



# Lake District National Park Authority

Interim Auditor's Annual Report  
Year ending 31 March 2025

24 September 2025



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The contents of this report relate only to those matters which came to our attention during the conduct of our normal audit procedures which are designed for the purpose of completing our work under the NAO Code and related guidance. Our audit is not designed to test all arrangements in respect of value for money. However, where, as part of our testing, we identify significant weaknesses, we will report these to you. In consequence, our work cannot be relied upon to disclose all irregularities, or to include all possible improvements in arrangements that a more extensive special examination might identify. We do not accept any responsibility for any loss occasioned to any third party acting, or refraining from acting, on the basis of the content of this report, as this report was not prepared for, nor intended for, any other purpose.

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# 01 Introduction and context

# Introduction

This report brings together a summary of all the work we have undertaken for Lake District National Park Authority (the Authority) during 2024/25 as the appointed external auditor. The core element of the report is the commentary on the value for money (VfM) arrangements. The responsibilities of the Authority are set out in Appendix A. The Value for Money Auditor responsibilities are set out in Appendix B.

## Opinion on the financial statements

Auditors provide an opinion on the financial statements which confirms whether they:

- give a true and fair view of the financial position of the Authority as at 31 March 2025 and of its expenditure and income for the year then ended
- have been properly prepared in accordance with the CIPFA/LASAAC Code of practice on local authority accounting in the United Kingdom 2024/25
- have been prepared in accordance with the requirements of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014

We also consider the Annual Governance Statement and undertake work relating to the Whole of Government Accounts consolidation exercise.

## Auditor's powers

Under Section 30 of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014, the auditor of a local authority has a duty to consider whether there are any issues arising during their work that indicate possible or actual unlawful expenditure or action leading to a possible or actual loss or deficiency that should be referred to the Secretary of State. They may also issue:

- Statutory recommendations to the full Authority which must be considered publicly
- A Public Interest Report (PIR).

## Value for money

Under the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014, we are required to be satisfied whether the Authority has made proper arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources (referred to as Value for Money). The National Audit Office (NAO) Code of Audit Practice ('the Code'), requires us to assess arrangements under three areas:

- financial sustainability
- governance
- improving economy, efficiency and effectiveness.

The NAO has consulted on and updated the Code to align it to accounts backstop legislation. The new Code requires auditors to share a draft Auditor's Annual Report (AAR) with those charged with governance by a nationally set deadline each year, and for the audited body to publish the AAR thereafter. This new deadline requirement is introduced from 30<sup>th</sup> November 2025 and applies to 2024/25 Audits.

# 02 Executive Summary

# Executive Summary – our assessment of value for money arrangements

Our overall summary of our Value for Money assessment of the Authority’s arrangements is set out below. Further detail can be found on the following pages.

Criteria	2023/24 Assessment of arrangements	2024/25 Risk assessment	2024/25 Assessment of arrangements
Financial sustainability	G No significant weaknesses in arrangements identified. No improvement recommendations made.	No risks of significant weakness identified	A No significant weaknesses in arrangements identified, but one improvement recommendation made related to strengthening financial forecasting.
Governance	A No significant weaknesses in arrangements identified, however, one improvement recommendation raised related to the Member Code of Conduct policy review and understanding.	No risks of significant weakness identified	G No significant weaknesses in arrangements identified or improvement recommendation made .
Improving economy, efficiency and effectiveness	G No significant weaknesses in arrangements identified. No improvement recommendations made.	No risks of significant weakness identified	G No significant weaknesses in arrangements identified or improvement recommendation made .

- G** No significant weaknesses or improvement recommendations.
- A** No significant weaknesses, improvement recommendation(s) made.
- R** Significant weaknesses in arrangements identified and key recommendation(s) made.

# Executive Summary

We set out below the key findings from our commentary on the Authority's arrangements in respect of value for money.



## Financial sustainability

The Authority concluded 2024/25 in a strong financial position, with an £850k underspend reinvested into reserves. Budgetary controls, scenario planning, and oversight remain effective, enabling timely responses to financial pressures. A phased savings programme is embedded in the Medium-Term Financial Strategy to address a projected funding gap by 2029/30. Strategic alignment with the Business Plan, prudent treasury management, and proactive risk mitigation underpin financial resilience. While no significant weaknesses were identified, continued focus on financial forecasting arrangements, income volatility, workforce planning, and reserve restoration will be key to sustaining long-term value for money and we have raised an improvement recommendation made related to strengthening financial forecasting.



