AGENDA 7, Enc i) ASHINGTON TOWN COUNCIL, AGREED Minutes of the Finance and General Services Committee held at 6:00pm on Tuesday 11th November 2025, at Ashington Town Hall, Council Chamber, 65 Station Road, Ashington, NE63 8RX

CLLRS PRESENT:
Cllrs Lynne Grimshaw (Chair), Karl Green, Kerry Davison, David Coyle, Marjorie Chambers, Louis Brown, Glyn Davies, Scott Amery, Jim Lang, Bob Walkinshaw, Caroline Ball, Sonia Simm, Steven Roberts, Paul Wright.

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

FGS2526/068 WELCOME BY THE CHAIR
Welcome by Cllr Lynne Grimshaw. Cllr Lynne Grimshaw welcomed Cllr Sonia Simm to her first meeting as a Town Cllr for the Hirst Ward.

FGS2526/069 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE
Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Mark Purvis.

FGS2526/070 DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS
Cllr Caroline Ball disclosed an interest in item FGS2526/066 MONTHLY SATURDAY MARKET as the operator is known to her.

FGS2526/071 DISPENSATIONS
No dispensations were requested.

FGS2526/072 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION
There were no members of public present.

FGS2526/073 DRAFT MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING
The minutes of the last Finance and General Services Meeting held on Tuesday 14th October were **RECEIVED** and **AGREED**.

FGS2526/074 CLERK AND OFFICER UPDATES
This report provides an update on key activities and developments since the last Finance and General Services meeting held in September 2025.

Neighbourhood Services

Doves Corner
Ward Cllrs have indicated that their preference is that ATC maintain this space in respect of sustainable planting; this will be brought to a future meeting to agree formally. Subject to approval this will be added to NSO work schedules.

Town Council Assets
Bus Shelters and Town Seats remain a priority. Information has been requested from NCC and providers on user numbers. We await information on a funding application for shelters and locally fabricated seats for shelters without them.

Those town seats for update are on the agenda following a response from Haydon Ward Cllrs and funding support from the County Cllr. A further reminder that ward Cllrs can get in touch if there are seats in there ward they would like to see updated with the new style seating which is

made with recycled materials and no maintenance, as well as being more accessible with arm rests. Thoughts being that if seats are identified for replacement rather than refurbishment we could seek funding via MLIS or Windfarm. **A reminder to Ward Cllrs to get in touch.**

Horticulture

Work is complete on the Woodhorn Road/Woodhorn Villas entrance feature which has always been more difficult to maintain. Mark and Ryan have built up the border in brickwork to match the gateway structure, the bed has been reduced and will be further planted in spring. We will look at mirroring this scheme at the Bothal entrance feature which is similarly sprawling and could do with a physical border.

Allotments

Site Inspections

- Routine inspections have continued across all managed allotment sites.
- Follow-up inspections from early to mid-September have been completed.

Allotment Liaison Group

An Allotment Liaison meeting was held on Thursday 23rd October with the opportunity for site representatives to bring forward capital projects across all allotment sites. The main emphasis for capital spending is roadways which Alan has started seeking costs for. Additionally fencing at Wansbeck Road Allotment site, and suggestions for community spaces at other sites. The workmanship on taps was raised. Discussions included the potential to switch off water supplies ahead of any cold snaps to prevent damage.

The assessment framework provides a transparent, fair way to evaluate capital work's needs, although the difficulty will be where sites have the same request – roadways. Information on the assessment framework was previously provided but if anyone has questions, they are welcome to contact Sarah or Alan.

Maintenance & Repairs

- **Roadways:** Initial meeting held with a contractor; awaiting quotes.
- **Fencing:** Meeting scheduled later this week with a fencing contractor.
- **Taps:** Additional repairs completed; lagging options to be explored before temperatures drop.
- **Locks:** Urgent repairs underway at the Woodhorn site; ongoing servicing will be required.

Plot Management

Several gardens have been re-let across various sites. Invoices for North Seaton Colliery will be issued next month, with rent due on 1st January.

