

NWIFCA Quarterly Meeting: 21st September 2023

REPORT NO.
2

CEO QUARTERLY REPORT – 12TH JUNE TO 5TH SEPTEMBER 2023

Purpose: For information.

Recommendations: The report is received.

1. Authority Committees

The Authority's F&P Sub-Committee met over Teams on 24th July and the TSB Sub-Committee met at Carnforth on 15th August.

I am delighted to welcome Cllr. Graham Davies to the Authority who has filled the vacant position as representative for Wirral Council, and Cllr. Hugo Deynem who fills the vacancy for Cheshire West and Chester Council.

2. Health, Safety and Wellbeing

The Authority's Health, Safety & Wellbeing Working Group is now back up-and-running and met on 19th June. There was a focus on reinvigorating the H&S Policy to bring it up-to-date and on establishing KPIs and CPD for staff on HS&W, as well as proceeding with new Standard Operating Procedures for specific high risk operational tasks.

3. Pay Review

The Pay Review / Job Evaluation exercise has now been completed by North West Employers with all roles within the Authority scored and rank based on a set of predetermined criteria. A subsequent grading structure and associated pay scales have been developed and these have been presented to F&P on 20th September. If accepted, this will result in a new grading and pay structure for the Authority with associated pay increases and back-pay for certain members of staff. This will need to be implemented over the coming months, with an appeals process in place for any staff who wish to appeal the results of their roles' scoring and grading.

4. Union Recognition

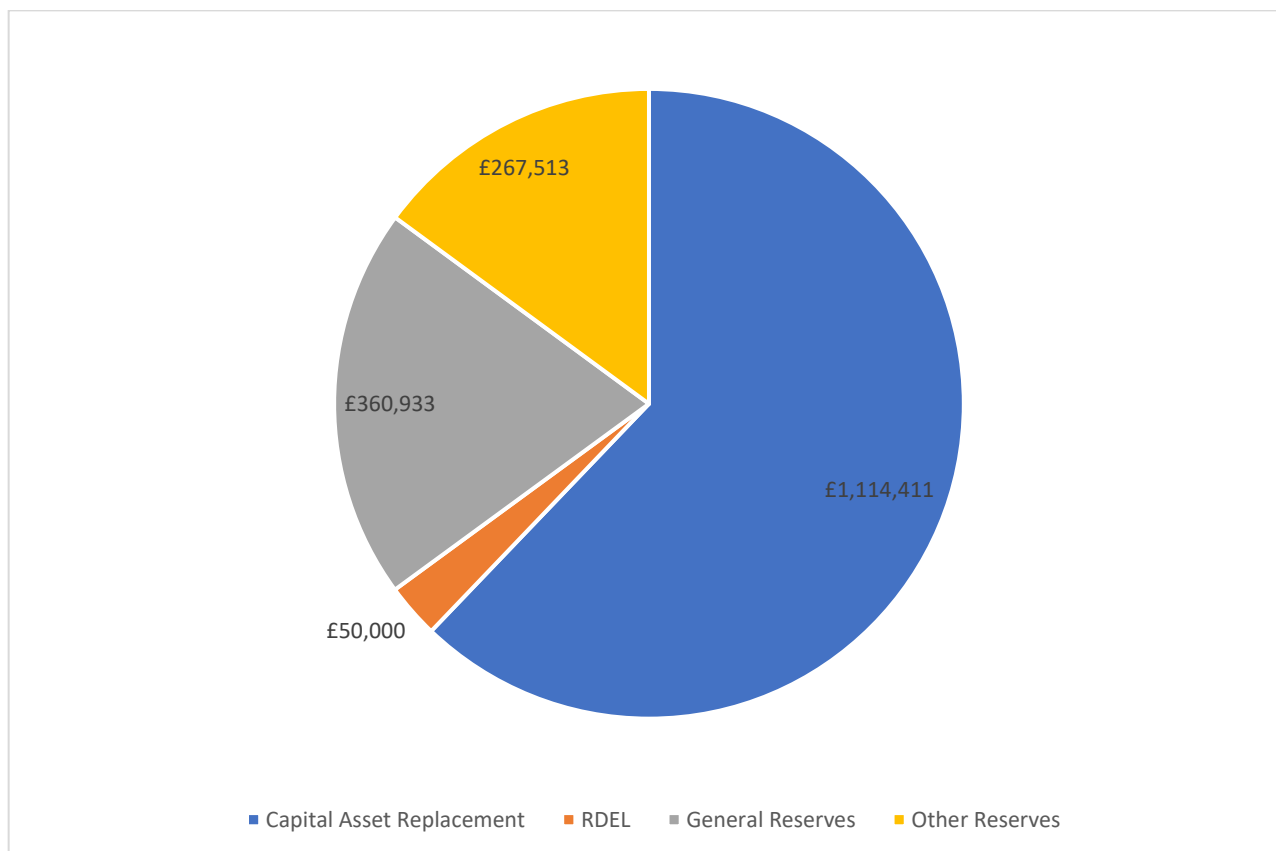
The Authority has now gained union recognition through UNISON. Our inaugural Joint Negotiation and Consultation Committee (JNCC) will be on 2nd October, where there will be much to discuss around subjects such as pay, policies and staff restructure.

