

**Cabinet**

**13 November 2024**

**Community Engagement Review**

**Ordinary Decision**



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## **Report of Corporate Management Team**

**Amy Harhoff, Corporate Director of Regeneration, Economy, and Growth**

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

### **Electoral division(s) affected:**

Countywide

### **Purpose of the report**

- 1 To provide an update on the community engagement review project, in particular proposals for the governance, funding, and branding arrangements to replace Area Action Partnerships with a Local Network model.
- 2 The report updates Cabinet on the outcomes of the Local Network Boundary consultation exercise and seeks Cabinet approval on proposals to change the current 14 Area Action Partnership boundaries to create 12 new Local Networks.

### **Executive summary**

- 3 In March 2022 Cabinet commissioned an impartial review of the councils' community engagement function which proposed the replacement of the council's Area Action Partnerships (APPs) with a new Local Network (LN) model. The aim of the new model is to improve the focus on community development and enhance the capacity of local communities and individuals to become more involved in improving their area. LNs will adopt a more strategic approach to their work and outcomes and develop focused four-year local action plans to guide investment. These plans will identify opportunities for increased joined up working between LNs, partners, and other Durham County Council

(DCC) services, and ensure that the LNs help to deliver the County Durham Inclusive Economic Strategy.

- 4 The new model is intended to be fully operational in April 2025 in time to prepare for the council elections in May 2025, and ensure the four-year LN planning cycle is aligned to electoral cycles. AAPs will continue to operate as Area Action Partnerships until 31 March 2025, and on 1 April 2025 they would assume their new identity as Local Networks.
- 5 This report sets out the approval and next steps needed to proceed to this point, including the new LN boundaries, the governance arrangements, funding guidance, and approach to naming and branding for the new LNs.
- 6 Geographically the new operating model will replace the existing 14 AAPs with 12 LNs in response to the outcomes of the recent Local Government Electoral Boundary Review. These will be aligned to the new electoral divisions and the associated data sets which will better inform investment decisions. They will also ensure that county councillors only cover one LN area and create more consistent population sizes for a more equitable allocation of LN budgets. The reduction would also help to meet required Medium Term Financial Plan budget savings.
- 7 The above principles have informed the proposed new geography of the twelve LNs, which were taken out to public consultation in the summer of 2024. These proposals deliver more consistent population size and county councillor representation with the exception of rural areas, where the dispersed nature of community infrastructure over large geographies necessitate a higher spend per head to create inclusive and equitable outcomes.
- 8 It is proposed to proceed with the new LN boundaries that were proposed as part of the consultation, except for a change in alignment of Pelton where there was overwhelming feedback that it more naturally aligns to the LN that covers the Chester-le-Street area rather than the Stanley area. This was the only locality where there was significant consensus for a revised boundary and the revision was not a consequence of a desire to reduce the population of a LN. The change is supported by both affected Local Networks; and doesn't result in county councillors being split across two network areas.
- 9 The report also sets out the new governance arrangements and funding guidance for the LNs. This includes new Terms of Reference (ToR) that define the purpose, structure, and functions of the LNs, and provides funding guidance that will underpin the move to a new four-year plan

approach to ensure improved strategic spending and to free up staff time to focus on community development activities.

- 10 Approving the recommendations in this report will ensure that the new LNs are in place for next April ready for the commencement of the new four-year plans aligned to the next local electoral cycle and help drive a more targeted and strategic approach to improving local outcomes.

### **Recommendation(s)**

Cabinet is recommended to:

- (a) note the update on the community engagement review project;
- (b) note the outcomes from the countywide consultation exercise for the proposed Local Network boundaries;
- (c) agree the new Local Network boundaries to create 12 Local Networks as set out in this report;
- (d) approve the governance arrangements and terms of reference; funding guidelines and identity and branding arrangements for the County Durham Community Network and Local Networks as set out in this report;
- (e) agree to delegate authority to the Head of Economic Development in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Economy and Partnerships to approve the operating procedures for the Local Networks; and
- (f) agree the proposed timescales for implementation.