Boundary Improvements

NCC has assisted with overgrown boundary clearance at:

- Seaton Hirst

- Hirst East End

Nursery Park has also been identified for future work. These efforts have improved site exteriors and may help deter littering.

Future Works

Ongoing discussions with NCC regarding boundary improvements between Highmarket and Wansbeck Road sites and adjacent church grounds. Work is expected to commence late November or early December.

Safety & Waste Disposal

The Town Council has partnered with a local company to safely dispose of gas canisters found on sites.

Play Areas

ROPSA inspections were postponed to 18th November to inspect all our play areas. This annual inspection is a legal requirement.

North Seaton Colliery Play Area

An order for the newly developed play area has been placed, this item is on the agenda.

Bywell Road Play Area

Following previous update about this NCC owned and maintained play area, the survey designed by us and sent out by NCC has had a good response so far. The findings have been shared with ward Cllrs and NCC.

Paddock Wood Play Area

Sarah has identified some areas for potential improvement at Paddock Wood Play Area and has arranged a site meeting with ward Cllrs. Areas identified are outside of the Town Council's remit but with funding could be actioned by a suitable contractor, i.e. youth shelter repainting, seat refurbishment or replacement. The play area itself has equipment that is no longer in use and bark continues to be an issue.

Events and Engagement

Youth Advisory Committee Collaboration Meeting Summary

Monday, 20th October 2025, Hirst Welfare Centre, Alexandra Road
The Youth Advisory Committee met with Youth Service Providers to review current youth services and partnership activities across Ashington. The meeting brought together representatives from Ashington Town Council, police, youth organisations, education providers, and community safety teams. A full report will be brought to the December FGS meeting.

Key Updates

Positive News: Youth-related antisocial behaviour is at an all-time low, with only fireworks-related incidents remaining a concern. The Playzone sessions have been highly successful, and Ashington Town FC has won funding to deliver additional activities there.

New Initiatives: Beyond Youth will open the pavilion over winter months from November. A Street Games project bid has been submitted to engage 14+ young people in project

development skills. A darts programme combining numeracy learning will launch with world number 6 Chris Dobey attending the opening event.

Funding Opportunities: Ashington and Blyth have been designated as Project Shield Areas, unlocking Home Office funding. Other available funds include Community Chest funding (contact: Rita Patel-Miller - ritapatel.miller@qtsdatacenters.com)
Bernica Fund (up to £200) and Eat Sleep Play Fund for travel costs.

Training: NUF Next Team course for 16+ starts 5th January 2026.

Challenges

- Fireworks incidents at Hirst Park remain problematic. Young people involved have been referred to fire services, and partners are working to identify supply sources.
- Need to increase engagement with older teenagers across multiple services.
- County lines awareness required - partners urged to report concerns to police due to limited intelligence in the area.

Actions

- All partners to send upcoming event information to Sharon
- Identify training needs
- FIBS (Fire Incident Behaviour System) form to be circulated for reporting fireworks incidents
- NUF course and Community Chest funding details to be shared with all partners

Small Grant Fund Summary - October 2025

The October 2025 Small Grant Fund round closed on 22nd October and received 9 applications in total.
6 organisations were successful, receiving a combined total of **£2,440** in funding for community initiatives including:

- A Christmas event for elderly clients and families
- Youth development equipment and activities
- Heritage preservation projects
- Community sports championships
- Radio station equipment upgrades

3 applications were unsuccessful as they did not meet the small grant criteria. These applicants included youth clubs and sports organisations seeking funding for volunteer expenses, uniforms, and equipment. All unsuccessful applicants have been signposted to alternative funding sources.

The successful grants will support diverse community activities ranging from heritage preservation and youth engagement to entertainment for elderly residents and local sports events.

The small grant funding report will be emailed out for information.

Celebratory Funding Film

An email invitation has gone out for a planning meeting taking place on Wednesday 17th November at 2pm here at the town hall.

All successful annual grant applicants have been invited to the meeting to arrange filming slots with Jimmy France from LukLuk Production for three short videos.

The videos will feature Sport, Youth, and Community and Climate Action. These videos will provide you groups and the Council with the opportunity to promote their organisation, showcase the wonderful work being done, and share stories with the wider community.

