

BERWICK-UPON-TWEED TOWN COUNCIL



Full Council

Time and date

Monday 29 June 2026 at 18:00

Place

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

Minutes

32.26 Members of the Council

Cllr Jane Turton (Mayor)
Cllr Rosemary Mackenzie (Deputy Mayor)
Cllr Janice Bowden
Cllr Graham Brown
Cllr Robert Bruce
Cllr Rachel Driver
Cllr Anne Forbes
Cllr Mike Greener
Cllr Laura Hawken
Cllr Paul Hillier
Cllr Ayrin Khan
Cllr John Robertson
Cllr Philip Rowe
Cllr Catherine Seymour
Cllr Gary Smith
Cllr Thomas Stewart

Members present:

Cllr Jane Turton (Mayor)
Cllr Rosemary Mackenzie (Deputy Mayor)
Cllr Janice Bowden
Cllr Graham Brown
Cllr Robert Bruce
Cllr Rachel Driver
Cllr Mike Greener
Cllr Laura Hawken
Cllr Ayrin Khan
Cllr John Robertson

In attendance (Officers):

Iain McCready, Chief Officer / Proper Officer
Stephen Robinson, Operations Manager

33.26. Open Session

The Mayor opened the public participation period and restated that the session allowed a total of 15 minutes, with contributions limited to 3 minutes per person. No representations, questions or evidence were made. One member of the public present confirmed that they did not wish to speak, and the meeting moved on to the formal agenda.

34.26. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Stewart, Seymour and Hillier.

35.26. Disclosure of Interests

No disclosures of interest were received, either in advance of the meeting or at the meeting itself.

36.26. Minutes

Council reviewed the minutes of the meeting held on 11 May 2026 and agreed a series of corrections before signature. Cllr Robertson asked for the reference on page 8, item 4.26, to be amended so that the outgoing Mayor's former Sheriff and partner were recorded. Further corrections were made to item 13.26 so that Cllr Mackenzie is not a member of either the Salmon Queen Task Group or the Neighbourhood Plan Task Group, and Cllr Bowden was restored to the Neighbourhood Plan Task Group with the Council's agreement.

A further amendment was made to the outside bodies entry at item 14.26, where Cllr Mackenzie clarified that the named representatives should be herself and Cllr Smith rather than Cllr Rowe and Cllr Smith on the Berwick Youth Project. With those amendments noted, the minutes were approved and signed as a correct record.

Decision: Minutes of the Full Council meeting held on 11 May 2026 were approved as a correct record subject to the agreed amendments to names, group membership and outside-body representation.

Decision: Cllr Bowden was restored to the Neighbourhood Plan Task Group when the amendments to the previous minutes were agreed.

37.26. Part I - Items for Decisions

The Council moved into Part I business for decisions and proceeded directly to the Annual Governance and Accountability Return and subsequent report items.

38.26. Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR) 2025 / 2026

Council took each element of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return for 2025 to 2026 in sequence. The signed internal audit for the year ended 31 March 2026 was received, with issues raised in the report noted for onward consideration by the Budget and Administration Working Group. Members then considered Section 1, the Annual Governance Statement, and approved signature by the Chair and Chief Officer.

The Council next approved Section 2, the Accounting Statements for the year ended 31 March 2026, again authorising signature by the Chair and Chief Officer. It then approved the variances between the 2024 to 2025 and 2025 to 2026 annual returns, approved submission of the AGAR for the year ended 31 March 2026, and approved publication on the Town Council website as required. Finally, the dates for the exercise of public rights were agreed.

Decision: The Annual Governance Statement for 2025 to 2026 was approved, with signature authorised by the Chair and Chief Officer.

Decision: The Accounting Statements for the year ended 31 March 2026 were approved, with signature authorised by the Chair and Chief Officer.

Decision: The variances between the 2024 to 2025 and 2025 to 2026 annual returns were approved.

Decision: Submission of the AGAR for the year ended 31 March 2026 and publication on the Town Council website were approved.

