

UPPER MEDWAY INTERNAL DRAINAGE BOARD



MINUTES OF THE MEETING of the BOARD

held at Marden Cricket and Hockey Club, 319 Maidstone Road
Tonbridge, Kent, TN12 9AG
on **Tuesday 21 January 2025 at 10am.**

Members of the Board Present

O Baldock
M Davis
D Goff (Chairman)
Cllr D King
H Rogers
C Wheeler
Cllr M Crane
Cllr M Summersgill
Cllr T Harwood
Cllr C Coleman
W Thompson
S Highwood

In attendance

O Pantrey – Clerk
L Carey – Responsible Finance Officer
J Schuiling – Works Manager
E Robertson – Sustainable Development Manager
B Thomson – Sustainable Development Officer

The Chairman proceeded the meeting by introducing our new member of staff Bailey Thomson to the Board.

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies received from Colin Hosmer & Cllr Patterson
Non-Attendees – Cllr A Baker & Louise Young

2. ITEMS OF INTEREST DECLARATION

No pecuniary interests were noted by members for the upcoming meeting.

3. REGISTER OF MEMBERS INTERESTS 2024/25

The Clerk said that the register of members interest 2025 form had been sent to members. He referred back to a request that members made about resubmission and that if already submitted the Board members do not need to do it again, unless there has been a change in their circumstances. He confirmed the policy for this has been changed to note that the interest now lasts for 5 years and was set for approval later in the meeting.

4. MINUTES

The Chairman requested any alterations to the minutes of 12 November 2024. He then requested that these were approved as correct.

On proposal from the Chair, it was **AGREED** by all Members present that the minutes of the meetings held on 12 November 2024 be approved as a true and accurate account.

5. ACTION LIST AND MATTERS ARISING

The Chairman asked the Clerk if there were any issues arising from the action list.

The Clerk said at present there were none of note outside of the listed elements and already reported work programmes.

6. CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

The Chairman gave a brief update, that he along with The Clerk and Sustainable Development Manager (SDM) attended the ADA conference, where various presentations were given in respect of Land Drainage.

He reported that the Clerks appraisal was completed by himself, on behalf of the Board, looking at the past year. He said that the clerk and the staff had achieved an outstanding amount of work to the benefit of the Board. He also informed members he had sat in on the other office staff's appraisals.

The Chairman explained that he, the Clerk and SDM interviewed 5 candidates for the new Sustainable Development Officer's role and was happy to report that we have taken on Bailey Thomson to fill that role.

The Chairman finished by saying he had recently been out with the Works Manager to see all the good work that the Ground Team had done this year.

7. MEMBERS ROUND TABLE REPORT

Cllr Coleman informed the Board that the Government has brought out a white paper regarding removal of two-tier local councils. Cllr Crane was concerned that this would impact the funding of the Board as the councils would become amalgamated as separate Unitaries.

The Clerk confirmed he had seen the white paper and that it would likely have no financial impact upon the Board as the unitary would become the collecting authority. He did say that it would likely have an impact on membership and that the way the unitary nominated members would be something that would need to be understood and communicated.

The Clerk confirmed he would however speak with ADA at the Policy Committee Meeting and determine their position and advice.

ACTION – Clerk to contact ADA concerning the above.

Cllr Harwood and Cllr King informed the Board that there was an influx on planning going on within the district and that the officers would need to keep an eye on this for the future.

ACTION – SDM to give an update at next meeting on local plan strategy.

8. CLERK'S REPORT

This item was for information. No questions were put to the Clerk.

9. WORKS REPORT

This item was for information. No questions were put to the Works Manager.

The Works Manager informed the Board that they had now put in place a calendar which has benefitted the ground team, in letting the landowners know in advance when they are to access and maintain the land. He also stated that the works are up by 1% on last year and that he hopes to improve that even more next year.

The Chairman asked the Works Manager to thank his team for all their hard work this year. All members agreed and wished to pass their thanks to the ground team.

10. FINANCE REPORT

This item was for information. The Finance Officer said there were several elements that needed discussion and approval.

The first was approval of the top sheet reconciliation for the period.

On proposal by Owen Baldock and Seconded by Will Thompson, it was **AGREED** that the reconciliation for the period had been seen and agreed by the Board.

The RFO informed the Board that the Fixed Term Deposit had now matured and asked if they would like to reinvest the £250,000, explaining that the interest rate had fallen to 3.73% for 6 months.

It was suggested that we should be using these funds for Capital assets/investments and not for increasing reserves.

