

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

CLLRS PRESENT:

Cllrs Lynne Grimshaw (Chair), Scott Amery, Jessica Appleby, Caroline Ball, Louis Brown, Marjorie Chambers, David Coyle, Glyn Davies, Kerry Davison, Melanie Fox, Steven Roberts, John Tully, Sonia Simm, and Bob Walkinshaw.

ALSO, IN ATTENDANCE

Sarah Eden – Executive Officer and Alan Bunker – Allotments Officer.

FGS2627/013 WELCOME BY THE CHAIR

Welcome by Cllr Lynne Grimshaw.

FGS2627/014 APOLOGIES

Cllr Mark Purvis, Cllr Jim Lang, Cllr Paul Wright, Cllr Karl Green

FGS2627/015 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Two members of the public present.

FGS2627/016 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday 23rd June 2026 were **RECEIVED**. The minutes were **AGREED** as a true record, with the date heading amended from Tuesday 12th May 2026 to Tuesday 23rd June 2026.

FGS2627/017 OFFICER'S UPDATES

Allotments

Woodhorn

- Weed killing on roadways ongoing – still more to do. Enquiries made regarding PA2 qualification for weed spraying.
- Weed-sprayed vacant plot has now been occupied.
- Road works carried out.
- Invoices issued, with payments already received.
- Keys allocated to new plot holders, giving extra time after main gates are locked.
- Enquiries conducted regarding people on site.

Seaton Hirst

- Fly-tipped fridge cleared by NCC.
- NCC pest control attended – last visit regarding rats.

Nursery Park

- Tap repaired.
- Vacant plot strimmed back and re-allocated.

North Seaton

- Fly-tipped bricks have now been cleared.
- Quarterly meter readings taken for Wansbeck Road, Highmarket, and Highmarket Small Holdings. One meter needed to be dug out.

Hirst East End

- Meeting held with plot holder regarding ongoing issues.

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- *Highmarket / Wansbeck Road*
- NCC contacted regarding a branch within the Holy Sepulchre Church, which has now been made safe.

General

Pre-planned work has now been postponed, as the larger van used by Neighbourhood Services was taken for MOT on 1st July, which is usually one week out of use. This wasn't scheduled in, but efforts will be made next year to ensure that is the case.

Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR)

The Annual Return has been published on the Council's website and submitted to the external auditor. This year the Council's submission formed part of the new AGAR digital trial, in which we are participating. Based on previous years, the external audit report is expected to be returned in time for the September meeting.

Power in Place Conference

Alongside a period of leave, the Executive Officer attended the Power in Place Conference for larger town and parish councils, held in Harrogate. The conference focused on councils leading strategically in their place, the changing political landscape of devolution, and how town councils can position themselves as the principal player in their town by innovating and recognising what they are able to deliver and achieve. It was a very worthwhile event, attended by many much larger councils — Ashington likely was among the smallest in attendance — and included some newly created councils (Harrogate and Taunton) and many currently going through [local government reorganisation \(LRG\)](#).

An example of what the programme included:

Adult to Adult Conversation with Unitary Authorities — Robin Tuddenham, Solace President and Chief Executive of Calderdale Metropolitan Borough Council, on the pressures facing principal councils and how strategic partnerships between the tiers can be built on an equal footing.

The Grand Local Government Reset: From Administration to Innovation — Professor Rachel Granger, De Montfort University, on the challenges facing local government, drawing lessons from Denmark's 2007 municipal reforms.

Power in Place: The Strategic Role of Larger Town Councils in England's Changing Governance Landscape — Mel Stevens, Chief Executive, Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS).

Taking the Long View: Possibility, Practice & Place — Eve Roodhouse, Director of Strategy and Policy, Local Government Association.

A recurring theme was the nature of the conversation between town and parish councils and their unitary authorities. Much of this was of most immediate value to councils currently going through LGR, but it remains highly relevant to Ashington: although reorganisation in Northumberland took place many years ago, the devolution agenda is very much live for this Council. Unitary authorities face sustained and rising demand in adult social care and services for looked after children, which will continue to absorb an ever-greater share of their budgets. The question posed to the sector was to what extent town and parish councils are willing and able to lead on the changes this creates in their places — a question directly relevant to the strategic priorities work coming before this Council.

