

AGENDA 8, Enc viii) CLERKS REPORT - NCVA REQUEST FOR EMERGENCY STABILISATION FUNDING

1. Purpose of the report

This report brings together all the information the Council now holds about NCVA's request for £15,000 of emergency stabilisation funding.

Members are asked to consider that information and decide whether they wish to place a motion to support funding on a future agenda and, if so, at what level.

This meeting cannot agree funding, because a decision to award funding has not been placed on this agenda. Section 5 explains how Members can indicate support so that the Clerk can respond to NCVA.

2. Background

The Council received a letter from Joe Jackson, Chair of Trustees of NCVA, as correspondence at the July 2026 Full Council meeting. The letter asked for time-limited emergency stabilisation funding of £15,000.

NCVA is based in Ashington and also acts as the Volunteering Centre for Northumberland. It describes itself as local voluntary and community sector (VCSE) infrastructure: governance advice, trustee and volunteer support, safeguarding guidance, funding readiness and organisational development for local groups.

The letter explains that Northumberland County Council's VCSE Infrastructure Commission was awarded to a non-local organisation. NCVA says this has left it without the core funding that previously supported its work in Ashington.

The original request was for:

- £15,000, to fund 2 core staff on a time-limited basis (described as 6 to 12 months);
- in practice, 2 staff working 3 days per week for 26 weeks;
- the stated aims being to protect local VCSE infrastructure in Ashington, maintain core staffing while other income is secured, and ensure local groups and volunteers are not disadvantaged.

NCVA states that the request is not open-ended and is not intended to replace county-level commissioning.

In the previous 12 months, the letter reports that NCVA supported over 110 local groups (74 delivering in Ashington), delivered over 330 hours of organisational development support, and had a membership of over 400 organisations.

3. Summary

NCVA has asked the Council for £15,000 of emergency stabilisation funding to employ 2 part-time staff for 26 weeks. The original letter was received as correspondence at the July 2026 Full Council meeting. This report sets out all the information received since, including NCVA's responses to the Clerk's questions, its supplementary document, activity figures, email exchanges, and a meeting between the Chair of Trustees and the Clerk, the Chair of Council and the Chair of Finance.

NCVA currently has no staff, and its trustees are managing the building and its users. They are considering options including selling the building and have asked their members to pay a small

AGENDA 8, Enc viii) CLERKS REPORT - NCVA REQUEST FOR EMERGENCY STABILISATION FUNDING

subscription. NCVA has said that £5,000, with money owed to it by VODA, would provide 15 hours a week of community development work and 15 hours of admin cover until the end of March 2027.

The request is above the £5,000 maximum of the Council's grant scheme. Any one-off funding would have to come from the contingency budget, which needs a separate motion. Funding cannot be agreed at this meeting because it is not on the agenda. Members are asked whether anyone wishes to propose, with a seconder, that a motion to support funding, and its level, be placed on the next FGS Committee agenda. The Clerk will report the outcome back to NCVA either way

4. Information received since July

Following the July meeting, the Clerk asked NCVA a series of questions. The Clerk, the Chair of Council and the Chair of Finance also met with Mr Jackson. NCVA has since provided a written response, a supplementary document (August 2026), a table of activity figures, and further information by email. All of this is summarised below.

Meeting with the Chair of Trustees

At the meeting, Mr Jackson confirmed that:

- all NCVA staff have now left, and the trustees are managing the building and its users;
- the trustees are looking at options for the future, including selling the building;
- NCVA has appealed to its members to pay a small subscription;
- NCVA is keen to receive any level of funding available, to give it breathing space to seek further funding.

