

Malvern Hills Trust

Ordinary Meeting of Staffing Committee

Manor House, Grange Road, Malvern WR14 3EY

Thursday 29 January 2026 at 4.00 pm

Present: Frances Victory (Chair – arrived 4.20 pm), David Baldwin, Richard Bartholomew, David Core (non-voting), Lucy Hodgson, John Michael (non-voting), John Stock.

In attendance: CEO, Secretary to the Board, Andrew Myatt (for items 1-8).

John Michael opened the meeting as Chair of the Board and chaired the meeting until Frances Victory's arrival.

1. Election of Chair

Frances Victory was appointed unopposed as Chair, proposed by Richard Bartholomew and seconded by John Raine.

2. Election of Vice-Chair

John Raine was appointed unopposed as Chair, proposed by Lucy Hodgson and seconded by Frances Victory.

3. Apologies for absence

John Raine.

4. Chair's announcements

There was a change in the order of the agenda, with item 10c being taken after item 7, since Andrew Myatt was attending to speak on item 10c only.

5. Declaration of interests

None.

6. Public Comments

There were none, no members of the public being present.

7. Matters arising from the Minutes of the meeting held on 9 October 2025

None

8. Staff Conduct (item 10c on the agenda)

The Committee received a paper prepared by the CEO, who reported that in October 2025, a trustee had requested the addition of a risk to the Corporate Risk Register, defined as a risk of actual or perceived lack of impartiality or conflict of interest by senior staff in advising or interacting with trustees, leading to a loss of confidence in governance assurance and decision-making integrity. The CEO had agreed to the request, pending the introduction of any new related policy; it had been suggested that the risk might be addressed through the introduction of a staff code of conduct.

The CEO had consulted with colleagues at the comparator organisation Wimbledon and Putney Commons Trust and established that they did not have a staff code of conduct. However, further research identified it was recommended as good practice in the recently issued Charity Governance Code (November 2025) for staff and volunteers and the CEO therefore recommended to the Committee that the Trust should introduce one. If the Committee accepted the recommendation, she proposed to invite the Staff Trustee Protocol Working Group (STPWG) to be involved in its development, bringing together in one place the parts of current documents and policies relating to staff behaviour.

Andrew Myatt was invited to address the Committee. He said he was delighted that the CEO had recognised that there was a gap and was making the recommendation. He said he had observed a 'tangible change in culture' since he was last on the Board in 2011 and asserted that his reading of two external investigation reports suggested that there had been lack of trust on behalf of staff and some trustees; trustees needed to be sure that staff were not conflicted.

The Secretary to the Board (SttB) left the meeting at this point.

Andrew Myatt referred to a paragraph in an external investigation report. He stated his belief that many of the problems currently experienced in the schism within the Trust were due to the perceived lack of impartiality of staff and that if there were a clear code of conduct, this would support the staff and would a basis upon which to judge everyone.

Frances Victory arrived at 4.20 pm

The CEO responded that she had received feedback from staff that there had been clear breaches of the Trustee Code of Conduct and the Staff Trustee Protocol, without any sanctions being applied to the trustees concerned, because the Trustee Disciplinary Procedure did not function effectively. However, if staff were to breach a Staff Code of Conduct, they could be disciplined; there would therefore be an imbalance.

A trustee referred to the CEO's paper, noting that the introduction of a code of conduct might make staff feel safer and if that was the case, the trustee would be in favour of it. The Chair of Staffing noted that staff certainly did not feel safe at the current time.

The SttB returned to the meeting.

A trustee said that since the new CEO came in, the whole staff culture had been lifted 100% and another trustee agreed. They felt that the code of conduct could be consolidated from other things.

A trustee said that they had never encountered partiality in staff. However, they thought that it was good practice for any organisation to have a staff code of conduct and that it would help employees in certain aspects. They added that adherence to the

trustee code of conduct should be addressed at the same time. They later recommended that HR Dept as an independent party should be asked to draft it.

A trustee referred to previous requests for access to information on behalf of trustees, pointing out that trustees needed to be mindful of the limitations of the capacity of staff, most of whom were not employed full-time. The trustee hoped that it might be possible to make use of technology to facilitate better access. They also reminded the Committee that it was important when considering staff/trustee relationships to remember that staff were servants of the Board, and not individual trustees, and to acknowledge that wholly inappropriate information requests had been made in the past

On the proposal of John Stock, seconded by Lucy Hodgson, it was RESOLVED unanimously to recommend to Board that a policy and procedure is required on staff conduct.

Andrew Myatt left the meeting at 4.30 pm

9. Staffing Matters

The Committee received a paper from the CEO. She drew particular attention to the following points:

- A member of staff had been promoted internally to the post of Estate Supervisor, on a six-month trial basis. This would be announced formally at the next Board meeting. The Committee welcomed the internal promotion.
- There had been two recent and well-received all staff events: a Christmas social with tree planting on 17 December and 'Brew Monday' at Top Shed on 19 January.
- The CEO gave some examples of recent positive interaction between staff and trustees. She was very grateful to the Chair of the Board for his Christmas 'walkabout'. The decision of the Chair of Staffing to hold the April 2026 meeting at Top Shed demonstrated the Committee's wish to interact with staff and see their environment as it really was. Staff and trustees had both been involved with the improvements to the reception area at Manor House, which it was hoped would make it more welcoming to visitors.
- A pay benchmarking exercise had recently been carried out by the Trust's HR advisor; this process took place every few years. One post had been identified for salary uplift and this uplift factored into the budget. The CEO acknowledged the challenge of rewarding staff who were allocated additional responsibilities whilst still adhering to NJC pay scales.
- The creation of the post of Land and Property Manager had been a great success. The postholder was both achieving cost savings and generating new income. The CEO felt strongly that additional communications capacity was needed – there was a squeeze on the capacity of the Conservation & Community Officer post, together with a need to explain the Trust's work to the public and address challenges to its reputation occasioned by the Private Bill –

but a communications post was not affordable at present and so the Trust would use external comms support based on outputs.

