



Better for everyone

## **GREAT AYCLIFFE & MIDDRIDGE PARTNERSHIP (GAMP)**

### **MINUTES OF THE BOARD MEETING TUESDAY 23 JULY 2024 (6:00PM) PIONEERING CARE CENTRE, NEWTON AYCLIFFE**

#### **PRESENT:**

Cllr Eddy Adam – DCC, Cllr Jim Atkinson – DCC (Vice Chair), Cllr Ken Robson – DCC, Cllr David Sutton-Lloyd – DCC, Cllr Tony Towers – Midldridge Parish, Sue Cooke, Chris Hutchinson (Chair), Peter Shovlin, Andy Coulthard – Livin Housing Representative (Vice Chair), Liz Fisher – Voluntary & Community Sector Representative, Malcolm Woodward – Fire Service Representative, Brian Riley – GAMP Coordinator, Victoria Grieves – GAMP Community Development Project Officer, Paula Stockport – GAMP Support Officer, Lee Copeland – Principal AAP Coordinator, Sarah Welsh – DCC Customer Services

#### **APOLOGIES:**

Daniel Blagdon, Glenis Simmonds, Inspector Sarah Honeyman, Jeff Watson, Simon Hocking, Andy Kerr

#### **OBSERVERS:**

Mr B Adamson, Ms S McCormick, Cllr A Chandran, Cllr T Armstrong, Cllr C Robinson

### **Standard Board Meeting**

#### **1. Introductions & Apologies**

CH opened the meeting, reminding Board members of the standard Declaration of Interest item on the agenda. CH informed observers they would be welcome to comment under Items 3 and 4 on the agenda.

Apologies for absence were noted, as above.

#### **2. Minutes of the Meeting Held on 21.5.24 – Matters Arising**

BR confirmed that the draft minutes from the Board meeting held on 21 May 2024 had been circulated in advance with the meeting papers.

There were no outstanding actions or matters arising, and the minutes of the last meeting were **AGREED** by the Board as a true and accurate record.

#### **3. Countywide Partner Issues**

##### **3.1 Proposed Changes to Face-to-Face Customer Services (Sarah Welsh)**

Board members received a presentation in relation to the review of Durham County Council's face-to-face customer services offer. SW broadly outlined the current service model, and the proposal to develop a more responsive offer to deliver customer service support to the places where it's most needed, reducing the time spent in current locations to better reflect demand.

SW advised that over the last 6 months (data to 31 March 2024) around 52% of available appointment slots have gone unused across the whole Customer Access Point (CAP) estate. In Spennymoor CAP, unused appointment slots are around 64%.

The proposals would see an adjustment to the days where appointments are available, from Monday to Friday, to Thursdays. The aim is to benefit residents with increased choice, and reduced travel requirements.

SW noted that the consultation is keen to gather as much feedback as possible from local community members in relation to where services are needed, and the issues that currently prevent people from attending appointments.

The following discussion points were noted:

- Cllr JA commented that the skillset of those staff offering face-to-face services is really important. SW clarified that all staff are trained using a multichannel approach, adding that there is currently not enough demand to fill the current available capacity with face-to-face provision alone, and hence DCC look to maximise resources by redirecting those staff to other areas, e.g. telephone support etc.
- Cllr EA asked whether the proposed changes are linked to a savings exercise. Cllr EA also commented that the closing date for responses is quite tight (28 July) and asked how long the consultation has been open for and what methods of engagement have been used. SW responded that the consultation was launched in May but the timing of some Board meetings and then the pause resulting from the pre-election publicity period had caused some delays in getting to all the AAPs. The consultation has been live on the DCC website since May and various methods of promotion have been used, including via local partners such as the Poverty Action Steering Group and the Advice in County Durham network. Elected Members were also given information and asked to support the consultation through member briefings. Service users have also been contacted directly to seek their views. SW added that the response rate for this round of consultation has been higher than the last one in January. SW further added that the proposals are linked to a savings target (£219k).
- Meeting observer Cllr TA commented that a lot of people, particularly the elderly or vulnerable, can't always access online information and services and welcomed the use of paper surveys as an option to respond to the consultation. Cllr TA questioned how people know the service exists and how they can physically access it, Green Lane is a reasonable distance from Newton Aycliffe. SW noted the current Customer Access Points are located where they have always been historically, and a key aspect of the consultation is to share this message and ask people to give their feedback on the locations and where they believe that services are needed. Current data shows how well the current locations are used, but what we don't know is where people need us to be.

