AGENDA 7, Enc ii) OFFICERS UPDATE - 10th March 2026

Town & Parish Council Conference

The event last Thursday was very well attended. Sarah was there on behalf of SLCC but will share slides as they are received.

IT & Asset Management – Looking Ahead

As part of our ongoing commitment to running the council as efficiently and effectively as possible, I am beginning to explore a modernisation of our IT systems. Our current package is not serving us as well as it should — in particular, the lack of integration between councillor tablets and calendar functionality continues to cause frustration and doesn't appear to have a fix. This is symptomatic of a broader picture where our systems are not working cohesively. At the same time, I am looking at dedicated asset management solutions — sector-specific products exist that would bring together our asset register, mapping, inspections, and job management into a single, joined-up platform; this is something we lack. Similar to the decision to move to a dedicated accountancy package, I believe the time is approaching to take the same step with our wider IT provision, especially with the deadlines requirements of WCAG 2.2 accessibility standards (Assertion 10).

Christmas Lights Contract

I have a meeting this week to discuss the replacement of the artificial cone tree with an artificial Nordic sustainable Christmas tree. NORDIKA, SUSTAINABLE CHRISTMAS TREE - Blachere Illumination

Neighbourhood Services

Play Areas

Repairs and maintenance continue across all play areas following each site having a RoSPA Play Safety inspection. Kompan have been booked to spend a day in People's Park with Ryan Appleby to carry out more involved repairs, do some training on shackles, gates and bearings, and to replace the track rider.

Repainting and resurfacing are a priority consideration for the spring.

North Seaton Colliery Play Area is complete apart from the basketball net, and some internal verge works. The contractor has not confirmed when this will be carried out – the invoice will not be paid until fully complete.

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

Five Haydon ward seats have arrived. The exact locations for the three on Newbiggin Road need to be agreed with Ward Cllrs. Two replacements beside the level crossing on Black Close Bank will

be made, with the two insitu offered to NCC Green Spaces for QEII Park following an approach by Cllrs for more seats in this area; we are awaiting a response on this.

Horticulture

Weed spraying started at the end of last season has been completed, with all assets and play areas now sprayed.

February visits were carried out on all horticultural features and this has commenced again for March. Soon we will move to more frequent visits for high season.

Costs are being sought for red and white seasonal planting which we hope will inspire great support for England in the World Cup during the summer.

Wall repairs surrounding the Woodhorn Gateway feature were carried out promptly by a local contractor.

Events and Engagement

Keep Britian Tidy - Spring Clean

We have planned to facilitate KBT Spring Clean inspired stalls at the Ashington Market on Tuesday 17th March. This will include relevant partners including NCC Recycling & Waste Management, Green Dog Walkers, Ashington Community Litter Pickers, and Northumbrian Water.

We will also be offering up litter picking equipment to anyone who wants to take part in litter picks around the town – litter pickers, gloves, bin bags, and we will liaise with NCC for their removal.

Youth Engagement - Northumberland College Roadshow Thursday 12th February 2026 Engaging with students and sharing community opportunities

Ashington Town Council participated in its first 2026 Northumberland College roadshow event on Thursday 12th February, connecting directly with students to raise awareness of local services and opportunities available in the town.

The event was expertly coordinated by Carla Thompson, Northumberland County Council's Community Coordinator, and Vanessa Jones, Head of Student Services bringing together a diverse range of organisations serving the Ashington community. Participating groups included ESCAPE Family Support, Pride Action North, Northumberland Thriving Together, Health Trainers, Northumberland Young Carers, Bernicia and the Hirst Strategic Team, creating a vibrant information marketplace for students.

The Town Council's stall proved popular with students, who enjoyed trying their luck on a tombola featuring prizes including sweets, water bottles, charging cables, and power banks. Beyond the fun activities, students also had the opportunity to contribute to Ashington Town Council's youth survey, Gary Holmes, Administration and Communications Officer informed students that the purpose of the youth survey is to ensure their voices are heard in shaping local services.

Information about the council-funded free-swimming sessions at Ashington Leisure Centre during the February half term was also distributed, promoting health and wellness opportunities available to young people in the community.

