

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

**Present:**

*Members:*

Gordon Bailey  
David Bence (Deputy Chair)  
David Harrison  
Patrick Heneghan (Chair)  
Victoria Mander  
Keith Mans  
George Meyrick  
Neville Penman  
Joe Reilly  
Ann Sevier  
Derek Tipp

*Officers:*

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
Rosalind Alderman	Solicitor and Monitoring Officer
David Stone	Corporate Services Manager
Tom Knott	Finance and Sustainable Performance Officer
Adam Vasey	Access and Volunteering Officer
Hayden Bridgeman	Ranger
Frances Connolly	Executive Assistant

Before the start of the formal agenda, Patrick Heneghan asked Members and Officers to pause briefly for reflection and pay tribute to Stephen Tarling who sadly had passed away after a short illness.

**1. Apologies for absence**

1.1 There were no apologies for absence.

**2. Declarations of Interest**

2.1 There were no declarations of interest on this occasion.

**3. Chair's announcements**

3.1 Patrick Heneghan thanked Caroline Rackham for her service on the Resources, Audit and Performance Committee and welcomed back David Harrison, and new members, Derek Tipp, Joe Reilly and Keith Mans. He also thanked members for re-electing him as Chair and David Bence as Deputy Chair.

#### **4. Minutes**

- 4.1 The minutes of the meeting held on 4 September 2023 were agreed as a true and accurate record.

**Resolved**, that the minutes of the meeting held on 4 September 2023 be confirmed as a correct record.

*Voting: none voting against*

#### **5. Public Question Time**

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

#### **6. Half-Year Progress Report 2023-24**

- 6.1 In considering the performance indicators, members noted that member participation at meetings was down to 69% but further noted that there had been significant changes to the membership following the local government elections in May and with a more stable membership, the figure should increase during the remainder of the financial year. This would be closely monitored at future meetings.
- 6.2 Referring to the action on enhanced walking, cycling and sustainable transport in and around the National Park (page 10 of the report), members noted that the New Forest Tour had received 5 out of 5 on all Trip Advisor reviews this summer, which was an excellent achievement.
- 6.3 Arising from a question about the outcome of Re:New Nature Partnership, the Committee was informed that the Authority was working with Mike Clarke, the Chair of Wildlife Roundtable who had offered to be Chair of The Re:New Nature Partnership, and a meeting would take place in December or early in the new year. With regard to the recent Article 4 Direction, Steve Avery advised the Committee that there was existing guidance to assist applicants who submitted an application for campsites that required planning permission and this would be updated in respect of the new Article 4 Direction; he anticipated taking it to the next Planning Committee for consideration in December. He stressed that all campsites would need to comply with the Habitat Regulations.
- 6.4 Re:New Place – Thriving Forest, page 21 - A member sought the Committee's views on the annual Green Halo conference as to whether it would be better to hold the conference on a regular basis rather than annually, which might attract a wider audience. Members agreed and understood that there was limited resource to develop Green Halo Partnership work and thought it was a topic worthy of discussion and for a specific paper at a future meeting.
- 6.5 An update was requested on the Encroachment Working Party and GIS, page 22. Steve Avery advised that the Encroachment Working Party was another partnership forum chaired previously by Lord Manners in his then role as Official Verderer, and the New Forest National Park Authority had provided the secretariat, but that post had been vacant for over a year. This meant the group had not reconvened but nonetheless work had continued, but he was keen to see it reinstated with the new Official Verderer.

Nigel Stone informed Members that he had spoken to other National Parks to see if their GIS was done in-house, externally or both. He had drawn up a tender document for a potential GIS service and hoped to get responses before Christmas - this would allow local authorities and private companies to bid. Nigel Stone pointed out that there was an option to have an internal officer, but this did have implications if the appointee were to fall ill or leave, so it was a higher risk approach.

- 6.6 Re:New Partnership – page 26: Paul Walton brought to members’ attention the support needed for commoning as there was a lot of change around the agri-environment support that was available to farmers, which also came at a time when there were phased reductions in the Basic Payment Scheme, due to end in 2027. The Commoners Defence Association had made it known that some of the cattle grazers were finding life very difficult with increases in overall costs at a time when their basic payments were being reduced.
- 6.7 He said there had been an opportunity to invite officials from the National Farmers Union to the New Forest which had been very well received, and the matter had been raised with all local MPs. Desmond Swayne MP has been in touch with the farming minister and invited him to the New Forest in the New Year. Paul Walton wanted Members to made aware that these issues would not be resolved quickly.

Members noted the report.

