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Archwilydd Cyffredinol Cymru
Auditor General for Wales

Biodiversity and Resilience of Ecosystems Report and Forward Plan



WALES AUDIT OFFICE
SWYDDFA ARCHWILIO CYMRU



This report on compliance by the Auditor General for Wales and Wales Audit Office with the Biodiversity and Resilience of Ecosystems Duty covers the period 1 April 2016 to 31 March 2019. It has been jointly prepared under section 6(7) of the Environment (Wales) Act 2016 and with regard to [Reporting Guidance](#) published by the Welsh Ministers.

Also included in this document is our related forward plan, which has been jointly prepared by the Auditor General for Wales and the Wales Audit Office under section 6(6) of the Environment (Wales) Act 2016.

As the Auditor General and the Wales Audit Office are separate legal entities, each with their own respective functions and each covered by the Biodiversity and Resilience of Ecosystems Duty, each are required to produce a related Plan and Report. However, as we work together in the same organisation, for coherence and economy we have agreed to bring our objectives together in a joint plan and to prepare a joint report on our progress.

If you require this publication in an alternative format and/or language, or have any questions about its content, please contact us using the details below. We welcome correspondence in Welsh and English and we will respond in the language you have used. Corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay.

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This document is also available in Welsh.

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Foreword

The Auditor General for Wales and Wales Audit Office are committed to seeking to maintain and enhance biodiversity so far as is consistent with our functions, and in so doing promote the resilience of ecosystems.

This is our first report on compliance with the Environment (Wales) Act 2016 Biodiversity and Resilience of Ecosystems Duty and covers the period 1 April 2016 to 31 March 2019.

Over the period 2016-17 to 2018-19, we took a broad range of steps that helped us perform the Biodiversity and Resilience of Ecosystems Duty. These included:

- delivering several audit examinations and studies which included considerations and recommendations relevant to maintaining and enhancing biodiversity;
- achieving our target of reaching Level 5 (the highest level) of the Green Dragon Environmental Standard, demonstrating our ongoing commitment to effective environmental management;
- reducing our total greenhouse gas emissions by over 25% and commencing carbon offsetting to compensate for our emissions by funding equivalent carbon dioxide saving projects elsewhere; and
- establishing an environmental champions staff group to promote the sustainability principle and raise awareness of biodiversity initiatives.

Also included in this document is our related Plan which consists of six specific objectives to help us better perform the Biodiversity and Resilience of Ecosystems Duty in the future.

In future years, we will report on the effectiveness of steps taken and progress made towards meeting these objectives each year in our Annual Report and Accounts and will review our objectives and revise as appropriate through our published Annual Plan.



Isobel Everett
Chair, Wales Audit Office



Adrian Crompton
Auditor General for Wales

Steps we have already taken towards meeting the biodiversity duty

Over the three-year period 2016-17 to 2018-19, we took a broad range of steps that helped us perform the Biodiversity and Resilience of Ecosystems Duty

- 1 The Auditor General's main functions involve examining and reporting on the stewardship of public money by Welsh public bodies. When undertaking this work, we consider how well public bodies are run and the effectiveness of their services. In reporting on public bodies, and in making recommendations, the Auditor General is therefore able to encourage beneficial changes in terms of maintaining and enhancing biodiversity in Wales and promoting the resilience of ecosystems.
- 2 We are also committed to embedding the principle of sustainable development in the way we run our business, and to maximising our contribution to achieving the seven Welsh well-being goals, including that of 'A resilient Wales'¹.
- 3 The Wales Audit Office does not own or manage land and therefore has a smaller opportunity to carry out activities for biodiversity than organisations that do own or manage land. However, the Board fully recognises the need to support biodiversity and ecosystem resilience, including through:
 - a reducing and offsetting our greenhouse gas emissions;
 - b reducing the total distance we travel on business and choosing more sustainable travel options;
 - c minimising our consumption of paper and water;
 - d minimising our production of waste and maximising the proportion of our waste that is recycled; and
 - e raising awareness of biodiversity and sustainability issues.
- 4 **Exhibit 1** provides detail on some of the key steps we took during the reporting period towards meeting the duty to help enhance biodiversity and promote the resilience of ecosystems.

