



STANLEY AREA ACTION PARTNERSHIP (AAP)

MINUTES OF THE BOARD MEETING

Held on Tuesday 5th September 2023 at 5.00pm

Councillor:

Cllr Angela Hanson
Cllr Joyce Charlton
Cllr Gordon Binney
Cllr Jeanette Stephenson, Vice Chair

Partner Organisations:

Suzanne Jobson (Karbon Homes)
Dan Hodgson (Fire Service)
N Insp Dave Stewart (Durham Constabulary)

Public Representatives:

John Ullathorne, Chair
Darren McMahon
Linda Tyman

Officer Attendance:

Daniel O'Brien (AAP Coordinator)
Lesley Lines (AAP Support Officer)
Andrea Boyd (AAP Community Development Project Officer)
Joanne Ashworth (Town & Villages, Community Development Project Officer)
Jeff Garfoot (Head of Corporate Finance & Commercial Services, Durham County Council)
Gordon Elliott (Head of Partnerships & Community Engagement, Durham County Council)

Apologies:

Barbara Edmundson (Integrated Care Board, NHS), Nerise Oldfield-Thompson (Voluntary & Community Sector), Vicky Walton (Public Representative), Cllr Joan Nicholson, Cllr Carole Hampson, Cllr Carl Marshall, Max Wright (Business Representative), Martyn Stenton (Durham County Council), and Olga Milburn (Public Representative).

Public Attendance:

Four members of the Forum/Public attended the meeting.

1. Introductions and Apologies:

Daniel welcomed everyone to Stanley AAP's first hybrid meeting at Morrison Busty. Apologies are noted above. Cllr Jeanette Stephenson chaired the meeting in John's absence, she advised John was running slightly late.

2. Declaration of Interest:

There were no declarations of interest.

3. Agreement of the Minutes – 4th July 2023 and matters arising not covered on this agenda:

The Minutes of 4th July 2023 were agreed as a true record. There were no matters arising.

4. Durham County Council Budget Consultation Presentation

Jeff Garfoot, Head of Corporate Finance & Commercial Services, Durham County Council gave a presentation:

Consultation on our budget proposals for 2024/5 and Medium-Term Financial Plan 2025-2028

Have your say on our budget proposals for 2024/25, as well as on how we meet the financial challenges we face over the next four years.

Like all councils, we are facing unavoidable financial pressures driven by rising costs and increasing levels of demand, particularly for adult and children's social care. In total 47 per cent of our budget is spent on social care, providing support to 2.5 per cent of the population. It is becoming more challenging to balance budgets with the funding received from the Government and the income we are allowed to raise locally.

Despite some additional government funding and assuming that there will be continued annual increases in council tax, we forecast that we will still need to make £56 million in savings over the next four years, with savings of £12.1 million required next year.

Although we will continue to maximise savings and efficiencies in management and administration services, it is becoming increasingly difficult to do this. We have always sought to minimise the impact on front line services, however, without further funding from Government, some of these services will be more affected in the coming years.

We have already agreed £2.2 million of savings for next year, and we are now consulting on proposals to save a further £3.7 million. That would still leave us with a £6.2 million shortfall for 2024/25, so we are also seeking your views on where we could make these savings, as well as the savings we'll need to make in future years.

To help our most vulnerable households, we are also proposing to extend our Council Tax Reduction Scheme in its existing form for another year. This scheme offers a council tax discount to eligible residents on low incomes whether in work, unemployed or retired. Please have your say on our spending plans, the current savings proposals and on which areas you feel we should prioritise for further, future savings.

We would like to hear your views on:

- Our proposals for saving £3.7 million and how these may impact on you.
- Our proposal to increase council tax for 2024/25 by 4.99% (with 2% of that to help meet rising adult social care costs)
- What other services areas we should prioritise for savings to meet the shortfall of £6.2 million for next year, and also to achieve the remaining £43.5 million required in savings over the next four years.

Below, you can read more about the detail of the challenges we face, what is impacting on our budget forecasts, the savings we propose from back office, efficiencies, increasing fees, and the changes to how we deliver front line services.

We also describe our reasoning for increasing the council tax for next year and list those service areas which may need to be targeted for savings either next year or over the next four years.

Saving from back Office and making efficiencies = Saving of £1.9 million

We've looked at all our services to identify ways in which we can make further savings which will hopefully not affect front line service delivery, including changes to the structure of services and staffing reviews.