## Background

- 11 The council carries out a number of community engagement functions across its services. The main vehicle that is used to engage with the public and local partners is through 14 Area Action Partnerships (AAPs).
- 12 Following agreement by Cabinet in March 2022, consultant ERS were appointed to undertake an impartial and unbiased review of the council's community engagement function i.e. primarily the work of the AAPs. The consultant's recommendations on this Community Engagement Review (CER) were the subject of a countywide consultation exercise, in April 2023.
- 13 In July 2023, Cabinet agreed a new of Local Network (LN) model to replace the existing AAP structure. The new model of a reduced number of twelve LNs would have a renewed focus on community development and enhancing the capacity of local communities and individuals to become more involved in improving their area.
- 14 It was agreed that the new geographic boundaries and associated governance and funding criteria and guidelines would be fully operational in April 2025, in time to prepare for the council elections in May 2025 and the commencement of a four-year LN planning cycle. AAPs would continue to operate as Area Action Partnerships until 31 March 2025, and on 1 April 2025 they would assume their new identity as Local Networks.
- 15 In shaping the geographic boundaries of the new LNs, Cabinet also agreed that LN boundary alignment would be reviewed following the outcomes of the Local Government Electoral Boundary Review.
- 16 The Local Government Electoral Boundary Review's final recommendations were published on 28 November 2023. The new electoral arrangements for County Durham (with effect from May 2025) will see the number of electoral divisions 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.
- 17 In addition to these strategic drivers of change, the council's extremely challenging financial position resulted in the County Council's Medium Term Financial Plan 2024/25 to 2027/28 and Revenue and Capital Budget 2024/25 (MTFP14) including a £0.500 million savings target for the new Local Network model, profiled as £0.250 million in both 2025/26 and 2026/27. This was approved in February 2024, with the savings proposed to be achieved from the 'review of the Local Network Model, taking into account the ongoing Boundary Commission review of the County Council's Elected Member boundaries'. In short, to meet this

savings target, a reduction in the 14 AAPs to 12 LNs is required under the new model.

- 18 The CER project is sponsored by the Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Economy & Partnerships and is now being led by the Corporate Director of Regeneration, Economy & Growth following realignment of the AAP teams into the council's economic development service in May 2024. This is to enhance the role of the Local Networks as a driver of the outcomes in the County Durham Inclusive Economic Strategy.
- 19 The project is being delivered by five workstreams with representation from cross council services: people; model; governance; funding; and marketing to deliver The County Durham Community Network and new Local Networks which aim to improve our focus on community development and enhancing the capacity of local communities and individuals to become more involved in improving their area.

### **Local Network Model**

- 20 The new County Durham Community Network and its 12 LNs will strengthen existing partnership working with agile support for local communities, groups and organisations to help identify and respond to immediate challenges facing our communities.
- 21 LNs 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, 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 LNs, and attendance to meetings and events are increased.
- 22 They will also focus on building stronger and more resilient communities with a more strategic approach to the work, funding and outcomes of the LNs through the development of individual four-year LN action plans that will guide strategic funding decisions.
- 23 These LN action plans will be co-developed with the County Durham Partnership and its thematic partnerships, and will help inform strategic priorities and identify opportunities for increased collaboration between LNs, partners and other DCC services to maximise the outcomes of funding decisions.
- 24 The LN action plans will be informed by: community views (residents and partners) facilitated by LN meetings and locality events and activities; 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 LN area).

