



Working towards

**a new era**

for local government

# **Get involved... in County Durham's new council**

## **Public consultation about Area Action Partnerships**



# Foreword from Simon Henig



The reorganisation to one council to provide all local authority services in County Durham, presents us with a major opportunity to move the county and its communities forward.

By 1 April next year, we have to link all of the services provided by the county and district councils together under one council. A key part of this is the development of 'Area Action Partnerships' in areas across the county.

These partnerships will bring local government closer to neighbourhoods and local communities. The partnerships would give people and organisations the chance to work alongside the new unitary council in the development of their local area.

In the original plans for the unitary council that the county council submitted to the Government, we said that we would consult with local people and organisations to come up with firm arrangements for the partnerships once the May '08 elections had taken place.

So over the summer, we are holding a series of consultation events to gauge people's opinions on the proposals for the partnerships.

This document will provide you with some background information on the issues and I would urge you to read it, then go along to one of the events being held in your community. Alternatively, complete and return the form at the end of this document to have your say.

**Councillor Simon Henig,  
Leader of Durham County Council**

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# The unitary council



Currently, the main council services in County Durham are split between the county council and seven district councils.

The Government has decided that the councils will be re-organised so that one unitary or 'all purpose' council provides all of the main council services people receive.

The key features of the change are:

- By 1 April 2009, the county and district councils will be brought together to create one new unitary council for the county.
- The unitary council will provide all of the main local services people currently get from the county and district councils.
- The unitary council will have local offices around the county.
- The number of councillors will be reduced from 375 to 126 and the council will have a cabinet of 10 councillors.

The re-organisation is based on a unitary proposal submitted to the Government by Durham County Council in the spring of 2007 (see [durham.gov.uk/newera](http://durham.gov.uk/newera) for details).

## **Area Action Partnerships consultation**

Part of the proposal that the county council submitted to the Government was around establishing 'Area Action Partnerships' (AAPs).

Over the summer, the county council, district councils and voluntary and community organisations are consulting with people on the AAPs. This is vital as the information local people and organisations provide will help to shape the AAPs and the way they work.

The rest of the information in this document will give you details on the proposals for the AAPs, and will give you an opportunity to have your say on how they are set up.

# What are Area Action Partnerships?



*The main centres and rural areas around which AAPs could be based*

Area Action Partnerships would be an integral part of the unitary council providing a link between the council and local neighbourhoods in the county. They would be local decision-making and consultation partnerships, listening to the views of local communities, and acting on what local people say.

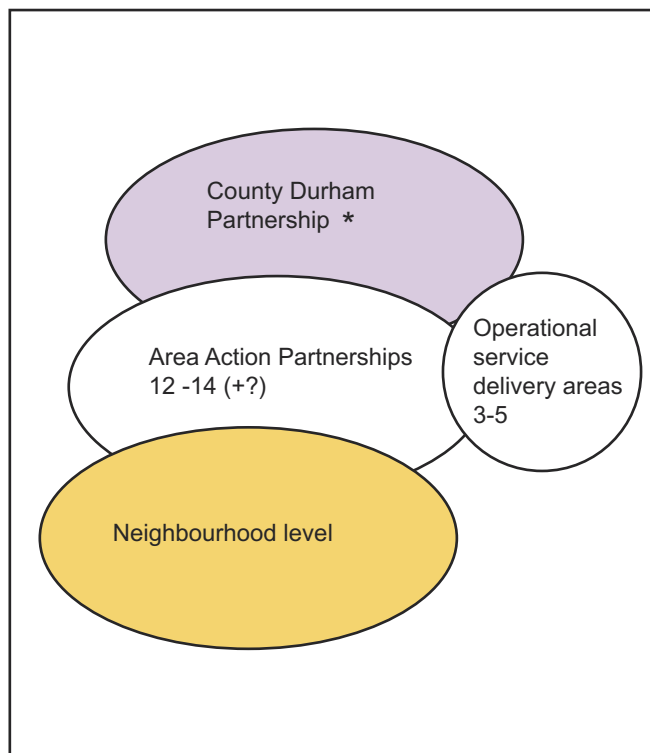
It is proposed that within the new unitary council, local decision-making and consultation would take place around local areas.

The initial proposal is for 12 to 14 areas based on the county's main settlements and rural areas. As part of the consultation, we will be seeking your views on this.

Each of these areas would be represented and supported by an Area Action Partnership, in turn supported by an area co-ordination team of council staff.

**We would like your thoughts on the precise geography of the AAPs.**

We are also exploring the possibility of operational areas for some services to organise themselves. These are mostly about service efficiency, but the diagram (to the right) shows the link between these and the area arrangements.



