

ASHINGTON TOWN COUNCIL
DRAFT Minutes of the Full Council Meeting (Annual Meeting) held at 6:00pm
on Tuesday 28th May 2024
at Ashington Town Hall, Council Chamber, 65 Station Road, Ashington, NE63 8RX

COUNCILLORS PRESENT:

Cllr Mark Purvis (Chair), Cllr Louis Brown, Cllr Glyn Davies, Cllr Pauline Thompson, Cllr Sophie Robinson, Cllr Jim Lang, Cllr Marjorie Chambers, Cllr Bob Walkinshaw, Cllr Lynne Grimshaw, Cllr Victor Bridges, Cllr Liam Lavery, Cllr Paul Wright, Cllr Graeme Wright, and Cllr Matthew Cuthbert.

ALSO, IN ATTENDANCE

Sarah Eden – Executive Officer/RFO, Stephen Humphrey - Assets and Development Manager and Gary Holmes – Administration Assistant.

FC24/001 ELECTION OF BUSINESS CHAIR

Pursuant to section 15 (2) of the Local Government Act 1972, to receive nominations for Chair 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 (enc)ⁱ

It was **PROPOSED** and **AGREED** to elect Cllr Mark Purvis as Business Chair.

FC24/002 ACCEPTANCE OF OFFICE

Cllr Mark Purvis signed and delivered a form that confirms the elected Chair's declaration of acceptance of office, in accordance with Local Government Act 1972, s83 (4).

FC24/003 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Caroline Ball and Cllr John Tully.

FC24/004 DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

There were no declarations of interest.

FC24/005 DISPENSATIONS

There were no requests for dispensations.

FC24/006 DRAFT MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

It was **AGREED** to **RECEIVE** and **SIGN** as a true record, the minutes of the last Full Council meeting held on 30th January 2024, noting that the draft was shared online in February.

FC24/007 ELECTION OF BUSINESS VICE-CHAIR

It was **PROPOSED** and **AGREED** to elect Cllr Graeme Wright as Business Vice-Chair.

FC24/008 ELECTION OF CIVIC HEAD OF ASHINGTON

It was **PROPOSED** and **AGREED** to elect Cllr Caroline Ball as Civic Head.

FC24/009 ELECTION OF DEPUTY CIVIC HEAD OF ASHINGTON

It was **PROPOSED** and **AGREED** to elect Cllr Sophie Robinson as Deputy Civic Head.

FC24/010 ELECTION OF THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

It was **PROPOSED** and **AGREED** to elect Cllr John Tully as Leader of the Council.

FC24/011 ELECTION OF THE DEPUTY LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

It was **PROPOSED** and **AGREED** to elect Cllr Louis Brown as Deputy Leader of the Council

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FC24/012 RESPONSIBLE FINANCIAL OFFICER

Pursuant to section 151 of the Local Government Act 1972, it was **CONFIRMED** that Sarah Eden is appointed as the Responsible Financial Officer (RFO).

FC24/013 CO-OPTION OF TOWN COUNCILLOR FOR THE COLLEGE WARD

a) Eligible Applicants

Cllr Mark Purvis invited the Executive Officer to confirm the names of those persons that have applied and are eligible to be co-opted to the office of Councillor for the College ward. *Anyone wishing to join the council via co-option must be eligible under s.79 of the Local Government Act 1972, and not disqualified under s.80 of the Local Government Act 1972.*

The Executive Officer confirmed the names in alphabetical order.

- ✓ Gemma Hemsley
- ✓ Andy McGregor
- ✓ Elaine Peverley

b) Statement from Candidates

The Chair advised that those present would be invited to read their statement, and speak for up to 3 minutes, and that he would read those where the candidate was not present.

Gemma Hemsley was unable to attend, and the following statement was read by the Chair:

"Hi All,

I am so sorry that I cannot be with you today to speak in person, which I would of preferred but I have a few final commitments to some of the clients I have cared for over the years before I move on to pastures new and hopefully, if elected to work alongside yourselves to give something back to my local community and the place I am proud to call my home. Should I have the privilege of being elected as Town Councillor I already have all the 2024 dates scheduled into my diary to ensure I attend all future meetings as understand and appreciate that this would be my duty.

