

Welsh National Park Authorities Planning services review Stage 2 Part A – Executive summary

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Introduction, context, approach and scope

- 1 The planning process in Wales has been the subject of much debate and discussion over the last few years. In June 2010 the Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) published its report on the “Planning Application Process in Wales”. This highlighted a number of key issues and recognised the significant variation between Local Planning Authorities (LPAs) in Wales in terms of resources, workloads and process. One of the key elements highlighted within this report was the fact that there was little common measurement or understanding of LPA success. The report’s recommendations were grouped into three key areas:
 - better understanding;
 - changing culture; and
 - proving operations.
- 2 Whilst we recognised that the WAG review was being undertaken at the same time as this Value for Money assessment, it is encouraging to see that the measures agreed between the three Welsh National Park Authorities (“Parks”) during this process are in line with a number of the WAG recommendations.

Context

- 3 During 2009, the Wales Audit Office undertook a review of the Planning Services at all three Parks. The resultant reports included recommendations for improvements specific to each Park. However, the reports also included a common recommendation raised for all three Parks, that being:
 - 4 *“Within the next 12 months the Authority should work in partnership with other suitably qualified authorities to develop robust comparative data and use this to demonstrate that it is providing value for money”.*
 - 5 To address this specific recommendation the three Parks have engaged PwC to undertake a review to assess whether the “Planning Services” of all three National Park Authorities (NPA’s) in Wales currently provide Value for Money. The key objectives specified within the invitation to tender were to:
 - develop and present robust performance comparative data for the development of benchmarking between the three NPAs and other relevant and appropriate LPAs in the UK; and
 - undertake a comprehensive value for money study for the three Parks in Wales, comparing the three NPAs and other relevant and appropriate LPAs in the UK.
 - 6 For the purpose of this review the “Planning Services” included: Development control/management service, pre-application advice and other guidance, planning applications, compliance – enforcement, land use policy and conservation of the built heritage.

Approach, scope and timescales

- 7 The scope of our work, approach and deliverables are detailed within our engagement letter, 8 February 2010. The Review had two distinct stages with two discrete deliverables. The diagram below details a summary of the approach and work undertaken:

Activity	Review Stage	Stage 1				Stage 2		
		Dec 09	Jan 10	Feb	March	April	May	June
Project Initiation	Stage 1							
Desk top data gathering and analysis	Stage 2 & 3							
Workshop 1 - challenge	Stage 4							
Refine comparative data	Stage 5							
Meet with WAO	Additional		15 th Jan					
Meet with Director of Planning (WAG)	Additional			9 th Feb				
Additional Meeting with Parks to refine approach & measures	Additional			11 th &16 th Feb				
Draft Stage 1 outputs	Stage 5							
Meet with parks to discuss Stage 1 outputs	Stage 6			26.02.10				
Final delivery of stage 1 output	Stage 6				15 st March			
Workshop 2 - VFM	Stage 7					22.04.10		
Detailed VFM Analysis	Stage 8							
Draft stage 2 outputs	Stage 9							
Meet with park to discuss stage 2 outputs	Stage 9							10.06.10
Final delivery of stage 2 outputs	Stage 10							30 th July 2010
Update meetings with Parks Project Coordinator		1	2	3		4		5

Deliverables Stages 1 & 2

- 8 Stage 1 output – An evaluation report summarising the context of the work, findings of audit, comparable data sets and suitable comparators. This was agreed as finalised on the 18 March 2010
- 9 Stage 2 output – A report containing analysis using the data set of the comparison made with comparable authorities and key findings in terms of whether the National Park Authorities provide Value for Money.
- 10 These reports have been prepared solely for the three Welsh NPAs whilst the scope of our engagement was defined with our engagement letter 8 February 2010 the focus of the review changed. Rather than focus on assessing Value for Money, it was agreed that the review would focus on identifying what a successful planning service looked like and then undertake an assessment of the Parks against these measures to determine performance and ongoing improvement. These changes were agreed with the Parks and are therefore an addendum to the original engagement letter. We do not accept or assume any liability or duty of care for any other purpose or to any other party.

Data Quality

- 11 In the undertaking of this review we have relied upon the Parks to provide the data used in undertaking the comparison and upon which conclusions have been drawn. This data has not been subject to external scrutiny. However, our observations are that for some areas of data, in particular financial data and data

around the number of FTEs, the information is not as comparable as we would have expected or have wished for and as such any conclusions drawn thereon should be read within this context. One of the key reasons for this lack of comparability is due to the way in which the RON figures have been adjusted to be comparable with the RO6 submitted by local authorities. Whilst PCNPA and SNPA have adjusted figures from the RON to align with the RO6 forms, BBNPA has used the RON figures. One of our key recommendations from this review is to encourage the Parks to agree a consistent basis for defining the measures, in particular those around finance.

Acknowledgements

- 12 We would like to thank all staff involved in this review for their cooperation and assistance during the review process.

