



Local Government for Langton Green, Speldhurst, Ashurst and Old Groombridge

**Minutes of a Governance Working Group Meeting held on
Monday 27th February 2023 at 7.30pm in the
Parish Council Office, Langton Green Recreation Ground**

MEMBERS PRESENT

Cllrs Mrs Lyle (Chair), Barrington-Johnson, Curry (ex-officio) and Ellery.

OFFICERS PRESENT

Mrs K Neve – Clerk and Mr C May – Responsible Financial Officer (RFO).

1. To enquire if anyone present intends to record the meeting

The meeting was recorded for the purposes of writing the minutes. The recording would be deleted once the minutes of this meeting have been approved and signed by the Chair.

2. To accept and approve apologies and reasons for absence

Apologies had been received from Cllr Rowe (away).

3. Disclosure of Interests

There were none.

4. Declarations of Lobbying

There were none.

5. Minutes

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the Governance Committee meeting held on **9th November 2022** be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

6. Public Open Session

There were no members of the public present.

7. Review of Action Points

The updated Action Points Table had been shared with councillors. The newly updated list of action points, incorporating the additional actions from this meeting, are shown at the end of these minutes.

8. Review of Internal Audit

- a) **Governance Check:** The Clerk reported that the monthly governance checks were up to date. Cllr Curry had carried out the last check and the next check would be carried out by Cllr Lyle.

- b) **Internal Auditor (IA):** The Clerk had circulated to councillors the first audit report from the new auditor. The report confirmed that the council has successfully maintained a robust system of financial control and identified no matters for concern. There were 6 minor recommendations which would be actioned before the next audit. A copy of last year's audit report had also been circulated to councillors. Councillors requested that the IA be requested to send a copy of future reports to the Chair, Chair of Governance and Clerk.
- c) **Annual Audit (PKF Littlejohn LLP):** Councillors noted that the year-end is at 31st March and this year we have a new external auditor, Mazars LLP based in Newcastle, for the next 5-year period, appointed by the Smaller Authorities Audit Appointments (SAAA).

9. Risk Management – insurable risk

- a) **Insurance Policy check:** There was nothing new to report.
- b) **Review of Fixed Asset Register:** The Clerk reported that the list of assets was up to date.
- c) **Photographic record of assets:** The Clerk reported that the photographic record of assets was up to date.
- d) **Groundsman Risk Assessment:** The Clerk reported that she and the Groundsman had put together a risk assessment for the job of Groundsman which would be included in the main Risk Assessment which it is reviewed at the next meeting.

10. Quality Assurance Check

There was nothing to report and this item would be removed from future agendas.

11. Risk Management – working with others

- a) **Staff members:**
 - **To consider staff working hours:** The Clerk reported that she and the Assistant Clerk (KH) are looking to take on managing finance. The RFO has indicated that he wishes to reduce his hours from 10 hours per week to 6 hours per week this year with a view to leaving in May 2024. In order to achieve this, the Clerk will need to increase her hours from 25 to 30 hours per week. There would be a minor cost to this. Over year-end, while the handover is undertaken and when the budget setting takes place there may be a need for the RFO to work a few more hours but this can be managed with time in lieu or additional payment. **RESOLVED** that the Clerk's hours increase from 25-30 hours per week and the RFO's hours reduce from 10-6 hours per week as from 1st April 2023.
 - **Appraisals:** The Clerk reported that she had carried out appraisals for the two Assistant Clerks and the Groundsman and had shared the appraisal notes with the Chair and Vice-Chair. The Clerk's and RFO's appraisals would be carried out by the Chair in consultation with members of the Governance Committee, and presented to the next meeting.
 - **Staff Training Record:** The Clerk reported that she had set up a record of staff training as part of the council's new training and development policy which had been circulated to councillors.
- b) **Financial bookkeeping:** The RFO requested an additional user for the Rialtas bookkeeping system at a cost of about £19 per month for one year to enable the Assistant Clerk (KH) to use the system as it was not permissible to share user log-ins. When the RFO leaves, we would revert to just two users. Cllr Ellery suggested repurposing the councillor read-only account as it was not well used. If any councillor wanted any financial information, they could ask the Clerk or RFO to provide it. If it was not possible to repurpose the account, the Finance Committee would be asked for spending approval for an additional account for the Assistant Clerk
- c) **Security:**
 - **IT:** Cllr Curry raised the question of IT security, particularly on computer equipment. He recommended that the current tablets be retired as they were very out of date. Consideration should be given to budget for replacement tablets on a 2 or 3 yearly cycle and new councillors should be given the option to have a council tablet or use their own device for council business. The Clerk would email councillors to find out how they currently access emails and

