

# NWIFCA Quarterly Meeting: 22<sup>nd</sup> June 2023

**AGENDA  
ITEM NO.  
11**

## CEO QUARTERLY REPORT – 24<sup>TH</sup> MARCH TO 11<sup>TH</sup> JUNE 2023

**Purpose:** For information

**Recommendations:** The report is received

### **1. Authority Committees**

The Authority's F&P Sub-Committee met over Teams on 18<sup>th</sup> April and the TSB Sub-Committee met at Carnforth on 9<sup>th</sup> May.

I am delighted to welcome three new councillors to the Authority. Cllr. Jenny Boak joins us as the representative of the newly established Westmorland and Furness Council<sup>1</sup>. Cllr. Mike Jones replaces Paul Williams as the representative for Cheshire West and Chester Council and Cllr. Jane Hugo joins as the new representative of Blackpool Council, replacing Neal Brookes. Wirral Council's position remains vacant, and Liverpool City Council continue to not put forward a representative. Through our Clerk, Alison Nicholson, we will be aiming to arrange a welcome chat with each of our three new councillors in the coming weeks.

I am hopeful that we can increase engagement with our constituent council representatives, particularly as we only had one councillor attend our last quarterly meeting in March, which is the minimum we need to be quorate. As per my email to all our Committee Members when I joined the Authority in April, I am keen to work with all members, including our councillors to ensure their support and valuable contributions continue, and I will reiterate my offer to meet with any members to discuss how we can work together going forward.

### **2. Health, Safety and Wellbeing**

The Authority's Health and Safety Working Group has been reinstated to focus on continuing the development of the Authority's health and safety policies and procedures documents and associated implementation, and, going forward, will include a focus on staff wellbeing too. We continue to work closely with our health and safety consultants, Inspire Safety, who advise on best practice and priority work.

### **3. Pay Review**

The Authority undertook to conduct a staff pay review and job evaluation exercise, employing the services of North West Employers (NWE) on the back of their work for us in undertaking the Cultural Review last year. This review has commenced and I have liaised with NWE to ensure their work is completed in an appropriate and timely manner. Given the importance of this for staff morale and retention, I want the review to be completed by the end of August at the latest and, whilst I have yet

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<sup>1</sup> Cllr. Anthony Markley retains his position on the Authority, now representing the newly established Cumberland Council.

to receive confirmation from NWE that they can work to this timeframe, I am hopeful this will be the case and we can reach a resolution in the coming months.

#### **4. Union Recognition**

As agreed at the last F&P meeting, the Authority is working towards recognition from our union UNISON. I met with their regional coordinator in May and we are working towards a recognition that is acceptable to staff, UNISON and the Authority; this will be brought to F&P once drafted. In preparation for recognition, our IFCO (Intel) Anthony Graham has put himself forward to be our UNION staff representative and has begun an in-depth Union Representative training programme.

#### **5. Policies**

I have established a small internal Policies Working Group consisting of myself, Head of Enforcement Joe Moulton and our Clerk and Office Manager, Alison Nicholson to assess our existing policies and develop new ones. This work has progressed well over recent weeks and has then been temporarily paused as we look to bring in a HR Consultancy to support our HR provision, which will include the development of our policies (see next section for further information on this).

#### **6. HR Consultancy**

With the resignation of our Head of Finance and HR last year, responsibility for our HR support and provision was delegated to Alison, who has progressed our work in this area admirably. However, Alison is not a HR professional and, along with me and the other line managers within the Authority, will need specialist support as we navigate our way through many of the legacy HR-related issues we have in the Authority. To that end, I have undertaken to procure some specialist HR consultancy support for the Authority. Members may be aware we do currently hold an associate membership with NWE, after they were brought in to deliver our Cultural Review and will deliver our Pay Review as detailed above. However, this associate membership is a broad-level, reactive service aimed at large local authorities with their own HR departments, and, after review, I have concluded it does not provide us with the level of support we currently need as an employer lacking the organisational maturity in areas of HR. To that end, I have reached out to other HR Consultants in the North West, and after review, I have decided the Authority will be best-served bringing in the services of Stephenson Solicitors LLP, whose employment law solicitors specialise in providing HR advice and employment support to businesses and employers. I will bring a proposal to secure Stephenson's services to the next F&P meeting for resolution.

#### **7. Finances (RDEL / CDEL)**

Our year-end finances can be seen in the Financial Report provided as part of this meeting. However, our Chair has asked me to update members on the financial situation in respect of the RDEL and CDEL funding we have been paid, or are due to be paid, by Defra as part of the additional areas of responsibility around MPAs, marine spatial prioritisation and FMPs that all IFCA's are being given.

