BERWICK-UPON-TWEED TOWN COUNCIL

Full Council

Time and date
Monday 27 July 2026 at 18:00

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

TO: **ALL MEMBERS OF THE FULL COUNCIL**

Dear Councillor

The Agenda for the meeting is set out below.

Iain McCready
Proper Officer
22 July 2026

Agendas and papers for all meetings can be accessed on https://www.berwick-tc.gov.uk/meetings

Members' Apologies
Members are requested to submit their apologies and any Declarations of Interest on the relevant form attached to this agenda to Chief.Officer@Berwick-tc.gov.uk by 5pm on the day before the meeting.

Recording of Council Meetings
The meeting is recorded for council use only.

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AGENDA

48.26.Members of the Council

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 and Cllr Thomas Stewart

49.26.Apologies for Absence

To receive apologies for absence.

50.26.Disclosure of Interests

See attached.

51.26.Open Session

Members of the public may make representations, ask questions and give evidence at a meeting which they are entitled to attend in respect of the business on the agenda. This is for a period of 15 minutes overall and is limited to 3 minutes per person.

52.26.Minutes

To sign as a correct record the minutes of the Berwick-upon-Tweed Town Council meeting held on 29 June 2026.

53.26.Part 1- Items for Decisions

Review the notes of the Working Groups and discuss any recommendations to Full Council

54.26.Notes of the Environment and Communities Working Group

To receive an update from the Lead Member on the recent meeting of the Working Group and to consider any recommendations to Full Council.

55.26.Notes of the Budget and Administration Working Group

To receive an update from the Lead Member on the recent meeting of the Working Group and to consider any recommendations to Full Council.

56.26.Announcement of a Casual Vacancy

To note the resignation as Councillor of Philip Rowe.
NCC Election Services have been notified of the vacancy.

57.26.Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Council will be held on Monday 28th September 2026.

58.26.Part 2 - Confidential Items

TO PASS A RESOLUTION to exclude members of the public and press from the meeting at Part 3 of the agenda (if required) in view of any confidential items under discussion. These will usually relate to exempt staffing matters or contractual matters which may be commercially sensitive.

59.26.Confidential Matters

Any confidential matters (if required) arising from discussions of the Working Group notes.

Berwick-upon-Tweed Town Council

Disclosure of Interests Form

(Localism Act 2011)

Notification by a Member of a Disclosable Pecuniary or Other Interest in a Matter under Consideration at a Meeting

Please complete the form below to indicate any agenda items in which you have an interest. If you have a disclosable pecuniary or other interest in an item, please also indicate whether you wish to speak (refer to the Council's Code of Conduct for details).

As required by the Localism Act 2011, I declare that I have a disclosable pecuniary or personal interest in the following matter(s):

MEETING: ____________________________

DATE: ________________________________

NAME OF COUNCILLOR: _______________________________________

Agenda Item No.	Type of Interest (Disclosable Pecuniary / Other)	Reason for Interest	Wish to Speak (Yes/No)

Signed: ______________________________

Date: ________________________________

Please return this form to the Chief Officer before the meeting begins.

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.

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

37.26. Part 1- Items for Decisions

The Council moved into Part 1 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.

<u>Decision</u>: The Annual Governance Statement for 2025 to 2026 was approved, with signature authorised by the Chair and Chief Officer.
<u>Decision</u>: The Accounting Statements for the year ended 31 March 2026 were approved, with signature authorised by the Chair and Chief Officer.
<u>Decision</u>: The variances between the 2024 to 2025 and 2025 to 2026 annual returns were approved.
<u>Decision</u>: Submission of the AGAR for the year ended 31 March 2026 and publication on the Town Council website were approved.
<u>Decision</u>: 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.

