



# Peak District National Park Authority

*Performance Assessment Report*  
September 2005

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## 1. Background

- 1.1 The National Park Authorities (NPAs), with the support of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) have decided to engage in a voluntary process of performance assessment.
- 1.2 Whilst many of the elements of the assessment process are similar to those used by the Audit Commission to assess other local authorities through the comprehensive performance assessment (CPA) regime, in the case of NPAs, a peer assessment approach is being used.
- 1.3 The national park authorities' performance assessment (NPAPA) process is intended to give each national park Authority a better appreciation of its strengths and weaknesses to assist it to improve the quality of the important services it offers to the public. It will show how good the Authority's performance is in delivering its strategic objectives and where it can make improvements. The NPAPA is thus more of a starting point for further engagement and action than an end in itself.
- 1.4 The aims of peer assessment are to:
  - Provide an objective, robust and managed external challenge to an NPAs own assessment of its current performance;
  - Encourage thinking about strengths and areas for improvement;
  - Contribute to producing a strong and forward looking improvement plan.
- 1.5 The SOLACE Enterprises' model of peer assessment for national park authorities involves a national park officer or chief executive, a serving local Authority chief executive, an NPA member and an NPA staff reviewer, all working with a facilitator for 4 days onsite. There is a follow up round table event plus an improvement planning event, the whole process taking place over an approximate 8 week period. This model has been specifically designed for providing peer assessment for NPAs. Principles on which the approach is based include:
  - Using credible peers who understand the working of the NPA;
  - The peer team must be and acceptable to the NPA;
  - The peer team must provide written and verbal feedback to the NPA;
  - The peer assessment must cover the guidance on the process for performance assessment of NPAs and the key lines of enquiry;
- 1.6 The approach to the performance assessment includes:
  - The emphasis placed on establishing a dialogue with the NPA;
  - The understanding that peer assessment is not an inspection
  - The emphasis placed on the flexibility of the assessment process, focusing on the specific circumstances of and issues facing the NPA.



## 2. The Peak District NPA performance assessment process

- 2.1 The Peak District National Park is located in central England close to major urban areas with some 24.5 million people living within a two hours drive; it also has considerable mineral reserves which create an industrial context alongside other development pressures. The park boundaries stretch across four government regions, 12 constituent authorities, 125 parishes and six emerging tourism destination partnerships.
- 2.2 The assessment of the Authority began during August 2005 when a provisional timetable of activities was drawn up and background documentation circulated to the peer team.
- 2.3 The peer team was also briefed for the process. The team was:
- Ken Lloyd, SOLACE Facilitator
  - Annie Shepperd, Chief Executive, Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council
  - Dr Nigel Stone, National Park Officer, Exmoor NPA
  - Dr Duncan Jeffray, Member, Lake District NPA
  - Mark MacGregor, Director of Field Services, Broads Authority
- 2.4 On the evening prior to the visit the team met to prepare for the assessment process. In that preparatory meeting the team:
- Reviewed the proposed methodology for NPAPA
  - Reviewed the background information provided by the Authority, including the self-assessment, the related evidence and any additional documentation requested by the SOLACE facilitator
  - Agreed initial lines of enquiry to be pursued during the visit and any additional activities and documentation that were needed to gather information on these
  - In the light of that agreement, reviewed and agreed adjustments to the provisional timetable of activities.
  - Agreed a *modus operandi* for the process (e.g. team roles and responsibilities)
- 2.5 The lines of enquiry identified by the team were:
- Prioritisation and progress against the performance improvement plan
  - Performance management and target setting
  - Partnership working
  - The impact of organisational change reviews
  - Minerals Issues
  - Planning and development control



