



# Draft minutes of the Performance Committee meeting

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

Online

23 March 2026 at 10.00am

## Present online

Kenny Deans (Chair)

Jackie Brierton (sub for Ann Ross)

Hannah Grist (sub for Steve Micklewright)

Sandy Bremner

Russell Jones (sub for John Kirk)

Eleanor Mackintosh

## In attendance

Grant Moir, Chief Executive Officer

David Cameron, Deputy Chief Executive Officer and Director of Corporate Services

Andy Ford, Director of Nature and Climate Change

Gavin Miles, Director of Planning and Place

Colin McClean Head of Land Management

David Clyne, Head of Cairngorms 2030

Oliver Davies, Head of Communications and Engagement

Alix Harkness, Clerk to the Board

## Apologies

John Kirk

Ann Ross

Steve Micklewright (Deputy Chair)

Michael Williamson



## Welcome and introduction

1. The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting of the Performance Committee. Apologies were noted. Special welcome to Subs: the Chair noted appreciation for their input.

## Approval of minutes of previous meetings

2. The draft minutes of the previous meeting held on 12 December 2025 were approved with no amendments.

## Matters arising not covered elsewhere

3. There were no matters arising.

<b>ACTION</b>	<b>Status</b>
<b>Action points arising from previous meetings</b>	
<b>12 December</b>	
<b>Approval of minutes</b> At para 2a i. CEO to share with the Committee who was allocated funds through the Climate Adaptation Fund including funding allocations and project types.	Complete
<b>Update:</b> <a href="#">Climate-adaptation-fund-2024.pdf</a> <a href="#">Climate-Adaptation-Fund-2025.pdf</a> Emailed to Performance Committee Members on 17 March.	
<b>Paper 4 - Cairngorms Nature Action Plan</b> At para 19f i. Consider a new term for "community benefits".	In hand

4. The Chair noticed that an action had been missed from the action table relating to 9e of the previous meeting and asked for it to be added.



## Declarations of interest

5. Eleanor Mackintosh declared for awareness that she is a member of the Cairngorms Trust Board and a member of the Cairngorms 2030 Board but that should not preclude her being able to take part in the meeting.

## Deer incentive scheme (Paper 1)

6. Colin McClean, Head of Land Management introduced the paper which presents an update on the delivery of the deer incentive scheme run by the Park Authority in the hind culling seasons of 2024/25 and 2025/26.
7. The Performance Committee discussed the paper and made the following comments and observations:
  - a) A member asked why the performance measure was rated green when only £25k of the £40k budget had been used and questioned whether this was realistic given that the scheme may not be delivering on intended outcomes? Head of Land Management advised that the rating depends on what criteria is being used; if the measure was budget utilisation, then no, it should not be rated green because the full budget has not been spent, while there is some expectation that the current figure may increase on finalisation of count. However, if the measure was successful design and implementation of an incentive scheme, including securing budget for delivery, then yes, the scheme is performing as intended because it provides a strong incentive (more than double game dealer rates). He acknowledged the point being made by the member and advised it was a judgement call. It was agreed the Key Performance Indicator (KPI) be reworded to accurately reflect the intended outcome by the Head of Land Management. [Post-meeting note: the final expenditure for 2025/26 is £35k of £40k budget.]
  - b) A member asked what a statutory control looks like and how it works? Head of Land Management explained section 8: where NatureScot will set cull targets for the estates. They will then have the option of trying to achieve those cull targets themselves. If at any point it looks like they're falling behind where they should be in terms of a timeline, then NatureScot would have the right to put in their own resource. And any cost to the public purse could potentially be paid back by estates. There's also a section 9 of the Deer Act which is all about cost recovery. So, NatureScot could impose cost recovery



and get all their costs back, which could be a considerable sum for estates. There is an appeals process, which is relatively untested. It goes through the land court. He added that all these sections of the Act have not been used before. Section 7 has been used regularly before, section 10 has been used before, but section 8 has never been used, and section 9, cost recovery has never been used. So that would all be setting legal precedence. We don't really know how it would work, but potentially it could be hard hitting on landowners.

