

Chester-le-Street & District Area Action Partnership (AAP) Board Meeting Minutes of Meeting held Monday 23rd September 2024.

Present:

Councillors: Alison Batey, Emma Waldoock. Julie Scurfield, Bill Moist and Tracie Smith.

Partner Organisations: Colleen Baker (VCS Representative), Marion Ingleby (Durham County Council). Wayne Thompson (Durham & Darlington Fire & Rescue, and Inspector Simon Hogg (Durham Constabulary).

Public Representatives: Clare Todd, Jake Rollings (Chair), and Howell Davies.

Officer Attendance: Michael Wilkes (Principal AAP Co-ordinator), Rob Davisworth (Head of Corporate Finance & Commercial Services), Helen Pinkney (Principal Community Development Project Officer), Laura Sloan and Allyson Rose (Community Development Project Officers).

Apologies: Colin Stephenson (NHS), Cllr Elsie Forrester & Maureen May (Parish Council Representatives), Joanne Malki (Business Representative), Khaled Malki (Public Representative), Chris Hoy (Public Representative), Suzanne Jobson (Karbon Homes)

Public Attendance: Six 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.

[Declaration of Interest](#)

There were no declarations of interest.

[Agreement of minutes from the previous meeting held on Monday 22nd July 2024 & Matters Arising](#)

Jake Rollings, Chair, went through the minutes page by page. Michael noted that all actions had been undertaken. **The Minutes were agreed.**

[Matters Arising](#)

There were no matters arising.

The Board agreed the minutes of Monday 22nd July 2024.

[2025/26 County Council Forecast Revenue Budget Consultation Presentation](#)

Rob Davisworth – Head of Corporate Finance & Commercial Services introduced himself and noted that he had taken over from Jeff Garfoot.

He reminded the AAP Board that the consultation was currently 'live' and would run from 20th September until 1st November 2024.

Rob then proceeded with a very informative presentation, which showed the financial position of the Council.

This would be the first of two phases of consultation, with a second taking place around December/January, which would include proposals to balance the budget and an overview for next year. It was noted, as part of the consultation, constructive feedback was needed around savings.

Rob reminded everyone that Council Tax only covers approximately 20% of overall Council costs. The properties in County Durham mostly fall within bands A-C, which doesn't raise a lot of revenue for service provision. He explained the difficulties in raising further funds to support services linked to Council Tax, when it was stated that this year would see a 2.99% increase.

Rob showed a pie chart which showed a large increase in social care costs, especially looked after children, which he then expanded upon noting the challenges that were faced. He also noted that costs were high around home to school transport. The challenges for the Council were becoming increasingly challenging.

Rob noted that reserves were held by local authorities for many different reasons but not to balance the budget.

Rob stated that there was a 21.7million shortfall in Council budget. The first Government budget would be end of October which could impact this.

A question, and answer session then took place around Rob's presentation as follows:

Cllr Julie Scurfield commented that she used to work in Children's Services and is well aware of high cost, specialised care for children and young people. Savage cuts in austerity meant that County Durham went from 45 children's centres to 15. It also annihilated youth service, a whole range of early support and presence in communities that enabled children and young people to be identified early and prevent escalation. She said that they have been seeing more and more money being invested in high cost highly specialised care. She said she was not seeing the balance if we continue to pick up children and families at crisis it will never change. The Council needs to consider how to get in earlier with families. More community services that were less cost, earlier help to provide support earlier on. The only way is to reverse some of the decisions that austerity forced us into. Massive political issue and now we are now confronting the impact of the savage cuts that were brought in. Investment in early help and support is critical in turning the tide.

Rob noted that spend on places for children support has gone up massively. There are currently 1,000 children in care. 150 are in external expensive residential placements. The Council have been looking at what other support can be provided and how can we step in and resolve.

Cllr Tracey Smith commented that she is on the audit committee at the Council and she totally endorsed what Cllr Julie Scurfield. On other issues, she felt there is a need for better PR on council tax as the Council provide excellent services. If the public had to pay privately it would be more expensive.

