

## NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

### MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE RESOURCES, AUDIT AND PERFORMANCE COMMITTEE HELD ON MONDAY 3 FEBRUARY 2020 AT 10:00 HOURS IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER, LYMINGTON TOWN HALL, AVENUE ROAD, LYMINGTON

#### **Present:**

##### *Members:*

Gordon Bailey  
Sue Bennison  
Oliver Crosthwaite-Eyre  
David Harrison (Chairman)  
Patrick Heneghan (Deputy Chairman)  
George Meyrick  
Ann Sevier

##### *Officers:*

Alison Barnes	Chief Executive
Steve Avery	Executive Director Strategy and Planning
Rosalind Alderman	Solicitor and Monitoring Officer
Nigel Stone	Head of Resources
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
Adam Vasey	National Park Access Ranger

##### *Also in attendance:*

Kevin Suter	Associate Partner – Ernst & Young, External Auditors
Antony Harvey	Deputy Head of Partnership (Southern Internal Audit Partnership)

#### **98. Apologies for absence**

98.1 Apologies for absence were received from David Bence, Mel Kendal and Neville Penman.

#### **99. Declarations of Interest**

99.1 There were no declarations of interest

#### **100. Chairman's announcements**

100.1 The Chairman said that Nigel Stone would give members an update on the future work programme following consideration of the third quarter progress report (minute 105).

#### **101. Minutes**

101.1 The minutes of the meeting held on 4 November 2019 were agreed as a correct record subject to an amendment to the attendance of the meeting to reflect the attendance of the Chief Executive.

**Resolved, that the minutes of the meeting held on 4 November 2019 be confirmed as a correct record.**

*Voting: none voting against*

## **102. Public Question Time**

102.1 There were no questions or statements from the public.

## **103. Ernst and Young – Audit Planning Report 2019 – 20**

103.1 Mr Suter presented the Audit Plan Report for 2019-20. He informed members that they had not identified any new significant transactions or new activities of the New Forest National Park that were different from previous years, so no changes in risk or focus.

103.2 He drew members' attention to the three main areas of risk which were set out in the report, namely risk of fraud from misstatements or error, valuation of land and buildings and pension liability valuation. Mr Suter said that a value for money risk assessment will be undertaken, however no significant risks had been identified to date.

**Resolved, that members confirmed their understanding of, and agreement to, the materiality and reporting levels, and approve the Audit Plan 2019/20.**

*Voting: none voting against*

## **104. Internal Audit Progress Report 2019-20**

104.1 Antony Harvey introduced the Internal Audit Progress 2019-20. He advised that the purpose of the report was to update members on the delivery of the approved audit plan and to provide an overview of the status of "live" reports.

104.2 Mr Harvey reported that there were three IT actions overdue, but there were no new items of significance that needed to be brought to members attention. A member asked for an explanation about the IT actions that were overdue. Nigel Stone clarified that the first of the three was an IT access control issue which had been resolved two months before but had been left on the audit list for internal audit to double check controls would be working properly within the next few months.

104.3 The other two IT actions were a delay in system changes to do with Information Governance for example retention of documents, which meant systems moving across to Office 365. Two thirds of the staff had already moved, and it was hoped that in six months' time the remaining actions would be completed but were being monitored.

104.4 Members noted the report.

## **105. Third Quarter Progress Report 2019-20**

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

105.2 Protect, page 2: In response to a query, Mr Matthews advised that we will have a better idea about the speed at which the Special by Design initiative could be brought back on track after the next Special by Design Steering Group meeting.

