



EXMOOR

NATIONAL PARK

EXMOOR NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY
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26th March 2026

EXMOOR NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY STANDARDS COMMITTEE

To: The Members of the STANDARDS COMMITTEE of the Exmoor National Park Authority

A meeting of the Standards Committee will be held at Exmoor House, Dulverton on **Tuesday, 7 April 2026 at 12.00pm.**

The meeting will be open to the press and public subject to the passing of any resolution under s.100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972.

There is a Public Speaking at this meeting, when the Chairperson will allow members of the public two minutes each in which to ask questions, make statements, or present a petition relating to any item on the Agenda. Anyone wishing to ask questions should notify the Democratic Support Officer by 4pm on the working day before the meeting of the agenda item on which they wish to speak, indicating a brief summary of the matter or matters to be raised (contact details are set out above).

Please be aware that this is a public Authority Meeting and will be **audio and video recorded**. We will make the recordings available via our website for members of the public to listen to and/or view, within 72 hours of the meeting taking place.

Members of the public may use forms of social media to report on proceedings at this meeting. Anyone wishing to film part or all of the proceedings may do so unless the press and public are excluded for that part of the meeting or there is good reason not to do so. As a matter of courtesy, anyone wishing to film proceedings is asked to advise the Chairperson so that those present may be made aware.

(The agenda and papers for this meeting can be downloaded from the National Park Authority's website www.exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk).

Sarah Bryan
Chief Executive

As set out above, the Authority welcomes public engagement with its work and believes that everyone attending a meeting of Exmoor National Park Authority or one of its Committees has the right to be treated with respect and to feel safe at all times, including before, during and after the meeting they attend.

The Authority understands that some situations can be difficult and lead to frustration; however, the Authority is committed to promoting an environment where everyone feels listened to and respected and is not subjected to unacceptable behaviour. Further guidance is provided in our Customer Notice, available on our [website](#).

A G E N D A

1. **Apologies for Absence**
2. **Declarations of Interest**
3. **Minutes:** (1) To approve as a correct record the Minutes of the meeting of the Standards Committee held on 2 December 2025 (Item 3).
(2) To consider any Matters Arising from those Minutes.
4. **Business of Urgency:** To introduce any business which by reason of special circumstances the Chairperson, after consultation with the Chief Executive, is of the opinion should be considered as a matter of urgency and to resolve when such business should be ordered on the Agenda.
5. **Public Speaking:** The Chairperson will allow members of the public to ask questions, make statements, or present a petition on any matter on the Agenda for this meeting or in relation to any item relevant to the business of the Standards Committee. Any questions specific to an agenda item can be posed when that item is considered subject to the discretion of the person presiding at the meeting.
6. **Annual Governance Review 2025-2026:** To consider the report of Chief Finance Officer and the Solicitor & Monitoring Officer (Item 6).
7. **Standards Committee Annual Report 2025-2026:** To consider the report of the Head of Enterprise & Operations and the Solicitor and Monitoring Officer (Item 7).

Details of the decisions taken at this meeting will be circulated in the formal Minutes which the Committee will be asked to approve as a correct record at its next meeting. In the meantime, details of the decisions can be obtained from the Democratic Support Officer, at Exmoor House. These documents can also be made available in alternative formats such as large print, on tape and on disc.

ITEM 3

EXMOOR NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY STANDARDS COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the meeting of the Standards Committee held at 12pm on Tuesday, 2 December 2025 in the Committee Room at Exmoor House, Dulverton.

PRESENT

Mr S J Patrinos (Chairperson)
Mr M Ellicott
Mr S J Pugsley
Mr N Thwaites

In attendance: Mr B Barrett, Head of Enterprise and Operations, ENPA. Independent person – Ms D Mortimer, Mr A Yendole – Solicitor and Monitoring Officer, Devon County Council.

1. **ELECTION OF A CHAIRPERSON** – Miss E Stacey had submitted her request 'in absentia' after a unanimous vote, the election to position of Chair was confirmed.
2. **ELECTION OF A DEPUTY CHAIRPERSON** – Mr J Patrinos was elected following a vote, and to chair the meeting on 2 December in absence of Miss E Stacey.
3. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE:** Apologies for absence were received from Miss E Stacey.
4. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST:** There were none.
5. **MINUTES:**
 - i. **Confirmation:** The [Minutes](#) of the Standards Committee's meeting held on 4 March 2025 were agreed and signed as a correct record.
 - ii. **Matters arising:** There were no matters arising from those Minutes.
6. **BUSINESS OF URGENCY:** There was none.
7. **PUBLIC SPEAKING:** There were no public speakers.
8. **ACTIONS UNDER THE AUTHORITYS MEMBER CODE OF CONDUCT**

To consider the verbal report of the Solicitor and Monitoring Officer

There was 1 complaint received in relation to a comment made by Councillor Ellicott at a Members forum meeting, a local resolution has been found and training undertaken.

Developments in Standards regulations are underway following Government consultation. New measures for Standards committees such as the right of appeal, and ability to suspend or disqualify elected members will be confirmed when they are finalised.

9. **OVERVIEW OF COMPLAINTS AND COMPLIMENTS:** The Committee considered the [Report](#) of the Chief Finance Officer and the Solicitor & Monitoring Officer.

The Committee's Consideration

The overview is for the period 18 February 2025 to 31 October 2025. This serves as an addendum to the overview provided in March 2025 covering the period 1 April 2024 to 17 February 2025

The report outlined receipt of 49 compliments relating to work carried out across the Authority and National Park Centres, this is a reassuringly positive trend to show the Authority is doing well in the activities and services it provides. It was confirmed that the compliments received are shared with ENPA staff.

2 formal Planning complaints were received. The Stage 2 complaint has been referred to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsmen, a decision is awaited following their investigation.