This includes a proposal to review the Music Service for schools, looking at how this service is delivered, considering its overheads, outgoings, its pricing policy and accommodation, to see where savings can be made.

We also propose to start a number of service reviews including for Corporate Affairs, Finance and Commercial Services, Digital Services and Customer Services. Within these reviews, we will consider several things such as the structure of these services and how best to use the resources they have available to achieve better value for money. We can and do consider the use of technology and how innovation can also bring about efficiencies to how these services operate.

Additionally, we aim to save money by deleting current vacant staff posts in the areas of development management and spatial policy which sit within our planning services team.

The opportunities available to save money from back-office efficiencies going forward are getting much more difficult to achieve.

Raising additional income and reducing our third-party contributions = Saving of £1.2 million

We have looked at ways in which we might raise additional income and reduce the amount of contributions we make to others. The proposals in this area can be summarised as follows:

- reduce contributions by bringing charges for the in-house extra care community alarm scheme in line with private sector schemes.
- increase community protection fees and charges which will be passed onto local businesses and traders, as well as bringing in new charges where possible.
- increase fees and charges across children and young people's services particularly reviewing and expanding services charged to schools.
- increase traffic management income, for example, from additional enforcement activities.
- increase income from roads, for example, from extra licensing income from companies carrying out roadworks.
- increase fees and charges within environmental services, relating to refuse and recycling, Fixed Penalty Notices (fines) and Durham Crematoria.

Separately we have consulted with Town and Parish Councils in relation to the option to reduce the grant support provided to some local councils by 50% over a two-year period. We are one of a few councils across the country, and the only one in the northeast, that still pays a grant to Town and Parish Councils.

We are also consulting separately on proposals to implement changes to our long term empty property policy and to introduce a premium on second homes in line with new powers we expect to receive once the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill passes through parliament

in the Autumn. More details on these proposals can be found on our [Consultation on increasing the council tax on empty properties and second homes](#) page.

Savings from the changes in the way we deliver front line services = Saving of £0.67 million

We will continue to explore ways to deliver services in different, and more effective and efficient ways, to help better meet the needs of our residents. Where appropriate, we will involve you in further conversations to get your feedback in more detail. Proposals outlined so far, which would be subject to further conversations, engagement or consultation with service users and/or the public are:

- moving Durham County News to a mainly online format, with four online editions and one printed version per year
- a review of Early Years Services across the children and young people's service with new ways of working and delivering services having the potential so see a reduction in service costs
- a review of Early Help to remove vacant staff posts as a result of more collaborative ways of working with partners and the benefits of linking this service to the new Family Hubs model
- a review of how we provide safeguarding services including the introduction of a new Family Help service, in line with the Government's national reform programme, leading to a reduction in service costs

A [review and consultation around home to school transport](#) was carried out earlier this year. A report, considered by our Cabinet meeting on 14 June 2023, agreed with all of the proposals except the fare increase for the concessionary bus scheme - this was reduced to £2 instead of the proposed £2.80.

Council tax increase of 4.99% (2.99% plus 2% adult social care precept) Additional Income £13.3 Million

As in previous years, to try and reduce the impact of cuts to services and the possible impact on many of our most vulnerable residents, an increase in council tax is also proposed.

Our savings figures have been calculated after an assumed increase in council tax to its maximum allowed amount of 4.99% next year. 2% of this figure is for adult social care services. The proposed increase is in line with the Government's expectations and represents the maximum increase permissible without a referendum. For each 1% reduction in this figure, the funding gap we've outlined will increase by a further £2.567 million. It is estimated that a 4.99% council tax increase will generate £13.3 million of additional income. If we set this figure lower, we would need to find more savings elsewhere than we've currently forecast.

A 4.99% increase in our council tax equates to a £92 increase on a Band D property which is around £1.76 per week. However, in County Durham, 83% of all properties are in Bands A to C, which means that the majority of people will be charged less than this. For example, those living in a Band A property would be charged £61 more next year - or £1.18 per week. The average council tax charged per household in County Durham is £1,385. This is £193 (12.2%) below the national average. Of the 295 local councils in England, we rank 229th in terms of the highest council tax which puts us in the bottom 25%.

