

DERWENT VALLEY PARTNERSHIP (DVP) BOARD MEETING MINUTES

25 September 2024, Salvation Army Hall, Consett at 6pm



Present:

Elected Representatives

Cllrs Veronica Andrews, Kevin Earley, Stephen Robinson (Chair), Kathryn Rooney, Alan Shield, Michelle Walton and Alex Watson.

Partner Organisations

Dan Hodgson (stand in for Allan Hobson (Co Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service (CDDFRS))), Philip Pollard (Karbon Homes) and Joanne Waller Durham County Council (DCC)).

Public Representatives

Linda Acres, Lea McConnell and Rosemary Morris (Vice Chair).

DVP

Corinne Walton (AAP Co-ordinator), Lynn Dougal (Support Officer), and Laura Sloan and Hayley Gowland (Community Development Project Officers (CDPO)).

Members of the Public: 9

Presenter: Rob Davisworth, DCC.

Apologies:

Partner Reps: Mark Clelland (Derwentside Trust) and Allan Hobson (CDDFRS). Public Rep: Helen Marley.

1. Meeting opened by the Coordinator

Corinne Walton welcomed everyone to the meeting and went through housekeeping.

Board members introduced themselves and apologies were noted as above. Ian Hodgson was thanked for standing in for Allan Hobson, Rob Davisworth was welcomed to the meeting as he was giving a presentation and Hayley Gowland was welcomed to the DVP Team as the new CDPO.

Declarations of interest were given from Cllr Earley regarding The Lodge Open Art Studio project proposal as he is Secretary of Friends of the Park who are involved in the project, from Cllr Walton regarding the Mini Bus project proposal as she is on Consett Air Cadets' committee and from Cllr Rooney who is a governor at Villa Real School regarding their project proposal.

2. Minutes of Previous Board Meeting (17 July 2024)

Matters arising

P8. Regarding the Speedwatch Vehicle and 20mph school zones speed visors for Medomsley and Burnopfield Cllr Shield raised some concerns. He has regularly asked for updates on these, particularly the 20mph zones, and was advised that the 20mph speed visor had been installed by the school in Medomsley. On inspection, Cllr Shield could not see any signs by the school. He was also advised that a sign had been installed by the school in Burnopfield. He feels that communication between the relevant services has been poor, and he plans to take this further. He reiterated that keeping written evidence (i.e. emails, minutes) is crucial to back up what has been agreed.

Regarding the Speedwatch Vehicle Cllr Shield said he has received information from Tom Drummond, currently the only Speedwatch volunteer, stating that volunteers are required to have a Level 2 vetting and a pre driving assessment to drive the vehicle. Police vetting could take up to 6 months which is a concern as there is no one to replace Tom if he is not available and the van would be standing idle.

A lengthy discussion ensued with the following comments noted:

- The DVP Board has had no police representation for a long time, therefore receives no updates regarding issues, like the above mentioned for example.
- In the Hamsterley Mill area, 2 residents offered to be Speedwatch volunteers about a year ago and have still not heard anything. The worry is that people who offer to volunteer and hear nothing back will lose interest.
- The Speedwatch Vehicle was shown at the Consett PACT meeting in August. There will be an official launch for the van and for volunteers – this work is ongoing.
- It was felt that the police only make a presence when something good happens.
- The speed limit at both ends of Dipton was agreed to be dropped to 40mph, which was funded by the Police and Crime Commissioner, but they have heard nothing yet.
- The B6310 at Hamsterley Mill was supposed to have speed limit signage and again nothing has happened.
- Actions that have been discussed, planned and minuted at meetings should not be ignored by other departments/organisations. We need to know where the money allocated from the Towns and Villages fund has been spent.
- Responsible drivers tend to respond to speed visor signs whereas less careful drivers do not care. The Speedwatch van needs to be deployed so direct action can be taken to those speeding.
- Fixed speed cameras should be placed in hot spot areas and the idea of them being installed should not be ruled out.

There were no further comments/matters arising and the minutes were AGREED.

3. Partner Updates

Rob Davisworth, Head of Corporate Finance and Commercial Services, DCC gave a presentation on the 2025/26 County Council Forecast Revenue Budget Consultation

The presentation included an overview of the Council Budget for 2025/26 financial year, the Council Tax position for next year and the medium term, the Council's proposed approach for

balancing the budget in 2025/26 and across the next four years and the consultation linked to this (a copy of the presentation can be requested).

