

DERWENT VALLEY PARTNERSHIP (DVP) BOARD MEETING MINUTES

29 November 2023, Salvation Army Hall, Consett at 6pm



Present:

Elected Representatives

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

Partner Organisations

Mark Clelland (Vice Chair) (Derwentside Trust), Donna Tunney (The Hub) and Joanne Waller (Durham County Council (DCC)).

Public Representatives

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

DVP:

Corinne Walton (AAP Co-ordinator), Lynn Dougal (Support Officer) and Kath Clements (Community Development Project Officer)

Members of the Public: 11

Presenters: Mike Allum DCC and Joanne Waller DCC

Apologies:

Elected Rep: Cllr Veronica Andrews. Partner Reps: Allan Hobson (Co Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service) and Philip Pollard (Karbon Homes). Public Rep: Linda Acres. T&V/DVP Officers: Joanne Ashworth and Laura Sloan.

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. Mike Allum and Joanne Waller were welcomed to the meeting, who were both giving a presentation.

Declarations of interest were from Mark Clelland regarding the Derwentside Trust funding application and Donna Tunney regarding the Celebrate Difference and Derwentside Trust funding applications.

2. Minutes of Previous Board Meeting (27 September 2023)

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

3. Partner Update

Mike Allum, Spatial Policy Manager gave a presentation on the Draft County Durham Housing Strategy and Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy

Following on from the previous presentation on DCC's Housing Strategies Principles and Priorities Paper, which was the first stage in the preparation of the Housing Strategy, the feedback collated from that consultation informed the Draft Housing Strategy, wherever possible. A further consultation on the Draft Housing Strategy runs until 18 December 2023 and modifications will be made as necessary with the strategy adopted in Spring/Summer 2024.

The Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy is also being consulted on at the same time as the housing strategy and will close on 18 December 2023. A previous review carried out on homelessness and rough sleeping provided more information to inform the new strategy (a copy of both presentations is available upon request).

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

Cllr Walton asked what the reasons are behind those tenants who have been given a 'notice to quit'. Mike said the reasons vary such as not paying their rent. However, we are seeing a lot of landlords not able to afford mortgages on their properties, due to high mortgage rates and/or landlords want to sell their properties.

Cllr Walton also asked what does it mean '*Access to some tenures for certain cohorts is difficult*'? Mike said this relates to those with complex needs.

Rosemary Morris asked what the timescale is for the Housing Strategy's Action Plan? Mike said work will be started on the Action Plan straight away, however, if it is affected by Purdah this may delay it being adopted if an election is called in the Spring.

Rosemary also asked if the Council has an inspection programme on rented properties? Mike said there is if they are affected by the Selective Licensing Scheme. Joanne Waller said Selective Licensing falls within the Housing Planning Team who make sure landlords have the right licence and adhere to those conditions. Selective Licensing is renewable every 5 years and subject to a regular inspection. If a tenant is not happy with their living conditions, they can raise a request for an inspection.

Cllr Earley wondered if the Council has thought about buying properties to alleviate the housing/homeless issues. Mike said there is an acquisition programme, and the Council has around 70 properties they own and looking to expand on that with new build and acquiring more properties.

Regarding bringing empty homes back into use, John O'Connor (Forum) thought it would be more advantageous to revamp/refurbish these properties which would offer a quicker solution rather than building a 100 new homes per year as planned.

Cllr Watson asked if there are regular inspections carried out to properties that have a change in use such as houses in multiple occupation (HMOs), ie around ASB, keeping property to a good standard, tidy gardens, etc. Joanne said certain types of HMOs are licenced but must be over a certain size/ number of tenants. Small HMOs fall outside of the licencing programme, but they are subjected to the same regulations as any private rented sector property. With ASB issues, the council, police and registered social landlords have a responsibility to tackle this. With

private rented properties, there are conditions attached to their licence to prevent ASB. ASB requires a collaborative approach from different agencies and the delivery plan aims to identify what and how this will work.

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

4. DVP Task Group Updates

Before Corinne gave an update on the 4 Task Groups, Donna and Mark, who declared an interest in the funding proposals under the Employment Task Group, temporarily left the meeting whilst the Board discussed the proposals – which the Board received copies of prior to the Board meeting.

Environment Task Group

The task group met on 7 November to agree project ideas around the group's action plan themes. They are keen to progress on several initiatives such as a Derwent Valley Schools Walking Bus project and a DVP Environment Conference. With the latter idea, the group will set up a subgroup to look at venue, key speakers and how the conference will be shaped.

At the next task group meeting on 16 January 2024, the group will review further details on project ideas and the costs involved.

Employment, Education and Training (EET) Task Group

The task group met on 9 November and briefly covered and finalised their action plan.

