



WASHINGTON NEIGHBOURHOOD BOARD

**Minutes of the Meeting held on Friday 23rd January 2026 at 1.30pm at Washington
Business Centre, Sunderland**

Present:

Members of the Board

Ruth Walker	Sunderland Youth Consortium
Cllr Linda Williams	Sunderland City Council
Paul McEldon OBE	North East Business Innovation Centre
Professor Graham Thrower	University of Sunderland
Kim Hunter	Washington Area VCS Network
Marc Edwards	Gentoo
Simon Marshall	Together for Children Sunderland Ltd
Emma Cottle	Education Partnership North East
Rachel Snaith	Police and Crime Commissioner
Lindsey Hall (<i>for Austin McNamara</i>)	Sunderland Voluntary Sector Alliance
Abi Talbot (<i>for Sharon Hodgson MP</i>)	Member of Parliament

All Supporting Officers

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

Welcome and Apologies

Debra Bond formally opened the meeting of the Washington Neighbourhood Board and welcomed all attendees.

Apologies for absence were received from Scott Watson - North East and North Cumbria Integrated Commissioning Board, Austin McNamara - Sunderland Voluntary Sector Alliance and Councillor Beth Jones – Sunderland City Council.

Appointment of Chair

At the meeting, Councillor Linda Williams formally nominated Ruth Walker to act as Chair and the nomination was seconded by Paul McEldon.



Board Members were aware that Sunderland City Council, as the accountable body, had consulted with Sharon Hodgson MP and had issued a recommendation to the Board by email prior to the meeting, seeking approval for Ruth Walker to be considered as the future Chair. As all Board members had indicated their agreement via email, it was unanimously agreed that Ruth Walker would take on the role of Chair.

Ruth began by formally expressing her thanks to Ellen Thinneson for her leadership and guidance and for her contribution and support in bringing the Board to its current position. She then thanked the Board for nominating her to take the Chair and stated that she was pleased to accept the role. She stated that she had many years of experience of working with young people and stressed the importance of the voices of young people and hoped the Board would agree that she was a strong advocate on their behalf. Ruth emphasised the importance of ensuring that everyone had a voice and felt included. She also noted that she preferred to be solution focused, with decisions achieved through collaborative working across the Board and seeking support to develop solutions together wherever appropriate.

Ruth explained that she would like to spend some time with all Board members following her appointment as Chair.

Minutes and actions arising from the last meeting held on 14th November 2025

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

Overview of refreshed PiPP prospectus launched December 2025

The Board received an update on the interventions list. Members noted that the new options introduced by Government placed a stronger emphasis on building community power, for example by establishing community owned spaces or supporting initiatives that enabled community-led housing or energy schemes.

The Board was informed that greater resident representation was now expected and that over time, the Board should aim for a majority (51%) of members to live or work within the boundaries of the neighbourhood.

The importance of community engagement was reiterated, and Members were reminded that Boards would continue to be required to evidence meaningful engagement in order to access delivery funding. Examples included hosting regular public forums and workshops to gather input on plans or using surveys to obtain feedback on priorities.

The Board noted that additional guidance had been published regarding the role of MPs in the programme thereby enhancing their involvement.

Members were further advised of the greater shift towards community-led models to which all Boards were expected to transition by year three, for example by establishing a local community organisation to act as an anchor institution.



Paul McEldon commented that a suitable community-led model would need to be identified and suggested that this could be explored through an options analysis. Simon Marshall observed that the Board should remain aware that such work if it needed to establish a stand-alone company might carry an associated cost and administrative burden. The Chair confirmed that supporting officers were aware of this and reassured Members that the Council, as the accountable body, had the appropriate framework in place to manage those requirements currently. It was also noted that the community-led approach is the key requirement and it was possible that this could be achieved without needing to set up a stand-alone company and that retaining support from the Council as the accountable body could be an option.

The Board noted that there were no immediate changes to the Pride in Place Programme delivery arrangements. Officers confirmed that assessment activity by Government was proceeding as planned and the Board was advised to continue preparing for delivery from April 2026.

It was reported that the financial profile for Phase 1, including revenue/capital split remained unchanged. Members noted the introduction of a new intervention titled 'Community Power', which related to delivering engagement, participation and involvement activities to enable communities to play an active role in local decision making.

