



Better for everyone

4 Together Partnership Area Action Partnership (AAP) Minutes of the Board Meeting Wednesday 7 February 2024 Dean Bank & Ferryhill Literary Institute

PRESENT:

Richard Morgan – Fire Service Representative, Victoria Murray – DCC Representative, Insp Mike Sammut – Police Representative, Carole Atkinson, Tony Cutmore, Susan Kirby, Oliver Peeke, Dennis Ramsey (**Chair**), Cllr Peter Atkinson – DCC, Cllr Curtis Bihari – DCC, Cllr Julie Cairns – DCC, Cllr Pauline Crathorne – Cornforth Parish Council, Cllr Elaine Peeke – DCC, Lee Copeland – Principal AAP Coordinator, Louise Porter – Principal Community Development Project Officer, Paula Nixon – Community Development Project Officer, Paula Stockport – AAP Support Officer

APOLOGIES:

Cllr Joe Quinn, Cllr Joe Makepeace, Nigel Jones, Mark Booth, Joanne Burnip

MEETING OBSERVERS:

Ms J Evans (DCC)

A1. Introductions & Apologies

DR opened the meeting of the 4 Together Partnership Board, and welcomed new 4 Together Partnership staff team member, Louise Porter, who has recently joined in the role of Principal Community Development Project Officer; a brief round of introductions was given.

LC confirmed that apologies for absence had been received, as above.

LC informed the Board that Anne Hall (Public Rep) has recently submitted her resignation. LC added that she has been in contact with the two Board members previously noted as having long-term non-attendance (David Stothard, Business Rep, and Liam Fellows, Public Rep) and taken their resignations from the Board also. LC will write out to the partner third of the Board shortly to coordinate a replacement Vice Chair rep and will also look at the position around replacing public reps (**Action 1: LC**).

DR asked whether Anne had given a reason for her resignation. LC clarified that she had felt our Board meetings had more of a political slant than she had anticipated when she originally applied to be a community representative. DR asked whether any other Board members have the same view in relation to meetings being over-political. Cllr PC commented that she feels they are, particularly for members coming onto the Board in the public rep role.

LC suggested that all Board members should aim to keep a closer eye on this going forward; the AAPs taking a non-political stance has always been at the forefront of what we do. LC encouraged any Board member who has any particular issues around the tone or content of meetings to please bring these to LC's attention so they can be dealt with before they escalate.

A2. Agreement of Minutes from Previous Meeting (1.11.23) - Matters Arising

LC reviewed the previous minutes for matters arising, actions and accuracy. There were no outstanding actions or other matters arising, and the minutes were **AGREED** as a true record.

A3. Countywide Partner Issues

LC clarified that no neighbourhood issues had been received in advance by the team. There were no additional partner updates.

A4. Local Neighbourhood Issues

A4.1 Neighbourhood Policing Update

Insp MS updated Board members in relation to crime trends and emerging issues. It was noted that there is a focus from Government in relation to shoplifting at the moment. A lot of work has also been done recently in relation to a large cannabis grow in Ferryhill, with a number of warrants issued. These grows often pose a huge fire risk, as well as the associated criminality linked to the individuals who are responsible, e.g. people smuggling etc. Insp MS asked people to be vigilant in keeping an eye out for any unusual activity around properties, people coming and going at random times etc.

In relation to antisocial behaviour, there continue to be issues with offroad bikes, especially in Chilton. Again, this is a national trend. Options for pursuit are limited due to the associated risks, and the police are looking into other tactics they can use, such as use of drones. As always, the biggest help is for members of the public to carry on reporting issues whenever they can. Cllr PA commented that it can often be difficult to get through using the 101 service when trying to provide information about offroad bikes. Insp MS suggested that if it's a crime in progress or there is a risk to public safety, then the best way to report this would be using 999.

Cllr CB raised an issue relating to a recent unauthorised traveller encampment in Ferryhill, which had caused significant problems in the local area. Insp MS commented that, in this particular case the land in question was privately owned and therefore the responsibility for taking action ultimately lies with the landowner. The police would only usually intervene via legislation in cases like this as an absolute last resort and where there was serious disorder, disruption or damage. It can often be the case that the encampment will simply move from one location to another. Ultimately DCC are the lead agency for dealing with these issues, the police are involved as a support agency but are not the decision-makers.

