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# Review of Involvement – **Snowdonia National Park Authority**

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Mae'r ddogfen hon hefyd ar gael yn Gymraeg. This document is also available in Welsh.

The team who delivered the work comprised Nick Selwyn, Euros Lake and Philippa Dixon

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# Summary report

## The Well-being of Future Generations Act 2015

- 1 The Well-being of Future Generations Act (the 'Act') requires public bodies in Wales to think about the long-term impact of their decisions, to work better with people, communities and each other, and to prevent persistent problems such as poverty, health inequalities and climate change. The Act also puts in place a 'sustainable development principle' which tells those public bodies covered by the Act how to go about meeting their duty.
- 2 Public bodies need to make sure that when making their decisions they consider the impact they could have on people living their lives in Wales both now and in the future. There are five things that public bodies need to think about to show that they have applied the sustainable development principle. These are set out in **Exhibit 1**. Following these ways of working will help public bodies to work together better, avoid repeating past mistakes and tackle some of the long-term challenges facing Wales.

Exhibit 1 – the sustainable development principle and the five ways of working



1

Source: Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 – [The Essentials](#)

## Involvement

- 3 Involvement is about having rich and meaningful conversations with the people in their community, finding out what matters to them, and reflecting that in the decisions that NPAs take. Involvement requires organisations to be open to influence from citizens and stakeholders, moving to a culture of ‘working with’ rather than ‘doing to’. In contrast to consultation, involvement approaches work with people at earlier stages, such as helping to identify issues and potential solutions, and being supported to remain involved right throughout design, implementation and evaluation processes.
- 4 Drawing on our most recent feedback presentation to Snowdonia National Park Authority’s (the ‘Authority’) Policy and Resources Committee on 24 July 2019, the Future Generations Commissioner for Wales’ [Journey Checker](#) and the [National Principles for Public Engagement in Wales](#) developed by Participation Cymru, [Exhibit 2](#) summarises the characteristics of an organisation with an effective approach to involvement.

### Exhibit 2 – the characteristics of a public body which has an effective approach to involvement

Effective involvement is embodied by....



- 5 Authorities should therefore set their agenda by listening to people, meaningfully involving them throughout the decision-making process, and being open to real change as a result. It is vital that activities and mechanisms for involving people are appropriately planned, monitored and reported, so they can be developed, challenged or championed. Ensuring that staff and organisations have the necessary skills, structures as well as time and resources to involve the public effectively is vital. This ensures that public services in Wales reflect what is important to the public and their needs, rather than what we may traditionally think works best.

## Scope of our Audit

- 6 Given the challenges for public bodies in embodying the sustainable development principle, we have on behalf of the Auditor General for Wales reviewed the Authority's approach and management of involving stakeholders when proposing service and policy changes, and in the design of activities. We undertook a more detailed look at how the Authority is involving stakeholders in developing the new Snowdonia National Park Management Plan (the Plan). The Plan provides the strategic policy framework for the entire National Park and includes a specific Action Plan which will be implemented over the next five years. The development of the plan is resourced through staff time with several members of staff working on the production of the Plan.

## Our Findings

- 7 Overall, we have concluded that **the Authority has established an effective partnership-led approach in developing Cynllun Eryri and is well placed to build on this going forward but needs to address its financial and capacity challenges to ensure its involvement work is sustainable**. We came to this conclusion because we found the following.

### The Authority has effectively involved key partners in co-producing Cynllun Eryri but involving the full range of interests in its wider work remains an ongoing public sector challenge

- 8 Overall, we recognise that the Authority has developed a good approach to involvement on the development of the new Park Management Plan. The Authority carried out the most widespread consultation it has ever undertaken and has used many of the processes used to develop the Local Development Plan and Snowdon Partnership Plan in its work on the new Park Management Plan. The Authority sought to engage with hard-to-reach groups/interests such as local schools, young people's groups/societies, young farmers for example. The Authority also created an Equalities and Impact Assessment sub-forum which it has taken advice from to

make the Plan easy to read, understandable and accessible. In developing the new Plan, the Authority also developed a consultation matrix which helps to evidence the process it has undertaken to identify and prioritise key stakeholders and interested parties. Positively, the matrix also allows for consideration of how to tailor communication methods for various stakeholders.

