

Malvern Hills Trust

Ordinary Meeting of Staffing Committee

Hampton Suite, Colwall Park Hotel, Colwall, Malvern WR13 6QG

Thursday 23 January 2025 at 6.00 pm

Present: Frances Victory (Chair), David Baldwin, Richard Bartholomew, David Core (non-voting), Lucy Hodgson, John Raine, Mary Turner.

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

1. Election of Chair

David Core opened the meeting and welcomed Frances Victory as the new Chair. She was appointed unopposed, nominated by Sheila Wren and seconded by David Baldwin. Mrs Victory took the Chair.

2. Election of Vice-Chair

Sheila Wren was appointed unopposed as Vice-Chair, nominated by Frances Victory and seconded by David Baldwin.

3. Apologies for absence

John Michael and Sheila Wren.

4. Chair's announcements

Frances Victory was pleased to note the provisions for improvement of staff well-being and retention included in the 2025-26 Budget, which had been approved by the Board.

There was a discussion about a start time for future meetings that might be convenient for both committee members and any staff who might wish to attend. It was agreed that future meetings would commence at 4.30 pm.

5. Declaration of interests

There were none.

6. Public Comments

There were none.

7. Matters arising from the Minutes of the meeting held on 22 August 2024

7.1. Review of the Staff Protocol

The Staff Protocol Working Group was due to meet in February to review how the Protocol was working. The CEO said that telephone contact from trustees appeared to have reduced, certainly for the Conservation Manager, but she was concerned that some of the contact had transferred to the Chair of the Board and this needed to be addressed. There had been some limited use of the

referral form, but in some cases this had been completed by a member of staff on receipt of an enquiry.

8. Staffing Matters

Frances Victory introduced this agenda item by reminding the Committee that its focus should be on strategy and policy, not implementation, which was the responsibility of the CEO.

8.1 Staff Review Recommendations

The Committee received an update report from the CEO on progress to date against the Staff Review recommendations. The CEO reported that the £30k contingency allocated by the Board had made a real difference, highlighting particularly the increase of capacity and the introduction of new staff benefits, which the contingency had made possible. The appointment of a new Land and Property Manager was major progress and would introduce expertise into the staff team that it had not previously had. The new postholder was due to start work on 3 February and a comprehensive induction was being arranged for her. There would be a backlog of work to cover, but going forward the CEO anticipated better tracking of infrastructure and improvements to relationships with neighbours. It was also hoped that the new manager's work would aid Land Management Committee's decision-making.

There had been numerous positive interactions between trustees and staff, not least the Wassail that had taken place the day before this meeting. Committee members were pleased to see photographs of the event. The CEO recorded her thanks to those trustees who had attended the leaving event for the outgoing Community & Conservation Officer. The CEO said that she planned to include further examples of interaction on future Staffing agendas. She acknowledged that some trustees chose not to engage, but these examples would show that interaction was happening.

The new weekend rota for the Wardens was working well, although it had been a difficult period with illness and injury, which resulted in there sometimes being only one Warden on duty. It had been necessary to call in the Field Staff team out of hours following an amber warning for snow. The Board had given permission for a new part-time Warden, whose hours would be arranged to complement those of existing staff. Remuneration for on-call work had been approved by the Board and would be incorporated into staff contracts; the opportunity to be on-call was to be extended to suitably qualified staff. In answer to a question, the CEO said that there were few incidents that required staff to attend in person – these included, for example, enforcing byelaws against the use of barbecues, or a dealing with a fallen tree on Trust land that was of immediate potential danger to the public. In most cases, the role of the on-call person was to alert the emergency services.

The plan to change the title of the Wardens to Rangers was noted with interest, since this had previously not been popular with staff; however, current staff had requested it. In answer to a question about when the change would be made, the CEO said that

it would be part of a package of changes to contracts and minor rebranding, which would all be done and communicated at the same time. She added that a Trust volunteer archivist had carried out some research into the history of the Wardens and there were some interesting stories that could be released. It was part of the Trust's communications plan to write more in 'Ranger voice', because it was thought that the public responded better to an 'outdoor' voice. A trustee recommended being very clear about the reasons for the change of title and the CEO assured the meeting that this would happen. She added that there was only a modest cost to the change.

