



STANLEY AREA ACTION PARTNERSHIP (AAP)
BOARD MEETING MINUTES

Held on Tuesday 1st October 2024 at 5.00pm

Councillors:

Cllr Carole Hampson
Cllr Joan Nicholson
Cllr Joyce Charlton
Cllr Jeanette Stephenson (Vice Chair)

Partner Organisations:

Sgt Terry Archbold (Durham Constabulary)
Suzanne Jobson (Karbon Homes) (Chair)
Dan Hodgson (Fire Service)
Martyn Stenton (Durham County Council)
Barbara Edmundson (Integrated Care Board, NHS)

Public Representatives:

John Ullathorne (Vice Chair)
Linda Tyman
Frankie Ward
Darren McMahan

Officer Attendance:

Daniel O'Brien (AAP Coordinator)
Andrea Boyd (Community Development Project Officer)
Lesley Lines (AAP Support Officer)
Joanne McMahon (Finance Manager, DCC)

Apologies:

Cllr Angela Hanson, Cllr Gordon Binney, Carl Gippert, Vicky Walton, Linda Tyman, and Cllr Carl Marshall.

Public Attendance:

Six members of the Forum/Public attended the meeting.

1. Introductions and Apologies:

Suzanne welcomed everyone to Stanley AAP's hybrid Board Meeting at Morrison Busty. Apologies are noted above.

2. 2025/26 County Council Forecast Revenue Budget Consultation

Presentation:

Daniel introduced Joanne McMahon, Finance Manager, Durham County Council, who gave the presentation.

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

She highlighted that we are a well performing council, and regularly measure ourselves against similar councils at a regional, national and statistical level. However, like all councils, we are facing unavoidable financial pressures. 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 predict that we will still need to make £64.1 million in savings over the next four years. This is an increase in savings from our last predication. The increase is mainly caused by rising costs and increasing levels of demand, particularly for adult and children's social care.

Although we will continue to make as many savings as possible and work as efficiently as we can, especially in areas such as management and administration services, it is becoming increasingly difficult to do this. We have always tried to minimise the effect on front line services, however, without further funding from government, some of these services will be more affected in the coming years. Ultimately to achieve these savings over the next four years it will be extremely challenging and should not be under-estimated.

The total savings we need to make next year is likely to be £21.7 million. This is around £4.9 million more than we predicted for 2025/26 last year which was £16.8 million. We have already agreed £3.2 million of savings for 2025/26, and £8.3 million of savings for the next four financial years. That would still leave us with an increased £21.7 million gap for 2025/26, so we are also continuing to ask for your views on where we could make these savings, as well as the savings we'll need to make in future years.

We would like to hear your views on:

- the approach we are continuing to use to find savings as shown in next year's proposal totalling £3.2 million for 2025/26
- our proposal to increase Council Tax for 2025/26 by the maximum of 2.99%
- whether, if we were given more flexibility from central government, we should consider raising Council Tax beyond the current allowed maximum amount
- what other services we should continue to prioritise for savings, to cover the remaining gap for next year (to meet the overall £21.7 million total for 2025/26), and longer term, to achieve the remaining £64.1 million in savings needed over the next four years

Below, you can read more details about the challenges we face, what is affecting our budget predictions, 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 the services which may need to be targeted for savings either next year or over the next four years.

Across our services, some of the biggest impacts are:

- Over 60% of our spending is on adult and children's services, with 47% being spent on caring for the most vulnerable. An increasing demand for these services, wage

increases in the care industry, and inflation, have led to an increase in the cost of this care.

- There continues to be an increase in demand for children in care services, with more children needing support or being taken into care, such as fostering, as well as some children having more complex needs. These are some of the largest budgets we have, which are spent on a small part of the population.
- The National Living Wage is expected to increase, adding significant costs, particularly in adult social care. It will also mean higher pay awards for our staff, as this is part of a national pay agreement and outside our control.
- High and rising inflation levels and increases in interest rates are adding to the costs of our regeneration projects and making it more expensive for us to borrow money.

