Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority **Item 12**

Finance and Resources Committee

19 May 2026

Volunteer Resources Annual Report

Purpose of the Report

1. To provide information on Dales Volunteers (DVs): volunteers who are directly recruited, trained and supervised by the Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority during 2025/26.

Recommendation

2. That the report be noted.

Strategic Framework

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

    - Corporate Plan Objective 11
      Give people from all backgrounds an opportunity to enjoy and contribute to the National Park by providing at least 7,000 volunteer days per year, with 15% coming from under-represented groups.

Background

4. Every year the Authority engages DVs across many areas of our work. In most cases DV activities and roles contribute directly to management plan objectives.

Diversity of our applicants

5. The monitoring of applications for the purpose of equal opportunities is a practice recommended by the Equality and Human Rights Commission. This monitoring provides evidence as to whether current recruitment practices (and role offers) are

reaching a diverse range of candidates and helps us to mitigate the risk of potential allegations of discriminatory practices.

6. Completion of monitoring forms is not compulsory, and non-completion does not invalidate an application. Therefore, not all applicants complete the form fully, or at all. The information we have concerning successful applications in 2025/26 is set out in **Table 1** in the **Annex**.

Diversity of our volunteers

7. We use data provided by the current volunteers to understand the diversity within DVs and to progress towards our targets of having 15% of our volunteer days completed by those who are in under-served groups. Under-represented groups include the following:
   - young people (those aged 5 to 24 years inclusive)
   - minority ethnic groups (all ethnic groups other than 'White – British')
   - people who consider themselves to have a limiting long-term illness or disability.

   The current profile across our 345 volunteers is set out in **Table 2** in the **Annex**.

8. In 2026 we recruited a Green Pathways Officer whose role focuses on youth volunteering, primarily Young Rangers and Dales Action Days (or other youth volunteering). This delivery commenced again in April 2026 and so will, in future, contribute to this under-represented group target, alongside the Up Skill Down Dale (USDD) programme. Despite this, the general trend seems to be towards an increasing number of our volunteer days being completed by those from under-represented groups. We hope this is in part a result of the cumulative effect of elements in the volunteer strategy which focuses on this target.

9. The Young Rangers numbers we reported in 2024/25 were those we had on our books from historic delivery. Due to a break in delivery and adoption of a new 2026 model, this trend data has terminated. We will now work with a smaller number of young people initially (approximately 15 to 20), with scope for this number to expand as the programme continues and develops.

Recruitment activity

10. Each year recruitment decisions are based on need. We review volunteer numbers against Volunteer Supervisors' future plans and our objectives, to determine if we need to recruit more volunteers to cover retirees who are leaving and/or expand the team.

11. For the period 2025/26, the Authority recruited 53 new volunteers, similar to 2024/25. They were recruited in Up Skill Down Dale (12), Community Champions (CNPfE project) (20), Young Creatives (20), Wildlife (1), DCM (3) and Other (8).

Training and development

12. All new volunteers complete the Authority's 'National Park Awareness' (NPA) core training. This is typically provided through face-to-face sessions, though we also offer a shorter online version of the course for those who will only be volunteering with us for a small number of days (and for whom the full training would be disproportionate). All volunteers also attend online 'Admin Induction' sessions as early as possible, so that they have all the basic information they need for things such as using our 'Better Impact' online system, basic health and safety, and claiming expenses.

13. It is the Volunteer Supervisors' responsibility to determine any additional training needed for each role, beyond the core training all receive. The Volunteer team work with the supervisors to deliver this via courses (both in house and with external providers), shadowing, briefings and information packs.

14. The Welcoming Dales Training which was introduced as standalone course last year for existing Dales Volunteers now forms part of the National Park Awareness Day so new recruits automatically undertake this as they join. To date around 80% of current DVs attended the course and any outstanding will be asked to attend those we run as part of NPA.

Volunteer turnover

15. Some degree of volunteer turnover is inevitable as people move away, find new interests, retire, or the role becomes too physically challenging for them. Historically, we have seen a high degree of loyalty from our volunteers and that has continued: 12% of our current volunteers have been with us for over 20 years and a further 14% for between 10 and 20 years. This means a quarter of our current volunteers have been with us for over 10 years. This number has been relatively consistent year on year.

16. During the period 2025/26, 22 volunteers resigned, 1 passed away and 2 moved away from the area. 16 volunteer records were removed from our books as they didn't start or were inactive for a sustained period. The length of service is shown in **Table 3** in the **Annex**.

