



City of Durham Parish Council

The City of Durham Parish Council. c/o The Enginemen Secretary's Office
The Miners Hall. Flass Street. Durham. DH1 4BE

Telephone: 07510 074875

Email: parishclerk@cityofdurham-pc.gov.uk

Date of summons: 19th March 2026

SUMMONS

To all Members of the City of Durham Parish Council: Councillors V Ashfield, 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 25th March 2026 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 FEBRUARY 2026**
- 4. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**
- 5. BITESIZE COUNCILLOR TRAINING – PARISH COUNCIL SCHEME OF DELEGATION**
- 6. COMMITTEE UPDATES**
 - **Planning and Licensing Committee minutes from the meetings held on 6th and 20th February 2026**

Copies of all approved minutes from these meetings can be found here:
<https://cityofdurham-pc.gov.uk/meetings/planning-and-licensing-committee/>

 - County Durham Plan Houses in Multiple Occupation Interim Policy
 - **Environment Committee minutes from the meeting held on 10th February 2026**

Copies of all approved minutes from these meetings can be found here:
<http://cityofdurham-pc.gov.uk/agendas-minutes/environment-committee/>

 - Proposal to establish a new City of Durham Partner of the Year Award.
 - Proposal to support students at Houghall College to showcase their work at Chelsea Flower Show 2026.
 - **Business Committee minutes from the meeting held on 20th January 2026**

Copies of all approved minutes from these meetings can be found here:
<http://cityofdurham-pc.gov.uk/agendas-minutes/business-committee/>
 - **Finance Committee minutes from the meeting held on 14th January 2026**

Copies of all approved minutes from these meetings can be found here:
<http://cityofdurham-pc.gov.uk/agendas-minutes/finance-committee/>
- 7. CHAIR'S UPDATES**

The Chair will provide a verbal update on matters arising since the Full Parish Council meeting on 25th February 2026
- 8. ASSERTION 10 – DIGITAL AND DATA COMPLIANCE FOR THE 2025/26 ANNUAL GOVERNANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY RETURN (AGAR)**
- 9. REPORT BY THE COMMUNITY CENTRE WORKING GROUP ON PROPOSED FUNDING ALLOCATION FOR 2026/27**

10. REPORT FOLLOWING THE PARISH CLERK'S ANNUAL APPRAISAL

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 will be 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 will be asked to leave the room.

11. CITIZEN OF THE YEAR 2026 NOMINATIONS

Minutes of the meeting of the City of Durham Parish Council held on Wednesday 25th February 2026 at 7:00pm in the Main Hall of the Merryoaks Community Hall, Park House Rd, Durham DH1 3QF.

Present: Councillors S Walker (in the **Chair**), V Ashfield, L Brown, T Cleaver, R Cornwell, D Freeman, E Hopgood, G Holland, C Lattin, P Layton and F Robinson

Also present: Parish Clerk Adam Shanley and 2 members of the public.

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

Apologies were received and accepted from Councillors E Scott and R Handy.

2. TO RECEIVE ANY DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST FROM MEMBERS

None received.

3. APPROVAL OF THE DRAFT MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE COUNCIL HELD ON 28TH JANUARY 2026

The minutes of the meeting were approved as a true and accurate record of proceedings by a majority vote of 6 votes in favour and 5 abstentions.

4. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Ms Polly Low advised that she was attending the Full Council meeting today as a representative of Elvet Residents Association (ERA). Polly advised that she and the Association had had sight of the proposed motion under item 8 of the Agenda and wished to express their full support for this motion, highlighting the significant importance of the Elvet green/ former bowling green area to local residents for outdoor pursuits and recreation.

Polly advised that she and ERA hoped that the Parish Council would unanimously support this motion and do all they could to keep this area open and accessible for the enjoyment of local residents and visitors.

The Chair thanked Polly for her statement.

5. COMMITTEE UPDATES

• Planning and Licensing Committee

Councillor L Brown presented the Planning and Licensing Committee minutes from the meetings held on 9th and 23rd January 2026. There being no queries from Members, Councillor L Brown moved on to Committee reports.

Proposed response to the consultation on changes to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

Councillor L Brown introduced the report outlining the Parish Council's proposed response to the Government consultation on reforms to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).

Councillor L Brown explained that the consultation represented one of the most significant revisions to national planning policy since the introduction of the NPPF and followed major changes already introduced in December 2024.

Members were informed that the Planning and Licensing Committee had undertaken a detailed review of the consultation documentation, which contained over 225 questions, and had determined that the Parish Council should focus its response only on those proposals of direct relevance to Durham City.

In presenting the report, Councillor L Brown highlighted several key areas of proposed reform which were particularly significant for the Parish area.

Firstly, the consultation proposed strengthening the presumption in favour of development, particularly within existing settlements and well-connected urban locations. Councillor Brown explained that while the Parish Council supported the principle of sustainable development, Members of the Planning and Licensing Committee were concerned that the revised wording could significantly reduce local discretion when assessing development proposals in sensitive historic environments such as Durham City. Particular concern was expressed that increased permissiveness around infill development, redevelopment and upward extensions within residential areas could undermine local character, townscape and heritage settings if not carefully balanced with robust design and conservation safeguards.

Secondly, the consultation introduced national minimum density standards, including minimum densities around railway stations and other well-connected transport hubs. Members noted that while more efficient use of land was generally supported, the introduction of fixed national density thresholds represented a departure from the current approach and could have implications for historic cities such as Durham where transport infrastructure is closely integrated with conservation areas and the setting of the World Heritage Site.

Councillor L Brown also outlined proposed changes to Green Belt policy, noting that the consultation suggested a more permissive approach to reviewing Green Belt boundaries through the plan-making process to support housing delivery. While the fundamental purposes of the Green Belt would remain unchanged, Members expressed concern that the proposed emphasis on meeting housing demand could weaken existing safeguards designed to protect the openness and permanence of Green Belt land.

