



# Minutes of Newton-le-Willows Neighbourhood Board

Friday 16 January 2026

<b>Invitees</b>			
<b>Name</b>	<b>Initials</b>	<b>Role</b>	<b>Organisation</b>
<b>Board Members</b>			
Chris Hickey	CH	Chair	Mercury Hampton
Ian Lewis	IL	Investment Manager	Liverpool City Region Combined Authority
Jon Julian Smith	JJS	Chief Inspector, St Helens	Merseyside Police
<b>Community &amp; Co-Opted Board Members</b>			
Alex Myhill	AM	Community Representative	Riddling Rack
Debbie Taylor	DT	Business Representative	Es Paradis Salon & Domestic Abuse WA12 CIC
Paul Romanko	PR	Business Representative	United Utilities Water Ltd
John Unsworth	JU	Cultural, Arts, and Heritage including Sports Groups Representative	Sea Cadet Corps
Reverend Chris Stafford	CS	Faith Representative	Team Rector at St Peters, Emmanuel Wargrave, and St John's
<b>Local Authority Representatives</b>			
Mary Jefferson	MJ	Head of Regeneration and Growth	St Helens Borough Council
Matthew Valentine	MV	Programme Lead	St Helens Borough Council
Rachel Bebbby	RB	Project Officer	St Helens Borough Council
Glenn Taggart	GT	Project Manager	St Helens Borough Council
Donna Wilby	DW	Finance Business Partner - Regeneration	St Helens Borough Council
Matthew McHale	MM	Principal Accountant	St Helens Borough Council
<b>Apologies Received</b>			
David Baines MP	DB	Member of Parliament, St Helens North	Member of Parliament, St Helens North
Councillor Anthony Burns	AB	Leader of the Council	St Helens Borough Council

Mark Palethorpe	MP	Chief Executive	St Helens Borough Council
Councillor Kate Groucutt	KG	Cabinet Member for Business & Inclusive Growth and Deputy Leader	St Helens Borough Council
Amie Louise Parsonage	ALP	Portfolio and Partnerships Officer	Merseyside Police and Crime Commissioner
Joanne Edge	JE	Community Representative	Newton Sports Club
Fiona Ruddy	FR	Third Sector Representative	Newton Community Centre

AGM AGENDA		
Item	Title	Lead
1.	Welcome and Introductions	CH
2.	Declarations of Interest	CH
3.	Neighbourhood Board Progress Report	CH
4.	Neighbourhood Board Membership	MV
5.	Plan for Neighbourhoods Finance Report	DW
6.	Updated Terms of Reference	MV

## 1. Welcome and Introductions

Chris Hickey (CH) welcomed the Board, advising that this was the Neighbourhood Board's first AGM (Annual General Meeting) and would be followed by a Neighbourhood Board business meeting.

CH acknowledged that apologies had been received from David Baines MP, Councillor Anthony Burns, Councillor Kate Groucutt, Mark Palethorpe, Joanne Edge, and Fiona Ruddy.

Amie Louise Parsonage (ALP) remains on maternity leave and is anticipated to return to board meetings on her return.

CH expressed his apologies to not be able to attend the full Neighbourhood Board meeting but recorded in person his formal endorsement for all decisions contained within the report, pertaining to both the AGM and the Neighbourhood Board meeting to follow.

## 2. Declaration of Interest

No declarations were declared.

### 3. Neighbourhood Board Progress Report

MV thanked Board for their dedication and commitment to the programme to date, with brilliant progress made for the programme in the past 18 months as follows:

- May 2024 – Appointment of CH as Chair.
- June 2024 - First mandated Board meeting.
- Summer 2024 - Recruitment of the full Board.
- 22 April 2025 - First major milestone (submission and subsequent approval of proposals to alter the 'default' area boundary, governance arrangements and Board composition to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government).
- Spring 2025 - Public consultation (recognised as best practice). The consultation reached approximately 60,000 people
- July 2025 - Public consultation findings report published.
- 3 October 2025 - Board approval of the Newton -Le-Willows Regeneration Plan and 4-Year Investment Plan
- 19 November 2025 - Cabinet approval of the Regeneration Plan and 4-Year Investment Plan
- 28 November 2025 – Submission of Regeneration Plan and 4-Year Investment Plan to MHCLG.

The Board progress has been exceptional, with the Board recognised both regionally and nationally as best practice.

