

**NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY
MINUTES OF THE RESOURCES, AUDIT AND PERFORMANCE COMMITTEE HELD ON
MONDAY 5 JUNE 2023 AT 10:00 HOURS IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER, LYMINGTON
TOWN HALL, AVENUE ROAD, LYMINGTON**

Present:

Members:

Gordon Bailey
David Bence (Deputy Chair – in the Chair)
Sue Bennison
Victoria Mander
George Meyrick
Neville Penman
Caroline Rackham

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
Shelley Filby	PEDALL Manager
David Stone	Corporate Services Manager (Deputy Monitoring Officer)
Tom Knott	Finance and Sustainable Performance Officer
Frances Connolly	Executive Assistant

Also in attendance:

Antony Harvey Deputy Head of the Southern Internal Audit Partnership and Chief Internal Auditor to the Authority.

Steve Trow Friends of PEDALL Trustee - via Teams

38. Apologies for absence

38.1 Apologies for absence were received from Patrick Heneghan (Chair) and Ann Sevier.

39. Declarations of Interest

39.1 Steve Trow declared a non-pecuniary interest in relation to minute item 49 (Team New Forest and Inclusive National Park – PEDALL) as Friends of PEDALL Trustee.

40. Chair's announcements

40.1 There were no announcements on this occasion.

41. Minutes

41.1 The Minutes of the meeting held on 6 March 2023 were agreed as a correct record.

42. Public Question Time

42.1 There were no questions or statements from the public.

43. Annual Internal Audit Performance and Opinion Report 2022/23

43.1 Antony Harvey presented the Annual Internal Audit Report and Opinion for 2022-23 which he said was used by the Authority to inform its Annual Governance Statement. He was satisfied that sufficient assurance work had been carried out for him to form a reasonable conclusion on the adequacy and effectiveness of the internal controlled environment. In Mr Harvey's opinion he thought that frameworks of governing risk management and management control were reasonable and audit testing had demonstrated controls were working in practice. Mr Harvey said that if any weaknesses were identified, his team would always work with officers to agree appropriate corrective actions and a timescale for improvements.

43.2 Antony Harvey informed members that in delivering the internal audit opinion, there were three key observations for 2022-23. The opinion assigned to each internal audit review was as follows:

Main Accounting and Reconciliations - Substantial Assurance
Information Governance - Records Management and Information Requests – Reasonable Assurance
IT Policies and Procedures - Limited Assurance

43.3 Due to the delayed implementation of the new planning system it had been agreed with officers and Members in February 2023 to defer the review to 2023-24 to enable the system to become fully embedded. The audit of the Treasury Management and Banking had not sufficiently progressed to be included with the report and so would be carried forward to 2023-24.

43.4 He advised that the remainder of the report gave information about the Southern Internal Audit Partnership - how they fully conformed to all their principles and were fully compliant with the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards.

43.5 Antony Harvey thanked Authority staff who had helped and supported his team throughout the year. In response, Nigel Stone thanked Mr Harvey and his team for their hard work and the service they provided.

43.6 One member asked about the phishing attacks training for staff which had been mentioned in the IT policies and procedures, and asked if many staff had taken part in the training as it wasn't mandatory. Nigel Stone said that phishing attacks were a big risk to the Authority, like all public bodies, and that he believed 75%-80% of staff had completed the training which had proved to be a useful exercise. Since then, our firewalls and other protection systems had been updated and so phishing attacks had now been reduced.

Resolved, that the Chief Internal Auditor's Annual Internal Audit Performance and Opinion Report for 2022-23 be approved.

Voting: Unanimous

44. Year End Progress Report 2022/23

- 44.1 David Stone presented the final quarter progress against the work objectives from the 2022/23 Interim Work Programme which had been agreed by members in March 2022.
- 44.2 Steve Avery apologised to members for not having the final planning application statistics. This was because he had still not received the interrogating report he had asked for from the new planning software company and receipt of this report was now significantly delayed. Steve Avery said that not only was it important for the Committee to have this information, but the statistics needed to be reported to Government. He was hopeful though that this information would be circulated to members in the next few weeks.
- 44.3 Steve Avery explained that even if the report had been run, he would have expected the planning application statistics to be below target either amber or red. This was mainly due to staff vacancies in the team and was further compounded by switching to the new planning system, but he thought the first quarter of this year's figures would be back on track.
- 44.4 Members also discussed the performance indicator for member attendance at meetings which was slightly lower than the overall target. Members noted that sickness had affected member attendance over the period. Cognisance also needed to be taken of those other bodies and forums which were attended by members and which might affect their attendance at Authority and Committees meetings. The attendance figure could be presented in a different format reflecting attendance by committee rather than overall attendance.
- 44.5 Members then reviewed the fourth quarter work programme and received an update on the two affordable homes in Burley (page 9) which had been delayed due to the necessary access agreements having still not been agreed by the landowner.
- 44.6 Members noted that there was a need for an enhanced GIS resource to develop a database/map of land use change in the National Park (page 10). Steve Avery advised that currently this resource was generated by a third party and consideration was being given to providing an enhanced resource internally through our IT team.
- 44.7 Members noted that Go New Forest had adopted Love the Forest as its charity of the year (page 17), however more could be done by learning from other NPAs to investigate possible improvements to partnerships with tourism related businesses within available resources.
- 44.8 Members noted the report.

