

**NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY
MINUTES OF THE RESOURCES, AUDIT AND PERFORMANCE COMMITTEE HELD ON
MONDAY 7 SEPTEMBER 2026 AT 10:00 HOURS IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER,
LYMINGTON TOWN HALL, AVENUE ROAD, LYMINGTON SO41 9ZG**

Present:

Members:

Gordon Bailey (left at 12pm)
Fran Carpenter (arrived at 11am)
Mary Davies (Chair)
Jack Davies
David Harrison
Adarsh Parekh (Deputy Chair)
Joe Reilly
Derek Tipp

Officers:

Alison Barnes	Chief Executive
Paul Walton	Director of Partnerships & Delivery
Nigel Stone	Director of Resources & Operations
Gareth Hale	Solicitor and Monitoring Officer
David Illsley	Head of Planning and Place
Jim Mitchell	Access & Learning Manager
Hilary Makin	Communications Manager
Vicki Gibbon	Member Services Administrator

In attendance Simon Mathers - Ernst & Young

52. Apologies for absence

52.1 Apologies for absence were received from Victoria Mander, Ann Sevier and Brice Stratford

53. Declarations of Interest

53.1 None.

54. Chair's announcements

54.1 The Chair welcomed Fran Carpenter and Jack Davies to the meeting as new members.

55. Minutes

55.1 The minutes of the meeting held on 1 June 2026 were agreed as a true and accurate record.

Resolved, that the minutes of the meeting held on 1 June 2026 be confirmed as a correct record.

Voting: Unanimous

56. Public Question Time

56.1 None.

57. Ernst & Young – External Audit – Rebuilding Audit Assurance (RAPC 599-26)

- 57.1 Simon Mathers provided a brief overview of his report, explaining that its purpose was to update the Committee on the proposed plans to rebuild audit assurance. He advised that, due to a number of national challenges affecting the wider audit sector, many local authorities did not receive a full audit by the end of the 2022/23 financial year. The Government had issued a framework and guidance to support both local authorities and their auditors in restoring assurance and returning to full audit opinions. Procedures had now been completed in response to the 2022/23 disclaimed audit opinion and in accordance with the National Audit Office's Local Authority Reset and Recovery Implementation Guidance. Mr Mathers drew Members' attention to several sections of the report and invited them to note the External Audit Plan for rebuilding assurance.
- 57.2 Nigel Stone thanked Simon Mathers and his team for their work and emphasised to Members that the issues identified were not attributable to the Authority but reflected wider challenges affecting local government audit arrangements nationally.

Resolved, that

Members note the External Audit Plan for rebuilding audit assurance

Voting: Unanimous

58. First Quarter Progress Report on the Work Programme 2026/27 (RAPC 600-26)

- 58.1 Nigel Stone began his report by reminding members that this was the first quarter progress report for April – June 2026 and was set against the 2026/27 Work Programme. He then proceeded to run through the document page by page.
- 58.2 Beginning on page 5 of the report, Key Performance Indicators he explained that there were some figures missing which should read –
% of planning decisions delegated to officers – 97%
% of planning applications approved – 90%

Mr Stone invited David Illsley to provide a brief update on planning matters.

Mr Illsley advised that the KPI for the Quality of Major Development Applications (% Overturned at Appeal) was currently recorded at 100%. This was attributable to the Authority having had only one major planning application during the reporting period that had gone to appeal, which was subsequently allowed on appeal.

He also provided an update on enforcement activity, advising Members that there were currently circa 130 live enforcement cases, representing a reduction since the previous report due to the hard work for the Enforcement team. Mr Illsley noted that further enforcement performance statistics would be provided to Members once the latest information had been received from the team.

A question was raised regarding the proposed national changes to Planning Committees being introduced by the Government. In response, Mr Illsley explained that, from 1 November 2026, generally only major applications would be considered by local authority Planning Committees, with all other applications delegated to officers. However, National Park Authorities has successfully lobbied for an exemption from these changes and NPA Planning Committees will continue to determine relevant planning applications in accordance with existing delegation arrangements.

- 58.3 Continuing on KPI's on page 6 of the report the Chair drew Members' attention to the indicator relating to Member participation in meetings, which remained below the annual target. The Chair emphasised the importance of Members taking their responsibilities seriously, noting that low attendance at meetings could limit the breadth of discussion and debate and impact the effectiveness of decision-making. In response, Mr Stone advised that the figures were affected by the fact that one Member was currently on long-term sick leave. He also noted that the indicator reflected attendance at statutory meetings only and did not capture the considerable additional work undertaken by Members outside of formal committee meetings.
- 58.4 Moving on to the first quarter of the Annual Work Programme 2026/27 Mr Stone again went through page-by-page asking members for any questions or comments.

Page 4 of the report, the Chair commented that the RAG status was green and asked if that confirmed that targets had been met. Mr Stone responded that yes targets had been met in year 1. The Chair asked to have added contextual text to be included – for example in section Particular Points to note – current status of challenging / positive impacts.

A question was raised regarding the recent wildfire incident and its impact on the land and wider environment.

