

**NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY
MINUTES OF THE RESOURCES, AUDIT AND PERFORMANCE COMMITTEE HELD ON
MONDAY 2 JUNE 2025 AT 10:00 HOURS IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER, LYMINGTON
TOWN HALL, AVENUE ROAD, LYMINGTON**

Present:

Members:

Mary Davies (Chair)
Gordon Bailey (*left the meeting at 12.10 pm*)
David Bence (Deputy Chair)
Barry Dunning
David Harrison
Victoria Mander
Joe Reilly
Ann Sevier
Derek Tipp
Malcolm Wade

Officers:

Alison Barnes	Chief Executive
Nigel Stone	Head of Resources (CFO)
David Stone	Corporate Services Manager and Deputy Monitoring Officer
Hilary Makin	Communications Manager
Jim Mitchell	Access and Learning Manager
John Stride	Net Zero with Nature Programme Manager

Ernst & Young LLP	Simon Mathers and Katie Lean, External Auditors to the Authority
Antony Harvey	Deputy Head of the Southern Internal Audit Partnership and Chief Internal Auditor to the Authority.

35. Apologies for absence

35.1 There were no apologies for absence received on this occasion.

36. Declarations of Interest

36.1 None

37. Chair's announcements

37.1 None

38. Minutes

38.1 The Minutes of the meeting held on 3 March 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

39. Public Question Time

None.

40. Ernst & Young: External Audit Planning Report 2024/25

- 40.1 Simon Mathers (Ernst & Young LLP, External Auditors to the Authority) advised that the purpose of the report was to provide the Committee with the External Auditor's proposed plan for the audit scope and approach for the year ending 31 March 2025 and this approach was consistent with all the relevant legislation.
- 40.2 Katie Lean then referred to salient points in the External Audit Planning Report and drew members' attention to the Public Sector Audit Appointment Limited's Statement of Responsibilities on page 36 of the report which set out what was expected of audited bodies in preparing their financial statements, as well as the timetable on page 30 of the report showing the key stages of the audit and deliverables through the audit cycle. She then responded to various queries raised by members clarifying aspects of the report and audit.

Members then noted the report.

41. Internal Audit Progress Report 2024/25

- 41.1 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 the Chief Internal Auditor's Annual Conclusion for 2024/25.
- 41.2 He drew members' attention to the Annual Conclusion Report for 2024/25, attached to the report as Annex 1, which, in page 6, provided the Chief Internal Auditor's opinion of 'Reasonable' (second highest out of four levels) on the adequacy and effectiveness the Authority's framework of risk management, control and governance processes for the year ending 31 March 2025 and advised that there were no significant issues to bring to the Committee.
- 41.3 Members noted with satisfaction that of the four audits undertaken during the year, two had received a reasonable assurance and two had received a substantial assurance.
- 41.4 Mr Harvey expressed his thanks to Nigel Stone and officers for there assistance during the audit and Mr Stone similarly recorded his thanks to the internal auditors.

Following further brief debate, members noted the report.

42. Year End (Final Quarter) Progress Report 2024/25

- 42.1 Nigel Stone presented the above paper which contained the final quarter progress as to the achievement of actions against the 2024/25 Work Programme.

- 42.2 Referring to the quarterly performance figures, members noted the mitigation against the slight delay in processing some complaints within 20 working days and further noted with appreciation the hard work that was undertaken by the officer concerned, Jo Murphy, in carrying out this work and ensuring that complaints were processed timeously.
- 42.3 Referring to the action on page 4 of the report concerning sustainable transport, Members agreed that contact be made with the recently nationalised South West Trains with a view to working collaboratively with the service in enhancing sustainable transport efforts in the New Forest through the duty in the Levelling-Up and Regeneration Act, including the possibility of a stop in the Ampress area of Lymington which could significantly reduce road traffic usage in this area.
- 42.4 Members discussed progress against other actions in the report including the success in promoting awareness of the New Forest Code, promoting Dark Sky Reserve status for the National Park (progress on which was dependent on further funding) and initiatives around enhancing Biodiversity Net Gain in the New Forest.

43. Financial Outturn and Treasury Management report 2024/25

- 43.1 Nigel Stone introduced the Report which set out the detailed projected outturn position for the Authority for the 2024/25 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. He said that the current report also included the annual report on the Treasury Service and Prudential Indicators for 2024/25.
- 43.2 He highlighted various aspects of the report referring to the draft year end position, anticipated variances set out in paragraphs 2 and 3 and the Authority's draft key reserves. He clarified that a net amount of £26,000 would be added to the Revenue Support Reserve and utilised in 2025-27 as per the budget approval in March 2025.
- 43.3 Members expressed appreciation for the clear and concise format of the report and approved the recommendations therein.

Resolved, that

- 1 the provisional outturn position be noted;**
2 the Treasury Management Stewardship Report and Prudential Indicators 2024/25 in Annex 6 be noted; and
3 the Committee approve the *indicative* transfers to/(from) Reserves in 2024/25 as set out in section 6 and detailed in Annex 5.

Voting: Unanimous

44. Annual Governance Statement 2024/25

- 44.1 David Stone outlined the purpose of the Annual Governance Statement which represented a review of the governance framework for 2024/25 covering a wide range of issues including the decisions making process, constitutional documents, grant funding and budget matters for the year. He said 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.

