**NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY**

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE RESOURCES, AUDIT AND PERFORMANCE COMMITTEE HELD ON MONDAY 5 SEPTEMBER 2016 AT 10:00 HOURS IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER, LYMINGTON TOWN HALL, AVENUE ROAD, LYMINGTON**

**Present:**

*Members:*

David Harrison (Chairman)

Marian Spain (Deputy Chairman)

Gordon Bailey

Oliver Crosthwaite-Eyre

Richard Frampton

John Pemberton

John Sanger

*Officers:*

Alison Barnes Chief Executive Officer

Julia Mutlow Solicitor and Monitoring Officer

Steve Avery Executive Director Strategy and Planning

Nigel Matthews Head of Recreation Management and Learning

Paul Walton Head of Environment and Rural Economy

Nigel Stone Chief Finance Officer

David Stone Corporate Services Manager

Hilary Makin Communications Manager

Fiona Wynne Grants Officer

Jo Murphy Information and Data Protection Officer

Frances Connolly Executive Assistant

**76. Apologies for absence**

76.1 An apology for absence was received from Edward Heron.

# 77. Declarations of Interest

77.1 There were no declarations of interest.

**78. Chairman’s announcements**

78.1 With the permission of the Chairman, Oliver Crosthwaite-Eyre, the Chairman of the Authority, reminded the Committee that the official opening of the new cycle hire centre situated at Brockenhurst Railway Station would take place at 1pm on Friday 9 September. He explained that the centre was run by Cyclexperience and had been funded by the New Forest National Park Authority through a £150,000 grant from the Department for Transport’s Cycling Ambition Fund. Mr Crosthwaite-Eyre encouraged Members to attend the event to see first-hand the new facility.

**79. Minutes**

79.1 The minutes of the meeting held on 6 June 2016 were agreed as a correct record.

**Resolved, that the minutes of the meeting held on 6 June 2016 be confirmed as a correct record.**

*Voting: none voting against*

**80.** **Public Question Time**

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

**81. First Quarter Progress Report 2016-17**

81.1 David Stone introduced the report and reminded Members that as on previous occasions the report contained Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), both national and local, followed by four tables which summarised the progress made on the various projects under the four work programmes. He explained that the reports covered the period April to June and said that since it was early days, most areas were flagged green.

81.2 Under the Achieving Excellence programme, Members asked about progress made on income generation by the Authority. Alison Barnes explained that she had been liaising across all National Parks on how the new Power of Competence might be used to generate income. Nigel Stone added that it would be necessary to create a vehicle (company) to use the Power of Competence and that currently the Authority was working on the issue with other NPA’s and awaiting legal advice on the options available. He said that he hoped that a decision on the best way to proceed would be made before the end of the calendar year. Ms Barnes reminded Members that National Parks Partnership Ltd (NPPL) was now set up and that although no deals had been secured, the Partnership had only been operating for a few months. Ms Barnes also informed the Committee that she and Marian Spain had met the Chief Executive of the HLF to highlight some of the projects being undertaken.

81.3 In response to a question under the Enjoy programme regarding the potential for an educational campaign on fungi picking, Ms Barnes confirmed that fungi picking is no longer permitted on the Crown Lands of the New Forest. Members noted that the announcement had been reported in the Times and the Guardian.

81.4 Members noted that some elements of the Prosper programme were flagged green, despite there being some elements of uncertainty within the projects and they queried why they were not flagged as amber; examples of these were the unsuccessful transport bid and the fact that the Chairman of the New Forest Marque had indicated she would be stepping down in December. Ms Barnes reassured Members that the RAG status related to the elements of the projects which fell within the Authority’s work and that she believed that our actions were on track. Nigel Matthews also reassured Members that if the current line of funding by the transport team could not be pursued further then officers would be investigating other options.

81.5 Under the Protect programme Members asked about the Latchmore habitat restoration scheme. Steve Avery confirmed that we were on track to consider the matter at the October Planning Development Control Committee (PDCC), he explained that the consultation period for the application had expired and that the Authority had received approximately 360 representations, of which only about 40 were in favour of the scheme. Members noted that as the applicant, it was for the Forestry Commission to make the case for the proposed scheme so that PDCC Members had sufficient information from both the applicant and the objectors to make an informed decision.

81.6 Members noted the report.

**82.** **First Quarter Budgetary Control Report 2016-17**

82.1 Nigel Stone presented the report and informed the committee that owing to the timing of the meeting he had been able to provide the latest figures which included the first four months of the year to the end of July. He explained that section two outlined the overall income and expenditure position and advised the Committee that the position was as would be expected at this time, taking into account the different timeframes for various expenditure/income. He explained that budget holders had been asked to identify any pressures or savings and that only a few minor issues had been identified and these were set out in section four of the report.

82.2 Mr Stone drew Members attention to section seven of the report which set out the Reserves position and highlighted Annex 4, which now contained details of the Developer Contributions and how they had been released for the Bransgore housing project. In response to a question regarding the potential for charging for pre-application advice, Mr Avery advised the Committee that he would be bringing a report on this to the next Authority Meeting for Members to consider.

82.3 Members noted the report.

**83.** **Corporate Risk Log**

83.1 David Stone presented the report and explained that the Auditors had recommended that the information should be set out in two sections; risks specific to the actions in the Business Plan which are subdivided into the work programmes (Protect, Enjoy and Prosper) and the overarching corporate risks across the entire business. Mr Stone highlighted three new risks which had been included since the last time Members had considered the log. They were i) the impact of the Brexit decision, ii) the impact of the any reorganisation of neighbouring Authorities or the creation of Unitary authorities, and iii) Potential risks associated with Medium Term Strategic Plans.

83.2 Mr Stone asked Members whether they were content with the new format. He confirmed he had viewed a number of other National Parks’ Risk Logs and that he believed the Authority’s compared favourably with these.