- 2.5 The basis for the assessment are Key Lines of Enquiry (KLOE) developed with input from, and agreed specifically for use in this pilot, by all NPAs. The team examined the standard KLOE but gave particular attention to the issues that appeared from the documentation to warrant more detailed focus. It was recognised by the team that they could not look at absolutely everything in the same level of detail and that the process needed to be bounded in some way.
- 2.6 The various methods that the team used to gather information included:
- Presentations by and discussions with the chief executive and chair of the Authority
  - Face to face and telephone interviews with a wide cross section of stakeholders from inside and outside the Authority
  - Individual interviews with key managers and members
  - A meeting with a cross section of members
  - Small group discussions
  - Two staff workshops involving group discussions with a diagonal slice of staff from the Authority including frontline staff.
  - A tour of the area to introduce the team to the national park
  - Interview with the external auditor
- 2.7 Throughout the process the team reflected back to the Authority what they thought they were seeing and learning which provided the Authority with an opportunity to steer the team to look at additional information if they thought that they had not been getting quite the right message. It was also intended that this dialogue would help to generate an ownership of our feedback because nothing should come as a surprise at the final meeting.
- 2.8 At the end of the visit the team fed back the results of the information gathering process in a more structured way. This event was attended by:
- The chair, deputy chair and members of the Authority
  - The chief executive and senior management team
  - Project team staff
- 2.9 The results of the process outlined above, including the feedback event, are set out in the remainder of this report which is structured as follows:
- Section Three: Summary of main points
  - Section Four: Feedback on the top level question **What is the NPA seeking to achieve?** and the three themes that fall under this question namely:
    - *Quality of vision*
    - *Quality of the Authority's plans*
    - *Setting priorities*



- Section Five: Feedback on the top level question **How has the NPA set about delivering its vision?** and the three themes that fall under this question namely:
  - *Organisational capacity*
  - *Learning ability*
  - *Performance management*
- Section Six: Feedback on the top level question **What has the NPA achieved/not achieved to date?** and the three themes that fall under this question, namely:
  - *Achievement in delivery of purposes and duties*
  - *Achievement of improvement in delivery of purposes and duties*
  - *Developing the effectiveness of the organisation*
- Section 7: Best practice highlights
- Section 8: Conclusion and recommendations
- Section 9: Scoring of assessment

The team took care to record areas of strengths as well as areas for improvement as both contribute to a better appreciation of services. However, since the main aim of the assessment process is to stimulate improvement, comparatively more attention has been given in this report to explaining and evidencing the areas on which the team believe the Authority should focus its improvement efforts in the future. This must not detract from the teams overall view that the Authority is performing effectively in the local delivery of national park purposes and duties and has examples of excellence.

### 3. Summary of main points

- Good member involvement in developing and scrutinising Authority work
- Structured approach to improvement planning
- Good progress on reviews, strategies and protocols
- Strong leadership and governance arrangements in place
- Enthusiastic, talented and committed staff
- Sound risk management framework and toolkit
- Achieving impressive outcomes recognised by stakeholders
- Sound financial management arrangements in place

*However, the team identified:*

- Greater clarity is needed about priorities, targets and outcome based objectives
- A need for more effective staff involvement and engagement
- The medium/long term strategy for minerals extraction issues needs review.
- Internal communications needs further improvement
- Leadership skills need further development
- Performance management arrangements are not sufficiently robust



#### 4. What is the NPA seeking to achieve?

##### **Theme One: Quality of vision**

###### *Strengths:*

- 4.1 The Authority has a clearly stated vision which translates into well documented corporate objectives. These corporate objectives are starting to be used consistently to guide the medium term planning (2004-09) and the year by year delivery through the BVPP and other corporate plans. Organisational values have been developed and these are set out in the best value performance plan.
- 4.2 The abbreviated version of the vision states; 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. This 4 line vision features in written documentation, notices and promotional material produced by the Authority.
- 4.3 Corporate objectives link to the vision and cover both national and local issues. They reflect major local concerns such as rural services, affordable housing, social inclusion and community facilities; as well as national priorities such as rural pathfinder and sustainable transport.
- 4.4 Consultation with stakeholders and communities took place in developing the vision and this process continues through meetings with authorities, park wide and area forums and public meetings.

