

Minutes of the Meeting of the Programme Committee

Monday 15 February 2021 at 14:00

VIRTUAL MEETING - MS TEAMS

Committee members present: Cllr S Tidy (Vice Chair and Acting Chair), Mr C Smith, Cllr C Hardy, Cllr R Stogdon, Mrs S McAll, Cllr David Elkin and Cllr S Shing

Co-opted Members/Advisors: Carole Mortimer (NE), Kristoffer Hewitt (NE)

Also present: Mr J Adler (CEO), Mrs K Dirs (Clerk), Mr M Infield (Stakeholder Consultation Project Manager), Mrs R St Pierre, Mr A Reid and Cllr Whetstone

Minutes taken by the Clerk

There were no members of the public present

		Action
01/21	<p>Apologies Apologies had been received from Dr N Mawdsley (Chairman) and Mr Cooper. The Conservation Officer did not attend.</p>	
02/21	<p>Declarations of interest by Members of a Personal or Prejudicial Nature There were none.</p> <p>The Chairman welcomed James Adler and Mark Infield to the meeting.</p>	
03/21	<p>Matters arising</p> <p><u>03.01/21 RPA Update</u> The CEO explained a formal complaint had been lodged with the Rural Payments Agency (RPA) in relation to the disputed land parcels and an eligibility disagreement between the RPA and Natural England (NE). The CEO confirmed he was in active dialogue with the RPA and would work carefully to achieve the best outcome for the Forest. ACTION: JA</p> <p><u>03.02/21 SAMMS</u> The CEO reported a positive and cooperative meeting with Kelly Sharpe, Wealden District Council (WDC) and expected the Memorandum of Understanding to be signed within the next few days. This would be followed by the launch of a recruitment programme. The CEO expressed surprise that WDC had not been in touch with Thames Basin Heaths in relation to the project and reminded Members WDC were responsible for the recruitment of the SAMMS Officer.</p> <p><u>03.03/21 Grazing Base</u> The CEO advised the project was on hold and would be reviewed as part of the strategic plan for the grazing programme.</p>	JA
04/21	<p>Financial Information for the Programme Committee</p> <p><u>04.01/21 Countryside Stewardship finance summary to date 20/21</u> Noted and agreed.</p> <p><u>04.02/21 Revised Countryside Stewardship budget 2021/22</u> Noted and agreed.</p>	

<p>05/21</p>	<p>Progress Reports</p> <p><u>05.01/21 Grazing Officer's report</u> The CEO outlined the work of the Grazing team. Cllr Whetstone questioned whether staff time was chargeable for facilitating the scrub clearance working party. The CEO noted the question and explained the New Forest were currently undergoing a consultation with their Commoners and were seeking views on amending the existing method of allocating areas for grazing to activate BPS entitlements. The CEO reminded Members the Conservators were not an administrative authority for BPS claims.</p> <p><u>05.02/21 Deer programme report</u> The CEO outlined the work of the Deer Programme, highlighting the need for a detailed census and more monitoring. More exclosure plots are required to establish habitat and regeneration information in areas deer are known to browse.</p> <p>The CEO reported that 70 deer had been culled, yet over 270 were killed on the roads. Night stalking was proving more effective but needed further review. The CEO advised he had approached the British Deer Society and was keen to work collaboratively with neighbours, land owners and other agencies to address deer management. The CEO agreed to report back his findings to the next Committee. ACTION: JA</p> <p>Carole Mortimer expressed concern at some internal processes which appeared to be causing delay to the repair of vital equipment. The CEO confirmed he would ensure the Deer Programme Coordinator had access to facilities. Some discussion followed on the effectiveness of deer whistles.</p> <p><u>05.03/21 Stakeholder consultation report</u> Mark Infield (MI) spoke to his report outlining some of the recent challenges faced in light of the restructure. He explained a draft procurement proposal had been shared with a number of companies potentially interested in bidding for contracts to undertake components of the stakeholder consultation. However, the Advisory Committee has raised concerns over the range of proposed consultation methods and the overall costs of the consultation project. MI explained that there were a range of views amongst many Forest users, Board members and staff as would be expected.</p> <p>The CEO will work with MI to identify a way forward. This will include a meeting this week with NE. He suggested there was an opportunity for a Forest wide review, not specifically focused on grazing, and agreed to report back to the next Committee meeting. ACTION: JA/MI</p> <p>Mr Reid expressed his approval at a holistic review of Forest management.</p>	<p>JA</p> <p>JA/MI</p>
<p>06/21</p>	<p>Compliance Checklist and Monitoring</p> <p><u>06.01/21 Monitoring</u> The CEO spoke of his intentions to adopt and revive more robust monitoring practices and to utilise and coordinate the expertise of local wildlife groups. He spoke of his priority to conduct a detailed survey on Nightjar populations and commended the work of Ranger James Clow, who had recently undertaken research into butterfly populations. The CEO also acknowledged the work of the Ashdown Forest Bird Group.</p> <p>The CEO reported a status change of a number of compartments, from unfavorable recovering condition to unfavorable declining condition, commenting the challenge provided an opportunity to revitalise ecological monitoring.</p> <p><u>06.02/21 Strategic Risks</u></p>	

	<p>The CEO explained that whilst a detailed conservation management plan was needed and strategic risks needed to be managed, he was enthused at the opportunity to improve habitat management.</p> <p>The CEO expressed enthusiasm for the new ELMS scheme (Environmental Land Management) to be introduced in 2026, noting that 2026 was also the centenary anniversary of Winnie the Pooh.</p>	
07/21	<p><u>Any Urgent Item for which the Clerk has notice in order to pass to the Chairman.</u></p> <p>The CEO informed Members the Conservation Officer had resigned. The Chairman paid tribute to the time, effort and energy he had dedicated to the Forest for the past 8 years.</p>	

The meeting closed at 16:08