

Peak District National Park Authority

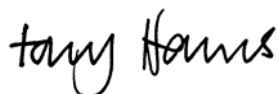
National Park Authority Performance Assessment : Self Assessment

The Peak District National Park is a very special place and it faces many challenges. We want to be an excellent authority so that we can meet those challenges. There is much strength in the way that we work internally and with partners. Performance improvement is something we very much welcome and in recent years we have embarked on a clear programme of change. This is beginning to show benefits and the authority is now making real strides in the way it embraces public service modernisation. We welcome National Park Authority Performance Assessment as an opportunity to help us focus, to determine how far we have actually changed and to provide an independent view of the effects of that change¹. We look forward to working with the assessors and genuinely want them to have as much support in their task as we can provide. We will act on their recommendations, in part by incorporating them into our Performance Improvement Plan.

In summary, we think that we:

- are realistic about the challenges we face and are ambitious to meet them
- are currently making real strides towards a more effective, co-ordinated and modern organisation
- deliver well to customers across a range of services, but not always consistently joined up
- work well in partnerships, but sometimes do not think enough about their outcomes or future
- need to develop further as managers and leaders, focusing on outcomes more than processes
- are well led by an increasingly coherent membership, management team and senior staff
- have developed and are now learning to use a better approach to performance management
- engage with staff, members and communities, but are only just beginning to do these well
- face some difficult financial challenges that will require further significant change in the future

The Chief Executive, Chair of the Authority, Management Team and a small project team drawn from the staff of the organisation have prepared this self-assessment. It has been worked on closely by Heads of Service, many of whom have made important overall comments as well as providing technical input. Through 6 events in July we have benefited from the input of over 145 staff². It has also been shared with a number of external partners whose insights are reflected. Members of the Authority considered the key lines of enquiry and the key issues in a workshop and all members reviewed a draft self assessment prior to the Audit and Performance Committee approving it unanimously on 2 September 2005.



Tony Hams
Chair of the Authority



Jim Dixon
Chief Executive

2 September 2005

Introduction

This document emphasises key issues and reflects the questions posed in common to all National Park Authorities within the Key Lines of Enquiry. It has the following structure:

- Section 1 explains the particular context of the Peak District National Park
- Section 2 explains our vision and the sort of Authority we need to be
- Section 3 describes actions taken to create the capacity for change and to follow it through
- Section 4 describes our performance through our own services and those delivered in partnerships

The sections correspond broadly to the Key Lines of Enquiry as follows:

Key Line of Enquiry		
Number	Title	Section in Report
1	Quality of Vision	2.1
2	Quality of Plans	3.1
3	Setting Priorities	4.1
4	Organisational Capacity	3.2, 3.3, 3.4
5	Working in Partnership	4.3
6.1 - 6.4	Performance Management	3.5
6.5 - 6.8	Learning	3.6
7	Achievement in Delivery of Purposes and Duties	4.2
8	Achievement of Improvement in Delivery of Purposes and Duties	4.1
9	Developing the Effectiveness of Organisation	2.2, 2.3, 3.6

1. A National Park Under Pressure

With globally valuable wildlife habitats³, high quality and distinctive landscapes and world-class recreation opportunities, the Peak District clearly merits its status as one of Britain's National Parks. This National Park is a special place for two reasons. Firstly, because of its intrinsic character, environmental value, land use, community and economy⁴. Secondly, because of its context, uniquely located close to the major urban areas of England with 24.5M people within 2 hours drive⁵. As one of the most visited National Parks in England and Wales⁶, with a resident population of nearly 38,000⁷ and multiple development pressures^{8, 9}, it is a national park facing many difficulties. This is why we apply sustainable development principles across our work¹⁰.

The Peak District faces many of the issues other national parks do, but the scale and intensity of some of these issues are particularly challenging here, especially because of the administrative complexity of the area. These issues include:

- managing changing landscapes and habitats through helping over 2000 farmers adapt to changes in policy – the new single farm payment - and a difficult market environment
- new arrangements for managing tourism within regional policy such that they foster a potentially growing tourism sector in a sustainable way
- ensuring high standards of working and the right strategic priorities for quarries in an area with 65 existing minerals sites, including complex and nationally contentious cases
- reducing the impacts of very heavy communications, especially traffic¹¹, in the midst of one of the busiest parts of England, through both strategic working and major casework
- making our contribution to the provision of services, a developing economy and affordable housing for local people in a rural area.

Issues common to other national parks also faced in the Peak District include achieving new national targets for nature conservation on specially designated sites¹²; implementing open access; responding to demands for active recreation¹³; ensuring socially inclusive services; working with private sector landowners; water catchment management; and fostering a sustainable resident community in a rural area. The Peak District has little commonland nor military use. The Authority owns proportionately more land than any other National Park Authority and whilst this poses its own challenges, it is only 5% of the total land area¹⁴ and so we must influence other landowners too.

The pressures facing the protection of this special place stem from our close proximity to large and changing urban areas. This is also our greatest opportunity as we are relevant to the quality of life, economy and civic life of surrounding urban areas¹⁵. We are close to the conurbations of Manchester, Leeds, Sheffield and West and East Midlands; smaller urban areas such as Macclesfield, Chesterfield, Buxton, Matlock, Ashbourne, Barnsley, Huddersfield and Oldham. We are the only National Park in the Midlands and the nearest upland National Park to London, the Eastern and South East regions. It is an area already used by a huge number and diversity of recreational users and is regarded as one of the best walking areas of England, an internationally important area for rock climbing and a major centre for cycling at all levels including international competitive level. Our historic mandate of ensuring sustainable access to the countryside remains as challenging today as ever, and we are focusing on enabling some of the most disadvantaged people in these urban areas to understand and experience the Peak District.

Managing these issues is made more challenging by the National Park falling within 4 government regions, having 12 constituent authorities (including major shire counties, rural districts and some of the largest urban unitary authorities in the country) and 125 parishes¹⁶. Local authorities and public bodies generally work well locally (7 of our constituent authorities are rated as 'excellent' with most others as 'good') and there are strong and developing voluntary bodies working in the National Park. Our challenge here is to ensure that all relevant regional and council-led strategies, plans and programmes reflect the needs and opportunities of the National Park. We must play our part in achieving their objectives too.

In partnerships we must engage with 4 Government Office Regions (and all that happens at regional level such as economic and sectoral strategies and investment streams) and a wide variety of strategic partnerships, such as the 11 Local Strategic Partnerships. At an operational level we deal with 9 Housing Authorities, 7 Highways Authorities, 6 Police, Fire and Ambulance authorities, 4 Rural Affairs and Defra regions (including 4 Rural Development Service, Environment Agency, English Nature, English Heritage

and Countryside Agency regions) and 6 emerging Tourism Destination Partnerships¹⁷. We are in 4 television regions and supply media information to numerous regional and local media outlets, as well as facing media issues of national interest¹⁸.

We have a strong constituency of staff, members and partners who care passionately about the special characteristics and opportunities of the Peak District. They take a pride in what has been achieved over the last 54 years and have an optimistic view of the future. Our job is to channel that passion to best effect. The remainder of this document describes how we think we are doing in our task.

2. What sort of National Park Authority do we need to be?

2.1 Our Vision for the Peak District National Park (KLOE 1)

Our vision¹⁹ has evolved over time and for an authority whose function is set out clearly in statute there is a close relationship between our statutory purposes and duty and our vision. It is also inclusive, based as it is on extensive consultation²⁰. Our vision incorporates partnerships and the core elements of sustainable development. It is thus an external-facing vision. Its genesis has been highly participative and ambitious with both high level stakeholders and also local communities, including hard to reach groups such as young people. Stakeholders and partners with diverse purposes themselves will rarely fully share this vision in its entirety, but we are confident that in key documents, such as Community Strategies, Regional Spatial Strategies and Economic Strategies there is awareness and a reflection of this vision. A constant struggle, however, is to ensure that a multiplicity of partners reflect the National Park in their strategies and plans. We have also adopted an abbreviated vision that we wish staff, stakeholders and others to remember:

Working together for the Peak District National Park

- *a special environment*
- *a welcoming place at the heart of the nation*
- *vibrant communities and a thriving economy*

We are now taking this forward in our National Park Management Plan²¹.

