Malvern Hills Trust

Special Meeting of Staffing Committee
Park View Community Room, Malvern Town Council, Victoria Park Road, Malvern WR14 2JY
Tuesday 15 July 2025 at 5 pm

Present: Frances Victory (Chair), Richard Bartholomew, Lucy Hodgson, John Raine, Mary Turner, Sheila Wren.

In attendance: Chris Rouse, CEO, Secretary to the Board.

1. **Apologies for absence**
   David Baldwin, David Core, John Michael.

2. **Chair's announcements**
   The Chair announced a change in the agenda order.

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 10 April 2025**
   - The Staff/Trustee Protocol Working Group had suggested 'a meeting without an agenda' between Staffing Committee members and outdoor staff, to take place at Top Shed. Given working patterns it was suggested that two dates be arranged so that all staff would have the opportunity to attend on at least one occasion. **Action**: Vice -Chair to contact the Operations Manager to arrange dates. Lucy Hodgson reminded the meeting that she and David Core attended alternate All Staff meetings in their roles as Trustee Points of Contact.
   - The CEO said that she had expressed concerns about the levels of staff sickness absence at the April meeting. However, having looked back to the figures for the first four months of 2024, levels of absence overall had been broadly similar, although peaks had come at different times. There were therefore no concerns.

6. **Policy Review**

   6.1. Bullying & Harassment Policy
   The Committee received an updated version of the Policy, together with an explanatory note from the Secretary to the Board. It was recommended that, for clarity, the Policy be renamed *Prevention of* Bullying & Harassment. Training had recently been provided for staff and for Nominated Contacts by Sara Marrett of HRDept, who had recommended that the CEO should not automatically be one of the Nominated Contacts, as had been the case formerly, in order for them to remain impartial.

A trustee drew attention to the reference to 'different genders', querying whether this should be 'opposite sexes'. It was agreed to check this point with Sara Marrett. It was also agreed to replace the reference to 'competent worker' with 'member of staff, trustee or volunteer', since the policy applied to all three groups.

It was noted that behaviours identified in the Policy as bullying and harassment would be discussed at the Risk Management Workshop on 18 September. A trustee cautioned that it needed to be clear that some of these behaviours would be classed as criminal under the Protection from Harassment Act 1997 and urged that any potential criminal behaviours should be highlighted.

On the proposal of Lucy Hodgson, seconded by Mary Turner, it was RESOLVED unanimously to recommend to Board that the policy be renamed the *Prevention of* Bullying & Harassment Policy and the recommended updates discussed in this meeting be adopted, following discussion with HRDept. It was also agreed to recommend that the CEO would not be one of the staff Nominated Contacts.

7. **Changes to Staff Handbook**

7.1. Whistleblowing Policy

An updated version of the Policy, reviewed by Sara Marrett of HRDept at the request of the CEO, was received. Sara Marrett had recommended the addition of an explanatory paragraph under the list of six specific concerns, and the rewording of section 11.6.3 on how to raise a concern.

A trustee pointed out that the Policy did not specify how a concern could be raised about the Chair of the Board. It was agreed to amend the Policy at 11.6.3 to read: *If you feel unable to raise the matter with the CEO, for whatever reason, please contact the Chair of the Board, Vice-Chair of the Board, or Chair of Governance Committee.*

On the proposal of Frances Victory, seconded by Sheila Wren, it was RESOLVED unanimously to recommend to Board that the updated version of the Whistleblowing Policy be included in the Staff Handbook, subject to the amendments agreed in this meeting.

8. **Health and Safety Update**

8.1. Health and Safety Report

The CEO's report for 1 April to 30 June 2025 was received. The following points were highlighted:

- The arrival of the new Operations Manager had assisted the Trust in being able to make operational improvements, with practical solutions being sought to the on-going issues around bin emptying, including more frequent collections in areas with heavy footfall. Bin locations were also being reviewed by means of an electronic map. The CEO was consulting other organisations on their handling of these issues. A proposal would be going to the September Board meeting for the purchase of a Suzuki Carry, which would have multiple purposes for the Trust, including assisting with bin emptying. A trustee noted that some organisations had opted to remove bins entirely and asked if the Trust might choose to do this. The CEO said that there was no proposal to go down this route now, but the experience of others could be looked at. A trustee asked whether there was any requirement in the Acts for the service to be provided – it was thought not – and suggested that the issue should be included in the Private Bill.

