

**MINUTES OF BRECON BEACONS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY AUDIT AND  
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD AT VIRTUAL MEETING ON FRIDAY, 23RD JULY,  
2021**

**PRESENT:**

**Powys**

**Monmouthshire**

Cllr A Webb (Deputy Chair)

**Carmarthenshire**

Cllr A James (Chair)

**Merthyr Tydfil**

**Rhondda Cynon Taff**

Cllr G Thomas

**Torfaen**

Cllr S Evans

**Blaenau Gwent**

Cllr J Hill

**Members appointed by the Welsh Government**

Mr James Marsden, Mr Christopher Coppock and Canon Aled Edwards

**In Attendance**

Catherine Mealing-Jones, Chief Executive  
Stephanie Evans, Transition Director  
Marc Ronan, Solicitor & Monitoring Officer  
Elaine Standen, Finance Manager  
Julia Gruffydd, Democratic Services Manager

**Apologies**

## 28/21 Correspondence

The Chair welcomed the new Chief Executive, Catherine Mealing-Jones to the meeting, and also the new Monitoring Officer, Marc Ronan. He thanked the Transition Director for her work in the interim.

He also welcomed Nick Selwyn, Philippa Dixon and Meleri Bethall from Audit Wales and Steen Gourlay from the Authority's internal auditors, TIAA.

## 29/21 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

## 30/21 Minutes

Some minor amendments and typographical errors were highlighted.

**RESOLVED: To approve the minutes of the Audit and Scrutiny Committee held on 7 May 2021, as amended and authorise the Chair to sign them as a correct record:**

## 31/21 Public Speaking Scheme

There were no requests to speak.

## 32/21 Audit Wales Action Plan Update

Members considered a progress report on the Audit Wales Report Action Plan. Questions were put to the Transition Director and CEO, including on the importance of setting a process for corporate performance and then linking in staff appraisals. The CEO advised that she was keen to continue a culture of performance review.

Mr Selwyn welcomed the approach to monitoring progress and advised that Audit Wales would sign off on actions when they could see the evidence. He set out the process for what would happen if Audit Wales were not satisfied that sufficient progress was being made, or that improvements were not being implemented. A further report under the Local Government Measure could allow intervention from Audit Wales.

Asked about a pulse survey of staff the Transition Director confirmed that in addition to the wellbeing and working practice survey just completed she had asked officers to prepare a survey timed to coincide with the CEO's commencement, which would focus on staff morale. She also confirmed that communication with staff had not been limited to

newsletters but extended to team meetings, consultation on the leadership team proposals, and celebrating success through press releases.

The Chair thanked officers for their sterling work in difficult times.

**RESOLVED: To note progress against the Change Programme Action Plan.**

### **33/21 Internal Audit update**

The Finance Manager updated members on the internal audit plan for this year.

A member made the point that internal audit should cross reference to the Authority's risk register, and that no action plan had been put in place to mitigate the risks identified by Cooke and Arkwright.

Due to technical issues Mr Gourlay could not be heard by all present but the Finance Manager advised that auditors would normally review the risk register and any relevant reports as part of the planning process for individual audits, but the remit could be widened if necessary.

**RESOLVED: To note the contents of the report.**

### **34/21 Draft Statement of Accounts 2020/21**

The Finance Manager presented the draft Statement of Accounts for 2020-21. In response to a comment about over 30% of the budget allocated to corporate services she advised that this included the support costs to those involved in delivery, as well as the CEO and corporate management, and that every effort was made to keep costs down.

Questions were asked about the sustainability of the Black Mountains Land Use Partnership and also about the use of the Sustainable Development Fund for funding Authority projects.

**RESOLVED: To note the contents of the report and the Draft Statement of Accounts.**

### **35/21 Budget Performance and Project Financial Management Q1**

Members reviewed budget performance for the first quarter. The Finance Manager advised that there would be more expenditure to report by September against the Sustainable Landscapes Sustainable Places money received from Welsh Government. The CEO confirmed that she would be working with officers on a spend profile and to demonstrate a good track record on spend in order to attract further funding. Members welcomed this approach and suggested that a long term capital programme over multiple years was needed.

The Finance Manager clarified a number of points for members.

**RESOLVED: To note the report.**

### **36/21 Corporate Plan Performance**

The Transition Director presented a report of progress against the Corporate Plan objectives. She advised that the consultant working with her would be considering options for performance reporting. She highlighted some areas of work, including the A470 congestion, and advised that work was progressing on the Waterfalls project, with member involvement being sought at the appropriate stage.

Members welcomed the alignment of the reporting to the Corporate Plan and hoped that this would also be aligned to the National Park Management Plan in future to provide a 'golden thread' from this, to the Corporate Plan, and to individual performance. A number of points were raised on the descriptions of risk, phosphates in particular, which would impact on performance across the organisation.

**RESOLVED: To note the performance against the Corporate Plan actions for Q1 of 2021-22.**

### **37/21 Risk Register**

Members reviewed the Risk Register and thanked the Transition Director and Monitoring Officer for their work on this. They welcomed the format and made some suggestions about future reports: it would be helpful to know if the RAG status had changed from lower to higher risk or vice versa. The need to include risks of biodiversity loss and climate change was also highlighted.

Concerns were raised about future accommodation and the transition period until the leadership team was appointed. The CEO confirmed her intention to address the issue of risk appetite but given capacity she would bring in additional resource if necessary in the interim period.

It was suggested that there needed to be a shared understanding of current risks between the Authority, Welsh Government, internal and external audit and stakeholders.

The Transition Director advised about preparatory work that officers were doing to prepare options for accommodation.

There was discussion about the level of reserves and how they should be used. It was acknowledged that this was a difficult balance between retaining resources to deal with unforeseen circumstances, but not restricting delivery by tying up resources.

**RESOLVED: To note the report.**

### **38/21 Complaints and FOI's**

Members reviewed the QI report.

### **39/21 Action Tracking**

Outstanding actions were reviewed.

### **40/21 Quarterly update report on delivery by Landscape and Nature Recovery Team**

The Transition Director presented a report of progress against the Nature Recovery actions in the Corporate Plan, on behalf of the Senior Ecologist for Climate Adaptation.

Members welcomed the report and recognised the amount of work being carried out; they hoped to receive reports from other Corporate Plan priorities. It was noted that there was considerable dependence on third parties to help deliver objectives. The Transition Director would ask the officer to respond to members on this point.

Views were expressed that there needed to be more on outputs rather than a list of work carried out, and the Transition Director responded that there was a debate to be had about the level of detail. A member advised that the State of the Park Report provided a strong baseline against a set of indicators, which could then be set against the Corporate Plan and National Park Management Plan.

**RESOLVED: To note the progress reported.**

### **41/21 Access to Information**

**RESOLVED:**

- a) **To exclude the press and public from the meeting during consideration of item 15 (legal Risk Register) in accordance with section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972, as amended, on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraphs 12, 13 and 14 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972.**
  
- b) **To exclude the press and public from the meeting during consideration of item 17 on the agenda (Cyber attack) in accordance with section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972, as amended, on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 14 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972.**

### **42/21 Legal Risk Register**

The Transition Director presented the legal risk register and addressed a number of queries from members.

**43/21 Cyber Attack Update**

The Transition Director updated members on the impact of the cyber-security attack in September 2020.

**44/21 Other Business**

There was no further business.

Signed as a correct record  
Chairman of the Audit and Scrutiny Committee