

Cabinet

16 June 2021

Area Action Partnerships and Member Neighbourhood Budgets - Proposed Operating Arrangements 2021/22



Ordinary Decision

Report of Corporate Management Team

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

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

Electoral division(s) affected:

Countywide

Purpose of the Report

- 1 This report sets out the proposed approach for Area Action Partnership (AAP) Boards and Teams to return to a greater local presence as the County emerges from the effects of the COVID – 19 Pandemic. It details the funding to be allocated to AAPs and Elected Members this year and sets out how that will be managed, including some proposed changes to the requirements and procedures around the allocation of that funding to ensure AAPs comply with best practice and the Council's procedures.

Executive Summary

- 2 As the country continues its efforts to tackle the COVID -19 pandemic and return to a semblance of 'normal life,' arrangements are being put in place to ensure AAPs can safely connect and be accessible to local communities. These arrangements will build on the lessons learnt during the last year and recognise that an immediate return to a pre-COVID way of working will neither be possible or desirable. However, the report outlines what steps will hopefully be taken in the coming months to return to a greater community presence.

- 3 Despite having to adapt to new ways of working during the pandemic, AAPs have played a vital role in supporting individuals and communities to deal with the many impacts it has had on life since the first lockdown. AAP teams were instrumental in setting up and staffing the COVID telephone helpline established by the Council and subsequently oversaw the allocation of funding to support hundreds of local projects that provided vital support to thousands of vulnerable people. In recognition of that role, as well as the previous eleven years of work, AAPs have been allocated additional funds to support communities to recover as well as tackle the Council's aim to revitalise towns and villages. The report details these funds and proposes how they will be managed and sub-divided between the AAP Boards and Elected Members.
- 4 AAPs have been operating for over 12 years and have achieved many successes, including supporting thousands of local projects, securing millions of Pounds in matched funding, inputting into many consultations by the Council and its partners and critically, supporting Elected members in their roles as community champions. Recently there have been a number of changes to the Council's operating procedures and regulations, as well as in the broader 'support community', that the report proposes need to be reflected in the procedures for AAPs. These include changes to:
- the declaration of interest in relation to Neighbourhood Budget;
 - the required make-up of management committees for applicant organisations.
- 5 The report concludes by recognising that as we hopefully move out of lockdown, the full effects of the pandemic on communities is not known, and further changes may be required to ensure the AAPs can maximise their impact as efficiently as possible.

Recommendation(s)

- 6 Cabinet is recommended to note the content of this report and to agree:
- (a) that AAP Terms of Reference be amended in order to allow provision for AAP Board meetings to be held as hybrid meetings, should individual boards agree to do so;
 - (b) the proposed amalgamation of the five budget headings: DCC Area Budget, Older People's Social Isolation Fund, Youth Grant, Welfare Reform Grant and the £100,000 COVID Recovery grant into a single 'Area Budget' Fund of £244,902 per AAP, of which a minimum of £125,000 will need to be defrayed in the current financial year;

- (c) that each Elected Member's Neighbourhood Budget will be enhanced with a one-off allocation of £10,000 for spend to support the revitalisation of towns and villages, with the funding awarded to AAPs reduced to £210,000 to offset these amendments;
- (d) the capacity for Elected Members to spend on small projects (between £100 to £999) be increased to £3,000 per annum for the period up to 31 March 2023;
- (e) the proposed information requirements from Elected Members if they intend to roll forward unspent Neighbourhood Budget allocations beyond year two of their period of office;
- (f) to the introduction of a new Area Budget / Neighbourhood Budget Application form;
- (g) that work will be carried out with the nominated AAP Chairs to develop the criteria for a Countywide AAP fund;
- (h) the changes to the Declaration of Interest process for Councillors when proposing schemes for Neighbourhood Budget spend in order that it is in line with the member Code of Conduct.