BERWICK-UPON-TWEED TOWN COUNCIL

Environment and Communities Working Group

Time and date
Wednesday 8 July 2026 at 12:00

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

Group Members
Cllr Graham Brown (Chair)
Cllr Jane Turton (Mayor)
Cllr Rosemary Mackenzie (Deputy Mayor)
Cllr Mike Greener
Cllr Paul Hillier
Cllr Ayrin Kahn
Cllr Gary Smith
Cllr Thomas Stewart

In Attendance
Cllr Graham Brown (Chair)
Cllr Jane Turton (Mayor)
Cllr Rosemary Mackenzie (Deputy Mayor)
Cllr Mike Greener
Cllr Ayrin Kahn
Cllr Thomas Stewart
Cllr Laura Hawken – nonvoting member

Officers
Iain McCready – Chief Officer (Item 5 and 6 only)
Stephen Robinson – Operations Manager

Notes

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Paul Hillier.

2. Disclosures of Interest

None Received.

3. Notes of the Previous Meeting

The group briefly revisited matters arising from the previous meeting. As they had already been through full council, rather than undertaking a detailed line-by-line approval of the prior notes a brief summary discussion took place.

Members also referenced ongoing matters including Woodland Walk, play areas, public bins, and other previously tracked items before moving on. No formal amendment to the earlier notes was finalised during this exchange, and the discussion served mainly as a short review of outstanding context before the group advanced to the budget report.

4. Spend vs Budget to Date

Members reviewed the budget report and focused on the presentation of expenditure lines rather than on a major spending variance. A question was raised about the structure of the report, particularly the distinction between the section covering lines 4500 to 4509, which appeared to relate to direct spending on physical assets, and lines 4602 to 4614, which appeared to cover staffing or other indirect operating costs. The concern was that both sections were labelled as indirect expenditure, which several members found confusing.

The explanation given was that the report is drawn directly from Rialtas accounting software and is presented in the form used for audit purposes. While there was some acceptance that the software structure might explain the wording, members were not fully satisfied that the labelling was clear for group use. The agreed way forward was to raise the issue through the Budget and Administration Working Group so that the classification and wording could be checked and discussed further there.

Task: Raise the confusing indirect expenditure headings in the budget report with the Budget and Administration Working Group for review.

5. Biodiversity and Sustainability

The Operations Manager introduced the first biodiversity and sustainability report, brought forward after the earlier decision to make this a standing item. Members welcomed the report as a strong starting point but asked for time to absorb it properly, as it had only just been circulated. Discussion then moved quickly into whether the document was sufficient as a first baseline and how far it should go beyond recording current practice into lobbying, policy, and longer-term ambition.

A substantial strand of the discussion focused on herbicide use, especially glyphosate. Members noted Northumberland County Council's twice-yearly glyphosate spraying program, which normally begins in April but was delayed by weather, contributing to heavier weed growth this year. Cllr Stewart recalled earlier lobbying and a claimed trial of alternatives that did not produce a publicly visible outcome, and they argued that continuing glyphosate use remained troubling because of concerns over human health and its admitted danger to aquatic life. Particular concern was expressed about spraying close to the River Tweed, including along Riverside Walk.

Other members took a more practical line, accepting the concern but emphasising the operational difficulty of weed control without chemical treatment. It was argued that the only consistently effective alternative is manual or mechanical maintenance, especially keeping streets and gullies clean, and that this creates a manpower and cost problem rather than a simple policy fix. Members nevertheless felt the council should state its concern to Northumberland County Council and press for more serious exploration of alternatives, while recognizing that the county council's current budget pressures make major service changes unlikely.

The group then broadened the report's scope. Cllr Hawken suggested the document should include not only public information but also structured engagement with stakeholders, including Greener Berwick and Northumberland County Council. Cllr Turton proposed that community composting and better use of green waste should at least be included as an area for future consideration, even if the council's present site is too small and insecure for a larger-scale scheme. The Operations Manager noted that a larger and more permanent site would be needed before investment in mulching or wider compost handling could be realistic.

