



City of Durham Parish Council

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Date of summons: 17th July 2025

SUMMONS

To all Members of the City of Durham Parish Council: Councillors V Ashfield, G Bignardi, L Brown, T Cleaver, R Cornwell, D Freeman, R Handy, G Holland, E Hopgood, C Lattin, P Layton, F Robinson, E Scott, S Walker and L Wilson.

You are hereby summoned to attend the **Meeting of the Council** to be held in the **Main Hall of the Merryoaks Community Hall, Park House Rd, Durham DH1 3QF** on **Wednesday 23rd July 2025 at 7:00pm** for the purpose of transacting the following Agenda business as shown.

Members of the public and press are also cordially invited to attend. Members of the public may address Council, Committee or Sub-Committee meetings for up to three minutes, with the agreement of the Chair of the meeting, provided that the statement is related to an item on the agenda. The speaker should approach the Clerk before the meeting commences to request to speak during the meeting.

Members are reminded that the Council has a general duty to consider the following matters in the exercise of any of its functions: Equal Opportunities, Health & Safety, Civility and Respect and Human Rights plus Social, Economic and Environmental matters.

Yours faithfully,

A. Shanley

Mr Adam Shanley
Clerk to the City of Durham Parish Council

AGENDA

- 1. TO RECEIVE AND APPROVE (OR NOT) APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE FROM TODAY'S MEETING**
- 2. TO RECEIVE ANY DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST FROM MEMBERS**
- 3. APPROVAL OF THE DRAFT MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE COUNCIL HELD ON 25TH JUNE 2025**
- 4. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**
- 5. COMMITTEE UPDATES**

- **Planning and Licensing Committee minutes from the meetings held on 22nd April and 27th June 2025**

Copies of all approved minutes from these meetings can be found here:

<https://cityofdurham-pc.gov.uk/meetings/planning-and-licensing-committee/>

- Proposed responses to the Government consultation on reforming Local Authority planning committees
- Report on licensed *sui generis* HMOs within the City of Durham parish area

- **Environment Committee minutes from the meetings held on 8th April and 24th June 2025**

Copies of all approved minutes from these meetings can be found here:

<http://cityofdurham-pc.gov.uk/agendas-minutes/environment-committee/>

- Proposals to support places of safety and residents during an emergency as part of the Parish Council's Community Emergency Plan.
- Update on the proposal to introduce 3 x new green-roofed bus shelters within the Elvet and Gilesgate parish ward.
- Renewing the Service Level Agreement with Durham County Council for an enhanced Neighbourhood Warden service

- **Business Committee minutes from the meeting held on 18th March 2025**

Copies of all approved minutes from these meetings can be found here:

<http://cityofdurham-pc.gov.uk/agendas-minutes/business-committee/>

- 6. CHAIR'S UPDATE**

The Chair will provide a verbal update on matters arising since the Full Parish Council meeting on 25th June 2025.

- 7. ANNUAL REVIEW OF PARISH COUNCIL STANDING ORDERS, FINANCIAL REGULATIONS, COMMITTEE TERMS OF REFERENCE AND COUNCIL POLICIES**

- To include the formal adoption of a Gifts and Hospitality Policy

- 8. REPORT ON GRANT FUNDING IMPACT FROM 2024-25**

- 9. MOTION BY COUNCILLORS R CORNWELL AND V ASHFIELD ON THE CLIMATE EMERGENCY**
- 10. RECRUITMENT OF PARISH COUNCIL REPRESENTATIVES TO DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL'S STANDARDS COMMITTEE**
- 11. TO APPOINT A CITY OF DURHAM PARISH COUNCIL REPRESENTATIVE ON TO THE CDALC EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**
- 12. CONSULTATION ON PROPOSED CHANGES TO COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT**
- 13. REPORTS FROM PARISH COUNCIL REPRESENTATIVES ON EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS**
 - Report by Councillor E Scott on the most recent meeting of Durham University's Community Engagement Task Force's economic sub-group
 - Report by Councillor S Walker on the most recent meeting of the County Durham Association of Local Councils (CDALC) meeting.

City of Durham Parish Council

Minutes of the meeting of the City of Durham Parish Council held on Wednesday 25th June 2025 at 7:00pm in the Main Hall of the Merryoaks Community Hall, Park House Rd, Durham DH1 3QF.

Present: Councillors V Ashfield, G Bignardi, L Brown, T Cleaver, R Cornwell, D Freeman, R Handy, G Holland, E Hopgood, C Lattin, P Layton, F Robinson, E Scott, S Walker and L Wilson.

Also present: Parish Clerk Adam Shanley, 8 members of the public and Mr Mark Anslow and Jacqui Toase (Durham County Council).

1. TO RECEIVE AND APPROVE (OR NOT) APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE FROM TODAY'S MEETING

Apologies were received and **accepted** from Councillor F Robinson.

2. TO RECEIVE ANY DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST FROM MEMBERS

Councillor E Scott declared an interest in the grant application from Artickoke and took no part in the discussion or vote on this application.

Councillor S Walker declared an interest in the grant application from Durham Woodland Cemetery and took no part in the discussion or vote on this application.

Councillor C Lattin declared an interest in the grant application from the Friends of Pelaw Woods and took no part in the discussion or vote on this application.

Councillor P Layton declared an interest in the grant applications from Alington House and St. Oswald's Institute and took no part in the discussion or vote on these applications.

Councillor L Brown declared an interest in the grant application from Durham Woodland Cemetery and took no part in the discussion or vote on this application.

3. APPROVAL OF THE DRAFT MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL MEETING OF THE COUNCIL HELD ON 28TH MAY 2025

The minutes of the annual meeting of the Council held on 28th May 2025 were unanimously **agreed** as a true and accurate record of proceedings.

4. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Mr Rupert Benjamin provided the meeting with an update on the waste situation at Homer Terrace and advised that he continues to take action as and where he can and took the opportunity to welcome some progress with students managing their waste in this area. Mr Benjamin advised that, with the students soon to move out, he would monitor the situation in this area and would look to report back to the Council in 3 months' time. The Chair thanked Mr Benjamin for his ongoing efforts and for this update.

Ms Debbie Hills took the opportunity to thank the Parish Council at the point of the meeting where the grant application for the Friends of Pelaw Woods was approved.

5. COMMITTEE UPDATES

• Finance Committee

Councillor S Walker presented the minutes from the Finance Committee meeting held on 14th February 2025. There being no queries from Members, Councillor S Walker moved on to Committee reports.

Report on financial position of the Parish Council at the start of Financial Year 2025-26

Councillor S Walker presented a report outlining a carried forward balance of £97,439 from 2024-25, supplemented by a VAT rebate of £7,654, totalling £105,093 in funds entering FY 2025-26. Members noted that £36,330 was ringfenced for specific projects and that £18,763 required reallocation or movement to reserves.

Councillor S Walker advised that the Parish Council's Finance Committee met on 20th June 2025 and Committee Members had **agreed** to recommend the reallocation of funding as follows, taking account of underspent budgets:

- £3,000 was moved from the Improving the River Wear budget, leaving approx. £4,300 remaining in this budget for FY25-26.
- £5,000 was moved from the (fundraising support) staffing budget in relation, leaving £8,750 in this budget for FY25-26 (of which up to £3,750 is already earmarked).
- £13,000 was added to the Council's events budget (taking account of upcoming Autumn events as well as the Christmas light switch on).
- £2,000 was added to the administration of the Council budget.
- £7,181 was added to the small grants budget, taking into account the demand for grants this financial year.
- £3,000 was added to the business events grant fund this financial year.
- £2,000 was added to the contingencies budget.

Councillor V Ashfield welcomed that the Parish Council is currently in a healthy financial situation and requested that £2,000 be reallocated to the Environment Committee's planting budget for FY 2025-26. Members agreed that this requested funding could be drawn from contingency funding during the year should this be required.