Assessment rationale

- 13 A significant amount of work has been undertaken within England by the Planning Advisory Service on “Managing an Excellent Planning Service” and “Transforming Local Planning Services”. One of the core principles behind this work is Planning Services clearly understanding and articulating what success would look like. Following discussion with the Parks it was agreed that this approach would be a logical starting place for this review. In our approach we worked with the Parks to establish an agreed set of measures that could be used by the Parks to measure success and improvement. To facilitate this process we brought together a range of current measures being collected and reported by local planning authorities, including other National Parks, across England, Wales and Scotland. These included a range of measures: Statutory, non statutory, financial, performance based, quality based and customer based. They were then grouped into six key areas: Policy, Governance, Approach, Responsiveness, Outcomes and Other statutory measures.
- 14 During the initial phase of the review we explored with the Parks the concepts around Value for Money and the changing focus from a one off evaluation to one of continuous improvement as defined within the Local Government Measure. The Parks agreed very early in the review lifecycle that this review would firstly need to focus on what a successful and improving planning service would look like. Only once these were articulated could the overall performance of the Parks be assessed. It was also recognised that this process is part of the continuous improvement journey for the Parks and that this review should leave them with a legacy enabling the Parks to assess their relative progress against themselves and others.
- 15 During workshop 1, which was attended by a large cross section of staff from the Parks’ “Planning Services”, we facilitated discussion and debate of this initial set of measures and gauged delegates’ perception of their relative importance to the Parks’ objectives. The Workshop also provided an opportunity to capture additional measures that delegates felt would be useful in assessing the Planning Services performance. The initial set of measures and the additional measures suggested by planning staff were captured within an overall success measures schedule (Part B – Technical Supplement Appendix 3). This initial list of Success Criteria and Measures schedule contained 32 success criteria and 83 separate measures relating to them.
- 16 It was recognised that collecting performance data can be resource intensive and if the data is not perceived to be of value this process can be counterproductive to achieving Value for Money. Therefore to ensure that the list of success criteria and measures were appropriate and proportional a joint prioritisation exercise was undertaken. The prioritisation scored the measures on a 1-3 scale. A score of 1 reflecting measures that must be used and collected by the Parks and a score of 3 being nice to have measures. There was also some consideration given in this prioritisation as to the relative ease with which these indicators could be collected.
- 17 This prioritisation then went through a number of further iterations and discussion with the Parks. This refinement of the original measures schedule reduced the number of success criteria from 32 to 23 and the number of related measures from 83 to 49.
- 18 There was some debate over the number of measures being used within this assessment. However it was agreed that the 49 measures would be necessary to provide useful performance information at the operational level with a summary of the measures then used to provide a more strategic performance overview. To facilitate this strategic summary of performance the success criteria have been subject to a self-assessment classification by the Parks using a Red, Amber, Green (RAG) scoring methodology, (Part B – Technical Supplement, Appendix 4). The 49 measures have then been grouped into the six key

areas resulting in an overall balanced score card of the six areas in question. It is recognised that this schedule of measures is an initial starting point for the Parks and will need to be refined and subject to further scrutiny over the next few years if it is to be current and effective.

Overall assessment

- 19 Our overall assessment of the three Welsh National Parks' planning services is there has been evidence of significant improvement over the last 18 months. Whilst there are differences in baseline and performance between the Parks, as highlighted in the next section, performance in all six of the success criteria areas has been progressive. When considering the performance of the Parks in relation to other LPAs the additional statutory duties placed on the Parks over and above that of other LPA's must be considered. As these duties would undoubtedly require additional resource and specialised skills. Also when considering the Welsh Parks overall costs other factors should also be taken into account. These being: the economies of scale that can be achieved by other LPA's due to the larger nature of their operations, and the impact of the Parks large geographical distribution of applicants, increasing the costs of administering such a scheme.
- 20 All three Parks recognise that they are on a continuous improvement journey, however our findings suggest that the last 18 months has seen a steeper and more progressive improvement than in previous years. Some of the key improvement messages include:
- in 2009/10 the Parks on average approved almost the same percentage of applications per year as some of the other rural LPAs in Wales and England;
 - for some of the application types such as Minor, Householder and Other, the Parks have performed better than a number of other Welsh Rural LPAs in processing times;
 - improvements in pre-application support and information, a clear use of the validation process ensuring streamlined business processes and better targeting and skill mixing with planning resources were cited as some of the reasons for these improvements;
 - overall the Parks had an average of nearly 90% green measures for governance with the remaining measures amber and no reds. This confirms the priority placed on this area by the Parks; and
 - over the last two years there has been an improvement across all Parks in most of the various application type processing times. For the same period there has been very little change in the Parks combined net development control costs. This would suggest that these improvements are not solely attributed to additional resources but also longer term sustainable changes to business process.
- 21 However, despite the Parks very positive progress there were also a number of challenges identified, namely:
- a significant drop in the number of planning applications received by between 7% and 24% over the last year. Whilst this has take some of the volume pressure away from the planning service it has also resulted in a significant drop in income;
 - increasing requirements for planners to understand and be skilled on a range of issues including biodiversity, design and access statements, code for sustainable homes and flooding to name but a few. Dealing with these appropriately has required additional time and resource;
 - difficulty in agreeing comparability of costs and resources across the Parks. This picture is very similar for other Welsh LPA's. However, this has made it difficult to ensure that the cost data provided was comparable and therefore robust; and

- above average costs for development control (DC) per application. In 2008/09 the net DC cost per application determined in the SNPA and PCNPA was £830 whilst the average for the other Welsh Rural LPA's was £729. However, in BBNPA costs were £1882 2.5 times above the average Rural LPA DC costs per application determined.

22 The following charts (Figures 1 – 3) highlight the cumulative performance assessment for the 49 measures of success used to determine the individual Parks performance and improvement. Nearly 90% of the measures have been assessed as green or amber. Whilst individual Parks will have specific areas where they need to focus improvement actions, these positive RAG scores in conjunction with the messages highlighted above indicate that the Parks have performed well over the last year with good prospects of improving in a number of the other measures over the next twelve months. The Parks will need to ensure that they prioritise the next steps as outlined on page 19 of this report if they are to maintain the momentum of the last year.

