

ASHINGTON TOWN COUNCIL
DRAFT Minutes of the Finance & General Services Committee,
held at 6:00pm on Tuesday 18th April 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 Bob Walkinshaw.

ALSO, IN ATTENDANCE

Sarah Eden – Town Clerk & RFO, Stephen Humphrey, Assets and Facilities Manager, Sharon Parmley – Administration (minute taking).

FGS23/349 WELCOME BY THE CHAIR

Welcome by the Chair Cllr Lynne Grimshaw.

FGS23/350 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs. Michelle Brannigan, Victor Bridges, Lawrence Henderson, Jim Lang, Liam Lavery and Sophie Robinson.

FGS23/351 DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS

Cllr Chambers declared an interest in item 15. PLAY AREAS AT AINTREE CLOSE AND EPSOM DRIVE as a resident on the estate.

Cllr Ball declared an interest in item 14. IMPROVEMENTS TO LABURNUM TERRACE FLORAL PLANTING.

FGS23/352 DISPENSATIONS

Cllr Chambers asked for dispensation to answer any questions relating to item 15. PLAY AREAS AT AINTREE CLOSE AND EPSOM DRIVE.

FGS23/353 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.

FGS23/354 CORRESPONDENCE

It was **AGREED** to receive a letter from All Churches Together sent out in advance of the meeting.

It was noted that a joint letter from Ashington Town Council and Woodhorn Museum would be sent to Ashington Churches Together to seek a minister for the service which form part of the Northumberland Miners Picnic on 10th June 2023.

FGS23/355 MINUES OF THE COMBINED FULL COUNCIL AND FINANCE AND GENERAL SERVICES MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 21ST MARCH 2023.

It was **AGREED** to **RECEIVE** and sign as a true record the minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday 21st March 2023.

FGS23/356 CLERK AND OFFICER UPDATES

It was **AGREED** to **RECEIVE** a tabled written and verbal update on items actioned since the previous meeting.

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Neighbourhood Services Officers

All column mounted bins have been removed from the town and repairs have been carried out on several bins. New bases have been fitted following recent vandalism. Play areas maintained by the Council have been tidied, in addition to bus shelter cleansing.

In the coming weeks Ryan will be maintaining floral displays on Station Road and at entrance features. Unfortunately, we have suffered several thefts and vandalism to town centre and particularly entrance feature planting. We expect the cost savings from the removal of unsustainable planting to provide the funds to purchase additional plants that Sean Murray has suggested.

Wansbeck Garden Centre and Plantscape will carry out the summer planting in flower towers, barrier planters, and large planters in May via Wansbeck Garden Centre and Plantscape. Maintenance is reduced via reservoirs but our NSO's will be watering as required.

A focus for Mark in coming weeks will be maintenance and painting of the public seating, with Station Road repainting commencing this week as the weather has improved.

Allotments

Following the first meeting of the Allotments Liaison Group, last month, work has commenced on developing new management agreements between allotment associations and the Town Council, supported by Mike Brannigan. The agreements will be agreed in coming weeks and will determine areas of responsibility between associations and the Town Council in the day-to-day management of the sites. The work will support new Tenancy Agreements and Rules & Regulations on the eight sites.

Work to install the new water system at the Green Lane Allotment Site will commence w/c 24th April 2023.

Bus Shelters

Eight bus shelters have been ordered, including those funded by Cllrs Lynne Grimshaw and Caroline Ball. The first four shelters will be installed in early May and the remaining are planned to be installed in early June.

Following some fly posting some painting is required on several shelters.

Tree Planting Schemes

A further thirteen trees were planted on the A197 (A1068 junction) and Woodhorn Road at the end of March.

War Memorial

Works to repoint and tidy the Ashington War Memorial and surrounding area will take place in the coming weeks, undertaken by Brambledown. Mark will also paint the bench seating within the Memorial Garden.

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Engagement

Wansbeck Community Engagement Day – Tuesday 21st March 2023 at Hirst Welfare Centre

This was facilitated by Wansbeck Community Links, employed by Cygnus support, they provide a Link Worker (Social Prescribing) service for the patients of WPCN (Bedlingtonshire, Gables, Guidepost & Seaton Park GP surgeries).

They also work closely within our local community to bring people together, build up resources, and help fill gaps in provision. This aims to strengthen our community assets and bring pride back into the local area.

The event comprised of Health based organisations including.

