

AGENDA 6, Enc i) ASHINGTON TOWN COUNCIL, DRAFT Minutes of the Finance and General Services Committee held at 6:00pm on Tuesday 8th July 2025, at Ashington Town Hall, Council Chamber, 65 Station Road, Ashington, NE63 8RX

CLLRS PRESENT:

Cllr Lynne Grimshaw (**Chair**), Cllr Mark Purvis, Caroline Ball, Karl Green, Kerry Davison, David Coyle, Pauline Thompson, Marjorie Chambers, Louis Brown, Glyn Davies, John Allen, Scott Amery, Paul Wright

ALSO, IN ATTENDANCE

Sarah Eden – Executive Officer, Alan Bunker – Allotments Officer and Gary Holmes – Administration Assistant

County Cllr Sonia Simm.

FGS2526/022 WELCOME BY THE CHAIR

Welcome by Cllr Lynne Grimshaw.

FGS2526/023 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs John Tully, Jim Lang, Vic Bridges and Bob Walkinshaw.

FGS2526/024 DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS

Cllr Wright declared an interest in Citizens Advice Northumberland in view of Grant Aid.

The Executive Officer advised that the agenda related to the policy and guidelines in regards Grant Applications for both Small and Annual Grants rather than individual awards to organisations.

FGS2526/025 DISPENSATIONS

There were no requests for dispensation.

FGS2526/026 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There were no members of the public present.

FGS2526/027 DRAFT MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the last Finance and General Services Meeting held on Tuesday 10th June were **RECEIVED** and **AGREED**.

FGS2526/028 CLERK AND OFFICER UPDATES

This report provides an update on key activities and developments since the last Finance and General Services meeting held in June 2025.

Neighbourhood Services

Station Road

Station Road maintenance was deliberately delayed ensuring flower beds were weed-free for the Animating Ashington Event on Saturday 5th July. This timing was prioritised given the anticipated high attendance, consistent with previous successful community events. Routine maintenance has now been completed following the event

AGENDA 6, Enc i) ASHINGTON TOWN COUNCIL, DRAFT Minutes of the Finance and General Services Committee held at 6:00pm on Tuesday 8th July 2025, at Ashington Town Hall, Council Chamber, 65 Station Road, Ashington, NE63 8RX

Gateways

Gateway maintenance has been completed, including work on the Mining Wheel and Jack Charlton Statue areas. However, the gateway bed at the entrance to the Northern Relief Road (Woodhorn Roundabout) requires priority attention due to ongoing soil quality issues. Mark and Ryan have developed improvement plans for this gateway, which is currently the only one not meeting our standards.

The remaining gateways present well as entrance points to the town, with the sustainable planting schemes and additional hard landscaping elements implemented by Ryan proving effective.

Green Lane Industrial Unit

Cllrs and Officers met with a representative from Green Ash Estates regarding the industrial unit. The estate agents have confirmed they are willing to negotiate both a new lease agreement and rental terms. A detailed report with further information and recommendations will be presented to Council at the proposed meeting on 9th September 2025.

Cllr Scott raised concerns about the sale of the community asset and the associated rent increase, requesting that a letter be sent to the CEO of Advance Northumberland regarding these matters. Sarah responded that while most of the small businesses have successfully settled through negotiations, she would be prepared to send a letter if the council agreed to this course of action. It was **AGREED** to proceed with sending the letter to Advance Northumberland CEO.

Cllr Ball emphasised the importance of including in any correspondence that the council's opinion holds significant weight when it comes to decisions about selling community assets. He stressed that the community's voice should be heard and considered in such matters.

Cllr Brown expressed frustration that none of the Town Councillors had been informed about these developments prior to them occurring. He recounted his experience during a Teams meeting where he had requested that negotiations be brought forward but received no response to his inquiry. Sarah acknowledged the communication issues and explained that the council requires a suitable unit for its operations. She noted that there are currently no appropriate units available within Ashington, making the Green Lane unit the most suitable option for the council's needs.

Cllr Coyle inquired about the possibility of storing equipment within one of the council's allotments as an alternative solution. Sarah explained that the current unit is actively used for indoor work activities, which would not be suitable for allotment storage. However, she indicated that this alternative could be explored as a future option if circumstances change.

