

## Minutes of the Meeting of Personnel held in Doggetts Barn on 3 March 2026 at 11:00 am

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Present: Cllrs. Angela Baker, Alan Layland, Margot McArthur (*Chair*), Stuart McGregor, Michael Stockdale, Bob Todd

In attendance: Town Clerk

11:30 Meeting opened.

### 1 To receive apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received, noted and accepted from Cllr Stockdale.

### 2 Declarations of interest or predetermination

None.

### 3 To receive, approve and sign the minutes of the Personnel Meeting held on 7 November 2025 (pages 2023-112/1-7).

**Resolved:** that the minutes of the Personnel Committee meeting held 07 November 2025 be duly signed as a true and accurate record of the meeting (pages 2023-0112/01-7).

### 4 Matters arising not covered elsewhere

Members received updates as noted in the papers including:

**Training records:** All staff have been issued with new electronic forms to record training from 2025 onwards, with forms held in central folder electronic file.

**Principles of Internal Auditing Local Councils (PIALC):** The Town Clerk started this in February, aiming to complete by end of March.

### 5 Budget 2025-26 update

Members received the updated staffing budget review and forecast position for 2025-26 (Based on 11 months' actuals plus forecast for March)

- Total salaries budget: £516,563.62
- Forecast year-end expenditure: £510,177.93
- Forecast underspend: £6,385.69

The revised forecast position reflected adjustments since the November forecast, including:

- The medical insurance renewal cost (£7,123.32 above budget; reported Committee March 2025) was not reflected in the November forecast and has now been incorporated into the updated position.
- Community Warden employer pension contributions were recalculated using Assumed Pensionable Pay (APP), resulting in an additional £1,334.43.
- Communications Officer additional website hours: £600 (approved June 2025).
- Employer National Insurance contributions: budget estimate £40,000; revised estimate £43,773.

To achieve the previously supported increase in the Staffing Earmarked Reserve (EMR) from £37,322 to £45,000, a transfer of £7,678 was required. Based on the revised forecast, this would require £1,292.31 to be drawn from the Council's overall year-end surplus. Members unanimously,

**Resolved:** to recommend to full Council to maintain the decision to increase maintain the Staffing EMR to £45,000, utilising £1,292.31 from the Council's overall year-end surplus to complete the transfer. It was noted this may be higher subject to final year-end position.

### 2026-27 Budget Position

The total staffing budget for 2026-27 was confirmed by Council at its December and January meetings, £572,559.47.

Members had no questions.

## 5.1 Kent Pension Scheme - Employer Pension Contribution Rate – 2026–29

Members noted the revised employer pension contribution rate following the Kent Pension Fund 31 March 2025 actuarial valuation, and pooling of council pensions.

The Town and Parish Council Pool valuation results schedule (27 November 2025) confirmed that the total employer contribution rate for the period 1 April 2026 to 31 March 2029 will be 19.2% of pensionable pay. This represents a reduction from the current employer contribution rate of 23.9%.

This reduction in employer contributions was reported to Council during the December budget-setting process, and it resolved not to reduce the staffing budget at that time, thereby retaining prudent provision within the overall staffing allocation.

**Financial Implications:** The staffing budget for 2026–27 was set using the previous employer contribution rate of 23.9%, allowing £95,611 for employer pension contributions. Based on the revised rate of 19.2%, the estimated employer pension cost was now approximately £80,030, resulting in a projected saving of £15,581. This saving remained within the overall staffing budget providing flexibility to offset other staffing-related cost pressures.

Members were pleased to see a reduction in employer pension contributions, and agreed it was sensible to maintain the staffing budget level.

## 6 To discuss Personnel matters

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

Members received and noted an update on staff attendance and absences up to 28 February, noting total sickness / compassionate leave was 193 days. This included three staff who had had time off for operations, and four days compassionate leave.

### 6.2 Grounds Apprenticeship update

At the November Committee meeting, members received an update on the grounds apprentice. Noting that he had not been able to complete the exams, members resolved to support him funding exam resits, to extend the fixed-term contract, and once the Level 2 Horticulture qualification was completed, to move to a permanent contract (as previously resolved). For completeness, a letter confirming the above was issued.

Members had no questions.

### 6.3 Medical Insurance Renewal 2026–27

The Committee considered the medical insurance renewal and the associated premium increase.

Members noted that the renewal premium for 2026–27 was £31,036.32 per annum (£2,586.36 per month). This represented an annual increase of £11,077.44 (£923.12 per month). The approved 2026–27 budget had allowed £21,958.88, resulting in a projected overspend of £9,077.44.

