AGENDA 6, Enc i) ASHINGTON TOWN COUNCIL, AGREED Minutes of the Full Council held at 6:00pm on Tuesday 29th July 2025,
at Ashington Town Hall, Council Chamber, 65 Station Road, Ashington, NE63 8RX

CLLRS PRESENT:
Cllr Mark Purvis (Chair), Caroline Ball, Karl Green, Kerry Davison, David Coyle, Pauline Thompson, Marjorie Chambers, Louis Brown, Glyn Davies, Scott Amery, Paul Wright, Lynne Grimshaw, Victor Bridges, Jim Lang and Steven Roberts.

ALSO, IN ATTENDANCE
Sarah Eden – Executive Officer, Alan Bunker – Allotments Officer and Gary Holmes – Administration and Communications Officer

FC2526/049 WELCOME BY THE CHAIR
Welcomed by Cllr Mark Purvis.

FC2526/050 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE
Apologies for absence were received from Cllr John Allen, Bob Walkinshaw and John Tully.

FC2526/051 DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS
There were no disclosures of interest.

FC2526/052 DISPENSATIONS
There were no requests for dispensation.

FC2526/053 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION
There were three members of the public present. Resident Mr Street asked if he could ask a question following the police update. The Chair agreed.

FC2526/054 ASHINGTON NEIGHBOURHOOD POLICING UPDATE
To receive an update from Inspector Wayne Daniels, who will be in attendance, and to ask any questions.

Inspector Daniels introduced himself to the new councillors, noting that they have not yet had the opportunity to work alongside him. He outlined the areas under his oversight, including Ashington and Bedlington, and explained his responsibility for community policing. Inspector Daniels oversees two teams and ensures there is always a team on site in Ashington. He also monitors crime trends and patterns across the area.

Inspector Daniels highlighted that the town centre experiences mainly antisocial behaviour and violent crime. He noted that Project Shield, which has been running for nearly a year, has been effective in addressing these issues. ASB in Ashington is currently at its lowest level in years. Inspector Daniels reported that drug supply and serious violence are often linked, citing a recent cannabis farm near the hospital with offenders now in prison. Another offender has been arrested in connection with a separate case. Retail crime remains a concern and is being treated seriously.

Preventative measures are being explored to improve the police response to crime.

For example, parking police vehicles on main streets can act as a deterrent. Project Horizon has been launched to engage with offenders, understand the reasons behind their actions, and provide support to prevent reoffending. Inspector Daniels stated that the project has been

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successful and encourages organisations to take an active role in supporting potential offenders.

The use of electric bikes and scooters has also been addressed. Police and partner services are raising awareness about the dangers of these illegal vehicles, particularly their batteries. Inspector Daniels noted that many reports of these vehicles lack specific information, such as an address, so education on anonymous reporting will be a focus going forward.

Community tensions are being monitored, particularly in light of protests around the country. Inspector Daniels emphasised that while the police cannot police social media, members of the public can help correct misinformation. CCTV continues to be an effective tool, with recent incidents reviewed with the assistance of Asset Watch providing accurate evidence.

The government has provided funding for additional staff, and new personnel will be joining Inspector Daniels' teams to strengthen community policing and public safety. The use of speed guns has proven successful, with teams noting a reduction in speeding where they have been deployed.

Cllr Amery asked about vehicles parked on public footpaths monitored by Asset Watch cameras, questioning whether police were enforcing fines or simply accepting the issue. Inspector Daniels explained that enforcement is not possible without yellow lines, and if the vehicle does not fully obstruct the footpath, it cannot be actioned.

Cllr Amery also inquired about cannabis-related QR codes. Inspector Daniels confirmed this is a national issue and noted that intelligence sharing has led to the arrest and disbanding of one gang. Cllr Ball added that Public Health is aware of the QR codes and is taking an active role.

Cllr Grimshaw thanked the police for their work and praised the effectiveness of their initiatives. A member of the public asked whether youth clubs could help reduce crime. Inspector Daniels confirmed that many youth groups exist in Ashington and invited suggestions on promoting engagement, with the public member recommending social media as a tool.

Resident, Mr Street raised concerns regarding a recent social media post by Cllr Wright referring to a change of plans for the development of Wansbeck Square, and that his post was later shared across other sites resulting in more racial tension, and comments about MP Ian Lavery, and that he felt it had done more damage than good.

