Noak Bridge Parish Council

Meeting of: Noak Bridge Parish Council

Date: Wednesday 25th February 2026

Time: 7.00pm

Place: Noak Bridge Village Hall, Coppice Lane, Noak Bridge

Members are hereby summoned to attend the above meeting to transact the following business. Members are respectfully reminded that each item on the Agenda should be carefully examined. If you have any interest, it must be duly declared.

Councillors to be present: M. Cottrell (Chairman), P. Daft (Vice-Chairman) C. Bateman, J. Dowton, L. Gilliam, P. Hawkins and T. Sargent

L Townend

Parish Clerk

18th February 2026

AGENDA

1. Apologies for Absence

To receive, consider and approve any apologies for absence.

2. Declarations of Interest

Members are reminded that they are required to disclose the existence and nature of any Disclosable Pecuniary Interests, Other Registerable Interests and Non-Registerable Interests relating to items of business on the agenda having regard to paragraph 9 and Appendix B of the Code of Conduct for Members. Members are reminded that they are also required to disclose any such interests as soon as they become aware should the need arise throughout the meeting.

3. Minutes

To receive, approve and sign the Minutes of the meeting Parish Council meeting held on the 21st January 2026, Minutes 01/2026 to 14/2026 inclusive (attached).

4. Public Participation Session

With respect to items on the Agenda and other matters of mutual interest.

5. Borough and County Councillor Reports

To receive update from District and Borough Councillors.

6. ABLC and LCLG Meetings

To receive an update from Members from the above meetings

8. Finance

8.1 Accounts for Payment

To approve the accounts for payment paid to the 18th February 2026 and due to the 28th February 2026. Attached.

8.2 Bank Reconciliation

To receive and note the bank reconciliation to the 31st January 2026. Attached.

8.3 Monthly Budget Report

To receive and note the monthly budget comparison to the 31st January 2026. Attached.

8.4 Council's Banking Arrangements

To receive an update regarding the Council's banking arrangements. Report attached.

8.5 Council Savings Accounts

To consider the transfer of council reserves to higher-interest savings or investment accounts. Report attached.

8.6 Verification of Quarterly Bank Reconciliations

To appoint a Member (other than the Chair) to verify quarterly bank reconciliations and the year-end reconciliation in accordance with Financial Regulation 2.6. Report attached.

8.7 Grant Application

To consider a grant application. Application sent separately.

9. Policies and Procedures

9.1 Disciplinary Policy

To review and adopt an updated Disciplinary. Report attached.

9.2 Media and Press Policy

To review and adopt an updated Media and Press Policy. Report attached.

9.3 Social Media Policy

To review and adopt an updated Social Media Policy. Report attached.

10. Schedule of Meeting Dates

To agree the schedule of meetings from May 2026 to May 2027. Draft schedule of meetings. Attached.

11. Planning

11.1 To consider planning applications detailed below and any planning applications published by Basildon Borough Council or other organisations between the circulation of this agenda and the meeting.

11.1.1 **26/00001/S211 -** 2 x Bird Cherry, fell and poison stump at 2 - 20 Lower Street Noak Bridge Basildon Essex. View application.

11.1.2 **26/00002/S211** - 1 x Oak, Crown reduce by 2-3m to clear branch off building at 25 - 31 Kenilworth Place Lower Street Noak Bridge Basildon Essex. View application.

11.1.3 **26/00093/TPOBAS -** T2 (Oak) of TPO/09/98 Crown Lift 3.95 m above ground level. Crown reduction height reduced by 9m. Spread reduced by 4.5m at 65 Bridge Street Noak Bridge. View application.

11.1.4 **26/00148/VAR** - Variation of condition 2 (Approved plans) of planning reference 25/00263/FULL, to change the materials of the extension walls and roof to Anthracite Zinc at Willow Park, Wash Road Laindon. View application.

11.2 To note planning decisions made by Basildon Borough Council

11.2.1 **25/01571/LDCP -** To establish the lawfulness of a proposed garage conversion. **DECIDED AND GRANTED.**

12. Environment – Handyman Tasks

To receive an update on agreed tasks and to consider and prioritise newly notified tasks. Report to follow.

13. CouncilWise Subscription

To consider subscribing to CouncilWise. Report attached.

14. Correspondence

To note correspondence received.

15. Date of Next Meeting

To next Parish Council meeting will take place at 7pm on the 25th March 2026

Noak Bridge Parish Council

Minutes

Held at Noak Bridge Village Hall, Coppice Lane, Noak Bridge SS15 4JS on

Wednesday 21st January 2026 @ 7.00pm

Present

Chairman:	Cllr Mark Cottrell
Councillors:	Cllr Cris Bateman, Cllr Paul Daft, Cllr Jacqui Dowton, Cllr Peter Hawkins, and Cllr Terri Sargent.
In attendance:	Cllr Malcolm Buckley, Lynda Townend (Clerk) and 3 members of the public.

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting.

01/2026 Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from Cllr Gilliam.

Borough Councillor Meyers and County Councillor Ball were unable to attend the meeting.

02/2026 Declarations of Interest

To receive any declarations of disclosable pecuniary interests, other pecuniary interests or nonpecuniary interests by Members relating to any agenda items.

No Declarations of Interest were made.

03/2026 Minutes

Members reviewed the minutes from the Parish Council meeting held on the 17th December 2025, Minutes 128/2025 to 133/2025 inclusive.

Resolved: That the Minutes of the meeting held on 17th December 2025 be approved and signed by the Chairman as a true record.

04/2026 Public Participation Session

A member of the public requested an update on the installation of additional dog waste bins within the village.

Cllr Sargent advised that Basildon Council's Wickford Area Committee had installed one new dog bin and that confirmation would be sought regarding the installation of any further bins.

No update was available in response to a previous enquiry regarding CCTV. Additional police patrols had been requested in the area, although no specific details were provided.

Ongoing issues with littering in Noak Bridge were raised again. Cllr Sargent confirmed that enquiries would be made and a further update provided once information had been received.

Cllr Cottrell informed the Council that he had recently witnessed three youths wearing hoodies travelling through the village on an electric bike at speed.

A member of the public asked for an update on the replacement of the boardwalk at the Nature Reserve, which had previously been removed due to health and safety concerns. It was noted that the works were originally expected to be completed before Christmas. Members were advised that the start date had been delayed, with a revised commencement date of the week beginning 19 January 2026; however, this had since been further delayed. The resident requested a further update on progress.

Resolved: That the Clerk make enquiries with Basildon Borough Council to obtain an update on the boardwalk works.

05/2026 Borough and County Councillor Reports

Cllr Sargent, in her capacity as a Borough Councillor, provided an update on Borough matters and the Local Council Liaison Meeting held on the 20th January 2026, in which she attended in her capacity as a Parish Councillor:

- Local Elections
    - The promised costs that Parish Councils will be charged for local elections, due to be held in 2026, were not provided. Cllr Aidan McGurran advised he will find out the costs and inform the Parish Councils.
    - Basildon Borough Council responded to the Government's letter asking whether it could continue planning for Local Government Reorganisation while holding elections. This matter was considered at a Cabinet meeting, attended by residents and Members during which the

majority of the Shadow Cabinet expressed views opposing the decision to postpone the elections. Basildon's Cabinet responded to the request that the elections be postponed.

Attendees at the Local Council Liaison meeting noted that this decision was extremely unpopular with residents, who felt it diminished their democratic right to vote.

- The final decision regarding the elections will be made by the Secretary of State, and the decision is expected by the end of January.

- Local Plan
  - The constraints and difficulties experienced by residents using the Commonplace platform for consultation responses were raised and a request was made to ensure alternative consultation formats were available for residents.

Cllr Buckley provided the following update on County matters including:

- Essex County Council has prepared their draft 2026/27 budget which will be increased by 3.95%. This will ensure the maintenance of existing services.
- It is expected the Police Fire and Crime Commissioner's budget will be increased by 5%.
- Essex County Council responded to the Secretary of State's letter regarding the feasibility of running the 2026 elections alongside Local Government Reorganisation, stating the Council believes the elections should proceed. A further letter has been received to clarify Essex County Council's position. Their response is being considered at a Cabinet meeting being held this evening.

06/2026 Local Government Reorganisation

Updates were provided by Cllr Buckley and Sargent in the minute point above.

07/2026 Noak Bridge Neighbourhood Plan Referendum Update

Cllr Sargent confirmed the Neighbourhood Plan referendum, which took place on Tuesday the 16th December, resulted in a 'yes' vote ensuing Basildon Borough Council use the Neighbourhood Plan for Noak Bridge to help it decide planning applications. The final plan has not yet been received from Basildon Council. This should be received by the end of the month.

