

WASHINGTON NEIGHBOURHOOD BOARD

Minutes of the Meeting held on Friday 6th June 2025 at 1.30pm at Washington Business Centre, Sunderland

Present:

Members of the Board

Ellen Thinnesen OBE (Chair)	Sunderland College
Sharon Hodgson MP	Member of Parliament
Cllr Beth Jones	Sunderland City Council
Cllr Linda Williams	Sunderland City Council
Paul McEldon OBE	North East Business Innovation Centre
Simon Marshall	Together for Children Sunderland Ltd
Marc Edwards	Gentoo
Professor Graham Thrower	University of Sunderland
Ruth Walker	Sunderland Youth Consortium
Scott Duffy (<i>in Rachel Snaith's absence</i>)	Police and Crime Commissioner
Kim Hunter	Washington Area VCS Network
Tara Case (<i>in Scott Watson's absence</i>)	North East and North Cumbria Integrated Commissioning Board

All Supporting Officers

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

Welcome and Opening Remarks

The Chair formally opened the meeting of the Washington Neighbourhood Board and welcomed all attendees. In her opening remarks, she outlined the overarching purpose of the Board, which was to serve as a strategic platform for developing a cohesive vision and investment strategy for Washington. The Chair stated that the Board would focus on identifying and prioritising areas most in need, ensuring that funding allocations contribute meaningfully to the development of social capital within the community.

The Chair emphasised the importance of listening to the voices of the Washington residents and embedding those into the decision-making process, focusing on their needs and interests. She also highlighted the Board's commitment to working in close collaboration with the local community to ensure inclusive outcomes.

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Tracy Hassan, Sunderland Voluntary Sector Alliance, Rachel Snaith, Police and Crime and Commissioner and Scott Watson, North East and North Cumbria Integrated Commissioning Board.

Board Governance arrangements, including circulation of papers, reports and decisions.

Patrick Houghton, Governance Law Specialist provided a summary of the governance framework for the Washington Neighbourhood Board. He confirmed that Sunderland City Council (as accountable body for the Board) would hold any funding agreements with Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) and manage the administration of this funding, as directed by the Board. The Council would also support on compliance matters such as procurement and subsidy control requirements.

It was noted that Sunderland City Council would also act as the initial secretariat for the Board. A dedicated online space would be created for the publication of agenda, reports and minutes, which would be accessible to the public. However, any items deemed to be commercially sensitive or which contain personal information could still be considered by the Board in private.

The Terms of Reference (previously circulated) outlined that decisions would typically be made collectively, by consensus of those present at any given meeting and meetings would be held quarterly, unless an urgent issue necessitated an additional meeting.

It was confirmed that the Terms of Reference would remain under review and formally revisited in twelve months.

Patrick advised that all Board members would be required to maintain a publicly available pen profile and declare any gifts, hospitality or interests. Further information regarding these requirements would be shared in due course in the form of a governance pack which would be compiled and distributed to all Board members.

The Chair thanked Patrick for his update.

Programme Review including delivery timeline, capacity funding and feedback from MHCLG visit (4.6.25)

Helen Peverley, Low Carbon and Sustainable Regeneration Senior Manager delivered a presentation to the Board outlining key details about the Plan for Neighbourhoods programme. She informed members that on 4th March 2025, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) announced that £1.5 billion worth of investment would be made available across 75 places in the UK over 10 years, totalling up to £20 million per area to support community regeneration and development.

Helen explained that this initiative represented an evolution of the previous 'Long Term Plan for Towns' programme, with a renewed focus under the revised 'Plan for Neighbourhoods'. Neighbourhood Boards had been encouraged to retain continuity with

previous Town Boards where applicable, with membership updates recommended after the first 4-year investment cycle.

The presentation highlighted the Plan for Neighbourhoods three strategic objectives were Building Thriving Places, Strengthening Communities, and Empowering People.

The programme aims were to raise living standards, reduce social exclusion, spread opportunities for young people, improve health and wellbeing, build stronger and more cohesive communities and reduce crime and anti-social behaviour.