RESOLVED:

1. To consider the overview report of the general complaints and compliments received by the Authority.

The meeting closed at 12.20pm

(Chairperson)

EXMOOR NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

7 April 2026

ANNUAL GOVERNANCE REVIEW 2025-2026

Joint Report of the Chief Finance Officer and Solicitor and Monitoring Officer

Purpose of Report: To report compliance with the Authority's Code of Corporate Governance and consider the Annual Governance Statement for 2025-26.

RECOMMENDATIONS: The Standards Committee is recommended to:

- (1) Approve the Annual Governance Review.
- (2) Note the results of the Governance self-assessment in Section 9.
- (3) Approve the Annual Governance Statement as set out in the attached Appendix for inclusion with the Annual Accounts for 2025/26.

Authority priorities: Manage corporate finances and diversify income streams; Develop and maintain effective and efficient services; Work with communities, businesses and partners to deliver the National Park Partnership Plan and statutory purposes; Manage the Authority's Estate and operations to support delivery of National Park purposes

Legal and equality implications: The background to this report is governed by **the** Local Government Act 2003, Parts 1-3 (Capital Finance, Financial Administration and Grants), and Sections 1-39

Further supporting acts include the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015, Sections 3 (Responsibility for Internal Control), 4 (Accounting Records and Control Systems) 5 (Internal Audit), and 6 (Review of Internal Control System). Additionally new guidance is contained within the CIPFA/SOLACE document – 'Delivering Good Governance in Local Government: Addendum'.

High standards of corporate governance are essential in ensuring all business is transacted lawfully and with propriety.

The equality and human rights impact of the recommendations of this report have been assessed as having no adverse impact on any particular group or individual.

Financial and risk implications: The report has no financial implications but the risks to the Authority could be substantial for non-compliance with its Code of Corporate Governance.

Climate change response: A well governed Authority is more likely to take full account of the environmental impact of decision making.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Sound governance arrangements and accountability are critical to the Authority to fulfil National Park purposes, deliver the intended outcomes in the National Park Management Plan and the Corporate Plan and operate in an effective, efficient and ethical manner. Good governance leads to good management, good performance, good stewardship of public money, good public engagement and ultimately good outcomes for the public and service users.
- 1.2 The Authority has endorsed the “Delivering Good Governance in Local Government Framework (2016)” that has been produced by CIPFA (Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accounting) and SOLACE (Society of Local Authority Chief Executives and Senior Managers) which has the support of the Department for Communities and Local Government.
- 1.3 The CIPFA/SOLACE framework is based on the following seven core principles of good governance:
 - A. Behaving with integrity, demonstrating strong commitment to ethical values, and respecting the rule of law.
 - B. Ensuring openness and comprehensive stakeholder engagement.
 - C. Defining outcomes in terms of sustainable economic, social and environmental benefits.
 - D. Determining the interventions necessary to optimise the achievement of the intended outcomes.
 - E. Developing the entity’s capacity, including the capability of its leadership and the individuals within it.
 - F. Managing risks and performance through robust internal control and strong public financial management.
 - G. Implementing good practices in transparency, reporting, and audit to deliver effective accountability.
- 1.4 These seven principles are reflected in the Authority’s Code of Corporate Governance. The CIPFA/SOLACE Framework sets out a number of supporting principles for each of the seven core principles and these are translated into a range of governance arrangements that the Authority has in place. The first section of this report summarises the Authority’s compliance with these principles during 2025/26.

2. A. Behaving with integrity, demonstrating strong commitment to ethical values, and respecting the rule of law

- 2.1 The governance arrangements the Authority has in place to achieve these principles are:
 - During 2025/26 the Authority undertook a structured review and refresh of its corporate values to ensure they remain relevant, clearly articulated and embedded across the organisation. The process was led by the Leadership Team and informed by engagement with Members and staff, reflecting the Authority’s commitment to ethical leadership, openness and accountability. The refreshed values were developed to support consistent decision-making, reinforce expected standards of behaviour and provide a shared framework for how the Authority works with communities, partners and stakeholders. The

adoption of clear, co-produced corporate values strengthens the Authority's ethical governance framework by promoting integrity, transparency and respect for the rule of law, and by supporting a positive organisational culture aligned with the principles of the CIPFA/SOLACE Delivering Good Governance Framework.

- Codes of conduct which define the standards of conduct and personal behaviour to which members, staff and agents of the Authority are required to subscribe.
- An effective Standards Committee.
- Arrangements and mechanisms to ensure all codes of conduct continue to operate in practice, to ensure that members and staff are not influenced by prejudices, bias or conflicts of interest in dealing with the public and stakeholders.
- Arrangements for reporting concerns at work (whistleblowing, grievances, and complaints) which are accessible to all staff and contractors.
- Shared values to act as a guide for decision making and as a basis for developing positive and trusting relationships within the Authority.
- Member training and induction.
- A register of gifts and hospitality and comply with anti- bribery and money laundering legislation.
- Partnerships underpinned by a common vision that is understood and agreed by all partners.

2.2 In year Commentary. During 2025/26 the Authority further strengthened its ethical governance framework. Annual reminders regarding standards of conduct, conflicts of interest and compliance with financial regulations were issued to staff. Registers of interest, gifts and hospitality were reviewed and maintained. The Standards Committee continued to oversee compliance with the Members' Code of Conduct, with no significant breaches identified during the year.

2.3 In year standards/code of conduct/role and E.D./Exmoor for Everyone Members training took place in September 2025.

3. B. Ensuring openness and comprehensive stakeholder engagement

3.1 The governance arrangements the Authority has in place to achieve these principles are to:

- Meet on a regular basis with meetings open to the public except where reasons of commercial or individual confidentiality require the meeting to be closed.
- Engage with local councils to ensure that National Park priorities are heard.
- Produce effective consultation and communication arrangements.
- Undertake regular surveys of visitors and businesses to ensure that balanced and representative opinions are available to inform decision making.
- Enable a complaint or request for information regarding any aspect of the Authority's activities to be easily lodged and to ensure it is properly addressed.

