

3 Towns Partnership Board Meeting
5.30pm on Thursday, 14 November at Crook Civic Centre

PRESENT:

Partner Organisations

Rachel Farnham, Durham County Council
Graham Tomaszko, Business Representative
Inspector Michael Sammut, Police Representative

Public Representatives

Pauline Moger
Dianne Mackay
David Dixon
Chris Ebdon
Mary Hall (Chair)

Elected Members

Councillor Olwyn Gunn, Durham County Council (Vice Chair)
Councillor Anne Reed, Durham County Council
Councillor Fraser Tinsley, Durham County Council
Councillor Paul Stokes, Tow Law Town Council
Councillor Richard Manchester, Durham County Council

Co-opted Members

Councillor Angela Smith, Elected Member, Greater Willington Town Council

Officer Attendance:

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

Presenters:

Jenna Worthington, Durham County Council Poverty Action Lead

Public Attendance:

6 Persons

Apologies:

Liz Bradley, Partner Representative Believe Housing
Jay Conlon, Public Representative
Jill Mathewson, DDES
Councillor Mike Currah, Durham County Council
Helen Ward, VCS Representative
Jono Homes, Fire Service

A1. Welcome and Introductions

MH (Chair) opened the meeting and thanked everyone for attending. Introductions were made.

A2. Agreement of minutes from previous meeting from 11 July 2024. Matters arising.

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

Matters Arising: FT raised the Local Network Boundary Consultation. Suggestions from the Special Meeting in October were not taken forward and he expressed serious concerns going forward. OG advised there is no right to appeal but it would be interesting to review the statistics in respect of the decision to see if it can be challenged. MH – confirmed there is no right to appeal and expressed the importance of engaging with the public and organisations moving forward. The Cabinet meeting is available on You Tube.

SD to distribute the Full Board Report once available.

Countywide Partners

- Poverty Action Strategy and Action Plan Progress Update – Jenna Worthington, DCC Poverty Action Lead

Jenna Worthington gave a presentation on the Poverty Strategy and Action Plan – progress update and invited questions:

Is there a definition of the term “absolute poverty” as mentioned in the presentation?

Yes, where people cannot afford their home, food or other basic necessities.

Action: SD to circulate official definitions

Thank you for the presentation – how many staff work in Welfare Rights? I’d like to know what their capacity is.

Action: Unsure, JW will provide update when known.

There are already several voluntary organisations and charities working in this area already providing alternative provision – is this reflected in the statistics? Could you let us know if there is still funding provided for Citizens Advice and Age UK. They are reliant on funding by DCC.

There are 4 groups who continue to receive funding and Age UK have been very helpful in the Pension Credit campaign.

Is the impact of poverty on children accessing education considered?

Education is crucial and schools are doing a great job.

Changes to the Free School Meals process provides help to parents and schools. Auto enrolment of free school meals has massively helped rather than people having to apply, with very little opt out (1%). This also brings increased amounts of pupil premium to schools as well.

Why did this not happen before?

There were some restrictions on data provided from DWP. Those restrictions still exist in post 16 education, but they are working on this.

Is this information available on a Ward-to-Ward level and is it know to wider voluntary groups? The Voluntary sector need access to the data to enable them to strengthen their bids.

Action: Not known but will respond.

If for example, someone presents at a Foodbank, other support may be identified and signposted. The £10,000 Welfare Reform Funding has been vital in the 3 Towns area and there are some concerns going forward.

Is there a target for reducing poverty? Lack of employment opportunities is a factor.

No specific target, just an overall reduction to give people pathways out of poverty.

For information, FISO has been extended until March 2026.

Action: SD will circulate a copy of the presentation to the Board.

A3. Local Neighbourhood Issues

Neighbourhood Budget Applications and Neighbourhood Budget report (NW, CDPO) NW referred to the details in the NB update available as electronic or paper copy.

The Board was reminded that this is the final year of Councillor's term, so projects need to be signed off as soon as possible.

1 project has been circulated for approval since the last meeting but has since been withdrawn and money will be reallocated.

AR thanked the 3 Towns team for their support.

A4. Priorities and Action Plans

- 3 Towns Partnership Budget update

SD referred to the circulated budget report showing the allocation for 2024/2025:

Combined Area Budget - £124,283.70

Big Arts Fund - £10,000

Fun and Food - £74,606

Allocated so far:

Area Budget - £99,885.73

Arts Fund - £10,000 Big

Fun and Food - £6,333.63

There have been 4 Fun and Food projects.

9 Area Budget Projects with additional match funding of £121,918.38.

Project breakdown: 2 for older people and social isolation, 1 young people, 4 relating to poverty support and 2 allotment projects relating to mental and physical wellbeing. Good geographical spread across the area.

- Call 4 Project Round 2 Funding Panel update

SD thanked the panel for attending the meeting last week - 3 applications were reviewed and DCP for Community Money Advice were successful.

This means that there is £15,166.27 capital and £9,231.70 revenue/capital, totalling £24,397.97 still to allocate.

- Call for Project Capital Round 3

Applications closed on 5 November 2024 and there were 5 applications to consider totalling £53,620.34. The projects have been appraised and queries sent to applicants. Volunteers are required for panel for the first week in December.