- c) A member noted that the paper accurately reflects how effective the incentive scheme has been so far, while also being honest about its limitations. He emphasised that although good progress has been made, a wider and more ambitious approach is needed—one that aligns with the broader deer management strategy recently brought to the Board. He concluded by saying it was a good paper.
- d) A member asked how can we judge the effectiveness of the incentive scheme when deer numbers are out of date or uncertain, and estates are claiming they don't have the deer? Without reliable, up to date data, how can we challenge estates' claims or demonstrate that progress is being made? Head of Land Management agreed with the concerns raised and he explained that estates generally fall into three categories which may vary over time:
  - i. those that genuinely have had no deer present during key periods.
  - ii. those that believe they have no deer but may not have fully surveyed their ground; and
  - iii. those that deny having deer despite holding significant populations.He stated that, from a public sector perspective, it was often impossible to distinguish between these situations. This uncertainty has led to repeated helicopter counts at considerable cost, as the area has continually sought to verify deer numbers. He agreed that confirming accurate data remains a persistent challenge for the scheme.
- e) The CEO noted that meeting the 2030 deer management targets will require measures beyond the current incentive scheme. He emphasised the need for NatureScot to strengthen statutory processes and consider moving beyond long-term Section 7 arrangements, supported by the new Natural Environment Act. He added that the Authority must continue pressing NatureScot on resources and seek adequate national funding. He agreed



progress is currently insufficient and said the next Park Plan will be key to driving change.

- f) The Chair noted previous discussion with NatureScot on the viability of estates operating with very low deer numbers. The Head of Land Management confirmed evidence from DMGs showing estates can operate effectively at around 8 deer per km<sup>2</sup>, with client satisfaction and a sustainable sporting model. He advised that viability becomes more challenging below this level and that access or terrain are not key factors; the main issue is ensuring sufficient stags are available during the peak guest period in September and October.

8. The Performance Committee noted the paper and agreed to the recommendations:

- a) Discuss the paper and consider any implications for deer management and future deer incentive schemes.

9. Action Point Arising:

- i. Head of Land Management to reword the Key Performance Indicator (KPI) to accurately reflect the intended outcome.

## **Cairngorms 2030 programme update: quarter four 2025 (October – December) (Paper 2)**

10. David Clyne, Head of Cairngorms 2030 introduced the paper which presents the status of the Cairngorms 2030 (C2030) programme and risk management, based on information in project reports for the period from October to December 2025, and updated where appropriate to reflect current position as at the time of writing, and the planned work to end March 2026.

11. The Performance Committee discussed the paper and made the following comments and observations:

- a) Chair thanked the Head of Cairngorms 2030 for the paper.
- b) A member asked what happened to the Spin Project? Head of Cairngorms 2030 advised that it had been delivered in full.
- c) A member asked why the Aviemore segregated cycle path had been included in the original project brief if there was insufficient road space to accommodate it. He queried whether this was simply an isolated issue or



indicative of wider issues in how transport projects are scoped. Head of Cairngorms 2030 acknowledged the concern and explained that transport projects funded through Sustrans or Transport Scotland must follow a staged design process. Early-stage outline designs rely on map-based desk assessments rather than detailed site surveys. It is only at a later stage when full topographical surveys are carried out, that accurate measurements of available space, including impacts on private boundaries, become clear. This was accepted as a structural issue within the funding and design framework and suggested that topographical surveys should ideally occur earlier in the process.

