

## **FULL COUNCIL**

**WEDNESDAY 10<sup>TH</sup> JUNE 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 10<sup>TH</sup> JUNE 2026 at 7.00 p.m.**

### **PRESENT**

Councillors: Tunde Akinsanya, Martin Ashcroft, Lindsey Aston, Dorothy Bowman, Richard Burchell, Arun M. Chandran, Chris Clement, Neil Collinson, Luke Ellis, George Gray, Brian Haigh, Phil Hawkins, Andy Hill, Sandra Kirby, Vijaya Kotur, John Moore, Carl Robinson, Kyle Robinson, Ken Robson, Michael Stead, Anne Woodward, 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 four members of the public present.

### **28. NOTICE OF MEETING**

The notice convening the meeting was taken as read.

### **29. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors: Tony Armstrong, Jaci Beddard, Tony Beddard, Richard Hutchinson, Sharon Hutchinson, Jackie McFadden Lewis, Brian Sowerby and Tracey Williams.

### **30. MEMBERS' DISPENSATIONS**

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

### **31. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

A declaration of interest was received from Councillor Chris Clement regarding Agenda Item 20 as a Co-Opted Member of the Council.

### **32. PUBLIC QUESTIONS**

There were no public questions.

### **33. MINUTES**

It was proposed by Councillor Phill Hawkins, and seconded by Councillor John Woodward and;

**RESOLVED** – That the minutes of the Annual General Meeting of the Council held on the 13<sup>th</sup> May 2026 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

### 34. MAYOR'S AND TOWN CLERK'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

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

The Town Clerk made a number of announcements.

He advised that that the Council has received an appeal from a member of staff in relation to a personnel matter and therefore will need to call a meeting of the Member Appeals Panel in July.

It was requested that the Council to agree to retaining the current Member Appeals Panel, to consider this appeal.

If any members cannot attend the next meeting, the power of substitution would apply with another member of the Personnel Sub Committee being invited to take up the vacant place.

This was agreed by all members.

The Town Clerk advised that he had received communication from County Councillor Tim McGuinness advising that the Durham County Councillors for Newton Aycliffe, would be happy to attend another meeting with town councillors whether informally or at a scheduled Council Meeting.

It was reported that the new councillor training session, provided by the Town Clerk, will be taking place on the evening of Tuesday 30<sup>th</sup> June.

It was advised that Councillor Arun Chandran has sourced and provided Great Aycliffe Town Council drinks coasters for the Council Chamber and has further coasters available to purchase if any councillors would like one.

The Town Clerk further advised that the Finance Manager wished to say a few words at the end of the meeting with members agreement. This was agreed.

The Town Clerk then took the opportunity to formally pay tribute to the outgoing Finance Manager, as this was her final Council Meeting:

*"Tracey is a truly brilliant Finance Manager and has served this Council over the last five years with distinction, total commitment and hard work.*

*Tracey has steered the Council's finances through some very challenging times, including the back end of the pandemic, the severe economic impact and cost of living crisis caused by two wars, and the withdrawal of the Council Tax Support Grant, which has long been identified as the greatest financial risk facing the Council, and which finally came to pass last year at great financial cost.*

*Despite these challenges, Tracey has ensured that the Council managed and planned its finances and budgets in a way that has maintained a healthy financial position and ensured that the Council can look to the future with a fair degree of confidence that it will not run into financial difficulties or black holes over the coming years, despite the substantial financial commitments and challenges that lie ahead.*

*She has also ensured that the Council financial management and governance arrangements are efficient and effective and deliver value for money to our local community, proven by the five years of unqualified external audit reports we have received over her time as Finance Manager.*

*Tracey regularly goes over and above, both in the countless extra hours she has put in on evenings and weekends and in the support she provides to the wider team.*

*She has sacrificed a lot over the last five years in service to this Council.*

*Her support to me as Town Clerk, both in terms of advice, and, when needed constructive challenge, has been absolutely vital in helping me manage the Council and I will sorely miss her when she leaves, both as a colleague and as a friend.*

*The Council and I have so much to be grateful to her for and I am sure you will join me in thanking her for her service and wishing her the very best for the future”.*

It was requested that the statement be recorded in the minutes and this was agreed.

