

EMPLOYMENT, FINANCE & STRATEGY GROUP MEETING

Meeting 17th April 2025

Minutes

1. Present: Cllrs Hotson, Sharp, Arger and Clerk

(Cllr Hotson chaired meeting in Cllr Riordan's and Perry's absence)

2. Apologies for Absence Cllrs Riordan, Martin, Perry and Wakeford

3. Dispensations - NA

4. Minutes of previous meeting – 20th March 2025 – agreed by those present
Group requested Clerk to send email offering condolences to Cllr Lottie Reid

5. Action plan – discussed

3 – Youth club initial discussion with KCC HR – arranging another teams meeting .
Also chasing "West Kent Thames Gateway" youth service to buy in youth service – generally preferred option

22- 3G pitch – still chasing planning permission

25 – Cleaner interviews this coming week – Cllr Sharp / Hotson – suggest at Council meeting request delegate authority in consultation with the Chairman, using the same Cleaning Service Contract otherwise Council would have to wait until 12th May 2025 Council meeting.

(Note used Indeed for Groundsman post– 20 or so applications which EFS group reviewed)

RFO aims to give an update to the group on Year-end and the amount of Council Reserves before going to AGM - Agreed EFS group meeting 11am 6th May 2025.

Arrange Cllr workshop late May 2025 / early June 2025 to discuss allocation of Council Reserves / funding priorities.

6. Organisation of Annual Parish Meeting / Staplehurst Awards and Social evening – Friday 16th May 2025 – discuss

- a) Promotion – Banner ordered, social media and website as an event – therefore may get some idea of those attending

Organisation on the evening – AM – add Cllrs attending SPC stall

- b) Clarify speeches / Merit Awards presentation – sent first draft of presentation sent to AM, onto Coms Group, asked MBC / KCC Cllrs for some key points
Merit Award Nominations sent to SCEnic

What do we want on the SPC stall?

- Report from Community Groups x 2 - JT

- 3G pitch plan – Colour A3
- Strategic Action Plan x 2
- Who does what x 2
- Previous Parish Magazine - remaining
- Request for Volunteers
- Feedback form

Agreed Logo photo Cllr ID Badges

7. Parish Council AGM – revised draft agenda discussed

Add in End of year accounts, remove appoint HR subgroup as EFS Group agree HR Subgroup from EFS Group

8. Devolution

- Verbal update – need to engage with Devolution consultation process after KCC elections

ii. Discuss potential services refer to SPC Strategic Action plan
Devolution may offer Staplehurst Parish Council the opportunity to taken on some Kent County Council or Maidstone Borough Council services, but do we want their liabilities?

Group discuss potential services against Parish Council priorities? More of an initial focus on what we **DO NOT** want to take on. Groups initial thoughts below.

Current				Devolution		
Responsibility / Service	KCC	MBC	SPC	SPC	NO	Comment
Abandoned Vehicles		✓			N	
Advertising Banners – depending on location	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Advertising – signs		✓	C	C		
Allotments			✓	✓		
Benches		✓	✓	✓	?	Audit, budget implications
Benefits		✓			N	
Building Regulations / Enforcement		✓			N	
Bylaws – depending on area	✓	✓	✓	✓	N	
Car Parks – Bell Lane		✓	C	C	N	

Cemeteries – burial related		✓			N	Staplehurst Church manages cemetery.
Cemeteries – mowing		✓			N	Staplehurst Church manages cemetery.
Charitable Street Collections		✓			N	
Children's Play Areas (housing areas, Lime Trees)		✓			?	Audit, budget implications
Children's' Play areas / Recreation Grounds			✓	✓		
Concessionary Bus fares	✓		C	C	N	
Council Housing		✓	C	C	N	
Council Meetings	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Council Tax		✓	C	C	N	
Dog Fouling		✓	C	C	N	
Economic Development		✓	C	C	N	
Education	✓				N	
Electoral Register		✓	C	C	N	
Emergency Planning	✓	✓	✓	✓	?	SEHT, Council supports with funding
Employment promotion		✓	C	C	N	
Environmental Health		✓			N	
Football pitches			✓	✓		
Footpaths	✓		✓	✓	?	Concern about lack of maintenance, budget implications
Graffiti removal general		✓			?	Part of an evolving community warden role?
Grass cutting – depending on area		✓	✓	✓	?	Audit, budget implications
Grass cutting – Road verges	✓				N	
Gritting and salting	✓				N	

