

POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

WEDNESDAY 21ST OCTOBER 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 21st October 2026 at 7.00pm.

PRESENT

Councillor Lindsey Aston (Chairman)

Tony Armstrong, Martin Ashcroft, Jaci Beddard, Tony Beddard, Richard Burchell, Arun M. Chandran, Chris Clement, Neil Collinson, Luke Ellis, Phil Hawkins, Andy Hill, Sharon Hutchinson, Sandra Kirby, Vijaya Kotur, Jackie McFadden Lewis, Carl Robinson, Kyle Robinson, Brian Sowerby, Michael Stead, Tracey Williams, Anne Woodward and John Woodward

OFFICERS

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

IN ATTENDANCE

One member of the public was in attendance.

47. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors: Tunde Akinsanya, George Gray, Richard Hutchinson, John Moore and Brian Sowerby.

48. MEMBERS DISPENSATIONS

No dispensation requests had been received.

49. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Neil Collinson declared a non-pecuniary interest in Agenda Item 8 – Grant and Donation Requests, as the Great Aycliffe Cancer Support Group is his nominated charity for his term of office.

Councillor Rich Burchell declared a non-pecuniary interest in Agenda Item 8 – Grant and Donation Requests as he is a member of a working group associated with the Great Aycliffe Cancer Support Group and donates to the charity.

Councillor Phill Hawkins declared a pecuniary interest in Agenda Item 8 – Grant and Donation Requests, in relation to the receipt of the post grant questionnaire, as a Trustee of Lifeline Community Action.

50. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

There were no public questions.

51. POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE MINUTES

It was proposed by Councillor Michael Stead, and seconded by Councillor Kyle Robinson and;

RESOLVED - that the minutes of the meeting of the Policy and Resources Committee, held on the 9th September 2026, be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

52. MEMBER APPEAL PANEL NOTES

It was proposed by Councillor Chris Clement, and seconded by Councillor Luke Ellis and;

RESOLVED - that the notes and recommendations of the meeting of the Member Appeals Panel Meeting held on the 28th September 2026, be agreed, confirmed as a correct record, and signed by the Chairman.

53. ASSET MANAGEMENT SUB COMMITTEE MINUTES

It was proposed by Councillor Chris Clement, and seconded by Councillor Rich Burchell and;

RESOLVED - that the minutes of the meeting of the Asset Management Sub Committee, held on the 7th October 2026, be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman, and its recommendations and decisions be agreed.

54. ACCOUNT CONTROL SHEETS

Account Control Sheets for the 27th August, 10th September, 25th September and 8th October 2026, and the General Bank Accounts for August and September 2026 were submitted for approval.

Councillor Carl Robinson asked why there was an increase in the water rates on the golf course.

The Finance Manager advised that it was due to a broken water meter which was replaced and resulted in a higher charge between April to August when the readings could be confirmed.

RESOLVED – that it be recommended that the Account Control Sheets for the 27th August, 10th September, 25th September and 8th October 2026 and the General Bank Accounts for August and September 2026, be received.

55. 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 £3,000 in the Community Events Grants Budget.

The following grant and donation requests were considered:

a) **Great Aycliffe Cancer Support Group**

A grant application form was received from the Great Aycliffe Cancer Support Group, requesting a grant of £897.50 from the Council towards the costs of strengthening the welfare support they provide to cancer patients and their families within Great Aycliffe community, via the purchase of a printer and tablet computer, as well as monies to fund a thank you meal for volunteers.

Councillor Arun Chandran expressed concern about funding the volunteer meal and proposed that the Council provides a grant towards the costs of the printer and tablet computer only. This was seconded by Councillor Vijaya Kotur.

Councillor Tony Beddard proposed an amendment that the full amount be given and the amount requested towards a meal for volunteers be requested to be allocated to direct welfare support instead, and that the charity feedback on how this was spent. This was seconded by Councillor Jaci Beddard seconded the amendment.

A lengthy discussion took place regarding the merits of the motion and amendment.

Councillor Jaci Beddard suggested that a post-grant questionnaire be requested to substantiate the use of the grant.

Councillor Tony Beddard spoke in support of his amendment highlighting the difficult circumstances that charities are facing.

A vote was taken on the amendment with the following outcome:

For: 8 Against: 11

The amendment failed.

A vote was carried out on the original proposal and was agreed by a majority decision.

RESOLVED – that it be recommended that;

- i) A grant for £560 be provided from the Grants and Donations Budget to the Great Aycliffe Cancer Support Group towards the purchase of a tablet, printer and ink cartridges.

b) Rotary Club of Great Aycliffe

A letter was received from the Rotary Club of Great Aycliffe requesting a donation of £500 to support the cost of their annual Model Railway Exhibition in March 2027. The donation is to assist with the costs of room hire and accommodation for some of the exhibitors.

