

WASHINGTON NEIGHBOURHOOD BOARD

Minutes of the Meeting held on Friday 19th September 2025 at 1.30pm at Washington Business Centre, Sunderland

Present:

Members of the Board

Ellen Thinnesen OBE (Chair)	Sunderland College
Cllr Linda Williams	Sunderland City Council
Paul McEldon OBE	North East Business Innovation Centre
Simon Marshall	Together for Children Sunderland Ltd
Professor Graham Thrower	University of Sunderland
Ruth Walker	Sunderland Youth Consortium
Rachel Snaith	Police and Crime Commissioner
Kim Hunter	Washington Area VCS Network
Lindsey Hall (<i>in Austin McNamara's absence</i>)	Sunderland Voluntary Sector Alliance

All Supporting Officers

Catherine Auld	Sunderland City Council
Helen Peverley	Sunderland City Council
Lucy Nicholson	Sunderland City Council
Patrick Houghton	Sunderland City Council
Kristofer Bendelow	Sunderland City Council
Debra Bond	Sunderland City Council

Welcome and Apologies

The Chair formally opened the meeting of the Washington Neighbourhood Board and welcomed all attendees.

Apologies for absence were received from Sharon Hodgson MP, Cllr Beth Jones - Sunderland City Council, Marc Edwards - Gentoo, Scott Watson - North East and North Cumbria Integrated Commissioning Board and Austin McNamara - Sunderland Voluntary Sector Alliance.

Minutes and actions arising from the last meeting held on 6th June 2025

The minutes were agreed as an accurate record and it was confirmed that all actions had been completed.

Patrick Houghton, Governance Law Specialist confirmed that the Governance Packs and Declaration of Interest forms had been circulated. Blank copies of the forms were

available for anyone who had not yet completed one and any questions could be picked up with himself or Debra at the end of the meeting.

Catherine Auld, Director of Economy, Sustainability and Culture updated the Board informing members that Data Workshops had taken place in June and August. A script had been provided to Board Members together with a linear timeline of dates. A Community Engagement plan had been implemented and a Community Engagement Workshop had been held: it was confirmed that an identity for the Board would continue to be developed through that work.

Indices of Deprivation including Ward level data had been circulated and communications continued to be developed around representation and inclusion following the successful launch of the Washington Neighbourhood Board website and publication of a press release.

It was confirmed that contact had been made with Jen McKeivitt from the Rank Foundation and that there was a potential opportunity to link with their Connecting Futures Programme. Enquiries also continued to be made regarding the eligibility of funding from other Government or external funding programmes, as match funding for this programme.

The Chair had met with the individual Board Members who had responded and a list of future Board meeting dates had been circulated for the year ahead.

Councillor Williams noted that she was yet to meet with the Chair, but it was agreed that they would make arrangements for a meeting.

Engagement Approach and Feedback

Lucy Nicholson, Communications Business Partner advised the Board that using the Government's updated Plan for Neighbourhoods prospectus, the Washington Board resumed community engagement to help shape the Regeneration Plan. An update was provided on engagement to date which highlighted emerging themes and the Board was invited to suggest further engagement opportunities.

The Board was informed that engagement work was still ongoing, with officers aiming to ensure it was thorough, demographically inclusive, and fully representative. It was confirmed that responses received to date were being reviewed.

Lucy summarised the recent engagement activity, which included the appointment of a research supplier. A facilitated workshop had taken place with Board members and representatives to shape engagement focus and questions. Face-to-face engagement activities had taken place, supported by the online engagement platform and feedback had been received from the national ZenCity survey and the Community Safety Hubs feedback from Sulgrave and Concord.

Lucy advised that fourteen Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) organisations had been awarded funding, reaching 4,940 participants together with many face-to-face opportunities with the support of Board members and partners.

For those responding online, the Commonplace platform was launched using questions developed during the facilitated workshop. It was confirmed that to date 1,074 responses had been received, with 796 individuals subscribing for project updates. It was noted that residents were very interested and were keen to know what was happening next.

