



Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Management Board

Date **Friday 22 September 2023**
Time **1.30 pm**
Venue **Committee Room 1A , 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. Declarations of Interest
4. Community Engagement Review Next Steps - Report of and presentation by the Corporate Director of Neighbourhoods and Climate Change (Pages 3 - 112)
5. Digital Solutions - Presentation by Head of Digital, Directorate of Resources (Pages 113 - 130)
6. County Durham Partnerships Update - Report of the Corporate Director of Neighbourhoods and Climate Change (Pages 131 - 160)
7. Notice of Key Decisions - Report of Head of Legal and Democratic Services (Pages 161 - 170)
8. Update in relation to Petitions - Report of Head of Legal and Democratic Services (Pages 171 - 180)
9. Such other business as, in the opinion of the Chair of the meeting, is of sufficient urgency to warrant consideration

Helen Bradley
Head of Legal and Democratic Services

County Hall
Durham
14 September 2023

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

Councillor R Crute (Chair)
Councillor C Lines (Vice-Chair)

Councillors V Andrews, A Batey, J Charlton, J Cosslett, B Coult, S Deinali,
J Elmer, K Hawley, P Heaviside, L Hovvels, M Johnson, P Jopling,
L Maddison, C Marshall, C Martin, J Miller, B Moist, E Peeke, A Reed,
K Shaw, M Stead, A Sterling, A Surtees and R Yorke

Contact: Jackie Graham

Tel: 03000 269 704

**Corporate Overview &
Scrutiny Management Board**

22 September 2023

**Community Engagement
Review**



Report of Corporate Management Team

Alan Patrickson, Corporate Director of Neighbourhoods & Climate Change

Councillor Elizabeth Scott, Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Economy & Partnerships

Electoral division(s) affected:

Countywide

Purpose of the Report

- 1 The purpose of the report is to provide members of Corporate Overview & Scrutiny Management Board (COSMB) with an update of the council's review of its' main community engagement function – the council's Area Action Partnerships (AAPs) following Cabinet approval on 12 July 2023 to implement a revised model.

Background

- 2 Members of COSMB were presented with an update on the findings from the independent consultant on the review of the council's community engagement function and the approach and delivery of a public countywide consultation at its' meeting on 3 April 2023.
- 3 Members of COSMB provided comments on the findings and recommended proposals made by the independent consultant and these comments were collated into a formal response that fed into the consultation. This included the recommendation that Cabinet agree the final decision in respect of the community engagement review be referred to full council for determination. However, the implementation of the community engagement arrangements are an executive matter and therefore it falls to Cabinet rather than Council to determine what the arrangements are.

- 4 Members asked at the meeting on 3 April that the Community Engagement Review be included in their work programme for 2023/24 so members can be updated on the review outcomes and next steps.
- 5 Arrangements have been made for a member of the AAP team to attend the meeting on 22 September 2023 and present the most recent Cabinet report which focusses on the outcomes of the county wide consultation and the recommended community engagement model and next steps, which were agreed by Cabinet on 12 July 2023 (see attached report and appendices).

Recommendations

- 6 Members of COSMB are asked to:
 - (a) receive the report and presentation and comment accordingly;
 - (b) agree to a further progress report at a future meeting.

Background papers

- [Cabinet Report, Review of Community Engagement and Funding Processes – 16 March 2022](#)
- [Cabinet Report, Community Engagement Review - 12 July 2023](#)

Author(s)

Gordon Elliott

Tel: 03000 264473

Appendix 1: Implications

Legal Implications

Not applicable

Finance

Not applicable

Consultation

Not applicable

Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty

Not applicable

Human Rights

Not applicable

Climate Change

Not applicable

Crime and Disorder

Not applicable

Staffing

Not applicable

Accommodation

Not applicable

Risk

Not applicable

Procurement

Not applicable

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Cabinet

12 July 2023

Community Engagement Review

Ordinary Decision



Report of Corporate Management Team

Alan Patrickson, Corporate Director of Neighbourhoods & Climate Change

Councillor Elizabeth Scott, Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Economy & Partnerships

Electoral division(s) affected:

Countywide

Purpose of the report

- 1 To provide Cabinet with an update on the findings from the countywide public consultation on ERS consultant's proposals for the council's community engagement function and to agree the recommendations for a revised function.

Executive summary

- 2 Following agreement by Cabinet in March 2022, consultant ERS were appointed to undertake an impartial and unbiased review of the council's community engagement function i.e. primarily the work of the Area Action Partnerships (AAPs). The consultant's report makes a number of recommendations aimed at improving our focus on community development and enhancing the capacity of local communities and individuals to become more involved in improving their area.
- 3 These recommendations were the subject of a countywide consultation exercise during the period 13 March to 23 April 2023. The council consulted with staff, elected members, AAP Board and Forum members, key partners, residents and other interested parties. Responses included: 188 survey responses; multiple online consultation sessions were held and presentations delivered as agenda items at various partner and key stakeholder meetings where participants

comments were noted for inclusion as consultation feedback; and 41 consultation responses were submitted via a dedicated consultation email address from a wide range of stakeholders.

- 4 Analysis of the consultation survey responses and other feedback shows that AAPs evoke a diverse range of opinions and that the review is a welcomed and timely opportunity to provide a natural progression from the existing AAP model.
- 5 In general, levels of satisfaction and support for the principles and functioning of AAPs are high. Most respondents are more supportive of incremental rather than whole scale change, with the preference to adopt some, not all the consultant's recommendations, building on the significant strengths of the current AAP model. Where the consultation analysis demonstrates broad agreement for the consultant's proposals, these have been included in the design of the new model.
- 6 The new model will deliver Local Networks which will primarily be based on the current AAP boundaries. Subject to outcomes of the Local Government Electoral Boundary Review, Local Networks will have the potential to align current AAP boundaries to the new electoral wards. Local Network boundary alignment will be reviewed following the outcomes of the Local Government Electoral Boundary Review (consultation closes 10 July 2023 and the final recommendations are due to be published 28 November 2023).
- 7 Local Networks will aim to attract involvement of a greater number, and a broader range of residents and local stakeholders through increased use and the relaunch of the current AAP Forum and its 15,000 members to form a County Durham Community Network. Opportunities will be enhanced to use new and traditional engagement tools and activities to improve local residents and partners engagement with Local Networks, and attendance at meetings and events is increased.
- 8 Local Network Panels will govern and manage the affairs of Local Networks in ways that are clear and transparent and demonstrate proper accountability to the County Council, partner organisations, stakeholders and the wider community.
- 9 Local Networks will adopt a more strategic approach to their work and outcomes through focussed Local Network meetings (reduced number per year) and the development of an individual local network plan in consultation with the County Durham Partnership and its thematic partnerships. Local network plans will help inform strategic priorities and identify opportunities for increased joined up working between Local Networks, partners and other Durham County Council (DCC) services.

- 10 Local network plans will be informed by: community views (residents and partners) facilitated by Local Network meetings and locality events; consultation and engagement with the County Durham Community Network and County Durham Partnership and its' thematic partnership sub groups; and utilising greater use of empirical data via a unique local profile (e.g. robust and detailed view on the profile and demographics of the Local Network area).
- 11 New governance including Terms of Reference (ToR) will clearly define the purpose, structure and functions of the Local Networks. It will provide in detail eligibility criteria, roles and responsibilities of Panel members and robust processes around recruitment and selection of Panel members to deliver improved assurance that Local Network Panels will be non-political.
- 12 Local decision making and transparency will be maintained with the AAP Board being replaced by a Local Network Panel and financial accountability will be improved with new funding guidelines and criteria and increased transparency on funding applications.
- 13 Application and funding processes will be streamlined to deliver improved efficiencies for applicants, elected members and Local Network staff. Improved processes and reduced formal Local Network meetings will ensure Local Networks have enhanced opportunities to carry out focussed engagement/neighbourhood planning type activities in particular with communities identified in the local network plan.
- 14 Following Cabinet agreement, the existing project group, sponsored by the Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Economy & Partnerships and led by the Corporate Director of Neighbourhoods & Climate Change, will deliver the next phase of this project to implement the new model. A detailed project and communications plan will be initiated in August 2023 with key milestones monitored against delivery.
- 15 AAPs will continue to operate as Area Action Partnerships until 31 March 2025, and on 1 April 2025 they will assume their new identity as Local Networks.
- 16 Where practically possible, and where it will cause no interruption to service delivery, improved/new processes and procedures will be implemented prior to April 2025. This will help test processes and to then embed improvements at the earliest opportunities and ensure efficiencies are realised promptly. This will also include the development and delivery of training and briefings for relevant stakeholders where necessary during the transition period, and for the April 2025 'go live', including working with the County Durham Partnership Board and

thematic partnerships to design and agree their role in the development and delivery of local network plans.

- 17 A launch campaign to set in motion, raise awareness and promote the New Local Networks will commence in January 2025 with Local Networks and their elected members delivering enhanced promotional and community engagement activities to attract new participants prior to an official 'go live' in April 2025.
- 18 A programme of tailored briefing and training sessions will be delivered for relevant stakeholders where necessary during the transition period, April 2025 'go live', and the appointment of new Panel members in May 2025. This will include: working with the County Durham Partnership Board and thematic partnerships to design and agree their role in the development and delivery of local network plans; governance and ToR protocols for Panel members; funding guidelines and criteria; and process arrangements for all relevant key stakeholders.
- 19 The new Local Network model is based on the existing funding and staffing team complement and staff are currently based within their geographic AAP boundaries. Within the current council staff hybrid working arrangements staff will have greater flexibility to identify days and locations where they can temporarily be based in buildings within the community to work more closely with the specific community groups/organisations they are currently supporting etc.
- 20 An equalities impact assessment screening details the potential impact of the protected characteristic groups for the implementation of the new model. In summary the recommendations for the new community engagement model do not disproportionately impact (both negatively and positively) the protected characteristics. The model is designed to be as inclusive as possible, with reasonable adjustments made where necessary in order to ensure the participation of people with disabilities.
- 21 In consulting and listening to the voices of our current AAP members, residents, partners and elected members etc. we intend to implement a new and improved community engagement model building on strengths of the current model and opportunities presented through the review and consultation phases. The new Local Networks will help the council, with our partners, to better engage, consult with and develop our communities so we can tackle the challenges that we face more effectively and help build more resilient communities.

Recommendation(s)

- 22 Cabinet is recommended to:
 - (a) note the outcomes from the countywide consultation exercise;

- (b) agree the proposed new Local Network model as the council's main community engagement function;
- (c) agree the proposed timescales for phased implementation and transitional arrangements; and
- (d) agree to receive an update on delivery progress including new governance arrangements and terms of reference in September 2024.

Background

- 23 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 over 2,600 groups/organisations deliver over 10,000 community-based projects as well as helping new groups with advice and support to become established organisations and they have assisted a range of council services, partners and agencies to carry out a plethora of consultations.
- 24 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. focussing primarily on the work of AAPs as the first phase one of a new transformation project. The consultant's review commenced in June 2022 and concluded in January 2023.
- 25 The consultant's report makes a number of recommendations aimed at improving our focus on community development and enhancing the capacity of local communities and individuals to become more involved in improving their area.
- 26 Phase two commenced with the recommendations from this impartial and unbiased review of the council's community engagement function being the subject of a countywide consultation exercise during 13 March to 23 April 2023. The council consulted with staff, elected members, AAP Board and Forum members, key partners, residents and other interested parties on the changes proposed in this independent review to our current approach.

Consultation

- 27 The consultation was delivered in accordance with the council's Consultation Statement and Consultation Protocol (March 2019) and complied with statutory and government guidance, as well as the general requirements of public law. The consultation 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 and sought feedback on the consultants four areas of recommendations detailed below.

Model

- 28 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

29 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

30 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

31 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 and community sector organisations (VCS);
- 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 VCS 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.

Response to consultation

32 The consultation provided an opportunity to seek feedback from a wide range of stakeholders via various methods and channels as detailed in the table below.

Activity	No. responses
Survey	
Residents	83
AAP Board & Forum members	26
County Councillors	11
Durham County Council Employees	24
Voluntary & Community Sector	27
Youth Council	8
Other	9
Submissions via email	
AAP Boards & Public Reps	12
AAP Teams	6
MP	1
Partners <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • County Durham & Darlington Local Resilience Forum • Durham Constabulary • Durham University • Durham Police & Crime Commissioners Office • NHS • Environment & Climate Change Partnership 	6
Residents	3
Town & Parish Councils / Councillors	8
Durham County Council Public Health	1
Voluntary & Community Sector	4
Notes/comments received at meetings/presentations	
AAP Boards	4
Overview & Scrutiny	1
Partners	5

Town & Parish Councils / Councillors	1
Comments received via social media	
Other	1

- 33 The survey contained mainly open questions with multiple choice for the ‘community development’ section and was duplicated across both the written and online forms; including areas for respondents to expand upon their answers and provide additional context to their responses. A total of 188 responses were received.
- 34 Survey feedback was broken down into agreement (positive), disagreement (negative), and neither agreement or disagreement (neutral). Where the respondent provided additional feedback, these comments have been coded against common areas/themes. These themes have been quantified to provide a numerical output relating to frequency of response. Analysis of the consultation survey responses is attached at appendix 2.
- 35 Multiple online consultation sessions were held and presentations delivered as agenda items at various partner and key stakeholder meetings where participants comments were noted for inclusion as consultation feedback (see appendix 3).
- 36 41 consultation responses were submitted via a dedicated consultation email address from a wide range of stakeholders.

Consultation outcomes

Analysis

- 37 Analysis of the consultation survey responses and other feedback shows that AAPs evoke a diverse range of opinions and that the review is a welcomed timely opportunity to provide a natural progression from the existing AAP model. The key points from the consultation outcome analysis for each of the four consultation areas are summarised below.

Model

- 38 The majority of responses (survey 42.4% and other submissions) indicated a majority disagreement for replacing AAP boards with community networks with no core board membership. Common themes around concerns for loss of structure, commitment and attendance, and current AAPs working well were frequently referenced.
- 39 Whilst 46.9% of survey respondents were in agreement to base community network meetings around specific themes, other submissions generally disagreed with this proposal, with common

themes from both survey and other submissions around concerns for hampering commitment and engagement and, loss of locally agreed priorities.

- 40 There was strong agreement from both survey respondents and other submissions for the proposal to host additional and varied engagement methods. This was also the case for the proposal for network teams to increase visibility by being based in community type buildings, however, other submissions in general did recognise current AAP staff are already based in their communities and 'outreach' type activities may be more beneficial than permanent work bases.

Boundaries

- 41 The majority of survey respondents were neutral to the proposals around changing boundaries (44.7%). This is in contrast to other submissions where there was strong agreement to maintain the existing boundaries. Common themes from both sets of responses were around: existing boundaries working and people knowing these boundaries; PCN boundaries are not set boundaries and change frequently; and concerns around proposing any changes to align to electoral wards prior to the outcomes of the Local Government Electoral Boundary Review for County Durham being known.

Funding

- 42 59.8% of survey respondents were in agreement with the proposal to introduce a new £300 Community Chest grant fund. Common themes from other submissions were not as supportive e.g.: duplicates other small grant funding groups/organisations across the county; £300 is a very small amount and concerns around the positive impacts it could achieve; and concerns around centralisation if Durham County Council (DCC) staff are making funding decisions, and the administrative burden may not best offer value for money.
- 43 There was general agreement with the proposal to replace the current annual Area Budget with Strategic Grants by other submissions however there were concerns around moving to a four-year funding allocation. Survey respondents were in the majority either neutral (38.2%) or in disagreement (34.7%). Common themes raised by survey respondents included the loss of flexibility to deal with emerging issues and opportunities to adapt and limiting opportunities some projects/organisations may have to access funding. Similar themes were highlighted via other submissions with an acknowledgement a four-year funding allocation may create other opportunities e.g.: increased assurance for longer term projects; more opportunities to link

to strategic planning; and increased opportunities for enhanced community development activities within communities.

- 44 There was general agreement from both survey respondents and other submissions on the sentiment of community networks developing a strategic programme. However, there was widespread disagreement from other submissions that strategic programmes would be approved by the County Durham Partnership with loss of local decision making and centralisation being the strongest theme. Survey respondents were in the majority neutral (43.6%) with 39.7% also in disagreement with this proposal.
- 45 Survey respondents were mainly neutral (43%) or in agreement (40.6%) for the proposal around set amounts of funding for each community network with extra funding based on other factors with common themes referenced around: funding being based on need and agreed criteria; population size may disguise actual need; rural communities have different needs and hidden poverty; and the approach would be fair and help level up areas. This proposal was not hugely referenced in other submissions but of those that did, it was noted that existing funding amounts vary due to the different number of elected members and Neighbourhood Budgets for each AAP.
- 46 There was general disagreement from other submissions around the proposal to focus grant funding during the transition period on 'cost-of-living' pressures whilst most survey respondents were either neutral (42.1%) or in agreement (34%). Common themes from other submissions were around the concern of centralisation and removing local decision making and determining what local priorities are.
- 47 There was general disagreement from other submissions for the proposal to ring-fence funding for economic development projects. This was mirrored by survey respondents where 40.6% of respondents were neutral and 33.1% were in disagreement. The main theme was concern around centralisation and removal of local communities determining their own proposals and needs.
- 48 There was widespread agreement from both survey respondents and other submissions around proposals to streamline/simplify funding processes. With widespread disagreement from both around the removal of the need for county councillors to report back to their community network their Neighbourhood Budgets, with common themes including concerns around: lack of transparency; removal of community oversight; and reduced ability to align county councillors community development work to that of their community networks.

Community development

- 49 Both survey respondents and other submissions were in widespread agreement to increase/enhance community development activities. There was widespread recognition from both that AAPs currently deliver most if not all of the activities within the proposals and that enhanced capacity from the implementation of proposals around simplifying funding and holding less formal meetings will lead to enhanced staff capacity to carry out increased activities. Common themes from both included: ability to react quickly; improve engagement with local communities to understand their needs and help inform planning; and to identify and support new groups/organisations with community development activities.

Partners & key stakeholders

- 50 In general, levels of satisfaction and support for the principles and functioning of AAPs are high amongst the partners and key stakeholders who responded to the consultation including: Durham Constabulary; Durham Police & Crime Commissioners Officer; County Durham & Darlington Local Resilience Forum; County Durham Partnership; County Durham Association of Local Councils; Durham University; Public Health; Corporate Overview & Scrutiny Management Board; and Mary Kelly Foy MP.
- 51 Most respondents would be more supportive of incremental rather than whole scale change, with the preference to adopt some, not all of the consultant's recommendations.
- 52 Some stakeholders including current AAP Boards, Board members and Forum members reflected concerns around the lack of detail in the consultant's recommendations and lack of evidence to support the case for widespread change.
- 53 It is broadly accepted that not all the consultant's recommendations build on the strengths of the APPs and it is felt by most that implementation of all recommendations would deconstruct the existing model, losing best practice and experience built up within AAP teams, boards and communities.
- 54 Some respondents feel that the term 'network' sounds more engaging than [AAP] 'board' and there is widespread agreement to make improvements and make AAPs even more efficient and effective.
- 55 Corporate Overview & Scrutiny Management Board made the recommendation that that Cabinet agree the final decision in respect of the community engagement review be referred to full council for determination. However, the implementation of the community

engagement arrangements are an executive matter and therefore it falls to Cabinet rather than Council to determine what the arrangements are.

Key Principles of the new model

- 56 Comments and suggestions from the consultation have been recorded and considered to inform the design going forward for the council's main community engagement function.
- 57 Where the consultation analysis demonstrates broad agreement for the consultant's proposals, these have been included in the design of the new model, including:
- maintaining a hyper local network of engagement mechanisms, following the local government boundary review outcomes;
 - enhanced capacity for community development support;
 - greater use of a wider range of engagement methods over and above Board meetings;
 - the development of a strategic plan to shape the allocation of funds including wider consultation and engagement with the County Durham Partnership and greater use of data and intelligence;
 - a costed plan based on four-year funding (with annual funding during transition year 2024/25);
 - simplified funding and application processes;
 - simplified councillor Neighbourhood Budget process including DCC project catalogue and dedicated contact within the funding team;
 - implementation of new grant application and funding system (subject to budget approval); and
 - review of AAP staff bases and opportunities identified for staff to work flexibly within their communities.

Proposed community engagement model

- 58 With the adoption of the above consultant's proposals and listening to other comments and feedback received during the consultation around the effectiveness and performance of the current AAP model, it is proposed to implement a rebranded community engagement model of

local networks. Appendix 4 details the Local Network model in diagram format.

- 59 Subject to outcomes of the Local Government Electoral Boundary Review, Local Networks will have the potential to align current boundaries to the new electoral wards. Local Network boundary alignment will be reviewed following the outcomes of the Local Government Electoral Boundary Review (consultation closes 10 July 2023 and the final recommendations are due to be published 28 November 2023).
- 60 Local Networks will maintain individual geographic names e.g., 3 Towns Local Network, 4 Together and will support communities at a time of increased pressures on residents and decreasing public resources.
- 61 Local Networks will aim to attract involvement of a greater number, and a broader range of residents and local stakeholders through increased use and the repurpose of the current AAP Forum and its 15,000 members, relaunched as the County Durham Community Network. Opportunities will be enhanced to use new and traditional engagement tools and activities to ensure local residents and partners engagement with Local Networks, and attendance to meetings and events are increased.
- 62 Local Networks Panels will govern and manage the affairs of local networks in ways that are clear and transparent and demonstrate proper accountability to the County Council, partner organisations, stakeholders and the wider community.

Boundaries

- 63 Local Networks will launch in April 2025 and subject to outcomes of the Local Government Electoral Boundary Review and a subsequent review by the council of current AAP boundaries, will have the potential to align Local Network boundaries to the new electoral wards whilst continuing to promote residents' affinity and cohesion in their communities, and maintaining stability and familiarity for partners and stakeholders.

Membership

- 64 The AAP Board will be replaced by a Local Network Panel and will maintain a non-political nature. The Panel will consist of a maximum of 21 members serving a four-year term. This will comprise of seven elected members (six county councillors and one Town & Parish councillor); seven partner representatives and seven community representatives. Revised open and transparent processes for the selection of Local Network Panel members will be included in the new

Terms of Reference (ToR) including guidance for elected member selection and term (including Town & Parish councillors).

- 65 To help ensure political neutrality neither county councillors and/or Town & Parish councillors nor anyone who holds office in a political party will be eligible to take up the position of community representatives.
- 66 Community representatives will be selected following an open and transparent recruitment process which will include the requirement to declare any conflicts of interest (financial and/or political). Selection will be determined by a selection panel (made up of a smaller group of Local Network Panel members) and will be endorsed by the full Local Network Panel. Community representatives will serve a maximum of a four-year term and cannot hold the position of community representative within 12 months of a previous term. All Panel members will be required to complete a register of interest and abide by a code of conduct that will be presented alongside ToR in a future report.
- 67 Partner representatives will consist of one representative from: Durham Constabulary; Durham & Darlington Fire & Rescue; health partners; registered social landlords; VCS organisations; and a local business. Local Networks will have the flexibility to reflect the individuality of their area on their membership Panel by offering the seventh partner representative position to an organisation or statutory body that has prevalence and significance in their local area (or they may choose to maintain a senior officer from Durham County Council as their seventh partner representative).
- 68 Each group (elected members, partners and community representatives) will elect a vice chair on an annual basis with the anticipation that the position of chair will revolve on an annual basis (e.g. be held by one of the vice chairs). Each chair must have a 12 month break between each term. If deemed appropriate by the Panel and agreement reached by a vote, chairs may continue for a maximum of a two-year term.

Governance

- 69 To ensure operational and decision making consistency across all Local Networks, and promote accountability and transparency, governance documentation and processes including new ToR will be developed. In consultation with a selection of representatives from each of the three Local Network Panel membership groups, all governance will reflect the Seven Principles of Public Life (Nolan Principles) and will outline the ethical standards Local Network Panel members are expected to adhere to. These will be approved by Cabinet prior to the launch in April

2025 and will be reviewed every 12 months to ensure they remain relevant and fit for purpose, or sooner if a need is identified and agreement from the relevant Cabinet Portfolio Holder is received.