Figure 1

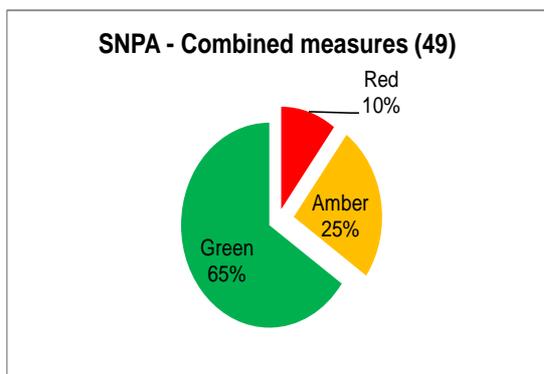


Figure 2

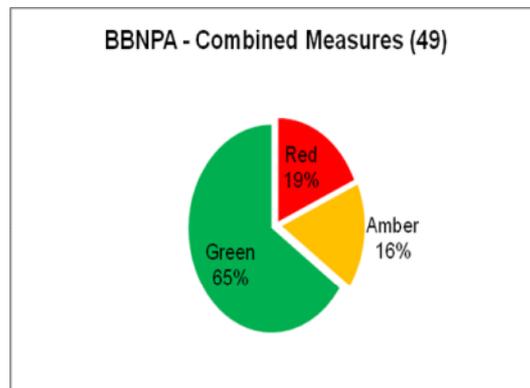
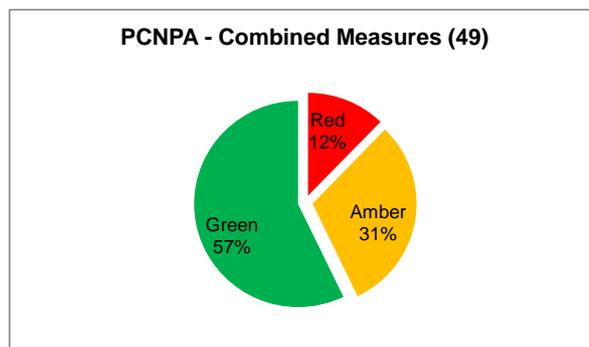


Figure 3



Key

Green – Top Quartile performance, or measure fully in place	Amber – Median Performance, or measure likely to be achieved in the next 12 months	Red – Lower quartile, measure unlikely to be achieved within the next 24 months.
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Note : The number in (brackets) represents the total number of measures

Key Messages

Key Message 1

23 Whilst it is recognised that the national statutory indicators are a necessary prerequisite for external comparison of performance, these measures alone do not provide sufficient information to determine the overall performance of a planning service. The current set of national indicators is largely focused on

process and outputs and not necessarily on the quality of the decisions being made or the outcome of those decisions. Measuring the qualitative aspects of the planning services is complex and recognised as difficult to define by the planning community. Our research has highlighted that there are very limited examples of other LPAs, UK wide or other private sector providers of contracted out planning services which use qualitative performance measures to measure success within their planning services. As is the case in Wales the current focus is on process and outcomes with a reliance on more generic inputs such as training, qualifications, and communications to improve rather than measure quality.

- 24 To ensure that the Parks were able to start to measure their impact on quality and identify improvement measures the suite of 49 success measures included a broad range of measures to build an integrated picture of performance. In isolation no one measure can effectively measure quality and improvement. However, when considered together the measures reveal a picture of quality and improvement and an indication of the Parks potential to improve. Whilst it is recognised that a more analytical approach to measuring quality impacts would be desirable, this initial approach has provided a useful first step in assessing the necessary behaviours and expectations of the Parks on their improvement journey.

Key message 2

- 25 There is a false public perception that the National Parks are more likely to decline a planning application than other LPAs. However, on average the Parks approve almost the same percentage of applications per year as other LPAs in Wales and England. Whilst PCNPA and SNPA have a greater percentage of approved applications than a number of other Welsh Rural LPAs, BBNPA had the lowest approvals percentage when compare with the other rural LPAs. Whilst the Parks' statutory purposes are focused on protecting the environment and countryside, the Parks are also keen to demonstrate that this purpose is delivered in an environment of an enabling planning regime and these statistics demonstrate that this is the case.

Key message 3

- 26 It is recognised within the planning community that the speed of processing planning applications does not necessarily measure the quality of the planning process. However, notwithstanding these issues there is recognition that a sharper focus on the planning process has resulted in improved efficiency and an opportunity to take out unnecessary bureaucracy. This focus on improving process has resulted in a significant improvement in the speed of processing planning applications across the entire Parks over the last two years. For some of the application types such as Minor, Householder and Other, the Parks have performed better than a number of other Welsh Rural LPAs. All Parks have seen significant improvement, for example BBNPA has seen processing times improve from 34% to 83% for householder application within eight weeks.
- 27 Our review has noted that this improvement has had a number of contributing factors such as: better pre-application support and information, a clear use of the validation process ensuring that the application is complete with all required documentation prior to the application process starting, streamlined business processes and better targeting and skill mixing with planning resources. Whilst there can be no doubt that the processing of applications has significantly improved, this has been in an environment where there has been less pressure on the planning application system with the number of planning applications received having dropped by between 7% and 24% over the last year. Whilst numbers of applications have reduced, there are other pressures for planners to understand and be skilled on a range of issues including biodiversity, design and access statements, code for sustainable homes and flooding to name but a few. Dealing with these appropriately involves additional time and resource.

Key message 4

- 28 The assessment identified that there was some variability between the Parks in the areas where they scored less well, namely the ambers and reds within the balanced score card. However, there were a number where the challenges were consistent across all three Parks, these included; the above average net costs of delivering the Parks planning service, see Key Message 6, and the Parks being able to determine how many buildings were actually built in accordance with their approved plans. This was considered to be a useful qualitative measure, however scored less well because of the current

availability of Parks resources to actually carry out sufficient routine visits to assess compliance.

Key message 5

- 29 The Parks recognise that having a robust Planning Committee with well trained Members is a prerequisite for ensuring an effective and quality planning process. There is still work to do in all three Parks to ensure that this critical element of the process follows best practice. However, there were some encouraging signs in a number of the measures around effective governance. Overall the Parks had an average of nearly 90% green measures for governance with the remaining measures amber and no reds. This confirms the priority placed on this area by the Parks. Good examples of governance measures included; embracing an effective annual member training programme, and increased levels of delegation to officers, the Parks signing up to Customer Charters and embracing the WLGA Members Excellence programme.