Background

- 7 AAPs are familiar with working to agreed priorities based on local need. Since 2009 they have focused activity on what matters most within that respective community evidenced through local research and engagement. During 2020/21, Area Action Partnerships (AAPs) provided a rapid response function to support our wider communities in need. Through an additional £1.4 million response funding allocation from the Council, AAPs provided support to those who have been detrimentally impacted due to the effects of COVID-19.
- 8 In addition, over the last year, AAPs continued their “Business as Usual” work including project development for Area Budget, holding regular online board and other community meetings, consultation on various topics, developing a countywide fund to support wide reaching project activity, producing 14 Countywide events and supporting our elected members with their final year of Neighbourhood Budget spend prior to the May 2021 elections.
- 9 In 2021/22, the role of the AAPs has been enhanced further by aligning dedicated funding pots that will drive their work along specific lines. This includes Towns & Villages funding, money from the Department for Education (DfE) for Holiday Activities with Healthy Food, Community Recovery funding as well as the annual core budget AAPs traditionally receive.
- 10 Extra staff resources have been recruited to support this additional work across AAPs, primarily funded from the Government’s Control Outbreak Management Fund (COMF).
- 11 To enable this range of project activity to be delivered effectively, as well as implement some changes to ensure AAP regulations accord with Council procedures, as well as best practice, the report proposes a number of changes to the operation of AAPs and Neighbourhood Budgets.

AAP Priorities

- 12 In 2020/21, due to the unprecedented impact of the pandemic, it was agreed that each AAP’s Area Budget allocation should be aligned to one broad priority focus of COVID-19 Recovery. Within this single focus, AAP Boards were able to address a wide range of issues around the broad themes set out below:
 - (a) Employability initiatives;
 - (b) Advice and Guidance;

- (c) Mental Health & Wellbeing;
 - (d) Organisational sustainability;
 - (e) Food provision and support;
 - (f) Social Isolation;
 - (g) Support for the Voluntary and Community Sector, or
 - (h) Support to small businesses (through a third party, not-for-profit).
- 13 As the work of AAPs commences in 2021/22, given the allocation of additional funds to address Town and Village revitalisation, Community Recovery and Holiday Activities with Healthy Food, it is appropriate that Boards will derive local priorities around these three themes and will work with Board members to establish the associated task and finish groups to oversee their work. In terms of further priorities to be addressed over the next year, normally at this point, an AAP will have had the benefit of a broad community consultation exercise to help shape their thinking on their focus for the year. However, given the impact of the pandemic, it has not been possible to carry out that exercise for boards to consider.
- 14 Whilst the choice of the priorities to be addressed is a decision to be made by each board, and is within their gift, it is proposed that they give careful consideration to adding substantially to these three themes. This is proposed as AAPs have reduced time to address a broad range of topics in a year following an election, the lack of up-to-date community priority data and the scale of the resources and their associated timeframes for spend (as explained later in this report).
- 15 If boards agree to progress on these three broad themes for 2021, this will be on the basis that community consultation is carried out during the Autumn on local priorities (to help shape priorities for 2022/23 as well as the towns and villages work). It is also proposed that to ensure maximum flexibility for AAP Boards during 2021/22, the Community Recovery theme (based on the broad headings outlined in paragraph 8), is bolstered by the inclusion of the criteria 'emerging community issues'. This wording mirrors that within our elected members' Neighbourhood Budget guidance and will allow AAP Boards the flexibility to consider and respond to key community issues as and when they arise.

AAP Boards

- 16 It is essential that boards remain the decision-making body for AAPs and work has continued extremely successfully during 2020/21 using a

virtual platform. Overall, attendance from board members has been high, separate consultation/focus groups have been organised and AAPs contributed to 14 Countywide events which were also well attended. AAPs have embraced virtual working and there has no perceived adverse effects on productivity or decision-making capability. However, it is recognised that in line with national and corporate guidance, plans to return to face to face working and staff presence within localities will need to be prepared.