## Governance

The Authority maintains effective governance, underpinned by a refreshed Risk Management Strategy and adequate oversight from the Strategic Leadership Team and Governance Committee. Internal audit coverage was comprehensive, with most reviews offering substantial or reasonable assurance. While one limited assurance finding and a dip in audit recommendation implementation were noted, continuous improvement is evident. Decision-making remains transparent and well-structured, with clear roles, regular scrutiny, and strong alignment to strategic objectives. No significant governance weaknesses were identified in 2024/25, and arrangements are considered sufficient to support informed, compliant, and resilient operations.



## Improving economy, efficiency and effectiveness

The Authority continues to demonstrate effective performance management, integrating financial, service, and risk data in quarterly reports. In 2024/25, 11 of 17 Business Plan actions were delivered, with the remainder rolled forward. Service performance improved overall, supported by mitigation plans and strong workforce outcomes. Strategic partnerships and environmental programmes progressed well, and procurement processes remain transparent. While challenges persist in some areas, monitoring, stakeholder engagement, and structured governance support continuous improvement. Performance reporting remains aligned with strategic objectives, enabling informed decision-making and accountability across services and partnerships.

# Executive summary – auditor’s other responsibilities

This page summarises our opinion on the Authority’s financial statements and sets out whether we have used any of the other powers available to us as the Authority’s auditors.

## Auditor’s responsibility

## 2024/25 outcome

### Opinion on the Financial Statements

We have nearly completed our audit of your financial statements and anticipate issuing an unqualified audit opinion following the Governance Committee meeting on 24 September 2025. Our findings are set out in further detail on pages 10 to 11.

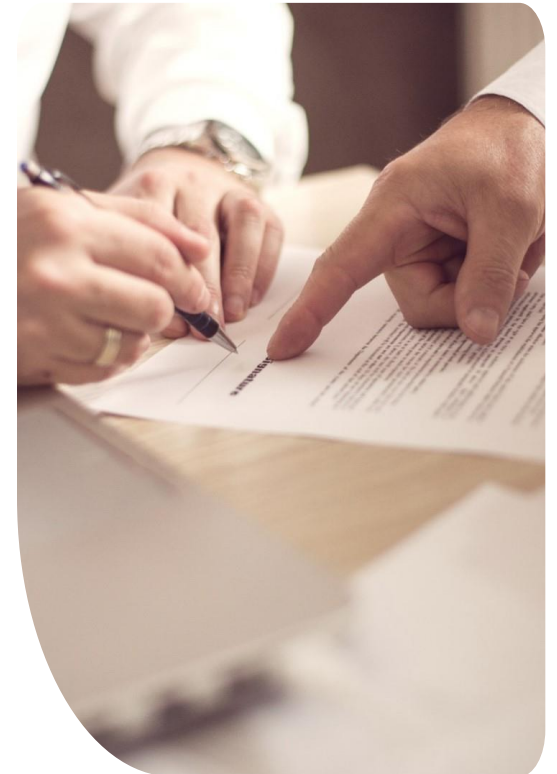
### Use of auditor’s powers

We have not made any written statutory recommendations under Schedule 7 of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014.

We have not made an application to the Court or issue any Advisory Notices under Section 28 of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014.

We have not made an application for judicial review under Section 31 of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014.

We have not identified any issues that required us to issue a Public Interest Report (PIR) under Schedule 7 of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014.



# **03 Opinion on the financial statements and use of auditor's powers**

# Opinion on the financial statements

These pages set out the key findings from our audit of the Authority's financial statements, and whether we have used any of the other powers available to us as the Authority's auditors.

## Audit opinion on the financial statements

We anticipate issuing an unqualified opinion on the Authority's financial statements following the Governance Committee on 24 September 2025.

The full opinion is included in the Authority's Annual Report for 2024/25, which can be obtained from the Authority's website.

### Grant Thornton provides an independent opinion on whether the Authority's financial statements:

- give a true and fair view of the financial position of the Authority as at 31 March 2025 and of its expenditure and income for the year then ended
- have been properly prepared in accordance with the CIPFA/LASAAC Code of practice on local authority accounting in the United Kingdom 2023/25
- have been prepared in accordance with the requirements of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014.

We conducted our audit in accordance with: International Standards on Auditing (UK), the Code of Audit Practice (2024) published by the National Audit Office, and applicable law. We are independent of the Authority in accordance with applicable ethical requirements, including the Financial Reporting Authority's Ethical Standard.