Net expenditure budgets 2024/25:

Adult and health (£159.46 million), Children and young people (£194.22 million), Neighbourhoods and climate change (£177.42 million), Regeneration Economy and Growth (£59.03 million), other (£34.75 million).

These rising costs are continuing to have a big impact on our budget.

For many years, government grant funding has not increased in line with the inflation that councils have been facing, which means that in reality, our funding has been cut. The new government is facing a number of economic and departmental challenges and has not committed to providing additional funding to local councils, nor to reform how we receive our funding. As a result, local councils are lobbying the new government to clearly set out how this will work. Although we expect to receive a £7.3 million increase in government funding this year, some of this is specific funding for specific purposes. Overall, the funding we will receive will not cover the spending we are faced with. We predict that we will still face a funding gap of £21.7 million in 2025/26 and £64.1 million over the next four years.

Wherever possible we have tried to make savings through efficiencies and raising additional income while protecting front line services. The proposals we've already identified for 2025/26 have four elements.

Saving from back office and making efficiencies.

We will continue to look for ways to make further savings which will hopefully not affect front line services, including changes to the structure of services and staffing reviews.

We'll also review Children Support Services and look at how we can work a more efficient, automated way, and simplify systems.

We will also continue our review of our catering to make sure it does not cost more to run than the income it makes. We will also look at reducing the running and maintenance costs for our council staff offices.

We are looking at ways to raise extra income and reduce the amount of contributions we make to others. We propose to:

- increase community protection fees and charges, as well as bring in new charges where possible.
- review fees and charges across children and young people's services.
- review what we charge for domestic and commercial pest control.
- increase fees and charges for environmental services such as refuse and recycling, Fixed Penalty Notices (fines) and crematoria.
- increase income for community cleaning services, saving money for street cleaning and using perennial plants that are longer lasting.
- increase rental income on commercial properties managed by Business Durham

- look at commercial opportunities, opening hours, and levels of service within catering, cleaning and building management.
- look at ways to reduce maintenance costs and the possibility of increasing fees for our allotment sites.

We have also consulted with Town and Parish Councils about reducing the grant support we provide to some local councils by 50% over a three 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 will continue to explore ways to deliver services in different, and more effective and efficient ways, to help better meet your needs. 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, information sharing, or consultation with service users and/or the public are:

- Early help: using technology to provide some online services rather than face to face.
- Early Years Services: looking at staff resources and non-council funding sources that could support activities.
- Learning Disability Services: a review of high cost care provision.
- Adult Social Care: a review of how we buy-in care for some customers
- Direct Payments: helping more people to be more independent using direct payments to pay for and arrange their care.
- Adult Learning Service: making sure the service fits with the future direction of education, employment and training opportunities for disadvantage young people.
- Community engagement: continuing to restructure our Area Action Partnerships (AAPs) into Local Networks and taking into account the ongoing Boundary Commission review of our county councillor boundaries
- Music Service for Schools: a review of how this service is delivered, considering its costs, pricing and accommodation, to see where savings can be made.
- Community Protection Service: a restructure of this service to make it more efficient.

We also expect the number of county councillors to reduce from May 2025. After reviewing councillors' allowances, it is expected that a saving will be made from councillor related budgets.

Council Tax increase of 2.99%

As in previous years, to try and reduce the effect of cuts to services and the possible effect our most vulnerable residents, we also propose an increase in Council Tax.

Our proposed savings are based on including an increase in Council Tax by 2.99% next year. The proposed increase is the maximum increase the Government allows us to make without holding a referendum and asking local residents to approve this proposed increase. If we do not increase Council Tax in line with government expectations, our funding gap will increase by £2.8 million for every 1% it is below the expected level. Therefore, if we increase Council Tax by less than this, we would need to find more savings elsewhere.

A 2.99% increase in our Council Tax is equal to an annual £57.83 increase on a Band D property which is around £1.11 a week. However, in County Durham, 57% of Council Tax payers live in a Band A property and 84% 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 £38.55 more next year, or 74p per week. The average Council Tax charged per household in County Durham is £1,459. This is £209 (12.5%) below the national average.

