

North York Moors National Park Authority

Finance, Risk, Audit and Standards Committee

1 September 2026

Item 16, Best Value Duty

1. Purpose of the report

- 1.1 To update FRASC on recent proposed changes to government guidance for Best Value authorities.
- 1.2 To consider the Authority's adherence to the seven Best Value themes and opportunities to improve practices.

2. Introduction and background

- 2.1 In May 2024, the then Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, Michael Gove, published guidance on best value standards and interventions, following a consultation in summer 2023. This guidance supplemented earlier guidance from 2015, providing more detailed and descriptive standards expected of local authorities to comply with the Best Value (BV) Duty. A report to FRASC in November 2024 provided a summary of that guidance.
- 2.2 After changes in local government, following the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Act 2026, the government has refreshed this guidance and recently republished it for consultation. A full copy of the draft statutory guidance and consultation can be found here <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/best-value-duty-consultation-on-revised-statutory-guidance>
- 2.3 The Best Value Duty stems from section 3 of the Local Government Act 1999, which requires best value authorities to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the way that their functions are exercised, having regard to economy, efficiency and effectiveness. Best value authorities include local authorities, combined and mayoral combined authorities and a range of special purpose authorities, including National Parks.
- 2.4 Local Authorities must have regard to the new statutory guidance. In the case of National Park Authorities it is seen as good practice rather than a requirement to take account of the guidance. It is thus a relevant tool for considering the North York Moors NPA's compliance with the Best Value Duty. Members resolved in November 2024 that the NPA would undertake a light-touch assessment of the Authority's performance against the seven themes defining best value (see Section 4 of this report).

3. The guidance

- 3.1 The updated statutory guidance makes some minor adjustments to the previous edition of 2024. It contains a series of guiding principles, seven good practice

themes that constitute best value and a framework for assurance including the Secretary of State's ultimate powers of intervention.

3.2 The guiding principles reflect government's approach to ensuring authorities carry out their functions in compliance with the Best Value Duty. They include:

- **Local accountability:** local mechanisms for assurance and accountability will be explored first before relying on central government.
- **Openness to challenge and support:** the duty is on the authority itself, and authorities should use performance indicators and be open to challenge from external bodies, including peer challenge.
- **Expectations:** the Government's expectations are set out in the seven themes in the statutory guidance. These are detailed in Section 4 below.
- **Prevention:** Authorities and Government should both identify and act on early warning signs of failure and address them at the earliest opportunity.
- **Empowering local ownership:** authorities are responsible for identifying, planning and managing their own improvement and assurance. Any action taken by government is intended to strengthen the capacity of authorities to lead their own local improvement, not deliver it on their behalf
- **Meeting the cost of failure:** the financial cost of failure will be met locally as far as possible.

3.3 The framework for assurance sets out how government will monitor performance, assess risk and ultimately intervene in the event of failure to comply with the Duty. It should be noted that the responsibility for compliance with the Duty and thus consideration of the guidance presented, rests with the Authority itself.

4. Seven best value themes – assessing NYMNPA's performance

4.1 The guidance describes seven overlapping themes that represent Best Value. It makes clear that there is no single version of 'good' and that the characteristics and indicators provided are illustrative. Nonetheless, they provide a helpful yardstick against which to consider how the North York Moors NPA is performing in relation to the Best Value Duty.

4.2 The table at **appendix 1** below provides a high-level Officer view of our performance against the seven best value themes that are set out in the guidance. Members consideration and comments on this assessment is sought.

5. Financial and staffing implications

- 5.1 There are no additional staffing implications from the Best Value guidance.

6. Contribution to National Park Management Plan

- 6.1 Adherence to the Best Value themes will further the organisation's contribution to the Management Plan and strengthen partner buy-in to it.

7. Legal and sustainability implications

- 7.1 All National Park Authorities are legally categorised as Best Value Authorities under the Local Government Act 1999. Whilst strict adherence to the new statutory guidance is not a legal requirement on NPAs, it is still considered to be good practice.

8. Recommendation

- 8.1 That Members note the content of this report and comment on the Officer assessment of adherence to the seven Best Value themes summarised in **appendix 1**.

