

**East Durham Rural Corridor Area Action Partnership Minutes of the Board Meeting
Thursday 22 October 2020
(Virtual Meeting – held via Microsoft Teams)**

Present: Councillor Stuart Dunn
Councillor Lucy Hovvels
Councillor John Robinson
Councillor Maura McKeon
Malcolm Gray
Jeff Garfoot (for Michelle Atkinson)
Chris Varty
Jen Straughan-Hawley
Clive Crosby

Officer Attendance: Jane Bellis - AAP Co-ordinator
Lyndsey Hunter - Community Development Project Officer
Marie Ainscough - AAP Support Officer

Forum Members: There were 3 forum members present at the meeting

Apologies: Eileen Dickinson, Councillor Peter Brookes, Claire Craft, Clair White, Mel Carr, Councillor Jude Grant, Annette Donohue, Guy Bashford, Christine Carter, Paul Howell, Angela Stobbart, Neighbourhood Inspector Sarah Honeyman

Introductions and Apologies

Jane Bellis (AAP Co-ordinator) chaired the meeting and everyone was welcomed to the Board Meeting of the East Durham Rural Corridor Area Action Partnership.

Apologies were noted for those Board members who were unable to attend the meeting and a round of introductions followed.

A warm welcome was offered to Louis Hurst from Investing in Children (IiC). Louis will be leading on the IiC project in the absence of Chloe Brown.

Minutes of the Meeting held on 7 September 2020 & Matters Arising

The minutes were agreed as a true and accurate record.

Declarations of Interest/ Meeting Etiquette/ New Ways of Working

Anyone present who had a conflict of interest in any item on the agenda was asked to declare an interest at the start of the agenda item to ensure this was formally recorded in the meeting minutes.

Jane reminded everyone present of the etiquette for Microsoft Teams meetings.

- Keep microphone on mute in case there is any background noise
- Raise your hand if you'd like to ask a question
- Chat bar on the right hand should anyone wish to add anything

Everyone was becoming familiar with the new ways of working.

Priority Updates (from Task Group and Projects)
Area Budget (including Welfare Reform, Youth Fund and OPSIF) COVID Recovery

Projects this year will fit with the single priority of 'Covid-19 Recovery'. The sub-headings under this are;

- Employability initiatives
- Advice and guidance
- Physical activity, mental health and wellbeing
- Organisational sustainability
- Food provision and support
- Social isolation
- Support for the voluntary and community sector, or
- Support to small businesses (through a third party, not for profit organisation to complement existing DCC and external opportunities)

Board Members had received a report on progress made through and following the task and finish group meeting held on Tuesday 13 October 2020.

Jane summarised the content of the report and asked the Board to approve the proposals and actions made by the task group.

In relation to the Groundwork project, Jane highlighted that a county-wide holiday activities with food workstream meeting was taking place today to discuss what can be done centrally regarding holiday activities with food during the Christmas period.

Councillor John Robinson requested information on what each locality within the East Durham Rural Corridor AAP area had received in terms of funding.

The report was approved.

Local Neighbourhood Issues
Police Update

Neighbourhood Inspector Sarah Honeyman had submitted her apologies but had provided Lyndsey Hunter with an update on local policing information –

- Staffing issues due to losing a PC in Sedgefield
- Extra strain in terms of having to do licencing checks on all pubs at weekends to ensure they are Covid compliant
- They have received feedback from farmers who say that the fields are being neglected and that there has been a spate of poaching and damage to crops and fields due to 4x4s racing round in the fields
- No update had been received from the Peterlee and Durham Teams
- In relation to the work that Sarah mentioned at the last Board meeting with regards to the MP office and confidence in the Trimdons; the questionnaire is ready and will probably go out next week if not the week after at the latest with a closing date of Christmas
- There has been a spate of arsons including one at Fishburn crossroads. The arsons carried out in the Trimdons have been identified as mechanical failures. One was related to a domestic and a couple of car breakdowns which resulted in fires.

Jane added that at the last board meeting, issues had been raised in relation to anti-social behaviour with youths and Sarah, Jane and a colleague from the Peterlee team agreed to hold a meeting. Following the meeting, conversations have been had between Jane, Chloe, Louis (from Investing in Children) and the youth workers in the area. One of the problems is that the Police are the only service on the ground as everyone else is working from home. Work is ongoing.

Councillor John Robinson highlighted that there had been a lot of concern and upset in Fishburn with regards to the young people and he said that they are working closely on this. There were nine high value cars burnt out in a car park in Sedgefield. Incidents like this are happening across the county.