- A member of the Ranger team would be retiring in February. The CEO had built capacity for a part-time Ranger supervisor post into the budget and the vacancy afforded the opportunity for it to be full time. She hoped to fill this via internal promotion, which is permitted in the Staff Handbook. The CEO confirmed that there were no new net costs to the staff budget and the Committee confirmed their approval of the planned way forward.
- The CEO confirmed that she would provide an update report on the Employee Engagement Survey actions to the April meeting and stressed there was plenty of activity already underway.
- It was noted that following the resignation of Sheila Wren from the Board, a replacement for her was required on the STPWG. Lucy Hodgson volunteered to join the group; this was considered particularly appropriate given that Mrs Hodgson is also a Trustee Point of Contact under the Prevention of Bullying & Harassment Policy.

10. Changes to Staff Handbook

There were none.

11. Policy Review

The Committee received a paper from the SttB, together with proposed minor amendments to three policies within the Staff Handbook. The paper also confirmed that the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Policy had been reviewed by the Trust's HR Advisor, who had advised that no changes were required at this time. The Committee also received for information a schedule for review of all policies allocated to Staffing Committee.

On the proposal of Richard Bartholomew, seconded by Lucy Hodgson, it was RESOLVED unanimously to recommend to Board that the proposed amendments to the three policies within the Staff Handbook should be adopted and that the EDI Policy, approved by Board in March 2024, required no changes at this time.

12. Health and Safety Update

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

- The new Health and Safety Statement and Policy had been formally approved by the Board on 15 January 2026. All staff and trustees were to be asked to sign a form to confirm that they had read it. The CEO would be implementing training for staff on risk assessments, commensurate with their roles; this was a new commitment in the policy.
- The Board had expressed an interest in engaging contractors from a health and safety perspective; to inform this the CEO and Operations Manager had

attended a briefing with the Health and Safety Advisor on appointing contractors and the Land and Property Manager was due to attend a RICS-accredited construction project management course. The CEO would brief the Health and Safety Working Group (HSWG) at its February meeting on what the organisation should be doing, any gaps and how the Trust planned to fill them if applicable.

- The CEO said the Trust's liability as regards contractors varied on the work being carried out and where it took place. For example, a contractor with more than five staff working on Trust premises would be required to provide a Health and Safety Policy and clear, documented risk assessments at the start of the contract, followed by dynamic risk assessments in the field when the contract began and progressed, taking account of conditions and circumstances at any given time. A trustee hoped that the Trust would usually be able to appoint contractors who were clearly competent, had the appropriate public liability insurance in place and who understood that they would not be supervised by Trust staff. The CEO said that the Health and Safety Advisor had advised the Trust to make sure that any contractor possessed public liability insurance at the same level as the Trust's.
- A trustee asked who observed health and safety operations; the CEO said it would vary depending on the circumstances. The CEO said that, since the issue had been raised at a Board meeting, it was important for the senior management team to consider who was carrying out observations and to ensure that the relevant people were trained and competent, and that those competencies were recorded. A trustee said they assumed that all staff felt comfortable calling out anything unsafe and the CEO reassured the committee that this was the case.
- The bin review was in progress and two trials of bin weights had been carried out. The CEO confirmed that there was no legal maximum lifting weight but that there were HSE guidelines. It was clear in the risk assessments that if a load was too heavy, a member of staff must ask for help.
- The Extreme Weather Emergency Plan and Business Continuity Plan had recently been activated during snowy weather. Snow did tend to attract visitors to the Hills and the CEO had met with the Land and Property Manager and Operations Manager to review how this had gone, with the aim of revising the plans. The Operations Manager was researching contractors who might carry out gritting if needed.. Trustees were concerned about staff safety and queried whether car parks should not just be closed in case of bad weather, but the CEO pointed out that car park closure was difficult to enforce and a trustee noted that staff would have to go out to enact a closure in any case. The Health and Safety Advisor had provided advice.
- The CEO was sorry to report that there had been another notifiable incident under RIDDOR. . A trustee said that the Committee needed to be reassured that everything that could be done to protect staff in the bin emptying operation was being done. The CEO added that the HSWG would be scrutinising all reports of accidents, incidents and near misses at its next meeting in February.

- There was a discussion about trustee behaviour towards a member of staff at the Special Board Meeting on 26 January 2026 and it was agreed that unacceptable behaviour needed to be called out when it happened. Although it was acknowledged that the Trust did not currently have the power to discipline trustees and that staff were well aware of this, it was nevertheless important complaints should be made where appropriate and tracked. It was pointed out that staff well-being was part of staff health and safety and linked with safeguarding.

13. Training Update

- The CEO reported that she and the Vice-Chair of Land Management Committee would be attending the Trustee Exchange 2026, organised by the Civil Society, on 28 April 2026.
- A further round of training on Prevention of Bullying and Harassment was required, since a number of trustees had either not been able to attend the course in November 2024, or had joined the Board since then. It was noted that this training needed to be offered on a regular basis in order to protect the organisation.

14. Urgent Business

14.1. Staffing Committee's risk management responsibilities

A snapshot of risk responsibilities allocated to Staffing Committee was tabled and trustees were invited to forward any questions to the CEO. It was agreed that an up to date snapshot would be included in the meeting pack for each future meeting of Staffing Committee.

15. Date of next meeting

Thursday 16 April 2026 at 3 pm

The meeting closed at 5.45 pm