

Hartlepool Board
Thursday 5 February 2026 at 2.30pm

Meeting Notes

Attendees – Board Members:

Iain Caldwell – Hartlepool Opportunities Partnership (HOP)
Christiana Celestine – Hartlepool Diversity Network
Angela Corner – Thirteen
Scott Gaiety – Headland Parish Council
Calvin George – Hartlepool Sport
Darren Hankey – Hartlepool College of Further Education
Cllr Pamela Hargreaves – Leader of the Council
Cllr Brenda Harrison – Elected Member
Haani Hasnain – Harmonised World and Vice Chair
Oliver Huermann – Member of Youth Parliament
Tom Legg – Cleveland Police
Denise McGuckin - Hartlepool Borough Council
Cllr Karen Oliver – Chair of Housing, Growth & Communities Committee
Juli Simons – Hartlepool Community Trust
Sean Smith – Cleveland Fire Brigade
Malcolm Walker – Chair

Other Attendees:

Scott Campbell – Hartlepool Borough Council
Connor Kerr – Hartlepool Borough Council
Mike Waite – Belong
Lisa West – Hartlepool Borough Council
Chris Woodcock – Hartlepool Borough Council
Tracy Bushnall – HOP

1.	Welcome, Introductions and Apologies Apologies were received from Neil Atkinson, Bev Bearne, Jonathan Brash MP, Phil Douglas, Christine Eddowes, Karen Hawkins, Gemma Ptak, Martin Raby, Sue Sharpe, and Matt Storey. It was noted that Angela Corner was attending as Kathryn Whittle’s substitute, Calvin George as Carl Jorgeson’s substitute, and Tom Legg as substitute for Helen Wilson.	
2.	Declarations of Interest There were no conflicts of interest declared by Board Members.	
3.	Minutes and Actions from the Last Board Meeting The minutes from the last board were accepted as an accurate representation of the meeting in January.	

4. Hartlepool Community Cohesion Strategy: Here for You

Mike Waite (MiW) from Belong introduced himself and provided an overview of his work over the last 12-18 months within Hartlepool. He delivered a presentation on the Hartlepool Community Cohesion Strategy: Here for You.

He outlined the extensive engagement for the development of the strategy which included 50 structured interviews, 10 workshops/focus groups, 8 facilitated events and more than 470 people involved. The strategy identified strong foundations to build on with most core services across agencies being provided to a high standard, sharp awareness of the challenges facing people in the borough and a commitment to pride across Hartlepool.

MiW then stated the key challenges including mistrust, isolation, social challenges, pressures on core services and issues around morale and aspiration. There is scope for concerns and anxieties to be shaped into resentments, divisive attitudes, and openness to misinformation. He then outlined the proposed approaches within the strategy:

- Close the Gaps - Build connections and linkages to other organisations within Hartlepool
- Handle Things in Healthy Ways – Recognise opportunities to connect to people, identify shared challenges and deal with these openly
- Do it Creatively – Build on the many positives about the borough and include people through culture, arts, sport, and participation
- Extend the Reach – Engage wider numbers of people across the Borough

Although the strategy is from October 2025, MiW outlined that the ethos needs to be embedded within all organisations, services, and strategies. It is therefore proposed that the strategy is governed by the Hartlepool Board. He is therefore asking today for members to endorse the Community Cohesion Strategy.

SC stated that we also need to consider the mechanism that the Board sees to take the cohesion work forward including the strategy. MW commented that he sees the strategy more as a way of working and mission statement with cohesion cross-cutting across everything. HH added that a sub group around this might be useful similar to the recently established Investment Subgroup. CC said that the Diversity Network have been working successfully with Belong and suggested having an action plan in which actions could be selected for adoption following endorsement of the Cohesion Strategy.



