



Better for everyone

**4 Together Partnership Area Action Partnership (AAP)  
Minutes of the Board Meeting  
Wednesday 3 July 2024  
Dean Bank & Ferryhill Literary Institute**

**PRESENT:**

Mark Booth – Health Representative, Joanne Burnip – Livin Housing, Craig Jewkes – Fire Service Representative, Nigel Jones – Voluntary & Community Sector (Vice Chair), Victoria Murray – DCC Representative, Carole Atkinson, Susan Kirby, Oliver Peeke, Dennis Ramsey (**Chair**), Cllr Peter Atkinson – DCC, Cllr Joe Makepeace – Ferryhill Town Council (Vice Chair), Cllr Elaine Peeke – DCC, Lee Copeland – Principal AAP Coordinator, Louise Porter – Principal Community Development Project Officer, Paula Stockport – AAP Support Officer

**PRESENTERS:**

Sarah Welsh – DCC Customer Relations Manager

**APOLOGIES:**

Tony Cutmore, Cllr Janet Snowball, Paula Nixon

**A1. Introductions & Apologies**

DR opened the meeting of the 4 Together Partnership Board. DR welcomed Craig Jewkes to his first meeting as County Durham & Darlington Fire & Rescue Service representative, replacing Richard Morgan. Craig explained that his attendance may be a temporary measure, he is already a member of another AAP Board, and the Fire Service are currently reviewing their representation across the AAPs. A round of introductions was given.

Apologies for absence were noted, as above.

**A2. Agreement of Minutes from Previous Meeting (1.5.24) - Matters Arising**

LC reviewed the previous minutes page by page for matters arising, actions and accuracy.

LC noted that there had been a query raised at the last meeting from Cllr JM in relation to the number of suicides in our area. LC confirmed that Public Health colleagues have advised they would prefer not to share specific data on this. Cllr JM advised that he has done his own research into this topic, noting that there was a rate increase of 11% during the pandemic, but that there has been a reduction in our area since the last figures were reviewed. LC clarified that the issue had been flagged to us as an AAP due to a specific spike within our area.

CJ commented from a Fire Service perspective that they carry out a lot of work around this, alongside relevant partner agencies, to support people in crisis. Trauma support and training is also available for staff; this has been an area of risk that hadn't really been specifically addressed by the Service in the past.

LC clarified there were no further outstanding actions or other matters arising, and the minutes were **AGREED** as a true record.

### **A3. Countywide Partner Issues**

#### **A3.1 DCC 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 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 proposal 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.

SW encouraged all Board members to complete and share the online survey; further information about the consultation is available via the website:

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

SW noted that the closing date for survey responses is **5.00pm on 28 July 2024**.

Questions/comments were invited from Board members and the following points were noted:

- OP noted from the presentation slides that roughly half of the Spennymoor appointments weren't being used but that the proposal is a reduction of around 4/5, which doesn't directly correlate. SW commented that any proposed reductions have been based on capacity and demand, and would help the service to maximise resources.
- Cllr JM noted that people could be fearful of what appears to be such a drastic reduction in the number of available days for appointments. SW noted that a review had been carried out last year, looking at four of the least used Customer Access Points. After the consultation, provision had been reduced, and these areas are still only using half of their available appointments. The current traffic figures have been looked at as part of this latest consultation, and the proposed number of appointments would easily fit into one day, whilst also giving the service the flexibility to open up in more locations.
- Cllr JM asked whether there will be another review or updated feedback after the change in provision, say in another year's time. SW clarified that the

service is reviewed continually. Cllr JM would welcome feedback after any proposed changes have been implemented to see the impacts.