Cllr Stewart also suggested editorial and policy changes. He felt the report relied too visibly on wording from South Cambridgeshire District Council and should be redrafted in a more locally owned voice. He asked for stronger public communication through the council website and argued that the draft was heavy on insects and pollinators but light on birds and mammals. Specific additions proposed during the debate included nesting boxes beyond Woodland Walk, hedge-cutting timing to protect nesting season through the end of July, swift bricks in new or renovated buildings, wildlife corridors, and broader consideration of hedgehog movement where planning opportunities arise.

A further planning-related issue was raised around biodiversity net gain. Members were concerned that development-linked biodiversity funding generated in Berwick could be spent elsewhere in the county or elsewhere in the country, creating a local net loss even if the formal requirement was met. The committee considered whether the council should press for biodiversity net gain linked to Berwick developments to be delivered in Berwick where possible, potentially through discussion with county planning officers or, in principle, through identifying land that could host improvement projects.

As the discussion drew together, members distinguished between broad aspiration and immediate deliverability. The Chief Officer emphasised that the report should be treated as a baseline or blueprint rather than an attempt to implement every suggestion at once, especially with a strategy session scheduled for the following day. The final sense of the meeting was that the report remained sound in substance, but that it should be lightly revised to remove borrowed wording, add a small number of the points raised, and return in a clearer form while the larger strategic and resourcing questions continued through wider council discussion.

Task: Revise the biodiversity and sustainability report to remove the South Cambridgeshire reference and reflect additional points raised in discussion before it returns in updated form.
Task: Develop the council's biodiversity and sustainability policy over the coming year.

6. Operations Manager Report

The Operations Managers report was summarised by exception to save time. On staffing, he confirmed that interviews are scheduled for 21 July and that the council is also working with Northumberland County Council's Getting to Work scheme, which supports young people with additional learning needs into employment. The candidate put forward through that route was described as having submitted a strong application and as being enthusiastic about horticulture and outdoor work. Members discussed whether the arrangement could help stretch staffing capacity, but the main point was that the scheme includes funded adjustments and up to 12 months of one-to-one support.

The wider operational theme was pressure on the current workforce. It was noted that complaints have been received about public seating becoming unusable because weeds, shrubs, and hedges are encroaching around benches and bus shelters. He said the council can only clear around benches when maintenance works already take place, which usually means a roughly two-year cycle, and that with more than 300 benches the council does not have the staff capacity to keep all locations in better routine condition. Members recognised this as part of the same wider weed-management problem already discussed under biodiversity.

On public seating and shelters, members were asked to report problem locations, ideally with what3words references, so officer time could be used more efficiently. There was discussion about repair work at Seafield Park and the role of a skilled local volunteer in replacing damaged timber. The report's RTPI reference was clarified as real-time passenger information. The Operations Manager explained that Borders Buses had been enthusiastic about extending digital passenger information and had already installed solar-powered RTPI elsewhere in the Scottish Borders, with systems that can also interface with Arriva and National Express, but that securing meetings with the relevant commercial decision-makers had been difficult.

Bus stop condition generated several specific concerns. Members raised the poor state of lamp-post notice boards, damaged glazing and exposed electrics at the shelter by St. Cuthbert's Catholic First School, broken or outdated timetable displays, and the need for a more systematic method of ward-by-ward checking. It was noted that one officer covers around 3,500 bus stops across the county, which helps explain delays. Members agreed it would be more practical for ward representatives to inspect bus stops in their own areas and feed issues back, particularly for damage, timetables, and notice boards.

Litter bins were also discussed in practical terms. Members questioned whether the public could access a map of bin locations, especially where complaints continue about dog waste and the perceived lack of bins along the riverside and at Ramparts. The Operations Manager said the council does not currently publish that map, though the stock is large at roughly 250 bins and QR codes already exist on bins for reporting overflow. A suggestion was made to adapt the QR function so residents could identify the nearest next bin, but this was linked back to wider website investment and technical capacity.

