

NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

MINUTES OF THE RESOURCES, AUDIT AND PERFORMANCE COMMITTEE HELD ON MONDAY 7 FEBRUARY 2022 AT 10:00 HOURS IN THE GATES HALL, LYMINGTON COMMUNITY CENTRE, NEW STREET, LYMINGTON

Present:

Members:

Gordon Bailey
David Bence
Sue Bennison
Victoria Mander
Alexis McEvoy (Deputy Chairman – in the Chair)
George Meyrick
Neville Penman
Caroline Rackham
John Sanger

Officers:

Rosalind Alderman	Solicitor and Monitoring Officer
Nigel Stone	Head of Resources (CFO)
Paul Walton	Head of Environment and Rural Economy
Hilary Makin	Communications Manager
Jim Mitchell	Interpretation and Outreach Manager
David Stone	Corporate Services Manager
Frances Connolly	Executive Assistant

Also in attendance:

James Stuttaford – External Auditors Ernst & Young LLP

84. Apologies for absence

84.1 Apologies for absence were received from Patrick Heneghan (Chair) and Ann Sevier.

85. Declarations of Interest

85.1 There were no declarations of interest.

86. Chairman's announcements

86.1 There were no Chairman's announcements on this occasion.

87. Minutes

87.1 The minutes of the meeting held on 1 November 2021 were agreed as a correct record.

88. Public Question Time

88.1 There were no questions or statements from the public.

89. Ernst and Young Audit Report 2020-21

89.1 James Stuttaford introduced the Audit Report for 2020-21 which was previously known as the Annual Audit Letter. He gave an overall summary on conclusions of the audit of financial statements and advised members that there were no significant matters to report or any weaknesses identified in relation to value for money.

89.2 Mr Stuttaford drew members attention to the fact that Ernst & Young were unable to formally certify the audit because they had not received the Whole of Government Accounts submissions via the National Audit Office. He expected that there would not be any additional procedures to perform so it would be a simple process to close the accounts once received.

89.3 He said that Ernst & Young had submitted their scale-fee rebasing to Public Sector Audit Appointments Ltd (PSAA) for their approval for 2019-20 onwards, but had still not received a final outcome from them in relation to the submission. Mr Stuttaford said he was aware that there had been some approval for other authorities, resulting in an average increase in fee of around 48%.

89.4 Nigel Stone updated members that he recently had a call from the PSAA to say they will shortly be looking at the Authority's case. He advised members to accept the report but not the fees recommended. He added that an increase of around 48% would equate to an additional £5,000 per year for the Authority and not the additional £27,000 as requested by Ernst & Young.

Resolved, that the Committee accept the report on behalf of the Authority, but that the unilateral fee rebasing figures set out in Appendix A be not accepted.

Voting: *Unanimous*

90. Third Quarter Progress Report 2021-22

90.1 Detailed discussion took place on the items within the report with members enquiring about progress on a range of actions.

90.2 In response to a query, Nigel Stone advised that the headings of 'Protect, Enjoy and Prosper', as well as the wider priorities of the Authority, would be reviewed during the drafting of the new Business Plan which would begin once the Partnership Plan had been finalised and approved in March. A further comment by members in considering the actions in the report was that, in some cases, progress reporting needed to be aimed at tangible actions or targets rather than general topics.

90.3 Regarding the spatial plan for nature recovery (page 2 of the progress report), members queried the status of the Wildlife Roundtable as a formal advisory group to the NPA on nature recovery and asked that further information be provided to members.

Action: Paul Walton to provide information to members on the status of the Wildlife Roundtable.

- 90.4 Members expressed concern regarding verge damage (page 5 of the progress report) and supported a suggestion that this matter be raised with the Partnership Plan Board once this was formed and also through the New Forest Consultative Panel.

Action: NPA concerns with regard to verge damage be raised with the Partnership Plan Board once this is formed and also through the New Forest Consultative Panel.

