

Delegated Decision

11 June 2020

**Area Action Partnerships Business
Continuity Proposals**



Report of Corporate Management Team

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

**Councillor Brian Stephens, Cabinet Portfolio Holder for
Neighbourhoods and Local Partnerships**

Electoral division(s) affected:

Countywide

Purpose of the Report

- 1 To outline the business continuity proposals for Area Action Partnerships (AAPs) for the remainder of the financial year, to widen the remit of our funding and development work from COVID-19 Response to Recovery, and to return as close as possible to business as usual.

Executive summary

- 2 As we work through the COVID-19 Pandemic, AAPs will have to alter many of our previous ways of working in order to deliver a frontline community service.
- 3 The changes outlined within this report, will allow us to continue to support our most vulnerable residents whilst at the same time we begin to rebuild our communities. They will also allow our boards to retain their strength of decision making and will provide different ways for us to engage and enthuse our partners, colleagues, elected members and communities.

Recommendation

- 4 Note the reasoning behind the delegated decision taken to establish business continuity proposals for AAPs.

Background

- 5 During the recent COVID-19 Pandemic, Area Action Partnerships (AAPs) have been providing a rapid response function to support those who are most vulnerable and our wider communities in need. Since our initial lead to establish and service DCCs North and South Community Hubs, AAPs then moved on to providing support to those suffering detriment due to the effects of COVID-19 through the allocation of an additional £1.4 million Response funding from DCC.
- 6 Although our current focus continues with COVID-19 Response projects, we need to plan for supporting our Communities and move our focus more to Recovery. We will continue to share information with key partners in order to maximise potential opportunities and reduce duplication and although positives from recent times have been thin on the ground, closer partnership working with our key partners such as Durham Community Action, County Durham Community Foundation and the National Lottery has developed and we expect this work to continue.
- 7 This year in our election cycle is always challenging for AAPs as we work to ensure our elected members are supported to achieve their aspirations. We lose part of our final quarter of operation due to purdah restrictions and have effectively lost around 4 months of this years “business as usual” due to dealing with the effects of COVID-19. The proposals here have been developed to ensure AAPs continue to respond to community need and that we are working at our most effective. They will allow the AAPs build on our strengths, maintain our impetus, keep our board and forum members engaged and allocate our resources appropriately.

AAP Priorities

- 8 Under normal circumstances each AAP has its own distinct priorities, voted on by the local community. However, as we are in unprecedented times therefore each AAPs Area Budget allocation for 2020/21 should be aligned to one broad priority focus of “**COVID-19 Recovery**”. All elements of the application process will revert as far as possible back to the standard Area Budget (AB) processes used for business as usual applications. The implication of this will mean that we move from a current lower grant application level of £500 back to the standard AB minimum of £5,000 (unless, as in previous years, there are exceptional/critical circumstances that would justify a smaller allocation) which will:
 - (a) Allow us to be more strategic in our response to community need;

- (b) Potentially reduce the number of AB bids which will make workload more manageable when we consider the numerous Neighbourhood Budget applications we will receive pre-elections;
 - (c) Further allow us to develop our partnerships with funders who have access to and experience of grants under £5,000 such as County Durham Community Foundation, Durham Community Action and the National Lottery.
- 9 Start dates for working on AB COVID-19 Recovery projects will be either:
- (a) When AAPs have exhausted the additional £100,000 they were allocated for COVID-19 Response projects, **or**
 - (b) from 1st July – whichever comes first.
- 10 Any Area Budget COVID-19 Response funding not spent by 30th June be re-allocated to supplement the fund that was established for Countywide Covid-19 Response schemes to cover Multi-AAP and Countywide proposals, but with the scheme realigned to reflect the process for AB COVID-19 Recovery projects i.e. minimum grants of £5,000 and use of the standard application form, with sign off these applications by the Head of Partnerships and Community Engagement or a Head of Finance following consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhoods and Local Partnerships.

2020/21 AAP Area Budget (AB) fund

11 The following money attached to each AAP will be pooled together for 20/21 in order to maximise opportunities for match funding and partnership working. A further rationale for merging the pots is that each AAP currently manages 5 different funds, each with their own criteria and application form which would be extremely difficult for AAPs to manage under the current circumstances. In addition, the run up to Elections is always an incredibly busy year but due to the delays from COVID-19 we need to develop a more manageable process with minimal impact on AAP teams as we have a much shorter time period to allocate due to the delays of COVID-19.

