

YORKSHIRE DALES NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY
FINANCE AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

7th August 2006

MEMBERS' USE OF INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (IT) EQUIPMENT

Purpose of report

To report on practices in place at other National Park Authorities (NPAs) for the provision of and support for members' IT equipment and to seek members' views on the level of provision of equipment and support by the Authority.

Strategic Planning Framework

The information and recommendation(s) contained in this report are consistent with the Authority's statutory purposes and its approved strategic planning framework:

- ***Best Value Performance Plan***

"Plan and manage all aspects of the Authority's business so as to make effective use of our resources."

Background

At a previous meeting of the Committee during consideration of a report on the Authority's IT policies, a member commented that no mention was made of member use of the Authority's IT systems and pointed out that some Authorities provide either IT equipment or an allowance as a contribution towards members' own costs of providing and maintaining IT equipment which they use in their role as a member of the Authority.

It had been intended to report to an earlier meeting of this Committee, but a meeting of the National Parks' IEG Steering Group was to discuss this precise issue and it was felt that it would be beneficial to await the outcome of that meeting before reporting back to members. The Authority was represented at that meeting by Wilf Fenten, who chairs the Group and Steve Funnell, the Authority's IT Officer.

This report covers the current position and includes proposals regarding the provision of equipment and support for members, and also reports on the progress towards the availability of a members' 'extranet'.

Current position

Provision of equipment and support for members: Attached as an **Appendix** to this report is a copy of the results of a survey that was carried out across National Park Authorities (NPAs) to see what level of IT equipment and support is provided for members.

As can be seen from the Appendix, other than at the Lake District and Peak District NPAs, the level of IT provision and support provided to members is either nil or, to say the least, fairly minimal. Most NPAs, including ourselves, rely on their members either having their own computer equipment

or having it provided by their nominating local authorities. The Appendix also shows that the level of support provided to members for their use of that equipment is also very low or negligible.

For the Authority to equip each member with, for example, a laptop, printer, internet link and the necessary software would be likely to cost a minimum of £1500 per member. In addition, there would inevitably be a requirement for additional staff and other costs to cover setting up, training and maintenance of the equipment and systems.

Whilst the scenario of each member having a dedicated Authority laptop onto which agendas could be either downloaded or accessed via CD is very attractive, officers do not believe that the Authority is anywhere near moving towards that position, let alone being in a financial position to do so.

Members' 'Extranet': To date there has been no dedicated work undertaken on providing a members' extranet. Resources have been directed towards updating the Authority's website, in line with the Authority's IEG target requirement, and hopefully much of the information that members may wish to access through an extranet is now available through the website, e.g. Authority policy documents and agendas and reports.

Conclusions

It is considered that, at the present time, it would not be appropriate for the Authority to provide each member with IT equipment. Currently, however, all members of the Authority have some IT equipment and all have email facilities, and all members seem content for officers of the Authority to use that facility.

In order that both members and officers know what level of use should be made of email, it is suggested that a 'protocol' is established, covering email communication between members and officers, to be advised to new members and staff on joining the Authority. Bearing in mind that not all members will have broadband connections, officers should only send members correspondence (Planning Committee site visit letters for example) or relatively small documents that do not need to be downloaded. If larger documents are sent, members should be invited to request hard copy so that they do not have to print off bulky documents. For regular use of e-correspondence to be adopted and accepted, Members could assist by checking emails on a daily (or very regular) basis (as they would check their normal 'mail box') and also by informing the Authority as soon as they are aware of any IT problems so that hard copies can be sent.

Officers are not recommending that any additional allowance be paid to members, although there will be a review of the current Scheme of Members' Allowances in 2007, when consideration could be given to the appropriateness of an 'IT Allowance' to cover consumables.

As regards the 'Extranet', it is not anticipated that there will be any progress on this for some time, as resources are being targeted at other in-house systems and the updating and maintenance of the Authority's website.

RECOMMENDATION

That the report be noted and members' comments sought

RICHARD PARKIN
SECRETARIAT OFFICER

Background documents: None
20th July 2006

Appendix

Park Authority	Q1 – do you provide ICT equipment to members (all, some, none)?	Q2 – do you provide financial support to members for ICT running costs (ink, paper, internet access)
Brecon Beacons	2 PCs in members' room, one in Welsh one in English, with access to a Corporate Governance intranet (agendas and minutes) Powys members' PCC issued laptops are configured for use on our network Laptop supplied for Deputy Chairman of the Authority	None
Broads Authority	None	None
Cairngorm	We will provide members with any surplus IT equipment, on loan, that may be needed to allow e-mail facility.	No – although we may provide technical assistance, especially if it is our own loaned equipment.
Dartmoor	To date we have only provide equipment to one member.	No.
Exmoor	None. We assume that district & county councillor members would have this provided by their own Authority. Similarly in practice Sec of State appointees also have their own equipment. We have not actively pursued this with parish members. However all members have an e-mail address through the office e-mail system with potential manual intervention to get the information relayed to them.	The Basic Allowance paid to all members is intended to cover incidental IT costs
Lake District	We provide those members that 'need' a PC with a Laptop. Some get a PC from another council (Cumbria County Council provides councillors with PCs, and some of the district do too); some already have a home PC they are happy to use. For the others we will buy and issue a laptop with MS Office, and a printer. It has been mainly Parish and SoS members that have been issued with laptops.	Yes – running costs are covered by an allowance of £20 / month, we also pay for subscriptions to BT Internet to allow 'unlimited' dial-up access to the internet from the member's home.
Loch Lomond	No	No
New Forest	Where possible access to IT equipment is made available on request i.e. use of a Laptop (off-site) or PC (on-site).	Initially support will be limited to mailbox facilities on NFNPA systems if required. Mailbox licence fees are covered by the Authority.