Remembrance Sunday Service & Parade 2025

9th November 2025, Ashington Memorial Garden
Ashington's annual Remembrance Sunday service and parade attracted hundreds of residents in a well-attended and moving tribute to the fallen and those who have served in our armed forces. The parade was led by Parade Marshall John Langan, with strong youth representation from Reiverdale Scouts, Ashington Girlguiding Division, Ashington Sea Cadets, and Dukes Combined Forces Cadets.

The service was conducted by Ashington Churches Together (Rev. Sam Lockhead and Fr. Vincent Waiga). The memorial garden welcomed:

- Four-person Honour Guard from Zulu Company 5 Fusiliers
- Music by Ashington Colliery Band
- Singing supported by Ashington Community Singers and Ashington & District Male Voice Choir
- Traditional two-minute silence, Last Post, Reveille, and Lament observed
- Wreath laying by armed forces representatives and local community groups (announced by Frazer Nicholson, Vice Chair of Ashington Royal British Legion)

Julie Cordon, Deputy Lord Lieutenant attended and Mr A Vaziri, Royal British Legion Branch President delivered the Exhortation and Kohima Epitaph.

There will be a de-brief arranged with Ashington Branch of RBL and others involved in the New Year.

Upcoming Events

Christmas Light Switch On & Lantern Parade, this Thursday 13th November on Station Road and at the Masonic Hall. Ashington Town Council Meetings List
Christmas Craft Market, this Friday 14th November on Station Road. Ashington Town Council Meetings List

Website and Social Media PR

Website

The following items appeared on our website news page since the previous officer's report. Members are reminded that we maintain active Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn pages to promote Council activities and engage with our community. You can read them in full by visiting the website.

https://www.ashingtontowncouncil.gov.uk/news/

Hundreds Gather for Ashington's Remembrance Sunday Service	*10 November 2025*
Ashington's Magical Christmas Lights Switch-On Returns with Fairies, Elves, and Festive Fun	*07 November 2025*
Ashington Town Council Welcomes Community Engagement Events on Town Centre Regeneration	*05 November 2025*
Ashington Memorial Garden Enhanced as Part of Town's Regeneration Ahead of Remembrance Sunday	*05 November 2025*
Finance & General Services Committee Meeting on 11/11/2025	*04 November 2025*
Ashington to Debut Spectacular Light Projections Across Town Centre This November through December	*31 October 2025*
A Warmer Welcome to Ashington	*28 October 2025*
Ashington to be Represented at North East Field of Remembrance	*27 October 2025*
Spooktacular series of events to launch new Animating Ashington Autumn Winter Festival	*24 October 2025*
Allotment Liaison Committee Meeting on Thursday 23rd October	*17 October 2025*
Casual Vacancy - Hirst Ward	*16 October 2025*
Ashington Christmas Craft Market with Festive Magic and Free Family Fun	*14 October 2025*

Ashington Christmas Craft Market with Festive Magic and Free Family Fun	*13 October 2025*
Ashington Town Council Launches Second Round of Small Grant Fund	13 October 2025
Finance & General Services Committee Meeting on 14/10/25.	08 October 2025

Facebook

The Town Council's Facebook page has shown positive performance during the period 14th October to 8th November 2024.

The page gained 158 new followers during this period, reflecting a 24% increase. This brings the total follower count from 3,400 (reported at the previous Finance & General Services Committee meeting) to 3,600.

Engagement Metrics:

- **Reach:** 70,000 (up 7.3%)
- **Views:** 320,000 (up 0.4%)
- **Content Interactions:** 3,800 (down 10.6%)
- **Link Clicks:** 558 (down 3.8%)
- **Page Visits:** 5,700 (down 30.4%)

Notable peaks in engagement occurred around 19th October and 3rd November, correlating with specific content releases.

Posts focusing on positive community news and Ashington-specific content continue to generate stronger engagement compared to shared content from partner organisations. This trend reinforces the value of locally focused original content.

Top Ten Posts were provided.

Halloween Trail

The Halloween Trail achieved significant success this year, with 26 businesses from Ashington High Street participating, including both new and returning traders.

