

AGENDA 6, Enc i) ASHINGTON TOWN COUNCIL, DRAFT Minutes of the Full Council Meeting held at 6:00pm on Tuesday 24th September 2024, at Ashington Town Hall, Council Chamber, 65 Station Road, Ashington, NE63 8RX

COUNCILLORS PRESENT:

Cllrs. Mark Purvis (Chair), Louis Brown, Marjorie Chambers, Matthew Cuthbert, Glyn Davis, Lynne Grimshaw, Gemma Hemsley, Jim Lang, Sophie Robinson, Pauline Thompson, John Tully, Victor Bridges, Paul Wright and Bob Walkinshaw.

ALSO, IN ATTENDANCE

Sarah Eden – Executive Officer/RFO, Stephen Humphrey – Assets & Development Manager, Sharon Parmley – Communications & Engagement Officer (minute taking)

FC24/052 WELCOME BY THE CHAIR

Welcome by Cllr Mark Purvis.

FC24/053 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs. Caroline Ball and Graeme Wright.

FC24/054 DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS

There were no disclosures of interest.

FC24/055 DISPENSATIONS

There were no requests for dispensations.

FC24/056 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There were no members of the public.

FC24/057 MINUTES OF LAST MEETING

It was **AGREED to RECEIVE and SIGN** as a true record, the minutes of the Full Council meeting held on Tuesday 30th July 2024.

FC24/058 NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL (NCC) COMMUNITY SAFETY TEAM

Community Safety Officers Neil Pacey and Grant Urquhart attended to outline the work of their team in Ashington and to answer any questions from Cllrs.

The Safety Team reported success in educating young people on anti-social behaviour (ASB) and its impact on the community. They have built strong professional relationships with the youth they engage with. The team's strategy includes four key approaches:

Cllr Paul Wright joined the meeting at 18:12.

The Safety Team works in partnership with the Police, Fire Service, Cramlington Voluntary Youth Project (CVYP), Town Council, Youth Outreach, and Manor Walks. They coordinate efforts to reduce ASB during school holidays and engage in joint patrols with partner organisations to prevent ASB before it escalates. Information sharing between partners is key to identifying and addressing ASB issues. The CVYP-provided van offers young people entertainment and activities, diverting them from ASB while promoting self-sufficiency. The Community Safety Team has a similar van for their work in Ashington, which was previously the mobile library. Regular patrols focus on areas around Asda, the Leisure Centre, Hirst Park, and the Hirst area, with patrol times lasting approximately 60 minutes.

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Cllr Matthew Cuthbert commended the proactive efforts of the Police and Asset Watch, noting that the new CCTV system in Ashington is proving effective.

Cllr Lynne Grimshaw inquired about any specific incidents contributing to ASB in Ashington and asked if the Safety Team can be deployed to other areas as needed. It was confirmed that all calls to the police are recorded, creating a hotspot map for ASB, and the Safety Team adjusts its patrols accordingly. Cllr Grimshaw also inquired about the funding for the Safety Team, which has been secured until May 2025. She further asked about the youth's response to the team's efforts, and it was confirmed that the youth are responding positively to the challenges posed by the team.

Cllr Sophie Robinson raised concerns about underreporting of ASB in the Hirst area and asked for clarification on the best way to report ASB. It was advised that reports can be made online, anonymously, if necessary, with the online system offering automatic logging of incidents.

Cllr Pauline Thompson highlighted the effectiveness of the CCTV system, citing a recent case where a suspect involved in damaging a church was identified through Asset Watch.

The Chair thanked the team for attending and for the positive comments about the town's CCTV, and Neighbourhood Policing Team.

FC24/059 CITIZENS ADVICE NORTHUMBERLAND

Community Advice Service Manager Geoff Crow in attendance to provide information on Winter Fuel Payments and the importance of claiming Pension Credit, and to answer any questions from Cllrs. It was confirmed that there had been a 50% increase in people accessing the benefits calculator, and NCC wrote out to 650 households.