Cllr Coyle also raised concerns about the deteriorating appearance of the area around the industrial units, specifically noting that the grass has not been maintained for a considerable period and is now looking unsightly. He requested that the council send a letter to the relevant parties to address this maintenance issue and ensure the area is properly cared for.

AGENDA 6, Enc i) ASHINGTON TOWN COUNCIL, DRAFT Minutes of the Finance and General Services Committee held at 6:00pm on Tuesday 8th July 2025, at Ashington Town Hall, Council Chamber, 65 Station Road, Ashington, NE63 8RX

Events and Engagement

Northumberland Miners Picnic Memorial Service

The Northumberland Miners' Picnic on Saturday 14th June began with a moving Memorial Service at Woodhorn Museum, bringing together distinguished guests and community members to honour those who worked and died in the Northumberland Coalfields.

The service was conducted at 10:30am by Ministers from Ashington Churches Together, the service welcomed notable attendees including:

- Councillor Pauline Thompson, Civic Head of Ashington
- High Sheriff Mr George Farr
- Deputy Lord Lieutenant Mr Keith Green
- Ian Lavery MP for Blyth and Ashington
- Members of the local community

The service featured poignant musical performances from, Ashington Colliery Band (Brass Marras) and Ashington & District Male Voice Choir.

The choirs performed "Requiem" and the deeply moving "Gresford" - a song written by Durham miner Robert Saint to commemorate the 266 men who lost their lives in the 1934 Gresford Colliery explosion in North Wales.

A wreath-laying ceremony was conducted by Ashington Town Council in memory of those who worked in the Northumberland Coalfield, followed by a respectful two-minute silence observed by all attendees.

The service concluded with a powerful address from Ian Lavery MP, who spoke passionately about the enduring legacy of mining communities. He emphasised that the miners didn't just extract coal but "forged communities, created solidarity, and left us with values that remain as precious as any mineral: courage, dignity, and an unbreakable bond between neighbours." The Memorial Service marked the beginning of a full day of celebration, featuring brass band performances, art activities inspired by the Pitmen Painters, community parades, and diverse entertainment that continued the spirit of remembrance and celebration throughout the day.

The Northumberland Miners' Picnic is organised by Woodhorn Museum, with the Memorial Service organised by Ashington Town Council. In recognition of the event's importance to the community, Ashington Town Council has made a generous donation of £5,000 this year towards the cost of the event, which was agreed earlier in the year.

Sarah has requested an evaluation of the event from North East museums, including income and expenditure, ahead of our contribution. Sharon received the following feedback directly to the Council. A meeting will be arranged with Jo and Liz from North East Museums to discuss next year's event and feedback on this year.

"Thank you, Sharon, it was my pleasure. Fantastic event and thoroughly enjoyed by all". Scott Dickinson

AGENDA 6, Enc i) ASHINGTON TOWN COUNCIL, DRAFT Minutes of the Finance and General Services Committee held at 6:00pm on Tuesday 8th July 2025, at Ashington Town Hall, Council Chamber, 65 Station Road, Ashington, NE63 8RX

"Thank you for your email. I'm proud to have taken part in such a wonderful event. I truly appreciate the opportunity" Kylie Parker Hirst Miners Welfare

"Once again, many thanks to everyone for their efforts in continuing to make this event a success. Please pass on our thanks to Sarah and all the councillors for their support it is greatly appreciated. Personally, I still prefer individuals being called out to lay a wreath I think that might be the first time we have done this differently, just something for discussion". John Dunn
Thank you for your letter. Actually, it is I who should be thanking you for what was a reflective memorial service with a beautiful musical accompaniment and a really fun day with wonderful entertainment. Thank you very much for asking me. High Sherriff of Northumberland.

