

NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

MINUTES OF THE RESOURCES, AUDIT AND PERFORMANCE COMMITTEE HELD ON MONDAY 6 JUNE 2022 AT 10:00 HOURS IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER, LYMINGTON TOWN HALL, AVENUE ROAD, LYMINGTON

Present:

Members:

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

Officers:

Alison Barnes	Chief Executive
Steve Avery	Executive Director
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
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

111. Apologies for absence

111.1 No apologies for absence were received.

112. Declarations of Interest

112.1 There were no declarations of interest.

113. Chair's announcements

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

114. Minutes

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

115. Public Question Time

115.1 There were no questions or statements from the public.

116. Annual Internal Audit Performance and Opinion Report 2021-22

116.1 Antony Harvey provided the Annual Internal Audit Report and Opinion for 2021-22 and was satisfied that sufficient work had been undertaken in order for him to form a reasonable conclusion on the accuracy and effectiveness of the New Forest National Park Authority's control environment. In his opinion the Authority's framework of governance, risk management and control was 'reasonable', and audit testing had demonstrated controls were operating in practice. Mr Harvey said that, if any weaknesses were identified, they would always work with the Leadership Team to agree appropriate corrective actions and a timescale for improvements.

116.2 Mr Harvey informed members that in delivering the internal audit opinion, internal audit had undertaken four reviews over the last twelve months. The opinion assigned to each internal audit review was as follows:

Payroll – Substantial Assurance

Corporate Governance Framework for Members – Reasonable Assurance

Business Continuity/ Disaster Recovery – Covid 19 Response – Reasonable Assurance

Cyber Security Incident Remediation – Reasonable Assurance

116.3 Antony Harvey was pleased to report there were no audits that concluded with a 'Limited Assurance' or 'No Assurance' and that there were no significant issues to bring to members' attention. He also confirmed that there were no disclosures of non-conformance that need to be reported.

116.4 Mr Harvey was pleased to inform members that the entire Audit Plan had been delivered. He thanked staff throughout the Authority who had supported them with a timely completion of their work. In response, the Chair thanked Mr Harvey and his team for their hard work and the service they provided.

Resolved, that the Chief Internal Auditor's Annual Internal Audit Performance and Opinion Report for 2021-22 be approved.

Voting: None voting against

117.1 Year End Progress Report 2021-22

117.1 Detailed discussion took place on the items within the report with members enquiring about a range of actions. In replying to a point raised on those performance indicators which measured the effect of the activity rather than the activity itself as being more informative to members, officers advised that the performance information provided often followed an evaluation of the effect of the activity by officers. The quality and benefit of the information was also dependent on the cost of collecting the information.

117.2 Members noted this was the final report of the 2021-22 work programme and were of the view that the achievement of actions at year end should have a clearer RAG

status of either green or red (and, in the case of the latter, a description provided to indicate which elements of the action had been achieved and what future action needed to be taken to achieve those elements which had not). Officers had drafted the report using 'amber' to indicate a result where the vast majority of the actions had been completed, and therefore the stated outcome was very close to being achieved, but were happy to change this in future.

117.3 Referring to the Wildlife Roundtable on page 2 of the programme, Alison Barnes referred to a possible 'Roundtable Roundup' where information on wildlife activities and priorities could be shared and discussed. Members supported this approach.

117.4 Following further discussion, members noted the report.

118. Financial Outturn and Treasury Report 2021-22

118.1 Nigel Stone introduced the report which set out the detailed projected outturn position for the Authority for the 2021-22 financial year. He informed members that the report would be put in a statutory format to the External Auditors, Ernst & Young LLP, in July, and then to the full Authority meeting in October to be approved. He highlighted the key points of the report and advised members that there were no significant issues identified.

118.2 He said the overall original income and expenditure budgets for 2021-22 were £5.32m which included £1.4m from Authority-led partnership projects.

118.3 The overall spend at year-end was £4.80m (90% of budget). Without the partnership projects, spend was £3.96m from a budget of £3.94m (101%). Our income position was the same.

118.4 Nigel Stone advised that there had been various transfers to and from earmarked reserves as set out in detail in the paper. He said that monies had to be put aside in some financial years in order to either ringfence specific funds or to fund larger individual costs, such as IT and vehicle replacements, in the future.

