

CAIRNGORMS NPA APPROACH TO BEST VALUE

Introduction

1. This paper sets out the Cairngorms National Park Authority's (CNPA's) consideration of the Scottish Government's "Best Value in Public Services Guidance for Accountable Officers" issued in March 2011.
2. The Authority had in place a best value self assessment dated 2008, and has been delivering against an associated action plan since that time. However, external audit review has highlighted that the review of Best Value within CNPA should be updated to consider this revised guidance. This paper therefore updates the Authority's approach to Best Value and actions this outstanding external audit recommendation.
3. The paper deals with the Authority's required response to the revised 2011 guidance by exception, detailing actions or at risk areas which management must implement or monitor respectively. The paper does not go through all the positive aspects of current practice which currently meet or exceed the Best Value requirements. By dealing with exceptions, the paper itself helps focus on continuous improvement by seeking new and better approaches to our work rather than resting on a wide range of existing positive attributes.

Outline of Best Value Requirements

4. Under the terms of the Scottish Public Finance Manual (SPFM) all public sector organisations and their Accountable Officers have a duty to "make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in performance while maintaining an appropriate balance between quality and cost; and to have regard to economy, efficiency and effectiveness". Compliance with Best Value is an auditable requirement and subject to scrutiny under section 22(1)(c) of the Public Finance and Accountability (Scotland) Act 2000.
5. Compliance with the duty of Best Value continues to require a systematic approach to self evaluation and continuous improvement. The revised guidance takes a new approach of considering delivery of Best Value across 5 generic and 2 cross-cutting themes instead of the 9 best value characteristics included in the previous guidance. This paper presents a self evaluation of CNPA across these 7 themes.
6. This paper draws out the core requirements as set out in the Scottish Government guidance of each of these 7 themes.
7. The paper identifies actions required specifically to address self-assessed gaps or weaknesses in our current provision which require improvements to be made in order to ensure that systems are continuously improving and that the Authority is striving to achieve Best Value in its operations and service delivery. The paper separately identifies "at risk" areas: projects or activities that have already been initiated independently of this review of Best Value guidance and for which successful conclusion will have a strong influence on our ability to deliver Best Value. These actions and at risk areas are identified in the paper and summarised in the Annex.

Theme 1: Vision and Leadership

8. From the guidance, “a best value organisation will have in place a clear vision and strategic direction for what it will do to contribute to the delivery of improved outcomes for Scotland’s people, making Scotland a better place to live and a more prosperous and successful country. The strategy will display a clear sense of purpose and place and be effectively communicated to all staff and stakeholders. The strategy will show a clear direction of travel and will be led by senior staff in an open and inclusive leadership approach, underpinned by clear plans and strategies (aligned to resources) which reflect a commitment to continuous improvement.
9. Our overall assessment is that the authority is strong in this area. The Authority is focused on the implementation and ongoing renewal of the National Park Partnership Plan (NPPP) and the CNPA’s own role in that as set out explicitly in agreed Corporate Plans. Explicit linkages are made between these plans and our staff structure and associated programme management responsibilities and resource allocations are also undertaken on the basis of these strategic plans. There is clear, transparent leadership on these strategic plans from Board, through Chief Executive through Management Team and Operational Management Group. Plans are set out fully in the context of delivering against National Outcomes and the Scottish Government’s National Performance Framework (NPF).
10. One gap arising from review of the guidance is around developing an explicit vision of the manner in which Best Value helps contribute to achieving effective outcomes for the organisation. While we do report on this in our Corporate Plan and Annual Reports, it is perhaps necessary to capture that better in internal leadership and communications on the manner in which the Authority delivers services.

Theme 2: Effective Partnerships

11. “A Best Value organisation will show how it, and its partnerships, are displaying effective collaborative leadership in identifying and adapting their service delivery to challenges that clients and communities face. The organisation will have a clear focus on the collaborative gain that can be achieved through collaborative working and community engagement in order to facilitate the achievement of its strategic objectives and outcomes.”
12. Again, given the overall ethos of partnership working within the Authority in development and delivery of the NPPP and in development of its services, the Authority is assessed as strong in this theme. This is reinforced by internal audit review of the Authority’s partnership working mechanisms.
13. There are no actions or areas assessed as “at risk” within this theme.

Theme 3: Governance and Accountability

14. “A Best Value organisation will be able to demonstrate structures, policies and leadership behaviours which support the application of good standards of governance and accountability in how the organisation is improving efficiency, focusing on

priorities and achieving value for money in delivering outcomes. These good standards will be reflected in clear roles, responsibilities and relationships within the organisation”.