12 The 20/21 breakdown per AAP would be as follows:

Area Budget	£100,000	Capital/Revenue split will remain the same (£76k rev/ £24k cap)
OPSIF	£25,000	(Older Peoples Social Isolation Fund)
WR	£10,000	(Welfare Reform)
Youth Fund	£9,902	

- 13 This will enable each AAP to draw from an enhanced Area Budget pot of up to **£144,902** (excluding any carryover from previous year) to focus on “COVID-19 Recovery” and although this is not an exhaustive list, we would expect that many projects will have a focus on:
- Employability initiatives
 - Advice and Guidance
 - Mental Health & Wellbeing
 - Organisational sustainability
 - Food provision and support
 - Social Isolation
 - Support for the Voluntary and Community Sector, or
 - Support to small businesses (through a third party, not-for-profit organisation to complement existing DCC and external opportunities).
- 14 These may need to be reviewed throughout the year and we will use information gathered from sources such as the Community Hubs to ensure we have up to date knowledge on gaps in provision.
- 15 AAPs also manage the Holiday Activities with Healthy Food fund at £10,000 per AAP/per annum. Work has been ongoing via the Poverty Action Steering Group and it is their preference that AAPs maintain this pot separately due to the close proximity of summer holidays and imminent funding decisions. It is therefore proposed that the AAPs continue to deliver this as a stand-alone fund in the current financial year.
- 16 Due to our shortened project development time, there will be no new small grants pots established through the 2020/21 AB fund. If AAPs have carry over within small grants from previous years then they can manage this individually until those funds are exhausted but it must be noted that those funds will not be “topped up” nor any new small grants pots established from the current years’ AB. Elected Members however, will still retain the ability to use a maximum of £2,000 of their 20/21 Neighbourhood Budget for small grant purposes.

AAP Board Involvement

- 17 It is essential that boards remain the decision making body for AAPs, however decisions at a virtual meeting could be difficult to obtain due to

quorum requirements. Some members do not have the technology to participate, some may not feel confident to engage via video/teams.

- 18 Our preference is still to hold board meetings in public whenever it is safe to do so, however in the meantime we will work with IT to develop a board meeting set up via Microsoft Teams. It is appreciated that in the initial stages there may be issues such as access to equipment, so we are suggesting that the actual decisions for Boards are taken by email. This will allow teams to work quickly and not be restricted by waiting for a board meeting. As work progresses we will aim to get back to making decisions within a board meeting setting. In the meantime, all decisions shall be made electronically via email, giving board members 1 calendar week from the date of email to respond.
- 19 In the first instance that AAP Boards will meet at least every 2 months but that the frequency can be agreed by each AAP board following discussions between the Chair/AAP co-ordinator if they feel that they can manage/need more frequent meetings. These should be scheduled as soon as possible after 1st July 2020. These will discussion meetings of up to 2 hours duration focused on 3 main areas:
 - **Area and Neighbourhood Budget Update** – including reference to any AB/NB applications approved pre-board meeting;
 - **Neighbourhood Issues** * – to seek information on community issues and potential gaps in provision;
 - **Countywide Partner Issues** – an opportunity for our Partner representatives to update on their current work and again, to explore potential gaps in provision.
- 20 * AAPs will incorporate local people's views and ask people via our facebook sites and within our e-bulletins to pose questions to the board. AAPs normally ask for questions five working days in advance of the board, however, in order to align with recent proposals for cabinet and take questions up until 12noon 3 days prior to the meeting. AAPs will still continue to take Neighbourhood Issues up to and including at the meeting, however it should be noted that the later we receive the questions, the less likely we can offer a full answer at the actual board meeting and responses in this case would be fed back as soon as possible after the meeting.
- 21 We will also remind our residents that they can submit their issues to their DCC elected members at any time in order to help strengthen our Elected Members community champion role during the current crisis.
- 22 We recognise that not all AAP Board members will have access to the necessary IT equipment to participate in online board meetings. Each

AAP therefore can utilise their individual supplies and services budget in the first instance to address any technology limitations of their Board Members.

- 23 To recap, AAP Boards will remain the decision making body via email with board meetings taking place virtually (when viable via Teams) focusing on discussion, however we will keep this under review throughout the year.

