

ASHINGTON TOWN COUNCIL
DRAFT Minutes of the Full Council Meeting held at 6:00pm
on Tuesday 20th June 2023
at Ashington Town Hall, Council Chamber, 65 Station Road, Ashington, NE63 8RX

COUNCILLORS PRESENT:

Sophie Robinson (Chair), Cllrs Louis Brown, Vicky Brown, Glyn Davies, Lynne Grimshaw, Jim Lang, John Tully, and Matthew Cuthbert

ALSO, IN ATTENDANCE

Sarah Eden – Executive Officer/RFO and Gary Holmes – Administration Assistant.

It was AGREED Cllr Sophie Robinson would chair the meeting in the absence of the Chair, and Vice Chair.

FC23/021 WELCOME BY THE CHAIR

Welcome by Cllr Sophie Robinson.

FC23/022 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs Bob Walkinshaw, Caroline Bell, Michelle Brannigan, Marjorie Chambers, Lawrence Henderson, Pauline Thompson, Mark Purvis, and Victor Bridges.

FC23/023 DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS

There were no disclosures of interest.

FC23/024 DISPENSATIONS

There were no requests for dispensations.

FC23/025 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Two members of the public attended the meeting.

FC23/026 MINUTES OF LAST MEETING

It was AGREED to RECEIVE and SIGN the minutes of the Meeting held on Tuesday 16th May 2023 as a true record.

FC23/027 FINANCIAL SUMMARY 2022/23

It was AGREED to RECEIVE a financial summary of year ending March 2023, as detailed in the Council's Accounts and Annual Report, and address any questions to the Responsible Financial Officer. There were no questions to the RFO.

Overview

In 2022/23 Ashington Town Council delivered significantly more spending and invested considerably more in assets than in the previous year. This indicates a greater level of output from the Council and its officers.

Financially, this was achieved with more strategically controlled reserves, and without any increase in the precept. Whilst spending and investing more, we also attracted more external funding.

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Capital Spending and Assets

The Council's large scale capital projects realised greater amounts of funding in 2022/23 (£101,615), than in 2021/22 (£74,211). The increase of £27,404 was achieved for bus shelters, the Jack Charlton and Footballing Heritage Project, defibrillators, and Alexandra Road Play Area.

The Council carried out several high value capital projects in 2022/23. This included the Jack Charlton Statue (£79,466), and linked Ashington's Footballing Heritage Storyboards (£38,127).

There were significant capital works in the town's allotments. This included fencing (£25,950) and water system (£15,635) at North Seaton Colliery, and new regulation standpipes (56) on all allotment sites (£32,465).

The Council installed a new play area at Alexandra Road (£43,453) and purchased twelve defibrillators and external cabinets (£14,820). Seven new bus shelters were purchased and installed (£46,580).

Total increased capital spending from 2021/22 to 2022/23 amounts to £303,981 which is included in the Council's Assets Register, which was presented to Full Council in May.

General Expenditure

Vehicle Costs

In other expenditure there was increased spending on the Council's works van as we disposed of our diesel van and entered into a lease agreement for an electric van. The large deposit and repayments increased spending year on year by just over £12,000.

Events

In 2021/22 as we came out of COVID, there was little spending on events (£1,400), whereas we spent £15,643 in 2022/23. This remains below expected but represents an increase of £14,243.

Allotments

Allotment spending has been significant in 2022/23 as the Council tries to catch-up on capital jobs and sees an increase in spending on clearances, repairs, and water.

In the current financial year (2023/24) the budget for capital and general expenditure has been split to allow instant monitoring, and work is ongoing to reduce the Council's spending commitment in this area.

Capital spending on allotments (included above), was £76,050 compared with £22,806 in 2021/22. In general expenditure there has been an increase in the need for clearance and repair work, the costs compare at £50,195 in 2022/23 to £37,233 in 2021/22, representing an increase of £12,962.

