

AGENDA 4, Enc i) ASHINGTON TOWN COUNCIL, DRAFT Minutes of the Finance and General Services Committee held at 6:00pm on Tuesday 12th May 2026, at Town Hall, 65 Station Road, Ashington, NE63 8RX

CLLRS PRESENT:

Cllrs Lynne Grimshaw (Chair), Mark Purvis, Kerry Davison, David Coyle, Marjorie Chambers, Louis Brown, Caroline Ball, Jessica Appleby, Paul Wright, Steven Roberts, Jim Lang, Sonia Simm and Karl Green.

ALSO, IN ATTENDANCE

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

FGS2526/163 WELCOME BY THE CHAIR

Welcome by Cllr Lynne Grimshaw.

FGS2526/164 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs Scott Amery, Bob Walkinshaw, John Tully, Melanie Fox, and Glyn Davies.

FGS2526/165 DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS

There were no disclosures of interest.

FGS2526/166 DISPENSATIONS

No dispensations were requested.

FGS2526/167 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There were no members of the public present.

FGS2526/168 DRAFT MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the previous Finance and General Services Meeting held on Tuesday 14th April were **RECEIVED** and **AGREED** as a true record.

FGS2526/169 CLERK AND OFFICER UPDATES

AGAR

The AGAR is 99% complete but as the RFO is part of the new digital trial which doesn't open until 17th May, formal completion has been delayed.

Annual Meeting of the Council and Policies

We have near thirty policies all of which have been updated in line with new legislation. New legislation includes The Employment Rights Act 2025, Worker Protection (Amendment of Equality Act 2010) Act 2023, Crime and Policing Act 2026, Online Safety Act 2023, Smaller Authorities' Proper Practices Panel (SAPPP) 2025, and Practitioners Guide 2026. Some Best Practice changes have also been made.

The agenda for the meeting is ready to go out but we are finalising the best way to display policies and committee terms of reference on the website. As well as the agenda being posted to those who receive paper packs, we will provide a link to policies as opposed to emailing, as a more efficient sharing mechanism.

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YouTube Videos

We have 575 views of our videos via YouTube. They are a superb showcase of the wonderful community groups working in the town. They remain as a lasting legacy of the Council's funding commitment and the work carried out by groups. We have received very welcome feedback from the groups involved who are using their own videos to share their work, recruit volunteers, achieve funding and members. Thanks again to everyone involved.

Grants and Funding

Our Annual Grant application window closes on 22nd May. The webpage for grants has been superbly updated by Gary and is now far more engaging and also offers fully electronic web forms in keeping with new regulations.

The first small grant opportunity of the year opened last Wednesday and closes next Wednesday (20th). Decisions are made without delay according to the agreed criteria, so groups have access to funds quickly.

Alan and Sharon jointly applied for funding from NCC Climate Change Fund and were successful – great news! We have £5,000 towards the development of sustainable and accessible plots at Nursery Park Allotment site.

Neighbourhood Services

Play Areas

Painting has been carried out in most play areas, now that the better weather has finally arrived. Smaller areas have been repainted by Ryan, but there is a possibility that larger scale painting of fencing at Alexandra Road could be contracted.

Some levelling solutions have been installed in the way of matting at entrance areas at People's Park. The MUGA entrances require some backfilling and reseeding.

Unfortunately, the recently replaced track rider at People's Park is broken again and has been removed – this is the third time. The suitability and functionality of the equipment will be raised with Kompan as it appears not to be fit for purpose. Having already looked at a possible alternative for this equipment, we know it is both costly and not as high in play value.

We have identified some opportunities for additional play panels on equipment at People's Park and Alexandra Road; currently they offer one side of play only.

We have a list of remaining jobs for play areas that will be carried out for the remainder of this week, and following spring removal/summer planting.

Ryan completed the RoSPA Operational Play Inspectors Course with flying colours. We will move to our own inspections when feasible. NCC continues to support us with this until then.

Horticulture

The summer bedding is delivered and being cared for at Heighley Gate. Spring removals will be carried out next week w/c 18th May, with the beds planted from 26th May. It is always a tricky decision with frosts, etc. but hopefully this is the right one and we can enjoy some red/white show for the start of the world cup on 11th June.

Bus shelters

No further update on funded schemes from NCC, via NECA. This is a county-wide delay rather than isolated to Ashington.

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Litter Bins

As we enter spring/summer litters bins are used more. With this in mind we are hoping to assess the suitability of size and location of bins to progress informed decisions which will also be affected by the new college, Wansbeck Square development, and different routes through the town centre.