I would ask that you please consider me as Town Councillor for the College Ward as I believe I would do the position justice in every way by being a very effective councillor by communicating between residents and the council to achieve positive outcomes for the main areas that require our focus and attention. A little bit about me. I am happily married with three older children who drive me round the twist most of the time but everything I spend my time on these days, I do, in the hope of helping make a difference and create positive changes that we need in order to make a better future for those we care about.

I come from a large family, and we have always lived in Ashington. I am extremely proud to call Ashington my hometown and look to support you, the town council in your ongoing projects to make Ashington an even better place to live, work and visit. I am very much a home bird, I don't go out partying etc and pretty boring in that sense but when I'm not at home my hobbies include

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anything that involves being around other people, from walking groups I am part of volunteering at the community park runs or just general meet and greet drop in sessions.

I am very passionate about nature, the environment and I am obsessed with recycling, so I look forward to the upcoming climate change meetings and supporting your clean, green Ashington campaign. I have a passion for intergenerational links and bringing the elderly and younger generation together. I also want to get out and talk to more younger people as I believe the 'hard to reach' generation are exactly the people we need to work alongside to make a brighter future for us all.

I feel comfortable producing and performing presentations to small and large groups as and when needed to help share our mission. I am happy to work alongside local people and partners, such as community groups and businesses to deliver on local priorities and enhance production on task completions. My background is in Adult Social Care, and I have collaborated with the council in various schemes during my time running my own care company as well as successfully being assigned contracts with the local authority.

I mention this so you are aware that I am highly professional in any work I conduct, and I understand the importance of adhering to the councils' policies and procedures at all times. I have read and understood your code of conduct and the 7 principles of public life, and I agree to adhere to these at all times. Due to the work, I have done over the years I have always Gemma Hemsley ensured that I kept an outstanding standard of behaviour, and I will always continue to do so, more so should I be lucky enough to be an elected representative.

I have gained a vast amount of knowledge over the years that I know will help me succeed in this role including communication training, the importance of abiding by GDPR regulations and Duty of Candour by being open, honest, and transparent to help build good working relationships. I have years of outstanding leadership skills and I am extremely well organised, to the point I am a bit of a stationary geek! I have experience in decision making, attending and holding meetings, meeting budgets, monitoring situation and giving the appropriate feedback. I have experience in different approach tactics, and I am always very aware of my surroundings. I am an incredibly positive, motivated, self-aware female who is also highly tapped into my teams' emotions and can skilfully adapt my language depending upon the audience and this helps me be able to emotionally connect with those around me in a professional manner whilst building good working relationships.

I am a HUGE people's person and love being around others, likewise I feel people who spend time with Myself within our local community would say they appreciate my passion and drive in everything I do. I am extremely approachable and know that this will make me a great asset to your town council team as I will be the perfect bridge of communication between the people who live within our local community and help take the pressures of yourselves as a council.

I always work to an exceedingly high standard, and I am never without a pen and paper close by. I am a highly respectful and respected individual within our local community, and I have the ability to create an inclusive vision whilst showing compassion and empathy towards others. I have good insight and key skills which will also help contribute to setting targets, goals, producing action plans and the completions of tasks.

Due to my good leadership skills and naturally compassionate nature, I have the ability to join you in leading the development of strategies and future plans for the Ashington area and restore

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the passion for our hometown that some residents may have lost. I am a 'see the good in everything' type of person who can see situations from different angles, giving me the opportunity to remain compassionate, understanding and appreciates issues and concerns raised. It would be an absolute honour to work alongside Mark, Liam, and the residents to help represent the College Ward in Ashington.