The group also reviewed 3 expressions of interest project proposals from Celebrate Difference, Derwentside Trust and Steam Ahead CIC. Following a scoring process, with set criteria, undertaken by the group via email, the outcome and recommendations to the Board are as follows:

Not recommended to support:

Steam Ahead CIC - Improving SEMH (social, emotional and mental health) through engaging STEM (science, technology, engineering and maths) activities, £10,000.

Recommended to support:

- **Derwentside Trust** - Readiness for Employment for Neuro Diverse/SEND (special educational needs and disabilities)/NEETS (not in employment, education or training) and Long Term Unemployed, £19,500.
- **Celebrate Difference** - Celebrating Neurodivergent Young People, £5,000 (submitted from Contingency Budget fund).

The total funding request is £24,500 which leaves a balance of £10,500 to be allocated.

A lengthy debate then followed, with the following comments noted:

Cllr Walton said she has concerns about the process for scoring and recommending the proposals for funding and feels that they have not been scrutinised enough. At the September Task Group meeting she was under the impression that any expressions of interest would be discussed further. As the October task group meeting was cancelled and she could not attend the November task group meeting, she sent her comments in about the proposals, but they were not considered at the November meeting. Therefore, she is not comfortable with accepting the above recommendations and feels that other organisations should have been given the opportunity to apply for funding.

Fraser Neill, Cllr Rooney, Rosemary and Lea also agree with Cllr Walton's comments in not supporting the proposals.

Cllr Watson said that as the task groups tend to do all the work in getting the proposals to the Board and that they have ample opportunity to discuss the proposals at task group meetings, he feels that they do not need further scrutiny at a Board meeting. He said he is happy to support them as per the task group's recommendations.

Cllr Earley echoed Cllr Watson's comments about the task groups usually recommending proposals and then the Board agreeing to support them. However, in the past the EET Task Group has struggled to get good projects with the limited budget they have.

Fraser said there was no project call out and thought the process was unfair that other organisations could not apply. He said he ended up walking out of the November task group meeting.

Corinne advised that she has received official complaints from members of the EET Task Group regarding the conduct of other members of this group at the 9 November meeting. The complaints are being investigated but it was clear that these issues had spilled over in to the Board meeting.

The Board were reminded that they agreed, at an earlier Board meeting, that it would be at the discretion of each task group whether they do a call out for proposals, or in-house project development. Each of the task groups chose to do project development for the 2023-24 financial year and this had been supported by the Board, therefore there was no call out and it was not open to all organisations to simply submit bids. However, the Contingency Budget was an open call out for projects (as approved by the Board), and the Board agreed that any unsuccessful proposals could go to the appropriate task group for them to consider funding.

Corinne strongly clarified that the EET Task Group chose to do project development and at their September task group meeting, it was noted that Derwentside Trust would be putting in an expression of interest. The Celebrate Difference proposal had come from the Contingency Budget and the group agreed to approach Steam Ahead to develop a project for the group to consider. All three proposals had therefore been legitimately submitted based on the processes agreed by the Board.

Regarding the recommendations that have come to the Board, Corinne asked the Board whether they would like to support the proposals or if they are not happy, then to agree what the next

steps should be. She also advised that £15k of the Area Budget (AB) had been allocated and just under £105k has yet to be allocated by March 2024.

John O'Connor (Forum and EET Task Group member) said that no decisions on the proposals were made at the 9 November meeting. Questions relating to the proposals were raised by task group members present and were subsequently sent to the applicants to provide a response. The responses were then sent via email to all task group members who were then asked to score the projects, against set criteria, and return them to the DVP Team by a deadline date.

Rosemary said that due to the October Task Group meeting being cancelled, the group were not able to discuss and agree the action plan and invite potential applicants to apply. She said 10 minutes was given to discuss the action plan at the November meeting and then they moved onto the 3 project proposals.

Both Kath Clements and Lynn Dougal said they were aware that the task group had been working on their action plan for a long time. Ideally the action plans should be finalised as soon as possible to allow the groups to spend time looking at the types of projects they would like to fund and to target specific project deliverers. It was also noted that not all task group members can make all the meetings and that can be difficult in making recommendations.

Kath said that if the task group is struggling to get people from organisations and groups to come along, she wondered if there was a merit in reviewing whether the task group was needed.

As time was pressing on and there were other agenda items to be presented, Corinne asked the Board to vote on whether they supported the Task Group's recommendations or not:

to support the proposals – 4
not in favour of supporting – 6

Therefore, the proposals will not progress this evening and will go back to the Task Group for further discussion at their next Task Group meeting on 25 January 2024.

Health and Wellbeing (HWB) Task Group

Following the HWB Forum event on 27 September, the task group received a report which provided a summary and feedback on the event that was reviewed and discussed at their last task group meeting on 25 October.

