



STANLEY AREA ACTION PARTNERSHIP (AAP)
BOARD MEETING MINUTES

Held on Tuesday 3rd December 2024 at 5.00pm

Councillors:

Cllr Carole Hampson
Cllr Angela Hanson
Cllr Joyce Charlton
Cllr Jeanette Stephenson

Partner Organisations:

N Insp. Dave Stewart (Durham Constabulary)
Stacey Dobson (Karbon Homes)
Martyn Stenton (Durham County Council)

Public Representatives:

John Ullathorne (Vice Chair)
Frankie Ward
Darren McMahan

Officer Attendance:

Daniel O'Brien (AAP Coordinator)
Andrea Boyd (Community Development Project Officer)
Lesley Lines (AAP Support Officer)
Patrick Hetherington (Assistant Assessment & Awards Manager)

Apologies:

Cllr Joan Nicholson, Suzanne Jobson (Karbon Homes), Dan Hodgson (Fire Service)
Cllr Gordon Binney, Vicky Walton, Cllr Carl Marshall, and Barbara Edmundson (Integrated Care Board, NHS)

Public Attendance:

Six members of the Forum/Public attended the meeting.

1. Introductions and Apologies:

John Ullathorne, Vice Chair welcomed everyone to Stanley AAP's hybrid Board Meeting at Morrison Busty. Apologies are noted above.

2. Poverty Action Strategy and Action Plan - Progress Update:

Daniel introduced Patrick Hetherington, Assessment & Awards Manager, (Durham County Council), who gave an update on the current strategy and action plan.

Project Overview:

- Update on welfare, economic and poverty indicators for the county.
- Overview of core expenditure which supports poverty related activities and enables support to be delivered to vulnerable households by the council and key partners.
- Progress of the council and partners in addressing and alleviating poverty.
- Actions for priority progress during 2024/25 and beyond.

Background:

- **Poverty is multi-faceted.** It comes in many shapes and forms and varies both in terms of duration and severity. Poverty is not just about money, it relates to opportunity, health, participation, and access to services. Its impacts are felt at an individual, household, and community level.
- Although many of the drivers of poverty, such as the **strength of the economy, employment, wage rates, national welfare provision and inflation**, are beyond the council's direct control, the council remains committed to tackling all aspects.
- We adopt a **holistic approach** to core financial support by utilising multiple sources of funding to deliver a comprehensive range of tailored offers.

This approach ensures that assistance is flexible and responsive to the needs of our residents addressing not only immediate financial hardship but also contributing to long term stability and well-being.

Through a coordinated effort, the council aims to provide a safety net for vulnerable residents, encompassing various forms of financial aid, advice and support services.

Local, Regional and National Picture:

- The county is ranked the **48th most deprived area in England** (from 151 upper tier local authorities) with **almost half of residents living in the 30% most deprived areas.**
- The county is the **26th most deprived for employment and the 42nd most deprived for income.**
- Although the gap has reduced, **the amount of money a County Durham household has available is lower than the wider Northeast**
- We **estimate 112,000 of residents are living in absolute poverty after housing costs** (21.3%).
- Across County Durham, poverty issues are exacerbated by high levels of deprivation.
- The situation has deteriorated since the last survey in 2015.
- (£335 p.a.) and England (£4,925 p.a.)
- This on par with the Northeast but is significantly lower than the UK average (18.9%)

Local, Regional and National Picture:

- It has been suggested that the poorest quarter of households are set to see their incomes fall further. This marks a significant decline in wealth for a proportion of the UK compared to 10 years ago, with more people falling into absolute poverty .
- Much of this fall is due to the cost-of-living crisis and more specifically the impact of inflation on energy, food, and fuel.
- During the 12 months ending 30 June 2024, the County Durham Food Bank issued just over 18,000 food vouchers, up by 5.8% from previous year.

- Over the same period, just over 3,100 fuel vouchers were issued, again 65% higher than the same period the previous year.
- The proportion of children and young people eligible for FSM across the county has steadily increased over the last five years. At faster rate than the England average.
- The proportion of those claiming has also increased. At a slower rate than the England average.

In Work Poverty:

- Due to prices of food and fuel there is a higher level of in work poverty than previously.
- This has seen a **0.1% increase of Universal Credit claimants who are in work**.
- This is the group referred to as '**just about managing**' where residents have just enough money to meet their basic commitments but as soon as anything unforeseen takes place they are at risk of debt and poverty.
- Durham residents are at risk of this due to the type of work common in the County being lower paid, less reliable hours and not always for a fixed term.
- VCS and public service partners continue to report that debt problems are rising, more people in work are using food banks and more families are struggling to get by and afford essential basics.
- This suggests an increase in financial strain even among employed individuals and the northeast, the rise in UC claims among working households highlights ongoing challenges related to low wages, cost of living pressures and job insecurity.