meeting documents and what their preference would be so that an accurate amount can be included in the budget. Any new machines purchased should support encryption. Cllr Curry also recommended that the council's IT provider be requested to activate 2 factor authentication after the elections. The Clerk would follow this up with Cloudy IT.

- **Car Park:** It had been noted that there was possible drug activity at the far end of the car park which the Police had been made aware of and asked to check and monitor.

12. Risk Management – self-management

- a) **Committees – to review:** The Clerk had circulated the current list of committees and membership for information. The list would need to be updated following the May elections as there would be a number of councillor changes.
- b) **Policies:** The Clerk reported that the IA had recommended we only review policies every 3 years, with the exception of the Financial Regulations and Standing Orders. The current yearly review dates were reviewed and updated accordingly.

The following Policies were reviewed:

- Financial Control
- Investment
- Data Policy

RESOLVED – That the policies listed above as amended where appropriate be approved and that all policies, with the exception of finance related policies and Standing Orders, be reviewed every 3 years.

RESOLVED – To defer the Data Privacy, Equality and Diversity Disability Discrimination and the CCTV policies to a future meeting.

The Clerk reported that there was no Grievance Policy. It was suggested that this could be included within the Employee Code of Conduct. The Clerk would bring an amended Employee Code of Conduct to a future meeting for consideration.

- c) **Terms of Reference (ToR):** Individual committees and working groups were responsible for reviewing their own ToR.

To review the Internal Audit Terms of Reference.

RESOLVED – That the Internal Audit Terms of Reference be approved.

- d) **Training Record for Councillors:** The Clerk reported that she had set up a record of councillors' training as part of the council's new training and development policy which had been circulated to councillors.

13. Items for information

- The Clerk presented the SLCC – Future of Local Council's Report for councillors' information.

There being no further items, the meeting closed at 9.12pm.

Chair

Governance Action Points

Action No.	Action	Owner	Date created	Status
1/23	Organise Governance Checks as follows: March – Cllr Lyle April – Cllr Rowe or Internal Auditor May – Cllr Barrington-Johnson June – Cllr Ellery	Clerk	27/2	
2/23	Request Internal Auditor to send future reports to Chair, Chair of Governance as well as Clerk	Clerk	27/2	
3/23	Confirm reduction in hours of RFO and increase in hours of Clerk to payroll	RFO/Clerk	27/2	
4/23	Carry out Clerk's and RFO's appraisals	Cllr Curry	27/2	
5/23	Investigate repurposing Rialtas account for the Asst Clerk (KN). If not possible request additional account and seek financial approval from Finance Cttee	RFO/Clerk	27/2	
6/23	Ask Cllrs how they access SPC emails and documents and what their preference in IT equipment is	Clerk	27/2	
7/23	Instruct Cloudy IT to turn on 2FA after elections	Clerk	27/2	
8/23	Update Policy Review dates and put in councillors' folder	Clerk	27/2	
9/23	Add following policies to April FC agenda for confirmation: Financial Control Investment Data Protection Plus Internal Audit Terms of Reference	Clerk	27/2	
10/23	Establish new Grievance procedure – to be included in the Employee Code of Conduct	Clerk	27/2	