Cllr Paul Wright left the meeting at 19:11.

Cllr Pauline Thompson inquired about raising awareness of Pension Credits. It was noted that information is available on the government website, Age UK website, and the County Council website. People can also seek assistance by calling, visiting the local office, or using the new web chat service.

Cllr Lynne Grimshaw commented that the change to winter fuel payments in some cases is encouraging more people to seek assistance from organisations like Citizens Advice and Age UK. As a result, some could end up receiving more financial support than they would have previously due to requesting help they might not have sought before.

Cllr Louis Brown asked about staffing levels at CAB. It was confirmed that in Northumberland, CAB has 120 staff members and 80 volunteers.

The Chair thanked Citizens Advice for the work they do in the town, and for speaking on this topic to help members better inform residents.

FC24/060 DISSOLUTION OF LEADER AND DEPUTY LEADER ROLES

Following the resignation of the current Leader and the dissolution of group meeting arrangements, it is proposed the roles of Leader and Deputy Leader are dissolved (placed on the agenda by Cllr Matthew Cuthbert).

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The motion as it appeared on the agenda was proposed by Cllr Matthew Cuthbert, and seconded by Cllr Gemma Hemsley.

Cllr John Tully expressed his disagreement with the proposal to dissolve the Leader and Deputy Leader roles, emphasising that, as Ashington is a large Town Council, these positions are vital for decision-making. He also voiced concerns about the strategic future of the Council. Cllr Pauline Thompson noted that there has always been a Leader and Deputy Leader, and a forum has historically existed to discuss issues collaboratively prior to meetings.

Cllr Louis Brown condemned the proposal, stating that the presence of a Leader and Labour group within the Town Chambers has always been a tradition.

Cllr Glynn Davies pointed out that the Leader and Deputy Leader are appointed at the Annual Meeting of the Council, and suggested deferring the decision until then, as a new council will be in place.

Cllr John Tully proposed an amendment to the motion to take the decision at the Annual Meeting of the Council in May.

In accordance with standing orders, the amendment was taken first, with 5 in favour, and 9 against. The amendment fell.

In accordance with standing orders, the original motion was voted upon, and was passed, 9 in favour, and 5 against. It was **AGREED** to dissolve the roles of Leader and Deputy Leader.

FC24/061 STANDING ORDERS

Following the agreement to dissolve the roles of Leader and Deputy Leader, to ensure clarity and legal compliance, **it was AGREED** to formalise the removal of these roles from the Standing Orders and reassign any roles or responsibilities that were previously attached to these positions.

- a) **It was AGREED** to remove references to the positions of Leader and Deputy Leader from the Council's Standing Orders 27 a-d
- b) **It was AGREED** to nominate Cllr Matthew Cuthbert as representative on the NALC County Committee.
- c) **It was AGREED** to nominate Cllr Marjorie Chambers as representative on the Ashington Town Board.
- d) **It was AGREED** to appoint two additional members to the Council's Personnel Committee, that ex-officio Chair and Vice Chair of the Climate Change and Environment Committee: Cllr Paul Wright and Cllr. Pauline Thompson. *The Executive Officer advised the revised Terms of Reference would be brought to Full Council for completeness.*
- e) Consider any other positions that were appointed on the basis of role. No other positions were considered.

FC24/062 FINANCIAL AND MANAGEMENT RISK ASSESSMENT

An updated document was **RECEIVED**.

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Councillor Louis Brown raised concerns about the status of Allotments, noting his lack of information on the matter. The Executive Officer sought a particular question and clarified that the red risk rating on the assessment with reference to 'Insufficient revenue from allotment rent to cover allotment costs', was justified as the Council was now unable to increase rent until 2026, but the Council could increase the budget available to cover costs either by increasing the precept or reducing non-discretionary spending elsewhere.

The inclusion of 'Health, Safety and Welfare of staff and Cllrs due to contentious decision-making' was discussed. This was included on the Financial and Management Risk Assessment as a result of the previous meeting, where the number of attendees was unknown prior to the meeting, and therefore not planned for. The Chamber was overcrowded, and some Cllrs had shared that they felt intimidated and unable to speak freely.