Members unanimously **agreed** to the recommended reallocation of budgets as set out in the report provided.

Report on grant applications from local community and voluntary organisations for Financial Year 2025-26

The Clerk reminded Members that, at the January meeting of the Full Parish Council 2023, Councillors formally agreed to allocate £15,000 of the budget for 2025/26 towards grants for local and voluntary organisations.

The Clerk advised that the grant funding window opened on 1st April 2025 and this has been advertised on social media, the Parish Council's website, through the local press and through direct e-mails.

The Clerk reminded Members that organisations were asked to apply by mid-June 2025 in order that the Finance Committee may consider this at its meeting in June and make a recommendation to Full Council in June. Once approved, all grant payments will be made at the end of June 2025.

The Clerk advised that Members have been provided with the full details of all applications. Members considered the merits of each application and unanimously **agreed** to allocate funding as follows, taking into account the additional allocation of grant funding agreed in the earlier item on the Agenda:

Organisation	Project	Amount requested	Amount agreed by Full Council
Alington House	To re-establish a garden group within Alington House, growing fruits and vegetables which the volunteers can take home and encouraging wellbeing by working in the outdoors. Since Covid we had a volunteer project from Ingeus repair access and build a seating area which our users enjoy but many have expressed an interest in gardening again and we are looking for funds towards extra accessible planters (we had raised beds built but these are down steps that are uneven) and plants	£750	£750

Artichoke	A grant from City of Durham Parish Council would enable us to engage Parishioners in a curator-led tour of the festival before it opens to the public, with opportunities to meet the creative team, learn about the artworks and celebrate Lumiere as a community. We will target communities who are underserved by creative activities and who face barriers to taking part, including low-income families. We have strong links with local schools and community groups, and we would work with City of Durham Parish Council to identify priority communities to engage in the tour. We will also work with the Parish Council to promote volunteering opportunities to Parishioners during the festival. Lumiere volunteers guide audiences and provide information about the artworks, meeting new people, developing their confidence and gaining a sense of community pride and belonging.	£1,000	£0
Durham Hospital Radio	The station has an item of equipment which urgently needs repairing at a cost of £1570. Also a contribution of £1430 against our annual running costs would be extremely beneficial.	£3,000	£1,570
Durham Scratch Choir	New printer to print all the music sheets for our choir	£250	£300

Durham Woodland Cemetery	Apart from a ring-fenced grant from Durham Crematorium Fund for 5 memorial benches for each of the glades in the cemetery our funds barely cover even our basic expenses (insurance etc). Our income prior to the covid pandemic came primarily from the hire of the lodge at the Woodland cemetery by families wishing to hold funeral services and memorials. Sadly the lodge has suffered severe storm damage to the roof, for the repair of which we have been quoted around £7000. We are intending to apply to Point North for a grant to help with this repair. We will then be able once again to hire out the lodge to bereaved families as mentioned. As a newly formed group of trustees we are also looking at various ways whereby we can raise regular funds including a possible nominal annual subscription from our membership. In the meantime, we would like to promote the Cemetery and provide information leaflets for funeral Directors and the general public. We are eager to attract volunteer working parties who would assist in the conservation of the area and keep it in good order. We would also like to improve the facilities offered by the lodge. Other than that, we depend upon donations and gift aid.	£500	£500
Friends of Pelaw Woods	We require materials - wood, drains, tools. To date this year we have purchased wood, a pond liner and new scythes. We also hire a contractor to cut the grass in autumn in specific locations. Over the last 4 years we have been spending donations generated by the former Chairman opening his private garden. These reserves are now spent. The current bank balance is £64. The proposed grant will fully fund us for the forthcoming 12 months.	£350	£350

Seven Stories	The Tiger Who Came to Tea touring exhibition from Seven Stories, The National Centre for Children's Books, delivers an unforgettable in-centre experience for children and their grown-ups — combining nostalgia, photo opportunities, and interactive fun. This will increase family footfall, dwell time, and social media buzz this summer. Supported by the Seven Stories unique story telling free to families throughout the day. We will also run book donations weekly whilst this exhibition is in Two Tales supporting books into communities.	£6,000	£2,700
St. Nicholas Community Forum	SNCF DELI COMMUNITY GARDEN PROJECT: SNCF commenced a community garden project January 2025 – the SNCF Deli Community Garden Project. Our aim is to provide a space where the local community can work together to grow chemical free produce throughout the year and share gardening skills and knowledge. The area is inclusive, child friendly and supports the environment and wildlife. By May 2025 we have 15 regular gardeners, mostly novices, but also wider community support from many other people within the local area who get involved when they can, help as needed with larger jobs, give donations of tools, plants and advice. We promote the project through local forums to encourage other residents to get involved and have linked with the University and students are welcome to join when they can. The community garden has already become something more than a communal space to grow produce. It is flourishing into a space of wellbeing, creativity, growing social connections and friendships. There are opportunities for everyone involved to share and learn gardening, woodwork, produce growing, environment, nature and wildlife skills and knowledge.	£2,964	£2,964

Together we have cleared the site and planted a large variety of vegetables and herbs, all are growing successfully. We plan to further develop the community garden; to maximise produce growing space and the potential for more members of the local community to be involved. We would like to apply for funding to purchase staging for the existing polytunnel in the garden (we are currently using makeshift shelves which limit the growing area), a greenhouse where we can grow more produce all year round and a small shed which will be custom made to be accessible and green, using reclaimed wood and a sedum roof. The shed will be used to safely store away tools under cover and resources that can be used by our community gardeners (seeds, gardening guides, etc). This will help us maximise use of the space we have.

We are requesting support for Stage Two of the garden development – polytunnel staging, a greenhouse (which includes greenhouse structure, installation, materials to prepare the base, internal staging, automatic window open system and gutter and water butt to utilise rainwater), a small green roof shed and seed trays/plant pots for planting.

The SNCF Deli Community Garden has Public Liability Insurance and comprehensive risk assessments for all activities. All necessary requirements are in place for student volunteering opportunities through Durham University volunteer platforms.

We are a new member of Social Farms & Gardens and look forward to working towards their vision: 'People and communities reaching their full potential through nature-based

	activities as a part of everyday life' and have joined the RHS Grow With It national programme to get year-round community growing support.		
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St Cuthbert's Hospice	Our gardens continue to be a focal point of the hospice and are enjoyed by our patients and visitors. 2025 is an extra special year because we have been chosen to be the recipient of the "Hospice Garden" which will be showcased at the Chelsea Flower Show in May. Afterwards it will be rebuilt in our grounds for the benefit and enjoyment of everyone who visits us. The additional garden will improve our grounds and continue to provide sensory stimulation and therapeutic benefits not only to our patients but to everyone who visits. The grant would be used to improve the site/garden and complete essential repairs which will contribute to our grounds being a welcoming and peaceful place for all who visit them. We anticipate at least 1000 would visit our gardens which includes patients, families, carers, health care professional, staff, volunteers and the public.	£4,250	£0
St Margaret's Centre	To purchase IT equipment (3 x laptops) to help us deliver activities, training and support.	£1,047	£1,047
St Oswald's Institute	Renovation of kitchen to include: isolation of gas supply; creation of serving hatch with food warmer below; provision of electric refreshment preparation and food reheating facilities, in line with C. of E. 2030 net zero target, for e.g. providing soup and Warm Space, and other community functions.	£5,000	£12,000
Total:			£22,181

6. CHAIR'S UPDATE

The Chair provided a verbal update on matters arising since the Full Parish Council meeting on 28th May 2025 as follows:

Firstly, a big thank you to everyone who attended the recent councillor training sessions organised by our Clerk. If you missed any, do not worry – more sessions will follow. Please do take a moment to read the planning training document, and I am pleased to be working with the Clerk on a new licensing guide – more on that soon.