2.2 Some recent achievements

The National Park Authority is made up of enthusiastic staff and members who work well with partners. Collectively, we share a passion for making a difference in the National Park. Whilst this assessment, rightly, focuses on how we perform as an organisation, we must also be judged on our achievements and the difference we make. These are summarised annually in our Best Value Performance Plan, but recent achievements include:

- being the first National Park to commence the Countryside and Rights of Way Act (2000) access provisions and hosting a highly successful media and VIP launch in the Peak District. In 2001 we were the first national park to open access following Foot and Mouth restrictions
- winning major legal challenges to minerals legislation and fighting effectively on some difficult minerals casework that is of national importance
- being the second busiest national park planning team, with an excellent record of winning appeals, the best performance by a National Park Authority on speed of determination and 'Pendleton' scores for electronic access to this service and an exemplary programme of stakeholder engagement in long-term plan-making
- working closely with the Peak Park Parishes Forum, communicating directly with all parishes and using to good effect our parish members
- leading the Moors for the Future Partnership which has delivered 16 projects, including restoring 3km² of eroded peat, 1.5 km² of eroded footpaths and completing the largest upland bird survey for 10 years
- working with landowners and English Nature to secure the conservation (and in some cases statutory protection) of the most important Peak District hay meadows and lead rakes and improving the condition status of Sites of Special Scientific Interest on our conservation properties from 56% favourable in 2003 to 85% favourable currently, in line with the national government PSA target. We are the only UK National Park to hold the Council of Europe Diploma for landscape protection
- achieving eco-centre status and a Gold Award for Excellence in Tourism for the East Midlands at our Environmental Learning Centre at Losehill Hall
- working in partnerships with others we have established the Peak District and Derbyshire Destination Management Partnership and have turned round a long-term decline in visitor usage

of our Tourist Information Centres by targeted investments and improvements, with over 500 000 people using the service in the last 12 months and over 1 million hits on our tourism website

- developing a programme for involving vulnerable and cared for children in outdoor experience in the National Park, initially with Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council and subsequently with Derbyshire County Council, leading to qualifications for this priority group
- leading a £350 000 improvement partnership that has secured an ODPM Capacity Building Grant to support 9 projects with 3 District and a County Council and the Lake District National Park Authority, including a Management Development programme, *Exceeding Excellence*, for over 60 staff
- organising 7 public meetings over the last year attended by over 600 members of the public, including several in partnership with other councils
- working in partnership with National Park Authorities, we have led on delivery of the shared National Park Portal, a new means for customers to access services and information; we continue to be a key player in establishing an appropriate Partnership Agreement to secure its longer term future²²
- improving our internal communications dramatically including to out-posted staff and members, reduced the complexity of our decision-making procedures and developing better services to customers in person, on the phone and electronically

2.3 The type of organisation we need to be (KLOE 9)

An organisation fit for National Park purposes and able to rise to the specific challenges we face requires an improvement agenda, building on existing strengths. We aim to be:

- a competently run organisation with attention paid to due process, audit and accountability, tight financial control and transparency in decision making
- able to deliver substantial direct services to the public e.g. on conservation, recreation, promoting understanding, planning and tourism
- effective at working in both strategic and operational partnerships
- forward-thinking, innovative, risk-taking and willing to challenge and be challenged, working to find new ways of meeting our objectives
- able to learn, change and direct our resources at changing priorities and willing to engage with users of our services, residents, visitors and partners to listen to what they say
- enabling and supportive of a dedicated staff so increasing performance and ensuring that people want to work for us
- committed to our duties as well as to our purposes

Despite considerable success in some areas, in others we did not move quickly enough to respond to the public service modernisation agenda²³. Specific symptoms of this were:

- highly competent services that sometimes did not work or deliver services that were joined up enough to customers
- an inward-looking leadership, more focused on process than outcomes
- staff were held in high regard technically, but some frustrated partners by their lack of pragmatism
- a focus on management inputs (budgets and finance) rather than on outcomes and outputs
- inadequate management information and performance management systems
- a poor differentiation between role of members and staff, leading to sometimes difficult relations
- lack of clarity on who made decisions and little buy in around the corporate priorities.

Progress is being made and these would not be current perceptions. Local Authority partners, for example, perceive greater openness, willingness to work together and less disjunction between National Park objectives and those of communities and other bodies. Staff and members see, and are engaged in, change and improvement.

2.4 What we are trying to do now (KLOE 9)

The National Park Authority is part way through a period of considerable change begun in 2001. The current emphasis is towards achieving a strong partnership between the political leadership and effective management with clarity on roles and responsibilities. A more coherent management structure, making more decisions on the basis of better strategic fit and more management information is key. Working in partnerships, and actively managing these is seen as the key to delivery in many areas²⁴. There have been significant changes in the governance, executive structure and culture, although there is more yet to be achieved. Key changes have been:

- streamlining of staffing, reducing Management Team by 25% and Heads of Service from 26 to 13
- streamlining of governance arrangements, reducing the number of committees from 7 to 4 and greater delegation to staff²⁵
- cultural changes, so that performance and project management and customer focus predominate over management of processes, learning predominates in place of blame²⁶
- a greater focus on corporate priorities, plans and performance management²⁷
- focused investments in Information Technology related to business processes management development, communications and accommodation to support cultural change²⁸
- the development of a more outward-facing and inclusive culture with greater emphasis placed on communications, partnerships, customer service, greater efficiency, community engagement and influence²⁹.

The principal drivers for performance improvement are from a broadly cohesive leadership, an excellent working relationship between the Chair and Chief Executive and from an enthusiastic, knowledgeable and experienced workforce who readily give positive feedback about change³⁰. There is a generally high calibre and diverse membership who work well with a senior team who inspire confidence amongst members. The Chair and Chief Executive aspire to more rapid and extensive change and there are already examples of change reflecting this. The shared commitment to the change agenda is manifested in the 5 year Performance Improvement Plan³¹. Agreed in 2004, this identifies 10 headline priority areas for changing the way the Authority works.

Our Performance Improvement Plan is being pursued by both corporate projects³² and a service-by-service review of performance that is part way through³³. A particular focus has been strengthening the customer focus and workflow management arrangements within Development Control³⁴ and greater innovation and efficiency in other services³⁵. Substantial external resources have been secured from, for example Planning Delivery Grant, ODPM Capacity Building Grant and Implementing Electronic Government, and this is being targeted at change work³⁶.

Performance culture, appropriate customer focus and overcoming silo working are important priorities. People in all parts of the Authority want to understand better 'the big picture', how they contribute and the role of their colleagues. They want to work together and there is an increasingly cohesive membership, management and staff³⁷. We want to manage our relationships with communities and partners better and have become very good at doing this. We have further to go to develop a forward-looking, comprehensive and cohesive organisational model.

3. Creating the Capacity

3.1 Planning the Authority's Work (KLOE 2)

The Structure Plan (1994) and Local Plan (2001) have been successful in guiding land use planning, are being reviewed by 2006 under the new Local Development Framework³⁸. The Best Value Performance Plan is improving with more focus on performance than before³⁹. Sector plans – such as the Biodiversity Action Plan⁴⁰, Access, Recreation, Sustainable Tourism, Interpretation and Promoting Understanding Strategies are in place and a Cultural Heritage Strategy is imminent. There is a developing strategic framework of Asset Management, Workforce, Comprehensive Equality Policy, Procurement and Implementing Electronic Government (IEG).