- Meeting observer Cllr TA asked whether care homes been targeted to seek their views as part of the consultation. SW commented that care homes haven't specifically been targeted but DCC have linked with Age UK and other partners.
- Cllr DSL commented that there will be a core of people who need that face-to-face support, and there will be a lot of local community-based organisations who are supporting people who could have that valuable data on where support is needed most.
- Cllr KR asked if any data is available in relation to the fall in the number of enquiries being received. SW clarified that the migration to Universal Credit from 2018 had a huge impact, with Dept for Work & Pensions now providing that support; this equated to around 16,000 appointments a year. The pandemic also had an impact.
- Cllr TT noted that a lot of people who will need support often give up as it can be too difficult to access. Cllr TT suggested that if the CAPs are currently under-utilised, would it not be an option to bring services out to local communities. Having a mobile service would allow DCC to make better use of resources rather than waiting for people to come to you, and Green Lane is quite far from Newton Aycliffe, especially for those who may have mobility or transport difficulties. SW noted the point.
- AC asked if information about user locations can be extracted from existing call data. SW clarified that this information isn't available, the service deals with around 1,000,000 calls a year. It is hoped that the consultation feedback will help DCC to get more of an idea of the areas where there is demand that isn't being met.

All Board members were encouraged to read further detail and take part in the survey via the website:

[Proposed changes to face-to-face customer services](#)

The closing date for responses is 28 July 2024.

*[SW left the meeting]*

### 3.2 Local Network Boundaries Proposals (Brian Riley)

Board members received a presentation in relation to proposals for Local Network (LN) boundaries. As we move towards the introduction of the new LNs, the Council have reviewed the current AAP boundaries to consider the new local boundaries. As part of this, the outcomes of the Local Government Electoral Boundary Review have been considered, which will see new boundaries for the county's electoral divisions come into effect in May 2025.

The AAP boundaries have stayed the same since their creation in 2009 and do not fully line up with the current electoral divisions, cutting through some electoral divisions. There is also currently a wide variation in population size across AAPs and therefore the number of county councillors that represent each AAP area.

The proposals aim to:

- align LNs fully to the new electoral division boundaries;
- facilitate increased use of available data;
- provide more consistent population size;
- provide more consistent county councillor representation within LNs;
- align county councillors to one LN only.

The proposals for Local Network 'A' will see:

- 3 electoral divisions (Aycliffe North & Middridge, Aycliffe South, and Sedgefield);
- 7 County Councillor representation;
- Estimated population of 36,200;
- 7 parished areas.

The main difference between GAMP AAP and LN 'A' is that all GAMP communities will move into LN 'A' along with Sedgefield, Bishop Middleham and Fishburn.

The following discussion points were noted:

- Cllr JA asked whether there would need to be staff reductions and do we know numbers or timescales for this. BR clarified that staffing levels cannot be looked at until the LN boundaries have been finalised but it's highly likely, given the £500k savings target for our service, that there will be a reduction. Cllr JA suggested that some of the £500k savings could be achieved by reducing AAP budgets.
- Meeting observer Cllr AC commented that this exercise will interfere with the CDALC Executive Committee processes. Currently, for GAMP AAP, Great Aycliffe Town Council and Middridge Parish Council meet once a year to agree a representative. The areas are being changed dramatically and there needs to be more clarity on the process for selecting the CDALC rep. CDALC will also need to review their constitution to take into account these changes and agree a way forward in terms of involvement, or not, with the LNs. BR asked Cllr AC to put these comments forward in writing directly to the consultation email address so he can be provided with a clear response.
- Cllr EA asked whether any decisions have been made in relation to the number of community and partner representative places on the LNs, and who will decide where and which projects are approved. Feedback to the original consultants who came in at the start of the Community Engagement Review process was that the GAMP Board worked really well so it's disappointing we're now in a situation where we're being changed, which will inevitably make things more complicated and risks losing our consistency. Great Aycliffe is a very large town, but the smaller villages around the Sedgefield area will no doubt have very different needs. BR clarified that the final workings of the LNs won't be finalised until the boundaries have been agreed and signed off. A lot of subgroups are working in the background, one of which will be looking at governance and Terms of Reference. All information is currently still draft, but BR's understanding is that the LN setup will still be 7 x Cllrs, 7 x partners and 7 x community representatives. The current proposals will see LNs working to a four-year strategic plan, so it would probably follow that projects will be more strategic, and the smaller groups/projects could be covered via Cllr budgets. The LNs will ultimately still be a 'partnership' represented by 21 people from across the LN area.
- Cllr JA asked whether there is a subgroup looking at staffing levels and whether redundancies will need to be considered. If so, would these be statutory or voluntary. LC (Principal AAP Coordinator) responded that there is a staffing subgroup, adding that formal staff consultation hasn't taken place yet; initial conversations have taken place with HR to set out the processes and engagement timetable but information on this cannot be brought to the Board until the boundaries have been signed off. LC added that any necessary staff reductions could hopefully be accommodated through expressions of interest that have already been received for ER/VR.

