Durham County Council

Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Management Board

Date	Monday 3 April 2023
Time	9.30 am
Venue	Council Chamber, County Hall, Durham

Business

Part A

**Items during which the Press and Public are welcome to attend.
Members of the Public can ask questions with the Chair's agreement.**

1.   Apologies for Absence

2.   Substitute Members

3.   Minutes of the meeting held on 10 February 2023 (Pages 3 - 12)

4.   Declarations of Interest

5.   Community Engagement (AAP) Review - Report of the Corporate Director of Neighbourhoods and Climate Change and presentation by representatives of ERS Research and Consultancy (Pages 13 - 82)

6.   Customer Feedback Q3 Update report - Report of the Corporate Director of Resources (Pages 83 - 108)

7.   Q3 Resources Budget Outturn - Report of the Corporate Director of Resources (Pages 109 - 120)

8.   Update in relation to Petitions - Report of Head of Legal and Democratic Services (Pages 121 - 134)

9.   Notice of Key Decisions - Report of Head of Legal and Democratic Services (Pages 135 - 144)

10.   Such other business as, in the opinion of the Chair of the meeting, is of sufficient urgency to warrant consideration

Helen Lynch
Head of Legal and Democratic Services

County Hall
Durham
24 March 2023

To: **The Members of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Management Board**

Councillor C Martin (Chair)
Councillor C Lines (Vice-Chair)

Councillors E Adam, A Batey, R Charlton-Lainé, J Charlton, I Cochrane, J Cosslett, B Coult, R Crute, J Elmer, O Gunn, P Heaviside, L Hovvels, J Howey, A Jackson, P Jopling, L Maddison, R Manchester, C Marshall, A Reed, K Robson, K Shaw, M Stead, A Surtees and M Wilson

Contact: Jackie Graham   Tel: 03000 269 704

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

At a Meeting of **Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Management Board** held in Committee Room 2, County Hall, Durham on **Friday 10 February 2023 at 9.30 am**

Present:

Councillor C Martin (Chair)

Members of the Committee:
Councillors E Adam, J Cosslett, B Coult, R Crute, J Elmer, O Gunn, P Heaviside, L Hovvels, J Howey, P Jopling, C Lines (Vice-Chair), R Manchester, A Reed, K Shaw, M Stead, A Surtees, D Sutton-Lloyd (substitute for A Jackson) and M Wilson

1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors J Charlton, I Cochrane, A Jackson and C Marshall.

2 Substitute Members

Councillor D Sutton-Lloyd substituted for Councillor A Jackson.

3 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 23 January 2023 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair, with the following amendment:

Item 6 Resolution - That the content of the draft Council Plan 2023-2027 (at Appendix 4 of the report) be considered and agreed.

4 Declarations of Interest

The Chair, Councillor C Martin declared an interest in relation to item 7 as his employer, Bishop Auckland College was referenced.

5 Report on the Council's use of powers under the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 - Quarter 3 - 2022/23

The Board considered a report of the Head of Legal and Democratic Services which informed Members of the Council's use of its powers under the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 (RIPA) during the period 1 October 2022 to 31 December 2022 (for copy see file of minutes).

Resolved:

    (i)   That the quarterly report on the Council's use of RIPA for the period covering quarter 3 2022/23, be received.

    (ii)   That the powers were being used consistently with the Council's policy and that the policy remained fit for purpose.

6   Medium Term Financial Plan 2023/24 to 2026/27 and Revenue and Capital Budget 2023/24

The Board considered a report of the Corporate Director of Resources that provided the opportunity to comment upon Cabinet's proposals on the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) 2023/24 to 2026/27 and Revenue and Capital Budget 2023/24. The report to Cabinet sets out comprehensive financial information and reflects the balance required between short term and long term investment in front line services with the need for financial prudence and reasonable council tax increases (for copy see file of minutes).

The Head of Corporate Finance and Commercial Services informed Members that government had announced the final settlement on the 6 February 2023 and highlighted the key areas:-

- £19 million added to the services grant fund with Durham County Council receiving £203,000 - MTFP savings target will be £203,000 less than published in the Cabinet report;

- £10 million added to the rural services delivery grant fund, however Members were aware that Durham County Council do not qualify for the rural services delivery grant;

- £200 million added to the business rate retention programme for government to reallocate to local authorities. £100 million of the funds would be allocated to the current financial year with Durham County Council receiving approximately £1 million.

With reference to government grant allocations, the Head of Corporate Finance and Commercial Services advised that grant allocations had increase by £39.8 million in 2023/24 and forecasted £13.7 million in 2024/25. It was noted that local authorities lobbying had been considered and additional funding had been provided by government, however the councils base budget pressures way exceeded the extra funding that had been provided.

The Head of Corporate Finance and Commercial Services further highlighted in detail key issues from the Cabinet report which included:

- Local Government Finance Settlement;
- Council Tax and Council Tax Support Arrangements;
- Dedicated School Grant;
- Financial Reserves Strategy;
- Capital Programme Schemes.

Councillor R Crute thanked the team for the hard work in preparing the detailed budget report. He commented on concerns regarding possible public perception that people were paying more and receiving less. Additional funding had been received from government, however cuts were still being made to services and council tax had increased by record amounts even with government assistance schemes. He referred to previous years where additional funding had been received which had then been passed on to benefit the public with zero percent council tax increase. The Head of Corporate Finance and Commercial Services explained that every authority in the Country faced the same issue, with 10% inflation on costs and council tax increases. He added that most North East authorities were proposing the maximum council tax increase, along with the majority of other authorities across the Country. He acknowledged concerns with public perception, however noted the extra funding and the Council Tax Reduction Scheme were strengths for the council.

Councillor R Crute then referred to a motion presented to Council in January 2023 to examine alternative options to replace council tax. He added that Cabinet had also been asked to consider similar options in December 2021, however nothing had been reported back to the Board. He suggested that the Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Resources be invited to attend a future Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Management Board meeting to present proposals to replace council tax and explain what progress had been made since 2021. The Head of Corporate Finance and Commercial Services advised that if council tax was replaced, the position for the council would be neutral as there would be no additional funds from government.

The Chair proposed that the Motion from Councillor R Crute be considered under any other business to keep focus on budget discussions.

Responding to questions from Councillor Adam regarding the £70 million identified as a capital receipt from the sale of the new HQ and the feasibility of capital spending on levelling up bids that had previously failed, the Head of Corporate Finance and Commercial Services explained that the HQ was fully funded in previous years from an earmarked reserve and a small amount of prudential borrowing and the £70 million from the sale was a new capital receipt which would be used in the current capital programme. Regarding levelling up match funding, reserves had been allocated for feasibility studies on the basis that work undertaken would provide the best possible chance of success. Revenue funds were utilised so that costs would not have to be written off if the scheme failed and if successful, those costs could then be

moved into capital. It was noted that £3 million had been set aside for feasibility and only £1.2 million had been used, however bids in round three could still be successful.

Councillor E Adam noted the positives in the report and welcomed the Capital Investment Programme. He referred to new capital schemes and paragraph 223 of the report that stated significant capital investment would be required to enable the council to reach its net zero carbon target by 2030. He added that the decarbonisation of heat and transport were the main challenges and £100 million was needed to meet the 2030 target. It was acknowledged that significant progress had been made to reduce the councils carbon footprint, however it was not good enough to aim for 80% reduction and that plans must be in place to reduce emissions year by year up to 2030 and beyond. He asked if there were any opportunities identified to invest to save within the MTFP and requested a breakdown of the Neighbourhood and Climate Change net zero capital spend. He further questioned the expected reduction in carbon emissions relating to the actual spend, why there were no significant revenue and capital spends on overall heat decarbonisation and whether the capital spend identified to reduce transport and fleet emissions was sufficient to meet the 2030 target.

The Head of Corporate Finance and Commercial Services advised that the council had made enormous strides with regards to emission reduction and all opportunities for the Council to invest in fully self financing schemes had been made. The capital budget was used to match against government grants and the council could not afford the required investment to achieve net zero without enormous amounts of government support, however the council would continue to strive to meet the targets. He explained the two major areas relating to buildings and vehicles, the main issue with council buildings being boiler replacement mainly in leisure centres and schools which the council could not afford at the level that was required. It was noted that replacement boilers cost more to run thereby putting financial pressures on the schools and new buildings must meet the new energy standards. Referring to vehicles, he added that replacing smaller vans with electric has been cost neutral, however the cost to replace larger vehicles in the future would require a revenue budget uplift of around £8 million more than at present, which would result in service budgets being cut to meet the target. It was hoped that by 2027/2030 technology would catch up and purchases would not be as expensive. He was confident that the vehicle fleet would be replaced by the 2030 target, however, was unsure with regards to boiler replacements unless changes were made to government funding.

Responding to questions from Councillor B Coult regarding the welfare assistance top up, primary and secondary deprivation figures and the reduction in costs in relation to the boundary review, the Head of Corporate Finance and Commercial Services advised that significant reserve had been in place for welfare assistance which was running out and would be looked at

as part of the 2024/25 budget. Regarding savings from the boundary review, there were no savings in the current budget, however noted there may be savings in 2025/26 subject to members decisions in relation to members allowances. With reference to the query on people premium and the difference between primary and secondary depravation figures, he would make enquiries and email Councillor B Coult following the meeting.

Councillor O Gunn expressed concern regarding the underfunding from government in the past 10 years and highlighted the cuts and efficiency savings that would affect residents across the county. She acknowledged the difficulties and highlighted in particular, the pressure on social care and looked after children and the effects that poverty and the cost of living crisis would have on families with support in this area being crucial. She asked for figures in relation to grant reductions for Durham County Council over the past 10 years and the impact on staffing levels due to cuts. The Head of Corporate Finance and Commercial Services advised that the overall reduction in grant funding had been estimated at £200 million with a loss of 3,000 employees. He added that the extra demand for looked after children in the past 4 years was a major concern. The budget was sufficient for the current levels in the care system, however, further increases would result in overspends. He added that significant investment had been planned with an extra £5 million added to the forecast for the next 3 years for additional social workers, fostering investment and preventative strategies.

Responding to a further question from Councillor O Gunn regarding the Rural Service Delivery Grant, the Head of Corporate Finance and Commercial Services made reference to the depravation factors and the Fair Funding Review. He advised that certain criteria had to be met in relation to the Rural Service Grant and although large parts of County were rural, the council had missed out to other authorities that were more vastly rural in comparison.

Councillor A Surtees commented on the £246 million in cuts reported and highlighted that the reduction in council spending during 12 years of austerity was over £1.2 billion.

Councillor L Hovvels referred to concerns with regards to building assets and queried the costs associated with empty buildings. The Head of Corporate Finance and Commercial Services advised that the council were prudent with investments and had a good track record in investing capital to save, improving systems and generating income within the county. He added that the asset management strategy was being finalised which would address the issues raised and utilise buildings more effectively. A demolition budget had been included in the capital programme for buildings declared surplus so they could be demolished as soon as possible to reduce associated costs which was approximately £200,000 in the current year.

Councillor J Elmer noted that the majority of capital expenditure associated with carbon reduction related to boiler replacement, however he felt that the priority should be to tackle heat reduction by improving building insulation which would reduce carbon emissions and save on energy costs. He added that just replacing boilers would be ineffective as modern boilers were also dependent on well insulated buildings to be efficient.

Responding to a query from Councillor M Stead in relation to compulsory redundancies, the Head of Corporate Finance and Commercial Services advised that at the start of austerity, government capped council tax and the council lost millions in government grants which resulted in large reductions in the workforce with around £60 million spent on redundancy packages funded from reserves. He added that the council's strategy would continue to make every effort to avoid compulsory redundancies by retaining vacant posts where possible, seek voluntary ER/VR and maximise redeployment and growth opportunities. It was reported that £18.261 million of savings were required and it was expected that a reduction of 118 full time equivalents would be required across the four year period. It was noted that £10 million of reserves would be required to balance the budget for 23/24 and there would be a £10 million shortfall for 24/25 with no further funding from government. He was confident the council would balance the budget in 23/24, however there were uncertainties around inflation, energy costs, looked after children and other budget pressures the following 3 years.

The Chair noted that savings and cuts would not directly affect public facing services which was positive, however recognised there may be knock on effects and further reductions in the future. He added that the role of Scrutiny was to scrutinise and comment on Cabinet proposals to ensure minimum impact and would be requesting that Cabinet announce proposals early in order for scrutiny to have discussions.

Responding to a query from the Chair in relation to Treasury Management and the increase in cash investment, the Head of Corporate Finance and Commercial Services explained that high cash balances were due to reserves, receiving grants up front and capital programme slippage. There was £400 million in investment cash available which was the highest ever for the council with the same amount of future borrowing required to fund the capital programme. He advised that it would be prudent to edge the market and delay borrowing until interest rates come down which was anticipated in the next 18 months, however cash balances would drop significantly with capital spending, therefore it was forecasted that the council would need to start borrowing again in 2025 when interest rates were lower.

Resolved:
That the Board considered and noted the contents of the report and that comments received be forwarded to Council for consideration at its meeting on 22 February 2023.

7   Digital Inclusion in County Durham

The Board considered a report of the Corporate Director of Resources that presented findings and recommendations of a recent high-level review of digital inclusion in County Durham (for copy see file of minutes).

The Digital Durham Manager delivered a presentation which highlighted the following areas:-

- Research identifying groups more likely to be digitally excluded;
- How they are affected;
- Regional Statistics;
- Connectivity, Devices and Digital Skills;
- Digital Exclusion Risk;
- Affordability Factor;
- Baselining Activity;
- Discovery Summary and Conclusion;
- Digital Journey;
- Next Steps;
- Digital Skills Training and Adoption.

Councillor D Sutton-Lloyd welcomed the report and advised on a digital community project he started in his area which had helped over 2000 elderly residents with broadband set up, satellite work and digital skills. He suggested a joined-up approach with opportunities for new projects and links with other organisations and venues within communities. It was noted that there may be opportunities with regards to the Shared Prosperity Fund Programme and internet access in community venues were currently being explored.

Councillor E Adam acknowledged the need for online services and suggested a coordinated approach with schools and colleges to support those that were digitally excluded. He commented on the varied broadband quality and speeds and noted the five areas of digital exclusion with the key issue being affordable broadband. The Digital Durham Manager advised they are linking in with New College Durham and Bishop Auckland College to discuss student volunteering, with a view to brokering relationships with community organisations to support people's digital skills. She added that most households do not necessarily need to purchase the fastest broadband packages, which tend to be more expensive, and would not encourage people to purchase them unless they were actually required. She added that there would be more opportunity for more reliable connectivity, offering faster speeds, as full fibre technology advanced and replaced older technology.

At this point, the Chair declared an interest in relation to Bishop Auckland College being his employer.

Responding to queries from Councillor C Lines regarding broadband network and limitations around the voucher scheme. The Digital Durham Manager advised that government had introduced two initiatives under Project Gigabit that hard-to-reach properties in County Durham will benefit from which includes contracts and a revised voucher scheme. Three contracts will be awarded to the North East under the first phase of Project Gigabit, and County Durham will benefit from two of them. It was reported that the Teesdale contract had already been awarded and details of properties that would benefit would be available in quarter one, and the procurement for the broader area in the North East was expected to be awarded in the summer. She added that Government were keen to utilise contracts more and there may be opportunities for areas that were identified outside the contract area to be incorporated at a later date. Referring to the voucher scheme, it was noted that the scheme would be used in conjunction with contracts to provision coverage, and the increased voucher value was a more viable amount of funding to be able to provide for the harder-to-reach properties.

The Digital Durham Manager responded to a further query regarding the government voucher scheme and advised it could not be used to supplement satellite installation services, however DSIT were exploring alternative initiatives for very hard-to-reach properties and she would keep members updated on any further developments.

With regards to concerns raised in relation to elderly people with health issues, reaching rural communities, and the importance of having digital facilities in every community, the Digital Durham Manager advised that next steps involved further analysis, exploring facilities such as digital hubs and community centres and engaging with Town and Parish Councils and local organisations within communities who already have links with people most likely to be digitally excluded. Councillor K Shaw referred to Durham Key Options and added that the Housing Solutions Team and Social Housing providers offer IT assistance to support people who were digitally excluded.

Following a query from Councillor L Hovvels regarding work with NHS professionals around the digital agenda, the Digital Durham Manager informed that it was in the early stage of the process and meetings had been held with stakeholders within the health service to obtain a better understanding of work programmes and anticipated working together moving forward.

Resolved:
That the content of the report and presentation be noted.

8   **Customer Feedback Report, Quarter Two, 2022/23**

The Board considered a report of the Corporate Director Resources which provide an overview of information collected from the council's customers to

describe their experiences of using our services for quarter two, July to September 2022 (for copy see file of minutes).

The Head of Digital Services advised that the biggest challenge for residents, local businesses and the council was the cost-of-living crisis which has had a significant impact on service delivery and the demand received. She highlighted the key messages from the Customer Feedback Analysis under the three summary sections in the report, going well, areas which require attention and other areas to note.

Councillor E Adam queried the connection between the reduced staffing levels and complaints in relation to delayed responses, and if failing to achieve the Freedom of Information (FOI) response targets had any financial penalties. The Head of Digital Services advised there was no direct link to the delayed response and the reductions in staff, however resource capacity, recruitment challenges as well as the significant increase and complexity of demands received in key areas were contributing factors. Referring to the FOI response targets, she added that there were no financial implications and explained that this was another area with significant increasing demands nationally and regionally with many FOI request requiring very detailed responses which presented challenges.

Resolved:
That the content of the report be noted.

9 Quarter Two, 2022/23 - Performance Management Report

The Board considered a report of the Corporate Director Resources which presented an overview of progress towards achieving the key outcomes of the council's corporate performance framework and highlighted key messages to inform strategic priorities and work programmes for quarter two, July to September 2022 (for copy see file of minutes).

The Corporate Scrutiny and Strategy Manager advised that performance had already been reported via the thematic committees and highlighted key issues relating to:

- Recruitment and Retention;
- Sickness Absence;
- Performance Development Reviews (PDRs).

Resolved:
That the content of the report be noted.

10 Any Other Business

Request for the Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Resources to attend a future Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Management Board meeting

Councillor R Crute clarified his earlier point and explained that he suggested the Cabinet Portfolio Holder attend a meeting of the Board to present proposals to replace council tax and explain what progress had been made. He made reference to a previous motion at Council and clarified it was not a motion for the Board to consider.

Resolved:
That the Chair discuss the suggestion to attend a future meeting with the Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Resources and he would provide feedback to the Board.

Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Management Board

3 April 2023

Community Engagement Review

Report of Alan Patrickson, Corporate Director of Neighbourhoods and Climate Change

Councillor Elizabeth Scott, Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Economy & Partnerships

Electoral division(s) affected:

Countywide

Purpose of the Report

1   To provide an update on the findings from the independent consultant on the review of the council's community engagement function and our approach to a public countywide consultation.

Executive Summary

2   Over recent years national and local agendas have changed and innovation needs to continue. We need to ensure that our community engagement mechanisms are fit for the future and that they continue to meet the corporate needs of the council and our key partners, including reducing inequalities and our continued implementation of the approach to wellbeing to deliver improved outcomes for our communities.

3   Following agreement by Cabinet in March 2022, consultants ERS were appointed to undertake an impartial and unbiased review of the council's community engagement function i.e. the work of AAPs. The consultant's review commenced in June 2022 and concluded in January 2023.

4   The final report detailing the consultant's findings and recommendations (appendix 2) analyses the data from interactions with hundreds of stakeholders, through interviews, focus groups, surveys and observations etc.

5   The consultant's research found that AAPs are well established and provide a focus for informing, enabling, and monitoring activity in response to identified community priorities. The research also identified that AAP capacity is invaluable during times of crisis, including the COVID-19 pandemic and the response to Storm Arwen. The AAP staff team are exceptionally well regarded and are open to looking at new approaches to delivering positive change for communities.

6   However, the consultant's research identified that AAPs evoke a diverse range of opinions. Nevertheless, in general, levels of satisfaction and support for the principles and functioning of AAPs is high, particularly from people engaged with them.

7   The review found that the diversity and effectiveness of community outreach and engagement has reduced over recent years, in part due to resource pressures across the team and the impact of COVID-19. Regular and direct community involvement in AAP Boards is limited to a relatively small number of individuals per AAP, although some areas do perform better in this regard. The research identified widespread agreement amongst those engaged that opportunities exist to improve how the community are engaged and funding is prioritised.

8   The consultant recommends implementing a 'hyper-local' community engagement network model to further help the council to understand and respond to local needs effectively, and increase involvement of community partners in creating local action e.g. this is especially relevant in times of crisis, such as the COVID-19 pandemic or Storm Arwen. To achieve this model of 'Community Networks' the consultant has identified a range of recommendations around four main areas covering: model; boundaries; funding; and community development paragraphs 29-33.

9   The council is currently consulting with staff, elected members, AAP Board and Forum members, key partners, residents and other interested parties on the changes that have been proposed in the independent review of our current approach. This consultation commenced on 13 March 2023 and will end 23 April 2023.

10   An equalities impact assessment screening has been completed detailing the potential impact of the protected characteristic groups for the consultation process. In summary the proposals for consultation do not disproportionately impact (both negatively and positively) the protected characteristics. This assessment will be updated throughout and following the consultation to assess the impact of the proposed changes.

11   The consultation will provide an opportunity to seek feedback from stakeholders in relation to the council's proposals for a future community engagement model with the aim of taking final proposals to Cabinet in June 2023.

Recommendations

12   The Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Management Board is recommended to:

(i)   note the findings and recommendations of ERS consultants' final report;

(ii)   note the approach to the countywide consultation and consider what views it may wish to submit to the consultation; and

(iii) note the opportunity for all elected members to submit individual views via the online survey.

Background

13   The Council carries out a number of community engagement functions across its services. The main vehicle that is used to engage with the public is through Area Action Partnerships (AAPs). Our 14 AAPs have been in operation since 2009 and have helped to fund over 10,000 community-based projects.

14   We want to ensure our community engagement continues to meet the future needs of our communities, councillors, and key partners, and we particularly want to understand how communities can be more involved in influencing local decision making by determining needs strengths, and aspirations.

15   Over recent years national and local agendas have changed and innovation needs to continue. We need to ensure that our community engagement mechanisms are fit for the future and that they continue to meet the corporate needs of the council and our key partners, including reducing inequalities and our continued implementation of the approach to wellbeing to deliver improved outcomes for our communities.

16   Following agreement by Cabinet in March 2022, consultants ERS were appointed to undertake an impartial and unbiased review of the council's community engagement function i.e. the work of AAPs. The consultant's review commenced in June 2022 and concluded in January 2023.

17   Overseen by a member/officer steering group, ERS delivered a robust, open and inclusive consultation and engagement process with a strong focus on engaging stakeholders with an existing appreciation of how AAPs currently operate and how community engagement is currently delivered e.g. including but not excusive to staff, AAP Board and Forum members, partners and elected members etc.

18   The final report detailing the consultant's findings and recommendations (appendix 2) analyses the data from interactions with hundreds of stakeholders, through interviews, focus groups, surveys and observations etc. and identifies that AAPs evoke a diverse range of opinions.

19   Against the context of increasing budgetary pressures, the consultant's report makes a number of recommendations aimed at improving our focus on community development and enhance the capacity of local communities and individuals to become more involved in improving their area.

Consultant's findings

20   The consultant's research found that AAPs are well established and provide a focus for informing, enabling, and monitoring activity in response to identified community priorities. AAP Board meetings largely operate well in prioritising and managing a range of funding streams and the process for developing, appraising and agreeing projects is robust.

21   AAP Boards provide a space for the council and partners to consult on key strategies and task and finish groups are effective in developing ideas and solutions to local issues.

22   The research also identified that AAP capacity is invaluable during times of crisis, including the COVID-19 pandemic and the response to Storm Arwen. The AAP staff team are exceptionally well regarded and are open to looking at new approaches to delivering positive change for communities.

23   However, the consultant's research identified that AAPs evoke a diverse range of opinions. Nevertheless, in general, levels of satisfaction and support for the principles and functioning of AAPs is high, particularly from people engaged with them.

24   The review found that the diversity and effectiveness of community outreach and engagement has reduced over recent years, in part due to resource pressures across the team and the impact of COVID-19. Regular and direct community involvement in AAP Boards is limited to a relatively small number of individuals per AAP, although some areas do perform better in this regard. The research identified widespread agreement amongst those engaged that opportunities exist to improve how the community are engaged and funding is prioritised.

25   The AAP approach was found to have become too focussed upon managing funding and not sufficiently focussed on the wider initial AAP objectives of engagement, empowerment and performance review. Significant potential exists to involve many more people via enhanced community engagement and community development.