Neighbourhood Services

Following the seasonal recruitment, the routine set out in the Workforce Planning Report has been running for 4 weeks and is working out well. Ryan and Matthew put significant effort into bringing Station Road, Memorial Garden, the planters, and the other planted features up to a good standard, and the routine is doing as intended to maintain that standard rather than chase a backlog.

While the schedule is working well, it has not yet been tested against genuinely extreme weather, or against either operative being unavailable through leave or sickness, or across a full winter. The Executive Officer is confident in the design but is not yet able to say it has been tested under all realistic conditions and will report back if the pattern needs to flex in response. It was flexed to cope with the ASB at People's Park.

The Executive Officer is working with ward councillors on a number of smaller projects to be delivered through their ward enhancement funding.

Members may note the tilted flagpole. The contractors who carried out the works last year have returned once already to tighten the bolts; they have been contacted to request a site visit to establish if this is going to be a recurring issue.

Play Areas

Consultation has begun on the Paddock Wood play area at North Seaton; procurement will be brought to the September FGS Committee. The formal opening of North Seaton Colliery play area has now been arranged for 17th July, from 3:30pm, all Cllrs have been invited.



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Website and Social Media PR

Website

A press release is currently being prepared to inform the public of the recent website changes. Work is also underway on a new "Things to Do Around Ashington" page, which will showcase local attractions such as parks, the woods and the museum, using the same interactive search and mapping system featured elsewhere on the website.

Councillors, residents, community groups and visitors are encouraged to explore the updated website and share their feedback. Anyone who spots an issue or has suggestions for further improvements is welcome to contact the Council directly.

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 Launches Next Round of Small Grants Fund — Award Cap Doubled to £1,000	1st July 2026
Ashington Town Council Champions Community Spirit with £71,547 Investment in Local Groups	29th June 2026
Ashington Marks Armed Forces Day with Thanksgiving Service	27th June 2026
Ashington Town Council Publishes Unaudited Annual Accounts for 2025/26 — Residents Invited to Exercise Their Right to Inspect	24th June 2026

Facebook

The Council's Facebook page has continued to perform strongly over the period 8 June to 5 July 2026, with growth recorded across almost all key metrics compared to the previous reporting period.

Views reached 233,400, an increase of 23.4%, with 78.2% of views coming from non-followers, reinforcing that content is continuing to reach well beyond the existing audience. Unique viewers totalled 59,387, up 52.4% on the previous period. Content interactions reached 1,200, up 21.8%, with interactions from non-followers again exceeding those from followers, 640 compared to 529, though the margin narrowed slightly this period. Facebook visits totalled 3,600, an increase of 41%.

The page recorded 121 new follows, up 92.1% on the previous period, against just 9 unfollows, delivering a net gain of 112 followers, an increase of 187.2%. This strong follower growth also saw the page pass the **4,000 followers** milestone during the period.

Overall, this has been another period of strong performance, with continued growth in reach, engagement and visits, and the added milestone of surpassing 4,000 followers reflecting the page's growing presence across the town and beyond.

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Date	Post	Reactions	Comments	Shares
01/07/2026	📢 Update from Northumbria Police regarding Hirst Park incident 📢 Northumbria Police have issued a s...	114	45	51
09/06/2026	⚠️ People's Park Play Area Closed Until Further Notice ⚠️ Ashington Town Council regrets to inform ...	103	29	38
22/06/2026	Update: Anti-Social Behaviour at People's Park Following our earlier post asking residents to repor...	112	28	10
10/06/2026	People's Park Play Area – Now Reopened Ashington Town Council is pleased to confirm that the People...	62	7	14
16/06/2026	❤️ Community Comes Together in Tribute at the Northumberland Miners' Picnic Memorial Service ❤️ Hundr...	39	2	10
01/07/2026	💡 Ashington Town Council is pleased to announce that the next round of the Small Grant Fund will op...	5	0	12
27/06/2026	Ashington Town Council's Civic Head, Cllr Caroline Ball, joined civic and military dignitaries this...	40	3	3
12/06/2026	🏠 Pothole or play park – who do you call? 🗣️ With both Ashington Town Council and Northumberland Co...	8	0	7
23/06/2026	. Playground Consultation Share Your Ideas! 💬 Ashington Town Council is inviting local residents ...	3	0	7
09/06/2026	🕒🐦 The annual Northumberland Miners' Picnic will begin with a special Miners' Memorial Service on...	6	1	4

