

North York Moors National Park Authority

10 July

Volunteer Strategy

1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 To report to members on progress in delivering the Volunteer Strategy and invite members to scrutinise performance and consider future delivery in this area.

2. Introduction and background

- 2.1 Volunteering is central to how this Authority works. Hundreds of people give their time, energy and expertise freely to help the Authority achieve its aims. Thousands of days' work are contributed by volunteers each year and the contribution that this makes to our delivery is enormous. It also makes us better engaged and better informed and enables many people to enjoy and understand the National Park whilst contributing to its long term care.
- 2.2 In March 2015 a new Volunteer Strategy was approved and adopted by the Authority. It proposes a way forward building on the existing, much valued and highly effective volunteer service and setting a high level direction for the coming years, transforming how we work with volunteers, developing a "one team approach" and delivering a doubling of the amount of work contributed by volunteers to delivery of the National Park Management Plan . Its successful implementation requires real change in the way we work both amongst staff and those who come to volunteer.
- 2.3 This report sets out progress in delivering the Strategy and invites members to consider how this might continue. A presentation to members will be made by the Volunteer Team who will also be available to respond to questions and suggestions by members.

3. Delivering the Strategy

- 3.1 A huge amount of very positive change has taken place in preparing the foundations of the strategy. However, it should be made clear from the outset that progress in delivering the strategy has been significantly delayed and is about 18 months behind the anticipated timetable. This, as outlined previously to members, is entirely due to staffing issues. Long term sickness and other staff changes have brought considerable disruption and the team now responsible for delivering the strategy are almost entirely different to that which was in place at the outset.
- 3.2 Despite these difficulties, much has been achieved and the foundations are now in place for delivery of the ambitious targets associated with the strategy and set out in the Business Plan. .
- 3.3 The strategy sets out seven key ways in which we will develop our work with volunteers, these are:
- More in-house volunteer groups
 - A new approach to delivering field services
 - Expanding "associate volunteering"
 - Developing opportunities for corporate volunteering

- Creating opportunities for "virtual" or "remote" volunteering
- Supporting all staff to work with volunteers
- Supporting staff to be volunteers

Sections 4 - 9 below summarise progress in each of these areas.

4. **More in house volunteering.**

4.1 It was recognised that the main barrier to growth of in-house volunteering was a lack of capacity amongst staff to provide supervision and it was proposed that this be addressed by providing training for existing volunteers to enable them to lead tasks. A training programme has now been developed and the first two cohorts of day task leaders have been trained. Volunteer led tasks are now a regular occurrence and feedback from both staff and volunteers regarding this is very positive.

4.2 Another recognised barrier to more in house volunteering was the limited range of tasks available. This has begun to be addressed by the following:

- Introduction of new software enabling a more open approach to advertising volunteering opportunities across the work of the Authority and enabling volunteers to better define the skills that they wish to offer.
- Training for staff enabling them to better work with volunteers and underlining the opportunity that this represents (see section 9 below)
- A more structured approach to defining volunteering opportunities in a wider variety of roles. Particular success in this respect has been achieved in the Education and Youth Engagement team and the Visitor Centres teams where volunteers are now a regular feature and are making a considerable input in a variety of roles.

4.3 It was also recognised that we needed to be more accessible and welcoming at the point where potential volunteers get in contact with the Authority and that we needed an improved process for taking volunteers on the journey from that first contact to the point where they begin volunteering. To this end, the volunteer's area of the website has been reviewed and updated and a welcome pack has been created to be given to all volunteers as they join the team.

4.4 Also with the aim of improving communications with volunteers and understanding their needs a Volunteer Satisfaction Survey was carried out in 2017 for the first time. The feedback was almost entirely very positive and some helpful suggestions were made. A summary of the key findings will be presented at the meeting.

5. **A new approach to delivering field services**

5.1 Based on ways of working successfully used in managing the Cleveland Way and the Community Access Project, it was proposed that Maintenance Rangers recruit dedicated teams of volunteers to assist them in their work. This has been very successfully implemented by the Ranger Service and volunteers now regularly work alongside Maintenance Rangers or independently on their behalf. This has been instrumental in the Authority's efforts to maintain the rights of way network following significant reduction in resources.

5.2 This element of the strategy has been effectively delivered as planned as was not affected by the staff changes in the Volunteer Team.

