



Better for everyone

GREAT AYCLIFFE & MIDDRIDGE PARTNERSHIP (GAMP)

MINUTES OF THE BOARD MEETING TUESDAY 28 NOVEMBER 2023 (6:00PM) MICROSOFT TEAMS ONLINE MEETING

PRESENT:

Cllr Eddy Adam – DCC, Cllr Jim Atkinson – DCC (Vice Chair), Cllr Neville Jones – DCC, Cllr Ken Robson – DCC, Cllr David Sutton-Lloyd – DCC, Cllr Tony Towers – Midldridge Parish, Sue Cooke, Chris Hutchinson (Vice Chair), Peter Shovlin, Glenis Simmonds, Jeff Watson, Daniel Blagdon – Health Representative, Andy Coulthard – Livin Housing Representative (Chair), Insp Sarah Honeyman – Police, Andy Kerr – DCC Head of Service Representative, Malcolm Woodward – Fire Service Representative

OFFICER ATTENDANCE:

Brian Riley – GAMP Coordinator, Victoria Grieves – GAMP Community Development Project Officer, Paula Stockport – GAMP Support Officer

APOLOGIES:

Carol Gaskarth

OBSERVERS:

Mr B Adamson, Ms K Ward, Ms E Pattison, Mrs A Willis, Mr T Armstrong

Standard Board Meeting

1. Introductions & Apologies

AC opened the meeting, reminding Board members of the standard Declaration of Interest item on the agenda. AC 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 26.9.23 – Matters Arising

BR confirmed that the draft minutes from the Board meeting held on 26.9.23 had been circulated in advance with the meeting papers.

BR highlighted that there had been an action for AC to contact the Head of Partnerships & Community Engagement on behalf of the Board after the last meeting, to request an update in relation to the Community Engagement Review. AC confirmed that he had completed this action, but there has been no formal response to date.

There were no 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 DCC Budget Consultation (Andy Kerr)

Board members received a follow-up presentation after the presentation given at the last meeting, in relation to some additional savings options to help reduce the forecast budget shortfall.

The consultation asked the following questions of the AAP:

- Our proposed approach to balance the budget further has identified additional savings needed of £1.9 million in 2024/25 and £2.9 million across the four-year period from savings from back office and making efficiencies, raising additional income and changes to delivering frontline services – what is the AAP 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?

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

- Cllr EA highlighted one point he felt worth making from GAMP point of view, in relation to the Local Co Tax Reduction Scheme. DCC are proposing to reduce funding to local Town & Parish Councils. From a Great Aycliffe Town Council (GATC) perspective this means they would lose £100k in finance from DCC, and will have to raise Co Tax as a Town Council by 3% (possibly even slightly more), over and above the 2.5% it would normally be raised by at this time of year, therefore in the region of 5-6% of Council Tax going up for GATC. DCC want to save £375k from this, which is a relative drop in the ocean versus the overall £8m target, but this will greatly impact on local residents in terms of their Council Tax going up. Rather than doing that why don't DCC raise their Co Tax across the board to achieve similar income but from a larger pot, with therefore less impact on local residents within Newton Aycliffe? AK – will note this point about the greater local impact rather than taking Co Tax from across the whole County, and take this back to finance colleagues.
- Cllr KR commented in terms of the proposed increase to parking charges in Durham, some £800k is spent on Lumiere for example, how essential is this and could consideration be given to not supporting this going forward as an alternative to increasing parking charges which may potentially have a greater impact on more residents? AK – note the point. In terms of Lumiere, this is a biannual event and clearly there is a cost to DCC, however lots of analysis work is done in terms of what the festival brings to the area, not just in terms of revenue but raising the profile of the area etc, and any future decisions around Lumiere will clearly have to be balanced in difficult financial circumstances. Everything will be on the table for consideration when DCC are looking at the scale of savings needed.
- Cllr JA commented that we've already had a lot of consultation around the budgets, e.g. senior representatives attended a recent GATC meeting and we've had previous presentations at our Board meeting. DCC use the word 'consultation' but it seems clear to me from all of the recent discussions that

