

AGENDA 6, Enc i) ASHINGTON TOWN COUNCIL, DRAFT Minutes of the Finance and General Services Committee held at 6:00pm on Tuesday 14th April 2026, at Town Hall, 65 Station Road, Ashington, NE63 8RX

CLLRS PRESENT:

Cllrs Lynne Grimshaw (Chair), Kerry Davison, David Coyle, Marjorie Chambers, Louis Brown, Bob Walkinshaw, Caroline Ball, Melanie Fox, Jim Lang, Scott Amery, Sonia Simm, Karl Green and Glyn Davies.

ALSO, IN ATTENDANCE

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

FGS2526/148 WELCOME BY THE CHAIR

Welcome by Cllr Lynne Grimshaw who gave a special welcome back to Cllr Jim Lang.

FGS2526/149 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs Jessica Appleby, Steven Roberts, Paul Wright and John Tully.

FGS2526/150 DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS

There were no disclosures of interest.

FGS2526/151 DISPENSATIONS

No dispensations were requested.

FGS2526/152 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There were no members of the public present.

FGS2526/153 DRAFT MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the previous Finance and General Services Meeting held on Tuesday 10th March were **RECEIVED** and **AGREED** as a true record.

FGS2526/154 CLERK AND OFFICER UPDATES

Christmas Lights Contract

We have secured a [NORDIKA, SUSTAINABLE CHRISTMAS TREE - Blachere Illumination](#) within budget for Christmas 2026. As well as Christmas and Remembrance projections we will also have projections for The World Cup – these should go down very well.



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Neighbourhood Services

Play Areas

Repairs and maintenance continue across all play areas following each site having a RoSPA Play Safety inspection. Kompan repairers attended People's Park with Ryan Appleby to carry out repairs and replace the track rider. The Executive Officer has some follow-up on this visit prior to settling the invoice.

Repainting and resurfacing are a priority consideration for the spring.

North Seaton Colliery Play Area basketball net was replaced, the verge works were planned for Monday and need to be inspected. Invoices will only be settled once works have been signed off as fully complete.

As highlighted last month, as soon as time allows, we will commence discussion for the redevelopment of Paddock Wood play area with Ward Cllrs. It is suggested that we follow a similar format as North Seaton Colliery play area with ward Cllrs involved throughout, agreeing the procurement and process at FGS.

Bus Shelters

As previous update - we are still waiting for funding information back in regards bus shelters. Progress is sought frequently; this has been outstanding since initially approved in January 2025. We are no different to other Towns and Parishes who are also waiting for the same information to proceed with orders.

Town Seats

By Friday all seats ordered for the Haydon ward will have been installed. These were funded by Cllr Sonia Simm NCC MLIS. Two seats being removed from Black Close Bank are being re-sited at QEII Park, exact location to be agreed.

Horticulture

We are moving into high season with more regular horticultural visits expected. Spring Planting will be removed w/c 11th May, with Summer Planting scheduled for w/c 18th May. The spring show is looking wonderful and resident and Cllr comments on this are much appreciated.

Events and Engagement

Keep Britian Tidy - Great British Spring Clean Event Ashington Tuesday Market 17th March

Ashington Town Council was delighted to take part in the Great British Spring Clean Campaign again this year by holding an event at Ashington Market on Tuesday 17 March 2026, instead of our usual planned group litter picks. Bringing together local organisations and residents the day focused on keeping the town clean and green.

Despite a bright, sunny but very windy day — which unfortunately meant the event had to wrap up a little earlier than planned — there was still fantastic engagement from the community throughout the morning.

Partner Organisations involved were:

- Groundwork NE & Cumbria

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- The Green Dog Walkers Scheme
- Ashington Community Litter Project

Key community concerns were raised by residents who engaged with council representatives and partners on a range of environmental issues, with two topics standing out as priorities:

- **Fly-tipping:** A key concern raised by several residents, who shared their experiences and sought advice on how the issue can be tackled.
- **Recycling & waste reduction:** Many residents were keen to learn more about recycling and how they can play their part in reducing waste.

New volunteers have joined local litter-picking efforts, helping to strengthen community action in keeping Ashington tidy. The day provided a great opportunity to promote the Great British Spring Clean campaign and highlight the simple actions everyone can take to make a difference.

Northumberland County Council — Waste Services Survey

Northumberland County Council recently had a survey open regarding waste collection services, including the bulky waste collection service. Residents were encouraged to have their say before the survey closed on Sunday 29 March 2026.

We would like to thank everyone who came along, as well as the partner organisations who supported the event. Together, we are continuing to work towards a cleaner, greener, and more vibrant Ashington.

