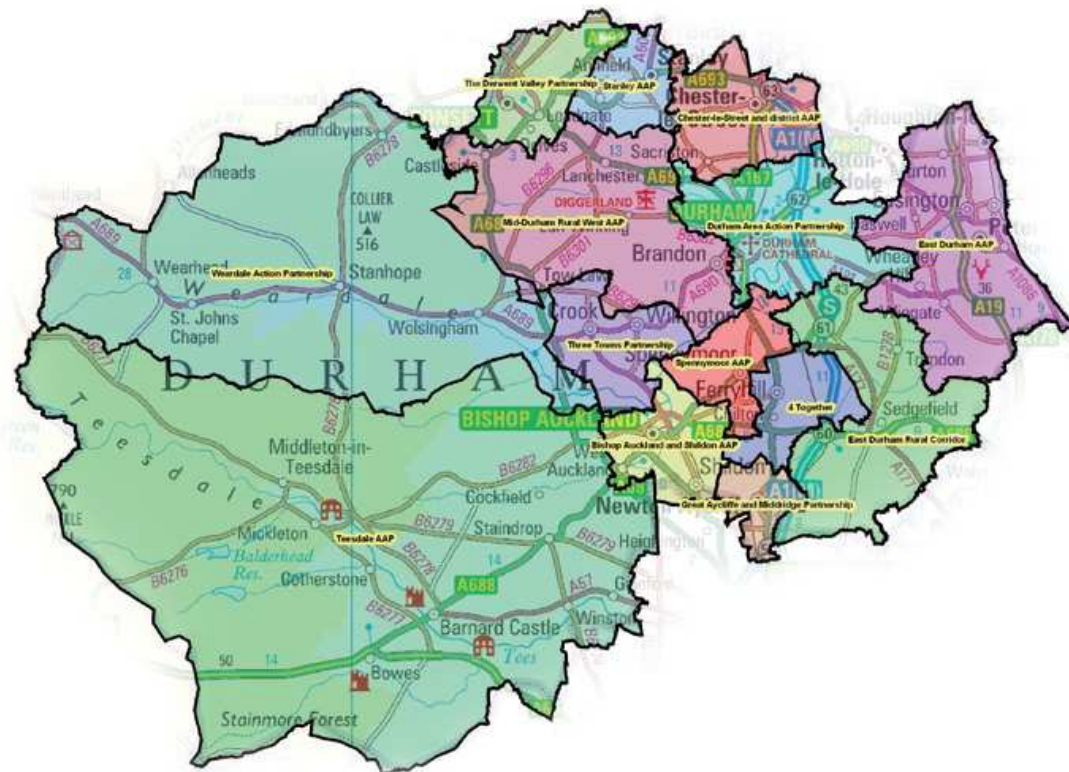




Altogether Better Durham

Overview and Scrutiny Management Board

“Fit for Purpose, Fit for the Future” - A Review of Durham County Council’s Area Action Partnerships – Executive Summary



Report of Scrutiny Working Group

July 2011

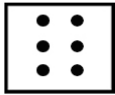


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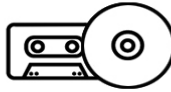
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Foreword

Durham County Council's vision is to build an Altogether Better Durham, which is better for local people and provides better places to live and work. We share this vision with other public, private and voluntary sector partners in the County. We need to make sure that the services of a range of organisations – including the county and town and parish councils, police, fire, health, and voluntary organisations – are directed to meet the needs of local communities.

A key focus of our approach is consulting and engaging effectively with local communities to ensure we are focused on people's needs. The Council's 14 Area Action Partnerships (AAPs) have been set up to give people in County Durham a greater choice and voice in local affairs. The partnerships allow people to have a say on services, and give organisations the chance to speak directly with local communities. They are working with existing community organisations to focus their action and spending on issues important to local communities.

This review of the Area Action Partnerships has examined whether they are "fit for purpose" and, more importantly, in the context of the Government's agenda and public sector funding reductions "fit for the future." We have examined the AAP governance arrangements; the funding and resources allocated to the AAPs, the level of community involvement and engagement with AAPs and associated activity as well as the impact that AAPs have made in the two years since their introduction. We also looked closely at the arrangements that AAPs have and are continuing to develop to make sure that they are delivering against their agreed priorities by way of robust performance management methodology.

AAPs have made immense progress from their inception, indeed the AAPs have been short-listed for a national local government award for the category of Best Community and Neighbourhood Category by the Association for Public Service Excellence. There is more to do and it is essential that the Council, its Partners and local communities continue to support them in striving for an "Altogether Better Durham."



I would like to thank everyone who has participated in the review and particularly those who participated in the 14 AAP Focus Groups and responded to the questionnaire on the Council's website. I would also like to thank my colleagues on the Working Group for their valuable contribution and the evidence, advice and information from all of the officers who have supported the review.

Councillor Joe Armstrong
Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Management
Board and the AAP Review Working Group

1. Key Messages

1.1 The AAP review has highlighted a number of key messages across the agreed Key Lines of Enquiry established for review, including a number of examples of good practice and developmental learning points. Evidence has been received from key officers reporting to the review Working Group and also from the engagement activity carried out which has supported the review.