08/2026 Finance

08/2026/01 Accounts for Payment

The Council received and approved the following accounts for payment:

Date	*Supplier*	*Item*	*Net*	*VAT*	*Total*
26/11/2025	Solopress	Referendum banner	56.20	-	56.20
26/11/2025	Solopress	Referendum banner	43.20	8.64	51.84
26/11/2025	Solopress	Referendum banner	25.37	5.07	30.44
26/11/2025	Solopress	Referendum banner	37.26	7.45	44.71
26/11/2025	Solopress	Referendum banner	31.32	6.26	37.58
26/11/2025	Solopress	Referendum leaflets	43.20	8.64	51.84
03/12/2025	Solopress	Referendum banner	29.33	5.87	35.20
03/12/2025	Solopress	Referendum banner	34.29	6.86	41.15
03/12/2025	Santander	November Bank Charge	9.99	-	9.99
04/12/2025	At Last Events	Final balance for Christmas lights	3,475.00	695.00	4,170.00
19/12/2025	NBCA	Hall hire 19/12/2025 - inv 215	25.00	-	25.00
24/12/2025	L Townend	December salary	679.52	-	679.52
24/12/2025	L Townend	December expenses	104.97	-	104.97
24/12/2025	HMRC	December PAYE costs	253.11	-	253.11
24/12/2025	Nest Pension	December submission	62.72	-	62.72
02/01/2026	Santander	Bank Charge	9.99	-	9.99
TBC	Peter Thomas	Oct and Nov handyman works	765.00	153.00	918.00
23/01/2026	L Townend	January salary	679.72	-	679.72
23/01/2026	L Townend	January expenses	54.46	-	54.46
23/01/2026	HMRC	January PAYE costs	52.88	-	252.88
23/01/2026	Nest Pension	January submission	62.72	-	62.72
TBC	NBCA	Hall hire 21/01/2026 – inv 10	50.00	-	50.00
		TOTAL:			**£7,682.04**

Resolved: That the accounts for payment from the 1st December 2025 to the 31st January 2026 be approved.

08/2026/02 Bank Reconciliation

The council **received and noted** the bank reconciliation report to the to the 31st December 2025.

Cllr Dowton left the meeting at 19:32

Cllr Dowton returned to the meeting at 19:33

08/2026/03 Monthly Budget Report

The Council **received and noted** the budget comparison to the 31st December 2025. It was highlighted the council had spent £51,301.51 representing 38% of the annual expenditure budget. This amount represents expenditure costs of 124% of the annual precept.

08/2026/04 Santander Bank Mandate

Cllr Sargent advised she is still waiting for account management forms to remove the signatory from account.

08/2026/05 Council's Banking Arrangements

Members received a report with recommendations relating to the Council's banking arrangements.

The Clerk confirmed the Unity Trust Bank current account is now open with the Clerk set up as the Administrator and three councillors as signatories. All that remains for the account to become operational is for funds to be deposited.

Cllr Sargent requested confirmation all councillors would be made aware of payments being processed for payment, which the Clerk confirmed.

Councillors discussed the current banking arrangements, the requirement for the council to hold a debit card on this account now Santander has started charging a monthly administration fee of £9.99 and alternative saving account products.

Resolved: That the Santander Current account be closed and the balance transferred to the Unity Trust Bank current account with all receipts and payments to be transacted from this account once the transfer has been completed.

Resolved: That a debit card will be requested from Metro Bank current account, ending 3192, for occasional, authorised, use by the council. The signing rules and individuals authorised on the account will be:

1. Mark Cottrell – with debit card, one to sign, full online banking access
2. Paul Daft – No debit card, one to sign, full online banking access
3. Lynda Townend – No debit card, two to sign, view-only online banking

Resolved: That the Clerk will investigate business savings products to be considered at the next Parish Council meeting which will allow higher interest rates to be achieved on the Councils cash assets.

08/2026/06 2026/27 Budget and Precept Demand

Cllr Cottrell reported that an informal budget meeting had been held on the 6th January 2026 where the Council's costs for the upcoming financial year were assessed.

Members received a copy of the draft budget and approved an amended expenditure budget of £159,764.20 including the use of earmarked reserves totalling £118,548.00. The resultant precept requirement is £41,216.20.

Using Basildon Borough Council's Precept calculator this equates to a Band D council tax charge of £41.13 per resident, a decrease of 0.44% from 2025/26 when the charge was £41.31**.**

Resolved: That the Council agreed to set an expenditure budget of £159,764.20 for the 2026/27 financial year.

Resolved: That the Council agrees to submit a precept demand to Basildon Borough Council of £41,216.20. (rounded to £41,285.47) resulting in a Band D council tax payment of £41.13 per resident.

08/2026/07 Grant to Essex and Herts Air Ambulance

Members considered a request for a donation to the Essex and Herts Air Ambulance.

Resolved: That the Council donate the sum of £100 to the Essex and Herts Air Ambulance.

08/2026/08 Grant to the Friends of Noak Bridge

Members considered a report regarding unexpected costs incurred by the Friends of Noak Bridge.

Resolved: That the council would consider the request on receipt of an official request from the Friends of Noak Bridge.

08/2026/09 Council Process of Obtaining Late Invoices

The Parish Council is currently awaiting three invoices from Basildon Borough Council for works completed: the CCTV service agreement, Beacon Lighting costs and the Tommy bench and path installation.

Cllr Daft left the meeting at 20:22

Cllr Daft returned to the meeting at 20:24

Resolved: That the Clerk will contact Basildon Borough Council's finance department, before the end of the financial year, to request the outstanding invoices and will continue to monitor the accounts regularly.

09/2026 Policies and Procedures

09/2026/01 Civility and Respect Pledge

The Council received and considered a report recommending the Parish Council sign up to NALC and the SSLC's Civility and Respect Pledge.

Resolved: That Noak Bridge Parish Council sign up to the Civility and Respect Pledge

09/2026/02 Equality and Diversity Policy

The Council received and considered adopting the NALC model Equality and Diversity Policy.

Resolved: That Noak Bridge Parish Council adopt the Equality and Diversity Policy which will be reviewed at least every three years unless a change in legislation occurs beforehand.

09/2026/03 Dignity at Work Policy

The Council received and considered adopting a Dignity at Work Policy.

Resolved: That Noak Bridge Parish Council adopt the Dignity at Work Policy which will be reviewed on an annual basis.

09/2026/04 Grievance Procedure

The Council received and considered adopting a Grievance Procedure.

Resolved: That Noak Bridge Parish Council adopt the Grievance Procedure which will be reviewed at least every three years unless a change in legislation occurs beforehand.

09/2026/05 Health and Safety Policy

The Council received and reviewed an updated Health and Safety Policy.

Resolved: That Noak Bridge Parish Council adopt the updated Health and Safety Policy which will be reviewed on an annual basis.

10/2026 Planning

10/2026/01 Planning Applications Considered

There were no planning applications to consider.

10/2026/02 Planning Decisions

There were no planning decisions to note.

11/2026 CouncilWise

Members received and considered a proposal to subscribe to a new, dedicated, training service provided by CouncilWise.

Resolved: That the Clerk prepare a proposed annual training programme, establish the anticipated costs, and obtain details of CouncilWise's training course fees for comparison before a decision is made.

12/2026 Environment - Handyman Tasks

Members were provided with a list showing the handyman tasks completed to date and newly suggested tasks which included:

Outstanding works include:

- Treating the benches by Coppice Lane pond

Newly identified works include:

1. Repair wooden bollards, Bridgecote Lane – total cost £604
2. Trimming back overhanging trees and shrubbery, Bridgecote Lane – total cost £80
3. Clear neglected area, Bridgecote Lane – total cost £540
4. Installation of Christmas tree fixing – total cost £290
5. Paint the Nature Reserve gates – total cost £750

Resolved: That the Council agreed tasks 1 and 2 be completed within the January budget allocation and tasks 3 to 5 be completed in the February budget allocation.

Cllr Daft left the meeting at 20:57.

13/2026 Correspondence

The Clerk advised Glen Owers from Basildon Borough Council had confirmed S106 funding had been allocated for improvements to the playground at Coppice Lane and that dates to meet to discuss its refurbishment will be forthcoming and circulated to Councillors.

14/2026 Date of Next Meeting

The next council meeting will be held on the 25th February 2026.