Resolved, that the Committee approve the Draft Annual Governance Statement for the financial year 2024/25 and that the draft be passed to the External Auditors.

Voting: Unanimous

45. Annual Health and Safety report 2024/25

- 45.1 Nigel Stone advised that, with Steve Avery now having left the Authority, he would be leading the Health and Safety function for the Authority. He added that with the member appointment of the current member representative for Health and Safety (Patrick Heneghan) coming to an end in June, officers would be submitting a report to the July meeting of the Authority on a replacement lead member for Health and Safety.
- 45.2 He drew members' attention to key aspects of the report and, in referring to paragraph 4 (Health and Safety audit), he mentioned that a further independent audit was due to be undertaken by the Health and Safety Team at New Forest District Council in 2026/27.
- 45.3 Mr Stone referred to the sickness statistics for 2024/25, which were slightly up on the previous year, largely due to long term sickness, and in response to a query, advised that officers were working on a clearer set of headings under which sickness absence would be recorded in future. Such a list would require a response and would not contain an option which allowed users not to answer.
- 45.4 He then responded to queries relating to the Employee Assistance Programme and undertook to include in the next staff survey a question on the degree of satisfaction with the programme and whether or not staff would refer the programme to a colleague.

Following brief debate, members noted the report.

46. Active Travel England National Park Capability Fund and Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan update

- 46.1 Jim Mitchell presented the report which provided a summary of work carried out under the Active Travel England's National Park Capability fund, which the Authority received in 2024/25. He said that the report also provided an update on progress of the New Forest Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan, produced by Hampshire County Council as Lead Partner and supported by the New Forest NPA, New Forest District Council, and Forestry England.
- 46.2 He highlighted key aspects of the report, and in referring to LCWIP, advised that this programme would go to Hampshire County Council for approval in September 2025 and thereafter for respective approval to New Forest District Council and the NPA (anticipated final approval in January 2026).

Following further brief discussion, members noted the report.

47. Protected Landscapes Targets and Outcomes Framework

- 47.1 The above report was presented by John Stride who advised that, in 2024, the Protected Landscapes Targets and Outcomes Framework was published by Government. This Framework established 22 targets for Protected Landscapes as places. Protected Landscapes, which included National Parks, were asked by Natural England to calculate their contributions to three of the targets which would need to be agreed by July 2025.
- 47.2 He drew members' attention to paragraph 4 of the report which set out the proposed area targets for the three apportioned targets for the New Forest NPA and other Protected Landscapes (depending on local circumstances). He advised that the Authority was already undertaking and developing work streams to deliver these targets through the current Partnership Plan. The targets would also be included in the revised Partnership Plan when this was reviewed in 2027 and it was intended that all 22 targets set out in Annex 1 of the report would be published on the NPA's website. In this regard Mr Stride drew attention to a typographical error in the recommendation of the report and advised that recommendation 2 should read 22 targets and not 12.
- 47.3 Following discussion, members supported the recommendations set out in the report as amended above.

Resolved, that, the following be approved:

- 1. the proposals for the 3 targets which can be apportioned by individual Protected Landscapes as set out in Section 4 of the report; and**
- 2. the publication on the NPA website of the 22 targets set out in Annex 1 by July 2025.**

Voting: Unanimous

48. Planning for the Future (June 2025)

- 48.1 Nigel Stone presented the report which provided a summary of the projected financial position of the Authority over the next three financial years and the proposed timetable to match resources to requirements to achieve the outcomes of the Partnership Plan and in particular with regard to the Authority's Business Plan.
- 48.2 Mr Stone referred to highlights within the report including the current financial position setting out how the Authority had responded to financial pressures over the last 15 years. He drew members' attention to the forthcoming Comprehensive Spending Review which was due to be presented to Parliament on 11 June 2025 which would set out Defra's, and consequently, the NPA's grant allocation over the next three years which was likely to provide further challenges. He mentioned that Defra had requested the Authority to utilise the capital funding it had received to reduce reliance on Defra revenue grants. However, it was likely to be some time before these capital investments generated income savings and Defra had not yet confirmed whether it would provide capital funding for the NPA's office needs and other capital funding requirements.
- 48.3 Mr Stone referred to the table in paragraph 3.2 of the report which set out the NPA's funding shortfall to 2028/29 and preliminary assumptions in paragraph 3.4 and areas for consideration in paragraph 3.5.

48.4 He proposed that the Finance and Facilities Task and Finish Group continue for a further six months to consider emerging financial pressures and opportunities. Members discussed the work of the Task and Finish Group with some members suggesting the possibility of creating a sub-group of the main Group to consider facilities specifically. It was agreed to give consideration to this possibility at the next meeting of the T & F Group.

Resolved, that this Committee approve the proposed plan, including the extension of the Finance and Facilities Task & Finish Group for a further six months.

Voting: Unanimous

49. Any other items that the Chair decides are urgent

None.

On closing the meeting, the Chair extended thanks to Officers, Members and Speakers for their hard work and reports.

The meeting then closed at 13:22 hours.

Signed
(Chair)

Date.....