Cllr Wright responded acknowledging the challenges of social media and whilst his post had zero racial elements and was a factual account of what had happened he had no control over how or where that would be shared. Cllr Wright highlighted that his aim was to highlight positive developments in Ashington but that he believed the NCC reporting was disingenuous.

Resident, Mr Street also questioned the role of the Reform Councillor for the Hirst ward, noting limited interaction with any of the Hirst groups operating. Cllr Amery responded that residents may contact the Councillor via email, when they would be able to answer themselves, rather than at a council meeting they weren't present at.

FC2526/055 FULL CIRCLE FOOD PROJECT
To receive information about the work of Full Circle Food Project from CEO Michelle Brannigan, who will be in attendance, and to ask any questions.

Michelle thanked the council for the opportunity to speak. She outlined the work of Full Circle Food (FCFP), which is based in the Growing Zone in Hirst. The organisation teaches people how to grow their own food on a low budget, how to grow healthy food in small spaces, and promotes community cohesion through food. FCFP also works to reduce food waste through composting, proper storage and cooking techniques, and supports initiatives to alleviate food poverty.

Michelle acknowledged the longstanding support from Ashington Town Council (ATC) and expressed gratitude. She highlighted that FCFP is seeking further support in several areas. She noted that while she had reviewed the council's five-year plan, it does not explicitly address the cost-of-living crisis or food poverty. Even a modest contribution could have a significant environmental impact, potentially preventing over a million kilograms of CO_2 equivalent. FCFP aims to conduct a study on using compost within community gardens and to grow a network for sustainable food, including the distribution of healthy community meals. The initiative would track both food provided and food waste, measuring CO_2 emissions saved. The main request is for ATC to support the creation of a food strategy, which could address issues such as poverty and obesity, support local growers and businesses, and increase access to fresh, healthy food. This strategy would also strengthen community cohesion and build local community spirit.

Michelle invited an open discussion and asked whether ATC could assist with initiatives such as leaflet drops.

Cllr Amery asked about the feasibility study, specifically whether it would incur costs for the council and who would conduct it. Michelle confirmed the study would be done in-house, using anecdotal evidence from FCFP, as no formal data currently exists.

Cllr Chambers referenced the success of FCFP's participation in the recent Big Green Week and asked whether they had considered a market stall. Michelle noted that staffing costs make this difficult.

Cllr Brown commented on the recent market in Hirst Park, noting that attendance had declined and queried whether this was related to COVID-19. Michelle responded that the decline is a recent trend and is being noticed by other organisations as well.

Cllr Davies asked about the logistics of the compost collection. Michelle explained that members of the community bring their food waste directly to FCFP. Davey added a caution regarding pests that can damage crops such as onions, cabbages, and potatoes.

Cllr Ball asked how the upcoming county-wide food waste collection planned for 2026 would affect FCFP. Michelle stated that while the county scheme is the future solution, there is an immediate need that FCFP is currently addressing.

Cllr Grimshaw thanked Michelle for attending, praising FCFP's work and vision.

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FC2526/056 DRAFT MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING
The minutes of the last Full Council meeting held on Tuesday 8th July were **RECEIVED** and **AGREED**.

FC2526/057 DRAFT MINUTES OF CLIMTAE CHANGE AND ENVIRONMENT COMITTEE
The minutes of the last Climate Change and Environment meeting held on Tuesday 24th June were **RECEIVED** and **AGREED**.

FC2526/058 REPORT FROM THE CIVIC HEAD OF ASHINGTON (CLLR PAULINE THOMPSON)
Cllr Thompson requested this be deferred as she was not feeling well. It was **AGREED** to move on.

FC2526/059 STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK 2025-2029
To introduce the Strategic Framework document for the new Council term and initiate discussion on the Town Council's strategic direction for 2025-2029. A Strategic Framework document has been prepared outlining the previous Council's priorities, mission statement options, and values framework. This serves as a starting point for the new Council to review, refine, or redefine Ashington Town Council's strategic direction. The Council is asked to receive the Strategic Framework document and agree to schedule further strategic planning sessions to establish the Council's mission, values, and priorities for the current term

Cllr Wright asked for clarification on the timescale for implementing the proposed policy. The Clerk explained that ideally, councillors would engage directly with the public to understand their priorities and then bring back to Council for agreement. It was suggested this should be imminent and several event and engagement opportunities were cited as places for such discussion.

