

EMPLOYMENT, FINANCE & STRATEGY GROUP MEETING

Meeting 20th November 2025

Minutes

- 1. Present:** Cllrs Sharp, Arger, Hotson and Perry and plus RFO and Clerk
- 2. Apologies for Absence –** Cllr Riordan
- 3. Dispensations -** NA
- 4. Minutes of last meeting –** agreed.

Note Vexatious Complaints Policy includes “Vice Chairman of EFSG” need to elect a Vice Chairman of EFS Group

Cllr Arger proposed, and Cllr Perry seconded Cllr Martin – agreed unanimously.

- 5. Action Plan –** on target
- 6. Budget 2025/26**

RFO lead discussion main points;

Christmas lights – investigate with KCC if they can be extended down the Hill towards Pinnock Lane, if so what cost? Leave Christmas Lights as is.

JF budget - potential drainage work – will need fully costed scheme and use “Sinking Fund from 2025/26” which should go into ring fenced reserves 31st March 2024.

If 3G pitch goes ahead still need to operate until hand over – summer 2026.

Leave JF budget as is.

Playground equipment purchases – potential cost but wait for results of consultation - cost of new equipment likely to be £10,000 plus. Leave as is.

Parade Toilets – still not opened and need to clarify how this is going to work. May become part of the Asset Transfer process of Unitary Authority. Discussed Surrenden Field lease / freehold and how complex and protracted that was. Leave budget as is.

Parish Service Grant – likely to stay the same, leave as is.

6a) Comparative grass pitch fees and charges

Clerk circulated comparative data (MBC, Sutton Valance, Marden, Goudhurst and Hawkhurst) following a discussion agreed to leave as last year.

6b) 3G pitch discussion

We all recognise that the delays in the planning process led to an increase in costs.

Latest construction cost – 1,094,055.09 see attached, subject to final check by Football Foundation – only minor amendments likely.

Some potential saving to overall project cost – remove container relocation (£5,000) from contractors cost and ask SMFC CIC to use their £2,200.

Also contribution to UMID board – Council could pay directly to save contractors overheads profit at 13.5% to overall project cost. But UMID board contribution added to Council fees.

Current funding

Football Foundation Grant £741,979.00

Confirmed S106 £210,616.98

SPC earmarked reserves £ 15,000.00

Kent FA £ 5,000.00

Total £972,595.98

Potential £1,000 from KPFA

Shortfall £121,459.11

Professional fees – see attached.

Paid to 28.10.25 – £25,996.76

Potential up to £44,536.76

Options – Group discussed each option in turn.

Option A – Reduce costs.

Retain soil on site? £50,000? This was raised by FF as the only realistic larger cost saving.

Group confirmed concerns ; concrete / contamination of soil, require amend Planning condition – do not want to do that as MBC took eighteen months to approve planning.

Option B – Council fund

Council find funding from Reserves / CIL

General Reserves – see policy - NALC guidance suggests a prudent level of general reserves to be not less than **3 months or 25%** of its annual expenditure/precept but no more than **6 months or 50%** of its annual expenditure/precept. However, the amount of general reserves should be annually risk assessed and approved by the council.

Therefore option to use General Reserves £51,000 (leaves £90,000 – 30% of precept)

Cil £70,459 (leaves £18,551.20)

Total £121,459.11

Potential but other projects fall back.

General Reserves -

CIL - Council receives about £2 – £30,000 of CIL per year but cannot budget for it.

Over time CIL pot would replenish for other projects, so priority would be 3G pitch.

Option C Public Works Loan plus Reserves / CIL

PWL say £80,000 and Plus CIL £41,459.11 (leaves £47,092.09 in CIL)

PWL say £80,000 illustration

10 years not more than 101/2 years = 5.12% = 4,972.25 x2 = £9,944.50 per year,
total overall payment = £104,417.25

Budget say £11,000.

15 years not more than 15 ½ years = 5.51% = £3,870.97 x2 = £7,741.94 per year

total overall payment £120,000.07

Budget sat £9,000.

Note this could lead to a lower precept as JF budget costs would disappear – and be replaced with

- Loan fee
- Management fee

Previously Council used a PWL to purchase Community Centre, still a big decision for the Council to take but it then becomes line in budget in future years.

Depending on Management Fee could show a reduction in the JF budget.

If this leads to increase in budget then need to consult – this will take too long due to time pressure on Football Foundation to start by March 2026.

Option D Re-tender

Exit fee to existing contractors - to be confirmed, would need to be paid up front.

Then retender and **hope** to make a saving on overall cost.

Also risk of time pressure as Football Foundation need project to start before end of March 2025.

Option E – Stop project.

Exit fee to existing contractors - to be confirmed.

General feeling of group is that Council should try and find a way to deliver project, However, in the Council as a whole; some Cllrs against, some Cllrs for and some not sure.

Clerk to circulate FAQ, contractors' calculations, PWL calculator, presentations, Reserves Policy, and CIL Policy.

