

## **EMPLOYMENT, FINANCE & STRATEGY GROUP MEETING**

### **Meeting Notes 20<sup>th</sup> March 2025**

- 1. Present:** Cllrs Martin, Hotson, Perry and Sharp
- 2. Apologies for Absence:** Cllrs Riordan, Wakeford and Arger  
(Cllr Perry Chaired the meeting in Cllr Riordan's Absence)
- 3. Dispensations - NA**
- 4. Minutes of previous meeting –** 20<sup>th</sup> February 2025, agreed by those present.
- 5. Action plan**
  - Kings Head - emailed on 13.3.25 - approved
  - Youth Club – emailed 13.3.25 – Meeting with LPR, KCC Cabinet Member for Children's Services Monday 24<sup>th</sup> March 2024.

#### Staff issues

Note need to advertise for cleaner – suggest on Council Facebook website – already approached by two people.

" We are seeking a self-employed cleaner for the Jubilee Field Pavilion lobby area / toilets and Youth Club – 2 hours per week, flexible hours, £20 per hour. It will be an advantage if you are local and can provide references. Please contact the clerk on clerk@staplehurst-pc.uk"

Staff Holidays - can carry over up to 5 days

- Clerk take 1 day before 31st March 2025 – carry forward 4.5 days
- RFO still to take 8 days – currently on return to work, HR Subgroup consider if 5 or 8 days can be carried forward
- Administration 3 days to take before 31<sup>st</sup> March 2025 – 5 days to carry over
- Caretaker – 0 days to carry over

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

a) Promotion – social media, community groups, banner, posters etc  
Advert in Parish Magazine, on social media, community groups, posters in village, Library, local shops etc.  
Agreed outdoor banner £80 plus VAT which can be used every year

Note sponsors "Balfour Winery and Homeleigh Group"

- b) Organisation on the evening – draft room layout – agreed
- c) Clarify speeches / Merit Awards presentations

Group felt that content of the speeches should be in the rolling presentation and that any speeches should be focused - 3 minute rule for each speaker - followed by Public Questions

Then a break and the Merit Awards presentation about 30 minutes later.

6pm – 7:30pm set up

7:30pm - Open

7:30pm – Mingle / stalls

8:15pm – Formal APM Speeches / Questions and Answers

8:30pm – Mingle / stalls

8-45pm - Merit Awards presentation

9:00pm – Mingle / Stalls

9:30pm - close and clear up

AM actions attached; AM chase up rota for Cllrs

## **7. Parish Council AGM**

The group discussed the draft agenda

Noted RFO is:

- Reviewing updated Model Financial Regulations - 1 amendment
- Subscriptions, donations and grants 2024/25 summary
- Proposed 2025/26 Subscriptions, donations and available grants budget

Group felt that a number of Cllrs and residents have raised concerns regarding the acoustics in the Infant Hall at the school. Now the South Hall has WIFI – general view is should return Council / Planning meetings to South Hall.

Clerk to clarify cost / availability of south hall and that the WIFI works – then report to Council with option to move back to the South Hall from 12<sup>th</sup> May 2025.

## **8. 3G pitch funding options**

Planning information still not on MBC planning portal, Clerk to chase again.

Group discussed 3G pitch funding - we know increase due to additional car parking and delays but will not know the actual cost until planning permission obtained and Design and Build Consultants confirmed figure.

Once known organise a Cllr workshops to look at all options such as CIL, Reserves, External funding and clarify funding priorities before a decision is made.

This will need to done within about 3 months of the planning permission.

## **9. Devolution**

Group discussed devolution and what approach does the Council want to take?

- Preferred option is the West Kent option
- Some consideration being given to a Swale, Maidstone and Ashford area due to "shared services"
- Note the Police Commissioner will be cut.

What are the impacts on Staplehurst Parish Council?

Likely increase in powers so “assets and services” potentially transferred to SPC?  
Need to seek clarification in “devolution consultation period” after KCC elections in Spring / summer 2025.

### **Assets – potential transfer or purchase**

KCC assets in Staplehurst? – the youth club land, Library, disabled toilet in parade area, School, parcels of open space, roads, footpaths / PROW

MBC assets in Staplehurst? Bell Lane (toilets and car park), Surrenden Field, parcels of open space – Lime Trees Playground

Aim for transfer but potentially Parish Council may need to purchase? Public Works Loan? This process goes through KALC initially.

Potential “services transferred” to Parish Council.

- Youth?
- Library?
- Community Warden?

SPC has a number of options for Assets or Services

No – SPC decide do not want the asset or service  
SPC - partnership with neighbouring Parish Councils  
SPC – take on asset or service but contract out  
SPC - Direct management by the Council

Likely not enough funding allocated / donated to the Parish Council to cover assets or services, currently Parish Council’s precept not capped so we can increase if required.

### **10. Parish Office Health and Safety**

Group discussed Health and Safety check list – up to date and working well – above the legal requirement as we have less than 10 employees.  
Clerk noted Cllr Riordan has concerns about previous years.

### **11. Precept – discuss – see Council cover report**

Group discussed increased and public comments Cllr Perry noted SPC £166 compared to MBC £504

Noted that group discussed the emerging 2025/26 budget on the 19/9/24, 17/10/24, 7/11/24, 21/11/24 and with detailed figures / increases on the 19/12/24.

Council discussed in detail on the 9/12/24 and then approved on 27/1/25 with report highlighting increases.

Cllr Martin and Cllr Hotson noted that we discussed issues but on reflection more scrutiny may have been required.

Main increases due to;

- Did not increase during COVID years
- Housing numbers grew, so could cover inflationary costs without increasing precept
- Contract inflation

Main increases in 2025/26 when compared to 2024/25

- Churchyard maintenance increase by £3,290 – in Churchyard agreement
- Public toilets £6,025 – proposed extra disabled toilet
- Staff - £10,000 – mostly NI increase
- Youth Service £14,000 – for contribution to pilot scheme
- General running costs 7,627 – contract increases, rent increase, Cllr IT equipment etc
- Cllr Allowance - £7,150

Need to consider how we can manage budget during 2025/26 – such as Cllr IT equipment, or disabled toilet project

## **12. Next Meeting 17<sup>th</sup> April 2025**