RD council tax – agreed it is reasonably good value for money. Some areas will shrink due to those in need. Lobbying government that funding from council tax is not keeping pace with demand and rising costs. Still using valuations from years gone by.

Cllr Alison Batey said she felt sorry for Rob and thanked him for the presentation. She noted that early intervention is key. She added that we need our finger on the pulse. Cllr Batey noted that gone are the days where Neighbourhood Budget was for niceties, it is now funding core services. She stated that there is a huge misconception as to where and what council tax is used for. In reference to those in the care system, the NHS institutional set ups have changed and moved towards support in communities but it is the Council picking up those costs. She noted that there are major issues with home to school transport and the affordability of this.

Cllr Batey commented that they had launched the consultation last Friday but queried how many people knew about it. Getting this consultation out to communities in hard copy is key as some of these groups and individuals don't have access to the internet.

Cllr Batey noted a lot of funding historically was allocated by central government on levels of deprivation and wished this was something that would be brought back. Cllr Batey also stated that the Council did consult on leisure transformation and promises were made. There was supposed to be £5million available to be spent on refurbishment but it actually is a contingency amount to keep the leisure centre open and not a refurbishment.

Rob noted that the leisure transformation is a bit of a microcosm and very difficult to deliver in current financial environment.

Rob agreed with regards the point on deprivation but also acknowledged the difficulties from a central government perspective.

Rob noted that, with regards home to school transport, this requires a government decision as decisions made may be subject to a legal challenge.

Clare Todd said she had been around doing voluntary work for a long time and that it feels like we have gone back to the 80s where the VCS service are picking up the slack on mental health and various other things. There is a concern that this will just continue.

Clare stated that Chester-Le-Street is an area that feels like it is an area being left behind. Riverside Park used to be a destination park and it needs money spent to keep these services going, even at a basic level. Clare noted the need for investment and maintenance of the splash pad area.

Rob stated that the Council are looking at what is possible with certain services. He stated that society does rely on goodwill and great work from the VCS but appreciated the increase demand on this.

Cllr Bill Moist echoed what has been said and stated he was pleased that preventative services had been highlighted and that these are always the cheaper option. He did however note that the negative side of this is that it can take years before this benefit kicks in. Cllr Moist noted that there was a Hallam University study stating that there can be savings of £56m annually through the provision of the right leisure services and that the new leisure centre in Chester-le-Street would have provided so much for residents. He noted that we should have fairness, Chester-Le-Street is second biggest area by population in the County but we do not get the second biggest service provision of investment. He noted that there was huge investment in Bishop Auckland and questioned why this was the case.

Rob appreciated some of the good points raised. He clarified that the funding in Bishop Auckland has been a conglomerate of pots.

As Robe noted previously, the leisure transformation process was very complex.

Cllr Moist stated there is a massive capital budget and nothing being delivered. He said there needs to be a health check on this. As an example, the DLI museum is going to cost a huge amount of funding but what are the long-term benefits from this service going to be.

Mick Rodgers commented that the presentation touched on assets. He felt that the Council should be looking at these as a priority. There are buildings which are dormant in Chester-Le-Street. Mich said there needs to be a focus on buildings to generate income to offset cuts.

Mick noted that when Pelton Community Centre get quotes for buildings, they get these from Durham County Council (DCC) and sometimes these quotes are three/four times more expensive. He commented that there must be something wrong internally and suggested that they consider subcontracting work out.

Rob said this was reasonable feedback. He said that DCC do sell services and that sub-contracting is and needs to be continuously looked at. He added that when DCC delivers capital projects, it must meet the highest level meaning that price and quality have to be met.

Rob added they do need to look at surplus properties which is an issue generally due to such a large complex estate.

Cllr Alison Batey stated that, in this area, we do not have a town council and whilst they have six/seven parish councils, none cover the town centre area. This puts them at a huge disadvantage in terms of physical infrastructure, parks, recreation areas.

Action: Michael agreed to circulate paper copies of the consultation and presentation.

Pelton Community Association - Project Presentation

Jake introduced Clare Robinson (Centre Manager – Pelton Community Association). Clare firstly thanked the AAP Board for their continued support of Pelton Community Centre through various projects over the years.

