1. **Councillors**
   1.1. Following election or co-option to the Council, each Councillor will be issued with a copy of the Code of Conduct and Standing Orders of the Council. They will sign the form of Declaration of Acceptance of Office in the presence of the Clerk of the Council, or of a Councillor who has been specifically designated by the Council for this purpose.

   1.2. All Councillors will observe the Code of Conduct at all times when on Council business and no member will act in such a way that will bring the Council into disrepute, behave offensively in meetings or obstruct the Council's business.

   1.3. The Code of Conduct states a Councillor will declare a personal or prejudicial interest in an item for discussion at a Council meeting at the at the agenda item - declarations of interest. The Councillor will declare that interest and the nature of the interest at the earliest opportunity.

2. **Annual Meetings**
   2.1. If the Annual Meeting is in an election year it must be held within 14 days after that election. If it is not an election year then the annual meeting will take place on an appropriate day in May. A parishioners meeting will also take place annually as arranged by the clerk.

   2.2. If the outgoing Chair is available then he/she will preside until a new Chair has been elected. The first business of the Annual Meeting will be the election of the Chair (and Vice Chair, if appropriate) and to receive their acceptance of office.

   2.3. The retiring Chair will report on the activities of the Council for the preceding year.

3. **Meetings**
   3.1. Meetings will be held in appropriate, accessible accommodation. Unless no other accommodation is available the meetings will not be held in premises used for the supply of alcohol.

   3.2. An agreed frequency of meetings will be decided at the Annual Meeting and Councillors will be advised of the meetings by the issue of a summons and agenda. The agenda may be delivered by email provided the Council has previously agreed to this. In any case the agenda must be issued at least three clear business days before the meeting.

   3.3. Public notices will be posted in conspicuous places informing members of the public of the venue, time, date and business to be transacted at the meeting. The notice will be posted at least three clear working days before the meeting.

   3.4. Meetings will be open to the public and press but they may be temporarily excluded from the meeting if the business is regarded as confidential. The public may record meetings in a non-intrusive manner but must not record other members of the public without their consent.

   3.5. Members of the public may speak at Council meetings at the discretion of the Chair of the meeting.

   3.6. The agenda for the meeting will be agreed by the Clerk and Chair and Vice Chair as appropriate. The agenda will always include an item to enable Councillors to

declare interests. An opportunity for public questions will be made available as part of the agenda.

3.7. The Council may only take decisions on items clearly specified on the agenda; if agreed by the chair, any urgent items which are not on the agenda may be introduced and discussed by the chair, but no decision by vote may be made at that meeting.

3.8. The Chair of the Council will preside at the meeting and will be responsible for the conduct of that meeting. If the Chair is not present then the Vice Chair will preside. If they are not present then the first matter on the agenda will be the election of an appropriate Councillor who will chair the meeting. Whoever chairs the meeting will assume the duties of the Chair for the meeting.

3.9. The quorum for the Council will be one third of the total Councillor places but in any case not fewer than 3. If there are insufficient members present then no business will be transacted and a fresh notice will be issued to reconvene the meeting at a later date.

3.10. If at any time during the meeting it ceases to be quorate then the meeting will be adjourned and any further business carried forward to the meeting when next convened.

3.11. Voting at the meeting shall be by a show of hands. A Councillor may also request that the Clerk records how each Councillor has voted, including abstentions. Any request of this nature must be made before moving on to the next business.

3.12. In cases of equal votes the Chair (or other person presiding) will have a second or casting vote as prescribed by the Local Government Act 1972.

3.13. A minute of the meeting will be kept by the Clerk or other nominated person in the Clerk's absence. The minutes will record any decisions made by the Council. Draft minutes will be circulated to Councillors as soon as practicable, at the latest within three weeks after the meeting. Councillors will supply any suggested amendments after which the amended unapproved draft minutes will be made available to the public unless the Council decides otherwise. The minutes will then be approved at the following meeting and signed by the person presiding at that meeting.

4. Finance

4.1. Responsible Finance Office (RFO)

4.1.1. The Responsible Finance Officer is a statutory office and appointed by the Council. The Clerk of the Council will take on this role of managing the Council's financial affairs in accordance with Proper Practices.

