

Cabinet

18 September 2024

County Durham Partnership Update

Ordinary Decision



Report of Corporate Management Team

John Hewitt, Chief Executive

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 Cabinet 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 March 2024 to July 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 The provision of adult social care in County Durham has been rated as 'good' following a recent assessment by the Care Quality Commission (CQC).
- 8 The Story was officially opened in June 2024. This new visitor attraction offers a gateway to the history of County Durham and its people.
- 9 The **Poverty Action Steering Group's** work has continued to concentrate on protecting our most vulnerable communities through the cost-of-living crisis. Progress made during the reporting period has included the initiation of a project to expand 'The Bread-and-Butter Thing' network from 15 to 20 hubs across the County and the development of a pilot project to support take up of Free School Meals through auto enrolment.
- 10 Good Things Foundation have joined forces with several mobile providers to launch the National Databank which aims to tackle data poverty by providing free mobile data, texts, and calls to people in need.
- 11 One of the final buildings to transfer to community control under the **Community Buildings Strategy** was completed in July.
- 12 During Easter 2024, the **fun and food programme** delivered 141 projects engaging with 1330 children and young people, 227 who had SEND, in a number of wonderful opportunities.
- 13 Partnerships also undertook a range of projects, detailed under the vision ambitions, including the following.
- 14 Members of the **Economic Partnership** Technical Funding Group met with members of the Treasury to discuss the **UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF)** and their experience of delivering the programme and the problems caused by not having confirmation of continuation funding post March 2025.

- 15 **Mental Health Awareness Week** took place during the 13 – 19 May 2024. This important event is one of the UK’s biggest annual mental health awareness campaigns. Durham County Council launched the signing of the MIND Mental Health at Work Commitment, which provides an effective, simple framework for employers to prevent poor mental health and recognise the importance of promoting staff wellbeing.
- 16 The **Safe Durham Partnership** agreed the new Safe Durham Partnership Strategy 2024-2029 at their meeting in May 2023. The simplified Safe Durham Partnership Strategy 2024-29 focuses on where and how SDP partners can make a difference a local level to add value and reduce duplication.

Recommendation

- 17 Cabinet is recommended to:
 - (a) note the contents of this update.

Background

- 18 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

- 19 The **County Durham Partnership** Board met in May. At the May meeting the Thematic Focus was on the preventative work of the County Durham Together (CDT) Partnership, working with communities most in need, underpinned by the Approach to Wellbeing Principles. The CDP Board reaffirmed its active support for the vision of CDT and partners agreed to instigate conversations within their organisations about what CDT means to them, ensure commitment to CDT workstreams and support collaboration around place-based working.
- 20 Partners received an outline of her Vision for the Force from Durham Constabulary's new Chief Constable, and an overview of the county's poverty issues from DCC's lead for Poverty Action. The Board discussed the need for joined up, data driven responses, avoiding duplication and working with communities and the voluntary and community sector to ensure maximum impact from all our resources.
- 21 In February, the **County Durham Partnership Forum** (made up of CDP Board and Chairs of Area Action Partnerships) focused on Humanitarian Support within County Durham, recognising and celebrating the work of the partnership and the collaborative approach to resettlement support. The aim of the session was to enable a better understanding of the humanitarian support schemes and to seek views on what more we can do to help new arrivals settle and communities deal with changes. Two very brave volunteers shared their first-hand experience of the Homes for Ukraine Scheme and the Afghan Scheme, and the Forum heard how they are both now helping others arriving in County Durham.
- 22 The Forum also heard about some of the successful projects supported by the Towns and Villages programme, managed by Area Action Partnerships, to regenerate and improve the areas where people live, work and visit, across the whole of the county.

Inspections

- 23 The provision of adult social care in County Durham has been rated as 'good' following a recent assessment by the Care Quality Commission (CQC).
- 24 The CQC assessed the authority in nine different areas across four themes including leadership, support, safety and its work with people.
- 25 The report praises staff at Durham County Council for how well they meet their responsibilities to ensure people have access to adult social care and support and found that over 85 per cent of CQC regulated provision in the county was rated as 'good' or 'outstanding' and that 95 per cent of equipment aimed at supporting people's independence, such as bathing aids, were delivered on time, sometimes on the same day.
- 26 The authority was praised for the way it supported people to lead healthier lives, with the report highlighting its work with community groups to deliver services locally as well as council commissioned preventative services, such as peer support groups and carer breaks. It also noted that the Social Care Direct service "was able to effectively direct people to a range of preventative services in the community."
- 27 All areas of leadership and support were rated as being of a good standard. This includes how well the council works with its partners and communities to deliver services to its residents.
- 28 Some extracts from the final report demonstrates our positive partnership arrangements: "The local authority worked collaboratively with partners to agree and align strategic priorities, plans, and responsibilities for people in the area. Partners worked positively together, with many long-standing relationships, with a good understanding of the health and care needs of the area."
- 29 A local area inspection (carried out jointly by Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission) also took place in June to review the impact of the local area partnership's arrangements for children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities. A final report and publication date is expected in the autumn.

