NEIGHBOURHOOD
Area Committee
Dorking and Villages

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Dorking and the Villages Neighbourhood Area Committee (NAC)

20 March 2026 Meeting Notes



Dorking and Villages Neighbourhood Area Committee

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Time: 10:00 – 12:00.
Address: Beare Green Village Hall, Merebank, Beare Green, Surrey, RH5 4RD

Chair: Hazel Watson – County Councillor, Surrey County Council

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

Attendees:

- Paul Bowyer – Surrey Fire and Rescue Service
- Emma Cox – Health
- Sally Dubery - Central Surrey Voluntary Action
- Michaela Afford – Mid Surrey Community Fridge
- Tony White – Mid Surrey Community Fridge
- Bradley Nelson – District Councillor
- Hannah Gilmour - Healthwatch
- Debbie Jones – Parish Councillor
- Hazel Watson – Twin Hatter (County & District Councillor)
- Wendy Saunders – Circular Dorking
- Trevor Stacey – Parish Councillor
- Alison Boyd – Citizens Advice Mole Valley
- Jon Mears – Westcott Village Hub
- JA – Westcott Village Hub
- KH – Mole Valley District Council
- Glyn Marchant – Mary Frances Trust

Additional attendees:

- Rachel O'Reilly, Mole Valley District Council (Facilitator)
- James Painter, Surrey County Council (Facilitator)
- Michelle Bradley, Surrey County Council (Facilitator)
- Carys Walker, Surrey County Council (Facilitator)
- Nikkie Thornton-Bryar, Surrey County Council (Facilitator)
- Rowena Zelley, Surrey County Council

Apologies:

- David Preedy – Parish Councillor
- Charles (Charlie) Allen – Clarion Futures
- Stephen Cooksey – Twin Hatter (County & District Councillor)
- Helyn Clack – County Councillor

- Pat Smith – Residents Association
- James Green – Surrey Police
- Will Dennis – Parish Councillor
- Jo McGowan – Dorking BID
- Judith Brooks – YMCA
- Stuart Kingsley – YMCA
- Helen Sutherland – Chart Downs/New Life Church
- CP – School Head
- A.M – Mole Valley District Council
- Robin Gupta – GP Health
- MA – Dorking Healthcare
- PW - Mary Francis Trust
- Richard Darke - Headteacher Powell Corderoy Primary School
- SL - Gatwick Airport
- CB - Surrey Coalition

Item 1: Welcome and Introduction

The fifth gathering of the Dorking and Villages Neighbourhood Area Committee (NAC) was held on Friday 20 March 2026 at Beare Green Village Hall. The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and gave a brief recap of the work to date and the action plan and priorities that had already been agreed.

The agenda was as follows:

Item 1: Welcome
Item 2: Expert Witness Presentations
Item 3: Action Plan groups
Item 4: Next Steps and session close

Item 2: Expert Witness Presentations

Paul Bowyer – Surrey Fire and Rescue Service

The Fire and Rescue Service undertakes a variety of emergency and preventative services across the County. The speaker outlined the various things that they do as a service, which includes: fires, vehicle collisions and road traffic incidents, flood issues, false alarms, animal rescue, terrorism, rescue from height, lift rescues and releases, chemical spills, missing persons and safe and well prevention visits.

The service plans for potential future risks, such as flooding, using the 100-year flood historic data to try to put plans in place for every eventuality. One example of this was the Thames flood, with lessons learnt – such as that boats with outboard motors cannot be used in shallow flood waters.

Another risk in Surrey is wildfires and the Cobham wildfire helped identify the need for staff welfare plans to address the long working hours of a major incident, including toilets and canteen facilities on site and the need for Unimog vehicles that can handle rough terrain and get water where it is needed. The service also learnt the importance of fire breaks and other measures that stop the fire spreading and allow it to burn out.

The service has found it useful to use social media both to promote and raise awareness but also to re-direct traffic away from major incidents or road closures.

They can hand out free fire safety equipment – especially for those that are more vulnerable. This can include smoke alarms, carbon monoxide alarms, Message in a Bottle kits, flame retardant bedding and throws and hard of hearing visual alarms and buzzers.

They highlighted the risks of candles, phone chargers left plugged in, washing dryers that are switched off before full cycle and how the rising cost of living has meant residents are more likely to leave the oven open, leave the hob on, use electric blankets and portable heaters, which can lead to more risk. He further advised that electric blankets should be stored flat to avoid damage to circuitry and should be checked each autumn and changed regularly.

Paul is available to go out and give talks to residents and at-risk groups. Their target for the Dorking area is 372 safe and well visits per annum, plus 80 business visits.

A question was asked about dredging to mitigate flood risk and this is currently a borough/ district responsibility. A question was also asked about the safety of electric bike chargers. These are deemed safe with advice to remove the battery during charge and to use on a timer to avoid overheating, with retro fitted units posing more of a risk.

The speaker also highlighted the importance of volunteers for incidents with the Local Resilience Forum (LRF) coordinating names and contact details. Volunteers play a vital role (for example in the Paris attacks they were vital in stopping bleeding of casualties). The LRF run training days and interested people can also volunteer to help at rest centres (currently run by borough/ district councils at designated local halls).

Hannah Gilmore, Surrey Healthwatch

Surrey Healthwatch is an independent organisation that champions the voice of local people to shape and improve NHS and social care services. Last year, 2000 people shared their experiences with Surrey Healthwatch, with data being collected out and about at local events, churches, faith groups, toddler groups etc.

