

**NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY
MINUTES OF THE RESOURCES, AUDIT AND PERFORMANCE COMMITTEE HELD ON
MONDAY 3 MARCH 2025 AT 10:00 HOURS IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER, LYMINGTON
TOWN HALL, AVENUE ROAD, LYMINGTON**

Present:

Members:

Mary Davies - Chair
Victoria Mander
Joe Reilly
Ann Sevier

Officers:

Alison Barnes	Chief Executive
Nigel Stone	Head of Resources (CFO)
David Illsley	Policy and Conservation Manager
Hilary Makin	Communications Manager
Paul Walton	Interim Monitoring Officer
Jim Mitchell	Access and Learning Manager
David Stone	Corporate Services Manager
Frances Connolly	Executive Assistant

Antony Harvey	Deputy Head of the Southern Internal Audit Partnership and Chief Internal Auditor to the Authority.
Malcolm Wade	New Forest National Park Authority Member

21. Apologies for absence

21.1 Apologies for absence were received from David Bence, Gordon Bailey, David Harrison and Brice Stratford.

22. Declarations of Interest

22.1 None

23. Chair's announcements

23.1 None

24. Minutes

24.1 The Minutes of the meeting held on 3 February 2025 were agreed as a true and accurate record.

Resolved, that the minutes of the meeting held on 3 February 2025 be confirmed as a correct record.

Voting: Unanimous

25. Public Question Time

None.

26. Internal Audit Progress Report 2024/25

- 26.1 Antony Harvey (Deputy Head of the Southern Internal Audit Partnership and Chief Internal Auditor to the Authority) introduced the report, the purpose of which was to provide the Committee with an overview of internal audit activity completed in accordance with the approved audit plan and to provide an overview of the status of 'live' reports, namely following up on progress with previous audit reviews. He reported on the status of audit reviews set out on pages 6 and 7 of the audit progress report attached as Appendix A; he added that the payroll audit had also recently been completed and received substantial assurance.

Members then noted the report.

27. Internal Audit Charter and Plan 2025/26

- 27.1 Antony Harvey presented the report, the purpose of which was to provide the Committee with the Internal Audit Charter and Internal Audit Plan 2025/26 for the New Forest National Park Authority.
- 27.2 He said that, from 1 April 2025, the 'standards or guidance' in relation to internal audit were those laid down in the Global Internal Audit Standards (GIAS) and the Code of Practice for the Governance of Internal Audit in UK Local Government, referred to as 'the Standards'. He confirmed to members that the Southern Internal Audit Partnership had made all necessary adaptations to its processes, procedures and practices to ensure it is best placed to conform with these requirements with effect from 1 April 2025. A guidance note on GIAS was included in a recent Members' bulletin.
- 27.3 He then referred to salient points with both the Audit Charter (Appendix A) and the Internal Audit Plan (Appendix B) and responded to questions by members in connection with the proposed audits for 2025/26. With regard to the audit of the Corporate Governance Framework, members agreed that this audit take place during quarters 3-4 rather than 2-3 to allow for the settling-in of the new Monitoring Officer, who would likely be taking up his role in June 2025. Following brief discussion, members approved the recommendation subject to the above amendment.

Resolved, that the Internal Audit Charter 2025/26 (Appendix A) and the Internal Audit Plan 2025/26 (Appendix B) be approved, subject to the amendment set out in this minute.

Voting: Unanimous

28. Draft General Fund Revenue Budget for the Financial Year 2025/26, Treasury Management Strategy and Medium - term Financial Plan

- 28.1 Nigel Stone explained to members that at the time of writing the report he didn't know what the Defra grant for 2025/26 would be and there was still no final confirmation of the grant that he could convey to the Committee at the meeting.
- 28.2 However, following on from a conversation between Defra and National Parks family last week, it was announced that there was likely to be a 9% reduction in revenue (core) funding for National Parks as a whole in 2025/26. The national revenue budget

would be reduced from £48.8 million to £44.8 million. The Authority's current core grant was for its running costs, staffing, and money needed to deliver its purposes, so it was not good news; particularly with the start of the 2025/26 financial year so close.

- 28.3 Regarding capital funding, for the ten English national parks there was better news as Defra offered the potential of significant capital (to buy or enhance assets, particularly those around climate/nature recovery or for income-generation), although the Authority's split was not yet known. The other good news was the continuation of the Farming in Protected Landscapes Scheme for another year, and the continuation of Access for All grant scheme.
- 28.4 There was some discussion about the Defra cuts to funding and how it would affect the Authority. Nigel Stone informed the Committee that there was a Finance and Facilities Task & Finish Group meeting on Wednesday 5 March to discuss the potential cuts and the impacts on the Authority's finances. He said it was reported in his paper that the Authority was in a good financial position and so on the 1st of April 2025 he would not be looking to make any sudden, drastic changes. The Authority had most of its financial stability reserves remaining and he was confident we would be able to balance the next financial year with the projected settlement figure.
- 28.5 Nigel pointed out that the budget would have to change before it went to the Authority meeting on the 27th March, so for the Committee at this point the recommendation was to support the ethos of the budget and not the detailed figures in the current draft report.