From 1 April 2025, we are introducing an additional 100% Council Tax premium on Second Homes, and we think this will generate an extra £0.7 million. We will therefore closely watch the impact of this.

The new government may also let local councils raise Council Tax by a larger amount without the need to hold a referendum. We expect to be able to confirm whether this is the case by December 2024 and if so, we will consider the views from this consultation before we make a bigger increase.

Further Savings

Although we have identified several savings proposals for next year, there remains a gap in funding of £21.7 million for 2025/26, and a £64.1 million over the following three years. We again need your views on how we might make further savings.

Where it makes sense to do so, we are considering working with our partners, residents and community groups to provide services that meet levels of demand and need as communities become more self-sufficient and independent. More details on these proposals, and the potential value of savings, will be provided in future Cabinet reports.

For this consultation, so we can set our budget, we have created a list of front-line services where we could make further savings. This would help close the current budget gap, which would only get bigger if we do not also increase Council Tax as we have proposed. We want to again gather your views on these areas to understand where you would continue to 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

Have Your Say

Consultation closes Friday 1st November 2024

The consultation can be found at: www.durham.gov.uk/consultation

Daniel opened the floor to questions.

There were no questions for Joanne. Cllr Jeanette Stephenson asked Daniel if a meeting could be arranged to discuss a joint response to this issue.

Daniel agreed to organize this.

Action: Daniel

The Chair thanked Joanne for the presentation.

3. Declaration of Interest:

AAP Board Members were asked to declare any interest in relation to the agenda. There were no declarations of interest.

4. Agreement of the Minutes – 3rd September 2024 and matters arising not covered on this agenda:

The Minutes of Tuesday 3rd September 2024 were agreed to be a true record. There were no matters arising from the minutes.

5. Neighbourhood Issues and Locality Policing Issues:

Sgt Terry Archbold gave the Policing update. He highlighted that the Police had had a positive period of dealing with illegal bikes. With the help of the CCTV controllers and neighbourhood wardens were able to track where the bikes were taken to people's homes. In South Moor a stolen bike was found in a property.

6. AAP Coordinator Update:

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

The Big Arts Project Funding 2024 Update

Four projects in line with World Mental Health Day.

- Open Arts Studio at The Venue – Durham County Council
- Creative Reflections - Just for Women
- Art Projects – Stanley Youth Area Consortium
- Art Project - Think Positive

Fun & Food

Daniel highlighted that the Christmas 2024 window is now open for applications. Closes Wednesday 9th October 2024 at 12 noon.

Poverty Task Group

Is being held on Wednesday 9th October 2024 at 5pm in The Louisa Centre. The Task Group are to take part in the On the table discussion that is being led by the Community Foundation for Tyne & Wear and Northumberland to discuss and come up with solutions to address our areas' challenges and opportunities.

Local Networks Update & Boundary Consultation

The boundary consultation closed on Friday 20th September 2024. Responses are to be analysed and a full Community Engagement Review report would go to Cabinet in November 2024.

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

Karbon Homes

Full update on activity in Stanley.

Stanley Board School - exploring further options:

- We have been progressing work on the potential options for the school after the community consultation earlier in the year.
- We were able to get permission at our Asset Management and Development Panel in September to explore the execs' preferred option of an 'Enterprise and Learning Hub' with a café on the ground floor, a few tenant organisations paying rent and various rooms for hire by regular users and community groups.
- We will explore further a concept that adds value: extending provision, pooling resource, increasing beneficiaries of existing and new organisations to Stanley, enhancing young people & adults' life chances, future prospects and RHI, as well as bringing new investment into the town.
- We will now be doing further work on a business plan to better understand management costs, revenue streams and future management routes. This will help us to understand the full feasibility of this model and we need to look at potential grant funding opportunities to bridge the gap in funding that we have calculated. We will return for further sign off at the end of 2024.