Members further discussed proposals to revise heritage policies within the NPPF. While the Government had indicated that the intention was to simplify and clarify the policy framework, Councillor L Brown reported that the Planning and Licensing Committee believed that replacing detailed guidance with broader principles could

potentially reduce the clarity and strength of protections afforded to heritage assets, particularly in areas of exceptional historic significance such as Durham.

Councillor L Brown also highlighted that the report also addressed proposed changes relating to developer contributions and planning obligations, including the introduction of more standardised approaches to Section 106 agreements and a stronger emphasis on securing infrastructure and affordable housing contributions at the plan-making stage. While Members welcomed efforts to reduce prolonged viability negotiations, concerns were raised about the potential limitations of viability assessments conducted early in long plan periods, particularly given changing market conditions and inflation.

The Clerk also noted the consultation's proposals relating to Article 4 Directions, which were of particular relevance to the Parish Council given its ongoing work to explore a potential Article 4 Direction to safeguard gardens within the city. Councillor L Brown advised that the Parish Council's response strongly supported the proposed clarification of national policy on the use of Article 4 Directions, particularly in addressing issues such as the over-concentration of Houses in Multiple Occupation.

Members **agreed** that it was essential for the Parish Council to respond to the consultation in order to ensure that the particular planning challenges and sensitivities associated with Durham City were fully recognised as part of this. Members unanimously **approved** the proposed response to this consultation, subject to some references within the responses changing from the 1st person pronoun to the 3rd person pronoun.

The Clerk took the opportunity to thank all Members who had supported this significant work as this had been a very substantial undertaking by Members.

Proposal to support the establishment of a 'City of Durham Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group'

Councillor L Brown introduced the report proposing the establishment of a City of Durham Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group to oversee the review of the existing Neighbourhood Plan.

Members were reminded that the current City of Durham Neighbourhood Plan came into force on 7 July 2021 and provided a framework for guiding development within the parish area in accordance with the County Durham Plan and the National Planning Policy Framework.

Councillor L Brown explained that it was necessary to periodically review the operation and effectiveness of the Neighbourhood Plan to ensure that it continued to respond appropriately to changing planning circumstances and emerging policy priorities.

Members were advised that since the adoption of the Plan in July 2021, a total of 1,798 planning applications had been determined within the parish area. Analysis

undertaken by Durham County Council indicated that 990 applications (55.1%) had directly engaged policies within the Neighbourhood Plan.

Members noted that 87 applications had been refused by the Local Planning Authority during this period. In 25 cases, the refusal had relied directly upon policies contained within the Neighbourhood Plan.

Councillor L Brown highlighted that Policy H2, which protects the Durham City Conservation Area, had been cited in 19 refusal decisions, making it the most frequently applied policy within the Plan. Other significant policies cited in refusal decisions included those relating to the World Heritage Site, sustainable transport, green infrastructure and sustainable development principles.

Members also noted that there had been 41 planning appeals within the parish area during this period, of which 30 had been dismissed, further demonstrating the effectiveness and robustness of the Neighbourhood Plan when tested through the appeals process.

However, Councillor L Brown emphasised that since the Plan's adoption, national planning policy had evolved, and further significant changes to the NPPF were expected during 2026. It was therefore appropriate for the Parish Council, as the qualifying body, to initiate a formal review of the Plan.

The proposed Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group would lead this review and would include:

- Three Parish Councillors
- One County Councillor representing the area
- Up to ten representatives from community organisations, residents' groups, and businesses
- Support from a Parish Council officer and, where required, a planning consultant

Councillor L Brown advised that she hoped that the Steering Group would undertake evidence gathering, community consultation and policy development, before presenting a revised draft Neighbourhood Plan to the Parish Council for approval and subsequent independent examination.

Members welcomed the proposal and emphasised the importance of ensuring that the revised Plan remained community-led, reflected local priorities and continued to protect Durham's historic environment while supporting appropriate sustainable development.

Members unanimously **agreed** a) the establishment of the City of Durham Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group; b) the Terms of Reference for the Steering Group; c) to delegate responsibility for overseeing the work of the Steering Group to the Planning and Licensing Committee; and d) to delegate responsibility to the Planning and Licensing Committee for agreeing the membership of the Steering Group.

• Environment Committee

Councillor C Lattin presented the minutes from the Environment Committee meeting held on 13th January 2026. There being no queries from Members, Councillor C Lattin moved on to Committee reports.

Report to support the work of the Wear Rivers Trust in tackling invasive non-native species (INNS) along the River Wear catchment area.

Councillor C Lattin presented the report concerning support for the Wear Rivers Trust and its work tackling Invasive Non-Native Species (INNS) along the River Wear catchment.

Members were reminded that protecting and enhancing the River Wear had been identified as a key strategic priority for the Parish Council. The Parish Council had therefore sought to work in partnership with local organisations, including the Wear Rivers Trust and the Durham City Riverscape Community Group, to address environmental challenges affecting the river.

Councillor Lattin outlined the work of the Wear Rivers Trust, an environmental charity established in 2008 to protect, enhance and restore the River Wear and its catchment. The Trust works collaboratively with landowners, local authorities, environmental organisations and volunteers to deliver projects focused on habitat restoration, water quality improvement and public education.

Members were informed that the spread of invasive non-native species, including Japanese Knotweed, Himalayan Balsam and Giant Hogweed, posed a significant ecological threat within the catchment. These species can dominate riverbanks, displace native vegetation, destabilise riverbanks and, in some cases, pose risks to human health.

Councillor C Lattin reported that the Trust had therefore developed a programme of activity focused on monitoring, controlling and preventing the spread of invasive species across the catchment area.

Councillor C Lattin highlighted that the report set out a funding proposal for a targeted project within the Durham Peninsula area, covering the stretch of river between Shincliffe Bridge and Barkers Haugh Sewage Treatment Works.