- 70 The new ToR will clearly define the purpose, structure and functions of the Local Networks, promoting consistent common practices which are easily enforced across all Networks. This will also include clear guidelines for the effective and efficient operation of 'project task and finish groups' and 'Panel sub groups'.
- 71 The ToR will provide in detail eligibility criteria, roles and responsibilities of Panel members and robust processes around recruitment and selection of Panel members to deliver improved assurance that Local Network Panels will be non-political.
- 72 The ToR will strengthen protocols on decision making to ensure clear and concise guidance is adhered to in relation to the declaration of all prejudicial interests and Local Panel meetings will be formatted to provide a protocol reminder at the start of each meeting.
- 73 Financial accountability will be improved with increased transparency on funding processes with introduction of new funding guidelines and criteria, developed in consultation with the council's Section 151 Officer.

Decision making

- 74 Local decision making and transparency will be maintained. All Local Network decisions will be made by the Local Network Panel with the aim that this is achieved by consensus. To ensure clarity that this can be achieved, in particular, on funding decisions, Panels will be required to hold a vote. The voting arrangements will form part of the procedure rules to be developed alongside the governance and ToR in consultation with the Head of Legal & Democratic Services.
- 75 New funding guidelines and criteria will be further developed to ensure all direct and indirect relationships with Panel members are declared.

Approach to enhanced community engagement and development

- 76 Local Networks will adopt a more strategic approach to their work and outcomes through focussed Local Network meetings (reduced number per year) and the development of an individual local network plan in consultation with the County Durham Partnership and its thematic partnerships. Local network plans will help inform strategic priorities and identify opportunities for increased joined up working between Local Networks, partners and other DCC services.

- 77 Local network plans will be informed by: community views (residents and partners) facilitated by Local Network meetings and locality events; consultation and engagement with the County Durham Community Network and County Durham Partnership and its thematic partnership sub groups; and utilising greater use of empirical data via a unique local profile (e.g. robust and detailed view on the profile and demographics of the Local Network area).
- 78 Improved processes and reduced formal Local Network meetings will ensure Local Networks have enhanced opportunities to carry out focussed engagement/neighbourhood planning type activities in particular with communities identified in the local network plan.
- 79 Existing community engagement and development activities will be improved for example: promoting the work of the Local Network and attracting new participation; support for groups/organisations in sourcing and attracting alternative sources of funding; continued support for administering and delivering activities funded by external budgets e.g. Holiday Activities with Healthy Food (HAWF); and identifying opportunities and working with new residents/community groups to support them in becoming formally constituted groups.
- 80 The current AAP Forum will be repurposed with a new identity. This will be relaunched as the County Durham Community Network and will increase opportunities for its 15,000 members to engage in local network plan development and delivery including the option to introduce a new online consultation and engagement platform. There will be an increased focus on Local Network consultation activities whilst also enhancing Local Network delivery of those consultation activities delivered on behalf of DCC and partners.

Funding

- 81 Strategic Grant funding will replace Area Budgets. Local Network Strategic Grant funding will commence in May 2025 and funding applications will be approved by the Local Network Panel.
- 82 Local Networks will have the opportunity to allocate funding more flexibly over a four-year period to provide the means for more strategic action aligned to the local network plan e.g. four-year costed plans. It will provide increased flexibility and improved opportunities to identify and respond to emerging community needs e.g. spend allowed in year one whilst local network plans are being developed, whilst also providing longer term funding assurance for some applicants and increase opportunities for attracting match funding etc.

- 83 The ability to allocate funding flexibly over the four-year period will also allow for more time and opportunity for Local Networks to explore and identify new options which will help deliver the outcomes of their local network plan. This will include increased funding opportunities for new groups/organisations as opposed to working with the same partners repeatedly because current annual funding timescales reduce the amount of time which can be spent on developing new and existing community groups/organisations.
- 84 New funding guidelines and criteria will ensure Local Network funding is allocated prudently throughout the four-year local network planning cycle to local projects/initiatives, to effectively deliver the local network plan and provide positive outcomes for local residents and communities throughout the four-year planning cycle.
- 85 The funding guidelines and criteria will be developed in consultation with the council's internal audit team to mitigate and manage the level of risk associated with any changes to financial processes.

Elected Members' Neighbourhood Budgets

- 86 Elected members' Neighbourhood Budgets will continue to be allocated on an annual cycle with streamlined processes to help elected members carry out their community development work e.g.: no Neighbourhood Budget decisions taken by the Local Panel; single points of contact within the funding team; and access to indicative costs, specifications and timescales for DCC frequently delivered projects by means of a 'catalogue' of common schemes.

Improved processes

- 87 Application and funding processes will be streamlined to deliver improved efficiencies for applicants, elected members and Local Network staff, including (but not limited to): streamlined application form for repeat applicants and statutory partners; projects delivered by DCC will only require Network Panel approval; stipulation that any relevant permissions required to deliver a project must be in place prior to application being submitted; financial monitoring will be streamlined (projects with a declaration of interest will be prioritised); increased access/visibility to the funding team for elected members and applicants; and the option to introduce a new online grant application and management system. Appendix 5 provides more detail on the specific process improvements which will be implemented in consultation with the council's internal audit team to mitigate and manage the level of risk associated with any changes to financial processes.

Performance management

- 88 A new efficient and user-friendly performance management framework and system will be developed to effectively monitor activities/projects delivered via the local network plan to determine impact and value for money. The new performance management framework and system will be considered as part of the option to introduce a new online grant application and funding system.
- 89 Local Network Panel members will be required to complement the performance management framework by assisting with some qualitative monitoring. By undertaking a 'project champion' role and visiting projects/initiatives to witness their delivery and outcomes etc. Local Network Panel members will also help share learning and promote best practice.
- 90 Fit for purpose monitoring will also feed into strategic countywide key performance indicators where appropriate and can be used to help inform strategic priorities set by DCC, County Durham Partnership and key partners.

Staffing

- 91 The new Local Network model is based on the current AAP and funding team staffing complement. Staff are currently based within their geographic AAP boundaries and where this is not within council owned buildings, options are currently being considered to re-locate staff to reduce office accommodation costs.
- 92 Within the current council staff hybrid working arrangements, staff will maintain their core base in a council owned building but will have greater flexibility to identify days and locations where they can temporarily be based within buildings in the local community to work more closely with the specific community groups/organisations they are currently supporting etc.

Next steps

- 93 Whilst the independent review and countywide consultation on the council's community engagement function have been crucial first phases, there remains detailed and extensive work to do in fulfilment of the recommendations in this report. Following Cabinet agreement, the existing project group, sponsored by the Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Economy & Partnerships and led by the Corporate Director of Neighbourhoods & Climate Change, will deliver the next phase of this project to implement the new model.

Phased implementation delivery plan

- 94 The new Local Network model will be incrementally implemented to mitigate service disruption, with the new Local Network model fully operational in April 2025 in time to prepare for the council elections in May 2025 and the commencement of the four-year network planning cycle, see table below.

Milestone	Delivery
Local Government Boundary Review consultation closes*	July 2023
Project plan including communications plan initiated	August 2023
Funding process improvements & efficiencies including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Streamlined approval process for lower spend threshold • Streamlined approval process for DCC delivered projects • Streamlined approval for applications pending conditions • New contact processes for funding team & applicants • Establish funding team single points of contact for elected members 	October 2023
Funding process improvements & efficiencies including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Streamlined process for Neighbourhood Budget (removal of AAP approval) • Revised process for applications requiring external permissions (e.g. planning/licencing etc.) • Streamlined application forms for repeat applicants & statutory partners • Catalogue for frequently delivered DCC projects • Financial monitoring (12 month pilot) 	April 2024
Local Network Governance and ToR (including funding guidelines) working group established	October 2023
Local Government Boundary Review - final recommendations*	November 2023
Potential commencement for review AAP boundaries	January 2024
Feasibility study for online grant application & management system	April 2024
Feasibility study for online consultation & engagement platform**	April 2024

Milestone	Delivery
Local Network Governance & ToR (including funding guidelines) sign off by Cabinet	September 2024
Strategic planning process with County Durham Partnership	December 2024
Local Network branding & communication tools	January 2025
Launch campaign for community & partnership events/activities	January – March 2025
Training	1 April 2025
Local Networks ‘go live’	1 April 2025
Local Network Panels appointed & four-year planning cycle commences	May 2025
Training (new Panel members)	June 2025

* out of scope – dates will be determined by the Local Government Electoral Boundary Review and therefore may be subject to change

** out of scope - will be delivered outside of this project as business as usual

- 95 AAPs will continue to operate as Area Action Partnerships until 31 March 2025, and on 1 April 2025 they will assume their new identity as Local Networks.
- 96 Where practically possible, and where it will cause no interruption to service delivery, improved/new processes and procedures will be implemented under our political management arrangements of chief officer delegated powers. This will help test processes and to then embed improvements at the earliest opportunities and ensure efficiencies are realised promptly.
- 97 A programme of tailored briefing and training sessions will be delivered for relevant stakeholders where necessary during the transition period, April 2025 ‘go live’, and the appointment of new Panel members in May 2025. This will include: working with the County Durham Partnership Board and thematic partnerships to design and agree their role in the development and delivery of local network plans; governance and ToR protocols for Panel members; and funding guidelines and criteria and process arrangements for all relevant key stakeholders.
- 98 A launch campaign to set in motion, raise awareness and promote the New Local Networks will commence in January 2025 with Local Networks and their elected members delivering enhanced promotional and community engagement activities to attract new participants prior to ‘go live’ in April 2025.

2024/25 transition year funding

- 99 It is proposed to continue with the current annual funding allocation arrangements for AAPs and elected members' Neighbourhood Budget for the 2024/25 financial year and commence the four-year local network planning cycle for Strategic Grant funding to align with the local council election in May 2025.
- 100 During this period AAPs will continue to empower boards to determine their local priorities based on local need for their last year for annual Area Budget.

Communications

- 101 An extensive communications plan will be developed and delivered to ensure all key stakeholders and residents are kept up to date on progress during the duration of the project.
- 102 This will include tailored and timely communications for the relevant stakeholders to highlight the implementation of process improvements and new ways of working etc. (e.g. in-line with delivery of key milestones).
- 103 Communication and engagement activities will also be delivered to specifically promote the new community engagement function and 'go live' in April 2025 to advertise and raise awareness of the new Local Networks, and to attract increase participation from local residents and communities.

Equalities Impact Assessment

- 104 An equalities impact assessment screening (appendix 6) details the potential impact of the protected characteristic groups for the implementation of the new model. In summary the recommendations for the new community engagement model do not disproportionately impact (both negatively and positively) the protected characteristics. The model is designed to be as inclusive as possible, with reasonable adjustments made where necessary in order to ensure the participation of people with disabilities.

Conclusion

- 105 We are aware that AAPs have been operating for 14 years and it is appropriate that we received independent advice and consulted widely with all stakeholders 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.

106 In consulting and listening to the voices of our current AAP members, residents, partners and elected members etc. we intend to implement a new and improved community engagement model building on strengths of the current model and opportunities presented through the review and consultation phases. The new Local Networks will help the council, with our partners, to better engage, consult with and develop our communities so we can tackle the challenges that we face more effectively and help build more resilient communities.

Background papers

- None

Other useful documents

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

Author(s)

Gordon Elliott

Tel: 03000 264473

Appendix 1: Implications

Legal Implications

The proposed new engagement model based is aimed to strengthen the Council's ability to ensure it meets it's statutory 'duty to consult' of service change.

Finance

The proposals set out in this report aim to enhance the capacity for local residents to engage with the council and its partners to ensure local communities are resilient and supportive. The proposals set out in this report are cost neutral, with the aim that the reviewed service, in line with the council's well-being principals, will help mitigate the level of need for other council 'mainstream' support services. Any costs for new online grant management or engagement tools would be met by current departmental budgets.

The funding guidelines and criteria will be developed in consultation with the council's internal audit team to mitigate and manage the level of risk associated with any changes to financial processes.

Consultation

The outcomes from the countywide consultation exercise are summarised within the report and further detail is provided in appendices 2 and 3.

Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty

An equalities impact assessment screening is attached as appendix 6 detailing the potential impact of the protected characteristic groups. The recommendations for the new community engagement model do not disproportionately impact (both negatively and positively) the protected characteristics. The model is designed to be as inclusive as possible, with reasonable adjustments made where necessary in order to ensure the participation of people with disabilities.

Climate Change

None.

Human Rights

None.

Crime and Disorder

Local Networks (as current AAPs) will support the council's legal responsibility for preventing and reducing crime and disorder in the area by enabling communities to identify and highlight crime and disorder issues in their area, and work with partners to problem solve and implement crime reduction and prevention strategies.

Staffing

The new Local Network model is based on the current AAP staffing complement.

Staff engagement has been a key element of the review process to date. Subject to the approval of this report, further engagement will be carried out 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 outcomes and the timescales we are working towards to implement the new model.

Accommodation

Consideration will be given to the Local Network teams making greater use of local community facilities to carry out drop-in sessions across their areas.

Risk

There is a risk that the desired increase in local residents do not engage with the new model. To mitigate this, a robust communications plan will be developed to promote the changes. Furthermore, staff will have more capacity to explore new engagement mechanisms, over and above the local network meetings, to engage with a broad range of the community.

The funding guidelines and criteria will be developed in consultation with the council's internal audit team to mitigate and manage the level of risk associated with any changes to financial processes.

Procurement

Procurement procedural regulations will be followed in the acquisition of a grant management and consultation/engagement systems.

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Community Engagement Review

Survey Analysis

Summary

Total of 188 responses were received to the survey (collated online and paper input).

Survey feedback has been broken down into agreement (positive), disagreement (negative), neither agreement nor disagreement (neutral) comments.

Where the respondent has provided additional feedback, these comments have been coded against common areas/themes. These themes have been quantified to provide a numerical output relating to frequency of response. The most frequent responses are highlighted throughout the summary in accordance with the relevant question.

In overview the most frequent response in respect of each question/proposal area generated a majority response of either:

- agree or
- neutral / neither agree nor disagree.

Only 2 questions generated a response that indicated majority disagreement covering:

- Replace Area Action Partnerships (AAP) Boards with community networks - community network meetings open to all, 42.4% no core board membership. 40.9%
- Remove the need for county councillors to report back to the community network on their Neighbourhood Budget projects. 64.7%

However, where the most majority response was either agree or disagree, the weighting was not overly strong on either side of this for the majority of questions.

A proportion of questions did generate a more obvious polarised response within elements of model and funding proposal questions:

Significant weighting towards agreement detected for the following questions/proposals:

- Model: community network staff hosting additional and varied engagement method such as 1-2-1 meeting.61.6%
- Model: locating community network teams in community locations such as libraries and family hubs to increase their visibility.71.2%
- Funding: the introduction of a community chest.59.8%
- Funding: simplifying the approach to approve county councillor Neighbourhood Budgets.68.9%
- Funding: reducing staff time in allocating and managing budgets to allow more time for grass roots community development.53.8%

Significant weighting towards disagreement detected for the following question/proposal:

- Funding: Remove the need for county councillors to report back to the community network on their Neighbourhood Budget projects.64.7%

Percentage responses across respondent groups:

- Residents 44.1% - 83 people
- AAP group (board member and forum member) 13.9% - 26 people
- Voluntary Community Sector (VCS) 14.4% - 27 people
- Durham County Council (DCC) employees 12.8% - 24 people
- County Councillor 5.9% - 11 people
- Durham Youth Council (DYC) 4.3% - 8 people
- Other (not identified) 4.8% - 9 people, unable to categorise within other groups

Breakdown of the respondent groups indicate divergence from the overall/collective response in respect of the following proposal areas:

Residents – deviation

- It is proposed that we replace AAP Boards with community networks – *element re: open to all, no core board membership – neutral majority against an overall disagree majority response.*
- It has been proposed that we replace the current Area Budget (a fund for local projects) with Strategic Grants which are allocated on a four-year funding period, in line with the election period – *disagree majority against an overall neutral majority response.*
- It is proposed that if the four-year Strategic Grant funding is adopted in May 2025, during the transition period the existing AAP budgets are used

to focus on tackling the cost-of-living pressure. – *agree majority against an overall neutral majority response.*

Resident responses made up 44.1% of overall responses. There was a close split between Agree and Disagree (36.7% and 38%) to Boards being replaced by Community Networks and an identical split on the idea of having no core membership (35.4% agree and 35.4% disagree).

In terms of funding there was a feeling that Strategic grants should not replace the current Area Budget but if they were, there was agreement to focus on tackling the cost of living. Where funding was concerned there was a stronger disagreement with a move to a four-year funding period than the general response and higher agreement for budgets focusing on cost-of-living pressures during any transition year.

Area Action Partnership group – deviation

- It is proposed that we replace AAP Boards with community networks - *majority split between agree and disagree against an overall disagree majority response.*
- It has been proposed that we replace the current Area Budget (a fund for local projects) with Strategic Grants which are allocated on a four-year funding period, in line with the election period - *majority agree against an overall neutral majority response.*
- It has been proposed that each community network will receive a set amount of funding for the Strategic Grant. Areas will then receive extra funding based on a range of factors such as population size and levels of disadvantage – *majority agree against an overall neutral majority response.*
- It is proposed that a proportion of each community networks' Strategic Grant funding should be ring-fenced for economic development projects - *majority split between neutral and disagree against an overall neutral majority response.*
- It is proposed that with a simpler process for Neighbourhood Budgets, that the funding team are the main resource to help county councillors develop projects with less reliance upon community network team members – *majority split neutral and agree against an overall agree majority response.*

13.9% of respondents were either board or forum members. Whilst the overall response was against replacing AAP Boards with Community Networks, the AAP Group were split on Agree and Disagree at 42.3% for each.

There was more favour within this group for the move to Strategic Grants on a four – year period but more negative response to the idea of ring-fencing funding for economic development projects.

The suggestion of set amounts for Strategic Grants with potential uplifts for factors such as population size and disadvantage also found more agreement within this group. Whilst there was agreement that Neighbourhood Budget should be simplified, there was an identical split between neutral and agree (36.8%) that the funding team should become the main support for members.

Voluntary & Community Sector – deviation

- It is proposed that the community network coordinators (our staff) to lead and develop the area's Strategic Grant programme with the community and partners, sharing ideas at community network meetings and with the involvement of county councillors – element re: share at community network meetings involving councillors – *majority neutral against an overall agree majority response.*
- It is proposed that with a simpler process for Neighbourhood Budgets, that the funding team are the main resource to help county councillors develop projects with less reliance upon community network team members - *majority neutral response against an overall agree majority response.*

The VCS respondents were more neutral towards the idea of Network co-ordinators leading and developing the Strategic Grant Programme. They were also more neutral towards the suggestion of the funding team being the main support resource for Cllrs when developing projects.

Durham County Council employee – deviation

- It is proposed that we replace AAP Boards with community networks – element: meetings would be every two months and chaired by a member of our staff - *majority disagree against an overall neutral majority response for both elements.*
- It has been proposed to introduce a new fund known as the Community Chest 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 - *majority neutral response against an overall majority agree response.*
- It has been proposed that we replace the current Area Budget (a fund for local projects) with Strategic Grants which are allocated on a four-year funding period, in line with the election period – *majority disagree response against an overall neutral majority response.*
- It is proposed that the community network coordinators (our staff) to lead and develop the area's Strategic Grant programme with the community and

partners, sharing ideas at community network meetings and with the involvement of county councillors - element re: *co-ordinators to lead area strategic grant programme and share at community network meetings involving councillors – majority neutral response against an overall majority agree response.*

- It is proposed that the four-year programme should be approved, at the end of year one, through a sub-group of the County Durham Partnership – *majority disagree response against an overall neutral majority response.*
- It is proposed that a proportion of each community networks' Strategic Grant funding should be ring-fenced for economic development projects – *majority disagree response against an overall neutral majority response.*
- It is proposed that with a simpler process for Neighbourhood Budgets, that the funding team are the main resource to help county councillors develop projects with less reliance upon community network team members – *majority disagree against an overall agree majority response.*
- It is proposed that the current administrative burden on staff of allocating and managing budgets should be reduced to free up more time for grass roots community development work – *majority neutral against and overall agree majority response.*

There was majority disagreement for a move from AAPs to Community Networks and for DCC staff to chair these networks. This group were more neutral to the idea of network co-ordinators developing the Strategic Grant programme and displayed higher disagreement towards 4-year strategic grants, ring fencing grant for economic development and for a sub group of the CDP approving the four year programmes. There was also greater neutrality towards the idea of a Community Chest.

The proposal for the funding team being the main support resource for Cllrs in developing projects, was also met with greater disagreement. There was a majority who were neutral towards the proposals for reducing administration and managing budgets to free up more time for grass roots community development work.

County Councillor – deviation

- It is proposed that we base our community network meetings around a new theme at each meeting covering environment and climate change, the economy, community safety, health and wellbeing, children and young people – *majority neutral response against an overall majority agree,*
- It is proposed that we introduce more evenly sized community network areas based on population. The options include to base the new structure on either AAP boundaries, Primary Care Network boundaries or the new electoral ward boundaries – *majority agree response against an overall*

majority neutral.

- It has been proposed to introduce a new fund known as the Community Chest 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 – *majority split neutral and agree against overall agree majority response.*
- It has been proposed that we replace the current Area Budget (a fund for local projects) with Strategic Grants which are allocated on a four-year funding period, in line with the election period – *majority disagree response against overall neutral majority response.*
- It is proposed that the community network coordinators (our staff) to lead and develop the area's Strategic Grant programme with the community and partners, sharing ideas at community network meetings and with the involvement of county councillors – *element re: co-ordinators to lead area strategic grant programme – majority neutral response against overall agree majority response.*
- It is proposed that the four-year programme should be approved, at the end of year one, through a sub-group of the County Durham Partnership – *majority disagree response against an overall neutral majority response.*
- It is proposed that we remove the need for county councillors to report back to the community network on their Neighbourhood Budget projects – *majority split response between agree and disagree against an overall disagree majority response.*

When looking at the suggestion for themed meetings the elected member group had a strong neutral response (60%) as opposed to the general agree majority. There was also more a more even split between those agreeing and disagreeing with the idea of County Councillors being required to report back to the network meeting.

This group displayed higher agreement towards more evenly sized community networks. In terms of funding, there was stronger disagreement with the idea of replacing Area Budget with a 4-year Strategic Grant in line with the election period, more neutral around the idea of co-ordinators leading and developing the Strategic Grant programme and a majority disagreement with a sub-group of the CDP approving the subsequent 4-year programme.

Although the general responses were in agreement with developing a community chest, elected members were majority split between neutral and agree with this idea.

Durham Youth Council – deviation

- It is proposed that we replace AAP Boards with community networks

including element re: open to all, no core board membership – *majority agree response against and overall disagree majority response in both cases.*

- It is proposed that as well as network meetings, staff should be encouraged to host additional and varied engagement methods such as 1-2-1 meetings, networking events and small group meetings – *response split between agree and neutral against an overall neutral majority response.*
- It has been proposed to introduce a new fund known as the Community Chest 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 – *majority response neutral against an overall agree majority response.*
- It is proposed that the community network coordinators (our staff) to lead and develop the area's Strategic Grant programme with the community and partners, sharing ideas at community network meetings and with the involvement of county councillors – element re: share at community network meetings involving councillors – *majority response neutral against an overall agree majority response.*
- It has been proposed that each community network will receive a set amount of funding for the Strategic Grant. Areas will then receive extra funding based on a range of factors such as population size and levels of disadvantage *majority response agree against an overall neutral majority response.*
- It is proposed that we should simplify the approach to approve county councillors' Neighbourhood Budgets (such as for repeat applicants and council delivered projects) - *majority response neutral against an overall agree majority response.*
- It is proposed that with a simpler process for Neighbourhood Budgets, that the funding team are the main resource to help county councillors develop projects with less reliance upon community network team members – *majority response neutral against an overall agree majority response.*
- It is proposed that the current administrative burden on staff of allocating and managing budgets should be reduced to free up more time for grass roots community development work - *majority response neutral against an overall agree majority response.*

60% of DYC respondents agreed that Community Networks should replace AAP Boards and that the Networks should be open to all.

General responses to host varied engagement methods was overall neutral, however, the DYC was split 50/50 between Agree and Neutral. In terms of funding, this group was more neutral than the overall agree majorities towards the proposals for:

- Community Network co-ordinators leading and developing the Strategic Grant programme

- The idea of a community chest
- Funding team to be the main support resource for councillors when developing projects
- Reducing administration and budget management to free up more time for grass roots community development

This group did however, display higher agreement for community networks to receive set amounts of funding plus extra funding based upon a number of factors including population and deprivation levels.

