

# **Broads Authority – Peer Review**

**10 – 12 October 2017**

**Feedback Report**

## 1. Executive Summary

The Broads Authority is a unique organisation which operates within a complex environment, spanning a number of local authority areas in both Norfolk and Suffolk. It has a number of distinct opportunities and challenges that it needs to progress its way through to create a sustainable and thriving future for the area.

The peer team found that there was a real passion for the Broads that was shared by Authority staff and members, and that much work had been undertaken by the Authority in progressing related matters since the Peer Review proposal was initiated. The executive leadership team was seen as accessible and staff feel valued and are seen as hardworking, committed, knowledgeable and experienced. This is a strong and positive platform to build upon.

Some partners believe the organisation successfully delivers and achieves a lot on a relatively small budget. The peer team felt that the Broads Authority as an organisation needed to reflect on what it has achieved and communicate these successes in a more strategic and proactive way to partners and the community e.g. the peer team found the Broads Plan 2017 to be a positive and well put together document. There is a concern that the organisation's achievements can get forgotten and overlooked due to the recent member issues that have partly been played out in public causing reputational harm for the organisation and using up senior leader capacity.

The peer team encourage the organisation as a whole to work together to ensure that these reputational issues are left in the past. Commitment to a common purpose from both officers and members needs to be gained so that the organisation can move forward positively together with partners.

To achieve this the peer team suggest that the Broads Authority review its current way of working through its governance arrangements. By reviewing the way it works and learning from other similar organisations there is an opportunity to provide greater clarity internally on roles and responsibilities, tighten up its complaints process and ensure that there is adequate informal time allocated for policy development and constructive challenge. This will help to ensure that it is fit for the future and able to respond and deal with issues in an open and transparent way.

All members of the organisation that the peer team met with were keen to contribute their skills and experience and viewed the Broads Authority role as a valuable one within the wider place agenda. It is clear that the unique setting that the authority operates in means that a diverse skill set will be required going forward to deliver on both the authority's objectives and the wider place objectives that it supports. Key to this is building positive and sustainable relationships with local authority partners, the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) and other bodies that promote and protect the Broads. It is really important that the wider strategic role is recognised and understood by all members, members of staff and other organisations

Re-engaging with local authority partners will also help the leadership of the organisation to navigate the changing local authority landscape and take a more active role in place shaping. There are some good relationships within the sub region with many partners that

can be built on and can help to develop the Broads Authority's profile on a sub-regional level. The peer team feel that learning from other stakeholders and national parks could help the Broads Authority with some of its more difficult challenges but are keen to note that the Broads Authority can also impart some of its successes too.

## **2. Key recommendations**

There are a range of suggestions and observations within the main section of the report that will inform some 'quick wins' and practical actions, in addition to the conversations onsite, many of which provided ideas and examples of practice from other organisations. The following are the peer team's key recommendations to the Broads Authority:

1. Acknowledge what you have achieved so far
2. Commit to a common purpose
3. Review the governance structure so it is fit for the future
4. Understand your wider strategic role within the region
5. Support the leadership in navigating the local government landscape
6. Learn from others
7. Build on existing relationships – sub regional platform

## **3. Summary of the Peer Review approach**

### **The peer team**

Peer Reviews are delivered by experienced member and officer peers. The make-up of the peer team reflected your requirements and the focus of the peer review. Peers were selected on the basis of their relevant experience and expertise and agreed with you. The peers who delivered the peer review at the Broads Authority were:

- Richard Leafe – CEX of Lake District National Park
- Penny James – Joint CEX of Taunton Deane & West Somerset Councils
- Cllr Glen Sanderson - Chairman of Northumberland National Park
- Nick Holliday - Secretary of State appointee, Exmoor National Park
- Simon Smith - Independent person, Broads Authority
- Ami Beeton - Programme Manager, LGA

### **Scope and focus**

The peer team was asked to consider the following areas for the Broads Authority peer review;

- The Broads Authority's current leadership, governance, policies and procedure; and
- The mechanisms for the Broads Authority's engagement with the broader economic and social agenda across the two counties of Norfolk and Suffolk.

## **The peer review process**

It is important to stress that this was not an inspection. Peer reviews are improvement focused and tailored to meet individual organisation's needs. They are designed to complement and add value to an organisation's own performance and improvement. The process is not designed to provide an in-depth or technical assessment of plans and proposals. The peer team used their experience and knowledge to reflect on the information presented to them by people they met, things they saw and material that they read.

The peer team prepared for the peer review by reviewing a range of documents and information in order to ensure they were familiar with the Broads Authority and the challenges it is facing. The team then spent 2.5 days on-site at the Broads Authority's offices, during which they:

- Spoke to more than 45 people including a range of Authority staff together with members and external partners and stakeholders.
- Gathered information and views from more than 30 meetings, visits to key sites in the area and additional research and reading.

