

DRAFT MINUTES FOR THE FINANCE AND HUMAN RESOURCES COMMITTEE
held on THURSDAY 15TH JULY 2026 at 7:00PM
at The Spetchells Centre, Meeting Rooms 1 Front Street, Prudhoe, NE42 5AA

Present:

Cllr Holly Waddell (Chair), Cllr Dot Dickinson (Ex Officio), Cllr Jane Johnson, Cllr Gerry Price

Shirley Ann Gaut (Clerk)

Stephanie Kirby (Deputy Clerk)

FHR2627/001 Welcome from Chair

Meeting opened by Chair Cllr Holly Waddell

FHR2627/002 Apologies for Absence

Cllr Bryan Futers, Cllr Russ Greig, Cllr Val Leslie, Cllr Jonathan Wheeler (Ex Officio)

FHR2627/003 Declarations of Interest

None received.

FHR2627/004 Dispensations

None received.

FHR2627/005 Minutes of the Human Resources Committee Meeting, held on 23rd April 2026
It was AGREED to receive the minutes as a true record.

FHR2627/006 Minutes of the Finance Committee Meeting, held on 15th April 2026
It was AGREED to receive the minutes as a true record.

FHR2627/007 Training and Development

a) Training and Development for Prudhoe Town Council Staff

It was AGREED to discuss progress on personal training and development plans for the Town Clerk/RFO and the Deputy Clerk, and to agree to any further training.

It was noted that both the Clerk and the Deputy Clerk have expressed an interest in undertaking the Level 4 Community Governance qualification. The course costs approximately £4,000 per annum, with an overall cost of approximately £8,000 per person for the full qualification. Consideration will be given to making appropriate budget provision to support this training.

It was also noted that a range of additional professional development opportunities are available, including courses on topics such as bereavement awareness and supporting those experiencing grief.

Whilst these courses are not mandatory, they may be undertaken where appropriate and at a time that is convenient to operational requirements.

Consideration should also be given to providing Institute of Local Council Administration (ILCA) training for any member of staff providing maternity cover, ensuring they are equipped with the knowledge and skills required to effectively fulfil the role and maintain continuity of service.

b) Training and Development for Councillors

It was AGREED that the training and development needs of Town Councillors would be identified and appropriate action taken to address any requirements.

It was noted that a range of online training opportunities is available. Whilst no specific training topics were identified at this stage, members were advised that details of relevant courses are circulated as they become available, enabling Councillors to express an interest in attending where appropriate.

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FHR2627/008 Financial Update

a) 2025-2026 Year End and Internal Audit

It was AGREED to receive an update on the 2025/26 Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR), including the Internal Auditor's Report.

The Clerk confirmed that the Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR) had been submitted to the external auditor on Friday, 26 June 2026. The submission included the required supporting documentation, comprising an explanation relating to Assertion 10 – Digital and Data Compliance, together with clarification regarding Assertion 9 – Total Fixed Assets and the Prior Year Comparative Figure.

It was noted that the Council's internal controls will be reviewed by two Members on a quarterly basis, in accordance with the Council's established procedures. This arrangement has been in place for a number of years and provides ongoing assurance regarding the effectiveness of the Council's financial and governance controls. It was further noted that this process had not been undertaken during the 2025/26 financial year, and Members acknowledged the need to ensure that quarterly reviews are resumed and maintained going forward.

FHR2627/009 Assessment

It was AGREED to receive an update from the Clerk and Deputy Clerk following a workplace assessment of the Council Office and to agree any recommendations for improvements.

It was AGREED that a list of improvements, including an ergonomic chair and fire-proof cabinets be presented to Full Council for formal approval. It was also noted that a solution for the heat in the office needs to be sought, with options to be presented to Full Council once identified.

FHR2627/010 Date of Next Meeting

It was AGREED that the next Finance and Human Resources Committee meeting will be held on Thursday 10th September 2026 at 6pm.

FHR2627/011 Exclusion of Press and Public

It was AGREED to invoke the provision of Section 1(2) of the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960, the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business, by reason of the confidential nature of business to be transacted, as this item of business relates to staffing matters.

FHR2627/012 Staffing Matters

Councillor Waddell provided the Committee with an update regarding arrangements for office cover during forthcoming periods of staff leave. It was noted that the recommendations arising from these arrangements will be presented to the Full Council for consideration at its meeting on Thursday, 23 July 2026.

It was noted that the Deputy Clerk will commence maternity leave on 12 October 2026 and is expected to be absent for a period of up to 12 months.

Members considered the arrangements for providing maternity leave cover and that a fixed-term Administration Assistant position be advertised for a period of one year. The proposed salary is £24,413 per annum (pro rata), based on 20 hours per week, to be worked over four days, five hours per day. It was noted that the working pattern could be flexible, subject to the needs of the Council and the preferences of the successful candidate.

It was further AGREED that the vacancy be advertised through NEREO and North East Jobs, with advertisements to be placed during August 2026. Interviews are to be held in early September 2026 and conducted by the Clerk together with two or three Members of the Council.

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Members also discussed the possibility of arranging a short handover period prior to the commencement of the maternity leave, with the successful candidate undertaking a shadowing day or week before 12 October 2026, where practicable.

It was AGREED that the proposed recruitment arrangements be submitted to the next meeting of the Full Council for consideration and approval.

Meeting finished 7:29pm

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