I would absolutely thrive in speaking to people, day in, day out and sharing views of those within our community. I promise and commit to being pro-active, visible, available and accessible to those I am accountable to, and I will be highly effective within my role. I trust that given the opportunity to join you here at the council – everyone would benefit. I have a fabulous personality and feel like I have the ability to light up an environment that I am part of. I am extremely resilient, humble, likeable, approachable and have a great listening ear which I think the people in our local community would respect.

I feel that now is the time to commit Myself to something more meaningful and I believe that this is it. I can see my vision clearly but with your help I can also create it, helping and inspiring others by making a difference to those who we reside alongside.

Thank you very much.”

Andy McGregor was present and read the following statement:

“Thank you for the opportunity to address the Council and explain why I wish to be co-opted onto Ashington Town Council (ATC). Many of you will already know me and my record of involvement in local civic and political life since the last millennium. I have worked alongside some of you in other organisations and hopefully you will acknowledge that I am neither an idiot or someone easily discouraged but that I genuinely have a desire to see Ashington, Northumberland and indeed the whole country a fairer, healthier and greener place for all. Many local “Parish” Councils are apolitical with councillors form a variety of parties or none. That has never been the case here. Issues that ATC is directly responsible for, like allotments and playgrounds are not really “big P political” but require a more common-sense and local knowledge-based approach. The responsibilities, staff and budget of ATC has grown and is over £1M per year.

Town Councillors are there to serve the interests of all residents: Sometimes difficult choices need to be made. Unfortunately, it isn't possible to please all the people all the time.

The guiding principles must be to listen to evidence, provide the greatest benefits to the most people, limit the adverse effects in severity and numbers affected. It is important to be transparent explain how and why decisions have been reached. I believe my background, as a former Royal Engineers Officer, current work as a clinical optometrist and being a local business owner have given me knowledge and skills to be able to consider complex issues, work with others to produce a range of options, select the most appropriate, then communicate the decision to those affected, oversee the implementation and monitor progress. Since moving to Ashington over 30years ago I have taken an interest in the whole area and have gained a good knowledge of the geography and conditions across the town.

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This particular co-option is for a vacancy as councillor in College Ward. Although I live in Bothal Ward I can effectively represent residents in College, and many issues affect the whole town anyway. In 1999, I was first elected to Wansbeck District Council, and was re-elected in 2007, serving until the 2009 local government reorganisation creating the unitary Northumberland County Council (NCC). I was elected to the first Ashington Town Council in 2009: so, I have experience of elected office in the Ashington. I have stood for election to NCC and ATC numerous other times, demonstrating an unrivalled determination to serve the community. I am proud to be a Liberal Democrat and stand as such.

The preamble to our Party constitution starts “The Liberal Democrats exist to build and safeguard a fair, free and open society, in which we seek to balance the fundamental values of liberty, equality and community, and in which no-one shall be enslaved by poverty, ignorance or conformity.” I believe these values will ensure that my being on ATC will only enhance its functioning and reputation.

An awareness of, and involvement in the wider political field, while not necessary for a Town Councillor, does, I believe, allow me to better understand the wider Political context in which ATC has to operate. This makes me a more effective advocate for the Town and better able to comment on proposals from NCC and other bodies, such as NHS, that may affect people in the town. It also ensures that through Association of Liberal Democrat Councillors (ALDC) I have access to expert advice. I consider myself to be politically progressive and am a member of www.compassonline.org.uk which describes itself thus “Compass is a home for political rebels. We practice a politics of kindness, openness and compassion.

Together we are working towards the Good Society: sustainable, free, equitable and more democratic.” My aims are not dramatically different from those of the Labour Party so I should be able to work with existing councillors. There are some differences of emphasis, which will be apparent during the General Election campaign. I genuinely believe that having more views and parties represented at all levels of local and national government will lead to better decision making and administration. Another organisation I support is www.makevotesmatter.org.uk who campaign for a more proportional voting mechanism.