The CEO said that some recommendations were still in progress, including a review of the roles of the Board and executive staff, and a complete review of current staffing and objectives. The latter would not have been appropriate during her first year in post. A salary benchmarking exercise had begun and job descriptions and salaries had been passed to HRDept (the Trust's HR Advisor). The CEO was aware of some uneasiness amongst staff about the exercise and was arranging for the HRDept representative to deliver a session to staff on the process, so that it was transparent and understandable. The approach to objective setting had been quite varied across teams in the past. Now that the CEO had agreed hers, she intended to cascade down to managers and thence to staff, so that individual objectives were in line with Trust objectives.

A trustee asked about staff development from a wider perspective, for example sustainability training for field and conservation staff. The CEO hoped that over time there would be more opportunities for staff to learn as a team via away days. She was keen to there to be more shared understanding of conservation principles and more holistic land management.

Questions were invited on the £30k contingency. The CEO noted that due to the Land and Property Manager not starting until February, there might be an opportunity to do other things before the end of the financial year. David Baldwin said that he had previously provided information about land-based apprenticeships to the former CEO and suggested that the idea be revisited. The CEO said she would look into the possibility of offering an apprenticeship.

The CEO reported that the approved General Budget for 2025-26 included provision for long service and retirement awards. The Operations Manager and a member of the Field Staff team were both retiring in the summer and it was planned to hold an event at which to present their awards. Both vacancies would be advertised together at different levels. In answer to a question, the CEO confirmed that internal candidates would be welcome to apply, but she wanted to advertise externally as well in order to test the market. She commented that other organisations were more skilled than the Trust at promoting their staff benefits package and she was working with HRDept to improve the Trust's offer. A recent recruitment process had attracted candidates from further afield, but the CEO would like to have seen more qualified

candidates to choose from. In answer to a question, she confirmed that the Trust was very specific about preferred qualifications.

8.2 Staffing next Steps

The CEO reported that the Protocol Working Group was due to reconvene and would be overseeing an anonymous Staff Survey. Sheila Wren had already seen the proposed questions. HRDept would carry out the analysis.

Tackling bullying & harassment training was being arranged for staff on Tuesday 25 February and the staff contacts, Lucy Hodgson and David Core, were invited to join that meeting. It was suggested that trustees who had been unable to attend the equivalent trustee course in November might be invited, but it was thought that some staff might not be comfortable with this. HRDept would be carrying out training for the four nominated contacts on the same day. The CEO said that she had previously felt vulnerable when trying to handle a bullying complaint and that it would be good to understand the process to follow.

The CEO confirmed that it had been decided not to recruit a communications staff member; it was not the right time and there was insufficient availability in the budget. Committee members agreed that this was the right decision.

The CEO advised that her performance review was due in March and would be carried out by the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Board.

8.3 Recommendations

On the proposal of John Raine, seconded by Lucy Hodgson, it was RESOLVED unanimously that:

- the CEO should update the existing Serious Incident Report using her reports to this meeting and that of 22 August 2024 as evidence base and bring it to the Board for consideration at its March meeting;
- the CEO should continue reviewing current staffing provision, in consultation with the senior management team, and undertake a bespoke, internal job evaluation and pay banding exercise to be completed by March 2025; and
- in the light of trustee training in preventing and tackling bullying and harassment, there should be a review of the Trust's current policy and associated processes.

Staffing Committee recorded their appreciation of the progress made so far.

9. Changes to Staff Handbook

No changes had been notified by the Trust's HR Advisor, but the CEO noted that some minor amendments would be needed following the introduction of staff benefits just approved by the Board.

David Core reported that conversations had started on Terms of Reference for the Board Effectiveness review, to be led by Governance Committee. He hoped that the review would lead to a better balance between strategic and operational business, especially in relation to what committees and the Board actually needed to approve and where it was sufficient for the CEO to report action taken. The Staff Handbook largely covered delegated responsibilities on how staff were managed.