Huge thanks to Cllr Holland for representing us so effectively at the Central & East Area County Planning Committee. The proposed conversion of Hallgarth Care Home into another PBSA was unanimously refused – a great result. We will keep a close eye on what happens next.

I am also pleased to hear that Councillors Lattin and Ashfield's landlord appeal scheme is moving forward and that the Environment Committee will be funding extra waste collections as a result. This is great news for our residents, especially as we aim to avoid a repeat of the waste issues seen in 2021.

A quick reminder: please use your official .gov email accounts for council business, and always submit apologies in advance if you cannot attend meetings – nominating a substitute helps keep us quorate and effective.

You will have seen the announcement about the Elvet Park consultation taking place next Tuesday. This site has been neglected for too long, so I hope residents and stakeholders will share their views. It is frustrating the old toilet block is still to be marketed, despite years of pressure.

On a more celebratory note, I am delighted that HM The King has appointed Mrs Sue Snowdon as a Dame Commander of the Royal Victorian Order for her outstanding service as Lord-Lieutenant of County Durham. Congratulations also to all the County Durham recipients including Patricia Barker from our Parish – we are proud of you all!

Finally, heartfelt thanks to Cllr Liz Brown for her fantastic service as Mayor over the past year. Liz, you did us proud. We warmly welcome Gary to the role and wish him every success.

7. PROPOSAL TO ESTABLISH AN EDITORIAL WORKING GROUP TO SUPPORT THE PRODUCTION OF THE PARISH COUNCIL'S NEWSLETTER

The Chair reported that, in April 2025, the Parish Council adopted its External Communications Strategy, which commits the Council to producing a quarterly newsletter in addition to its existing monthly Neighbourhood Warden report and the annual Chair's report. The strategy identifies the newsletter as a key vehicle for informing residents, partners, and stakeholders about the Parish Council's activities, promoting local democracy, and strengthening community engagement.

The Chair highlighted that the newsletter serves an important role in raising awareness of the Parish Council's work, enhancing transparency, and fostering a more informed and active community. While residents can subscribe online to receive digital copies, at least one edition each year—specifically the October issue—will be printed and delivered to households in the Parish area. The cost of printing and delivering each edition prohibits all four issues from being circulated in hard copy, but efforts will continue to ensure wide access to the publication.

To support this work, the Chair proposed that an Editorial Working Group be established with the following aims:

- To identify and gather content for the newsletter;

- To ensure the tone, balance, and messaging align with the Council's External Communications Strategy;
- To review draft editions prior to publication;
- To promote the newsletter to residents and stakeholders;
- To consider and incorporate resident feedback;
- To operate in a fair, inclusive and non-partisan manner.

The Working Group was agreed to comprise no fewer than three elected Members (with representation from all political groups) and the Parish Clerk, who will serve in an advisory and editorial capacity. It will meet at least quarterly, prior to each newsletter's publication.

Members unanimously **agreed** to the establishment of the Editorial Working Group, adopted the Terms of Reference as set out, and appointed Councillors V Ashfield, R Cornwell, C Lattin, G Holland, L Brown and (as a reserve Member) R Handy as Members of the Group, alongside the Clerk.

8. PLANNING EVENTS TO COMMEMORATE THE 80TH ANNIVERSARY OF VICTORY OVER JAPAN DAY

The Clerk reminded Members that the 80th anniversary of Victory over Japan (VJ) Day, which marks the official end of the Second World War on 15 August 1945, represents an important national and local moment of remembrance and tribute.

The Clerk also reminded Members that the Parish Council has previously taken a lead in organising commemorative events, including for VE Day and D-Day anniversaries.

The Clerk outlined the significant historical importance of VJ Day, noting the diversity of the Commonwealth's Fourteenth Army, the scale of conflict across the Asia-Pacific, and the enduring impact of the sacrifices made by both Armed Forces personnel and civilians.

The Clerk confirmed that the Council had agreed a provisional budget of £1,000 for VJ Day commemorations. Following on from this, a full programme of events was proposed as follows:

- A commemorative service at Durham Cathedral on Friday 15 August 2025, with invitations extended to veterans, local dignitaries, schools, and residents.
- The Cathedral to be lit red in honour of the anniversary.
- A special exhibition of items from the DLI and archives to be hosted at The Story, coordinated in partnership with the Clerk.
- A public film screening of *Unbroken*—which tells the story of a WWII POW in Japan—to take place in the City during August.
- A civic reception in the Durham Room at County Hall, followed by the ceremonial lighting of the Durham City Beacon in the evening.

The Clerk also reported that the Durham City Freemen Charitable Trust has pledged £2,000 toward the reception and beacon lighting and will cover the cost of the beacon's operation. The Chair thanked the Trust for its generous support

and Members **agreed** to accept this kind offer as well as the offer of further funding towards beacon lighting events marking important national anniversaries, etc.

Members unanimously **approved** the full schedule of commemorative events and **agreed** to delegate all associated budgetary and logistical responsibilities to the Parish Clerk.

9. PROPOSAL TO PROVIDE FUNDING TO THE DURHAM CITY SAFETY HUB

The Chair highlighted that the Parish Council has played a central role in supporting the Durham City Safety Hub since its inception in February 2022, contributing £10,000 per year for each of the past three years. The Chair reminded Members that in agreeing its 2025/26 budget, the Council had again allocated £10,000 to the Hub, in recognition of its ongoing importance to community safety—particularly for women and vulnerable individuals in the night-time economy.

The Chair provided a detailed background to the Hub's establishment, which followed the award of Safer Streets and Safety of Women and Girls at Night (SWaN) funding. Though initial plans to operate the hub from a city centre retail unit proved impractical, a successful partnership with St. Nicholas Church enabled the project to proceed from that location.

The Chair reported that, since its launch, the Safety Hub has proven to be a valuable and, in some cases, life-saving facility, operating on Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday nights from 9pm to 3am. It supports individuals experiencing a wide range of vulnerabilities, including intoxication, mental health crises, and general welfare concerns. Notably, incident data shows that female-related interventions consistently outnumber those involving males, with no recorded instances of spiking or sexual offences.

Mr Mark Anslow advised that, due to ongoing financial constraints, the Hub has now ceased operations on Wednesday nights. Mark also advised that the revised annual running cost for maintaining operations on Friday and Saturday nights is approximately £69,000.

Durham County Council (DCC) and the Police and Crime Commissioner's Office have already pledged continued funding for 2025/26, and Mark advised that discussions with Durham BID and Durham University around future funding are ongoing.

Members expressed their desire to see the Wednesday operation of the City Safety Hub relaunched through further financial support from Durham University. The Chair also reaffirmed the Parish Council's wider ambition to see the night-time economy contribute to long-term funding of this hub.

Members unanimously reaffirmed their commitment to the project and **agreed** to provide £10,000 to support the Safety Hub's operation in the 2025/26 financial year.

10. REQUEST TO SUPPORT THE MAYOR'S CHARITY APPEAL

The Clerk advised that the Parish Council has received correspondence from the Mayor's PA at Durham County Council on behalf of the newly elected Mayor of Durham City Councillor Gary Hutchinson, asking if the Parish Council would consider supporting the mayor's charity appeal this year.

Following his election as Mayor in May 2025, Councillor Gary Hutchinson announced that he would be supporting St. Cuthbert's Hospice in the City of Durham parish area; a charity close to his heart.

The Clerk advised that no specific amount has been requested in the letter from the Mayor's PA and any offers of a donation will be gratefully received and acknowledged and any donations will be provided to the charity.

The Clerk reminded Members that the Parish Council has previously supported the past Mayors' appeals with a donation of £500.

Members unanimously **agreed** to support the Mayor's Charity Appeal for St. Cuthbert's Hospice with a total donation to the appeal of £500.

11. TERMS OF REFERENCE AND APPOINTMENT OF THE PARISH COUNCIL'S CLIMATE LEAD

The Clerk reminded Members that, in February 2022, the Parish Council had agreed to establish the role of a Climate Lead for the City of Durham Parish Council. To support with the understanding of the responsibilities of this role, a set of Terms of Reference for this position were also established.