- 105.3 Protect, page 4: the Committee was pleased to note that the existing HLS Scheme would be extended for a further calendar year. Members were also advised that indications were that this would likely be followed by a further two-year extension of the scheme. Members recorded their appreciation for the work done by the Forest Farming Group in assisting to secure the extension.
- 105.4 Enjoy, page 7: Alison Barnes reported that the 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Volunteer Fair had been attended by 57 volunteering organisations and 763 prospective volunteers – exceeding the 40 organisations and 400 prospective volunteers set out in the objectives on this item.
- 105.5 Prosper, page 3: Alison Barnes advised that the availability of suitable sites and funding for affordable housing would be raised at the next meeting between the Chairman of the Authority and local MPs. Steve Avery advised that proposals for joint partnership working with the New Forest District Council on affordable housing provision in the New Forest were also being explored.
- 105.6 Achieving Excellence, page 5: A member commented on the volume of hard copies being generated for committee and Authority meetings and that office efficiency should be maximised to reduce the current usage of paper and suggested that the RAG status should be amber rather than green.
- 105.7 David Stone agreed with the above comments and informed members that a pilot project using two Authority members was being progressed which would test the use of electronic distribution of agendas and the use of iPads as meetings. He and the Member Services Administrator would also be attending a demonstration of the possible use of the Modern.gov system. As this work was in hand members agreed that the RAG status remain green.
- 105.8 Nigel Stone updated members on the forthcoming Work Programme for 2020/21 which was the final year of the 2018-21 Business Plan. He noted that a number of key policy directions had emerged since the Business Plan was adopted, including the 25-year Environment Plan, Glover Review, Partnership Plan Review and recent Members' steer on the climate and nature emergency. He said that officers would be drafting the next Work Programme for consideration at the Committee meeting in March 2020 which would be similar in format to previous work programmes. The wider report would take stock of the achievements under the Business Plan such as the adoption of the Local Plan, State of the Park Report, People Plan, 22 actions from the RMS review, Green Halo Partnership and Year of Green Action. However, as well as completing a significant number of actions from the current Business Plan, the 2020/21 Work Programme would also seek to proactively address the emerging issues set out above. Work had already started on crafting the Work Programme actions under key headings and subheadings identified by the Executive Leadership Team and these would be ready for consideration by the Committee on 2 March 2020. The 2020/21 Work Programme would therefore constitute a transition year to enable the Authority to redeploy some of its resources from the actions in the current Business Plan to the Authority's emerging priorities which would also enable these to be included in the discussions with partners on the new Partnership Plan. Following discussion, members noted the update and supported the proposals put forward.

**106. Third Quarter Budgetary Control Report 2019-20**

- 106.1 Nigel Stone introduced the report, which provided a summary of the financial performance for the first nine months of 2019/20. The key figures were expenditure that showed £3.48m spend (71% of budget) and the income position which showed £3.57m received (73% of budget). Without the partnership projects, income was £3.09m from a budget of £3.90m.
- 106.2 Mr Stone said that overall the figures after nine months of the financial year were on target and no significant issues had emerged. He added that cumulative small savings across the budget lines could add up to around £5-10,000 as it had in previous years.
- 106.3 Nigel Stone informed members that staff costs were the authority's largest costs and were slightly above budget but were likely to come in on target by year-end. He said that planning income was slightly below forecast at present, but those figures excluded the one-off fee for the proposed Fawley development.
- 106.4 Mr Stone pointed out that Authority was eight weeks away from starting a new financial year, and it was extremely disappointing that no confirmation had been received from Defra as to what the 2020/21 grant determination would be. He added that there was some positive news in respect of pension contributions which had come down from previous years, although some provision had to be made for a pension reserve to accommodate an upswing in future costs, there would still be significant savings for the Authority.
- 106.5 A member commented on the volume of hard copies being generated for committee and Authority meetings and that office efficiency should be maximised to reduce the current usage of paper and suggested that the RAG status should be amber rather than green.
- 106.6 David Stone agreed with the above comments and informed members that a pilot project using two Authority members was being progressed which would test the use of electronic distribution of agendas and the use of iPads as meetings. He and the Member Services Administrator would also be attending a demonstration of the possible use of the Modern.gov system. As this work was in hand members agreed that the RAG status remain green.

106.7 Members noted the report.

**107. Grant Funding for Heritage Walks**

- 107.1 Mr Vasey presented his report highlighting key elements of the capital funding bids through the Landscape Enhancement Initiative and Rural Development Programme for England Growth Programme both of which required an initial expression of interest to be submitted in mid-February.
- 107.2 He said that funding would be used to develop a series of new accessible self-guided walks along existing rights of way around the New Forest as part of the Our Past, Our Future landscape partnership scheme. The development of the three routes concerned were intended to help direct visitor pressure from the Crown Lands onto the more robust routes beyond using the existing rights of way network. The routes concerned were on the Waterside in Marchwood, Totton and Cadland Estate and

officers would liaise with the Hampshire County Council and Wiltshire Council in taking forward the improvements.

107.3 Following brief discussion, members supported the recommendation contained in the report.

**Resolved**, that the report be noted and that the submission of the applications to the LEI and Growth Programme be approved.

*Voting: none voting against*

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

108.1 No items were raised on this occasion.

**109. Date of next meeting**

109.1 Members noted that the next meeting of the Committee would be held on 2 March 2020.

The meeting closed at 12.05 hours

Signed ..... Date.....  
(Chairman)