###### *Issues to consider:*

- 4.5 To assist in the delivery of the vision, there is a need to more clearly distinguish between what are the Authority's priorities, what are objectives and what are indicators of performance. This needs to be clearer and more focussed on priorities and how they link to delivering the targets that help the authority to reach its vision. This has been recognised by the Authority and it is starting to impact on its approach to implementing the vision.
- 4.6 Ambition for the Authority is not consistently focused through the vision or linked to specific outcomes. There is a strong emphasis on process improvement and less on what the Authority is seeking to achieve, such as its approach to the special qualities of the national park set in the context of some of the other key challenges, such as minerals extraction.
- 4.7 There is limited knowledge, understanding and recognition by staff of the Authority's published corporate values, vision and objectives. The more general use of the shortened vision statement is not yet being widely acknowledged.



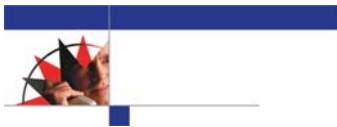
## **Theme Two: Quality of Authority's plans**

### *Strengths:*

- 4.8 Annual corporate objectives support the five year corporate priorities and are used to inform the best value performance plan and service planning. These provide a robust framework for the evolving cascade of priorities and translation of plans in to action.
- 4.9 Members have been actively involved in developing and scrutinising plans. The strategic planning events and the strategic advisory group have enabled members to engage in shaping the priorities of the Authority.
- 4.10 Organisational development issues identified by the Authority have been used as the basis of the performance improvement plan and the best value performance plan. This is supported by a well structured and presented performance plan which has a clear programme of activity with good use of indicators of performance and other supporting information. The audit and performance review committee plays a prominent role in monitoring these and other Authority plans.
- 4.11 Good progress has been made on reviews, strategies and protocols. This has been helped by the availability of comprehensive data to support strategic decision making. The Authority has a considerable amount of high quality documentation such as local authority census, survey derived information and its own state of the park reports which are reviewed regularly. These provide a sound basis for members and stakeholders to develop future priorities.
- 4.12 There are good linkages between the management plan and consultations on the local development framework. This strength demonstrates the authority's overall commitment to consultation and community engagement.
- 4.13 There is an obvious commitment to wider engagement in planning for the future with hard to reach groups, such as urban communities, young people and people with disabilities.

### *Issues to consider:*

- 4.14 There is limited use of outcome focussed objectives or similar SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, time-related) measurements in service and other plans. Because of this, it is not clear how targets are set and this lack of SMART objectives impedes effective monitoring of progress towards completion of actions or projects.
- 4.15 Few linkages exist to explain the relationship between the allocation of resources and key priorities. Whilst considerable activity is evident there is little upon which to judge whether the scale of the task and associated programmes are appropriate and whether they are creating the best impact. One example might be village plans and projects, where 200 buildings have been identified as at risk but only 15 cases are receiving attention.



- 4.16 There is a need for greater involvement of staff in the development of Authority plans. This feature has previously been identified by the Authority through its staff focus groups and is a positive opportunity as staff are a key strength.

### **Theme Three: Setting priorities**

#### *Strengths:*

- 4.17 The strategic objectives and the wide range of activities of the Authority are generated from and influenced by a number of sources, including government priorities external and internal consultations, best value and other reviews and from the priorities of stakeholder organisations, such as local strategic partnerships.
- 4.18 Consultation and general communication with stakeholders and the media is proactive, well regarded and continually improving. There is a tangible feeling that the Authority is getting through clear messages about the special nature of the national park and, for their part, partners feel that the Authority is listening to what they are saying about their own priorities.
- 4.19 The use of best value reviews to influence priorities is evident in such issues as transport, where the Authority has determined it will move to a more influencing role, rather than necessarily be a provider of direct funding. In a similar vein, the review of Losehill Hall is a good example of the Authority seeking to establish priorities for the targeting of resources and so gain the best return on its investment.
- 4.20 There is evidence of resources being redirected to changing priorities, such as in the establishment of a customer services team and a restructuring of both the estates and conservation services.