6. Expanding Associate Volunteering

- 6.1 The Strategy proposed that special interest groups be enabled to carry out more work on our behalf but independently of Authority staff involvement. It set out an aim to provide training (where necessary) for associate groups and to develop a simple standard form of agreement setting out each party's responsibilities in relation to insurance and health and safety, etc.
- 6.2 Following a delayed start, this is now happening. A particular area of success is the Ramblers Association who now regularly carry out footpath management work and who have been trained to carry out the annual survey of rights of way.
- 6.3 Another area where this is developing is the "Hoots Volunteers" who carry out frequent and valuable conservation and access work on the Hawk and Owl Trust managed estate. The Trust is being supported with provision of tools and transport and enabled to more frequently operate volunteer tasks without requiring the presence of a member of Authority staff.
- 6.4 This is an area for continued work in the coming months

7. Developing opportunities for Corporate Volunteering

- 7.1 This is an area of work where little progress has been made, primarily due to staffing and the need to concentrate on higher priority areas. There are however some positive examples such as the partnership with Network Rail who (via the North York Moors Trust) are carrying out regular large scale tasks.
- 7.2 The team are investigating the success or otherwise of approaches to corporate volunteering taken in other National Parks and will develop proposals for implementation in the North York Moors over the coming months.

8. Creating opportunities for remote/virtual volunteering

- 8.1 This is also an area where no progress has been made. It is anticipated that these new types of volunteer opportunity will increase as more staff are trained and enabled to engage volunteers in a wider variety of ways.

9. Supporting all staff to work with volunteers

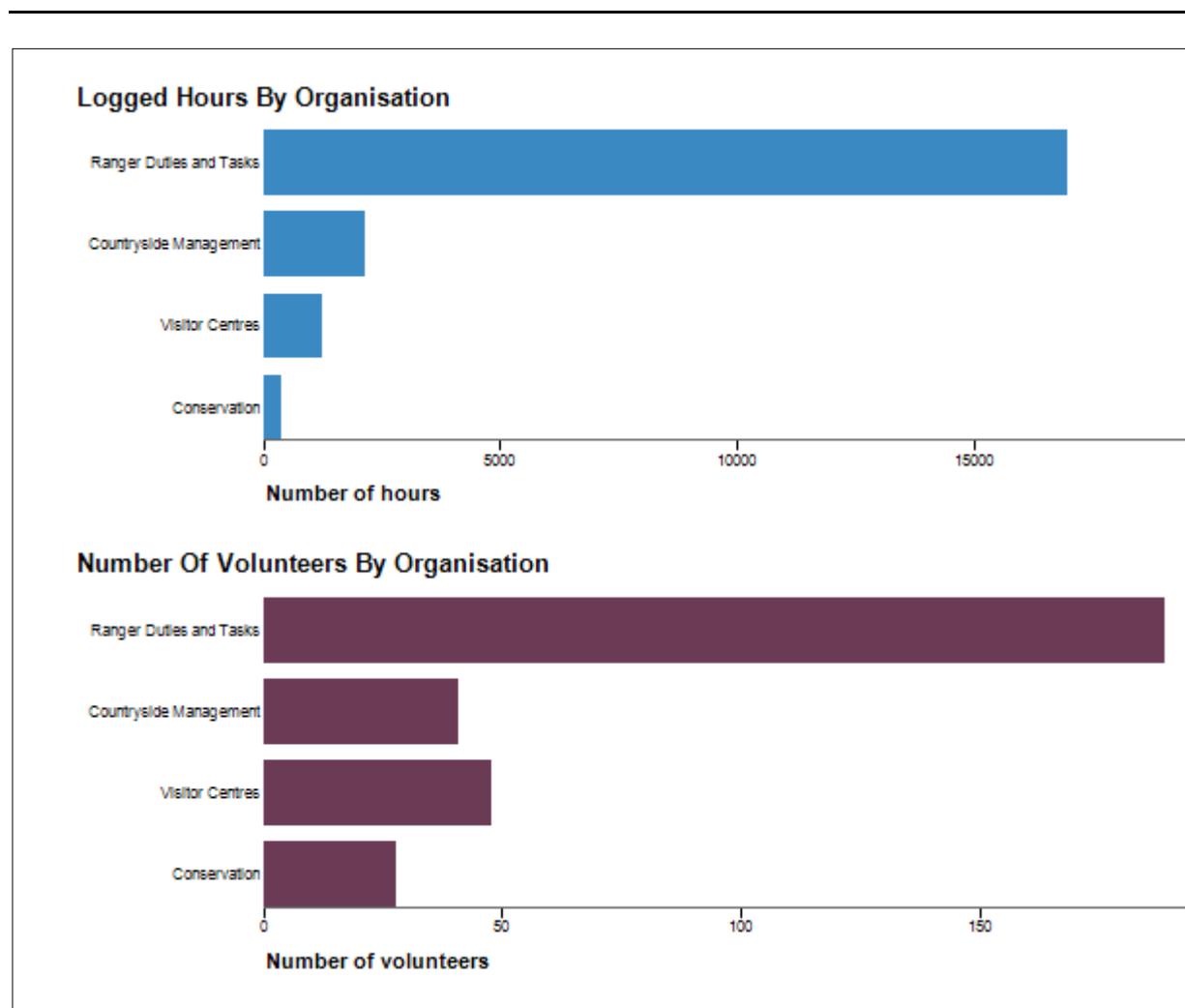
- 9.1 Enabling and encouraging all staff to work with volunteers is a central aim of the strategy and much has been done with the aim of getting to a point where all staff understand what volunteers can contribute to the delivery of their individual role and feel equipped and empowered to engage with and manage volunteers.
- 9.2 Many staff have been trained in the use of the new "My Volunteer Page" software which enables them to administer the advertisement of volunteer roles, posting and management of tasks, recruitment of appropriate volunteers and recording of hours worked.
- 9.3 A training programme for staff has been developed by the Volunteer Team providing essential briefing in how to work with volunteers, especially focussing on effective leadership and health and safety. This is currently being rolled out. At the same time, some staff have expressed an interest in training as day task leaders, this has now been arranged and the training is to be delivered by volunteers who have completed the training themselves.