Families collected stamp cards and visited each participating shop to receive treats and stamps. The event attracted over 100 families and young people, representing a 100% increase in participation compared to the previous year.

Feedback from participating businesses was positive regarding the operational change from stickers to stamps. Shops reported that stamping cards was more efficient than the previous

sticker-based system, whilst children responded enthusiastically to the Halloween-themed stamps.

IT and Computer Systems

Work has commenced on developing a comprehensive asset register database using Microsoft Access. The database is designed to maintain a complete record of all Town Council assets throughout Ashington.

The system will include the following features:

- Photographic records of each asset
- What3Words location data for precise geographical referencing
- Inspection schedules and records
- Notes and maintenance history
- Asset condition monitoring

This database will provide a centralised system for managing and maintaining up-to-date information on all Council assets across the town, improving operational efficiency and asset management capabilities.

FGS2526/075 CASUAL VACANCY – HIRST WARD

To formally note that a casual vacancy in the office of Councillor was formally **DECLARED** following the resignation of Cllr John Allen.

Members **NOTED** that the formal Notice of Vacancy was published on 14th October 2025.

FGS2526/076 BUDGET AND EXPENDITURE 2025/26

a) Updated Budget Report

The updated budget and expenditure report was **RECEIVED** and there were **NO** questions to the RFO.

The Executive Officer noted an error in the CCTV header relating to an input issue. This will be rectified and be restored online.

b) Accounts Paid and to be Paid

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

c) Bank Reconciliation

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

FGS2526/077 HIGHWAY GULLIES MAPPING INITIATIVE (placed on the agenda by Cllr David Coyle)

The proposal for a coordinated initiative involving ATC Ward Councillors in identifying and mapping problem highway gullies within their wards was **AGREED**.

Cllr Brown commented that this was a good idea and that the Council needs to continue with this way of thinking in order to get NCC to act and improve Ashington.

Cllr Coyle stated he has spoken to other Councillors around the South East of Northumberland who agreed this is an issue. He noted that whilst the partnership board arrangement is complex, gully cleaning is not currently on the remit for Ashington. The plan proposed looked at a way to proactively fix the problems.

Cllr Green raised issues with estates that are not adopted. Cllr Grimshaw clarified that this was a longstanding problem; if the area is not adopted reports do not go through.

Cllr Davies noted that the gully wagons need access and residents should support efforts by moving cars but asked if they were advised beforehand.

Cllr Brown reported that on Boiler Road, North Seaton, the hedges on the side of the road are being trimmed and one of the new sweepers was observed behind clearing.

FGS2526/078 ENVIRONMENTAL ENHANCEMENTS WARD BUDGET

Seaton & Spital Ward (placed on the agenda by Ward Cllrs)

It was **AGREED** that the previously allocated funding of £3,000 to the 'heat loss scheme' at North Seaton Community Centre be redirected to North Seaton Colliery Community Centre, with £2,000 allocated to this new scheme and a further £1,000 remaining for North Seaton Community Centre to complete their project.

Cllr Amery asked if there was a concrete cost for the scheme at North Seaton Community Centre. Cllr Lang confirmed there will be Cllr Brown reaffirmed that £1,000 remains allocated for Cllr Lang to complete the project.

The Executive Officer confirmed that whilst money was allocated for this project, not had been reclaimed. In order to reclaim the funds allocated the costs would be shared and would be available to Council.

The Executive Officer reiterated the details from the report provided, that this was moving money from one ward project to a different ward project. Cllr Green noted that the money was allocated before he became a Cllr, therefore he had no issue with the money leaving his ward and going towards another ward.

Cllr Brown explained that the funding for North Seaton Colliery Community Centre is for solar panels in order to get the heating working, and that quotes are ready to proceed. He noted that historically the facility has not had access to gas, as tapping into the gas supply would require £20,000 which cannot be afforded.

The Executive Officer advised that the Council had committed £5,000 towards this project from Annual Grants and that money would be paid over once the full funding required has been confirmed and the works have been ordered.

College & North Seaton Ward (placed on the agenda by Ward Cllrs)

It was **AGREED** that the remaining £3,500 in the College & North Seaton Ward Environmental Enhancements budget is committed to the new heating system at North Seaton Colliery Community Centre.

