AGENDA 6, Enc i) ASHINGTON TOWN COUNCIL, DRAFT MINUTES OF THE FULL COUNCIL MEETING, HELD ON TUESDAY 29th SEPTEMBER 2026, AT 6:00PM AT ASHINGTON TOWN HALL

CLLRS PRESENT
Cllrs Melanie Fox (Chair), Scott Amery, Jessica Appleby, Louis Brown, Marjorie Chambers, David Coyle, Glyn Davies, Kerry Davison, John Tully, Karl Green, Lynne Grimshaw, Jim Lang, Sonia Simm and Bob Walkinshaw.

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

FC2627/042 WELCOME BY THE CHAIR
Welcomed by Cllr Melanie Fox

FC2627/043 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE
Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs Caroline Ball, Paul Wright, Steven Roberts and Mark Purvis.

FC2627/044 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (DOI)
There were no declarations of interest.

FC2627/045 DISPENSATIONS
There were no dispensations requested.

FC2627/046 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION
There were two members of the public present.

FC2627/047 DRAFT MINUTES OF PREVIOUS FULL COUNCIL MEETING
It was **AGREED** to **RECEIVE** the minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday 28th July 2026 as a true record.

FC2627/048 WANSBECK WAY PRESENTATION – Lesley Silvera in attendance
Members **RECEIVED** a presentation from Lesley Silvera of Groundwork North East & Cumbria (GWNE) on work along the River Wansbeck, including the proposed Wansbeck Way, a 35-mile walking route from sea to source. Lesley advised that one purpose of attending was to recruit a Councillor as a volunteer.

Lesley reported that a number of agencies have been involved in the project since 2018, including barrage investigative work and pontoon replacement. The project is one of six national pilots working at landscape scale in the upper Wansbeck catchment with major partners, and also includes peat restoration with Forestry England, exhibitions, guided walks and events.

The principal funder is Northumbrian Water through its Blue Spaces Fund, which aims to deliver access and recreational facilities, wildlife and biodiversity enhancements, and improved water quality. Northern Powergrid will fund saltmarsh work along the Wansbeck estuary and events at Wansbeck Riverside Park as part of its social responsibility for upgrading a substation.

GWNE requires volunteers and asked for the Council's help in promoting these opportunities, as well as in joining up with existing groups, publicising events and providing a steering group member. Volunteer roles include a small trained and equipped group to manage invasive species; water quality monitoring at 12 sites from spring 2027; photography for exhibitions and reference; tree planting and aftercare, with planting in autumn 2027; pollinator surveys from April to September 2027; a student-led social media project; and litter picks in areas not already covered.

Cllr Tully expressed his full support for the work of GWNE and asked whether it is funded by Northumberland County Council (NCC). Lesley confirmed that GWNE receives no funding from NCC, although it receives very good staff support. Cllr Tully asked whether the barrage investigative work affects wildlife along the riverside. Lesley advised that it inevitably will, but that the funding does not allow further research. Investigative work has been carried out along Sandy Bay, the post at Dragon's Teeth will be repaired because of the project, and the whole area is being monitored. Part of the project aims to put restoration on the map.

Cllr Tully asked what effect the barrage not working has on habitat and wildlife. Lesley explained that the main concern is fish passage; a fish pass exists but does not work well. Experts consulted have corroborated that the damaged barrage is causing a passage issue. Historic maps from around 100 years ago show the extent of change and are available at www.keystothepast.info.

Cllr Brown commented that the topic is of great interest and noted that his allotment is 50 yards from the barrage. He asked whether GWNE had carried out the investigative work. Lesley advised that it was carried out by the University and the Environment Agency under a contract with NCC. Cllr Brown stated that the barrage is open 20% at all times, is neither natural nor artificial, and is causing issues.

Cllr Chambers advised that NCC had examined the matter some years ago, with involvement from Wansbeck Water Interest, but that the investigation cost millions and the work did not proceed. Lesley noted that a report exists from the Royal Haskoning [*to be confirmed*]. Cllr Simm advised that NCC has a working group looking at the barrage and its failings.

Cllr Grimshaw, who was a County Councillor at the time, confirmed that an investigation took place, that the cost would have run to millions of pounds, and that no funder came forward, so the project did not proceed.

Cllr Tully stated that past events may not be known to all, but that the Council wished to be made aware of them and kept informed, and to establish exactly what had taken place and the cost involved. He noted that the barrage is an asset located in both Wansbeck and Ashington.

It was AGREED that the Executive Officer, on behalf of the Council, should make a Freedom of Information (FOI) Request to NCC and the Environment Agency for information pertaining to the investigations and findings on the barrage.

It was **AGREED** to appoint Cllr Melanie Fox to represent the Council on the project.

FC2627/049 ANNUAL GOVERNANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY RETURN (AGAR), YEAR ENDING MARCH 2026

a) External Auditor Report/Certificate

The External Auditor Report/Certificate was **RECEIVED**.

b) Notice of Conclusion of Audit

The publication of the Notice of Conclusion of Audit was **RECEIVED** and **ENDORSED**.

Cllr Grimshaw, on behalf of all Councillors, expressed sincere thanks to the Executive Officer and the Finance and Events Officer for their sterling work on the finances.

FC2627/050 NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL PUBLIC SPACES PROTECTION ORDER (PSPO) – CONSUMPTION OF ALCOHOL: CONSULTATION

Northumberland County Council's consultation on a proposed countywide PSPO relating to the consumption of alcohol in public places was **CONSIDERED**, no comments or objection.

FC2627/051 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

The following resolution was **PASSED**.

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.

FC2627/052 CLIMATE, EVENTS AND ENGAGEMENT MANAGER - APPOINTMENT

Members **RECEIVED** a verbal report from the Personnel Committee Chair, Cllr Lynne Grimshaw, following interviews for the post of Climate, Events and Engagement Manager. The Council **ENDORSED** the decision of the interview panel to offer the appointment to Stef Anderson.

The Executive Officer reported that the post had been formally offered to and accepted by Stef Anderson. Six candidates were interviewed, and the strength of interest was high. The Executive Officer noted that positioning the role as climate, events and engagement, moving into a deputy clerk function, rather than a straight deputy clerk role, had attracted greater interest. The appointee is required to serve two months' notice and will start in December.

Cllr Grimshaw advised that the Personnel Committee was impressed by the quality of applicants and found shortlisting difficult. She thanked the Executive Officer and the Councillors who attended for their contribution to the process.

The Executive Officer noted that the Council has indicated a wish to see more public events and climate change work across Ashington, and that this role brings these functions together.

The Full Council Meeting was formally closed at 18:36.

DRAFT