26   Opportunities to shape policy or include the voice of diverse communities in partner consultations channelled via the AAP Board are limited. AAP Board meetings routinely spend too much time discussing and agreeing funding proposals rather than enabling open and meaningful consideration of community issues. It is not always clear how the AAPs' identification of local needs is considered in the development of wider strategy and policy by wider partners. There is a requirement to consider how to better inform strategic priorities with local needs assessments and how to respond collectively and efficiently to those needs. Similarly, it is not always clear how the

strategies in turn support or impact local decision making by AAP Boards on funding. Funding priorities are driven by community priorities and not sufficiently informed by quantitative data.

27   Whilst the process of agreeing individual projects is robust, it draws considerable staff resource that should be utilised engaging directly with communities. The funding approval process is intensive for applicants, especially those repeating the process year on year for the same type of intervention. Some organisations do not apply for funding due to process barriers.

28   There are inconsistencies in how some AAPs operate and some AAP Boards do not function consistently well. The potential for political conflict in some AAPs reduces the effectiveness of partnership working by making board meetings more combative in tone. This can act as a disincentive for non-politically motivated people to participate.

Consultant's recommendations

29   The consultant recommends implementing a 'hyper-local' community engagement network model to further help the council to understand and respond to local needs effectively, and increase involvement of community partners in creating local action e.g. this is especially relevant in times of crisis, such as the COVID-19 pandemic or Storm Arwen. To achieve this model of 'Community Networks' the consultant has identified a range of recommendations around four main areas covering: model; boundaries; funding; and community development.

Model

30   The consultant recommends that we take steps to further enhance community engagement by improving our extensive local networks so that they can better understand the strengths of our communities, involve more and a wider range of participants, respond to local needs effectively and involve partners in achieving solutions together. Key proposals are:

- replace AAP Boards with community networks. AAP Board meetings would be replaced with community network meetings, meeting every two months, open to all, not have a core Board membership and be chaired by a senior community coordinator (i.e. member of staff);
- base our community network meetings around a new theme at each meeting e.g. environment and climate change, economy, safer communities, health and wellbeing, and children and young people etc.;

- ensure staff spend less time on managing budgets in order that, in addition to network meetings, they use other methods to engage with communities; and
- work more closely with our communities by being more visible. This could include community network teams working in community centres, libraries and/or family hubs etc.

Boundaries

31 The consultant recommends the introduction of more evenly sized geographical community network areas based on population and proposes three options to consider:

- keep our current existing geographical boundaries but split East Durham AAP into two or three community networks;
- align our boundaries with new electoral wards (following the ongoing Boundary Commission Review) and divide into seven community networks which would be introduced following the May 2025 local election; or
- align with the 13 NHS Primary Care Network (PCN) boundaries but create 14 community networks by splitting Derwentside PCN into two areas given its large size.

Funding

32 The consultant recommends streamlining the project approval process to enable staff to allocate more time to working in, and with, communities. Recommendations include:

- introduce a small Community Chest fund where discretionary grants of up to £300 could be awarded by community development workers to support new and/or small-scale activity with a more straightforward and simple approval process;
- replace the current Area Budget with Strategic Grants which are allocated on a four-year funding cycle, in line with the election cycle. Funding proposals would be developed by co-ordinators during year one in consultation with their Community Network and local councillors. Approvals would be given by the County Durham Partnership at the end of year one providing projects up to three years assured funding i.e. from April 2026.
- in advance of the new four-year system being introduced, funding is focussed on tackling the cost of living crisis; and
- create a simpler approach to consider and approve County Councillors' Neighbourhood Budgets, especially where we have requests from repeat applicants. Also, the need to report back to the community networks regarding the Neighbourhood Budget would be removed.

Community development

33   The consultant recommends an improved focus on community development to enhance the capacity of local communities and increase the number of individuals who become more involved in improving their area. Staff are recommended to carry out the following activities to engage with more people so they understand objectives of community networks, understand how to engage and appreciate the value generated:

- build on community engagement within local areas and ensure people continue to be involved in development, changes and decisions that affect them;
- support partners including residents and voluntary community sector organisations;
- help local people to develop new projects and get their initiatives up and running;
- help organisations to secure funding for the first time;
- identify gaps in local voluntary and community sector provisions;
- be visible in our communities and more able to react to changing priorities. especially in areas where they need this the most;
- support intelligence and knowledge gathering on local priorities;
- manage the new Community Chest process; and
- work closely with councillors to share local information that will help inform decision making.

Consultation approach and timeline

34   A consultation working group has been established to enable the project team to work with the council's consultation officer group, equalities team and corporate communications team to develop the consultation plan and ensure that the key messages are effectively conveyed to all stakeholders involved in a timely manner.

35   The consultation plan and activities are built on the pre-consultation information and engagement work which was undertaken with the County Durham Partnership Forum on 14 February 2023 and the County Durham Together Partnership on 3 March 2023 which helped us develop the consultation approach.

36   The council is consulting with staff, elected members, AAP Board and Forum members, key partners, residents and other interested parties on the changes that have been proposed in the independent review of our current approach. This consultation will take place between 13 March 2023 and 23 April 2023. The consultation will seek feedback on

their views of the four areas of recommendations from the consultant detailed in paragraphs 29-33.

37   The consultation has been planned and will be implemented in accordance with the council's Consultation Statement and Consultation Protocol (March 2019) and will be undertaken to comply with statutory and government guidance, as well as the general requirements of public law.

38   Consultation activities and methods include:

- attendance and discussion at staff briefing sessions;
- briefing/summary document for key stakeholders including elected members;
- online/paper survey form seeking feedback on the key proposals;
- attendance and discussion at key stakeholder meetings;
- series of online briefings for AAP Board and Forum members;
- a web page outlining the consultation with links to the consultant's report, online survey and dedicated email address for feedback and questions;
- social media signposting to the web page and online survey; and
- County Durham News article signposting to the web page and online survey.

39   The consultation process will be undertaken in accordance with the timeline below:

Activity	Start	End
Consultation period (6 weeks)	13 March 2023	23 April 2023
Analysis of feedback and preparation of report for Cabinet	24 April 2023	30 May 2023
Report to Cabinet with outcome of consultation and proposals	14 June 2033	14 June 2023

Equalities impact assessment

40   An equalities impact assessment screening detailing the potential impact of the protected characteristic groups for the consultation process has been completed. This assessment will be updated throughout and following the consultation to assess the impact of the proposed changes.

41   In summary the proposals for consultation do not disproportionately impact (both negatively and positively) the protected characteristics. The consultation is designed to be as inclusive as possible, engaging a broad range of stakeholders, including listening to the views of young people and people with a disability. The impacts on groups of people with protected characteristics will continue to be reviewed as the protect and proposals progress and the council will work with partners to identify and evaluation any mitigations to address adviser impacts.

Conclusion

42   We are aware that AAPs have been operating for 14 years and it is appropriate that we received independent advice to determine if they are still fit for purpose given the many changes the council, communities and partners have witnessed and been part of since AAPs were first established in 2009.

43   Having completed their review, the consultant has now provided a range of proposals for us to consider. The consultant believes that by making these changes we will increase the effectiveness and consistency of community engagement across the county, provide opportunities for more people to shape policy and include the voices of diverse communities. It will also make it more clear how local needs are identified and considered in the development of wider policies and allow for more meaningful discussion around community issues instead of being often funding focused. Importantly at the heart of this it will mean that community staff are able to spend more time in communities and be responsive to local needs.

44   The consultation will provide various opportunities to seek feedback from stakeholders in relation to the council's proposals for a future community engagement model, including opportunities for elected members to submit views.

Other useful documents
- [Cabinet Report, Review of Community Engagement and Funding Processes – 16 March 2022](#)

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Appendix 1: Implications

Legal Implications
The project team is aware of the current AAP Terms of Reference and the delegated authorities originally signed off by Cabinet.

Finance
The cost of the consultation will be met from Neighbourhood and Climate Change reserves.

Staffing
There is a need to engage with all AAP staff and other DCC teams working with AAPs e.g. business support, finance and members support etc. to ensure they are aware of the consultation and the timescales we are working to.

Risk
There is a risk of challenge if the consultation and equalities impact are not undertaken in accordance with legislative requirements. A number of risks exist that could impact on the delivery and the effectiveness of the consultation which are detailed in the project initiation documentation and will be regularly monitored, and mitigating actions identified where necessary.

Equality and Diversity/Public Sector Equality Duty
An equalities impact assessment screening has been completed detailing the potential impact of the protected characteristic groups for the consultation process. This assessment will be updated throughout and following the consultation to assess the impact of the proposed changes.

Climate Change
N/A

Accommodation
N/A

Crime and Disorder
N/A

Human Rights
N/A

Procurement
N/A

Disability Issues

N/A

Consultation

Detail of the consultation plan is included in the main report.

Durham Community Engagement Review

January 2023

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Executive Summary

What are the positives of the current system?

The AAPs are well established and provide a focus for informing, enabling, and monitoring activity in response on identified community priorities. AAP Board meetings largely operate well in prioritising and managing a range of funding streams. The process for developing, appraising and agreeing projects is robust. AAP Boards provide a space for DCC and partners to consult on key strategies. Task and Finish Groups are effective in developing ideas and solutions to local issues. AAP capacity is invaluable during times of crisis, including the pandemic and the response to Storm Arwen. The AAP Staff Team are exceptionally well regarded and are open to looking at new approaches to delivering positive change for communities.

Why are we making changes?

Our research has identified that AAPs evoke a diverse range of opinions. Nevertheless, in general, levels of satisfaction and support for the principles and functioning of AAPs is high, particularly from people engaged with them.

The diversity and effectiveness of community outreach and engagement has reduced over recent years, in part due to resource pressures across the team. Regular and direct community involvement in AAP Boards is limited to a relatively small number of individuals per AAP, although some areas do perform better in this regard. Our research identified widespread agreement amongst those engaged that opportunities exist to improve how the community are engaged and funding is prioritised.

The AAP approach has become too focussed upon managing funding and not sufficiently focussed on the wider initial AAP objectives of engagement, empowerment and performance review. Significant potential exists to involve many more people via enhanced community engagement and community development.

Opportunities to shape policy or include the voice of diverse communities in partner consultations channelled via the AAP Board are limited. AAP Board meetings routinely spend too much time discussing and agreeing funding proposals rather than enabling open and meaningful consideration of community issues. It is not always clear how the AAPs' identification of local needs is considered in the development of wider strategy and policy by wider partners. There is a requirement to consider how to better inform strategic priorities with local needs assessments and how to respond collectively and efficiently to those needs. Similarly, it is not always clear how the strategies in turn support or impact local decision making by AAP Boards on funding. Funding priorities are driven by community priorities and not sufficiently informed by quantitative data.

Whilst the process of agreeing individual projects is robust, it draws considerable staff resource that should be utilised engaging directly with communities. The funding approval process is intensive for applicants, especially those repeating the process year on year for the same type of intervention. Some organisations do not apply for funding due to process barriers.

There are inconsistencies in how some AAPs operate and some AAP Boards do not function consistently well. The potential for political conflict in some AAPs reduces the effectiveness of partnership working by making Board Meetings more combative in tone. This can act as a disincentive for non-politically motivated people to participate.

What are those changes?

A hyper-local community engagement network is important if DCC is to understand and respond to local needs effectively and involve community partners in creating local action. This is especially relevant in times of crisis, such as the pandemic or Storm Arwen.

The recommendations include the cessation of the current AAP process and associated Boards, to be replaced by more flexible Community Networks that place greater emphasis on community engagement, community development and community capacity building.

There is benefit in retaining the existing boundaries. A further option is that 14 Community Networks reflect the Primary Care Networks (Derwentside PCN split into two), albeit rounded to align with the new electoral ward boundaries due to come into effect in 2025. This latter point would improve alignment with Neighbourhood Budget delivery. Community Networks would have no decision-making role for funding.

We propose streamlining the project approval process. This will enable staff to allocate more time to working in, and with, communities. We propose replacing the Area Budget with a Strategic Grant process that allocates funding on a four-year funding cycle, enabling larger and more strategic projects to be funded that enhance opportunities to attract match-funding. Projects will be developed by DCC Senior Community Coordinators, informed by Community Networks and agreed by a sub-group of the County Durham Partnership. The Neighbourhood Budget would largely remain as present. There would be no requirement for County Councillors to report funding priorities to Community Networks. Community Development Workers would have access to a flexible Community Chest pot to allocate small amounts of funding to kickstart new initiatives. Community Network staff would be based in local community venues.

What are the benefits?

To extract the value of Community Networks, it is essential to reduce the time spent by AAP staff in managing funding to enable their time to be allocated to community engagement and community development to build local capacity. This should include reducing the number of funding transactions, an online system to efficiently manage project applications, output management, finances and reporting, and a streamlined process for funding internal services from DCC departments and other established trusted partners given the reduced level of risk.

Improved focus on community development will enhance the capacity of local communities and individuals to become more involved in improving their area. Prioritisation of funding would be improved by increased analysis of data; wider and more targeted engagement with all communities to inform priorities; greater collaboration across Community Network areas to coordinate interventions over a longer time period and over a wider geographical area; enhanced monitoring of impact and value for money; and remove the perception that funding decisions are made on the views of a relatively limited number of community representatives who often benefit directly from funding.

What are the outcomes for communities?

The Community Networks approach will enhance opportunities for all communities to better engage in issues that impact their lives. They will operate to identify local assets and needs, create opportunities for local action, partnership collaboration, volunteering and co-production of services more comprehensively. More people will understand the aims and objectives of Community Networks, understand how to engage and appreciate the value generated.

1 Introduction and Headline Findings

1.1 Context to Review

In June 2022, ERS was commissioned by Durham County Council (DCC) to undertake a review of Community Engagement across the county.

This report analyses the data from interactions with hundreds of stakeholders, through interviews, focus groups, surveys and observations. It tells the story of delivery covering management and governance; the challenges faced; performance and positive impacts; and makes recommendations for improvement against the context of increasing DCC budgetary pressures.

Our focus for the consultation has been upon engaging stakeholders with an existing appreciation of how AAPs currently operate. Our approach has been to understand different perspectives in regard to what works well, what doesn't, what needs to improve and why.

We recognise that different stakeholders each have much to gain (or lose) from either retaining, slightly amending or radically overhauling the approach to determining priorities, influencing policy and the allocation of funding at a locality level. We have had to understand the background to the views expressed to us through the inclusive approach to engagement in this review.

At the outset of the review there was no requirement within the agreed scope to focus upon reducing the cost requirements related to AAP delivery. There was an emphasis upon value for money. As the review has progressed, it has become evident of the scale of budgetary pressures faced by DCC in setting the budget for 2023/24. In this review we have sought to prioritise the 'must have' elements of community engagement. Staffing resource to deliver effective frontline community engagement and community development should be protected.

1.2 Key Findings

Our research found widespread support for components of the AAP model. DCC Cabinet regard AAPs as an important mechanism to enable DCC to engage at a local level, facilitating interactions with the community and there is a willingness to support successful elements of the current model.

AAP staff are generally highly experienced, skilled and committed to their roles and to the principles of community engagement. AAP teams have established knowledge of community assets and networks with local organisations. Significant knowledge of internal DCC departments, key contacts and processes has also been developed by AAP teams, who act as two-way connectors between communities, voluntary sector organisation, DCC structures and County Councillors.

A local hyper-local community engagement network is important if DCC is to understand and respond to local needs effectively and involve community partners in creating local action. Effective community engagement activity is essential to allow DCC to respond to local needs. This is especially relevant in times of crisis, such as the pandemic or Storm Arwen.

Our research has identified that AAPs evoke a diverse range of opinions and views. Nevertheless, in general, levels of satisfaction and support for the principles and functioning of AAPs and their staff is high, particularly from people engaged with them.

There is widespread agreement that opportunities exist to improve how the community are engaged and funding is prioritised.

Funding through AAPs directly benefits the voluntary sector, with an average of £1.1m funding per year provided to VCS organisation of community centres and local assets from the Area Budget in the years to 2019/20. This increased to between £2m-£3m in 2020/21 and 2021/22 with additional funding streams, such as the Covid Recovery Fund.

Most consultees supported the idea of making changes to the current approach to refresh operations. There was lower level of satisfaction with how a small number of AAPs operated, but on closer scrutiny many criticisms (not all) were often found to be based on hearsay or misunderstandings.

There are significant variations in the internal processes of the different AAPs, which can't be explained through adaptation to local requirements or needs.

Satisfaction with the funding processes is low due to a number of reasons:

- The absence of an efficient, intuitive online project application and management system, and related challenges in gaining updates and gathering monitoring information.

- The duration and intensity of the scrutiny process through AAP Task and Finish Groups and then AAP Boards, prior to technical appraisal.

- The process for capital applications is considered onerous. It requires obtaining costings from resource-light internal DCC departments prior to being progressed as applications. This is a particular issue for County Councillors who place a value on expedient delivery.

It should be noted that the processing time for technical appraisals once the application is completed and submitted is regarded as comparable to that of other funders.

The diversity and effectiveness of community outreach and engagement has reduced over recent years. Regular and direct community involvement in AAP Boards is limited to a relatively small number of individuals per AAP, although some areas do perform better in this regard. Reasons for this include:

- AAPs are increasingly used as a mechanism to distribute additional pots of funding and facilitate DCC actions at a local level. AAPs facilitated double the number of schemes in 2021 than in 2017 and this has reduced capacity for staff to deliver proactive community development.

- Significant AAP staff time is utilised providing support to County Councillors with their Neighbourhood Budget.

- The AAPs' terms of reference specify Board Meetings. This structured format of engagement provides high levels of scrutiny but Boards themselves are not regarded as inclusive and accessible for all.

- AAP activities such as participatory budgeting, forum events and innovative and adaptive community engagement have reduced in recent years, in part due to the pandemic.

The statutory duty on DCC to carry out consultation is made relatively straightforward via AAPs. However, on too many occasions this is considered to be a 'tick box' exercise, while opportunities to shape policy or include the voice of diverse communities via the AAP Board are limited. AAP Board meetings routinely spend too much time discussing and agreeing funding proposals rather than enabling open and meaningful consideration of community issues.

In some AAPs there can be a tension between the views of County Councillors and other AAP Board Members. The potential for political conflict in some AAPs reduces the effectiveness of partnership working by making Board Meetings more combative in tone. This can act as a disincentive for non-politically motivated people to participate.

The AAP geographical areas are well established, and AAPs and partners have become familiar with them over time. AAP boundaries do not align with local government ward boundaries or other partner operational boundaries. It is important that the geographical groupings remain local enough that communities feel affinity to them. There is a case for retaining the current boundaries. A further option is that boundaries reflect the 13 Primary Care Networks (Derwentside PCN split into two would lead to 14 area), albeit rounded to align with the new ward boundaries due to come into effect in 2025. This latter point would improve alignment with Neighbourhood Budget delivery.

Links to strategic priorities and the County Durham Partnership could be improved. It is not always clear how the AAPs' identification of local needs is considered in the development of local strategies. There is a requirement to consider how to better inform strategic priorities with local needs assessments and how to respond collectively and efficiently to those needs. Similarly, it is not always clear how the strategies in turn support or impact local decision making or AAP spending.

Given that the new system of locality engagement recommended in this report is significantly different from the current AAP approach, it is recommended that they adopt a new identity. We propose to rebrand the AAP process as Community Networks to more accurately reflect their role in delivering community engagement, community development and community capacity building.

Community Networks should have less focus on delivery of funding, and more focus on community development activities like identification of local assets and needs, creating opportunities for local action, partnership collaboration, volunteering and co-production of services. This should maximise the impact of the work, improving outcomes for communities.

To extract the value of Community Networks, it is essential to reduce pressure on the capacity of AAP staff in managing funding to enable their time to be allocated to community engagement and community development to build local capacity.

This should include reducing the number of funding transactions, an online system to support the funding application and reporting, and a streamlined process for funding internal services from DCC departments given the reduced level of risk.

At this stage we propose variations to the current approach to funding. This is summarised in the table below.

Fund	Value	Decision makers	Criteria
Community Chest	Discretionary up to £300	Community Coordinators/ Community Development Workers	Strict criteria, seed funding for communities only
Neighbourhood Budgets	Medium value	County Councillors	County Councillor led, influenced by local need
Strategic Grants (replace Area Budget)	Large Value	Board representing County Durham Partnership (public and partner representation)	Based on needs profiles identified by area in consultation. Multiple year funding.
External funding streams (Fun and Food, Towns and Villages, etc)	As defined	Co-produced in local areas, informed by Community Networks, but final decisions through Community Coordinators	Based on needs profiles identified by area in consultation.

Improved communication and coordination between Community Networks would improve their impact. This could be achieved through coordinated strategic priority groups, better use of information and data, and improved cooperation with other teams and agencies dedicated to identifying local needs and improving outcomes. The management structure that has Senior Community Coordinators overseeing multiple Community Networks would support this approach.

2   Scope of Review and Approach

This section of the report outlines the scope of the review and the ERS approach to gathering data and insight to inform the conclusions and recommendations. It also outlines the structure of the report.

2.1   Review Scope

DCC Cabinet outlined the scope of the review, as summarised below.

Review Scope
The National Picture – emerging policy
Reflect on what we do well and look at opportunities for future development backed by national good practice.
Review the developing national picture and how community engagement will inform and support the delivery of government strategies such as Levelling Up and Left Behind Neighbourhoods etc.
Community Engagement, Involvement and Consultation
Assessment of the management of various funding programmes currently aligned to AAPs vs staff capacity to support more grass roots community development work.
How do we best integrate the wider engagement needs of the Council and our key partners into an updated or revised delivery model?
Our Council Vision includes 'Connected Communities' engagement will be key to this – what form should that take?
Delivering Change at a Local Level
There is the opportunity to engage on some emerging policy areas to ensure that the Council has a community engagement mechanism that provides support for our communities in line with the Council's future vision and priorities and also reflects the needs of the wider County Durham Partnership.
Review opportunities for local engagement to influence social value and make recommendations for how that could be delivered across County Durham.
How can our communities be involved with the local delivery of the Inclusive Economic Strategy?
Review the scope and range of decisions that could be addressed in local communities in order to achieve better outcomes.
To consider the potential for improved realignment of the council's community engagement resources to support and empower communities to be cohesive and better placed to do things for themselves.

Review Scope
Funding Processes and Timescales Review our funding arrangements for AAP and Councillor focused Neighbourhood Budget grants and timescales for funding awards. Consider any process improvements to ensure the safeguarding of public funds and a clear audit process whilst making speedier decisions.
Current Governance Review of governance and decision-making processes of existing partnership structures, including; consideration of local Board representation; review if the AAP geography is still appropriate after 12 years of operation; and explore how structures best provide effective support to local Councillors.
Influencing Strategy and Planning How we adapt so that we improve local delivery of wider Council priorities and strategies? How do we embed better community resilience planning and response into our engagement work? This was particularly evident from the Storm Arwen experience in Nov 2021. How can future community engagement shape the policy of Council and partner services? How can we deliver more resilient communities by communities taking a greater lead on certain agendas?

2.2 Research Method

Our primary research was supported by desk-based review and analysis of relevant national and local policy and AAP-related material, including annual reports, Terms of Reference, funding data and findings from a County Councillor e-survey undertaken in 2021.

An inclusive approach to involving people in the review was essential throughout, keeping with the spirit of community engagement to ensure that voices are heard. Optimal insight could only be achieved by giving the diverse range of people and partners opportunities to contribute to shaping the future model.

Our approach has included:

- Attendance at each AAP Board to observe activity, highlight the review and listen to perspectives of Board Members. At each meeting we expressed the option for Board Members to contact us directly to arrange a one-to-one meeting, should this be required.

- Facilitation of six visioning events that engaged 122 stakeholders.

- One to one and small group meetings with a wider range of DCC staff, including Senior Managers, Heads of Service, AAP staff at all levels and role, and Towns & Villages support staff.

- Engagement with a number of County Councillors via one to one meetings alongside a session with informal Cabinet.

- One to one and small group interviews with wider partners including Durham Community Partnership, Durham Police, OPCC, Fire Service, Heath partners, and a number of voluntary sector partners that have accessed funding.

- Online workshops from representatives from Town and Parish Councils.

- Circulation and analysis of a stakeholder e-survey that generated 267 responses.

2.3   Structure of the Report

Section 3 of the report summarises the context to AAP delivery alongside the wider community engagement requirements and opportunities across Durham.

Section 4 of the report includes an evaluation of current AAP operations, structured in relation to a logic model that maps the inputs, activities, outputs, outcomes and impact. It summarises what works well, what works less well and the context for future delivery.

Section 5 of the report outlines the key findings and recommendations in relation to community engagement, community development and capacity building. It makes the case for Community Networks to replace the existing AAP approach.

