

ASHINGTON TOWN COUNCIL
DRAFT Minutes of the Finance & General Services Committee,
held at 6:00pm on Tuesday 13th June 2023
at Ashington Town Hall, 65 Station Road

COUNCILLORS PRESENT:

Cllrs. Lynne Grimshaw (Chair), Caroline Ball, Louis Brown, Vicky Brown, Marjorie Chambers, Matthew Cuthbert, Glyn Davies, Mark Purvis, Pauline Thompson, John Tully, and Michelle Brannigan.

ALSO, IN ATTENDANCE

Sarah Eden – Executive Officer and RFO, Sharon Parmley – Events and Engagements Officer, Gary Holmes – Administration Assistant

FGS23/018 WELCOME BY THE CHAIR

Welcome by the Chair Cllr Lynne Grimshaw.

FGS23/019 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs. Jim Lang, Bob Walkinshaw, Sophie Robinson, Victor Bridges and Lawrence Henderson.

FGS23/020 DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS

There are no disclosures of interest.

FGS23/021 DISPENSATIONS

No dispensations were requested.

FGS23/022 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There were no items for consideration from members of the public and there were no members of the public present at the meeting.

FGS23/023 MINUTES OF LAST MEETING

It was **AGREED to RECEIVE** and sign as a true record the minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday 23rd May 2023.

FGS23/024 CLERK AND OFFICER UPDATES

It was **AGREED to RECEIVE** an update on items actioned since the previous meeting.

Basic Parish Allowance and Expenses

Sarah has written to Northumberland NALC to request that all Northumberland T&P Councils are asked about the above. It was suggested that Clerks should be contacted as it would require a formal response from each Council. The NALC Chief Officer has confirmed that the matter will be added to the NALC County Committee being held on 17th June. The Clerk is unsure of total T&P representation on this Committee and has sought clarification. It was suggested that the question could also be posed via the ENews, however this is usually information giving and doesn't always stimulate a response. It has been discussed with the Chief Officer of NALC that communication with fellow T&P Councils, via NALC, does require improvement, so the Council may need to be patient on this, or consider writing to each themselves. Cllr John Tully represents the Council on the County Committee, so will be able to provide an update following the County Committee on 17th June.

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Hirst Park Liaison Meeting

No formal update has been given yet; however, we are aware that development posts have been reconfigured. The Park Development Officer is now working out of Hirst Welfare as part of the Northumberland Communities Together team. The Hirst Park Revival Co-ordinator remains in post at Hirst Park and discussions are ongoing with partners and Heritage Lottery regarding the role and experience and relationships being maintained and developed further.

Enhanced Neighbourhood Services Partnership Meeting

In addition to the agenda item on negotiating the future partnership agreement, the following update is given.

Litter Picking Group

A coffee morning was held with volunteers, Cllrs, and officers from ATC and NCC. Various initiatives were discussed; those concerning action by ATC will be brought forward for consideration by the Council when time allows. NCC agreed a dedicated email address for litter pickers making reports and there was a greater appreciation of the challenges on both sides. Amanda from Asda took away a suggestion for vape disposal in store, as they already collect batteries. The continued offer to support with positive publicity, recruiting new volunteers and attending events was also reinforced.

Local Environmental Quality Inspections

Sarah and Stephen are now carrying out LEQ inspections, in addition to those carried out by NCC. This relates to street cleansing and litter bins. At the time of the meeting, we are into week 3 and a report of the findings will go to the Partnership Board meeting and to NCC Officers. We both carry out a before and after of 2 zones each week. We do not cover the entire zone route, but an element of it. Therefore, at the end of three weeks every zone will have had an inspection. In the next three weeks we will look at a different element of the zones. An NCC operative has been moved onto gateways following feedback on these areas.

Play Areas

As members are aware, Sarah has pursued the legal arrangements for the Play Areas declared the responsibility of ATC, shortly after taking up post. It is now clear that although ATC maintain ten play areas, in conjunction with NCC, there is no legal arrangement in place. In respect of those play areas that are owned by NCC (People's Park, Alexandra Rd, NS Colliery, Paddock Wood) the Council will receive a Draft Licence, that will be brought to a meeting to agree to sign. The Council may decide that it wishes to pursue a long-term lease, or land transfer instead of a licence; these matters will have to be considered.

