NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY
MINUTES OF THE RESOURCES, AUDIT AND PERFORMANCE COMMITTEE HELD ON MONDAY 1 JUNE 2026 AT 10:00 HOURS IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER, APPLETREE COURT, BEAULIEU ROAD, LYNDHURST

Present:
Members:
Gordon Bailey (left at 11:58)
Mary Davies (Chair)
David Harrison
Victoria Mander
Adarsh Parekh
Joe Reilly
Ann Sevier
Derek Tipp

Officers:

Paul Walton	Head of Environment and Rural Economy
Nigel Stone	Head of Resources (CFO)
Gareth Hale	Solicitor and Monitoring Officer
David Illsley	Interim Head of Planning and Place
Vicki Gibbon	Member Services Administrator
In attendance	Simon Mathers & Rumana Rafiq Ullah - Ernst & Young Antony Harvey - Southern Internal Audit Partnership

38. Apologies for absence

38.1 Apologies for absence were received from Alison Barnes and Brice Stratford.

39. Declarations of Interest

39.1 None.

40. Chair's announcements

40.1 The Chair expressed her appreciation to Frances Connolly for her years of service in minute-taking.

The Chair informed the Committee that, as a result of local elections, Malcolm Wade had ceased to be a member of the Authority, resulting in a vacancy in the position of Deputy Chair of RAPC. As a result, a Deputy Chair would be required until the Annual Authority Meeting in October 2026. Adarsh Parekh was proposed and seconded for this position and will serve as Deputy Chair of the Committee until the Authority Meeting in October.

Resolved, that Adarsh Parekh be appointed Deputy Chair of the Resources, Audit and Performance Committee until the Authority Meeting in October 2026.
Voting: Unanimous

41. Minutes

41.1 The minutes of the meeting held on 2 March 2026 were agreed as a true and accurate record.

Resolved, that the minutes of the meeting held on 2 March 2026 be confirmed as a correct record.
Voting: Unanimous

42. Public Question Time

42.1 None.

43. Ernst & Young – External Planning Report 2025/26 (RAPC 591-26)

43.1 Simon Mathers explained that the purpose of his report was to provide the Committee with the External Auditor's proposed plan for the audit scope for the year ending 31 March 2026.

43.2 Mr Mathers drew members attention to several sections of report, giving members the opportunity to ask questions afterwards. Members then endorsed the recommendation as detailed below.

Resolved, that Members approve the External Audit Plan for 2025/26
Voting: 7:0, 1 abstention

44. Internal Audit Annual Conclusion 2025/26 (RAPC 592-26)

44.1 Antony Harvey explained that the purpose of his report was to provide the Committee with the Chief Internal Auditor's Annual Conclusion on the adequacy and effectiveness of the Authority's framework of risk management, control and governance processes for the year ending March 2026.

44.2 Mr Harvey drew members attention to page 6 of Annex 1, which sets out the Internal Audit Conclusion. He confirmed that, in his view, this represents a positive and clear report, and he expressed his appreciation to all those who contributed to its delivery.

Resolved, that Members note the Internal Audit Annual Conclusion for 2025/26
Voting: Unanimous

45. Final Quarter Progress Report 2025/26 (RAPC 593-26)

45.1 Nigel Stone introduced his report advising that this was the fourth quarter (January – March) progress against the 2025/26 work programme. He then went through the report page by page allowing members to comment, question and discuss.

45.2 In relation to the Key Performance Indicators, it was noted that the Enforcement section were not currently available due to the team's current workload. Members requested that the teams' figures be amended in future, showing both the number of cases received and the number resolved. It was also highlighted that member attendance remains below the annual target, and members were encouraged to attend as many meetings as possible.

45.3 Members then noted the report.

Resolved, Members note the contents of the report and following discussion, agree to any management action

Voting: Unanimous

46. Financial Outturn and Treasury Report 2025/26 (RAPC 594-26)

46.1 Nigel Stone advised members that the report set out the detailed projected outturn position for the Authority for the 2025/26 financial year. He explained that this would subsequently be incorporated into the annual financial report, which would be subject to audit and presented to the Authority for consideration and approval. Mr Stone briefly guided members through the report, highlighting key points of interest, before inviting them to endorse the recommendations.

Resolved, that Members

1. note the provisional outturn position;
2. note the Treasury Management Stewardship Report and Prudential Indicators 2025/26 in Annex 6 of report RAPC 594/26; and
3. approve the indicative transfers to / (from) Reserves in 2025/26 as set out in section 6 and detailed in Annex 5 of report RAPC 594/26.