The Clerk explained that the interest received from these investments was now part of the revenue income calculation and a vital part of the financing of Board objectives without massive increases on the levy.

Mark Davis proposed that we reinvest £250,000 for a further 6 months. Seconded by Howard Rogers.

The Board **AGREED**, Cllr Harwood and Cllr Crane abstained.

The RFO then went on to explain that the Works Manager's private mileage does not have to be charged if he is travelling from home to a works site and that at present this has been deducted from his wages at source. The RFO had checked with the Internal Auditors and HMRC and they confirmed it was only private mileage he was liable for. It was then put to the Board for agreement.

On proposal by Mark Davis and seconded by Will Thompson, it was **AGREED** by the Board that the mileage be calculated in accordance with the advice from HMRC and the auditor.

The Internal Auditors have requested that Petty Cash is reintroduced as we had a rate payer come to the office and pay in cash. It was requested that the Board approves this return and that the policy is changed to reflect this.

On proposal by Mark Davis and seconded by Will Thompson, it was **AGREED** by the Board.

ACTION – Change Petty Cash Policy.

The RFO informed members that the Clerk's vehicle was coming up for renewal at the end of this financial year. She said that if they changed the car in February 2025, taking one from the showroom, he has been able to save the Board over £4,000 over the course of the contract. It was requested that the Board approves the acceptance of this offer.

On proposal by Mark Davis and seconded by Will Thompson, it was **AGREED** by the Board.

11. SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT REPORT

The Sustainable Development Manager reported that there were no applications for the Board to approve at present. She added that there are 42 planning cases open and several that were expected to come to the Board in the near future.

She took the opportunity to welcome Bailey officially and said that they had been working on basic cases and industry knowledge as part of Bailey's initial training.

The members asked how the workload was currently going since the appointment of the new Sustainable Development Officer.

The Sustainable Development Manager said that it would help once the new SDO was trained but, even then, the work was still substantial due to the catchment-based approach that was being taken.

12. BIODIVERSITY REPORT

S Highwood gave the report to cover the year's achievements.

The Chairman asked the Board if they had any questions for Mr Highwood on his report, there were none.

13. HEALTH AND SAFETY REPORT

O Baldock gave the report to cover the year's achievements.

The Chairman asked if there were any questions relating to the H&S report – None.

The Health & Safety representative for the Board said he had visited the Depot and stated that there was a vast improvement and that he was very happy that there were no H&S issues. He also congratulated the Works Manager in obtaining his NEBOSH.

Mr Baldock and the Clerk have agreed that there should be more H&S meetings, perhaps one every 3 months.

14. ENVIRONMENT AGENCY PRESENTATION

No one from the EA attended the Board meeting in person, however the local team manager did send a report for the year. The Chairman noted from their report that it looked like there was a large underspend of £30,000.

The Clerk said that the EA have requested that we increase our precept to them by 3%, but there is a concern that they are not spending these funds year on year.

The Clerk said he had suggested to the EA that we do more invasive species work to help spend the precept and potentially offer improvement to the efficiencies of the maintenance delivery on main river. The Clerk added that the works on the Penn Stream was due to be completed before April 2025, otherwise the underspend of £30,000 will just disappear and not offer benefit to the district.

Members voiced significant disappointment at the underspend and suggested it should be debated in future about whether the requested rises are paid.

The Clerk reminded members that this was a legal obligation to pay the precept, but that should the Board choose to argue it then a letter could be sent to the minister to address the concerns.

The Chairman requested that he and the Clerk have another meeting with Sally Harvey concerning this.

ACTION – Clerk to arrange meeting with Sally Harvey

It was reiterated that in future Board members would like to know where the precept funds are spent to ensure that it is not lost to central treasury each year. Members also asked what happened if we as a Board did not pay our precept.

The Clerk repeated that this was an obligation but that a protest could be raised if necessary.

15. ESTIMATES AND SPECIAL LEVIES

The members discussed the budget submitted by the Clerk and Finance Committee.

The proposal from the Finance Committee was that the levy be set at 3%.

On proposal by O Baldock and seconded by W Thompson, it was **AGREED** by all members to set the penny rate for the coming year at 4.3859p in the pound and that the Clerk and Chairman should duly sign the rates certificate for the coming year.

Cllr Harwood, Cllr Summersgill, and Cllr Coleman abstained.

Cllr Harwood explained that Maidstone Council would rather 0% increase to stagnate the levy and draw down on the reserve.