4.2. Estimates and Precept

4.2.1. The RFO will compile estimates of income and expenditure annually for the Council's consideration. The Council will review the budget not later than the end of December in preparation for the precept being agreed, and normally submitted to the Collection Authority in January. During the year the budget will be reviewed against actual expenditure and income. Amendments to the budget will be discussed in Council and changes minuted.

4.3. Income and Expenditure

4.3.1. The RFO will supply regular updates of income and expenditure throughout the year. Significant underspends or overspends will be brought to the attention of the Council and action taken to address any discrepancies.

4.4. **Accounting and Audit**

4.4.1. The RFO will determine all accounting procedures and financial records of the Council in accordance with the Accounts and Audit Regulations.

4.4.2. The RFO will complete the annual financial statements of the Council including the annual return as soon as practicable after the end of the financial year and will submit and report on them to the Council. The Council will review each year and ensure that there is an adequate, effective system of internal audit of the Council's accounting, financial and other procedures in line with Proper Practice.

4.4.3. An Internal Auditor will be appointed by the Council to carry out the work required to comply with the Proper Practice. The person appointed will be competent and independent of the operation of the Council as recommended by NALC.

4.4.4. The RFO will submit the Annual Return to the External Auditor by the due date, ensuring the return is complete.

4.5. **Banking Arrangements and Cheques**

4.5.1. The Council's banking arrangements will be made by the RFO and approved by the Council. They will be regularly reviewed for efficiency.

4.5.2. A resolution of the Council will nominate at least three members to be authorised by the Council to action payments.

4.5.3. All items of expenditure will be authorised by the Council during a meeting and the payments approved. The RFO will examine invoices and verify and certify the expenditure.

4.5.4. Any utility bill or recurrent payment may be paid by Direct Debit or Standing Order provided that the instructions are signed by two authorised Councillors.

4.6. **Loans and Investments**

4.6.1. All loans and investments will be negotiated in the name of the Council and will be set for a period approved by the Council.

4.6.2. All borrowings will be in the name of the Council and will not be entered into until necessary approvals have been given. Any application will be approved by Council, especially the terms and purpose. These terms must be reviewed annually.

4.6.3. All investments of money under the control of the Council will be in the name of the Council and all certificates or other documents will be retained by the RFO.

4.7. **Contracts and Purchase Orders**

4.7.1. An official order, letter or email will be issued for all work or service paid for by the Council. All Councillors and officers are responsible for obtaining good value for money at all times. An officer placing an order on behalf of the Council will ensure that good value and appropriate terms are obtained for the transaction.

4.7.2. Orders for values £500 to £2000 require a minimum of two quotations being sought; for values above £2000 three quotations are to be sought.

4.7.3. All estimates will be approved by the Council; while the Council is not obliged to accept the lowest quotation the reasons for accepting the quotation will be recorded.

4.7.4. The clerk may make small purchases limited to administration items of the council done within a limit agreed by the full council as set in the budget meeting held in November each year.

4.8. **Assets**

4.8.1. The RFO will ensure that an appropriate and accurate Register of Assets is maintained by the Council. It will be reviewed at least annually**,** in conjunction with a health and safety inspection of assets if appropriate.

4.9. **VAT**

4.9.1. The RFO will promptly complete any VAT Return. Any repayment claim due in accordance with the VAT Act 1974 section 33 will be made annually within the financial year.

5. **Insurance**

5.1. Following the annual risk assessment the Council will review the level of insurance cover and ensure it is adequate and appropriate for the activities of the Council. Minimum cover will include Public Liability, Employers Liability, Money and Fidelity Guarantee.

6. **Risk Assessment**

6.1. A risk assessment will be undertaken annually of all the activities of the Council and a report approved by the Council. This assessment will also cover the appropriateness of the internal audit arrangements. The Risk Assessment will be reviewed annually.

6.2. If the Council undertakes a new activity not covered by the existing risk assessment an assessment will be undertaken before the activity commences.

7. **Freedom of Information**

7.1. The Council is subject to the Freedom of Information Act and has adopted the Model Publication Scheme for Parish Councils. The Clerk will ensure the Council conforms to the requirements of the Act allowing public access to the appropriate documents.