Key message 6

- 30 The lack of true comparability of costs and resources across Welsh LPAs has been recognised within the recent WAG Planning review. The information on costs and resources has been provided by the Parks and has not been subject to audit or verification. Whilst the Parks have made some initial attempts to ensure comparability and consistency between themselves and other LPAs this is an area which is recognised as one which requires a significant amount of attention and is highlighted as one of the recommendations within the next steps element of this report. This will be critical if the Parks are to ensure that they are able to compare themselves in terms of performance. However, if we are to understand the whole story around performance and improvement we need to consider the level of investment used to achieve any change. (Part B – Technical Supplement – Appendix 5) contains a detailed assessment of costs and resources.
- 31 In 2008/09 the average Development Control net cost per application determined in the Parks was £1180£whilst the average for the other Welsh Rural LPA's was £729. This is in part explained by the additional costs associated with the Parks exercising their statutory purposes and by BBNPA costs being £1880, 2.5 times greater than the rural LPAs average, thereby skewing the overall park average. The 2009/10 figures also show that on average the Parks Development control costs did not increase during the year. However when we look at the individual Parks it is BBNPA's Development Control costs that have decreased by 15% in the year whilst the other Parks have increased. However, there are a number of factors to consider when assessing the Welsh Parks overall costs. These being: the economies of scale that can be achieved by other LPA's due to the size of their operations, and the impact of the Parks large geographical distribution of applicants increasing the costs of administering such a scheme.
- 32 The figures also highlight the fact that of the three Parks, BBNPA 2009/10 total net development control costs are approaching double that of the other Welsh Parks with the 2009/10 net development control cost per application nearly 2.5 times greater than the other Welsh Parks. However, when considering the detailed figures these indicate that net development control cost for BBNPA have reduced by almost 15% between 2008/09 and 2009/10, whilst they have increased for the other Welsh Parks. However, the number of applications determined within BBNPA has fallen by almost 36%, thereby pushing up the average cost per application determined. It is also the case that during 2008/09 there were a number of exceptional items that may have increased costs for BBNPA during this year, such as costs for high profile planning cases such as Gilestone.
- 33 It is also worth noting that the difference between gross and net expenditure between the other LPA's and the Parks. This difference is predominantly explained by the level of income the other LPAs are able to generate from fee income. On average almost 50% of costs can be met from fee income. The parks generate significantly less income that the other LPAs from fees and therefore this results in disproportionate levels of recharges being included in planning costs.
- 34 However, costs cannot be considered in isolation and must be viewed alongside individual Park development control performance and a consideration of the elements that make up this average. Whilst the cost of Development Control per determination for BBNPA has been significantly higher than the other Parks their performance in turnaround times over the last two years has improved significantly. For

example the percentage of householder applications processed within 8 weeks increased from 34% in 2007/08 to 83% in 2009/10. On the first view it would appear that on average net DC costs have increased for all Parks. However when we look at the detail this is not the case, with BBNPA net costs of Development Control reduced by 15% between 2008/09 and 2009/10. However the number of applications they have determined has also dropped by almost 36% over the same time period, therefore the cost per determined application has gone up.

- 35 Over the last two years there has been an improvement across all Parks of in most of the various application type processing times. In the same period there has been very little increase in the average net development control costs. This would suggest that these improvements are not solely attributed to additional resources but also longer term sustainable changes to business process. However, the ability of the Parks to sustain this level of improvement aligned with higher than average costs per application processed remains an ongoing challenge for the Parks.
- 36 When considering costs and comparison with other LPAs the special purpose of the Parks should also been seen as a contributing factor to additional cost. These purposes are not just about process but are required by statute (Environment Act 1995) and require all decisions to be made with the purposes of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the Parks and promoting opportunities for enjoyment and understanding of those special qualities. There is also the additional duty of fostering the economic and social well being of the local communities. These purposes require special consideration over and above that required of other LPAs and as such often require specialist input and additional resource.

Key message 7

- 37 The current suite of statutory planning indicators has developed over time and is intended to assess the performance of Local Planning Authorities in general. However, due to the unique nature and size of the National Parks there are a number of indicators which add little by the way of assessing performance, as either the Parks are unable to directly influence them or they relate to such small numbers making any comparison, either year on year or with other LPAs, unreliable. Examples of these indicators include PLAN/06 & PLAN/07, the indicator relating to the provision of affordable and new housing units. Others where the numbers are very small include “Major applications” and applications requiring an Environmental Impact Assessment. In the short term there is a statutory requirement for Parks to report all statutory indicators; therefore they should articulate a clear rationale setting the performance context for these indicators which have less relevance to the National Parks. However in the longer term the Parks should work with WAG and the WAO to reassess the requirement of these types of indicators and should look to develop quality indicators which would effectively assess the impact and quality of decisions made in the context of the Parks purposes.
- 38 The review approach recognises that comparison with others is important to provide a baseline and sense check on relative performance improvement and to identify LPAs with possible examples of improving or notable practice. Currently due to the limitations in the comparability of the performance/cost data other LPAs collect and publish these comparisons have tended to focus on the national indicators. Where possible our overall assessment has built in comparison of these national indicators into the overall assessment. We have also highlighted these in more detail in the “Performance Compared” section of the Part B Report– Technical Supplement. However, the “Overall Assessment” has been based on the whole suite of 49 indicators each with an equal weighting. This approach will ensure that the Parks focus their priorities on a holistic range of appropriate measures and not just those indicators which they have traditionally collected and reported.
- 39 If this initial assessment is to be effective and have impact it is critical that there is appropriate Member engagement and buy-in to both the process and the measures of success themselves. Now that the executive within the three Parks have reached an initial agreement on the measures of success the next step for the Parks is to ensure that these are shared and debated with Members. This assessment should not be seen as a one off exercise, but should be integrated into the Parks’ business and performance planning processes. The importance of this next step should not be underestimated and is a key milestone within the “Next Steps” section of this report.