1.2 These can be summarised as follows:-

- The Governance arrangements established for the AAPs have provided an extremely robust mechanism for ensuring the effective operation of the AAPs through which the Council works with local communities and key partners to make sure those local services meet local needs and that the voice of the community is heard within the service development process.
- The diversity of membership across the AAP Boards coupled with the wider involvement and engagement of some 5000 AAP Forum members has been highlighted across the County as a real strength.
- An extensive training and development induction programme has been delivered across the AAPs to Board members and staff which has included, “Building firm foundations”; decision making as a Board; community works and strategic neighbourhood working; AAP project funding and appraisal and chairing skills.
- Over 900 projects have been delivered across the AAPs up to April 2011. Some £3.7m of Area Budget spend has attracted £5.6m of matched/additional funding and £4.8m Neighbourhood Budget spend has attracted £8.6m of matched/additional funding.
- When examining 2009-11 Area budget (AB) spend against AAP priorities, £1.1m was allocated to Young People’s activities and £850,000 to the Community and Voluntary sector
- When examining 2009-11 Neighbourhood budget (NB) spend against AAP priorities, £1.9m was allocated to young people’s activities and £800,000 to Environment and street cleansing

- In respect of AAP spend and matched funding by County Durham Partnership theme, the largest allocations for both NB and AB were against the “Altogether Better for Children and Young People” priority. These figures were £6.7m for NB and £3.2m for AB.
- The AAP project application, funding and appraisal process has been developed and enhanced and the working group commends the ability of the AAP Co-ordinators, support staff and funding team to achieve this whilst delivering the number and range of projects to date.
- All AAPs have identified the co-ordinator and staff as being the cornerstone to their success with all displaying professionalism, accessibility and knowledge together with a positive work ethic
- The ability of local community and voluntary sector groups to access small grants has enabled them to become sustainable and, in turn enhances the services delivered by these groups in their localities.
- AAP Board meetings have seen average attendances of around 70-80% with additional observers attending AAP Board meetings although this varies across AAPs.
- AAP task and finish groups are an area in which wider public and AAP Forum members consider that they were engaged well. Statistics showed that almost 1000 people have attended task and finish groups across the AAPs and been involved in project development work in this area.
- The level of engagement and involvement with AAPs should also take into account other AAP related events and activity. Examples of this include:-
 - 800+ people engaged in the Stanley AAP Participatory Budget event
 - 2000+ attendances at the Mobile cinema project
 - Over 1400 young people attending Chester Fest and Have your say events
 - The County Council’s MTFP Consultation process which engaged widely across County Durham via the AAPs.

- There has been a significant level of engagement and involvement by local communities including Town and Parish Councils and the voluntary and community sector organisations. A number of non-parished areas e.g. Derwent Valley, Chester-le-Street and Durham City have highlighted a desire to see local councils established to provide an additional method of local engagement and involvement.
- AAPs have received an incredible amount of publicity and press coverage in the local and regional media and this is largely down to the development of a robust Marketing and Communications strategy for AAPs and the close working between AAP staff and the Council's Communications team. AAPs want to build on the success of their project activity to enhance their profile even further.
- The openness and transparency of AAP meetings has been noted as a positive step forward, which may be reflected in the increasing number of people who feel that they are able to influence local decision making. This figure is 40% in the Residents' survey of 2010 against 25% for the 2008 Place Survey.
- AAPs are fit for purpose. They have a pivotal role in understanding the needs of their area, acting upon those needs and influencing service delivery. They will need to develop their strategic role in responding to the Government's agenda on for example Localism and ideas associated with the Big Society.
- AAPs have delivered projects that have addressed both locally agreed AAP priorities and also the strategic priorities in the Sustainable Community Strategy of the County Durham Partnership. There is a clear relationship developing between the AAPs and the CDP and its thematic boards (and sub groups) which AAPs wish to enhance by ensuring that they can influence strategic issues and priorities from the bottom up.
- Examples of good practice in respect of community involvement and engagement include the development of youth forums; the establishment of a local councils group which feeds into the Mid-Durham AAP via its nominated representative; the Council's MTFP consultation process; consultation on the review of indoor facilities; participatory budget events.
- AAPs have also expressed a desire to explore innovative ways of engaging with groups via Facebook, Twitter, text messaging and the Worldwide Web.

- The number and value of projects delivered via the AAPs represents a significant level of investment in the current economic climate and have made a huge impact on the local communities and residents
- AAPs have processes for reporting progress upon projects to AAP boards and this should be shared amongst the wider forum membership.
- Performance and project management information should be reported by project sponsors and deliverers on a quarterly basis to enable AAP Boards to assess progress against targets for agreed projects.
- The development of the Council's Area Action Partnerships has been recognised in a number of arenas:-
 - The Association of Public Sector Excellence (APSE) has short-listed AAPs for a national local government award for the category of Best Community and Neighbourhood.
 - The Government Select Committee examining Localism has described the success of the County Council's Area Action Partnerships in involving thousands of residents in decision-making.
 - In an address to the Local Government Association's Annual Conference 2011, Ed Milliband, M.P. stated that "the partnership between Town Halls and local communities must continue to evolve. Some of you have been leading the way in rethinking this partnership locally for many years. In Durham, Area Action Partnerships have devolved millions of pounds, successfully engaging and involving thousands of local people in deciding how money is spent."
- A number of examples of good practice have been evidenced by AAPs during the course of the review, including:-
 - Durham AAP has a place on their Board for Durham University to enable the City's student population to have a voice within the AAP
 - Mid Durham Rural AAP has introduced a mechanism whereby local parish councils meet regularly to discuss AAP Board issues and feed this information through the local Council representative member of the AAP Board.