Northumberland Miners' Picnic — Memorial Service Update

Planning is well underway for this year's memorial service, which will take place at Woodhorn Museum on Saturday 13th June 2026 at 10:30am. The service will once again be led by Ministers of Ashington Churches Together.

The order of service follows a traditional format, opening with a welcome and a performance from Brass Marras, followed by the hymn Abide with Me. A Bible reading, sermon, and prayers will be delivered by the officiating ministers, before Brass Marras return to perform Gresford — composed by Durham miner Robert Saint in memory of the 266 men who lost their lives in the 1934 Gresford Colliery explosion.

This year's service carries particular significance, marking the 110th anniversary of the mining disaster. To commemorate the occasion, the Ashington and District Male Voice Choir will perform an additional piece '*Woodhorn Disaster*' alongside their established Requiem performance with the band Brass Marras.

The service will close with a blessing from Fr. Sam and a closing address from Ian Lavery MP.

Free Swim Sessions

The free swim sessions continue. 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.

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Easter Holidays

Four free swim sessions were scheduled across the Easter holiday period. The Saturday sessions during the Easter holidays have a revised start time of 2:30pm – 3:30pm (rather than 1pm) due to existing pool commitments at the leisure centre. We will report numbers at the next session.

Date	Day	Time	Slots Available
8th April 2025	Wednesday	1pm – 2pm	80
11th April 2025	Saturday	2:30pm – 3:30pm *	80
15th April 2025	Wednesday	1pm – 2pm	80
18th April 2025	Saturday	2:30pm – 3:30pm *	80

The Free Swim programme continues to make a positive impact with strong attendance during the February half term and four further sessions planned for Easter; the initiative is on track to provide accessible, free leisure opportunities to a growing number of local residents. Our own publicity of the free swim is high profile. We have requested that Places Leisure make the free sessions more visible, suggesting posters in the leisure and that screen display the opportunity. We have also recently reminded the organised youth groups, like Scouts and Guides that this opportunity exists.

The funding commitment has increased from £74/hour to £100/hour, still offering value for money at £1.25 per possible attendee. 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.

Allotments

Hirst East End

Good progress has been made at this site across several areas of maintenance and administration.

- Weed spraying and litter picks have been carried out to maintain the general appearance and usability of the site.
- Named helpers are being re-introduced to support day-to-day site management and provide a point of contact for tenants.
- Invoices have been issued to plot holders and rent payments are being received.
- Several plots have been halved to increase availability, and new tenants have been successfully taken on, reducing the number of vacant plots.
- CCTV has been moved.
- Plans are being developed for another metal recycling day in late April, which will help clear accumulated waste materials.

Woodhorn Road

This site has seen a range of maintenance activities and some important ongoing discussions with external partners.

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- Work to the roadways within the site is planned to commence shortly. The contractor is ready to begin; we are awaiting a suitable period of dry weather to ensure the work can be completed effectively.
- Weed spraying has been carried out across in some areas and recently empty plots. Plans to spray on a greater scale.
- New plot holders have been welcomed to the site, reflecting continued demand for allotment provision in the area.
- Overgrown hedges on individual plots have been cut back, improving sight lines and tidiness across the site.
- Several previously neglected or abandoned plots have been cleared and are now let to new tenants, maximising the productive use of available land.
- Metal has been recycled from the site, and door and window frames have been located and stacked ready for a future recycling collection. This work was carried out with the valued assistance of site members.
- There was a plot fire on Easter Sunday which was responded to promptly by the Site Rep who alerted the Allotment Officer, and emergency services.
- Discussions with Northumberland County Council (NCC) and the Fire and Rescue Service regarding the establishment of an emergency access point off the A197. This is an important safety matter and progress will be reported to members in due course.

Seaton Hirst

Activity at this site has focused on community engagement and environmental improvement. The site participated in the Great British Spring Clean, joining forces with the Ashington Community Litter Project to carry out a coordinated tidying effort. This initiative helped improve the local environment while strengthening relationships with community partners. Further plans with Committee with historic fly tipping in the autumn

North Seaton Colliery

Several positive activities have taken place at North Seaton Colliery, with member involvement continuing to be a key feature.

- A metal recycling day has been held, helping to clear redundant materials from the site and contributing to environmental sustainability goals.
- Work is planned to clear communal areas, with members offering their assistance. This collaborative approach helps build a sense of ownership and pride in the site.
- Additional bird boxes have been distributed across the site, supporting local biodiversity and encouraging wildlife-friendly growing practices among tenants.

Nursery Park

Nursery Park continues to develop, with notable progress on accessibility and plot management.