Individual summary assessment

40 Whilst the scope of this assessment has been to consider the three Welsh National Parks as a whole, the differences between the Parks in baseline and performance should be explored to ensure that significant variances and specific areas for improvement are highlighted. Therefore we have provided a high level individual summary for each Park based on the results of the 49 success measures.

Snowdonia National Park Authority

41 Of the three Parks SNPA have the greatest percentage of measures, (90%) which have been assessed as either Green or Amber. When compared with the other National Parks in Wales there are a number of factors that are contained within the RAG performance results in Figures 4-9 that are peculiar to the SNPA and help articulate its performance story. These include:

- the significant improvement in the percentage of granted applications within the eight week period with improvement in minor, householder and other applications between 2008/09 and 2009/10, for example “other” applications improved from 61.5% in 2008/09 to 92% in 2009/10;
- a small reduction in the number of applications received and applications determined between 2008/09 and 2009/10;
- an increase in overall net costs for development control between 2008/09 and 2009/10 of almost 21% this has been due to a 41% drop in development control income;
- the net development cost per planning application determined in 2008/09 was £830 with the average for Welsh Rural LPAs at £729; and
- an improvement from 69% in 2008/09 to 72% in 2009/10 in the percentage of planning appeals that upheld the authority’s decision.

42 In comparison with the other Welsh Parks, the SNPA is very similar to PCNPA in terms of its overall performance. However, there are a number of areas for specific improvement these include the speed and scope of its enforcement service, improved clarity and communication of its planning policy and a better understanding of the extent to which buildings are built in accordance with approved plans.

Figure 4

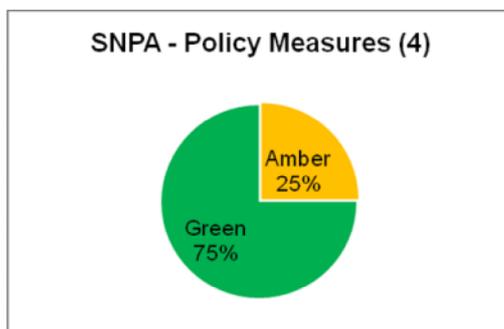


Figure 5

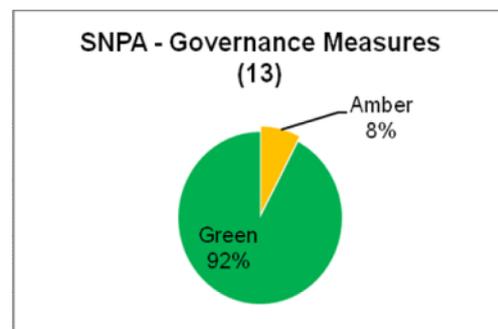


Figure 6

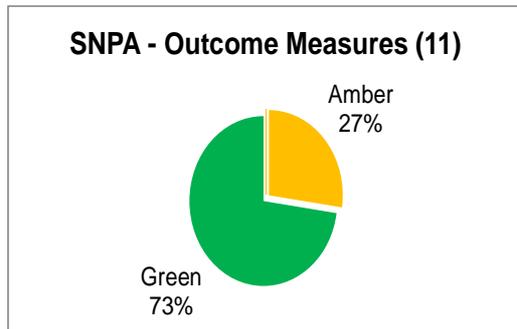


Figure 7

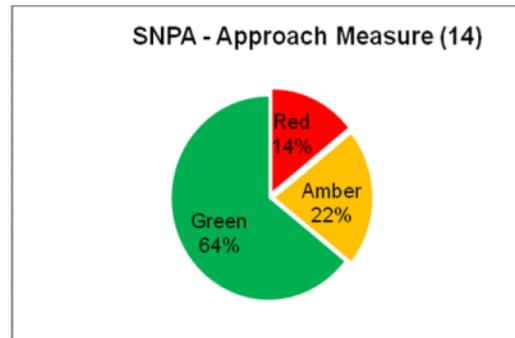


Figure 8

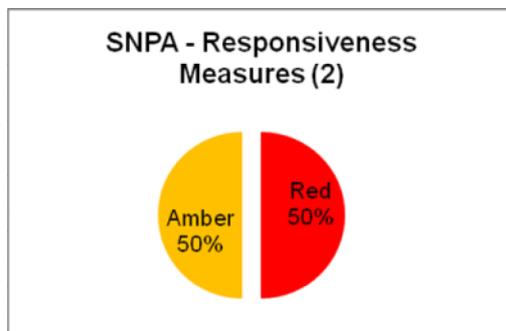
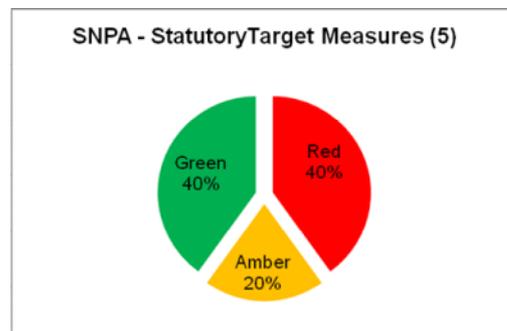


Figure 9



Note: Numbers in (brackets) represent the total number of measures within each area

Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority

- 43 In early 2008 Members recognised that the planning service was under pressure, with the Authority consistently in the bottom half of the performance league table of Welsh planning authorities. The philosophy of the planning section was to concentrate on quality, often at the expense of speed. A few high profile and contentious applications, two of which had resulted in failed judicial reviews had deflected resources. Some long term absences within the team had also demoralised staff. The authority recognised there were problems and started to take action to bring the service up to the required standard, without sacrificing the positive service attributes valued by service users.
- 44 With support from PSMW, a consultant was appointed to work with staff to identify and implement improvements to the work flow. A number of small task and finish groups, under the supervision of a project board, were set up to analyse the various procedures required to process a planning application. These identified a number of bottlenecks and improvement opportunities in the processing which have now been implemented.
- 45 The most significant change was to introduce a validation process to ensure that only valid applications, complete with all the necessary documents, were registered, removing the delays which had occurred when additional information or amended plans were necessary, and wherever possible S106 agreements are drafted during the validation process. Clear deadlines are set for agents and very limited changes are permitted after registration. To support applicants, a more formal, but at present free, pre-application advice service has been introduced, along with additional supporting documentation and information both in print and on the authority's website.
- 46 A new computer system is being installed in partnership with Pembrokeshire County Council and new

senior planning staff have been recruited. The delegation scheme has been revised and a new set of service standards published, along with codes of conducts for both officers and Members. Improved management information now makes tracking an application easier and highlights when a delay might be occurring.

- 47 A publicity campaign will be developed about the importance of planning in a National Park and features about particular successes and high quality designs.
- 48 As a result of these changes the backlog has been substantially reduced from 98 to typically 20 and the 8 week performance has improved overall from below 49% in 2007/8 to 72% in 2009/10.
- 49 With the improvements now in place for the processing of planning applications, PCNPA are now taking a similar approach to dealing with its enforcement service.
- 50 When compared with the other National Parks in Wales there are a number of factors that are contained within the RAG performance results in Figures 10-15 that are peculiar to PCNPA and help articulate its performance story. These include:
- the significant improvement in the percentage of granted applications within the eight week period with improvement in minor, householder and other applications between 2008/09 and 2009/10; for example, the processing of householder applications within eight weeks increased from 63% in 2008/09 to 81% in 2009/10
 - a consistent number of applications determined between 2008/09 and 2009/10;
 - an increase in overall net costs for development control between 2008/09 and 2009–10 of almost 11% and a drop of 16% in development control income;
 - the net development cost per planning application determined in 2008/09 was £830 whilst the average for Welsh Rural LPAs was £729; and
 - the percentage of planning appeals that upheld the authority’s decision dropped significantly between 2008/09 (71%) and 2009/10 (47%). It is recognised that due to the low numbers this figure may be skewed by relatively small changes in the numbers. This large percentage change was caused by a difference of just 4 appeals being allowed.
- 51 In comparison with the other Welsh Parks, the PCNPA is very similar to SNPA in terms of its overall performance. However, there are a number of areas for specific improvement around its pre application advice and support and in the speed and scope of its enforcement service.

Figure 10

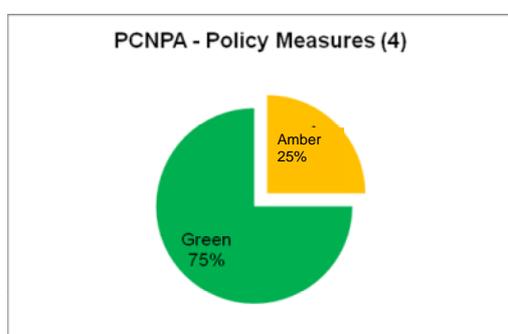


Figure 11

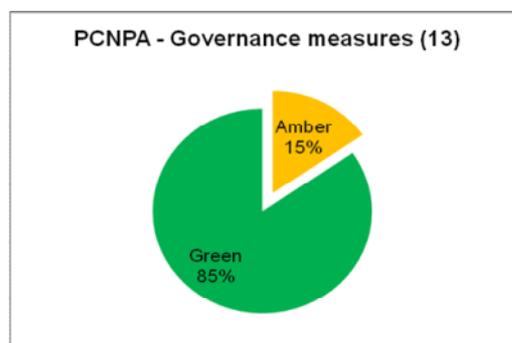


Figure 12

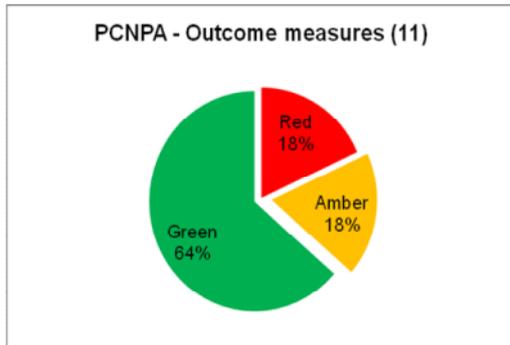


Figure 13

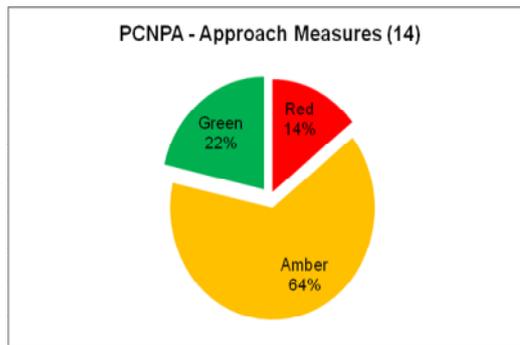


Figure 14

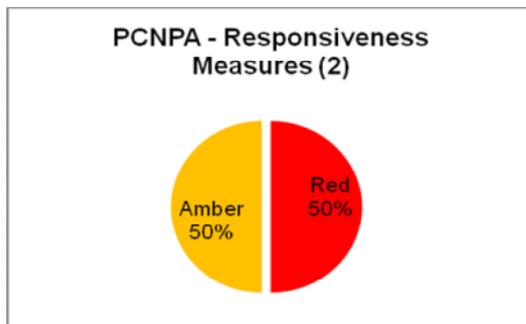
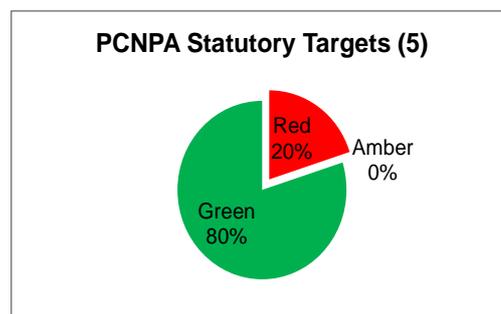


