

AGENDA 7, Enc ii) ASHINGTON TOWN COUNCIL, AGREED Minutes of the Full Council Meeting held at 6:00pm on Tuesday 25th March 2025, at Ashington Town Hall, Council Chamber, 65 Station Road, Ashington, NE63 8RX

CLLRS PRESENT:

Cllr Mark Purvis (Chair), Cllr Marjorie Chambers, Cllr Matthew Cuthbert, Cllr Lynne Grimshaw, Cllr Graeme Wright, Cllr Paul Wright, Cllr Jim Lang, Cllr Pauline Thompson, Cllr Caroline Ball, Cllr Glynn Davies

ALSO, IN ATTENDANCE

Sarah Eden – Executive Officer, Gary Holmes – Administration Assistant

FC24/105 WELCOME BY THE CHAIR

Welcome by Cllr Mark Purvis.

FC24/106 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Sophie Robinson, Cllr John Tully, Cllr Victor Bridges, Cllr Louis Brown and Cllr Bob Walkinshaw.

FC24/107 DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS

There were no disclosures of interest.

FC24/108 DISPENSATIONS

No dispensations were requested.

FC24/109 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There was one member of the public present. The Chair read out the questions sent in advance of the meeting, and offered the answers noted in bold.

Question for Ashington Town Council Meeting 25 Mar 2025.

In the written reply to my question about the involvement of ATC in the planning process the following statement was made:

“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”

Please can the council explain how the lack of any formal responses to two major planning applications, namely the re-development of Wansbeck Square, and the proposed cinema is in accordance with “being an active voice in planning”?

The Council, while not submitting formal written responses to the Wansbeck Square redevelopment and cinema planning applications, was actively engaged through numerous meetings and presentations regarding both developments. This engagement represents an active voice in the regeneration process, though in a different form than formal written submissions.

The Council's participation in these meetings allowed for direct dialogue with developers and NCC Regeneration, providing input and representing community interests throughout the development process. This approach, while different from formal written responses, still constitutes active involvement in planning matters.

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Cllr Marjorie Chambers noted that the resident, who has been part of the regeneration meetings, is aware that Ashington Town Council has been actively participating in discussions regarding the main street, the cinema, and other related developments. She questioned the purpose of the inquiry, given their existing knowledge of the Council's involvement and input.

The resident was permitted to respond and acknowledged that this was how the Council was able to engage and respond, however public perception via the Planning Portal showed no comment from the Council.

FC24/110 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 28th January 2025.

FC24/111 PRESENTATION FROM COMMUNITY SAFETY TEAM – PROJECT SHIELD

Northumberland County Council's Community Safety Team in attendance to update on recent work and data.

Wayne Daniels, Neil Pacey, Grant Urquhart, and Julie Leddy were present for the presentation.

Cllr Lynne Grimshaw commended the community safety team for their excellent work.

Grant discussed an increase in electric bikes and scooters during the Christmas period, explaining the "Back on Track" program targeting 9-10 year olds in schools to educate them about electric scooter and bike usage.

The program, involving the fire service and ambulance service, aims to educate on usage and create a positive image of the Police. While successful in Cramlington, they plan to expand to Central Primary in Ashington and Blyth. Grant emphasized that only orange scooters in Newcastle are legal, requiring a license, and these vehicles can only be used on private land. Previously, three girls were main offenders in Manor Walks, but after the program, they became advocates.

During the winter, there was a slight rise in anti-social behaviour around Asda, McDonald's, and the leisure centre. The LAC meeting discussed the train station, with police and council aware of anti-social behaviour and coordinating with British Transport Police to ensure safety. Neil shared testimonies from Manor Walks shop keepers indicating a decrease in anti-social behaviour. Between 1st September 2024 and 28th February 2025, 334 ASB incidents were recorded on foot beats, representing a 24% decrease from 2023 to 2024.

Cllr Graeme inquired about comparisons with other projects, with Neil suggesting they could obtain the data, currently comparing to the West End of Newcastle. Cllr Glyn raised concerns about people feeling police reports are ineffective, with Wayne acknowledging the frustration of only having data from actual reports. Cllr Caroline asked about ASB breakdown, with Neil confirming it could be categorized, and Julie noting that more detailed breakdowns are available in their meetings.

Cllr Paul asked about the legal powers regarding illegal scooters, with Neil confirming they can seize and destroy them. Wayne mentioned the challenge of addressing the vast number of scooters but emphasized they act when reported. Many housing associations prohibit these

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vehicles due to fire hazards. Cllr Pauline shared a personal incident with a speeding electric bike, with Neil reassuring her of the illegality of such vehicles.