- 9 How the Authority engages with stakeholders is driven by a partnership approach with regular meetings with key stakeholders to get good buy-in. The Authority established Fforwm Eryri (a partnership forum) specifically for the purpose of shaping and co-producing the new Plan. Forum members meet quarterly to determine the future direction and priorities of the plan. The draft Plan reflects the views of the members of Fforwm Eryri, but the speed of progress has been slow – Cynllun Eryri is a five-year Plan that has taken four years to produce.
- 10 Following initial public consultation, the Authority held internal workshops centred on themes with Authority staff and key statutory advisors Cadw and Natural Resources Wales participating. The workshops helped shape the final draft Park Management Plan which will be the subject of formal public consultation in early 2020. The Authority plans to follow a similar process to the one it used in the adoption of the Local Development Plan. The plan is ‘ambitious, but realistic’ and the Authority is aware that it needs to ensure it has the right outcome measures in place to be able to judge progress, as well as demonstrating the impact of involvement. For example, the current performance indicator noting that ‘100% of all interested parties are satisfied with the opportunity to be involved/engaged’ should reflect that these are the views of partners attending Fforwm Eryri rather than ‘all interested parties’.
- 11 Within the draft Plan, the focus on the Welsh language is exemplary. Most staff are able to communicate in both languages, and the proposed ways forward in Cynllun Eryri, bolstered by the Consultation Report responses, identify the Welsh language and its use as a key priority for the area. The Authority is also starting to work through how best to disseminate the new Plan and how to engage with and involve local people and communities.
- 12 However, the Authority does not enable all those who may want to contribute in other languages/mediums to do so. There is no provision throughout the consultation that encourages or accepts contributions in British Sign Language (BSL) or in languages other than Welsh and English. In addition, whilst people from Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) communities do not account for a significant number of residents in the area, the Authority has a wider reach and responsibility that goes further than its boundary. It needs to do more to widen its appeal and encourage people from more economically or socially deprived areas, including those who may be on low or no incomes, to use the Park.
- 13 Consequently, we conclude that although the Authority recognises it could do more to involve hard-to-reach groups, it needs to be able to demonstrate its consideration of whether and how it involves community groups such as those outlined above. Working through representative groups across the local area and

the wider North and Mid Wales region will help the Authority find an efficient way to engage with overarching representative groups which can provide insight and challenge on the effectiveness of current approaches to involvement with hard-to-reach groups. To date, involvement work has been focussed on the Authority area and its inhabitants. Whilst the initial consultation element was broad, this still falls short of the expectations of the Act which requires public bodies to involve the full range of potential users and stakeholders.

- 14 Defining 'people' to involve with is challenging because involvement is not just about the people who live in the Park area, the businesses which work in the Park area and key local Authority partners but also the wider population. Consequently, the Authority needs to consider tourists/visitors to the National Park. Many of these come from outside Wales which can make it challenging to engage with. There is also a tension between the Authority's two primary purposes – to conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the National Parks; and to promote opportunities for the understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of the Parks by the public.
- 15 There has been a 100% increase in tourism in the last ten years with more people visiting and enjoying Snowdon. This has contributed to the annual generation of £70 million in the local economy but increasing visitor numbers are having a detrimental impact on the environment. Managing the potential effect of increasing visitor numbers going forward – making tourism and its impact on the Park sustainable in terms of the environment – remains a key challenge for the Authority and its partners, including the Welsh Government.
- 16 Positively, the Authority has approved the creation of a new Sustainable Tourism officer to help focus its involvement work in this important area in the future. The Authority is broadly using the Welsh Government's 'Valued and Resilient' priorities to shape how it involves people in its work and decision making. However, it is seeking to balance the impact of increasing tourism in the Park area with the conservation of Snowdonia's distinct biodiversity and cultural heritage. This is a balancing act that has no easy solution as the Authority is one of a number of local and national bodies that promote the Park area.
- 17 Wardens are an important part of the community and the refocusing of these services offers an opportunity to widen the involvement focus of their role. Historically, the warden's team has been delivering engagement through, for instance, engagement with local groups, schools. The restructure is not fully embedded and delivering but the new approach focussed on the revised role – income generation, project work, land management, asset management and mediation between land users, ramblers, tourists and farmers – and education work will help modernise the service making it more customer focussed. Warden area plans offer an opportunity to capture involvement activity on the ground. Effectively involving traditionally hard-to-reach groups, such as disabled access groups and disadvantaged communities living on the Park fringes, remains a challenge.



