



BANWELL PARISH COUNCIL

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE EMPLOYMENT COMMITTEE HELD AT THE YOUTH & COMMUNITY CENTRE AT 7:15pm ON MONDAY 1st of SEPTEMBER 2025

Present: Cllrs Mike Bailey (Chairman), Paul Harding and Tara Wright.

In attendance: Liz Shayler (Clerk)

19/25 To receive and accept apologies for absence (agenda item 1).

Apologies were received from Cllr Arlidge.

20/25 To elect a Chair for 2025/26 (agenda item 2).

Resolved – That Cllr Bailey be elected as Chairman.

The resolution was correctly proposed and seconded (unanimous).

21/25 To elect a Vice-Chair for 2025/26 (agenda item 3).

Resolved – That Cllr Wright be elected as Vice-Chairman.

The resolution was correctly proposed and seconded (unanimous).

22/25 To receive members' declarations of interest on any agenda item (agenda item 4)

No member's declarations of interest were received.

23/25 To approve as a correct record the minutes of the meeting of the Employment Committee held on the 12th of May 2025 (agenda item 5).

Resolved – That the minutes be approved as a correct record of the meeting.

The resolution was correctly proposed and seconded (unanimous).

The minutes to be signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

24/25 To approve the self-certification sick leave form (agenda item 6).

Resolved – To approve the self-certification sick leave form.

The resolution was correctly proposed and seconded (unanimous).

25/25 Exclusion of the press and public. (The Committee is recommended to resolve that member of the press and public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of agenda item 6 by reason of the confidential nature of the item of business to be transacted, in accordance with Section 1(2) of the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960 (agenda item 7).

Resolved – That the press and public be excluded from the meeting.

The resolution was correctly proposed and seconded (unanimous).

26/25 To note the Communication Officer six-monthly appraisal targets (agenda item 8).

The Communication Officer's six-monthly appraisal targets were noted.

27/25 To note the Environment and Biodiversity Officer’s six-monthly appraisal targets (agenda item 9).

The Environment and Biodiversity Officer’s six-monthly appraisal targets were noted.

28/25 To undertake the Clerk’s six-monthly appraisal (agenda item 10).

Resolved – The Clerk was thanked for her hard work and commitment. The Chairman undertook the appraisal which resulted in a satisfactory outcome, identifying key work targets.

The resolution was correctly proposed and seconded (unanimous).

29/25 To reassess the need for additional workforce capability and discuss increasing officer hours (agenda item 11).

Resolved – To increase the Environment and Biodiversity Officer’s core hours from 8 to 10 per week to cover Planning Committee administration, with the continuation of an additional 2 hours per week for grant funding purposes until March 2026. The Clerks monthly overtime allowance to be raised to 16hours a month.

The resolution was correctly proposed and seconded (unanimous).

30/25 To undertake the annual salary review (agenda item 12).

Resolved – That all salaries remain the same and be reassessed in September 2026 for the 2027/28 budget.

The resolution was correctly proposed and seconded (unanimous).

31/25 To agree the date of the next meeting (agenda item 13)

2nd March 2026 at Banwell Youth & Community Centre

The Chairman closed the meeting at 8:05pm

.....Chairman

.....Date

Future Office Resilience and Capacity Planning Report

Executive Summary

This report considers the current and future resilience of the Parish Council office in light of increasing workload, financial scale, and governance requirements. The current structure places a high level of statutory, financial, and operational responsibility within the Clerk role. This has led to ongoing reliance on overtime and limited capacity to absorb operational pressures, indicating a need to strengthen resilience.

To address this, a phased approach is proposed:

- An increase in Clerk hours from 28 to 30 per week to address immediate capacity pressures
- A review of role progression from LC2 above substantive to LC3 below substantive as part of the 2027/28 budget-setting process
- Consideration of a Finance Officer role to support financial administration and improve longer-term resilience, particularly in preparation for Income & Expenditure accounting requirements

Councillors are invited to approve the proposed increase in Clerk hours and provide initial views on the longer-term proposals.

1. Introduction

This report sets out considerations regarding the current and future resilience and capacity of the Parish Council office. It brings forward a small number of immediate recommendations, alongside longer-term options for councillor discussion as part of future budget planning.

The Council has experienced a sustained increase in activity in recent years, including increase in staff, delivery of projects, increased financial scale and more complex governance requirements. This has been supported by the current officer structure, which has enabled a high level of service delivery.

However, the concentration of statutory, governance, and financial responsibilities within a single role, combined with increasing operational demands, presents a potential risk to continuity and resilience. This has been evidenced by the consistent use of overtime and challenges in taking full annual leave, particularly during periods of reduced staff capacity.

To support the continued effective operation of the Council, this report proposes a modest adjustment to the Clerk's contracted hours and pay scale progression, alongside consideration of longer-term structural options to strengthen resilience and prepare for anticipated changes in financial reporting requirements.

