



## For discussion

**Title: Cairngorms Trust and Community Led Local Development update**

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### Purpose

This paper 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.

### Recommendations

The Performance Committee is asked to consider:

- 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.

### Performance Dashboard

1. Assessment of the delivery of work being taken forward by the Cairngorms Trust and in development of CLLD within the Cairngorms National Park against key performance measures is presented in the following table. The overall assessment and risk rating against these measures is presented as compared to the previous rating last reported to the Committee in March 2025.



Performance Measure	Prior Rating	Current Rating	Commentary
Finance: Deliver Cairngorms LEADER Programme, maximising use of resources made available.	Blue (complete)	Blue (complete)	Programme concluded 31 December 2021, with final project LEADER spend at 95% of allocation and total project expenditure at 168% of allocation after accounting for match funding levered into projects.
Audit: Clean closure of LEADER Programme including monitoring and evaluation of performance indicators.	Blue (complete)	Blue (complete)	All project records finalised. No matters arising with respect to LEADER closure over last 18 months. Some potential for EU audit remains until 10 years following programme closure.
Policy: Secure future CLLD of equivalent value to LEADER Programme allocation.	Green	Green	<p>While no long term or multi-year commitment is in place, funding allocations to CLLD of £320,000, £403,000 and £400,000 over prior three years approached previous LEADER Programme values at an annual equivalent level. Funding for 2025/26 to date is £352,223 with allocations in 2026/27 expected to be broadly static.</p> <p>Budget papers published by Scottish Government (SG) in January 2026 set out indicative forecasts of 'flat cash' national funding to CLLD of £9.3m for 2026/27 and each of the following two years to 28/29.</p>
Policy: Develop and implement voluntary giving mechanisms	Amber	Red	This remains a challenging area of work both in terms of capacity to progress and results of initiatives. Cairngorms Trust has



Performance Measure	Prior Rating	Current Rating	Commentary
through Cairngorms Trust.			a new manager in place and will reconsider approaches to this area of work along with the stakeholder group advising on the development of voluntary giving approaches.
Finance: Increase voluntary giving returns within Trust's future funding profile to a level which sustain costs of infrastructure and return meaningful surpluses for investment.	Red	Red	The Cairngorms Trust's revised business plan agreed by the Trust board in August 2024 targets increasing voluntary giving returns to £30,000 by 2026/27. A voluntary giving partnership group has been reformed to help drive this, including Park Authority, Trust, community and Cairngorms Business Partnership (CBP) representatives. However, tests of various voluntary giving mechanisms continue to highlight the difficulty of raising significant funds in a crowded voluntary giving sector.
Policy: Operation of charitable mechanism an effective element of National Park Partnership Plan (NPPP) priority delivery.	Green	Green	The capacity to work in partnership with an independent charity covering the Cairngorms has been a crucial element in successful delivery of Green Recovery Funding; in securing resource for CLLD made available over the last three years; and in community engagement in delivering local priorities. The use of the charity mechanism to establish the Cairngorms Youth Local Action Group as a delegated grant awarding body has received national prominence and has featured as an exemplar approach in Scottish Government CLLD guidance. The Trust has trialled a similar model with a



Performance Measure	Prior Rating	Current Rating	Commentary
			<p>black and ethnic minority lived experience group.</p> <p>A number of the Park Authority's teams have also partnered with the Trust in offering grants supporting community led activity in developing nature networks, cultural heritage, community development and local path work.</p>

## Strategic context

2. The NPPP for 2022 to 2027 includes the following objective:
  - a) **B7 Community-led Planning and Development:** Communities have up-to-date community action plans and are supported by a CLLD funding programme, delivering the NPPP.
3. This objective has an associated action of develop and administer a new community-led development funding stream.
4. The Park Authority's Corporate Plan agreed by the board in March 2023 includes the following relevant strategic objectives associated with this aspect of the NPPP:
  - a) **Direct activity by the Park Authority:** Act as accountable body or other supporting role as required to underpin delivery of CLLD in Cairngorms.
  - b) **Indirect activity supported or resourced by the Park Authority:** Influence strategic development of national focus on and design of CLLD to secure an adequate level of resourcing which continues to focus on Cairngorms National Park as an administrative boundary.
5. Delivery of these NPPP and Corporate Plan actions to date is covered by this paper.



