

ASHINGTON TOWN COUNCIL, AGREED Minutes of the Full Council Meeting held at 6:00pm on Tuesday 28th January 2025, at Ashington Town Hall, Council Chamber, 65 Station Road, Ashington, NE63 8RX

CLLRS PRESENT:

Cllr Mark Purvis (Chair), Cllr Louis Brown, Cllr Marjorie Chambers, Cllr Matthew Cuthbert, Cllr Lynne Grimshaw, Cllr Graeme Wright, Cllr Paul Wright, Cllr Jim Lang, Cllr Pauline Thompson, Cllr John Tully, Cllr Glynn Davies, Cllr Sophie Robinson.

ALSO, IN ATTENDANCE

Sarah Eden – Executive Officer. Two members of the public.

FC24/085 WELCOME BY THE CHAIR

Welcome by Cllr Mark Purvis.

FC24/086 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Caroline Ball, Cllr Gemma Hemsley, Cllr Victor Bridges, Cllr Bob Walkinshaw.

FC24/087 DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS

Cllr Louis Brown disclosed an interest as an allotment holder, and site representative.

FC24/088 DISPENSATIONS

Cllr Louis Brown requested as dispensation. **It was AGREED.**

FC24/089 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There were two members of the public present. One members of the public was present on a matter relating to the Hirst ward and was advised to contact County Cllr Ken Parry.

Another member of the public sought answers to the following questions:

Q1: How is Ashington Town Council seeking to ensure that all developments and initiatives affecting the future of Ashington give the best possible outcomes for all those who live and work in the Town while providing the best value for money? The North Seaton Road Cycleway is an example where a "solution" was introduced in Ashington without adequate involvement of local people in the selection of how the money from central government was spent. Alternative cycle way improvements, for example from Ashington Farm to Bothal Middle school would have created something new and really transformational in safe routes for children to school.

Q2: Does the Town Council see an increased role in planning a Neighbourhood plan and commenting on planning applications?

The Chair advised that a written response was tabled and **it was AGREED** would be sent. The resident sought consultation over and above the statutory framework. Cllr John Tully responded that he also championed greater consultation.

The written response was as follows:

Dear Resident X

Thank you for your questions about planning processes and development in Ashington.

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We appreciate your specific concerns about the North Seaton Road Cycleway project and the consultation process. While central government funding provides valuable opportunities for our community, these funds often come with strict criteria and timeframes that can impact project selection and delivery by the County Council.

As a Town Council, we are committed to being an active voice in planning matters affecting Ashington. While we are a consultee like other bodies, we do try to ensure community views are heard and considered in the planning process, as evidenced with the planning application for land off Wansbeck Road - 22/04216/OUT.

Regarding a Neighbourhood Plan, this is something the Council can look at post-May 2025. There are a number of planning changes coming into effect which are expected to bring significant modifications to the planning system, and we want to ensure we adopt the most effective approach for Ashington's future.

We remain focused on securing the best possible outcomes for everyone who lives and works in Ashington, via our role as a Town Council, and as a member of the Ashington Town Board.

FC24/090 MINUTES OF LAST MEETING

It was AGREED to RECEIVE and SIGN as a true record, the minutes of the Full Council meeting held on Tuesday 26th November 2024.

FC24/091 REPORT FROM THE NEIGHBOURHOOD POLICING TEAM

Below is a summary of the verbal report delivered by Inspector Wayne Daniels, accompanied by Sgt Chris Burt.

Crime Statistics and Trends

- ❖ Overall crime data shows a 6% reduction in 2024 compared to 2023
- ❖ Crime variation of 4% considered minimal
- ❖ Antisocial behaviour reduced by 15%, marking the largest reduction
- ❖ Shoplifting remains a priority with neighbourhood teams focusing on repeat offenders
- ❖ 83 positive outcomes achieved out of 200+ shoplifting incidents

Key Issues

- ❖ Motorcycle-related antisocial behaviour has decreased compared to 2023 but remains a significant concern
- ❖ Business and retail crime engagement continues to be challenging, with limited participation in meetings
- ❖ MBCS (Municipal Business Crime Strategy) and Shopwatch initiatives in place, though shops must actively sign up

Offender Management

- ❖ Officers Chris and Cassidy credited with reducing crime numbers among top offenders
- ❖ Project Horizon introduced as a multi-agency approach to handle repeat offenders
- ❖ Case study highlighted: Portland area resident with 50 ASB incidents received intervention following a drugs warrant.