## **7. Half-Year Budgetary Control Report 2023-24**

- 7.1 Nigel Stone provided a summary of the financial performance for the first six months of the financial year 2023/24 from April to September. The overall expenditure position showed £2.24m spend (47% of budget) and the overall income position showed £2.34m (49% of budget).
- 7.2 He drew members’ attention to item 4.1 of the report, detailing the general budget analysis which he said was on track with no significant issues. He wanted to make members aware of the savings as more interest was received than had been expected, i.e., likely to be £40-50,000 more over the financial year. However, there were three corresponding pressures:
- legal support due to a requirement for temporary staffing cover,
  - planning support and income again due to temporary staffing cover together with a slight decrease in planning fee income, and
  - the Waterside Development – consultancy contract, which was a new piece of work that had not been known about at the time of setting the budget in February last year.

Nigel Stone added that the resulting balanced budget position would be reviewed again at the end of Quarter 3.

- 7.3 With regard to 4.2 of the report, Nigel Stone updated members about the pay award position. He said the National Pay award for 2023/24 had since been agreed at the level expected - £1,925 per FTE. Members’ allowances would go up by 3.88% as per the Members’ Allowance Scheme. The pay award would be backdated from 1 April 2023 and staff/members would receive the payment in their November pay.

- 7.4 Nigel Stone highlighted 9.1 of the report advising members that the Authority's 2022/23 external audit was yet to commence due to national auditing issues which had affected virtually the whole of the public sector. If the audit was not completed by March 2024, then the Authority would potentially receive a qualified audit opinion by default, which it had never had before. He said it was expected at this stage that a Value for Money conclusion for each authority would be completed. Members noted this position and agreed that this would need to be carefully presented to avoid any notion of fault by the Authority or within its finances.
- 7.5 Another key point for members to note was the audit fee for 2021/22 which had been agreed at £20,623 - approximately £27,000 less than the auditors had originally requested. Ernst & Young LLP, who had been recently appointed for a further 5 years as the Authority's auditors, said their costs were projected to double to £40,000 per year due to rising costs and additional works. Nigel Stone said that he had already budgeted for a significant increase, but the actual increase was still slightly higher than had been expected.
- 7.6 There was some discussion about the consultancy contract commissioned for the Waterside development, which was costing £24,000. Steve Avery explained that this work had been commissioned to look into linkages between the Forest and the Waterside. ARUP Consultancy had been commissioned to undertake work to particularly identify ecology and wildlife links, and how the communities on the Waterside access the Forest. The work was now underway, and Steve Avery would share results with Members.

**Resolved**, that the current income and expenditure position, including the potential savings and pressures identified be noted.

*Voting: none voting against.*

## **8. Corporate Risk Register**

- 8.1 Nigel Stone presented the report and explained that an additional column had been added to the register to illustrate the direction of travel in respect of each of the risks. Additions to the log since the last time the Committee had considered the log in March 2023 were shown in italic type.
- 8.2 A member suggested that the risk associated with the revocation of a Certificate of Lawfulness at Vernon Dene be added to the register. Another member suggested a risk be added to the register dealing with the potentially devastating habitat damage or loss of life resulting from out of control fires, such as had taken place in Greece. Mr Avery undertook to raise this with the Strategic Leadership Team with a view to possibly expanding Risk 3 (Significant habitat or species loss within the New Forest) and incorporating relevant risk mitigation.
- 8.3 Members considered Risk 8 and requested that only the words 'due to the Coronavirus outbreak' be deleted as the remaining text dealing with strains on the NPA's finances was still relevant. In this regard, members noted that a significant part of the NPA's budget was spent on accommodation costs and this would be further discussed later in the agenda. Following further discussion, it was agreed that the risk associated with the budget should be split into a short term risk to provide more focus on the current financial situation and a longer term risk providing an overall picture of the wider financial risk of the Authority.

8.4 Members referred to Risk 12 (Post Brexit arrangements impact on funding for conservation, recreation, commoning, research and designated of protected sited in the New Forest) and requested that consideration be given to transferring this risk to a higher body. Nigel Stone advised that a meeting would be taking place with Defra during early December where the mitigation of this risk would be considered.

Following further brief discussion, members noted the updated Corporate Risk Register

## 9. Any Other Business

### **PART II ITEMS WHICH MAY BE TAKEN IN THE ABSENCE OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC ON THE GROUNDS THAT EXEMPTED INFORMATION MAY BE DISCLOSED**

**Resolved that the public be excluded from the meeting during the following item of business, as it is likely, in view of the nature of the business to be transacted or the nature of the proceedings, that if members of the public were present during this item, there would be disclosure to them of exempt information within Paragraph 3, Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972, and further that in all the circumstances of the case, the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information, namely the need to avoid disclosing sensitive information relating to the Authority's financial and business affairs.**

## 10. Future Office Accommodation

Members received an update on future office accommodation. This is a summary of the minute which contains exempt information.

The meeting closed at 12:25 hours.

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