3.2 In year Commentary:

- (i) Extensive consultation arrangements are in place. The Corporate Strategy continues to compare performance against the objectives set for the previous year and sets the targets for the forthcoming year.
- (ii) During 2025/26 the review and refresh of the National Park Management Plan progressed significantly with the plan being formally adopted in July 2025. Public consultation activity was completed, including partner workshops, engagement with statutory stakeholders and a public opinion survey. Feedback informed refinement of draft priorities and actions. Ongoing changes to national policy guidance for Protected Landscapes continued to influence final timescales, but governance arrangements remained robust throughout the process.
- (iii) We continued to respond to Freedom of Information, Environmental Information Regulation requests, complaints and compliments within statutory timescales.

4. **C. Defining outcomes in terms of sustainable economic, social, and environmental benefits**

4.1 The governance arrangements the Authority has in place to achieve these principles are to:

- Produce a National Park Management (Partnership) Plan, reviewed every five years, which contains a vision for Exmoor, key challenges and ambitions.
- Publish a Corporate Plan and performance report presenting an objective and understandable account of its activities and achievements, its financial position and performance and an assessment of plans to maintain and improve service quality.
- Produce a Medium-Term Financial Plan which estimates income and expenditure over a five-year period to ensure that obligations can be met.
- Engage with young people and a wide variety of community groups to ensure that the value of national parks is appreciated into the future.
- Ensure that the forward year budget includes a risk assessment.
- Assess the impact on community groups before recommendations are made.
- Work positively with DEFRA to ensure the long-term role and funding of national parks is secured.

4.2 In year Commentary

- (i) A three-year Corporate Strategy was agreed by the Authority in May 2023. This set out the key priorities for the Authority and included actions for 2025/26. The Strategy reflected the emerging themes of the 2025/30 Exmoor National Park Management Plan, and the priorities identified in Government's response to the Landscape Review. A six-month progress report was presented to Members in November 2025. A new Corporate Plan will be

approved by Members in April 2026, setting out the actions the Authority will take to deliver the new National Park Management Plan.

- (ii) We received an unqualified opinion for the 2024/25 Annual Statement of Accounts by the Auditor, Grant Thornton LLP. Complaints procedures are in place, are easily accessible and are easy to use. Requests for information under the Freedom of Information Act, 2000 are dealt with in accordance with the statutory requirements. Reports on both complaints and Freedom of Information Act requests were submitted to the National Park Authority.
- (iii) During 2025/26 the Authority established a Youth Board, approved by Members, to strengthen inclusive governance and partnership working by providing a structured mechanism for young people aged 18–26 to engage with Members, officers and partner organisations. Developed in consultation with existing youth partners and operating on a consultative and ambassadorial basis, the Youth Board supports policy development, engagement priorities and delivery of the National Park Management Plan, complements existing arrangements such as Exmoor Young Voices, and provides assurance through defined terms of reference and annual reporting to Members.
- (iv) Since declaring a climate emergency in 2019/20 we have been implementing actions identified to achieve carbon neutral status for ENPA by 2030. 2025/26 has seen the purchase of two further electric vehicles (2x Hyundai Kona EV Pool-cars). Following an internal climate change audit, we strengthened our procedures for monitoring and reporting on the climate action plan including the addition of a trajectory to deliver the 2030 carbon neutral target. We continue to feed into the Somerset and Devon climate change partnerships and are present on a DEFRA working group in respect of 4x4 and commercial vehicles. The Authority has joined with other UK National Park Authorities to join the Race to Zero, and submitted its annual reporting on climate mitigation and adaptation. Work has been commissioned to carry out a climate risk and vulnerability assessment for the National Park, and a climate adaptation plan will be produced in 2026/27.
- (v) In March 2026, Members approve the first ENPA Biodiversity Duty Report, required as part of the Environment Act 2021. The report sets out how the Authority fulfils the requirements of the biodiversity duty, and the actions being taken to conserve and enhance biodiversity including actions ENPA's estate, in land management, policy making and decision taking. As a supporting Authority, Members also approved the Devon and Somerset Local Nature Recovery Strategies for consultation in 2025 and for adoption in 2026.
- (vi) The task of developing a balanced medium-term financial plan is ongoing. The Authority successfully managed an in-year revenue grant cut of 8.2% announced in April 2025 and has risen to meet the target of making full use of a £1.4m capital allocation for the 2025/26 year.

5. D. Determining the interventions necessary to optimise the achievement of the intended outcomes

5.1 The governance arrangements the Authority has in place to achieve these principles are:

- Considering a full range of options before recommendations are presented to members of the Authority.
- Undertaking regular surveys of visitors and businesses to ensure that balanced and representative opinions are available to inform decision making.
- Producing a Corporate Plan setting out objectives and targets for the period ahead.
- Monitoring the achievement of these targets in year, and publicly reporting performance at the year end.
- Producing a Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP) which estimates income and expenditure over a five year period, agreeing annual budgets which implement the Corporate Plan and are informed by the MTFP.
- When assessing options for capital investment the Authority, considering the life-cycle costs of the asset and the cost of capital financing.
- Maintain a record of decisions made by officers.

5.2 In year Commentary. During the year the Authority continued to operate within its established decision-making framework, supported by Standing Orders, the Scheme of Delegation and Financial Regulations. The Authority continued to provide enhanced members scrutiny of budget proposals, investment decisions and financial risks, strengthening assurance prior to decisions being taken by the Authority.

- (i) The Authority's decision-making processes are based on a slim line structure embracing the principle that there should be no duplication of effort. The Authority is not required to provide executive arrangements which were introduced in the Local Government Act 2000 and apply only to local authorities.
- (ii) The present Authority structure meets all the requirements of the Local Government Act. Standing Orders, Powers, Duties and Functions of the Authority Meeting, the Scheme of Delegation and Financial Regulations were reviewed and updated during 2024/25. The Members' Code of Conduct was last revised by the Authority in April 2024. With a revision in June 2025 for the nominations of Planning Committee substitutes and a reduction in the notice period from 10 to 3 days, save for exceptional circumstances when 24 hours' notice would need to be provided
- (iii) The scheme of delegation of functions to Authority Committee and to the Chief Executive works well and is kept under review. In any public authority, decisions are being made all the time and it is important to strike the right balance between those that require Member consideration and those that can be taken by Officers. The scheme of delegation is set out fully in the Authority's standing orders. All decisions by Officers must accord with all Authority policies and must where appropriate, involve consultation with Members. Whether a Member or Members should be consulted on any particular issue is a matter of judgement but it is the practice to consult

committee chairmen and deputy chairmen on some issues and indeed local Members, that is to say those representing a division, ward or parish. An overriding safeguard in the delegation scheme is that the Chief Executive is required in all cases to consider whether, rather than proceed under the scheme, they should refer the matter to a committee for decision. Where any controversy is likely, it is always the policy to refer such matters to committee for decision.

