

## Environment and Sustainability Committee

E&S(4)-24-13 paper 3

### Draft Budget 2014-15: Paper from the Minister for Culture and Sport

To assist with scrutiny of the Draft Budget 2014-15, the Environment and Sustainability Committee has requested written evidence from the Minister for Culture and Sport for the period on:

- Changes to allocations for National Parks, access and outdoor recreation, and allotments; discussions with other Ministers about the use of these allocations to deliver Programme for Government commitments; and how the outcomes of the allocations are monitored.
- European funds and programmes which are to be accessed
- Allocations for Welsh legislation and the impact of UK legislation

#### *Funding Allocations*

##### *National Parks and National Botanic Garden*

The relevant budget lines by BEL are as follows:

<i>Budget</i>	<i>2013-14 Supplementary Budget £000</i>	<i>2014-15 Draft Budget £000</i>	<i>2015-16 Indicative Plans £000</i>
<i>National Parks &amp; National Botanic Garden – Revenue</i>	<i>12,102</i>	<i>11,077</i>	<i>10,617</i>
<i>National Parks &amp; National Botanic Garden – Capital</i>	<i>445</i>	<i>445</i>	<i>445</i>

Note: the revenue figure shown above of £12,102k includes funding for the National Botanic Garden of £685k. In the published budget table, the figure for the National Botanic Garden's revenue funding in 2013-14 has been included in a separate Action – Support and sustain a strong arts sector via the Arts Council and

others. The budget is being moved to the above budget line for 2014–15 and beyond, and therefore the figure for 2013–14 shown above has been amended for consistency.

The total revenue budget for the National Parks and the National Botanic Garden is being reduced from £12,102k in 2013–14 to £11,077k in 2014–15 (reduction of 8.5%), and then to £10,617k in 2015–16 (a further reduction of 3.8% on the 2013–14 figure). In overall terms, the revenue budget for the Culture & Sport MEG is being reduced by 3.6% in 2014–15 and 4.8% in 2015–16. Difficult decisions have been necessary, and the percentage reductions applied to the revenue budget figures for the National Parks and the National Botanic Garden have been greater than the overall percentage reductions. This reflects the proportion of outcome delivery provided by different elements of the Minister's portfolio. The National Parks currently have some Reserves which will help cushion the impact of the budget reductions.

A consultation on a new policy statement for the protected landscape in Wales has recently closed. Its purpose is to set out Welsh Government's strategic policy framework for Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and National Parks in Wales. The aim of the statement is to take the long view – to set out the vision for these landscapes so as to focus effort on addressing the long term challenges facing people and the environment. It therefore provides an opportunity to reflect on delivery priorities and activities within the National Park Authorities, and to tailor these to the available resource.

The annual priorities for the National Park Authorities are agreed with them in their strategic grant letter.

### **Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)**

The AONBs are managed by their host local authorities and derive their funding via those authorities, a strategic partnership grant from Natural Resource Wales, and various project or initiative based external funding. The funding allocation from Welsh Government enables each AONB to administer a modest local fund to support projects that help develop and test ways of achieving sustainable development in a countryside of great natural beauty and diversity in which the local characteristics of culture, wildlife, landscape, land use and community are conserved and enhanced.

<i>Budget</i>	<i>2013-14 Supplementary Budget £000</i>	<i>2014-15 Draft Budget £000</i>	<i>2015-16 Indicative Plans £000</i>
<i>Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty</i>	<i>350</i>	<i>350</i>	<i>350</i>

## Access

The health, social and economic benefits of outdoor recreation, whether walking, cycling, gardening, or engaging with nature has been well recognised and promoted by the Welsh Government for over 10 years. Our priorities are set out in the Programme for Government, where the intentions are:

- remain committed to improving public access to land and water with better access for families and young children;
- to improve rights of way for cyclists and walkers,;
- to create the Wales Coast Path by 2012; and
- legislate on the amount of land to be used for allotments.

The allocations are as follows:

<i>Budget</i>	<i>2013-14 Supplementary Budget £000</i>	<i>2014-15 Draft Budget £000</i>	<i>2015-16 Indicative Plans £000</i>
<i>Access Revenue</i>	<i>290</i>	<i>290</i>	<i>290</i>
<i>Access Capital</i>	<i>2,500</i>	<i>2,500</i>	<i>2,500</i>

The primary delivery programmes supported are the Wales Coast Path Improvement Programme, Rights of Way Improvement Programme, and the Splash: Water Recreation Fund. Each of these programmes is administered on behalf of Welsh Government by Natural Resources Wales.

The Minister for Culture and Sport is joint sponsor with the Minister for Natural Resources and Food of Natural Resources Wales, and so will discuss how these programmes complement the organisation's other significant activities in supporting Programme for Government ambitions in this area. The Minister for Culture and Sport has also agreed with the Minister for Economy, Science and Transport to work together to support the marketing of the Wales Coast Path, and the precise detail of that approach will be confirmed during the autumn.

Each programme is monitored closely against delivery targets. The Wales Coast Path was opened in May 2012, on time and on budget. As a flagship outdoor recreation asset, its completion highlighted the importance of the Welsh environment in attracting tourism spend and supporting associated jobs. In addition to economic benefit, the Wales Coast Path provides opportunities for local communities along the coast to be physically active, in line with the strategic aims of Creating an Active Wales.

Cardiff Business School estimated that 2.89 million people used the Wales Coast Path between September 2011 and August 2012, resulting in an additional £32.2m worth of demand in the Welsh economy which equates to £16.1 million of Gross Value Added (GVA).

For 2014–15 £1.15m is already committed for improvements to the Wales Coast Path. This will be the second year of funding intended to maximise the economic contribution of the Path by helping to ensure a high quality visitor experience throughout its length. The new Tourism Strategy for Wales, 'Partnership for Growth', lists the Wales Coast Path as one of the compelling reasons for people to visit Wales, reflecting evidence which indicates that 73% of visitors staying in Wales cite the natural environment as the primary reason for their visit.

Natural Resources Wales has been commissioned to evaluate the progress of local authorities in implementing their Rights of Way Improvement Plans, and the role that the additional funding provided by Welsh Government has played in supporting delivery. The final report is now due, and its recommendations can inform the setting of detailed priorities and plans for 2014/15 and beyond.

The Splash Water Recreation Fund supports improved access to inland water and funds projects to achieve that aim.

### ***European Funds and Programmes***

From 2007/8 to the end of 2012/13, investment in the Wales Coast Path totalled approximately £15.4 million, comprised of £11.5 million from Welsh Government

and £3.9 million in EU funds. The EU funding was provided to accelerate the completion of the Path for 2012.

***Legislative programme***

The timetable for Assembly Bills with a bearing on this portfolio means there are no likely impacts on any of the allocations during 2014–15. Similarly, no UK legislation that will apply to Wales is likely to impact on any of the allocations in 2014–15.