

Chester-le-Street & District Area Action Partnership (AAP) Board Meeting Minutes of Meeting held Monday 22nd July 2024.

Present:

Councillors: Alison Batey, Emma Waldoek. Julie Scurfield, Alan Bell and Maureen May (Deputy Parish Council Representative).

Partner Organisations: Joanne Malki (Business Association) Colleen Baker (VCS Representative) and Marion Ingleby (Durham County Council). Wayne Thompson (Durham & Darlington Fire & Rescue

Public Representatives: Clare Todd, Jake Rollings, Howell Davies, Chris Hoy, and Khaled Malki.

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

Apologies: Colin Stephenson (NHS), Cllr. Bill Moist, Cllr Elsie Forrester (Parish Council Representative), Cllr. Tracie Smith, Suzanne Jobson (Karbon Homes) and), Inspector Lee Morris (Police), Janet Ford Davidson (Public Representative).

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

Introductions, Apologies and Virtual Housekeeping Code of Conduct/Protocols

Jake Rollings (Chair) opened the meeting. Housekeeping arrangements were noted. Apologies were also noted as above.

Michael introduced Scott McInally Durham County Council (DCC) and Kate Larkin Rape & Sexual Abuse Counselling Centre (RSACC) who were each presenting.

Declaration of Interest

There were no declarations of interest

Agreement of minutes from the previous meeting held on Monday 20th May 2024 & Matters Arising

Jake Rollings, Chair, went through the minutes page by page.

The Minutes were agreed.

Matters Arising:

There were no matters arising.

The Board agreed the minutes of Monday 20th May 2024.

Michael welcomed the new Fire & Rescue Representative, Wayne Thompson

Welfare Advice Presentation

Scott McNally, Assistant Assessment & Awards Manager (DCC), gave an update on the current service and the background to this consultation.

Background

- DCC know the difference receiving advice and guidance in the right place and at the right time can have on a person, on families and on the wider community.
- This is particularly important when information, advice and guidance relates to managing money, debt advice and access to benefits.
- For many, receiving support can reduce fears and financial worries and positively impact health and wellbeing. It can also help people to access benefits they did not know they were entitled to or make a case for extra financial support.
- DCC are committed to helping all residents in County Durham access this support and we currently do this through our own Welfare Rights Team and through specific funding to Citizens Advice County Durham, to provide free, confidential and impartial advice and support with the aim of maximising benefit entitlement.
- Over the last 10 years DCC have seen a change in the types of advice that residents of County Durham are asking for.
- Because of that DCC want to make sure that the advice services we fund continue to meet the needs of residents.
- DCC want to continue to provide the most effective services, make it easy to know where to look for them, and get the best support in the way that suits user needs.
- By better understanding these needs, DCC can contract with the right organisations, offer the right services and measure the difference it makes to individuals, households and communities.

DCC are asking people to tell us about:

- Their experiences of looking for and using advice, good or bad
- The reasons they have not used advice services when they needed support.
- How DCC could enhance the existing offer
- How they would like to get advice in the future such as appointments, telephone calls, online help or other ways
- The types of advice they would like to see offered in the future.
- Go to our consultation website for more information and to complete the survey online.
<https://www.durham.gov.uk/consultation>
- Visit one of DCCs libraries or DCC Customer Access Points (CAP) to complete a paper survey.
- Take a paper survey.

- The deadline for feedback is 5.00pm Friday 20th September 2024.
- The feedback received will help to inform the services we fund from 2025/26.
- It will be used alongside information we have gathered from the advice services we provide / fund and information from other partners, to deliver effective advice and support services in the future.

The following questions were asked:

Q. Suzanne Jobson asked if the consultation was fully explained on the website?

A. Yes

Suzanne Jobson highlighted that the offer in Stanley was different to the Chester-le-Street area.

Q. With Citizens Advice closing in Chester-le-Street, is this consultation going to bring back a face-to-face service?

A. It may highlight that need.

Q. Cllr Alison Batey asked where are the cut off areas?

A. No cut offs, based within the whole of North Durham.

Howell Davies advised, as a volunteer for Citizens Advice, there were a lot of people who like to talk. Will you bring back face-to face-advice provision? He added that evidence had shown that for every £1 the service put into helping people access benefits, an extra £3 - £5 is put back into the economy.

