

Chester-le-Street & District Area Action Partnership (AAP) Board Meeting Minutes of Meeting held Monday 14th November 2022

Present at the meeting:

Councillors: Craig Martin, Elsie Forrester (Parish Council Representative), Alison Batey, Emma Waldock, Tracie Smith and Bill Moist.

Partner Organisations: Joanne Malki (Business Association Representative), Suzanne Jobson (Karbon Homes), Insp Lee Morris (Durham Constabulary), and Vicky Murray (Durham County Council).

Public Representatives: Clare Todd, Khaled Malki, Mick Rodgers, Howell Davies, Janet Ford-Davidson,

Officer Attendance: Michael Wilkes (Principal AAP Co-ordinator), Pete Garrod (Principal Community Development Project Officer) Allyson Rose (Community Development Project Officer), Laura Sloan (Community Development Project Officer) and Lesley Lines (AAP Support Officer).

Apologies: Councillor Phil Heaviside, Colin Stephenson (NHS North East & North Cumbria ICB) Graeme Carr (Durham & Darlington Fire and Rescue Service), Aaron McCormack (Public Representative), Ian Heaviside (Public Representative), Chris Hoy (Public Representative).

Public Attendance: Eighteen members of the AAP Public Forum were present at the meeting.

[Introductions, Apologies and Virtual Housekeeping Code of Conduct/Protocols](#)

Suzanne Jobson (Chair) opened the meeting and welcomed everyone. Housekeeping arrangements were noted. Apologies are noted above.

[Agreement of minutes from the previous meeting held on 10th October 2022 & Matters Arising](#)

The Chair went through the minutes page by page.

There were no matters arising.

The Board agreed the minutes of 10th October.

[The Medium-Term Financial Plan Presentation](#)

Vicky Murray gave a detailed presentation/overview on Durham County Council's Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP) proposals.

It was noted that the consultation will run until 22nd November but will extend this date to ensure that all feedback is received from all AAP Board Meetings, with the last one taking place on 1st December 2022.

The key questions at the end of the presentation were as follows:

- What is the AAP view on our approach to balancing the 2023/24 forecast budget shortfall?
- What do you feel will be the impact of this approach upon you or those you represent?
- Do you have any alternatives to the approach, whilst making the required savings?



Better for everyone

- If the government do remove the cap, what is your view on the council utilising additional Council Tax raising powers above the current 2.99% forecast, given that we may be expected to do this?

The next steps with regards the MTFP were as follows:

- Take on board feedback from budget consultations at Cabinet in January 2023.
- Budget report presented to Cabinet on 8 February 2023.
- Cabinet budget proposals then presented to Full Council on 22 February 2023 where budget approval and Council Tax for 2023/24 will be set.
- Further work underway to identify further budget savings to meet the shortfall expected for the MFTP 2023/24 - 2026/27.
- Further extensive consultation in 2023 to help formulate our budget plans for 2024/25 and the MFTP 2024/25 - 2027/28.

Board Members and members of the public were encouraged to complete the online survey.

Vicky asked for the view of Board Members on the approach outlined by Durham County Council (DCC) and opened the floor up for questions.

A lengthy discussion took place. Questions and comments included the following:

Q) What is the criteria for paying Council Tax? Could you change the criteria so that more people pay council tax?

Universal Credit claimants do not automatically receive a reduction in Council Tax. Claimants have to apply to the Council where additional help is available, but you have to apply for it.

Q) 59% of back-office staff seems like a lot of staff to lose, can you tell us how many staff this equates to?

These are unprecedented times, a very serious matter for the council, we need to look at ways things can be done differently.

Q) Some Councils have gone bankrupt, will they get a bail-out from Government?

Q) What is the criteria for voluntary redundancies?

It was stated that this approach to the AAP felt uncomfortable. Asking for a consensus when it should be DCC Cabinet making these decisions.

It was also highlighted that DCC should not keep reducing staff numbers.

It was further highlighted that Councillor Neighbourhood Budgets were not being used for their intended purposes because of the cuts to services.

Another comment was, the issue of the amount of officers leaving DCC, which is causing problems and putting more strain on the VCS sector/volunteers. It was highlighted that more needs to be done to retain officers.



Better for everyone

Vicky advised she would feed in all the comments received and get comments back on those she could not give more detail on. The Chair thanked Vicky for her presentation.