Councillor C Lattin reported that the proposed programme included:

- Water quality monitoring conducted by trained volunteers using dedicated testing kits
- Training programmes enabling staff and volunteers to obtain PA1 and PA6 spraying qualifications for the safe treatment of invasive plants
- The purchase of herbicides and equipment required to treat Giant Hogweed and Himalayan Balsam
- Direct spraying work carried out by Trust staff across identified problem areas
- Volunteer recruitment and engagement activities involving local organisations, including Durham University, Durham Cathedral and community groups

- Volunteer work days focused on invasive plant removal within locations including Pelaw Wood, Blads Wood and Aykley/Hopper Wood

Members were informed that the total project cost was £5,795.82, which is included in this financial year's budget.

Councillor Lattin emphasised that this project would support improved biodiversity, habitat restoration, and improved water quality monitoring within the River Wear corridor.

Members welcomed the proposal and recognised the importance of partnership working in addressing environmental challenges affecting the river system. Whilst there were some initial queries around the impact of the water testing element of this proposal, Members unanimously agreed the funding request from the Wear Rivers Trust as set out in the report as follows:

Activity		Materials/ Training Course/Training Course	Mileage	Staff delivery	Total Costs
Water Quality Testing	3 testing kits at £160 each Training (1 day to prepare and deliver training session)	£480	£20	£284.59	£784.59
Spraying Training	Costs for PA1 and PA6W Spraying Certificate for WRT Staff Member	£550	£30	£284.59	£864.59
Spraying Training	Costs for PA1 and PA6W Spraying Certificate for 3 Volunteers	£1650			£1650

Cost of Gylosphate	2 containers at £69.96	£139.92			£139.92
WRT Spraying of Giant Hogweed and Himalayan Balsam	4 days: 2 staff for 2 days		£40	£1138.36	£1178.36
Volunteer Recruitment	1 days		£10	£284.59	£294.59
Volunteer Events	3 days		£30	£853.77	£883.77
Total Costs					£5795.82

Report on priorities for greening the parish area over 2026-27

Members considered a report outlining proposed planting priorities for the 2026–27 financial year, following the Council’s resolution to allocate £20,000 to support greening initiatives across the parish.

Members noted that the overarching aim of the programme is to enhance the quality of the parish area, increase biodiversity and respond to the climate crisis, while delivering environmental, social and visual benefits for residents and visitors.

Councillor C Lattin advised that the proposed allocations include £4,000 for parish-wide spring bulbs, £4,000 for a fruit tree giveaway event in November, £1,000 for Viaduct planters, £2,500 for hanging baskets within the Viaduct area and £8,000 for hanging baskets on the main shopping streets.

Councillor C Lattin advised that the spring bulbs and fruit tree initiatives will be delivered in Autumn 2026. The fruit tree giveaway, first trialled in November 2025, was reported as a success and is to be repeated, providing further opportunity for community engagement and the distribution of pollinator-friendly planting.

Members agreed to retain the Viaduct planters at the Colpitts public house, Mistletoe Street and Allergate, acknowledging the contribution of local volunteers in maintaining them.

Members noted that certain other planters had been removed without approval and agreed that several remaining planters within the Viaduct area should be offered to local groups for maintenance or reuse. It was further agreed that a number of three-tier planters in prominent locations be removed, as they are not being planted and maintained as originally envisaged in partnership with Durham County Council.

In place of the removed planters, Members supported the installation of summer floral hanging baskets on selected residential streets within the Viaduct area and

on shopfronts along North Road, Saddler Street, Silver Street, Back Silver Street, Lower Claypath and Elvet Bridge.

Members noted that several businesses had already agreed to participate and that this investment is intended to enhance the street scene within the town centre boundary. It was further noted that baskets will not be installed on Listed Buildings without existing brackets due to consent requirements.

Councillors L Brown and F Robinson warmly welcomed the proposed hanging baskets to the front of premises and expressed the hope that this will give all of the main streets in Durham a real lift over the Summer.

Members unanimously **approved** the proposed planting plan for 2026–27 and thanked the Environment Committee for their work on this.

6. CHAIR'S UPDATES

The Chair provided a verbal update on matters arising since the Full Parish Council meeting on 28TH January 2026, as follows:

The Chair began the update by reporting that the funeral of Dr Fenwick Lawson had taken place earlier that day and had been conducted by the Dean of Durham Cathedral. The Chair noted that the service had been a fitting tribute to Dr Lawson's life and work and that it had been an honour for the Cathedral to host such an occasion. The Chair remarked that Dr Lawson's family remained in the thoughts and prayers of the community and emphasised that Dr Lawson's artistic legacy continued to shine brightly both within the City of Durham and further afield.

The Chair then welcomed the announcement by Downing Street of the appointment of The Venerable Rick Simpson as the next Bishop of Durham. The Chair informed Members that The Venerable Rick Simpson had served as the Archdeacon of Auckland within the Diocese of Durham since February 2018 and expressed the Parish Council's anticipation of working closely with him in the future in matters affecting the City and wider community.

The Chair also placed on record thanks to all those involved in organising this year's Chinese New Year celebrations in the City. The Chair reported that the event had attracted a very large crowd and had created a vibrant and welcoming atmosphere across Durham. The Chair noted particular enjoyment in attending the special Tea Ceremony alongside the Mayor and in participating in the traditional "lucky lettuce" ceremony in the Market Place.

The Chair expressed appreciation for the cultural significance of the event and its growing popularity in the City and commented that the Parish Council looked forward to supporting its continued development in future years. The Chair further noted that the Fire and Ice Festival taking place over the coming weekend was also expected to draw significant interest and expressed hope that the event would prove equally successful.

The Chair extended thanks to Councillor L Brown for organising a special meeting of residents the previous evening in partnership with Durham County Council. The

meeting had been convened to inform residents about forthcoming changes to waste collection arrangements, including alterations to glass recycling collections and the planned introduction later in the year of a separate food waste collection service. The Chair advised that further opportunities would be provided for residents and Councillors to learn more about the scheme at the Annual Meeting of the Parish in May ahead of the changes being implemented.

The Chair informed Members that the Parish Clerk would be undertaking events safety qualification training during two periods in March, from 10–12 March and again from 17–19 March. The Chair emphasised that this training was essential for the safe delivery of large-scale events organised by the Parish Council, including events such as the annual Remembrance Day commemorations, and requested that Members bear this schedule in mind when contacting the Clerk during those dates.