5. Policies

Our internal Policies Working Group has now recommenced, our having brought in Stephenson Solicitors LLP to act as our HR consultants going forward. They will advise on all significant matters of HR, supporting our HR lead, Alison Nicholson, and I with this important piece of work. At the appropriate time, draft policies will be brought to members for approval.

6. Finances

At the July F&P meeting we addressed our significant reserves of ~£1.8m at 2022/23 year-end and agreed an appropriate structure and delineation of them going forward. This is shown in the table below.



Members will note that the Patrol Vessel Replacement Fund has been rebadged as a wider Capital Asset Replacement Fund, as agreed by F&P. This is to account for future expenditure required to replace *all* our vehicles and vessels over the next three and a half years, not just our main patrol vessel, and due to the fact that the Authority has committed to retaining North Western Protector for the foreseeable future with the recent approval of ~£400,000 expenditure to remanufacture her engines. Furthermore, any future costs associated with replacing North Western Protector are likely to be covered by Defra and / or can be covered via other arrangements, as other IFCA's have done.

Defra's RDEL funding, which has been provided to uplift our resources to help support additional marine environmental burdens Defra have placed upon us, has also been ringfenced. This needed to be separated out to ensure it was not used for ineligible expenditure, and since the start of 2023/24 has increased to £175,000 with the receipt of the rest of our 2022/23 RDEL funding; a further £150,000 is expected this year and next year.

F&P also voted to create a 'General Reserves' fund which would act as a 'safety net' in the event the Authority experienced any unforeseen financial difficulties. This figure of £361,000 has been calculated as 25% (one financial quarter) of our current annual operating budget. These monies are not to be used unless *in extremis*.

The 'Other Reserves' category is additional monies in reserves which are not specifically allocated for any purposes and are to be used following the Authority's usual constitutional approval procedures around expenditure.

7. Estates

We continue to explore potential new premises for our Carnforth and Whitehaven offices. Currently, nothing suitable has been found in the local area to replace our Head Office in Carnforth, but we continue to look. For Whitehaven, a potential opportunity is being explored to move into a large premises across the road from our current office and discussions with the prospective new landlord there are ongoing.

We have brought in local solicitor Ratcliffe and Bibby to support our estates work, with the objective of providing assurances around our leasing arrangements, and to clarify the ambiguous issue of ownership relating to the Whitehaven office.

8. Vessels and Vehicles

Officers have been working hard to bring all seagoing assets back online. North Western Protector is close to being operational again, with the engines due to be delivered back to Whitehaven week commencing 4th September, and then subsequent ancillary works associated with their refit scheduled in thereafter. It is hoped she will be back on the water late-September / early-October and operational soon afterwards. Protector Gamma is now fully repaired and operational and is awaiting MCA coding. Bay Protector is now back on the water and has undertaken several inshore patrols from Liverpool in August.

Our oldest RIB, Protector Bravo, remains up for sale, although little interest has been generated thus far.

An ATV has been sold from Carnforth and an old pick-up in Whitehaven is up for sale.

At the meeting of the F&P on 20th September, members were presented with a Capital Asset Replacement Strategy, which sets out a plan over the next three and a half years to replace all our vessel and vehicular assets, other than North Western Protector. This is due to an ageing fleet, which historically has not been routinely replaced and is causing considerable operational, H&S and financial risks due to regular issues with breakdowns and repairs. A future policy of replacing vans every five years and ATVs every three years has been proposed to bring us in line with other IFCA's¹. Overall costs of ~£600,000 are anticipated, with this to be paid for out of the newly badged Capital Asset Replacement Fund.

