AGENDA 6, Enc i) ASHINGTON TOWN COUNCIL, DRAFT Minutes of the Full Council held at 6:00pm on Tuesday 24th November 2025,
at Ashington Town Hall, Council Chamber, 65 Station Road, Ashington, NE63 8RX

CLLRS PRESENT:
Cllrs Caroline Ball, Kerry Davison, David Coyle, Marjorie Chambers, Louis Brown, Glyn Davies, Scott Amery, Paul Wright, Lynne Grimshaw, John Tully, Jim Lang and Steven Roberts.

ALSO, IN ATTENDANCE
Sarah Eden – Executive Officer, Alan Bunker – Allotments Officer and Gary Holmes – Administration and Communications Officer

FC2526/076 WELCOME BY THE CHAIR
Welcomed by Cllr John Tully

FC2526/077 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE
Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs Karl Green, Bob Walkinshaw, Sonia Simm and Mark Purvis.

FC2526/078 DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS
There were no disclosures of interest.

FC2526/079 DISPENSATIONS
There were no requests for dispensation.

FC2526/080 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION
There were two members of the public present.

Public Questions
Questions for full Council 25 Nov 2025

Community Facilities

1. What formal, and informal, representations has Ashington Town Council made to NCC/Advance to express the widely felt feeling that the postponement or cancellation of the building of the "Community Facility" on the site of the demolished Wansbeck Square is betrayal of the people of Ashington who were promised this as part of the gateway from the railway station to the town.
2. Have the Town Council considered and thoroughly investigate the possibility of working with NCC/Advance and other potential funders, including the Ashington Leisure Partnership, to acquire the Old Police Station to provide, at least an interim facility. Town Council conduct and membership

3. Does the Council consider that the very inclusion of today's Agenda item 11 on Civility and Respect and training demonstrates that until now these have been lacking on Ashington Town Council ? Historically there has been little effort to "attract and retain talented individuals willing to serve our community" instead vested party political interests have prevailed. The lack of spending on councillor training has not improved the skills of elected members. The proposals in the motion are positive move.

DRAFT

4. The suggestions in Agenda item 12 on recording Council meetings are welcome, but won't, I think, greatly increase public participation. Will the council consider holding an informal "meet your councillors" session prior to formal meetings to allow members of the public to speak to their representatives about any topics that concern them and the Town Council may be involved in?
   As all the Cllrs will be gathered for the scheduled meeting it would not be too onerous task. If the council employees are there too it may be possible to answer some of the questions on the spot, or at least know what issues were concerning people, so they can gather information for a fuller answer later. This could be trialled in the New Year.

In response to Q1:
Cllr Chambers mentioned she was at the meeting and let Northumberland County Council know her feelings.

Cllr Amery mentioned he had spoken to Northumberland County Council and asked them to remove the hoardings due to false hope, and they responded that they would remove them.

Cllr Davis mentioned he went to the cricket club and did not stay long at the meeting as he was told there were no investors to take over the building. He stated that this meant Ashington now had two holes and it was a disgrace as they were promised this and that and it never came to fruition.

Cllr Ball advised that there was representation from both Town and County Councillors at the Ashington Community Forum meetings where plans were discussed and updated.

Cllr Tully mentioned there was a silver lining to a dark cloud and that it was disappointing. They may now get an operator for the building to occupy it.

In response to Q2:
Cllr Ball mentioned it was currently privately owned. There was a partnership from some community organisations looking to take over the building. Personally, there was a lot to consider before it became a matter of discussion for the Council, as it would need to look into pricing and other factors.

The resident responded that he believed it was a cop out and the Council had powers to take over.

Cllr Wright mentioned that there was an overestimating of the powers of the Council and that many factors were to be considered prior to taking on ownership of a private building, and an apology was in order.

The resident refused and noted Morpeth Town Council owned private buildings and stated the Council lacked will power and political power and lack of leadership to pull it off.

Cllr Grimshaw stated the resident was being very rude proposed that the Chair should motion any further questions received a written response. This was seconded by Cllr Caroline Ball.

The Chair allowed questions to continue.

Framing questions 3 and 4, the resident asked about civility and how the Council had lacked this, specifically with no spending on training and skills for members. As a further questions, they asked if the Council would be willing to host an informal meeting where the general public could ask them questions.

Cllr Davis mentioned he was offended by the resident's style of questioning, which insinuated the Council was not attracting good enough members.

Cllr Brown mentioned that the resident themselves had been a Cllrs and knew full well what Councillors could and could not do. Cllr Brown suggested that questions were deliberately degrading.

Cllr Ball reminded the resident that the public themselves voted in the Councillors and there were very intelligent and skilled members on the Council. She was very disappointed in the tone of the question, especially for someone who was currently running for election for the next election. She stated she was personally offended by this question and asked again that the Chair support the motion that written responses be given.

Cllr Chambers seconded that a written reply should be given, noting that she was also angry with the style of questioning being used.

Cllr Davison mentioned the lack of spending on Councillor training, that there was a vast amount of money allocated for this and it was up to individual Councillors to take up opportunities for training.

Public questions were closed.

Cllr Simm arrived at 18:06.

FC2526/081 DRAFT MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS FULL COUNCIL MEETING
The minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday 30th September were **RECEIVED** and **AGREED**.