Stanley Board School- structural problems:

After strong winds and heavy rain during the week commencing 2 September 2024, parts of the roof of the Board School, became loose to the rear of the building and we have had to take immediate preventative steps to ensure that we minimized any risk to the public from further tiles being dislodged.

We installed signage to advise that the building and the site around it are unsafe and our priority is the safety of residents and visitors to Stanley Front Street, and we worked with Durham County Council to erect secure metal fencing.

We have commissioned surveyors to assess the state of the site and provide recommendations on next steps and we must explore all options for this, which includes demolition. We will continue to keep local residents and businesses informed of any further developments.

Stanley Action Plan:

We have been working on condensing potential actions down to a list of core asks which we have now completed. This now has nine main objectives, separated into three topics of home, customers and place. We are ready to launch this at an event that we are arranging at the Skills Hub on November 7th at 10 am until midday. We will be inviting a wider range of stakeholders and encouraging them to sign up to a pledge to commit to working with us and investing in Stanley. We have been building up a list of contacts over time and now have over 100 different contacts of people who are active in Stanley, many who also live locally.

Skills Hub:

The Town Council have asked if they can use some space at the Skills Hub on a Thursday. This has been agreed.

Events Plan is in progress and aiming to engage and liaise with other local partners to help promote and refer to other opportunities as well. Aiming to link this launch with the Stanley Day of Action on 28th November.

Secured funding through DCC via the UK Shared Prosperity Fund in partnership with Livin & believe. We utilised this funding to create 10 x New Start career starter opportunities. These have all been successfully placed, and all were Stanley Karbon Homes residents. 6 are working locally in Stanley: 1 x Greencroft Doggy Day Care, 2 x Stanley Travel & 4 x Karbon Homes (3 based in the Skills Hub!). All customers were also economically inactive.

Meetings with Town Council:

We have had a few meetings with councillors and officers on the Town Council over the last month to discuss how better to work together and collaborate on adding specific actions to the action plan. We have started to discuss about how we can invest in the Front Street and identify quick wins to improve the local area.

Stanley Day of Action:

We are planning a day of action on 28th November where we can direct employees of Karbon to and the wider community to come out to tidy up the streets, remove any tagging, clean up, plant new planters/trees and more. We will be able to share this invite once arrangements have been finalised, but we thought this might be nice to do the week before the Christmas Tree goes up.

Creative Regeneration report:

We commissioned an arts consultant, Sally Dixon, and The Forge to explore the art of the possible and what a proposal for a community-driven, arts, culture and creativity-led approach to regenerating Stanley Front Street might look like. We met about this in August and are considering how to take forward the recommendations.

We do not intend on delivering on all the proposals and intend to work with the AAP and other proposed partners such as the Town Council, Durham County Council, schools and education providers, and Beamish Museum to identify opportunities and work with them, who we feel are better placed to lead the work.

Tour of Stanley garages:

We own a variety of garage sites in Stanley and as part of the action plan, we want to assess options for what we can do with them. We will have a tour of the garage sites in Stanley, scheduled for 16th October 10:30 – 12:30.

8. Neighbourhood Budget Summaries:

Neighbourhood Budget Small Grant:

South Stanley Partnership – Festive Brass Band Concert

Project Brief: The funding is to be used for a local brass band to perform at a Christmas event.

Total Cost: £480.00

Councillor Carl Marshall Contribution £150.00

Councillor Angela Hanson Contribution: £150.00

9. Pre-Notified Any Other Business:

Daniel advised that he had received a funding approach from Durham Constabulary for two additional Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) cameras for the Stanley area to assist in the tackling of ASB, vehicle crime, drugs supply, county lines and organised crime gang activity.

Sgt Archbold highlighted the need for more ANPR cameras in the Stanley area. He added there was huge benefits to improving tracking of the network.

Action: Daniel to liaise with Durham Constabulary on the completion of an Area Budget Application for the cameras and to send round the Board for Approval.

10. Next Meeting:

Tuesday 3rd December 2024 – 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