

NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE RESOURCES, AUDIT AND PERFORMANCE COMMITTEE HELD ON MONDAY 7 DECEMBER 2015 AT 10:00 HOURS IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER, LYMINGTON TOWN HALL, AVENUE ROAD, LYMINGTON

Present:

Members:

Gordon Bailey
Oliver Crosthwaite-Eyre
Richard Frampton
David Harrison (Chairman)
John Pemberton
John Sanger
Marian Spain (Deputy Chairman)

Officers:

Alison Barnes	Chief Executive Officer
Steve Avery	Executive Director Strategy and Planning
Julia Mutlow	Senior Solicitor and Monitoring Officer
Nigel Matthews	Head of Recreation Management and Learning
Paul Walton	Head of Environment and Rural Economy
David Stone	Corporate Services Manager
Nigel Stone	Finance and Performance Manager
Jo Murphy	Information and Data Protection Officer
Frances Connolly	Executive Assistant

Also in attendance:

Glenda Chambers Principal Auditor, New Forest District Council

16. Apologies for absence

16.1 An apology for absence was received from Edward Heron.

17 Declarations of Interest

17.1 Richard Frampton declared a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest in minute item 31 Bransgore Affordable Housing Update and accordingly withdrew from the meeting for this item.

18 Chairman's announcements

18.1 There were no announcements on this occasion.

19 Minutes

19.1 Steve Avery gave the Committee an oral update on the action point arising from minute item 8.2. He informed Members that between 1 April and 1 November 2015 the New Forest National Park Authority (NPA) had determined 461 planning

applications, of which 38 were overtime and of these 13 (2.8% of the total) had taken between three and six months to determine. He explained that the majority of the delays were owing to negotiations taking place between the applicants and the NPA with regards to Section 106 Agreements. Mr Avery drew Members' attention to the Half Year Progress Report which contained the Development Control KPIs and stated that where applications missed the 8 week deadline the average additional time taken was 13.8 days. He agreed to prepare a short report with further details for the meeting on 1 February 2016.

Action: Steve Avery to prepare a report with details of planning applications that had not been determined within three months of the application date.

- 19.2 Members were informed that the New Forest Marque Business Plan was still being developed and that it would be circulated to the Committee once completed. John Sanger reminded the Committee that the NF Marque was now managed by volunteers from the member businesses and that there was limited resource to input into this process.
- 19.3 The minutes of the meeting on 7 September 2015 were agreed as a correct record of the meeting.

Resolved, that the minutes of the meeting held on 7 September 2015 be confirmed as a correct record.

Voting: none voting against

20 Public Question Time

- 20.1 There were no questions or statements from the public.

21 Ernst and Young Annual Audit Letter

- 21.1 Nigel Stone introduced the report and explained that the information was a summary of earlier reports that had been previously presented to the Committee at the June and September meetings. He reminded Members that Helen Thompson had now stepped down as engagement lead for the NPA and that Kate Handy would be her replacement and would be introduced to Members at the February meeting. Nigel Stone informed the Committee that Alison Barnes would be sending Ms Thompson a letter of thanks.
- 21.2 Mr Stone informed Members that the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) had released updated terms of reference to reflect good practice for audit committees. He explained that under the Scheme of Delegations Julia Mutlow, the NPA's Monitoring Officer, could amend the terms of reference in consultation with the Chairman, to ensure that the wording was aligned to the new guidance. He explained that one new recommendation was that a report should be written annually to the full Authority on the Committee's performance; covering areas such as whether the Committee was the correct size and whether Members had the requisite skills and knowledge to carry out its functions. In regard to how this report was drafted, and by whom, the Chairman asked Nigel Stone to investigate what actions other authorities were taking to comply with the new requirements.

Action: Nigel Stone to investigate what actions other authorities were taking to comply with the new guidance.

21.3 Members accepted the letter on behalf of the Authority.

22 Internal Audit Plan Progress Report 2015-16

22.1 Glenda Chambers introduced herself as Lucinda Upton's replacement and then drew Members' attention to progress on the Audit Plan. She explained that a couple of audits had moved from Q2 to Q4 due to staff changes, but all were on target. She also explained that some audits had been completed ahead of schedule, such as the IT Controls and General Ledger Audits. Ms Chambers confirmed that there were no significant audit issues to report.