Much effort has been put into engaging members and managers in thinking more about outcomes and tying our effort more closely to corporate objectives⁴¹. There is an increasing focus on corporate objectives (near term) that contribute to longer-term outcomes⁴² as set out in Part 1 of our Best Value Performance Plan. Resources have been allocated and some outcomes have been met, e.g. conservation management of properties to meet Public Service Agreement (PSA) targets, supporting corporate projects such as Moors for the Future, more socially inclusive access, enhanced communications and community engagement⁴³. Strong performance in external funding in some areas has resourced new work, e.g. Moors for the Future, New Environmental Economy and a clear Performance Improvement Plan is backed up by ODPM IEG and Capacity Building Grant resources. A new framework for planning and agreeing external funding has been agreed and implemented from September 2005.

Plan making is generally highly inclusive, with successful staff, member and external stakeholder engagement⁴⁴, a regular pattern of all staff events⁴⁵ and engagement by senior managers in planning. The Local Development Framework consultation process is constrained in legislation and ODPM guidance, but we have sought to go beyond this in terms of community consultation⁴⁶. In the past, there was a lack of focus and commitment to engage with communities and partners and as a result, the Authority picked up a 'corporate arrogance' tag and was perceived by some local authority partners as rather academic or aloof. The previous culture of consultation by process, is giving way to more inclusive and effective engagement⁴⁷. There is a growing external focus and commitment by the leadership to a wide range of community and partnership engagement⁴⁸. The Authority has begun innovative and partnership-based community engagement with hard to reach groups focusing on young people, residents and surrounding urban areas. However, a large (by national park standards) resident and surrounding population and large administrative complexity requires high-level commitment to communications and community/partner engagement⁴⁹.

The Authority's members and senior staff are highly attuned to both national priorities (expressed in Planning Policy Statements, national planning targets and government PSA for access and wildlife sites and rural issues) and local priorities expressed in Community Strategies and directly by local people, such as affordable housing, young people's issues and transport⁵⁰. It is playing a key role in the national Rural Pathfinder, primarily by enabling local authorities to lead, and in Local Area Agreements. There is strong engagement by staff and members at all levels in national working and exchange of expertise and good practice.

We are currently reviewing the National Park Management Plan and Local Development Framework for publication in 2006 and 2007 respectively. Annual Best Value Performance Plans are prepared around a twice-yearly strategic planning exercise reflecting local and national priorities and resource scenarios. Members are engaged in shaping the organisation's strategic agenda through the Strategic Advisory Group, which meets with senior managers 3-4 times per year.

3.2 Making Decisions and Managing the Authority (KLOE 4)

The Authority now has a better system for making decisions at four clear levels (see annex 1) based on principles of trust, delegation and accountability for delivery of outcomes. Much of the last three years has been taken up with achieving this new structure and, whilst we are still experiencing some difficulties, decision-making is now much clearer in the Authority. There is a clear hierarchy of responsibility, with the following good attributes about decision-making:

- clear governance arrangements with an up to date officer/member protocol, revised and much clearer standing orders and a greater delegation than before⁵¹

- new committee arrangements focus on setting strategy, performance and major decisions
- authority agendas covering primarily strategic or policy issues and less operational⁵²
- a much more effective scrutiny and performance-focused Audit and Performance Committee oversees corporate work, for example on audits, but also annual service reviews. Some of this work is now member-led in line with best practice for scrutiny⁵³
- more time is allocated to member training and development⁵⁴
- delegation achieved in Planning Control increased from about 55% to 80% over the last four years and much greater delegation on financial, staffing and other management matters
- Adoption and consistent application of member's code of conduct and the Planning Protocol⁵⁵
- Much informal work is done by mixed member and officer task teams and with Lead Members and Champions for key issues
- Quality advice is provided to members by key statutory and specialist staff e.g. Monitoring Officer, Chief Finance Officer and Head of Law as well as other professional officers

The impact of the new governance arrangements is being evaluated after a 12-month trial period, but it is already clear that there has been greater strategic focus, increased delegation and more focus on outcomes. There are difficulties which are more about culture and performance and less about structure:

- officers and members have embraced change and are working towards more effective strategic and scrutiny performance and more consistent decision-making
- we have not yet reduced member workload to allow for a wider external engagement for some members
- member attendance varies with lower participation from some councillors⁵⁶
- there is sometimes an over parochial approach from some members, (witnessed by a tendency to challenge planning policy through cases) and some national members need to retain broad focus alongside championing their specialist knowledge

Officers generally work well with members. Membership is diverse, with high skills and experience. There is a clear and effective working relationship between the Chief Executive and Chair and also high levels of mutual respect between Management Team and senior members. Members work together with senior staff at 2 strategic awaydays per year linked to the planning cycle and through a Strategic Advisory Group consisting of key members and Management Team. Some mixed staff and member temporary task teams have been successful, especially as they embrace potentially all of the membership. Five Lead members for complex, difficult issues and champions for some work areas (e-government, equalities, asset management, cultural heritage and youth) have been appointed and this is generally working well. Staff surveys show a high level of regard for members and senior officers and this is a key measure of the Performance Improvement Plan to monitor⁵⁷.

Individually, Management Team members have high personal commitment, credibility and effectiveness. We are currently developing a management culture based on outcomes, leadership, partnership and contemporary management skills with a significant investment in this. Of course, exercising statutory functions and accountability requires a certain type of management culture which is competent on process, but we have worked to complement this with greater freedoms, delegation and flexibility. We are at the early stage of new delegated responsibilities and we will delegate further (from members to Management Team and Management Team to Heads of Service) in the coming year.

We are working to develop the strategic leadership skills of the Management Team, so that it is consistently coherent, demonstrates more leadership skills (complementing management skills) and builds on the high personal regard and dedication the team members have. We have developed an annual plan for the Management Team that focuses on fewer priorities, although we need to devote more quality time to fewer key areas in order to ensure that it can be more cohesive and follow-through its intent. Heads of Service have variable skills (dependent on professional background and experience) and some front line managers have had very little formal support in management in the past, something being overcome by the new management development programme, *Exceeding Excellence*. There has been too little

investment in managers of the future, a problem that will affect the organisation severely over the next 10 years with a large proportion of senior staff meeting retirement age. This is in part being addressed by:

- jointly procuring, with 3 Local Authority partners, a management development programme – *Exceeding Excellence* – that will come on stream for all levels of management from Autumn 2005 with over 20 managers undertaking level 3 or 5 Institute of Leadership and Management (ILM) qualifications
- investment in coaching and project management skills for all key managers in the last year
- a review of the Management Team in January 2005 that has led to new ways of working

The acid test of improvements in governance and management is whether better decisions are made and that the Authority prioritises and makes clear decisions to deliver its vision and corporate priorities. There is a strong commitment to address major development issues, especially minerals (such as our willingness to pursue high profile and costly legal issues at Lees Cross/Endcliffe and to take enforcement action at Backdale)⁵⁸. Important decisions have been made to implement Single Status, the new Executive Structure and to cope over several years with a tight financial environment.

3.3 Finances

The Authority has achieved secure standards of financial management, initially through close dependence on Derbyshire County Council systems and staff, and more recently in the mid 1990s, particularly following the Financial Services Review in 1998, in a more independent in-house function coupled with supporting external contracts for specific services and advice. The Resource Management Team, comprising Management Team with Finance and Human Resources support, was established in 1996 to ensure that resource decisions were taken by the executive within a controlled decision making process, before going onto formal Membership approval in committee, if necessary.

The Financial Strategy document was approved in July 2004⁵⁹, making clear some of the key principles applied in our approach to resource planning and financial governance and highlighting areas for development. Annex 2 outlines 12 criteria by which a local authority can be reviewed as to its ability to deliver value for money, in the economy, efficiency and effectiveness of its use of resources. The Best Value Performance Plan 2005/6 sets out our proposed expenditure over a 3 year horizon.