- 18 Similarly, the engagement team and the refocussed emphasis on several involvement strands offer an opportunity to build on the Authority's historically strong involvement work with town and community councils. Its planned work on Volunteering and Well-being and Sustainable Tourism provides a platform to develop and diversify the Authority's offer and appeal to public health partners. The Volunteering and Well-being role in particular offers opportunity to adopt a more strategic approach to the developing the Authority's offer in relation to the public health and wellbeing agenda.
- 19 However, the Authority has work to do to shape public perception where citizens see their local council rather than the Authority as their 'driver of change' (even though the Authority is seeking to address community issues that other public sector partners do not see as important or do not have the resources to address). For example, the Authority has taken on the responsibility in addressing local community issues such as addressing highways issues to improve access to the Park, investing in new bus shelters and responding to town and community councils' concerns. Often the Authority is not acknowledged or credited for this work and could do more to publicise its impact.
- 20 The Authority's two Local Access Forums support delivery of work and provide an opportunity to engage with landowners, recreational user groups and others. However, governance arrangements state that Access Forums' primary role is focused on discharging responsibilities under the [Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000](#) (CROW). However, the current operational focus is not enabling the Authority to work to the principle of 'making every contact count', where it uses all involvement work with stakeholders to help support and inform strategic planning.

## The current operating environment means that it is questionable how sustainable the Authority's approach to involvement is

- 21 The impact of austerity remains the most significant challenge facing all national park authorities in Wales. The short-term nature of Welsh Government funding and allocation of additional capital and revenue monies close to the year-end continues to impact on the Authority's ability to plan long term. Consequently, the Authority has sought to identify alternative sources of funding to offset reductions in core grant from the Welsh Government. These financial pressures are likely to continue for the medium term. The current operating environment and challenges do mean however, that it is questionable how sustainable its approach to involvement is, and whether the Authority can take a sufficiently long-term view.
- 22 Capacity is stretched and staff are going the extra mile to keep services operating. Crucially, the partnership approach in developing Cynllun Eryri has led to greater ownership of the Plan by partners, which will create greater resilience and efficiencies in delivering the Plan. However, officers acknowledge a lack of capacity to deliver its core services collaboratively and involve all interested parties remains. A particular concern is that the opportunity for mainstreaming benefits of

some good engagement (and to a lesser extent involvement) work could potentially be missed or delayed because of the level of change within the Authority. At present, financial challenges mean that involvement activity is not building the Authority's capacity nor developing citizens' capabilities to do more.

