

**MINUTES of MEETING of the  
AUDIT COMMITTEE of  
THE CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY**

**held at Albert Hall, Ballater  
on 1 November 2007**

**Present:**

Eric Baird	Ross Watson
Fiona Murdoch	Sue Walker

**In Attendance:**

Jane Hope  
David Cameron, Head of Corporate Services  
Lisa MacDonald, Deloitte

**Election of Committee Chair**

David Cameron indicated that as this was the first meeting of the Committee following the Board's ratification of Committee memberships, Committee members should elect their Chair for the year.

Fiona Murdoch nominated Eric Baird, seconded by Sue Walker. There being no other nominations, David declared Eric Baird as Audit Committee Chair.

**Apologies:**

Nonie Coulthard, Stephen O'Hagan (Audit Scotland), Stuart Sands (Deloitte)

**Minutes of Previous Meeting**

1. Minutes of the August meeting had not been circulated and would be considered at the next meeting of the Committee.

**Best Value Self Assessment (Paper 1)**

2. David Cameron introduced this paper, highlighting that the Authority is under an obligation to consider its achievement of Best Value in the delivery of public services and, through that, to consider how the organisation can seek to deliver a continuous process of improvement in public services.

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3. The previous Scottish Executive had developed a characterisation of Best Value as comprising 9 key components: commitment and leadership; governance; accountability; management of resources; responsiveness and consultation; review and option appraisal; sustainable development; equal opportunities; and joint working. To assist in the consideration of an organisation's position on each of those 9 characteristics, the Scottish Executive also developed a self-assessment questionnaire to help structure an organisation's position against key elements of these 9 best value characteristics.
4. The paper presented now to the Committee presented the Authority's completed Best Value self-assessment, as agreed by Management Team in October 2007. This was set out in full in Annex 1.
5. An action plan, setting out priority areas in which the Authority would seek to achieve continuing service improvements, had been developed from the self-assessment and was also set out, at Annex 2 to the paper.
6. Members welcomed the presentation of the self-assessment, indicating that the papers highlighted both that the Management Team were effectively discharging the Authority's best value responsibilities, and taking responsibility for considering ongoing improvements to the organisation's service provision. Jane Hope commented that the self-assessment highlighted that the organisation was generally well placed in its coverage of the Best Value characteristics as a result of the time invested in developing the organisation, its structures and processes.
7. The Chair invited members to make any detailed comments on the self-assessment and resulting action plan. The Chair and David Cameron highlighted that the self-assessment did not require to be comprehensive in covering all potential aspects of evidence to support the assessment conclusions. Members were particularly invited to focus comments on any key aspects of delivery or evidence which were missed from the self-assessment, or where they did not agree with the overall assessment given.
8. In discussion, members made a number of detailed comments on aspects of evidence that may have been omitted. David undertook to incorporate these into a revised, final version. Members agreed the self-assessments for each of the 9 characteristics.
9. On the action plan, members requested that explicit timescales be added to each of the actions. David agreed to include these, highlighting in response to questions that the self-assessment and action plan was intended to be valid for the next 2 to 3 years. A revised self-assessment would be undertaken at that time, while the action plan would be incorporated into the Management Team's regular review of operational delivery.
10. In discussion, members agreed that the action plan was appropriate, while also recognising that there had to be a sense of priority. The self-assessment shows that systems and services were being delivered well. In terms of resource investment, the service improvement actions may have to be revisited to ensure that the organisation was not committing scarce resources to deliver a "gold-plated" service.

11. **Members agreed the self-assessments for each of the 9 characteristics, an agreed that the Best Value action plan should be added to the standing items presented to the Audit Committee.**
12. The Chair thank officers for the work in developing the self-assessment, and also thanked Jane and David for their work in establishing the underlying organisational processes to which many of these areas related.

### **Standing Item: Strategic Risk Register and Balanced Scorecard Measures (Paper 2)**

13. Members considered the latest Strategic Risk Register, following review by Management Team in October 2007. No additional risks had been added to the register since it was last considered by the Committee at its meeting in March 2007. A number of updates to actions and status of tracking of risk had been made and these were noted in the Annex. Where a risk is no longer considered relevant, this has been shaded in grey.
14. **Members endorsed the Strategic Risk Register, with no additions or amendments suggested on this occasion.**
15. David Cameron highlighted that Annex 2 to the paper set out the latest balanced scorecard performance monitoring statistics for governance and risk management. Only the Freedom of Information (FOI) handling measure was highlighted, at “amber” as a result of a single response which had not met the 20 working day deadline for responses. David reported that this response will fall out of the monitoring figures in the next reporting cycle and this measure will revert back to green, assuming procedures continue to ensure the 20 day response target is met.
16. Members discussed the FOI process and scale of the Authority’s resources that were occasionally diverted from other core business into dealing with these requests. Members agreed this was a concern but one that it seemed the organisation had to live with given the statutory requirements of FOI.
17. In response to questions, David assured members that there were no underlying process issues in the organisation’s handling of FOI requests that may lead to delay in responses. The question was one of resources as members had suggested.
18. **The Committee noted the internal auditors’ report and recommendations, and endorsed officers’ proposed actions in response to the issues identified.**

### **AOCB**

19. No other business was raised.

### **Date of Next Meeting**

20. 14 December 2007, 9:00am, Nethy Bridge Community Centre. *(Subsequently deferred to 19 March)*