

# Corporate Overview & Scrutiny Management Board

## Community Engagement Review update

22 September 2023

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# Recap

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

# Consultation responses/feedback

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

# Consultation – feedback analysis

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

# COSMB – feedback included...

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

# COSMB recommendations

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

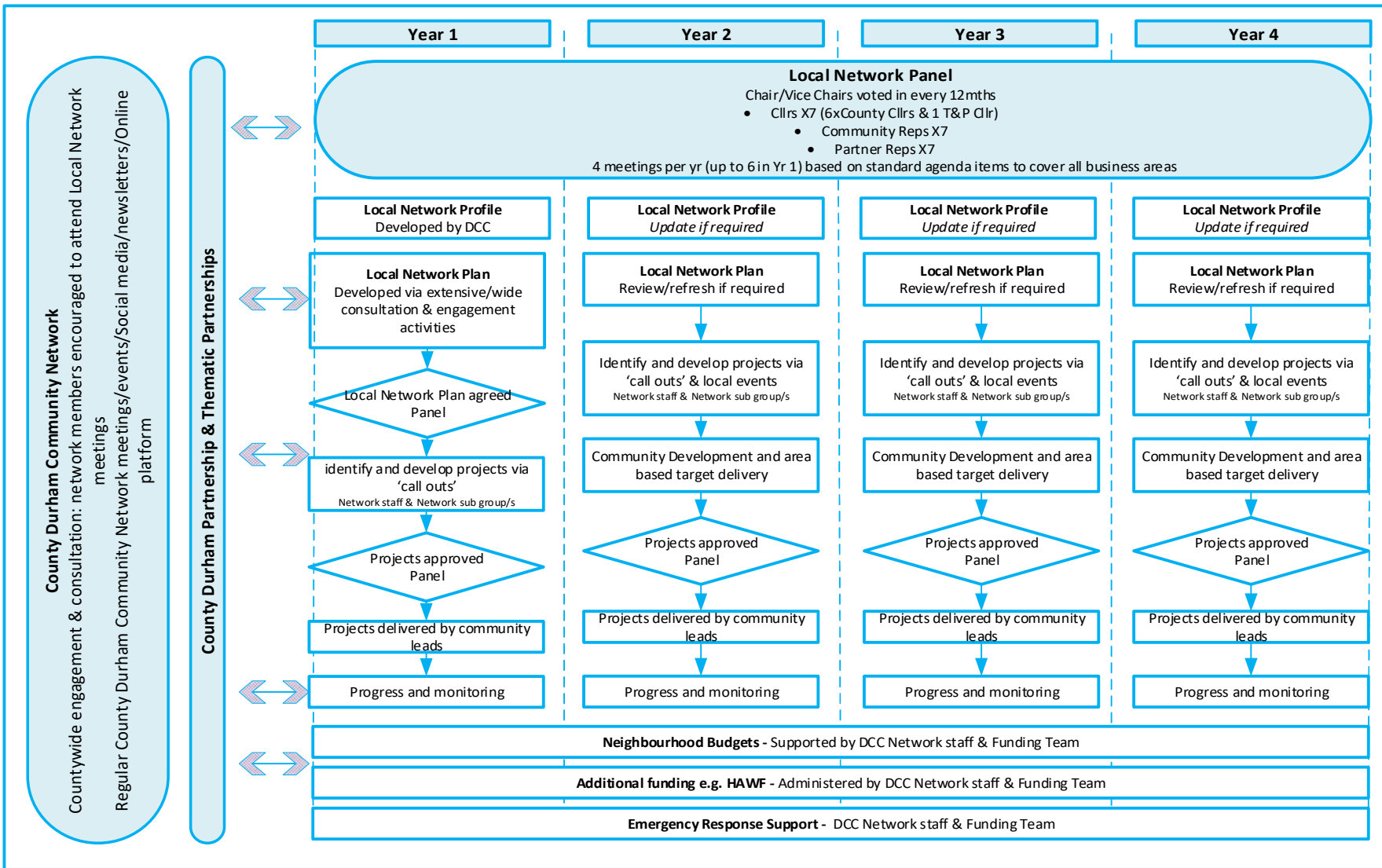
# ERS principles not to be adopted

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

# ERS principles to be adopted

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





# Local Network model

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

# Local Network model

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

# Local Network Panel

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

# Local Networks – Next steps

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

# Local Networks – High level milestones

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

# Questions

