

National Park Authorities Performance Assessment



Final Report

We have now received the final report following the external peer review assessment completed during the week of 25 September. The report is available publicly on our website (www.peakdistrict.org under Performance Assessment). Copies will also be placed in reception and can be obtained from any member of the Management Team, Democratic Services or Customer Services. Overall, it is a very helpful and positive report that reflects the hard work put in by all staff and members into our work and the expertise and effort of the assessment team.

What the report says

The assessors believe that *the Authority is performing effectively in the local delivery of national park purposes and duties and has examples of excellence.* The report says that *the self awareness of the Authority demonstrated in the content of the self assessment produced for this performance assessment is very good.* *The views of the assessment team differed very little from those set out by the Authority.* Of the 9 Key Lines of Enquiry, it identifies 3 strong areas, 4 where we have made strong progress but where minimal improvements are needed and 2 where we have made a good start but have further to go. There are no weak areas identified. The report makes 21 recommendations.

The team's impression was of *an Authority that has a lot to be proud of and that is responding well to the pressures and complexities arising from its location.* *The Authority is making progress and the team are confident more will be made.* *The challenges are in how the Authority decides to move forward and how it will address this in the performance improvement plan.* In summary, the main strengths are:

- *Good member involvement in developing and scrutinising Authority work*
- *Structured approach to improvement planning*
- *Good progress on reviews, strategies and protocols*
- *Strong leadership and governance arrangements in place*
- *Enthusiastic, talented and committed staff*
- *Sound risk management framework and toolkit*
- *Achieving impressive outcomes recognised by stakeholders*
- *Sound financial management arrangements in place*

Further work is required in the following areas:

- *Greater clarity is needed about priorities, targets and outcome based objectives*
- *A need for more effective staff involvement and engagement*
- *The medium/long term strategy for minerals extraction needs review*
- *Internal communication needs further improvement*
- *Leadership skills need further development*
- *Performance management arrangements are not sufficiently robust.*

The assessors say that there is a *tangible feeling that the Authority is getting through clear messages about the special nature of the national park.* *There is an excellent record of and substantial improvement in developing partnerships.* *The Authority has been effective in achieving recognisable outcomes in the delivery of its purposes and duties.* They say that *there is strong leadership from members and officers and both the leadership and staff are well regarded by stakeholders...the Authority is seen as forward thinking, innovative and committed.* The assessors repeat several times that the Authority's strongest asset is its staff: *staff are seen by stakeholders as enthusiastic, talented and committed and with a strong belief in their national park work.* *For their part, staff see the organisation as caring and inclusive in its work.* However,

the assessors believe that managers must do more to involve staff, to communicate to them and to listen and act on their views: *Managers are not consistently exercising the leadership skills that enable staff to be involved and to contribute their ideas and skills.*

What are we going to do next?

The main message from the assessors is that the things we are already doing to improve must continue as they are having a positive impact. Key examples are:

- The partnership work many of you are engaged in
- Service reviews, such as the Development Control service work
- The *Exceeding Excellence* leadership development programme that started this week
- The new governance arrangements for Members that will be discussed tomorrow
- Improvements in customer focused services

In addressing the 21 recommendations and the 2 key lines of enquiry where we have more work to do, we will be taking a structured approach, based around our performance improvement plan. For some of the actions, it will be very clear what we have to do and there will be no practical or cost reasons why we are not able to do it. Others will take time or resources to do and so we will need to think how best to take these forward. I would welcome ideas from all of you on how we can work together on these areas. However, at this stage the overall response to the headline areas identified for further work is as follows:

- *Greater clarity is needed about priorities, targets and outcome based objectives.* When our National Park Management Plan is complete in Spring 2006 we will begin setting objectives for subsequent years and will do this with greater clarity and outcome focus
- *A need for more effective staff involvement and engagement.* Managers will involve staff more in key decisions in their services and Authority wide
- *The medium/long term strategy for minerals extraction needs review.* As part of our National Park Management Plan and Local Development Framework reviews we will review our minerals work
- *Internal communication needs further improvement.* We will introduce an Authority-wide team briefing, with feedback opportunities, as a first next step early in 2006
- *Leadership skills need further development.* The *Exceeding Excellence* programme started this week with most managers attending over the next year. I will work with staff and members to review leadership styles in the organisation
- *Performance management arrangements are not sufficiently robust.* This will be taken forward by Management Team and Heads of Service involving staff and members

How can you get involved?

I am aware that whilst overall the assessment is positive, we need to think hard about continued improvements and we especially need to involve staff working with managers and members. Over the coming year we face very big challenges in the National Park and with the Authority's finances. To kick start working together, I'd like to invite you all to a short briefing on the assessment as follows:

- Aldern House Board Room Monday 31 October 13.00-14.00 and Thursday 3 November 12.30-13.30. Rich Campen will fix a date to do a similar briefing at Losehill Hall

Jim Dixon, Chief Executive, 13 October 2005