

Notes of the Weardale Area Action Partnership Board Meeting



9th June 2022 – Eastgate Village Hall

ATTENDEES

Board Members

Public Representatives: Will Wearmouth (WW)
Kevin Roddam (KR)
Richard Lawrie (RL)
Ian Hirst (IH)

Partner Representatives: Damian Pearson (DP) – believe housing-**CHAIR**
Insp. Ed Turner (PS) – Durham Constabulary
Jeff Bell (JB) – Business Representative

Elected Members: Cllr Anita Savory (AS)
Cllr David Sugden (DS) – Wolsingham Parish Council
Cllr Helen Barrass (HB) – Muggleswick Parish Council

Officers: Angelina Maddison (AM)
Tracy Edwards (TE)
Fiona Barber (FB)

Presenters: Mary Readman (MR) – Durham County Council

APOLOGIES

Public Representatives: Adrian Holden
Joan Warriner

Elected Representatives: Cllr Olive Wilson – Witton-le-Wear Parish Council
Cllr Angela Hawkes – Stanhope Parish Council

Partner Representatives: Julian Haynes – Voluntary Sector Representative
Dan Wootton – County Durham and Darlington Fire and
Rescue Service
Ian Conway - Durham County Council

1. Welcome and Introductions

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting. A special welcome was extended to Jeff Bell who joins the Board as our Business Representative.

Introductions were made around the table.

Apologies are recorded above.

2. Declaration of Interest

The Chair asked for any Declarations of Interest to be raised as appropriate during the meeting.

3. Presentations:

Poverty Action Strategy and Action Plan – Mary Readman, Head of Transactional and Customer Services, Durham County Council.

A copy of the presentation is held on file in the WAP office – please contact a member of the team for a copy via email at weardaleaap@durham.gov.uk

Mary gave a presentation to the Board which gave an overview of the Poverty Action Strategy and Plan, and which also outlined the response to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on household finances. Mary reported that the Poverty Action Steering Group works in partnership with a large number of agencies and organisations across the county to support residents of County Durham.

Mary explained the various support schemes which are in place to ensure people who are in crisis receive the help that they need. She advised Board members that Durham County Council have a dedicated webpage for people who need assistance - <https://www.durham.gov.uk/helpwithyourmoney>

Mary reported that requests for assistance have risen from 200 to 800 a week and that in County Durham 1 in 3 children live in levels of poverty. She also advised that only 84% of those eligible for school meals take up the option to have them.

Mary asked Board members for their views on what is happening locally.

AS shared that WAP employs a Rural Advice Worker who offers a confidential service to residents of Weardale. She reported that just this week she had referred a resident to the worker and she is now receiving vital help. AS stated that this is a great intervention work as often the families who struggle are hidden.

AS also shared that Wolsingham School dinner staff have reported to her that children on Free School Meals have changed their eating habits and are now choosing more substantial meals than previously perhaps in response to not having enough food at home.

AS asked that the thanks of the Board be recorded for Linda our Rural Advice Worker – Agreed by the Chair and other Board members.

Mary shared that the Advice in County Durham Portal links agencies together and means that they can offer a 'no wrong door' service and enables quick and accurate referrals to be made. Board members voiced concerns that when the provision of

support services moved to predominantly online during the pandemic, there was a dramatic drop in uptake in Weardale.

Mary advised that the Household Support Fund was previously directed towards families with children. One third of this is now directed towards pensioners. AM advised that WAP has also employed a Community Wellness Coordinator who works specifically with older members of the community – particularly those deemed to be vulnerable.

DP advised that he is seeing evidence that 2 person households who have one income are expected to be pushed below the poverty threshold due to the rise in living expenses which hits particularly hard in rural areas e.g. the cost of fuel to travel out of the dale for work.

Mary shared this concern and advised that the worry is that people become entangled in a debt spiral and another vicious cycle begins. Mary also shared that a lot of private landlords are selling up which impacts on people's choices, options and puts an additional strain on social housing.

RL queried whether statistics are kept on Weardale so Board members could see where the problems are. Mary advised that currently statistics are held on a countywide basis but ways to improve this are being explored. She acknowledged that a number of residents in Weardale who have oil-based heating systems are experiencing fuel poverty. This also applies to many who live in property bands E-H so do not meet existing government criteria.

AM advised that our Rural Support Worker attempted to engage with parents and worked closely with local schools to try and improve the rate of take-up of Free School Meals. She shared that there was minimal take-up of this offer as people do not want to admit they are struggling. From feedback from our local foodbank as well as from food bag projects we have delivered we know that there is a substantial need locally.

