



# **COUNTY DURHAM COMMUNITY NETWORK & LOCAL NETWORKS TERMS OF REFERENCE**

**If you need this information summarised in another language or format, please call 03000 260000.**

## Abbreviations

AAP	Area Action Partnership
AGM	Annual General Meeting
CDALC	County Durham Association of Local Councils
CDCN	County Durham Community Network
CDP	County Durham Partnership
CG	Councillors' Grants
DCC	Durham County Council
LN	Local Network
LNAP	Local Network Action Plan
LNf	Local Network Funding

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## Introduction

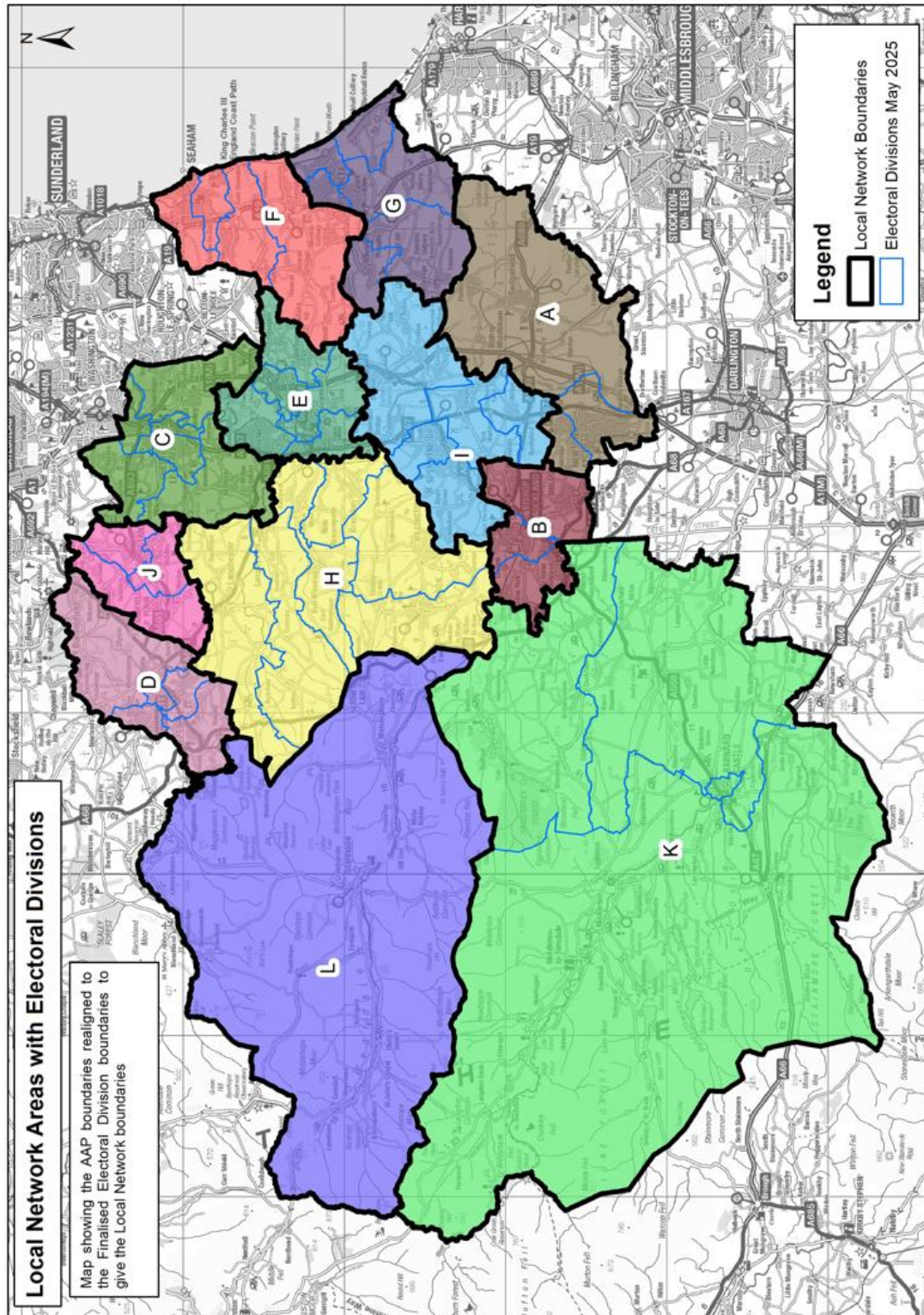
County Durham is a large county with a wide range of communities, settlements, and landscapes. In 2009, as a key component of the original bid for unitary council status, 14 Area Action Partnerships (AAPs) were established to cover County Durham, and to act as Durham County Council's (DCC) main vehicle to engage with the public. Between 2009 and 2025 AAPs helped over 2,600 groups/organisations deliver over 10,000 community-based projects as well as helping new groups with advice and support to become established organisations. AAPs also assisted a range of council services, partners and agencies to carry out a range of consultations.

Following an extensive review and public consultation, AAPs were replaced with 12 new Local Networks (LNs) with an overarching County Durham Community Network (CDCN). The County was split into 12 geographic areas, each with their own LN and serving over 500,000 people across the County. The LNs are defined by the boundaries of County Council electoral divisions that were created following the 2022-23 Local Government Boundary Commission Review.

DCC has agreed these Terms of Reference (ToR) which set the governance, funding criteria and guidelines for the CDCN and LNs to ensure that their operation is efficient, transparent and accountable. The CDCN and LNs can only function effectively if there is trust among those involved and these ToR adopt The Seven Principles of Public Life which outline the ethical standards those working in the public sector are expected to adhere to. They were first set out by Lord Nolan in 1995 in [the first report of the Committee on Standards in Public Life](#) and they are included in the code of conduct for LN Panel members.

## Boundaries

The LNs are defined by the boundaries of County Council electoral divisions that were created following the 2022-23 Local Government Boundary Commission Review. LNs cannot alter their boundaries.



## Vision statement

**The new County Durham Community Network and its 12 Local Networks will help us to strengthen our existing partnership working with agile support for local communities, groups and organisations to help identify and respond to immediate challenges facing our communities.**

Local Networks 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 Local Networks, and attendance to meetings and events are increased.

**We will also focus on building stronger and more resilient communities with a more strategic approach to the work and outcomes of the Local Networks through the development of individual four-year local network action plans.**

Local Network 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 Local Networks, partners and other DCC services.

Local network action plans will be informed by: community views (residents and partners) facilitated by Local Network meetings and locality events; 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.