A graph was presented to Board members showing geographical response rates for both in-person and online engagement.

Board members were informed that schools and the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) had been targeted separately as part of the engagement activity.

Emerging themes from the question “*What do you like about Washington?*” included green spaces and nature, community spirit, good transport links and location, local amenities such as shopping, and concerns about future challenges facing the area. Some illustrative quotes were then shown to Board members representing geographical and representational views.

Emerging themes from residents when asked “*What would you like to see in Washington?*” included a desire for improved youth and family services, action to tackle crime and anti-social behaviour, enhanced green spaces, better transport and infrastructure and increased access to opportunities. Some indicative quotes were then shown to demonstrate what people had said.

When asked “*What would you like to see in Washington in 10 years?*” emerging themes expressed by residents included a safe and clean environment, a thriving community, accessible green spaces and strong economic growth. Residents associated strong economic growth with aspirations for more local jobs, increased independent retail, and greater support for local businesses.

Lucy stated that further engagement activity was underway, including targeted work with schools using a toolkit, a children and young people’s survey and face-to-face sessions. Street researchers would focus on geographical areas most in need and those with the lowest online response rates. Engagement work would also take place with GP practice managers through the GP Alliance Scheme. It was confirmed that a final report would be brought back to the Board following this work.

Kim Hunter, Washington Area VCS Network asked whether data had been collected from non-residents or visitors to Washington. In response, Lucy confirmed that the questions had been designed to capture this information, allowing the data to be separated between residents and non-residents. Catherine Auld added that the data would be available from an overall perspective, allowing clear distinctions to be drawn between different respondent groups.

Paul McEldon, North East Business Innovation Centre asked whether the engagement findings were being mapped against factual information. It was confirmed that this was indeed the case.

Councillor Williams highlighted the need for improved street lighting and support for the Princess Anne Park. She also stressed the importance of maintaining play areas and

parks and noted that funding should be directed toward actual, rather than perceived, gaps in provision.

Graham Thrower shared insights from previous work on understanding UK communities, noting that perceptions based on accurate data tended to be strong. He highlighted that perception was often shaped by behaviour, for example, individuals may avoid walking in certain areas if they feel unsafe. He suggested that addressing such issues may not always require solutions like crime reduction but could instead involve improved communication.

Simon Marshall, Together for Children Sunderland Ltd emphasised the importance of the Board not only setting out its plans but also encouraging residents to play an active role in shaping their communities. He highlighted the need to foster resilience, pride of place, and a shift in expectations and behaviours to support positive change.

Simon then asked whether any comments had been received regarding new housing developments in Washington. It was confirmed that no significant feedback had emerged so far, but this would be explored further through thematic analysis.

Councillor Williams expressed the view that there should be an increase in the provision of social housing in Washington, noting that some may feel the current housing mix is imbalanced.

The Chair asked whether college students in Washington had engaged as part of the process. It was confirmed that officers had not yet received a response from Vicky at the College. The Chair agreed to take this forward as an action to ensure students were given the opportunity to contribute.

Ruth Walker, Sunderland Youth Consortium stated that she was aware the Army Cadets and Sunderland Football Hub had been approached as part of the engagement activity, although not all relevant groups had been included. She added that Everyone Active maintained connections with all leisure facilities across Sunderland and suggested these groups also be approached. Helen Peverley Low Carbon and Sustainable Regeneration Senior Manager agreed to pick this up.

Councillor Williams, referring to sixth form students, noted that while some choose to stay at home, others move out of the area. She suggested that promotional work could be developed to help school leavers thrive and develop within Washington.

Paul McEldon added that the North East Business Innovation Centre supported individuals in starting their own small businesses in Washington. He agreed to take a questionnaire to gather further insights on this topic.

The Chair thanked Lucy for the update and everyone for their efforts and comments.

The Chair asked whether officers were aware of how the performance of the Washington Neighbourhood Board compared with other Neighbourhood Boards. It was confirmed that positive feedback had been received from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG).