The first phase of the consultation, which will end on 1 November 2024, is asking the public's views on the following:

- Do you agree or disagree with the council's continued approach to help balance the budget for 2025/26, which includes progressing the £3.2 million of savings consulted on last year, derived from back-office savings and efficiencies, income raising and reductions in third party contributions and savings from changes in the way we deliver front-line services?
- What do you feel will be the impact of this approach to savings for 2025/26 upon you or those you represent?
- Which three service areas do you think the council should focus on to achieve additional savings still needed for 2025/26 of £21.7 million, £23.7 million in 2026/27 and £64.1 million over the full four-year period?
- What is your view to the council raising the council tax by 2.99%, or to a higher amount if the government allowed this? If you disagree to raising council tax by 2.99%, or above, more savings would have to be found from services. Please tell us which additional three services you would prioritise for further savings.
- Do you have any additional comments to make, including ideas as to where we can make further savings, and views on how proposals will impact upon you and your community?

A further consultation will take place around December/January and will provide more information about some of the cuts the council is proposing, the savings we will have to make and more insight into the difficult decisions that will have to be made in later years.

The survey is available online at www.durham.gov.uk/consultation as well as paper copies available.

Following the presentation, comments/questions below were noted:

- As leisure centres are not a statutory provision, and usage in some areas has dropped significantly, could this delivery be done differently as the costs for these centres are high and keep increasing?
All non-statutory service areas will be looked at and whether we need to provide it at that level or if it can be scaled back. As for leisure centres, we have a capital programme to keep them open as they are a major asset. However, a combination of reduced provision or delivering them differently may be needed, for example other groups or interested parties could manage some leisure centres.
- Although the scale of the savings to be made is huge, the Council is in a better position than some other local authorities. The problem is rising costs against reduced funding.
- The overall funding formula set by central Government needs to be changed and there needs to be lobbying for this change.
The formula has not been adjusted for some time and the government has put more emphasis on local authorities to grow their own tax base which works if there is a thriving local economy, higher rates of council tax and bills are paid on time, for example.
- Can empty properties be subjected to a premium council tax charge?

This has already been introduced and those homes that are empty for a year will be charged 200%, with longer empty properties charged 300%.

- Inefficiencies in the way services are currently delivered need to be identified so we are achieving better value for money across all areas. Communication within some departments is currently very poor and they should be held accountable.

We continually look for ways to be more efficient, for example through better use of technology such as AI (artificial intelligence), and the organisational structure of the council.

- Can we maximise the use of local facilities to generate more income i.e. Consett Empire Theatre could be used for other functions such as a wedding venue for example.

We do look at options to generate more income. Using local facilities for functions carries an element of risk as these need to be resourced and staffed and these costs could outweigh the income generated.

- The proposals show a continuation of austerity rather than economic growth which is what the new Government has stated needs to drive things forward. We cannot simply keep on cutting services down to nothing.

We have invested in high quality facilities to encourage businesses to the county and our budget projections assume we will continue to attract new businesses. It is a struggle compared to other parts of the country where there has been more economic growth. We are encouraging new housing developments to the area which will increase council tax revenue but there is a cost to the infrastructure we need to provide.

- There should be a consultation linked to the amount of funding for SEND provision to try and help reduce costs in that area.

This is not part of the current consultation. We have invested in this area and the demand for assessments has increased. We are lobbying the Government about this being underfunded.

Stephen thanked Rob for his presentation and input at the meeting.

4. Community Resilience Task Group Project Recommendations and Additional Project Call Out

Community Resilience Task Group Project Recommendations

Corinne gave an update on the task group. Board members received copies of the associated paperwork prior to the Board meeting.

The call out for projects went out on 22 May 2024 with the budget available for the 2024/25 financial year £123,076 (£93,076 for revenue projects and £30k for capital). By the deadline date of 2 August 2024, 14 completed expression of interest (EOI) forms were received with one of those EOIs being ineligible.

The total request for funding from the 13 EOIs was £107,340.98, therefore we were undersubscribed by £15,735.

The Task Group met on 11 September (pre-registered Task Group members had received redacted copies of the EOIs prior to the meeting) to discuss and score the proposals. Individual task group members scored each proposal, against set criteria, which was given a total average score and ranked in order from highest to lowest. The group agreed that those projects that scored 20+ points would be recommended to the Board for funding consideration.