Belong.pdf

	<p>KO suggested that a workplan would be useful to take forward this work, with connections and communication being important. PH commented that a co-ordinated approach is needed, and the strategy was something of a snapshot of the time as hopefully a lot of things will be fixed before the end of March 2028.</p> <p>SS added that the Fire Service have been having similar conversations this week, and it was important for organisations to collaborate. MiW agreed on the importance of avoiding duplication and identifying any gaps. He added that Belong can support with additional work on the implementation if needed by the Board.</p> <p>MW then facilitated a vote on endorsing the Hartlepool Community Cohesion Strategy which would be governed through the Board. This was unanimously approved by all members of the Hartlepool Board.</p>	
<p>5.</p>	<p>Launch of Common Ground: Building Cohesive Communities Guidance</p> <p>SC introduced the Common Ground: Building Cohesive Communities Guidance which was published last week and provides a nationally endorsed framework to help areas strengthen social cohesion. This has been produced by Belong and the Local Government Association.</p> <p>The guidance provides timely, practical, and evidence-based support designed to help areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build a stronger shared local identity and ensure there is a sense of belonging. • Tackle emerging tensions, misinformation, and division earlier and more effectively. • Strengthen multi-agency collaboration across public, voluntary and community sectors. <p>This is only the start of the journey, and we need to embed cohesion into other strategies across stakeholders - including education, employment, health, and community safety.</p> <p>SC shared the great news that three case studies from Hartlepool have been included as best practice within this national guidance including the Hartlepool Pride in Place Programme. MiW stated that not many places had been featured and this recognition nationally demonstrates the strong partnership working in Hartlepool.</p> <p>ACTION: The link to Common Ground: Building Cohesive Communities Guidance will be shared with the Board.</p>	

	<p>KO commented on the importance of being accountable to the public, feeding back to the public, and listening to feedback. PH commented on the good work from Belong and the fantastic recognition for Hartlepool.</p> <p>PH announced that an independent survey had rated Hartlepool Borough Council as the sixth most productive Council in England. DM added that HBC was also the highest rated Council in the North East.</p>	
<p>6.</p>	<p>Hartlepool Opportunities Partnership Long-Term Strategic Plan</p> <p>IC delivered a presentation highlighting the current progress and long-term strategic plan for Hartlepool Opportunities Partnership (HOP). He stressed the long-term plan involves collaboration with partners, such as Hartlepool Community Trust, and if approved in-principle today, then a more detailed proposal will come to the next meeting of the Board.</p> <p>He started by providing some key milestones which have been achieved including applying to be accredited as a Local Infrastructure Organisation by the National Association for Voluntary and Community Action (NAVCA). This would demonstrate the quality of support offered to VCSEs and ensure adherence to a national quality framework, and they have been supported by Middlesbrough Voluntary Development Agency.</p> <p>IC then updated on governance with recruitment of a chair ongoing and a number of new trustees are either already or in the process of joining HOP's board. In relation to the original commission from the Board, he provided the financial position against each theme, confirmed action plans are being produced for all Advisory Groups and detailed the outcomes that have been achieved to date as an LIO. Some examples included providing 73 VCSEs with intensive support to date (against an overall target of 25), supporting 34 VCSEs to submit funding applications (against an overall target of 15) and supporting VCSEs to secure over £61k of funding for Hartlepool.</p> <p>He went on to say that for every £1 invested into the voluntary sector, it creates a return of £5. HOP are working on a volunteering strategy, and all targets have been met or will be surpassed by the end of March 2026. From attending a recent regional Pride in Place event, the feeling was that Hartlepool were ahead of other places especially partnership working with VCSEs. IC stated that as part of the long-term plan for HOP they are already working with funders and other partners to secure additional funding to support the core elements of being a Local Infrastructure Organisation.</p>	 <p>HOP.pdf</p>

He then presented on a proposed funded role for HOP across the initial 4-year Pride in Place Investment Plan (2026-2030) which would be focused on embedding the Community Power investment theme within the whole programme. This followed the Board's decision last month to add Community Power to our 4-year Investment Plan.

IC stated that Pride in Place requires a commissioning framework based on the principles from New Deal for Communities to guide the commissioning of proposals and to strengthen collaboration with the community. This framework will ensure that local priorities are identified, resident voices are embedded in decision-making, and investment is directed toward interventions that have meaningful and lasting impact for Hartlepool. HOP can provide the necessary capacity, coordination, and governance mechanisms to support the Board. This will include supporting neighbourhood forums to co-design proposals and ensuring that commissioning pathways are accessible, accountable, and aligned with the wider regeneration objectives. This will work from an Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) approach meaning it builds on the strengths, skills, and resources already present within Hartlepool.

IC then summarised on the key elements he is proposing for HOP to lead on over the 4 years which included:

- Embedding Community Power
- Public Engagement Stages & Action Cycles
- ABCD – Embedding into Practice
- Resident Voice – Neighbourhood Forums
- Collective Leadership & Leadership Development

IC then added that SC has been in touch with Cormac Russell, who is an international expert in ABCD, who wants to come and work with us in Hartlepool. This demonstrates the strength of our current approach through the Board.

