

THE NATIONAL PARKS JOINT SCRUTINY GROUP ON THE ECONOMY
30th January 2015

Present:

Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority representatives:

Members: Mrs G Hayward (Chair), Councillor DGM James and Mr AE Sangster.

Officers: Mr T Jones, Chief Executive.

Snowdonia National Park Authority representatives:

Members: Councillor A Gruffydd, Dr I ap Gwynn, and Councillors C and Mrs E Roberts.

Officers: Mr E Williams, Chief Executive, Mr J Cawley, Director of Planning and Cultural Heritage and Mr GI Jones, Director of Corporate and Legal Services.

(Meeting by Video Conference 2.00pm – 3.10pm)

1. Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors B Kilmister and RM Lewis (Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority), and Councillors E Edwards, SW Jones and J MacLennan (Snowdonia National Park Authority).

2. Disclosures of interest

No disclosures of interest were received.

3. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on the 17th September 2014 were presented for confirmation and signature.

It was **AGREED** that the minutes of the meeting held on the 17th September 2014 be confirmed and signed.

4. Face-to-face discussions: results

The Chairman referred to the results of those face-to-face discussions that had taken place to date, and thanked the Members involved for taking the time to carry them out. She was of the opinion that quite a lot of useful information could be taken from the 'interviews'. Mr AE Sangster agreed, saying that some themes could be identified, namely:

- the involvement of the planning process;
- the fact that contacts and processes were important to people;

- very small businesses appeared to have a lack of understanding of and/or difficulty in engaging with the National Park Authorities;
- almost universal approval/support of the value National Parks added to the landscape and those who lived in the Parks.

The question was raised by Dr I ap Gwynn as to how the information gathered was to be used; whether for internal use or for wider external circulation. He contended that the limited number of businesses/areas of industry interviewed was not wide enough, and could be considered as being too subjective – or even biased – in its approach, which could lead to criticism of any eventual findings.

Mr T Jones responded by saying that the scrutiny exercise was intended to provide the Authorities with an insight into how successful current National Park policies were, and whether these needed to be redefined in any way. He reported that previous Scrutiny review undertaken by the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority (whether in partnership with the Brecon Beacons National Park Authority or on its own) had followed the same format, and some of the evidence gathered was not flattering. However, the outcome of those reviews had resulted in changes being made, which would improve the Authority's way of working. The fact that only a small sample of businesses was being targeted should not be discarded as bringing no value to the current review process.

The Chairman also reminded Members that the National Assembly for Wales continuously looked at itself and the way it operated. Because the Authorities were undertaking this investigation themselves did not render the review invalid. They were creating a body of knowledge about attitudes towards National Park economic policies.

Councillor Mrs E Roberts welcomed the fact that 'service users' were involved in the process. She referred to the Future Generations Bill, which focused on the citizen centred approach. Mr T Jones reported that the Brecon Beacons National Park Authority had developed their Scrutiny process to involve members of the public in their reviews. This was welcomed by Members as a way forward for future Scrutiny reviews.

5. Responses received from 'umbrella bodies'

The Chairman reported that responses had been received to date from the National Farmers' Union, the Country Land and Business Association, and Pembrokeshire Tourism. Reminders would be sent to those other 'umbrella bodies' that had been contacted to see whether they wished to provide a written response or whether they would rather meet the Committee to discuss issues.

Snowdonia National Park Authority Members suggested contacting some 'umbrella bodies' in their area, and the Chairman asked that all written responses should be received by the end of February 2015.

6. **Additional evidence**

The Chairman stated that the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority Members had met with officers and Members from Pembrokeshire County Council to discuss their respective economic approaches. This had proved a very useful session, and Mr E Williams stated that he would arrange a similar session with Gwynedd County Council.

Members also considered that oral evidence should be invited from a number of sectors, including tourism, agriculture, retail/chamber of commerce and outdoor pursuits. It was suggested that two sessions be arranged, one in Pembrokeshire and the other in Snowdonia, and relevant organisations/bodies invited to attend to give evidence. It was also suggested that Assembly and/or Parliamentary Members be invited to give evidence, particularly as they were the people businesses approached if they had a problem.

It was **AGREED**:

- (a) that two meetings be arranged, in the respective National Park areas, and that organisations/individuals identified be invited to give oral evidence to the Committee,
- (b) that Members approach their constituent Assembly and/or Parliamentary Members to provide evidence.