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Ongoing Operations

- ❖ Operation Capio will continue to address ASB and motorcycle disorder
- ❖ Work ongoing with ASDA regarding young people, in collaboration with Community Safety Team
- ❖ Focus on fostering understanding rather than just enforcement
- ❖ Continued targeting of drug supply and cannabis farms

CCTV and Enforcement

- ❖ Inspector reported CCTV as a "brilliant" investment for the town
- ❖ Team adjusting shifts to work until 2am on weekends
- ❖ Actions to follow from CCTV footage in relation to licensing issues

Recent Multi-Agency Operation

Well-attended operation with partner agencies supporting three warrants.

Results included:

- ❖ 50+ speeding violations
- ❖ 70 other violations
- ❖ 5 vehicle seizures
- ❖ Fire Service provided drone support
- ❖ DVLA conducted vehicle examinations
- ❖ Community Safety Team participated for safer transport

Engagement described as good. MP inquiry about train-related issues: nothing currently raised, meeting planned soon.

Youth Outreach Program (YOP)

- ❖ Positive feedback received on recent initiatives
- ❖ Plans for smaller-scale events with partners in targeted

In response to a question from Cllr Sophie Robinson regarding the case study mentioned. Inspector Daniels advised that the individual had ADHD, had stopped medication, and developed drug issues. Police intervention considered successful as it connected the individual with necessary support. Inspector Daniels noted that addiction and mental health issues are common factors. Cllr Robinson advised the support services need to be better linked up as missed appointments put patients back to the start which causes issues.

FC24/092 REPORT FROM THE CIVIC HEAD OF ASHINGTON (CLLR CAROLINE BALL)

The item was deferred as Cllr Caroline Ball was not in attendance.

FC24/093 RESIGNATION OF CLLR ELEANOR ARMSTRONG (Central Ward)

a) Casual Vacancy following resignation

It was AGREED formally receive the resignation of Cllr Eleanor Armstrong, received on 15th January 2025, and to note the advice of the Executive Officer that as of 4th November 2024 (being within 6 months of the May 2025 elections), under Section 89(3) of the Local Government Act 1972, any casual vacancies arising in the council:

- Must still be declared

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- Will not trigger the right for electors to call an election
- Can be filled through co-option at the council's discretion

b) Co-option

It was AGREED that in view of the few Council meetings left in the current council term, that the Council would not enact the co-option procedure for the casual vacancy.

FC24/094 FINANCIAL AND MANAGEMENT RISK ASSESSMENT

It was AGREED to receive the updated document and to note new/alterd risks included by the Executive Officer.

In response to a question from Cllr Graeme Wright about the new financial system, the Executive Officer advised that if the budget is agreed, officers are ready to go with the Scribe system which meets the Council's needs, is web based and most affordable.

FC24/095 NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT

It was AGREED to consider the make-up of the Partnership Committee and agree those members for the remainder of the Council term. Having representation across wards was discussed, as well as having meetings at times that were suitable for members, which could include evening.

The Executive Officer advised that several NCC Officers attended the Partnership meeting, and it would be appropriate to ask if meetings outside normal work hours were agreeable.

It was AGREED that Cllr Pauline Thompson would replace Cllr Glynn Davies. All other members and meetings times would remain until further discussion.

FC24/096 PENSION AND FLEXIBLE RETIREMENT POLICY

It was AGREED to adopt the Pension and Flexible Retirement Policy, as recommended by the Personnel Committee.

FC24/097 PENSION DISCRETIONS POLICY

It was AGREED to adopt the Pensions Discretions Policy, as recommended by the Personnel Committee.

FC24/098 ASHINGTON COMMUNITY WOODS PROJECT

It was AGREED to APPROVE the allocation of previously reserved funds (£3,000) towards the Project Development Phase of the Ashington Community Woods Project, including associated consultation, steering group management, and funding application preparation costs.