Neil highlighted the police's new authority to address illegal bikes, including tactical intervention. Wayne stressed the importance of careful handling, given many offenders are children, focusing on education over confrontation. Cllr Caroline suggested a Christmas campaign to educate parents about purchasing such vehicles, with Grant revealing their first Snapchat campaign aimed at early intervention.

Wayne mentioned that with the sheer number of scooters, it is almost impossible to get them all, but they will act when reported. He also highlighted that many housing associations will not allow these vehicles in their properties due to fire hazards. Cllr Pauline shared an incident where an electric bike came flying out as she turned a corner at the park, asking about her position if it were to hit her. Neil reassured her that she would have done nothing wrong, as the riders are operating illegal vehicles.

Neil explained that the police now have authority to address these bikes, including the ability to intervene tactically in certain circumstances. Wayne emphasized the importance of handling these situations carefully, acknowledging that many offenders are children, and stressing the need for education over confrontational approaches. Cllr Caroline proposed a Christmas campaign aimed at preventing parents from buying such vehicles for their children, with Grant confirming this would be their first Snapchat campaign targeting early intervention.

Julie mentioned that the fire service would be conducting a significant push due to safety concerns surrounding the batteries and associated fire hazards. Cllr Lynne inquired about available leaflets for schools, with Neil confirming they have numerous resources. She then suggested inviting parents of caught offenders to demonstrate the dangers, which Neil agreed to discuss with the fire service. Lynne also asked if Asset Watch could assist, with Sarah noting they generate at least three videos daily. Wayne acknowledged the challenges of identification due to masks but confirmed they maintain a database for intelligence sharing.

In February, Project Shield conducted 28 patrols, resulting in 253 man hours, 740 engagements, and 22 home visits.

FC24/112 REPORT FROM THE CIVIC HEAD OF ASHINGTON (CLLR CAROLINE BALL)

Civic Head Cllr, Caroline Ball provided the following updates:

- **Small Grant Presentations:** Councillor Ball expressed gratitude for the positive impact of the small grants awarded, noting that recipients have conveyed their appreciation for the support.
- **International Women's Day Event:** She attended the International Women's Day event organized by Full Circle at Hirst Park, highlighting the importance of such community gatherings.
- **Pride Event Participation:** Over the past weekend, Cllr Ball participated in the Pride event at Hirst Park, carrying the torch alongside Walk the Plank, emphasizing the significance of inclusivity and community spirit.
- **National Funding in Ashington:** She expressed satisfaction in seeing national funding being allocated to Ashington, enabling the hosting of significant events in the town.

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- **Appreciation for Civic Head Role:** Cllr Ball thanked the Council for appointing her as Civic Head for the year, expressing her gratitude for the opportunity to engage with various community groups and organizations.

Cllr Lynne Grimshaw thanked Caroline on behalf of Ashington Town Council for her hard work and dedication as Civic Head of Ashington Town Council.

FC24/113 RESIGNATION OF CLLR GEMMA HEMLSEY (College Ward)

The resignation of Cllr Gemma Hemsley was formally **RECEIVED**.

Cllr Caroline Ball wanted it noted that the Council thanks Gemma for her work during her tenure at the Council and the efforts she put forward as a Councillor.

FC24/114 DRAFT POLICY COUNCILLOR-OFFICER PROTOCOL

The model policy 'Councillor-Officer Protocol' endorsed by NALC and SLCC as part of the Civility and Respect Campaign was **RECEIVED and AGREED**.

FC24/115 NALC COUNTY COMMITTEE

The minutes of the meeting held on Saturday 25th January 2025 were **RECEIVED**.

FC24/116 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.

FC24/117 CONFIDENTIAL ITEM – LEGAL MATTER

The Council reviewed the Executive Officer's report on a legal matter involving Ashington Town Council. Following advice and information gathering, **it was AGREED** to proceed as recommended. The Executive Officer will communicate the decision and notify the Council's insurers.

FC24/118 STAFFING MATTERS

The Council reviewed the Personnel Committee's recommendation to engage an independent investigator for a personnel matter, following advice from North East Regional Employers Office (NEREO). The approach was recommended to ensure impartiality and legal protection.

It was AGREED to approve spending of up to £1,700 for the investigation, and that the Personnel Committee should proceed with engaging the investigator.

FC24/119 DATE, TIME AND VENUE FOR THE NEXT MEETING

Tuesday 20th May 2025, 6:00pm at the Town Hall