You, as ATC councillors, could show a commitment to having at least a token representative from a different party on your council by deciding to co-opt me. This would, I think, demonstrate to the electorate that you are concerned about everyone, whatever their party affiliation, and don't believe that only one party can provide representatives to ATC for some historical reason. Comments I hear from the public are “you are all the same you politicians” and “why can't you work together to solve the issues not just fight amongst yourselves” Given there would still be a 17 : 1 situation on ATC there is no danger of you losing any votes in Council, but together we may be able to come up with better ideas, and improve the public's perception of the Council and its members”

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Elaine Peverley was unable to attend, and the following statement was read by the Chair:

"Hello, my name is Elaine, I'm 62 years old and a resident of College Ward. Retired Registered Mental Health Nurse. I cannot be with you tonight, due to a hospital procedure, but I have met most of you in a variety of settings, what I call "Question Time" in this chamber.

I would like to be a Town Councillor because I have the confidence, motivation, I care and have a passion for "Love Where You Live" and make a difference!

I'm a strong believer in "Walk the Walk and Talk the Talk" (a join in and negotiate approach).

I'm an active volunteer and advocate for several groups in the locality (especially Hirst Park & Welfares and Physical Mental Health Wellbeing groups).

Historically, I remember doing 'O' Level Environmental Studies. A Town Councillor called Arthur Gallagher obtained some information regarding the reclamation and transformation of Ashington pit heaps and surrounding area, to the current Queen Elizabeth II Country Park and Lake. I think the course today would have been called Climate Change & How to Improve and Save the Environment, the Planet! The information gained me an 'A' grade and a keen interest in the local area and nature at its best. So, thank you, Arthur!

I am adaptable, a team leader, I can support any group that is identified by the Chamber as having a shortfall in their membership.

I would pledge my support to the residents of Ashington, to the Chamber and if successful, to College Ward residents.

Whatever happens on 28/5/24, my "Love Where You Live and Make a Difference!" approach will continue.

*Kind regards,
Elaine Peverley"*

c) Voting on Co-option

The Chair sought proposers and seconders for each candidate in alphabetical order.

Gemma Hemsley was **PROPOSED** and **SECONDED** and received a unanimous vote in favour.

No further proposals were received, and therefore, Gemma Hemsley was duly co-opted to the office of Cllr for the College ward.

FC24/014 TOWN TWINNING – REMSCHEID VISIT

Correspondence of October visit and 40th anniversary of the Wansbeck-Remscheid Miner's Support Group from Town Twinning Secretary, Bill Gale was **RECEIVED**.

It was **AGREED** that Cllr Caroline Ball, Cllr John Tully, Cllr Louis Brown, and Cllr Lynne Grimshaw are to be involved in discussions regarding joint hosting of the event, event details,

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and potential costs and budget, noting that proposals will be brought to the FGS Committee for consideration and agreement.

Bill Gale and Peter Miller provided a few words about the history of Remscheid and the Town Twinning project and what it meant to the people of Ashington and the day it was formally recognised as a Town Twinning organisation during the Miner's strike. Photographs were distributed retelling the historic visits to Remscheid over the years.

FC24/015 STANDING ORDERS

In accordance with the Local Government Act 1972, Sch 12, para 42, it was **AGREED** to adopt updated Standing Orders for the Council (previously adopted May 2023)

Stephen Humphrey left the meeting at 18:41.

FC24/016 FINANCIAL REGULATIONS

In accordance with the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 (SI2015/234), it was **AGREED** to adopt updated Financial Regulations (previously adopted in May 2023).

Stephen Humphrey left the meeting at 18:44

FC24/017 STANDING COMMITTEES

a) Finance and General Services Committee (FGS)

The terms of reference of the Finance and General Services Committee were **AGREED**.

b) Personnel Committee

The terms of reference of the Personnel Committee were **AGREED**, including members assigned by role, which was Business Chair/Vice Chair, Leader/Deputy Leader, FGS Chair/FGS Vice Chair.

c) Climate Change and Environment Committee

The terms of reference of the Climate Change Committee were **AGREED**.

d) Youth Co-ordination Group

The terms of reference of the Youth Co-ordination Group were **AGREED**, including members Cllr Caroline Ball, Cllr Louis Brown, Cllr Matthew Cuthbert, Cllr Lynne Grimshaw, and Cllr Graeme Wright.