- Cllr PA is concerned at the proposed reduction to opening times. Cllr PA believes that deprivation levels should be an important consideration, for example in Ferryhill people often don't have the money available to travel by bus to Spennymoor, and this is a big issue for people who need to access support. Cllr PA would be receptive to the offer of provision in more locations and is hopeful that these locations will be based on need/demand, to help give people better access to support services.
- OP asked if there is any anecdotal data available around why people choose face-to-face contact, rather than other methods that are available, e.g. online. SW noted that the service has always provided a multichannel choice offer, and the way people choose to make contact comes down to customer preference. SW further added that a big chunk of the service's work prior to the implementation of Welfare Reforms was linked to benefit support, which is now provided by the DWP. The pandemic also impacted on the number of people choosing face-to-face contact as a method of support. The service is keen to protect face-to-face as a channel choice for those who want to use it, just with a different configuration.
- DR commented that public transport links for people from outlying villages trying to get Spennymoor are really poor, and this can deter people. DR suggested that transport links are taken into consideration as part of the consultation.

DR thanked SW for her presentation; SW left the meeting.

### A3.2 Improving Advice Services in County Durham (Vicki Murray)

Board members received a presentation in relation to Durham County Council's review of advice services for the County, with the aim of making sure that services funded continue to meet the needs of residents.

Durham County Council want to continue to provide the most effective services, make it easy for people to know where to look for them, and to 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.

VM encouraged all Board members to complete and share details of the consultation as widely as possible. Further details are available via the website: [Advice Service Consultation](#)

VM noted that the closing date for consultation responses is **5.00pm on Friday 20 September 2024.**

Questions were invited from Board members and the following points were noted:

- OP asked what the plan is to reach people who aren't currently engaged. VM noted that consultation will be carried out via AAPs, community centres, local advice providers, foodbanks, various touchpoints across the County, as well as a lot of wider work to promote the survey via different channels, through customer contact services, online messages, social media, press releases, mailshots etc. DCC are keen to get a good cohort of engagement and gather as many views as possible.

- Cllr JM noted there is a danger DCC are doubling up on some advice, for example with DWP, independent advisors, town councils etc. A lot of resource is potentially going into something that's already available elsewhere. VM commented that DCC work as part of the Advice in Co Durham (AiCD) network, whose wider aim is to understand what provision is available, from whom, and avoiding duplication as far as possible.
- JB commented from Livin's perspective, they have seen an increase in demand for advice from tenants. Livin are also part of the AiCD network, and their ethos is that 'there's no wrong door' – all partners will signpost to the most appropriate place.
- JB asked whether this consultation includes plans for any reductions or cuts to services. VM clarified that there are currently no proposed MTFP savings identified in this service area. DCC are keen to build resilience in the system while we have the chance. JB commented that Livin do work with other local authorities in the area, and the service that people receive from DCC is second to none.
- Cllr EP commented that often these types of consultation using online surveys can have pretty poor response rates. Cllr EP feels that DCC should be more visible in local communities to try and encourage better engagement, perhaps making use of an empty shop for a couple of sessions a week to try and catch local footfall. VM noted the point, adding that measuring outcomes and data in this type of setting can be difficult. As part of the consultation, DCC will be setting up some partner forums and going into different settings, e.g. Citizens Advice, East Durham Trust, local foodbanks etc, to try and capture as much information as possible. Links will also be made via the AiCD network, where partners will be asked to survey their respective clients, which will hopefully help target some of the smaller organisations who are providing support.

DR thanked VM for her presentation; VM left the meeting.

#### **A4. Local Neighbourhood Issues**

##### **A4.1 Neighbourhood Policing Update**

Item deferred, no Police representative present.

Board members were keen to note some points they wanted to raise with our Police Representative, and to request feedback at a future meeting. The following issues were noted:

- Cllr EP wanted to raise a point about the general lack of response to ongoing issues with offroad bikes in the West Cornforth area, particularly at PACT meetings. Cllr EP has been advised by the Police & Crime Commissioner's Office that Cornforth isn't 'on the radar' in terms of potential funding to address the ASB issues. Residents routinely raise issues at PACT meetings, but no action appears to be taken. Funding was requested for gates to block the entrance to the wooded area where the bikes are causing a lot of problems, but this was unsuccessful. Residents are advised to ring in with issues, but getting through on the non-emergency number can be a frustrating process.
- Cllr EP further added that the Parish Council has paid for signage (which would allow offending bikes to be seized on the spot), but no progress has been made in having the signs installed.
- Cllr JM has concerns about issues with inconsiderate parking, particularly in the Ferryhill area (near the Greyhound pub), people are parking on pavements, blocking buses from getting through, grass verges are being

damaged and poorly parked vehicles are generally causing obstructions in a number of locations.

