

Minutes of the Meeting of Personnel held in Doggetts Barn on 13 June 2025 at 11:00 am

Present: Cllrs. Alan Layland, Margot McArthur (*Chair*), Stuart McGregor, Michael Stockdale
In attendance: Town Clerk.
11:20am Meeting opened.

1 To receive apologies for absence

Cllr McGregor proposed Cllr Layland to Chair the meeting in the late arrival of Cllr McArthur; Cllr Stockdale seconded. Members unanimously,

Resolved: *Cllr Layland as Chairman for the meeting.*

Apologies for absence were received, noted and accepted from Cllrs Baker, Gemmell Smith, and Todd. Cllr McArthur apologies for late arrival was noted.

2 Declarations of interest or predetermination

None.

3 To receive, approve and sign the minutes of the Personnel Meeting held on 10 March 2025 (pages 2023-088/1-4).

Resolved: that the minutes of the Personnel Committee meeting held 10 March 2025 be duly signed as a true and accurate record of the meeting (pages 2023-088/01-4).

4 Matters arising not covered elsewhere

None.

5 Budget 2025-26 update

Members received a summary of the approved staffing budget 2025-26 with an early forecast (pre first quarterly review) noting the 6-weeks salary saving in groundstaff, and the Community Warden long-term absence. They also viewed the staff earmarked reserves (EMR): As at the end of 2024-25, there was a surplus of £19,722 - this was due to staff shortages creating savings and some training costs yet to be funded. Committee and Council had supported moving this to EMR, to build a reserve for unexpected costs such as additional staffing to cover sickness i.e. clerk locum costs; or NJC pay scale increments higher than budgeted; or training costs.

There were no questions.

6 To discuss Personnel matters

6.1 To receive update on staff attendance/absence for 2025/26

Members noted, total sickness days for April - June was 82 days. However this was due to two employees on long-term leave - details of these were presented to committee together with copies of HR letters to each outlining their sickness benefits and routes back to work.

- **The Community Warden:** Due to health issues had been signed-off long-term, with a review in mid July.
- **Planning and Admin Officer:** Following a recent operation, the recovery had been slower than expected, but was signed fit to return 16 June.
- **Upcoming absence - RFO/Deputy Clerk:** Due to have an operation in August, estimated recovery minimum three-weeks.

6.1.1 To note impact on annual leave and staff levels over the year

11:26 Cllr McArthur joined the meeting.

The the holiday season would result in more staff having booked annual leave. Staff shortages were noted, and possible impact of holidays on staffing levels. In addition, when an employee is on sick they are unable to take annual leave (even if it was pre-booked, this time comes under sick leave) and therefore any annual leave accrued under the contract for the period of sickness absence is added back on to their allowance. This also applies to bank holidays since this is part of their annual leave entitlement, and is the same for part time staff but the pro-rated equivalent. If leave is not taken then there could be the added issue carrying leave over in to the following year, as has already happened.

Members noted the leave issues, and that whilst officers would try to minimise lone working or days with no staff, there may be the occasional date where the office is shut. Should there be a need to close the office notices/social media posts would be provided.

6.2 To consider options due to staff long-term absences

In view of the potential extended absence of the Community Warden (CW), members were asked to consider a advertising 6-month position 11 hours per week. Budget savings would be made when sick pay moved to half pay and later SSP. When the CW does return, it would be unlikely initially at full hours (22 hours) so there may be a cross over though this could be beneficial. There was also the matter that several aspects of the role were not happening. It was also noted that the role was part funded by a grant (£8k) from GSBT. Members supported unanimously the proposal to appoint a temporary position for a CW on a temporary fixed term contract, subject to the potential return date of the current Warden; proposed advertising in September

Resolved: to advertise for a temporary Community Warden on a 6-month fixed contract 11 hours per week, SCP 7, 11 hours £634 pcm.

6.3 To receive an update on other staff matters

Members noted the following:

- Kai Day (grounds person) was nearing the completion of his apprenticeship. Committee and Council had already resolved following completion of his apprenticeship, and recognising the qualification in the pay scales from level 4 to 5 (once achieved the Horticultural level 2 qualification). He had also completed and passed his PA1 and PA6 spraying, and as approved by Open Spaces Committee July, had now been booked on the chainsaw cross cutting and maintenance course.
- Dan Strugnell (Open Spaces Officer) had completed and passed his Introduction to Local Council Administration (ILCA), which means he qualified for the scale increment for qualifications, moving from 17 to 18, annual increment £499.

