

City of Durham Parish Council

Minutes of the annual meeting of the City of Durham Parish Council held on Wednesday 28th May 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 and 5 members of the public.

Councillor S Walker opened the meeting.

1. ELECTION OF CHAIR

Councillor S Walker was **elected** (9 votes in favour and 4 abstentions) as Chair of the Parish Council for the ensuing year. Proposed by Councillor E Scott and seconded by Councillor L Brown. Councillor S Walker read out and signed the Declaration of Acceptance of this Office.

There were no other nominations for the role of Chair.

2. ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIR

Councillor D Freeman was proposed by Councillor G Holland and seconded by Councillor C Lattin for the role of Vice-Chair.

Councillor R Cornwell was also proposed by Councillor V Ashfield and seconded by Councillor F Robinson for the role of Vice-Chair.

Councillor D Freeman was **elected** as Vice-Chair of the Parish Council by 8 votes to 5.

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

None received.

4. TO RECEIVE ANY DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST FROM MEMBERS

None received.

5. APPROVAL OF THE DRAFT MINUTES OF THE COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON 24TH APRIL 2025

The minutes of the meeting held on 24th April 2025 were unanimously **agreed** as a true and accurate record of proceedings.

6. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

None received.

7. CHAIR'S UPDATE

The Chair provided a verbal update on matters arising since the Full Parish Council meeting on 24th April 2025 as follows:

- The Chair extended congratulations to all Members on their successful election to the City of Durham Parish Council and commended the positive campaigns run ahead of the May local elections. The Chair noted that, although the Parish Council was still young in comparison to others across County Durham, new Members could be proud at joining one of only three Parish Councils in the county and one of just 100 nationally to have achieved the National Association of Local Councils' Quality Status Award.
- The Chair advised that the Parish Council fully accepted the democratic outcome of the recent elections and would be working with all of the new County Councillors to ensure the City's voice remained prominent, especially in matters concerning cultural heritage, diversity, clean air and climate change; all of which are major issues for the City.
- The Chair extended her congratulations to the organisers of the recent Durham Pride event, which took place the previous weekend. The Chair reported that Mel Metcalfe and his team had delivered another successful event and she was delighted to have attended alongside the Clerk and Councillors Brown and Hopgood. The Chair emphasised the importance of Pride as a celebration of diversity, equality and inclusion in the City.
- The Chair thanked the Clerk and Durham Markets Company for the successful organisation of VE Day events earlier in the month. The Chair highlighted that the Parish Council's recent street party in Durham City had received BBC coverage. She also thanked Councillors Ashfield and Lattin for supporting the beacon lighting event in the Clerk's absence, alongside the Fire and Rescue Service. Special thanks were given to District Manager Gary Tough and his team for enabling the event to proceed at significantly reduced costs.
- The Chair highlighted that the Parish Council had recently hosted an annual meeting of the parish and extended her thanks to Durham University for hosting the event free-of-charge at the Waterside building. The Chair reported a strong turnout and noted that several well-deserved awards had been presented. The Chair also thanked Dave Clarke for his presentation and for addressing public questions regarding community safety and the Public Space Protection Order. The Chair noted that a first-ever request for a parish poll had not gained sufficient support to proceed.
- The Chair reminded Members of the upcoming Councillor training sessions and reminded anyone yet to book on these sessions to please contact the Clerk by the end of the week.
- The Chair also reminded Members that the Clerk would be on annual leave until 16th June and would be unavailable via email during this period.
- Finally, the Chair extended her congratulations to the founders of Seven Stories on the launch of the new Two Tales unit at Prince Bishops Place. The Chair

reported that the centre featured a gallery, interactive storytelling, and educational workshops. The Chair advised that she was delighted to have attended the opening of Two Tales and wished Claire Riley, Richard O'Neill, Wendy Elliott, and the team every success, expressing hope that the venture would significantly boost the local high street.

8. PROPOSAL TO ESTABLISH A WORKING GROUP TO REVIEW THE PARISH COUNCIL'S STANDING ORDERS, FINANCIAL REGULATIONS, COMMITTEE TERMS OF REFERENCE AND COUNCIL POLICIES

Members were asked to consider the formation of a dedicated, time-limited Working Group to undertake the annual review of the Parish Council's core governance documents. The Clerk highlighted that this included the Council's Standing Orders, Financial Regulations, Committee Terms of Reference, and various Council Policies.

In addition to the existing documents, the Chair reported that the Working Group would also consider a new Gifts and Hospitality Policy, following correspondence earlier in the month.

The Chair explained that the purpose of the review was to ensure that all governance documents remained current, legally compliant, and reflective of best practice in Parish Council operations. Although not a statutory requirement, the Council had a well-established practice of reviewing these documents annually to maintain high standards of governance, transparency, and accountability.

The Clerk advised that the Working Group would be tasked with reviewing each document in detail; taking advice from the Clerk on any relevant legislative changes since the last review in 2024; identifying any sections requiring amendment or clarification; and bringing forward recommended revisions to a future meeting of the Parish Council for formal adoption.

The Chair noted that, following approval of the updated documents in June, the next review would be scheduled for April 2026 with adoption in May.

Members unanimously **agreed** to the formation of this time-limited Governance Review Working Group and also **agreed** the Councillors S Walker, V Ashfield, C Lattin and R Cornwell should form the membership of this Working Group.