In response, Ms Barnes, Chief Executive, advised that the wildfire had been both significant and severe in its impact. She noted that it was likely to take many decades for the affected area to fully recover. However, she explained that comparisons could be drawn with a previous wildfire in 1989, from which valuable lessons had been learned and could be applied to current recovery efforts.

Ms Barnes further advised that the Authority was working with other National Park Authorities to review and strengthen wildfire response arrangements. This work would form part of the wider Partnership Plans and help inform future approaches to wildfire prevention, preparedness and recovery.

A question was raised regarding the National Park boundary and if this could now be reviewed following its original confirmation in 2005 through the New Forest National Park Designation Order.

David Illsley responded that it is only the Government who can initiate a review of National Park boundaries. Such a review falls within the remit of Natural England and would require an assessment against the relevant designation criteria. The Government undertook this process in the Lake District and Yorkshire Dales National

Parks just over a decade ago. It was agreed that a further discussion would take place to investigate this.

- 58.5 Referring to page 10 of the report, Paul Walton advised that the RAG status for Green Halo should be amended to Amber, while the RAG status for New Forest Produce should be amended to Green.

Mr Walton explained that it had been challenging to progress work with Green Halo in recent months. However, he advised that a conference was scheduled to take place in March 2027, which would provide an opportunity to strengthen engagement and collaboration. He emphasised the importance of maintaining the partnership, as it played a valuable role in demonstrating the significance of the National Park and the wider local environment.

- 58.6 Referring to page 16 of the report, a question was raised regarding the number of Local Authority representatives that would serve on the National Park Authority Board following the implementation of Local Government Reorganisation.

In response, it was advised that the Authority had not yet received any information regarding the future composition of the Board and, therefore, the number of Local Authority representatives remained unknown. Members were also informed that the Authority had not been advised whether it would have representation on the proposed Hampshire Combined Mayoral Authority.

A proposal was made that Members of the RAPC request the Chair of the Authority write to the appropriate government minister requesting that the New Forest National Park Authority be formally represented by having a seat on the new Hampshire Combined Mayoral Authority; and to also seek clarification and confirmation on how the proposed new unitary authorities in Hampshire would appoint members onto the National Park Authority. This was duly seconded and voted unanimously by members.

Resolved, that

Members note the contents of the report and following discussion agree to any necessary management action.

Voting: Unanimous

59. April – July Budgetary Control Report 2026/27 (RAPC 601-26)

- 59.1 Nigel Stone advised that his report provided a summary of the Authority's financial performance for the first four months of the 2026/27 financial year. The report also outlined potential budget variances and the measures being taken to address them.

Mr Stone highlighted several key sections of the report, including the current financial position, the general budget analysis, the treasury management position, and progress on capital projects. He invited questions from Members and subsequently asked them to note the report.

Resolved, that

Members note the current income and expenditure position, including the potential savings and pressures identified.

Voting: Unanimous

60. Risk Register (RAPC 602-26)

60.1 Nigel Stone provided a brief overview of the updated Risk Register, highlighting that several risk ratings had increased following the wildfire incident, while others had decreased. He explained that these amendments were identified in italics within Report No. 602/26. He then invited members of the Committee to consider whether any additional risks should be included in the Register.

60.2 Following discussion, it was requested that a risk relating to Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) and the associated challenges and uncertainties be added to the Risk Register. Members also requested further information regarding any land acquisitions and the potential risks associated with such purchases.

Resolved, that

Members note the updated Risk Register

Voting: Unanimous

61. Grant Funding Update (RAPC 603-26)

61.1 Jim Mitchell, Access & Learning Manager began his report by advising members that the Authority had a strong track record of securing grants to deliver the Partnership Plan work, he explained that this report provided an update on several key grant funding initiatives and requested members approval for future grant funding opportunities.

61.2 Mr Mitchell then provided an overview of the various funding programmes detailed within the report, including the Landscape Connections proposal, the YouCan Programme, which had now concluded, the Local Enterprise Partnership Legacy Fund, and the Landscapes Enhancement Initiative. He outlined the purpose and current status of each programme before inviting Members to endorse the recommendations set out below.

Resolved, that members

(i) note the contents of the updated report; and

(ii) approve the continuing programme of applications to the National Grid to support the current and future Partnership Plan and Work Programme

Voting: Unanimous

62. Any other items that the Chair decides are urgent

62.1 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.

Part I of the meeting closed at 12:25 hours.

PART II

Members were asked to resolve that the public be excluded from the meeting during the following item of business, as it was likely, in view of the nature of the business to be transacted or the nature of the proceedings, that if members of the public were present during this item, there would be disclosure to them of exempt information within Paragraph 3, Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972, and further that in all the circumstances of the case, the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information, namely the need to avoid disclosing sensitive information relating to the Authority’s financial and business affairs.

Members Unanimously agreed to begin Part II of the meeting

62 Capital and Major Projects Update

62.1 This item was heard in Part II of the meeting and was therefore minuted as such in accordance with the Authority’s Standing Orders

SignedDate.....
(Chair)