

## NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

### MINUTES OF A VIRTUAL MEETING OF THE RESOURCES, AUDIT AND PERFORMANCE COMMITTEE HELD ON MONDAY 1 JUNE 2020 AT 10:00 HOURS

#### **Present:**

##### *Members:*

David Harrison (Chairman)

Patrick Heneghan (Deputy Chairman) – Observer unable to login due to technical difficulties

Gordon Bailey

David Bence

Sue Bennison

Oliver Crosthwaite-Eyre

##### *Officers:*

Alison Barnes

Chief Executive

Steve Avery

Executive Director Strategy and Planning

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) and Chief Internal Auditor to the Authority

#### **123. Apologies for absence**

123.1 Apologies for absence were received from John Sanger, Ann Sevier and Neville Penman. The Chairman was reminded that Mel Kendal was no longer a member of the Authority.

#### **124. Declarations of Interest**

124.1 There were no declarations of interest.

#### **125 Chairman's announcements**

125.1 The Chairman thanked staff on behalf of all members for the way they had responded to the restrictions caused by the Coronavirus pandemic.

#### **126. Minutes**

126.1 The minutes of the meeting held on 16 March 2020 were agreed as a correct record subject to the correction of two typographical errors on minute item 117.2 and 117.4.

126.2 Members asked Nigel Stone if he had the information on the activities of the National Parks Partnership as agreed at the last Resources, Audit and Performance Committee on 16 March 2020. He advised members that the information would be in the next Members' Bulletin.

## **127. Public Question Time**

127.1 There were no questions or statements from the public.

## **128. Coronavirus Update Report**

128.1 Steve Avery introduced the report which set out how the New Forest National Park Authority had responded to the Coronavirus pandemic over the past few months, how work had been carried out, the financial implications and what it meant for the longer term.

128.2 Mr Avery reminded members that a Covid-19 working group had been set up to consider how the National Park Authority would respond to the pandemic, and that a Pandemic Policy had been reviewed and updated from a 2008 Swine Flu policy. Excellent work had been achieved by the ICT team which had enabled most of the staff to work from home as soon as it was recommended by Government.

128.3 He said that various meetings had taken place including an All Staff team meeting and two virtual Planning Committee meetings. The New Forest National Park had also deployed Rangers to the forest as the public returned in large numbers over the past couple of weekends and had supported the New Forest Marque by delivering products to households. Steve Avery also mentioned that staff newsletters had been circulated on a regular basis which helped to keep staff updated on developments and engaged with one another.

128.4 Steve Avery said it was good to note that the New Forest National Park Authority's financial position remained stable at the present time which was largely due to the one-off annual grant from DEFRA and this was being kept under review.

128.5 For the longer term, Mr Avery advised members that the Authority would have to adapt to new ways of working from an office-based organisation to one where staff largely worked from home.

128.6 A member asked for confirmation that the Authority's financial position remained stable. He was advised by Nigel Stone, Chief Financial Officer, that the risks were manageable and there might be a potential to use reserves if some income streams were lost but would be manageable in the longer term.

128.7 During an ensuing discussion, a member asked about the possibility of sending out a staff survey to get an idea of the benefits and disadvantages of working from home. Officers informed members that a staff survey had taken place which 95% of staff had completed and the outcome was positive. The results would be taken to the Senior Leadership Team and a full report of the findings would be brought to the next Resources, Audit and Performance Committee in September.

Members considered and noted the report.

## **129. Annual Internal Audit Report and Opinion 2019-20**

- 129.1 Antony Harvey introduced the report which provided the Resources, Audit and Performance Committee with the Chief Internal Auditor's opinion on the adequacy and effectiveness of the New Forest National Park Authority's framework of risk management, control and governance processes for the year ending 31 March 2020.
- 129.2 Mr Harvey informed members that in his opinion the New Forest National Park's framework governance risk management and control was substantial and where weaknesses had been identified audit had worked with management to agree appropriate corrective actions and a timescale for improvement.
- 129.3 He said that the Authority was due to change financial systems during the year, but in conjunction with New Forest District Council it had been delayed to the beginning of April 2020. However, he was able to confirm that business continued as usual as it should. The payroll system which had already been implemented was also concluded as substantial, so there were no significant issues identified.