AS advised that schools are an important link as they know which families are struggling. She also shared that the foodbank will deliver food bags in order to allow people to keep their pride. Mary echoed that the increased demand experienced by the Weardale foodbank is being mirrored across the county and no doubt across the country. They are experiencing an increase in demand at the same time as a reduction in donations. Mary also shared that there are a multitude of reasons as to why there is a low take up of FSM and that there is currently no solution although Public Health are looking into this.

DP suggested that those providing food services need to share information more. Mary advised that they are currently working with the main providers to standardise the information that is given to create consistency in the advice given.

JB shared the perspective of landlords who are sometimes hit with a premium on properties that are left vacant for more than 12 months. He also suggested that the council needs to look at business rated and find ways to help landlords who are experiencing difficulties in letting their properties. He advised that bigger properties are becoming 'unlettable' and this needs to be addressed to avoid further desertion of high streets. These properties may be an individual's only investment or may be pension related and can have a huge impact on the individual landlord.

Mary advised that this falls under the remit of Business Durham. She shared that there has been an increase in demand for small business premises – especially for those who qualify for relief. She cautioned that the council is restricted somewhat in terms of the national framework for business rates.

DP thanked Mary for attending. Mary asked that Board members feedback their views on the strategy. AM confirmed that an email will be sent to Board members to advise how they can have their say.

4. Agreement of Notes from Board Meeting of 28th April 2022 and Matters Arising

The notes of this meeting, as printed and circulated, were **AGREED** and confirmed as a true record by those present. There were no matters arising.

5. Towns & Villages Funding Update

In the absence of Bill Lightburn, AM shared the status of all projects currently under consideration for Towns & Villages Funding which has a budget of £210,000.

Witton-le-Wear Community Centre

AM advised that the Community Centre is planning a complete refurbishment of the building. They have some funding themselves and are looking for match funding to be able to complete the project. Board members requested a fuller understanding of their aspirations, cost and identified match funding.

Muggleswick Church (HB declared an interest)

AM advised that this project is linked to a much bigger project.

WW queried whether the Diocese or Church Commissioners put any money into this project. AM advised that this question has been asked and a response is awaited.

HB advised that there is a meeting scheduled for next Wednesday and she hopes to have a clearer understanding regarding progress following this.

WW commented that the Church of England already has (or will have soon) a problem with redundant buildings. He suggested that this project could be used as a model for other buildings and therefore beneficial to the Church of England. Should they invest in this project they may save money in the long run.

HB added that this project has many benefits: for the tourist industry; for health and wellbeing; for walking; for preserving history etc. Although the church will still be available for services, she suggested that a new name for this project be used in the future to focus instead on the changes to building usage.

AS suggested that as a pilot project it could attract National Heritage Lottery funding and our funding could be used as match to draw this in.

Stanhope Open Air Swimming Pool

AM advised that as there is only 1 year remaining on the land lease, the pool's committee is unable to apply for funding from most sources. AM advised that work is being undertaken to look at all the work that is required so that this can inform a decision as to the size of any refurbishment project. AM shared that the management committee needs support and is a huge undertaking for volunteers. AM also advised that the pool meets the criteria for a countywide resilience pot of levelling up funding.

Board members voiced concern that there is a danger this well-loved community facility is in danger of being lost. AM agreed and suggested that a proper feasibility study is required to understand the extent of the undertaking for any committee. IH shared that it is a struggle to maintain community facilities and it is often not possible to raise prices and not lose users to help to fund the upkeep of such facilities.

AM advised that Sport England are interested in supporting the pool due to its unique nature.

IH queried the usage – is it caravanners or local residents who mainly use it. AM advised that the pool has this level of data.

AS commented on the status of the pool as a local employer and training provider which provides opportunities for local young people.

JB asked what the expectation of the landlord is – AM replied that she is not sure.

KR suggested that open and frank discussions seem to be the way forward and offered to assist with this.

AS cautioned that if the pool is not available then children and young people will use the rivers and this could lead to dangerous situations.

Weardale Museum

AM advised that the museum has secured various pots of match funding. The project now has more definition and they are looking for a Towns & Villages grant of £60,000.

Ashcroft MUGA / Play Area Refurbishment – RL & WW declared an interest

AM advised that this was initially a community funded facility which is now in need of repair. She stated that several site meetings have already taken place to consider options.

St John's Chapel and Wearhead Play Areas

AM advised that she has asked for consideration of these two additional play areas to be looked at in conjunction with the Ashcroft renewal as this would be a fairly straightforward project to undertake and is worth having lined up if a quick project is needed towards the end of our funding window for Towns & Villages.