Board members noted that MHCLG had provided programme monitoring guidance on what the accountable body, the Council, would provide MHCLG in terms of Board membership changes, updates for projects and activities being undertaken including the focus interventions and summary of expenditure every six months.

A summary was then provided of the decisions taken at the meeting held on 14 November.

Managing the Pride in Place Programme within Washington – proposed procedures and documentation

In referring to the PowerPoint presentation slides, the Board was advised that the programme had been framed around the overarching ambition of 'building thriving places', with a particular focus on 'strengthening communities' and 'empowering people'.

It was reported that the programme interventions comprised the following thematic areas: -

- Regeneration of high streets and heritage
- Housing
- Work, productivity, skills, education & opportunity
- Cohesion
- Health and wellbeing
- Transport
- Safety and security
- Community Power (new)



The Board was further informed that the detail behind the new 'Community Power' intervention introduced a series of activities designed to enhance the role of local communities in shaping their areas. These activities included: -

- Delivering engagement, participation and involvement activity to enable communities to contribute to decision making
- Providing opportunities for communities to take part in the design and delivery of local services
- Enabling community wealth building
- Supporting the growth of the local social economy, including community businesses, co-operatives and social enterprises
- Funding impactful volunteering and social action projects to develop social and human capital within local places
- Investing in capacity building and infrastructure support for local civil society, youth organisations and community groups

The programme aims were highlighted as follows: -

- Raise living standards
- Reduce social exclusion
- Spread opportunities for young people
- Improve health and wellbeing
- Build stronger and more cohesive communities
- Reduce crime and anti-social behaviour

The Board discussed a proposed approach to plan delivery for the first investment period covering 2026 to 2030. It was proposed that activity during this phase would be focused on a number of target communities within Washington, as agreed by the Board during the November 2025 meeting.

The identified target communities were: - Concord, Sulgrave, Usworth, Barmston, Glebe, Lambton, Oxclose and Harraton

The Board reconfirmed the target communities above and noted that work should also extend across the wider Washington area in order to support target groups in local areas and to promote the work and objectives of the Board overall.

A reminder of the guiding principles that underpinned the development and delivery of the programme was set out as follows: -

1. Working in partnership and maximising resources
2. Targeted and sustainable action
3. Evidence led and impact driven

Proposal No. 1: Small Grants Fund

A draft Proposal No 1: The Small Grants Fund was presented for the first year of the programme, which centred around the launch of a small grants fund for communities across the Washington area. Under the proposal, the fund would open in March 2026 and operate from April 2026 to March 2027, or until fully allocated. It was noted that



communities most in need would be prioritised. The proposed funding allocation for 2026/27 totalled £500,000, comprising £200,000 revenue and £300,000 capital. It was proposed that grants would range from £1,000 to £10,000, supporting new or existing projects for up to 12 months, with awards potentially made from both capital and revenue resources.

Eligible applicants were proposed to include voluntary and community organisations, not-for-profit organisations, registered charities, higher and further education institutions, public sector bodies and private sector SMEs.

Emma Cottle suggested that, in addition to the eligibility criteria, the programme aims should also be included for completeness and clarity.

Applications would be required to align with Programme Interventions and respond to engagement findings. It was noted that successful longer-term projects might be considered for continued support following evaluation. The proposal also highlighted potential for an annual Grant Fund across the four-year investment period, subject to future Board decisions.

There was a full discussion on all aspects of the proposal among Board members. It was agreed that the Board would look favourably on applications targeting areas of highest need, demonstrating partnership working or additional funding leverage.

Board Members held a discussion which included the importance of ensuring that appropriate support was available for applicants seeking small grants of between £1,000 and £10,000 and that any information materials produced were clear, accessible and easy to understand. It was agreed that advance notice would be given to the voluntary sector community of the funding opportunity to give them time to prepare applications.

Councillor Williams remarked that the eight areas prioritised by the Board should receive a significant proportion of the available funding. She further noted that some Washington residents had expressed frustration regarding the recent change to the name of the Washington Neighbourhood Board and suggested that retaining a consistent name would be beneficial for branding purposes. Councillor Williams also observed that, as Section 106 funding might also be available, there may be potential to maximise opportunities for larger projects by pooling such resources.