- 17 As we work towards holding board meetings in public again, AAPs are seeking advice from IT colleagues to develop a hybrid approach to meetings which consists of a mix of people meeting in person and other board members or presenters attending virtually. Some of our board members may still wish to attend virtually and the best ways to ensure we have maximum board and community involvement whilst allowing people to access in the way they feel most comfortable, are being explored. Alongside this, advice is also being sought on the mobile technology to deliver the best experience for meetings once community venues are used again.
- 18 During 2020/21 many AAP Boards made the decision to move to earlier meetings. This was due to a number of reasons including many board representatives working from home and a 6 – 8pm meeting time was difficult due to immediate home responsibilities. AAP Co-ordinators will be encouraging their boards to move back to an evening meeting time. This will ensure that as many sectors of the community can access our meetings if they wish to do so. Discussions on these themes will form part of the AAP Co-ordinators report at the upcoming AGMs (June/July 2021).

AAP Locality Bases

- 19 In accordance with corporate advice, AAP teams are planning to return to their locality bases from July 2021. In line with that advice, it is envisaged AAP support staff will implement a hybrid form of office / homeworking. This will always be in line with corporate guidance.

AAP Governance

- 20 AAPs have a suite of governing documents including Terms of Reference and Code of Conduct etc, which will need revising in light of corporate guidance on new ways of working going forward ie hybrid working and meetings. These revisions are proposed to take place during 2021/22 and will involve wider community and Elected Member representation alongside officers to develop the proposed changes.

Core AAP Area Budget

- 21 Over recent months a light touch internal review of the AAP funding process has been carried out. One of the initial findings of that review was that AAPs have lots of distinctive budget areas that often have their own 'call-out' and application process. This is often driven by the reporting and monitoring arrangements attached to the various funding allocations. This can cause confusion for applicants and for AAP Boards when projects are sub managed within smaller budget amounts.
- 22 AAPs currently receive £100,000 from the County Council in the form of an Area Budget to support the delivery of their local priorities.
- 23 In addition to this, AAPs have historically received a number of distinct budgets from various internal service groupings who are seeking to achieve their objectives through investment in local community initiatives. These include:
- £25,000 Older Persons Social Isolation Fund from Adult and Health Services;
 - £9,902 Youth Fund Grant from Children and Young People's Services to align to organisations who support youth delivery;
 - £10,000 Welfare Assistance Scheme Grant funding to tackle poverty issues.
- 24 In 2021/22 AAPs will also receive Community Recovery Funding of £100,000 each. This funding has come to AAPs from the Local Council Tax Support grant the Council will receive in the current year.
- 25 This gives each AAP a Core Budget sum of £244,902 made up of the following funding streams;
- | | |
|------------------------------------|----------|
| AAP Area Budget (DCC) | £100,000 |
| Older People Social Isolation Fund | £25,000 |
| Youth Grant | £9,902 |
| Welfare Assistance Grant | £10,000 |
| COVID Restoration Grant | £100,000 |
- 26 Taking on board the findings from the review, having these budgets aligned as part of one amalgamated 'Area Budget' will enable AAPs to reduce the amount of project call outs and give them flexibility to fit proposed projects against a greater range of themes rather than having to allocate a finite amount of funding to a particular topic.

- 27 Previous experience shows that AAPs consistently allocate funding to these key elements of community life across County Durham; Young People, Older People and Social Isolation, and widespread Welfare Reform projects. The proposal to amalgamate the funds is therefore not expected to change what types of projects AAPs fund, but it will give them more flexibility about how they manage that process. Often the projects funded fit multiple outcomes.
- 28 It is therefore recommended that we formally classify these five budget areas as an amalgamated Area Budget for 2021/22 of £244,902.
- 29 The proposed introduction of a new electronic Application Form will also make this transition easier in terms of managing the grant application process and gaining monitoring data to report on outcomes achieved through this funding.