#### *Issues to consider*

- 4.21 There are too many issues being addressed without clarity of prioritisation. This impacts on both stakeholders and staff and to the Authority's credit has ready been recognised as an issue for improvement. The key now is to implement mechanisms to establish a priority order for the work the Authority wishes to carry out; to ensure that it is deliverable within the resources allocated; and followed through into the newly developed service plans.
- 4.22 Minerals extraction is a big issue for the Authority and considerable resources are allocated to address its impact in various ways. Authority publications could emphasise more the prioritisation of issues around minerals extraction, what the Authority seeks to achieve in the medium to long term and how resources will be allocated to ensure an optimum impact.
- 4.23 The Authority has identified the need to improve internal communications and secure greater ownership of priorities. Whilst a number of means of communication are in place, such as e-zines and the frontline publication, mechanisms are needed to monitor the effectiveness of communication. There is also a need for more structured approaches, such as the proposed core team briefings, to be put in place quickly as a consistent organisational approach. This will respond positively to the issue identified at staff forums.





- 4.24 Communications with communities have been improving considerably and are recognised as such by recipients. However, further attention could be given to the most appropriate ways of structuring community based meetings to ensure that the Authority gains maximum advantage for its own purposes as well as for those of the community.

## 5. How has the NPA set about delivering its vision?

### Theme Four: Organisational capacity

#### *Strengths:*

- 5.1 There is strong leadership from members and officers and both the leadership and staff are well regarded by stakeholders. Stakeholders and others have recognised a positive change in the Authority and its political and managerial leadership, with a new impetus around the leadership of the organisation which is driving improvement. As a result, the Authority is seen as forward thinking, innovative and committed.
- 5.2 Good governance arrangements, executive structures and improved organisational culture have resulted from the fundamental reviews conducted by the Authority. The reduction of committees from seven to four; reduction and streamlining of the management team and increased delegation have all been positive outcomes. This has reduced bureaucracy and improved effectiveness.
- 5.3 Staff are seen by stakeholders as enthusiastic, talented and committed with a strong belief in their national park work. For their part the staff see the organisation as caring and inclusive in its work with a concern about the national park and staff feel valued by the organisation.
- 5.4 Members are committed to the new governance arrangements with good working relationships. They have appropriate involvement in financial issues, audit and risk management. Robust budgetary information is accessible to members and is comprehensive and understandable. In addition many members are active in leading task teams on issues such as communications, decision making and plan development. They also act as lead members and champions for key issues such as e-government, equalities, asset management, cultural heritage, and youth.
- 5.5 Effective delegations have reduced bureaucracy. This has led to a 32 percent reduction in business going to committees. Further delegations are being implemented to both planning and services committees and these are expected to reduce business by 50 percent overall.
- 5.6 Investment has been made in training and development for staff and members. Recent changes combined with external funding have made significant improvements to the structure and availability of good quality training.



### *Issues for discussion*

- 5.7 Managers are not consistently exercising the leadership skills that enable staff to be involved and to contribute their ideas and skills. There are not always the effective two way exchanges needed to provide impetus for implementing change or support and enable staff in the delivery of work programmes.
- 5.8 Training and development for staff is not yet linked to organisational needs through the joint performance review process, nor are the outcomes from training measured for effectiveness.
- 5.9 The *exceeding excellence* programme is being delivered to managers to help provide consistent managerial competencies and approaches. It is an important and well constructed cornerstone for the development of the Authority's managers. However, the Authority has yet to consider what other development programmes it might need to meet some of the other specific managerial needs. For example, some silo management still exists within the organisation and has an impact on Authority working. This may need different developmental approaches to remedy and the Authority needs to ensure that any additional schemes connect naturally to the main developmental programmes.

