

## **ANNUAL MEETING OF THE COUNCIL**

**WEDNESDAY 13<sup>TH</sup> MAY 2026 – 7.00 p.m.**

Minutes of the proceedings of the **ANNUAL MEETING** of the **COUNCIL** held in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, School Aycliffe Lane, Newton Aycliffe, on **WEDNESDAY 13<sup>th</sup> MAY 2026 at 7.00 p.m.**

### **PRESENT**

Councillors: Tunde Akinsanya, Tony Armstrong, Martin Ashcroft, Lindsey Aston, Jaci Beddard, Tony Beddard, Dorothy Bowman, Richard Burchell, Arun M. Chandran, Chris Clement, Neil Collinson, Luke Ellis, George Gray, Brian Haigh, Andy Hill, Sharon Hutchinson, Sandra Kirby, Jackie McFadden Lewis, John Moore, Carl Robinson, Kyle Robinson, Ken Robson, 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**

Three members of the public.

Councillor Ken Robson took the Chair for the meeting as the current Mayor and made a brief speech regarding his year in office thanking his consort and the Deputy Mayor.

The Corporate and Policy Officer presented a short notice regarding housekeeping and security matters within the Council Offices building.

*Councillor Jackie McFadden Lewis and Jaci Beddard left the meeting at this point.*

#### **1. APPOINTMENT OF MAYOR FOR THE MUNICIPAL YEAR 2026/27**

It was proposed by Councillor Martin Ashcroft, and seconded by Councillor Carl Robinson, that Councillor Neil Collinson be nominated as Mayor for the Municipal Year 2026/27.

**RESOLVED** – that Councillor Neil Collinson be appointed Chairman (Mayor) of the Council for the Municipal Year 2026/27.

**Councillor Neil Collinson took the Chair for the meeting.**

#### **2. DECLARATION OF ACCEPTANCE OF OFFICE**

- a) The newly appointed Mayor made and signed the Declaration of Acceptance of Office.

The Mayor thanked the outgoing Mayor, Councillor Ken Robson, for his service during his year in office.

**RESOLVED** – that the information be received.

**3. APPOINTMENT OF DEPUTY MAYOR FOR THE MUNICIPAL YEAR 2026/27**

It was proposed by Councillor Lindsey Aston, and seconded by Councillor Kyle Robinson, that Councillor Michael Stead be appointed as Deputy Mayor for the Municipal Year 2026/27.

It was further proposed by Councillor Carl Robinson, and seconded by Councillor Ken Robson, that Councillor Tony Armstrong be appointed as Deputy Mayor for the Municipal Year 2026/27.

Councillor Tony Armstrong requested a named vote.

**Votes for Councillor Michael Stead:**

Councillors: Anne Woodward, Arun Chandran, Brian Sowerby, Chris Clement, John Woodward, Kyle Robinson, Lindsey Aston, Luke Ellis, Michael Stead, Richard Burchell, Sandra Kirby, Sharon Hutchinson, Tracey Williams, Tunde Akinsanya.

**Total 14 votes**

**Votes for Councillor Tony Armstrong:**

Councillors: Brian Haigh, Carl Robinson, Dorothy Bowman, George Gray, John Moore, Ken Robson, Martin Ashcroft, Tony Armstrong.

**Total 8 Votes**

**RESOLVED** – that Councillor Michel Stead be appointed Vice Chairman (Deputy Mayor) of the Council for the Municipal Year 2026/27.

**4. NOTICE OF MEETING**

The notice convening the meeting was taken as read.

**5. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies were received from Councillor Phil Hawkins.

**6. MEMBERS' DISPENSATIONS**

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

**7. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

No declarations of interest were made.

**8. MINUTES**

It was proposed by Councillor Arun Chandran, and seconded by Councillor Lindsey Aston and;

**RESOLVED** – that the minutes of the Ordinary Meeting of the Council held on the 22<sup>nd</sup> April, and the minutes of the Extraordinary Meeting of the Council held on 29<sup>th</sup> April 2026 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

## 9. ANNOUNCEMENTS

### Mayor's Announcements

The newly appointed Mayor, Councillor Neil Collinson, thanked the Council for the honour of being appointed. He advised that his nominated good causes for fundraising during his term of office are Great Aycliffe Cancer Support Group and All Disabilities Matter. A short presentation was made to the outgoing Mayor, Councillor Ken Robson.