Model

1. It is proposed that we replace AAP Boards with community networks.

Majority disagree 42.4% followed by agree 37.3%
 DYC different - majority agree at 60% followed by disagree at 40%
 VCS majority stronger disagree to overall at 52.2%
 DCC majority stronger disagree to overall at 58.3%
 Cllrs majority stronger disagree to overall at 60%
 AAP group different – majority split disagree 42.3% / agree 42.3%
 Other group different – majority agree 66.7%

Within this question respondents' fed back the following breakdown of proposal elements were as follows:

- **Meetings would be every two months** – majority neutral 45.5% followed by 29% disagree

DCC employee different - majority disagree at 41.7%

- **Open to all, no core board membership** – majority disagree 40.9% / followed by 32.4% agree

Residents different - majority neutral response with split 35.4% agree / 35.4% disagree

DYC different - majority agree at 60% followed by disagree 40%

DCC employee majority stronger disagree to overall at 54.2%

Cllrs majority stronger disagree to overall at 60%

- **Chaired by a member of our staff** – majority neutral 46% followed by 27.3% agree

DCC employee different – majority disagree at 41.7%

- **County Councillors would be encouraged to attend meetings and events** – majority neutral 43.8% followed by agree 31.8%

Top comment areas:

Concern: No core group = loss of structure, objectives, continuity, purpose, commitment, balance

Concern: Poor public/partner attendance/involvement

Retain: Current AAPs' work adequate

Positive: Encourage/increase engagement, interest, representation

Total of 292 coded additional comments regarding this question

- 2. It is proposed that we base our community network meetings around a new theme at each meeting covering environment and climate change, the economy, community safety, health and wellbeing, children and young people.**

Majority agree 46.9% / followed by neutral 35.4%

DYC majority stronger agree at 66.7%

Cllr different - majority neutral at 60%

AAP group majority stronger agree to overall at 53.8%

Top comment areas:

Themes: Could hamper progress and ongoing engagement

Flexibility: Time between themed discussions could make it reactive

Themes: Could lead to inconsistent/low attendance

Themes: Locally agreed could increase focused engagement

Total of 173 coded additional comments regarding this question

- 3. It is proposed that as well as network meetings, staff should be encouraged to host additional and varied engagement methods such as 1-2-1 meetings, networking events and small group meetings.**

Majority agree 61.6% / followed by neutral 31.4%

DYC different - balanced 50-50 split agree / neutral

VCS majority stronger agree to overall at 81.8%

Cllr majority stronger agree to overall at 80%

Top comment areas:

Inclusive: AAPs already do this

Inclusive: Need broad ways to engage/seldom heard voices

Resources: Must be resourced whilst not increasing costs

Further clarity needed

Total 152 coded additional comments regarding this question

- 4. It is proposed that we locate our community network teams in places such as community centres, libraries and family hubs to increase their visibility.**

Majority agree 71.2% followed by neutral 22.6%
Residents' majority stronger agree to overall at 73.8%
DYC majority stronger agree to overall at 75%
DCC employee majority agree not as strong at 54.2% (possibly because staff feel they are already visible?)
AAP group majority stronger agree to overall at 88%

Top comment areas:

Accessibility: Locate in accessible local venues
Visibility: Outreach/networking rather than staff location
Visibility: AAPs are already doing this
Financial: Centres have to be funded - help sustainability
Total 183 coded additional comments regarding this question

Boundary

- 5. It is proposed that we introduce more evenly sized community network areas based on population. The options include to base the new structure on either AAP boundaries, Primary Care Network boundaries or the new electoral ward boundaries.**

Majority neutral 44.7% followed by agree and disagree split at 27.6%
VSC majority stronger neutral at 57.1%
Cllr different - majority agree at 44.4%
Other group different – majority spilt neutral 37.5% / agree 37.5%

Top comment areas:

Retain: Existing boundaries work, people know them
Change: Electoral/ward boundaries
Concern: Evenly sized community networks based on population
Don't change: PCN boundaries change too frequently
Total of 213 coded additional comments regarding this question

Funding

- 6. It has been proposed to introduce a new fund known as the Community Chest 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.

Majority agree 59.8% followed by neutral 27.4%
Residents' majority stronger agree at 65.4%
DYC different - majority neutral at 75%
DCC employee different – majority neutral at 50%
Cllr different – majority split 40% neutral / 40% agree

Top comment areas:

Grant size: £300 is too small
Admin: Requires clear guidance, criteria and due diligence to approve
Usefulness: Easy to access quickly for small organisations
Admin: The current process is fit for purpose
Admin: The current process is too onerous
Total of 215 coded additional comments regarding this question

7. It has been proposed that we replace the current Area Budget (a fund for local projects) with Strategic Grants which are allocated on a four-year funding period, in line with the election period.

Majority neutral 38.2% followed by disagree 34.7%
Residents different - majority disagree 37.2% / agree 26.9%
DYC split 50-50 disagree and neutral
DCC employee different – majority disagree at 40.9%
Cllr different – majority disagree at 50%
AAP group different – majority agree at 41.7%

Top comment areas:

Funding: Could be limiting (to some projects/organisations)
4-year cycle: Lose flexibility for emerging issues/opportunities, adapt existing
4-year cycle: Frequency of applications/allocation/continuity over the cycle
Election cycle: Perception that politically driven, effect on decision making
Total of 311 coded additional comments regarding this question

8. It is proposed that the community network coordinators (our staff) to lead and develop the area's Strategic Grant programme with the community and partners, sharing ideas at community network meetings and with the involvement of county councillors.

Within this question respondents' fed back the following breakdown of proposal elements were as follows:

- **Co-ordinators to lead area strategic grant programme** – majority agree 42.9% followed by neutral 36.9%

DYC majority split 50-50 agree and neutral
 DCC employee different – majority neutral at 56.5%
 Cllr different – majority neutral at 50%
 AAP group stronger agree to overall at 50%
 Other group different – majority neutral 57.1%

- **Share at community network meetings involving councillors** – majority agree 44% followed by neutral 37.5%

DYC different - majority neutral 100%
 VSC different – majority neutral at 47.8%
 DCC employee different – majority neutral at 56.5%
 Cllr majority stronger agree at 60%
 AAP group stronger agree to overall at 50%
 Other group different – majority neutral 57.1%

Top comment areas:

Outcomes: Needs staff on the ground to ensure implementation
 Influence: Make decision in-house
 Engagement: Need broader ways of engagement e.g. task groups/voting
 Process: Robust to deal with disgruntled community members
 Role: Community Capacity building a key priority
 Total of 196 coded additional comments regarding this question

9. It is proposed that the four-year programme should be approved, at the end of year one, through a sub-group of the County Durham Partnership.

Majority neutral 43.6% followed by disagree 39.7%
 DYC stronger majority neutral 100%
 DCC employee different – majority disagree at 59.1%
 Cllr different – majority disagree at 90%

Top comment areas:

Governance: Community accountability /Impact on relationships & engagement
 4-year cycle: Frequency of funding applications /allocation/continuity
 Locality: Understanding of/address local needs & relevance
 4-year cycle: Flexibility to respond to change
 Total of 197 coded additional comments regarding this question

- 10. It has been proposed that each community network will receive a set amount of funding for the Strategic Grant. Areas will then receive extra funding based on a range of factors such as population size and levels of disadvantage.**

Majority neutral 43% followed by agree 40.6%

DYC different - majority agree 66.7%

VSC split 40.9% agree / 40.9% neutral

AAP group different – majority agree at 54.2%

Top comment areas:

Approach: All funding should be based on need/agreed criteria/transparent

Factors: Rural communities have different needs and hidden poverty

Factors: Population size may disguise actual need

Approach: Fair and help to level up areas

Factors: Need clear justification/value

Total of 150 coded additional comments regarding this question

- 11. It is proposed that if the four-year Strategic Grant funding is adopted in May 2025, during the transition period the existing AAP budgets are used to focus on tackling the cost-of-living pressures.**

Majority neutral 42.1% followed by agree 34%

Residents' different - majority agree at 44%

DYC stronger majority neutral at 100%

Other group different – majority split neutral 42.9% / agree 42.9%

Top comment areas:

Too narrow focus: Need a range of projects that meet local needs

Influence: Involve communities in deciding how the money is spent locally

Need clear definition of what cost of living means

I don't understand the proposal

Total of 104 coded additional comments regarding this question

- 12. It is proposed that a proportion of each community networks' Strategic Grant funding should be ring-fenced for economic development projects.**

Majority neutral 40.6% followed by disagree 33.1%

DYC stronger majority neutral at 100%

DCC employee different – majority disagree at 50%

AAP group different – majority split neutral 36.4% / disagree 36.4%

Top comment areas:

Community networks should determine their own proposals/needs
More details needed to comment
All funding should be processed in the same way, not ring fenced
Need to understand what is meant by economic development
Total of 151 coded additional comments regarding this question

13. It is proposed that we should simplify the approach to approve county councillors' Neighbourhood Budgets (such as for repeat applicants and council delivered projects).

Majority agree 68.9% followed by neutral 19.9%
Residents' majority stronger agree 73%
DYC different - majority neutral at 100%
VSC stronger agree to overall at 71.4%
Cllr majority stronger agree to overall at 80%

Top comment areas:

I agree, simplify all application processes
Need to show they meet the funding criteria
More information/knowledge needed to comment
Projects need to demonstrate outcomes and outputs
Total of 115 coded additional comments regarding this question

14. It is proposed that with a simpler process for Neighbourhood Budgets, that the funding team are the main resource to help county councillors develop projects with less reliance upon community network team members.

Majority agree 37.3% followed by neutral and disagree both 31.3%
Residents' stronger agree 44.1%
DYC different – majority neutral at 100%
VSC different - agree and disagree split evenly at 35%
DCC employee different – majority strong disagree at 72.7%
Cllr majority stronger agree to overall at 60%
AAP group different – majority evenly split neutral 36.8% / agree 36.8%

Top comment areas:

Requires community oversight and accountability
Team capacity/knowledge issue to support projects for 126 councillors and the networks
I don't have the knowledge to comment/need more detail
Many councillors/groups rely on the expertise and support of the AAP
Total of 112 coded additional comments regarding this question

15. It is proposed that we remove the need for county councillors to report back to the community network on their Neighbourhood Budget projects.

Majority disagree 64.7% followed by agree 19.9%
Residents' majority stronger disagree to overall at 72.2%
Cllr different – majority split 50% agree / 50% disagree

Top comment areas:

Accountability: Lose transparency and public accountability of £2.5m
Communication: Outcomes and impacts of projects should be shared
Accountability: Retain as its open to scrutiny and good practice
Communication: Key to community engagement and involvement
Total of 137 coded additional comments regarding this question

16. It is proposed that the current administrative burden on staff of allocating and managing budgets should be reduced to free up more time for grass roots community development work.

Majority agree 53.8% followed by neutral 36.3%
DYC different - majority neutral at 66.7%
DCC employee different – majority neutral at 57.1%
AAP group majority stronger agree to overall at 82.6%

Top comment areas:

Admin: Simplifying the grant & monitoring process addresses the issues
Approach: Community and capacity development underpins the grant support work
Approach: Free their time to work with broader community
Approach: Their expertise and time is wasted on grant admin
Resources: Staff will require retraining during transition
Retain: Staff currently do both very well
Total of 137 coded additional comments regarding this question

Community Development

Respondent was asked to identify from a list of functions how important they were.

Overall top listed important to extremely important combined percentage:

- react quickly to changing needs.

- engage with local communities to understand their needs and help inform strategic priorities.
- support organisations and groups to secure project funding for the first time.
- improve our understanding of our communities to help recognise hidden issues.
- help local people develop the skills to start opening new projects and initiatives in response to know local needs.

Overall top listed lesser to least important combined percentage:

- produce a directory of community buildings, contact details and timetables for activities.
- manage a small community chest fund to encourage community engagement.
- support the development of local knowledge on priorities and needs, helping to build a countywide picture.
- work closely with all county councillors to share knowledge of local needs and opportunities.
- develop a culture of partnership working, including bridging the gap between party-political differences

Do you have any other suggestions as to functions we could provide?

Top comment areas:

Engagement: Awareness of community networks, comms, signposting, engagement portal, outreach

Status quo: AAPs already carry out these functions

Capacity building: Across all local agencies, public, staff

Accountability: Transparent, politically neutral decisions

Collaboration: Avoid duplication of activity/effort

Collaboration: Closer working/data from trusted local sources/partners

Local: Enhance the local area/address local needs

Total of 120 coded comments regarding this question

Do you have any further comments regarding the County Durham community engagement review?

Top comment areas:

Consultation/review issues: Process, report, materials, info provided

Positives of current system not acknowledged/understood/lost

General positive comments regarding proposals/review/rationale/intended outcomes

Retain status quo and/or partial change

Consultation/review issues: Scope/necessity/rationale, value for money

Total of 221 coded additional comments regarding this question

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Community Engagement Review

Feedback Analysis (non survey)

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Corporate Overview & Scrutiny Management Board

Corporate Overview & Scrutiny Management Board at its meeting on 3 April 2023 considered a report and presentation which detailed the key findings from ERS Consultants on the review of the Council's community engagement function/Area Action Partnerships and approach to a planned public countywide consultation. The comments noted at this meeting relating to the consultant's report and proposals have been thematically analysed and are presented below.

General comments

- Critical of the report
- Opportunity to review and improve
- Critical of the case for change
- Perceived lack of engagement in the original review
- Decision should be taken to Full Council

Model

Case for change: It is noted that report acknowledges the strengths of the AAPs and the general positive regard in which they are held, but recommendations are being made to deconstruct the existing model. It was generally considered that the review was timely.

Board: There is some disagreement with the statement within the review report that AAP boards were not representative of the county's demographics and not truly diverse. Whilst some state that some AAP boards whilst working well did not always reflect or represent local community views, priorities or aspirations.

Local decision making: It is acknowledged that local communities feel part of any decision making arrangements in relation to the size of the county and any agreed devolution deal.

Politics: Concerns are expressed at the reference to political conflict impacting on the effectiveness of AAPs with not clarification on how deep seated this is.

Communication: There is concern that there are still lots of people throughout the county who are aware of AAPs and AAP communications need to be improved and engagement increased in particular with younger people.

Alignment with strategic priorities: It is suggested that at its core cooperating model should be work to deliver against the council's and County Durham Partnership's declared climate and ecological emergency priorities.

Funding

Local decision making: It is hoped that review would address the perceived/evidenced disconnect between AAPs, community groups and council services groupings when considering AAP funded projects. There is concern that the County Durham Partnership's role within the recommended funding model appears to remove the ability or local determination of grant application and allocations.

Repeat Applicants: There is concern at the inference that repeat recipients of funding is a negative outcome and disregards positive outcomes these projects deliver. It is suggested that the new model should work with organisations to support the potential sourcing of alternative funding mechanisms which could free up resource for new initiatives.

Flexible and responsive: It is acknowledged the need for a balance between ensuring that projects are delivering agreed outputs are sustained whilst providing flexibility to fund new initiatives.

Simplified processes: There is general support for streamlining and simplifying grant application and approval processes whilst acknowledging the need for appropriate transparency, accountability and assurance.

Time: It is hoped that review would address the time taken from project inception, funding approval and project delivery.

Community development

Staff: Clarification is needed around the reference to a reduced community engagement role being evident within AAPs due to resource pressures. Roles should be developed to support groups and organisations in delivering projects locally.

Elected Members: There are concerns that the review does not reflect the role of elected councillors in supporting community development work and associated projects.

Partners: It is noted that community development work is undertaken by a range of organisations and partners.

AAP Boards

Three AAP Boards submitted formal responses to the report, with a further five submitting detailed notes of separate sessions/sections of their Board meetings where the content of the report was discussed. The notes of these formal submissions and discussions have been thematically analysed and are presented below.

General comments

- Critical of the report
- Critical of the case for change
- Not enough detail in the report and lacks content/context
- Questioning the need/rationale for substantial change
- Concern that the report moves away from local influence, decision making and openness/transparency

- Perceived lack of engagement in the original review

Model

There is a lot of concern in relation to removing the input and local decision making from locality areas, along with the openness and transparency that this brings. The report lacks any detail on how the proposed Community Networks would work, what their structure would be and the governance that would sit behind them. It is generally stated that the openness and lack of structure would be a problem. Lack of interest within localities and partners is also highlighted as a concern. The need for independence is stressed as well with regards to locality partnerships not being chaired by officers.

Boundaries

Generally, it is viewed that, if any of the options had to be chosen, option one would be the preferred route. Not moving away from the current model with the potential to be aligned more closely to electoral wards were also expressed.

Funding

Trying to simplify the processes that are currently in place was welcomed, as is the ability to be more flexible over a four-year period. There were however other major concerns raised. The potential impact on local VCS organisations, particularly those smaller groups, is a major worry with the proposals in the report. Moving away from local decision making, at a local level, is viewed as a negative and backward step. There is a distinct lack of detail in the report but not having the ability to spend in year one, as an example, is a concern. There are major reservations over the £300 Community Chest recommendation, this is mainly due to the size of the grant, the fact that a large number of groups will be ineligible and the decision-making process that goes with it.

Openness and transparency were also raised as a major issue with regards the proposed funding changes, alongside the current valued support that Elected Members and local VCS groups receive via the current structure.

Delays with regards current funding were also recognised as being an issue that falls outside the control of AAPs. These delays invariably sit with deliverers/applicants and not AAPs, therefore any changes will not help with this issue.

Community Development

Although the move to doing more community development was welcomed, there was a clear message stating that the AAPs already carry-out a lot of this work that was simply not picked up in the report. If further community development works needs carrying out then this would need to be appropriately resourced.

General Comments

It was generally acknowledged that AAPs may need a few tweaks and changes. It was commented that AAPs were a flagship model that is held in high regard nationally and therefore wholesale change is not required. A number of comments were raised suggesting that, if there are specific issues with specific AAPs, then those problems need resolving, not the whole countywide structure. Once again, it

was noted that there is a general lack of detail in the report and lots of content missing with regards the work that AAPs currently carry-out.

AAP Board Member Consultation Sessions

AAP Board members were invited to attend one of four sessions which took place virtually on 22 March, 28 March, 29 March and 13 April 2023. A total of 33 Board members took part in the discussions. The notes of the discussions have been thematically analysed and are presented below.

General comments

- Critical of the report
- Critical of the case for change
- Not enough detail in recommendations
- Perceived lack of engagement in the original review

Model

Case for change: People do not feel as though the case for change is strong enough. People feel as though the recommendations do not build on the existing strengths of the Area Action Partnerships. People would be supportive of incremental rather than whole scale change.

Retain a Board: People feel as though there is need to retain a Board as, without a core membership, there is a feeling that these networks will become “talking shops” with little action or accountability. People feel the removal of a Board could have a detrimental effect on attendance levels.

Politics: People feel that with the proposals of removing the Board, there will be more opportunity for area networks to be politicised rather than focusing on the locality and what is best for the community.

Relationships: There is a recognition that relationships between partners including the VCS is key to community development, engagement and good partnership working. There is a concern that relationships would be lost with the proposed changes.

Partners: The recommendations are not clear on how partners will fit with the proposed changes and whether there is potential for duplication.

Led by local concerns: There is concern that imposing themes on the new networks will dissolve local input. If themes were imposed, they need to be flexible to meet the needs of communities at the time. There is a feeling that if themes are not relevant to the local communities this could have a detrimental effect on engagement and attendance at meetings. Community priorities are paramount.

Diversity of voices: To gain greater diversity in voices, people identified the need to have meetings on days, at times and in venues that work for community members. There is a recognition that community networks could provide an opportunity to engage with a wider audience than current, but they need to advocate on community needs and wants, be accessible for all and have visible action and outcomes as well as a focus on the involvement of young people.

Engagement: There is concern that the proposals set out in the consultation will not have the desired effect in increasing engagement and that the recommendations will continue to facilitate the same people attending meetings.

Disempowerment: There is a feeling that the proposals seek to withdraw power, control and decision making away from local areas to more centralised structures.

Boundaries

Need for change: People are unsure of the rationale behind proposed boundary changes and feel the current boundaries work.

Timing: People identified that the time to talk about changing boundaries was ill-conceived as the outcome of the review of the ward boundaries is many months away.

Size: Concerns are raised about making boundaries any bigger. Moving to 7 networks would make decision making and local voice more difficult.

Alignment with strategic partners: Whilst there is some support for alignment with PCN Boundaries many people were unsure of the rationale behind this proposal. People queried whether police boundaries could also be reflected.

Funding

Small Grants: There is general support for a small grants fund, however, people repeatedly identified that £300 was not realistic and would advocate increasing the amount. There was concern raised that these pots of funding could duplicate other small grant schemes that are already in existence. There was some concern that there would be more to administer with small grant schemes than current larger funding schemes and also queries over the accountability for these funds.

Local decision making: There is concern that the proposals for decision making around funding are being removed from local communities and are disempowering local communities and represent a move towards centralisation. Many people are concerned that moving decision making to County Durham Partnership will favour larger, less local organisations who have experience of writing bids and will also mean decisions are taken without context or understanding of local areas.

Flexible and responsive: People are concerned that moving to longer term funding will inhibit the ability to be flexible and responsive to local needs and concerns as they arise. People are concerned about the potential funding gap in 2024-25 and have queried whether there would be a gap every 4 years to accommodate the election cycle. People feel the proposals will deter partners from engaging if funding cycles and processes change.

Simplified processes: People recognise the need for simplified funding processes especially where funding is repeat. A single process for applications over a cluster of AAPs would be advantageous. A simplified process would still need governance, accountability and transparency at a local level including for elected member budgets.

Economic development: People identified that more information was needed about the amount “top sliced” for economic development.

Timeliness of projects: Concern was raised about the length of time it takes for DCC delivered projects to come to fruition and the time and support required by AAP staff to navigate bureaucracy. It has been queried why the position is to use DCC services rather than other local services for contracting/using Neighbourhood Budgets.

Funding for community development: There is some recognition that officer time needs to be freed up from funding to undertake more community development, while others feel that current funding processes do not prohibit community development. There is acknowledgement, however, that community development and funding are not mutually exclusive and need to be considered together.

Community development

Staff: Staff were praised for the fantastic work they do, their work ethic, knowledge and dedication. Board members who attended the sessions were keen to ensure that staff are seen as integral to any changes that may occur and they should not be removed from the decision-making process.

Time: It was recognised that the capacity of staff for community development work was limited. People recognised that there is more community development and engagement work that can be done such as identifying and supporting newer groups/ organisations if time is freed up to undertake such activity.

Adverse impact of other proposals: People felt that other recommendations, particularly in relation to funding, within the report do not support/is at odds with the aims and objectives of community development.

Location: People feel that AAP staff are already visible and accessible within communities.

Duplication: There is an air of caution in ensuring that community development work via networks does not duplicate work being delivered in communities by partners including the VCS. Sharing good practice across the AAPs was identified as useful.

AAP Public Representatives

Three AAP Board Public reps submitted formal responses to the report. These have been thematically analysed and are presented below.

General comments

- Critical of the report
- Critical of the case for change
- Not enough detail in the report and lacks content/context
- Concern that the report moves away from local influence, decision making and openness/transparency

Model

Strategic priorities: There is general agreement in the potential to better support community input into strategic priorities for DCC and partners, and that this is not solely be the responsibility of AAPs and rely on commitment from DCC and partners.

Formal structure: There was general agreement that the removal of a formal structure e.g. the Board and governance arrangements, would result in reduced engagement and prove difficult to adequately deliver and track agreed actions.

Centralisation: It was noted that centrally imposed themed meetings and decision making would reduce continuity and engagement and meetings would be unproductive/'talking shops'

Engagement: There was general agreement that engagement opportunities and activities are delivered successfully at present and funding activities are also important to engagement and developing local resilience.

Current strengths: It was noted that the review and recommendations does not take into account the individual strengths of each AAP to use these in the existing structure to spread good practice.

Politicisation: It was noted that there has been no evidence of political conflict.

Boundaries

Need for change: There is uncertainty of the rationale behind proposed boundary changes and a general feeling that the current boundaries work and any changes would be to the detriment of existing relationships and community cohesion.

Timing: People identified that the time to talk about changing boundaries was ill-conceived as the outcome of the review of the ward boundaries is many months away.

Alignment using other datasets: It was suggested that additional datasets should be considered when determining any changes to boundaries, such as travel-to-work, travel-to-learn areas.

Funding

Local decision making: There is concern that the proposals for decision making around funding are being removed from local communities and are disempowering local communities and represent a move towards centralisation.

Economic development: It was noted that opportunities to increase match funding for economic development activities in communities should be identified.

Flexible and responsive: There was general agreement that a small fund budget may provide benefit, £300 is not sufficient and multi-year strategic budget should be considered for long-term opportunities with communities contributing to the design and deployment. There was concern that the proposed 4year funding cycle leaves funding gaps and will not be responsive.

