

Malvern Hills Trust

Ordinary Meeting of Staffing Committee

Guesten Suite, Lyttelton Well, Church Street, Malvern WRE14 2AY

Thursday 16 April 2026 at 3.00 pm

Present: Frances Victory (Chair), Simon Baggaley, David Baldwin (arrived 3.15 pm), Richard Bartholomew, David Core (non-voting), Lucy Hodgson, John Raine, John Stock.

In attendance: CEO, Secretary to the Board, Finance and Administration Manager, Richard Fowler, Andrew Myatt, five members of staff, one member of the public.

1. Apologies for absence

John Michael (non-voting).

2. Chair's announcements

- The Chair was pleased to report that three new Rangers had been appointed to the staff team, following a recruitment round that had attracted a large number of applicants.
- The Trust's Health and Safety Advisor had visited on 7 April and had been very impressed with the work done on health and safety.
- The Trust would be seeking support on work-related stress issues from an alternative source, since this was not part of the Health and Safety Advisor's specialism.

3. Declaration of interests

None.

4. Public Comments

None.

5. Matters arising from the Minutes of the meeting held on 29 January 2026

5.1. Staff Code of Conduct

The Committee received a paper prepared by the Secretary to the Board (SttB) on behalf of the Staff Trustee Protocol Working Group (PWG). The CEO reported that she had been asked to look into the requirement for a staff code of conduct and that it had seemed sensible to involve the PWG, which included staff from office, field and conservation teams, as well as trustees. They had instead recommended the introduction of a Professional Behaviour Policy, which would apply to volunteers and trustees, as well as staff.

The CEO had discussed the issue with the Trust's HR Advisor, who did not advise having anything in addition to the Staff Handbook (the Handbook), from which the draft policy was drawn. The HR Advisor had pointed out that there was a specific clause on conduct in the Handbook within the Disciplinary Policy. Although the Handbook and Disciplinary Policy were not contractual, there was a

mutual understanding that staff would comply with them. The Handbook was based around employment law and good practice, and the HR Advisor had cautioned that the Board should not make arbitrary changes to it, since to do so might be contrary to employment law and could invalidate insurance. The CEO confirmed that the HR Advisor had carried out a full review of the Handbook in January 2025 and that they had confirmed that, although the Handbook was an operational document, it could be shared with trustees if wished. However, the Trust's HR agreement was between HR Dept and the CEO, *not* trustees; the trustees were not covered by HR Dept insurance. The CEO confirmed that she could commend the Professional Behaviour Policy to the Committee on the basis that it was drawn from the Staff Handbook, but she could not commend anything else. The Handbook was a long document and this Policy might help to make it easier for staff to understand conduct within it.

In answer to a trustee question, it was confirmed that volunteers were issued with an onboarding letter that included specific information including data protection. Day sheets, a form of risk assessment, were completed ahead of volunteer tasks, but the CEO wasn't aware of anything specifically on volunteer conduct. There was a Volunteer Policy in the Staff Handbook; the SttB said this needed to be updated. The Volunteer Policy did include a requirement to follow 'reasonable instructions'. A trustee suggested that to apply the Professional Behaviour Policy to trustees and volunteers as well as staff would be to duplicate documentation that already existed and there was general agreement with this view around the table. It was agreed that officers would work with HR Dept to create a section on volunteer conduct for inclusion in the Handbook.

A trustee pointed out that the advice of HR was that no further document was required for staff. The CEO said that she had recommended in January that a code of conduct was required because to have one was cited as good practice in the Charity Governance Code 2025; however, it had now been established that the Staff Handbook was sufficient.

Andrew Myatt drew attention to a document he had circulated to all committee members, arguing that the draft Professional Behaviour Policy was not fit for purpose, appeared to 'have an agenda' and to have sidestepped the issue he had raised. He considered that it was to the benefit of staff for their need to be impartial to be made clear and for there to be guidance on what *not* to do, such as engage politically or align with any faction. He added that he was disappointed that the Staffing Committee had been approving amendments to a Handbook they hadn't seen. Neither the officers present nor the Committee were clear why there had been a practice of bringing changes required by legislation to Board for approval and it was agreed that this would be looked into.

On the proposal of Frances Victory, seconded by Richard Bartholomew, it was RESOLVED unanimously that the proposal for a staff code of conduct should be withdrawn, because staff conduct was already covered in the Staff

Handbook. Thanks were recorded to those staff and trustees who had been involved in the research.

