

FULL COUNCIL

WEDNESDAY 22ND JULY 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 22ND JULY 2026 at 7.00 p.m.**

PRESENT

Councillor Michael Stead (Chairman) and
Councillors: Tunde Akinsanya, Tony Armstrong, Martin Ashcroft, Lindsey Aston, Jaci Beddard, Richard Burchell, Arun M. Chandran, Chris Clement, Luke Ellis, George Gray, Brian Haigh, Phill Hawkins, Andy Hill, Sharon Hutchinson, Sandra Kirby, Vijaya Kotur, Jackie McFadden Lewis, John Moore, Tracey Williams, Anne Woodward and John Woodward.

OFFICERS

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

IN ATTENDANCE

There were three members of the public present.

A minutes silence was held for the recent passing of former councillor, Brian McAnaney.

49. NOTICE OF MEETING

The notice convening the meeting was taken as read.

50. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors: Tony Beddard, Dorothy Bowman, Neil Collinson, Richard Hutchinson, Carl Robinson, Ken Robson and Brian Sowerby.

51. MEMBERS' DISPENSATIONS

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

52. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

53. GUEST SPEAKER

Aycliffe and District Bus Preservation Society representative, Alex Willis, provided a presentation on the future vision and plans for the society and museum.

Following the presentation, Councillor Tony Armstrong suggested that the museum enquires with Durham County Council for a brown heritage direction sign. Councillor Michael Stead added that he would investigate this.

Councillor Sharon Hutchinson suggested the society linking up with the Friends of the Stockton and Darlington Railway for their upcoming Open Day.

54. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

There were no public questions.

55. MINUTES

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

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the Council held on the 10th June 2026 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

56. MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

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

57. COMMITTEE MINUTES

(a) Recreation Committee

It was proposed by Councillor Tony Armstrong, and seconded by Councillor Richard Burchell; and

RESOLVED – as follows:

- i) That the minutes of the meeting of the Recreation Committee held on the 8th July 2026 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 Chris Clement; and

RESOLVED – as follows:

- i) That the minutes of the meeting of the Environment Committee held on the 8th July 2026 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 Luke Ellis and;

RESOLVED – as follows:

- i) That the minutes of the meeting of the Policy and Resources Committee held on the 15th July 2026 be received.
- ii) That the minutes and recommendations be approved and adopted.

58. CLIMATE EMERGENCY - PROGRESS UPDATE

The Town Clerk submitted a report to provide an update to Members as to progress in making the Town Council carbon neutral within an ambitious timeframe.

It was noted that the Council's Carbon Footprint had seen a reduction in carbon emissions of 9.86 tonnes-CO₂-e, or 4.5%, year on year and that work is ongoing with regards to the solar panels and EV charging points projects at the Oak Leaf Sports Complex.

Councillor Sharon Hutchinson thanked the Town Clerk for a well written, clear report and proposed that due to staffing capacity limitations, that the target date of 2030 for the Council becoming carbon neutral be deleted and replaced instead with a continuous improvement approach to the Council becoming carbon zero by 2050.

Councillor Sharon Hutchinson further proposed that officers review the Carbon Reduction Plan and identify which planned actions require the least officer input to deliver, and further identify which planned actions will lend themselves to the Council seeking external advice or assistance to ease the pressure on officers.

Councillor Luke Ellis seconded the proposal.

Councillor Arun Chandran highlighted the previous Council resolution to ensure that the Council complies with any legislative requirements around climate change but observes value for money in considering and making any related investments.

Councillor Tony Armstrong questioned whether officers had undertaken any climate change related training.

The Town Clerk advised that senior officers had all undertaken climate change training and that all managers consider carbon reduction and biodiversity in all proposals and decisions to reduce the carbon footprint. However he highlighted that climate change was an addition to existing officer workloads and staff capacity was an issue.

RESOLVED – as follows;

- i) That the report be received.
- ii) That the target for the Council to become carbon neutral by 2030 be deleted and reframed to a continuous improvement approach to the Council becoming carbon zero by 2050;
- iii) That officers review the Carbon Reduction Plan and identify which planned actions require the least officer input to deliver and further identify which planned actions will lend themselves to the Council seeking external advice or assistance to ease the pressure on the officers;
- iv) That an update be brought forward at the next six-monthly interval.

59. INSURANCE POLICY STABILITY AGREEMENT EXTENSION

The Town Clerk submitted a report to request Members' consideration and approval of a proposed extension to the Council's main Commercial Combined Insurance Policy on the basis of a new three-year stability agreement.

Councillor Chris Clement raised concern at the value of extending the agreement on the terms offered.

He advised that property and liability rates have been easing after several hard-market years and local authority risks which were once seen as high-frequency, high-severity are now viewed more favourably due to improved risk management standards, better claims defensibility, more structured procurement and more competition for large, stable accounts. A rate escalator clause of 2.5% plus indexation is therefore out of sync with the current market direction, where rates are being pushed down not up.

He suggested that the council should be seeking to test the market and that the Council's insurance broker should be able to advise on this.