Simplified processes: People recognise the need for simplified funding processes. A simplified process would still need governance, accountability and transparency at a local level including for elected member budgets.

Transparency: there are concerns that the removal of reporting for Neighbourhood Budgets would remove transparency and small grant budget approval should not sit with officers.

Funding for community development: There is some recognition that officer time needs to be freed up from funding to undertake more community development, while others feel that current funding processes do not prohibit community development. There is acknowledgement, however, that community development and funding are not mutually exclusive and need to be considered together.

Community development

Staff: Staff were praised for the fantastic work they do, their work ethic, knowledge and dedication.

Time: It was recognised that the capacity of staff for community development work was limited. People recognised that there is more community development and engagement work that can be done such as identifying and supporting newer groups/ organisations if time is freed up to undertake such activity with the introduction of new processes and new technologies.

Adverse impact of other proposals: People felt that other recommendations, particularly in relation to funding, within the report do not support/is at odds with the aims and objectives of community development.

Location: People feel that AAP staff are already visible and accessible within communities and not all community buildings will deliver effective engagement compare to 'pop-up' activities on weekends and evenings etc.

AAP Teams

Six AAP Teams submitted formal responses to the report. There were numerous suggestions for change which can be seen in detail within the documented responses but in terms of general comments the following provides a comprehensive overview.

General comments

Although some points within the report were highlighted as positive, the general feedback was critical of the report and its' proposals due to a number of reasons including:

- Factual inaccuracies
- Sole focus on AAPs being a missed opportunity to rationalise authority wide community engagement
- No visible evidence/appendices to support the report claims
- Contradictory elements throughout the report
- Distinct lack of detail on the operation and role of community networks, the actual governance and staff's roles and structure
- Recommendations not following the reports' findings

Model

There was general concern about the move to Community Networks for several reasons including the potential for low attendance, the disengagement of partners, the proposal for DCC officers chairing being disempowering to communities and the potential for network meetings to become "talking shops".

There was some favour for having meeting "themes", however this was not linked to CDP thematic groups but more about bringing themes into the current agenda framework and ensuring local people had the opportunity to decide on what themes were relevant to them.

Based on some of the earlier comments in the ERS report it was generally felt that due to the high regard for AAPs and their staff, a suggestion for refreshing and reviewing the current model would have made more sense, especially considering the lack of evidence from the community for a network approach. Staff acknowledged and were supportive of change, however they felt that the model was not building on the good work and years of engagement that had been developed in the County via AAPs.

A common point was that ERS had not reflected the true nature of how the current AAP teams work. There was a suggestion within the report for teams to be more visible within their community, however no acknowledgement that all teams are already locally based and that the ERS suggestion of co-location in community centres, libraries etc was not suited to business or communities' needs and had the potential to put staff at risk due to lone working and non-adherence to individuals' health and safety requirements i.e. adapted working environments/essential support adaptations.

There was also a general concern that ERS had not reflected the range of community development and engagement that is currently practised through AAPs and little reference to how much is delivered by staff in their communities already.

Boundaries

There was no support for aligning with PCN boundaries. Instead, there was widespread support for keeping remaining boundaries as they are for the current time until the boundary review in 2025. Staff were not adverse to change but felt that the rationale needed to make sense to all.

Funding

Staff supported the proposal of a more simplified funding process but questioned whether audit had been consulted on this - the general view was that public money needs to be accountable. There was no support for the £300 community chest proposal which was seen to be of little use to limited groups and already provided via several other avenues (including our own Elected Members small grants process).

The idea of a 4-year funding cycle was welcomed in terms of allowing more time for research and planning with the caveat that any future structure still needs to be responsive to local community needs, emerging issues and emergency situations – would a more strategic approach still allow for these eventualities?

There was blanket concern for elected members to have direct support only from funding officers due to a number of reasons:

- Capacity of such a small team to respond to all members
- Change of roles, responsibilities and job descriptions to allow staff to do this.
- It could potentially lead to a loss of valuable community insight
- As it was a suggested change to job descriptions it was felt that this should be discussed only as a management decision and not wider.

Also, it was felt that decision making should remain at a local level and not a strategic body and a concern that moving to a more strategic grant would disadvantage those most vulnerable in our communities.

No support for the idea of budget top slicing for economic development.

No support for a transition year focusing on cost of living – a general feeling that the theme should be locally chosen.

Community development

There was general agreement that ERS' perception and acknowledgement of current AAP involvement in Community Development was factually incorrect. The view represented was that AAPs needed to be freed from funding burdens to allow them to undertake community development work when in fact, AAPs all deliver community development albeit at varying levels and that this support was not recognised or fed into the report by the consultants.

General comments

The general overview from staff was positive with regards to AAPs requiring review as there were numerous examples of where they themselves can see improvements.

It was felt however, that the current positive aspects of AAPs were not expanded upon within the report. The consultants' recommendations proposed a very different model with no great detail to be confident of its' operational success, no factual evidence to support the recommendations for change and, due to the numerous inaccuracies, no confidence in the consultants' understanding of what AAPs and the staff currently do. Generally, there was confusion about why we weren't building on our model as the proposed model would create a lack of transparency, accountability, engagement and action.

County Durham Partnership Forum (pre consultation feedback)

County Durham Partnership Forum members were invited to take part in a pre-consultation activity which took place on 14 February 2023. The notes of the discussions have been thematically analysed and are presented below.

General comments

- Critical of the case for change
- Not enough detail in the report and lacks context and detail
- Concern that the report moves away from local influence, decision making and openness/transparency
- AAPS work well, but could be improved

Model

Case for change: People did not feel as though the case for change is strong enough. People feel as though the recommendations do not build on the existing strengths of the AAPs. People would be supportive of incremental rather than whole scale change.

Terminology: People feel that 'Community Network' sounds more engaging than 'Board' and may increase participation and engagement.

Retain a board: People feel as though there is need to retain a 'board' as, without a core membership, there is a feeling that these networks will become "talking shops" with little action or accountability. People feel the removal of a board could have a detrimental effect on attendance levels and would prove difficult for an officer to chair effectively.

Strategic priorities: There is general agreement in the potential to better support community input into strategic priorities for DCC and partners, and that this is not solely be the responsibility of AAPs and will require commitment from DCC and partners.

Politics: People feel that with the proposals of removing the Board, there will be more opportunity for area networks to be politicised rather than focusing on the locality and what is best for the community.

Relationships: There is a recognition that relationships between partners including the VCS is key to community development, engagement and good partnership working. There is a concern that relationships would be lost with the proposed changes.

Partners: The recommendations are not clear on how partners will fit with the proposed changes and without a formal 'board' and guaranteed regular attendance by partners residents' engagement will decrease.

Led by local concerns: There is concern that imposing themes on the new networks will dissolve local input. There is a feeling that if themes are not relevant to the local communities this could have a detrimental effect on engagement and attendance at meetings which could become unproductive. Community priorities need to be area based.

Disempowerment: There is a feeling that the proposals seek to withdraw power, control and decision making away from local areas to more centralised structures.

Boundaries

Need for change: People were unsure of the rationale behind proposed boundary changes and feel the current boundaries work and the option to split the larger AAP area of East Durham into two should be considered – residents and communities should design any boundary change.

Timing: People identified that the time to talk about changing boundaries was ill-conceived as the outcome of the review of the ward boundaries is many months away.

Size: There was some agreement to creating more evenly sized geographical boundaries.

Alignment with strategic partners: Whilst there is some support for alignment with PCN Boundaries many people were unsure of the rationale behind this proposal. People queried whether police boundaries could also be reflected or if boundaries could be flexible and be determined by project/scheme initiatives.

Funding

Local decision making: There is concern that the proposals for decision making around funding are being removed from local communities and are disempowering local communities and represent a move towards centralisation. It was generally agreed that approval by the County Durham Partnership would remove any conflicts of interest but this process would remove local decision making.

Economic development: It was noted that opportunities to increase match funding for economic development activities in communities should be identified.

Small funding budget: There was general agreement that a small fund budget may provide benefit, £300 is not sufficient and duplicates other funding streams.

Long term funding: People feel that multi-year strategic budget should be considered for long-term opportunities with communities contributing to the design and deployment and may attract more match funding opportunities. There was concern that the proposed 4year funding cycle leaves funding gaps and will not be responsive.

Simplified processes: People recognise the need for simplified funding processes. Simplified processes would reduce bureaucracy but still need governance, accountability and transparency at a local level including Neighbourhood Budgets.

Funding for community development: There is some recognition that officer time needs to be freed up from funding to undertake more community development, while others feel that current funding processes do not prohibit community development. There is acknowledgement, however, that community development and funding are not mutually exclusive and need to be considered together.

Transparency: There is agreement that removal of Neighbourhood Budget reporting may lead to disengagement by residents if they are unable to see how this budget is allocated and its outputs.

Community development

Staff: Staff were praised for the fantastic work they do, their work ethic, knowledge and dedication.

Time: It is recognised that the capacity of staff for community development work was limited. People recognise that there is more community development and engagement work that can be done such as identifying and supporting newer groups/ organisations if time is freed up to undertake such activity with the introduction of new processes and new technologies.

Attracting new participation: People feel that a large number of residents and some communities still do not know much about how AAPs work and increased promotional activities are required to make the new delivery model successful.

Location: People feel that AAP staff are already visible and accessible within communities and not all community buildings will deliver effective engagement compared to 'pop-up' activities on weekends and evenings etc.

Environment & Climate Change Partnership Board

County Durham Environment & Climate Change Partnership Board formally responded to the consultation. The submission has been thematically analysed and are presented below.

Model

There is support for themed meetings with caution that the thematic partnership board would only be able to support meetings on strategic issues, not local operational issues and consideration would need to be given on capacity/resourcing of the thematic partnership when supporting multiple meetings countywide.

Boundaries

There is no preference on boundary options.

Funding

The partnership feels that multi-year strategic budget should be considered for long-term projects and would provide partners with opportunities to access funding which previously wasn't suitable for large scale countywide projects.

The partnership would be open to having a role in assessing the Strategic Grants funding applications but would need to understand the capacity/resource implications.

The partnership also supports the proposal to allocate a proportion of the Strategic Grant specifically to economic development projects, with the ask that this includes investment in 'green economy' projects.

Community development

The proposals are supported to build upon the community engagement work already delivered with the ask for an emphasis on climate action goals.

Town & Parish Councils/Councillors

A total of six emails from Town & Parish Councils or individual councillors were received within the consultation period, and a virtual session was held on 30 March for Town & Parish councillors and staff with 17 in attendance. The comments and feedback from these emails and notes from this session have been thematically analysed and are presented below.

General comments

- Critical of the report – the report acknowledges the strengths and successes of the AAPs yet recommends radical change

- Critical of the case for change - full scale review is not necessary, tackle individual AAPs and learn from the better ones
- Not enough detail in recommendations
- Recognition that there is room for strategic and structural improvements and a rebrand
- Existing AAPs are non-political and successfully deliver community development

Model

Centralisation: There are concerns around the proposed model and removal of the boards. It is felt this would create a centralised decision making system with DCC staff making decisions and engagement from local people would be seen as a 'token opportunities'.

Public involvement: It is recognised that increased activities and opportunities for public engagement and community development were needed.

Increased involvement by T&PCs: – It is suggested that increased public engagement could be achieved by increasing the involvement and role of T&PCs.

Themes: It is felt that centrally imposed themes would reduce engagement if not relevant and themes should be agreed at a local level.

Capacity: It is felt that the removal of a board would create capacity issues for staff to effectively chair network meetings

Politics: There are concerns that removing the Board, would increase opportunities for area networks to be politicised rather than focusing on the locality and what is best for the community.

Boundaries

Need for change: There is uncertainty around the rationale behind proposed boundary changes and feel the current boundaries work.

Timing: There is general uncertainty on how boundary changes could be considered due to not knowing how the electoral boundaries will be changed.

Funding

Local decision making: There is concern that the proposals for decision making around funding are being removed from local communities and represent a move towards centralisation. It was felt that the County Durham Partnership is a strategic group and not focussed on individual community involvement. There are concerns that this will result in the needs of larger towns taking precedence over smaller villages and rural areas.

Flexible and responsive: It is acknowledged there were merits in moving to a four-year funding cycle for larger projects but committing funding longer term will reduce engagement with local communities and smaller groups. It was felt that moving to the proposed four-year funding cycle is not agile and leaves no flexibility to respond to emerging issues during year one.

Simplified processes: It is acknowledged that the current funding processes are robust, transparent and accountable and it was felt the current processes could be simplified.

Monitoring: There is concerns around the lack of clarity around monitoring and reporting requirements within the proposals and if County Councillors are no longer required to report back Neighbourhood Budget spend they would disengage with the Network.

Community development

Staff: Staff is praised for their invaluable work and their work ethic. It was acknowledge that AAPs have developed extremely positive relationships with their T&PCs.

Time: It is recognised that the demands on staff has increased over time with additional funding grants to administer, and it was felt that the support staff provide to councillors and local groups works effectively and productively and should be retained.

Location: It is felt that AAP staff are already visible and accessible within communities and there could be more use of T&PC buildings.

Activities: It is felt that the suggested proposals in relation to community development activities are already functions of, or undertaken by the current AAPs.

Public Health

Public Health provided a comprehensive response to the survey questions and made numerous suggestions for additional functions for DCCS Community Engagement function.

General comments

Although some points within the report were highlighted as positive, Public Health questioned how progressive some of the suggestions would actually be.

Model

The addition of more community centred approaches as suggested in the report are welcomed, however the name “Community Networks” is not new or innovative with the suggestion for co-production of the name with communities.

Rather than being “encouraged” to attend as suggested in the report, public health recommended that elected members should be “actively encouraged”.

There was concern over accountability if no board was in place and a desire to see the Chair rotate when the networks mature, rather than having sole responsibility on council officers.

There was some favour for having meeting “themes”, but with a recommendation that officer expertise was brought in to inform discussions. Alongside the themes it was felt that meeting content should be community led with the ability to influence policy and strategy at an early stage.

There was a desire for more hyper local engagement with marginalised groups backed by a workforce development plan to ensure staff have appropriate skills and expertise.

Support was expressed for staff to have a base within neighbourhoods but to undertake more work in communities whilst also maintaining an online presence and engagement through a range of methods.

Boundaries

The response proposed that geographies should be based on consistent statistical boundaries with a preference for MSOAs due to the availability of data. A closer alignment with health care services would be welcomed but there was no appetite for aligning with PCN boundaries.

Funding

There was support for the idea of discretionary grants for capacity building but with suggestions for criteria to target these grants and ensuring that work funded is health promoting.

A more strategic grant process was seen as positive but with the acknowledgement that this would need to be flexible to changing needs and pressures with an approach that would not see smaller VCS organisations missing out.

Aligning to the electoral cycle was queried as the networks would not be political so why was there a need to do this?

Public health agreed that the strategic grant programme needed to be led by DCC staff but that it should be developed in co-production with communities. There was a recommendation to seek specialist advice in advance of formal adoption of the strategic grant programme with recognition that there needs to be professional commissioning support, strong governance, and accountability.

There was support for networks with more inequalities receiving greater allocations with the JSNAA being used to allocate funding proportionately.

During the transition year it was felt helpful for AAPs to continue with projects that are working well and focus on cost of living as purely focusing on cost of living could lead to a change of approach for one year followed by another change when moving to strategic grants. Recommendation for a transition plan to be developed for the new arrangements from 2025 which should include evaluation of AAP work to inform future developments.

There was disagreement for ringfencing funds for any specific area of work not just economic development.

The suggestion for a simpler funding process and a funding team resource to support councillors was supported as long as the funding team minimised duplication by having an understanding of what is already being commissioned.

Rather than removing Neighbourhood budgets (NBs) from the reporting process to networks, Public Health advocated that NBs should be developed alongside community networks.

Community development

There was agreement that staff time should be freed up to allow more time for community development.

Within the function list of Q17, the public health opinion was that all but one of the functions were either “important” or “extremely important”. The only function which differed was “Produce a directory of community buildings, contact details and timetables for activities”, and this was ranked as “Not important at all”.

General comments

The general comments from Public Health were positive towards the review and they view it as a significant opportunity to accelerate the County Durham Together programme.

A number of other functions were suggested that DCC could provide including social value and community wealth building, evaluation and contribution to research and making sure countywide plans are being appropriately implemented in network areas. The potential remit suggested for community networks was much wider than suggested within the review with a strong focus on measuring success (e.g. through the development of a local community life survey), impact and evaluation and input to the “County Durham Book” rather than the development of 14 different directories.

Voluntary & Community Sector

A total of four emails from Voluntary & Community Sector organisations or representatives were received within the consultation period. The comments and feedback from these emails and notes from this session have been thematically analysed and are presented below.

General comments

- Critical of the report
- Not enough detail in recommendations
- Critical of the case for change

Model

It is noted by respondents that there is insufficient detail for the proposals, with three out of four respondents generally opposed to the changes proposed on the grounds

that the current AAP model works efficiently and guarantees value for money and professional accountability. One respondent feels the current AAP model does not work and has never been fit for purpose.

Boundaries

It is noted by respondents that there is insufficient detail on the proposals with three out of four respondents generally opposed to all changes and making no comments on the proposed boundary changes. One respondent feels that changing boundaries to electoral wards would fit well and increase County Councillor involvement but only to a limited degree.

Funding

It is noted by respondents that there is insufficient detail on the proposals with all respondents generally opposed to the proposals. One respondent is in agreement for revised funding procedures and light touch options.

Community development

Three respondents are generally opposed to all proposals and made no specific comments on the proposed changes, with two respondents praising staff for their invaluable work and work ethic. One respondent stated AAPs rely on the VCS for intel and local knowledge and one respondent suggested increased involvement by County Councillors.

Durham Constabulary

Durham Constabulary's East NPT Inspectors submitted a formal response to the report on behalf of Durham Constabulary. The following is a summary of the comments received.

General comments

It was commented that AAPs are a great platform for engagement with partners and communities and as a partnership they have achieved and delivered projects that have significantly benefitted communities.

There is a fear that they will lose this crucial engagement paradigm under the new proposed model and query why there is a need to change a model that is already embedded and works effectively.

There is concern regarding the new proposed funding structure of strategic grants being allocated on a 4-year basis. It is stated that the proposals will remove the flexibility and ability to respond and provide grant funding quickly to emerging issues or community needs.

Finally, it is commented that locality Inspectors have close working relationships with their AAP Co-ordinators and by attending meetings and participating as Board

Members, are able to directly address emerging trends and concerns from the key community contacts, which can then be addressed by partnership working and funding from the AAP. It is felt that, whilst some of the processes could be streamlined, the local board process with regular meetings and follow-up actions works well and should remain in its current format.

Durham Police & Crime Commissioner's Office

Durham Police & Crime Commissioner's Office submitted a formal response to the report. The following is a summary of the comments received.

General comments

AAPs continue to be a great platform for engagement and in partnership with Durham Constabulary have achieved and delivered successful projects that have significantly benefitted our communities across County Durham. This platform has been regularly used by the PCC to consult on issues that matter to local people for example: Policing issues and Precept.

The suggested model to give communities more of a say will be welcomed and valued as it is important to ensure that the diversity and effectiveness of community outreach is maximised to encourage positive engagement, local decision making and prioritisation of funding.

Concerns are noted that they will lose this crucial engagement paradigm under the new proposed model and have particularly highlighted concerns around the funding structure of strategic grants being allocated on a 4-year basis and planned a year in advance. This proposal can potentially remove the flexibility and ability to respond and provide grant funding quickly to emerging issues or community needs.

The view of the OPCC is that all community issues must be considered in a meaningful way to develop wider strategy and policy by wider partners and local decision making and impact should be supported with quantitative data.

There is agreement that some of the processes could be streamlined, and it is vital that the close working relationships with Locality Police Inspectors under any proposed model must not be lost so that any emerging trends and concerns from the key community contacts can be promptly addressed with partners and funding can be collectively agreed and prioritised.

It is noted the opportunity the proposed model gives for communities to have more of a say but a Board model with proper governance and structures in place in favoured so that partnership working can continue and mitigate duplication and join up with existing developments and celebrate collective achievements and successes.

County Durham & Darlington Local Resilience Forum

A response was received on behalf of the County Durham & Darlington Local Resilience Forum. The following is summary of the comments received.

General comments

As an LRF there was a recognition that they have a solid working partnership with the AAPs and would continue to do so in the future.

Model

The LRF felt that AAPs provide valuable insight into local communities, which informs their work on emergency preparedness and building resilience across County Durham and Darlington. As such the AAPs are an integral part of the Community Resilience Standing Group and wider LRF partnerships. They ensure that the LRF has relevant links into communities to give them a voice in the work that they do. The LRF felt that the current model works well and would question what benefits the new models would bring, and perhaps more importantly, how they would benefit the communities themselves.

Boundaries

The current AAP boundaries work well in bringing together local communities, facing similar issues. As such, there are strong community networks already established within the current boundaries. These have taken considerable time to develop. Any changes should be able to provide considerable benefits to local communities. The LRF questioned which of the given options provide local communities the best opportunities and outcomes? What would be lost by changing them?

Funding

AAP teams have a long-established presence within their communities and understand the needs and aspirations of the groups that they work to support. Funding decisions are taken at a local level, based on local knowledge. This is paramount to maintain. The LRF works closely with both AAPs and communities on resilience projects. Local knowledge and local decisions are integral to developing and maintaining community resilience. The LRF expressed concern around the complexity and length of time of the funding process. It was thought that by simplifying the process, this will look to address many of the inefficiencies detailed in the report, such as the time needed to work on community development.

Community development

Currently the AAPs undertake priority setting exercises every year and work to develop community groups based on their substantial knowledge and understanding of the communities that they work within. As detailed above, the LRF feel that giving consideration to simplifying the funding process would create greater scope for enhancing community development.

General comments

The LRF noted that the consultation document and feedback procedure is not user friendly to some of our local communities which they felt might deter some groups

and individuals from providing valuable feedback. CDDLRF value the work of the AAP's and the contribution that they bring to their work on resilience. In addition, the AAPs are integral to giving communities a voice at a grass roots level – something that cannot be underestimated. The LRF requests that any changes to current arrangements and practices, takes into consideration their comments and observations, and seeks to deliver a model that is achievable, adequately resourced and funded, and which provides tangible benefits to the communities within County Durham.

Durham University

Durham University's Pro-Vice Chancellor Global, submitted a formal response to the report on behalf of Durham University. The following is a summary of the comments received.

General comments

There is broad support for the proposals to refresh the current approach to community engagement through the AAPs such as the online application management system, to free up the AAP team's time to work more locally within the Durham AAP area. It was commented that this seems to be a natural progression from the existing model, making the most of the considerable experience of the team in supporting local groups.

The proposal to replace the current funding model with 'Strategic Grants' available over a longer period of time, suggests this could be of benefit to the sustainability of the projects and organisations supported through the funding. There is general support of the proposal for a 'place-based community-focussed approach' to health, wellbeing and economic strategies.

It was noted that the AAP Board has been of great benefit to the University and has connected the University to the wider community of Durham, allowed it to engage with local consultations, strategies and funding reviews, and the University has been able to attend the Board on several occasions to engage members and the public in the University's own consultations and it hopes to see this positive partnership continue.

Member of Parliament

General comments

Mary Kelly Foy, Member of Parliament for the City of Durham, submitted a formal response to the report. The summary of this response is provided below.

There is a recognition that there may be a need for a review of how AAPs operate however the report appears confusing, contradictory and perhaps an overreaction to any perceived problems with the current AAP model.

It is noted that the report states that the effectiveness of community engagement has reduced over recent years and that a “hyper-local” community engagement network would allow the local authority to be more responsive to needs in communities. The report notes that the networks would however have no decision-making powers and therefore this would be a direct move against what AAPs were designed to deliver.

It is stated that the proposed new community networks could potentially jeopardise the current structures in place and therefore potentially reduce community engagement. It is noted that the report makes assumptions that the AAP system discourages people from engaging however caution is highlighted with regards these assumptions and the impact any changes could have. It is highlighted that the report does not acknowledge that, by providing routes and access to funding, that this is a form of community engagement in itself.

A major concern is raised with regards the removal of local-decision making and questions around how the newly proposed framework could possibly succeed. This leads queries on the lack of detail in the report regarding the newly proposed structures and how this could potentially threaten existing funding provided and supported through AAPs.

A lack of detail and confusion is also highlighted in relation to the funding cycle described within the report and the impact that this could have, particularly if there are gaps in funding, within localities.