Advice in County Durham

- 30 **Advice In County Durham** hosted a one-day Foundations of Housing and Effective Partnerships conference in May 2024 at the Seat Unique Riverside Stadium in Chester-le-Street and welcomed over 138 delegates.
- 31 The main keynote speakers were from Crisis, a national charity for people experiencing homelessness, who gave an overview of the homelessness challenges presenting in the North East.
- 32 Shelter, a National Charity who provide advice and support around housing and homelessness, provided an overview of the issues presenting around housing and specific data in County Durham. The DCC Housing Solutions Team gave an overview of the support they offer and the DCC Private and Selective Licensing teams.
- 33 There were a series of workshops and presentations throughout the day, looking at how our Social Landlords support their tenants with enhanced offers, with representation from Livin Housing, Believe Housing, Karbon Homes, Home Group and DCCs Durham Key Options.
- 34 It was a positive day for all partners who attended, with key contacts and new relationships developed as a result. The day was to cement more effective partnerships and to work more productively with the housing sector, allowing those frontline practitioners to support their service users and residents of County Durham.



Delegates at the Advice in County Durham conference

Poverty Action Steering Group

- 35 The **Poverty Action Steering Group's** work has continued to concentrate on protecting our most vulnerable communities through the cost-of-living crisis with initiatives focused on mitigating the impact of food and fuel poverty, ensuring access to welfare advice and guidance services, and promoting financial inclusion.
- 36 We know that tackling poverty takes time so the Poverty Action Strategy and Plan not only sets out the short-to-medium term initiatives and investments to help our residents recover from the pandemic and navigate through the cost-of-living crisis, but the longer-term action that we hope will manifest into a changed and improved situation, helping to break the cycle of poverty.

- 37 Initiatives to improve access to data and intelligence, determine measures to better understand our residents and their financial issues, and to assess the impact of our work has continued and has included the development of a bespoke performance dashboard (made up of datasets across partners) that will support targeted benefit take-up and campaign activity and assess the impact of interventions.
- 38 £450,000 of **UK Shared Prosperity Funding** secured for 2024/25 will support a project to expand 'The Bread-and-Butter Thing' network from 15 to 20 hubs across the County in addition to a Cost-of-Living Advice and Guidance project which is being delivered through Citizen's Advice County Durham, East Durham Trust, Durham Christian Partnership and Age UK County Durham. These projects are now in delivery.
- 39 Delivery of the Financial Inclusion Support Officer (FISO) programme has continued and is actively exploring new ways to tackle child poverty and overcome the current challenges related to the cost-of-living crisis. This work focuses on maximising entitlement to generate income from social security benefits and on supporting parents/carers to pursue pathways into employment. It also supports families by providing advice on support available for children such as free school meals and clothing grants. Two FISO's are now in post working with 12 secondary schools across County Durham.
- 40 The 'Cutting the Cost of the School Day' (CCSD) programme has continued to provide training to educational settings with the aim to gain a deeper insight into the scale and impact of poverty on children and young people, to challenge the stigma associated with living in poverty and support settings to develop practical steps in which to cut the cost of the school day. A pilot project to support take up of Free School Meals through auto enrolment starts in September.
- 41 Good Things Foundation have joined forces with several mobile providers to launch the National Databank which aims to tackle data poverty by providing free mobile data, texts, and calls to people in need. The Digital Durham Team are proactively seeking hyperlocal distributors for the DataSIMs.
- 42 Like a foodbank but for mobile data, the National Databank provides free mobile SIM cards to help digitally excluded people get connected. Digital Durham is working to encourage more external organisations and customer facing council teams and services to support the scheme. As a result, there are 35 physical drop-in Databanks in the county, as well as many more teams distributing SIMs directly to clients.
- 43 105 County Durham venues have been identified as offering some sort of free digital-related support including access to a device, connectivity,

and digital skills support. An online postcode checker on the [Digital Durham website](#), is being promoted to customer facing staff and organisations to direct people to local support.

