

**3 Towns Partnership Board Meeting  
5.30pm on Thursday 10 October via Teams**

**PRESENT:**

**Partner Organisations**

Rachel Farnham, Durham County Council  
Liz Bradley, Believe Housing  
Graham Tomaszko, Business Representative  
Grant Cockerill, Police Representative

**Public Representatives**

Pauline Moger  
David Dixon  
Mary Hall  
Dianne Mackay

**Elected Members**

Councillor Paul Stokes, Tow Law Town Council  
Councillor Richard Manchester, Durham County Council  
Councillor Olwyn Gunn, Durham County 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:**

Joanne McMahon, Finance Manager, Durham County Council

**Public Attendance:**

1 person

**Apologies:**

Councillor Anne Reed, Jono Holmes, Insp. Mike Sammut, Chris Ebdon, Jay Conlon, Fiona Nicol, Councillor Fraser Tinsley, Councillor Mike Currah, Helen Ward

**A1. Welcome and Introductions**

MH (chair) opened the meeting and thanked everyone for attending. Welcome to Rachel Farnham to her first 3 Towns Board Meeting as the DCC Head of Service and to Joanne McMahon, Finance Manager, Durham County Council. Group introductions made.

**A2. Countywide Partners**

JMc gave a presentation on the **2025/2026 County Council Forecast Revenue Budget Consultation**

JMc opened the floor to questions:

The following comments were received:

- There was an acknowledgment that statutory services cannot be cut.
- **How much would a 2.99% increase in Council Tax affect the public.**  
Band A residents will see a £38.55 increase per annum.
- The council tax costs affect everyone- children, young people and adults.  
Board members were encouraged to complete the online consultation.
- There are difficult decisions to be made but people will struggle with an increase of £38.55 and this will hit vulnerable people and people in deprived areas across the North East. **Could concerns be expressed to the current Government?**  
Discussions are already taking place.
- Concerns were expressed about inflation, food, heating and this will create even tighter household budgets. Although the Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme is available to low-income households, there are concerns for fixed income homes where financial support may not be available.
- **Would any further help be forthcoming from the Government?** DCC has managed budgets well. Moving to a Unitary Authority meant it was possible to manage budgets in a way, other Local Authorities have been unable to do. It is important to get the budget for Childrens Social Care right as this could incur further costs in the future as a result of lack of support for children during their early years. Council Tax Reduction is a mainstay in supporting vulnerable people. The public may not fully understand the implications on council tax bands in the income that the council receive. **Are we paying higher Council Tax than other Local Authorities?** As a result of the differences in council tax income due to the bands of properties within their areas, comparisons are difficult between different areas. It is difficult to plan without a multi-year plan and not knowing what the government settlement will be year to year. We have just elected a North East Mayor, regions with a regional mayor have access to additional streams of funding. **Will there be any further funding going forward from this source?**  
JMc responded that she wasn't sure about funding from the North East Mayoral Authority but she will provide a written response  
**Action – JMc to provide a written response to the Board on the funding which may be available from the North East Mayoral Authority**

- There is little that could be done about Council Tax bands but there should be improved clarity, transparency and information for residents.

MH thanked JMc for the presentation.

The consultation is now available on [www.durham.gov.uk/consulation](http://www.durham.gov.uk/consulation) and will also be circulated to Board members. JMc suggested reading the Cabinet Papers will be useful. They are available on DCC website. Feedback from the consultation will be presented at Cabinet on 4 December 2024. A further consultation period will take place throughout December and January and a budget report presented to Cabinet on 12 February 2025 and Full Council on 19 February 2025.

### **A3. Priorities and Action Plans**

SD gave a Call 4 Projects Funding update. Round 2 had an available budget of £34k of which £19,231.70 Revenue and £15,166.27 Capital.

Three completed applications were received with a total revenue request of £27,688.50. There were no capital requests. Appraisal queries have been sent to applicants and the Board funding panel is scheduled for 6 November, 2pm-3.30pm at Crook Civic Centre.

SD asked the board to consider three proposals for the remaining capital budget:

1. Round 3 Call Out for Projects based on capital only to be launched tomorrow, Friday 11 October to ensure all completed applications are submitted to the funding team before Christmas. This would require volunteers for panel week commencing 9 December.
2. The caveat applied to Round 2 around preference given to new applicants be removed and therefore to include all organisations.
3. The upper limit, previously of £10k, be removed. The existing minimum application will remain at £5k.

The board agreed all three proposals.

.A4. Date and time of next meeting

**5.30pm on Thursday 14 November 2024 at Crook Civic Centre**