

AGENDA 6, Enc i) ASHINGTON TOWN COUNCIL, DRAFT Minutes of the Finance and General Services Committee held at 6:00pm on Tuesday 9th December 2025, at Ashington Town Hall, Council Chamber, 65 Station Road, Ashington, NE63 8RX

CLLRS PRESENT:

Cllrs Lynne Grimshaw (Chair), Mark Purvis, Jim Lang, Caroline Ball, Steven Roberts, Scott Amery, Bob Walkinshaw, Marjorie Chambers, Kerry Davison, David Coyle, Karl Green, Louis Brown, John Tully

ALSO, IN ATTENDANCE

Sarah Eden – Executive Officer, Sharon Parmley – Events and Engagement Officer, Alan Bunker – Allotments Officer, Mark Air – Neighbourhood Services Officer

FGS2526/086 WELCOME BY THE CHAIR

Cllr Lynne Grimshaw opened the meeting and welcomed everyone.

FGS2526/087 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Cllr Paul Wright, Cllr Glyn Davies, Cllr Sonia Simm

FGS2526/088 DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS

There were no disclosures of interest.

FGS2526/089 DISPENSATIONS

No dispensations were requested.

FGS2526/090 WANSBECK VALLEY FOODBANK

Finance and Funding Officer, Karina Henery, and Chair Rev. John Rowley were in attendance.

Rev John Rowley delivered an update, including how the current financial climate is continuing to affect the local area. Rev. Rowley outlined information from the expected 2025 Financial Report explaining that this was not yet published as the year ends on 31st December. The update shown on the screen was difficult to see and it was AGREED copies would be forwarded for Cllrs.

The presentation delivered included:

- Income received from donations has increased other than from business, clubs and churches.
- Funding from National Lottery which was used for the Funding Officer post and vehicles for delivery did not continue in 2025 but there were funding applications being made.
- 50% of their work continues to be in Ashington.
- The main issues are money management and homelessness.
- Small grants have been received for sleeping bags and travel toiletries to support the homeless who access services, sometimes via The Bothy and Hirst Welfare.
- Significant savings have been made in food purchasing via bulk buy and local suppliers.
- Food demand is nothing like it was in 2023 and continues to reduce, but food inflation is on the increase
- Grants are harder to come by and the reporting mechanisms are significant.
- Donations of food have reduced but monetary donations are healthy.
- All food bags are via referral which allows signposting to other services.

In response to questions from members:

- It was agreed that the financials would be sent.
- Demand was described as creeping and food inflation as a concern.

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- They would look at a direct from wage donation in view that many do not carry cash and donation boxes are a less effective use of volunteer time.
- The profile of the organisation needs to be publicised.
- The impact of lifting of 2 child benefit cap is unknown at this time, however food spending to support those in Ashington has risen from £40k to £60.

The Chair closed the item following extended time having been allowed. Cllrs were invited to visit WVFB in their new premises.

FGS2526/091 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There was one member of the public in attendance, but no questions had been received in advance of the meeting and in accordance with standing orders.

FGS2526/092 DRAFT MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the last Finance and General Services Meeting held on Tuesday 11th November were **RECEIVED** and **AGREED**.

FGS2526/093 CLERK AND OFFICER UPDATES

The report was tabled.

Neighbourhood Services

Play Areas

Repairs and maintenance are being worked through across all play areas following each site having a RoSPA Play Safety inspection.

Bus Shelters

We are still waiting for funding information back in regards bus shelters. Once this is confirmed we will be able to order those identified as requiring replacement.

Town Seats

All seats are being refurbished where necessary. As stated previously, if you have identified any issues with public seats in your ward, please contact the office.

Allotments

North Seaton Site

Tenancy and Administration

A new plot holder has been onboarded at North Seaton. Invoices for the coming year have been issued to tenants, with several payments already received.

Maintenance and Infrastructure

Pothole repairs have been completed at the site. Management is actively working to identify a longer-term solution to prevent recurring issues.

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Site Cleanliness and Security

Metal recycling days have been organised at the site, and plot clearance work has commenced with additional work planned. The site has experienced an increase in fly-tipping incidents. A site meeting has been scheduled for 9th December with environmental enforcement to discuss this issue and share problem-solving strategies.

Woodhorn Road Site

Maintenance Activities

Maintenance work has been carried out on the side gate, which will now require servicing twice yearly to ensure continued functionality.

Plot Restoration Project

Significant progress has been made on restoring three neglected plots. Work has gained momentum with support from Woodhorn volunteers, and this winter-long project continues to advance after years of the plots being left unattended.

Recycling and Collections

A metal recycling day was successfully held, along with a UPVC collection. The site has also experienced fly-tipping, though items have been successfully returned to their owner.

