

AGENDA 6, Enc i) ASHINGTON TOWN COUNCIL, DRAFT MINUTES OF THE FULL COUNCIL MEETING, HELD ON TUESDAY 23rd June 2026, AT 6:00PM AT ASHINGTON TOWN HALL

CLLRS PRESENT

Cllrs Mark Purvis (Chair), Scott Amery, Jessica Appleby, Caroline Ball, Louis Brown, Marjorie Chambers, David Coyle, Glyn Davies, Melanie Fox, Lynne Grimshaw, Jim Lang, Steven Roberts, John Tully, Paul Wright, Sonia Simm, Bob Walkinshaw, and Karl Green.

ALSO, IN ATTENDANCE

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

FC2627/021 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Kerry Davison.

FC2627/022 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (DOI)

There were no declarations of interest.

FC2627/023 DISPENSATIONS

There were no dispensations requested.

FC2627/024 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There were 4 members of the public present.

A member of the public asked the following questions, received in advance on 26th May:
(copied as received)

Q1. re Ashington Town Forum TOR. It is hard to disagree with the Purpose of the Forum. Under methods is states “look for opportunities to engage with other stakeholders in the town....Constructive relationship with property owners. Yet there are only Strategic Business and no representatives of the many smaller businesses and retailers in the town centre and around the whole town. These strategic businesses are important and will play a big part in major developments. Does the council think it would be useful to have some formal representation of the smaller businesses too? Similarly on Education the new college and EPNE are a vital part of education and training, but there are more children in the schools form 5 to 18 than the college. Shouldn't the school partnerships be involved too? There is no mention of the health sector, from GPs to the District hospital. This may be covered elsewhere but I believe it needs consideration. What does the Town Council think of this suggestion? Confidentiality. While I agree there are some commercially sensitive matters does the council think it would be better for this section to read; “ All participants are expected to respect the commercially sensitive nature of some developments and to maintain the confidentiality of such information disclosed within the meeting” Does the council think that the present wording is too restrictive for a forum aimed to bring a cohesive approach to the development, prosperity and community of the town? The mantra should be tell as much as possible to as many people as possible as early in the design /planning process as possible.

Response - The Terms of Reference for the Ashington Town Forum are set by Northumberland County Council, not Ashington Town Council, and the Council itself is not in a position to offer a formal view on the suggested changes to membership or to the confidentiality wording, as these are matters for NCC to determine. Individual Cllrs did not wish to offer their own personal views on the points raised.

Q2. Size of council workforce. The running costs of the council are a major part of the budget, and hence precept. I note the staff numbers are increasing. Has the council been able to identify any waste that has been eliminated as some councillors gave the impression when seeking election last year that there could be savings?

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Response - Staff numbers have decreased from 7 FTE to 5.4 FTE. The Council does not comment on statements made by individual councillors during election campaigns, as these are not matters of Council record. The Council has not identified or eliminated a specific item or category of spending that could be described as "waste." Staffing levels and the overall budget are determined by service need, statutory requirements, and member-led budget setting, and are kept under regular review by the Personnel Committee and Finance & General Services Committee.

A member of the public asked the following questions, received in advance on 18th June:

(Copied as received)

Q1 whether Ashington Town Council had requested that the Police and Crime Commissioner attend a town council meeting to discuss crime in Ashington.

Response - It was confirmed that no such request had been made at this time.

Q2 whether there would be an increase in spending on the Ashington Christmas lights display this year, and whether fun fair rides would feature.

Response - It was reported the Christmas Lights Displays budget has increased from £41,000 to £55,000. This year Ashington will have an amazing fully dressed and lit 8 metre Nordica Tree instead of the Cone Tree. The budget for the Christmas Lights Switch-On event has increased from £5,000 to £10,000. Planning for the event has not started yet.

Q3 when an announcement would be made regarding the Saturday market, noting that all necessary permissions had been approved.

Response - It was reported that an update was still awaited.

Q4 whether the town council would support proposals for a brown tourism board to be sited near the MOT centre on Station Road, to showcase the level of tourism in Ashington, and noted that Northumberland County Council had also been contacted regarding the proposal.

