**NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY**

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE RESOURCES, AUDIT AND PERFORMANCE COMMITTEE HELD ON MONDAY 6 JUNE 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

Edward Heron

Richard Frampton

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

David Stone Corporate Services Manager

Nigel Stone Finance and Performance Manager

Rosalind Alderman Member Services Officer and Deputy Monitoring Officer

Frances Connolly Executive Assistant

*Also in attendance:*

Glenda Chambers Principal Auditor, New Forest District Council

Claire Lowe Inspire Learning Federation

**58 Apologies for absence**

58.1 An apology for absence was received from John Pemberton.

# 59 Declarations of Interest

59.1 Edward Heron and David Harrison each declared a non-pecuniary interest in minute item 64 (Year End Progress Report) during the discussion of shared services.

59.2 Oliver Crosthwaite-Eyre declared a non-pecuniary interest in minute item 65 (New Forest Centre Annual Report) as a Trustee of the New Forest Ninth Centenary Trust.

59.3 David Harrison declared a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest in minute item 66 (PEDALL – Big Lottery Reaching Communities Bid) as a Trustee of PEDALL. He left the meeting during the discussion and vote on this item and the Chair was occupied by the Deputy Chairman.

59.4 Richard Frampton declared a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest in relation to minute item 72 (Development of two new affordable homes, the Old Vicarage, Bransgore) and accordingly withdrew from the meeting during the debate and vote on that item.

**60 Chairman’s announcements**

60.1 The Chairman welcomed Claire Lowe to the meeting. As part of her ongoing professional development, Ms Lowe had been invited to ‘shadow’ the NPA’s Chief Executive for the day.

**61 Minutes**

61.1 The minutes of the meeting on 7 March 2016 were agreed as a correct record.

**Resolved, that the minutes of the meeting held on 7 March 2016 be confirmed as a correct record.**

*Voting: none voting against*

**62** **Public Question Time**

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

**63 Annual Internal Audit Performance and Opinion Report 2015-16**

63.1 Glenda Chambers introduced her report (NFNPA RAPC 292/16), explaining that the internal audit process had now been completed. She drew Members’ attention to the summary, set out at paragraph 3.2 of the report, which confirmed that in her opinion adequate arrangements were in place to ensure an adequate and effective internal control environment, and that the systems and internal control arrangements were effective and agreed policies and regulations were complied with on the majority of occasions. Managers were aware of the importance of maintaining internal controls, and were implementing appropriate changes where minor control weaknesses had been identified during the year. Ms Chambers highlighted the fact that, as set out in Annex 1 to the report, all audit reviews had resulted in an opinion of “Reasonable” or “Substantial” assurance, and explained that the fact that three categories (Treasury Management, Human Resources, and Information Governance) had received a “Substantial” assurance was an excellent achievement. Finally, Ms Chambers summarised the only area arising during the audit that required further work, as detailed at paragraph 3.4 of her report, concerning the NPA’s arrangements for counter fraud measures. The NPA was considered low risk but it was advisable to adopt best practice measures in accordance with the CIPFA toolkit, and this would take place over the forthcoming year.

63.2 Members echoed Ms Chambers’ commendation of the audit results and the teams involved. In response to a query, Ms Chambers clarified that the outstanding audit work on affordable housing would take place in September and an update would be brought to the November meeting of the Committee.

**Resolved, that:**

**1. the Auditor’s Annual Opinion report be noted and taken into account when approving the Annual Governance Statement; and**

**2. it be recorded that the Committee is satisfied with the effectiveness of the Internal Audit in line with Regulation 6 of the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015.**

*Voting: none voting against*

**64** **Year End Progress Report 2015-16**

64.1 David Stone presented the report (NFNPA RAPC 293/16). He reminded Members that as on previous occasions the report contained Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) followed by four tables which summarised the progress made on the various projects under the four work programmes; Protect, Enjoy, Prosper and Aiming for Excellence.

64.2 Under the ‘Protect’ programme, a minor clarification was noted with regard to the ‘rounding up’ of the target percentages for SSSI management explaining the reason for the total figure being 101% in the report. The Chief Executive also explained that the NPA had been designated a target for SSSIs that was based on a share of the overall national targets, but unfortunately not all of the land in question was within the NPA’s control as much of it was Crown land. The same issue arose in respect of rights of way (detailed at page 7 in the ‘Protect’ section of the report), and Members asked that thought be given to how the NPA could work with other organisations to influence the provision of rights of way.

**Action:** Nigel Matthews to consider how the NPA could work with other authorities and organisations to influence the provision of rights of way within the New Forest.

64.3 In response to a query on the ‘Protect’ programme regarding improvements to waterways and specifically to the Avon area, Alison Barnes explained that it was hoped that the work of the Land Advice Service and the Green Infrastructure/ Green Halo projects would bring significant benefits in that regard, and would assist in involving landowners further with this important improvement work.

64.4 With reference to page 7 of the ‘Protect’ section of the report, Steve Avery updated Members to the effect that the Verderers had been asked to assist in drafting a list of criteria to identify back-up grazing land.