*Councillor Jaci Beddard returned to the meeting at this point.*

## 10. ANNUAL CONSTITUTION REVIEW

The Town Clerk submitted a report to provide Members with information regarding the annual review of the Council's Constitution and to seek the approval and adoption of any new items or propose amendments as appropriate.

He highlighted the main changes made, drawing attention to the changes to Standing Order 21 regarding staff appointments and the Members Code of Conduct which had been brought in line with the Durham County Council Code of Conduct.

It was proposed by Councillor Arun Chandran and seconded by Councillor Tracey Williams that the recommendations of the report be agreed, and that any update of the Members' Allowances Scheme be held in abeyance.

Councillor Sharon Hutchinson raised concerns regarding the changes to Standing Order 21 relating to staffing changes and staff appointments highlighting the need for councillors to give more consideration to the proposed changes. She proposed an amendment that this item be deferred and brought to the Personnel Sub-Committee for Members to discuss. This was seconded by Councillor Tony Beddard.

Councillor Arun Chandran agreed to incorporate this change into his original proposal.

The Town Clerk clarified that any reconsideration of Standing Order 21 would need to go to Full Council as it was a constitutional matter and highlighted that that the changes brought forward within the report has been requested by the Council, adding that a further discussion may be helpful for the new Councillors.

Members discussed the proposed changes to the Members Code of Conduct and the possible alignment with Durham County Council by adding in the following paragraph to the Members' Code of Conduct:

*"The right to freedom of expression under Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights is the basis of democracy and will be upheld at all times. Members have a democratic duty to represent their constituents and engage in robust political debate. Therefore in a political context, a degree of immoderate, offensive, shocking or provocative expression is acceptable".*

Members spoke for and against the proposal with concerns raised regarding whether the above paragraph was consistent with other aspects of the Code of Conduct and Constitution, and whether *not* adopting the paragraph would be at odds with Code of Conduct complaint investigations by the Durham County Council Monitoring Officer.

An amendment was proposed by Councillor Lindsey Aston, that the paragraph be adopted but with the last sentence removed. This was seconded by Councillor Sharon Hutchinson.

A vote then took place on the amendment to remove the last sentence with the following results:

For: 13  
Against: 12

The amendment became the substantive motion and Members then took a vote on the substantive motion with the following results:

For: 13  
Against: 12

**RESOLVED** – as follows:

- (i) That the report be received.
- (ii) that the proposed amendments to the various Articles be confirmed and to readopt the Constitution of the Council, with the exception of the proposed changes to Standing Order 21 – Staffing Changes and Appointments which will be deferred for further consideration at the next full Council meeting.
- (iii) That an additional paragraph be added to the Members' Code of Conduct to read: *"The right to freedom of expression under Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights is the basis of democracy and will be upheld at all times. Members have a democratic duty to represent their constituents and engage in robust political debate"*.
- (iv) The Council agrees the Civic Dignitary Invitation List for 2026/27 as set out in Appendix E to the Mayor's Information Booklet, and the new Mayor advises the Council of which two other authorities within the County Durham boundary they wish to add to the List.
- (v) A review of the Members' Allowances Scheme be held in abeyance pending a review by Durham County Council.
- (vi) A full copy of the Constitution of the Council, be made available for Members in the Council Chamber, updates be issued for the Member Information Packs, and the information will also be made available via the Council's Website.

## 11. REVIEW AND APPOINTMENT OF COMMITTEES

The Town Clerk submitted a report requesting members' consideration of the appointment of Committees for the 2026/27 year including setting the numbers on the three Standing Committees of the Council: Environment, Recreation and Policy and Resources and the appointment of Members to those committees.

The Town Clerk advised that members could follow the workbook prepared by Councillor Arun Chandran, to determine the numbers and appointments to the committees if they were happy to do so.