## Findings from the audit of the financial statements

The Authority provided draft accounts in line with the national deadline of 30 June 2025.

Draft financial statements were of a reasonable standard and supported by detailed working papers.

- Our audit work was completed during July-September as planned.
- We have not identified any adjustments to the financial statements.
- We have identified 3 unadjusted misstatements which were not adjusted on the grounds of materiality.
- We identified a number of minor disclosure misstatements, which the Authority has updated the financial statements for.

## Audit Findings Report

We report the detailed findings from our audit in our Audit Findings Report. A final version of our report was presented to the Authority's Governance Committee on 25 September 2025. Requests for this Audit Findings Report should be directed to the Authority.

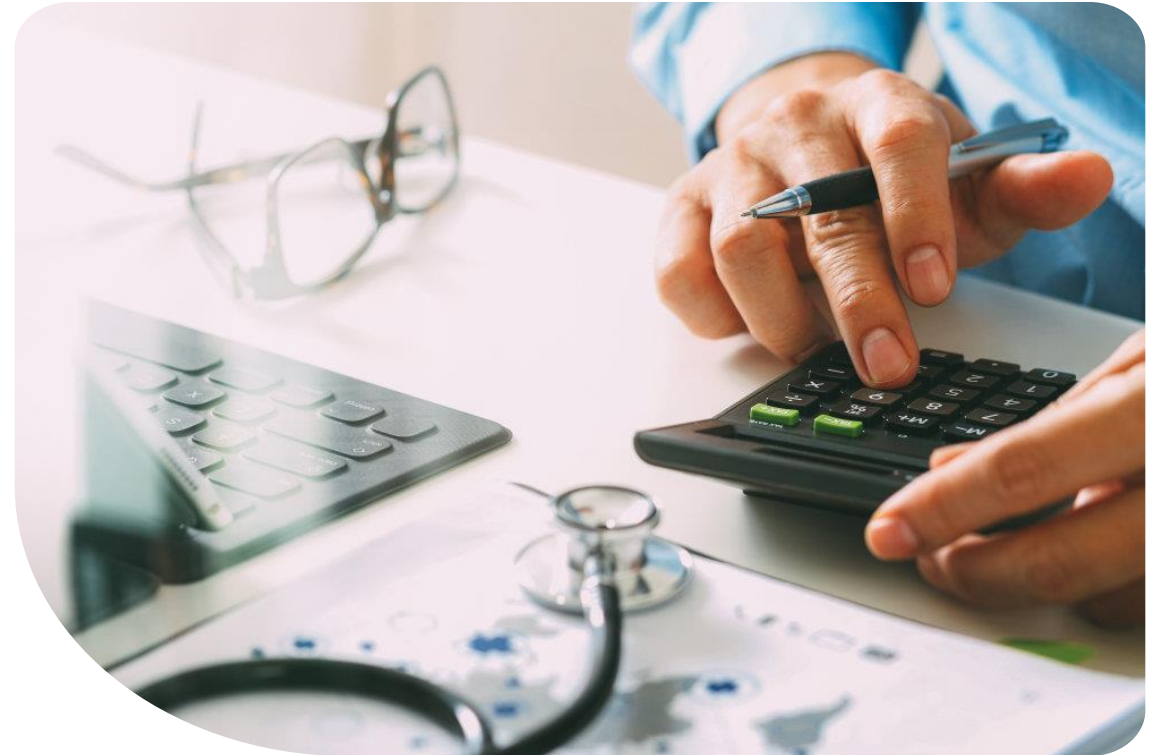
# Other reporting requirements

## Annual Governance Statement

Under the Code of Audit Practice published by the National Audit Office we are required to consider whether the Annual Governance Statement does not comply with the requirements of the CIPFA/LASAAC Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting, or is misleading or inconsistent with the information of which we are aware from our audit.

We are not required to consider whether the Annual Governance Statement addresses all risks and controls or that risks are satisfactorily addressed by internal controls.

We have nothing to report in this regard.



# **04 Value for Money commentary on arrangements**

# Value for Money – commentary on arrangements

This page explains how we undertake the value for money assessment of arrangements and provide a commentary under three specified areas.

All Authorities are responsible for putting in place proper arrangements to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness from their resources. This includes taking properly informed decisions and managing key operational and financial risks so that they can deliver their objectives and safeguard public money. Authority's report on their arrangements, and the effectiveness of these arrangements as part of their annual governance statement.

