



4 Together Partnership Minutes of the Board Meeting Wednesday 5 January 2022, (Virtual Meeting via Microsoft Teams)

PRESENT:

Mark Booth – Health Representative, Justin Parry – Fire Service Representative, Mary Readman – DCC Head of Transactional Services, David Stothard – Business Representative (Vice Chair), Carole Atkinson, Susan Kirby
Dennis Ramsey (Vice Chair), Cllr Peter Atkinson – DCC, Cllr Julie Cairns – DCC (Chair), Cllr Pauline Crathorne – Cornforth Parish Council, Cllr Joe Makepeace – Ferryhill Town Council, Cllr Elaine Peeke – DCC, Cllr Joe Quinn – DCC, Lee Copeland – Principal AAP Coordinator, Callum Aitchison – Principal Community Development Project Officer, Paula Nixon – Community Development Project Officer, Paula Stockport – AAP Support Officer, Dr Matt Shield – Sedgfield North Primary Care Network

APOLOGIES:

Chris Cairns, Nigel Jones, Angela Smurthwaite, Insp Mike Sammut, Tony Cutmore

OBSERVERS:

Mr D Curry

Standard Board Meeting

A1. Introductions & Apologies

Cllr JC welcomed everyone to the meeting of the 4 Together Partnership Board, and a brief round of introductions was given.

Apologies for absence were noted, as above.

A2. Agreement of Minutes from Previous Meeting (3.11.21) - Matters Arising

LC reviewed the previous minutes for matters arising, actions and accuracy. The following points were noted:

- A previous action had been recorded for Cllr JC to forward a copy of the notes from the meeting with representatives of Ferryhill/Chilton GP's surgery she had previously attended with Cllr PA. Cllr JC will follow up (**Action 1: Cllr JC**).
- LC clarified that in relation to the previous action to convene a subgroup to look at the Towns & Villages funding, 8 Board members have expressed an interest. Our T&Vs Link Officer, Angela Blanchard, is currently on annual leave but LC will be looking at hopefully arranging the first meeting towards the end of January.
- DR requested that ongoing discussion in relation to the review of bus services be kept on the agenda. Cllr EP added that she has recently forwarded a written update from the first Local Bus Board meeting she attended to LC for onward circulation to Board members (**Action 2: LC**).

- Cllr JM commented that he had recently attended a meeting at Spennymoor Town Hall with the Police & Crime Commissioner. Cllr JM highlighted that two pertinent issues discussed included a review of the Police's non-emergency contact number, as well as ongoing problems with parked cars in various locations blocking potential access for emergency vehicles. Cllr JM requested that it be noted, for the minutes, that the PCC had confirmed that a review of the system for non-emergency contact would take place, although this could be a lengthy process. The PCC had also noted the point in relation to parked cars causing obstructions, particularly in the Dean Bank area.

There were no further matters arising, and the minutes were **AGREED** as a true record.

A3. Countywide Partner Issues

A3.1 DCC Budget Update (Mary Readman)

Board members received a presentation in relation to the Council's budget and Council Tax position, with the following key messages:

- the Council is in a strong financial position, but things can quickly turn – there is a need to continue to plan and prepare for the worst;
- a range of unavoidable additional budget pressures need to be accommodated next year;
- significant uncertainty exists over impact of possible redistribution of government funding and Social Care Levy / Social Care changes in the medium term;
- the Council continues to suffer from low tax base and limitations on tax raising capacity;
- additional flexibility on council tax increases and expectation from Govt that this is taken – if not taken in any one year cannot be recovered, is lost forever from base.

The AAP was asked to consider their view on balancing the 2022/23 forecast budget shortfall from council tax increases vs reductions in services or one-off use of reserves which would increase the savings required in 2023/24.

Questions were invited from Board members and the following points were noted:

- DR highlighted an error in the figures on Slide 3 – the “sum financed by Council Tax” should be £241m.
- MB suggested that a 3% uplift would be the most prudent approach from a financial point of view.
- Cllr PA acknowledged that the Council faces difficult decisions; if cuts to services were considered these would be hard to justify given previous cuts and services already running at minimum capacity. Likewise, should reserves be used to cover some of the shortfall, the Council would find itself in the same position next year.
- Cllr JM asked how much the Council has in reserves, both allocated and unallocated. He would find it difficult to make an informed decision without having this information first; MR will clarify the figures (**Action 3: MR**).
- Cllr PC commented that DCC have always managed their finances prudently. She noted the increased demand particularly for social care services and the ongoing pressures in relation to reduced Government

funding. Cllr PC added that she feels there should be caution if considering use of reserves, once this has been spent it cannot be replaced.

- Cllr JC suggested that better communication with residents is needed in terms of how budgets are allocated and managed, specifically in relation to Council Tax - there is a perception of “what do I get for my money”. In addition, people can often be disengaged with issues that don't directly affect them.

MR explained the next steps will be a Budget report presented to Cabinet on 9 February 2022, and a Cabinet report then presented to Full Council on 23 February 2022 where budget approval and council tax for 2022/23 will be sought.

Cllr JC thanked MR for her presentation.

A3.2 Sedgefield North Primary Care Network Update (Dr Matt Shield)

Dr Shield updated Board members in relation to the Sedgefield North Primary Care Network (PCN). The aim of the PCNs are to:

- improve health outcomes for patients in the local area;
- add extra capacity into Primary Care to help meet the demands of the ever-growing population;
- encourage practices to work together to deliver services in a more joined up way.

Dr Shield's presentation covered the challenges faced by Primary Care over the last 18 months, as well as information relating to patient access, PCN workforce, service requirements, and future developments.