**RESOLVED** – as follows:

- i) That the information in the report be received.
- ii) That no additional committees be appointed.
- iii) That the numbers and membership of each committee be agreed as follows:

**(i) Recreation Committee**

- (a) That a Recreation Committee be appointed for the Municipal Year 2026/27.
- (b) That it comprises of 27 Members of the Council plus the Mayor and Deputy Mayor as Ex-Officio Members.
- (c) That the Membership of the Recreation Committee be:

Councillors: Tunde Akinsanya, Tony Armstrong, Martin Ashcroft, Lindsey Aston, Jaci Beddard, Tony Beddard, Dorothy Bowman, Richard Burchell, Arun M. Chandran, Chris Clement, Neil Collinson, Luke Ellis, George Gray, Brian Haigh, Phil Hawkins, Andy Hill, Richard Hutchinson, Sharon Hutchinson, Sandra Kirby, Jackie McFadden Lewis, John Moore, Carl Robinson, Kyle Robinson, Ken Robson, Brian Sowerby, Michael Stead, Tracey Williams, Anne Woodward and John Woodward.

**(ii) Environment Committee**

- (a) That an Environment Committee be appointed for the Municipal Year 2026/27.
- (b) That it comprises of 27 Members of the Council plus the Mayor and Deputy Mayor as Ex-Officio Members.
- (c) That the membership of the Environment Committee be:

Councillors: Tunde Akinsanya, Tony Armstrong, Martin Ashcroft, Lindsey Aston, Jaci Beddard, Tony Beddard, Dorothy Bowman, Richard Burchell, Arun M. Chandran, Chris Clement, Neil Collinson, Luke Ellis, George Gray, Brian Haigh, Phil Hawkins, Andy Hill, Richard Hutchinson, Sharon Hutchinson, Sandra Kirby, Jackie McFadden Lewis, John Moore, Carl Robinson, Kyle Robinson, Ken Robson, Brian Sowerby, Michael Stead, Tracey Williams, Anne Woodward and John Woodward.

**(iii) Policy and Resources Committee**

Councillor Arun Chandran proposed that the Councillor who is due to be co-opted to the Woodham Ward vacancy be appointed to this committee, meaning one current councillor would need to come off the committee. This was seconded by Councillor Chris Clement.

Councillor Tony Beddard proposed an amendment that the Councillor who is due to be co-opted to the Woodham Ward vacancy should be excluded from taking up a place on the committee. This was seconded by Councillor Ken Robson.

Councillor Lindsey Aston suggested using the Members' Attendances list, as a guide to which councillor should not take up a place on the committee. As a lot of members do not attend committee meetings, thereby allowing the space to be held open for the co-opted candidate.

## 12. ADJOURNMENT OF COUNCIL MEETING

It was proposed by Councillor Martin Ashcroft proposed an adjournment to discuss the appointees to the Policy and Resources Committee. This was seconded by Councillor Michael Stead.

**RESOLVED** – that the Council Meeting be adjourned to discuss appointees to the Policy and Resources Committee.

## 13. RECONVENING OF COUNCIL MEETING

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

**RESOLVED** – that the meeting of the Council be reconvened.

### (iii) Policy and Resources Committee

Councillor Martin Ashcroft advised that Councillor Brian Haigh would step down from the Policy and Resources Committee. The Town Clerk asked Councillor Tony Beddard to confirm that the amendment was now withdrawn. Councillor Tony Beddard confirmed this.

**RESOLVED** – as follows:

- (a) That a Policy and Resources Committee be appointed for the Municipal Year 2026/27.
- (b) That it comprises of 27 Members of the Council plus the Mayor and Deputy Mayor as Ex-Officio Members.
- (c) That the membership of the Policy and Resources Committee be:

Councillors: Tunde Akinsanya, Tony Armstrong, Martin Ashcroft, Lindsey Aston, Jaci Beddard, Tony Beddard, Dorothy Bowman, Richard Burchell, Arun M. Chandran, Chris Clement, Neil Collinson, Luke Ellis, George Gray, Phil Hawkins, Andy Hill, Richard Hutchinson, Sharon Hutchinson, Sandra Kirby, Jackie McFadden Lewis, John Moore, Carl Robinson, Kyle Robinson, Ken Robson, Brian Sowerby, Michael Stead, Tracey Williams, Anne Woodward and John Woodward plus the Councillor to be appointed to the Woodham Ward vacancy by Co-Option.

