

National Park Authority Board Meeting

Agenda Item 10

Annual Report by Audit & Risk Committee to the Board of Activity in 2018/19



Paper for noting

1. Purpose

- 1.1 The Audit & Risk Committee is required to report annually to the full Board on its activities, and on the reports presented to the Committee by the Authority's internal and external auditors.
- 1.2 This Annual Report is presented by the Chair, Ronnie Erskine, on behalf of the Audit & Risk Committee to cover the period of its operations in relation to the financial year 2018/19, including the Audit & Risk Committee meeting held on 27 June 2019. This includes the completion of the 2018/19 year-end audit and signing of the annual accounts.

2. Recommendation

- 2.1 Members are asked to note the contents of this report.

3. Contribution to National Park Partnership Plan and Our 5-year Plan

- 3.1 The role of the Audit & Risk Committee supports the management of risk to delivery of the National Park Partnership Plan 2018-23 and Our 5-year Plan 2018-2023 and ensures that good governance is in place to allow for the continuous improvement in our systems and processes evidencing best value.

4. Background

- 4.1 In accordance with the Scottish Government Audit and Assurance Committee Handbook ("the Handbook") the Audit & Risk Committee is required to provide the Board and Accountable Officer with a written annual report, timed to support the finalisation of the accounts and the governance statement, summarising its conclusions from the work it has done during the year.
- 4.2 The draft annual report was presented at the March 2019 Audit & Risk Committee and the final report presented at the September 2019 Audit & Risk Committee, following final reports by the Authority's internal and external auditors.

5. Consideration

5.1 **Overview**

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- 5.1.1 The period of this Annual Report covers consideration of final accounts for 2018/19, together with associated reports from Grant Thornton LLP, the Authority's external auditors for the period.
- 5.1.2 The Committee has continued to have oversight of the work of the Authority's internal auditors and consider reports issued by them.
- 5.1.3 The Committee met four times over the period covered by this report.
- 5.1.4 In addition to management reports from the Authority's Internal and External Auditors, the Committee considered the following issues during the course of the year:
- 5.1.5 **Corporate Risk management** – the Audit & Risk Committee provides scrutiny and oversight by monitoring and reviewing risk and providing robust assurance in these areas to the Board. The 2018/19 Corporate Risk Register was approved by the Board in June 2018 and progress in managing risk was reported quarterly to the Committee for review and assurance purposes. The Committee also reviewed and approved the Fraud Risk Register in March 2019.
- 5.1.6 **Governance Statement** – reviewed and approved the Governance Statement for 2018/19 prior to its inclusion in the annual accounts and prior to signature by the Accountable Officer.
- 5.1.7 **Updates on progress in implementing previous audit recommendations** – officers have presented regular progress updates on the implementation of audit recommendations.

These officer reports have been highlighted by internal auditors as establishing good practice. The internal auditors will also undertake formal follow-up reviews of action taken on previous recommendations. Closure of outstanding actions remains a key priority.
- 5.1.8 **Policy updates** – the Committee has reviewed progress on the policy schedule quarterly.
- 5.1.9 **Consideration and agreement of forward internal audit activity plans** – a forward plan of internal audit activity for 2019/20 was approved by the Committee in March 2019.

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- 5.1.10 **Terms of Reference** – the Audit & Risk Committee Terms of Reference were revised to align them more closely with the recently revised (March 2018) model Terms of Reference within the Scottish Government Audit and Assurance Committee Handbook, and the Terms of Reference were approved by the Committee in March 2019.
- 5.1.11 **Assurance Framework** – in accordance with the requirements of the Scottish Government Audit and Assurance Committee Handbook an approach to the assurance framework was presented to the Committee for review and approved in March 2019, which included the first stage assurance map template. The Committee also approved the timetable for the stage 1 and 2 assurance map in 2019. The stage 1 map was presented in September 2019 and the Audit & Risk Committee decided not to pursue stage 2 of the assurance framework this year.
- 5.1.12 **Board Member Training** – the Committee monitored progress of Board Member training on a quarterly basis and 12 Board Members, including 6 Audit & Risk Committee Members attended training in March 2019 on “The Effective Audit & Risk Committee”. The Competency Framework within the Audit and Assurance Committee Handbook were reviewed to identify any training needs for Committee members.
- 5.1.13 **Best Value** – the Committee approved the Best Value Annual Report, which demonstrates compliance with the Best Value Guidance for Accountable Officers and the Best Value Policy.

5.2 Internal Audit

- 5.2.1 The Committee reviewed and agreed an annual internal audit work programme to be completed by the internal auditor.
- 5.2.2 Over the course of the period of this report, West Dunbartonshire Council have presented five management reports to the Committee. Their findings and consequent recommendations for action are graded according to the internal auditors’ assessment of the significance of the underlying weakness to the effective management of the organisation. Table One (below) presents a summary of the internal audit findings over the period of this report.

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Table One: Summary of Internal Audit Findings

Internal Audit	Number of recommendations		
	High	Medium	Low
Ranger Deployment	-	1	1
Access	-	-	4
Greenspace	-	1	1
Performance Indicators	-	-	1
Procurement	-	6	1
Total	-	8	8

Key – West Dunbartonshire Council definition of categorisation of recommendations:

High: “material observation requiring immediate action”.

