

Community Engagement Review – Local Network Boundary Proposals Consultation

Feedback Analysis (non survey)

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AAP Boards

All AAP Boards received a presentation at their individual Board meetings held July-August 2024 and submitted their comments and feedback as discussed at these meetings.

Two AAP Boards submitted formal responses to the consultation. These formal submission and Board meeting discussions notes have been thematically analysed and are presented below, followed by comments/feedback concerning specific AAP areas.

General comments

- Understanding and acceptance of the need to make budget savings
- Acknowledgement that the boundaries of LNs should coincide with the new electoral division boundaries
- Acknowledgement that the availability of less finance is unfortunate, but if this keeps local engagement in the areas this is still a good option
- Acknowledgement that councillors will have to get to know new communities and organisations in their new electoral divisions and LNs
- Critical of the consultation process and timescales and the perception that decisions have already been made – lack of consultation on boundaries prior to this exercise and lack of data to support the proposals
- Critical of the consultation information provided - not enough detail on how the proposed boundaries were designed and/or methodology
- Critical of the case for change and lacks information/data to show how the proposed boundaries improve on existing boundaries
- Concerns and questions raised around details falling ‘out of scope’ of the boundary consultation including: staffing implications; how LNs will operate; and the make-up and governance of LNs
- Concerns around feedback at the start of the review process found that individual AAP Boards worked really well so it’s disappointing AAP Boards will be changed, which will inevitably make things more complicated and risks losing our consistency
- It was commented that AAPs are a flagship model that is held in high regard nationally and therefore changes to boundaries risk undoing this.

Partners

There is concern that the proposed LN boundaries do not align with partner boundaries including the Police and there will be implication for partner reps if their remit covers more than one LN and may negatively impact a partner’s ability to engage.

It is stated that there is a risk of an adverse impact on Town & Parish Councils and how LNs communicate with them. New LNs will require significant engagement with their new T&PCs. This exercise will interfere with the CDALC Executive Committee processes – they will need to review their constitution to take into account these changes and agree a way forward in terms of involvement with LNs.

Community cohesion

It is stated that AAPs were formed to connect areas with affinity and bring together similar communities and boundaries should be decided using more than population and elected member numbers. There is concern around losing community cohesion and affinity if communities are separated and moved into different LNs. It is stated that the relationships and connections within existing AAPs will be threatened/lost within the proposed boundaries and engagement levels may reduce.

There are concerns around the potential reduction in future attendance of residents to new LN meetings.

Public representation

There is concern that recruiting public representatives may be difficult in LNs where boundaries are considerably different to their respective AAP boundaries.

Population/DCC Elected member representation

There is general concern that population and DCC elected member representation is still inconsistent across the some LNs including rural areas (LN K – Teesdale area and LN L – Weardale area).

Funding

It is generally accepted that savings need to be achieved, but there were concerns around the lack of detail around how moving from 14 AAPs to 12 LNs will achieve savings.

It is stated that there is a distinct lack of detail in the consultation on how funding will be allocated across LNs. There is concern that funding will be unfair with equal funding for LNs with different population sizes with a suggestion that funding should be based on population size. There is a perception that some communities will lose out in the larger populated LNs. There is concern that it will be difficult to allocate funding across areas that have varying levels of wealth and types of communities and it therefore be difficult for projects to stretch across different communities.

It is stated that areas may feel weakened with the addition of new communities, and the potential vying for ground/position that would ensue after the establishment of LNs.

Concern around the new electoral boundaries, noting that councillors will have a very difficult job trying to allocate their Neighbourhood Budget funding fairly across their whole ward areas, and where LNs have less county councillors than their previous AAP this will be a reduction in councillor budget funding.

Transport

Concerns are noted around bringing communities together under one LN where transport links are not in existence or are impractical. It is stated that existing transport systems may reduce the attendance at meetings and engagement with activities if transport does not link up communities within new LNs.

Concerns are noted on the perceived increase in budgetary pressures if there is an increase in travel required across an LN's geography to allow consistent meeting attendance.

Timing

Concerns were noted around the timing of the inception of LNs in relation to local elections. AGMs for the new LNs, which are supposed to come into effect from April 2025, will need to be deferred until after the local elections in May, which could potentially see a very different make-up of the Council, as well as new local councillors.