**With improved transparency, governance and funding arrangements we will remove barriers to participation and increase community involvement in consultation, engagement and delivery of local network action plans.**

Local Networks will improve our focus on community development to enhance the capacity of local communities and individuals to become more involved in improving their area.

## Section 1 - Governance

### Purpose and principles

The CDCN is DCC's overarching mechanism for community engagement and community development and will operate to the following principles:

- mutual trust and respect
- openness and transparency
- effective communication and accountability
- removal of barriers to equality of access and opportunity
- effective performance management
- non-political

The CDCN and the 12 LNs are responsible for:

- facilitating local **engagement and consultation** activities for residents, councillors, community groups and partners to come together in a non-political forum to identify and influence priorities for their local communities, making sure their voice is heard;
- supporting the **development and resilience** of communities through locally agreed four-year Local Network Action Plans (LNAPs), based on robust evidence from local and strategic engagement and consultation, and local data profiles;
- supporting the **delivery** of LNAPs and activities to achieve local priorities and deliver locally agreed improvements; and
- promoting **continuous improvement and collaboration** to ensure services and LNAPs continue to evolve to meet emerging local and strategic needs.



## Functions

Through LNs, the CDCN will provide the following functions:

### Engagement and consultation

- facilitate opportunities for residents, councillors, community groups and partners to be actively involved in their LN through various engagement channels including, but not limited to: regular LN meetings; regular LN area based events; and neighbourhood planning events etc.;
- facilitate opportunities for the council and partner organisations to engage in a meaningful dialogue with their local communities and support debate, ensuring that all voices are heard;
- shape and support local identity and promote community cohesion in order that communities can speak with a clear and strong voice;
- encourage local people to engage with local democratic processes; and
- encourage local people to engage in cross-public sector consultations.

### Development and resilience

- communicate local issues and priorities to public partners, based on an analysis of local data, engagement and consultation;
- work with partners including the County Durham Partnership and its' thematic partnerships to facilitate the development of a LNAP which highlights local needs and ways to address them;
- identify opportunities to link LNAPs to DCC and partner strategic plans and priorities;
- support the involvement of local people in the way local services are planned and delivered and to assist partners to meet their duty to involve people in decisions, policies and services;
- provide advice and support to communities for the resolution of local issues;
- provide advice and support to local groups for the development of their project plans and applications etc. aligned to the delivery of the LNAP;
- provide advice and support to local groups/organisations in the sourcing and application funding from non DCC funding streams; and
- identify opportunities and facilitate links to enthuse/help local groups/organisations connect with other groups/organisations to work together and widen community activities, share learning and best practice and achieve best value for money.

### Delivery

- focus actions to identify local needs and achieve priorities via the LNAP;

- assist DCC services and partners to effectively combine their efforts in a local area to improve local outcomes, narrow gaps between different areas of the County and improve quality of life;
- work with communities to help develop capacity to deliver their own projects;
- administer LN funding aligned to the delivery of the LNAP;
- support county councillors' in their community champion role and administer the process of their Councillor Grants;
- work with DCC and partners to support the delivery of emergency response activities; and
- manage and co-ordinate the delivery of additional funding streams aligned to LNs.

### Continuous improvement and collaboration

- manage LN affairs in a clear and transparent manner and demonstrate accountability;
- facilitate access to quality performance data to enable local residents and communities understand performance as it applies to their area;
- co-ordinate performance monitoring and evaluation of the LNAPs;
- help to inform strategic priorities and identify opportunities for increased collaboration between LNs, County Durham Partnership, partners and other DCC services to contribute to wider community infrastructure; and
- recognise, celebrate and support the role and contribution of individuals and partners in improving their communities and share learning and best practice across the CDCN.

LNAs will not:

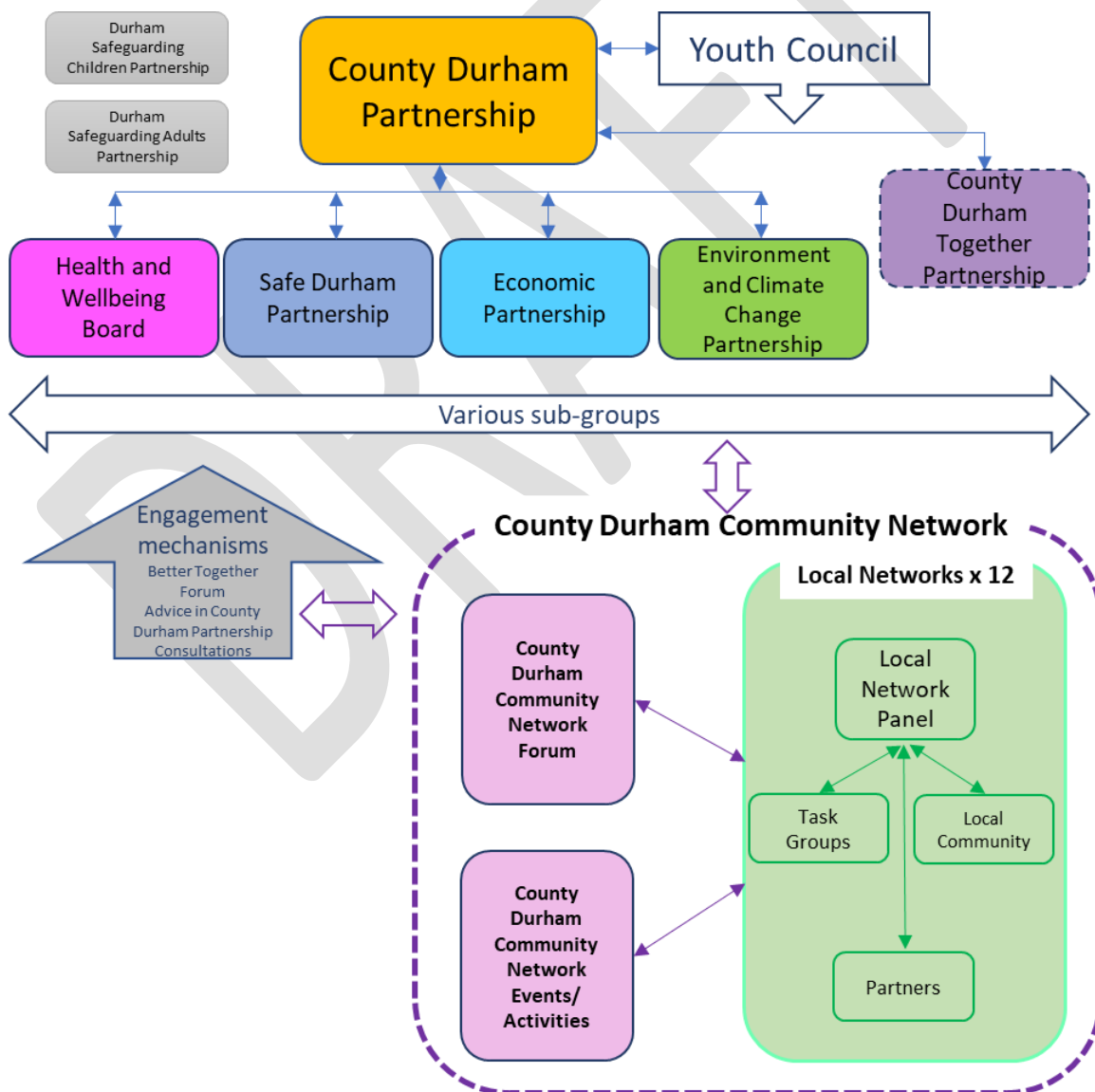
- deliver and fund core council services;
- apply for/be awarded LNF or CGs or be the lead deliverer of projects;
- write or make funding applications on behalf of local groups, county councillors, DCC services or partner organisations etc.
- apply for any licences, permissions or temporary road, path or public right of way closures etc. which may be required for the delivery of a project; and
- design and/or co-ordinate emergency response activities.