- 25 New governance including ToR will clearly define the purpose, structure, and functions of the LNs. It will provide in detail eligibility criteria, roles and responsibilities of LN Panel members and robust processes around recruitment and selection of Panel members to deliver improved assurance that LN Panels will be non-political.
- 26 Local decision making, transparency and financial accountability will be improved with new Funding Criteria and Guidelines (FCG) and increased transparency on funding applications, and aligned with the agreed action plans. Application and funding processes will be streamlined to deliver improved efficiencies for applicants, DCC councillor, and free up the time of LN staff to enhance community engagement and development. Improved processes and reduced formal LN meetings will ensure LNs have better opportunities to carry out focussed engagement/neighbourhood planning type activities in particular with communities identified in the local network action plan.
- 27 This improved transparency, governance and funding arrangements will remove barriers to participation and increase community involvement in consultation, engagement and delivery of LN action plans, and improve focus on community development to enhance the capacity of local communities and individuals to become more involved in improving their area.
- 28 **Local Network boundaries' review**  
*Current AAP boundaries*
- 29 Using town and parish council boundaries as the 'building blocks' for the new AAPs, the current AAP boundaries were determined following extensive public and stakeholder engagement and consultation in 2008-2009 as part of delivering the 'blueprint' for the new unitary council.
- 30 The approach taken for all areas was to, wherever practical, comply with the results of the consultation as this would have greater chance of 'buy-in' to the AAP and therefore increase its' prospects of leading to action. The 14 AAPs and boundaries were agreed by Cabinet, January 2009 (see appendix 2).
- 31 The current AAP boundaries, whilst aligning to town and parish councils, do not fully align to the current electoral divisions and therefore some AAP boundaries cut through electoral divisions. This means some county councillors have more than one AAP covering their electoral division, and there is also currently an imbalance in the population size for each AAP.

32 *Table 1* shows the current electoral divisions which either fully or partly sit within an AAP and also shows the estimated population size of each AAP (calculated by DCC using 2021 population data to the AAP boundary lines).

*Table 1 – Current AAP boundaries*

<b>AAP</b>	<b>Current Electoral Division Boundaries</b>	<b>No. County Councillors</b>	<b>2021 Population Estimate</b>
3 Towns Partnership AAP	Crook Tow Law (part) Willington & Hunwick (part)	3 1 (split) 2 (split)	25,344
4 Together Partnership AAP	Bishop Middleham & Cornforth Chilton Ferryhill (part)	1 1 3 (split)	17,940
Bishop Auckland and Shildon AAP	Bishop Auckland Town Coundon Shildon & Dene Valley West Auckland Woodhouse Close	2 1 3 2 2	42,767
Chester-le-Street & District AAP	Chester-le-Street East Chester-le Street North Chester-le-Street South Chester-le-Street West Central Lumley North Lodge Pelton Sacriston	1 1 2 2 2 1 3 2	53,991
Derwent Valley AAP	Benfieldside Burnopfield & Dipton Consett North Consett South Delves Lane Leadgate & Medomsley	2 2 2 1 2 2	46,447
Durham AAP	Belmont Deerness (part) Durham South Elvet & Gilesgate Esh & Whitton Gilbert (part) Framwellgate & Newton Hall Neville's Cross Sherburn Trimdon & Thornley (part)	3 3 1 2 2 (split) 3 2 2 3 (split)	66,862
East Durham AAP	Blackhalls Dawdon Deneside Easington Horden Murton Passfield Peterlee East Peterlee West Seaham Shotton & South Hetton Trimdon & Thornley (part) Wingate	2 2 2 2 2 2 1 2 2 2 2 3 (split) 1	92,536

AAP	Current Electoral Division Boundaries	No. County Councillors	2021 Population Estimate
East Durham Rural AAP	Coxhoe (part) Sedgefield Trimdon & Thornley (part)	3 (split) 2 3 (split)	25,572
Great Aycliffe & Midridge AAP	Aycliffe East & West Aycliffe North Midridge	2 3 2	26,811
Mid Durham AAP	Brandon Deerness (part) Esh & Witton Gilbert (part) Lanchester (part) Willington & Hunwick (part)	2 3 (split) 2 (split) 2 (split) 2 (split)	34,257
Spennymoor AAP	Coxhoe (part) Ferryhill (part) Spennymoor Tudhoe	3 (split) 3 (split) 3 2	23,320
Stanley AAP	Annfield Plain Craghead & South Moor Stanley Tanfield	2 2 2 2	33,304
Teesdale AAP	Barnard Castle East Barnard Castle West Evenwood	2 2 2	24,691
Weardale AAP	Lanchester (part) Tow Law (part) Weardale	2 (split) 1 (split) 2	8,127
	<b>Total Estimated Population</b>	<b>126</b>	<b>521,969</b>

- 33 The current boundaries have remained unaltered and there has been little challenge to alter these boundaries since 2009.

