



Better for everyone

4 Together Partnership Area Action Partnership (AAP) Minutes of the Board Meeting Wednesday 1 November 2023 Dean Bank & Ferryhill Literary Institute

PRESENT:

Joanne Burnip – Livin Housing, Nigel Jones – VCS Representative, Victoria Murray – DCC Representative, Sgt Pete Newman – Police Representative, Anne Hall, Susan Kirby, Dennis Ramsey (**Chair**), Cllr Pauline Crathorne – Cornforth Parish Council, Cllr Joe Makepeace – Ferryhill Town Council (Vice Chair), Cllr Elaine Peeke – DCC, Lee Copeland – Principal AAP Coordinator, Peter Garrod – Principal Community Development Project Officer, Paula Nixon – Community Development Project Officer, Paula Stockport – AAP Support Officer

APOLOGIES:

Carole Atkinson, Cllr Peter Atkinson, Cllr Curtis Bihari, Mark Booth, Cllr Julie Cairns, Liam Fellows, Richard Morgan, Oliver Peeke, Cllr Joe Quinn, Insp Mike Sammut

A1. Introductions & Apologies

DR welcomed everyone to the meeting of the 4 Together Partnership Board. Apologies for absence had been received, as above.

DR noted that we have a couple of long-term absentees. LC clarified that a couple of members haven't attended a meeting for some time, so they will be sent a letter stating that the Board can take their continued non-attendance (without apologies or attendance at any subgroups) as their resignation. LC will action this and keep Board members updated on seeking replacements (**Action 1: LC**).

A2. Agreement of Minutes from Previous Meeting (6.9.23) - Matters Arising

LC reviewed the previous minutes for matters arising, actions and accuracy. There were no outstanding actions or other matters arising, and the minutes were **AGREED** as a true record.

Cllr JM asked whether there would be any merit in considering a change to our meeting day/schedule, as this frequently clashes with Ferryhill Town Council meetings. LC clarified that our Board meeting day has been changed in the past specifically to avoid clashes with Town & Parish Council meetings. LC has recently discussed meeting schedules with the new Ferryhill Town Clerk. LC added that it's probably not the most sensible time to look at a potential change given that the AAPs are going through their Review and upcoming transition to Local Networks. LC noted the point, and will continue to liaise with the Town Clerk going forward and see how things progress.

DR briefly updated Board members on his recent attendance at the County's Local Bus Board meeting. DR had fed back a couple of local issues at the meeting, mainly in relation to ongoing issues at West Cornforth. DR is aware of an upcoming gap in service over the Christmas/Easter periods (again in West Cornforth), and will raise this at the December meeting. If any Board member has any specific issues to raise, please forward these to DR.

A3. Countywide Partner Issues

A3.1 DCC Budget Consultation, Phase 2 (Vicki Murray)

Board members received a follow-up presentation after the presentation given at the last meeting, in relation to some additional savings options to help close the forecast budget shortfall.

The consultation asked the following questions of the AAP:

- Our proposed approach to balance the budget further has identified additional savings needed of £1.9 million in 2024/25 and £2.9 million across the four-year period from savings from back office and making efficiencies, raising additional income and changes to delivering frontline services – what is the AAP view on this approach?
- What do you feel will be the impact of this approach upon you, your communities or those you represent? – why do you believe this would be the case?
- Do you have any additional ideas or suggestions as to areas where we can raise further income or become more efficient in the years to come?

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

- Cllr JM commented that he has always thought it unfair if you go to a hospital you must pay to park (including staff), but no one pays at County Hall/Council premises, is that part of the review or will it stay a 'perk' for staff? VM clarified her understanding is that parking charges for council employees are not included within the scope of this saving proposal, however Board members will be aware that in line with the Council's accommodation strategy the lifespan of County Hall is getting shorter as development activity is completed on alternative locations. A programme of work to decant staff currently located at County Hall is underway, and this is likely to include a review of employee parking arrangements.
- DR asked what will happen to the County Hall 'asset' once it's been cleared, will there be any revenue from this? VM will take this point back and provide an update on how the County Hall site has been factored into financial planning and support the budget moving forward (**Action 2: VM**).
- Cllr JM asked whether DCC made any profit from the sale of the newly built HQ building at the Sands? VM will confirm the position outside of the meeting and determine what information is available to share on public record (**Action 3: VM**).
- Cllr PC asked whether there are any plans in relation to the review of car parking charges for this to include Park & Ride locations? VM clarified her understanding is that parking charges for Park & Ride locations are not included within the scope of this savings proposal. However, this is a potential option for generating further income that can be fed back as part of the consultation and incorporated with the feedback relating to council staff parking charges in strategic sites across the county.

