

Minutes of the Meeting of Personnel held in Doggetts Barn on 30 June 2026 at 11:00 am

Present: Cllrs. Alan Layland, Margot McArthur (*Chair*), Stuart McGregor, Bob Todd
In attendance: Town Clerk; there were no members of the public or press.
11:05 the meeting opened.

1 Election of Committee Chairman for the ensuing year

Cllr Layland proposed Cllr McArthur to continue as Chairman; Cllr McGregor seconded. Members unanimously,

Resolved: Cllr Margot McArthur to continue as Chair of the Personnel Committee.

2 To receive apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received, noted and accepted from Cllrs Baker, Gemmell Smith, and Stockdale.

3 Declaration of Interests or Predetermination

None.

4 To receive, approve and sign the minutes of the Personnel Meeting held on 3 March 2026 (pages 2023-129/1-6).

Resolved: that the minutes of the Personnel Committee meeting held 03 March 2026 be duly signed as a true and accurate record of the meeting (pages 2023-129/01-6).

5 Matters arising not covered elsewhere

Members received updates as noted in the papers including:

Formal Complaint to Council: Following a recent complaint received by the Council, an investigation was undertaken in relation to the conduct of two employees and an alleged disclosure of personal data. The matter was addressed internally with the officers concerned, and it was concluded that there was no evidence of a reportable personal data breach. The investigation did, however, identify some procedural improvements, and appropriate measures have since been implemented.

As the staffing aspects of the complaint fell within the Council's internal employment procedures, any personnel matters were managed separately from the Council's Complaints Procedure. The complaint itself was progressed in accordance with the Council's Complaints Procedure and reported to Full Council.

Medicals for grounds Team: All medicals were undertaken. No issues other than three recommendations for eye tests; and one 1:1 sessions. The Town Clerk has confirmed as they drive for work Council will reimburse eye test cost.

Paternity leave: One member of staff would be taking their paternity leave in two or three periods across July and August, in addition to some annual leave.

Probation periods: WorkNest has advised that, from 1 January 2027, employees will gain ordinary unfair dismissal rights after six months' service (reduced from the current two years). To minimise risk, they recommend a standard three-month probation period, with any extensions normally ending by five months, and ensuring any decision to terminate employment (including the notice period) is completed before the employee reaches six months' service. Our current practice is already to operate a three-month probation period, so no change to our policy is required at this stage.

Committee resignation: Cllr McArthur reported that Cllr Gemmell Smith had requested to step down from the Personnel Committee. **Action:** Town Clerk to include on Council agenda.

6

Budget 2026-27 monitoring and NJC pay update

Members received and noted the first quarterly review for the staffing budget for 2026/27. Total budget £572,559.47, including provision for an estimated 4% NJC pay award.

- Current expenditure totals £129,882.58, representing 22.68% of the annual staffing budget. At this stage, expenditure was therefore tracking below the profiled budget allocation.
- The employer pension contribution rate had reduced to 19.2%, generating a potential budget saving of approximately £17,708.39, prior to any adjustments relating to the renewal of the Council's medical insurance or any future staffing structure changes.

Update on the 2026/27 Joint Trade Unions national pay negotiations, in which they are seeking:

- an increase of at least £3,000 or 10% (whichever is greater) across all NJC spinal column points;
- a minimum hourly rate of £15.00;
- an additional day's annual leave; together with a number of other employment-related improvements.

The National Employers responded with a 3.3% pay offer, which has been rejected by all three recognised unions (UNISON, GMB and Unite). At the time of writing, no revised national offer has been made and discussions remain ongoing. Any agreed pay award will be backdated to 1 April 2026 and the Council has made prudent provision within the current staffing budget to accommodate the anticipated settlement.

7

To discuss Personnel matters

7.1

Staff attendance/absence for 2026-27 - first quarter

Members noted, one day sick leave since 1 April.