Questions put to NCVA and the responses received

Question asked by the Clerk	Summary of NCVA's response
Management accounts and financial projections	Current accounts are with NCVA's accountant. NCVA offered last year's certified accounts or a summary of what has been submitted. These have not been received with the information for this report.
What happens at the end of the 26 weeks, and what alternative income is being pursued	The 26 weeks would be used to explore funding, including possible uses of the Station Road building, and to test whether the model is fit for purpose. NCVA is preparing a small bid to extend its Mind the Gap programme, testing a membership fee scheme, and meeting the National Lottery. Nothing is guaranteed.
Whether other councils or funders have been approached	NCVA is meeting the National Lottery and is preparing a bid to the Community Foundation for 2 years of part-time staffing. That post would be north of Alnwick, not in Ashington, though it may

AGENDA 8, Enc viii) CLERKS REPORT - NCVA REQUEST FOR EMERGENCY STABILISATION FUNDING

	cover some shared core costs. No other council approaches were reported.
How the proposed staff would be deployed	2 part-time staff would manage the building (tenant access and support to the 3 groups using the conference room), set up a new service focused on volunteer support, training and placement, and work with the Chair on partnerships, membership and fundraising.
What other models for the building have been considered	NCVA owns the building. Possible uses of the Station Road asset are being explored, and the trustees have confirmed a sale is one option.
Detail of the 74 Ashington groups supported	NCVA initially said it would need each group's permission to share details. An anonymised breakdown was then given in the supplementary document.
Which groups and volunteers have been, or would be, disadvantaged	Answered in part by the supplementary document's position statement since July.

Supplementary document (August 2026)

NCVA broke down the 74 Ashington organisations and individuals supported in the previous 12 months:

- 21 organisations given mostly one-off support (governance, constitutions, payroll), averaging 2 contacts each;
- 7 organisations helped with preparing, auditing and returning accounts (multiple contacts);
- 7 people volunteering directly for NCVA or groups using its building (around 350 contacts a year);
- 18 people given advice and support to volunteer;
- 15 people attending the weekly art group at the NCVA office, 10 of them asylum seekers (around 750 contacts a year);
- 7 individuals helped with setting up community groups, DBS or safeguarding queries.

Since July, with no staff in place, NCVA reports that:

- 2 groups still use the office, including volunteers on the Tea and IT programme, and the art group still meets there;
- the Chair is in contact with 8 people about volunteering and is preparing accounts for 2 organisations;
- payroll clients have been redirected to another charity-facing accountancy service;
- 4 organisations have asked for help with funding bids (2 supported, 2 referred) and 4 groups have sought constitutional advice;

AGENDA 8, Enc viii) CLERKS REPORT - NCVA REQUEST FOR EMERGENCY STABILISATION FUNDING

- the Vodafone SIM card programme cannot run without a trained permanent member of staff.

NCVA's view is that funding applications take time and cannot bridge the short-term gap. Funding from the Town Council would give it space to look at options, including selling the building.

Activity figures

The figures table compares April 2024 to April 2025 with April 2025 to date. It covers NCVA's countywide work, with Ashington figures shown separately where available. Ashington-specific figures include:

- 74 member organisations based in Ashington and a further 102 delivering services in the town;
- 505 Ashington residents supported with SIM cards through the Vodafone programme;
- 102 Job Club participants, all from Ashington (16 into employment, 52 gaining Level 1 or 2 qualifications);
- 118 Ashington participants on the Solid Foundations employability programme and 51 on the ENGAGE 55+ programme;
- 144 Ashington volunteers supported, 13 Ashington organisational health checks, and DBS checks for 21 Ashington organisations and 53 volunteers.

Email exchanges

On 24 August, the Clerk asked what NCVA's service would look like if the Council awarded its maximum grant of £5,000. On 7 September, NCVA replied that £5,000, with money owed to it by VODA, would provide 15 hours a week of community development work and 15 hours of admin cover until the end of March 2027, based at the Ashington office.

NCVA also said that the membership subscription is bringing in money, but only enough to support existing activity. It will assess its position after the Council's decision.

On 5 October, the Clerk asked NCVA to confirm whether the request remains £15,000, whether the intended recruits are still available, how much membership income has been raised, and whether a decision has been made on the building.

5. Financial, legal and procedural considerations

The Council's annual grant scheme awards up to £5,000. A request above that level falls outside the scheme and would need to be treated as one-off hardship funding.