MV highlighted the timeline in Appendix 1. This can be used as part of Neighbourhood Board branding to demonstrate progress and milestones achieved. Future timelines will be produced as the full programme develops.

**NOTE: Board noted the progress made to date.**

### 4. Neighbourhood Board Membership

A summary of Board membership as of 16 January 2026 was provided. Proposed updates to Neighbourhood Board membership and governance were outlined.

Within the current Terms of Reference:

- **Mandated Members:** the duration of Board membership is for an initial period of 36 months, with options for extension on agreement of the Board.
- **Co-opted Members:** Board membership term is for 12 months which an option to extend subject to Board approval.

In March 2025, Board agreed to freeze membership until such time that the Regeneration Plan was developed, and a Skills Audit could be undertaken.

MV provided an update of current Board membership, including those members who had left the Board due to job changes and the Board position being to the role rather than the individual, this included Kath O'Dwyer and Councillor Richard McCauley who vacated the Board as former Chief Executive of the Council and former Portfolio Holder for the programme. Their roles have been taken up by Mark Palethorpe as the new Chief Executive of St Helens Borough Council and Cllr Groucutt as the Portfolio Holder for Business and Inclusive Growth. The Board sent its thanks to Kath And Cllr McCauley for their service at such a critical stage in the Board creation.

The report also detailed proposal, to align board membership with the 4-Year investment plan priorities, it was proposed to:

- Appointment 1 representative from an 'Education and Opportunity' background and
- Appointment of 1 representative from a 'Health and Wellbeing' background

Section 4 of the report 'Newton-le-Willows Board Membership- Past and Present' detailed the terms of non-mandated members. The existing Terms of reference outlines that following the recruitment freeze and submission of the Regeneration Plan, Mandated members terms can be extended for 12 months. After which, the full Board can vote to extend all Board membership until March 2030 to align with the end of the first investment period.

A Board discussion confirmed the procedure for Board recruitment (through asking for nominations from Board members, senior council officers and Ward Councillors) before final appointments are decided by the Board Chair (CH). The timescale for recruitment was confirmed to be by April 2026 via an expression of interest to outline nominee's previous experience. It was outlined that Representatives must live or work within the area to understand the community.

MV updated that the Chair has appointed Ian Lewis (IL) as Deputy Chair of the Neighbourhood Board due to his previous relevant experience.

**DECISION: Mandated Board members approved the extension of community positions for a period of 12 months in line with existing Terms of Reference.**

**DECISION: Board approved the extension of the term of office of all current Board members until March 2030, in alignment with the first 4-year investment period cycle. This decision succeeds the previous in relation to community member extension.**

**DECISION: Following a skills analysis of the Newton-le-Willows Neighbourhood Board it was agreed to appoint two new Board Members with specialisms of Health and Wellbeing and Education and opportunity to align to the 4- Year Investment Plan priorities.**

**DECISION: Board agreed the recruitment route for the two new Board members as outlined at paragraphs 3.6 and 3.7 of the papers.**

**DECISION: Board noted the appointment of Ian Lewis as Deputy Chair, in accordance with the Terms of Reference procedures.**

## **5. Plan for Neighbourhoods Finance Report**

Donna Wilby (DW) provided a finance update to Board in her role as Finance Business Partner at the Council.

DW provided a position statement on capacity funding spend to until the end of December 2025, utilising Table 1 in the report to demonstrate spend. MHCLG will conduct their analysis in quarters once funding is awarded in April 2026. AGM's will be structured to align with reporting to MHCLG. The Council as accountable body will produce reports to meet the six-month and twelve-month reporting requirements.

Board members queried the timeline that reports are required– whilst not currently defined, it is expected to be aligned with the budget year with meeting dates arranged accordingly.

**DECISION: Board reviewed and noted the financial summary report.**

## **6. Updated Terms of Reference**

Revised terms of reference were presented to Board, to align to the Governments rebranding of the Programme. In September 2025 Government launched the Pride in Place programme and advised the Board that they were rebranding the Plan for Neighbourhoods Programme as the Pride in Place Tranche 1 programme. Government issued revised guidance that the Board must be compliant with.

The Pride in Place Programme retains the previous core components and core elements of the Plan for Neighbourhoods programme but it has made some key amendments to the terms of reference requirements, these include:

- Strengthening the Board's strategic role and responsibilities.
- Declaration of Interest forms to be populated on an annual basis.
- Strengthening the Board's representation to ensure it has a resident focus.
- Extension of Board membership.
- Inclusion of a Neighbourhood Board meeting quorate.