Sharon Parmley, Engagement and Events Officer for Ashington Town Council, reflected on the successful event: "Thank you to Carla for arranging this excellent opportunity. College roadshows provide students with a valuable chance to discover what services and support are available to

them right here in Ashington. It was fantastic to engage directly with young people and hear their perspectives."

The roadshow represents part of Ashington Town Council's ongoing commitment to meaningful youth engagement and ensuring young residents are aware of the support networks, activities, and opportunities accessible to them locally.

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.

February Half Term – Session Report

Two free swim sessions were delivered during the February half term holiday. Both sessions were well-attended, demonstrating strong community demand for the initiative.

Date	Day	Time	Attendance
18th February 2025	Wednesday	1pm – 2pm	**39**
21st February 2025	Saturday	1pm to 2pm	**37**
Total February Half Term Attendance			**76**

A combined total of 76 residents attended across the two February sessions, reflecting the continued popularity and community value of the programme.

Upcoming Sessions – Easter Holidays

Four free swim sessions are 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.

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

We have new plot holders at Woodhorn following works to bring poor plots back into use. There are further plots to occupy following continued team effort and support from allotment holders to Alan.

Further tap repairs have been made.

Temporary repairs have been carried out on roads at Highmarket and Wansbeck Road using road planings.

Plans are in place to resurface roads at Woodhorn in the next couple of weeks, depending on weather. Several hedges have been cut back by plot holders at Woodhorn, opening the gardens up with very visible improvements.

A communal area has been cleared at North Seaton. This includes hedges cut back, rubble removed, materials separated for recycling, and weed spraying carried out. Alan was supported by some allotment holders with was hugely appreciated. NCC will chip the hedges, with chippings to be recycled by plot holders. In the future, this area will be levelled and road planings added so it can be used.

NCC have cut back the hedge line between Highmarket Allotments and the Holy Sepulchre church

Woodland bird boxes have been installed at Green Lane and North Seaton Colliery.

Weed spraying on allotment sites has started, with Nursery Park complete.

Website and Social Media PR

Website

Widescope was contacted to add an extra slot to meetings to upload scanned copies of the signed agreed minutes of each meeting.

The Town Councillor page (Ashington Town Council - Town Councillors) has also been redesigned for better readability and easier reference of which Councillor is part of which committee.

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/

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Article Title	*Date*
Finance & General Services Committee Meeting on 10/03/2026	*2nd March 2026*
EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY - DEPUTY CLERK	*25th February 2026*
Ashington Town Council Offers FREE Swimming Sessions This Easter Half Term	*24th February 2026*
Ashington Town Council Supports the Great British Spring Clean with Community Event at Ashington Market	*24th February 2026*
Ashington Town Council at Northumberland College Roadshow	*16th February 2026*

Facebook

Facebook has remained relatively stable over the past month, typical for this time of year as the post-Christmas excitement dies down. Looking ahead, the Easter Trail will run throughout the Easter half term from 30th March to 18th April, with over 20 shops participating once again, welcoming Aaron's Opticians as a new addition, alongside Modern Living returning for another year.

Analytics (10 Feb to 9 Mar 2026)

This period saw a dip across most metrics compared to the previous month. Views were 49,900, down 50.2%, with 13,618 unique viewers (down 34.4%). Content interactions totalled 244, down 36.1%, and page visits came in at 1,100, down 31.2%. The page gained 18 new follows against 5 unfollows, giving a net gain of 13 followers, though this is down 38.1% on the prior period. The one positive note is that non-follower views grew slightly by 2.5%, accounting for 53.4% of all views, indicating the content is still reaching beyond the existing audience.

Upcoming Meetings & Events

Great British Spring Clean – 17th March, 10:00am

Wansbeck Valley Foodbank AGM – 23rd March, 2:00pm

Partnership Meeting – 24th March, 2:00pm

Full Council Meeting – 31st March, 6:00pm

Ashington Town Forum – 1st April, 3:00pm (held at Bernicia Headquarters) with site tour of new college beforehand at 1:30pm.

Grants Advisory Meeting – 8th April, 6:30pm