FC2526/082 ELECTION OF CIVIC HEAD OF ASHINGTON
Cllr Ball moved to defer this to the Annual Meeting of the Council in May 2026, thus giving whoever gets the role their full term. In the interim the Chair and representative ward Cllrs could be contacted if invites were received. This was seconded by Cllr Grimshaw and **AGREED.**

FC2526/083 ELECTION OF DEPUTY CIVIC HEAD OF ASHINGTON
It was **AGREED** to **DEFER** this motion as the previous item.

FC2526/084 VACANCIES ON COUNCIL COMMITTEES AND MEETINGS
Cllr Ball proposed that this be deferred to the January Full Council meeting in view of imminent elections. It was **AGREED**

FC2526/085 COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE REVIEW
It was AGREED to formally receive and respond to The Town & Parish Council consultation.

Cllr Brown commented that in his view eighteen Councillors and six wards was the right number.

Cllr Grimshaw mentioned that Ashington was expanding rapidly and reducing the number of Councillors at this point may be detrimental, as the amount they had now was perfect in terms of responsibility for eighteen Councillors.

It was AGREED to respond with that the number of councillors and ward boundaries were considered appropriate.

FC2526/086 CIVILITY & RESPECT (Placed on the agenda by Cllr Kerry Davison)
Cllr Davison mentioned the background for putting this forward. Across Northumberland. Councils had struggled with Councillor conduct. Northumberland County Council's Deputy proposed a motion about Councillor behaviour, especially on social media, and the leader of Northumberland County Council said there would be zero tolerance of this. It was more evident this was needed after the elections in May 2025 for what happened to Councillors after the elections. She had put a proposal to the National Association of Local Councils for comprehensive training to all Councillors for Civility and Respect. She proposed Ashington Town Council officially adopt the National Association of Local Councils Civility and Respect pledge and policy.

Cllr Ball mentioned she had no problem with adopting the pledge or the training, but none of it was enforceable. Without any kind of consequence, it was meaningless. A formal system needed to be put into place.

Cllr Grimshaw agreed with Cllr Ball and stated that as it stood it needed to be seriously looked at, at a County and Government level. Local government should be able to handle any issues internally, such as removal or removal from committees.

Cllr Brown said the last twelve months had been in consultation and this may be going in front of parliament early next year. **Cllr Brown proposed** that the Council defer any decision and wait until this had been discussed and voted upon by Parliament, and this could be handled at next year's Annual Meeting at the start of the Council term. **There was no seconder.**

Cllr Amery agreed it was not enforceable now, but he was loathed to wait for anything that happened at a government level, as they should be seen to be proactive. He explained that Councillors did this role voluntarily and did it for the love of Ashington and should be able to do their job without any kind of bullying or intimidation.

Cllr Ball asked The Executive Officer if there was anything in their policies to make this enforceable. The Executive Officer mentioned this Council could not handle complaints internally. The only route available to the Council was to remove Cllrs from Committees, or if behaviour in the meeting, to seek redress and removal via standing orders.

Cllr Grimshaw mentioned that over the last few years, the National Association of Local Councils training had not been up to date and up to scratch. She would welcome training from elsewhere.

It was **AGREED to:**

- Adopt the NALC Civility & Respect Pledge

- Commit to undertaking Civility & Respect training for all councillors
- Review and strengthen our existing policies and procedures relating to councillor conduct

FC2526/087 RECORDING MEETINGS (Placed on the agenda by Cllr Kerry Davison)
Cllr Davison mentioned the rationale for this was that the only minutes for these meetings were the ones released online and she would like to give the public a better understanding and vision of the meeting. Nine councils around the County had adopted this and it increased accountability and transparency, enhanced accessibility for people who may not be able to attend, and community engagement and provided a more accurate record of meetings.

Cllr Ball mentioned she had no issues with the meetings being recorded but questioned whether the cost would be worth it when considering the viewership of Northumberland County Council's meetings. She also mentioned the Council may not have the skillset, as Northumberland County Council had a full department for audio and visual, and this could take up too much Officer time. Cllr Ball also mentioned the memes that are created from this by way of ridiculing Cllrs.

The Executive Officer sought the Chair's approval to advise of the costs. A quote for the equipment was received, and as a one-off cost this was £2,153.

Cllr Wright mentioned that from a transparency point of view and accessibility, it was one hundred percent something he would back. However, he had concerns about the civility issues just discussed and that memes and social media could be taken out of context, such as taking snippets of the recorded meeting and spreading it around social media. He was also concerned that while being recorded, a disagreement may not be open, and Councillors may feel they could not express their opinions openly in a trusted environment and debate.

Cllr Amery mentioned he appreciated Cllr Wright's comments, but the public could come into a meeting and record anyway. He suggested the Council should give it a go, even on a trial basis, and if it did not work, it did not work.

Cllr Grimshaw agreed with Cllr Wright based on previous incidents. Town Councillors were volunteers and were not paid and she would hate for Councillors to leave because they felt uneasy while recorded when they gave up their own time to be a Councillor, whereas County Councillors were paid and they were recorded for a reason.

Cllr Chambers mentioned she would not like it and there had been times she had felt vulnerable in the council chambers, and she would not like her face being recorded and put online.

It was AGREED to proceed to a vote.

Five voted in favour.

Seven voted against.

The motion fell and **WAS NOT AGREED**.

FC2526/088 DATE, TIME AND VENUE FOR THE NEXT MEETING
Full Council Meeting – Tuesday 27th January 2025, 6:00pm, Council Chamber.

The meeting ended at 18:54.