

NORTHSTOWE TOWN COUNCIL - PERSONNEL COMMITTEE
MINUTES of the meeting held on 13th May 2025 at The Cabin, Northstowe.

Members: 6 - Cllr Bros Sabría (Chair); Cllr Delip (Vice-Chair); Cllr Benedicic; Cllr Castelino; Cllr Hodgson; Cllr Susarla.
Quorum: 3 Members.
Present: 3: Cllr Benedicic; Cllr Bros Sabría; Cllr Hodgson.
Town Clerk; Deputy Clerk
Members of the Public: 1.
Apologies: Cllr Castelino; Cllr Delip; Cllr Susarla.
Absent: N/A.

The meeting was started at 7:00 PM; Cllr. Bros Sabría took the Chair.

01/25-26/PER APOLOGIES (Standing Item)

To record apologies for absence received prior to the meeting.

Apologies had been received, and accepted, from: Cllr Castelino; Cllr Delip; Cllr Susarla.

02/25-26/PER DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (Standing Item)

a) *Councillors to declare any pecuniary or personal interest in any items on the agenda.*

b) *Councillors to declare any prejudicial interest in any items on the agenda and to inform the Chair if they wish to speak on the matter during public participation.*

None were declared.

03/25-26/PER PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (Standing Item)

To allow members of the public and Councillors declaring a prejudicial interest to address the meeting in relation to business to be transacted at this meeting (for up to 15 minutes in total; maximum 3 minutes per person).

A member of the public wished to speak regarding items 05/25-26 and items 06/25-26 on the agenda, requesting for the Personnel Committee to consider that most of the sub-items were not to be included in a closed session, given the nature of those sub items and that there have not been any supporting documents published on the website in advance of this meeting. The Chair thanked the member of the public for their contribution.

04/25-26/PER MINUTES OF PREVIOUS COMMITTEE MEETINGS (Standing Item)

1) *To approve the minutes of the meeting of the Personnel Committee held on 10th January 2025 as a true record of the meeting (draft minutes attached).*

It was proposed by Cllr Bros Sabría, seconded by Cllr Benedicic and **RESOLVED**, unanimously, **to accept the minutes of the meeting of the Personnel Committee held on 10th January 2025 as a correct record.**

2) *To approve the minutes of the extraordinary meeting of the Personnel Committee held on 11th March 2025 as a true record of the meeting (draft minutes attached).*

It was proposed by Cllr Bros Sabría, seconded by Cllr Benedicic and **RESOLVED**, unanimously, **to accept the minutes of the meeting of the Personnel Committee held on 11th March 2025 as a correct record.**

To resolve to move into a closed session and exclude the public and press, in accordance with the Public Bodies (Admissions to Meetings) Act 1960, due to the sensitive and/or commercial nature of business to be discussed under items 05/25-26/PER to 07/25-26/PER.

It was proposed by Cllr Bros Sabría, seconded by Cllr Hodgson and **RESOLVED**, unanimously, **to AMEND the motion, changing 'items 05/25-26/PER to 07/25-26/PER' to: '05/26-26/PER(1) and 07/25-26/PER'.**

It was proposed by Cllr Bros Sabría, seconded by Cllr Hodgson and **RESOLVED**, unanimously, **to move into a closed session and exclude the public and press, in accordance with the Public Bodies (Admissions to Meetings) Act 1960, due to the sensitive and/or commercial nature of business to be discussed under items 05/25-26/PER, sub-item 1 and 07/25-26/PER (as amended).**

The Chair used their discretion to change the order of the agenda, by first dealing with items 05/25-26/PER(1) and 07/25-26/PER first.

05/25-26/PER RE-RECRUITMENT ASSETS AND ESTATES MANAGER

Further to items deferred to Personnel Committee at Full Council meeting 22nd April 2025, item 14/25-26/FC(1-3):

1) *To receive and consider an exit interview held with the outgoing Assets and Estates Manager, held on 29th April 2025 by Cllr Hodgson on behalf of the Town Council (shared with Cllrs).*

The Chair invited Cllr Hodgson to provide further details on the exit interview held with the former Assets and Estates Manager; he then highlighted several points. In a subsequent discussion a number of items were considered as things for the Council to consider taking on board, for future recruitment and staff management purposes;

- Provide clarity where there are evening or other irregular hour work needs;
- Manage expectations, during interviews, as to extent of delegated powers and responsibilities, and progression and benefits options;
- Reconsider length of the probationary period and align this with level of position;
- Identify staff member's skill set early on and work within those parameters;
- Define clear criteria and milestones during probationary period;
- Line manager to raise staff members' wellbeing / job satisfaction concerns with Personnel Committee;
- Ensure mutually beneficial and respectful interactions between Members and officers at all times.

07/25-26/PER STAFFING MATTERS

1) *To receive and discuss an overview of staffing tasks against FTE availability and needs (shared with Cllrs.).*

The clerk summarised the information shared with Councillors, highlighting that the spreadsheet shared is a further detailed version of what had been shared with the committee for its January 2025 meeting; it assesses per work stream (and for individual key tasks within each work stream, also showing which member of staff is leading on tasks) the FTE needs for each work stream against current capacity. The clerk summarised that his assessment shows a deficit in staffing, exacerbated by recent staff losses, and which the clerk would welcome the Council to consider.

