

BERWICK-UPON-TWEED TOWN COUNCIL



Full Council

Time and date

Monday 23 February 2026 at 18:00

Place

Berwick-upon-Tweed Town Council, Unit 1, 82-88 Marygate, Berwick-upon-Tweed, Northumberland. TD15 1BN

Minutes

15.26. Members of the Council

Members in attendance (13):

- Cllr John Robertson (Mayor, in the Chair)
- Cllr Janice Bowden
- Cllr Graham Brown
- Cllr Robert Bruce
- Cllr Rachel Driver
- Cllr Mike Greener
- Cllr Laura Hawken
- Cllr Rosemary Mackenzie
- Cllr Philip Rowe
- Cllr Catherine Seymour
- Cllr Gary Smith
- Cllr Thomas Stewart
- Cllr Jane Turton

16.26. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from: Cllrs Anne Forbes, Ayrin Khan and Paul Hillier.

17.26. Disclosure of Interests

There were no disclosures interests received from any of the councillors present.

18.26. Open Session

During the open session, members of the public were invited to make representations, ask questions, and provide evidence related to the business on the agenda. Stephen Scott, a resident, raised concerns about the proposed purchase of an office building, questioning the financial viability and potential disruption costs. He also challenged the notion that the move would increase footfall in the town and expressed doubts about relocating the visitor centre. The Mayor acknowledged these points and clarified that this isn't the only option for the visitor centre and that they had approached the council about the move.

Lizzie Middlemiss, another resident, expressed her support for the council maintaining a presence on Berwick High Street (Marygate), emphasising the importance of accessibility and respect for residents. She criticised the council's response to public concerns and highlighted the need for the council to remain central to the town. The Mayor responded by assuring that the council staff do their best to assist residents and that members of the public are directed to Northumberland County Council (NCC) only when it is an issue that they deal with. Also, the council will continue to have an office, potentially at Hide Hill.

A third resident questioned the timing and necessity of the proposed purchase, given the ongoing Community Governance Review (CGR) and suggested considering a commercial lease instead. The Mayor explained that the council had taken its time to carefully consider the proposal and negotiate the price, emphasised the potential benefits of the building, including local housing and regarding the CGR, highlighted the effort in creating Berwick-upon-Tweed Town Council.

19.26. Minutes

Cllr Robert Bruce noted that his apology for absence was not recorded.

Cllr Catherine Seymour noted she had requested a named vote for item '7.26 Budget' which was not recorded.

The Mayor apologised for the late distribution of corrected documents, which caused some frustration among councillors.

After which, Councillors voted to approve the minutes of the meeting held on the 19th January 2026 with the amendments.

20.26. Proposed Purchase of Building.

Points raised during the discussion included housing needs, conversations with housing partners, cost and time of repayments, projected impact on precept, risk assessments, spending requirements, inadequacies of the current premises against benefits of a new building and consistency of payments on a purchased building as opposed to those on a rented building.

Cllr R Bruce asked that it be included in the minutes that he is against the proposal.

Decisions

Council resolved to:

1. Note the Public Works Loan Board / Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities borrowing process;
2. Instructs officers to prepare the supporting financial information required to inform a public consultation and any future borrowing approval application;
3. Agrees to progress the proposal to the next stage by undertaking a public consultation on the potential purchase / refurbishment and the option of borrowing; and
4. A further report be brought to Full Council presenting the consultation findings and updated financial and survey information, at which point Full Council will determine whether to proceed (including whether to apply for borrowing approval and borrow funds).

21.26. Notes of the Budget and Administration Working Group.

Cllr P Rowe presented the notes from the Budget and Administration Working Group meeting held on 9th February 2026 and during the discussion raised the following points.

- Recommendations regarding a meeting structure moved to next Full Council due to limited feedback.
- The next Budget and Administration Working Group meeting is scheduled for 13th April 2026.

Decisions

Council resolved to approve the following recommendations of the Working Group:

Standing Orders

1. Amendment to Standing Order 3 so that public participation is normally at the start of the meeting; and
2. Adding an explicit Chair's clarification exception to permit brief questions and answers with members of the public during item discussion where the Chair considers it helpful, with appropriate safeguards and with the Chair retaining discretion to decline.