- Health Trainer Service
- Man Health
- Get Onside Northumberland
- Cygnus Support
- Bright Red Charity
- North East Drive Mobility
- Regional Transport Hub
- Northumberland Fire and Rescue Service
- Alzheimer's Society
- Escape Family Support
- Parkinson's support
- Northern Cancer Alliance
- Vision Northumberland
- Blyth Resource and Initiative Centre (BRIC)
- Northumberland Library, Reading for Wellbeing
- Carers Northumberland
- Northumberland CVA
- Northern Learning Trust
- Northumberland Recovery College
- Northumberland Family Hubs
- Northumberland Front Line

Also, there on the day were Ashington Veterans & Elders Institute, Talking Marras, Seaton Park Patients knitting group, and Koast Radio.

Those organisations who were not on the Town Council website have been added. This will create a comprehensive list for the Community to access.

Sharon also had a tour of the garden area from a member of Talking Marras who are extremely grateful for the £500 small grant fund from ATC. They have big plans for the area to the rear of Hirst Welfare Centre.

Defibrillators

At the time of writing only two defibrillator cabinets remain outstanding, which may have been installed by the time of the meeting.

All locations need photographs and associated publicity with custodians and County Cllrs.

Recruitment

We have received 24 applications for the post of Administration Assistant, at the time of writing.

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The vacancy closes at the end of the day on Monday, so there may be a few more this afternoon/evening.

End of Year/Audit

All end of year work has been completed, including updating the Council's Assets Register, VAT return, work to inform the Annual Governance and Accountability and Return, and answering questions from the Internal Auditor.

Members are encouraged to come into the office if they have any accounting or governance questions, or if they want to look through the financial records. The Annual Return Accounting Statements will be presented for members at a meeting of the full council on Tuesday 20th June 2023. This includes a comprehensive report of variances from the previous year, which illustrates the significant increase in work carried out in 2022/23, compared to 2021/22, with the same precept, but more effective use of budget not allocated/reserves.

The Clerk agreed to get an update on Youth Work in the town.

FGS23/357 BUDGET AND EXPENDITURE 2022/23

a) Updated Budget Report

It was **AGREED to RECEIVE** the final budget and expenditure for 2022/23 and note any surplus funds.

b) Surplus Funds at Year End

It was **AGREED to RECEIVE** the RFO's note regarding the movement of surplus funds to specific budget headings.

EOY Balance 31/03/2023	£424,584
VAT due back (+)	£90,736
Expenditure CF (2023/24)	-£45,828
Income CF (2023/24)	£24,036
<i>EOY Calc Opening Reserves</i>	£493,528
<i>Earmarked Reserves</i>	-£97,000
<i>General Reserves and Contingency</i>	-£175,000
A - Use of Balances	£221,528
B - Precept	£836,861
Overall Expenditure Funds A+B	£1,058,389
Budget 2023/24	£1,053,085
C - Surplus (before April commits)	£5,304
Employment Costs	£7,812
Roadways at Woodhorn	£3,000
D - Resulting Contingency	£158,884

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It was noted that estimates were accurate when the budget was set in January, however, there have been some changes that have resulted in fluctuations.

Tree planting that was expected to be carried out and maintained in-house was approved on a higher contract with maintenance provided as part of the contract, due to the original contractor not being able to deliver.

Estimated costs to install defibs came in at less. Windfarm funding was able to be used to offset the costs of bus shelters.

The RFO described that as expected, there are ups and downs that are within the margins of the budget. Notwithstanding the decisions taken at the March FGS in relation to Employment Costs and roadways at Woodhorn Allotments, the Council would have had a small surplus of £5,304. Those financial decisions in March removed £10,813 from contingency.

It was noted that the resulting contingency, which was set at £175k at the start of the year, is now £158,884 taking in the £5,304 surplus, but removing the figures of £7,812 to Employment Costs, and £3,000 to Allotment Capital Costs.

It was FURTHER AGREED to endorse the movement.

c) Accounts Paid

It was AGREED to **RECEIVE** a schedule of accounts paid since the March Finance and General Services Meeting.

It was FURTHER AGREED to endorse those accounts paid according to the Council's Financial Regulations.

FGS23/357 TELEPHONE SYSTEM

It was AGREED to **RECEIVE** a report from the Communications and Engagement Officer regarding the Council's office phone system.

The report outlined the costs, benefits, and improved use for Ashington Town Council, in comparison to the current service.

It was noted that new telephone system and broadband combined would cost more than the current combined cost. Annually this would be £1,175.40 as opposed to £558. However, the current service was not meeting the Council's needs. Three competitive quotes had been sought, and the preferred supplier was also the least expensive.

It was AGREED to enter a 24-month contract with Grace Office Supplies – Global Connect at a cost of £74.95/month telephone system, £23/month Broadband, with an installation cost of £250.

