NEIGHBOURHOOD
Area Committee
Dorking and Villages

MAKE IT HAPPEN

Dorking and the Villages Neighbourhood Area Committee (NAC)

11 February 2026 - 13:30 – 15:30 – Meeting Notes



Dorking and Villages Neighbourhood Area Committee 11 February 2026 Meeting Notes

Time: 13:30 – 15:30.
Address: Capel Village Memorial Hall, 55 The Street, Capel, Dorking, Surrey, RH5 5LD.

Chair: Hazel Watson – County Councillor, Surrey County Council

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

Attendees:

- Emma Cox – Health
- Charles Allen – Clarion Futures Housing
- Michaela Afford – Mid Surrey Community Fridge
- Jon Mears – Westcott Village Hub
- Stephen Cooksey – County & District Councillor
- Pat Smith – Pixham Residents Association
- James Green – Police Borough Commander
- Hannah Gilmour – Health Watch Surrey
- Jo McGowan – Business/BID
- Helyn Clack – County Councillor
- Hazel Watson – County & District Councillor
- Stuart Kingsley – YMCA
- Helen Sutherland – New Life Dorking
- Sue Bloom – Parish Councillor
- AB – CEO Citizens Advice Mole Valley
- Robin Gupta – GP Health
- KH – Mole Valley District Council
- Glyn Marchant – Mary Frances Trust
- Richard Darke – Headteacher Powell Corderoy Primary School

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
- Karen Dransfield – Surrey County Council
- Cassandra Brewer – Surrey County Council
- Justine Aldous – Good Neighbour Scheme

- Mark Lediard – Mole Valley District Council

Apologies:

- Paul Bowyer – Surrey Fire and Rescue Service
- David Preedy – Parish Councillor
- Sally Dubery – Chief Officer, Central Surrey Voluntary Action
- Tony White – Mid Surrey Community Fridge
- Bradley Nelson – District Councillor
- Debbie Jones – Parish Councillor
- Will Dennis – Parish Councillor
- Wendy Saunders – Circular Dorking
- Judith Brooks – YMCA
- Trevor Stacey – Parish Councillor
- K.B – Executive Assistant to Headteacher and Senior Leadership Team on behalf of C.P – Head Teacher and S.K – Senior Pastoral Manager
- S.H – Age Concern
- N.P – Churches Together
- A.M – Mole Valley District Council
- W.H – Parish Councillor
- M.A – Dorking Health Care
- P.W – Mary Frances Trust
- W.W– YMCA
- RN – YMCA
- SE – YMCA
- SM – YMCA
- SW – YMCA

Introduction

The fourth gathering of the Dorking and Villages Neighbourhood Area Committee (NAC) was held on 11 February 2026. As people arrived, the chair offered a friendly introduction that set an encouraging atmosphere for the afternoon. Once everyone had settled, the group was taken through the outline of the session ahead, and a brief pause was used to revisit the overall project timeline along with the recommendations shaped during earlier meetings.

The agenda was as follows:

- Item 1: Welcome – Session aims and key outcomes (13:30 – 13:35)
- Item 2: Expert Witness Presentations (13:35 – 14:05)
- Item 3: Break (14:05 – 14:15)
- Item 4: Action Plan – Workshop and Small Group Activity (14:15 – 15:25)
- Item 5: Next Steps and Session Close (15:20 – 15:30)

Previously, the group had agreed on the NAC priorities.

The priorities are deprivation – including loneliness, isolation, mental health, lack of transport and the cost of living. The group was reminded that there is a data insight pack available to members which was shared in session 2, and it helps in terms of informing the evidence base on how we can work together. They were asked if they hold any information within their own organisations that could be circulated to the group at would be relevant to the NAC.

Members were also reminded about the online engagement platform Commonplace, and that residents can inform the NACs through there on what is important to them.

Members heard that the NAC proposals had recently been formally presented to and endorsed by Cabinet on 27 January. This update came alongside the appendix outlining the 'Test, Learn and Grow' approach, and the learning from the evaluation which continues to shape how the programme develops. It was also explained that other strands of related work are underway in the background, and these will play an important role in guiding future collaboration with the emerging shadow authorities. There is potential to expand the pilot to one or two further areas from May 2026.

Cabinet confirmed that neighbourhood committees will carry on operating until the pre-election period begins, offering continuity as the wider changes take shape. With that in mind, the group was told to note the date of the next meeting, scheduled for 20 March.