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

RESOLVED – that it be recommended that;

- i) A donation of £500 be provided from the Grants and Donations Budget to the Rotary Club of Great Aycliffe to assist with the costs of room hire and accommodation for some of the exhibitors at the 2027 Model Railway Exhibition.

c) Post Grant Questionnaire – Lifeline Community Action

A post grant questionnaire was received from Lifeline Community Action relating to the £2,500 grant awarded in April 2025, to fund the purchase of fridges and freezers for their Community Pantry initiative. It was noted that the delivery of this initiative and the pantry opening to the public was delayed which meant the late receipt of this information. The pantry opened in September 2026 is now fully operational and estimated to support 1,800 local people per year.

RESOLVED – that it be recommended that;

- i) The post grant questionnaire from Lifeline Community Action relating to the grant awarded in April 2025 be received.

56. 2026/27 REVENUE AND CAPITAL BUDGET POSITION TO 30TH SEPTEMBER 2026 AND PROJECTION OF EXPECTED OUTTURN

The Finance Manager submitted a report and corresponding appendices, to present the six-month financial position on the Council's approved 2026/27 Revenue and Capital Budget up to 30th September 2026, along with a forecast of the expected year-end outturn position.

It was proposed by Councillor Arun Chandran and seconded by Councillor Neil Collinson, and;

RESOLVED – that it be recommended that:

- i) The six-month financial position on the Council's 2026/27 Revenue and Capital Budgets and the early projection of year-end expected outturn be received;
- ii) A further Revenue and Capital Budget Position Report be received at the January Policy and Resources Committee, detailing the financial position as at 31st December 2026 and an updated projection of expected outturn.

57. 2027/28 DRAFT POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE REVENUE AND CAPITAL BUDGET

The Finance Manager submitted a report and corresponding appendices setting out the draft 2027/28 Revenue and Capital Budgets for the Policy and Resources Committee for approval.

It was proposed by Councillor Martin Ashcroft, and seconded by Councillor Luke Ellis, and;

RESOLVED – that it be recommended that:

- i) The report be received;
- ii) The draft 2027/28 Policy and Resources Committee Revenue Budget be agreed.
- iii) The draft 2027/28 Policy and Resources Committee Capital Programme Budget be agreed and the projects be categorised as per the officer's recommendations outlined within the report.

58. OVERALL DRAFT 2027/28 REVENUE AND CAPITAL BUDGETS

The Finance Manager submitted a report and corresponding appendices setting out the Council's overall draft 2027/28 Revenue Budget and Capital Programme for approval.

The report also asked Members' to provisionally agree the proposed level of Precept and Town Council Tax for next year and note the likely movement on the Council's balances and reserves.

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

RESOLVED – that it be recommended that:

- i) The report be received.
- ii) The draft 2027/28 Precept of £2,251,012 be agreed.
- iii) The proposed increase of 2.5% in the Town Council be agreed.
- iv) The draft 2027/28 Capital Programme Budget of £425,300 be agreed as per the report and officers' recommendations regarding the categorisation of the programme.
- v) The possible fall in the Council's Balances and Reserves to as low as £1 million by the end of 2027/28 be noted.
- vi) Any comments, feedback and proposed amendments to the 2027/28 draft Revenue and Capital Budgets be submitted to the Chairman or Vice Chairmen of the Committee and officers as soon as possible.

59. ADDITIONAL CAPITAL BUDGET APPROVAL REFERRED FROM THE RECREATION COMMITTEE

Members were asked to approve an additional capital budget amount of £5,000 for the purchase of a framework and harness system for a Council works vehicle, for use during the Santa Tours event, as agreed at the Recreation Committee meeting on 14th October 2026.

It was proposed by Councillor Martin Ashcroft and seconded by Councillor Luke Ellis, and:

RESOLVED – that it be recommended that:

- i) The additional capital budget approval of £5,000 be agreed.

60. PATERNITY LEAVE AND PAY POLICY UPDATE

The Corporate and Policy Officer submitted the updated Paternity Leave and Pay Policy for members' consideration and approval.

Members were requested to agree changes to the policy to reflect new employment legislation. The main changes reflected eligibility rights from the first day of employment, plus a new section to cover neonatal care leave and pay.

It was proposed by Councillor Luke Ellis, and seconded by Councillor Martin Ashcroft and;

RESOLVED – that it be recommended that:

- i) The report be received.
- ii) The amendments to the Paternity Leave and Pay Policy be agreed.