With no further business the meeting closed at 21:04

Signed:_____ Date:_____
Chairman

Return to Agenda

Accounts for Payment

Accounts for Payment **For authorisation on: 25th February 2026**

Date	*Supplier*	*Item*	*Net*	*VAT*	*Total*
03/02/2026	Santander	Bank charge	9.99	0.00	9.99
25/02/2026	L Townend	February salary	680.12	0.00	680.12
25/02/2026	L Townend	February expenses	116.08	0.00	116.08
25/01/2026	HMRC	February PAYE costs	252.05	0.00	252.05
25/02/2026	Nest Pension	February submission	62.70	0.00	62.70
26/02/2026	NBCA	Hall hire - 25th February 2026	50.00	0.00	50.00
TBC	Basildon Borough Council	VE 80 Beacon lighting costs	855.00	0.00	855.00
TBC	Essex & Herts Air Ambulance	Grant agreed 21/01/2026 minute ref: 08/2026/07	100.00	0.00	100.00
28/02/2026	Unity Bank	Bank charge	6.00	0.00	6.00
		TOTAL:			**£ 2,131.94**

BANK RECONCILITION - Financial year ending 31.03.26

	Actual	Actual	Actual	Actual
Bank Balance as at	**29.10.2025**	**30.11.2025**	**31.12.2025**	**31.01.2026**
Current Account	£ 33,037.15	£ 31,563.51	£ 26,574.03	£ 24,270.87
Business Saving Account Santander	£ 18,001.16	£ 18,001.16	£ 18,001.16	£ 18,001.16
Business Saving Account Metro	£ 71,960.29	£ 72,004.65	£ 72,050.52	£ 72,096.42
Unity Trust Bank	£ 85,000.00	£ 85,000.00	£ 85,000.00	£ 85,000.00
Total:	**£ 207,998.60**	**£ 206,569.32**	**£ 201,625.71**	**£ 199,368.45**
Less Unpresented cheques				
HMRC Costs	£ 251.86	£ 504.59	£ 757.70	£ 252.88
Coppice Lane Pond		£ 3,000.00	£ 3,000.00	£ 3,000.00
Nest pension			£ 62.70	
Total of unpresented cheques	£ 251.86	£ 3,504.59	£ 3,820.40	£ 3,252.88
Net Bank Balances as at	**£ 207,746.74**	**£ 203,064.73**	**£ 197,805.31**	**£ 196,115.57**
CASH BOOK				
Balance	£ 202,631.11	£ 202,631.11	£ 202,631.11	£ 202,631.11
Plus Receipts Current account	£ 44,891.30	£ 44,971.30	£ 44,971.30	£ 45,263.41
Plus Receipts Bus. Saving account	£ 1,060.97	£ 1,060.97	£ 1,060.97	£ 1,060.97
Plus Receipts Bus. Sav. Metro Account	£ 348.69	£ 393.05	£ 438.92	£ 484.82
Plus Receipts Unity Trust Bank	£ -	£ -	£ -	£ -
Total	**£ 248,932.07**	**£ 249,056.43**	**£ 249,102.30**	**£ 249,440.31**
Less Payments	£ 41,185.33	£ 45,991.70	£ 51,296.99	£ 53,324.74
Grand Total	**£ 207,746.74**	**£ 203,064.73**	**£ 197,805.31**	**£ 196,115.57**
Difference	**£ -**	**£ 0.00**	**£ 0.00**	**£ -**

Return to Agenda

NOAK BRIDGE PARISH COUNCIL	MONTHLY BUDGET REPORT
Month	January 2026

INCOME	Budget	Actual (to date)	Variance (+/-)
Precept	£41,235.00	£41,276.54	£41.54
LCTS Grant	£0.00	£292.11	£292.11
CIF Grant	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00
Interest	£0.00	£1,545.79	£1,545.79
Event Income	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00
Miscellaneous	£0.00	£203.70	£0.00
- VAT reclaim 08/04/2024	£3,511.00	£3,491.06	-£19.94
- VAT reclaim	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00
- VAT reclaim			
INCOME TOTALS	**£44,746.00**	**£46,809.20**	**£2,063.20**

EXPENDITURE	Budget	Total spent to 30/04/25	Variance (+/-)	Percentage spent	Expenditure in month
Staff Costs					
Salaries	£10,215.00	£6,789.97	£3,425.03	66%	£679.72
Tax & Employer NI	£1,970.00	£2,942.20	-£972.20	149%	£252.88
Pension	£500.00	£563.34	-£63.34	113%	£62.70
Payroll	£300.00	£84.00	£216.00	28%	£0.00
Home allowance, Travel & Costs	£500.00	£455.18	£44.82	91%	£54.46
Training inc. travel	£2,000.00	£120.00	£1,880.00	6%	£0.00
Office equip & stationery	£1,000.00	£336.93	£663.07	34%	£0.00
General Costs					
Computer & Other Digital Equipment	£500.00	£0.00	£500.00	0%	£0.00
Fixed asset maintenance	£2,000.00	£904.00	£1,096.00	45%	£0.00
Telephone & Internet	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	#DIV/0!	£0.00
Elections/By-election	£2,500.00	£0.00	£2,500.00	0%	£0.00
Professional fees	£2,000.00	£70.00	£1,930.00	4%	£0.00
Hall Hire	£1,000.00	£400.00	£600.00	40%	£50.00
Insurance	£1,200.00	£931.19	£268.81	78%	£0.00
Subscriptions	£1,000.00	£1,090.50	-£90.50	109%	£0.00
Councillor Training	£1,500.00	£0.00	£1,500.00	0%	£0.00
Audit Fees	£750.00	£390.00	£360.00	52%	£0.00
Bank Charges	£0.00	£9.99	-£9.99	#DIV/0!	£9.99

EXPENDITURE CONTINUED	Budget	Total spent to 30/04/25	Variance (+/-)	Percentage spent	Expenditure in month
Publications/newsletters	£1,500.00	£0.00	£1,500.00	0%	£0.00
CCTV & Security	£1,500.00	£0.00	£1,500.00	0%	£0.00
VAT		£3,726.34	-£3,726.34	#DIV/0!	£153.00
Community Support					
Community Events Support	£1,500.00	£2,301.01	-£801.01	153%	£0.00
Kings Meni Bridge	£500.00	£0.00	£500.00	0%	£0.00
Kings Coronation	£500.00	£0.00	£500.00	0%	£0.00
Community Grants Awards (small)	£2,000.00	£0.00	£2,000.00	0%	£0.00
Community Lights Project	£4,700.00	£8,450.00	-£3,750.00	180%	£0.00
Support Grants	£100.00	£0.00	£100.00	0%	£0.00
Projects					
Parish Plan	£5,000.00	£0.00	£5,000.00	0%	£0.00
D Day (from reserves) VE Day	£5,000.00	£250.00	£4,750.00	5%	£0.00
Contingency earmarked (from reserves)	£10,000.00	£0.00	£10,000.00	0%	£0.00
Community Projects earmarked (from reserves)	£30,000.00	£16,004.44	£13,995.56	53%	£0.00
Community Projects Play Area earmarked (from reserves)	£25,000.00	£0.00	£25,000.00	0%	£0.00
Environmental Maintenance (From Reserves)	£10,000.00	£4,245.00	£5,755.00	42%	£765.00
Neighbourhood Plan (funded from reserves)	£10,000.00	£3,265.17	£6,734.83	33%	£0.00
EXPENDITURE TOTALS	**£136,235.00**	**£53,329.26**	£82,905.74	**39%**	**£2,027.75**
PRECEPT TOTALS	41,276.54	53,329.26		**129%**	

AGENDA REPORT ITEM 8.4
Council Banking Arrangements Update

Background Information

At its meeting under Minute Reference **08/2026/05**, the Council resolved that the Santander UK current account be closed and the balance transferred to the recently opened Unity Trust Bank current account, with all receipts and payments to be transacted via Unity once the transfer had been completed.

The Council also resolved that a debit card be requested for the Metro Bank current account (ending 3192) for occasional authorised use, and that the Clerk investigate business savings products for future consideration.

It is understood a request to close the Santander account was made on 14 February 2026 and that the transfer of funds may take a few working days to complete as part of the bank's closure process. As at 5.00pm on Wednesday 18 February, the Unity Trust Bank account had not yet received any funding.

The Metro Bank debit card has now been applied for.

Summary

The Unity Trust Bank monthly account charge of £6.00 is due to be collected automatically on 28 February 2026.

If sufficient funds are not credited to the account before that date and the account becomes overdrawn, the bank may apply:

- An unpaid item fee of £15 per day; and
- Unauthorised overdraft interest (currently 25%).

While it is anticipated that the Santander transfer will complete shortly, Members may wish to consider whether alternative arrangements are required to ensure sufficient cleared funds are available in the Unity account before 28 February to cover payments.

One option would be to transfer £2, 132 from the Metro Bank account balance to Unity Trust Bank to ensure the account is funded and the Council's February payments can be made, thereby avoiding any potential charges.

