

FULL COUNCIL

WEDNESDAY 11TH MARCH 2026 – 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 11TH MARCH 2026 at 7.00 p.m.**

PRESENT

Councillor Ken Robson (Chairman) and:
Councillors Tony Armstrong, Martin Ashcroft, Lindsey Aston, Jaci Beddard, Tony Beddard, Dorothy Bowman, Arun M. Chandran, Neil Collinson, Luke Ellis, George Gray, Brian Haigh, Phil Hawkins, Andy Hill, Richard Hutchinson, Sandra Kirby, Jacqui McFadden Lewis, John Moore, Carl Robinson, Brian Sowerby, Michael Stead, Tracey Williams, Anne Woodward and John Woodward.

OFFICERS

Mr. Dan Austin (Town Clerk)
Mrs. Tracey Woodhead (Finance Manager)
Miss. Amanda Donald (Corporate and Policy Officer)
Mrs. Sharna Stretch (Senior Administration Officer)

IN ATTENDANCE

There were five members of the public present.

118. NOTICE OF MEETING

The notice convening the meeting was taken as read.

119. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors: Tunde Akinsanya, Lisa Conners and Kyle Robinson.

120. MEMBERS' DISPENSATIONS

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

121. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were received.

122. GUEST SPEAKER

Durham County Councillor; Tim McGuinness was in attendance to provide an update on the work that he is currently involved with at the County Council as portfolio holder for Rural, Farming and Transport. He explained that this includes responsibility for pothole repairs which is a major issue, and highlighted his work with Middridge Parish Council on speed control measures.

With particular reference to Great Aycliffe he highlighted his work with the North East Combined Authority to secure funding for the upgrade of bus shelters in Newton Aycliffe. He is liaising closely with Council officers on this issue.

He further highlighted that he is keen to create a dialogue regarding the town centre and what can be done to improve it.

Councillor Martin Ashcroft asked for clarification on the cabling for the bus shelters lighting and Councillor McGuinness advised that he was hopeful that they would have the upgraded lighting.

Councillor Tony Armstrong asked if there were plans to carry out another traffic survey on Central Avenue and for a pedestrian crossing near to Vane Road, adding his thanks for the improved signage on Central Avenue.

Councillor McGuinness agreed to investigate this.

Councillor Michael Stead advised there were no further traffic survey plans as at present, there was no increase in traffic.

Councillor Tony Beddard stressed the importance of drop-kerbs around the town and that the process was quite a protracted. Councillor McGuinness added that this was a countywide measure, and he would provide further details.

A discussion was held regarding the improvement of the town centre. It was advised that the town centre was part of the Strategic Place Plan for Newton Aycliffe but that improvements would require external funding and collaborative working.

Councillor Michael Stead referenced the previous levelling up bid which had unfortunately been unsuccessful, which had included plans for a bus station and re-design of the town centre shops on the Central Avenue side.

The Chairman thanked Councillor McGuinness for attending the meeting, adding that the Town Council were looking forward to working with him and his fellow county councillors.

123. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

A member of the public spoke in support of the motion for councillors to be DBS checked highlighting that councillors should be subject to the same checks as Council officers and staff.

Another member of the public also spoke in favour of the motion noting the importance of safeguarding children and vulnerable residents. He suggested a balanced approach and if a councillor does not agree to undertake the DBS check, then they should not be allowed to sit on any committee with responsibility for services relating to children or vulnerable adults.

124. MINUTES

It was proposed by Councillor Martin Ashcroft, and seconded by Councillor Andy Hill and;

RESOLVED – that the minutes of the Meeting of the Council held on the 28th January 2026 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

125. ANNOUNCEMENTS

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

RESOLVED – as follows:

- i) That the announcements be received.

126. 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 25th February 2026 be received.
- ii) That the minutes and recommendations be approved and adopted.

(b) Environment Committee

It was proposed by Councillor Martin Ashcroft, and seconded by Councillor Andy Hill; and

RESOLVED – as follows:

- i) That the minutes of the meeting of the Environment Committee held on the 25th February 2026 be received.
- ii) That the minutes and recommendations be approved and adopted.

(c) Policy and Resources Committee

It was proposed by Councillor Michael Stead, 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 4th March 2026 be received.
- ii) That the minutes and recommendations be approved and adopted.

127. NOTICE OF MOTION

Members considered the following Notice of Motion proposed by Councillor Michael Stead and seconded by Councillor Lindsey Aston:

The Council recognises that Town Councillors regularly engage with residents, community groups, schools, young people and vulnerable adults as part of their civic responsibilities.

The Council further recognises the importance of safeguarding, transparency and maintaining public confidence in elected representatives.

While Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks are not currently a statutory requirement for Town Councillors, the Council believes that adopting such checks would demonstrate a proactive commitment to high standards of conduct, strengthen public trust, and ensure that safeguarding expectations are applied consistently and fairly across the authority.