Wansbeck and Central Development Group Meeting Summary the meeting held on 14th May 2025

**Northumberland Recovery College Update
Current Provision Status**

- 201 new student enrolments since last meeting
- 35-40 sessions running weekly across the region
- Several programs fully booked with waiting lists (Happiness and Mediation Club, Jigsaw of Me, All About: ADHD, Autism Peer Support Groups)
- Café Connect Ashington experiencing low attendance and requires marketing support
- New online program "She Shares Online" launching 11th June

NRC is exploring restructuring to address waiting lists and student dependency issues through:

- Core continuous sessions for viable student numbers
- Time-limited block sessions with defined start/end dates
- Tiered sessions matching different skill levels
- Enhanced peer support groups for program graduates

Ashington Town Council Events Update given

- **Big Green Week:** 10th June, 10:00am-2:00pm at Ashington Market (featuring raffles for air fryers and slow cookers)
- **Community Fair:** 6th July, 1:00-4:00pm at People Park
- **Free children's swim lessons** took place during May half term, with two/week planned for summer

Partner Organisation Activities Update given

- **Thriving Together:** Bi-monthly newsletter, networking event 15th July in Stocksfield (previous event attracted 90 attendees), Solid Foundations project refunded, new Volunteer Passport programme launched
- **Repurposeful:** Community activity pack creation project for schools, care homes, and community organisations supporting people with disabilities, autism, and dementia
- **Northumberland County of Sanctuary:** Supporting asylum seekers with significant mental health challenges including PTSD

AGENDA 6, Enc i) ASHINGTON TOWN COUNCIL, DRAFT Minutes of the Finance and General Services Committee held at 6:00pm on Tuesday 8th July 2025, at Ashington Town Hall, Council Chamber, 65 Station Road, Ashington, NE63 8RX

Key Issues and Actions from the 14th May meeting

Student Feedback Concerns

- **Promotion accessibility:** Online-focused promotion excludes non-digital users; need for local newspaper, magazine, and council newsletter promotion
- **Session naming clarity:** Some gender-specific groups not clearly identified in titles, causing confusion

Action Items

- NRC to review promotional materials and expand offline promotion methods
- NRC to contact Repurposeful about Café Connect involvement in activity pack creation
- Clearer demographic specifications needed on session information

The group prefers face-to-face quarterly meetings and wants increased student participation in future development discussions. Current meeting location at The Bothy is suitable but may need larger venue if attendance grows.

Next Meeting: Wednesday 13th August 2025, 2:00-4:00pm at The Bothy, Ashington

Ashington Community Fair Sunday 6th July 2025

Ashington Community Fair was a fantastic success, drawing excellent attendance from across the community. Despite a brief rain shower during the day, spirits remained high, and the event continued in full swing.

The fair featured an exciting programme of live performances and youth services offering engaging activities while helping to promote Ashington Town Council's important youth survey.

These youth engagement initiatives are being funded through the Youth Advisory Committee Budget as part of the Council's commitment to improving engagement with young people throughout the town.

The event showcased a vibrant mix of market stalls featuring both local traders and community groups, alongside the ever-popular Richardson's amusements, creating something for everyone to enjoy. A full report on the day's activities will follow, accompanied by professional video coverage from LukLuk Productions and comprehensive photographic documentation captured by Ashington Camera Club.

We are looking closely at this event for next year, hoping to seek more involvement from the Youth Advisory Committee and feedback from those involved over the last few years.

Thank you to Sharon for her amazing work pulling the fair together, and co-ordinating the Miners Memorial Service, it's a lot all at the same time. Sharon has also co-ordinated the Riverside Open Day that all Cllrs have been invited to, so we hope so can go along and see our superb Riverside groups in action.

AGENDA 6, Enc i) ASHINGTON TOWN COUNCIL, DRAFT Minutes of the Finance and General Services Committee held at 6:00pm on Tuesday 8th July 2025, at Ashington Town Hall, Council Chamber, 65 Station Road, Ashington, NE63 8RX

Allotments

Recycling initiatives continue to expand across allotment sites. Glass recycling is now operational at NS Colliery, with a similar facility planned for Seaton Hirst Allotment site. Window and door frame recycling is planned for Seaton Hirst, with Woodhorn Road anticipated to follow. Cllr Kerry Davison, as a member of the Allotment Liaison Committee, is conducting proactive site visits in liaison with Alan to support her understanding.

Site representatives and volunteers from Woodhorn Road allotment site have worked collaboratively with Alan to bring vacant plots back into productive use. We are very grateful for their hard work on Monday and Tuesday, as well as their good humour. This remains a priority area, and the team's ongoing efforts are really appreciated.