The Clerk reminded Members that this role and these Terms of Reference must be reviewed on an annual basis at the Council's annual meeting.

Members unanimously **agreed** the Terms of Reference for the Climate Lead role and also unanimously **agreed** to appoint Councillor V Ashfield as its Climate Lead for the ensuing year of the Parish Council; as proposed by Councillor C Lattin and seconded by Councillor R Cornwell.

12. TERMS OF REFERENCE AND APPOINTMENT OF THE PARISH COUNCIL'S ARMED FORCES CHAMPION

The Clerk reminded Members that, in June 2023, the Parish Council had agreed to establish the role of an Armed Forces Champion for the City of Durham Parish Council. The Clerk advised that this role was primarily a ceremonial role where the postholder may represent the Parish Council at such events as the Remembrance Day parade and all other events with a main focus on the past and present contributions of the armed services. This role involves working with the Clerk and partners on the organisation of these important events.

The Clerk reminded Members that this role and the Terms of Reference associated with this role must be reviewed on an annual basis.

Members unanimously **agreed** the Terms of Reference for the Armed Forces Champion role and also unanimously **agreed** to appoint Councillor E Scott as its Armed Forces Champion for the ensuing year of the Parish Council; as proposed by Councillor D Freeman and seconded by Councillor L Brown.

Due to the confidential nature of the following items, in accordance with Section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and the public were excluded from the meeting for the following item of business on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in 3 paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the LGA 1972 Act and section 1(2) of the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960. At this point in time the press and the public were asked to leave the room.

13. MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING RELATING TO THE DURHAM CITY BEACON

Members considered the existing Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the County Council, Durham City Freeman and the City of Durham Parish Council and **agreed** that this ought to be reviewed at the earlier opportunity.

Members also **agreed** to delegate full responsibility of this task to the Clerk and the newly appointed Armed Forces Champion for the City of Durham Councillor E Scott.

There being no further business, the Chair thanked everyone for their attendance and contributions and closed the meeting.

Signed,

**Chair of the City of Durham Parish Council
(23rd July 2025)**

ITEM 5: PROPOSED RESPONSES TO THE GOVERNMENT CONSULTATION ON REFORMING LOCAL AUTHORITY PLANNING COMMITTEES

In May 2025, the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities launched a technical consultation on the reform of planning committees in England. This follows the introduction of the Planning and Infrastructure Bill to Parliament in March 2025, which proposes significant changes to the operation of local planning authorities. The consultation focuses specifically on how regulations might be drafted to deliver three core reforms to planning committee procedures. These are: the introduction of a national scheme of delegation for planning decisions; controls on the size and composition of planning committees; and the implementation of mandatory training requirements for elected members involved in planning decision-making.

The central aim of the proposed reforms is stated as being to improve the speed, consistency, and quality of decision-making in the planning system, particularly for small and routine applications. The government has expressed concern that current committee processes are overly variable, inefficient, and prone to politicisation. As such, the reforms are intended to streamline the planning process while ensuring that councillors are properly trained and that their involvement is focused on matters of greater local or strategic significance. The proposals have prompted debate within the local government sector, with some welcoming the prospect of greater efficiency, and others cautioning against the potential erosion of local democratic oversight and community engagement.

The consultation is open until 23rd July 2025, and seeks views from local authorities, parish councils, developers, planning professionals and the wider public. The outcome will inform the development of secondary legislation under the forthcoming Planning and Infrastructure Act, once that legislation is enacted.

A small working group of Members from the Parish Council's Planning and Licensing Committee met to go over this consultation and the following responses have been proposed:

Question 1: Do you agree with the principle of having a two-tier structure for the national scheme of delegation?

No, the two-tier national scheme of delegation being proposed is a severe erosion of the local democratic basis of the development management process and disenfranchises both locally elected Councillors and, by virtue of the way Durham County Council's constitution allows this, local Parish Councils; all of whom have a duty to respond and reflect local concerns about a development proposal.

The Government has made it clear that it wants to speed up the delivery of development, both residential and commercial and has identified the planning decision-making process as the major impediment to achieving development. This is entirely inappropriate and trying to impose a one-size fits-all nationwide scheme

of delegation on Local Planning Authority (LPA) planning committees is aiming at the wrong target.

Given that LPAs are already delegating over 90% of decisions to their planning officers, the imposition of a nationwide scheme of delegation is not only unwarranted but also unnecessary. The Government already has the tools and processes it needs to sanction any LPAs that are not deciding planning applications in a timely manner, or whose planning decisions are not of high quality, or both. No further Government interventions are needed.

In the first section of this consultation, it is repeatedly stated that the intent is to ensure that planning committees can focus on 'applications where local democratic oversight is required' (paras 3, 4, 14 et al) and that 'we need to ensure that there remains an opportunity for locally important schemes to have appropriate democratic oversight' (para 17). But a mandatory nationwide scheme of delegation as proposed in this consultation runs completely contrary to that stated intent, in that it would remove the ability for democratically-elected local Councillors to apply their knowledge and experience of local context and local concerns.

It is imperative that LPA planning committees continue to have the ability to exercise local discretion in all cases when deciding which cases to determine in committee.

There can be many variables involved in even very small development proposals, based on unique local context and constraints, sometimes in conjunction with the cumulative impact of other pending 6 local changes. To maintain trust and confidence in planning decisions, it is imperative that locally elected Councillors sitting on LPA planning committees have the opportunity to consider and determine locally significant development proposals regardless of the size or type of those proposals.

It is equally imperative that local people continue to have the opportunity not only to make written representations on planning applications in their community, but also that they retain the opportunity to attend LPA planning committees and voice their concerns.

The Government's proposed changes in this consultation amount to a severe erosion of local democracy by reducing the opportunity for input from democratically-elected local Councillors and from local people, in decisions that have significant and often permanent impact on their communities and on their quality of life.

By concentrating on introducing a national scheme of delegation the government is severely jeopardising a basic characteristic of the statutory development management process which provides a clear and vital link between decision-making and local democratic participation. This is a simplistic solution to a complex

situation which debases considerably a crucial element of the planning process and is likely to have a minimal effect on timescale for decision-making.

Question 2: Do you agree the following application types should fall within Tier A?

- applications for planning permission for:
- Householder development
- Minor commercial development
- Minor residential development
- applications for reserved matter approvals
- applications for non-material amendments to planning permissions
- applications for the approval of conditions including Schedule 5 mineral planning conditions
- applications for approval of the BNG Plan
- applications for approval of prior approval (for permitted development rights)
- applications for lawful development certificates
- applications for a Certificate of Appropriate Alternative Development

No, local context is crucially important in local planning decisions, and therefore there should be no mandatory Tier A. For example, a proposed 'minor residential development' of nine dwellings may be of huge local significance in an area of only a dozen existing dwellings. Or for another example, applications for reserved matters approvals may be highly complex and locally contentious in a proposed development of thousands of new homes and/or large amounts of commercial space situated next to a locally important landscape or heritage site. All too often we see reserved matters applications being used as a mechanism by developers to avoid full scrutiny of an application and the outline-reserved matters application process causes too much confusion for consultees and local stakeholders.

For this reason, it is essential that LPA planning committees continue to have the ability to exercise local discretion in deciding which cases to consider and decide in committee, and which cases to delegate to Council planning officers.

Question 3: Do you think, further to the working paper on revising development thresholds, we should consider including some applications for medium residential development (10-50 dwellings) within Tier A?

No

If so, what types of application?

None

Question 4: Are there further types of application which should fall within Tier A?

No

Question 5: Do you think there should be a mechanism to bring a Tier A application to committee in exceptional circumstances? If so, what would those circumstances be and how would the mechanism operate?