***Proposed model for how AAPs will work within the unitary council***

\*The County Durham Partnership brings together the main public, private and voluntary sector organisations to help improve the quality of life in the county

# What will Area Action Partnerships do?



## Local Action

Area Action Partnerships (AAPs) will focus on local action. They will be involved with a range of local issues covering: 'Clean and Green' local environmental improvements; planning issues; business support; and possibly others.

### **We'd like your thoughts on the types of issues AAPs should cover.**

The current overall principle for the AAPs is that the council will work flexibly with local communities and partners. This will ensure that communities have influence over the delivery of services locally.

The council will also devolve services to local bodies where there is capacity and desire to do so. Where there is no desire for this, we will develop, consult, listen and respond to local communities on a wide range of issues.

## Strategy

The county council's Cabinet feels that driving economic and social improvement in County Durham needs to be done at a county-wide level. This will help the county work at a regional and national level, and make the most of its links with regional and national organisations.

The AAPs will help the new unitary council to understand and act on the differences within communities in County Durham. This would help narrow the gaps in things like health and quality of life, and would help inform the new council's county-wide strategies.

Please see page seven for the questions that we would like you to answer to help us set up the AAPs.

# Consultation process

The consultation process for the Area Action Partnerships started in July 2008. Council officers and staff from voluntary organisations are attending meetings of community organisations and are running workshop events and community exhibitions at locations across County Durham.

We are running 17 workshop consultation events across the county to present the issues to local people and allow you to have a say on the AAPs. You need to book a place at the event you want to attend.

We are also running community exhibitions at venues across the county. You can drop into the exhibitions at any time and there will be council and voluntary organisation officers on hand to answer your questions and listen to your views.

## Times and dates

The venues, times and dates for each of the consultation events are available on the internet at [durham.gov.uk/newera](http://durham.gov.uk/newera). If you do not have access to a computer, please contact Craig Morgan on 0191 3708748 for details of the events near you.

## Can't make it to the events?

If you're not able to come along to any of the events, please complete and return the form on pages seven and eight of this document.

## Next steps

The consultation closes on 4 September. The responses will be collated and used to inform councillors' decisions on how the AAPs will be set up. We will be giving feedback about the findings of the consultation.



If you would like more information on the AAPs or the unitary council in County Durham, visit:

- [www.durham.gov.uk/newera](http://www.durham.gov.uk/newera)
- [www.communities.gov.uk/corporate](http://www.communities.gov.uk/corporate)
- [www.electoralcommission.org.uk](http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk)


For details on the consultation arrangements, call Craig Morgan on 0191 3708748.

The consultation closes on 4 September.

Please send your completed response forms to:

Durham County Council  
Corporate Communications  
Freepost NEA 10933  
Durham  
DH1 5BR

If you need this information in another format such as Braille, large print, CD or talking tape, please call the number below.

 (0191) 383 3168

# Response form

Name..... Telephone.....  
Organisation (if applicable)..... Email.....  
.....  
Address..... Signed.....  
.....  
..... Date.....

Please tick this box if you would prefer your responses not to be made public

**Questions for you to answer:**

- 1. What would be the most important activities for Area Action Partnerships to be involved with?  
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- 2. How many partnerships do we need? Is 12 to 14 the right number? (see page 4)  
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- 3. Which areas should the partnerships serve? (see page 4)  
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- 4. How should the partnerships keep in touch with local people?  
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.....
  
- 5. How can the partnerships best involve local people and groups?  
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.....
  
- 6. Are there any other issues you would like to raise?  
.....  
.....

*Please continue on another sheet if you don't have enough space.*

As an equal opportunities Council we want to ensure that we hold fully inclusive consultations – to help us ensure that we do so, we would be grateful if you would complete this short questionnaire. Your answers to 1 to 3 will be treated with the utmost confidence and will be used only for statistical purposes – thank you.

**1. What is your ethnic group?** - Choose one section from (a) to (e) then tick the appropriate box in column (2) and also (3) if applicable.

Column (1)	Column (2)	✓	Column (3)	✓
a) White	British		Welsh	
	Irish		English	
	Any other White background		Scottish	
b) Mixed	White & Black Caribbean			
	White & Black African			
	White & Asian			
	Any other mixed background			
c) Asian or Asian British	Indian			
	Pakistani			
	Bangladeshi			
	Any other Asian background			
d) Black or Black British	Caribbean			
	African			
	Any other Black background			
e) Chinese or Other Ethnic group	Chinese			
	Any other			
f) Traveller/Gypsy	Traveller			
	Gypsy/Roma			

<b>2. Gender</b>	Female		Male	
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**3. Disability** - Do you consider yourself to be a person with a disability as described by the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 i.e. Do you consider yourself to be someone who has a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long term adverse effect on your ability to carry out normal day to day activities?

Yes  No