#### *Local Network boundaries proposal*

- 34 As some of the current AAP boundaries cut across electoral divisions, some DCC councillors have had to choose which AAP they align to. The proposed boundaries for LNs would remove this discrepancy as they will be aligned to electoral division boundaries (i.e. each LN will comprise of full electoral divisions).
- 35 We took into consideration wherever practical the organic alignment communities may have with geographic areas to help maintain 'buy in' from communities who actively engage with their local AAP and to maximise that benefit of 'natural communities' for future co-production and development.
- 36 The 12 proposed LN boundaries are designed to achieve more consistent populations and DCC councillor representation across the 12 LNs, (with the exception of the more rural areas within the County e.g. Teesdale and Weardale where larger rural areas would result in



increased pressures associated with administering and providing community development support in a large rural area).

- 37 To further enhance this move to consistency, the proposal also looked at the current East Durham AAP. With a population and DCC councillor quota almost double some of the largest AAPs, realigning boundaries gave the opportunity to propose this area be split into two LNs in the new structure.
- 38 In addition, the move from 14 AAPs to 12 Local Networks, will help to meet required MTFP14 savings by reducing the cost of administering a larger number of Local Networks.
- 39 When considering boundaries for LNs against savings targets, we focused on ensuring our community engagement service continues to meet the needs of our communities, councillors, and key partners.
- 40 Appendix 3 shows the map of the new electoral divisions aligned to their proposed new LNs, with *Table 2* showing the number of county councillors and experimental population estimates for each Local Network (official population estimates based on the new 2025 electoral divisions are unlikely to be available until late 2025 – mid 2026).

*Table 2 – Proposed Local Network boundaries*

	Area	New Electoral Division Boundaries	No. County Councillors	2021 Population Estimate
A	Aycliffe & Sedgfield	Aycliffe North & Middridge Aycliffe South Sedgfield	7	36,200
B	Bishop Auckland	Bishop Auckland Shildon & Dene Valley West Auckland	8	43,300
C	Chester-le-Street	Chester-le-Street North Chester-le-Street South Lumley & West Rainton North Lodge Sacriston & Witton Gilbert	9	44,200
D	Derwent Valley	Benfieldside Consett North Consett South Delves Lane Derwent & Pont Valley	9	47,900
E	Durham	Belmont Elvet, Gilesgate & Shincliffe Framwellgate & Newton Hall Neville's Cross Pittington & Sherburn	10	56,900
F	East Durham North	Dalton & Dawdon Easington & Shotton Murton	9	49,300

	Area	New Electoral Division Boundaries	No. County Councillors	2021 Population Estimate
		Seaham		
G	East Durham South	Blackhalls & Hesledens Castle Eden & Passfield Horden & Dene House Peterlee Thornely & Wheatley Hill Trimdon & Wingate	9	51,400
H	Mid Durham	Brandon Crook Deerness Lanchester & Burnhope Langley & Esh Willington & Hunwick	11	58,500
I	Spennymoor	Bowburn & Coxhoe Chilton Ferryhill Spennymoor Tudhoe	10	52,700
J	Stanley	Annfield Plain & Tanfield Craghead & South Moor Pelton Stanley	9	48,400
K	Teesdale	Barnard Castle Evenwood Lower Teesdale Upper Teesdale	5	23,600
L	Weardale	Weardale	2	9,600
		<b>Total Estimated Population</b>	<b>98</b>	<b>522,000</b>

### *Countywide consultation on proposals*

- 41 A consultation exercise was delivered between 5 July – 20 September 2024 in accordance with the council’s Consultation Statement and Consultation Protocol (March 2019) and complied with statutory and government guidance, as well as the general requirements of public law.
- 42 The consultation sought feedback on the proposals for Local Network boundaries as detailed in paragraphs 34 to 40.
- 43 The survey contained one question for each of the 12 proposed Local Networks, i.e. ‘do you agree or disagree with the proposed boundaries for Local Network X?’ with a multiple-choice answer: strongly agree; agree; neither agree or disagree; disagree; or strongly disagree. Respondents were also able to provide additional comments as to why they agreed or disagreed via a free text box. Respondents were able to

choose which maps they commented on. A total of 299 survey responses were received.

