Malvern Hills Trust

Ordinary Meeting of Staffing Committee
Guesten Suite, Lyttelton Well, Church Street, Malvern WRE14 2AY
Thursday 29 October 2026 at 4.00 pm

Present: Frances Victory (Chair), David Baldwin, Richard Bartholomew, Lucy Hodgson.

In attendance: CEO, Secretary to the Board, Finance and Administration Manager, Andrew Myatt, Chris Rouse.

Absent: John Stock

Before the meeting opened, a trustee in attendance raised a point of order, complaining that papers had not been circulated five clear days in advance (they had been circulated on Thursday 22 October) and that an attachment was missing. The Secretary to the Board said that she had cleared the date of circulation with the Committee Chair.

1. **Apologies for absence**
   Simon Baggaley, David Core (non-voting), John Michael (non-voting) John Raine.

2. **Chair's announcements**
   - A new Ranger Team leader had recently been appointed along with a new member of the Field Staff team.

3. **Declaration of interests**
   None.

4. **Public Comments**
   None.

5. **Matters arising from the Minutes of the meeting held on 16 April 2026**
   None.

6. **Staffing Matters**
   The Committee received a paper from the CEO. She went through the paper, highlighting the following points:
   - Work on the Employment Engagement Plan continued, with staff feedback being collected on an on-going basis.
   - David Core had attended the most recent All Staff meeting in his role as one of the Trustee Points of Contact and had provided feedback on decisions made by the Board at the Special Meeting on 8 October, to reassure staff. The meeting had also been a good opportunity to share positive Land Management Plan feedback with staff. A member of staff said they'd had the opportunity to demonstrate the remote-control mower to partners of the Malvern Hills National Landscape..

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- The CEO was concerned about low staff morale following feedback on less than positive interaction with trustees in staff appraisals and staff meetings. She invited suggestions from the Committee as to how low morale might be addressed. There were still plans to conduct another staff survey, but this would need to be done in-house due to cost. A trustee in attendance asked what was causing the low morale. The CEO said that staff felt that trustees didn't trust them and didn't really understand what they did; also, there was overreach into operations. Until recently, the problem had been confined to officers working in governance, but it had now spread to outdoor and conservation staff.
- The new Ranger Team Leader was leading on relaunching the volunteer programme. Committee members were interested to learn more about this. A trustee asked whether volunteers were recruited for specific tasks. The CEO explained that there were two conservation volunteer days a week during the spring and autumn months; the work of these volunteers was particularly valuable because they could access areas that machinery couldn't. There was less volunteer work during the summer and indeed volunteer tasks had had to be cancelled this year due to the heat. A trustee in attendance commented that field-based volunteer work by trustees was very valuable. A trustee asked how trustees knew what the volunteer tasks were. The CEO explained that this could be done by applying to become a volunteer. The Trust didn't publish a schedule of tasks because this might encourage people to turn up who were not registered volunteers. The SttB was asked to circulate a link to the volunteers' page on the website so that trustees could find out more.

7. **Changes to the Staff Handbook**
   None.

8. **Health and Safety Update**
   The Committee received the CEO's health and safety report. She highlighted the following points:
   - The main challenge of recent months had been coping with heatwaves and dry spells of weather. This had had a major impact on operations, with large number of calls to the office from people worried about their property's proximity to standing vegetation. There had been a fire at Happy Valley in early May, a vehicle fire in Townsend Way and another small fire, but otherwise problems had been confined to the usual challenges of barbecues on the Hills; nothing had got out of hand. There had been a week when the fire service had urged people not to mow due to the risk of igniting vegetation; the Trust had followed this advice, which had been unpopular with some members of the public. A trustee asked whether there was a way of highlighting to the public all the work done during the summer to prevent fires and the CEO said that there would be some information in the forthcoming Autumn/Winter Newsletter. The Trust would be producing a fire plan as part of the new Land Management Plan.
   - A trustee in attendance observed that the land at Happy Valley had recovered in three weeks and asked whether the Conservation Manager had taken the

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opportunity to review the value of controlled burning. The CEO said that the Trust had ceased the practice some years previously. The vegetation might have recovered, but ground nesting animals had died instantly and there were also nesting birds that were lost. The impact of the fire would be assessed in the fire plan.