3.4 People

Motivating, managing fairly and effectively and getting the most out of the staff are key priorities within the Performance Improvement Plan. At 1 August 05 the Authority employed 273.1 full time equivalent posts with 156 full time, 57.4 part time/ job share, 46.8 fixed term and temporary posts 12.9 casual and seasonal contracts. Staff are engaged in consultation on strategic and corporate issues with annual All Staff Meetings⁶⁰. Formal and informal consultation with UNISON and Staff Committee are routine with excellent, and often challenging feedback (e.g. Establishment Control). We have introduced effective communications to all staff, tailored to meet different needs, for instance in different locations. The Human Resources team works well in partnership with Derbyshire County Council to provide information for payroll and pensions. The Best Value Performance Plan evidences good outputs against Key Performance Indicators such as turnover and sickness absence.

Our approach to people management is based on three key areas that are elaborated on in Annex 3:

- a proactive approach to people management
- an exciting new management development programme
- a strategic commitment to improvement, taking a long-term view of our needs

3.5 Performance Management (KLOE6)

Plans, strategies and targets are now more corporate and better documented and focused: they are more active than descriptive. The Authority has prepared and followed Performance Indicators. In recent years, a more effective performance management system has begun to be developed and used, involving:

- performance indicators allow comparisons over time, with constituent authorities and national park authorities⁶¹
- risk management, the State of the Park report, environmental scanning and stakeholder consultation are being used in planning annually by Management Team, staff and members
- annual corporate objectives, based on a 5 year set of corporate priorities⁶², have been adopted and form the basis of the Best Value Performance Plan, resource allocation, corporate communications and service planning⁶³
- a performance management framework has been introduced from 2003/04⁶⁴ with much wider adoption during 2005, including much wider use of Joint Performance Reviews for all staff⁶⁵, performance management systems and an e-based service planning system
- Resources Management Team monitors key targets and performance measures quarterly and takes action as necessary
- the new governance arrangements have created an increasingly effective way of engaging members in performance management through the Audit and Performance Committee.

Some performance indicators do not correspond well with specific organisational objectives⁶⁶ and a fully effective performance management culture is not yet established. All important areas are not necessarily covered by Performance Indicators and data is not always collected and analysed in ways that inform management decisions. Some managers struggle with a performance management culture and so this is a priority for the *Exceeding Excellence* programme.

Following the Risk Management Audit Review in 2002/3 and Action Plan⁶⁷ we have developed a corporate risk register and strategy, which is used in service and strategic planning. We aim to achieve Audit Commission Level 3 during 2005, having achieved level 1 in 2003. Statutory requirements govern our attitude and approach to risk in financial planning⁶⁸ and we comply fully with these⁶⁹. We consider risk as an integral part of project management and we have a good, but limited, Health and Safety framework where we have recently completed an external scrutiny of our practices with the aim of guiding further improvements⁷⁰. A performance management database (introduced corporately during 2005) is currently being developed to make Joint Performance Reviews and Personal Development Plans simpler to use. Performance management is now being introduced for members too in line with national advice⁷¹.

3.6 Learning (KLOE 6.5-6.8)

Developing a learning organisation has not been a specific priority for the Performance Improvement Plan, in part because we do not believe it to be a major failing and in part because there are actions, primarily addressing other concerns, already tackling this issue such as management development and project management.

As an Authority we have a highly educated staff with, in some areas, a high calibre of research, analysis and intellectual debate and performance. Many staff have high personal standing in their professions, with some of national standard. In some disciplines, such as planning policy, environmental education, conservation and recreation management, we have a track-record of high professional standards and contact with learning institutions, to the highest level. We have followed this through in several of our contemporary projects, where we have high levels of external expert input and interchange. Examples are Moors for the Future, New Environmental Economy and the Performance Improvement Plan Capacity Building Project. We also learn through:

- inspections, audits, Best Value Reviews
- inviting critical friends and visitors to see our work and seeking feedback from them
- employing local trainees through the Chamber Training Programme
- wide recruitment to broaden skills base
- a growing corporate commitment to developing peoples' skills including professional skills
- a corporate procurement strategy
- engagement in external networks

The Authority has used external challenge, peer review and expert specialist input in recent Best Value such as reviews of transport, planning, community engagement, development control, access and recreation, workforce and asset management and there is an external academic assessor engaged on the Performance Improvement Plan. Officers and members are actively engaged in national debates and best practice exchanges (Development Control is involved with other National Park Authorities in meetings with ODPM, Planning Inspectorate, regular meetings with Development Control teams in other local authorities etc; Legal and Democratic Services Team organises the extranet with other National Park committee and legal staff and is involved in a Planning Special Interest Group with other local authorities and other networking groups etc). Newly appointed staff have been agents for change, complementing expertise held within the organisation where promotions have also led to change.

We recognise the need to improve on internal communications, and are making significant changes to how we do this. We are not as effective or consistent as we might be at evaluating the success / progress of work with partners e.g. lessons learned from a joint project. We probably need to be better at corporately learning lessons, reviewing issues and using evidence to make decisions. Informal networks, based around people from different areas working and/or socialising together are getting stronger, in part because internal communication, including staff events, intranet and talks, is improving.

Some actions, such as the executive and governance reviews, have been done on the basis of learning. For example the governance review established a pilot approach to committee structures for a 1-year pilot, which will be fully evaluated. Some service training plans have been amended such as that for part time rangers. There is a stronger and more co-ordinated communication function and bidding process for external funding. Good examples of policy research, resulting in Supplementary Planning Guidance, on farm buildings, affordable housing and renewable energy have drawn on learning and are the basis of planning decisions. Some staff have been seconded across the Authority to share expertise/different ways of doing things and there is some sharing of experience between the Legal, DC and the Policy Team, for example and rangers and conservation staff. But, it is rare for staff to work 'offline' and for professionals to move around the organisation; so most learning is within silos of departments or professions. There is, of course, a value for money issue in moving experienced staff from critical work.

3.7 Developing the Organisation (KLOE 9)

There is a strong commitment to investing in management capacity at all levels – front-line to middle to Directors through organisational change and management development. Investments in new skills, staff and assets have been largely as a result of one-off project funding so there is a significant gap developing for running costs, asset management costs and for investing in skills at the current workforce levels. New approaches to governance have reduced non-strategic member involvement and have been replaced by better organisational strategies and management of people, finances and other assets. Performance management and workforce planning are sound, if emerging, building blocks. The Executive Review is in place, is effective and has been reviewed⁷². Working in new ways is emerging and through the introduction of widespread project management skills this should increase⁷³. There have been big advances in IT which are beginning to have an impact on the way that staff organise their work programmes. Because of the limits of Implementing Electronic Government funding, we have, as yet, offered less to more remote workstations. A Green Travel Plan is in preparation⁷⁴.

Continuing to secure sustainable funding to meet our challenges and the expectations of service users, staff and members is a major long term task. A flair and track record for using external funding (an increase between 2000/1 and 2003/4 of £2M) has generated considerable resources for trialling and delivering new services and projects and for investment in buildings, skills and IT. But there is a risk that the external funding projects are not leading to mainstream organisation change and projected efficiencies and savings and may not be sustainable. There is a clear framework now for prudent use and knowledge of our assets, liabilities and capacity for long-term borrowing and expenditure. Like all National Park Authorities, the Authority manages long-term commitments, relationships and services with an annually agreed and, in real terms, near static budget. Making bids against national priorities has not yet led to much support from Defra. At regional level, there is a need to show we are/can deliver regional/sub-regional strategies and secure resources for this (e.g. tourism). There is a need to look more creatively at funding mechanisms and procurement and the development of a new Strategic Investment Group will address this to some extent.

Best Value Reviews have been used on key service improvements, involving external critical friends (transport, equalities, community engagement and planning). Visitor services have been externally assessed, including use of 'mystery shoppers' and this is being extended to all of our customer services.

