

POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

WEDNESDAY 21ST JANUARY 2026

Minutes of the meeting of the **POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE** held in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, School Aycliffe Lane, Newton Aycliffe on Wednesday 21st January 2026 at 7.00pm.

PRESENT

Councillor Carl Robinson (Chairman),
Martin Ashcroft, Arun M. Chandran, Neil Collinson, Luke Ellis,
Jordan Gill, George Gray, Brian Haigh, Phillip Hawkins, Andy Hill,
Ken Robson, Michael Stead, Tracey Williams, Anne Woodward and
John Woodward.

OFFICIALS

Mr. Dan Austin (Town Clerk)
Mrs. Tracey Woodhead (Finance Manager)
Mr. Steve Cooper (Works and Environment Manager)
Ms. Amanda Donald (Corporate and Policy Officer)
Mrs. Sharna Stretch (Senior Administration Officer)

IN ATTENDANCE

One member of the public was in attendance.

85. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors:
Tunde Akinsanya, Tony Armstrong, Jaci Beddard, Tony Beddard,
Dorothy Bowman, Sandra Kirby, Jackie McFadden-Lewis, John Moore,
Kyle Robinson and Brian Sowerby.

86. MEMBERS DISPENSATIONS

No dispensation requests had been received.

87. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were received.

88. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

There were no public questions.

89. POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE MINUTES

It was proposed by Councillor Ken Robson, and seconded by Councillor Michael Stead and;

RESOLVED - that the minutes of the meeting of the Policy and Resources Committee, held on the 3rd December 2025, be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

90. ACCOUNT CONTROL SHEETS

Account Control Sheets for the period 21st November, 4th and 22nd December 2025 and 9th January 2026 and the General Bank Accounts for November and December 2025 were submitted for approval.

Councillor Martin Ashcroft thanked the Finance Manager for the prompt clarification on a query he had raised.

RESOLVED – that it be recommended that the Account Control Sheets for the period 21st November, 4th and 22nd December 2025 and 9th January 2026 and the General Bank Accounts for November and December 2025 be received.

91. GRANTS AND DONATIONS

The Town Clerk submitted a report setting out for consideration the current position of the grants and donations budgets.

It was reported that a total of £7,550 is currently available in the Grants and Donations Budget, £8,510 in the Community Benefit Fund and £1,899 in the Community Events Grants Budget.

It was noted that no requests for grants or donations had been received since the last meeting.

A Post Grant Questionnaire and supporting information was received from Bacchanalia in relation to the £1,001 grant awarded earlier in the year towards the costs of artist fees, materials, venue infrastructure, and marketing for the South-West Durham Heritage Festival 2025.

It was proposed by Councillor Ken Robson, and seconded by Councillor Phillip Hawkins, and

RESOLVED – that it be recommended that;

- i) The report be received.
- ii) The post grant questionnaire be received.

92. INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY, COMPUTER AND COMMUNICATIONS AND GENERAL DATA PROTECTION POLICY UPDATE

The Corporate and Policy Officer submitted a report to request members' approval of required updates to the IT, Computer and Communications Policy, and General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) Policy.

Councillor Martin Ashcroft thanked the Corporate and Policy Officer for the hard work in preparing the report and policy updates.

It was proposed by Councillor Ken Robson, and seconded by Councillor Martin Ashcroft, and

RESOLVED – that it be recommended that:

- i) The report be received.
- ii) The updated IT, Computer and Communications Policy be approved.
- iii) The updated GDPR Policy be approved.

93. CYBER SECURITY INVESTMENTS

A report was submitted requesting members' consideration of proposals recommended by the Council's Information Technology Consultant to improve the Council's cyber security arrangements following the completion of a Cybersecurity Audit.

Based on a review and prioritisation of the audit recommendations it was proposed that the Council proceed with the necessary technical preparations and subsequently applies for the nationally recognised and government backed Cyber Essentials Accreditation, all of which the Council's Information Technology Consultant will manage on behalf of the Council.

Councillor Arun Chandran requested that officers bring a report back to the Committee after completion detailing the work implemented.