Resolved, that

- 1 the General Fund Budget for 2025/26 be supported for approval at the Authority meeting on 27 March 2025;**
2 that the underlying minimum level for the General Fund Reserve which remains at £0.35 million be noted;
3 the implications on the Reserves of the proposed budget for 2025/26 be noted;
4 the Risk Assessment and Section 25 Statement (Section 7) be noted;
5 the Treasury Management Strategy in Annex 3 be supported and recommended for approval at the Authority meeting on 27 March 2025; and
6 the Medium-Term Financial Plan up to 2028/29 and the Forward Projection in Annex 4 be noted.

Voting: none voting against

29. Draft Work Programme 2025/26

- 29.1 Nigel Stone introduced the report and advised that the Authority had derived and extracted its specific actions and outcomes from the Partnership Plan into an Authority Business Plan. The full Business Plan, covering the same period as the Partnership Plan (up to 2027), was approved by the Authority in July 2023. Each year, a specific annual Work Programme is then produced and approved. This Work Programme is overseen and its progress monitored by the Resources, Audit and Performance Committee.
- 29.2 Members then considered and debated the draft Work Programme in detail and made suggestions and amendments to various actions contained therein, these were noted by the officers present at the meeting who would amend the draft programme accordingly prior to submission and final approval by the Authority on 27 March 2025.

Resolved, that subject to the amendments agreed at the meeting, the Draft Work Programme 2025/26, as set out in Annex 1 to the submitted report, be recommended for approval at the Authority Meeting on 27 March 2025.

Voting: Unanimous

30. Corporate Risk Register

- 30.1 Nigel Stone advised that the corporate risk register has been reviewed and updated and was attached to the report as Annex 1. He said that updates to the risk register, which have been made by the Executive Board since the November RAPC meeting, were shown in italic type. He drew members' attention to each of these updates.

Following brief debate, members noted the report.

31. Inclusive National Park

- 31.1 Jim Mitchell gave members' an update on the Inclusive National Park which focussed on the need to remove barriers so that under - represented / under-served parts of society could access the National Park. He said the paper was not exhaustive as there were other areas of work within the Inclusive Partnership Plan theme. The paper set out several different projects and initiatives under the Inclusive National Park theme for members to comment on.
- 31.2 Jim Mitchell said the Inclusive National Park programme was closely aligned with New Forest Voices initiative which focussed on three areas: to enhance understanding, develop experiences and create new ways of working. This report focussed mainly on the experiences area of New Forest Voices; a paper would be brought to a Resources, Audit and Performance meeting in June to report more extensively on the 'ways of working', including progress of the National Park Youth Board and ways to make the business of the National Park more accessible.

Members noted the report.

32. Grant Funding Update

- 32.1 Fiona Wynne brought two funding applications, these required to be approved by the Committee as they were in excess of £50,000.
- 32.2 The first application was for Landscape Connections which is a programme funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund: a strategic initiative designed to address long-standing heritage issues to make landscapes better for nature, supporting rural economies and connecting people to nature. Fiona Wynne said grants up to £10 million were available over a ten year time frame, so there was a significant amount of funding potential, and the long time frame was important for the Authority too. The intention was to seek a development phase grant of around £250,000 to take place during 2025/26. Fiona informed members' that, in terms of putting the bid together, workshops would be held for a range of partner organisations and staff, and members would also be invited to contribute to a full application submission. The workshops would take place in March and April. This development phase would conclude after twelve to eighteen months, and the data and evidence would be collated for the main project delivery to coincide with the next Partnership Plan phase in early 2027.

- 32.3 The second application was for the UK Community Fund. The Education and Youth teams within the National Parks were working together for a joint application. It followed the success of the Generation Green initiative.
- 32.4 Discussions had taken place to develop the Junior Ranger programme, pathways into green careers and to develop youth voice. These discussions were in their infancy and so had not progressed as far as the Landscapes Connections Initiative, but Fiona Wynne thought it was a good idea to bring it to the Committee at this early stage (with the June Committee date being too late for the submission).

Resolved, that:

the submission of the two applications, as outlined in the report, be supported and that the Authority be delegated to officers to take all action as necessary to submit these bids and, if successful, to complete the projects.

Voting: Unanimous

33. Ranger Strategy – oral report

- 33.1 Nigel Stone explained that the role of the rangers had changed over the years, and they now had a much wider role in engagement, worked with Hampshire County Council rangers, Police, Verderers to mitigate risks, shared the New Forest Code with visitors, cared for the forest, and made sure important messages reached the public. Therefore, Steve Avery and Gillie Molland, the Ranger Services Manager, were drafting a Ranger Strategy report which would be brought to the next Resources, Audit and Performance Committee meeting in June.

34. Any other items that the Chair decides are urgent

None.

In closing the meeting, the Chair thanked members, and all officers for their hard work in preparing the reports.

The meeting closed at 11:45 hours.

Signed
(Chair)

Date.....