Members reaffirmed the importance of the medical insurance scheme for staff wellbeing and noted the benefit to the Council in enabling staff to access treatment more quickly, supporting earlier return to work and maintaining operational continuity.

Members expressed support for maintaining the current level of cover. It was agreed that the Council's broker should be asked to review the market and confirm whether comparable cover could be obtained at a more competitive premium.

The Committee noted that the broker had previously advised that changing providers while there were ongoing claims could affect the level of cover available to affected employees, both now and in the future.

Members further noted that the value of claims made in recent years would have significantly exceeded the premiums paid by the Council, and that the scheme had provided substantial benefit to both staff and the organisation.

Members unanimously.

**Resolved:** to support the additional cost of the medical insurance renewal and recommend to Council that the medical insurance scheme be continued with no reduction to the level of cover, and that the 2026–27 premium of £31,036.32 be approved.

Later in the meeting, discussion referred back to medical insurance and eligibility criteria. It was **agreed** that this should be reviewed and reconsidered by Committee later in the year.

#### **6.4 Paternity Leave Policy – review, and to not upcoming Paternity Leave**

Members received notice that the Head Groundsman & Buildings Manager would be taking paternity leave summer 2026.

Members noted the current policy entitlement was two weeks' paternity leave, with one week payable at 100% of normal weekly earnings, and one week payable at 90% of normal weekly earnings (inclusive of Statutory Paternity Pay). This was the minimal statutory time off, although employers do have the option to use discretion; however, it should generally be exercised reasonably and consistently. Members discussed, including to update the policy to two weeks at 100%, and extending the provision. It was agreed and,

**Resolved:** to recommend to Council to approve the amendment to the Staff Handbook to provide four weeks' paternity leave at full pay; and note that a wider review of family leave provisions will be presented later in the year.

#### **6.5 Annual Leave and Time Owed – year end position**

Members received an update on the current annual leave and time owed balances. In reviewing the year-end annual leave position for staff, they considered the treatment of any leave remaining at the end of the financial year noting Staff Handbook policy and the ongoing issue of leave that is carried over and not taken due to other work commitments.

**Resolved:** to recommend to Council, for the current year, where annual leave cannot reasonably be taken before 31 March, payment in lieu may be made. In respect of the Town Clerk, the Committee recommends that payment may be made for up to three weeks' untaken annual leave, if it is not possible for the leave to be taken before the end of the financial year.

#### **6.6 Policies: To receive and recommend to adoption**

##### **6.6.1 Sexual Harassment policy**

Members were asked to consider the adoption of a standalone Sexual Harassment Policy as an addition to Section 6 of the Staff Handbook.

While the Council's Equal Opportunities and Harassment Policy already addresses harassment generally, recent legislative developments have strengthened employers' proactive duty to prevent sexual harassment. The proposed policy:

- Clarifies expectations of behaviour for both employees and councillors.
- Provides clear reporting routes.
- Aligns the Council with current employment legislation.
- Demonstrates the Council's commitment to maintaining a respectful and professional working environment.

The policy was not intended to create unnecessary formality or inhibit positive working relationships. Rather, it provided clarity, protects staff and councillors alike, and ensures that the Council has a clear framework in place should concerns arise. Adoption of this policy strengthens governance arrangements and reflects best practice within the local government sector. Members asked the Town Clerk to provide a copy to its HR consultant (Worknest), and also

**Resolved:** to recommend to Council to approve and adopt the Sexual Harassment Policy.

##### **6.6.2 Menopause Policy - to review section 6.2 Staff Handbook**

Members were asked to acknowledge and reconfirm their satisfaction with the Council's

Menopause Policy, as set out in Section 6.2 of the Staff Handbook, which was prepared by Worknest as part of the comprehensive handbook review in 2024.

While the policy was already in place, periodic review and formal acknowledgement demonstrates good governance practice and ensures continued awareness of the Council's commitment to supporting employee wellbeing. Menopause is increasingly recognised as a workplace matter affecting equality, health and retention, and reconfirming the policy affirms that the Council remains satisfied that appropriate guidance and support arrangements are in place.

**Resolved:** to recommend to Council to confirm and readoption of its Menopause Policy (section 6.2 of Staff Handbook).

### **6.6.3 Training and Development Policy**

Section 7 of the Staff Handbook already addresses training, the proposed policy expands upon this to reflect the Council's current practices, including induction training, annual appraisals, use of an E-Learning platform, sector training through KALC, NALC and SLCC, and support for work-related qualifications. It also clarifies approval arrangements and time off in lieu for training undertaken outside normal working hours. It formalises the Council's commitment to maintaining high professional standards, ensuring legal compliance, supporting employee development and providing clarity around governance and budget control.