things have basically already been looked at. Whilst I appreciate your presentation, in terms of 'consultation' when you look at things like inflation, is there any scope realistically for us to help? At the end of the day Cabinet will tell us what we're doing anyway. AK – Councils have a statutory duty to consult. Cabinet have a lot of difficult decisions going forward around how to balance budgets, and we're keen to do this from as informed a position as we can. It's a very challenging picture without a huge amount of wriggle room, we're still not able to tackle the full savings target but this will get us closer to where we need to be.

- Meeting Observer TA commented in relation to the upcoming A167 changes taking place, and the £7m govt housing infrastructure funding to change the road there and put crossings in (linked to the new housing development at Low Copelaw), this sounds wonderful and should be applauded. But how do the different departments within DCC, and their funding streams, cross over, are they separate pots? TA has been petitioning for a pedestrian crossing at Central Avenue but has been told there isn't enough traffic/pedestrians for this to be warranted, yet there can be a crossing at the A167? TA commented on another example around funding, being the new cycle path from Aycliffe Village to Moore Lane, which is around 1 mile in length and cost £300k+, but isn't really being used. In TA's view the funding could have been better spent. AK – this consultation is around the revenue position for DCC. Capital projects are separate to this (HIF fund for example is external, which DCC successfully secured from Homes England). Decisions around pedestrian crossings are considered from capital transport budgets, and are made as & when. With new housing developments, there is often S106 funding available for the associated highways improvements. This consultation is around existing budgets. The cycle lane referenced will have come through external funding, which is often the nature of how funding comes down from central govt.
- Meeting Observer TA noted that it's a shame DCC got rid of the speed/traffic cameras in the City Centre. There are a lot of places elsewhere in the country, e.g. Newcastle City Centre, where local authorities probably generate significant income from speeding fines, but DCC appear to have abandoned that.
- Cllr TT commented that as a County we seem to be a bit lax on fining poorly parked vehicles especially outside of schools, and this could be a potential income generator. Also, as an example, Edinburgh Council are now fining motorists who park on pavements, which is a danger to the public. AK – the costs associated with enforcement can be a factor, will take the point back.
- Cllr EA commented in relation to Cabinet's proposal to cut £10k from each AAP's Area Budget, believing this will have a negative impact on our communities going forward. AAP funding is used to support the most vulnerable in our communities, and the impact going forward may in fact increase costs for DCC picking up the pieces, Cllr EA sees this as a really negative move. We need to make sure we can spend funding locally, we as an AAP know the local issues, and in Cllr EA's view it would be beneficial for us to retain that funding as an AAP.

AK highlighted that the closing date for responses is 3 December 2023; further information is available via the website:

<https://www.durham.gov.uk/consultation>

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

- Update from DCC Consultations team (26.10.23);
- GAMP Q2 project update reports (3.11.23);
- DCC Housing Strategy / Homelessness & Rough Sleeping consultation info (8.11.23);
- Director of Public Health Annual Report (21.11.23);
- A167 upgrade info (22.11.23).

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

Insp SH updated Board members in relation to local PACT priorities, PACT meeting dates and current/emerging issues.

Insp SH gave a brief update on staffing; the picture will hopefully be improving for the New Year.

In terms of new premises for the policing team, Insp SH confirmed that they will temporarily be based at Glow (Xcel Centre) for around 12-18 months, probably from January 2024. The longer-term position is still to be determined and will be a decision for the Police & Crime Commissioner and the new Chief Constable.

Insp SH confirmed that this year's Christmas grotto will be held on 9 and 10 December at the Big Club, in conjunction with Community Spirit – it will be a free event for all the family with raffles/fundraising for local charities, so please come along and spread the word.