Cllr Amery asked whether the policy needed to be implemented in full or could be introduced in stages. The Clerk confirmed that it could be applied either wholly or partially, noting that while there may be disagreements, the aim of the policy is to represent the views of the general public and then agreement by Council.

Cllr Ball emphasised the importance of the community engagement strategy, highlighting that councillors need to actively seek feedback through events, the website, and other engagement methods to ensure the voices of the community are heard.

Cllr Brown suggested earmarking a meeting in September to discuss the strategy further. He also noted that the council's main focus at present is securing funding, as financial resources are required to deliver on Ashington's priorities.

Member of the public, asked for permission to speak and expressed gratitude to the Allotments Officer for his recent work on the Woodhorn Road Allotment site, and also thanked both the Allotments Officer and the Clerk for their collaborative efforts, noting that their strong working relationship has benefited both the council and the allotments.

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FC2526/060 PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION POLICY (Placed on the agenda by Cllr David Coyle)
To receive and adopt a Proportional Representation Policy to ensure fair and transparent allocation of committee seats that reflects the political composition of the Council, currently with 12 Labour and 6 Reform UK Cllrs, and that this policy be applied to all existing and future committees.

The policy would:

- Ensure minority groups have meaningful representation on all committees
- Create transparent and fair allocation methods
- Apply to all current and future committees
- Be reviewed annually and following any changes in Council composition

Proposed by Cllr David Coyle, seconded by Cllr Kerry Davison.

Cllr Coyle stated that all committees should have proportional representation emphasising that the council operates as one team, this supported diversity and inclusion and ensured that new passionate members who are part of Reform have a proportionate opportunity.

Cllr Wright raised a concern that proportional representation could place councillors on committees without the necessary skillset or willingness to serve, which could be counterproductive, and not always achieve the right people. He suggested that more time should be taken to consider the implications.

Cllr Ball expressed that she has no issues with representation but stressed that any changes should come through the Annual Meeting of the Council rather than mid-year, noting that terms of reference for each committee had come through in May.

Cllr Amery disagreed with Cllr Wright's concerns regarding skillset, noting that councillors are volunteers elected by the public and should act in the best interests of Ashington, regardless of party. Cllr Amery questioned whether any Cllr had submitted a CV when elected, so how would anyone be able to assess skillset on a committee.

Cllr Green acknowledged that the Labour Party had initially allowed partial representation and highlighted that only one committee currently lacks a Reform councillor. He suggested that an allowance should be made for one councillor to join that committee.

Cllr Purvis commented that the Personnel Committee comprises the Chair and Vice-Chair of other Committees, and that any changes to its membership should occur at the Annual Meeting of the Council.

Cllr Davies requested additional time to consider the potential ramifications of changes to committee representation.

The Clerk explained that all committees except the Personnel Committee already meet proportional representation via their agreement of members, rather than by a policy of proportional representation. Any agreed changes would require an amendment to the committee policy and potentially to the terms of reference, which could be brought to a future Full Council meeting, if agreed tonight.

AGREED

Cllr Thompson objected to the use of the term “skill,” questioning what skills are needed, and expressed the opinion that the Personnel Committee should be disbanded. Cllr Brown added that he has never served on the Personnel Committee and noted that historically, changes have only been made at the Annual Meeting of the Council, which he felt should continue.

Cllr Coyle countered that he possesses relevant skills as an employer and sees no issue with inclusion on the Personnel Committee. He reminded councillors that first Annual Meeting of the Council had new Reform councillors who lacked the opportunity to request committee membership, and that the proposal would still maintain Labour majorities on all committees.

Cllr Wright proposed that consideration of committee representation be deferred to the Annual Meeting of the Council in May, with Cllr Brown seconding the motion. Cllr Roberts asked whether all proposed changes could be included at the Annual Meeting of the Council in May.

Cllr David Coyle requested a named vote.
For the proposal as set out:

- **For:** Cllr Kerry Davison, Cllr Steven Roberts, Cllr Karl Green, Cllr David Coyle, Cllr Scott Amery
- **Against:** Cllr Lynne Grimshaw, Cllr Jim Lang, Cllr Marjorie Chambers, Cllr Victor Bridges, Cllr Glynn Davies, Cllr Louis Brown, Cllr Paul Wright
- **Abstain:** Cllr Pauline Thompson, Cllr Caroline Ball

Cllr Lang raised a concern regarding public members of the Climate and Environment Committee having voting rights. The Clerk clarified that, according to the terms of reference agreed by Full Council that Committee included members of community groups elected onto the committee and having voting rights. In accordance with the Council’s Standing Orders each Committee does elect their own Chair and Vice-Chair and all members present are included in that vote.

