

NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE RESOURCES, AUDIT AND PERFORMANCE COMMITTEE HELD ON MONDAY 16 MARCH 2020 AT 10:00 HOURS IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER, LYMINGTON TOWN HALL, AVENUE ROAD, LYMINGTON

Present:

Members:

Sue Bennison
Oliver Crosthwaite-Eyre
David Harrison (Chairman)
Patrick Heneghan (Deputy Chairman)
George Meyrick
Neville Penman
John Sanger
Ann Sevier

Officers:

Alison Barnes	Chief Executive Officer
Rosalind Alderman	Solicitor and Monitoring Officer
Nigel Stone	Chief Finance Officer
Nigel Matthews	Head of Recreation Management and Learning
Paul Walton	Head of Environment and Rural Economy
Hilary Makin	Communications Manager
David Stone	Corporate Services Manager
Frances Connolly	Executive Assistant

Also in attendance:

Antony Harvey Deputy Head of Partnership (Southern Internal Audit Partnership)

110. Apologies for absence

110.1 Apologies for absence were received from Gordon Bailey, David Bence and Mel Kendal

111. Declarations of Interest

111.1 There were no declarations of interest.

112. Chairman's announcements

112.1 The Chairman informed members that under item 12 of the Agenda there would be updates on Coronavirus and affordable housing.

113. Minutes

113.1 The minutes of the meeting on 3 February 2020 were agreed as a correct record subject to an amendment regarding a duplication under minute items 106.5 and 106.6.

Resolved, that the minutes of the meeting held on 3 February 2020 be confirmed as a correct record subject to the above amendment.

Voting: none voting against

114. Public Question Time

114.1 There were no questions or statements from the public.

115. Internal Audit Charter 2020-21

115.1 Antony Harvey informed members that the Internal Audit Charter was received annually by the Chief Internal Auditor and presented to Senior Management and Resources, Audit and Performance Committee. He said there had not been any significant changes in the past few years.

Resolved that the Internal Audit Charter for 2020/21 be approved

Voting: Unanimous

116. Internal Audit Plan 2020-21

116.1 Antony Harvey explained that the Internal Audit Plan detailed the work to be carried out during the financial year 2020/21 which had been agreed with the Chief Executive and with the Executive Board.

116.2 He introduced the Audit Plan for the forthcoming year and said the audit coverage between IT and Finance would be evenly split. There was some discussion about auditing other areas of work, but Mr Harvey said the focus would be on the new financial system which would take priority in 2020/21 and, in the future, other areas of work for audit coverage could be looked at.

116.3 Members asked for reassurance that the amount of days spent on internal audit was appropriate. Antony Harvey gave his reassurance that audits were not being overdone and the internal audit provision was included in the SLA.

Resolved that the Internal Audit Plan 2020/21 be approved

Voting: Unanimous

117. Draft Work Programme 2020-21

117.1 Alison Barnes advised that there had been a number of significant developments since the current Business Plan had been approved which included the list set out in paragraph 2.1 of the report. She pointed out that 2020/21 was the final year of the Business Plan and following discussion with officers and then members at a workshop on 2 March 2020, it had been agreed that 2020/21 would constitute a 'bridging' work programme which acknowledged new developments such as the 25 year environment plan and climate and nature emergency and moved towards the drafting of a new Business Plan.

117.2 Members drew attention to some typographical and textual changes to the work programme and officers responded to queries raised around the inclusion in the work programme of specific issues such as the Environment and Agriculture Bills. Members requested columns reflected in the current work programme such as project owners be included in the final version of the work programme.

- 117.3 In response to a query, Nigel Matthews undertook to provide members with the presentation given by Footprint Ecology on 28 March.
- 117.4 There was some discussion about the use of sustainable transport and Nigel Stone informed members that the New Forest National Park had acquired its first electric car, a Nissan Leaf, four years previously. A second electric car had been leased and this would arrive in April. He said that the cost of leasing electric cars had come down considerably and, as there were no fuel costs, they were exceptionally good value for money.
- 117.5 A member asked if there was any opportunity to make schemes available for staff to incentivise changes of behaviour to encourage the use of sustainable transport. Mr Stone advised that work was already underway, and he was looking into interest free loans for train tickets and electric cars for staff.

Resolved that approval of the draft Work Programme 2020/21 be recommended to the Authority.