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Background documents to this report

1. Best Value Duty – A statutory guide for Best Value authorities

Appendix 1 – Officer assessment of seven Best Value themes

Theme	Description	NYMNPA strengths	Opportunities for improvement
Continuous improvement	Authorities should have established mechanisms for learning, evaluation, self-assessment and improvement	• Public transparency in decision making • Monitoring and scrutiny of business plan progress • Use of key performance indicators including comparable benchmarks (eg planning performance) • Use of internal and external auditors to provide scrutiny and challenge • Investment in professional development • Annual Governance Statement (AGS) published in line with current guidance	• Use AGS as an improvement document • Develop and embed KPIs within service functions • Simplify and improve accessibility of business plan format • Use complaints more proactively to identify trends and improve service delivery • Seek to undertake peer review and challenge with like authorities
Leadership	Authority should have effective leaders with a clear vision and set of priorities for their place and organisation.	• Authority has a clear strategy, developed by senior officers with Members • Corporate/ business plan is evidence-led and realistic. Approved and reviewed by Members • A proactive approach to horizon scanning and innovation • S151 and Monitoring officer able to uphold their duties • Strong financial management and reporting • Strong Member/ Officer relationships, maintained regularly • Strong external relationships and networks	• Streamline and simplify priorities to focus on doing fewer things well • Improvements in systems, IT, property, workforce planning

Theme	Description	NYMNPA strengths	Opportunities for improvement
Governance	Robust governance and scrutiny arrangements in place. Decision making should be within clear schemes of delegation. Should have sector standard codes of conduct and HR processes	• Scheme of Delegation set and reviewed periodically • Decisions are logged and acted upon • Relevant and updated codes of conduct and policies • Public engagement and consultation widely used in developing major policies (eg Local Plan and Management Plan) • Cyber resilience and security are tested and valued • Periodic reviews of governance arrangements • Regular engagement with external auditors • Training and support provided to Members in respect of statutory planning function • KPIs are regularly interrogated by Officers and Members • Audit weaknesses are identified and acted upon • Regular consultation with the Independent Person to support governance arrangements	• Training and development of Members in relation to corporate governance and scrutiny • Updates to some organisation policies are needed
Culture	How governance procedures and leadership are exercised in practice. Having an agreed set of values, ethics and beliefs. How members and officers behave, interact and carry out their roles	• Authority has a set of values, drawn up with staff and approved by Members • Culture of respect and co-operation with Members • Understanding of Nolan principles and periodic training on code of practice • Respective roles of Members and Officers is well understood. Decision making empowers officers, enabling Members to focus on strategic direction and oversight • Regular staff survey undertaken to understand morale and motivation of the workforce • Opportunities sought for staff and Members to come together. Twice-yearly all-staff events held • Culture promotes openness and challenge	• Strengthen Member awareness and understanding of ongoing work • Develop communications with local communities on services and work of NPA

Theme	Description	NYMNPA strengths	Opportunities for improvement
Use of resources	Authority has a strategic approach to financial management and plans for assets and people. There are effective controls to manage expenditure and resources with clear financial reporting	• Robust MTFS reviewed annually • Balanced budgets set within context of MTFS. Reported on and reviewed quarterly (reforecasting) in public by Members • Reserves are designated and approach is reviewed annually, including contingency reserves • Authority complies with Prudential Framework • Financial risk reported on in context of quarterly reporting, MTFS and risk register • Authority has an organisational development plan and invests in the development of its workforce • Investment in IT infrastructure, systems and processes (eg new finance system)	• Corporate resources often stretched with limited capacity for forward planning • Opportunities to improve workforce and succession planning • Induction and onboarding processes for staff and members
Service delivery	Well-run local services that are customer-focussed. Service plans are evidence-based and align to Authority's strategy and priorities. Scrutiny and oversight of service delivery	• Services align with organisational priorities in relation to nature recovery and climate change • Strategic pillars around reputation (comms), people and customer service are monitored • KPIs specifically track areas of service delivery linked to strategic pillars via a scorecard and are reported to Members for oversight • Authority complies with statutory duties and seeks to further statutory purposes • High quality planning service that is benchmarked nationally against peer group • Procurement seeks to achieve best value whilst recognising need to balance quality and climate impact of decisions • External and internal audit reports offer substantial assurance on value for money and service delivery • Opportunities for efficiency saving/ diversification are sought	• Organisational resources often thinly spread • Opportunities to further focus services to key priorities, notably health and well-being • Partnership pillar of strategy is hard to measure

Theme	Description	NYMNPA strengths	Opportunities for improvement
Partnerships and community engagement	Seek to involve service users/ customers in decision making. Convene effective partnerships to support delivery	• Management Plan developed with involvement of partners and stakeholders. Partners engaged through Partnership delivery group • Strategy specifically refers to partnership, supported by organisational value (collaborative) • Early engagement and consultation with local residents and stakeholders on key policy areas eg local plan review • Authority supports other agencies as a partner eg Local Nature Recovery Strategies	• Ongoing challenges in securing commitment to delivery from all partners • Engaging local communities and residents can be challenging