

**NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY
MINUTES OF THE RESOURCES, AUDIT AND PERFORMANCE COMMITTEE HELD ON
MONDAY 4 SEPTEMBER 2023 AT 10:00 HOURS IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER,
LYMINGTON TOWN HALL, AVENUE ROAD, LYMINGTON**

Present:

Members:

Gordon Bailey
David Bence
Patrick Heneghan (Chair)
George Meyrick
Neville Penman

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
Jo Murphy	Deputy Monitoring Officer
Tom Knott	Finance and Sustainable Performance Officer
Vicki Gibbon	Member Services Administrator

51. Apologies for absence

51.1 Apologies for absence were received from Caroline Rackham and Victoria Mander.

52. Declarations of Interest

52.1 There were no declarations of interest on this occasion.

53. Chair's announcements

53.1 None.

54. Minutes

54.1 The Minutes of the meeting held on 5 June 2023 were agreed as a true and accurate record.

55. Public Question Time

55.1 There were no questions or statements from the public.

56. First Quarter Progress Report 2023-24

56.1 Nigel Stone began his presentation by reminding members that this was the first quarter progress report against the objectives from the 2023/24 Work programme agreed by members in July, it was not a conclusive list of everything that the Authority does. He explained that a Chief Executive report was produced for each Authority meeting, along with an Annual Review at the end of the year, which sets

out the wider work carried out by the Authority. The Chair then ran through the document page by page asking for any comments and / or questions.

- 56.2 *Page 6*, the Chair asked when the TBC's were likely to be confirmed. Nigel responded that the TBC's were National Indicators, set across all English National Parks, and they were currently in discussion with Defra about them. Once it was confirmed what the current base positions were, it would then be possible to set future targets. Mr Stone was hoping that this would be confirmed by the next meeting.

Page 17, the Chair asked if there was any indication on the number of ranger engagements in regard to the new public space protection orders (PSPO's). Steve Avery responded that he was due to meet with Forestry England to review how this had progressed over the summer, he explained that NPA along with FE Rangers had an app where they record all interactions with the public regarding PSPO's and that he would have more information on this soon.

Page 19, regarding the first outcome '*Improved management and oversight if land use change in the National Park*' the Chair pointed out that the status was both amber in this quarter along with 'Achieved by March 2024' section he asked for further expansion on this issue. Mr Avery advised that the encroachment working party were not meeting at the moment, however, plans to re-instate the group were currently being worked on, it was important to re-instate the group as the Authority were presently dealing with an encroachment case. Developing a map of land use change in the National Park had been a long ambition and dependent on gaining a GIS resource.

- 56.3 The Chief Executive advised the committee that all nameplates would shortly be refreshed to reflect the new Business Plan. Hilary Makin also commented that both internal and external communications would also be updated to reflect the new Business Plan.

Members then noted the report.

57. April - July Budgetary Control Report 2023-24

- 57.1 Nigel Stone explained that this report provided a summary of the financial performance up to the end of July 2023. Mr Stone advised that the overall expenditure position shows £1.50m spend over the first four months of the financial year (32% of budget) with the overall income position showing £2.09m received (44% of budget).

- 57.2 Members were then guided to look at 4.1 of the report which detailed the general budget analysis, there were no significant variations, and this would be reviewed at the end of Q2. Due to the current increases in interest rates, the Authority was likely to be £20-£30k up at the end of the financial year. Mr Stone highlighted that the pay award for 2023/24 had yet to be finalised, however it was hoped this should be completed within the next few weeks.

- 57.3 Members then noted the report.

58. Team New Forest – New Forest Land Advice Service

58.1 Paul Walton introduced his report and gave a brief background on the Land Advice Service, a partnership between the NPA and the Hampshire & Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust which had been providing advice to commoners and landowners since 2009. He explained that staff changes, and the conclusion of some project funding in recent years, had meant that NFLAS had lost considerable experience and a reduction in advisors. However, the Farming in Protected Landscapes programme does include a budget for advisors and administration until 2025 and the board for the Verderer's Higher-Level Stewardship scheme had recently agreed to continue their support until the end of 2027.

58.2 Mr Walton went on to explain that the Authority and HIWWT continue to remain committed to NFLAS, especially during this time of agricultural transition. He said that the need for effective land advice had never been greater. Mr Walton highlighted the future opportunities of the NFLAS and explained that the NPA and HIWWT were working to align the work programme with the Nature Recovery and Net Zero objectives within the Partnership Plan and the Trust's Wilder Strategy.

58.3 Mr Walton concluded his presentation by advising that the Authority would be recruiting a 'Net Zero with Nature Manager' who would have day-to-day responsibility of the NFLAS team. Along with HIWWT and Natural England, the Authority would work to examine opportunities for extending the NFLAS team. A Memorandum of Agreement and Terms of Reference would be drawn up to formalise this arrangement. Members were asked to note the report and the floor was opened to questions.

58.4 A question was raised whether it would be feasible to charge for NFLAS advice, Mr Walton responded that opportunities for charging were limited as the advisors were paid through grant-funding. A condition for that funding was that the advice was unable to be charged for, however a donation could be made. George Meyrick drew members attention to 3.3 of the report and asked which activity took up the majority of advisors time and resource, Mr Walton replied that currently the bulk of work was around the FiPL programme with a pipeline of projects being developed with landowners who were interested in that particular programme. Advice for holdings which were managed by commoners was also a key area of work. It was suggested that a members day be held to show the wider membership of the Authority the work of the NFLAS team.

Members noted the report.

59. ICT Update

59.1 Nigel Stone commenced his report by advising members that the ICT team were the pillar of the back office and ensured the organisation ran smoothly. The last stand-alone update was in 2021, during covid, and it was now timely to give further detail on the work of the team. He explained that the report set out the changes and achievements of the team, along with looking forward to its future priorities.

Mr Stone asked members to note the report, which they duly did.

60 Any Other Business

60.1 Paul Walton informed the committee that it was increasingly common for grant funding to come with very short application deadlines and reminded them that member approval was required for any formal bid over £50,000. The Heritage Fund had launched a new funding programme called the Species Survival Fund, which was aiming to support the creation and restoration of wildlife rich habitats in England. The expression of interest ran from late June until 24 July, the Authority submitted an expression of interest for a project that would see the Authority working in partnership with the Freshwater Habitats Trust, Wild New Forest, the Amphibian and Reptile Conservation Group and the Commoners Defence Association. The expression of interest was successful, and the Authority had now been invited to turn that into a full bid, the deadline of which would be 26 October. The total value of the programme which was submitted in the expression of interest was c£1million and set out a number of achievable targets. Mr Walton then asked members for their full support to take this forward.

60.2 Members were supportive of the proposal in principle, however due to the limited information that was before them, they agreed that the matter should be determined at the Authority Meeting to be held on 21 September 2023 when further details could be made available in a full paper. In the unlikely event, that it was not feasible to include the item on the agenda of that meeting, because of the tight deadlines involved, Members delegated the decision to submit the bid to officers in consultation with the Chair and Deputy Chair of the Resources, Audit and Performance Committee.

Resolved that:
In the event that, the matter is not considered by the full Authority at its meeting on 21 September 2023, the decision to proceed with the bid be delegated to officers, in consultation with the Chair and Deputy Chair of the Resources, Audit and Performance Committee.

The meeting closed at 11:30 hours.

Signed**Date**.....
(Chair)