



Draft minutes of the Audit and Risk Committee meeting

Held at Cairngorms National Park Authority office, Grantown-on-Spey

Hybrid

13 March 2026 at 2.00pm

Present

Fiona McLean (Chair)

Duncan Miller

Ian McLaren (Vice Chair)

Paul Gibb

Virtual

Tom Reid, Forvis Mazars LLP

Caleb Oguche, Forvis Mazars LLP

Gregor Chalmers, Forvis Mazars LLP

Peter Clark, wbg

David Cameron, Director of Corporate Services and Deputy CEO

Alix Harkness, Clerk to the Board

In attendance

Grant Moir, Chief Executive Officer

Apologies

Geva Blackett

Bill Lobban

Louise Allen, Head of Finance and Corporate Operations

Welcome and apologies

1. Fiona McLean, Chair of the Audit and Risk Committee, welcomed everyone to the meeting. Apologies were noted.



Approval of minutes of previous meetings

2. The draft minutes of the previous Audit and Risk Committee meeting held on 14 November 2025 were approved with no amendments

Matters arising not covered elsewhere

3. David Cameron, Deputy CEO and Director of Corporate Services provided an update on the one outstanding action on financial scenario planning:
 - a) Completed as a result of pulling together the budget development proposal which was brought to the Board at the Board Business session in January 2026 then brought to the Resources Committee meeting in February 2026 and then will be brought to the full Board for ratification at the end of March.
 - b) He proposed this item be closed off as complete.

Ref	Action Detail	Who	When	Status
27/09/24	At para 20i <ol style="list-style-type: none">i. Update on internal audit view on financial scenario planning to be provided to the Audit and Risk Committee	David and Stephanie	At the end of the 24/25 financial year.	Ongoing Management to report back to Committee to give assurance

Update: Grant and David have been working on it over the summer; more work to be done before can be brought to the Committee.

4. The Chair sought clarity with reference to the internal audit plan follow up review which stated that the scenario planning would be completed by March 2027. Deputy CEO and Director of Corporate Services confirmed that management believes they have completed the required work on budget scenario planning. He explained that:
 - a) The current approach to budgets and scenario planning is considered appropriate and complete.
 - b) Scenario planning aligns with the four year corporate plan and wider Board policy discussions.



- c) He gave an example of scenario planning regarding vacancy savings that was updated after Board feedback, with reduced vacancy savings now reflected in the March budget.
 - d) He provided the reassurance that should any additional scenario planning elements need to be drawn out separately, management would do so.
5. The Chair thanked the Deputy CEO and Director of Corporate Services for the explanation and the Committee agreed to close off the action.
6. There were no other matters arising not covered elsewhere.

Declarations of interest

7. There were no declarations of interest.

Annual audit plan 2025/2026 (Paper 1)

8. Tom Reid, Forvis Mazars LLP presented the external auditor's plan for the forthcoming audit of the 2025/26 annual report and accounts. He added that they are running an event on 24 March in their Glasgow office for all their audited bodies, risk and resilience forum to include workshops on financial reporting, cyber resilience and business transformation. He extended the invite to any members of the committee.
9. Deputy CEO and Director of Corporate Services highlighted a risk relating to pension benefits disclosures in the accounts:
- a) Capita has taken over administration of the civil service pension scheme from the previous provider (MyCSP).
 - b) Capita was currently dealing with significant backlogs and data-transfer issues, affecting day-to-day pension administration.
 - c) These issues create a material risk that Capita may not be able to provide the Authority with required pension information within necessary timelines.
 - d) The team has tried to engage early with Capita, and Tom will raise the matter within Audit Scotland's wider networks.
 - e) The situation is outside the Authority's control, but the Committee needs to be aware of the risk.
10. The Audit and Risk Committee discussed the report and made the following comments and observations:



- a) Chair noted that the executive summary was very useful.
- b) The Chair noted that the new finance system had significant implications on the increase of fees. Tom Reid explained that the fee in the paper was indicative, pending approval by Audit Scotland.