Any preparatory appointment from February 2027 would have a modest impact on the 2026/27 budget (approximately 24 hours at SCP 13, plus on-costs), representing a limited transitional cost rather than a full-year commitment.

2. Current Office Structure

The Parish Council's current officer structure is:

- Clerk to the Council – 28 hours per week (also Responsible Financial Officer)
- Communications Officer – 6 hours per week
- Environment & Biodiversity Officer – 10 hours per week, including approximately 2 hours per week for grant funding

This structure has enabled delivery of projects, strengthened planning responses, secured funding, and improved community engagement.

3. Identifying the Resilience Risk

The Clerk role currently carries a significant concentration of statutory, governance, and financial responsibility. This includes:

- Meeting management and agenda preparation
- Governance advice and legal compliance
- Financial oversight and audit responsibility (as Responsible Financial Officer)
- Budget preparation and precept recommendation
- Coordination of council functions and delivery of council decisions

While this structure has enabled effective delivery to date, it creates a reliance on a single role for both strategic oversight and operational continuity.

In practice, this has resulted in limited capacity to absorb fluctuations in workload or periods of reduced staff availability. This has been evidenced by the consistent use of overtime and difficulty in taking full annual leave, indicating that the current structure does not provide sufficient resilience to accommodate routine operational pressures.

A modest increase in Clerk hours would provide additional operational capacity and help address these immediate pressures. However, this alone would not resolve the underlying structural dependency, as core governance and financial responsibilities would remain concentrated within a single role.

The issue is therefore not solely one of workload, but of structural resilience. Strengthening resilience requires consideration of how responsibilities are distributed, ensuring that routine processes can continue during periods of absence while maintaining clear accountability for statutory functions.

4. Consideration of a Deputy Clerk Role

The introduction of a Deputy Clerk has been considered. While appropriate for larger councils or those with substantially expanded officer teams, such a role at Banwell's current scale could result in duplication of governance functions or the creation of a residual "mop-up" role without delivering genuine resilience benefits.

Given that the Clerk will remain Responsible Financial Officer, subdividing statutory governance responsibility is not considered proportionate at this stage. This option may warrant reconsideration in the medium to long term (5–10 years) should the Council's assets, income streams, or statutory obligations increase significantly (as expected with the new Wolvershill Development).

5. Financial Administration as a Resilience Opportunity

Routine financial administration is clearly defined, cyclical, and process-driven. Key tasks include:

- Invoice processing and payment schedules
- Monthly bank reconciliation
- Maintaining Scribe records
- Preparing financial reports
- Year-end groundwork and audit preparation

A structured financial task list has already been developed in response to audit expectations. Unlike statutory governance responsibilities, these tasks are capable of being standardised, documented, and undertaken independently of the Clerk role, while remaining subject to appropriate oversight.

Separating routine financial processing from governance oversight therefore offers a proportionate way to improve continuity. It enables core financial processes to continue during periods of absence, while retaining clear accountability through the Responsible Financial Officer role.

This approach strengthens internal resilience without fragmenting statutory responsibility or introducing duplication of governance functions.

5.1 Anticipated Transition to Income & Expenditure Accounting

The Council was below the £200,000 threshold in 2024/25 but is forecast to exceed it in 2025/26 and is unlikely to fall below it in subsequent years due to:

- A precept exceeding £145,000
- Ongoing asset investment and project activity
- CIL income and expenditure
- Rising operational costs

If gross income or expenditure exceeds £200,000 for three consecutive financial years (anticipated 2025/26, 2026/27 and 2027/28), the Council will be required to prepare its accounts on an Income & Expenditure basis from 2027/28. This introduces additional procedural requirements, including:

- Accruals and prepayments
- Debtors and creditors
- Clearer capital/revenue classification
- Structured balance sheet reporting within AGAR

While statutory responsibility remains unchanged, processing complexity and audit scrutiny increase. Planning ahead reduces transition risk. This also provides an opportunity to ensure that appropriate processes and support structures are in place, reducing reliance on a single role and supporting continuity during implementation.

6. Continuity and Internal Control

Separating routine financial processing from statutory oversight provides a practical improvement in continuity and internal control.

Routine financial tasks can continue during periods of Clerk absence, reducing the risk of delays in payments, reconciliations, and reporting. At the same time, the Clerk retains sufficient oversight to provide cover where required and to maintain overall accountability as Responsible Financial Officer.

This separation also strengthens internal control by introducing a clearer distinction between financial processing and review, supporting transparency and audit assurance while maintaining a proportionate approach appropriate to the Council's scale.

Overall, this approach improves operational resilience without fragmenting governance responsibility or introducing unnecessary complexity.