In a discussion, the following points were raised;

- A further level of understanding of priorities and work planning would be needed: what can be improved on in terms of efficiency, processes and IT tool usage, and which tasks could potentially be dropped altogether;
- Bottlenecks in priorities across the year to be understood better;
- A future presentation would need to include proof that all possible efficiency measures have been put in place;
- Risks of being under-staffed to be understood better, with risk management plan and mitigation measures to be put in place to address any remaining staff capacity issues;

The Personnel Committee **tasked the clerk** to stop, or reduce, all work streams that are not a priority, such as attendance at external partnership meetings or social media engagement. The clerk responded that the work streams mentioned had already been reduced to a bare minimum, and that he would look into further options for staff to reduce time input into workstreams of lower priority.

2) *To consider future staffing needs, in light also of Unity Centre Business Plan and 25-26 staff budget proposals.*

This item was not addressed further.

3) *Consider other staffing matters, including any wellbeing checks made.*

Cllr Hodgson mentioned that a first wellbeing meeting had taken place with the clerk earlier that day, and that it would be important to instigate such meetings on a regular basis, as part of the employer's duty of care. Points raised by Councillors to ensure positive wellbeing included adherence to the Code of Conduct; ways of communication to avoid impact on staff wellbeing; and enabling opportunities to ensure points of view from staff can be taken on board.

To resolve to end the closed session

It was proposed by Cllr Bros Sabría, seconded by Cllr Hodgson and **RESOLVED**, unanimously, **to end the closed session.**

05/25-26/PER RE-RECRUITMENT ASSETS AND ESTATES MANAGER

2) *To receive an updated Job Description and recruitment advert for the position of Asset & Estates Manager (latest drafts shared with Cllrs).*

It was discussed that the Job Description may need to be rewritten to include feedback from the exit interview (see sub item 1) and associated discussions that took place in the closed session. In light of the Town Council having submitted a Business Plan to SCDC for management of the Unity Centre, it was, in addition, considered important to reconsider the Job Description to assess whether this would still be the right role, or whether there may be an opportunity to consider including more of the roles envisaged for the Unity Centre Manager.

Cllr Hodgson was tasked to lead on rewriting the Job Description and presenting this back to the Council at a future meeting, either Full Council or a future Personnel Committee.

3) *To decide to re-recruit for an Assets and Estates Manager as soon as possible, using the updated Job Description and advert as a template.*

4) *To delegate to the clerk the task of advertising the position, making use of free advertisement opportunities, and work with the Personnel Committee for any input needed in next procedures.*

It was proposed by Cllr Bros Sabría, seconded by Cllr Hodgson and **RESOLVED**, unanimously, **to DEFER sub-items 3 and 4 until a future meeting, pending an updated Job Description for the Assets and Estates Manager position.**

06/25-26/PER RE-RECRUITMENT MARKET MANAGER

Further to task set to Personnel Committee at Full Council meeting 22nd April 2025, item 13/25-26/FC:

- 1) To consider re-recruitment of the Market Manager position (most recent Job Description; Person Specification; and Advert, with - draft - amendments shared with Cllrs.), and to provide a recommendation to Full Council.

Discussions took place around the Job Description, footfall, frequency of markets and the type of products sold at the market, costs and benefits of the market, and whether or not re-recruitment would be the most appropriate next step. It was proposed by Cllr Bros Sabría, seconded by Cllr Hodgson and **RESOLVED**, unanimously, to **DEFER the re-recruitment of the Market Manager to Full Council, following a possible rewording of the Job Description.**

The Chair used their discretion to change the order of the agenda, by dealing with item 09/25-26/PER first.

09/25-26/PER WORKNEST

- 1) To (retrospectively) approve access to all Members of the Personnel Committee to the online MyWorknest and LearningNest platforms for access to relevant resources.

It was proposed by Cllr Hodgson, seconded by Cllr Benedicic and **RESOLVED**, unanimously, to (retrospectively) **approve access to all Members of the Personnel Committee to the online MyWorknest and LearningNest platforms for access to relevant resources.**

- 2) To (retrospectively) approve for the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Personnel Committee to be nominated contacts to receive advice via portal/email/phone from designated WorkNest representatives.

It was proposed by Cllr Bros Sabría, seconded by Cllr Benedicic and **RESOLVED**, unanimously, to **AMEND sub-item 2 to read: To approve for all members of the Personnel Committee to be nominated contacts to receive advice via portal/email/phone from designated WorkNest representatives.'**

It was proposed by Cllr Benedicic, seconded by Cllr Bros Sabría and **RESOLVED**, unanimously, to **adopt the motion, as amended.**

- 3) To approve to give access to the YouManage portal to Members of the Personnel Committee with allocation of two Councillors (recommended: Chair and Vice-Chair) for leave and absence management for the Town Clerk on the system.

