

Malvern Hills Trust
Covid-19 Contingency Committee
By telephone conference call
Meeting 17 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 (joined during item 6), Ms S Rouse

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

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

1. **Apologies for absence**

Mr J Bills.

2. **Declarations of interest**

There were none.

3. **Chair's announcements**

There were none. No comments had been received for this meeting.

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

On the proposal of Mr Bartholomew, seconded by Dr Braim, it was **RESOLVED** unanimously to approve the minutes of the meeting held on 09 April 2020.

5. **Summary of actions taken**

The CEO reported that, as everyone knew, the lockdown had been extended for a further three weeks to 7 May. Easter weekend had been very quiet on the Hills. There had been a number of incidents, as there would have been in normal circumstances. In the last few days there had been an increase in activity, in particular barbeques (the fire brigade had been called out on 16 April), more fly tipping, a few groups gathering, and drinking and drug related activity. This was not unusual at this time of year, but was disappointing in the current circumstances. Police were continuing to patrol but liaison was becoming more difficult. The CEO had been trying to speak to his contacts today but without success.

Field Staff were carrying out routine work, and grass cutting would be started shortly. A list of priority areas was being prepared (including sight lines, key access routes and essential conservation management). Most of the office staff were working from home, except for one person manning the office on a rota. Ms Rouse felt there was no issue arising from the Regulations in relation to grass cutting – other organisations were doing so. Mr Davies thanked the CEO and the staff.

6. Financial update

The Finance and Administration Manager reported that further details had been released on the Job Retention Scheme (JRS), including the information which would be required to register as soon as the portal opened. It appeared that the requirement for furlough to be an alternative to redundancy had been removed – it was sufficient that the employer did not have work for the employee to carry out.

Further details had become clear about the position of staff that were self-isolating. They were entitled to sick pay but furloughing could be considered if there was a business case for doing so. The third option of unpaid leave (as recorded last week) was not appropriate.

There had been a net decrease in cash flow since 1 April of £520. Various payments had been received (the levy payment from Herefordshire, Natural Networks grant and income from Brewin Dolphin). The balance on the various bank accounts was £973,859.

Mr Cordey, the Finance and Administration Manager and CEO had held one of their regular meetings with Brewin Dolphin via Skype. Brewin Dolphin's current view was that recovery would take around 12 – 18 months. The meeting had considered MHT's holdings in detail and there was only one which in the longer term was a possible cause for concern (making up 1.4 % of the Parliamentary Fund). It was agreed it would be prudent to budget for a reduction of 50 % in income from the portfolios this financial year- the Finance and Administration manager had not included any income from this source in the revised budget presented last week, so this represented an improved position.

The Finance and Administration Manager was investigating the possibility of a grant for leisure businesses in relation to business rates but was not convinced that MHT would qualify. She would make the application none the less. The CEO had ascertained that MHT would not be eligible for the Heritage Lottery Fund grant. The Committee **NOTED** that, in the minutes of the meeting of 9 April, option (iii) of item 6 (b) was not applicable.

7. Car Parks

The CEO reported that yesterday there had been media reports of internal police guidance on enforcement of the Coronavirus Regulations. This guidance indicated that it was lawful to drive to exercise as long as the drive was reasonable as a proportion of the time taken to exercise. This had generated discussion on social media as well as members of the public contacting MHT to ask about the car parks being re-opened. Other organisations still had their car parks closed. The CEO thought it impractical to open the car parks to local people only.

Members of the Committee made clear that it would not be for the wardens to become involved in deciding whether travel was legitimate or not. The Government Advice had not changed, but was ambiguous. The CEO was asked to continue to try to get clarity on West Mercia Police view on the guidance and on the car parks remaining closed.

The Committee **AGREED** that there were no reasons for the Trust to change its position on the car parks remaining closed, and any further action would only be taken in consultation with West Mercia Police.

The issue would be considered again at the next meeting.

8. Any other matters for discussion

The Committee considered Mr Fellow's E mail concerning the NHS, but did not view the points raised as falling within the remit of the Trust's objects.

The Secretary to the Board was continuing to explore the options for in some way opening the Committee meetings to the public. She was looking into streaming, which was not supported by the current conferencing platform. Some Councils were using Zoom but this presented some well publicised security issues as well as not being as stable. Ms Rouse pointed out that other Councils would be exploring their options and the position might become clearer in a few weeks. The position in relation to resuming Board meetings would need to be investigated if restrictions continued in the longer term or if strategic decisions were required. Prof Raine was asked to enquire who looked after Worcestershire County Council's streaming arrangements.

Although some Committee members were able to use the video link, others could not do so because of limited Broadband speeds

9. Date of next meeting

Next meeting 24 April 2020 at 4.00pm (by telephone conference).

The meeting closed at 5.05pm