Under the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014, we are required to be satisfied whether the Authority has made proper arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources. The National Audit Office (NAO) Code of Audit Practice ('the Code'), requires us to assess arrangements under three areas:



## Financial sustainability

Arrangements for ensuring the Authority can continue to deliver services. This includes planning resources to ensure adequate finances and maintain sustainable levels of spending over the medium term (3-5 years).



## Governance

Arrangements for ensuring that the Authority makes appropriate decisions in the right way. This includes arrangements for budget setting and budget management, risk management, and making decisions based on appropriate information.



## Improving economy, efficiency and effectiveness

Arrangements for improving the way the Authority delivers its services. This includes arrangements for understanding costs and delivering efficiencies and improving outcomes for service users.

# Financial sustainability – commentary on arrangements

We considered how the Authority:

Commentary on arrangements

Rating

<p>identifies all the significant financial pressures that are relevant to its short and medium-term plans and builds these into them</p>	<p>The Authority concluded the 2024/25 financial year in a strong position, reporting a net underspend of approximately £850k, significantly outperforming the Q3 forecast of £43k. This favourable variance was achieved through service-level savings, higher-than-expected investment income, and lower operational expenditure. The surplus was strategically reinvested into earmarked reserves to mitigate future financial risks.</p> <p>Budgetary control arrangements remain adequate, with regular budget monitoring, scenario planning, and targeted reforecasting, particularly in high-risk areas like Visitor Services. However, the material gap between Q3 forecasts and the final outturn highlights an opportunity for improvement. While some variances were anticipated, the scale of the underspend was significantly under forecasted. We understand a significant proportion of this movement was due to the truing up of staff costs to be charged against grants mainly taking place in Q4. We have therefore raised a recommendation in respect of financial forecasting. See page 16 for details.</p>	<p>A</p>
<p>plans to bridge its funding gaps and identify achievable savings</p>	<p>The Authority continues to enhance its strategic planning via a Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) that projects a funding gap of £750k by 2029/30. To address this, a phased savings programme has been embedded within the MTFS and budget-setting process, with £1 million in recurring savings approved for 2025/26, including significant transformation of Brockhole Visitor Services.</p> <p>Savings initiatives are categorised by delivery stage and certainty. Confirmed and forecasted measures include Visitor Services marketing budget reduction (£23.9k); Staff turnover savings (£25k) and others.</p> <p>By year-end, £337k of 2025/26 savings had already been delivered, and if all initiatives are delivered as planned, a £174k surplus is expected. The Resources Committee and Commercial Strategy Board provide oversight, while individual Heads of Service own specific savings lines. The Authority has moved away from reliance on ad-hoc projects to a more structured, proactive approach, supported by a savings and investment reserve built from prior underspends.</p>	<p>G</p>

- G** No significant weaknesses or improvement recommendations.
- A** No significant weaknesses, improvement recommendations made.
- R** Significant weaknesses in arrangements identified and key recommendation(s) made.

# Financial sustainability – commentary on arrangements (continued)

We considered how the Authority:	Commentary on arrangements	Rating
plans finances to support the sustainable delivery of services in accordance with strategic and statutory priorities	Financial decisions are directly aligned with the 2025–2028 Business Plan, which comprises 20 strategic and 20 service actions tied to six core priorities. Growth bids are only approved if they support these priorities and pass through a structured approval process. Service leads collaborate with finance in validating planning assumptions and ensuring resource allocations align with delivery plans. Regular monitoring by the Strategic Leadership Team and quarterly oversight by the Resources Committee ensures accountability and adaptability.	G
ensures its financial plan is consistent with other plans such as workforce, capital, investment and other operational planning which may include working with other local public bodies as part of a wider system	<p>Capital investments are prioritised based on need, affordability, and business case, guided by the Property Asset Management Strategy (PAMS), currently under revision to reflect natural capital principles. Investment decisions are reviewed quarterly and re-prioritised where necessary.</p> <p>Treasury management is compliant with CIPFA standards, with borrowing only considered when necessary. Investment performance exceeded expectations in 2024/25. The Authority's net-zero by 2030 commitment is embedded in both capital and revenue budgets.</p> <p>Workforce risks are managed through annual reviews that link staffing to Business Plan delivery. Recruitment strategies are in place to fill skills gaps and address diversity.</p>	G
identifies and manages risk to financial resilience, e.g. unplanned changes in demand, including challenge of the assumptions in underlying plans	<p>The Authority continues to demonstrate a mature approach to risk management, supported by regular financial resilience assessments aligned with CIPFA's Financial Management Code. Risks are actively reviewed, and scenario planning is undertaken for 1–10% shifts in income and expenditure.</p> <p>Key risks—including pay inflation, commercial income volatility, and grant uncertainty—are modelled in the MTFS. The Authority is working toward restoring reserves to target levels: £1.5m General Fund and £500k Trading Reserve, with progress monitored throughout the year.</p>	G

- G** No significant weaknesses or improvement recommendations.
- A** No significant weaknesses, improvement recommendations made.
- R** Significant weaknesses in arrangements identified and key recommendation(s) made.