Financial support for households

We offer [Support to help you pay your council tax](#) to our most vulnerable households who may be struggling to pay and are proposing to extend our local [Council Tax Reduction scheme](#) in its existing form for another year. This scheme provides council tax discounts of up to 100% to eligible households. We are one of the few authorities in the country to provide this level of support, with our scheme mirroring the entitlement afforded to people in 2013, before the National Council Tax Benefits system was abolished and decisions on the

level of support provided to financial vulnerable working age claimants was passed to local authorities.

81.4% of all eligible (financially vulnerable) working age households (around 33,400) in County Durham currently receive 100% support and have no bill to pay.

You can also find out about a range of other [financial help available to residents](#).

Priorities for further savings for 2024/25 and the following three years

Although we have identified several savings proposals for next year, there remains a funding shortfall of £6.2 million for 2024/25, and a £43.5 million shortfall over the following three years. With this in mind, we need your views on how we might make further savings.

Our biggest budgets relate to social care services for adults and children, waste disposal, home to school transport and capital financing costs linked to the council's external borrowing. In total 47 per cent of our budget is spent on social care, providing support to just 2.5 per cent of the population. In the vast majority of circumstances, we are limited to how much we can reduce spend on these budget areas and in recent years, particularly in children's social care there have been significant cost and demand pressures that we have had to face.

We will continue to seek efficiencies within adult and children services, but savings of this nature will not meet the amount needed.

Furthermore, our options for savings in areas, such as social care, are generally limited due to the statutory nature of some services. In other areas we are limited in the savings we can make because we have fixed costs that we need to pay such as in waste disposal. It is therefore becoming more difficult to find other areas where savings can be found.

In previous years we have used reserves to help us reduce our budget shortfalls. For example, in 2023/24 we have used £10 million of reserves to bridge the funding gap. However, this is not a sustainable position, and we cannot continue to do this going forward. Reserves are held for a number of reasons including:

- To help cushion the impact of any uneven cash flows, for example, delays in expected income or funding.
- To avoid unnecessary temporary borrowing, especially important given rising interest rates.
- As a contingency to cushion the impact of any unexpected events or emergencies, for example flooding, and other exceptional weather.
- As a means of building up funds for known or predicted future liabilities. These are known as earmarked reserves.

So, any use of reserves to bridge the budget gap impacts on our financial stability and programmes and projects funded from earmarked reserve.

By the end of this financial year, our reserves will have reduced by £73 million since 1 April 2022 and our General Reserve (to cushion unforeseen events) will be only 5% of our Net Expenditure.

Other areas we can explore:

We have compiled a list of front-line services where we could make further savings to help close the current budget deficit, which would only increase if the assumed council tax increases are not implemented. We want to gather your views on these areas to understand where you would prioritise savings. It is important to remember that savings in these areas will still be difficult to achieve and could have a significant impact.

- **Community safety and protection** - environmental health, trading standards, taxis and events, neighbourhood wardens, emergency planning, road safety and school crossing patrol services.

- **Council tax, benefits and other processing** - processing of Housing Benefit, Council Tax Benefit and other Council Tax and Business Rates account changes
- **Culture** - council owned museums and theatres, libraries and support to cultural events.
- **Customer access and customer services** - customer access points, call handling and contact arrangements to report issues / access services.
- **Economic development** - support for businesses, projects and support services to improve the county's economy, creating jobs and wealth.
- **Environment and climate change** - reduction of carbon emissions for the council, residents, and business, to tackle pollution and nature conservation.
- **Housing services** - homelessness, home adaptations for vulnerable people and housing advice.
- **Leisure and wellbeing** - leisure centres, parks, play areas, playing pitches and allotments and associated activity programmes.
- **Local community projects** - support for community development including Area Action Partnerships (AAPs) and the voluntary sector.
- **Local council tax support** - provided to working age people. We could cap or cut the current level of support in future years.
- **Planning services** - provision of planning and building control services.
- **Preventative services** - community-based early intervention support for vulnerable people with their mental and physical wellbeing to maintain their quality of life and independent living, thus helping to reduce future statutory social care spending.
- **Roads and transport** - road and footpath maintenance, pothole repairs, gully cleaning, street lighting, winter maintenance, parking services, subsidised transport e.g. bus routes and bus passes.
- **Street cleaning and grounds maintenance** - including parks, cemeteries and open spaces, litter picking, fly tipping, dog fouling, grass cutting, flower beds and trees
- **Waste collection, disposal and recycling** - household and business bin collections and recycling centres.
- **Welfare assistance and advice** - advice and financial support provided to vulnerable people to help address poverty especially during the cost of living crisis.

