**NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY**

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE RESOURCES, AUDIT AND PERFORMANCE COMMITTEE HELD ON MONDAY 13 NOVEMBER 2017 AT 10:00 HOURS IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER, LYMINGTON TOWN HALL, AVENUE ROAD, LYMINGTON**

**Present:**

*Members:*

David Harrison (Chairman)

Marian Spain (Deputy Chairman)

Oliver Crosthwaite-Eyre

Patrick Heneghan

Mel Kendal

Neville Penman

*Officers:*

Alison Barnes Chief Executive Officer

Julia Mutlow Solicitor and Monitoring Officer

Steve Avery Executive Director Strategy and Planning

Nigel Stone Chief Finance Officer

Nigel Matthews Head of Recreation Management and Learning

Paul Walton Head of Environment and Rural Economy

David Stone Corporate Services Manager

Hilary Makin Communications Manager

Jim Mitchell Interpretation and Outreach Manager

Frances Connolly Executive Assistant

*Also in attendance:*

*Antony Harvey Interim Head of Internal Audit (NFDC)*

*Karen Warner HR Advisor (NFDC)*

**16. Apologies for absence**

16.1 No apologies for absence were received.

# 17. Declarations of Interest

17.1 There were no declarations of interest.

**18. Chairman’s announcements**

18.1 The Chairman announced the sad passing of Ken Thornber and asked Members to observe a minute’s reflection on the contributions Ken had made to the New Forest National Park Authority and the wider community.

**19. Minutes**

19.1 The minutes of the meeting on 11 September 2017 were agreed as a correct record.

**Resolved, that the minutes of the meeting held on 11 September 2017 be confirmed as a correct record.**

*Voting: none voting against*

**20.** **Public Question Time**

# 20.1 There were no questions or statements from the public.

**21. Internal Audit Plan progress Report 2017-18**

21.1 Antony Harvey introduced himself to members as the interim Head of Internal Audit and then presented the Internal Audit Progress Report 2017/18. The report was to inform the Committee of the progress made against the agreed Internal Audit Plan for 2017/18. This work would be completed by the end of the financial year and he was pleased to report that there were no significant audit issues to bring to the Committee’s attention.

21.2 Members noted the report

**22. Half-Year Progress Report 2017-18**

22.1 David Stone introduced the report which set out mid-year progress against the 2017/18 work programme which was the last programme of the 2015/18 business plan, with the new Business Plan being approved in March 2018. He said that the majority of actions continued to remain green, although amber risks have been registered against some of the actions and an explanation provided to give the Committee early notification where insufficient progress has been made against an action or where progress was not being driven by the Authority – in line with the comments made by members at the last meeting.

22.2 The Committee then considered and discussed the sections of the Work Programme and specifically the following:

* Under Enjoy 11, Members noted the new campaign to alert drivers on high risk routes of the potential for animal accidents at night through temporary eye-catching signs which they said were very visible and imaginative.

Referring to the update to the Recreation Management Strategy (RMS) and the processing of the 7,000 comments received, members noted that this was a significant task and thanked Nigel Matthews and those that have worked with him on this important work.

Members expressed concern regarding the problem of litter which they said was a year round problem. Nigel Matthews advised that litter awareness and education was carried out at schools and by rangers, and that although the annual clean-up and school sessions happened in the spring, officers were also considering further measures with our partners – including a focus on drivers since much of the litter is thrown from cars. He added that the most common themes occurring from the RMS consultation responses were litter, animal accidents and feeding of animals. The NPA along with businesses and partners had signed up to raising awareness of responsible driving and reducing animal accidents. Following further discussion, Members agreed that the success of the RMS was dependent on strong leadership and a joint commitment by all partners within the Steering Group and requested that a Members’ Day be set up with partners to formulate a joint and cohesive approach to the issues affecting the New Forest.

**Action: Corporate Service to arrange a Members’ Day with partners to formulate a joint and cohesive approach to the issues affecting the New Forest as identified through the RMS consultation.**

* Referring to the Woodfuel Productivity Programme under Prosper 7, the Committee noted that the risk against the Programme had been registered as amber when reported under first quarter progress but was now green and suggested that in future, risk changes from previous reports be identified in the latest progress report to update members.

**Action:** **Officers to highlight where** **risks have changed from the previous report of the Work Programme.**

* Under Achieving Excellence 5, the Chairman mentioned that the New Forest District Council had changed the name of its Planning Development Control Committee to the Planning Committee for clarification purposes and asked that the NPA’s Planning Development Control Committee be consulted on the possibility of following suit with this change.