45. Financial Outturn and Treasury Report 2022/23

- 45.1 Nigel Stone introduced the report which set out the detailed projected outturn position for the Authority for the 2022-23 financial year. He then thanked Tom Knott and budget holders that helped put the report together.

- 45.2 He said the overall expenditure position at year end showed £5.01m spend (101% of budget). The overall income position showed a matching £5.01m received.
- 45.3 Nigel Stone informed members that employee costs were a net positive variance of £18,000. There were additional employee costs due to the higher than expected staff pay award for 2022/23, but this was more than netted off by vacancy savings across the organisation.
- 45.4 Some of the negative variances were due to having to extend the existing planning IT software for six months, after the new replacement system was delayed from going live in April, and there was also a one-off payment of £35,000 for appeal costs.
- 45.5 Nigel Stone reminded members that the Authority was given a one-off additional £440,000 by Defra in 2022-23 to aid its future financial stability, and this was set aside in the Earmarked Reserves as planned.
- 45.6 He drew attention to the Investment and Interest Income section of the report and highlighted the £40,000 positive variance. Interest had been low for a few years but was now higher which was a positive for the Authority's financial position.
- 45.7 The key points were in section 6 of the report which were the various transfers to and from earmarked reserves. Nigel Stone had split and listed these into two categories: utilised amounts of c£350,000 (which paid, for example, for the Nature Recovery post, ICT/Vehicle replacements and the Landscape Enhancement Initiative projects) and those which were set-aside/ring-fenced totalling c£520,000 (which included the £440,000 financial stability grant already mentioned). He added that overall, a positive result had been achieved, and the Authority's financial position was stable.
- 45.8 In answer to a question about the Planning Risk Reserve, Nigel Stone explained that it was specifically for planning appeal costs, either our costs in fighting an appeal or from cost awards made against us, and that it was one of the Authority's major financial risk areas. A full review of the reserves was taken to the Authority meeting in January 2023 and agreed to steadily increase the amount set aside up to £200,000. Nigel Stone said that he therefore planned to set aside a further £20,000 a year into the Planning Risk Reserve over the next five years as it was important that this risk be adequately resourced.
- 45.9 Another member asked about planning fees as there was a negative variance showing reduced fees received. Steve Avery said that planning fees generally, and in particular the larger one-off fees, were hard to predict and variable, but planning activity was relatively stable.
- 45.10 George Meyrick asked Nigel Stone if the Authority contributed to the running of 'Go New Forest', and if it was the best organisation to deliver tourism. Nigel Stone said he didn't believe we did, but that he would look into it definitively and liaise directly with him about any contributions.

Resolved, that

- 1. the provisional outturn position be noted;**

2. the Treasury Management Stewardship Report and Prudential Indicators 2022-23 in Annex 6 be noted; and

3. the *indicative* transfers to/(from) Reserves in 2022-23 as set out in section 6 and detailed in Annex 5 be approved.

Voting: None voting against

46. Draft Annual Governance Statement

46.1 David Stone presented this report and which he said provided a governance framework for continuous improvement, safeguarding the funds of the Authority and ensuring proper standards were adhered to. He drew members' attention to page one of the Statement which provided the scope of responsibility in more detail.

46.2 Following acceptance by the Committee the draft AGS would be passed to the External Auditors alongside the Financial Report for the year and would then be subject to audit by them. Both finalised documents would then go to the Authority for approval.

46.3 Following brief discussion, members approved the AGS.

Resolved, that the Draft Annual Governance Statement for the financial year 2022/23 be approved and that the draft be passed to the External Auditors for audit.

Voting: Unanimous

47. Annual Health and Safety Update

47.1 Steve Avery presented the report which was to update members on how the Authority had discharged its health and safety duties over the last year.