Contrasting views were expressed; on one side welcoming the numbers in attendance and not feeling intimidated or unable to speak freely, and one of concern that the presence and behaviour of those present created an atmosphere that made it difficult to speak and vote openly.

FC24/063 ANNUAL GOVERNANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY RETURN (AGAR), YEAR ENDING MARCH 2024

a) External Auditor Report/Certificate

The External Auditor Report/Certificate was **RECEIVED**.

b) Notice of Conclusion of Audit

The publication of the Notice of Conclusion of Audit was **RECEIVED** and **ENDORSED**.

FC24/064 HALF-YEAR BUDGET REVIEW

A half-year budget report **was RECEIVED** which outlined the pressure on the Council's budget due to £12k taken from general reserves for allotment repairs, the impact of the NJC pay deal, growing allotment costs with no growth in allotment income, and the necessary long-term investment into the earmarked asset fund for future play area developments.

The report outlined that the Council would be faced with a challenging choice when setting the 2025/26 budget, between cutting non-discretionary spending, or increasing the precept. To mitigate this the Executive Officer advised the Council should avoid spending projected balances this year to help offset next year's financial pressures.

The Executive Officer advised that the report outlined maintaining a balance at the year-end would help mitigate the risks of rising costs, pay increases, and the future need for investment. The decision rests with the Council, between restraint this year or facing increased financial pressure when setting the budget. Given the circumstances, the Executive Officer strongly advised the Council to carefully consider these options when making financial decisions this year, for projects and spending not already committed.

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FC24/065 PERSONNEL COMMITTEE

a) Report of Meeting held on 23rd July 2023

The report of the meeting held on 23rd July 2024 was **RECEIVED** and **AGREED**.

b) Salary Sacrifice EV Car Scheme

The report was **RECEIVED** which provided a comprehensive overview of salary sacrifice electric vehicle (EV) car schemes, including the mechanics, tax implications, cost analysis, and public sector adoption. The report outlined that by adopting this EV scheme, the Council will contribute significantly to reducing the impact of climate change while realising financial benefits, enhancing employee satisfaction, and solidifying the Council's position as a community leader in sustainable practices.

The potential benefits of adopting a salary sacrifice EV car scheme were detailed in the report. It offers tax savings for both employees and the Council, long-term cost-effectiveness through reduced fuel and maintenance expenses, and a positive impact on employee satisfaction and retention. Additionally, sustainable transportation choices through EVs aligns with the Council's commitment to reducing its carbon footprint and contributing to the fight against climate change.

It was **AGREED** to progress the recommended car leasing scheme for employees via NHS Fleet Car Solutions, noting there is no outlay for the Council.

c) Proposal for installation of staff shower facility

It was **AGREED** the proposal to install a staff shower facility was in alignment with environmental goals, has potential for improved staff welfare, and potential use by officers when working in dirty or hot conditions, however it was **AGREED** to defer any spending in this direction in view of the financial challenges faced by the Council. The Executive Officer advised that this was not essential work, and the estimate of £4,411 would be better consider in budget rounds for next year.

d) Increase in staff training budget

It was **ENDORSED** to increase the staff training budget by £1,545 to cover training that is deemed essential. In response to a comment that spending has been deferred for a shower, but spent on training, the Executive Officer advised that the Personnel Committee approved that the training was considered essential to the role.

FC24/066 YOUTH ADVISORY COMMITTEE

The report of the meeting held on 13th August 2024 was **RECEIVED**.

FC24/067 NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT

It was **AGREED** to nominate a fifth member to the Partnership Board, as provided for in the Partnership Agreement. A vote was taken and Cllr Gemma Hemsley was elected by a majority of 7/5 in favour.

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FC24/068 DATE, TIME AND VENUE FOR THE NEXT MEETING

Tuesday 26th November 2024, 6:00pm at the Town Hall

The meeting ended at 8:01pm.

DRAFT