FC24/018 NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT

It was **AGREED** Cllrs Louis Brown, Marjorie Chambers, Cllr Glynn Davies, and Cllr John Tully to be members of the board which meets quarterly to set priorities, monitor performance, and to mutually decide any changes to the agreement.

FC24/019 ASSETS REGISTER

In accordance with the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 (SI2015/234), the updated assets register was **RECEIVED and NOTED**.

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FC24/020 INSURANCE ARRANGEMENTS

In accordance with the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 (SI2015/234), confirmation of arrangements for insurance was **RECEIVED**.

FC24/021 POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

a) Code of Conduct

In accordance with the Localism Act 2011, 28 (12), **It was AGREED** to adopt the Code of Conduct for Ashington Town Council (previously adopted May 2023).

b) Complaints Procedure

It was **AGREED** to adopt the Complaints Procedure of the Council (previously adopted May 2023).

c) Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Policy

In accordance with the Equality Act 2010, It was **AGREED** to adopt the updated Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Policy (received and recommended by the Personnel Committee on 27th February 2024).

d) Press and Media Policy

In accordance with the Council's Standing Orders and communications protocol, **it was AGREED** to adopt the updated Press and Media Policy (received and recommended by the Personnel Committee on 27th February 2024).

e) Social Media and Email Policy

In accordance with the Code of Conduct, Data Protection Act 1998, Freedom of Information Act 2000, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy, and other applicable laws, **it was AGREED** to adopt the updated social media and Email Policy (received and recommended by the Personnel Committee on 27th February 2024).

f) Data Protection Policy

In accordance with the Data Protection Act 2018, **it was AGREED** to adopt the updated Data Protection Policy (received and recommended by the Personnel Committee on 27th February 2024).

g) Model Publication Scheme

In accordance with the Freedom of Information Act 2020, **it was AGREED** to adopt the Model Publication Scheme (previously adopted May 2023).

h) Safeguarding Policy

It was AGREED to adopt the updated Safeguarding Policy (received and recommended by the Personnel Committee on 27th February 2024).

i) Employee Code of Conduct

It was AGREED to adopt the Employee Code of Conduct (received and recommended by the Personnel Committee on 27th February 2024).

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j) Disciplinary Procedure

It was **AGREED** to adopt the updated Disciplinary Procedure (received and recommended by the Personnel Committee on 27th February 2024).

k) Grievance Procedure

It was **AGREED** to adopt the updated Grievance Procedure (received and recommended by the Personnel Committee on 27th February 2024).

l) Health and Safety Policy

It was **AGREED** to adopt the Health and Safety Policy (received and recommended by the Personnel Committee on 27th February 2024).

m) Working from Home Policy

It was **AGREED** to adopt the updated Working from Home Policy (received and recommended by the Personnel Committee on 27th February 2024).

FC24/022 REPRESENTATIVES ON OUTSIDE BODIES

a) Northumberland Association of Local Councils (NALC) (includes Town & Parish Liaison Working Group)

It was **AGREED** that Cllr John Tully would be the representative on the NALC County Committee of Northumberland.

b) Ashington Town Board

It was **AGREED** that Cllr John Tully would be the representative on the Ashington Town Board.

It was requested that the representative of Ashington Town Council within the Ashington Town Board would bring any information requested by the Council, to the Council, and that Ashington Town Council's views are brought to the attention of the Ashington Town Board.

The Executive Officer advised that since appointment the issue of a lack of written report has been raised, but nothing has been forthcoming, with the reliance placed on members attending to share information.

It was **AGREED** that the Leader's Report in future meetings should include a report from the Ashington Town Board.

FC24/023 DATE, TIME AND VENUE FOR THE NEXT MEETING

Finance & General Services Committee - Tuesday 11th June 2024, 6:00pm, Council Chamber.

Full Council (AGAR) – Tuesday 25th June 2024, 6:00pm, Council Chamber.

The meeting ended at 18:56.