7.2. The Council will adopt a policy setting out the periods for which classes of documents are to be kept.

8. **Clerk to the Council**

8.1. The Council may appoint a number of employees to assist it in the performance of its duties. The Council will appoint a Clerk to the Council which will be on an employed basis, unless the Clerk is a member of the Council, acting in an unpaid capacity.

8.2. The Clerk will act as the Proper Officer of the Council, and he/she will: receive the Declarations of Acceptance of Office; sign documents on behalf of the Council and issue agendas and notices of meetings; receive and distribute plans and documents on behalf of the Council; and also advise the bank of changes to mandates with the bank.

8.3. The Clerk will act as Responsible Financial Officer or be responsible for managing a Finance Officer or other employees of the Council.

8.4. As an employee of the Council the Clerk is covered by employment legislation dealing with employment rights, discrimination in employment, unfair dismissal, redundancy and similar matters. The Clerk will therefore have a contract of employment stating the terms and conditions under which he/she is employed. This will effectively be administered by the Chair or designated Councillor acting with the authority of the Council.

9. **Sub groups**

9.1. The Council from time to time may set up a sub group to undertake information gathering or instruction on behalf of the Council. The sub group must report to the full council and cannot make decisions outside the council formal scheduled meetings. Sub groups may contain both Cllrs and members of the public, they are not formal meetings of the council, they have no terms of reference and they must report periodically to the full Council. The Chair of the council may create or dissolve sub groups as deemed necessary.

10. **Emergency Business**

10.1. Should it not be appropriate to convene a special meeting then any emergency business will be handled by the Clerk, in consultation with the Chair and one other Councillor. Actions will be reported promptly to the Council.

11. **Alteration or Reversal of previous decisions**

11.1. Decisions of the Council will not be revised within 4 months, except where a special item is placed on the agenda bearing the name of two Councillors, and is considered and approved by the Council.

12. **Standing Orders**

12.1. These and any other standing orders will be reviewed annually by the Clerk and the Chair, and any amendments will be decided by the Council.

12.2. During the course of meetings of the Council, the Chair's decision as to the interpretation of the standing orders will be final. In cases of doubt, the Council will seek the advice of the Northumberland Association of Local Councils.

12.3. The Council may resolve to suspend a Standing Order, in order to progress the business of the Council, and such decision will be included in the minutes. The suspension will not be taken lightly and it will be time-limited.

12.4. References to written documents in these Standing Orders and Financial Regulations shall be taken as including electronic communications.

The following additional information was made on 23rd July 2025 - reviewed July 2026

1.1. If thought appropriate by the Council, payment for items may be made electronically by BACS method using secure internet banking. The approval of the action to make a payment will be completed by banking signatories in accordance with the internet banking mandate.

1.2. Where a computer requires use of a personal identification number (PIN) or other password(s), for access to the Council's records on that computer, a note shall be made of the PIN and Passwords and shall be handed to and retained by the Chair of Council in a sealed dated envelope. This envelope may not be opened other than in the presence of two other Councillors. After the envelope has been opened, in any circumstances, the PIN and / or passwords shall be changed as soon as practicable. The fact that the sealed envelope has been opened, in whatever circumstances, shall be reported to all members immediately and formally to the next available meeting of the Council.

1.3. No employee or Councillor shall disclose any PIN or password, relevant to the working of the Council or its bank accounts, to any person not authorised in writing by the Council or a duly delegated committee.

1.4. Regular back-up copies of the records on any computer shall be made and shall be stored securely away from the computer in question, and preferably off site.

1.5. The Council, and any members using computers for the Council's financial business, shall ensure that anti-virus, anti-spyware and firewall software with automatic updates,is used.

1.6. Where internet banking arrangements are made with any bank, the Clerk shall be appointed as the Service Administrator or key contact. The bank mandate approved by the Council shall identify a number of Councillors who will be authorised to approve transactions on those accounts.

1.7. Access to any internet banking accounts will be directly to the access page (which may be saved under "favourites"), and not through an e-mail link. Remembered or saved passwords facilities must not be used on any computer used for Council banking work.

These Standing Orders were adopted by the Whalton Parish Council at a meeting of the Council held on 2nd September 2026