Attention was drawn to the funding profile which indicated that £200,000 capacity funding would be released to the Council in 2025/26 to support with community engagement, plan development and secure advice and expertise, with delivery funding expected at the beginning of April 2026. The total funding allocation over ten years would see approximately £1.6 million of capital and £400,000 revenue annually. Further information and guidance relating to support was expected from MHCLG in due course. In the meantime, it was confirmed that meetings with colleagues in Finance were planned to take place to ensure robust processes were put in place to manage income and expenditure.

Simon Marshall then enquired whether the Board could utilise other Government funding as match-funding, which he was advised was something the Council support officers would investigate. It was also confirmed that capacity building funding to manage the Board would be required and that this would be highlighted in the Regeneration Plan.

The Chair suggested additional funding could also be potentially obtained through capital and revenue micro grants.

Moving on to the Washington Neighbourhood Boundary, Catherine Auld, Director of Economy, Sustainability and Culture advised that MHCLG had published governance and boundary guidance. In referring to the presentation Catherine explained that the original boundary map for Washington had been redesigned in line with its ward areas and then submitted back to MHCLG. The Board confirmed their agreement to the revised boundary map.

Councillor Williams stated that internal boundaries were due to change in 2026, which would have implications for areas such as health data, deprivation statistics and related indicators, therefore advised that the Board should remain mindful of these forthcoming changes when making decisions and planning future activity.

The Chair thanked both Catherine and Councillor Williams for her informative observation. It was agreed that it would be useful to discuss these matters in more detail outside of the meeting.

Board members were then referred to the timeline and advised that Neighbourhood Boards and local authorities were expected to receive a tailored data pack detailing metrics around the three strategic objectives, which was yet to be received. Results were also awaited from the Zensity Survey which the Government had initiated in 2024 to measure resident satisfaction. It was confirmed that the Council had already begun pulling together data on behalf of the Board. It was also confirmed that the membership of the Washington Neighbourhood Board and boundary information for spending had already

been submitted to MHCLG. Future anticipated important dates were summarised as follows: -

- Summer 2025: Resident engagement and plan development.
- November 2025: Regeneration Plan submission.
- April 2026: Delivery phase begins.

Councillor Williams expressed some scepticism regarding the Zencity Survey, raising concerns about the data it might produce. Catherine concurred, clarifying that the Council had not been provided with the survey questions in advance, and had not been able to promote the survey to increase take-up, therefore an assessment would be made to justify any future use of information provided from the Zencity survey, including the level of engagement and evidence base. Catherine further stated that, moving forward, community engagement activity would be shaped and informed by the Board and that a data workshop would be arranged to look into this matter further.

Professor Graham Thrower added that working with communities across the northeast and with academics who are responsible for research could be a critical first step to empower people to take control.

Board members were advised that a Regeneration Plan must be submitted to MHCLG by 28th November 2025, which was to include a 10-year vision and detailed 4-year investment plan. Board members agreed that community engagement was essential and that there ought to be a focus on inclusive engagement. Board members appreciated they would be required to provide regular updates to ensure accountability and reflect community priorities.

Simon Marshall suggested that it could be useful for Board members to agree a script to ensure that key messages remained consistent. The Chair agreed, adding that a linear timeline of dates and future next steps would also be useful.

Finally, the Board were presented with some key statistics of the Washington area.

The Board also noted a series of MHCLG pre-approved Interventions including the regeneration of high streets and heritage, housing, work productivity and skills, cohesion, health and wellbeing, transport, safety and security, education and initiatives.

Data and Intelligence – feedback from resident and school engagement opportunities

Lucy Nicholson, Communications Business Partner explained that the Board had expressed its intention to develop a long-term engagement plan in-line with MHCLG requirements. The Board recognised the importance of adopting a forward-looking approach over the next ten years. It was noted that, over the summer period, efforts should focus on gaining a clear understanding of the priorities, aspirations and overall vision for Washington.

The Board was advised that the Jarrow Neighbourhood Board had recently completed its engagement plan, and there may be valuable learning opportunities from their approach, as well as from other comparable places.