Voting: Unanimous

47. Annual Governance Statement 2025/26 (RAPC 595-26)

47.1 Nigel Stone opened his report by advising members that the Annual Governance Statement was required to be submitted to the External Auditors alongside the draft Financial Report for the year. Both documents would then be subject to the usual audit process and any necessary amendments, with the finalised versions to be presented to the full Authority meeting in October 2026 for formal approval.

Members agreed to resolve the recommendation as detailed below.

Resolved, that Members approve the Draft Annual Governance Statement for the financial year 2025/26 and that the draft is passed to the External Auditors.

Voting: Unanimous

48. Annual Health & Safety Report 2025/26 (RAPC 596-26)

48.1 Nigel Stone introduced his report, advising that Committee members have responsibility for monitoring the Authority's Health and Safety Policy. The purpose of the report was to update members on how the Authority had discharged its Health and Safety duties over the past year. He noted that David Stone was now the principal day-to-day contact for Health and Safety matters, with David Harrison serving as the Authority's Lead Member.

48.2 Mr Stone provided an overview of the report, highlighting several key areas of interest. These included the introduction of an updated risk assessment template and training, intended to provide greater consistency and continuity for staff. He also noted that stress, depression, and neurological conditions represent a significant proportion of sickness absence. It was proposed that further analysis be undertaken in future to better understand whether the underlying causes of stress and depression were work-related or personal, in order to inform appropriate support and interventions.

Following discussion, Members requested that the sickness data be further disaggregated and categorised to provide a more comprehensive understanding.

Members noted the report.

49. Budget & Governance Update (RAPC 597-26)

49.1 Nigel Stone advised the Committee that, following approval of the 2026/27 budget by members at the Authority Meeting in March 2026, both the capital grant and one-off revenue uplift had now been confirmed by Defra. An updated budget would be presented to members at the Authority Meeting in July 2026. He explained that this report detailed the current proposals from Officers.

49.2 Mr Stone provided a brief overview of the report, highlighting that the capital core grant had been confirmed at £1,406,722 and the one-off revenue uplift at £1,720,000 for the 2026/27 financial year. He detailed the current spending plans for these funding pots as set out in the report, whilst highlighting the pressure from the late notice of the figures from Defra and short timescale to fully utilise the funds before March 2027.

49.3 Gareth Hale provided a Governance Update, advising the Committee that, particularly following a recent Court of Appeal judgment, Officers were proposing that a review of its planning governance documents and arrangements was required. This review will assess whether any weaknesses had been identified in recent experiences and ensure that any relevant findings were addressed.

49.4 Mr Hale outlined the proposed scope of the governance review, which would include: consideration of the vision and underlying principles of the Authority's planning functions; a review of the Authority's Scheme of Delegations, with particular focus on the granting and revocation of lawful use certificates; a review of the "Protocol for Members and Officers dealing with planning matters" policy; a review of the Authority's retention schedule; and an assessment of the management structure and oversight of the decision-making processes. Officers will approach the Planning Advisory Service to seek their support and benchmarking data to assist with elements of the review.

49.5 Following discussion, during which Members' comments and suggestions were noted by the Solicitor and Monitoring Officer, the Committee unanimously agreed to approve the recommendation as set out below.

Resolved, that

1. the suggested 2026/27 Budget updates, as set out in section 1 of report RAPC 597/26 be recommended to the Authority meeting in July 2026, and that

2. Members support the planning governance review proposals to include the amendments proposed by Members.

Voting: Unanimous

50. Landscape Connections Update (RAPC 598-26)

50.1 Paul Walton introduced the report, reminding members that the Authority was currently leading on a bid to the National Lottery Heritage Fund's Landscape Connections Strategic Initiative. He noted that, following the submission and subsequent approval of an Expression of Interest in December 2025, the Authority was now in a position to submit a formal bid / application in September 2026. Subject to approval, a final decision would be expected in December 2026, with the initial development phase anticipated to commence in January 2027. Should this timetable slip to the following lottery approval window, these dates would all move to around three months later.

50.2 Mr Walton advised that Members would be kept informed throughout the development of the bid. He also confirmed that Mary Davies and Adarsh Parekh have been asked to support engagement activities with Members as part of the bidding process.

Members noted the report.

51. Any other items that the Chair decides are urgent

51.1 There were no further items.

On closing the meeting, the Chair thanked officers, teams and members for their input into reports and debate at the meeting.

The meeting closed at 12:50 hours.

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