- Plans for the provision of sustainable accessible plots are advancing. Funding has been successfully secured from NCC Climate Action Fund (£5,000) to support this work, which will help ensure the site is welcoming and usable for tenants with mobility or disability needs.
- Invoices have been issued to plot holders in line with the standard rental schedule.

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- Plot holders have expressed a wish to halve their current plots, either due to personal circumstances or to reduce their workload. Discussions are ongoing to accommodate these requests while managing demand fairly.

Overall, the allotment sites are in a positive position. Maintenance and tenancy management are being actively progressed, community engagement is strong, and a number of longer-term improvements — including accessible plots at Nursery Park and roadway repairs at Woodhorn Road — are moving forward.

Website and Social Media PR

Website

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
<u>Finance & General Services Committee Meeting on 14/04/2026</u>	7th April 2026
<u>Kerb Appeal Trial Update: Real Results, Real Teamwork</u>	2nd April 2026
<u>Ashington Submits Bid for UK Town of Culture 2028 — and the Town is Ready to Show the Country What It’s Made Of</u>	2nd April 2026
<u>Ashington Town Council Awards Small Grants to Three Local Community Groups</u>	23rd March 2026
<u>Full Council Meeting on 31/03/2025</u>	19th March 2026
<u>Ashington Residents Get Involved in Great British Spring Clean Event</u>	17th March 2026
<u>Ashington Town Council Pays Tribute to Project Shield Team as Funding Ends</u>	13th March 2026
<u>Ashington Town Council Acts to Secure Roads and Pavements Investment for the Town</u>	13th March 2026

Facebook











Our Facebook page has continued to show positive performance since the last Communications Officer's report on the 10th of March 2026. The reporting period (17th March - 13th April 2026) reflects strong engagement and continued follower growth across key metrics.

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During this period, the page received 76,200 views, with 41.6% coming from existing followers and 58.4% from non-followers, reaching a total of 19,276 unique viewers. Content interactions reached 425, an increase of 20.7% on the previous period, with the majority (304) coming from our existing followers — a significant rise of 62.6%. Facebook visits also grew slightly, reaching 1,300 visits, up 3.2%.

Follower growth remains encouraging, with 42 new follows (up 44.8%) and only 4 unfollows, giving a net gain of 38 followers (up 46.2%) for the period. Since the last meeting our follower count stood at 3,800, and this continues to grow.

Positive posts and content directly concerning Ashington continue to generate the strongest community engagement, compared to shared posts on behalf of other organisations. Efforts remain ongoing to optimise our Facebook presence to ensure the greatest possible reach and engagement, and discussions around the potential use of paid advertising to boost posts are continuing.

Title	Date published ↑↓	Reach ↑ ↓	Likes and reactions ↑↓	Shares ↑↓
 Changes to fares on the Northumberland... Ashington Town Council	19 March 14:39	6,818	11	6
 Easter fun is hopping back into town... Photo • Ashington Town Council	17 March 14:48	4,848	19	19
 Ashington is starting to look sharper and p... Reel • Ashington Town Council	9 April 13:22	4,046	48	4
 A proud and emotional moment as the final... Ashington Town Council	10 April 11:25	2,219	25	3
 Easter fun is hopping back into town... Photo • Ashington Town Council	3 April 14:00	1,972	1	2
 SPRING SOCIAL – ALL WELCOME! ... Photo • Ashington Town Council	20 March 09:59	1,789	6	3
 The Full Council will be held on 31/03/2026... Photo • Ashington Town Council	20 March 18:00	1,730	4	1
 Looking for some friendly advice and a cha... Photo • Ashington Town Council	8 April 11:03	1,339	0	3
 Ashington, the town that sent the Pitman ... Photo • Ashington Town Council	2 April 12:16	1,238	32	7
 Easter fun is hopping back into town... Photo • Ashington Town Council	22 March 09:00	1,187	0	1

Upcoming Meetings

- Youth Collaboration Group Meeting – Monday 20th of April – 2pm
- County Council Meeting – 6th of May 2026 – 2pm
- Finance and General Services Committee – 12th of May 2026

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- Cabinet Meeting – Tuesday 12th of May 2026
- Annual Meeting of the Council – 26th of May 2026
- Miners Picnic – Saturday 13th of June 2026 – 10:30am

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.

FGS2526/155 BUDGET AND EXPENDITURE 2025/26

a) Updated Budget Report

The updated budget and expenditure report was **RECEIVED** and there were **NO** questions to the RFO.

b) Accounts Paid and to be Paid

The schedule of accounts paid was **RECEIVED** and those accounts paid since the last meeting were **ENDORSED** and there were **NO** questions received.

c) Bank Reconciliation

The bank reconciliation dated 31st March 2026 was **RECEIVED**

FGS2526/156 CCTV MEETING, HELD 22ND FEBRUARY 2026

The report of the meeting was **RECEIVED** and the recommendations were **ENDORSED**.