Data and Intelligence for Wasington

Catherine Auld, Director of Economy, Sustainability and Culture advised that the criteria for data had been developed and agreed during the initial Data Workshop. The approach focused on areas with a high proportion of deprivation, defined as populations living within the 20% most deprived areas in England, in line with the NHS Core 20+ population.

The investment plan for Washington will concentrate on specific areas within Washington while also adapting key principles for implementation across the wider Washington area. Consideration had been given to MSOA (Middle Layer Super Output Area), and LSOA (Lower Layer Super Output Area) levels to ensure that baseline information and progress indicators could be accessed and monitored throughout the ten-year programme.

A map was shown to demonstrate key statistics from a Corporate Plan perspective in relation to the numbers of residents in Washington and their age-ranges, population density, employment figures, workless households, gross weekly income and rates of varying types of health. These initial key statistics were summarised as follows: -

- There were 5 wards with Washington North being the most deprived ward and Washington South being the least deprived ward
- Washington North had the highest proportion of children living in low-income families and in receipt of free school meals
- Washington South and West had the highest proportion of residents over 65 years
- Washington Central had the lowest proportion of children under 15 years; and
- Life expectancy and other health indicators were poorest for Washington North

Catherine advised that the first Data Workshop held on 6th August involved colleagues and partners. During that initial session, a range of detailed information was shared, including data from schools, NHS services, GP practices, and Sunderland College regarding post-16 education.

Discussions also explored the potential development of a youth hub in Concord, with a view to integrating services more effectively. Similar themes emerged during conversations with the police, particularly around access to health services and employment opportunities. It was confirmed that more workshops would be held going forward.

A second workshop took place on 11th September and included a review of data held by Board partners whereby contributions were received from: -

- Together for Children
- North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care Board
- Sunderland College and Higher Education (with suggested areas for intervention)
- Northumbria Police and Crime Commissioner
- Northumbria Police (including suggested interventions)
- Gentoo; and
- Sunderland Council

A range of data was provided through both workshops, which informed the Board on several key themes. This included insights into school absence rates, health and

wellbeing challenges in Washington covering socio-economic deprivation, health behaviours, long-term conditions and mental health indicators.

GP practice deprivation profiles were presented using Indices of Deprivation data, alongside information on participation in further education and training through Sunderland College. This included study pathways and student numbers broken down by Washington localities.

The Board also received details of the Safer Streets Summer Initiative, as well as evidence highlighting gaps in service accessibility that contributed to increased levels of exploitation and offending.

Data from Gentoo Housing summarised the number of owned properties in Washington, those classified as Ready to Let, overall housing types, and figures relating to anti-social behaviour breaches and rent arrears.

Councillor Williams highlighted that private landlords may be one of the more challenging groups to engage with and emphasised the importance of involving them in discussions, particularly to support residents living in poorly maintained accommodation. Councillor Williams added the need for more social housing in Washington, to secure tenancies where people can make houses their homes.

Helen Peverley stated that the ongoing dialogue with Gentoo would continue and any developments would be included in the timeline, delivery plan, and overall vision.

Graham Thrower suggested that it would be valuable to explore more granular data regarding economically inactive individuals. He was particularly interested in a breakdown across the spectrum, including those who were job market-ready, those in precarious employment and the nature of employment opportunities available to them. Catherine agreed to explore what data was currently available and what additional data could be accessed to support further analysis.

In response to an enquiry regarding the involvement of the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), it was confirmed that relevant schemes and connections would be available.

The Chair thanked Catherine for the update.

Development of Washington Regeneration Plan – discussion and next steps

Helen Peverley, Low Carbon and Sustainable Regeneration Senior Manager reminded Board members that the Washington Neighbourhood Regeneration Plan was due to be submitted to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) by 28th November at noon.

Helen outlined the strategic approach underpinning the plan, which included the following four key stages: -

- Engage – building trust and authentic connections
- Define – ensuring the plan is meaningful and reflects lived experiences

- Activate – generating momentum and visibility
- Deliver – demonstrating impact through effective implementation

Board members were reminded that the Regeneration Plan must include two core components. The first being a 10-Year Vision: A strategic PDF document setting out the long-term vision for Washington, detailing where, why, and how funding would be targeted and managed over the ten-year period. This must include a projected spending profile.