Recommendation

That the Council:

1. Notes the update regarding closure of the Santander account and the pending transfer of funds to Unity Trust Bank.
2. Notes that the Unity Trust Bank account charge of £6.00 is due on 28 February 2026.
3. Considers whether to:
    - Await completion of the Santander transfer; **or**
    - Authorise an interim transfer from the Metro Bank account of £2,132 to Unity Trust Bank to ensure sufficient funds are available and avoid any potential bank charges.

Members are invited to determine how they wish to proceed.

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AGENDA REPORT ITEM 8.5
Council Savings

Background Information

The Council currently holds £72,050.52 in a Metro Bank account earning approximately 0.76% interest and £18,001.16 in a Santander Business Savings account earning 1.00% interest per annum. The combined balance is £90,051.68 (excluding interest accrued to date).

These interest rates are significantly below those currently available to parish councils, and the Council could achieve materially improved returns by transferring funds to higher-interest bearing accounts while maintaining an appropriate level of security and liquidity.

The Financial Services Compensation Scheme (FSCS) protects deposits of up to £85,000 per depositor, per banking group. Any investment strategy will therefore need to take this limit into account, either by limiting deposits per banking group or by using suitable low-risk public sector investment vehicles.

As resolved at the meeting held on 21 January 2026 (Minute Reference 08/2026/05), the Clerk has investigated suitable savings and investment options available to parish councils.

Summary of Account Options

1. Hampshire Trust Bank[1]:

- **Instant Access**: 3.81% gross
  Minimum £5,000 | Maximum £750,000
- **95-day Notice**: 3.95% gross
  Minimum £5,000 | Maximum £750,000

2. Cambridge and Counties Bank[2]:

- **30-day Notice**: 3.80% gross
  Minimum £10,000 | Maximum £3,000,000
- **95-day Notice**: 4.10% gross
  Minimum £10,000 | Maximum £3,000,000

[1] Hampshire Trust Bak: Easy Access & Notice Business Savings Accounts | Hampshire Trust Bank (HTB)
[2] Cambridge and Counties Bank: Our business savings accounts | Cambridge & Counties Bank

3. CCLA Public Sector Deposit Fund:[3]

- **Current Yield (February 2026)**: 3.6613% (net of charges)
- **Access**: Funds available within 24 hours, no penalty
- **Minimum Deposit**: £25,000
- **Annual Management Charge**: 0.08%

Note: The CCLA Public Sector Deposit Fund is a low-risk fund designed specifically for public sector bodies. It offers competitive returns, high liquidity and a strong security profile. While not FSCS-protected, it is widely used by local authorities and carries a high credit rating.

Projected Returns on Selected Accounts

Projected Returns on £88,000	Interest Rate (Gross)	Projected Return	Notes
Existing Accounts	~1.00%	£950	Existing rate, instant access
Hampshire Trust Bank	3.81% (instant access)	£3,352.80	Instant access; FSCS protected
Hampshire Trust Bank	3.95% (95-day notice)	£3,476.00	95 day notice account, FSCS protected
Cambridge and Counties Bank	3.80% (term deposit)	£3,344.00	30 day notice account, FSCS protected
Cambridge and Counties Bank	4.10% (term deposit)	£3,608.00	95 day notice account, FSCS protected
CCLA Fund	3.66.13% (variable)	£3,221.94	Variable return; accessible within 24 hours; not FSCS but low risk

Liquidity and Other Considerations

Based on current forecasts, the Council is not expected to require access to these reserves until Quarter 3 of 2026 (October–December). This means there is no immediate operational risk in placing funds into a 95-day notice account should councillors wish to prioritise higher returns.

If councillors prefer to retain immediate or near-immediate access, the Hampshire Trust Bank Instant Access account or the CCLA Public Sector Deposit Fund would provide suitable alternatives.

It should also be noted there is currently an ex councillor currently on the mandate for accounts held with Santander.

[3] CCLA Key Investor Information: Key Investor Information

Recommendation

It is recommended that the Council resolves to:

- Open a new higher-interest savings account or public sector investment fund and invest a minimum of £88,000. The Clerk should be added to the account in the capacity of administrator/main contact and at least three councillors as signatories.
- Close the Santander Business Savings account, transferring the full balance to the newly approved account or fund.
- Transfer all but £2,000 from the Metro Bank account, retaining a small balance for occasional debit card payments.

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AGENDA REPORT ITEM 8.6
Verification of Bank Reconciliations

Background Information

The Council's Financial Regulation 2.6 (Risk Management and Internal Control) sets out the requirement that bank reconciliations be independently verified. The regulation states:

"At least once in each quarter, and at each financial year end, a member other than the Chair, shall be appointed to verify bank reconciliations (for all accounts) produced by the RFO. The member shall sign and date the reconciliations and the original bank statement (or similar document) as evidence of this. This activity, including any exceptions, shall be reported to and noted by the Council."

This process forms part of the Council's internal control framework and supports good financial governance and transparency.

Summary

To ensure compliance with Financial Regulation 2.6, the Council must appoint a Member to undertake this verification check for the current financial year. The appointed Member will be required to:

1. Review and verify bank reconciliations for all accounts on a quarterly basis and at year end;
2. Sign and date the reconciliation documents and supporting bank statements (or similar evidence);
3. Report any findings or exceptions back to the Council for noting.

It is recommended that the appointed Member be independent of the Chair to comply with the Regulation and maintain robust separation of duties.

Recommendation

That the Council appoint a Member (other than the Chair) to verify quarterly bank reconciliations and the year-end reconciliation in accordance with Financial Regulation 2.6.

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AGENDA REPORT ITEM 9.1
Revised Disciplinary Policy

Background Information
Noak Bridge Parish Council currently uses an outdated disciplinary policy.

The National Association of Local Councils (NALC), in partnership with WorkNest (employment law, HR and health & safety services), published a Model Disciplinary Policy on 8 December 2025 for small councils.

The policy is based on the 2015 ACAS Code of Practice on Disciplinary and Grievance Procedures and ACAS guidance on discipline and grievances, and is fully compliant with current employment law, including the Equality Act 2010 and UK GDPR.

The model policy is designed to support councils in handling employee conduct and performance fairly, consistently, and transparently, with clear procedures for informal management, formal investigation, disciplinary meetings, and appeals.

Summary
The NALC Model Policy:

- Aligns fully with ACAS 2015 guidance and current employment law.
- Provides a clear framework for handling misconduct, gross misconduct, and unsatisfactory performance.
- Clarifies roles and responsibilities of the Staffing Committee, Investigators, and Sub-Committees.
- Confirms employees' rights to representation, notice, evidence, confidentiality, and appeal.
- Ensures disciplinary action is proportionate, with stages of first written warning, final written warning, and dismissal.
- Includes guidance on suspension, mediation, and informal resolution.
- Is written in a clear, accessible format suitable for small councils.

Recommendation
That Noak Bridge Parish Council adopt the NALC Model Disciplinary Policy (published 8 December 2025**)** for immediate use.

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Disciplinary Policy

Version	Date Adopted	Minute Reference	Review Date
1			

1. Introduction

Introduction

1. This policy is based on and complies with the 2015 ACAS Code of Practice[4].
2. It also takes into account the ACAS guide on discipline and grievances at work[5].
3. The policy is designed to help council employees improve unsatisfactory conduct and performance in their jobs. Wherever possible, the council will try to resolve its concerns about employees' behaviour informally, without starting the formal procedure set out below.
4. The policy will be applied fairly, consistently and in accordance with the Equality Act 2010.
5. This policy confirms:
    - Informal coaching and supervision will be considered, where appropriate, to improve conduct and/or attendance.
    - The council will fully investigate the facts of each case.
    - The council recognises that misconduct and unsatisfactory work performance are different issues. The disciplinary policy will also apply to work performance issues to ensure that all alleged instances of employees' underperformance are dealt with fairly and in a way that is consistent with required standards. However, the disciplinary policy will only be used when performance management proves ineffective. For more information, see ACAS Performance Management.
    - Employees will be informed in writing about the nature of the complaint against them and given the opportunity to state their case.
    - Employees will be provided, where appropriate, with written copies of evidence and relevant witness statements in advance of a disciplinary hearing.
    - Employees may be accompanied or represented by a companion – a workplace colleague, a trade union representative or a trade union official - at any investigatory, disciplinary or appeal meeting. The companion is permitted to address such meetings, to put the employee's case and confer with the employee. The companion cannot answer questions put to the employee, address the meeting against the employee's wishes or prevent the employee from explaining their case.
    - The council will give employees reasonable notice of any meetings in this procedure. Employee must make all reasonable efforts to attend. Failure to attend any meeting may result in it going ahead and a decision being taken. An employee who does not attend a meeting will be given the opportunity to be represented and to make written submissions.
    - If the employee's companion is not available for the proposed date of the meeting, the employee can request a postponement and can propose an

[4] Acas Code of Practice on disciplinary and grievance procedures | Acas
[5] Discipline and grievance | Acas

alternative date that is within seven calendar days of the original meeting date, unless it is unreasonable not to propose a later date.

