

EMPLOYMENT, FINANCE & STRATEGY GROUP MEETING

Minutes of meeting 18th December 2025

- 1. Present:** Cllrs Sharp, Martin, Arger, Perry and Hotson plus the Clerk and RFO
- 2. Apologies for Absence:** Cllr Riordan
- 3. Dispensations - NA**
- 4. Minutes of last meeting** – Cllr Martin proposed, and Cllr Sharp seconded to approve minutes of 20th November 2025- agreed unanimously
- 5. Action Plan** – noted work with Peninsula of HR and HS work starting in January 2026
- 6. Finalise Budget 2026/27** – RFO led the discussion, some points are:
 - Basic increases to each expenditure budget where known, otherwise inflation increase
 - Greener Group retain £2,500 budget
 - Christmas lights – includes Christmas Tree and Parade lights but **not** new motifs.(could use projects budget)
 - Churchyard budget - agreed at Council agreed 8th December 2025 includes £17,500 + £1,767.
 - Jubilee Field / skate park – retain as a working budget
 - Public Toilets - sum for operating Bell Lane and potentially Parade disabled toilets
 - Youth Service – already removed £14,000 for Youth Worker
 - Projects includes sum for Surrenden Field pavilion, additional motifs reduced to £21,000
 - Professional fees includes new HR and HS consultant fees agreed 8th December 2025
 - Running costs - includes ongoing office rental, telephone, IT support
 - Fees and charges, following discussions and comparisons supported. Note nominal charge for Surrenden Field being introduced
 - The discussion include the use of refundable deposits – but felt that should be worked up and considered next year.

Summary of draft 2026/27 budget

Expenditure £342,757.60

Income £41,850.80

Proposed rounded precept £301,000.00

Proposed 2026/27 budget compared to 2025/26

As the tax base has increased to 3,090.10, the £1,000 increase in the precept figure means that there is 0.05% reduction in the Parish Council portion of the Council Tax in Staplehurst.

For a Band D property, which is the mid-range property and used for comparisons, see below.

	2025/26	Proposed 2026/27	Increase
Precept	£300,000	£301,000	£1,000
Band D – annual	£99.72	£99.67	0%
Band D – monthly	£8.31	£8.30	0%
Band D - weekly	£1.92	£1.92	0%

We need to ensure that residents understand that we have been prudent and worked hard to keep the Parish Council portion of the Council Tax the same as 2025/26.

RFO to highlight % increases over the past few years and double check the budget figures for a 0% increase.

Following a discussion Cllr Arger proposed and Cllr Perry seconded to recommend to Council the following proposed budget for 2026/27 budget

Expenditure £342,757.60

Income £ 41,850.80

Proposed rounded precept £301,000.00

Percentage decrease -0.05%

7. Finalise funding 3G Multi-Sport pitch

Construction cost

At the Council meeting on the 8th December 2025 the Guaranteed Maximum Price construction cost of £982,027.62 was agreed by Council. This was reconfirmed by the Design and Build Contractors on the 9th December 2025.

Funding mix

The Employment, Finance and Strategy Group considered the funding shortfall as set out below

GMP2 Construction cost **£982,027.62**

The confirmed funding is set out below

Football Foundation Grant	£741,979.00
S106 funding	£210,616.98
Parish Council	£ 15,000.00
Kent FA Grant	£ 5,000.00
Total	£972,595.98

Construction cost shortfall £ 9,431.64

We have submitted a grant application to Kent Playing Field Association £1,000, awaiting a decision but are unlikely to be successful as they focus on smaller projects.

Additional Council costs, taken out of contract to save additional contractors fees are;

Upper Medway Internal Drainage Board - £10,410.62	
BNG Monitoring Fee	- £10,000.00
Total	£20,410.62

Following a discussion Cllr Arger proposed and Cllr Sharp seconded that the Employment, Finance and Strategy Group recommend to Council the following Council funding;

Construction cost shortfall = £9,431.64 use CIL funding, leaving £79,119.56 in CIL for further projects in line with CIL Policy.

Additional Council cost = £20,410.62 –

- General Reserves £10,410.62, leaving £131,190 in the General Reserves, 43.8% of 2025/26 precept, well within Reserves Policy.
- Reallocate £10,000 from Youth Club earmarked reserves as work on the youth club building is completed, but retain £3,485.10 in earmarked reserves for any future issues at the Youth Club.

Note use professional fees for projected professional fees in 2025/26 and possibly 2026/27.

Clawback clause – legal check.

For a Football Foundation grant of this size there is a 21-year clawback clause. The Council solicitor has raised the issue that some wording is a bit legally ambiguous. The Football Foundation support you through the project to deliver the football development plan, realistically the only reason the Clawback would be enacted is if the Council sold the site.

Just to clarify the meeting with the prospective sport and recreation management company is on Thursday 15th January 2026 – 10am at Jubilee Field. It is not a Council meeting, but a meeting all Councillors are welcome to attend.

Clerk raised some other Jubilee Field issues;

Girl Guides lease our solicitor still concerned over legally ambiguous wording – meeting this afternoon – finalise and circulate to all Cllrs. Update Cllrs at Council meeting 12th January 2026.

Pavilion guttering – Roofers did cut edge erosion yesterday tried clearing gutters – but root system has developed. They suggest only real way of doing it is to remove the guttering, cut out and put back or put back new guttering? Agreed ask for a quote?

8. Contracts – RFO lead the discussion

Contract Item	Company	Annual Value 2026-27	Cost per Unit 2026-27	Current Contract End Date	Notes	Actions
Surrenden Field hedge	Forestry First Landscape services	£2,300 £949	£2,300 £949	Autumn 2027	Concern about Landscape Services standard of work	Recommend Forestry First £2,300 plus VAT
Bell Lane Toilets - Cleaning/Open/Sundries	P&F Cleaning Services Ltd	£12,120.00	£1,010.00 p.m.	31/03/2026	No price increase. EF&SG for FC Approval.	Recommend P and F Cleaning £12,120 plus VAT
Youth Club - potable water supply	Castle Water	120.00 est.	£10.00 p.m.	31/12/2025	Ongoing annual roll over. EF&SG for FC Approval.	Recommend Castle Water £120.00 plus VAT per year est

Clerk to report to Council the following

PEAT - testing Parish Office, Air Raid Shelter, SF Pavilion, Youth Club	South East PAT Testing	£125.00 est.	£50 up to 50 items then £1.15 per item thereafter	16/12/2025	Testing carried out bi-annually. Parish Office only carried out in 2023. Air Raid shelter carried out in 2024 for 1 year.
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Wimpey Field - Management of land	KCC - Medway Valley Countryside Partnership	Need to confirm		31/03/2026	EF&SG for FC Approval.
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CCTV service taken place – need to replace video recorder £473.11. Agreed to proceed ASAP.

9. Volunteer Awards and Annual Parish Meeting

Council AGM 11th May 2026

Therefore, suggest Fri 15th May 2026, subject to North Hall being available

Same as last year, went well / positive feedback – advert in Village Update Adult / Junior Volunteer Awards

Promote widely after 12th January 2026 – nomination closing date end of March 2026.

Scenic at their April 2026 meeting consider nominations and recommend to Council meeting 20th April 2026.

Following a discussion Cllr Arger proposed and Cllr Sharp seconded to recommend to Council the following.

Volunteer Awards and Annual Parish Meeting – Friday 15th May 2026, North Hall
Same style format as last year.

Volunteer Awards – Adult / Junior closing date for nominations 5pm 31st March 2026

10. One more thing, next EFSG meeting changed to 22nd January 2026, 10am at the Parish Office.