**Resolved, that the Chief Internal Auditor's Annual Internal Audit and Opinion for 2019-20 be approved**

*Voting: Non-voting against*

## **130. Year End Progress Report 2019-20**

- 130.1 Nigel Stone explained to members that he had not put in the report whether there had been changes between Q3 and Q4, so he updated members by informing them that there were four items that had improved from Q3 to Q4. The three that had improved from amber to green were the Green Halo, Educational Campaigns and the quality of planning applications going forward. The one that had moved from red to amber was affordable housing.
- 130.2 There were six items that had slipped largely due to the pandemic and so moved to a negative status from green to amber, and those were as follows:
- Special by Design – did not complete by end of March
  - Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL)
  - Meeting about young people and how we engaged them in the forest
  - Communications Team preparing to get out an advocacy pack – again delayed
  - Partnership Plan
  - Financial stability of our key partners
- 130.3 He drew attention to a couple of KPI's which were not available at the time of writing the report and those were days lost to sickness absence per FTE. There were three days which were below the target and the days lost to sickness absence per FTE not including long-term sickness was 2.6 days per staff member. There were still a couple of other KPI's not available, and these were CO2 usage and mileage reductions, but these would be finalised within the next few weeks.

- 130.4 *Protect, page 10:* in response to a query Paul Walton explained that the RAG status was red and the overall RAG status was green because there wasn't a member of staff in the Community Archaeologist post, and there was uncertainty that there would be funding available through the OPOF scheme. He said that fortunately both the issues had been resolved and the post had now been advertised and they would recruit in August.
- 130.5 *Strategic Themes, page 8:* In response to a question about delays in improving signage on rights of way, Nigel Matthews advised there was a desire to have greater joint working between partner organisations across the Forest in terms of their signage. Mr Matthews said the work was being progressed through a project called Special by Design and that they were working with consultants to identify ways in which signage could be improved (through materials, appearance and content). He informed members that there was a steering group of organisations that had jointly funded the work. The ideas would be taken forward by the steering group and would come back to members of the Authority for an update.
- 130.6 A member mentioned how much the Authority had achieved and how positive the work programmes were but thought members and officers should think about how others might view the New Forest National Park Authority. Members discussed the possibility of an informal peer review with some of the Authority's major partners to get an honest appraisal from them as to how they thought the Authority could improve its ways of working. It was thought that as well as stakeholders, communities could also be involved, and those opinions could be built into the Partnership Plan.

**Resolved, that the contents of the report be noted**

*Voting: Non-voting against*

**131. Financial Outturn and Treasury Report 2019-20**

- 131.1 Nigel Stone informed Members that there were a few updates to report for the 2019-20 figures. He said the Authority had been looking at an overspend of £6,000 which as a result meant taking £36,000 from the Revenue Support Reserve. Now the figure had been updated there had been a positive variance of £14,000 from the original figures. There was now a saving of £8,000 overall. He said if £22,000 was taken from our Revenue Support Reserve it would leave around £13,000-£14,000 in the Revenue Support Reserves which could be used in 2020/21.
- 131.1 The overall spend at year-end was 101% of the budget which excluded partnership projects. Our income position was the same.
- 131.3 Mr Stone said there was a slight overspend on our employees costs due to anticipated vacancy saving that did not occur. He also expected the access officer costs to be covered by funding for the establishment of the England Coast Path, but this had been delayed.
- 131.2 Nigel Stone said the planning fee income was £96,000 higher than originally forecast, but if the Fawley development application of £150,000 was excluded then planning

fees were down by £54,000 in the year. He advised that the £54,000 figure was one of the figures that had improved slightly since writing the report and it was now £49,000 as some additional planning fee income had been received.

- 131.4 Mr Stone advised members that the only major variance in the Authority's Accounting Policies which has had an impact from Covid-19 was the Hampshire County Council pension fund. This was because it largely invested in stocks and shares so had an impact at year-end. He said on the balance sheet it would show the overall liability had increased from £6.45m to £7.29m.

**Resolved, that:**

**1 the provisional outturn position be noted**

**2 the Treasury Management Stewardship Report and Prudential indicators 2019/20 in Annex 6 be noted; and**

**3 the indicative transfers to/(from) Reserves in 2019/20 as set out in section 6 of the report and detailed in Annex 5 be approved**

*Voting: Non-voting against*

**132. Draft Annual Governance Statement 2019/20**

- 132.1 Nigel Stone presented the report and advised that the purpose of the Annual Governance Statement was to provide assurance that the Authority's business was conducted in accordance with the law and that public money was safeguarded and accounted for. The Statement also ensured that there are arrangements in place for continuous improvement of the Authorities functions.

- 132.2 The Annual Governance Statement was compiled using a wide range of evidence sources from across the Authority, such as:

- The Internal Auditor's opinion for the financial year 2019/20
- Corporate risk register
- External Audit reports
- the Monitoring Officer's review of governance

- 132.3 He added that the report would go to the auditors alongside the financial statements and then would come back to members for final approval at the September Authority meeting.

**Resolved, that the Draft Annual Governance Statement for the financial year 2019/20 be approved and that the draft be passed to the External Auditors.**

*Voting: Non-voting against*

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

133.1 There were no urgent items on this occasion.

**134. Date of next meeting**

134.1 Members noted that the next meeting of the Committee would be held on 7 September 2020.

The meeting closed at 11:45 hours

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