

YORKSHIRE DALES NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY
AUDIT AND REVIEW COMMITTEE

15 September 2006

PERFORMANCE IMPROVEMENT AND MAJOR PROJECT REVIEWS

Purpose of report

To establish a future programme of reviews in order to:

- a) learn lessons from major projects; and,
- b) improve performance in areas where the Authority is currently under-performing.

Strategic Planning Framework

The information and recommendation(s) contained in this report are consistent with the Authority's statutory purposes and its approved strategic planning framework:

- ***Best Value Performance Plan***

Strengthen the role of the Audit and Review Committee

Introduce arrangements for reports on progress and lessons learnt from major projects to go to the appropriate Committee

Background

Members will be well aware that, following the conclusion of the National Park Authority Performance Assessment (NPAPA) last year, the Authority has undertaken a general review on the role and responsibilities of Members.

One part of this review has focused on the Peer Review Team's conclusion that the Authority needed to re-examine the role of the Audit & Review Committee. In particular, it was suggested that consideration should be given to Members taking a more direct role in reviewing progress and taking lead responsibility for the dissemination of 'lessons learned/best practice' throughout the Authority.

At the last Authority meeting, Members agreed a new, enhanced role for the Audit and Review Committee. The Committee's revised terms of reference include:

- a) Lead on improvement planning and learning from major projects and on-going programmes;
- b) Instigating a programme of reviews in areas where the Authority is under-performing, and report back to the Authority

The types of review

The revised terms of reference (above) cover two very different types of review:

Major projects

These reviews will be retrospective (i.e. carried out once a project has been completed). They should provide members with an opportunity to hear from the officers about what has been achieved, focus on learning from what worked/what didn't, and make recommendations for future project development and management across the Authority. A suggested framework for reporting these reviews is at **Annex A**. Two other reports on this agenda give examples of how this structure works in practice.

Performance improvement

These reviews will be current, which is to say they will look at areas of work that are on-going. They will focus on areas where the Authority is not achieving what it has set out to do, and will need to focus closely on the options for change. A suggested framework for these reviews is at **Annex B**.

It follows from the above that reviews of projects will tend to be 'lighter touch' than those looking at performance. Members should note that the final frameworks for both types of review will need to be discussed with the Audit Commission to ensure compliance with the Authority's statutory obligations in relation to value for money and best value.

Programme of Reviews

Clearly, there will be a limit to the number of reviews it is possible, or indeed practical, to carry out each year. Members recognised this at the last meeting of the Committee, expressing a strong desire for 'few but focused' as the maxim when developing a programme. As a consequence, it is proposed that this be limited to a maximum of 4 project reviews and 2 performance improvement reviews in any given year.

At **Annex C** is a list of major projects that have just been or will be completed over the next 2 years. It is proposed that this form the programme of project reviews. The dates in brackets show the suggested Committee meeting dates.

At **Annex D** is a list of the work areas that were identified at the last meeting of the Committee as being *potential* areas for review because either:

- a) the Authority is not meeting its own objectives/targets; or,
- b) the Authority appears to be under-performing compared to other NPAs.

As was made clear at the last meeting of the Committee, the reasons for the apparent under-performance vary, and there are a number of areas where there may be little value in carrying out an in-depth performance review. **Annex E** gives a brief assessment of the appropriateness or otherwise of reviewing each potential area.

If Members concur with that assessment, it is suggested that the first performance improvement review (to be carried out in 2006/07) should look at:

- the speed with which the Authority deals with natural environment and cultural heritage consultations.

Subject to performance over the rest of this year, the main candidates for review in 2007/08 would seem to be:

Managing scheduled ancient monuments;	Woodland planting;
Listed buildings 'at risk';	Definitive map cases;

However, it is recommended that the final decision on which areas to review next year be taken at the Committee's meeting in May 2007, when the Committee will receive its annual report on performance in the previous year

Carrying out the reviews

It is proposed that project reviews should be carried out by the relevant Head of Department and project manager (consulting as appropriate with other staff who were involved). The final report would then be signed off by the Senior Management Team to ensure cross-departmental consensus. On that basis, it is estimated that each review would require about a week of fte officer time (equating to roughly £700). This would give a total indicative cost of £2,800 if there are 4 project reviews each year.