Section 6 of the report outlines the key findings and recommendations in relation to managing and administering funding.

Section 7 of the report outlines the key findings and recommendations in relation to how Community Networks will be structured geographically and resourced.

3 Community Engagement in County Durham

This section of the report summaries the background and current approach to delivering community engagement via AAPs.

3.1 The Formation of AAPs

AAPs are the principal structure for community engagement across DCC. They were designed as a key feature of the bid in 2008 for DCC to become a Unitary Council. The original objectives were fourfold: engagement; empowerment; local action; and performance review. The original vision is included below.

The AAP is the mechanism through which the Council works with local communities and partner organisations to make sure those local services meet local needs and that the voice of the community is heard within the service development process. The AAP is non-political and enables councillors, residents and partners to come together to influence priorities and take decisions in the light of local needs and circumstances. It focuses on local actions to help the Council and its partners to tackle inequalities and narrow the gap between different areas and it also delivers locally agreed improvements that are important to communities within its area.

There are 14 AAPs. AAP boundaries were determined following a major consultation exercise at the formative stage of AAPs and are shown in Figure 3.1 below.

Figure 3.1 AAP Arrangement

Each AAP is managed through a Board of 21 people established with equal representation from County Councillors, members of the public, and partner organisations including Police, Fire, Housing and Health. AAPs vary in population size. Some County Councillors automatically have a place on their AAP Board but in larger AAPs a rotation system operates.

AAPs are supported by staff teams consisting of Local Area Coordinators, Community Development Project officers, administrative support staff and staff from the Funding Team.

At the point of inception of the AAP in County Durham, they were regarded as being at the cutting edge of community engagement and development work nationally. Peer challenge for the AAPs in 2012 found that they were 'sound, valued and have exceeded early expectations'. Many other local authorities have visited Durham to understand AAP operations to inform the implementation of their own model.

3.2   Designing and Delivering Local Projects

In the 12 years since the inception of AAPs, £59.5m has been allocated to 10,000+ community-based projects, matched with an additional £69.7m of funding.

Project ideas were intended to be identified through co-productive approach in AAP networks, as well as via call outs or direct approaches from partner organisations. Projects are subject to a process of refinement and scrutiny through AAP Board Meetings. Once applications for funding have been and agreed through AAP Board Meetings, they are submitted to the DCC Funding Teams for technical appraisal and payment. Periodic monitoring against key performance indicators is undertaken once delivery commences.

At present, Area Budgets are allocated evenly across the AAPs, regardless of the population of the AAP area. Some AAPs therefore benefit from a significant budget uplift per head of population.

Approximately 18% of funding goes back to fund DCC services, most commonly highways, environmental projects and to community venues. These tend to be capital projects that come more frequently from County Councillor Neighbourhood Budgets.

There have been significant changes to the scope of action of AAPs in the previous three years with new local coordination responsibilities and emergency response, as well as management and allocation of additional funds. This includes:

- Coordinating local responses to the COVID-19 pandemic, offering DCC representation and working with partners on local volunteering and food banks.

- Identifying local need and coordinating the local responses to Storm Arwen.

- Distributing Fun and Food targeting local children and young people in need.

- Distributing funding and coordinating activities for the Platinum Jubilee.

- Distributing the £4m Towns and Villages Fund.

- Coordinating the Warm Spaces response to the cost-of-living crisis.

Whilst there has been benefit of invesment in localities, the proliferation of funding streams and the scale of funding has drawn staff resource away from most of the four core aims of AAPs. There is a requirement to reset the balance. The recommendations as part of this review must consider how enhanced local capacity building can be undertaken to underpin resilience of communities through improved hyper-local infrastructure – both people and organisations.

3.3   Requirement for Community Engagement

DCC has statutory duties that require effective community engagement. These include:

- County Durham Health and Wellbeing Board functions include developing a Joint Strategic Needs Assessment to provide evidence of the current and future health and wellbeing needs of the people of County Durham and based on this evidence, developing a Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy.

- The Community Safety Partnership established to tackle crime, disorder, anti-social behaviour, substance misuse, and other behaviour adversely affecting the local environment, and to reduce re-offending.

Some common themes emerged from our needs analysis and policy review, particularly in relation to Levelling Up and the Health and Care Bill that require a place-based community focussed approach to health, wellbeing and economic strategies.

With more limited resources available, local authorities and other statutory bodies are no longer to deliver all the scale of services previously seen. Their role is expected to shift from service provider to anchor institution[1], providing collaborative innovation and pooling resources with partners, to best meet the needs of local communities. This requires:

- Identification of local need through wide community consultation, and the collation and use of local data.

- Strong partnership and collaboration with NHS colleagues, statutory partners and other government institutions, including joint commissioning.

- Partnership with and support of the voluntary sector.

- Sourcing external funding and the involvement of the private sector.

- Supporting communities to help themselves, including through volunteering and collaboration.

It is important that any new model considered how this can be delivered.

In February 2022 the Government published its long-awaited Levelling Up the United Kingdom White Paper. It includes 12 new missions across four broad areas:

- Boosting productivity and living standards by growing the private sector, especially in those places where they are lagging;

- Spreading opportunities and improving public services, especially in those areas where they are weakest;

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[1] Anchor institutions must re-imagine how public bodies immerse themselves within local communities | The King's Fund (kingsfund.org.uk)

- Restoring a sense of community, local pride and belonging, especially in those places where they have been lost; and

- Empowering local leaders and communities, especially in those places lacking local agency.

The missions most relevant to the theme of the review includes:

- By 2030, wellbeing will have improved in every area of the UK, with the gap between top performing and other areas closing.

- By 2030, pride in place, such as people's satisfaction with their town centre and engagement in local culture and community, will have risen in every area of the UK, with the gap between the top performing and other areas closing.

- By 2030, homicide, serious violence, and neighbourhood crime will have fallen, focused on the worst-affected areas.

Under each of the above missions is a wider narrative that summarises the ambition of government of how they are to be delivered. There is a clear alignment to the opportunities presented by a new model of community engagement and community development in Durham.

3.4   Community Engagement Via AAPs

AAPs enable community consultation and engagement, including regular Forum events to obtain resident input and agree priorities for each area (although there has been less of this since the pandemic). Each AAP is allocated an Area Budget to spend according to those agreed priorities. AAPs also coordinate local Task & Finish Groups to consider specfic topics of interest, established following discussion at each AAP. Membership is less prescriptive than the AAP Boards and this flexibilty enables (in princple) opportunities for wider involvement.

DCC and partners have a number of teams and mechanisms focussed on community engagement. The DCC Consultation Team are managed within the same department as AAPs and are responsible for supporting DCC departments to carry out meaningful engagement with communities. Other services with engagement functions include Economic Development and Leisure services (amongst others). These describe productive relationships with AAP staff and joint working on specific projects.

Whilst there are plenty of positives to build upon, our research has identified some areas where delivery is less effective due to the governance and wider approach of AAPs.

In principle, AAPs offer a streamlined route for joint working and the sharing of opportunities to consult and communicate. Our view, based on research undertaken, is that that consultation exercises are often 'tick box' exercises managed through presentations to AAPs with limited opportunity for the Board to discuss the detail and influence outcomes.

The AAP Board Meetings overall are not currently established as spaces where a diverse cross sector of the community are represented, attend and engage. The overall number of members of the community is low, although we do recognise that those public representatives are valuable to the process, providing local insight to inform priorities.

Scope for the AAPs to consistently and strategically provide their insights about local needs and opportunities (beyond Area Budget funding priorities) seem to be limited beyond specific work of Task & Finish Groups, partly because of the lack of tangible specific evidence generated from about local need. A system that emphasises more varied methods of community engagement (see Appendix A) would enhance the opportunities to influence wider policy and delivery.

"There could be opportunities to looking at how AAPs could be used better. They are a very effective route to get information out to people, they have really good reach, but they are only on broadcast. How do we get two-way dialogue, and have it fed back?" **Strategic Engagement Partner**

3.5   Improving Links to Health and Wellbeing

Our research has identified opportunities for further joint working with health partners that would improve service design and health outcomes.

Since April 2020, the NHS and DCC have operated as an integrated team in the planning and commissioning of health and care services. There have been ongoing efforts to align the approaches to engaging with residents and listening to their views and experiences of the health and care services provided locally. The creation of a joint Health and Care Public Engagement Forum is being established to underpin community engagement activity.

There was an engagement function for Clinical Commissioning Groups that are now separated into local duties for Primary Care Networks (PCN) linked to the Integrated Care Board (ICB). Engagement is to inform and influence service provision to improve local outcomes. This process is not fully aligned geographically or operationally to AAPs. From a frontline delivery perspective, a number of Community Connectors associated with public health and the COVID response are engaged with AAPs.

Within the Integrated Care System (ICS), place-based partnerships are to lead the detailed design and delivery of integrated services across their localities and neighbourhoods. The partnerships will involve the NHS, DCC, community and voluntary organisations, local residents, people who use services, their carers and representatives and other community partners with a role in supporting the health and wellbeing of the population.

As the ICB develops, and each PCN looks to develop its community engagement function, there is an opportunity for greater collaborative working within an evolving AAP-type model. The potential exists for Community Networks to become an important asset in supporting this shift, from top-down service provision to a less resource intensive, more collaborative bottom-up approach.

Later in this report we consider the approach to locality-based delivery. There is a strong rationale for coterminous boundaries for PCNs and Community Networks.

4   Evaluation of Current AAP Approach

This section of the report is structured around the main functions of the AAP process, as summarised in the logic model overleaf. It summarises the main headline findings on the role and operations of the current AAP function. It identifies areas of improvement that inform future sections of the report covering community development approach, funding, geographical structure and the resources required for delivery.

4.1   Inputs

4.1.1   Staffing Resource

A successful model of delivery requires staff with the appropriate capability and capacity. Our research has identified that the existing AAP staffing infrastructure provides a firm base. Wider stakeholders have praised the commitment, ability and attitude of staff. They understand the patch, the community and local infrastructure, and the opportunities. Each AAP has a Coordinator who is supported by Community Development Project Officers and Administative Support Staff. Key duties include:

- Arranging and minuting board meetings and Task and Finish Groups.

- Supporting organisations to complete funding applications, and to follow up progress.

- Managing the process of requests for support to internal DCC departments.

- Collecting monitoring information from funders.

- Managing lists of contacts and partners.

- Communications like newsletters, social media updates and annual reports.

- Board directed activities like directories of services.

- Support to County Councillors, including in some cases daily or weekly phone calls. Often this support related to facilitating the Neighbourhood Budget prioritisation.

- Organisational development support to new organisations.

- Acting as a link person or signposting to other DCC services.

The Towns & Villages Fund has boosted the number of staff operating across Durham. The staffing resource is utilised flexibly, targeting localities based on need. Whilst we have seen evidence of joint working and coordinated activity across AAP boundaries, there remains scope to deliver more of this.

Main Functions of AAP Process

Rationale	Local people and organisations are uniquely placed to understand the specific needs, assets and capabilities of their local area. The AAP is the mechanism for DCC, local communities and partner organisations to work together to tackle inequalities and deliver local change that is important to communities and makes a difference locally.

Inputs	AAP Staffing
	Funding
	Time and support from:
	  • The public
	  • Elected members
	  • Voluntary sector organisations
	  • Police
	  • Health (ICS)
	  • Fire and Rescue
	  • Housing
	  • DCC officers
	  • Community groups
	Local data ad performance info

Activities	Public communication, outreach and events Administering funding and funding support AAP Meetings AAP Forum Task and Finish/ Priority working groups Networking and local advice Councillor support

Outputs	Opportunities for a wide and inclusive range of residents to have their say, and have agency
	Identification of local needs, issues
	Identification of local assets
	  • Organisations
	  • Buildings
	  • Individuals
	  • Funding
	Development of local relationships
	Identification & facilitation of local solutions
	Funding Solutions

Outcomes	Changes to service provision by DCC, partners and local organisations. New projects coproduced or influenced by residents in partnership with local organisations, meeting local needs Increase volunteering and action by residents in local communities, for the benefit of individuals and communities
Impacts	Increased civic pride, partnership and leadership Improved community cohesion Increased access to services, activities and opportunities Improved services Increased equality and inclusion Improved health and wellbeing Increased public safety, and reduced offending Local economic development, increased jobs, and reduction in poverty

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4.1.2 Funding

AAPs provide a governance model for agreeing, managing and monitoring funding across multiple streams. Figure 4.1 below summarises the overall scale of funding processed through AAPs alongside the number of transactions (projects). The scale of the work is significant, delivering much needed additional investment into communities across all corners of Durham. Appendix B provides further analysis of funding processed through AAPs.

Figure 4.1: AAP Funding Stream Value and Transactions

Fund Names	09/10	10/11	11/12	12/13	13/14	14/15	15/16	16/17	17/18	18/19	19/20	20/21	21/22	Total
Members Neighbourhood Budget	189	538	584	1091	609	583	326	672	1049	1224	1337	1405	1037	10644
Area Budget	236	204	264	403	465	457	513	420	451	259	346	555	205	4778
Holiday Activities with Food – DCC											47	184	181	412
Holiday Activities with Food – DFE													284	284
Youth Fund									63	63	50			176
Welfare Reform						29	24	21	23	32	18	1		148
Social Isolation Fund										46	45			91
Public Health						26	26							52
Consett Community Facilities										4	1	2	1	8
Members Towns & Villages Fund													8	8
Towns & Villages Fund													5	5
Total	**425**	**742**	**848**	**1494**	**1074**	**1095**	**889**	**1113**	**1586**	**1628**	**1844**	**2147**	**1721**	**16606**

The Area Budget was introduced as a key component at the commencement of AAPs. The scale of resource allocated has fluctuated year on year in response to allocation decisions by DCC. Area Budget funding is available for projects with a value of £5,000 or greater. Projects need to contribute to locality and county-wide priorities, meet a local need, and improve social, economic and environmental well-being.

The procedures specify that only non-profit organisations can receive funding. This includes:

● Voluntary and Community Sector organisations.

● Statutory bodies including DCC Services, Police, Fire and Health bodies.

● Parish and Town Councils.

● Schools and Colleges.

Area Budget projects are encouraged to secure match funding, both cash and 'in-kind' to maximise the benefits of the scheme. Funding allocated on an annual cycle and repeat funding for the same purpose year on year is monitored and discouraged.

County Councillors have responsibility for prioritising their Neighbourhood Budget. Neighbourhood Budget funding is available for projects with a value of £1,000 or greater. Each County Councillor can allocate up to £2,000 of their Neighbourhood Budget to a Neighbourhood Budget Small Grants (NBSG) for smaller projects of a value between £50 and £1,000. As with the Area Budget, the Neighbourhood Budget requires significant staff resource to manage, from supporting the development of ideas to final sign off and delivery.

Our review considered the level of funding available to County Councillors compared to other authorities. Figure 4.2 shows the comparators.

Figure 4.2: Comparison of Councillor Budgets Across Local Authorities

Comparison of Councillor Budgets Across Local Authorities	
Local Authority	**Budgets**
Durham County Council	£19,400
Northumberland County Council	£15,000
Stockton Borough Council	£10,700
North Yorkshire County Council	£10,000
Kent County Council	£10,000
Devon County Council	£8,000
Suffolk County Council	£8,000
South Oxfordshire District Council	£5,000
Nottinghamshire County Council	£5,000
West Suffolk Council	£3,300
Malvern Hills District Council	£500
Shropshire Council	£0
Gloucester City Council	£0

The evidence is that DCC allocates a larger sum than all other areas. Our review also identified that the process for allocating funding is far more intensive than other areas.

One of the key priorities emerging from the research is the requirement to reduce the administrative burden associated with agreeing funding priorities. It is simply too resource intensive. Our approach has considered how processes can be streamlined, enabling more resource to be directed towards community development from the wider team.

About 30% of the Neighbourhood Budget projects go directly to DCC departments to deliver projects. Neighbourhood Budget projects make up around 60-70% of the transactions processed by the DCC Funding Team in any given year. There is an ongoing issue with the capacity of DCC staff in core services to deliver funded projects in a timely manner, leading to a degree of frustration by some County Councillors and wider partners. Whilst we understand this is due to capacity issues, any new model needs to be delivered in a way that enables improved planning of workload. A continuous stream of asks upon some DCC service areas, including Highways, makes this difficult at present.

Durham has advanced systems for scoping, appraising and agreeing priorities in relation to the Area Budget and the Neighbourhood Budget. The process provides assurances to minimise duplication and safeguard against accusations of misuse of public funds. The process is universal regardless of whether interventions are large projects from a first-time deliverer or a small project from a DCC service that has consistently delivered the same type of intervention on many occasions over a number of years. Whilst the robust process provides a high degree to scrutiny, it requires significant staff resource. It often takes too long to progress even small projects to delivery, when considering both pre-application support and the application process.

The Funding Team allocated significant time and energy to co-developing an online form with DCC's ICT team. Other options exist that would provide a more effective system for managing the process of agreeing and monitoring funding.

Our research has identified that the requirement to "use it or lose it" approach to allocating sizeable six-figure budgets at relatively short notice in some AAPs has reportedly led to a less considered approach to commissioning and reduced value for money. This needs to be considered in the design of the future model.

There is some evidence that in the largest AAPs, there is less prevalence in engaging and supporting small community and voluntary sector organisations. Instead, there is a reliance on larger organisations to coordinate or deliver on behalf of the AAP.

Emphasis is placed on match funding in reporting. This does not consider whether the AAP is the principal funder, so a contribution of £10,000 can be seen to attract £500,000 for a capital project. In monitoring the impact of any future funding, caution needs to be taken in assuming that this funding would not otherwise have been attracted into Durham.

Funding acts as an important mechanism to engage people in the processes and meetings of AAPs. It is also a key reason for some partners to engage. One of the most frequently referenced issues from some County Councillors has been a degree of dissatisfaction with the role of Public Members in decision making over funding. Whilst in some areas this is not an issue, in others it underpins a level of dissatisfaction that envelopes their wider view of the whole AAP approach. The issue stems from Public Members sometimes seeming to represent a party-political approach that influences the allocation of funding. A number of public representatives are also directly linked to an organisation that benefit from funding agreed via an AAP Board. Whilst systems are in place to manage conflicts of interest in the decision-making process, the perception remains that influence on the AAP Board provides an advantage to some organisations and in how funding is prioritised more generally.

Whilst we see some value of representation of public members on AAP Boards, greater value is achieved in Task & Finish Groups (and other meetings), where there is increased scope to be involved in sharing local intelligence and contributing to solutions. There is the potential to utilise public members to a much greater extent in the review of how funded projects are performing. This approach is undertaken in some AAPs but not in others.

Current budgets operate on an annual allocation cycle. This means that the process of appraising and agreeing priorities follows a frequent process of intensive repeated administration. The allocation of annual budgets tends to lead to less strategic interventions or a case where interventions expect to (and indeed do) secure funding across multiple years but have to 'jump through the necessary hoops' each year.

4.1.3   Partner Input

Where it works well, the AAP Boards have been largely successful in bringing partners from a diverse range of organisations together. Connections are made, networks are formed and conversations continue outside of AAP Board Meetings. It is important to retain this element of delivery.

Our research has identified that whilst the majority of AAPs operate as expected, a number continue to suffer from low involvement and attendance. Overall, public involvement on AAP Boards is consistent but is not regarded as sufficiently diverse to be considered truly representative of communities. Police and Fire services regard AAP Board meetings as key to their engagement activities and attendance is strong. We have seen some

excellent engagement from Housing, Health and Voluntary sector partners, but this was not consistent across all AAPs. Most areas struggled to engage business sector organisations. These partners do occasionally engage in Task & Finish Groups. It is important to ensure that the evolving structure explores the opportunities to involve such partners in the most appropriate way.

For young people especially, there is need to consider the role of incentives to generate engagement. Consideration should be given to boosting capacity across the team to support young people to engage in a meaningful way across the county.

The size of each AAP is so different that the experience of a being a Board Member, or of applying to be a Board Member varies. In smaller AAPs there is a reduced pool of public members willing to undertake the role, so terms are often extended. In larger areas not all County Councillors have the opportunity to be represented on the AAP Board.

4.1.4   Local Data and Performance Information Input

The priority is attached to community priorities rather than any objective use of data in determining the priority themes for each AAP each year.

Our research identified reference that the use of the Durham Insights portal and other quantitative data in developing local priorities is limited. There was limited evidence of systematic development of needs assessments or local insight which could be shared and acted upon. Aligning locality boundaries to data units e.g. lower level super output areas would be advantageous.

4.2   Activities

AAP staff are often a first point of contact or are signposted as a point of contact from wider stakeholders. Issues are discussed and questions get answered. It is important that this resource is retained in the future model. It is evident that much of AAP Coordinators and wider staff time is utilised providing support and assistance to County Councillors, albeit some much more than others.

There is greater scope for AAP staff to contribute to the development of policy and strategy led from County Hall at a much earlier stage. Their knowledge in relation to local community needs, opportunities, etc. seems under-utilised.

4.2.1   AAP Functions and Board Operation

Whilst the Terms of Reference provides the bedrock of AAP delivery, it is evident that within this framework some AAPs deliver differently. This includes the process for understanding community priorities via direct engagement; the process of funding calls (or not); retention of Board Members after terms expire; and the response to issues after Board Meetings i.e. sharing of summary actions and not waiting weeks for minutes, etc. There is a need for a consistent approach to be delivered.

Our research gathered data on the effectiveness of current AAP functions via an e-survey that generated 267 responses. The proportion of respondents who stated "Agree" or "Strongly Agree" to particular statements about the impact of AAPs are summarised below.

- The AAP makes a positive difference in the community through delivering funding: 88%

- The AAP helps DCC and partners act at a very local level: 84%

- The AAP helps communities to speak up and ensure all voices are heard: 84%

- The AAP encourages local people be involved in shaping their communities: 82%

- The AAP supports people to take an active involvement in developing new ideas and projects: 82%

- The AAP helps partners to effectively combine their efforts in a local area: 80%

- The AAP helps identify local needs and understanding of what would make a difference in the AAP area: 79%

- The AAP recognise, celebrates and support the role and contribution of individuals in improving their communities: 77%

- The AAPs streamline and focus cross-public sector consultation with local people: 73%

- The AAP supports the impact of the County Durham Partnership and its thematic groups in achieving its priority outcomes: 66%

- The AAP makes a positive difference in the community by encouraging voluntary community action (unfunded): 63%

We understand that the majority of people responding to the survey were likely to be already engaged in the AAP structure. Some respondents will have benefitted from the AAP process in any number of ways and may therefore have an interest in their AAP continuing in its current form. For example, there was limited support for reducing many of the functions. Many respondents cited the need for more funding. There was support for increasing the activities of the AAP staff team, including delivering more grassroots community development. Figure 4.3 below provides insight from respondents on priorities looking forward.

Figure 4.3: Survey responses about AAP activity levels

Survey responses for AAP Activity Levels	We need much more %	We need more %	It's about right %	We should do less %	We should do much less %	Don't know %
Board Meetings	0.52	4.64	72.68	6.19	1.55	14.43
Task and Finish Groups	1.55	16.49	62.37	2.58	2.06	14.95
Forum	2.59	17.1	56.99	1.55	2.07	19.69
Identifying local needs	5.61	26.53	56.63	1.53	1.53	8.16
Reporting and communication	3.59	11.79	74.36	1.54	0.51	8.21
Funding	14.36	32.31	45.64	2.56	1.03	4.1
Consultation	7.67	20.51	62.56	1.54	1.03	6.67
Support to elected member	4.06	5.08	63.96	3.05	3.55	20.3
AAP Team activities	7.69	30.77	46.67	0.51	1.54	12.82

The common view is that activity levels across a range of variables seem "about right". The strongest views for enhanced activity relate to funding (i.e. to process more funding via AAPs) and for identifying local needs.

Whilst the overall findings are positive, there were some less positive responses made from 14 respondents, who responded negatively to every question. They tended to be County Councillors, 10 of whom were not active AAP members. These responses disproportionally represent a small number of AAPs. This reflects our wider understanding that some AAPs are regarded as operating less effectively for some partners than others.

AAP Board meetings are the principal mechanism for regular and frequent community engagement. These were observed to be formal meetings, expertly facilitated and minuted, with set agendas often including presentations of county wide updates or consultation, partner updates, and scrutiny of funding applications.

We observed the majority of AAP Board meetings. They were efficiently managed in progressing the business on the agenda. Contributions were generally well managed by the Chair, with priority of response given to Board Members, and more limited opportunities for input from community observers. Many funding applications presented at AAP Board meetings had previously been developed and/or scrutinised by Task and Finish Groups, which tended to be less formal and more collaborative.