Paul McEldon agreed that the programme's impact needed to be concentrated on the areas the Board had identified as priorities. He emphasised that the approach must remain outcome focused and deliver clear benefits for the communities the Board existed to serve. Marc Edwards highlighted the amount of work involved in assessing small grants such as the Aspire grant managed by Gentoo. Rachel Snaith offered to share experience from the PCC's office of running small grants schemes and suggested looking at a pilot approach, making sure it was properly resourced behind the scenes, and considering for example a cap of 30 for micro grants. She also suggested that any statutory organisations applying for funding should need to show clear community support for their proposals.

Simon Marshall commented that an appropriate infrastructure would need to be established and that legal advice would be required in relation to the development of an



application process to ensure eligibility, assessment criteria, scoring matrix and any conflicts of interest were all clear. This was agreed.

It was suggested that, rather than introducing a fixed bidding window for funding applications, the Board should consider running a pilot exercise and keeping the application process open.

Emma Cottle highlighted the importance of measuring impact and ensuring that outcomes were clearly demonstrable.

The Chair requested that on the slide entitled ‘Decisions for Proposal 1’ the following bullet point be added: -

‘Continue to work with the Washington VCS to understand the landscape, funding and opportunities.’

Following a detailed discussion, it was agreed to give further consideration to a proposal to establish a Small Grant Fund or Impact Fund in the context of ensuring the volume of grants could be managed, the proposed value of the grants was appropriate and the Board could be clear about the outcomes and impact it wanted to be able to achieve.

It was further agreed that detailed documentation, including key performance indicators and evaluation criteria would be developed for a call for small grant / impact funding to support communities across the Washington area, to ensure the Board was able to measure impact and inform future priorities for Washington. This work would be funded from Year 1 resources and would focus on all Programme Interventions (excluding Housing), while responding to the key engagement findings.

Proposal No. 2: Our Future Fund

Proposal No 2: Our Future Fund was presented which would entail a call for Expressions of Interest (EOI) for long term partnership projects under the Washington Neighbourhood Board’s “Our Future Fund”. It was noted that under the proposal the call would be launched in summer 2026, enabling proposals to come forward for delivery between 2027 and 2030. The proposal would target communities most in need across Washington and required projects to align with several Programme Interventions and reflect the engagement findings.

The Board received information on the funding profile for the first four-year investment period, as set by MHCLG. The total funding being made available to the Board amounted to £1,352,000 in revenue and £5,306,000 in capital, phased as follows:

- 2026/27: £232,000 revenue, £360,000 capital
- 2027/28: £256,000 revenue, £1,736,000 capital
- 2028/29: £432,000 revenue, £1,605,000 capital
- 2029/30: £432,000 revenue, £1,605,000 capital

Within the overall funding context, Board Members were referred to the project eligibility criteria, outlined in the presentation. It was proposed that projects would commence from April 2027 and conclude no later than March 2030. Under the proposals, individual



projects would run for a minimum of 12 months and up to a maximum of 36 months, supporting either new or existing initiatives.

Support of up to £250,000 per project (indicative) was proposed, with awards potentially made up of both capital and revenue funding. Projects would be required to align with multiple Programme Interventions, respond to engagement findings, demonstrate partnership working and maximise additional funding opportunities.

Applicant eligibility was proposed to include voluntary and community organisations, not-for-profit organisations, registered charities, further and higher education institutions, public sector bodies and private sector SMEs.

The Board noted that the EOI process was intended to identify largescale projects operating within the targeted communities of Concord, Sulgrave, Usworth, Barmston, Glebe, Lambton, Oxclose and Harraton, whilst responding to engagement findings.

Projects would be required to cross-cut several Programme Interventions, including: - Regeneration, High Streets and Heritage; Housing; Work, Productivity, Skills, Education and Opportunity; Cohesion; Health and Wellbeing; Transport; Safety and Security; and Community Power.

Board members also discussed the possibility of encouraging organisations to buy local, as well as considering a pilot approach with some resources allocated to the VCS sector in the eight target communities to develop projects and bring together different ideas.

Following detailed discussion, the Board agreed to give further consideration to Proposal No. 2 and discuss it further at the next meeting in March, alongside further discussions relating to Proposal No.1.

Discussion and Decision for Proposal No. 3

The Board were advised that work continued to take place on the draft local assurance framework document that had recently been circulated for delivery of the Pride in Place Programme in Washington.