11. The Committee agreed to the recommendations in the paper.

12. Action Points Arising: None.

Internal audit plan 2025/26: Governance (Paper 2)

- 13. Peter Clark, wbg presented the internal auditor's review of the Park Authority's governance arrangements that was conducted as part of the agreed plan of work for 2025/26.
- 14. Deputy CEO and Director of Corporate Services reported that it had been a valuable audit, he had liaised separately with the Board Convener who was content. Arrangements are in hand to implement the recommendations with a review of the Terms of Reference scheduled to take place in November.
- 15. The Audit and Risk Committee discussed the report and made the following comments and observations:
 - a) Chair commented that she liked the approach taken with the layout and explanation in the paper, and the observations. She thanked Peter for the report.
 - b) Member asked about the standardisation of meetings per year? CEO advised that the the Terms Of Reference will be amended as an addendum to the Standing Order's of the Board to say that the Committees will meet at least four times annually.
 - c) Member asked what would happen if we were to drop below four meetings per year? CEO advised as accountable officer he would have to write to our sponsor team at Scottish Government and explain why.
 - d) A member asked if the third observation in the report was referring to the current Committee Chairs departure? CEO confirmed this was the case, he reported that there had been 27 applications for that post received, interviews would take place shortly and that there should be some cross over in appointment. He added that background knowledge in audit and risk was focal point of that exercise.



- e) The Chair suggested refresher audit and risk committee training for new board members. Deputy CEO agreed and advised that would take place post direct elections.
- f) A member noted that in the executive summary it stated only 10 of the 19 members responded to the survey which was disappointing and suggested that members collectively agree to encourage peers to complete it. This was agreed.

16. The Audit and Risk Committee agreed to the recommendations:

- a) Consider the internal auditors report and findings
- b) Endorse the management responses to recommendations for future action and improvements

17. Action Point Arising:

- i. Audit and Risk Committee refresher training for Board members to be organised to take place after the local elections in March 2027.

Internal audit plan 2025/26: New finance system (Paper 3)

18. Peter Clark, wbg presented the internal auditor's review of the implementation of the Park Authority's new finance system that was conducted as part of the agreed plan of work for 2025/26.

19. Deputy CEO and Director of Corporate Services made the following points:

- a) He expressed great satisfaction with the successful implementation of the new finance system, noting it is a major undertaking for any organisation.
- b) Internal audit findings confirm the organisation's own experience that the system went live smoothly and without disruption to operations.
- c) The new system was already enabling greater digitisation, simplification, and internal efficiencies.
- d) He welcomed the independent assurance from internal audit that validates management's positive assessment.
- e) The team has already implemented the recommended action, and although it would be reviewed as part of follow-up audit work, a fix was in place and is operational now.



20. The Audit and Risk Committee discussed the report and made the following comments and observations:
- a) A member asked if a specific policy to prevent delegated authority being assigned to someone who was resigning, retiring, or potentially subject to disciplinary action was needed? For example, should we record a rule preventing delegation to someone on notice or garden leave? Deputy CEO and Director of Corporate Services advised:
 - i. Anyone still employed retains their delegated rights until their final day; once they leave, authority automatically escalates to the next level.
 - ii. If someone is under investigation and placed on garden leave, management can temporarily suspend their approval rights in the system.
 - iii. The system allows delegation changes to be made quickly, including for long-term sickness or similar situations.
 - iv. The new system provides stronger controls than the old paper-based arrangements
 - b) Member asked given what happened in a previous audit, do we now need to have this process (e.g., suspension of delegated authority for staff on leave or under investigation) documented in our financial procedures? Deputy CEO confirmed that financial procedures must be written down and accurately reflect practise. He advised this was already an outstanding recommendation in the follow up report. Peter Clark added that internal audit will not only check that the procedure is documented but also that it is operationally effective, including stress-testing it.
 - c) The Chair in reference to the second observation on the list, asked if the staff expenses function would be implemented in the new financial year? Deputy CEO and Director of Corporate Services confirmed that it would not be ready to implement in the new financial year. He added that the delay was due to priorities, resources and capacity and that team does not yet have that element ready for rollout.
21. The Audit and Risk Committee agreed to the recommendations:
- a) Consider the internal auditors report and findings



- b) Endorse the management responses to recommendations for future action and improvements

22. Action Point Arising: None.

Internal audit plan: Project initiation (Paper 4)