The prescribed structure of Board Membership serves to limit new and different voices at each meeting. The Board Meetings are too formalised and too structured around agreeing small pots of funding. They are not typically an arena for in-depth debate on key issues due to the sheer volume of core business to be completed during each meeting.

In most AAPs there is openness and respect between staff, public representatives, statutory partners and County Councillors, regardless of party-political lines. In other areas, the AAP is less collaborative; engagement of statutory partners is low; there is distrust; decision making on funding priorities is often regarded as being driven by political allegiances of public representatives; and funding is allocated to organisations that either don't deliver and/or expect annual funding from Area Budget as matter of course.

Capacity for enhanced community engagement, community development and capacity building can only be achieved if current elements of the process are rationalised and the roles of delivery staff evolved. Streamlining the administration of funding pots is an obvious starting point.

4.2.2 Wider AAP Organisational Infrastructure

Behind the AAP Boards sits a number of processes and activities that underpin activity. This includes the AAP Forum, Task and Finish Groups and one to one support from AAP staff to stakeholders.

There is evidence that historically AAPs carried out a much wider range of community engagement activities and events, such as participatory budgeting, school events, open forums, outreach and engagement. Our research identified a willingness from staff to undertake more of this activity but their capacity to carry out more grass roots community engagement activity was curtailed by increased administration required to manage funding.

AAP Forums form a wider network of people who have previously engaged in an interaction focussed upon asking them what they think is important to them. It could be someone who engaged at a community event or who has responded to an online conversation. Since the

pandemic there has been limited work in engaging with the wider community in AAP related activity.

Our research has identified that the approach to Task and Finish Groups is largely successful in enabling space for genuine discussion on key issues that lead to service improvement. This is especially the case where groups are focussed on collaborative problem solving, rather than scrutinising funding applications.

AAP Forums and outreach events have historically attracted large numbers of people. It is important that any future mechanism is underpinned by space for all interested residents, County Councillors and wider stakeholders to discuss issues, ideas and solutions.

4.3   Outputs: Listen, Design, Connect, Facilitate

AAP Teams provide an area-based approach to delivery, facilitating some reach into communities. A local connection to DCC is highly valued. Community representatives engaged in our research highlighted that they are a mechanism to inform and influence delivery. For many, County Hall, literally and metaphorically, seems a long way away.

Our research has identified that AAP Teams understand their localities and communities. Low turnover of staff, combined with the relative longevity of the AAP approach has assisted in embedding knowledge. The AAP Team had a key role as part of the recent responses to hyper-local needs, such as the Covid pandemic and the post-Storm Arwen response.

AAP Boards can be a valuable mechanism for the sharing community intelligence. In observing AAP Boards we have seen examples of public representatives, County Councillors, DCC staff, wider partners and AAP staff demonstrating a deep-rooted understanding of the community infrastructure. It is important the any transition to a refreshed model of community engagement considers how those partners currently adding value are supported and encouraged to continue engaging.

Our research has identified some positive examples of local voluntary organisations working much more collaboratively as a result of AAP led activity. There remains scope to deliver more of this by releasing additional staff capacity from administrative roles related to funding. Whilst we know that some collaboration occurs through organic connections, further resourcing of community development staff to facilitate greater reach, including into rural communities where perhaps there is greater need due to a lack of wider services, should be a priority.

We have seen some good examples of AAPs coordinating activity that spans their boundary. There is scope for further joint working as at present there are too many piecemeal interventions funded that could be delivered much more efficiently across a larger area.

4.4   Outcomes and Impact

AAPs have been successful in facilitating new projects and providing funding to local organisations and communities, with more than 2,000 projects funding in 2021-22. Since the commencement of AAPs, funding has supported:

- 9,540 schemes supporting voluntary and community group activities.

- 3,914 supporting community buildings/facilities.

- 8,344 road safety initiatives.

- 1,820 schemes aimed at delivering a cleaner, more attractive, and sustainable environment.

- 619 schemes aimed at improving the quality of life, independence, care and support for people with long term conditions.

This has resulted in:

- 24,738 people engaged in voluntary work.

- 15,126 people benefitting from schemes that reduce the impact of welfare reform.

- 32,913 people benefitting from schemes to protect victims and vulnerable people from harm.

- 9,454 people undertaking training courses.

- 553 jobs being created.

- 61,597 people involved in initiatives aimed at improving mental health/ wellbeing.

- 160,343 children and young people benefitting from schemes to support them in achieving and maintaining optimal mental health and wellbeing.

Whilst at first glance these figures seem impressive, this is expected given the scale of the funding allocated since AAPs commenced. What is evident is that there remains a demand in localities for ongoing investment. There is still more to do. Whilst funding is part of the solution, there is a need to consider more innovative, locally driven solutions. A revised approach that prioritises resources upon community development and local capacity building should be part of this.

Whilst the process for appraising funding is sophisticated, there are less advanced systems for monitoring the outcomes and impact generated. Monitoring information is not systematically assessed and used for evaluation and learning, and evaluation skills and resources are limited. Information is collected from projects and is often (but not always) reported back to the AAP Board. Given the scale of interventions funded across Durham each year, it is simply not possible to understand the overall impact generated and any assessment of value for money.

Some AAPs arrange project visits via Board Champions to enhance understanding of projects. There is value in retaining this approach in any future model.

Our research has identified an overall lack of awareness of the role of AAPs and what they deliver by the majority of population of Durham. AAP staff teams do consider opportunities to publicise their AAP, but effectiveness varies. AAP good news stories are less likely to be included in the County Durham News than in previous years. Branding of AAP projects is

not widespread or consistent, and so positive impacts are not always attributed to the AAPs (and therefore DCC as funders of the function).

In some areas there is a deficit in local capacity and/or an expectation the AAP Teams will take the lead in delivering. Other voluntary and community sector organisations or volunteers could be better placed to lead, but there is a need to develop capacity for the community to take greater responsibility. In the context of ongoing funding pressures, it becomes even more important to use resources more effectively between partners, and support communities to develop their own capacity to make changes. An increased focus for the AAP Teams in developing community capacity would support this.

5 Community Engagement, Community Development and Local Capacity Building

This section of the report outlines recommended changes to deliver improved community engagement, community development and enhance local capacity building.

5.1 The Case for Continued Investment

There is sound evidence that community development can facilitate sustained, positive change, individually and collectively and reducing demand on services. The Community Planning Toolkit[2] articulates the evidence and thinking behind community development in the below comparison between areas with and without community development functions.

Where there is No or Weak Community Development a locality often has these characteristics	Where there is Community Development a locality often has these characteristics
The most disadvantaged people receive poor quality services and are less able to articulate needs.	People are more confident and able to shape the quality of their lives.
Communities miss out on opportunities and are more excluded.	There is more involvement and positive citizenship.
People are unable to agree issues and priorities and to have these recognised by decision makers.	Communities and their leaders better understand wider issues and how to influence change.
Cultural differences are less likely to be respected.	There is a planned approach to tackling issues by communities and public bodies.
There is less volunteering and fewer skilled community groups.	Areas have a better image, can point to improvements in quality of life and are better able to attract economic investment.
Public bodies find it difficult to engage with people and communities.	Young people who gain qualifications and employment are more likely to stay and the area is more likely to attract employed people, thus increasing spending.
People who gain employment may move out thus reducing the pool of skills and spending in the area.	Communities take more responsibility for developing their own services, enterprises and social economies.
The area may have a poor reputation and fail to attract economic investment and opportunities.	People are more capable and supported to take advantage of economic and employment growth in the wider city.
People are less resilient and capable of benefiting from wider economic change.	

[2] communityplanningtoolkit.org from Big Lottery and Community Places

Effective community development mechanisms can support new projects, activities and services, funded through procurement, grant funding, or voluntary action. Community engagement can improve feedback on existing services: where they operate from, how they can increase uptake, how they should be targeted or marketed.

5.2   Principles of Successful Delivery

We explored the approach to community engagement nationally and internationally, reviewed the academic literature in this area, and considered what would be most relevant to consider for structuring the engagement mechanisms in Durham.

The challenges of community engagement

- Formal meeting structures are inaccessible and not a useful tool for ideas generation or collaboration, they are better for scrutiny but can become combative. Less formal participation activities drive better and wider participation.

- Participation is strongly correlated to income/wealth and education and political engagement – in other words members of the civic core tend to turn up. While these citizens may not always be representative of the local population as a whole, they tend to have multiple "hats", lots of experience and commitment, plus the time and ability to take action. However, it is important not to base understanding of local needs solely on the views of the civic core. Such people should be welcomed and engaged, alongside efforts to encourage and support others to also become involved.

- Good community engagement can lead to increased volunteering and more community groups, with communities taking more responsibility for developing their own solutions without services, but this generally needs to be supported and facilitated.

- People need to be supported and educated on key issues in order to make good decisions. Training and skills in community development or structural issues are needed to inform meaningful changes, for all participants.

- Politics - small P, and big P – and organisational structures are a major challenge and barrier in citizen led change. Organisational representatives should attempt to overcome political and structural conflict and boundaries to support communities to make a difference.

- Community members often care most immediately about physical issues in their local environment – play areas, dog litter etc.

- Identifying need in a way that creates actionable insight for health and social care is complex, and a developing practice. Data to inform and underpin this needs to be provided by "anchor institutions" like local authorities and health partners.

- Online tools and time limited engagement are useful in widening participation.

- Engagement with young people is often most successful through schools or youth activities.

What you need

- Paid worker support in the community is key to building and maintaining networks and helping to facilitate change.

- Community development generally requires the availability of "seed funding" or small pots of project funding, with minimal barriers to access.

- Community Centres are key to facilitating local solutions and involving local people. Co-location of staff in community locations is a good way to make community links to both residents and local paid workers.

- Many community groups or local agencies are hampered by a lack of access to resources that can be provided easily and cheaply by larger partners to support collaborative innovation. These can be called 'slack resources' and include things like collaborative spaces; facilitation of 'serendipitous' meetings between local actors; capability and capacity for evaluation and communication of failures and successes. If these resources are provided by local authorities and staff, other community development activities can be maximised.

5.3   Resourcing Community Development

We recommend significant changes to how the functions of AAPs are delivered. We recommend that a team of Senior Community Coordinators, Community Coordinators and Community Development Workers are resourced to deliver a new wave of community engagement, community development and community capacity building.

The current AAP model provides a role for members of the public to take an active role in determining how the Area Budget and other funding streams are prioritised. Our recommendation is to remove this function. The public role instead will become one of engaging in meaningful discussion about what needs to improve in their area and informing how this is best delivered in partnership with other organisations. With additional frontline resource, this open community engagement, working alongside residents should lead to more informed solutions, some of which may require funding (but many won't).

We recommend that the revised community development function prioritises:

- Supporting residents and VCS organisations with one to one support.

- Taking a lead role in enabling networks and collaboration across voluntary and community sector (VCS) and wider partner within and beyond the locality.

- Assisting local people to develop the capability to start operating new projects and initiatives in response to known local needs.

- Supporting organisations secure project funding for the first time. Assist in developing individual/organisational systems and resilience.

- Identifying gaps in local VCS provision and commence a process of 'grow your own' to respond to need.

- Supporting the development of local intelligence on priorities and needs, either at a community or county level.

- Providing a visible and trusted presence in communities, including often under-represented communities and remote villages and settlements.

- Enabling a degree of insight beyond the existing level i.e. to recognise the hidden issues that exist.

- Able to react quickly to emerging needs.

- Managing a small community chest to stimulate community engagement.

- Producing a directory of community buildings, contact details and timetable of activities, etc.

- Delivering community engagement to inform strategic priorities.

- Working closely with all County Councillors to share insights.

- Developing a culture of partnership, including bridging the gap between party-political differences.

It is important that staff time is not overly diluted by involvement in planning and managing funding streams. The current administrative burden on staff needs to be reduced to free up more time for grass root community development work.

We recommend a clear refresh of brand to reflect new focus. This should involve the change of the name of AAPs to Community Networks. We also recommend that the Area Budget is modified and retitled Strategic Grants. Further detail is included in Section 6.

We recommend the cessations of AAP Board meetings to be replaced by regular (perhaps bi-monthly) Community Network meetings that focus on a rotating theme. The themes would link to need and the County Durham Partnership subgroups (Youth, Community Safety, Economic Development, etc).

Meetings would be open access, with no 'top table' of selected Board Members. County Councillors should be encouraged to attend. The Community Network meetings would be chaired by Senior Community Coordinators/ Community Coordinators. Formal minuting of meetings should be reduced to minuting actions only, and for meetings this responsibility could and should be with wider partners to undertake.

The Community Network meetings should not be the only engagement point. More varied, flexible engagement methods should be adopted as routine, including the best functions of existing Task and Finish Groups and AAP Forums, with a range of other options including one to one meetings, networking events, and other small group meetings. This flexible method should enable enhanced working with other partners based on community issues e.g. Parish and Town Councils.

Greater collaboration with local partners could facilitate coordinated responses across a number of areas including the prepatation of:

- Newsletters and communications.

- Directories of services and activities (potentially utilising Durham Families Information Service Directory).

- Databases of community members and partners or training and skills opportunities.

Appendix A provides a list of engagement activities which have been successful elsewhere and should be used in designing detailed approaches in each Community Network.

New success metrics should be developed that emphasise engagement and partnership working.

Engagement with young people is often most successful through schools or youth activities. We recommend dedicated resource to enhancing young people's engagement in each Community Network.

5.4 Delivering from Local Bases

We recommend that Community Network Teams be based in community centres, libraries, warm spaces, family hubs etc. Co-location can give benefits in access to communities and tacit knowledge of other staff. These community spaces present opportunities for AAP staff to increase their visibility.

6   Funding

This section of the report outlines the options and recommendations for prioritising and managing funding area-based structures.

6.1   Introduction

DCC funding to AAPs via the Area Budget and Neighbourhood Budget has enabled a diverse range of important projects to be funded. We recognise that DCC has to find savings in the setting of its budget for 2023/24, and that this may impact what, and at what scale, funding packages continue for future AAP-type structures. The cessation or significant reduction in budgets will have an impact upon local organisations, local delivery of services and outcomes on local people.

6.2   Reducing the Administrative Burden

There is a requirement to reduce the administration associated with funding processed through locality structures. We recommend streamlining current forms and monitoring processes for all applications. This will enable resources from within the team to be directed towards frontline community development. It will also release capacity from project leads, including DCC Officers across departments.

We also recommend the implementation of a specialist external ICT system to manage online applications. Our research has identified alternatives to the current funding administration system. These are summarised below.

Figure 6.1: Delivery options for funding

Delivery options for funding
Durham County Council in-house funding team • **5p per £1** last year, varies from 4p to 11p. Cost is £280k for funding team • Appraisal only • Excluding Town and Villages, who have their own funding officers for an additional £4m. With them, 8p per £1 last year
Community Foundation • Up to **10p per £1**, cost would be between £350k and £1m pa, £373k last year without Neighbourhood budget • Includes decision making facilitation and appraisal, facilitated independently • Connected to local charities and other funds. Not likely to be able to support Neighbourhood Budgets or link to DCC departments
Durham County Council with funding software • Specialist funding software, online forms, reporting, contracts, monitoring. Should provide efficiencies • Appraisal only • **Additional 0.5p per £1** in Y1, and **0.2p** for subsequent years. Approx 14k pa, plus £20-25k set up costs.
NEPO and Bloom • Cost to supplier of 5% • Appraisal only • Technically some differences between grant funding and procurement. Not likely to be able to support Neighbourhood Budgets or link to DCC departments. Bureaucratic and difficult for small organisations

The progression with such a model is related to the level of funding expected to flow via Community Networks.

New approaches to support delivery of capital projects should be implemented that minimise the requirement for Senior/Community Coordinators to develop. This responsibility should be with staff from the Funding Team directly, albeit with some input from Community Coordinators where this would support targeting of support, etc.

6.3   Area Budget and Strategic Grants

We recommend that the Area Budget should transition to a new Strategic Grant programme, adopting a more strategic approach to allocating the funding based on a four-year funding cycle tied to the electoral cycle. This approach would have a number of benefits:

- Enabling a window for comprehensive community engagement to determine a clear strategic approach to funding priorities during the first 12 months of the electoral cycle.

- Reduce the bureaucracy with partners bidding on an annual cycle for the same projects.

- Reduce the resource required to appraise and approve projects, releasing staff to focus more time on genuine community development.

- Provide greater certainty, increasing opportunities for match funding and for retaining staff on three-year rather than 12-month contracts.

- Improve opportunities to increase match funding from external sources that otherwise would not be secured, bringing additional investment into County Durham.

- Enable interventions to be coordinated across multiple Community Network areas.

- Provide organisations three years to develop a plan for sustainability post Strategic Grant funding.

- Provide clarity to organisations that continued funding for the same intervention across four-year cycles would not be allowed.

The Senior/Community Coordinators would co-produce their programme with the community and partners, sharing ideas at Community Network meetings and with involvement of County Councillors. We recommend that formal approval of funding should be through a sub-group established by the County Durham Partnership. Such an approach would be transparent, separating decision making from the project development phase. There is scope to design a process that is evidence-based, objective and based on criteria agreed by DCC (as the funder),

The transition to the four-year funding cycle would commence in May 2025. If the recommendation is agreed, then consideration needs to be given to the transiton between 2023/24 and 2024/25. If the funding level is retained in the DCC budget, then there is the opportunity to utilise funding to focus on tackling the cost of living crisis.

The Area Budget amount is standard across each AAP, regardless of the population served. This means that the smallest AAP gains much more funding per head of population than the largest AAP. Should the Strategic Grants process be adopted, it is recommended that each locality receives a base level of funding with an uplift allocated on a population size basis. There is potential to factor other variables into the funding model, including the level of disadvantage and the existing VCS infrastructure that is able to draw wider funding into the area.

6.4   Neighbourhood Budget

At present, Neighbourhood Budgets have to be approved using the same intensive process as the Area Budget. Our recommendations are that:

- A light touch approach to appraisal and approval is adopted, reducing the administrative requirements. Such an approach will enable projects to be designed and commenced within a shorter timescale than at present. It reduces the administrative burden on project proposers, including DCC staff that typically account for a third of the overall Neighbourhood Budget projects each year.

- County Councillors are not required to report the use of their Neighbourhood Budget back to the Community Network.

- County Councillors are encouraged to attend their Community Network, participate in discussions and use insights to inform prioritisation of their Neighbourhood Budget.

- County Councillors can use their Neighbourhood Budget to boost activity funded via the Strategic Grant i.e. fund an additional youth worker for their ward/group of wards with agreement of other County Councillors.

- County Councillors have a dedicated contact within the Funding Team to support the planning and delivery of interventions funded via their Neighbourhood Budget.

- A brochure of regular capital items be developed i.e. bins, 20mph zone etc. to inform County Councillors of the approximate costs of interventions.

One option identified through the consultation was to increase the level of the Neighbourhood Budget allocated to each County Councillor funded by the cessation of Area Budgets. This has some advantages, including ensuring that funding is equally distributed across the county and enabling higher value schemes to be funded.

Such an approach does present challenges. One issue of the current system is the capacity within DCC to progress so many projects within a timescale deemed acceptable to County Councillors and wider stakeholders. Even with a streamlined system for allocating funding, increasing the Neighbourhood Budget without additional capacity within DCC departments to support the design, costing and delivery of projects will lead to even further delays in delivery.

6.5   Community Economic Development

A number of AAPs currently fund a range of employability support programmes. We see the value of these on a local level. There is a dislocation between the priority attached to economic development activity, as AAPs tend to undervalue this compared to the corporate priority of DCC. The cessation of funding from European Structural Investment Funds, the transition to UK Shared Prosperity Fund and the emerging possibility of a devolution deal

for Durham mean that resourcing from 2023 is uncertain. There is scope for a structured approach to resourcing economic development interventions by ring-fencing the Strategic Grant. Coordinating activity can present opportunities for economies of scale whilst reducing the risk of duplication.

The Levelling Up White Paper also sets out a new devolution framework for England and this presents an opportunity for Durham. There is a role for locality-based structures to contribute to localised insight and localised delivery.

6.6   Wider Funding

The AAP structure is a vital mechanism for delivering targeted programmes to communities. We recommend that the Community Network is used to inform priorities but that decisions are taken by Senior/Community Coordinators.

We recommend that Community Development Workers have access to a discretionary Community Chest to support new and/or small scale activity in their area. We propose a £300 limit for new organisations that have been operating for less than three years or that have annual turnover of less than £1,000. There should be a light-touch approval process to remove barriers to access for people who may have not previously accessed funding. The process cannot be a barrier to engagement.

7 Managing Delivery

This section of the report summarises the options for locality-based delivery across the county. It outlines recommendations for structuring geographical arrangements for delivery and the resource required to underpin the recommended model.

7.1 Locality Delivery

The recommended evolution of AAPs to Community Networks underpinned by community development. The starting point for determining boundaries of Community Networks needs to be informed by the ideal footprint for coverage of Senior/Community Coordinators, Community Development Workers, support staff and Funding Officers. Based on our understanding of existing delivery and from experience elsewhere, we would recommend an effective system can be delivered on the basis of 14-18 evenly sized (by population) geographical units of delivery across Durham.

Taking the existing AAP structure as a starting point, this could be delivered by retaining the existing AAP operational boundaries with the exception of splitting the East Durham AAP into two (or even three) separate units. There could be scope under this option for Weardale and Teesdale to share a Senior/Community Coordinator.

The second option would be for Community Network boundaries to align with the new electoral ward boundaries due to come into effect in 2025. With the reduction of County Councillors from 126 to 98, this could lend itself to structuring localities on the basis of seven areas each with 14 County Councillors (and their associated Neighbourhood Budgets). If DCC decide to increase the value of Neighbourhood Budgets then this option makes more sense. One concern is that electoral ward boundaries do not always reflect natural communities. Some flexibility may be required in the number of clusters to ensure the best fit.

The third option would be for Community Networks to align with PCN boundaries (shown overleaf). Alignment of coterminous boundaries presents opportunities. There is considerable overlap between the 'wider determinants of health' agenda in the Health and Care Bill and the requirement from PCN/ICB to resource community development activity. Aligning resources will present efficiencies in staffing and data analysis functionality.

There is some evidence that health is unevenly represented on existing AAP Boards, so closer alignment of operational boundaries would encourage joint working. Budgets for commissioning are linked to PCN boundaries, so in principle Community Networks can provide intelligence to inform resource decisions.

The Derwentside PCN is large, so we would propose splitting this into two. This arrangement would lead to 14 Community Networks. It is recommended that further analysis is undertaken of the PCN option, to consider the potential to amend boundaries to better align with new ward boundaries. PCN borders are approximate, so can be flexible to consultation, natural settlements and alignment with other boundaries.

There is a risk that any change to boundaries would disrupt the level of local knowledge, networks and partnerships that have been established over time, and are essential to the functioning of the AAPs. However, this risk is mitigated if staff are retained.

There is a secondary risk that health boundaries may evolve further. It is expected that a period of transition will be required to any evolving model, so this can be monitored during 2023.

7.2   Resourcing and Managing Delivery

We have considered how the Community Networks could be resourced on the basis of the existing staffing levels across the AAP service. However, this does need to respond to the implementation (or not) of the recommendations made in this report.

We recommend that the management and staffing structure should include: an overall Senior Manager to lead the Community Networks and oversee Strategic Grant funding; and a Senior Community Coordinator or Community Coordinator (current AAP Coordinator-type role) and a minimum of one Community Development Worker for each Community Network.

It is recommended that the 14 Community Networks are packaged into larger clusters, each with a Senior Community Coordinator to oversee strategic delivery. These seven operational clusters of Community Networks would each have an administration and funding officer to support delivery of Neighbourhood Budgets and Strategic Grants (if agreed). In summary, this would require seven Senior Community Coordinators and seven Community Coordinators.

Each Senior Community Coordinator would specialise in a thematic area aligned to County Durham Partnership priorities, with responsibility to coordinate and share knowledge within Community Networks and acting as a conduit to wider partners e.g. DCC Economic Development Team, Business Durham, etc.

Changes to how current funding is managed will impact upon the role of the Funding Team. We recommend that the Funding Team are the main resource to support County Councillors with their Neighbourhood Budget. There is a requirement that the Funding Team develop an understanding of the key issues across their clusters and we expect that Senior/Community Coordinators would have some role in assisting project development.

We also recommend staffing resource be allocated towards:

- Evaluating the impact of the investment with a consistent set of tools.

- Marketing and publicity to drive up community knowledge of how to engage with Community Networks and publicise achievements.

- Supporting young people to engage. We recommend separate roles including Data and Insight and Evaluation Lead; Marketing Lead, Youth Lead, Training and improvement lead.