# Financial sustainability (continued)

## Area for Improvement identified: Financial Forecasting Accuracy

**Key Finding:** The Authority reported a final outturn underspend of £865k for 2024/25, which was a £822k variance on the Q3 forecast of £43k.

**Evidence:** Although the Authority has regular budget monitoring and scenario planning in place, the Q3 forecast did not reflect the full extent of emerging underspends. Key drivers of the variance—such as staffing vacancies, staff recharges to grants, capital financing adjustments, and investment income—were not fully captured, although we acknowledge that some of these movements were known variances or relate to items which are difficult to forecast effectively.

**Impact:** Without accurate and timely forecasting, the Authority risks underestimating its financial position, which may affect decision-making, resource allocation, and the credibility of financial planning. Improved forecasting would enhance transparency and support more effective use of resources.

## Improvement Recommendation 1

**IR1:** The Authority should strengthen its financial forecasting arrangements to capture more accurate estimates of vacancy underspends and staff charges to grants throughout the year.

# Governance – commentary on arrangements

We considered how the Authority:

Commentary on arrangements

Rating

monitors and assesses risk and how the Authority gains assurance over the effective operation of internal controls, including arrangements to prevent and detect fraud

The Authority continues to demonstrate effective governance arrangements underpinned by a refreshed Risk Management Strategy, which includes a clear scoring methodology, risk appetite framework, and alignment with strategic objectives. Corporate and service-level risks are monitored through biannual and quarterly cycles, with oversight from the Strategic Leadership Team and Governance Committee. Controls, risk owners, and mitigation timelines are clearly documented, enabling the Authority to proactively respond to emerging risks such as resource capacity and delivery of its commercial strategy.

The 2024/25 Internal Audit Plan was fully delivered, focusing on key risk areas like procurement, finance, and HR. Most reviews resulted in substantial or reasonable assurance, with one limited assurance finding relating to General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). The Head of Internal Audit’s opinion concluded that the Authority maintains reasonable and effective governance, risk, and control arrangements. Audit recommendations are regularly tracked, and while implementation rates dipped slightly to 63% (from 89%), ongoing monitoring through the Governance Committee supports a culture of continuous improvement. The 2024/25 Annual Governance Statement identified only minor issues, with five out of six prior concerns resolved, and the remaining (data management) carried forward to the 2025/26 plan.

Fraud risks were considered during internal audit planning, and no significant instances of fraud or corruption were identified in 2024/25. A review of anti-fraud and whistleblowing arrangements is scheduled for 2025/26. Staff are supported by an up-to-date Whistleblowing Policy, with formal mechanisms for managing complaints, Freedom Of Information (FOI) and Environmental Information Regulations (EIR) requests, and annual reporting to the Governance Committee. The 2025 Staff Engagement Report noted a rise in the Employee Net Promoter Score (eNPS), with a structured action plan in place to address concerns.

G

G

No significant weaknesses or improvement recommendations.

A

No significant weaknesses, improvement recommendations made.

R

Significant weaknesses in arrangements identified and key recommendation(s) made.