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FGS23/358 COMMUNITY SUPPORT

a) Sub-headings and Budget Available

It was **AGREED** to an eighty/twenty split for the sub-heading within the Community Support budget heading. Annual Grant Awards Scheme would have a budget of £80,000, and Small Grants a budget of £20,000.

b) Application Process and Criteria

It was **AGREED** to stipulate that applicants applying for a small grant award may only apply once in the financial year.

It was **AGREED** to continue not to fund schools, religious establishments, and businesses.

The Clerk advised that in respect of Warm Hub Funding in the previous year, the Council did agree to relax this condition.

c) Annual Grants 2023/24

It was **AGREED** to the following timeline for annual grant funding.

Annual Grant Funding 2023/24

- Invitations to be received from 20th April 2023
- Closing date for applications Friday 19th May 2023
- Presentations if applicable week commencing 22nd May 2023
- Decisions for applications to be made at the Finance and General Services Meeting on Tuesday 13th June 2023.

It was **AGREED** to launch both the Annual Grant Aid Fund and the Small Grant Aid Fund together.

d) Small Grant Funding 2023/24

It was **AGREED** to the following timeline for small grant funding.

Small Grant Funding 2023/24

- Invitations to be received from 19th April 2023
- Closing date for application 12th May 2023
- Decisions for application to be made at the Finance and General Services Committee meeting on Tuesday 23rd May 2023.

It was **FURTHER AGREED** to promote the funds across all social media channels and contact community groups and organisations that may be interested in applying for a grant.

FGS23/359 LITTER BINS

It was **AGREED** to place an order for twenty-four litter bins from Broxap, at a cost of £7,728, to be received in two deliveries and installed as replacements where needed.

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FGS23/360 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.

FGS23/361 IMPROVEMENTS TO LABURNUM TERRACE FLORAL PLANTING

It was AGREED to RECEIVE a report from the Assets and Facilities Manager to support Central Ward Cllrs Eleanor Armstrong, Caroline Ball and Lawrence Henderson use of Environmental Enhancements budget of £5,000 per ward, sent out in advance of the meeting.

It was AGREED to approve works to remove four floral planters, with associated seating, at Laburnum Terrace due to disrepair and high-level watering requirements.

It was further AGREED to re-site three floral towers, from Wansbeck Square (2) and Laburnum Terrace (1) to this area.

The Assets and Facilities Manager described that the rationale in re-siting the two flower towers from Wansbeck Square, are that these towers have become a target of anti-social behaviour in recent years and there is adequate nearby floral planting on Station Bridge with flower troughs.

As part of the works, Town Council assets of a public seat and litterbin will also be re-sited to improve the general appearance of this area.

It was AGREED to receive and approve a quotation from WL Straughan Ltd to remove the planters and reinstate block paving at a cost of £2,986.00.

The Assets and Facilities Manager noted that other works would be carried out by the Council NSO's.

FGS23/362 PLAY AREAS AT AINTREE CLOSE AND EPSOM DRIVE

It was AGREED to RECEIVE a report from the Assets and Facilities Manager on the appropriate development of both play areas, in consultation with ward Cllrs Michelle Brannigan, Marjorie Chambers, and John Tully, along with quotations for each.

It was AGREED that the final designs should consider the results of the survey, alongside the benefits of having a variety of equipment, accessible equipment, and the closely located play areas complementing each other.

It was AGREED to select Option B for Aintree Close as the firm favourite among those who responded.

It was AGREED that a combination of Option A and B should be selected for Epsom Drive, accounting for the fact that preferences in the survey were very close, with a difference of only 5, and that priority should be given to incorporating an inclusive roundabout.

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A hybrid of Options A and B will include a two-tower unit with slide, net climb, stairs, tunnel bridge, and sliding pole, as well as an inclusive roundabout.

The Assets and Facilities Manager noted that as part of the works fencing, gates, and seating would be re-painted.

It was AGREED that those play areas installed should be from the Greenline Range which is made using recycled waste sources within the materials to produce play products with a low carbon footprint.

The RFO described the Council's asset management plans to replace one play area each year, according to lifespan/condition, but noted that there were costs efficiencies from doing two in the same year. The RFO noted that additional funding is available in the Asset Reserves budget that can be used earlier than expected, which would result in a saving of over £8,000.

It was AGREED to proceed with the work to install two new play areas.

It was AGREED to place an order with Kompan for both play areas, as selected, at a cost of £24,035.08 for Aintree Close, and £33,278.17 for Epsom Drive.

It was FURTHER AGREED to agree to seek section 106 play funding for the schemes selected, and to use the Council's Earmarked Reserves for the remaining budget required.

FGS23/363 DATE, TIME, AND VENUE FOR THE NEXT MEETING

Tuesday 23rd May 2023, 6:00pm, Council Chamber, Town Hall, Station Road, Ashington, NE63 8RX.

Meeting ends 7.05pm