Meeting observer TA commented that there are problems with quads/offroad bikes in various areas, would it not be possible for the police to use offroad bikes to get out and apprehend these people? Insp SH commented that Operation Endurance, which covers the whole force area, can use bikes however for a number of reasons, pursuing people is not always an option. The police are currently looking into securing funding to use drones going forward, which could follow the offroad bikes more easily. Local intelligence is also invaluable, with people continuing to report what they see.

Insp SH confirmed that a copy of her update report will be circulated with the minutes, for information.

BR confirmed that he has recently received some Local Neighbourhood Issues from a GAMP resident, Mrs Alison Willis, to bring to the Board. BR will formulate a response to the points raised on behalf of the Board after the meeting.

- The foul odour emissions coming from Warren's Emerald Biogas, which have been occurring for years now, and particularly noticeable to those in the Simpasture area.
- The proposed moving of the police station. We need a better, stronger more noticeable police force in Newton Aycliffe, not one that is stationed too far away to be of any use.
- Parking issues in various streets. Why can't some of the grass verges be removed to provide better, safer and more car parking spaces? I live in Bewick Crescent and the parking on an evening is ridiculous.

- Grass cutting in various areas leaves a lot to be desired. They randomly cut parts of the green, leaving other parts uncut then the grass is left in piles to blow everywhere.
- Why is it that Newton Aycliffe always misses out on the Levelling Up money grants that other local towns such as Bishop Auckland and Spennymoor seem to receive, is Newton Aycliffe not as important?

BR will formulate a response, in conjunction with the Chair, and respond back to Mrs Willis (**Action 1: BR**).

AK commented in relation to the Levelling Up query; DCC was successful in Round 1, securing funding for Bishop Auckland. Another 5 bids were submitted for the second round of funding, but all were unsuccessful. After the event it was clarified that the Government had decided not to fund any places that had been successful in Round 1, so DCC were never going to be successful in Round 2. For Round 3, it has been announced recently that there would be no bidding process at all, and again DCC were unsuccessful and awaiting guidance on those decisions. Separate to the Levelling Up funding, the Government has recently allocated £20m to Spennymoor (from their Towns Programme), DCC weren't given any information about this in advance, the Government had decided to target to 55 towns across the country, Spennymoor being one of them.

5. **GAMP Coordinator's Update**

5.1 2023-24 Funding Update

Area Budget (AB)

All of this year's applications have now received their grant offer letters. The Board has supported x13 projects this year, some of which may have very recently started, and some which will be coming online over the next few weeks, so Board members will be receiving quarterly progress updates going forward for these new projects. BR noted that there has been a good range of projects and groups supported this year.

BR reminded Board members that they're welcome to carry out a visit to any 'live' projects they may have a particular interest in, please contact the GAMP team to arrange.

Neighbourhood Budget (NB)

Cllrs' NB spend continues to progress steadily. BR highlighted that Cllrs are permitted to roll any unallocated NB from this financial year into next year, but this will of course be the last year of the current electoral term and no further carry forward will be possible. BR asked Cllrs to bear this in mind with a view to allocating their NB funding sooner rather than later. VG will continue to support Cllrs with the NB process going forward.

Towns & Villages (T&V)

Each AAP received an allocation of £210k to support local Towns & Villages schemes back in 2021-22. BR confirmed that the final funding application which will see our T&V budget fully allocated is currently with our Funding Team undergoing technical appraisal. In total the Board supported x8 local schemes:

- Burnhill Way Footway Lighting – complete.
- Cricket Club Changing Room refurb – complete.
- School Aycliffe Community Centre toilet refurb – complete.
- Byerley Park Footpath Improvements – complete.
- SUDS Nature Reserve Improvements – almost finished, a couple of minor jobs still left to complete.
- Western Area Footbridge refurbishments – complete.
- Gardeners Guild – this group required a lot of background support from Angela Blanchard, but are now in a position to get started.
- Aycliffe Footpaths – currently at technical appraisal.

BR noted that our T&V link officer, Angela Blanchard, has recently secured alternative employment, so the GAMP team will be mopping up any ongoing T&V-related issues and future monitoring for these schemes.