FGS2526/079 REPLACEMENT OF PUBLIC SEATING IN HAYDON WARD (placed on the agenda by Ward Cllrs)
The replacement of five public seats on North Seaton Road (3) and Newbiggin Road (2) was **AGREED**.

Cllr Lang asked if there is a possibility for benches to be placed on the grass opposite Wetherspoons. The Executive Officer advised that it is a commercial space that is still being marketed by NCC/Advance Northumberland.

Cllr Amery explained that the land is designated for future development and the grass has been laid to improve the appearance in the interim.

Cllr Lang continued that there should be seats at the bus shelters. The Executive Officer noted that all bus stops on the bus station had a shelter with seat and confirmed that Cllr Ball had funded those without. Cllr Ball suggested Cllr Lang speak with her after the meeting.

FGS2526/080 NORTH SEATON COLLIERY PLAY AREA
The project update report on North Seaton Colliery Play Area development was **NOTED** and **RECEIVED**.

The Executive Officer noted that additional funding from the wind farm was available and would be drawn, this would boost reserves previously allocated to play areas.

FGS2526/081 PARTNERSHIP BOARD UPDATE REPORT
The report of the Ashington Partnership Board meeting held on Tuesday 22nd October 2025 was **RECEIVED**.

Cllr Davies expressed concern that for several years the Council has paid for several employees but has never had assurances from NCC that they will not be deployed elsewhere and used exclusively within Ashington.

Cllr Chambers stated that the employees are used within Ashington, citing examples such as Rapid Response and an extra operative for road sweeping. Cllr Chambers confirmed that assurances have been received during meetings that the five NCC personnel work within Ashington only.

Cllr Coyle reported that the Council has had some productive meetings with NCC, and that the intention is for the operatives to be removed from general cleansing duties and deployed exclusively as a team to undertake work as directed by the Council within Ashington. He stated that five operatives will work on kerb appeal, this would be more groundwork than cleansing.

Cllr Amery stated that if any operatives are unwell, NCC must replace them as this is a partnership arrangement, and the Council should not pay for a service it does not receive. The Executive Officer advised that if the Town Council wished to purse an agreement with built in cover for personnel being off sick or on holiday that would be more costly but could be pursued.

Cllr Brown suggested that NCC should be given a chance with the new action plan and expressed hope that the arrangement remains positive.

The Allotments Officer reported that NCC has completed work to the allotments boundaries which was very impressive.

FGS2526/082 MONTHLY SATURDAY MARKET
The report on the introduction of a monthly Saturday market on Station Road was received and the idea supported.

Cllr Amery asked what the market would sell and hoped that it would bring a different offer than is often seen. Cllr Ball confirmed that similar markets in Blyth attract high-end themed markets and crafts.

FGS2526/083 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC
Members are invited to consider passing the following resolution:
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.

FGS2526/084 COUNCIL UNIT FOR OPERATIONAL WORKS

Cllr Paul Wirght left the meeting at 18:54.

The Council considered a confidential report regarding the potential asset transfer of a building for use as a depot.

Members expressed support for the opportunity, noting it would be an ideal space and excellent investment that could future-proof the Council's operational needs.

Discussion took place regarding the potential inclusion of public toilet provision at the site. Various views were expressed regarding the merits and challenges of taking on such responsibility, including consideration of ongoing costs, separation from staff facilities, and the condition of existing public toilets in the town.

It was proposed and **AGREED** to defer the public toilets discussion to a future meeting to allow for fuller consideration.

Members emphasised the importance of progressing the depot provision as soon as possible to meet operational requirements.

RESOLVED that the Council:
1. Noted progress to date
2. Agreed in principle to explore the asset transfer, subject to feasibility and cost review
3. Approved expenditure for a building survey and schedule of works
4. Authorised the Executive Officer to progress discussions
5. Deferred discussion on public toilet provision to the next FGS Meeting

FGS2526/085 DATE, TIME AND VENUE FOR THE NEXT MEETING
Tuesday 9th December 2025, 6:00pm, Council Chamber.

The meeting ended at 19:07