In year spend

- 30 It has been confirmed that £125,000 of the above funding; the £25,000 Older Persons Social Isolation element and the £100,000 Community Recovery Funding have been made available from budgets that need to be spent this financial year and as such AAPs will need to evidence defrayed spend by the year end. This will be communicated to AAP Boards to ensure they are able to deliver on this commitment.
- 31 With regard to the remainder of the combined Area Budget allocation, it is proposed AAPs are given the flexibility of being able to carry forward any uncommitted resources into the 2022/23 financial year to ensure they have the resources to address emerging issues.
- 32 It is recognised that AAPs have additional distinct budgets to manage as set out below that it is proposed are kept separate from the £244,902 'Area Budget' allocation given their focus and origin of the funding.

Towns and Villages Funding

- 33 Cabinet on 10 February 2021 agreed an allocation of £4.2 million for AAPs to fund the wider corporate objectives of improving Towns and Villages across County Durham and the broad criteria for the fund as set out in Appendix 2. This was confirmed in the MTFP11 and 2021/22 budget setting report to County Council on 24 February 2021.
- 34 Further consideration has been given to this decision, and in order to ensure a greater focus is given to the funding of community 'town and villages' themed projects across the county in every electoral division, it is proposed that each AAP is allocated £210,000 to manage (rather than the £300,000 originally allocated) and that each elected member is allocated a one-off additional £10,000 to their Neighbourhood Budget

allocation of £19,400 this year. In terms of this additional allocation to members, it is proposed that, unless there are exceptional circumstances, spend will be broadly in line with the criteria set out in Appendix 2. Taking into account the size of the allocation per member and AAP, it is proposed the minimum spend to ensure impact should be set at £5,000 and that there is no requirement for a specified matched funding target against the member allocations.

- 35 It is further proposed that given the neighbourhood Budget is effectively increased by 50% for the current year, the capacity for members to spend their core (£19,400) budget on smaller projects (between £100-£999) is increased by the same proportion, from a total of £2,000 to £3,000. It is recommended that this increase applies to the period up to 31 March 2023.
- 36 Staff from the Council's Regeneration, Economy and Growth (REG) service grouping will attend AAP Board meetings from July to present Towns and Village related information to AAP Boards and Elected Members to help them make investment decisions. This will include local data, details of relevant projects being developed by the Council and other partners in their locality and also new opportunities that Boards may wish to consider supporting. AAP Boards will make recommendations for schemes they want to support and those will go through the existing sign-off and approval process that has been adopted for all other AAP activity.
- 37 It is not anticipated that the Towns and Village budget allocations will be fully defrayed within this financial year. Following the election, as highlighted earlier, there will be a shorter administrative year for AAP Boards and Elected Members and it is important to ensure that projects are developed in a coherent manner and they have the time to undertake consultation and engagement with the community in determining their local priorities. This will be further supported by the input of REG colleagues through the Board process.
- 38 Principal AAP Coordinators will attend the Towns & Village Working Group to shape this work and discuss scheme ideas with REG colleagues. The first meeting of this group took place on 12 May 2021.
- 39 As highlighted earlier, a dedicated team of Officers is being created to help manage this funding (financed primarily by Covid funding) and the recruitment of that team is underway.

Holiday Activities with Healthy Food

- 40 In February 2021, the Council received final notification from the Department for Education (DfE) that it would receive £2,383,860 for the

delivery of a Holiday Activities with Healthy Food (HAWHF) programme in 2021.

- 41 £525,000 has been allocated to AAPs for the local delivery of the programme. This will run similarly to the programme in 2020 and will target smaller locally based partners/providers. Individual allocations have been based on the number of Free School Meal (FSM) eligible children per AAP area and child poverty rates for 5-15 year olds. An uplift of funding has also been allocated to Teesdale and Weardale to account for the rural nature of each of these AAPs.
- 42 The amounts allocated per AAP are summarised in Appendix 3. Funding amounts range from £118,541 for East Durham AAP to £18,016 for Weardale AAP.
- 43 AAP Boards are aware of this funding and work has already commenced to allocate the funding as it was available to support activities from Easter 2021.
- 44 As with delivery in 2020, the whole application, approval and monitoring process was done within AAP Teams for the Easter 2021 period. Moving forward, there will be additional staff to support the AAP Funding Team to carry out this work for the summer holiday period and beyond. These staff are funded by the DfE and available Covid funding.
- 45 Children's and Young People's Services will lead on the overall co-ordination of the programme and ensure that DfE requirements are met. There will be some community development resource as part of this team that will work closely with local AAP teams.
- 46 In April 2021, AAPs were also notified that they would be receiving £95,188 for HAHF delivery in the May and October half-terms. This was money that was allocated internally by the Council and is separate to the DfE funding, however, to ensure consistency, it was decided to allocate funding to each AAP on the same basis as the DfE funding.

