Malvern Hills Trust

Ordinary Meeting of Staffing Committee
Hampton Suite, Colwall Park Hotel, Colwall, Malvern WR13 6QG
Thursday 10 April 2025 at 4.30 pm

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

In attendance: CEO, Secretary to the Board.

1. **Apologies for absence**
   Richard Bartholomew and John Michael.

2. **Chair's announcements**
   - The small staff team had been adversely impacted by staff illness, including respiratory and back problems. Since this was unusual, the CEO had asked the Finance and Administration Manager for a staff absence report.
   - The Chair of the Board would shortly be presenting the first staff long service awards.
   - Over 30 applications had been received for both the Operations Manager and Field Staff team member positions.
   - The CEO would be working with the Conservation Manager and the Wardens to bring a paper on volunteers to the next meeting. It was suggested that, subject to individuals' permission, it would be helpful to have a list of volunteer names with photographs available to staff and trustees in the office.

3. **Declaration of interests**
   There were none.

4. **Public Comments**
   There were none, no members of the public being present.

5. **Matters arising from the Minutes of the meeting held on 23 January 2025**

   5.1. Wardens

   5.1..1. Rebranding

   The CEO confirmed that the Wardens were shortly to be renamed as Rangers; the team felt that the Ranger title better described their role. The Trust was due to advertise shortly for a new Ranger and this would be the moment to launch the new name, or rather the old name, because the term 'Ranger' had been used in the Trust's past. There would be some modest rebranding changes to clothing and vehicles to reflect Rangers' role in interacting with the public; all the (minimal) costs would be covered by the £30k allocated to address the findings of the Staff Review. A volunteer archivist had carried out some research into the role of 'Ranger' in the past and this story would accompany the launch.

5.1..2. Car Parking Charges

The Trust had received some negative reaction to its decision to increase car parking charges from 1 April. Requests from members of the public for a half day tariff had been noted. The CEO said she would be discussing the charging model with the Finance and Administration Manager, and longer term, with the District Council. The Trust wanted to be a good neighbour and was mindful of the sensitivities around these charges. It did not currently have the resources to enforce shorter term car parking, but it might be possible to introduce it at some of the quieter car parks once a new Ranger had been appointed.

5.1..3. On-Call Offer

There had been some feedback to suggest that some Wardens would prefer to receive time off in lieu rather than payment for being on-call. This was up for negotiation.

5.2. Benchmarking

This exercise, managed by HRDept, was underway, although due to some technical issues with the portal, it was running a couple of weeks behind schedule. The Trust would receive feedback on salary range and benefits for comparable roles, which would be passed to Staffing Committee in order for any appropriate recommendations to Board to be made. The CEO said that it was possible that salary uplifts might be recommended but cautioned that there was no provision for this in the budget.

5.3. Staff Benefits

The CEO confirmed that the benefits agreed by the Board had now been implemented. She thought that there was scope for improving how benefits were promoted to potential applicants. The Relocation Policy had been updated and it had been clarified that it was at the Trust's discretion as to whether it would be applied. The CEO and Secretary to the Board (SttB) both described the benefits to themselves and the Trust that they were already experiencing courtesy of their new professional memberships.

6. **Staffing Matters**

6.1. Update on Staff Survey

The survey had now been circulated to all staff, in paper form, since the online version favoured by HRDept hadn't worked. The CEO thanked Sheila Wren and the Protocol Working Group (PWG) for their input. She thought that this was the first time a staff survey had been conducted and was expecting some challenges. HRDept would collate the responses and provide a report to PWG to consider at a meeting in June. The report would then go to Staffing Committee; given the length of time until the next scheduled meeting, it was hoped that some quick wins would be possible in the meantime. In answer to a question, the CEO said that it hadn't been possible to split the questionnaire according to roles, but it was recognised that staff from different groups might have differing views.

Sheila Wren asked what the PWG would be expected to do with the survey results; the CEO suggested that the Group might look at HRDept's conclusions and identify areas of sensitivity that needed to be highlighted. She wished to feedback to staff on the survey results by the end of June.

6.2. Confidential questions to the referral form

Staffing Committee had been asked by the Board to consider how confidential questions could best be managed, following a concern expressed by a trustee at the last Board meeting. It was noted that all forms initially went to the SttB only and that this was correct. The Committee did not consider it necessary to have a separate procedure for confidential enquiries, since the SttB could be relied upon to handle all enquiries appropriately.

