

## EXMOOR NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

6 SEPTEMBER 2005

### NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT

#### Report of the National Park Officer

**Purpose of Report:**

To advise members of the outcome of the Performance Assessment team visit to Exmoor in July 2005

**Legal Implications including Human Rights Act 1998:**

None

**Financial Implications:**

The Authority has budgeted £10,000 towards assistance in putting together its self-assessment report and £15,000 towards the formal NPAPA review visit in accordance with the national scheme for National Park Authorities (NPAs)

**National Park Purposes:**

Improving effectiveness in achieving National Park purposes is a central aim of the Performance Assessment process.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

It is recommended that the Authority:

1. RECEIVES the performance assessment team report following the visit to Exmoor NPA
2. CONSIDERS the main findings to include within the Authority's forthcoming improvement plan
3. NOTES the key elements for the next stages of the improvement planning process

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The NPA Performance Assessment process has four stages:

1. A **self-assessment** of performance by the NPA setting out strengths/achievements and weaknesses/issues, together with an action plan setting out a short, medium and longer term programme of improvements.
2. A visit from a 'peer' review team comprising a lead member from SOLACE Enterprises (the selected contractor to manage the process for all English NPAs); a local authority chief executive, and a NPA chief executive, senior officer and member
3. Report from SOLACE Enterprises setting out the key findings of the assessment team.
4. A 'round table' discussion with leading members and officers from the authority, auditors, Defra etc. to consider the authority's response to the review report and help with improvement planning.

1.2 The Exmoor review visit took place between 18 July and 22 July 2005 and a draft report was received on 9 August. The Chairman and National Park Officer met with the SOLACE facilitator for the assessment team, Pat Coleman, on 11 August to seek clarification on specific points and correct factual errors. The final draft report was received on 19 August and the report's conclusions and recommendations are attached at Appendix 1. A full version of the report will be sent to all members and made available to staff.

## 2. **IMPROVEMENT PLAN**

2.1 The next stage in the NPAPA process is the formal 'Round Table' meeting that will include representatives from SOLACE, Defra, ODPM and the Audit Commission, together with a small team of Authority members and staff. Following the Round Table discussions, it is proposed to hold a member workshop and staff workshops to establish a more detailed improvement plan for the Authority for implementation over the next 2 to 3 years.

**Nigel Stone**  
**National Park Officer**  
**11 August 2005**

**Background papers on which this report, or an important part of it are based, constitute the list of background papers required by Section 100 D (1) of the Local Government Act 1972 to be open to members of the public comprise:-**

**Performance Assessment Report for Exmoor National Park Authority. SOLACE Enterprises. August 2005**

### Conclusions and Recommendations

The ENPA is a small organisation which is doing and achieving a lot. The following recommendations are intended to be helpful as suggestions about how its performance could become even better. The points identified under the sections headed “Issues to Consider” in this report should not be viewed as *criticisms* but as learning points.

The NPA produced a detailed self-assessment for the NPAPA process, as required by the guidance. Staff and Members indicated they felt the organisation had benefited from the effort put into developing the self-assessment and they had enjoyed the process.

The self-assessment correctly identified “Prioritisation” as an area for improvement but underestimated the extent to which the failure to prioritise effectively has impacted on other aspects of the organisation’s performance including its overall clarity of direction, medium term planning, relations with partners, the performance management framework and internal and external communication. The NPA must address the issue of priorities as a matter of urgency.

The recommendations are grouped under four main headings:

#### Confidence and Resolve

*Members, managers and staff of the NPA should be more proud and confident about, their achievements, many aspects of which are superb. The team wish to encourage the NPA to be more robust on occasions, and to stick to what has been decided – rather than to give in to external challenge. The NPA should not try to please everyone all of the time since this will always be impossible to achieve. Sometimes there will be a need to be unpopular.*

*The organisation is well placed to raise its game and utilise its national status to achieve results.*

#### Leadership

*Members must take responsibility for and lead the development of the policy framework in collaboration with officers. Members must take responsibility for the determination of goals and priorities for the ENPA. The goals and priorities must be widely communicated internally and externally. Members have an on-going role in monitoring implementation of policy and reviewing its effectiveness.*

*The title of National Park Officer should be replaced with the title “Chief Executive and National Park Officer” to signify that there is an important and high level managerial role which needs to be recognised. In order to carry out this role effectively the Chief Executive needs to have executive support.*

*There is a need to invest further in the management of the organisation. The current management development programme should be extended in order to define and assess management competencies and provide more focused development opportunities.*

## **Communities and Partnerships**

*The Team think the NPA should consider creating an Exmoor National Park Strategic Partnership comprising: regional and local statutory bodies, community and business representatives, landowners, voluntary sector and others. The Exmoor Strategic Partnership could steer the development of the new Management Plan. This would enable the NPA to provide the kind of involvement for partners which they say they want i.e. not consultation after the event but involvement from the outset. It would also help to ensure full integration of economic and social issues with environmental ones.*

*In order to work more effectively with partners the NPA should establish and work to a set of clear partnership principles. These should include, for example:*

- *always feedback to the community or partners on the reasons for decisions especially when they appear to be contrary to what had been hoped for.*
- *be open at the outset about what you're able to do and not do*

*The NPA should develop an external funding strategy in order to target its resources towards funding opportunities which are most likely to prove productive.*

## **Performance Management**

*The NPA must develop a comprehensive performance management framework centred on a clear vision, goals and priorities, and which builds on the existing staff review and development arrangements.*

*The NPA needs to be more focused in its efforts to diversify the user base of the National Park. It should identify its targets for and mainstream the delivery of the diversity agenda so that all sections have this within their remit.*

*The NPA should establish proper project management arrangements in order to better focus resources and delivery on the things which are really important.*

*The NPA should always consider, before undertaking analysis and investigations, whether it has the resources to act and that they are directly related to priorities.*

*The NPA should embed risk assessment into all elements of its work.*

*The NPA should undertake a fundamental review of its use of all its resources, including*

*staffing and develop a medium term financial plan to deliver its future goals and priorities.*

***Further Recommendations***

In its self-assessment the NPA prepared a list of actions proposed for inclusion in an improvement plan. Reviewing this following the assessment it is clear that, without exception, the issues identified have been covered in the body of this report or referenced specifically within the recommendations above. The NPA now needs to work on an Improvement Plan which identifies specific outcomes, timescales and resources it will commit to taking these recommendations and improvement actions forward.