- Any changes to specified time limits in the council's procedure must be agreed to by the employee and the council.
- Information about an employee's disciplinary matter will be restricted to those involved in the disciplinary process. A record of the reason for disciplinary action and the action taken by the council is confidential to the employee. The employee's disciplinary records will be held by the Council in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).
- Audio or video recordings of the proceedings at any stage of the disciplinary procedure are prohibited, unless agreed by all affected parties as a reasonable adjustment that takes account of an employee's medical condition.
- Employees have the right to appeal against any disciplinary decision. The appeal decision is final.
- If an employee who is already subject to the council's disciplinary procedure raises a grievance, the grievance will normally be heard after the completion of the disciplinary procedure.
- Disciplinary action taken by the council can include a written warning, a final written warning or dismissal.
- This procedure may be implemented at any stage if the employee's alleged misconduct warrants this.
- Except for gross misconduct, when an employee may be dismissed without notice, the council will not dismiss an employee on the first occasion that it decides there has been misconduct.
- If an employee is suspended following allegations of misconduct, it will be on full pay and only for such time as is necessary. Suspension is not a disciplinary sanction. The council will write to the employee to confirm any period of suspension and the reasons for it.
- The council may consider mediation at any stage of the disciplinary procedure where appropriate (for example, where there have been communication breakdowns or allegations of bullying or harassment). Mediation is a dispute resolution process that requires the consent of affected parties.

Examples of misconduct

6. Misconduct is employee behaviour that can lead to the employer taking disciplinary action. The following list contains some examples of misconduct (the list is not exhaustive):
    - Unauthorised absence.
    - Poor timekeeping.
    - Misuse of the council's resources and facilities, including telephone, email and internet.

- Inappropriate behaviour.
- Refusal to follow reasonable instructions.
- Breach of health and safety rules.

Examples of gross misconduct

7. Gross misconduct is misconduct that is so serious that it is likely to lead to dismissal without notice. The following list contains some examples of gross misconduct (the list is not exhaustive):
   - Bullying, discrimination and harassment.
   - Incapacity at work because of alcohol or drugs.
   - Violent behaviour.
   - Fraud or theft.
   - Gross negligence.
   - Gross insubordination.
   - Serious breaches of council policies and procedures, e.g. the Health and Safety Policy, Equality and Diversity Policy, Data Protection Policy and any policies regarding the use of information technology.
   - Serious and deliberate damage to property.
   - Use of the internet or email to access pornographic, obscene or offensive material.
   - Disclosure of confidential information.

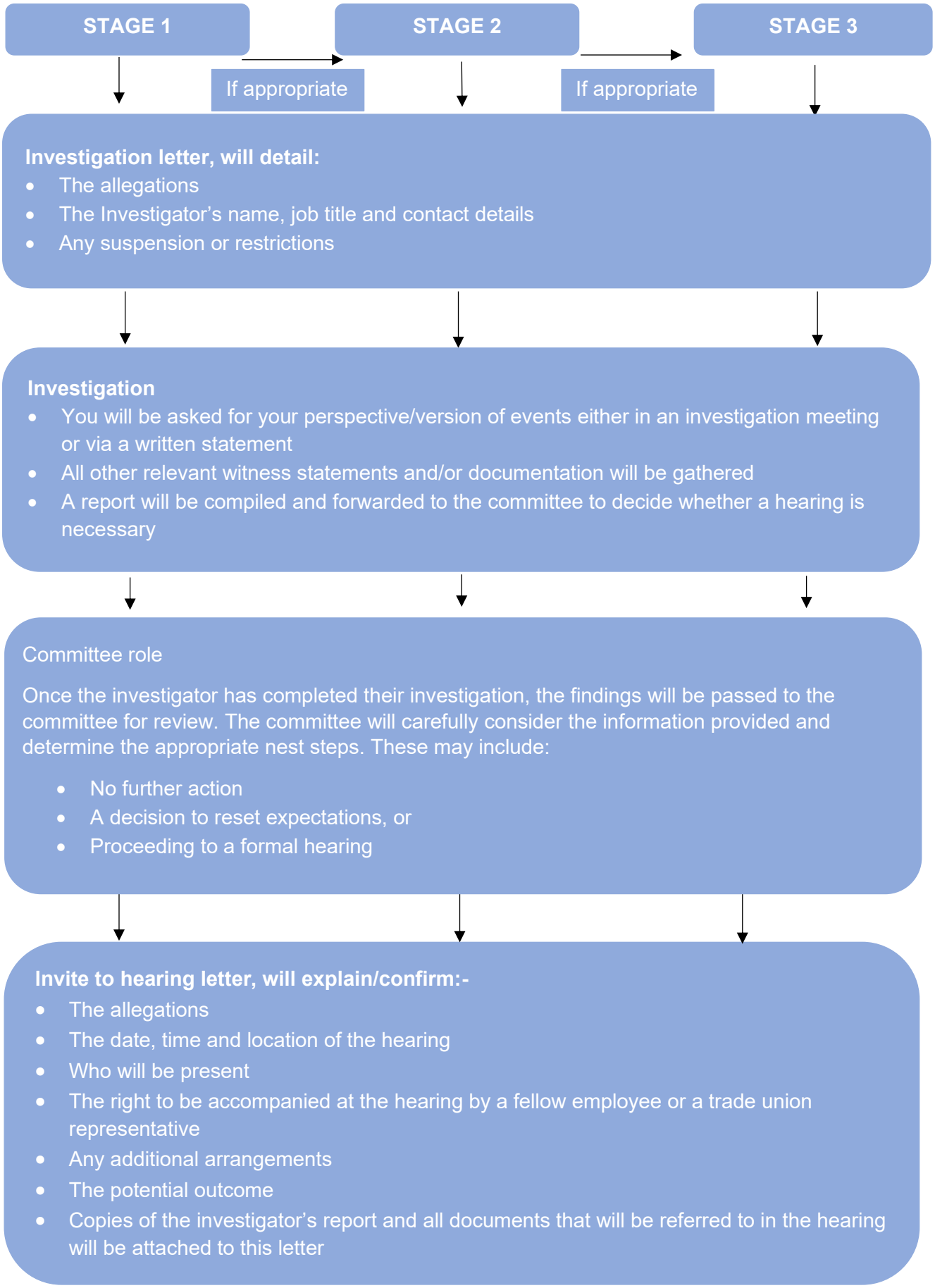
Suspension

8. If allegations of gross misconduct or serious misconduct are made, the council may suspend the employee while further investigations are carried out. Suspension will be on full pay. Suspension does not imply any determination of guilt or innocence, as it is merely a measure to enable further investigation.
9. While on suspension, the employee is required to be available during normal hours of work in the event that the council needs to make contact. The employee must not contact or attempt to contact or influence anyone connected with the investigation in any way or discuss this matter with any other employee or councillor.
10. The employee must not attend work. The council will make arrangements for the employee to access any information or documents required to respond to any allegations.

Examples of unsatisfactory work performance

11. The following list contains some examples of unsatisfactory work performance (the list is not exhaustive):
    - Inadequate application of management instructions/office procedures.
    - Inadequate IT skills.
    - Unsatisfactory management of staff.
    - Unsatisfactory communication skills.

The procedure



The Hearing

- An appropriate level of management will conduct the disciplinary hearing ('the Chair'), and there may also be a note-taker present. In some cases, a Human Resources Partner will also be present
- The Chair will explain the role of all those in attendance, the allegations and go through the evidence that has been gathered
- You will be given the opportunity to respond in full. This will include time to ask questions and present evidence. If you intend to call any witnesses, you must give us advance written notice that you intend to do this
- The Chair will adjourn at the end to consider their decision
- Where possible, the outcome will be given the same day. Where this is not possible, because for example, the Chair requires further time to consider their decision or complete further investigation, you will be informed
- You will be informed of the outcome verbally (either in person or by phone) and then in writing

Potential outcome: First Written warning

Potential outcome: Final Written warning

Potential outcome: Dismissal (with or without notice/pay in lieu of notice)

Outcome letter will advise:

- The nature of the misconduct that has led to the outcome (including any prior warnings that have been taken into account, if appropriate)
- The action or improvement required
- The timescale for implementing such action (if relevant)
- That this is a first/final written warning and that the next stage may be final written warning/dismissal if there is no sustained improvement or change
- That the warning will remain live for 12 months
- That whilst the warning will not remain active after this time in relation to future disciplinary matters, a record of what has occurred will be kept and may be referred to if relevant
- The right of appeal

Outcome letter will advise:

- The reasons for dismissal
- Any prior warnings that have been taken into account, if appropriate
- The date on which employment will end
- The right of appeal

12. Preliminary enquiries. The council may make preliminary enquiries to establish the basic facts of what has happened in order to understand whether there may be a case to answer under the disciplinary procedure.
13. If the employee's manager believes there may be a disciplinary case to answer, the council may initiate a more detailed investigation undertaken to establish the facts of a situation or to establish the perspective of others who may have witnessed misconduct.
14. Informal Procedures. Where minor concerns about conduct become apparent, it is the manager's responsibility to raise this with the employee and clarify the improvements required. A file note will be made and kept by the manager. The informal discussions are not part of the formal disciplinary procedure. If the conduct fails to improve, or if further matters of conduct become apparent, the manager may decide to formalise the discussions and invite the employee to a first stage disciplinary hearing.

