

EMPLOYMENT, FINANCE & STRATEGY GROUP MEETING

Minutes 6th May 2025

1. Present: Cllr Riordan, Perry, Sharp, Arger, Martin Plus RFO (part) and Clerk

2. Apologies for Absence: Cllr Hotson
Absent Cllr Wakeford

3. Dispensations - NA

4. Minutes of previous meeting – 17th April 2025 - agreed

5. Financial update – RFO led the discussion

a) Year-end amendments

- Allotments – still no water charge
- Jubilee Field maintenance – under budget
- Skatepark maintenance – under budget: due to inclement weather painting not undertaken
- Youth club maintenance – slightly over budget
- Staff costs – under budget
- Audit – over budget - external audit fee increased as intermediate procedures took place due to increase in income and expenditure
- Overall, underspend of £37,579

b) Reserves

Group agreed to recommend to reallocate £4,000 from allotments to:

Surrenden Field - £1,000

Youth Club building - £1,000

NDP Review - £1,000

Wimpey Field - £1,000

6. Dispensations. (moved until after item 7, 8 and 9)

7. Parish office health and safety documentation & insurance requirements;

Cllr Riordan led the discussion and felt that it had not been dealt with adequately in the past.

Group explained that this was the 6th time this item had been discussed at EF&SG and that the Council was in a good place regarding H&S.

Cllr Riordan felt the Council insurance was invalid in 2023 as the SCCT did not have a valid EICR and that the Youth Club had been closed due to insurance issues.

RFO explained that the Parish Council owned and was responsible for the Youth Club building. A Fire Risk Assessment report from a qualified assessor, approved by the Council, highlighted considerable issues and the assessor recommended closure of the building. The Council insurance company would not insure the Youth Club building until the required work was completed.

Cllr Riordan disputed the qualified assessor (note Council meeting 18th September 2023, item 4.5)

The group concluded the discussion.

The Parish Office is two small offices and a store cupboard. It is used by three members of staff and occasional visitors.

The primary Health and Safety Legislation is the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974, which is overseen by the Health and Safety Executive. (HSE).

The HSE guidance for a shared office of under 10 people is verbal discussion and review, as required, at least annually.

2022

When the Clerk arrived July 2022 the Council was in turmoil.

Locum Clerk in place– two short hand over meetings, RFO was on long term compassionate leave, a Locum RFO and one member of staff just back from serious illness.

Clerk discussed Office Healthy and Safety with staff, as per HSE guidance, and a written Risk Assessment sent to Council, therefore exceeding HSE advice.

2023

In 2023 an annual Office Risk Assessment was completed with staff plus PAT tests, checking fire extinguishers etc. Purchased PPE for Caretaker and a written Risk Assessment sent to Council, exceeding HSE advice.

2024

The Council is moving towards Health and Safety standards for an “open office of 10”: Introduced further standards such as Work Station Assessment, mix of weekly, monthly, annual checks and a written Risk Assessment sent to Council, exceeding HSE advice for an office of over 10 people.

Building

The Parish Office is rented from SCCT.

SCCT's EICR was found to have expired in 2023, the new EICR was completed on 11th and 12th April 2024, actions undertaken and EICR lasts five years until April 2029

SCCT have provided copies of their insurance for 2023, 2024 and 2025.

Conclusion

The Chairman raised the lack of a historical check list, but now completed, monitored and moving forward Parish Office health and safety is in the best place it has ever been. The Council check includes SCCT responsibilities so the Clerk can chase in advance.

However, Health and Safety is a continuous process of monitor, review and improve. The Council should not be complacent.

Health and Safety will continue to be a regular item on the EF&SG agenda and EF&SG/Council will review Office Risk Assessment in summer 2025.

8. Appraisal process

Cllr Riordan led discussion and felt that he had a right as Chairman to have an input to the Clerk's appraisal and claimed that a meeting took place without his knowledge, and therefore he had been excluded.

Following the appalling appraisals in 2024 staff felt a need for Cllr training. Clerk arranged KALC HR training with neighbouring Parish Councils.

All members of EF&SG attended training, 30th October 2024, and The Appraisal Policy was drafted by Cllr Martin and went through the EF&SG in early 2025, Council adopted the Appraisal Policy at the Council meeting 31st March 2025 Minutes...2340/6.1, circulated for the meeting

Setting up Appraisals 2025

Cllr Riordan emailed on the 3.4.25 asking Clerk and Cllrs to arrange the staff Appraisals by the end of April 2025 and said he would be back on the 15th April - he did not give days/times when he was available or which Cllrs the HR Group had earmarked to staff appraisals.

Cllrs Martin and Arger emailed in with dates/times of their availability.

Clerk discussed these with staff and pencilled in appraisal dates.