Figure 15



Note: Numbers in (brackets) represent the total number of measures within each area

Brecon Beacons National Park Authority

- 52 In 2009 the Brecon Beacons National Park Authority undertook a structural review to address concerns of a critical WAO report. This review put in place senior experienced management to support and direct a largely junior team. The resultant changes following this review have resulted in a new modus operandi for the Park's planning services and therefore performance and improvement should be seen in this context of a service still settling in after a period of significant change.
- 53 As part of this ongoing review BBNPA has undertaken a comprehensive process review and reengineering which has stripped out complex and unnecessary tasks which had evolved over time. Some of the changes to the new ways of working within the Parks' planning services include:
- restructuring officer availability to provide a balance between open planning surgery and need to progress individual applications with limited resources;
 - new business process which places IT system and resultant efficiencies at the heart of the planning system and also gives more robust audit trail to comply with findings of the Gilestone report concerning process and file management;
 - new process which allows for targets to be set and work flow monitoring information to be gathered and used by managers to actively manage the work enabling both backlogs to be tackled and improve the turnaround for new applications; and
 - development of a Performance Management approach for staff, allowing managers to agree individual targets for performance and development at regular intervals.
- 54 Other changes which have impacted BBNPA significant improvement in processing times for all application types has included; the use of the planning portal, the development of IT for electronic

consultation and communication, officers validating applications and screening for EIA and the introduction of local validation requirements and validation guidance.

- 55 The Park reports that this review has also seen a change in the ethos of the way officers operate and have taken back control of the Development Control process during negotiations by setting clear deadlines for agents/applicants and not allowing applications to 'drift' in terms of negotiating for incremental improvements.
- 56 Most importantly, the review has seen a significant increase in resources for the planning services with a better integration of available skills. The creation of two new Principal Planning Officer's posts and a secondment from RCT to cover for post holder on sabbatical, and the recruitment of two Officers into Area Planning Advisor posts from the private sector has seen a period of general staff stability through 2009. This focus upon performance has been said to have improved morale and a desire amongst staff to prove that BBNPA development Control Service is amongst the best in the country. However, sustainability of this performance may be significantly impacted should this investment in the service be reduced.
- 57 When compared with the other National Parks in Wales there are a number of factors that are contained within the RAG performance results in Figures 16-21 that are peculiar to BBNPA and help articulate its performance story. These include:
- the significant improvement in the percentage of granted applications within the eight week period, with an average improvement in minor applications from 25% in 2008/09 to 63% in 2009/10 and householder applications from 43% in 2008/09 to 83% in 2009/10 ;
 - a significant reduction (36%) in the number of applications determined between 2008/09 and 2009/10;
 - the reduction in overall net costs for development control between 2008/09 and 2009/10 of almost 15%;
 - a net development cost per planning application determined in 2008/09 of £1882, 2.5 times greater than the average for Welsh Rural LPAs of £729; and
 - The significant investment in resources within the Parks planning services. This has resulted in over 20 FTE in development control, this is between 50% - 100% more than the other Parks.
- 58 In comparison with the other Welsh Parks, the BBNPA has more red success measures requiring improvement. However, this is not necessarily surprising given the Parks very low performance baseline during 2007/08. However, when we consider the Parks progress over the last two years this has been steeper and higher than the other Parks. Whilst this is a positive story, the Park needs to ensure that this significant improvement in performance is sustainable and that its improvement is based equally on all three dimensions of effective resourcing, quality outcomes and maintaining customer satisfaction.