One of the main projects that had recently taken place was provision of hot meals for those in need across the area. This had been highly successful and supported residents on low incomes to eat good food/healthy food and alternatives.

Another project was the provision of hygiene packs to the community, and this has been very well received, due to the cost-of-living crisis. Clare stated that the provision of basic necessities in an emergency situation was a life saver.

The Warm Packs project, where Pelton CA were the recipient of funding, was part of a more holistic approach with other community buildings. Clare noted that there were still some warm packs left to allocate which were held at Pelton Community Centre. This project tries to provide energy saving training/tips and has worked with many partners. They have also supported the Police with some homeless issues within the area.

Another project was delivered via OPSIF (Older Peoples Social Isolation Funding). With this support, the centre was able to provide low level activities to engage local people in keeping fit, alongside other activities. She noted that 1,800 people were now using the building, which was back to the numbers they had pre-COVID.

Cllr Tracie Smith noted that Clare was an inspiration and doing a fantastic job. She noted that Pelton Community Centre were a credit to the community. Cllr Alison Batey reiterated this sentiment and congratulated Mick Rodgers on his nomination for a recent award. Clare Todd noted that all centres needed to be working together and Clare had been integral in bringing centres together through her community building work Belinda.

Area Budget Report

Helen Pinkey presented the report.

Helen noted that a total of £25,774 revenue funding is available. In line with the previous decisions made by the Panel/Board, it is recommended that the following projects should be offered funding subject to full application and appraisal:

Sacriston Youth Project to receive an additional £6,206 to bring the total Area Budget allocation to £10,120, in line with their original application request.

Sacrison Youth Project – Sacrison Youth Project

The project will offer a new Youth Café session for those aged 16+. Following a recent survey, Sacrison Youth Project's (SYP) older young people asked for a session specifically for them.

The session will be a youth café where young people attend The Hub for a cuppa and chat with youth workers and access support in areas such as mental health awareness/support, sexual health advice and C-Card, exam stress, cooking skills, budgeting, support with CV building and the opportunity to get involved in social action projects through The Key. It is hoped that the project will offer the skills to enable the young people to run a youth café for younger members during the holiday which will go towards developing their skills and confidence. Funding will also go towards updating youth facilities for the project including gaming station and various youth club resources.

The project will also give support for ongoing current sessions to support activities such as arts and crafts and cooking. Currently, sessions are funded for term time only, the project will enable SYP to run during the holidays.

Area Budget Amount: £10,120

Match Funding Contribution: £1,300

Total Project Cost: £11,420

Allocation Agreed

Great Lumley Parish Council to be offered part funding of £19,568.

Great Lumley Parish Council – Centre Manager for Great Lumley Community Centre

Great Lumley Parish Council are on the cusp of taking on the ownership of Great Lumley Community Centre which is to be asset transferred from Durham County Council. This significant and very well used community asset would inevitably have been closed had the Parish Council not stepped in.

The centre will be transformed into a modern and sustainable activity space for existing users with huge aspirations to expand and provide a true multipurpose community hub for the future. With a focus on sustainability and social inclusion, they need to appoint a Centre Manager to develop the small scale, volunteer led operation of the local community.

The purpose of the Centre Manager will be to:

- Make ongoing funding applications for Centre led projects and core costs
- Promote volunteering and community involvement in a wide range of diverse activities
- Promote social inclusion across all demographics particularly those which are under represented
- Promote local businesses and community led organisations to a greater use of facilities to increase occupancy and to manage space hire to maximise availability to all
- Manage the Community Centre's social media feeds
- Manage and support existing user groups whilst refurbishment works are underway

Funding will be a contribution towards the core cost of the Centre Manager be funded for one year whilst the new venture gets off the ground, expands and becomes financially self-sufficient.

Area Budget Amount: £19,568 – part-funded

Match Funding: £12,500

Total Project Cost: £32,455

Allocation Agreed

The Board ratified the decisions made by the Board Panel in Section 4 of the report as follows:

Chester-le-Street Amateur Rowing Club – CLSARC Olympic Boat Project

For the first time in its 137-year history, CLSARC has had a member both appear and win a medal at the Olympics.