Digital Inclusion:

The ability to interact digitally, essential to addressing social and economic inequalities and levelling up our communities remains a challenge for our rural communities.

Many of the cheapest ways of accessing goods and services are only available online, mainstream banking has disappeared from many of our highstreets (especially in rural areas) and many educational courses and job applications are restricted to online access. In addition, people who are not using online services can lack a voice and visibility in the modern world, as government services and democracy increasingly move online.

National Policy Update:

There have been changes to national policy (both welfare and cost-of-living related) which have or will impact the financial position of residents across the county during 2024/2025 and beyond. The main changes are:

- Household Support Fund - £4.67 million from the government for Local Authorities to support vulnerable households. Runs from 01 October 2024 to 31 March 2025.
- 'Fun and Food' in County Durham - £2.3million from Department of Education to co-ordinate and deliver free holiday activities and healthy food for children eligible for free school meals in the end of term holiday periods.
- Family hubs - £4.4million allocated from 2022 to 2025 to develop a family hub and start for life offer.
- Single Homelessness Accommodation Programme (SHAP) - £4.4million awarded to purchase 32 bedspaces for rough sleepers, or people at risk of sleeping rough, and procure 24/7 wrap-around support.
- UK Shared Prosperity Funding - £998,000 grant approved in February 2024 until 31 March 2025 to spend on anti-poverty and cost of living alleviating schemes, including food poverty, debt advice, child poverty and intelligence.

Progress to date:

- Development of a pilot using new CACI data sets to address low levels of uptake of pension credit.
- Introduction of the FISO programme across 12 secondary Schools
- FSM Auto-Enrolment of an additional 2469 children (over £1 million saving between 1727 families) (over 3million additional PP funding into Schools)
- Funding an additional TBBT van to support the opening of 5 additional hubs (we are now supporting (1600 residents a week)
- Continued provision of effective support to vulnerable households through CTR, housing payments and partnership support arrangements

- Since the strategy and plan were adopted by Cabinet (November 2022) significant progress in line with our action plan has been made.
- The strategy and action plan are living documents. They change as the poverty landscape changes, new funding opportunities and programmes arise, and existing programmes end or are further developed.

Conclusion:

- Poverty is multi-faceted and not just about money it's about opportunity, participation and access to services.
- The impact of poverty can be widespread and impact on health, wellbeing, education and a wider community.
- By maintaining our partnership-based approach to delivering the Poverty Action Strategy and action plan we continue to make it everyone's business to respond to poverty and the risk to financial exclusion.

Questions:

Darren McMahon highlighted some observations he had made:

- 112,000 people is 1 in 4 – 1 in 5 people are in poverty in County Durham which is appalling.
- On a Monday PACT House runs a foodbank, 22 people attended in 10 minutes of opening yesterday. 5 years ago, we would see 16 people a week now 45 – 50 a day 6 days a week.
- You say Durham County Council wants to bring things closer to the people, and yet they are closing public assets.
- Homelessness; I have a person in contact with me who has been homeless for 5 weeks now.
- Trussell Trust referral, you try to get a referral, it has been impossible.
- This data is depressive, whilst sat in this meeting 21 people have asked for a toy for a child for Christmas.
- It seems that people are making a profit out of poverty.
- People want to see a person, they need a hug, and most people who I meet struggle with digital technology.

Darren invited Patrick to visit PACT House to see how bad Stanley is.

The Chair thanked Patrick for the presentation.

Action: Daniel to circulate Poverty Action Strategy and Action Plan - Progress Update presentation slides and Patrick's contact details to Board Members post meeting.

3. Declaration of Interest:

AAP Board Members were asked to declare any interest in relation to the agenda. There were no declarations of interest.

4. Agreement of the Minutes – 1st October 2024 and matters arising not covered on this agenda:

The Board Meeting Minutes of Tuesday 1st October 2024 were agreed to be a true record. There were no matters arising from the July minutes.

5. Neighbourhood Issues and Locality Policing Issues:

N Insp. Dave Stewart gave the Policing update:

- He highlighted that all crime was down 18% year on year, and that overall, all crime being solved is up 3% to 20%.
- Drug offences up 3% year to date. ASB down 17%.
- Incidents – Working with immigration a couple of shops have been closed.
- Speed Watch Van – Derwent Valley have agreed that the equipment can be used in priority areas.

Anti-Social Behaviour – Cllr Joyce Charlton highlighted issues that involved children throwing bricks from a bridge in Tanfield. N Insp. Stewart again stated that people must report all incidents on 101 because if no reports are received, then resources cannot be put in that area.

Cllr. Charlton highlighted that the PCSOs had come to a PACT meeting, however Karbon had not attended. Stacey highlighted she would find out who was invited from Karbon.