Any one-off funding the Council wished to give NCVA, at whatever level, would have to come from the contingency budget. Use of the contingency budget requires a motion in its own right, so a future agenda item would need to cover both the award and the use of contingency.

Business must be specified on the agenda to be transacted (Local Government Act 1972, Schedule 12, paragraph 10(2)(b)). A decision to award funding is not on this agenda, so it would not be appropriate for this meeting to agree funding.

In considering whether to take this forward, Members may wish to weigh:

AGENDA 8, Enc viii) CLERKS REPORT - NCVA REQUEST FOR EMERGENCY STABILISATION FUNDING

- NCVA currently has no staff, and the trustees are considering selling the building;
- management accounts and projections have not yet been provided;
- it is not yet confirmed whether the original £15,000 request still stands or whether the intended recruits are still available;
- NCVA's own account of what a £5,000 award would deliver;
- any conditions the Council might attach, such as monitoring and reporting on use of the funds.

If information relevant to a future decision is commercially sensitive, such as the sale of the building, the Council may resolve to consider it in private session. Any decision would still be made public.

6. Options for Members

Any Member may propose that a motion to support one-off funding for NCVA be placed on the next FGS Committee agenda. The proposal should state the level of funding, for example £5,000, £15,000 or another amount.

If the proposal is seconded, a vote would show the likely level of support. The Clerk could then go back to NCVA with an indication of what may be possible, ahead of a formal decision at the next meeting.

If no proposal is made or seconded, the Clerk will let NCVA know that the Council does not intend to consider funding further. This gives NCVA certainty as it plans its next steps.

7. Recommendations

That the Council notes the information received from NCVA since the original letter was received as correspondence at the July 2026 Full Council meeting.

That the Council notes it would not be appropriate to agree funding at this meeting, as that decision has not been placed on the agenda.

That the Council considers whether any Member wishes to propose, with a seconder, that a motion to support one-off funding for NCVA, and its level, be placed on the next FGS Committee agenda.

That the Council notes any one-off funding would be taken from the contingency budget, which requires a separate motion.

That the Clerk reports the outcome back to NCVA.

8. Appendices

- A.** Letter from NCVA Chair of Trustees (received as correspondence, July 2026)
- B.** NCVA Supplementary Document (August 2026)

AGENDA 8, Enc viii) CLERKS REPORT - NCVA REQUEST FOR EMERGENCY STABILISATION FUNDING

APPENDIX A

Subject: Request for Emergency Stabilisation Funding to Protect Local VCSE Infrastructure in Ashington

Dear Councillors,

I am writing to you as Chair of Trustees of Northumberland Community and Voluntary Action (NCVA) to request time-limited emergency stabilisation funding from Ashington Town Council, in response to significant changes in how voluntary and community sector (VCSE) infrastructure support is now being commissioned and delivered in Northumberland.

NCVA is based in Ashington, with a core focus on Ashington and South-East Northumberland, and also operates countywide as the Volunteering Centre for Northumberland. We are a long-established, locally rooted VCSE infrastructure organisation supporting community groups, volunteers, and residents. Our role is not primarily to deliver services, but to ensure that local charities and community groups are able to operate safely, compliantly, and sustainably. Much of this work takes place quietly in the background, but it underpins a significant proportion of community activity in the town.

Context: Changes to VCSE Infrastructure Provision

Northumberland County Council's recent procurement of the VCSE Infrastructure Commission, awarded to a non-local infrastructure organisation, represents a fundamental shift in how support for the voluntary and community sector is now provided.

While we recognise NCC's commissioning decisions, the current model has had unintended consequences for place-based VCSE infrastructure:

- Local VCSE infrastructure organisations are now excluded from core infrastructure investment
- Support is increasingly programme-led and aligned to County Council priorities, rather than locally determined need
- Long-standing relationships, local intelligence, and organisational memory are at risk of being lost
- Smaller grassroots groups face reduced access to independent, trusted, face-to-face support

As a result, NCVA continues to meet significant local demand in Ashington without access to the infrastructure funding that previously sustained this work, placing pressure on our financial sustainability despite strong evidence of need and impact.

