

DERWENT VALLEY PARTNERSHIP (DVP) BOARD MEETING MINUTES

27 September 2023, Salvation Army Hall, Consett at 6pm



Present:

Elected Representatives

Cllrs Stephen Robinson (Vice Chair), Kathryn Rooney, Michelle Walton and Alex Watson.

Partner Organisations

Allan Hobson (Co Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service (CDDFRS)), Philip Pollard (Karbon Homes), Donna Tunney (The Hub) and Alison Lazazzera (Durham County Council (DCC)).

Public Representatives

Lea McConnell (Chair), Helen Marley, Rosemary Morris and Fraser Neill.

DVP:

Corinne Walton (AAP Co-ordinator), Lynn Dougal (Support Officer), Kath Clements (Community Development Project Officer) and Joanne Ashworth (AAP Towns and Villages Officer).

Members of the Public: 10

Presenter: Jeff Garfoot DCC.

Apologies:

Elected Reps: Cllrs Veronica Andrews and Watts Stelling. Partner Rep: Mark Clelland (Vice Chair) (Derwentside Trust). Public Rep: John Marshall.

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. Donna Tunney from The Hub in Consett was welcomed to the Board as the new Business Rep and Jeff Garfoot was welcomed to the meeting who was giving a presentation.

Declarations of interest were from Rosemary Morris in relation to the Hamsterley Mill Residents Association funding application and from Donna Tunney in relation to the Celebrate Difference funding application.

2. Minutes of Previous Board Meeting (19 July 2023)

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

3. Partner Updates

Jeff Garfoot, Head of Corporate Finance and Commercial Services gave a presentation on DCC's Forecast Revenue Budget 2024/25 and the consultation.

Jeff delivered the presentation which included an overview of the Council's Budget for 2023/24, the Council Tax position, Budget pressures the Council is facing, the proposed approach for balancing the budget in 2024/25 and across the next four years, and what the consultation process is (a copy of the presentation is available upon request).

The consultation is open to all and available online as well as paper copies being made available. The Council is seeking views on:

- The savings proposals for 2024/25, particularly the £3.7 million of savings derived from back-office savings and efficiencies, income raising and reductions in third party contributions and savings from changes in the way front-line services are delivered.
- What you feel will be the impact of this approach to savings for 2024/25 upon you or those you represent?
- Which three service areas should the council focus on to achieve additional savings still needed for 2024/25 of £6.2 million and £43.5 million over the following three years?
- Raising the council tax by the maximum amount of 4.99% to protect service provision and ensure the additional savings required are kept to £6.2 million for 2024/25? If you disagree with the 4.99% increase, choose a further three services to reduce.
- Do you have any additional ideas as to where further income can be raised or become more efficient?

The consultation closes on 20 October 2023. Feedback from this consultation will be considered by Cabinet in December 2023, with a Budget report presented to Cabinet on 14 February 2024. Cabinet budget proposals will then be presented to Full Council on 28 February 2024 where budget approval and Council Tax for 2024/25 will be set.

Work is underway to identify further budget savings to meet the shortfall expected in 2024/25 - 2027/28 and further consultations may take place across October/November if additional savings options are to be consulted upon.

Following the presentation, the following questions/comments were noted:

Cllr Watson said as the Council will be able to increase council tax in 2024/25 by a maximum of 4.99%, he suggested that the public should have their say on whether they wish to increase this amount beyond 4.99%. He said the public might be prepared to increase council tax by 1%, for example, in order to prevent the closure/reduction of services such as leisure facilities.

Jeff advised that all public services are under budget pressures and some councils are close to going bankrupt. He wonders if any council will break ranks and go for a referendum in the near future. As for DCC, we still have some reserves and likely to use them in the short term until we get a long term settlement. Asking the public to have their say on further increases in council tax will be difficult as people tend to vote based upon geography and what's important in their area.

Rosemary Morris said that the number of young people, particularly in this area, that are called NEETS (not in employment, education or training) is quite alarming. She suggested that those services working with providers, such as schools and colleges could be given targets to get young people into training where there is likely to be a skills shortage. She also said that she is

surprised by the amount of consultants employed by the Council; they cost a lot of money and would like to see a ban on their use.

Jeff said that a priority with our DurhamWorks service is to help get young people into work. DurhamWorks received around £10m through European funding and when that ended it was replaced with the Shared Prosperity Fund which is now around £5m. As the council value this service, a further £1m from next year's budget will be put into the service.

Regarding consultants, he also said he does not like the council using them but they are mainly used in large capital projects. Due to a reduction in employees over the years, the council does not have the staff to manage a capital programme, therefore bring people in to do them. We do not hire them ourselves, as in 3 years' time for example we may not have that much capital programme as it could be much smaller.

Cllr Shield said that DCC are the only council in the North East and a small number of councils countrywide who still maintain the Council Tax Reduction Scheme, which is costing us over £60m per year. Approximately 200k households in County Durham pay full council tax and he is not sure if they will be amenable to paying a further 1% – 2.5% on top of the proposed increase of 4.99%.

