

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

Present:

Members:

Gordon Bailey

David Bence (Deputy Chair)

Patrick Heneghan (Chair)

Victoria Mander

George Meyrick (arrived during consideration of the Third Quarter Progress Report 2022-23)

Caroline Rackham

John Sanger

Ann Sevier

Officers:

Alison Barnes Chief Executive

Nigel Stone Head of Resources (CFO)

Paul Walton Head of Environment and Rural Economy

Hilary Makin Communications Manager

Jim Mitchell Access and Engagement Manager

Natalie Walter Principal Planning Officer

David Stone Corporate Services Manager (Deputy Monitoring Officer)

Frances Connolly Executive Assistant

14. Apologies for absence

14.1 Apologies for absence were received from Neville Penman, Alexis McEvoy and Sue Bennison.

14.2 It was noted that George Meyrick would arrive late to the meeting.

15. Declarations of Interest

15.1 George Meyrick declared a non-pecuniary interest in relation to minute item 22 as the Hinton Admiral Estate is a member of the New Forest Marke.

16. Chair's announcements

16.1 The Chair asked members to remain after the meeting for a Resources and Business Plan briefing.

17. Minutes

17.1 Item 4.1 - John Sanger requested an update regarding a previous query which related to the Authority's levying powers. Following discussion, the Chair suggested that it would be useful if Rosalind Alderman could provide all members with a short briefing paper in a future Members' Bulletin.

Action: Rosalind Alderman to provide a briefing paper for the Members' Bulletin

- 17.2 The minutes of the meeting held on 7 November 2022 were agreed as a correct record.
- 18. Public Question Time**
- 18.1 There were no questions or statements from the public.
- 19. Third Quarter Progress Report 2022-23**
- 19.1 David Stone introduced the report which comprised the third quarter progress (October -December 2022) against the objectives from the 2022/23 Interim Work Programme agreed by members in March 2022. The committee considered and specifically discussed the following:
- 19.2 **Key Performance Indicators, page 5:** Natalie Walter gave the Committee some background information on the new ICT system Agile. She stated that there had been a scheduled three week period of downtime during the transition and as a result it had not been possible to register or issue any planning decisions during this period. Subsequently, applications submitted via the planning portal should have automatically connected with the new system. Unfortunately there was a 6 week delay in this happening, so manual downloads had to be undertaken.
- 19.3 During this time there was also staff sickness which further exacerbated the backlog. Work continues to reduce the backlog, with more staff resources brought in to help.
- 19.4 **Nature recovery, page 2:** Under the sustainable farm business outcome, the quarterly RAG status was raised as it had turned from green to amber. Paul Walton informed members that there had been staff departures within the New Forest Land Advice Service which were having a negative impact. Members said they were aware the NFLAS team were under a lot of pressure and hoped that the vacancies would not continue for much longer.
- 19.5 Concern was expressed about the reducing number of more experienced commoners, and how the younger generation were finding commoning a financial challenge. Verderers had also noticed a significant decline in cattle numbers on the Forest. A member stated that a meeting was to be held this week with the Forest Farming Group which would seek to provide clarity on how to best support the commoning community into the future.
- 19.6 **An Inclusive National Park, page 11:** A member expressed disappointment that Forestry England had not engaged the National Park to manage any scheduled monument improvement works during the 2022/23 winter season. Jim Mitchell informed members that the works programme had been successful in 2021/22. He said he would find out why works had not been commissioned for 2022/23 and would report his findings to the Committee.

Action: Jim Mitchell to follow up with Forestry England and to understand what their future plans are .

- 19.7 **Organisational Development, page 20:** It was noted that there had been a change on the outcome to 'Achieve Organisational Net Zero by 2030 or earlier.' The quarterly RAG status had moved from amber to green but at year end had moved from green to red. Nigel Stone advised that most planned activity for the current year was based on being able to use the data that the NPA received through the partnership with Defra and the Carbon Trust. As the NPA was unlikely to receive figures for the 2021/22 emissions from the Carbon Trust until the end of March 2023, a detailed action plan will now only be possible in 2023/24. In the meantime, significant progress had been made in preparing recommendations for sustainable practices.
- 19.8 There was discussion regarding the most meaningful overall RAG rating when an Outcomes box contains multiple Action / Priority bullets, some with a different RAG status. It was agreed that it would be more useful if Outcomes boxes were divided in these cases, thus giving a better reflection of individual item progress.

Members then noted the report.

