Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority **Item 8**

Audit & Review Committee

14 April 2026

Programme of Reviews for 2026/27

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 2026/27.

Recommendation

2. That members select one performance review and two major project reviews in 2026/27.

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 30:**
      Plan and manage the Authority's work to make the most effective use of its resources, including generating sufficient income to maintain expenditure at the same level as 2014/15 in real terms.

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:

    - **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.

- **'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.

Suggested reviews for 2026/27

Performance Review

7. Officers have identified several potential reviews:
    a. **Volunteers programme.** Levels of volunteering have dropped from around 7,000 days in 2022/23 to around 5,500 in 2024/25 (similar to 2014-16 levels). The Authority is moving towards our volunteers doing more for other bodies and aims to diversify volunteering.
    b. **Water quality.** The most recent figures for water quality show that 51% (by length, km) are in high or good ecological condition. A performance review could only look at how the Authority has performed in carrying out relevant functions (the Catchment Sensitive Farming programme and our role through the planning service), not the actions of others (e.g. Environment Agency, water companies).
    c. **Use of capital funding**. A review could look at how well the Authority coped with the shift to more capital funding and how successful we were in spending it. This could be useful if it can be done in time for any future rounds of capital funding and therefore would need to be a 'short and sharp' review.
    d. **The National Park Management Plan 2020-25.** A review could look at how effectively the Authority held other bodies accountable for achieving the objectives in the previous Plan. However, the Authority has already reported progress on the 2020-25 Plan and already produced a new National Park Management Plan with a new 'accountability framework' (supported by the new duty in the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023).

8. Officers recommend that Volunteers is selected for performance review. However, Members are invited to consider all the proposed options

Major Project Reviews

9. There are five 'major projects' that officers consider would fit the timeframe to be worth reviewing this year:
    a. Construction of the new ranger base at Langcliffe Quarry. A significant building project that was completed in October last year.
    b. Production of the National Park Management Plan 2025-30. The major strategic document that drives much of the Authority's work, and that of partners. The new

Plan was launched last November. Its production was overseen by the NPMP Partnership.

c. The ‘Grow Back Greener’ woodland creation programme. A four-year programme of native woodland creation, with the Authority acting as the ‘delivery agent’ for the Woodland Trust within the National Park. The programme finished in March, and the Authority is now developing new woodland approaches to support woodland.

d. The redevelopment of the Authority’s main website. A year-long project to create and populate a completely new, modernised website. The work is now well underway and progressing to plan, with completion expected by the end of summer 2026.

e. The Smardale ‘Miles without Stiles’ route (Access to Eden). The creation of a new, accessible footpath from Smardale Nature Reserve car park to Waitby Greenriggs Nature Reserve, involving the re-surfacing of the route and installation of two new footbridges. The project is expected to be complete by summer 2026.

10. Members are invited to select two projects from the list above.

Financial Implications

9. There are no substantive financial costs in carrying out the reviews, other than a significant amount of staff and Member time.

Legal Implications

10. None.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Implications

11. Reviews of the Volunteers programme, the National Park Management Plan, Digital Access Hub and Smardale ‘Miles without Stiles’ route would all need to consider equality, diversity and inclusion implications.

Conclusion

12. Performance Reviews and Major Project Reviews are an important part of the framework by which this Committee can scrutinise the effectiveness of the Authority’s work. The reviews proposed for 2026/27 would provide valuable information to inform the development of future work programmes.

Kate Clark
Performance Management Officer

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Performance Reviews

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 in the following format:

Issue	**Action**	**When**	**Who**
(Short description e.g. 'Website')	(Can be more than one action per issue)	Date the action should be completed	The roles responsible (not names)

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).