1 Described in the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 as 'A nation which maintains and enhances a biodiverse natural environment with healthy functioning ecosystems that support social, economic and ecological resilience and the capacity to adapt to change (for example, climate change)'.

Exhibit 1: Steps taken during 2016-17 to 2018-19 towards meeting our duty to help enhance biodiversity and promote the resilience of ecosystems

Over the period 2016-17 to 2018-19, the Auditor General delivered several examinations and studies which included considerations and recommendations relevant to maintaining and enhancing biodiversity and the resilience of ecosystems. These included:

- [The effectiveness of local planning authorities in Wales](#) – considering the extent to which local planning authorities are acting in accordance with the sustainable development principle contained within the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015
- [Waste Management in Wales – Preventing Waste](#) – assessing the level of priority that the Welsh Government has given to waste prevention, progress made towards waste prevention targets and the quality of data available to the Welsh Government with which to measure progress
- [Waste Management in Wales: Municipal Recycling](#) – exploring whether the Welsh Government is making good progress to promote municipal waste recycling and the efficient and effective collection of municipal waste.
- [Procuring Residual and Food Waste Treatment Capacity](#) – focusing on the provision of infrastructure for food waste recycling through anaerobic digestion and recovery of energy from waste.
- [Assessment of how public bodies in Wales have responded to the Well-being of Future Generations Act](#) – providing commentary on how public bodies responded to the Act in the first year.
- [Coastal Flood and Erosion Risk Management in Wales](#) – evaluating whether key objectives in the Welsh Government’s National Strategy for Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management in Wales are being met.

[A revised Code of Audit Practice](#) was published on 1 May 2018. The revised Code provides enhanced prescription on how, when exercising the Auditor General’s functions, auditors must consider sustainable development and apply the sustainable development principle, as defined in the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.



In 2018-19, the Wales Audit Office achieved our target of reaching Level 5 (the highest level) of the [Green Dragon Environmental Standard](#), demonstrating our ongoing commitment to effective environmental management.

The Standard is intended to provide organisations with:

- the elements of an effective environmental management system that are appropriate to the context, nature and scale of their activities and operations; and
- a system to reduce the organisation's environmental impacts and protect the environment, including minimising ecosystem degradation, climate change, loss of biodiversity, pollution, use of finite resources and waste management.

Over the reporting period 2016-17 to 2018-19, we reduced our total greenhouse gas emissions by over 25%. A major contributory factor to this reduction in emissions was a 28% lowering of our consumption of energy sourced from electricity supply.

In 2016-17, we also commenced carbon offsetting to compensate for our emissions by funding equivalent carbon dioxide saving projects elsewhere. In 2018-19, we offset all our carbon dioxide equivalent emissions (tCO₂e), including those resulting from our business travel, by supporting the following projects:

- Portel-Pará reduced deforestation and biodiversity conservation project in Brazil (199 tCO₂e)
- Wind-based power generation project by Panama Wind in India (198 tCO₂e)
- Planting 199 native broad leaf species trees in Wales in school locations and other biodiversity sites



Over the three-year reporting period we have invested in Skype for Business – a system which allows our staff to collaborate and communicate with each other, and with outside contacts, through phone calls, video conferencing, screen sharing and instant messaging, via their laptops and regardless of where they are working.

This investment has significantly reduced the need for colleagues and client staff to travel to meet and work together; in 2018-19 alone we reduced car business travel by 79,000 miles.

In April 2016, we introduced a new policy for business travel and expenses aimed at reducing our environmental impact and costs while protecting employee health and well-being. The following questions underpin the policy and are applicable to any journey undertaken:

- Is there a need to undertake the journey at all – would an email or telephone/videoconference call suffice instead?
- Is it an option to undertake the journey on public transport?
- Is car sharing with colleagues an option?

Under the policy, to be eligible for receipt of travel allowance, an employee must be in a role classified as mobile² and their car must meet prescribed emissions limits (which are subject to ongoing review).

Most of our staff now use laptops which combine the size format of tablets with mobile device functionality, reducing the need for the printing of meeting papers and enabling them to take notes onscreen.

As reported in our [Annual Report and Accounts 2018-19](#), over the reporting period this has helped us reduce our paper consumption by over 40% and we are committed to using recycled stationery products.