47.2 Mr Avery drew members' attention to the scope of responsibility for health and safety as set out in the report.

47.3 He explained how the Authority had dealt with the Coronavirus Pandemic in 2022/23 which had a much lesser impact than in previous years. Many staff were now working according to a hybrid system whereby a staggered working arrangement between the office and home working had been agreed between managers and staff – a key priority of this system had been to ensure that the office was adequately staffed during office hours. Additional fire wardens and first aiders had been recruited in response to this new way of working.

47.4 Referring to the health and safety audit, Mr Avery said that a key recommendation of the audit had been the review and update of the Authority's Health and Safety Policy – this was the subject of report elsewhere on the agenda.

47.5 Mr Avery then referred to other health and safety activity undertaken during 2022/23 (section 5 of the report) and the recorded health and safety incidents for the year (section 6 of the report).

47.6 Members then considered the table of sickness absence set out in the report which had increased significantly, these included cases of absence due to Covid 19 which had affected absence across the country.

47.7 Members then noted the report.

48. Health and Safety Policy

48.1 David Stone presented the report which contained an update of the Authority's Health and Safety Policy in response to an informal audit recommendation by the Authority's health and safety advisors.

48.2 The update to the draft Policy had been carried out by an officer group comprising the Executive Director, Head of Resources, Corporate Services Manager and Business Support Officer.

48.3 The suggested updates to the Policy were set in track changes in the draft attached to the report. The updated draft had been made available to Unison and their responses discussed and actioned and a full consultation on the draft Policy had been carried out with no responses received.

Resolved, that the draft Health and Safety Policy, attached as Annex 1 to the report be approved.

Voting: Unanimous

49. Team New Forest and Inclusive National Park – PEDALL – partnership between the New Forest National Park Authority and charity Friends of PEDALL

49.1 Jim Mitchell brought the PEDALL report to the Resources, Audit and Performance committee (RAPC) under Team New Forest and to bring out the partnership elements of the project in the report. He highlighted the journey PEDALL had been on since its inception in 2011 and felt it met the Authority's second purpose - Enjoy. He said many people were involved with PEDALL which included a team of three staff, volunteers and had Friends of PEDALL trustees' support. The purpose of bringing the report to RAPC was to ask for members approval for the next phase of funding and to apply to the National Lottery Community Fund later in the year.

49.2 Shelley Filby the PEDALL Manager informed members that she had joined the PEDALL project team six months previously, and prior to that she was a volunteer with PEDALL. She pointed out that in 2022, 4,500 people used PEDALL and it supported around twenty-eight different organisations which included schools, care homes, colleges, people with mental and physical disabilities, and those with other barriers to access the Forest. Shelley Filby said that she was passionate about giving people access to the New Forest and was very proud to be part of the project. The team were engaged with the Lottery to go through a further round of funding, and the Fund manager was visiting the newly opened second base in Ashurst the following week.

49.3 Shelley Filby said the project was not just about the experience given to riders with difficulties and barriers, but it extended beyond that to a community of carers, parents, teachers and volunteers, and there was a lot of work to do to push and

offer what PEDALL had. She had spoken to a many people that were not familiar with the work PEDALL did, but there was a lot more work to do.

- 49.4 The team had also started to do training courses for young people with additional needs such as bike maintenance skills and work experience skills at Brockenhurst College. They had also opened a drop-in bike maintenance clinic at the Ashurst Base, and offered social confidence rides for those who might not have obvious health issues/barriers but wanted a social ride and enjoy the Forest with guidance from expert team of riders and volunteers.
- 49.5 Steve Trow, Friends of PEDALL Trustee (accessed the meeting remotely) added that the Friends had managed to access funds of £240,000, and the main aim was to make the board a more robust platform for the future.
- 49.6 Shelley Filby was asked how the team measured success in quantity. She said that the team cycled with 4,500 riders per year, but they could do a better job of filling all the ride slots so improvements could be made. A member mentioned that the Lottery funded projects had a budget for an external evaluator and asked Shelley Filby if she could share what other people were saying about PEDALL. Shelley said that participants had been asked to complete a survey which she said had heart warming and positive responses and she would be happy to share the information.
- 49.7 Alison Barnes thanked all those who worked hard on the PEDALL Team and said that she was proud to have them as part of the project. David Bence added his thanks to the team.

Resolved, that

- 1. members noted the content of the report;**
- 2. members approve an application to the National Lottery Community Fund for five years support totaling approximately £500,000.**

Voting: None voting against

50. Date of next meeting

- 50.1 Members noted that the next meeting of the Committee would be held on 4 September 2023 in the Council Chamber at Lyminster Town Hall.

The meeting closed at 11:50 hours.

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