

# **BRECON BEACONS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY**

## **SCRUTINY POLICY**



**Review Date: 2016**

**SCRUTINY POLICY**

**1.0 What is Scrutiny?**

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The Centre for Public Scrutiny defines scrutiny as:

“...the activity by one elected or appointed organisation or office examining and monitoring all or part of the activity of a public sector body with the aim of improving the quality of public services.”

The Brecon Beacons National Park Authority (BBNPA) uses scrutiny to carry out in-depth studies into areas of its work, involving members, officers, expert witnesses, other organisations and members of the public. These studies will be used to improve services, shape future policy and highlight the work of the Authority.

In doing this the Authority will use the following four principles of scrutiny and apply them to its own scrutiny work:

- constructive ‘critical friend’ challenge
- amplifies the voices and concerns of the public
- led by independent people who take responsibility for their role
- drives improvement in public services)

**2.0 How will Scrutiny be carried out?**

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The Authority will carry out two scrutiny reviews each year, and appoint members to small panels who will carry out the work. These will include:

- Up to six members of the Authority (to include a lead member who will chair the panel)
- One officer from a different area of work to the chosen topic
- At least one external member (for example, from a partner organisation or another National Park)
- Members of the public in response to invitations via the Authority’s website and social media, and direct approaches to partner organisations such as the Brecon Beacons Park Society, One Voice Wales and constituent local authorities.

### 3.0 Choosing Topics for Scrutiny

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The Authority has opted to link scrutiny reviews to its improvement objectives. These represent particular areas of work that the Authority would like to focus on and may be prompted by suggestions arising out of internal or external audit reports, through problems or challenges in an area of service delivery, or through concerns raised by the public. It is not about scrutinising individual performance, but about ensuring that objectives are met and identifying any areas for improvement or enhancement. It can provide useful research as a basis for seeking or increasing external funding and gives valuable opportunities for members, officers and the public to work together in support of National Park purposes.

In September 2014 the Authority opted to carry out one scrutiny review per annum on an improvement from the previous year as a tool for providing additional and in depth evidence for the Authority, the public and the Wales Audit Office – to commence in September each year (backward looking) and to include the public vote and involvement.

From April to September each year a scrutiny review will be carried out on an area of work taken from across the whole range of the Authority's activities, which has the potential to inform future actions and identify opportunities for the Authority in delivering its purposes and duty (forward looking), to include the public vote and involvement.

The improvement objectives will be placed on the BBNP website and the public will be able to 'vote' for the area they feel is priority for scrutiny. The Authority will make the final decision on the two topics for the year, taking all views into account.

A flow chart summarising the process for selecting the 'forward looking scrutiny' is shown at Fig. 1 at the end of this policy and the 'backward looking scrutiny' at Fig. 2.

### 4.0 Carrying out Scrutiny Reviews

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The Scrutiny Panel will work with members, officers, other organizations and the public to gather evidence in any or all of the following ways:

- Research into existing reports, data and other information
- Interviews with officers
- Telephone or face to face interviews with the public
- Telephone or face to face interviews with expert witnesses
- Questionnaires
- Hearings
- Focus Groups
- Use of the website to invite comments
- Meetings with existing forums or groups (eg. Town and Community Councils, Area Advisory Forums)
- Site visits

The Panel will then write a final report with recommendations and present this to the Authority's Audit and Scrutiny Committee. The Authority will be asked to agree the recommendations and officers will draw up a prioritized, resourced action plan to improve the service area. This action plan will be monitored by the Audit and Scrutiny Committee until all actions have been completed.

All reports and action plans will be published on the BBNP website and subsequent reviews accessible via committee agendas.

## **5.0 Role of the Scrutiny Panel Chairman**

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- Provides effective management of the Scrutiny Panel in line with the governance of the Authority
- Demonstrates an objective and evidence based approach to scrutiny
- Manages the review to ensure all agreed deadlines are met
- Manages all meetings effectively and ensures that objectives are met
- Encourages active participation from all members of the Scrutiny Panel
- Promotes the Scrutiny Review both internally and externally to build understanding and ownership of the scrutiny function
- Is committed to the values of public office

## **6.0 Role of the Scrutiny Panel**

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- To scope and plan the Scrutiny Review using the Scrutiny Toolkit
- To set some 'key questions' which the review will seek to answer
- To seek advice from officers within the service area on the scope of the review, the evidence available and the evidence which will need to be gathered
- To develop a communications strategy for each scrutiny review
- To gather evidence using the most appropriate methods for the service area
- To encourage contributions from any interested parties – to include the public, partner organizations and expert witnesses and ensure that they are kept informed of any outcomes from the Scrutiny Review
- Make progress reports to the Audit and Scrutiny Committee during the review period
- To consider all the information and come to objective, evidence based conclusions on the area of scrutiny
- To prepare a report and recommendations for the Audit and Scrutiny Committee
- To be accountable to the Authority for the work carried out
- To carry out all work in line with the Authority's Code of Conduct for Members and the Member Officer Protocol.

## **7.0 Tools for Scrutiny**

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### **7.1 Member Support**

The Scrutiny Panel will be able to draw upon the expertise of any or all of the Authority's members to help them in their review.

### **7.2 Officer Support**

The Scrutiny Panel will be supported by the Democratic Services Manager who will be the lead officer for Scrutiny, and by the Scrutiny Officer who will provide administrative support and assist members in the evidence gathering, setting up hearings and site visits, and keeping a record of the

review. A lead officer will be identified for each Scrutiny Review who will liaise with members on behalf of his/her team in the service area to be scrutinized.