- 44 To support our Digital Durham Team, in looking at connectivity in the rural areas, a new and unique offer is being explored by **Weardale AAP**. The concept of community volunteers working with B4RN (Broadband for Rural North) to bring high speed broadband to homes and businesses in rural northern England. The volunteers will support B4RN the communication to the local community to ensure robust information is supplied and understood. The connectivity of Weardale will improve job prospects for home workers.
- 45 The council continues to work in partnership with NEFirst Credit Union to provide interest free loans of up to £500 to qualifying residents. Council staff working with children can refer families who they feel might meet the requirements for the loan <https://www.durham.gov.uk/financialhelp> and a webpage on the DCC website <https://www.durham.gov.uk/schooluniform> has been developed to advise families of the support available when buying school uniforms with further engagement activity underway.
- 46 **Stanley AAP** funding has ensured the continuation of a Durham County Council Welfare Rights Officer in The Venue, Stanley every Wednesday providing seven hours of one-to-one appointments with residents who reside within the Stanley AAP area. The Welfare Rights Officer provides advice and support on social security issues and makes referrals on other money matters where appropriate to other partners in the building, Citizens Advice County Durham, Durham Money Advice Service, Home Group, and Foodbank services. Advice in County Durham Partnership Officers and Welfare Rights Service Staff will also provide training, information, advice and guidance to staff and volunteers from the local voluntary and community sector in the Stanley AAP area to enable them to support and signpost residents for assistance.
- 47 Our partnership-based approach to delivering the Poverty Action Strategy and action plan, will ensure we make it everyone's business to respond to poverty and the risk to financial exclusion.

Humanitarian Support programme

- 48 The **humanitarian support team** continues to support refugee families across County Durham, including four families welcomed to the area in March 2024 under the UK resettlement programme and three families resettled through Afghan programmes.

- 49 County Durham has been provided with funding from the Department for Levelling up, Housing, and Communities (DLUHC) to procure properties for resettled Afghan families, allowing us to source a number of properties to accommodate refugee families, enabling the delivery of the resettlement programme through this route. The Team continues to support individuals and families through the Homes for Ukraine sponsorship scheme, a programme 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.
- 50 The council is working with partners to engage in the government's full dispersal asylum accommodation programme, including co-ordination of responses to property requests and supporting the County's 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 in the area under the government's contract with a private housing provider.
- 51 North East local authorities were recently updated on Home Office proposals for future allocations of asylum dispersal accommodation under a regional plan. The revised plan will be a rolling 12-month programme, which will be reviewed quarterly. The plan proposed for 2024 will use indexing to determine future allocations, considering 21 factors, grouped under 4 meta-factors (housing, viability, social, population) for each local authority area. This will be undertaken using published information.
- 52 The Team will continue to monitor new announcements affecting future policy in this complex area of work.

Fun and Food programme

- 53 The **Fun and Food programme** has continued to be delivered in 2024. Within the terms of the Department for Education funding, half term holidays



cannot be funded. Recognising the need and demand for holiday activities with healthy food during half term holidays, Durham County Council's **Poverty Action Steering Group** have allocated £425,000 to Fun and Food to fund enriching activities and food for the four half terms February 2023 to February 2024. February half term 2024 was the final half term funded holiday period, 72 projects were delivered, 2061 children and young people engaged and of these 618 had

additional needs. Partners continued to offer wonderful creative projects, engaging children and young people in experiences and opportunities they would not ordinarily be able to access.

- 54 From Easter 2024, small changes were introduced to the way the Fun and Food programme is ran, in order to ensure children in receipt of free school meals get priority access to this service. This is to ensure, the funding restrictions imposed by the Department for Education, who provide funding for us to run the Fun and Food programme in the Easter, Summer and Christmas holidays, are met.
- 55 Working together with schools, Fun and Food Tickets were distributed to eligible families, in receipt of benefits related free school meals, through their school communication channels. The Fun and Food Tickets provided a link to explore what was available across the county and for parents/carers to book their children on to any activities. An enquiries inbox has also been developed for any parents/carers who may have questions.
- 56 During Easter 2024, 141 projects took place, 1330 children and young people, 227 who had SEND, engaged in a number of wonderful opportunities. The range of activities can be seen in the Easter Fun and Food video [Fun and Food videos - Durham County Council](#)
- 57 Following feedback from families, Fun and Food worked together with SEND Empowering Inclusive Communities (SENDEIC) to provide a range of activities specifically aimed at children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities.
- 58 Engaging with 11-16 years continues to be a challenge and to help address this the dedicated 11–16-year-old Physical Activities Officer continues to support groups broaden their provision for this age group.
- 59 Additional funding has been secured from the **UK Shared Prosperity Fund and Household Support Fund** to expand the Fun and Food offer over the Summer and Christmas holidays to fund places for children, not in receipt of benefits related free school meals, but who we know are still vulnerable. This will significantly add to the programme funded by the DfE.