Yes. Notwithstanding our opposition to the principle of a mandatory Tier A, in the event of a Tier A, it is essential that LPA elected members continue to have the ability to exercise local discretion in deciding which applications should be determined in committee. Guidelines may be published for more consistent schemes of delegation between LPAs which should include all levels of application, including existing major and minor application categories. Nationally determined thresholds cannot take account of locally significant issues, concerns and constraints.

Question 6: Do you think the gateway test which requires agreement between the chief planner and the chair of the planning committee is suitable?

No, a gateway test administered by the chief planner and chair of the planning committee is not suitable. It would place enormous and inappropriate pressures on the two individuals, and in the case of the planning committee chair, could make him/her the focused target of immense amounts of lobbying and campaigning by local people who would have no other means of getting their voices heard on locally-contentious proposals but to persuade the planning committee chair to ensure the case is not delegated to officers. This also opens up the potential for inappropriate influence and/or lobbying of a chair of a committee by interested parties.

The proposed gateway process would also place inappropriate pressure on the chief planner and potentially planning staff involved in determining applications where participation and consultation would be limited. A key link between local communities and their elected representatives would be lost on a range of environmental issues which are of increasing concern.

If not, what other mechanism would you suggest?

The introduction of government advisory guidelines for a scheme of delegation common to all LPAs but which nevertheless maintains the capability for local elected members to refer decisions to committee would reduce inconsistencies in practice between LPAs.

Question 7: Do you agree that the following types of application should fall within Tier B?

a) Applications for planning permission aside from:

- Householder applications
- Minor commercial applications
- Minor residential development applications

b) notwithstanding a), any application for planning permission where the applicant is the local authority, a councillor or officer

c) applications for s73 applications to vary conditions/s73B applications to vary permissions

No. Government advisory guidelines for a scheme of delegation, as noted in our response to Question 6 above, would obviate the need for Tiers A and B as presently proposed and provide for greater consistency between LPAs in the determination of planning applications and enable local democratic involvement where appropriate. The present proposed tier system is a simplistic potential solution to often complex issues, even at a small spatial scale.

As a further point, under section b) listed above, the spouse, partner or anyone living at the same address of a Councillor and/or Officer should be included in this list. We would also include the Local Member of Parliament in this list.

Question 8: Are there further types of application which should fall within Tier B?

The introduction of Government advisory guidelines as noted in the response to Question 6 above would remove the need for Tiers A and B.

Question 9: Do you consider that special control applications should be included in:

- Tier A or
- Tier B?

Tier B, LPA planning committee discretion. See our response to Question 6 above recommending the introduction of Government advisory guidelines for local schemes of delegation which maintains the capability of locally elected Members to refer decisions to planning committee. This would clearly include the consideration of special control applications.

Question 10: Do you think that all section 106 decisions should follow the treatment of the associated planning applications? For section 106 decisions not linked to a planning application should they be in Tier A or Tier B, or treated in some other way?

The proportion of S106 decisions not linked to planning applications is so minimal that such matters are most appropriately dealt with by planning committees, and are most unlikely to make an appreciable difference to speed of delivery.

Question 11: Do you think that enforcement decisions should be in Tier A or Tier B, or treated in some other way?

Similarly with regard to our response to Question 10 above, the diminution of planning enforcement action due to its discretionary nature and lack of staff means that this is most unlikely to be affecting delivery in any meaningful sense. Initial

stages of enforcement can be carried out by officers as presently, and main decisions regarding prosecution should be made by committee.

Question 12: Do you agree that the regulations should set a maximum for planning committees of 11 members?

No strong feelings for or against this. Although para 34 recognises the 'need for some local flexibility', we see no need for micro-management in this area.

Question 13: If you do not agree, what if any alternative size restrictions should be placed on committees?

Government may publish advisory guidance on planning committee size but it is not necessary to make this mandatory.

Question 14: Do you think the regulations should additionally set a minimum size requirement?

Government may publish advisory guidance on planning committee size but it is not necessary to make this mandatory.

Question 15: Do you agree that certification of planning committee members, and of other relevant decisions makers, should be administered at a national level?

We are very much in favour of this. We consider that it is important that Members of the Planning Committee and any substitutes should have a thorough understanding of planning issues through appropriate ongoing training. In addition, LPAs should ensure that only trained Members are able to make decisions.

Training should be delivered at a national level to ensure consistency and to minimise pressure on Local Planning Authorities. However, Councils should not be prevented from supplementing it with local training where needed. For example, for Durham City this would include specific student housing and heritage matters, e.g. impact on World Heritage Sites, etc.

Question 16: Do you think we should consider reviewing the thresholds for quality of decision making in the performance regime to ensure the highest standards of decision making are maintained?

No. Constant performance review should be an automatic requirement for LPAs, and Government which can already sanction LPAs if they have too many decisions overturned on appeal. If there is to increased targeting of LPAs, there ought to be a measure and a target to determine applications within a set period of time to avoid development proposals remaining undetermined for years.

Question 17: For quality of decision making the current threshold is 10% for major and non-major applications. We are proposing that in the future the threshold could be lowered to 5% for both. Do you agree?

No. For major applications, the proposal to lower the threshold to 5% is considered to be disproportionate. For smaller councils, a 5% threshold could be met by very few decisions being overturned on appeal. Particularly for major applications, there are complex issues that arise to which reasonably different weight can be given by the decision maker. Therefore, it is not unreasonable for an LPA to take a different view to an inspector unless costs are awarded against the local authority.

Particularly with LPAs now reviewing their Local Plans in the context of, in many cases, higher housing targets set nationally, there is a greater risk, as policies are fresh to officers and consultees, that some applications could be determined as test cases to clarify an apparent ambiguity.

Question 18: Do you have any views on the implications of the proposals in this consultation for you, or the group or business you represent, and on anyone with a relevant protected characteristic? If so, please explain who, which groups, including those with protected characteristics, or which businesses may be impacted and how.

No

Question 19: Is there anything that could be done to mitigate any impact identified?

Not applicable.

Question 20: Do you have any views on the implications of these proposals for the considerations of the 5 environmental principles identified in the Environment Act 2021?

The five principles identified in the Environment Act 2021 should have wide-ranging and significant impacts on planning decisions and plan-making, and the implications of the legislation require much more detailed attention by government and LPAs alike. It is not appropriate to attempt to indicate the implications with regard to the operation of planning committees at this stage.

DECISIONS REQUIRED	1) For Members to endorse the responses to this important consultation, as set out in the above report. 2) In light of the implications of these proposals and how they will likely impact on the democratic function of the planning process, for Members to agree to write formally to our Member of Parliament to ask that she raises these issues with the relevant Minister.
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ITEM 5: REPORT ON LICENSED *SUI GENERIS* HMOs WITHIN THE CITY OF DURHAM PARISH AREA

Large HMOs (Houses in Multiple Occupation) with more than six unrelated residents are classified as *sui generis* for planning purposes, meaning they fall outside the standard use classes. This change in classification, introduced by the amendment to the Town and Country Planning (Use Classes) Order 1987, came into effect on 6th April 2010.

Before this date, HMOs with more than six occupants were not explicitly defined in the Use Classes Order, and their classification could vary. The introduction of the C4 use class for HMOs housing between three and six unrelated individuals, along with the *sui generis* classification for larger HMOs, was intended to provide more clarity and control over HMO development.

However, the change of use from a C3 dwellinghouse to a C4 HMO became permitted development on October 1st 2010 through the introduction of amendments to the General Permitted Development Order (albeit this did not apply to *sui generis* HMOs and planning consent was still required for a change of use to a *sui generis* HMO even after this amendment). That said, Durham County Council introduced an Article 4 Direction in Durham City to control the conversion of family homes into HMOs in September 2016.

The main reason for this was to address concerns about the impact of HMOs, particularly those occupied by students, on the character of residential areas and the amenity of local residents. This included concerns about the potential for increased crime, anti-social behaviour, and an imbalanced community.