Figure 16

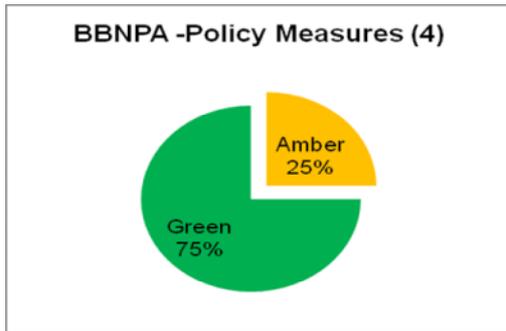


Figure 17

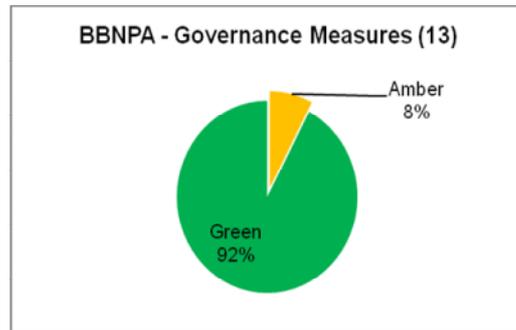


Figure 18

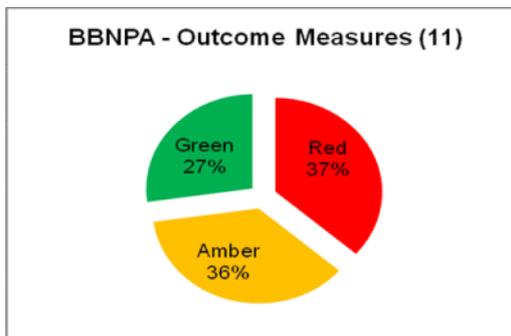


Figure 19

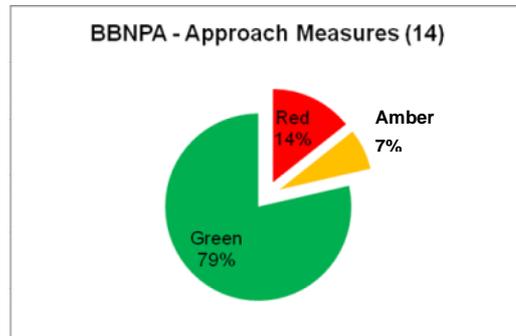


Figure 20

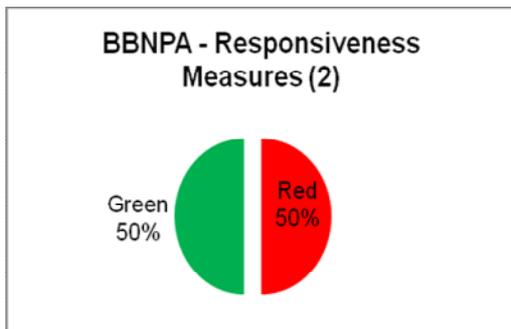
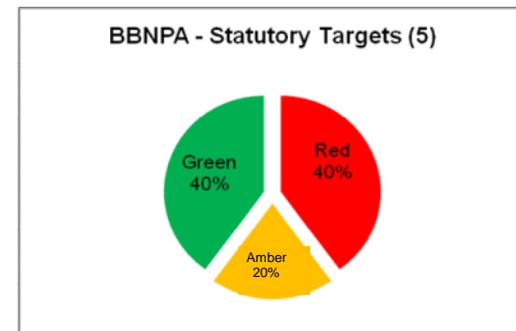


Figure 21



Note: Numbers in (brackets) represent the total number of measures within each area

Next steps

- 59 To ensure that this assessment is not a one-off exercise and that it becomes fully embedded within the Parks' business and performance planning processes, there are six key steps that the Parks should take:
- Step 1 – Further engage Members within the performance measurement debate. This process should not only be used to communicate the process and deliverables thus far, but also engage the Members in open and constructive dialogue which provides further information to shape the initial measures and the targets associated with them.
 - Step 2 – Revisit the success measures to determine the relative costs against the value gained from collecting the measures data. This will enable the Parks to refine the list to include only those measures that are useful and have a positive value to cost ratio.
 - Step 3 – Continue to work with other LPAs, including other UK National Parks and other Welsh Rural LPAs to build a continuous improvement group, where success measure can be agreed/shared and broader performance and improvement assessed and discussed.
 - Step 4 – Continue to develop stakeholder engagement to ensure that the changes around process are understood and accepted.
 - Step 5 – Ensure that this list of measures is not seen as a standalone process but integrated into the Parks' current business and performance planning. This should also ensure that there is a focus on setting realistic but stretching targets and also the development of a more robust set of quality based indicators.
 - Step 6 – Undertake further analysis on costs and resources to understand and agree a consistent basis for comparison.

Appendix 1 – Sources of information

Name of source	Address
Office for National Statistics	www.statistic.gov.uk
National Parks Authority	www.nationalparks.gov.uk
Planning Advisory Services	www.pas.gov.uk
Local Government Data Unit – (England)	www.dataunitwales.gov.uk
All National Parks, England, Wales and Scotland	See www.nationalparks.gov.uk for e-mail address of all UK National Parks.
Planning Officers Society Of Wales and England (PSOW)	www.planningofficers.org.uk
Wales Audit Office	www.wao.gov.uk
Welsh Assembly Government	www.wales.gov.uk
Audit Commission	www.audit-commission.gov.uk

Appendix 2 – Assumptions (A) and Data Notes (DN)

Assumptions

A1 – The Parks have undertaken their own due diligence on the figures/data they have provided as part of this assessment. Where possible data has been taken from externally available sources such as the quarterly planning statistics submitted to WAG. Where data has been provided by the Parks themselves these figures have not been subject to independent audit.

A2 – The RAG status of the 49 measure of success have been self-assessed by the Parks, other than for the National Indicators where comparison with others has determined the relative rating. Where Parks have not provided information these measures have been rated as red.

Data Notes

DN1 – Notes on financial data – To ensure that cost data was as comparable as possible between Welsh Local Unitary Planning Authorities the Parks have made a number of adjustments to the RON forms to ensure that these are comparable with the RO6 forms submitted by local authorities. These adjustments were initially modelled by SNPA and then agreed between the Parks. We are aware however, that BBNPA has used the RON figures and not applied the model as defined by SNPA. It should be noted that the resultant figures from this adjustment approach and used within this assessment have not been subject to external independent scrutiny.

DN2 – The basis for the figures used for the Statutory indicators on percentage of householder applications determined within eight weeks and the percentage of other applications determined within eight weeks may not be consistently applied across all three Welsh Parks and therefore the data may not be directly comparable.

DN3 – Due to the differences between the ways that householder applications are collected for English LPAs we have been unable to provide English National Park Comparison for this performance metric.

DN4 – The overall apportionment as calculated by the Parks may well be different between the Parks as the required apportionment per staff member and budget line has been undertaken by each Park individually. Looking to the future, and the continued use of these figures for benchmarking purposes, the detailed apportionments need to be undertaken individually by each Park Authority and there should be agreement on how to reduce the subjectivity inherent in the process (subject to practical constraints).

In the event that, pursuant to a request which Snowdonia National Park Authority has received under the Freedom of Information Act 2000, it is required to disclose any information contained in this report, it will notify PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) promptly and consult with PwC prior to disclosing such report. Snowdonia National Park Authority agrees to pay due regard to any representations which PwC may make in connection with such disclosure and Snowdonia National Park Authority shall apply any relevant exemptions which may exist under the Act to such report. If, following consultation with PwC, Snowdonia National Park Authority discloses this report or any part thereof, it shall ensure that any disclaimer which PwC has included or may subsequently wish to include in the information is reproduced in full in any copies disclosed.

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