

# Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Management Board

8 April 2024

## County Durham Partnership Update



### Report of Corporate Management Team

**Alan Patrickson, Corporate Director of Neighbourhoods and Climate Change**

**Councillor Amanda Hopgood, Leader of the Council**

**Councillor Elizabeth Scott, Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Economy and Partnerships**

#### Electoral division affected:

Countywide

#### Purpose of the Report

- 1 The purpose of the report is to update COSMB on issues being addressed by the County Durham Partnership (CDP), which includes the CDP Board, Forum, Thematic Partnerships and Area Action Partnerships (AAPs) across the county.

#### Executive summary

- 2 This report is in two parts, firstly it outlines the work of the **County Durham Partnership** and is supplemented by work of other partnerships dealing with cross cutting issues.
- 3 Secondly, the work of our thematic partnerships is framed under the County Durham Vision 2035 three strategic ambitions:
  - (a) More and Better jobs
  - (b) People live long and independent lives
  - (c) Connected communities

This is further illustrated by wider partnership work and local examples from our AAPs.

- 4 Our partnership boards continue to deal effectively with a wide range of strategic issues affecting the county and our **Area Action Partnerships** are an important way of working with our local communities. AAPs

address issues identified in their communities and show the significant progress made at a local level is improving outcomes for our local people.

- 5 This report covers the period September 2023 to February 2024 and areas of work to highlight include the following.
- 6 In terms of the work of the County Durham Partnership Board and partnerships dealing with a range of cross cutting issues, highlights of the projects implemented include the following.
- 7 On 17 November 2023 the **County Durham Partnership's Annual Event** celebrated 10 years of Public Health within the Local Authority and 10 years of Health and Wellbeing Boards. 135 people from a range of organisations attended the event to celebrate our successes and focus on the future for improved health and wellbeing in our communities.
- 8 At that event, the **County Durham Together Community Champions** based on a model co-designed by Champions was relaunched to get public health information to people who otherwise might not access it.
- 9 **Lumiere** took place from 16 to 19 November 2023. The UK's light art biennial is a global event with artists from 15 different countries exhibiting their artwork completely free for the public.
- 10 Following the provision of the Warm Spaces Network project last winter, the initiative was relaunched as **Welcome Spaces**.
- 11 The **fun and food programme** has continued to develop, and over the summer holidays, 225 projects have been delivered across the County, running 1,982 sessions, and providing 72,982 meals over the 6-week Summer holiday period.
- 12 Partnerships also undertook a range of projects, detailed under the vision ambitions, including the following.
- 13 The **UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF)** allocation for County Durham is £30,830,613 with an additional £2,803,077 to fund Multiply - a new adult numeracy programme to help transform the lives of adults across the UK, by improving their functional numeracy skills.
- 14 The **Health and Wellbeing Board** provided its full support to the Government's "Stopping the Start" plan to create a smokefree generation and raise the legal age for tobacco sales.

- 15 An application was successfully made in September to renew the Gold Award level accreditation that the County Council holds for the **Ministry of Defence Employer Recognition Scheme**.

### **Recommendation**

- 16 COSMB is recommended to:
- (a) note the contents of this update.

## Background

- 17 The **County Durham Partnership** including the board and forum (which bring together the board and local communities), five partnerships (**Health and Wellbeing Board, Safe Durham Partnership, Economic Partnership, Environment and Climate Change Partnership** and **County Durham Together Partnership**), **Durham Safeguarding Children Partnership** and the **Durham Safeguarding Adults Partnership, Better Together VCS Forum** and all **Area Action Partnerships** lead on key initiatives being carried out in partnership across the county.

## County Durham Partnership board and forum

- 18 The **County Durham Partnership** Board met in September, November and January.
- 19 At the September meeting, partners shared their financial outlook, plans and pressures, to enable partners to understand each other's savings and efficiency plans and their impact. It is important that partners work together to reduce duplication in services and estates and eliminate cost shunting, where possible. It was agreed that all partners would continue to use the **County Durham Together approach** to make sure partners are making changes, understanding the wider impact on individuals, partners and the county as a whole.
- 20 At the November meeting, the thematic focus was the **Environment and Climate Change Partnership (ECCP)** who have reviewed and refreshed their ways of working and will focus on supporting the three workstreams to deliver on their areas of work, enabling collaboration across the workstreams and with other thematic partnerships, and influence decision making locally, regionally and nationally.
- 21 The **ECCP** will aim to 'Inform, Influence and Amplify' the environmental agenda, with the challenge to all partnerships to consider how they can best support each other's agendas across all our work.
- 22 At the January meeting, the thematic focus was on the **Economic Partnership (CDEP)**, and the Delivery Plan for the Inclusive Economic Strategy (IES). The IES is owned by all partners across the county and will be delivered in partnership, with governance through the Delivery Improvement Group, a subgroup of the CDEP.
- 23 The CDP Board also received an update on North East Devolution progress, proposals and portfolios, and an overview of preparations for CQC assurance of our adult social care services.

## County Durham Partnership event

24 On 17 November 2023 the **County Durham Partnership's Annual Event** celebrated 10 years of Public Health within the Local Authority and 10 years of Health and Wellbeing Boards. 135 people from the wider County Durham Partnership, Board members, VCS organisations, statutory services, and AAPs came together to celebrate our successes and focus on the future for improved health and wellbeing in our communities.

25 Our keynote speaker was Professor Dame Carol Black, the Government's independent advisor on drug misuse, Chair of the British Library, the Centre for Ageing Better and Think Ahead, the Government's fast-stream training programme for Mental Health Social Workers. Carol's work around drug treatment provides a positive example of working as a whole system to address health inequalities and was well received alongside contributions on the new Joint Local Health and Wellbeing Strategy and the County Durham Together approach.



Dame Carol Black speaking at the County Durham Partnership Annual Event

26 Professor Peter Kelly CBE, Regional Director for Public Health and Office for Health Improvement and Disparities provided us with a call to action focused upon narrowing health inequalities through giving every child the best start in life, improving health and wellbeing in older age and creating a smoke free County Durham.