Countywide Community Recovery Fund £300,000

- 47 A £300,000 budget for Countywide activity is also available across the 14 AAPs and funded from Covid funding available in 2021/22. A countywide fund was originally established during the height of the pandemic in 2020 to respond to approaches for organisations working across multiple AAP areas. This was positively received by AAPs in recognition of the cross-boundary work, particularly from organisations that cover many localities.

- 48 A Panel of the 14 AAP chairs was created to manage this process. This panel met on 4 occasions during 2020/21 and allocated funding of £344,298 to 6 countywide projects.
- 49 It is proposed that this process will continue in 2021/22 and there is the opportunity to enhance the approach that has been taken and formalise arrangements of this group and create clearer terms of reference that cover multiple areas including chairing arrangements and how we open up this funding stream across the County to ensure a clearer application process.
- 50 We propose to work with the 14 AAP chairs once in place at the respective AAP AGMs to gain their input through a co-production approach and will report back to AAPs once this process is complete.

Neighbourhood Budget

- 51 Councillors currently receive £19,400 each per year for the development of local projects in their ward areas. This is split into a capital and revenue allocation. As highlighted in paragraph 34, it is proposed that this is further enhanced with a one-off allocation of £10,000 to address towns and villages revitalisation.
- 52 Since 2009 Members have been able to carry this budget over on a yearly basis as long as it is allocated by the end of their electoral cycle.
- 53 It is recognised that Members have funded an impressive range of schemes across multiple priority areas for their communities, bringing in over £41m in match funding since 2009.
- 54 The challenge for the AAPs and the Council in delivering the projects is that the spend profile of this funding has been heavily weighted towards the final year of an election cycle when the members often have a significant amount of resources to allocate. Data from 2020/21 shows that 26% of the 4-year budget was allocated between June 2020 – Dec 2020 and 19% of the 4-year budget was allocated in the final quarter in the run up to the pre-election period.
- 55 The impact on AAPs is that they have a large volume of projects to develop, appraise and issue grant offer letters for within a very tight time frame. There is also a knock-on impact to the delivery organisations and with many members supporting projects delivered by Council service areas this puts further pressure on other areas of the Council.
- 56 It is recognised that members require a degree of flexibility with this budget allocation and often they roll money forward into future years to make a larger contribution to a significant local project.

57 In order to allow this flexibility but provide greater clarity on proposals to enable early work to commence on their development, it is proposed that there is a checkpoint stage after year two and also year three of the electoral cycle. At these points, unless there are exceptional circumstances that have impacted on a members ability to develop project proposals (such as a long term illness), carryover between the years two and three and years three and four would only be allowed if the member has a clear spending plan for what they want to allocate the funding for. A Project Proposal Form will be developed for AAP Teams to discuss ideas with individual members to get clear details on planned future schemes. It is proposed that this only comes in after year two to recognise that members have a shorter year this year with the May election and new members will need to undergo training on the rules surrounding the Neighbourhood Budget. This will effectively shorten the financial year and limit the project development timeframe.

New Application Form

58 Work has been undertaken to update the application form for Area Budget and Neighbourhood Budget applications over £1,000 after feedback that some users were struggling with the PDF format due to software issues and not being able to access and save information into the previous form. The decision to move an electronic online format hosted on our CRM system links well with the Council plan to make all PDF documents accessible (in line with national accessibility requirements) and was a recommendation of a recent review of AAP processes.