### **Theme Five: Working in partnership**

#### *Strengths:*

- 5.10 There is an excellent record of and substantial improvement in developing partnerships. Partnership working has been a long time feature of the Authority's thinking as shown in the 2000-05 management plan approach. Further noticeable improvements have been made recently with stakeholders seeing marked positive changes in the approach to partnership working, including the establishment of strategic connections reflecting its city and urban context.
- 5.11 Sound partnership work shows in the considerable number of successful schemes such as the Bakewell regeneration project which has made significant improvements to the local street scene; and the very positive relationship with the fire and rescue services which has led to a reduction in the severity and impact of moorland fires.
- 5.12 There are good examples of Authority objectives being delivered through partnership work such as the the *moors for the future* project. The *Stanage forum* is an example which was exemplary in communicating and listening to stakeholders. This project has produced a sound solution with agreed outcomes for a potentially difficult and complex issue. In its approach to this delicate project the Authority traded control for influence and produced a successful set of outcomes with ownership amongst stakeholders.
- 5.13 Impressive work is taking place on tourism and interested stakeholders have seen this through examples such as the *visitpeakdistrict* theme.



- 5.14 A staff survey of stakeholder engagement and subsequent staff focus groups have been effective ways of producing a basis for future partnership working. This has led on to the formation of a working group to plan future involvement and provide a database on the 300 or so partnerships that exist.

*Issues to consider:*

- 5.15 A number of issues are being addressed by work that has started on improving partnership working. This includes the development of a partnership protocol; the sharpening of the way the Authority targets its resources and influence; and improving outcomes from partnerships. It will also provide a structure for those partnerships it should lead and those where another body is better placed to take on the function.
- 5.16 Whilst there is a clear Authority focus on access for all, with good initiatives, some partners, advertisers and event organisers could be encouraged to make similar demonstrations, such as simple marking of projected events to show those suitable for wheel chair access and signing facilities for deaf people.

## **Theme Six: Performance management & learning**

*Strengths:*

- 5.17 A performance management framework has been developed and is being implemented progressively across the Authority. There is quarterly reporting of information to managers and senior members with an accessible database for other data searches and routine monitoring of performance.
- 5.18 Project management skills have been improved through a programme of training for managers. The Authority has responded well to this identified need and now has an improved spread of project skills and knowledge.
- 5.19 The risk management framework and toolkit are well structured and provide an effective resource for the identification and monitoring of risk. The inclusion of the risk register in the best value performance plan allows a wider stakeholder understanding of the risks being addressed. Identified risk areas are managed and corporate risks have been reduced from 29 to 17 over the last year.
- 5.20 Changes to the complaints system following review have improved the service to customers. The structure has been improved, as has the system for extracting learning from complaints. There is an accessible database for staff to use with the presentation of information on complaints and remedial action to members is well structured.
- 5.21 Staff focus groups provide an effective mechanism for identifying issues and increasing organisational self awareness. These groups have led to more informal networks for information exchange which is a positive outcome. A list of issues for improvement has been produced and reported to members with an approved action plan to address the most important items.



- 5.22 The Authority responds positively to internal and external reviews. For example the district auditors comments on risk in their 2002/03 report resulted in improvements to the appraisal and management of projects; development of a corporate insurance strategy; and managing and approving contractors.
- 5.23 The self awareness of the Authority demonstrated in the content of the self assessment produced for this performance assessment is very good. The views of the assessment team differed very little from those set out by the Authority. In order to strengthen its learning, the Authority could continue to seek out the views of specialist external expertise, critical friends and informed visitors.
- 5.24 The coordination of proposals for external funding is being strengthened. The creation of the strategic investment group is intended to develop visionary investment projects and link funding applications to the objectives emerging in the new management plan.

*Issues to consider:*

- 5.25 Whilst the performance management framework is in place and the prospects for the future are good, the approach still remains to be fully embedded with managers at all levels and with members. The performance management framework is relatively complex for the size of the authority and most importantly not always seen as useful or motivating by staff. It is not based closely enough on the Authority's vision and organisational objectives; and lacks alignment to key performance indicators.
- 5.26 The complexity of joint performance reviews is one factor in the framework not being implemented widely and only 53 percent of staff have completed a review in the 2005-06 cycle. Given the importance of this process to the engagement of staff and the delivery of the Authority's objectives much higher coverage and consistency is needed.
- 5.27 The software systems for performance management are operating on a pilot basis and still being developed, with seven of the 13 services using the new system. This means that the management of performance in a corporate way is not as effective as the organisation needs.
- 5.28 Structured systems for the sharing of learning are still being developed and are not yet consistently in place. Learning from partners is not consistent. There is limited evaluation of the experiences gained from joint working or projects and more could be done to capture both strengths and learning points for the benefit of future work programmes.