Cllr Robinson raised concerns about the amount of money spent on home to school transport, particularly since Covid-19, where children are travelling in separate taxis rather than together. He also said that the cost of taxi contracts from home to school and back are extortionate, therefore could a parent, for example, ring for a taxi on the day which would be cheaper.

Jeff advised that the pandemic had a huge impact on home to school transport costs. The approach going forward would be for new children coming into the special needs sector to travel to school together by mini bus. As some schools specialise in a particular special need this means that some children have to travel further afield which increases home to school transport costs.

Cllr Robinson said that the underlying message from government is that if you want something you have to pay more council tax. Jeff said that DCC think council tax is an unfair tax in Durham and have lobbied against this. However, residents in County Durham do pay their bills and we collect around 99% of council tax every year.

Cllr Robinson also asked why the Government do not want to overhaul and re-evaluate council tax bands. Jeff replied with 'poll tax riots'. No government wants a repeat of these, that happened in the early 1990s. Currently properties are based on 1990 valuations and any government that considers re-banding of properties fears that this could happen again.

Lea McConnell thanked Jeff for his presentation and input at the meeting.

Corinne advised Board and Forum members that hard copy consultation forms are available to complete at the meeting. Completed forms will be collected at the end of the meeting and passed onto Jeff and his team.

4. Task Group Updates

Corinne gave an update on the 4 Task Groups.

Environment Task Group

Prior to the task group meeting on 19 September, the group undertook some research around the themes in their action plan. Based on the results of the research, the group will be looking at project development around:

Theme 1 Reducing energy consumption - heat, transport and electricity:

- Derwent Valley 'Borrow a Bike' scheme
- Derwent Valley 'Green Doctors'
- Climate Fresk Facilitator Workshops
- Community energy training courses (free)
- DVP Environment Conference 2024 (inclusive for all Countywide partners and AAPs)

Theme 2 Recycling, reuse and waste reduction:

- Community growing (gardens and allotments)
- Pre-loved clothing schemes

The next task group meeting is on 7 November at St Patrick's Church Hall to focus on project development linked to the above themes.

Rosemary said that the Primary School Head Teachers in our Partnership area invited her and Ann English (Chair of Task Group) to their meeting to talk about a walking bus scheme.

Susan Mellor (Forum) said that there will be a pre-loved clothing bank starting at the Methodist Church on 6 October. Corinne said that the task group will be linking in with the Methodist Church group to offer some support, eg publicity.

A Forum member asked if there are any plans to do some training for people who have not cycled for many years and may not be aware of the rules regarding cyclists and pedestrians. Corinne said that the Borrow a Bike scheme has an element of training around multi use pathways; they will also be looking at offering start up equipment, eg helmets, lights.

Employment, Education and Training (EET) Task Group

The task group met on 7 September and received a presentation from North East Innovation Centre about their Durham Boost project, which is to help people develop Social Enterprises. They also received an update from STEAM Ahead CIC on the EET funded project Improving Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) through engaging Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM) activities.

A meeting is planned for 12 October for the group to look at the action plan themes which includes Skills for the future, Barriers to employment and an Employment Forum. A further task group meeting is scheduled for 9 November at Glenroyd House to look at project development.

A Forum member asked if the aim is to improve opportunities for young people or does it include all ages. Corinne advised that the action plan will include young people, to help get them the skills and training they need, and older people (50+), for those who are interested in reskilling or retraining.

Health and Wellbeing (HWB) Task Group

The task group held a HWB Forum event this afternoon at the Salvation Army Hall where networking and HWB themed engagement activities took place around its action plan themes of Suicide prevention, Social isolation, Bereavement support and Physical activity. It was well attended with representatives from various organisations linked to the action plan themes.

It provided a good networking opportunity and for the different organisations to discuss a collaborative approach to generate some multi agency working and projects.

A report will be compiled which will summarise the event, specifically the feedback from the engagement activities.

Fraser Neill thought it was an excellent event, very productive and positive.

Cllr Shield said that last winter DCC provided funding for Warm Hubs across the county, which were very successful. DCC is looking to do something similar this winter with a focus, not just on the warmth aspect but on the welcome aspect.

The next task group meeting is on 25 October at Glenroyd House. The group will review the feedback from the event with the aim of developing project proposals with the organisations who attended on the day.

Towns and Villages (T&V) Task Group

The task group has now allocated the remaining budget (£48,225) to fund a town centre events programme and to promote the town centre. Therefore the group has allocated their £210k budget to various projects across the Partnership area and has a balance of £0.

The group will meet on 18 October at St Patrick's Church Hall to receive an update on the projects funded and to agree their role moving forward.

Corinne advised that the first event of the town centre programme is Christmas in Consett on Saturday 9 December from 4pm-6pm in Middle Street. There will be live entertainment, children's characters, a Christmas jumper competition and a Christmas tree lights switch on. A Food and Drink Market at The HUB Consett and Christ Church's Christmas Tree Festival will be open to coincide with the event, further publicity relating to the event will be provided / circulated in due course.