# Governance – commentary on arrangements (continued)

We considered how the Authority:	Commentary on arrangements	Rating
approaches and carries out its annual budget setting process	<p>In 2024/25, the Authority's budget-setting process remained consistent with previous years, with no fundamental changes to the Authority's established arrangements. While the late grant settlement introduced uncertainty and required additional scenario planning, internal processes remained stable. Operational challenges, such as the Brockhole issues and Visitor Centre restructuring, were managed separately and did not impact the core budget process. Strategic discussions and budget holder reviews continued to inform budget development, with final proposals reviewed and approved through established governance channels. The Strategic Leadership Team reviewed service plans and associated risks quarterly, while the draft 2025–2028 Business Plan and budget were reviewed by the Resources Committee and approved by the Full Authority in March 2025. The budget remained closely aligned with the MTFs, supporting long-term financial sustainability.</p>	G
ensures effective processes and systems are in place to ensure budgetary control; to communicate relevant, accurate and timely management information; supports its statutory financial reporting; and ensures corrective action is taken where needed, including in relation to significant partnerships	<p>Quarterly budget monitoring reports to the Resources Committee provide detailed updates on capital and revenue budgets. Treasury management is actively monitored, with £183k interest earned by Period 9 and year-end interest of £260k against a £160k budget, supported by average daily cash holdings of £5.3m. The Authority remains debt-free, with no borrowing or MRP obligations. Non-financial data, such as sickness absence rates, are reported separately to ensure operational oversight. Sickness absence rates remain low, with only 1.5% of staff time lost in 2024/25, well below the 3.0% internal target and national averages. Budget holders meet with finance partners to review allocations, and statutory responsibilities are clearly defined in the Financial Regulations. The Authority's arrangements are considered sufficient to support effective financial governance.</p>	G

- G** No significant weaknesses or improvement recommendations.
- A** No significant weaknesses, improvement recommendations made.
- R** Significant weaknesses in arrangements identified and key recommendation(s) made.

# Governance – commentary on arrangements (continued)

We considered how the Authority:	Commentary on arrangements	Rating
<p>ensures it makes properly informed decisions, supported by appropriate evidence and allowing for challenge and transparency, including from governance committee</p>	<p>The Authority ensures informed and transparent decision-making through a clear governance structure, with the Full Authority approving key policies and strategic decisions. Committees, particularly Resources and Governance, play a vital preparatory and scrutiny role. For example, the Resources Committee reviewed and commissioned external advice on the Brockhole site before Full Authority approval.</p> <p>Meetings are public and supported by published agendas and papers. Declarations of interest are made at each meeting, and minutes reflect active discussion and challenge. The Governance Committee met regularly, overseeing audit activity and completing a self-assessment that found no significant weaknesses, though it highlighted the need for ongoing training. To support effective challenge, members receive pre-meeting briefings, and “away hours” are used for informal discussion and training. Roles and responsibilities are clearly defined, and risks such as groupthink are actively monitored. Overall, arrangements support transparent, and well-informed governance.</p>	<p>G</p>
<p>monitors and ensures appropriate standards, such as meeting legislative/regulatory requirements and standards in terms of staff and board member behaviour</p>	<p>The Authority's Annual Governance Statement for 2024/25 reports no significant breaches or non-compliance. Declarations of interest are made at the start of all Full Authority and Committee meetings. Procurement is overseen by the Resources Committee, which receives quarterly updates on contract exemptions. A 2024/25 internal audit gave procurement a “Substantial Assurance” rating, confirming strong controls and compliance with revised Contract Standing Orders. Officers have received training on the Procurement Act 2023.</p> <p>The Authority uses legal update services and makes sure legal and financial advice is considered when making decisions. Between April 2024 and March 2025, eight minor data breaches were reported, mostly due to human error, such as lost phones or incomplete redactions. None were serious enough to report to the Information Commissioner’s Office. Improving data handling is part of the 2025/26 action plan. Member behaviour is guided by the Authority Handbook and Code of Conduct, with plans to update the Handbook to reflect recent leadership changes and to improve access to training.</p>	<p>G</p>

- G** No significant weaknesses or improvement recommendations.
- A** No significant weaknesses, improvement recommendations made.
- R** Significant weaknesses in arrangements identified and key recommendation(s) made.

# Improving economy, efficiency and effectiveness – commentary on arrangements

We considered how the Authority:	Commentary on arrangements	Rating
<p>uses financial and performance information to assess performance to identify areas for improvement</p>	<p>The Authority assess performance by combining financial data, business plan progress, service-level outcomes, and risk management in quarterly reports to the Resources Committee. These reports enable members to track delivery against strategic objectives, monitor financial pressures, and review service performance using RAG ratings. The Authority delivered 11 of 17 strategic Business Plan actions, with six rolled over due to resource constraints and external factors. Service performance remained strong overall, with three of five areas rated green and two amber, supported by mitigation plans. Workforce data, such as sickness absence and appraisal completion, is monitored through separate reporting, with findings informing improvement actions.</p> <p>Performance indicators are regularly reviewed to ensure data quality, and monthly service assessments feed into strategic planning. This approach allows the Authority to identify underperformance, understand root causes (e.g. resource constraints or external dependencies), and implement mitigation plans.</p>	<p>G</p>
<p>evaluates the services it provides to assess performance and identify areas for improvement</p>	<p>The Authority continues to evaluate its services through quarterly performance and risk reporting. The 2024/25 year-end report highlights that while challenges persist—particularly in Development Management and Resources—overall service performance has improved, with three out of five service areas rated green.</p> <p>Notable progress was made in workforce outcomes, with staff appraisal completion rising to 92% from 67% in 2023/24 and volunteer satisfaction exceeding targets, reflecting a strong organisational culture. Although six of the 17 key Business Plan actions were not fully completed, all have been rolled forward into 2025/26, with clear plans for delivery. The Authority also advanced its sustainability agenda by developing a new Sustainability Strategy, which is set for implementation in 2025/26. Delivery continued across key environmental and visitor-focused programmes, including Fix the Fells, the Access Infrastructure programme, and the Coast-to-Coast National Trail.</p>	<p>G</p>