- Cllr JM asked whether electric vehicle charging points are free of charge? VM advised she would check this outside of the meeting (**Action 4: VM**).
- Cllr PC commented that parts of the former Sedgefield Borough area (i.e. West Cornforth) are double taxed, and Cllr PC is worried about the impact on small parish councils who have very low budgets as it is to be able to provide services, a lot will have to cut back on what they can do, where they don't have assets like car parks to potentially generate additional income. It would help parish councils if we didn't have to maintain parks etc, would then have more funding for our area.
- Cllr JM asked if figures for allocated & unallocated reserves are available? VM advised she would check this outside of the meeting (**Action 5: VM**).
- NJ asked for clarity around what DCC defines as 'changes to delivering front line services'. NJ commented that this is really worrying from a VCS perspective. It feels like a lot of charities, e.g. Citizens Advice, are pulling back more and more from helping people locally, and moving to more of an online presence, often only offering 'by-appointment' services or time-limited drop-in services, or signposting people to websites, which doesn't help people in real need. There's an increased demand for support services, and VCS service providers are all being asked to do more with less funding. The AAPs provide so much funding support to small, local service providers so, from an AAP point of view, if budgets continue to be reduced, who will be there to support the smaller communities, e.g. Chilton, Cornforth, Ferryhill etc? VM clarified her understanding is that the scope of the review relating to the way the Council provides front line services will primarily focus on the review of AAPs, council-run nursery services, neighbourhood protection and allotments. As Head of Transactional and Customer Services VM has seen changes within her own service in terms of opening times in four of the Council's least used access points based on reductions in demand for face-to-face services, but would like to provide reassurance that all proposals and decisions were very much data and intelligence led with a commitment to maintaining appropriate channel choice from a customer service point of view. There have been no full closures, rather a very measured approach.
- NJ acknowledged the budget pressures being faced by DCC, however when hours are reduced this results in clients having to go elsewhere for support, to places like the Ladder Centre & Cornforth House, because there are no other support services available. People need access to support, talking to someone (e.g. for help with benefits etc), there are a lot of high-risk families moving into the area, and local providers are having to pick up the backlog, simply downloading a form from a website isn't a reality. VM commented that she recognises the demand for support services is not decreasing but in the case of the access points how residents were choosing to access services was, and many organisations were having to change their delivery model to respond. VM added that as a lead officer responsible for delivery of the Council's Poverty Action Plan, VM wanted to also highlight that this Plan does include a recent review of advice services (including welfare & debt advice), which is in delivery over the next 18 months. Work is being done to baseline current provision funded by DCC, and develop the model for the future. NJ noted that ultimately someone must pay for these great local services.

VM advised that Board members are welcome to submit additional comments via the online survey, which is open until 5.00pm on Sunday 3 December. Further information is also available via the website:

[Consultation on further proposals to balance the Council budget](#)

A4. Local Neighbourhood Issues

A4.1 Neighbourhood Policing Update

Sgt PN briefly updated Board members in relation to the current position around staffing in the team, as well as a couple of recent good news stories which have seen some prolific local offenders convicted.

A5. Area & Neighbourhood Budget Update

A5.1 2023-24 Area Budget (AB) Funding Report

PG confirmed that a report had been circulated in advance with the meeting papers, for Board members to note. The report outlines the background and process for this year's Area Budget project callout, and reflects the decisions of the ranking panel. PG clarified that we had an available budget of £119,900 this year, and the total funding request for Expressions of Interest received was in excess of £250k.

Section 3 of the report provides details of the 9 x projects recommended to the Board for approval. PG clarified that all applicants had been asked to complete and submit a full Area Budget application form; all but one have now been submitted (one applicant had some technical issues with the form which have now been resolved and hopefully the application is expected next week).