It is recommended that the Board rebrand the programme as Pride in Place and that a Pride in Place agenda item will be added to a future Board meeting for further discussion. It was also noted that Government have identified a second tranche of Pride in Place areas whose terms of reference and financial award are slightly different to Tranche 1 areas.

In addition to these amendments, it was also noted that Sub committees or sub-groups can be established by the Board to function as Task and Finish Groups, 'delegating tasks and powers. This is to enable the Board to continue with its strategic role whilst moving towards a delivery model based on investment themes and sub-groups. Board members can apply to be part of a sub-group and can

function as a 'Project Sponsor' and will be able to invite advisors who would be subject area specialists to the task groups to provide specific skills and knowledge. The task groups will work under the remit provided by the Board. Developed projects may then be brought back to full Board meetings for a strategic consideration and final approval. This was welcomed by Board to ensure appropriate capacity and expertise.

**DECISION: Board agreed the updated Terms of Reference, following updated guidance provided by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG).**

**Meeting ended at 2:35pm.**

NEIGHBOURHOOD BOARD AGENDA		
Item	Title	Lead
1.	Welcome and Introductions	CH
2.	Declarations of Interest	CH
3.	Early Delivery Projects	MV
4.	Building Improvement Scheme	MV
5.	AOB	All

### 1. Welcome and Apologies

The Deputy Chair confirmed apologies had been received from Chris Hickey, David Baines MP, Councillor Anthony Burns, Councillor Kate Groucutt, Mark Palethorpe, Joanne Edge, and Fiona Ruddy.

Amie Louise Parsonage (ALP) remains on maternity leave and is anticipated to return to board meetings on her return.

**NOTE: It was noted that ALP absence from Board during maternity leave does not impact the quorum (providing the remaining number of attending Board members meets the minimum required by the terms of reference).**

### 2. Declarations of Interest

No declarations were received ahead of the meeting.

Debbie Taylor (DT) asked if she needs to declare a conflict with the Building Improvements Programme noting investment interest within Earlestown town centre. It was clarified at this stage it was a non-pecuniary interest and therefore DT would remain in the Board. As the project develops, members with conflicts would be asked to vacate the meeting for the agenda item.

No further declarations were received.

### 3. Early Delivery Projects

An update was provided by MV on Year 1 progress in the development of 'Early Delivery Projects' of the programme.

At the 3 October 2025 Workshop, projects were scored via a matrix, the workshop members endorsed the scoring approach and those ranked highly by the workshop members were prioritised for Board consideration. Three projects were listed for consideration and have since further developed for consideration by Board today, these are.

- St Johns Playground
- Earlestown Town Hall AV and Lighting Enhancements
- Arts on Prescription

A brief overview of the projects was provided.

**St Johns Playground** was selected due to deprived super output area statistics and the equipment reaching an end-of-life stage. The playground is proposed to be branded as a 'children's playground' including inclusive equipment alongside core play equipment. **Proposed allocation:** £0.203m from the Capital budget.

**Earlestown Town Hall AV equipment:** This project allows community groups to optimise their use of the space. Community groups have outlined the benefits this project could bring. If endorsed, that this will need to go to competitive tendering and the following informs an indicative budget. **Proposed allocation:** £0.134m with £7,625 match from St Helens Borough Council enabling works from the Capital budget.

**Arts on Prescription:** Offering arts and creative workshops for adults experiencing mild to moderate mental health issues. The proposed provision would take place in Newton-le-Willows Library with three cohorts of ten people engaging in the programme over a 36-week delivery period. **Proposed allocation:** £0.024m from the Revenue budget.

The recommendation on the Board paper seeks approval of £0.361m but within the table it references £0.386m allocated. It was clarified that the variance relates to the £0.025m allocated for the community pot in Year 1, previously endorsed by the Neighbourhood Board through the Regeneration Plan.

Discussion took place about the method of procurement (confirmed that it was required to be compliant with public sector procurement rules and therefore would be conducted via the Council's appointed procurement provider, STAR procurement). It is expected that delivery be within the first year of the programme, ahead of April 2027.

Following procurement, any unspent budget will be returned to Board for reallocation to alternative projects, or alternatively the scope of the project could be reviewed.

A discussion took place relating to the Earlestown Town Hall AV equipment, it was confirmed that the specification has been developed alongside a specialist's provider to ensure suitability for a wide range of community groups. Event planners and dance groups have been contacted for comment, and the specification is futureproofed and adequate for a standard band.