We have moved a bin from Home Farm Close to the area of the pedestrian crossing/school crossing patrol, which has resulted in some objections from residents. The move was done to support the school crossing patrol request to help educate about using the bin as they were ending up with pockets full of rubbish. There remains a bin at the bus shelter less than 20metres from where the bin was removed. The bin at the bus stop is on a public highway as opposed to the one removed which was the entrance to the estate. The resident who contacted the office has been reassured that we will monitor the situation.

Allotments

Nursery Park

- All rents have been paid.
- Plans for the sustainable and accessible plot are currently under way.
- Fly-tipping has occurred, believed to have taken place over the preceding weekend. An email was sent to all plot holders the week prior to the incident occurring reminding about closing/locking the gate. The tipped material consists of hedges which, unfortunately, we do not currently have the resources to recycle. We are speaking to NCC regarding this.
- Plans are in place to introduce an additional plot within the coming year.
- June for further weed spraying.

North Seaton

- A plot has been split following contact from a plot holder regarding the size of their plot; the holder has expressed a wish to continue maintaining a garden.
- Work has commenced on one of the three communal areas. This includes the removal of waste, soil, and rubble. A new recycling process has been utilised which enables the recycling of stones — this is the first attempt and results will inform future roll-out decisions.
- Enquiries have been made to assess whether the use of a digger would be beneficial.
- A new plot holder has been assigned following a plot being given up.
- June for further weed spraying

Hirst East End

- A recycling day was held on site; a further trailer-load of metal has been disposed of.
- Plots have been halved to create new plots. Previously vacated plots are now being occupied, with viewings taking place this week.
- Clearance works has been carried out by the allotment officer.
- A rat burrow has been identified on site. NCC Pest Control have attended and are due to return this week.
- 1 rent due.
- June for further weed spraying.

Seaton Hirst

- Concerns have been raised by residents regarding rats. A site visit is scheduled this week in conjunction with the association.

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Woodhorn

- Further plots have now been occupied.
- Plans for new resurfacing are expected to be carried out in the coming weeks.
- Weed spraying will be undertaken following completion of the road resurfacing works.
- Work to clear further plots is ongoing.

Highmarket & Wansbeck Road

- Issues relating to fly-tipping have been reported. Advice has been sought from NCC and on-going assistance is being provided.

General Update

- New equipment has been purchased which is significantly improving clearance work efficiency. The equipment operates with zero emissions

Events and Engagement

Free Swim Sessions

The Free Swim programme is a community initiative funded by Ashington Town Council, delivered in partnership with Ashington Leisure Centre (Places Leisure), located at Lintonville Terrace, Ashington, NE63 9JY. The programme provides free, open-access swimming sessions during school holiday periods, welcoming residents of all ages and abilities to enjoy the pool at no cost.

Each session offers up to 80 slots on a first-come, first-served basis. No booking is required — participants simply turn up to take part. The programme supports the Council’s goals of promoting active and healthy lifestyles, increasing access to leisure facilities, and inspiring the next generation of swimmers.

Date	Day	Time	Slots Available
8th April 2025	Wednesday	1pm – 2pm	18
11th April 2025	Saturday	2:30pm – 3:30pm	12
15th April 2025	Wednesday	1pm – 2pm	36
18th April 2025	Saturday	2:30pm – 3:30pm	19
Total Easter Holiday Attendance			85

The Free Swim programme continues to make a positive impact in the Ashington community. With strong attendance during the Easter holidays. Further sessions to be booked for the Summer. The initiative is on track to provide accessible, free leisure opportunities to a growing number of local residents.

Ashington Town Council will continue funding and commitment to this initiative for 2026, which supports health and wellbeing across the community and encourages participants of all ages to learn to swim or develop their existing skills. We are pushing for more visibility of this initiative in the leisure centre and will get information out to youth groups and schools via leaflets and posters.

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Great Big Green Week Event

As part of the national Great Big Green Week campaign celebrating community action to tackle climate change, Ashington Town Council will be at the local market on Tuesday, 9th June from 10:00am to 2:00pm.

Our annual vibrant event will once again bring together local organisations committed to environmental sustainability. Whether you're a gardening enthusiast, concerned about climate change, or simply curious about green initiatives in your community, there's something for everyone!

Climate Change Committee Showcase

- Share your thoughts on climate change with council representatives
- Learn about the Council's Climate Change Committee

Free Raffle with Amazing Prizes!

Our popular free raffle is back with fantastic eco-friendly prizes to be won!