- Transport Task Group Update

Transport issues were identified at the Networking Event in February 2024 and the first meeting of the Transport Task and Finish Group took place in July 2024. It was decided that there was no merit in arranging a further meeting in the immediate future but that it could be considered again by the Local Network going forward. SD met with Craig Rutherford, Durham County Council about access issues and he provided a list of accessible taxis. This is updated monthly on the DCC website. Craig confirmed there was a national shortage.

OG - County Durham is isolated in relation to other North East areas and is concerned that there are so many issues. Residents are anxious that they won't benefit from any changes. FH responded that Kim McGuinness, N.E Regional Mayor has responsibility for the entire North East region and is committed to making a difference.

Paul Stokes provided information from the local Bus Board. FH said that we are lucky to have PS on the board because of his expertise in this area.

Fiona Harrington introduced herself as the Bus Community Engagement Officer employed by the North East Mayor (temp) to identify examples of good practice and areas where improvements can be made. There are issues in rural areas but confirmed that issues across the entire area have equal value. FH has provided links and information which has been circulated to the Transport Task Group but the information will be more widely available in the next E-Bulletin.

The Mayor's Local Transport Plan Consultation is ongoing which we can feed into. FH encouraged everyone to participate in the consultation.

- Youth Panel

SD and NW are meeting with the Youth Panel on 19 November 2024 to review the monitoring returns for projects they allocated funding. The Board were asked if they would like the Youth Panel to present at a future board meeting and this was agreed.

A5. Countywide Partners

- Local Policing Update, Mike Summat

MS provided a local crime update. There has been an overall increase of 4% since last month with 1% this year to date. Some of the increases are based on very low numbers which can skew the data while some areas have seen a fall in crime i.e. Crook -3% Year to date and Willington/ Oakenshaw -1% Year to date.

The statistics provide an indication only, but the general trend is down which is good given the time of year that traditionally sees an increase. He can see that the police are picking up things that really matter. A suspect in a commercial burglary was immediately arrested. MS advised there had been a few thefts from motor vehicles and thieves were using By-Pass kits as keyless entry to start cars remotely. People should remain vigilant and store their devices safely, using a Faraday bag. There is a trend around rural acquisitive crime and stolen property may turn up on the street or people may present as suspicious. There has been no common pattern and no common hot spot locations to speak of. These may relate to isolated incidents or people passing through.

ASB update - Overall most areas have seen falls, for example Sunnybrow/Hunwick - 10% since last month, Willington/Oakenshaw – 6%, however Crook Town has seen an increase of 12%. As with the crime figures, these percentages are not always a true reflection of the level of ASB because the numbers are low in some areas.

The overall trend is not bad at all although people may think this doesn't feel right in their experience. Bonfire night was very busy, 1 young person was identified and dealt with for targeting fireworks at a house in Bridge Street, leaving the resident petrified. Questions were raised about where they are getting the fireworks from. The Police follow up incidents by viewing CCTV and interviewing residents to identify people involved. The Police have also worked with shopkeepers, but adults may be buying the fireworks and selling them on.

One Dispersal Order was issued in Willington due to the use of fireworks and this was effective at reducing issues on the night.

CE asked about the trend for youths on motorbikes using the road from Willington to Hunwick in the early hours of the morning and at the traffic lights on Willington High Street and asked what the approach was on this issue. MS – we try to be reactive but there is the potential to cause injury and provoke further dangerous driving when the outcome is negligible. The recent purchase of 2 drones is a more effective method and allows the police to be more tactical. The force is investing in technology with 2 more drones for Weardale/Teesdale and 1 for Crook. It is more effective and safer to follow the bikes by drone and seize the vehicles. The Police, Op Endurance are working with partners to make it more difficult for offenders. This includes working with petrol stations to identify youths with petrol cans.

AR – expressed surprise by the ASB reduction. She often does estate visits and has been able to identify bikes used in anti-social behaviour but without evidence they cannot be removed. MS confirmed that evidence is required – camera/CCTV before action can be taken. Glenholme park also has an issue with bikes. MS confirmed this is a national issue which causes jeopardy for officers. AR also raised the issue of fireworks being thrown at children in Glenholme Park. Adults were seen selling fireworks from cars. AR asked about the progress of CCTV at Glenholme and asked SD provide an update. SD confirmed that funding has not been withdrawn and the project is still progressing.

RH raised the issue of criminal exploitation of young people. There is a massive link between criminal exploitation and stealing bikes for criminals. Police should be able to disrupt adults who are involved. MS gave reassurance that this is being reviewed.

DD raised the issue of a longstanding decline in Glenholme Park leading to increased ASB. He asked if there are any improvement or recreation plans which would turn the area around to avoid further decline? He stated the area itself is attractive and unless issues are addressed problems will continue. He feels there are a lot of issues in the area but nothing is being done to address them. He asked if anyone from the Council could be appointed to take this forward. OG advised this be taken up with County Councillors outside of this meeting. AR advised there will be new outdoor gym equipment but no further plans at this point. There are some concerns that the equipment may be damaged. OG referred to the recent fire at The Spectrum site and agreed this was an important issue but should be raised again outside of the meeting. OG mentioned the agreed Levelling-Up Fund application which suggested lots of things would be implemented but this didn't happen.

- Update on Community Engagement Review Item was discussed in Matters Arising

MH closed the meeting and thanked the participants.

A6. Date and time of next meeting

5.30pm on Thursday 16 January 2025 at Crook Civic Centre