

FULL COUNCIL

WEDNESDAY 23RD JULY 2025 – 7.00 p.m.

Minutes of the proceedings of the **ORDINARY MEETING** of the **COUNCIL** held in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, School Aycliffe Lane, Newton Aycliffe, on **WEDNESDAY 23RD JULY 2025 at 7.00 p.m.**

PRESENT

Councillor Ken Robson (Chairman) and
Councillors Tunde Akinsanya, Tony Armstrong, Lindsey Aston,
Jaci Beddard, Tony Beddard, Dorothy Bowman, Arun M. Chandran,
Neil Collinson, Luke Ellis, Jordan Gill, George Gray, Brian Haigh,
Phillip Hawkins, Andy Hill, Richard Hutchinson, Sandra Kirby,
Jacqui Mcfadden, John Moore, Carl Robinson, Kyle Robinson,
Brian Sowerby, Michael Stead, Tracey Williams,
Anne Woodward and John Woodward.

OFFICERS

Mr. Dan Austin (Town Clerk)
Mrs. Tracey Woodhead (Finance Manager)
Mrs. Sharna Stretch (Senior Administration Officer)

IN ATTENDANCE

Five members of the public were present.

42. NOTICE OF MEETING

The notice convening the meeting was taken as read.

43. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Martin Ashcroft and Lisa Connors.

44. MEMBERS' DISPENSATIONS

There had been no requests for dispensations under disclosable or non-disclosable interests.

45. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made.

46. GUEST SPEAKER – NEWTON AYCLIFFE TOWN CENTRE MANAGER

Due to unforeseen circumstances the guest speaker was unable to attend.

47. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

A member of the public gave a statement regarding the Councillor Vacancies Report on the Agenda and spoke against the option of co-option.

He asked whether calling a by-election to fill the vacancies is an option available to the Council.

The Town Clerk advised that Durham County Council have confirmed that a by-election is not option and that the two options available are therefore to co-opt two councillors or leave the vacancies unfilled for the duration of this Council.

The member of the public then spoke on the agenda item relating to the Code of Conduct decision in relation to his complaint against Councillor Tony Beddard and requested that Councillor Beddard releases a full transcript of the conversation that they had and asked what steps the Council will take to add confidence that there would be no repeat of such behaviour.

The Chairman stated that the Durham County Council Monitoring Officer found no case to answer or wrong doing and that there were no recommendations for the Town Council to take in relation to the complaint.

48. MINUTES

It was proposed by Councillor Andy Hill and seconded by Councillor Carl Robinson and;

RESOLVED – that the minutes of the Meeting of the Council held on the 11th June 2025 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

49. ANNOUNCEMENTS

A list of the Mayor's most recent appointments was submitted for information.

The Town Clerk gave a statement to update members regarding speculation around an alleged incident at the Sports Complex, he confirmed that no incident had taken place at the complex or any surrounding town council land.

RESOLVED – as follows:

- i) That the announcements be received.

50. COMMITTEE MINUTES

(a) Recreation Committee

It was proposed by Councillor George Gray, and seconded by Councillor Andy Hill; and;

RESOLVED – as follows:

- i) That the minutes of the meeting of the Recreation Committee held on the 9th July 2025 be received, and
- ii) That the minutes and recommendations be approved and adopted.

(b) Environment Committee

It was proposed by Councillor Andy Hill, and seconded by Councillor Phillip Hawkins; and

RESOLVED – as follows:

- i) That the minutes of the meeting of the Environment Committee held on the 9th July 2025 be received, and
- ii) That the minutes and recommendations be approved and adopted.

(c) Policy and Resources Committee

Councillor Arun Chandran recommended that the minutes be received and agreed subject to the confirmation that the extra £3,000 set aside in the Community Support Fund for community events be used to support the Fun in the Park events as per the Head of Leisure and Events suggestion – Minute 31(ii) refers.

It was proposed by Councillor Arun Chandran, and seconded by Councillor Carl Robinson; and

RESOLVED – as follows:

- i) That the minutes of the meeting of the Policy and Resources Committee held on the 16th July 2025 be received, and
- ii) That the minutes and recommendations be approved and adopted subject to the confirmation that the extra £3,000 set aside in the Community Support Fund for community events be used to support the Fun in the Park events.

51. COUNCILLOR VACANCIES

The Town Clerk submitted a report requesting Members' consideration of how the Council wishes to proceed in relation to the two councillor vacancies in the West Ward and Byerley Park, Horndale and Cobblers Hall Ward following the recent elections.

