

**3 Towns Partnership Board Meeting
5.30pm on Thursday 11 July at Crook Civic Centre**

PRESENT:

Partner Organisations

Michael Summat
Graham Tomaszko

Public Representatives

Pauline Moger
Fiona Nicol
Dianne Mackay
David Dixon

Elected Members

Councillor Richard Manchester, Durham County Council
Councillor Mike Currah, Durham County Council
Councillor Fraser Tinsley, Durham County Council
Councillor Olwyn Gunn, Durham County Council
Councillor Paul Stokes, Tow Law Town Council

Co-opted Members

Councillor Angela Smith, GWTC Elected Member

Officer Attendance:

| | |
|-----------------|---------------------------------------|
| Sandy Denney | AAP Coordinator |
| Nicola Woodgate | Community Development Project Officer |
| Sue Richardson | AAP Support Officer |

Presenters:

Scott McNally, Durham County Council, Welfare Rights
Sandy Denney, AAP Boundary Review
Michael Summat, Locality Policing Update

Public Attendance:

5 members of the public were in attendance

Apologies:

Rachel Farnham, Durham County Council, Mary Hall, Cllr Patricia Jopling, Cllr Anne Reed, Jono Holmes, Liz Bradley, Helen Ward, Chris Ebdon

The meeting is not quorate so any decisions taken by the board will be circulated electronically for agreement.

A1. Welcome and Introductions

OG opened the meeting, thanked the Board for attending and also welcomed Angela Smith and Insp. Mike Summat to their first meeting.

A2. Agreement of minutes from the previous meeting 16 May 2024 – Matters Arising

The minutes from the last meeting were agreed as a true and accurate record.

A3. Countywide Partners

SMc gave a presentation on Welfare Rights, Welfare Benefit and Debt Management Information, Advice and Guidance Consultation. The consultation is available on the DCC website and hard copies are available from libraries. The background, and purpose of the consultation was discussed. The deadline is 5pm on 20 September 2024. The consultation will be used alongside other sources and partners to develop the new offer for 2025/26.

SMc opened the floor to questions:

- **Since CA withdrew from Tow Law is there any way to arrange drop-in sessions?**
The CA is centralized at present and telephone advice only at present.
- **How can people find out about the consultation and offer details? Could access be widened?**
Information is available on the DCC website, but most are from other organisations.
- **Can you describe the relationship between CA and DWP? Do they signpost to you?**
They are our partners, but they do not signpost to CA directly as they do not promote individual organisations. There is a good working relationship in the main, but it can become adversarial in tribunals.
- **Are there enough resources to have a physical person on site?**
Since the opening hours were amended there is less physical presence and resources are limited.
- **It's likely that a lot of people will not complete the form. Will this go directly to community groups in the 3 Towns Area?**
Yes, there are also consultation questions for organisations, charities and advice providers and they have been asked to cascade to service users. Advice in County Durham have 170-200 diverse organisation with a wide reach.
- **We weren't aware of the consultation. Hard copies would be helpful. Our numbers have doubled because DWP refer people to us partly due to the transition to Universal Credit. Is it possible to have hard copies? We**

have a large reach and would be able to assist with the completion of forms.

Yes.

- **How will you reach people at home who are housebound?**
- **CA was successful and would refer people to GWTC.**
- **With limited staff, prioritising vulnerable people may be overlooked.**
- **Are there any resources to support people with the completion of forms?**

The consultation and partnership team are working on it. There should be a good reach.

OG – could the board promote the consultation and urge people to complete the forms?

Local Network Boundary Consultation

SD gave a presentation on the Local Networks Boundary Consultation. She described the changes that were proposed for the 3 Towns area, the majority of the 3 Towns area (the new Crook and Willington and Hunwick wards) will sit within Local Network H, along with the electoral wards of Brandon, Deerness, Lanchester and Burnhope, Langley and Esh. This will form a LN with a population of approx. 58,500. Tow Law town will join Local Network L along with the rest of the new Weardale division, forming a LN with a population of approx. 9,600.

SD encouraged all Board and Forum members to complete the consultation by visiting the website on the presentation, emailing cer@durham.gov.uk or completing the paper copies of the questionnaire, available at the meeting.

Action – AAP team to circulate the presentation to the Board and Forum members in attendance.

SD invited comments from the Board. A question was asked regarding the decisions that have already been made to inform these changes. OG explained that a constituency boundary review and local government boundary review had taken place. The local government boundary changes resulted in a reduction of councillors from 126 to 98. This is due to take effect from the local elections in May 25.

