Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority **Item 4**
Audit and Review Committee

Minutes of the meeting held at the YDNPA offices, Yoredale, Bainbridge, Leyburn DL8 3EL on Tuesday 14 April 2026 at 10:30am.

Members Present:

Saira Ali, Lizzie Bushby, Mark Corner, Felicity Cunliffe-Lister, Robert Heseltine, Richard Ingram, David Ireton, Allen Kirkbride, Steve Shaw-Wright, Graham Simpkins.

Copies of all documents considered are in the Minute Book

01/26 Apologies

Apologies were received from Yvonne Peacock.

02/26 Minutes

Resolved - That the minutes of the meeting held on 25 November 2025, having been printed and circulated, be taken as read and be confirmed and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

03/26 Public Questions/Statements

No notifications of public questions or of the intention to make a statement had been received.

04/26 Declarations of Lobbying

No declarations of lobbying were made at the meeting.

05/26 Performance Review: SSSIs in Authority Management

The Committee **considered** the report and presentation of the Director of Conservation and Community (now Acting Chief Executive).

Members thanked officers for the rigorous and thorough review undertaken; noting their diligence and enthusiasm.

Members asked how long the recovery of Freeholders Wood is likely to take and whether the area above the station could be used to experiment with the planting of trees resistant to ash die back, or other suitable species. The Acting Chief Executive advised that recovery would take a long time (tens of years); and he would investigate the potential for more diverse tree planting. A Member advised against removing dead ash trees and the

Acting Chief Executive clarified that this was only done where the safety of the public may be at risk. Regarding Victoria Cave, Members raised a number of suggestions about managing access, and these were noted by the Acting Chief Executive.

Members asked that it be noted that they were entirely supportive of the proposed management approach for both Freeholders Wood and Victoria Cave even though it might not result in either reaching favourable condition any time soon.

Resolved - To **note** the findings of the review and **approve** the recommendation for future actions set out in the recommended action plan.

06/26 Major Project Review – Cross Keys Bridge

The Committee **considered** the report and presentation of the Head of Park Management.

Members thanked officers for the strong achievement in delivering a sensitive local adaptation of the bridge; and acknowledged the helpful input from the British Horse Society.

A Member asked if data is available regarding usage of the bridge. The Director of Park services advised that only a few routes can be monitored at any one time. A review of the location of 'people counters' will take place later this year, and Cross Keys would be considered alongside other routes.

Resolved – a. To **note** the lessons learned from the Cross Keys Bridge project, and

b. To **agree** that the recommendations in section 51 of the Annex should be taken into account in guiding the Authority's future approach for development and delivery of similar projects.

07/26 Annual Governance Statement 2025/26

The Committee **considered** the report of the Director of Corporate Services and Chief Financial Officer.

Resolved – i. To **approve** the Annual Governance Statement to accompany the 2025/26 Statement of Final Accounts, and the Chair of the Audit & Review Committee to sign the Annual Governance Statement; and

ii. To **confirm** that, subject to the matters identified in Table B which are to be addressed in 2026/27, the Authority's internal control systems and governance arrangements are considered to be fit for purpose.

In response to a Member's question about why the National Park Management Plan was not listed in Table B (matters to be addressed over the next 12 months), the Acting Chief Executive advised that once the Plan has been adopted and published it is no longer a 'governance issue'.

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08/26 Programme of Reviews for 2026/27

The Committee **considered** the report of Performance Management Officer, presented by the Acting Chief Executive.

Members discussed the options for Performance Review and Major Project Reviews for the coming year.

It was agreed by Members that the topics of water quality and capital funding for major project reviews would be best suited to consideration at a Policy Development Forum.

Resolved – i. To **select** the Volunteers Programme as the subject for performance review for 2026/27; and

ii. To **select** the Production of the National Park Management Plan 2025-30 and the 'Grow Back Greener' Woodland Creation Programme as the major project reviews for 2026/27.

09/26 Internal Audit - Complaints and Compliments

The Committee **considered** and **noted** the report of the Director of Corporate Services.

10/26 Complaints and Compliments Annual Report 2025/26

The Committee **considered** and **noted** the report of the Corporate Services Officer presented by the Governance and Compliance Officer who gave an update in relation to a recent referral which the Ombudsman has now confirmed they will not be investigating.

11/26 Internal Audit Report 2025/26

The Committee **considered** and **noted** the report of the Head of Finance.

The Head of Finance introduced Thomas Absalom (Audit Manager, Veritau Ltd) and Stuart Cutts (Head of Internal Audit, Veritau Ltd).

A Member asked how the Authority compares with other National Park Authorities. The Internal Auditor confirmed that 'substantial assurance' is the highest level achievable.

12/26 External Audit Report 2024/25

The Committee **considered** and **noted** the report of the Head of Finance.

There being no other business, the meeting closed at 11:31 a.m.

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