Decision: The dates for the exercise of public rights were approved.

39.26. Asset Register

The updated Asset Register, including additions, disposals and reclassifications, was presented to Council and approved without further amendment.

Decision: Additions, disposals and reclassifications to the Asset Register were approved.

40.26. Notes of the Budget and Administration Working Group.

In the absence of Councillor Stewart, members considered the Budget and Administration Working Group notes directly. The meeting noted that Councillor Stewart had been elected Chair of the Working Group. Particular attention was given to item 5.26, which summarised the Internal Auditor's report for the year ending 31 March 2026. Three principal areas requiring further attention had been identified: the absence of a formally adopted investment strategy, the need to review and update the asset register, and the need to improve the Council website so information is easier to find and navigate.

Members recognised those issues as part of the Council's continuing work on governance, financial management and public transparency. The Working Group had already agreed that officers would begin reviewing the investment-strategy requirements and updating the asset register. Council then considered the recommendation to establish a website task group to review website structure, content and accessibility and to report back with findings and recommendations to the Budget and Administration Working Group.

During discussion, officers explained that the work was linked to strengthened accountability requirements, including accessibility expectations and wider compliance improvements. Members considered whether specialist skills would be needed and heard the earlier Working Group view that councillors should first review the website themselves and identify concerns, after which an external perspective could be brought in so both sets of views could be combined before any later tendering process. Members also agreed that all councillors should be given the opportunity to join the task group, including Councillor Stewart in his absence.

The Council therefore agreed that an e-mail should be sent to every councillor inviting expressions of interest and feedback. Members also agreed that responses should be returned by next Friday so the process did not drift. A suggestion that a fixed question set be issued with the e-mail was raised, but the discussion concluded in favour of allowing councillors to comment freely on what they considered right or wrong with the website.

Decision: A website task group was established to review the Council website and report its findings and recommendations to the Budget and Administration Working Group.

41.26. Notes of the Environment and Communities Working Group

Councillor Brown presented the Environment and Communities Working Group update from 10 June. He reported his election as Chair and said the group intended to operate more strategically, with meetings focused on project development, oversight of the additional expenditure supported by the precept, a strategic planning day now given a date, a target maximum meeting length of 2 hours, and regular inclusion of an Operations Manager report, budget monitoring and a new biodiversity and sustainability report.

On horticulture, the Working Group reviewed the current £45 charge for baskets and noted that this did not fully cover the cost of provision and watering. Members were nevertheless reluctant to increase the price because it needed to remain realistic against other providers. Sponsorship opportunities beyond individuals were discussed, including the Chamber of Trade, Rotary and larger businesses, although it was also noted that several major firms had reduced their community spending. The Council also heard that the town had been entered into the Northumbria in Bloom competition.

On tree planting and environmental projects, members were advised that 3 new planters were already in place on Marygate, with planting first and trees to follow later in the year. The lower planter position on the hill would be adjusted away from the West Street entrance because the Maltings and its contractors required access from that point. Officers also clarified that, as part of traffic-management arrangements, some modern kerbs and tarmac would be used temporarily while heritage kerbs and paving were lifted and stored to protect them during works, before reinstatement afterwards. The Woodland Walk scheme had been agreed with Northumberland County Council, with work hoped to begin in the summer, and there was optimism that Northumbrian Water volunteers could be involved. It was also reported that the

Salmon Queen area remained on course and that a £5,000 pound grant had been secured from Northumbrian Water.

The Working Group drew attention to play provision as a major strategic issue. A recent expensive repair suggested that the Splash Park was nearing the end of its life cycle, and full replacement could be in the region of a quarter of a million pounds. Members also discussed capacity issues at Newfields and Westfield. Rather than treating these as isolated matters, it was agreed that the Splash Park, Newfields, Westfield and other sites should be brought together in a broader strategic review of play provision, with the strategic planning day identified as a possible starting point given the scale of potential expenditure.

