NEIGHBOURHOOD
Area Committee
Dorking and Villages

MAKE IT HAPPEN

Dorking and the Villages Neighbourhood Area Committee (NAC)

08 December 2025 - 14:00 – 16:00 - Meeting Notes



Dorking and Villages Neighbourhood Area Committee 08 December 2025 Meeting Notes

Time: 14:00 – 16:00.
Address: Christian Centre, Church Street, Dorking RH4 1DW

Chair: Hazel Watson – County Councillor, Surrey County Council

Vice Chair: Sally Dubery – Chief Officer, Central Surrey Voluntary Action

Attendees:

- Helyn Clack – County Councillor
- Will Dennis – Parish Councillor
- James Green – Police Borough Commander
- Emma Cox – Health
- Jon Mears – Westcott Village Hub
- Stephen Cooksey – County & District Councillor
- Deborah (Debbie) Jones – Parish Councillor
- David Preedy – Parish Councillor
- Paul Bowyer – Surrey Fire and Rescue Service
- Jo McGowan – Business/BID
- Michaela Afford – Mid Surrey Community Fridge
- Tony White – Mid Surrey Community Fridge
- Hazel Watson – County & District Councillor
- Bradley Nelson – District Councillor
- Pat Smith – Pixham Residents Association
- Sally Dubery – Central Surrey Voluntary Action
- Wendy Saunders – Circular Dorking
- Charles Allen – Clarion Housing
- Judith Brooks – YMCA
- Trevor Stacey – Parish Councillor
- Helen Sutherland – New Life Dorking
- Stuart Kingsley – YMCA
- Hannah Gilmore – Health Watch Surrey

Additional attendees:

- Rachel O'Reilly – Mole Valley District Council
- James Painter – Surrey County Council
- Michelle Bradley – Surrey County Council
- Rowena Zelley – Surrey County Council
- Mila Ekkel – Surrey County Council
- James Glover – Surrey County Council

Apologies:

- K.H – Mole Valley District Council
- N.P – Churches Together
- R.G – GP Health
- A.B – Citizens Advice Mole Valley
- K.B – Executive Assistant to Headteacher and Senior Leadership Team on behalf of C.P – Head Teacher and S.K – Senior Pastoral Manager
- G.B – Mount Green Housing Association
- G.M – Mary Frances Trust
- P.W – Mary Frances Trust
- D.R – Clarion Housing Association
- A.M – Mole Valley District Council
- S.H – Age Concern
- S.C – Mount Green Housing Association
- W.H – Parish Councillor
- M.A – Dorking Health Care

Introduction

The third Dorking and the Villages NAC meeting took place on 8 December 2025. The meeting opened with a warm welcome and a positive tone for the afternoon was set as attendees settled in. Everyone was then guided through the day's agenda, and a moment was taken to remind the group of the project timeline and the recommendations already developed in previous sessions.

The agenda was as follows:

- Item 1: Welcome – Session aims and key outcomes (14:00 – 14:05)
- Item 2: Finalising recommendations (14:05 – 14:45)
- Item 3: Expert Witness and Wider Engagement Update (14:45 – 15:05)
- Break (15:05 – 15:10)
- Item 4: Review and evaluation recap journey, hear about NAC recommendations, and share your feedback (15:15 – 15:45)
- Item 5: Meeting Close (15:45 – 16:00)
- Item 6: Informal Networking – Wider Engagement Activity (16:00 – 16:30)

Item 2: Finalising Recommendations

Part 1: Review draft recommendations and voting to prioritise recommendations

The group was invited to revisit the actions identified during the second NAC meeting, drawing on the pre-meeting report and action plan that had been shared in advance. The purpose of this session was to refresh everyone's understanding of

the emerging recommendations and to begin narrowing these down through a prioritisation activity.

Participants began by reviewing the draft recommendations as a whole group, taking a moment to reacquaint themselves with the suggested actions before moving into the voting exercise. Each NAC member was given four sticky dots—two to allocate to quick wins and two to longer-term actions. This was done to encourage everyone to consider both feasibility and impact when casting their votes.

