

**AGENDA 6, Enc i) ASHINGTON TOWN COUNCIL, AGREED Minutes of the Full Council held at 6:00pm on Tuesday 30<sup>th</sup> September 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, Marjorie Chambers, Louis Brown, Glyn Davies, Scott Amery, Bob Walkinshaw, Paul Wright, Lynne Grimshaw, John Tully, Jim Lang and Steven Roberts.

**ALSO, IN ATTENDANCE**

Sarah Eden – Executive Officer, Alan Bunker – Allotments Officer and Gary Holmes – Administration and Communications Officer, Ian Stephenson – Project Shield and Inspector Wayne Daniels – Northumbria Police.

**FC2526/064 WELCOME BY THE CHAIR**

Chair, Cllr Purvis made an announcement to open the meeting in response to a request by a member of the public to record the meeting.

“Before we begin this meeting, I need to make everyone aware that the proceedings are being recorded from the public gallery.

Under the *Openness of Local Government Bodies Regulations 2014*, members of the public and the press have the right to film, photograph, audio-record, or report on council meetings, including through social media. Any recordings may be published or shared in the public domain.

This is part of the Government’s aim to ensure openness and transparency in how councils make decisions.

If you are uncomfortable with being filmed or recorded, please make this known to the person carrying out the recording. However, please bear in mind that by attending a council meeting that is open to the public, you may be included.

I would also remind everyone that while recording is permitted, it must not disrupt the meeting. Freedom of speech and reporting must remain within the law, including the laws on defamation and public order.

I would also like to remind members about the expected standards of conduct in Council meetings. Members should raise their hand and speak through the Chair and may speak only once on any item on the agenda. Speaking once is limited to 5 minutes and will be enforced unless you are raising a point of order, giving a personal explanation, or exercising a right of reply. Once debate is closed, we will move to a vote on the item, with the mover having the right of reply before the vote is taken.

I think we can all agree that the last meeting was not the Council’s finest hour. We do not want a repeat of that this evening, so I ask everyone to conduct themselves with courtesy and respect as we go through the business of the Council, which is on the agenda.”

Cllr Purvis then asked members to agree a deferment of agenda items 8 and 9.

“As you are aware, Councillor Pauline Thompson has resigned. On behalf of the Council, I would like to thank Councillor Thompson for her service and dedication as an elected official, and we wish her all the best for the future. With this in mind, there will be no Civic Head Report,

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I also ask for your agreement to defer the election of a Deputy Civic Head in view that we now need to appoint a Civic Head, both of which will be added to the November meeting agenda."

It was **AGREED** to defer **ELECTION OF DEPUTY CIVIC HEAD OF ASHINGTON** until the meeting in November, alongside the **ELECTION of CIVIC HEAD**.

**FC2526/065 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr John Allen.

**FC2526/066 DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS**

There were no disclosures of interest.

**FC2526/067 DISPENSATIONS**

There were no requests for dispensation.

**FC2526/068 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

There were nine members of the public present.

***Representation from Ashington Charities and Community Groups***

The Council received a statement from the voluntary sector, represented by the CEO of NCVA, regarding community tensions linked to recent local events. Key points raised included:

- Reports of individuals feeling targeted, intimidated, or unsafe, resulting in reduced attendance at community sessions.
- Concerns from LGBT residents about reduced feelings of safety and support.
- Assertion that misinformation is contributing significantly to hostility and community division.
- Observation that certain flag displays, while normally patriotic, are currently being perceived as intimidating by parts of the community.
- Requests that Ashington Town Council:
  - Consider issuing a joint statement of unity with the voluntary sector; and
  - Support the removal of the flags referenced.

***Resident Concerns Regarding Social Media Posts by Councillors***

A member of the public raised concerns about unverified and incorrect information shared on social media relating to a community meeting on 14 August. Points raised included:

- Claims made online about the Tempos building being converted to an HMO and about an alleged assault incident, both of which the resident stated were unsubstantiated.
- A request for clarity on whether it is acceptable for elected members to share unverified or inflammatory information.
- Requests for assurance that fact-checking processes would be followed and for information on how the Council is ensuring fair treatment of asylum seekers.

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**Responses from Councillors:**

- It was stated that the email submitted by the resident contained inaccuracies and that no fact-checking had been carried out before making some claims.
- Councillors asserted that the resident themselves had not attended the referenced community meeting.
- It was stated that the councillor concerned had attended the meeting in a personal capacity as a resident and parent, not as a councillor.
- Clarification was provided that the Tempos building is not intended to become an HMO, based on information received after the initial posts.
- Clarification was given that a video shown relating to an incident at a local eatery appeared to depict an altercation, but details could not be confirmed.
- It was reiterated that while community concerns about immigration are frequently raised with councillors, violence is not condoned under any circumstances.