27 Delegates attended workshops where they talked about new ways of working in partnership with communities to improve health outcomes through homes and neighbourhoods, work, culture, learning and the climate.

28 The event also saw the relaunch of the County Durham Together Community Champions based on a model co-designed by Champions. Community Champions are local people from across County Durham who care about health and wellbeing and are trusted voices within their community who help to get public health information to people who otherwise might not access it. Community Champions help to:

- (a) keep their local communities informed so that people can make informed decisions to help them stay healthy, safe and well and

- (b) share their, local insights, knowledge and experiences with us.
- 29 The programme utilises a network of recruited volunteer champions from across County Durham to share information, address barriers and improve connections between services and communities. Durham County Council have a [County Durham Together Community Champions](#) webpage where you can watch an animation and find out more.

## **Lumiere**

- 30 Lumiere took place from 16 to 19 November 2023. Fourteen years after Lumiere debuted in Durham, and more than one million visitors later, the UK's light art biennial is a global event with artists from 15 different countries exhibiting their artwork completely free for the public. It is estimated that around 176,000 people attended this event.
- 31 For the first time, Bishop Auckland joined the Lumiere spectacle with four works interacting with a façade, building or public space, transforming the heart of the town.
- 32 Lumiere is produced by leading arts producers Artichoke and commissioned and funded by Durham County Council. Lumiere receives additional support from Arts Council England, Durham University, County Durham Community Foundation, and many other supporters. Spotlight on Bishop Auckland is produced in partnership with The Auckland Project and supported by the Stronger Towns Fund.
- 33 Proposals and plans are already being developed for Lumiere 2027, alongside an Economic Impact Assessment, which will be considered by Cabinet later this year.

## **Advice in County Durham**

- 34 Advice in County Durham took the lead in preparation of the Universal Credit Migration which began its rollout in County Durham at the end of July 2023.

35 123 delegates attended a conference in September around Universal Credit Migration to prepare key partners and stakeholders. The conference consisted of both national speakers and local providers to inform and highlight potential issues to support stakeholder partners around how the migration process will affect the residents of County Durham.



Delegates at the Universal Credit Migration conference

36 The workshops included:

- (a) Managed migration - the challenges
- (b) Tax Credits and Universal Credit - 5 key differences
- (c) Preparing Tenants for Universal Credit
- (d) DWP & Help to Claim - Support for the Claim Process

37 The event ended with a panel of experts in the field including the keynote speaker and the workshop hosts with a Q&A session.

38 The key focus was as always to ensure that by working collaboratively all key partners can support individuals in getting the right support and advice through the 'No Wrong Door' ethos, which will be key during this challenging transitional period.

## Poverty Action Steering Group

39 Over the last year the **Poverty Action Steering Group's** work has concentrated on protecting our most vulnerable communities through the cost-of-living crisis. Initiatives have focused on mitigating the impact of food and fuel poverty, ensuring access to welfare advice and guidance services, promoting financial inclusion, and supporting vulnerable groups. Progress has also been made on projects to enhance access to data and intelligence and determine key measures that will enhance the council's understanding of our residents and their financial issues, as well as supporting the development of mechanisms to assess the impact and outcomes of **Poverty Action Steering Group**.

- 40 Activity to increase awareness and maximisation of benefit entitlements and the council's 'first point of contact' offer has been extended to include more detailed conversations to help those in financial difficulty as well as the continued provision of training to local Voluntary and Community Sector organisations to enable them to identify residents in need of financial support and signpost them to appropriate help.
- 41 A detailed annual report describing the poverty issues across the county, the support that exists for vulnerable households, the progress of the council and partners in addressing and alleviating poverty, and the priority actions to be progressed during 2024/25, was presented to Cabinet in February 2024. The report highlighted the risks presented by the ongoing uncertainty regarding the continuation of the Household Support Fund, when the existing scheme ends on 31 March 2024, and the contingency planning that is taking place to mitigate these risks including a review of the council's Welfare Assistance Scheme and work with third sector partners to determine what support will be available without the Household Support Funding.
- 42 The group continues to work in partnership with a wide range of organisations to provide a joined-up cohesive approach to tackling issues, including:
- (a) with private and social landlords to understand issues in the housing market, and support rough sleepers, ex-offenders, and vulnerable people into accommodation;
  - (b) educational settings to understand the scale and impact of poverty on young people and 'cut the cost of the school day'; and
  - (c) NEFirst Credit Union to provide interest free loans to families in need of financial assistance.
- 43 NEFirst Credit Union were funded by **Chester le Street and District AAP** to deliver financial surgeries to engage and encourage residents to get support and advice around finances. The Credit Union promoted services and the support available via a targeted leaflet drop to residents as well as engaging a wide number of partners and providing them with promotional literature to distribute to those individuals most in need of financial support and advice.
- 44 Information surgeries held at community centres raised the visibility of NEFirst as an ethical, financial organisation, enabling financial inclusion for all. Accessibility enables residents to reach out to save and lend responsibly. The project supports residents in taking control of finances and building financial resilience, leading to improved health and wellbeing. Residents can avoid high credit lending such as illegal



lending and access interest free loans through local and government funded initiatives.

- 45 A further focus of the **Poverty Action Steering Group** has been building on the success of the previous initiative last winter, the 'warm spaces' project which has been relaunched as **Welcome Spaces**.
- 46 Feedback highlighted that a range of additional support was provided on matters ranging from finance, housing, mental health and wellbeing to drugs and alcohol. As a result, the initiative was relaunched as Welcome Spaces, with funding provided both by Durham County Council and the County Durham Community Foundation to groups and organisations that can help.
- 47 Those that receive funding are offered training on a range of topics, including basic mental health, food safety and safeguarding, with grants able to cover a range of expenses such as utility bills, volunteer expenses or staff time, equipment and furniture. Key information including the organisations providing a Welcome Space, opening times, accessibility, and any other facilities available, such as the offer of hot drinks or wi-fi, are included on Locate to ensure people can access their nearest space.
- 48 **East Durham Rural Corridor AAP** funded The Rose Cottage Community Interest Company for The Wellbeing Project. The project provides a warm, welcoming space where local people can access healthy and hot, low cost or free meals. Not only do people have access to a warm space, hot drinks and food they are able to socialise in a welcoming environment. Community meals bring the community together, giving those in food insecurity dignified access to food.
- 49 The funding paid for one part time staff member as the primary person making the food; volunteers to complete food hygiene training; paying towards the cost of the meals, and management of the project. Volunteers are used to assist in the running of the project, with a view to getting them trained fully to be able to run it without a staff member in the future.
- 50 A further focus of the **Poverty Action Steering Group** has been supporting the expansion of the 'The Bread and Butter Thing' food hub network to 15 hubs which support around 1,200 families each week with low-cost food and access to advice and support.