118.5 Mr Stone reported that the minimum reserve remained at £300,000 which was roughly 10% of the annual Defra grant. There was a Planning/Risk Reserve of £140,000 in the event the Authority received a planning appeal or large legal fee, and the Capital / Major Projects Fund was used to invest in significant projects such as Franchises Lodge or our invest-to-save ideas.

118.6 The Chair concluded from the report that the Authority appeared to be in a good financial position and expressed the Committee's thanks to Nigel, his team and to all officers involved.

Resolved, that

1. the provisional outturn position be noted;

2. the Treasury Management Stewardship Report and Prudential Indicators 2021-22 in Annex 6 be noted; and

3. the *indicative* transfers to/(from) Reserves in 2021-22 as set out in section 6 and detailed in Annex 5 be approved.

Voting: None voting against

119. Draft Annual Governance Statement

- 119.1 Nigel Stone presented the Draft Annual Governance Statement for the financial year 2021-22. He said following acceptance at this Resources, Audit and Performance Committee it would be passed to Ernst & Young LLP, the External Auditors, alongside the draft Financial Report for the year. When both of the documents were finalised they would go to the full Authority in October for approval. The Annual Governance Statement must then be signed by the Authority's Chair and the Chief Executive.
- 119.2 Mr Stone explained to members that much of the Authority's Governance Statement did not substantially change year on year, as the governance environment, framework and procedures stayed consistent, but that he had gone through the document thoroughly and updated it for the current circumstances. In particular, he had updated it with detail of the pandemic situation and the Authority's response to the recent Glover Review consultation. He asked members for any further suggested changes or comments and there were none.

Resolved that the Draft Annual Governance Statement for the financial year 2021-22 be approved and that the draft be passed to the External Auditors.

Voting: None voting against

120. Annual Health and Safety 2021-22 Update

- 120.1 Steve Avery introduced the report which summarised the Authority's health and safety matters over 2021-22 and highlighted various salient points within the report. Referring to the sickness statistics, he drew members' attention to the impact that Covid-19 had had on attendance during this time.
- 120.2 Officers responded to various queries on the wellbeing of staff and the continuity of the Authority's work during the past year. It was noted that the absence of office-time and/or in-person meetings would have had an effect on new staff in terms of learning and sharing of knowledge and information on the culture of the organisation. Officers advised that they were aware of the situation and, where possible, were addressing this issue through the recent increased use of the offices by all staff and more in-person meetings.
- 120.3 In response to a further query regarding Lyme's disease, officers advised that work would be undertaken to raise greater public awareness about Lyme's disease with the Authority's partners.
- 120.4 Following further discussion, the report was noted.

121. Corporate Risk Register and Countermeasures

121.1 David Stone introduced the report and drew attention to the following points:

- reputational risk in the log had been expanded to include all such risks which could impact the Authority
- italic type had been used to illustrate where risks had been updated; and
- significant input and advice from David Bence had now been factored into the log.

121.2 David Bence then elaborated on the updated risks and responded to a query regarding the strategic role of the risk log as compared to some of the operational / specific risks to the organisation.

121.3 Members noted the updated corporate risk register.

122. Any other items that the Chair decides are urgent

122.1 The Chair wished to formally thank the Member Services Team for the production of timely and accurate minutes of these Committee meetings.

122.2 There was one item of urgent business raised as set out below.

123. Bird Aware Mitigation Programme

123.1 Jim Mitchell brought to members' attention the opportunity for an application to the Bird Aware Site Specific Fund, part of the wider Solent mitigation programme relating to recreational disturbance arising from development.

123.2 Mr Mitchell informed members that Bird Aware had very recently approached the New Forest National Park Authority, along with a number of other partners, to invite applications to their scheme – the Sites Specific Fund. The NPA had brought together partners locally, including Hampshire County Council and New Forest District Council, to support an initial application on three sites – Hurst Spit, Tanners Lane and Lymington Keyhaven Nature Reserve. The scheme would be for a range of signage improvement, interpretation, fencing and habitat creation to mitigate disturbance at these three sites. The application would be in the region of £50,000 and would be likely to be finalised/determined later in the current calendar year.

123.3 The Chair expressed an interest in hearing more details about the proposal at a future meeting of the Committee.

123.4 Members supported the application for funding to the Bird Aware Mitigation Programme.

124. Date of next meeting

- 124.1 Members noted that the next meeting of the Committee would be held on 5 September 2022 in the Council Chamber at Lymington Town Hall.

The meeting closed at 11:50 hours

Signed Date.....
(Chair)