F&P members will be aware that we have already received £50,000-worth of RDEL funding from Defra in 2022/23. This funding is for revenue costs associated with uplifting our resources to attend to the additional responsibilities as described above. However, I am concerned that it appears the Authority has not had any discussions or made any decisions on how this money should be utilised, and hence, reviewing the 2022/23 Financial Report, it appears to simply have been subsumed into our budget and ultimately has ended up in our reserves. There is significant risk here in that, if and when Defra seeks to review how IFCA's have used the RDEL funding they have been given, we could not satisfactorily demonstrate any meaningful use for the £50,000 received thus far, and it could be taken back from us. Added to this, we have recently received the second payment of

£125,000 for this funding, and again, there does not appear to be any resolution as to how this money will be spent and, therefore, we risk having it withdrawn. AIFCA have informed me that Defra are committed to providing this RDEL funding to all IFCA's for 2023/24, and have earmarked it for 2024/25, ultimately the potential being we see a permanent uplift in our central funding to retain any additional resource brought in with this funding. However, Defra will also be scrutinising how the monies have been spent, and if the Authority does not spend it, we risk losing it. As such, I will be meeting with Joe, Senior Scientist Anna Plumeridge and Alison in the coming weeks to develop a proposal for how we utilise this RDEL funding going forward, probably by way of some fixed-term additional posts; I will endeavour to bring a recommendation to F&P for resolution. We must not miss the opportunity to bolster our resources with money specifically allocated for this purpose, and I believe it is inappropriate to simply subsume this funding into our budget with the ultimate outcome of it going into our reserves, which are already somewhat (perhaps unjustifiably) sizeable.

In addition to the RDEL revenue funding we've received / are due to receive for additional staff, we are also due to receive CDEL capital funding from Defra to contribute towards the purchase of a new patrol vessel. In summary, as it stands, this is effectively a 'promise to pay' from Defra for £325,000, subject to their approval of an appropriate business case. I believe this has been discussed and agreed up at previous F&P and Committee meetings, with an anticipated budget of £400,000 for the new vessel, so there is not necessarily any discussions to have or decisions to make concerning this funding. Joe is leading on the procurement of a newly built patrol vessel, as per Defra's requirements, and on the production of an associated business case to present to them for approval.

## **8. Estates**

Following a review of our estates provision, and in consultation with staff, I have undertaken that, for the long-term strategic and operational benefit of the Authority, we should seek to move from our current premises in both the Carnforth and Whitehaven offices. For Carnforth, we have started the process for reviewing our requirements for any new premises and associated lock-up spaces, and have viewed two potential commercial office spaces, one in Lancaster city centre and one at Lancaster University; further premises viewings are arranged. I will be meeting with Whitehaven staff in the coming weeks to discuss the requirements for a new office there, and we will then commence searching for appropriate premises within the area.

As and when appropriate premises are found, and, in respect of Carnforth, a potential means of ending our tenancy agreement has been agreed with our landlord<sup>2</sup>, I will bring proposals to the F&P Sub-Committee with associated recommendations, to then be approved at this Committee.

I have entered into an agreement with a North West-based company, LCM Group, for them to provide our facilities management across our estates at Whitehaven, Barrow, Carnforth and Liverpool. This will provide assurance that maintenance and repair work to our buildings is being done in a safe, compliant and consistent manner and to a high standard, and will initially involve LCM producing a maintenance plan for each of our six buildings. There is no standing charge for this service, LCM will invoice as and when we use their services. I do anticipate a slight increase in our expenditure under the 'Premises' budget heading as we start to use LCM, as they will charge more for maintenance and remedial work than local providers would. However, the benefits here outweigh the anticipated increased expenditure, in terms of ensuring our buildings are under a formal maintenance programme, are maintained and repaired to a high, compliant standard and will significantly reduce the amount of staff time lost when they have to arrange things locally and find a specific tradesperson to deal with a specific issue.

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<sup>2</sup> The Authority owns the Whitehaven office; the arrangements with Cumberland Council are currently being researched to understand our obligations and options.

## 9. Vessels and Vehicles

Unfortunately, we have not had any seagoing capability during this reporting period, due to various issues with our four vessels. All issues are close to being resolved, and I anticipate I will be able to report seagoing activities having recommenced at the next quarterly Committee meeting. Please see Joe's Patrol and Enforcement Report for further details, particularly in relation to North Western Protector, which we anticipate will be back online in the coming months.