The capacity of the Town Hall was confirmed, and the space may be used for a variety of community uses. Local schools, and choirs have also expressed interest in the room.

Board members discussed the St John's Playground proposal including in relation to nearby car parks and public transport.

No further comments were received on the Arts on Prescription project.

**DECISION: Board endorsed £0.361m of Year 1 funding for Early Delivery Projects comprising £0.203m St Johns Playground, £0.134m Earlestown Town Hall AV equipment, £0.024m Arts on Prescription and £0.025m community pot.**

#### **4. Building Improvements Scheme**

Board was provided with a summary of the Earlestown town centre Building Improvements Scheme. The Board undertook site visits to Tyldesley to see a similar scheme.

This project was brought forward as the public consultation had identified it as a key outcome. The public identified Earlestown town centre as needing visual improvements, such as improved shop frontages and is contained within the published public consultation findings report.

Restoring historic buildings will make Earlestown a more attractive place to live and visit and the Board can provide measurable change for the local community with the core objectives being:

- Increased Economic Activity – by increasing footfall and revenue through new/enhanced retail spaces and hospitality venues.
- Improved Connectivity – enhancing connectivity between the rail station, Town Hall and Market Square.
- Supported Local Businesses – to improve their facilities and create spaces for local enterprises to thrive.

The scheme is contained within the priority area of Earlestown conservation area. Buildings it is proposed that buildings in this area would be eligible to apply for a grant. All applications will be judged against an assessment criterion and scoring matrix (to be developed at the right time with the Board).

Works in schemes of this nature generally fall into two main categories being: the restoration of historical shopfronts and historical building repairs. Other applicable costs include professional fees preliminaries and a contingency budget which can all be capitalised.

A funding allocation of £1.2million is recommended, informed by officer's previous experience and best practice. To ensure the funding pot supports as many eligible projects as possible, the scheme would require a financial contribution from building or business owner (exact contribution rate to be determined). A tiered contribution rate will be explored and developed to provide flexibility for grant applications.

The management model options for the Building Improvement Scheme are:

Internal Delivery Partner – Option 1:

- Based on a 3-day/week commitment led by the Council's Heritage Project Officer.
- Costs are indicative subject to inflation and will be reviewed annually.

- Provides flexibility to Board, to supplement with external expertise if required.
- Cost to the Board equates to 13% of £1.2million budget = £159,000

#### External Delivery Partner – Option 2:

- Based on local case study examples, with an external provider leading the project, with fee totalling approximately 27% of the budget.
- Costs are indicative, subject to procurement, with possibility that costs may be higher.
- Cost to Board based on 27% of £1.2million budget = £324,000
- Note - the Board has insufficient revenue funding remaining within the Regeneration, High Streets and Heritage allocation to cover a 27% fee. Any procurement would therefore only relate to available budget. This provides further risks to the Board if procurement at a reduced budget level is unachievable and means there will be no revenue allocation for further projects within this theme.

Option 1 was recommended. This management approach offers a lower-cost baseline, while retaining flexibility to supplement with additional expertise if required.

Board discussed the capacity of the proposed officer for Option 1, and this was confirmed as being available and being fully auditable as part of programme governance. It was confirmed that the officer brings considerable relevant local knowledge and expertise.

A discussion took place on the management of the available budget; it was confirmed that the application process will ensure that funding was not exceeded. Board may evaluate phase 1 and consider whether to continue with additional phases of a Building Improvement Scheme in the following investment periods.

**DECISION: Board endorsed the £1.2m funding allocation for a Earlestown town centre Building Improvement Scheme, subject to the Council's formal approvals.**

**DECISION: Board endorsed Option 1 Internal Council Delivery management approach.**

## 5. Any Other Business

The Deputy Chair thanked Board Members for their contributions inviting any other business.

MV noted branding had been discussed with Board as a priority ahead of the project delivery launch in April 2026. Capacity funding can be used to take this forward promptly; it was agreed to form a Branding Sub-Group and an expression of interest form to be circulated to Board members accordingly. The Branding Sub-Group will bring their findings to the next Board meeting for formal endorsement.

Following discussion, it was clarified that whilst Council Communications Officers could offer advice for this discussion, the branding will be unique to Board, and decisions taken accordingly.

IL closed meeting confirming that the date of the next Board meeting is to be confirmed.