Based on the scoring, the Task Group recommended the following 10 projects to the Board for funding consideration:

1. **Consett Amateur Swimming Club** - Securing the future of swimming in Consett, £11,600 (Health and Wellbeing).
2. **Durham Constabulary** - E-Bikes, £2,554 (Community Safety).
3. **Consett Steelers Netball Club** - Beacon of Light Para-Netball Durham, £8,680 (Health and Wellbeing)
4. **Randoms Retreat** - Nurturing wellbeing and resilience, £9,070 (Environment).
5. **Durham County Council – Arts and Culture Team** - The Lodge Open Art Studio, £5,000 (Social Isolation).
6. **Burnopfield Play Care** - Outdoor and active afterschool clubs, £5,140 (Children and Young people).
7. **Villa Real School** - Together we learn, together we grow: Occupations then and now, £8,200 (Children and Young people).
8. **Burnopfield Community Association** - Community Worker, £5,960 (Community Support).
9. **Durham County Council – Arts and Culture Team** - Women and the Steelworks, £5,000 (Health and Wellbeing).
10. **Consett Air Cadets** - Minibus Project Continuation Cadets No Cost Activities, £5,841 (Children and Young people)

The following 3 projects did not meet the minimum threshold of 20 points, therefore were not recommended by the group for funding consideration:

1. Pelton Community Association (Youth Print Anchor Organisation) - North Durham Area Activities, £5,300 (Children and Young people).
2. MK Youth Sports CIC - MK Youth Sports, £14,060 (Health and Wellbeing).
3. Groundwork North East - A Job 4 U, £20,936 (Employment).

As some of the projects above have unsecured match funding, it is recommended that those projects, should they be supported, are given a conditional offer on the basis that match funding is secured before funds are released.

It was then opened up for discussion by the Board with the following points noted:

- What was the reason why one project was ineligible?
The DVP Team checked the EOIs for eligibility before the Task Group reviewed them and one project was from a theatre company for production costs, and they had received money from the Big Arts Project just recently, equally it was difficult to see how this proposal met the specified DVP priority themes for this year.
- As there were 12 task group members reviewing/scoring the projects at the meeting, it was felt that this was a thorough process, and the Board were happy to accept the task group's recommendations.
- For those groups that were not supported, is there an option to contact them and ask if they could strengthen their application so that they may receive funding.
They could reapply through the additional call out (see below), however the second call out is likely to focus on the themes that were not covered in the original call out, i.e. welfare and community safety.

- Concerns were raised about organisations based out of the area applying for funding. Although an organisation may be based outside of the area, the majority of beneficiaries need to be from the DVP area.
- Are DCC internal departments able to apply for council money? DCC, as well as other statutory services e.g. Police, Fire, Health, Housing, are eligible to apply to us if it is seen as added value to a service and they are not able to fund from their mainstream budgets.

There were no further comments, and the Board APPROVED the Task Group's recommendations as above.

Additional Project Call Out

The total amount for the above approved projects is £67,045 which leaves a balance of £56,031 (£28,585 for revenue projects and £27,446 for capital). Due to changes in the AAP structure to Local Networks next April, all remaining funding has to be spent by 31 March 2025.

It is proposed that the DVP issue a second project call out which would go out on 26 September 2024 with the deadline for EOIs on 25 October. The next Task Group meeting is on 6 November where they will review and score the EOIs with recommendations presented at the Board meeting on 27 November.

Rosemary Morris said that as employment was not well represented in the call out, we may need to emphasise that we are looking for employment projects. If not, then why is employment one of the themes. Corinne advised that there were opportunities for employment proposals to come through the Employment Task Group, however, last year we found that it was a saturated theme with a number of duplicate projects. Although employment has been suggested as a theme for this year, we may need to take into consideration the feedback that there is a lot of delivery around employment already.

Philip Pollard felt that the amount of funding available from the DVP may be a factor why so few proposals came forward as other employment funding pots have much larger amounts.

The Board agreed to a second call out as outlined above.

Corinne advised that the 10 successful organisations will be contacted to complete the online application form and the second call out will go live on 26 September 2024 as planned.

5. Neighbourhood Budget Update July – September 24

In addition to the Area Budget, the DVP also manages the 11 local councillors' Neighbourhood Budgets and Neighbourhood Budget Small Grants (NBSG). Projects supported/contributed to (Jul-Sep 2024) by local councillors:

- **Cllr Alan Shield**
DCC Leisure - Hamsterley and Derwentside Park Seating Installation, £3,827. New seating installed.