Tree Boundary Review

A meeting is scheduled for 9th December with Northumberland County Council (NCC) to review and assess the tree boundary with the A197 (Relief Road).

General Site Management

Inspections and Enforcement

Regular inspections have continued across all managed allotment sites. Where necessary, termination procedures have been conducted in accordance with tenancy agreements.

Capital Works Planning

The team is working alongside contractors to obtain quotes for capital works projects at several allotment sites, supporting the ongoing improvement and development of facilities.

Events and Engagement

Ashington Christmas Market

The Ashington Christmas Craft Market, with funding from North East Combined Authority as part of Animating Ashington was due to take place on Friday 14th November. Following postponement due to forecast strong winds, the market was rescheduled to take place on Sunday 7th December at Hirst Park as part of the Heart of the Hirst Christmas Fayre.

An event evaluation will be provided by Money Tree Crafters who organised the event.

Annual Grant Video

A planning meeting was held on Wednesday 19th November at the town hall where successful

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grant recipients were invited to be part of a celebratory video, to showcase the grants awarded by the Council, and the amazing community organisations in the town.

The resulting video being filmed and edited by LukLuk Productions will be added to the catalogue of videos we have on the Council's YouTube channel.

A filming schedule is now in place, and filming has already taken place at Ashington JW Rugby Football Club, YMCA and Koast Radio.

Youth Services Collaboration Meeting Report

A meeting was held on Monday 1st December, meeting report to follow in January 2026. Earlier meeting is on the agenda.

Free Swim Sessions

Due to how the calendar falls in December, we have booked Saturday sessions only as Wednesday sessions were Christmas and New Years Eve. The sessions available in October half-term were not as well attended as previous sessions. We have requested that as well as our publicity, the Places Leisure formally publicise the sessions across their socials and with posters throughout the leisure centre. Each session has capacity for 80 places, given on a first come first served basis.

Next sessions are:

- Saturday 27th December 2025, 1pm to 2pm
- Saturday 3rd January 2026, 1pm to 2pm
- Wednesday 18th February 2026, 1pm to 2pm
- Saturday 21st February 2026, 1pm to 2pm

Christmas Jumper Day Event

Tuesday 9th December, taking place on Station Road Tuesday Market, raising funds for Save the Children, we had reindeer food, chocolate coins, Shaun the Sheep colouring sheets and also the chance to offer your preference for Christmas tree for 2026.

FGS2526/094 BUDGET AND EXPENDITURE 2025/26

a) Updated Budget Report

The RFO advised in advance of the meeting and reported at the meeting. **Item 9a) Budget Update**

"Please be advised that a comprehensive budget review is currently underway in preparation for the 2026/27 budget-setting process.

The Council operates its day-to-day accounting on a receipts and payments basis, which records transactions as and when money physically enters or leaves the bank account. Budget monitoring reports presented throughout the year have reflected this same basis, showing actual cash received and spent against budgeted figures.

However, as we approach year end and budget setting, it is necessary to adjust these figures to an income and expenditure basis. This means accounting for money the Council is committed to paying or entitled to receive, regardless of whether it has yet passed through the bank. For example, invoices received but not yet paid, or income due but not yet received, need to be factored in to give a true picture of the Council's financial position. There are adjustments from

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last year to take into account. It seems pointless presenting you with a receipts and payments budget summary at this stage in the budget cycle.

This reconciliation work is currently being undertaken, alongside verifying cost coding accuracy and calculating commitments through to year end. A fully updated budget position, prepared on an income and expenditure basis, will be presented to the Finance and General Services Committee at its meeting in January. This will ensure members receive a complete and accurate financial picture on which to base budget and precept decisions. With this in mind, I am not presenting a budget update tonight.”

b) Accounts Paid and to be Paid

The schedule of accounts paid was **RECEIVED** and those accounts paid since the last meeting were **ENDORSED**. There were **NO** questions received.

c) Bank Reconciliation

The bank reconciliation dated 31st November 2025 was **RECEIVED**

FGS2526/095 PUBLIC TOILETS (placed on the agenda following proposal at last meeting)
It was AGREED to RECEIVE and Note the report on Public Toilet Provision - Station Road Facilities.

Following a healthy debate that included:

- Discussion of costs and the condition of the toilets.
- Their situation and suitability on the High Street.
- The impact on the tax payers of Ashington with any involvement by the Council.
- Their current poor state and any ongoing financial commitments.
- The importance of public toilets as a basic human need.

It was AGREED by a majority of those present and voting that the Town Council should enter into discussion with Northumberland County Council to express interest in principle in exploring the potential transfer of Station Road public toilets, on the basis that any agreement would be subject to satisfactory terms including full capital refurbishment by NCC prior to transfer.