6. E. Developing the entity's capacity, including the capability of its leadership and the individuals within it

6.1 The governance arrangements the Authority has in place to achieve these principles are:

- Ensuring the Chief Executive is responsible and accountable to the Authority for all aspects of operational management.
- Ensuring induction programmes are arranged for new members and new staff.
- Ensuring Members are provided with the necessary training to perform their roles including member review and Member briefing arrangements.
- Ensuring that staff are competent to perform their roles and that arrangements are in place for all staff to have a Personal Development Review.
- Ensuring mechanisms are in place to maintain the health, safety and wellbeing of staff at work.
- Ensuring that the roles and responsibilities of Members and staff are documented including those of the statutory officers namely Chief Executive, Chief Finance Officer and Monitoring Officer.
- Providing arrangements that are designed to encourage individuals from all sections of the public to engage with, contribute to and participate in the work of the Authority.
- Ensuring meetings are held on a regular basis, are open to the public except where reasons of commercial or individual confidentiality require the meeting to be closed.

6.2 In year Commentary. During 2025/26 induction and training arrangements for Members continued, supported by regular informal Members' Forums. The annual Members' review process was completed. Staff Appraisals were taken across the Authority, ensuring objectives remained aligned with the Corporate Plan.

- (i) Members have adopted a role description outlining the role and responsibility of members and an annual Member review is conducted by the Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson.
- (ii) All members of staff normally receive an annual appraisal which included ensuring their job description was up to date, reviewed progress against current individual objectives and sets new objectives for the coming year. These objectives are directly linked to those contained in the Corporate Plan. Regular opportunities are provided to staff throughout the year to review their progress and development with their manager.
- (iv) Many organisations are committed to taking a lead role in the achievement of actions in the National Park Management Plan and these comprise local

authorities, statutory agencies, voluntary organisations and partnerships. All contribute to the periodic updating of progress against the targets.

- (iii) The Authority maintained its focus on staff wellbeing and professional development. Ongoing engagement through Leadership Team and Delivery Team meetings provided a forum to identify training needs and organisational capacity risks.
- (iv) The Authority received Employer Accreditation from CIPFA for its identification of professional development requirements for professionally qualified staff.
- (v) The Authority retains its status as a Mindful Employer and has signed the Menopause Workplace Pledge.

7. F. Managing risks and performance through robust internal control and strong public financial management.

7.1 The governance arrangements the Authority has in place to achieve these principles are:

- To produce and agree an annual risk register and risk management policy.
- To maintain an effective risk management system including systems of internal control and internal audit.
- A Health and Safety Committee to ensure that accidents and incidents are reported and appropriate management action taken to reduce risk.
- Information management, e-mail, internet and ICT policies that are communicated and understood.
- Targets for performance in the delivery of services on a sustainable basis.
- Ensuring the Chief Finance Officer advises on all financial matters, keeps proper financial records and accounts and maintains an effective system of internal financial control.
- To produce an annual governance statement for inclusion in the Annual Statement of Accounts.
- To operate a Final Accounts Committee and the Finance and Performance Advisory Panel to provide an additional level of oversight and challenge.
- An Internal Audit service to provide reassurance over the operation of internal control and processes.

7.2 In year Commentary

- (i) The Corporate Plan sets out the priorities and objectives for each financial year with periodic reports to those charged with governance on achievements/progress.
- (ii) During 2025/26 the Authority implemented a refreshed Risk Management Strategy and Policy following a comprehensive review undertaken with Devon Assurance Partnership. A revised Strategic Risk Register and risk identification matrix were embedded, supported by risk heat mapping to improve visibility and escalation of key risks to members.

- (iii) Annual reports have been made to the National Park Authority on the Risk Management Strategy and the Internal Audit Service. The Auditor, Grant Thornton LLP presented their Annual Audit Findings Report to the Authority in December 2025 and an unqualified audit report was issued. The external auditors also undertook an enhanced Value For Money appraisal at this time also. Internal Audit presented their 2025/26 audit report to the March Authority which concluded that the Authority displayed substantial assurance for all risk areas covered.
- (iv) The Health, Safety and Welfare policy has been reviewed to reflect the Authority's new flexible working arrangements and how reporting Health and Safety concerns is done in practice. New online reporting mechanisms are in place for accidents and near miss incidents as well as continuing to use a downloaded form. Health and safety issues are now discussed at regular Team meetings and the Health and Safety Committee meets on a quarterly basis with the existing system of reporting continuing.
- (v) Policy reviews carried out during 2025/26 include: Standards of Conduct, Bullying and Harassment, Health, Safety and Wellbeing, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion, Lone Working, Personal Safety and Behaviour Safeguarding, Driving Authority Vehicles and Use of Personal Vehicles, Safeguarding – working with children and vulnerable adults, Expenses, and Flexible Working Arrangements. New policies introduced during the year include a Modern Slavery Statement, as well as Guidance to sit alongside policies in areas such as health and safety, personal safety and dealing with sexual harassment in the workplace (supported by a risk assessment). A continual review process is taking place in line with legislative changes.