Disciplinary investigation

15. A formal disciplinary investigation may sometimes be required to establish the facts and whether there is a disciplinary case to answer.
16. If a formal disciplinary investigation is required, the Council's staffing committee will appoint an Investigator who will be responsible for undertaking a fact-finding exercise to collect all relevant information. The Investigator will be independent and will normally be a councillor. If the staffing committee considers that there are no councillors who are independent (for example, because they all have direct involvement in the allegations about the employee), it will appoint someone from outside the Council. The Investigator will be appointed as soon as possible after the allegations have been made. The staffing committee will inform the Investigator of the terms of reference of the investigation. The terms of reference should specify:

    - The allegations or events that the investigation is required to examine.
    - Whether a recommendation is required
    - How the findings should be presented. For example, an investigator will often be required to present the findings in the form of a written report.
    - Who the findings should be reported to and who to contact for further direction if unexpected issues arise or advice is needed.

17. The Investigator will be asked to submit their findings, usually within 35 Calendar days of appointment, where possible. In cases of alleged unsatisfactory performance or of allegations of minor misconduct, the appointment of an investigator may not be necessary and the Council may decide to commence disciplinary proceedings at the next stage - the disciplinary meeting (see paragraph 22).

18. The Staffing Committee will notify the employee in writing of the alleged misconduct and details of the person undertaking the investigation. The employee may be asked to meet an investigator as part of the disciplinary investigation. The employee will be given sufficient notice of the meeting with the Investigator so that they have a reasonable time to prepare for it. The letter will explain the investigatory process and that the meeting is part of that process. The employee will be provided with a copy of the council's disciplinary procedure. The council will also inform the employee that when they meet with the Investigator, they will have the opportunity to comment on the allegations of misconduct.
19. Employees may be accompanied or represented by a workplace colleague, a trade union representative or a trade union official at any investigatory meeting.
20. If there are other persons (e.g. employees, councillors, members of the public or the council's contractors) who can provide relevant information, the Investigator should try to obtain it from them in advance of the meeting with the employee.
21. The Investigator has no authority to take disciplinary action. Their role is to establish the facts of the case as quickly as possible and prepare a report that recommends to the Staffing Committee whether or not disciplinary action should be considered under the policy.
22. The Investigator's report will contain their recommendations and the findings on which they were based. They will recommend either:
    - The employee has no case to answer, and there should be no further action under the council's disciplinary procedure.
    - The matter is not serious enough to justify further use of the disciplinary procedure and can be dealt with informally.
    - The employee has a case to answer, and a formal hearing should be convened under the council's disciplinary procedure.

23. The Investigator will submit the report to the staffing committee, which will decide whether there is no case to answer; the matter should be considered informally, or a formal Disciplinary Hearing should be convened. If the Investigator is a member of the Committee making the decision, they should recuse themselves from any formal votes or decision-making regarding their findings as to whether there is a case to answer at a Disciplinary Hearing.
24. If the council decides that it will not take disciplinary action, it may consider whether mediation would be appropriate in the circumstances.

The disciplinary meeting

25. If the Staffing Committee decides that there is a case to answer, it will appoint a staffing sub-committee of three councillors to formally hear the allegations. The staffing sub-committee will appoint a Chair from one of its members. The Investigator shall not sit on the sub-committee. The staffing sub-committee will be given the delegated authority to make a decision in relation to the Disciplinary.

26. No councillor with direct involvement in the matter shall be appointed to the sub-committee. The employee will be invited, in writing, to attend a disciplinary meeting. The sub–committee's letter will confirm the following:
    - The names of its chair and the other two members.
    - Details of the alleged misconduct, its possible consequences and the employee's statutory right to be accompanied at the meeting.
    - A copy of the information provided to the sub-committee, which may include the investigation report, supporting evidence and a copy of the Council's disciplinary procedure.
    - The time and place for the meeting. The employee will be given reasonable notice of the hearing so that they have sufficient time to prepare for it.
    - Whether witnesses may attend on the employee's and the council's behalf, and if they may, both parties should inform each other of their witnesses' names at least two working days before the meeting.
    - The employee may be accompanied by a companion - a workplace colleague, a trade union representative or a trade union official.

27. The purpose of the disciplinary meeting hearing is for the allegations to be put to the employee and then for the employee to give their perspective. It will be conducted as follows:
    - The chair will introduce the members of the sub-committee to the employee and explain the arrangements for the hearing.
    - The chair will set out the allegations and invite the Investigator to present the findings of the investigation report (if there has been a previous investigation).
    - The chair will invite the employee to present their account.
    - The employee (or the companion) will set out their case and present evidence (including any witnesses and/or witness statements).
    - Any member of the sub-committee and the employee (or the companion) may question the Investigator and any witness.
    - The employee (or companion) will have the opportunity to sum up.

28. The chair will provide the employee with the sub-committee's decision with reasons, in writing, within 7 calendar days of the meeting. The chair will also notify the employee of the right to appeal the decision in the event that formal action is taken.
29. The disciplinary meeting may be adjourned to allow matters that were raised during the meeting to be further investigated by the sub-committee.

Disciplinary action

30. If the sub-committee decides that there should be disciplinary action, it may be any of the following:

First written warning:

31. If the employee's conduct has fallen below acceptable standards, a first written warning will be issued. A first written warning will set out:
    - The reason for the written warning, the improvement required (if appropriate) and the time period for improvement.
    - That further misconduct/failure to improve will result in more serious disciplinary action.
    - The employee's right of appeal.
    - That a note confirming the written warning will be placed on the employee's personnel file, that a copy will be provided to the employee and that the warning will remain in force for a specified period of time (e.g. 12 months).

Final written warning:

32. If the offence is sufficiently serious, or if there is further misconduct or a failure to improve sufficiently during the currency of a prior warning, the employee will be given a final written warning. A final written warning will set out:
    - The reason for the final written warning, the improvement required (if appropriate) and the time period for improvement.
    - That further misconduct/failure to improve will result in more serious disciplinary action up to and including dismissal.
    - The employee's right of appeal.
    - That a note confirming the final written warning will be placed on the employee's personnel file, that a copy will be provided to the employee and that the warning will remain in force for a specified period of time (e.g. 12 months).

Dismissal:

33. The council may dismiss:
    - For gross misconduct.
    - If there is no improvement within the specified time period, in the conduct which has been the subject of a final written warning.
    - If another instance of misconduct has occurred and a final written warning has already been issued and remains in force.

34. The council will consider very carefully a decision to dismiss. If an employee is dismissed, they will receive a written statement of the reasons for their dismissal, the date on which the employment will end and details of their right of appeal. If the sub-committee decides to take no disciplinary action, no record of the matter will be retained on the employee's personnel file. Action taken as a result of the disciplinary meeting will remain in force unless it is modified as a result of an appeal.

The appeal:

35. An employee who is the subject of disciplinary action will be notified of the right of appeal. Their written notice of appeal must be received by the council within seven calendar days of the employee receiving written notice of the disciplinary action and must specify the grounds for appeal.
36. The grounds for appeal include:
    - A failure by the council to follow its disciplinary policy.
    - The sub-committee did not support the sub-committee's disciplinary decision.
    - The disciplinary action was too severe in the circumstances of the case.
    - New evidence has come to light since the disciplinary meeting.