64.5 John Sanger requested that in future reports officers should seek to identify whether outcomes in respect of any given issue should be considered as ‘successful’, rather than simply listing what had been done with regard to that issue. Ms Barnes pointed out that the prior establishment of baseline data to provide a point for comparison would assist with this, work that had recently been undertaken in respect of, for example, ecosystem services. Marian Spain requested that a Members’ Day be scheduled to look at the work of the Land Advice Service.

**Action:** Paul Walton and officers to consider how future reports could best identify the success or otherwise of each outcome.

**Action:** David Stone’s team to arrange a Members’ Day on the Land Advice Service.

64.6 One member requested that the results of the visitors’ survey, referred to at page 8 of the ‘Enjoy’ section of the report, be provided to Members.

**Action:** Nigel Matthews to arrange for the results of the visitors’ survey to be circulated to Members.

64.7 Concerns were raised with regard to the ongoing sustainability of the New Forest Marque, in terms of both time and funding, particularly in view of the fact that the current Chairman of the Marque, Jane Overall, intended to step down at the end of the year. Paul Walton explained that the directors of the Marque were currently preparing a business plan which would inform future discussions on the viability of the Marque.

64.8 It was suggested that the possible reorganisation of local government bodies should be included as an item on the NPA’s risk register.

**Action:** David Stone to update the risk register to include reference to potential reorganisation of local government bodies.

64.9 Members then noted the report.

**65** **New Forest Centre Annual Report**

65.1    Nigel Matthews introduced the report (NFNA RAPC 394/16) which set out the annual update on the work of the New Forest Centre and the use of the annual grant from the NPA. Members discussed the trial of free entry to the Museum, and whether voluntary donations could be increased. They also discussed how the welcome and entrance to the Visitors’ Centre and Museum could be improved, both to make the existence of the museum clear to visitors and to enhance the NPA presence.

**Action:** Nigel Matthews to update the report and cover paper to include updated figures on entry to the museum, related income and reference to the £15,000 held in reserves for the Centre.

**Resolved, that the updated annual report be endorsed by the Committee and recommended to the NPA for approval at the meeting on 14 July 2016.**

*Voting: None voting against*

**66** **PEDALL – Reaching Communities Bid**

66.1 Andy Brennan presented the report (NFNPA RAPC 295/16), explaining that the NPA was preparing the first part of a two stage application to the Big Lottery Reaching Communities Fund. The funding, if obtained, would be used to employ a part time manager and full time ride leader to support PEDALL, the new inclusive cycling organisation. The Big Lottery bid would be made in the NPA’s name as officers had been advised that a new organisation such as PEDALL with no known history of delivery would be less likely to be awarded funding. Members were supportive of the bid but discussed how, at the second stage of the application process, the NPA could safeguard its financial accountability and ensure that any funds were administered in accordance with the NPA’s preferred outcomes. Members also discussed the value for money that any funding would deliver. In response to these points, officers explained that the NPA would be represented on the project board, and the grant holder would also have a power of veto over the expenditure of the funds. Key groups with relevant knowledge would also be included on the project board. Officers confirmed that the HLF had indicated that they were satisfied with the value for money of the proposed use of funds. Whilst Members welcomed this information they emphasised that it was important the NPA must satisfy itself as to value for money, risk and accountability, before taking the application to the second stage should the first stage of the process be successful.

**Resolved, that the submission of the stage one application to the Big Lottery Reaching Communities Fund be approved, subject to clarification as to how the NPA would be safeguarded before any second stage application.**

*Voting: None voting against*

**67 Draft Annual Governance Statement 2015/16**

67.1 Nigel Stone presented the report (NFNPA RAPC 296/16), drawing Members’ attention to the requirement for the Annual Governance Statement to be approved and signed by the Chairman and Chief Executive in July prior to its publication. He explained that some of the key items of work over the foregoing year had been the production of the Partnership Plan 2015-2020 and the Business Plan 2015-2018, referred to at page 4 of the report. The NPA also continued to be successful at attracting external funding, leveraging £13 funding for every £1 spent. Member attendance had increased to 80% from 78%. The report also highlighted other successful areas of work, such as the support provided by the Land Advice Service and the New Forest Consultative Panel.

**Resolved, that the Draft Annual Governance Statement for the financial year 2015/16 be approved, and the draft be passed to the External Auditors.**

*Voting: None voting against*

**68 Draft Financial Outturn and Treasury Report 2015/16**

68.1 Nigel Stone presented the report (NFNPA RAPC 297/16), explaining that it set out the detailed projected outturn position for the NPA for the 2015/16 financial year. The original budget for 2015/16 had estimated that a £46,000 contribution would be required from the Revenue Support Reserve to balance the budget, but the latest Budgetary Control Report estimated a £40-70,000 saving due to some additional planning fee income and a repayment from the Icelandic Bank investment. The draft outturn figures indicated a saving of £59,000 which equated to less than a 1% variance to the original budget and was well within the revised estimate above. As a result a figure of around £13,000 would be added to the Revenue Support Reserve and, as previously agreed, these savings would be carried forward to fund the 2016/17 budgets. Mr Stone then took Members through some of the detail of the report, explaining that whilst central costs had risen slightly, a slight saving had been made on employee costs. The minimum reserves continued to be maintained at £300,000. He also took Members through the partnership projects detailed at page 11 of the report.