County Durham Together

- 60 As noted previously, the County Durham Partnership reaffirmed its support for the vision and ambitions of the **County Durham Together (CDT) Partnership**, whose vision is “County Durham Together is about working with communities, especially those most in need, making sure they are at the heart of decision making, building on their existing skills,

knowledge, experience and resources to support everyone to thrive and to live happy, healthy and connected lives”.

- 61 Progress has been made through the CDT workstreams focusing on Communication and Digital Inclusion.
- 62 In addition to representative organisations on the County Durham Partnership, a number of Partnerships have committed to embodying the CDT principles within their work, including the Economic Partnership and the Child Poverty Action Steering Group. An [animation](#) has been developed and is being promoted across partner organisations and Partnerships.
- 63 The **UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF)** has been utilised around community hubs work. This is an opportunity to expand reach and work, with the aim to create up to 26 Digital hubs to be located in neighbourhoods across the county, to support them with the provision of connectivity, whether that be devices or wrap around digital and skills programmes.
- 64 Working with Age Concern, colleagues have commenced supporting BT with their outreach work, to reach individuals who will be concerned or impacted around the change in transferring telephony lines from analogue to digital, and what it means for them. Following lobbying, BT have increased the number of roadshows and included a van tour around the county to help inform and educate communities.

Vision 2035: More and better jobs

- 65 The North East Combined Authority (NECA) - representing the seven local authority areas of County Durham, Gateshead, Newcastle, North Tyneside, Northumberland, South Tyneside and Sunderland) was formed on 7 May 2024 with the appointment of Kim McGuinness as the North East Mayor.
- 66 Seven portfolios have been established for the NECA which will be the focus of programmes of work:
- (a) Culture, Creative Tourism and Sport
 - (b) Transport
 - (c) Finance and Investment
 - (d) Environment, Coast and Rural
 - (e) Economy
 - (f) Housing and Land

(g) Education, Inclusion and Skills

67 Each portfolio will be led by a different local authority, with Durham County Council taking the lead for the Culture, Creative Tourism and Sport.

68 The Story was officially opened in June 2024. This new visitor attraction offers a gateway to the history of County Durham and its people. Bringing together diverse collections of records and objects for the first time, The Story charts thousands of years of everyday life in the county and offers visitors access to ancient documents and archaeological finds, records of bravery, and stories of life-changing events. This includes six miles of archives charting 900 years of County Durham's history and the entire Durham Light Infantry (DLI) Collection.



Official opening of The Story

69 A free, interactive exhibition space showcases the stories within these collections, and an exciting programme of activities will offer new ways for people to discover and learn more about the people and events that shaped the county. It is also the new home for the Registration service and the venue where marriages, civil partnerships and citizenships ceremonies can take place in a number of ceremony rooms in the restored and extended Grade 11 listed Mount Oswald manor house.

70 The Story will reinforce County Durham's standing as the Culture County and support the local economy.

71 As reported previously, the current allocation of **UK Shared Prosperity Funding**, which County Durham benefits from, is circa £34 million which will cease in March 2025.

72 Members of the **Economic Partnership** Technical Funding Group met with members of the Treasury to discuss the UKSPF and their experience of delivering the programme and the problems caused by not having confirmation of continuation funding and the impact this will have on the delivery of activities and to their beneficiaries' post March 2025. They were able to share experiences to date and the very real challenge to delivery of not only the UKSPF programme, but also to the delivery of the County Durham Inclusive Economic Strategy (IES).

73 They were also able to share the role that the **Economic Partnership** and wider partnership activity had played in delivery. The future of UKSPF funding nationally remains very uncertain. Locally, efforts to

ensure that the work that has been identified as necessary for Durham through the North East Combined Authority funds continues.

74 The annual County Durham Future Business Magnates competition saw Year 8 pupils from local schools apply creativity and problem-solving to a range of challenges. Organised by Business Durham, this year's theme was 'What a Wonderful World - Can you Make it Better?'

75 Pupils from King James I Academy took first place overall with their 'Smart Weigh' business. Their ingenious concept is based on an eco-friendly bin that can weigh food waste, with users then earning points according to how much of the waste is recycled or composted.



