

**NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY  
MINUTES OF THE RESOURCES, AUDIT AND PERFORMANCE COMMITTEE HELD ON  
MONDAY 5 FEBRUARY 2024 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)  
David Harrison  
Victoria Mander  
George Meyrick  
Neville Penman  
Ann Sevier  
Derek Tipp

*Officers:*

|                   |   |
|-------------------|---|
| Alison Barnes     | Chief Executive Officer                     |
| 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                  |
| Adam Vasey        | Access and Volunteering Officer             |
| Tom Knott         | Finance and Sustainable Performance Officer |
| Frances Connolly  | Executive Assistant                         |

**11. Apologies for absence**

11.1 Apologies for absence were received from Patrick Heneghan, Keith Mans and Joe Reilly.

**12. Declarations of Interest**

12.1 There were no declarations of interest on this occasion.

**13. Chair's announcements**

13.1 The Deputy Chair asked the Committee to remain after the meeting for a members' briefing.

**14. Minutes**

14.1 The Minutes of the meeting held on 6 November 2023 were agreed as a true and accurate record.

**Resolved**, that the minutes of the meeting held on 6 November 2023 be confirmed as a correct record.

*Voting: none voting against*

## **15. Public Question Time**

15.1 There were no questions or statements from the public.

## **16. Third Quarter Progress Report 2023-24**

16.1 Nigel Stone drew members' attention to paragraph 3.3 of the report. He said that, since writing it, he was happy to report that Defra had published their protected landscapes Targets and Outcomes Framework. As it was only received a short while ago there had not been much of a chance to go through it in detail, but he urged members and members of the public to read it carefully as it set out what the National Parks as a protected landscapes family in England would need to deliver. There were ten outcomes within the document and the targets stated were collective for all 10 English National Parks and the 34 National Landscapes (previously known as Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty).

16.2 It was suggested that, once the Strategic Leadership Team had had the opportunity to review and consider the proposals, further information would be shared with all members.

**Action:** Nigel Stone to share further information with all members once available.

16.3 **Page 11, Local Listing Project** - Steve Avery informed members that since they no longer had a dedicated resource, a lower number of buildings would be added to the Local Listing Project, but when local communities wanted to bring buildings, monuments or structures to the NPA's attention, that they believed were worthy of some sort of listing or recognition, then they would continue to be looked into and if necessary have them added to the local lists.

**Page 15, Green Halo** - A member asked about the value of the Green Halo Partnership conference, and as the Authority was not hosting it this financial year (2023/24), had officers considered changing the format in some way to improve and enhance it. Paul Walton stated that the NPA was looking to host the conference in either late May or early June 2024. He added that this conference will be focussed on health and wellbeing issues; and that it had a value to the NPA which had been demonstrated over the years and was a forum the Authority was keen to maintain.

**Page 17, Develop a Spatial Plan for Recreation** - Steve Avery responded to a question about the spatial plan for the future of the New Forest. He explained that it was an ongoing challenge as to how the partners managed the increasing recreational impacts and pressures, but a spatial plan was actively being pursued through the Recreation Management Steering Group which Gavin Parker now Chaired. Steve Avery, Jim Mitchell, and other colleagues at the NPA had regular catchups with colleagues at Forestry England specifically to take this work forward. The group had met in December and were committed to producing a draft spatial plan for the purposes of public engagement and consultation.

**Page 19, Partnership Plan Leaders' Panel** - the Leaders' Panel had agreed a draft annual Work Programme and the panel had scheduled a meeting for the 7 March on

prioritising those actions that were already set out in the Partnership Plan. Steve Avery reported that there was a suite of actions that needed to be carried out over the plan period up to 2027, and the purpose of the annual Work Programme was to prioritise actions for the year. The panel had scheduled to meet four times a year and one of those would be a tour; this year it would be hosted jointly by Wiltshire and Test Valley.

The meeting on the 7 March 2024 was to be chaired by Edward Heron as Official Verderer and issues around commoning would specifically be looked at. There would also be meetings in September and March and pencilled in as chairs were Natural England and the Environment Agency.

**Page 20, Sustainable farm businesses** - Paul Walton informed members that funding had been secured from the Rural Payments Agency (RPA) to investigate the most appropriate successor to the Verderers Higher-Level Stewardship (HLS) scheme.

The Verderers would like the NPA to manage the resulting contract. Once various paperwork is completed the appointed contractor will work closely with the Forest Farming Group, which includes key stakeholders.

Alison Barnes reiterated to the Committee that the contract would be done in full accordance with the NPA's procurement rules in an open and transparent manner.

Following further brief discussion, members noted the report.

## **17. Third Quarter Budgetary Control Report 2023-24**

- 17.1 Nigel Stone informed members that there had not been many significant changes financially since the last meeting in November 2023. He said the key figures to highlight were the overall expenditure position which showed a £3.34m spend over the first nine months of the financial year (67% of the budget), and the overall income position showed £3.44m received (69% of the budget). Section 4 of the report showed three pressures and one saving which were the same as in the half-year.
- 17.2 He drew members attention to section 9 of the report the External Audit Update. Nigel Stone reported that the Value for Money conclusion had started for the 2022/23 financial year by the New Forest National Park's external auditors Ernst & Young LLP and would be completed soon. However, as he explained at the last Committee meeting, the external audit for 2022/23 was unlikely to be completed due to lack of external audit resources.
- 17.3 Nigel Stone pointed out that there was a new statutory deadline proposed for all outstanding audits to now be completed by September 2024. However, in short, the new statutory deadline would still likely be missed, leading to the NPA, alongside many other public bodies, receiving a qualified / modified audit opinion. He said that Ernst & Young LLP had seemingly now moved their focus on to the 2023/24 audit, this current financial year, by giving dates in March for doing some pre-audit work and dates in June for doing the final audit. He hoped that, by moving forward with and completing the 2023/24 audit, it would again show that the New Forest National Park Authority was in a good financial position and that the lack of audit opinion in 2022/23 did not mean those figures were in any way incorrect as this would have fed through to 2023/24.

17.4 In answer to a question, Nigel Stone said there would be wording agreed by the audit firms, audited bodies and government agencies, for use within the Accounts, to make it known to the public that a full audit had not taken place in 2022/23 but that this was at no fault of the Authority and should not cast any doubt on the figures produced.

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

*Voting: none voting against.*

The meeting closed at 11:30 hours.

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