- The Health and Safety Working Group (HSWG) oversaw a rolling action log. Members had reviewed the annual summary of tree safety and had noted the presence of sooty bark disease. When found, this might need to be removed by a contractor.
- The Health and Safety Advisor (HSA) had done his customary sixth-monthly visits to the Trust. The first meeting had focused on operations, while for the second, senior staff had taken part in an emergency scenario, comprising a member of staff having an accident in a Trust vehicle when the CEO was away. The HSA's feedback was that their approach had been level-headed and competent. The HSA had supported the Trust with advice on dealing with heatwaves; it had been helpful to have an external perspective on this.
- The CEO was pleased to report that recent fire assessments had identified great improvements at Top Shed, Manor House, and St Ann's Well, due to the pragmatic, inexpensive measures implemented.
- The Bin Review continued. The HSWG had held a useful discussion at its September meeting about the provision of dog waste bins. The Trust was not required to provide these and it was noted that organisations such as Forestry England and Wyre Forest had removed them completely. The CEO had held two useful meetings with Malvern Wells Parish Council where it had been agreed that organisations needed to work together to find a solution, because waste had to go somewhere. Staff safety and manual handling requirements were of paramount importance.
- The CEO said that the number of reported incidents was higher than she would like. She noted the four instances of work-related stress and incidents due to the heat, alongside incidents arising from normal day-to-day work on the Hills. A trustee commented that they were grateful that all these incidents *were* being reported, because of the potential for learning. Another trustee recommended that the member of staff responsible for the completion of RIDDOR reports might benefit from attending accident and investigation training. It was noted that the KPI for RIDDOR reports was that there should be zero; there had been two in the previous financial year, but none so far this year. The CEO explained that notifiable accidents remained on the reporting schedule until the regulatory investigation was complete. A trustee asked whether the Trust had to be notified if the emergency services attended an accident on Trust land. The CEO said not; the reported incidents involving members of the public were only there because the Trust knew about them, perhaps because a Ranger had helped at the scene. They needed to be reported in case of a claim. A trustee asked whether the recent vandalism of water bowsers was a police matter; the CEO thought this had been reported the problem had been addressed via the installation of locks.

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- The CEO summarised her report by stressing that all incidents were used as an opportunity to learn. The HSWG received the full dossier and had the opportunity to review and comment. Next steps priorities included the development of the procedures to sit under the Health and Safety Policy and the creation of a risk assessment to protect workers from stress at work. The CEO explained that a procedure was being drafted for each main hazard, which would inform a list of competencies and lead to a risk assessment. It was hoped that the drafts would be ready by January 2027.
- Lucy Hodgson, Trustee for Safeguarding and Wellbeing, reported that she had recently completed annual safeguarding training in her role as a school governor. The SttB was asked to check whether this training was sufficient to cover Mrs Hodgson's role at the Trust. Mrs Hodgson said that she would welcome some training on stress and wellbeing.

9. **Staffing Risk Register**

The Committee received, for information, a copy of the risks from the Risk Register that had been allocated to Staffing Committee. The CEO explained that the full Register was being updated ahead of the Annual Meeting in November. She expected that the impact scores of these risks would remain the same and the likelihood scores mainly the same.

- The potential for internal disputes score had been raised to four, which trustees at the recent Risk Management workshop had agreed was appropriate. Trustees were asked to suggest any possible control measures. A trustee asked whether the Staff Trustee Protocol was working and the staff present thought not, although it was noted that the Points of Contact worked well. It was further noted that due to staff turnover, membership of the Protocol Working Group needed a refresh.
- A trustee referred to the red risk of loss of key staff. The CEO said that actually this hadn't changed and was always high. The Committee considered that the risk was significant, given what had been reported at this meeting. A trustee commented that the morale of staff *and* trustees had been adversely affected by the poor behaviour of certain trustees and members of the public, and they expressed a hope that the Board could make it clear that such behaviour was unacceptable and enforce discipline. The fact that the Board was split on the Bill did not mean that it was not possible to be courteous to the staff. A trustee in attendance insisted that trustees were required to be 'unwaveringly analytical' and that they were there to apply due diligence, which might be uncomfortable for trustees and staff. However, there was a difference between asking the right questions and doing so in an insulting or mocking manner. The SttB reminded the meeting that trustees were expected to provide not just challenge but also support to the organisation and its staff. A trustee commented that a Board meeting was not a time to accuse staff of not doing their job, especially not in front of members of the public.

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10. **Policy Review**

The Committee received a paper from the SttB. She apologised for omitting the attachment. Hard copies of the draft Stress and Wellbeing Policy were tabled for committee members and it was agreed that the policy would be discussed in detail at the next meeting.

10.1. Policies in the Staff Handbook

- None for this meeting.

10.2. Other Policies

- **Safeguarding**. The SttB reported that she had reviewed the Safeguarding Policy and was recommending that it be approved unchanged. It was agreed to recommend that the Board do so.
- **Prevention of Bullying and Harassment**. New provisions of the Employment Act 2025 were due to come into force on the day after this meeting, requiring employers to take *all reasonable steps* to prevent harassment of staff by third parties and *all reasonable steps* to prevent sexual harassment. There was concern about what this meant in practice and the SttB was asked to do further research to find some relevant examples that could be included in the policy. It was however noted that the changes were required by law and must be made. The SttB recommended that the Chair could highlight the new requirements at the November Board meeting, and that the Policy could be presented to the January meeting. A trustee recommended adding a reference to the Protection from Harassment Act 1997 to the policy. The CEO expressed concern about the increasing burden of regulation, observing that the Trust did not have the capacity to deal with it. It was suggested that the CEO research the approach being taken by similar organisations.
- **Stress and Wellbeing**. A trustee in attendance suggested that officers had gone into the drafting of this policy 'blind' and should be consulting HR and lawyers. The CEO and SttB both objected to this analysis. It was noted that the SttB held relevant qualifications and that the Trust was responding to concerns raised in the employee engagement survey and discussed with HR and the HSWG.

11. **Staff Training Update**

Nothing further to report.

12. **Urgent Business**

None.

13. **Date of next meeting**

Thursday 14 January 2027 (provisional)

The meeting closed at 5.30 pm

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