Regarding the task groups in general, Corinne suggested that we theme Board meetings around one of the task groups. For example, a more in depth update on Environment at one Board meeting, followed by more detail about HWB at the next one and so on.

Lea said the task groups are open to Board and Forum members and said they are worth attending as the research, expertise and work that goes into them is commendable.

5. DVP Contingency Budget Funding Proposals and Project Genesis Trust Funding Contribution

DVP Contingency Budget Funding Proposals

Corinne went through the Contingency Budget funding proposals, that Board members had received copies of prior to the meeting.

Following the call out for project proposals, that went out on 5 August, 23 expression of interest (EOI) packs were issued with 12 completed forms returned to the DVP Team by the deadline date of 15 September 2023.

The budget for the Contingency Fund was £14,902 but was rounded up to £15k as the minimum funding request was £5k. The total amount of funding requested was £86,159.90 which meant we were £71,159.90 oversubscribed.

EOI project proposals were received from:

- Celebrate Difference, Celebrating Neurodivergent Young People - £5,000
- Consett Heart, Consett Heart Activity Days (Culture and Heritage) - £8,238.90
- Consett Salvation Army, Children's After School and Holiday Clubs - £6,956
- Derwentside Detached Youth Project, Derwentside Detached Youth Project in Leadgate (2 year project) - £9,000
- Derwentside Trust, Mini Medics and Defibrillator Training - £5,000
- Durham County Council, Classical Music in Consett Bus Station - £6,000
- 1st Dipton Scout and Guide Group, Nights Away and Outdoor Activities - £8,225
- Hamsterley Mill Residents Association, Hamsterley Hall Sculpture and Seating - £5,000
- NHS Foundation Trust, Blackhill Community Allotment Young People's Project - £10,540
- Randoms Retreat, Random's Retreat Rewilding - £5,000
- Sport Works, Inclusive Youth Club for Young People in Consett - £10,000
- St John's Ambulance, Derwent Valley Primary Schools First Aid Training - £7,200

Due to Rosemary and Donna declaring an interest, they temporarily left the meeting whilst the Board discussed the proposals.

Board members were asked to read through the proposals in readiness for discussion at the meeting so a collective decision could be made on which projects they wish to support.

Given the time constraints at the meeting, Board members were asked to either:

1. Receive the scoring sheet electronically and score the proposals individually against set criteria. The scores would then be collated by the DVP Team and added together to obtain a collective score. This process would need a quorate response, ie minimum of 3 reps from each Board category.
2. By a show of hands at the meeting as to which projects they would like to support.

3. Set up a panel made up of a select number of Board members with delegated decision making powers to review and score the projects.

Cllr Walton suggested Option 1 and that each Board member has an input and scores individually. Fraser and Lea also agreed. Following a brief discussion the Board agreed to this option.

Corinne said that each Board member, apart from Rosemary and Donna, would be sent the scoring sheets electronically to complete and return to the DVP Team by a set deadline. The scores would be added together, each project proposal would be given an average score and ranked in order from highest to lowest.

The results (list of projects with scores) would be circulated to the Board to either ratify by email or for further discussion and approval at the November Board meeting.

Corinne reiterated the process and next steps which is to email the scoring sheets and redacted expression of interest project proposals to Board members. Further instructions and a deadline date for completed scoring sheets will be given. The scores will be collated by the DVP Team and the outcome will be emailed to the Board for agreement. The successful applicants will then be notified and asked to complete the full online funding application form. Once this is received it will go through the Funding Team appraisal process.

Project Genesis Trust (PGT) Funding

Back in 2021, PGT kindly offered the DVP £10k to be used as discretionary match funding for local projects receiving DVP funds. PGT has offered this amount again and can be used to add value to our existing funds (eg DVP Contingency Fund). This additional support is awarded at the discretion of the Board.

The Board accepted and thanked PGT for their kind offer.

6. DVP November 2023 Forum Event Update

Further to the Board's discussion, at the July Board meeting, around the DVP hosting a Forum event in November, Corinne suggested that we do not hold the event this year but consider holding it next year. As the Board agreed previously not to run a participatory budget (PB) scheme and there are no plans to involve the public in local priority setting, there is no 'hook' to get people to come along. Other than networking, there are no other activities that we could deliver at a Forum event that would make it attractive and worthwhile.

As the DVP Team has limited capacity and due to other work commitments, ie Task Group project development, Fun and Food, Christmas event, it is proposed that we run a Forum event next year as we should have an update on how the new structure for the Local Networks will look. As the AAPs will change and become Local Networks, there will be a new name and new branding and a Forum event would be a good opportunity to promote the new service.

The Board agreed to not go ahead with a November Forum and agreed to hold it sometime next year, details to be discussed at a later date.

7. Meeting Close and Date of Next Meeting

Lea thanked everyone for attending the meeting.

The next Board meeting will be on Wednesday 29 November 2023, 6pm at The Salvation Army Hall, Consett.