## 14. ADJOURNMENT OF COUNCIL MEETING

It was proposed by Councillor Carl Robinson, and seconded by Councillor Tony Armstrong and;

**RESOLVED** – that the Council Meeting be adjourned to enable Special Meetings of the Recreation, Environment and Policy and Resources Committees to take place to appoint their Chairmen, Vice Chairmen, Sub-Committees and Working Groups.

*Please refer to the separate Minutes of each Committees.*

## 15. RECONVENING OF COUNCIL MEETING

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

**RESOLVED** – that the meeting of the Council be reconvened following the completion of the meetings of the Recreation, Environment and Policy and Resources Committees.

## 16. MEMBERS' ATTENDANCES 2025/26

The Town Clerk submitted a list of members' attendances for the Municipal Year 2025/26.

It was proposed by Councillor Carl Robinson, and seconded by Councillor Lindsey Aston and;

**RESOLVED** – that the information be received.

## 17. DISCLOSURE OF MEMBERS' ALLOWANCES 2025/26

The Finance Manager submitted a report setting out allowances and expenses which had been paid to Elected Members during the Financial Year 2025/26.

It was proposed by Councillor Carl Robinson, and seconded by Councillor Lindsey Aston and;

**RESOLVED** – that the information be received.

## 18. OUTSIDE BODIES

The Town Clerk submitted a report for the Council to consider membership of, and representation on any relevant outside bodies.

**RESOLVED** – that the following members and officers be nominated to the undermentioned outside bodies:

- (a) **County Durham Association of Local Councils**  
It was proposed by Councillor Arun Chandran and seconded by Councillor Tracey Williams and resolved that Councillors Arun Chandran and Sharon Hutchinson be appointed, together with the Town Clerk.
- (b) **County Durham Association of Local Councils Executive Committee**  
It was advised that Councillor Arun Chandran had previously been appointed for a two-year term.
- (c) **Aycliffe Village Community Association**  
It was proposed by Councillor Martin Ashcroft and seconded by Councillor Ken Robson and resolved that Councillor Carl Robinson be appointed.
- (d) **Woodham Village Community Association**  
It was proposed by Councillor Martin Ashcroft and seconded by Councillor Carl Robinson and resolved that Councillors Jackie McFadden Lewis and the future Co-Opted Councillor to the Woodham Ward be appointed.

- (e) **County Durham Association of Local Councils Larger Council Forum**  
Councillor Arun Chandran proposed the Chairman and Vice Chairman of the Policy and Resources Committee be appointed. Councillor Lindsey Aston advised that she was not able to attend the meetings due to work commitments. It was proposed by Councillor Arun Chandran and seconded by Councillor Lindsey Aston and resolved that Councillor Sharon Hutchinson and Councillor Michael Stead, plus the Town Clerk be appointed.
- (f) **Newton Aycliffe Bus Preservation Society**  
It was proposed by Councillor Arun Chandran and seconded by Councillor Tracey Williams and resolved that Councillor Chris Clement be appointed.
- (g) **Friends of Stockton and Darlington Railway**  
It was proposed by Councillor Arun Chandran and seconded by Councillor Lindsey Aston and resolved that Councillors Luke Ellis and Sharon Hutchinson be appointed.
- (h) **Western Area Partnership**  
It was proposed by Councillor Arun Chandran and seconded by Councillor Lindsey Aston and resolved that Councillors Arun Chandran and Kyle Robinson be appointed.
- (i) **Cornforth Partnership**  
It was proposed by Councillor Martin Ashcroft and seconded by Councillor Ken Robson and resolved that Councillor John Woodward be appointed. It was additionally proposed by Councillor Carl Robinson and seconded by Councillor Neil Collinson and resolved that Councillor Tony Armstrong be appointed.
- (j) **Community Hub Development Group**  
It was proposed by Councillor Arun Chandran and seconded by Councillor Lindsey Aston that Councillor Tracey Williams be appointed. It was additionally proposed by Councillor Carl Robinson and seconded by Councillor Ken Robson that Councillor Tony Armstrong be appointed.

