

POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

WEDNESDAY 9TH SEPTEMBER 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 9th September 2026 at 7.00pm.

PRESENT

Councillor Sharon Hutchinson (Chairman)

Jaci Beddard, Tony Beddard, Richard Burchell, Arun M. Chandran, Chris Clement, Luke Ellis, George Gray, Phill Hawkins, Andy Hill, Sandra Kirby, Vijaya Kotur, Jackie McFadden Lewis, Carl Robinson and Michael Stead

OFFICERS

Mr. Dan Austin (Town Clerk)
Miss. Helen Roberts (Finance Manager)
Mr. Steve Cooper (Works and Environment Manager)
Mrs. Sharna Stretch (Senior Administration Officer)

IN ATTENDANCE

One member of the public was in attendance.

Members were asked to appoint a Vice-Chairman for the meeting.

It was proposed by Councillor Chris Clement and seconded by Councillor Carl Robinson and agreed that Councillor Luke Ellis be appointed as Vice Chairman for the meeting.

33. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors: Tunde Akinsanya, Tony Armstrong, Martin Ashcroft, Lindsey Aston, Neil Collinson, Richard Hutchinson, John Moore, Ken Robson, Brian Sowerby, Tracey Williams, Anne Woodward and John Woodward.

34. MEMBERS DISPENSATIONS

No dispensation requests had been received.

35. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Declarations of interest were received from Councillors Sharon Hutchinson and Luke Ellis for Agenda Item 7 on grants and donations as they are the Council's outside body representatives on the Friends of the Stockton and Darlington Railway.

36. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

There were no public questions.

37. **POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE MINUTES**

It was proposed by Councillor Andy Hill, and seconded by Councillor Phill Hawkins and;

RESOLVED - that the minutes of the meeting of the Policy and Resources Committee, held on the 15th July 2026, be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

38. **ACCOUNT CONTROL SHEETS**

Account Control Sheets for the 3rd July to 13th August 2026 and the General Bank Accounts for July 2026 were submitted for approval.

RESOLVED – that it be recommended that the Account Control Sheets for the 3rd July to 13th August 2026 and the General Bank Accounts for July, be received.

39. **GRANTS AND DONATIONS**

The Town Clerk submitted a report setting out for consideration the current position on the Council's various Grants and Donations Budgets for the 2026/27 financial year.

It was reported that a total of £6,867 is currently available in the main Grants and Donations Budget, £9,758 in the Community Benefit Fund and £4,000 in the Community Events Grants Budget.

The following donation request was considered:

a) Friends of the Stockton and Darlington Railway

A request was received requesting a donation of £1,000 towards the costs of a community fun day at Heighington Station.

Councillor Chris Clement proposed that the amount of £1,000 be donated and that this be funded from the Community Events Budget.

Councillor Vijaya Kotur seconded the proposal subject to enquiries being made in relation to the audit of the charity's accounts.

Councillor Tony Beddard suggested that the group had sufficient funds and that the Council should be prioritising support to the charities most in need.

Councillor Arun Chandran added that the donation request related to a standalone event, towards the expected costs of £5,000 and that the Council needed to look at the funding of the event in isolation, and the importance of the event in putting the town on the map.

RESOLVED – that it be recommended that;

- i) Subject to clarification regarding the audit of the accounts, that a donation of £1,000 be given, from the Community Events Budget to the Friends of the Stockton and Darlington Railway towards the cost of their Community Fun Day at Heighington Station.

b) Letters of Thanks – Lifeline Community Action

A letter of thanks and post grant questionnaire was received from Lifeline Community Action relating to the grant awarded for the 'Move Your Way Superhero Walk' event.

It was advised that there was an underspend on the event of £245.67 and members were asked to consider if this should be returned bearing in mind that the event was funded from various other funding sources and therefore only a proportion of this underspend would be due to be repaid.

Councillor Arun Chandran proposed that the Council does not ask for the funds to be returned and this was seconded by Councillor Chris Clement.

Councillor Tony Beddard commented that the Council does not know how the underspend is to be allocated or spent, and proposed an amendment that the Council should ask for this information. This was seconded by Councillor Carl Robinson.

A vote took place on the amendment with the following results:

For:	5
Against:	8

The amendment failed.

A vote then took place on the original proposal and this was agreed by a majority vote.

RESOLVED – that it be recommended that;

- i) The post grant questionnaire from Lifeline Community Action relating to the grant awarded for the Move Your Way Superhero Walk event be received.
- ii) The underspent amount of £245.67 is not required to be returned.

40. MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN 2026/27 TO 2030/31

The Finance Manager and Town Clerk provided a report setting out the Council's 2026/27 to 2030/31 Medium Term Financial Plan and its associated appendices for members' consideration and approval.

Councillor Vijaya Kotur asked if the capital projects could be ranked according to statutory need, risk and financial return, with a view to identifying which ones could be deferred and deleted from the programme of work.

The Town Clerk explained that this already happens via the Asset Management Sub Committee with a line-by-line review of which projects are essential, provisional sums, to be deferred to a later date, or deleted.

It was proposed by Councillor Arun Chandran and seconded by Councillor Andy Hill, and;

RESOLVED – that it be recommended that:

- i) the 2026/27 to 2030/31 Medium Term Financial Plan be approved.