For the performance improvement reviews, it is recommended that a small team be established along the lines of those used previously for Best Value Reviews. It is proposed that each team should contain no more than 6 people, including:

- 2 Members (from the Audit and Review Committee and/or the relevant 'champion');
- Head of the relevant Department;
- Head of another Department
- 2 further members of staff.

On the basis of experience of Best Value Reviews, and more recent reviews carried out by the Head of Park Management, it is estimated that the performance improvement reviews would require around 25 days of fte officer (and member) time. This would equate to roughly £3,500 – giving an indicative annual total for two reviews of £7,000.

It is recommended that the costs (in time) of the various reviews be monitored, and any significant variations from these estimates be reported back to this Committee for consideration.

Conclusions

The enhanced role of the Audit and Review Committee has the potential to make a real impact on improving the Authority's performance and ensuring that lessons are learned from major projects – for the benefit of future projects.

In addition, the consideration of major projects carried out by the Authority, together with direct involvement in carrying out Performance Improvement Reviews should provide a more dynamic and worthwhile role for Members, as well as increasing the opportunity for

contact between Members and officers (something that was picked up in the Authority's own Self Assessment Report last year).

The key issue for Members to consider is whether the proposed programme and framework for the two types of review strikes the right balance between the need for rigour in carrying out the reviews, and the need to keep the time and resources at a level that is practical for an organisation of this size.

RECOMMENDATION

That Members consider the proposals set out in this report and:

- a) agree a framework for project reviews and performance improvement reviews;
- b) indicate the number of reviews that the Committee would like to see undertaken each year;
- c) determine which major projects should be reviewed over the next 2 years, and when;
- d) determine which, if any, areas of work should be subject to a performance improvement review in 2006/07;
- e) determine the arrangements for carrying out each type of review.

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Background documents: None

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FRAMEWORK FOR REPORTING 'LESSONS LEARNT' FROM MAJOR PROJECTS

1. The intention

- Why was the project was set up?
- What was it intended to achieve (objectives, outputs, outcomes etc)?
- Original timescale
- Original funding/resources plan
- Proposed means of delivery

2. The reality

- What was actually achieved?
- Final timescale
- Final cost/resources
- Means of delivery

3. Sustaining the project

- How will the work be taken forward now the project has finished?

4. Lessons learnt

- What went well and why?
- What didn't go well and why?

NB Should focus in particular on how the project matched up to YDNPA checklist for project development/management, which will be produced in 2007/08]

5. Recommendations for future projects

FRAMEWORK FOR REPORTING PERFORMANCE IMPROVEMENT REVIEWS

1. The issue

- In what area are we under-performing?
- Why does it matter?
- What are we supposed to be achieving (objectives, outputs, outcomes etc)?

2. Current performance

- What are we actually achieving?
- What resources are we putting in?
- How is the service being delivered?
- Does it represent value for money?

NB In each case, how do we compare to other bodies (NPAs and/or other bodies providing the same type of service)?

3. The evaluation

- Are the current objectives realistic and practical?
- Why are we not achieving the desired result?
- What are the potential options for improvement?
- Are there any other options (e.g. abandonment)?

4. Future action

- Recommended action plan
- Future funding/resourcing
- Timetable

POTENTIAL MAJOR PROJECTS FOR REVIEW OVER NEXT 2 YEARS

- Out of Oblivion (September 06)
- Public Spaces, Private Places (September 06)
- Northern Office (February 07)
- Park-wide habitat survey (May 07)
- WAN/Citrix/Intranet (August 07)
- Limestone Country (November 07)
- New website/electronic services (February 08)
- Beyond the Boundary (May 08)
- Mosaic Partnership (August 08)
- Learning in Limestone Country (November 08).

