

## City of York Council

Resolutions and proceedings of the Extraordinary Meeting of the City of York Council held in the Guildhall, York on Thursday, 26 March 2026, starting at 6.15 pm

**Present:** The Lord Mayor (Cllr Martin Rowley BEM) in the Chair, and the following Councillors:

Acomb Ward	Bishopthorpe Ward
Lomas Rose	Nicholls
Clifton Ward	Copmanthorpe Ward
Myers Wells	Steward
Dringhouses & Woodthorpe Ward	Fishergate Ward
Fenton Mason Widdowson	Whitcroft Wilson
Fulford and Heslington Ward	Guildhall Ward
Ravilious	Clarke Melly Merrett
Haxby & Wigginton Ward	Heworth Ward
Cuthbertson Hollyer Watson	Douglas Perrett Webb
Heworth Without Ward	Holgate Ward
Ayre	Kent Steels-Walshaw Taylor

Hull Road Ward

Baxter  
Moroney  
Pavlovic

Huntington and New Earswick  
Ward

Cullwick  
Orrell  
Runciman

Micklegate Ward

Crawshaw  
Kilbane

Osbalwick and Derwent Ward

Rowley  
Warters

Rawcliffe and Clifton Without Ward

Smalley  
Wann

Rural West York Ward

Hook  
Knight

Strensall Ward

Fisher  
Healey

Westfield Ward

Coles  
Nelson  
Waller

Wheldrake Ward

**77. Apologies for Absence (6.17pm)**

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Burton, Vassie and Waudby.

**78. Declarations of Interest (6.17pm)**

Members were invited to declare at this point in the meeting any personal interests not included on the Register of Interests, any prejudicial interests or any disclosable pecuniary interests they might have in the business on the agenda.

None were declared.

**79. Public Participation (6.18pm)**

The Lord Mayor reported that there had been one registration to speak at the meeting under the Council's Public Participation Scheme.

Gwen Swinburn expressed concern about the reputational impact on the City of York arising from continued associations linked to the Duke of York and stated that the city's name and standing were being undermined. While acknowledging that the Council did not have the authority to remove royal titles, she asked Members to make a clear and unequivocal statement that the association was damaging to the city and did not reflect its values. She asked Members to remove the Honorary Freedom and to commit to further action if procedural constraints prevented this.

**80. Notice of Motion - Removal of Sarah Ferguson's Honorary Freedom of the City status (6.21pm)**

The Lord Mayor invited Councillor Douglas, the Leader of the Council, to move the motion to withdraw Sarah Ferguson's Honorary Freedom of the City status.

Councillor Douglas stated that the Freedom of the City was awarded only to persons of distinction or those who had given commendable service to the city, and that recipients were expected to uphold standards consistent with the honour. She stated that continued association with Jeffrey Epstein after his crimes were widely known fell short of these expectations and that

evidence contained within the Epstein files demonstrated such association. She urged Council to support the motion.

Councillor Baxter seconded the motion and reserved the right to reply.

Councillor Smalley spoke in support of the motion. He referred to the Council's decision in April 2022 to remove the Honorary Freedom from Andrew Mountbatten-Windsor, noting that this was the first time the honour had been withdrawn by the Council. He stated that, while it had previously felt inappropriate to judge Sarah Ferguson by the actions of her former husband, subsequent disclosures demonstrated her own continued association with Jeffrey Epstein. He emphasised the importance of civic honours reflecting decency, accountability and support for victims.

Councillor Baxter noted that the honour had been granted in 1987 and that expectations and public standards had evolved. She stated that honorary freedoms were not solely historical recognitions, but ongoing endorsements associated with the city's values and reputation. She referred to the Council's statutory power both to grant and withdraw honorary freedoms and emphasised the importance of maintaining the integrity of the City's highest civic honour. She also highlighted the need to remember victims in considering the matter.

Resolved (unanimously):

Pursuant to Section 249 of the Local Government Act 1972, the City of York Council withdraws the Honorary Freeman of the City status from Sarah Ferguson, which was conferred upon her in 1987.

Cllr Martin Rowley BEM  
LORD MAYOR OF YORK

[The meeting started at 6.17 pm and concluded at 6.31 pm]