51 With funding from **Bishop Auckland and Shildon AAP**, Woodhouse Close Church and Community Centre has built an extension to allow for additional space that will house the food bank element of the crisis intervention project.

52 Food donations with long shelf-life dates will be stored within a purpose-built room that will also provide facilities to pack the bags and store the made-up bags ready for those visiting.

53 The extension will enable existing space/rooms to be reconfigured i.e., a small break out room for 1-1 meetings will be created, the vestry will be increased in size for much needed office space as well as additional meeting area space.



Checking in on the new extension at Woodhouse Close Church and Community Centre

## Humanitarian Support programme

54 The **humanitarian support team** continues to support refugee families across County Durham, delivering government humanitarian support programmes including resettlement support. The current focus is on assisting the government to deliver support to resettle eligible Afghans who supported the UK's presence in Afghanistan, including Afghan families facing deteriorating conditions in third countries.

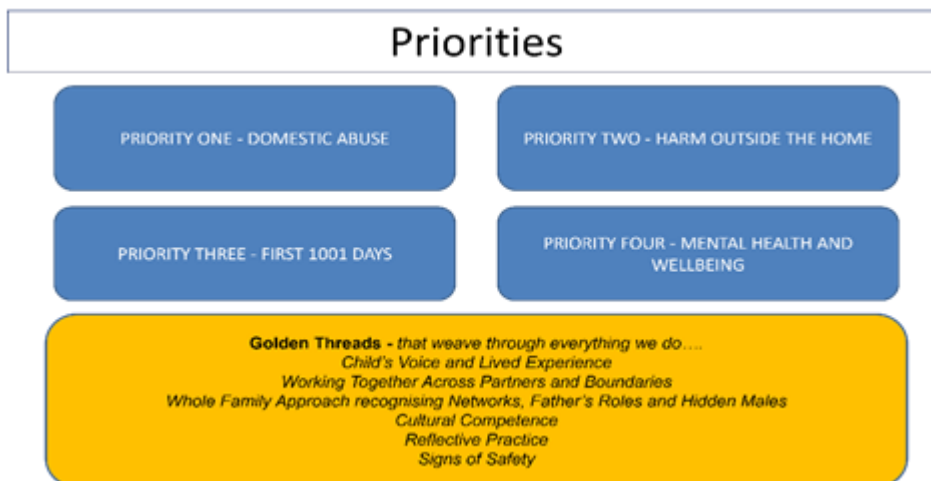
55 The largest single programme is the Homes for Ukraine sponsorship scheme, an emergency programme developed at pace, which has seen residents of County Durham offering accommodation and sponsorship to individuals affected by the invasion of Ukraine who wish to come to the UK. Through the scheme the council has supported more than 670 guests and over 300 sponsor households to welcome families to the County.

56 It's a fast-changing and complex area of work, requiring the council to respond to new and emerging policy developments. This includes collaboration with partners and services to inform the local authority's response to the government consultation on "safe and legal routes" to the UK under the Illegal Migration Act.

57 The Team continues to work with partners to engage in the government’s full dispersal asylum accommodation programme, ensuring allocation is in line with the agreed regional plan. Activities include the co-ordination of responses to property requests and working with our new arrivals pathway partner, Communities Together Durham, and other voluntary and community sector organisations, to provide a support infrastructure for individuals seeking asylum who are located to the area under a private housing contract.

## Safeguarding

58 The **Durham Safeguarding Children Partnership (DSCP)** continue to manage their three-year business plan (2023-2026) which outlines a clear set of priority areas and golden threads which will influence the work of the DSCP in the coming months/years.



59 Within the last six months, work under priority one has been completed, which looked at Child and Adolescent to Parent Violence and Abuse (CAPVA) and the impact this intervention has upon children and families in County Durham. An outcome of this work has been to develop an action plan to help raise awareness, improve recording, and improve communication. The DSCP have also designed and shared a practitioner briefing about this work which has been shared on the website and across the partnership.

60 The DSCP are currently completing work looking at Harm Outside the Home, with the Key Line of Enquiry being around the partnerships’ understanding of early warning indications of exploitation. Priority briefings will be completed and distributed following each piece of work to promote learning around key safeguarding issues across County Durham.

61 The DSCP continuously strives to ensure and embed a learning culture at the heart of what they do and will, where appropriate, take all

opportunities to review circumstances in order to identify and learn from good practice and areas where practice could be strengthened. A number of ways the Partnership has done this over the past six months includes:

- (a) Developed a “Think Tank” model to look at performance data.
- (b) Coordinated a referral for learning pathway, this allows partners to refer in both positive practice cases and learning from practice cases for discussions and oversight.
- (c) Created and distributed learning briefings
- (d) Provided practitioner briefings on what the DSCP does and how we can support practice in County Durham.

62 As a result of this work, there has been an increase in the number of partners accessing the DSCP website. From April 2023 to December 2023, the partnership website recorded in excess of 66,210 visits, this compares positively to the full year figures for 2022-2023 of 22,544. The number of subscribers to Me-Learning (training site) has also significantly increased in 2023. The number of new registrations were recorded between April 2023 to December 2023 to be at 4,069, in 2022 the numbers of new subscribers was 2,933. The DSCP are now sending out monthly newsletters with over 1000 subscribers, the partnership also uses Twitter to communicate and are looking at developing further social media platforms.

