

## NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

### MINUTES OF THE RESOURCES, AUDIT AND PERFORMANCE COMMITTEE HELD ON MONDAY 7 MARCH 2022 AT 10:00 HOURS IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER, LYMINGTON TOWN HALL, AVENUE ROAD, LYMINGTON

#### **Present:**

##### *Members:*

David Bence  
Sue Bennison  
Patrick Heneghan (Chair)  
Victoria Mander  
Alexis McEvoy (Deputy Chair)  
George Meyrick  
Neville Penman  
Caroline Rackham  
John Sanger  
Ann Sevier

##### *Officers:*

Alison Barnes	Chief Executive
Steve Avery	Executive Director of Strategy and Planning
Nigel Stone	Head of Resources (CFO)
Paul Walton	Head of Environment and Rural Economy
Hilary Makin	Communications Manager
Jo Murphy	Information and Data Protection Officer (DMO)
Jim Mitchell	Interpretation and Outreach Manager
Tom Knott	Finance and Sustainable Performance Officer
Frances Connolly	Executive Assistant
Rachel Bonathan	Administration Assistant

##### *Also in attendance:*

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

#### **96. Apologies for absence**

96.1 Apologies for absence were received from Gordon Bailey.

#### **97. Declarations of Interest**

97.1 There were no declarations of interest.

#### **98. Chairman's announcements**

98.1 Patrick Heneghan thanked Alexis McEvoy for deputising as Chair at the last RAPC meeting on the 7 February 2022.

#### **99. Minutes**

99.1 The minutes of the meeting held on 7 February 2022 were agreed as a correct record.

**100. Public Question Time**

100.1 There were no questions or statements from the public.

**101. Internal Audit Progress Report 2021-22**

101.1 Antony Harvey provided a summary of the internal audit progress for 2021-22 and reported that the plan was 50% completed and the remainder was in progress.

101.2 He said the Internal Audit Progress for 2021-22 had been discussed by the Authority's Executive Board and were implementing the actions that had arisen from the previous audit report. Mr Harvey confirmed that there were no 'Limited' or 'No' assurance opinion reports issued during 2021-22.

101.3 Antony Harvey stated that the

- Corporate Governance Framework was finalised in January 2022 with 'reasonable assurance'
- Cyber Security Incident remediation had been finalised and provided 'reasonable assurance'
- Payroll review would be completed within the next few days
- Progress around Business Continuity/Disaster Recovery would be completed in March 2022.

101.4 In answer to a question about two items that were overdue in the Audit Review, Nigel Stone explained that the audits had highlighted transparency data that was not showing on the Authority's 'live' website, and this was corrected immediately. Mr Stone said that he had decided to keep this item as overdue until other data that was due had also been provided.

101.5 The second item related to the payment card machine on the reception desk, where payments were taken mostly for planning applications. It was recommended by internal audit that a Payment Card Industry Standards test was completed to make sure the machine was secure. He advised members that a new machine was due at the end of March for the reception desk, so checks would be completed then.

Members noted the report

**102. Internal Audit Charter and Plan 2022-23**

102.1 Antony Harvey advised members that within the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards there was a requirement to formally consider and approve the Internal Audit Charter each year.

102.2 Mr Harvey was asked if he could give assurance that nothing had changed within the Charter since they had been the Authority's internal audit provider. Antony Harvey confirmed that the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards had not changed during that time, and that there had not been any further updates. He said that in September 2020 they had been assessed externally by the Institute of Internal Auditors and could confirm to members that all documents were 100% aligned to all the standards.

- 102.3 Antony Harvey informed members that the Internal Audit Plan for 2022-23 had to be formally approved each year and highlighted the proposed coverage for 2022-23. This had been developed through discussions with Nigel Stone and then the senior management team for consideration.
- 102.4 The three areas that had been proposed for the next financial year were:
- Planning – review of the changes to the system
  - Audit of the main financial systems
  - Review the ICT Policy and Procedures.

**Resolved, that** the Internal Audit Charter for 2022-23 (Appendix A) and Internal Audit Plan 2022/23 (Appendix B) be approved.