Over the course of the pilots, several meaningful achievements emerged that demonstrated both the depth of local involvement and the strength of collaboration across the area. From the outset, stakeholder engagement proved exceptionally strong. More than 160 representatives – spanning local authorities, health partners, voluntary organisations, and community groups – took part in workshops and meetings. Their collective insight and willingness to contribute set a solid foundation for the work that followed.

Engagement with residents was equally thoughtful and inclusive. Over 840 people shared their views, whether by attending in person events or contributing through digital platforms. This engagement ensured that all the neighbourhood's priorities were shaped not just by data, but by the everyday experiences and aspirations of the people who live there.

As discussions progressed, each NAC found clear areas of agreement. Evidence based priorities were identified and shaped into practical action plans, with many participants stepping forward to take ownership of both immediate and longer-term recommendations. This sense of shared responsibility strengthened the momentum of the work.

The pilots also helped deepen relationships across sectors. By working closely with local councils, health partnerships, and wider stakeholder forums, the NACs

reinforced existing connections while building new ones. These strengthened partnerships created better strategic alignment and ensured that the pilots influenced broader planning and decision-making processes.

Perhaps most importantly, the pilots generated valuable learning for the future. The insights gathered throughout the process are now helping inform thinking about what scalable neighbourhood governance could look like under Surrey's forthcoming unitary arrangements. In this way, the pilots have not only delivered benefits in the present but also laid important groundwork for the structures that will shape local decision making in the years ahead.

Members were informed that the first meetings of the new East and West Joint Committees were held on 15 and 16 January. They were introduced to early details about the formation of an officer Implementation Team, the programme's structure, and the proposed process for creating a single Implementation Plan. The East and West Committees will now move into a regular rhythm, meeting monthly, with all papers made publicly available to ensure transparency.

Item 2: Expert Witness Presentations

Surrey County Council – Surrey Connect Bus Service

The story of Surrey's demand–responsive transport service began during the COVID19 pandemic, when the County Council found itself rethinking how rural mobility could work. Traditional fixed bus routes had long struggled to meet the needs of sparsely populated areas, and earlier attempts to improve rural transport hadn't delivered the hoped for results. This time, the team took a different approach: instead of starting with predetermined routes, they explored the potential of demand–responsive transport, inspired by the flexibility people had come to expect from on–demand services like Uber.

Working closely with Mole Valley District Council, the group built a bid for the Department for Transport's Rural Mobility Fund. Their proposal centred on a modern solution: a fleet of accessible electric vehicles supported by a digital booking system. The timing was significant — COVID had radically accelerated people's comfort with online ordering and app-based services, which provided a natural bridge to app-based travel.

The service, later branded Surrey Connect, began in West Leatherhead and the northern part of Mole Valley in 2021, initially with just two zero emission electric minibuses. As demand grew, the fleet expanded to cover the whole Mole Valley area, increasing to four vehicles by mid2023. Surrey County Council described the early response as encouraging, with customer satisfaction notably higher than many other national Rural Mobility Fund pilots.

Instead of following fixed bus stops, the route changes dynamically depending on who needs to travel and where. Users can book through the Surrey Connect mobile app, via the website, or by calling a dedicated booking line – a crucial option for those less confident with technology. Every bus is registered as a local bus service, and journeys can be paid for online, through the app, using an electronic ticket machine on board, or even with cash. Drivers receive updates through their own app, alerting them to new pickups, changes in routing, and real–time adjustments.

Passengers can reserve journeys anywhere from 30 minutes to seven days in advance, and they receive reminders the day before travel, alerts ten minutes before the vehicle arrives, and updates if the bus is running early or late. The system also generates virtual bus stops, placing them where clusters of passengers tend to book from. These stops must meet safety standards, and the team regularly analyses usage data to refine their placement; if a stop isn't being used despite complaints or suggestions, the evidence helps guide whether a change is needed.

With success in Mole Valley, enthusiasm grew to extend the approach into more areas. The service gradually expanded across Surrey. Each expansion zone brought its own challenges and lessons, but demand consistently demonstrated that residents valued flexible travel options.

Originally, the service operated almost door–to–door, which mirrored the dial–a–ride model. This caused confusion among passengers and did not reflect the intended purpose of Surrey Connect, which was never meant to function as assisted transport. In response, the model shifted in 2024 to a stop–to–stop system, which ultimately allowed more journeys to be served and relieved operational pressure while maintaining accessibility.