The group is exploring project development linked to Men's mental health and social isolation (CREE project) with links to existing groups, Digital communication to promote services linked to HWB action plan themes and St John's Ambulance proposal (submitted from Contingency Budget fund).

The next task group meeting is on Wednesday 10 January 2024.

Towns and Villages (T&V) Task Group

The task group has allocated their £210k Towns & Village budget to various projects across the Partnership area.

The group met on 18 October and received an update on all the current projects and to agree their role moving forward.

Provisionally, a further two meetings will be held – one in January 2024 and another before the group ends in March 2024 where they will review the project monitoring for the funded projects and reflect on the programme.

5. Partner Update

Joanne Waller, Head of Community Protection Services gave a presentation on DCC's updated Forecast Revenue Budget and Consultation.

Further to the presentation that was given at the September Board meeting, Joanne gave an update on the Council's medium term financial forecasts, the reasons for the changes to the financial forecast and the impact, the additional savings options to help close the forecast budget shortfall and the consultation process (a copy of the presentation is available upon request).

DCC is asking the public for their views on their proposed approach to balance the budget further:

- As additional savings of £1.9 million in 2024/25 and £2.9 million across the four-year period (2024/25-2027/28) from savings from back office and making efficiencies, raising additional income and changes to delivering frontline services have been identified – what is your view on this approach?
- What do you feel will be the impact of this approach - upon you, your communities or those you represent? Why do you believe this would be the case?
- Do you have any additional ideas or suggestions as to areas where we can raise further income or become more efficient in the years to come?

The deadline for feedback is 3 December 2023. Following feedback from both budget consultations a budget report will be 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. Further work will continue to identify budget savings beyond 2024/25.

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

As there are around 40k households in County Durham that pay no council tax, John O'Connor (forum) suggested charging these households £100 per year (approx £2/week) and that would generate around £4m in revenue.

Cllr Watson reiterated his previous comments suggesting that the public should be given the opportunity to have their say on whether they would support a small increase in their council tax above 4.99%. He said the public might be prepared to increase their council tax by an extra 1%, for example, to prevent the closure/reduction of services such as libraries and leisure facilities.

Cllr Early referred to the councillors' Neighbourhood Budget (NB) and the capital/revenue split that is applied to the budget. He said he finds it very frustrating why he must differentiate between the two when he agrees to fund local community organisations from his NB. He finds the rules around capital/revenue split restrictive and would like to see some flexibility.

John Marshall agreed with Cllr Watson's comments and suggested that something could be included in householders' yearly council tax notifications asking them if they would be willing to pay extra on their council tax to help save some services.

Lea thanked Joanne for her presentation.

6. DVP Contingency Budget Funding Update and Project Genesis Trust (PGT) Funding Proposal

DVP Contingency Budget

At the September Board meeting, the Board briefly discussed the Contingency Budget project proposals. Due to time constraints at that meeting, they agreed to receive the proposals (redacted) and scoring sheets via email and score them individually against set criteria.

The scores were returned to the DVP Team, by a deadline date, who collated the results and ranked the project proposals in order from highest scored to lowest.

The results (list of projects with scores) were circulated and ratified by the Board via email prior to the November Board meeting.

The Contingency Budget was £15k and we received funding requests totaling £86,158.90. Of the 12 project proposals received, the top 3 projects were awarded funding:

1. **Consett Salvation Army Hall** - Children's After School and Holiday Clubs project, £6,956
2. **Derwentside Trust** - Mini Medics and Defibrillator Training, £5,000
3. **NHS Foundation Trust** - Blackhill Community Allotment Young People's Project, £3,044 (part funded)

The successful applicants will be notified and asked to complete the full online application form and will then go through the funding appraisal process. Unsuccessful projects are being considered for alternative funding pots such as DVP funds via the appropriate Task Group (Health, Employment and Environment) and external funding opportunities.

There were no comments, and the above projects were APPROVED by the Board.

PGT Funding Proposal

Due to time constraints, this item has been deferred to the January 2024 Board meeting.

7. DVP Christmas in Consett 2023

The DVP's Christmas in Consett (funded via the Towns and Villages Task Group) will be on

Saturday 9 December in Middle Street, Consett from 4pm ending with a Christmas tree lights switch on. The event will include a variety of entertainment and a Christmas jumper competition. Also, Christ Church in Consett has an additional date for their Christmas Tree Festival, The Hub in Consett will be hosting a Food and Drink Market and the DCC Elf Trail in Consett starts on the 9th and runs until mid-December.

8. Meeting Close and Date of Next Meeting

Lea thanked everyone for attending the meeting and wished everyone a wonderful Christmas.

The next Board meeting will be on Wednesday 31 January 2024, 6pm at The Salvation Army Hall, Consett.