For discussion

Title: Annual accounts and Corporate Plan delivery update

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Purpose

This paper draws the Park Authority's accounts and annual report for 2025/26 to the board's attention.

The paper presents the final audited financial position for 2025/26 following completion of the audit by Mazars and review by the Auditor General for Scotland. The paper also takes a more focused look at the Park Authority's delivery toward agreed strategic objectives in the context of the wider update on Cairngorms National Park Partnership Plan (NPPP) delivery considered by the board at its previous meeting.

Recommendations

The Board is asked:

a) To note the financial results for 2025/26

b) To review the status of delivery toward Corporate Plan objectives as set out in the Performance Report included in the Annual Report

c) To consider any actions needed to address delivery of those Corporate Plan objectives, particularly those corporate objectives highlighted as at increased delivery risk.

Strategic context

1. The Park Authority's Corporate Plan for 2023 to 2027 sets out the organisation's planned contributions toward achievement of the Cairngorms NPPP. The corporate plan establishes the Park Authority's agreed strategic corporate objectives for the period to 2027. The Board considered an update on the status of delivery against the NPPP at its previous meeting in September. This report now provides an update on delivery of the Park Authority's own direct and indirect contributions to

the NPPP. This paper therefore focuses on the Park Authority's performance and finances, and our contribution to the delivery of the NPPP outcomes.

2. Our Performance Monitoring overview included in the annual report and accounts, set out in pages 44 to 48 presents progress over the course of the third year of our corporate plan in delivering against these strategic objectives. By nature of the Park Authority's role – seeking to lead collaborative effort in tackling the big issues for the Cairngorms – our performance measures are rarely directly controllable by the Park Authority alone. Rather, they require collaboration and engagement of the Park Authority and our partners. In this way, they act as measures of the effectiveness of our leadership and influencing abilities, combined with our own direct investment of finance and staff resources, in tackling these priorities.

Strategic policy consideration

3. The Annual Report and Accounts for 2025/26 is presented in full at Annex 1 to this paper.

4. Budget monitoring throughout the 2025/26 financial year has been undertaken by the Board's Resources Committee. The preparation and audit of the accounts for 2025/26 has been overseen by the board's Audit and Risk Committee. These committee roles are as set out in the terms of reference for the board's committees. The accounts as presented in Annex One have been cleared by the Auditor General for Scotland and laid in Parliament on Monday 16 November.

5. The accounts for 2025/26 show the Park Authority's highest ever level of income and expenditure, despite financial activity on the Cairngorms 2030 programme in the year being lower than originally expected, with total income at £17.54 million and total operating expenditure of £17.57 million. This continues an increasing trend, with total income and expenditure increasing by 70% in the five years 2020/21 to 2025/26. A fuller financial performance summary can be found at pages 18 to 25 of Annex 1.

6. The accounts present a near break-even position for the year, with available funding fully invested in the operation of the Park Authority and investment in projects within the Cairngorms National Park. There is an outturn net expenditure position of £9,000 against the total income of £17.54 million.

7. The Annual Report for 2024/25 includes a performance report, set out in pages 36 to 47 of Annex 1, which presents an overview of the Park Authority's performance in delivery against our strategic objectives. A dashboard summary indicates whether progress has been broadly on track and meeting expectations (rated 'green'); or has experienced delay or some shortfall against objectives which can be remedied before the end of the corporate plan period (rated 'amber'). A 'red' rating would be used for any strategic objectives unlikely to be substantially complete by the end of the corporate plan period. There are no strategic objectives classified as red at this stage. The performance dashboard has been replicated at Annex 1 to this paper for ease of reference.

8. Attention is drawn to the fact that the assessment of delivery against strategic objectives is generally the status as of the end of the prior financial and operational year, 31 March 2026. While some more current actions and results may be reflected, in general such, some time has passed from the overview of corporate delivery position now presented. The future actions addressing those objectives highlighted at some increased risks are noted from page 47 of Annex 1.

9. Board discussions have previously highlighted that the risk assessment of the delivery of housing as 'amber' is somewhat at odds with the recognised and ongoing high-priority need for housing within the Cairngorms. As noted above, the corporate performance reporting focuses on the areas more under the direct control of the Park Authority: in this instance, our local development plan and development control activities, combined with our participation and influencing work with partners.

Stakeholder engagement

10. As noted at the outset of this paper, given the nature of the Park Authority's role – seeking to lead collaborative effort in tackling the big issues for the Cairngorms – achievement of our corporate objectives typically requires the necessary collaboration and engagement of our partners. The assessment of progress against objectives is made in context of the collaborative work undertaken between the Park Authority and our delivery partners. Fuller information on the partnership delivery has been provided in the previous board meeting update on NPPP delivery.

Strategic risk management

11. Our strategic risk register has been developed to support delivery of the strategic objectives covered in the performance report. The risk register is reviewed an updated regularly by both the Executive Management Team and the members of the Audit and Risk committee.

Implications

12. Our annual operational plan and budget is established to give a balance of investment which will collectively achieve our strategic objectives. The evidence from 2025/26 performance assessment suggests that the balance of investment has been appropriate in support of the successful delivery of the Park Authority's wide range of strategic objectives.

13. The Park Authority continues to deliver against these strategic objectives over the course of 2026/27, the final year of the current corporate plan. The Resources Committee has reviewed the position of current year budget management and noted that we remain on track from a financial perspective to deliver a range of initiatives and investments further progressing these objectives within a generally balanced budget position.

14. The implications for corporate delivery into 2026/27 will be considered with the board in December 2026 to March 2027 as we develop budget and operational plan proposals for 2027/28 informed by the Scottish Government's budget.

Success measures

15. The performance report dashboard comprises a key element of the Park Authority's corporate performance framework and success measures. This gives a high-level strategic overview of progress being made toward achievement of agreed corporate plan objectives.

16. Delivering our planned activity within a balanced budget position also forms a key element of our corporate success measures.

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