All of EFS group invited to Teams meeting with FF, Monday 3pm (Can come into the office if you wish)

Timescales

Meeting with Football Foundation – 24.11.25

Cllr Workshop – 1.8.25 – presentation then discussion

Closing date for Sport and Recreation Tender submissions - 5.12.25

3G Multi-Sport Group meeting to consider tender submission – 11.12.25 – 7pm will invite all Cllrs.

Further questions and answers with potential contractors – week of 5.1.26 invite all Cllrs to attend.

Agreed that it should not be a public Council meeting as we would not be able to ask key questions nor potential contractors answer the questions in public due to contractual confidentiality.

6c) Churchyard budget – discussion include following points.

We have an agreement, it would be wrong to just break the agreement, it has Six-month break clause and requires "such sums as it (SPC) considers appropriate."

It is a donation / contribution not commitment to cover the churchyard maintenance costs.

Church is a valued community facility in Staplehurst – does not depend on going to Church, or not.

Some Cllrs feel it is an “open cheque book” and the Church have made little effort into funding / volunteers work regarding maintenance of Churchyard.

Other Cllrs felt that the Church have raised significant funding for the Church Tower in recent years and historically the Parish Council has always supported the Church.

Most Churches have groups of volunteers that do maintenance to the Churchyard, to help keep costs down.

The setting of Church Burial fees are controlled centrally; the local church cannot just put up fees like a local authority run cemetery or have resident / non-resident fees.

Suggested to ask for Churches latest accounts. (AM to ask)

The Group felt

- That we should retain the figure of £17,000 in the draft budget.
- Encourage Church to get volunteer working groups to do maintenance – we are promoting the one this weekend.
- In New Year discuss with the Church “cap the amount moving forward” in future years.

6d) IT Contract / subscription reductions

Items such as Zoom, Norton not being renewed as with IT Contract package

7 Contracts

Following a debate group agreed to recommend the following to Council.

Appendix Staplehurst Parish Council - Forthcoming Contract Reviews/Renewals 2025-26							
Contract Item	Company	Annual Value 2025-26	Annual Value 2026-27	Cost per Unit 2026-27	Current Contract End Date	Notes	Actions
Grass mowing Youth Club x8 cuts	Forestry First Ltd	£480.00	£520.00	£65.00	31/03/2026	Increase of 0.083%. EF&SG for FC Approval.	Agreed by EF&SG for approval by FC.
Hedge Cutting Youth Club x2	Forestry First Ltd	£600.00	£600.00	£300.00	31/03/2026	No price increase. EF&SG for FC Approval	Agreed by EF&SG for approval by FC.
Hedge cutting Surrenden Field	Forestry First Ltd	£1,500.00	£2,900.00	£2,900.00	31/03/2026	Price for one-off cut to £8ft to contain hedge as only one cut p.a., hedge overgrown EF&SG for FC Approval	Not possible to cut to a height of 8ft as agreed with residents to keep to 12ft. Further quotes required.
Mowing A229/Chestnut Avenue X8 cuts	Forestry First Ltd	£640.00	£680.00	£85	31/03/2026	Increase of 0.058% EF&SG for FC Approval.	Agreed by EF&SG for approval by FC.
Hedge Cutting Jubilee Field	Forestry First Ltd	£780.00	£780.00	£780.00	31/03/2026	No price increase. EF&SG for FC Approval	Agreed by EF&SG for approval by FC.
Grass mowing & strimming Wimpey Field x48hrs	Contrast Garden Maintenance	£1,200.00	£1,200.00	£25 per hr	31/03/2026	No price increase. EF&SG for FC Approval	Agreed by EF&SG for approval by FC.
Grass mowing Surrenden Field including hedge line	Forestry First Ltd		£3,120.00	£195.00			Not accepted.
Grass mowing Surrenden Field including hedge line	Landscape Services	£1,994.38	£1,967.62	£122.98	31/03/2026	Reduction in cost of £26.76 EF&SG for FC Approval	Agreed by EF&SG for approval by FC.
Hedge Cutting Chestnut Ave/A229	Landscape Services		£150.62	£150.62			Not accepted.
Hedge Cutting Chestnut Ave/A229	Contrast Garden Maintenance	£525.00	£250.00	£250.00	31/03/2026	Price reduction due to extra work carried out in 2025. EF&SG for FC Approval	Agreed by EF&SG for approval by FC.
Hedge Cutting Chestnut Ave/A229	Forestry First Ltd		£150.00	£150.00			Not accepted.

Please note Audit statement

The RFO advised the EF&SG members that she had received a letter from Mazars, the external auditors, in response to her complaint that they had incorrectly raised a point in their audit report to the effect that no internal audit of the accounts in 2024/25 had been completed at the time of the AGAR. In their letter Mazars accepted that this point is inaccurate and 'wholeheartedly apologise for this matter being included on the external auditor's report'.

Next Meeting 18th December 2025, 10am at Parish Office.