15. The Authority does have clear governance and accountability processes in place. There are, however, a number of improvements we have identified independently of the Best Value guidance, which the guidance itself now backs up as elements of improvement toward demonstrating continuous improvement within the theme of governance and accountability.
16. In discussions with Board, we have identified the need to review arrangements dealing with governance and clarity of accountability where the Authority moves into more and increasingly complex long term delivery arrangements with third party organisations such as Cairngorms Outdoor Access Trust (COAT) or through new bodies such as the potential Cairngorms Common Good Fund.
17. We are also seeking to place greater emphasis within the staff group on implementing standardised project appraisal and project management arrangements, supported by learning from improved post-implementation project review systems. This is complemented by plans to revise the involvement of Board Committee’s through refocusing a Finance and Delivery Committee on the earlier stages of Operational Plan and project design and project options in order that Board advice can be taken at a much earlier and “open” stage of project design where there is more opportunity for governance arrangements to help ensure influence of activities at the correct stage.
18. One aspect of governance and accountability noted as at risk at this point in time concerns the CNPA complaints system, which is currently under review to consider changes required to meet new guidelines on best practice issued by the Ombudsman.

Theme 4: Use of Resources

19. “A Best Value organisation will show that it is conscious of being publicly funded in everything it does. The organisation will be able to show effective management of all resources (including staff, assets, information and communications technology (ICT) procurement and knowledge) is contributing to delivery of specific outcomes.”
20. There are three at risk areas with regard to use of resources relating to key organisational development projects already initiated, the success of which will impact of assessed delivery of Best Value:
 - a. Development of internal guidance and regulation around state aid implications of funding;
 - b. Development of systems supporting improved information governance: including the Authority’s revised records management action plan and filing structures and classification systems.
 - c. Wider development of the Authority’s ICT Strategy within the overall Organisational Development Strategy.
21. Beyond these three at risk areas, the Authority’s overall internal control systems as extensively audited by internal and external auditors are generally confirmed as robust and in need of very few improvement actions. There are therefore no new specific

actions identified in pursuance of Best Value in the Use of Resources and this theme is also self-assessed as strong, while in need of ongoing renewal as recognised in the range of ongoing projects.

Theme 5: Performance Management

22. “The Performance Management theme focuses on how a Best Value organisation embeds a culture and supporting processes which ensures that it has a clear and accurate understanding of how all parts of the organisation are performing and that, based on this knowledge, it takes action that leads to demonstrable continuous improvement and performance outcomes”.
23. A relatively new area of the Authority’s systems to be monitored as an “risk” item to ensure it meets the Authority’s and partners’ needs in delivering best value is around the ongoing development and implementation of performance management frameworks for both the NPPP and Corporate Plan performance. These systems have been newly developed to fit with the current NPPP and Corporate Plan and are in their first year of evolution. They also have been impacted on by loss of key staff.
24. Beyond this risk, there are no issues to raise in the self assessment with the various evidence criteria set out in the guidance all in evidence within the Authority. These systems and Best Value theme are therefore again assessed to be strong within the CNPA.

Cross-Cutting Theme: Sustainability

25. “The goal of Sustainable Development is to enable all people throughout the world to satisfy their basic needs and enjoy a better quality of life without compromising the basic quality of life of future generations. Sustainability is integral to an overall Best Value approach and an obligation to act in a way which it considers is most sustainable is one of the three public bodies duties set out in section 44 of the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009.”
26. The Authority has for some years used statutory and internal processes to test the sustainability of its policy proposals and actions, while also implementing a clear target to measure impact of areas of its own organisational sustainability policies.
27. Nevertheless, this is a high profile area both as a Best Value theme and also in terms of the corporate objectives of the Authority. The internal audit plan for 2013/14 includes a proposed review of the Authority’s sustainability actions and policies and the results of this independent audit will be used to inform future revisions of the Best Value action plan should any specific actions or improvements be identified.

Cross-Cutting Theme: Equality

28. “A Best Value organisation will demonstrate that consideration of equality issues is embedded in its vision and strategic direction and through all of its work”.

29. The Authority has undertaken a great deal of work on equalities issues and on embedding equalities considerations as a core aspect of evaluation of all proposed plans and key actions. The Authority has agreed an Equalities Action Plan at Board level to further improve our performance in this area.
30. The delivery of the agreed Equalities Action Plan itself will progress the organisation as a Best Value organisation and this work therefore overlaps to complement the work on Best Value self assessment. The ongoing delivery of the equalities plan under the leadership of the Head of Organisational Development and coordination of the internal Park for All Group remains a risk area in terms of the Best Value self assessment for ongoing monitoring by the Management Team.

David Cameron
2 September 2013

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Best Value Action and Risk Schedule, as at August 2014