County Durham CCG - GP Practice Primary Care Networks

Primary Care Network (PCN) borders within the CCG are arbitrary, and have been produced to show the approximate areas covered by each PCN. They should not be used as actual borders to determine PCN areas or be used to directly influence any decision making. Populations for each GP Practice have been summarised for each PCN and are published via NHS Digital, they are correct as of 1st January 2020.

Primary Care Networks

- Chester-le-Street (56,719)
- Claypath (34,886)
- Dales 1 (29,867)
- Bishop Auckland PCN (37,977)
- Teesdale PCN (24,358)
- Derwentside (94,063)
- Durham East (27,337)
- Durham West (51,496)
- Easington Central (33,533)
- Easington District (32,417)
- North Easington (37,185)
- Sedgefield 1 (41,983)
- Sedgefield North (56,462)

Produced by: Thomas Luck / Checked by: Dominic Rowney

Data Sources:
CCG and STP boundaries via ONS. Contains National Statistics data © Crown copyright and database right 2017.
Practice locations via Ordnance Survey. Contains Royal Mail data © Royal Mail copyright and Database right 2017. Contains National Statistics data © Crown copyright and database right 2017.
Roads via OpenStreetMap. Contains OpenStreetMap data © OpenStreetMap contributors.
Raw List Sizes from NHS Digital as of 1st January 2020.

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Appendix A: Creative Methods of Community Engagement

Traditionally, **public meetings** are often taken as the standard practice within community engagement activity[3]. These approaches often adopt a formalised and structured format with pre-determined agendas or discussion topics, which can be beneficial in gathering together large numbers of people to share information and gather feedback. However, there are also disadvantages to using public meetings. Attendance at these more structured meetings is likely to be higher for issues which are particularly controversial and where more people feel concerned or angry, which might limit the usefulness of the information that can be gathered. Similarly, attendance at public meetings is unlikely to be representative of a whole community, as some people are more inclined and able to attend than others. However, several alternative and innovative models have emerged. These creative and alternative approaches may be used in isolation or in combination with public meetings and other traditional approaches.

Visioning is an activity which might be beneficial for identifying common ground, establishing consensus, and generating some ideals for informing future strategy. However, these activities are best suited for use with participants with a high level of knowledge and skills in engagement and interaction, such as policymakers, local electives and other strategic partners. They may be less accessible to wider communities. They are also not well-suited to discussing topics which are highly contested, as they rely on some common ground from which to establish a strategic plan and action plan.

The **Open House** approach involves a more flexible public gathering, where project information is displayed for participants to engage with and view at their own pace, in combination with the presence of the project team to answer questions and respond to feedback[3]. The flexibility of this approach, which does not involve a formalised presentation, is useful for widening the scope of engagement to include a broader demographic e.g. families or parents with young children who might otherwise be unable to sit quietly through a formal presentation. These events are also often held over days or weekends, meaning that participants are free to engage and attend when they are able. It is crucial to consider the accessibility and neutrality of the venue, as well as the availability of a selection of the project team to engage face-to-face with the public.

Similarly, the **Open Space Technology**[4] model adopts a more open-ended structure in comparison to public meetings. These events are typically held over 1-3 days and follows a logical, but flexible, process comprising of several stages of activity. These activities begin with an informal 'opening circle' led by a facilitator to introduce the key issues, followed by agenda-setting amongst all participants. Participants then choose from the parallel workshops they wish to attend and move between workshops to discuss the issues. Discussions and comments are recorded, and the event is rounded off with a feedback session to report on issues raised during discussions. Following the event, all feedback comments are collated into a report format to be distributed to participants. This model is particularly suited to exploring complex topics with the potential for high levels of conflict, whilst engaging a diverse range of individuals. The format is useful for introducing people to new ideas and perspectives and removing traditional 'us and them' barriers to engagement.

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[3] Hinge Collective (n.d.) Alternatives to Public Meetings. https://hinge-collective.com/s/5AlternativestoPublicMeetings-FINAL.pdf

[4] Involve.org.uk. https://involve.org.uk/resources/methods/open-space-technology

The agenda is set and moulded by participants as the event develops, leading to a 'self-organizing' format. However, participants are self-selecting and this format is unlikely to attract new people beyond those already likely to attend traditional meetings. The 'one-off' nature of such events may also make it difficult for some people to participate due to scheduling clashes.

Another creative method for engaging members of the community is the Block Party model[3]. This is a one-off outdoor neighbourhood event to generate interest in or celebrate a neighbourhood project or cause. The approach often draws upon community organizing, involving local residents in designing and organising the event, to increase reach and build excitement in the community whilst offering a welcoming and friendly environment. The events are designed to be enjoyable and informal, making them useful tools for community consultation in areas with high levels of 'consultation fatigue' or for engaging demographics who may be thought of as 'hard to reach' using more traditional methods of consultation, such as teenagers or children. The method can also be useful in building upon existing community connectedness by bringing together sub-groups of the local community who may not otherwise interact with each other, such as students (a transient population) and community members[5], and by empowering local businesses, traders, artists and musicians to become involved in the event delivery.

Workshops and Focus Groups allow for smaller, in-depth discussions on a focussed topic, and can be targeted towards certain demographics including typically excluded communities or 'hard to reach' groups[6]. In communities where there is no clear central or accessible venue for all communities, where there are hard-to-reach groups, or where multiple languages are spoken, **Small Workshops** may be a useful tool for delivering community engagement[3]. This involves a series of small, focussed meetings or discussions which take place across several locations in the community, and which are led by partner organisations who are recognised and trusted by members of the community. This method requires experienced facilitators to ensure that all voices are heard, not just those individuals who are particularly outspoken. To ensure that all members of the community are given an opportunity to have their say, and not just those who are already involved with a specific partner organisation, these workshops may be combined with other approaches.

Forums or **Citizens' Panels** may involve similar activities to workshops and focus groups but involving a more regular format and with repeat attendees comprising of the same group. Forums may be beneficial in maintaining momentum and enthusiasm and can be used to engage 'hard to reach' groups where focussed upon a specific concern or priority. This can then form the basis of broader engagement as the themes and activities develop. However, group membership can be a challenge, as attendance may be limited to a small group of proactive or enthusiastic citizens at the expense of broader engagement. There is the potential for such forums to become rule-bound and bureaucratic and structured like more traditional public meetings. Conversely, there may also be an overemphasis on discussion, consensus building and deliberation over action.

Tabling is another creative approach for raising awareness of and consulting residents on a community project or issue. This method involves the installation of a table or exhibit at

[5] Wilsey, Whelpley & Welty (2017) Community Engagement in a Former Steel Town: The Role of a Living-Learning Community. https://encompass.eku.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1111&context=prism

[6] Community Places (XXXX) Community Planning Toolkit: Community Engagement. https://www.communityplanningtoolkit.org/community-engagement

an everyday location where large numbers of people likely to hold some stake in the project would already gather, such as a local park, transport hub, or community event[3]. The exhibit is typically staffed by community partners or team members who are knowledgeable about the project and able to answer questions and hold in-depth discussions with interested residents. The exhibit may include incentives to take part, such as a raffle or prize draw, or creative spaces for children and young people to participate through drawing, model building, or idea generating. This approach is beneficial for increasing reach with a diverse range of people who may not otherwise know about the project or where there may be a lack of community partners able to assist with delivering events and activities. This approach also enables residents to engage with the consultation at a level they deem appropriate, whether that is simply learning about the project, leaving a comment or feedback, or having an in-depth discussion with staff. This method can be combined with activities such as **community mapping** (see for instance the use of 'actor mapping' by Sport England in the You've Got This South Tees Local Delivery Pilot, where residents and stakeholders were invited to explore community priorities and issues[7]).

Another interactive approach is the Walkshop; this involves a public meeting which is held on a walking tour in the local neighbourhood[3]. This uses the neighbourhood landscape as a prompt for conversation and is particularly useful for consulting on issues of neighbourhood planning or community assets, or where there are complex issues which can be more easily understood with a visit. This method is beneficial in positioning community members as experts in their own neighbourhood. The visibility of this method in the local community also may draw in additional interest and attendance beyond those originally intending to engage, through striking up conversations during the walk. This method requires a skilled facilitator and representative who is knowledgeable about the location(s) of interest.

Methods of engagement involving **art and creative activities** might also be particularly beneficial for generating interest in projects and ideas and encouraging participation amongst a wider range of stakeholders including children and young people[6]. These activities might take place in combination with other methods and events outlined above and may include participant-led photography where individuals are given disposable cameras alongside a prompt such as "what do you like most about your area?", or competitions where people are invited to submit artwork, poems or written plans outlining their ideas.

Several methods also adopt the use of **virtual technologies** including digital platforms and web-based methods of engagement. However, there are also opportunities to harness existing web-based platforms based upon geographic proximity, such as the NextDoor app, although such methods raise additional considerations of digital exclusion and digital literacy.

There are also a range of **toolkits** designed to support policymakers to develop meaningful and relevant community engagement activities. For example, VOiCE (Visioning Outcomes in Community Engagement) is an IT-based tool designed by the Scottish Government to support the implementation of the National Standards for Community Engagement; the toolkit can be used to plan, develop and evaluate community engagement activities.

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[7] Sport England (2021) Understanding the system you are trying to shape. https://sportengland-production-files.s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/2021-10/Putting%20it%20into%20practice%20-%20understanding%20the%20system%20you%27re%20trying%20to%20shape.pdf?VersionId=y4QRROd19YWZkBRMiiZhW7K.0gnigZ1o

Appendix B: Analysis of Funding Linked to AAP

We have done some analysis of spend for the past three full financial years. Because of their relatively small size, the NBSGs accounted for 41% of the payments and transactions from the funding team.

Figure 1: Area Budget and Neighbourhood Budget Allocations by Theme

Theme	Area Budget (£)	Neighbourhood Budget
Covid-19/Covid-19 Recovery	£2.13m	£0.26m
Wealthier…	£0.81m	£1.30m
Children and Young People	£0.85m	£1.18m
Connecting Communities	£1.54m	£0.32m
Safer	£0.11m	£1.46m
Long and Independent Lives	£1.13m	£156k
Healthier	£0.65m	£0.39m
Greener	£0.13m	£0.42m
NBSG	£0	£0.51m
More and Better Jobs	£0.44m	£22k
An Excellent Council	£0	£0

COVID-19 and COVID Recovery had an additional allocation in 2020/21 and 2021/22. The Safer priority theme includes highways changes like 20mph zones, dropped kerbs and CCTV, which is more likely to be funded via Neighbourhood Budget. Environmental projects, such as parks and green spaces are also more likely to be funded via Neighbourhood Budget.

Figure 2: Average Size of Project by Funding Stream

Average Size of Project by Funding Stream	
Towns & Villages Fund	£26,613.20
Consett Community Facilities	£17,531.43
Members Towns & Villages Fund	£10,775.62
Social Isolation Fund	£7,584.47
Welfare Reform	£6,357.16
Area Budget	£5,353.32
Holiday Activities with Food - DCC	£1,079.74
Holiday Activities with food - D F E	£2,676.26
Youth Fund	£2211.65
Neighbourhood Budget Small Grants	£246.10
Members Neighbourhood Budget	£1566.48

In 2021/22, The Neighbourhood Budget was 25% of the total funding but accounted for 60% of total transactions. Holiday activities - Fun and Food also had significantly more transactions than the Area Budget.

Figure 3: Funding Amounts vs size of transactions

Funding Amounts vs size of transactions	2021/22 Fund Amounts £ (%)	2021/22 Fund Transactions (%)
Area Budget	52.20%	11.91%
Neighbourhood Budget	25.41%	60.26%
Holiday Activities with Food – DFE	13.76%	16.50%
Holiday Activities with Food – DCC	3.91%	10.52%
Others	4.71%	0.81%

Figure 4: Number of recipients and transactions by area

Transactions 2019/20 to 2021/22 excluding Neighbourhood Budget			
AAP	Number of Recipients	Funds Paid	Transactions
Mid Durham	66	£334,427.04	116
Durham City	64	£364,419.03	113
Derwent Valley	47	£359,708.50	70
East Durham	41	£360,112.00	95
Weardale	41	£314,913.23	93
3 Towns	39	£366,704.51	85
BASH	39	£409,589.54	74
GAMP	38	£334,977.41	67
Teesdale	36	£359,926.79	76
Chester-le-Street	35	£362,196.92	83
EDRC	33	£394,687.28	94
Spennymoor	33	£346,913.71	68
Stanley	28	£312,792.15	64
4 Together	24	£401,691.02	72
Cross County and other	17	£351,306.02	25
Total	**458**	**£5,374,365.15**	**1195**

Figure 5: Comparison of AAP Area Demographics and Spend 18/19

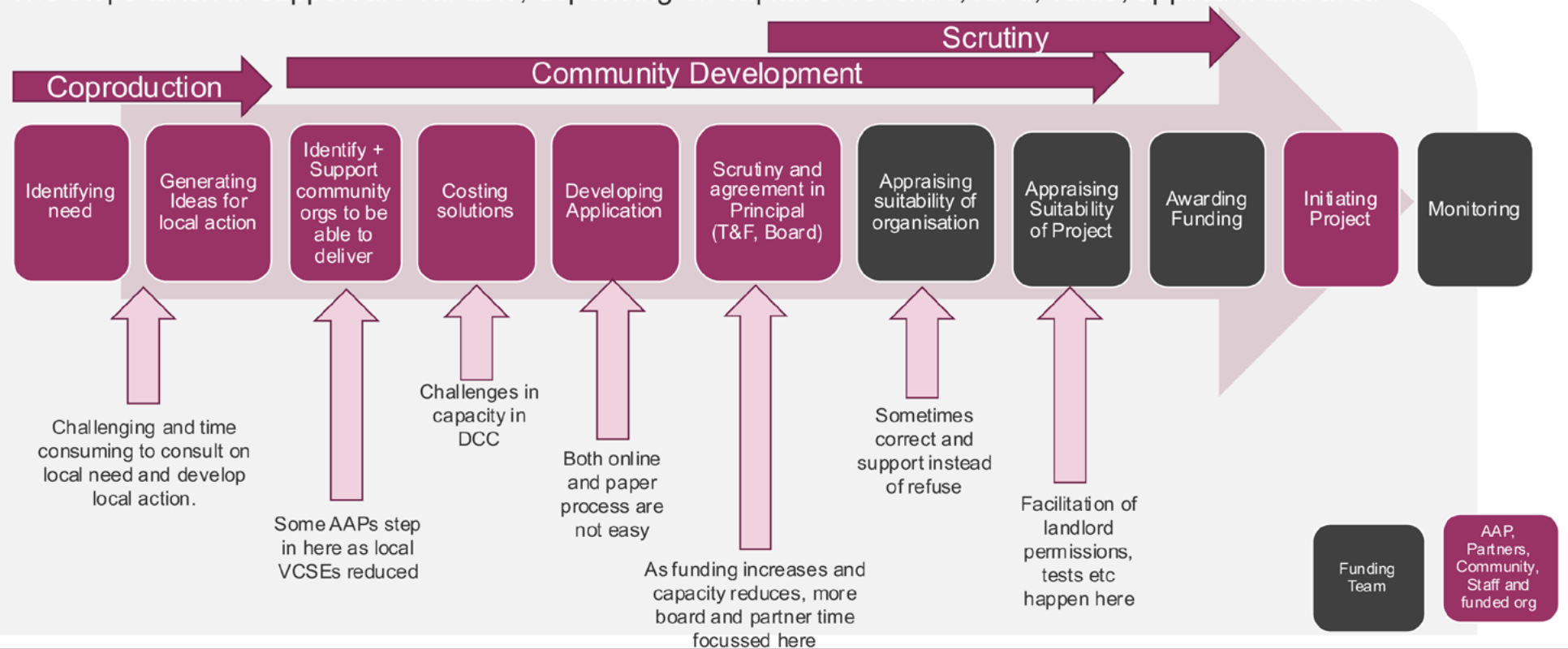| AAP Area	Population	IMD2019 % Population in the top 10%	Spend 18/19	Per capita 18/19
East Durham	93686	23%	£317,903	£ 3.39
Durham City	73681	4%	£300,656	£ 4.08
Chester-le-Street	54758	3%	£209,260	£ 3.82
Derwent Valley	47375	0%	£254,875	£ 5.38
BASH	43005	26%	£216,119	£ 5.03
Mid-Durham	34597	5%	£184,215	£ 5.32
Stanley	33680	8%	£211,943	£ 6.29
GAMP	26967	21%	£186,412	£ 6.91
East Durham Rural	25669	0%	£220,855	£ 8.60
3 Towns	25626	17%	£174,355	£ 6.80
Teesdale	25279	0%	£190,309	£ 7.53
Spennymoor	23306	13%	£172,489	£ 7.40
4 Together	17540	7%	£209,030	£ 11.92
Weardale	7980	0%	£147,306	£ 18.46
Grand Total	**533149**		**£3,059,657**	**£ 5.74**

Figure 6 shows how the process of funding support through AAPs differs from a traditional funder.

Figure 6: Funding Process

Current Steps to develop a project to the point of funding

The steps taken in support are variable, depending on capital or revenue, fund, value, applicant and area

Coproduction

Community Development

Scrutiny

Identifying need — Generating Ideas for local action — Identify + Support community orgs to be able to deliver — Costing solutions — Developing Application — Scrutiny and agreement in Principal (T&F, Board) — Appraising suitability of organisation — Appraising Suitability of Project — Awarding Funding — Initiating Project — Monitoring

Challenging and time consuming to consult on local need and develop local action.

Some AAPs step in here as local VCSEs reduced

Challenges in capacity in DCC

Both online and paper process are not easy

As funding increases and capacity reduces, more board and partner time focussed here

Sometimes correct and support instead of refuse

Facilitation of landlord permissions, tests etc happen here

Funding Team

AAP, Partners, Community, Staff and funded org

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Durham Community Engagement Review

Presentation of Headline Findings

January 2023

Introduction

ERS Ltd. commissioned in June 2022 to undertake a comprehensive review of community engagement process delivered by Durham County Council. The inclusive approach involved:

- Attendance at each AAP Board to observe activity, highlight the review and listen to perspectives of Board Members. At each meeting, the option for Board Members to contact ERS and arrange a one-to-one meeting was offered.
- One to one and small group meetings with a wider range of DCC staff, including Senior Managers, Heads of Service, AAP staff at all levels and role, and Towns & Villages support staff.
- Engagement with a number of County Councillors via one to one meetings alongside a session with informal Cabinet.
- One to one and small group interviews with wider partners including Durham Community Partnership, Durham Police, OPCC, Fire Service, Heath partners, and a number of voluntary sector partners that have accessed funding.
- Online workshops from representatives from Town and Parish Councils.
- Circulation and analysis of a stakeholder e-survey that generated 267 responses.
- Desk based review of local documentation and data alongside a review of national policy and good practice.

Strengths of the Current AAP Approach

The existing model of community engagement offer a number of positives to communities and wider partners:

- The AAPs are well established and provide a focus for informing, enabling, and monitoring activity in response on identified community priorities.
- AAP Board meetings largely operate well in prioritising and managing a range of funding streams.
- The process for developing, appraising and agreeing projects is robust.
- AAP Boards provide a space for DCC and partners to consult on key strategies.
- Task and Finish Groups are effective in developing ideas and solutions to local issues.
- AAP capacity is invaluable during times of crisis, including the pandemic and the response to Storm Arwen.
- AAP Staff Team are exceptionally well regarded and are open to looking at new approaches to delivering positive change for communities.

Rationale for revising the current approach

The existing model of community engagement offer a number of positives to communities and wider partners:

- The diversity and effectiveness of community outreach and engagement has reduced over recent years, in part due to resource pressures across the team.
- Regular and direct community involvement in AAP Boards is limited to a relatively small number of individuals per AAP, although some areas do perform better in this regard.
- AAP approach has become too focussed upon managing funding and not sufficiently focussed on the wider initial AAP objectives of engagement, empowerment and performance review.
- Significant potential exists to involve many more people via enhanced community engagement and community development.
- Opportunities to shape policy or include the voice of diverse communities in partner consultations channelled via the AAP Board are limited.
- AAP Board meetings routinely spend too much time discussing and agreeing funding proposals rather than enabling open and meaningful consideration of community issues.

Rationale for revising the current approach

The existing model of community engagement offer a number of positives to communities and wider partners:

- AAP Board meetings routinely spend too much time discussing and agreeing funding proposals rather than enabling open and meaningful consideration of community issues.
- It is not always clear how the AAPs' identification of local needs is considered in the development of wider strategy and policy by wider partners.
- Funding priorities are driven by community priorities and not sufficiently informed by quantitative data.
- Whilst the process of agreeing individual projects is robust, it draws considerable staff resource that should be utilised engaging directly with communities.
- The funding approval process is intensive for applicants, especially those repeating the process year on year for the same type of intervention. Some organisations do not apply for funding due to process barriers.
- There are inconsistencies in how some AAPs operate and some AAP Boards do not function consistently well. The potential for political conflict in some AAPs reduces the effectiveness of partnership working by making Board Meetings more combative in tone. This can act as a disincentive for non-politically motivated people to participate.

Recommended Changes

Our review includes a number of significant changes in how DCC lead and manage community engagement, community development and community capacity building:

- A hyper-local community engagement network is important if DCC is to understand and respond to local needs effectively and involve community partners in creating local action. This is especially relevant in times of crisis, such as the pandemic or storms that cause significant disruption.
- Cessation of the current AAP process and associated Boards, to be replaced by more flexible Community Networks that place greater emphasis on community engagement, community development and community capacity building. The new system, twinned with streamlining funding allocation processes, will enable staff resources to focus more on community development activity.
- The Community Networks approach will enhance opportunities for all communities to better engage in issues that impact their lives. They will operate to identify local assets and needs, create opportunities for local action, partnership collaboration, volunteering and co-production of services more comprehensively.
- Propose 14 Community Networks. Option to retain current boundaries or amend to reflect the Primary Care Networks (Derwentside PCN split into two), albeit rounded to align with the new electoral ward boundaries due to come into effect in 2025. This latter point would improve alignment with Neighbourhood Budget delivery. Community Networks would have no decision-making role for funding.

Recommended Changes

Our review includes a number of significant changes in how funding is determined:

- Streamline the project approval process, enabling staff to allocate more time to working with communities.
- Replace the Area Budget with a Strategic Grant process that allocates funding on a four-year funding cycle, enabling larger and more strategic projects to be funded that enhance opportunities to attract match-funding. Projects will be developed by DCC Senior Community Coordinators, informed by Community Networks and agreed by a sub-group of the County Durham Partnership.
- The Neighbourhood Budget would largely remain as present. There would be no requirement for County Councillors to report funding priorities to Community Networks.
- Prioritisation of funding would be improved by increased analysis of data; wider and more targeted engagement with all communities to inform priorities; greater collaboration across Community Network areas to coordinate interventions over a longer time period and over a wider geographical area; enhanced monitoring of impact and value for money; and remove the perception that funding decisions are made on the views of a relatively limited number of community representatives who often benefit directly from funding.
- Community Development Workers would have access to a flexible Community Chest pot to allocate small amounts of funding to kickstart new initiatives. Community Network staff would be based in local community venues.

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Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Management Board

3 April 2023

Customer Feedback Report, Quarter Three, 2022/23

Durham County Council

Report of Paul Darby, Corporate Director of Resources

Councillor Susan McDonnell, Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Digital and Customer Services

Electoral division(s) affected:

Countywide

Purpose of the Report

1   To present an overview of the wide range of information collected from our customers that describe their experiences of using our services.

2   The report covers performance in quarter three 2022/23, covering the period October to December 2022.

Executive summary

3   Customer feedback such as satisfaction with, and general experiences of the services and support we provide, is an important aid to improve customer service and align our actions with customer need.

4   Performance is reported on an exception basis with key messages under three summary sections of going well, areas which require attention and using feedback to inform learning.

5   The legacy of COVID-19 can still be seen within our performance reporting, so performance data relating to the last two financial years is not representative for many areas. Therefore, wherever possible, we have compared current performance against pre-pandemic data.

6   However, the greatest challenge for our residents, local businesses and the council is the current cost-of-living crisis which has steadily worsened

over the last 12 months. High inflation, currently at 10.5%[1], has largely been driven by the rise in the cost of fuel and energy bills, which is being impacted significantly by world events, including the war in Ukraine.

7   The cost-of-living crisis is impacting our contact with our customers in three key ways:

- Demand for financial support and advice services. High inflation is outstripping wage and benefit increases, so income is falling in real terms. This has been further exacerbated by the rising costs of mortgages, energy, and food. This is driving demand for services which help support people facing financial hardship or who are in crisis.

  We are receiving more contact from households seeking financial assistance, and we are continuing to see high volume of applications for Welfare Assistance and Discretionary Housing Payments. We are continuing to support residents through the crisis with various initiatives and funds.

