

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