LC will contact Insp Evans on behalf of the Board to request feedback on the above points (**Action 1: LC**).

Cllr PA suggested that Cllr EP may wish to consider making a direct approach to Joy Allen to discuss the ongoing issues with offroad bikes in West Cornforth.

Cllr PA commented that a scheme has been funded recently in Newton Aycliffe which will see the police secure drones for local use. It is hoped that these will be helpful in providing support in general, but also potentially around the issues with offroad bikes. LC noted that she is due to attend a meeting next week in relation to one of our previously supported Towns & Villages projects, which was to fund CCTV equipment for the police. LC clarified that there have been some issues relating to permissions and ongoing maintenance/insurance which have delayed progress with the project. Spennymoor AAP are in the same position as 4 Together, having funded a similar scheme. LC will be proposing that the option of purchasing drones with the funding be considered, rather than the planned CCTV equipment, and to avoid this funding being lost to our area.

CJ commented that the Fire Service have access to drones (as do the Police). They can be useful in terms of their flexibility and gathering good quality footage/images but they're not really a 'quick fix'. They take time to set up and have users trained, and can be limited by range, particularly in larger rural areas.

CJ suggested that the Board may wish to consider making an approach to Joy Allen, with a request for her to attend a future meeting to discuss the general issues around ASB.

## **A5. Area & Neighbourhood Budget Update**

### **A5.1 2024-25 Area Budget Update**

LC confirmed that a report from Paula Nixon had been circulated in advance with the meeting papers, for information and for Board members to note the content. LC briefly highlighted some of the key points from the report:

- The Partnership has a total Area Budget for 2024-25 of £117,740.
- We have received 20 x eligible Expressions of Interest to this year's Project Callout, with a total funding request of £271,188.

LC noted that Paula Nixon will be in touch with Board members shortly with further information on next steps. It would be helpful if Board members could respond promptly when asked about potential Declarations of Interest so that we can get the ranking panel set up and move forward with this year's process.

### **A5.2 2024-25 Neighbourhood Budget (NB) Update**

LP confirmed that an update of NB spend had been circulated in advance with the meeting papers, for information. The update gives details of current NB spend and balances for all Elected Members. LP highlighted that there are several NB projects currently in development, which will be brought to the Board over the coming weeks. LP will also be catching up with Elected Members over the next few weeks to look at balances and planned spend, so that we're in a good position to have NB funding fully allocated by the deadline of December 2024.

### A5.3 Fun & Food (F&F) Funding Update

LP updated Board members in relation to our F&F funding allocations. The Department for Education (DfE) funding programme aims to support organisations to deliver projects targeted at school age children from Reception to Year 11 who receive benefits-related free school meals. Durham County Council also secured additional funding from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund for the Summer programme (for every two DfE funded places, applicants could apply for one DCC funded place).

LP confirmed that the Fun and Food programme for the Summer holidays has seen 6 projects supported, to deliver 75 sessions to children and young people in our AAP area over the summer holidays. LP clarified that further details of the sessions taking place will be shared via the F&F team shortly.

LP will circulate a written F&F update to Board members following the end of the Pre-Election Publicity Period (**Action 2: LP**).