## 6. What has the NPA achieved/not achieved to date?

### Theme Seven: Achievement in delivery of purposes and duties

#### *Strengths:*

- 6.1 The Authority has been effective in achieving recognisable outcomes in the delivery of its purposes and duties and the award of the Council of Europe diploma for landscape protection is a reflection of this. There are many other noteworthy achievements over a considerable time such as the proactive approach in providing open access after the foot and mouth restrictions. More recently, the new environmental economy project shows innovation, involves many other agencies and provides excellent linkages between rural regeneration and care for the environment.
- 6.2 The implementation of the countryside and rights of way (CROW) legislation has been exemplary. This involved the Authority's staff in contacting over 400 landowners to facilitate implementation and reduce potential conflict.
- 6.3 Other key recreational, visitor services and tourism targets are being delivered. As a result visitor usage of tourist information centres has increased.
- 6.4 The planning service is improving its performing on national indicators and has made commendable achievements in electronic access. Issues of a consistent customer focus within development control are being addressed with the full involvement of members supported by interim managerial arrangements and business process reengineering.
- 6.5 An example of delivery of a specific priority is the increase in the number of sites of special scientific interest (SSSI's) owned by the Authority that have achieved favourable status. This has risen from 56 percent in 2003 to 85 percent today.
- 6.6 Wider social issues are being addressed through inclusivity work and projects such as looked after children and the promoting understanding strategy review.
- 6.7 Losehill Hall is an impressive award winning facility which is very supportive of the Authority's wider educational interests. Its environmental learning centre, received a gold award for excellence in tourism in 2005.
- 6.8 Extensive comparative information is used to benchmark the Authority against other national park authorities and neighbouring local authorities. This allows the Authority to understand its standing in both a national park and local geographical context.

#### *Issues to consider:*

- 6.9 The delivery of medium term objectives is clouded by historically poor target setting and aspirational objectives. The 2000-05 national park management plan contained few measurable actions to support its four strategic objectives of environment; people; economy; and understanding. In a similar vein, the delivery of the biodiversity action plan is mixed and only some of the targets have been delivered. Again more recently (2004-05 the targets for 10 of the 18



key performance indicators used by the Authority were not achieved – although many were high performing in comparative terms. The message here is not that the Authority has difficulty in delivering quality; it is more about it needing robust targeting and improved measurement for outcomes.

- 6.10 Whilst the authority has been in the lead, nationally, in developing policies that support affordable housing provision, there are perceptions amongst some stakeholders that planning policies do not facilitate the provision of affordable housing, farm diversification and rural regeneration, and are inconsistent with the Authority's vision. More needs to be done by the Authority to communicate and engage with key stakeholder groups to ensure that these perceptions are informed by authoritative comment and information. The Authority can also afford to be more robust with partners in ensuring an up to date housing needs analysis has taken place.

### **Theme Eight: Achievement of improvement in delivery of purposes and duties**

#### *Strengths:*

- 6.11 Communities and stakeholders show widespread recognition of improvement in work of the Authority and its impact. They are complimentary about what has improved and speak highly about the staff, managers and members who are producing these changes. Much of the improvement is highlighted in other ways elsewhere in this report but some specific examples are included in this report and we are confident that there are more.
- 6.12 There is a commitment to improvement throughout the organisation and approximately half of the key performance indicators used by the Authority are in the top performing quartile of comparative authorities and a similar number are showing improvement on the previous year. This is commendable.
- 6.13 The emergence of tourism as a priority was noticeable to stakeholders and the resulting joint arrangements with the district councils have brought improvements to facilities and visitor enjoyment. Other improved aspects that have been identified by stakeholders are in the access and recreation service, in the provision of car parks and in visitor services. Together these have helped visitors see much more of the national park and not just the key attractions.
- 6.14 Other improvements to frontline services have occurred with cycle hire, environmental education and access management and through the delivery of schemes such as Bakewell town centre and other environmental work.
- 6.15 The self assessment shows the Authority is open and generally aware of where it needs to improve. It has used focus groups, seminars and external reviews very effectively to identify issues for improvement and is now working through these.
- 6.16 A positive inclusive approach is taken to both visitors and staff. This includes outreach work with underrepresented groups and some leaflets and other information to encourage access for all was evident.