Cllr Lynne Grimshaw thanked Cllr David Coyle for bringing this matter forward and also asked the record to reflect thanks for the work in respect of street scene/kerb appeal and the gullies proposal, which she said he had worked hard on, and which were all making an impact in the town.

FGS2526/096 CCTV MEETING

It was AGREED to RECEIVE and NOTE the report of the meeting held on 12th November 2025. No members identified any matters arising from the report requiring further consideration or information.

FGS2526/097 YOUTH SERVICES COLLABORATION MEETING

It was AGREED to RECEIVE the report of the meeting held on Monday 20th October. Members noted the content of the report and the discussion arising with updates on current youth provision, emerging opportunities, community safety matters and areas where further coordination may be beneficial.

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Cllr Caroline Ball commented that there was a good spread of youth groups in attendance and it was good to welcome Northumberland College. The meeting was useful with a very good discussion of training needs.

FGS2526/098 REMEMBRANCE SUNDAY, 9TH NOVEMBER 2025

It was AGREED to RECEIVE the report on Remembrance Sunday, **it was also AGREED** to arrange a meeting of Ashington RBL, Churches Together and Town Council in the New Year.

Cllr Marjorie Chambers, also Chair of the Ashington Branch of RBL advised that a meeting was scheduled for 14th January that could be co-ordinated to include this. Cllr Chambers acknowledged that there were timing issues and unfortunately the chimes of the clock meant this was very obvious. Cllr Chambers spoke about the huge numbers attending, and also the brilliant piper. Cllrs echoed that this year saw huge crowds and there was lots to commend about the service, notwithstanding the timing issues.

Cllr Chambers advised that at last count there was £27k raised by the Ashington Branch of RBL and they hoped this would be £30k. There are plans for a pipe band next year and it is hoped the Town Council will contribute towards this.

The catering in the cricket club afterwards was also congratulated but unfortunately not many attended as the announcement wasn't made.

FGS2526/099 CHRISTMAS LIGHTS SWITCH-ON EVENT, 13TH NOVEMBER 2025

It was AGREED to RECEIVE the report.

Following a healthy debate, **it was AGREED** that the Town Council should look at a combination of commercial and community for future lights switch-on events. The community group engagement achieved by the Events and Engagement Officer over the past 2 years was congratulated and should be built on.

Technical issues with the contractors were questioned, the Executive Officer advised what had occurred and that this has been addressed directly.

FGS2525/100 NCC DOG CONTROL PUBLIC SPACES PROTECTION ORDER - NOTICE OF CONSULTATION

It was AGREED to RECEIVE the consultation notice and to make representations to Northumberland County Council regarding the proposed Dog Control PSPO, particularly in relation to the potential inclusion of sports pitches within the exclusion provisions. It was acknowledged that this requires the collection of evidence, and in this regard to seek that NCC actively collate evidence to this effect. In turn, **it was AGREED** that Cllrs and the Council would encourage reporting of dog fouling with photographic evidence, especially on sports fields, despite the apathy and any confidence in sanctions.

The debate included the prevailing issue of dogs being let off lead in parks and fields after dark, having no idea where they have fouled in order to pick it up, and likely with no intention of doing so.

Cllrs Mark Purvis and John Tully left the meeting at 7:30pm

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FGS2525/101 NORTHUMBERLAND ASSOCIATION OF LOCAL COUNCIL MEETING REPORT

It was AGREED to receive the reports from the County Committee held on 11th October, and the Annual General Meeting on 15th November. There were no matters raised to be taken to a future meeting.

Cllr Lynne Grimshaw thanked Cllr Kerry Davison for raised Cllr training, and Civility and Respect at the recent NALC meeting, commending Cllr Davison for doing so at her very first attendance.

FGS2526/102 BUDGET 2026/27

It was AGREED to NOTE that draft budget figures for the 2026/27 financial year will be presented to the Finance and General Services Committee on 13th January 2026 for consideration and discussion.

The Executive Officer advised that Councillors are invited to meet with her at any time before the FGS meeting, either individually or in groups, to review year-end figures, provisional budget proposals, and discuss any budget ideas or queries they may have.

The final budget and precept for Ashington Town Council will be set at the Full Council meeting on 27th January 2026.

FGS2526/103 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

It was AGREED that the press and public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the following item, permitted under Section 1 (2) LGA 1960, due to the confidential nature of the business being transacted. Item 17 is a legal matter.

FGS2526/104 COUNCIL UNIT FOR OPERATIONAL WORKS

An update was received.

FGS2526/105 DATE, TIME AND VENUE FOR THE NEXT MEETING

Tuesday 13th January 2026, 6:00pm, Council Chamber.

The meeting ended at 7:45pm.