- Greater cross-boundary working and sharing of good practice is already being demonstrated amongst the AAP co-ordinator group who, as well as having regular co-ordinator meetings, also meet as “cluster groups” to share experiences and areas of good practice to discuss “what is working well and what is not so good”.
- Huge success has been demonstrated across all AAPs in securing additional matched funding to support the delivery of local community based projects
- £5.4m of matched funding has been secured against Area Budget spend by County Durham Partnership themes with both Weardale and East Durham Rural AAPs securing over £750,000 worth of matched funding.
- £9.7m of matched funding has been secured against Neighbourhood Budget spend by CDP themes, with Durham City AAP securing more than £2.5m and both 3 Towns and East Durham both receiving over £1m
- A participatory budget pilot called “It’s Up 2 U” has been developed by Stanley, 3 Towns and Derwent Valley AAPs to showcase how local community representatives can have a say in spending decisions within their local communities. These events have generated significant local public interest in the AAPs with over 800 people attending the event in Stanley and a further 200 attending an event in Crook
- Good examples of financial reports being presented to Bishop Auckland and Shildon and Great Aycliffe and Middridge AAP Boards
- Chester-le-Street and Stanley AAPs have both enjoyed considerable success in engaging with children and young people with both having established well supported youth forums.
- Strong working relationships have been developed between Spennymoor, Bishop Auckland and Shildon, Stanley and 4 Together AAPs and their respective local Parish/Town Councils
- Examples of good practice adopted by the AAPs in respect of their involvement with Durham County Council consultation exercises, notably in respect of the development of the Medium Term Financial Plan and the County Durham Plan. This involvement has stimulated the engagement of local communities with both the AAP

and, more importantly, the Council's decision making process.

- Weardale and Teesdale AAPs have developed particularly strong relationships with the local media. The Weardale Gazette and Teesdale Mercury frequently carry stories regarding AAP activity and projects delivered in both areas
- The AAP Funding Team have developed a rigorous project appraisal process together with clear information guides which explain both the Area Budget and Neighbourhood Budget process
- The Partnerships and Community Engagement Team have also produced a case study form which is used to recording engagement and neighbourhood work. It has access to a number of tools and good practice to support this at its disposal.

2. Executive Summary

2.1 Introduction

2.1.1 In response to the 2006 Local Government White Paper “Strong and Prosperous Communities” Durham County Council submitted proposals for a new Unitary Council for County Durham. These were approved by Government in July 2007. Elections to the new Unitary Council were held in May 2008 and the Unitary Council came into being on vesting day, 1st April 2009.

2.1.2 The new County Council’s proposal for Unitary status outlined a model for community engagement and local partnership working through the development of Area Action Partnerships. One of the key drivers for the County Council’s decision to establish AAPs was a desire to devolve decision making to communities in line with the 2006 White Paper and to improve the level of consultation. The new Council’s mantra was to be “Devolve where there’s capacity and demand: develop, consult, listen and respond where there’s not.”

2.1.3 Following the May 2008 election, the new County Council consulted stakeholders and members of the public on the AAP model. Accordingly after this consultation and following inaugural AAP Forum meetings, the following 14 AAPs were established:-

- Bishop Auckland and Shildon AAP
- Chester-le-Street AAP
- Derwent Valley AAP
- Durham AAP
- East Durham AAP
- East Durham Rural Corridor AAP
- Four Together AAP
- Great Aycliffe and Middridge AAP
- Mid Durham Rural AAP
- Spennymoor AAP
- Stanley AAP
- Teesdale AAP
- Three Towns AAP
- Weardale AAP

2.1.4 Within the 19 March 2009 Cabinet report which considered the arrangements for the establishment of Area Action Partnerships, there was a requirement for a review of AAPs to be undertaken. Given that they have been operational for over two years, it was therefore considered timely to undertake a systematic process of AAP Review that looked back to consider if they were “fit for purpose”, and to look forward within the context of the Government’s policy agenda to ensure that they are “fit for the future”.

2.1.5 A central aim of the review was to assess AAPs, examining practices and processes to establish:

- the difference that they have made
- areas for further improvement
- the potential for further refinements in light of a changing policy and partner environment.

2.1.6 The Scope of the review was framed within a series of Key Lines of Enquiry (KLOEs) covering:-

- Governance Arrangements
- Resources
- Community Involvement/Engagement
- Impact
- Performance Management

2.1.7 The methodology for the review involved:-

- “Desk top research” including collating and analysing evidence and information from AAP staff, AAP publications and the AAP Webpages.
- A series of Focus Group meetings with key individuals and organisations including:-
 - AAP Chairs
 - AAP Board and Forum Members including public members and Heads of Service within the County Council
 - Town and Parish Councils
 - Key partner organisations
 - Voluntary sector organisations including those who have received funding support from AAPs
 - AAP staff
 - The Public
- Case study evidence was sought, particularly that which demonstrated how AAPs had sought to address their priorities by way of initiatives funded from within their core funding and also Member Neighbourhood budgets. This also sought to assess the success/impact of these initiatives through the analysis of information obtained from the Area and Neighbourhood Budget grant monitoring process.
- Evidence was also sought from the National and Local Press and media to establish how positively or otherwise the work of AAPs was portrayed in the media.