61. NOTICE OF MOTION - BUY LOCAL PROCUREMENT POLICY

Councillor Sharon Hutchinson submitted the following motion for members discussion:

"It is proposed that the Council considers making it an explicit part of the Council's Standing Orders for Contracts and Procurement to give consideration to whether the Council is able to buy locally, i.e. from businesses in Newton Aycliffe.

It is noted that the Council does not currently have a formal procurement policy on buying local, but that this is identified as a future aspiration within the Carbon Reduction Action Plan.

Officers already give consideration to the location of suppliers and contractors in a number of procurement decisions, as reflected in various committee reports, particularly those relating to capital projects.

Standing Order 15 (Award Criteria and Evaluation of Tenders and Contracts) permits the Council to take non-financial sub-criteria into account, and this could accommodate consideration of local suppliers alongside the existing sub-criteria.

It is proposed that the Council's Finance Manager is tasked with seeking advice from Durham County Council Procurement Department, under the Procurement Service Level Agreement, with a view to formally considering and, where practicable, recording whether a local supplier is able to meet the Council's requirements at a competitive price and to the required standard of value for money, before a procurement decision is finalised, and incorporating this into the next annual review of the Standing Orders for Contracts and Procurement.

For clarity it is not intended that this policy would require the Council to purchase locally in every instance but would ensure that local sourcing has been actively considered and that this consideration can be evidenced in the Council's procurement records and committee reporting”.

Councillor Hutchinson outlined the rationale for the motion which was about supporting local businesses and strengthening the local economy.

Councillor Lindsey Aston proposed an amendment to the motion, following discussions with officers as to the practicalities of the motion and the need to adopt of proportionate approach and not create additional layers of complexity to the Council's procurement processes.

The following amendment was proposed as an addition to Standing Order 8.1 (Procedure Prior to Procurement) in the Standing Orders for Contracts and Procurement:

"Consider whether suitable goods, services or works can feasibly be sourced from businesses based in and around Newton Aycliffe, with the aim of buying locally where practicable, provided value for money and all applicable procurement requirements are met, and record evidence that local sourcing has been considered."

The amendment was seconded by Councillor Martin Ashcroft.

Councillor Luke Ellis spoke in support of the original motion advising that the Council should explore how it can support local businesses while complying with procurement law and safeguarding public money. He added that the Procurement Act 2023 and the Local Government Order 2026 provide greater flexibility for certain lower-value contracts, but they do not permit contracts simply to be handed to local firms. He suggested the aim should be to ensure local suppliers know about the opportunities and can compete through accessible processes, assessed fairly on value for money, quality, reliability and wider public benefit. He further suggested that officers should seek specialist advice while recognising that this Council remains responsible for its own decisions. He added that members should receive a practical, transparent and legally robust process for considering local suppliers and recording procurement decisions and to turn the principle of buying locally into meaningful action while remaining firmly within the law.

Councillor Tony Beddard asked for officer feedback from the Town Clerk regarding the motion and amendment.

The Town Clerk welcomed the opportunity to formally recognise the Council's commitment to buying locally, provided it remains non-prescriptive and does not create additional administrative burdens.

He advised that Durham County Council Procurement had advised officers that any buy local policy would need to be drafted carefully to comply with procurement legislation and had offered further guidance.

The Town Clerk felt that the proposed amendment strikes a good balance by formally recording the principle and commitment to considering buying local in Standing Orders but without imposing rigid requirements.

He further advised that there was scope for officers to seek further advice from Durham County Council Procurement on making procurement opportunities clearer and more accessible to local businesses.

Councillor Tony Armstrong asked for clarification of what is defined as local.

A discussion took place and it was agreed that initially it should be Newton Aycliffe, then extending to the wider area of County Durham.

Councillor Arun Chandran added that he did not agree with changing Standing Orders advising that the Council's Standing Orders are based on best practice guidance from the National Association of Local Councils. He agreed with the amendment as it was not too prescriptive and established a flexible principle of buying locally without imposing unnecessary rules. He noted that officers already source locally where practical and remain subject to the full requirements of the Standing Orders for purchases over £5,000. He advised that he opposed broader changes to the Standing Orders, arguing that the existing system works well.

Councillor Sharon Hutchinson agreed to withdraw the original motion.

A vote was taken on the amendment and agreed by a majority decision.

RESOLVED – that it be recommended that:

- i) The following requirement be incorporated into the Standing Orders for Contracts and Procurement; Standing Order 8.1, Procedure Prior to Procurement:

"Consider whether suitable goods, services or works can feasibly be sourced from businesses based in and around Newton Aycliffe, with the aim of buying locally where practicable, provided value for money and all applicable procurement requirements are met, and record evidence that local sourcing has been considered."

CHAIRMAN