There is an acknowledgement that there are some suggestions that are worthwhile within the report with regards removing certain potential barriers to engagement and expanding engagement with residents, where possible. Alongside this, there is agreement that steps could be taken to streamline the funding process, whilst acknowledging the need to maintain oversight as to how money is spent.

Finally, there are questions raised with regards the process of consultation that Durham County Council have taken on the Review, with an overall comment that the local authority needs to proceed with caution, based on the fact that the report itself evidences high levels of satisfaction and support for the principles and functions of AAPs but subsequently proposes largely dismantling its structures.

County Durham Care Partnership Executive

At its meeting on 28 March 2023 the County Durham Care Partnership Executive considered a report and presentation which detailed the key findings from ERS Consultants on the review of the Council's community engagement function/Area Action Partnerships and their recommended proposals. The comments noted at this meeting relating to the consultant's report and proposals have been presented below.

General comments

- Welcomes the report
- Welcomes the work of the AAPs
- Critical of the case for change

Model

It is stated that AAPs have been effective in Teasdale to join up services but the issue, as usual, is to achieve continuity of services (with short term funding).

Boundaries

It is stated that suggested boundaries should reflect local communities and a linkage to PCN boundaries makes sense, but with a warning that health boundaries are liable to change. A strength of the current AAPs is their independence.

Funding

It is suggested that the allocation of small grants with a very simple process is a good idea (but over time may cost more to administrator). Larger grants, may limit ability to innovate (deter smaller groups from applying) which is a strength of AAPs now.

Youth Council

The Youth Council met on Wednesday 19 April 2023. A presentation was provided on the Community Engagement Review report. The following information is a summary of the comments received at the meeting.

General comments

It is felt that advertising is an issue for AAPs. There should be advertising how young people can get involved. Awareness of what AAPs have done and supported needs to be publicised better.

It is commented that boundaries need to be considered as it should not be a one size fits all approach.

The Youth Council notes that they would like informed and be part of the planning for what AAPs may become moving forward. The Youth Council would like to increase their engagement with AAPs moving forward.

County Durham Health & Care Engagement Forum

The County Durham Health & Care Engagement Forum met on Thursday 22 March 2023. A presentation was provided on the Community Engagement Review report. The following information is a summary of the comments received at the meeting.

General comments

It is felt that there must be accountability within any structure moving forward and that people would need to know who purported to represent them at the meetings. Some concern was expressed that there could be a point where broad membership became 'defuse'.

It is commented that each AAP was naturally different given the demographics of the populations they served. Priorities were different. It was felt that any subsequent model would have to be core to the local areas.

Some concern are raised about the timing of the consultation. It was felt that it might have been better to let the changes within the NHS embed and stabilise before any further changes were made to the engagement model.

Concerns are raised about what was suggested to be a lack of detail in the report to enable an informed decision about some of the recommendations.

It is finally commented that the introduction of a Community Chest could cause confusion with other funding streams e.g. Co-operative Community Chest.

Residents

Three residents submitted formal responses to the report. These have been thematically analysed and are presented below (NB. One response does not comment on any of the recommendations – only the quality of the consultant's report).

General comments

- Critical of the report

Model

It is noted by one respondent that the report's recommendations went against the report findings and the current AAPs are operating in an effective manner. One respondent notes that current 'board' structure is no longer working and engagement is low.

Boundaries

One respondent would support the implementation of moving to seven networks along the lines of the proposed Local Boundary changes.

Funding

One respondent agrees with all the proposals whilst it is noted by one respondent that there is insufficient detail on the proposals and current funding arrangements are effective and robust.

Community development

One respondent agrees with all the proposals whilst one respondent feels the lack of detail in the proposals means it is difficult to see how the proposed changes will bring about the benefits claimed.

Social Media

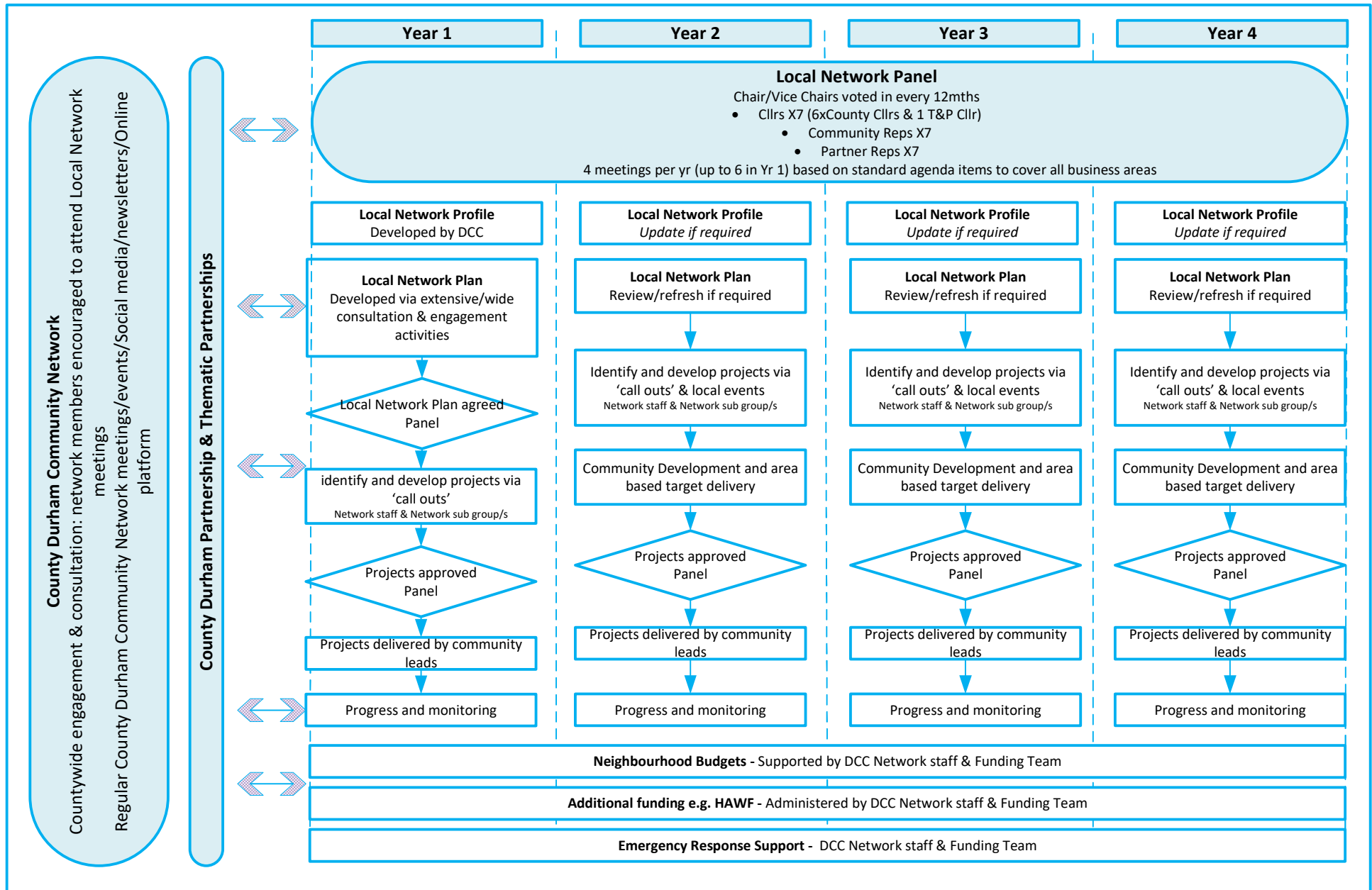
One comment was received via social media.

General comments

"Not sure why you want our views on system that by your own admission works really well in the main. There are some issues in some areas that I would imagine could be easily addressed, tweaked and improved upon. But to use it as an excuse to add in an extra two layers of bureaucracy, doubling the area sizes and therefore making it less community focused, whilst at the same time selling it as more community focused is quite frankly bonkers. There's always room for improvement but this is terrible, I dare say there's a private enterprise waiting in the wings to take control of community spending..."

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Appendix 4 - Local Network Model



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Appendix 5 – Process Improvements

	Process	Benefits
Funding	Strategic Budget – Increased flexibility to facilitate project delivery if required during the Yr1 of the 4yr Local Network Plan and to deliver 4y costed plans	4Yr costed plans will provide the means for more strategic action and assurance for applicants.
	Neighbourhood Budget – submitted directly to Funding Team removing Panel approval/discussion	Removal of routine task for Network staff to improve staff capacity and speeds up application process.
	Principal AAP Coordinator or HoS approval not required - (e.g. following approval from Panel application submitted directly to Funding Team)	Removal of routine task for Network staff to improve capacity and speeds up application process.
	Any relevant permissions required to deliver the project must be in place prior to application being submitted (e.g. planning permission, licences etc.)	Prevents underdeveloped projects being submitted and reduces the time staff spend on projects which may not be achievable due to permissions never being granted. Budget allocation will be more accurate if underdeveloped projects are not being aligned to budget.
	Shorter application form for those groups/organisations who apply for funding regularly e.g. negating the need to supply duplicate information	Improved and more efficient process for applicants. More efficient process for staff which will result in improved turnaround.
	Shorter application form for statutory partners who apply for funding regularly e.g. negating the need to supply duplicate information	Improved and more efficient process for applicants. More efficient process for staff which will result in improved turnaround.
	Remove re-approval step e.g. once conditions have been met applications can be submitted for payment	Improved process and turnaround.
	Introduce a catalogue of frequently delivered DCC projects with indicative costs, specifications and timescales etc. - to provide applicants with an indication of whether their scheme is feasible before submitting and application (this will act as a guide only with the caveat that costs/timescales can be inflated by various factors)	Reduce abortive work from other DCC services on costing schemes which are not achievable or where sufficient budget is unavailable. Will help County Cllrs when planning their projects.
	Funding Team will liaise directly with applicants & keep Local Network staff (and County Cllrs for Neighbourhood Budget issues via their dedicated point of contact) up to date on progress	Reduction in Network staff time on application queries and will improve Network staff capacity and speed up application process.

	Process	Benefits
	Monitor 25% of all projects - random (and projects identified with a declaration of interest)	Less monitoring and improved staff capacity. Random sampling will ensure that all applicants have to be prepared to be monitored if called for.
	Introduce a grant application and management system (subject to procurement process, user testing and budget allocation etc.)	Reduction in Local Network staff and Funding Team time on supporting the application process improving staff capacity and speed up application process. Will allow applicants to monitor and track the progress of their application etc.

Durham County Council Equality Impact Assessment

The Public Sector Equality Duty (Equality Act 2010) requires Durham County Council to have 'due regard' to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between people from different groups. Completion of this template allows us to provide a written record of our equality analysis and demonstrate due regard. It must be used as part of decision making processes with relevance to equality.

Please contact equalities@durham.gov.uk for any necessary support.

Section One: Description and Screening

Service/Team or Section	NCC Partnerships & Community Engagement
Lead Officer name and job title	Gordon Elliott, Head of Partnerships and Community Engagement
Subject of the impact assessment	Review of the council's Community Engagement functions (AAPs)
Report date CMT	14/06/23
MTFP Reference (if relevant)	NCC 21
EIA Start Date	13/03/2023 – consultation commences
EIA Review Date	14/06/2023 – findings and proposals to CMT

Subject of the Impact Assessment

Please give a brief description of the policy, proposal or practice which is the subject of this impact assessment.

For the last 14 years Area Action Partnerships (AAPs) have been one of the main ways for us to engage with the public on a local level. Currently there are 14 AAPs in the county.

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

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. primarily the work of the Area Action Partnerships (AAPs). 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.

These recommendations were the subject of a countywide consultation exercise during the period 13 March to 23 April 2023. The council consulted with staff, elected members, AAP Board and Forum members, key partners, residents and other interested parties. Responses included: 188 survey responses; multiple online consultation sessions were held and presentations delivered as agenda items at various partner and key stakeholder meetings where participants comments were noted for inclusion as consultation feedback, and 41 consultation responses were submitted via a dedicated consultation email address from a wide range of stakeholders.

Analysis of the consultation survey responses and other feedback shows that AAPs evoke a diverse range of opinions and that the review is a welcomed and timely opportunity to provide a natural progression from the existing AAP model.

In general, levels of satisfaction and support for the principles and functioning of AAPs are high. Most respondents are more supportive of incremental rather than whole scale change, with the preference to adopt some, not all of the consultant's recommendations, building on the significant strengths of the current AAP model. Where the consultation analysis demonstrates broad agreement for the consultant's proposals, these have been included in the design of the new model.

The new model will deliver Local Networks which will primarily be based on the current AAP boundaries whilst acknowledging there may be some scope to closer align to electoral boundaries following the local government electoral boundary review.

Local Networks will aim to attract involvement of a greater number, and a broader range of residents and local stakeholders through increased use and the repurpose of the current AAP Forum and its 15,000 members to form a County Durham Community Network. Opportunities will be enhanced to use new and traditional engagement tools and activities to ensure local residents and partners engagement with Local Networks, and attendance at meetings and events is increased.

Local Networks will adopt a more strategic approach to their work and outcomes through focussed Local Network meetings (reduced number per year) and the development of an individual Local Plan in consultation with the County Durham Partnership and its thematic partnerships. Local Plans will help inform strategic priorities and identify opportunities for increased joined up working between Local Networks, partners and other DCC services.

Local Plans will be informed by: community views (residents and partners) facilitated by Local Network meetings and locality events; consultation and engagement with the County Durham Community Network and County Durham Partnership and its' thematic partnership sub groups; and utilising greater use of

empirical data via a unique Local Profile (e.g. robust and detailed view on the profile and demographics of the Local Network area).

New terms of reference (ToR) will clearly define the purpose, structure and functions of the Local Networks. It will provide in detail eligibility criteria, roles and responsibilities of Panel members and robust processes around recruitment and selection of Panel members to deliver improved assurance that Local Network Panels will be non-political.

Local decision making and transparency will be maintained with the AAP Board being replaced by a Local Network Panel and financial accountability will be improved with new funding guidelines and criteria and increased transparency on funding applications.

Application and funding processes will be streamlined to deliver improved efficiencies for applicants, elected members and Local Network staff. Improved processes and reduced formal Local Network meetings will ensure Local Networks have enhanced opportunities to carry out focussed engagement/neighbourhood planning type activities in particular with communities identified in the Local Plan.

Following Cabinet agreement, the existing project group, sponsored by the Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Economy & Partnerships and lead by the Director of Neighbourhoods & Climate Change, will deliver the next phase of this project to implement the new model. A detailed project and communications plan will be initiated in August 2023 with key milestones monitored against delivery.

AAPs will continue to operate as Area Action Partnerships until 31 March 2025, and on 1 April 2025 they will assume their new identity as Local Networks.

Who are the main people impacted and/or stakeholders? (e.g. general public, staff, members, specific clients/service users, community representatives):

- General public
- Staff
- Elected members
- Key council partners including: County Durham Partnership; Police; Fire; Health; Housing; Town & Parish Councils; schools; and faith organisations etc.
- Voluntary and community sector organisations/groups

Screening

Is there any actual or potential negative or positive impact on the following protected characteristics ¹ ?		
Protected Characteristic	Negative Impact Indicate: Yes, No or Unsure	Positive Impact Indicate: Yes, No or Unsure
Age	No	Unsure
Disability	No	Unsure
Gender reassignment	No	Unsure
Marriage and civil partnership (only in relation to 'eliminate discrimination')	No	Unsure
Pregnancy and maternity	No	Unsure
Race	No	Unsure
Religion or Belief	No	Unsure
Sex	No	Unsure
Sexual orientation	No	Unsure

Please provide **brief** details of any potential to cause discrimination or negative impact. Record full details and any mitigating actions in section 2 of this assessment.

Negative impact on the protected groups is not anticipated.

Please provide **brief** details of positive impact. How will this policy/proposal promote our commitment to our legal responsibilities under the public sector equality duty to:

- eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation,
- advance equality of opportunity, and
- foster good relations between people from different groups?

The revised community engagement model will adopt a more strategic approach to their work and outcomes through focussed Local Network meetings (reduced number per year) and the development of an individual Local Plan in consultation

¹ <https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/equality-act/protected-characteristics>

with the County Durham Partnership and its thematic partnerships. Local Plans will help inform strategic priorities and identify opportunities for increased joined up working between Local Networks, partners and other DCC services.

Local Plans will be informed by: community views (residents and partners) facilitated by Local Network meetings and locality events; consultation and engagement with the County Durham Community Network and County Durham Partnership and its' thematic partnership sub groups; and utilising greater use of empirical data via a unique Local Profile (e.g. robust and detailed view on the profile and demographics of the Local Network area).

Improved processes and reduced formal Local Network meetings will ensure Local Networks have enhanced opportunities to carry out focussed engagement/neighbourhood planning type activities in particular with communities and groups identified in the Local Plan.

Existing community engagement and development activities will be improved for example: promoting the work of the Local Network and attracting new participation; support for groups/organisations in sourcing and attracting alternative sources of funding; continued support for administering and delivering activities funded by external budgets e.g. Holiday Activities with Healthy Food (HAWF); and identifying opportunities and working with new residents/community groups to support them in becoming formally constituted groups.

The current AAP Forum will be repurposed with a new identity. This will be relaunched as the County Durham Community Network and will increase opportunities for its 15,000 members to engage in Local Plan development and delivery including the option to introduce a new online consultation and engagement platform. There will be an increased focus on Local Network consultation activities whilst also enhancing Local Network delivery of those consultation activities delivered on behalf of DCC and partners.

The new model aims to attract a broad range of participants, potentially the new approach will benefit a broader age range, in particular working and younger age groups with an improved strategic focus and a reduction in the number of meetings. The model aims to be inclusive to all with reasonable adjustments made where necessary in order to ensure the participation of people with disabilities.

Evidence

What evidence do you have to support your data analysis and any findings?

Please **outline** any data you have and/or proposed sources (e.g. service user or census data, research findings). Highlight any data gaps and say whether or not you

propose to carry out consultation. Record your detailed analysis, in relation to the impacted protected characteristics, in section 2 of this assessment.

For the last 14 years AAPs have been one of the main ways for us to engage with the public on a local level and over £59.5m has been allocated to 10,000+ community-based projects, matched with an additional £69.7m of funding.

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. The 2021 Census first release estimates the population of County Durham at 522,100 and currently AAPs vary in population size. Some County Councillors automatically have a place on their AAP Board but in larger AAPs a rotation system operates.

The consultation provided an opportunity to seek feedback from a wide range of stakeholders via various methods and channels as detailed in the table below.

Activity	No. responses
Survey	
Residents	83
AAP Board & Forum members	26
County Councillors	11
DCC Employees	24
Voluntary & Community Sector	27
Youth Council	8
Other	9
Submissions via email	
AAP Boards & Public Reps	12
AAP Teams	6
MP	1
Partners <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • County Durham & Darlington Local Resilience Forum • Durham Constabulary • Durham University • Durham Police & Crime Commissioners Office • NHS • Environment & Climate Change Partnership 	6
Residents	3
Town & Parish Councils / Councillors	8
DCC Public Health	1
Voluntary & Community Sector	4
Notes/comments received at meetings/presentations	
AAP Boards	4
Overview & Scrutiny	1

Partners	5	
Town & Parish Councils / Councillors	1	

Screening Summary

On the basis of the information provided in this equality impact screening (section 1), are you proceeding to a full impact assessment (sections 2&3 of this template)?	Please confirm (Yes/No) No
---	-----------------------------------

Sign Off

Lead officer sign off: Gordon Elliott, Head of Partnerships & Community Engagement	Date: 05/06/23
Equality representative sign off (where required): M Gallagher, E&D Team Leader	Date: 05/06/23

If carrying out a full assessment please proceed to sections two and three.

If not proceeding to full assessment, please ensure your screening record is **attached to any relevant decision-making records or reports**, retain a copy for update where necessary, and forward a copy to equalities@durham.gov.uk

If you are unsure of assessing impact please contact the corporate equalities team for further advice: equalities@durham.gov.uk

Section Two: Data analysis and assessment of impact

Please provide details of impacts for people with different protected characteristics relevant to your screening findings. You need to decide if there is or likely to be a differential impact for some. Highlight the positives e.g. benefits for certain groups and advancement of equality, as well as the negatives e.g. barriers or exclusion of particular groups. Record the evidence you have used to support or explain your conclusions, including any necessary mitigating actions to ensure fair treatment.

Protected Characteristic: Age

What is the actual or potential impact in relation to age?	Record of evidence which supports and/or explains your conclusions on impact.	What further action or mitigation is required?

Protected Characteristic: **Disability**

What is the actual or potential impact in relation to disability?	Record of evidence which supports and/or explains your conclusions on impact.	What further action or mitigation is required?

Protected Characteristic: **Gender reassignment**

What is the actual or potential impact in relation to gender reassignment?	Record of evidence which supports and/or explains your conclusions on impact.	What further action or mitigation is required?

Protected Characteristic: **Marriage and civil partnership (only in relation to 'eliminate discrimination')**

What is the actual or potential impact in relation to marriage and civil partnership?	Record of evidence which supports and/or explains your conclusions on impact.	What further action or mitigation is required?

Protected Characteristic: **Pregnancy and maternity**

What is the actual or potential impact in relation to pregnancy and maternity?	Record of evidence which supports and/or explains your conclusions on impact.	What further action or mitigation is required?

Protected Characteristic: **Race**

What is the actual or potential impact in relation to race?	Record of evidence which supports and/or explains your conclusions on impact.	What further action or mitigation is required?

Protected Characteristic: **Religion or belief**

What is the actual or potential impact in relation to religion or belief?	Record of evidence which supports and/or explains your conclusions on impact.	What further action or mitigation is required?

Protected Characteristic: **Sex**

What is the actual or potential impact in relation to sex?	Record of evidence which supports and/or explains your conclusions on impact.	What further action or mitigation is required?

Protected Characteristic: **Sexual orientation**

What is the actual or potential impact in relation to sexual orientation?	Record of evidence which supports and/or explains your conclusions on impact.	What further action or mitigation is required?

Section Three: Conclusion and Review

Summary

Please provide a brief summary of your findings; a summary of any positive and/or negative impacts across the protected characteristics, links to the involvement of different groups and/or public consultation, mitigations and conclusions made.

--

Will this promote positive relationships between different communities? If so how?

--

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Action Plan

Action	Responsibility	Timescales for implementation	In which plan will the action appear?

Review and connected assessments

Are there any additional or connected equality impact assessments that need to be undertaken? (If yes, provide details)	
When will this assessment be reviewed? Please also insert this date at the front of the template	

Sign Off

Lead officer sign off:	Date:
Equality representative sign off (where required):	Date:

Please ensure:

- **The findings of this EIA are carefully considered and used to inform any related decisions and policy development**
- **A summary of findings is included within the body of any relevant reports or decision-making records**

- **The EIA is attached to reports or relevant decision-making records and the report Implications Appendix 1 is noted that an EIA has been undertaken**

Please retain a copy for review and update where necessary, and forward a copy to equalities@durham.gov.uk

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Corporate Overview & Scrutiny Management Board

Community Engagement Review update

22 September 2023

Gordon Elliott, Head of Partnerships & Community Engagement



Recap

- AAP Reform an early Cabinet priority for Joint Administration
- June 2021 – Cabinet agree a range of changes and recognise ‘the need to explore further enhancements’
- March 2022 – Cabinet agree the Community Engagement Review
- Steering Group established
- June 2022 – ERS Commissioned
- January 2023 – Final report submitted to the Community Engagement Review Steering Group
- March/April 2023 – Countywide consultation on ERS proposals
 - 3 April 2023 – Corporate Overview & Scrutiny Management Board
- May 2023 – Consultation feedback analysed and proposed new community engagement model designed
- July 2023 – Proposed model agreed for implementation by Cabinet

Consultation responses/feedback

- Survey
 - Residents X83
 - AAP Board & Forum Members X26
 - County Councillors X11
 - DCC Employees X24
 - VCS X27
 - Youth Council X8
 - Other X9
- AAP Boards
 - Submissions X3
 - Discussion notes from Board meetings X5
 - Discussion notes from online sessions X4
- AAP Public Rep submissions X3
- AAP Teams submissions X6
- Corporate Overview & Scrutiny Management Board
- Partners
 - Submissions
 - LRF
 - Durham Constabulary
 - Police & Crime Commissioners Office
 - Durham University
 - Mary Kelly Foy MP
 - Town & Parish Councils & Councillors X8
 - VCS X3
 - Environment & Climate Change Partnership
 - Disability Partnership
 - Public Health
 - Discussion notes from partner meetings/sessions
 - County Durham Partnership Forum
 - Youth Council
 - County Durham Health & Care Engagement Forum
 - County Durham Care Partnerships
 - County Durham Association of Local Councils



Consultation – feedback analysis

- AAPs are established in communities and work extremely well - this should not be lost with any new model
- Frequent recognition/praise for staffs' experience, knowledge and commitment
- Agreement to make improvements to make AAPs even more efficient and effective e.g.
 - Review and improve funding and application processes and maintain transparency and accountability
 - Increase capacity and opportunities to deliver enhanced community development activities with increased participation from the wide community and stakeholders Make better use of data, evidence and intelligence from local participation to design and deliver local action plans
 - Provide more flexible funding e.g. longer term projects
- Feedback on ERS model includes:
 - Lack of appetite to change boundaries - retain existing boundaries which work well and promote community cohesion
 - Centralisation - officer based decision making and unrealistic expectation that CDP will understand local communities – lack of engagement if decisions seen to be made centrally
 - Removes local decision making – no local 'Board'
 - Reduced engagement in absence of guaranteed attendance by Cllrs and partners e.g. no Board and if themes are not seen as relevant/timely to large parts of the communities – 'talking shops'
 - Lack of transparency if NBs are not reported back to Networks
 - Reduced opportunities to respond to emerging needs in 4yr funding model if year one concentrates on planning only
 - Minimal opportunities to administer additional external funding, respond to emergencies, support consultation work and support Cllrs with NBs

COSMB – feedback included...