Best Value Theme	Action / Risk Area	Commentary
Vision and Leadership	Action: Develop vision of how Best Value contributes to achievement of effective organisational outcomes.	Corporate Services Director and Head of Organisational Development to consider inclusion of this within wider Organisational Development Strategy and associated internal communications.
		2014 update: OD Strategy now adopted following consultation and incorporates a range of targeted ongoing improvements in vision and leadership and supporting mechanisms across the organisation. This action therefore complete in terms of Best Value initiation and monitoring of improvement will be through the monitoring and evaluation of OD improvements.
Governance and Accountability	Action: Consider governance and accountability issues for Board and organisation arising from increasing ongoing, long term delivery partnerships through third party organisations.	Corporate Services Director to lead on facilitated discussion with Board, following which there should be an explicit written framework which sets out relative roles and responsibilities, objectives and outcomes and processes for reporting and risk management for ongoing, long term delivery through third party organisations.
		2014 update: Board facilitated discussion held in March 2014 supported by Harper MacLeod LLP. This action complete. Action to produce a written framework outstanding. Potential to pick this up to follow further Board session on role of Board / "On Board" guidance and training; may also be dealt with through 2015 onward Corporate Plan development in setting out the role of Board / vision and mission of CNPA and through OD Strategy delivery.
Governance and Accountability	Action: Improve project option appraisal and design arrangements to strengthen processes around consideration of project selection at an early stage, and also strengthen post project implementation review.	Corporate Services Director leading on greater emphasis on project design and option appraisal, and on improved project implementation review, through wider implementation of standard project management arrangements and reorientation of Board Finance and Delivery Committee to consider project design at an earlier stage and have less involvement in operational budget management. More staff resource

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		being added into this area.
		2014 update: Focus of Finance and Delivery Committee of Board now reoriented to these areas of project selection at earlier stage and internally working with Heads of Service to support this. Some bedding in of change still required with better routing of project proposals to the Committee still to be achieved. These changes hampered to a degree by 2014/15 being a rather “interim” year completing current Corporate Plan projects while new Corporate Plan is in development.
Governance and Accountability	Risk: Complaints system is undergoing review to comply with new guidelines from Ombudsman in 2013/14 and must be implemented as an effective, fit for purpose system.	Model complaints handling procedure issued by the Ombudsman and being reviewed by Corporate Services staff in association with NDPB partners to draw up revised CNPA systems.
		2014 update: New complaints procedure drawn up and in place. Some early adoption / teething problems still to be ironed out. Work substantially complete.
Use of Resources	Risk: Evolving and increasingly high profile state aid regulations must be understood and appropriate guidance and internal processes adopted accordingly.	Corporate Services Director liaising with lawyers in development of State Aid checklists and processes and developing a central knowledge base around this subject.
		2014 Update: service improvement complete. With advice from Harper MacLeod, a standard state aid risk assessment tool has been drawn up and used to support early evaluation of a number of projects. State Aid advice being led by Corporate Services Director as a single point of coordination and knowledge building.
Use of Resources	Risk: Information management systems and filing classification systems and procedures must be revised and updated to support increasingly complex operational procedures and to meet changing legislative requirements.	Projects are underway in development of the Authority’s filing classification system and are soon to be more fully resourced to take forward implementation. Model records management plan has been issued by the Keeper of Scotland’s Records and will be reviewed in determining appropriate systems for CNPA.
		2014 Update: revised filing structure has been agreed. Work ongoing to establish and implement migration plan and supporting document

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		management and information security policies.
Use of Resources	Risk: ICT investment and associated development must follow a clear ICT Strategy which itself is linked into and complementary to a wider Organisational Development Strategy.	Corporate Services Director coordinating overall approach to Organisational Development Strategy along with Head of Organisational Development, which will set out the ICT Strategic Direction.
		2014 Update: OD Strategy now completed with implementation progressing. ICT strategy in development, informed by various OD workstreams, to ensure ICT investment is fully complementary to wider organisational change.
Performance Management	Risk: Corporate Performance systems remain relatively new and also impacted on by the loss of the Finance and Performance Manager and subsequent structure change.	The Corporate Services Director with Management Team will be responsible for ensuring that Corporate Performance systems for both NPPP and Corporate Plan delivery continue to be embedded into the Authority's work programmes and reporting.
		2014 Update: We continue to provide corporate performance information through our balanced scorecard indicators and more widely through monitoring progress in collective delivery of NPPP. However, developing key performance indicators to support monitoring and evaluation of the current 2012 to 2015 Corporate Plan has not progressed as fully as originally intended. This work needs to be revisited for the forthcoming 2015 onward Corporate Plan.
Sustainability	Risk: No specific risks identified at this point	The internal audit review of the CNPA processes and procedures to deliver sustainability proposed within the 2013/14 internal audit plan will assist management in determining whether any risks or actions need be incorporated in future revisions of this Best Value Action and Risk Schedule.
		2014 Update: internal audit has highlighted some enhancements that could be made to the Authority's internal sustainability / carbon management and monitoring systems and these will be progressed by staff during 2014/15.

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Equalities	Risk: delivery of ongoing improvement and a best value culture in the area of equalities is dependent on delivery of the existing Equalities Action Plan.	Head of Organisational Development is leading on overseeing delivery of the equalities action plan and Corporate Services Director will liaise with Head of Organisational Development with regard to its impact on Best Value improvements.
		2014 Update: Ongoing work progressing equalities action plan evidenced in annual review. Equalities impact assessments becoming embedded as elements of project design: e.g. LEADER Local Development Strategy and Local Development Plan design processes undertaken in the year have both included full Equalities Impact Assessments.

David Cameron
22 August 2014