

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
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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