

**AGENDA 6, Enc i) ASHINGTON TOWN COUNCIL, DRAFT Minutes of the Finance & General Services Committee, held at 6:00pm on Tuesday 14<sup>th</sup> January 2025 at Ashington Town Hall, 65 Station Road**

**COUNCILLORS PRESENT:**

Cllrs. Lynne Grimshaw (Chair), Cllr Gemma Hemsley (arrived at 18:04), Cllr Graeme Wright, Cllr Paul Wright, Cllr Pauline Thompson, Cllr Caroline Ball (arrived at 18:17), Cllr Jim Lang, Cllr Matthew Cuthbert, Cllr Louis Brown, Cllr Marjorie Chambers (arrived at 18:04), Cllr Matthew Cuthbert, Cllr Sophie Robinson, Cllr Glynn Davies and Cllr John Tully.

**ALSO, IN ATTENDANCE**

Sarah Eden – Executive Officer, Alan Bunker – Allotments Officer, and Gary Holmes – Administration Assistant.

**FGS25/090 WELCOME BY THE CHAIR**

Welcome by the Chair, Councillor Lynne Grimshaw.

**FGS25/091 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Victor Bridges, Cllr Mark Purvis, and Cllr Bob Walkinshaw.

**FGS25/092 DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS**

There were no disclosures of interest.

**FGS25/093 DISPENSATIONS**

There were no dispensations requested.

**FGS25/094 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

There were no members of the public present.

**FGS25/095 ASHINGTON MARKET**

Neil Brown attended and answered many of the questions put forward by the Council.

Neil has said that Ashington Market is one of the most successful markets around Northumberland in terms of trade and active traders. A lot of other markets around Northumberland do not retain their traders, and Ashington is healthy in this regard as traders find it easier to trade at Ashington market. Neil sees this as an opportunity for younger traders to break into trading via market stalls and veteran traders to find and mentor new market traders. Neil also mentioned with great excitement that there are going to be new and updated market stalls to ensure the aesthetics of the market, but also health and safety as they will be new and include anchors for the wind.

A survey is used with market traders and customers to gauge market success, and Ashington is a great success with both the public and traders and local traders who agree it is good for business.

Cllr Lynne Grimshaw asked if they are advertising the new train line within Ashington as an incentive to come to Ashington market to trade. Neil stated that it's an excellent form of advertisement and incentive and that it is advertised.

Cllr Marjorie Chambers asked if the ice being dumped by the fish trader is of any concern of health and safety. Neil said that he wasn't aware of this and would investigate it and speak with Environmental Health.

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Cllr Caroline Ball showed concern at the standards of the market and asked how they are encouraging higher standards of traders, such as craft traders. Cllr Ball also showed great concern about counterfeit goods being sold on the market. Neil has said that market stalls geared around crafts are hard to upkeep due to the price crafts are generally sold for. If anyone knows of a trader who would like to participate, you can forward them to Neil, and he will happily speak with them in the hopes of bringing new and high-standard traders. Neil also mentioned that if you are to notice counterfeit goods being sold, you should contact trading standards immediately.

Cllr Lynne Grimshaw asked how often food hygiene certificates are checked and verified by environmental health. Neil said that all traders will have their certificates, but they may not be displayed. He also mentioned that as long a trader has a request to receive an inspection and certificate from environmental health, they will be on the system and can trade if a request is in. This can take up to 12 months for an inspection and certification.

Cllr Graeme Wright asked what the biggest challenges are for potentially asking traders from other markets to come to Ashington. Neil said that it is mainly due to their scheduling, as they may already go to other markets. He also mentioned that there are quite a few traders who are retiring and cannot commit to other towns.

Cllr Pauline Thompsom mentioned that it is paramount that all food traders show their certification of food hygiene. Neil mentioned that they do have their certificates, but they may not be on show depending on the stall but can be requested.

Cllr Jim Lang asked if we encourage street food vendors to the market, rather than vans as they stick out onto the street. Neil mentioned that it is welcomed, but we would need to locate street food vendors and encourage them to attend Ashington market, but he welcomes anyone to get in touch with him in regard to this.

