

# 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](mailto:equalities@durham.gov.uk) for any necessary support.

## Section One: Description and Screening

<b>Service/Team or Section</b>	Economic Development
<b>Lead Officer name and job title</b>	Andy Kerr, Head of Economic Development
<b>Subject of the impact assessment</b>	Review of local network boundaries
<b>Report date (Cabinet/CMT/Mgt team etc)</b>	MTFP 14
<b>MTFP Reference (if relevant)</b>	NCC 16
<b>EIA Start Date</b>	5 July 2024 – Local Network Boundary consultation opens
<b>EIA Review Date</b>	16 October 2024 – 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.

Following an independent review of our current engagement practices, and a countywide consultation, Cabinet agreed in July 2023 to replace the current AAP model with a new Local Network (LN) model. It was also agreed to review the Local Network boundary alignment following the outcomes of the Local Government Electoral Boundary Review which will see new boundaries for the counties electoral divisions come into effect in May 2025.

A new pattern of LNs has been proposed for County Durham taking into consideration the new electoral divisions and it is proposed the new boundaries come into effect from April 2025 in time for local council elections due to take place in May 2025. In May 2025, the number of electoral divisions will reduce from 63 to

51 and the number of county councillors reduce from 126 to 98, with each councillor representing an average of 4,150 electors.

We propose that the county should be made up of 12 LNs, and unlike the current AAP boundaries, the LN boundaries will be aligned fully to electoral division boundaries meaning County Councillors will be aligned to one Local Network only.

The LN boundaries have been designed to achieve more consistent population size and county councillor representation, with the exception of our more rural areas, where joining more electoral divisions onto these would create large geographic areas and the increased pressures on resources associated with administering and providing community development support in such large areas.

Moving to 12 LNs from 14 AAPs will contribute towards MTFP savings with less grant funding required for 12 LNs and a reduced staffing compliment of the current AAP team. Following the local council elections in May 2025, LNs will have the opportunity to agree on a suitable name for their LN.

Analysis of the Local Network boundary consultation survey responses and other feedback shows that moving to 12 Local Networks and redefining boundaries evoke a diverse range of opinions.

There was general acknowledgement that aligning Local Network boundaries to electoral division boundaries was a sensible approach however both survey respondents and other feedback identified general comments around inconsistencies in population sizes and concerns around potential loss of community cohesion as a result of boundary changes. However, none of the feedback generally identified obvious alternatives to the proposed boundaries that would resolve the issue of balancing population numbers, reducing the overall number of Local Networks from the previous 14 AAP areas, and maintaining the strategic drivers of the boundary changes.

The one notable exception to this was significant feedback on the proposed inclusion of the electoral division of Pelton within Local Network J (Stanley area) from both Chester-le-Street & District and Stanley AAP boards, and in other feedback submissions. There was strong disagreement with the proposal and clear preference for Pelton electoral division to be included within Local Network C (Chester-le-Street area).

Following Cabinet agreement, the existing project group, sponsored by the Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Economy & Partnerships and lead by the Director of Regeneration, Economy & Growth, will deliver the next phase of this project to implement the new boundaries. The project and communications plan continue to be delivered and 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 and their new boundaries in preparation for the local council elections in May 2025.

Who are the main people impacted and/or stakeholders? (e.g. general public, staff, members, specific clients/service users, community representatives):

- 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
- General public
- Staff

## Screening

Is there any actual or potential negative or positive impact on the following protected characteristics<sup>1</sup>?

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.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/equality-act/protected-characteristics>

Negative impact on the protected groups is not anticipated. A reduction in grant funding across the county will mean less Local Network grant funding per head of the population.

Moving to 12 Local Networks from 14 AAPs will contribute towards MTFP savings with less grant funding required for 12 LNs and a reduced staffing compliment of the current AAP team. Fair treatment of staff will be ensured through the agreed corporate HR change management procedures and the progression of Early Retirement/Voluntary Redundancy (ER/VR) wherever possible reducing the necessity for compulsory redundancies in the process.

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 consultation delivered clear and consistent messages around the proposals using specific communication channels whilst being as inclusive as possible, engaging a broad range of stakeholders, including providing opportunities for specific groups to feedback via their local AAP or dedicated email address.

LN boundaries will be aligned fully to electoral division boundaries. This will mean county councillors are aligned to one LN only and their local priorities and commitments can be concentrated to one LN area. It will also mean that communities within a single LN will have the opportunity to benefit from 100% of their county councillors grant funding.

Aligning LNs to electoral boundaries will help inform the development of unique and robust local profiles. These profiles will facilitate the increased use of local empirical data along with opportunities to hold more localised events and activities, with increased opportunities for all residents and partners to be involved and enable LNs to adopt a more strategic approach to their work and outcomes via the development and delivery of a 4-year local plan.

The LN boundaries have been designed to achieve more consistent population size and county councillor representation, with the exception of our more rural areas, where joining more electoral divisions onto these would create large geographic areas and the increased pressures on resources associated with administering and providing community development support in such large areas. More consistency in population size and county councillor representation will also help ensure LN grant funding and county councillor's grant funding is more evenly spread across the county.

Through the promotion of the new boundaries, Local Networks will aim to attract involvement of a greater number, and a broader range of residents and local

stakeholders with an increased use and the repurpose of the current AAP Forum and its 15,000 members, relaunched as the 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, with fewer formal meetings and increased local events and activities. Local Networks will also utilise the council's new consultation and engagement platform and existing social media platforms to increase engagement with those residents and stakeholders who prefer to engage via online activities.

## 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
<b>Survey</b>	
Residents	209
AAP board members	40
County councillors	14
DCC employees	7
Voluntary & community sector	4
Other	8
Not stated	17
<b>Submissions via email</b>	
AAP board/board members	4
AAP Forum	3
DCC councillors	7
Partners	3
Residents	1

Town & parish councils/councillors	6
<b>Notes/comments received at meetings/presentations</b>	
AAP boards	14
AAP staff	1

The consultation aimed to seek feedback from different groups as detailed in the tables below.

	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Male	83	39.0%
Female	130	61.0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>213</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Under 18	1	0.5%
18-24	1	0.5%
25-34	22	10.3%
35-44	32	15.0%
45-54	39	18.3%
55-64	59	27.7%
65-74	45	21.1%
75+	14	6.6%
<b>Total</b>	<b>213</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Yes	41	19.6%
No	168	80.4%
<b>Total</b>	<b>209</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
White British	201	98.0%
Mixed Race	2	1.0%
Arab or Middle Eastern	1	0.5%
Asian or Asian British	1	0.5%
<b>Total</b>	<b>205</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Heterosexual/straight	180	95.7%
Bisexual	4	2.1%
Gay or lesbian	4	2.1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>188</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

## 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)
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## Sign Off

Lead officer sign off: Andy Kerr, Head of Economic Development	Date: 14.10.24
Equality representative sign off (where required): M C Gallagher, E&D Team Leader	Date: 14.10.24

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](mailto:equalities@durham.gov.uk)

If you are unsure of assessing impact please contact the corporate equalities team for further advice: [equalities@durham.gov.uk](mailto: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: <b>Age</b>		
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: <b>Disability</b>		
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: <b>Gender reassignment</b>		
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: <b>Marriage and civil partnership (only in relation to 'eliminate discrimination')</b>		
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: <b>Pregnancy and maternity</b>		
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: <b>Race</b>		
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: <b>Religion or belief</b>		
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: <b>Sex</b>		
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: <b>Sexual orientation</b>		
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?

### 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](mailto:equalities@durham.gov.uk)