Project Presentation – Going for Gold

Thomas Jones, Pelton Youth Worker, introduced the group of young people who had attended the training to give a presentation highlighting the achievements of the Going for Gold project.

The group of participants presented on their experience and taking part in the project/Duke of Edinburgh award. The individuals stated that the project was an amazing opportunity to develop new life skills, create new friendships and to explore new places and gain new experiences

The young people who presented stated that they would like to build on their experiences and plan to use these skills and experiences as they hopefully move on to university.

The Chair thanked the group on behalf of the Board for coming along to the meeting and giving up their time to give the presentation.

Area Budget Report

OASES – Climate Friendly Schools – Area Budget, Towns & Villages Priority

The aim of this project is to help the whole school community become more climate aware and to take climate action. The project will support a minimum of ten schools to establish a Climate Friendly Action Team within the school. OASES will support the team to complete a Climate Friendly audit of the school campus, curriculum, culture and the wider community and futures. They will work with the groups to develop an Action Plan for the school and community.

The plan will have a focus on seven themes, Buildings, Consumption, Energy, Food, Grounds, Water and Transport.

Under each theme groups will be able to establish how climate friendly each school is with respect to their:

- Culture
- Campus
- Curriculum
- Community
- Futures

Although it is delivered in schools, the groups will be made up of the wider community, including, parents, governors/trustees, members of the public and school staff/pupils.

The outcome of this project is to educate young people and communities on climate change and the importance of taking action. Part of the funding request will enable schools to act. By engaging parents and other members of the local community through this project, the aim is to ensure the learning goes beyond the school grounds and is instilled in everyday life. There will be opportunities to deliver action in communities, as well as engaging with local businesses.



Better for everyone

OASES are pro-actively looking at opportunities for further business engagement to provide further sponsorship and support to the school climate action team. Any in-kind or match funding will be used to support the school to address the actions outlined in the plan.

Although the project will work with smaller groups to develop plans, the aim is that it engages with the whole school and wider community. The expected beneficiaries for such a project includes both members within the school and community and is expected to exceed 2,000 beneficiaries.

Funding will be used:

- To allow schools to take action on climate change and the Action Teams to develop projects
- Staff time from OASES to provide wrap-around support and advice to the Action Teams
- Staffing costs for monitoring, evaluating, reporting and sharing good practise between the Action Teams
- Promotion and recruitment materials for the project
- Administrative and management/co-ordination of the project

The project will work with ten schools in the AAP area over a two-year period. Five schools in the first year and five the second.

The Towns & Villages Task Group have suggested that the project is conditioned, so that the second years payment is released once satisfactory monitoring is received from year one.

Request - £35,874 Area Budget Funding

Match - £0

Total Project Cost - £35,874

It was commented that, as an AAP, we need to be proactive and champion things we feel the town needs, we need to trust the Task & Finish Groups to scrutinise these projects.

Michael Wilkes reiterated that, most Task Groups are made up of Board Members. Michael noted that the Board could look at various methods of approval at Board level.

Some Board Members noted that they needed to see full applications before they can approve projects.

Joanne Malki highlighted as a Task Group Member and Board Member, how hard it was to put things in place that the Government were not doing enough about. Joanne added that, if Board Members had been at the presentation given at the Task Group meeting, they would have had a greater understanding of the project.

A member of the Board asked if money was not spent, would it be lost. Michael Wilkes highlighted that the money would be lost and could be reallocated to other schemes.

Michael highlighted that the full applications had been and could be made available on the dedicated Board Team Channel, prior to full Board Meetings.

Michael advised that all these projects had all been scrutinised at their respective Task Groups, where enough time was given to discuss and develop these projects.



Better for everyone

It was again suggested that Board Members, where possible, should attend these Task Groups to debate the merits of projects.

Board Members voted. The project was Agreed.

Michael Wilkes noted that the project will be conditioned on satisfactory monitoring of the first year.

It was also noted that work would be carried out with the applicant to assess if additional match funding could be claimed.

Durham Constabulary – Market Activity Week – Area Budget, Towns & Villages Priority

The aim of Market Activity week is to provide opportunities for families to engage in positive and fun activities to families through the school holidays that are free.

The event is designed to build relationships between young people and agencies such as the Police, Local Authority, youth projects, community organisations, volunteer groups and to convey important messages around crime and community safety to the public.