- Cllr EA asked whether AGMs for the new LNs, which are supposed to come into effect from April 2025, will be deferred until after the local elections in May, which could potentially see a very different make-up of the Council, as well as new Cllrs. BR clarified that the new LN AGMs will need to be delayed until after the elections.

BR noted that all feedback will be considered, with finalised proposals considered by Cabinet before implementation in April 2025.

All Board members were encouraged to read further detail and take part in the survey via the website:

[Proposals for new Local Network boundary areas](#)

There is also a dedicated email address that can be used to provide feedback or ask for further information:

[cer@durham.gov.uk](mailto:cer@durham.gov.uk)

The closing date for responses is 20 September 2024.

BR confirmed, for the minutes, all information circulated by email from the GAMP team since the last meeting:

- Special Educational Needs & disabilities (SEND) Inspection information (11.6.24);
- DCC's latest Consultation & Engagement update (8.7.24);
- GAMP ebulletin (12.7.24).

BR reminded partners to get in touch if they need space on a future meeting agenda.

#### **4. Local Neighbourhood Issues**

##### **4.1 Neighbourhood Policing Update**

BR gave a brief update on behalf of Inspector Honeyman, outlining upcoming PACT meeting dates, PACT priorities, as well as current and emerging issues. Any Board member queries for Insp Honeyman can be passed to BR. A copy of Insp Honeyman's update report will be circulated with the minutes.

#### **5. GAMP Coordinator's Update**

##### **5.1 2024-25 Area Budget (AB) Update**

BR updated Board members in relation to this year's Area Budget (AB) process. We have carried out our project ranking exercise with the subgroup of Board members who had previously volunteered to take part. BR noted thanks to the panel members, who had the very difficult task of reviewing and ranking the 23 eligible Expressions of Interest that were submitted this year to our AB Project Callout.

BR confirmed that, following the project ranking, panel members agreed to approve 11 projects, which will see our total AB for 2024/25 (£110k) fully allocated. We have also met the threshold for the minimum amount of funding towards capital expenditure (£30k), as well as supporting schemes which address the Poverty Action criteria, for which we had a £10k allocation as part of our overall AB.

BR confirmed that all applicants have now been notified of the outcome of their application, both successful and unsuccessful. The successful applicants are in

the process of working on their full AB application forms, and copies will be circulated to the full Board by email for review and comment as part of the final approval and ratification process in due course. Following this, they will be passed to our Funding Team for full technical appraisal. BR is hopeful that groups should be receiving grant offer letters by mid to late September.

BR highlighted that those applicants who were unsuccessful have been given information on potential alternative sources of funding, and Victoria will be liaising with our Elected Members to see if they may be interested in picking up some of the projects we couldn't fund through AB.

BR thanked panel members again for their input with this year's process, and also thanked VG and PSt.

Meeting observer Cllr TA asked whether the AAP priorities change each year and how these will be agreed for 2025-26. BR clarified that this year's priorities and budgets (2024-25) are now complete. Priorities for next year, when we move to a Local Network, will need to be agreed by the new LN.

### **Any Other Business**

PSh raised a point about the current closure of Central Avenue, and asked whether any public consultation had taken place around this and the impacts it will inevitably have on the town, the business park, and local residents. BR clarified that a public consultation event in relation to the wider Copelaw housing development was held at the Leisure Centre, where information was available about access to the site. LF noted that all the other local roadworks happening at the same time in the area weren't highlighted at any of the consultation events as far as she was aware.

Cllr EA commented that he had asked DCC Highways for more information about the road closures and whether these could have been completed in shorter separate stages, and their response had been that the decision was taken to expedite the works together on the understanding that although the works would cause additional disruption this would be over a much shorter period of time.

PSh stated that he wasn't aware Central Avenue would be closed for as long. He would be interested to know if Highways will be carrying out any checks in terms of the impacts on traffic during the period of disruption; BR will contact Highways on behalf of the Board to request an update on this (**Action 1: BR**).

**6. Date/Time of Next Meeting:  
Tuesday 10 September 2024, 6:00pm, Newton Aycliffe Youth & Community Centre**

BR confirmed that we have a couple of items confirmed for the next agenda:

- an update from DCC's Humanitarian Support team;
- information in relation to DCC's Advice Service consultation.

CH thanked all attendees, and LF/Pioneering Care Partnership for hosting the meeting, and the meeting was closed.