It is therefore proposed that the Council resolves to:

- 1. Use the 2026/27 Revenue Budget Contingency Sum to undertake DBS checks for all serving Town Councillors as soon as practicable in the new financial year.*
- 2. Request that officers investigate the appropriate level of DBS check required and report back with implementation arrangements.*
- 3. Undertake DBS checks on all councillors after every Town Council Election and on all new councillors elected via by-election or co-option.*
- 4. Make appropriate budget provision to undertake councillor DBS checks as set out above.*
- 5. Encourage all councillors to participate fully in the process in the interests of safeguarding and transparency.*

Councillor Michael Stead spoke in support of the motion adding that this would strengthen public confidence in the Council knowing that safeguarding is at the forefront of the Council's priorities. He suggested that the DBS check should be carried out at the start of the term of office and renewed after each four-year period, with checks undertaken on any new councillors during the term.

Councillor Arun Chandran proposed that the Town Clerk investigates what the criteria is for town councillors and to seek to undertake an enhanced check if possible. Councillor Michael Stead agreed to add this to the motion.

The Town Clerk advised that officers would investigate the appropriate level of check but highlighted that the Criminal Records Regulations provides that enhanced checks can usually only be undertaken where there is a specified role or function in discharging education or social services functions on behalf of the Council.

A number of members spoke in support of the motion and the motion was unanimously agreed.

It was proposed by Councillor Michael Stead, and seconded by Councillor Lindsey Aston; and

RESOLVED – as follows:

- i) That all councillors, after every Town Council Election and on all new councillors elected via by-election or co-option, undertake a DBS check.
- ii) That officers investigate the appropriate level of DBS check required, to include investigation of the feasibility of undertaking an 'enhanced' check, and report back with implementation arrangements.
- iii) That the 2026/27 Revenue Budget Contingency Sum be used to undertake DBS checks for all serving Town Councillors as soon as practicable in the new financial year.
- iv) That the appropriate budget provision to undertake future councillor DBS checks as set out above is made.
- v) That all councillors are encouraged to participate fully in the process in the interests of safeguarding and transparency.

128. INTERNAL AUDIT PROVISION

The Finance Manager submitted a report updating members on the Council's Internal Audit provision situation and the need to appoint a new provider ahead of the 2026/27 financial year.

The Finance Manager highlighted the various options considered and the difficulties presented by the national shortage of internal auditors, and requested that Members authorise officers to engage with a private sector audit company with a view to entering into negotiations with the company to provide an internal audit service for the 2026/27 financial year as set out in this report.

Councillor Arun Chandran proposed that that the company specified be engaged for a year and then reviewed. This was agreed.

Councillor Martin Ashcroft wished to convey his thanks to the Finance Manager and the team for the report and thanks and best wishes for the future to the outgoing Internal Auditor.

It was proposed by Councillor Carl Robinson, and seconded by Councillor Martin Ashcroft; and

RESOLVED – as follows:-

- i) That the information contained in the report be received.
- ii) That the Town Clerk and Finance Manager be authorised to engage with the identified private sector audit company with a view to entering into negotiations with the company to provide an internal audit service for the 2026/27 financial year as set out in this report, on the basis of 27 audit days, within the budget set by the Council, and with a formal service level agreement / letter of engagement being drawn up.
- iii) That this be reviewed after one year.

Councillor Jackie McFadden Lewis left the meeting at this point.

129. ANNUAL REVIEW OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE COUNCIL'S SYSTEM OF INTERNAL CONTROL

The Finance Manager submitted a report to put forward the annual review of the effectiveness of the Council's system of internal control for the 2025/26 financial year for Members consideration and approval.

It was noted that no material issues or weaknesses had been identified during the review.

Councillor Martin Ashcroft passed on his thanks to the finance team for their hard work every year.

It was proposed by Councillor Martin Ashcroft, and seconded by Councillor Carl Robinson; and

RESOLVED – as follows:-

- i) That the annual review of the effectiveness of the Council's system of internal control in respect of the 2025/26 financial year is approved by the Council.
- ii) That the review is taken into account in providing the assurance that the Council requires in order to approve the 2025/26 Annual Governance Statement, as set out in Section 1 of the 2025/26 Annual Governance and Accountability Return later in the year.

130. ANNUAL REVIEW OF RISKS FOR THE FINANCIAL YEAR 2025/26

The Corporate and Policy Officer submitted a report setting out an overview of the Council's risk management arrangements including a full list of current corporate business risks for the Town Council for the 2025/26 financial year for consideration and approval.

Councillor Martin Ashcroft passed on his thanks to the Corporate and Policy Officer for her due diligence with this report.

It was proposed by Councillor Martin Ashcroft, and seconded by Councillor Carl Robinson; and

RESOLVED – as follows:-

- i) That the report be received;
- ii) That the year-end Business Risk Register for the 2025/26 financial year be approved.

131. CODE OF CONDUCT DECISION NOTICE

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

It was advised that the Durham County Council Governance Solicitor had concluded that no action was needed in relation to the complaint.