NCVA's Role and Response

This request is not intended to duplicate NCC-commissioned VCSE provision. The infrastructure commission currently in place delivers time-limited, programme-focused support aligned to County Council priorities. By contrast, NCVA provides independent, locally governed VCSE infrastructure, offering ongoing advisory, governance, compliance, and organisational development support that sits outside any single commissioning framework.

NCVA acts as a neutral and trusted body for the voluntary and community sector, providing the scaffolding that enables organisations to exist, comply, and grow, rather than delivering commissioned activity on behalf of the local authority. This includes charity governance advice, trustee and volunteer

AGENDA 8, Enc viii) CLERKS REPORT - NCVA REQUEST FOR EMERGENCY STABILISATION FUNDING

support, safeguarding guidance, funding readiness and early-stage organisational development — functions that are not replicated within the commissioned model.

Without locally grounded, independent infrastructure operating alongside commissioned delivery, Ashington risks losing the foundations that allow community organisations to operate safely, effectively, and sustainably. Independent VCSE infrastructure plays a critical role in enabling organisations to challenge, adapt, and remain compliant — functions that cannot be fulfilled by a body operating primarily as a delivery partner to the local authority.

What NCVA's Infrastructure Support Looks Like in Practice

To illustrate the nature and value of NCVA's work in Ashington, the following are typical examples of the support we provide to local charities and community groups:

Organisational health and governance support

NCVA works with small charities to undertake organisational health checks, helping trustees and staff reflect on their development, identify strengths and weaknesses, and plan for sustainable future delivery. This type of early-stage governance support is often the difference between a group surviving or closing.

Volunteer infrastructure and pathways

As the Volunteering Centre for Northumberland, NCVA provides countywide volunteering infrastructure while ensuring opportunities are accessible locally.

We support organisations to develop safe and effective volunteer recruitment and management processes, while also providing borough-wide volunteer brokerage. This creates pathways for residents to build skills, confidence, and routes back into employment, while ensuring community services can function.

Crisis coordination and community cohesion

During periods of heightened racial tension in Ashington, NCVA played a key role in convening local charities, advocating for vulnerable communities, and ensuring grassroots voices were represented in community safety and strategic discussions. This informal convening and advocacy role is critical, yet cannot be delivered through commissioned programmes alone.

Safe, trusted space and relationship-based support

NCVA provides a welcoming, neutral space for vulnerable residents and groups, including those experiencing discrimination or social isolation. Through trusted relationships, we connect groups to venues, partners, and opportunities — for example enabling community art activity that has gone on to be exhibited in local venues across the town.

These examples reflect ongoing, relationship-based infrastructure support, rather than time-limited service delivery. Much of this work is preventative, enabling organisations to operate safely and effectively before issues escalate. This type of work is rarely commissioned, often unnoticed when it is working well, and deeply felt when it is absent.

AGENDA 8, Enc viii) CLERKS REPORT - NCVA REQUEST FOR EMERGENCY STABILISATION FUNDING

Impact

Alongside this qualitative, relationship-based support, NCVA operates at significant scale. In the last year alone, we have supported over 110 local voluntary and community groups, 74 of these groups and organisations deliver directly in Ashington, delivered more than 330 hours of direct organisational development support, maintained a VCSE membership of over 400 organisations, coordinated volunteering opportunities with nearly 50 local organisations, supported with 1,028 volunteering opportunities advertised via NCVA VC Connect and supported hundreds of residents through digital inclusion, employability, health and wellbeing, and social action initiatives. This breadth of activity reflects NCVA's role as a connector, enabler, and stabilising force across Ashington's voluntary and community sector.

Our Request

We are therefore requesting emergency stabilisation funding of £15,000, for the provision of 2 core staff members, provided on a time-limited basis (6–12 months), to:

- Protect essential local VCSE infrastructure capacity in Ashington
- Maintain core staffing while alternative income and partnership routes are secured
- Ensure local groups and volunteers are not disadvantaged during this period of systemic change

This request is not open-ended, nor is it intended to replace county-level commissioning. It is a place-based intervention to safeguard a key local asset while longer-term solutions are developed.