Councillor Arun Chandran requested a round of applause.

Councillor Ken Robson offered his thanks the Finance Manager.

Councillor Michael Stead added his thanks and regards, adding how responsive and efficient the Finance Manager has been in responding to his queries.

The Chairman added that the Finance Manager will be sorely missed, and there followed a round of applause in appreciation for her service.

**RESOLVED** – as follows:

- i) That the announcements be received.

### **35. COMMITTEE MINUTES**

#### **(a) Recreation Committee**

It was proposed by Councillor George Gray, and seconded by Councillor Brian Haigh; and

**RESOLVED** – as follows:

- i) That the minutes of the meeting of the Recreation Committee held on the 13<sup>th</sup> May 2026 (AGM) be received.
- ii) That the minutes and recommendations be approved and adopted.

#### **(b) Environment Committee**

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

**RESOLVED** – as follows:

- i) That the minutes of the meeting of the Environment Committee held on the 13<sup>th</sup> May 2026 (AGM) be received.
- ii) That the minutes and recommendations be approved and adopted.

**(c) Policy and Resources Committee**

It was proposed by Councillor Lindsey Aston, and seconded by Councillor John Woodward and;

**RESOLVED** – as follows:

- i) That the minutes of the meeting of the Policy and Resources Committee held on the 13<sup>th</sup> May 2026 (AGM) be received.
- ii) That the minutes and recommendations be approved and adopted.

**(d) Recreation Committee**

It was proposed by Councillor Luke Ellis, and seconded by Councillor George Gray; and

**RESOLVED** – as follows:

- i) That the minutes of the meeting of the Recreation Committee held on the 27<sup>th</sup> May 2026 be received.
- ii) That the minutes and recommendations be approved and adopted.

**(e) Environment Committee**

It was proposed by Councillor Chris Clement, and seconded by Councillor Andy Hill; and

**RESOLVED** – as follows:

- i) That the minutes of the meeting of the Environment Committee held on the 27<sup>th</sup> May 2026 be received.
- ii) That the minutes and recommendations be approved and adopted.

**(f) Policy and Resources Committee**

It was proposed by Councillor Lindsey Aston, and seconded by Councillor Rich Burchell; and

**RESOLVED** – as follows:

- i) That the minutes of the meeting of the Policy and Resources Committee held on the 3<sup>rd</sup> June 2026 be received.
- ii) That the minutes and recommendations be approved and adopted.

**36. CO-OPTION OF COUNCILLOR TO WOODHAM WARD VACANCY – CANDIDATE STATEMENTS**

The candidates for co-option to the councillor vacancy in the Woodham Ward were each given five minutes to introduce themselves to the members and provide details of their background, experience and the reasons why they would like to become a councillor.

Members then had the opportunity to ask candidates questions.

### 37. CO-OPTION OF COUNCILLOR TO WOODHAM WARD VACANCY

The Town Clerk gave a brief statement to explain the co-option voting process and confirming that each candidate met the eligibility criteria for standing as a councillor.

The Chairman requested proposers and seconders for the candidates for the vacancy to the Woodham Ward.

It was proposed by Councillor Martin Ashcroft and seconded by Councillor Carl Robinson; that John Clark be co-opted.

It was proposed by Councillor Ken Robson and seconded by Councillor Brian Haigh; that Stephen Smith be co-opted.

It was proposed by Councillor Lindsey Aston and seconded by Councillor Kyle Robinson; that Vijaya Kotur be co-opted.

Councillor Arun Chandran requested a named vote.