POTENTIAL AREAS FOR REVIEW OVER NEXT 2 YEARS

There are a number of areas where the Authority *appears* to have under-performed in one way or another. These are:

1. Speed of dealing with natural environment consultations (Priority A);
2. % BAP habitats surveyed (A);
3. Speed of dealing with planning applications (A);
4. Quality of planning services checklist (A)
5. Valid planning applications (A);
6. Managing scheduled ancient monuments (B);
7. Woodland planting (B);
8. Speed of dealing with cultural heritage consultations (B/C)
9. Listed buildings 'at risk' (C);
10. Conservation Area appraisals (C)
11. Definitive map cases opened (C);
12. Digitising the Definitive Map of rights of way (C);
13. Raising the national profile of the Park (C);
14. Completing the Pennine Bridleway (E);
15. Providing services electronically (core).
16. Equality Standard (core);
17. Managing sickness absence (core);
18. Completing staff appraisals (core)

ASSESSMENT OF POTENTIAL AREAS FOR PERFORMANCE IMPROVEMENT REVIEW

1. **NE Consultations**
High priority and persistent problems in meeting targets and compared to other NPAs. Should be reviewed (see also 8 below).
2. **Habitats surveyed**
Apparent poor performance was due to miscalculation of last year's PI target – and overall project will still be finished by December 2006 target date. Better to review as a 'project'.
- 3/4/5 **Planning**
Detailed review of performance completed in 2005/06, and improvements still being put in place (too late to affect last year's performance). No sense in reviewing again at this point.
6. **Monument management**
Problems in meeting our objective partly due to delay in launch/take up of new Environmental Stewardship Scheme. Objective re-scheduled to 2008, and suggest reconsider next year.
7. **Woodland planting**
Last year was first year that NPA has committed significant resources to woodland planting, and performance is partly driven by other bodies (FC and YDMT). Consider again if this year's targets are missed by some distance.
8. **Cultural heritage consultations**
Significant improvement in performance over last 2 years. However, also involved in farm conservation agreements where performance has been more patchy (see NE consultations above). Any review of NE consultations should, therefore, include CH as well
9. **Listed Buildings at Risk.**
Failed to meet targets in last couple of years, largely because our approach was wholly reactive. This year, we have a specific budget for LBs and the 'milestones' project. Together these should allow the 3-year objective to still be met. If it isn't, this area would be a very strong candidate for review next year.
10. **Conservation Area appraisals**
Poor performance compared to other NPAs reflects historic lack of priority of this area of work (this is also the first year this PI has been collected). Initial programme now in place for improving performance but still need Member approval for future targets. Consider again in 2 years.
11. **Definitive Map cases**
A post-implementation review of the team was undertaken in 2005. As a result, targets for 2006/07 were revised and the Senior Definitive Map Officer has a personal target to produce an improvement plan this year. An unexpected issue has been the large amount of public rights of way legal changes that became part of the Natural England and Rural Communities Act. Whilst the changes are very welcome they have resulted in a short-term increase in workload for the definitive map team. Time should be allowed for the full implications of these changes to be assimilated, but, once in place, they may well impact on the priorities and direction of definitive map work in the future. It is therefore

considered that a review of this area of work should be undertaken next year to assess those implications.

12. Digitising the Definitive Map

There is a clear reason for this target not being met in that an issue has arisen across the Authority regarding the consistency and version of the 'mastermap' base layer on which information is stored. Work on digitising the definitive map highlighted that this was an issue across the Authority and that it was pointless digitising the map until the issue was resolved. Subsequently one officer has been seconded to carry out the necessary changes. In addition a working group of GIS officers has been set up to ensure that all departments use the same map base, that data is transferred onto that base and that an assessment is carried out of the longer term management and maintenance issues relating to GIS are identified. The project is scheduled to report to the Senior Management Team in September.

13. Raising YDNP profile

Concern here is based on the fact that we don't know whether we are on course to meet our objectives, and won't until we reach the point when they're due to be achieved (2009 and 2010).

14. Pennine Bridleway (PBW)

The original objective was to complete the PBW in 2007. This was based on the Countryside Agency's original grant allocation to that date. The evidence since has demonstrated that that original completion date, set by the Countryside Agency, was unrealistic. This has been recognised by the Agency who have now allocated some grant funding up to 2007. The revised project plan was considered and approved by the Authority's Access Committee in August 2005. [check

15. Electronic service delivery

Didn't meet target of 100% of services available electronically by end 2005. However, the only ones not in place are Members' Extranet and Video-Conferencing

16. Equality Standard

No progress in several years. However, a comprehensive equality policy has now been developed and is due to go to Members in November.

17. Sickness absence

Failed to meet our own target last year, but still 3rd best NPA (having been best NPA the year before). Suggest not an area of sufficient concern yet.

18. Staff appraisals

Missed target every year and seemingly stuck in mid-80%s. However, largely a failure of individual management and not an obvious target for a review of this sort.