- 9.4 Simultaneously, a staff handbook/manual has been produced setting out best practice in working with volunteers. This will be available to all staff following completion of the training programme.
- 9.5. Recent Business Plan investment in youth engagement combined with the above improvements in volunteer engagement is starting to pay real dividends. Mary Jane Alexander, Youth Engagement Officer has successfully engaged with a wide range of youth groups and schools across Teesside and Tammy Andrews, Explorer Volunteers Coordinator has enrolled a new and larger cohort of families in the programme, these are delivering a rapid increase in youth volunteering
- 9.6 Other areas where activity is significantly increasing include This Exploited Land and the Education Team.

10. **Volunteer Days Delivered**

- 10.1 We are in a transition from a paper based recording system to a digital recording system which enables volunteers and staff to more accurately record the number of hours worked. This has thrown up some significant differences in results arising from the same quantity of volunteering and raised some issues about what should be included in each case as volunteer hours.
- 10.2 Previously, calculation of volunteer days was by rounding the number of hours worked up to reach a “days worked” figure. This methodology, by its nature involved significant approximation. The new system records the actual number of hours worked and divides the total by 7.5 to reach a days worked figure. This new methodology does not however include any allowance within the “hours worked” for preparation, training or administration time that a volunteers does (a member of staff would be paid to plan their work, organise a route and read the staff bulletin during working hours), nor does it account for the fact that some volunteers are physically unable to work 7.5 hours. The rounding up effect of the previous methodology will have in effect but unintentionally made allowance for these additional “out of work” aspects. In the Business Plan the financial value attributed to a volunteer day is modest, partly in recognition of the different ways in which volunteers work compared with paid staff. In order for us to properly reflect the value of the time, expertise and energy that volunteers give we need to consider how the “out of work” commitment is reflected. Early calculations and analysis suggest that this change in methodology may result in around an 18% reduction in “days worked” for the same amount of volunteer activity, but this may be a harsh reflection of volunteer effort given the issues just raised. It will not be possible to properly analyse the data and the impact of the new methodology until we have a full years data and it is proposed that a report be brought to FRASC in June 2018 setting out proposals for the new methodology and associated base line figures.
- 10.3 In order for trends in performance to be properly identified we will use both methodologies side by side for at least one year.
- 10.4 By applying the old methodology to this year’s data and making the reasonable assumption that the amount of volunteering carried out by some associate groups who have yet to confirm their data is the same as last year, it is calculated that 12,100 volunteer days were worked on behalf of the National Park Authority during the year 2016/17. This compares to a target of 13,500 volunteer days for the year and a figure of 11,478 in the previous year. There has therefore been continued growth in volunteering albeit at a slower rate than anticipated.