## Structure

The County Durham Community Network (CDCN) is the overarching countywide membership group consisting of the 12 Local Networks (LN) and their respective members. Each LN is made up of a Local Network Panel and a Local Network Forum.

The CDCN will work closely with the County Durham Partnership which is made up of key public, private and voluntary sector organisations that work together to drive a common purpose and ambition for the county and improve the quality of life for the people within County Durham. There is a strong track record of working in partnership across County Durham, which is evident throughout the County Durham Partnership.

Diagram 1: The County Durham Partnership



## Membership & Terms of Office

### County Durham Community Network

The County Durham Community Network (CDCN) will provide members with opportunity to learn more about and engage with the wider community engagement and development activities.

The CDCN consists of all Local Network (LN) Panel members, and: residents; community groups; elected members; and partners etc. who live, work, study, or volunteer in County Durham and who have asked to be kept up-to-date with news and developments on the work of LNs.

Additionally, all applicants who apply for and receive Local Network Funding (LNF) or DCC Councillors' Grant (CG) funding will be automatically added to the CDCN (as reflected in the terms and conditions of the grant offer letter, unless recipients choose to opt out).

### Local Network Forums

CDCN members will be grouped into LN specific areas called Local Network Forums (LN Forum) to target and tailor messages around specific areas including the opportunity to attend Panel meetings and events and contribute to the development and review of local action plans.

Members will receive regular communications from their Local Network Coordinators in relation to their respective LN, but will also be part of this wider network of community minded, interested people who will be able to regularly engage with the wider County Council's priorities and decisions via the Online Consultation Portal [\(insert link\)](#) and other engagement opportunities via County Council Services.

LN Forums will perform a number of key functions that support the work of the LN including:

- i. engaging in the development and review of LNAPs via local events, area meetings, online discussions and other appropriate engagement opportunities;
- ii. opportunities to be involved in local task groups and attend LN Panel meetings;
- iii. being encouraged to engage with consultations carried out by DCC and other local and strategic partners. Where appropriate LNs will convene events and activities that support people involvement in consultations; and
- iv. opportunity to be involved in local community development activities.

## Local Network Panel

The Panel will govern and manage the affairs of LNs in ways that are clear and transparent and demonstrate accountability to residents, councillors, partners, DCC and the wider community.

The membership of a LN Panel will be formed by three cohorts:

- seven community members
- seven councillors; and
- seven partner representatives

Panel members must be a minimum of 16 years of age.

### Community members

Community members must live, work, study or volunteer within the LN boundary (work may include unpaid work).

Members of the community wishing to stand as a representative on their LN Panel must complete the Community Member Recruitment and Appointment process.

Community members will be selected to serve a maximum of a four-year term (from the date of their appointment) and cannot hold the position of a LN Community Panel member within 12 months of a previous term.

Community members may only be a Panel member for one LN at any one time.

Community members are not permitted to send a substitute representative if they are unable to attend LN meetings.

Community members are free to be members of political parties or a political grouping, however anyone who holds office in a political party or political grouping cannot take up the position of a community representative Panel member.

Councillors (Durham County Councillors and Town & Parish Councillors) cannot take up the position of a community member on a LN panel.

Former AAP public representatives wishing to become a LN community member in April 2025 would need to re-apply following the new process.

### Councillors

County councillors and Town & Parish councillors may serve a maximum of a four-year term (or for the full duration of the local election cycle if this is longer than four-years). Councillors who are re-elected (or co-opted Town & Parish councillors) will require re-appointment to their respective LN.

Councillors may only be a Panel member for one LN at any one time.

Councillor Panel members are not permitted to send a substitute representative if they are unable to attend LN meetings.

Of the seven places available for councillors, up to six will be made available to Durham County Councillors within the LN boundary and one to a councillor representative from the Town/Parish Council/s within the LN boundary.

If there are fewer than six Durham County Councillors able to take up positions on the LN Panel, the remaining places will be made available to councillor representatives from the respective Town/Parish Council/s.

Where there are more than six Durham County Councillors within the LN boundary, to allow all County Councillors the opportunity to sit on their LN Panel, County Councillors will serve no more than 24 months (two years) before requiring reappointment.

The composition of the councillor cohort will best reflect the political representation of the combined electoral divisions within the LN.

The County Durham Association of Local Councils (CDALC) will inform the LN which Town/Parish Councillor is to sit on each LN Panel. If CDALC declines to nominate a Town/Parish Councillor for a LN, the LN will conduct its own appointment process involving the relevant towns/parishes within the LN.

Where a Town/Parish Council boundary straddles more than one LN boundary, the Town/Parish council may have one councillor sitting on one LN Panel at any one time.

#### [Partner organisations](#)

The partner organisation cohort will consist of a suitable representative from the following organisations:

- County Durham & Darlington Fire & Rescue Service;
- Durham Constabulary;
- Local health organisation;
- Registered social landlord;
- Voluntary and community sector (VCS) representative from a local group/organisation within the LN boundary;
- Local organisations from the business, skills and economy sector e.g. recognised business network/representative from the local business sector, or local educational establishment etc.; and
- Durham County Council (Head of Service representative or senior officer).