Q. How does this consultation link in with the customer services consultation?

A. CAP and this consultation are under the same manager and as so will link together.

A. Michael advised the AAP would send out the slides

Action: Michael Wilkes

Q. Can we have some copies of the questionnaire printed and distributed to community buildings

Action: Team Michael

The Chair thanked Scott for the presentation.

Empowerment Project Presentation

Kate Larkin (RSACC), gave a presentation highlighting what their project delivered and what the AAP funding had been used for.

The aim of the project is to educate secondary school students on themes such as sexual violence and its impact, consent, and how to be an effective bystander. It fosters safe environments where empathy, understanding and the power of our choices can be explored.

Assemblies are delivered to each year group. Slips with information of support options for each student are provided. Group work sessions are delivered to small groups allowing for more in depth exploration of key topics

Emotional support is available for any student requiring additional support around sexual violence.



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The project reached out to both Park View School and Hermitage Academy. Park View were very keen to be involved and were open to supporting the pilot project. To date the project has delivered seven assemblies, worked with five groups and completed some one-to-one emotional support sessions with Park View School.

Hermitage Academy were interested in the project, but due to other demands, were unable to commit to the work this academic year.

A discussion took place around funding and educating the next cohort of children.

The Chair thanked Kate on behalf of the Board for the presentation.

Michael highlighted the varying nature of the projects that the AAP support and how this project was a really good example of some of the important work that is being delivered across the AAP area.

AAP Community Engagement Review - Boundary Consultation

Michael Wilkes gave a brief update

- AAP Reform an early Cabinet priority
- March 2022 – April 2023 – Review of council's main community engagement function (AAPs) including countywide consultation on review's findings and recommendations
- July 2023 – Cabinet approve new community engagement model for new Local Networks (LN) to replace AAPs
- November 2023 – New electoral boundaries for County Durham published
- February 2024 – Council agree review of the LN boundaries to achieve Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) savings (2025/26 – 2026/27)
- May 2024 – AAP service transfers to Regeneration, Economy & Growth Development

Local Networks – Changes agreed in July 2023

- Rebranded model
- Revised and improved Terms of Reference
- Revised and improved Grant Funding Criteria & Guidelines
- Simplified funding processes
- 4yr funding planning cycle - strategic
- Repurpose and better utilise AAP Forum
- Attract new participation with focussed engagement/neighbourhood planning activities
- Closer working relationship with the County Durham Partnership and County Durham Together
- Review of AAP boundaries following the publication of new electoral division boundaries

Michael highlighted that whilst the current AAP boundaries align to town and parish councils, they do not fully align to the current electoral divisions and therefore some AAP boundaries cut through electoral divisions. This means some County Councillors have more than one AAP covering their electoral division, and there is also currently an imbalance in the population size for each AAP.

The proposal is that the county should be made up of 12 LNs, and unlike the current AAP boundaries, the LN boundaries will be aligned fully to electoral division boundaries. This will mean county councillors are aligned to one LN only and their local priorities and commitments can be concentrated to one Local Network area.

Aligning LNs to electoral boundaries will help inform the development of unique and robust local profiles. These profiles will facilitate the increased use of local empirical data along with opportunities to hold more



Better for everyone

localised events and activities, to enable LNs to adopt a more strategic approach to their work and outcomes via the development and delivery of a 4-year local plan.

The LN boundaries have been designed to achieve more consistent population size and county councillor representation, with the exception of our more rural areas, where joining more electoral divisions onto these would create large geographic areas and the increased pressures on resources associated with administering and providing community development support in such large areas.

Moving to 12 LNs from 14 AAPs will contribute towards MTFP savings with less grant funding required for 12 LNs and a reduced staffing compliment of the current AAP team.

Regardless of any changes to AAP/LN boundaries - the number of electoral divisions will reduce from 63 to 51 and the number of county councillors reduce from 126 to 98

The LN boundaries have been designed to achieve more consistent population size and county councillor representation, with the exception of our more rural areas, where joining more electoral divisions onto these would create large geographic areas and the increased pressures on resources associated with administering and providing community development support in such large areas.

Population data has been calculated using 2021 census population data matching postcode level data for the new electoral division boundaries which come into effect in May 2025.