It was also AGREED to use Ward Cllr Funding remaining across all wards to cover the remaining £865.

FC24/099 MINING WHEEL AT QEII COUNTRY PARK

It was AGREED to receive and support the proposal from Ward Cllrs in Central, College and Bothal wards to contribute £980 towards the costs of essential maintenance and paintwork to the Mining Wheel at QEII Country Park from their Environmental Enhancement budget heading, sharing the costs across wards, **and it was AGREED** to confirm the contribution with Northumberland County Council, as the landowner.

FC24/100 BUDGET AND ANNUAL PRECEPT 2025/26

a) Budget 2025/26

It was AGREED to receive the proposed budget following agreement at the Council's Finance and General Services Committee, and to consider the Council's expenditure, commitments and plans for 2025/26.

Cllr John Tully expressed that he could not condone the cutting of support for community groups and advised that the budget he proposed maintained the levels without increasing the precept, with only a minor £4,000 reduction in the youth budget. Cllr John Tully proposed that a 0% increase in the precept would help members on the doorstep in upcoming elections.

Cllr Paul Wright noted that he would feel confident on the doorstep advising of the Council's increase in the precept to fund what is in the budget, as he could explain what the figures represented for the community. He explained he would prefer to talk about a budget that plans to the future, police – ASB – safety, investment in our young people, and that the Council is doing something.

Cllr Lynne Grimshaw agreed with the comments made by Cllr Paul Wright, speaking about some great work by the Council's Youth Advisory Committee, and funded activities for young people in Ashington. Cllr Grimshaw spoke about looking ahead and keeping the money for youth where it is, as well as having the option to support the Community Safety Team.

Cllr Graeme Wright challenged the premise the alternative proposed budget proposed maintained levels as employment costs were radically cut, allowing no flexibility for staffing levels post-election. Additionally, the alternative proposed budget reduced the investment in youth by £14,000 not £4,000 as stated by Cllr Tully, which was acknowledged.

In response to a question from Cllr Louis Brown about bus shelter cleansing, the Executive Officer advised that officers were always looking at better ways of doing things, and should this be up for consideration, it would be brought to a future Finance and General Services Committee. However, there was no reflection in the budget being discussed presently.

Cllr Louis Brown also suggested the Council should prioritise an Allotment Liaison meeting. Members questioned the relevance to the budget setting being discussed as matters for the committee were for the following budget year; the matter was not progressed.

Cllr Glynn Davies questioned the value of the Christmas Lights budget heading being increased so significantly and suggested that the lights should be extended elsewhere in the town.

Cllr Pauline Thompson left the meeting. There was a short pause in proceedings.

The alternative and amended budget was proposed by Cllr John Tully and seconded. There were 4 votes in favour and 7 votes against.

The proposed budget was proposed by Cllr Matthew Cuthbert and seconded. There were 7 votes in favour and 4 votes against. The proposed budget sent out with meeting papers was **AGREED**.

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MANAGEMENT & SUPPORT	BUDGET
Employment Costs	£314,852
Office Rental	£6,500
Meeting Hire	£1,000
ATC Vehicle Costs	£10,000
Storage Unit (Green Lane)	£5,600
Tools & Equipment	£5,000
Office, Stationery & Sundries	£5,000
Telecoms & IT	£11,500
Professional Expenses	£1,000
Publicity & Comms	£1,200
Audit Fee	£2,750
Insurance	£8,500
Subscriptions	£5,800
Expenses (Phone, Mileage, Clothing)	£2,500
Civic Head Expenses	£500
Staff Training	£9,000
Member Training	£2,500
RECREATION & LEISURE SERVICES	BUDGET
Events, Community & Engagement	£37,000
Play Areas (Capital)	
Play Areas (General)	£7,500
Christmas Lights Displays	£41,000
Allotments (Capital)	£5,090
Allotments (General)	£6,713
ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES	BUDGET
ATC Neighbourhood Partnership Agreement	£235,740
Environmental Contracts	£22,000
Environmental Enhancements	£0
Climate Change Projects & Initiatives	£25,000
Bus Shelters (Capital)	£0
Litter Bins (Capital)	£8,000
Street Scene Repairs & Maintenance	£8,500
GRANTS & SUBSIDIES	BUDGET
Community Grants & Support	£65,000
Youth Initiatives & Support	£30,000
OTHER SERVICES	BUDGET
Election Expenses	£25,500
CCTV Provision (Town Centre)	£36,144
CCTV Provision (Play/Other)	£10,716
Defibrillators	£500