Resolved: to ratify the increment move for Daniel Strugnell from 17 to 18 in recognition of the ILCA.

- Guy (Market Officer) completes four years in May 2026, budget preparations in October would be reconsidering the Council's role with the market and the market officer position which would then be under a permanent contract.

6.4 To ratify the additional hours for the Tourism Officer

Due the long-term absence of two staff, the Tourism Officer had provided a few hours extra to help cover VE Day and annual leave cover - total 27 hours. She had also been asked to help out to cover leave periods or events as needed. Members expressed their appreciation to Lindsey and unanimously,

Resolved: to ratify the additional 27 hours, and future hours as the Toon Clerk saw necessary to cover other absences and leave.

6.5 To receive a request and confirm a six-week sabbatical period of leave for an employee

Members were asked to consider approving a sabbatical period of leave to allow for an extend period of travel - 22 October to 4 December (6 weeks) for Kai Day. Both the Head Groundsman and Town Clerk were happy to support the request - using some annual leave and approximately

4-weeks unpaid leave. Neither would like to see Kai leave, and especially given the Council's investment in him and he has become a valued member of the team.

General information on sabbaticals:

- There is no legal obligation on employers to offer employees sabbaticals.
- Sabbaticals are often regarded as an important part of an employee's career development, and may be granted for a variety of different reasons including study, research, travel or voluntary work.
- Offering sabbaticals to can aid employee retention by allowing them scope to try something different with the security of knowing that they can return to work at the end of the time away.
- It is most important that both the employer and the employee agree in advance when and how the employee will return to the workplace.
- The employer should take particular care to ensure that any guarantee of re-employment is worded clearly and unambiguously in order to avoid any disagreement or challenge at a later date.

Members unanimously,

Resolved: to support a sabbatical period of six-weeks for Kai Day 22 October to 4 December.

6.6 To approve the expenditure for an occupational health assessment for Community Warden for a return to work, estimated expenditure £600

Members unanimously,

Resolved: to approve the expenditure for an occupational health assessment for Community Warden for a return to work assessment, estimated expenditure £600.

6.7 Health Assured

Members noted its employers assist programme (EAP) with Health Assured (HA) had been upgraded last year, this was an additional £56 per year - annual subscription moving from £639 to £695. This enabled the Council to benefit from additional support including new starter occupational health assessments, increase of counselling sessions if needed, and training for mental health first aiders training; however this required 2-days training so as yet we not nominated anyone. Details of the improved benefits were emailed out at the end of last year to all employees and councillors (all councillors are eligible to use this service as well).

There had been some confusion with the billing since the upgrade but this appears to be resolved after some months. There were no questions.

7 Groundstaff staffing update

7.1 To confirm making offer to Ian McPherson on a permanent contract and confirm pay scale

Ian McPherson joined the team on 12 May. He had settled in well and proven already to be an asset to the team, especially given is range of experience and skills. The vacancy had initially advertised for an apprentice or full-time position. Ian had been offered a fixed term contract to 30 September, on scale 2 (plus outer London weighting allowance). Members were asked to confirm a permanent offer to Ian, and to align his pay scale to skilled grounds person usually scaled at 7-12. Members unanimously,

Resolved: to confirm a permanent offer to Ian McPherson and align the scales for a skilled grounds person starting at level 7; budget increase £1,928 plus pension and contributions.

8 To receive an update on office hours, visitors to office and staffing hours

Members received an update on visitor numbers to the office for April (233) and May (217) noting daily averages of 15-18 visitors which was up from the previous review. Members,

Resolved: to keep the office visitor numbers under review and request if the there could be more detail to

this, for example hourly visits.

9 Kent Pension Fund - Pooling of Town & Parish Council - Formal Consultation - Deadline: 4 August 2025

In preparation for the 31 March 2025 triennial valuation results, the Kent Pension Fund (the Fund) is formally consulting with town and parish councils currently participating in the Fund, and other interested parties (e.g. borough, district and city councils), on proposals to form a Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS) funding pool (the Pool) specifically for town and parish councils as at 31 March 2025, with a possible universal LGPS pooled employer contribution rate for all involved, operative from 1 April 2026.

Members noted the consultation, raising the following questions/concerns:

- Is it going to safeguard town and parish councils to changes in the LGPF.
- It is difficult to know or understand what the impact could be.

Members.

Agreed: to refer this to full Council to consider a response, and asked the Town Clerk to ask KALC of its view.

11:52 Meeting closed.