Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority **Item 8**

Audit and Review Committee

14 July 2026

Performance Review – Volunteer Programme

Purpose of the Report

1. To propose membership of the team to conduct the Member-led performance review of the Authority's Volunteer programme and to set out the scope for this review.

Recommendations

2. That Members:

   (i) agree membership of the team for the performance review, including appointing one member of Audit and Review Committee to the team; and

   (ii) agree the scope of the review as set out in **Appendix**.

Strategic Framework

3. The information and recommendation(s) contained in this report are consistent with the Authority's statutory purposes and support the strategic planning framework:

   - Corporate Plan Objective 32:
     Operate Governance arrangements that are fit for purpose, as reported through the Annual Governance Statement and Annual Governance Report.

Background

4. At Audit and Review Committee on 14 April 2026, Members determined that a performance review of the Authority's Volunteer programme should be carried out.

5. A draft terms of reference has been prepared for Member approval in accordance with the broad framework for all performance reviews and can be found at **Appendix**.

Financial Implications

6. None, the performance reviews will be conducted using existing resources.

Legal Implications

7. None.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Implications

8. None.

Conclusion

9. The Audit and Review Committee has agreed to conduct a performance review of Volunteer programme. The review group will offer recommendations of potential actions for the Authority and National Park partners to help deliver the National Park Management objective for volunteering. It will report back to this Committee in November 2026.

Elliott Lorimer
Director of Park Services

Appendix

Performance Review of the Volunteer programme

Draft of Terms of Reference

Proposed membership of the review team

- Member of Audit and Review Committee
- Lizzie Bushby, Member Champion for Recreation Management
- Elliott Lorimer, Director of Park Services
- Clare Burrows, Director of Corporate Services
- Rebecca Greenfied, Head of Access and Engagement
- Sally Robertshaw, Volunteers Development Officer

Background

The Authority operates a Volunteer programme offering many medium- to long-term volunteering roles as part of the Dales Volunteer programme, working across all three directorates. These include opportunities within Ranger teams, the Learning and Engagement team, Conservation teams, and the Tourism team.

In addition, there are a series of targeted volunteering programmes, primarily focused on young people. These include initiatives such as Young Rangers, Up Skill, Down Dale, and Dales Action Days. Alongside these ongoing opportunities, there are on occasions fixed-term projects that involve volunteers.

The National Park objective for volunteering is outlined in the Management Plan 2025-30:

3.5. Give people from all backgrounds an opportunity to enjoy and contribute to looking after the National Park by providing at least 7,000 volunteer days per year, with at least 20% coming from under-served communities by 2029.

The Authority objective for volunteering is outlined in the Corporate Action Plan 2026/27:

12. Give people from all backgrounds an opportunity to enjoy and contribute to looking after the National Park by providing at least 5,000 volunteer days per year, with at least 20% coming from under-served communities by 2029.

In terms of volunteering days, we may be beginning to see the impact of wider societal changes on volunteering, including post-Covid shifts observed across the UK and other volunteer-involving organisations. Although we continue to recruit new volunteers to replace those retiring, overall volunteering days remain stable or are declining in some areas. This is likely because many long-standing volunteers contributed consistently over many years, while newer volunteers tend to engage differently.

Our newer recruits are generally younger, and roles are now more flexible to fit around work and family commitments. As a result, volunteer numbers are growing, but the number of days contributed is not increasing at the same rate, which may present challenges in meeting future volunteering day targets.

While some Dales Volunteer roles have remained stable or expanded, other teams are working less with volunteers. This may reflect increased project-based work, shifts in staffing, and changing priorities.

Purpose

The purpose of this review is to:

a) Understand the effectiveness of the Authority's delivery of the Volunteer programme and assess the reasons for the decline in total volunteer days.
b) Consider how, with the support of the Authority, National Park partner organisations could engage and involve volunteers more effectively in the delivery of the National Park Management Plan objective
c) Carry out an assessment and evaluation of the cost effectiveness of the delivery of the Volunteer programme (in line with direction from Members); benchmarking with other National Park Authorities where appropriate.
d) Make recommendations on how the Volunteer programme can achieve Corporate Plan objectives and targets, contribute to the Management Plan targets and support health and wellbeing and skills development.