As the activity unfolded, one participant noted that many of the recommendations overlapped and could potentially be streamlined, suggesting that many challenges could be addressed if there were accessible, central places for people to go. Others echoed the importance of accessibility more broadly, emphasising that any solution must work for everyone. The group also highlighted the significance of economic development, recognising that organisations cannot sustain their work without ongoing funding. Additionally, it was observed that the Surrey Connect on demand bus service remains underused, signalling an opportunity for improvement.

Once voting closed, officers tallied the dots and confirmed the top four recommendations that would shape the remainder of the session. The following recommendations were selected:

Short-term:

- Collate and distribute key local service information via multiple channels.
- Address digital exclusion with non-digital communication methods.

Long-term:

- Promote community hubs as focal points for advice and services.
- Develop transport links to hubs and Good Neighbour Schemes in Villages.

Overall, the conversation reinforced a shared sense of direction: hubs, information sharing, and transport links were seen as the essential pillars for strengthening local support and improving community access.

Part 2: Table discussions on selected recommendations

With the priority actions now agreed, each table was invited to take ownership of one of the selected recommendations. Every group was provided with an A3 worksheet designed to help them explore their assigned priority in greater depth. The task encouraged participants to think about what it would take to turn a recommendation into reality.

Participants identified an owner for each recommendation. They were also encouraged to think about key partners who would need to be involved, spanning councillors, statutory bodies, voluntary and community organisations, businesses,

and residents. Discussions touched on how these partners might be engaged and who already held useful connections.

The groups then considered the resources required to deliver the recommendation, including people, assets, and potential budgets. They explored opportunities to make use of existing support, whether current funding streams or grants could be leveraged, and where any gaps might need to be addressed.

Timeframes were also discussed, with tables asked to outline a realistic schedule for delivery, identify key milestones, and anticipate any potential delays or barriers. This naturally led into conversations about risks, dependencies, and other contextual factors that could influence progress.

The exercise encouraged thoughtful, practical planning and helped each group begin shaping their assigned recommendation into a more actionable proposal, laying the groundwork for the next stage of the NAC's work.

Table 1 Discussion: Collate and distribute key local service information via multiple channels

The table focusing on collating and distributing key local service information through multiple channels explored how to make communication clearer, more consistent, and more accessible across the community. They emphasised the value of face-to-face interaction and noted that in smaller villages, simple door-to-door leaflets can often be more effective than parish magazines. While parish publications remain useful, the group felt that leaflets are sometimes better at reaching people directly.

A recurring challenge was the difficulty of knowing "who's who" locally, highlighting the need to build a stronger understanding of the community and ensure information comes from trusted sources. The group discussed how best to collate information in a structured way, favouring a forward-planned approach.

Parish councils were seen as important conduits for sharing information in rural areas, though the group noted a degree of complacency around online communications, which are often assumed to be read despite being less effectively presented than they could be, or overly text-heavy. They stressed that effective dissemination—across both digital and non-digital formats—is essential.

Voluntary Action, Surrey County Council, and Mole Valley Council were identified as potential owners. Resources would need to include funding for collation and distribution, as well as support to build a stronger local information network.

Table 2 Discussion: Address digital exclusion with non-digital communication methods

The table exploring digital exclusion focused on understanding who is most affected and how support could be delivered more effectively. They noted that many residents lack the equipment or confidence to get online—whether due to limited Wi-Fi access, not owning a mobile phone, or being unable to use library facilities. Older residents were highlighted as particularly at risk, often finding it difficult to navigate digital systems or even share basic information such as emails.

The group stressed that every digital service must be matched with a non-digital alternative to ensure no one is left behind. Outreach through community and parish magazines was seen as valuable, as these are trusted sources, though their cost can be a barrier. This led to discussion about alternative funding options for newsletters and printed materials.

Community hubs, schools, cafés, libraries, and warm hubs were all identified as ideal places to offer face-to-face support and basic digital training, including help with NHS apps and online safety. The group also recognised that fear of the internet—alongside concerns about cost, scams, and lack of training—continues to deter many residents.