2 Defined in the policy as a role for which there is:

- an unquestionable need to travel to audited bodies or other locations for work purposes;
- an absence of suitable public transport alternatives to meet the business need; and
- a frequency of travel that makes it more effective that the individual provides their own car.

In 2018-19, we recycled over three-quarters of our waste. We use the WRAP business waste weights calculator tool to provide accurate measurements and reduced our total amount of waste between 2015-16 and 2017-18 by 50%.

In 2018-19, we launched a new cycle-to-work scheme for staff, purchased pool bicycles for our offices and invested in a larger bike cage for our Cardiff office, to help further reduce our environmental impacts and improve the health and well-being of our staff. We also installed electric vehicle charge points at our Cardiff office in March 2019.

In 2016-17, we relocated our North Wales office to smaller premises with improved environmental performance. We have also recently undertaken preventative repairs to our Cardiff office to improve its overall performance.

Despite inflationary increases in rent, rates and other costs, due to improvements in our environmental performance and use of office space, our overall efficiency of estate slightly improved in cash terms between 2018-19 (£3,378 per full-time equivalent) and 2014-15 (£3,397 per full-time equivalent).

Notwithstanding an increase in the number of shared learning events held at our Cardiff headquarters, our water consumption over the reporting period also reduced by nearly 25%.

Sustainability considerations are now firmly embedded in our procurement practices, including through:

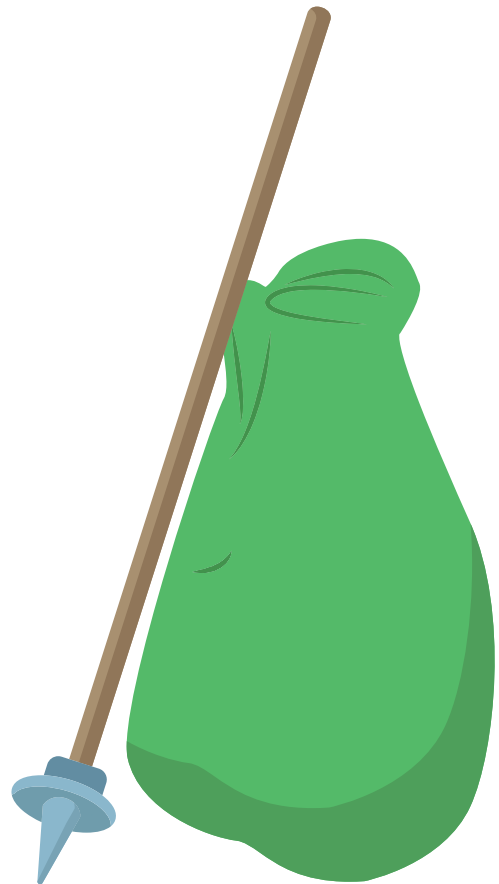
- providing training for procurement staff in sustainable procurement principles;
- undertaking sustainability risk assessments for higher value procurement and considering whole life costs;
- using government frameworks where available and ensuring that the suppliers we engage follow sustainable practices; and
- using the Buying Standards as a guide for cleaning, construction and purchase of equipment.



We have established an environmental champions staff group to promote the sustainability principle and raise awareness of various staff initiatives, including those related to biodiversity and ecosystems resilience.

Notable examples include:

- Joining four schemes for recycling typically hard-to-recycle waste:
 - The [Pladis Biscuits and Snacks Recycling Programme](#)
 - The [Colgate® Oral Care Recycling Programme](#)
 - The [Crisp Packet Recycling Scheme](#)
 - The [Writing Instruments Recycling Programme](#)
- Participating in the Keep Wales Tidy beach clean in September 2018, where colleagues attended events at three beaches across Wales.
- Running an active internal social media group and hosting 'lunch and learn' workshops where ideas for reducing your impact on the environment are shared.