Hackney carriages - Taxis		✓			N	
Hedges and Shrubs – responsibility of land owner – if danger to road KCC can cut and charge land owner.			✓	✓	?	Audit, budget implications
Hedges and Shrubs road side	✓				N	
Highways	✓		C	C	N	
Highway maintenance	✓		C	C	N	
Homelessness		✓			N	
House to house charity collections		✓			N	
Housing benefits		✓	C	C	N	
Housing list		✓	C	C	N	
Kent and Medway Fire and Rescue Authority	✓				N	
Leisure centre – Cranbrook is TWBC -		✓			N	
Library	✓				?	Concerns at cost
Litter control – depends on area litter is in	✓	✓	✓	✓	N	
Markets and Fairs		✓			N	
Noise Nuisance and control		✓			N	
Parks & Open Space			✓	✓		
Parking and parking enforcements		✓			?	Audit, budget implications
Pavements	✓		C	C	N	
Pavilion			✓	✓		Surrenden Field
Planning Policy		✓	C	C	N	

Planning Applications		✓	C	C	N	
Planning enforcement of approved applications		✓			N	
Pollution – Air		✓	C	C	N	
Public Toilets			✓	✓		
Public entertainment licence		✓	C	C	N	
Public transport	✓		C	C	N	
Recreation Ground			✓	✓		
Recycling		✓	C	C	N	
Refuse collection		✓	C	C	N	
Refuse disposal		✓			N	
Social Services	✓				N	
Street cleaning / Road sweeping		✓			N	
Street entertainment licences		✓	C	C	N	
Street lighting	✓				N	
Street lighting – Nicholson Walk, Chapel Lane and 6 on Maidstone Road			✓	✓	N	Do not want street lights.
Street Trading Licences		✓	C	C	N	
Street furniture – benches, bus shelter etc	✓				N	
Tourism		✓			N	
Traffic Road Safety	✓		C	C	N	
Trees on the Highway	✓				N	

Youth Service	✓				?	Buy in service or partner with neighbouring Parish Council
Community Warden	✓				?	Audit functions, budget implications

Summary of groups discussion

- MBC / KCC may seek to off load liabilities / services they do not want – cannot afford
- Do not want assets / liabilities / services without funding
- Need to audit, clarify costs of any asset /service before any transfer
- Clarify Parish Council evolving "Powers"
- Clarify Parish Council Risk / Insurance
- Potentially evolving partnership roles with neighbouring Parish Councils; Youth Services / Community Warden etc
- "Bundle contracts" into one i.e. Open space maintenance

Agreed arrange Cllr workshop on devolution, implications for Staplehurst once we know more, September 2025.

Engage residents once proposed service / costs are known.

9. Dispensations Information

Group discussed dispensation information after some discussion at recent meetings.

(Will circulate update to all)

10. HR issues

DJ doing well, working hard at home to finish Year End. Aiming to be back in the office 6th May 2025, phased return to the office with some working from home if required.

Council Reserves in the region of £225,527 (General, earmarked and ring fenced) plus CIL of £55,925.

Appraisals dates

- RG – 23.4.25 – AM and MA
- DJ – 29.4.25 – RG and AM
- JT – 30.4.25 – RG and AM
- PN – 7.5.25 – RG and AS

a) Pay review

Cllrs may have underestimated the impact on staff.

Staff asked RG for copy of HR report to the 31st March 2025 Council meeting on Wednesday 26, Thursday 27 and Monday 31st March 2025 – RG informed staff daily he had not received a copy of HR report to the 31st March 2025 Council meeting.

Group confirmed no HR report to the 31st March 2025 Council meeting, just verbal update

b) Discussion of potential report to staff related to recently approved wage rises.

As the wages are in a contract, therefore a change in wages is a change in contract, the Chairman should write to each member of staff formally confirming the changes to their contract, a letter has been drafted.

c) Communication with staff since the wage rises were approved.

Staff asked RG for the decision as soon as he knew on Tuesday 1st and Wednesday 2nd April 2025. Cllr Arger visited the office on the morning of Wednesday 2nd April 2025 and became aware nothing had been sent to staff.

Therefore when RG received an email from Cllr Riordan in the afternoon of Wednesday 2nd April 2025 he forward it on to Staff.

PN actually walked into the office just after RG opened email and discussed with him – asked to chat when back from holiday.

Note ongoing communication with staff will initially be through appraisal system

Group confirmed DJ can carry forward 8 days holiday from 2024/25 into 205/26.

11. Next Meeting 15th May 2025, 1:30pm Parish Office