All Woodhorn Road invoices (248 in total) were issued on Monday 30th June. Due to the scale of this administrative task, other enquiries were deferred on that day to ensure completion. Plot holders are encouraged to make payments directly via bank transfer where possible to reduce administrative processing time, but we appreciate many will be coming to the office to pay by cash or card.

Alan has access to the works van over the next two weeks during Ryan's and Mark's annual leave periods and has scheduled clearance and weed spraying works during this time.

Website and Social Media PR

Website

The following items appeared on our website news page since the previous officers report. Members are reminded that we maintain active Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn pages to promote Council activities and engage with our community. You can read them in full by visiting the website.

<https://www.ashingtontowncouncil.gov.uk/news/>

Civic Head Visits Northumberland CVA to View County of Sanctuary Art Exhibition	04 July 2025, 12:15
Riverside Open Day to Showcase Water Sports and Maritime Activities for Local Community	04 July 2025, 09:53
Ashington Community Woods Consultation Follow-Up	02 July 2025, 13:07
Northumberland Line Progress Update: New Stations Set to Open as Community Engagement Continues	02 July 2025, 12:53
Finance and General Services Committee Meeting - 08/07/2025	30 June 2025, 15:28

AGENDA 6, Enc i) ASHINGTON TOWN COUNCIL, DRAFT Minutes of the Finance and General Services Committee held at 6:00pm on Tuesday 8th July 2025, at Ashington Town Hall, Council Chamber, 65 Station Road, Ashington, NE63 8RX

From Ashington to Antarctica: Dr Nina Purvis Makes History on "White Mars"	24 June 2025, 13:51
Community Consultation Begins for Ashington Community Woods Enhancement Project	24 June 2025, 13:23
Ashington Town Council Completes Play Area Legal Framework and Unveils New Signage	24 June 2025, 12:53
Local Councillors Discover Hidden Gem at Historic Ashington Veterans and Elders Centre	20 June 2025, 10:18
Climate Change and Environment Committee Meeting - 24/06/2025	18 June 2025, 15:26
Ashington Town Council Announces Spectacular Community Fair with Powering the Future Parade	18 June 2025, 13:32
Ashington Celebrates Community Unity During Refugee Week with Shared Meal Event	18 June 2025, 09:46
Ashington's Community Climate Action Event Celebrates Huge Success During Great Big Green Week	17 June 2025, 10:49
Civic Head Attends Arts and Crafts Program with Blossoming Communities	16 June 2025, 09:09
Miners Memorial Service Honours Northumberland's Coal Mining Heritage at Annual Picnic	16 June 2025, 8:44
Finance Committee Leadership Confirmed as Council Agrees Grants Task Group and Allotment Rent Changes	11 June 2025, 09:06

Facebook

Love it or hate it, Facebook gets the message out quickly and we actively use it to share stories from the Council and others.

Our followers have increased by 30% in the last month, credit to Gary who has taken to mantle from Sharon on this.

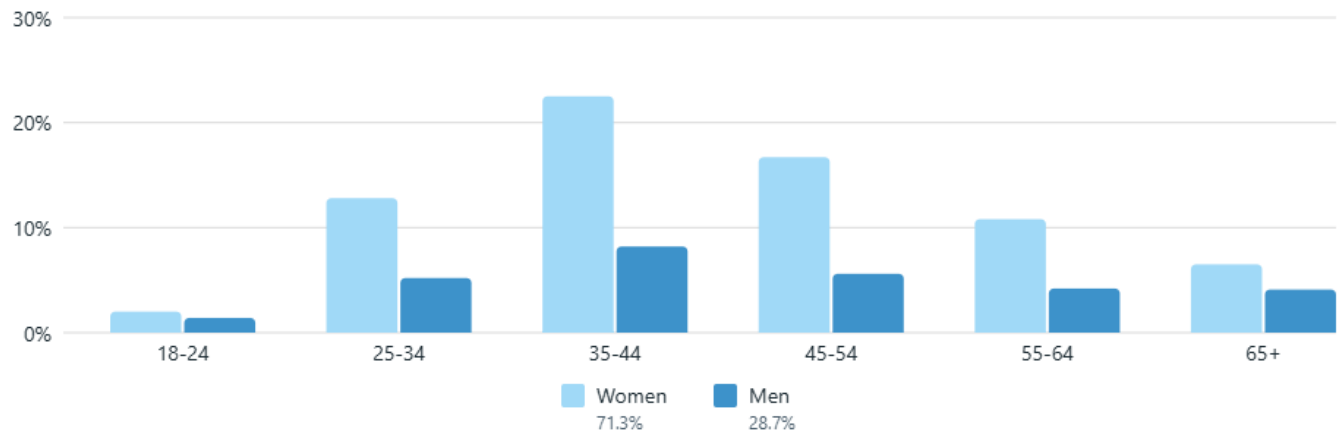
AGENDA 6, Enc i) ASHINGTON TOWN COUNCIL, DRAFT Minutes of the Finance and General Services Committee held at 6:00pm on Tuesday 8th July 2025, at Ashington Town Hall, Council Chamber, 65 Station Road, Ashington, NE63 8RX