2020/21 AAP Annual General Meetings (AGMs)

- 24 We recognise that some AAPs may already have made decisions with their boards regarding AGMs. In situations where AGMs have not yet been considered, it is proposed that in the first instance, the AAP co-ordinator will ask current Chair and Vice Chairs if they wish to remain in position. If they do, the co-ordinator will contact the full board by email to seek views on the current representatives remaining in position for another year and also, will ask if there are any nominations for the 20/21 positions.

- 25 If there is agreement for reps to remain (and it meets quorum) then the co-ordinator can proceed and confirm the continuation of representatives via email to the board. If nominations for additional reps are received, the co-ordinator will seek votes via email.

- 26 Although it would not be practical to try and hold AGMs virtually we can still conduct the following AGM activity via email:

- **Appointment of Chair and Vice Chairs 2020/21** can go ahead as detailed above;
- **Presentation of 2019/20 Annual Reports (including financial information)** due to work on COVID-19 Response projects, work on Annual Reports has been delayed. AAPs could pull reports together ready to present after 1st July and this could be circulated to all board members/forum members/linked to the AAP Websites and publicised on our individual AAP Facebook sites. AAPs will be at different stages in this process so not all reports will be available at the same time. However, we will encourage AAPs to aim for as close to the 1st July as possible.

- 27 At the same time AAPs would be planning for virtual board meetings and scheduling suitable dates to carry out the proposed Agenda items.

Task and Finish Groups

- 28 We recognise that it will be impossible to host traditional Task and Finish Group (T&FG) meetings for the foreseeable future, however we do need

wider involvement than just AAP teams to identify areas of need and be involved in discussion around potential projects.

29 T&FGs will carry out the traditional tasks of assessing current consultation, needs identification and gaps in provision that have appeared during the COVID-19 pandemic with an aim of Community Recovery. This group should comprise:

- **At least 1** member from each of the thirds of the board (up to a maximum of 3 per grouping)
- AAP co-ordinator
- 1 AAP CDPO
- 1 AAP Support Officer
- Any existing T&FG members (agreed by the AAP Board and Co-ordinator) that are able to participate via teams and could effectively contribute to the group discussions

30 **NOTE:** Board members on this sub-group should be chosen as far as possible from those who DO NOT have a declaration of interest in the projects being considered.

31 After the work around needs identification and gaps in provision, we are proposing 2 options for how T&FGs can then progress:

- **Option 1** – Task and Finish Groups then develop detailed criteria to seek projects that could address the gaps in provision. This would then follow the route of open **Project Callout** to gain the maximum amount of interest and be as transparent as possible for all potential applicants who could develop a project to meet local needs. A standard process will be followed by those AAPs, and advice will be given via the Principal AAP Co-ordinators.
- **Option 2** - Project proposals will be developed by the AAP team and the Task and Finish sub-group. Then, with the boards agreement the AAP team and T&FG will then develop full applications to be distributed to the board for electronic decision. This is on the proviso that they can get broad representation and a fully functioning T&FG, otherwise the recommendation would be to follow Option 1.

32 **NOTE:** Any application will only be considered fully approved and progress to the Funding Team if the board decision is quorate i.e. a minimum of 3 responses from each third of the board.

- 33 AAPs will not plan or undertake Participatory Budgeting exercises in the current financial year. Applications will be developed by AAP teams in consultation with their T&F sub-groups looking at current consultation and information on the local effects of COVID-19, following one of the two options highlighted above.
- 34 Delays due to the impact of COVID-19 mean that we have a much shorter time period for allocation of funds and a more complicated framework within which to operate. We acknowledge that there is no flexibility for carryover of Neighbourhood Budget due to our upcoming election year so this will be a major focus for AAPs. Due to the above, AAPs will be able to carry over Area Budget funding into 2021/22 if it proves unfeasible to allocate appropriately.