- “the report acknowledges the strengths of the AAPs and the generally positive regard in which they are held. Therefore, why are the recommendations are being made to deconstruct the existing model and replace it with one where funding decisions sit centrally with the County Durham partnership;
- the County Durham partnership's role within the recommended funding model appears to remove the ability for local determination of grant applications and allocations;
- it appears that the national and regional regard in which the current AAP model is held has not been reflected within the report;
- members acknowledged the need for a balance to be struck between ensuring that projects that deliver agreed outputs and outcomes are sustained and providing flexibility to fund new initiatives;
- general support to the streamlining and simplification of AAP grant application and approval processes was expressed;
- whilst agreeing the need for a simpler grant funding process, members acknowledged the need for appropriate transparency, accountability and assurance regarding decision-making in this respect;
- a greater role should be developed for AAPs or the proposed community development networks to support CVS organisations and groups in delivering projects locally;
- members hoped that the review would address the perceived or, in some cases, evidenced disconnect between AAPs, community groups and County Council service groupings when considering AAP funded projects and the length of time taken from project inception, funding approval and project delivery;
- it was generally considered that the review of community engagement arrangements was timely given that AAPs have operated for some 14 years, with acknowledgement that no organisation should be complacent or resistant to review and change”

COSMB recommendations

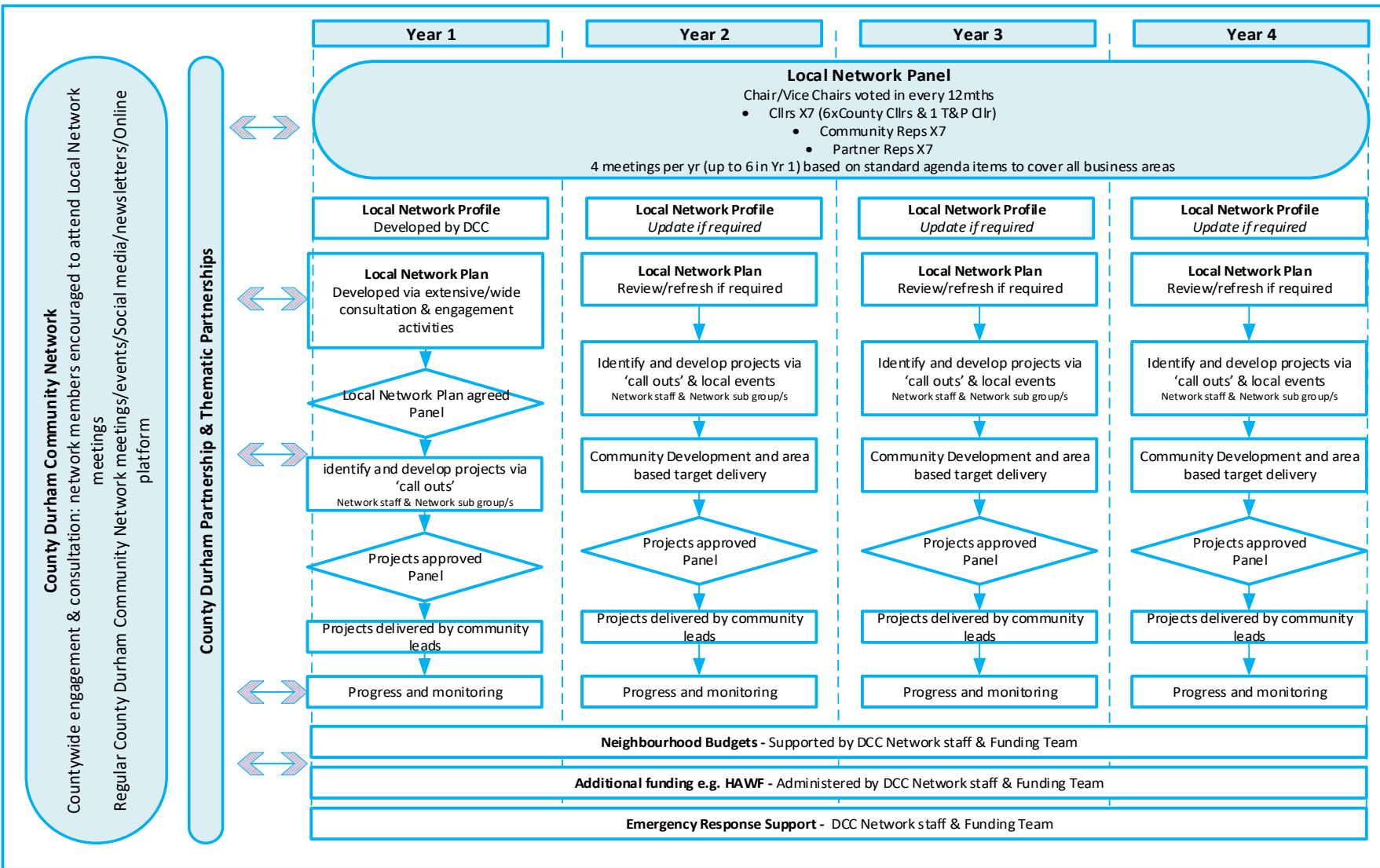
- *“the approach to the proposed countywide community engagement consultation be noted and the views expressed at the meeting be submitted as the COSMB response to the consultation;*
- *the opportunity for all elected members to submit individual views via the online community engagement review survey be noted; and*
- *that Cabinet be recommended to agree that the final decision in respect of the community engagement (AAP) review be referred to full council for determination.”*

ERS principles not to be adopted

- Officers will not chair Local Network Meetings
- Funding decisions will not be made by the County Durham Partnership - maintaining decision making for funding being taken in the locality
- External funding allocation in communities (e.g. HAWF) will not be decided by Officers – maintaining the decisions on funding being taken in the locality
- Year 1 of the 4yr funding programme will not be for planning only - retaining capacity to spend budgets in year 1 (up to a specified percentage of a 4yr allocation)
- Funding uplift based on population – funding levels already vary based on number of Neighbourhood Budgets in an AAP area
- Community Chest will not be adopted - level of funding will have limited impact and there are sufficient alternative resources for this level of funds which Network staff will help groups to source and make an application
- Elected Members support for Neighbourhood Budget projects will not solely be provided through the Funding Team - maintaining capacity for local co-ordinators and Network staff to continue to be the primary point of contact for Neighbourhood budget project development (with a named point of contact in the Funding Team for budget and monitoring issues)

ERS principles to be adopted

- Maintaining a hyper local network of engagement mechanisms, with the potential to more closely align to Electoral Divisions
- Enhanced capacity for community development support
- Greater use of a wider range of engagement methods over and above 'Board' meetings
- The development of a strategic plan to shape the allocation of funds including wider consultation and engagement with the County Durham Partnership
- A 4yr funding planning cycle (maintain annual funding during transition year 2024/25)
- Simplified funding and application processes
- Simplified Elected Member's Neighbourhood Budget process including DCC Project Catalogue and dedicated contact within the Funding Team
- Implementation of new grant application and funding system (subject to budget approval)
- Review of AAP staff bases and opportunities identified for staff to work flexibly within their communities



Local Network model

- A rebranded model that attracts new participation and places the emphasis on creating and supporting local networks in communities that are increasingly essential at a time of increased pressures on residents and decreasing public resources
- Aligned to the current boundaries (with the potential depending on the final details of the boundary Review to align Local Network boundaries to those of Elected Members)
- Repurpose and better utilise AAP Forum to a new rebranded Durham Community Network (c15,000 members) with increased use of new and traditional engagement tools to attract involvement of a greater number, and broader range, of residents and local stakeholders
- Adoption of a more strategic approach to the work of the Local Networks through the development of Local Network Plans, based on extensive preparatory work during Year 1 of a 4yr cycle, utilising greater use of empirical data (via Local Profiles prepared by Corporate Services) as well as broader community views (via input from the County Durham Community Network, as well as a series of locality events)
- Closer working relationship with the County Durham Partnership and its Thematic Partnerships who will be invited to help shape the development each Network's Local Plan
- A 4yr funding planning cycle that will provide the means for more strategic action and assurance for applicants
- Opportunities to attract new participation by carrying out focussed engagement/neighbourhood planning activities in particular communities identified in the Local Plan as a consequence of enhanced team capacity (fewer Network formally Board meetings and significantly simplified funding and application processes)
- A significantly simplified funding process for Neighbourhood and Strategic Budgets, including no decisions being taken at Local Panels on elected Members' Neighbourhood Budgets

Local Network model

- Based on the current AAP and funding team staffing complement
- Staff currently based within their geographic AAP boundaries and where this is not within council owned buildings, options are currently being considered to re-locate staff to reduce office accommodation costs
- Staff will maintain their core base in a council owned building with greater flexibility to identify days and locations where they can temporarily be based within buildings in the local community to work more closely with the specific community groups/organisations they are currently supporting etc.
- New governance – Terms of Reference approved by Cabinet prior to launch in April 2025, including Panel selection, recruitment and term with greater emphasis on political neutrality
- New funding criteria and guidelines including improved transparency on declarations of interest and decision making processes
- Streamlined and improved funding processes and procedures
- Regular training on governance and decision making

Local Network Panel

- AAP Board will be replaced by a Local Network Panel
 - maintain a non-political nature
 - maximum of 21 members serving a four-year term
 - seven elected members (six county councillors and one Town & Parish councillor)
 - seven partner representatives
 - seven community representatives
 - Partner reps will consist of one representative from: Durham Constabulary; Durham & Darlington Fire & Rescue; health partners; registered social landlords; VCS organisations; and a local business
 - Option to replace DCC partner rep (HoS) with a rep to reflect the individuality of their area on their membership Panel e.g. an organisation or statutory body that has prevalence and significance in their local area
 - Community Reps will serve a maximum of a 4-year terms and cannot hold the position of Community Rep or Partner Representative within 12mths of a previous term
 - 12mth term for Chair with a 12mth break between each term – if deemed appropriated by the Panel and agreement reached by a vote, Chairs may continue for a maximum of a 2-year term

Local Networks – Next steps

- Steering Group and Project Group membership/governance
 - Project workstream collaboration
- Phased implementation project plan:
 - Number of improvement processes delivered by April 2024
 - Transition year (including additional process improvements) April 2024 - May 2025
 - Launch - First year of a 4yr planning cycle from May 2025
- Communications plan to promote new model and provide updates on phased improvement delivery (between now and May 2025)
- Regular training opportunities for elected members and key stakeholders
- New model goes live in May 2025
- New robust Governance, Terms of Reference and documentation with a commitment to review on an annual basis

Local Networks – High level milestones

Milestone	Delivery
Project plan (including project membership & governance) & communications plan initiated	August 2023
Funding process improvements & efficiencies including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Streamlined approval process for lower spend threshold Streamlined approval process for DCC delivered projects Streamlined approval for applications pending conditions New contact processes for funding team & applicants Establish funding team single points of contact for elected members 	October 2023
Funding process improvements & efficiencies including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Streamlined process for Neighbourhood Budget (removal of AAP approval) Revised process for applications requiring external permissions (e.g. planning/licencing etc.) Streamlined application forms for repeat applicants & statutory partners Catalogue for frequently delivered DCC projects Reduction in financial monitoring (12 month pilot) 	April 2024
Local Network Governance and ToR working group established	October 2023
Feasibility study for online grant application & management system	April 2024
Feasibility study for online consultation & engagement platform	April 2024
Local Network Governance & ToR sign off by Cabinet	September 2024
Strategic planning process with County Durham Partnership	December 2024
Local Network branding & communication tools	January 2025
Pre-launch community & partnership events/activities	January – March 2025
Local Networks Launch	1 April 2025
Local Network Panels appointed & 4yr planning cycle commences	May 2025

Questions



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COSMB

Digital Solutions – supporting new ways of working

Marion Ingleby, Head of Digital
September 2023

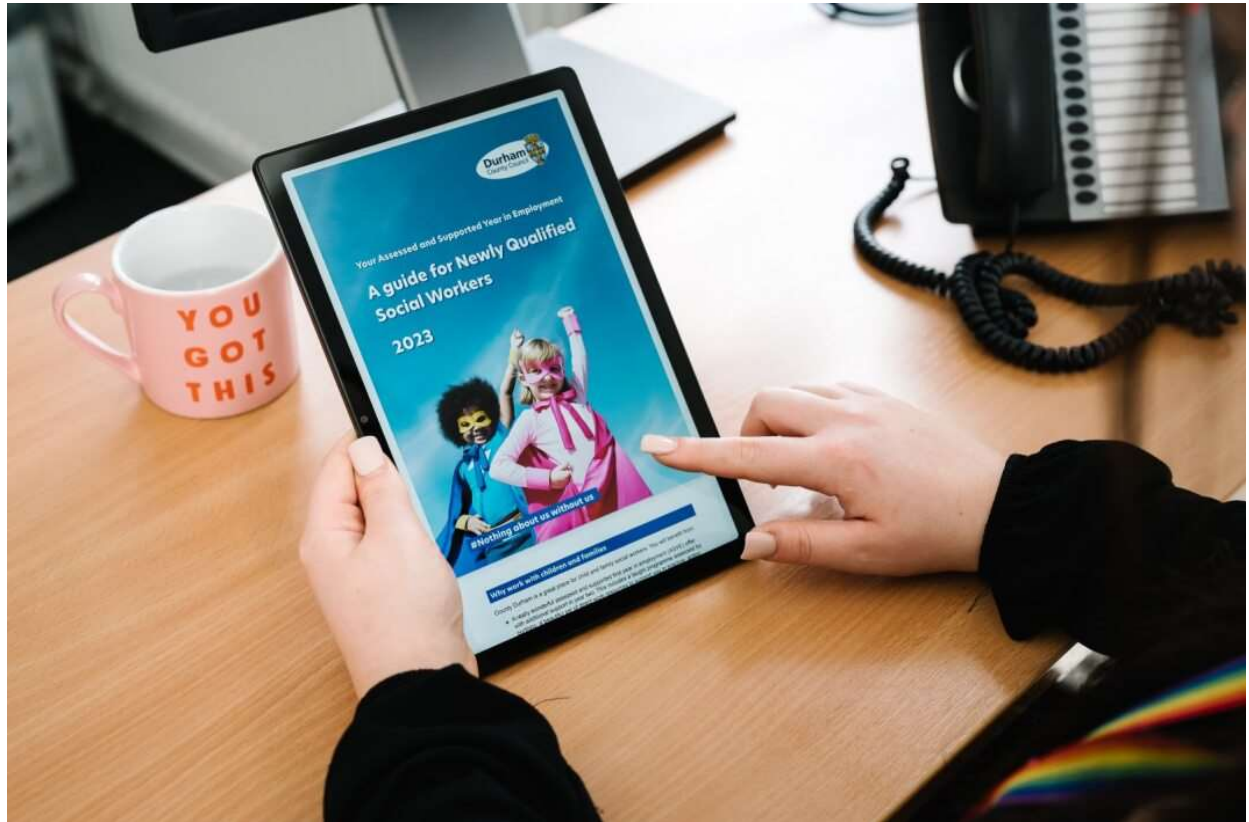


New ways of working.....





Digital ways of working



Benefits of digital solutions to smarter working

- manage our people and resources effectively
- create/supports a workforce for the future
- better services for our residents
- use data and technology more effectively to support decision making
- actively performance manage our services
- deliver services that respect that we operate in a world with limited natural resources, biodiversity scarcity and climate change

Digital Strategy

Digital Durham

- Our digital vision and principles

Digital Customer

- Improve how people can access our services

Digital Organisation

- Make sure our staff have the right digital skills

Digital community

- Expand digital access across county

Digital Council

- Developing proposals for new internal governance for digital
- Developing digital action plan across organisation

Ways of working

- New Intranet delivered
- Digital mail room delivered with Business Support
- CRM system continued development
 - Hospital Discharge Process
 - W3W Pilot
 - Updated Bulky Waste Collection
 - Updated Health & Safety Process
 - Scaffolding Permit Process
 - School Admissions and Appeals
 - Research approval application
- Spiidur- phase 1 delivered – new building facilities product
- New flexi recording system being launched



Office 365

- SharePoint migration now completed to new secure platforms- 3,297 sites migrated
- Successful pilots on new ways to share information securely
- Pilots on new ways to capture electronic signatures
- Engagements with Microsoft to explore new opportunities for technology- AHS use case

Learning, training and skills

- Members' support
 - Specific Teams training
 - Specific governors portal training with CYPs colleagues
 - Digital skills survey complete
 - Ongoing support members ICT
- Staff training offer
 - Improved training offer
 - New sessions being delivered



Meeting Room Video Conferencing



Small/Medium Room Teams Solution

5 – 10 People

55" Screen with MS Teams Integrated Video
and Audi
and MS Outlook calendar management



Large Room Teams Solution

10+ People

65" Screen with MS Teams Integrated Video
and Audio
MS Outlook calendar management

Video Conferencing Usage Statistics

 113 ROOMS	 4 UNUSED ROOMS	 16% UTILIZATION	 2565 SCHEDULED MEETINGS	 78% ONLINE MEETINGS	 461 CALLS	 98% CALL PERFORMANCE
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Top 10 rooms by utilisation

Display name	Hostname	Utilization ↓	Booked Online	Scheduled Meetings	Total Calls	Call performance
CH Res HoS G18	CH-VC-G18	70%	0%	21	1	100%
CH Beaumont Room 1/80-81 (14)	CH-VC-Beaumont	41%	59%	37	2	100%
Green Lane 3.06 (6)	GL-VC-306	38%	90%	70	7	85.71%
Green Lane 3.08 (6)	GL-VC-308	37%	100%	55	9	100%
Green Lane 3.05 (6)	GL-VC-305	36%	91%	78	13	100%
Green Lane 0.03 (6)	GL-VC-003	33%	75%	51	2	100%
Green Lane 3.07 (10)	GL-VC-307	33%	89%	46	10	100%
CH Committee Room 2 (54)	CH-VC-CommRo...	32%	48%	27	4	100%
CH Corporate Director 3/1	CH-VC-Director3	32%	21%	19	0	N/A
Green Lane 1.03 (12)	GL-VC-103	32%	61%	28	5	100%

Infrastructure

- Morrison Busty
- The Story



Infrastructure

- Improvements to Tanfield
 - Corporate firewall upgrades – security and remote access improvements
 - Data centre security upgrades
 - Cyber Security Framework developed
 - Out of Hours Support reviewed and updated

Equipment

- Provision of devices
 - Flexible devices in Adult Social care
 - Service efficiencies
 - Embracing new technology
 - Improvements in:
 - Care provision
 - Staff work/life balance
 - System accuracy and timely availability of data
 - Review of Technology Provision Strategy
 - Holistic approach to device lifecycles
 - More regular replacement patterns
 - Better financial control



Look ahead

- Events booking online –Sept 2023
- Member Portal Launch - October 2023
- Online booking for registrars service – Oct 2023
- Member Digital Skills Programme
- New staff site for 365 learning
- New schools extranet to be launched - Oct 2023
- Home and Shared folder migrations to commence
- Teams telephony integration
- Online booking Registrars service

Questions?

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**Corporate Overview and Scrutiny
Management Board**

22 September 2023

County Durham Partnership Update



Report of Corporate Management Team

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

Councillor Amanda Hopgood, Leader of the Council

**Councillor Elizabeth Scott, Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Economy
and Partnerships**

Electoral division affected:

Countywide

Purpose of the Report

- 1 The purpose of the report is to update Cabinet on issues being addressed by the County Durham Partnership (CDP). The report also includes updates on other key initiatives being carried out in partnership across the county.

Executive summary

- 2 The **County Durham Partnership event** this year will take place on 17 November and will focus on celebrating 10 years of health and wellbeing in the local authority and Health and Wellbeing Boards.
- 3 The **Health and Wellbeing Board** agreed the Joint Local Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2023-28 at their meeting in May 2023. The plan is underpinned by evidence in the Joint Strategic Needs and Assets Assessment and focussed on health and wellbeing, which is influenced by a range of factors and the wider determinants of health.
- 4 All of the seven cabinets in the north-east agreed to move forward with the **Devolution** deal for the North East. It is hoped, we will hear later this year that the parliamentary order to create the new Combined Authority will be laid. A mayor for the region will then be elected in May 2024.

- 5 The Council's **community engagement review** has now been completed. This was subject to further countywide consultation with stakeholders and recommendations for a revised community engagement function have recently been agreed at Cabinet.
- 6 The **fun and food programme** delivered 143 projects across the County over the two-week Easter holiday period. During May half term, an additional 60 projects being delivered across the county.
- 7 **CONTEST: The UK's Strategy for Countering Terrorism 2023** was published on 18 July. The aim of CONTEST is to reduce the risk from terrorism to the UK, its citizens and interests overseas, so people can live freely and with confidence.
- 8 The **Government's Anti-Social Behaviour Action Plan** was launched on 27 March to tackle anti-social behaviour. The Durham Force Area are one of the 16 Trailblazer sites who will receive government funding over 2 years.
- 9 In June, we held the County Durham Partnership Forum where we discussed the work that is taking place in relation to anti-social behaviour in conjunction with the Police and Crime Commissioner.

Recommendation

- 10 COSMB is recommended to:
 - (a) note the contents of this update.

Background

- 11 The **County Durham Partnership** including the board and forum (which bring together the board and local communities), five partnerships (**Health and Wellbeing Board, Safe Durham Partnership, Economic Partnership, Environment and Climate Change Partnership** and **County Durham Together Partnership**), **Durham Safeguarding Children Partnership** and the **Durham Safeguarding Adults Partnership, Better Together VCS Forum** and all **Area Action Partnerships** lead on key initiatives being carried out in partnership across the county.

County Durham Partnership board and forum

- 12 The **County Durham Partnership** Board met in May and July.
- 13 At the May meeting, we started the discussion in relation to planning our annual County Durham Partnership event to celebrate 10 years of Health and Wellbeing Boards and marking 10 years since Public Health functions moved to local authorities from NHS Primary Care Trusts.
- 14 Meetings continue to have regular updates from Thematic Chairs to concentrate on key areas of their work for the County Durham Partnership. The May meeting looked on the work of the **County Durham Together Partnership**. The vision of County Durham Together is about working with communities, especially those most in need, making sure they are at the heart of decision making, building on their existing skills, knowledge, experience and resources to support everyone to thrive and to live happy, healthy and connected lives. The meeting focused on utilising the momentum and lessons learned in supporting communities through the Covid pandemic and moving forward based on the Approach to Wellbeing, to achieve better outcomes for communities and those most in need.
- 15 The importance of embedding the County Durham Together (CDT) approach into our statutory pieces of work such as the Joint Strategic Needs and Assets Assessment (JSNAA) was highlighted. County Durham are one of the only places in the country thinking about our community assets and strengths in the JSNAA.

16 At the July meeting, the thematic focus was the **Health and Wellbeing Board** with discussion around the NHS Joint Forward Plan and the importance of one of the key roles of the Integrated Care System to join up Health and social care.