Specifically, the Article 4 Direction removed permitted development rights, meaning that landlords needed to apply for planning permission to convert a property into an HMO. This allowed the council to assess the impact of such conversions on the local area and give residents a chance to have their say.

The initial Article 4 Direction applied to a large part of Durham City centre. Subsequent further Directions have been introduced to areas such as Framwellgate Moor, Newton Hall, Carville, Mount Oswald, etc. in order to prevent the overspill of HMO developments into other areas.

In addition, Mandatory HMO licensing in England started on 6th April 2006 through the implementation of the Housing Act 2004 and applies across County Durham. This act defined HMOs and established standards of management, including mandatory licensing for certain types of HMOs. Initially, mandatory licensing applied to properties with five or more occupants, forming two or more separate households, and sharing amenities like kitchens or bathrooms, and which were three or more storeys high. In October 2018, the definition of mandatory HMO licensing was expanded to include certain self-contained flats within larger blocks, and the three-storey threshold was removed.

According to data published and accurate up to December 2024, there are at least 150 licensed HMOs falling within the *sui generis* use class (i.e., with seven or more occupants) located within the City of Durham Parish Council area.

However, initial research suggests that 103 (68.7%) of these properties do not have a corresponding planning application or permission for a *sui generis* HMO listed on the County Council's online planning portal (see addendum attached). This raises questions as to whether the necessary planning consent has been obtained in all cases, or whether alternative evidence has been used to determine lawful use.

Particularly concerning are properties claimed to have been operating as large HMOs prior to the 2010 regulatory changes. While lawful use before this date may exempt such properties from requiring retrospective planning permission, it is unclear what type and standard of evidence is used by DCC's HMO licensing team to verify such claims.

Equally, in the event that a property has been in continuous use as an HMO for a period of 10 years or more, it will be eligible for lawful use without planning consent. That said, the question remains how this is assessed.

In relation to the data available, Members should consider that: a) this is only partially correct up to December 2024 and the updated HMO register does not allow for mass visibility of all properties (the user is now required to search via individual postcodes and can then only view one record at a time) and b) this data only captures the licensed *sui generis* HMOs within the parish area and not the 3-6 bed HMOs which likely represent circa. 95%+ of all HMOs within the parish area. However, it is felt that this is enough of a representative sample to understand the way in which HMO licensing is managed within the City.

As such, it is recommended that the City of Durham Parish Council formally approach Durham County Council's HMO licensing team and the Planning department to request a joint meeting in order to:

- Understand the procedures and criteria the HMO licensing team uses to determine whether a property has the necessary planning permission in place prior to first issuing or renewing an HMO licence.
- Seek clarification on how the team verifies claims that properties were in large-scale HMO use prior to 6th April 2010, particularly what evidence is accepted as sufficient to establish lawful existing use.

DECISION REQUIRED	For Members to note the above information and to request a formal joint meeting with DCC's HMO licensing team and planning department, as set out in the above report.
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ITEM 5: PROPOSALS TO SUPPORT PLACES OF SAFETY AND RESIDENTS DURING AN EMERGENCY AS PART OF THE PARISH COUNCIL'S COMMUNITY EMERGENCY PLAN

As Members are aware, the Parish Council, in partnership with Durham County Council's Civil Contingencies Unit (CCU), residents' associations, and other key stakeholders, has developed a comprehensive Community Emergency Plan for the City.

This plan is designed to strengthen community resilience and ensure that residents are informed, prepared, and supported in the event of an emergency. While emergency services and local authorities remain the lead responders under the Civil Contingencies Act 2004, the Parish Council's plan enables local residents to complement this response through a coordinated, community-led initiative.

The Emergency Plan covers a wide range of risks relevant to Durham, including flooding, severe weather, power outages, loss of utilities, and civil disturbances. It identifies pre-approved Places of Safety across the city—such as churches, community centres and hotels that may be used to shelter affected residents temporarily during emergencies.

Each of these designated venues will play a crucial role in safeguarding the wellbeing of residents should local infrastructure be compromised or access to services disrupted.

To support the practical implementation of this plan, the Parish Council has approved a budget of £4,000. Members are also reminded that the Parish Council produced and distributed an Emergency Card highlighting the places of safety and including advice on what to do in the event of an emergency.

Following a recent meeting of the working group of residents who helped shape the plan, it was agreed that this funding should be allocated toward creating emergency supply boxes to be stored at each designated place of safety. These boxes are intended to be deployed rapidly in the event of an incident and will contain essential items to help volunteers provide immediate support to affected individuals.

Each box will include the following items:

- A-boards for clearly identifying the Place of Safety to the public;
- A loud hailer for effective communication in outdoor or crowded settings;
- A water purification device or purification tablets to ensure access to safe drinking water;
- Foil (thermal) blankets to help protect residents from cold or shock;
- Wind-up torches to ensure lighting in case of power failure;
- High-visibility jackets (non-branded) with ID badges for volunteers to ensure visibility of volunteers.
- A supply of non-perishable (tinned) food to offer initial sustenance.

It may be that each group has a specific inventory need depending on the most likely nature of their emergency, e.g. one area is located in a flood zone risk area.

The designated places of safety as part of the Emergency Plan include:

- Durham Cathedral
- St. Cuthbert's Church, North Road
- North Road Methodist Church
- Premier Inn, Freemans Quay, DH1 1SQ
- St. Nicholas' Church Youth Centre, Providence Row
- St. Cuthbert's Church, New Elvet
- St. Oswald's Church, Church Street
- St. Oswald's Institute, Church Street
- Radisson Hotel
- Merryoaks Community Centre
- Ustinov College Community Room

The working group will coordinate with representatives from each identified place of safety to confirm their willingness and capacity to store and manage this equipment. Volunteers will also be given basic training on the use of these resources and the appropriate procedures during plan activation.

The estimated cost per emergency supply box is £500. However, from initial consultation, it is unlikely that all of these places of safety will require an emergency supply box.

Once the individual unit cost is confirmed and depending on the number of places of safety to be equipped, the total budget will be allocated accordingly.

The Parish Council's Environment Committee, will oversee procurement and distribution

DECISIONS REQUIRED	1) For Members to consider the above information and agree to the allocation of £4,000 towards the supply of emergency boxes for each of the designated places of safety. 2) If 1) is approved, for Members to delegate responsibility for the procurement and distribution of these boxes to the Parish Council's Environment Committee.
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ITEM 5: UPDATE ON THE PROPOSAL TO INTRODUCE 3 X NEW GREEN-ROOFED BUS SHELTERS WITHIN THE ELVET AND GILESGATE PARISH WARD.

Members are reminded that the City of Durham Parish Council has submitted an application for the use of Section 106 funding to replace three existing bus shelters within the Elvet and Gilesgate electoral division—two located at Lower Claypath and one on Church Street, adjacent to the entrance to St Oswald's Church.

The proposal involves the installation of new shelters incorporating sedum green roofs, which will contribute to environmental improvements in an area significantly affected by air pollution and traffic, notably along the Air Quality Management Area.

These green roof shelters are designed to align with Durham County Council's Air Quality Action Plan and its wider Climate Emergency Response Plan. The shelters aim to reduce carbon, absorb pollutants, enhance biodiversity, and improve the commuter experience.

The application process has been held up due to outstanding questions about the long-term maintenance responsibilities associated with the new shelters, particularly the green roof element. We are pleased to report that the County Council's Public Transport team, led by Tony Leckenby, has now confirmed that Durham County Council will adopt and maintain the shelters themselves. However, responsibility for the ongoing maintenance of the green roof components must be taken on by the Parish Council.