59 This format also affords us the option of making further improvements and changes down the line with the possibility of a case management system being introduced in the future.

60 The change is timely as it not only coincides with the new cohort of elected members, it is also being introduced at a time when we are moving away from the “All together” of the previous County Vision to the new corporate priorities of more and better jobs, connected community and people living long and independent lives, alongside the Excellent Council theme. This gives AAPs the opportunity to link their reporting priorities and KPIs to the new Council Vision ambitions. The new form will enable AAPs to evidence their support of the vision by logging outputs and outcomes against these ambitions.

61 Benefits to the user include:

- the users will see a more professional user-friendly form which will be accessed from the Council’s ‘Do it Online’ platform which will be familiar to many users;

- the questions and information requested will all be familiar to regular applicants;
- the requirement to complete all fields and upload supporting documents with the application will result in a quicker turnaround time as time won't be lost while AAP staff chase up missing information. It will however require applicants to have these in place at the point of application;
- the form will also highlight the minimum application thresholds which is a shift from applicants being able to apply for amounts of funding under the set limits. Again, when necessary and in exceptional circumstances lower amounts will be accepted but will require discussion with the AAP and Funding Team prior to submission;
- in order to align with requirements of other major funding bodies, the form now asks for:
 - applicant organisations to have a minimum of three unrelated people on their management committees;
 - for applicants to declare if any of the contactors, suppliers or consultants they wish to appoint using the grant funding are linked to themselves, for example close friends or relatives, or if there is any financial link such as ownership of these suppliers. In which case, they will need to seek four quotes for the contract, even if it is under £5,000.

Terms of Reference Amendments – Councillor Declaration of Interests

62 AAPs regularly review their Terms of Reference and particularly in light of recent national focus on influence by Councillors, it is now proposed that we make a change to the declaration of interest process to ensure this is more aligned to the Council's Member Code of Conduct that Councillors are familiar with.

63 The current guidance AAPs are working to states:

Declaration of Interest: A Councillor is regarded as having an interest in any business which may affect the wellbeing (financial or otherwise) of a body of which he/she is a member. Any question of advancing money to such a body would normally give rise to a prejudicial interest and any Member who advances such a proposal for approval must declare a personal prejudicial interest. Do you have a personal prejudicial interest in this project? Please indicate yes or no below.

- 64 The proposed change will bring the guidance to members in line with the current terminology used in the Members Code of Conduct will focus on if the Councillor has ‘disclosable pecuniary interest’ or an ‘other relevant interest’ in a project. Training on these terms is provided to Elected Members by the Council’s Legal and Democratic Services Department and it is suggested that in these cases the Councillor cannot fund an organisation for which they have a disclosable pecuniary interest through their Neighbourhood Budget. It is proposed the guidance on Neighbourhood Budget application forms is amended as set out below (along with some clear examples of what constitutes each type of interest) and will apply to all new Neighbourhood Budget application forms following this Cabinet decision.

Declaration of Interest: Do you have a disclosable pecuniary interest or other relevant interest in this project? Please indicate in the table below.

Any councillor having a disclosable pecuniary interest in an organisation is prohibited from allocating Neighbourhood Budget funds to any project delivered by or in connection with that organisation.

Where a Councillor has an other relevant interest the application needs to be approved by the appropriate AAP. Full guidance on interests is contained in the Members Code of Conduct”

- 65 This change will not limit the ability of a Councillor to support an organisation where they are only involved in a voluntary / community capacity. For example, a community centre management committee or through a role as a school governor. In those situations, the Councillor would declare they have a relevant interest, and in line with the current practice the project will be required to be signed off by a Head of Service or Corporate Director as outlined in our current Neighbourhood Budget Scheme of Delegation. The change would only impact Councillors where they have a disclosable pecuniary interest.