Partner organisation Panel members are free to be members of political parties or a political grouping, however anyone who holds office in a political party or political grouping cannot take up the position of a Partner organisation Panel member.

Councillors (Durham County Councillors and Town & Parish Councillors) cannot take up the position of a partner organisation Panel member on a LN panel.

Partner organisation Panel members are expected to send a substitute representative if their main representative is unable to attend LN meetings.

Each LN will also have the ability to co-opt additional partners who offer expertise of local relevance to the work of the Local Network.

#### [Chair and Vice Chair](#)

Each cohort (community members, councillors and partners) will elect a Vice Chair on an annual basis.

The position of LN Chair will be taken by one of the three Vice Chairs and will revolve on an annual basis to allow each cohort Vice Chair the opportunity to sit as LN Chair within the four-year cycle. The position of Chair in year four will be taken by the cohort who held the chair in year one.

Each year the LN Panel will formally elect their LN Chair and Vice Chairs at their first meeting after 1<sup>st</sup> April (i.e. the LN Annual General Meeting).

#### [Cessation of membership for a Local Network Panel member](#)

A Panel member may have their position on a LN Panel terminated if the correct procedures are not followed for the purposes of non-attendance at LN Panel meetings.

If a Panel member fails to attend two consecutive LN Panel meetings, regardless of whether apologies have been received, the Local Network Coordinator will contact them in writing to remind them of their duty to regularly attend Panel meetings and to inform them that one more missed meeting may result in them being removed from their Local Network Panel position.

If a Panel member fails to attend three consecutive LN Panel meetings, regardless of whether apologies have been received, (and no dispensation for leave of absence has been granted) the Local Network Coordinator will contact the panel member and inform them that their continued non-attendance has resulted in them being removed from the Local Network Panel.

### Resignation

A Panel member wishing to resign must submit this intention in writing to the LN Coordinator who will communicate the resignation to the wider Panel.

The LN Coordinator will advertise the vacancy and commence the relevant Panel member appointment process.

### Panel vacancies

Panel members representing partner organisations, must inform their respective organisation as soon as possible to enable the organisation to arrange alternative representation on the LN Panel at the earliest convenience of the organisation and the LN i.e. within the next two LN Panel meetings.

Where a vacancy occurs in the Community members' cohort (e.g. voluntary resignation or where there has been non-attendance at three consecutive Panel meetings and no dispensation for leave of absence has been granted), the Panel will select a new member from the list of reserves compiled from the most recent recruitment and appointment process.

If a reserve list is not available then the LN Coordinator will carry out the Community member recruitment and appointment process.

### Non-voting co-optees

LN's may engage additional stakeholders outside of their existing LN Panel membership for specific pieces of work e.g. advice/guidance, project delivery support etc.

Co-optees would be chosen following the identification and appointment of co-optees guidance and the duration of their term may last up to the end of the LN's four-year plan cycle.

Co-optees are free to be members of political parties or a political grouping, however anyone who holds office in a political party or political grouping cannot take up the position of a Co-optee.

Co-optees are not elected representatives on the Panel and are in attendance to add their expertise and are not permitted to vote on LN Panel decisions.

### Representation to external bodies

Where external bodies request representation from their respective LN, the Panel will determine who should represent the LN on the external body.

Where the LN representative on the external body fails to attend three consecutive meetings of the external body, the Panel will stand down this representative and choose a different Panel member to represent the LN.



### Task groups of the Local Network

The LN Panel may choose to set up small task groups (TG) to support work on discrete tasks which are defined by a fixed beginning and end.

TGs of the LN Panel must appoint a Chair at their first meeting who will be responsible for feeding back progress to the LN Panel.

TGs must adhere to Terms of Reference (outlining remit and roles/responsibilities etc.) which will be presented by the LN Coordinator at the first Task Group meeting.

### Engaging with neighbourhoods and communities of interest

DCC's equality objective 2020-24 aims to:

*“connect our communities and improve levels of tolerance and integration for our diverse communities we will support better partnership work on equality. This work will support a series of events that foster good relations between groups”.*

LNPs will ensure that they engage with and consider the needs and priorities of all neighbourhoods and communities of interest.

Each LN will utilise key DCC and partner engagement mechanisms within each four-year planning cycle and will supplement these with bespoke local engagement opportunities that suit the needs and circumstances of these neighbourhoods and communities e.g. opportunities from: VCS organisations; T&PCs; County Councillors; resident groups; and organisations who represent projected groups etc.

## Roles and responsibilities

### Local Network Panel - Chair and Vice Chairs

The duties of the Local Network (LN) Chair and Vice Chair will include:

- i. undertake training and attend briefing sessions relevant to the role of LN Chair/Vice Chair;
- ii. promote and raise awareness by acting as an ambassador for the LN;
- iii. work closely with the LN Coordinator to ensure that the meeting is able to conduct its business in an orderly and timely fashion;
- iv. ensure all Network Panel attendees adhere to the Terms of Reference, and Code of Conduct;
- v. abide by reasonable standards of behaviour and respecting all attendees and their entitlement to express their views during LN meetings and events;
- vi. ensure Local Networks remain politically neutral and do not become a platform for political debate;
- vii. ensure that decisions taken at the meeting follow the correct voting protocol;
- viii. the Chair of the LN meeting will exercise a 'casting vote' in the event of a tie;
- ix. participate in LN engagement events and activities;
- x. represent the LN at key stakeholder events;
- xi. represent the LN on The County Durham Partnership as set out in the County Durham Partnership's governance arrangements (or arrange for an alternate to attend);
- xii. undertake 'Project Champion' activities to assist in the monitoring and evaluation of LN funded projects and initiatives;
- xiii. work with the LN Coordinator when considering any criticisms or concerns raised about the role or functioning of the LN to determine appropriate and timely resolution;

### Network Panel – Councillors

- i. undertake training and attend briefing sessions relevant to the role of Local Network Panel member;

- ii. promote and raise awareness by acting as an ambassador for the LN;
- iii. represent your electoral division's communities at LN meetings and events;
- iv. attend LN Panel meetings and contribute to the business of the meetings;
- v. adhere to the Terms of Reference, and Code of Conduct;
- vi. inform the Local Network Coordinator of any declarations of interest at the earliest opportunity;
- vii. abide by reasonable standards of behaviour and respect all attendees and their entitlement to express their views during LN meetings and events;
- viii. remain politically neutral during Panel meetings and ensure that Local Networks do not become a platform for political debate;
- ix. ensure that you follow the correct voting protocol when taking part in decision making;
- x. participate in LN engagement events and activities;
- xi. represent the LN at key stakeholder events;
- xii. undertake 'Project Champion' activities to assist in the monitoring and evaluation of LN funded projects and initiatives;