RESOLVED – as follows;

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

132. TOWN CLERK'S APPRAISAL ARRANGEMENTS

Members were asked to consider the arrangements for the Town Clerk's annual appraisal, 2026.

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

RESOLVED – as follows;

- i) That the report be received.
- ii) That the current Town Clerk Appraisal process and paperwork are fit for purpose and should continue to be used.
- iii) That the structure of the Appraisal Panel as the Chairman and Vice Chairman of the Personnel Sub-Committee, plus one representative from each political group be agreed.
- iv) That the names of the representatives from the political groups to form the Appraisal Panel be Councillors Martin Ashcroft, Tony Beddard, Luke Ellis, Andy Hill, Carl Robinson and Michael Stead.

133. NORTH-EAST WAR MEMORIALS PROJECT

A letter was received from the North-East War Memorials Project requesting consideration of the Council becoming a Friend of NEWMP by giving an annual donation (minimum £15).

It was advised that the project records the War Memorials (from all wars), found in North-East Communities. To date, 5,122 memorials of all types in the area between the Tweed and the Tees have been recorded.

It was proposed by Councillor Martin Ashcroft, and seconded by Councillor Lindsey Aston; and

RESOLVED – as follows;

- i) That the request be received.
- ii) That a donation of £100 be made to the Northeast War Memorials project.

134. OUTSIDE BODIES

Members received reports from representatives on the following Outside Bodies:

- (a) **County Durham Association of Local Councils (CDALC)**
Councillor Arun Chandran advised he had been elected to the Executive Committee and gave a brief update on the recent meeting including changes to the CDALC Constitution. He requested that the Council agree to host one CDALC meeting at the Oak Leaf Sports Complex. This was agreed.
- (b) **Aycliffe Village Hall Association**
Councillor Carl Robinson gave a brief update.
- (c) **Woodham Village Community Association**
Councillor Neil Collinson gave an update on the AGM which was held on 4th March. It was advised that the Council's two representatives had attended and had been provided with a full breakdown of accounts and future plans.
- (d) **Larger Local Councils' Forum**
Councillor Martin Ashcroft advised that the Town Clerk had circulated the notes from this meeting.
- (e) **Newton Aycliffe Bus Preservation Society**
There were no updates to report as there has been no meetings.
- (f) **Friends of Stockton and Darlington Railway**
Councillor Brian Haigh gave an update reporting that the assessors have visited Locomotion No 1.
- (g) **Western Area Partnership**
The Town Clerk advised that there has been no meetings.
- (h) **Cornforth Partnership**
Councillor John Woodward advised there had been no meetings.
- (i) **Community Hub Development Group**
Councillor Jaci Beddard advised there had been no meetings.
- (j) **Oak Leaf Golf Club**
Councillor John Moore reported that it was a very proactive meeting with the Golf Club and the Town Council working towards a common aim and that junior member numbers are very good.

Councillor Tracey Williams questioned what initiatives were being undertaken to encourage more lady golfers to join the facility

Councillor Arun Chandran suggested that the Golf Administrator attends the next Recreation Meeting to update members on female numbers and any plans to engage more female golfers.

135. NOTICE OF MOTION

Members considered the following Notice of Motion proposed by Councillor Ken Robson and seconded by Councillor Martin Ashcroft:

That the Council reconsiders the decision taken at the July 2025 Full Council Meeting that Council not to co-opt two councillors to the two vacancies left unfilled at the 2025 Election (in the West Ward and Byerley Park, Horndale and Cobblers Hall Ward), for the duration of the four-year term of this Council.

It is requested that the Council instead agrees to co-opt two councillors to the vacancies, following the procedure set out in the Council's approved Co-Option Policy.

Councillor Arun Chandran spoke against this motion highlighting that this was a decision that could be reversed again in another six months' time, adding that as it stands, all current members are on all committees and if co-option is implemented and two councillors were appointed, one member would have to step down from the committees. He requested a named vote.

The Chairman stated that councillors can change their minds on previous decisions and that democracy must be respected.

Councillor Michael Stead reminded members that items are often brought back to the Council for reassessment.

Councillor Phillip Hawkins added that he was against this motion, this does not mean he is right and proposed that the motion be put to the vote. This was seconded by Councillor Carl Robinson.

Councillor Chandran withdrew his request for a named vote.

A vote was carried out on the motion with the following results:

For:	18
Against:	3
Abstentions	2

The motion was carried.

RESOLVED – as follows:

- i) That the Council reverses the decision taken at the July 2025 Full Council Meeting not to co-opt two councillors to the two vacancies left unfilled at the 2025 Election (in the West Ward and Byerley Park, Horndale and Cobblers Hall Ward), for the duration of the four-year term of this Council
- ii) That the Council agree to co-opt two councillors to the vacancies, following the procedure set out in the Council's approved Co-Option Policy.

CHAIRMAN