

**NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY
MINUTES OF THE RESOURCES, AUDIT AND PERFORMANCE COMMITTEE HELD ON
MONDAY 4 NOVEMBER 2024 AT 10:00 HOURS IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER,
LYMINGTON TOWN HALL, AVENUE ROAD, LYMINGTON**

Present:

Members:

Gordon Bailey
David Bence – Deputy Chair
Mary Davies - Chair
Barry Dunning
David Harrison
Victoria Mander
Neville Penman
Joe Reilly
Derek Tipp

Officers:

Alison Barnes	Chief Executive
Steve Avery	Executive Director Strategy and Planning
Nigel Stone	Head of Resources (CFO)
Rosalind Alderman	Solicitor and Monitoring Officer
Hilary Makin	Communications Manager
Paul Walton	Head of Environment and Rural Economy
John Stride	Net Zero with Nature Programme Manager
Jim Mitchell	Access and Learning Manager
David Stone	Corporate Services Manager
Frances Connolly	Executive Assistant

1. Apologies for absence

1.1 None

2. Declarations of Interest

2.1 None

3. Chair's announcements

- 3.1 Mary Davies said she looked forward to her year in the role of Chair of Resources, Audit and Performance Committee (RAPC). She gave her sincere thanks to Patrick Heneghan, the outgoing Chair, who had been on the Committee for seven years and had been Chair for the last three.
- 3.2 The Chair gave thanks also to David Bence, the past and present Deputy Chair, and thanked Keith Mans and George Meyrick for their time and commitment on the Committee.

4. Minutes

- 4.1 The Minutes of the meeting held on 9 September 2024 were agreed as a true and accurate record.

Resolved, that the minutes of the meeting held on 9 September 2024 be confirmed as a correct record.

Voting: Unanimous

5. Public Question Time

None.

6. Team New Forest – joint working between the New Forest National Park Authority and Forestry England (presented jointly between Paul Walton and the Deputy Surveyor for the New Forest)

- 6.1 Paul Walton reminded members of the joint national Accord signed in 2018 listing the five priority areas where National Park Authorities and Forestry England worked together to deliver a shared ambition for the management of woods and forests within England's National Parks. He said that the oral report would set out how this joint work had been taken forward in the New Forest.
- 6.2 Mr Walton then introduced Craig Harrison, Deputy Surveyor, Forestry England who said that strategic delivery in the New Forest National Park required good collaboration and cohesion between key partners such as between the NPA and Forestry England, and it was important that this collaboration continued.
- 6.3 At the Resources, Audit and Performance Committee meeting in 2023 he had provided an oversight of how Forestry England strategic objectives closely aligned with National Park aims and the Partnership Plan themes. In this regard he reported on a number of core joint actions against the Partnership Plan objectives included under wildlife, people and resources. In this latter regard he reported on funding sources which Forestry England were exploring in the light of current and future core funding challenges, inflationary pressures and obtaining and retaining a skilled workforce.
- 6.4 Following discussion, the Chair thanked Craig Harrison and Paul Walton for their report which was noted by members.

7. Half Year Progress Report 2024/25

- 7.1 Members considered the second quarter progress report of the 2024/25 Work Programme and discussed several issues therein. On the performance indicators, Nigel Stone responded to queries with regard to member attendance and said that this was anticipated to improve over the next quarter with the recent appointment of new committee membership for the ensuing year. Nigel Stone then advised that the government had recently published a public consultation which proposed the possibility of allowing local authorities (including National Parks) to hold hybrid meetings whereby members would be permitted to attend meetings in person or remotely. A second proposal in the consultation was the possibility of allowing proxy voting. Mr Stone undertook to provide members with a link to the consultation.

- 7.2 Mr Stone referred to item 4.1 of the report and said that the latest timescale for the implementation of the new national KPIs was the spring of 2025.

Following further brief discussion, members noted the report.