Lauren Irwin competed in the women's 8's and won a Bronze medal at Paris 2024. In order to commemorate the achievement and solidify the club's future ability to support upcoming international athlete, they would like to purchase a high-quality racing boat fit for both junior men and women to compete in. The boat will be usable for the next 20+ years for rowers from all wards of Chester-le-Street who aspire to reach the pinnacle of the sport in international representation at future Olympic Games.

Area Budget Amount: £5,880

Match Funding Contribution: £9,000

Total Project Cost: £14,880

Allocation Agreed

Fencehouses Community Centre – Doors / Safeguarding

The project seeks to improve the safety and security of users at Fencehouses Community Centre.

The project will purchase internal doors to be installed at the entrance of the building that are keypad controlled and made with toughened glass. The entrance currently comprises of wooden doors which means people are able to walk into the building and disrupt activities. Funding will also be used to replace the fire exit door at the back of the building as it is no longer secure or fit for purpose.

Area Budget Amount: £8,700

Match Funding Contribution: £200

Total Project Cost: £8,900

Allocation Agreed

Real Lives: Real Choices – The Old Haberdashery Shop, Coop Buildings, Sacriston

The project will improve Unit D in the old Coop buildings in Sacriston. The funding will be used to install a kitchen and associated equipment to provide a hygienic and health and safety compliant facility to be used as part of the supported volunteering project that will be based in the space, as well as CCTV.

It is hoped that the project will also be used to improve storage and replace floor coverings as part of the ongoing works to bring the buildings back into use. Unit D has an excellent resource and has been used as a workshop, arts space, pop-up retail space and as a pop-up art gallery. It is now required to improve the space to ensure its use going forward.

Funding will be used to install a small kitchen area to enable volunteers to make refreshments, store and heat their personal packed lunches, a sink, hand sink, dishwasher and fridge. Redecoration works and replacement flooring will also be done as part of the project.

Area Budget Amount: £4,351 (This is part funded. It is under the £5,000 minimum as it is the remaining funding available)

Match Funding Contribution: £5,249

Total Project Cost: £9,600

Allocation Agreed

Neighbourhood Budget Report

Helen presented the report, explaining that there was now, only a requirement to bring those projects that had a Declaration of Interest (DOI) to the AAP Board for approval, these were as follows:

Cllr Emma Waldock and Cllr Simon Wilson – Sacriston Community Association (The Fulforth Centre) – Multi-sports Community Sessions

The aim of this project is to partner with SportsCool to deliver a Multi-Sports Community session for 12 weeks. Sessions will take place once per week early evening (after school) and will be open to all primary school aged children in the area.

Declaration of Interest: Cllr Wilson is a trustee of Live Well who currently operate the Fulforth Centre.

NB Allocated: £2,100 (Cllr Waldock and Cllr Wilson £1,050 each)

Allocation Agreed

Cllr Emma Waldock and Cllr Simon Wilson – Live Well North East – Live Well Kids

The aim of this project is to contribute towards the project costs of Live Well Kids, our weekly after school, children's wellbeing group.

Declaration of Interest: Cllr Wilson is a trustee of Live Well.

NB Allocated: £2,000 (Cllr Waldock and Cllr Wilson £1,000 each).

Allocation Agreed

Monitoring Report

The report was distributed for information. Michael noted the breadth of projects that the AAP had supported.

Michael informed the AAP Board that, Durham Works, noted within the report, would be presenting at the November AAP Board meeting.

Report Agreed

Partner Updates

Unfortunately, neither Karbon or a Health representative were available for the meeting. Updates were provided as follows:

Durham Constabulary

Inspector Simon Hogg, taking over from Inspector Lee Morris as the new AAP Board Representative, introduced himself. Inspector Hogg stated that new staff were starting soon with recruitment currently taking place.