63 The partnership published its annual report, the reports can be accessed via the DSCP website [Durham Safeguarding Children Partnership Annual Report 2022/2023 \(durham-scp.org.uk\)](https://www.durham-scp.org.uk).

64 The **Durham Safeguarding Adults Partnership** continues to share and raise awareness of key information and messages related to the prevention and protection from abuse and neglect for adults in its area.

65 In the six months from April 2023 to September 2023, the partnership website recorded in excess of 23,988 visits, this compares positively to the full year figures for 2022-2023 of 32,783. In addition, 18 ebulletins have been issued across a range of statutory and relevant partners and wider provider and voluntary community sector organisations.

66 The partnership published its annual report suite, which includes a report on a page, easy read report and report in video format, all reports can be accessed via the [Durham Safeguarding Adults Partnership](https://www.durham-scp.org.uk) dedicated website.

- 67 Working in close connectivity to the Durham Safeguarding Children Partnership, a joint Safeguarding Week took place during November 2023. The week was opened by the Chairs of the respective partnerships and offered a range of learning opportunities open to professionals, practitioners, and volunteers. Both partnerships reporting upon the impact of the week in line with their individual reporting arrangements. Key highlights include over 500 attendances across the week's events, with a 48.2 per cent response rate for evaluations, and an average rating of 4.67 out of 5 stars for events accessed.

### **Fun and Food programme**

- 68 The **fun and food programme** has continued to develop, and over the summer holidays, 225 projects have been delivered across the County, running 1,982 sessions, and providing 72,982 meals over the 6-week Summer holiday period.
- 69 The range of activities can be seen in the Summer Fun and Food Video [Fun and Food videos - Durham County Council](#). 21,819 children were engaged in these sessions, and of these, 4,574 children had additional needs.
- 70 During the October half term holiday, 81 projects were delivered across the county, and partners continue to offer wonderful creative projects, engaging children and young people in experiences and opportunities they wouldn't ordinarily be able to access. 2,810 children engaged, and of these, 723 had additional needs.
- 71 During the Christmas holidays 69 projects were delivered across the county by a variety of partner agencies including VCS, schools, leisure services, and family hubs. Enriching activities include performing arts, choir singing, outdoor activities and sports/physical activities and much more. 2620 children and young people engaged and of these, 719 had additional needs.

### **Vision 2035: More and better jobs**

- 72 In 2022, the County Durham Inclusive Economic Strategy (IES) was adopted by the council and the **County Durham Economic Partnership (CDEP)**. The strategy set an ambitious vision for the county's economy to 2035, providing a long-term focus which will drive strategic projects that aim to make a transformational improvement to the county's underlying economic conditions.
- 73 The Delivery Plan aligns with the strategy and sets out how the actions we take over the coming years will support the achievement of the strategic ambitions. The Delivery Plan was been developed between March and September 2023 with strong engagement from **CDEP**

partners. With support from DCC, the **CDEP** will oversee the implementation of the Delivery Plan, track outcomes, and oversee the modification of the approaches and actions taken.

- 74 The Delivery Plan is organised around the four core themes of the IES, People, Productivity, Place and Promotion, with the fifth cross-cutting theme of Planet. The actions in the Delivery Plan are identified using a 'logic chain' approach which ensures the actions relate to an ambition, have a lead, resources, and timescales identified where possible, and show linkages to other actions. The Delivery Plan will evolve over the coming years to capture more project details and align project outcomes with data from national sources. It will be a live document so that it can adapt to respond to changing economic conditions.
- 75 The Delivery Plan is accompanied by a performance framework which identifies aspects of the county's economy that are below regional and national performance. It will be used to track and report overall changes in these conditions as well as improvements in economic inclusivity. It includes targets for 2035 which align with the overall principal to try to close the gap with national average levels of economic performance, setting out what success of the Inclusive Economic Strategy looks like.
- 76 The Inclusive Economic Strategy and Delivery Plan are also informing the development of a new Investment Plan which will be used to promote major projects and investment opportunities to prospective public and private sector investors.
- 77 The **County Durham Pound Project** has continued to build on the social value work undertaken by the Council, with the principles, practices and procurement processes now adopted by the partners of the project within their respective organisations.
- 78 The drive on including a social value assessment within procurement activity linked to the local needs analysis and reflective of strategies like the Inclusive Economic Strategy has provided increased opportunities for local based businesses to provide goods, works and services (either directly or indirectly through the supply chain) to the County Durham Pound Partners.
- 79 A leading example of good practice, national interest in the project continues and locally, the move from transactional social value to transformational social value, including expanding the project's reach to include the Private and Third Sector is the next phase in our growth.
- 80 The **UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF)** allocation for County Durham is £30,830,613 with an additional £2,803,077 to fund Multiply - a new adult numeracy programme to help transform the lives of adults across the UK, by improving their functional numeracy skills. All the

funding has now been allocated, and 16 projects have been formally approved so far including:

- (a) **Durham Business Growth Programme:** An integrated programme to boost productivity and support growth in County Durham businesses. Led by Business Durham with UMi and the Regional Technology Centre as core delivery partners. £8.16m total programme value (of which £4m is for business grants, including £1.6m from Rural England Prosperity Fund).
- (b) **Innovating Together in the North East (In-TUNE):** Durham University was awarded £4.75m UKSPF funding secured for £5.08m In-TUNE programme until March 2025. It is a collaboration between Durham, Newcastle, Northumbria and Sunderland Universities plus the Centre for Process Innovation. It includes two existing programmes, the Northern Accelerator – supporting commercialisation of University Intellectual Property through Spin-Outs and Arrow – Rolling Out Innovation support to Small and Medium Sized Enterprises.
- (c) **DurhamEnable Supported Employment Service:** A Supported Employment service, initially funded by £3.6m of European Social Fund and match funding from February 2021 to December 2023. Then further funded by UKSPF until March 2025.
  - (i) The scheme is a multi-agency approach to tackling the historically low employment rate for adults with Learning Disabilities and Autistic people in County Durham.
  - (ii) Target Group: 18+ eligible for Adult Social Care support, Learning Disability and/or Autism, Disability – physical/sensory, Mental Health difficulties, previously held an Education, Health and Care Plan/Statement.
- (d) **Multiply & Communicate:** County Durham has highest number of people with low essential skills (75,557). Multiply delivers innovative interventions to support adults to develop their numeracy skills for life home and work. There is £2.8 million to deliver this project until 31st March 2025.
  - (i) 50% of population do not have minimum literacy skills to cope with everyday life. Communicate is a new project that is funded by UKSPF People and Skills funding that will work together with Multiply to support people to develop literacy skills. £800k of funding until March 2025 will be utilised to improve functional health literacy, interactive health literacy and critical health literacy. Learners will take part in a range of activities which will enable them to improve their ability to