37. Where possible, the appeal will be heard by a panel of 3 members of the staffing committee who have not previously been involved in the case. This includes the Investigator. There may be insufficient members of the staffing committee who have not previously been involved. If so, the appeal panel will be a committee of 3 members of the council who may include members of the staff committee. The appeal panel will appoint a chair from one of its members.
38. The employee will be notified, in writing, within 14 calendar days of receipt of the notice of appeal of the time, date and place of the appeal meeting. The employee will be advised that they may be accompanied by a companion - a workplace colleague, a trade union representative or a trade union official.
39. At the appeal meeting, the chair will:
    - Introduce the panel members to the employee.
    - Explain the purpose of the meeting, which is to hear the employee's reasons for appealing against the disciplinary decision.
    - Explain the action that the appeal panel may take.
40. The employee (or companion) will be asked to explain the grounds for appeal.
41. The chair will inform the employee that they will receive the decision and the panel's reasons, in writing, usually within five working days of the appeal hearing.
42. The appeal panel may decide to uphold the disciplinary decision of the staffing committee, substitute a less serious sanction or decide that no disciplinary action is necessary. If it decides to take no disciplinary action, no record of the matter will be retained in the employee's personnel file.
43. If an appeal against dismissal is upheld, the employee will be paid in full for the period from the date of dismissal and continuity of service will be preserved.
44. The appeal panel's decision is final.

Important notice

This is an example of an employment policy designed for a small council, adhering to statutory minimum requirements, and does not constitute legal advice. As with all policies, it should be consistent with your terms and conditions of employment.

This document was commissioned by the National Association of Local Councils (NALC) for the purpose of its members. Every effort has been made to ensure that the contents of this document are correct at the time of publication. NALC cannot accept responsibility for errors, omissions and changes to information subsequent to publication.

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AGENDA REPORT ITEM 9.2
Revised Media and Press Policy

Background Information
The Council's current Press Policy was adopted in October 2016 and is brief in scope.

Summary
Since that time, expectations around transparency, data protection, media engagement and good governance have evolved, and more detailed guidance is now recommended for parish councils.

The updated Media and Press Policy has been drafted to provide clear, proportionate guidance to Councillors and the Clerk when dealing with press and other media enquiries. The revised policy:

- Aligns with NALC guidance and the Government's Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity;
- Is consistent with the Council's adopted Standing Orders, in particular Standing Order 22 (Relations with the Press/Media), and relevant provisions relating to confidentiality, data protection and conduct;
- Clearly identifies authorised spokespersons for the Council while protecting Councillors' rights to express personal views;
- Provides clarity around media attendance at meetings, press releases and the handling of sensitive or confidential matters; and
- References the Council's separate Social Media Policy, without duplicating its provisions.

The revised policy is intended to support openness and transparency while safeguarding the Council's reputation and ensuring lawful and consistent communications.

Recommendation
That Noak Bridge Parish Council approves and adopts the updated Media and Press Policy as presented, with effect from the date of adoption.

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Media and Press Policy

Version	Date Adopted	Minute Reference	Review Date
1			

1. Introduction

1.1 This policy sets out how Noak Bridge Parish Council ("the Council") will work with the press and other media, including print, broadcast and online platforms.

1.2 The policy provides guidance to Councillors and the Clerk on handling media enquiries and communications. It is not intended to restrict freedom of expression, but to ensure that communications are accurate, lawful and protect the reputation of the Council.

2. Key Aims of the Policy

2.1 The Council is accountable to the residents of Noak Bridge and recognises the importance of open, transparent and effective communication.
2.2 The media play a vital role in informing the community about the Council's services, decisions and priorities. The Council will therefore seek to maintain positive and constructive relationships with the media.
2.3 The Council will also respond appropriately to inaccurate or unfounded criticism and will ensure that residents are properly informed of the relevant facts.

3. Legal Framework

3.1 Media and publicity activities will be conducted in accordance with, but not limited to:

- The Local Government Act 1986 and 1988;
- The Freedom of Information Act 2000;
- The Transparency Code 2015;
- The Data Protection Act 2018 and UK GDPR; and
- The Government's Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity.

3.2 The Council's adopted Standing Orders and Code of Conduct must be complied with at all times.

4. Contact with the Media

4.1 This policy is adopted pursuant to Standing Order 22 (Relations with the Press/Media) and should be read in conjunction with the Council's Standing Orders, Code of Conduct and all information governance policies.

4.2 Councillors and the Clerk must always have due regard for the long-term reputation of the Council in all dealings with the media.

4.3 Confidential information, exempt minutes, draft reports, legal advice and private correspondence must not be disclosed to the media. Any suspected breach will be investigated and dealt with in accordance with the Council's procedures.

4.4 Where a media enquiry relates to a matter that is subject to, or likely to be subject to, legal proceedings, no comment should be made without first seeking advice from the Council's solicitor.

4.5 Wherever possible, information provided to the media should be given in writing to reduce the risk of misunderstanding or misreporting.

5. Authorised Spokespersons

5.1 The Clerk and the Chair of the Council are the Council's authorised spokespersons and may speak to the media on behalf of the Council.

5.2 In specific cases, the Clerk and/or the Chair may authorise another Councillor to respond to a particular media enquiry.

5.3 Statements made by the Chair or the Clerk must reflect agreed Council policy or decisions.

5.4 Councillors who are not authorised spokespersons may speak to the media in a personal capacity, but must make it clear that the views expressed are their own and not those of the Council. Councillors must not give the impression, directly or indirectly, that they are speaking on behalf of the Council.

6. Personal and Sensitive Matters

6.1 This section should be read alongside Standing Orders 11 (Management of Information), 19 (Handling Staff Matters), 20 (Responsibilities to Provide Information) and 21 (Responsibilities under Data Protection Legislation).

6.2 Particular care must be taken when media enquiries relate to personal or sensitive issues, including (but not limited to):

- Personal data of Councillors, the Clerk or staff;
- Disciplinary matters;
- Employment issues or long-term sickness absence.

6.3 In such cases, advice must be sought from the Clerk before any response is made.

7. Council Meetings and the Media

7.1 Media attendance and reporting of meetings is governed by Standing Order 3, in particular Standing Orders 3(l)–(n), which permit reporting, filming and recording of meetings that are open to the public, subject to the Chair's discretion and statutory requirements.

7.1 In accordance with the Local Government Act 1972, agendas, reports and minutes will be provided to the media on request.

7.2 Members of the media are welcome to attend Council meetings. Reasonable facilities will be made available where practicable.

8. Press Releases and Official Statements

8.1 The issuing of press releases and official statements must comply with the NALC Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity and must not be party-political, misleading or designed to improperly influence public opinion.

8.1 Press releases may be used to:

- Provide important information to residents;

- Publicise Council services, facilities or events; or
- Explain or clarify the Council's position on specific issues.

8.2 Draft press releases may be prepared by the Clerk or Councillors, but all press releases and official statements must be issued through the Clerk to ensure legal compliance, consistency and accuracy.

9. Social Media and Other Communication Channels

9.1 The Council maintains a separate Social Media Policy. Any use of social media by Councillors or staff which may relate to the Council, or give the impression of representing the Council, must comply with that policy, the Code of Conduct and this Media and Press Policy.

10. Review

10.1. This policy shall be reviewed at least every three years or sooner if required by legislative or guidance changes.

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AGENDA REPORT ITEM 9.3
Revised Social Media Policy

Background Information

The Council's current Social Media Policy was adopted in September 2022 and is brief in scope. The policy has now been reviewed to ensure it reflects current legislation, governance best practice and alignment with the Council's recently updated policies, including the Press and Media Policy and Equality and Diversity Policy.

Since the original policy was adopted, expectations around transparency, data protection, online conduct and pre-election publicity have evolved. Social media is now a primary communication tool for parish councils and requires clear governance safeguards to protect the Council, Councillors and staff.

A revised Social Media Policy has therefore been prepared to modernise the framework, strengthen compliance provisions and ensure consistency with the Council's Standing Orders, Code of Conduct and other adopted policies.

Summary

The updated policy provides clearer governance structure, improved legal safeguards and better distinction between official Council communications and personal use of social media.

Key updates include:

- Clearer definition of who may post on official Council social media accounts
- Stronger alignment with Standing Orders, the Press and Media Policy, Code of Conduct, Data Protection Policy and Equality and Diversity Policy;
- Clear distinction between official Council accounts and personal social media use by Councillors and employees;
- Inclusion of guidance for Councillors using personal accounts, including recommended disclaimer wording;
- Explicit prohibition on using social media to circumvent formal Council decision-making processes;
- Strengthened data protection provisions and reference to UK GDPR and Freedom of Information obligations;
- Introduction of a moderation section setting out when comments may be removed or users blocked;

- Inclusion of pre-election (purdah) restrictions to ensure compliance with political publicity rules;
- Clarification of investigation and enforcement routes, distinguishing between employee disciplinary action and Code of Conduct referrals for Councillors;
- Updated monitoring and annual review provisions.