The Chair closed questions back and forth between members of the public and Cllrs. Cllr Louis Brown asked whether councillors may ask questions of members of the public during the public participation session. It was confirmed that they may not.

**FC2526/069 DRAFT MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

The minutes of the last Full Council meeting held on Tuesday 29<sup>th</sup> July were **RECEIVED** and **AGREED**.

**FC2526/070 DRAFT MINUTES OF JUNE COMBINED FINANCE AND GENERAL SERVICES COMMITTEE, AND FULL COUNCIL MEETINGS**

The minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday 10<sup>th</sup> June were **RECEIVED** and **AGREED**.

**FC2526/071 PUBLIC STATEMENT ON RECENT EVENTS IN ASHINGTON (placed on the agenda by Cllrs Louis Brown, and John Tully)**

It was unanimously **AGREED** to make a public statement on behalf of the Council on current events in Ashington.

**It was AGREED** the statement would read:

*“Ashington Town Council is taking a clear stand on recent events in our town. We hope that community leaders, local groups, and residents will stand with us in sending this message. Over the past few weeks, we have witnessed flags being illegally attached to public assets, divisive protest marches with inflammatory chanting, vandalism of street signs and road markings, and everyday conversations poisoned by hostility. This behaviour does not represent Ashington. We do not support these actions.*

*These actions are being driven by a small group, not by the town as a whole. These actions spread hatred and unrest. They divide rather than unite. They damage the reputation we have all worked to build.*

*Everyone has the right to peaceful protest—but what we are seeing goes far beyond legitimate expression. These protests achieve nothing positive for Ashington’s image or future. The colourful union flags being erected today will become tattered and torn eyesores tomorrow, and it will fall to overstretched public resources to remove them. That is money and staff time that should be invested in improving our community, not repairing damage caused by a destructive few.*

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*We want to be absolutely certain there is no misunderstanding: we are not challenging anyone's right to display flags with pride on their own property. The current displays create an atmosphere of exclusion and unease.*

*We have heard from residents and community groups asking local leaders to take a stand. This is us taking that stand.*

*Misinformation is being deliberately spread to fuel fear and division. We urge anyone with genuine questions or concerns to use proper channels—contact your councillors, attend meetings, speak to community leaders, engage with community groups. Real answers are available through honest, direct conversation, not through inflammatory speech or social media speculation.*

*Above all, we want to remind everyone what Ashington truly represents: a welcoming town with a proud history of people from all backgrounds settling here, working hard, and contributing to our schools, shops, businesses, and community life. We ask every resident to pause and consider: how must our neighbours—whether newly arrived or established for generations—feel when they see these divisive displays and experience the atmosphere of unease and unwelcome being deliberately created on their way to work, school, or the shops?*

*Ashington is stronger because of its diversity. Respect, fairness, and inclusion are the values that have always bound us together. We will not allow a small minority to undermine these principles.*

*We are asking every resident to play their part: reject actions and speech that harm our community, treat all neighbours with respect, and help ensure Ashington remains a town we can all be proud to call home.*

*The majority of Ashington's residents believe in decency, community, and mutual respect. It is time we made our voices heard more loudly than those who seek to divide us.*

In response to a question from Cllr Glyn Davies about Cllrs personal addresses, the Clerk clarified that the declarations of interest on Northumberland County Council's website are mandatory and include personal addresses. However, during this period, the page was suspended as there was potential threat to Cllrs. The Clerk confirmed that Cllrs must themselves write to NCC Democratic Services if they wish to have their address redacted from their Declaration of Interest. The Clerk also noted that personal addresses are not included on Ashington Town Council's website, this is only relevant for forms completed at election and held by NCC.

**FC2526/072 PROJECT SHIELD**

**It was AGREED** to receive a report on Project Shield's deployment in Ashington, hear their presentation, and consider a funding contribution request.

Ian Stephenson on behalf of the Project Shield team shared a presentation with the Council.

Project Shield started in 2023 and is part of the government's response in tackling anti-social behaviour and violence towards women and young girls. The project is funded through the hotspot response fund and works closely with partners on intelligence gathering and

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determining where to deploy their teams in order to tackle anti-social behaviour. This intelligence is pulled from various sources and teams are dispatched using this data. Everything they do is intelligence driven.