Secondly, a 4-Year Investment Plan: A detailed submission via the Delta portal, outlining:-

- Community engagement and involvement in shaping the plan
- Targeted outcomes based on local context
- Proposed priority interventions
- Planned expenditure timelines; and
- Delivery mechanisms and management arrangements

A funding profile was presented for Board members' information, showing a forecasted breakdown of revenue and capital expenditure over the first four years. It was noted that the total funding allocated to the programme to date by Government was £450,000, with £85,000 already spent to fund community engagement.

The strategic objectives and programme aims were also highlighted, along with proposed interventions. Board members were referred to initial draft content for the strategic case for change, the vision for Washington's future and key considerations aligned to thematic priorities. The presentation also emphasised the importance of aligning the Regeneration Plan with other programmes and investment streams.

Councillor Williams, in referring to the draft Strategic Case for Change which stated *“Residents feel that issues are dealt with separately, but they are all interconnected – need to join up what's there and already being delivered – consider methods of communication”*, commented that, from a resident's perspective, it is often irrelevant who is responsible for addressing issues, whether it was Gentoo or the Council. She emphasised the importance of overcoming this disconnection and recognise the opportunity to explore how services could be better coordinated and communicated to residents.

Councillor Williams pointed out the importance of managing communications effectively, particularly in relation to building expectations. She highlighted the Galleries Shopping Centre as a key location that should be included in regeneration discussions to maximise its potential offer and questioned how engagement with stakeholders there would be approached. She also noted the relocation of the Police Station from the Galleries and stressed the need to take this into account stating that establishing strong links with the Galleries was important for the success of the wider Regeneration Strategy.

Simon Marshall stated that the Regeneration Plan must be data-driven, with a clear demonstration of impact and a realistic approach to delivery. He highlighted the importance of identifying quick wins by maintaining focus and concentrating efforts where they would have the greatest effect. The Chair added that managing expectations would be crucial throughout the process.

Rachel Snaith, Police and Crime Commissioner enquired about how this information could be shared and aligned with other programmes. In response, Helen suggested that a separate conversation outside of the meeting would be beneficial to explore this further.

Graham Thrower enquired about the methodology underpinning the Board's decision-making processes in relation to capital funding criteria. He asked whether there was scope to leverage finance from external sources or incorporate self-funded projects. He noted the importance of ensuring transparency and clarity in decision-making, particularly in the event of future audits, and stressed the need for the Board to be clear on the rationale behind its funding priorities. In response, Catherine advised that officers were exploring opportunities to work with external funding teams and were keen to avoid embedding overly burdensome internal Council processes into the Board's operations. She added that the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) provided a useful framework for learning and development in this area.

Graham Thrower enquired further if presentation slides shown in the meeting could be circulated in advance of future meetings. Catherine acknowledged the request and confirmed that Board members would receive the slides ahead of the next meeting. In the meantime, Board members were asked to provide any comments on the slides presented by the end of the week.

Helen Peverley advised that individual Board members would be invited to attend workshops focused on the actions required to develop the four-year investment plan.

It was noted that in terms of next steps, the aim would be to seek approval of the Investment Plan and the Delegation Scheme at the next Board meeting scheduled for 14th November.

Action Points

To summarise, the following actions were agreed: -

- Councillor Williams to meet with the Chair **(HP/ET)**
- Lead engagement activities with students at Washington College. **(ET)**
- Approach Everyone Active as part of the wider engagement activity **(LN)**
- Collate data on new small business start-ups in the area. **(PM)**
- Explore more detailed data available on economically inactivity in Washington. **(CA)**
- Issue invitations to Board members for workshops aimed at shaping the four-year investment plan. **(HP)**
- Circulate presentation slides to Board members in advance of the next meeting. **(CP)**

Date and time of next meeting

The next meeting was scheduled to take place on 14 November, 2025 at 1.30pm.

(Signed) E. THINNESEN
Chair