Events and Engagement

Sound Futures Festival

Planning for this year's Sound Futures Festival is now well underway, led by YMCA Northumberland with partners across the Youth Collaboration Partnership. The festival is a reimagining of Ashington Fair Day and, as Council previously resolved, responsibility for its delivery has passed to YMCA Northumberland and partners, marking a fresh new chapter for the event. The

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vision is a vibrant, youth-led festival in the heart of Ashington, celebrating young people, creativity, music, community and the range of opportunities available locally for young people and families.

The event is happening on Saturday 22nd August 2026, running from 11am to 6pm. The day will offer family-friendly entertainment, live music, activities, fairground rides and opportunities for the community to come together, with something for all ages — celebrating local talent, community pride, and Ashington's heritage as well as its future.

The centrepiece will be a main stage showcasing young musicians and bands from across the area, supported by an acoustic and open mic stage to keep the atmosphere flowing during changeovers and give more young performers the opportunity to take part. The confirmed line-up so far includes Bear Park, Cardboard Church, Ben Harwood, State Label, Funky Biscuit, Y-Music, Keiran Simpson, Tanzeela Ruby, Alfie and Nissi, with further acts to be announced. Around the site, themed zones are planned covering activities, sport, a market, food, and information and guidance, where organisations can showcase their services and opportunities for local young people. The overall aim is a relaxed village festival feel, with the stage as the focal point and all stalls and gazebos forming one shared festival environment.

The overall budget is modest at around £13,000, a significant proportion of which is required for essential infrastructure such as staging, PA, toilets, power and tents. Partners have been contributing activities, stalls, performers and volunteers, with a formal volunteer induction process to be introduced closer to the day. Further announcements will follow as plans develop, with updates shared through YMCA Northumberland's social media channels, and our own and momentum around the event continues to build.



Summer food provision — Full Circle Food Project

Following the Council's agreed financial support, and working through the Youth Advisory Committee, the Council is supporting a free packed lunch offer during the summer holidays with Full Circle Food Project, based at Hirst Park. Rather than limiting numbers, the opportunity will be open to all and demand-led, running one day each week across the holidays.

It had originally been expected that the Council would be match-funding, with Northumberland County Council (NCC), a larger-scale summer food offer. The provision that has come forward is scaled down from this with NCC looking at this in the future, taking a deliberate test-and-learn approach for its first year, which has the

advantage of presenting fewer barriers to families using it — there is no registration or eligibility requirement, simply a free, nutritious packed lunch for those who want one. Because of the Council's close working relationship with Full Circle Food Project, the funding arrangement reflects this: rather than a fixed grant, funding is open to reclaim based on actual demand, up to the value of the delegated funds of £2,000, ensuring the Council pays only for what is delivered

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while allowing the offer to grow if take-up is stronger. Promotion is underway, with the Council acknowledged as sponsor.



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). 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.

Date	Day	Time	Slots Available
27 th May 2026	Wednesday	1pm – 2pm	23
30 th May 2026	Saturday	2:30pm – 3:30pm	21
Total May Half Term Attendance			44

The availability of free swims continue throughout the summer holidays.