- 23 For instance, the movement between roles and rebalancing of portfolios from the Chief Executive and Directors down and throughout teams including frontline staff impacts on timeliness and delivery of key areas of work. In particular, planning services which have been subject to considerable capacity issues and change in recent months. This means that continuity of delivery and timeliness of implementing and delivering actions are stalling on occasion and often delayed. These short-term changes need to be contextualised with a consideration of the potential impact of an ageing workforce with key staff nearing retirement. Succession planning is focussed on 'growing your own' – a worthy solution to recruitment issues but places a lot of expectation on relatively junior and often inexperienced staff to 'learn on the job'. The increasing competition between public bodies to recruit experienced bilingual staff is making it difficult for the Authority and other public bodies in Wales to attract and retain people of the right calibre with the right skills and knowledge. This is challenging for the Authority given its finances and need to manage the potential impact of wage increases.
- 24 Short-term project work remains the focus for staff undertaking involvement activity. The proportion of staff delivering project work is already quite high and is set to grow with the refocussed role of the wardens. Staff estimate that currently they have 20 different schemes and projects with 13 staff in the Conservation team alone (out of a team of 20) on fixed-term project contracts and roughly 20% of all posts across the organisation delivering project-based work. A growth in short-term contracts means the Authority is not able to maximise their impact. Projects have no certainty attached to them and shifting more staff to project-based work brings an inherent risk if external opportunities reduce. The Authority recognises there is a risk of its corporate identity being watered down with a shift to increasingly becoming project led. It is not clear how the Authority intends to mainstream involvement to make this everyone's job drawing on and using informal as well as formal involvement to drive improvement.
- 25 In mitigation, officers cite place plans such as the Snowdon Partnership, and indeed the new Cynllun Eryri, as a means of sustaining the Authority's identity by determining which projects the Authority should bid for. The Authority plans to maintain and strengthen its 'golden thread' to ensure the Corporate Plan and individual work plans take account of Cynllun Eryri once adopted. Because involvement activity is still carried out on a project by project basis there are few opportunities to build capacity, strengthen key messages and maintain a coherent corporate identity that the public can relate to.
- 26 At present there is a lot of involvement and engagement activity taking place with a degree of overlap – for instance the potential overlap and duplication in the development of Supplementary Planning Guidance, Place Plans, the work of the Local Access Forums, Conservation team and the revitalised Wardens service.

Similarly, the Conservation, Woodlands and Agriculture team are undertaking significant frontline engagement, information sharing and involvement work but a lot of this is at an individual one-to-one level and is not always consistently captured or used strategically. Building on the work of Fforwm Eryri and extending the approach to work on Supplementary Planning Guidance and community level Place Plans; using and widening the work of the Local Access Forums; and the focus and dissemination of the Warden Area Plans offer genuine opportunities to ensure involvement is mainstreamed and used strategically to support improvement.

- 27 Demonstrating the Authority's capabilities to make a greater contribution to Public Health and more generally with Public Services Boards (PSBs) is progressing slowly. Social prescribing has not developed very far, and more work is needed with local General Practitioners to encourage use of the National Park in addressing health needs. The new Volunteering and Well-being role within the engagement team offers an opportunity to review the Authority's offer and to better co-ordinate and develop these activities.

## Proposals for improvement

28 Rather than list proposals for improvement we have produced a self-assessment for the Authority's staff and members to use in identifying the strengths and weaknesses of its current approach to involvement. This self-assessment can be used at both a corporate strategic level but also on individual projects to judge how well the Authority is doing and where change is needed to ensure involvement is mainstreamed and made sustainable. We expect the Authority to use this tool to evaluate its current performance and to identify how it can improve its work.

### Exhibit 3: self-assessment

Action	We do this well on every occasion and do not need to improve our approach at all	We do this well some of the time but there are opportunities to improve our approach	We are not good at this and need to improve our approach
We have a strategic approach to involvement which directs all our activity			
We understand who needs to be involved and why			

Action	We do this well on every occasion and do not need to improve our approach at all	We do this well some of the time but there are opportunities to improve our approach	We are not good at this and need to improve our approach
We prioritise the space, time and resources for meaningful involvement			
We have designed our involvement activity to ensure that citizens and partners can influence our policies and plans			
We have designed our involvement activity to ensure that citizens and partners can influence how we design and deliver services			
We have made clear to citizens and partners how their involvement will help improve their lives			
We have made clear to citizens and partners how their involvement with us will result in change happening			
We explain the impact involvement has had on our decisions, policies and services			
We tailor our approach to involvement to ensure all citizens and partners can take part			
We use the findings from involvement activity to shape and improve policy and decision making			