The Chair further advised that the Clerk would shortly circulate details of the annual Citizen of the Year Awards. The Chair explained that these awards recognise outstanding commitment to life in the City of Durham and may be presented for exceptional voluntary service, work undertaken to support others, or achievements that have delivered clear benefits to the local community. Members were asked to submit a nomination of approximately 150–200 words to the Clerk ahead of the March Full Council meeting.

The Chair reminded Members that nominations must remain confidential and that the decision would be taken by secret ballot in closed session at the end of the meeting, with those receiving a straight majority of votes declared the winner or winners. The awards would then be formally presented at the Annual Meeting of the Parish in May.

The Chair concluded the update by thanking the Clerk and Members of the Environment Committee for the significant work undertaken in developing the recently agreed action plan for Back Silver Street and Fowler's Yard. The Chair acknowledged that this initiative had required many years of effort, careful negotiation, and partnership working with a wide range of stakeholders. The Chair expressed hope that the agreed measures would have a meaningful and lasting impact on this distinctive and creative part of the City.

The Chair also thanked the Environment Committee for progress made in planning the unveiling of the Mo Mowlam blue plaque. The Chair reported that the wording of the plaque and its location had now been agreed with Mo Mowlam's family and colleagues at Durham University. The Chair further noted that Sir Adam Ingram, who had served as a Northern Ireland Minister during the signing of the Good Friday Agreement, had confirmed attendance at the unveiling ceremony and that further details of the event would be shared with Members in due course.

7. PARISH COUNCIL CIVILITY AND RESPECT PLEDGE

The Chair introduced the report concerning the Parish Council Civility and Respect Pledge, which had been developed by the National Association of Local Councils (NALC) and partner organisations.

Members were informed that the pledge formed part of a wider national initiative to address increasing concerns regarding bullying, harassment and intimidation within the local government sector.

The Chair emphasised that the pledge required councils to commit to promoting civility and respect in their interactions with councillors, staff, volunteers, partner organisations and members of the public.

The Chair also noted that the Parish Council had already adopted a Dignity at Work Policy, which was reviewed annually, and that signing the pledge would reinforce the Council's commitment to maintaining a positive and respectful working environment.

Members expressed strong support for the principles underlying the pledge and agreed that promoting respectful behaviour was essential to maintaining public confidence in local democracy. All Members in attendance at the meeting signed the Civility and Respect Pledge individually.

It was also unanimously **agreed** that the City of Durham Parish Council should sign the Civility and Respect Pledge and commit to honouring the principles and actions set out within it.

8. MOTION BY COUNCILLORS V ASHFIELD AND F ROBINSON RELATING TO ELVET GREEN AND THE RETENTION OF OPEN SPACE ACCESSIBLE TO ALL

Councillor V Ashfield presented a motion concerning the future of Elvet Green, which was seconded by Councillor F Robinson.

In presenting the motion, Councillor V Ashfield reminded Members that when the land was originally sold by Durham University to Durham County Council it was covenanted for the "perpetual enjoyment of the residents of the city."

Councillor V Ashfield stressed that the recent consultation by Durham County Council regarding the future use of the site had demonstrated the high level of public support for retaining the green space as an accessible recreational area.

Councillor V Ashfield highlighted that, while the proposal to convert the former public toilet block into a café had received general support, the motion she was presenting to Members today sought assurances that the surrounding green space would remain open, green and freely accessible to residents and visitors.

Members discussed the importance of protecting publicly accessible green spaces within the city centre and emphasised the role such spaces play in supporting community wellbeing and access to the riverbanks.

Councillor D Freeman expressed his full support for the motion and advised that he was aware that DCC officers and Councillors were keen to keep this area open and accessible for the enjoyment of the public.

Members unanimously **agreed** to support the motion as follows:

The motion:

"At the time of the university selling this land to DCC it was covenanted: "for the perpetual enjoyment of the residents of the city". The recent DCC consultation on its future use has indicated how dear this space is to the current residents (and via the Pointers to visitors too). While the former toilet block is the matter of a sale to become a cafe, which we support, we would like DCC to assure us that the adjacent green space will remain green, open and freely accessible to all who enjoy the riverbanks."

9. DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL CONSULTATION ON TACKLING POVERTY IN COUNTY DURHAM

The Clerk presented the report into Durham County Council's consultation on the proposed County Durham Poverty Strategy 2026–2030.

Members broadly welcomed the Strategy and its recognition that poverty within County Durham is deep-rooted, structural and complex, affecting more than 112,000 residents (over 21% of the population) and over one quarter of children living in relative poverty.

Members also agreed with the Strategy's strong emphasis on skills development, education, training and access to secure and well-paid employment, recognising that economic inactivity, underemployment and low wages remain key drivers of poverty across the county.

However, Members also expressed concern that certain recent and proposed policy decisions by Durham County Council risk undermining the Strategy's objectives. In particular, Councillor D Freeman expressed his opposition to the reduction of the Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme, noting that requiring low-income households to contribute a minimum of 10% towards council tax could place additional financial pressure on vulnerable residents and increase the risk of debt and enforcement action.

Councillors C Lattin and D Freeman further emphasised the importance of investment in renewable energy, energy efficiency and housing retrofit programmes, noting that tackling fuel poverty and improving housing quality could play a significant role in reducing household costs while creating long-term employment opportunities within the green economy. This was strongly echoed by all Members.

Councillor D Freeman also highlighted the urgent need to increase the supply of genuinely affordable and energy-efficient social housing, noting that demand for social housing remains extremely high across County Durham, with more than 10,000 people currently on the waiting list and that the proposed development of 500 new homes to come on board across County Durham were moving at a very slow pace.

Councillor C Lattin also stressed the importance of maintaining accessible advice and support services, including face-to-face provision such as Citizens Advice, recognising that these services play a vital role in preventing financial difficulties from escalating into crisis.