- 44 Survey feedback was broken down into agreement (positive), disagreement (negative), and neither agreement nor disagreement (neutral). Where the respondent 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. Analysis of the consultation survey responses is attached at appendix 4.
- 45 Presentations were delivered to all 14 AAPs during their respective board meetings which took place during July and August 2024. Comments and feedback were noted and summarised for inclusion in the consultation feedback (see appendix 5).
- 46 24 responses were submitted via a dedicated consultation email address as detailed in *Table 3* and summarised and included in consultation feedback (see appendix 5).

*Table 3 – Consultation responses*

<b>Activity</b>	<b>No. responses</b>
<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

- 47 Analysis of the consultation survey responses and other feedback received shows that the proposed boundaries evoke a diverse range of opinions. There was general acknowledgement that aligning LN 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 LNs from the previous 14 AAP areas, and maintaining the strategic drivers of the boundary changes.

- 48 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).

*Proposed boundary change following consultation*

- 49 Based on the outcomes of that consultation, it is proposed to refine the boundaries to include the electoral division of Pelton within Local Network C (Chester-le-Street area) instead of Local Network J (Stanley area). This change reflects the strength of local feeling and received overwhelming consensus from both exiting AAP boards at a special meeting held on 21 October 2024, where there was strong agreement to move Pelton back into Local Network C (Chester-le-Street area). This change remains consistent with all the strategic drivers of the boundary changes.

*Final proposed Local Network boundaries*

- 50 *Table 4* and appendix 6 reflects the above revisions and shows the new electoral divisions aligned to their proposed new LN, with number of county councillors and experimental population estimates for each LN (official population estimates based on the new 2025 electoral divisions are unlikely to be available until late 2025 – mid 2026).

*Table 4 – Final proposed Local Network boundaries*

	<b>Area</b>	<b>New Electoral Division Boundaries</b>	<b>No. County Councillors</b>	<b>2021 Population Estimate</b>
A	Aycliffe & Sedgefield	Aycliffe North & Middridge Aycliffe South Sedgefield	7	36,200
B	Bishop Auckland	Bishop Auckland Shildon & dene Valley West Auckland	8	43,300
C	Chester-le-Street	Chester-le-Street North	12	59,000

	Area	New Electoral Division Boundaries	No. County Councillors	2021 Population Estimate
		Chester-le-Street South Lumley & West Rainton North Lodge Pelton Sacriston & Witton Gilbert		
D	Derwent Valley	Benfieldside Consett North Consett South Delves Lane Derwent & Pont Valley	9	47,900
E	Durham	Belmont Elvet, Gilesgate & Shincliffe Framwellgate & Newton Hall Neville's Cross Pittington & Sherburn	10	56,900
F	East Durham North	Dalton & Dawdon Easington & Shotton Murton Seaham	9	49,300
G	East Durham South	Blackhalls & Hesledens Castle Eden & Passfield Horden & Dene House Peterlee Thornely & Wheatley Hill Trimdon & Wingate	9	51,400
H	Mid Durham	Brandon Crook Deerness Lanchester & Burnhope Langley & Esh Willington & Hunwick	11	58,500
I	Spennymoor	Bowburn & Coxhoe Chilton Ferryhill Spennymoor Tudhoe	10	52,700
J	Stanley	Annfield Plain & Tanfield Craghead & South Moor Stanley	6	33,600
K	Teesdale	Barnard Castle Evenwood Lower Teesdale Upper Teesdale	5	23,600
L	Weardale	Weardale	2	9,600
		<b>Total Estimated Population</b>	<b>98</b>	<b>522,000</b>