Service Level Agreements (SLAs)

1. To adopt the SLA eligibility criteria and minimum SLA content as the standard framework for issuing and renewing SLAs,
2. To recommend that a Task Group be established (maximum 8 members) to determine which organisations should be eligible to be included in an SLA.
3. The Working Group to establish the eligibility criteria and bring back to a future meeting of Full Council.
4. That membership of the Task Group include Cllrs J Bowden, R Bruce, R Mackenzie, J Robertson and P Rowe

Council Strategy

1. That the Council Strategy be reviewed and refreshed, including appropriate member involvement, to agree the Council's goals for this administration.

Town of Culture

1. That Berwick-upon-Tweed Town Council lead and facilitate the Town of Culture 2028 bid and approve an appropriate budget of £2,000 to support the Expression of Interest consultation activity.

Canadian Pipes and Drums (August 2026)

1. That the Canadian Pipes and Drums be hosted in August 2026; and
2. To approve a budget of £2,000.

Town Centre Improvements

1. That £20,000 be allocated for Town Centre improvements, to be funded from the excess Schedule III monies received this year. This funding will support various improvement projects, including market enhancements and infrastructure upgrades.

Reserves

1. To maintain a defined General Reserve expressed as months of NRE, target range 3 – 6 months. RFO to bring a report to the next B&A Working Group.
2. That earmarked reserves should be held only where each reserve has a clear purpose, indicative cost, and review/drawdown plan; and
3. The allocation of £39,000 to boost the operating/general reserve, funded from the excess Schedule III monies received this year.

22.26. Notes of the Environment and Communities Working Group

Cllr J Turton presented the notes from the Environment and Communities Working Group meeting held on 2nd February 2026.

During which Cllr C Seymour raised concerns about the legal stipulations regarding the use of parks, noting that they must remain children's parks or revert back to NCC if closed. Officers provided an update regarding correspondence with Strategic Estates at NCC because legal copies of the documents that the Town Council holds states that the land may be used as public open space and no response or evidence has been provided to the contrary.

Decisions

Council resolved to approve the following recommendations of the Working Group:

Northumberland College

1. That officers progress the community partnership with Northumberland College with the college acting as principal contractor, ensuring health and safety compliance and the project involving students building additional polytunnels at the nursery site.

Grove Gardens South

1. That officers conduct a survey of the houses surrounding Grove Gardens South about the parks future uses.

Northumbria in Bloom

1. That officers continue to progress Northumbria in Bloom as laid out in the report which included:
 - a. Noting the progress to date and the planned partnership meeting.
 - b. Supporting the inclusion of community groups and partners.
 - c. Endorsing the proposed approach of starting in 2026 and refining over the next few years to build a stronger community

23.26. Stage One Community Governance Review Public Consultation

The council discussed the latest NCC Community Governance Review Public Consultation document. The discussion highlighted that this was an informational item to keep councillors informed about the consultation process. The mayor clarified that the removal of this tier of local government was not an option in this review. Councillors expressed their views, and it was noted that the consultation was intended to ask the community about their opinions on the matter. The council agreed to move on from this item, recognising it as an update for information purposes.

24.26. Quayside Huts

Cllr G Brown proposed that the meeting move straight to the recommendation.

Decision

Council resolved to approve that officers extend the quayside units to six with permission from NCC.

25.26. Santander Closure

The council discussed drafting a letter of opposition to Santander's proposed closure. It was agreed that sending the letter would record the council's opposition to the closure and support for the staff who would lose their jobs. Also agreed was the suggestion of asking Santander to consider a pop-up shop in the workspace, similar to that provided by Barclays and TSB.

Decision

Council resolved to approve that the Chief Officer, in conjunction with the Mayor, draft and send a letter of opposition to Santander's proposed closure with reference to the points raised during the discussion.

26.26. Recycling

Councillors discussed NCC's decision for residents to have a third recycling bin. It was noted that the idea was part of an expanded recycling strategy being rolled out by NCC, which might raise concerns among residents, particularly in areas with limited space.

Decision

Council resolved to inform residents about the new third recycling bin in the next newsletter, clarifying that it is a County Council initiative.

27.26. Date of Next Meeting

Decision

The next meeting of the Council will be held on Monday, 27th April 2026 at 18:00. This was confirmed without further discussion.

Decision

Council resolved to exclude members of the public and press from the meeting at Part 2 of the agenda in view of any confidential items under discussion. These will usually relate to exempt staffing matters or contractual matters which may be commercially sensitive.

28.26. Part 2 - Confidential Items

29.26. Confidential Matters

No confidential items were raised.

30.26. Staffing Working Group

Council resolved to agree the notes and approve the recommendations of the Working Group.