Full Circle Food Project

- Plant sale, pick up some locally grown plants for your garden
- Find out more about the Full Circle Food Project
- Take part in fun, family-friendly gardening activities

Climate Action Wansbeck Pledges

- Swap pledges for plants with Climate Action Wansbeck
- Get information on how you can tackle climate change

Citizens Advice Energy Team

Speak to the Citizens Advice Energy Team and find out how to save money on your energy bills

NCC Climate Change Team

- Join the Warmer Homes team for advice on making your home more energy efficient, including information on free grants currently available to residents
- Find out more: Northumberland County Council – Renewable Energy and Heat

Groundwork NE & Cumbria

- Recycling advice and information
- Information on their current volunteering project
- Great Big Green Week information

Great Big Green Week is a nationwide celebration of community action to tackle climate change and protect nature. By coming along to our local event, you'll learn more about environmental initiatives right here in Ashington and connect with like-minded people passionate about building a more sustainable future.

Litter Picking - Cleasewell Hill School Children

The litter picks formed part of the spring clean campaign. The sessions were originally planned for an earlier date but had to be rescheduled after the school's minibus required repairs. Cleasewell Hill School rearranged the visits and completed both sessions last week, Tuesday 5th May and Thursday 7th May at Hirst Park.

Ryan Appleby ATC Neighbourhood Services Officer attended both sessions and provided all necessary equipment — litter pickers, bags and gloves. Each child also received a participation

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certificate and a packet of sweets. After litter picking, the children enjoyed some time in the park's play area.

"They had a great time going around the park litter picking and then they got to spend some time in the play area." Ryan, Neighbourhood Services Officer

A big thank you to Cleasewell Hill School and all the children involved for doing a fantastic job helping to keep Hirst Park clean and tidy.

Website and Social Media PR

The Council's grants webpage has been redesigned and updated to present a cleaner, more modern layout that is easier for residents and community groups to navigate. The page now clearly sets out the available funding schemes, key dates, and eligibility criteria in a more accessible format, ensuring applicants can quickly find the information they need.

A significant improvement has been made to the application process, with grant application forms now moved to Google Forms, allowing organisations to apply online directly from the website. This replaces the previous document-based process and removes barriers for applicants, making it simpler and more straightforward to apply. The follow-up monitoring forms, required from grant recipients to report on the use of funding, will also be moved online in due course, further streamlining the process for both applicants and the Council.

Work to update and modernise the website is ongoing, with the allotments page identified as the next area for development. The aim is to ensure all pages across the site are kept up to date, easy to use, and reflective of the Council's commitment to clear and accessible communication with residents.

The following items appeared on our website news page since the previous officer's 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/>

Article Title	Date
Ashington Town Council Opens Small Grant Fund Applications for 2026/27	5th May 2026
Finance & General Services Committee Meeting on 12/05/2026	5th May 2026
Ashington Marks International Workers' Memorial Day with Wreath-Laying Tribute	5th May 2026
Ashington Town Council Celebrates Local Groups and Organisations	29th April 2026

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Article Title	Date
<u>A Tree Grows in Ashington: Community Honours Litter-Picking Hero George Dobson on St George's Day</u>	24th April 2026
<u>Bunny Hop Easter Trail Brings Record Turnout to Ashington High Street</u>	21st April 2026
<u>Applications Now Open for Ashington Town Council's 2026–27 Grant Funding</u>	14th April 2026

ABC Magazine, North Seaton Directory

Richard continues to allow us generous editorial coverage in the magazines which we take great advantage of.

Facebook

Our Facebook page has continued to perform well during the period covered by this report (14th April - 11th May 2026), building on the positive trends noted in the previous Communications Officer's report.

During this period, the page received 58,800 views, with 54.9% coming from existing followers (up 31.9%) and 45.1% from non-followers, reaching a total of 13,185 unique viewers. The increase in views from our existing follower base is a particularly encouraging sign of growing loyalty and engagement with our content.

Content interactions saw a significant uplift, reaching 718 — an increase of 68.9% on the previous period. The majority of these (477) came from existing followers, up 56.9%, while interactions from non-followers also rose substantially by 99.2%, totalling 241. Facebook visits remained steady at 1,300.

Follower growth continues to be positive, and we are pleased to report that our page has now reached 3,900 followers, a milestone that reflects the growing interest in our work across the community. During this period, the page gained 33 new follows and recorded 18 unfollows, resulting in a net gain of 15 followers.

As noted previously, posts and content directly concerning Ashington continue to generate the strongest community engagement compared to shared posts on behalf of other organisations. Work is ongoing to optimise our Facebook presence to maximise reach and engagement, and discussions around the potential use of paid advertising to further boost visibility are continuing.