To that end, the Parish Council has received a formal quote from a trusted maintenance company we have used in the past for the maintenance of the green roofs. This maintenance will ensure the continued health, safety, and appearance of the installations. The quote proposes:

- Approximately 20 visits per year to each shelter
- Visits to be conducted early mornings or late evenings to avoid disruption
- Tasks including general upkeep, weeding, watering, and minor maintenance

The annual cost per shelter is £350 (excluding VAT), giving a total annual cost of £1,050 for all three shelters. This figure is exclusive of VAT and is proposed as a recurring commitment to support the sustainable nature of the project.

Members are asked to note this requirement and consider approving this quote so that the Section 106 application may proceed to final determination. This innovative project has the full support of the local Ward Members and has attracted endorsements from residents' groups, including the Elvet Residents Association and the St Nicholas Community Forum.

The shelters will be installed on Durham County Council-owned land and will use a shelter model and supplier already approved by the Council.

Members' approval of the quoted maintenance cost is now the final step required from the Parish Council to progress the application and deliver this important and high-impact environmental scheme (each shelter has the ability to capture 10 kilograms of CO₂ year).

DECISIONS REQUIRED	1) For Members to consider the above information and agree to the proposal that the Parish Council assumes ongoing maintenance responsibility solely for the green roof components of these shelters. 2) If 1) is approved, for Members to approve the quote of £1,050/ year, subject to an annual review of this maintenance agreement, for the ongoing maintenance of the green roof components of these shelters.
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ITEM 5: RENEWING THE SERVICE LEVEL AGREEMENT WITH DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL FOR AN ENHANCED NEIGHBOURHOOD WARDEN SERVICE

As Members are aware, the Parish Council has benefitted enormously from a successful Service Level Agreement (SLA) with Durham County Council for the provision of an enhanced Neighbourhood Warden service. Whilst this enhanced service has been provided since 2019, the current SLA has been in effect since July 2022.

As this three-year SLA approaches its conclusion, the Environment Committee, which oversees the work of the Wardens, is now considering its renewal for a further three-year term, from the end of July 2025 to July 2028.

A monthly report setting out the key achievements delivered across the parish is provided by the Neighbourhood Wardens and residents react very positively to their work.

This report outlines the rationale for renewing the agreement, the proposed terms, and the financial considerations involved, including the continued deployment of the current Warden officers, Kirk Thiis and Antony Waterson, who have delivered excellent service throughout the existing agreement.

Under the current SLA, the Parish Council has funded 10 hours of enhanced Neighbourhood Warden time per week, at an annual cost of £10,000. This funding supports a proactive, visible Warden presence in the parish, targeted at addressing local environmental issues, anti-social behaviour, and improving community confidence and cleanliness.

The agreement has required monthly monitoring reports, regular liaison meetings, and flexibility in service delivery, with priority focus areas such as dog fouling, littering, and public engagement being agreed collaboratively. The work has been performed to a high standard by Officers Kirk Thiis and Antony Waterson under the supervision of Durham County Council.

Neighbourhood Wardens play a crucial role in:

- Tackling environmental crime (e.g., dog fouling, littering, fly-tipping).
- Providing a uniformed presence to reassure residents and deter anti-social behaviour.
- Educating residents on responsible dog ownership and waste management.
- Working in partnership with local services, the police, and the community to improve neighbourhoods.

Durham County Council equips Wardens with the authority to issue fixed penalty notices and take enforcement action where necessary. Their presence supports the Parish Council's wider ambitions for a clean, green, safe and welcoming environment.

The Environment Committee proposes to renew the SLA for a further three-year term from July 2025. Key terms proposed for the renewed agreement include:

- Duration: 3 years (July 2025 – June 2028).
- Staffing: Continuation of the same Wardens – Kirk Thiis and Antony Waterson – in delivering the enhanced service.
- Service hours: 10 hours per week of dedicated enhanced Neighbourhood Warden time.
- Monitoring: Continuation of monthly reports and liaison meetings to review progress and agree priorities.
- Visibility and Communication: Continued promotion of the service through Parish Council newsletters, website updates and community outreach.

Durham County Council has advised that the annual cost for the enhanced Warden service will increase from £10,000 to £13,000 per annum for the same level of service (10 hours per week). This cost has not increased since 2019 and takes account of both increasing inflationary costs as well as salary and on-cost rises. Members are reminded that the Parish Council earmarked £12,000 for this service this financial year and the increased costs would commence from the beginning of this new SLA.

The high quality and measurable impact of this service is consistently rated highest in resident consultation responses. The Parish Council recognises the significant value delivered through the enhanced Neighbourhood Warden service and expresses its strong preference to continue this partnership with Durham County Council.

The Environment Committee believes that the continued involvement of Wardens Kirk Thiis and Antony Waterson is essential to maintaining the consistency and quality of the service.

Members are reminded that Kirk and Antony were recently awarded the Good Citizen of the Year Award this year.

DECISIONS REQUIRED	1) For Members to agree to renew the Service Level Agreement with Durham County Council for a further three-year period (July 2025 – July 2028). 2) If 1) is approved, for Members to approve the revised annual cost of £13,000 for the provision of 10 hours per week of enhanced Warden support, as set out in the above report. 3) If 1) and 2) are approved, for Members to confirm the Parish Council's strong desire to retain the named Wardens delivering the service as part of the new Agreement.
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ITEM 7: ANNUAL REVIEW OF PARISH COUNCIL STANDING ORDERS, FINANCIAL REGULATIONS, COMMITTEE TERMS OF REFERENCE AND COUNCIL POLICIES

Following the resolution of the Parish Council in May to establish a dedicated Working Group to undertake the 2025 annual review of the Council's core governance documents, the Working Group has now completed its work.

The Working Group, comprising four Councillors and the Parish Clerk, met to review the Standing Orders, Financial Regulations, Committee Terms of Reference and Council Policies, as well as to consider the introduction of a new Gifts and Hospitality Policy.

The review was undertaken with the objective of ensuring that all documents remain compliant with current legislation, reflective of best practice, and fit for purpose. The review also incorporated statutory updates where necessary and responded to local governance needs as identified over the previous year.

Summary of main changes

The following key amendments and additions have been recommended by the Working Group:

Standing Orders and Financial Regulations

- Statutory updates have been incorporated to reflect changes in legislation and guidance affecting local councils.

Committee Terms of Reference

- The Personnel Committee will now consist of six Members (increased from the previous five Members).
- The election of the Chair and Vice-Chair for each Committee will now take place at the Annual Meeting of the Parish Council, rather than at individual Committee meetings.

Public participation protocol

- Members of the public must now register to speak in advance of each Full Council meeting.
- Public speaking will be limited to designated participation items; contributions on motions or outside these items will not be permitted.

Communications Policy

- A reference to the Parish Council's newsletter has been included.
- The policy now formally references the Nolan Principles of Public Life.

Grants Policy

- A clear directive has been introduced stipulating that, where an applicant fails to provide a written report on the impact of a grant received, the Parish Council will seek a refund of the funds awarded.

Section 106 Applications

- All new consultations regarding Section 106 funding applications are now delegated to the Finance Committee.

New Gifts and Hospitality Policy

- The Working Group has also drafted a new Gifts and Hospitality Policy. This document outlines expectations for Members regarding the receipt and declaration of gifts and hospitality and is proposed for formal adoption as part of this governance review.

DECISIONS REQUIRED	1) For Members to approve the changes made to all governance documents as set out in this report and in the documents included. 2) For Members to formally adopt the new Gifts and Hospitality Policy.
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ITEM 9: MOTION BY COUNCILLORS R CORNWELL AND V ASHFIELD ON THE CLIMATE EMERGENCY

Councillors R Cornwell and V Ashfield wish to propose and second the following motion to the Parish Council on the climate emergency.