Followers ⓘ

Lifetime

3,052

Age & gender ⓘ



Those stories on Facebook that resulted in the highest interaction, either via likes or reach are in bold above. Events, visits by the Civic Head, and the wonderful Dr Nina Purvis.

Cllr Chambers expressed that she was ecstatic with the Community Fair Day and its success. Councillor Purvis described the Community Fair Day as a fantastic event, noting that while attending with MP Ian Lavery, the MP mentioned he was impressed with the event and what he witnessed.

Cllr Ball suggested that the council should put pressure on the legacy funding to increase funding for events, making them bigger and better and ensuring they continue for a long time to come. He emphasised the importance of securing sustainable funding for future community events.

Cllr Grimshaw took the opportunity to extend thanks to several individuals for their valuable contributions to the community. She thanked Alan for his dedicated work with the allotments, Gary for his efforts on the website and Facebook, Sharon for events, and Sarah for her supporting work, and Mark and Ryan for their work on the ground with planting and their beautiful plant features around the town.

Cllr Wright provided perspective on attendance figures from a numbers point of view, mentioning that everyone he spoke to indicated that attendance was at least twice or three times as many people compared to previous years, demonstrating the significant growth in community participation.

FGS2526/028 BUDGET AND EXPENDITURE 2025/26

a) Updated Budget Report

The updated budget and expenditure report was **RECEIVED**.

b) Accounts Paid and to be Paid

It was **AGREED** to receive a schedule of accounts paid; to endorse those accounts paid since the last meeting

AGENDA 6, Enc i) ASHINGTON TOWN COUNCIL, DRAFT Minutes of the Finance and General Services Committee held at 6:00pm on Tuesday 8th July 2025, at Ashington Town Hall, Council Chamber, 65 Station Road, Ashington, NE63 8RX

c) Bank Reconciliation

It was **AGREED** to receive the bank reconciliation dated 30th June 2025

FGS2526/029 CENTRAL ARCADE (known as Co-op Building) Placed on the agenda by Cllr Caroline Ball

It was **AGREED** to formally identify Central Arcade known as Co-op building as a priority for heritage conservation and economic regeneration.

It was **AGREED** to write to Northumberland County Council and Advance Northumberland to request the Regeneration and Economic Development department explore all available funding mechanisms, partnerships, and strategic frameworks to support the acquisition, restoration, or enhancement of the asset.

It was **AGREED** to request Northumberland County Council officers prepare a report outlining options for regeneration-led heritage and tourism investment in Ashington.

It was **AGREED** write to Northumberland County Council enforcement to ensure the owner is meeting all current requirements of grade II status.

Cllr Ball thanked colleagues for supporting the motion on the agenda, explaining that the building will be 100 years old next May and is a Grade II listed building. She highlighted the deteriorating condition, noting there is a tree growing out of the side and black mould within the building. She emphasised that this motion aims to celebrate the building and restore it to its former glory, explaining that the building is constructed from limestone and any further water damage could make it unsalvageable. She argued that Ashington Regeneration should take on this building as it falls within their remit and restore it, stressing the need to request Northumberland County Council officers to create an outline report on the building for heritage and tourism aspects.

Cllr Wright expressed agreement with Cllr Ball, stating his dissatisfaction with how the regeneration team dictates to Ashington what they will and will not regenerate. He viewed this as an opportunity for the Council to tell the regeneration team what they should regenerate within Ashington, emphasising that as a council they need to improve upon being louder and demanding change for the people of Ashington.

