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Minutes of a meeting of the '**Finance & H.R. Committee**' which was held on **Wednesday 21st January 2026 at 3pm** in The Parish Office.

Present:- Rosemary Thew (Chairman), Nigel Sutcliffe (Vice-Chairman), Samantha Arlow & Jenny Girling.

Clerk:- Tracey Bayfield

Public:- 0

Did not attend:- Iain Wolfe

1. **Apologies** for absence were **accepted** from; Judy Pegden & Mike Reed.
2. There were no **Declarations of Interest** or requests for **dispensations** from members.
3. **Resolved** to approve the **Minutes** of the meeting held on Monday 1st December 2025.
4. **Open Public Session** – None.
5. Members noted that from 1st December 2025 the **Financial Services Compensation Scheme (FSCS)** limit was increased from £85K to £120K.
6. **Nationwide** and our current position in relation to potential account close and a request for further information;
 - **Rosemary Thew** has completed her Certification of Identification Form with a member of staff at the Sheringham branch of Nationwide. The documents will be sent to Nationwide tomorrow.
 - **Jennifer Girling** confirmed that she completed her Certification of Identification Form with a member of Nationwide staff at the Fakenham branch on Thursday 15th January and that her completed paperwork was retained and returned to the correct department at Nationwide directly.
7. **Resolved** that having reviewed the following reports that each are **approved & noted**;
 - Quarterly **Internal Audit Report** for Quarter 3 dated 14th January 2026.
 - **Bank Reconciliation Statements/report** for Quarter 3.
 - **Receipts & Payments** for Quarter 3.
 - **Income & Expenditure figures** for Quarter 3 against budget variance.
 - **Car Park Income** figures to date.

- **Internal Auditor** general update.

8. **Resolved** that Rosemary Thew & Nigel Sutcliffe will undertake all aspects of the interviews on behalf of this committee and appoint (along with reps from the National Trust) for the role of **Car Park Attendants** for 2026.

9. H.R. Related Polices – (Consideration of Whole Council HR Training)

The Clerk informed the Committee of the potential for a professionally delivered whole council **HR and employment training** session, facilitated locally through a trusted provider used by NPTS. Members were advised that this training would be timely and deliverable within both the current and proposed budgets for council training.

In view of the Committee's delegated responsibilities in relation to staffing, HR and legal employment matters, the Clerk emphasised the relevance and importance of such training being considered by all members.

The Committee received the information but offered no comments or recommendations. Given the Committee's advisory role in matters of employment compliance and staff governance, the Clerk advised that this would be an agenda item for the February Full Council meeting, as alluded to in the initial email sent to all.

Members considered which of the **H.R. related policies** this committee should undertake to review. The Clerk had previously identified 41 policies requiring review or potential amalgamation and highlighted 13 that may be appropriately reviewed by this committee, as previously agreed by Full Council.

Members found it challenging to agree on a clear method for progressing this task. A range of views were expressed, some members preferred to conduct the reviews collaboratively during committee meetings, while others favoured an approach where individual members could review specific policies and bring back their findings and recommendations to the committee for further discussion.

The Clerk provided guidance, clarifying that members are not expected to draft new policies from scratch, particularly given that none hold formal HR qualifications. Rather, the task is to review the existing Blakeney Parish Council policies against the current model templates (e.g. from NALC or SLCC), to assess their relevance and accuracy, and to identify where localisation is needed, while ensuring legal compliance.

Resolved that each of the seven committee members would review two policies and bring their findings and recommendations back to this committee for discussion.

Confidential Business – Exclusion of the Press & Public – Resolved that, *Due to the confidential nature of the business about to be transacted (employment related), on the grounds that it is not in the public interest to disclose discussion on the items below relating to contracts and staffing matters, it is proposed that the*

press and public are now excluded and they are instructed to withdraw. (Admission to Meeting Act (Public Bodies) 1960.

10. Pensions Arrangements Review – LGPS vs NEST in respect of the Clerks/Responsible Finance Officer.

Members considered the detailed report presented by the Clerk regarding the proposal for Blakeney Parish Council to join the Norfolk Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS), and for the Clerk (and any future eligible employees) to be enrolled accordingly.

During discussion, members acknowledged the benchmarking evidence provided, which demonstrated that many comparable councils, including those with significantly lower precepts, already provide LGPS access to staff. Members also noted that the new confirmed employer contribution rate of **19.5% from 1st April 2026** made participation in the scheme financially more viable than initially expected.

However, members expressed concern about the long-term financial implications for the Clerk. In particular, it was agreed that a clear and objective comparison was needed between the LGPS and the existing NEST pension scheme to determine which arrangement would provide the greatest benefit to the Clerk in retirement. Members stressed the importance of ensuring that the Council not only complies with its contractual duties but also acts in the best financial interest of its staff.

It was agreed that the comparison should include projected retirement benefits under both schemes, taking into account the Clerk's existing service history, employee and employer contributions, and any additional benefits.

With **1st April 2026** fast approaching, members expressed a strong desire to make a final decision within the current financial year to allow time for any necessary implementation.

Although this deferred the item once again, the Clerk thanked members for their thorough and thoughtful consideration of the matter. She confirmed she would seek the necessary pension projections and report back as soon as possible.

Resolved - That a final decision on whether to transition the Clerk from the NEST pension scheme to the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS) be deferred pending a clear comparison of long-term financial benefits to the Clerk under both schemes, and that this matter be brought back to Council for a decision **within the current financial year**, noting the **1st April 2026 implementation deadline**.

11. Resolved that having worked through the **Draft Budget for 2026/27** we approve the budget figures as presented to us with no change.

We also **resolve** the need to invoice i) The War Memorial Cottages Trust (admin) & ii) The Dinghy Park Management Committee (postage costs) as

per the recommendation as these are both significant costs which should be born by the respective groups.

Throughout the review, the Clerk also reminded members of the **importance of long-term financial planning**, particularly in light of the potential future devolution of assets from the principal authority. With this in mind, it was recommended that the Council begin developing a **4 to 5-year medium-term budget strategy**. Members were in **full agreement** with this approach, and the Clerk confirmed she would arrange appropriate training to support its implementation.

12. **Resolved** that the Council supports the Clerk's revised **Precept** proposal of **£75,000 for the 2026/27 financial year**, and that this figure be recommended to Full Council for formal approval at its meeting on **3rd February**.
13. **Resolved** to call the next meeting of the **H.R. & Finance Committee** as soon as any outstanding information has been received.

Meeting closed at 4:51pm

Chairman _____