Members unanimously **agreed** to engage positively in this consultation and to make these points in a formal response. Members also unanimously **agreed** to delegate responsibility to responding to this consultation to the Parish Council's Finance Committee.

10. REPORT FROM PARISH COUNCIL REPRESENTATIVES ON EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS

Report by Councillor S Walker on the most recent meeting of the County Durham Association of Local Council (CDALC)

Councillor S Walker presented the following report on the most recent meeting of the County Durham Association of Local Council (CDALC), held on 19th February 2026.

Planning and Infrastructure Act 2025

The Executive Officer presented a report on the Planning and Infrastructure Act 2025, which received Royal Assent on 18 December 2025.

Key provisions of particular relevance to parish and town councils include:

- The introduction of a National Scheme of Delegation, which may transfer more planning decisions from committees to planning officers.*
- Mandatory training requirements for members serving on planning committees.*
- New compulsory purchase powers enabling parish and town councils to acquire land at existing use value for affordable housing, where justified in the public interest.*
- The introduction of Strategic Planning through Spatial Development Strategies, likely to operate across wider geographic areas.*
- Changes affecting nationally significant infrastructure projects, including streamlined processes.*

Members were advised to consider the potential implications for local democratic input, governance arrangements, and engagement with strategic planning processes.

Improving Civility and Respect – Governance Checklist

A report was presented on the Civility and Respect Governance Checklist.

Members were reminded of the importance of maintaining high standards of conduct and ensuring governance arrangements remain robust and up to date.

The discussion also referenced developments relating to Member Codes of Conduct, particularly the proposed Freedom of Expression clause introduced by Durham County Council. Forum members reiterated their view that they did not support adopting the additional clause, although this remains a matter for individual councils to determine.

Planning Applications – Battery Storage and Solar Farms

Hetton Town Council introduced a discussion regarding the increasing number of planning applications for battery storage facilities and large-scale solar farms.

Members shared experiences of managing such applications, highlighting concerns regarding:

- *The scale and cumulative impact of developments.*
- *Community engagement and local opposition.*
- *The strategic balance between renewable energy targets and local environmental considerations.*

There was a view expressed that the overall balance of such developments may need to be addressed more strategically at a higher level.

Hetton Town Council indicated that they would welcome collaboration with other town and parish councils who may wish to work together in making representations opposing specific developments of concern.

Rise North East

Becks Lippe, Durham Relationships Lead for Rise North East, addressed the Forum regarding their work to transform lives through the power of movement.

Members were informed of opportunities for parish and town councils to support community wellbeing initiatives, including active travel, physical activity programmes, and improved access to green space.

It was suggested that Rise North East may be a useful contact when reviewing neighbourhood plans, particularly in relation to active travel routes and making local areas more pedestrian- and cycle-friendly.

End of report

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.

11. PERSONNEL MATTERS AND STAFF/ MEMBER TRAINING

Members noted the recent resignation of Councillor Giuseppe Bignardi as a Parish Councillor for the Neville's Cross parish ward. The Chair noted her thanks to Giuseppe and Members wished Giuseppe and his family well for the future.

The Chair also presented a report on further training opportunities for Members as well as the intention to look into further pastoral support for Members and staff.

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

Signed,

**Chair of the City of Durham Parish Council
(25th March 2026)**

ITEM 6: COUNTY DURHAM PLAN HOUSES IN MULTIPLE OCCUPATION INTERIM POLICY

The report presented to Cabinet on 18 March 2026 seeks approval to consult on a new interim planning policy governing Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) in parts of County Durham outside the existing Durham City Article 4 areas.

The Council has stated that the purpose of the interim policy is to address emerging concerns regarding the increasing number of HMOs across the county and to establish planning guidance before a broader review of the County Durham Plan (CDP) is completed.

A full copy of this report can be found here: [CDP HMO Interim Policy Report.pdf](#)

As Members are aware, an HMO is defined as a property occupied by three or more people from two or more separate households who share facilities such as bathrooms or kitchens. HMOs provide an important form of relatively affordable accommodation but can create planning challenges where they become highly concentrated in particular neighbourhoods.

The interim policy therefore aims to ensure that HMOs contribute to mixed and balanced communities while protecting residential amenity and maintaining a high standard of living conditions for occupants.

Under national planning regulations, a family dwelling (Use Class C3) can be converted to a small HMO housing three to six residents (Use Class C4) without planning permission through permitted development rights. Larger HMOs (more than six residents) require planning permission as they fall within the sui generis category.

Local authorities can remove permitted development rights by introducing an Article 4 Direction where evidence shows that uncontrolled conversions may harm local communities. In Durham City, such directions already apply in areas including:

- Framwellgate Moor
- Newton Hall
- Pity Me
- Mount Oswald
- Carville
- Belmont

These controls were introduced primarily because of high concentrations of student HMOs, which were considered detrimental to balanced neighbourhoods.

However, this interim policy is proposed to apply to all parts of the County outside the existing Article 4 area. This will impact part of the City of Durham parish area however because Aykley Woods (the site of the old Police HQ) is outside the Article 4 area.

The current County Durham Plan Policy 16 places limits on student HMOs within Durham City, stating that they should not exceed 10% of residential properties within a 100-metre radius. This policy remains in force within the existing Article 4 areas.

Evidence gathered by Durham County Council indicates that HMO numbers have begun increasing outside the existing controlled areas, particularly in parts of the county not previously subject to Article 4 restrictions.

To address this trend, the Council has approved a new Article 4 Direction covering the remainder of the county, which will remove permitted development rights for HMO conversions from 17 August 2026. This means that, from that date, most conversions from family homes to small HMOs across the wider county will require planning permission.

However, planning applications must be determined against clear policy guidance. As the County Durham Plan is currently under review, the council has proposed introducing an interim HMO policy to bridge the gap until the new plan is adopted.

The interim policy is designed specifically for areas outside the Durham City Article 4 zones. Within the city's existing Article 4 areas, Policy 16 of the County Durham Plan will continue to apply, and the interim policy will not replace it.