Upcoming Meetings

Annual Meeting of the Council – 26th of May 2026

Combined Full Council and Finance and General Services Committee - 23rd June 2026

Finance and General Services Committee - Tuesday 14th July 2026

Gary has a meetings list and has also created a scannable QR code that will put meeting dates into your calendar, please ask for this.

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Post Title / Topic	Date Published	Reach	Likes & Reactions	Shares
Simpler Recycling is Coming to Northumberland	17th April 2026	4,469	31	31
International Workers' Memorial Day	6th May 2026	4,196	48	2
Funding available for Ashington community groups (1)	15th April 2026	1,993	7	9
Men's Pie Club is coming to Ashington!	28th April 2026	1,639	18	14
COMING SOON - 3 Special Grant Fund Films	29th April 2026	1,552	46	3
Funding available for Ashington community groups (2)	3rd May 2026	1,297	4	2
Video 2 - Celebrating Ashington's Sports Clubs & Groups	29th April 2026	1,286	15	5
Funding available for Ashington community groups (3)	10th May 2026	1,091	0	4
Video 3 - Celebrating Ashington's Youth Groups	29th April 2026	1,085	19	5
Video 1 - Celebrating Ashington's Community Groups & Organisations	29th April 2026	995	22	4

FGS2526/170 ACCOUNTS PAID

The schedule of accounts paid was **RECEIVED** and those accounts paid were **ENDORSED**.

FGS2526/171 APPROVAL OF ANNUAL GOVERNANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY RETURN (AGAR) 2024/25: COMBINED FGS COMMITTEE AND FULL COUNCIL MEETING

It was **AGREED** that a combined meeting of the Finance and General Services Committee and Full Council be held on Tuesday 23rd June 2026 for the purpose of approving the Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR) 2025/26.

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FGS2526/172 ASSET REGISTER POLICY, CAPITALISATION THRESHOLD AND AGAR RE-STATEMENT

The Executive Officer presented a report seeking Council approval to formalise the Council's approach to asset recording in line with the 2026/27 Practitioners' Guide.

The report detailed that since April 2022 the Council has recorded assets at cost and gifted or community assets at a nominal value of £1, as required, but has not applied a formally minuted minimum capitalisation threshold. The Practitioners' Guide now requires that such a threshold be set, minuted, and applied consistently, with any resulting changes to reported figures clearly explained.

The report presented by the Executive Officer recommended the following:

1. Capitalisation Threshold (new) – A minimum threshold of £250 is adopted for inclusion in the Asset Register. Items below this value will be treated as revenue expenditure. This threshold is aligned with the Council's insurance excess and reflects a proportionate, risk-based approach. It will be reviewed annually, with any amendments formally minuted.
2. Methodology (continuing) – Assets will continue to be recorded at purchase cost. Gifted and community assets will continue to be recorded at a nominal value of £1. Assets under construction will only be recorded upon completion and being brought into use. Obsolete or disposed assets will be clearly identified. The Council will not apply depreciation or revaluation, in accordance with proper practices.
3. AGAR Restatement (one-off) – As a direct consequence of adopting the threshold, the RFO is authorised to review and update the Asset Register and to restate the total asset value reported in AGAR Box 9 for both 2025/26 and the comparative year 2024/25. Council noted that any change to reported figures arises solely from the application of the new methodology and does not reflect any physical change in assets held.
4. Future Reporting (new baseline) – Following restatement, year-on-year variances in AGAR Box 9 will reflect only actual additions, disposals, or enhancements, ensuring consistency and audit transparency going forward.

The Executive Officer invited questions. There were none. **All recommendations were agreed.**

FGS2526/173 ASSET MANAGEMENT PLATFORM – CIVICLY

The Executive Officer presented an executive summary and business case seeking Council approval for the adoption of Civic.ly, a digital asset management platform purpose-built for town and parish councils, developed in collaboration with the supplier Scribe.

The report detailed the limitations of the council's current approach to asset management — including spreadsheet-based registers, informal coordination via WhatsApp and email, and paper-based inspection records — and set out the case for a mobile-enabled platform incorporating a GPS-located asset register, pre-built inspection checklists, automated scheduling, a real-time mobile field app, interactive GIS mapping, a full audit trail, and unlimited user access. The report further detailed the imminent transition of play area inspections from NCC to in-house delivery, the compliance obligations this created, and the governance importance of a reliable audit trail as the council's direct responsibility for public assets grew.