20. Third Quarter Budgetary Control Report 2022-23

- 20.1 Nigel Stone introduced his report and advised that this provided a summary of the financial performance of the Authority in the first nine months of 2022/23. He then took members through the variances in the budgeted amounts and mentioned the increased income from investments. The current net position of the Authority was £32,000 savings projected for the financial year.
- 20.2 Members noted that the overall third quarter expenditure of the Authority was £3.66 million from a budget of £4.87 million and overall income at the same stage of the year was £3.70 million (75% of the budget).
- 20.3 Mr Stone then advised that the items remaining in the Authority's audit for 2021/22 had been addressed, namely that final assurances from the Hampshire Pension Fund auditors had been received confirming the valuation of the Pension Fund assets and the accounts had now been signed off. He also advised that the issue regarding the audit fee had been resolved through the PSAA (Public Sector Audit Appointments Ltd) process and an audit fee of approximately £16,000 had now been agreed.
- 20.4 Following further brief discussion, members noted the report.

21. Scheme of Members' Allowances

- 21.1 David Stone briefly introduced the report before Patrick Heneghan, the Committee Chair and Chair of the members informal working group which carried out a review of members' allowances, took members through the key areas which had been considered by the working group and subsequently the Standards Committee - these being outlined in the report.
- 21.2 He said that the group's proposals had been considered by the Standards Committee on 9 January 2023 resulting in the recommendations which had been

brought to the Resources, Audit and Performance Committee and the proposed new Scheme attached to the report. This had included a review of subsistence allowances recommended by the Standards Committee.

- 21.3 In submitting the Standards Committee's recommendations, Patrick Heneghan proposed an amendment in that any periodic adjustments made to members subsistence allowances to cater for any inflation increases be referred to the Standards Committee for approval.
- 21.4 The Chief Finance Officer confirmed that he would monitor the current dependent carers' allowance and report as necessary to the Standards Committee any cost-of-living increases which may be necessary.

Recommendations of the Resources, Audit and Performance Committee to the Authority meeting on 23 March 2023, that

1. the draft Scheme of Allowances as set out in Annex 2 to the Committee's report be adopted from 1 April 2023.
2. the Chief Finance Officer be authorised to monitor subsistence allowances and with the Standards Committee recommend any periodic adjustments to the amounts to cater for inflation increases as necessary.
3. The current basic allowance of £2,132 pa be retained and linked to increases at the lowest percentage rate of any future staff pay awards
4. The duration of the Scheme, if adopted, be for a period of 4 years with the Standards Committee being authorised to monitor any unexpected economic or political impacts which may affect the duration of the Scheme and report accordingly to the Authority via the Resources, Audit and Performance Committee.

Voting: unanimous

22. Team New Forest – Authority partnership working in support of local produce through the New Forest Marque

- 22.1 Paul Walton updated the committee on the New Forest Marque. He reminded members that New Forest Produce Limited (NFPL) was established in 2003 and was initially supported by New Forest District Council to help protect and preserve the New Forest's unique environment and its farming and commoning way of life.
- 22.2 The NFPL was governed by a voluntary Board of Directors and was staffed by an Operations Manager and supported by a part-time Communications Officer. Paul Walton drew attention to the membership of the Marque's relevant eligibility criteria set out in paragraph 2.4 of the report.
- 22.3 He said the number of members in the Marque scheme varied but was around 150 to 160, and Dan Parsons, the Chair of the New Forest Marque would like membership to reach 200.
- 22.4 The New Forest National Park Authority (NPA) had provided a cash grant to the Marque between £15,000-£25,000 per annum. Since September 2021 the support

from the NPA had been the equivalent of £25,000 per annum which was made up of the part-time Communications post and a small cash grant of £4,000.

22.5 Paul Walton informed the committee that there would be a new membership category – *New Forest Inspired* . The NPA had assisted with the grant application to the Arts council and awaited the outcome.

22.6 He said it was intended that the NPA would continue to financially and non-financially support the New Forest Marque. It had a key role in developing the thriving forest aims of the Partnership Plan, and there were a number of Marque producers that would benefit.

22.7 John Sanger, who is the NPA appointed representative on the NFPL Board, drew members attention to 3.4 of the report, and commented on the benefits of the Marque. He endorsed the report.

22.8 The Chair thanked Paul Walton for bringing the report to the Committee and congratulated the New Forest Marque on its work.

Members then noted the report.

23. Date of next meeting

23.1 Members noted that the next meeting of the Committee would be held on 6 March 2023 in the Council Chamber at Lymington Town Hall.

The meeting closed at 12:05 hours

Signed
(Chairman)

Date.....