

ASHINGTON TOWN COUNCIL, DRAFT Minutes of the Personnel Committee Meeting held at 5:30pm on 23rd July 2024

COUNCILLORS PRESENT

Cllr Lynne Grimshaw (Chair), Cllr Mark Purvis, Cllr Matthew Cuthbert, Cllr Louis Brown, Cllr Graeme Wright

ALSO, IN ATTENDANCE

Sarah Eden – Clerk/RFO

PC24/001 ELECTION OF CHAIR

In accordance with Standing Orders, **it was AGREED** to receive nominations for Chair of the Personnel Committee of Ashington Town Council, and in the event of more than one Councillor being proposed and seconded, to take a vote and elect the Councillor with the majority.

Cllr Lynne Grimshaw was proposed, seconded and duly elected.

PC24/002 ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIR

In accordance with Standing Orders, **it was AGREED** to receive nominations for Vice-Chair of the Personnel Committee of Ashington Town Council, and in the event of more than one Councillor being proposed and seconded, to take a vote and elect the Councillor with the majority.

Cllr Matthew Cuthbert was proposed, seconded and duly elected.

PC24/003 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Cllr John Tully.

PC24/004 DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS

None.

PC24/005 DISPENSATIONS

None to consider.

PC24/006 DRAFT MINUTES OF COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 27th FEBRUARY 2024

It was AGREED to APPROVE the minutes as a true record.

PC24/007 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

It was AGREED that the press and public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the following items, permitted under Section 1 (2) LGA 1960, due to the confidential nature of the business being transacted.

PC24/008 SALARY SACRIFICE EV CAR SCHEME

It was AGREED to receive a report examining the key aspects of implementing a salary sacrifice electric vehicle (EV) car scheme for the Council's employees, in the first instance the Executive Officer. The scheme offers potential benefits for both the Council and its employees, such as tax savings, cost-effectiveness, and environmental advantages. However, it also involves some administrative overhead and considerations.

The report covered the scheme's mechanics, tax implications, cost analysis, public sector adoption, and other relevant factors to aid decision-making. Cllr Mark Purvis added further information in regards the system operated by the NHS, previously Fleet Solutions which was presented for consideration, but now being operated in-house.

Cllr Graeme Wright added information relating to Northumberland County Council's scheme. Cllr Matthew Cuthbert added that salary sacrifice travel passes were also viable and supported climate

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and employee benefits, and like salary sacrifice EV car schemes, they were cost neutral for the employer.

It was AGREED to recommend to Full Council that a scheme should be supported, and that in the first instance the Executive Officer should express an interest in signing up as further information is available once registered. The Executive Office assured that registering would not commit the Council but would allow further investigation.

PC24/009 PROPOSAL FOR SUSTAINABLE COMMUTING INFRASTRUCTURE: INSTALLATION OF STAFF SHOWER FACILITY

It was AGREED to receive a report outlining a proposal to install a shower facility in current male toilets of the Council offices, aimed at promoting sustainable commuting and enhancing staff welfare when working outside. The Personnel Committee is asked to consider funding this in principle, but also potentially seeking part-funding by NCC as the building owner.

The proposed shower facility would be designed as a unisex amenity, which aligns with our equality duty and offers several benefits:

- ✓ **Inclusivity:** A unisex facility ensures equal access for all staff members, regardless of gender identity, promoting a more inclusive workplace environment.
- ✓ **Non-discrimination:** By avoiding gender-specific facilities, we reduce the potential for discrimination or discomfort for transgender or non-binary employees and visitors.
- ✓ **Flexibility:** Unisex facilities can better accommodate changing demographics in the workforce without requiring future modifications.
- ✓ **Compliance:** This approach aligns with evolving best practices in workplace design and equality regulations.

By implementing a unisex shower facility, Ashington Town Council demonstrates its commitment to equality, diversity, and inclusion in the workplace. This approach not only fulfils our legal equality duty but also promotes a culture of respect and inclusivity among our staff.

Key Considerations were discussed as outlined in the report presented:

Environmental Impact

- Encourages cycling, reducing carbon emissions from those commuting.
- Supports Ashington's and NCC's sustainability objectives.
- Contributes to our priority of reducing the impact of climate change.

Staff Welfare

- Promotes healthier lifestyles.
- Improves work-life balance.
- Potential to improve job satisfaction.
- Toilet would also become unisex.

Operational Benefits

- Supports neighbourhood officers during long shifts, during hot summer months.
- Enhances productivity and staff morale.

Shared Resource

- Could potentially benefit other building users, maximising utility, and carbon saving opportunities, if ATC seek shared cost with NCC.

Property Value

- Could enhance the attractiveness and value of the building.

The Executive Officer put forward options for the committee to consider in regards funding, as outlined below:

Full funding by Ashington Town Council

Pros: Full control over implementation, immediate action.

Cons: Full financial burden on ATC.

Partial funding with NCC contribution

Pros: Shared costs, collaborative approach with NCC as building owner.

Cons: Potential delays, negotiation required, NCC support not guaranteed.

Decline support at this time

Pros: No immediate financial outlay.

Cons: Missed opportunity for environmental and staff welfare improvements.

Full funding by NCC with costs recouped through a negotiated rent increase to Ashington Town Council

Pros: No upfront costs for Ashington Town Council, NCC retains ownership of the improvement.

Cons: Long-term increase in operational costs, dependent on NCC's willingness to invest.

Given the alignment with environmental goals, potential for improved staff welfare, and potential use by officers when working in dirty or hot conditions, **it was AGREED** to recommend to Full Council that ATC place an order for the work to be carried out and take full financial ownership for the alterations.

The Executive Officer advised that the half-year budget review could reveal underspends where money could be moved from to cover the costs.

PC24/010 INCREASE IN STAFF TRAINING BUDGET

It was AGREED to receive a report outlining the proposal to fund a Level 2 Plumbing Studies course for the Allotment Officer. The aim being to enhance in-house plumbing capabilities, improve service delivery at allotment sites, ensure regulatory compliance, and potentially reduce costs where their response will be the first choice over a plumber. Regulatory compliance is essential on allotment sites, and the Executive Officer made clear that the course was being supported as work could and would be carried out by the Allotment Officer as a result.

Whilst training undertaken is delegated to the Executive Officer as Line Manager within budget, this is outside of the current training budget, at a cost of £1,545.

Members considered that the training was essential for the Allotment Officer to carry out their job. The Executive Officer acknowledged that the role was new and emerging, and when designed it

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was unclear how much of the role would be practical and how much administrative/regulatory. This is becoming clearer, and it is essentially a perfect mix of the two. The Executive Officer also confirmed that the next course was expected to start at the beginning of September.

Financial Regulation 5.13 and 5.15 were used **to agree** funds be made available in the Training Budget.

5.13. Individual purchases within an agreed budget for that type of expenditure may be authorised by:

- *The Clerk under delegated authority, for any items below £1,000 excluding VAT.*
- *The Clerk, in consultation with the Chair of the Council, or Chair of Committee, for any items below £2,000 excluding VAT.*

5.15. No expenditure may be authorised that will exceed the budget for that type of expenditure other than by resolution of the council, or a duly delegated committee acting within its Terms of Reference, except in an emergency, and in accordance with 5.13 above.

It was AGREED to approve that funding be moved into the training budget to allow the Allotment Officer to enrol on a Level 2 Plumbing Studies course, and to report to Full Council in September.

It was also AGREED to bring to a future agenda, to agree a Training and Development policy.

The meeting ended at 6:15pm.