6. AAP Coordinator Update:

Daniel updated on a range of initiatives that the AAP had been working on.

Community Engagement Review Update

Daniel highlighted that the full Community Engagement Review report which had gone to Cabinet in November 2024 had been fully agreed.

He talked around a few salient points:

- As part of the MTFP savings AAPs would be reduced from 14 down to 12 new Local Networks. It was further agreed that Pelton will not come into the Stanley area although Maiden Law will now be part of Annfield Plain Electoral Division, which will slightly increase the population size of the Local Network.
- AAPs will cease to exist on the 31st of March 2025 and the Local Network will come in to being on the 1st of April 2025.
- A lot of work is now going on behind the scenes in relation to new Terms of Reference/Operating Procedure documents. Outlining how a Local network will function going forward.
- One slight change moving forward is that we have always had Board Member consensus on funding decisions etc. moving forward Local Networks will hold a vote for such decisions.

- There will also be tighter controls around declarations of interests whereby Local Network Members must leave the room for a decision to be made on a project in which they have a declaration of interest.
- Partner representatives will be asked to continue to be involved in the Local Networks. Business Representatives on Local Networks will be recruited along with the local Voluntary & Community Sector Representative.
- All our current Public Representatives on the AAP will stand down, they can reapply to become a Community Member of the Local Network as long as they are not a Town Councillor or in office in the political party. A recruitment exercise will happen after the local elections in May 2025.
- Next year staff will be going out engaging with the voluntary & community sector and key partner agencies about their delivery plans and identifying gaps in provision in the hope of creating a four-year or Local Network Action Plan which local network will work too. So, for the first year no funding will be going out the door.
- Councillors however will be able to use their Councillor Grants as they wish, without Local Networks approval. However, we will still bring Councillor Grant summaries to Local Network meetings to update on what the Councillors are spending money on in their local community. Councillors will continue to have £19,400 a year, Local Networks will have £100,000 of Local Network funding per year which is what we have now for the Area Budget (with a capital/revenue split).

Daniel asked if anyone had any questions:

Q. Am I right in thinking that you cannot sit as a Community Member on a Local Network if you are a Town Councillor?

A. Yes, that's right. We are going to be doing a big PR exercise to recruit and get Community Members and representatives to come forward and apply to be on the Local Network who aren't Town Councillors.

It was highlighted that Stanley will only have six County Councillors for the Stanley area, (we did have 8). 19 Town Councillors won't get a place, but one will.

Darren highlighted he would have too many declarations of interest and he would be outside the meeting more than in it. He cautioned there may be 15,000 people on Forums but there's only 10 that will get involved in meetings. You will exhaust your core people, and will these people wait for a year and not get involved in something else.

Daniel highlighted there were still another two AAP meetings in February and March, and he would keep everyone updated about the Local Network going forward.

Darren acknowledged that some of the new procedures for Local Networks he agreed with, like for instance, some projects might need 4 years of funding, but if we get things wrong you need to stop, not be stuck with it for another three years, you need to be able to react. However. He also referenced his disappointment with the Terms of Reference, he though if people were willing to sit around this table and be involved in engaging the community they should be cherished and encouraged, not be told they can't do it for another 12 months. I was approached to be on the AAP Board because I have experience in the community and I really enjoy it, but if I wasn't on it for 12 months, I might find another activity to get involved with and I might never come back.

John gave an example; four years ago, the Air Cadets had 63 flying squadrons and then what happened was an aeroplane didn't work properly because it wasn't maintained, so flying squadrons were paused for 12 months. Now they have 12 Flying Squadrons left because people found other things.

The Chair highlighted that they need to understand they are going to lose good community representatives.

Daniel advised that this was all discussed at different levels throughout the compilation of the report. AAP Public Representatives can apply to be Community Members on the Local Networks if they are not Town Councillors.

There was some confusion as to why Town Councillors couldn't apply. Was it because they might be political? If so why are County Councillors allowed, are they not political?

All the good work that has been done will be lost. It doesn't feel like it's building on the years of success the AAPs have had, it feels like it's burning it down and hoping a phoenix rises from those ashes.

Excluding people because they are involved in certain things is no good. I hope it is reviewed quickly. Board members around the table agreed.

Martin highlighted that because of the strength of feeling it would be worth feeding back some of the points made by Stanley AAP Board Members to colleagues working on the introduction of Local Networks. Daniel advised he would feed in the different views.

Martin advised the new Terms of Reference for Local Networks were not yet finalised.

Frankie advised she would also give her thoughts in writing.

Area Budget Live Projects Qtr.2 2024/25 Monitoring Report

Daniel highlighted this had been sent out to Board Members via email for their information. If they had any queries regarding the report, then please get in touch.

Fun & Food – Christmas 2024 Update

Five projects will be running over the Christmas 2024 Holiday period for free school and non-free school meal children and young people.