A brief Q&A took place, and the following points were noted:

- Cllr JQ acknowledged that the NHS do a fantastic job. He believes the main issue, especially locally, is difficulty getting through to the surgery by phone. Dr MS acknowledged the issue and noted that this is already on the agenda for discussion locally. A couple of possible options being considered to support the volume/demand for the system are call waiting and call back systems.
- CA acknowledged the significant increased pressures that have resulted from the pandemic, commenting that she feels a call back system could be beneficial in alleviating peoples' frustrations and increased feelings of panic caused by being on hold or not being able to get through. Better use of online services/methods of contact would also help to ease the pressure on telephone services.
- Cllr PC suggested that people should be encouraged to make better use of pharmacies, to help alleviate some of the pressure on GPs. Cllr PC suggested that specific promotion could be done via the AAP, Town & Parish Councils etc. MB commented that use of pharmacy services has been promoted previously, but not specifically through the AAP; MB will speak to the relevant contact within the CCG to arrange some literature for circulation (**Action 4: MB**).
- DR commented that he believes people still not being able to walk into their surgery causes an increased demand for telephone support. Dr MS advised that each practice would vary, some are open now but some still aren't.

Dr MS concluded by stating that the PCN is very keen to establish local links to support information sharing. His colleague, Lynn Hope, will be working on engagement going forward. A copy of the presentation slides will be circulated with the minutes, and any Board member who would like to discuss any specific issues further, please contact Dr Shield.

A3.3 Fire & Rescue Service Community Risk Management Plan (Justin Parry)

Board members received a presentation in relation to the Fire & Rescue Service's Community Risk Management Plan consultation, which is seeking views on how the Service plans to tackle the risks our communities face every year, including deciding where and how resources are used. Current response standards were outlined, and the new proposed standards.

A brief Q&A took place, and the following points were noted:

- Cllr JM highlighted recent discussions with the Chief Fire Officer in relation to issues with parked cars blocking access for emergency vehicles in the Dean Bank area. JP noted the point, adding this is an issue in a number of areas across the County. Work is ongoing to identify specific troublesome areas, with feedback gathered via local crews, but ultimately there is very little the Fire Service can do unless there is a specific incident. The Local Authority would have the power to restrict parking, but it was noted that households frequently now have multiple vehicles and these have to park somewhere. Cllr JM suggested that DCC should look at removing the planters to support better access; he acknowledged these were put in when fewer people had multiple vehicles, but feels that their removal would help improve access and relieve a very real safety issue.
- MB asked whether there are any tier 2 targets in relation to response times. Without a target for 100% attendance/responses, there could be no 'incentive'. JP acknowledged the point; historically there were 2 tiers, JP will feed this back.

Cllr JC thanked JP for his presentation; a copy of the slides will be circulated with the minutes for information. Board members were encouraged to take part in the consultation, which closes on 7 February 2022.

A4. Neighbourhood Issues

A4.1 Neighbourhood Policing Update

LC confirmed that Insp MS had forwarded a written update report for onward circulation to Board members given his absence from the meeting (this was emailed 5.1.22).

A5. Area & Neighbourhood Budget Update

A5.1 2021-22 Area Budget Funding Update

PN briefly updated Board members in relation to the recent Area Budget callout. There were 12 x eligible project applications submitted, with a total funding request of £129,721¹ for the £100k we have available, and a good mix of projects. PN commented that some of the capital-based schemes could potentially be picked up via our Towns & Villages funding, but this would obviously need to be discussed in more detail. PN has recently emailed Board members with details of the applicants, requesting any relevant Declarations of Interest – responses are needed no later than 7 January. PN will then be looking to proceed to the project ranking stage of the process, and Board members will be kept updated.

¹ Post Meeting Update: following a project review this figure has been slightly amended to £128,690.81

A5.2 2021-22 Neighbourhood Budget Funding Update

CAi briefly updated Board members in relation to NB spend to date for Elected Members and their current balances, for information.

CAi reminded Board members of the importance of responding to emails when NB applications are circulated for approval, particularly where there is a Declaration of Interest, to ensure that decisions are quorate.

A5.3 Holiday Activities with Healthy Food/Fun & Food Funding Update

CAi updated Board members in relation to the Christmas round of funding. There were 4 x projects supported to deliver in our area:

- The LADDER Centre took young people to the panto and ice skating and put on a Christmas party and Christmas dinner.
- Premier Education provided a week-long sports camp at the leisure centre, which was accessed by people from across the Partnership area (£6,292)
- Dean Bank Early Years Centre provided over 100 food packs and Christmas Eve Activity boxes
- Enter CIC put on a theatrical performance for young people from across the County to access, distributed 500 activity packs and produced a Christmas-themed digital resource which could be accessed by up to 5,000 young people (£42,558.05).

CAi clarified that final monitoring is being collected for the Christmas projects and will be shared with the Board in due course.

CAi advised that applications are now open for February Half Term, the deadline for applications is Wednesday 19 January and anyone interested in applying should be signposted to the AAP team for more info.

A5.4 Towns & Villages Funding Update

LC clarified that there have been 8 x volunteers from the Board who are interested in joining the Towns & Villages Funding Subgroup; anyone else who would like to get involved, please contact LC. Our T&Vs Link Officer, Angela Blanchard, will be back from annual leave later this week and LC will liaise with Angela to convene a meeting hopefully towards the end of January (**Action 5: LC**).

A6. Date & Time of Next Meeting:

Wed 3 March 2022, 6.00pm (Microsoft Teams unless otherwise stated)

Cllr JC thanked everyone for their attendance, and the meeting was closed.