The group then turned to outstanding projects. On Grove Gardens, the Operations Manager reported that a public consultation had produced only three responses from around 150 flyers, with three different preferred outcomes: a standard play area with more robust equipment, a community garden, or a special educational needs play space. Members noted the low response rate but also the difficulty of getting engagement generally, with Woodland Walk having produced only 10 responses from 400 flyers. For Five Arches Park, The Operations Manager said county officers remained supportive of phased transfer of the whole site rather than partial arrangements, provided conditions were addressed around railings, tree works, and footpath remediation. Members reaffirmed support for progressing that route, subject to governance and cost handling.

Allotments and land opportunity questions were touched on briefly. Discussion continued around whether land near Riverside Road was worth pursuing through a Land Registry search, with the view that the likely route would be more expensive than county-owned alternatives but that identifying the owner would still be useful. The committee also revisited Cemetery Lane and other community garden references, clarifying what had and had not progressed.

Task: Ward representatives should inspect bus stops in their own areas and report damage, notice-board issues, and timetable problems back to the Operations Manager.
Task: Proceed with a Land Registry search on the Riverside Road land to confirm ownership.

7. Reports from Outside Bodies

No reports from outside bodies were presented at this meeting.

8. Small Schemes Requests

The committee considered several proposals linked to County Councillor Nicole Brooke's small schemes funding, with discussion framed by the question of legacy responsibility. Members accepted that while the initial capital cost could come from county funding, any asset placed in the public realm would need a body willing to carry ongoing liability and maintenance. That principle shaped the discussion of all three ideas.

The proposed outdoor warrior gym received the most positive response. The Operations Manager explained that the concept had shifted since earlier papers and was now intended for open ground at Newfields adjacent to an existing play area. He described it as a calisthenics-style installation made of robust galvanized steel bars with a hard-standing surface, requiring very little routine maintenance. Members acknowledged that broader community research had not been extensive, but several felt the likely public-health and fitness benefit, low upkeep burden, and minimal downside made the proposal reasonable. The committee therefore supported recommending the scheme to full council.

The outdoor chess table proposal was also received favourably. The Operations Manager reported a quoted installation cost of £4,884 for a stone chess board with steel frame and integral seating, intended for the quayside area. The equipment was described as robust, and County Councillor Brooke also intended to arrange a small number of chess sets to be available through the YHA so that visitors would not need to bring their own pieces. Members noted that the idea appeared to have attracted broad informal support and that any reputational risk from low uptake would sit mainly with the scheme promoter rather than with the town council. The committee agreed to recommend support to full council.

The flagpole proposal prompted a much more cautious and at times openly critical discussion. Members heard that the proposal involved two flagpole locations, including one near the War Memorial and one on county land near the retail park approach, together with a Berwick flag, a St George's flag, and the Union Jack. The Operations Manager explained that formal control over which flag was flown would sit with the town council once adopted and that the dominant intention was said to be celebrating Berwick, not flying national flags routinely. He also warned that this option carried the highest legacy cost, potentially around £100 to £250 per replacement flag.

Despite that clarification, members remained uneasy. Concerns covered vandalism, whether the visual improvement was meaningful, whether the proposal risked drawing the council into avoidable political or symbolic controversy, and whether officer and member time should be spent on managing a sensitive flag calendar.

Since the meeting a discussion between Officers and County Councillor Brooke had taken place and County Councillor Brooke confirmed she would be happy for the pole to fly the Berwick flag permanently, with the exception of if a Monarch was to die.

Decision: Recommend to Full Council to support the installation of a 'Warrier Gym' at Newfields play park.
Decision: Recommend to Full Council to support the Quayside chess table proposal.
Decision: Full Council to discuss the support for the flag pole project noting that the decision from the Environment and Communities Working Group is not to support due to the reasons stated above.

9. Tourist Kiosk

The proposal for a tourist information kiosk at Castlegate Car Park was treated as well-intentioned but with operational concerns raised. Members acknowledged the underlying idea had merit, particularly given the volume of visitors arriving by car and the possibility that a kiosk could direct people onward to existing visitor services. The discussion also recognised Ms Middlemiss' earlier positive contribution to town events, including work on the Christmas market and other successful events.