It was proposed by Cllr Benedicic, seconded by Cllr Hodgson and **RESOLVED**, unanimously, to **AMEND sub-item 3 to read: 'To approve to give access to the YouManage portal to all Members of the Personnel Committee for leave and absence management of the Town Clerk, and for other staff in the system, where needed.'**

It was proposed by Cllr Benedicic, seconded by Cllr Bros Sabría and **RESOLVED**, unanimously, to **adopt the motion, as amended.**

It was clarified that the amendment to sub-item 3 for Personnel Committee members to sign off annual leave requests for other staff would only be needed in situations where the clerk is not able to do so.

- 4) To receive an update on any other work streams where input from WorkNest HR Consultancy is being sought.

The clerk provided an update on relevant workstreams being worked on by staff where input is required from WorkNest HR Consultancy:

- Further improvements to the setup of online personnel data management system (YouManage/PeopleNest);
- LearningNest training package options are being looked into for new and existing staff;
- Performance Management Framework improvements: discussions with WorkNest input to make system SMARTer.

There was also an update from an information session from WorkNest on the 16th of May, attended by two Councillors of the Personnel Committee; it was highlighted that the leave and absence management systems in YouManage were available to access for Councillors, and that other full packages including for Recruitment and Performance are available for an additional cost.

The **clerk was tasked** to look at the original quote and information from WorkNest, to obtain further clarification as to what is included in the current package.

08/25-26/PER POLICIES

- 1) To receive and consider the following (draft) policies:

- a) Further to deferral to Personnel Committee at Full Council 22nd April 2025, item 14/25-26(4-5)): draft Employee Departure Policy; and Interview Questions Template (shared with Cllrs).

This item was **DEFERRED** to the next meeting.

- b) Further to deferral at Personnel Committee 11th March 2025, item 48/24-25(1): draft HR Handbook; and associated Action Plan for Preventing Sexual Harassment (shared with Cllrs).

This item was **DEFERRED** to the next meeting.

- c) Further to deferral at Jan 2025 Personnel Committee, item 33/24-25: draft Training and Development Policy – updated version, with further WorkNest comments; and WorkNest's proposed 'Agreement for refund of training fees' to go with the policy (as well as NALC Template of 'Training and Development Policy' for comparison purposes) (shared with Cllrs).

This item was **DEFERRED** to the next meeting.

- d) Further to task set to Personnel Committee by Full Council 22nd April 2025, item 14/25-26(8): draft Annual Leave Policy (based on NALC 2024 template) (shared with Cllrs).
- e) draft Lone Working Policy (based on NALC 2024 template); plus example of Lone Working Risk Assessment as drafted for Northstowe market in 2024 (shared with Cllrs).
- f) draft Performance Improvement Policy and Procedures (based on NALC 2024 template) (shared with Cllrs).
- g) draft Disciplinary Policy (based on NALC 2024 template) (shared with Cllrs).
- h) Draft Dignity at Work Policy (based on NALC 2024 Template shared with Cllrs.).

2) To decide to recommend above policies under sub-item 1 to Full Council for adoption or (where relevant) to nominate Councillors to collaborate with the clerk on finalising the HR Handbook and/or pending policies.

It was proposed by Cllr Bros Sabría, seconded by Cllr Benedicic and **RESOLVED**, unanimously, **to AMEND the motion, to read: 'To decide to recommend policies under sub-item 1 (d) to (h) to Full Council for adoption.'**

It was proposed by Cllr Bros Sabría, seconded by Cllr Benedicic and **RESOLVED**, unanimously, **to adopt the motion, as amended.**

Following a discussion around the focus for HR-related policies now being on stand-alone policies and not (just) in the HR Handbook, the **clerk was tasked** to find out if separate policies would be updated automatically by WorkNest, as is the case for the HR Handbook once adopted, or if this would have to be requested separately.

3) To agree to update new staff contracts, using the latest NALC template as a model or using the bespoke WorkNest draft contract as a template (shared with Cllrs).

This item was **DEFERRED** to the next meeting.

4) To recommend to Full Council for the Town Council to sign the Civility and Respect pledge (linked to above-mentioned draft Dignity at Work Policy).

This item was **DEFERRED** to the next meeting.

10/25-26/PER DISABILITY CONFIDENT EMPLOYER SCHEME

1) To consider joining the Government's Disability Confident Employer Scheme, with the aim to reach Level 1 (Disability Confident Committed) - see How to sign up to the Disability Confident employer scheme - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk).

2) To recommend to Full Council for Northstowe Town Council to join this scheme.

This item was **DEFERRED** to the next meeting.

11/25-26/PER DATES OF NEXT COUNCIL MEETINGS (Standing Item)

a) Annual Meeting of the Town Council: Tue 27th May 2025, 7-9 pm; The Cabin, Northstowe.

[Final versions of motions & papers to be received by 16/05 at the latest].

NB: For all NTC meetings, see www.northstowetowncouncil.gov.uk

Noted.

The Chair closed the meeting at 9:00 PM.

Signed.....

Chair of the Personnel Committee

Date.....