Elected Members Neighbourhood Budget

- 35 In 2020/21 only, members will have flexibility to swap capital funding for revenue funding where expenditure is related to coronavirus, meaning that their full £19,400 could be spent on revenue if appropriate. Any capital/revenue funding rolled over from previous years will retain the same split as was carried over with no potential for Capital/Revenue swap even if its proposed use is for COVID-19 related projects.
- 36 We will strongly encourage all complete Neighbourhood Budget (NB) applications to be submitted to the relevant AAP team by **31st December 2020** in order to ensure they can be fully processed before the end of the financial year.
- 37 Applications received after this time have a significant chance of not being appraised by the end of the financial year. As in previous election years, applications submitted after 31st December will be accepted up to the commencement of purdah, and if appraised and approved after the election, will be implemented. However, there is a risk the scheme will not be approved in which case the funding would be returned to the Council's central reserves. To mitigate against this risk we will:
- (i) Encourage an NB application deadline of 31st December for the reasons outlined above and strongly advise members to work towards this, and
 - (ii) Enhance our funding team with additional appraisal staff for quarters 3 and 4 of the current financial year. We will be looking to redeployed staff in the first instance and will aim to recruit 1 additional monitoring officer and 2 additional appraisal officers.
- 38 Up until now, all projects that were not emergency Covid related had been suspended. We acknowledge that a number of Elected Members have projects in the pipeline and are keen to start work on them, so with this in

mind we the restrictions have been lifted on NB from **15 June 2020**. **Elected members will be encouraged to align their NB to emerging local issues and/or projects that meet the criteria of the COVID-19 Recovery priority.**

- 39 **Note:** this does not mean that from 15 June Elected Members can no longer fund Covid-Response projects. If emergency response projects are still a local issue and they fit with the NB criteria then elected members can fund them.

Conclusion

- 40 We have faced unprecedented times recently and as we start to move forward, AAPs have a duty to support our communities to re-build. The proposal for AAPs to pool budgets and refocus on the global priority of recovery will allow us to make a real impact in our communities, while the other changes will allow the partnerships to engage more fully with their Board members and the public. These changes are summarised below:

- AAPs to focus on Covid-19 Recovery and to follow standard Area Budget practice as far as possible including reverting back to a £5,000 minimum application threshold (unless there are exceptional circumstances)

- Start dates for the move to Covid Recovery as:

Area Budget being either:

- (i) When AAPs have exhausted the additional £100,000 they were allocated for COVID-19 Response projects, **or**
- (ii) From 1 July – whichever comes first.

Neighbourhood Budget (for projects that address community issues as well as covid recovery) from 15 June.

- AAP Covid-Response underspend as at 30 June is reallocated to the Countywide/multi-AAP Covid Fund
- Pool 4 of the AAP funding strands into 1 Area Budget Fund
- Allow the AAPs to manage the Holiday Activity with Healthy Food fund as an aside to the Area Budget for the current financial year
- AAPs to hold virtual board meetings via Teams

- AAPs to utilise their Supplies and Services budget to address any IT limitations for Board Members that prevent them from participating in Teams meetings
 - AAPs to align their time for Questions in advance of meetings to Cabinet protocol of by 12 noon 3 days before the meeting
 - AAPs to have the flexibility to carry over any Area Budget not allocated in the current year into 2021/22
 - Elected Members be encouraged to submit Neighbourhood Budget Applications by the 31 December 2020
 - Seek support from redeployed staff in the first instance to support our funding team in quarters 3 and 4 of the current financial year
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Appendix 1: Implications

Legal Implications

Not applicable

Finance

The proposals set out in this report are primarily concerned with existing budgets aligned to AAPs. The additional staffing resource will be sought from redeployed staff.

Consultation

This report proposes the reinstatement of board meetings, new ways of working, and more avenues for submitting and addressing Neighbourhood Issues through the AAPs.

Consultation has still been progressed via the AAPs when requested during the lockdown period, but an opening up of our consultation mechanisms will help greatly for future requests. This will allow us to further support our DCC colleagues and external partners with their consultation requirements as well.

Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty

Not applicable

Climate Change

Not applicable

Human Rights

Not applicable

Crime and Disorder

Not applicable

Staffing

Within this report there is a request for three additional staff in qtrs. three and four of 2020/21. In the first instance we will be seeking one additional f/t monitoring officer and two additional f/t appraisal officers for the AAP funding team and will look to acquire these staff from our redeployed workforce if possible.

Risk

Risk of not being able to recruit additional staff into the AAP Funding team leads to further risk of the team being unable to deal with the volume of workload in qtrs. three and four. This could lead to NB applications not being assessed and funding not being allocated before the end of the current financial year.

Procurement

The funding that is managed by AAPs is allocated in terms of grants and in accordance with advise provided by procuremet.