### **Network Panel – Partners members**

- i. undertake training and attend briefing sessions relevant to the role of Local Network Panel member;
- ii. promote and raise awareness by acting as an ambassador for the LN;
- iii. represent your organisation at LN meetings and events;
- iv. attend LN Panel meetings and contribute to the business of the meetings;
- v. adhere to the Terms of Reference, and Code of Conduct;
- vi. arrange for a suitable substitute representative when you are unable to attend a LN meeting or event and advise the LN Chair and LN Coordinator of the substitutes relevant details e.g. name, job title, contact information at your earliest convenience etc. at your earliest convenience;

- vii. inform the Local Network Coordinator of any declarations of interest at the earliest opportunity;
- viii. abide by reasonable standards of behaviour and respecting all attendees and their entitlement to express their views during LN meetings;
- ix. remain politically neutral Panel during meetings and ensure that Local Community Networks do not become a platform for political debate;
- x. ensure that you follow the correct voting protocol when taking part in decision making;
- xi. participate/chair task groups requested by the Panel;
- xii. participate in LN engagement events and activities;
- xiii. represent the LN at key stakeholder events;
- xiv. undertake 'Project Champion' activities to assist in the monitoring and evaluation of LN funded projects and initiatives;

### Network Panel – Community members

- i. promote and raise awareness by acting as an ambassador for the LN;
- ii. represent your local community and its' residents at LN meetings and events;
- iii. attend LN Panel meetings and contribute to the business of the meetings;
- iv. adhere to the Terms of Reference, and Code of Conduct;
- v. inform the Local Network Coordinator of any declarations of interest at the earliest opportunity;
- vi. abide by reasonable standards of behaviour and respect all attendees and their entitlement to express their views during LN meetings and events;
- vii. remain politically neutral during Panel meetings and ensure that Local Community Networks do not become a platform for political debate;
- viii. ensure that you follow the correct voting protocol when taking part in decision making;
- ix. participate/chair task groups requested by the Panel;
- x. participate in LN engagement events and activities;

- xi. represent the LN at key stakeholder events;
- xii. undertake 'Project Champion' activities to assist in the monitoring and evaluation of LN funded projects and initiatives;

## Staff

The LN Panel will be supported by staff employed by DCC who are expected to follow the values and behaviours of the council which ensure that staff do the right things in the right way. In addition to the council's values and behaviours it is important that staff abide by the standards of conduct as detailed within the council's [Code of Conduct for Employees](#).

Staff employed by DCC will provide support in the execution of LN business and decision-making activities but will not chair LN meetings (with the exception of the Annual General Meeting (AGM)) and will not be permitted to take a vote on decisions.

Staff employed by DCC will not complete funding applications on behalf of applicants and will not compose official correspondence on behalf of the LN Panel or panel members. Staff employed by DCC may however provide advice, support, guidance and co-ordination of such activities.

## Code of conduct

The County Durham Community Network and Local Networks (LN) has adopted the following code which takes effect from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2025 and will be reviewed in line with the Terms of Reference.

The Code sets out the conduct that is expected of Local Network Panel (Panel) members and co-opted members when they are acting in that capacity.

## General conduct

Panel members and co-opted members of the Panel are expected to behave in a manner that is consistent with the following principles to achieve best value for residents and maintain public confidence in the Council:

- **Selflessness**; act solely in terms of the public interest and not act in such a way as to gain financial or other material benefits for themselves, their family or friends;
- **Integrity**: not placing themselves under any financial or other obligation to outside individuals or organisations that might seek to influence them in the performance of their official duties;
- **Objectivity**: make choices on merit, in carrying out public business, including when making public appointments, advising on contracts, or recommending individuals for redivisions and benefits;
- **Accountability**: be accountable for their decisions and actions to the public and must submit themselves to whatever scrutiny is appropriate to their office;
- **Openness**: be as open as possible about all the decisions and actions they take, and give reasons for decisions and restrict information only when the wider public interest or the law clearly demands;
- **Honesty**; declare any private interests relating to their public duties and take steps to resolve any conflicts arising in a way that protects the public interest; and
- **Leadership**: promote and support these principles by leadership and example.

Panel members and co-opted members of the LN Panel are expected to act in accordance with the principles above and, in particular:

- i. Champion the needs of residents - the whole community and put the public interest first;
- ii. Not allow other pressures, including the financial interests of themselves or others connected to them, to deter them from pursuing

the interests of the Local Network or the good governance of the Local Network in a proper manner;

- iii. Exercise independent judgement and not compromise their position by placing themselves under obligations to outside individuals or organisations who might seek to influence the way they perform their duties as a Local Network Panel Member/Co-opted Member of the Local Network;
- iv. Listen to the interests of all parties, including relevant advice from statutory and other professional officers, take all relevant information into consideration, remain objective and make decisions on merit;
- v. Be accountable for decisions and cooperate when scrutinised internally and externally, including by local residents;
- vi. Contribute to making the LN's decision-making processes as open and transparent as possible to ensure residents understand the reasoning behind those decisions and are informed when holding the Local Network Panel to account but restricting access to information when the wider public interest or the law requires it;
- vii. Behave in accordance with all legal obligations, alongside any requirements contained within the LN's ToR, including on the use of the LN's resources;
- viii. Value all persons and engage with them in an appropriate manner and one that underpins the mutual respect that is essential to good community engagement and development;
- ix. Always treat people with respect, including the organisations and public they engage with and work alongside.

Respect means politeness and courtesy in behaviour, speech, and in the written word. Debate and having different views are all part of a healthy democracy. Panel members should express, challenge, criticise and disagree with views, ideas, opinions and policies in a robust but civil manner. Panel members must not, however, subject individuals, groups of people or organisations to personal attack.