Cllr PC commented that people don't have the funds available to get these encampments to move on. Cllr PC feels the Police and DCC could have done more in this situation, which would potentially be deemed a health and safety hazard, with children and fires in the area. Cllr PA added that he feels the situation shouldn't have escalated as far as needing crowdfunding to support the removal of the encampment and feels that DCC and the police could have done

more. Insp MS noted that all agencies will take feedback and learn from what happened with this particular situation.

TC commented that Cornforth Partnership (or another representative in West Cornforth area such as the Parish Council or Tarmac) have recently been offered some CCTV cameras through the Police & Crime Commissioner, the primary focus for which would be helping tackle the ongoing issues with offroad bikes in West Cornforth. TC asked whether retrospective footage would be useful to the police if anything significant was captured. Insp MS would be happy with any footage that can identify people or vehicles.

[Insp MS left the meeting]

A5. Area & Neighbourhood Budget Update

A5.1 2023-24 Area Budget (AB) Funding Update

PN gave Board members a brief update in relation to this year's AB funding. Of the projects already approved by Board members, 6 have now received grant offer letters from the Funding Team. There's one project remaining which is still at technical appraisal and should hopefully be signed off soon.

PN noted that unfortunately two AB projects didn't come to fruition; Chilton Academy withdrew their application as they weren't in a position to progress within the required timescales (£19,500) – Board members have already agreed to reallocate this funding to the Towns & Villages schemes that have recently been approved by email to progress. The other project was for Bishop Middleham Parish Council (Wildlife Garden Regeneration), again this project was withdrawn by the applicant as they weren't in a position to progress with it. This leaves an AB underspend of £7,740 and we're awaiting guidance from the Funding Team as to whether there is potential for this to carry forward to 2024/25.

PN highlighted that the AAPs' Area Budget allocations for 2024/25 have just recently been confirmed; each AAP will have a total AB of £110k (£70k revenue, which is made up of £60k AB and £10k Youth Fund, £30k capital AB, and £10k poverty action funding). PN added that the team will be looking ahead to processes for 2024/25 allocation over the next few weeks and will keep Board members updated on progress with this.

A5.2 Neighbourhood Budget (NB) Update

PN noted that an updated summary of NB spend was circulated in advance with the meeting papers, for information. Overall, this continues to progress well, with a good mix of projects and groups supported.

PN confirmed that the 2024/25 allocation for NB will stay the same for elected members (£19,400).

PN noted that the team have received a lot of funding approaches/enquiries over the last few months, particularly from new groups, and it's always helpful if Cllrs can assist with letting groups know in the first instance what makes an eligible group. As always, PN is happy to offer advice and support, particularly for newly set up groups, so please signpost to PN if needed.

Cllr PA commented that there is potential for a significant pot of NB funding to be lost from the 4 Together Partnership area when the current number of Cllrs is

reduced from 2025/26. LC clarified that the future of Local Networks and what they will look like in terms of geography/boundaries will be linked to the Boundary review, so the position around funding amounts in each area is unclear at present.

A5.3 Community Engagement Review

LC updated Board members. In relation to AAP premises, the 4 Together team will no longer be based at the office in Haig Terrace in Ferryhill (this is linked to savings targets for the coming year and the withdrawal of premises budgets). Currently, two potential alternative locations are being considered for the team; Chilton Depot or Green Lane at Spennymoor. LC added that the AAP bases aren't intended to be open, public-facing offices. LC further added that as the AAPs transition to Local Networks, there will be more focus on community engagement work, with the teams being in their localities more frequently in any case, so the new bases are really more of a hub for the staff team.

LC highlighted that several different Review workstreams have been set up, looking at areas such as four-year Network plans and model, area profiles, staffing, Terms of Reference, partner specifications, public rep recruitment etc. There's a lot of work happening in the background, and LC is hopeful that we should have a formal update available for AAP Boards soon.

LC asked Board members to note that the office at Haig Terrace in Ferryhill is currently not accessible for either AAP staff or visitors due to a recent security incident which took place, and this is likely to be the case until we formally vacate at the end of March 2024.

A5.4 Towns & Villages (T&V) Funding Update

LC clarified that an email had recently gone to Board members in relation to the previously agreed Chilton Town Council project that was allocated T&V funding but could not progress. LC apologised for the tight timescale on this, and thanked Board members for their approval responses on how to reallocate the funding.