- A questionnaire amongst the wider AAP forum membership was undertaken.
- Letters to Durham County Councillors, all town and parish Councils/meetings the Chairs of the County Durham Partnership and its thematic sub-groups and the Council's key partners were sent inviting comment and input in to the evidence gathering stage of the Review.

2.1.8 A cross party Working Group was established to conduct the review and take evidence. The Working Group has met on 8 occasions to receive evidence based upon its agreed terms of reference, Review scope and Key Lines of Enquiry.

2.1.9 The conclusions and recommendations are based on the KLOEs

Governance

2.1.10 The Working Group considered information regarding the AAP Terms of Reference and in particular the following key areas:-

- Purpose and Principles
- Functions
- Membership and Terms of Office
- Cessation/Vacancies/Co-optees
- Roles and Responsibilities
- Meetings and Standing Orders
- Decision making and Finance
- Task and Finish Groups
- Complaints
- Equalities and Neighbourhoods

2.1.11 Linked to their consideration of the Terms of Reference, the Working Group also examined the work that had been undertaken in respect of the identification, delivery and appraisal of training and development that had been initially agreed for AAP Boards and staff.

2.1.12 The AAP focus sessions also provided feedback in respect of the AAP Governance arrangements

AAP Governance Arrangements

Working Group Conclusions

1. The Working Group considers that the governance arrangements for the Area Action Partnerships have provided a robust mechanism for ensuring the effective operation of the AAPs and that these have been developed to incorporate key learning from the extensive consultation undertaken prior to their

establishment, the views expressed previously by Overview and Scrutiny and also best practice developed by the County Durham Partnership.

2. The Working Group have nevertheless identified a number of areas that should be reviewed in light of comments made during the AAP Review process as well as the experience of the past two years operation of AAPs. These areas are:-
 - The inclusion of AAPs being non-political within the purpose and principles outlined within the AAP Terms of Reference;
 - The list of alternative public representatives drawn up at the initial appointment stage to be revisited as it is over 2 years old;
 - The rules regarding co-option and their application (currently co-optees have to stand down after 6 months but can be co-opted again formally);
 - The rules relating to the rotation of chairmanship of AAP Board amongst the three Board Groups and their application;
 - The rules regarding speaking at AAP Board meetings and their application;
 - Clarification on the roles of the AAP Forum and Board meetings and which issues can be discussed at which meeting;
 - The inclusion of information and guidance regarding “Conflicts of Interest” and the rules for declaring personal/prejudicial interests;
 - The production of robust terms of reference for task and finish groups to ensure that their activity is conducted within appropriate governance arrangements;
 - Where AAPs identify a need to alter their Terms of Reference this should be done in compliance with the County Council’s Local Code of Corporate Governance.
3. A vital element of ensuring that the AAPs were fit for purpose had been the steps taken in identifying training and development needs and designing and delivering training sessions accordingly. The process has also included an in-built mechanism to ensure that training was evaluated and, where necessary, revised to meet identified needs.
4. There has been a significant amount of training and development delivered to AAP Board members, AAP Staff and other service staff which has contributed to the effectiveness of the AAPs. Between the period January 2010 and March 2011, a total of 732 AAP Staff and Board Members attended training sessions, 148 of which have been held.

5. The Working Group have identified the following challenges faced by AAPs in respect of training, including:
 - Ensuring equal participation across all AAPs.
 - Cancellations of training sessions.
 - Meeting the demand for training with reduced trainer resources.
 - Drawing on the skills and knowledge across AAPs of other services.

AAP Focus Group Session Conclusions

1. The diversity of membership and skills brought to the AAP Board and Forum are considered to be real strengths of the AAPs and are a good example of partnership working at a local level.
2. The work of task and finish groups is vital to all AAPs – this is where projects are developed and delivered with a focus on key AAP priorities. This is where AAPs are making an impact.
3. The involvement of Town and Parish Councils is welcomed across all AAPs where they exist, indeed a number of non-parished AAPs would welcome the establishment of a local Council to work alongside them. Some town and parish councils would like to see an increase in local council representation at AAP Board level. This has been supported by CDALC.
4. The involvement of AAPs in Council and partner consultations is welcomed by all, although some clarification has been requested on the role of AAPs. The need to strike a balance between ensuring debate on local issues with the need for AAPs to input into strategic policy and service decision making has also been highlighted. AAPs also want to ensure that they can influence decision making upwards.
5. All Durham County Councillors should engage with their local AAP.
6. The openness and transparency of AAP Board and Forum meetings has been highlighted as a key strength across all AAPs as well as the ability for local people to have their say on local issues and engage with the Council and partners.

Resources

2.1.13 The Working Group has considered information in relation to the resources allocated to the AAPs including funding arrangements and staffing. They have also examined the project appraisal and funding approval processes to ensure that they are robust and provide appropriate assurances and public accountability.