Fun & Food

BR clarified that AAPs receive two different funding allocations to cover the various school holiday periods throughout the year – funding from the Dept for Education which covers Easter, Summer and Christmas, whilst funding from DCC's Poverty Action Steering Group covers the x3 half-term periods.

The funding window for Christmas was open recently, and we will be supporting x2 projects to deliver during this holiday period.

BR reminded Board members to support the promotion of this funding when each funding window is open.

5.2 2024-25 GAMP Priorities

BR asked Board members to consider the GAMP priorities for 2024-25. In line with a recent Cabinet report, flexibility for the final year of AAPs before they transition to Local Networks had been given, allowing Boards to determine their local priorities based on local need for the final year of annual Area Budget.

As Coordinator, BR proposed that we keep the same overarching 'Community Recovery' priority with the previously agreed subthemes:

- Employability initiatives
- Advice and Guidance
- Mental health & wellbeing
- Organisational sustainability
- Food provision and support
- Social Isolation
- Support for the Voluntary and Community Sector
- Tackling antisocial behaviour
- Support to small businesses (through a third party, not-for-profit organisation to complement existing DCC and external opportunities)
- Older peoples social isolation

- providing positive and sound outcomes in relation to the Welfare Reform Agenda and the impact of Welfare Reform on individuals or communities
- Emerging community issues

BR believes these key issues give us broad enough scope to address a wide range of community issues, which has been demonstrated through the range of projects we have supported since we implemented the Community Recovery priority in 2020.

Board members **AGREED** to continue with the Community Recovery priority for 2024-25. BR noted that once we have our budgets confirmed from April 2024, he will be keen to get started on our project callout straight away.

5.3 Community Engagement Review

BR gave a brief update on work that's been taking place around the setting up of various workstreams relating to the Review:

- funding
- comms & branding
- people
- governance (ToR)
- model
- consultation

BR highlighted that from April next year, some AAPs who are based in premises that aren't DCC-owned will be relinquishing their premises budgets, to support the Council's MTFP savings targets. GAMP is one of those AAPs, so from April next year we will no longer be based at the Pioneering Care Centre; BR noted thanks to Carol Gaskarth and the Pioneering Care Centre team for their hospitality over the last 13 years or so. DCC are working to find alternative accommodation for those AAP teams affected, and the guidance from Cabinet is to try and house teams within their geographical area or as close to as possible.

BR also highlighted that, linked to the upcoming outcome of the Boundary Commission consultation, there could be scope to look at how the revised boundaries could potentially marry with the further AAP savings targets.

BR noted that some back-office changes arising from the Review have already taken place, mainly around funding approvals processes.

AAP Coordinators are having their first full team get together tomorrow on the Review, so hopefully BR should have more to update Board members on going forward. AC asked if the Board could have a brief bullet-point summary from BR if there's anything material to update on ahead of the next board meeting; BR will arrange (**Action 2: BR**).

Meeting observer TA asked if BR feels the proposed change in structure for AAPs will affect your powers as an organisation going forward? BR responded that there are no major differences at the moment, but clearly we will have to wait & see. If the number of Elected Members is reduced in any given area, then clearly the corresponding funding in that area will also be reduced.

Meeting observer TA asked about allocation of Cllr/GAMP funding, noting for example that street lighting has recently been funded, but funding for a traffic

crossing doesn't appear to be an option that could be supported. BR clarified that Cllrs' Neighbourhood Budget funding is allocated solely at their own discretion. Anyone with a potential request for funding is more than welcome to contact the relevant Cllrs for that respective ward/area to enquire about funding support.

5.4 2024 Board Meeting Dates

BR noted that a copy of the schedule/dates for our 2024 Board meetings was circulated in advance with your meeting papers and asked all Board members to make a note of the dates.

6. **Date/Time of Next Meeting:
Tue 30 January 2024, 6:00pm, Microsoft Teams**

AC/BR thanked all attendees, and the meeting was closed.