8 Half Year Budgetary Control Report 2024/25

- 8.1 Nigel Stone informed the Committee that there were some updates to his report, but first he went through the Authority's current financial position.
- 8.2 The current overall expenditure position showed a £2.65m spend over the first six months of the financial year (40% of budget). Without the partnership projects, spend was £2.29m from a budget of £4.68m (49%).
- 8.3 The overall income position showed £2.72m received (41% of budget) over the first six months of the financial year. Without the partnership projects, income was £2.36m from a budget of £4.68m (50%).
- 8.4 Nigel Stone then drew members' attention to an update to paragraph 4.2 of his report and advised that the 2024/25 pay award had been agreed but not yet paid out. The standard pay scales would be increased by £1,290 per full-time equivalent and be pro-rated for part time staff, and there would be an increase of 2.5% for the higher scale points. Members' allowances would also be increased by 2.5%, and the award would be backdated to 1 April 2024. He was able to confirm the backdated payments would be made in the November salaries.
- 8.5 Nigel Stone gave the first of his updates about the national Budget picture, as set out by the Chancellor the previous week. He said that Defra had received a flat cash revenue settlement for 2025/26, which meant in real terms that there was a cut within Defra's funding; it would not be known what the 2025/26 Defra revenue grant would be for the Authority for at least the next few months. Secondly, a Comprehensive Spending Review had started last week and would continue until March 2025, after which the Chancellor would announce a multiple year spending settlement. Also announced in the budget was the rise in National Insurance for employers from April 2025. This would have an impact on the Authority as it had a large complement of staff, so Nigel Stone hoped that funding would be set aside by the Treasury to offset this. He reminded those members that were on the Task and Finish Group that there was a meeting of the group in the afternoon of the 5 November to further discuss the implications of the Budget.
- 8.6 Nigel Stone informed members that he had just received the first draft of the 'Audit' report for the 2022/23 financial year. His initial thought was that the report was very fair as Ernst & Young LLP had made it quite clear it was not the Authority's fault that there had not been an audit that year and mentioned the national issues which had instead caused this.

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

Voting: none voting against.

9. Corporate Risk Register and Countermeasures

- 9.1 Nigel Stone advised that the updates to the register requested at the Annual Authority meeting on 17 October 2024, namely the risk associated with the disclaimed 2022/23 Audit Opinion, had been included as a new risk in the register as Risk Item 10.
- 9.2 Members suggested that, for members' information, future cover reports include a summary of the key elements of the register which had been considered by the Executive Board, whether this led to changes or not.
- 9.3 Referring to risk 5, Alison Barnes advised that there was a wider national dialogue currently taking place around recreation management and, as this might impact on local recreation issues, she suggested that the risk be raised from green to amber. This change was supported by the Committee.

Thereafter the report was noted.

10. Water Quality and Recreation in the New Forest National Park

- 10.1 Paul Walton presented the report and advised the Committee that as an Authority the National Park (NPA) did not have a statutory role in relation to water quality and provision of water-based recreation. Section 3 of the report highlighted where water recreation did take place in and outside of the National Park.
- 10.2 In terms of achieving designated bathing water status he said it was for Defra, New Forest District Council and the Environment Agency to do this, and Paul Walton set out the processes for this in section 4 of the report.
- 10.3 It was reported in section 6 and 7 of the report the Authority's involvement in the wider partnership working with the Environment Agency who were signatories to the Partnership Plan. He said Southern Water was responsible for all wastewater treatments works in the National Park. In the summer, the Authority was visited by their Chief Executive and one of their Senior Directors, and so was able to highlight the importance of the water environment in the New Forest.
- 10.4 Paul Walton said that the Partnership Plan Leaders Panel would meet the following week, and the Environment Agency and Southern Water would also be present to explore how they could collectively work together.

Following further brief discussion, members noted the report.

11. Net Zero with Nature – establishing a robust and consistent evidence base

- 11.1 John Stride introduced his report which he said was around the National Parks' Net Zero pathway and the commitments within it. The paper highlighted various aspects of the Authority's work which focussed on those areas within the 2024/25 annual work programme:
 - Gain Partnership Plan Leadership Group endorsement of the net-zero pathway
 - Agree a framework to address evidence gaps regarding the carbon storage and sequestration rates of the National Park's habitats
 - Take forward the agreed actions of National Parks UK in relation to net zero
 - Develop a means of tracking progress towards a net zero goal by 2050

- Build an understanding of climate risks the National Park faces and the adaptations necessary to manage those risks.

11.2 The Net Zero pathway was originally published in 2022 and had been updated this year based on the data from 2022. He said the important thing to note was to continue to understand the evidence, improve the evidence that the pathway was based on, and to acknowledge the uncertainty around that evidence.

After discussion members noted the report

12. Any other items that the Chair decides are urgent

None.

In closing the meeting, the Chair thanked all officers for their reports and assistance that had been given to members.

The meeting closed at 12:25 hours.

SignedDate.....
(Chair)