Surrey Healthwatch recently received funds to undertake a project on Men's Mental Health in Dorking. In 2004, three quarters of all suicides were male, with men less likely to seek support. In fact, the Surrey Wellbeing strategy showed that Mole Valley had the highest incidence of suicides (9.8 people out of 100,000). The project aimed to identify support available, how well known and accessible support was and to identify if men feel a part of the community. 125 men completed the survey (including local 6th form boys and Wanderers FC). 81 of those 125 lived in Dorking and Villages.

Engagement for the project took place over a 2-month period at various locations. The findings show that 87% felt part of the community but 61% said that they wanted to feel more part of the community. It was noted that men that did get out and undertook volunteering felt this was a big help. 58% found it difficult to integrate, including time issues and feeling guilt about time for themselves rather than with family etc.

The overview was that guilt, time, and lack of awareness of support services were barriers. 15 out of 125 men surveyed had accessed local support groups. A lack of groups in Dorking was also mentioned and a perception that services were for those in crisis and not those struggling with prevention and escalation. Surveyed males wanted low level support and not clinical support, and they wanted this in male only spaces.

There was an identified issue with lack of youth clubs and spaces for young males and that the younger generation feel very isolated.

Ideas to address the issues were around hosting events for families, information and promotion of support services, champions and more youth focussed groups.

Questions from the committee were around support for the Dorking Men's shed, who have 70 men aged 30 to 90 on their contact list and offer social events and walks as well as the shed. It was further noted that Michelle has contacted the Men's Mental Health Lead to explore setting up a Men's Pit Stop in Chart Downs.

Item 3: Action Plan

The group broke into 3 groups

<u>Table 1 – Focus on communication</u>

The group discussed the issues of information overload and discussed Padlet, which can be a useful tool to get out detailed messages. It was suggested that the CVSA was a good way of getting information out to groups. The importance of good local signposting was highlighted, and the need to tailor help and support to best meet need rather than blanket signing which is not helpful. The group talked about Citizens Advice Mole Valley (CAMV) and its “No Wrong Door” policy of helping

people by training staff in services offered and signposting on if needs cannot be met.

This led to further discussion of “Warm Referrals” - contacting other organisations on residents’ behalf to check if they can assist and to make appointments for them.

It was noted that Community Connectors are being used in the Elmbridge area- with funding from the Borough Council to train volunteers for these roles. Central Surrey Voluntary Action (CSVA) can circulate information. CAMV spoke about the “Advice First Aid” (AFA) they use which gives a quick briefing to staff on Citizens Advice Mole Valley support prior to referral. Sally and Tony were interested in putting people forward for this and could do a further course that could be delivered at the Point.

- ACTION – CSVA, Citizens Advice Mole Valley and Community Fridge to look at making this happen

ACTION – lots of people have a social media presence and so urged everyone to cross post information to reach wider audiences

- It was further noted that Canva is free for Charities and CICs (Community Interest Company) (a useful tool to design leaflets, posters, brochures, and media posts. The group have looked at using young people to help with social media via schools etc, but this has not given any firm leads.

Table 2 – Mapping Community Hubs

Discussions on mapping community hubs had led to a discussion about what a hub is. It was noted that lots of rural communities could benefit from a hub.

Three things were identified as being needed for a hub to work.

- Finding community champions, passionate residents.
- Match and learn with expertise.
- Building, for example Newdigate has identified need but doesn’t know how to go about it.

It was noted that the answer was not always to go into Dorking for support and help, as transport links could be difficult. It was also noted that community spaces are constantly closing.

A proposed community hub model had been written by Jon Mears, and this was to be circulated to NAC members. This includes criteria to establish if the asset is a hub or whether it sits outside of that and therefore, what role can it play. Ideally hubs need to be non-denominational, run by the community, open at convenient times, and offer other services than advice, and be not for profit. Leatherhead and Westcott Hubs fit this model. Places such as libraries and churches may see themselves as

hubs but are often not doing everything that a hub does. The group also looked at passing information between assets such as Men's Sheds and hubs to fill the gaps.

Charlwood has a potential building (the new Charlwood Pavilion) for a hub. A meeting has been set up with a parish councillor and Horley Town Council regarding Horley Men's Shed as Horley is closer to Charlwood than Dorking.

Newdigate has a district member who is very willing to set something up but has no time to do it, can see the need of meeting with people living with dementia and their carers.

Lots of learning available from setting up Westcott hub.

Identify community champions before getting a building.

Table 3: Transport Links and Community Transport

The group looked at raising awareness of the transport services available (e.g. Surrey Connect bus scheme, the Good Neighbour schemes etc) using digital means but also using the network of local charities and groups to get information out. They did discuss using GP surgeries but noted that they had leaflet overload.

The group also wanted to link with the CSVA to encourage volunteer drivers. Paul from SFRS undertook to look at "one stop surrey" initiative to see if they could target signposting to isolated and vulnerable people – the group noted that they had captured several names to action some of the priorities suggested.

Item 4: Next Steps and Session Close

The Chair outlined that we were now going into the pre-election period (23 March to 7 May) and that there would be no public meetings during this time, but that work would continue behind the scenes. The Council were committed to maintaining progress and induction materials were being prepared for new Councillors, with monitoring of National Policy on Neighbourhood Area Committees and community engagement. In April 2027, Mole Valley District Council and Surrey County Council would cease to exist, and two new unitary authorities would take over and decide how to proceed. However, the work that has been done will help to inform and showcase how effective these discussions have been. Feedback from participants in the NAC was encouraged.

Wendy from Circular Dorking highlighted the "Our Future Surrey Pledge" – a non-political group – further information on this is available at https://ourfuturesurrey.org

The notes would be added to Commonplace, and partners were encouraged to make a short video to give feedback

Thank you to everyone for attending and taking this forward!

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