17. As stated in previous reports, we believe we are beginning to see a reflection of the wider societal changes affecting volunteering. Despite taking on new volunteers to replace those who are retiring, our volunteering day numbers are remaining relatively stable and, in some areas, declining. This is likely to be attributed to the fact that many of our older volunteers have tended to contribute a high number and consistent level of volunteering days for many years and some of those who are replacing them don't view volunteering in the same way.

18. Our new recruits are mainly younger and our roles are now more flexible, designed to fit the lifestyle of those who have other responsibilities e.g. work or family commitments. This means that whilst the number of volunteers is generally increasing,

the number of days they do is not increasingly proportionally and so this may present a challenge in future years reaching the volunteering days target.

19. The Volunteer Team are continuing to monitor societal and YDNPA patterns and in the meantime are developing ways to try and address this, for example the recently trialled partnership volunteering model has the potential to achieve more volunteering tasks with less direct YDNPA staff supervision, and the new volunteer survey should provide data on what works well for volunteers. The forthcoming Performance Review will also consider these trends and patterns and may offer new ideas.

20. As is usual some Volunteer roles changed this year: Young Rangers and Dales Action Days paused and will restart in 2026. The Coast to Coast project reduced delivery of typical ranger-led activities, particularly in the north. Larger Ragged Robins task days will not return, with a shift to more one-to-one work.

21. New partnership delivery included Aire Rivers Trust, with Yorkshire Peat Partnership planned. Projects included Going Places (5 year project), CNPfE continues (ends in 2026/27) and Roots to Jobs (2 year project).

Feedback from volunteers

22. This year Information by Design worked with us to survey all Dales Volunteers, the report will be circulated separately but key finding include:
    a. Very high volunteer satisfaction and loyalty (NPS - a common measure of loyalty- of 69%?).
    b. Volunteers feel highly valued by staff and enjoy their roles.
    c. Strong confidence in safety, training and information; team support and kit slightly lower.
    d. Volunteering improves skills, confidence, conservation knowledge and life satisfaction.
    e. 40% want more involvement; main barriers are time, with travel, cost and information also factors.
    f. Wellbeing outcomes are strong across all “5 Ways to Wellbeing”

23. We send an online survey to volunteers when they leave; it is not compulsory that they complete it. 10 leavers provided feedback this year, this was largely positive and stated their reasons for leaving were circumstantial.

Financial Implications

24. None. Continuation of the standard Volunteers Budget which covers expenses, training and materials associated with volunteering.

Legal Implications

25. None.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Implications

26. Please see information included in paragraphs 5 to 10.

Climate Change Implications

27. In an attempt to reduce the carbon emissions associated with volunteering we continue to promote car share amongst volunteers and supervisors to be more targeted in the use of volunteers geographically. For 2025/26 our carbon emissions figure was 24,727 CO2e compared to the 2024/25 figure of 22,303 CO2e.

Sally Robertshaw
Volunteers Development Officer

Annex

Table 1 – The profile of applicants

0% of applicants were under 18 years old
32% in the age group 18-25
25% in the age group 26-35
9% in the age group 36-45
8% in the age group 46-55
19% in the age group 56-65
8% over 65 years of age

In relation to disability, 9% of DV applicants reported that they have a disability or an impairment, condition or access need. With regard to ethnicity, 49% of applicants stated they were of 'White' ethnicity ('White-British', 'White-English', 'White-Scottish', 'White-Welsh', 'White-Irish' or 'White-other'). A further 49% were from minority ethnic groups, and this is likely due, in part, to the Championing National Parks for Everyone project.

Table 2 – The profile across our current 345 volunteers

0% are under 18 years old (see 10. below regarding Young Rangers)
8% in the age group 18-25
13% in the age group 26-35
4% in the age group 36-45
7% in the age group 46-55
20% in the age group 56-65
48% are over 65 years of age

4% of DVs reported that they have a disability, disability or have an impairment, condition or access need

86% stated they were of 'White' ethnicity, ('White-British', 'White-English', 'White-Scottish', 'White-Welsh', 'White-Irish' or 'White – other'), 1% preferred not to say and 14% of our volunteers are from minority ethnic groups.

Table 3 – Length of service of volunteers who resigned

The length of service of the 43 people who stopped volunteering in 2025/2026 is shown below:

Length of Service	Number of leavers	% of leavers
<1 year	2	5%
>1 year but < 2 years	4	9%
>2 years but < 3 years	6	14%
>3 years but < 4 years	6	14%
>4 years but < 5 years	3	7%
>5 years but < 10 years	11	26%
>10 years but < 20 years	6	14%
>20 years	5	12%