Cllr Chambers reflected on the building's past glory, recalling that back in the 1950s the building was like a grand castle with multiple shops within. She remembered how during Christmas the magnificent staircase was beautiful, arguing that the council should be preserving the building instead of letting it go to rack and ruin and become unrecognisable from its original state.

Cllr Amery echoed the previously mentioned sentiments, noting that the co-op also owns the old police station which would also become dilapidated and unrecognisable. He argued that the council should push for this to be regenerated as well. Cllr Davison shared personal memories, mentioning that her late mother used to work within the building back when it was open for business, describing it as beautiful.

Cllr Brown viewed this as a great opportunity for Advance Northumberland to invest in Ashington and help regenerate the building. Cllr Ball reiterated the need to lean into

AGENDA 6, Enc i) ASHINGTON TOWN COUNCIL, DRAFT Minutes of the Finance and General Services Committee held at 6:00pm on Tuesday 8th July 2025, at Ashington Town Hall, Council Chamber, 65 Station Road, Ashington, NE63 8RX

Northumberland County Council and Advance Northumberland to invest in the asset and include it in the regeneration plan. Cllr Wright emphasised this as an opportunity to become more active as a council and take ownership, rather than be dictated to.

Cllr Chambers shared her frustration from experience, mentioning that she was on a stakeholder meeting 11 years ago when Northumberland County Council was going to regenerate the town, and they are still waiting. She described it as very disheartening, explaining that regeneration had to be stopped when the high street work was being done due to complaints that brought it back to planning. Cllr Davies identified that one of the biggest drawbacks is the absence of a chamber of commerce or trader's association.

Cllr Ball requested to move to a vote.

It was **AGREED** by unanimous vote.

It was **AGREED** to make the public relations announcement and include the comments made during the discussion.

It was **AGREED** to keep the police station and co-op building as separate motions for future consideration.

FGS2526/030 NCC NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES PARTNERSHIP

The report was **RECEIVED** and **NOTED**.

Cllr Brown inquired whether any councillors had observed the new road sweepers that had been promised to the town. None of the councillors present confirmed having seen the new equipment in operation.

Cllr Coyle proposed that councillors should convene a meeting prior to the partnership meeting to prepare these questions and ensure they are ready for discussion at the next partnership meeting. This would allow for proper preparation and coordination of the council's concerns and inquiries.

FGS2526/031 YOUTH ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING, 17TH JUNE 2025

The meeting held was **RECEIVED** and **NOTED**.

It was **ENDORSED** for funding be allocated towards 2 free swims sessions in each week of school holidays, to include Wednesday and Saturdays.

It was **ENDORSED** that we explore similar free gym sessions at Ashington Leisure Centre and Hirst Welfare Centre.

It was **ENDORSED** and **AGREED** that £3,000 funding allocated to this event from 'Events Budget' be made available to Pride Action North, or another to lead on delivery.

It was **ENDORSED** that £300 is allocated towards food and refreshments on the day, and the Council supports with publicity for the Riverside Open Day event.

AGENDA 6, Enc i) ASHINGTON TOWN COUNCIL, DRAFT Minutes of the Finance and General Services Committee held at 6:00pm on Tuesday 8th July 2025, at Ashington Town Hall, Council Chamber, 65 Station Road, Ashington, NE63 8RX

FGS2526/032 GRANT FUNDING 2025/26 – ANNUAL AND SMALL GRANTS

Members discussed the new annual grant funding guidelines and application process sent out with the agenda. A summary of the recommendations as well as the guidance and new monitoring was received in full.