Working Group Conclusions

1. The Working Group note that in respect of Area Budget (AB) spend, £3.7m grant had been committed up to April 2011 with matched funding levered in of £5.6m. 345 projects had been approved during this period.
2. The Working Group note that in respect of Neighbourhood Budget (NB) spend, £4.8m grant had been committed up to April 2011 with matched funding levered in of £8.6m. 493 projects had been approved during this period.
3. The Working Group recognise the key role that the AAP Funding Team plays in supporting all 14 AAP Boards and Staff in developing and delivering projects which impact on agreed AAP priorities. In providing this role, the Working Group have learned that a considerable amount of development and improvement work has been undertaken to constantly enhance the AAP project Funding and Appraisal process. This development work has been undertaken alongside the AB/NB funding and project appraisal work for existing and new projects. The ability of AAP co-ordinators, support staff and the AAP Funding Team to improve such processes whilst, at the same time ensuring that ongoing projects are developed and appraised is to be commended.
4. The Working Group welcome the internal review that has been undertaken in respect of the AAP project funding process and looks forward to all of the key actions identified in the review being implemented, particularly in respect of training and development. (See Section 5.78 of main report for details)
5. During the course of the AAP Scrutiny Review, concerns have been expressed about the ability of AAPs to continue to deliver the number and value of projects in the current financial climate facing the Council and its partners. The Working Group consider it vital that the positive impact made across County Durham by all 14 AAPs and the value added by AAP generated projects continues to be supported by Durham County Council and partners.

6. The Working Group have noted the importance of having a robust system of performance and project management/ monitoring in place which includes the ability to analyse funding data which will allow for a more comprehensive breakdown of project funding, including matched funding. The Working Group welcomes therefore the development of the “System K” software package which will enable this breakdown to be produced.

AAP Focus Group Session Conclusions

1. All AAPs have identified their co-ordinator and staff as being the cornerstone to their success and as being professional, accessible and knowledgeable with a good work ethic.
2. The financial resource allocated to AAPs in respect of their Area and Neighbourhood budgets have enabled a significant number of projects to be delivered to address local priorities across County Durham. The ability of AAPs to lever in additional matched funding at a higher ratio to AB/NB spend has added significant value.
3. A number of AAPs have established small grants schemes that have proved a vital source of income to the smaller community and voluntary groups and in turn enables these groups to provide much needed services, projects and events in their local communities.
4. The project funding process has been a source of frustration amongst Public Board members and some wider Forum members. There is a perception that the checks and balances within the project appraisal and funding approval process are an additional example of Council bureaucracy. However, there is an acknowledgement that financial probity has to be assured when public money is being spent and accountability must also be demonstrated.
5. All AAPs have expressed concern at their ability to continue to deliver projects that impact on and address local priorities in the current climate of public sector funding reductions. To this end, the continued support of AAPs by the County Council, its Partners and those sources of external/matched funding is seen to be vital to the continued success of AAPs.

Community Involvement and Engagement

2.1.14 When considering the level of community involvement and engagement with AAPs, the Working Group has examined:-

- The level of engagement and attendances at AAP Board, Forum and task and finish group meetings as well as other AAP related events.
- Examples of community led projects including projects that have been developed by community representatives and also where projects have actually been delivered by community groups and organisations.
- How AAPs have used Marketing and Communications to enhance community involvement and engagement.

2.1.15 The AAP focus group sessions have also examined the level of community involvement and engagement with AAP activity and also areas where this could be further enhanced.

Community Involvement and Engagement

Working Group Conclusions

1. The Working Group note that the vast majority of AAP Board meetings had seen average attendances of around 70-80%. Observer attendance at AAP Board meetings varies across AAPs from 3 to 32 although the Working Group are aware that there is a variety of reasons to explain this including venue, transport and accessibility, Board agenda content and procedures adopted at meetings.
2. In considering the number of people engaged in the AAP task and finish groups, the Working Group noted that this was an area in which wider Public and AAP Forum members considered that they were engaged well. Statistics showed that almost 1000 people had attended task and finish groups across the AAPs and been involved in project development work in this area.
3. The Working Group also noted that the level of engagement and involvement with AAPs should also take into account other AAP related events and activity. Examples of this include:-
 - 800+ people engaged in the Stanley AAP Participatory Budget event.
 - 2000+ attendances at the Mobile cinema project.
 - Over 1400 young people attending Chester Fest and Have your say events.
 - The County Council's MTFP Consultation process which engaged widely across County Durham via the AAPs.

4. The Working group note that in relation to the total number of 876 AAP Projects, 50% of Area Budget (AB) related projects and 58% Neighbourhood Budget (NB) related projects were Community – led. This demonstrates the benefit that the Task and Finish Groups have had in increasing community engagement in this element of AAP activity.
5. This increase in community involvement and engagement generated through AAP activity also stands the Council in good stead to deliver against the Government’s Localism and Big Society agendas
6. The AAP Marketing and Communications Strategy provides a robust framework and plan of action for communications regarding AAPs including the development of a bespoke Communications Plan for each AAP which reflects local circumstances.
7. There is a named officer within the Council’s Communications team who works with AAP co-ordinators in respect of press releases, media events and articles relating to AAPs for Durham County News.
8. AAP co-ordinators are extremely proactive in ensuring that information regarding AAP activities including Board and Forum meetings, engagement events such as the recent participatory budget sessions and project launches is produced and shared with media both internal and external. There are regular press articles which feature in the press cuttings digest produced by the Communications Team. However, there is an appetite to do even more in order to increase further the level of awareness and engagement with AAPs by local communities.
9. The Working Group have noted the following potential ways in which AAP Press and Media coverage could be enhanced including:-
 - Actively engaging with Town/Parish Councils and utilise their publications to showcase AAP activity.
 - Enhancing relationships between AAP Boards and co-ordinators with local media.
 - Liaising with community groups/residents associations.
 - Including dedicated AAP pages within Durham County News.