Since April 2025, the project has achieved the following: 655 patrol hours conducted; 48 home visits conducted; 12 Acceptable Behaviour Agreements served; 25 banning letters served for targeted business premises; 4 community events attended; 6 multi-agency operations utilising drone capability; 5 referrals through to the Northumberland Fire and Rescue Service extinguish programme; and 3 referrals to Youth Justice "turnaround" support programme.

A small amount of funding was secured in order to connect and share information with young people. By working with young people, a message was created with them for a social media campaign called "Positive Potato". Over half a million engagements were generated when sharing these on social media over the summer in Ashington and Cramlington.

A 46% reduction in anti-social behaviour was recorded in Cramlington Town Centre, and the shopping centre manager stated the programme worked and shoppers feel safer during the evening hours.

Cllr Purvis asked if Grant and Neil still work for Project Shield. Ian stated they do and confirmed there are four members of staff including Grant and Neil.

Cllr Amery asked about the work carried out from April 2025, specifically what the severity of the home visits conducted was and whether they led to the Acceptable Behaviour Agreements. Ian stated he could not give specific information, but that one thing does lead to another. Cllr Amery asked about the 25 banning letters for businesses. Ian mentioned they visit licensed premises and work to support them in a partnership approach.

Cllr Grimshaw commended the wonderful work that the team does alongside the police, stating they make a massive difference, and the testimonials speak for themselves.

Cllr Davies asked for clarification on the e-bike incidents reported, specifically whether this includes everyone and not just people who have balaclavas, and whether it includes smaller children. Ian stated it includes e-bikes, mopeds, mini mopeds, scooters, and similar vehicles. Ian also stated there is an upcoming county-wide campaign aimed at educating people on the dangers of e-bikes and scooters and the damage that can be caused to themselves or others, as well as the general safety of the vehicles, such as battery safety.

Cllr Ball asked if Ashington Town Council can share the details of the campaigns on how to report these incidents, and whether there is another one coming up. Ian thanked Cllr Ball for the positive comments and stated they are looking at ways to increase and improve the reports and specifics such as locations, descriptions of the riders, and incidents.

Cllr Wright applauded the perspective that the team has, such as Operation "Final Bell" when children go on their holidays, and their perspective of young people making themselves vulnerable with their behaviour.

Cllr Amery asked what education is being provided to parents regarding the effects of buying these vehicles for their children, given their price, dangers, and the risk of confiscation. Ian

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mentioned they are educating parents alongside the police and making people aware that these vehicles are illegal. The campaign is designed to help people understand the implications.

Inspector Wayne Daniels mentioned he has been policing for several years and stated that alongside the fire service and the Project Shield Team, it is a very good collaboration in terms of intelligence sharing. He emphasised that the partnership cannot work without Project Shield and the partners, and that he is proud of their work.

Cllr John Tully left the meeting at 19:15.

Cllr Amery asked a question to Inspector Wayne Daniels, referring to the previous Council meeting when the Inspector said there would be resources for additional police officers and asked if this has happened. Inspector Wayne Daniels was happy to announce that as of next week, they will be at full strength.

A vote was cast and it was unanimously **AGREED** to contribute £20,000 to Project Shield.

**FC2526/073 ANNUAL GOVERNANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY RETURN (AGAR), YEAR ENDING MARCH 2025**

**a) External Auditor Report/Certificate**

The External Auditor Report/Certificate was **RECEIVED**.

**b) Notice of Conclusion of Audit**

The publication of the Notice of Conclusion of Audit was **RECEIVED** and **ENDORSED**.

The statement on the Council's website confirming the Notice of Conclusion was **ENDORSED**.

Cllr Grimshaw commended the Executive Officer for her remarkable job in keeping the books in order.

The Executive Officer thanked the two signatories, Cllr Grimshaw and Cllr Thompson, for their quick and accurate authorisations in order to process payments.

**FC2526/074 HALF-YEAR BUDGET REVIEW**

The report was **RECEIVED** and **NO** actions were taken.

Cllr Brown requested that more Councillors attend the next strategy meeting.

The Clerk mentioned that the next meeting would be cancelled, and the following meeting would be held in November, so the Councillors can focus on the partnership agreement. The Clerk noted that the partnership committee meets in October.

**FC2526/075 DATE, TIME AND VENUE FOR THE NEXT MEETING**

Full Council Meeting – Tuesday 25<sup>th</sup> November 2025, 6:00pm, Council Chamber.

The meeting ended at 19:23