Response - Members asked the questioner to share their ideas with the council and to confirm whether discussions with Northumberland County Council were ongoing, noting that they were already in contact with Northumberland County Council on this, they would be the relevant authority for any necessary permissions given it relates to highways signage.

FC2627/025 DRAFT MINUTES OF PREVIOUS FULL COUNCIL MEETING

It was **AGREED** to **RECEIVE** the minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday 26th May 2026 as a true record.

FC2627/026 FINANCIAL OVERVIEW

The financial report for year ending March 2026 was **RECEIVED** and there were NO questions for the Responsible Financial Officer.

FC2627/027 UPDATED FINANCIAL AND MANAGEMENT RISK ASSESSMENT, JUNE 2026

In accordance with the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 (SI2015/234), and the Governance and Accountability for Smaller Authorities in England — Practitioners' Guide 2025, issued by the Smaller Authorities' Proper Practices Panel (SAPPP), specifically Assertion 5 - Risk Management, it was **AGREED to RECEIVE and APPROVE** the updated document presented by the Executive Officer/RFO.

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Cllr Lynne Grimshaw thanked the officer for their continued work on this.

FC2627/028 INTERNAL AUDIT 2025/26

In accordance with Regulation 3 and Regulation 5 of the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 (SI 2015/234), and the Governance and Accountability for Smaller Authorities in England — Practitioners' Guide 2025, issued by the SAPPP, specifically Assertion 6 — Internal Audit and Assertion 7 — Reports from Auditors; the following documents were presented...

a) Internal Audit Report, year ending March 2026

The Annual Internal Audit signed AGAR for year ending March 2026, carried out by Susan Saunders was **RECEIVED and APPROVED**, with no matters to note or action.

b) Internal Audit Checklist, year ending March 2026

The Audit Report, carried out by Susan Saunders was **RECEIVED AND APPROVED**, with no matters to note or action.

c) Actions Arising from the Internal Audit Report, year ending March 2026

There were no actions recommended.

FC2627/029 ANNUAL GOVERNANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY RETURN (AGAR) YEAR ENDING MARCH 2026

a) Annual Governance Statements

The Annual Governance Statements were **RECEIVED** and **RESPONDED** to. The Chair and Executive Officer both signed the document.

The recommendation of the Executive Officer to agree 'NO' in respect of Assertion 10 - IT and Data Management was **NOTED** and **AGREED**.

b) End of Year Bank Reconciliation, March 2026

The End of Year Bank Reconciliation, March 2026 was **RECEIVED** and **APPROVED**.

c) Accounting Statements

The Accounting Statements for the year ending March 2026 was **RECEIVED** and **APPROVED**. The Chair formally signed and dated the declaration, which had been signed by the Executive Officer/RFO.

d) AGAR Submission 2025/26

The submission of the AGAR for year ending March 2026 was **APPROVED** for submission and publication.

FC2627/030 NOTICE OF PUBLIC RIGHTS AND PUBLICATION OF UNAUDITED ANNUAL GOVERNANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY RETURN

The dates set for the period for the exercise of public rights of inspection as 25th June 2026 – 5th August 2026 were **APPROVED**.

FC2627/031 INTERNAL AUDIT 2025/26

In accordance with Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015, part 2 (1), and having checked their professional qualifications, competency and independence, **it was AGREED** to re-appoint Mrs Susan Saunders as the Internal Auditor for 2026/27, and to agree that the Executive Officer signs the terms of engagement.

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FC2627/032 GOVERNANCE

Members considered the appointment of a councillor to undertake routine checks of the Council's financial statements and accounting records, to provide assurance that the accounts are being properly kept, in accordance with the Council's system of internal control.

It was **AGREED** that Cllr Kerry Davison would be responsible for undertaking routine checks (financial statements and accounting records) to ensure accounts are being kept properly and to comply with the Council's review of effectiveness of internal audit.

The Full Council Meeting was formally closed at 18:14.

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