Next Steps

- General comments and questions from AAP Board discussions captured and fed into the consultation findings
- AAP Board Members still encouraged to submit individual (or group) responses by 18th August via the survey at <https://online1.snapsurveys.com/LocalNetworks> or by email to: cer@durham.gov.uk

All feedback will be considered. Proposals will then be finalised and considered by our Cabinet before implementation in April 2025.

Michael opened the floor to a discussion.

Cllr Alison Batey noted that Michael has been given a poison chalice. Cllr Batey noted that, when AAPs were created, the level of consultation done to establish them was vast, consulting with a huge amount of local people and organisations to establish the original boundaries. This time around, no consultation with Cllrs before the consultation was undertaken. Also, there are no natural linkages or bus routes between Pelton and Stanley, where there are with Chester-le-Street.

The Pelton division has a Chester-le-Street postcode. It has sat within the boundary of Chester-le-Street since the inception of AAP's and before, as a District Council. Cllr Batey noted that she did not agree with the timeline for consultation. She noted that this is the summer holiday period, so many people will be preoccupied with holidays.

Cllr Batey stated that all services are currently aligned and these will be effected e.g. Police, Karbon etc. Cllr Batey said that, Pelton moving into Stanley will mean Pelton has to pitch against a Town Council for services and funding. This consultation should have been taken out to communities first, after consulting with Elected Members. The whole consultation has been pitched completely wrong. This information was held back from Elected Members, why? It should have come to Elected Members first.



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Cllr Julie Scurfield stated that someone in County Hall who doesn't know how Chester-le-Street works cannot make these decisions. Cllr Scurfield stated that she was not against a review but this doesn't feel like a best fit.

In order for a LN to work, it has to be part of a network on a range of different levels and this is not the best possible fit. Cllr Scurfield asked why have they not moved the rural areas as, if looking to achieve an area of greater equity, how can we retain an area with two councillors? She noted that the impact this AAP has had is incredible and that she worries about losing that.

Cllr Danny Wood stated that the dates for consultation are suspicious. Councillors were informed the day after the General Election to promote it. He would question the way that's been done and whether it fits with the Councils constitution rules. Cllr Wood noted that, having been involved in the boundary review, it was based on the joint interest of everyone in the area, with Pelton Fell going into Pelton.

Cllr Wood noted that there would be an unfair fight for funding. Cllr Wood also highlighted that only West Pelton and Beamish have Stanley postcodes and that Beamish is covered by a small parish council. Pelton Fell is unique in that it doesn't have a parish council, it sits within Chester-le-Street. In terms of numbers for the statistics, Cllr Wood suggested they are out of date.

On the day of General Election, Cllrs were told about this, during purdah, why not wait until Monday and add an extra week onto the consultation timeline?

Clair Todd noted what others had already mentioned. She stated that the proposal was so frustrating. She noted that the original review did not highlight splitting the boundaries.

Howell Davies asked how will the financial Impact in terms of budgets be managed?

Michael noted that the proposals are to keep the budgets and allocations the same. Moving from 14 to 12 LNs will make the required savings.

Suzanne Jobson asked **how** did they get to the decision of where and how to move the boundaries? How did this come about?. Was there a chunk of consultation missed out? A lot of this should have been discussed with the communities it impacted. This wasn't what the consultation they gave us. Suzanne noted that she works across the two areas (Chester-le-Street and Stanley) and the areas are completely different. Karbon has changed their boundaries but only after they consulted with the residents first.

Cllr Alan Bell asked **how** much of an influence has the boundary commission had in changing the LN boundaries?

Cllr Emma Waldock noted that Witton Gilbert has no links with Chester-le-Street.

Khaled Malki stated that he agreed with the other observations and everything that has been said.

Colin Reynolds (Forum Member) noted that the information presented in this consultation is very poor. None of this information tonight was on the website. Therefore, this was a fake consultation.

Colin accepted that the boundaries of the networks should coincide with the new ward boundaries for Election Members, however did not accepted that these proposals provide more consistent population size e.g. Weardale and Teesdale.

It appears that the decision to reduce the number of LNs to 12 from the original 14 AAPs is driven by finance, with a proposed annual saving of £500,000. It is not stated what the remaining budget will be. How will the funding allocated to the LNs be determined?