Summary of Recommendations in respect of Annual Grants

1. **Removed presentation requirement** - Now states clearly that all applications will be reviewed based on submitted forms and documentation only.
2. **Added £5,000 maximum award limit** - Clearly stated in the funding section.
3. **Match funding preference** - Added explanation that when applications exceed available funds, projects with match funding may be favoured, with reasoning about maximising public fund impact.
4. **Ashington-only requirement** - Clear statement that applicants must be based in Ashington and applications from outside groups will no longer be considered.
5. **Fundraising efforts section** - New dedicated section explaining that applications demonstrating fundraising efforts will be favoured, with specific requirements for what to include.
6. **30% reserves policy** - Clear policy stating groups with more than 30% of annual running costs in unrestricted reserves will be asked to for explanation and reserves policy.
7. **Evaluation requirements** - Added mandatory evaluation form completion with consequences for non-compliance.
8. **Retrospective funding prohibition** - Clear statement that retrospective projects won't be funded and projects must be achievable within 12 months.
9. **Comprehensive publicity requirements** – Includes detailed publicity section including logo usage, social media credit, and photo opportunity assistance.
10. **Public documents notice** - Added warning about sensitive information in reports since council papers are public.

Summary of Recommendations in respect of Small Grants

1. **Defined Three Grant Rounds Per Year** - Set deadlines in July, October, and February to improve planning and fairness for applicants and Officers.
2. **Continue a Maximum Grant of £500** - to ensure wider distribution of funds across the year.
3. **Continue to Restrict Applications to One Per Organisation Per Year** – to prevent multiple small grant applications from the same organisation as well as excluding organisations who received a large grant in the same financial year.
4. **Apply Consistent Eligibility Criteria, delegated to Officer** - Provide Officers with a formal eligibility checklist and prioritisation scoring tool (Appendix A), and delegate decision making to officer level. This ensures consistent decisions based on information provided.
5. **Match the large grant scheme** on location, organisation type, policies, and financial evidence, including reserves, and ensure small grants meet the same quality and governance expectations.
6. **Implement a Simple Prioritisation System for Oversubscription** - Use application content only (e.g. benefit to Ashington, collaboration, need, effort to raise other funds) to score applications when more are received than funding allows.

AGENDA 6, Enc i) ASHINGTON TOWN COUNCIL, DRAFT Minutes of the Finance and General Services Committee held at 6:00pm on Tuesday 8th July 2025, at Ashington Town Hall, Council Chamber, 65 Station Road, Ashington, NE63 8RX

- 7. Strengthen Publicity Expectations** - Make Council credit and promotion a condition of award. Require use of logo, acknowledgment on social media, and willingness to share updates or photos.
- 8. Support Groups Without Policies** – Continue to encourage groups who don't yet meet policy requirements to seek help. Offer signposting so they can apply in future rounds.
- 9. Improve Transparency** - Build changes into guidance and publish a scoring/eligibility matrix (Appendix A) to make clear how and why decisions are made.

Cllr Brown asked whether £5,000 was the maximum funding amount and questioned what would happen to organisations such as the Wansbeck Valley Food Bank under this arrangement.

Cllr Grimshaw responded that if the council feels strongly about supporting a particular organisation, it can be included in the budget. Cllr Brown requested an amendment to ensure that Citizens Advice Bureau and Wansbeck Valley Foodbank remain adequately funded by the Council moving forward.

Cllr Davies emphasised that Citizens Advice Bureau is essential for Ashington residents.

Cllr Ball explained that the working group had examined other towns and their funding levels, raising the question of how the council should decide which organisations are more important to fund than others. She stressed the need for the council to be responsible for the entire town and noted that £5,000 is still a significant amount of money and represents almost 10% of the funding budget.

Cllr Brown proposed that Citizens Advice Bureau and Wansbeck Valley Foodbank should retain their current yearly funding of £14,000 and £16,000 respectively.

Cllr Wright declared an interest regarding Citizens Advice Bureau.

The Executive Officer advised that individual awards to organisations were not on the agenda for discussion. What the Council was being asked to agree was the funding application process and guidelines.

Cllr Wright expressed concern that cutting funding by two thirds in one go, rather than compassionately reducing it over several years, would reflect poorly on the council.

Cllr Amery clarified that Wansbeck Valley Foodbank does not exclusively serve Ashington but operates around Northumberland, with the council providing most of their funding.

Cllr Green mentioned that the loss would not actually be two thirds due to funding received from other councils.

Cllr Chambers agreed with Cllr Ball, stating that while the council has been generous in the past, the current approach is becoming unsustainable. She emphasised that the council needs to establish limits on grants as it would not be possible to fully fund everyone who requests money.