This would allow the provision of 2 core staff, on a 3 day per week basis, for a period of 26 weeks.

The Role of Ashington Town Council

Support from Ashington Town Council would:

- Safeguard local voluntary and community sector infrastructure
- Demonstrate civic leadership and confidence in local capacity
- Mitigate the unintended impact of county-level commissioning decisions
- Protect the resilience of Ashington's community groups, volunteers, and residents

We would be pleased to provide management accounts, projections, and further evidence of local impact, and to meet with councillors to discuss this request in more detail.

Closing

NCVA has supported Ashington's communities for many years and remains committed to doing so. With short-term stabilisation support, we can continue to adapt responsibly while ensuring that local voluntary and community organisations are not left without the independent infrastructure they rely on.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I would welcome the opportunity to discuss this further.

Yours sincerely, Joe Jackson
Chair of Trustees

AGENDA 8, Enc viii) CLERKS REPORT - NCVA REQUEST FOR EMERGENCY STABILISATION FUNDING

APPENDIX B

NCVA Supplementary Document

Ashington Town Council . August 2026

Further to the application made to the Town Council in July 2026, I have been asked to provide supplementary information to help Councilors have a greater understanding of the impact of NCVA and advise of those bodies who have contacted more recently.

This is in relation to members determining if NCVA is a reasonable candidate for funding, potentially outside their normal remit.

In the original submission, I advised that 74 Ashington based organizations and individuals had been supported in the previous 12 months. This can be broken down further into which organizations or individuals; what the nature of the support was; and whether there were repeat calls.

Organizations

21 Organizations were supported, often these were one off contacts for support regarding matters such as Governance advice, help in constructing documents such as constitutions, payroll services. There on average 2 contacts with these groups

7 organizations had assistance with the compilation, auditing and returns of accounts, so had multiple contacts.

Individuals

7 people were directly involved in volunteering for NCVA, or groups using the NCVA facilities. This meant there were some 350 contacts over the year

18 people were given advice and support to volunteer.

10 asylum seekers took part in the art group based at the NCVA office, as did another 5 citizens. These were people who would return on a weekly basis. So over 12 months there were 750 contacts over the year.

7 individuals contacted regarding issues such as setting up community groups or queries regarding DBS and safeguarding (these were also issues with the other users).

I have not included those asylum seekers who benefitted from the sim card program from Vodaphone. Unfortunately, we cannot administer that program without a permanent member of staff trained for this purpose.

The question then, quite rightly, is whether the service is likely to be missed. To which I can only give a position statement of the period I have been managing the office, i.e. July until present.

2 groups continue to use the NCVA office that covers the volunteers directly involved, especially in our Tea and IT program.

The art group still meets and is facilitated at the office.

I have contact with 8 individuals regarding volunteering opportunities.

AGENDA 8, Enc viii) CLERKS REPORT - NCVA REQUEST FOR EMERGENCY STABILISATION FUNDING

I am currently engaged in accounts for 2 organizations. Those above a certain threshold must be referred to a fully qualified accountant, so we can't take that on, although we were asked.

Those on our payroll service have been redirected to another charitably facing accountancy service.

4 organisations have contacted regarding assistance with funding applications; 2 I have supported directly and two I referred to an appropriate funder.

I have been contacted by 4 local groups regarding advice on constitutional matters, all of whom I have been able to advise, but have suggested that they return with their documents for checking.

Several people have contacted generally about whether the service is operational and to what level

Personally, I believe many have contacted out of curiosity to see if the organization was still going.

I am hopeful that an application for funding towards staffing, on a part-time basis, for two years with the Community Foundation may assist generally and will potentially bring an administrative element that I can use toward core costs. I have discussed the application with the Funding Manager and they seem keen to support, but like yourselves, have to consider our viability.

We will continue to seek funding, but the issue we face is that such applications can be drawn out and may not be able to assist in bridging the gap in the short term.

Finance from yourselves would allow some space to look at the options including the potential sale of the office asset.