Colin noted that, bearing in mind that the report to DCC Cabinet last July referred to LNs attracting/involving a greater number of residents/stakeholders in community affairs this proposal seems a strange way to achieve that by reducing the funding provided to do so and also the points at which access can be gained.

Colin stated that the consultation document does not show how the current AAPs fit into the new LNs. It also does not indicate where the offices for the Networks will be.

Colin said that It is surprising to put Pelton in with Stanley as most of the Pelton Ward is considerably closer to the town of Chester-le-Street when compared to Sacriston, Witton Gilbert or the southerly part of the Lumley and West Rainton ward. Colin said that the bus services in the Pelton ward are mostly centred on Chester -le-Street and not Stanley. Pelton ward is also mainly within the Chester-le-Street GP Primary Care Network area.

Mick Rodgers (Forum Member) stated that he concurs with what everyone has already mentioned. Mick noted that Pelton Parish Council and Pelton Community Centre rely on funding from different sources. It's not just the funding from the AAP it's the impact on other funders. If Pelton goes outside this area it will lose this network of funding. Mick asked how could DCC Cabinet make these decisions?

Sophie (Forum Member) noted that the Community Mental Health Transformation work is based on the current boundaries and it works well. Pelton was where the Steering Group meetings for Chester-le-Street take place.

Charlie Lodge (Forum Member) asked that, with regards to the MTFP savings, is the £500,000 savings aligned to the AAP's reduction of staff? Or is it a reduction to the budgets to the public/partnerships. Michael noted it was both.

AAP Budget Report

Michael noted that, due to time constraints, the report will be e-mailed to Board Members.

Neighbourhood Budget Report

Neighbourhood Budget Projects with Declarations of Interest – Approval Required

Bullion Community Resource Centre - Everything in Place – Cllr Karen Fantarrow-Darby and Cllr Simon Henig

The first part of this project is to work with St Cuthbert's Hospice to undertake a ten week Everything in Place course with 16 participants.

The second part of the project is to contribute towards the replacement of outdated inverters for the existing solar panel array. This was identified as required as part of a recent independent energy assessment of the centre.

Declaration of Interest: Yes – Cllr Fantarrow-Darby is a Trustee at Bullion CRC

NB Allocated: £6,300 (Cllrs Henig and Fantarrow-Darby £3,150 each)

Neighbourhood Budget Projects without any Declarations of Interest – Information Only

Selby Cottage Childcare Centre – Selby Cottage Events – Cllr Tracie Smith

The aim of this project is to provide the nursery with various equipment for the children to get out and explore their environment, as well as enabling events at the centre.

Declaration of Interest: None

NB Allocated: £1,650

**Neighbourhood Budget Small Grant Projects – Information Only.
Urpeth Parish Council – Remembrance Poppies – Cllrs Alison Batey, Paul Pringle and Danny Wood**

The aim of this project is to provide funding to purchase remembrance poppies to display on lampposts during the remembrance period in November.

Declaration of Interest: None

NBSG Allocated: £436 (Cllrs Pringle and Wood £145 each and Cllr Batey £146)

The Board Agreed the report.

Holiday Activities with Healthy Food

The report was distributed for information.

Partner Updates

Business

Joanne Malki advised that a lot of people had been asking for a copy of the recently produced Town Map.

Voluntary Sector

Colleen Baker noted that, at Aspire, they are expecting to see a rise in the need for household support as the long summer holidays begin and women and families are trying to juggle the often higher cost of feeding and caring for their younger children. There has also been a higher number of women accessing the basic food, hygiene and cleaning products as well as stock of used clothing toys and household items.

Aspire have developed a small gardening group. Over the last two years the gardening group have completely transformed the front of the Aspire building from a bare entrance to a really welcoming relaxing area using pots, tubs and planters.

AAP Co-ordinators Update

Annual Report – Michael advised this was now ready to be sent to Board Members for comment.

Date and Time of the next meeting

Monday 23rd September 2024. Venue TBC

Action Box	By Whom
Send out Welfare Advice Slides	Lesley



Better for everyone

Photocopies for Clare of Welfare Advice Consultation	Lesley
Photocopies for Clare of Boundary Consultation	Lesley