Comments/statements around specific AAPs/LNs

<p>3 Towns Partnership</p>	<p><i>“The 3 Towns Board oppose the current proposals and agree that they should be realigned with Weardale division as an alternative.”</i></p> <p>3 Towns Partnership has so much more in common geographically with Weardale.</p> <p>Tow Law will be at a disadvantage if it is disconnected from their existing links to services and community engagement i.e. removing Tow Law from the area that they have worked with during the last 15 years. The proposals will make Tow Law even more isolated.</p>
<p>4 Together</p>	<p>Concerns that the 4 Together communities will be ‘swallowed up’ when moved into a bigger area (LN I). Settlements in the current AAP area have already been overlooked for investment and funding over the years as it is, but once re competing with other areas like Spennymoor and Coxhoe, then this will negatively impact on 4 Together communities even more.</p>
<p>Bishop Auckland & Shildon</p>	<p>No concerns raised in relation to LN B.</p>
<p>Chester-le-Street & District</p>	<p>Pelton division has a Chester-le-Street postcode. It has sat within the boundary of Chester-le-Street since the inception of AAP's and before as a District and proposed changes do not take into account history and geography.</p> <p>Pelton moving into Stanley will mean Pelton has to pitch against a Town Council for services and funding.</p> <p>Pelton Fell is unique that it doesn't have a parish council it sits within Chester-le-Street.</p> <p>Pelton Ward is also mainly within the Chester le Street GP primary care network.</p>

Derwent Valley	<p>There were no concerns raised with regards to the villages of Rowley and Castleside being included in the new Local Network D boundary.</p> <p>The AAP Board and Forum did not raise any queries or concerns with respect to the newly proposed LN D boundary.</p>
Durham	<p>Concerns around the big differences in area and population sizes Aycliffe/Sedgefield compared to Crook/Willington/Brandon etc. and the funding allocation across areas.</p>
East Durham	<p>LN boundaries do not align to the Police boundaries and housing partners could potentially be covering 2 areas</p> <p>The creation of two LNs could fragment East Durham and cohesion may be affected.</p> <p>May weaken public and Town & Parish rep recruitment.</p>
East Durham Rural	<p>Communities need to feel connected and Newton Aycliffe and Middridge have nothing in common with Sedgefield. It should be about community, not electoral boundaries.</p>
Great Aycliffe & Middridge	<p>This area is being changed dramatically and there needs to be more clarity on the process for selecting the CDALC rep.</p> <p>Great Aycliffe is a very large town, but the smaller villages around the Sedgefield area will no doubt have very different needs.</p>
Mid Durham	<p>Disagreement with the inclusion of Crook – it is a town. Mid-Durham is a collection of villages, concerns that funding will be more finite (in a bigger area) the needs of a large town in the LN will detract from the needs of the villages.</p>
Spennymoor	<p>Concerns around the size of the LN which includes Spennymoor and areas such as Tudhoe being disadvantaged.</p> <p>Concern around the new electoral boundaries, and in particular how these will impact on West Cornforth going forward.</p>
Stanley	<p>No natural linkages or bus routes between Pelton and Stanley.</p> <p>Pelton communities do not naturally align with those in the LN J (Stanley areas) and residents have more connections and affinity with LN C so it makes more sense to leave Pelton aligned with LN C (Chester-le-Street areas).</p>
Teesdale	<p>Concerns around proposals not providing a more consistent population size and Councillor Representation as it ignores the fact that Weardale and Teesdale have been treated on a differing basis.</p> <p>Concerns that Etherley Parish will be split between two LNs.</p>
Weardale	<p>Concerns around proposals not providing a more consistent population size and Councillor Representation as it ignores the</p>

	<p>fact that Weardale and Teesdale have been treated on a differing basis.</p> <p>Concerns around the rural areas – if looking to achieve an area of greater equity how can we retain an area with 2 councillors such as LN L (Weardale area).</p>
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AAP Board Member's individual comments

In addition to presentations presented at AAP Boards, AAP Board members were invited to submit individual comments via the consultation email address or survey. Two AAP Board members submitted comments/feedback via email and these have been thematically analysed and are presented below.

General comments

- Critical of the case for change
- Not enough detail in proposals

Population

One Board Member noted that aligning the current 3 Towns AAP area into Weardale would meet population figures in a fairer way.

Transport

It was stated that 3 Towns AAP area would be a better fit into the Weardale area LN due to natural linkages e.g. transport.

AAP Forum Members' individual comments

AAP Forum members were invited to submit individual comments via the consultation email address or survey. Three emails were received from AAP Forum members and these have been thematically analysed and are presented below.

General comments

- General acceptance of the principles of the proposed boundaries
- Critical of the information provided for the consultation
- Disagreement that proposals provide a more consistent population size and county councillor representation

Community cohesion

Concerns are stated around loss of community cohesion as there may well be some small, significant communities which have a historic and/or geographically significant connection with a Local Network Area in which they do not fall.