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Interactive Cameras	£1,000
total	£958,605

b) General Reserves and Contingency

It was AGREED to receive the anticipated provision towards 'General Reserves and Contingency' for 2025/26, noting that this could change depending on balances at the year-end. **It was AGREED that this would be £175,000.**

Cllr Louis Brown stated that advice from Northumberland NALC suggested that the council's contingency should be a third of the precept. The Executive Officer acknowledged this adding that when the Council agreed their reserves and contingency policy in November this was made clear. The Executive Officer advised what was best practise but the level had to be tolerable within the Council's means, and it was agreed that £175,000 was tolerable. The Executive Officer advised that the Council would not be in favour of increasing the precept or cutting budget spending to increase contingency.

c) Earmarked Reserves

It was AGREED to receive the Asset Management Budget, and the provision to earmarked reserves in 2025/26 to accumulate funds towards longer term asset management and replacement. It was noted that this budget reflects expected balances at the year end and that this could change. Once year-end balances are confirmed, decisions on movement will be brought to Council.

	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	2029/30	2030/31	2031/32	2032/33	
Alexandra Road Play Area (£45k)	£3,000	£3,500	£3,500	£4,000	£4,000	£5,000	£6,000	£7,000	£9,000	
Bywell Road Play Area (£39k)										
North Seaton Colliery Play Area (£30k)	£20,000	£10,000								
Paddock Wood Play Area (£75k)	£5,000	£10,000	£10,000	£10,000	£10,000	£10,000	£10,000	£10,000		
People's Park Play Area (£185k)	£15,000	£15,000	£25,000	£25,000	£30,000	£35,000	£40,000			
Seaton Vale Play Area (£25k)	£10,000	£5,000	£5,000	£5,000						
War Memorial	£1,750	£500	£500	£500	£500	£500	£500	£500	£500	
Mining Wheel	£1,250	£500	£500	£500	£500	£500	£500	£500	£500	
Full Council Election		£4,500	£4,500	£5,000	£5,000	£5,000	£5,000	£5,500	£5,500	
Allotments	£5,960									
	£61,960	£49,000	£44,500	£45,000	£45,000	£51,000	£57,000	£18,000	£10,000	
Balance	£61,960	£110,960	£155,460	£200,460	£245,460	£296,460	£353,460	£371,460	£381,460	

d) 2025/26 Precept Demand

It was AGREED to issue a demand to Northumberland County Council, for a precept of **£958,605** which represented an increase of £2.25 for band A properties, and £3.38 for Band D properties.

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A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	L	M
			(6/9)	(7/9)	(8/9)	(9/9)	(11/9)		
	Precept	Property Base	Band A	Band B	Band C	Band D	Band E	A	D
	£		£	£	£	£	£	Increase	Increase
Current precept	£899,950	7994.79	£75.04	£87.55	£100.06	£112.57	£137.58		
Proposed Pece	£958,605	8267.82	£77.30	£90.18	£103.06	£115.94	£141.71	£ 2.25	£ 3.38

FC24/101 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

Members AGREED that the press and public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the following items, permitted under Section 1 (2) LGA 1960, due to the confidential nature of the business being transacted.

FC24/102 FLEXIBLE RETIREMENT REQUEST

It was AGREED to APPROVE the flexible retirement request from Communications and Engagement Officer, Sharon Parmley, from 37 hours to 22.5 hours (over three days), from 1st April 2025, in accordance with the Council's Pension and Flexible Retirement Policy.

FC24/103 STAFFING MATTERS

It was AGREED to temporarily increase the contracted hours of the Administrative Assistant, Gary Holmes', from 30 to 37 hours per week, to commence from 3rd February 2025, in response to operational needs and staffing changes and to prioritise administrative efficiencies.

FC24/104 DATE, TIME AND VENUE FOR THE NEXT MEETING

Tuesday 25th March 2025, 6:00pm at the Town Hall