This report provides a summary of the peer team's findings. It builds on the feedback presentation provided by the peer team at the end of their on-site visit. In presenting feedback to you, they have done so as national parks and local government officers and members, not professional consultants or inspectors. By its nature, the peer review is a snapshot in time. We appreciate that some of the feedback may be about things you are already addressing and progressing.

## **4. Feedback**

### **4.1. Leadership**

The executive leadership team within the organisation is both accessible and visible to staff and members. The chief executive sits in an open plan office which staff appreciate as he is approachable and open to discussion and support. The peer team found evidence that the operational function of the organisation worked well. This was supported by Monday morning briefings for staff. Holding this briefing session has ensured that all staff are aware of what is happening that week but also aware of the direction of travel of the organisation.

Staff are valued by the executive leadership team and partners who see them as hardworking, committed, knowledgeable and experienced. Some partners commented that staff were open and enthusiastic particularly around conservation elements of their work. The peer team found evidence that the vision and values of the organisation were present within the organisation both physically and within work practices e.g. appraisals and that these were continuing to be progressed, developed and embedded.

It was clear to the peer team that this passion and commitment for the Broads was also felt by its members. There were some concerns felt by the peer team about the different factions of members present on the authority and the state of some relationships but it was clear that all members supported the idea of the Broads Authority and its objectives. An important message for the organisation is to be united in support of the organisation and its aims and vision and to create a 'one team' culture. To help achieve this the peer team felt that the Authority would benefit from having some arrangements in place for members both physically to drop in and talk informally to the leadership team and to each other and informal time for debate, review and discussion with the Management Team about new initiatives and work streams. This would help facilitate more conducive relationships between members and between members and officers, support a culture of collective responsibility and allow for questions and understanding in an informal setting rather than challenge and criticism at a public and formal meeting.

The peer team believe that the organisation needs to have a greater external focus on its work with partners, in particular local authorities, in a more collaborative and strategic way. The peer team suggests that there is a complex piece of work around stakeholder engagement that needs to be carried out. This will help the organisation to look outwards and understand how it can play into more strategic and collaborative discussions in a partner setting e.g. with the LEP around tourism. Following on from recent heavy involvement in legal and other issues, it is also important that the leadership can focus some time on external relationships with local authorities and other key partners. Regular meetings with other local leaders will provide an opportunity to understand each other's objectives and create an environment for collaboration on future plans. Building these relationships will also provide both the Broads Authority and the relevant local authority an opportunity to jointly deal with any issues that arise on shared boundaries which will be more effective and efficient for all.

#### **4.2. Policies and procedures and Governance**

The Broads Authority is a unique organisation in some respects with representatives from six local authorities across two counties, Secretary of State Appointees and two members appointed from the Navigation Committee. It has its own legislation and is focused on conserving and enhancing the special qualities of the Broads, promoting their enjoyment and understanding and the maintenance of the navigation area. The level of commitment by members to the Authority and its ethos needs to be worked on to create a united position for the organisation. Having a strong governance structure with clear policies and procedures will help to achieve this. The Broads Authority has recently reviewed its code of conduct, the protocol on member officer relations, the member development protocol, and developed a new policy on ethics in the Authority and a new social media policy. This progress is welcomed by the peer team.

A clear member induction process is crucial for the Broads Authority to ensure that members get an understanding of the strategic vision and operating environment from the start. There should be a focus on vision, values, aims and purpose of the organisation that all members can buy into. Leading on from this should be a clear and comprehensive member development programme that provides members with

the opportunity to learn relevant skills and knowledge for their roles. All members have an annual appraisal and this was greatly appreciated. It was noted that this was a large amount of work for the Chair in particular to carry out but that it formed a helpful role in regard to allocating places on committees based on skills. The peer team would question how much support / development was able to be offered due to the volume of work involved and suggest that this needs to be considered carefully so that the process adds as much value as possible. A skills audit for members may be one way of helping the organisation to understand the resources and expertise that it has and would also help with appointments and allocations. The peer team found that some members would welcome a more open and transparent process for appointments to committees. Having clear guidelines around the processes that are in place across the organisation will help all members understand selections.

The peer team suggests that the proposed new member's handbook would be helpful for both new and existing members in understanding their roles and responsibilities and also that of officers. By having this as a reference members would have more clarity on the boundaries in which they can operate as well as how the governance structure and appointments worked. This would help to clear up any misunderstandings. Reviewing the job descriptions for members, Chairs of committees and the Chair of the Authority would also help to outline expectations of the various roles and responsibilities as well as the skills needed.

There was a clear view from a number of stakeholders that the peer team spoke to that a way should be found to try and resolve 'grumbles' and more minor complaints early on. A quick and simple process that reduced the risk of them escalating into formal complaints would be beneficial, rather than engaging the full rigour of the conduct regime with all the damage that can result from that process.

