

NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

MINUTES OF THE RESOURCES, AUDIT AND PERFORMANCE COMMITTEE HELD ON MONDAY 5 SEPTEMBER 2022 AT 10:00 HOURS IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER, LYMINGTON TOWN HALL, AVENUE ROAD, LYMINGTON

Present:

Members:

Gordon Bailey
Sue Bennison
Patrick Heneghan (Chair)
Alexis McEvoy (Deputy Chair)
George Meyrick
Neville Penman
Caroline Rackham
John Sanger
Ann Sevier

Officers:

Alison Barnes	Chief Executive
Steve Avery	Executive Director
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	Access and Engagement Manager
Fiona Wynne	Grants Officer
David Stone	Corporate Services Manager
Frances Connolly	Executive Assistant

125. Apologies for absence

125.1 Apologies for absence were received from Victoria Mander and David Bence.

126. Declarations of Interest

126.1 There were no declarations of interest.

127. Chair's announcements

127.1 There were no Chair's announcements on this occasion.

128. Minutes

128.1 John Sanger mentioned that there were occasions when he felt that the minutes did not do justice to the level of discussion on some issues. Whilst not disputing the accuracy of the minutes, he felt certain discussions could be more fully recorded to better reflect the depth and quality of discussion that took place. John Sanger also felt that all discussion should be attributed to officers and members by name.

- 128.2 Following discussion, members were of the general view that it was important that the minutes remain both concise and usable. It was agreed, however, that should members believe items of particular importance merited more detailed recording, the secretariat would be guided accordingly.
- 128.3 The minutes of the meeting held on 6 June 2022 were agreed as a correct record.
- 129. Public Question Time**
- 129.1 There were no questions or statements from the public.
- 130. First Quarter Progress Report 2022-23**
- 130.1 The Committee considered and discussed the sections of the first quarter progress (April - June) and specifically the following:
- 130.2 **Nature Recovery, page 2:** In response to a query, Paul Walton advised that the Authority's neighbouring landscapes were Cranborne Chase AONB, South Downs National Park and to some extent the Isle of Wight AONB. There was a regional forum for the thirteen protected landscapes in the southeast from Kent to Norfolk. He said the forum worked collaboratively and met virtually three to four times a year and addressed things at a regional level. On a national level they worked with all English National Parks and Paul Walton informed Members that Alison Barnes was the lead on behalf of the national parks for Nature Recovery.
- 130.3 **Nature Recovery, page 3:** A member asked about the peat mapping exercise whether it would be a baseline survey. Paul Walton said the peat restoration was a national priority and there was a great deal of financial investment going into the issues. In order to get funding, Paul Walton said that it was necessary to know exactly where the peat areas were mapped, and specifically where those areas were, how deep they were and what functions they provided in terms of carbon sequestration. He added that all wetland areas in the national park were prime candidates for peat restoration.
- 130.4 **Net Zero with Nature, page 9:** A Member asked about developing sustainable construction techniques and asked if the Authority had a policy to only approve planning applications where energy efficiency had been taken into account. Steve Avery said that energy efficiencies were promoted through pre-application advice and discussion, but planners could not compel developers, through the planning process, to meet a certain standard. However, new building regulations were introduced earlier in the summer and would come into effect in 2023 which would be significant in terms of energy efficiency in all new buildings.
- 130.5 **Net Zero with Nature, page 9:** In answer to a question about the Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) Jim Mitchell updated Members. He said that the LCWIP work started over a year ago and there had been workshops in March 2021, but since then, although work had continued, they had not been able to produce a map. He said that it was a partnership piece of work with Team New Forest, and they were looking for ways to support Hampshire County Council who was the lead partner. Jim Mitchell said that it was a challenging piece of work as an

LCWIP had not been done in a place like a national park before, and it was a new model for them. He informed the committee that he was in touch with them on a regular basis and Richard Taylor, Chair of the Cycle Working Group, had been very helpful and the current idea was to see if they could help with the audit of cycle routes. When a map had been produced there would be a formal consultation, and although Jim Mitchell could not be certain he hoped the audited map would be complete by March 2023.