Cllr JC commented that Chilton wanted to be aspirational when submitting their project, but the T&V funding timescales didn't allow for that, and with hindsight they wouldn't have chosen such an ambitious project. Cllr JC expressed her disappointment that this funding (and also the AB funding previously agreed for Chilton Academy that Cllr JC wasn't aware had been withdrawn) has been lost to the area, which is a real kick in the teeth for Chilton. LC noted Cllr JC's frustration and disappointment; the applicant for the T&V project had been offered significant support from T&V officers throughout the process, but the deadlines for this funding were always very clear and there was no alternative under the circumstances to avoid this funding being lost to the 4 Together AAP area completely. LC added that there is always the potential for Community Resilience funding or even future Area Budget funding to support this project further down the line once it's in a position to move forward.

Cllr EP commented that she felt the recent Board email seeking a decision on reallocation of the T&V funding was too short notice with so much public money at stake. Cllr EP feels that some of the T&V projects now being considered weren't felt to represent good value for money by the panel members who met to review the original Expressions of Interest. LC noted Cllr EP's point about timescales, but this was unavoidable under the circumstances. LC further noted that none of the projects were rejected by the panel, they are all eligible, viable

projects and they will still go through robust technical appraisal by our Funding Team; copies of all panel member feedback will also be sent with the final applications when they are considered for technical appraisal.

PN noted that the situation had been made more complicated because the officers overseeing the T&V panel process chose not to follow our usual AB processes, despite advice from PN, which would have seen all projects scored and ranked against fixed criteria, rather than basing funding decisions on a general discussion, albeit with consensus agreements. This would have given a clearer steer of which projects were next in order of score/preference in the event of any projects being withdrawn or not being able to progress, as in the case of Chilton Town Council.

Cllr PC expressed concern that panel members didn't formally rank the EOIs, and doesn't feel this is a fair or transparent process, and OP agreed with this view. LC noted that lessons have been learned; the officers overseeing the T&V funding hadn't worked within our processes before, and we will ensure that we adhere to our usual ranking processes going forward.

Cllr CB commented from his perspective that he couldn't personally justify loss of funding to an area that has been deprived for so long when we have eligible projects available and ready to go.

[OP left the meeting]

A5.5 Fun & Food (F&F) Funding Update

LP gave a brief update. The February round of funding was completed recently, and 4 x organisations will be delivering activities in our area.

From Easter going forward, LP clarified that new guidance from the Dept for Education stipulates that the F&F funding should have a more targeted approach and be focused on supporting children in receipt of benefits-related free school meals, but a hybrid offer may be possible if organisations have additional funding. The closing date for Easter applications was today, and we have received 5 applications. LP will be meeting with F&F reps tomorrow and, depending on the final funding allocation we have for Easter, will be looking at potentially setting up a panel should we be oversubscribed.

Cllr JC asked whether we get the same organisations applying for the F&F funding every time. LP confirmed there is a new organisation this time round. LP's aim in the longer term will be to try and reach out to different organisations and see what we can do to encourage other groups to get involved. LP added that the revised funding criteria will see a requirement to work more closely with schools, and in particular those with high numbers of free school meal children.

TC noted that applications have dropped dramatically on this round in the East Durham Rural Corridor AAP area, presumably as a result of the new criteria, with some backlash that the funding is only available to support children in receipt of benefits-related free school meals. There are huge issues for people who will fall just short of this threshold and for those living in 'in-work' poverty who will miss out on funding. LC commented that these issues have been raised with the F&F Programme Manager who is well aware of the difficulties linked to such specific

criteria. The plan is to work through the process for Easter then come back together and review the position.

TC asked whether there would be scope to potentially earmark some AB from 2024/25 to use as match funding for the DFE funding to support those children who aren't eligible under the DFE criteria. PN noted that this would need to be a full Board decision and could be difficult depending on the very tight/fixed timescales linked to the F&F funding. LP added that it's important to note the F&F funding is about targeting now, not openly advertising, and the AAP will provide support to empower organisations and ensure they're sustainable going forward.

VM added that DCC's Poverty Action Group have recently applied for UK Shared Prosperity Funding (£1m) and have been working closely with the F&F Programme Manager to augment their proposal to reflect the recent changes imposed by the DFE, with the aim to use some of the funding to 'top up' some of this gap. Timings won't allow for any intervention for the Easter holiday period, but hopefully for the Summer holidays there should be scope to provide organisations with that additional funding so they can sustain an inclusive offer moving forward.

**A6. Date & Time of Next Meeting:
Wednesday 6 March 2024, 6:00pm (venue tbc)**

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