68.2 Members welcomed the report and discussed the costs of providing the planning service and whether this could ever pay for itself. In response to discussions about the ongoing provision of support to the New Forest Marque, and picking up on points made earlier in the meeting as detailed in minute item 64.7, one Member suggested it would be appropriate to receive a paper with further detail on the sustainability of the Marque in due course.

**Action:** Officers to prepare a report on the sustainability of and support to the New Forest Marque, once its business plan has been prepared.

**Resolved, that:**

**1. the provisional outturn position be noted;**

**2. the Treasury Management Stewardship Report and Prudential Indicators 2015/16 in Annex 4 to NFNPA RAPC 297/16 be noted; and**

**3. the indicative transfers to/(from) Reserves in 2015/16 as set out in section 6 and detailed in Annex 3 to NFNPA RAPC 297/16 be approved.**

*Voting: None voting against*

**69. Annual Report Document**

69.1 Hilary Makin took Members through the draft Annual Report for 2015/16 and asked for comments and input prior to finalising the document in advance of the NPA meeting on 14 July. Members commended the document as drafted and in particular endorsed the reference to rare and unusual species under the ‘Protect’ section of the proposed content.

69.2 Following further brief discussion, Members noted the report.

**70 Health and Safety Update**

70.1 Steve Avery presented the report (NFNPA RAPC 299/16) to Members, setting out the relevant roles and responsibilities of staff and highlighting the Health and Safety activity undertaken during 2015/2016. He explained that the Rangers had led or jointly delivered more than 100 events in 2015/16 and led approximately 20 walks in the same year, and was pleased to report that during that time there had been no health and safety incidents, which was a remarkable achievement.

70.2 A defibrillator had been installed by New Forest District Council at Lymington Town Hall for joint use with the NPA, to be kept outside the NFDC caretaker’s office. A map of the location had been circulated to all NPA staff.

70.3 Mr Avery was pleased to report that absenteeism at the NPA remained well below the national average of public and private sectors, which reflected well on the Authority. Members and Officers discussed the possibility that the NPA could offer free flu jabs to staff, possibly in conjunction with the existing NFDC scheme, although it was pointed out that the provision of vouchers might not be the optimum way of managing this benefit. Members noted the report.

**Action:** Officers to investigate the provision of staff flu jabs in conjunction with NFDC

**71External Funding Report**

71.1 Paul Walton presented the report on external funding (NFNPA RAPC 300/16), which provided a brief review of the fundraising strategy that was in place and highlighted some challenges and opportunities.

71.2 One Member then expressed regret that some staff with the relevant skills and experience to pursue external funding opportunities were no longer employed by the NPA, which was unfortunate as this expertise could potentially be very useful in the future. In broad terms, Members felt that the current strategy was successful, but requested a more detailed report on the actual return on investment generated by this work. Members then noted the report.

**Action:** Paul Walton to prepare a detailed report on the return on investment generated through pursuing external funding opportunities, for consideration at a future meeting of the Committee.

**72 Development of two new affordable homes, the Old Vicarage, Bransgore**

72.1 Steve Avery presented the report to Members (NFNPA RAPC 301/16), which set out progress on the development of two new affordable homes at Bransgore, and tabled some photographs of the works for Members. He explained that the project was currently approximately on time and on budget. Members noted with disappointment the recent changes to affordable housing contributions and suggested that the Planning Minister should be informed of the impact of this. Members then welcomed the progress that had been made on the project, and noted the report.

**Action:** Steve Avery to arrange a tour of the site for Members and the Chairman write to the Planning Minister Brandon Lewis MP

**73 Any other items that the Chairman decides are urgent**

73.1 There were no urgent items on this occasion.

**74 Date of next meeting**

74.1 Members noted that the next meeting of the Committee would be held on Monday 5 September 2016 at 10.00 hours at Lymington Town Hall.

**PART II ITEMS WHICH MAY BE TAKEN IN THE ABSENCE OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC ON THE GROUNDS THAT EXEMPTED INFORMATION MAY BE DISCLOSED**

***Resolved,*** *that the public be excluded from the meeting during the following item of business, as it is likely, in view of the nature of the business to be transacted or the nature of the proceedings, that if members of the public were present during this item there would be disclosure to them of exempt information within Paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972, and further that in all the circumstances of the case, the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information, namely the need to avoid disclosing sensitive information relating to the Authority’s financial affairs*

**75 Project at Burley**

75.1 Members considered a report on a proposed project at Burley (this is a summary of a minute that contains exempt information).

The meeting closed at 12.20 hours

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

 **(Chairman)**