- 130.6 **Organisational Development, page 24:** There was some discussion about changes to the way staff were working after Covid. Nigel Stone informed members that there was hybrid working guidance in place where it was expected that staff would work 50% of their time in the office and 50% at home. This had been in place since May/June and now that Autumn had arrived, he said there would be a further push for staff to return. He thought that most staff had welcomed the 50/50 approach.

Action: Nigel Stone said he would circulate the guidance to RAPC members.

131. First Quarter Budgetary Control Report 2022-23

- 131.1 Nigel Stone presented the report which provided a summary of the financial performance up to the end of July 2022, the first four months of the 2022/23 financial year. He drew Members' attention to the key figures set out in section two of the report. He explained that the overall expenditure position totalled £1.55m spend (32% of budget), and the overall income position showed £1.23m received (25% of budget).
- 131.2 Nigel Stone said his team and officers had looked at their budgets and had put a table of pressures and/or savings together which had been identified early in the financial year. He advised Members that budgets were on track, but there were three significant issues in the budget table, and the first of those was a financial pressure. Last month the employer side had made an offer to the employee side for a pay award for 2022/23 for £1,925 per FTE to be added to each scale point. This would mean a 10% increase for the lower paid members of staff, and for the higher paid members of staff it would mean a 4% increase. He informed Members that the offer had not yet been accepted, but it was a financial pressure of £50,000 as only a 3% pay award had been budgeted for.
- 131.3 Nigel Stone explained that there was a £15,000 small cumulative saving from pension/NI assumptions and additional vacancy savings. Also, interest rates had risen higher than projected so there were additional savings of between £16-18,000. The current Net Position was £17-19,000 negative variation which Mr Stone said would be reviewed again at the end of the second quarter. If these savings could not be achieved, then he would suggest using the £19,000 from the Revenue Support Reserve in the first instance.
- 131.4 Nigel Stone said there were three matters which would be looked at over the next few months. He was requested by the Authority to undertake a full review of Reserves and would report the results on that back to the Resources, Audit and Performance Committee (RAPC) in November, and then to the full Authority in January 2023.

- 131.5 The second review of the central costs is also planned, designed to consider efficiency and effectiveness and how they delivered the Authority's direct purposes and duty. The final review would be around the flexibility and resilience of the Authority's work and workforce. These reviews would be reported back to the committee early in 2023.
- 131.6 Following discussion about the pay award, one Member suggested that RAPC members should have early involvement in the budget setting process in order to have discussions around what the priorities should be when considering potentially reduced resources. Nigel Stone was also asked what the Authority's training budget was – £25,000 for 2022/23.
- 131.7 Nigel Stone agreed that there should be a timetable for discussions. He said the Leadership Team would need time to prepare and discuss where the Authority should be heading, and then a Part 2 paper would be brought to the next RAPC meeting on the 7 November to discuss the Authority's projected financial position. Defra had already given an indication that the grant for 2023/24 would again be a flat cash settlement, so before the budget approval in March he said there might need to be further interim meetings and/or a Members Day.
- 131.8 Another Member asked Nigel Stone what the Authority's powers were to raise revenues. Nigel Stone advised that the Authority would need the Secretary of State's permission to use its levying powers. He said that increased income should be the first port of call and to maintain the Authority's delivery.

Action: A briefing to be held for members on the Authority's levying powers.

- 131.9 A Member raised a concern about the £4,000 budget for the New Forest Marque and commented on its benefits. It was of the opinion that the budget for 2023/24 should be looked at in a different way if the Marque was to continue to be resilient. Nigel Stone pointed out that the £4,000 was cash, but there was also £21,000 in Communications support and the New Forest Marque also had administration support, so the total budget was around £40,000 and not just the £4,000 mentioned.

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

Voting: none-voting against.

132. Team New Forest – Authority partnership working and delivery in relation to freshwater habitats and water issues

- 132.1 Paul Walton introduced the report because he thought it was a good time to highlight to Members the work the Authority was doing around the Team New Forest Agenda. He said the idea was to not only focus on the work the Authority was doing on freshwater habitats and water issues, but also to mention the other partnership areas, for example, New Forest Marque, SLA's, PEDALL and New Forest Land Advice Service. The Authority had a programme fund of £200,000 a year and had some flexibility about how the money was invested. Paul Walton

reported that £13,000 had been provided to the New Forest Catchment Partnership which was the largest contribution from the Partnership Fund.

