

Annual Report on Best Value 2020/21

Agenda Item 9

National Park Authority Audit and Risk Committee

Tuesday 7th September 2021

Paper for approval

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1. Purpose

1.1. To present the Annual Report on Best Value for 2020/21.

2. Recommendation(s)

2.1. Members are asked to review and approve this report which demonstrates compliance with the Best Value Guidance for Accountable Officers.

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

3.1. Best Value is an enabler to achieving the delivery of Our 5 Year Plan by ensuring that we maximise the value we achieve from our resources

4. Introduction

4.1. Under our Best Value policy (**see Appendix 1**), it is the role of the Audit & Risk Committee to review and approve the Annual Report on Best Value to ensure compliance and report as needed to the Board.

5. Annual Report on Best Value 2020/21

5.1. The main monitoring tool for continuous improvement is the reporting against Annual Operational Plan presented to the Board. The final progress report for 2020/21 was discussed at the June 2021 Board meeting.

5.2. The majority of the deliverables within the Annual Operational Plan were achieved, including the vast majority of those items identified as COVID-19 recovery priorities. Most of the postponed items ones we proactively decided to delay when we adjusted the 2020/21 AOP in light of the onset of the pandemic.

5.3. This represents a high level of success, especially given the challenging conditions of working through the pandemic. The Executive Team are proud of what teams throughout the organisation were able to accomplish over the year, making significant progress on the key priorities of the plan such as climate, nature, visitor management, and reopening.

5.4. The following table summarises some of the achievements in relation to each Best Value theme.

<p>Vision & Leadership</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Led COVID-19 safe recovery efforts within the National Park, including convening partner organisations responsible for visitor management through a new National Park Safe Recovery Action Group. • Engaged with and advised a range of national organisations and groups to help develop policies, guidance and support. CEO sits on the national Visitor Management Strategy Steering Group. • Positive feedback from staff on leadership shown through the pandemic, including in supporting staff’s individual work and personal circumstances. • Budget and Annual Operational Plan for 2020/21 kept under close review given COVID-19 crisis • Significant uplift in Grant-in-Aid achieved for 2021/22 based on National Park Authority’s track record on delivery and reputation with Scottish Government and other stakeholders
<p>Effective Partnerships</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Worked with and co-ordinated other public bodies, NGOs, communities, businesses and landowners and work with national bodies to work towards a safe recovery • Established the National Park Safe Recovery Action Group with our partners to co-ordinate facilities reopening, traffic management, visitor management (including enforcement) and communications to visitors and communities • Callander’s Landscape includes 15 partners from across the community, public sector, voluntary organisations, local businesses and landowners working together to deliver projects in and around Callander • Providing funding to groups and delivery bodies within the National Park through our grant schemes • Established a National Park wide litter prevention steering group

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partner working with Cairngorms National Park Authority in relation to a number of back office and procured services and systems and in sharing and learning from good practice in policy and initiatives development. • The Environment and Economy portfolio of Scottish Public Bodies has a valuable Leadership Group to support effective partnership working and share good practice within the portfolio.
Governance & Accountability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To respond to the needs of the pandemic, temporary governance arrangements put in place from April 2020 for our Board to ensure timely access to decision-making and oversight. These were reviewed in September and December 2020. • Developed a COVID-19 Risk Register • To ensure we are able to best use the skills and expertise of Board members to help develop projects, we dissolved the Delivery Group and created a new Futures Group to consider how to address difficult challenges facing the National Park • Camping Management Byelaws Three-Year report approved by Scottish Ministers • Board Standing Orders reviewed, and appointments completed for Chair / Deputy Chair positions. Two new members inducted to the Board.
Use of Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Budget fully reviewed in light of onset of COVID-19, identifying new savings as well as new risks. Additional £400k of Grant-in-Aid sought and received from Scottish Government to recognise loss of income and increased pandemic costs • Successful use of 'pop-ups' as short term tenanted arrangements on our sites. • Salary savings of £182k achieved through vacancy management • 1809 volunteer hours delivered • Continued focus on leveraging other significant levels of funding; for example Callander's Landscape, the Countryside Trust, and Regional Land Use Partnerships. • Renegotiated our mobile phone contract to better fit the circumstances of the pandemic (increased data use) while also achieving financial savings • Migration to the SWAN network increased our data bandwidth whilst also saving £11k per year
Performance Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 16 of 17 COVID-19 recovery priorities from the 2020/21 Annual Operating Plan were complete • Positive feedback received from visitors who said they would be likely to recommend camping at a campsite or permit area: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 98% at Loch Chon campsite ○ 95% at Loch Achray campsite

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 92% at permit areas • 66% of invoices paid within 10 days of receipt; 94% paid within 30 days. • 82% of complaints responded to within time limits • 98% of information requests and reviews responded to within time limits
Sustainability (cross-cutting theme)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mission Zero Route Map created and approved by Board, with targets to achieve Net Zero carbon emissions by 2030. • Became a signatory of the international Edinburgh Declaration, as part of our commitment to tackling biodiversity (nature) loss and support our ambition to show greater leadership and deliver more for restoring nature in the National Park • Climate impact RAG rating tool put in place to help inform internal budgeting process. • £23,000 in grants resulting in nearly 2000 trees planted, in 9 locations • 4% reduction in emissions, year-on-year • Increase in electric or hybrid vehicles, now covering 47% of our fleet, a 10-point increase from last year • All Board and Committee meetings held virtually in 2020/21, reducing travel-related emissions. All papers electronic only.
Equality (cross-cutting theme)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participated in the Access to Public Appointments Board shadowing pilot for people with disabilities to gain experience of public sector Boards • Recognised with a Highly Commended award from Flexworks, which recognises the efforts we have made as an employer to offer flexible working • Continue to be accredited as a Scottish Living Wage employer • Implemented new accessibility requirements for Board and Committee papers • Updated our Board Standing Orders to ensure they use inclusive and gender-neutral language • Trialled new methods of virtual community engagement due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which has benefited some age groups such as younger people.

6. Appendices

6.1. Appendix 1 – Best Value Policy.

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