FC2526/061 VEXATIOUS, PERSISTENT, AGGRESSIVE AND ABUSIVE COMPLAINTS POLICY
To receive and consider adoption of a new policy for managing vexatious, persistent, aggressive and abusive complaints and correspondence directed at the Council, its staff, and elected members. This is a standard policy in the local government sector

Cllr Thompson questioned why the complaints policy was being presented to the council, expressing the view that Cllrs already have a Code of Conduct that they must adhere to. The Clerk confirmed that the policy did not apply to Cllrs, the policy was an extension of the Council’s own complaints procedure, which was about actions taken by the Council, not individual Cllrs. The Clerk added that this type of policy is standard across local government. The Local Government Ombudsman actively encourages councils to adopt such policies, and most councils, county councils, NHS trusts, police authorities, and government departments have similar frameworks in place. Ashington Town Council would simply be brining themselves in line with established best practice that's been recommended by sector bodies for years.

Cllr Brown asked why this was needed when the Council has never had one before, and who was bringing it forward. The Clerk responded that she happy to provide examples from other councils and the Local Government Ombudsman guidance that explains why these policies are

necessary and widely adopted, adding that the policy protects everyone - staff, councillors, and the public. It ensures we can focus our resources on serving residents effectively rather than dealing with unreasonable behaviour that wastes time and money. It strengthens our complaints process by ensuring genuine concerns get proper attention, while preventing our systems from being overwhelmed by frivolous or repetitive complaints.

Cllr Ball expressed full support for the policy.

Cllr Coyle described the policy as good, highlighting that Section 5 addresses assessment procedures and raised a question regarding complaints involving The Clerk. The Clerk clarified that in such cases, the matter would be referred to the Chair of the Council.

Cllr Grimshaw noted concerns regarding potential vendettas or "witch hunts," but acknowledged the officers' excellent work. She emphasised that all matters must be referred to Full Council and expressed her complete agreement with the policy.

It was AGREED to adopt the policy.

FC2526/062 URGENT ITEM – CHILDREN'S CHRISTMAS LIGHT MOTIFS
Cllr Wright stated that if finances allow, the council should continue to do its best for the town at Christmas, as it reflects the community spirit. He asked whether it would be possible to engage a new generation of children in future years. The Clerk confirmed that this was feasible.

Cllr Amery noted that it might be too late to make changes this year, but raised a concern regarding lights that are over ten years old and beginning to fail. He asked what the cost would be to hire lights annually. The Clerk explained that purchasing new lights is very expensive, whereas hiring them is a more cost-effective solution.

Cllr Chambers recalled her experience on the committee previously, noting the fantastic children's artwork submitted. She asked whether the last seven entries could be offered to families. The Clerk clarified that condemned lights would not be offered to families, but if safe items were returned, a disclaimer would need to be provided.

Cllr Grimshaw observed that engaging with schools previously led to repetitive designs from children and suggested that starting fresh now could encourage originality.

Cllr Ball noted that some of the current features are old and some children from the original scheme are no longer of school age. She suggested that rather than focusing only on lighting, the council could have a similar competition for projectors to display hundreds of children's designs, modernising the scheme.

Cllr Thompson added that purchasing lights had previously caused storage issues, whereas hiring solved these problems and ensured annual PAT testing.

It was AGREED to go with the option to completely replace those area where children's motifs were previously at an additional cost of £1,660.50.

Option D includes:

- Hire 15 additional column motifs for full replacement

- Remove all children's motifs from the street scheme
- **Cost:** £1,660.50 (£110.70 per motif)
- **Impact:** Maintains full column coverage with consistent, professional appearance

Following confirmation of agreement to Option D, the Council **also agreed** to propose exploring indoor display options or gifting them to community facilities such as the Children's Centre, where they could be mounted on the building (subject to necessary permissions). Installation cost would be approximately £100 per motif.

It was AGREED that the children's motifs have served the community well, but their time as part of the main street display has reached its natural conclusion. The proposed community reuse option ensures they can continue to bring joy in a more appropriate setting.

FC2526/063 DATE, TIME AND VENUE FOR THE NEXT MEETING
Full Council Meeting – Tuesday 30th September 2025, 6:00pm, Council Chamber.

The meeting ended at 20:06.

AGREED