understand and use information to make decisions about their health and care and the health and care of those in their care such as children. This will include developing the skills needed to effectively use and respond to spoken and written communication. The strongest correlation to ill health – stronger than education level, deprivation, age or ethnicity – is health literacy.

- 81 County Durham has a shortage of new industrial units which is restricting the growth of new and existing local companies wanting to set up or grow a business. County Durham's Inclusive Economic Strategy sets a vision for the area's economy up to 2035 that includes developing employment land for improved infrastructure, providing better facilities and opportunities for businesses in the area.
- 82 £1.8 million has been approved in principle from the UKSPF as part of the estimated £8.5 million capital cost to develop additional much-needed business units at South Church Enterprise Park, Bishop Auckland. This could see some 45,000 square foot of units built for new and young small businesses needing space.
- 83 Furthermore, circa £1,000,000 to deliver additional initiatives with a focus on food poverty alleviation, the provision of cost-of-living advice and guidance, and fun and food with half term activities has been secured through UK Shared Prosperity funding with projects planned for delivery through 2024/25.
- 84 **Durham AAP** has supported a local organisation, EMPOWHer, to give young women the practical skills to get employment in the beauty business. The young woman aged between 17 and 25 have all had a baby recently or are pregnant and the training gives them very practical, accredited training that will help them either become self-employed or work in a salon. The young women involved also look at business planning skills and after the course has finished there is ongoing support from the delivery team. The first course has just finished with two more planned.



Learning business planning skills



- 85 The new Durham Bus Station opened to the public on 7 January. The new bus station has been designed to increase the overall space for passengers and has improved facilities including segregated toilets, a Changing Places toilet, improved information displays and upgraded seating in the passenger waiting area.
- 86 Providing high quality facilities, the station will serve as a major transport hub for both the city and the county. It is hoped it will help attract both shoppers and tourists to the city, supporting our independent businesses and our cultural attractions and will encourage people to make more journeys by bus rather than car, promoting more sustainable travel.
- 87 **Teesdale Action Partnership (TAP)** has provided funding along with Durham County Council Regeneration Fund and The Witham itself, to boost the Witham's profile. Funding has been allocated to light up the exterior of the popular arts venue and provide acoustic improvements to the music hall. The scheme will also help enhance the Highstreet making it a more vibrant place.

### **Vision 2035: People live long and independent lives**

- 88 Smoking continues to be a key priority for the **Health and Wellbeing Board**, and it provided its full support to the Government's "Stopping the Start" plan to create a smokefree generation and raise the legal age for tobacco sales.
- 89 Smoking remains the largest single cause of preventable deaths and is one of the largest causes of health inequalities in England. The harm of smoking falls on everyone within our society. The cost of smoking isn't just on the individual but on the wider economy, such as health and social care costs, fire brigade call outs, and loss to the economy due to people being unwell and unable to work.
- 90 A motion to full council welcoming the consultation on the "Stopping the Start" plan was moved by Cllr Cathy Hunt and received cross-party support. Endorsement of proposed new measures to tighten the promotion, packaging, branding and pricing of vapes to reduce their appeal to children and young people was also agreed.
- 91 Work is taking place to improve **health literacy**, which is a crucial element of us achieving the priorities in the Joint Local Health and Wellbeing Strategy. This is about ensuring that people have the skills, knowledge, understanding and confidence to access, understand, use and navigate health and social care information to maintain good levels of wellbeing.

92 The aim is to empower people to take control of their own health and wellbeing and improve shared decision making and personalised care. This will help people to access the right services at the right time, reduce crises and reduce inappropriate appointments.

93 People with limited health literacy are more likely to use emergency services and less likely to successfully manage long-term health conditions - as a result, incurring higher health and social care costs.

94 Collaboration between the **Health and Wellbeing Board** and the **County Durham Economic Partnership** is taking place on health literacy.

95 The County Durham Care Partnership (a subgroup of the **Health and Wellbeing Board**) which facilitates improved collaborations between health and social care teams, aimed at giving residents better, connected health services, closer to home, has been recognised as a national model for collaboration. The Government's representatives said they were particularly struck by County Durham Care Partnership's culture of continuous improvement, and the teams' commitment to improve the system even further.



96 The **Health and Wellbeing Board** supported the development of a Carers Plan on a Page which has been written together with carers and those providing support to carers. The Carers Plan on a Page addresses areas highlighted in the recent strategic review of carer support as needing focused support or attention, such as young adult carers, male carers and working age carers. The plan has been developed around four key areas which provides a framework for targeting and developing support to carers in County Durham.

- (a) **Be seen** - identification of carers
- (b) **Be well and healthy** - improving physical and mental health
- (c) **Be connected** - providing support to carers
- (d) **Be heard** - capturing the carers voice

97 The Carers Plan on a Page will be published on the Durham Carers Infopoint [www.durhamcarers.info](http://www.durhamcarers.info) which provides a range of information, advice and guidance to unpaid carers.

98 **Spennymoor AAP** has allocated funding to provide supplementary support with the running costs of the Sing for Life Community Choir which is a thriving community choir that takes place at Croxdale Community Centre. The choir is an inclusive space that engages with participants of all different ages, abilities, and backgrounds. The choir supports combatting social isolation in the older generation and ensuring accessibility to participants with disabilities of all ages and improving overall health and wellbeing through the positive physiological benefits of singing.