Council then took the formal recommendations. The proposal to give officers operational control over litter bin and bench placement was approved on the basis that members would set the budget and workable parameters, after which officers would manage provision and provide monthly expenditure reporting. A minor textual point in the report was also raised where Northumberland was misspelt in three places.

The recommendation on Hyde Hill tree planters prompted more extended debate. Members noted that the Working Group recommendation had only been carried by 4 votes to 3 and agreed that, given the closeness of that split, the matter should properly come before Full Council for final determination. Concerns were raised about sustainability, the eventual removal or replacement of trees, total lifetime cost, and whether one planter should first be tested on Hyde Hill because of the slope. Officers explained that moving a planter could be done quickly with suitable plant, although a one-off move using hired equipment would be disproportionate; in practice, any later relocation could be coordinated with larger infrastructure works.

Further clarification was given that Northumbrian Water's wider water-catchment and landscape project was expected to run over 3 years and cost millions of pounds, and that any in-ground tree planting associated with that scheme would return to Council in a future plan. Members also heard that the existing cherry trees had an expected life of about 20 years and that the current planters were adequate for them for that lifespan. Financially, the proposed Hyde Hill installation was discussed as costing about £10,000 for four units, before officers advised that only odd-numbered groupings would look right on the hill. The proposal was therefore revised from 4 trees to 3, reducing the spend to about £7,500. The approved recommendation was for 3 tree planters on Hyde Hill during the 2026 to 2027 financial year, with the cost met from the £20,000 town-centre improvements budget. Members also noted that county officers would still need to be satisfied about pavement width and placement.

Decision: Operational control of litter bin and bench placement was delegated to officers within an agreed budget and reporting framework.

Decision: Installation of 3 tree planters on Hyde Hill during the 2026 to 2027 financial year was approved, with the cost to be met from the £20,000 town-centre improvements budget.

42.26. Quayside Huts Design

Council considered the proposed Quayside hut designs prepared with the artist in residence at Berwick Academy. Members responded positively overall, describing the designs as imaginative and visually strong.

Decision: The proposed Quayside hut designs were approved.

43.26. Litter Picking Competition Prize

Council received the report on the litter-picking competition being developed with community groups across Berwick, Spittal and Tweedmouth. Officers explained that the project aimed to educate young people about litter prevention and that, following contact from Asda's community and customer champion Shona, 3 schools had agreed to take part. Children would produce a piece of artwork or a small-scale model in a format of their choice, each school would select a winner, and the winning child would then help develop the design into a display model. The entries were expected to cover the importance of not littering, environmental and wildlife impacts, the local

litter-picking groups and the 3 Rs message of reduce, reuse and recycle, using recyclable materials wherever possible.

Members noted that the 3 final school models would be displayed during June and July, with venues still to be confirmed. Greener Berwick had already donated prizes for the children, and the report asked Full Council to add £100 in book tokens for the schools because no budget line existed for that purpose. Councillor Mackenzie queried how £100 would be divided across 3 schools. Officers clarified that, if approved, the overall prize pot would be £100, allowing for a £50 first prize and 2 second prizes of £25 each. Council accepted that split and approved the expenditure.

Decision: Expenditure of £100 on book tokens for the litter-picking project was approved, to be awarded as a £50 first prize and 2 second prizes of £25 each.

44.26. Sheriff Appointment

Council noted the appointment of Councillor Greener as Sheriff for the 2026 to 2027 municipal year.

Decision: The appointment of Councillor Greener as Sheriff for the 2026 to 2027 municipal year was noted.

45.26. Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Council was confirmed for Monday 27 July 2026 at 18:00.

Decision: The next meeting of the Council was set for Monday 27 July 2026 at 18:00.

46.26. Part 2 - Confidential Items

At the close of the open agenda, the meeting indicated that it was moving on to confidential items.

47.26. Confidential Matters

Decision: Council resolved to:

- i. Agree a way forward for confidential items discussed, and
- ii. Note and approve the recommendations of the Staffing Working Group.