## Strategic risk management

6. Strategic risks of relevance to consideration of performance of the programmes of work considered by this paper are:
  - a) Public sector finances constrain capacity to allocate sufficient resources to deliver the corporate plan. A mitigation of this risk is to continue to support bodies such as the Cairngorms Trust to secure inward investment.
  - b) Risk of Cairngorms 2030 (C2030) match funding not being secured. Anticipated CLLD funding to be secured by the Cairngorms Trust totalling £1.25 million is incorporated as match funding.
7. These strategic risks are declining at this time and are now moving toward 'managed' status given the funding position secured over prior years and expected for 2026/27 budget with level of CLLD financing which matches our target levels.
8. There are no matters of strategic significance which are assessed to merit escalation at this time in the opinion of senior managers leading the Park Authority's linkage to the areas of activity covered by this paper and associated reports.

## Delivery Update

9. The Cairngorms Trust, working with the Park Authority as its Accountable Body, has successfully secured funding of around £400,000 annually in support of CLLD activities. Annual CLLD resources have reached levels of funding which approach the equivalent annual values available in previous multi-year LEADER programmes of between £2 million and £3 million over a five-to-six-year period.
10. The Cairngorms Trust and the Park Authority have played a leadership role over the year in driving activity on creation of a national network covering all 20 current Local Action Groups (LAGs) to promote, evidence advocate for the role of CLLD funding in national policy. Scotland's National CLLD Network will be established by the end of March 2026 and become active in addressing these objectives over the coming financial year. This work focuses on addressing and delivering the corporate plan objective of "influence strategic development of national focus on and design of CLLD to secure an adequate level of resourcing which continues to focus on Cairngorms National Park as an administrative boundary".



11. The lack of confirmed, or at least indicative, multi-year funding allocations to LAGs remains a key limitation in our support of CLLD activities. Community groups are not able to plan and develop their project proposals over the long term without facing the risks of finances not being available in future years. This acts to prevent support to significant 'step-change' projects in local communities.
12. The collective work of the Cairngorms Trust and Park Authority in this area of activity is to an extent leading the way for development of approaches to CLLD in Scotland. Our decision to incorporate the Local Action Group (LAG) some years ago as a Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation (SCIO) has been illustrated as an aspect of good governance within the SG's policy documentation. Similarly, our decision to establish the Youth LAG, and to do so within the Trust's charitable structure, is also now reflected as an exemplar approach by SG's CLLD guidance.
13. Around £75,000 has been spent annually over the last couple of years by the Park Authority and Cairngorms Trust in partnership, in support of the development and operation of the Youth LAG and to support the wider operation of the Cairngorms Youth Action Team (CYAT). This has covered coordinator costs of around £30,000 (a self-employed contract), a fund for distribution of grants, and meeting / residential costs supporting the engagement of the young people and development of the Youth LAG / CYAT, together with supporting the wider operational work of the CYAT as part of the Park Authority's learning and engagement activities.
14. The Trust has trialled a similar model to that established with the Youth LAG with a black and ethnic minority lived experience group, working through a lived experience group to deploy a small initial grant fund totalling £6,500 to support projects within that community in the Cairngorms.

## **Management and Governance**

15. The Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) governing relationships between the Trust and the Park Authority has been updated during 2025/26. This is presented at Annex 1 to this paper.
16. The C2030 Programme will see the inception of the Cairngorms Community Fund Project delivering grant funds on the basis of codesigned grant criteria in the course of the coming year. There are plans in place for the Codesign Panel to



discuss its plans with the Cairngorms Trust as part of the codesign process, while management will continue to manage risks around this process. This subject will be dealt with separately through a paper to the forthcoming full board meeting.

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