The Chair, Chief Executive and senior staff regularly make themselves available to public scrutiny, e.g. in public meetings and face-to-face meetings. Complaints from the public are handled effectively and lead to tangible improvements in services⁷⁵. Partnership working, such as the Stanage Forum, are examples where we open up our working practices to those of others. Examples of being open to external challenge are the equalities audit group and plans review process⁷⁶.

4. Continuous Improvement in what we do

4.1 Being clear about what needs to be improved (KLOE3)

In the past, the Authority has undertaken Best Value Reviews of Promoting Understanding⁷⁷, Corporate and Democratic Core⁷⁸, Planning Services⁷⁹, Cycle Hire⁸⁰ and Transport⁸¹, each leading to some changes integrated into service plans⁸². Best Value Reviews create a useful framework for change, although they have risked being rather process-focused in the past with actions left undone in some cases. Change programmes such as IEG and performance related to Development Control have been adopted and, mostly, with enthusiasm. There is active engagement and pursuit of Government public services reform agenda. There is now a clear commitment to change led by members from 2001 to present with the Executive Review, Governance Review and Performance Improvement Plan 2005-09⁸³. The Performance Improvement Plan was prepared by the Management Team in consultation with senior staff and members during 2004 based on an IDeA model self assessment⁸⁴. Ideally, there would have been more staff and stakeholder engagement in that process, a weakness that has been remedied through preparation for the NPAPA which has been much more inclusive. Staff focus groups (in 2003 and 2005) informed the performance agenda alongside a comprehensive staff survey in 2003⁸⁵. This is partially integrated into service planning and is driving a 4 stage process of performance improvement:

- Personal Development Plans at an individual level⁸⁶
- improvement integrated into Service Planning annually
- periodic Service Reviews that are undertaken by Heads of Service and Management Team
- periodic reporting of service performance and key topics to Audit and Performance Committee, leading to scrutiny investigations⁸⁷.

We are striving to undertake all of our change work through a clear and organisation-wide project management framework. 43 Managers and staff (including Management Team) have been through a 2 day project management course with 11 more planned. Key change programmes currently that are within this framework include Development Control, Promoting Understanding, Accommodation, Workforce Plan and Management Development and Cultural Heritage Strategy⁸⁸. Project management is one facet of a wider skills deficit in change management that is being addressed in our management development programme, *Exceeding Excellence*.

There is full formal membership endorsement for the Performance Improvement Plan and particular changes, such as the Development Control Change Plan and Environmental Education Review (which is member led)⁸⁹. Good quality staff and member communications have been introduced (member and staff e-zines and *On the Frontline* for front line service providers) and we are seeking feedback on their effectiveness. There are some good examples of change within some services as has been evidenced in reports to the Audit and Performance Committee, but more still needs to be done in some services. Corporate communications have been strengthened. A cascade briefing system will be introduced in Winter 2005/6, with a trial in Conservation and Development Directorate, building on an existing variable pattern of team communications. A programme of 'Walks and Talks' open to staff, members and volunteers has been very well received⁹⁰. A newsletter for front line staff (*On the Frontline*) has been launched aimed at over 400 part-time and voluntary rangers, estate and cycle hire staff and other part-time and field-based staff.

The Performance Improvement Partnership has been the basis of a successful partnership bid of £250K to the ODPM Capacity Building Programme that is focusing on management development, workforce planning, corporate identity, community engagement and partnership working. This project is well managed and is rated as 'low risk' by ODPM. We have done well with indicators that set our Planning Delivery Grant (including being within the top quartile of Pendleton scores in 2005/6 and heading for maximum points in 2006/7) and have also secured several years of IEG resources for the performance improvement agenda. £3.8M was secured in external funding in 2004/5, a total of 60% of the Authority's income above and beyond Defra grant in aid.

The Authority has, however become dependent on external resources for change and these cannot necessarily be sustained. External funding has, in the past, been *ad hoc* in its focus and duplications in both service delivery and back office support have occurred. Overall, there has been a commitment to new ways of working and priorities within budgets 2004/5 and 2005/6 with leadership commitment towards further change, for example through disestablishing posts in some key services. A flat settlement horizon makes it increasingly important to manage effectively and identify search areas for efficiency savings and

redeployment of funds to priority areas⁹¹. The Executive Review redeployed resources to priorities e.g. establishing a customer service team, abolishing the estates service and reorganising conservation service, but the scale of efficiency savings expected of us now is increasing.

4.2 Making a Difference through our Services (KLOE7)

i. Working together, priorities and focus

Management skills are improving, with a focus on performance and project management and coaching⁹². The management group is more cohesive and is working more closely together although there is some way to go. The Authority is more outward-focused with better and developing meaningful partnerships locally, regionally and nationally and an improving reputation amongst stakeholders and residents⁹³. The commitment to equality in all that we do is reflected in socially inclusive services and facilities and the attainment corporately Level one in the Equality Standard⁹⁴. Staff morale and support/trust in leadership and engagement by staff in decision-making is good and improving⁹⁵. Corporate services are driving change in the organisation with a clearer strategic framework of asset management, workforce planning, risk and other corporate work. Developing IEG systems support service delivery such as the customer relations management, document management, integrated data and performance management systems. Key staff are working together more effectively on cross cutting issues such as engagement – e.g. ODPM project to engage Looked After Children and the Promoting Understanding Strategy review.

Overall, there is a strong delivery culture amongst key services, such as conservation, environmental education, recreation and access and sustainable tourism. Key recreational, visitor services and tourism targets have been delivered, including the pioneering Countryside and Rights of Way Act access to open land⁹⁶. Some environmental targets within the Biodiversity Action Plan have been met although this will be reviewed critically in its mid term review. Positive achievements on key mineral cases are very high despite their high costs and inherent complexity. The 2000-2005 National Park Management Plan provided the framework for more detailed plans that were never followed through and in itself is too aspirational for any realistic assessment of performance against its objectives, but this is a major part of what we are addressing in the current plan review.

The Authority's priorities are chosen to reflect major local concerns (such as rural services, affordable housing, social inclusion and community facilities⁹⁷) and national priorities (such as the Rural Pathfinder⁹⁸ and sustainable transport⁹⁹). The Authority consults regularly with Constituent Authorities¹⁰⁰ and Parish Councils¹⁰¹ and as part of Area Forum meetings in December 2005 we will be consulting communities on our budget priorities for 2006/7. We have cross-checked what we do against other national priorities¹⁰², but it is increasingly difficult to be consistent with varying national, regional and sub-regional priorities. Defra guidance to National Park Authorities rarely reflects the multiplicity of targets and expectations of National Park Authorities by other public bodies¹⁰³. We strive to understand and engage in Regional Planning, Economic and other strategies, as this is the best way to ensure greater alignment. But this is a risk area for the Authority, especially when large proportions of our funding come in relation to either ring-fenced resources or through externally funded partnerships. We have erred to the latter in recent years in the view of many current staff. In engaging with local communities, we have increasingly opened up our decision-making to public scrutiny and taken into account views from public meetings and have supplemented this by engaging specific, hard to reach groups especially the young. The results of surveys and consultations have been reflected in plans and policies, such as the Attitude Survey 1999¹⁰⁴, the Employer's Survey 2005¹⁰⁵, Surveys of Visitors¹⁰⁶ and the results of plan consultations. However, resources have meant that the scale of this work has been limited and sometimes delayed because of the need to secure external and partnership funding for key pieces of work.

In some services, there has been a tendency to be self selecting on what to deliver – i.e. we do what we can do rather than what we should be doing, then make it 'fit' into the National Park Management Plan and service plans. There is a need to focus on fewer priorities which we are good at and where we are clear we add value in the delivery of our purposes.