Cllr Graeme Wright asked if a Youth Market may be something the markets manager could pursue. Neil mentioned that it worked very well at Bedlington but unfortunately stopped due to COVID-19. Hexham is also working with local colleges to introduce younger people to trading, and it would be something they could investigate for Ashington with help from the local schools.

Sarah Eden asked what impact the newer, bigger stalls would bring for the Neighbourhood Services team, asking if they would be the ones to assemble them on market day. Neil mentioned that it would be neighbourhood services who would set up the stalls, and he doesn't foresee there being any other issues with the new stands.

**FGS25/096 MINUTES OF LAST MEETING**

**It was AGREED to RECEIVE and SIGN** as a true record, the minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday 10<sup>th</sup> December 2024 with the amendment of Cllr Glynn Davies being present.

**FGS25/097 CLERK AND OFFICER UPDATES**

The following update was given:

***Allotments (General)***

Our first glass recycling day is planned for January 27<sup>th</sup> at Nursery Park with assistance from NCC.

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After the success of our first plastic recycling day at North Seaton we are rolling this out at Seaton Hirst along with a second day at North Seaton. We recycled over 400kg of plastic at North Seaton on our first collection. Several frames have already been identified at both sites. 17th February has been allocated for both sites.

Road repairs will be carried out at North Seaton later in the month. Road planings have been ordered and the work will be carried out by in-house, by Alan, Mark and Ryan.

North Seaton Colliery rents for 2025 were issued from 1<sup>st</sup> January 2025 – 60% have now paid. One reminder will be issued - all tenants have been advised that non-payment within 40 days results in termination of tenancy. Some tenants have vacated and two new tenants have been signed up, the remaining vacant plots will be rented out ASAP.

Following recent on-the-job training, Alan has repaired several taps across the sites after the latest cold snap. An issue has been identified with the fixings, which will be swapped out when time allows. Repairs at Woodhorn, North Seaton and High Market will be carried out over the next couple of days.

We are developing new and improved signage for those sites we manage.

### ***ATC Neighbourhood Services***

We have had a very productive session on how we want to see Neighbourhood Services delivered and Managing Assets going forward.

- Focusing on self-sufficiency and doing things in-house where this is the most efficient way of doing things.
- Specific outcomes and clear goals.
- Routine inspections.
- Continuous improvement.
- Recognising effort and achievement.

Slides are available if members would be interested in the approach and further information.

### ***Play Areas***

New signage is being developed for the play areas we manage.

NCC and Bernicia are engaging on Bywell Road Play Area. This is with a view to a survey to establish whether residents value the play area. Following any result, we would only seek to take on the lease for this play area if it was brought up to an appropriate standard.

There could be an opportunity for Suez Funding for North Seaton Colliery Play Area, which is the next identified as requiring update. With this in mind we will bring a preferred supplier tender to Council asap, with the expectation that the Council and the chosen supplier will consult in the local community.

### ***Litter Bins***

In the next financial year the focus will be on replacing those high street/ public realm litter bins with grey, and also looking at capacity where this needs to be increased.

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***Christmas Lighting***

Lights have been removed and will be tested in the next couple of weeks. The February FGS will receive the tender for a preferred supplier.

***Bus Shelter Cleansing***

Gary is mapping all shelters using what3words///, and Arriva specific name. This is with a view to moving towards asset mapping and a mobile system. The EO is looking at outsourcing costs for the routine quarterly cleansing of shelters.

***Projects***

***Ashington Cricket Club Commemorative Tree Project to Mark the 80th Anniversary of the ending of WWII***

Trees are being delivered on 11<sup>th</sup> February, with planting scheduled for Saturday 15<sup>th</sup> February.

***Ashington Community Woods***

We are waiting for a project spec from Groundwork, this has been requested for the January Full Council meeting. The intention is that the project will be outlined, with a fees schedule to consult on it and get the project bid-ready for Heritage Lottery Funding.