- d) CEO added that a segregated cycle path was technically feasible along most of the route, but there were three to four sections where significant disruption would occur, requiring land take from the road or private gardens. Following community feedback and practical assessment, the conclusion was that alternative solutions would be more appropriate and less contentious. He agreed that it was frustrating that this conclusion emerged late and acknowledged that the issue could have been identified earlier. Director of Planning and Place added that the project had highlighted the need to push consultants more firmly at the early stages to be realistic about constraints. The late-stage identification of limitations could have been avoided with clearer early advice, and he provided reassurance that this would be a learning point for future transport project scoping.
- e) A member who is Chair of the Economic Steering Group asked whether this would be an appropriate point to begin examining the economic outputs associated with Cairngorms 2030 in more detail. She noted that the passing of the Community Wealth Building Bill may provide a new opportunity to align project outputs and outcomes with this policy direction. She invited Head of Cairngorms 2030 to attend their next meeting to begin setting goals and exploring how this alignment could be achieved. Head of Cairngorms 2030 welcomed the suggestion and confirmed he would be pleased to attend the next Economic Steering Group meeting. He agreed there was clear potential to strengthen the links between Cairngorms 2030 outcomes, the emerging legislative context, and the project's monitoring and evaluation requirements. He highlighted that work on the legacy planning for Cairngorms 2030 already included identifying the "golden thread" connecting project actions, new legislation, and the direction of travel beyond 2029. He confirmed he was



happy to work with the Chair of the Cairngorms Economic Steering Group and the Director of Planning and Place to contribute to this process.

- f) A member noted the positive nature of the report and asked whether, aside from the transport-related issues already discussed, there was anything within the Cairngorms 2030 programme that was causing significant concern. Head of Cairngorms 2030 advised that although the programme is complex, the governance, communication, and risk-management arrangements were working well, and nothing was causing major concern. He added that the only area of uncertainty lay within the nature recovery projects, where some elements of scope were still being clarified.
- g) A member asked what model was being used for the Glen Clova project?
- h) Director of Nature and Climate Change explained that the Glen Clova model centres on supplying venison to the hotel, enabling the recruitment of a butcher and expansion of associated hospitality. As the hotel demand grows, the estate may need to work with neighbouring estates to secure additional supply. He added that engagement from the land manager had been positive. Head of Land Management added that part of the venison also goes to Glen Kilry for the school kitchen programme, which had been operating successfully. The value of the venison provided over the contract is roughly equal to the capital costs of the facility provided. Glen Clova had been a key participant in the venison subsidy and has increased its cull levels. He stated that engagement was now constructive across several fronts.
- i) A member noted his previous difficulty getting venison onto Highland Council school menus and asked whether venison is now being supplied to schools, particularly in Badenoch and Strathspey. C2030: Nature Based Solutions Manager confirmed that following lengthy discussions, Highland Council had agreed to accept venison for school dinners in Badenoch and Strathspey. Venison was now being supplied both for cookery education and for school meals.

12. The Performance Committee noted the paper and agreed to the recommendations:
- a) Note the progress to date and future for C2030 delivery.
  - b) Note specific points of C2030 delivery risk.
  - c) Highlight any issues arising that members may feel need specific consideration by staff from a strategic and board perspective.



13. Action Point Arising:

- i. Head of Cairngorms 2030 to attend the next Economic Steering Group meeting to work with the Chair and the Director of Planning and Place to align Cairngorms 2030 economic outputs with the Community Wealth Building Bill and inform future legacy planning.

## **Cairngorms 2030 restoring and enhancing landscape's theme update February 2026 (Paper 3)**

14. Matthew Hawkins, Cairngorms 2030 Nature Based Solutions Manager, introduced the paper which describes recent activity and progress on the seven projects within the Cairngorms 2030 (C2030) Restoring and Enhancing Landscapes theme.
15. The Performance Committee discussed the paper and made the following comments and observations:
  - a) A member asked if there was any monitoring on the welfare of cattle that are going to be put onto graze? Cairngorms 2030 Nature Based Solutions Manager provided reassurance that he had spoken to the Durrell Trust about it and a farmer from Kingussie was looking to develop more conservation grazing as part of his business model. The member added in addition, it would be good to monitor and feedback to the farming industry, if they need extra mineral supplements or extra feeding? Would they need extra worming and what was the tick effect on them, if any. Cairngorms 2030 Nature Based Solutions Manager advised that they had talked about worming and agreed to raise those questions.
  - b) The Chair asked for clarification about what was meant by the "common theme" in paragraph 5, noting that the projects within the theme, and across the wider programme, are very diverse, and that it was unclear how a common theme was emerging from them. Cairngorms 2030 Nature Based Solutions Manager explained that the common theme was not about the projects being similar, but about how they have developed over time. In particular, he highlighted a shared improvement in community and public engagement across the projects. While some nature projects initially had little or no engagement built in, this had grown significantly as the team's confidence and skills had increased.