### **7.3 Training**

All new members appointed to the Authority will be provided with training in relation to the role of scrutiny and how it operates within the organization.

Training and/or in house support will also be available to officers who are invited to contribute to scrutiny reviews.

### **7.4 Resources**

The Authority will not allocate a budget to scrutiny panels but will make staff resources available to members as outlined above.

Costs of member involvement on Scrutiny Panels will be met in accordance with the Authority's Scheme of Member Remuneration. Costs of meetings with external representatives should be kept to a minimum, but where necessary costs are incurred, these will be met from the committee meetings budget.

The Panel will not be able to remunerate external witnesses or members of the public making contributions, but will be able to offer refreshments if they are asked to attend meetings or hearings.

### **7.5 Scrutiny Toolkit**

Scrutiny Panels will be provided with a Scrutiny Toolkit to help them carry out reviews. This includes:

- templates for scoping and planning reviews
- guidelines for involving the public
- guidelines for expert witnesses
- guidance for Scrutiny Chairs
- questioning Skills
- template for writing reports
- evaluation form

The toolkit will be updated and expanded in response to feedback from Scrutiny Panels or officers.

## **8.0 Review of Scrutiny Policy**

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The Scrutiny Policy will be reviewed annually to ensure its effectiveness and to identify any improvements or changes that need to be made.

Fig. 1: Scrutiny Process in the Brecon Beacons National Park Authority: Forward Looking Scrutiny

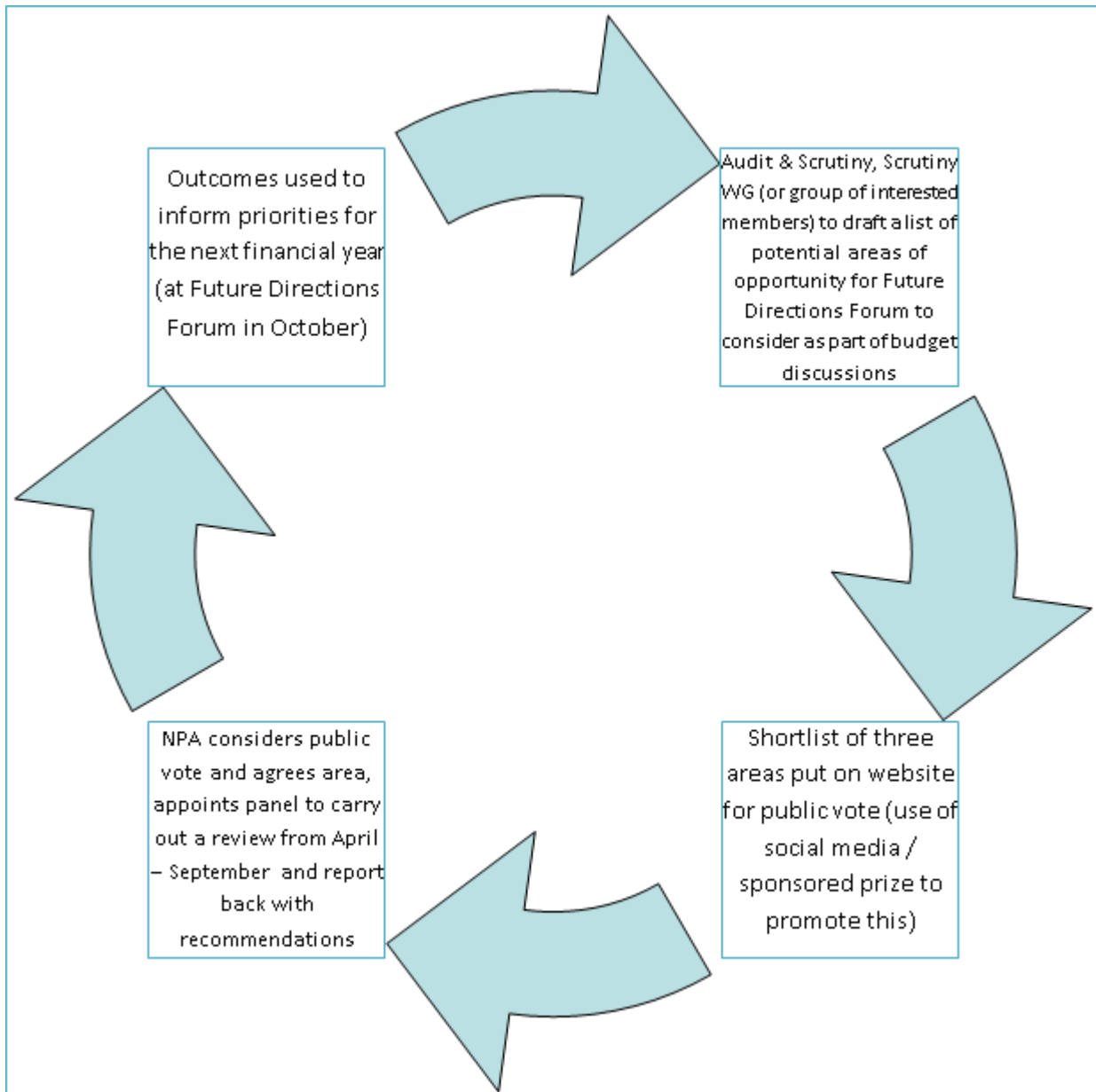


Fig. 2: Scrutiny Process in the Brecon Beacons National Park Authority for the 'backward looking' scrutiny