## Governance

- 51 The governance workstream completed a review of current AAP Terms of Reference (ToR) and identified gaps for the associated content and documents required for the new LN model. The new LN ToR has been developed in conjunction with the model and funding workstreams and has included consultation with AAP teams coupled with advice and support from legal and other council services (see appendix 7).
- 52 The new ToR promotes the Seven Principles of Public Life (Nolan Principles) and outlines the ethical standards Local Network Panel members are expected to adhere to. The ToR provides in detail eligibility criteria, roles and responsibilities and a code of conduct for Panel members.
- 53 The new ToR clearly defines the purpose, structure, and functions of the LNs, promoting consistent common practices which are easily enforced across all LNs. New and improved operating procedures which ensure the ToR are adhered to will continue to be developed and will be approved under the council's offer scheme of delegation ready for the launch of LNs in April 2025.

#### *Membership*

- 54 LN Panels will govern and manage the affairs of LNs clearly and transparently and demonstrate proper accountability to the council, partner organisations, stakeholders, and the wider community, whilst maintaining a non-political nature.
- 55 The LN Panel will consist of a maximum of 21 members serving a four-year term. This will comprise of seven councillors (a maximum of six county councillors and one Town & Parish councillor); seven partner representatives and seven community members.
- 56 Robust processes around declaration of interests for LN Panel members have been included to deliver improved assurance that LN Panels will be non-political e.g. neither county councillors and/or Town & Parish councillors nor anyone who holds office in a political party will be eligible to take up the position of partner representatives or community members.
- 57 LN community members will be recruited following an open and transparent recruitment process. Selection will be determined by a Panel (made up of a smaller group of Local Network Panel members which will include a county councillor representative) and will be endorsed by the full LN Panel.
- 58 Community members may only be a LN Panel member for one LN at any one time. They will serve a maximum four-year term and cannot hold the position of community member or partner representative within

12 months of a previous LN Panel term. AAP public representatives wishing to become a LN community member in April 2025 would need to re-apply following the new process.

- 59 The selection process for community members will take place after the local elections in 2025 to ensure new LN boundaries are fully in place and LN teams, county councillors, community groups/organisations and residents are correctly aligned to their new LN to help attract an increased number of eligible candidates and facilitate a robust recruitment and selection process.

#### *Declaration of interest*

- 60 All LN Panel members will be asked to formally submit any declarations of interest at the start of their term as LN Panel member. All declarations will be recorded on the LN Panel declaration of interest register which will be maintained by the LN. Each LN Panel meeting will have a standard item on the agenda for declarations of interest where the LN Coordinator will provide a protocol reminder and request any changes/updates in relation to business items on the agenda.
- 61 Where the matter under consideration by the LN Panel directly or indirectly affects the LN Panel member, and a declaration of interest has not already been made, they must make a declaration of interest at the earliest opportunity to the LN Coordinator and at the very latest during the LN Panel meeting.
- 62 If a LN Panel member with a declaration of interest is present at a LN Panel meeting they may make representation on the item but will not be permitted to participate in any discussion of an item which affects or relates to the subject matter in which they have such an interest, and they must leave the room (in person or virtual) where the meeting is held whilst any discussion and/or voting takes place.

#### *Decision making*

- 63 The ToR provides clear protocols on decision making and voting procedures to ensure clear and concise guidance is adhered to in relation to the declaration of all prejudicial interests etc.
- 64 No business can be formally agreed at a LN Panel meeting unless there is a quorum of 10 LN Panel members, which must include either the LN chair or at least one vice chair.
- 65 LN Panels will be required to hold a vote for all decisions with all LN Panel members present in the room at the time the matter was tabled. If a LN Panel member with a declaration of interest is present, they must

leave the room (in person or virtual) whilst any discussion and/or voting takes place.

- 66 If there are equal numbers of votes for and against, the chair has the casting vote.

