

**NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY  
MINUTES OF THE RESOURCES, AUDIT AND PERFORMANCE COMMITTEE HELD ON  
MONDAY 3 JUNE 2024 AT 10:00 HOURS IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER, LYMINGTON  
TOWN HALL, AVENUE ROAD, LYMINGTON**

**Present:**

*Members:*

Gordon Bailey  
David Harrison  
Patrick Heneghan – Chair  
Keith Mans  
George Meyrick  
Neville Penman  
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
Jim Mitchell	Access and Learning Manager
Rosalind Alderman	Solicitor and Monitoring Officer
David Stone	Corporate Services Manager
Tom Knott	Finance and Sustainable Performance Officer

Simon Mathers

Katie Lean                      Ernst and Young, External Auditors to the Authority

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

**30.      Apologies for absence**

30.1      Apologies for absence were received from David Bence (Deputy Chair), Joe Reilly and Victoria Mander.

**31        Declarations of Interest**

31.1      George Meyrick declared a prejudicial interest under Part 2 section A (pecuniary interests) of the NPA's Code of Conduct in minute item 36 as he controlled entities which are members of the New Forest Marque. He accordingly left the meeting during the debate and decision on that item.

**32.      Chair's announcements**

32.1      None.

### **33. Minutes**

- 33.1 The Minutes of the meeting held on 4 March 2024 were agreed as a true and accurate record.

**Resolved**, that the minutes of the meeting held on 4 March 2024 be confirmed as a correct record.

*Voting: Unanimous*

### **34. Public Question Time**

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

### **35. Ernst & Young: External Audit Plan**

- 35.1 Simon Mathers from Ernst & Young advised that the purpose of the report was to provide the Committee with the External Auditor's proposed plan for the scope of the audit and approach for the year ending 31 March 2024. He then drew attention to the significant audit risks and audit materiality set out under items 2 and 4 respectively of the report and responded to queries by members in respect of these items and other aspects of the report including the scope of the audit.
- 35.2 Responding to audit fees, Mr Mathers advised that the fees in respect of 2022/23 would be based on the quantum of work undertaken to discharge value for money responsibilities and the reduced audit in respect of that year. The fee for the 2023/24 financial year, rising to over £40,000, reflected the results of the new national contract through the national procurement process and agreement.

**Resolved**, that the External Audit Plan for 2023/24 be approved.

*Voting: Unanimous*

### **36. Team New Forest: New Forest Marque SLA**

*As mentioned under Minute 31.1, George Meyrick declared an interest under the NPA's Code of Conduct in this item and accordingly left the meeting during the debate and vote on the item.*

- 36.1 Paul Walton advised that the purpose of the report was twofold in seeking members' approval for the grant agreement as set out in the report which included funding for the appointment of a Communications Officer and secondly to introduce Dan Parsons as Chair of the New Forest Marque.
- 36.2 Dan Parsons addressed members and referred to the close co-operation that existed between the Authority and the Marque and drew attention to an overview outlining the activities and successes of the Marque and in particular the support provided to small and micro enterprise members.
- 36.3 Members queried the amount of money which the Marque generated into the local economy and the number of jobs created and suggested that the Marque might seek this information informally from its members to assist in its future marketing strategy and in reporting back to the NPA.
- 36.4 Members expressed their support for the work of the Marque and its objectives.

**Resolved:** That the Committee

1. approve the provision of assistance and a grant to New Forest Produce Limited (trading as New Forest Marque) to an annual value of £25,000 over a three-year period on the terms set out in this paper and the annex hereto,
2. approve the principle of the Authority entering into a grant agreement with New Forest Produce Limited (trading as New Forest Marque), to incorporate at a minimum the key terms appended to the report at Annex 1, and
3. delegate authority to the Chief Executive Officer to take all action as necessary to enable the Authority to enter into the grant agreement, including overseeing the drafting of the agreement, negotiating any amendments if required, and executing the agreement on behalf of the Authority.

*Voting: Unanimous*

**37. Annual Internal Audit Report and Opinion 2023/24**

- 37.1 Antony Harvey introduced the report the purpose of which was to provide the Committee with the Chief Internal Auditor's opinion on the adequacy and effectiveness of the Authority's framework of risk management, control and governance processes for the year ending 31 March 2024.
- 37.2 Members noted that the result of the audit which identified a reasonable level of assurance was the second highest which could be awarded by the auditors.

**Resolved, that** Chief Internal Auditor's Annual Internal Audit Performance and Opinion Report for 2023/24 be approved.

*Voting: Unanimous*

**38. Year End (Final Quarter) Progress Report 2023/24**

- 38.1 Nigel Stone presented the above paper which contained the final quarter progress as to the achievement of actions against the 2023/24 Work Programme.
- 38.2 Referring to Page 4 of Appendix 1 (Enhanced walking, cycling and sustainable transport), in noting that the roll out of the consultation had been delayed until the summer of 2024, members were of the view that the final quarter progress should be amber and not green regardless of the delay having been due to circumstances outside the control of the Authority which had completed its share of the resources.
- 38.3 Page 7 (Eligible development provides, as an absolute minimum, the mandated level of Biodiversity Net Gain in the National Park). Discussion took place with regard to water quality of local streams and although it was noted that responsibility for this rested with other agencies and partners, members requested that an action dealing with monitoring water quality be included in the 2024/25 Work Programme under the NPA's recreation management function. In this regard, members further noted that a meeting between Alison Barnes and the Chief Executive of Southern Water would be taking place in the summer. Officers advised that a report on safe and enjoyable access to streams in the New Forest would be submitted to a future meeting of the Committee.