FGS2627/018 BUDGET AND EXPENDITURE 2026/27

a) Budget Report 2026/27 (July)

The updated budget and expenditure report was **RECEIVED**. There were no questions to the RFO.

b) Bank Reconciliation

The latest Bank Reconciliation, month ending 30th June 2026 was **RECEIVED**. There were no questions to the RFO.

c) *Schedule of Accounts Paid*

The schedule of accounts paid was **RECEIVED** and payments were **ENDORSED**. There were no questions to the RFO.

FGS2627/019 TREASURY MANAGEMENT – INVESTMENT OF COUNCIL FUNDS

The Committee received a report of the Executive Officer/RFO seeking a recommendation to Full Council on the adoption of an Investment Strategy and Treasury Management Policy 2026/27, the opening of an account with The Public Sector Deposit Fund (PSDF), managed by CCLA Investment Management Limited, with an initial investment of £625,000, and a consequential amendment to Financial Regulation 6.9(iv).

The Executive Officer/RFO presented the report, noting that the Council currently holds all of its funds with a single banking institution, that the Council is not eligible for FSCS deposit protection as its budget exceeds the 'small local authority' eligibility threshold, and that the proposals formed the final stage of the systematic review of the Council's reserves and financial governance under way since 2022. The indicative cash flow demonstrated that the proposed arrangement maintained ample liquidity at all times, supported by the fund's same-day access terms, and was expected to generate interest in the region of £20,000–£24,000 per annum.

In discussion, the following matters were raised:

Cllr Louis Brown expressed a preference for retaining all of the Council's funds in the existing Unity Trust Bank account, citing concerns arising from past banking and investment failures affecting local authorities, and questioned the need for change given that the current arrangement had caused the Council no harm to date. The Member's concerns were noted.

Cllr John Tully asked whether CCLA invests ethically. It was agreed that a response to the question would be prepared.

It was AGREED to RECOMMEND that Full Council:

- approves and adopts the Investment Strategy and Treasury Management Policy 2026/27;
- approves the opening of an account with The Public Sector Deposit Fund (CCLA Investment Management Limited) in the name of Ashington Town Council, with an initial investment of £625,000;
- approves the amendment to Financial Regulation 6.9(iv) as set out in Section 6 of the report;
- authorises the Executive Officer/RFO to complete the account opening documentation and to operate the arrangement in accordance with the adopted Strategy, reporting to each meeting of the Finance and General Services Committee; and requests that the use of fixed-term deposits be considered by way of a further report to the Finance and General Services Committee once the arrangement is established.

FGS2627/020 ENHANCED NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES PARTNERSHIP MEETING, 24TH MARCH 2026

The report was **RECEIVED** and **NOTED**, with all posed questions answered by Cllr David Coyle.

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Cllr John Tully asked if the Partnership Board could consider including grass cutting in the Partnership Agreement, noting that every 15 days is not sufficient, and neither is twice yearly weed spraying.

Cllr Sonia Simm raised an issue with the speed at which fly-tipping was removed by NCC, acknowledging that this was now back to the core service which is 72 hours. Cllr Simm also noted that the removal of bulky household waste was too expensive for many residents, and that NCC should look at reducing this cost. The Chair responded that County Cllrs for many years had sought the difference between the income from bulky household waste and the cost of fly-tipping, making the case for reduced fees. Cllr Simm also noted that there were overflowing bins. All members were encouraged to report overflowing bins.

Cllr Scott Amery commented that the kerb appeal works were well received, noting that issues raised in respect of grass cutting and fly-tipping were core service issues. In his opinion the frequency of grass cutting was not the issue. Cllr Amery commented that the problem is the quality of grass-cutting, noting the cutting in People's Park as an amenity space to be very poor indeed.

Cllr Louis Brown raised concern about the appearance in the Hirst ward, noting the area around the football club and pavement towards the hospital.

Cllr Melanie Fox acknowledged concerns about weeds, but noted the biodiversity gains from weed growth, which subsequently resulted in better health and wellbeing outcomes.

FGS2627/021 YOUTH ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING, 15TH JUNE 2026

The report was **RECEIVED** and **NOTED**. Cllr Caroline Ball noted that the plans for Sound Futures Festival were progressing well.