22.2 One member requested that more information be included in the additional comments column in order to understand the outcome of completed audits and the nature of any recommendations. Ms Chambers confirmed that she would be happy to provide this for future reports.

Actions: Ms Chambers to provide a summary of the audit outcomes in the comments column on future reports.

22.3. Members noted the report.

23 Half-Year Progress Report 2015-16

23.1 David Stone presented this report. He informed members that where projects were flagged as amber or red in the Business Plan that the risks and mitigation column had been completed to give more detail.

23.2 It was pointed out that under the local indicators for 'Protect' the target to support 25 young commoners had been achieved in Q1 and that it was disappointing that given the early achievement of this target that greater numbers were not now being seen in Q2. Alison Barnes explained that the Land Advice Team had been very busy assisting Commoners to access new schemes and grants to which they were entitled.

23.3 Members praised those responsible for the high volume of face-to-face contacts made in Q2 (Education team, Rangers, Concierge etc.). Members debated the issues around the loss of back-up grazing land under 'Protect'. Steve Avery informed members that as part of the Local Plan update, the policy to look at that specific issue was being reviewed. He reassured Members that commoning would be a key subject for the Local Plan review, and would take into account comments received during the consultation process. The Chairman confirmed there was no need to take any specific action at this time.

23.4 One Member asked how the tranquillity map was being used and it was suggested that Parishes needed to be aware of the areas of tranquillity in order to inform their decision making. Alison Barnes suggested that recreation management and how it fits

with tranquillity would be a good session for a future Members' Day for further discussion on the matter.

- 23.5 Members debated the current LiDar exhibition at the New Forest Centre. One member was concerned that there was no way of establishing attendance figures. Another member believed that there was a counting mechanism on the exhibition entrance and that numbers were very high. Paul Walton said that he believed that the LiDar exhibition was a success, as over 7,000 visitors attended the exhibition, however it was accepted that dwell time in the exhibition could not be established from these figures.

Action: Paul Walton to provide visitor numbers to the LiDar exhibition and clarify how attendance is captured.

- 23.6 In respect of the 'Prosper' work programme, Members congratulated Alison Barnes for her involvement with the M3 LEP Rural Group meeting in September. She informed Members that she had invited the Rural LEP Board to the New Forest for their next meeting in January to coincide with the NPA Local Plan Review. She was also pleased to inform Members that the Local Sustainable Transport Fund (LSTF) had been awarded a further £500 million and that we were awaiting details of the application process.

- 23.7 One member raised concerns about the Ecology SLA that the NPA had with NFDC. He asked if officers were overstretched and whether this had impacted on core NPA work. Alison Barnes said that the SLA was working well and that any impact on the Business Plan was being monitored. The Chairman then asked about the Corporate Partnership Officer post, as the report indicated that the officer will be leaving the Authority in December. Alison Barnes explained that at the present time there was no plan to replace the post like-for-like; however that existing contacts and relationships would be followed up by the relevant teams and that Mark Holroyd, through his involvement with potential sponsorship at national level would also be taking this initiative forward.

- 23.8 Members asked that the details of the three community projects currently being worked with and identified on page 9 of Prosper could be supplied by way of the minutes.

Action: Fiona Wynne to identify which three community projects were referred to in the report.

- 23.9 Members noted the report.

24 Half-Year Budgetary Control Report (including Treasury Performance Report) 2015-16

- 24.1 Nigel Stone introduced the report reminding Members that the half year report also included the Treasury Performance Report. He drew Members' attention to paragraphs 2.2 and 2.3 of the report, containing the overall income and expenditure positions, which clearly showed the headline figures were on-track.

- 24.2 Mr Stone reminded Members that Planning Fee income had been £30,000 ahead of expectations at the end of the first quarter, however this figure had now reduced to £23,000. He said that it was estimated that the additional income for the year would be in the range of £20-£50,000. Mr Stone was pleased to inform the Committee that a further payment had been received from the Icelandic Bank in August, and that the total that had now been paid was £507,000, meaning that the NPA had now recovered more than its initial investment and 98% of the total investment (including the expected interest).
- 24.3 Nigel Stone explained that the salary budget allowed a 2% provision for vacancies arising during the year, and that this budget was now estimated to be approximately £10,000 'overspent', however it would be closely monitored throughout the remainder of the financial year.
- 24.4 Members raised questions about the budgets that were currently 'underspent'. In particular it was noted that the Sustainable Communities Fund still had over £100,000 of funding to pay out. Members were reminded that there is often a time delay between the funds being allocated to projects and it being claimed.