The monthly subscription of £262 represents a 50% discount on the standard rate, negotiated directly by the Executive Officer, with the £1,000 setup fee waived as an existing Scribe customer. The annual cost of £3,144 was proposed to be met equally from the Staffing and Street

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Repairs and Maintenance budget heads, reflecting where the most direct savings were anticipated. The subscription may be cancelled at any time with 30 days' notice. The Clerk invited questions. There were none.

The Chair commended the report as very thorough and noted that the Executive Officer had negotiated a more favourable deal for the council than had initially been offered.

The Council AGREED the adoption of the Civic.ly asset management platform at a monthly subscription of £262, subject to the 30-day cancellation terms, with the annual cost of £3,144 funded equally from the Staffing and Street Repairs and Maintenance budget heads.

FGS2526/174 PADDOCK WOOD PLAY AREA

The report was **RECIEVED**, and it was **AGREED** that Paddock Wood Play Area is designated as the Council's next priority site for investment in play provision.

FGS2526/175 YOUTH ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING REPORT AND SUMMER FOOD PROGRAMME

The report of the Youth Advisory Committee meeting, held on 20th April 2026 was received.

In response to a question from Cllr Marjorie Chambers regarding the location of Mortal Fools, Cllr Caroline Ball advised that they were now based at the Family Hub. Cllr Ball further commented that it was encouraging to see various youth organisations collaborating to deliver activities across the town.

In response to a question for clarification, the Executive Officer explained that Full Circle Food Project and Hirst Welfare Centre presented a proposal for a Summer Breakfast and Packed Lunch Club, providing food to children and young people in Ashington— on two days per week across the six-week summer holiday. The proposal arose directly from NCC's removal of holiday food vouchers for eligible children, with estimated costs of £100–£200 per day depending on attendance. At the same meeting, NCC Locality Co-Ordinator, Carla Thompson had separately indicated funding was available for a complementary summer programme targeting families just above the HAF eligibility threshold, to be delivered from Hirst Park one day per week. It was considered that the two programmes could potentially be combined to provide broader coverage, and it was agreed this should be revisited once groups had responded to NCC regarding what they could deliver and at what cost.

Cllr Marjorie Chambers asked if any further information was available. The Executive Officer responded that no firm plan or confirmed funding figure was available at the time of the YAC meeting or has been provided since.

The Executive Officer confirmed that as the Youth Advisory Committee does not hold delegated spending powers, any funding commitment requires a formal decision of Council. Members were asked to consider delegating authority to the Executive Officer, in consultation with the Youth Advisory Committee, to commit funding subject to confirmation of NCC's contribution and the final programme proposal, with a report back to the next appropriate meeting on expenditure incurred.

It was AGREED to delegate spending of £2,000 from the Youth Funding budget to the Executive Officer in consultation with the Youth Advisory Committee with a firm agreement reached when more information is available from NCC.

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FGS2526/176 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

It was AGREED 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.

FGS2526/177 URGENT ITEM – DEPUTYT CLERK

The Chair sought the agreement of the Council to receive an urgent item in respect of the process followed for the recruitment of a Deputy Clerk, and the successful offering of the post to Vicki Smith. The Chair thanked everyone involved in the interviews and confirmed that Vicki would have a period of notice which the Executive Officer would keep everyone informed of.

FGS2526/178 SEASONAL OPERATIVE NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES

A recommendation from the Personnel Committee to commence recruitment of a seasonal operative for Neighbourhood Services support during high season was **RECEIVED and AGREED by MAJORITY with nine votes in favour, 1 vote against and 2 abstentions.**

Cllr Brown expressed his disagreement with the seasonal nature of the proposed employment, stating that he believed the role should be full-time/permanent.

Cllr Chambers observed that historically the Council had only employed one Neighbourhood Services Operative, and noted that based on the report, there did not appear to be sufficient work throughout the whole year to sustain two operatives.

Cllr Lang enquired about the possibility of apprenticeships, noting that an apprentice could be employed for an entire year and would represent a unique opportunity for the Council. The Executive Officer acknowledged that taking on apprentices in the future would be beneficial but explained that the work that is needed to be delivered now in terms of seasonal support is not suitable as an apprentice cannot be simply left to get on with tasks unsupervised.

Cllr Coyle acknowledged that apprenticeships had been raised as a future consideration but noted that the seasonal approach remained the most appropriate option at present.

In response to questions, the Chair confirmed that the situation would remain under review as was the case with resourcing generally.

Cllr Ball called for the motion to be advanced and suggested that apprenticeships could be explored in the future.

FGS2526/178 DATE, TIME AND VENUE FOR THE NEXT MEETING

Tuesday 23rd June 2026, 6:00pm, Council Chamber.

The meeting ended at 18:28