A named vote took place with the following results:

**For John Clark:**

Councillor Carl Robinson  
Councillor John Moore  
Councillor Martin Ashcroft

**Total Votes: 3**

**For Stephen Smith:**

Councillor Brian Haigh  
Councillor Dorothy Bowman  
Councillor George Gray  
Councillor Ken Robson

**Total Votes: 4**

**For Vijaya Kotur:**

Councillor Andy Hill  
Councillor Anne Woodward  
Councillor Arun Chandran  
Councillor Chris Clement  
Councillor John Woodward  
Councillor Kyle Robinson  
Councillor Lindsey Aston

Councillor Luke Ellis  
Councillor Michael Stead  
Councillor Neil Collinson  
Councillor Phill Hawkins  
Councillor Rich Burchell  
Councillor Sandra Kirby  
Councillor Tunde Akinsanya

**Total Votes: 14**

**RESOLVED** – as follows:

- i) that Vijaya Kotur be co-opted to the Town Council to represent the Woodham Ward;

*Councillor Vijaya Kotur signed the Declaration of Acceptance of Office then took her seat on the Town Council.*

### 38. APPROVAL OF THE 2025/26 ANNUAL INTERNAL AUDIT REPORT

The Finance Manager submitted the 2025/26 Annual Internal Audit Report for members approval.

It was proposed by Councillor George Gray and seconded by Councillor Arun Chandran; and

**RESOLVED** – as follows;

- i) That the report be received.
- ii) That the annual Internal Audit Report for the 2025/26 financial year be approved.

### **39. APPROVAL OF THE 2025/26 ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT**

The Finance Manager submitted the 2025/26 Annual Governance Statement for approval.

It was proposed by Councillor Arun Chandran and seconded by Councillor John Moore; and

**RESOLVED** – as follows;

- i) That the report be received.
- ii) That the annual Governance Statement for the 2025/26 financial year as set out in Section 1 of the 2025/26 Annual Governance and Accountability Return be approved and signed off by the Town Clerk and Chairman of the Council.

### **40. APPROVAL OF THE 2025/26 ACCOUNTING STATEMENTS**

The Finance Manager submitted the 2025/26 Annual Accounting Statements for approval.

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

**RESOLVED** – as follows;

- i) That the report be received.
- ii) That the 2025/26 Accounting Statements set out in Section 2 of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return, be approved.
- iii) That the supporting financial documents are approved and be submitted to the external auditors with the Annual Governance and Accountability Return.
- iv) That the Annual Governance and Accountability Return and supporting documents are sent to the external auditor, following their approval.
- v) That the unaudited Annual Governance and Accountability Return is published on the Council website on Thursday 11<sup>th</sup> June.
- vi) That the thirty-day public inspection period in relation to the statement of accounts commences on Friday 12<sup>th</sup> June, running until Thursday 23<sup>rd</sup> July.
- vii) That notice of the publication of the accounts and the public inspection rights and period will be advertised on the Council website on Thursday 11<sup>th</sup> June.
- viii) That following the completion of the external audit by Mazars LLP, and receipt of the signed audit opinion and certificate, the Annual Governance and Accountability Return will be published in accordance with the statutory framework.

### **41. 2026/27 SERVICE DELIVERY PLAN**

The Corporate and Policy Officer submitted for Members' consideration and approval the 2026/27 Town Council Service Delivery Plan.

**RESOLVED** – as follows;

- i) That the report be received.
- ii) That the 2026/27 Town Council Service Delivery Plan be approved.

**42. HERITAGE PLACES PROJECT FOR SHILDON AND NEWTON AYCLIFFE – DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL**

The Corporate and Policy Officer submitted a report to request members' agreement to provide a letter of support for the Heritage Places National Lottery Heritage Fund bid, being led by Durham County Council, on behalf of Great Aycliffe Town Council.

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 a general letter of support for the Heritage Places funding bid be forwarded to Durham County Council.