There were two options available to the Council:

- *Co-opt two councillors, following the procedure set out in the Council's approved Co-Option Policy and the suggested timescale set out in this report.*
- *Leave the two vacancies unfilled for the duration of the four-year term of this Council.*

Councillor Tony Armstrong spoke in support of the proposal to co-opt advising that many people are willing to carry out the role unpaid, two good prospective candidates have expressed an interest, and that many other local authorities are using co-option to fill vacancies following the elections.

Councillor Arun Chandran spoke against co-option highlighting that at the Full Elections in May only 2 months ago, anyone who wanted to stand could have chosen to do so. Having 24 of 28 Councillors elected unopposed was hardly giving the public choice and neither does co-option. He advised that there is an opportunity to reduce the Council to 28 members which would provide a better councillor to elector ratio and reduce the size of the Council, without compromising anything, improving governance and efficiency. It would also allow all current members to remain on committees.

Councillor Carl Robinson spoke in favour of co-option highlighting that it would increase democracy and representation as well as diversity in the council chamber.

Councillor Tony Beddard also spoke in favour of co-option.

The Chairman added that there is no excuse for not representing the people of Great Aycliffe adding that most other councils use co-option regularly.

It was proposed by Councillor Carl Robinson and seconded by Councillor Tony Beddard that the Town Council co-opt two councillors to the vacancies following the procedure set out in the approved Co-option Policy and the timescale set out in the report.

Councillor Arun Chandran requested a named vote.

A named vote then took place with the following results:

For – 12 votes:

Councillors: Tony Armstrong, Jaci Beddard, Tony Beddard, Dorothy Bowman, Neil Collinson, George Gray, Brian Haigh, Richard Hutchinson, Jackie McFadden, John Moore, Carl Robinson, Ken Robson.

Against -14 votes:

Councillors: Tunde Akinsanya, Lindsey Aston, Arun Chandran, Luke Ellis, Jordan Gill, Phillip Hawkins, Andy Hill, Sandra Kirby, Kyle Robinson, Brian Sowerby, Michael Stead, Tracey Williams, Anne Woodward, John Woodward.

The proposal was defeated.

It was proposed by Councillor Arun Chandran and seconded by Councillor Phillip Hawkins, that the two vacancies are left unfilled for the duration of the four-year term of this council.

A named vote then took place with the following results:

For – 14 votes

Councillors: Tunde Akinsanya, Lindsey Aston, Arun Chandran, Luke Ellis, Jordan Gill, Phillip Hawkins, Andy Hill, Sandra Kirby, Kyle Robinson, Brian Sowerby, Michael Stead, Tracey Williams, Anne Woodward, John Woodward.

Against – 11 votes

Councillors: Tony Armstrong, Jaci Beddard, Tony Beddard, Dorothy Bowman, George Gray, Brian Haigh, Richard Hutchinson, Jackie McFadden, John Moore, Carl Robinson, Ken Robson.

Councillor Neil Collinson abstained from the vote.

The proposal was agreed.

RESOLVED – as follows:

- i) That the report be received.
- ii) That the Town Council do not co-opt two councillors
- iii) That the two vacancies are left unfilled for the duration of the four-year term of this Council.

52. DECISION NOTICE – CODE OF CONDUCT COMPLAINT 1

The Town Clerk submitted a report to advise the Council that a Code of Conduct complaint has been made against a Member of the Council, and to report the outcome of the investigation by the Durham County Council Solicitor, as required by Council Standing Order 32 – Code of Conduct Complaints.

RESOLVED – as follows;

- i) That the report be received; and;
- ii) That the outcome of the Code of Conduct Complaint and the publication of the Decision Notice be noted by members.

53. DECISION NOTICE – CODE OF CONDUCT COMPLAINT 2

The Town Clerk submitted a report to advise the Council that a Code of Conduct complaint has been made against a Member of the Council, and to report the outcome of the investigation by the Durham County Council Solicitor, as required by Council Standing Order 32 – Code of Conduct Complaints.

Councillor Michael Stead advised that in the future, Durham County Council could pass on the costs for processing these complaints to Town Councils.

The Town Clerk drew members attention to the section of the report highlighting the advice from the Governance Lawyer in that what is said by councillors is subject to enhanced protection, on matters of public administration and concern, and the high level of this threshold, the right of councillors to criticise and make value judgments, and that councillors lay themselves open to closer scrutiny of their words and actions and consequently must display a greater degree of tolerance. It was advised that while there may be robust debate in Council meetings, that may offend, many complaints to the Monitoring Officer would fall short of the threshold.