**Action:** **Steve Avery to consult the NPA’s Planning Development Control Committee on changing its name to the Planning Committee.**

**Resolved that the contents of the report be noted and the management action mentioned above be agreed.**

*Voting: None voting against*

**23. Half-Year Budgetary Control Report (including Treasury Performance Report) 2017-18**

23.1 Nigel Stone presented the report and advised that NPA expenditure (52%) and income (49%) were in line with expectations at the mid-year point. He said that the variance in the salary budget caused by additional costs of staff maternity cover would be monitored throughout the remainder of the financial year. He drew Members’ attention to the shortfall in match funding of approximately £30,000 in the Our Past Our Future scheme which was funded largely by the Heritage Lottery Fund. Should the shortfall have to be paid and as the main beneficiary of the Scheme, the NPA’s portion would be £17,000 paid over three years. The NPA would be holding discussions with the other Board members on how the possible shortfall in match funding could best be underwritten and ensure full access to the HLF funds.

23.2 Referring to upcoming regulatory changes affecting the Authority’s Treasury Management position, Nigel Stone advised that, following a government review of how public sector investments should be managed in future, a new regulation would be coming into effect in January 2018, which restricted the types of investments available to public bodies with an investment portfolio of less than £10 million. As the Authority fell into this category, it would be precluded from certain investments, including the current Money Market Fund investment. He would accordingly be investigating alternative investment options permitted under the new regulation.

23.3 Nigel Stone concluded his report by informing the Committee that, as per the officer rotation policy of the Authority’s external auditors (Ernst and Young), Kevin Suter would be taking over from Helen Thompson as Audit Director and Emily Farley would be taking over from Justine Thorpe as Audit Manager. Alison Barnes had spoken to Helen and thanked both outgoing officers on behalf of the Authority for their advice and input over the years of their five year appointment.

**Resolved that,**

**1 the current income and expenditure position, including the potential savings and pressures identified be noted; and**

**2 the potential modifications to the Authority’s treasury position/strategy as a result of the upcoming regulatory changes be noted.**

*Voting: None voting against*

**24. New Forest Centre Agreement**

24.1 Nigel Matthews introduced his report by reflecting that, across the National Parks, each visitor centre was different and that there was no set formula which would produce an optimum solution.

24.2 The Chairman invited Members to input into aspects of the report at the current meeting but suggested that a more in-depth discussion with all Members and a clear steer on future arrangements with the Ninth Centenary Trust regarding the Centre, should be provided at the forthcoming Members’ Day at the Centre on 6 December. Outcomes from this would be incorporated into a new agreement that would be taken to the full Authority for a decision in January. This process will also ensure the agreement reflects the Authority’s new Business Plan for 2018-2021 and the Recreation Management Strategy for the National Park.

24.3 Marian Spain commented that opportunities could be explored for enhancing the amount of information provided to visitors at the Centre on the National Park, information on sustainable transport and what the Centre could do in terms of raising income for the Forest.

24.4 During the ensuing discussion, members agreed that it was difficult to quantify the benefits to the National Park and the Authority but that the Centre was an excellent showcase and an important source of information on the National Park in the heart of the Forest. Members asked officers to help them understand what is or could be delivered through the New Forest Centre and thereby understand the value of the partnership.

**Action: Officers to provide information on what the New Forest Centre can deliver to help inform the value of the partnership with the Ninth Centenary Trust.**

**Resolved, that:**

1. **the Committee endorse the use of the 6 December Members’ Day at the New Forest Centre to develop shared goals to inform a new Agreement; and**
2. **a proposed new Agreement lasting for the duration of the NPA’s new Business Plan, 2018-2021 and funding schedule be brought to the Authority on 18 January 2018.**

*Voting: None voting against*

**25. Sickness Absence and Ill Health Policy**

25.1 Karen Warner presented the report which outlined updates to the current Sickness Absence and Ill Health Policy. She informed members that she had left the strike through in the text to highlight what had been taken out of the original policy.

25.2 She said the main changes and amendments were

* to update terminology as a result of introducing online forms;
* to provide for staff to meet with their manager after each period of absence and a return to work form to be completed;
* for staff to be advised early in the process that they could be dismissed from the Authority if sickness continued.

She stated that she had produced a flow chart for staff which clearly explained the steps of the policy.

25.3 Karen reported that she had met with members of UNISON who had been consulted on the proposed changes, and Union representatives within the New Forest National Park Authority had canvassed staff and agreed the majority of comments.

25.4 Discussion followed about the appeal process should a member of staff be dismissed. Members asked officers to ensure that there was a mechanism to hear and decide on such appeals in the National Park Authority’s scheme of delegation and to bring this matter back to the Committee if such a structure needed to be set up.

25.5 Members noted that the Union had requested an annual review of the policy to enable managers and staff to give feedback on its operation and agreed to include this proviso in its decision.

**Resolved, that**

1. **the proposed amendments to the Sickness Absence and Ill Health Policy be adopted and that return to work meetings are conducted after each period of sickness absence; and**
2. **the above Policy be reviewed annually to enable managers and staff to give feedback on its operation**.

*Voting: None voting against*

**26. Any other items that the Chairman decides are urgent**

26.1 There were no urgent items on this occasion.

**27. Date of next meeting**

27.1 Members noted that the next meeting of the Committee would be held on 5 February 2018

The meeting closed at 11:20 hours

**Signed ……………………………………………………Date………………….**

**(Chairman)**