

Wylam Institute

Chair's report to the AGM – June 2026 Financial year 1 April 2025 to 31 March 2026

Introduction

This is my second annual report as Chair of Wylam Institute, and I am pleased to reflect on another positive and productive year. Over the past twelve months, the Institute has continued to be a well-used and valued community asset, hosting a wide range of classes, activities, meetings and celebrations for people of all ages.

The level of hire has been challenging this year, with Northumberland County Council having moved the EOTAS school to new premises and the loss of another regular hirer. We have made considerable efforts to bring in new activities and events this year, and I'm pleased to say this has resulted in some new regular classes and other events.

Governance, safety and operations

Over the year, the trustees and staff have continued to focus on ensuring that the Institute is governed well, remains a safe environment for all users, and is financially sustainable. Health and safety continues to be treated as a priority, and all our policies and procedures have been kept under regular review. Safeguarding remains central to our work, helping to ensure the wellbeing of everyone who uses the Institute.

Improvements have been made with the installation of a new sign on the front of the building, a new ground floor boiler and new porch doors. Regular maintenance work ensures safety and comfort for visitors, and this has included the removal of some unsafe trees in the garden.

I would like to thank my fellow trustees and the staff team for their continued commitment, practical support and constructive challenge. Their collective experience and willingness to give time and expertise are essential to the smooth running of the Institute.

Financial position

The Institute's finances remain stable. The Treasurer's report provides full detail, but I highlight our continued focus on managing resources carefully while planning for future needs. External support, including an annual grant from the Parish Council, continues to play an important role in helping us meet essential costs such as insurance.

Charitable status and trusteeship

Members approved the change to our charitable status and a new constitution at the 2025 AGM. Progress stalled during the year and, in the meantime, Action for Communities in Rural England (ACRE) revised the constitution template, which was approved by the Charity Commission in January 2026.

We have now revised the constitution again, and ask the members to accept this amended document, which will be submitted immediately after the AGM for approval by the Charity Commission, to create a new Charitable Incorporated Organisation for the Institute. This remains an important step in securing the long-term future of the Institute, reducing personal liability for trustees and formalising arrangements for staff.

Communication and engagement

Communication with hirers and the wider community has continued to develop over the past year. Our online booking system has made Institute activities visible to everyone via our website and has simplified booking arrangements. Our website and social media presence are now well established and provide clear information to support our aims. We have continued to value opportunities for listening and feedback, including direct contact with hirers and informal conversations with groups and visitors. Our 130th anniversary weekend offered a glimpse into the Institute's history and for people to come together, which was the very reason for the Institute's conception in 1896.

Wylam Institute future

The loss of key income streams and reduced use of halls and rooms has emphasised the need to accelerate plans to secure the future of the Institute as a community association for the village and surrounding area. Engagement with residents on how they see a future for the Institute was essential and we have just closed a consultation to seek views. Once the results have been analysed, we will share a summary of the findings with residents, hirers and partners.

2026/2027 and beyond

Guided by the result of our survey and from experts in building modernisation, technology and sustainability, the Institute will look to produce a framework for major improvements to the Institute, and to work with partners in creating the type of community asset that meets the needs of the village in the long term. This will involve partnership working with local groups and organisations and securing external funding to support large-scale improvements. The Institute commits to regular progress updates for the community throughout the project.

My thanks

Once again I want to show my appreciation of everyone who contributes to the life of the Institute. Everyone I have met and worked with this year has been generous with their time, expertise and skills.

In particular, I would like to say a heartfelt thank you to the trustees and staff who continue to govern and run the Institute, and who have supported the 130th anniversary weekend, the Institute Future consultation and many other activities this year. I particularly want to thank Fiona Oomes for her 19 years of service as Clerk, who has been so helpful with her time and wise advice and has been an all-round delightful member of the team. Fiona retired on 31 March, and we all wish her a very happy retirement.

To all those who organise events, classes, celebrations or groups at the Institute, please accept my grateful thanks for continuing to meet here and support us to continue as a thriving village hall.

My final thank you is to the people of Wylam and beyond who visit the Institute for many reasons. Your support ensures that the Institute remains a lively, inclusive and much-loved community hub.