We have resolved to sell our oldest RIB, Protector Bravo, which has had to have expensive repairs in recent years and is significantly older than our other vessels. With the advent of a new patrol vessel in the coming years on the back of the Defra CDEL HPMA funding, we are in a good position to dispose of this asset whilst retaining, and ultimately improving, our seagoing capabilities.

We still have one Carnforth-based ATV up for sale, and hope to sell this in the coming weeks.

I have undertaken to work with Joe to carry out a strategic review of all our vessel and vehicle assets to ensure we have a fleet that is fit-for-purpose. My initial view of our assets in this respect is that we have too many, all being used too infrequently, and our associated maintenance and repair bills are high as a result. I believe we will need to rationalise our vessel and vehicle fleet going forward, to ensure we have more effective capabilities and a more streamlined asset maintenance programme.

## 10. Staffing

During the last quarter, we have advertised for our three IFCO (Crew) vacancies in Whitehaven, recruitment for which was previously paused by the Authority until a permanent CEO was recruited. I have been encouraged by the number and standard of applications we have received, and we will be interviewing ten candidates for the three vacancies in June, with the intention to offer posts shortly after that, and ideally have new staff in post by July / August.

I am disappointed to inform the Authority that our IFCO (Engineer) Phillip Greenop resigned at the end of May. Phil made a valuable contribution to our work during his tenure, and we all wish him well in his new role. I asked our Joe and our IFCO (Master) Hugh Thinnesen to review the post in respect of whether we wished to replace Phil in a like-for-like capacity (*i.e.* using the same job description) or whether there was scope to recruit differently, such as recruit a standard IFCO and procure in marine engineering services as and when required; they felt it served the Authority best to retain a full-time Engineer role, but we will ensure that this role also retains some shore-based routine IFCO duties. Recruitment for this vacancy will commence in the coming weeks.

One of our IFCOs based in Whitehaven, Grace Edwards, has relocated to Carnforth and will now be based out of this office, fulfilling the IFCO (Comms) role previously held by Anthony Graham. Grace's vacated post in Whitehaven will be filled as part of the abovementioned recruitment of the three IFCO (Crew) vacancies.

During the reporting period, the Authority had three outstanding employee grievances, two from current members of staff and one from a previous employee. The grievance with the previous staff member has now been resolved, and, after an appeal hearing, I found that their grievance was not upheld. The two grievances with current staff are still outstanding, but as their grievances relate to pay, I have agreed with them that we will not address them until such time as the Pay Review has been concluded.

I would also like to note how impressed and enthused I have been by the staff's attitude and commitment to the Authority that they have demonstrated since I took up the CEO post. It will not have gone unnoticed by members that many of the staff have had a tumultuous experience working at the Authority in recent times, and I must express my admiration and gratitude for how they have retained their professional and commitment over this time. I would also like to acknowledge the sterling work Joe has done in fulfilling the CEO role on an interim basis for six months, whilst continuing to deliver his Head of Enforcement duties; he has handed the Authority over to my stewardship in a much better state than that which he found it in. There is of course a lot of work still

to be done to have an Authority that is fit-for-purpose, adaptable and delivering its responsibilities to the highest standard, but I am confident that, with the Executive Team we have here, we can achieve many great things.

## **11. Communications**

In her new role as IFCO (Comms), Grace has expressed a desire to improve the Authority's website, to provide a more engaging and navigable platform to inform stakeholders and showcase our work. She has already begun assessing our website and will work with colleagues to bring about the necessary improvements.

In recent weeks, we have been approached by journalists from the Liverpool and Wirral areas to request our comments on the apparent increase in marine life strandings and wash-ups on the north Wirral coastline, in particular of smooth-hound. Two stories on this were published in the Liverpool Echo [here](#) and [here](#), and it was also picked up by the BBC [here](#). Longer-serving members will know this is a recurring issue in the area, with local members of the public suggesting the incidents are caused by local gill-netters. Our communications with local media focussed on a reiteration of the legality of gill-net fishing in the area, and our IFCOs' regular presence there. We also welcomed direct feedback and evidence of strandings from the public, and staff will be meeting in late June to discuss a wider communications and engagement strategy for this particular issue, starting with a consultation or open day-type event on the Wirral to invite members of the public and stakeholders to meet with Authority staff face-to-face to discuss their concerns and potential solutions, and learn more about our work. Anna has proposed a research project to look into the causes of these incidents, although the Science Team's summer schedule probably negates the potential to look at this issue this year; we will however continue to engage with the public and gather more information to inform any future management decisions we might propose to the TSB and full Committee.