*Voting: none voting against*

**103. Draft General Fund Revenue Budget for the Financial Year 2022-23, Treasury Management Strategy and Medium-Term Position**

- 103.1 Nigel Stone highlighted the key points of the report. He said that the Authority had still not received its grant determination, but there were strong indications that it would be a flat cash settlement. Mr Stone expressed disappointment that it was another single year settlement but had budgeted for £3.25m for 2022-23.
- 103.2 The report focussed on how the Authority would spend its Defra funding, but there were other funding streams such as externally-funded projects, and for every £1 the Authority put into its partnership projects, a further £18 was generated from partner organisations to be spent in the New Forest.
- 103.3 Nigel Stone said that a minimum reserve of £300,000 would be maintained in the General Fund Reserve. He said that other smaller earmarked reserves had been set aside and so was able to fund a Nature Based Solutions Officer, vehicle replacements and potential minor works to the two houses in Bransgore this year.
- 103.4 Mr Stone drew members' attention to the risks and uncertainties that he had set out in the report. He said those that were particularly difficult to predict were the legal costs and potential pay award. Nigel Stone felt that the budget for 2022-23 was fully robust. For 2023-25 a further £170-260,000 would need to be found for the budgets to balance, but he was not concerned with this position as it was in line with the same budgetary stage within previous years.
- 103.5 There was some discussion about staff morale and it was thought that the finances of the Authority had been in a good position since 2010. There had not been a redundancy programme during this time and staff had regularly received the nationally-agreed pay awards. It was felt that there was a strong commitment from staff and they worked incredibly well as a team.

**Resolved that:**

- 1 the General Fund Budget for 2022-23 be recommend for approval at the Authority meeting on 24 March 2022
- 2 it be noted that the underlying minimum level for the General Fund Reserve remains at £0.3 million
- 3 the implications on the Reserves of the proposed budget for 2021/22 be noted
- 4 the Risk Assessment and Section 25 Statement (Section 7) be noted
- 5 the Treasury Management Strategy in Annex 3 be supported and recommended for approval at the Authority meeting on 24 March 2022
- 6 the Medium-Term Financial Plan up to 2024/25 and the Forward projection in Annex 4 be noted

*Voting: Unanimous*

**104. Interim Work Programme 2022/23**

- 104.1 Mr Stone said that following the discussion and agreement by the Committee at its meeting on 7 February 2022, and once the new Partnership Plan had been approved on 24 March, officers would shortly be beginning the task of updating the Authority's own Business Plan. Whilst this key strategic work was underway, delivery would continue on the ground for the Forest and its communities through an 'Interim Work Programme' to reflect the core Authority structures and outcomes expected over the coming months. The draft attached to the report mirrored the five strategic themes from the Partnership Plan. A sixth heading had been added to cover internal organisational governance, performance management, support services and staffing strategy.

Members discussed and commented on several aspects of the draft Interim Work Programme.

Resolved that the report on the Interim Work Programme be endorsed by the Committee.

**105. Authority Carbon Reduction Plan**

- 105.1 Mr Stone presented the report which sets out the final draft Carbon Reduction Plan for the Authority, containing the current status and proposed way forward, to reduce and/or offset the Authority's own carbon footprint from its assets and operations. He said that a draft was brought to this Committee in November and this had now been updated with the final 2019/20 baseline figures from Defra / Carbon Trust.
- 105.2 The Plan had been drafted in response to the global pressures from climate change, the wider UK target to be entirely Net Zero by 2050, the Authority's local declaration of a Climate and Nature Emergency and the agreed objective for the Authority itself to be Net Zero by 2030 at the latest. Whilst the report concentrated on the Authority's own carbon outputs, there were significant strands of work elsewhere within the Authority and in partners organisations which looked at the

necessity to reduce and/or offset carbon within the New Forest National Park as a place.

Members discussed aspects of the draft Plan which was then supported by the Committee.

**Resolved that the Authority’s Carbon Reduction Plan be approved.**

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

106.1 There were no urgent items on this occasion.

**107. Date of next meeting**

107.1 Members noted that the next meeting of the Committee would be held on 6 June 2022 in the Council Chamber 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 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.**

**108. Budgetary Allowances 2022-23**

108.1 Members received an update on Budgetary Allowances for 2022-23. This is a summary of the minute which contains exempt information.

**109. Planning Appeal Decision Making Process**

109.1 Members received an update on the Planning Appeal Decision making Process. This is a summary of the minute which contains exempt information

**110. National Parks Partnership**

110.1 Members received an update on the National Parks Partnership. This is a summary of the minute which contains exempt information

The meeting closed at 13:15 hours

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