Pupils from King James I Academy celebrating success at the County Durham Future Business Magnates Competition

76 Runners-up, Belmont Community School, came up with 'TechC', a camera installed inside people's fridges to monitor the shelf life of products and Framwellgate Moor School's team were third place for their educational 'ShoreSavers' package, designed to teach primary school children about protecting the earth's oceans.

77 **Bishop Auckland and Shildon AAP** provided funding to Bishop Auckland College to support residents in finding employment or to progress in their career. This has had a positive impact in building their confidence, self-esteem and in contributing to the local economy. The project enables residents to develop the skills, qualifications, and attributes they will need, if they are to secure employment or improve their employment status.

78 The project has supported the development of strong partnership working between the college and the referral organisations and has seen several clients gain employment because of the training provided through the employability project.

CASE STUDY

JE was referred to the project in March by his Careers Advisor. He was unemployed after working for 17 years as a Vehicle Technician. He had been an avid artist since a young age and had taken a huge interest in the art of Tattoos with an aspiration to make this his career.

He had been shadowing a Tattooist to deepen his knowledge and understanding of the role. He had an extensive paper and digital portfolio showcasing his artistic talent and design work, using social media to display/advertise his designs as a form of business development. JE had been offered employment as a Tattoo Apprentice at Ink Heart Studio in Bishop Auckland, who had invested in some equipment for JE including a specialist chair.

The project was able to support JE by funding his Licence to carry out tattooing and equipment to enable him to begin his journey as an Apprentice Tattoo Artist.

- 79 **Derwent Valley AAP** is supporting a 'Readiness for Employment for Neuro Diverse/SEND/NEETS and Long Term Unemployed' project which is a collaborative initiative between Derwentside Trust and The HUB Consett.
- 80 The project will deliver a number of accredited training courses that support all ages and abilities as well as developing interpersonal skills to support individuals into employment. The programme runs over a five-day period over four weeks and provides support for confidence building, team working, mental health and wellbeing and the development of a full CV, along with interview techniques training and recognised accredited qualifications that employers look for when considering employment.
- 81 The HUB Consett is ensuring the training caters for those who have additional needs, and they are supporting the design and delivery of these courses and will also be signposting neuro diverse clients and those individuals who have further educational needs to this provision.

Vision 2035: People live long and independent lives.

- 82 In May 2023, the **Health and Wellbeing Board** agreed its [Joint Local Health and Wellbeing Strategy \(JLHWS\) 2023-28](#) in May 2023. From the evidence base in the Joint Strategic Needs and Assets Assessment (JSNAA), the four biggest contributors to people in County Durham dying young, living in poor health or with illness were agreed as the four key priority areas of focus:
- (a) Making smoking history

- (b) Enabling healthy weight for all
- (c) Improving mental health, resilience, and wellbeing
- (d) Reducing alcohol harms

83 At the last **Health and Wellbeing Board** meeting in July, the HWB agreed the ninth HWB Annual Report 2022-23, and the first since the publication of the new Joint Local Health and Wellbeing Strategy. The report is written in an easy to read, accessible format and includes examples of work the HWB has undertaken, or supported, during the past 12 months which have enabled progress towards the four key priorities. The report includes case studies which show how the work of the HWB, and its sub-groups has impacted on people's lives and also identifies challenges which might impede our progress and outlines some of our next steps.

84 Improving mental health, resilience and wellbeing is one of the four priority areas of the County Durham Joint Local Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2023-28.

85 Mental Health Awareness Week took place during the 13 – 19 May 2024. This important event is one of the UK's biggest annual mental health awareness campaigns. The theme for this year's campaign was "*Movement: Moving More for Mental Health*".



86 Part of this celebration saw Durham County Council launch the signing of the MIND Mental Health at Work Commitment, which provides an effective, simple framework for employers to prevent poor mental health and recognise the importance of promoting staff wellbeing.

87 The framework sets out six clear standards based on what best practice has shown is needed to make a difference and better equip employers to create an environment where employees can thrive.

88 At the Health and Wellbeing Board, the importance of this commitment was highlighted and promoted to the Board with the opportunity to become signatories within their respective organisations. County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service and Durham Constabulary have signed up to the Mental Health at Work Commitment with further work planned with the Health and Wellbeing Board

members to encourage other local organisations to become signatories themselves.

- 89 **Durham AAP** have funded a number of local mental health charities, St Margaret's Centre, RT Projects and the Waddington Street Centre have received funding to help them build their capacity and sustainability. Funding has helped St Margaret's Centre to develop their volunteer base at their community café. Overall, 25 volunteers have been supported with one of them saying, "I've wanted to volunteer in this sort of environment for a while but struggled to find a place that could accommodate my hearing impairment, it has been lovely to come to St Margaret's Centre and have people make an effort to support me so I can be independent and learn new skills."