- c) The Chair noted that the Spey Catchment Initiative had achieved strong community engagement in Altmore by first contacting key local individuals and asking them to share information, which resulted in a very high turnout at the initial meeting.
- d) A member asked about the Glasgow School of Art (GSA) Rural Lab project, specifically whether it had a presence within the National Park and what level of resource it brought. Head of Cairngorms 2030 explained that the Rural Lab is based on the Altyre Estate just outside Forres and had been operating for many years. He outlined that the Lab undertakes systems design and creative academic research and was seen as a valuable partner. He also noted that the Rural Lab lead, Dr Claire Deveny, had joined the Cairngorms 2030 Board, and that there was potential for future collaboration, including wider research opportunities supported by significant recent funding for rural PhD programmes. Head of Cairngorms 2030 offered to arrange a meeting. The member welcomed the offer of a meeting noting the relevance to enterprise and skills activity.

16. The Performance Committee noted the paper.

17. Action Points Arising:

- i. Cairngorms 2030 Nature Based Solutions Manager to raise and consider monitoring of cattle welfare as part of planned grazing, including issues such as mineral supplementation, additional feeding or shelter, worming, and potential tick impacts, with a view to sharing relevant learning with the wider farming industry.
- ii. Head of Cairngorms 2030 to arrange an introductory meeting between Dr Claire Deveny and Board member (Jackie Brierton).

#### **Cairngorms Peatland ACTION Programme (Paper 4)**

18. Colin McClean, Head of Land Management introduced the paper which presents an update on the delivery of the Park Authority's Peatland ACTION programme in 2025/26 and the developing programme for 2026/27.

19. The Performance Committee discussed the paper and made the following comments and observations:



- a) A member raised concern about whether peatland restoration could face a similar issue to path projects, where capital funding was available but long-term revenue funding for maintenance would prove uncertain. Head of Land Management acknowledged the uncertainty around future maintenance needs, noting that early peatland projects were less robust but that standards have improved. Deputy CEO and Director of Corporate Services clarified that, unlike paths, peatland restoration grant agreements (particularly under the Peatland Code) place maintenance responsibility on land managers for up to 10 years (and up to 30 years under newer arrangements), meaning the Park Authority does not carry sole maintenance responsibility.
- b) A member asked if the likely scale of required maintenance, particularly for projects delivered between 2014–18, be quantified? Head of Land Management confirmed that earlier non-Peatland Code projects lacked formal maintenance obligations, though newer projects included them. He added that a review of completed projects was underway, and lessons are being learned. At present, no significant or alarming maintenance burden was evident, but longer-term impacts remained uncertain due to natural processes and climate factors.
- c) The Chair asked if the wider benefits of peatland restoration, beyond carbon, be clearer for communities, given that baseline data was not always collected? Head of Land Management agreed that peatland restoration delivers benefits beyond carbon, including biodiversity, water retention, and potentially wildfire mitigation, and that more work was needed to evidence and communicate these outcomes. Director of Nature and Climate Change added that future project prioritisation will increasingly consider multiple benefits, additionality, greenhouse gas metrics, and landscape-scale impacts, aligned with Scottish Government priorities and supported by monitoring plans.
- d) The Chair asked if there a monitoring requirement for peatland restoration like there was for river restoration projects? Director of Nature and Climate Change confirmed that there was a dedicated monitoring officer and an established monitoring plan and programme for peatland restoration.
- e) A member sought clarity on whether the £300,000 cap represented full or partial funding, and how this affects landscape-scale projects. Head of Land Management explained that £300,000 represents the Park Authority's contribution, with private funding expected for additional costs.