It was suggested that it would be helpful to reiterate to trustees the different methods to be used to contact the Trust, depending on the enquiry, namely:

- Items for Board or committee agenda should be sent to the Chair of the Board/Committee for consideration and copied to the SttB;
- Trustee specific enquiries should be logged using the referral form;
- Something to do with the Hills and Commons, or an enquiry received from a member of the public, should be notified to info@malvernhills.org.uk;
- Any trustee or member of staff who wished to suggest possible candidates for Board vacancies should contact the SttB;
- Any trustee who was still unsure of how to direct an enquiry should contact the SttB directly.

6.3. Process for exit interviews

It was noted that the Staff Handbook did not currently include any information about exit interviews, and there was no procedure in place for trustees either, although there was a standard letter that was sent by the SttB to anyone resigning mid-term, reminding them of their continuing commitments under the Code of Conduct. It was suggested that the CEO might approach HRDept about a standard form to be used for staff exit interviews; the Trust could then adapt this for trustees. Sheila Wren said she had a sample form and would share it with the CEO. It was agreed that Staffing Committee should receive periodic theme-related feedback from exit interviews.

6.4. Future role of Protocol Working Group

It was agreed that the PWG should remain in place to be consulted if and when required.

6.5. Objective setting and productivity

The CEO reported that objective setting took place every year as part of the appraisal process. There had previously been no 'golden thread' linking objectives across the organisation and the CEO was now trying to achieve this. She shared a slide showing the new process, whereby the CEO's own objectives would be set first with the Chair of the Board and then cascaded down the organisation. Sara Marrett of HRDept was due to run a training session for Trust managers on objective setting. The CEO believed that the award of annual increments should be linked to performance and that there needed to be a clear indication of whether a member of staff had met, or indeed exceeded, their objectives. There was currently no mechanism for rewarding outstanding performance. The CEO added that objectives could be set at any time and if a member of staff had already achieved their objectives, they could ask for new ones.

The CEO said she had taken on board a trustee's comments about efficiencies and staff productivity, which had been made at the last meeting of the Finance, Administration and Resources Committee. She acknowledged that all staff could be pushed to improve this, but the Trust needed to be clear on *what* productivity it wanted improved. Staff wished to know that they were delivering on the Board's objectives and plans.

7. **Changes to Staff Handbook**
   None for this meeting.

8. **Policies due for review by Staffing Committee**
   Three policies had been highlighted for the Committee's attention: Safeguarding; Whistleblowing, and; Vexatious Complaints. The CEO assured the meeting that the Vexatious Complaints policy had recently been checked by the Trust's solicitors and found to be fit for purpose; the challenge was more around its application. The Charity Commission had directed that the Trust must review its Safeguarding Policy and so this was a priority, although it was recognised that the Trust did not work with young people or vulnerable adults and the Health & Safety Advisor had advised therefore that the policy should be 'proportionate'. It was suggested that the PWG could work on it; it was also suggested that the Trust could look at policies used by other wildlife trusts, as a guide. Sheila Wren offered to help with the Whistleblowing Policy.

   John Raine left the meeting at 5.40 pm.

9. **Health and Safety Update**
   9.1. Health and Safety Report
   The CEO's report for January to April was received. The following points were highlighted:
   - The Health and Safety Policy still required updating; it was behind schedule due to staffing pressures.
   - There were low levels of asbestos at Manor House; there were signs up warning that it should not be disturbed.

- There was a safe system of work and risk assessments in place; there was a risk assessment registers and COSHH register on view to employees.
- It was the job of the Health & Safety Working Group to do a deep dive into any reports of near misses. A further meeting of this group was due.
- Safety observations reports, designed by David Baldwin, had been introduced at his suggestion. One issue had been easily resolved, another – bin emptying – was longer term. Various solutions were being investigated, including the provision of a smaller truck (not in the budget). The CEO said that it was helpful to have these reports available to capture the issues, rather than relying on anecdotal examples.
- In answer to a question, the CEO confirmed that no recent staff sickness absence had been work-related.

10. **Training Update**
The CEO confirmed that a record of mandatory staff training was kept by the admin team, which would be available if the HSE carried out a spot check. She also confirmed that she was confident that all staff had access to the CPD they needed.

11. **Urgent Business**
There was a brief discussion about fundraising (outside the remit of this Committee).

12. **Date of next meeting**
Thursday 9 October 2025 at 4.30 pm

The meeting closed at 6.10 pm