The Clerk explained that this is why the expenditure was at an increase of 8.5% and the request was for 3%. The 5% difference between income/expenditure was allowing the Board to draw down on the reserves in a controlled and responsible manner whilst still pushing forward with its objectives in relation to the 7 core areas of the business and avoid stalling the progress made in the last 4 years.

He said that he would never recommend that the Board nosedive its finances without appropriate reason and that even then by doing so would demonstrate a lack of diligence on behalf of the officers and indeed the Board. He added that he felt the levy should be managed with a long-term view and not reactive to annual requirements of outside bodies that didn't take the plans of the Board into consideration, thus offering predictability and consistency to the authority partners.

Cllr Coleman withdrew her abstention and resolved to **AGREE** to the 3% increase.

The Chairman offered a meeting with Mark Green at Maidstone Borough Council and Sharon Shelton at Tonbridge & Malling Council to explain this to the officers.

ACTION: Letters to be sent to the respective Special Levy paying councils to notify of the rate set.

ACTION: Clerk and Chairman to sign the rates certificate for 2025/26.

ACTION: Clerk to offer meeting to local councils.

Remuneration – It was requested that the Board approve the staff remuneration increase of 2% for 2025/26.

On proposal by O Baldock and seconded by Cllr Coleman, it was **AGREED** by the Board.

16. STRATEGY AND OBJECTIVE

Catchment Operations Pilot - The Clerk said that a report was sent to the Board members explaining the expansion pilot with KCC and that the associated PSCA was now at the point of signing. He said that this basically agreed the council sharing some of their responsibilities under the Land Drainage Act with us for the area of the pilot.

Lees Road Development – Mr Davis reported that he & Mr Hosmer met with the Clerk, Chairman, and the Works Manager at the Depot to assess a possible new office and larger depot. He said that the site offered a good opportunity to determine whether the Board could put the office and depot teams in one place improving efficiency and overall morale. He said that it wasn't a decision they took during the meeting, but more of an oversight of the Clerk's plan for the site and should be assessed if it is at all possible or if the Board would have to look elsewhere.

A question was asked, what was wrong with the office that we already occupy. The Clerk explained that with the increase in staffing levels we have now outgrown the office at Bullen Court and that it would be beneficial to have both the office and the Depot in the same place. Therefore, we as a Board need to look at what would be the best way to go forward.

The Clerk requested that we put aside £10,000 from the savings account for a feasibility budget to complete studies on Lees Road, or to explore other sites, to enable us to bring a short list to the June 2025 meeting.

On proposal by H Rogers and seconded by S Highwood, it was **AGREED** by the Board.

Minimum Bank Balance – The RFO requested approval of the £350,000 minimum bank balance for 2025, as recommended by the Finance Committee.

It was **AGREED** by the Board to retain the £350,000 minimum bank balance.

17. GOVERNANCE

The Chairman asked the Board if they were happy with the updated policies

Updated Policy

- Anti-Fraud and Corruption
- Biosecurity
- Contracts Standing Orders
- Gifts and Hospitality
- Members Code of Conduct
- Pension
- Procurement
- Statement of Accounting Policies
- Statement of Internal Controls
- Whistle Blowing

On proposal from the Chairman, it was **AGREED** to approve the policies listed

18. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

It has been requested by the Officers to move the May Finance Committee meeting forward to Tuesday 20th May 2025

AGREED by the Board

Mink Eradication Project – The Clerk updated the Board that Waterlife Recovery South East, led by Dr Tony Martin, remain passionate about bringing this work into the region still and that there has been significant interest, particularly in the Romney Marsh area. The Clerk indicated that he does not think WRSE currently have the logistics in place, specifically regarding on-the-ground staff, therefore he would not be recommending that the Board place any funds into this project at this time.

19. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The date of the next meeting was set as:

EOY Finance Committee - Tuesday 20th May 2025, 10am – Bullen Court

EOY Board Meeting - Tuesday 17^h June 2025, 10am – Location to be advised

It was mentioned that perhaps we could have our next meeting at Igtham Court or Sissinghurst.

ACTION: RFO to research available venues with links to NFM or surface water programs.

20. PRIVATE AND CONFIDENTIAL MATTERS

At this time the staff were asked to leave the meeting whilst the Board discussed staffing and the promotion of Emma Robertson to Sustainable Development Manager as of January 2025.

The request to promote the SDO to become SDM and make necessary adjustments to remuneration was **AGREED** by the Board

ACTION: RFO to implement necessary HR changes to reflect the promotion.

21. CLOSE

There being no further business, the Chairman thanked the Clerk and his team for their efforts and closed the meeting.