Lucy emphasised that listening to the view of residents would be essential, with particular importance placed on ensuring both the depth and breadth of responses to inform future planning and decision-making.

Professor Graham Thrower suggested that facilitating engagement sessions could be a valuable approach to managing community expectations and encouraging informed discussion around allocation of funding. These sessions would help to identify and prioritise key areas of focus, such as opportunities for young people, including work experience, internships and employment, particularly within more disadvantaged communities.

The Chair acknowledged Graham's comments. The Chair then emphasised the importance of considering demographic factors, including age ranges, as well as the need to reflect on appropriate timelines and the level of formality required for effective engagement.

In response to the comments, it was clarified that no decisions had been finalised at this stage in relation to data intelligence and feedback from residents. The Board was advised that a dedicated workshop on engagement would be arranged. This session would explore how to effectively position and deliver engagement activities, including the methods and approaches required to ensure broad and inclusive reach within the strategic framework.

Paul McEldon suggested that the Board should initiate a conversation with Jen McKevitt from the Rank Foundation, who was investing £1.5m in Sunderland. The Rank Foundation worked closely with key hyper-local organisations such as Back on the Map, Easington Lane Community Access Point, Pallion Action Group to name a few, as well as voluntary sector organisations. He emphasised the importance of the Board engaging with these partners to support collaborative working and maximise impact.

Kim Hunter, Washington Area VCS Network emphasised the importance of ensuring that individuals with disabilities and those living with long-term health conditions were meaningfully represented. Kim expressed a desire for their voices to be heard and their perspectives included in the Board's work, particularly in relation to disability inclusion.

The Chair thanked Paul and Kim for their contributions stating that moving forward, the development of a representation and inclusion-focused workshop would be beneficial to support the Board's work in this area.

Helen in referring to the presentation highlighted some key demographic information relating to Washington. It was suggested that aligning this data with information held by individual Board members could help inform the Board's future direction and priorities.

Board members' attention was drawn to the indices of deprivation within Washington. It was noted that this data had been broken down to Ward level and would be shared with members following the meeting.

At this juncture, Simon Marshall enquired whether the Board had considered establishing a data sharing agreement. In response, Patrick confirmed that he could act as the point of

contact for such matters and indicated that he would be able to arrange agreements with individual organisations as needed.

Development of Washington Regeneration Plan – discussion and next steps

Helen referred to the key actions and next steps set out in the presentation. In addition, the Chair offered to spend some time with each individual member to hear their thoughts and ideas on how to shape the plan going forward.

Simon raised whether any consideration had been given to formalising the identity of the Board with some branding and a logo. Lucy responded advising this matter would be picked up at the engagement workshop.

The Chair expressed thanks for everyone's attendance commenting that the meeting had been both successful and informative. It was confirmed that work would continue towards developing the Regeneration Plan for submission by the 28th November deadline. In the meantime, a press release would be issued to introduce the Washington Neighbourhood Board.

Action Points

To summarise, the following actions were agreed: -

- Formation of a governance pack, including declarations of interest and register of gifts and hospitality for all Board members **(PH)**
- A Data Workshop to be arranged in June **(HP)**
- Board Members to be provided with a script **(HP)**
- Board Members to be provided with a linear timeline of key dates **(HP)**
- Implementation of a Community Engagement Plan and a Community Engagement Workshop **(HP)**
- Identity for the Board to be created through the Engagement work **(HP)**
- Indices of Deprivation Ward level data and boundary information to be circulated **(HP)**
- Communications to inform proposals around representation, inclusion and engagement, data sharing agreements and managing the profile of the Board **(LH)**
- Contact to be made with Jen McKevitt from the Rank Foundation to introduce the Washington Neighbourhood Board **(CA)**
- Enquiries to be made regarding the eligibility of funding from other Government programmes as match-funding **(HP)**
- Meetings to be coordinated with each individual Board member and the Chair **(HP)**
- Future Board meetings to be arranged for the year ahead **(HP)**
- Publication of a press release to introduce the Washington Neighbourhood Board supported by social media **(LH)**

Date and time of next meeting

The date of the next meeting was to be confirmed.

(Signed) E. THINNESEN
Chair