83.3 Mr Stone reassured members that our anti-virus software had been improved and that the recently introduced electronic records system meant that each team’s files were separated on different drives which would significantly assist in isolating a virus should a breach occur. He also explained the Authority were in the process of updating the IT Policy and user guidance.

83.4 Members queried why the ‘Last update’ column did not appear to have the most recent date. Mr Stone agreed to ensure that this column was updated to correspond with any amendments to the log.

83.5 Members noted the report and confirmed that they were content with the format.

**84.** **New Forest Arts Festival – Arts Council Bid**

84.1 Fiona Wynne and Hilary Makin presented the report and explained that art enabled the NPA to connect and collaborate with visitors, residents and businesses and was a great vehicle to connect people with the landscape and the work of the NPA. Ms Makin explained that the bid to the Arts Council was being made in collaboration with the Hampshire Cultural Trust (HCT) and that the funds would be used to commission art works. Ms Wynne explained that they would continue to build on this year’s successful Arts Festival, which had been developed as part of the Our Past, Our Future (OPOF) project.

84.2 Members were supportive of the bid and were pleased to have reassurance that even if the bid were not successful the Arts Festival would be repeated next year. Ms Wynne also confirmed that there was still opportunity to work with HCT on other projects, if this one did not get accepted. Ms Barnes reminded Members that the Government’s recent White Paper supported the principle of linking arts and culture to the landscape.

**Resolved that the submission of the application to the Arts Council for £94,950 be approved.**

*Voting: unanimous*

**85. The New Forest Marque**

85.1 Paul Walton presented the report and reminded Members that since May 2015 the New Forest Marque (NFM) had been run by volunteers, and in particular by the Chairman of New Forest Produce Ltd (NFPL). He explained that since that time there had been a rise in interest in the NFM and that following a reorganisation of membership fees there had been an increase in both the number of members and income received. He also drew Members’ attention to paragraph four of his report, which set out the current support provided by the NPA. Mr Walton pointed out that there was an opportunity to submit a bid for funding to the ‘Championing Great British Food Tourism Grant’; however the closing date for this was 26 September 2016.

85.2 John Sanger, the NPA’s Member representative on the board of NFPL reminded Members that the Chairman of NFPL had indicated that she could not continue to give so much time to the NFM beyond December and that he had grave concerns about the future of the NFM without her drive and enthusiasm. He reminded the Committee of the benefits that the NFM provided, and how it underpinned the National Park purposes. Mr Sanger proposed that the NPA increase its monetary support for the NFM by £10,000, to £25,000 for the coming financial year in order to support the NFM at this critical moment in time.

85.3 Members commented that the NFM was a success story and endorsed the NPA’s commitment to it and the need to assist the NFM in ensuring its continued viability. Nigel Stone cautioned Members against making piecemeal budget decisions without considering how the additional funding would be accommodated within the overall budget for the year. Members also queried why the NFM Business Plan was not available at the meeting for consideration. Questions were also asked about how widely known the Marque was and whether the current delivery model was best, given that it was likely to remain dependent on grants.

85.4 A motion to amend the recommendation in the report to include the sum of £25,000, rather than an unspecified sum, was proposed and duly seconded. The Committee voted on each element of the recommendation in turn, as detailed below.

**Resolved, that the New Forest Marque be supported by the NPA in the following ways:**

**1. continued in kind support for administration, financial accounting and communications be provided;**

(*Voting: Unanimous)*

**2. a bid to the Championing Great British Food Tourism Grant (closing date for applications 26 September) be prepared; and**

(*Voting: none voting against)*

**3. work to develop a Protected Food Name Status for New Forest Products.**

(*Voting: none voting against)*

**and resolved to recommend to the full Authority at its meeting on 22 September 2016, that**

**4. a grant of £25,000 be allocated from the 2017/18 budget to the New Forest Marque.**

(*Voting: 4-0, 3 abstentions)*

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

86.1 Nigel Stone explained that the current external audit arrangements (with Ernst and Young LLP) were due to expire at the end of 2017/18 and that the NPA was obliged to appoint its auditors for the 2018/19 financial year and beyond by December 2017. He informed Members that there were three possible options:

i) to procure our own auditor which would involve a tender process;

ii) to procure auditors in partnership with other bodies such as the New Forest District Council (which had yet to decide on a course of action) or alternatively a joint initiative with other NPAs; or

iii) opt in to a Local Government Association (LGA) sector-led procurement process to appoint auditors

86.2 Mr Stone explained that option one would be costly and would involve the creation of an Audit Panel to consider the tender process. There was also likely to be little interest from large accounting firms considering the NPA had relatively straightforward audit requirements and the small annual audit fee involved. Mr Stone stated that the option for a joint initiative with other NPAs was impractical because of the disparate geographic locations of the other UK National Parks; he said that in 2012, when the Audit Commission had tendered the current contract, it was widely accepted that local geographic connection was preferred for audit purposes and had kept costs down. Therefore Mr Stone advised that the third option was likely to be the most practical and cost effective way forward. He stated that he believed that the majority of National Park Authorities were also considering this option.

86.3 Mr Stone informed Members that he would be taking a paper to the Authority meeting on 22 September 2016 with detail on the options involved and, if the preference was for a sector-led arrangement via the LGA, to seek approval for the opt-in decision to be delegated to the Chief Executive in consultation with the Authority Chairman and the Chief Finance Officer - this due to a final decision being required in November/December 2016 and there being no other Authority meetings until January 2017.

**87. Date of next meeting**

87.1 Members noted that the next meeting of the Committee would be held on Monday 21 November 2016 at 10.00 hours at Lymington Town Hall.

The meeting closed at 12.30 hours

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

**(Chairman)**