Volunteers at St. Margaret's Community Cafe

- 90 The **4 Together Partnership** allocated funding towards the Get Active project, developed and delivered by the Cornforth Partnership. This project has supported young people and adults to make sustained changes to their health and wellbeing through their participation in physical activities and one to one mentoring. Through the employment of a specialist health and wellbeing co-ordinator the Partnership has been able to organise a series of wellbeing walk and talks, re-open the community gym in the village and provide qualified supervision for its use, alongside planning and delivering weekly sports activity sessions for both adults and children.
- 91 The **Health and Wellbeing Board** held a development session in June which looked at Health and Wellbeing Board priorities for children and young people with a dedicated focus on Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), including the first-hand perspective from children, young people and their parents and carers. Discussion took place on how we can work together to improve things in County Durham for children and young people with SEND, including knowing what's available, sharing best practice, advocacy around national reforms and sharing information that is easily accessible for children, young people and families/carers.
- 92 **Mid Durham AAP** have supported a Befriending Service, operated by the North East Autism Society, primarily for the autistic and neurodivergent community across the Mid-Durham AAP area. The project aims to address and improve mental health and social concerns faced by local people with autism and those with neurodiverse challenges.

93 Based in Brandon, the befriending service does not only allow affected people to meet up and make connections in supportive group sessions, but also allows those who attend to be signposted regarding key information, such as NHS provision, benefit availability, social housing, employment opportunities and other aspects promoting social welfare. The project also provides advice in person, extra support on-line, or over the phone. The project's lead is autistic himself, with substantial experience of working as a peer mentor, a major factor in making the group a success.

94 The **Health and Wellbeing Board** received information on the Department of Health and Social Care consultation process to expand community water fluoridation schemes across the North East of England. The consultation ended on 31 July 2024.

95 Water fluoridation is included as part of the Oral Health Promotion Strategy as an effective way of reducing inequalities in dental health, along with wider health programmes, that when combined will reduce decay levels and the impact of dental disease for our residents.

96 The **Health and Wellbeing Board** responded to the government consultation in favour of the expansion of community water fluoridation schemes across the North East.

97 **Teesdale Action Partnership (TAP)**

working in partnership with the parish council and Hamsterley Community Sports Association (HCSA), created plans to transform the redundant tennis courts into the Hamsterley Multi-use Games Area (MUGA). With help from Teesdale Action Partnership, more than £70,000 worth of funding was secured to build the new facility. In

addition to £35,000 Teesdale Action Partnerships' town and villages fund and £10,000 from Durham County Councillors town and villages pots, local businesses and individuals also supported the project with donations. The new MUGA facility is proving to be a success with the local primary school actively using the facility and recent multi-sports sessions have been held, supported through the Fun and Food Programme.



Community partners at Hamsterley Multi-use Games Area

98 The **Better Together VCS Forum** held its 11th Policy Forum meeting in April at an event at Bowburn Community Centre to look at Ageing Well in County Durham. Representatives from 28 different organisations explored the key issues on how we are supporting our ageing

population and what we might do better together. The detailed report from the event can be found [here](#).

99 Scheduled meetings of the Better Together Forum continue to enhance the working relationship of the key County Durham charities, considering issues such as how North East devolution will impact upon Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise organisations and how these organisations will work with Durham Police to help deliver the new Right Care, Right Person policy.

100 The County Council once again marked **Armed Forces Week** (24 to 29 June), which includes Reserves Day on Wednesday 26 June and Armed Forces Day on Saturday 29 June by flying our Armed Force flag.



101 Armed Forces Day supports the people who make up the armed forces community, from currently serving troops to service families, veterans, and cadets. Reserves Day recognises the dedication and professionalism of those in the reserve forces.

102 As part of the ceremony, Cllr Nicholson and Cllr Potts held a reception for the Vice Lord-Lieutenant of County Durham, senior representatives of the armed forces community, and our employees who are reservists or cadet force adult volunteers.

Vision 2035: Connected communities

103 The **Safe Durham Partnership** agreed the new [Safe Durham Partnership Strategy 2024-2029](#) at their meeting in May 2023. The strategy is underpinned by evidence from Durham Insight, alongside horizon scanning, local expertise and the voice of our communities and focuses on areas where the Safe Durham Partnership can make a difference at a local level to add value and reduce duplication.