Landscape-scale outcomes could still be achieved through multi-year and multi-project approaches. Director of Nature and Climate Change added that the figure was an indicative budget used to design projects, allowing existing commitments and landscape-scale ambitions to be met over time. There is no formal cap on the funding.

- f) A member asked if there were estates within the National Park that have not engaged with peatland restoration? Head of Land Management confirmed that almost all estates are engaged; only three are not currently involved, and these were not considered critical in terms of flooding risk or restoration urgency.

20. The Performance Committee noted the paper and agreed to the recommendations:

- a) Note the progress against programme targets for 2025/26.
- b) Note the plans for 2026/27.

21. Action Points Arising:

- i. None.

The meeting paused for a comfort break at 11.25am

The meeting resumed at 11.31am

## **Communications and Engagement update (Paper 5)**

22. Oliver Davies, Head of Communications and Engagement introduced the paper which presents an update of current communications and engagement activity, plus outlines a number of key priorities for the next quarter. It also includes a strategic risk register and accompanying mitigation measures.

23. The Performance Committee discussed the paper and made the following comments and observations:

- a) A member asked how long after the campaign would detail results from the pre and post campaign survey be available? Head of Communications and engagement advised that the pulse survey results would be processed quickly by YouGov, but full results were likely to be available after the summer bylaw period, estimated for late August or September, once the campaign has concluded.



- b) A member noted that in preparation for the papers for the Formal Board meeting later this week, the risk relating to decisions of the Cairngorms 2030 Communities Fund Panel being contentious should be elevated from medium to high, given the sums involved and potential community reaction. Head of Communications and Engagement confirmed and advised that this committee paper had been finalised and published in advance of that change being made to the paper submitted to the board.
- c) A member asked if there was a danger that widespread muirburn activity undermine or confuse public messaging around the Fire Bylaw? CEO acknowledged the difficulty caused by the delayed introduction of muirburn licensing. Head of Communications and Engagement added that messaging had been checked with partners including Scottish Fire and Rescue Service, NatureScot and others. The agreed public message remains that any fire of concern should be reported to 999. Reassurance was provided that while some confusion was inevitable, partners were comfortable with the current approach.
- d) A member asked if progress was being made towards establishing a dedicated Cairngorms National Park app? Head of Communications and Engagement confirmed discussions were ongoing with partners including Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park (LLTNP) and VisitScotland. Development is dependent on partner progress and shared funding arrangements. LLTNP aims to complete its website work by October, after which progress may be made.

24. The Performance Committee noted the paper and agreed to the recommendations:
- a) Review activity across a range of communications and engagement channels in the past three months and discuss the identified priorities for quarter two of 2026.
  - b) Review the accompanying risk register to ensure key risks are captured and that mitigation measures are appropriate.

25. Action Points Arising:



- i. None.

## **Cairngorms Trust and Community Led Local Development update (Paper 6)**

- 26. David Cameron, Deputy CEO and Director of Corporate Services introduced the paper which presents an update on the work of the Cairngorms Local Action Group Trust ('the Cairngorms Trust') and the collective work of the Cairngorms Trust and the Park Authority in Community Led Local Development (CLLD) activity.