The request for funding is to cover delivery of the event for 2023 and 2024. The event will be developed differently this year and will include some key partner organisations to add value, expertise and support to develop the project to provide longer terms impacts.

Partners include Durham County Council Culture, Sport & Tourism, Karbon Homes, Children & Young People Services and more.

Durham Constabulary will continue to lead on the event but with wider support from partners to ensure the events capitalises on the footfall and provide further benefits to the locality. By working in partnership, the hope is that partners see the value of such an event and in the future can provide additional resource to the event.

By funding the project over a two-year period, it provides further opportunity to attract funding investment and develop a strategic plan for the event.

The Towns & Villages Task Group have identified the need to continue to support the event, given the important positive impact it has on the locality, both in providing positive activities for families, education on community safety and the economic benefits from the increased footfall.

This year's event (2022) had approximately 20,000 visits to the event, throughout the full week. The event continues to grow in the number of beneficiaries, and it is expected that the project will continue to engage in such high numbers.

The Towns & Villages Task Group have suggested that the project is conditioned so that the second years payment is released, once satisfactory monitoring is received from year one.

Request - £20,000 Area Budget Funding

Match Funding Contribution – £36,000

Total Project Cost - £56,000



Better for everyone

Pete Garrod added that the Task Group would be working with a range of different partners to look at providing further and additional outcomes for the Chester-le-Street & District AAP area, as well as considering future proofing the event and capitalising on a captive audience.

Pete highlighted that the match for this project may increase, however whatever is the end figure, it will be spent on rides and activities for children. Pete further added that the Police & Crime Commissioner has indicated interest in providing match funding, although confirmation has not been confirmed.

It was highlighted that, because of the cost-of-living crisis, support mechanisms should be attached to the project. This is an ideal, light-hearted way to get members of the public interacting with services without feeling intimidated.

Insp. Morris agreed and added that, as part of the wider group, they will be looking at the planning stages, which was wider than the area, and inviting partners to come along with stalls to engage people.

It was highlighted that this year's event had a few issues with toilets and car parking etc. It was noted that rectifying such matters would come at a financial cost, however it was clarified that these areas would continue to be looked at.

Board Members voted. The project was Agreed.

Michael Wilkes reiterated that the project will be conditioned on satisfactory monitoring of the first year.

Durham Works – Durham Works Project – Area Budget, Cost of Living & Employability Priority.

The aim is to set-up a Chester-le-Street AAP specialist training and equipment budget. The budget is aimed at supporting young people who are unemployed and aged between 16 and 24 (and some older clients with disabilities) living in the Chester-le-Street & District AAP area.

The project will complement the existing offer from DurhamWorks which provides, one to one support and getting young people the skills, qualifications and experience they need to enter into work, volunteering, further learning, or training.

The budget will provide beneficiaries the opportunity to overcome barriers to work and can support with transport, incentivisation, specialist equipment and payment for childcare and courses that are not otherwise available.

Durham Works have delivered similar initiatives successfully across the County in recent years through various other funding sources. These projects, along with the wrap around support, have enabled Durham Works to support 15,000 young people across County Durham. They have identified a continued need to provide those not in education, employment or training (NEET) with this additional support to ensure young people can overcome barriers to employment.

The project aims to support 25 young people into employment and ensure they have the opportunity to undertake appropriate training or have the tools required to overcome individual barriers to employment.



Better for everyone

The funding will be used by engaging with individuals and understanding their needs and requirements. It will be a huge incentive to allow the project to engage with those hard-to-reach young people and support their individual needs.

Request - £10,670 Area Budget Funding

Match Funding Contribution – £0

Total Project Cost - £10,670

Pete Garrod advised that this project would complement the existing project through Durham Works, offering support that otherwise would not be available.

Janet Ford-Davidson asked what kind of overlap there was with other projects i.e., Restart in Durham. The Chair noted that, due to Government funding, Restart is mandated. If your work-coach tells you to go, then you have to go, however, Restart kicks in at nine months and only lasts eighteen months. It was noted that Durham Works would pick up people from the start.

Cllr Alison Batey asked for clarity on the criteria in order to protect the beneficiaries. **Action Michael Wilkes to get further information.**

Howell Davies highlighted that this was a project providing equipment to get people into the workplace.

