Minutes of the Justice and Peace Co-ordinating Council AGM

held on 8 May 2026

at St Mary's Cathedral Conference Room

The theme of the AGM was "Responding to the Climate and Nature Emergency. The morning started by Prof Hayley Fowler (professor of Climate Change Impacts, Newcastle University) introducing the powerful film, National Emergency Briefing, about the Climate and Nature Emergency. After the film there was a discussion on how we, as a society, should respond.

This was followed by Minnie Fraser (Diocesan Environmental Lead) who gave an update on the progress being made in the Diocese.

Formal AGM

Present: Clare Myers, Chris Myers, Azad Hasan, Marjory Knowles, Phil Watson, Kath Wade, Ann Maughan, David Archibald, Julie Maguire (Minutes) and 4 guests

Acting chair, Clare Myers, opened the meeting.

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 13 April 2026 were accepted by Azad and Marjory.

There were no matters arising.

Justice and Peace Refugee Project

Key facts:

- The Project supports families, men, women, children
- Clients come from a lot of regions, including the US - countries where there is wide scale persecution or civil war
- Clients are mainly located in Tyneside areas – Newcastle, Gateshead, North Shields, South Shields. Some are located in Co Durham, Northumberland, Sunderland
- We give support to help tackle poverty, end isolation and because people have the right to be treated fairly and with dignity while their claim is being processed
- From 1/1/2025 to 31/12/2025 the Project supported 1,105 clients – 1067 green card clients and 38 white card clients. There were 98 client drop-in sessions

- 320 (£14,400) supermarket vouchers were issued to destitute clients during the year. A further £2,400 was provided to clients through Christmas vouchers
- The Project relies heavily on donations of food and toiletries. 14,171 (£115,709) food bags were distributed, a rise of £16,847 since the previous annual report
- Client numbers vary with people arriving and leaving the area. There were 672 new clients in 2025. 439 babies were supported with formula milk and nappies, an increase of 269 from 2024. The SVP provided 358 clients with clothing and household items
- There was a very successful visit from the Papal Nuncio Miguel Maury Buendia, and Bishop Stephen
- The Project and SVP clients are provided with free haircuts
- There was a successful day out in Haydon Bridge in August, thanks to support from Caritas and Haydon Bridge parish
- Very good links have been established with schools in the area, and the students are very engaged
- The challenges experienced by asylum seekers include an increasingly hostile environment, long waits for the Home Office, no right to work and mental health issues

The Project has been running for over 20 years, supported by volunteers and Parishes. Supermarkets and charities have also had a big impact. There was recognition of the work Azad does, the huge difference he has made and the how well respected he is.

Environment Report Chris Myers

2025 was the 10th anniversary of Laudato Si'. Chris shared his personal journey and spoke of Pope Francis. He also shared a list of Diocesan Events and Activities in 2025, including a special anniversary Mass with Bishop Stephen and Deacons awareness event at Minsteracres.

59 churches have signed up to the IFM Renewable Energy contract

- 10 schools have installed solar rooftops
- The Diocese is one of 8 to still bank with HSBC who are involved with the fossil fuel industry. There is currently no viable alternative

The Diocese is not doing enough. We have a vision to care for our home and environment, but we need to engage with others.

For 2026

- The vision is for a world free from poverty on a liveable planet.
- Screenings of the National Emergency Briefing to be held in schools and parishes
- Mass to celebrate Laudato Si' week at St Augustines, Darlington
- Other events are taking place at schools in the Diocese
- More schools are signing up to Cafod's LiveSimply Award
- £30million is required for the project at Rothbury to purchase the estate. £18million has been raised so far
- As individuals we are encouraged to engage with and lobby our MPs and local councils
- Not to cut our lawns in May
- Support our own parish to become a LiveSimply Award community
- To check if our own parish is signed up to the IFM Renewable Energy contract

Pat Devlin: Parish is working towards the LiveSimply award, as part of that they signed up to the IFM, but this has been a bad experience due to an issue with the contract resulting in increased charges. How much consultation/negotiation there had been between the Diocese and IFM?

Chris: This is something that needs to be raised with Fiona in the Diocese and that these issues will hopefully be sorted.

Pat Devlin: Parish has made links with Northumberland Wildlife Trust who had asked whether there was an initiative to install solar panels on churches as well as schools.

Chris: Very few parishes have done this. The Diocesan environment group is working towards this. Minnie is trying to get an energy consultant on board. It's hoped that by showing the film to the trustees and people who work in the Diocese will help.

Treasurers Report

The Justice and Peace Refugee Project is keeping its head above water. The Project hasn't been very successful in grant funding. Grant money is falling. This could be due to funders struggling in the money they can give.