Hannah Grist left the meeting at 11.48 am

- 27. The Performance Committee discussed the paper and made the following comments and observations:
  - a) A member raised concern that while funding levels into Cairngorms remain positive, inflation had significantly eroded the real value of Community-Led Local Development (CLLD) funding compared to previous LEADER programmes. Deputy CEO and Director of Corporate Services acknowledged the erosion in value and confirmed that while headline funding levels were broadly comparable to the previous LEADER programme, inflation and the absence of multiyear funding significantly constrained delivery and community engagement.
  - b) A member commented that maintaining a strong national Local Action Group (LAG) network was essential to protect lobbying power and prevent further erosion of rural development budgets, with the Cairngorms Trust well-placed to lead due to its independent trust model. The member supported this work and encouraged the continued progress of work on developing the network.
  - c) A member asked if there was scope for the Cairngorms Trust to act as a conduit for additional funding streams beyond CLLD, such as employability or successor Shared Prosperity Fund-type funding? Deputy CEO and Director of Corporate Services confirmed there was strong potential, particularly for supporting rural business development and employability, and that this was an area the Trust should actively explore as part of its future direction.
  - d) Concern was raised about a perceived drift by the Trust towards greater independence from the Park Authority, potentially weakening a previously strong partnership. Deputy CEO and Director of Corporate Services



acknowledged the concern as a valid strategic risk and confirmed that a refresh of the Memorandum of Agreement was intended to help manage this balance, maintaining the Trust's charitable independence while strengthening partnership working. Other officers echoed the importance of collaboration to maximise delivery and funding opportunities.

- e) A member questioned whether voluntary giving continue to be an aspiration, or be removed from the risk register and Trust business planning, given the challenging fundraising environment? Deputy CEO and Director of Corporate Services agreed this required careful reconsideration. He provided reassurance that early discussions had begun, and the Trust and Park Authority would reflect on whether voluntary giving remains realistic or cost-effective, with further governance discussion to follow.
- f) A member questioned whether it was timely to review the long-standing approach to community development funding within the National Park? CEO confirmed that a broader strategic discussion on community development funding priorities over the next 5–10 years would take place as part of work on the next National Park Partnership Plan, involving the full Board.

28. The Performance Committee noted the paper and agreed to the recommendations:
- a) Whether the programmes of activity are making the expected contribution to the Park Authority's agreed strategic outcomes.
  - b) Whether the delivery updates suggest any strategically significant impacts on the Park Authority's agreed performance objectives.
  - c) Whether any material impacts on the Park Authority's strategic risk management and mitigation measures arise from assessment of programme delivery.
  - d) Noted paper 6 annex 1.

29. Action Points Arising:
- i. None.

## **AOCB**

30. None



## Date of Next Meeting

31. The date of the next meeting is 12 June 2026.

32. *The meeting concluded at 12.16pm*

<b>ACTION</b>	<b>Status</b>
<b>Action points arising from previous meetings</b>	
<b>12 December</b>	
<b>Paper 4 - Cairngorms Nature Action Plan</b> At para 19f ii. Consider a new term for "community benefits".	In hand
<b>Paper 2 – Cairngorms 2030 programme update: quarter three 2025 (July – September)</b> At para 9e  CEO to confirm and provide information on the process for how the Park Authority would highlight what funding is available, for farmers to choose who they go to. █	
<b>23 March</b>	
<b>Paper 1 – Deer Incentive Scheme</b> At para 7a i. Head of Land Management to reword the Key Performance Indicator (KPI) to accurately reflect the intended outcome.	
<b>Paper 2 – Cairngorms 2030 Programme Delivery Update: Quarter Four 2-25 (October – December)</b> At para 11e i. Head of Cairngorms 2030 to attend the next Economic Steering Group meeting to work with the Chair and the Director of Planning and Place to align Cairngorms 2030 economic outputs with the Community Wealth Building Bill and inform future legacy planning.	



**Paper 3 – Cairngorms 2030 restoring and enhancing landscape's theme update February 2026**

At para 15a

- i. Cairngorms 2030 Nature Based Solutions Manager to raise to raise and consider monitoring of cattle welfare as part of planned grazing, including issues such as mineral supplementation, additional feeding or shelter, worming, and potential tick impacts, with a view to sharing relevant learning with the wider farming industry.

At para 15d

- ii. Cairngorms 2030 Manager to arrange an introductory meeting between Dr Claire Deveney and Board member (Jackie Brierton).