It was proposed by Councillor Martin Ashcroft, and seconded by Councillor Neil Collinson, and

RESOLVED – that it be recommended that:

- i) The report be received.
- ii) Officers proceed with the proposal and required investments to achieve the Cyber Essentials Accreditation.
- iii) The cost of the work be funded via the Information Technology Revenue Budget.
- iv) It is noted that there will be an overspend in the region of £1,000 on this budget as a consequence.
- v) A report be brought back to the Committee after completion detailing the work completed and improvements implemented.

94. 2025/26 REVENUE AND CAPITAL BUDGET POSITION TO 31ST DECEMBER 2025 AND PROJECTION OF EXPECTED YEAR-END OUTTURN

The Finance Manager submitted a report providing the financial position on the Council's approved 2025/26 Revenue and Capital Budget to 31st December 2025, along with a forecast of the expected year-end outturn.

The Finance Manager provided a detailed overview of the report, providing detailed explanation of the Revenue Budget savings made, and the reasons for these, highlighting that a number of the savings were of a one-off nature and that many had been accounted for in the 2026/27 Revenue Budget.

Finally attention was drawn to a request to carry forward £16,500 in the 2026/27 Budget Support Fund to fund the recruitment of a seasonal Greenkeeper / Grounds Maintenance Operative to be employed between April and September 2026, and that recruitment of this temporary member of staff takes place ahead of the new financial year.

The fall in the Council's balances and reserves was also highlighted and attention drawn to the Council's long-term capital commitments which exceeded the level of balances held.

Councillor Arun Chandran thanked the Finance Manager for the explanation for the reasons for the underspends, adding that a unique set of circumstances that has occurred this year which has resulted in many of the underspends, and it is always better to be prudent in setting income and expenditure budgets.

It was proposed by Councillor Arun Chandran, and seconded by Councillor Ken Robson, and

RESOLVED – that it be recommended that:

- i) The nine-month financial position on the Council's 2025/26 Revenue and Capital Budgets to the 31st December 2025, and the projection of year-end expected outturn, be received.
- ii) The year-end outturn on the 2025/26 Revenue and Capital Budget be reported to the June Policy and Resources Committee.
- iii) A sum of £16,500 be set aside in the 2026/27 Budget Support Fund to fund the recruitment of a Seasonal Greenkeeper / Grounds Maintenance Operative to be employed between April and September 2026, and that recruitment of this temporary member of staff takes place ahead of the new financial year.

95. SETTING OF THE 2026/27 REVENUE AND CAPITAL BUDGET

The Finance Manager submitted a report to seek members' approval for the setting of the Council's 2026/27 Revenue and Capital Budget.

It was advised that approval of the budget will enable the 2026/27 Precept and Town Council Tax to be set at the Council meeting on the 28th January 2026 and this will then be communicated to and confirmed with Durham County Council following that meeting.

The Finance Manager drew attention to the fact that the Council is facing a significant additional Revenue Budget commitment of £113,250 as a consequence of Durham County Council's proposal to withdraw the Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme Grant in its entirety with effect from 2026/27.

It was explained that the 2026/27 Revenue Budget will require the 2026/27 Precept to be set at £2,190,100 and that this would result in a 3.99% increase in the Town Council Tax next year.

Councillor Arun Chandran noted that if the Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme Grant had not been withdrawn by Durham County Council, the Town Council could have frozen the Council Tax next year.

The Chairman thanked the Finance Manager and Town Clerk for the work that had gone into preparing the report.

It was proposed by Councillor Arun Chandran, and seconded by Councillor Martin Ashcroft, and

RESOLVED – that it be recommended that:

- i) The final 2026/27 Revenue and Capital Budget proposals be received and the changes made to the draft budget noted.
- ii) The feedback from the 2026/27 Budget Survey be received.
- iii) The Council's 2026/27 Revenue and Capital Budget as set out in the report and attached appendices be approved.
- iv) The 2026/27 Precept be set at £2,190,100 and the proposed increase of 3.99% to the Town Council Tax be approved.