Those play areas not owned by NCC (Aintree Close, Epsom Drive, Bywell Close, Seaton Vale, Shire Farm, Warren Court) need to be considered separately in direct negotiation with the landowner/developer. The play areas were not part of any agreed 106 arrangement and the title deeds are clear in respect of land ownership. The Clerk is liaising with each party separately, and the Council should expect to engage with members of the public to ascertain the perceived value of each play space.

Small Grants

Civic Head Cllr Victor Bridges has attended Sea Cadets and Newbiggin Brass band to present small grant cheques; publicity is included on the website and Facebook page. At the time of the

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meeting, the 2nd small grant opportunity will have gone out, for decisions at the meeting on 11th July.

ATC Neighbourhood Services

An annual schedule has been agreed for the work ATC is responsible for in the town – this is scheduled work. Additionally, we have a record of unscheduled work because of deliberate damage, graffiti, and wear and tear. Gary has worked well to create a spreadsheet that does what we want it to. The information is collated to record and better understand the time and cost of this reactionary work.

Bus Shelters

Four replacement bus shelter on Station Road West and Milburn Road were installed w/c 5th June 2023. Some finishing off work to take place w/c 12th June including repairs to the windows of the town centre shelters and the shelter at Wansbeck General Hospital. Several shelters have recently been targeted with graffiti as well as a number of windows being broken; this is now being recorded as above.

Public Seats

Work is ongoing to repaint seats while the weather allows.

Floral Planting (Entrance Features and Station Road)

Twenty-three flower towers and tubs around the town have been planted with summer bedding as well as four hanging baskets on Wansbeck Road, by Wansbeck Garden Centre. Twenty-nine troughs on Station Bridge have been planted with summer planting as well as 10 hanging baskets on Station Road (one way section), by Plantscape. NSO's worked from 8.00pm on 26th May to 2.30am on 27th May to assist contractors on Station Road, then to water the features due to the long bank holiday weekend. Members were made aware of significant thefts of sustainable planting (planted in September 2022), particularly to the town's four entrance features. Work to replenish the features was completed w/c 5th June and Northumbria Police have been requested to give attention to these areas in coming weeks. Work to weed and replenish some of the stolen planting on Station Road will commence w/c 12th June as well a tidy and weed of the beds.

Weather and Vandalism

The recent dry weather spell has provided challenges in terms of the watering of the recent floral and sustainable planting, as well as recently planted trees, by the Town Council (that are now out of the maintenance schedule) that have also required attention. Additionally, we have also suffered significant vandalism and ASB to play areas, litterbins, and public seating in recent weeks, this is being recorded as above. The local policing team have been informed and NSO's continue to address these issues in coming days. Given the weather and the recent ASB and vandalism some non-urgent tasks such as cleaning of bus shelters will be behind schedule in coming weeks.

Installation of New Play Areas at Aintree Close and Epsom Drive

Work to install the new play areas at Aintree Close and Epsom Drive will take place at the end of June /early July, with works hopefully completed before the school holiday period.

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Improvement Works to College Shops

Work has been agreed with contractors for the improvement works to College Shops, following the last Council meeting (painting of low-level walls, railings, and replenishment of planting), with work expected to commence in coming weeks. As part of the work town council NSO's will also repaint the public seating in the area.

Allotments

We continue to have issues at Hirst East End Allotment Site with vandalism and thefts on the site. Northumbria Police have been informed and are taking appropriate action.

Work to install a new water system at Green Lane Allotment Site is almost complete. Stephen will meet with Northumbrian Water staff, w/c 12th June to discuss the possible repositioning of the water meter onto the site.

Work to develop new management agreements between the allotment associations in the town and the town council is ongoing. The work will lead to new tenancy agreements and rules & regulations on the sites in due course. Officers will meet again with Mike Brannigan w/c 12th June.