**Resolved:** to recommend to Council to adopt the Training and Development Policy.

### **6.6.4 Paternity pay policy - to consider amendment**

Minuted under agenda item 6.4.

## **7 To receive an update on other staff matters**

### **7.1 To note: The Groundstaff annual medicals in March**

Members noted the annual medicals for the groundstaff were booked for late March. These covered general medical, audio, lung function, HAVS, vision.

The question was asked about eyesight tests especially for office staff and what monitoring measures did Council have in place. This would be presented to a future Committee meeting.

### **7.2 Community Warden Role – review of hours and future provision**

The Committee considered the current Community Warden arrangements following the appointment of the temporary Community Warden on a fixed-term contract of 11 hours per week, with the initial six months ending in April.

Members noted the work currently being undertaken within the reduced hours and the areas of the original role which were not currently being delivered. Discussion took place regarding the future structure of the role, including whether the previously established 22-hour provision remained appropriate, the potential for a job-share arrangement, and whether some elements of the role could be aligned with office support functions.

Members also noted that the Community Warden role continued to be supported through a combination of Council funding and external grants, currently estimated at approximately 50% Council funding and 50% grant funding. Members recognised the importance of maintaining the Community Warden service within the community.

Following discussion, the Committee agreed that the current temporary arrangement should continue in the short term while a broader review of the role is undertaken.

**Resolved:** to offer the Community Warden a further six-month extension to the fixed-term contract at 11 hours per week, and to recommend to Council that a review of the Community Warden role and the allocation of the previously established 22 hours be undertaken.

### **7.3 Head Groundsman & Buildings Manager – proposed title change**

Members were asked to consider a proposed change of job title from Head Groundsman & Buildings Manager to Facilities Manager.

The role includes managing a grounds team of five (including himself), delivering all grounds maintenance across the Council's open spaces. In addition, the responsibility for the Buildings Manager function was added in 2023. Since that time, the scope of the buildings role has expanded significantly, particularly in relation to compliance requirements and the ongoing maintenance and oversight of the Council's property portfolio.

The administrative and committee functions relating to buildings are supported by the Open Spaces Officer, and the working relationship between both roles is effective.

The proposed title of Facilities Manager is considered to more accurately reflect the breadth of operational, compliance and property management responsibilities now undertaken.

**Resolved:** to recommend approval for the proposed title change to Facilities Manager.

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

Overall, staff were better managing their contracted hours appropriately. When reviewed on a monthly basis, looking at January and February, there were generally no additional unpaid hours accrued; apart where approval was already pre approved.

- January: With time owed hours being utilised, no additional hours were accrued.
- February: The Town Clerk worked an additional 20.4 hours. Of these, 14.5 hours qualified for TOIL in accordance with contractual arrangements.

Update on office visitors

- January: Fairly quiet month, daily visits ranged between 2 to 10.
- February: Started quite, daily average 3 to 5, but some days have peaked at 27 to 32.

The office had been asked to monitor the times of day, but there is no conclusive pattern.

Members had no questions.

### **9 Staff salaries**

#### **9.1 Appraisals, and confirmation of annual pay increments**

All staff, including the Town Clerk, had received their annual appraisals. There were no issues for noting.

As per the contracts, staff are all eligible for their annual pay increment: "Subject to satisfactory performance which will be linked to the staff appraisal, you will progress through the range by annual increments until you reach the maximum salary in the range. NB: 'Satisfactory performance' will include continuous development by means of gaining additional/improved abilities and skills through training, experience, achieving target or other means". These have been allowed for in the budget 2026-27.

**Resolved:** to confirm and recommend to Council to formally confirm the annual pay increment awards for staff.

#### **9.2 To consider the Clerk's LC pay scale review**

*12:40 The Town Clerk left the meeting.*

Committee received a letter from the Town Clerk requesting that the Personnel Committee consider a resolution to move the post from LC3 (Scale 42-45) to the LC4 range. Completion of the PIALC qualification would take the role to the top of the LC3 scale, with no scope for further pay increments.

The Committee noted the scope, responsibility and complexity of the role and agreed that the post aligns with the LC4 range under the NJC/SLCC framework. The Committee therefore supported

progression into LC4.

**Resolved:** to recommend to Council to confirm the Town Clerk's placement within the LC4 range, commencing at Scale 46.

*12:45 The Town Clerk re-joined the meeting to minute the resolution.*

12:45 Meeting closed.

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