Today, Surrey Connect continues to evolve. The focus remains on making travel easier, especially for those without access to a car, while also reducing congestion and supporting Surrey's environmental goals. More than 14,000 rides had already been completed in the early phases alone, reflecting strong community uptake and signalling that Surrey's experiment in flexible, data–driven mobility is steadily becoming a cornerstone of the county's future transport network

Surrey County Council - Community Transport Service

As the discussion moved on, members reflected on the reality that not everyone can simply rely on hop–on bus services. Many residents need extra support to travel – whether because of limited mobility or because they live in areas that are geographically isolated. Although providing this type of transport is not a statutory duty, everyone in the room recognised just how significant an impact it has on people's daily lives. Reliable, supported transport shapes outcomes in health, adult social care, mental health, and overall wellbeing. In many ways, it acts as a preventative barrier, helping people stay connected and independent before difficulties escalate.

But the group also acknowledged the practical challenge: transport is expensive to run. For these services to survive long–term, additional income streams will eventually be needed. That is why the council continues to work closely with community transport operators – a patchwork of in–house teams within districts and boroughs, alongside independent operators and charitable organisations. Together, they provide county–wide coverage, with the one exception of Reigate and Banstead. Passenger numbers understandably fell after COVID, but encouragingly, they are beginning to rise again.

Much of the fleet consists of accessible vehicles, and drivers routinely assist passengers on and off the bus. Members heard that a real sense of community forms around these journeys – for some riders, the driver may be the only person they speak to that day. For many residents, the service is a genuine lifeline. Beyond everyday travel, these operators also run numerous home–to–school contracts and support non–emergency transport needs, making them a vital part of Surrey's wider social infrastructure.

During questions, concerns were raised about accessibility barriers for some passengers: the lack of a landline option, difficulties navigating the website, or issues getting the app to function. The team reassured members that these concerns would be followed up individually, and that if someone doesn't have an email address, a temporary one can be created for them – though this does mean they won't receive real–time updates. Members were encouraged to email any specific problems so that the team could identify the source of the issue and resolve it.

The presenter was thanked for her insights, and with that, the meeting moved on to the introduction of the Good Neighbours Scheme.

Surrey Community Action - Good Neighbours Scheme

The group heard how the service plays a vital role in supporting other organisations by offering information, advice, and practical help. This includes assisting existing schemes, sharing best–practice guidance, providing funding advice, helping with marketing, and offering bespoke support on issues such as DBS checks, governance concerns, conflict resolution, and partnership working. They have even formed agreements with Surrey hospitals that allow volunteer drivers to park for free when transporting residents to their appointments – with East Surrey Hospital being the only exception.

Across Surrey, there are now more than 75 Good Neighbour schemes, each run by local people for their own communities. Every scheme decides for itself who it will support, the area it will cover, and what services it will provide. While they do not deliver social care, they are funded through a mixture of public contributions and volunteer drivers, making them deeply rooted in community generosity.

Transport remains at the heart of their work: taking people to hospital appointments, GP visits, collecting prescriptions, and supporting other medical needs. But the service also stretches further – helping people attend personal care appointments, go shopping, join social activities, or visit loved ones in care homes. In many places, volunteers collect residents from their front door, take them to their appointment, and even stay with them throughout. Around 85% of all requests are for medical appointments, which is especially important in areas without major hospitals. Some schemes also provide additional support that helps people live independently and reduces feelings of isolation. In Mole Valley alone, there are eight existing schemes, with two more currently in development.

Last year brought significant change: requests increased by 50%, supported by around 1,500 volunteers. Yet 75% of schemes reported recruitment challenges, even as they collectively handled more than 50,000 requests, representing the equivalent of 19 years of driving hours. In total, they served around 4,000 clients, and together, their volunteer drivers travelled the distance of 55 round trips to the moon.

The wider benefits were also highlighted. Government research shows that initiatives like Good Neighbour schemes can reduce missed medical appointments by 60%, preventing unnecessary strain on the NHS, which loses around £1 billion a year to missed appointments. Without support, people are 40% more likely to visit A&E within seven days. By addressing loneliness and isolation, the schemes help reduce longer-term health and social care costs and save taxpayers over £1.3 million.

One member reflected on how invaluable these services are for carers – without reliable transport, accessing respite would be far more difficult. Another person asked whether the scheme was available everywhere, and the response was clear: every area needs this kind of support.