Love Ashington

Following positive feedback on the Council's barrier planters, Gary had the idea of sharing photographs from members of the public, of their favourite places in Ashington. We all loved the idea and the positive about Ashington message and have included a question to seek further engagement. Members on Facebook may have seen some of the images shared.

Events and Engagement

At the time of the meeting, we will have hosted the Miners Memorial at the Northumberland Miners Picnic, and also Great Big Green Week on the Tuesday Market.

Miners Picnic

We had a great response for the banner exhibition for the Miners Picnic and if you were not able to make the picnic, photos will be posted soon. The banners are going on to be displayed at our Fair Day, and then at Hirst Park Pavilion from 3rd July, and at Hirst Welfare from 12th August to coincide with the Family Fun Day.

Ashington Camera Club Photography Exhibition – Starts Saturday 1st July to Sunday 8th July

Our £250 funding will pay the rental of the unit on Wansbeck Square. The unit is booked, tables and chairs are being supplied by the YMCA and we are loaning the Club our water boilers. We are waiting for permission from Mrs Critchlow to show Mik Critchlow's work as part of the exhibition.

Ashington Community Fair Day – Sunday 2nd July

Planning is on schedule for a fun packed day. Richardson's Fairground Rides and Food Vans, a bigger stage than last time with a full line up of dancing, bands, and a Marching Display from the Sea Cadets. Market stalls with traders from Station Road and Community Groups. Face painting facilitated by Hirst Park, craft activities facilitated by Ashington Family Hub and a WI Tea Tent. As well as Northumberland Fire and Rescue Service and Northumbria Police attending with vehicles.

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Family Fun Day – Saturday 12th August

As well as arranging the banner display and the first aid provision for the day. ATC agreed to fund some activities, which should include an inflatable assault course 40 ft assault course suitable for all ages, Archery Recurve bow and fire through bow suitable for age 8 plus, Soft Archery suitable for all ages, Disc Golf suitable for all ages and Space Hopper football. Also included in the event is the Community Group Showcase, Koast Radio and the Café will be open on the day.

Further Engagement Work

Northumberland Wildlife Trust – on 19th August Northumberland Wildlife Trust will be on Station Road, with some nature themed children’s activities. They will also be attending a future Climate Change & Environment Committee Meeting to give a talk on wildlife and the environment.

Leading Link Charity – Leading Link are coordinating the summer holiday provision in Northumberland, as well as working from the Hirst Welfare, currently providing a Community Café on Fridays, and organising free football sessions for older children.

HAF Programme – I have met with Julie Leddy coordinator for Ashington HAF Programme, details on the programme will be available in the next couple of weeks.

Northumberland Recovery College – I have met with a representative for Northumberland Recovery College and have been added to their network, I will receive updates on course and activities available for mental health and wellbeing in Ashington.

Ashington Community Litter Pickers – the coffee morning went well on Tuesday 23rd May, with several of the group coming along with Officers from NCC attending also.

Hirst Park – I have met with Sarah Brendan-Kept Community Coordinator for the Park and Tracey McNickie, the new Full Circle Food Project CEO, lots going on with both places and I will be posting on our website and Facebook page all the activities and events coming up.

Carbon Literacy Training

Cllrs will have completed the training and their pledges, and we will be informed of the outcome in due course. Once members are signed off as Carbon Literate we will arrange for a presentation of certificates and some publicity for the Council and the course. ATC is the first Council in this area to undergo the training. In pursuit of our priority to ‘Fight the effects of Climate Change’ it would be good to share the experience with others in the hope that the training will be taken up.

New Telephone System

The new system is installed and working very well. Do not be surprised if you call the number for someone, and another answers; we can now pick up any call. The main ATC number (01670) 624521, which used to be Sarah’s number, now has the option to divert to NCC by pressing 1, or 2 for ATC. This is great for Sarah, who has a new direct dial (01670) 338775, as the number of calls about bus passes, registrar, green bins, housing, and benefits has decreased significantly. Please rest assured everyone in the office remains a customer centred sign-poster and if we do receive calls for other agencies, we redirect them with full knowledge that they are the best person to help.