Panel members should treat members of the public politely and courteously. Rude and offensive behaviour lowers the public's expectations and confidence in Panel members. Panel members equally have a right to expect respectful behaviour from the public. If members of the public are being abusive, intimidatory or threatening, Panel members may stop any conversation or interaction in person or online and report them to the Local Network Coordinator, the relevant social media provider or the police. This also applies to fellow Panel

Members, where appropriate action could then be taken under the Code of Conduct, and DCC employees, where concerns should be raised in line with the local authority's relevant protocols;

- x. Provide leadership through behaving in accordance with these principles when championing the interests of the Local Network with other organisations as well as within this Authority;
  - a. Not disclose information given to them in confidence by anyone or information acquired, which they believe, or ought reasonably to be aware, is of a confidential nature, without express authority and/or unless the law requires it.
  - b. Not to bully or harass any person and you must not intimidate or improperly influence, or attempt to intimidate or improperly influence, any person who is involved in any complaint about any alleged breach of the code of conduct.

Bullying may be characterised as: offensive, intimidating, malicious or insulting behaviour; or an abuse or misuse of power in a way that intends to undermine, humiliate, criticise unfairly or injure someone. Harassment may be characterised as unwanted conduct which has the purpose or effect of violating an individual's dignity or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for an individual.

Bullying and/or harassment may take many forms, it could include but is not limited to age, disability, gender reassignment, race, religion, belief, sex and/or sexual orientation.

- xi. Not to bring the role of Panel member or the County Durham Community Network and Local Networks into disrepute and be aware that the actions and behaviour of a Panel member are subject to greater scrutiny than that of ordinary members of the public;
- xii. To hold the LN and fellow Panel members to account and constructively challenge and express concern about decisions and processes undertaken by the LN whilst continuing to adhere to other aspects of this Code of Conduct.

It is expected that Panel members will at all times comply requests as part of Code of Conduct investigations and any arising outcomes. Panel members will not submit malicious or trivial complaints.

Where it is alleged that a Panel member has failed to act in accordance with the Code, a complaint will be presented to the LN Coordinator for consideration with Head of Economic Development.



## Prevention of corruption and declaration of interests

All LN Panel members need to register their declarable interests – both declarable pecuniary interests, and other personal interests that must be declared and registered.

A LN Panel members' pecuniary interests are their business interests (for example their employment, trade, profession, contracts, or any company with which they are associated) and wider financial interests they might have (for example trust funds, investments, and assets including land and property).

A personal interest becomes a potential conflict of interest if it is one which a member of the public with knowledge of the relevant facts would reasonably regard as so significant that it is likely to prejudice the LN Panel member's judgement on a matter.

All LN Panel members must:

- i. Register and, where appropriate, disclose those disclosable pecuniary interests that they are obliged to declare under the Localism Act and associated regulations; and
- ii. Register any body of which they are a member (or in a position of general control or management) to which they were appointed or nominated by the Council; and
- iii. Register details of their membership of any organisation or body whose rules or requirements of membership could be regarded as suggesting a degree of loyalty to that organisation or body. This could arise by reason of an organisation having an obligation of secrecy about its rules, its membership or conduct and/or a commitment of allegiance or support to that organisation or body. Such organisations or bodies may or may not be charitable concerns and they may also have a local, regional, national or international aspect; and
- iv. Register details of my membership of any trade union within the meaning of Section 1 of the Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992.

All Panel members will be asked to formally submit any declarations of interest at the start of their term as Panel member. All declarations will be recorded on the Local Network Panel Declaration of Interest Register which will be maintained by the LN Coordinator. These registers are maintained to protect public funds and help to prevent fraud and corruption by eliminating potential conflicts of interest.

It is the responsibility of all LN Panel members to keep their declaration of interest entries up-to-date within reasonable timescales by informing the LN Coordinator.

### **Disclosable pecuniary interests entered on the LN register**

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 to the LN register in relation to business items on the agenda.

Where the matter under consideration by the LN Panel directly or indirectly affects the LN Panel member, and a pecuniary interest has been entered onto the LN register:

- i. the LN Panel member with the pecuniary interest 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 where the meeting is held whilst any discussion and/or voting takes place; or
- ii. for online LN Panel meetings, the LN Panel member with the pecuniary interest must terminate their connection to the online meeting and wait for the connection to be restored by LN Coordinator who will call the LN Panel member back into the meeting at the appropriate time.

### **Disclosable pecuniary interests NOT entered on the LN register**

Where the matter under consideration by the LN Panel directly or indirectly affects the LN Panel member, and a pecuniary interest has not been entered onto the LN register, the LN Panel member must disclose the pecuniary interest at the earliest opportunity to the LN Coordinator and at the very latest during the LN Panel meeting and:

- i. the LN Panel member with the pecuniary interest 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 where the meeting is held whilst any discussion and/or voting takes place; or
- ii. for online LN Panel meetings, the LN Panel member with the pecuniary interest must terminate their connection to the online meeting and wait for the connection to be restored by LN Coordinator who will call the LN Panel member back into the meeting at the appropriate time.

If a pecuniary interest is not entered on the LN's register and is not the subject of a pending registration, LN Panel members must notify the LN Coordinator of the interest within 28 days of the date of the disclosure.

LN Panel members with the power to discharge a LN function acting alone will have a disclosable pecuniary interest in any matter to be dealt with or being dealt with by them in the course of discharging that function:

- i. they may not take any steps, or any further steps, in relation to the matter (except for the purpose of enabling the matter to be dealt with otherwise than by them); and
- ii. if the interest is not entered on the LN's register and is not the subject of a pending registration, they must notify the LN Coordinator of the interest within 28 days of becoming aware of the interest.

### Sensitive interests

This applies to a situation where a LN Panel member considers that the disclosure of the details of their interest – including that of their spouse or partner – could lead to them, or a person connected with them, being subject to violence or intimidation.

In such circumstances the LN Panel member should share their concerns with the LN Coordinator. If the LN Coordinator agrees with the LN Panel member, then the details of the interest will not be included in the LNs published register, but the LN register may state that the LN Panel member had registered an interest the details of which had been withheld under Section 32 of the Localism Act 2011.

If the LN Coordinator has accepted that the LN Panel member has a sensitive interest under Section 32 of the Localism Act 2011, they should declare the existence of the interest at any meeting at which they are present but they need not declare the details of the interest.

If circumstances change and the information excluded from the LN register on the grounds of sensitivity is no longer sensitive information, the LN Panel member must notify the LN Coordinator within 28 days.

### Other relevant interests

LN Panel members may have another relevant interest (which is not a disclosable pecuniary interest) in any matter to be considered or being considered at the meeting) where:

- i. a decision in relation to that matter might reasonably be regarded as affecting the well-being or financial standing of them or a member of their family or a person with whom they have a close association, or an organisation or body under paragraph 8 b), 8 c) or 8 d) above, to a greater extent than it would affect the majority of the Council Tax payers, ratepayers or inhabitants of the ward or electoral area for which they have been elected or otherwise of the authority's administrative area; and

- ii. the interest is one that a member of the public with knowledge of the relevant facts would reasonably regard as so significant that it is likely to prejudice their judgement of the public interest.