104 The Safe Durham Partnership Strategy ambition is that “Durham is a county where everyone can feel and be safe” with three priorities as:

- (a) **Anti-social behaviour** and Crime which disrupts our communities
- (b) **Hate Crime** and building community cohesion
- (c) **Sexual Violence** and other violent crime

- 105 The Strategy recognises the work across the Community Safety arena and the Safe Durham Partnership will provide ongoing oversight and receive regular assurance from the well-established groups already in place to address these areas.
- 106 Members of the Safe Durham Partnership signed up to the Safer Homes Protocol to show their commitment to working in collaboration with County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service to reduce the risk of accidental fire from occurring, and thus the likelihood of injury or fatality to our communities.
- 107 This includes looking for data sharing opportunities with partners that will support identification of vulnerable people, the promotion of training to frontline staff and referral mechanisms for Home Fire Safety visits within partner organisations.
- 108 The **Environment and Climate Change Partnership (ECCP)** ran an Emergency Summit in March, bringing together environmental and community leaders from across County Durham to help set the agenda for the Environment and Climate Change Partnership for the future. The event was held at the Durham Leadership Centre in Spennymoor and was well attended. Following discussions at this event, the **Environment and Climate Change Partnership (ECCP)** has identified the following key priority areas going forward:
- (a) Improving communication of information on the environmental and climate challenges facing County Durham, with emphasis on countering deliberate misinformation.
 - (b) Increasing the finance available to invest in solutions to the climate and ecological emergencies and overcoming the negative impacts on people and communities.
 - (c) Ensuring that environmental issues are a significant part of the North East Combined Authority's agenda.
- 109 Communications representatives from partner organisations have met to plan how communication might be coordinated, and the information and messaging shared. The intention is to counter misinformation about environmental issues with the emphasis on showing positive action and the practical interventions that organisations and individuals can take.
- 110 As reported previously, 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. The project is exploring how it can deliver further investment to address local

environmental issues. ECCP member organisations are examining their supply chain and procurement processes to see if they can deliver further environmental and social benefits and act driver for change in the county.

111 The **Environment and Climate Change Partnership** has supported the development of the third Climate Emergency Response Plan (CERP3), which was approved and adopted by Cabinet in July, marking another significant step in the commitment to tackling climate change. The plan builds on the ambitious targets of 2022, aiming for a net zero council by 2030 and a net zero county by 2045 by reducing carbon emissions and promoting and delivering a more sustainable economy.

112 CERP3 underlines County Durham's proactive stance on climate and environmental issues, which builds on the Climate Emergency Declaration of 2019 and aligns with national and global efforts to combat climate change. The plan's comprehensive approach also ensures that a wide range of sectors, including operational, residential, commercial, transportation, food production, and the natural environment, are all recognised as links in the chain.



113 CERP3's focuses on community involvement and education which is critical in engaging residents and businesses and promoting a fair and just transition. CERP3 includes an action plan which details 232 actions across the eight thematic areas which aim to reduce carbon across the county. Key initiatives include increasing renewable energy sources and reducing reliance on fossil fuels; improving energy efficiency; adopting low emission vehicles wherever possible, along with the infrastructure needed to support this transition; enhancing public transportation and promoting biodiversity and nature-based solutions.

114 Durham's Early Help Strategy 2024-2026 was published in June and focuses on building positive and trusted relationships, between services, our communities and most importantly families. Our early help offer is focussed on identifying needs for the whole family at the earliest opportunity and using our collective support to respond swiftly and effectively. Working in partnership with health, education, criminal justice and voluntary, community and faith sector organisations will ensure our support offer is accessible and meets the needs of all families in County Durham.

- 115 Youth services have a wide and popular appeal, engaging with any young people regardless of their socio-economic status or where they live. They provide the opportunity for personal development as a key part of a young person's education, support skills for life and work, and mental and physical wellbeing, however, there is a national shortage of trained youth workers which threatens provision.
- 116 **Chester-le-Street and District AAP** funded Bullion Community Resource Centre to provide Youth Work training following organisations in the area highlighting a lack of Level 2 Trained Youth Workers locally.
- 117 A project was devised to provide a 14-week Level 2 accredited youth work course for volunteers / paid staff already working with young people locally in formal and informal youth group settings.
- 118 It is envisaged that the training will add quality to the youth work offered in the area and key areas will be strengthened such as understanding and implementing safeguarding, emotional development, and mental health for young people. In addition, it is hoped to provide a route to employment for volunteers, better paid sessional youth work and expansion of the pool of youth workers.