Two forum member stated concerns around the electoral division of Pelton being aligned to LN J (Stanley area) as Pelton has strong links with everyone associated the Chester-le-Street AAP and should therefore be aligned to LN C (Chester-le-Street area).

Partners

Concerns around the implications on partners, in particular the Police if their boundaries do not align with LNs and unstated implications for parish council and local councillors, and community buildings.

AAP Staff (Pre consultation feedback/comments)

AAP staff were provided with an opportunity to view the proposed boundary options for LNs during a pre-consultation exercise in May 2024. This included a presentation to AAP co-ordinators and an email to all staff providing detail and access to the supporting documents. Comments/feedback received at the AAP co-ordinators meeting is summarised below along with comments/feedback received from two individual members of staff and one team.

General comments

- Aligning LN boundaries with electoral divisions seen as a positive.
- Proposal seems to strike a balance between the competing factors.

Population size/Elected member numbers

Concerns around inconsistent population sizes e.g. where there is a suggested LN with over 58,000 people within it, compared to a LN with over 9,000 residents – how does this contribute to the consistent approach?

Should boundaries be re-configured with the smallest LN joining another LN (attached to them), this would then create a more equal population/LN size? And equalise elected member numbers across LNs?

With 9,600 people and two councillors it feels like LN L (Weardale) is being treated differently, possibly preferentially over the other LN areas. Would they be getting a similar level of resources to the other LNs for example or will staffing and funding be proportional to populations and numbers of councillors (with a rural consideration)?

Merge LNs K and L (Teesdale and Weardale areas) to make the population figure fairer. They will still have less population and potentially less councillors than any other LN.

Suggestion to move Trimdon and Wingate electoral division into LN A (Aycliffe and Sedgfield area) to even out population.

Option to add Crook and Willington into LN L (Weardale area). It makes sense to keep the 3 Towns Partnership AAP together and enhance consistency re population sizes etc.

Partners

Open dialogue with those already engaging with AAPs to ensure we take them along the journey and do not lose anyone along the way.

What implications will the new boundaries have on partners and agencies engaging with AAPs – what changes will they need to make to engage with LNs?

Community Cohesion/Affinity

How do we take people with us when the new boundaries do not align with existing community affinity/cohesion?

We place more emphasis on boundaries/geography than many of our communities - they don't care too much about how that's achieved strategically, as long as we take action and it makes a difference to them.

DCC Elected Members

Seven DCC Elected Members submitted formal responses to the consultation. These have been summarised and are presented below.

General comments

- Concerns around the level of information and data provided for the consultation
- Concerns around losing existing community cohesion

Cllr Danny Wood – Pelton division

Concern around Pelton electoral division being aligned in LN J (Stanley area) stating Pelton Fell is the only village in the Chester-le-Street area that does not have a parish council and would be at a significant disadvantage grouped in with areas represented by one large town council. It is stated Chester-le-Street is the town centre, and is where Pelton's transport links and community links are and it is possible to walk from Pelton and Pelton Fell into the centre of Chester-le-Street in about half an hour. To walk to Stanley would take over an hour and a half.

Cllr Paul Pringle – Pelton division

Concern around Pelton electoral division being aligned in LN J (Stanley area) and in agreement with Cllr Danny Wood's comments.

Cllr Eddy Adam – Aycliffe West division

Concern around linking Aycliffe communities to Sedgfield.

Cllr Richard Manchester – Tow Law division

Cllr Olwyn Gunn – Willington & Hunwick division

Cllr Fraser Tinsley – Willington & Hunwick division

Strong opposition to the recommended LN boundaries in particular LN H (mid Durham area) which pays little mind to community cohesion and would seem to massively weaken the ability of residents to engage productively with the council and towns and villages failing to agree priorities– a LN with 58,000 residents and its geographical size cannot be considered local.

Concerns that residents in the 3 Towns AAP area have few links no shared concerns with places such as Lanchester and Bearpark and the Local Government Boundary Commission split Crook, Tow Law and Willington from Lanchester and Burnhope.

The new Crook and Willington electoral divisions should be joined to LN L (Weardale area) to represent closer affinity between towns and villages, greater community cohesion and would align to the local police boundaries.

Cllr Patricia Jopling – Crook division

Noted that Crook has always had a strong affiliation with Weardale and opinion that Crook should be moved into LN L (Weardale area).

Partners

Partners were invited to submit individual comments via the consultation email address or survey. Two partners submitted comments/feedback via email and these are summarised below.

NHS/Health

It is noted that the LN boundaries do not align to the Primary Care Network (PCN) boundaries and concerns noted that there is lack of detail provided as to how the LN boundaries will map to PCN boundaries.