AAP Focus Group Session Conclusions

1. All AAPs have been recognised as having genuinely increased the level of community engagement and involvement in their activities and those of the County Council. Particular successes have been referenced in respect of:-
 - The engagement and involvement of children and young people in AAP activity including the development within some AAPs of youth forums;
 - The involvement of Town and Parish Councils at AAP Board, Forum and task and finish group level activity
 - Access to support and advice by local community organisations and groups via the AAP co-ordinator, support staff and the funding team especially in relation to funding advice and sourcing out external funding streams.
 - The County Council's MTFP Consultation process which engaged widely across County Durham via the AAPs and which also importantly enabled officers to feedback to AAPs on how consultation responses and views had informed the MTFP and budget setting process.
 - Participatory budgeting exercises in Stanley and 3 Towns AAPs (800+ and 220+ attendees respectively) with a further event at Derwent Valley AAP.
2. Challenges have been identified in matching the level of involvement and engagement in the current financial climate particularly where funding is adversely affected.
3. All AAPs have expressed a desire to further enhance the level of engagement and involvement in AAP activity via new ways of working using the Internet, Facebook, Twitter and SMS Messaging.

Impact

2.1.16 The Working Group has examined the impact which AAP generated projects have had in delivering against AAP priorities and also how the development of AAPs and delivery of projects have enhanced public awareness of their activity. The Working Group learned that AAPs have also increased the number of people who expressed the view that they can influence local decision making. This figure is 40% in the residents' survey of 2010 against 25% for the 2008 Place Survey.

Working Group Conclusions

1. The fundamental principle behind the establishment of the 14 AAPs was that they should deliver action and not be talking shops. The Working Group have been astounded by the number and diversity of projects that have been developed by the AAPs with over 900 delivered across County Durham.
2. In terms of NB spend against AAP priorities, some £4.8m worth of projects have been delivered up to April 2011 and for AB spend against these same priorities, £3.7m worth of projects delivered.
3. When looking at the spend against County Durham Partnership priorities (including matched funding), a total of £15.2m has been delivered against NB including £9.7m of matched funding. For AB these figures are £9.3m and £5.4m of matched funding.
4. The aforementioned figures are significant investments within County Durham especially given the current economic climate and have made a staggering impact upon the AAPs and their local communities and residents.
5. The Working Group have also noted the success and impact of the AAPs in facilitating changes to both council and partner services at no additional cost during the many debates and discussions at AAP Board and Forum level on local issues that matter to local people. This has in turn enhanced the feeling amongst local communities that they can influence decision making through AAPs, a fact borne out in the survey undertaken amongst the wider AAP Forum membership reported later in this report. This augers well for the future in respect of the AAPs ability and potential to deliver against the Government's Localism agenda.
6. The AAPs have also demonstrated that they have robust project monitoring and performance management processes in place to ensure that delivery of and impact by AAP projects can be monitored, reported and appraised. The AAPs need to get better at publicising, promoting and reporting this impact.
7. The evidence reported to the Working Group in respect of the 2010 Residents Survey has demonstrated that the introduction of the 14 AAPs within County Durham has resulted in a corresponding increase in the percentage of people who feel that they can influence decision making within County Durham.

This figure was 40% in the residents' survey of 2010 against 25% for the 2008 Place Survey.

8. The Working Group have received evidence expressing concerns that delays had been experienced from project appraisal and funding approval to delivery on the ground. Additional concerns were expressed about projects being subsumed into service grouping work schedules and programmes and a subsequent delay in the project benefits/impacts being realised. Greater liaison needs to be undertaken between AAPs and service groupings charged with undertaking these works and assurances given around the project start and finish dates.

AAP Focus Group Sessions – Conclusions

1. Every AAP has identified large numbers of projects that have had a huge beneficial impact on their local communities. The evidence of project delivery that has occurred in such a short period of time from the AAPs' inception has demonstrated the extent of this impact.
2. The AAP Governance arrangements which enabled AAPs to establish task and finish groups have also been recognised within the focus group sessions as having an extremely positive effect on ensuring that projects with impact have been developed and delivered.

Performance Management

2.1.17 The Working Group has considered evidence in relation to:-

- How AAPs reported upon their performance within the County Council and the wider County Durham Partnership, and
- The Role of AAPs within the County Durham Partnership Framework

Working Group Conclusions

1. The Working Group welcome the County Durham Partnership (CDP) Update Reports that are presented to both Cabinet and the CDP. As well as updating on issues being addressed by the County Durham Partnership and the five thematic partnerships, the report highlighted the work of all 14 Area Action Partnerships including projects delivered and how they were engaging with members of the local community.

2. AAPs have well developed processes for reporting progress upon projects to AAP Board meetings but it is unclear how this gets reported to the wider AAP Forum membership.
3. The development of local performance indicators based upon Quality of life measures has been a high priority for AAP co-ordinators and the AAP funding team and is actively being pursued. At a time when the Council's approach to performance management is being reviewed to incorporate the need for performance reporting at a Sub-County level this work is to be welcomed.
4. There are well established relationships between the CDP, its thematic sub groups and the 14 AAPs in respect of AAP Board Chairs attending the CDP and also the membership of key partners on all AAP Boards. It is also evident that the CDP Priorities within the Sustainable Community Strategy have been impacted upon by a wide range of AAP activity. The Working Group have heard that the relationship needs to be enhanced so that the AAP membership can see how they are able to influence the priorities of the CDP and ensure that a balance is struck between Regional/Sub-Regional and Countywide strategic issues and those issues and priorities developed at the more local, community/ neighbourhood level.