- 119 Shotton Youth Centre is a brand-new purpose-built youth facility for residents of Shotton and surrounding areas. **East Durham AAP** used part of its Towns and Villages funding to help with the feasibility study which has helped bring in over £1.3 million in funding for this facility.



Shotton Youth Centre

- 120 The funding is enabling two residents to be trained as Youth Workers to work in the centre once their training is completed. Employment of part time staff including caretaker and a cook has also been made possible.
- 121 Children and young people will have the option to participate in youth work activities and informal education, that will enable them to have the best start in life and try new experiences and develop life skills, increase confidence, self-esteem and raise expectations.
- 122 Funding from **East Durham AAP** has also been used to purchase equipment to help fit out the centre, including access to ICT equipment and furniture.

- 123 **Spennymoor AAP** provided funding to Spennymoor Community Centre to operate a Youth Festival in July 2024. Spennymoor Youth and Community Association will work with local youth service providers, clubs and groups to organise a one-day Youth Festival event aimed at connecting young people with local youth provision, services and opportunities.
- 124 The festival saw a market of youth engagement stalls where local organisations can showcase their services including:
- (a) Events and activity tasters through the day where young people can try out activities.
 - (b) Workshops for life skills, wellbeing and confidence, careers and leadership talks/advice,
 - (c) pampers (nails, hair, makeup), competitions.
 - (d) A performance space where young people or youth groups can showcase their talents throughout the day.
 - (e) This Youth Fest will celebrate young people, provide a fun and informal day with new experiences and connect people with provision and opportunities in Spennymoor, surrounding areas and online.
- 125 The event has been developed in consultation with County Councillors, Spennymoor AAP and partners who have identified the need for an event which connects young people, families and local youth service providers and community groups together to help raise awareness of opportunities within the AAP area and throughout County Durham for young people.
- 126 Working is taking place with Durham Community Action, as the umbrella voluntary organisation, to support community groups to consider the energy efficiency of their buildings. A number of AAPs are working at a community level to ensure there are sustainable community facilities that connect local people. This has included **East Durham Rural Corridor AAP** who funded Future Leisure in Coxhoe to install a new main door into the leisure centre as well as a set of secondary doors inside the reception area. As well as making the centre more sustainable by reducing energy bills, users of the building and staff will have a better experience, which it is envisaged will result in increased gym membership which should have an impact on health and wellbeing.

127 One of the final buildings to transfer to community control under the **Community Buildings Strategy** was completed in July. The freehold of Great Lumley Community Centre was transferred to Great Lumley Parish Council to enable them to attract funding to refurbish the centre and improve the facilities for the benefit of the community. A capital investment sum of £389,000 will also be made by the County Council to help them achieve the project, expected to be in excess of £1 million. There is significant value to buildings as a community asset within the heart of our communities.

128 **Great Aycliffe and Middridge Partnership (GAMP)** has supported Groundwork to host community social events in Newton Aycliffe at St Clare's Church with an average of 23 people attending each week. The group has a diverse mix of individuals that attend the coffee morning from all areas of the town enabling people to socialise with others they may not have met.

129 Since starting the sessions project leads have created strong trusting relationship with the clients. Private informal chats with a client led to signposting to other professionals for debt advice and assistance has been given to an individual to apply for a hardship fund through their energy provider to clear their energy debt they were unable to pay.

130 Building on the success of the Village Friends project in Howden-le-Wear, the **3 Towns Partnership** allocated further funding to continue and develop the project further. Further groups are being set up targeted to widows in the village (Connect Group) and men.



Howden-le-Wear Village Friends

131 The Connect Group recipe sharing project have held three get togethers at the Village Hall so far. A coffee morning to plan activities for the coming months has been held as well as a social evening at The Green in Billy Row. The twenty ladies in the Connect Group have all expressed appreciation for the difference the group is making to their lives and the Men's Night in May was also highly successful.

Feedback the Village Friends has included: **"I look forward to each week and meeting friends"**, **"I am so pleased that I saw the notice on the park fence. I was made so very welcome"** and **"Since coming here each week my life has gained meaning again"**.

Conclusion

132 The impact of national challenges, from the cost-of-living crisis, funding uncertainty related to the future of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF), changes to the Department of Education Holiday Activity with Food programme criteria to the national shortage of youth workers is being felt by our communities in Durham. There is significant partnership work taking place across our strategic partnerships and locally within our AAPs to mitigate these challenges for our communities. We continue to work together with our stakeholders and partners to support our communities and ensure we have good outcomes.

Background papers

- None.

Other useful documents

- None.

Author

Julie Bradbrook

Tel: 03000 267325

Appendix 1: Implications

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.