17 We also received an update on the work of the 15 Family Hubs across the County. 75 Local authorities, including County Durham, received additional funding to develop its Family Hubs and Start for Life offer.



18 The Department for Health and Social Care (DHSC) and the Department for Education (DfE) launched a three-year Family Hubs and Start for Life (SfL) programme to deliver a step-change in outcomes for babies, children, young people, parents, and carers. The aim is to provide a system wide model of providing high-quality, joined-up, whole-family support services. Family Hubs will deliver these services from conception, through a child's early years until they reach the age of 19 (or 25 for young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities).

19 The outcome of the Community Engagement review and next steps were also shared.

20 In June 2023, **the County Durham Partnership Forum** took place at the Horden Welfare Centre, a space used by all from the Horden Together Partnership, creating a methodology for place-based working and supporting the community. The focus of the meeting was to celebrate 10 years of the Advice in County Durham Partnership (AICD), who are the one remaining advice partnerships in the country from a Big Lottery funded national Citizens Advice project in 2013. Achievements over the last 10 years have included providing 7,000 people with access to training, supporting collaborative projects on specific issues and gaps in provision, preparing the county for the roll out of Universal Credit, and the Stanley Advice Hub, which has helped over 8,800 clients over 5 years.

21 A workshop focused on what we can do to tackle anti-social behaviour (ASB) across the County, priority areas include making reporting ASB easier, listening to the victim's voice, targeting hotspot areas, diversionary activities for young people and improvements in communication, including highlighting good news stories.

- 22 A range of AAP projects was also outlined arising from a need to tackle ASB, including:
- (a) Section 59 Notices, drones, barriers and Young Mechanics projects to reduce nuisance off-road vehicles.
 - (b) Purchasing and upgrading CCTV cameras, improved lighting, installing lockable gates and clearing undergrowth and specific partnership working to make people feel safer.
 - (c) Diversionary activities for young people.
- 23 Feedback from the workshop will contribute to the development of a delivery plan which supports the County Durham ASB Strategy.

County Durham Partnership event

- 24 The **County Durham Partnership** event will take place on 17 November and will focus on celebrating 10 years of health and wellbeing in the local authority and Health and Wellbeing Boards.
- 25 It will coincide with Lumiere, the light festival which has taken place in Durham, every 2 years, since 2009. It will take place this year from 16-19th November.

Review of Community Engagement

- 26 Following agreement by Cabinet in March 2022, consultants ERS were appointed to undertake an impartial and unbiased review of the Council's community engagement functions including the work of AAPs. The review commenced in June 2022, and the final report detailing the consultant's findings and recommendations, was subject to further countywide consultation with stakeholders.
- 27 The majority of respondents supported incremental, rather than whole scale change, and to build on the significant strengths of the current AAP model. Recommendations for a revised community engagement function have recently been agreed at Cabinet.
- 28 The new model will deliver Local Networks which will:
- (a) Attract new participation and places, with the emphasis on creating and supporting local networks in communities that are increasingly essential at a time of increased pressures on residents and decreasing public resources.
 - (b) Align to the current boundaries (with the potential depending on the final details of the boundary Review) to align Local Network boundaries to those of Elected Members.

- (c) Repurpose and better utilise the AAP Forum to a new rebranded Durham Community Network (c15,000 members) with increased use of new and traditional engagement tools to attract involvement of a greater number, and broader range, of residents and local stakeholders.
 - (d) Adopt of a more strategic approach to the work of the Local Networks, with a reduced number of meetings per year, and through the development of Local Network Plans. A 4-year planning cycle that will provide the means for more strategic action and assurance for applicants.
 - (e) Have a closer working relationship with the County Durham Partnership and its Thematic Partnerships.
 - (f) Provide opportunities to attract new participation by carrying out focussed engagement/neighbourhood planning activities, in particular, with communities identified in the Local Plan, as a consequence of enhanced team capacity.
 - (g) Undertake a significantly simplified funding process for Neighbourhood and Strategic Budgets, including no decisions being taken at Local Panels on elected Members' Neighbourhood Budgets.
- 29 New governance including Terms of Reference will clearly define the purpose, structure and functions of the Local Networks. It will provide in detail eligibility criteria, roles and responsibilities of Panel members and robust processes around recruitment and selection of Panel members to deliver improved assurance that Local Network Panels will be non-political.
- 30 AAPs will continue to operate as Area Action Partnerships until 31 March 2025, and on 1 April 2025 they will assume their new identity as Local Networks.

Devolution deal for the North East

- 31 Following an eight-week consultation earlier this year, where we asked residents, businesses and other stakeholders to give their views on the proposed scheme, respondents welcomed the proposed increase in regional power, a greater profile for the North East, and closer working arrangements among key organisations.
- 32 In addition to members of the public responding to the survey, a number of key organisations from around the region submitted responses lending their support to the deal. These included private businesses, voluntary and community sector organisations, trade unions,

educational institutions, sports clubs and public sector bodies who welcomed the proposed investment and opportunities the deal could provide.

- 33 In total, it is expected to provide £4.2 billion of additional investment to the region over 30 years, including a £1.4bn investment fund alongside significant funding for transport, education and skills, housing and regeneration. The deal would involve the creation of a new mayoral combined authority covering County Durham, Gateshead, Newcastle, North Tyneside, Northumberland, South Tyneside and Sunderland, and is projected to create 24,000 additional jobs in the area and unlock £5 billion additional private sector investment into the region.
- 34 The formation of the new combined authority would not impact on any of the services delivered by the seven local authorities involved. However, the North of Tyne Combined Authority, covering Newcastle, North Tyneside and Northumberland, and the North East Combined Authority covering County Durham, Gateshead, South Tyneside and Sunderland, would both cease to operate.
- 35 The deal announced with government also includes scope for the region to enter into 'trailblazer' negotiations to enable the North East to play a leading role in further devolution of powers and investment in the future.
- 36 A summary of the consultation findings has been presented to the respective Cabinets of each of the seven constituent local authorities and two combined authorities and the findings will be presented to the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities to consider before laying an order in Parliament to establish the new combined authority.
- 37 Subject to these steps, it is expected that an election to appoint a new mayor would take place in May 2024, at which point the new North East Mayoral Combined Authority would come into effect.

Advice in County Durham

- 38 The Advice in County Durham (AiCD) Partnership held two celebratory events in June for their 10-year anniversary of when the Partnership first formed back in 2013. The Partnership membership has now expanded to over 180 partner organisations over the years. The two events in Murton and Stanley attracted over 140 delegates who came to celebrate the achievements and successes over this period.



Celebrating the tenth anniversary of AiCD

- 39 The Advice Partnership consists of members of the VCSE sector, social enterprise and statutory sectors that underpin and are representative of the work going on across the county, AiCD continue to work with partners to support communities around the 'Cost of Living' which continues to be a key focus, by facilitating and informing organisations working to create a coordinated approach to ensure that there is 'no wrong door' for anyone seeking advice and support.
- 40 AICD are pleased to be taking the lead in preparation of Universal Credit Migration which began its rollout in County Durham at the end of July 2023. AICD are hosting a conference which will consist of both national speakers and local providers in September, to inform and highlight potential issues to support stakeholder partners around how that will affect the residents of County Durham.
- 41 Our key focus is to ensure that by working collaboratively all key partners will be able to support individuals to get the right support and advice through our 'No Wrong Door' ethos during this challenging transitional period.

Poverty Action Strategy and Plan for County Durham

- 42 A Poverty Action Strategy and Plan for County Durham has been in place and regularly reviewed since 2015.
- 43 Following a review, the current version has been in place since November 2022. The vision is **'to work together with communities so**

fewer people will be affected by poverty and deprivation in the county’.

- 44 The action plan contains four main objectives:
- (a) Use Intelligence and data to target support to low income household
 - (b) Reduce the financial pressures on people facing or in poverty
 - (c) Increase individual, household and community resilience to poverty
 - (d) Reduce barriers to accessing services for those experiencing financial insecurity
- 45 Initiatives include the expansion of ‘That Bread and Butter Thing’ to now cover 15 sites across County Durham, which are also starting to offer wrap around financial support as part of the provision.
- 46 Continued support for residents with their Council Tax bill includes the continued 100% Local Council Tax Reduction scheme (meaning many claimants have zero Council Tax to pay). DCC are in the minority of local authorities to offer this. For those who do not qualify for the full 100% reduction and have a balance to pay there is a £75 top up payment they automatically receive.
- 47 The Household Support Fund is currently in year 4, with over £9million provided in funding from central Government being issued to those residents who need it most.
- 48 Following the provision of the Warm Spaces Network project last winter, which provided local people with a place to go and keep warm and enjoy a little company, discussion will take place at the Poverty Action Steering Group in relation to plans for the forthcoming winter.

Humanitarian Support programme

- 49 The **humanitarian support team** continues to support refugee families across County Durham.
- 50 The Homes for Ukraine sponsorship scheme enable residents to volunteer accommodation and offers a route to safety for individuals and families who want to come to the UK and who have someone here willing to provide a home. Through this scheme, the council has supported nearly 600 guests and more than 275 sponsor households to provide a warm welcome to the County. County Durham residents have

made the largest number of accommodation offers in the north east, reflecting the generosity of the County's communities.

- 51 In June 2023, the humanitarian support team welcomed six Afghan families to the County as part of the council's resettlement programme. Under the scheme, the Afghan families (10 adults and 16 children), who arrived in the UK following the withdrawal of British troops and the emergency evacuation from Afghanistan, who have been living in temporary hotel accommodation, have been offered a home and three years resettlement support to help establish a new life in County Durham.
- 52 The Team is also working to ensure the council can effectively participate in the government's full dispersal asylum accommodation programme, which all local authorities have been mandated to engage in. This includes co-ordinating responses to property requests, in consultation with partners and services, and assisting the voluntary and community sector to develop a support infrastructure for those arriving in the area under a private housing contract.

Safeguarding

- 53 **Durham Safeguarding Children Partnership (DSCP)** have continued working towards their new structure and model, this included a change in staffing and introduction of a new Partnership Improving Practice Manager.
- 54 The DSCP seeks to challenge partners to continuously improve safeguarding for children and young people in County Durham. Multi-agency, collaborative and practitioner led auditing has been completed throughout 2022-2023. These audits were identified by partners at the Embedded Learning Group following review of wider service intelligence and learning from Local Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews. Four audits were completed focusing on:
- (a) Multi agency assessments and recognition of cumulative harm.
 - (b) Recognising and responding to risk factors in sexual abuse.
 - (c) How and when Strategy Meetings are convened, focussing on children at risk of Child Sexual Exploitation.
 - (d) Whole family assessments, considering cumulative harm, frequent house moves and consideration of all adults significant in the life of the child.
- 55 Recommendation for learning has been developed from each audit, the audit activity has been cross referenced with wider DSCP learning

activity to understand consistent themes and focus improvement activity linked with this. Themes for improvement have included:

- (a) Supervision
- (b) Multiagency engagement
- (c) Cross boundary working
- (d) Use of tools (Harm Matrix)

56 The **Durham Safeguarding Adults Partnership (DSAP)** has continued to regularly share and promote headline messages related to the safeguarding adults agenda. It has maintained its updates of the local picture to statutory and relevant partners, and wider stakeholders and continued to seek related assurance. In recent months the DSAP has shared key briefings with all partners which have included a continuation of a suite of 'what good looks like' related to Mental Capacity Act (2005) Assessments, including a guide to inform practitioners about preferred communication and all practicable steps to support adults with care and support needs.

57 There were over 36,000 visits to the DSAP website between April 2022 and March 2023.

58 The DSAP continued to extend its online training offer, it issued over 800 Raising a Concern Workbook certificates to professionals, staff and volunteers by the end of March 2023. Within its dedicated Safeguarding Week, it offered topics such as:

- (a) Modern Slavery Must Knows
- (b) Safeguarding and Family Carers
- (c) What to do about self-neglect – learning from best practice
- (d) Self-Neglect Revisiting Safeguarding Practice
- (e) Understanding Safeguarding for Voluntary and Community Organisations
- (f) Advocacy Matters
- (g) Cyber stalking and Domestic Abuse

59 It is a statutory requirement upon the DSAP to undertake Safeguarding Adults Reviews in certain circumstances, as outlined in Section 44, of the Care Act 2014. The partnership commissioned a complex review into events at an Independent Hospital, Whorlton Hall (Barnard Castle).

The DSAP published the findings in full in May 2023 following conclusion of criminal trial, in which four of nine defendants were found guilty. The DSAP will continue its work to engage with agencies to take forward the findings of the review which focus upon national learning.

Fun and Food programme

60 The **fun and food programme** continues to develop, and over the Easter holidays, 143 projects have been delivered across the County, running 520 sessions, and providing 21,125 meals over the two-week Easter holiday period. The Department for Education has provided funding of £411,885. The range of activities can be seen in the [Easter Fun and Food Video](#).

61 9557 children were engaged in these sessions, and of these, 2009 children had additional needs and 30% of these were eligible for free school meals.

62 During the May half term holiday, the Poverty Action Steering group gave £71,457 to fund 60 AAP projects, delivered across the county, and partners continue to offer wonderful creative projects, engaging children and young people in experiences and opportunities they wouldn't ordinarily be able to access.



Children preparing for a canoeing activity at an Easter Fun and Food session.

63 A Summer Fun and Food programme is also in place. 225 projects are being delivered across the county by a variety of partner agencies including VCS, schools, leisure services, community arts and family hubs. Enriching activities include outdoor/forest activities, dino digs, performing arts, sports/physical activities and much more. Working together with SEND Empowering Inclusive Communities, there is now a Fun and Food offer specifically for children and young people with SEND. This has been developed in direct response to families feeding back that they would like to have activities they can attend that are exclusively for children and young people with SEND, this compliments the inclusive offer that some partners are able to deliver. We continue to develop our offer for 11 – 16-year-olds and now have a dedicated worker in place to support this.

- 64 **Spennymoor AAP** provided Fun and Food funding to Trinity Methodist Church for their Bop and Hop Along Project, which provided children and families with a range of innovative activities which included disco dancing, drama and lunch where children and families were able to choose a variety of healthy options to mix up their own topping for a jacket potato.
- 65 Families were also provided with a take home potato growing pack. This included a special tub with a viewing window so that the children can see the potatoes growing under the soil. Families also received seed potatoes, compost, and fertilizer along with a recipe sheet with low cost, healthy meals using potatoes.
- 66 The Fun and Food event has provided the following outcomes:
- (a) Providing an opportunity for families to come together and meet each other.
 - (b) Encourage parents and children to work together and try something new/different.
 - (c) Encourage children and parents to engage in physical activity.
 - (d) Giving an opportunity for families to be creative.
 - (e) Enabling families to learn and experience growing food.
- 67 Influence church, based in the Cockton Hill area of Bishop Auckland were supported through the **Bishop Auckland and Shildon (BASH) AAP** to deliver a weekly breakfast hub and evening youth group at Bishop Auckland Baptist Church. The funding has supported employment of a part-time community worker and the costs of project activities.
- 68 The Breakfast Hub is a drop in facility, which is open to families with children every Friday morning and offers social activities as well as distribution of weekly breakfast supplies, baby supplies and resources to aid warm living during the winter months.
- 69 The Elevate Youth Group runs on Friday evenings during term time and caters for young people aged 11-18. It is open to people from all genders and backgrounds, without discrimination, and provides a safe place for young people to socialise and learn life skills through a range of activities and learning.
- 70 The Breakfast Hub and Youth Group jointly provide services directly to around 250 people and are supported by a team of up to 15 volunteers.

71 The Church has also received support through the Fun and Food Programme which has enabled them to extend their activity programme, and reach, during several school holiday periods.

Vision 2035: More and better jobs

72 The County Durham Inclusive Economic Strategy (IES) sets a clear, long-term vision for the area's economy up to 2035, with an overarching aim to create more and better jobs in an inclusive, green economy. Since March 2023, a detailed delivery plan for the IES has been in development by the **Economic Partnership**, which includes partners from the private, charity and community sector, giving stakeholders another chance to help shape and deliver the strategy.

73 The delivery plan is being developed under the five key priority areas included in the IES of:

- (a) **People** - supporting people into education, training and jobs and enabling them to excel in their careers and in business.
- (b) **Productivity** - supporting business innovation, growth and higher levels of productivity.
- (c) **Places** - improving places and planning infrastructure so that people and businesses can access opportunities.
- (d) **Promotion** - promoting the county, its assets and opportunities to businesses, investors, visitors, developers and residents.
- (e) **Planet** - investing in people, technologies, research, development and businesses in order to help achieve net zero emissions in County Durham by 2045, activities are captured with each of the above priorities.

74 In order to conclude the work, a workshop is due to be held with the **Economic Partnership** and partners in September to review the Delivery Plan and identify any gaps. The final Delivery Plan will be presented to a future Economic Partnership meeting.

75 The current UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) plan, which was reported in the previous update, has now commenced with its delivery. The plan sets out how funding will be invested into the county over the next three years, following the themes of communities and place, supporting local businesses, and people and skills.

76 Previous restrictions that meant the People and Skills strand could not commence until April 2024 have now been removed, and plans can commence. Our focus for the people and skills area is to support people into employment by increasing life and work skills within communities. The money will be used to provide a broad employment and skills support offer, with activities focusing on addressing sector pressure and skills shortages.

- 77 Any future rounds for the UKSPF will be routed through the new North East Mayoral Combined Authority.
- 78 The Business Energy Efficiency Project (BEEP2) has now been completed with over 500 small and medium sized enterprises and has assisted with energy advice and support since 2019.
- 79 The Cornforth Partnership were funded by **East Durham Rural Corridor AAP** for the Job Shop project. The team developed a new project that offered a programme of personal mentoring, bespoke training and informal learning available to all, including those with additional needs, residents with mental health issues, learning disabilities, long term unemployment, lone parent, ex-offenders, over 50's and those who suffer from low confidence or long-term health issues. The project included:
- (a) "Pop up" Job shops in local community venues across the area where demand was required. These included Coxhoe Village Hall, Fishburn Youth and Community Centre, and Trimdon Village Hall.
 - (b) Identifying appropriately qualified mentors with Information Advice and Guidance, Mentoring and Mental Health First Aid, Qualifications to deliver a comprehensive programme of one-to-one mentoring support in the community.
 - (c) Providing residents with a named member of staff to offer information and guidance over the phone during periods when face to face work was not available.
- 80 All clients were supported to complete a work Outcome Star (a holistic tool that covers seven outcome areas linked to employability and employment) which tracked and monitored progress and the client journey and helped participants to form their SMART Action plan.
- 81 Outcomes included:
- (a) 13 people were supported into employment and 2 jobs were safeguarded.
 - (b) 120 advice and guidance sessions took place.
 - (c) 36 people undertook formal training.
 - (d) 4 community building facilities and 2 voluntary and community groups were supported.
 - (e) 13 people were involved in initiatives aimed at improving mental health and wellbeing.

82 **Stanley AAP** is supporting DurhamWorks to deliver a Stanley Specialist Training and Equipment Budget (Flex Fund) project. This budget will be used to supply all the unemployed young people of Stanley with everything they need to start work, college, or training in their chosen field. The budget can be used for specialist equipment and courses that are not available other than through private procurement methods, it will also have a Discretionary Fund element to be used to remove barriers for clients to access training.



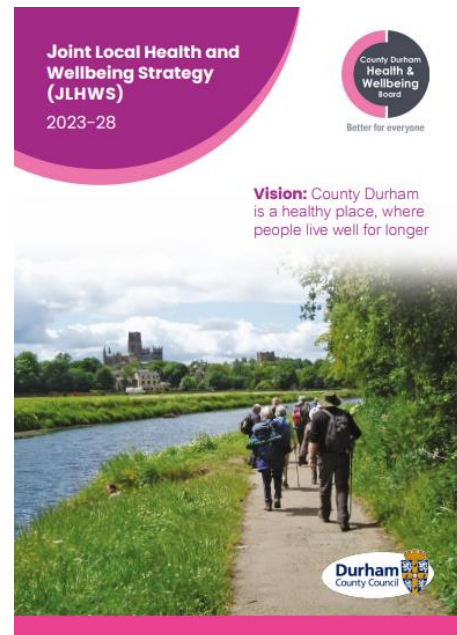
83 To address the significant changes in the funding climate for our young people needing support with employment, Cabinet agreed to increase Core funding by £1 Million at the July 2023 Cabinet meeting. This funding will be provided to ensure consistency of provision for 2024/25 with our well-established employment support teams.

84 Tourism supports our rural communities and offers security of employment. In Weardale, there is a need to ensure that cultural and tourist attractions in the locality are supported and enabled to grow and thus increase the visitor offer, to attract a greater and more diverse footfall. **Weardale AAP** has funded a set of interactive films to engage visitors, which narrate the story of the locality. Investing in Killhope will secure the current jobs but also lead to additional seasonal seasonal workers.

85 Residents of Cotherstone, have been working for over three years to raise funds and negotiate taking over the Methodist Chapel. **Teesdale AAP**, provided funding to support the project alongside other funding streams and the residents Group have also raised £115,000 from a Community Share issue and a series of pop-up cafes. This has enabled the group to purchase the chapel outright and they will now embark on a program of renovations and improvements to create the shop, café and heritage centre.

Vision 2035: People live long and independent lives

86 The **Health and Wellbeing Board** agreed the Joint Local Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2023-28 at their meeting in May 2023. The plan is underpinned by evidence in the Joint Strategic Needs and Assets Assessment and focussed on health and wellbeing, which is influenced by a range of factors and the wider determinants of health.



87 Health and Social Care services which prevent and treat illness and maintain health and wellbeing, as well as services which support with day-to-day life for people who live with illness and disability, and as people age, are really important, but account for as little as 15% of the health and wellbeing of a population.

88 Behavioural risk factors, such as what we eat and drink, how often we are physically active, whether we smoke or drink alcohol (and if so, how much) and our mental health, all have a huge effect on our state of health and wellbeing. Decisions about food, exercise, smoking, and alcohol use, and our mental health are often influenced by other factors including family and social networks, education, poverty, and culture. These healthy behaviours or risk factors account for 40% of our health and wellbeing.

89 How much money we have, the quality of the house we live in, being safe and secure, as well as the natural environment surrounding us and our access to transport, education and work have the greatest impact on our health and wellbeing. These are the 'building blocks of good health' which impact on our chances of living a long and healthy life and account for approximately 45% of our health and wellbeing.

90 The strategy talks about the impact of behavioural risk factors and wider determinants of health (the building blocks of good health) as well as the impact of access to and quality of health and social care. It is based on evidence from the Joint Strategic Needs and Assets Assessment, to determine the four things upon which a focussed effort would have the biggest impact on Durham's health outcomes. These are:

- (a) To make smoking history.
- (b) Enable a healthy weight for all.

- (c) Improve mental health, wellbeing and resilience.
 - (d) Reduce alcohol harms.
- 91 Our Joint Local Health and Wellbeing Strategy is underpinned by the County Durham Approach to Wellbeing which helps us focus on the key role that people, families and communities play in supporting health and wellbeing.
- 92 It is a high-level strategy, which is simple and easy to understand – helping partners, communities and individuals to get on board with tackling these priority areas.
- 93 Smoking continues to be a key priority for the **Health and Wellbeing Board**. The Government asked for feedback from the public to identify how to reduce the number of under 18s accessing and using vape (e-cigarette) products, while still making sure that adults could access these products to help them stop smoking.
- 94 We used this opportunity to develop a County Durham response on behalf of our **Health and Wellbeing Board**. The County Durham survey was hosted on the Durham County Council website, and feedback was collated, which incorporated views gathered from a range of elected members, agencies, and local residents as part of the consultation.
- 95 It was emphasised that this call for evidence needs to be viewed within the wider context of tobacco. Durham County Council continues to work alongside Fresh and the Association of Directors of Public Health North East who are taking a strategic approach to addressing vaping as part of its regional tobacco control programme – funded by local authorities and the Integrated Care Board – and has developed a series of resources including an evidence based slide set on vaping, a position statement on nicotine vaping, a communications guide, a factsheet for professionals working with young people and a guide for local tobacco control alliances on holding themed discussions on vaping.
- 96 It was noted that a clear theme through our local consultation was that parents and teachers are growing increasingly concerned about the long-term use of vapes especially from a young age. While there is an overall view that for smokers, vaping poses less risk than smoking, there are still worries over the long-term impact of vaping.

