

ASHINGTON TOWN COUNCIL Proposal: Additional one-off funding for Wansbeck Valley Food Bank and Northumberland Citizens Advice

Proposed by: Cllr John Tully
Meeting date: 22nd June 2026

Proposal

That the Council awards an additional £5,000 each to Wansbeck Valley Food Bank and Northumberland Citizens Advice for 2026/27, on top of the £5,000 each recommended to them through the Annual Grants Scheme. The additional £10,000 would be funded from the underspend in this year's Annual Grants budget arising from the Grant Funding Working Group's recommendations.

I want to be completely open with Members about what this is: a decision outside the Annual Grants Scheme and its £5,000 cap. I am not asking the Council to bend its Grant Awards Policy – the cap stays in place and applies to everyone, including these two organisations, within the scheme. I am asking the Council to make a separate, one-off decision, in open session and on the record, because I believe the work these two organisations do for Ashington justifies it.

Background

Earlier in the year, several of us raised whether the £5,000 cap was the right limit for these two organisations. The Executive Officer's advice reminded Members that the Grant Awards Policy was agreed by Full Council, and that every applicant prepared and submitted their application with the cap in mind – so the cap could not fairly be stretched or worked around within the scheme, unless amended by Full Council. There was no support to increase the cap. Members were not seeking flexibility for all organisations, only for these two, and on that basis the proper route was open to us: to bring an open and transparent proposal to Council for additional funding outside the policy, provided the money could be found. At that point, so early in the financial year, it could not – so the proposal was held back.

That position has now changed. The Annual Grants round is in progress, and the recommendations being put forward by the Grant Funding Working Group would, if approved as presented, leave a £10,000 underspend in the Annual Grants budget. I want to be upfront with Members: this proposal follows on from those recommendations, and I appreciate they may not achieve full support – if Council amends them, the underspend available will change. But as matters stand there is a potential £10,000 in Annual Grants, and the Council's Youth funding has also shown some flexibility in its annual awards, giving a reasonable second source from which any shortfall could be met. On either footing, this proposal makes no call on reserves or contingency and has no impact on the precept.

Why these two organisations

Most of the organisations we support through Annual Grants serve a particular activity, interest or part of our community – and they do it brilliantly. These two are different in kind. They provide a safety net that is open to every resident of Ashington, at the worst moments of their lives, with no membership and no joining fee:

- **Wansbeck Valley Food Bank** is the last line of defence for households in crisis – a delayed benefit payment, a job loss, an unexpected bill. Demand remains stubbornly high after years of cost-of-living pressure, and in a town with Ashington's level of need it runs above the regional average. Every pound goes straight to feeding local families.
- **Northumberland Citizens Advice** tackles the causes behind the crisis – debt, benefits, housing, employment. Good advice at the right moment stops rent arrears

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becoming homelessness, and stops a debt problem becoming a food bank referral. Citizens Advice consistently shows its work returns several times its cost in income gained for clients and savings to public services.

The two work hand in hand: one deals with the emergency, the other with what caused it. Funding both properly supports residents through the whole journey, from crisis to recovery.

Keeping it fair and transparent

To protect the integrity of the Grant Awards Policy and be fair to every other applicant, I propose the following safeguards:

- This is a one-off award for 2026/27 only. It creates no entitlement and no expectation for future years – any repeat would need a fresh decision of Council, as with all budget decisions.
- As has been the case in the past, regular reports on the work carried out.

Proposed resolution

That Council resolves:

To award additional one-off funding of £5,000 to Wansbeck Valley Food Bank and £5,000 to Northumberland Citizens Advice for 2026/27, outside the Annual Grants Scheme, in recognition of the essential safety-net services both provide to Ashington residents, funded from the underspend in the Annual Grants budget arising from the Grant Funding Working Group's recommendations and, to the extent of any shortfall, from the Youth funding budget.