**Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority** **Item 6**

**Audit & Review Committee**

**15 April 2025**

# Programme of reviews for 2025/26

## 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 2025/26.

## Recommendation(s)

2. That Members select two major project reviews in 2025/26.

## 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 the **Annex**. 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.

**Performance Review 2025/26**

7. Members will be aware that the Authority is likely to be facing a challenging financial situation beyond next year. The scale of the current projected shortfall in funding for 2026-27 is now £1.1 million and continues to grow thereafter. This is likely to require a re-structuring of the Authority and its programmes. We, therefore, recommend that no Performance Review take place in 2025/26, to maximise our capacity to plan for and respond strategically to these budget challenges.

**Major Project Reviews 2025/2026**

8. The following are the 'major projects' that fit the timeframe to be considered for review this year:

    a. Aysgarth Accessibility. This project provided an accessible path through Freeholders' Wood at Aysgarth falls, enabling wheelchair users to access the lower falls for the first time. The project was funded by a Removing Barriers grant from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and ended in March 2025. A review of the lessons learned would help inform our future implementation of accessible routes.

    b. National Park Management Plan 2025-2030. The Plan has been developed by the National Park Management Plan Partnership, made up of the authorities and organisations that have a major contribution to delivering the objectives. The draft Plan has been through public consultations and is due to be completed and adopted at the June 2025 National Park Authority meeting. A review of the lessons learned would help inform our thinking on how future Management Plans are developed.

    c. Generation Green 2. The Authority participated in Generation Green 2, delivered by the Access Unlimited coalition (https://www.yha.org.uk/generationgreen) and funded by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. The Authority helped young people aged 7-18 to visit the National Park, with a focus on those living in some of the most under-served communities in the UK (IMD Areas 1-3 and schools with a pupil premium 30% or more). Generation Green 2 ends in March 2025. A review of the lessons learned would help inform our thinking on how we can further engage first-time visitors to the National Park.

    d. Cautley Bridge. This project is for a new bridge over the River Rawthey, near Cautley Spout waterfall, to make the area more accessible to

pedestrians, cyclists, equestrians and wheelchair users. The bridge also allows farmers and commoners access by quadbike and allows stock movement off the fell. The bridge has been installed and the remaining works to the Bridleway and the highway are due to be completed by Autumn 2025. The project was funded by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Farming in Protected Landscapes programme. A review of the lessons learned would help inform our future implementation of rights of way and access projects involving provision of new accessible bridges.

e. New southern area ranger base at Langcliffe Quarry. The ranger base is now under construction and due to be completed by Summer 2025. A review of lessons learned would assist with any future building projects and project management more generally.

9. Members should note that projects a.-c. above could report to the November Committee meeting. Timescales for completion of the Cautley Bridge and Langcliffe Quarry projects would mean they would report to the following meeting (in April 2026).

**Financial, legal or equality, diversity and inclusion Implications**

11. There are no direct financial costs in carrying out the Major Project reviews, other than a relatively small amount of officer time.

**Conclusion**

12. Carrying out reviews of the Authority's work programmes and projects is an important part of the framework by which this Committee is able to scrutinise the effectiveness of the Authority's work. The challenging financial projections suggest that resources this year would best be focused on assessing the potential impacts on our work programmes as a whole, rather than a detailed performance review. However, there is still capacity for two major project reviews, and these would provide valuable information to inform the development of future projects.

Kate Clark
Performance Management Officer

## Performance Reviews **Annex A**

### 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;

At the outset of the review, 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] 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).

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