- **Cllr Veronica Andrews**
DCC Highways - Dropped Kerbs, Park Villas, Dipton, £4,941. Dropped kerbs in Park Villas to help with accessibility.
Collierley Primary School - Travel costs to local Pantomime in December.
NBSG allocated: £999.
- **Cllr Kevin Earley**
DCC Neighbourhoods and Climate Change - Community Allotment Enhancement, £1,650.
Installation of two benches in the community allotment site at Blackhill and Consett Park.
DCC Clean and Green - Blackhill and Consett Park Improvements, £12,151. Improvements to the park through new planters, access path, gates and replacement fencing.
- **Cllr Watts Stelling**
Derwentside Detached Youth Project - Room Hire Costs, £1,440. Rent costs for premises at the Eden Miners Centre for youth groups.
- **Cllr Stephen Robinson**
Blackhill Baptist Church - Blackhill Baptist Church Capital Project, £1,208. Capital project improvements to attract new users that includes dishwasher, lawn mower, hedge trimmer and chair trolley.
- **Cllr Dominic Haney**
Derwentside Detached Youth Project - Moorside Community Worker, £2,400. Community Worker role to promote community activities in St John's Village Hall in Moorside.
DCC Clean and Green - Chester Road Fencing Project, £8,264. New fencing, stile and gate to site.
- **Cllrs Declan Mulholland and Veronica Andrews**
Lintz Cricket Club - Refurbishment to Cricket Netting Poles, £1,800.96 (£900.48 per Cllr).
Rrefurbishment of existing four steel netting poles.
Burnopfield Community Association - Burnopfield Community Worker, £5,000 (£2.5k per Cllr).
Employment of a community worker for a 12-month period.
Burnopfield Primary School - Burnopfield Primary Wellbeing Area, £9,000 (Cllr Mulholland £5k/Cllr Andrews £4k). To create a wellbeing area for children to access during lunchtime.
- **Cllrs Michelle Walton and Angela Sterling**
Survivors of Bereavement by Suicide - Therapy sessions and library. NBSG allocated: £720 (£360 per Cllr).
Foundation of Light - Foundation of Light Kicks Project. Activities and treats at moving up/social interaction transition sessions. NBSG allocated: £500 (£250 per Cllr).
Delves Lane Methodist Church - Methodist Church Outreach. To support church group activities and costs towards the Christmas Fayre. NBSG allocated: £400 (£200 per Cllr).

6. Additional DVP Business Items to Raise

Realignment of funds linked to DV Bike Club proposal (£12,000 revenue allocated from 2023/24 budget)

The DV Bike Club proposal is no longer going ahead, and Cllr Earley gave an update on behalf of The Friends of the Park.

The service area within DCC, who have responsibility for bike clubs countywide, felt that there was too much duplication in the above project. Therefore, under the heading of active travel, the applicant would like to reallocate the £12k plus any other funds they can get to do a feasibility study around road crossing improvements on the C2C route at the entrance to Blackhill and Consett Park on Laburnum Avenue. The aim is to make the route safer for cyclists and pedestrians.

Cllr Walton said she supports the new proposals but wondered if this would have to come back through any process as this look similar to an earlier proposal made by St John's Ambulance where they changed the project proposal altogether.

Corinne advised that it would come back to us, once the Board are prepared to explore the other option put forward. It would be a change from revenue to potentially being a capital project. Cllr Earley will come back with more details on the proposal and the Board could then decide whether to realign the funds or not to the new proposal.

The Board agreed for Cllr Earley to gain more information about the proposal.

Cost of Living initiatives update

Due to time constraints, Lea McConnell asked for this item to be deferred to the Community Resilience Task Group meeting.

Derwent Valley NEWS, Winter 2024 edition

The Derwent Valley NEWS (DVN) will be distributed to all homes in the DVP area from the beginning of November. We had a good response to a request for articles which meant not all articles could be included in the newsletter, however, those articles will be promoted on our Derwent Valley Life website and Facebook page.

Christmas 2024 Fun and Food Programme

The Christmas Fun and Food Fund for activities with healthy food for over the Christmas school holidays went out on 23 September. The deadline for completed applications is 9 October 2024.

Christmas in Consett

The DVP will be hosting Christmas in Consett on Saturday 7 December 2024 on Middle Street, Consett. Timings and programme will be notified of in due course. The event will be promoted on our Derwent Valley Life website and Facebook page as well as on the front page of DVN.

Environment Conference

A reminder to those who have already booked to attend the DVP's Environment Conference which is on 27 September 2024 at Consett Rugby Club from 10am-2pm. We have had a good

response from the community and beyond and this event is now fully booked.

Partner Vice Chair position vacancy

Donna Tunney, partner Vice Chair is no longer able to commit to the role, but she remains as a business rep on the Board. If any partner reps would like to put themselves forward as Vice Chair please let Corinne know. Partner representation on the Board is low as we have no health rep and no participation from the police.

Public Rep position vacancy

As of today, John Marshall has notified us that he no longer wishes to be a public rep on the Board. As we will be changing from AAPs to Local Networks next April, it is unlikely that this position will be filled before the end of March 2025.

7. Meeting Close and Date of Next Meeting

Cllr Robinson thanked everyone for attending the meeting.

The next Board meeting will be on Wednesday 27 November 2024, 6pm at The Salvation Army Hall, Consett.