- As we continue to administer support schemes provided through Government funding, customer contact increases as residents make enquiries in relation to their own circumstances. The Government's Council Tax Energy Rebate Scheme resulted in significant increases in customer contact as residents make enquiries and also need support to progress claims (Non Direct Debit payers).

  There could be additional contact when the council starts administering £400 payments to people who do not have a direct relationship with an energy provider (Energy Bill Support Scheme – Alternative Funding).

- As resources are allocated to enable the implementation of additional support, this can impact the performance and delivery of mainstream services which can prompt further contact and potentially complaints.

Recommendation(s)

8   That Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Management Board notes the overall position and direction of travel in relation to quarter three performance, the impact of COVID-19 pandemic recovery and the external international factors driving inflation and cost-of-living on the councils' performance.

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[1] UK Consumer Price Index for 12 months to December 2022. Indicative modelled consumer price inflation estimates suggest that the CPI rate would have last been higher in October 1981, where the estimate for the annual inflation rate was 11.2%.

Background

9   Successful organisations listen and respond to their customers and one way to gain this valuable insight is by gathering and utilising customer feedback. This should then be used to inform learning and continuous improvement across services.

Analysis of Customer Feedback

Going well

10   Around 22% of customer contact[2] is now digital, up from 15% at the beginning of the pandemic. More customers have digital accounts: an extra 42,000 have do-it-online accounts (up 32%), an additional 46,000 have open portal system accounts (up 137%) and a further 35,000 receive council tax bills via e-mail (up 98%).

11   Both the number of corporate complaints and the proportion which has been upheld are static compared to pre-pandemic volumes (six fewer complaints and 62% upheld).

12   Of customers who requested a service through our Customer Relationship Management System and who responded to our satisfaction survey[3], 82% stated they were satisfied with overall service delivery. The main driver for dissatisfaction continues to be timeliness (of both acknowledgment and response), insufficient progress updates and service requests being closed without being actioned, which in most cases is due to the request being added to a future work programme.

13   In addition, of customers visiting our theatres and cinemas who responded to our survey, 92% rated their 'whole experience' as 'good' or 'very good'.

14   During quarter three, we progressed with our Chatbot project, to reduce avoidable contact and provide digital customer service 24/7 via the council's website. We also increased functionality within the Eckoh system, including developments to send customer satisfaction surveys via text message at the end of telephone calls and incorporating real time information within the system.

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[2] received through the ACD, face to face through our customer access points, do-it-online, webchat, social media and email.
[3] satisfaction survey is automatically e-mailed to the customer when their service request is closed within the CRM.

Areas which require attention

15   Customer contacts through our reported channels[4] continue to be skewed by the transfer of telephone lines to our automatic call distribution system. However, we estimate a 'true' increase in customer contact since the pre-pandemic year of around 5% (an additional 62,000 contacts), mainly driven by increased levels across council tax and benefits, the emergency duty team, and welfare assistance.

16   Although more customers are contacting us digitally – a change driven by the pandemic which accelerated the availability of service requests available through do-it-online, and the launch and increasing popularity of webchat – and more are registering to use our digital tools, contact through our Customer Access Points (CAPs) has fallen and is now around two-thirds of its pre-pandemic volume. We started consulting on our proposal to reduce the hours in four of our least used CAPs at the end of January 2023. Consultation closes on 9 March.

17   60% of all CRM service requests received during quarter three can be assessed against a performance standard. Although 81% met the performance standard overall, 11 service areas (which accounted for 4.5% of requests received during quarter three) met the standard for fewer than 50% of requests. We are analysing the data in more detail and discussions are ongoing with services regarding improvement opportunities.

18   Of the 241 requests relating to Freedom of Information / Environmental Information Regulations received during quarter three, 80% were responded to within 20 working days, lower than the target of 95%. This was due to a combination of volume, bottlenecks within certain services and staff shortages.

19   77% of first stage complaint responses met their performance standard, compared to 85% pre-pandemic. If first stage responses were timelier or more comprehensive, up to 23% fewer complaints would have been escalated to independent investigation (up to 50 complaints over 12 months). We are providing training to service areas to help resolve this and our ongoing complaints review will help streamline, improve and enhance the process.

20   The report in Appendix 2 provides the detailed update on Customer Feedback during quarter two 2022/23 and the actions put into place as a result.

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[4] contacts received through the ACD, face to face through our customer access points, do-it-online, webchat, social media and email.

Using feedback to inform learning

21   We are continuing with our data analytics project which will provide interactive dashboards and combine data at a person level to give new insights about our residents and service users. This data driven approach will results in better services for customers, better value for money, and more joined up service delivery. Social care has been prioritised and we expect new reports to go live in these areas in the new year.

22   During quarter three, we worked with services to ensure that customer feedback is being used to better understand the experience of accessing council services from the perspective of the customer.

Background papers

- None

Other useful documents

- Previous Customer Feedback reports presented to Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Management Board.

Author(s)

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Appendix 1: Implications

Legal Implications

Not applicable.

Finance

Information on financial remedies in relation to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman is included within the report.

Consultation

None.

Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty

Complaints regarding any equality and diversity aspect are handled in consultation with the Council's Equality Team.

Climate Change

None.

Human Rights

None.

Crime and Disorder

None.

Staffing

None.

Accommodation
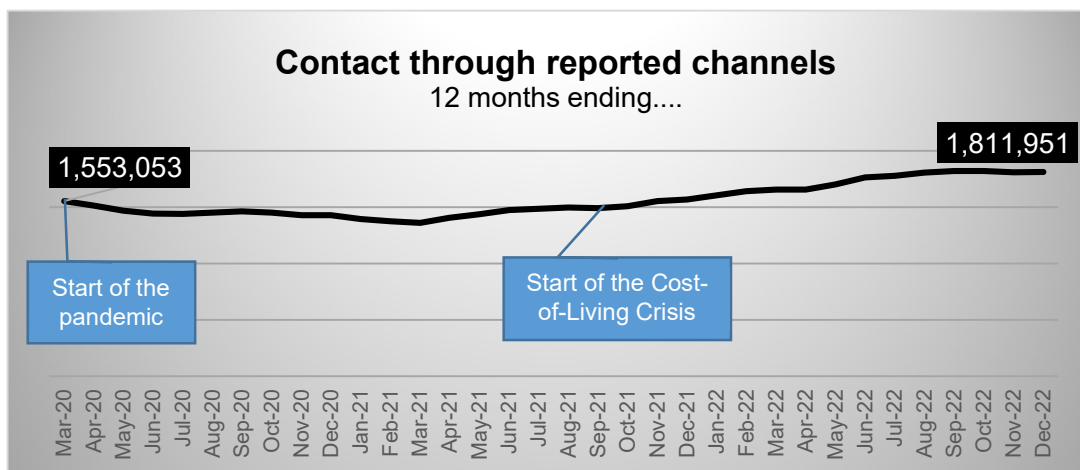
None.

Risk

None.

Procurement

None.

Durham County Council Customer Feedback Report

Quarter Three, 2022/23

Contact through our reported channels[5]

1   Over the last 12 months we received more than 1.8 million contacts, almost 260,000 more than the pre-pandemic year[6]. This equates to a 17% increase.

Contact through reported channels
12 months ending....

1,553,053

1,811,951

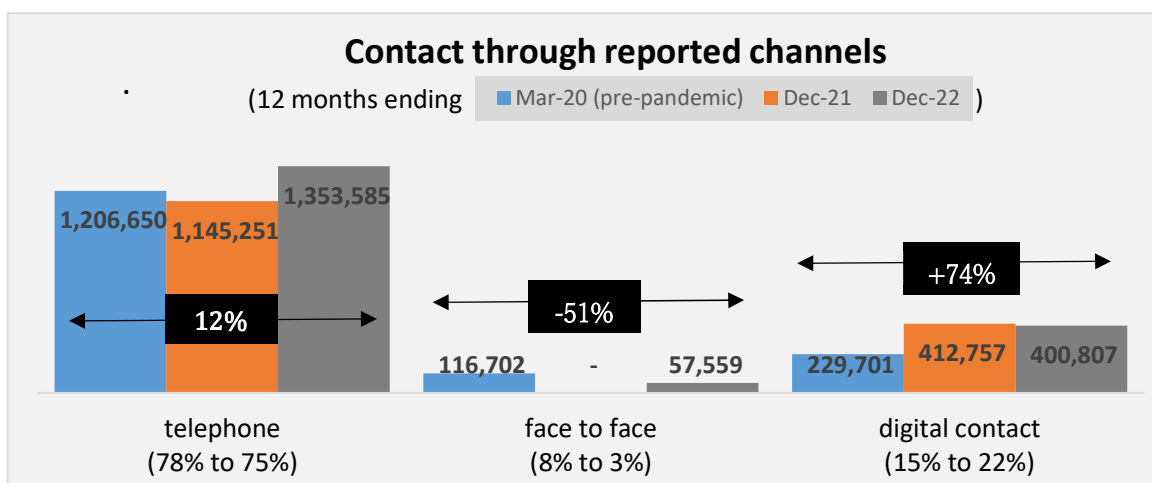Start of the pandemic

Start of the Cost-of-Living Crisis

2   However, the main reason for this increase, accounting for around half of the additional contact, is transferring telephone lines to our automatic call distribution (ACD) system[7]. As we can't migrate past data, the transferred lines create artificial increases in call volume.

3   If we adjust call volume by removing those telephone lines for which we do not have a pre-pandemic comparison, then contact through our reported channels over the last 12 months is around 62,000 higher than pre-pandemic year (+5%).

4   Services experiencing increased levels of contact compared to the pre-pandemic year include council tax and benefits, the emergency duty team, and welfare assistance.

5   Although most contact is non-digital (by telephone or face-to-face), the proportion of contact that is digital has increased over the last two years.

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[5] Through our ACD telephone system, Customer Access Points, Do-It-Online, webchat, e-mail to customer services, social media
[6] 12 months ending 31 March 2020
[7] Telephone calls are received either through our ACD system, which routes calls to groups of agents on a first-in-first-answered criteria, or directly to a telephone extension non-ACD. Only calls received via our ACD system are included in our telephone statistics. When we transfer non-ACD lines into the ACD system, there is no past data. Consequently, it appears that call volume has increased.

Contact through reported channels

(12 months ending ▣ Mar-20 (pre-pandemic) ▣ Dec-21 ▣ Dec-22)

telephone (78% to 75%)	face to face (8% to 3%)	digital contact (15% to 22%)
1,206,650 — 1,145,251 — 1,353,585 (12%)	116,702 — - — 57,559 (-51%)	229,701 — 412,757 — 400,807 (+74%)

6   Most of this change was driven by the pandemic with more service requests available through do-it-online, and the launch and increasing popularity of webchat. In addition, more customers are registering to use our digital tools.

Account		Pre-pandemic volume	12 months ending 31 December		Change since pre-pandemic	
			2021	2022		
Do-it-online (CRM)		129,876	158,763	171,550	+41.674	+32%
Revenues & Benefits	Open Portal	33,876	39,344	80,133	+46,257	+137%
	Council tax e-bills	36,193	33,714	71,640	+35,447	+98%

7   Conversely, contact through our Customer Access Points (CAPs) has yet to return to pre-pandemic volumes – it is currently around 64%. We are currently consulting on our [proposal to reduce the hours in four of our least used CAPs](#).

Comments relating to policies, procedures, decision-making and charges

8   The following table summarises feedback received over the 12 months ending 31 December 2022.

37 objections to our decisions (-6)	Covered a range of service areas in small numbers such as waste (5), and culture and sport (4).
49 dissatisfied with fees and charges (-18)	Just over 60% related to replacement bins (15), leisure centres (9) or council tax (6). Remaining feedback was across a wide variety of service areas in smaller numbers

85 comments about policies / procedures (+24)	Three quarters related to waste: refuse and recycling services (39) and HWRC policies / procedures (26). The remainder covered a range of other policies and procedures.

Performance Standards

9   60% of service requests received and recorded in our Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system during quarter three can be assessed against a performance standard. Of these, 81% met the performance standard.

10   Thirteen service areas met the performance standard for at least 80% of requests. This included: assisted bin collection (100%); waste permits (96%); dog bins or litter bins (89%); joining the garden waste scheme (88%) and street lighting (81%).

11   However, 11 service areas met the performance standard for fewer than 50% of requests. This included: road or footpath obstruction (47%); abandoned vehicles (43%); rubbish in gardens and yards (40%); tree or hedge pruning, removal (37%) and business waste collections (36%).

12   Action taken in response to performance standards of less than 50%, including exploring customer journeys and implementing new customer and service improvement meetings. The information will also be used to inform our Business as Usual activity for process review.

Customer suggestions

13   Whilst we receive and review all suggestions, most have been addressed previously and/or considered as part of service development.

14   A small sample of customer suggestions received during the latest quarter is attached at Appendix three.

Customer Compliments and Star Rating Feedback

15   Although most compliments relate to satisfaction with service provision, we continue to receive praise specific to the actions of our staff.

16   There were recurring themes in the feedback received through the star rating system[8]. 91% of respondents (67,013) rated the service as three star or above and provided positive feedback in relation to the following

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[8] initial contact and the online experience

services: bins: new, replacement, repair (speed of service, efficiency); bulky waste, white goods collection (courtesy, accessibility); garden waste - join the scheme (helpful scheme) and waste permits (conveniently designed).

17   Nine percent of respondents rated the service as one star or two stars (6,774) and provided negative feedback in relation to the following services: the customer satisfaction survey; joining the garden waste scheme (website impractical and difficult to navigate); missed bin collections (difficult to report); bin – new, replacement, repair (cost of service); street lighting (communication) and council tax – change of payment method; customer document submission (issues with file size limit).

18   A small sample of the compliments and star rating feedback received during the latest quarter is attached at Appendix four and five.

Customer satisfaction through the CRM[9]

19   Overall, 82% of respondents to our satisfaction survey (which is automatically e-mailed to the customer when their service request is closed within the CRM) stated they were satisfied with overall service delivery.

20   Service requests attaining an overall satisfaction rating of at least 90% related to: bulky waste collections; domestic pest control; birth, death or marriage certification; waste permits; garden waste scheme; free school travel and Care Connect.

21   Service requests attaining an overall satisfaction rating of less than 70% related to: generic enquiries; complaints; tree/hedge pruning and removal; dog fouling; dog bins and litter bins; drainage and flooding and noise complaints.

22   The main driver for dissatisfaction during quarter three was timeliness (of both acknowledgment and response), insufficient progress updates and service requests being closed without being actioned, which in most cases is due to the request being added to a future work programme

23   The survey also showed that overall:

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[9] Customer satisfaction surveys are automatically e-mailed to the customer when their service request is closed within the CRM. The response rate has improved over the last two years and is currently around 5.4% of service requests. As the results are taken from a sample survey, we are carrying out further work to determine if the results are statistically relevant.

- 97% felt their request was handled knowledgeably and effectively,
- 92% found it easy to contact the right service,
- 86% were satisfied with our handling of the initial contact,
- 78% were informed of how long it would take to complete the task,
- 73% were kept informed of progress,
- 82% were satisfied with the time taken to complete the task,
- 81% felt they were treated with dignity and respect,
- 87% were provided with clear information,
- 82% of respondents who were satisfied with overall service delivery.

Customer satisfaction theatres and cinemas: Gala, Bishop Auckland Town Hall and Empire[10]

24   Across the three venues, respondents rated the following as 'good' or 'very good':

	Overall	Gala	Bishop Auckland	Empire
Ticket booking experience	96%	95%	95%	97%
Staff welcome	93%	91%	96%	95%
Food and drink facilities	72%	69%	77%	76%
Quality of event	90%	85%	84%	98%
Value for money	92%	88%	91%	98%
Whole Experience	92%	89%	90%	98%

25   Specific customer feedback was received through the satisfaction survey. Recurring issues were poor toilet facilities, long queues for food and drink, and the auditorium temperature (too cold).

26   Also, some customers felt we were under-selling the shows and suggested that events could be better advertised with more information about the event provided.

Freedom of Information and Environmental Information Regulations

27   241 requests were received during quarter three, 10 more (+4%) than the same period last year. We responded to 80% of requests within 20

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[10] October to December 2022

working days, lower than the target of 95%. This was due to a combination of volume, bottlenecks within certain services and staff shortages.

Priority Correspondence

28 During the 12 months ending 31 December 2022, we received 2,287 items of priority correspondence and responded to 1,498 within the performance standard (66%).

29 The main topics during quarter three were enquiries relating to housing and planning, council tax and energy rebate, and anti-social behaviour.

Complaints[11]

Corporate Complaints

30 Corporate complaints have remained static compared to pre-pandemic volumes (six fewer). Of those investigated, 62% were upheld, on par with the pre-pandemic year.
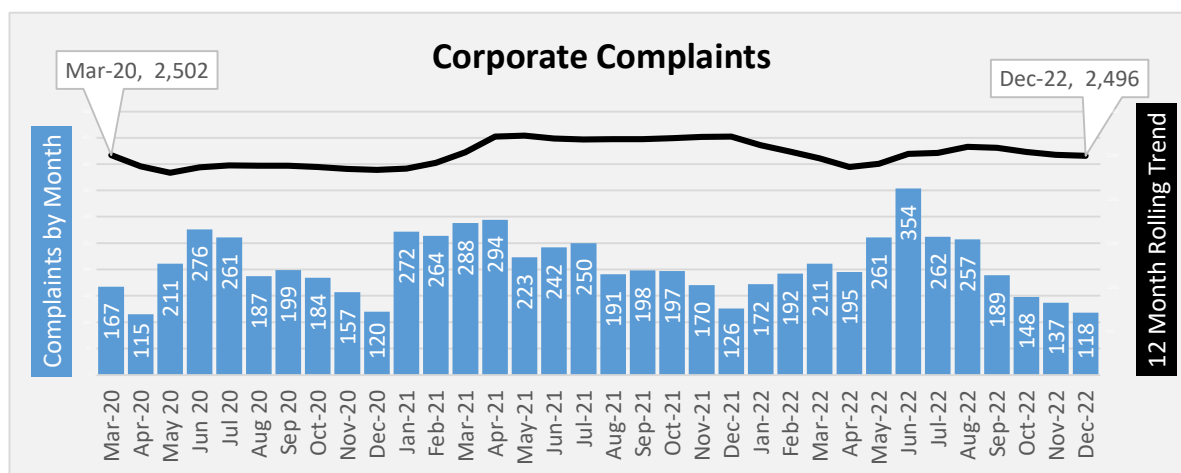
31 The most frequent cause for complaint continues to be missed bins with around 78% of these complaints being upheld. However, although missed bins account for 14% of all complaints, as this equates to only 0.003% of bins scheduled for collection this is not a major service area concern.

32 Other areas of complaint were bulky waste; contamination letters; billing/payment issues; maintenance activities and staff practices.

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[11] statutory complaints that arise from our duties as a local social services authority and corporate complaints that cover all other complaints

Corporate complaints subjected to independent investigation

33   During quarter three, 76% of independent investigations were responded to within the performance standard, compared to 79% the same period last year.

34   Analysis suggests that up to 23% of complaints escalated to independent investigation could have been avoided if there had been a timelier or more comprehensive update from the service at the first stage response. Training is being provided to service teams to help reduce the number of complaints escalated and our ongoing complaints review will help streamline, improve and enhance the process.

35   Details of complaints upheld by independent investigation during quarter three are included in Appendix six.

Statutory Complaints: Adult Health Services (AHS)

36   98 statutory complaints received by AHS during the 12 months ending 31 December 2022. 89% of the complaints related to the following areas: 35 to older people/physical disabilities/sensory impairment (36%), 30 to financial assessments and charging (31%), and 22 to learning disabilities/mental health/substance misuse (21% complaints).

37   The most frequent reasons for making a complaint were dissatisfaction with charges (14 complaints), lack of service (14), application of guidance/procedures (11), disagreement with an explanation or decision (11) and speed of service (11).

38   During quarter three, in response to complaints received, we communicated the importance of adhering to the complaints policy, and the importance of contacting service users (or their representatives) providing reasons for delays when issuing invoices containing large back-dated amounts.

Statutory Complaints: Children & Young People's Services (CYPS)

39   44 statutory complaints were received over the reporting period, 26% more than the same period last year. Of these, 21% were upheld and 28% partially upheld.

40   21 complaints (48%) related to the Families First teams (responsible for children in need, child protection plans, child, and family assessments in cases of parental dispute), 16 complaints (36%) related to teams involved

with Children Looked After, 2 complaints (5%) related to the Adolescent Safeguarding & Exploitation team and, 5 complaints (11%) to the Children with Disabilities team.

41   Statutory complaints for CYPS are complex and up to three reasons can be recorded for each. Of the 44 complaints, 23 involved communication issues, 12 involved staff behaviour and 10 involved a disagreement.

42   During quarter three, in response to complaints received, we ensured young people moving to a new placement are accompanied by a social worker with relevant handover information, ensured social workers withdrawn from a case at a family's request have no future contact, and amended the procedure in relation to carers applying for passports for children in care to remove unnecessary delays.

Complaints to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (the Ombudsman)

43   Two of the 20 decisions delivered during quarter three were upheld (10%). Details are included in Appendix seven. Additional information regarding complaints escalated to the Ombudsman is available here.

Recent developments that enhance the customer experience

44   We are continuing with our major project to implement a corporate data analytics solution which will allow us to combine data from our separate IT systems into a single platform. It will provide managers with interactive data dashboards and allow us to combine data at a person level to give us new insights into our residents and service users.

45   Social care (adult and children's) has been prioritised and we expect new reports to go live in these areas in the new year. We are reviewing our staffing structures and are developing proposals for a suitable operating model based on the roles, responsibilities and skills needed to meet the demands of a data driven local authority.

46   A pilot scheme to explore the potential of increasing customer location accuracy using what3words will commence in March, with a full evaluation in the summer of 2023.

47   The Chatbot project, to reduce avoidable contact and provide digital customer service 24/7 via the council's website, progressed during quarter

three. Staff development sessions were held and acquired skills enabled the chatbot to be further developed and configured for business use.

48   Additional functionality within the Eckoh system was progressed during quarter three. This included developments to send customer satisfaction surveys via text message at the end of telephone calls and incorporating real time information within the system.

Appendix 3: Sample of suggestions received during quarter three, 2022/23

Suggestion: In this current energy crisis we need more warm spaces for the community.

Our Response: We have provided £200,000 of funding to create a network of 168 warm spaces. We have a dedicated warm spaces section on our website.

Suggestion: Give customers the option to cancel their request for a bin repair.

Our Response: We have added this suggestion to our work programme and will be completed as and when business need / other priorities allow.

Suggestion: Ensure the pool timetables work with any internet browser.

Our Response: We are working to resolve this issue. In the meantime, customers can view the timetable via the following link: https://leisurehub.durham.gov.uk/LhWeb/en/public/timetable or through the Thrive Active app.

Suggestion: Offer food recycling for residents at their homes.

Our Response: Almost half of all Local Authorities across England have yet to adopt food recycling and are waiting for the outcome of the Environment Bill, Resource and Waste Strategy. The situation should become clearer in the next few months at which time we will consider our approach.

Suggestion: Introduce 'What 3 Words' for those able to use it.

Our Response: We will incorporate 'What 3 Words' as a trial along with the usual location markers (maps) when residents log an issue.

Suggestion: Provide alternative contact channels as speech recognition technology is not working correctly.

Our Response: We have reviewed relevant calls and used this information to inform changes to the voice system. There is a safeguard that allows customers to default to general enquiries thus avoiding speaking to the system. Our webchat function is also available.

Suggestion: Give residents a say on the North East Devolution deal?

Our Response: Residents can give their views by completing an online survey; attending an in-person consultation; or an online meeting .

Suggestion: Create a blog or page on the council's website so good deeds and kindness can be recognised and appreciated.

Our Response: The council recognises good deeds locally by awarding the Chairman's Medal. However, adding a more open-source feature to our website would help shine a light on the good work done throughout the county so we will investigate how this could function.

Suggestion: introduce card payments in the auditorium of the Empire Theatre and assess stock levels (ice cream, popcorn) for pantomime performances.

Our Response: We are looking to introduce card payments into the auditorium, but this depends on the signal strength in these areas of the venue. Additionally, we are reviewing the required stock levels for pantomime performances prior to the new season beginning later in the year.

Suggestion: Can the council install a camera near the mini roundabout before Newton Cap Viaduct as it may help reduce the number of people self-harming or committing suicide?

