

**Minutes of the
FINANCIAL & REGULATORY COMMITTEE MEETING OF THE
BOARD OF CONSERVATORS OF ASHDOWN FOREST**

Monday 14 June 2021

14.00 via MS Teams

Committee members present: Mr C de Mestre (Chairman), Cllr. Roundell, Mr AG Reid, Mrs R St. Pierre

Ex-Officio Mr C Smith, Ms S McAll

Also present: Mr J Adler (CEO) Mrs K Dirs (Clerk), Mr R Stogdon and Mrs S Tidy

Minutes taken by the Clerk

There were no members of the public present

		Action
14/21	Apologies Apologies were received from John Spicer	
15/21	Declarations of interest by Members of a Personal or Prejudicial Nature Mr de Mestre declared he is a commoner grazier and receives the BPS payment	
16/21	Matters Arising There were none	
17/21	<p>Finance</p> <p><i>17.01/21 – RPA Payment</i> The CEO advised the Conservators had received a sum of £366k from the RPA, but the remainder of the grant was being withheld whilst the eligibility disagreement in relation to disputed land parcels was contested. The CEO explained he had submitted a fourth complaint and that Natural England have stepped in to assist with the claim. The CEO advised that if the matter was not resolved, other courses of action, including escalation to the Secretary of State were available. ACTION: JA</p> <p><i>17.02/21 2021/22 Budget Adjustment post restructure</i> The Chairman advised that the 2021/22 budget had been prepared before the full outcome of the restructure had been finalised. Accordingly, an adjustment to operational expenses included a deferred pension liability extending to 2023/24. Budgeted staff costs were £36k lower than previously estimated and restructuring costs were £7k higher.</p> <p>The Chairman reported the Covid-19 relief grant of £70k had been received from ESCC and a surplus for the 2020/21 FY of £36K was recorded on the Core budget, compared to a forecasted deficit of £70k.</p> <p><i>17.03/21 To receive a copy of the Asset Register</i> The Committee acknowledged the asset register and the Chairman reminded the Committee that assets should be held at cost and commercial concepts of depreciation were not applicable to the organisation. A review of livestock assets needs to be undertaken.</p> <p><i>17.04/21 To recommend the Statement of Accounts 2020/21 for Board approval</i> The Committee reviewed the Statement of Accounts and agreed to recommend to the Board for electronic authorisation.</p>	JA

	<p><i>17.05/21 To receive the Internal Auditor's Report</i> The Committee considered the report, noting the weaknesses in the accounting and internal control systems.</p> <p>The Chairman explained there was an anomaly recording stock on Sage which resulted in the year end balance showing a cumulative net amount of opening and closing balances over the year. A further anomaly had been identified whereby Forest Rates/Rents posted to Sage may include outstanding arrears for previous years. Tighter reconciliation between internal databases is needed. The Committee agreed to recommend to the Board the Internal Auditor's Report for electronic authorisation.</p> <p><i>17.06/21 To recommend the Annual Governance and Accounting Return</i> The Committee considered the Annual Governance and Accounting Return and agreed to recommend the statements to the Board for electronic authorisation.</p> <p><i>Post meeting note:</i> <i>In accordance with the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015, the Board is required to sign off annual accounts by 30 June and for these accounts to be published by 01 July. Failure to do so may result in a qualified audit. Given the Board will not have full membership until after 29 June (when ESCC appoint the remaining Conservators), the Board meeting will be rescheduled to 12 July at which time the Board will be constituted with 16 Members.</i></p> <p><i>In light of the missed publication deadline and risk of a qualified audit, the Chairman has confirmed the least detrimental option is to have an audit with a procedural qualification resulting from a delay in approval, rather than anything where the Board may be seen to provide less than satisfactory oversight resulting from an alternative process to meet a deadline.</i></p>	
18/21	Forest Amenity	
	The CEO spoke to the Ashdown Forest Code and the need to welcome and engage Forest users. Ms McAll questioned the status of the licence for Whitehouse Barn and Mr Stogdon confirmed he would continue to pursue the matter. ACTION: RS	RS
19/21	Breach of Bye-law issue and encroachments	
	The Clerk advised that fly-tipping remained prevalent on the Forest and informed the Committee the Rangers were working closely with the Rural Crime Policing Team on a livestock initiative.	
20/21	Licences, Permits, Rates and Wayleaves	
	The Clerk reported 260 riding permits had been issued since 01 April, 5 commercial dog walking licences and 3 small scale filming requests. The coffee huts were still proving to be a lucrative enterprise.	
	The Clerk advised fibre broadband was being installed at Chelwood Vachery and a wayleave formalising the installation was being managed by the Estates team.	
21/21	Employment & Staffing Arrangements	
	The CEO explained a number of strong candidates had been interviewed for the post of Countryside Manager. An offer was made to an exceptional candidate but a counteroffer from their present employer meant we could not recruit. The other candidates lacked technical experience at this point in their careers. The CEO is considering using an external agency to recruit the post. ACTION: JA	JA
	Mrs St Pierre queried whether a new Finance Officer was being recruited and the CEO explained a temporary Finance Officer was providing interim cover whilst the job description for the role is revisited. ESCC are also providing support.	

22/21	Policy and Procedure and Statutory Documents	
	Nothing to report.	
23/21	Health and Safety and Insurance claims (standing item) verbal update	
	The Clerk advised an insurance claim for escape of water was ongoing.	
24/21	Data breaches (standing item) verbal update	
	There were none.	
25/21	Any Urgent Item of which the Clerk has notice in order to pass to the elected Chairman	
	There were none.	

The meeting closed at 15:00