- G** No significant weaknesses or improvement recommendations.
- A** No significant weaknesses, improvement recommendations made.
- R** Significant weaknesses in arrangements identified and key recommendation(s) made.

# Improving economy, efficiency and effectiveness – commentary on arrangements (continued)

We considered how the Authority:	Commentary on arrangements	Rating
<p>ensures it delivers its role within significant partnerships and engages with stakeholders it has identified, in order to assess whether it is meeting its objectives</p>	<p>The Authority ensures it delivers its role within significant partnerships through structured governance and regular performance monitoring. The Park Management &amp; Vision Committee coordinates contributions to the Lake District Management Plan, while quarterly reports to the Resources Committee track progress against Business Plan actions, including those led with partners. These reports use a RAG rating system, KPIs, and risk registers to assess delivery and escalate issues.</p> <p>Stakeholder engagement is embedded in both formal and informal partnerships, such as with the National Trust, local authorities, and the Safer Lakes initiative. Updates from partnership activity are accessible to all Authority members, ensuring transparency and alignment with strategic objectives.</p>	<p>G</p>
<p>commissions or procures services, assessing whether it is realising the expected benefits</p>	<p>Procurement is governed by Contract Standing Orders, with contracts awarded through public tender processes. A contract register, introduced in November 2023, tracks contract values, durations, and suppliers, supporting transparency and compliance. As of June 2025, it lists around 30 contracts valued at over £1 million.</p> <p>Contract management is decentralised, with individual service managers responsible for oversight. Most contracts are for one-off acquisitions or project delivery, requiring limited monitoring. However, where services are outsourced, such as the Brockhole site, dedicated oversight and performance tracking, including KPIs, are planned.</p> <p>The Brockhole decision was supported by financial modelling and expert advice from Savills, who conducted an options appraisal and soft market testing. This provided evidence on market interest, delivery models, and investment potential. The Resources Committee also receives quarterly financial updates, including capital programme outturns and variance analysis, to monitor delivery and benefit realisation.</p>	<p>G</p>

- G** No significant weaknesses or improvement recommendations.
- A** No significant weaknesses, improvement recommendations made.
- R** Significant weaknesses in arrangements identified and key recommendation(s) made.

# Grant Thornton insights – learning from others

The Authority has the arrangements we would expect to see in respect of partnerships and benchmarking, but could challenge itself to go further, based on the best arrangements we see across the sector



## What the Authority is already doing

- Volunteers are embedded into the Authority’s core service delivery, contributing over 30,000 hours annually—equivalent to 15 full-time staff—demonstrating a cost-effective resource strategy.
- The Authority works with conservation groups and other National Parks to align volunteer efforts with broader environmental and community objectives.



## What others do well

- The most effective partnership arrangements we see include development of quarterly reviews of volunteer impact help maintain accountability and demonstrate measurable outcomes.
- The incorporation of cross-sector benchmarking and collaboration across organisations enables shared learning and improved efficiency in volunteer management.



## The Authority could consider

- Expanding Benchmarking Practices: Deepening collaboration with other public sector bodies could enhance learning and improve volunteer programme effectiveness.
- Enhancing Impact Reporting: Incorporating more detailed metrics and qualitative outcomes in the Volunteering Report could strengthen its value as a strategic tool.
- Formalising Volunteer Development Pathways: Introducing structured training and progression routes for volunteers may boost retention and engagement, aligning with workforce development goals.