Following further discussion, members noted the report.

### **39. Financial Outturn and Treasury Report 2023-24**

- 39.1 Nigel Stone introduced the Report which set out the detailed projected outturn position for the Authority for the 2023-24 Financial Year. He said that this information will form the basis for the annual Financial Report which will then be audited and presented for consideration and approval by the Authority in October 2024. The current report also included annual report on the Treasury Service and Prudential Indicators for 2023-24.
- 39.2 He said that an amount of £22,000 would be added to the Revenue Support Reserve and utilised in the 3-year period 2024-27, as per the approved budget.
- 39.3 Mr Stone then highlighted various aspects of the report including the income and expenditure position of the Authority and explained the key anticipated variances set out in paragraphs 2, 3 and 4 of the report.
- 39.4 Mr Stone drew members' attention to the total of £712,000 spent during 2023-24 on Authority-led Partnership Projects. Members noted that, of this funding, only £20,000 was inputted by the Authority, meaning that for every £1 spent by the Authority a further £36 was generated. Mr Stone advised that a more accurate figure was £1 to £18 when expenditure was taken over a 5-year average.

**Resolved, that** the Committee:

1. note the provisional outturn position;
- 2 note the Treasury Management Stewardship Report and Prudential Indicators 2023/24 in Annex 6 of the report; and
- 3 approve the indicative transfers to/(from) Reserves in 2023/24 as set out in section 6 and detailed in Annex 5

*Voting: Unanimous*

### **40. Annual Governance Statement 2023-24**

- 40.1 Nigel Stone outlined the purpose of the Annual Governance Statement and advised that following acceptance by this Committee, the draft AGS would be passed to the external auditors alongside the draft Financial Report for the year. These will then be subject to audit by the Authority's External Auditors and both finalised documents would then come back to the Authority for definitive approval.
- 40.2 Members referred to minor inaccuracies in the AGS and thereafter approved the draft document.

**Resolved, that** the Committee approve the Draft Annual Governance Statement for the financial year 2023/24 and that the draft be passed to the External Auditors.

*Voting: Unanimous*

#### **41. Annual Health & Safety Report 2023-24**

- 41.1 Steve Avery advised that the purpose of the report was to update members on how the Authority had discharged its health and safety duties over the last year under its approved Health & Safety Policy.
- 41.2 He referred to various key aspects of the Report and drew members' attention to the overall short- and long-term sickness figure which had decreased from 6.85 days as at 31 March 2023 to 3.47 days per FTE as at 31 March 2024, representing a drop from 2.49% of working time lost to 1.33% as at 31 March 2024.
- 41.3 Members noted that no reason had been given for sickness absence in 16.48% of cases, as set out in paragraph 7.3, and were of the view that a reason needed to be given in every case. Officers undertook to ensure that the recording process was corrected.
- 41.4 Mr Avery reported that the Annual Medical Health Checks had been very well received by staff.

Members then noted the report.

#### **42. Communications Plan**

- 42.1 Hilary Makin presented the Report and advised that the Plan, which was attached to the report as Annex 1, highlighted the direction the Authority's Communications team would take to deliver the Joint Partnership Plan, the Business Plan and Annual Work Programmes. She said that the Communications Plan was intended to offer a strategic overview of where the NPA should concentrate communications resources, of areas where the NPA needed to undertake more work to ensure it was reaching its full potential and to offer an insight into how the communications team was working to deliver the NPA's communications goals for the life of the Business Plan.
- 42.2 She advised that the Plan would be implemented through a delivery calendar developed to support the coming year's work programme, and the Plan would be reviewed at the end of the Business Plan period but would also be flexible to address changing circumstances and new developments during the period.
- 42.3 Members were fully supportive of the Plan and agreed to the recommendation.

**Resolved, that the Draft Communications Plan as Annex 1 to the report be approved.**

*Voting: Unanimous*

#### **43. Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy**

- 43.1 Jim Mitchell introduced the Report, the purpose of which was to provide the Committee with the proposed draft of a new Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy for the Authority. He said that any changes made by members would be included in the Policy before the final draft is considered for approval at the next full Authority meeting. Training on aspects of the Policy would take place for staff and members as well as new staff and members when they joined the Authority.

- 43.2 In supporting the Policy, Members suggested a small number of changes to the document which were recorded by officers.

**Resolved, that**, subject to suggestions made by members at the meeting, the draft Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy be recommended for approval at the next Authority meeting.

*Voting: Unanimous*

#### **44. Budget Update 2024-25**

- 44.1 Nigel Stone advised that the purpose of the report was to provide the Committee a number of budgetary updates relating to the 2024-25 financial year. The primary update was additional revenue and capital funding from Defra announced in late March after the original budget had been approved by the Authority. The report gave a breakdown of the additional funding and Mr Stone took members in detail through the proposed use of those funds; members were supportive of the rationale and final list.
- 44.2 Mr Stone announced, as per section 3, further funding of around £75,000 was likely to be forthcoming to expand day and overnight visits to the National Park for young people from underprivileged backgrounds.
- 44.3 Finally, Mr Stone confirmed the proposed process for seeking members to take part in the Resources & Facilities Task & Finish Group over the Summer and Autumn; members agreed with the proposals.

**Resolved, that**, the Committee approve the 2024/25 budget amendments as set out in the submitted report.

*Voting: Unanimous*

#### **45. Any other items that the Chairman decides are urgent**

- 45.1 None

The meeting closed at 13:05 hours.

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