99 The **Health and Wellbeing Board** agreed the 'Think Autism in County Durham' Autism Strategy for Children, Young People and Adults 2023 – 2026. The strategy is completely aligned to the National Strategy for Autistic Children, Young People and Adults 2021-26 and includes an increased focus on criminal justice and is also aligned to Tees Esk and Wear Valley's Autism Strategy Framework. The strategy has six aims to achieve the vision that **"in County Durham all autistic people live fulfilling and rewarding lives within a society that accepts and understands them. They can access advice and support if they need it, and they can depend on mainstream public services to treat them fairly as individuals, helping them make the most of their talents."**



**Think Autism in County Durham**  
Autism Strategy for Children, Young People  
and Adults  
2023 - 2026



100 **Great Aycliffe and Middridge AAP (GAMP)** supported the North East Autism Society to run a series of youth clubs for autistic children and young people at Woodham Community Centre based in Newton Aycliffe. Sessions are run by staff members, with volunteer support for children aged 5 to 10, and 11 to 19. These youth club sessions provide a range of activities for autistic and neurodiverse children/young people, in a safe and understanding environment, designed by and for its members.

101 The project continues to be on track and is making excellent progress. All participants have integrated into the youth club well - participating in play with other autistic children; improving their communication/social skills; and stimulating their sensory experience.

- 102 Feedback from families continues to be very positive; where some say it is a lifeline for their child to mix with other young people away from school and enjoy some social time away from the family, allowing them some freedom and independence without parental supervision. The parents are also using this free time to good effect and strong support and friendships are forming.
- 103 The **Derwent Valley AAP** is supporting a Community Garden Wellbeing Programme which will enable the Friends of Blackhill and Consett Park to employ skilled tutors to develop the community garden for activities that can help address social isolation and improve mental and physical health and wellbeing.
- 104 The aim is to extend the opening hours of the community garden, and the range of activities to attract new and existing participants. The project will offer:
- (a) a gardening programme to enable local people to grow their own food and learn about organic growing.
  - (b) cooking activities using the garden's bread oven.
  - (c) traditional crafts, e.g., whittling, basket making.
  - (d) creative arts such as watercolour painting, drawing and photography.
  - (e) woodworking activities such as making troughs and planters, re-building the raised beds, bird and bat boxes.
  - (f) hosting family activities during school holidays/after school.
- 105 The project will benefit 118 users and aims to improve mental health and wellbeing whilst promoting a more attractive and sustainable environment.
- 106 Working with a specialist Mental Health nurse to support those in the Dales who are currently experiencing low mood, **Weardale AAP** is currently developing a “menshed” – a safe place for men to come together – that will be underpinned by relevant referral and support services.
- 107 **Employer Supported Volunteering (ESV)** is where the employees of an organisation take paid time off to volunteer during work hours. Employees can choose to use their volunteering time to support a charity or community group of their own choice, or to take up an opportunity provided by their organisation. ESV is key in promoting a

better work-life balance and a having a positive impact on health and wellbeing.

- 108 ESV opportunities are seen by many employers as contributing to an attractive employment package to prospective job applicants, with organisations able to show a direct correlation between their ESV schemes and staff engagement scores.
- 109 The recent workforce survey highlighted that only 20.9% of the Council's workforce currently volunteer but it also highlighted that 63.8% would volunteer if they had more time.
- 110 An ESV Coordinator has been appointed and taken up post who will ensure the effective implementation and ongoing development of the Employer Supported Volunteering Scheme, engage with relevant stakeholders and build relationships with partner organisations. In collaboration with relevant stakeholders, the postholder will take primary responsibility for developing the ESV to support widening participation and will also be responsible for the marketing, promotion and evaluation of the ESV, ensuring both DCC employees achieve the best possible outcomes from their volunteering journey.
- 111 The scheme is for Durham County Council employees to be supported to volunteer for a maximum of 24 hours per year and will be launched in April 2024.
- 112 The County Council have committed to fund the two-armed forces outreach workers based within the Housing Team on a permanent basis. The **Armed Forces Outreach Service**, in partnership with Gateshead Council, Newcastle City Council and Believe Housing, provide support and advice to veterans and those leaving the armed forces and their families, with two full time posts within the County Durham area. The assurance to fund on a permanent basis further demonstrates the Council's pledge to the **Armed Forces Covenant** and our commitment to work with other partners in the local region to support our armed forces community.
- 113 An application was successfully made in September to renew the Gold Award level accreditation that the County Council holds for the [Ministry of Defence Employer Recognition Scheme](#). This award recognises the positive role that the County Council plays in supporting the Armed Forces community.
- 114 The **Better Together VCS Forum** held its 10th Policy Forum meeting in October, bringing together a broad range of VCS organisations and colleagues from Public Health and Durham University to consider whether there is an evidence base in County Durham informed by all sectors to support the wider determinants of health of our communities.

A report on the conference and reports from other regular meetings of the Forum can be found [here](#).

- 115 Our series of Breakfast Seminars which bring together elected members, officers, partners, and individuals from **faith and community groups** in roundtable conversations have hosted Seminars October and January. The October Seminar looked at how partners can work together to explore the possibility of encouraging community-led housing projects in the County. The January Seminar looked at the incremental breakdown of the NHS through the privatisation of health care services, with a keynote speech by Professor Peter Kelly CBE.

### **Vision 2035: Connected communities**

- 116 Anti-social behaviour and protecting vulnerable people are key priorities for the **Safe Durham Partnership**.
- 117 Round 5 of the Safer Streets funding runs from 1 November 2023 to March 2025. This round maintains the same focus as Round 4, aiming to reduce levels of neighbourhood crime, Violence Against Women and Girls in public spaces and Anti-Social behaviour.
- 118 For the first time, funding has been directly awarded to Police and Crime Commissioners as opposed to competed, although Police and Crime Commissioners were still required to submit funding proposals to confirm that they meet the requirements of the fund.
- 119 Funding is allocated to the following projects:
- (a) **Left Behind Towns/ASB hotspot areas:** Interventions include CCTV, More officers, Off road bike barriers, crime prevention equipment.
  - (b) **Rural crime:** Interventions include Ruralwatch coordinators, intelligence analyst, and administration support officer from National Farmers Union, Crime Prevention Equipment, body cams, Aerial Surveillance-Drones and pilot licenses and Rural Vehicles
  - (c) **Violence against women and girls (VAWG) in Durham City:** Interventions include Public Space CCTV and deployable cameras, VAWG engagement officer
- 120 A “Spotlight on coercive control” conference took place virtually in November 2023 as part of our wider work on the White Ribbon agenda (working together to end men’s violence against women).