7.2

Medical Insurance Scheme – Eligibility Review

At its March 2026 meeting, Personnel Committee reviewed the Council's private medical insurance scheme and recommended continuing the benefit, maintaining the current level of cover and approving the 2026–27 renewal premium. Council subsequently endorsed that recommendation.

During the Personnel Committee discussion, Members had requested that the eligibility criteria for the scheme be reviewed. Employee contracts currently provide eligibility following two years' continuous service (as at 1 April each year). Having now consulted with the Council's HR advisers they provided the following advice:

Whilst the Council has discretion over whether to provide a private medical insurance scheme as an employee benefit, they have advised that restricting eligibility based upon contracted hours presents a significant legal risk under the Part-time Workers (Prevention of Less Favourable Treatment) Regulations 2000 and may also give rise to indirect discrimination risks under the Equality Act 2010.

Accordingly, should the Council wish to continue providing private medical insurance as an employee benefit, HR advice is that eligibility should continue to apply consistently to all qualifying employees, rather than introducing a minimum contracted-hours threshold.

Members noted:

- **The HR advice regarding eligibility for the medical insurance scheme; and**
- **Confirmed that the existing qualifying arrangements should remain unchanged.**

Referring to the new contract of employment for the Market Officer, moving from a fixed-term contract to a permanent contract following four years' continuous service (recommendation confirmed by Council December meeting), members were asked to note the medical insurance and premium. Members confirmed, and

Resolved:

the Market Officer met the medical insurance eligibility criteria to be included within the medical

insurance scheme. The additional cost for the remainder of the current policy year was £4,312.44 (£479.16 per month), based on a full annual premium of £5,749.92.

Members were asked to consider another long-serving employee, and whilst their contract of employment did not refer to the medical insurance benefit, under the Part-time Workers Regulations, it could be considered that they should not be treated less favourably. Advice from HR consultant was, Members should consider if this presented a discrimination risk. Members could choose to take a commercial decision and decide not to offer this, and as long standing employee where this hasn't been raised already. However, it is the Council's decision, as long as they are mindful of the risks and happy to take these on.

Members discussed, and agreed that no employee should be discriminated, and particularly in this case where the employee has given such long-service to the Council. Members unanimously,

Resolved: to offer the employee the option to join the medical scheme.

8 To receive an update on other staff matters

8.1 Permanent Contract - Guy Holden

A revised contract has been prepared following HR review for the Market Officer to sign. Members were asked to note, the Government's current pension auto-enrolment earnings trigger is £10,000 per annum, with qualifying earnings commencing at £6,240 per annum. Based on the Market Officer's contracted hours, annual earnings were close to the auto-enrolment threshold. The employee therefore had the statutory right to request membership of the pension scheme, which would result in an additional unbudgeted employer contribution.

9 Community Warden role – service review and future provision

At its previous meeting, the Committee agreed to extend the Community Warden's fixed-term contract for a further six months at 11 hours per week and to undertake a review of the Community Warden role and the previously established 22-hour provision.

Since her appointment, the new Community Warden (Lin) had established positive relationships with local community groups, housing providers and partner organisations. She had successfully re-established the Community Warden's presence within the town, including coordinating volunteer litter picking, restarting Community Speedwatch sessions, maintaining regular community engagement and supporting residents through signposting and local initiatives.

The role has naturally evolved over recent years from a traditional Community Warden function towards one with a greater emphasis on community engagement, partnership working and volunteer development. This change reflects both local priorities and the needs of the community.

Whilst Members have previously expressed support for maintaining a 22-hour Community Warden service, experience over the past year had highlighted recruitment challenges, with limited interest when advertising the role. The current Community Warden had indicated that she did not wish to increase her contracted hours.

Committee were asked may therefore wish to consider whether the remaining hours should continue to be allocated solely to Community Warden duties or whether there may be opportunities to develop a complementary role which could combine community engagement activities with other Council priorities, such as grant funding, project support or office-based community initiatives. Given that the current arrangements continued to operate effectively and budget planning for 2026–27 would commence in the autumn, it was suggested that a more detailed review of the Community Warden service be undertaken alongside the budget process, allowing Members to consider future service priorities, staffing structure and funding requirements together.