Conclusion

- 66 AAPs have been a key mechanism for engaging and empowering communities over the last twelve years, and over the extremely challenging period of the pandemic, have been instrumental in providing support to the vulnerable. Prior to the onset of COVID – 19, work had commenced to consider if enhancements could be made to AAP processes, and that work has been enhanced by lessons learnt during the pandemic.
- 67 This report proposes a number of changes that will ensure that AAPs, alongside Elected Members, are best placed to support our communities to recover and re-build. However, it is also recognised that there is an ongoing need to explore, alongside AAP Boards and

Elected Members, further enhancements to ensure AAPs can be as effective as possible going forward.

Author(s)

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Appendix 1: Implications

Legal Implications

The report identifies proposed changes to the Terms of Reference in relation to Councillors declaration of Interest on Neighbourhood Budget projects. Discussion have been entered into with Legal Services and they have proposed revised wording to reflect the changes we are proposed regarding pecuniary interests.

Finance

The report doesn't seek any additional budget allocations to support AAP activity. All of the budget streams referenced in the report are already approved in line with the Council's budget setting process. The report does however outline a planned change to the way the budgets are managed at an AAP level and includes changes to the budget allocations for investing the funding provided in support of towns and villages revitalisation.

Previous reports to Cabinet and Council had allocated £300,000 to each AAP. The proposals in this report seek to reduce that to £210,000 per AAP and provide each elected member with an additional one-off allocation of £10,000 to augment their core Neighbourhood Budget allocations.

£125,000 of the funding allocated to AAPs: the £25,000 Older Persons Social Isolation element and the £100,000 Community Recovery Funding needs to be defrayed this financial year and as such AAPs will need to evidence defrayed spend by the year end.

Appendix 2 sets out details of the funding allocations to individual AAPs with regards to the Holiday Activities with Food grant funding that has been received and will be administered by AAPs this year.

Consultation

No implications identified.

Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty

Not applicable.

Climate Change

Not applicable.

Human Rights

Not applicable.

Crime and Disorder

Not applicable.

Staffing

Additional staff are being recruited to support the Towns and Villages and the Holiday Activity with Healthy Food programme. The costs of these staff is primarily met from external funding reserves.

Accommodation

The accommodation need for the 6 extra Town and Village staff has been highlighted with the Office Accommodation Team.

Risk

The funding allocated to AAPs this year is significant and higher than normal. There are risks over the capacity and ability to effectively administer these funding streams within the existing support staffing complement and to address this additional temporary staffing is being recruited to assist the core team.

The proposals set out in this report seek to streamline and simplify the application and approval process and as such should produce some efficiencies and address the issues caused by significant proportions of spend being incurred in the last year of a members term of office.

The proposals with regards to the changes to the declaration of interest will bring this in line with the Member Code of Conduct provisions and as such address an inconsistency and risk in the current arrangements.

Procurement

The funding that is managed by AAPs is allocated in terms of grants and in accordance with advice provided by Procurement following the Council's contract procedure rules.

Appendix 2 - Towns & Village Programme Proposed Criteria (information taken from MTFP Cabinet Report)

The general principles for this investment fund are:

- (a) the funding can be used for both capital and revenue;
- (b) schemes funded should have a clear exit plan and not create an ongoing expectation of support longer term;
- (c) although the funding is allocated next financial year, there is no need for AAPs to have it all allocated or spent next year and they are free to profile this as they see fit;
- (d) AAPs will have the flexibility to innovate so there will be some flexibility but within criteria established for these allocations (see below);
- (e) application of the funding will be collated alongside the schemes overseen by the Towns and Villages Co-ordination Group;
- (f) given the level of interest in this subject at the recent Autumn AAP consultation events, it is anticipated there may be a need for some further engagement with communities as to how it could be best used in an AAP area based on the areas it can be applied to;
- (g) the over-riding aim of the funding is to have a meaningful impact, and in order to ensure the public see a real difference, AAP Boards therefore should cap any spend on feasibility studies to a maximum of £30,000. In addition, given the availability of this funding offers a significant opportunity for AAPs, it is proposed that unless there are exceptional circumstances, projects supported should have a minimum contribution from this fund of £10,000 and that they seek to achieve a match funding rate of at least 30%.

