

**MINUTES of MEETING of the  
AUDIT COMMITTEE of**

**THE CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY**

**held at Albert Halls, Ballater  
on 3 September 2010**

**Present:**

Eric Baird (Chair)  
Ian Mackintosh

Sue Walker  
Lucy Grant

**In Attendance:**

Duncan Bryden, Chair, Planning Committee  
Jane Hope, Chief Executive  
David Cameron, Corporate Services Director  
Murray Ferguson, Sustainable Rural Development Director  
Alistair Hight, Finance Manager  
Lisa MacDonald, Deloitte  
Stephen O'Hagan, Audit Scotland

**Apologies:**

Fiona Murdoch

**Minutes of Previous Meetings**

1. David Cameron explained this was an additional meeting to consider the internal audit review of Planning and minutes of the meetings held on 20 August would be presented to the next scheduled meeting of the Committee.

**Internal Audit Review: Planning (Development Management) Effectiveness  
(Paper 1)**

2. Jane Hope gave some initial context to the rationale for this work. A review of planning had originally been intended for phase 2 of the strategic review of national parks, however this did not proceed. There remained a need to test the consistency of work on planning with other local authorities and to review the effectiveness of the Authority's services after several years of operations.
3. Jane noted that some of the main themes arising from the report were that the validity of applications coming to the Authority had to be reinforced through the planning protocol group which brought the Authority together with the local authority planners; and there was a need to revisit the process of making comments. These and other matters coming from the recommendations set out in the report would be valid issues for further consideration as part of the Service Improvement Plan (SIP) being developed for planning.

4. Murray Ferguson highlighted that consideration of audit issues now fitted within a process of a broad discussion with Planning Committee on 17 September on ways of working; review of Standing Orders in October, and the SIP in November.
5. Lisa MacDonald, in introducing the report itself, highlighted that 10 priority 2 level recommendations had been made. In overall summary, the conclusion was that there is an effective planning service in place, with the issues arising primarily focused on opportunities to improve efficiency.
6. In a wide ranging discussion the following key points were made:
  - a. Reference recommendation 2.1 and 2.3 regarding delegation of planning powers and committee numbers, there is a balance to be achieved in efficiencies of smaller numbers on the Committee with corporate buy-in to decisions. There was also a challenge for new members in making decisions early in their tenure. There are differing levels of potential areas of delegation: call-in; delegation to sub-committee and delegation to officers.
  - b. With regard to recommendation 2.5 – caseload management systems – there is no current focus on developing specialisms in some aspects of planning. In practice, officers may take on similar types of application where they have some prior experience. However, the Authority has a small team and it is difficult and potentially not advisable in these circumstances to seek to develop officers with specific areas of expertise.
  - c. There is a balance to be achieved in maintaining the current positive service ethos, of seeking to work with partners to achieve a mutually acceptable conclusion, to managing caseloads efficiently. Ongoing dialogue over some cases could pose significant resource implications for a small team, while also in some cases presenting determination statistics in an unfair, poor light where additional time is taken to work with applicants.
  - d. There was some feeling amongst members that it may be possible to give more prominent focus in Committee reports to the key issues of an application as regards the National Park aims. There is also potential to review the structure of reports to give a clearer structure and more standard approach to an application; and through this to provide some assistance to the Chair to help focus Committee discussion.
7. Members thanked Lisa and the Deloitte team for all the work in reviewing these systems and preparing the report.

### **Any Other Business**

8. Stephen O'Hagan reported that Audit Scotland was considering a national study on the potential to deliver good governance by electronic means. There is no detailed specification for the study at this time.

### **Date and Time of Next Meeting**

9. Next meeting to be held on 10 December 2010, Community Hall, Boat of Garten.

### **Actions Log**

**CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY  
AUDIT COMMITTEE  
MINUTES 20/08/10**

<b>Meeting</b>	<b>Summary of Actions</b>	<b>Responsible / Due by</b>	
20 Aug 10	Audit Scotland National Study – Protecting and Improving Scotland’s Environment. Feed back to Audit Scotland relevance of National Parks to work in this subject area.	S O’H	