Future focus for our work on meeting the biodiversity duty

We have six specific objectives to help us better perform the Biodiversity and Resilience of Ecosystems Duty in the future

- 5 This Plan sets out the key steps that the Auditor General and the Wales Audit Office are committed to taking over the coming years in order to help maintain and enhance biodiversity in Wales and promote the resilience of ecosystems, so far as is consistent with the proper exercise of our functions.
- 6 Alongside our overall statement of commitment (outlined in [paragraphs 1 to 3](#) of this document), our Plan consists of six specific objectives to help us perform the Biodiversity and Resilience of Ecosystems Duty.
- 7 Our objectives have been prepared with sight of the objectives of the [Nature Recovery Action Plan for Wales](#), which have been identified to contribute to reversing the decline of biodiversity in Wales.
- 8 We will report on progress made towards meeting our objectives each year in our Annual Report and Accounts and will review and revise our objectives as appropriate through the annual preparation of our published Annual Plan.

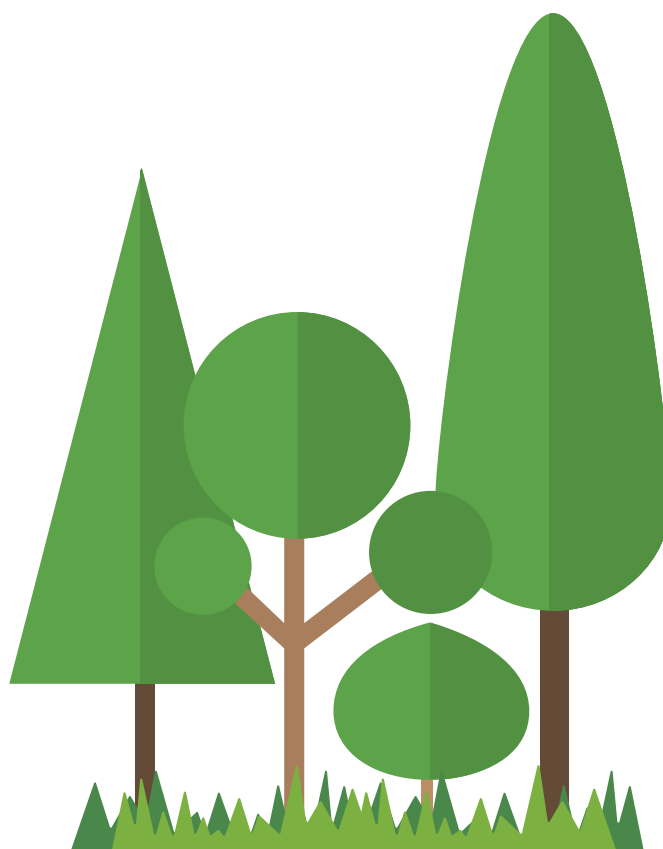


Exhibit 2: Our future objectives for helping ensure that the Auditor General and the Wales Audit Office meet the duty to help enhance biodiversity and promote the resilience of ecosystems

<p>We will have regard to The State of Natural Resources Report, and will engage with people and organisations with an interest in maintaining and enhancing biodiversity in Wales when considering:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• what programmes of value for money examinations and studies we will undertake; and• the approach to be adopted in value for money examinations and studies that have a primary focus relevant to the Biodiversity and Resilience of Ecosystems Duty.
<p>We will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• include, in the next revision of the Auditor General’s Code of Audit Practice and related guidance, prescription on how auditors should perform the Biodiversity and Resilience of Ecosystems Duty; and• update our audit ‘project initiation’ document template so that it explicitly requires value for money examination and study teams to identify where a particular audit might support the Auditor General in discharging the Duty.
<p>In carrying out the Auditor General’s examinations under the Well-being of Future Generations Act (Wales) 2015, we will consider whether public bodies are acting in accordance with the sustainable development principle so that they can contribute to the national well-being goals, including ‘A resilient Wales’.</p>
<p>We will extend the scope of our arrangements for assessing the likely impact of Wales Audit Office policies and practices (revised or new) to include biodiversity and resilience of ecosystems considerations where appropriate. Relevant upcoming projects include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• the implementation of smarter and more flexible working arrangements;• our strategy for estate rationalisation; and• the recommendations of an external audit review of our travel scheme.

When procuring services, we will:

- include requirements relevant to performance of the Biodiversity and Resilience of Ecosystems Duty in our tender award criteria; and
- comply with the Biodiversity and Resilience of Ecosystems Duty when stipulating the performance standards to be included in the contract.

We will continue to support the work of our environmental champions staff group on raising awareness across the organisation about how each role can impact and influence biodiversity.

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