AAPs will be free to develop a programme of works that meet the particular needs and priorities of their areas and in common with the approach taken to use of their Area Budget, they will be provided with the scope to innovate. However, the investment of this funding will be within the criteria that is signed off and agreed by Cabinet. As a steer for the utilisation of this funding, AAPs will be encouraged to consider investment in the following potential initiatives (note that the decision to go ahead with any local scheme will be shaped by the need to avoid duplication with other schemes).

Scheme Criteria

- a. Localised environmental maintenance/enhancements.
- b. Enhancing community resilience.
- c. Time-limited financial support for current town and village centre businesses to maintain their presence in a locality.
- d. Time-limited support to assist with attracting new users/businesses to a centre.
- e. Projects that build on a centre's ability to attract new users to a location e.g. through the improvement of a visitor experience or development of an area's tourism potential.
- f. Accessibility improvements in order that more people can travel to (e.g. public transport/parking), and within (e.g. disabled access enhancements) a centre.
- g. Improvements to connectivity (walking and cycling).
- h. Improved IT connectivity for businesses and visitors.
- i. Public realm improvements, including addressing 'grot spots' and parking issues on estates that impact on their open space areas.
- j. Initiatives to improve public safety in order that people feel more secure when living in or visiting a location.
- k. The creation of a vibrant community hub within a town or village centre.

Additional Information

Bids for funding will be made through the established AAP funding process.

Given the scope of the Towns and Villages programme and the established process of local priority setting and resourcing, higher value projects may be developed drawing together existing AAP allocations and the uplifted Towns and Villages element.

An important element of the Towns and Villages programme is the ongoing commitment to regular engagement with each AAP by the Regeneration Economy & Growth Service to identify larger scale regeneration needs and opportunities outside of the scope of the AAP allocations. These sessions as well as participation in AAP Priority Task Group Meetings which align with the core Towns and Villages themes will enhance and embed the activity at an AAP level, in line with the principles established in the Towns and Villages Cabinet reports.

Appendix 3

Holiday Activity with Food Funding across AAPs

AAP	Pupils living in County Durham attending schools in the County				% of children aged 5-15 living in the top 30% most deprived areas		AAP funding
	Eligible for FSM		All Pupils	%Total FSM	Count	%	Amount
	No	Yes					
3 Towns	2860	1139	3999	6.61%	2415	68.2%	£33,028
4 Together	1767	778	2545	4.51%	1619	79.0%	£22,560
Bishop Auckland and Shildon AAP	4620	2059	6679	11.94%	4801	87.0%	£59,705
Chester-le-Street and District AAP	5798	1384	7182	8.03%	2706	41.5%	£40,132
Derwent Valley Partnership	4911	1233	6144	7.15%	1329	21.8%	£35,754
Durham Area Action Partnership	5918	1062	6980	6.16%	1548	23.5%	£30,795
East Durham AAP	10093	4088	14181	23.71%	8718	71.6%	£118,541
East Durham Rural Corridor	2939	800	3739	4.64%	1704	50.7%	£23,198

	Pupils living in County Durham attending schools in the County				% of children aged 5-15 living in the top 30% most deprived areas		AAP funding
	Eligible for FSM		All Pupils	%Total FSM	Count	%	Amount
AAP	No	Yes					
Great Aycliffe and Middridge Partnership	2813	1124	3937	6.52%	1991	53.7%	£32,593
Mid Durham AAP	3923	874	4797	5.07%	1781	42.9%	£25,344
Spennymoor AAP	2586	700	3286	4.06%	1301	46.5%	£20,298
Stanley AAP	3622	1505	5127	8.73%	4001	86.3%	£43,641
Teesdale AAP	2267	393	2660	2.28%	356	12.9%	£21,396
Weardale Action Partnership	698	104	802	0.60%	28	3.2%	£18,016
County Durham	54815	17243	72058	100.00%	34,298	52.9%	£525,000