The Broads Authority had some good examples of how it has been updating its approach to governance. It has introduced recording of meetings so that those that are not able to make them can listen back and hear any discussion and debate. The peer team thought that the approach taken to develop the Broads Plan with member workshops and briefings, was positive and could be replicated for other key documents and pieces of work.

Although there was some concern about the appointment process to the Tolls Review Group, the work of the group was received and viewed positively by members of the authority and relevant partners. This demonstrated how well members worked on specific and time limited issues. Members have been encouraged by this success and greater inclusion in decision making and are keen for further opportunities for involvement and contribution. As previously mentioned the peer team feels that it would be beneficial for the organisation to have more informal safe time for member and officer discussions and debate either at committees or as strategic planning events and away days. This will help to create a more inclusive culture, enable greater member involvement in policy development and strategic planning and help to increase the ownership of the strategic plans and vision for the organisation.

The current committee structure needs to be reviewed to look at how effective and efficient it is and where it could benefit from some amendments. One way to do this is to learn from other similar bodies and national parks governance structures. Members of the peer team are happy to share the experience and knowledge of their own organisations with the Broads Authority.

The current role of the Financial Scrutiny and Audit Committee needs to be considered as part of this review to see if there would be more value from a different arrangement. There was a view from some stakeholders that the Broads Authority was not open and transparent or accountable enough in how it spent public money. The Broads Authority needs to think about this perception and how it communicates its work and achievements both internally and externally to dispel this view. Specifically, when reviewing its governance arrangements the Broads Authority should consider its relationship with all its stakeholders.

#### **4.3. Engagement with partners on the broader economic & social agenda**

The Broads Authority has strong and effective partnerships with some key stakeholders. There is evidence of good interaction and joint working particularly with conservation and some tourism bodies. There are several good examples of partnership projects and community engagement both locally and on a European level e.g. the Water, Mills and Marshes Landscape Partnership project, joint events hosted with the community and the European CANAPE project. The Broads Authority recently hosted a successful start-up event with European partners for CANAPE and has secured substantial funding for this and other projects.

The peer team found that some partners felt that there was less clarity on the Broads Authority's role in regard to tourism, economic development and public access. Whilst there is clearly very positive work going on here e.g. the new national park branding and work with the Broads Tourism there is still some further work to be done in understanding some of the business and community needs. The Broads Authority would benefit from having more engagement and visibility with the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) and needs to consider how it can work with and feed into its broader economic plans.

The peer team also found evidence of some good engagement with local authority partners although this was not consistent. It is essential that the executive leadership team and the wider organisation understand the changing context and environment that local government is operating within and the challenges that many local authorities are facing, especially financial. To achieve this and to work more closely and collaboratively with local authority partners it is important for the organisation to reach out and rebuild relationships, whilst at the same time the Broads Authority's local authority members can play a more active role back in their respective authorities, facilitating closer working relationships. Whilst the onus is not just on the Broads Authority to make this collaboration work the peer team suggests that the leadership team consider how it can get 'around the table' with key local government players and demonstrate to them how the Broads

Authority can add value to local and regional plans and ambitions. One way of doing this would be for the Broads Authority to frame and articulate its strategic vision to partners in the context of the place as a whole. By highlighting the same ambitions for growth of tourism and conservation the Broads Authority will articulate its support and willingness to work with neighbouring local authorities and other partners and will be able to play into any key documents or frameworks at a local and sub regional level.

The Broads Authority does have a good story to tell but this needs to be communicated more effectively so that all partners are aware of its achievements. Strengthening the organisation's consultative process with partners will help address this and gain buy in and engagement. This can also be done through more informal processes at an early stage to test ideas and plans e.g. regular catch ups with local authority partners. Currently there is limited informal space for suggestions and constructive challenge which leaves some partners with the view that their input is not required until the final version is produced. They then feel it is very difficult to comment on something that has been signed off. This perception needs to be changed so that the Broads Authority is viewed as an organisation that values the contributions and views of all partners.

The actions that are taken early on (i.e. over the next few months) in response to this review, by both the Broads Authority and the local authorities will be important in shaping future relationships.

## **5. Next steps**

### **Immediate next steps**

We appreciate the senior managerial and member leadership will want to reflect on these findings and suggestions, to determine how the organisation wishes to take things forward.

As part of the peer review process, there is an offer of further activity to support this. The LGA is well placed to provide additional support, advice and guidance on a number of the areas for development and improvement and we would be happy to discuss this. Gary Hughes and Rachel Litherland are the Principal Advisers for the region. Their contact details are: Email [gary.hughes@local.gov.uk](mailto:gary.hughes@local.gov.uk) and [rachel.litherland@local.gov.uk](mailto:rachel.litherland@local.gov.uk)

In the meantime we are keen to continue the relationship we have formed with the Broads Authority throughout the peer review. We will endeavour to provide signposting to examples of practice and further information and guidance about the issues we have raised in this report to help inform ongoing consideration.