

CITY OF DURHAM PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of the Parish Council Finance Committee held on Wednesday 14th January 2026 at 11:00am via Zoom

Present: Councillors S Walker (in the Chair), L Brown, G Holland, E Scott, V Ashfield and L Wilson.

Also present: Parish Clerk A Shanley.

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor E Hopgood. The Chair accepted that Councillor G Holland was attending the meeting as a substitute for Councillor Hopgood.

2. TO RECEIVE ANY DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST FROM MEMBERS

None received.

3. TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 19th NOVEMBER 2025

The minutes of the meeting held on 19th November 2025 were unanimously agreed as a true and accurate record of proceedings.

4. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

None received.

5. REPORT ON THE FINANCIAL POSITION OF THE PARISH COUNCIL

The Clerk presented a detailed report on the financial position of the Parish Council. Members had previously been circulated with the nominal ledger and budget headings for review. The Clerk advised that, as at 9th January, there had been no additional transactions since the financial position was last updated.

Total income received during the financial year to date stood at £312,362. Total expenditure to date amounted to £251,275 against an approved annual budget of £370,710. This meant that approximately 32% of the Council's overall budget remained unspent at that point in the financial year, which the Clerk advised was broadly in line with expectations given the timing of expenditure.

The Clerk explained that certain budgets appeared underspent but that this reflected the timing of payments rather than an absence of commitments. The staffing budget stood at £61,220 against an allocation of £95,000, noting that this included provision for the fundraising role. The Small Grants budget had already been fully committed. Expenditure on events had reached just over £36,000 against a total allocation of £38,000. Members were reminded that the Beacon events allocation included £10,400 which remained ring-fenced as it had been received as a donation.

The Clerk further reported that the administration budget currently stood at just over £23,000 against a budget allocation of £21,000. This reflected the timing of payments for items such as IT provision, insurance, communications costs and the introduction of a new office space which carried a slightly higher rental cost. It was therefore anticipated that some additional funds might need to be transferred into the administration budget before the end of the financial year.

Within the Business Committee budget, expenditure currently stood at £18,630 of an allocation of £20,438, representing around 91.2% of the available budget having been spent or committed. The Environment budget showed expenditure of £56,676 against an allocation of £103,979, leaving £47,303 remaining. The Clerk explained that this apparent underspend was largely due to the timing of invoices rather than the absence of activity. For example, the enhanced policing programme showed expenditure of £3,376 against a £40,000 allocation, but four further invoices were expected which would fully utilise that budget.

Additional environmental projects were also expected to generate expenditure shortly. The River Wear programme was due to incur significant upcoming costs, and the Blue Plaques programme included works relating to the Mo Mowlam Blue Plaque, the Shincliffe boundary stone project and works associated with the Gilesgate duck pond. The Green Move-Out programme had also been pursued, with the Clerk confirming that an invoice for the Green Move-In project had been chased. The Emergency Plan budget had effectively been fully allocated but some expenditure still required processing due to VAT arrangements.

Members were also advised that a significant invoice was expected for professional planning support relating to the Article 4 Direction report, which would shortly be presented to Full Council.

The Clerk reported that expenditure from earmarked reserves totalled £28,000, comprising £24,745 from the Election Reserve and £3,312 from the Contingencies Reserve. Approximately £16,943 remained in the earmarked reserves.

The Clerk concluded that the Parish Council remained in a strong and stable financial position. Income had been received early in the year, while a proportion of expenditure remained to be delivered later in the financial year. The current financial position therefore reflected the expected phasing of income and expenditure. The level of uncommitted funds and underspent budgets also provided flexibility for the Council to progress projects, respond to emerging priorities and reallocate resources where required.

Members discussed several aspects of the report. Councillor Walker raised the small budget allocated for the use of drug detection dogs and asked whether the budget would be utilised. The Clerk advised that some expenditure would occur but that the full allocation was unlikely to be spent.

The Clerk also advised that an additional £3,000 to £4,000 might need to be allocated to the events budget to support Chinese New Year activities, particularly as the cost of installing banners along North Road had proven higher than originally anticipated. However, he noted that approximately £12,000 remained within the Council's contingency budget, which could be used to support both events and administrative costs if required. Members expressed support for using contingency funds where necessary, noting that contingencies existed precisely to support such requirements.