8. G. Implementing good practices in transparency, reporting, and audit to deliver effective accountability

8.1 The governance arrangements the Authority has in place to achieve these principles are:

- Ensuring meetings are held on a regular basis, are open to the public except where reasons of commercial or individual confidentiality require the meeting to be closed.
- Arrangements designed to encourage individuals and groups from all sections of the public to engage with, contribute to and participate in the work of the Authority.
- Ensuring that all activities are legally correct, fully documented, appropriately authorised and carried out in a planned manner.
- Ensuring the Chief Executive is responsible and accountable to the Authority for all aspects of operational management.
- Ensuring that the roles and responsibilities of officers are documented including those of the statutory officers namely Chief Executive, Chief Finance Officer and Monitoring Officer.
- Publishing an Annual Statement of Accounts each year in accordance with statutory requirements.

- Arrangements to enable a complaint or request for information regarding any aspect of the Authority's activities to be easily lodged and to ensure it is properly addressed.
- Ensuring the Chief Finance Officer maintains proper records to ensure the annual statement of accounts show a true and fair view and that expenditure has been properly authorised and allocated in an appropriate manner.
- Commissioning an Internal Audit service to provide reassurance over the operation of internal control and processes.
- Inclusion of an annual governance statement in the Statement of Accounts.
- A Corporate Strategy setting out the objectives and targets for the three-year period ahead and annual reports on performance against Corporate Actions and targets.
- An annual update on the progress of the Authority and its partners on the implementation of the National Park Partnership Plan.
- Auditing of the Authority's financial position and performance every year via an External Audit of the final accounts.
- The completion of Statutory returns and quarterly returns to Defra.

8.2 In year Commentary: Transparency and accountability continued to be strengthened during 2025/26. Authority provided additional oversight of financial management and value-for-money considerations. Internal and External audit findings were reported openly to Members, with no significant weaknesses identified. The Authority maintained public access to meetings through audio and video recording, and governance arrangements were kept under review, including completion of a new modern slavery statement and harassment policies. Based on reviews carried out in year, governance arrangements remain fit for purpose.

- (i) Extensive consultation arrangements are in place. The three-year Corporate Strategy (2023-2026) in its final year, continues to compare performance against the objectives set for the previous year and sets the Corporate Actions for the forthcoming year.
- (ii) Annual reports have been made to the National Park Authority on the Risk Management Strategy and the Internal Audit Service. The Auditor, Grant Thornton LLP presented their Annual Audit Findings Report to the Final Accounts Committee in December 2025 and a Value for Money report did not identify any weaknesses in arrangements.
- (iii) The Authority has the capability for audio and video recording of its meetings, and they can be viewed over the internet.
- (iv) This year there have been reviews of Harassment policies to include sexual harassment, guidance and an organisation risk assessment and a new Modern Slavery Statement.

9. Audit Committee Self-Assessment

- 9.1 In May 2022 the External Auditors recommended that an annual self-assessment of the Audit Committee be undertaken to comply with recommended practice. This is the third year that this has been undertaken.
- 9.2 The purpose of an audit committee is to provide to those charged with governance independent assurance on the adequacy of the risk management framework, the internal control environment and the integrity of the financial reporting and annual governance processes.
- 9.3 Exmoor National Park Authority does not have a separate Audit Committee, but it is the Authority that is the body charged with governance and it is the Standards Committee that undertakes the annual review of governance. In discussion with the External Auditors, they did not raise any objection to the annual self-assessment falling to the Standards Committee.
- 9.4 Included within the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy's practical guidance on Audit Committees is a self-assessment of good practice. This is shown in the table below. It is suggested that where an audit committee has a high degree of performance against the good practice principles, then it is an indicator that the committee is soundly based and has in place a knowledgeable membership.
- 9.5 In the absence of an Audit Committee, the Standards Committee will endeavour to complete the self-assessment with the governance structure in operation at ENPA.
- 9.6 During 2025/26 the governance and internal control systems within the Authority operated effectively and were reviewed by the Solicitor and Monitoring Officer and the Chief Finance Officer. Assurance was provided through Internal Audit, External Audit and Members scrutiny. Where improvement opportunities were identified, including in relation to safeguarding and risk management, actions were implemented and confirmed as complete.

Good practice questions	Yes	Partly	No
Audit committee purpose and governance			
1. Does the authority have a dedicated audit committee?			x
2. Does the audit committee report directly to full council? (applicable to local government only)		n/a	
3. Do the terms of reference clearly set out the purpose of the committee in accordance with CIPFA's Position Statement?		n/a	
4. Is the role and purpose of the audit committee understood and accepted across the authority?		n/a	
5. Does the audit committee provide support to the authority in meeting the requirements of good governance?		n/a	
6. Are the arrangements to hold the committee to account for its performance operating satisfactorily?		n/a	
Self-Assessment Commentary: <i>It is the full Authority that is the body charged with governance. The Authority fully understands its responsibility with regards to Governance.</i>			
Functions of the committee			
7. Do the committee's terms of reference explicitly address all the core areas identified in CIPFA's Position Statement?	x		
• good governance	x		

• assurance framework, including partnerships and collaboration arrangements			
• internal audit	X		
• external audit	X		
• financial reporting	X		
• risk management	X		
• value for money or best value	X		
• counter fraud and corruption	X		
• supporting the ethical framework	X		
8. Is an annual evaluation undertaken to assess whether the committee is fulfilling its terms of reference and that adequate consideration has been given to all core areas?	X		
9. Has the audit committee considered the wider areas identified in CIPFA's Position Statement and whether it would be appropriate for the committee to undertake them?		See below	
10. Where coverage of core areas has been found to be limited, are plans in place to address this?		n/a	
11. Has the committee maintained its advisory role by not taking on any decision-making powers that are not in line with its core purpose?		n/a	
<p><i>Self-Assessment Commentary:</i> <i>The Authority is guided and governed by the Constitution, Scheme of Delegation and Standing Orders. These documents cover the areas identified above.</i></p> <p><i>Potential wider areas concern of concern identified by CIPFA include Treasury Management, providing oversight of annual reports or considering risk or governance at the request of other committees. These wider areas of concern also go to the Authority.</i></p>			
Membership and support			
12. Has an effective audit committee structure and composition of the committee been selected? (ENPA Authority)	X		
This should include:	n/a		
• separation from the executive	X		
• an appropriate mix of knowledge and skills among the membership	X		
• a size of committee that is not unwieldy	X		
• consideration has been given to the inclusion of at least one independent member (where it is not already a mandatory requirement)	X		
13. Have independent members appointed to the committee been recruited in an open and transparent way and approved by the full council or the PCC and chief constable as appropriate for the organisation?	x		
14. Does the chair of the committee have appropriate knowledge and skills?	x		
15. Are arrangements in place to support the committee with briefings and training?	x		
16. Has the membership of the committee been assessed against the core knowledge and skills framework and found to be satisfactory?			x
17. Does the committee have good working relations with key people and organisations, including external audit, internal audit and the CFO?	x		
18. Is adequate secretariat and administrative support to the committee provided?	x		