- 23. Peter Clark, wbg presented the internal auditor's review of the implementation of the Park Authority's project initiation procedures that was conducted as part of the agreed plan of work for 2025/26.
- 24. Deputy CEO and Director of Corporate Services provided an overview and made the following points:
 - a) The audit report and process were considered very helpful for assessing the new project initiation system.
 - b) The system was introduced to address strategic risks arising from the expanding range and complexity of the Authority's activities.
 - c) Its purpose is to ensure early involvement of the right expertise in project development, reducing late-stage issues.
 - d) The audit recommendations provided useful guidance for further development and embedding of the system.
 - e) The system remains new and is not yet fully embedded across the organisation.
 - f) A follow-up audit is planned in around 12 months to assess embedding and effectiveness.
 - g) Middle managers would review the system, recommendations, and improvements in line with management response timelines.
 - h) He highlighted uncertainty around setting a project approval timeframe until there was clearer definition of what qualifies as a "project."
 - i) He acknowledged the suggestion of considering an approval timetable as helpful for future refinement.
- 25. The Chair welcomed the helpfulness of the audit process and agreed it would be valuable to undertake a follow up review once the new project initiation system becomes more fully embedded. Deputy CEO and Director of Corporate Services confirmed that this aligns with management thinking and suggested a follow up audit not in the coming financial year but the following year to ensure enough time had passed for meaningful testing of embedded controls. This was agreed by the Committee.



26. The Audit and Risk Committee agreed to the recommendations:
27. Action Point Arising:
 - i. Follow up audit on project initiation to be carried out in 2027/2028.

Internal audit plan 2025/26: Follow up review (Paper 5)

28. Peter Clark, wbg presented the internal auditor's review of the implementation of recommendations made in previous internal audit reviews that was conducted as part of the agreed plan of work for 2025/26.
29. Deputy CEO and Director of Corporate Services advised there were a number of outstanding recommendations there which reflected the ongoing prioritisation of work within available staff capacity on the finance system, grants administration and project initiation. He added that most of the work was in progress. He explained that work has begun on the business continuity plan, through the advisory audit on IT and back up arrangements which have moved to cloud based services.
30. The Audit and Risk Committee discussed the report and made the following comments and observations:
 - a) A member commented that given the volume of documentation and administrative work, and noting that many actions fall to the Head of Finance, who already has a heavy workload, was there any short-term need for additional administrative support to help her complete this work? Deputy CEO and Director of Corporate Services confirmed that there was pressure on corporate services in balancing operational delivery with administrative process work. Some support has already been added through the recruitment of the financial accountant, who has been documenting financial procedures as part of her role. He went on to explain that wider staffing constraints imposed by the Scottish Government limit the ability to bring in further resources.
 - b) Member asked what KPIs are used for procurement, and what do they typically measure? Deputy CEO and Director of Corporate Services explained that Procurement KPI's focus on whether procurements attract bids and result in awarded contracts, are delivered within agreed budgets and timelines, and meet expected quality outcomes. They may also include monitoring where



contract spend is geographically located, including within the National Park, provided this remains compliant with procurement regulations.

31. The Audit and Risk Committee agreed to the recommendations:
 - a) Consider the internal auditors report and findings
 - b) Endorse the management responses to recommendations for future action and improvements

32. Action Point Arising: None.

Internal audit plan 2025/26: Grants administration and management (Paper 6)

33. Peter Clark, wbg presented the internal auditor's review of the implementation of the Park Authority's grants administration and management that was conducted as part of the agreed plan of work for 2025/26.
34. Deputy CEO and Director of Corporate Services made the following points:
 - a) Community Grants Manager who led the work with the audit team, found the process extremely helpful and described it as the best audit process she has experienced, particularly notable given how often her grant administration work is audited.
 - b) This is the second year of operating the joined-up grant funding system introduced last year.
 - c) The system aims to provide a better service for applicants, allowing them to submit one expression of interest while staff identify the most suitable fund.
 - d) This approach removes the need for applicants to navigate multiple funds themselves.
 - e) Early indications show the new system is welcomed by applicants.
 - f) Internal audit found strong initial controls within the system.
 - g) The audit also provided useful insights and recommendations for further improvement.
 - h) Overall, the process and findings were positive.
35. The Audit and Risk Committee discussed the report and made the following comments and observations:



- a) A member commented that the climate adaptation fund appeared more accessible to the public. Deputy CEO and Director of Corporate Services agreed and said some applicants who could not be funded from their original chosen fund have been seamlessly redirected by staff to other available funds, including through the Cairngorms Trust, without needing to reapply. This has resulted in a more streamlined and improved service for applicants.
- b) A member asked when the new community fund panel is set up, would the Grants team support applicants in the same way as with other grants for example assessing applications, informing applicants, coaching them, and reviewing project outcomes? And would this work be ring-fenced so it can be viewed separately from other Park Authority grant activity? Deputy CEO and Director of Corporate Services advised that the final process for community grants was still being developed by the co-design panel, but the Park Authority would remain the accountable body and ensure appropriate checks are in place. If the Grants team supports the process, it will follow the same separation of support and decision-making used in other grant schemes.
- c) A member sought clarity on how will it be ensured that the community panel cannot progress projects that conflict with Board expectations or the accountable officer's responsibilities? Deputy CEO and Director of Corporate Services advised that Officers would still provide oversight to ensure proposals are appropriate, and the accountable officer retains the final authority to refuse funding that doesn't meet requirements. This provides a clear safeguard even if the community panel recommends a project.

36. The Audit and Risk Committee agreed to the recommendations:

- a) Consider the internal auditors report and findings
- b) Endorse the management responses to recommendations for future action and improvements

37. Action Point Arising: None.

Internal audit progress report (Paper 7)

38. Peter Clark, wbg presented the internal auditor's progress report.

39. The Audit and Risk Committee agreed to the recommendations:



- a) Consider the internal auditors report and findings
- b) Endorse the management responses to recommendations for future action and improvements

40. Action Point Arising: None.

Internal audit plan 2025/26 (Paper 8)

- 41. David Cameron, Deputy CEO and Director of Corporate Services presented the paper which informs the Committee of arrangements made for internal audit services for the coming two financial years. He reported that the relationship with wbg had developed positively and their audit reports have been well received by the Committee.
- 42. The Audit and Risk Committee expressed their appreciation for wbg's work and welcomed the continuation of the relationship.

43. Action Point Arising: None.

Internal audit plan 2026/27 and Strategic Risk Registers (Paper 9)

- 44. David Cameron, Deputy CEO and Director of Corporate Services presented the report on a proposed internal audit plan for 2026/27 prepared by the internal auditor, wbg.
- 45. The Audit and Risk Committee discussed the report and made the following comments and observations:
 - a) Chair welcomed the improved spread of audit papers planned for the Committee's meetings noting it would benefit both staff and the committee. She expressed contentment with the proposed plan and particularly pleased to see cybersecurity included as a priority area.
 - b) Deputy CEO and Director of Corporate Services highlighted that the upcoming complaints audit would assess the robustness of both the organisation's standard complaints handling processes and its approach to managing more complex, high-level governance complaints. He went on to explain that the audit would ensure such complaints were handled appropriately while also considering value-for-money implications in how public funds are used when responding to them.
 - c) A member asked if there was a risk register for individual projects within the Cairngorms 2030 programme and would these be included in the audit?



Deputy CEO and Director of Corporate Services advised that there is a programme-wide Cairngorms 2030 risk register covering all projects, with individual project risk registers created only where necessary (e.g., higher-risk projects such as the community grants project). This avoids unnecessary work on low-risk projects, and these registers are audited as part of the programme.

46. The Audit and Risk Committee considered the report and assessed the plan for 2026/27 within the context of the strategic risk registers currently live on the strategic risk registers (main register and Cairngorms 2030 programme register) and considered whether the focus of work meets the Park Authority's need for assurance.
47. Action Points Arising: None.

AOCB

48. There were no items of business.
49. Motion to take the next items in confidential session.

Date of Next Meeting

50. The date of the next meeting is 19 June 2026 online.
51. The public part of the meeting concluded at 3.26 pm

Ref	Action Detail	Who	When	Status
13/03/26	At Para 18i Refresher Audit & Risk Committee training to be organised	David Cameron	Following directly elected elections March 2027	
13/03/26	At Para 28i) Follow up audit on project initiation to be carried out in 2027/2028.	Internal auditors	2027/ 28	