Where a LN Panel member has an other relevant interest in an item of business, the LN Panel member shall declare it at the earliest opportunity. The LN Panel member may make a representation on the item but will not be permitted to participate in any discussion or vote taken on the matter at the meeting. The LN Panel member must leave the meeting once the representation has been made to avoid influence on those making the decision.

### Gifts and Hospitality

LN Panel members must, within 28 days of receipt, notify the LN Coordinator in writing of any gift, benefit or hospitality with a value in excess of £50 which they have been offered as a LN Panel member from any person or body other than the LN Panel, whether the offer is accepted or declined.

The LN Coordinator will place any notification received on a LN register of gifts and hospitality.

The duty to notify the LN Coordinator does not apply where the gift, benefit or hospitality has been approved by the LN Panel for this purpose.

Where it is alleged that a LN Panel member has failed to act in accordance with this code of practice a complaint will be presented to the Head of Economic Development for consideration.

## Local Network Panel meetings

All Local Network (LN) Panel meetings will be in person. Where a LN Panel meeting may be cancelled due to extenuating circumstances the LN Chair and LN Coordinator may determine that the meeting can be moved to a remote or hybrid meeting.

The LN Panel will meet up to six times during the first year of the four-year planning cycle.

The LN Panel will meet four times per year (years two, three and four in the four-year planning cycle). If necessary, up to two additional LN Panel meetings can be held for additional urgent LN Panel decision making or where LN Panel input is needed for Partner/DCC consultations and where this business cannot be reasonably deferred to the next scheduled LN Panel meeting. LN Panels must not hold more than six meetings per year. The timing of any additional meeting/s will be determined by the Chair and the LN Coordinator.

A minimum of five working days' notice will be given (to LN Panel members, County Durham Community Network members and the public) on the details and business of the meeting.

LN Panel meetings will be held in local venues across the LN area.

LN Panel meeting venues will be determined by the LN Coordinator in consultation with the LN Chair and Vice Chairs.

These LN Panel meetings will follow a standard format including LN Panel standard agenda items and decisions to be taken.

All other LN meetings, events and activities etc. will be determined with agreement from the LN Chair.

## Remote/hybrid meetings

A remote meeting (also known as a virtual meeting) occurs when all attendees are dispersed across different locations and join the meeting via a virtual meeting platform such as Microsoft Teams.

A hybrid meeting involves a mixture of in-person and remote attendees. Remote attendees join the meeting via a virtual meeting platform which is made accessible to the in-person attendees.

A remote or hybrid LN Panel meeting should only be considered in extenuating circumstances where it is more appropriate for the LN Panel meeting to go ahead as scheduled, rather than re-arrange to a different date and time.

Extenuating circumstances may include, but not limited to: severe weather alerts; infection control alerts; unforeseen building safety issues; and access restrictions to the venue due to emergency services type activities.

Where meetings are to take place remotely or hybrid, notice will be given by the LN Coordinator, including details on how to join the meeting and procedures to be followed to ensure LN Panel members with declarations of interest correctly leave/rejoin the LN Panel meeting at the appropriate times.

If the LN Chair and/or the LN Coordinator are made aware that the LN Panel meeting is not accessible to all LN Panel members and the public through remote means, due to any technological or other failure of provision, then the Chair shall adjourn the meeting immediately. If the provision of access through remote means cannot be restored within a reasonable period, then the remaining business will be considered at a time and date fixed by the Chair and LN Coordinator. If a date is not fixed, the remaining business will be considered at the next LN Panel meeting.

### Local Network Panel meeting format

#### Presiding

The LN Chair will preside at any meeting of the LN Panel. In the absence of the LN Chair, the Panel will appoint one of the two Vice Chairs to preside. Where the LN Chair and two Vice Chairs are not present, another LN Panel Member will be chosen by Panel Members present to Chair the meeting.

#### Attendees

County Durham Community Network members, and the public will be invited to attend LN Panel meetings as observers.

Only LN Panel members are eligible to take part in any decision making associated with the LN Panel, but other attendees can at the discretion of the Chair contribute to discussions where deemed appropriate.

#### Non-attendance

If any LN Panel member is unable to attend a Network Panel meeting then they are required to submit their apologies in writing to their LN Coordinator prior to the meeting.

#### Dispensation for non-attendance

Where a Panel member is aware they will be unable to attend future meetings for a specified amount of time, in certain circumstances Panel members may be granted dispensation for leave of absence for an agreed number of meetings and still retain their position on the Panel.

A request for leave of absence must be made on an individual basis and submitted in writing to the LN Coordinator. This request will be discussed with the LN Chair and Vice Chairs (including any options available around a

temporary substitute for the Panel member). The decision will be communicated by the LN Coordinator to the Panel member and where dispensation for leave of absence is granted this will be subsequently communicated to all Panel members.

#### Quorum

No business can be formally agreed at a LN Panel meeting unless there is a quorum of 10 Panel members, which must include either the LN Chair or at least one Vice Chair.

If a quorum is not achieved at the meeting (including where a Panel member has declared an interest and will therefore not be included in the formal agreement of business), the LN Chair and LN Coordinator will agree to either:

- i. defer decisions to the next LN Panel meeting; or
- ii. make an in principle decision at the meeting and seek ratification on the decision from those not in attendance by email, administered by the LN Coordinator within reasonable timescales after the meeting.

Where the LN Chair has declared an interest and will not be included in the formal agreement of business, one of the two Vice Chairs will be asked to chair the meeting for the that specific decision. If no Vice Chairs are present at the meeting quorum cannot be achieved for that specific decision and the above protocol will be followed.

## Local Network Panel decision making

### Voting

Panels will be required to hold a vote for all decisions. Panels will be required to hold a vote with all Panel members present in the room at the time the matter was put.

If a LN Panel member with a declaration of interest is present at a LN Panel meeting they must leave the room where the meeting is held whilst any discussion and/or voting takes place.

The LN Panel Chair will take the vote:

- by a show of hands; or
- by roll call (if meeting is being held remotely).

### Chair's casting vote

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

### Recorded vote

Where a recorded vote is requested and agreed by over half of LN Panel members present at the meeting, the names for and against the matter or abstaining from voting will be taken down in writing and entered into the minutes of the meeting.