The Executive Officer reported that this was a routine meeting. She noted that one of the CCTV cameras from Hirst East End had been relocated to Woodhorn Road, which allowed the camera to capture a greater coverage area without compromising security. The police had identified hotspot areas and had been requested to address them accordingly. She further advised that NCC had allocated a budget to the Council to install commando sockets which was welcome and would be used for this purpose. She confirmed that additional cameras would be positioned at the side car park of Bubbles and at the car park of The Cree. The Executive Officer acknowledged that some cameras remained offline as a result of the outage affecting streetlights adjacent to the bus station had been reported to Northern Power Grid but the issue had not been resolved although many partners had chased this. This was confirmed by Cllr Caroline Ball who was also seeking attention on the matter.

Cllr Purvis enquired as to the location of the hotspot in North Seaton. The Executive Officer responded that Cllr Ball had suggested writing to businesses along North Seaton Road to identify vehicles leaving the area. Cllr Purvis believed a camera had been installed previously in this area and would pick this up after the meeting.

Cllr Amery asked whether Asset Watch were still monitoring the cameras at People's Park. The Executive Officer confirmed that they were. Cllr Amery requested that Asset Watch be asked to report anti-social behaviour in this area. The Executive Officer stated that the Council would request that Asset Watch be extra vigilant in monitoring this location, and that we would seek any ASB seen.

FGS2526/157 PARTNERSHIP MEETING, HELD 24TH MARCH 2026

The report was **RECEIVED** and the actions were **ENDORSED**.

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Cllr Coyle asked whether all the ward priorities had been identified and shared. The Executive Officer advised that Seaton and College wards were outstanding. Phase 2 would shortly be completed, and then phase 3 would commence on 20th April.

FGS2526/158 ANNUAL AND SMALL GRANTS

The report was **RECEIVED** and the recommendations were **CONSIDERED** and **APPROVED**.

The Executive Officer advised that filming and production by Luk-Luk Productions is almost complete and a press release will go out asap to launch the films.

FGS2526/159 SATURDAY MARKET

The Executive Officer's report was **RECEIVED**.

Cllr Ball expressed her opposition to the John Street car park proposal, stating that the car park was busy on Saturdays and that directing activity to John Street would draw people away from the high street.

Cllr Chambers concurred with the Executive Officer's observation that Saturdays were quiet. She further agreed that market traders concluded trading too early on Tuesdays, which created safety concerns with vans positioned on pavements and traders hurrying to close their stalls. She expressed her support for the main street option.

Cllr Amery noted that a Saturday market would require higher quality provision.

There was no support for the John Street proposal.

Discussion continued on the potential costs associated with delivering a market. There was no support for any contribution from the Council, with all members agreeing that this is a commercial entity and costs should be funded via the stall income.

With regards to the potential to hold a Saturday Market on the 'meanwhile use' space at Wansbeck Square, this was unanimously supported.

FGS2526/160 SUMMER 2026 COMMUNITY EVENT – YOUTH-LED DELIVERY

It was **AGREED** to invite Youth Advisory Committee members to plan and deliver the town's 2026 summer event in place of the traditional Fair Day.

Cllr Fox expressed her agreement and stated that the organisations involved were all well-run, which would allow the Council an opportunity to have a respite.

Cllr Amery suggested that it would be a mistake to implement a hiatus, noting that the Council required more food vendors. He cautioned that if the fair did not proceed this year, public interest would begin to diminish.

Cllr Fox acknowledged that a hiatus might prove beneficial if the planning was undertaken too late and the process became rushed.

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Cllr Ball enquired as to when the Deputy Clerk would commence their role. The Executive Officer advised that interviews had not yet commenced.

Cllr Amery mentioned if time is a burning issue, could we instead push it back, rather than an entire year? The Executive Officer said yes, of course.

FGS2526/161 MEMORIAL TREE FOR GEORGE DOBSON

The planting of the memorial tree was **CONSIDERED** and **AGREED**.

Cllr Ball stated that she fully supported this proposal, noting that Mr. Dobson had been a formidable advocate for maintaining Ashington in a clean and tidy condition.

It was clarified that that proposal was for a tree rather than a seat; the Executive Officer apologised for the error on the agenda.

FGS2526/162 DATE, TIME AND VENUE FOR THE NEXT MEETING

Tuesday 12th May 2026, 6:00pm, Council Chamber.

The meeting ended at 18:43