They emphasised the need for information to be shared in a variety of formats and through trusted channels, ensuring communication is two-way and allows people to ask questions. Accessibility was also raised as a practical issue: if residents cannot see or read a screen clearly, they are effectively excluded from digital services.

Table 3 Discussion: Promote community hubs as focal points for advice and services

The table exploring promoting community hubs as focal points for advice and services focused on how these spaces could become more active and accessible. They suggested extending opening hours in rural village halls, creating weekly activity lists for each venue, and offering both digital and printed updates. A text-message service was proposed to keep residents informed, alongside digital upskilling for hub staff to strengthen marketing and accessibility.

There was a volunteer in the group to lead this work, and he said he could be supported by a range of local partners including Residents' Associations, Voluntary Action, charities, Surrey County Council and Mole Valley organisations. The group noted that funding would likely need to come from a mix of community and partner contributions, though they acknowledged potential challenges such as bureaucratic delays.

It was highlighted that residents rarely travel between villages, underscoring the need for locally relevant hubs. The group agreed on a provisional timeframe of summer 2026 for progressing this work.

Table 4 Discussion: Develop transport links to hubs and Good Neighbour Schemes in Villages

The table working on developing transport links to community hubs and strengthening Good Neighbour Schemes focused on how to make local travel more accessible and better aligned with residents' needs. A key theme was raising awareness of existing options such as the Surrey Connect on demand bus service and wider community transport, as many felt these resources were underused.

The group discussed the importance of improving connectivity to key destinations, particularly places where services are already concentrated, such as family centres. Rather than expanding the network, they suggested reviewing and refining current Surrey Connect stops to ensure they are located where they are most needed.

They also emphasised the value of involving the right partners in the conversation. The Manager from Mole Valley Life was identified as a crucial voice in shaping this work, as the overseer of both Surrey Connect on demand bus service and Mole Valley Community Transport.

Accessibility was another priority, with the group noting that booking systems and service information must be available in more than just digital formats to ensure everyone can use them confidently.

Item 3: Expert Witness and Wider Engagement Updates

This agenda item provided space for expert witnesses to share insights from their organisations and highlight initiatives that NAC members should be aware of. Updates were provided on wider engagement activities that had taken place since the previous meeting and the key feedback themes from them.

Expert Witness: YMCA East Surrey

YMCA offered an overview of their long-standing presence across East Surrey and West Sussex, where it has been operating for more than 170 years and now supports around 9,000 children each year. It was explained that the YMCA runs the Mole Valley Family Centre and is keen to strengthen its presence in Leatherhead and surrounding rural areas. Their work spans a wide range of programmes, including youth work at Ashtead Youth Centre, Parent Puzzle, the Freedom Programme, Speech and Language sessions, Stay and Play groups, emotional wellbeing support, and the Family Wellbeing Service. They also accept family referrals and run both a break and after-school club at St Joseph's Primary, as well as a Y-Kids holiday club at St John's CofE. As part of their disability service, they offer short-break weekend and holiday clubs.

Expert Witness: New Life Church/Chart Downs

New Life Church/Chart Downs' role was described as a voice for those who may struggle to be heard. Their ethos centres on empowerment, connection, and holistic support. The importance of tailoring services to what residents say they need was emphasised. Their support ranges from home visits, to running warm hubs offering free drinks and affordable food. All volunteers bring either professional expertise, for example nurses, or those with lived experience.

The breadth of their sessions was outlined. These include baby massage, sleep and feeding support, first aid training, a parenting café, intergenerational craft sessions, and support groups for survivors of abuse. They also advocate for families navigating complex situations. Looking ahead, they hope to expand their offer for older residents, including memory clinics and exercise classes, and aim to provide long-term, consistent support.

Wider Engagement Update: Surrey County Council

The engagement events held between the second and third NAC meetings were outlined. Residents were invited to share their views through informal activities and discussions, helping to ensure that NAC work continues to reflect shared aspirations and real-world challenges. Local insights and lived experiences were gathered to gain a deeper understanding of community priorities. Engagement sessions took place at Westcott Village Hub, Box Hill Warm Welcome, and Chart Downs Community Cafe.

