

AGENDA 7, Enc vi) YOUTH ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING, HELD ON 17TH JULY 2026 AT YMCA, COMMENCING AT 2:00PM

Present:

(Chair) Cllr Caroline Ball, ATC
Kirsty Bush, Ashington Family Hub
Rob Cox, YMCA
Cllr Karl Green, ATC
Cllr Melanie Fox, ATC
Cllr Lynne Grimshaw, ATC
Samantha Kuk, Northumberland College
Jane McGee, Wansbeck Community Links
Ricky Murray, YMCA
Sharon Parmley, ATC
Keir Tattersdill, Active Through Football
Carla Thompson, NCC

1. Welcome and Introductions

Councillor Caroline Ball welcomed everyone to the meeting and attendees introduced themselves and the meeting commenced.

2. Partner Updates

The following partners provided updates on their current activities and recent developments:

YMCA Northumberland

The weekly programme is continuing Monday to Thursday in Ashington and Friday in Bedlington and all sessions have been well attended.

Northumberland College

- A Freshers Event will be held on Thursday 17th September.
- The new college will be opening at the beginning of November.

3. Ashington Town Council Update

ATC Summer Event Funding Update – Sound Futures Festival

- Event schedules for main stage and acoustic stage ready, with headliners Bear Park playing the last set on the main stage
- 42 traders attending, including 21 market stalls and food vans
- Site layout and zones for sports, youth, and community finalised
- Event meeting brief Tuesday 18 August, 6.30pm at YMCA

4. Opportunities

The July round of small grant funding seen 11 successful applicants awarded £5,898. Read News link [here](#).

The next round of ATC Small Grant Fund is open for applications Wednesday 7 October 2026, closing date Wednesday 21 October 2026.

AGENDA 7, Enc vi) YOUTH ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING, HELD ON 17TH JULY 2026 AT YMCA, COMMENCING AT 2:00PM

The Chair invited Jane McGee from Wansbeck Community Links to present the following proposal for consideration.

Wansbeck Community Links - Proposal Presented to Ashington Advisory Committee

Wansbeck Community Links are a team of six Social Prescribing Link Workers, including one manager and one team lead. We are employed by Cygnus Support, a long-standing counselling charity, based in Ashington, in partnership with Wansbeck PCN. Seaton Park surgery here in Ashington is the largest of the PCN's GP practices that the team offer 1-1 patient support to.

As well as supporting patients 1-1, the team run several wellbeing activities across the PCN that are open to all, not just the PCN's patients. Activities ran in Ashington include a Walk & Talk, Coffee morning in surgery, Wellbeing Wednesday, Creative Writing, Cancer Peer Support and most recently Lego Lunch Club.

During all of these activities, attendees are supported by a Link Worker, so this can help reduce feelings of anxiety around attending something new.

Only the Teams wages are funded by the PCN, and all the community activities and events are a direct result of the Team themselves applying for small pots of funds, fundraising and through donations.

We would like to seek funding from Ashington Town Council, via the Youth Fund for £2,760 to secure a small base within Ashington YMCA for a pilot of 12 months.

We carried out a similar project in 2022 when through an agreement with NCC, we had a free base within Hirst Welfare in exchange for us actively engaging with the local community, and encouraging them to return to utilise the centre, following Covid.

This also included an informal drop in for teenagers during the school holidays where they could seek advice and talk things through if had any worries during the school break.

We had a very successful year and had meaningful engagement with over 2,000 residents from varying age groups, and with many positive outcomes. (Report available on request).

Ashington and the wider Northumberland area, see young adults with autism face high rates of co-occurring mental health issues. Local surveys reveal that the Ashington and Blyth areas have the highest concentration of autistic youth seeking support, with over 60% of autistic people experiences co-occurring psychiatric conditions like anxiety and mood disorders.

Northumberland exceeds the national average for children and young people being admitted to hospital for self-harm and mental health needs.

AGENDA 7, Enc vi) YOUTH ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING, HELD ON 17TH JULY 2026 AT YMCA, COMMENCING AT 2:00PM

The Office for national statistics data places the population of Ashington at roughly 28,000 residents with young adults aged 18-25 making up approximately 8% to 10% of the population (around 2,500 people).

There is no exact record of how many people live with Autism in Ashington but an estimated local figure using the UK prevalence data estimates that roughly 1 – 1.76% that is between 280 – 500 people are on the spectrum. Given that younger generations have significantly higher rates of formal identification, local data indicates that approximately 200 of these individuals are children and young people under 25.

The above numbers relate to residents who have been formally diagnosed as on the Autistic spectrum but how many are out there slipping through the gaps who have no formal diagnosis, are waiting a long time for one or don't want the 'label' of a formal diagnosis, but all of whom are struggling and need support?

These are the very young people who our team are trying to identify and help. By running activities of interest in a local setting, we can entice these young people, most of whom are NEET, out from their bedrooms and into a safe and inclusive environment such as the YMCA.

Once the team build up rapport and trust with these young people, these activities can take on a wellbeing slant, such as introducing bite size sessions around dealing with stress, depression and anxiety, as well as general wellbeing such as diet, exercise, education, training and even employment.

Our team are also a vital link into Primary care services for these young people, who may not normally seek support from their GP surgery.

We have secured funding from the VCSE MH Alliance to help run our Lego/Games Lunch club, which meets weekly on a Wednesday afternoon. This is proving popular with neurodiverse young adults and some young people from our LGBTQ+ community and is already building up a steady attendance.

The YMCA have been very generous in offering us a discount on the Youth Hub room, which was a venue chosen by the group themselves, after initially trialling Hirst Welfare. The group are aware of the amount of funding on offer from the VCSE and we are actively encouraging them as a group to make decisions on how funding can be spent to help develop the group but also attract additional funds to help its longevity.

Our current funding for this project does not cover having a daily base which is why we are reaching out to the Youth Advisory Committee.

Having a staff member in the YMCA Monday to Friday will offer an opportunity for more young people with issues to seek immediate support, offering that stitch in time intervention that can stop issues escalating so much that they begin to effect wellbeing.

AGENDA 7, Enc vi) YOUTH ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING, HELD ON 17TH JULY 2026 AT YMCA, COMMENCING AT 2:00PM

The base will also allow for more joined up working to ensure all the needs of this lost group of young people can be addressed in one place – no wrong door.

Jane McGee – Wansbeck Community Links Manager.

The YAC Committee supported the funding proposal and it was AGREED that Chair, Cllr Caroline Ball should present the proposal to the next meeting of the Council for consideration.

Full Circle Food Project

Revised plans for the project are going well, the free packed lunches on Tuesdays and Thursday during the summer holidays have been a huge success.

Ashington Junior Parkrun

The proposal taken to the Council meeting was agreed, Cllr Caroline Ball presented the proposal, and Councillors agreed the £4,800 startup costs adding to the already committed £500 from the small grant fund.

Councillors agreed that the Junior Parkrun provided the perfect opportunity to create a regular event for young people, with all the benefits of exercising outdoors brings as well as a legacy event created from the youth fund.

Cllr Ball confirmed the final sign off was happening imminently and the Junior Parkrun will start in September at the Hirst Welfare.

5. Actions and Next Steps

The following actions were agreed:

Rob Cox — to report on the Sound Futures Festival at the next meeting.

All partners — share Autumn programmes.

Cllr Caroline Ball / Youth Advisory Committee — Take the Wansbeck Community Links proposal to the FGS Committee of the Council.

Next Meeting – Monday 19th October, 2pm, venue TBC.