

ASHINGTON TOWN COUNCIL
DRAFT Minutes of the Finance & General Services Committee,
held at 6:00pm on Tuesday 13th February 2024
at Ashington Town Hall, 65 Station Road

COUNCILLORS PRESENT:

Cllrs. Lynne Grimshaw (Chair), Louis Brown, Graeme Wright, Marjorie Chambers, John Tully, Mark Purvis, Caroline Ball, Sophie Robinson, Pauline Thompson, Matthew Cuthbert, and Jim Lang.

ALSO, IN ATTENDANCE

Sarah Eden – Executive Officer and Responsible Financial Officer and Sharon Parmley – Communications and Engagement Officer.

FGS24/128 WELCOME BY THE CHAIR

Welcome by the Chair Cllr Lynne Grimshaw.

FGS24/129 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs. Eleanor Armstrong, Vicki Brown, Victor Bridges, and Glyn Davies.

FGS24/130 DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS

There were no disclosures of interest.

FGS24/131 DISPENSATIONS

No dispensations were requested.

FGS24/132 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There were no members of the public present.

FGS24/133 MINUTES OF LAST MEETING

It was **AGREED** to **RECEIVE** and **SIGN** as a true record, the minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday 12th December 2023.

FGS24/134 CLERK AND OFFICER UPDATES

The following update was **RECEIVED** which had been sent out in advance of the meeting.

Potland Burn Surface Mine, Ashington

Update 03/01/24 Planning Enforcement has confirmed that the matter has been registered as a planning enforcement case – ref: **24/00002/BRCND** with an assigned case officer.

An enforcement investigation will commence, and the enforcement officer will determine whether planning permission is required and whether there has been a breach of planning control. Due to the high volume of cases under investigation there is a backlog of site visits waiting to be carried out therefore cases are being dealt with in priority order with the cases causing irreversible harm being dealt with first. For this reason, NCC are unable to offer updates during the investigation and will be in touch with the outcome when the investigation is complete.

If we wish to contact NCC during the course of the investigation with additional information, we can but they will not be in touch until the investigation is complete.

Update 18/01/2024 Countryside and Green Spaces Manager updates:

I write in response your letter, on behalf of Longhirst Parish Council and Ashington Town Council, raising concerns over the delayed reinstatement of public access across the Potland Burn site.

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My team have recently recruited a new Area Countryside Officer (Adam Musk) for this area who has now surveyed the site and made contact with the agent in order to progress reinstatement of existing public rights of way and the establishment of the new routes set out in the site's reinstatement plan.

In the near future we expect to be able to resolve some issues along the routes of existing rights of way so that available access routes are in evidence and straightforward to follow. I understand that reinstatement works have been taking place on site but that there remains a significant body of work outstanding to fully establish new routes on the ground and to carry out the legal work necessary to create and record these new public rights of way. I'm sorry that more has not been achieved before now, and it is likely to be some time before we're able to have all planned routes in place; however, following contact with the agent I expect us to be able to move through the work required in order to have access across the site in place in line with the reinstatement plan.

I've asked my colleague Adam to provide you with an update on progress by the end of March, by which time I hope there will have been improvements to the existing public rights of way on the site.

Allotments

Our new Allotments Officer, Alan Bunker started on Monday 29th January. Alan has been working closely with the current allotment association volunteers, assessing the recent damages from both storm Isha and Jocelyn, working with contractors and rectifying issues. Alan is looking forward to speaking and working with allotment holders in the coming days and weeks. Plans and updates will be shared going forward.

In the move towards more direct management of allotment sites, we have been collecting the required data to inform tenancy agreements. Gary has successfully uploaded the information into excel. Following more detailed discussion this has now been moved to a much more effective access database. This is a work in progress, but the system will be invaluable moving forward.

We are now managing North Seaton Colliery Allotment site and have issued tenancy agreements and rents. The direct management of Hirst East End will commence on 1st April, and Woodhorn on 1st July.

Gary's work on the database was highly commended.

Allotments (Capital Works)

The new Water system at Woodhorn Road Allotment site will be complete in the coming days. Following the budget announcement this week, we will now look to proceed with the new water systems at Seaton Hirst Allotment site at a cost of £16,889.40. The work will begin early in the new financial year.

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ATC Neighbourhood Services

Play Areas

A clean and tidy of the town's play areas is underway including edging works and removal of graffiti etc. Repairs to equipment have been carried out at People's Park, which this year celebrates its 5th anniversary. Preparation works have taken place at Paddock Wood Play Area for the replenishment of the bark safety surface this month.

Station Road Planting

Works to tidy the planting on Station Road were carried out w/c 5th February. Additional planting is planned to take place in the spring.