97 The **Health and Wellbeing Board** agreed the Moving Together in County Durham Strategy, our Physical Activity Strategy, which is a call to action for those who can influence others to commit to the goal of getting County Durham more active. The following priority areas are identified in the Strategy:

- (a) Children and Young people
Local communities, stakeholders and experts in children and young people's physical activity and will work together to ensure an equitable physical activity offer across the County, identifying and learning from areas of good practice, whilst addressing gaps in provision.

- (b) Inclusive Communities
Empowering local communities to move more in their daily lives and the provision of equitable opportunities to engage in physical activity are key objectives within this strategy. Local insights show that the least active of our population are 'harder to reach'; therefore, engaging communities, valuing our assets, listening, and adapting is a critical part of the Moving Together mission. This group will comprise the gatekeepers to our communities including Action Area Partnerships, Community Action Teams, Social Prescriber Link workers, Refugee settlement officers/coordinators, participation and engagement staff (DCC and CDS), Police and fire service, community pilot and project leads, Durham Community Action, CREE, Local councillors, and any others who are connectors to the community.

- (c) Active Environments
Active Travel, planning, road safety/safer streets, and climate change areas of work are closely aligned. There was evidence that a group to combine these agendas would be useful in communicating and driving forward the health, wellbeing, and climate change focus of these partnerships. A working group comprising partners from Planning, Climate and Regeneration, Woodlands, Active Valleys, and Active Travel will work together to address identified actions and recommendations.



(d) Health and Social care Settings

A wide range of champions from NHS, Wellbeing for Life and Social Care have engaged in the Moving Together process so far. The aim is to establish a group of key influencers who will drive forward actions to make physical activity a standard part of health and social care across County Durham. Training needs have been identified, and a healthy weight conversation group led by Public Health is coproducing brief intervention tools to support health practitioners to increase confidence and improve support for patients in achieving a healthy weight. Further collaboration with secondary care providers and the Prison Service will also take place.

- 98 **The Environment and Climate Change Partnership (ECCP)** and partners have engaged in the consultation to inform the development of the Moving Together in County Durham Strategy and associated action plan. Focal points for input have centred on improving population health by engaging more with our natural environment and the use of natural assets to promote increased physical activity and mental health for both residents and those visiting the county. Recommendations from the ECCP, which included promoting programmes to include cycling and clear links to the food agenda have been incorporated into the action plan.
- 99 **Derwent Valley AAP** is supporting the delivery of a 'Health and Happiness Hubs' project which is a 36-week health and inclusion programme.
- 100 The project is being facilitated by SportWorks and encourages older people to participate in a range of physical activities including seated exercise, stretch and flex, dance, bowls and fun/interactive games. Refreshments are provided after the activities so participants can interact and make new friends. All activities are designed around improving socialisation (making friends), functional fitness (falls prevention), mental health (feeling good) and cognitive stimulation (supporting healthy brain function).
- 101 **Great Aycliffe and Middridge (GAMP) AAP** has funded the Glow Cares projects delivered by the Glow Church UK to provide a warm and welcoming meeting place for people to come together, interact, make friends and enjoy a free vintage 'afternoon tea' in an effort to tackle social isolation and loneliness.
- 102 In recent months due to its popularity the sessions have moved from monthly to weekly, and the group is seeing increased numbers attending as the weather has improved. As the sessions have been so warm and welcoming a group of women have now dedicated

themselves as ‘unofficial’ volunteers, making sure everyone is seen, noticed and supported during sessions and activities.

103 Feedback from the session remains positively high: **“This is the only time of the week I leave the house in a social capacity, and I thoroughly enjoy my time here.”**

104 **3 Towns Partnership AAP** newly formed Youth Panel, gathered for the first time to assess applications for its Children and Young People’s Small Grants fund in January 2023 and has met monthly since then.

105 Jointly managed by the AAP and the Youth Panel, the fund awards grants between £200 and £500 to organisations for projects for children and young people up to age 19.



Members of the 3 Towns' Youth Panel

106 The ideas and applications must come from children and young people, with the support from an adult within the applying organisation, and the final decision on which projects receive funding is made by the members of the Youth Panel.

107 The panel has awarded 6 grants totalling £3000 which should benefit 374 Children and Young People.

- (a) £500 to Jack Drum Arts to hold workshops at its Building Our Planet Festival (BOP Fest), a free festival for families sharing positive messages about what people can do to help prevent the impact of climate change.
- (b) £500 to Natural High, a group which promotes music, dance and drama opportunities for young people, to purchase costumes for its upcoming production, Cinderella Rockerfella.
- (c) £500 to Peases West Primary School to pay for the coach costs for a theatre visit to Lion King at Sunderland Empire.
- (d) £500 to Sunnybrow Primary School – to pay for the coach costs to transport children to the Dukeswood House for a residential.

- (e) £500 to Howden-Le-Wear Primary School towards the construction of the Hobbit Hut a shelter from the elements for Forest School activities.
 - (f) £500 to Stoke The Flame for Graffiti artists sessions at Tow Law Youth Club.
- 108 Jay Conlon was a member of the Youth Panel as a teenager and is now supporting the panel in assessing applications as a **3 Towns Partnership AAP** public representative board member.
- 109 He said: **“As a young person, it was a great opportunity to be part of the panel responsible for the initial Children and Young People's Small Grants, and it's a great privilege to be supporting the delivery of the scheme, with a new generation of young people and projects.”**
- 110 The Armed Forces Day flag was raised at County Hall on 19 June, where Cllr Joan Nicholson, chair of the council, hosted a reception for Deputy Lieutenant of Durham Major (Retired) Chris Lawton MBE, senior representatives of the armed forces community, and council employees who are reservists or cadet force adult volunteers.
- 111 Since signing the Armed Forces Covenant, DCC have been recognised as gold award holders in the Ministry of Defence's Employer Recognition Scheme due to the range of proactive measures taken as a supportive employer and service provider. DCC has a guaranteed interview scheme for veterans who meet essential criteria for an advertised post, and have this year increased the eligibility for roles to five years since leaving the armed forces. Last year, we employed 17 veterans into our workforce.
- 112 DCC contribute to the funding of two full time armed forces outreach workers who offer a first point of contact for veterans or those leaving the armed forces and their families. Their role includes providing support with housing, benefits and debt advice, employment and training, or health and social welfare.
- 113 Also in attendance was our newly designated Armed Forces Champion, Cllr Robert Potts who will represent the County Council at regional Armed Forces partnership meetings.
- 114 **The Better Together VCS Forum** which brings together senior leaders from the larger and/or specialist VCS organisations across County Durham continues to meet to share good practice and look for opportunities to collaborate. The ninth bi-annual Better Together Policy Forum took place at Durham Town Hall in April, with the theme of Healthy Communities: Finding common ground within the Integrated

Care System. Key messages included a willingness to work collectively and collaboratively, flexible longer-term funding at a local level and building an evidence base both of need for local communities and for the impact VCS services can make in our communities. A report on the event can be found [here](#).

Vision 2035: Connected communities

115 Anti-social behaviour is a key priority for the **Safe Durham Partnership** and the final Strategy was agreed at the **Safe Durham Partnership** in January 2023.

116 The **Government's Anti-Social Behaviour Action Plan** was launched on 27 March to tackle anti-social behaviour. The Durham Force Area are one of the 16 Trailblazer sites who will receive government funding over 2 years. County Durham and Darlington will receive £2 million this year, with the same expected next year.



117 Funding has been targeted by the government to focus on the following areas:

- (a) Probation Service 18+
- (b) Youth Justice from 12 years old – some reparation but mostly educational, diversionary
- (c) Mediation, for example, neighbourhood disputes

118 The lead partner in this work is the Office of Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC) and partners will be working together to focus in on hotspot areas to try and really make a difference. The OPCC will be required to monitor performance monthly and report back to government.

119 A delivery plan which supports the County Durham Anti-Social Behaviour Strategy will incorporate actions from the areas contained in the Government action plan where it has been identified locally as a priority. Further work is taking place to develop the delivery plan for the County Durham ASB Strategy in relation to actions which have been identified and are not supported by this Government funding.

- 120 **East Durham AAP** has funded a Young Mechanics Project which works with young offenders who could be involved in nuisance biking. The police are running a mechanics course aimed at those offending or at risk of offending with regard to nuisance riding, either by a quad or motorbike. The aim is to educate as to the law and the risks involved in these behaviours, as well as to provide skills in terms of repairing bikes that can be used for volunteering and employment.
- 121 **Chester-le-Street and District AAP** have supported the Market Activity Week since 2010. This project is organised by Durham Constabulary, heavily funded via the AAP and local Councillors, and latterly external funders. There is also an opportunity for local organisations to take part in the week, with a marketplace approach for any who wish to participate to showcase their services.
- 122 The aim of the project is to provide opportunities for families to engage in positive and fun activities through the school holidays, which are Free.
- 123 The event is designed to build relationships between children/young people and local agencies including Durham Constabulary, Durham County Council, Fire & Rescue Service, youth projects, community organisations and volunteer groups to convey messages around crime and community safety to the wider public.
- 124 This event has grown considerably over the years, with thousands of local families attending. This has been especially significant in the last two years, as food has also been provided by working in partnership with local supermarkets, linking in with the holiday activities with healthy food agenda.
- 125 **CONTEST**: The UK's Strategy for Countering Terrorism 2023 was published on 18 July. The aim of **CONTEST** is to reduce the risk from terrorism to the UK, its citizens and interests overseas, so people can live freely and with confidence.
- 126 The **CONTEST** remains a flexible and adaptable framework, and continues to be around the 4 P's:
- (a) **Prevent**: stop people from becoming terrorists or supporting terrorism.
 - (b) **Pursue**: stop terrorist attacks happening in this country or against UK interests overseas.
 - (c) **Protect**: strengthen our protection against a terrorist attack.

- (d) **Prepare:** minimise the impact of an attack and reduce the likelihood of further attack.
- 127 As reported previously, Durham County Council along with other local authorities across the North East and Yorkshire were identified as a pilot area by the Home Office and Counter Terrorism Policing for Publicly Accessible Locations/Zones management in relation to protecting people and places from a terrorist attack. The **Public Accessible Locations (PALs) Trial** had now concluded, and the evaluation has now been completed by Coventry University and conclusions shared with the participating North East Local Authorities.
- 128 This evaluation finds that the North-East Zones Pilot has achieved the aim of increasing the capability of local authorities to address the Protect and Prepare elements of the National Counter Terrorism Strategy. Local authorities which actively engaged in the pilot have seen improvements in their capacity and confidence to work with and address Protect and Prepare which have, in turn, led to increases in their capabilities to do so.
- 129 The North-East Zones Pilot has performed well and the model that it uses is sound and suitable for a wider rollout if desired. It is also likely that more impact and joint outcomes will be seen in the North East over the coming months and years.
- 130 However, there are still some areas that require further clarification, particularly in relation to the role of local authorities by way of support of roll out and enforcement and additional resources required for this scale of work.
- 131 Alongside this work, the draft Martyn's Law has now been published and working its way through the parliamentary process under the title of Terrorism (protection of Premises) Bill. Work is underway in partnership with our dedicated Counter Terrorism Security Advisor to ensure those businesses and organisations affected by this imminent legislation are prepared for its implementation and the impact it will have on them.
- 132 To aid in the process, the Protect and Prepare group initially set up as part of the PALS pilot will continue to meet and provide strategic direction to support any responsibilities under Martyn's Law.
- 133 Durham County Council declared an ecological emergency in April 2022, and in response an Ecological Emergency Action Plan (EEAP) is now in place. A wider ecological strategy, a statutory Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS), for the county will be produced by the Ecological Emergency workstream of the **Environment and Climate Change Partnership**.

134 The Ecological Emergency Workstream has been waiting on guidance from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) before undertaking any significant work on the LNRS. The DEFRA guidance was released in March 2023 and both Natural England and DEFRA have been holding meetings with partners about producing the LNRS and outlining the requirements that are set out in the Government guidance.

135 Durham County Council, as the designated Responsible Authority for producing the LNRS, have been working with Natural England to identify the best locations for habitat creation and restoration to enhance existing habitat networks and increase connectivity across landscapes. DCC proposed using magnesium limestone grassland as the trial habitat and Natural England are now liaising with the Environmental Records Information Centre for data on magnesium limestone grassland distribution and Local Wildlife Sites and Local Nature Reserves with a magnesium limestone interest. This trial will feed into the mapping process for the LNRS.

136 **Mid Durham AAP** has funded a wildlife and community officer to work on a 2-year programme to engage the local communities in 3 areas surrounding the churches of St Michaels in Esh Laude which includes Esh Village, Quebec and Langley Park, St Josephs in Ushaw Moor, Our Lady Queen of Martyrs in Esh Winning which includes Cornsay Colliery and Waterhouses. Each church has natural wildlife-rich grounds with areas of grassland, mature trees and open space. Each one has the potential to become richer in wildlife with involvement from a wide cross section of the community, to create valuable green havens for everyone to enjoy.

137 Activity and plans at the sites include:

- (a) Bat boxes and bird boxes ready to install.
- (b) A peace garden at St Michaels Church for the local community to reflect on those who have passed.



Families helping out at their local church

- (c) Clearing up rubbish from the wasteland, which will be transformed into a wildlife meadow.
 - (d) Discovering a priest burn water beck, which will be transformed with a kingfisher project, which will include shrub clearance.
- 138 There have been a series of events and open sessions resulting in both increased numbers of volunteers but also increased awareness of the project and highlighting the difference it is making to people and wildlife.
- 139 **4 Together AAP** funded Ferryhill Town Council to install specialist renewable technology at the Football Facility at Dean Bank Recreation Ground. The funding from the partnership will enable the Town Council to install 124 Solar Photovoltaic modules at the facility, and the ability to store any unused energy generated by the solar panels. This enables the Town Council and Ferryhill Town Youth football club, to reduce their carbon footprint, thus having a wider impact on the local community.
- 140 This has been identified as a priority for the Town Council and is expected to result in a net greenhouse gas reduction of 15.96tCO₂e, making the building more energy efficient and as such helping to alleviate the Climate Change Emergency that has been declared across County Durham. Having the ability to store the energy will also provide an economic boost for the facility, supporting the long-term sustainability of a facility that supports the physical and mental wellbeing of the many local residents and the cost of energy for its users.

141 The Lowes Barn Community Project was established several years ago in the Neville's Cross area of Durham. The group have been working toward opening a new community



Celebrating opening Merryoaks Community Hall

centre for the area with the majority of the funding for the project from Section 106 funding, however, **Durham AAP** have supported with additional funding. The trustees of the community group have put in thousands of hours over the last few years and on 11th June, the Merryoaks Community Hall was officially opened. The hall is offering a wide range of activities for the local community and is available for bookings.

- 142 Our series of Breakfast Seminars which bring together elected members, officers, partners, and individuals from **faith and community groups** in roundtable conversations hosted its Breakfast Seminars in May and July. The focus of the May workshop was ‘tainted money’ which could be derived from a number of sources such as gambling from the National Lottery and asked attendees to consider “does it matter where money comes from as long as we are using it well”? The workshop in July looked at the subject of Food justice, not food charity... a sustainable future.

Conclusion

- 143 There has been a range of legislation that has recently been through parliament, as well as those areas that are planned. This will provide some clarity of any responsibilities that may be incumbent on us as we continue to work together with our stakeholders and partners to support our communities. However, we will continue to work together to ensure we have good outcomes for our communities.
- 144 The conclusion of our review of community engagement and our new model for the delivery of Local Networks, will strengthen the value of good partnership working and community engagement and provide opportunities to attract new participation by carrying out focussed engagement/neighbourhood planning activities. New governance will clearly define the purpose, structure and functions of the Local Networks.

Background papers

- None.

Other useful documents

- None.

Author

Julie Bradbrook

Tel: 03000 267325

Appendix 1: Implications

Legal Implications

None.

Finance

Area and neighbourhood budgets are utilised and delivered through the 14 AAPs and ensure the Council (and AAPs) receive improved information on the outputs achieved through use of locality budgets.

Consultation

The County Durham Partnership framework is a key community engagement and consultation function of the Council and its partners. The recommendations in the report are based on extensive consultation with AAP partners.

Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty

The actions set out in this report aim to ensure equality and diversity issues are embedded within the thematic partnerships and the working practice of AAPs.

Climate Change

This is recognised throughout partnership activities.

Human Rights

None.

Crime and Disorder

The Crime and Disorder Act 1998 placed a statutory duty on local authorities to form a Community Safety Partnership (CSP) to tackle crime, disorder, anti-social behaviour, substance misuse, other behaviour adversely affecting the local environment and to reduce re-offending. In County Durham, the CSP is the Safe Durham Partnership.

Staffing

None.

Accommodation

None.

Risk

None.

Procurement

None.

**Corporate Overview and
Scrutiny Management Board**



22 September 2023

Notice of Key Decisions

Report of Corporate Management Team

Helen Bradley, 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 take key decisions at its meeting to be held on 11 October 2023. It also contained information on those key decisions that are currently scheduled to be considered by the Executive up to 31 January 2024.

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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SECTION ONE - CORPORATE

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 Input
CORP/R/23/01	11/10/23	MTFP - Update on development of MTFP including consideration of options for consultation		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 have input into the formulation of the MTFP through Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Management Board meetings
CORP/R/23/02	15/11/23	Council Tax Base 2024/25 and Forecast Surplus / Deficit on Collection Fund		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 have input into the formulation of the MTFP through Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Management Board meetings
CORP/R/23/01	13/12/23	MTFP - Update on development of MTFP including analysis of the Autumn Statement		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 have input into the formulation of the MTFP through Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Management Board meetings
CORP/R/23/01	17/01/24	MTFP - Details of Provisional Finance Settlement		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 have input into the formulation of the MTFP through Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Management Board 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
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SECTION THREE - ADULT AND HEALTH 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
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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	Scrutiny Input
REG/06/2023	15/11/23	External Contractor Staff Suitability Policy		Portfolio Holder for Economy and Partnerships		Cathy Knight, Integrated Passenger Transport Manager Tel: 03000 268512	
REG/07/2023	15/11/23	Adoption of the Inclusive Economic Strategy Delivery Plan		Portfolio Holder for Economy and Partnerships		Andy Kerr, Head of Economic Development Tel: 03000 266917	The Inclusive Economic Strategy Delivery Plan is being examined by the Economy and Enterprise OSC. A workshop was held in July 2023 and consideration of the draft IES Delivery Plan will be undertaken at the EEOSC meeting on 6 October 2023
REG/08/2023	11/10/23	Milburngate (Exempt Report)	Cabinet Report 13 June 2018	Councillor James Rowlandson. Portfolio Holder for Resources, Investment and	Other Cabinet members and relevant service areas	Susan Robinson, Head of Corporate Property & Land Tel: 03000 267332	

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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**Corporate Overview and
Scrutiny Management Board**

22 September 2023



Update in relation to Petitions

Report of Corporate Management Team

Helen Bradley, 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 five new e-petitions have been submitted, two were rejected as did not qualify under the scheme. Three e-petitions are currently ongoing and collecting signatures via the website.

- 7 Three new paper petitions have been submitted, two have closed and one was rejected as other procedures applied. 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 433 Derelict and abandoned houses in Stanley E-Petition Received 10.3.23 No. of signatures 10	REG	Petition asking the Council to put pressure on landlords and owners to bring back derelict/abandoned property back in to use.	E-Petition ran from 13.3.23 – 31.8.23
Petition 435 Save Leadgate Village Received 11.5.23 No. of signatures 453	REG	<p>Petition asking the Council to use emergency powers to resolve the disruption being caused at the crossroads at St. Ives Road and Durham Road as this is having a sever effect on local businesses and the community.</p> <p>The traffic lights were initially installed in the interest of public safety when the Council received a report of the structural issues at number 48 and 49 Front Street.</p> <p>The Council’s Building Control department have been liaising with the building owners, their insurers and contractor since the issues were raised, a number of surveys and structural inspections have had to be carried by the owners out before repair work could be arranged.</p> <p>Structural scaffold is now being erected around the building to stabilise it while repairs are carried out, once the scaffolding has been installed the Council will review the situation and the traffic lights will be removed if deemed safe to do so.</p>	Petition Closed
Petition 437 20 mph South Stanley Junior School Received 20.07.23 No. of signatures 208	REG	<p>Petition asking the Council to look into dangerous driving and speeding around South Stanley Junior School, and for someone to visit the school to talk to the children about this issue.</p> <p>Early discussions had taken place between Durham County Council Traffic Assets team and local elected members regarding the introduction of a 20mph zone outside of South Stanley Junior School on Tyne Road. However,</p>	Petition Closed

Nature of Petition	Appropriate Service	Summary of Information	Status of Petition
		<p>current policy states that funding must be secured from AAP, Elected Member Neighbourhood Budgets, Town/Parish Councils or schools when introducing 20mph speed limits or zones onto existing roads. If suitable funding can be obtained, our Traffic Assets Team will develop the detailed design and progress with the implementation of the scheme.</p> <p>Further to the above, as you will be aware, the Council's Road Safety Team had provided the school with a Safer School Gate Parking Campaign toolkit to help you disseminate messages to parents/carers locally, about the importance of safe and considerate parking. The toolkit includes images and messages for schools to post on their social media platforms and in their school newsletters. The team are able to offer education and advice pertaining to road safety and to support and promote walking and safer parking initiatives if this would be of further benefit to the school.</p>	
<p>Petition 439</p> <p>Hawthorn Petition For Reduced Speed Limit</p> <p>Received 04.08.23</p> <p>No. of signatures 82</p>	<p>REG</p>	<p>Petition asking the Council to review road safety at Hawthorn.</p> <p>Residents often have a desire for a lower speed limit outside their properties and along roads in general and the Council take these concerns seriously and give them full consideration when evaluating changes to speed limits. In undertaking these reviews, guidance issued by the Department of Transport is used and our own local experience of implementing speed limits within the County. We also work closely with Durham Constabulary when considering changes to speed limits.</p> <p>It is an intention of the Department for Transport guidance to ensure that speed limits are credible with the aim that they become self-evident and enforcing by virtue of their surroundings. During the review process many criteria and factors are considered and evaluated. The existing vehicle speeds, nature of the road and its surroundings, local needs, existing highway infrastructure, development, highway signs, road markings and street lighting, the various road users, the credibility of the speed limit and accident history</p>	<p>Petition Closed</p>

Nature of Petition	Appropriate Service	Summary of Information	Status of Petition
		<p>are some of these factors being considered. The length of speed limit, distance between speed limit terminal points and the number of changes along the route are also considered.</p> <p>The speed limits along the B1432 have been reviewed in accordance with the criteria mentioned above. This review which was undertaken jointly with Durham Constabulary considered that the speed limit in the location is the correct speed limit for the road and therefore the Council does not propose to make changes.</p> <p>Unfortunately, the setting of speed limits can be quite an emotive issue with residents generally demanding lower speed limits on roads and motorists opposing any reductions. We therefore have a difficult task in striking a balance and providing a compromise based upon the national and local strategies and also taking local factors into account. As is often the case, a speed limit which lacks credibility results in a significant proportion of motorists ignoring the limit and potentially driving at even higher speeds and can also lead to greater risk taking. In addition, the imposition of non-credible lower limits can raise residents' expectations that the speeds of vehicles will suddenly reduce but this is seldom being achieved in practice, thus creating further annoyance for both residents and motorists, and also unfair criticism of the police who have to enforce the speed limits.</p> <p>Whilst it is common for people to compare one location with another, a speed limit review considers each road on its own merits and taking into account all the relevant factors.</p> <p>A review of the road markings and signage through Hawthorn has already been completed and it is expected that the proposed changes will start to be implemented in the coming months. These road markings are aimed at</p>	

Nature of Petition	Appropriate Service	Summary of Information	Status of Petition
		highlighting the road layout to drivers and providing markings to assist driver control.	
Petition 440 Red light cameras A690 Rainton Gate E-Petition Received 11.08.23 No. of signatures	REG	Petition asking the Council to install red light enforcement cameras and a bus lane camera at the new A690 crossing/Rainton Gate.	E-Petition to run from 11.08.23 – 22.09.23
Petition 441 Salters Lane footpath for walkers E-Petition Received 15.08.23 No. of signatures	REG	Petition asking the Council to build a simple footpath along the length of Salter's Lane from the Nature Reserve into Trimdon Grange	E-Petition to run from 18.08.23 – 15.10.23
Petition 443 Pedestrian crossing requirement E-Petition Received 17.08.23 No. of signatures	REG	Petition asking the Council to provide a public crossing area on Carr Street Road, Spennymoor from the Burton Woods Estate over to Jubilee Park	E-Petition to run from 17.08.23 – 28.09.23

Nature of Petition	Appropriate Service	Summary of Information	Status of Petition
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