It is suggested that it would make sense to collocate LNs with Integrated Neighbourhood Team boundaries.

County Durham & Darlington Fire & Rescue Service

The Service agrees with the proposed boundaries for the Local Networks A to L and that the more consistent matching of boundaries in population size and county councillor representation will mean that grant funding is more evenly spread across the county. The Service notes it is pleased to see that the uniqueness of the County's rural areas have been recognised for the Teesdale and Weardale Local Networks.

The Service notes the matching to the new electoral divisions as a positive change, better matching to existing information and insights that are collected and used by partners to understand the needs of each area, which should improve partnership working. The Service is currently represented on the 14 Area Action Partnerships (AAPs) and will look to carry this representation forward to the new Local Networks and believes it will be a positive method to connect and engage with local communities to agree local priorities and actions.

Town & Parish Councils/Councillors

A total of six emails from Town & Parish Councils or individual Town & Parish councillors were received within the consultation period. The comments and feedback from these emails have been analysed and are summarised below.

General comments

- Lack of consideration of community links when preparing the boundaries
- Acknowledgement of the need to make savings
- Acknowledgement of the existing relationships some Town & Parish Councils have their local AAP
- Disagreement that proposals promote consistency in LN population size and county councillor representation
- Concerns around funding distribution between communities within LNs

Shildon & Dene Valley electoral division

Support for the inclusion of Shildon & Dene Valley electoral division with LN B (Bishop Auckland area).

Pelton electoral division

It is noted that Ouston's residents, community centres and other organisations, have a Chester-le-Street postal address as well as the majority of the other parish councils in Pelton Division.

Ouston is closer to and has stronger links with Chester-le-Street. Ouston to Chester-le-Street is 2.5 miles and Ouston to Stanley 5.1 miles which is more than double the distance and Ouston's transport links and community links are with Chester-le-Street.

Concerns are stated around small community groups and organisations in the Pelton electoral division could be competing for funding that is allocated to the town of Stanley and Stanley Town Council will not be pleased sharing their funding with Parishes such as Ouston. Ouston Parish Council feel it will have a detrimental effect on their groups with regards funding.

Sacrison & Witton Gilbert electoral division

It was noted that it may be appropriate to move Sacrison & Witton Gilbert electoral division out of LN C (Chester-le-Street area) to reduce the population size and elected member representation, but it was acknowledged that this would further complicate other LNs.

Evenwood electoral division

Concerns around Evenwood electoral division in LN K (Teesdale area). Accepting that LNs should include whole wards, Evenwood is close to West Auckland and Bishop Auckland and has more affinity with them rather than with Barnard Castle and Teesdale.

Sedgefield electoral division

Concerns around Sedgefield electoral division in LN A (Aycliffe and Sedgefield area) with a lack of commonality or natural linkage between Sedgefield and Newton Aycliffe/Middridge and no direct public transport between these areas.

Concern that smaller communities such as Sedgefield being over-ruled and out-voted when decisions are made in LN A.

Ferryhill electoral division

Concern that LN I (Spennymoor area) covers a much larger area than the 4Together AAP and contains the large town of Spennymoor, whereas the current AAP area covers only villages and a small town (Ferryhill).

Concern there is a danger that the LN may become dominated by Spennymoor-based members and organisations, to the detriment of the villages and smaller towns. There is a worry that Cornforth, one of the more deprived parts of the area, will lose out on vital funding because of this.

Residents

One resident submitted via email a formal response to the consultation. This has been summarised and is presented below.

General comments

- Further work needs to be undertaken to identify and highlight the consequences and implications of re-grouping communities with the new LN boundaries to highlight the benefits
- Lack of supporting information and data used to inform the proposals
- Proposed reorganisation must add more value than merely saving money
- Concerns around how budgets are allocated, including budget funding, within a LN, in order to ensure fairness of representation (and reacting to the direct needs of smaller local communities)

Mid Durham AAP

There is not a key driver within this AAP which dictates that boundaries and operational activities should and must change at this time.

Crook

There are concerns for synergy which will not be achieved by including Crook and possibly the whole of Willington and Hunwick within LN H (Mid Durham area). It is noted that consideration should be given to assigning Crook another LN area with which it is more comparable – perhaps to LN L (Weardale area) from LN H.

Lanchester

It is noted that Lanchester is and remains a key rural hub in the Mid Durham AAP area and concern was noted around Lanchester being included within a LN with an increased population size compared to the current AAP population size and the impacts on how resources will be allocated to Lanchester once part of a bigger LN.