Board Members voted. The project was Agreed.

Great Lumley Methodist Church – Heavens Kitchen – Area Budget, Cost of Living Priority

The aim of the project is to support residents most in need and impacted by the increase in the cost of living and ensuring that residents of the Chester-le-Street & District AAP area have access to warm food and food supplies.

The project will do this by increasing their kitchen capacity to enhance the luncheon club offer which provide people with the opportunity to get a cooked meal and provide opportunities to socialise with others and support residents' well-being. To increase capacity, funding will be used to enhance kitchen equipment, freezers, units and worktops.

The project is seeing an increase in demand and the funding will also enhance the offer of the Foodbank, Mini Market and Community Fridge to reach the wider communities across the AAP area. The project is already engaging a wide number of people from other towns and villages across the AAP.

Funding will also be used to provide ICT and administrative equipment (printer, laptop, paper and ink) to enable the project to further promote the opportunities available to the community. This cost is currently being met by volunteers.

Request - £5,050 Area Budget Funding

Match Funding Contribution – £1,000

Total Project Cost - £6,050



Better for everyone

Pete Garrod advised that the Task Group were working with the project to add value and contribute more match funding. Pete highlighted the increase in demand and the fact that everyone who attends the kitchen will be supported.

Board Members voted. The project was Agreed.

Michael highlighted that Board Members will be aligned to these projects as Board Champions and so that will be another level of monitoring assurance.

Fun & Food Report

Allyson Rose noted a sum of £14,490 was available to allocate for the Christmas holiday period. The closing date for receipt of applications for October was Wednesday 19th October 2022. The designated Task Group met on Friday 21st October 2022 to discuss the applications submitted. A total of five applications were received, totalling £6,554. It was noted that no monies can be carried forward into the new financial year.

The Board discussed the short turnaround time for applications.

Michael Wilkes noted that a lot of the schools, particularly faith schools, were breaking up late and it was difficult to get schools to participate over the Christmas break.

It was further highlighted that Easter could also be a problem with faith schools breaking up late.

Neighbourhood Budget Report

Neighbourhood Budget Small Grant Allocation

Councillors Simon Wilson & Emma Waldock – Durham County Council – Plawsworth Platinum Jubilee Tree Planting

The aim of this project is to commemorate the Queens Platinum Jubilee by planting four flowering cherry trees at the entrance to Plawsworth.

Declaration of Interest: None

NBSG Allocation: £300 (each Councillor allocating £115 Platinum Jubilee NBSG)

The project was supported

Neighbourhood Budget Allocation

Councillors Emma Waldock and Simon Wilson – DCC Clean & Green – Seating Edmondsley

The aim of this project is to add four new seats to areas throughout the Sacriston Ward.

Two will be in the park at Edmondsley, one on the crossroads at Edmondsley and one in Womble Park, Sacriston.

Declaration of Interest: None

NB Allocation: £2,770 (each Councillor allocating £1,385)

The project was supportet

Partner Updates

Police – No report

Health – No report

Fire & Rescue Service – No report

Karbon Homes – Suzanne Jobson advised that Karbon Homes, Foundations for Life, were working with the County Durham Employment Forum to deliver their 3rd in a series of forum meetings at the Cathedral Suite at the Riverside Stadium, Chester-le-Street on Friday 18th November.

The Write Turn (CLLD Funding) – Suzanne highlighted that The Write Turn helps people who lack confidence with their reading, writing, maths and digital skills. It was also noted that there is the offer to cover the fee for a provisional driving license and the theory test. Sessions on how to complete the driver's theory test and develop digital skills to access and complete the test will also be on offer.

It was noted that to find out more you could get in touch at foundations@karbonhomes.co.uk or call 0191 223 8750.

Business Sector – No report

Voluntary Sector – No report

AAP Co-ordinators Update

Healthy Relationship Funding & OPSIF Funding – Michael Wilkes noted that two applications had been received for the Healthy Relationship Funding and six applications had been received for OPSIF Funding. These will be discussed at respective Task Groups and a report will be brought to the January Board Meeting.

Christmas Event – Saturday 26th November from 4pm. Leaflets were made available to take away.

Date and Time of the next meeting

Monday 16th January, Chester-le-Street Cricket Club, Ropery Lane, Chester-le-Street.

It was noted that the Car Park is accessible from Ropery Lane.