Members praised the work of Lin, who had made a notable impression and improved links and communications with many local groups. They were also pleased to see the more regular Speedwatch and litter picking sessions. They expressed a preference for Lin to increase her

hours, but noted that currently she did not want to. Members unanimously.

Resolved:

that a full review of the Community Warden service and the allocation of the previously established 22 hours be undertaken at the October Personnel Committee meeting alongside consideration of staffing structures and budgets for 2026–27; and to approve a further six-month extension to the Community Warden's fixed-term contract at 11 hours per week, to 31 March 2027, to provide continuity of service while the review is completed

10

HR and H&S consultancy services provision and agreement - to receive an update on the potential transition to a new provider

Members noted this was first presented to full Council in May as part of the Annual Meeting of the Council business. Providing some background for committee, the meeting papers summarised the current HR and Health & Safety consultancy agreement with WorkNest, the proposals to transfer to a new provider Peninsula, and the outcome of discussions regarding early termination, and to seek Members' support for the proposed way forward.

Background: The Council currently receives HR and Health & Safety consultancy support from WorkNest. The service has provided valuable support over a number of years, particularly in relation to personnel matters, and the HR advisory service continues to be responsive and well regarded.

The Council also has access to WorkNest's associated online platforms, including YouManage for HR record keeping, SafetyNest for Health & Safety monitoring and an e-learning portal. However, officers have found these platforms difficult to implement and use effectively

At its May meeting, Council supported, in principle, the proposed transition from WorkNest to Peninsula, subject to clarification of the existing contractual arrangements and any implications arising from early termination.

Current Contract Position: It was originally believed that the current agreement was due to expire later this year. However, following review of the signed agreement and associated Terms and Conditions, it has been confirmed that the Council entered into a five-year agreement ending on 20 November 2028.

Following Council's decision, the Town Clerk entered into discussions with WorkNest seeking an agreed early termination of the contract prior to the next annual renewal. WorkNest confirmed that it did not consider there to have been a material breach of contract and therefore did not accept that the agreement can be terminated under the contractual provisions. However, WorkNest had indicated that it would be prepared to agree an early termination by mutual consent, subject to payment of a settlement figure of £4,336.82 plus VAT.

Having reviewed the contractual position and settlement proposal, the Town Clerk did not currently consider this figure to represent best value for the Council.

Operational Review: Whilst the HR advisory service continued to provide valuable support, the principal concerns related to the associated software platforms. The YouManage HR system had not proved suitable for the Council's operational requirements. Despite implementation attempts and online training, the system had not been successfully embedded and officers have continued to rely upon existing manual processes.

Similarly, the SafetyNest platform has proved administratively difficult to use. Following the January 2025 Health & Safety audit, monitoring records became unavailable and required investigation by WorkNest's technical team before being reinstated. Whilst some of the records were ultimately restored, the incident resulted in operational disruption and a loss of confidence in the platform.

The Council had also experienced continuing difficulties with the e-learning platform, particularly regarding accessibility and ongoing administration.

Overall, whilst the advisory service remains strong, it was no longer considered the associated software platforms to adequately support the Council's operational requirements. The Town Clerk believes, further officer time spent attempting to re-implement these systems would not represent an efficient use of Council resources.

Health & Safety Audit: The Council received Health & Safety audit visits in November 2023, July 2024 and January 2025. Having raised with WorkNest that the Council had not received what it considered to be its annual audit, they advised that the agreement did not necessarily require visits at 12-month intervals but rather within each calendar year. Following these discussions, WorkNest offered a visit in late July, which they subsequently withdrew. Officers are now seeking to arrange a visit in early September.