This distinction is important because applying the interim policy within the city could undermine the effectiveness of the existing planning framework designed to regulate student HMOs.

Evidence also suggests that non-student HMOs are not significantly increasing within Durham City itself, partly due to property values and existing planning restrictions. Licensed HMO data generally aligns with student council tax exemption properties, indicating that most HMOs in the city continue to be student housing.

The report indicates that this policy is grounded in the principles of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), which requires planning authorities to provide an adequate supply of housing while ensuring development creates sustainable, inclusive communities.

While HMOs can play an important role in providing affordable housing for a range of groups — including students, young professionals, migrants, and lower-income households — high concentrations can lead to several challenges:

- Loss of traditional family housing
- Changes to neighbourhood character
- Increased noise, waste management, or parking pressures
- Reduced community stability due to transient populations

The interim policy seeks to balance the need for affordable accommodation with the need to protect residential amenity and maintain community cohesion.

A central element of the proposed policy is the introduction of clear thresholds designed to prevent over-concentration of HMOs in any given area.

Two key restrictions are proposed:

- First, an HMO should not be approved if three or more of the ten nearest neighbouring properties are already HMOs.
- Second, planning permission should normally be refused where a new HMO would result in “sandwiching”, meaning a residential property would be located between two HMOs or between an HMO and a non-residential use.

These measures aim to ensure that HMOs remain dispersed within communities rather than clustering together.

In addition to location thresholds, the interim policy introduces several operational and management requirements for planning applications.

Applicants must submit a management plan demonstrating how the property will be managed and how potential impacts on neighbouring residents will be addressed.

The policy also includes requirements intended to ensure a high standard of accommodation, including adequate internal space, appropriate facilities, and measures to minimise disturbance to neighbouring properties.

These requirements seek to improve both the quality of accommodation for residents and the living conditions of surrounding households.

As Cabinet has now approved the recommendation, the interim policy will be subject to a six-week public consultation between 25 March and 5 May 2026.

DECISION REQUIRED	For Members to note the content of the above report and the substantive report presented to the March DCC Cabinet meeting and agree to engage positively with the upcoming consultation and instruct the Planning and Licensing Committee to draft a response to this interim policy, to be presented and approved at the April Full Council meeting.
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ITEM 6: PROPOSAL TO ESTABLISH A NEW CITY OF DURHAM PARTNER OF THE YEAR AWARD

Members will recall that the Environment Committee proposed the introduction of a new "Partner of the Year Award" to recognise the contribution of organisations working collaboratively to enhance life within the City of Durham parish. Draft criteria were circulated for consideration, setting out detailed eligibility requirements, assessment criteria, and nomination processes.

Following circulation, the Clerk has received feedback from Members expressing the view that the proposed criteria may be overly prescriptive and could unintentionally limit the spirit and accessibility of the award. There is a clear view that the intention of the award is to celebrate positive contributions made by organisations to the parish, and that a simpler, more flexible approach would better reflect this aim.

Members have expressed strong support for this award but suggested that the award criteria should instead align more closely with the Council's established "Citizen of the Year Award". This approach focuses on recognising outstanding commitment to parish life, including exceptional contributions to voluntary or community activity, support for others and achievements that benefit the wider community. Adopting a similar framework for the Partner of the Year Award would ensure consistency across Council awards, while allowing Members discretion to recognise a broad range of organisational contributions without unnecessary restriction.

It is therefore proposed that the detailed criteria previously drafted be replaced with a concise statement recognising outstanding contributions by organisations, groups, charities, social enterprises, public bodies or businesses that have demonstrably benefited the City of Durham parish. As with the Citizen of the Year Award, there should be no requirement for the organisation to be based within the parish, provided that its work has made a significant positive impact locally nor that the award should be limited to one recipient per year.

In line with existing practice, nominations would be submitted by Parish Councillors and supported by a short, written statement of approximately 150–200 words. Nominations should remain confidential and be considered by Full Council in closed session, with voting undertaken by secret ballot. Any organisation receiving a straight majority of votes would be declared the recipient of the award. Presentation of the award would take place at the annual meeting of the City of Durham parish in May.

DECISIONS REQUIRED	1) For Members to adopt a simplified set of criteria for the Partner of the Year Award, as set out above and aligned with the principles of the Citizen of the Year Award.
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	2) If 1) is approved, for Members to agree that nominations for eligible organisations be invited for consideration at the April Full Council meeting.
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ITEM 6: PROPOSAL TO SUPPORT STUDENTS AT HOUGHALL COLLEGE TO SHOWCASE THEIR WORK AT CHELSEA FLOWER SHOW 2026

The purpose of this report is to inform Members of an opportunity for floristry students from East Durham College to exhibit at the RHS Chelsea Flower Show and to seek Council approval for a financial contribution toward the project.

The Council is asked to approve the allocation of the £3,000 underspend in the Environment Committee's planting budget for the current financial year to support the students' participation.

East Durham College has been selected to exhibit at the RHS Chelsea Flower Show, one of the most prestigious horticultural events in the world. The exhibition attracts over 145,000 visitors annually, alongside international media coverage and professional visitors from across the horticulture and floristry sectors.

The College's floristry students, drawn from across County Durham, will design, construct and present a floral installation in the Great Pavilion responding to the theme "Floristry Laboratory."

Participation in the show represents a significant opportunity for the students to showcase their creative and technical skills on a national and international stage. For many learners, this is expected to be a once-in-a-lifetime professional experience that supports career development, confidence and industry connections.

At the time of writing, the College is working with its press team regarding the formal announcement of its participation. The information is therefore being treated in confidence until the official communications are released.

The total estimated cost of delivering the installation and supporting the students' participation is £15,457.