- 10.5 Given the significant disruption, both in terms of staffing and ways of working, it is not surprising that there was a modest reduction in volunteer days during 2016/17. That said, measures and additional resources as outlined above are now in place and starting to take good effect and it is expected that this decline has already been reversed during the current year and that good growth will be seen in this and the following years.
- 10.6 The chart below shows the areas of work where volunteering activity was generated during 2016/17. This shows clearly that there should be scope for significant volunteer engagement in certain areas, particularly conservation, education and youth engagement. We are confident that the education and youth engagement areas are now delivering significant levels of activity and are likely to meet Business Plan targets. Work is well underway to identify any issues preventing volunteer engagement in the Conservation Departments work. Supporting conservation staff in the engagement of volunteers will be a priority for the Volunteer Team in the coming year.



10.7 Whilst the figures available suggest that more volunteer days are worked for this National Park than for any other, it is not possible at this time to properly benchmark our performance. From early discussions with Volunteers Officers in other National Parks it is clear that several different methodologies are being used and that other Authorities are in a similar transition between systems (despite a previously JIG approved methodology being in place) . It is therefore also proposed that discussions are held with Volunteers Officers in all National Parks with the aim of agreeing a common methodology and that the results of this be fed into the report to FRASC in June 2018.

11. **Health and Safety**

11.1 Whilst the Volunteer Strategy drives us to “let go” and enable more volunteering to take place without direct paid staff supervision, it is fully recognised that this brings with it a need for increased focus on ensuring that the work takes place safely. There is a constant focus on ensuring that the right health and safety culture is maintained by staff and volunteers, it is a standing item on staff and volunteer meetings, a regular feature in communications and a key element of training.

11.2 A primary focus of the new training programmes for both staff and volunteers is health and safety and our specialist health and safety advisors have been involved in designing these aspects of the training programmes.

11.3 The new software system allows a more active and two way communication between staff and volunteers regarding health and safety and produces a clearer health and safety audit trail than was previously possible.

11.4 New standard agreements for associate volunteer groups contain clear allocation of responsibility for insurance and health and safety.

12. **Summary of progress to date**

12.1 As outlined above, a huge amount of progress has been made in making the operational and cultural changes necessary for the delivery of the strategy. Despite a slower than hoped for start, volunteer activity has continued to grow and work done over the last year has laid the foundations for growth at least the levels anticipated in the Business Plan.

12.2 During the last year, excellent progress has been made in the key areas, particularly:

- Empowering volunteers to get more involved and to lead tasks
- Enabling and encouraging more staff to engage volunteers in a wider variety of ways.
- A shift in the ways of working for the Volunteer Team – away from being directly responsible for delivering much of the volunteer activity towards facilitating and supporting all staff and volunteers to deliver
- Embedding new ways of working in Ranger Service
- Developing youth engagement opportunities
- Improving administration
- Improving communications.
- More accurate recording of hours and better reporting
- Clearer health and safety audit trails for all volunteer groups

12.3 This said, there is much more to be done. It is proposed that the following are the focus for the coming year:

- Complete roll out of staff training programme and handbook
- Continue training of Volunteer task day leaders and delivery of volunteer led tasks
- Embed use of “My Volunteer Page” software with staff and volunteers
- Implement business plan actions for youth engagement
- Work with Conservation Department to support them in delivering Business Plan targets.
- Continuously review and improve communications and the volunteer “journey
- Review and agree monitoring methodology and new baseline for performance.

12.4 Members views are sought regarding this proposed course of action

13. **Financial and Staffing Implications**

13.1 All of the proposed actions contained in this report will be funded within existing budgetary allocations.

14. **Contribution to National Park Management Plan**

14.1 Delivery of the recommendations in this report will enhance the Authority’s capacity to deliver many management plan policies relating to both purposes. It will also directly contribute to the delivery of following National Park Management Plan policies:

- U7 The public will be able to improve their health through connecting with nature.
- C2 Opportunities for volunteering will be created.

15. **Legal Implications**

15.1 There are no legal implications arising from this report

16. **Recommendation**

16.1 That:

Members scrutinise performance in delivering the Volunteer Strategy and consider planned future action.

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Background papers to this Report

File ref

1. Volunteer Strategy 2015