*Issues to consider:*

- 6.17 The sustainability of recent improvements may be threatened by the lack of prioritisation of resources in a climate of reducing resources. This is of particular concern over externally funded elements and robust exit and continuance strategies need to be in place for these schemes.

**Theme Nine: Developing the effectiveness of the organisation**

*Strengths:*

- 6.18 Sound financial management and supporting systems are in place in the Authority
- 6.19 Human resources policies are being progressively put in place. Good recruitment practices exist, there are exceptionally low sickness levels and a work life balance policy is in force with amongst other standard policies. There is an equality in employment policy, supported by an equality standard audit group which has led to the attainment of level one of the local government equality standard, with level two being pursued. Staffing and resources have been improved for human resources work which will allow for important development work on pay and benefits, equalities, training and development and the leadership and development programme.
- 6.20 ICT has been improved through IEG and is beginning to impact on ways of working
- 6.21 The *exceeding excellence* scheme is a commendable contribution towards improving managerial development. Considerable investment has been made in developing a management culture based on a modern management approach.
- 6.22 External funding has been used to good effect. This funding has helped resource the *moors for the future* project, the *new environmental economy* approach and resourced the performance improvement plan. All of this is investment for the future.
- 6.23 The Authority has responded to an external health and safety audit in a positive manner to take forward audit issues and build these into short and medium term plans.

*Issues to consider:*

- 6.24 A sustainable procurement strategy is needed. Plans are in place to have one developed by March 2006.
- 6.25 Remote workers need to be better supported and to gain the benefits of ICT working. Limitations on the information technology programme have meant that less has been offered to some locations and this is limiting the ability of frontline staff to access information, communicate with colleagues and represent the authority effectively to partners and the wider public.



- 6.26 The absence of a recognition system to acknowledge team achievements is not helping the development of the organisation or promoting the teamwork approach.
- 6.27 Whilst there has been effective use of one off external funding it is leading to a potential gap in operating costs, including staff and their development. To ensure that it continues to have adequate resources for the future, the Authority needs to have in place processes to ensure that the fall off in funding and projected efficiency savings can be accommodated. This issue is being addressed by the Authority's strategic investment group as part of a wider consideration of funding.

## 7. Best practice highlights

In each assessment the teams intend to identify initiatives, services or functions which they feel represent best practice and are worthy of examination by other national park authorities. In the case of the Peak District NPA the areas identified are:

- Very wide consultation and a process of involvement which leading to sustainable solutions – the *Stanage forum*
- Exemplary partnership programmes such as *moors for the future*, *new environmental economy* and *visitpeakdistrict*
- Managerial development in partnership - the *exceeding excellence* scheme

## 8. Conclusions and recommendations

- 8.1 The findings of this report are to a great extent, confirmed in the Authority's own self assessment and through its performance improvement plan. The purpose of a *peer* assessment is to encourage an organisation's self awareness and to support improvement. Because of the time available and because of the basis on which the team members offer their insights, a peer assessment is not intended and can never provide a detailed forensic analysis of an organisation. However, the team reached their conclusions and put forward their recommendations on the basis of triangulating evidence from a range of sources. During the course of the assessment week team members met and held detailed discussions with a large number of people representing internal and external interests. They also had access to a considerable amount of documentary information. Nothing in the report is simply the perception of the team or a single view expressed by one person who was interviewed. All the contents have been well substantiated. When speaking to team members, respondents were given a commitment of confidentiality. That has been maintained, since it is essential for making the assessment process effective.
- 8.2 The team's impression was of an Authority that has a lot to be proud of and that is responding well to the pressures and complexities arising from its location. The Authority is making good progress and the team are confident more will be made. The challenges are in how the Authority decides to move forward and how it will address this in the performance improvement plan. A





review of the strategy for managing quarrying and minerals; setting priorities, and engaging and involving staff are all critical issues to be addressed.