We have been proactive in communicating the increase to the whelk minimum size as part of the Byelaw 4 flexible permitting provisions. Our limited number of permit holders have been informed and work is underway to assess the size of maturity of whelks within the District to inform our future maximum minimum size (see Anna's Science Report).

## **12. Byelaws**

I have resurrected the internal staff Byelaw Working Group consisting of me, Joe and Anna, to meet on a bimonthly basis to discuss and ensure progression of our byelaw development work. This will then help inform discussions and recommendations to be brought to the TSB Sub-Committee.

Byelaws 2 (North Wirral Foreshore), 3 (Cockles and Mussels) and 4 (Potting) are now implemented and being administered, monitored and enforced accordingly.

Byelaw 1 (MCRS) remains with the minister awaiting sign-off. I recently chased this with a Defra ministerial aide but have yet to have an update; I will continue to chase.

## **13. Fisheries Management Plans**

The six front-runner draft FMPs are nearing completion and it is anticipated that Defra will be going out to consultation on them imminently (*i.e.* late June / early July), albeit with a short consultation period of just six weeks, due to their desire to have them finalised before Parliamentary Summer Recess. As part of this consultation, IFCA's will be consulted, and this includes members. Today's Agenda Item on FMPs will provide more detail, and I have invited Tim Smith from the Association of IFCA to talk about the FMP development process more generally, to act as a precursor for us to feedback on the front-runner FMPs when the consultation lands. As a recap, the six front-runner FMPs are:

- Crab and Lobster
- Bass

- Whelk
- Scallop
- English Channel Non-Quota Species
- Southern North Sea / Eastern English Channel Flatfish

I would suggest the Authority's focus for feedback will be on the first three in the above list, given they are all significant fisheries in our District, with perhaps some limited focus on the Scallop FMP given its wider importance in the Irish Sea; the last two are geographically-specific to areas outside of the District and so will be less relevant, although members will be welcome to feedback on these too as they see fit.

Following today's meeting, we will provide further information on the FMP consultation and how best to provide your feedback as Authority members.

Following on from the front-runner FMPs, work has already begun nationally on the Tranche 2 FMPs that will follow behind. These include a Cockle FMP which the IFCAs have been asked to lead on the development of. Again, Tim from AIFCA will talk more about this specific FMP in his presentation, but I have agreed with him that the Authority will take a lead role in the development of this FMP, given our significant organisational and collective experience in managing cockle fisheries. Eastern and Kent and Essex IFCA will also be contributing to the development of the national Cockle FMP, which will then go to the other IFCAs for internal feedback, before the draft goes out to wider consultation along with the other second tranche FMPs. I am keen that the Authority plays a key role in the development of this FMP, as we have substantial expertise and therefore potential contributions to make to it, and also, our work on this will help iterate and improve our own internal District-specific Cockle FMP which is currently in development (see below). The national Cockle FMP has to be drafted and presented to Defra by March 2024, so I anticipate our involvement in this work will ramp up in the coming months as Tim and his AIFCA colleagues start to develop the plan.

In addition to our work with AIFCA on the national Cockle FMP, it is timely that we are also currently drafting our own internal Cockle FMP. Anna is leading on this important piece of work, and has already started to identify the framework and broad-level information that we would wish to capture within the FMP to inform our future management of this vital District fishery. More information will be provided to TSB and full Committee as this work progresses.

#### **14. AIFCA**

I have attended two AIFCA Chief Officer Group (COG) meetings during this reporting period, as well as AIFCA's AGM in London, along with other Chief Officers and Chairs, including Phil. AIFCA and COG have been very supportive towards me since joining the Authority, and have really helped me get up-to-speed with the wider IFCA landscape and what will be expected of us all in the coming months and years as Defra asks more and more of us, which, incidentally, is a demonstration of their faith in retaining the IFCA model.

Many things are happening at national level that I cannot go into now, but perhaps the most significant development is that COG has undertaken to take responsibility for training IFCA officers back from AIFCA, who had previously led on this through their employment of an AIFCA Training Coordinator. COG has established a Training Working Group to initiate this work, and I have volunteered to be part of this given my training background in the MMO. This Group meets for the first time at the end of the month, and I will update members on how things progress at the next quarterly meeting.

*Mark Taylor, North Western IFCA CEO, 11<sup>th</sup> June 2023.*