- 90.5 Members discussed the England Coast Path (Calshot to Milford-on-Sea), page 17 of the report. Mr Mitchell advised that officers would provide details of the exact route and report to the Committee on plans for the management of the coastal path once established by Natural England, particularly with regard to any financial or resource implications for the Authority.

Action: Officers to provide details of the exact route of the England Coast Path (Calshot to Milford-on-Sea) and report to the Committee on plans for the management of the coastal path once established by Natural England, particularly with regard to any financial or resource implications for the Authority.

Following further discussion, members noted the report and the action discussed above.

91. Third Quarter Budgetary Control Report 2021-22

- 91.1 Nigel Stone presented his report and drew members attention to the financial performance for the first nine months of 2021/22. The key figures were expenditure which showed £3.31m spend (63% of budget) and the income position which showed £3.68m received (70% of budget).
- 91.2 He informed members that after nine months of the financial year the figures were on track and there were no significant issues that needed to be brought to their attention.
- 91.3 Mr Stone highlighted the point that the Authority had still not received its grant determination for the 2022/23 financial year. Despite the challenges ahead, such as inflation on all costs especially in regard to the Authority's utilities and staffing costs, he was confident that the Authority would achieve a balanced budget for 2022/23.
- 91.4 Members discussed having a Members Day to see how the Authority could generate its own revenue rather than being reliant on Defra's grant, and also to discuss future office accommodation.

Action: A future Members Day to be arranged to discuss grant-reliance and future provision of the Authority's headquarters.

Resolved, that the current income and expenditure position, including the potential savings and pressures identified be noted.

Voting: Unanimous

92. New Forest Trust Memorandum of Understanding

- 92.1 Hilary Makin explained that the New Forest National Park Authority had worked with the New Forest Trust since 2017 on the Love the Forest Visitor Giving Scheme and had a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) which had now expired after four years, and officers were looking to renew it.
- 92.2 Mrs Makin informed members that the New Forest Trust charitable objectives closely aligned with the Authority's purposes of conservation, education and commoning. She advised that the report was to ask members for a steer on the content of a new MOU. She added that the existing MOU would be revised to expand the scheme to provide opportunities for the NPA and the Trust to work in partnership on other aspects of charitable giving. Funds would be used to help support the New Forest National Park's Partnership Plan projects.
- 92.3 Members supported the approach suggested.

Resolved, that

1. the principle of continuing to work with the New Forest Trust on the Love the Forest Visitor Giving Scheme and expanding the relationship be approved.
2. Authority be delegated to officers to negotiate and enter into a memorandum of understanding with the New Forest Trust and to take all other action as necessary to give effect to this arrangement.

Voting: Unanimous

93. Business Plan and Work Programme – oral update

- 93.1 Nigel Stone advised that the review of the Partnership Plan was nearing finalisation and would be reported for approval to the Authority meeting on 24 March. Work would then commence on the development of the new multi-year Business Plan for the Authority. Officers were proposing that they work with members on the Business Plan during April, May and June, after which the draft plan would be presented to this Committee for consideration and recommendation in June and thereafter to the Authority meeting in July for final approval.
- 93.2 Referring to programme delivery from April through to July, officers were proposing that an updated 'interim' 2022/23 Work Programme be put in place. This would be based on the five headings contained in the Partnership Plan together with a further heading 'Organisational Development' in the place of 'Achieving Excellence'. The Interim Work Programme would be brought to the next meeting of the Committee on 7 March 2022.

93.3 The Interim Work Programme would then be fully reviewed following the drafting of the new Business Plan, and a final version brought to members for approval in June and July.

93.4 Following brief discussion, members noted the report and supported the approach described above.

94. Any other items that the Chairman decides are urgent

94.1 There were no urgent items on this occasion.

95. Date of next meeting

95.1 Members noted that the next meeting of the Committee would be held on 7 March 2022 in the Council Chamber at Lymington Town Hall.

The meeting closed at 12:05 hours

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