#### *Chair & Vice Chairs*

- 67 Each cohort (community members, councillors, and partners) will elect a vice Chair on an annual basis.
- 68 The position of LN chair will be taken by one of the three vice chairs and will rotate on an annual basis to allow each cohort vice chair the opportunity to sit as LN chair within the four-year cycle. Chairs may serve a maximum of a 12-month term and must have a minimum of a 12-month break between terms. For year four, the chair rotates back to the cohort chosen in year one.
- 69 The Head of Economic Development will monitor and review the operation of the ToR in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Economy & Partnerships to ensure that the aims and principles of the ToR are given full effect. Amendments to the ToR will be approved via Officer Scheme of Delegation.
- 70 The ToR will be fully reviewed and approved by Cabinet every four years.

### **Funding**

- 71 The funding workstream has delivered streamlined application and funding processes to improve efficiencies for applicants, DCC councillors and AAP staff including:
- streamlined application form for repeat applicants and statutory partners;
  - projects delivered by DCC require one-step approval only (e.g. AAP Board/LN Panel approval only);
  - stipulation that any relevant permissions required to deliver a project must be in place prior to application being submitted;
  - streamlined financial monitoring (projects with a declaration of interest will be prioritised); and
  - increased access/visibility to the funding team for DCC councillors and applicants with a dedicated funding team points of contact for all DCC councillors.
- 72 New Funding Criteria and Guidelines (FCG) documentation has been developed in conjunction with the governance and model workstreams



and in consultation with colleagues from the council's finance and audit teams, (see appendices 8-11).

- 73 DCC councillor funded projects no longer need to go to AAP Board/LN Panels for approval. This will result in a quicker turnaround from application to offer letter.
- 74 Community Interest Companies (CIC's) will now only be supported if they have been in operation for at least 12 months and generate a percentage of their income through trade.
- 75 LNs will not be able to directly apply for LN funding or be the lead deliverer of projects.
- 76 The Head of Economic Development will monitor and review the operation of the FCG in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Economy & Partnerships to ensure that the aims and principles of the FCG are given full effect. Amendments to the FCG will be approved via Officer Scheme of Delegation.
- 77 The FCG will be fully reviewed and approved by Cabinet every four years.

## **Identity and branding**

- 78 The aim of the new identity and branding is to look significantly different from the current AAP branding so as to attract new interest from communities and residents and to be easily recognisable as new LNs.
- 79 The new identity and branding also aims to complement the existing identities for the County Durham Partnership (and its thematic partnerships) and the County Durham Vision 2035 to visually demonstrate a relationship between these and the new LNs.
- 80 The preferred concept as shown in illustration 1 meets the above aims whilst offering a fresh identity and flexibility in terms of LN names which will be chosen at the inception of each LN, and flexibility for use and application e.g. across social media; websites, printed materials etc.
- 81 The adopted branding will also be kept under review to ensure it continues to fit/align with any future changes to other council branding and identities etc.

*Illustration 1: Proposed County Durham Community Network & Local Network branding*



- 82 The name of each individual LN will be determined by the LN Panel at one of their first meetings to ensure it reflects their perception of the new geography.

### **Equalities Impact Assessment**

- 83 An equalities impact assessment screening (appendix 12) details the potential impact of the protected characteristic groups for the implementation of the new LN boundaries. In summary the recommendations do not disproportionately impact (both negatively and positively) the protected characteristics. The boundaries are designed to be as inclusive as possible, with reasonable adjustments made where necessary in order to ensure the participation of people with disabilities.
- 84 The removal of posts within the current AAP staffing team are expected to be made through the progression of ER/VR and there is no disproportionate equality impact.

### **Next Steps**

- 85 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.
- 86 The project team will codesign and codevelop working practices and process around the delivery of the four-year planning cycle with colleagues and partners including the County Durham Partnership to ensure the work of LNs helps achieve our strategic aims and objectives.
- 87 Over the coming months targeted communications will be delivered to all AAP Boards and relevant stakeholders to advise practical arrangements such as: final AAP board meetings; completion and closing down all AAP funding; and performance monitoring arrangements etc.
- 88 In conjunction, a tailored launch campaign will start following agreement on the LN boundaries being received from Cabinet to set in motion,

raise awareness and promote the new County Durham Community Network and LNs and celebrate the work of the AAPs.