Voting: Unanimous

118. Draft General Fund Revenue Budget for the Financial Year 2020-21, Treasury Management Strategy and Medium-Term Position to 2023

- 118.1 Nigel Stone informed members that the New Forest National Park Authority had finally received the Defra Grant determination for the 2020/21 financial year. He said he was disappointed with the settlement partly because the figure was the same as the current year, and because it represented only a one-year settlement. He had expressed these concerns to Defra. Representations had also been made to the Secretary of State regarding National Parks unique position in leading on the government agenda around climate change, nature recovery and the future of land management.
- 118.2 Mr Stone said the core planning fee and grant income in 2020/21 was projected to be significantly lower due to the large one-off Fawley application in 2019/20. He also said there was a slight drop in other planning income. The predicted planning fees for the year ahead was £380,000, but this figure could be affected by external events outside of the NAP's control.
- 118.3 Nigel Stone advised members that there had been a significant net decrease in pension costs of around £150,000 due to the removal of top-up payments which had previously been required due to an overall deficit within the pension fund. A further £50,000 of pension savings would be placed in risk reserves. He said that following a full review, it was recommended to maintain a minimum General Fund Reserve level of £300,000.
- 118.4 In response to a query, Mr Stone undertook to provide members with information on the activities of the National Parks Partnership.

Resolved, that members

- 1 support the General Fund Budget for 2020/21 and recommend it for approval at the Authority meeting on 26 March 2020
- 2 note that the underlying minimum level for the General Fund Reserve remains at £0.3 million
- 3 note the implications on the Reserves of the proposed budget for 2020/21
- 4 note the Risk Assessment and Section 25 Statement (Section 7)
- 5 support the Treasury Management Strategy in Annex 3 and recommend it for approval at the Authority meeting on 26 March 2020
- 6 note the Medium Term Financial Plan up to 2022/23 and the Forward Projection in Annex 4

Voting: Unanimous

119. Acquisition of a Small Meadow in Godshill

- 119.1 Paul Walton presented the report and advised that a local family had offered to gift a small meadow in Godshill to the NPA, which would be used by the use of the New Forest Land Advice Service (NFLAS). He said that this was a rare opportunity to support and foster the work of the NFLAS team and to protect and enhance the meadow in perpetuity. Paul Walton drew members' attention to Section 3 of the report which set out the various options for the use of the land.
- 119.2 Officers then responded to queries from members in connection with concerns over holding the land in perpetuity and were advised that if the NPA were to dispose of the land, this would have to be on the same terms and conditions as its own acquisition (that is, subject to restrictive covenants as to how the land could be used) and would also be subject to obtaining the donors' consent to any future transfer. Nigel Stone advised that this and future offers of gifted land would each be considered on their individual merits and no precedent would be set by accepting the current gift.
- 119.3 Members expressed their appreciation to the Land Advice Team for their work with the landowners of the site.

Resolved that it be recommended to the full Authority that the Authority accept the offer of the gift of the meadow in Godshill to the New Forest National Park Authority.

Voting: 7:0 (one abstention)

120. Review of Constitutional Documents (Finance and Resources Matters)

- 120.1 In introducing the report, Rosalind Alderman advised that officers were conducting an overall review of the Authority's constitutional documents, in order to ensure their consistency and fitness for purpose, to simplify certain procedures, and to consider where further delegations to officers of Committees and Sub-committees might facilitate the more efficient running of the Authority's business.
- 120.2 She mentioned that a number of the proposed updates to the constitutional documents had been considered and agreed by the Standards Committee and elaborated on the

outcomes from these discussions set out in section 2 of the report and drew members' attention to the proposed RAPC updates under paragraph 3.

Resolved that the revised Standing Orders (Annex 1), Code of Conduct (Annex 2), the Arrangements for dealing with Member allegations (Annex 3), the Local Protocol for Member and Officer Relations (Annex 4), the Scheme of Delegations to Officers and Committees (Annex 5), the Financial Regulations (Annex 6) and the Standing Orders as to Contracts (Annex 7) be recommended to the full Authority for approval.

Voting: Unanimous

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 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.

121. Any other items that the Chairman decides are urgent

121. Members received an oral update on two items. This is a summary of the minute which contains exempt information.

122. Date of next meeting

122.1 Members noted that the next meeting of the Committee would be held on 1 June 2020.

The meeting closed at 12.10

SignedDate.....
(Chairman)