Councillor Lucy Hovvels had had conversations with Sarah and livin in relation to Redesdale Court and the state of the shops in Trimdon Grange. Lucy thanked everyone involved. She reported that there had been a lot of dog thefts not only in Trimdon but in other areas and there is a reward from someone who has had four dogs stolen in Trimdon Grange. She raised concerns in relation to the sorting office and post office in Trimdon Station which is due to close in February. There is a petition online. The six staff have not been informed and no consultation has been carried out.

Chris Varty added that the post office is also a bank and used by many aged people in the area. She encouraged everyone to support this.

Derek Bradley said that the post office had been up for sale over the years. The building is not fit for purpose. The post mistress is hoping to relocate the post office elsewhere.

Countywide Partner Issues Council Budget Presentation

On behalf of Michelle Atkinson, Jeff Garfoot, Head of Corporate Finance and Commercial Services delivered a presentation on Durham County Council's 2021/22 Budget and 2021/22 to 2024/25 Medium Term Financial Plan Consultation and Budget Update.

The presentation was shared with the meeting and included a general overview of the Council's budget, the financial pressures and the plans for budget setting for next year.

- 60% of the £1,083m gross expenditure is spent on adult and children services
- Due to austerity, the council did receive a core government grant of £2m which has reduced to £67m, a significant reduction
- The council tax element only makes up 22% of the council's overall expenditure

During 2020/21 the council has faced significant additional costs and loss of income resulting from the pandemic.

A breakdown of the financial pressures which made up the £25.1 m shortfall was included in the presentation.

The Local Government Finance settlement is not due till late which has a knock-on effect in terms of planning and there is a delay in the Fair Funding Review. This could result in Durham County Council losing income.

In relation to Covid, the local authority has incurred an additional £41m of costs. The authority has forecast money from government grants of £47m which leaves a £25m deficit.

The council prudently invested £20 million on a short- term basis in 2020/21 of which £10 million will be withdrawn in 2021/22 assisting in offsetting budget pressures. A circa £9 million shortfall is still forecast.

Jeff highlighted that Durham County Council are in a much stronger position than many other local authorities and it is not anticipated (as it currently stands) that there will be any significant cuts to front line services.

The Council is seeking feedback on –

- Is the AAP comfortable with the council's approach in terms of identifying savings to balance the budget but considering the utilisation of the Budget Support Reserve to balance the budget due to the significant uncertainty faced and the tight timeframes
- The council may still need to consult upon savings options in early 2021 if there is a significant budget shortfall. If there are front line service impacts, there will be further email consultations with all AAP's

The final budget report will go to Cabinet in February followed by a Cabinet report going to Full Council on 24 February 2021.

Malcolm Gray asked a question in relation to the above –

I know the Council fund the care providers and there is a big case currently at court with Mencap to do with sleep ins and if the court decide to vote against Mencap and provide carers with more salary links like sleep in costs this will increase the cost of the care package itself. Is there a contingency in the budget for this?

Jeff – we are often approached by care providers with a whole range of extra regulations that they're facing in terms of providing more care, staffing and support. Wherever we can, we will try and support that. At the moment, we had £3m for adult social care. The Adult Social Care team go through and identify a whole range of pressures they think they are going to face in the future and they advise us how much they think they are going to need. The Mencap one wouldn't be that big for us. The bigger issue is the residential care homes. They want an extra 10% recurrent and this would cost us £15m extra. Our services have been cut significantly and we have saved £260m in services in the last 10 years. There would need to be consultation with the public in terms of reducing services.

Jane thanked Jeff for his presentation.

Neighbourhood Budgets

The following Neighbourhood Budget project had been shared with the Board -

Name of Scheme: Toilet Refurbishment

Councillor(s): Blakey / Dunn / McKeon

Interest Declared: Yes – Cllr Stuart Dunn is Chair of Coxhoe Parish Council, based at Coxhoe Village Hall

Amount: £15,000.00 (£5,000.00 each)

The Board was happy to approve the project and the interest as declared.

Date and Time of Next Meeting

The next Board meeting will be held in November 2020 (date and time to be confirmed) - Leisure Transformation will be on the agenda

Subsequent Meeting – 21 January 2021

Malcolm Gray commented on the recent vote not to extend the free school meals, which the MP voted against in Parliament. He wondered if MP Paul Howell's representative could comment as to why this was the case as this may have an impact on AAP applications in the future.

David Willis explained that Paul had sent a response out about this today and they had received quite a lot of mailings about it also. David asked Malcolm to send an email and they would get a response to him. Councillor Lucy Hovvels asked if the response could be circulated as this was an issue high on everyone's agenda.

Everyone was thanked for their attendance.