

NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE RESOURCES, AUDIT AND PERFORMANCE COMMITTEE HELD ON MONDAY 14 MAY 2018 AT 10:00 HOURS IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER, LYMINGTON TOWN HALL, AVENUE ROAD, LYMINGTON

Present:

Members:

David Harrison (Chairman)
Oliver Crosthwaite-Eyre
Richard Frampton
Patrick Heneghan
Neville Penman
John Sanger

Officers:

Alison Barnes	Chief Executive Officer
Julia Mutlow	Solicitor and Monitoring Officer
Steve Avery	Executive Director Strategy and Planning
Nigel Stone	Chief Finance Officer
Paul Walton	Head of Environment and Rural Economy
David Stone	Corporate Services Manager
Hilary Makin	Communications Manager
Jim Mitchell	Interpretation and Outreach Manager
Rosalind Alderman	Deputy Monitoring Officer and Member Services Officer
Holger Schiller	Partnerships and Community Officer
Frances Connolly	Executive Assistant

Also in attendance:

Antony Harvey Audit Group Manager (Southern Internal Audit Partnership)

54. Apologies for absence

54.1 Apologies for absence were received from Edward Heron, Mel Kendal and Marian Spain (Deputy Chairman).

55. Declarations of Interest

55.1 David Harrison, Richard Frampton and Neville Penman declared a non-pecuniary interest in relation to minute item 59 (Request for Joint Working) as members of New Forest District Council.

56. Chairman's announcements

56.1 There were no announcements on this occasion

57. Minutes

57.1 The minutes of the meeting on 5 March 2018 were agreed as a correct record.

Resolved, that the minutes of the meeting held on 5 March 2018 be confirmed as a correct record.

Voting: none voting against

58. Public Question Time

58.1 There were no questions or statements from the public.

59. Request for Joint Working

59.1 Alison Barnes introduced the report and advised that this included input from senior managers, the planning team and all other staff. She then summarised the various sections of the report referring to:

- the context and background of the letter from the Chief Executive from the New Forest District Council,
- the current position regarding engagement with NFDC and other partners and stakeholders
- the Service Level Agreements which were already in place in connection with shared specialist services, adding that the Authority had more shared services in place than any other National Park, particularly with regard to those specialist services offered to other organisations,
- the NFDC proposal for a single managed planning service and the potential consequences that this would have on the Authority's resources, and
- other options for moving forward the Authority's relationship with NFDC.

59.2 She then tabled the list of criteria considered at the Authority meeting on 22 March against which the current proposal had been assessed and mentioned that this assessment process would be useful in considering future joint working proposals with partners.

59.3 Oliver Crosthwaite-Eyre proposed the 3 recommendations in the report. He thanked the Chief Executive and her team for their work in putting the report together which he said was an excellent paper covering all the points to be considered.

59.4 He added that the Authority had a very close and productive working relationship with NFDC (as evidenced in the list attached as Annex 3 to the report) as well as other partners including Wiltshire Council, and Dorset County Council. He said that the report demonstrated how well the relationship with NFDC was working and how the current level of engagement could be improved in terms of exploring further joint working opportunities, shared services and areas of savings and efficiencies. A joint leadership forum with NFDC should therefore be fully supported but needed further scrutiny to ensure that this did not duplicate what was already in place.

- 59.5 With regard to the proposal for a single managed planning service, he said that 10 years ago, the Authority took the decision to run its own planning service and it was his view that this was the right decision then and continued to be the right decision now. The New Forest National Park Authority had an excellent, well respected and bespoke planning department tailored to the National Park and its purposes. The planning team worked closely together and with the Authority's planning colleagues beyond the Authority's boundaries. If the Authority had a shared head of service, he believed that it would not realise any savings for the Authority, would undermine its Executive leadership capacity, diminish staff moral and motivation and threaten the Authority's public reputation.
- 59.6 There being no further debate, the proposal was seconded and unanimously supported by the Committee.

