

Committee: AUDIT AND REVIEW
Date: 27 June 2008

Report: PERFORMANCE IMPROVEMENT REVIEWS 2008/09

Purpose of the report

1. To identify up to two areas of the Authority's work that should be subject to 'performance improvement reviews' in 2008/09, and consider a potential amendment to the terms of reference for such reviews.

Strategic Planning Framework

2. The information and recommendation contained in this report are consistent with the Authority's statutory purposes and its approved strategic planning framework:
 - **Corporate Plan objectives**
Ensure a robust and accountable Performance Management Framework is in place and is driving improvement, so that at least 75% of the Authority's objectives are achieved or remain 'on course' each year.

Background

3. Members will recall that one of the key recommendations from the National Park Authority Performance Assessment in 2005 was that Members should take a more direct role in reviewing progress, and take lead responsibility for the dissemination of 'lessons learned/best practice' throughout the Authority. As a result, in July 2006 the Authority agreed a new, enhanced role for the Audit and Review Committee, which included:
 - Instigating a programme of reviews in areas where the Authority is under-performing, and report back to the Authority.
4. The Committee agreed the key characteristics of the reviews as follows:
 - they will focus on areas where the Authority is not achieving what it has set out to do, and will need to focus closely on the options for change.
 - limited to a maximum of 2 reviews in any given year;
 - each review team should contain no more than 6 people, including:
 - 2 Members (from the Audit and Review Committee/the relevant 'champion');
 - Head of the relevant Department;
 - Head of another Department
 - 2 further members of staff.

Identifying areas for review

5. Elsewhere on the agenda, Members have received a detailed report of the Authority's performance in 2007/08. Bringing together the information on objectives, performance indicators and actions, it is possible to identify all those areas where there *appears* to be scope for improvement. These are listed in **Annex A**.
6. The reasons for the under-performance vary, and there are a number of areas where there may be little value in carrying out an in-depth performance review. Annex A, therefore, also gives an assessment of the reasons for the under-performance, and the appropriateness or otherwise of reviewing each potential area. However, the final decision is one for Members.

Scope of reviews

7. One of the agreed characteristics of reviews is that they should focus closely on the options for change (i.e. how performance can be improved). Clearly, one option will always be to increase resources which, if significant, will generally depend on increasing the priority of the programme (and decreasing the priority of some other area of work). The Committee might want to consider the appropriateness of this, given that the full Authority has already set the Authority's priorities after considerable deliberation. It might be more appropriate to make it explicit that reviews should look at how to improve performance *within the context and resources* of the current priorities. It would still be within the remit of a review team to conclude – and draw this Committee's attention to the fact – that significant improvement is not possible without a change in priority. However, the primary focus of any review ought to be on trying to find ways to deliver the best possible service within the priority set by the Authority.
8. A suggested revised framework to make this more explicit (revisions highlighted in bold) is attached at **Annex B**.

RECOMMENDATION

9. That Members:
 - a) identify up to two areas of the Authority's work that should be subject to performance improvement review during 2008/09;
 - b) identify two Members to sit on each of the review teams; and,
 - c) amend the framework for reviews to make clear that they should focus on improving performance within the context of the Authority's current priorities

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12 June 2008

POTENTIAL AREAS FOR PERFORMANCE IMPROVEMENT REVIEW

Priority programmes

A1 Production of digital biodiversity map

Action postponed for second year due to complexity of processing data collected from survey in Richmondshire. Led to postponement of two related actions to make biodiversity data available to the public.

Already scheduled for a 'Major Project Review' this year. Area of work that is not 'on-going' so little value in a Performance Improvement Review as well. Not recommended for Review.

A2 Quality of planning service (inc. decisions, appeals, valid applications)

Failed to achieve our objectives on: decisions in line with policy; new homes on previously developed land and appeal decisions. Now in the bottom half of NPA family on the latter two. The number of planning applications that were 'valid' when initially received fell for the third year in a row (now down to 49%). Also missed targets for timely processing of major applications.

Two of these (appeals, major applications) are based on small numbers so results do fluctuate. Reduction in new homes on previously developed land reflects shift in planning policy to support affordable housing on greenfield sites. Increase in invalid applications due to changes in validation requirements and applicants' difficulty in dealing with new national 'OneApp' system. Not recommended for Review.

A3 Rights of way

PI targets for 'easy to use' and signposting missed. For second year both figures have actually dropped – potentially casting doubt on achievement of overall objective. Now in bottom half of NPAs.

Picture confused by inconsistency amongst NPAs in calculating 'easy to use' figure. NPAs been working together to develop new standard performance indicators, which should bring clarity next year. The underlying targets (relating to the number of stiles/bridges/surfaces in good condition etc) have all been exceeded, which suggests that the overall condition of rights of way is getting better. It is suggested that this priority area of work is monitored for a further year to see if the downward trend continues or improvement is seen in the data. If no improvement is made this should be a strong area for Review in 2009.

Areas where we aim to provide a good service/make steady improvement

B1. Enforcement of breaches of planning control

Performance dropped from 65% to 51% of cases being resolved within 16 weeks. *Due to decision in July last year not to re-staff fully following departure of former enforcement officer (as part of efforts to implement Authority policy of maintaining staff budget below 70% of DEFRA grant). As a result, the section carried an effective vacancy of 0.3 fte for the rest of the year.*

In light of the better than expected Defra settlement, the full-time enforcement officer post has been re-instated and filled. Not Recommended for Review

C1. Restoration of field barns

Failed to meet target (10) after previous failure to meet 3-year objective in 2007. *The number of barns being restored has dropped dramatically in the last two years due to a reduction in Natural England funding for capital works through ESA schemes, and the targeting of new resources (through the Environmental Stewardship Higher Level Scheme) on the restoration of SSSIs. Situation is unlikely to improve over the next two years. Not recommended for Review*

C2 Conservation area appraisals and management plans

Failed to meet annual PI targets, with one appraisal (Settle-Carlisle) and one management plan (undetermined) postponed.