- 89 This will include current AAP teams working with their communities and DCC councillors to deliver enhanced promotional and community engagement activities. These will aim to inform residents and communities of their new LN boundaries and the opportunity to get involved in deciding a name for their LN at one of the first LN meetings. The activities will also aim to attract interest for increased participation for the up-and-coming LNs.
- 90 Following the required HR processes which will see AAP staff re-aligned to their new LNs prior to 'go live' in April 2025, a programme of tailored briefing and training sessions will be delivered for relevant stakeholders on the new governance and funding arrangements etc. and promotion and briefing sessions for prospective community member applicants prior to the recruitment and selection process being delivered after the local elections in May 2025.

## **Conclusion**

- 91 Responding to recent feedback on the proposed LN boundaries, we will re-align communities into new LN boundaries to promote consistency across the county and ensure we can meet the MTFP14 savings goals aligned to AAPs/LNs.
- 92 We will continue to implement the new County Durham Community Network and Local Networks model to help us better engage, consult with, and develop our communities so we can tackle the challenges that we face more effectively and help build more resilient communities.

## **Background papers**

- Cabinet Report, Community Engagement Review – 12 July 2023
- Cabinet Report, Review of Community Engagement and Funding Processes – 16 March 2022

## **Other useful documents**

- Cabinet Report, Area Action Partnerships – 22 January 2009

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## **Implications – Appendix 1**

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### **Legal Implications**

The proposed options to change the boundaries will continue to strengthen the Council's ability to ensure it meets its statutory 'duty to consult' on service change.

Fair treatment of staff will be ensured through the agreed corporate Human Resources (HR) change management procedures and the progression of Early Retirement/Voluntary Redundancy (ER/VR).

### **Finance**

The report sets out the recommendations on the MTFP14 savings to be realised from the Area Action Partnership (AAP) budget. The County Council's Medium Term Financial Plan 2024/25 to 2027/28 and Revenue and Capital Budget 2024/25 (MTFP14) includes a £0.500 million savings target for the new Local Network (LN) model, profiled as £0.250 million in both 2025/26 and 2026/27. This was approved in February 2024, with the savings proposed to be achieved from the 'review of the Local Network Model, taking into account the ongoing Boundary Commission review of the County Council's Elected Member boundaries'.

### **Consultation**

The outcomes from the countywide consultation exercise on LN boundaries are summarised within the report and further detail is provided in appendices 4-5.

### **Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty**

An equalities impact assessment screening is attached as appendix 12 detailing the potential impact of the protected characteristic groups. The recommendations for the new LN boundaries do not disproportionately impact (both negatively and positively) the protected characteristics. The boundaries are designed to be as inclusive as possible, with reasonable adjustments made where necessary in order to ensure the participation of people with disabilities.

### **Climate Change**

None.

### **Human Rights**

None.

## **Crime and Disorder**

LN (as current AAPs) will continue to support the council's legal responsibility for preventing and reducing crime and disorder in the area by enabling communities to identify and highlight crime and disorder issues in their area, and work with partners to problem solve and implement crime reduction and prevention strategies.

## **Staffing**

The impact of implementing the proposed LN boundaries is detailed within the report.

HR policies will be strictly adhered to in terms of any restructure activity and priority will continue to be placed on seeking voluntary redundancies and early retirement to mitigate against the need for compulsory redundancies.

Staff engagement has been a key element of the review process to date. Further engagement will be carried out with all AAP staff and other DCC teams working with AAPs e.g. business support, finance and members support etc. to ensure they are aware of the consultation outcomes and the timescales we are working towards to implement the new boundaries.

## **Accommodation**

Consideration will be given to the LN teams making greater use of existing council strategic sites and local community facilities to carry out drop-in sessions across their areas.

## **Risk**

There is a risk that local residents do not engage with LNs following changes to their local AAP boundaries. To mitigate this, a robust communications plan will be delivered to promote the changes. Furthermore, staff and local members will have increased opportunities to explore new engagement mechanisms, over and above the local network meetings, to engage with a broad range of the community.

## **Procurement**

None.