Resolved, that it be recommended to the Authority that:

- i. Members note that, due to remit and resource constraints, the proposal for a shared Head of Service and single managed planning service across the National Park and District Council areas is not workable.**
- ii. Members propose their preferred alternative arrangements, which may include:
The existing shared service arrangements continue to be supported and to actively explore with NFDC opportunities for extending these shared services as set out in Section 7 of the report.**
- iii. The Authority's Chief Executive and Chairman work with NFDC's Chief Executive and Chairman to explore opportunities for a new Forum for NFNPA Members and NFDC Councillors to come together to discuss and agree a strategic approach to the 'big ticket' items; the constitution and terms of reference of such Forum to be ratified at a future Authority meeting.**

Voting: Unanimous

60. Annual Internal Audit Performance and Opinion Report 2017/18

- 60.1 Antony Harvey introduced the report explaining that its purpose was to provide an opinion on the adequacy and effectiveness of the Authority's framework of risk management, control and governance processes for 2017/18. He informed members that the audit opinion was for a reasonable level of assurance with no significant issues identified that required action.
- 60.2 As part of the Service Level Agreement, the 2017/18 internal audit plan was delivered by New Forest District Council's in-house team. However, from 1 April 2018, NFDC had transferred the audit function and responsibility to the Southern Internal Audit Partnership which would in future deliver the internal audit service and annual audit opinion report that would be used by the Authority to inform its annual governance statement. The annual audit opinion for 2017/18 concluded that there were no weaknesses or issues identified.
- 60.3 Mr Harvey drew members' attention to the summary table of all the internal audit work undertaken during 2017/18. There were four areas of substantial assurance and two

further areas with reasonable assurance. He said that the Chief Financial Officer and the Chief Executive monitored the actions and had no concerns. He added that there were no fraud investigations undertaken by Internal Audit in 2017/18.

Resolved, that the Chief Internal Auditor's Annual Internal Audit Report and Opinion for 2017/18 be approved.

Voting: Unanimous

61. Year End Progress Report 2017/18

61.1 David Stone introduced the report which set out progress against the final quarter (January to March 2018) of the 2017/18 work programme which was the last annual work programme of the 2015-18 Business Plan. The new Business Plan for 2018-21 as well as the 2018/19 Work Programme were approved in March by the Authority.

61.2 The Committee then considered and discussed the key performance indicators and sections of the Work Programme and specifically the following:

- *Family KPI's, page 7, – concern at the reduced number of volunteer days attended by 'under represented' groups.* Jim Mitchell, acknowledged that, although the overall number of volunteers had increased due to various volunteering initiatives under OPOF, there was more work to be done on promoting attendance at volunteer days by under-represented groups. Alison Barnes suggested that an item on engagement with under-represented groups would be added to the Authority's risk register to provide additional focus on this issue.

Action: that an item on improved engagement with under-represented groups be added to the Authority's risk register.

- *Protect, page 3, loss of domestic hedgerows and woodland hectare targets –* a member expressed concern at the potential loss of domestic hedgerows and noted that officers had reported under mitigation that the target hectare of woodland would not be met as the Authority could not control the size of woodlands that came into the project. Paul Walton advised that officers were working with the planning team to establish an accurate position on domestic hedgerow loss and this would be a key initiative within the new Business Plan and annual Work Programme. With regard to the Working Woodlands Project, a replacement member of staff was now in post and officers would be assessing what further work could be done in terms of additional protection for these areas.
- *Protect, page 6, undergrounding of power lines at Hale Purlieu –* Members suggested that the membership of the Stakeholder Reference Group be expanded to include representation from residents of Hale Purlieu for local input on the undergrounding of power lines across the area. Paul Walton confirmed that there was parish representation on the local reference group and NPA officer representation on both the local and national reference group. He added that a planning application from National Grid was anticipated in the Autumn and residents would have an opportunity to input on the application at that time.