41. 2027/28 BUDGET SETTING FRAMEWORK AND TIMETABLE

The Finance Manager submitted a report setting out the proposed framework and timetable for the setting of the Council's 2027/28 Revenue and Capital Programme Budgets for members' consideration and approval.

It was proposed by Councillor Arun Chandran, and seconded by Councillor Andy Hill, and;

RESOLVED – that it be recommended that:

- i) The budget framework and timetable for the setting of the Council's 2027/28 Revenue and Capital Budgets be approved.
- ii) The proposed online budget consultation as part of the 2027/28 budget process be agreed.

42. INSURANCE POLICY STABILITY AGREEMENT EXTENSION

The Town Clerk submitted a report for members to consider and approve the proposed extension to the Council's main Commercial Combined Insurance Policy based on a new three-year stability agreement.

It was advised that the original decision was deferred at the Full Council Meeting held on 22nd July 2026 for further information and assurances from the insurance brokers.

It was noted that following a meeting with the insurance brokers, Councillor Chris Clement and the Town Clerk, a revised extension had been proposed which would include a funded revaluation of the Council's building values, worth £2,299, and a further 'risk management bursary' to the value of £1,500, on top of the £1,241 premium refund referred to in the previous report

Councillor Chris Clement thanked the Town Clerk for the report and the time taken to meet the insurance brokers. He suggested that the risk management bursary could be utilised towards water leak detection and a thermographic camera to detect hotspots.

Councillor Tony Beddard thanked Councillors Lindsey Aston, Chris Clement and Sharon Hutchinson for assisting the officers.

It was proposed by Councillor Chris Clement, and seconded by Councillor Tony Beddard and;

RESOLVED – that it be recommended that:

- i) the current three-year rate stability agreement on the Commercial Combined Insurance Policy, be extended by a further two years, to a five-year agreement ending in June 2029, as proposed and recommended by James Hallam; the Council's Insurance Broker.

43. INTERNAL AUDIT ENGAGEMENT LETTER AND THREE-YEAR INTERNAL AUDIT PLAN

The Finance Manager submitted a report to update Members on the Council's new Internal Audit provision, following the appointment of a new Internal Audit provider with effect from 1st April 2026.

Members were asked to approve the Letter of Engagement for the 2026/27 financial year and the draft three-year Internal Audit Plan for 2026/27 to 2028/29.

It was proposed by Councillor Arun Chandran and seconded by Councillor Chris Clement, and:

RESOLVED – that it be recommended that:

- i) The report be received.
- ii) The current Internal Audit arrangements following the appointment of Clive Owen LLP as the Council's Internal Audit provider with effect from 1st April 2026, be noted.
- iii) The Letter of Engagement, including Scope of Assignment and Internal Assurance Document be approved, as is required under the non-statutory guidance for internal audit for town and parish councils, set out in the 'Governance and Accountability Practitioners' Guide'.
- iv) The proposed three-year Internal Audit Plan covering the 2026/27 to 2028/29 financial years and providing for 27 internal audit days per annum be approved.
- v) It be noted that progress against the Internal Audit Plan and the draft Internal Assurance Report relating to the first Internal Audit visit during July will be reported to the Audit, Risk and GDPR Sub-Committee in due course, once the report and recommendations have been reviewed by officers.

44. PLAY AREA SAFETY SURFACING REPLACEMENT – HORNDALE PARK

The Works and Environment Manager submitted a report for members to consider the proposed priority works for the improvement of the safety surfacing within the Council's play areas this year, highlighting the replacement of the safety surface at Horndale Park as the priority area.

Members were asked to consider the quotes received and agree the award of the contract as part of the approved 2026/27 Capital Programme Budget.

Councillor Tony Beddard asked what insurance backed guarantees or warranties were in place with the recommended suppliers to mitigate the risks in the event they go out of business.

The Works and Environment Manager advised that both contractors have various accreditations within their trade, adding that the town council have worked with the recommended company for many years.

Councillor Arun Chandran proposed that the recommendations of the report be agreed due to the timescales involved. He added that the work has always been of good quality.

The Town Clerk suggested that the Works and Environment Manager would make enquiries with the contractor to provide an answer to Councillor Beddard's question regarding guarantees, and that this be circulated to all councillors for information.

He also advised that this issue could be considered in future procurement exercises by officers where relevant.

It was proposed by Councillor Andy Hill, and seconded by Councillor Carl Robinson and;

RESOLVED – that it be recommended that:

- i) The report be received.
- ii) The priority safety surfacing improvement works identified in the report at Horndale Park be agreed.
- iii) The award of the contract to Streetscape at a total cost of £27,490, be agreed.

45. MAYOR'S ALLOWANCE

Councillor Arun Chandran had submitted an agenda item asking members to consider whether the Mayor's Allowance should be increased to take into account the fact that it is taxable thus reducing its actual value, net, in defraying the expenses incurred whilst carrying out the duly approved and constituted duties of the Office of Mayor, adding that no mayor should be making a profit, but likewise the Council needs to ensure that no one is out of pocket, or deterred from standing for Mayor.

He proposed that the allowance should be increased by £700 per year.

Councillor Tony Beddard suggested that the increase should be on an inflationary basis.

A short debate took place regarding the most appropriate level of increase.

It was proposed by Councillor Arun Chandran, and seconded by Councillor Andy Hill and;

RESOLVED – that it be recommended that:

- i) A one-off increase of £700 to be added to the Mayor's Allowance for the financial year 2027/28.

CHAIRMAN