There is money in reserve for core costs such as rent and salaries.

What comes in by way of donations to buy food and vouchers is on an even keel. The amount spent on vouchers is down, this is reflected in the number of destitute clients reducing.

Phil: Asked what the situation was with monetary donations from parishes.

Marjory: Money rarely comes from parishes. There are some dedicated parishes who send money. Some parishes would have a Sunday collection, but this has stopped since Covid.

Clare: Noted that J&P donations in Blyth had gone down, partly as people who donated have died and younger people can't afford to give.

This needs to be raised with the Diocese. Although there is information on the Diocesan website about the Project, people don't always read this.

David: A lot of charities are struggling and there's uncertainty with change of councils. The Project has a big impact and can positively help people.

Marjory: Over 1 year ago we signed up to FareShare. We pay a monthly subscription and get so many kilos of produce, mostly tinned goods for the Project. Newcastle City Council agreed to pay this fee to FareShare as part of its food poverty strategy. This is around £75 per month which has helped.

The figures in the report were accepted.

Chair's report

Clare acknowledged the detailed reports prepared by Azad, Chris and Marjory, how this highlights the work going on and the amount of work involved.

Clare reminded us that Pope Francis died just over a year ago on 21 April, and that he left a huge legacy for us. Pope Leo was elected on 8 May 2025 and is carrying on Pope Francis' legacy, as well as his own. We should all pray for and remember Pope Leo so that he can continue his work with difficulties in his own country.

Clare acknowledged the challenges faced by the Council over the past year and that there have been changes. She thanked Paddy, who resigned as chair in October, for his commitment to justice and peace and his time as chair of the Co-ordinating Council.

Clare also acknowledged the hard work and commitment of Liz who stood down from the Council. She offered our sincere thanks to Liz for her outstanding contribution to justice and peace, and for the amount of work she undertook as communications officer.

Clare acknowledged and thanked the individual members of the Council.

Clare reminded those present of Cafod's pilgrimage to Holy Island in June.

A summary of 2025

Pat (Devlin) presented the Parent Circle films at the AGM last year. This brought about much needed questions and debate to the AGM.

In April the Council were joined by Sr Imelda Poole who spoke about Mary Ward Loreto mission in Albania.

NJPN conference in the summer was well attended by our Diocese. The theme was "Just Peace". Discussions were had on tackling international debt, dismantling nuclear weapons, and the switch to greener banking.

There were networking open days:

- A Zoom meeting attended by Bishop McAleenan entitled 'Opening Doors to Refugees and Asylum Seekers' where Azad spoke about the real issues people have encountered
- An event in Sheffield entitled 'Shining a light on food sustainability' attended by Chris and Clare. Attendance was disappointing. Prof. Peter Jackson from the Sheffield Institute of Sustainable Food addressed the issue of the world food crisis, food & the environment and food & health.
- An online event 'Shining a light on racism in England' where Christians were encouraged to become more active in confronting racism. Dr Beverley Prevatt Goldstein spoke from a personal and professional point of view.

The diversity of the Council was recognised.

The vigil at Medomsley continues, coordinated by Liz and David. This takes place at 3pm on the first Sunday of the month.

A discussion took place on Assisted dying. People were asked if they would be prepared to engage with the House of Lords. Many people did so, some people received responses.

If there are issues people would like to be addressed, they are encouraged to bring it to the Council where it will be discussed.

People are encouraged to sign petitions on Cafod's website and to circulate these in the parish.

Looking ahead, to promote the Council in parishes so that people know who we are. If people contact the Council and provide their email, we can send out information and keep in touch.

Chairs thanks

As acting chair, Clare thanked Azad, David and the volunteers at the Project for the work they do, Marjory who is wanting to stand down (if anyone is interested in this role to contact Marjory to discuss), Paddy for his time on the Council as chair, Liz for the considerable work she did over the years.

Clare closed with the following comment from Pope Leo at the Raising Hope conference, "God will ask us if we have cultivated and cared for the world that He created, and if we have taken care of our brothers and sisters. What will be our answer?".

Clare was thanked for stepping up as chair and for the work she has done.

Elections

Chair – Phil elected as chair.

Treasurer – Marjory to remain in this role for now

Vice chair – Marjory elected as vice chair.

Communications officer –Clare elected as communications officer.

Environment officer – Chris elected as environment officer.

AOB

New members are needed for the Council.

Links between the Council and parishes needs to be better structured so that people are aware of what is going on. The Council need to know how many local J&P groups there are.

Consideration to be given to moving from monthly to bi-monthly meetings. This to be discussed as next meeting.

The AGM closed with a prayer from Fr Jim O'Keefe