PG gave a brief outline of each project in turn from the report:

- Item 3.1 - Carlton Street Play Area Upgrade (Ferryhill Town Council)

AB Request: **£18,800**

Match Funding Contribution: £1,000

Total Project Cost: £19,800

- Item 3.2 - Wildlife Garden Regeneration (Bishop Middleham Parish Council)

AB Request: **£7,740**

Match Funding Contribution: £500

Total Project Cost: £8,240

- Item 3.3 - The Heart of the Community Project (Chilton Academy)

AB Request: **£19,500**

Match Funding Contribution: £6,445

Total Project Cost: £25,945

- Item 3.4 - Craft Café (Endeavour Woodcrafts CIC)

AB Request: **£5,170**

Match Funding Contribution: £1,106

Total Project Cost: £6,276

- Item 3.5 - Youth Network (The Cornforth Partnership)

AB Request: **£19,836**

Match Funding Contribution: £26,937

Total Project Cost: £46,773

PG highlighted that the panel had stipulated that 50% of the funding would be paid in advance and the following 50% paid based on satisfactory monitoring and further development of the youth network. The conditions were placed on the project based on the fact it was a pilot project and wanting to see further engagement from partners within relevant sectors.

- Item 3.6 - Goals & Shelters (Chilton Juniors FC)

AB Request: **£10,647.70**

Match Funding Contribution: £1,062.77

Total Project Cost: £11,710.47

- Item 3.7 - LADDER Kids (Ferryhill LADDER Centre)

AB Request: **£11,300**

Match Funding Contribution: £4,680

Total Project Cost: £15,980

- Item 3.8 - Recovering Futures (Ferryhill LADDER Centre)

AB Request: **£18,594**

Match Funding Contribution: £6,000

Total Project Cost: £24,594

PG noted that this project includes an element of Neighbourhood Budget funding from Cllr Julie Cairns, no Declaration of Interest.

- Item 3.9 - Ferryhill Unique Ninjas (Deaf Hill Ward Regeneration Partnership)

AB Request: **£8,312**

Match Funding Contribution: £3,168

Total Project Cost: £11,480

Board members **APPROVED** the decisions of the ranking panel and agreed to support the 9 x projects. PG clarified that the applications will now go through technical appraisal, with grant offer letters hopefully before the end of December.

A5.2 Neighbourhood Budget (NB) Update

PG clarified there is no NB report today, as there are no projects needing Board consideration. PG circulated an updated summary of spend for all NB/Cllrs, for information. If any Board member has any queries in relation to NB, please contact the team.

A5.3 Community Engagement Review

LC updated Board members. Work has been ongoing since the sign-off of the Cabinet report in July, with various officer workstreams being set up to look at areas such as staffing structure, governance, future funding model etc. There are also subgroups underneath the main workstreams that will look at more specific elements around the structure of the Local Networks going forward. LC highlighted that there are 6 x AAPs based in premises not owned by DCC, who will be relinquishing their sites from April 2024 onwards, in line with savings linked to the MTFP (4 Together Partnership is one of these). Work is ongoing to identify alternative accommodation, with the aim that this is within or very close to the relevant geographical area covered by the AAP. In addition, looking towards the next round of target savings for AAPs (£500k), this will likely link to the Boundary Commission review once this has been published. LC clarified that a lot of changes have been made already, mainly around internal funding processes. LC is hopeful that a full progress report on the Review will be available shortly, and Board members will be kept updated as we go forward.

A5.4 Towns & Villages (T&V) Funding Update

PG advised Board members that our T&V Project Officer, Angela Blanchard, has recently secured a new role and so Joanne Ashworth will be taking over from

Angela to finalise our remaining couple of T&V projects. Five schemes were originally approved by the panel, three of these have now been completed and the other two are still in development. The T&V Programme finishes in March 2024, each project has to have had an offer letter with no conditions and all funding paid out; so as an AAP, we're in a good position.

A5.5 Fun & Food (F&F) Funding Update

PG highlighted that 4 x local organisations are delivering provision this week (Deaf Hill Ward Regeneration Partnership, Little Treasures, LADDER Centre & Mainsforth Boxing Club). Applications for the Christmas holiday period are currently open; we have a total budget of £6k available for this period and Board members had previously agreed a maximum grant limit of £2k per project. The closing date for applications is 15 November and PG asked that Board members promote this funding and signpost any prospective applicants to the AAP team. PG noted that it had previously been agreed that the Chair and Vice Chairs would form a panel to review F&F applications but following discussion with the Chair we feel it would be advantageous to extend the invitation to any Board member (without a Declaration of Interest) who may be keen to take part. PG will be leaving the 4 Together team from next week and so F&F will be picked up by the wider AAP team going forward.

**A6. Date & Time of Next Meeting:
Wednesday 7 February 2024, 6:00pm (venue tbc)**

DR noted that this will be PG's last meeting with the 4 Together team and thanked him on behalf of the Board for his hard work during his time with us.

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