9. TO DECIDE ON APPOINTMENT OF PARISH COUNCIL REPRESENTATIVES ON LOCAL ORGANISATIONS

Members considered the current list of Parish Council representatives on all of the local organisations listed in the report to Council.

Members also considered that the Parish Council has agreed to have a representative on outside local organisations only where the aims of these groups are aligned with the strategic objectives of the Parish Council in the exercise of its functions.

Members also noted that there is a need for all Parish Council representatives to provide a report to Full Council on the work of these organisations/ bodies following each meeting they attend.

In view of this, Members agreed to retain an official Parish Council representative on each of the following groups and the respective representative on each group was also unanimously agreed as follows:

Local organisation/ body	City of Durham Parish Council representative
Community Engagement Task Force	Victoria Ashfield
Community Engagement Task Force sub group - Economic	Elizabeth Scott
Community Engagement Task Force sub group - Lived Environment	Giuseppe Bignardi
CDALC Larger Councils Forum	Susan Walker, Fred Robinson and Adam Shanley
City Safety Group	Adam Shanley
Durham BID board	Adam Shanley
Durham University Housing Group	Roger Cornwell

10. TO DECIDE ON PARISH COUNCIL COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

The Chair highlighted that there is a need for the Parish Council to agree the membership of each of its Committees. The report presented to Members highlighted the specific functions of each of the Committees and Members were asked to consider which of these Committees they wished to sit on.

The Clerk advised that a quorum for all of the Committees is presently no fewer than three Members. The Clerk also highlighted that, in all cases, the maximum number of Members per committee is set out within the Terms of Reference for each Committee

Councillor V Ashfield advised that each Committee should have a membership which is formed proportionately based on the overall political makeup of the Council.

Councillor L Brown proposed that the Committees should be able to commence following provisional agreement of their membership at this meeting but that this matter should be reviewed in September 2025 instead of waiting until May 2026 for the next Full Council meeting. This proposal was agreed unanimously.

In light of this, the membership of each Committee was unanimously **agreed** as follows:

Planning and Licensing Committee (7 Members) Grenville Holland Liz Brown Susan Walker Carole Lattin Roger Cornwell Philip Layton Rory Handy	Environment Committee (6 Members) Carole Lattin Victoria Ashfield Tony Cleaver Giuseppe Bignardi Grenville Holland Fred Robinson
Personnel Committee (5 Members) Susan Walker David Freeman Roger Cornwell Giuseppe Bignardi Victoria Ashfield	Business Committee (6 Members) Philip Layton David Freeman Elizabeth Scott Ellie Hopgood Rory Handy Les Wilson
Finance Committee (6 Members) Susan Walker Liz Brown Ellie Hopgood Elizabeth Scott Victoria Ashfield Les Wilson	

In addition, to support the creation of a timetable of meetings, Members unanimously agreed that the first meeting of each Committee should be as follows:

- **Planning and Licensing Committee** – Friday 27th June at 10:00am via Zoom.
- **Environment Committee** - Tuesday 24th June at 13:00pm via Zoom.
- **Personnel Committee** - Wednesday 5th November at 11:00am at Clayport
- **Business Committee** - Tuesday 15th July at 13:00pm via Zoom.
- **Finance Committee** - Friday 20th June at 11:00am at Clayport library.

It was highlighted that, in all cases, a special meeting of each Committee may be called at any time.

Members also **agreed** to continue with the tradition that no Committees should sit in August or December.

11. ANNUAL GOVERNANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY RETURN FOR 2024/25

- I. Members unanimously **agreed** the actions arising from the report of the internal auditor 2024-25
- II. Members unanimously **approved** the annual governance statement 2024-25
- III. Members unanimously **approved** the draft annual accounts for 2024-25
- IV. Members unanimously **approved** the register of assets 2024-25
- V. Members unanimously **approved** the accounting statement and explanation of variances 2024-25.

In closing this item, the Chair took the opportunity to thank the Clerk for all his work throughout the year in maintaining the Council's accounts and his work in the governance of the Council.

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

Councillor R Cornwell highlighted that the nomination process for this role requires a Member/ Members to apply to the Clerk no later than 7 clear working days prior to the meeting and he had only received the Agenda and notification of this 3 clear working days prior to the meeting (not including the date of publication of the Agenda and the date of the meeting). As such, it was unanimously **agreed** to defer this item until the June Full Council meeting.

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

Councillor R Cornwell highlighted that the nomination process for this role requires a Member/ Members to apply to the Clerk no later than 7 clear working days prior to the meeting and he had only received the Agenda and notification of this 3 clear working days prior to the meeting (not including the date of publication of the Agenda and the date of the meeting). As such, it was unanimously **agreed** to defer this item until the June Full Council meeting.

14. CYCLE OF FULL COUNCIL MEETINGS

Members unanimously **agreed** the following cycle of Full Council meetings for the year ahead:

2025

Wednesday 25th June

Wednesday 23rd July

Wednesday 24th September

Wednesday 22nd October

Wednesday 26th November

2026

Wednesday 28th January

Wednesday 25th February

Wednesday 25th March

Wednesday 22nd April

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.

15. ARRANGEMENTS FOR UPCOMING REMEMBRANCE EVENTS

Members **agreed** to work in collaboration with both the County Council and the Freeman's Charitable Trust on the delivery of upcoming remembrance events, specifically taking account of ensuring both safety and best value-for-money in delivering these important events.

It was **agreed** that the Clerk should liaise with appropriate Officers and representatives of each organisation on these matters.

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
(25th June 2025)**