Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority **Item 6**
Audit & Review Committee

Date: 23 April 2024

Report: Programme of Reviews for 2024/25

Purpose of the Report

1. To determine which aspects of the Authority's work should be considered as the potential focus for reviews by this Committee in 2024/25.

Recommendation(s)

2. That Members select one performance review and one major project review in 2024/25.

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 31: Provide high quality, efficient and effective services and communications to the public and other stakeholders, and so maintain the Customer Service Excellence standard every year.

Background

4. Members will be aware that the Authority has a strong commitment to improvement and accountability – both which form part of our core values – and in which this Committee plays a key role.

5. Each year, the Audit and Review Committee identifies a programme of reviews comprising two elements:

    a. **Performance Reviews** are Member-led and focus on effectiveness and value for money. In the past they focused on *improving* performance but this might not necessarily be the main driver now. Some reviews can be about *maintaining* performance with less resource, while others might even be about how best to *reduce* performance in order to make necessary savings. The current 'Framework for Reporting Performance Reviews' is shown in **Annex A**. This sets out the core questions that need to be considered by such reviews

    b. '**Major Project' Reviews** are led by officers. They are a quick and honest assessment of the success or otherwise of significant projects that we have been involved in, so that lessons can be learned for future projects.

6. In recent years, the Committee has generally instituted one performance review and up to two major project reviews each year.

7. Members will be aware that the Authority is already committed to completing reviews of both the Local Plan and National Park Management Plan in the coming year. Given that this will require a significant amount of time from many different officers, as well as input from Members, it would be prudent to limit the scale/number of other reviews.

Suggested reviews for 2024/25

Performance Review

8. There are two potentially significant reviews already planned for the coming year, and it is recommended that Members select one of these to be this year's performance review:
    a. **Delegated statutory highway duties** – Members will be well aware of the issues around the unsustainable costs of the rights of way programme in the light of current financial pressures. The Authority will need to take decisions on whether – and how - to continue to carry out this delegated role. A review of the effectiveness and cost of carrying out this statutory function on behalf of the Highway Authorities would provide valuable evidence to inform the subsequent decisions.
    b. **Carbon Reduction Plan** – the Authority's plan was published in March 2020, and is due for review by March 2025. Most of the proposals in it have now been implemented. Achieving the remainder of the Authority's ambitious emissions reduction objective will depend on pursuing some radical and potentially expensive options. A review of our performance in this area would be a timely precursor to producing a new Plan.

Major Project Reviews

9. There are only two 'major projects' that fit the timeframe to be considered for review this year:
    a. The most significant is the recently-completed Westmorland Dales Landscape Partnership scheme, which was funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund. The scheme was led by Friends of the Dales but with the Authority acting as the 'accountable body' and leading the implementation of a number of specific projects. A review of the lessons learnt would be especially timely in advance of the development of a number of other landscape-scale partnership projects.
    b. As part of the Authority's commitment to making the National Park a friendly, welcoming and open place, two 'Changing Places' are being installed at the Dales Countryside Museum (completed) and the Grassington National Park Centre (due to complete in May). These will provide fully accessible toilet facilities with extra equipment and space to allow people with profound learning disabilities, as well as people with physical disabilities such as spinal injuries, muscular dystrophy and multiple sclerosis to get out and about and enjoy the

National Park. A review of the lessons learnt from these grant-funded infrastructure projects would be helpful to inform our thinking about future accessibility improvements.

Financial, legal or equality, diversity and inclusion Implications

10. There are no substantive financial costs in carrying out the reviews, other than a significant amount of staff time. It should be noted, though, that there are significant legal, financial and equality implications that would need to be considered as part of any review of our performance in implementing the delegated rights of way agreement.

Conclusion

11. Performance Reviews and Major Project Reviews are an important part of the framework by which this Committee is able to scrutinise the effectiveness of the Authority's work. The reviews proposed for 2024/25 would provide valuable information to inform the development of future work programmes.

Gary Smith
Deputy Chief Executive

8 April 2024

Performance Reviews

Annex A

Background

The work of the Audit and Review Committee includes instigating reviews in areas where the Authority is under-performing, 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, therefore, be a maximum of two performance reviews 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 (from the Audit and Review Committee and/or the relevant 'champion');
- The relevant Director and Section Head;
- The Director of Corporate Services or the Head of Finance;

At the outset of the review, the relevant Section Head should ensure that SMT are 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] This should 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).