The motion

This Parish Council:

- 1. Deplores the decision of Durham County Council on 16th July 2025 to rescind the Climate Emergency Declaration it made on 20th February 2019;*
- 2. Notwithstanding the DCC resolution, the climate emergency continues, so the Council reaffirms the City of Durham Parish Council Climate Emergency Resolution of 28th March 2019.*
- 3. Instructs the Parish Clerk to publicise the Parish Council position through the Parish website, newsletter and social media channels, and to the print and broadcast media."*

DECISION REQUIRED	For Members to consider the content of the above motion and approve its content.
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ITEM 10: RECRUITMENT OF PARISH COUNCIL REPRESENTATIVES TO DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL'S STANDARDS COMMITTEE

Durham County Council (DCC), in collaboration with the County Durham Association of Local Councils (CDALC), is initiating a recruitment exercise to fill two vacancies for parish and town council representatives on DCC's Standards Committee. While these positions are non-voting, the contribution of the local council sector is considered vital to the Committee's effective functioning.

The Council's Standards Committee is primarily responsible for promoting and maintaining high standards of conduct by councillors, independent members and co-opted members. It is responsible for advising and arranging relevant training for members relating to the requirements of the code of conduct for councillors. It is also responsible for:

- The assessment and/ or referral for investigation and determination of allegations of misconduct.
- Dealing with any alleged breaches by a councillor of other relevant council codes and protocols.
- The determination of allegations of misconduct on the part of Members and Co-opted Members of the Council and Parish and Town Council Members.
- Approving the arrangements under which allegations of a failure to comply with the Council's Code of Conduct for Members can be investigated and decisions on allegations can be made, pursuant to section 28(6) of the Localism Act 2011.
- Overseeing the Protocol on Member / Officer Relations.
- Approving the appointment of at least one independent person to discharge the functions set out in section 28(7) of the Localism Act 2011.

This broad remit gives the committee the chance to make a much more meaningful, proactive and positive contribution to the work of the council. You can see further details on the committee in article nine of our [Constitution of the council](#).

The Committee's responsibilities may expand further in light of potential changes to the national standards framework. These changes are anticipated as a result of the Government's recent consultation titled "*Strengthening the standards and conduct framework for local authorities in England*". Should the proposals be implemented, the Standards Committee will likely oversee and coordinate any required reforms across all tiers of local government in County Durham.

The opportunity is open to serving parish and town councillors who are committed to promoting high standards in public life and willing to act as ambassadors for the sector. Interested councillors are required to complete an application form and secure formal nomination from their parish or town council.

Key details of the application process are as follows:

- A maximum of two applications per council will be accepted.
- Applications must be submitted by email to cdalc@durham.gov.uk by 5.00pm on Monday 22nd September.
- Both typed and scanned handwritten applications are acceptable.
- Applications will be considered by the CDALC Executive Committee in late September or early October.
- Shortlisted applicants may be invited to attend an interview.
- Final appointments are subject to approval by Durham County Council.

The invitation for nominations has been circulated to all Members. To date, Cllr S Walker and Cllr G Holland have expressed their interest in being nominated for co-option onto the Standards Committee.

DECISION REQUIRED	For Members to consider formal nominations for up to two councillors from the City of Durham Parish Council to apply for co-option to DCC's Standards Committee.
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ITEM 11: TO APPOINT A CITY OF DURHAM PARISH COUNCIL REPRESENTATIVE ON TO THE CDALC EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Members are reminded that The County Durham Association of Local Councils (CDALC) is the representative body for town and parish councils within County Durham. Its core purpose is to support local councils through:

- Representing their interests at county, regional and national levels;
- Facilitating communication and collaboration between local councils;
- Providing training, advice and guidance on governance and good practice;
- Coordinating responses to consultations and policy development relevant to local councils.

CDALC is affiliated with the National Association of Local Councils (NALC), giving it a voice in shaping policy affecting the local council sector nationally. The CDALC Executive Committee is the principal governing body of CDALC and is responsible for overseeing the strategic direction and management of CDALC's work, ensuring effective representation of member councils' interests, approving policy positions and responses to consultations as well as monitoring the financial and operational performance of the Association.

Membership of the Executive Committee is drawn from representatives of town and parish councils across the County, ensuring geographical balance and wide input. The President of the CDALC Executive Committee is our local Member of Parliament Mary Kelly Foy.

It is essential that the City of Durham Parish Council maintains a presence on the CDALC Executive Committee and a vacancy has arisen since Councillor A Doig ceased being a Member of the Parish Council.

Most recently, the Parish Council has had a positive engagement with the CDALC Executive in gaining its approval to advocate for health impacts to be included as one of the key objectives of the Licensing Act.

The Parish Council's continued involvement with this Committee will ensure that we have a direct voice in the development of policies affecting parish and town councils and that the Council is kept updated of key developments and can advocate effectively for the interests of our parish and residents at a strategic level.

Councillor S Walker has expressed a willingness to be appointed as the City of Durham Parish Council's representative on the CDALC Executive Committee.

DECISION REQUIRED	For Members to consider the above information and approve the appointment of a Parish Council representative on to the CDALC Executive Committee.
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ITEM 12: CONSULTATION ON PROPOSED CHANGES TO COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT

Purpose of the report

To brief Members on Durham County Council's consultation on proposed changes to the Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme (LCTRS) for 2026/27, set out the main proposals and their potential implications, and to consider a response to the consultation for approval by the Parish Council.

Background

Since April 2013, local authorities in England have been required to develop and manage their own Council Tax Reduction (CTR) schemes for working age residents, while pension age residents continue to be protected under national rules.

Durham County Council's current working-age CTR scheme mirrors the old Council Tax Benefit model and allows up to 100% support with no cap. The scheme has not changed since its introduction in 2013. However, recent changes in the welfare system, especially the rollout of Universal Credit (UC), have placed increasing administrative burdens on the Council. Almost 80% of current CTR claimants are on UC, and this is expected to increase to 96% by 2026.

Key Issues Driving the Consultation

- Administrative complexity: The current scheme requires recalculations and new council tax bills each time there is a change in UC (often monthly), leading to an average of 11 bills per claimant per year.
- Rising costs: The overall cost of the scheme has risen to approximately £66.2 million in 2024/25, of which £41.3 million relates to working age residents.
- Budget pressures: Durham County Council is exploring ways to simplify the system, reduce administration costs, and potentially generate savings.

Consultation Proposals

Durham County Council is consulting on the following options:

- 1a: An income banded CTRS, with support of up to 100 per cent still being made available to working age residents
- 1b: An income banded CTRS, with a maximum of 90 per cent of the bill being covered by the CTRS and a minimum of a 10 per cent contribution from all working age residents to their council tax bill
- 1c: An income banded CTRS, with a maximum of 80 per cent of the bill being covered by the CTRS and a minimum of a 20 per cent contribution from all working age residents to their council tax bill
- 1d: An income banded CRTS, with a maximum of 75 per cent of the bill being covered by the CTRS and a minimum of a 25 per cent contribution from all working age residents to their council tax bill

Under each of these options, DCC is proposing to remove the current complex calculations and replace them with income bands, meaning that minor changes to

a claimant's circumstances would not impact on their CTRS entitlement. This would simplify the process, avoid multiple bills being issued and provide an opportunity to make savings in the administration of the scheme.

Three of the options also include a proposal to introduce a minimum council tax contribution for all working age households to help DCC meet the huge financial pressures they are facing.

DCC will also consider circumstances where minimum contributions, if applied, may not be applicable, such as those diagnosed with a terminal illness and how wider discretionary support can be provided in these instances.

In February, a report identified that DCC has had to deliver £289million of savings since 2010 in order to balance its budget; with a further £45million needed to be saved by 2028/29.

The CTRS currently costs more than £60 million per year and the introduction of minimum contributions could reduce this by between £3.8 million and £10.35 million a year.

The Council will also need to factor in the costs of any unpaid debts and costs for recovery of unpaid Council tax. In FY 2024/25, DCC instructed private bailiffs/enforcement agents 2,576 times in order to enforce council tax debts owed to the local authority. In 2023/24, that figure was 2,276 times.

DECISION REQUIRED	For Members to consider the above information and agree a proposed response to this consultation.
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