NEIGHBOURHOOD
Area Committee
Dorking and Villages

MAKE IT HAPPEN

Dorking and the Villages Neighbourhood Area Committee (NAC)

02 October 2025 – 14:00 – 16:00 - Meeting Notes



Dorking and the Villages Neighbourhood Area Committee 02 October 2025 Meeting Notes

Time: 14:00 – 16:00.
Address: Beare Green Village Hall, Merebank, Beare Green, Surrey, RH5 4RD

Chair: H.W – County Councillor, Surrey County Council

Vice Chair: S.D – Chief Officer, Central Surrey Voluntary Action

Attendees:

H.C – County Councillor
D.V – District Councillor
W.D – Parish Councillor
J.G – Police Borough Commander
E.C – Health
J.M – Westcott Village Hub
S.C – County & District Councillor
D.J – Parish Councillor
D.P – Parish Councillor
P.B – Surrey Fire and Rescue Service
J.M – Business/BID
M.A – Mid Surrey Community Fridge
G.M – Mary Francis Trust
S.B – Healthwatch Surrey Contract Manager
H.W – County & District Councillor
B.N – District Councillor
W.H – Parish Councillor
P.S – Pixham Residents Association
M.A – Dorking Health Care
A.B – Citizens Advice Mole Valley
S.D – Central Surrey Voluntary Action
W.S – Circular Dorking

Additional attendees:

U.D – Surrey County Council
R.O – Mole Valley District Council
J.P – Surrey County Council
M.B – Surrey County Council
R.Z – Surrey County Council
K.D – Surrey County Council

M.E– Surrey County Council

Apologies:

K.H – Mole Valley District Council
R.G – GP Health
N.P – Churches Together
C.A – Clarion Futures Housing
K.B – Executive Assistant to Headteacher and Senior Leadership Team on behalf of
C.P – Head Teacher and S.K – Senior Pastoral Manager
A.M – District Councillor
J.B – YMCA
S.H – Age Concern
S.C – Mount Green Housing Association

Agenda Item 1 – Welcome

The meeting of the Dorking and Villages Neighbourhood Area Committee had a wide range of representatives attend from county, district, parish councils, policing, health, voluntary and community organisations, and local groups. At the beginning of the meeting, a warm welcome was given to the participants and thanks for attending and helping to shape what the Neighbourhood Area Committee (NAC) in Dorking will look like. The agenda of the day was run through and the committee were told what the session aims and key outcomes would be.

The agenda was as follows:

- Item 1: Welcome – session aims and key outcomes (14:00–14:10)
- Item 2: Neighbourhood Area Committees – Recap and progress update (14:10–14:25)
- Item 3: Terms of Reference and ways of working (14:25–14:40)
- Break (14:40–14:50)
- Item 4: Data and insights – Presentation and small group discussions (14:50–15:50)
- Item 5: Next steps and session close (15:50–16:00)

Item 2 – Neighbourhood Area Committees Recap and Progress update

The Committee received a recap of the purpose and progress of the NACs since the July meeting. During discussion, someone mentioned that due to the high level of ongoing change and consultation within the county, they wondered whether the work currently underway would translate into meaningful action. There was a response

that much of the current activity is in direct response to central government direction and is therefore both necessary and timely. This item reaffirmed the ongoing development of the NACs and the commitment to progressing their work.

Item 3 – Terms of reference and ways of working

A presentation was given explaining what the Terms of Reference (ToR) covers, followed by a discussion on ways of working and communication preferences. The Committee was asked to ratify the ToR and formally recognise the Chair and Vice Chair roles. Several queries and concerns were raised, including how the ToR could be adapted in future. It was clarified that this version applies only to the pilot phase and can be revised after the pilot ends. It was expressed that a more democratic process for selecting Chairs should be considered for the future. There was another question on how representation would be ensured in areas that are not parished. Following the discussion, the Committee agreed to adopt the Terms of Reference for the duration of the pilot. The Chair and Vice Chair for the pilot period were formally introduced, and it was agreed that ways of working would evolve through a "test and learn" approach.

Item 4 – Data Insights Presentation and small group discussions

The Committee received a presentation introducing the data and insights pack, outlining its purpose, contents, and how NAC members could contribute to shaping local understanding. Members then broke into small groups for two rounds of discussion.