He also went on to say that he recently had a walking meeting with DH in Burn Valley which was productive and suggested this as a way forward for members of the Board within different neighbourhoods across Hartlepool.

MW commented that a lot of progress has been made over the past few months by HOP.

MW then facilitated a vote on approval in-principle for the plan by HOP for their role across the initial 4-year Pride in Place Investment Plan (2026-2030) subject to a financial proposal being brought to the next meeting. This was unanimously approved by all members of the Board.

7. Programme Update

SC discussed a North East wide Pride in Place event held in Newcastle on Tuesday. There was positive recognition for Hartlepool on the way we have developed our Pride in Place Programme especially the community-focussed approach through this Board. SC had also been approached to support a couple of phase two areas and had been asked by another phase one area if they could come to visit Hartlepool to learn more about our community engagement and the wider focus of the Board being a Local Strategic Partnership.

There was also compliments from the regional lead at the Ministry for Housing, Communities & Local Government (MHCLG) who appraised our Pride in Place Regeneration & Investment Plan. We found out that we were one of the only areas in the region that had no queries and our plan has now progressed to final national sign-off by MHCLG.

SC then went on to share proposed dates for the Innovation Days following the presentation at the last Board and the work of the ongoing Investment Subgroup:

- Monday 9 March 2026 – 1pm to 4pm
Venue - West Rugby Club
Theme: Regeneration, High Streets and Heritage
- Wednesday 11 March 2026 – 9am to 12noon
Venue - Belle Vue Community Centre
Theme: Health and Wellbeing
- Friday 20 March 2026 – 9am to 12noon
Venue - Belle Vue Community Centre
Theme: Safety, Security and Cohesion

The events will be put on Eventbrite with invites being shared in the next week for the Innovation Days. There is also a need for board members to support with the scene setting element at the start of each thematic session. As an example, SS has already agreed to support with the Safety, Security & Cohesion Theme potentially alongside a colleague from Cleveland Police.

ACTION: Board Members to identify if they can be a thematic lead to support with the scene setting for either the Regeneration, High Streets & Heritage; Health & Wellbeing; or the Safety, Security & Cohesion Innovation Days.

SC then updated on the Pride in Place Impact Fund highlighting some of the projects which have already started or will start in the next few weeks including the range of neighbourhood improvements which have been identified

	<p>based on resident priorities. In addition, a Community Asset Capital Improvement Grant Scheme will launch early next week providing up to £20,000 for eligible organisations within Hartlepool.</p> <p>ACTION: The Community Asset Capital Improvement Grant will be shared with members of the Board.</p> <p>JS stated that HOP and Hartlepool Community Trust are organising some Momentum Days which will continue the community engagement and re-engage the circa 250 people who said they wanted to remain involved following the work last Summer. The first conversation with the community will be on Thursday 12 February at 10am – 12noon at Six8Nine. This is part of the HOP’s commissioned work and will support the development of Neighbourhood Forums.</p> <p>AC commented that it could be helpful if people were able to dial in to the events or if there could be a virtual session. CK confirmed that we will have the technology to be able to support this and can look at an online event via MS Teams.</p>	
<p>8.</p>	<p>Board Health</p> <p>SC outlined that the Board has been in place for nearly a year and attendance continues to be strong, but it seems an appropriate time to review membership. We have an attendance record for all members and there a few members who have not been able to attend as regularly so this is an opportunity to have conversations with them. We can also review any gaps to ensure that we have everyone required as members. SC and GP will be working with Chairs and Vice Chairs around this, with proposals to come to the next Board.</p>	
<p>9.</p>	<p>Any Other Business</p> <p>DH commented on how positive a recent walking meeting had been (as referenced by IC earlier in the meeting). He stated that it should be adopted by other members of the Board.</p> <p>HH added that SC and himself had recently presented at the Hartlepool Business Forum, around the Pride in Place Programme and the Business Advisory Group.</p> <p>SS was thanked for hosting today’s board meeting at the Cleveland Fire Brigade HQ.</p>	
<p>10.</p>	<p>Date and Time of Next Meeting</p> <p>The next meeting is scheduled for Friday 6 March 2026 from 9am to 10.30am at Hartlepool College of Further Education.</p>	