Darren highlighted that with additional funding he had a free bus going to the Gala to see Sleeping Beauty.

Poverty Task Group

The next meeting is Wednesday 11th December 2024 at 5pm in The Louisa Centre

Area Budget 2024/25 Pipeline Project Update

In July 2024 Stanley AAP Board Members recommended the Burnside Community Hub project being led by Burnside Primary School for approval. Additional approval was also given by Stanley AAP Board Members via email for Cllr Hanson and Cllr Marshall to contribute Neighbourhood Budget funding to the project due Cllr Marshall's declaration of interest as a Governor of the School. Unfortunately, due to structural problems with the school building the project has had to be changed. Plan B - will see a stand-alone Community Hub structure now delivered and built within the grounds of the School. The overall KPIs and outcomes would remain the same. The Board were asked to approve this change.

The Board approved the change to the project.

Two projects were ongoing:

DLI Memorial – Working with Stanley Town Council and the Stanley and Consett DLI Association Branch.

St Cuthberts Cross & Seating project in Tanfield Village.

7. Partner Work Update / Stanley specific items of interest:

Fiona Harrington, Bus Community Engagement Officer, Durham County Council introduced herself and informed the meeting that she is employed by Durham County Council, but her wage is covered by Kim McGuinness and the Northeast Combined Authority. She highlighted that she was tasked with finding out people's feelings about the public bus service in County Durham. Daniel had already sent out links on the consultation. This consultation will be online until the end of January 2025.

Fiona added that £1 charge for young people will continue until at least the end of 2025.

Cllr Joyce Charlton highlighted that a fairer scheme would be zones for bus fares.

8. Neighbourhood Budget Summaries:

Annfield Plain Cricket Club – APCC Ground Refurbishment

The Neighbourhood Budget grant will support the refurbishment of the cricket field and prepare it for the next season, ensuring the pitch is up to standards and safe to use. It will consist of purchasing loam, grass seed, and bring in a contractor to scarify and seed the cricket wicket.

Project Cost: £2,666.00

Councillor Joan Nicholson Contribution: £1,333.00

Councillor Christine Bell Contribution: £1,333.00

Tantobie Association for Sport and the Community – Emergency Access

The Neighbourhood Budget grant will support the association to make alterations to the current shutters and add a generator in case of a power outage/extreme weather, to ensure entry to our building is still possible and it can be used as a hub to access electricity and keep warm.

Project Cost: £1,127.00

Councillor Joyce Charlton Contribution: £1,127.00

Durham County Council Clean & Green – Seat Project

The Neighbourhood Budget grant will allow additional seating to be sited around the Cllrs Electoral Division, including Annfield Plain Park. It will also see a bespoke seat sited in New Kyo, working alongside the local Partnership to choose the design.

Project Cost: £4,500.00

Councillor Joan Nicholson Contribution: £2,225.00

Councillor Christine Bell Contribution: £2,225.00

Durham County Council Clean & Green – Chaucer Close Tree Project

The Neighbourhood Budget grant will enhance the parking area project at Chaucer Close with the installation of three trees around the new parking bays to comply with planning conditions.

Project Cost: £1,387.00

Councillor Carl Marshall Contribution: £693.50

Councillor Angela Hanson Contribution: £693.50

Small Grants:

New Kyo and Oxhill Partnership – Half Term Activities

The funding is to be used to contribute towards materials and packed lunches for the children & young people attending the activities.

Total Cost: £500.00

Councillor Joan Nicholson Contribution £250.00

Councillor Christine Bell Contribution: £250.00

Tanfield Lea Partnership – Carol Service

Project Brief: The funding is to help with Band and PA costs for the community Christmas Carol Service in Tanfield Lea.

Total Cost: £600.00

Councillor Joyce Charlton Contribution £300.00

Councillor Gordon Binney Contribution: £300.00

9. Pre-Notified Any Other Business:

Darren highlighted PACT House's free Christmas Day meal. And, if anyone wanted to nominate a child for a free toy for Christmas to get in touch.

Daniel highlighted that because this Board Meeting was being held before Phase 2 of the Durham County Council Budget Consultation, an online consultation event will be held. Stanley AAP's will be the 10th of December online on Teams from 6pm – 7pm, invites will go out later this week.

On the back of the Tanfield School Vex Robotics Team going to America to compete in the World Championship, £15,000 worth of extra funding was secured. This will allow 15 Air Cadet Squadrons to take part in future Vex Robotic competitions.

The chair thanked everyone and wished everyone a Happy Christmas and all the very best for 2025.

10. Next Meeting:

Tuesday 4th February 2025 – Morrison Busty Depot fully Hybrid.

For further details about these minutes please contact Stanley AAP office,
Tel: 03000 265323 or Email: Stanleyaap@durham.gov.uk