The main concern was staffing. Members were clear that a kiosk of this kind would rely on a dependable volunteer rota and that no such plan currently existed. It was also noted that if the kiosk were installed and volunteer support failed to materialise, the asset could become redundant, although one member observed that a hut structure might at least be reusable elsewhere. Even so, the committee did not consider it realistic to proceed on goodwill alone.

Members therefore settled on a cautious response. The proposal was not supported at this stage, but the group agreed that the originator should be encouraged to return with a clearer management model if she wished to pursue it further. The group's emphasis was that any revived proposal would need a practical operating plan, named volunteer capacity, and a credible explanation of how the kiosk would function without placing additional burden on the council's already stretched staffing resource.

Decision: The tourist kiosk proposal was not supported in its current form because no credible staffing and management arrangement was in place.
Task: Write to the proposer of the tourist kiosk outlining that the idea could be reconsidered if a clear management plan and confirmed volunteer rota are provided.

10. Grass Cutting Palace Green

The committee considered the request connected with grass cutting at Palace Green and quickly established that the council could not absorb the work within existing staffing. Members noted that the town council already contracts out its own grass cutting, so any direct support would in practice mean extending that contract rather than using internal staff. An estimated additional cost of about £50 a fortnight was discussed, which would place the seasonal cost at roughly £800 over the April to October period.

The discussion widened briefly into the longer-running issue of responsibility for the Scout Hut site and its wider community use. Members recalled that questions around how the building and grounds are managed have arisen repeatedly over many years, with recurring difficulties around volunteer commitment, grant eligibility, and long-term stewardship. The immediate conclusion, however, was narrower and practical: if support were to be considered, it should either come through the council's grant process or through a paid service arrangement rather than through an unfunded expectation that the town council would simply take on the work.

Decision: To not take on responsibility for the Palace Green Scout Hut grass cutting currently, either through internal or external contracting.
Task: To write to the Scouts and inform them that a grant application would be the best option for gaining support from Berwick Town Council for their ground's maintenance.

11. Items for Future Agendas

Under future business, the group considered a request to support the Harbour of Memory research project being undertaken through Northumbria University. Members understood that the project involved work around harbours, filmmaking, community exhibitions, and archive activity, and that the request was for council support rather than funding or staff time. The group was content in principle, with only minor discussion about whether the council could also help promote the work through its social media channels if material were provided.

Members then looked ahead to upcoming committee business. There was interest in bringing bus stop conditions back to a future meeting after ward representatives had inspected stops in their own areas. At the same time, several members felt that the following day's strategy session would shape much of the future agenda, so they were reluctant to add more items prematurely. The next meeting date was confirmed as Wednesday 9 September 2026 at 12:00.

Decision: In-principle support was given to the Harbour of Memory project, subject to any necessary governance checks.

BERWICK-UPON-TWEED TOWN COUNCIL

Budget and Administration Working Group

Time and date
Thursday 16 July 2026 at 16:00

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

Members of the Working Group
Cllr Thomas Stewart (Chair)
Cllr Janice Bowden
Cllr Rachel Driver
Cllr Mike Greener
Cllr John Robertson
Cllr Philip Rowe
Cllr Jane Turton (Mayor)

Members present:
Cllr Thomas Stewart (Chair)
Cllr Janice Bowden
Cllr Mike Greener
Cllr John Robertson
Cllr Jane Turton (Mayor)

Officers:
Iain McCready, Chief Officer

Notes

1.26 Apologies for Absence

There were no apologies for absence.

2.26 Disclosures of Interest

There were no disclosures of interest.

3.26 Notes of the Previous Meeting

The notes of the meeting held on 18 June 2026 were received and agreed as an accurate record and authorised for signature.