RESOLVED – as follows;

- i) That the report be received; and;
- ii) That the outcome of the Code of Conduct Complaint and the publication of the Decision Notice be noted by members.

54. DECISION NOTICE – CODE OF CONDUCT COMPLAINT 3

The Town Clerk submitted a report to advise the Council that a Code of Conduct complaint has been made against a Member of the Council, and to report the outcome of the investigation by the Durham County Council Solicitor, as required by Council Standing Order 32 – Code of Conduct Complaints.

RESOLVED – as follows;

- i) That the report be received; and;
- ii) That the outcome of the Code of Conduct Complaint and the publication of the Decision Notice be noted by members.

55. RECRUITMENT OF TOWN AND PARISH COUNCILLORS TO THE DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL STANDARDS COMMITTEE

The Town Clerk submitted a note received from County Durham Association of Local Councils requesting nominations to the two vacancies on Durham County Council's Standards Committee.

Councillor Arun Chandran proposed that the existing members be nominated. This was not seconded.

Councillor Carl Robinson proposed that Councillor Tony Armstrong be nominated. This was seconded by Councillor Tony Beddard.

Councillor Michael Stead proposed that Councillor Luke Ellis be nominated. This was seconded by Councillor Arun Chandran.

The Town Clerk advised the members nominated would need to submit their applications to CDALC.

RESOLVED – as follows;

- i) That the briefing note be received and;
- ii) That Councillor Tony Armstrong and Councillor Luke Ellis are nominated by the Council and authorised to apply to the two vacancies on Durham County Council's Standards Committee.

56. OUTSIDE BODIES

Members received reports from representatives on the following Outside Bodies:

- (a) **County Durham Association of Local Councils (CDALC)**
The Town Clerk had attended the meeting and advised that the Council's motion regarding the make-up of the CDALC Executive Committee, following the move from Area Action Partnerships to Local Networks, to draw members from the Larger and Smaller Local Council Forums, would be going to the CDALC AGM in October for consideration.
- (b) **Aycliffe Village Community Association**
Councillor Carl Robinson gave a verbal update.
- (c) **Woodham Village Community Association**
There had been no meeting.
- (d) **Local Network (Aycliffe North and Middridge, Aycliffe South and Sedgefield) Committee**
The Town Clerk advised that there are no meetings as the Local Networks are on hold at Durham County Council, however, he is trying to pull together a meeting with the Town Clerks in the other councils to discuss the setting up of a relevant Local Network Committee.
- (e) **Larger Local Councils' Forum**
The Town Clerk gave a brief update, advising that two presentations had been received in relation to Durham County Council's consultations around the Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme with proposed changes that could benefit the Town Council in terms of raising its tax raising capacity, and the rewriting of the County Durham Plan which will incorporate the priorities of the new Reform Administration.

- (f) **Newton Aycliffe Bus Preservation Society**
There had been no meeting.
- (g) **Friends of Stockton and Darlington Railway**
Councillor Brian Haigh added that he had not received notification of meeting dates. Officers to look into this.
- (h) **Western Area Partnership**
Councillor Dorothy Bowman advised that she had not received a date for the meeting. Other members advised of the upcoming meeting date.
- (i) **Cornforth Partnership**
There had been no meeting.
- (j) **Community Hub Development Group**
Councillor Jackie McFadden advised that she is awaiting a confirmation of the next meeting date.
- (k) **Oak Leaf Golf Club**
Councillor John Moore gave a verbal update on the recent Golf Club meeting and was pleased to advise that the Club and Council are working well together and wished to commend the golf greenkeeping staff for their hard work for a team of two.

57. EXEMPT BUSINESS

It was proposed by Councillor Carl Robinson, and seconded by Councillor Andy Hill and;

RESOLVED – that it was in the opinion of the Council that due to the confidential nature of the following item, it was advisable to exclude the press and public.

58. COMMUNITY RECOGNITION AND AWARDS SCHEME NOMINATION

A report was submitted from the Town Clerk for members to consider a nomination received under the Council's Community Recognition and Awards Scheme.

It was proposed by Councillor Arun Chandran and seconded by Councillor Carl Robinson that the nominee receive a community recognition certificate and a 'local hero' medal. Councillor Tony Beddard requested a frame also be purchased.

RESOLVED – as follows:-

- i) That the report be received;
- ii) That the nominee identified in the report receives a community recognition scheme medal and certificate.
- iii) That a frame be purchased for the certificate.

59. RE-ADMISSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

It was proposed by Councillor Arun Chandran, and seconded by Councillor Carl Robinson and;

RESOLVED – that it be recommended that the press and public be re-admitted to the meeting.

CHAIRMAN