**43. REVIEW OF STANDING ORDER 21 – STAFFING CHANGES AND APPOINTMENTS**

The Town Clerk submitted a report to provide members with details of a review of Standing Order 21 – Staffing Changes and Appointments as requested by the Council, with a view to providing officers greater flexibility to manage staffing changes and appointments, via delegated authority from the Council.

The Town Clerk explained the proposed changes which included increasing the salary threshold for Personnel Sub Committee involvement in shortlisting, interview, and appointment, providing more flexibility to officers, via delegated authority, to make variations to staffing structures, within the overall staffing budget available for each department, and a requirement that Members take into consideration the recommendations of the officers who are part of the Interview Panel, before moving to a decision on appointments

The Town Clerk stressed that the updated Standing Order makes it absolutely clear that any proposal to create a new or additional staffing post, delete a staffing post, make changes to the existing staffing structure that have an additional budget implication for the Council, or change the terms and conditions of a post, would still require a full report to the Personnel Sub-Committee.

Some further proposed changes to the Standing Order, received from Councillor Sharon Hutchinson, were also considered.

Councillor Arun Chandran proposed that the report be received and to approve the officer recommendations including the provision that the make-up of the Member Shortlisting and Interview Panel should remain unchanged with the power of substitution if required.

This was seconded by Councillor Lindsey Aston and;

**RESOLVED** – as follows;

- i) That the report be received;
- ii) The proposed amendments to Standing Order 21 be agreed.
- iii) The make-up of the Member Shortlisting and Interview Panel remains unchanged with the power of substitution if required.

#### 44. DRIVING RANGE MACHINERY REPLACEMENT

The Town Clerk and Golf Administrator submitted a report to request an additional capital budget approval for the replacement of the original driving range ball dispenser machine, the ball washing machine and conveyor system.

The Town Clerk advised that whilst the replacement of the ball dispenser and conveyor system would be an unbudgeted cost, the driving range service is running at a surplus and the payback period on the cost of the machinery would be short in light of the high usage of the facility.

It was noted that a Standing Order Exemption Form would need to be completed to allow officers to use the recommended supplier, without seeking further quotes, if the purchase is agreed.

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

**RESOLVED** – as follows;

- i) That the report be received.
- ii) That a replacement driving range ball dispenser machine is purchased at a cost of £4,550.
- iii) That a replacement driving range ball washer machine and conveyor belt system is purchased at a cost of £5,700, plus £300 for installation.
- iv) That an additional Capital Budget of £7,750 is approved.
- v) That a Standing Order Exemption Form be completed by officers.

#### 45. CODE OF CONDUCT DECISION NOTICE

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.

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

**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.

#### 46. NOTICE OF MOTION

Members were asked to consider the following motion from Councillor Arun Chandran, which was seconded by Councillor Lindsey Aston:

*“That in furtherance of Minute 147 of Full Council on Weds 22<sup>nd</sup> April , Great Aycliffe Town Council calls upon the Government, via the County Durham Association of Local Councils (CDALC) and the National Association of Local Councils (NALC), and our Member of Parliament to facilitate all Councils to be able to seek Enhanced DBS Checks on their Councillors. If done immediately after elections and publicised before elections that it will be undertaken, it may help to deter potential undesirable elements from seeking public office. Councillors have regular contact with residents and groups which could have vulnerable adults and or children, we owe a duty of care to try to reduce harm as well as reputational damage. “*

The Town Clerk advised on a point of clarity that the NALC would be notified via CDALC, rather than directly.

**RESOLVED** – as follows:

- i) That the motion be agreed.
- ii) That Great Aycliffe Town Council calls upon the Government, via the County Durham Association of Local Councils (CDALC) and the National Association of Local Councils (NALC), and our Member of Parliament to facilitate all Councils to be able to seek Enhanced DBS Checks on their Councillors. If done immediately after elections and publicised before elections that it will be undertaken, it may help to deter potential undesirable elements from seeking public office. Councillors have regular contact with residents and groups which could have vulnerable adults and or children, we owe a duty of care to try to reduce harm as well as reputational damage.