Park Authority	Q1 – do you provide ICT equipment to members (all, some, none)?	Q2 – do you provide financial support to members for ICT running costs (ink, paper, internet access)
North York Moors	As a rule we do not provide any ICT equipment to any of our members, nor do we assist them with consumables etc. However, ICT equipment will be provided on a temporary basis should a member require it for Authority business (e.g. NPAPA assessments), and also any of our members are welcome to ask us ICT advice should they require it.	Not normally, only in special circumstances.
Northumberland	Northumberland County Council appointees receive computers and support from County Council District Council appointees supported by their District Councils (but not all are currently on-line) Do not currently provide anything from NPA for Parish or National Interest SoS appointees.	Occasional reams of paper on request and running costs to be covered by Basic Allowance.
Peak District	Members have use of a PC in the members' room and can use PCs in the training room and the reception area if necessary. Provision has been made to supply the Chair and Deputy Chair with email capable mobile phones/PDAs which link to the Authority's MS Exchange Server and laptops. To date the Chair has been given the 'phone but the other equipment has been declined.	We have prepared training manuals for the equipment to which members have access. They can call on IT and Committee Services support but we have explained that we may not be resourced to meet their needs. We operate an informal helpdesk giving advice where we can but the default position is that we're not resourced to provide support. Members will receive a £30 pa contribution towards printing costs from 2006/07. Proportionately more is added for special roles: i.e. Chair and Deputy Chair of the Authority, Chairs and Vice Chairs of Committees, Lead and Champion Members. We have also arranged to supply 15 members with copies of MS Office; so far two members have taken up the offer.
Pembrokeshire Coast	None provided	Nothing
Snowdonia	No	No
Yorkshire Dales	Nothing	Nothing

Park Authority	Q3 – do you have a ‘formal’ policy in place as per IEG outcome R17, or a draft, that covers support for members?	Q4 – what training do you provide to members to help them use IT as part of their role?	Q5 – do you have plans or projects in place now that will change any of the above answers in the next 6 months (up to July 2006)?
Brecon Beacons	No, but we will need to consider this	Introductory training in Windows and MS Office provided to some members in 2005. Plans to refresh and progress this in 2006.	<p>Proposal pending to change to CD based agendas to reduce costs and improve efficiency and sustainability.</p> <p>Likely to work with other Authorities’ IT departments to adopt model established with PCC for shared use of IT equipment.</p> <p>Possibly will support home working via broadband and portals, forums, etc. by that date.</p>
Broads Authority	We have a support policy (within our Work Life Balance Policy) for home workers which makes no specific reference to Members. However we would offer the same support to Members were we to provide them with equipment.	None	We are planning to provide email access to allow contact with Members via our website and for them to respond via an @broads-authority.gov.uk address. There will be a need to supply some equipment and training.
Cairngorm	<p>Does not apply to Scotland</p> <p>We have Web Outlook to allow staff to access e-mail only from external locations</p>	We offer to give advice if requested, but most members are pretty computer literate	Nothing programmed
Dartmoor	Currently under development within the framework of the Members Business Review	Ad-hoc training as requested by individual members is provided, but this is being reviewed under Priority Outcome G12.	Yes. An audit of what IT equipment and skills members currently have will be carried out during January 2006 with a view to reviewing the provision of ICT to members following that audit, by end of March 2006.
Exmoor	Yes, we have a documented home-working policy.	Nothing formal, but any needs are met as they arise.	No.

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Lake District	We only have a draft policy in place; it is still subject to consultation with Unison.	We provide 1:1 training as members request it. With members having laptops we ask them to bring the PC to the office for support and training, rather than have to send staff to members’ homes.	Through our Sharepoint project we intent to deploy Sharepoint as an ‘extranet’ with Members allowed access on our Intranet from home (or anywhere else they have an Internet connection). We are also likely to ‘refresh’ some of the member laptops in the next couple of months.
Loch Lomond	N/A	None	No
New Forest	No, although the intention is to produce one by April 2006 in consultation with Member’s Services team.	Essential training as provided to staff at NFNPA will be provided as or when required.	1) Provision will be made for a Members Extranet if required. 2) When NFNPA’s physical site (building works etc) are complete the fact that IT resources (shared PC + printer) are available for use will be made known to Members via Member’s Services team.
North York Moors	We have a home/remote working policy which covers staff. As far as I am aware, it would also apply to members should they ever require it.	None as such, although there has been a members IT workshop held March last year. More of a walk through style event than training per se.	No, although in the longer term it may be an option to use the portal extranet to provide easier access to and communication between members. Not only locally but nationally?
Northumberland	Home working policy in place since March 2005. Reference: http://www.northumberland-national-park.org.uk/AboutUs/Meetings/agendasrports.htm Appendix H March 2005	None	Sharepoint training (DMS) to be provided within next 6 months to all Members CRM training within next twelve months if agreed by SMT.
Peak District	We have a formal e-policy and users guide (attached). Members are asked to sign relevant agreements. Members agreed the attached at an Authority	In the last two years we have arranged 2 IT briefing sessions and one training session. Members can book the training rooms which has teach yourself material	There are no formal plans but we feel that at some point better IT provision will have to be provided for members if we are to develop their understanding of

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	meeting which considered one of the IEG returns	in MS Office, PowerPoint etc. Members can also be supported to attend external IT courses if they wish.	IEG. We have an agreement to review each year.
Pembrokeshire Coast	No	None	No
Snowdonia	Not at present	None	No
Yorkshire Dales	No	None. They have been offered free participation on ECDL courses, but there have been no takers.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Looking at allowances for consumables 2. Looking at Members' extranet