AM advised that a Task Group / Appraisal Panel will be convened prior to the next Board meeting to look at these projects and others in more detail.

6. WAP Budgets Update

AM shared with the Board the budgets available to the Weardale Action Partnership in 2022/23. These are as follows:

Area Budget	£100,000 + £12,630 c/o from 2021/22
Welfare Reform	£10,000
Older Peoples Social Isolation Fund	£25,000
AAP Youth Fund	£9,902
Young People – Healthy Relationships	£10,000 - NEW
Towns & Villages	£210,000
Total	<hr/> £364,902

Fun & Food funding

AM advised that this is a complex funding stream. Due to the complexities, two suppliers are not prepared to submit further applications and one has found it easier to apply to the central pot of funding and deliver projects for multiple AAPs.

The next funding opportunity will be for delivery during Christmas holidays as there will be no provision during half terms.

AM reported that feedback suggests that residents prefer the food provision to the activity provision – this will be monitored in the coming months.

Young People – Healthy Relationships Funding

AM explained that this is a new funding stream which is intended to deliver projects to 11-18 year olds to help them to gain greater understanding around relationships and consent. These projects are not able to run within schools unless it is outside of normal curriculum teaching.

Board members made suggestions as to what these projects could look at:

- Drugs – what happens when you start using; Legal / prescribed medication addictions
- Domestic Abuse – Many children witness this at home and think it is normal
- Consent
- Alcohol
- Relationships

Area Budget

Stanhope Market Place – Installation of Infrastructure and Lights - £12,531

AM explained that £12,531 of Area Budget has been allocated to the above project. This has previously been circulated to Board Members for consideration and approval and is presented to the Board for ratification tonight.

AM advised that as WAP Coordinator she supports the project. There were NO Declarations of interest and Board members ratified the decision made previously by email to APPROVE the project for £12,531

Expression of Interest – Killhope Tales - £15,000

AM explained that an Expression of Interest has been received from Killhope for a project which will produce three films depicting the working life, hazards and community of the lead mining workforce. The project will incorporate archive material and oral history stories from Killhope. The films will be available on site through new technical equipment – also included in the bid.

Board members discussed the project and generally liked the idea. They expressed a preference to see the applicant provide additional match funding – the WAP team will raise this with the applicant.

Board members AGREED to invite applicant to submit a full application.

Other Project Ideas

AM advised that the WAP team have received the following suggestions for future projects:

- Small Grants Fund – AM advised that discussions are taking place internally as to the current shape of Small Grants Funds
- Wolsingham Christmas Celebrations (AS, DS & JB declared an interest)

- Infrastructure & Lights
- Christmas Decoration Workshops for Primary Schools
- Youth Work for Stanhope
- Norman Wright Pavilion – AM advised that there are technical problems with the lease that are being addressed. This building is being used a lot by the Close Knit Community group
- Community Resilience Planning
- Play Areas – dependent on Towns & Villages application

AM advised that Expressions of Interest will be promoted in the coming weeks.

7. Neighbourhood Budget 2022-23 Overview

AS reported to the Board following the Jubilee tea at Wolsingham School which she funded with her Platinum Jubilee funding. The event was aimed at local people who mainly live on their own. She spoke about how attending the event had given a much-needed boost to people and the school staff and pupils did an excellent job. AM echoed this and remarked that the interaction between old and young was great to see – she suggested it would be good to see this happening more regularly.

AM detailed the current expenditure from this year's Neighbourhood Budget allocation.

Cllr Savory - £22,647 – Total available Neighbourhood Budget

Small Grant Fund

Wolsingham Nursery – Repairs to Castle

Cllr Shuttleworth - £45,000 – Total available Neighbourhood Budget

- Stanhope Photographic Society
- High Pennine Horticultural Society
- Wear Rivers Trust

8. Countywide Partner Issues

Police

No update – Weardale remains a safe place to live and work

RL queried whether Expressions of Interest could have photographs included to enable Board members to get more of a feel for the projects and provide context. AM stated that these could be obtained and that site visits could also be arranged prior to funding decisions being made.

AM stated that there is an issue with organisations not acknowledging the support or funding of the WAP as much as they perhaps could. JB advised that prior to attending recent WAP events he had not realised how many projects the WAP is involved with, and our involvement needs to be promoted more.

HB queried the status of Sports Apprentice recruitment. AM advised that interviews have been scheduled.

9. Dates and Times of Future Meetings

The next meeting of the Weardale Action Partnership Board will take place on Thursday **21st July, 6:00pm**. Venue TBC.

The Chair thanked everyone for attending and closed the meeting.