96. SPORTS COMPLEX SOLAR PANELS PROJECT FEASIBILITY REPORT

The Town Clerk submitted a report to update members on the planned 2025/26 Capital Programme project to install a solar panel system to the Oak Leaf Sports Complex, following receipt of the Feasibility Study Report from the appointed consultants, and members were asked and to agree the next steps based on the recommendations made in the report.

The Town Clerk provided a detailed overview of the Feasibility Study Report, highlighting the scope of the review and work undertaken, the options considered, including roof and ground mounted solar photovoltaic arrays, anticipated budget costs, regulatory issues, risk management, the requirement for various preliminary work and surveys and contract management.

It was highlighted that the recommended option was a ground mounted system, located within the hardstanding area in the Council Depot yard.

The total estimated cost of the recommended option, including the cost of supplying and installing the system, various surveys, preliminary works, contract management and a contingency sum and risk factor provision was £188,429.

This would require an additional Capital Budget approval of £63,300.

It was added that there is scope to look at the Golf Shop and Works Depot in the future and that the indicative timescale for the work to be completed would be 10 to 11 months.

It was proposed by Councillor Arun Chandran, and seconded by Councillor Martin Ashcroft, and

RESOLVED – that it be recommended that:

- i) The report be received.
- ii) The information provided in the attached Phase 1 Feasibility Study Report and the recommendations made, as well as the additional budget implications highlighted in the Financial Implications Section are noted.
- iii) Officers proceed with the Sports Complex Solar Panel System Project based on recommended Option 2 i.e. the smaller ground mounted system within the depot yard.
- iv) An additional Capital Budget of £63,300 be approved.
- v) Officers are authorised to proceed with the project, including the organisation of the various surveys and permissions, the engagement of the consultants to undertake RIBA Phases 2 to 6 contract management process, the engagement of Durham County Council Procurement to undertake the tender process, and the reprofiling of the depot yard, subject to progress updates being reported back to the Council as required.

97. REPLACEMENT OF THE GOLF SHOP FLOORING

Members were requested to consider options for the completion of the renewal of the flooring in the golf shop and entrance area and approve an additional Capital Budget to enable the preferred option to go ahead.

It was proposed by Councillor Martin Ashcroft, and seconded by Councillor Ken Robson, and

RESOLVED – that it be recommended that:

- i) The report be received.
- ii) Option 1 plus barrier matting, at a total cost of £3,045 be agreed,
- iii) An additional Capital Budget of £1,045 be approved.
- iv) Standing Orders be waived to allow the officer to place an order for the work to be completed as soon as possible, without waiting for ratification from Full Council.

98. REPLACEMENT OF THE STUMP GRINDER MACHINE

A report was submitted requesting members' consideration of the purchase of a new stump grinder machine, and to agree to bring forward the Capital Budget currently set aside for the 2027/28 financial year in the Medium-Term Financial Plan.

The Chairman asked if the remote-control option should be included on the preferred machine as this would bring with it health and safety improvements.

The Works and Environment Manager gave a brief outline of the usage of the machine and the benefits of the remote-control option adding that he felt the additional cost of the remote control could not be justified.

Councillor Michael Stead proposed that the recommended stump grinder machine be ordered without the option of a remote control.

This was seconded by Councillor Luke Ellis.

Councillor Stead also asked about the regularity of use of the machine which the officer addressed.

It was proposed by Councillor Martin Ashcroft and seconded by Councillor Arun Chandran that the recommended stump grinder machine be ordered with the option of a remote control.

A vote took place on the original proposal of purchasing the recommended FSI B31 stump grinder machine without the remote control with the following results:

For	5
Against	9

A vote then took place on the counter proposal of purchasing the recommended FSI B31 stump grinder machine with the remote control with the following results:

For	14
Against	0

RESOLVED – that it be recommended that:

- i) The report be received.
- ii) The purchase of the FSI B31 stump grinder machine with remote control, at a cost of £30,750 be agreed.
- iii) The £35,000 Capital Budget provision in the Medium-Term Financial Plan be brought forward from the 2027/28 financial year to the current 2025/26 financial year.

Chairman