Self-Assessment Commentary: <i>Members of the Authority and the Standards Committee are appointed from a range of elected public bodies or have been appointed from a DEFRA led competitive process. Members have a range of skills and professional backgrounds.</i>			
Effectiveness of the committee			
19. Has the committee obtained feedback on its performance from those interacting with the committee or relying on its work?	x		
20. Are meetings effective with a good level of discussion and engagement from all the members?	x		
21. Does the committee engage with a wide range of leaders and managers, including discussion of audit findings, risks and action plans with the responsible officers?	x		
22. Does the committee make recommendations for the improvement of governance, risk and control and are these acted on?	x		
23. Has the committee evaluated whether and how it is adding value to the organisation?	x		
24. Does the committee have an action plan to improve any areas of weakness?		n/a	
25. Does the committee publish an annual report to account for its performance and explain its work?	x		
Self-Assessment Commentary: <i>The Authority and the Standards Committee receive reports from internal and external audit throughout the year, and from ENPA staff on Risk Management. There is a very healthy debate and engagement with these.</i> <i>The overall governance structure is regularly debated to ensure that it is operating most effectively.</i>			

Ben Barrett
Chief Finance Officer
March 2026

Andrew Yendole
Solicitor & Monitoring Officer



ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT 2025/26

1. Scope of responsibility

- 1.1 Exmoor National Park Authority is responsible for ensuring that its business is conducted in accordance with the law and proper standards, and that public money is safeguarded and properly accounted for, and used economically, efficiently and effectively. The Authority also has a duty under the Local Government Act 1999 to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the way in which its functions are exercised, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness.
- 1.2 In discharging this overall responsibility, the Authority is responsible for putting in place proper arrangements for the governance of its affairs, facilitating the effective exercise of its functions, and which includes arrangements for the management of risk.
- 1.3 Exmoor National Park Authority has approved and adopted a code of corporate governance, which is consistent with the principles of the CIPFA/SOLACE Framework *Delivering Good Governance in Local Government*. A copy of the code can be obtained from the Chief Executive, Exmoor House, Dulverton, TA22 9HL. This statement explains how the Authority has complied with the Local Code of Corporate Governance and also meets the requirements of regulation 4(2) of the Accounts and Audit (England) Regulations 2015 and the amended regulations for 2021 in relation to the publication of statement on internal control.

2. The purpose of the governance framework

- 2.1 The governance framework comprises the systems and processes, and the culture and values, by which the Authority is directed and controlled and its activities through which it accounts to, engages with and the leads the community. It enables the Authority to monitor the achievement of its strategic objectives and to consider whether those objectives have led to the delivery of appropriate, cost-effective services.
- 2.2 The system of internal control is a significant part of that framework and is designed to manage risk to a reasonable level. It cannot eliminate all risk of failure to achieve policies, aims and objectives and can therefore only provide reasonable and not absolute assurance of effectiveness. The system of internal control is based on an ongoing process designed to identify and prioritise the risks to the achievement of the Authority's policies and aims and objectives, to evaluate the likelihood of those risks being realised and the impact should they be realised, and to manage them efficiently, effectively and economically.
- 2.3 A governance framework has been in place at Exmoor National Park Authority for the year ended 31 March 2026 and up to the date of approval of the Corporate Plan and statement of accounts.

3. The Governance Framework

3.1 The key elements of the governance framework include:

- A National Park Management Plan that contains a vision and targets, and a corporate strategy to meet National Park purposes;
- The production of a Medium Term Financial Plan taking account of the anticipated level of National Park Grant;
- The production of a Corporate Plan that includes data on performance and objectives both achieved and planned;
- Committee papers that are linked to National Park Management Plan or Corporate Plan objectives and in compliance with equality and human rights legislation;
- Standing orders and financial regulations to regulate the conduct of the Authority's affairs;
- A Scheme of Delegation which sets out the functions and workings of the Authority and the powers delegated to Committees and the Chief Executive;
- Formal codes of conduct which define the standards of personal behaviour of members and staff. The code for Members was initially adopted in 2012 along with the establishment of a Standards Committee comprising 5 Authority members and the appointment of an "Independent Person" under the provisions of the 2011 Localism Act. A further process was the provision of guidance on the registration of interests. This was reviewed and refined in August 2012 with recommendations to Authority for standards arrangements and for the provision of member training on the new standards regime;
- Responsibility for audit matters are retained by the Authority;
- A Solicitor and Monitoring Officer who has a statutory responsibility supported by the Chief Finance Officer and financial regulations to ensure the legality of transactions, activities and arrangements the Authority enters;
- Financial management arrangements of the Authority which conform with the governance requirements of the CIPFA Statement on the role of the Chief Financial Officer in Local Government (2010) ;
- A complaints procedure and a whistle-blowing policy in place for members of the public, members, staff or contractors;
- An Anti-Fraud, Corruption and Bribery Policy;
- ICT Acceptable Use, data protection and security policies;
- Risk Management Policy, Registers and Business Continuity and Disaster Recovery systems which are approved, in place and subject to annual regular review;
- Extensive arrangements for partnership working on a range of projects. Partnership working is crucial to the achievement of the priorities set out in the National Park Partnership Plan.
- A staff performance and development review process which identifies training and development needs;
- Training, briefing and induction programmes for members; and

- Wide consultation with interested parties and an Exmoor National Park Forum meets to engage with the community and a Local Access Forum considers access and rights of way issues. Numerous diverse organisations are represented on these consultative mechanisms.