Action: Fiona Wynne to provide reassurance to the Committee that this budget was on track and a summary of how the funds will be drawn down.

- 24.5 Oliver Crosthwaite-Eyre noted that all the New Forest Family Cycling Experiences projects were completed within the timescales and that the Department for Transport grant had been fully utilised. He wished to pass on his congratulations to the staff for this achievement.
- 24.6 Alison Barnes clarified that Bob Jackson was still the Chief Finance Officer (CFO) for the National Park, despite his new role as Chief Executive at New Forest District Council (NFDC). She confirmed that we are looking at keeping the Service Level Agreement with NFDC but it was not clear yet how the CFO function would be discharged.

Resolved, that

- 1 the current income and expenditure position, including the potential savings, pressures and issues identified in the report be noted, and**
- 2 the performance of the treasury management function for the period from 1 April to 30 September 2015 be noted.**

Voting: none voting against

25 Task and Finish Group Update

- 25.1 Nigel Stone drew Members' attention to Annex 2 of the report which contained the proposed agenda for the Members' Day on 10 December which would consider the recent Comprehensive Spending Review announcement and its impact on the NPA budget. He also reminded Members that the Task and Finish Group had been set up two years ago to consider the finances for the period ending March 2016. He commented that although the NPA were not facing further budget reductions there was still a need to ensure that money was spent efficiently and there was still pressure on the budget from inflation and rising staff costs, owing to pay awards, automatic scale point rises and increased National Insurance contributions.

25.2 Alison Barnes reminded Members that at this time it was not clear whether the NPA's grant would be increased in line with inflation and that the exact figure would be announced in January 2016. Members debated whether a new Task and Finish Group should be formed at this time. It was agreed to wait until the full grant details were known before deciding whether a new Task and Finish Group was required.

25.3 Members noted the report.

26 Review of Risk Management Strategy and Risk Log

26.1 David Stone introduced the report to Members, explaining that in accordance with the recommendations of the annual audit results report for 2014/15, officers had significantly reviewed and updated the Authority's Risk Management Strategy and corporate risk log to align with the Business Plan under Protect, Enjoy and Prosper.

26.2 He mentioned that the broader corporate risks such as funding, staff, IT and Data Protection have been retained in the log under their original headings as these cut across all activities of the Authority. The log would be considered at all meetings of the Executive Board and every six months by the Resources, Audit and Performance Committee.

26.3 Operational risk was also linked to the Business Plan through the risk included in the quarterly progress reports on the annual work programme. Progress reports would be considered quarterly by the Executive Board and Resources, Audit and Performance Committee.

26.4 He advised that the Risk Management Strategy and revised logs have been supported by Executive Board and discussed with Ernst and Young who have raised no issues other than to suggest that provision be made in a future internal audit plan to assess the effectiveness of the new procedures.

Resolved, that the updated and revised Risk Management Strategy and the process for logging and mitigating corporate and operational risk as described in the report be approved.

Voting: none voting against

27 Any other items that the Chairman decides are urgent

27.1 There were no urgent items on this occasion.

28 Date of next meeting

28.1 Members noted that the next meeting of the Committee would be held on Monday 1 February 2016 at 10.00 hours at Lymington Town Hall.

PART II ITEMS WHICH MAY BE TAKEN IN THE ABSENCE OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC ON THE GROUNDS THAT EXEMPTED INFORMATION MAY BE DISCLOSED

Resolved, that the public be excluded from the meeting during the following item of business, as it is 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 of 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 affairs

30 Establishing National Parks’ Partnerships

30.1 Members considered a report on Establishing National Parks’ Partnership (this is a summary of a minute that contains exempt information).

31 Bransgore Affordable Housing Update

31.1 Members considered a report on a Bransgore Affordable Housing Update (this is a summary of a minute that contains exempt information).

The meeting closed at 12.35 hours

SignedDate.....
(Chairman)