AAP Focus Group Sessions – Conclusions

1. Each AAP has recognised and promoted the importance of having a robust system of performance management and project appraisal to determine if and ensure that projects and AAPs are delivering against the locally agreed priorities and also contributing to the wider strategic priorities of the County Council, partners and the Sustainable Community Strategy.
2. AAP Boards and Co-ordinators work very closely with the Funding Team and also Partners to ensure that regular performance reports are tabled at Board meetings. The Working Group feels that this should be expanded into the Wider Forum members and also local communities. It is therefore essential that robust links continue to be made between performance reporting and the AAP Communications Strategy(ies) to ensure that the public and local community are aware of the progress being made against priorities.
3. The Working Group also supports the opportunity to share performance information across AAPs and also recognise the value of using this information to identify and promote potential areas of joint working.

Additional Engagement and Consultations

2.1.18 *Questionnaire to the Wider AAP Forum Membership*

Methodology

- 2.1.19 To better understand how forum members engage with AAPs a questionnaire was developed by the Research and Consultation team for Overview and Scrutiny in conjunction with AAP co-ordinators and the Council's Consultation Officers' Group.
- 2.1.20 A covering letter by post and email was sent out by each AAP to their own forum members with the necessary information to direct them to questionnaire. The email users had a link sent with the covering letter to the online version of the questionnaire and the postal users were directed towards the link via the Overview and Scrutiny website. This was distributed to the 5,242 AAP forum members from all 14 AAPs with the intention of one month's fieldwork. The invitations for this survey were sent in late May, with a closing date of 1 July 2011.

Response

- 2.1.21 The response from Forum members was lower than expected. Despite extending the deadline beyond 1 July to incorporate some forum events just 273 responses were received. This gave a response rate of 5.2%. The AAP with the highest response with 41 responses was the Derwent Valley AAP.

Initial Findings

- 2.1.22 In terms of level of involvement over half of respondents (57%) were involved in community projects with around three out of five (62%) of these receiving help from an AAP and co-ordinators.
- 2.1.23 Forum members were asked why they joined their local AAP. Many respondents said they joined the AAP out of interest for their own area and because they wanted to get more involved in making a difference. When asked what would result in people attending more, the majority of responses indicated that participants were already involved as much as they could, with time issues being the main reason.
- 2.1.24 The ability of local people to influence decisions in their local area was a very important issue to respondents, with almost nine out of ten respondents (86%) stating this. Almost two in three (64%) agreed they, individually, could influence decisions with, whilst around a third (36%) stated they tended to or definitely disagreed.
- 2.1.25 Around three out of five (62%) respondents rated the performance of AAPs in engaging residents and service users as either fairly or very

good. However around a quarter (23%) thought this was either fairly or very poor.

2.1.26 Half of respondents (50%) felt very strongly that AAPs are an important means of involving local residents about issues in the local community and also an important means of consulting local people about policy changes. A similar proportion (49%) also felt very strongly that they do receive feedback about AAP achievements.

2.1.27 The volume of newsletters was about right according to the majority of respondents (55%) about one in seven (14%) thought there was too little. However around one fifth (19%) indicated their area didn't receive newsletters and very few people (1%) said there was too much publicity and awareness raising. About two thirds of respondents (67%) have said they had seen stories in local newspapers about their local AAP.

2.1.28 In terms of overall impact, around two thirds agreed that their local AAP provides an important point of contact for local people to discuss local public services (70%) and local issues (67%).

2.1.29 Additional comments in terms of overall improvement contained a large number of suggestions regarding the need for more publicity of AAPs and what they do, including feedback from such activities. The comments also outlined the need for the forums to be inclusive and accessible to more local people.

2.1.30 A detailed analysis of the results of the AAP Forum member questionnaire is attached to the full report. (Appendix 1)

2.1.31 Town and Parish Council/Meetings Representations

2.1.32 In accordance with the terms of reference for the Overview and Scrutiny Review of Area Action Partnership, a key stakeholder group identified for consultation and engagement was the County Durham Association of Local Councils (CDALC) and the 104 Town and Parish Councils and 22 Parish Meetings within County Durham.

2.1.33 The Chair of the AAP Working Group wrote to CDALC and all Town and Parish Councils/Meetings on 10 April 2011 informing them that Overview and Scrutiny would be undertaking a review of Area Action Partnerships and that their input would be welcomed. A further letter was sent to all parties on 18th May 2011 asking for responses based upon a number of KLOEs. A closing date for responses was given of 30 June 2011.

2.1.34 Responses to the consultation letter have been received from 14 Town/Parish Councils.

2.1.35 There have been mixed responses to the AAPs expressed with 6 local Councils acknowledging the success of their local AAP. 6 Local Councils have, in commenting on their local AAPs, suggested potential ways in which they could be improved. 1 Town Council has merely noted the letter inviting them to contribute to the review whilst 1 Parish Council has called for AAPs to be scrapped altogether.

2.1.36 A table is attached to the full report detailing these responses (Appendix 2).

2.1.37 Responses from other interested parties

2.1.38 Additional representations have been received during the course of the Review from County Councillors, Town/Parish Councillors and members of the public. These are detailed in Appendix 3 of the full report.