4. Review of Effectiveness

4.1 Exmoor National Park Authority has responsibility for conducting at least annually, a review of effectiveness of its governance framework including the system of internal control. The review of effectiveness is informed by the work of the Chief Executive and Heads of Section within the Authority who have responsibility for the development and maintenance of the governance environment, the annual report on internal audit, and by the Annual Governance Report of the external auditors. The annual review of the effectiveness of the governance framework is undertaken by the Standards Committee and the Authority approve this Annual Governance Statement. The Standards Committee now also undertake an annual self-assessment of effectiveness.

4.2 The process that has been applied in maintaining and reviewing the effectiveness of the governance framework is:

- The adoption of an updated Code of Corporate Governance in March 2017 with an annual review by the National Park Authority carried out by the Authority's Solicitor and Monitoring Officer to ensure compliance with the Code and audited by the Chief Finance Officer;
- Adoption of Standing Orders, the scheme of delegation and financial regulations which are periodically reviewed, updated and approved;
- Reports to the Authority on performance management including sustainability and the corporate planning and performance framework;
- Annual reports presented to the Authority in respect of internal audit which is a contracted service, and from the external auditor appointed by the PSAA;
- Annual reports presented to the Authority on risk management, performance indicators and treasury management; and
- An internal audit service is contracted from the Devon Assurance Partnership and an annual work programme is agreed with the Chief Finance Officer with the internal auditors producing an annual report covering their activities for presentation to the Authority.

5. Significant governance issues

5.1 During 2025/26 the governance and internal control systems within the Authority operated effectively and were reviewed by the Solicitor and Monitoring Officer and the Chief Finance Officer. Assurance was provided through internal audit, external audit and Member scrutiny. Where improvement opportunities were identified, including in relation to safeguarding and risk management, actions were implemented and confirmed as complete.

Completed during 2025/26

- Progressed, consulted and launched the new National Park Management Plan
- Implemented a refreshed Risk Management Strategy and Strategic Risk Register

- Strengthened safeguarding, health and safety and anti-harassment governance arrangements
- Launched new Finance Systems (Access Financials), Payroll System (EduPay) and Development Management system (DEF).
- Embedded enhanced financial scrutiny through Authority
- Progressed preparations for Biodiversity Net Gain in planning and completed the statutory Biodiversity Duty Report
- Implemented carbon monitoring and reporting

Actions for 2026/27

- Preparing for the review of the Local Plan, complying with new Government policy on Plan-making;
- Understand the implications of the proposed changes to local government in Devon and the emerging new structures of Strategic Authorities on the Authority’s decision making; and
- Working with Defra to deliver the National policy agenda on climate, nature and engagement with communities;
- Continued diversification of income and financial resilience work
- Monitoring new legislation and changes in policy to ensure that account is taken of the impact on National Parks and National Park communities;
- Implement a new Corporate Plan matched to the 2025-30 Management Plan, Monitoring the performance of the Corporate Plan;
- Continuing to develop customer service standards and culture;
- Continue to engage and communicate flexibly while making best use of technology;
- Continuing to operate within limited resources while increasing revenue from alternative sources;
- Continue to adapt the Farming in Protected Landscapes panel and model of decision making;
- Delivering capital funding including new funding streams for Government targets on creating wildlife rich habitats

5.2 We propose over the coming year to take steps to address the above matters to further enhance our governance arrangements. We are satisfied that these steps will address the need for improvements that were identified in our review of effectiveness and will monitor their implementation and operation as part of our annual review.

Signed

S Bryan, Chief Executive

A Davis, Chairman

Date

EXMOOR NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

7 April 2026

STANDARDS COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT 2025-2026

Joint Report of the Head of Enterprise and Operations and the Solicitor and Monitoring Officer

PURPOSE OF THE REPORT: To consider the report of the Standards Committee functions during 2025-2026.

RECOMMENDATIONS: The Committee is recommended to:

- (1) Note the contents of the Annual Report for 2025-2026
- (2) Discuss any Member training needs for 2026-2027

Authority Priority: To meet the requirements of legislation where applicable to National Parks and conduct Authority business in line with good practice and the 7 principles of public life.

Legal and Equality Implications: Section 65(4) Environment Act 1995 – provides powers to the National Park Authority to “do anything which in the opinion of the Authority, is calculated to facilitate, or is conducive or incidental to-

- (a) the accomplishment of the purposes mentioned in s. 65 (1) [National Park purposes]
- (b) the carrying out of any functions conferred on it by virtue of any other enactment.”

The Localism Act 2011 requires the Authority to promote and maintain high standards of conduct.

The equality impact of the recommendations of this report has been assessed as follows: There are no foreseen adverse impacts on any protected group(s).

Consideration has been given to the provisions of the Human Rights Act 1998 and an assessment of the implications of the recommendations of this report is as follows: There are no implications for Human Rights Act.

Financial and Risk Implications: Reputational and other risks including criminal liability could arise should Members fail properly to comply with the provisions of the Localism Act 2011, particularly in relation to the declaration of relevant interests.

Climate Change Implications: None identified

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This report provides an overview of the functions of the Standards Committee during 2025-2026. The Standards Committee met in March and December 2025.

2. Annual Review of Standing Orders

- 2.1 The last major changes to Standing Orders came into effect from 1 April 2024, upon the creation of a Planning Sub Committee for a trial period of up to 12 months.
- 2.2 At its meeting on 6 May 2025, the Authority Committee resolved to approve the retention of a Planning Committee of 12 Members.
- 2.3 Further amends were made to Standing Orders and the Scheme of Delegation at the 3 June 2025 Authority meeting, to reduce the notice period required to nominate a Planning Committee Substitute from 10 working days before the Committee meeting to 3 working days before the Committee meeting, save for exceptional circumstances (due to an emergency or sudden illness) when 24 hours' notice would need to be provided.