4.26 Grants and Service Level Agreements

The Working Group considered five applications received under the Council's community grants scheme.

The annual grants budget is £15,000. After allowing for the previously agreed £500 payment to the choir, £14,500 remained available. The recommendations below total £7,300, leaving £7,200 available for the December funding round, subject to any further decision by Full Council.

Members considered the community benefit, accessibility, financial position and deliverability of each proposal. Particular support was expressed for projects benefiting children and young people, increasing participation and improving access to community activity.

Recommendations to Full Council

- That a grant of £2,500 be awarded to Amped Berwick.
- That a grant of £2,500 be awarded to Berwick Parkrun.
- That a grant of £1,000 be awarded to Berwick Literary Festival, restricted to its schools and young people's activity.
- That a grant of £300 be awarded to Three Bridges Explorer Unit/North Northumberland District Scouts.
- That a grant of £1,000 be awarded to Berwick Rugby Club.

The Working Group also discussed the distinction between discretionary grants and recurring financial support for an agreed service. Members considered that recurring support, where the Council expects defined outputs, may be better governed through a service level agreement.

Agreed

That the Chief Officer prepare a report on service level agreements, with examples, for consideration at the September meeting.

5.26 Review of Financial Regulations

The Working Group reviewed the draft Financial Regulations and agreed that further amendments were required before the document could be recommended to Full Council.
The revised draft will:

- refer expressly to card payments and the controls applying to card income;
- name the Budget and Administration Working Group as the group responsible for considering draft budgets before referral to Full Council;
- reflect the proposed external bookkeeping arrangements while retaining oversight by the Responsible Financial Officer;
- require financial checks to be carried out by two separate individuals where verification by two officers is required;
- provide for the second Council debit card to transfer from the Finance Officer to the Operations Manager once the finance function has been externalised; and
- clarify the reporting and approval arrangements for the disposal of assets and the subsequent updating of the asset register.

Members also considered the existing financial delegation thresholds and requested benchmarking against councils of a comparable size before any revised limits were proposed.

Agreed
That the Chief Officer amend the Financial Regulations and prepare benchmarking on delegation thresholds. The revised draft is to return to the Working Group before referral to Full Council, following the appointment of an external bookkeeper.

6.26 Expenditure Against Budget – Year to Date

The Working Group reviewed the budget variance report and the detailed income and expenditure report. Members discussed publicity and communications, staff training, visitor support services, the Woodland Walk, floral displays, town improvement projects, the Salmon Queen and the Neighbourhood Plan.

Two editions of the Council bulletin had been produced during the year, supported respectively by the Neighbourhood Plan and Salmon Queen budgets. A further autumn edition was proposed, with a substantial contribution expected from Berwick Community Trust. Members agreed that future bulletin planning and content should be overseen by the Budget and Administration Working Group.

Members noted that no further expenditure was currently expected against the staff training overspend during this financial year. Future website training would be charged to the relevant project budget. The visitor support service and the outputs received by the Council would be reviewed separately.

Some apparent variances arose from the timing of expenditure, transfers between budget headings, committed costs not yet invoiced and related income not yet received. Further sponsorship and other income were expected for the Salmon Queen. The event's final financial position and delivery arrangements would be reviewed once all income and expenditure had been recorded.

Neighbourhood Plan expenditure would increase when the latest consultant invoice was posted. Earmarked reserves remained available and likely referendum costs would need to be considered in the 2027/28 budget. The Neighbourhood Plan would continue under the present planning framework and be reviewed after Northumberland County Council's new Local Plan had been adopted.

Agreed
- That bulletin planning be included on the agenda for the September meeting.
- That future financial monitoring reports show relevant reserve balances alongside expenditure and income.

7.26 Notification of Receipts

Receipts for the period were noted. No further matters were raised.

8.26 Bank Reconciliations

The bank reconciliations were noted. No further matters were raised.

9.26 Date of Next Meeting

The date of the next meeting would be Thursday 17 September 2026.