2.1.39 Staff Focus Groups

2.1.40 A series of Staff focus groups have been held to gauge the views of AAP Co-ordinators, AAP Support staff and the AAP Funding team. The sessions took the same format as the 14 individual AAP Focus Group sessions and asked staff to detail the Strengths, Challenges and Opportunities facing AAPs and to consider where they sat within the agreed KLOEs for the Review. Feedback from the Staff Focus Group sessions is detailed in Appendix 4 of the full report.

2.1.41 In general, the key issues raised by staff included:-

- there is good partnership working across AAPs, with a good set of skill mix.
- the profile of AAPs within the council across all service groups needs raising which could improve the levels of engagement.
- Successful match funding has been achieved across all AAPs, enabling larger projects to be carried out. The AAPs work collectively to achieve Value for Money. The funding team have dealt with a huge amount of projects and have been reactive and responsive to requests. AAPs deliver in a matter of weeks and the funding team is a key strength behind this.
- Engaging with the community is critical to the success of AAPs, as local knowledge reflects community needs in setting the priorities. AAPs can also assist in carrying out the Big Society/Localism agenda. It was agreed that work with the voluntary sector has improved since the set up of AAPs.

- Most AAPs have a good relationship with Town and Parish Councils. This could be strengthened in some areas.
- Successful projects are being carried out throughout the County by all AAPs in relation to the AAP priorities, including projects for young people, transport, job creation.
- There is a need for robust Performance Management systems to be put in place. With demands on the funding team as project numbers increase there is a need to ensure that project outcomes are monitored and evaluated.

2.1.42 Recommendations

2.1.43 The Working Group recommend that:-

- (i) a review of the AAP Terms of Reference be commenced to cover:
 - The inclusion of AAPs being non-political within the purpose and principles outlined within the AAP terms of reference;
 - The list of alternative public representatives drawn up at the initial appointment stage to be revisited as it is over 2 years old;
 - The rules regarding co-option and their application (currently co-optees have to stand down after 6 months but can be co-opted again formally);
 - The rules relating to the rotation of chairmanship of AAP Board amongst the three Board groups and their application;
 - The rules regarding speaking at AAP Board meetings and their application;
 - Clarification on the roles of the AAP Forum and Board meetings and which issues can be discussed at which meeting;
 - The inclusion of information and guidance regarding “Conflicts of Interest” and the rules for declaring personal/prejudicial interests;
 - The production of robust terms of reference for task and finish groups to ensure that their activity is conducted within appropriate governance arrangements;
 - Where AAPs identify a need to alter their Terms of Reference this should be done in compliance with the County Council’s Local Code of Corporate Governance.
- (ii) routine analysis of training needs and training to meet such development needs for both the board and staff should continue as this will enhance their effectiveness in the AAP;

- (iii) all Durham County Councillors be encouraged to engage with their local AAPs.
- (iv) Cabinet reaffirm the role of AAPs as a key mechanism through which the Council and partners will consult upon service and policy reviews; that service groupings, via the Consultation Officer Group ensure that such consultation is timely, appropriate and consistent across all AAPs.
- (v) where Town and Parish Councils are members of the County Durham Association of Local Councils (CDALC) appointments to AAP Boards should be made via CDALC. However, not all Town and Parish Councils are affiliated to CDALC and where this is the case in a particular AAP area then every effort should be made to ensure that those Town and Parish Councils have an equal opportunity to become involved with their respective AAP;
- (vi) the key actions identified within the internal review of AAP project funding (Section 5.78 of the main report refers) be implemented, particularly in respect of those areas of training and development identified.
- (vii) Cabinet in determining its Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) take into consideration any financial allocation to the AAPs, the value that AAP Area Budget(AB) and Neighbourhood Budget(NB) have brought by way of matched funding opportunities namely, that each £1 of AB funding generates an average of £1.39 matched funding and each £1 of NB funding generates an average of £1.75 matched funding.
- (viii) AAPs look to develop the level of engagement and activity with the press and other media by:
 - Actively engaging with Town and Parish Councils and utilising their publications to evidence and raise awareness of AAP activity
 - Enhancing relationships between AAP Boards and Co-ordinators with local media
 - Liaising with community groups/residents associations
 - Including dedicated AAP pages within Durham County News
 - further enhancing AAP activity via new ways of working using the Internet, Facebook, Twitter and SMS Messaging.
- (ix) that the AAP project funding approval, appraisal process and application forms include a requirement that reports be submitted to AAP Boards on a quarterly basis detailing project progress.

- (x) performance reports for AAP activity be shared with the wider AAP Forum membership and that the AAPs further develop the process of publication and reporting of the delivery of and impact made by AAP projects against local priorities. That the 14 AAPs come together in an annual conference to celebrate their achievements and successes in this respect.
- (xi) AAPs undertake further work in conjunction with the ACE Planning and Performance team to enhance the reporting of performance management information and indicators.
- (xii) the learning and evidence of good practice detailed within this review report be shared by AAP co-ordinators and their respective Chairs across all 14 AAPs and that bespoke improvement plans for each AAP be produced for example engagement with young people, options for broadening representation.
- (xiii) the Council's Equalities and Diversity Team run a seminar with all 14 AAPs to develop an action plan to ensure that equality considerations are embedded in AAP practice and procedures evidencing the good practice that already exists.
- (xiv) an initial response to these recommendations is brought back to the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board within six months; and that Cabinet agree to a review of the AAPs in another 2 years.