Our Response: Work is underway to investigate a range of measures to prevent suicide at Newton Cap Viaduct. The project involves elected members and the local MP.
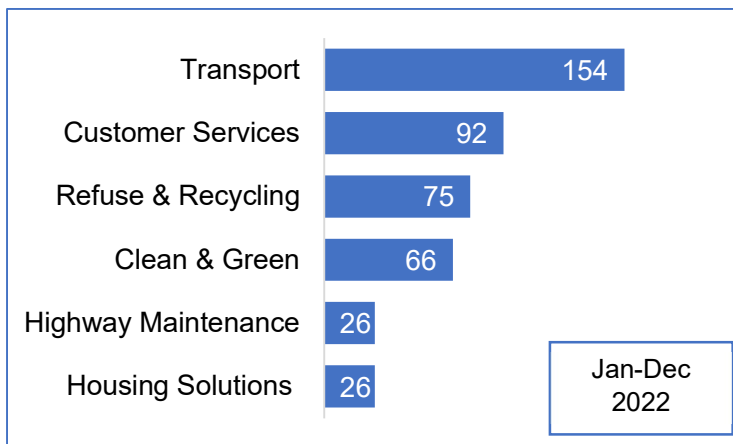
Suggestion: Introduce more swim sessions outside the 9 to 5 working day at Freemans Quay Leisure Centre.

Our Response: Additional sessions were added to the programme in January: Tuesday 06:30-08:00 and Friday 18:00-20:00. Members can also utilise swim sessions at other sites, for example Chester-le-Street has a general swim finishing at 21:00 on Wednesdays.

Suggestion: Increase the number of charging points for electric vehicles.

Our Response: We installed 50 additional charging points in 2022 and have scheduled a further 100 charging points to be installed during 2023.

Appendix 4: Sample of compliments received during quarter three, 2022/23

Transport: 154
Customer Services: 92
Refuse & Recycling: 75
Clean & Green: 66
Highway Maintenance: 26
Housing Solutions: 26

Jan-Dec 2022

You have all been lovely every time I call for my blue badge.

Thank you so much for the help and advice you've given us, we truly couldn't have got through this without you.

I know no system is perfect but from my own experience, Care Connect have been a real help and a godsend to us as a family.

I feel compelled to acknowledge the wonderful customer service I received today.

Thank you for all the service I have received over the years. You have been reliable and dependable.

Customer would like to compliment both crews for refuse and recycling in the area as they are excellent and work hard.

I want to place on record the excellent work completed by the clean and green team.

Just had our gas boiler serviced under DCC 'Warm and Healthy Homes Scheme'. The engineer was excellent.

Would not be without this service, it's a lifesaver I have needed them a lot. (Care Connect)

I am writing to send mine and my family's gratitude and respect to DCC's Adult Social Care service.

Thank you to the allotment team. I was over the moon at the weekend to discover that not only had they cleared the rubbish for me, but they had also stripped the vast majority of the grass. I really appreciate their hard work and kindness.

May I take the time to voice my gratitude and appreciation to Consett Town Centre Litter Picking Team, under extreme duress and difficulty with time restraints, what a marvellous job they do, out at the crack of dawn in all weathers. Thank you.

We would like to thank the council and in particular the occupational therapy office. Their work has made a huge difference to our lives.

A good safeguard and having this service certainly makes you feel a lot more confident knowing there is always a contact/help available right away.

Just got care connect last month for my husband for when I go out. I can do the shopping without worrying if he's in a bad way or had a fall. It has changed our lives for the better.

Staff went above and beyond in all correspondence, and I really appreciate all of the work they did for me. With this help I was able to start my new job with support and not worrying about how I could afford my petrol costs to travel to & from work. Thank you to the Employability Team.

I am writing to acknowledge the great work of the social worker that works with the young person I foster. She is always warm and supportive and has always been quick to put in plans to make things easier for him.

Thank the team who came out are sorted the drains in my street. It got tested with heavy rain during this period and have worked perfectly.

Customer would like to thank the team who came out and cut back 100 yards of overgrown path. It has been very well done and is now a lovely walk to go on. Thank you to the team on their proactive work.

Thank you for your work on my case – you really have gone above and beyond as usual and we really value your clear and prompt communication.

It is gratifying to note that several strong, well supported saplings have recently been planted in parts of Peterlee and, no doubt in other parts of the County.

Appendix 5: Sample of comments received with the star ratings during quarter three, 2022/23

5★- Pest Control – "Quick and easy to get an appointment."

2★- Customer Document Submission – "Have found the forms to be generally intuitive but have had real problems uploading documents."

5★- Customer Satisfaction Survey – "I was kept up to date via text message, and was made to feel that my issues were being valued."

2★- Bin – New, replacement and repair – "Tried to contact by phone but all the time you are just talking to a machine. It feels like there is an assumption that everyone has a computer or iPhone."

3★- Dog fouling – "Not even space for details or explanation."

3★- Littering – "Cannot upload CCTV/video footage of the offence."

1★- Planning Enquiry – "You cannot proceed without uploading a diagram, and for a preliminary enquiry that is too early. I want to know what can be done not what can't be. "

2★- Street lighting – "Your systems map was not up to date. Please look at adding new-build estates."

1★- Garden Waste – Join the scheme – "£35 is quite a lot of money when you only need it emptied twice a year. Especially considering our the relatively high council tax bill we pay in DCC. "

5★- Fly Tipping – "I have reported similar issues in the past and they have been resolved quickly. Let's make sure we keep our community tidy! Thank you."

5★- Bulky waste, white goods collection - "Using this service is a no-brainer. It is cheap and guarantees that the items are disposed correctly instead of them potentially being dumped.

4★- Garden waste – Join the Scheme - "Relatively painless but Apple Pay would be a good option for payment.

4★- Anti Social Behaviour – "Only hitch was that I was timed out twice, otherwise a good service."

3★- Council tax – Change of payment method – "Slightly confusing and unsure if setting up this account for monthly direct debit will actually work for my late mum's property."

1★- Dog bins or litter bins – "Would rather speak to someone on the phone. Tried several times and have been on hold for 20

3★- Tree or hedge pruning, removal – "Not everyone is computer literate. For example, I really struggled with uploading photos for evidence."

5★- Waste Permit – "Waste permits in County Durham are excellent. I think they should be adopted in a similar way all over the country to reduce fly tipping. Thank you!"

5★- Garden waste – Join the scheme – "Easy to complete and very convenient. Better than having to submit paper applications or via telephone."

4★- Bin – Not emptied - "Would prefer to speak to someone instead of having to solely report these issues online."

4★- Bulky waste, white goods collection - "happy with the service but it would be beneficial to optimise the mobile user interface. Found it awkward to manoeuvre and I have a new phone."

2★- Bin – not emptied – "Website was very slow and clunky today. Not easy for someone aged 86 to use."

5★- Anti Social Behaviour – "It is reassuring that I have someone who may be able to help me resolve this issue."

Appendix 6: Independent investigations by Customer Feedback Team where corporate complaints were upheld

Complaint Upheld	Our Response
Following the cancellation of their gym membership, the complainant was informed their direct debit payments remained active. However, a late payment charge was incurred.	We have apologised for any confusion regarding the cancellation process. Agreed to remove the late payment charge and the September payment.
The customer contacted us on multiple occasions to report only one temporary road sign had been removed, instead of two.	We have apologised for failing to escalate the initial request, and acknowledge resolution took longer than expected and communication could have been improved. The second sign has now been removed.
The customer is dissatisfied with our decision not to replace a damaged fence and disputed our view that it is the homeowner's responsibility to replace it.	Our initial response contained incorrect information and we acknowledge we should have waited for further information before responding. We have now clarified the situation and have written to the local Cricket Club to advise them of their responsibilities regarding the fencing and requested the installation of a new fence within 28 days.
The customer is unhappy that their bins are not being returned to the designated collection point after being emptied.	We have apologised to the customer and will monitor the situation during the next four weeks. Any issues encountered will be prioritised.
The customer disagrees that their garden waste bin was contaminated and should have been emptied.	We have apologised to the customer for incorrectly classifying acorns as 'food waste', which led to the escalation of the complaint. We have removed the contamination record against the address and the garden waste bin has been emptied.

Complaint partially upheld	Our Response
The complainant is unhappy with our handling of two planning applications.	The 2016 delegated report was subsequently found to be inaccurate. However, we acknowledge the complainant should have been directly consulted regarding the application and its subsequent variation of conditions. We have apologised and recommend appropriate feedback and training for relevant case officers. We found no fault in the subsequent planning enforcement investigation.
The complainant was unhappy with the works to remove overgrown foliage from their property which they claim damaged their fence.	We apologised to the complainant for not responding to the report in a timely manner, and although the land in question was not council-owned, to remedy our poor communication, we cut back the foliage as a gesture of goodwill. However, as the land is not council owned, we are unable to compensate for any scratches or damage to the fence.
The complainant is disappointed that the council did not notify them in a timely manner that they were no longer entitled to housing benefit, which consequently resulted in a financial loss of universal credit.	We are unable to investigate as there is an alternative appeals process. We have found no fault in the decision as the complainant had ceased to qualify for housing benefit due to an increase in income. However, we acknowledge that we did miss several opportunities to signpost the complainant to make a universal credit claim. Therefore, we have agreed to pay £180.36 - equivalent to the housing benefit the complainant would have been entitled to during the 12 week period in question.
The complainant is unhappy that the council installed a fence without consulting them, and this has caused issues accessing parking facilities.	Although no fault was found in the decision making process, communication could have been improved and a formal written response should have been provided earlier. We have apologised for this. Feedback has been provided to relevant officers.

Complaint partially upheld	Our Response
The complainant is dissatisfied with a planning decision which resulted in a business being able to operate from a residential site.	Although we found no fault with the investigation process, there was a delay in investigating potential breaches of conditions 3 and 5. Feedback will be provided to prevent this from happening again. We have apologised to the customer and initiated a new enforcement case as a remedy for the faults identified.

Appendix 7: Complaints upheld by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (the Ombudsman)

Ombudsman's final decision	Agreed action
There was fault by the council in how it delayed changing and informing the complainant about the customer's increased care contributions. The council also failed to explain the revised charges in a timely manner. This caused uncertainty, confusion and the time and trouble chasing and complaining.	Apologise to the customer and pay £150 to acknowledge the uncertainty and confusion caused. Provide evidence to the Ombudsman of the implementation of our new online financial assessments (introduction in April 2023)
Customer complained about how the appeal panel considered her appeal for her child at a preferred school. There were some faults in how the panel considered their appeal. As a result, they cannot be satisfied the appeal process was carried out fairly.	Arrange a fresh appeal with a different panel and clerk for the hearing. The panel should use admission figures at the time of the first appeal to ensure the complainant is put back in the position they would have been if the appeal had been properly considered. Ensure admission arrangements are applied in line with statutory guidance, and clear reasons for decisions are recorded.

Data Tables

Key to Symbols

Performance against target and previous performance		Performance against comparable groups		Direction of Travel	
✓	meeting or exceeding	✓	Performance is better than national or north east	↑	higher than comparable period
○	within 2%	✗	Performance is worse than national or north east	→	static against comparable period
✗	more than 2% behind			↓	lower than comparable period

NB: oldest data in left column

Types of indicators

There are two types of performance indicators throughout the report:
1. Key target indicators – targets are set as improvements can be measured regularly and can be actively influenced by the council and its partners; and
2. Key tracker indicators – performance is tracked but no targets are set as they are long-term and / or can only be partially influenced by the council and its partners.

National Benchmarking
We compare our performance to all English authorities. The number of authorities varies according to the performance indicator and functions of councils, e.g., educational attainment is compared to county and unitary councils, however waste disposal is compared to district and unitary councils.

North East Benchmarking
The North East figure is the average performance from the authorities within the North East region - County Durham, Darlington, Gateshead, Hartlepool, Middlesbrough, Newcastle upon Tyne, North Tyneside, Northumberland, Redcar and Cleveland, Stockton-on-Tees, South Tyneside, Sunderland.

More detail is available from the Strategy Team at performance@durham.gov.uk

Performance Indicator		Latest data (period covered)	Performance compared to:			N	NE	Direction of Travel - last four reporting periods				updated
			Period target	12 months earlier	Pre-COVID							
No. of contacts through reported channels		1,811,951 (Jan-Dec 22)	Tracker -	1,567,594	1,553,173	-	-	↑	↑	↑	↑	Yes
% of contact through reported digital channels		22% (Jan-Dec 22)	Tracker -	26%	15%	-	-	↓	→	↓	↓	Yes
% of contact received through reported non-digital channels		78% (Jan-Dec 22)	Tracker -	74%	85%	-	-	↑	→	↑	↑	Yes
% of CRM requests meeting performance standard		81% (Oct-Dec 22)	Tracker -	68% ✓	n/a	-	-	↑	↓	↑	↑	Yes
% of respondents who were satisfied with overall service delivery (CRM)		82% (Jan-Dec 22)	Tracker -	80% ✓	81% ✓	-	-	↑	→	→	↑	Yes
% of customers who request a service via an online form who give a rating of 4 or 5 stars		85% (Jan-Dec 22)	Tracker -	84% ✓	n/a	-	-	↑	↓	→	↑	Yes
Statutory Complaints: Adult and Health Services	No. received	98 (Jan-Dec 22)	75 ✗	86 ✗	84 ✗	-	-	↓	↑	↑	↑	Yes
	% within performance standard	100% (Jan-Dec 22)	Tracker -	100% ✓	100% ✓	-	-	→	→	→	→	Yes
	% upheld (fully or partially)	61% (Jan-Dec 22)	Tracker -	49% ✗	44% ✗	-	-	↑	↑	↓	↑	Yes
Statutory Complaints: Children and Young People's Service	No. received	44 (Jan-Dec 22)	46 ✓	34 ✓	100 ✓	-	-	→	↓	↑	↑	Yes
	% within performance standard	74% (Jan-Dec 22)	Tracker -	67% ✓	76% ✗	-	-	↑	↑	→	↑	Yes
	% upheld (fully or partially)	49% (Jan-Dec 22)	Tracker -	44% ✗	33% ✗	-	-	↑	↓	↓	↑	Yes

Performance Indicator	Latest data (period covered)	Performance compared to:			N	NE	Direction of Travel - last four reporting periods				updated
		Period target	12 months earlier	Pre-COVID							
No. of corporate complaints	2,496 (Jan-Dec 22)	Tracker -	2,715 ✓	2,502 ✓	-	-	↓	↑	↑	↓	Yes
Ratio of corporate complaints to service requests	0.006 (Jan-Dec 22)	Tracker -	0.006 ○	0.007 ✓	-	-	→	→	→	→	Yes
No. of independent investigations	207 (Jan-Dec 22)	Tracker -	195	192	-	-	↓	↑	↑	↑	Yes
No. of complaints submitted to Ombudsman	69 (Jan-Dec 22)	Tracker -	67 ✗	91 ✓	-	-	↑	↓	↑	↑	Yes
% of complaints responded to within performance standard	77% (Jan-Dec 22)	Tracker -	76% ✓	85% ✗	-	-	↓	→	→	→	Yes
% of corporate complaints investigated which were upheld	62% (Jan-Dec 22)	Tracker -	67% ✓	62% ○	-	-	↓	↓	↓	→	Yes
No. of priority correspondence received	2,287 (Jan-Dec 22)	Tracker -	1,882	n/a	-	-	↑	↑	↑	↑	Yes
% of priority correspondence responded to within performance standard	66% (Jan-Dec 22)	Tracker -	69% ✗	n/a	-	-	↑	↑	↑	↓	Yes
% of Freedom of Information and Environmental Information Regulations requests responded to within 20 working days	80% (Oct-Dec 22)	95% ✗	73% ✓	86% ✗	-	-	↓	↑	↓	↑	Yes
% of CRM service requests which were self-serve	72% (Jan-Dec 22)	Tracker -	68% ✓	49% ✓	-	-	↑	↑	↑	↑	Yes
No. of compliments	672 (Jan-Dec 22)	Tracker -	916 ✗	688 ✗	-	-	↓	↓	↑	↓	Yes
No. of suggestions	485 (Jan-Dec 22)	Tracker -	558 ✗	546 ✗	-	-	↓	↓	↓	↓	Yes

Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Management Board

03 April 2023

Resources – Quarter 3 December 2022: Forecast of Revenue and Capital Outturn 2022/23

Ordinary Decision

Report of Paul Darby, Corporate Director of Resources

Electoral division(s) affected:

Countywide

Purpose of the Report

1   To provide details of the updated forecast revenue and capital outturn budget position for the Resources service grouping, highlighting major variances in comparison with the budget based on the position to the end of December 2022.

Executive summary

2   The quarter 3 forecast position shows that the service is forecasting a cash limit underspend of £0.094 million against a revised budget of £25.943 million.

3   The Resources Cash Limit balance carried forward at 31 March 2023 is forecast to be circa £0.544 million. Other earmarked reserves under the direct control of RMT are forecast to total £15.520 million at 31 March 2023.

4   The revised Resources capital budget is £4.275 million for 2022/23, with a total expenditure to 31 December 2022 of £2.481 million (58.04%).

Recommendation(s)

5   Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Management Board is recommended to note the forecast of outturn position.

Background

6   County Council approved the Revenue and Capital budgets for 2022/23 at its meeting on 23 February 2022. These budgets have subsequently been revised to account for grant additions/reductions, corporate savings/adjustments, budget transfers between service groupings and budget profiling between years. This report covers the financial position for the following major budget areas maintained by the Resources service grouping:

- Revenue Budget - £25.943 million (original £25.249 million)
- Capital Programme - £4.275 million (original £11.977 million)

7   The original Resources General Fund budget has been revised in year to incorporate a number of budget adjustments as follows:

	£,000s
Quarter 1:	
Transfer to NCC – Business Support	(22)
Transfer to REG – Business Support	(176)
Transfer to REG – Health & Safety	(795)
Transfer to REG – County Records	(258)
Transfer from CYPS to HR	71
Transfer from Contingencies	26
2021/22 Pay award	977
Transfer to Corporate Budget	(8)
Transfer from Business Support Reserve	24
Transfer from Procurement Development Reserve	77
Transfer from Human Resources Reserve	95
Transfer from ICT Reserve	19
Transfer from Legal Expenses Reserve	27
Transfer from Legal Services Reserve	34
Transfer from Digital Workforce Transformation Reserve	30
Transfer from Revenue & Benefits Reserve	193
Transfer from Internal Audit & Corporate Fraud Reserve	67
Transfer to Transformation Programme Reserve	(90)
Transfer from Resources Cash Limit Reserve	292
Quarter 2:	
Transfer from REG – Business Support	38
Transfer from AHW – Business Support	49
Transfer from AHW – Strategy	43

Quarter 3

Transfer from REG – Business Support	23
Transfer from AHW – Business Support	5
Transfer to NCC - Research and Consultant Officer	(47)
TOTAL	**694**

The revised General Fund Budget for Resources is £25.943 million

8   The summary financial statements contained in the report cover the financial year 2022/23 and show:

- The approved annual budget;

- The actual income and expenditure as recorded in the Council's financial management system;

- The variance between the annual budget and the forecast outturn;

- For the Resources revenue budget, adjustments for items outside of the cash limit to take into account such items as redundancies met from the strategic reserve, capital charges not controlled by services and use of / or contributions to earmarked reserves.

9   The service is forecasting a cash limit underspend of £0.094 million (0.36%) against a revised budget of £25.943 million. This compares to the previous forecast, reported at quarter 2 of a cash limit underspend of £0.324 million and is therefore an decrease in the underspend of £0.230 million across the two forecasts.

10 The tables below compare the actual expenditure with the budget. The first table is analysed by Subjective Analysis (i.e. type of expense), and the second by Head of Service.

Type of Expenditure (Subjective Analysis) (£000's)

	2022/23 Budget £000	YTD Actual £000	QTR3 Forecast of outturn £000	Variance (under) / over spend £000	Items Outside Cash Limit £000	Reserves £000	Cash Limit Variance £000	Memo Item: Q2 Cash Limit Variance £000
Employees	68,408	51,785	69,802	1,394	(3,430)	-	(2,037)	(792)
Premises	2,049	296	1,977	(72)	55	-	(17)	(19)
Transport	729	406	550	(179)	-	-	(179)	(144)
Supplies and Services	17,010	14,995	17,799	789	-	-	789	157
Third Party Payments	52	7,347	45	(7)	-	-	(7)	(8)
Transfer Payments	-	14	3	3	-	-	3	-
Central Support and Capital	27,031	1,245	26,998	(33)	(55)	(217)	(305)	(968)
Gross Expenditure	**115,279**	**76,088**	**117,173**	**1,895**	**(3,430)**	**(217)**	**(1,754)**	**(1,774)**
Income	(89,938)	(20,059)	(88,280)	1,658	-	-	1,658	1,450
Net Expenditure	**25,341**	**56,029**	**28,894**	**3,553**	**(3,430)**	**(217)**	**(94)**	**(324)**
HB Transfer payments	104,245	85,823	103,013	(1,229)	-	-	(1,229)	-
HB Central Support and Capital	300	-	300	-	-	-	-	-
HB Income	(103,943)	(484)	(102,711)	1,229	-	-	1,229	-
HB Net Expenditure	**602**	**85,339**	**602**	**-**	**-**	**-**	**-**	**-**
Total Net Exp	**25,943**	**141,368**	**29,496**	**3,553**	**(3,430)**	**(217)**	**(94)**	**(324)**

By Head of Service (£000's)

	2022/23 Budget £000	YTD Actual £000	QTR3 Forecast of outturn £000	Variance (under) / over spend £000	Items Outside Cash Limit £000	Reserves £000	Cash Limit Variance £000	Memo Item: Q2 Cash Limit Variance £000
Central Establishment Recharges	(24,184)	-	(24,184)	-	-	-	-	-
Corporate Finance & Commercial Services	4,060	3,219	4,185	125	(214)	-	(89)	(182)
Internal Audit and Insurance	1,172	718	1,086	(86)	(53)	94	(45)	(54)
Legal & Democratic Services	8,593	6,779	8,646	53	(241)	(40)	(228)	(89)
Service Management / Central Charges	(10,497)	175	(10,551)	(54)	54	-	-	-
HR & Employee Services	4,972	3,813	5,453	481	(263)	(117)	101	146
Transactional & Customer Services	8,520	14,766	9,539	1,019	(853)	(133)	33	(392)
Digital Services	13,941	10,142	14,891	950	(441)	(251)	258	341
Corporate Policy Planning & Performance	2,217	1,783	2,405	188	(169)	(34)	(15)	(93)
Procurement Sales & Business Services	16,450	14,541	17,327	877	(1,250)	264	(109)	(1)
Pension	97	699	97	-	-	-	-	-
Net Expenditure Excluding HB	**25,341**	**56,635**	**28,894**	**3,553**	**(3,430)**	**(217)**	**(94)**	**(324)**
Housing Benefit	602	84,733	602	-	-		-	-
Net Expenditure	**25,943**	**141,368**	**29,496**	**3,553**	**(3,430)**	**(217)**	**(94)**	**(324)**

11 The table below provides a brief commentary on the variances against the revised budget analysed by Head of Service. The table identifies variances in the core budget only and excludes items outside of the

cash limit (e.g. redundancy costs) and technical accounting adjustments (e.g. capital charges):

Head of Service	Service Area	Description	Year End (under) / overbudget £000	Year End (under) / overbudget £000
Central Establishment Recharges	Central Establishment Recharges	No material variances.	0	**0**
Corporate Finance & Commercial Services	Corporate Management	No material variances.	0	
	Management Priority	£26,000 under budget on employees.	(26)	
	Financial Systems	£45,000 over budget on employees. £25,000 over budget on supplies & services.	70	
	Financial Management	£72,000 under budget on employees. £3,000 under budget on transport. £6,000 over budget on supplies & services. £32,000 under achieved income.	(37)	
	Strategic Finance	£110,000 under budget on employees. £20,000 over budget on supplies & services. £6,000 over achieved income.	(96)	**(89)**
Procurement Sales & Business Services	Procurement	£109,000 overachieved income.	(109)	**(109)**
Pensions	Pension	No material variance.	0	**0**
HR & Employee Services	Advice & Guidance	£65,000 over budget on employees £11,000 under budget on transport £25,000 over budget on supplies & services. £11,000 under achieved income	90	
	Head of People & Talent Management	£15,000 over budget on employees.	15	

Head of Service	Service Area	Description	Year End (under) / overbudget £000	Year End (under) / overbudget £000
	Payroll & Employee Services	£73,000 under budget on employees. £5,000 under budget on transport £71,000 under achieved income.	(7)	
	Occupational Health	£38,000 under budget in employees. £22,000 under budget on supplies & services. £63,000 under achieved income.	3	**101**
Transactional & Customer Services	Customer Relations	£256,000 under budget on employees. £10,000 under budget on transport £7,000 under budget on supplies & services	(273)	
	Service Management	£16,000 under budget on employees. £14,000 over budget on supplies & services	(2)	
	Revenue & Benefits	£104,000 under budget on employees. £35,000 under budget on transport £85,000 under budget on supplies & services. £532,000 under achieved on income	308	**33**
Digital Services	Digital Services	£682,000 underbudget on employees. £34,000 underbudget on premises. £53,000 underbudget on transport. £49,000 under budget on supplies & services £1,076,000 under achieved income.	258	**258**
Internal Audit and Risk	Insurance and Risk	£3,000 over budget on employees. £13,000 over achieved income	(10)	
	Internal Audit	£13,000 underbudget on employees. £14,000 over achieved income.	(27)	

Head of Service	Service Area	Description	Year End (under) / overbudget £000	Year End (under) / overbudget £000
	Corporate Fraud	£13,000 underbudget on employees. £5,000 underachieved income	(8)	**(45)**
Legal and Democratic Services	Corporate and Democratic Core	£37,000 under budget on employees. £16,000 under budget on premises. £6,000 under budget on transport. £30,000 under budget on supplies & services. £90,000 over achieved income.	(179)	
	Legal and Other Services	£300,000 under budget on employees. £11,000 under budget on transport £305,000 over budget on supplies & services. £43,000 over achieved income.	(49)	**(228)**
Corporate Policy Planning & Performance	Head of Transformation	£20,000 under budget on employees.	(20)	
	Equality & Strategy	£36,000 over budget on employees. £2,000 under budget on transport £6,000 under budget on supplies & services £35,000 over achieved income (relating to the overspend on employees)	(7)	
	Research & Intelligence	£31,000 over budget on employees. £6,000 over budget on supplies & services	37	
	Transformation	£20,000 under budget on employees. £1,000 under budget on transport £4,000 under budget on supplies & services.	(25)	**(15)**
TOTAL				**(94)**

13   In summary, the service grouping is on track to maintain spending within its cash limit.

Capital Programme

14   The original Resources capital programme was £11.977 million, and this has been revised for additions/reductions, budget transfers and budget profiling. The revised budget now stands at £4.275 million.