Due to decision in September 2007 not to refill vacant Building Conservation Officer post (as part of efforts to maintain staff budget below 70%). Long-term objective should still be achieved. Not recommended for Review

C3. Definitive map

Targets for order-making and decisions missed for third year in a row – although 10 anomalies were resolved. Identified as potential candidate for review for last two years. Deferred last year to allow time to assess performance against revised work priorities.

Strong candidate for review now.

C4. National public awareness of YDNP

Just failed to meet objective (9% of people can now name the Yorkshire Dales as being a national park – compared to our objective of 10%).

However, represents an improvement (7% in 2004) at a time when recognition of other Parks has declined. Not recommended for Review.

C5 Production of planning policy

Milestones set in the Local Development Framework for 2007/08 were missed for second year despite achieving all the actions. Also failed to meet objective to set a target for new affordable housing. Final target unlikely to be adopted until 2009.

This area has been subject to a Performance Improvement Review in 2007/08 (see item elsewhere on the agenda). .

C6 Customer satisfaction with car parks and toilets

Satisfaction survey not carried out for second year running. The refurbishment of Stainforth and the review of Wood Lane car park were both postponed.

The survey was not carried out as no resources were allocated to the task. However, the public toilets were subject to a Performance Improvement Review during 2007/08 (see item elsewhere on the agenda).

Areas where progress will be limited or dependent on external funding

D1. Access for all

Missed targets for works to make rights of way more accessible for those in wheelchairs or with limited mobility.

The issue here is simply one of funding. Targets were set based on a minimal budget allocation and the possibility of drawing in external funding. In the event, external funding was not available. Some Authority budget has been allocated for 2008/09 and the external funding situation is under constant review, therefore the picture should improve. Not recommended for Review.

D2. Landscape character guidelines

Objective to prepare the guidelines was missed for second consecutive year.

Primarily the result of delays in filling the Landscape Conservation Officer post, and the decision to make the post part-time (reflecting the relatively low priority of this area of work and the need to stay within the 70% salary ceiling). Process was further delayed by transfer of responsibility to the National Park Management Plan steering group. Timetable and programme now approved and LCO post has been temporarily increased to 0.8fte to ensure good progress is made this year. Not recommended for Review.

D3 National Park Centre Effectiveness

Although the Authority achieved its objective, performance on two of the three measures of effectiveness got worse, and we appear to be at the bottom of the (five) Authorities that have reported figures.

Performance at least partly reflects what is realistic given the priority of this area of work. Picture is also confused by inconsistency amongst NPAs in assessing NPCs. NPAs have been working together to develop a new standard performance indicator. This should bring more clarity and it may be better to wait until reliable comparative data is available. However, this will not be until March 2010. This is an area to consider for Review.

E1. Bus services

The PI target for services on bank holidays and weekends has not been met. The level of service is actually getting worse, due to reduced funding for leisure services from the County Council.

The main responsibility for the provision of public bus services rests with the County Councils. The increasing activity and influence of the Yorkshire Dales Society's Dales and Bowland Community Interest Company (to which the Authority has recently approved a grant of £20k) provides some hope for better provision in the future. Not recommended for Review.

E2 Pennine Bridleway

Three actions postponed all relating to legal agreements associated with new sections of the route.

Still on course to complete the route within the original timescale. Not recommended for Review.

E3. Traffic management

Highways delegation agreement and development of new road hierarchy both postponed for second year running.

Responsibility for this action rests primarily with North Yorkshire County Council. Not recommended for Review.

Core services

X1. Equality Standard

Target to achieve Level 1 of the standard missed again. Also in bottom half of NPAs in terms of staff from ethnic minorities or with a disability.

All elements of Level 1 (and several at higher levels) are in place but not formally 'signed off' by the Authority. Staff figures based on very small numbers (best NPA is only 3.5%). Nonetheless, alongside the performance on 'Access for All' (see D2 above); this may be an area that would benefit from a review.

X2. Sickness absence

Failed to meet our own target for third year in a row.

The Authority is the second best NPA and compares very favourably to equivalent organisations elsewhere in the public and private sectors. YDNPA target (4 days per fte) has been unrealistic for several years. Now revised to 4.5 days which is still 'challenging'. Not recommended for Review.

X3 Property management

3 actions postponed.

All related to long-term sickness absence of one member of staff. All have now been completed. Not recommended for Review.

FRAMEWORK FOR REPORTING PERFORMANCE IMPROVEMENT REVIEWS

1. The issue

In what area are we under-performing?

Why does it matter?

What are we supposed to be achieving (objectives, outputs, outcomes etc)?

2. Current performance

What are we actually achieving?

What resources are we putting in?

How is the service being delivered?

Does it represent value for money?

NB In each case, how do we compare to other bodies (NPAs and/or other bodies providing the same type of service)?

3. The evaluation

Are the current objectives realistic *given the current priority of the programme?*

Why are we not achieving the desired result?

What are the potential options for improvement *given the current priority of the programme?*

Are there any other options (e.g. abandonment, *less challenging objectives*)?

4. Future action

Recommended action plan

Future funding/resourcing *implications*

Timetable