Paddock Wood

ATC Neighbourhood Services have supported the Ashington Community Litter Group to carry out a litter pick of Paddock Wood. Northumberland County Council have also supported the works through cutting back shrubbery as well as assisting with the removal of fly tipping and litter. A further tidy of Paddock Wood will take place, in March, as part of the Town Council's Great British Spring Clean effort.

Tree Planting Seaton Ward

Tree planting, as agreed with Seaton Ward Cllrs Environmental Improvements funding will take place in coming weeks, with 8 trees to be planted in the Hillcrest and South Side area.

Tree Planting Haydon Ward

ATC staff will support Northumberland County Council's tree planting in the Haydon ward, in the coming weeks.

Events and Engagement

Funding plaques

Funding plaques have been made and given to annual grant recipients for display on their premises or at locations they operate. We have asked that each group send a photo once the plaques are installed.



Christmas Trail

The Christmas Trail engaged twenty local shops and businesses in the Town Centre (thirteen took part in the previous year), along Station Road, Woodhorn Road, Lintonville Terrace and Laburnum Terrace.

Shops included: The Sewing Machine Guy, Scope, L A Clothing, CEX, Card Factory, Timewarp Sounds Record, Salvation Army, Sense, The Little Tea Room, Sweet Memories, Hog Roast Deli, Tony Joshua Couture, Bettini's, British Heart Foundation, Mind, Body & Spirit, Herons, M & H Bakes, Select, Glentons, Iceland and Asda.

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Feedback sought concluded that many shops reported increased foot traffic and enjoyed seeing children come in to collect trail stickers and being part of festivities. There were more shops and more children involved in 2024, than in 2023.

Points for the future are to include checking store opening hours to avoid disappointment and launching sooner to give families more time. Consideration could be given to reducing the number of selection boxes purchased, in line with expected numbers involved.

<https://www.ashingtontowncouncil.gov.uk/news/news.php?s=2023-12-18-a-heartfelt-thanks-to-our-christmas-trail-participants>

Christmas Window Competition

Fourteen local business took part. These were on Station Road, Lintonville Terrace, Woodhorn Road, and Laburnum Terrace. There were some very festive windows, and the spirit of friendly competition was evident, with many congratulating each other on the results. The winner of the Christmas window competition was Mind, Body and Spirit, Cllr Bridges went along to hand over the hamper.

<https://www.ashingtontowncouncil.gov.uk/news/news.php?s=2023-12-18-mind-body-spirit-takes-the-prize-in-ashingtons-christmas-window-display-competition>

Northumberland CVA AGM – 27th January 2024

Sharon attended Northumberland CVA's AGM. Northumberland CVA champions and supports the local voluntary sector. Empowering community groups and connecting people to volunteering opportunities to develop new skills and retain independence. By assisting charities and organisations with funding, partnerships, and capacity building, they promote community activity that enables positive change across Northumberland.

Central Northumberland Network Meeting – 28th January 2024

Sharon attended a network meeting at Ashington's Family Hub. As well as finding out about what is going on at the Family Hub, Sharon met members of staff from Ashington Library and Northumberland Fire and Rescue Service, spoke with NHS staff promoting a host of self-help guidance and information on issues such as Health Anxiety, Stress, Bereavement and Depression.

Cambois Rowing Club – Name the Boat

On 16th January we launched a name the boat call-out via Facebook. Three names were selected from a very long list, and there was some good engagement from members of the public. The vote was closed on 2nd February, and the winning name has been sent to Alan at the rowing club. By the time of the meeting this should have been announced, and we can arrange a phot call.

Ashington Youth Offer Meeting – 25th January 2024

Sharon attended a meeting at Ashington Hirst Welfare, organised by Northumberland Communities Together, Carla Thompson.

The purpose of the meeting was to create a more coordinated approach to youth work in Ashington.

Others in attendance were Ed Browne, NCC Youth Support Worker, Eric Fletcher, YMCA Northumberland, Wayne Daniels, Northumbria Police, Marie Oliver, Teen Bar, Ashington Life

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Centre, Elinor Bryant, Mortal Fools, Jake Preece and Bailey Milligan, Get on Side and Paul Killpatrick, Off the Grid CIC.

Some of the youth work discussed included a new graffiti project at the Family Hub, HAF at Dukes Primary School, Ability to Play, a youth group at the YMCA, the new play zone coming to Hirst Park and Shannon the new Youth Project Coordinator at Full Circle Food.

Household Information Event – 26th January 2024

Sharon attended the Household Information Event held at Ashington Hirst Welfare. Some of the information on offer was from Citizens Advice, Thriving Together, Army Recruitment, Northumberland CVA, Ashington Community Litter Pickers, Every Turn, Newcastle United, Northumberland Skills, Network Rail, Wansbeck Community Links and Peoples Plus.