15   Summary financial performance to the end of December 2022 is shown below:

	Original Annual Budget 2022/23 £000	Revised Annual Budget 2022/23 £000	Actual Spend 31/12/2022 £000	Remaining Budget 2022/23 £000
Digital Services	10,561	2,599	1,924	675
Corporate Finance & Commercial Services and Transactional & Customer Services	16	16	6	10
Corporate Policy, Planning & Performance	1,400	1,660	551	1,109
`Total	**11,977**	**4,275**	**2,481**	**1,794**

16   The revised Resources capital budget is £4.275 million with a total expenditure to 31 December 2022 of £2.481 million (58.04%). A full breakdown of schemes and actual expenditure to 31 December 2022 is given in Appendix 2.

17   At year end the actual outturn performance will be compared against the revised budgets and at that time service and project managers will need to account for any budget variance.

Background papers

- County Council Report (23 February 2022) – Medium Term Financial Plan 2022/23 to 2025/26 and Revenue and Capital Budget 2022/23.

- Cabinet Report (14 September 2022) – Forecast of Revenue and Capital Outturn 2022/23 – Period to 30 June 2022.

- Cabinet Report (16 November 2022) – Forecast of Revenue and Capital Outturn 2022/23 – Period to 30 September 2022.

- Cabinet Report (15 March 2023) – Forecast of Revenue and Capital Outturn 2022/23 – Period to 31 December 2022.

Other useful documents

- Previous Cabinet reports / None

Author(s)

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Appendix 1: Implications

Legal Implications

The consideration of regular budgetary control reports is a key component of the Council's Corporate and Financial Governance arrangements. This report shows the forecast spend against budgets agreed by the Council in February 2022 in relation to the 2022/23 financial year.

Finance

Financial implications are detailed throughout the report which provides an analysis of the revenue and capital outturn position.

Consultation

Not applicable.

Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty

Not applicable.

Climate Change

Not applicable.

Human Rights

Not applicable.

Crime and Disorder

Not applicable.

Staffing

Not applicable.

Accommodation

Not applicable.

Risk

The consideration of regular budgetary control reports is a key component of the Councils Corporate and Financial Governance arrangements.

Procurement

The outcome of procurement activity is factored into the financial projections included in the report.

Appendix 2 Resources Capital Programme 2022/23 – Detailed Monitoring Statement to 31 December 2022

Resources	Revised Annual Budget	Actual Spend	Remaining Budget
	2022/23	31-Dec-22	2022/23
	£000	£000	£000
Applications and Development	259	-	259
Design and Print	2	-	2
Head of Service	2	-	2
Technical Services	2,117	1,701	416
Customer Relations	-	-	-
Digital Durham	219	219	-
Digital Engagement	-	4	(4)
ICT Services Include Design and Print Total	**2,599**	**1,924**	**675**
Migration of HR/Payroll Functionality	16	6	10
Policy Planning & Performance	1,660	551	1,109
Financing Resources Total	**1,676**	**557**	**1,119**
RES Total	**4,275**	**2,481**	**1,794**

**Corporate Overview and
Scrutiny Management Board**

3 April 2023

Update in relation to Petitions

Report of Corporate Management Team

Helen Lynch, Head of Legal and Democratic Services

Electoral division(s) affected:

Countywide.

Purpose of the Report

1   To provide for information the quarterly update in relation to the current situation regarding various petitions received by the Authority.

Recommendation(s)

2   Members are requested to note the update report on the status of petitions and e-petitions received by the Authority.

Background

3   Following the introduction of The Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009 all of the petitions that have been received by the Authority are processed by democratic services in line with its petitions process.

4   The Board have received update reports on petitions since September 2008.

5   From the 15 December 2010, the Authority has provided a facility for members of the public to submit e-petitions on the Council's website.

Current Notice of Key Decisions

6   Since the last update four new e-petitions have been submitted. Two are ongoing and two were rejected as other procedures applied.

7   One new paper petition had been submitted, and had completed.   A list giving details and current status of all active petitions is attached as Appendix 2 to the report.

Contact: Michael Turnbull   Tel: 03000 269714

Appendix 1: Implications

Legal Implications

None.

Finance

None.

Consultation

Petitions which refer to a consultation exercise are reported to committee for information and forwarded to the relevant officer for consideration

Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty

None.

Climate Change

None.

Human Rights

None.

Crime and Disorder

None.

Staffing

None.

Accommodation

None.

Risk

None.

Procurement

None.

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Nature of Petition	Appropriate Service	Summary of Information	Status of Petition
Petition 422 Road Safety Improvements – A177 Shincliffe Village/High Shincliffe **E-Petition** Received 15.08.22 No. of signatures 19	REG	Petition asking the Council to reduce the speed limit to 30mph on a 735m stretch of road, from the start of Willow Tree Avenue to part-way up Shincliffe Bank. (Note that a 40mph speed limit within County Durham was enforceable from 10%+2 = 46mph.) - Improve road signage to advise people of the approaching risks to reduce the number of accidents travelling southbound out of the city. Durham County Council and Durham Constabulary have exchanged correspondence with the petitioner previously on the issues set out in the petition and was more recently discussed at a public meeting in Shincliffe on 1/11/22 with a wider group including residents, Durham Constabulary, Durham County Council Traffic Assets, MP office, Parish Council and also the PCC and her team. E-Petition ran from 20.8.22 – 20.11.22. The position regarding the speed limit had been discussed at length and whilst we appreciate the comments raised Durham County Council and Durham Constabulary remain in agreement that the speed limit set at 40mph remains appropriate and credible. At the public meeting one of the actions agreed was to undertake a new speed survey and it was expected that this would be commissioned at the start of the new year. Summary data as below would be circulated from this new survey, once available. **A177 Shincliffe (between High Street and Old School House junctions)**	Petition CLOSED

Date of Survey	Average Daily Traffic Flow	≤30 MPH	31-35 MPH	36-40 MPH	41-45 MPH	46-50 MPH	51-55 MPH	56-60 MPH	>60 MPH	Mean Speed	85th Per centile
19/10 - 25/10/20	7410	15%	21%	38%	21%	5%	0%	0%	0%	36 mph	42 mph

(*shaded area is percentage of vehicles within Police enforcement threshold*)

Nature of Petition	Appropriate Service	Summary of Information	Status of Petition
		(while there were some vehicles in the 0% level they were so small in numbers that they do not register as a percentage) *40 MPH Speed Limit* • *74% of vehicles travel within the existing 40 mph speed limit* • *5% of vehicles travel at a level where speed enforcement may be considered by the Police but at the lower end of offending* • *While there were a few vehicles in the 51 to 60 mph thresholds they do not register as a percentage due to the low numbers* • *Some of the higher speeds as we know would be attributed to blue light vehicles but we can't quantify that* • *In the above 50 mph the data shows the vehicles to be present Monday to Friday between 3 pm and 9 pm, Saturday between 6 am and 9 am, Sunday between 9 am and 10 am* • *The speed profiles, mean speed and 85th percentile show that a 40 mph speed limit is generally well respected and had credibility* Also agreed at the meeting as actions for Durham County Council were localised traffic solutions which included sign and road marking maintenance, introduction of a short section of barrier where children wait for the bus on A177 and a review of the speed limit signage on this section of A177. We have reviewed the personal injury accident data and have offered feedback previously. While we would prefer to see no accidents the ones that have occurred at this location have involved driver error, and in some cases criminality, however there is nothing from the analysis of the accident information that suggests they were attributable to either the highway or speed. Durham County Council and Durham Constabulary hoped to continue to engage positively with the residents group, the Parish Council and also with the PCC's office to progress and investigate the issues raised by the group at the meeting. We would of course share the speed data early in the new year once the survey was completed.	

Nature of Petition	Appropriate Service	Summary of Information	Status of Petition

Petition 423
 	
Request for traffic mitigation measures on Lowes Barn Bank
 	
E-Petition
Received 15.08.22
No. of signatures 126
	REG	Petition asking the Council to provide short and long-term solutions to the continually worsening traffic problems on Lowes Barn Bank, a residential 'c' road:
		  - to mitigate the exceptionally large increase in car and HGV traffic using this road as an unofficial / unsigned diversion route in Summer/Autumn 2022 during the multi-month B6300 closure, and the resultant stationary traffic / chaos for much of the working day - including air quality monitoring.
		  - to propose workable solutions to restrict HGVs from using this steep road as a short-cut, which we feel was a completely inappropriate and unsafe route for such vehicles, given the 'c' classification and character of the road - especially given the proximity to the alternative 'A' road routes.
		  - to propose solutions to limit the speed of all vehicles to a safe speed at times of day when traffic was flowing - especially on the downhill approach to the sharp bend.
		E-Petition ran from 19.8.22 – 31.12.22
		
		Durham County Council were sorry hear about the issues facing those residents who live on or adjacent Lowes Barn Bank, especially during the months when the closure of B6300 Burnigill Bank. Despite signed diversions some additional traffic was inevitably displaced into this area. We appreciated the patience of all those affected by this extra traffic however after previous delays to the progression of this scheme it was essential that the works were completed to allow the available routes and capacity on the road network to be restored.
		
		Although it had been suggested that Lowes Barn Bank should had a weight restriction imposed upon it we had already explained our rejection of this request in line with Durham County Council's current policy. Durham Constabulary, who would
			Under Review

Nature of Petition	Appropriate Service	Summary of Information	Status of Petition
		be responsible for the enforcement of any such provision, also do not support the implementation of a weight limit restriction. In considering the location of Lowes Barn Bank, linking two of 'A' class roads and adjacent a major junction, there were arguably other routes for HGV traffic to use in this vicinity however it was the driver's choice to take whichever route on the public highway they wish to use. It was also likely that these decisions may differ depending upon volume of traffic at certain times of the day. Durham County Council as the Highway Authority had a duty to facilitate the expeditious movement of traffic and given Lowes Barn Bank, Neville's Cross Bank and Darlington Road were public highways suitable to carry all classes of traffic, it would not be appropriate to divert specific classes of vehicle traffic onto other routes in the location, negatively impacting other residential areas, motorists, public transport users and emergency service response times. Since Durham County Officers from Strategic Highways and Strategic Traffic meet with residents and local councillors on site, we had reopened discussions with local generators of HGV traffic. Historically discussions had resulted in an undertaking to, where possible, operate in a manner that affords a reasonably equitable distribution of their journeys over available routes. This means that the burden of these journeys was not imposed solely on any one location. Where these local agreements exist, they are, unless imposed via a planning condition or operator's licence, a voluntary arrangement and we were therefore unable to either insist upon their use or enforce them. As operators these companies can choose to direct their vehicle onto any public highway, where there were no restrictions. The carriageway construction on Lowes Barnes Bank was, like the majority of county roads, constructed to accommodate vehicles of all weights. The petition suggested that the traffic on this road was resulting in structural damage to homes so should any resident consider this the case it would be advisable, as with any public road, that they should direct their concerns to their household insurance company. In turn, they would make an assessment and where necessary instruct a structural engineer to act on their behalf. If such a survey was to categorically confirm structural damage was occurring the County Council would investigate the claim. DCC carried out	

Nature of Petition	Appropriate Service	Summary of Information	Status of Petition
		vibration surveys on private and commercial dwellings for over twenty years but discontinued this service because in all that time we never obtained a reading approaching a level that may cause structural damage to a building. Many of the reported issues at this location point to driver behaviour and judgement however the manner in which motorists drive on the public highway was not controlled by the imposition of speed limits or weight restrictions and the Highway Code was provided as the basis for driver behaviour on public roads. Making changes to access was unlikely to change habitual driving behaviour and changing poor driver behaviour was an issue for which powers were only afforded to the Police when an offence had been committed. Despite the concerns raised , personal injury accident and speed data for Lowes Barn Bank does not suggest an overall issue. DCC had considered the issues reported and investigated the requested changes. As part of this review the information held relating to Lowes Barn Bank had also been considered and officers had carried out their own observations of the traffic at various times. We do appreciate the time taken to pursue these requests for changes at Lowes Barn Bank however we had concluded that there were no measures that we were able to support.	
Petition 428 The Play/Recreation Area at The Wynd, Pelton. **E-Petition** Received 10.10.22 No. of signatures 79 **Paper Petition** No. of signatures 107 Total - 186	REG	Petition asking the Council to stop discussions with a housing developer, Bellway Homes. Bellway Homes have been given permission by Durham County Council to carry out site investigations on land registered as an Asset of Community Value. E-Petition ran from 10.10.22 – 20.1.23. Durham County Council noted the petition in relation to the land south of the Wynd, Pelton and the listing of the same as an Asset of Community Value ('ACV') following nomination by Pelton parish Council. Early stage discussions had been held with Bellway Homes Limited, who had expressed an interest in purchasing the subject land. At this time, Durham County Council had not committed its land for sale. The Durham County Council ('DCC') Asset of Community Value ('ACV') Board made the decision to list the asset as an ACV on 8th August 2022. The listing was	Petition CLOSED

Nature of Petition	Appropriate Service	Summary of Information	Status of Petition
		confirmed following a nomination by Pelton Parish Council. The Governments 'Assets of Community Value – Policy Statement' – September 2011 was clear that the listing of the asset does not restrict what DCC can do with the land. In order to inform discussion with a third party housing developer, site investigations were undertaken in September 2022. If the land were to come forward for housing development then DCC (as a corporate landowner) would be seeking to ensure that the existing open space and play facility would not only be replaced but also enhanced to provide the local residents with a better facility than is currently available.	
Petition 429 A181 near Thornley and Cassop **E-Petition** Received 10.10.22 No. of signatures 36	REG	Petition asking the Council to make changes to the road A181 near Thornley & Cassop to avoid accidents & increase safety. E-Petition ran from 10.10.22 – 14.11.22. The section of A181 referred to dis carry a high volume of traffic daily, as did many of 'A' class roads countywide. The section in question carries traffic between B1279 Thornley and B6291 Cassop, as well as the onward travel to surrounding villages, it was therefore anticipated that these routes would be busy. Based on a search of the database we shared with Durham Constabulary there had been one personal injury accident recorded on the section of A181 between its junctions with the B6291 and B1279 in the last 4 years, being our standard search criteria. This accident involved a turning movement and not attributed to the highway layout. Considering the flow of traffic traversing this route daily, and when compared to other similar junctions, this represented a favourable accident record. We were aware of other personal injury accidents on the A181 but not on the section referenced in this petition and unfortunately, 'damage only' collisions take place on a daily basis across the road network, where damage had occurred to property/third party vehicles resulting typically in an exchange of insurance details. While we would prefer to see no accidents, the limited road safety funding available had to be prioritised towards dealing with personal injury accidents as Highway Authorities nationally look to reduce casualty accidents across the road network.	Petition CLOSED

Nature of Petition	Appropriate Service	Summary of Information	Status of Petition
		The Council's entire road network is monitored annually by colleagues in our Accident Investigation and Prevention Team, who undertake analysis at locations where there is a developing accident trend beyond set intervention levels. This methodology ensures that the Council targets its limited road safety resources towards dealing with the locations that have the worst accident records. Considering this the investigation of further measures at this location would not be supported as it did not meet our current escalation levels. Historically the complaints we received regarding this section of A181 had generally been in relation to the right turn out of Thornley and delays caused due to the traffic flows on the A181 not providing sufficient gaps for the right turn manoeuvre. Traffic surveys on the A181 show that there was very good compliance with the speed limit and a review of the speed limit confirmed that the current National Speed Limit was the correct one for this road. With the relatively close proximity of the roundabout to the south east (approx. ¾ mile), it could be considered appropriate to prohibit the right turn from Dunelm Road onto the A181. This would require all traffic to turn left onto the A181 and carry out a U-turn at the roundabout. This would help reduce the delays at the junction caused by drivers waiting for a gap in both directions of traffic flow on the A181 before pulling out, a left turn only requiring a gap in the southwest bound flow thereby presenting more opportunity to exit the side road. However, whilst the removal of the right turn from Dunelm Road had the potential to make an improvement at peak times, this may not be the case at other times and may lead to drivers intentionally carrying out an illegal manoeuvre out of peak. In addition, whilst bus operators have allowances in their time schedules to cover for delays at peak times, this measure would add an extra 2 minutes to every journey impacting on already tight schedules. This location would continue to be monitored as part of the countywide analysis and it was noted that the location could benefit from a refresh of the existing road markings. This work would be carried out as part of our routine activities when the contractor was next in the area and the weather conditions were suitable.	

Nature of Petition	Appropriate Service	Summary of Information	Status of Petition
Petition 430 New footpath and bench at Hargill Bank, Howden-le-Wear Received 6.12.22 No. of signatures 69	REG	Petition asking the Council for a new footpath and bench on Hargill Bank, Howden-le-Wear. Durham County Council, like most Councils, had a highway maintenance backlog and must prioritise limited budgets where they would have the most impact. This was generally in the maintenance of existing footway and carriageway provision. The creation of new highway infrastructure, such as footpaths, was normally funded by developers when areas were developed for retail, commercial and housing. The Council then adopts and maintains thereafter. While the demand for new facilities was appreciated it was not always possible to provide them from existing budgets. However, the Council were committed to expanding our work as an authority to encourage more active lifestyles with cycling and walking being of high importance in achieving this in our towns and villages. The Strategic Traffic Team were currently working with the Area Action Partnerships, Towns and Villages Officers and the local County Councillors to address issues raised by local communities. At this time traffic management projects were being investigated in this area to address concerns about traffic speed and road safety the request for footway and seating provision would be discussed further should a funding opportunity present. In the interim the Sustainable Transport Team who, along with colleagues investigating provision of projects in the wider areas, may be at some point in the future be able to take forward this request subject to the sourcing of available funding streams. This would ensure it was given consideration in the future if we were able to undertake a walking and cycling scheme in this area.	Petition CLOSED

Nature of Petition	Appropriate Service	Summary of Information	Status of Petition
Petition 433 Derelict and abandoned houses in Stanley **E-Petition** Received 10.3.23 No. of signatures	REG	Petition asking the Council to put pressure on landlords and owners to bring back derelict/abandoned property back in to use.	E-Petition would run from 13.3.23 – 21.4.23
Petition 434 Front street Pelton Fell speed limit **E-Petition** Received 17.3.23 No. of signatures	REG	Petition asking the Council to enforce a 30mph speed limit through the residential area, by either traffic calming measures or a speed camera.	E-Petition to run from 22.3.23 – 28.8.23

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**Corporate Overview and
Scrutiny Management Board**

3 April 2023

Notice of Key Decisions

Report of Corporate Management Team

Helen Lynch, Head of Legal and Democratic Services

Electoral division(s) affected:

Countywide.

Purpose of the Report

1   To consider the list of key decisions that is scheduled to be considered by the Executive.

Recommendation(s)

2   The Corporate Overview and Scrutiny management board is recommended to give consideration to items listed in the notice.

Background

3   New rules in relation to Executive decisions were introduced by The Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012, which came into force on 10 September 2012.

4   The regulations took away the requirement for the Executive to produce a Forward Plan of key decisions, however introduced that the decision maker cannot make a key decision unless a document has been published at least 28 clear days before the decision is taken, unless either a general exception or special urgency requirements have been met. The document which has to be published must state:

a) that the key decision is to be made on behalf of the relevant local authority

b) the matter in respect of which the decision is to be made

c) where the decision maker is an individual, that individual's name and title if any and where the decision maker is a decision making body, its name and list of its members

d) the date on which or the period within which the decision is to be made

e) a list of the document submitted to the decision maker for consideration in relation to the matter of which the key decision is to be made

f) the address from which, subject to any prohibition or restriction on their disclosure copies of, or extracts from any document listed as available

g) that other documents relevant to those matters may be submitted to the decision maker

h) the procedure for requesting details of those documents (if any) as they become available.

5 The requirements also apply to an exempt matter as previously it did not strictly have to be included in the Forward Plan. Now a publicity document must contain particulars of the matter, but may not contain any confidential exempt information or particulars of the adviser or political adviser or assistant.

6 Notices of key decisions that are being produced meet the legal requirements of publication, as well as continuing to provide information for a four month period. Members will therefore be able to consider key decisions as previously for the four month period.

Current Notice of Key Decisions

7 The notice of key decisions that is attached to the report at Appendix 2, is the latest to be published prior to the papers for the Board being dispatched to members. The notice complies with the requirements for Cabinet to be able to take key decisions at its meeting held on 19 April 2023. It also contained information on those key decisions that are currently scheduled to be considered by the Executive up to 31 July 2023.

Contact: Michael Turnbull   Tel: 03000 269714

Appendix 1: Implications

Legal Implications

Will be reflected in each individual key decision report to Cabinet. To publish the notice of key decisions in accordance with The Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012.

Finance

Will be reflected in each individual key decision report to Cabinet.

Consultation

Will be reflected in each individual key decision report to Cabinet.

Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty

Will be reflected in each individual key decision report to Cabinet.

Climate Change

Will be reflected in each individual key decision report to Cabinet.

Human Rights

Will be reflected in each individual key decision report to Cabinet.

Crime and Disorder

Will be reflected in each individual key decision report to Cabinet.

Staffing

Will be reflected in each individual key decision report to Cabinet.

Accommodation

Will be reflected in each individual key decision report to Cabinet.

Risk

Will be reflected in each individual key decision report to Cabinet.

Procurement

Will be reflected in each individual key decision report to Cabinet.

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Ref. No.	Date of Decision (i.e. date of Cabinet meeting)	Description of Decision to be Made	Background Documents	Lead Cabinet Member	Main Consultees & Means of Consultation	Contact details for further information	Scrutiny Involvement
CORP/R/23/01	12/07/23	Medium Term Financial Plan and Review of the Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme		Leader of the Council and Deputy Leader of the Council		Jeff Garfoot, Head of Corporate Finance and Commercial Services Tel: 03000 261946	Scrutiny members will consider this as part of the Scrutiny of the MTFP through COSMB Meetings

SECTION TWO - CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S SERVICES

Ref. No.	Date of Decision (i.e. date of Cabinet meeting)	Description of Decision to be Made	Background Documents	Lead Cabinet Member	Main Consultees & Means of Consultation	Contact details for further information

Ref. No.	Date of Decision (i.e. date of Cabinet meeting)	Description of Decision to be Made	Background Documents	Lead Cabinet Member	Main Consultees & Means of Consultation	Contact details for further information

SECTION FOUR - REGENERATION, ECONOMY AND GROWTH

Ref. No.	Date of Decision (i.e. date of Cabinet meeting)	Description of Decision to be Made	Background Documents	Lead Cabinet Member	Main Consultees & Means of Consultation	Contact details for further information

SECTION FIVE - NEIGHBOURHOODS AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Ref. No.	Date of Decision (i.e. date of Cabinet meeting)	Description of Decision to be Made	Background Documents	Lead Cabinet Member	Main Consultees & Means of Consultation	Contact details for further information

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