Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority **Item 11**

Audit & Review Committee

15 July 2025

Performance Review

Purpose of the Report

1. For Members to re-consider whether to initiate a Performance Review in 2025-26.

Recommendation

2. That Members determine whether to instigate a review of the Authority's performance in relation to the management of Sites of Special Scientific Interest, and, if so, appoint two Members to lead the review.

Strategic Framework

3. The information and recommendation contained in this report are consistent with the Authority's approved and adopted strategic planning framework:
    - Corporate Plan objective 31: "Provide high quality, efficient and effective services and communications to the public…..".

Background

4. At the last Committee meeting in April, Members considered a report on the proposed programme of reviews to be initiated by the Committee this year. The report recommended that the Committee commission officers to carry out two 'major project reviews' (Generation Green 2 and Cautley Bridge). However, it recommended that no 'Performance Review' take place in 2025/26, to maximise our capacity to plan for and respond strategically to the significant budget challenges that the Authority seemed likely to face. Members were supportive of this approach but noting that it could change if the pressures on the Authority changed.

Consideration

5. As reported by the Chief Executive at the subsequent Finance and Resources Committee in May, and the Policy Development Forum in June, the financial outlook remains challenging but more positive in the short-term (the additional capital grant for 2025/26) and potentially the long term (an expectation in Government that these capital allocations are likely to continue for future years). Additionally, there is now an

expectation that the internal business planning within Defra – and, thus, our financial settlement for the next 3 years - is unlikely to be concluded before Jan/Feb 2026. As a result, Members clearly indicated a desire to delay any big decisions about the future structure/resourcing of the Authority until we have full details of that settlement.

6. There is, therefore, some limited capacity to undertake a performance review this year, should Members wish to do so. As a reminder, the current 'Framework for Reporting Performance Reviews' is shown in the **Annex**.

7. Given the resource constraints, and other workload pressures, it is proposed that the review be more narrowly focused than the norm. Members will be aware from the earlier report on the review of performance in 2025 that there is a particular issue with the condition of the Sites of Special Scientific Interest that the Authority owns or manages. The issues around these sites are complex and – to some extent – the decisions about them will be 'political'. So, there would be merit in having the direct involvement of Members in any review.

8. If Members are minded to instigate such a review, one of the two Members involved would be the Member Champion for Natural Environment (Mr Corner). Members are invited to consider which Member from this Committee should also be involved.

Financial Implications

9. None.

Legal Implications

10. None.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Implications

11. None.

Conclusion

12. Performance Reviews are an important part of the Authority's performance management system – but can be very resource-intensive when looking at whole programmes or services. A more tailored approach this year would meet an identified business need and be commensurate with the current capacity of the organisation.

Gary Smith
Deputy Chief Executive

Performance Reviews **Annex**

Background

The work of the Audit and Review Committee includes instigating reviews in areas where the Authority is seeking to improve performance and/or value for money, and reporting back to the Authority.

Scope of reviews

These reviews will be current, which is to say they will look at programmes of work that are on-going. They will focus on programmes or areas of work where the Authority:

- is not achieving what it has set out to do; and/or
- has identified a specific need to reduce costs; and/or
- has identified a need to improve value for money.

The reviews will focus closely on the options for change. That means looking at whether costs can be reduced, and ways to improve value for money and deliver the desired quality of service *within the context* of the current priority of the programme. The balance of these elements will vary from review to review. The exact scope of each review will, therefore, be determined in advance by the Audit and Review Committee. A broad framework for all reviews is in the attached **Annex**.

Scheduling of Reviews

There will be a limit to the number of reviews it is possible, or practical, to carry out each year. There will normally be only one performance review in any given year.

Carrying out the reviews

A small team will be established for each review, containing up to 6 people, including:

- 2 Members (the relevant 'Champion' and a Member of Audit and Review);
- The relevant Director and Section Head;
- The Director of Corporate Services or the Head of Finance;

The relevant Section Head should ensure that SMT is given an opportunity to identify issues to be covered within the scope of the review. SMT should have the opportunity to comment on the draft final report before it is signed off by the review team. This will allow any SMT comments to be considered by the review team before finalising the report.

The relevant Section Head should also ensure that all staff involved in the delivery of the service being reviewed have the opportunity to:

- Comment on the results of the anaylsis; and
- Provide suggestions/feedback on how the service could be improved.

Framework for reporting Performance Reviews

1. The issues

a) What are the specific performance/cost issues that the review has been set up to tackle?

b) Why do the issues matter?

2. Current performance

a) How is the service currently being delivered?

b) What are we *supposed* to be achieving (i.e. what are our current objectives, targets, standards etc)?

c) What are we *actually* achieving?

d) How much is it costing?

3. The evaluation

a) How do our current costs and performance compare to other bodies (NPAs and/or other bodies providing the same type of service)?

b) Are the current objectives realistic given the current priority of the programme and any funding decisions already taken?

c) What are the potential options for alternative ways of delivering the service to improve value for money[1] - given the current priority of the programme and any funding decisions already taken?

d) Are there any other options (e.g. ending the service, reducing quality etc)[2]?

4. Future action

a) Recommended action plan

b) Future funding/resourcing implications

c) Timetable for implementation

[1] To include consideration of ways to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from the operation of the service.

[2] Consideration of options should include an Equality Impact Assessment (for people-based services).