

## ENVIRONMENT, PLANNING AND TRANSPORT COMMITTEE

Date: Wednesday 3 July 2002

Time: 2:00 pm to 5:30 pm

Venue: Committee Room 3, National Assembly for Wales

### **Attendance:**

#### ***Committee Members:***

Richard Edwards, Chair

Preseli Pembrokeshire

Eleanor Burnham

North Wales

David Davies

Monmouth

Janet Davies

South Wales West

Brian Hancock

Islwyn

Sue Essex, Minister for Environment

Cardiff North

Val Lloyd

Swansea East

Tom Middlehurst

Alyn and Deeside

Karen Sinclair

Clwyd South

Phil Williams

South Wales East

#### ***External organisations:***

Cllr Evan Morgan

Member, Brecon Beacons National Park Authority

Chris Gledhill

Secretary, Welsh Group of National Park Authorities and Welsh National Park Officers Group (Chief Executive Brecon Beacons National Park Authority)

Iwan Huws	Chief Executive, Snowdonia National Park Authority
Nic Wheeler	Chief Executive, Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority
Dr Alun Gee	Acting Director, Environment Agency Wales
Andrew Harvey	Planning and Performance Manager, Environment Agency Wales
John Lloyd Jones	Chair, Countryside Council for Wales
Roger Thomas	Chief Executive, Countryside Council for Wales
<b>Secretariat:</b>	
Siwan Davies	Committee Clerk
Vaughan Watkin	Deputy Committee Clerk

## **Opening Remarks from Chair**

0.1 The Chair welcomed Members and attendees to the meeting, and extended a warm welcome to Karen Sinclair on her return to the Assembly.

## **Item 1: Apologies, substitutions and declarations of interest**

1.1 The following interests were declared under Standing Order 4.5:

- Brian Hancock - prior to election to the National Assembly worked as a Health, Safety and Environmental consultant;
- Val Lloyd - Member of Swansea City and County Council.

## **Waste regulation**

2. The Minister drew the Committee's attention to a Press Notice that she had issued welcoming the impact the additional £2 million funding to the Environment Agency was having in cracking down further on rogue waste site operators and fly-tipping.

## **Item 2: Work Programmes of Countryside Council for Wales, Environment Agency Wales and the Welsh National Parks**

EPT-12-02 (p 1) - Countryside Council for Wales: Corporate Plan 2003-06

EPT-12-02 (p 2) - Environment Agency Wales: Review and Forward Look

EPT-12-02 (p 3) - Welsh National Parks: Corporate Programme 2003-06

2.1 The Chair welcomed attendees from the National Park Authorities, the Environment Agency and the Countryside Council for Wales (CCW) to the annual scrutiny session. Each organisation gave a brief presentation covering the topics outlined in their papers. John Lloyd Jones paid tribute to the work of Paul Loveluck, former Chief Executive of CCW, who had retired during the reporting year.

2.2 The following were the main areas of scrutiny of the performance of individual organisations:

### **National Park Authorities**

- Key achievements – the National Parks circulated a copy of their ‘Grant Bid’ document for the coming budget planning round, highlighting their achievements for the previous year, which had not been included in the paper. Questioning focused on how their performance was measured and benchmarked against other local planning authorities in Wales and the English National Park Authorities;
- Efficiency – Members were interested in the scope to improve service delivery and make efficiency savings, particularly given the scale of the bids for additional resources, and keen that these issues be addressed during the forthcoming quinquennial review of the Welsh National Parks. It was noted that the National Parks were subject to ‘Best Value’;
- Sustainable development – the Committee commented on the lack of emphasis in the paper on the work the National Parks were doing to promote sustainable development, particularly with regard to the Environment Development Fund;
- Planning – Members explored the potential for conflict in the National Parks’ roles as planning authorities and guardians of the environment and landscape where planning applications fell within a National Park. Brecon Beacons National Park would write to David Davies about specific concerns raised;

- Bids – Members questioned the scale of the bid to purchase a new headquarters building and noted that the Minister was currently working with the National Park to negotiate lease of the property. There was also surprise that Brecon Beacons were seeking additional funding to cover the cost of its Unitary Development Plan inquiry, when Snowdonia and Pembrokeshire Coast could meet this cost within existing resources. There was support for Snowdonia's proposal for the redevelopment of the summit building on Snowdon.

## **Environment Agency**

- Vision – Members queried the steps the Agency would be taking to 'be successful' along the lines outlined in the paper, and tested the potential difficulties for the Agency in working constructively with industry whilst maintaining the confidence of the public;
- Openness and transparency – questioning focused on steps being taken to implement the recommendation of the Nantygwyddon investigation that the Agency be open and transparent to the maximum extent permitted by law. The Agency accepted the principle of the recommendation, but would need further advice from the Welsh Assembly Government on aspects such as the definition of "maximum";
- Staffing – Members queried whether Agency staff were adequately rewarded for their specialist skills, noting that staff salaries were set at 'market median';
- Flood defence – Members explored the nature of the Agency's research into climate change to inform its future flood defence programme.

## **Countryside Council for Wales (CCW)**

- Key achievements – Members noted that the targets partially met related to notifying sites of special scientific interest (SSSIs) and Tir Gofal scheme agreements, and were due to the inaccessibility of land during the foot and mouth outbreak;
- Vision – the Committee tested the definition of a 'distinctive landscape character' and examined CCW's contribution to increasing the biodiversity of the landscape through its work on Local Biodiversity Action Plans (LBAPs) and Species Action Plans;
- Efficiency – Members sought quantification of the efficiency savings identified in CCW's five year efficiency plan that would be reinvested in CCW's infrastructure, further details would be circulated to Members when available;
- Public education – Members questioned the scale of the bid to 'get the message across' and tested the scope for savings in future core activities should this investment result in

positive changes to public attitude to conservation;

- Planning – in response to a query CCW clarified that local planning authorities could only grant permission for development on protected sites where it was demonstrated to be of ‘overriding public interest’;
- Tir Gofal – Members queried the extent of additionally in the funding of Tir Gofal, which came from the National Assembly’s agriculture budget.

## **General issues**

2.2 The Committee also scrutinised the organisations on the following cross-cutting areas:

- Improving service delivery – the Committee had invited each organisation to identify scope to improve service delivery and make efficiency savings. Members tested the scope for this to be achieved by rationalising the number of organisations involved in countryside conservation and environmental regulation, without limiting the openness and transparency of decision making. The Committee requested that in advance of the next scrutiny session the organisations jointly produce a report setting out the relationship between the organisations and identifying any overlapping areas of policy or implementation;
- Equal Opportunities – Members commented on the lack of emphasis in the papers on work being done to promote equality of opportunity, particularly engagement with diverse groups.

2.3 The Chair recorded the Committee’s thanks to all attendees.

## **Item 3: Minutes of the meeting 19 June 2002 - EPT-11-02 (min)**

3.1 The Committee adopted the minutes of the meeting held on 19 June.

## **Date of next meeting**

4.1 The next meeting of the Committee would be at 2.00 pm on Wednesday 17 July at the National Assembly for Wales.