- 132.2 He said that the Authority joined with The Freshwater Habitats Trust to co-host the New Forest Catchment Partnership which was a notable success, and which had contributed to the national adoption of Catchment Based approach by the government. In 2022/23 the Authority contributed £12,000 to assist the facilitation of the Partnership, events, training and delivery of practical projects, and this contribution was governed by a Memorandum of Understanding.
- 132.3 Paul Walton said that the wider partnership working was to highlight to members that officers were involved with a number of partners and the main one's were Environment Agency, Southern Water, Bournemouth Water, New Forest Freshwater and Wetland Restoration Forum, and Partnership for South Hampshire and Solent nitrates.
- 132.4 Members reviewed the paper and there was discussion around sewerage and septic tanks in the New Forest. Paul Walton advised members that the Environment Agency was the licencing authority and everything that Southern Water did was permissible under that licence. He said the wider issue of water quality was not just about storm water disposal but pollution.
- 132.5 With regard to septic tanks Paul Walton informed Members that the Freshwater Water Habitats Trust did walk over surveys of the different river catchments and streams and took water samples in order to identify what the chemical pollutants were to see whether they were from agricultural, road or septic tank run-offs. It had been identified that septic tanks were the main polluters, and it was an area of work that had to be dealt with and to try and attract funding from the Environment Agency.
- 132.6 In answer to a question Alison Barnes said that she had been approached by Southern Water to participate in an independent panel to scrutinise their climate and environment work which would have direct access to their Chief Executive and their board.
- 132.7 In conclusion, Members welcomed future discussions on Team New Forest and noted the content of the report.

133. Any other items that the Chairman decides are urgent

- 133.1 There were two items of urgent business raised as set out below.

134. National Lotteries Communities Fund

- 134.1 Fiona Wynne explained to Members that she wanted to apply for a funding bid with the National Lotteries Communities Fund Programme. She had brought the proposal to RAPC for Members approval as it was likely to cost over £50,000.
- 134.2 She said the fund was primarily to use nature to encourage and inspire community led climate action and was about the benefits to people and communities. Through the fund she expected social and economic benefits to come to communities

through green skills and jobs, and to work with underrepresented groups. Fiona Wynne explained that the fund was focussed on place-based partnerships which involved different sectors; one of those organisations would lead in supporting smaller organisations to develop capacity.

- 134.3 Fiona Wynne informed Members that the fund was up to £1.5 million per project, but most projects would be around £300-500,000 which is what she would aim for, and funding would be over two to five years.
- 134.4 She reported that it was a lengthy timetable to come to a decision, so an Expression of Interest would need to be submitted by the end of September with a full bid in November so something would be in place by April 2023.

Resolved, that The New Forest National Park Authority make an Expression of Interest to the National Lotteries Communities Fund in respect of a possible funding bid, and that authority be delegated to officers to take all necessary action in this regard.

Voting: none-voting against.

135. Lymes Disease

- 135.1 George Meyrick referred to the RAPC minutes of the 6 June 2022 where Lymes Disease had been raised, and wanted to report to the committee about some of the preliminary investigations that he had carried out.
- 135.2 He wanted to raise awareness of Lymes disease because he felt there was a duty to the Authority's staff who worked outdoors, there was a duty to promote safe recreation for visitors to the New Forest, and because he thought it was a hidden issue.
- 135.3 George Meyrick had spoken to people who had contracted the disease, and a medical practitioner who had no expertise with Lymes disease and no apparent recognition of how potentially significant it could be. So, he asked members for their support to further investigate this issue in an organised way.
- 135.4 There was discussion about Lymes disease and members offered a few ideas about how awareness could be highlighted amongst the public. George Meyrick thought that convening powers should be considered to start a discussion with the health service and also to do a survey to see how virulent Lymes disease was in the New Forest.

136. Date of next meeting

- 136.1 Members noted that the next meeting of the Committee would be held on 7 November 2022 in the Council Chamber at Lyminster Town Hall.

The meeting closed at 13:10 hours

SignedDate.....
(Chairman)