Overall, the Best value Performance Plan indicates that we have met 68% of targets, and we are improving on over half of our targets. We are in the top quartile of performance by National Park Authorities on over half of the targets.

ii. Change in our Development Control Service

We are a busy Local Planning Authority with around 1200 applications per year and we are the 5th busiest Minerals Planning Authority (of all NPAs and county councils) in the country. There is a very high cost that the Authority currently shoulders associated with providing the highest calibre policy and legal expertise on planning, minerals and other development issues, such as transport and farming. Services to residents, especially planning, are stretched currently by higher than ever workloads and expectations and a service which has not yet fully adapted to that. Development Control, whilst technically a highly competent service provides customer service currently below expectations of the users¹⁰⁷. Addressing this is a high priority for the Authority^{108,109}. In the Executive Review, delivery of services was split from strategic plan and policy-making to ensure better customer focus for the service. This is being followed up currently by a customer-focused change programme, involving all of the staff. A complex picture of change in customer expectations, the inherent tensions within National Park planning that communities experience and where a range of different staff are involved are the focus of this programme.

There is increased up-take of opportunities for public involvement in the planning process through improved guidance and information provision and public participation at committee. Improvements to Development Control services have not yet delivered measurably better quality of service (but the quality of our judgements is good, with real benefits to the National Park¹¹⁰), although targets for speed of determination and the accessibility of the Planning Committee have improved modestly¹¹¹.

There is a clear planning policy framework that takes into account issues such as community facilities, affordable housing, economic regeneration and this guides all decisions. There have been very few departures from policy, few successful claims for costs, a good history on winning appeals and no recent complaints supported by the Ombudsman against the authority for maladministration in planning¹¹². Partnership working with local authorities has led to successful regeneration, the best example being the District Council-led Bakewell Project where our enabling approach to planning was crucial to its success. Similarly, the Supplementary Planning Guidance on Affordable Housing and related work is enabling provision of housing¹¹³. Partners involved in direct provision of services to the public, such as District Councils, recognise a real desire to work together on provision of affordable housing¹¹⁴. Policy monitoring identifies tangible impacts of such policies^{115,116}.

There is a perception amongst some local authority partners that planning has not enabled rural regeneration and that the National Park is not reflected in the plans of economic bodies. There is a tension between striving for consistency in meeting our statutory duties whilst at the same time achieving social and economic objectives.

iii. Change in other services

Many of our services deliver a high and growing quality of service and customer care to the Park's residents and users in key frontline services such as cycle hire, sustainable tourism, environmental education and access management. There is awareness and much expertise in the provision of access services to very diverse groups and also meeting the specialist needs of specific groups of recreational users. Whilst direct services are good overall, there are weaknesses in some areas. Resource decisions have not always been made on customer-feedback, although areas such as sustainable tourism and access and recreation are improving. Services offered commercially – such as at the Environmental Learning Centre at Losehill Hall, campsites, hostels and Cycle Hire – are well run but it is questionable whether these business models lead to fully inclusive service. As yet, there is little data to consider this.

Our services to land managers clarify an otherwise general confusion amongst recipients about the role of various (mainly Defra) bodies working to support sustainable land management. Too often the Authority has tried to be a major delivery agent – on public transport and land management payments, for example, necessitating a difficult withdrawal from these when they become unsustainable. There is a clear intent to reduce direct payments for public transport provision, but no clear intention to withdraw from land management payments. Filling gaps in national delivery has been a strength and creates a positive climate for working with land managers. Over time, there is a need to move towards a better local delivery framework between the NPA and partners.

Resources, and until recently focus, have meant that Authority properties have been too poorly resourced to be exemplars of sustainable land management. There are clearer management plans for NPA owned properties with targets being met for wildlife site condition¹¹⁷ and a willingness of estates staff to work in partnership with others. Support to the tourism sector is improving as a result of a strong partnership focus

and resultant increased resources which have been used for the provision of new services and facilities as witnessed by users of our Tourist Information Centres¹¹⁸.

The ability of services to work together on delivery still requires improvement, with duplication of some frontline roles, buildings and poor coordination of contacts with, e.g. parish councils and customers. It is a priority to improve services to customers and there is a potential efficiency gain to be made, but we have yet to make decisions that properly integrate crosscutting services (such as community engagement, field workers, survey staff, enforcement posts and customer contact services). Feedback from customers suggests that the information we provide about our grants and support to businesses, land managers and community groups may be confusing. We are taking part in a Derbyshire e-Government partnership 'Mystery Shopper' exercise that will examine in excess of 462 transactions across our services and have committed to taking action on the results. We are only at a very early stage of making customer-evident improvements resulting from the creation of a customer services team. The creation of this team is at an advanced stage and has already allowed very effective responses to, for example, Freedom of Information requests, handling of complaints and improved accessibility of our services through the website.

Improvements have generally been in line with our priorities, such as achieving favourable conservation status on Authority-owned property. We will re-assess this following receipt of the NPAPA assessor's report. For many of our services we are focusing on 'getting the basics right' for development control, recreational and conservation sites. Communities are witnessing a more open, accessible and confident leadership willing to engage at all levels with those who live in or work in the National Park¹¹⁹. Visitors using recreational and tourist facilities, such as TICs and cycle hire centres, are recording high overall satisfaction with services and facilities¹²⁰, and since September 2004 the area of open access has increased by over 50% in the National Park. The availability of information electronically and the 'front' facing parts of the organisation such as communications, reception areas and publications are noticeably improved on recent years¹²¹. Senior officers and members in constituent authorities, regional bodies, national government and others report having seen a leadership willing to explain, share and work together in the interests of the National Park. Communications and two-way engagement with specific audiences is improving – parish councils, communities, community leaders in urban area, regional and national agencies and voluntary bodies.

4.3 Partnerships for Delivery (KLOE 5)

The Authority works in a strong partnership environment with high expectations from staff, members and partners that these will deliver results. The Authority has a good reputation amongst partners for partnership working, with local authorities valuing our role in for example joint work on tourism, rural development, area forums and co-ordinating EU funding programmes¹²². But partnerships are also extremely complex. We are currently reviewing partnerships, bringing greater focus, improved alignment to our priorities and more effective delivery to customers through partnerships. The Authority has been both a willing initiator and leader of partnerships and also a participant in those led by others. The National Park Management Plan Review and proposals to monitor Section 62 compliance¹²³ provide the policy context for this. Engagement and partnership reviews are looking at ways to improve the way we work with key partners and stakeholders¹²⁴. Partnerships include:

- playing a growing role in joint work with local authorities and within Local Strategic Partnerships, where Directors take a personal lead in contact with various local authority regions where we have Link Members for each region
- strategic partnerships with a range of regional bodies in 4 regions¹²⁵
- national and regional land management bodies¹²⁶
- work with major landowners, e.g. 3 major utilities, National Trust and private estates such as Chatsworth¹²⁶
- long-standing commitments to address housing, transport, economic regeneration, biodiversity, access, recreation, education and tourism through close, enduring partnerships based around delivery¹²⁷
- leading developments for the National Park family, for example for the Portal for National Parks¹²⁸

There is strong commitment in some services, such as conservation, recreation and access and tourism, to delivery of services through partnership and joint area management working, with for example

VisitPeakDistrict, operational partnerships with Police, Fire and Ambulance Services. We are currently exploring innovative partnerships, for example on community engagement, land management, rural pathfinder, delivery of IEG and Management Development and workforce planning. We have been able to work closely with major economic agencies on the emerging Northern Way, particularly as a partner within Sheffield City Regional Development Plan. We have links to – and sometimes lead – a number of professional working groups with other National Parks and constituent authorities such as personnel, legal, communications, property management, transport, agriculture and planning officers. For key corporate services, such as legal, finance and Human Resources, we have practical working arrangements with Derbyshire County Council to provide services at a sensible cost in line with, but rather in advance of, Gershon thinking.

Partnerships have levered external resources, such as the £4.5 M Heritage Lottery funded Moors for the Future project, New Environmental Economy programmes and Management Development. Recent improvements in project management skills, development of a comprehensive external funding strategy and closer controls on decision-making by the Authority's Resource Management Team over partnership projects and a better overall intelligence on partnership working are now paying dividends.