Small Group Discussion 1 – Reflections on Emerging Insights

Participants reflected on the insights pack, identifying both gaps in the data and areas of strength:

Identified Gaps

Members noted several gaps, including:

- Limited information on business challenges in town centres
- Insufficient detail on lifestyle factors
- Lack of ethnicity related trends and intersectional insights
- Need for greater clarity on how communities and issues interlink
- Localised data, particularly around energy costs and fuel poverty
- Greater emphasis needed on loneliness and isolation, including reference to the council's Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA)

Positive Observations

Members also highlighted a number of local strengths:

- Strong community assets and resilient VCSE networks
- Positive relationships between businesses and community groups
- Good general community connectedness
- Stable GP practices, supporting trusted patient relationships
- Strong primary care provision in villages, though mental health service access is weaker

Reflections on Emerging Trends (Expanded Insights)

Discussions further explored broader themes across transport, environment, housing, and youth needs:

Transport and Connectivity

Members emphasised significant challenges around transport coordination, affordability, and communication. Roadworks and diversions were noted as causing disproportionate disruption due to lack of agency coordination. Public transport remains limited or expensive, leading to isolation—though better promotion of Surrey Connect could support rural mobility. Digital exclusion, often linked to poor broadband access, continues to compound isolation.

Community and Environmental Pressures

Concerns were raised regarding:

- Flooding and river pollution
- Increased fire risks (woodland and heathland) due to climate change
- Biodiversity loss
- Rising energy costs
- Noise pollution, particularly in areas like Mickleham
- The impact of new developments on traffic and noise

Local resilience work (including Brockham Emergency Response Team (BERT) and Environment Agency insights) was noted as valuable learning for community preparedness.

Housing Affordability Crisis

A major area of concern was the lack of affordable housing across the district. This affects key worker recruitment, family stability, and forces many residents to relocate due to high living costs. Members noted ongoing challenges with damp, mould, and low quality housing, particularly within social housing stock, and expressed frustration at the limited influence councillors have over housing association maintenance.

Police colleagues linked several local issues—such as antisocial behaviour, deprivation, and lack of education access—to housing conditions.

Youth and Vulnerability

Members identified rising challenges for young people, including:

- Recruitment issues for small to medium enterprises (SMEs) linked to high living costs
- Rural isolation and limited access to higher/further education
- Increasing 'Not in Education, Employment, or Training' (NEET) figures despite strong school performance
- Falling pupil numbers
- Lack of youth activities, contributing to antisocial behaviour
- Poor mental health and limited support services
- Insufficient 'Special Educational Needs and Disabilities' (SEND) provision
- Challenges for unpaid carers

Small Group Discussion 2 – Agreeing Priorities

In the second round of discussions, each table reviewed the insights and agreed on key priorities for the NAC to take forward.

A strong consensus emerged around isolation and loneliness, affecting all ages and closely connected to other local pressures such as poor transport links, limited awareness of available services, and knock-on effects for mental and physical health.

Other priorities identified included:

- Deprivation – including hidden deprivation and demographic inequalities
- Housing – especially long-term issues and concerns around park homes
- Youth voice – mental health, and complex needs

Headline Priority

The NAC agreed that the overarching priority arising from the discussions are addressing deprivation across the Dorking and Villages area, encompassing loneliness, isolation, mental health challenges, transport gaps, and cost of living pressures.

Item 5 Next Steps and Session Close

The final part of the meeting summarised next steps and key reflections. Members questioned the added value of NACs compared to existing structures, with some suggesting that access to dedicated funding would significantly strengthen the NAC's impact. There was also discussion about whether priorities could evolve at each meeting.

It was noted that the pilot involves two parallel processes:

- Operating as a NAC
- Evaluating how the NAC model works

Future agendas may separate these elements more clearly.

A gap in representation from employment, skills, and jobs was acknowledged, and Members suggested exploring how to bring this voice into future meetings.
It was proposed to create a newsletter after each NAC meeting to share updates more widely across communities.

Dates of future meetings

- 11 November, 14:00–16:00 – Betchworth Village War Memorial Hall
- 08 December, 14:00–16:00 – Small Hall, Dorking Christian Centre