

Overview

In 2022/23 Ashington Town Council delivered significantly more spending and invested considerably more in assets than in the previous year. This indicates a greater level of output from the Council and its officers.

Financially, this was achieved with more strategically controlled reserves, and without any increase in the precept. Whilst spending and investing more, we also attracted more external funding.

Capital Spending and Assets

The Council's large scale capital projects realised greater amounts of funding in 2022/23 (£101,615), than in 2021/22 (£74,211). The increase of £27,404 was achieved for bus shelters, the Jack Charlton and Footballing Heritage Project, defibrillators, and Alexandra Road Play Area.

The Council carried out several high value capital projects in 2022/23. This included the Jack Charlton Statue (£79,466), and linked Ashington's Footballing Heritage Storyboards (£38,127).

There were significant capital works in the town's allotments. This included fencing (£25,950) and water system (£15,635) at North Seaton Colliery, and new regulation standpipes (56) on all allotment sites (£32,465).

The Council installed a new play area at Alexandra Road (£43,453) and purchased twelve defibrillators and external cabinets (£14,820). Seven new bus shelters were purchased and installed (£46,580).

Total increased capital spending from 2021/22 to 2022/23 amounts to £303,981 which is included in the Council's Assets Register, which was presented to Full Council in May.

General Expenditure**Vehicle Costs**

In other expenditure there was increased spending on the Council's works van as we disposed of our diesel van and entered into a lease agreement for an electric van. The large deposit and repayments increased spending year on year by just over £12,000.

Events

In 2021/22 as we came out of COVID, there was little spending on events (£1,400), whereas we spent £15,643 in 2022/23. This remains below expected but represents an increase of £14,243.

Allotments

Allotment spending has been significant in 2022/23 as the Council tries to catch-up on capital jobs and sees an increase in spending on clearances, repairs, and water.

In the current financial year (2023/24) the budget for capital and general expenditure has been split to allow instant monitoring, and work is ongoing to reduce the Council's spending commitment in this area.

Capital spending on allotments (included above), was £76,050 compared with £22,806 in 2021/22. In general expenditure there has been an increase in the need for clearance and repair work, the costs compare at £50,195 in 2022/23 to £37,233 in 2021/22, representing an increase of £12,962.

Christmas Lights

The Council improved Christmas Lights displays in 2022/23 spending £38,608 compared to £18,691 in 2021/22. This represents an increase of £19,917.

Environmental Improvements

The Council improved the appearance of the town centre and gateways into the town in 2022/23 with newly designed sustainable planting schemes. In terms of environmental enhancements the Council increased spending from £45,244 in 2021/22 to £72,506 in 2022/23, representing an increase of £27,262.

Climate Change

Spending on Climate Change initiatives also increased with several tree planting schemes across the town. This rose from £7,533 in 2021/22 to £33,793 in 2022/23. This represents an increase in spending of £26,260.

Election Costs

In 2021/22 the Council had no election costs, but we paid costs of £21,585 in 2022/23 because of a casual vacancy in 2022, and all out elections in May 2021 being invoiced late. The budget required for elections in May 2026 is being contributed to over the years via our earmarked reserves.

CCTV

The Council has invested in more CCTV coverage across the town. In 2021/22 spending on CCTV was £5,724, in 2022/23 this increased to £18,379. This represents an increase in spending of £12,655.

Office and Admin

The Council has made efficiencies in office and administration costs resulting in approximately £5,000 less spending across these items.

Concluding Comments

The Council's Annual Governance and Accountability Return is being presented to the Full Council meeting on Tuesday 20th June.

The information contained above is included as part of the return to the External Auditor to comply with the requirement to explain variances of more than 15% lower or higher than the previous year.

If anyone has any questions about any of the information contained, please contact me.

Sarah Eden
Executive Officer/Responsible Financial Officer