The principal expenditure areas include:

- Flowers and foliage: £3,500
- Transport (people): £1,500
- Transport (materials): £541
- Accommodation (12 people): £6,816
- Construction materials (including contingency): £3,100

Several costs are being reduced through in-kind support, including:

- Parking provided by Capel Manor College
- Construction labour provided by the College's construction department
- Public liability insurance covered under the College's existing policy
- Sustainable sourcing of construction materials through waste and sample materials where possible

The project has already secured significant support from the Royal Horticultural Society (RHS) and the College:

- RHS contribution: £5,000 towards flowers, foliage and construction costs
- RHS transport contribution: £2,457
- College contribution: £1,000

Despite this support, an estimated £8,000 remains to be raised through sponsorship, donations and fundraising to ensure that all students are able to participate fully, particularly in relation to accommodation, travel and construction materials.

At its most recent meeting, the Environment Committee considered the request for support. The Committee noted that the project aligns closely with the Council's interest in horticulture, environmental awareness, community pride and support for education and young people within County Durham.

Members also recognised the value of the project in promoting the region's creativity and horticultural expertise at a national and international event.

The Committee therefore agreed to recommend that the £3,000 underspend in its planting budget for the current financial year be allocated to support the East Durham College floristry students' participation in the RHS Chelsea Flower Show.

Supporting this project would enable the Parish Council to contribute to a significant educational and cultural opportunity for local students.

The project highlights:

- Skills development in horticulture and floristry
- Opportunities for young people from County Durham to participate in a globally recognised event
- Promotion of environmental awareness through sustainable design approaches
- Positive recognition of the region's education and creative sectors

Sponsors and supporters will also be acknowledged in project publicity where appropriate and a representative of the Parish Council (Councillor Ashfield) was pleased to attend a launch event on 19th March with florist to the Royal Family Simon Lycett promoting this fantastic opportunity for the College.

The proposed allocation of £3,000 would be funded from the Environment Committee planting budget underspend for the current financial year. No additional budget provision is required.

**DECISION
REQUIRED**

For Members to approve the allocation of £3,000 from the Environment Committee's planting budget underspend to support East Durham College floristry students in delivering their installation at the RHS Chelsea Flower Show.

ITEM 8: ASSERTION 10 – DIGITAL AND DATA COMPLIANCE FOR THE 2025/26 ANNUAL GOVERNANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY RETURN (AGAR)

Members will be aware that the Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR) for 2025/26 introduces a new requirement in the form of Assertion 10, which must be considered and approved as part of the Council's Annual Governance Statement.

Assertion 10 represents a significant development in governance expectations for parish and town councils, in that it brings together digital infrastructure, information governance and data protection into a single, clearly defined assurance. In practical terms, it requires the Council not only to comply with relevant legislation and best practice, but also to be able to demonstrate that such compliance is active, embedded and subject to review.

At its core, Assertion 10 requires the Council to confirm that it has appropriate arrangements in place for the secure and lawful handling of information. This includes the use of an official .gov.uk domain for both the Council's website and email communications, ensuring that public-facing digital services meet recognised accessibility standards, and maintaining full compliance with the requirements of the UK General Data Protection Regulation and the Data Protection Act 2018. These elements are not new in themselves; however, Assertion 10 formalises the expectation that they are consistently applied, properly documented, and supported by evidence.

In order to meet these requirements, the Council has undertaken a comprehensive review of its current arrangements. This has included the transition to a .gov.uk domain and the allocation of official email addresses for all Members and officers, thereby ensuring that Council business is conducted through secure and accountable channels. The Council's website has also been reviewed and configured to meet recognised accessibility standards, with appropriate tools in place to identify and address any issues, alongside a published accessibility statement and clear reporting mechanisms for users.

Alongside these digital improvements, particular emphasis has been placed on data protection and information governance. A structured data audit and mapping exercise has been undertaken in order to establish what personal data the Council holds, the purposes for which it is processed, where it is stored, who has access to it and how long it is retained.

This exercise is a fundamental component of demonstrating compliance, as it enables the Council to identify potential risks, ensure that lawful bases for processing are clearly understood, and confirm that appropriate controls are in place. The outcome of this work indicates that the Council processes only limited amounts of personal data, and that existing arrangements are proportionate, clearly defined and capable of meeting statutory requirements.

To support this framework, a suite of policies and procedures has been developed and is presented within the addendum for consideration. These include a Data Security Breach Policy, a Subject Access Request procedure, a Consent Form, a Records Retention Policy, an Information Technology Policy and a Use Your Own Device Policy. Collectively, these documents establish a coherent and practical set of controls governing how information is managed across the organisation. They address key areas such as incident response, individual rights, lawful processing, retention and disposal of records, appropriate use of technology and the management of risks associated with personal devices. Taken together, they provide the necessary structure to ensure that compliance is not only achieved, but maintained over time.

It is also important to note that responsibility for data protection compliance ultimately rests with the Council as a corporate body. In recognition of this, the Clerk has been formally designated to undertake the role associated with data control responsibilities, with clear terms of reference setting out duties in relation to monitoring compliance, advising Members, maintaining records of processing activities and acting as a point of contact for both the Information Commissioner's Office and members of the public. This arrangement ensures that there is both operational oversight and accountability within the Council's governance structure.

Members should also be mindful that Assertion 10 is not a one-off exercise linked solely to the completion of the AGAR. Rather, it reflects an ongoing requirement for the Council to review, update and evidence its arrangements on a continuing basis. The policies and procedures presented are therefore intended to be living documents, subject to periodic review and refinement in response to changes in legislation, guidance or operational practice. The completion of the data audit and the introduction of the accompanying policy framework represent a significant step forward, but they should be seen as part of an ongoing cycle of governance rather than a fixed endpoint.

DECISIONS REQUIRED	1) For Members to formally appoint the Clerk as the Data Controller for the Parish Council. 2) For Members to consider the substantive addendum report in detail and to recognise that a comprehensive data audit has been completed, appropriate controls and processes are in place, and that the Council is in a position to confirm compliance with the requirements of Assertion 10. 3) For Members to formally adopt the suite of policies contained within the addendum, namely the Data Security Breach Policy, Subject Access Request procedure, Consent Form, Records Retention Policy, Information Technology Policy and Use Your Own Device Policy, thereby ensuring that these arrangements are embedded within the
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	Council’s governance framework and can be relied upon as part of the 2025/26 AGAR submission.
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ITEM 9: REPORT BY THE COMMUNITY CENTRE WORKING GROUP ON PROPOSED FUNDING ALLOCATION FOR 2026/27

Members will recall that the Parish Council established the Community Centre Support Scheme as part of its wider commitment to strengthening community infrastructure within the parish area. Following the Expressions of Interest process undertaken in autumn 2025, a total of eight submissions were received from eligible organisations. After assessment by the Working Group, three organisations were invited to progress to the full application stage: St Giles Church, Waddington Street United Reformed Church, and Alington House Community Association.