In response to a question regarding the summer food opportunity, the EO explained that NCC confirmed it would not be possible to arrange funding in time for summer holidays 2026. With this in mind the Town Council's commitment to funding packed lunches by Full Circle Food Project, with some youth work delivered by Beyond Youth was being supported.

FGS2627/022 LOCAL TRANSPORT PLAN: ROAD CONDITION RATINGS

The conditions ratings information shared by NCC Highways was **RECEIVED**.

Members discussed the ratings. It was suggested by Cllr Amery that mileage figures would be helpful.

FGS2627/023 LOCAL TRANSPORT PLAN: REQUEST FOR FURTHER INFORMATION FROM NCC HIGHWAYS (placed on the agenda by Cllr David Coyle)

Members considered the item placed on the agenda by Cllr David Coyle, seeking further information from Northumberland County Council following the presentation of the Local Transport Plan Capital Programme 2026–2029 on 14th April 2026 and the subsequent provision of road condition ratings for the Ashington wards.

During discussion, Cllr Lynne Grimshaw raised the status of priorities identified under previous Local Transport Plan arrangements. Members noted and discussed several highways priorities in Ashington, and the Councils lack of progress towards these. The Executive Officer noted that these matters were related but separate to the proposal placed on the agenda, suggesting that

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if Cllrs wished to debate individual highway concerns, consideration could be given to a separate committee, or meeting.

Cllr Caroline Ball recommended a Highways Committee would be a good way forward, supported by Cllr Steven Roberts. It was noted that these matters had not been published on the agenda and could not therefore be determined at the meeting; they would be added to a future agenda for consideration, with appropriate terms of reference.

It was AGREED to write to Northumberland County Council requesting the information set out in the agenda item, namely: the Green, Amber and Red condition ratings for each of the other areas of the county (North Northumberland, Tynedale, Castle Morpeth, and Cramlington, Bedlington and Seaton Valley); confirmation of the date and survey period to which the current ratings apply, including mileage information, including whether this differs between A, B, C and unclassified roads; the confirmed 2026/27 works programme by named location for those schemes presented as "Countywide" or "Various"; and the outcome of the North East Combined Authority report on the £9.4m Reserve Schemes (Highway Maintenance Incentive Fund) and how these schemes will be allocated;

The response, once received, be reported to the Finance and General Services Committee for further consideration and any action arising.

FGS2627/024 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.

FGS2627/025 STAFFING MATTERS – DEPUTY TOWN CLERK

The Committee received the report of the Executive Officer presenting the recommendation of the Personnel Committee, agreed unanimously at its meeting on 25th June 2026 and circulated to all members thereafter, together with the full Deputy Clerk Options Report previously shared with members by email.

The report set out the background to the recommendation, namely the earlier unsuccessful recruitment to the Deputy Town Clerk post and the risks identified in the Workforce Planning Report relating to succession planning and statutory officer cover, capacity to progress the Council's Climate Change ambitions, and capacity to deliver events and member-led projects. Four options were presented for consideration.

The Personnel Committee recommended that the Council proceed with Option A: to recruit to a post focused on Climate Action, Events, and Engagement at SCP 29–32, with the expectation that the successful candidate would develop toward Deputy Clerk capability over time, including enrolment on the CiLCA qualification no sooner than after the first full financial year in post, with grading and any deputising responsibility to be revisited on completion. The Personnel Committee confirmed it had discussed and been fully assured on succession planning, the training and development support to be provided, and the contingency position should recruitment prove unsuccessful.

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Members noted that, should recruitment not bring forward suitable candidates, the agreed contingency would be to move to Option C — contracting events delivery externally while maintaining climate and engagement work in-house — and to take stock of the position at that point.

It was AGREED to APPROVE the Personnel Committee recommendation, and that the Council proceed to recruitment for a Climate, Events and Engagement post on the basis of Option A as set out in the report.

That, in the event recruitment does not bring forward suitable candidates, the contingency arrangement under Option C be implemented, with the position reviewed at that point.

The meeting ended at 19:25

DRAFT