AGENDA 6, Enc i) ASHINGTON TOWN COUNCIL, DRAFT Minutes of the Finance and General Services Committee held at 6:00pm on Tuesday 8th July 2025, at Ashington Town Hall, Council Chamber, 65 Station Road, Ashington, NE63 8RX

Cllr Davies asked for clarification on whether the funding would be restricted to Ashington only, and Sarah confirmed this would be the case.

Cllr Thompson, who had managed Wansbeck Valley Foodbank for four years in the past, noted that many people came from Newbiggin and Lynemouth. She agreed with Cllr Wright that any reduction should be done incrementally rather than in one go.

Cllr Brown argued that Ashington receives the best value for money from Wansbeck Valley Foodbank, explaining that two thirds of their budget is spent within Ashington. He noted that while most donations come from outside Ashington, two thirds of the food distributed goes to Ashington residents.

A proposal was made to amend the discussion to remove the cap and instead discuss reducing funding over time. Cllr Wright proposed this amendment, which was seconded by Cllr Brown.

Cllr Purvis proposed a further amendment to increase the funding limit to £7,500. This received no seconder.

Cllr John Allen proposed that Citizens Advice Bureau and Wansbeck Valley Foodbank should be treated as separate cases. This received no seconder.

A vote was taken on the original motion as per the papers and recommendations presented. Proposed by Cllr Lynne Grimshaw and seconded by Cllr Caroline Ball.

Six councillors voted in **FAVOUR**
Three councillors voted **AGAINST**,
Three councillors **ABSTAINED**.

The motion to **AGREE** the recommendations as presented was carried.

Alan Bunker left the meeting.

FGS2526/033 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

Members are invited to consider passing the following resolution:

That the press and public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the following item, permitted under Section 1 (2) LGA 1960, due to the confidential nature of the business being transacted. Item 14 is commercially sensitive, Item 15 relates to an individual, Item 16 is a legal matter.

FGS2526/034 NORTH SEATON COLLIERY PLAY AREA REDEVELOPMENT

Following a procurement exercise which was tendered by two providers, Cllrs Mark Purvis, Louis Brown and Steven Roberts recommended Kompan as the preferred supplier for the North Seaton Colliery Play Area Development project.

The Council **APPROVED** the recommendation. Additionally, the Council **AGREED** to seek minimum £15k from the funding available via Scottish Power Renewables Windfarm funding, to add to the £45k available for the play area project.

AGENDA 6, Enc i) ASHINGTON TOWN COUNCIL, DRAFT Minutes of the Finance and General Services Committee held at 6:00pm on Tuesday 8th July 2025, at Ashington Town Hall, Council Chamber, 65 Station Road, Ashington, NE63 8RX

The Council **AGREED** to seek support and funding from NCC and County Cllr Steven Roberts for works to ensure main access of street level is DDA compliant.

To proceed the Executive Officer confirmed that the preferred supplier would be invited to detailed discussions on what is achievable within the current budget and scope available, to agree the community consultation and to work directly with the contractor on this consultation process. Additionally, to seek input from NCC Highways and County Cllr Steven Roberts to progress DDA Compliant entrance from Links View.

It was confirmed that following consultation, the provider would develop detailed design and costings.

It was AGREED that final approval for the project would be delegated to the Executive Officer in consultation with ward Cllrs.

Gary Holmes left the meeting.

FGS2526/035 PERSONNEL COMMITTEE MEETING

The Council received and considered the recommendations of the Personnel Committee meeting held on 1st July 2025.

It was **RESOLVED** that:

- Amendments to the staffing structure, including revised job titles, responsibilities, grading, and contracted hours, be approved.
- Acting-up arrangements within Neighbourhood Services continue, with a broader review of service delivery and capacity to be undertaken.
- Options for strengthening allotment inspection and enforcement be explored.
- The noted budget surplus be taken forward into strategic planning discussions to inform future staffing and resource requirements.

Sarah Eden left the meeting.

A recommendation from the Personnel Committee relating to professional advice previously sought was presented. The matter was raised and challenged, however Committee members declined to comment further and no further detail was provided.

FGS2526/036 UNIT AT GREEN LANE

The matter was deferred.

FGS2526/037 DATE, TIME AND VENUE FOR THE NEXT MEETING

Full Council Meeting – Tuesday 29th July 2025, 6:00pm, Council Chamber.

The meeting ended at 20:15