The Clerk also confirmed that Durham BID had agreed to contribute £1,000 towards the cost of banners along North Road. Members welcomed the collaborative work undertaken by partners and the strong level of cooperation across organisations involved in planning the celebrations.

The Committee noted the report on the financial position of the Parish Council. The Committee **agreed** that the contingency fund should be used to support events and administration expenditure this financial year, moving £6,000 to administration costs and £5,000 to events accordingly.

6. REPORT FROM THE COMMUNITY CENTRE SUPPORT WORKING GROUP

The Clerk presented a report on the work of the Community Centre Support Working Group. Members were advised that the Council had received eight expressions of interest from community organisations seeking support.

Following consideration of all submissions, the Working Group had decided to invite three organisations to progress to the next stage of the process during the current financial year. These organisations were St Giles Church, Waddington Street United Reformed Church, and the Allington House Community Association. The Clerk emphasised that progressing to this stage did not guarantee that financial support would be awarded, as final decisions would depend on the quality and strength of the applications submitted.

The Working Group had observed that the most significant challenge facing community centres at present was the rising cost of energy and operational running costs. In response, the group had prioritised proposals that aimed to improve both environmental and financial sustainability. One key area of focus was the potential installation of solar panels to reduce energy costs and improve long-term resilience.

The Clerk reported that initial work had already been undertaken with Allenton House to explore solar panel installation and wider sustainability improvements. Some staffing changes within that organisation were also expected to contribute to improved financial sustainability.

The Working Group had also considered an application relating to the City Theatre. While members had recognised the importance of the theatre and its cultural value to the city, it was concluded that the scale of its financial requirements was significantly greater than the Parish Council could realistically support through direct grants.

Instead, the proposal was that the Parish Council should support the Theatre by appointing a fundraising contractor who could assist in developing large funding bids to external bodies such as the National Lottery and the Cultural Growth Fund, which was expected to open for applications later in February. The proposed allocation for commissioning this work was approximately £5,000.

The Clerk noted that when the Parish Council had previously agreed to employ a fundraiser, three priority themes had been identified: environmental sustainability, cultural support and heritage. Work on environmental initiatives was already underway, and the proposed support for the City Theatre would form part of the cultural strand of that programme.

Members were also informed that unsuccessful applicants had been encouraged to apply again in the future and had been directed towards alternative funding sources which might be able to support their projects.

During discussion, Councillor Walker confirmed that none of the applications involved grants being used to promote any particular religious faith. The Clerk confirmed that this was correct and that the support being considered related solely to community use of facilities and sustainability improvements.

Councillor G Holland welcomed the focus on solar panel installations but asked what proportion of costs the Parish Council might be expected to cover. Councillor Walker explained that projects often involved match funding, with other organisations such as Northern Power Grid offering grants which the Parish Council could supplement.

The Clerk added that the Parish Council had a total fund of approximately £40,000 available for this programme and that allocations would be made on a competitive basis depending on the strength of applications submitted. For example, an application demonstrating match funding and detailed planning work would likely be prioritised over one with limited preparation.

Members also discussed the broader benefits of solar energy systems, including the potential for community centres to generate electricity and sell surplus power back to the grid. Councillor Walker shared her experience of solar panel installations at another community building, noting that energy costs had previously exceeded £1,000 per month but were expected to reduce significantly following installation.

Councillor G Holland highlighted that older buildings such as Allenton House could also face challenges relating to heat loss and building insulation, and suggested that energy efficiency improvements could also form part of sustainability discussions with community organisations.

The Clerk confirmed that full applications from the shortlisted organisations were expected by mid-February, allowing the Committee to make funding decisions later in the year.

Finally, the Clerk asked Members to approve the proposal to advertise for a fundraising contractor to support the City Theatre project. Members indicated their support for the proposal.

The Committee **agreed** to progress the Community Centre Support programme as outlined and also **agreed** to approve the advertisement for a fundraising contractor to support major funding applications for the City Theatre.

7. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

Wednesday 15th April at 11.00am via Zoom.

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

Signed,



**Chair of the Parish Council Finance Committee
(16th March 2026)**