# **05 Summary of Value for Money Recommendations raised in 2024/25**

# Improvement recommendations raised in 2024/25

	Recommendation	Relates to	Management Actions
IR1	The Authority should strengthen its financial forecasting arrangements to capture more accurate estimates of vacancy underspends and staff charges to grants throughout the year.	Financial sustainability (pages 14 – 16)	<p>Actions:</p> <p>Management accept that as the single largest element of expenditure, monitoring of staff costs is a key financial control. Significant work is already undertaken to identify and plan for the impact of vacancies. Further work will be done to ensure the reporting of this is clearer and that the magnitude of underspends due to time spent on grant funded activities is flagged prior to year end.</p> <p>Responsible Officer:</p> <p>Head of Resources</p> <p>Due Date:</p> <p>31 December 2025</p>

# 06 Appendices

# Appendix A: Responsibilities of the Authority

Public bodies spending taxpayers' money are accountable for their stewardship of the resources entrusted to them. They should account properly for their use of resources and manage themselves well so that the public can be confident.

Financial statements are the main way in which local public bodies account for how they use their resources. Local public bodies are required to prepare and publish financial statements setting out their financial performance for the year. To do this, bodies need to maintain proper accounting records and ensure they have effective systems of internal control.

All local public bodies are responsible for putting in place proper arrangements to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness from their resources. This includes taking properly informed decisions and managing key operational and financial risks so that they can deliver their objectives and safeguard public money. Local public bodies report on their arrangements, and the effectiveness with which the arrangements are operating, as part of their annual governance statement.

The Authority's Chief Finance Officer is responsible for preparing the financial statements and for being satisfied that they give a true and fair view, and for such internal control as they determine necessary to enable the preparation of financial statements that are free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error.

The Chief Finance Officer is required to comply with CIPFA/LASAAC code of practice on local authority accounting in the United Kingdom. In preparing the financial statements, the Chief Financial Officer is responsible for assessing the Authority's ability to continue as a going concern and use the going concern basis of accounting unless there is an intention by government that the services provided by the Authority will no longer be provided.

The Authority is responsible for putting in place proper arrangements to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources, to ensure proper stewardship and governance, and to review regularly the adequacy and effectiveness of these arrangements.



# Appendix B: Value for Money Auditor responsibilities

Our work is risk-based and focused on providing a commentary assessment of the Authority’s Value for Money arrangements

## Phase 1 – Planning and initial risk assessment

As part of our planning, we assess our knowledge of the Authority’s arrangements and whether we consider there are any indications of risks of significant weakness. This is done against each of the reporting criteria and continues throughout the reporting period.

## Phase 2 – Additional risk-based procedures and evaluation

Where we identify risks of significant weakness in arrangements, we will undertake further work to understand whether there are significant weaknesses. We use auditor’s professional judgement in assessing whether there is a significant weakness in arrangements and ensure that we consider any further guidance issued by the NAO.

## Phase 3 – Reporting our commentary and recommendations

The Code requires us to provide a commentary on your arrangements which is detailed within this report. Where we identify weaknesses in arrangements we raise recommendations.

 **A range of different recommendations can be raised by the Authority’s auditors as follows:**

**Statutory recommendations** – recommendations to the Authority under Section 24 (Schedule 7) of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014.

**Key recommendations** – the actions which should be taken by the Authority where significant weaknesses are identified within arrangements.

**Improvement recommendations** – actions which are not a result of us identifying significant weaknesses in the Authority’s arrangements, but which if not addressed could increase the risk of a significant weakness in the future.

## Information that informs our ongoing risk assessment

Cumulative knowledge of arrangements from the prior year	Key performance and risk management information reported to the Executive or full Authority
Interviews and discussions with key stakeholders	External review such as by the LGA, CIPFA, or Local Government Ombudsman
Progress with implementing recommendations	Regulatory inspections such as from Ofsted and CQC
Findings from our opinion audit	Annual Governance Statement including the Head of Internal Audit annual opinion

# Appendix C: Follow up of 2023/24 improvement recommendations

	Prior Recommendation	Raised	Progress	Current position	Further action
IR1	<p>We recommend that the Authority:</p> <p>Clearly states to the Governance Committee on an annual basis that the Authority Handbook, incorporating the Member Code of Conduct, has been reviewed for relevance and updated where necessary.</p> <p>On an annual basis all Members should confirm they have read and understood the Authority's Complaints procedures and Code of Conduct.</p>	2023/24	The member confirmation process is in place, while the Authority Handbook update is pending but scheduled with a clear timeline of September 2025.	In progress	To verify update issued in September 2025.



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