Medium: “significant observation requiring reasonably urgent action”.

Low: “minor observation requiring action to improve the efficiency, effectiveness and economy of operations or which otherwise require to be brought to the attention of senior management”.

- 5.2.3 The Committee welcomes the fact that no high recommendations have been raised by internal audit and that medium and low recommendations have been identified to assist in on-going improvement of our processes and controls. The medium recommendations were all closed during 2018/19.
- 5.2.4 According to the priority definitions, only high priority recommendations need be brought to the attention of the Audit & Risk Committee. In practice, and in line with the Authority’s values of transparency, the Committee is aware of all recommendations made by the internal auditors, through consideration of full management reports following each audit review.
- 5.2.5 The Committee welcomes the value added by the number of audit days provided by West Dunbartonshire Council which is highlighting recommendations for improvement in systems and controls. This assists the Authority with the Best Value and continuous improvement agenda.
- 5.2.6 The Committee has agreed management responses to all recommendations made and continues to monitor progress made. The internal auditors have also conducted follow-up reports and report back to the Committee on their findings.

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5.2.7 All scheduled internal audit work during the period was completed in a timely manner and feedback received complimented the organisation on the level of cooperation and efficiency of the organisation in responding to data requests.

5.2.8 The Committee has considered the Internal Auditors' Annual Report for 2018/19. The internal auditor's annual report for each year concludes that: "very effective arrangements are in place in relation to the systems of governance, risk management and internal control." This is the highest rating possible.

5.2.9 The period covered by this report represents the third year of delivery of internal audit services by West Dunbartonshire Council. The Audit & Risk Committee approved the extension of the services of West Dunbartonshire Council for a further year to 31 March 2020.

5.3 External Audit

5.3.1 The Authority's accounts for 2018/19 received a clear, unqualified external auditor's report and opinion from Grant Thornton LLP, our external auditors.

5.3.2 The accounts and external auditor's report for 2018/19 were reviewed. The accounts were approved for signing, pending the revaluation of the pension liability.

The pension liability was revalued by our actuaries following court rulings regarding transitional protections for other public sector pension schemes that are likely to impact Local Government Pension Schemes. The approval was granted at the Audit & Risk Committee on 27th June 2019, with the accounts being signed in August 2019, within the statutory timescales.

5.3.3 The Annual Report and Accounts were submitted to Audit Scotland and Scottish Government in August 2019.

5.3.4 The Audit and Risk Committee has considered Grant Thornton LLP's External Audit Plan and Annual Report on the 2018/19 audit. The report highlights the following actions:

- Engage with Strathclyde Pension Fund and actuaries to maintain an accurate understanding of pension liabilities.
- Consider the schedule of meetings to allow the Audit & Risk Committee to review financial statements for approval at the Board.

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- Review medium term financial projections and consider these with the Board when shaping financial strategy (ongoing action from 2017/18).

5.3.5 This was the third year of a five year appointment for the external auditors Grant Thornton LLP.

6. Conclusion

- 6.1 The Audit & Risk Committee considers that it has been successful in progressing the Board's governance and internal control priorities during the period covered by this annual report. This includes a review of and revisions to the Committee Terms of Reference to ensure that they represented good practice and were aligned more closely with the Scottish Government Audit and Assurance Committee Handbook.
- 6.2 The Committee welcomed the success in finalising the annual accounts and completing the external audit process this year. The Committee recognised that the process had been very effective and would like to take this opportunity to register its thanks to both the Authority Finance team and the Grant Thornton team led by John Boyd. The Committee encouraged early identification and agreement on changes that might affect future accounts.
- 6.3 There has been positive engagement through the period with issues identified by the Authority's internal and external auditors, and also by the Authority's officers. The Committee has received full reports on issues raised; considered recommendations made; and approved responses and actions.
- 6.4 The internal auditors' findings of very effective arrangements in relation to governance, risk management and internal control and that the assurance framework reflects the Authority's key objectives; and the external auditors' unqualified audit certificate, provide assurance to the Committee and Board that the Authority's internal control and governance objectives are being met effectively by Management.
- 6.5 It is reassuring to see that there are no high priority recommendations and that the number of audit days allocated to reviews continues to identify a number and range of improvements to be made. While it is accepted that there will always be improvements that can be made to services and controls, and as such a number of recommendations for improvement from internal audit will be expected, the Committee welcomed the evidence of generally effective control systems evidenced by the reports.

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- 6.6 The Committee will continue to address key, basic issues of internal control and the development of appropriate processes within the Authority.

- 6.7 The work of the Audit & Risk Committee was supplemented by the Delivery Group during 2018/19 who reported directly to the Board on the delivery of high priority projects. The Audit & Risk Committee's remit of considering accuracy of accounting treatments and strength of internal control systems; implementation of effective risk management systems; and, more widely, effective, efficient and economic use of the Authority's resources in delivering our objectives has been achieved by thorough review of the reporting from internal and external audit, regular monitoring of actions arising from internal and external audit reports, review of the Corporate Risk Register, Fraud Risk Register and key policies, and a review of the Authority's progress against the Best Value policy.

Author: Eilidh McKerry, Finance Manager

Executive Sponsor: Gordon Watson, CEO

Board Sponsor: Ronnie Erskine, Chair Audit & Risk Committee