- 121 Over 500 people attended the conference and the agenda for the day reflected a blend of research, lived experience and expertise that helped create greater recognition of the indicators of coercive control, greater understanding of the risks associated with coercive control and increase awareness of the impact that the many different tactics of coercive control, used by those causing harm, have on both adult and child victim/survivors.
- 122 A highlight of the event were the personal stories that were shared by two speakers which were so powerful to the audience.
- (a) Luke Hart talked about his lived experience of growing up in a household governed by Coercive Control which tragically led to the killing of his mother and his sister, at the hands of his father.
  - (b) Aged 14, Georgia Hooper witnessed her mother being shot dead by her stepdad. Georgia shared about what life was like for her living in a rural farmhouse with her mother and abusive stepfather, her stepfathers use of Coercive Control and the events leading up to the tragic death of her mother.
- 123 274 evaluations were received, all of which were extremely positive. Comments included **“The conference has given me deeper insight of coercive control and has bettered me in being able to teach the meaning to the young people I support”** and **“Hearing from survivors was so impactful, I will never forget this and will do my best to support those affected”**.
- 124 A number of AAPs have responded to local need with a range of community safety projects.
- 125 **East Durham AAP** continues to support the Safer Homes project, which is targeting those who are at risk of theft, burglary and personal attack. Items such as alarms and locks are being distributed through the local neighbourhood police teams.
- 126 **4 Together AAP** has funded ICT equipment for the “Positive Change Through Sport” project delivered by Seconds Out at Ferryhill Sports and Education Centre. Focusing on young people who are entering into the youth justice system this group provides an opportunity to engage in both physical and wellbeing related activity, alongside developing life skills and employability tools. The equipment is used to analyse and enhance physical performance, CV development, research and signposting as well as improving general IT skills.
- 127 **Stanley AAP** organised an event at Tanfield school where representatives from the Air Cadets, Army Cadets, police, and fire service came together to demonstrate the cadet opportunities that are

available in the region and the potential for these experiences to pave the way for future careers within the respective services.

- 128 Over 160 Year 8 pupils took part in the event and experienced a range of activities including:
- (a) hands on experience using flight simulators, experiencing a virtual reality glider flight, and took part in leadership exercises under the guidance of Air Cadet staff.
  - (b) With the Army Cadets staff, they learned the basics of personal camouflage with fieldcrafts and took part in fitness and teambuilding activities. They also had a taste of the ration packs and an overview of how to save lives with first aid.
  - (c) The fire service taught pupils drills with fire hoses and how to work in pairs to rescue a small dummy from a smoke tent.
  - (d) The police brought along an Armed Response Vehicle, long lens camera and an e-bike. The children were taught how to use riot gear, handcuffs and surveillance equipment, and learnt how the police's drone is deployed to support those in need and detect crime.
- 129 To end the day everyone gathered to watch the fire service carry out a live demonstration of how they deal with a road traffic collision, by cutting out and rescuing two budding Air Cadets employees from a car.
- 130 The deputy headteacher of Tanfield School, said: "This was a fantastic opportunity for our students. As a school our mission is to get every student into their dream job. We talk a lot about careers and aspirations, but bringing this experience into school takes it to another level.
- 131 "Many of our students were left in awe at what some of the services do and it has certainly inspired some of them to think about careers in this sector. The day was informative and motivational, and we cannot thank the services involved enough for giving up their valuable time."
- 132 The **Environment and Climate Change Partnership (ECCP)** reviewed and refreshed its structure in September 2023. The meetings moved from sharing information, to focus on:
- (a) supporting the three work streams to effectively deliver on their agendas;
  - (b) enabling collaboration across the workstreams and with other thematic partnerships; and
  - (c) influencing decision making locally, regionally, and nationally.



- 133 The ECCP aims to deliver the vision of ‘A better County Durham: sustainable communities, resilient to climate change, richer in nature’ by informing on, influencing, and amplifying the environmental agenda.
- 134 In March, an annual ECCP Emergency Summit, which provides all members of the ECCP with the opportunity to share information, plan for the future and network with partners will take place.
- 135 The Climate Emergency Workstream have written the third **Climate Emergency Response Plan 2024 – 27 (CERP3)**. Partners have made significant progress since the first plan was agreed in 2020, and are working closely with private industry, other local authorities, and the voluntary and community sector to support wider decarbonisation initiatives. Following consultation, nine new themes have been agreed:
- (a) Buildings
  - (b) Transport and Connectivity
  - (c) Sustainable Energy
  - (d) Business, Green Economy and Skills
  - (e) Waste and Resources
  - (f) Agriculture and Food
  - (g) Natural Environment
  - (h) Adaptation
  - (i) Engagement, Education and Behavioural Change
- 136 CERP3 will be launched in April 2024.
- 137 Partners from the ECCP’s Climate Emergency Board – Durham University, Durham County Council and Kromek – completed a joint research study in December to understand the viability of using liquid desiccant (usually used in air conditioning) as thermal batteries. The project assessed the feasibility of recovering ultralow-grade heat sources using the desiccant technology and identified the optimal design to increase the performance of the storage system. The research was supported with £50,000 worth of funding from the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council Impact Acceleration Account. It aimed to move the technology closer to commercialisation by testing and demonstrating it in live conditions, specifically heating and dehumidification at indoor swimming pools, using DCC’s Freeman’s Quay pool as a test venue. It was found that a significant reduction in energy consumption and costs could be

achieved by using the liquid desiccant technology, however it was also concluded that the desiccant solution was better suited to providing dehumidification and heating to a facility that required it at lower temperatures and unfortunately it was not suitable for Freeman's Quay, however, research will be undertaken for alternative applications that are able to benefit from this technology.