Cllr Riordan apologised for not being able to make the EF&SG meeting on the morning of the 17.4.25

At the EF&SG meeting in the afternoon of the 17.4.25 the following appraisal dates/times and attendees were noted

- RG – 23.4.25, 2:30pm – AM and MA
- DJ – 29.4.25 11am – RG and AM
- JT – 30.4.25 10.00- RG and AM
- PN – 7.5.25 3pm – RG and AS

Note PN had been away so his appraisal drifted into early May.

Cllr Martin emailed Clerk and Cllr Arger early on 22.4.25 to say she could not make the Council meeting on 22.4.25 or the appraisals on 23.4.25

An exchange of emails between those present at EF&SG led to Cllr Sharp stepping forward as substitute for Clerks appraisal on the 23.4.25.

Alleged meetings

The Chairman alleged he was been exclude from meetings. It was noted that just before the Full Council meeting on 22.4.25, the Clerk popped outside to check people knew where to go as the meeting venue had been changed to the large hall and, in the process, he bumped into Cllr Arger (who was directing people across to the large hall)

Clerk said - "Just confirming Cllr Sharp tomorrow" Cllr Arger said "Yes" Clerk said "See you tomorrow"

The group felt this was more of a conversation, not a meeting – no meetings took place.

Cllr Riordan still felt this was an illegal meeting and wanted to know why he was not included. As per Appraisal Policy members of staff are allowed to veto one Cllr, the Clerk had requested at the EF&SG meeting 17.4.25 that Cllr Riordan be vetoed.

The Clerk took a break from the meeting.

The RFO left the meeting.

9. Dealing with the letter written breaching policies

Clerk returned to the meeting, Cllr Riordan stated that he felt that the RSG had breached policy – RSG Terms and Conditions. Cllr Riordan then left the meeting.

Group confirmed this item had been discussed already 3 times, on the 20th February 2025 group agreed matter was "closed and concluded."

Previous Council Clerk's had drafted letters and they had been sent for years without going through Council. However, to avoid any future misunderstanding, the current Clerk put forward, agreed by Council (27th January 2025 2332/7e) "that in future letters to groups of residents should be approved by Council"

Deferred Item 6 Dispensations Information

Legal position

- Localism Act 2011 – sections 26-34
- See NALC guidance note – LTN 80

Perception

In some cases the perception is just as important as the legal position.

Most Cllrs know numerous residents, there is no need to "declare an interest because you know them" but sometimes it is best to do so due to perceptions.

Declaration Standard Practice

- If a Cllr (and officer) has an Pecuniary interest they should declare it
- Primary through their DPI form at the start of their appointment as a Cllr
- Then amend as required
- But then also on individual agenda items at meetings – it should be in writing beforehand to the Clerk
- If a Cllr has a pecuniary interest for Council and Planning meetings the Councillor should leave the room and is called back when the item has been concluded
- Alternatively they can request to seek a dispensation to speak and or vote
- This is a decision by the Councillors at the meeting, including those seeking dispensation by the way

Why leave the room if you have a Pecuniary Interest?

- Localism Act 2011 – sections 26-34
- See NALC guidance note – LTN 80 states "he/she is barred from participating in any part in the discussion or voting"
- This is basically to protect the individual Councillor and Council from claims of misconduct / bribery etc

Dispensations

- As mentioned Councillors can seek a dispensation
- Could be a written request and can be up to, but not more than 4 years
- Should not really be used unless the following criteria;
 - Without the dispensation the number of persons prohibited for participating in any particular business would be so great a portion of the body transacting the business as to impede the transaction of the business or

- Granting the dispensation is in the interest of persons living in the Council's area or
- It is otherwise appropriate to grant a dispensation

Practical way forward

The EFS Group felt that Council should follow the following:

Detail

The EFS Group felt that Council should follow the following:

If a Cllr has a **Pecuniary interest** – own land, property in family, contractual interest etc – they should leave the room for the item and could offer a written statement to the Chair of the meeting to read out.

If a Cllr is a **Trustee they should** write seeking dispensation up to 4 years or next election (May 2028) declaring an interest but seeking dispensation to be able to speak / answer questions and **not vote** or leave the room for the item.

If this dispensation request is approved by Council the dispensation would roll over for 4 years / next election.

If a Cllr is **named on planning application / or Trustee of the applicant-** and is a Cllr on the Planning Committee they should leave the room for the item and could write a statement to the Chair of Planning to read out.

If a Cllr, as an **individual has already opposed an issue in writing** they should leave the room for the item and could write a statement to the Chair of the meeting to read out.

If a Cllr has a **general interest** i.e. house opposite or can be seen from your own property, or know the person in the village – there is no need to declare an interest. However for **transparency / perception** may seek a dispensation.

If a Councillor is a **Council representative** to an outside body /group they should declare an interest and seek dispensation.

Councillors on Parish Council Working Groups do **not** have to declare an interest.

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