To close, members were invited to speak with the presenter if they wanted more information or were interested in volunteering.

Item 4: Action Plan

The session was designed to familiarise NAC members with the emerging action plans and agree how the next steps would be taken forward. The meeting opened with an overview of the action plan so far, before members moved into smaller groups to explore specific draft recommendations and discuss the actions linked to them. Each group was arranged according to who would be responsible for delivering those recommendations. Before wrapping up, members were also given space to raise any related actions that had come out of the previous month's discussions. All members worked on developing the action plan of the recommendations.

Table 1 - Collate and distribute key local service information via multiple channels (magazines, community/resident boards, letterbox drops).

During the discussion, the group noted that some residents struggle to contact groups and support available to them or may not be aware of available support. Questions were raised about whether contact information is easily accessible to people who need help.

The group discussed the possibility that volunteering could be a method of addressing some of these gaps, particularly if existing volunteers already hold DBS checks. There was interest in identifying what volunteering databases already exist and whether these could be accessed or reviewed.

Members highlighted concerns that some people may not get the help they need and that greater clarity is required regarding which organisations provide support. The group also discussed the challenge of managing and maintaining up–to–date data and whether information from Tech Angels or broader datasets could be drawn together to obtain a clearer local picture.

There was a suggestion to explore whether partners already hold useful data that could support the mapping of need, including the possibility of pulling data into one place.

One of the points raised was the need to understand where community groups currently meet and whether these settings could serve as potential access points for support. The group noted that in some areas there are limited local social spaces, which reduces opportunities for information sharing.

There was interest in mapping which social groups operate within the community and considering whether a more organised approach to linking residents with support could be developed. Members questioned how people find out about services, especially if they are socially isolated.

The group noted that key partners such as GP practices, social prescribers, and local voluntary groups might already hold valuable insights about who is struggling or may need additional help. There was discussion about how these partners could be more effectively engaged.

Concerns were raised about residents who may be newly arrived or who do not have established networks locally. The group discussed how difficult it can be for such individuals to identify what support exists and reflected on the importance of clear communication from the council and partner organisations.

Finally, the group discussed the importance of ensuring that communication channels are accessible, reliable and known about. It was felt that better signposting

and more coordinated sharing of information could help ensure that residents do not miss out on essential support

Table 2 - Promote community hubs as focal points for advice and services.

Work is ongoing to gather information about local community spaces and hubs. This includes places such as the Leatherhead Hub, Westcott Village Hub, Family Centre, the Christian Centre, local libraries, Harvest Church, Men's Shed in Dorking, Fetcham Church, and the Leatherhead Employment Skills Hub (still to be confirmed). Other areas for future exploration include Charlwood, Beare Green, Capel, Ashtead, Bookham, Box Hill, and Newdigate.

As part of this, members decided there needs to be a decision on how hubs should communicate upcoming events. A weekly text service is one option, but it may be more practical to keep communication ad hoc or move to a WhatsApp community model. It is also important to define who we mean by "members," and to explore whether Tech Angels or other digital support teams could assist. Another possibility is shifting toward a simple newsletter for hubs rather than sending messages to individuals.

There is interest in improving digital and marketing skills for staff and volunteers in hubs. We need to understand whether this would be useful to them and whether support could come from the Comms team, Tech Advocates, or other partners. This could include written guides, short video tutorials, or training sessions. There may also be scope to create local "social media champions," supported by Tech Angels or Clarion Futures, helping hubs promote activities and empowering volunteers to act as Tech Champions within their own communities.

Another question is how village hubs and community halls might stay open later to host more events. It is important to distinguish between hubs and halls, as their roles differ. Halls could potentially operate as hub spaces, but hubs themselves are designed to support community connection rather than provide direct services. A key challenge is finding ways to reopen or repurpose community buildings and understanding what local people want these spaces to become. Sustainable use remains an issue, especially when balancing community activities with commercial needs.

Overall, sustainability is central. Community spaces need a mix of commercial and non–commercial activity to remain viable. This may involve helping groups develop small-scale business skills where appropriate and identifying individuals or groups who can take ideas forward with the right support.

Across all areas, the main challenge is clarifying what we are aiming to achieve and understanding the costs, capacity, and resource implications for hubs moving forward.

Table 3 - Develop transport links to hubs (e.g., Connect bus stop for Westcott Hub) and Good Neighbour Schemes in villages.