Councillor Clement proposed that the Council undertakes the renewal of the final year of the current long-term agreement, without entering into an extension, and ask the insurance broker to undertake a re-tender process, at the most competitive price, ahead of the end of the current agreement next year with a view to agreeing a 3 or 5-year long-term agreement, with rating stability alongside a low claims rebate and cyber insurance cover.

Councillor Arun Chandran proposed an amendment, that the decision is deferred to a future meeting and that the Town Clerk, Councillor Chris Clement and the Chairman and Vice Chairman of Policy and Resources (Councillors Lindsey Aston and Sharon Hutchinson) are given authority to meet with the Council's insurance broker to clarify the queries and concerns raised, and bring a report back to a future Policy and Resources Committee Meeting. This was seconded by Councillor Phil Hawkins.

Councillor Chris Clement agreed to accept Councillor Chandran's amendment.

The Town Clerk clarified that the insurance broker represents the whole town and parish council sector and would likely not be able to undertake a re-tender process specifically on behalf of the Council. Undertaking a re-tender exercise would likely need to involve Durham County Council Procurement and would be a very labour intensive, time-consuming and expensive process which would create significant work for officers.

RESOLVED – as follows:

- i) That the report be received.
- ii) That the Town Clerk and Councillors Chris Clement, Lindsey Aston and Sharon Hutchinson meet with the Council's insurance broker to discuss the concerns raised regarding the proposed extension to the Council's main Commercial Combined Insurance Policy on the basis of a new three-year stability agreement.
- iii) That a report be brought to a future Policy and Resources Committee Meeting.

60. SCOPING CONSULTATION FOR COUNTY DURHAM PLAN

The Corporate and Policy Officer submitted a report to draw members' attention to a scoping consultation being conducted by Durham County Council in preparation for a new Local Plan. It was advised that the County Council are inviting residents, businesses and all interested parties to help to shape the plan and ensure it reflects community aspirations and meets local needs, but remains aligned with national and regional policy requirements.

The Chairman outlined the Scoping exercise in his capacity as a Durham County Councillor commenting on land banking and advising that this exercise will be a long process.

Councillor Arun Chandran advised that the Council's Neighbourhood Plan is what stands between the Town Council and developers.

Councillor Luke Ellis proposed that the Council does not solely rely on members responding individually to the consultation and the Corporate and Policy Officer prepares and submits a corporate response on behalf of the Town Council, referencing the key principles of the Great Aycliffe Neighbourhood Plan including valued green spaces, employment, improved public transport and the town centre.

RESOLVED – as follows;

- i) That the report be received.
- ii) That the Corporate and Policy Officer prepare and submit a corporate response on behalf of the Town Council referencing the key principles of the Great Aycliffe Neighbourhood Plan.
- iii) That individual members take part in the Scoping Consultation, if they wish to do so;
- iv) That the consultation link <https://letstalkcountydurham.co.uk/en-GB/projects/county-durham-plan-scoping-document-consultation> and information be shared with local residents.

Councillor Sandra Kirby left the meeting at this point.

61. 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. The Annual Meeting is due to take place in October.
- (b) **County Durham Association of Local Councils Executive Committee**
Councillor Arun Chandran advised that there is a meeting next month.
- (c) **Aycliffe Village Community Association**
There was no update.

- (d) **Woodham Village Community Association**
The Town Clerk advised members that correspondence had been received from the community association advising that formal representation from the town council was no longer necessary, but informal interest is welcomed. He requested that the Council consider deleting Woodham Village Community Association from the official outside body list. A discussion was held about community association accounts and governance and the Council's role in this. It was proposed by Councillor Michael Stead and seconded by Councillor Arun Chandran that this association be removed from the Outside Bodies list and this was agreed. The Chairman requested that officers ask the community association to advise the Council of the next Annual General Meeting date and circulate this to councillors.
- (e) **County Durham Association of Local Councils Larger Council Forum**
Councillor Sharon Hutchinson advised that the County Durham Local Plan Scoping Consultation had been the main topic of discussion at the meeting. Councillor Arun Chandran added that the Council's motion on councillor DBS checks had been discussed and referred to the Executive Committee and that the National Association of Local Councils is updating the Model Standing Orders. He advised that the Town Clerk has the minutes of the meeting if members wish to read them.
- Councillor Tracey Williams left the meeting at this point.*
- (f) **Newton Aycliffe Bus Preservation Society**
Councillor Chris Clement thanked the members of the society for their warm welcome and reminded councillors of the Open Day on Saturday.
- (g) **Friends of Stockton and Darlington Railway**
Councillor Sharon Hutchinson advised that the report had been circulated in advance and that they were holding an Open Day on 27th September which the Aycliffe Bus Preservation Society could potentially link up with.
- (h) **Western Area Partnership**
Councillors Arun Chandran advised that no meetings have been held.
- (i) **Cornforth Partnership**
Councillor Tony Armstrong advised that he had attended a meeting and circulated their e-newsletter to members.
- (j) **Community Hub Development Group**
The Town Clerk advised that no meetings have been held.
- (k) **Oak Leaf Golf Club**
There was no update.

CHAIRMAN