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FGS23/025 BUDGET AND EXPENDITURE 2023/24**i. Updated Budget Report**

It was AGREED to RECEIVE an updated budget report and address any questions to the Responsible Financial Officer (RFO). There were no questions put to the RFO.

ii. Accounts Paid and to be Paid (Including Bank Reconciliation)

It was AGREED to RECEIVE a schedule of accounts paid and to be paid; to endorse those accounts paid and agree those to be paid, since 16th May 2023

FGS23/026 ANNUAL GRANT AID 2023/24

It was AGREED to RECEIVE a summary of Annual Grant Aid applications received between 20th April – 19th May 2023. The Chair invited comments from those Cllrs present for the presentations. Members gave a summary of the presentations received, and noted the great work being done in Ashington.

It was AGREED to fund the following organisations with the sums listed. Noting that those organisations receiving £5,000+ would provide regular updates and would receive instalments of their whole award.

Ashington Rugby Cricket Club – £8,125
 Ashington Hirst Running Club - £2,968
 Ashington Rugby Club - £3,000
 Being Woman - £2,800
 Cambois Rowing Club - £5,000
 Citizens Advice Northumberland - £14,242
 Cycling 4 Everyone - £2,806
 Escape Family Support - £8,000
 Mortal Fools - £5,000
 Northumberland Community Bank - £2,000
 Real Deal Plus - £5,000
 Reiverdale Scouts Group - £950
 Talking Marra's - £2,5000
 Wansbeck Valley Foodbank - £14,500
 YMCA - £10,000

Applications were received from Blyth Resource and Initiative Centre and Northumberland CVA, which were unsuccessful. **It was AGREED** to invite Northumberland CVA to discuss their work in Ashington

It was AGREED that Northumberland Community Bank would be funded partly from Grant Aid and partly from Events, Community and Engagement, with a request that the work of the bank, especially with reference to reducing the use of loans sharks, is showcased at local events and activities.

FGS23/027 CHRISTMAS LIGHTS 2023

It was AGREED to RECEIVE recommendations in respect of 2023 displays, taking into consideration defective council owned stock, and improvements within the budget available.

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It was AGREED to order eight new rented display motifs to replace the eight defective lights, at a cost of £3,430 in year 2 and £3,080 in year 3. **It was AGREED** that it was wise to stick to a two-year rental agreement which would run alongside the existing features plans.

FGS23/028 EVENTS, COMMUNITY AND ENGAGEMENT

a) Ashington Family Hub Brunch Club

It was AGREED to make £1,000 available from the Events, Community & Engagement Budget to allow Ashington Family Hub to deliver weekly brunch sessions in the school summer holidays.

b) Ashington Family Hub Bus Trips

It was AGREED to make £900 available from the Events, Community & Engagement Budget to allow Ashington Family Hub to run two family trips during the school summer holidays.

c) Ashington Family Hub Graffiti Workshop

It was AGREED to make £300 available from the Events, Community & Engagement Budget to allow Ashington Family Hub to run a graffiti workshop for young people aged 8 -13.

d) Ashington Family Hub Animal Antics

It was AGREED to make £200 available from the Events, Community & Engagement Budget to allow Ashington Family Hub to run an Animal Antics workshop for young people aged 8 -13.

e) Feedback and Evaluation

It was AGREED to delegate to the Communication and Engagement Officer to seek feedback and evaluation on activities agreed to be funded by the Council.

FGS23/029 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

It was AGREED to PASS the following resolution.

That the press and public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the following items, permitted under Part I of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended by the Local Authorities (Access to Information) (Exempt Information) (England) Order 2006) Act as the matter is confidential (8) Expenditure proposed to be incurred for the supply of goods or services, and (9) terms proposed or to be proposed by the authority in the course of negotiations for a contract for the supply of services.

FGS23/030 ENHANCE SERVICES PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT (NEGOTIATIONS)

It was AGREED to RECEIVE the report of the negotiations meeting held on 19th May 2023. Those proposals put forward to be trialled were rejected.

FGS23/031 DATE, TIME, AND VENUE FOR THE NEXT MEETING

Tuesday 11th July 2023, 6:00pm, Council Chamber.

Meeting ends 20:19pm