

**NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY  
MINUTES OF THE RESOURCES, AUDIT AND PERFORMANCE COMMITTEE HELD ON  
MONDAY 6 MARCH 2023 AT 10:00 HOURS IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER, LYMINGTON  
TOWN HALL, AVENUE ROAD, LYMINGTON**

**Present:**

*Members:*

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

*Officers:*

Alison Barnes	Chief Executive
Steve Avery	Executive Director Strategy and Planning
Nigel Stone	Head of Resources (CFO)
Paul Walton	Head of Environment and Rural Economy
Hilary Makin	Communications Manager
Jim Mitchell	Access and Learning Manager
David Stone	Corporate Services Manager (Deputy Monitoring Officer)
Tom Knott	Finance and Sustainable Performance Officer
Frances Connolly	Executive Assistant
Vicki Gibbon	Member Services Administrator

*Also in attendance:*

Craig Harrison	Deputy Surveyor – New Forest
Antony Harvey	Deputy Head of the Southern Internal Audit Partnership and Chief Internal Auditor to the Authority.
Liz Foster	Audit Manager, Southern Internal Audit Partnership

**24. Apologies for absence**

24.1 Apologies for absence were received from Neville Penman and Sue Bennison.

**25. Declarations of Interest**

25.1 There were no declarations of interest.

**26. Chair's announcements**

26.1 There were no announcements on this occasion.

## 27. Minutes

- 27.1 The Chair reviewed the Minutes of the meeting held on 6 February 2023 and highlighted those with actions against them. The first action was under 17.1 regarding the Authority's levying powers, Nigel Stone advised that this was still a work in progress, but there would be an update in a future Members' Bulletin.
- 27.2 The Chair invited Jim Mitchell to give an update on the second action under 19.6. Jim Mitchell informed members that in 2021/22 work had been carried out for a pilot programme in addition to the Service Level Agreement which the Authority had with Forestry England (FE) to manage scheduled ancient monument (SAM) improvement works. Actions have been identified in SAM management plans to maintain and improve the monuments over time of which the improvement works were a part. FE had not commissioned any work from the Authority for 2022/23 as other work had been prioritised, including reviewing and completing the SAM improvement plans to guide future work. Members were made aware that there are no SAMs on Crown Land which are on the Heritage at-risk register.
- 27.3 Members then considered the rest of the minutes and corrected a typographical error under item 21.4 and reviewed the text under paragraph 22.7. The minutes as amended above were accordingly agreed as a correct record.

## 28. Public Question Time

- 28.1 There were no questions or statements from the public.

## 29. Forestry England Accord

- 29.1 Paul Walton began his report by reminding members that Forestry England and National Parks England have a joint national Accord which was signed in 2018. This set out five priority areas where the two bodies work together to deliver a shared ambition for the management of woods and forests within England's National Parks. He explained that this report detailed those outcomes of joint working. With the production of the Partnership Plan, this had provided an opportunity to review the local partnership and work was now being aligned around the delivery of actions within that Plan. Mr Walton then introduced Craig Harrison, Deputy Surveyor, Forestry England.
- 29.2 Craig Harrison introduced himself to the Committee as the Deputy Surveyor for the New Forest and said that he also had the role of Forest Management Director for South Forest District. He gave a presentation to the Committee about 'Joint working with the New Forest National Park Authority' and reminded members that the Forestry Commission comprised of three key parts and each had its own role. The first:
- **Forestry England** – manage and care for the nation's forests, including the New Forest Crown Lands, and was where the majority of staff worked
  - **Forest Research** – this was Great Britain's principal organisation for forestry and tree-related research, and was internationally renowned for the work they did in support of sustainable forestry
  - **Forest Services** – they dealt with local landowners and other people who owned land and woodland.

- 29.3 He concluded that the Partnership Plan and Accord confirmed that Forestry England would continue to work with the New Forest National Park Authority with land management and recreation a primary area of collaboration work. Other areas for joint working would be:
- how the Crown lands provided a core from which wider benefits could be secured,
  - to work with the New Forest National Park Authority on future developments and to secure a long-term sustainable future for the New Forest.

- 29.4 Patrick Heneghan thanked Craig Harrison for the excellent insight into what Forestry England's priorities were and how they would be achieved. He reiterated that alignment was key for successful partnership working, particularly when working towards shared goals.