138 Hamsteels Community Centre Sustainability Improvements in Esh Winning invited the council's Business Energy Efficiency Project team to undertake an audit of the building in terms of its energy efficiency and where it can take steps to improve this as a way of negating rising energy monthly energy bills which were forecast to exceed the Centre's income.

139 The community centre had undertaken some measures that were easily achieved and practical (low cost) including monitoring energy use, using curtains and blinds to regulate light and temperature, improved heating and hot water controls and marking switches to make it clear what they were for.

140 **Mid Durham AAP** provided funding to add solar panels at the Centre and also improve the lighting within the building to make a much greater economic, carbon and sustainability difference. A solar panel was installed to supply sufficient power to meet the greater part of current use which would result in a saving of around 50% on electricity costs. In terms of lighting, the main hall is the most used space and currently lit by 10 floodlights. A linear LED lighting scheme has been designed to reduce running costs, offer more control (e.g., lighting only half the hall for smaller groups) and with adjustable brightness to be used to suit.



The new energy efficient LED lighting scheme

141 The ECCP Ecological Emergency Workstream have been working on the development of the **Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS)**. The initial focus was on two areas of work:

- (a) Working alongside regional partners and the Environmental Records Information Centre to map the current position, collate baseline data and identify any gaps.
  - (b) Set up working groups to identify priority areas and develop an outline LNRS for County Durham.
- 142 Meetings have been held between the regional Local Authority Ecologists, the Wildlife Trusts, and Tees Valley Local Nature Partnerships to discuss the LNRS across the region and how best to ensure cross boundary co-ordination of the LNRS. This grouping has formed the basis of a cross boundary group tasked with ensuring that each LNRS is cognisant of each other, and linkages are made between the mapping and biodiversity priorities.
- 143 A wide-ranging consultation exercise is taking place to support the development of the LNRS. The consultation aims to engage with all the residents of County Durham alongside identified specialist organisations and individuals with an interest in the LNRS. The consultation is in two stages:
- (a) The first stage, which went live in February 2024, was designed to inform the writing of the LNRS and a final consultation on the draft LNRS.
  - (b) The second stage, which will begin in autumn 2024, will consult on the final draft LNRS.
- 144 The target date for the competition of the LNRS is Spring 2025. A dedicated [LNRS webpage](#) which holds background information on the LNRS and supports the consultation process has been developed.

145 **3 Towns AAP** supported the Crook Winter Light Parade (CWLP) which was co-created with the community taking inspiration from northeast folklore, featuring mythical creatures, fairies and a Celtic 'King and Queen' all with an environmental focus using recycled materials to create a carnival parade by, with and for the people of Crook and the surrounding area.



Children enjoying Crook Winter Light Parade

- 146 Inspired by a cultural trip for members of Jack Drum Arts Social Prescribing group to the Museum of British Folklore's exhibition 'Making Mischief' the project supported professional arts workshops for:
- (a) Adults from the social prescribing group to create large Celtic-inspired puppets working with a skilled professional artist.
  - (b) School children to create folkloric costumes using recycled materials working with skilled creative practitioners.
  - (c) Families to create lanterns with folkloric symbols linked to the environment working with skilled creative practitioners.
  - (d) Adults from an open callout across the 3 Towns Area to create costumes working with a skilled costume designer.
  - (e) Local young people worked with professional performance artists to create contemporary circus and folk dance and Jack Drum Arts community band worked with professional folk musicians to create new music to complement existing repertoire.
- 147 This work culminated in a spectacular outdoor parade in Crook on 26 November 2023, attended by over 3,500 people celebrating folk traditions unique to the northeast supporting the development of a vibrant cultural community in the 3 Towns area. The event also played an important part in bringing people of all ages, backgrounds, and interests together, building civic pride and contributing to a greater sense of togetherness and wellbeing of all those who took part and joined on the streets to be an audience member.
- 148 Feedback collected from members of the public who attended CWLP included "The energy of the music, dancing, acting, performing, costumes, lighting all Intermingling beautifully together. Such a magical sense of community spirit bringing so much love and light through the town." and "Every age group was included in the parade, and this crossed over into the crowds of people who attended. Young, old, families all together for a few hours outside and not watching on TV. The atmosphere was friendly and uplifting. The Marshalling of the event was first class and did not block and spoil the event."

## **Conclusion**

149 As we continue to support and protect our most vulnerable communities through the challenges of the cost-of-living crisis, there has been significant progress in partnership working both at a strategic level and on the ground. Our 14 AAPs have made significant progress in supporting their communities and the golden thread of strategic partnership level work and what takes place in our communities is clear. This report only shows a flavour of the many projects that are taking place across the county at a community level that support our communities.

## **Background papers**

- None.

## **Other useful documents**

- None.

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## **Appendix 1: Implications**

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### **Legal Implications**

None.

### **Finance**

Area and neighbourhood budgets are utilised and delivered through the 14 AAPs and ensure the Council (and AAPs) receive improved information on the outputs achieved through use of locality budgets.

### **Consultation**

The County Durham Partnership framework is a key community engagement and consultation function of the Council and its partners. The recommendations in the report are based on extensive consultation with AAP partners.

### **Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty**

The actions set out in this report aim to ensure equality and diversity issues are embedded within the thematic partnerships and the working practice of AAPs.

### **Climate Change**

This is recognised throughout partnership activities.

### **Human Rights**

None.

### **Crime and Disorder**

The Crime and Disorder Act 1998 placed a statutory duty on local authorities to form a Community Safety Partnership (CSP) to tackle crime, disorder, anti-social behaviour, substance misuse, other behaviour adversely affecting the local environment and to reduce re-offending. In County Durham, the CSP is the Safe Durham Partnership.

### **Staffing**

None.

### **Accommodation**

None.

**Risk**

None.

**Procurement**

None.