10. Health and Safety Update

10.1. Health and Safety Report

The Committee received a report prepared by the CEO, who spoke to the paper. Significant progress had been made since the summer to address non-compliance and opportunities for improvement. The CEO recorded her thanks to Cheryl Morris for all her hard work, observing that considerable effort was needed to get even minor things done. All the Trust's health and safety documentation was now in order. It had been really helpful to have the Health & Safety Advisor, Keith Tomkins, on call; he had confirmed that there was nothing urgent outstanding and he had been impressed by the improvements made and staff enthusiasm about getting things right. In answer to a question about whether the Trust was inspected by the HSE, it was confirmed that there could be spot checks.

On the proposal of John Raine, the Committee recorded a vote of thanks to Cheryl Morris for her hard work.

A trustee asked whether a further online training session for trustees was required. The CEO confirmed that there would be an annual refresher, reminding the meeting that the Board could not fully delegate responsibility for health and safety. A trustee suggested that the Board could be better informed about the safety issues around outside machinery and working practices, and about public liability to those visiting the Hills.

The CEO reported that an asbestos management survey had been commissioned for each site and was due to take place in late February. There had not been a survey for 10 years. There was known to be a small amount of asbestos in Manor House, but this was safe provided it remained undisturbed.

The CEO referred to on-going safety concerns about bin emptying. She was investigating how this was handled by similar organisations and by the Council, with Richard Bartholomew representing the Land Management Committee. There was no immediate solution, since the Trust did not have the funds to outsource bin emptying.

10.2. Accidents, Near Misses, Incidents and Training

A trustee expressed concern that no Near Misses had been reported during the last period. The CEO insisted that staff were clear on the procedure for reporting Near Misses and that there was no hesitancy about doing so; there simply hadn't been any and there were accidents to note. David Baldwin said that he had previously devised reporting templates for near misses and safety observations; it was suggested that the availability of the latter be highlighted to staff.

The CEO confirmed that the Health & Safety Working Group would look at patterns of accidents. She intended to obtain legal advice on the Trust's position if a grazer was injured when not wearing a helmet. She was developing a relationship with Visit Worcestershire with the aim of helping visitors prepare to visit the Hills e.g. by wearing appropriate clothing.

11. Training Update

- The Secretary to the Board reported that she was part way through an online course in Supporting Good Governance, run by the NCVO. The most recent session had covered review of board effectiveness, which was directly relevant to work currently being undertaken by the Governance Committee.
- Lucy Hodgson had attended training in risk management for trustees.
- The Finance & Administration Manager had attended an annual update course run by Charity Finance Group. The slides were with the Secretary to the Board for upload to the Board Members' area of the website.
- The CEO hoped to arrange for training for both trustees and staff in developing organisational values.
- The CEO wanted a more rigorous assessment of training needs, now that the training budget was being set for 2025-26 and she invited trustees to think about what trustee training might be needed.

12. Urgent Business

12.1. Trustee Exchange

The CEO reported that the Civil Society Trustee Exchange would take place in London on Tuesday 29 April. She had attended with David Core in 2024 and intended to go again. She would be writing to Chairs of Committees to find out if any of them were interested in attending.

12.2. Staff Well-being

- Mary Turner reported that she was representing trustees on a Staff Trustee Social Group. She thanked the CEO for her hard work organising the Wassail, which had been good for staff and volunteer well-being. The Social Group would be reviewing the event at their next meeting in February and thoughts about future events were invited.

- Mary Turner asked where well-being fitted into health and safety. The CEO confirmed that the HSWG would cover it, but it remained the responsibility of Staffing Committee. It was agreed that staff well-being should form a standing item on Staffing Committee agendas and the responsibility for it added to the committee's Terms of Reference.

12.3. Volunteers

The CEO suggested that the Committee should consider a paper on Trust volunteers and that volunteers might be invited to meetings.

13. Date of next meeting

Thursday 10 April 2025 at 4.30 pm

The meeting closed at 7.45 pm