

Malvern Hills Trust
Covid-19 Contingency Committee
By telephone conference call
Meeting 3 April 2020 4.30pm

Present: Mr R Bartholomew, Dr S Braim, Mr M Cordey, Mr M Davies, Mrs C Palmer, Prof J Raine, Mrs G Rees

In attendance: CEO, Finance and Administration Manager, Secretary to the Board

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

1. **Apologies for absence**

Ms Rouse. Mr J Bills.

2. **Declarations of interest**

There were none.

3. **Chair's announcements**

Comments had been sent in by John Watts, Trevor Parsons and Richard Fowler and had been circulated. The Chair had received a separate E-mail from Mr Fowler, which had also been circulated. The content would be referenced in the relevant agenda items. He had also received a letter from Messrs Crisp, Fowler, Parsons and Watts on the subject of the Charity Commission Scheme. That was not a matter within the Committee's remit and would have to be dealt with in due course.

There would be discussions within the meeting about staffing and other matters which would have to be dealt with as confidential items.

The CEO had an update on the Countryside Stewardship Scheme.

4. **To approve the minutes of the last meeting**

On the proposal of Mrs Rees, seconded by Mr Bartholomew, it was **RESOLVED** unanimously to approve the minutes of the meeting held on 27 March 2020.

5. **Summary of actions taken**

The CEO went through his report. He had considered whether there were any indirect discrimination issues under the Equality Act in relation to the car park closures, and had discussed the matter with the police. The Coronavirus Act appeared to apply equally to all groups. Activity around the car parks would be monitored in the coming days and over Easter. The CEO and wardens who were not on duty were on-call.

One of the wardens was shielding, and not in self-isolation as stated in the paper.

The wardens were still dealing with all of the normal issues – utility companies and others working on MHT land, fly tipping, byelaw transgressions etc.

The risk assessments for outdoor staff had been updated in relation to Covid 19 risks.

All of the Trust's activities had been assessed by the Officers in the light of Government guidance. All of the office staff were able to work from home. Non-essential contract work was not being carried out at present, but some work had to continue where it was safety critical or in order to meet grant deadlines. Mr Davies suggested the CEO approach MHDC to enquire whether the deadline for grant assisted work at the Community

Woodland could be extended. There had been no extension of time for any HLS/Countryside stewardship schemes.

In response to Mr Fowler's comments, no vehicles could be "SORNed" because the Trust was operating a one-driver-one-vehicle policy in order to reduce virus transmission risk and all vehicles were in use. The Finance and Administration Manager had checked some weeks ago whether anything which could be recovered under the Trust's policies of insurance. Pandemics were not included in most business interruption policies. Mr Cordey suggested it would be helpful to have a paper setting out possible cost saving strategies.

6. Update on financial position

The Finance and Administration Manager was pleased to report that notwithstanding the disruption, the February accounts had been finalised and circulated. She had been working to gain an understanding of the various Government schemes which had been announced, looking at the budgets and the effect of the Covid 19 restrictions on cash flow.

She clarified that the Government's Job Retention Scheme (JRS) had been announced on 20 March. More information was published on March 26, as reported at the meeting last week. Applications could be backdated to 1 March and were designed to cover 80% of affected employees' salaries for a minimum of 3 weeks up to a current maximum of 3 months.

The Committee recognised the need for significant cost control, whilst maintaining services and needed to re-evaluate the budget for 2020/21, taking into account the resources which were now likely to be available and what expenditure could sensibly be curtailed within the current financial year.

The Finance and Administration Officer said she would provide more details at the next meeting, but the only Government scheme which might be of any significance to the Trust was the JRS. The change in relation to statutory sick pay would be a small help.

Non-essential work was not being commissioned at present.

On the proposal of Mr Davies, seconded by Mr Bartholomew it was **RESOLVED** unanimously to ask the CEO and Finance and Administration Manager to prepare a paper setting out recommendations for reduction of costs and deferral of expenditure (including the potential for using the Job Retention Scheme if the Trust was eligible) as soon as practicable.

It was **AGREED** to close the meeting in order to discuss confidential staff related issues.

7. To confirm the current plan in relation to the issue of 2020/21 car park passes

It was proposed to extend the life of all current parking passes by 2 months. If there were no further changes arising from extension of the Covid 19 restrictions, residents' passes would henceforth renew on 1 June. The CEO said there should be no significant financial impact flowing from this, as it was anticipated that about the same number of people would renew their passes during the financial year.

On the proposal of Mr Davies, seconded by Mr Bartholomew, it was **RESOLVED** to extend all current parking passes by 2 months.

8. Update on staff

Taken in confidential session.

9. Other matters

The CEO said a payment under the current Stewardship scheme had been rejected by the RPA because of a change from the specified contractor. The decision was being appealed. The RPA were offering no flexibility on their deadlines in response to the pandemic.

A further matter was discussed as a confidential item (commercially sensitive).

An attempt had been made to use the video conference facility but it remained a work in progress.

A vote of thanks was given to the Officers for all their hard work.

10. Date of next meeting

Next meeting Thursday 9 April 2020 at 4.30pm (by telephone conference).

The meeting closed at 6.20pm

John Watts

The Government's Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme has been in existence since 1st March 2020 and so far I have seen no mention of it in the two meetings of the Contingency Committee nor have I seen any schedule of reduced workloads as a result of the effective closure of the charities activities.

Failure to take advantage of this scheme will be extremely costly for the charity, especially given the reduced income from car parking.

I would ask that this point is brought to the attention of the Contingency Committee and that the full content of this email is minuted.

Richard Fowler

Please carefully consider the need for cost savings to be implemented within the Malvern Hills Trust. This as I stated in my previous email to Mr Davies should be part of day to day business but now needs urgent consideration in view of the dent in MHT income following the car park closures.

Furloughing of staff should have been considered prior to the meeting on 27th March 2020. It takes time to implement this type of scheme that requires consultation with the staff involved to ensure a full understanding of the need and how it can be fairly introduced.

The minimum period for furlough is 3 weeks and it may well be possible to rotate staff to ensure that the scheme operates fairly and that staff remain familiar with the work that they are employed to undertake.

If it helps I attach a furlough letter devised with legal advice for use by another charity.

Consideration should also be given to other cost savings such as energy usage if offices are not in full use.

Action should be taken to restrict any hours worked to the contractual minimum.

Do any insurance policies held by the trust have provisions that might be applicable to recover losses in the current situation.

Can any vehicles be SORNED to reduce fixed taxation and insurance costs.

Can any sub contracts be temporarily interrupted to minimise costs.

There may well be other cost saving ideas that may prove of value.

Remember £10 saved is at least as good as a £10 donation or precept payer contribution as it entirely under the control of the Trust.

If there is anything I can do to assist with this matter please do not hesitate to contact me.

Trevor Parsons

I am alarmed to see that there is no concern about the wage bill at present, since our second main source of revenue is defunct due to an apparent concern about people queuing too closely to each other at ticket machines.

In view of the Government's offer to mitigate losses via 80 % payments for furloughed staff, why are we not immediately taking up this offer? Any potential losses for employees can still be funded by us so that staff do not lose anything.

The precept payers will not be pleased in present circumstances to see that the MHT is casually wasting its reserves in a needless exercise.

After years of embarrassments we really cannot afford to have our reputation as a well-managed trust dragged down any lower!

Please treat this as a serious concern for all the officers and members of the Board but particularly for those who have been elected by the public, voted in specifically to help keep the Board's affairs in good order.