

NFNPA RAPC 597/26

NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

RESOURCES, AUDIT AND PERFORMANCE COMMITTEE MEETING – 1 JUNE 2026

BUDGET AND GOVERNANCE UPDATE 2026/27

Report by: Nigel Stone, Head of Resources / Chief Finance Officer and Gareth Hale, Monitoring Officer

Summary:

This paper will give members of the Committee an update on the Authority's Budget for 2026/27 and our initial proposals around a review of planning governance.

1. Budget Update 2026/27

- 1.1. Following the 2026/27 Budget being approved by members at the Authority meeting in March, both the capital grant and revenue uplift have been confirmed by Defra. As a result, officers will have to present an updated Budget paper to the Authority in July; below is the current proposals from Officers.
- 1.2 The 2026/27 capital core grant has been confirmed as £1,406,722. It is proposed that this is used to fund (all figures estimated at present):
 - £420k – Foxlease, development of two properties ready for rental
 - £80k – Completion of website microsites and ICT replacement & renewals
 - £900k – Purchase of properties for main office, 30x30 and/or income generation.
- 1.3 The 2026/27 one-off revenue uplift has been confirmed as £1,720,000. It is proposed that this is used to fund (all figures estimated at present):
 - £1.1m – Offsetting existing earned income for 2026/27 to enable funds to be set aside in a Financial Stability Reserve for future years.
 - £175k – Develop baselines and evidence-based support for the new Partnership Plan development (place shaping)
 - £100k – Complete remaining 'Green Links' studies and develop project list from the existing Waterside study
 - £100k – Extend staff on short-term contracts ending in 2026/27 until end of the year, using this additional resource to develop strategic objectives in their teams
 - £90k – Procure consultancy support for a full Income Generation Strategy
 - £40k – Procure consultancy support for an Organisational Development Strategy (delivered via our People Plan)
 - £40k – Investment in Learning & Development (Staff and Members)
 - £75k – Added to 2026/27 Programme Fund to be allocated in-year.

2. Governance Update 2026/27

- 2.1 Following the recent Court of Appeal judgment, the Authority has initially determined a need to undertake a review of its planning governance documents and position to determine if there are any weaknesses relating to issues raised in the judgment and to address the findings. The issues arising from the judgment are summarised below;

In 2008 the Authority granted a certificate of lawful use to a landowner in terms that appeared to be broader than applied for, or that there was evidence of (with some of the documentation being lost or destroyed).

In reaching its decision to revoke the above certificate, the Court of Appeal found apparent bias in the actions of a senior planning officer preparing the report to Authority which the court determined unfairly impacted the impartiality of the decision making process.

- 2.2 In order to review the Authority's position going forward, and to seek to avoid similar issues from arising, it is necessary to review our governance arrangements for any weaknesses and to propose actions to address the findings.
- 2.3 The scope of the governance review is suggested below;

Review the vision and underpinning culture of the planning functions.

Review the Authority's Scheme of Delegations, with particular focus on the granting and revocation of lawful use certificates and the processes, including comparing constitutional documents from other National Park Authorities.

Review the Authority's policy entitled 'Protocol for Members and Officers dealing with Planning matters', with particular focus on officers acting impartially and recording/declaring approaches from the public in relation to Authority decision making. Nationally the Government intends to make training for Planning Committee members mandatory (see [Reform of planning committees: technical consultation - GOV.UK](#)) and this is a positive opportunity to further drive standards.

Review the Authority's retention of documents and planning systems / processes.

Review the management structure/oversight of staff decision making. The Government continues to advocate delegation to officers for the vast majority of planning decisions (see [Planning Committees and the National Scheme of Delegation of Planning Functions: Draft guidance for Local Planning Authorities in England - GOV.UK](#) for example); and the New Forest National Park Authority's existing scheme of delegation involves more member oversight and input than many other planning authorities. To support this oversight, we intend to instigate regular senior management planning meetings to involve senior planning staff, Monitoring Officer and the Authority's Executive Leadership Team to further ensure collective input into and accountability for our statutory planning functions.

Review the interface and engagement with external individuals, stakeholders and/or partners.

Review the resources of the planning functions.

Recommendation:

Members are requested to:

- 1 Recommend the suggested 2026/27 Budget updates, as set out in section 1, to the next Authority meeting in July**
- 2 Discuss, amending as necessary, and support the planning governance review proposals**

Contact: Nigel Stone, nigel.stone@newforestnpa.gov.uk

Previous papers: AM 735/26 Budget 2026/27