Peninsula Proposal: Council previously received details of Peninsula's integrated HR and Health & Safety support package. In addition to providing HR advice, Health & Safety support, BrightHR and BrightSafe software platforms, Peninsula also offers:

- Employee self-service through a mobile application;
- Annual leave and absence management;
- Secure document management;
- E-learning (including via mobile app);
- Employee assistance programme;
- Integrated compliance monitoring;
- Annual auditing;
- Implementation support.

Peninsula has also confirmed that it was prepared to offer the Council a twelve-month transition period at no additional cost, allowing implementation of its systems whilst the existing WorkNest contract remains in place.

In addition, Peninsula had offered to review the Council's existing WorkNest agreement through its legal team to identify whether any additional contractual options may exist. The Town Clerk had not taken up this offer at the present time, preferring to continue direct discussions with WorkNest and maintain a positive working relationship whilst we continue to receive services under the current agreement.

Financial Considerations: The Council currently pays approximately £4,491 per annum for WorkNest and the separate Health Assured employee assistance programme.

- The proposed Peninsula package would increase annual costs by approximately £693, although this was considered to represent improved value through enhanced functionality, integration and efficiency.
- The proposed WorkNest settlement figure of £4,336.82 plus VAT would represent a significant additional cost to the Council and is not currently considered to represent best value in terms of budget expenditure.

It was considered, a more prudent budgetary approach would be to continue with the existing WorkNest agreement through the November 2026 renewal, whilst commencing preparations for transition to Peninsula.

By doing so:

- The Council continues to receive HR advice and Health & Safety support;
- The Council receives the outstanding Health & Safety audit;
- Peninsula's transition offer can be utilised at the appropriate stage;
- Officers have sufficient time to properly implement the new systems; and
- Discussions regarding termination can be revisited once only a single contract year remains.

Should negotiations resume at that stage, any settlement would relate to one remaining contract year rather than the current two-year position, and can be considered with 2027-28 budget.

Town Clerk's Comment: Having reviewed the contractual position, the correspondence received from WorkNest and the financial implications, whilst her preferred long-term solution remained a transition to Peninsula, she did not consider the current settlement proposal to represent the best use of public funds at this stage.

Instead, the recommendation was that the Council continued to prepare for transition to Peninsula, whilst maintaining a constructive relationship with WorkNest and continuing to

receive the services available under the existing agreement.

This approach provides the Council with the greatest operational flexibility, avoids unnecessary immediate expenditure and places the Council in a stronger position to revisit discussions regarding the remaining contract period after the November 2026 renewal.

Members discussed, noting that Worknest HR service had been very helpful, professional and informative. However, noting the issues with the software platforms which were supposed to help improve efficiencies, it was not good enough that the Council had not been able to utilise these fully, and remained working with its backup manual systems. The Chair mentioned that in other work she had worked with Peninsula and found them to be very good, and that they had a good reputation. Members agreed that the transition of HR & H&S consultancy provider should proceed.

Members were asked to support the recommendations, and they unanimously,

Resolved: to support preparations for a transition from Worknest to Peninsula and,

- **Noted the current contractual position with WorkNest.**
- **Authorise the Town Clerk to continue discussions with WorkNest regarding a reduced early termination arrangement at an appropriate time following the November 2026 renewal.**
- **Note that a potential termination cost may need to be considered as part of the 2027/28 budget process.**
- **Authorise the Town Clerk to continue reviewing the available contractual options and, where considered beneficial, seek further advice regarding the Council's position and report back to Members as appropriate.**

11 To review the Personnel Risk Assessment

The Town Clerk mentioned under the Committee's Terms of Reference referred business included the Personnel Risk Assessment. This was last reviewed by the Finance and Governance Committee in March 2026 as part of the overall governance review. However, Members were asked to receive the current RA and provide any feedback to the the F&G Committee.

Members noted the RA, and were satisfied with the recent review. However, members **recommended that Cllr Layland and Town Clerk review and include more detail under the comments/actions section.**

11:58 the meeting closed.