### Record of meeting including decisions

After any LN Panel meeting, the LN Coordinator (on behalf of the person presiding the meeting), will produce a record of every decision taken and actions agreed at the meeting as soon as practicable.

The actions and decisions log/minutes will include the date it was made, a statement of the reasons for each decision and any alternative options considered and rejected at the that meeting.

A record of any conflict of interest relating to the matter decided which was declared by any LN Panel member and in respect of any declared conflict of interest a note of dispensation granted by the LN Coordinator will also be included.

### Urgent/Emergency response decisions

In the unlikely event a decision is called for that does not allow time for a LN Panel meeting to be arranged, the LN Coordinator will contact all Panel members by email and facilitate an email vote. This decision will be communicated to the rest of the LN Panel by the LN Coordinator as soon as it is taken and will be reported to the next LN Panel meeting, which will provide



a clear audit trail and public record of the decision having been taken and reasons for decision being taken outside of a LN Panel meeting.

Where an urgent or emergency response decision is needed and time will not permit a full Panel meeting to be arranged or a full Panel email vote, the LN Coordinator will facilitate consultation between the Chair and two Vice Chairs, and the Chair will take the decision after this consultation. This decision will be communicated to the rest of the LN Panel by the LN Coordinator as soon as it is taken and will be reported to the next LN Panel meeting, which will provide a clear audit trail and public record of the decision having been taken and reasons for urgency.

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## Section 2 – Funding Criteria and Guidelines

The County Durham Community Network financial year will commence on 1<sup>st</sup> April in each year and shall end on 31<sup>st</sup> March of the next calendar year.

### Local Network Funding

Each LN will have a Local Network Funding budget (LNF) to allocate to projects which will help deliver the objectives of the LN four-year plan.

The LNF is a devolved allocation of funds to each of the LNs, to support community led initiatives that meet local needs, impact on wider county priorities and encourage community participation in decision making. Its overall purpose is to support the improvement of social, economic and environmental wellbeing, whilst also supporting the effective operation of each LN.

Each LN is required to develop a LNAP that identifies the key priorities to be addressed across their respective areas. These plans are then used to identify and develop projects that meet gaps in existing service provision or result in additionality to existing local services. The LNF is used to support the delivery of these plans.

The amount allocated to LNs will be set annually by DCC and will be aligned to the four-year council election cycle, with year one commencing in 2025/26.

### Councillors' Grants

Councillor Grant (CG) is an allocation of funds to each DCC councillor to support:

- Social, economic and environmental well-being activities that improve the quality of life in communities;
- The funding of larger scale proposals which are identified as priorities within the Local Network Action Plan (LNAP) or meet emerging neighbourhood issues;
- The funding of new and additional community and voluntary projects within their area that meet an identified need and will benefit people;
- DCC councillors in their community champion role; and
- Community participation in decision making.

The amount allocated to CGs will be set on a four-year council election cycle by DCC, with year one commencing in 2025/26.

In the event a DCC councillor is unable to carry out their duties, any projects to be funded via their CG budget, that have been submitted in writing with DCC councillor confirmation of support, will be progressed as normal. Any planned or pipelined projects, where applications have not been submitted but there is written confirmation from the DCC councillor of their desire to fund the project, will also be progressed, where possible.

During a term of office, any CG budget remaining unallocated will be held until either the DCC councillor returns to active duties, or the seat is vacated, in which case the remaining budget will be transferred to the newly elected DCC councillor for that seat.

### **Short term/temporary additional funding streams**

Any funding which is aligned to LNs from 2025/26 onwards, will be administered in accordance with pre-agreed protocols and principals between LNs and the partner/body providing said funding.

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## Complaints

LN Panel members or members of the CDCN wishing to submit a complaint should do so in writing to the respective LN Coordinator who will investigate the matter and determine the next appropriate course of action.

An acknowledgement to a written complaint will be made within five working days from receipt of complaint which will:

- i. outline the procedure to be followed to address the complaint; or
- ii. provide an explanation as to why the complaint will not be dealt with by the LN Panel; or
- iii. provide a full response and where appropriate proposed resolution to the complaint.

If a complaint either concerns the Chair, or you wish to escalate an existing complaint because you believe it was not dealt with appropriately by the LN Coordinator/Panel, you should refer the matter in writing to:

Head of Economic Development  
Regeneration, Economy & Growth  
Durham County Council  
County Hall  
Durham  
DH1 5UL

Email: XXX

The complaint will be investigated according to DCC's corporate complaints policy. Full details can be found on the DCC website at <https://www.durham.gov.uk/complaints>

Complaints against councillors on the LN Panel will be forwarded to the County Council's Monitoring Officer for consideration under the Procedure for Member Code of Conduct Complaints. [Member Code of Conduct Complaints Procedure](#).

If your complaint is concerning the LN Coordinator or any member of the LN staffing team, the matter should be referred in writing to the Head of Economic Development, and the matter will be dealt with appropriate advice from DCC's Human Resources and Internal Audit teams.

A thorough investigation of the issues raised will be conducted. However, where this is progressed through DCC's disciplinary policy details must remain confidential between the council and the staff member and so the council may not always be able to share details of the outcome with the complainant.

Review and alteration to the Terms of Reference and/or Funding Criteria and Guidelines

The Head of Economic Development will monitor and review the operation of the Terms of Reference and Funding Criteria and Guidelines in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Economy & Partnerships to ensure that the aims and principles of the Terms of Reference and Funding Criteria and Guidelines are followed. Amendments to the Terms of Reference and/or Funding Criteria and Guidelines will be approved via the Officer Scheme of Delegation.

The Terms of Reference and Funding Criteria and Guidelines will be fully reviewed and approved by Cabinet in line with the four-year planning cycle.

Any requests to amend the Terms of Reference and/or Funding Criteria and Guidelines should be made in writing to the Head of Economic Development.

Changes to the Terms of Reference and/or Funding Criteria and Guidelines will only be approved after consideration of the proposal by the Head of Economic Development in consultation with Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Economy & Partnerships. Where the Head of Economic Development in consultation with the Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Economy & Partnerships deem a change request to be one that is minor and will not alter the interpretation of the Terms of Reference and/or Funding Criteria and Guidelines, and/or only affects an individual LN, the request to change may be considered under the council's Officer Scheme of Delegation prior to the four-year review.

## **Dissolution**

The CDCN and its 12 LNs can only be dissolved by DCC.