- The CEO had attended a toolbox talk for staff on dynamic risk assessment (DRA), delivered by the Trust's Health and Safety Advisor. She had been pleased with his confirmation that staff had the time and resources to carry out and implement DRA, referring the Committee to the two 'near miss' reports for the period, which both related to the cancellation of events due to the extreme weather forecast. It was acknowledged and appreciated that both the Health and Safety Working Group and Staffing Committee were very concerned about near miss reports.
- There had been a number of first aid incidents on the Hills. The CEO urged the Committee not to be overly concerned about this. It was a case of 'the more you look the more you find'; staff were out on the Hills and therefore around to help when there was an incident. There had been an occasion when a Ranger had personally taken the casualty to hospital; the CEO confirmed that it was the duty of the First Aider to promote recovery and that it was therefore sometimes appropriate to take this action if there was no chance of an ambulance arriving before the casualty's condition deteriorated. Staff working on the Hills were trained in First Aid with Forestry, which gave them the ability to make a judgement as to when to take this action; the clarification of 'on call' responsibilities also assisted with this. The Trust had an interest in all incidents on the Hills due to possible resulting insurance claims against it, but often staff input was not needed.
- The CEO confirmed that the notifiable accident and reported accident quoted in the report were one and the same. The Trust could not comment further on this incident at present.
- Trust staff had been busy enforcing the byelaws on unauthorised fires, which were not permitted anywhere on Trust land. Following a recent fire at Peachfield Common, a Ranger had been asked by the fire service to remain on site and monitor the scene for an hour to ensure that the fire did not restart.
- A trustee referred to the training needs in the report that were marked 'as needs basis' and asked what this meant. The CEO said that there

was a schedule of dates; the Trust had full records of what would be required when.

- Finalisation of a new Health and Safety Policy was still outstanding; the CEO reassured the meeting that the existing policy was still in date, but it was planned to have a revised format for the new policy.

9. **Training Update**
Covered under health and safety; nothing further to report.

10. **Staffing Matters**

10.1. Staffing Recommendations, survey results and recommended actions

The survey results were tabled in the meeting for committee members only and collected in again afterwards.

10.1.1 Staffing Recommendations

Trustees received, under confidential cover, a paper prepared by the CEO and the Vice-Chair of Staffing Committee on progress against the Staffing recommendations since January 2025. The following points were highlighted:

- The original Serious Incident Report dated October 2023 largely centred around the departure of senior staff and the need to replace them. Replacement staff were in post and this was therefore dealt with.
- There had been some recent positive interactions between staff and trustees.
- Significant progress had been made in early 2024 with the Trustee Code of Conduct, but unfortunately two trustees appointed in May 2025 had so far not signed it, despite reminders.
- There had been a specific requirement in the Staff Review of early 2024 for the incoming CEO to review and restructure the staffing of the Trust. The CEO said she had decided this was not required.
- The Staff Trustee Protocol Working Group had met twice, the second time in June when the Group had reviewed the survey results and fed back its thoughts to the CEO. There had been some progress implementing the Protocol, although a small minority of trustees continued to behave inappropriately.
- No additional member of staff had taken up the opportunity to be 'on-call'. The CEO said that the Trust needed to consider the feasibility of providing this service. It was noted that Worcestershire County Council Open Spaces team had ceased their on-call service. However, the CEO added that the Trust did have a grazing operation and a significant number of calls for their attention were received by the Trust out of hours, which staff passed on. It was noted that if the service was needed, the Board would need to decide how to fund it. It was suggested that the

Trust might look at sharing on-call resources with similar organisations.

- It had been agreed that long service awards would be presented to staff at the next All Staff meeting on Wednesday 10 September.
- Managers had received training from HRDept on objective setting. There was work in progress to cascade objectives set for the CEO throughout the whole organisation. HRDept had provided key performance indicators for staffing; if these were approved by the Board, Staffing Committee would be able to track progress between meetings.

10.1.2 Staff Survey Results

- The CEO was pleased with the 73 % response rate to the survey and proud that staff felt able to be honest and open in their responses. It was good to note that most staff felt they received recognition and praise.
- Clearly there was a challenge around staff feeling supported by trustees and trustees recognising that their role was strategic. It was also disappointing that some staff felt they didn't have opportunities to learn and grow.
- There was a discussion as to how the Trust might explore some of the issues further with staff, perhaps via focus groups or an internal briefing session at the All Staff meeting. The CEO was invited to advise trustees how they might support the process.
- Referring to the list of verbatim comments, the CEO said that she was reassured that none of the remarks was a surprise to her; the Trust had good lines of communication.
- Senior Management Team had only seen and discussed the results at its last meeting on 2 July; with hindsight, it would have been better for them to be involved sooner.

10.2. **Staff well-being**

The Chair announced that there would be a workshop for Staffing Committee members and members of the Senior Management Team to discuss staff well-being. Committee members were invited to forward suggestions for discussion topics to the Chair.

11. **Urgent Business**

None

12. **Date of next meeting**

Thursday 9 October 2025 at 4.30 pm

The meeting closed at 6.25 pm