Jeff opened the floor to questions and asked Board Members for comment:

It was highlighted that Neighbourhood Wardens did not have the powers Police did and so were unable to stop ASB at the Bus Station. It was suggested that the money used to pay Neighbourhood Wardens would be better spent on Police.

It was suggested that in order to ask the public which of the services they would like to make savings on, more needs to be done to inform the public what the impact would be. i.e. moving refuse collection to a 4-weekly cycle, how much would that save? Giving the public a list of proposals with the savings would be beneficial.

With regard to Council Tax. Is it Central Government that decided Students would not pay Council Tax? Jeff advised that it was.

It was suggested that hard copies of the presentation were made available for people who did not have access to online consultation. Daniel advised that hard copies would be made available from the office, local libraries, and the Customer Access Point.

It was highlighted that savings could be made by switching off streetlights at certain times of the night. Jeff advised this is something that already is being done as some lights are on timers.

My experience of Neighbourhood Wardens has always been positive. How would you assess the impact on the community, if for example Neighbourhood Wardens were highlighted as a saving.

Jeff advised that once individual issues were highlighted. Consultation would continue to make sure all communities are happy with the outcome. Quality impact assessments would also be carried out in collaboration with partners and commissioning services regarding any reductions in services or front-line delivery.

Suzanne highlighted that consultation was disproportional. Jeff advised that through members representing their patches all areas it would be thrashed out.

The consultation runs from Tuesday 5 September to Friday 20 October 2023 and will be available at www.durham.gov.uk/consultation

John highlighted that more microphones were needed in Morrison Busty Office for the hybrid meetings as sound quality was very poor for people at home/online. **Action: Daniel**

5. Neighbourhood Issues and Locality Policing Issues:

N Insp. Dave Stewart – informed the meeting that theft is down 3% over this two-month period. Crime up 8% to 19% although this is mainly down to cybercrime.

An upcoming Crime Stoppers Campaign will be taking place with a £1000 reward for information on off road bikes in hot spot areas.

N Insp. Stewart alluded to the issues that local Bus drivers had encountered mainly being targeted with Gel Blaster Guns. Thankfully no one had received any lasting injuries. An investigation is ongoing, and images of the perpetrators are to be shared with local schools.

Sgt Terry Archibald will be returning to work next month which will be a massive asset to Stanley.

6. AAP Coordinator Update:

Daniel updated on a range of initiatives that the AAP had been working on.

Community Engagement Review:

Daniel advised Board Members that over the next weeks working groups would be set up to look at a range of things including new Terms of Reference for the Local Network Panels.

Area Budget Live Projects Monitoring Update Report

Daniel advised this report had been circulated previously to Board Members.

He highlighted two projects which were unable to continue delivery. He advised this money would come back to the AAP to be used on other projects.

Area Budget Application for approval:

Stanley Activity and Support Information Directory

Project Description: The planning and production of two further editions of the Stanley AAP Directory, that contains activity details and support information for local residents; elderly, carers, disabled, children and young people who all reside in the Stanley AAP area. The Directory's content will be checked, amended, updated and added to by Stanley AAP Officers following consultation with the Groups, Venues and Organisations contained within it and those that have been omitted from earlier editions, but will be included going forward. The Directory will again be printed by Design & Print. At the core of all AAPs is its ability to engage effectively with the local community, partners, and other stakeholders. Part of this engagement is to ensure that the AAP communicates and publicises local activities and support information of its partners and local community buildings for the benefit of the residents of the area it covers. The Directory will again include up to date information about what is available in local community buildings in the Stanley area and will range from a local toddler group to a seated exercise class. The Directory will also include information from key

partners detailing the support and advice they are able to provide to local residents. The Directory will also promote the work and priorities the Stanley AAP are focusing on, support better communication links between the AAP and local residents, and to empower the community with relevant local information on other local services and avenues for how they can interact effectively with them to improve service delivery in their area and better meet their needs. The Directory will again assist the AAP to work more effectively with local residents, volunteers, workers, businesses, agencies and services within the Stanley AAP locality to help address the AAP's priorities.

