

BERWICK-UPON-TWEED TOWN COUNCIL



Full Council

Time and date

Monday 27 April 2026 at 18:00

Place

Berwick-upon-Tweed Town Council, Unit 1, 82-88 Marygate, Berwick-upon-Tweed, Northumberland.
TD15 1BN

Minutes

1.26. Members of the Council

Members in attendance (14):

- Cllr John Robertson (Mayor, in the Chair)
- Cllr Janice Bowden
- Cllr Graham Brown
- Cllr Robert Bruce
- Cllr Rachel Driver
- Cllr Laura Hawken
- Cllr Paul Hillier
- Cllr Ayrin Khan
- Cllr Rosemary Mackenzie
- Cllr Philip Rowe
- Cllr Catherine Seymour
- Cllr Gary Smith
- Cllr Thomas Stewart
- Cllr Jane Turton

2.26 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from: Cllrs A Forbes and M Greener.

3.26 Disclosure of Interests

There were no disclosures interests received from any of the councillors present.

4.26 Open Session

The Mayor opened the public session and reminded those present that members of the public may make representations, ask questions or give evidence in respect of the business on the agenda, subject to the time limits set out on the agenda.

A member of the public asked what the existing lease of the former Barclays building meant for the Council's possible intention to purchase the building. The Mayor advised that the Council would respond within three days.

A further question was raised regarding an advertisement connected to office space required during the Maltings refurbishment works. It was explained that the main contractor required office accommodation during the refurbishment period and had reached an arrangement with the existing leaseholders.

Cllr G Brown made a statement relating to a complaint about his member conduct which had been made to Northumberland County Council. Cllr G Brown stated that the complaint concerned an alleged omission from his register of interests relating to his voluntary directorship of a subsidiary catering company connected with the Maltings. Cllr G Brown stated that the omission had been an oversight, that the company was effectively dormant, and that his register had been corrected following contact from the Monitoring Officer. He further stated that he had not been present at the Full Council meeting in June 2025 when the Council considered support for the Maltings redevelopment, and that had he been present he would have declared the interest.

5.26 Minutes

The Council considered the minutes of the Full Council meeting held on 23 February 2026. The Mayor reviewed the minutes page by page and invited members to raise any corrections. A point was raised regarding whether residents should be named in Open Session. It was clarified that, where a resident states their name in the meeting, the name will be recorded in the minutes; where a resident does not state their name, it will not be recorded.

Decisions

Council resolved that the minutes of the Full Council meeting held on 23 February 2026 be approved and signed as a correct record.

Part I - Items for Decisions

6.26 Policies

Vexatious and Unreasonable Behaviour Policy

The Council considered the revised Vexatious and Unreasonable Behaviour Policy. Cllr C Seymour asked when members had been given sight of the revised policy, what changes had been made, where the policy had come from, and who had written it. It was clarified that the report author was the Chief Officer and that the Council's existing policy was already available on the Council website.

Cllr C Seymour raised a query regarding the section of the policy which provided for the Chief Officer to assess whether conduct fell within the policy. The Mayor and members discussed the role of the Chief Officer as Proper Officer and clarified that the Chief Officer would be the first point of assessment, with consultation with the Mayor, Chair of Staffing and/or Council where appropriate. Cllr R Driver asked about scrutiny and appeal arrangements for a person subject to the policy. It was clarified that an appeal route was provided for within the policy.

Decisions

Council resolved that the revised Vexatious and Unreasonable Behaviour Policy be adopted. Voting: Carried by majority. Two members voted against and one member abstained.

Council / Officer Relations Protocol

The Council considered the Council / Officer Relations Protocol. Members discussed whether the protocol complemented the existing Civility and Respect material previously adopted by the Council. It was confirmed that the documents were intended to complement one another.

Members discussed whether a set of key governance documents, including the Code of Conduct, Standing Orders and Financial Regulations, should be printed on coloured paper and kept in councillor trays for reference. It was agreed that Budget and Administration Working Group would consider a list of suitable documents for this purpose.

Cllr C Seymour asked about the section on councillor access to Council documents, including the statement that councillors do not have unrestricted rights to inspect every document held by the Council. The discussion covered confidential information, staffing information, draft reports, and the role of the Proper Officer in considering requests for access to documents by reference to the councillor's role, the nature of the information and the legal basis for disclosure.

During the discussion Cllr C Seymour referred to the working relationship between councillors and officers using the phrase "master and servant". The Mayor stated that he was unhappy with that wording. Members then discussed the importance of a proper working relationship between councillors and officers, with reference to civility, respect and the statutory role of the Chief Officer.