Members noted the content of the report and the presentation from the Deputy Surveyor of the New Forest.

### **30. Internal Audit Progress Report 2022/23**

- 30.1 Antony Harvey provided the Committee with a brief progress update of the delivery of the Internal Audit Plan for 2022/23. He drew members attention to page 6 of the report as it gave an update on where the management team were in terms of implementing the actions that had arisen out of previous audit reviews. He said it was good to note that there were three areas where all the actions had been completed.
- 30.2 One audit review from this year had been completed and it concluded that there was a 'limited' assurance opinion; this was due to the current ICT policy being overdue for a full review. Nigel Stone confirmed this review was currently underway, having been delayed firstly by the impacts of the pandemic and then more recently by some urgent infrastructure works, and the wider recommendations from the audit would now be fed in to that process too.
- 30.3 Antony Harvey explained that Internal Audit had intended to review the Authority's new planning system this year, but due to the delayed implementation it was proposed to defer the review to 2023/24 to enable the system to become embedded – the Treasury and Information Governance audits from 2023/24 would consequently be brought forward to this year instead.

Members noted the report.

### **31. Internal Audit Charter and Plan 2023/24**

- 31.1 Antony Harvey introduced the report informing members that it was a requirement under the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards that they formally reviewed the Authority's internal audit charter each year and bring it to the management team for agreement and then to Resources, Audit and Performance Committee to be approved.

- 31.2 He said the most important part of the Internal Audit Plan was the proposed review of the planning system and to further work with the Authority with regard to Disaster Recovery from an IT perspective. One member asked if the Corporate Risk Register was taken into account when considering the Internal Audit Plan. Antony Harvey confirmed that it was, as evidenced by the focus in the past two to three years on IT and IT security as it was such high risk as shown by its scores in the Risk Register.

**Resolved, that the Internal Audit Charter 2023/24 (Appendix A) and the Internal Audit Plan 2023/24 (Appendix B) be approved.**

*Voting: Unanimous*

**32. Draft General Fund Revenue Budget for the Financial Year 2023/24, Treasury Management Strategy and Medium-term Financial Plan**

- 32.1 In introducing the report, Nigel Stone advised that, subsequent to the report being sent out with the agenda papers, Defra had advised that it would be providing a supplementary grant of £4.4 million, with each of the ten English National Parks being awarded an equal share of the grant, namely £440,000. This was outlined in a letter from Defra and tabled at the meeting. Although the funds would be required to be spent before the end of the current financial year, resultant savings would be generated on other income streams due to have been used during 2022/23. He also mentioned the proposed increase in planning application fees, potentially equating to around 25%, which was currently the subject of a Government consultation.
- 32.2 The supplementary income from 2022/23 would be put into a financial stability revenue reserve with the purpose of securing the Authority's medium-term financial position, particularly the financial years 2025/26 and 2026/27. The Resources Task and Finish Group had been discussing the potential of this financial contribution and would continue to identify areas where any such additional funding could be targeted towards the longer-term financial stability of the Authority. He added that a pay award offer for 2023/24 financial year had been made by employers which comprised of £1,925 pa on every scale point, matching the financial element of the pay award for 2022/23 – this had been factored into the budget as presented.
- 32.3 Defra has announced that there would be a Farming in Protected Landscapes programme for 2024/25, extending the current scheme by a further one year beyond the initial three-year period agreed. Nigel Stone stated there was also a growing expectation of a significant increase in our scheme allocation for both 2023/24 and the additional 2024/25 year.
- 32.4 The Resources Task and Finish Group had looked at the detail behind the budget figures presented and, with their input, it had been possible to balance the 2023/24 and 2024/25 budgets and significantly reduce the shortfall in the following two years after that.
- 32.5 Nigel Stone then took members through key aspects of the report and drew attention to the core grant from Defra which had been frozen for a further year and the risks and uncertainties outlined in section 5 of the report.

**Resolved that:**

1. the General Fund Budget for 2023/24 be supported and recommended for approval at the Authority meeting on 23 March 2023
2. it be noted that the underlying minimum level for the General Fund Reserve increases to £0.35 million
3. the implications on the Reserves of the proposed budget for 2023/24 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 recommend for approval at the Authority meeting on 23 March 2023
6. the Medium-Term Financial Plan up to 2026/27 and the Forward Projection in Annex 4 be noted.