Project cost £5,000 (actual £4,619.37 mop up from 2022/23 Area Budget)

Daniel asked the Board for any comments. Darren highlighted that within one of his service reviews, the Directory had been highlighted as a very positive contribution to Stanley and the residents of Stanley.

The Board approved the application.

Poverty Task Group:

The next meeting of the Task Group will be held Wednesday 27th September 2023 at 5.00pm in person in The Louisa Centre. Board Members were reminded that if they would like to join the Task Group to contact Daniel so he can add you to the email circulation list for the meeting.

The Task Group will focus on the live projects going forward. Looking at supporting families with the Cost of Living Crisis. Launch of the Household Support Fund delivered by Durham County Council and the County Durham Community Foundation. And the Welfare Rights Officer based in The Venue.

Fun & Food October Half Term 2023:

Daniel advised that the closing date for applications was 12noon on Wednesday 20th September 2023.

7. Partner Work Update / Stanley specific items of interest:

Karbon Homes – Suzanne promoted the Stepping into Employment Event; that will showcase job opportunities in Construction, Retail, Care Contact Centres, Administration, Travel, and Apprenticeships. It will be held on Wednesday 11th September, 10am – 2pm, The Venue, Stanley. Suzanne to pass on the poster to share with AAP Board and Forum Members.

8. Neighbourhood Budget Summaries:

Eden Learning Trust, Tanfield School – Learning Resource Centre

The project will support renovating a former classroom into an accessible learning resource area to be used throughout the day including before and after school. The project will make a safe space that doesn't replicate a classroom giving users the opportunity to use the free space as they wish without the pressure of classroom learning. The funding will support furnishing the areas with fixed benching, shelving, tables, chairs and soft seating.

Project Cost: £3,000.00

Councillor Joyce Charlton Contribution: £3,000.00

The Activity Den – Legionella Remedial Works

The project will support works needed to be carried out to comply with current regulations. The project will also build in some future proofing, so the upgrades last a long time. This will improve safety and help with sustainability of the building ensuring our water systems are fit

for the future and reduce risks all round.

Project Cost: £2,595.00

Councillor Gordon Binney Contribution: £2,341.00

DCC Regeneration Economy & Growth – Playing Pitch Improvements

This application specifically relates to Annfield Plain football pitches as well as changing room improvements at Annfield Plain Park. Pitches have been professionally inspected to determine scope of works required including weed killing/fertilising, spiking and rolling. In addition, the Towns & Villages element will not only support the Annfield Plain area but also the enhancement of Oakies, and Craghead football pitches.

Project Cost: £30,314.00

Councillor Joan Nicholson Contribution: £6,577.50

Councillor Christine Bell Contribution: £6,577.50

SAAP Towns & Villages Contribution: £14,376.00

Section 106 Contribution: £2,783.00

Stanley Events Limited – Celebrating the New Beamish FC Building Reveal

The project will see a fun day delivered within the grounds of the Stanley Community Football Centre with kids rides, inflatables and stalls. In addition to the fun day the group will launch the plans for the future redevelopment of the current building, showing local people the plans for improvement and sustainability within the current facility.

Project Cost: £1,250.00

Councillor Angela Hanson Contribution: £416.67

Councillor Carol Hampson Contribution: £416.67

Councillor Sam McMahon Contribution: £416.67

North East Horticultural Society - North East Horticultural Society Annual Show.

The project will support the group to help fund their annual show held at the Louisa Centre, it consists of a series of competitions for both flowers and vegetables, the Event will attract small growers from local people to growers from around the country. There will be various competition categories competing, bringing communities together to support each other and enjoy the event.

Project Cost: £8,245.00

Councillor Joan Nicholson Contribution: £1,500.00

Councillor Christine Bell Contribution: £1,500.00

Small Grants:

Applicant: Annfield Plain Cricket Club – Fun Day

Project Brief: To support the Cricket Club to deliver a family fun day.

Total Cost: £1,800.00

Councillor Joan Nicholson: £450.00

Councillor Christine Bell Contribution: £450.00

9. Pre-Notified Any Other Business:

No pre-notified any other business had been received.

10. Next Meeting:

TBC – Morrison Busty Depot fully Hybrid.

For further details about these minutes please contact Stanley AAP office,
Tel: 03000 265323 or Email: Stanleyaap@durham.gov.uk