Decisions

Council resolved that the Council / Officer Relations Protocol be approved as presented.

Voting: Carried by majority. Two members abstained.

7.26 Notes of the Environment and Communities Working Group

Cllr J Turton, Lead Member, introduced the notes of the Environment and Communities Working Group meetings held in March and April 2026. The Council noted updates on bus fare discrepancies, Grove Gardens South, public access to EpiPens, improvements to Spittal Promenade, public water fountains, the Salmon Queen event, Northumbria in Bloom, the Far East Campaign Memorial, War Memorials, Five Arches Park, allotments, Pocket Park and play parks.

The Council noted that a number of projects remained dependent on responses or action from Northumberland County Council. It was agreed that the proposed letter to Northumberland County Council should cover the Far East Campaign Memorial, War Memorials, Five Arches Park and allotments.

The Council discussed campervans and the potential benefit of contacting the owner of a site in Spittal to explore whether a semi-temporary campervan facility could be brought forward for the benefit of the business, the community and the visitor economy.

The Council also discussed public toilet provision. It was noted that the Woolmarket toilets had reopened on the day of the meeting, but members wished to seek assurance that the reopening was permanent and to raise wider issues including temporary toilet provision at Eastern Lane car park, the "You're Welcome" scheme, and access/opening arrangements for toilets near the beach.

Decisions

- Council resolved that officers write to Glenn Sanderson and the three Berwick Ward County Councillors requesting assistance to progress outstanding projects relating to the Far East Campaign Memorial, War Memorials, Five Arches Park and allotments.
Voting: Unanimous.
- Council resolved that officers contact the relevant landowner and arrange a meeting to discuss the potential benefits of creating a semi-temporary campervan park on part of the site in Spittal.
Voting: Carried by majority, with one abstention.
- Council resolved that officers write to Northumberland County Council and Cllr Nicole Brooke regarding public toilet provision, including assurance on the Woolmarket toilets, possible temporary toilets at Eastern Lane car park, the "You're Welcome" scheme and opening/access arrangements for beach-side toilets.
Voting: Carried unanimously.

8.26 Notes of the Budget and Administration Working Group

Cllr P Rowe, Lead Member, introduced the notes of the Budget and Administration Working Group meeting held on 13 April 2026 and presented the recommendations to Full Council.

8.26.1 Meetings and Schedules

The Council considered the proposed meeting structure for the 2026/27 municipal year. Members discussed the consultation with councillors, the merits of working groups compared with committees, public attendance, councillor availability and officer capacity. A show of hands was taken on whether members wished to return to a committee structure; the majority did not support a return to committees.

Members discussed the proposed frequency of meetings and the continuation of task groups. It was clarified that existing task groups would continue only while required, with the Salmon Queen Task Group likely to pause after the 2026 event before restarting as necessary, and the Markets Task Group to be reviewed as the work develops.

Members agreed that Full Council meetings should continue to be held on Mondays. It was further agreed that the calendar for working groups could identify week-commencing dates, with each working group deciding its preferred day at its first meeting of the municipal year, subject to officer support and practical arrangements.

Decisions

- Council resolved that the current Working Group structure be retained.
Voting: Carried by majority.
- Council resolved that the proposed meeting frequency for 2026/27 be 10 Full Council meetings, 10 Budget and Administration Working Group meetings, 8 Environment and Communities Working Group meetings, 4 Staffing Working Group meetings, and Planning Committee meetings as required.
Voting: Carried by majority. Two members voted against.
- Council resolved that existing Task Groups continue unless and until they are no longer required, with individual task groups to be reviewed as appropriate.
Voting: Carried unanimously.
- Council resolved that a Festive Lights Task Group be created in the new municipal year, with the first meeting to take place in May 2026.
Voting: Carried unanimously.
- Council resolve that Full Council meetings continue to be held on Mondays.
Voting: Carried by majority.
- Council resolved that working group dates be set initially by week commencing dates, with each working group agreeing its preferred meeting day at its first meeting of the municipal year.
Voting: Carried unanimously.

8.26.2 22-24 Hide Hill / Former Barclays Building

The Council considered the Working Group recommendation relating to the proposed acquisition and development of the former Barclays building at 22-24 Hide Hill. Members noted the strategic case set out in the report, including the limitations of the current Marygate premises, the potential to create a town-centre civic and service hub, and the possible inclusion of smaller locally priced homes within the scheme.