***Events and Engagement***

***Operation Impact Day Wednesday 18th December 2024***

Northumbria Police conducted Operation Impact in Ashington, with several key outcomes:

1. Drug-related arrests:
  - An 18-year-old man and 17-year-old female were arrested on suspicion of Class A drug supply
  - Both were released on police bail
2. Vehicle and traffic enforcement:
  - Two motorcycles were seized in Newbiggin-by-the-Sea using drone assistance
  - Over 50 speeding offenses were detected
  - 20 vehicles were inspected with the Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency
3. Additional enforcement:
  - Three property warrants were executed on Rosalind Street, Sycamore Street, and Woodhorn Villas
  - A 38-year-old man was arrested and charged with shoplifting

The operation focused on tackling anti-social behaviour, retail crime, and drug-related offenses through partnership working between police and local agencies. Inspector Wayne Daniels emphasised their commitment to addressing community concerns and providing outstanding service.

Operation Impact rolls into Northumberland | Northumbria Police

As part of the initiative, Ashington Town Council coordinated a comprehensive cleanup of the Hirst Area. Town Council staff collaborated with Ashington Community Litter Pickers and Councillors Ball, Chambers, and Hemsley to conduct litter collection throughout the colliery rows and adjacent areas. Northumberland County Council provided support by deploying their sweeper service and collecting the accumulated waste.

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In conjunction with the cleanup operation, Hirst Master Plan Officers Neil Quinn and Gary McGuire conducted an estate inspection with Hirst Ward Councillors, focusing on the area between Percy Street and Alexandra Road. The walkabout, supported by NCC cleansing and enforcement teams, aimed to identify empty properties and unkempt gardens, with the broader objective of developing improvement strategies for the Hirst area. Following evaluation of this pilot initiative, there are plans to extend this approach to other sections of the Hirst in the coming year.

The day's activities concluded with a social gathering at the Hirst Welfare, where the Town Council provided refreshments for all participants.

[Ashington Town Council](#)

***Walk The Plank Event Updates***

Light Nights 29th and 30th January – On 29th January the Spark Drummers will march on Station Road and 8th Row. There will also be a photo opportunity on the newly opened rail station platform.

ATC are looking into funding a drumming workshop as part of the Finale at the Hirst Welfare, currently waiting for workshop briefing and further details for the event.

Shop Front Wraps – work is under way to contact landlords of properties in town centre for the shop window artworks and a call out for artists to hold design workshops has also gone out.

Toy Parade – link to video of toy parade at the Christmas Light Switch On;  
<https://vimeo.com/1040042366/1e33d03295?share=copy>

Torch Lit Procession and Feast of Fire – Invitations going out soon for nominations for community heroes to carry touches in the torch lit processions which will culminate at a fire garden in Hirst Park.

More update to follow soon on other events planned to include One Amazing Day on the one way section of Station Road Day and a Parade on Fair.

***Youth Services Gathering Wednesday 8th January 2025***

YMCA Northumberland Activities: Currently offering five weekly youth programs, including Creative Mondays, Young Changemakers, Young Pioneers, Girls Only sessions, and Youth Cafe, serving different age groups between 10-18+ years. Rob Cox noted these programs depend on securing future funding in the coming year. The YMCA also has office space available for rent.

Community Safety: The Ashington Community Policing Team reported increased anti-social behaviour during Christmas, including an incident involving 30 young people at Asda car park. A dispersal order has been implemented, and new projects are planned to address issues around Station Road pubs and clubs. Town centre CCTV continues to be effective in identifying offenders.

Community Services:

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- Central Northumberland Family Hub continues successful after-school club for ages 5-8, and are now referring older children to YMCA
- Ashington Town Council announced several upcoming events including swimming sessions, a drumming workshop for Light Night Finale (January 30<sup>th</sup>), an ECO Fair (April 25<sup>th</sup>), and Local Heroes Torch Lit Procession (March 21<sup>st</sup>-22<sup>nd</sup>). Small grants up to £500 are available, with applications closing 31<sup>st</sup> January 2025
- Northumberland Communities Together are organising Health and Wellbeing Roadshows at Northumberland College and Kirkley Hall, with additional events planned at Dukes Academy and Ashington Academy

Sports Development: Work on the Play Zone begins January 20<sup>th</sup>, 2025, with discussions ongoing about booking arrangements, including potential free access days for young people. Ability to Play sessions are reported to be successful, with new activities in development. The next meeting will focus on identifying gaps in youth services, and annual meeting dates will be distributed soon.