<https://www.ashingtontowncouncil.gov.uk/news/news.php?s=2024-01-29-people-and-services-come-together-at-ashington-information-day>

Living Wage Employer

You may have noticed that our Living Wage Employer Accreditation is complete. This has been shared across our media and we have the logo displayed on our website.



<https://www.ashingtontowncouncil.gov.uk/news/news.php?s=2024-01-22-ashington-town-council-accredited-as-a-living-wage-employer>

Budget and Precept

The required information was sent to Northumberland County Council following the Full Council meeting. Information was put into the public domain the following day.

<https://www.ashingtontowncouncil.gov.uk/news/news.php?s=2024-01-31-ashington-town-council-sets-responsible-precept-demand-for-20242025-ensuring-financial-stability-and-minimal-resident-impact>

FGS24/135 BUDGET AND EXPENDITURE 2023/24

a) Updated Budget Report

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

b) 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 1st December 2023.

FGS24/136 SMALL GRANT FUNDING – FEBRUARY 2024

It was **AGREED to RECEIVE** a funding summary of applications received for the fourth and final quarter of the Small Grant Fund sent out in advance of the meeting.

a) Ashington Community Litter Pickers

It was **AGREED to RECEIVE** an application from Ashington Community Litter Pickers. It was **FURTHER AGREED** to consider the application and to award £500.

Councillors expressed their thanks and commented that the group was doing a brilliant job.

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b) Butokokan Judo Club

It was **AGREED to RECEIVE** an application from Butokokan Judo Club. It was **FURTHER AGREED** to consider the application and to award £500.

c) North Seaton Colliery Community Centre

It was **AGREED to RECEIVE** an application from North Seaton Colliery Community Centre. It was **FURTHER AGREED** to consider the application and to award £500.

FGS24/137 ANNUAL GRANT AID FUNDING UPDATES

a) YMCA Northumberland

Rob thanked the council for inviting him to speak, and report on the work of YMCA Northumberland for the youth services they have been delivering for young people, and gave the report noted below:

Personnel Changes & Plans

We recently brought on Eric as our new Youth and Communities Project Manager. He is still in the early days of assessing our programming and looking to stabilise and eventually move things forward. We hope to do more focused projects and training opportunities, in addition to offering a space for young people to visit. Eric is currently looking for funding to support these new projects.

We need to hire new youth workers to replace those who left. However, there are not many candidates coming through the pipeline locally. It's crucial we look after our current staff by providing opportunities for their development, training, safeguarding, and paying a living wage. We hope to bring on permanent youth workers soon. Our youngest team member is also our most qualified, so we will advertise a Senior Youth Worker role with higher pay to attract strong candidates.

Current Programming

We currently offer 4 nights per week of programming at the YMCA centre. This serves as a safe place for youth to spend time with friends. With winter here, there are fewer kids out on the streets, so all programming is focused at the centre currently.

Key Challenges

Unfortunately, we have been struggling with youth engagement and troubling behaviour. However, it has also taken a toll on our staff. We have lost 4 youth workers who left to find new roles, citing the level of abuse from youths. This is undoubtedly a difficult job given the high levels of anti-social behaviour.

Funding Needs

We have never before had to fund additional youth workers. To deliver programming 5 nights per week, we need to secure funding to support the staffing. Our short-term goal is protecting current services, then looking at adding further programming where possible. We want to generate income from the building.

Partnerships

We aim to continue working with partners like Mortal Fools theatre company and the Ashington Children's Community group to deliver impactful youth programming. Building partnerships with

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other organisations will be key to stabilising and eventually expanding our offerings to young people. In a couple years when we move to new premises, we hope our programming and staff will be in place.

Current Status

We have 45 youth visiting per night, with max capacity of 30-35. Creative Mondays is offered Monday nights. Tuesdays focus on volunteer training and peer research programs. Unfortunately, detached services have not been available since mid-December due to staff shortages and lack of young people out over the winter months. Funding for the detached offer ends at the end of the financial year. All programming will move indoors. We welcome council members to visit the centre in the evenings to better understand our work.

Conclusion

In summary, we are facing funding and staffing shortages, but remain committed to supporting the youth of our community. We will work hard to maintain services, while also seeking partnerships and funding to eventually allow for expanding programming.

Questions regarding funding, capacity and detached delivery were answered. Members raised concerns that detached was not being delivered as per the agreed funding. Rob apologised and explained that this has only been the case since mid -December.

Members thanked Rob for attending to give the report and for the work carried out by YMCA.

It was AGREED to receive update on work this year to date, and to release 2nd and 3rd instalment of annual funding

b) Escape Family Support

It was AGREED to RECEIVE a report on work this year, send out in advance of the meeting. It was **AGREED** to thank Escape Family Support for the excellent work carried out and to release the 3rd instalment of annual funding.