- 8.3 The recommendations of the team which are drawn from the detail of the report are set out below:

### **Vision, plans and priorities**

1. More clarity is needed on objectives, priorities and targets (4.5)
2. Ambition and outcomes for the park's special qualities should be clarified and be set in the context of the challenges it faces. (4.6)
3. Ownership by staff of the Authority's corporate values, vision and objectives should be improved. (4.7)
4. There should be more use of outcome focussed objectives, SMART targets and measurements in Authority plans. (4.14)
5. Linkages between resource allocation to priorities and the resulting outcomes should be clearer. (4.15)
6. Staff need to be more intimately involved in the development of the Authority's plans. (4.16)
7. The approach to strategic minerals extraction issues should be re-evaluated to ensure that resources are directed in the most effective way and the optimum impact is achieved. (4.22)
8. Internal communications should continue to be improved, including mechanisms to monitor the effectiveness of communication and early implementation of the core team briefings. (4.23)
9. The structure of community based meetings needs attention. (4.24)

### **Capacity, partnerships and performance management**

10. Managers need to be more consistent in the exercising of leadership that involves and enables staff to contribute. (5.7)
11. Improvements are needed to the joint performance review process to ensure it links to organisational needs, is more universally implemented and less complex. (5.8 & 5.26)
12. The *exceeding excellence* programme should connect with supplementary managerial development needs that exist. (5.9)
13. The work that has commenced on improving partnership working should be continued. (5.15)
14. The Authority could use its influence on partners and advertisers to improve access for all publications. (5.16)



15. Performance management frameworks need further work to embed them more firmly, make them more straightforward and motivating, align them more closely to Authority objectives and display improved targeting and measurement. (5.25, 5.27 & 6.9)
16. Structured systems for the sharing of learning need to be developed further. (5.28)

### **Achievements and developing effectiveness**

17. Communication and engage with key stakeholder groups is needed to provide authoritative information on issues around development control. (6.10)
18. An assessment should be made to identify externally funded items and then produce exit or financial continuance strategies as appropriate. (6.17 & 6.27)
19. Work on producing a sustainable procurement strategy should continue to be progressed. (6.24)
20. Access to the information network should be improved for remote workers. (6.25)
21. A staff recognition system should be developed. (6.26)

**Ken Lloyd on behalf of the Assessment Team**

**September 2005**



**The Assessment Team's Judgement of the Authority's Current Performance against the nine themes of the Key Lines of Enquiry:**

<b>KLOE Themes</b>	<b>Assessment</b>
<b>What is the NPA trying to achieve?</b>	
Quality of vision	Strengths outweigh/Weaknesses
Quality of Authority's plans	Strengths outweigh/Weaknesses
Setting priorities	Weaknesses outweigh/Strengths
<b>How has the NPA set about delivering its vision?</b>	
Organisational capacity	Strengths outweigh/Weaknesses
Working in Partnership	Strong
Performance management and Learning	Weaknesses outweigh/Strengths
<b>What has the NPA achieved / not achieved to date?</b>	
Achievement in delivery of purposes and duties	Strong
Achievement of improvement in delivery of purposes and duties	Strong
Developing the effectiveness of the organisation	Strengths outweigh/Weaknesses

### **Definitions**

**Strong:** High achieving with few outstanding improvement issues to address

**Strengths outweigh weaknesses:** Making strong progress towards achieving the standard. Some improvements still required but these are minimal compared to the distance travelled so far.

**Weaknesses outweigh strengths:** On the move with evidence of progress being made but there is further to go in making improvements than the distance travelled so far or in seeing the changes create an impact.

**Weak:** Little evidence of achievement, considerable improvement required. Clear focus and a structured approach to improvement is necessary.