**47. NOTICE OF MOTION**

Members were asked to consider the following motion from Councillor Arun Chandran, which was seconded by Councillor Lindsey Aston:

*"That the Council asks County Durham Association of Local Councils (CDALC), National Association of Local Councils (NALC), and the local MP to lobby the Government to amend regulations to allow co-opted members to be paid the Basic Allowance, on the grounds that the only legal difference between elected and co-opted councillors is that they don't get the Allowance, in all other respects, they have the same rights duties and responsibilities, which is unfair."*

**RESOLVED** – as follows:

- i) That the motion be agreed.
- ii) That the Council asks County Durham Association of Local Councils (CDALC), National Association of Local Councils (NALC), and the local MP to lobby the Government to amend regulations to allow co-opted members to be paid the Basic Allowance, on the grounds that the only legal difference between elected and co-opted councillors is that they don't get the Allowance, in all other respects, they have the same rights duties and responsibilities, which is unfair.

**48. OUTSIDE BODIES**

Members received reports from representatives on the following Outside Bodies:

- (a) **County Durham Association of Local Councils**  
The Town Clerk advised that no meetings have been held.
- (b) **County Durham Association of Local Councils Executive Committee**  
Councillor Arun Chandran advised that the meeting is due to be held next week.
- (c) **Aycliffe Village Community Association**  
Councillor Carl Robinson gave an update regarding the hall redecoration.

- (d) **Woodham Village Community Association**  
There had been no meetings held. It was noted that Councillor Kotur would be the Council's second representative on this outside body following her co-option.
- (e) **County Durham Association of Local Councils Larger Council Forum**  
Councillor Michael Stead and Arun Chandran and the Town Clerk had attended this meeting. The Town Clerk advised that there is a commitment to renew the Local Council's Charter to improve the relationship between the county council and town and parish council sector in County Durham and that there will be drop in event on Monday 15<sup>th</sup> June at Newton Aycliffe Leisure Centre regarding the launch of the new Local Networks.
- (f) **Newton Aycliffe Bus Preservation Society**  
Councillor Chris Clement advised that no meetings have been held.
- (g) **Friends of Stockton and Darlington Railway**  
Councillor Luke Ellis advised that he was unable to attend the meeting, however he is happy to circulate the minutes via the Town Clerk.
- (h) **Western Area Partnership**  
Councillors Arun Chandran and Kyle Robinson advised that no meetings have been held.
- (i) **Cornforth Partnership**  
Councillor John Woodward advised that no meetings have been held.
- (j) **Community Hub Development Group**  
The Town Clerk advised that no meetings have been held.
- (k) **Oak Leaf Golf Club**  
The Town Clerk advised that a meeting was held on Tuesday 9<sup>th</sup> June which was very positive. Compliments had been received on the condition of the golf course and a recent mixer competition that has proved to be popular in engaging members. Progress has also been made in establishing a ladies section and a meeting is to be held to take this forward.

The Finance Manager then gave a closing speech as this was to be her final Council meeting.

The Finance Manager thanked Members for the opportunity to serve in the role over the past five years. She referred to the contribution and support of colleagues, highlighting what a good team of officers the Council has in place. She stated that her decision to leave had been a difficult one. She also referred to concerns regarding the manner in which officers are sometimes addressed during public meetings and the effect this can have on staff morale. She highlighted how open and transparent officers are in providing the Councillors with reports and information to enable decision making and then gave the Council's budget-setting process as an example of just how much information is provided to Members. She concluded by encouraging Members to raise any concerns regarding officers outside of public meetings where appropriate, and ensure it supports and looks after the officers moving forward. She thanked the Council and conveyed her best wishes for the future.

The Chairman thanked the Finance Manager for her hard work and dedication, and members then gave a standing ovation in appreciation.

**CHAIRMAN**