The group discussed the development of transport links to community hubs, including options such as creating a Connect bus stop for the Westcott Hub and strengthening connections with Good Neighbour Schemes (GNS) across villages. Providers present at the table contributed practical ideas that could address several of the issues raised. However, it was noted that some preparatory work is required before these actions can progress, as highlighted in earlier discussions.

Work in this area has already begun. The Community Transport Manager has started visiting community hubs and listening to their needs to gain a clearer understanding of local circumstances.

The group suggested that public events could be used to further raise awareness. It was proposed that a coordinated diary of local events–drawn together from district and borough councils–would help identify town and village open days and other opportunities where information could be shared.

The group discussed who might be able to map all existing community hubs. The suggestion was to link initially with the Community Hub Workstream and then overlay this with data showing current Connect bus stops. It is likely that bus stops already exist near many of these hubs, and in some cases, improvements may simply involve clearer labelling within the booking system so that passengers can easily identify the stops closest to key locations.

A concern was raised regarding the Connect bus booking system. Feedback from NAC community engagement indicated that although phone bookings are available, residents feel that those able to book online have an advantage, as online bookings can be made 24/7, whereas phone bookings can only be made during office hours. Members questioned whether there is a way to mitigate this imbalance. It was noted that Good Neighbour Schemes typically take bookings by phone, which may help address accessibility issues for some residents.

The Group also reflected ton the issue highlighted in the Surrey Community Action - Good Neighbours Scheme presentation that Surrey hospitals have formed agreement that allow volunteer drivers to park for free when transporting residents to their appointments – with East Surrey Hospital being the only exception and questioned whether this could be a priority to work toward addressing within the action plan under this priority.

The group heard how the service plays a vital role in supporting other organisations by offering information, advice, and practical help. This includes assisting existing schemes, sharing best–practice guidance, providing funding advice, helping with marketing, and offering bespoke support on issues such as DBS checks,

governance concerns, conflict resolution, and partnership working. They have even formed agreements

Table 4 – Address digital exclusion with non-digital communication methods

The group discussed the need for a clearer understanding of the real picture of digital exclusion. As part of this, it was suggested that available data should be examined. Initial data reviewed during the meeting indicated that in the Dorking area, 5.7% of adults were completely offline, 19% did not have a laptop or PC, and 14% did not own a smartphone, according to figures from the Surrey Health & Wellbeing Board.
It was agreed that further investigation was needed, including exploring data by postcode to understand which geographies are most affected. A key question raised was whether digital exclusion is more prominent in rural areas.
Tech Angels shared helpful data that had been presented at the Mole Valley Partnership Forum. Their information showed that 50% of people referred to Tech Angels required lessons only, 25% needed a device only, and 25% needed both a device and lessons.

The group discussed the possibility of using existing volunteers—such as those involved in Good Neighbour schemes, who are already DBS checked—to provide digital support.

There was also discussion around establishing digital hubs or centres where residents could access support. While some help is already available in libraries, it was acknowledged that not everyone is able to travel to them. The group considered whether this could link to ongoing work around community hubs, which is another NAC priority.

Another issue raised was the resistance that some people have to becoming digitally connected. This may stem from concerns about scams or from attitudes such as “I have managed for 80 years without it, so I do not need it now.” This theme was also highlighted in feedback from the Mole Valley Partnership Forum.

A specific example was shared of a member of the community that had been without internet for over a month due to damage caused during the installation of new fibre infrastructure. More generally, the group discussed whether rural areas continue to experience issues with internet connectivity and phone signal. This is an area identified for further exploration.

Finally, access to devices was discussed. Devices are currently available through Tech Angels and through the Clarion Futures digital offer. The group also considered whether unused but functional devices could be donated to residents who need them, particularly where affordability of equipment or internet access is a barrier to being online.

Item 5: Next Steps and Session Close

As the session drew to a close, everyone was thanked for taking the time to attend. The group was reminded that the next meeting will take place on the morning of 20 March, when there will be an opportunity to look more closely at the feedback gathered so far. At that session, all participants' contact details will also be shared within the group, as permission has now been given.

There was a brief look ahead to future developments: exploring how a digital element could be incorporated and a couple more guest speakers would be invited members were asked to share any suggestions on who. The action plan will be written up again and circulated before the next meeting. It remains a living document, continually refined as people volunteer their time to take forward specific actions. The intention is to make further improvements and strengthen the work before everything pauses for the pre-election period.
With final thanks offered to everyone for their contributions, the meeting ended with wishes for a safe journey home.

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