- 61.3 The Chairman noted that a great deal of excellent work had been inputted into the Work Programme by staff over the year and, on behalf of the Committee, thanked relevant officers for this. In echoing these comments, Alison Barnes advised that the Annual Report was due to be presented at the Annual Authority meeting in July and invited members to feedback to Hilary Makin on any specific achievements they would like to see included in this report as well as any formatting suggestions.

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

Voting: None voting against

62. Financial Outturn and Treasury Report 2017/18

- 62.1 Nigel Stone presented the report and highlighted the following:

- the amount to be taken from the Revenue Support Reserve figure was now £80,000 (down from £92,000 set out in the report), and
- the Local Plan costs were significantly higher than expected during 2017/18, but this one off cost had been counter-balanced by the 20% increase in planning fees, with some large planning applications being received during the year.

- 62.2 Mr Stone advised that a letter had been received from the New Forest National Park Authority's landlord (New Forest District Council), stating that there would be a rental increase in the Authority's premises, backdated to late 2016.

- 62.3 Consequently, he had included a provision in the 2017/18 budget of £35,000 to cover the rental increase. Some members queried the possibility of agreeing a smaller rent rise with NFDC and Steve Avery advised that the Authority had requested Savills to identify a market related rental figure for the premises which would form the basis for further discussions with the District Council to agree a rental amount for the NPA offices.

Resolved, that:

- 1. the provisional outturn position be noted;**
- 2. the Treasury Management Stewardship Report and Prudential Indicators 2017/18 in Annex 6 of the report be noted; and**
- 3. the *indicative* transfers to/(from) Reserves in 2017/18 as set out in section 6 of the report and detailed in Annex 5 be approved.**

Voting: Unanimous

63. Annual Governance Statement 2017/18

- 63.1 David Stone, presented the report and advised that the production of the Annual Governance Statement was a legal requirement and demonstrated that the Authority's business was conducted in accordance with the law, that public money was

safeguarded and accounted for and that there were arrangements in place to secure continuous improvement of the Authority's functions. He added that following acceptance by the Committee, the draft AGS would be passed to the external auditors alongside the draft financial report for audit before being brought back to the Authority meeting in July for final approval.

Resolved, that the Draft Annual Governance Statement for the financial year 2017/18 be approved and passed to the External Auditors.

Voting: Unanimous

64. New Forest Centre

- 64.1 Jim Mitchell presented the report which updated members on progress towards agreeing a Memorandum of Agreement (MoA) between the Authority and the Ninth Centenary Trust for work within the NF Centre. He said that members' input from the current meeting would be included in a proposal on an appropriate MoA which would be brought to the Committee meeting on 10 September; a final proposal would then go to the full Authority on 11 October for approval.
- 64.2 During the ensuing debate, some members expressed concern that there was a lack of clarity of the services set out in the report and that these should be quantified and costed. Some of the services also appeared to be double counted. Alison Barnes advised that the report had come to members early for members input and direction as per the recommendation.
- 64.3 A suggestion was made that it would be more practical and economical for the NPA to sublease a part of the New Forest Centre which would more focused and aligned to the Authority's purposes and set up accordingly. Some members supported this approach.
- 64.4 Following discussion, members were unable to support recommendation 3 in the report, which proposed committing to a third quarter payment. Instead it was agreed that this would be decided at the Authority meeting on 11 October.

Resolved, that:

- 1. the current stage in discussions with the Ninth Centenary Trust to agree a MoA with the NPA be noted, and**
- 2. a decision on a third quarter payment be deferred to the Authority meeting on the 11 October**

Voting: Unanimous

65. Any other items that the Chairman decides are urgent

65.1 Members briefly discussed the possibility of the remit of the Committee being expanded to include the consideration of policy matters, however, it was generally agreed that members involvement in policy issues was adequately catered for through the current informal structures and processes such as briefings and members’ days and consequently there was not need to formalise policy consideration through expanding the terms of reference of the Committee.

66. Date of next meeting

66.1 Members noted that the next meeting of the Committee would be held on 10 September 2018.

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

There were no Part 2 items for consideration on this occasion.

The meeting closed at 11:43 hours

SignedDate.....
(Chairman)