FGS24/138 EVENTS APRIL – JULY 2024

a) Great British Spring Clean

It was AGREED to RECEIVE and endorse published activities for the Great British Spring Clean Campaign during the week of 25th March – 30th March 2024.

b) Bunny Hop Easter Egg Trail

It was AGEED to allocate a budget of £400 for the Bunny Hop Easter Egg Trail and it was **FURTHER AGREED** to delegate responsibility for organisation and delivery to the Communication and Engagement Officer, with spending delegated to the Executive Officer/RFO in accordance with Financial Regulations.

Cllr Caroline Ball requested that the Easter Egg Trail be extended to include shops and businesses on Milburn Road, **it was AGREED.**

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c) St George's Day Parade

It was AGEED to allocate a budget of £350 for the St Georges Day Parade Window Display competition. It was **FURTHER AGREED** to delegate responsibility for organisation and delivery to the Communication and Engagement Officer, with spending delegated to the Executive Officer/RFO in accordance with Financial Regulations.

d) Climate Change School Poster Competition

It was AGEED to allocate a budget of £2,500 for the Climate Change School Poster Competition and it was **FURTHER AGREED** to delegate responsibility for organisation and delivery to the Communication and Engagement Officer, with spending delegated to the Executive Officer/RFO in accordance with Financial Regulations.

e) Great Big Green Week

It was AGEED to allocate a budget of £1,500 for Great Big Green Week and it was **FURTHER AGREED** to delegate responsibility for organisation and delivery to the Communication and Engagement Officer, with spending delegated to the Executive Officer/RFO in accordance with Financial Regulations.

f) Ashington Fair Day

It was AGEED to allocate a budget of £14,000 for Ashington Community Fair Day and it was **FURTHER AGREED** to delegate responsibility for organisation and delivery to the Communication and Engagement Officer, with spending delegated to the Executive Officer/RFO in accordance with Financial Regulations.

FGS24/139 DETACHED YOUTH WORK

It was AGREED to RECEIVE a report of the liaison meeting held on 14th December 2023 sent out in advance of the meeting.

It was **AGREED** to add Cllr Ball to the liaison meeting minutes held on 14th December 2023.

Cllr Tully **PROPOSED** that it was imperative to continue supporting youth work.

It was AGREED that a task and finish working group should be set up to look at detached delivery in the next financial year.

It was **FURTHER AGREED** in respect of the YMCA's move to move detached youth delivery inside, that the Council should be supportive and fund these sessions, but to request that as much detached as possible is delivered to the end of March, in accordance with the agreement.

FGS24/140 DRAFT REPORT OF ENHANCED NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES PARTNERSHIP BOARD MEETING

It was AGREED to RECEIVE and ENDORSE a report of the meeting held on 16th January 2024 sent out in advance of the meeting. Members were also shown before and after photographs of the additional works carried out.

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FGS24/141 ELECTRIC VEHICLE CHARGEPOINTS AT ASHINGTON THROUGH LOCAL ELECTRIC INFRASTRUCTURE (LEVI) FUNDING

It was AGREED to RECEIVE information from the Climate Change Team at Northumberland County Council regarding proposed vehicle chargepoints in Ashington.

It was FURTHER AGREED to respond supporting the locations suggestions and to promote across Ashington Town Council's social media channels.

FGS24/142 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

It was AGREED in accordance with section 1 (2) LGA 1960, to agree to exclude the press and public due to the confidential nature of the business being transacted.

FGS24/143 PLAY AREA UPDATE

It was AGREED to RECEIVE update on the legal position in respect of Ashington play areas, being managed by Ashington Town Council, with no historical legal agreement in place.

It was AGREED to move forward on the basis of the report received and to withdraw from any transfer of Warren Court and Shire Farm Close play areas as despite good faith negotiations, it has not been possible to agree on the funding required to bring the play areas up to accessible and safety standards; these play areas are considered a liability rather than an asset and have little in the way of appeal.

It was FURTHER AGREED the Council should give notice to developers as the legal owners, and to Northumberland County Council who carry out the weekly play inspections. Following the notice period the Council will act to remove any association of these play areas.

Members noted imminent successful transfers of Epsom Drive, Aintree Close and Seaton Vale play areas. In respect of Bywell Close lay area, it was noted that negotiations were progressing, and any decision should be deferred.

It was AGREED that the Council should pursue a 25year lease for those play areas owned by NCC which include North Seaton Colliery, Alexandra Road, and Paddock Wood, as opposed to the Licence Agreement offered by NCC.

It was AGREED to delegate to the Executive Officer to continue progressing the legal agreements for play areas.

FGS24/144 DATE, TIME, AND VENUE FOR THE NEXT MEETING

Tuesday 12th March 2024, 6:00pm, Council Chamber.

Meeting ended 7.35pm