Members noted that the figures in the report were indicative and would require formal verification through valuation, quantity surveying, design work, borrowing advice and business planning before any final decision could be made. Members also noted the likely need for interim arrangements if any future move could not be completed before the end of the current lease arrangements.

Cllr C Seymour spoke against the proposal being investigated further, expressing concern about the scale and length of potential borrowing, public support, and the role of the Town Council. Other members stated that the recommendation was for further due diligence only and not a decision to purchase or borrow, and that long-term rental costs also had to be considered.

During the debate, Cllr C Seymour questioned another member's role in preparing the financial figures. The Mayor intervened and stated that members should not question another councillor's ability to use the Public Works Loan Board calculator or present indicative figures. The Mayor then moved the recommendations to the vote.

Decisions

- Council resolved that Option 2, namely the purchase and development of the former Barclays building at 22-24 Hide Hill, be investigated further.
Voting: Carried by majority. Twelve members voted in favour and two voted against.

- Council resolved that no final commitment be made until a full business case, valuation, survey work, legal advice, affordability assessment and public consultation have been completed.
Voting: Carried by majority. Twelve members voted in favour and two voted against.
- Council resolved that quotations be obtained for the next-stage professional work, including architect and quantity surveyor input, dimensional survey work, outline designs and outline costings, so that a fully developed report can be brought back to members.
Voting: Carried by majority. Twelve members voted in favour and two voted against.

8.26.3 General Reserves and Earmarked Reserves

The Council considered the recommendations of the Budget and Administration Working Group relating to General Reserves and Earmarked Reserves. Members noted that the General Reserve stood at approximately £144,415.35, equating to approximately 3.9 months of core operating expenditure, and was therefore broadly within the proposed target range of three to six months.

Decisions

- Council resolved to confirm that its General Reserve should be maintained at a level equivalent to between three and six months of core operating expenditure.
Voting: Carried by majority, with one abstention.
- Council resolved that the current General Reserve position be noted as broadly consistent with that range when assessed against the 2026 operating-cost budget.
Voting: Carried by majority, with one member voting against.
- Council resolved that earmarked reserves should only be held where each reserve has a clear purpose, indicative cost and review or drawdown plan.
Voting: Carried by majority, with one member voting against.

8.26.4 Service Level Agreements

The Council noted that the Working Group had discussed the need for a Task Group to develop criteria for Service Level Agreements, in accordance with the previous Full Council resolution.

Decisions

Council resolved that the SLA Task Group be constituted in May 2026 in order to begin work on SLA criteria.

Voting: Carried unanimously.

8.26.5 Expenditure vs Budget Year to Date

The Council considered the year-to-date expenditure report. Members noted that pension expenditure remained affected by central government changes. Queries were raised regarding Public Realm Works, and it was noted that some expenditure was expected to be recovered from Section 106 funding held by Northumberland County Council. The future approach to the Council newsletter was also discussed.

Decisions

- Council resolved that the report be noted.
Voting: Carried unanimously.
- Council resolved that officers pursue recovery of the relevant Section 106 monies from Northumberland County Council, including by tranche if appropriate.
Voting: Carried unanimously.
- Council resolved that the future approach to the Council newsletter be brought back to a future meeting for further consideration.
Voting: Carried unanimously.

8.26.6 Armed Forces Day 2027

The Council received an update on the possibility of Berwick-upon-Tweed being involved in a bid to host a National Armed Forces Day event in 2027 in partnership with Northumberland County Council and others.

Decisions

Council resolved that officers work on a bid for National Armed Forces Day 2027 with Northumberland County Council and other partners.

Voting: Carried unanimously.

9.26 Motions from Cllr Robert Bruce

The Council considered Cllr R Bruce's motion requesting a report on the income and expenditure of the Wednesday and Saturday Town Markets for 2025/26. Members discussed whether the timing was appropriate given that the market work was relatively recent and that the Markets Task Group was due to report through the Budget and Administration Working Group. Cllr R Bruce did not pursue the motion further at this stage.

The Council then considered Cllr R Bruce's second motion, requesting a report on the costs associated with the production and distribution of the Council Bulletin. Cllr R Bruce agreed that this report to go through the next Budget and Administration Working Group meeting which will then report to Council.

10.26 Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Council was confirmed as Monday 11 May 2026 at 18:00. The primary business would be the Annual Meeting of the Council / Mayor-Making.

Part 2 - Confidential Items

11.26 Confidential Matters

No confidential items were recorded in these draft minutes.