**FGS25/098 BUDGET AND EXPENDITURE 2024/25**

**a) Updated Budget Report**

The updated budget and expenditure report was **RECEIVED**.

**b) Accounts Paid and to be Paid (including Bank Reconciliation)**

The schedule of accounts paid and to be paid was **RECEIVED**; the accounts paid was **ENDORSED** and those to be paid was **AGREED**.

**FGS25/099 CLOSED CIRCUIT TELEVISION (CCTV)**

The report of the meeting held on 4<sup>th</sup> December 2024 was **RECEIVED** and **NOTED** and no questions were asked.

**FGS25/100 NCC NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES PARTNERSHIP MEETING, 17<sup>th</sup> December 2024**

The report was **RECEIVED** and **NOTED**, and no questions were asked.

Following a discussion, **it was AGREED** to add membership of the Partnership Board to the next Full Council meeting.

**FGS25/101 DRAFT BUDGET 2025/26**

A draft budget and precept was received with the agenda papers., for consideration and agreement by the Council.

An amendment to the budget put forward was discussed.

Cllr Pauline Thompson wanted a second look at the Ward Cllr improvements budget, stating that £4,000 instead of £5,000 is recommended and is unsure why this was reduced in the first place. The suggestion to put this into the Climate Change and Environment budget is problematic as groups are now going to invited to this.

Cllr John Tully agreed that the Ward Cllr improvements should be retained at £5,000 and continue at that level. He also mentioned that the community grants and support should continue as the most disadvantaged people will benefit from these grants. It was also mentioned that the Council needs to investigate the Northumberland County Council Partnership

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agreement as he feels Ashington Town Council are not getting a value for money with the current agreement. Other areas could benefit from this while looking at the priorities and capping, such as Youth budget being £20,000, the Christmas lights remaining at the current £35,000 and using the money from employment costs as Cllr Tully doesn't see the reason to keep this to one side if it's not being used. This would reduce the precept to a 0.5% but could be further reduced.

Cllr Glynn Davies asked whether we are replacing Assets and Facilities Manager as it is disingenuous to leave the money within the budget if it isn't being used. Cllr Davies also noted that the increased Christmas lights budget to £41,000 is a 40% increase over last year's budget and should be reduced while also focussing on enhancing the Christmas lights around Ashington, rather than just the main street. Cllr Davies then mentioned that the ward grants are working and should remain at £5,000. Cllr Davies agrees with Cllr Tully that the Northumberland County Council Partnership needs to be investigated as he feels we are not getting a value for our money as well.

Cllr Louis Brown stated that the 3-year contract for the Christmas lights did work, and the lights have been well received, but should not be increased beyond £35,000 this year. The employment costs are more than in our own costs due to employing Northumberland County Council with the Partnership agreement and he does not feel this is value for money. He also mentioned that key groups for the community support grants should be earmarked for support as the groups around Ashington bring in money, with a suggestion of £40,000 to these groups, and a further £40,000 to other groups who apply for funding. Cllr Brown also mirrored that the ward funding remaining at £30,000 is a good idea as it has worked out very well for Cllr projects.

In accordance with standing order, the amendment was taken first.

Cllr John Tully called that the budget should be amended with the suggestions put forward, and this was seconded by Cllr Glynn Davies.

**With a vote called there was 5 in favour and 8 opposed.**

Cllr Matthew Cuthbert proposed the budget as presented, this was seconded by Cllr Gemma Hemsley.

**With a vote called there was 8 in favour and 5 opposed.**

It was **AGREED** to recommend the budget and precept demand as set out in the papers, to the Full Council meeting on Tuesday 28<sup>th</sup> January 2025.

**FGS25/102 ENVIRONMENTAL ENHANCEMENTS – SEATON WARD**

The proposal from Seaton Ward Cllrs to contribute £3,000 from their Environmental Enhancements budget towards a project to reduce heat loss from North Seaton Community Centre was **RECEIVED and AGREED**.

**FGS25/103 DATE, TIME, AND VENUE FOR THE NEXT MEETING**

Tuesday 11<sup>th</sup> February 2025, 6:00pm, Council Chamber.

**Meeting ended 19:43pm**