3. Annual Review of Member Conduct and Code of Conduct

- 3.1 The last changes to the Member Code of Conduct also came into effect from 1 April 2024. These were relatively minor changes to reflect the terminology of the newly created Planning Committee.
- 3.2 The Member Role Profile / Member Training & Development Programme was reviewed, a fuller explanation is provided in section 6.
- 3.3 During 2025-2026 there have been no formal complaints requiring investigation under the Members' Code of Conduct. One matter was raised informally and was resolved without need for formal action by the Monitoring Officer or Standards Committee.

4. Dispensation to Authority Members

- 4.1 On 3 March 2026 the Authority agreed to renew, for a further 4 years, a proposal from the Solicitor and Monitoring Officer relating to the granting of exemptions for Members who are members of another authority where a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest would only arise by virtue of the fact that s/he or his/her spouse or partner is in receipt of an allowance from the other authority.
- 4.2 This dispensation was first introduced in November 2021 and the reasons for the exemptions were to protect Members from inadvertent breaches of the requirements related to Disclosable Pecuniary Interests, due to omissions and ambiguities in the legislation and to ensure that the National Park Authority can conduct its business effectively. Without the grant of dispensation, the ability of Members to make representation on local issues would be significantly impaired. The text of this dispensation can be viewed on the Key Documents page of ENPA's website: [Member-Dispensation-renewed-06.03.2026.pdf](#)

5. Review of the Annual Governance Review

- 5.1 This is covered separately under Item 6 of the agenda. Matters arising from the Annual Governance Review relevant to standards, conduct and member development are addressed within this report.

6. Identification of Relevant Member Training Requirements

- 6.1 A revised Member Role Profile and Member Training and Development Programme was adopted at the 4 February 2025 Authority Meeting. The revised programme includes provision for Member mentoring, which will be implemented during 2026-27.

- 6.2 Obligatory review training on the Member Role, the Standards Regime and the Member Code of Conduct was delivered by the Monitoring Officer in September 2025, along with an “Exmoor for All” session on equality and diversity.
- 6.3 Informal Member briefings during the year covered topics including planning and regulatory changes, landscape recovery and access management, supporting Members’ understanding of emerging policy and operational issues.
- 6.4 Induction training for one new Member was delivered by ENPA staff and the Monitoring Officer and Legal advisor in January 2026.
- 6.5 Member study tours have not taken place since before Covid, however one is planned for late spring / early summer 2026.
- 6.6 Members may wish to comment on training requirements for 2026-27.

7. Overview of ENPA Complaints and Compliments

- 7.1 An overview of ENPA complaints and compliments for the period 18 February 2025 to 31 October 2025 was presented to the Standards Committee at the December 2025 meeting and is available on the website [02-December-2025.pdf](#).
- 7.2 From 1 November 2025 to the date of this report (25 March 2026), two formal complaints have been received, one of which has received both a Stage 1 and Stage 2 response.

Stage 1 - Planning – Concerns about handling of a permitted development matter	November 2025	Complaint not upheld. The complaint related to the application of Class R of the General Permitted Development Order and the Authority concluded that the building met the legislative requirements, having been in sole agricultural use on the relevant qualifying date.
Stage 2 - Planning – Concerns about handling of a permitted development matter	December 2025	Complaint not upheld. The Authority concluded the correct procedures had been followed, that there was no substantive evidence to demonstrate the building was not in sole agricultural use on the relevant qualifying date and that the planning impacts raised had been appropriately assessed.
Stage 2 – Estates / Planning – Concerns about historic planning advice (in 2019) and damage arising from cliff safety works undertaken by the Authority (made good in Nov 2024)	March 2026	Complaint not upheld. The Authority considered the planning advice given in 2019 was consistent with Local Plan policies, was not unequivocal but constituted sound officer advice. Officers had advised it was open to the applicant to demonstrate the merits and/or reasons behind an alternative scheme. In relation to minor damage caused during safety works, this had been repaired by contractors to the complainant’s satisfaction in late 2024. Further remedial works were undertaken by the contractors as a goodwill gesture in early 2026.
Stage 1 – Planning – Concerns about how planning application was	March 2026	Complaint partially upheld. The Authority provided an apology for some shortcomings in regard to communication and timeliness but concluded that the planning process was handled

<p>handled and the value of pre-application advice</p>		<p>appropriately overall, the requests for additional information were reasonable, and the pre-application advice added value, and that planning permission was ultimately granted.</p>
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- 7.3 As reported at the December 2025 meeting, a Stage 2 complaint had been referred to the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) in May 2025 and a draft decision was still awaited in December.
- 7.4 Whilst the LGSCO investigation was still live, the complainant submitted a claim for Judicial Review to the High Court in January 2026.
- 7.5 On 3 February 2026, the LGSCO advised that they cannot investigate a complaint if someone has started court action about the matter. (Local Government Act 1974, section 26(6)(c), as amended).
- 7.6 In addition to the 49 compliments received between 18 February 2025 to 31 October 2025 (see link at 7.1 above), a further 24 compliments were received during the period 1 November 2025 and the date of this report (25 March 2026). These written compliments reflected positive feedback on services including planning, access & engagement and the National Park Centres, however, were often the result of contributions from multiple service areas.

8. Review of National Standards Arrangements and Good Practice

Government’s Response to the “Local Government Ethical Standards: Report

- 8.1 The Committee continues to monitor national developments in ethical standards, including the Government’s response to the Committee on Standards in Public Life, and will review any implications for local arrangements as best practice evolves.

Ben Barrett
Head of Enterprise and Operations
March 2026

Andrew Yendole
Solicitor and Monitoring Officer

Background papers on which this report, or an important part of it are based, constitute the list of background papers required by Section 100 D (1) of the Local Government Act 1972 to be open to Members of the public comprise:

- Localism Act 2011.