

TECHNICAL OFFICERS'
WORKING PARTY REPORT

WYE VALLEY AONB
JOINT ADVISORY COMMITTEE
4th March 2019

AONB UNIT WORK PROGRAMME 2019/2020

Purpose

To seek members' approval for the proposed business plan for the AONB Unit during the forthcoming financial year.

Recommendations

That the JAC endorses the AONB Unit Work Programme for 2019/2020

Key Issues

- The attached table sets out the proposed business plan for the AONB Unit in the form of the Work Programme 2019/2020.
- During the year it is anticipated that the AONB Unit will shrink from 5.6FTE staff to 4.4FTE and the Work Programme is built to accommodate this 20% decrease in capacity.
- Priorities include progressing the review for the AONB Management Plan 2020-2025 and continuing a range of existing activities and projects while retaining enough flexibility to pursue new funding opportunities and develop new initiatives.
- The budgets in the Work Programme have been approved by the AONB Steering Group and submitted to DEFRA and Natural Resources Wales (NRW).
- This is the final year of a four year core funding settlement with DEFRA and the second year of a 3 year funding agreement with NRW.
- It will be the second year of Welsh Government's confirmed allocation of £55,000 for the Sustainable Development Fund.

Reasons

The main tasks in the year ahead are:

- completing the review for the AONB Management Plan 2020-2025.
- maintaining a high profile for the AONB including developing content on the new website
- progressing funding proposals for the Wye Valley River Festival 2020 and testing any proposed new governance and delivery models
- continuing activities such as the AONB Farming Awards and the Youth Rangers and mindSCAPE programmes, both now part funded through the Foresters' Forest Landscape Partnership and the Arts Council through ArtSpace Cinderford
- delivering ongoing partnership initiatives, such as the Wye Valley Walk Partnership and the legacy opportunities related to the Overlooking the Wye scheme
- developing and submitting new projects, partnership initiatives and funding bids for the future delivery of the AONB Management Plan including landscape scale partnership

projects, the delivery of the proposed Water Environment Grant programme and supporting the Offa's Dyke Collaboratory.

Implications

This is the final year of the DEFRA four year grant allocation (2016-2020) and the second year of a three year grant programme with Natural Resources Wales (NRW). Welsh Government continue to provide funding of £55,000 for the delegated AONB Sustainable Development Fund (SDF).

The Work Programme 2019/20 accommodates the anticipated 21.5% decrease in capacity of the AONB Unit. This is the result of core AONB staff working on reduced hours to mitigate budget reductions, combined with the completion of the 18 month Lower Wye Catchments Natural Flood Management & Green Infrastructure Project and the predicted loss of the Project Officer. The AONB Unit with 4.4FTE staff means staffing levels return close to how they were in 2002-2003.

Negotiations are underway with DEFRA and Welsh Government about appropriate levels of funding and staffing for AONBs in the context of the Reviews of Designated Landscapes in Wales and England. However, there is currently no agreed long term security of funding for the core AONB Unit.

Overall the AONB Unit business plan, based on the Work Programme, focuses on maximising the benefits for the local communities, the local economy and the outstanding landscape, while optimising the limited resources available. Best use is made of opportunities for collaboration and maintaining a level of flexibility to lever in additional funding and resources wherever possible.