6. Staffing Matters

6.1. Employee engagement survey progress report

The Committee received a paper from the CEO and the paper slides of the survey outcomes as a visual aid, previously viewed by the Committee in July 2025. The CEO was conscious that her paper focused on action taken to address the seven questions with the most negative feedback, which HR Dept had recommended should be the priority, and she wished to stress that there had been plenty of positive feedback too. She said that the survey had opened up a conversation with staff, which was ongoing. Progress had been made via the SMT workshop with Staffing Committee and All Staff meetings attended by the two Trustee contacts (David Core and Lucy Hodgson). It was a work in progress – the CEO drew attention to the action plan in the paper annex – but there had been tangible improvements, demonstrating the Trust’s willingness to support its staff.

The Chair thanked staff present for attending the meeting and invited them to contribute to the discussion.

There was a discussion about if and when to repeat the survey, particularly given the staff changes that had occurred since the last one and consensus was reached that it should be an annual event. The CEO was concerned to make sure that staff feedback should not be focused entirely on a survey but and it was pointed out that there were various ways for staff to contribute depending on what was most comfortable for them, for example in one to one meetings with line managers, in appraisals or at All Staff meetings.

6.2. Staff Update

The CEO drew attention to the following points in her paper:

- The Secretary to the Board, as the Trust’s Mental Health First Aider, had led a session on personal stress awareness at the last All Staff Meeting. The CEO now wanted other staff to receive competency training in mental health awareness.
- The previous Staff Review had resulted in the CEO’s commitment to identify gaps in the staff structure. Three vacancies had been advertised in the period since the last meeting. Retirements in the Ranger team had created a window to introduce a Ranger team leader. The CEO would like to have a dedicated communications officer in house, but the Trust did not have the resources for this. Instead a budget had been allocated for communications outputs.
- The CEO drew attention to the photo in her paper of trustees viewing the refurbished reception area and the Chair commented that it was much more welcoming now.

6.3. Staff wellbeing

The Committee received a paper from the SttB on work done so far to promote staff mental and physical wellbeing, plus measures planned, which included the appointment of a liaison trustee for wellbeing and a possible wellbeing workshop for trustees. The CEO added that according to the Safeguarding Policy, a liaison trustee for safeguarding was also required. Lucy Hodgson was asked if she would be willing to take on both roles; she was already a member of Health and Safety Working Group and knowledgeable on safeguarding through her work as a school governor.

The SttB was asked to research what a wellbeing workshop for trustees might look like; the Committee felt attendance at such a workshop should be voluntary for trustees, although Lucy Hodgson thought that every trustee should get involved in the wellbeing of the organisation¹.

The SttB's paper also included, for information, a summary of key points from the Institution of Occupational Health and Safety Policy white paper: *From perks to prevention: redefining health and wellbeing for today's workforce*.

On the proposal of John Stock, seconded by Frances Victory, it was RESOLVED unanimously to recommend to Board that Lucy Hodgson should be appointed as the liaison trustee for wellbeing and liaison trustee for safeguarding.

7. Changes to the Staff Handbook

The Committee received a paper from the SttB, outlining the changes to the Staff Handbook that had been advised by HR Dept as required by legislation, effective from 6 April 2026.

On the proposal of Frances Victory, seconded by Lucy Hodgson, it was RESOLVED, with six in favour and one abstention, to adopt in the Staff Handbook the changes listed in the paper and required by legislation.

8. Health and Safety Update

The Committee received the CEO's health and safety report. She highlighted the following points:

- At its January meeting, the Board had asked for information on how risk management in relation to contractors was managed. A paper in response had been submitted to Land Management Committee and discussed by the Health and Safety Working Group. The CEO encouraged trustees to read this if they had not already done so.
- The Health and Safety Advisor (HSA) had commented that they could really see improvements that the Trust had made over the last three years. The CEO

¹ Employers have a legal duty to prevent stress at work. See [Work-related stress and how to manage it - HSE](#)

recorded her appreciation for the hard work of the Administration Assistant responsible for health and safety, and she complimented all staff present for helping develop a culture of improving health and safety. The HSA was also appreciative that eight trustees had made the effort to attend a health and safety briefing.