The revised policy is more proportionate, governance-focused and aligned with current parish council best practice.

Recommendation

That Noak Bridge Parish Council approves and adopts the updated Social Media Policy as presented, with effect from the date of adoption.

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Social Media Policy

Version	Date Adopted	Minute Reference	Review Date
1			

1. Introduction

1.1 This policy sets out how Noak Bridge Parish Council ("the Council") will use social media and the standards expected of Councillors, employees and authorised representatives when engaging on social media platforms.

1.2 Social media includes (but is not limited to) Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), Instagram, LinkedIn, community forums, blogs, message boards, video-sharing platforms and comments on web-based articles.

1.3 This policy aims to:

- Protect the Council's reputation;
- Ensure lawful, consistent and transparent communications;
- Clarify roles and responsibilities;
- Safeguard confidential and personal information; and
- Promote respectful, inclusive and constructive engagement.

1.4 This policy must be read in conjunction with the Council's:

- Standing Orders;
- Press and Media Policy;
- Code of Conduct;
- Equality and Diversity Policy;
- Data Protection Policy; and
- Disciplinary Procedure.

2. Scope of the Policy

2.1 This policy applies to:

- All Councillors;
- All employees;
- Any volunteer or person authorised to post on behalf of the Council.

2.2 The policy applies to both:

- Use of official Council social media accounts; and
- Personal social media use where Council business is discussed or referenced.

2.3 Failure to comply with this policy may result in action under the Council's Disciplinary Procedure (for employees) or referral under the adopted Code of Conduct (for Councillors).

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3. Official Council Social Media Accounts

3.1 The Council may operate official social media accounts to:

- Share factual information;
- Publish Council decisions;
- Promote community initiatives and events; and
- Provide updates of public interest.

3.2 The Clerk, as Proper Officer, has overall administrative control of official accounts.

3.3 Only the following may publish content in the Council's name:

- The Clerk;
- The Chairman (where appropriate);
- Any person or Councillor formally authorised by resolution of the Council.

3.4 All content published must:

- Reflect an agreed Council decision or delegated authority;
- Be factual, accurate and lawful;
- Avoid party-political content;
- Avoid expressing personal opinions;
- Comply with the Council's Equality and Diversity Policy.

3.5 Social media must not be used to circumvent the Council's formal decision-making processes.

4. Personal Use of Social Media by Councillors and Employees

4.1 Councillors and employees are entitled to hold personal social media accounts.

4.2 When using personal accounts, individuals must not imply that they are speaking on behalf of the Council unless formally authorised to do so.

4.3 Councillors expressing personal views on Council-related matters are encouraged to include a disclaimer such as:

"The views expressed are my own and do not necessarily reflect those of Noak Bridge Parish Council."

4.4 Councillors and employees must not:

- Disclose confidential or exempt information;
- Pre-empt Council decisions;

- Engage in conduct that would bring the Council into disrepute;
- Use social media to bully, harass or intimidate others;
- Post content that would breach the Council's Equality and Diversity Policy.

4.5 All Councillors must comply with the adopted Code of Conduct when using social media.

4.6 Employees must seek prior approval from the Clerk before posting on social media about Council business in a professional capacity.

5. Data Protection and Confidentiality

5.1 Personal data must only be published where lawful to do so and in accordance with the UK General Data Protection Regulation and the Data Protection Act 2018.

5.2 Confidential, commercially sensitive or exempt information must never be disclosed.

5.3 Care must be taken when publishing photographs or videos to ensure appropriate consent has been obtained where required.

5.4 Social media communications relating to Council business may constitute official records and may be subject to Freedom of Information requests.

6. Standards of Conduct Online

Whenever using social media in connection with Council business, individuals must:

6.1 Be respectful, courteous and professional;

6.2 Avoid posting content that is defamatory, abusive, discriminatory, obscene or unlawful;

6.3 Avoid escalating heated discussions and seek to respond with factual information where appropriate;

6.4 Respect copyright and intellectual property rights;

6.5 Avoid publishing personal contact details without consent;

6.6 Consider the potential reputational and legal impact on the Council before posting.

6.7 Ensure that all engagement reflects the principles set out in the Equality and Diversity Policy.

7. Moderation of Council Social Media Pages

7.1 The Council reserves the right to remove comments or posts on its official pages that are:

- Abusive, defamatory or discriminatory;
- Spam or promotional in nature;
- Unlawful or misleading;
- Irrelevant to the original post.

7.2 Repeated or serious breaches may result in users being blocked from the Council's social media platforms.

7.3 The Council is not responsible for the content of third-party comments posted on its platforms.

8. Pre-Election Period (Purdah)

8.1 During periods of heightened sensitivity, such as local or national elections, the Council will ensure compliance with restrictions on political publicity.

8.2 Official social media accounts must not publish content that could reasonably be perceived as supporting or opposing a political party or candidate.

9. Breaches of this Policy

9.1 Alleged breaches by employees will be addressed under the Council's Disciplinary Procedure.

9.2 Alleged breaches by Councillors may be referred to the Monitoring Officer under the adopted Code of Conduct.

9.3 Serious misuse of social media may constitute gross misconduct and may, in certain circumstances, amount to a criminal offence or give rise to civil liability.

9.4 The Council may investigate alleged breaches, including reviewing publicly available content and, where appropriate, Council-managed account records.

10. Monitoring and Review

10.1 The Council is responsible for monitoring the operation of this policy.

10.2 The Clerk will recommend any necessary amendments.

10.3 This policy will be reviewed annually, or sooner if required by changes in legislation or best practice.

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Schedule of Meetings 2026/27

Noak Bridge Parish Council
Schedule of Meetings 2026/2027
Meetings start at 7pm in the Village Hall

Parish Council Meeting
Annual Parish Council Meeting
Public Holiday

May-26

Su	Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa
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Jun-26

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Jul-26

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Sep-26

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Oct-26

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Nov-26

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Feb-27

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Mar-27

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Apr-27

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May-27

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AGENDA REPORT ITEM 11
CouncilWise Subscription

Background Information

At its meeting held on 21 January 2026, under Minute Reference 11/2026, the Council resolved:

"That the Clerk prepare a proposed annual training programme, establish the anticipated costs, and obtain details of CouncilWise's training course fees for comparison before a decision is made."

Further to that resolution, course fee information has now been obtained and a comparison of costs between EALC and CouncilWise has been collated for Members' consideration.

As previously reported in January, CouncilWise Training & Support is a newly established organisation founded by experienced sector professionals Ann Wood and Pearl Willcox, who together bring nearly 50 years' experience working with parish and town councils. The company began delivering training, support and networking opportunities from 1 January 2026, with an optional subscription service available from 1 April 2026.

CouncilWise offers in-person and online training, governance support, sector-specific advice and networking opportunities for Clerks, Chairs and Councillors, with a stated focus on good governance, compliance and professional development.

For councils with a precept between £15,000 and £75,000, the annual subscription cost is £150 per year.

It is important to reiterate that access to NALC resources can only be obtained through membership of the EALC.

Summary

A comparison of course costs (sent separately) demonstrate:

- There are a number of broadly comparable courses offered by both providers.
- CouncilWise courses can be accessed without taking out a subscription, although the subscription provides a 20% discount on course fees.

- EALC continues to provide an established and recognised training programme, alongside essential access to NALC.

CouncilWise Subscription (£150 per annum) would provide:

- Free invitations to Clerks' and Councillors' networking events
- 20% discount on all training courses
- Email and telephone support (Mon–Thu) for Councillors and the Clerk (up to 30 minutes per call)
- Out-of-hours urgent support (Mon–Thu, 5pm–7pm)
- Face-to-face support at their Great Dunmow office (by appointment)
- Regular newsletters and training bulletins

Additional paid services include tailored training, one-to-one Clerk support and audit health checks.

Key Considerations:

- The Council must retain EALC membership in order to maintain access to NALC.
- CouncilWise training can be accessed on a course-by-course basis without subscribing, albeit at a slightly higher rate.
- The subscription would provide additional support and resilience, particularly during the period of Local Government Reorganisation.
- However, there may be an element of duplication with services already available through EALC.

Members are therefore asked to consider whether the additional £150 annual subscription represents value for money, given that training can still be accessed without subscribing and that EALC membership remains essential.

Recommendation

That the Council:

4. Notes the course cost comparison and proposed training information prepared in accordance with Minute Reference 11/2026.
5. Confirms continued membership of EALC in order to retain access to NALC resources.
6. Considers whether to approve an annual subscription to CouncilWise Training & Support at a cost of £150 per year from 1 April 2026;
   or
7. Resolves to access CouncilWise training on an ad hoc basis without taking out the subscription.

Members are invited to determine how they wish to proceed. Return to Agenda