It was noted that several documents had already been drafted, including the Local Assurance Framework, the Fraud and Risk Management Plan, the Key Performance Indicators and progress metrics and the Scheme of Delegation, though the latter remained dependent on the release of the MHCLG Memorandum of Understanding.

The Board also noted that an Investment Panel would be developed later in 2026, supported by a Terms of Reference, a nomination process and declarations of interest arrangements. This would provide support to the Board with the work involved in assessing applications for funding, with the Board remaining the decision-makers.

Following a brief discussion, it was agreed that the Council, as the accountable body, would continue to finalise the required governance documentation in consultation with the Chair and bring it to the Board in March for approval, to enable the timely launch of grant funding proposals from April 2026.



Communications and Engagement Update / Discussion and Decision No. 4

The Board received an update from Lucy Nicholson on key activity undertaken in support of the new Chair, the development of the programme vision and the submission of the plan to Government. Thanks were recorded for members' participation in the engagement activities. Targeted briefings had taken place with key networks, including attendance at the Washington VCS Network on 20 January, alongside wider communications activity.

It was noted that approval of the plan via MHCLG was scheduled for March/April and work was ready to commence on the recruitment and appointment of young people to join the Board. Preparations were also underway to be able to support a call for projects from April.

Next steps for programme development included a facilitated workshop with communications and engagement leads from partner organisations to support work on the programme's emerging identity and provide an opportunity for further engagement. The workshop would also begin development of a communications and engagement plan for the Board, including the creation of shared guidelines and principles.

The Board thanked Lucy for the update.

The Board agreed to nominate communications and/or engagement representatives to attend the facilitated workshop to shape communications and engagement plan, identity and principles.

Invitation for Young People to join the Board / Discussion and Decision No. 5

The Board discussed the most appropriate way to involve young people in its decision-making. Suggestions included a Shadow Board made up of young people with two / three young people, who would then share the views of the young people and be their representatives at the Board meetings. The possibility of Together for Children facilitating this was discussed. Opportunities to work with Washington Youth Council were also discussed. Emma Cottle also advised that the College could help with engaging young people. The possibility of allocating some of the Capacity Fund resources to enable this work with young people was discussed.

The need to handle any potential conflicts of interest appropriately was discussed and noted.

It was agreed to progress discussions to be able to invite two / three young people to join the Board as soon as possible, working in partnership with the Youth sector in Washington, and that the next meeting would be held in one of the Washington youth projects venues.



Summary

Given the extent of discussion in relation to the proposals, Catherine Auld asked Board members to confirm her understanding of the request from the Board in terms of next steps as follows: -

Officers to give further consideration to the approach to the Year 1 funding proposal to include:

- 1) An allocation in support of the 'community led' nature of the programme (to include, for example, support to actively engage young people in the work of the Board and support for capacity / facilitating project development in the 8 target community areas)
- 2) An allocation for a grants programme, for example an Impact Fund which combines thinking in relation to Proposals 1 and 2 (Small Grants Fund / Our Futures Fund) as well as a scoring matrix / assessment criteria
- 3) Fuller proposals and revised costs to ensure management, administration, communications and evaluation / impact are appropriately resourced

This was agreed as an action for the team to progress.

Action Points

To summarise, the following actions were agreed: -

- Ruth to spend time with all Board members individually – HP / KB to support with arrangements
- Future Board meetings to take place on rotation across various community venues in Washington
- All Board members to give further thought to the small grants / our futures fund proposals and share these including in 1-1 meetings with the Chair
- Board to give advance notice to VCS organisations ahead of publishing Call for Projects to give time to prepare
- Continue to develop proposals for small grants / impact fund and bring updated proposals to the next Board meeting for further consideration
- Finalise Risk Plan and all other assurance documentation required by MHCLG and accountable body to sign off with Chair and present for full Board approval at March Board
- Communication actions to progress as agreed at Board meeting, with all Board members to provide a named contact in their organisation to support
- Progress proposal for two / three young people to be recruited to join the Board
- March / April 2026 – MHCLG feedback expected (endorse Plan and provide Memo of Understanding (MOU))
- 6th March 2026 – Board meeting and young people welcomed onto Board.

Any Other Business

There was no other business to report.



Date and time of next meeting

The next scheduled meeting was due to be held on 6th March, 2026 at 10.30am, Ayton Centre, Dunlin Drive, Washington, NE38 0DL

(Signed) R. WALKER
Chair