At Westcott Village Hall, residents raised concerns about overgrown footpaths and increasing parking pressures, issues they felt would worsen with upcoming building developments. Mental health support was reported as limited, with provision often only available at crisis point. Many also described long waits for GP appointments and the difficulty of navigating lengthy online forms.

In Box Hill, transport was a central theme. The Connect service stops on the main road where there is no pavement, making it inaccessible for residents with mobility issues. Those who can no longer drive are left with limited independence due to public transport difficulties. Limited local amenities were also highlighted: the post office – the only place to withdraw cash – is not always open, and the single village shop offers only a small range of produce. Despite these challenges, the Warm Welcome sessions were praised as a lifeline, helping to reduce isolation.

At Chart Downs, residents spoke about the dangers of walking into Dorking due to the lack of barriers along the road, which makes the route feel unsafe. There was appreciation for recent improvements to the social club, including new toilets and better disability access. However, transport issues persisted, with bus times not aligning with school schedules. Many residents also struggled to secure Citizens Advice appointments and needed support with form-filling and digital skills, expressing a strong desire for more help in becoming digitally confident.

Item 4: Review and Evaluation Recap Journey

The final workshop session brought the group back together to reflect on the journey of the NAC pilot so far, revisiting the key milestones and setting the scene for the evaluation phase. Members were walked through what had been achieved to date. They were also introduced the evaluation that NAC members would be asked to complete, emphasising its importance in shaping the next stage of the pilot.

Looking ahead, potential changes were outlined to the meeting schedule in the new year, noting that the NAC may shift from monthly meetings to a bi-monthly or a quarterly rhythm. Some members expressed surprise that this had not been raised earlier. One member suggested that any change in frequency should be put to a vote, and there was a sense that many did not want the current pattern to change. In response, someone proposed that working groups could be established to maintain momentum if meetings become less frequent.

Questions were raised about how the NAC would operate once Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) comes into effect. Members discussed whether partners could take on more responsibility if future funding becomes uncertain, and some expressed concern that the NAC was being positioned as a governance model without fully addressing how it aligns with the emerging LGR structure. The group were reassured that further clarity from government is expected, and once received, it will be shared with members.

The discussion also touched on the importance of shared interests across towns and villages, with one member noting that differing local needs can make collective working more complex. Others questioned whether new unitary authorities would continue to support NACs and highlighted the need to engage with the shadow authority as plans develop.

There was recognition of the significant effort invested by Surrey County Council and partners, which many felt had been key to the NAC's success so far. Members agreed that even if SCC's capacity changes, continued involvement would remain important. Concerns were also raised about the work feeling too Dorking-focused, with rural areas needing greater visibility.

Despite these uncertainties, the mood in the room was positive. When asked whether they were happy for the NAC to continue until the elections, members nodded in agreement, signalling strong support for carrying the work forward.

Item 5: Meeting Close

The meeting ended with an outline of the next steps and upcoming milestones. It was explained that the Resident Insight team at Surrey County Council would now begin analysing all the data gathered throughout the pilot, including interview findings, survey responses, and notes from the day's discussions. These insights will

feed into a report for Cabinet, due by mid-December, which will present the key findings alongside the emerging recommendations.

A decision on the future of the NAC will be made by Cabinet on 27 January, with the outcome shared promptly with committee members and wider stakeholders. Should the decision be to continue, the next NAC meeting is expected to take place in February 2026, with further details to follow regarding any changes to membership or chairing arrangements.

It was also noted that a more detailed evaluation report will be available at the end of January 2026, offering deeper feedback to support learning and inform the development of future NACs.

The session ended with thanks to all attendees for their contribution to the pilot and their ongoing commitment to the work.

Annex

Appendix 1: Dorking and the Villages NAC selected recommendations

Draft recommendation or action	**Timeframe**
Collate and distribute key local service information via multiple channels (magazines, community/resident boards, letterbox drops).	Short-term
Promote community hubs as focal points for advice and services.	Short-term
Develop transport links to hubs (e.g., Connect bus stop for Westcott Hub) and Good Neighbour Schemes in villages.	Long-term
Address digital exclusion with non-digital communication methods.	Long-term