7. Immediate Capacity Adjustment

In order to address current operational pressures, it is proposed to increase the Clerk's contracted hours from 28 to 30 hours per week. This reflects the sustained increase in workload and the current reliance on overtime to maintain service delivery, as well as the difficulty in taking full annual leave. A modest increase in hours will provide additional capacity to support day-to-day operations and improve sustainability in the short term.

The financial implication of this adjustment is approximately £2,376 per annum based on current salary levels, equating to around £3,000 per annum including on-costs.

While this increase will help address immediate capacity pressures, it does not resolve the underlying structural resilience issue identified earlier in this report. Further consideration of longer-term options, including the potential introduction of a Finance Officer role, is therefore recommended as part of future budget planning.

8. Potential Future Option: Finance Officer (Discussion Only)

To further support resilience and prepare for continued operation above the £200,000 threshold, the Council may consider introducing a Finance Officer role focused on financial administration. The Clerk would remain Responsible Financial Officer and retain statutory sign-off.

This builds on the proposed increase in Clerk hours by addressing the underlying structural resilience issue identified earlier in this report. Indicative outline:

- 10–12 hours per month
- Routine processing and reconciliations
- Preparation of standard reports
- Maintenance of Scribe (potentially including Cemetery & YCC bookings)
- Year-end schedules prepared for Clerk review

This would strengthen internal control and support transition to Income & Expenditure accounting from April 2027. Subject to councillor support, formal approval would be sought in September 2026, with recruitment between November 2026 and January 2027 and a proposed start date of February 2027.

8.1 Employment or Contracting Model (Discussion Only)

At this stage, it is not necessary to determine whether a future Finance Officer role would be directly employed by the Council or contracted in as a professional service. Both models are commonly used within the parish and town council sector and can be equally acceptable from a governance and audit perspective, provided that responsibilities, access controls, and accountability are clearly defined. The most appropriate delivery model would depend on:

- Skills and experience available at the time
- Value for money

- Flexibility and resilience
- The ability to clearly ring-fence financial duties from statutory governance responsibilities

Should councillors be broadly supportive of the principle, it is proposed that the employment versus contracting options are explored in more detail as part of the September 2027 budget-setting process, prior to any formal decision being taken.

9. Cost Effectiveness and Wider Value

The proposed increase in Clerk hours represents a financial adjustment, estimated at approximately £3,000 per annum including on-costs. This provides immediate additional capacity to support day-to-day operations and reduce reliance on overtime. However, increasing Clerk hours alone does not address the underlying structural resilience issue identified earlier in this report and would continue to concentrate responsibility within a single role.

In contrast, the potential introduction of a Finance Officer role represents a more proportionate and cost-effective long-term solution. By separating routine financial processing from statutory oversight, it enables improved continuity and internal control without requiring a significant increase in senior officer hours.

It should also be recognised that the Clerk currently undertakes a level of unpaid additional work to maintain service delivery. Increasing contracted hours will help to reduce this reliance and support a more sustainable and transparent allocation of officer time.

Additionally, releasing Clerk capacity from routine financial processing would enable greater focus on higher-risk statutory and governance areas, including financial oversight, cemetery administration, and health and safety responsibilities.

10. Proposed Timeline

A phased approach is recommended to ensure both immediate capacity needs and longer-term resilience are addressed.

- Immediate 2026/27 – Increase Clerk hours from 28 to 30 per week and further develop structured financial task lists.
- September 2026 – Consider progression from LC2 above substantive to LC3 below substantive (for inclusion in the 2027/28 budget) and budget provision for a Finance Officer role.
- November 2026 to January 2027 – Possible recruitment of a Finance Officer.
- February 2027 – Finance Officer appointment commences (partial-year cost within the 2026/27 budget).
- April 2027 – Prepared to operate under Income & Expenditure accounting requirements for the 2027/28 financial year.

11. Conclusion

The Parish Council has experienced sustained growth in both activity and financial scale, supported by a committed officer team and effective delivery of council priorities. However, the current structure places a significant concentration of statutory, governance, and financial responsibility within the Clerk role, creating a risk to continuity and resilience. This has been reflected in ongoing reliance on overtime and limited capacity to absorb operational pressures.

A modest increase in Clerk hours provides a proportionate and immediate response to current capacity demands. Longer-term resilience, particularly in light of increasing financial complexity and the anticipated transition to Income & Expenditure accounting, will require a structural approach.

The potential introduction of a Finance Officer role offers a practical and sustainable means of strengthening internal control and continuity, while retaining clear statutory accountability within the Clerk role. Councillors are invited to:

- Approve the increase in Clerk hours from 28 to 30 per week;
- Note the intention to review role progression from LC2 above substantive to LC3 below substantive as part of the 2027/28 budget-setting process; and
- Provide initial views on the potential future introduction of a Finance Officer role.