The Performance Improvement Plan identifies improved partnership working as a priority. There are sound approaches to managing funding, staffing and other resources within projects with clarity about accountability¹²⁹. VisitPeakDistrict, the National Park Authorities Portal project and the ODPM Capacity Building Programme are good examples of effective partnership working e.g. structure, budget planning, regular steering group reviews, academic input etc. Corporate Identity is being well integrated into projects with a better corporate framework. We are reviewing partnerships so that we can a) understand them better, b) focus our efforts on key ones and c) ensure we achieve real delivery through them.

5. Conclusions

We welcome the National Park Authority Performance Assessment because we are committed to serving the Peak District well and to National Park Authorities being at the forefront of high quality public services. We want to help the assessors understand us and contribute their experience to our continuing improvement. We have come from a solid and professional background, but at times in the past we have not moved quickly enough to adapt our capacity and practices. This means that some of our staff, partners and customers may have a less than wholly positive view of the Authority. We want to overcome those concerns and engage them all in our current change programme.

We are currently making several key changes to the organisation, notably in management development, investing in buildings and customer-facing IT systems, strengthening governance arrangements and improving how we communicate to staff, our communities and our customers. Within our services, there is a commitment to improvement too. This is summarised in our Performance Improvement Plan draft action plan for 2006 that we will complete on receipt of the assessor's report¹³⁰. We know we are trying to do much and we will value the views of the assessors in particular on:

- the priority with which we are addressing issues
- whether we are making the progress we think we are
- what our most important next steps should be
- our priority for investing our resources in change
- the most important things we should spend our time on
- where we should seek additional help and/or resources

We look forward to working with the assessors and will ensure that their visit is productive and interesting.

**Peak District National Park Authority
September 2005**

Peak District National Park Authority : Self Assessment

Annex 1. Decision Making in the Peak District National Park Authority

Level of Decision Making	Principal Role	Key Changes	Comments
Membership	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Strategic leadership & decisions 2. Scrutiny and Performance Focus 3. External representation 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Governance Review 2004-2005 2. Reduction in members 2007 	New arrangements broadly working well, although awaiting evaluation of trial period, with greater delegation, more strategic focus on e.g. Best Value Performance Plan, risk and service performance, not management. Still further cultural and skills development needed.
Management Team	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Strategic leadership 2. Delegated resource decisions 3. Week to week decisions – running the Authority 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Management Team appointed 2003 2. Review in January 2005 	Weekly Business Meetings work well and ensure quick decisions, efficient handling of corporate business and continuity between member decisions and business. Resource decisions made against better strategic framework. Finding time for strategic work difficult. Directors still not delegating fully.
Services	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Responsibility for running services 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. New tier of performance management focused Heads of Service created in 2003. 2. Management Development programme 2005/6 3. Services and cross-functional work subject to annual programme of performance review by Management Team and Audit and Performance Committee 	Mixed experience, pressures and skills has lead to variable, but generally improving performance. After a difficult start, a more coherent 'team' is developing with greater trust and buy in to the 'corporate' agenda.
Teams and Individuals	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Personal and team plans and performance objectives 2. Engagement in wider Authority decisions 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Joint Performance Review Authority wide rolled out 2004-5 	Generally dedicated and expert staff, now readily engaging with corporate and collective effort. Improved communications paying dividends.

Peak District National Park Authority : Self Assessment

Annex 2. Financial Strategy

The Financial Strategy document was approved in July 2004, making clear some of the key principles applied in our approach to resource planning and financial governance and highlighting areas for development. The Code of Audit Practice 2005 outlines 12 criteria by which an organisation can be reviewed as to its ability to deliver value for money, in the economy, efficiency and effectiveness of its use of resources. The following is a brief statement of the Authority's position in respect of all 12 criteria, with examples of relevant evidence:-

Local Authority Criterion	Criteria for District Auditor's Judgement	Evidence
1. Arrangements for setting and reviewing objectives	-	<i>Section 3.1</i> ¹³¹
2. Channels of communication with service users, stakeholders and partners	-	<i>Section 4.3</i> ¹³²
3. Arrangements for monitoring and scrutiny of performance 4. Quality of information	Arrangements for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • objective setting; cascading to service level • action plans to achieve key targets • monitoring and scrutiny • response to external bodies 	<i>Section 3.5</i> ¹³³
5. Sound systems of internal control	Arrangements for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Statement of Internal Control • Internal Audit function • Procedures, standing orders & delegation schemes • Audit committee • Compliance with law • Partnership agreements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Statement of Internal Control</i> ¹³⁴ • <i>Standing Orders</i> ¹³⁵ • <i>Delegation Schedule (& App1)</i> ¹³⁶
6. Register of Key Risks	Arrangements for <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assigning ownership • Reporting to members 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Corporate Risk Register</i> ¹³⁷ • <i>Audit & Performance Committee reports</i> ¹³⁸
7. Arrangements for continuous improvement	Arrangements for <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reducing costs/quality • High spending areas reviewed • Reviewing and improving v.f.m. • Information on costs and quality reported • Targets set with robust efficiency plans • Effective procurement practices • Internal reviews carried out and achieving value improvements. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Section 4.1</i> ¹³⁹ • <i>Emerging frameworks – Asset Mgt Plan; Procurement Strategy; Capital Strategy; Workforce Plan; External Funding Strategy</i> ¹⁴⁰ • <i>Establishment control.doc (& Appendices)</i> ¹⁴¹ • <i>Procurement Strategy terms of reference</i> ¹⁴²

<p>8. Medium term financial strategy to deliver strategic priorities</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Modelling of income and expenditure over 3 years reviewed annually • Comprehensive, realistic and balanced revenue budget • Budgets revised annually • Affordable capital programmes • Subject to review by members • Budgets assigned to officers • Cash flow forecasts • CFO statement on robustness of estimates 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>BVPP</i>¹⁴³ • <i>Financial Strategy.doc</i>¹⁴⁴ • <i>Budgets and Strategy.xls</i>¹⁴⁵ • <i>Presentation finance.xls</i>¹⁴⁶ • <i>Peak District NPA Finance and Resources.doc</i>¹⁴⁷ • <i>Financial Issues AMP.ppt</i>¹⁴⁸ • <i>Budget report 2005-6.doc (& Appendices 1-5)</i>¹⁴⁹
<p>9. Spending matches available resources</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Balanced budget takes account of cost pressures • Spending maintained within budget • Policies and monitoring of reserve levels • CFO statement on adequacy of reserves • Annual investment strategy • Monitoring of budget and action on variances 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Outturn report 2004-5 (& Appendices A-F)</i>¹⁵⁰ • <i>See Budget and outturn report</i>¹⁵¹ • <i>Specific Reserves.doc (& Apps 1-2)</i>¹⁵² • <i>App1 Treasury Mgt</i>¹⁵³
<p>10. Arrangements in place for monitoring of budgets</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Profiled budgets input to a/cs system • Formal scheme of budget delegation • Guidance to budget holders • Action plans on variances • Appropriate budget monitoring information • Budget in user friendly format allocated to major spending activities • Financial systems secure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Budget monitoring agenda.doc (& Apps A, C, D,E, F)</i>¹⁵⁴ • <i>FRED.mdb (Budget Monitoring Database 2004-05)</i>¹⁵⁵ • <i>Service training module1.doc (Extract of manual)</i>¹⁵⁶ • <i>Service training module 2.doc (Extract of manual)</i>¹⁵⁷ • <i>Statement of Internal Control</i>¹⁵⁸ • <i>Budget 2005/6 Charts for Members</i>¹⁵⁹
<p>11. Arrangements in place for management of asset base</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Corporate capital strategy linked to financial strategy • Asset management plan • Up to date asset register • Annual programme of planned maintenance and rolling programme of surveys 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>See Budget and outturn report</i>¹⁶⁰ • <i>Prudential borrowing report.doc (& App1 Treasury mgt)</i>¹⁶¹ • <i>Financial issues AMP.ppt</i>¹⁶² • <i>Asset management plan</i>¹⁶³ • <i>Fixed Asset Register</i>¹⁶⁴
<p>12. Arrangements to secure probity and propriety</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Codes of conduct for members • Codes of conduct for employees • Registers of interests • Complaints procedure • Monitoring officer • Standards Committee • Fraud and Corruption policy and procedure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Codes of Conduct for members and employees</i>¹⁶⁵