Inspector Hogg noted that a reported 25,000 people had attended Activity Week. There were 2,000 free meals provided by working in partnership with the Salvation Army. Karbon Homes also provided water for the event. Inspector Hogg stated he would like to continue the event as he can see its value locally, but there is a need for funding to continue with the event. He noted that they were looking at how this can be achieved through the availability of external funding.

Inspector Hogg noted that retail crimes were a real issue in the town centre and these have increased.

Inspector Hogg mentioned that, via Trailblazer, increase anti-social behaviour patrols are taking place. This runs until April 2025. The covers engagement and reassurance, plus lots of other areas.

Inspector Hogg noted that there had been issues with PACT Meetings and he hoped to rectify these.

Cllr Alison Batey noted that, with regards Market Activity Week, approaches could be made to Joy Allen (Police Crime Commissioner) for potential funding support.

Cllr Tracie Smith noted that the social media presence from the Police was great, and some good intelligence was gained through this.

Clare Todd stated that shoplifting was a big issue in the town centre for businesses. Shoplifters are walking out with goods and the shop owners can't do anything and the Police do not seem to be able to keep up with this.

Inspector Hogg noted this needs to be tackled and first and foremost, reported.

Cllr Bill Moist said he feels there is a lack of communication with Police. Would be good to get better communication, then more reporting could take place. He said the standards in the town centre are going down and there needs to more of a presence on the front street. Cllr Moist asked for regular meetings with Cllrs if possible.

Durham & Darlington Fire & Rescue

Wayne Thompson stated that there had been 146 incidents (39 fire, 36 special services, 116 secondary fires with many usually ASB related). 908 prevention initiatives had taken place (fire alarms fitted within the community and safety advice given). 13 referrals to other agencies had taken place and 69 business had been supported with legislative guidance. Wayne noted there had been particular issues around Gibside, where joint patrols had taken place to combat issues. Wayne noted they had been into schools to talk about anti-social behaviour, dark nights and the dangers associated with bonfire night.

Business Association

Jake Rollings provided a verbal update from on behalf of Joanne Malki.

Jake noted there was to be a Santa's Grotto, which would be free and this would be linked to the Christmas Light Switch on that will take place on Saturday 13th November, in the Market Place, Chester-le-Street.

Jake stated that the Christmas Window Competition will be taking place, as well as a Christmas Colouring Competition. The winners of the latter would be undertaking the Christmas Light Switch on. All entries to be placed in Tesco.

Voluntary Sector

Colleen Baker noted that attendees at Aspire were constantly worried about the cost-of-living crisis. Aspire found a lot of women were being referred around this. Aspire work in the preventative intervention field but were finding that a lot of women had complex needs and more and more are coming to them in crisis. Now looking to future-proof the organisation, looking at options of changing from a Community Interest Company to a charity.

Howell Davies stated that the Citizens Advice Bureau want to know who is not claiming Pension Credit and to get in touch with them for assistance. He asked everyone to look out for the older community and make sure that relatives and people they know who qualify claim.

Clare noted that Chester-le-Street/ Chester-le-Street in Bloom had recently won various awards.

AAP Co-ordinators Update/AOB

Community Engagement Review – Michael stated that the consultation had closed the previous Friday and a lot of feedback had been received. More information will follow in due course.

Big Arts Funding – Michael said an update report would be provided at the November AAP Board Meeting

Fun & Food – The Christmas call for projects opened today. The closing date for applications was 12noon on Wednesday 9th October 2024. Helen Pinkney noted she would be in touch with AAP Board Members in due course, regarding a Funding Panel Meeting.

In Your Neighbourhood – Clare Todd stated she would send information around local groups and organise a meeting with Joy Allen to discuss.

Farmers Market – Board Members wanted to know the next step and the future of the market. Michael stated that Bacchenalia were looking at the success of this round of markets across the county and feedback would be provided.

Date and Time of the next meeting

Monday 25th November 2024. Venue TBC

Action Box	By Whom
Circulate copies of the budget consultation	Michael
Circulate copies of the budget presentation	Michael
Big Arts Funding – Report to November AAP Board	Michael
AAP Board Funding Assessment Panel	Helen
Feedback on Farmers Markets	Michael