Cllr EP asked whether children from all our areas have an opportunity to attend sessions. LP briefly outlined the process, whereby children in receipt of benefit-related free school meals receive a ticket via their school, which allows them to book onto any funded sessions anywhere in the County. Cllr EP asked whether any data is available in terms of identifying children who want to attend a session but aren't able to, for example due to transport cost barriers. LC clarified that we don't have this information available to us as AAPs. There was a general view from Board members that it would ultimately be up to the service providers who are applying for the F&F funding to deliver local projects and whether they think this would be an issue that needs to be addressed as part of any project proposal; LC added that deliverers would be welcome to include transport costings as part of their project proposal if there was a specific need. LP noted that schools will also have access to different funding streams to cover school holiday periods. LP added that a possible avenue to explore in future, if there is further Fun & Food financial support available, could be to make an approach directly to a provider to see if they could consider running a project from a mobile facility which could target hard to reach communities.

### A5.4 Big Arts Funding Update

LP updated Board members in relation to this year's Big Arts funding allocation (£10k).

The aim of the Big Arts funding is to use Culture and Arts to enhance mental health, wellbeing and resilience, focusing on protective factors and enhancing a sense of belonging. Projects will work across all age groups to help people come together to improve their mental health through creativity, using local artists and community assets.

A display of projects will take place across each of the 14 local AAP areas within libraries, leisure facilities, schools, streets, churches, community venues etc. This will take place during the week of World Mental Health Day 2024 (Monday 7 to Sunday 13 October 2024).

LP noted that we have received Expressions of Interest from two eligible organisations to run projects within the 4 Together Partnership area. A review of

the proposals was completed on 30 May via our Chair & Vice Chairs, and both organisations were asked to complete a full Area Budget funding application. LP advised that the applications will be circulated to Board members over the coming week for information purposes.

LC added that a brief report has been prepared centrally for Public Health, with information on all of the Big Arts projects being supported across the 14 AAPs. LC commented that the report will be brought to the Board for information, to give Board members a flavour of the huge range of projects being delivered across the County.

#### A5.5 Community Engagement Review

LC advised Board members that we will be looking to host an additional meeting to look at the Boundary Consultation for AAPs as we move to Local Networks. To fit within the planned consultation timeline, LC is proposing to hold the meeting on Wed 7 August, 6.00-7.00pm (at Dean Bank & Ferryhill Literary Institute). Cllr JM asked whether there will be any scope for Board members' views to impact on potential outcomes. LC confirmed that Board members will have an opportunity to review information from the Boundary Consultation, and then to discuss the proposed new Local Network boundaries. Board members will be able to give their views on the proposals. There will also be an online survey available for the wider community to take part in the consultation. LC expects further information on this will be shared with AAP Boards shortly.

#### **Any Other Business**

- LC advised Board members that information will be shared shortly on behalf of DCC's Overview & Scrutiny Committee who have some current Committee vacancies for non-voting co-optees.
- OP asked whether the Board could consider potentially rotating venues for meetings, covering our whole Partnership area. LC noted that historically our meetings did rotate to different venues, but that we had encountered difficulties in some areas and a Board decision had been taken to stick to one venue going forward. LC clarified that Board members are welcome to discuss and review this issue again at a future Board meeting; LC will agenda this for our September meeting (**Action 3: LC**).
- DR informed the Board that he recently attended a Patient Participation Group meeting in West Cornforth where they had received a visit and presentation from Age Concern representatives, which gave a lot of useful information about what support they can provide. DR asked whether Board members would be interested in receiving a presentation at a future Board meeting; Board members would welcome this. It was agreed that DR would pass on the relevant contact details to LC to make arrangements for a future meeting (**Action 4: DR/LC**).
- Cllr EP raised an issue around some recent changes within Library Services at DCC which had impacted on her intention to work with local library colleagues, as she has in previous years, on a possible Neighbourhood Budget project. LP explained that she has been trying to look into this with Library Services; LP will pass on the background information to LC for further consideration, and LC will feed back to Cllr EP with any further information (**Action 5: LP/LC**).

#### **A6. Date & Time of Next Meeting:**

**AAP Boundaries Consultation (One Item Agenda):**

- Wed 7 August 2024, 6.00-7.00pm, Dean Bank & Ferryhill Literary Institute

**Full Board Meeting:**

- Wed 4 September 2024, 6.00-8.00pm, venue tbc

DR/LC thanked everyone for their attendance, and the meeting was closed.