Peak District National Park Authority : Self Assessment

Annex 3. Managing People

i. Our most important asset: people

Motivating, managing fairly and effectively and getting the most out of the staff are key priorities within the Performance Improvement Plan. At 1 August 05 the Authority employed 273.1 full time equivalent posts with 156 full time, 57.4 part time/ job share, 46.8 fixed term and temporary posts 12.9 casual and seasonal contracts. Some key posts however are supported by short term funding and staff experience uncertainty (sometimes within a month of the contract end) until renewed external funding is confirmed. However we have made good use of fixed term arrangements to deliver time-limited projects. In addition to establishment the authority makes excellent use of volunteers (c300 Rangers, 10 PC Volunteers and 10 Moors For Future) supporting the work of established staff. A timely report on Establishment Control, bearing in mind the projected settlement, was discussed at Committee in March and Resource Management Team are considering action plans in consultation with UNISON and Staff Committee during the Budget Planning process.

Staff are actively engaged in consultation on Strategic and Corporate issues with an annual programme of All Staff Meetings¹⁶⁶ and public meetings attended by senior staff. Formal and informal consultation with UNISON and Staff Committee are routine with excellent, and often challenging feedback (e.g. Establishment Control). We have introduced effective communications to all full-time staff with a new newsletter aimed specifically at remote outstationed, part-time and volunteer staff this autumn. We are trialing a formal team cascade approach to ensure consistent communication with staff and have recently introduced a policy that all staff should wear name badges, in part, to ensure greater awareness of new starters etc. A programme of walks and talks for all staff, part-timers and members has been highly successful during summer 2005 and this is being extended into the autumn/winter 2005/6.

The HR administration process to support information flow to Derbyshire County Council (DCC) for payroll and pensions for the complexity of contracts is very skilled and experienced. Efficiency savings could be achieved with investment to linking the stand alone HR database to DCC or having direct access to their database.

The Best Value Performance Plan evidences good outputs against Key Performance Indicators such as turnover and Sickness Absence. The latter is helped by the Absence Management Policy but not helped by the fact that in a small authority individual cases of serious illness skew the otherwise excellent absence data¹⁶⁷.

ii. Proactive approach to people management

The authority has well documented Human Resources Procedures and Policies, available to the majority of staff through a shared server. Human Resources are a proactive service to develop and implement new policies to meet strategic requirements¹⁶⁸, and review other policies in recognition of new legislation¹⁶⁹. More work needs to be done to embed these policies and to support managers operating consistently within them. This includes plans for training through the *Exceeding Excellence* Programme and corporate training initiatives¹⁷⁰. We have developed a Comprehensive Equality Policy in order to achieve Level 1 of the Equality Standard for Local Government¹⁷¹. Our Work Life Balance policy is proven as a highly successful recruitment and retention tool¹⁷² with 160 staff agreements in places across all services. This policy has been shared with, and adopted by, other National Park Authorities.

We review corporate training needs annually in a structured model which links training and development to corporate priorities¹⁷³. Training is regularly reviewed and developed e.g. staff induction training¹⁷⁴. In addition to the £17,000 Corporate Training Budget, services have small training budgets and there is a £3,000 Vocational Training Budget with less support (£500) given to more staff this year to gain qualifications at college/ night school with study leave support.

Recruitment processes were reviewed and updated in 2003 and senior posts selected via a competency based assessment centre. We have experimented, successfully, with advert design to attract applicants to key posts. We are also trialing, less successfully so far, placing additional adverts in inner city newspapers in order to try to improve organisational diversity. This will be developed into specific outreach for employment through the Work Force Plan initiative.

iii. Management development

There is a strong commitment to achievement from staff, with relatively few weakly managed areas and the leadership is focusing on improvement in these weak areas, such as customer focus in Development Control. The external and staff perception of the leadership is generally good and there is a strong and demonstrative commitment to effective partnerships and community engagement¹⁷⁵. Strengthening of the management skills and cohesiveness of the Management Team, the Heads of Service and 'bringing on' new talent are the main ways in which further improvements will occur over the next 2-3 years¹⁷⁶. This is evidenced through a large management development programme, *Exceeding Excellence* delivered in partnership, commencing 4 October 2005¹⁷⁷. Some operational and strategic managers have not been offered formal management development in the past, albeit they may be strong professionals and there are areas of excellence within the management group.

The management group of Directors and Heads of Service operate in a more coherent way than in the past. We have introduced a coaching style of performance management and training has been given to all Directors, Heads of Service in 2004/5 and is currently being cascaded to Team Managers supported by some Heads of Service to develop their skills further. As this is still being rolled-out, coaching is not yet seen as the cultural norm but there is evidence of powerful changes where individual managers have 'had a go'. Action Learning Sets are being introduced to follow the Team Manager Training to share learning, experiences and embed the skills.

In the last 12 months significant investment in training project management methodology (43 managers received 2 day project management training, 11 more in plan and 42 training in MS Project software). The use of project methodologies need to become the cultural norm (e.g. RMT reports and committee scrutiny are not yet uniformly following project management templates) for all work (including new initiatives before they become 'business as usual') not just used for 'Major Projects'. It is proposed that Members will receive a Project Management Master class to aid their scrutiny role, so that they are better able to probe and support the Executive in project management and change-related work.

iv. Our priorities for improvement

In addition to *Exceeding Excellence*, we are focusing on performance management, workforce planning, improving recruitment and putting our Health and Safety work on a more solid footing. The appraisal process, the Joint Performance Review (JPR), is not yet seen by all managers as an integrated part of their job. Staff know it is crucial to understand the golden thread of performance management and their role in NP purposes¹⁷⁸. We are at the forefront in local government with a Performance Management Database. All Heads of Service are using the Database to track objectives and record outcomes. The database requires further development to provide individual staff reports. Whilst the JPR process works well in some areas, JPR's are seen by some as a once-a-year task with no follow up or monthly one-to-one meetings to ensure that targets and timescales are being achieved. Performance is not being managed effectively in all places especially where it is important to challenge poor performance. Coaching and Individual Performance Improvement Plans are not being used routinely to manage under performance. A review of the process will be in the HR Service Plan for 2006/07 and embedding these approaches will be important within the *Exceeding Excellence* Programme.

Excellent work in a cross cutting project steering team led to the publication of the Authority's Work Force Plan with approval and roll out of a Year 1 Action Plan¹⁷⁹. The Action Plan has clear strategies to address important limitations on staffing resources such as recruitment and retention. This included approval for 3 interim HR specialists, funded through the ODPM Capacity Building Fund, to achieve identified outcomes by March 2006 in relation to 'Outreach For Employment' to underrepresented groups; making recommendations on pay and benefits issues; and to the development of a Training Strategy to include development of a Project Plan to show how to gain Investors in People Accreditation and a mentoring skills workshop. Other action identified in the plan fall to Management Team, Heads of Service and individual specialists. The Steering Team is tracking performance and will commence consultation on a Year 2 Action Plan in the autumn for roll out from March 2006.

Effective Health and Safety management has been divided between HR for office safety and Access & Recreation for field based staff. We invited an external specialist to audit our practices and whilst complementary within resources and expertise available has recommended a dedicated part time resource and urgent actions in some areas¹⁸⁰. The challenge is how this could be resourced, including sharing a contract (of employment or for services) with another local authority. A draft action plan is going to Health and Safety committee in September.

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154. a) Budget Monitoring Meeting Agenda. 26.05.05
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