SD opened the floor to comments:

- Is this a “done deal” and a system to dismantle AAP’s?
- The consultation is politically motivated and already a ‘done deal’ AAPs are a recognised model which has been recognised nationally and internationally as a positive way to engage communities. The change from 14 AAPs to 12 Local

networks doesn't appear to achieve anything- unsure as to where the cost savings are being proposed.

- Cost savings are understandable but reducing the number of AAP's will not achieve this.
- It is illogical how the numbers have been decided and could result in less money across the area.
- Previously boundaries were made on connections between areas however there is no connections between the 3 Towns areas and the wards that we are proposed to be merged with.
- Geographical, family and social relationships currently exist but there will be no connections with Ushaw Moor for example.
- Would they consider including the old 3 Towns with Weardale where there is more natural connectivity?
- It seems much more logical to link 3 Towns and Weardale areas, they have a connection, and this would give a population size of approx. 35k .
- Tow Law will be at a disadvantage if it is disconnected from their existing links to services and community engagement.
- Removing Tow Law from the area that they have worked with during the last 15 years is ludicrous.
- Definitely makes more sense to align with Weardale
- The understanding of the communities, the cohesiveness of this AAP could be threatened by the perceived differences with the new areas.
- The hill top areas, have daily connections with Tow Law currently. The proposals will make Tow Law even more isolated.
- The number of towns and villages in a proposed local network should also be taken into consideration, not only population size. Towns and villages generally mean more organisation which would make it more difficult in terms of budget allocations.
- Why are Weardale and Teasdale not together?
- I don't think this will work and it will have an impact on the public.
- The proposal for 3 Towns will mean a doubling of the population but with the same budgets available.
- It seems illogical – Teesdale population size is reducing and Weardale seems to be about the same.
- One board member stated that geographically the distance from Crook to Tow Law and Crook to Esh Winning are similar. However, he knows a lot of people from Tow Law but no-one from Esh Winning.
- The proposals are a shocking indictment of inclusivity of communities.
- If the aim is to improve community engagement rather than cost cutting, I can't see how this will improve communications/connections when Tow Law will be isolated within a rural area. Weardale and Teasdale together would make more sense. The population size will increase demand on community resources, and I'm not convinced this will be an improvement. It will make it more difficult for communities. Is it possible to create a Task Group to discuss

further? SD explained that we had been informed that this meeting was the opportunity for the Board to have their say, alongside the electronic survey. It was commented that this was restricting the opportunities for the Board to make comments – especially as the meeting is not quorate tonight. This is not a way to consult and provide an opportunity for open and free discussion.

- Nothing gives me optimism that this will improve community support to all communities. 3 Towns is a cohesive group which works together despite political differences. There is respect and voices, representing the community, are heard. This makes me upset; it fractures community support and people who need it most will suffer.
- Can we have the results of the consultation in full and if everyone says “no” will we be able to see it?
OG informed the board that all consultations are published in Cabinet reports and will be publicly available.
- Can we meet informally to consider a comprehensive response from the Board?
- There is a strong bond in the 3 Towns Area of networks, schools and this doesn't make much sense. A cross-party statement including County, Town and Parish Councillors will have an impact.
- County and Town councillors present agreed to look to arrange a meeting to put together a 3 Towns cross party response to the consultation.
- Will the AAP respond with a summary of this meeting?
SD confirmed all comments are being recorded.
- Can we take a vote to agree that we disagree with the proposals?
- A query was raised as to whether the new larger areas would have the same budget levels as now given the bigger areas? SD confirmed this to be the case, highlighting that all AAPs currently have the same budgets, with differing sized areas.
- Do we know how Mid-Durham feel about the proposals?
The group was advised that Mid-Durham meets next week.
- Why does this consultation have to be rushed through?
- Can meetings or events be held in 3 Towns area to discuss further and gain more responses? I'm concerned about the timing over the summer holidays. How can funding decisions be made centrally?
- It would be helpful to have information about other areas. I have real concerns about what is being put forward and there is not enough information available.
- The proposals make no sense and should be reconsidered.
- Can there be a collaborative, cross party response to express objections. Could this be an open meeting with other AAP's?
- Can I suggest, as a Board, that we propose joining with Weardale?
- Can we be more specific? Tow Law will be disadvantaged by aligning with Weardale. I'm concerned that the understanding of communities and cohesiveness will be threatened. There are clear differences in the areas. Tow Law will be out on a limb.
- The decision to split the hilltop villages makes no logical sense.