Since the Finance Committee considered this matter in January, further progress has been made. Firstly, St Giles Church has formally withdrawn from the process. The Church has indicated that due to capacity constraints during the current year it is not able to progress its application further. The Clerk has acknowledged receipt of this and indicated that the Church would be welcome to re-engage with the scheme in future funding rounds should circumstances allow and the Clerk will also keep the Church updated on the small grants scheme later in FY 2026-27.

As a result, the Parish Council has now received two full funding applications, from Alington House Community Association and Waddington Street United Reformed Church, which are attached for Members' consideration.

Members will recall that the Parish Council has budgeted for £40,000 towards the main community centre support project as well as an upper limit of £5,000 towards the City Theatre cultural funding contract.

Alington House Community Association

The application submitted by Alington House Community Association focuses on improving the long-term energy efficiency and sustainability of the building. As Members will be aware, Alington House occupies a historic building within the city centre and currently experiences disproportionately high energy costs due to the age and condition of the structure.

The proposal adopts a "fabric-first" approach, addressing the underlying condition of the building before pursuing more advanced energy generation technologies. The works proposed include the installation of a zoned smart heating system, replacement of single-glazed sash windows that are currently in poor condition and contribute to significant heat loss, repairs to the roof where slipped tiles are causing water ingress, and the installation of additional loft insulation to improve thermal performance.

The total estimated cost of the project is £55,903, broken down as follows:

- Heating system controls – £20,000
- Replacement windows – £30,703
- Roof repairs – £2,200
- Additional insulation – £3,000

Alington has requested £30,000 from the Parish Council, with the remaining funding to be sought from other grant bodies including Durham County Council, Screwfix and Northern Powergrid. Alington has confirmed that the project is deliverable within the 2026–27 financial year, with a preference for works to be undertaken during summer 2026 to minimise disruption to users of the building.

The application emphasises that Alington House is currently the only remaining community centre located directly within the heart of Durham City, providing an important space for community groups, room hire and warm space provision during colder months. The proposed works are therefore intended to improve both the financial sustainability of the building and its ability to continue serving the wider community.

Waddington Street United Reformed Church (URC)

The application submitted by Waddington Street United Reformed Church differs in focus from its original Expression of Interest.

Members will recall that the initial Expression of Interest placed significant emphasis on solar panel installation as part of an environmental sustainability initiative. However, the URC has subsequently revised its proposal and is now seeking support for a set of internal improvements to enhance the accessibility and usability of the building for community groups.

The application proposes two specific improvements:

1. Replacement of worn carpets in the entrance areas, stairs and passageways leading to the community hall and meeting room.
2. Upgrading the building's audio system to provide a more flexible, reliable and inclusive sound system for meetings and community activities.

The estimated total cost of these works is £7,066.88, comprising £3,580 for carpeting and £3,486.88 for the audio system. The URC has indicated that it would welcome financial assistance towards these works, although it is able to cover any shortfall from its own resources if necessary.

While the revised proposal does not directly relate to energy efficiency improvements, the URC has indicated that it is separately exploring solar panel installation. The point of contact at the URC has explained: *"We have had to have the roof surveyed and that involved specialist contractors and internal scaffolding which all took an inordinate amount of time. We also had to have the existing electrical supply investigated. This has delayed progress to the point that we are only now able to seek estimates for the installation of solar panels and batteries. I cannot guarantee that this work could be completed this financial year and do not have the necessary paperwork to attach to this current application. I therefore applied for assistance to current work on the basis that any help received would help offset the finances for the solar panels and it will have definite benefits to the many users of our premises."*

The URC has confirmed that the works proposed in this application could be delivered within two to three months, making the project readily achievable within the 2026–27 financial year.

Fundraising contractor – City Theatre

Members will also recall that, during the January discussions, the Working Group considered the Expression of Interest submitted by the City Theatre.

While the Working Group recognised the significant cultural importance of the theatre, it concluded that the scale of funding required to secure its long-term future would be beyond the scope of the Community Centre Support Scheme. It was therefore proposed that the Parish Council should instead support the theatre by commissioning a specialist fundraising and bid-writing contractor to pursue major external funding opportunities.

Following approval by the Finance Committee, the Parish Council advertised this opportunity publicly via its website. The advert invited proposals from experienced fundraising professionals capable of developing and submitting funding applications to regional and national programmes such as the National Lottery and Cultural Growth Fund.

The Parish Council has since received two bids for this work:

- Contractor A – £5,000
- Contractor B – £15,960

Both bids have been received following the publication of the advert and are available for Members' review.

At its forthcoming meeting on Tuesday 24th March 2026, the Working Group will be asked to: a) note the withdrawal of St Giles Church from the Community Centre Support Scheme for this financial year; b) consider the two applications received from Alington House Community Association and Waddington Street United Reformed Church and c) provide direction on the appointment of a suitable fundraising contractor to support the City Theatre project.

Please note that a recommendation for the allocation of this funding will be coming to the Full Council meeting in March 2026 for a decision and shall be circulated in advance of the meeting, immediately following the Working Group meeting of 24th March 2026.

DECISIONS REQUIRED	1) For Members to consider the addendum reports and recommendation(s) of the Community Centre Support Working Group and agree to the allocation of funding towards a project(s) to support the identified Community Centre/ Facility accordingly.
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	2) For Members to consider the formal bids for supporting the City Theatre to access wider funding as well as the recommendation(s) of the Community Centre Support Working Group and approve the appointment of an appropriate bid writer.
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