Christmas Lights

The Council improved Christmas Lights displays in 2022/23 spending £38,608 compared to £18,691 in 2021/22. This represents an increase of £19,917.

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Environmental Improvements

The Council improved the appearance of the town centre and gateways into the town in 2022/23 with newly designed sustainable planting schemes. In terms of environmental enhancements, the Council increased spending from £45,244 in 2021/22 to £72,506 in 2022/23, representing an increase of £27,262.

Climate Change

Spending on Climate Change initiatives also increased with several tree planting schemes across the town. This rose from £7,533 in 2021/22 to £33,793 in 2022/23. This represents an increase in spending of £26,260.

Election Costs

In 2021/22 the Council had no election costs, but we paid costs of £21,585 in 2022/23 because of a casual vacancy in 2022, and all out elections in May 2021 being invoiced late. The budget required for elections in May 2026 is being contributed to over the years via our earmarked reserves.

CCTV

The Council has invested in more CCTV coverage across the town. In 2021/22 spending on CCTV was £5,724, in 2022/23 this increased to £18,379. This represents an increase in spending of £12,655.

Office and Admin

The Council has made efficiencies in office and administration costs resulting in approximately £5,000 less spending across these items.

FC23/028 UPDATED FINANCIAL AND MANAGEMENT RISK ASSESSMENT, JUNE 2023

In accordance with the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 (SI2015/234), **it was AGREED to RECEIVE and APPROVE** the updated document presented by the Executive Officer/RFO.

FC23/029 INTERNAL AUDIT 2022/23

- a) **It was AGREED to RECEIVE** the Annual Internal Audit Report for year ending March 2023, carried out by Susan Saunders, in accordance with Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015, part 2 (5).
- b) **It was AGREED to RECEIVE** the Audit Checklist, carried out by Susan Saunders in accordance with Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015, part 2 (5).

The RFO referred to the note by the Internal Auditor relating to the inclusion of Financial Regulations in the Standing Orders. Although not confirmed whether these need to be included if the Council adopt separate Financial Regulations, they have been added back into Standing Orders, therefore are included in both documents for assurance.

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FC 22/030 ANNUAL GOVERNANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY RETURN (AGAR) YEAR ENDING MARCH 2023

- a) The Chair read out each statement in the Annual Governance Statement, section 1 of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return 2022/23, and asked members if they agreed. Members responded positively to each statement, and **it was AGREED** that the Chair and the Clerk should sign and date the statement accordingly.
- b) **It was AGREED to RECEIVE and APPROVE** the End of Year Bank Reconciliation, March 2023.
- c) **It was AGREED to RECEIVE and APPROVE** the Accounting Statements, Section 2, for the year ending March 2023, and that the Chair should sign accordingly.
- d) **It was AGREED to APPROVE** the submission of the AGAR for year ending March 2023, and publication on the Town Council website, as required.

FC23/031 NOTICE OF PUBLIC RIGHTS AND PUBLICATION OF UNAUDITED ANNUAL GOVERNANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY RETURN

It was AGREED to APPROVE the dates set for the period for the exercise of public rights of inspection as 22nd June 2023 – 2nd August 2023, and to publish these accordingly.

FC23/032 INTERNAL AUDIT 2023/24

In accordance with Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015, part 2 (1), **it was AGREED** to re-appoint Mrs Susan Saunders as the Internal Auditor for 2023/24.

FC23/033 ELECTORAL REVIEW OF NORTHUMBERLAND

It was AGREED to RECEIVE the draft recommendations in respect of Ashington, based on the following statutory criteria:

- ✓ Make sure that, within an authority, each councillor represents a similar number of electors.
- ✓ Create boundaries that are appropriate and reflect community ties and identities.
- ✓ Deliver reviews informed by local needs, views, and circumstances.
- ✓ Reflect the request for single-member divisions.

FC23/034 DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

Tuesday 18th July 2023, 6pm, Ashington Town Hall, 65 Station Road, Ashington, NE63 8RX.

The meeting ended at 18:25pm