- What is the reason for the deadline of 18 August, given that the other presentation heard tonight doesn't close until mid September? The timing of the consultation was also commented upon during the peak holiday season. OG clarified that this will be to give time to process the response and prepare the cabinet papers for the November meeting.
- There is not enough information or time to formulate a detailed response to the consultation.
- We can put something together to oppose the current proposal and realign with Weardale including Tow Law?
- As part of his Local Policing Report, Inspector Mike Summat stated that police boundaries had not changed and are still aligned with Crook, Willington and Weardale.

The proposal was put forward for the board to agree a joint statement from the 3 Towns Board. SD reminded the Board that this would need to be ratified by email as the meeting is not quorate.

'The 3 Towns Board oppose the current proposals and agree that they should be realigned with Weardale division as an alternative.'

Action – 3 Towns Team to circulate the proposed statement to the full Board for agreement given that the meeting is not quorate.

A4. Local Neighbourhood Issues

Neighbourhood Budget Applications and Neighbourhood Budget Report

NW reminded the Board that there had been recent changes to the process. NW referred to the details in the NB update available. There have been 2 applications circulated electronically since the last meeting. She then presented 4 Neighbourhood Budgets (for information only) and directed the Board to the report in their packs.

1. Hoop Fencing, Durham County Council

Councillors Olwyn Gunn and Fraser Tinsley

NB £6,722 (£3,361 each); Match £0; Total £6,722

Good idea, very welcome.

2. Memorial Bench, High West Road, Crook, Durham County Council

Councillor Mike Currah

NB £1,925.28; Match £0; Total £1,925.28

No comments were made.

3. Crook Festive Lights, Durham County Council

Councillors Mike Currah, Patricia Jopling, Anne Reed

NB £3,980 (£1,326 each); Match £0; Total £3,980

No comments were made.

4. Footpath Improvements – Willington, Durham County Council Councillors Olwyn Gunn, Fraser Tinsley

NB £7,012.28 (£3,506 each): Match £0: Total £7,012.28

No comments were made

A5. Priorities and Action Plans

Action Plan and Project Updates

SD gave **Call 4 Project Funding** updates: 9 applications were reviewed at panel on the 10 July, 8 were approved and 1 was declined. SD will email the list to board members once all successful applicants have been informed. £89,885.73 was allocated (£14,833.73 capital and £75,072 revenue) with match funding of £119,918. There is £34,398.97 still available (£15,166.27 capital and £19,231.70 revenue).

OG thanked the members of the panel.

Big Arts fund (£10,000) has been fully allocated.

Fun and Food - £4664.81 has been allocated and £69,941.19 still available for Christmas.

SD discussed options for remaining budget allocations.

Potential projects may be developed following the Transport Task and Finish group. If not, a call for projects could go out again in September with all submissions to the Funding Team before December.

SD asked the board if they could consider:

Should there be a call out for projects?

The board agreed - yes, subject to any issues raised in the Transport T&F group.

Should there be a smaller limit?

The board agreed - yes, up to £10,000

Should previous successful applicants be excluded from this round?

The board agreed to use wording "all applications welcome but if there are insufficient funds, previous successful applicants may not be considered."

SD discussed the Transport Task Group.

The Transport Task and Finish group meeting is taking place on Thursday 18 July, 2pm – 3.30pm in the Welfare Space at Crook Civic Centre. SD encouraged people to attend where possible.

A6. Countywide Partners

Local Policing Update

MS gave a policing update:

The following statistics were provided for the Crook/Tow Law area:

Crime generally down 2%

Violent crime down 9%

Theft up 18%

There have been some good results in Willington following a spike in car and shed break-ins. 1 person has been arrested. The police are working with partners to advise residents to lock doors and cars. Willington has been identified as an area needing attention and extra patrols are taking place.

2 Drones will become available within 4-5 months following training. They will offer a good geographical range and good quality footage.

RM asked if this would be a rolling programme of training going forward. MS – yes, to respond to improved tech and to ensure officers are available.

MS was informed about issues at traffic lights on the High Street, Willington where cars are speeding up as they approach the lights. He suggested if people could identify the driver or record the registration it can be followed up.

MS was asked if he was able to provide statistics around the speed van. The group was advised that funding will end in April 2025.

A7. Date and time of next meeting

5.30pm on Thursday 19 September 2024 at Crook Civic Centre