A vote was carried out with the following results:

Councillor Tracey Williams - 14 Votes  
Councillor Tony Armstrong - 10 votes

It was resolved that Councillor Tracey Williams be appointed, together with the Town Clerk.

- (k) **Oak Leaf Golf Club**  
It was proposed by Councillor Martin Ashcroft and seconded by Councillor Andy Hill and resolved that Councillor Luke Ellis and Councillor Kyle Robinson be appointed, together with the Town Clerk.

## 19. MEETINGS 2026/27

A suggested schedule of Council meeting dates for the Municipal Year 2026/27 was submitted by the Town Clerk and agreed.

Councillor Tony Beddard requested that officers investigate adding the meeting dates to members Microsoft 365 diaries.

**RESOLVED** – that the list of scheduled meeting dates for the Municipal Year 2026/27 be approved.

*Councillor Tony Armstrong left the meeting at this point.*

## **20. COUNCIL INSURANCE ARRANGEMENTS REVIEW**

The Finance Manager submitted a report setting out the annual review of the Council's insurance arrangements, including a list of insurance claims made or received over the last ten years, as required by the Council's Standing Orders.

Councillor Chris Clement advised that the Council should consider adding cybersecurity cover and an excess layer for Public and Employer Liability insurance.

The Finance Manager advised that cybersecurity cover is already being considered and agreed to investigate an excess layer further.

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

**RESOLVED** – that the annual review of the Council's insurance arrangements and list of insurance claims over the last ten years, as required by Standing Orders, be approved.

## **21. REVIEW OF ARRANGEMENTS WITH DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL - LICENCE TO OPERATE ON DCC ENVIRONMENTAL AREAS**

The Town Clerk submitted a report setting out a review of the licence agreement in place with Durham County Council allowing the Town Council to operate on County Council environmental areas, as required by the Council's Constitution.

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

**RESOLVED** – that the report be received and that the licence is continued.

## **22. REVIEW OF ARRANGEMENTS WITH DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL - WINTER MAINTENANCE ARRANGEMENT**

The Town Clerk submitted a report setting out a review of the licence agreement in place with Durham County Council covering winter maintenance works, as required by the Council's Constitution.

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

**RESOLVED** – that the report be received and that the licence is continued.

## **23. REVIEW OF INVENTORY OF LAND AND BUILDINGS**

The Town Clerk submitted a report to provide a list of land and buildings under the Council's ownership.

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

**RESOLVED** – that the report be received.

## **24. REVIEW OF COUNCIL AND STAFF SUBSCRIPTIONS TO OTHER BODIES**

The Town Clerk submitted a report with a list of subscriptions to other bodies currently paid on behalf of the Council and its officers for consideration.

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

**RESOLVED** – that the report be received with no changes proposed to the list of subscriptions.

## **25. REVIEW OF COUNCIL EXPENDITURE INCURRED UNDER THE GENERAL POWER OF COMPETENCE 2025/26**

The Town Clerk submitted a breakdown of expenditure incurred by the Council under the General Power of Competence during the 2025/26 financial year.

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

**RESOLVED** – that the report and information be received.

## **26. COUNCILLOR TRAINING**

The Town Clerk submitted a report to provide Members with information on the training provided and undertaken by councillors during 2025/26 and forthcoming training available during 2026/27.

The Town Clerk advised that new councillor induction training will be undertaken in June.

Members noted that they will receive regular reminders of training available and are requested to contact the offices to book their places.

**RESOLVED** – that the report be received.

## **27. POLITICAL GROUPS**

The Town Clerk requested that each Political Group on the Council advise who their Spokesperson(s) are for the information of Officers of the Council to enable consultation and co-ordination of information outside of Council Meetings.

**RESOLVED** – that:

- (i) Councillor Lindsey Aston is the spokesperson for the Liberal Democrats.
- (ii) Councillors Martin Ashcroft and Tony Beddard are the spokespeople for the Independent Group.
- (iii) Councillor Luke Ellis is the spokesperson for the Labour Group.
- (iv) Councillors Sharon Hutchinson, Chris Clement and Andy Hill are included individually.

**CHAIRMAN**