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A new innovation when I first became Member Champion was the External Funding Group. This meets about five or six times a year. Members who attended the PDF last October will be aware of some of its functions. The intention is to promote external funding opportunities to officers within the authority and to marry up possible projects and potential funding sources. As the park which first established a Millennium Trust we already have a better track record than all the others put together. However there is always scope to go further, without compromising our objectives.

The main function of the group is to reiterate at all times that everyone in charge of projects, regardless of their priority must first of all consider the prospects of external funding. To this end a site has been set up on the YDNP Intranet and a number of officers have built upon their already considerable knowledge of this area. The External Funding Group is a good opportunity to keep up to date with David Sharrod, Chief Executive of the Millennium Trust and Fiona Rosher from the Dales Countryside Museum amongst others.

I have had many meetings with individual officers, particularly David Butterworth, my lead officer. Recently we have discussed the next round of performance assessment for National Parks. Defra have now agreed that any new process, which must be agreed by the English National Parks will begin in April 2009 – this date corresponds with the new Comprehensive Area Assessments from District and County Councils. I have had sight of some early drafts of the proposed new Key Lines of Enquiry, the “KloEs”. As with all the current round of assessments the intention is that they should be more “Outcome” orientated than last time. The best analogy of what this means is the little girl in the 1930s who pointed to the Prime Minister, Stanley Baldwin and demanded to know, “What is that man for ?”

I have been consulted on various documents in their drafts stages, such as the Corporate Governance Framework. Many of these papers represent reworking and refinement of existing policies. It would appear that the network of policy documents, all ultimately sitting under the Management Plan is complete – a very different situation from when I first joined the shadow authority in 1996.

A Lessons Learnt Report on setting up the new improved YDNP Website is being prepared for the February Audit and Review Committee. This report arises out of the realisation long ago that councils and similar bodies were often unclear when it came to running major projects as to what were the intended outputs. It would be fair to say that YDNP did not do particularly well in this area in the NPAPA process although we did do better than most of our colleague NPAs.

As a result of the project we now have an up-to-date website in a design which is consistent with those of the other NPAs. I personally have difficulty with the four categories, I just don't think in that way. But, apart from that I find the site fairly easy to use. There is a view that there should be a members' area to access the intranet. I am conscious that SLDC has such a site but I am ashamed to say that I hardly ever use it.

Members will be aware that in spite of my own concerns there has been a good budget settlement announced by government just before Christmas, 4.2% on average for NPAs and rather more for Yorkshire Dales. I remain keen to see this money spent wisely. It is right that Finance and Resources have allocated this additional grant to the Opportunities Fund. The key decision in this area was taken last year when we decided to adopt the discipline of 70% salary/grant ratio. Perversely, it is often harder to make prudent financial decisions after a generous funding settlement than after a lean one.

Deborah Millward and I have worked together on a couple of reviews, one concerning the quality of responses to consultation requests and the other on the authority's response to the issue of Climate Change.

The first was an area which was new to both of us. As members we were obviously aware that for instance, it might be necessary to consult the archaeological team on a planning matter, or to consult the wildlife team on a Defra grant application. The response times for these requests was a self-marked element of previous Best Value Performance Indicators. The review was initiated by concern over the widely varying speeds from different parks. As Gary Smith, the lead officer noted, on the face of it there was significant scope for improvement. And this was in fact the case. Many suggestions for new methodologies had already been made long before Deborah and I became involved. So, as a consequence we found ourselves investigating a rapidly improving area. There are still issues concerning specialist responses to planning enquiries: some have been dealt with already while others are in the pipeline.

Our work on Climate Change policy within the authority resulted in the paper which was presented to the November authority meeting.

We have also had a number of Member Champion Meetings, chaired by the Authority's Chairman. I enjoy the member champion role and feel it has given me an opportunity to improve the workings of the park outside the traditional meeting based setting.