9. Staffing

During this reporting period, we have recruited two new IFCOs who have joined our Whitehaven office, Alexander Schweizer and David Haile. We were initially unsuccessful with filling the third IFCO vacancy there, but, after going back out to recruitment, we were successful and have offered this position to Christopher Taylor, who will join us on 2nd October. This second recruitment campaign gave us several high-quality candidates and, as such, we were also able to offer the position of IFCO (Engineer) to Leon Webber and the two-year fixed-term, RDEL-funded IFCO position in Barrow to Robin Love; Leon starts with us on 2nd October, whilst Robin joins us on 18th September. Another two-year fixed-term RDEL-funded position of Science Officer to be based in Carnforth is currently being advertised, and we aim to advertise a third RDEL-funded Admin Officer position in the coming weeks, as well as a permanent replacement for our Senior Operational Support Officer, Cath Dobson, who is due to retire at the end of March next year.

We have two outstanding grievances with current staff, 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.

¹ Vessels to be replaced on an *ad hoc* basis as and when required.

10. Communications

On 27th July we held an event in Wallasey to invite members of the public from the North Wirral area to meet with officers to discuss the ongoing issues around marine wildlife specimens washing up on the coastline there, and the alleged links to gillnetting in the area. The event was well-received, with significant interest beforehand, particularly from local journalists. It was covered on BBC Regional News, and acted as a useful means by which officers could explain more about the Authority, the work we do, the legislative constraints we work under and what we are looking to do to address the specific issue at hand, by way of further research and the current development of the Netting Byelaw.

We have been proactive in communicating the renewal of permits as part of Byelaw 3 and most permit holders have renewed as a result. Permits from those few who did not renew have been offered to individuals at the top of the waiting list. Officers plan to conduct a review of the Byelaw 3 Permit Waiting List in the coming months with a view to removing anyone who does not confirm with us their wish to remain on it.

11. 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. I have also asked for volunteers from TSB to form part of the Byelaw Working Group to meet on an *ad hoc* basis when discussions are needed around our current byelaw development work and wider byelaw strategy.

Byelaw 1 (MCRS) remains with the minister awaiting sign-off. We recently had correspondence with Defra on this byelaw and discovered there had been some confusion as to its inception and purpose, which seems to have delayed matters. No further progress has since been made with Defra and Joe continues to chase this with them.

12. Fisheries Management Plans

Defra has now launched its public consultation on the six front-runner draft FMPs. Despite suggestions the consultation period would be abbreviated to ensure it was completed before Parliamentary Summer Recess, this has not been the case and the consultation remains open until 1st October. If members have not responded already to any specific FMPs of interest, they are encouraged to do so before the deadline. I am working with Joe and Anna to coordinate responses to the Crab and Lobster, Bass and Whelk FMPs on behalf of the Executive Team. Unfortunately, with time and resource constraints on officers, on this occasion it has not been possible for us to collate and coordinate responses from the wider membership, which I am aware some other IFCAs have been doing. Members should be assured that I recognise the value in seeking their wide range of views on matters such as these and that going forward, with more time to prepare and consider, and with fewer more urgent priorities, I will endeavour to involve members in the Authority's provision of any such consultation responses.

Our direct involvement in the Tranche 2 national Cockle FMP is now well underway, with Anna acting as the primary technical advisor to AIFCA, who are leading on the drafting of this FMP. As mentioned in my previous quarterly report, our involvement in this work will have reciprocal benefits for our own District-based Cockle FMP, which Anna is also working on.

13. AIFCA

I have attended one AIFCA Chief Officer Group (COG) meeting during this reporting period. AIFCA and COG colleagues 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.

14. Dee Estuary Cockle Management

I have attended two meetings with Natural Resources Wales (NRW) who currently hold responsibility for managing the cockle fishery within the Dee Estuary, on both the Welsh *and* English sides, via a Regulating Order. This Regulating Order is due to lapse in 2028 and NRW are keen to explore future management and regulatory options for the fishery. There appear to be three distinct options for the management of the fishery beyond 2028:

1. NRW reapply for a Regulating Order and continue to manage.
2. NWIFCA apply for a Regulating Order and take on management.
3. The Regulating Order is allowed to lapse and management reverts to the default, devolved approach, with NWIFCA managing the English side and Welsh Government managing the Welsh side.

I have indicated to NRW that we would *consider* applying for a Regulating Order to take over the management of the entire fishery but would need to ensure we are sufficiently resourced and funded and had members' backing to do so. The next stage is that Joe, Anna, and I are meeting with NRW in Wales in early October to further the discussions, focussing on all possible options in more detail and planning a way forward, with appropriate milestones, for the necessary decision making and processes that will need to be followed under whichever option is eventually agreed.

Mark Taylor, North Western IFCA CEO, 5th September 2023.