Action	We do this well on every occasion and do not need to improve our approach at all	We do this well some of the time but there are opportunities to improve our approach	We are not good at this and need to improve our approach
We can demonstrate that our approach to involvement adds value to what we do			
We can demonstrate that our approach to involvement saves long-term costs			
We ensure the full diversity of stakeholders can be involved in what we do and how we do it			
We have mature and trusting relationships with all our stakeholders			
Our approach to involvement allows our partners to hold us to account for the decisions we make			
Our approach to involvement allows citizens to hold us to account for the decisions we make			
Our approach to involvement is enjoyable and worthwhile			
Our partners see our work on involvement as enjoyable and worthwhile			

Action	We do this well on every occasion and do not need to improve our approach at all	We do this well some of the time but there are opportunities to improve our approach	We are not good at this and need to improve our approach
Our citizens see our work on involvement as enjoyable and worthwhile			
Our approach to involvement helps us to integrate our work to avoid silos			
We use the outcome of our involvement to work co-productively to design and deliver services			
We undertake timely evaluation of involvement to learn what works			
We undertake timely evaluation of involvement to identify what needs to improve			

# Appendix 1

## Examples of involvement approaches in UK National Park Authorities

National Parks England has produced some guidance for organisations and individuals wanting to get involved in developing National Park Management Plans. See [nationalparksengland.gov.uk/get-involved](https://nationalparksengland.gov.uk/get-involved), [get-involved-in-a-national-park-management-plan](#) and [National Parks England publications](#). This contrasts strongly with the lack of output from National Parks Wales despite the benefits of collaborating on common issues.

National parks elsewhere are using multi and mixed media to engage communities and prevent problems. South Downs National Park Authority asked its communities to answer the following question: **How do you bring about behavioural change among irresponsible dog walkers without demonising them?** Responses are [here](#) and demonstrate what can be achieved by taking a different approach to involving subject experts and local businesses in finding solutions.

Cairngorms National Park Authority Communications and Engagement Strategy 2018-2022 contains some key features that enable this national park authority to do involvement activity more effectively. Features include:

- including a baseline of information and data on how effectively the national park authority involves the public, a measure of people's awareness of what goes on in the national park, how they like to be involved, and what people think about services;
- a commitment to evaluate engagement work measuring outcomes where possible, to test impact and continuously learn and improve;
- involvement activity integrates with the work of nearby partners and national campaigns, for example the Scottish Nature BIG weekend; and
- a key priority is for the national park authority to inspire new generations to be park champions and take the lead of community projects in the future.

North York Moors National Park Authority Measuring Health and Well-being Impact report from November 2018 highlights the importance of involving stakeholders and the difference it makes to the work of the Authority. Examples include:

- how the Authority has included involvement activity in its Social Return on Investment (SROI) calculations, and the value people's views add. Specific changes post consultation are tracked and valued.
- people engage better when they understand the wellbeing benefits they may gain and after acquiring knowledge about the special qualities of the park. This includes telling people what the National Park Authority does and exactly how they can get involved.
- the Authority thinks that the best data is collected as a routine part of the work of the Authority or as an integral part of any intervention, initiative, programme, or activity. They find that people are less willing or able to provide feedback or views



in 'set piece' type events and need to understand the relevance of involvement to their lives and be assured the Authority will make change happen.

Wales Audit Office  
24 Cathedral Road  
Cardiff CF11 9LJ

Tel: 029 2032 0500

Fax: 029 2032 0600

Textphone.: 029 2032 0660

E-mail: [info@audit.wales](mailto:info@audit.wales)

Website: [www.audit.wales](http://www.audit.wales)

Swyddfa Archwilio Cymru  
24 Heol y Gadeirlan  
Caerdydd CF11 9LJ

Ffôn: 029 2032 0500

Ffacs: 029 2032 0600

Ffôn testun: 029 2032 0660

E-bost: [post@archwilio.cymru](mailto:post@archwilio.cymru)

Gwefan: [www.archwilio.cymru](http://www.archwilio.cymru)