Voting: Unanimous

**33. Draft Interim Work Programme 2023/24**

- 33.1 Alison Barnes introduced the draft Interim Work Programme for 2023/24. She said the Authority was transitioning into the new work programme which was presented under the new Partnership Plan themes; this was the first presentation of our own work in that format.
- 33.2 Nigel Stone explained the new work programme would align the Authority's resources to what it would deliver, and it was important to take time with the draft version. As agreed with the Committee members in February, the final version of the new Business Plan and Work Programme would be brought to the Committee in June and to the Authority in July for final approval.
- 33.3 There were five strategic themes from the Partnership Plan and a sixth one was added for internal focus called Achieving Excellence. The Strategic Leadership Team (SLT) had drafted the document and Nigel Stone thought it needed to be further tweaked / reworded and performance indicators would have to be added. He then invited initial comments from members.
- 33.4 Some members thought there was too much detail in the draft version of the work programme and wondered if it was the correct way it should be presented. It was thought that it might be too onerous on what was expected from officers. Others thought the level of detail was ideal as it was good to have that level of knowledge when answering questions from the public.
- 33.5 Members were informed that staff from different teams of the Authority pooled ideas together within the new 'Programme Steering Groups' for each of the six themes to input into the work programme. It enabled staff to have a voice and was good for team building.
- 33.6 The Chair noted that the word 'draft' was not included in the title of the report but it would have been helpful if it had and proposed such as an amendment; members were therefore then asked to note the Draft Interim Work Programme.

Members noted the report.

### 34. Funding Update

- 34.1 Hilary Makin began her report by reminding members that the Authority had always had focus on securing external funding to support work in delivering its core purposes and socio-economic duties. Since 2019, £2.7m had been secured for Authority projects, which averaged at an £18 investment in the Forest for every £1 we had invested in these projects. She explained that this report was to ask members to approve the submission of two applications, one to the National Lottery Community Fund and the other to the National Lottery Heritage Fund.
- 34.2 Fiona Wynne gave a brief overview of the application to the National Lottery Community Fund's Climate Action Fund. An expression of interest was previously submitted which had been approved and the Authority was now asked to submit a full application by 31 March 2023. The Authority was co-ordinating and leading the bid on behalf of partners and if approved would be working together to increase the scale and reach of outdoor learning, galvanise communities to feel more connected to and caring for the places they live.
- 34.3 Jim Mitchell then gave a brief overview of the application to the National Lottery Heritage Fund, which would focus on supporting volunteers and increase engagement with nature within the National Park.

**Resolved**, that members

(i) note the contents of the report

(ii) approve the submission of an application to the National Lottery Community Fund as outlined in the report, and that authority be delegated to officers to take all action as necessary in this regard, and

(iii) approve the submission of an application to the National Lottery Heritage Fund as outlined in the report, and that authority be delegated to officers to take all action as necessary in this regard

Voting: none voting against.

### 35. Draft Safeguarding Policy

- 35.1 Nigel Stone introduced his report advising members that this was a new policy as previously these risks had been covered within the Authority's other policies or procedures, however it was now good practice for the Authority to have a standalone policy for safeguarding. The policy had been passed to staff and unions for consultation, he had recently received some further feedback from the union but this would not affect the overall core drafting of the policy. Members were then asked for any further comments and to recommend the subsequent draft for approval at the next full Authority meeting.

**Resolved**, that

Subject to any changes members support the draft Safeguarding Policy and recommend for approval at the next full Authority meeting.

Voting: none voting against.

**36. Corporate Risk Register and Countermeasures**

- 36.1 David Stone introduced the report and advised that any updates to the existing risks within the log had been identified by red italic type. He drew members' attention to risk item 9 which had been increased by a score of 4 and 5 (likelihood and impact respectively) in the light of uncertainties around future grants by Defra. This had increased the overall severity score of this risk item to 20 (red status).
- 36.2 A member requested that the risk trend be shown on the log by means of an arrow reflecting the direction of risk, members also agreed that the risk attached to item 15 should be increased to amber in the light of changes around the basic payment scheme.
- 36.3 Following further brief discussion, the update on the Authority's risk register was then noted.

**37. Date of next meeting**

- 37.1 Members noted that the next meeting of the Committee would be held on 5 June 2023 in the Council Chamber at Lymington Town Hall.

The meeting closed at 13:02 hours

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