- The next priority was to develop procedures to sit under the new Health and Safety Policy. The HSA thought it would take 12 months to develop these, but the Trust wanted to do so sooner.
- There were ongoing concerns about the bin emptying operation; near misses and incidents relating to bin emptying had been reported during this period. The HSA had confirmed that, with bin emptying remaining part of staff roles, the Trust was managing as well as it could in a non-ideal situation. The CEO said that the Trust could not simply outsource health and safety issues of the work to a contractor; with its own people doing the work, the Trust had closer oversight.
- The CEO regretted that she needed to add a recent incident to the list of near misses verbally. A Ranger collecting a bin earlier in the week had found a shard of glass inside. Fortunately, the Ranger had not been injured. This was why it was so important for staff to have and use the correct equipment. It was an ongoing discussion and a serious one.
- A trustee drew attention to two near misses at Peachfield Common relating to the volume of litter and asked how often the bin there was emptied. A Ranger present said this was done every day of the year except Christmas Day. It was noted that Peachfield Common was a heavily used area, particularly by dog walkers.
- A trustee asked whether the Trust was considering mechanised bin emptying, in order to minimise staff contact with bin contents. The CEO said that this could be considered as part of the bin review, but the Trust could not just outsource the health and safety issues.
- A trustee referred to a near miss reported on a chainsaw use. The CEO said that the priority at the time was for the staff member to cease the activity immediately and to wait until it was certain that the equipment could be used safely. She stressed how important it was for near misses to be reported.
- There had been a useful all staff training session on conflict resolution, run by a company who trained RSPCA inspectors. The CEO and Estate Supervisor had attended a course on 'everyone can be a fire marshal'. The CEO said that training was due to provide off-road driving skills; the Trust was searching for a trainer who understood the kind of land the Trust owned.

9. Policy Review

The Committee received a paper from the SttB.

9.1. Policies in the Staff Handbook

- The SttB proposed some minor amendment to the Flexible Working Policy, drawn from the ACAS Code of Practice on flexible working. There might be some further minor changes following the government consultation on the new

Employment Rights Act 2025; the policy would be brought back to the Committee in 2027.

- The CEO had spoken to the Data Protection Officer about the current Data Protection Policy. They had advised that it was too long and had offered to review and refresh it. It had been agreed between the Chairs of Staffing and Finance, Administration & Resources Committee (FAR) that it would be more appropriate for the latter to have oversight of this policy. It would therefore be taken to the June meeting of FAR. The CEO drew attention to s170 of the UK Data Protection Act and pointed out that if trustees persistently used personal email accounts for Trust business, the Trust could not guarantee a secure environment, and trustees risked breaking the law. It was essential that the Trust was able to contain data in a safe system. If personal accounts were used for Trust business, the Trust would need to ask for the data to be returned upon leaving the Trust. This issue would also be raised at the June meeting of FAR.

9.2. Other Policies

- The SttB reported that she had worked to simplify the Staff Trustee Protocol. There was a discussion about encouraging trustees to introduce themselves to staff; it was very important for staff to know who they were. David Baldwin shared a photocard that he had been given some years previously, which could be shown to staff. It was noted that the SttB had been encouraging trustees who had not already done so to provide a photograph of themselves for the website. The SttB was asked to chase this up. The CEO reported that the website would be migrating to a new platform over the next few months and this might provide opportunities to improve the members and staff areas.
- It was confirmed that review of the CEO Appraisal procedure was being deferred until the current process was completed.

On the proposal of Frances Victory, seconded by John Raine, it was RESOLVED unanimously to recommend to Board that the Board approve the proposed amendments to the Flexible Working Policy, the Abusive, Persistent and Vexatious Complainants Policy, and the Staff Trustee Protocol.

10. Training Update

The CEO reported that she and Mark Driscoll would be attending the Civil Society Trustee Exchange in London on 28 April. She would provide any feedback via email.

11. Urgent Business

None

12. Date of next meeting

Thursday 8 October 2026 at 4 pm

Confidential

On the proposal of Richard Bartholomew, seconded by John Stock, it was RESOLVED unanimously to exclude the public for the discussion of item 13 on the agenda on the grounds that publicity would be prejudicial to the public interest by reason of the exempt or confidentiality nature of the business to be transacted (matters relating to individuals).

The meeting closed at 4.40 pm