



Area Action Partnership Ways of Working

Function, Governance and Budgets

Consultation Document – December 2008

Background

During the summer, we held almost 100 events, meetings and exhibitions giving local people and organisations the chance to share their views on our proposals for Area Action Partnerships (AAPs) in County Durham.

Informed by the results of the consultation, Durham County Council elected members approved a 'Blueprint' for the new unitary council. This included information about the focal points for County Durham's 14 AAPs, and information on the way the AAPs will be governed.

We are now working on the details of the proposed role and function of AAPs and the model for AAP's decision-making and budgets. The information in this document will tell you about our proposals. It is important to stress that this model is likely to change on account of the comments received from stakeholders, so we are very keen to receive your views.

Please read through this information and send us your comments on the enclosed question sheet. This will help County Councillors make decisions on a further-developed model for AAPs in the New Year.

Proposed functions of AAPs

Area Action Partnerships will be a key way of **listening and working with local people in partnership** with other organisations. They will ensure action is taken to deliver **quality, cost effective services** to meet local needs.

The **proposed** functions of AAPs are based around four themes:-

1. Working with communities

AAPs will enable the unitary council and partner organisations (for example, Police / Fire/ National Health Service / Voluntary and Community Sector) to communicate and work with people in local communities. They will help:

- To build and shape local identity so that communities can speak with a clear, strong voice
- To bring communities together and support debate, ensuring that all voices are heard
- To encourage local people to work with the Council and its partners to help shape their communities
- To recognise, celebrate and support the role of individuals and volunteers
- To streamline the number of public sector consultations with local people.

2. People power

AAPs will take the views of local people and clearly communicate issues and priorities to public sector partners. This will be based on analysis of local

information and opinions and will help to develop a shared vision for each area. It's proposed that the AAPs will:

- Involve local people in the way local services are planned and delivered, and help service providers to involve people in decisions, policies and services that affect or interest them
- Assist partners to effectively combine their efforts in a local area to improve local services, and narrow gaps between different areas of the county and improve quality of life.

3. Local action

The AAP will provide a means to:

- Resolve local issues through:
 - Direct action through using its own development funding or prompting voluntary community action
 - By talking with county council departments and county councillors to use their delegated budgets on certain projects
 - Negotiation with the council's partners
- Develop an 'Annual Action Plan' for an area to target the key issues that the AAP wants to resolve for the area
- Help the local authority to establish the required 'participatory budget' before the national target date of 2012. (Participatory budgeting is a process which allows communities to directly decide how proportions of the council budget are spent).

4. Reviewing performance

As well as taking action, the AAPs will improve access to quality performance information to help local people understand the performance of the services in their area. This will help:

- Review the impact of the County Durham Partnership in achieving its outcomes
- Frontline councillors to fulfil their scrutiny role and help them to exercise their 'Councillor Call for Action' powers
- Contribute to the Comprehensive Area Assessment (Audit Commission Inspection) process for County Durham.

We understand that all communities are different, which is why they may need different solutions to tackle the issues they face. That's why we will be encouraging a variety of approaches within common principles for AAPs.

Principles for AAPs

The overall principles for AAPs as set out in our Blueprint are:

- **People power** - Communities have the power to make decisions about their own area to address and improve local issues and priorities

- **Integration** - There is a strong and clear connection between local areas and the corporate and service decision-making processes of organisations that provide services to those areas. This will help local needs and wishes to be understood, articulated and central to county-wide decisions
- **Flexibility** - The same solutions to locality working, participation and engagement will not work with all communities of geography, identity or interest. A variety of approaches will be encouraged within a common framework for AAPs
- **Including everyone** – The AAPs will reach out to ensure that everyone who wants to get involved, can get involved
- **Community leadership** - Elected county councillors will be supported to play their key community leadership role in local areas
- **Accountability and transparency** - Communities will be able to see how their participation has made a difference, or they will be able to have an adequate explanation as to why a particular issue has not been dealt with
- **Support** – People are encouraged and supported to take an active part in the life of the community. The council will provide resources to support people and organisations to do this.
- **Delegated decision-making** – Decision-making should be devolved to the most local level which is safe, practical and cost effective.

Structure

We anticipate that each AAP will reflect the interests of the communities it serves, and will allow people with an active interest in their area to participate.

To strike a balance between including all interested parties and having effective local decision-making, we propose a dual structure for each AAP:

An Area Forum: A meeting to allow as many people as possible to participate twice a year on issues such as:

- Defining local priorities
- Agreeing an annual Area Action Plan
- Discussions with partner organisations around their key decisions and strategic plans for the year
- Reviewing the AAP's progress against Local Area Agreement targets
- Innovative approaches to community-led decision-making and working.

An Area Board: A monthly meeting to consider:

- How the AAP is progressing in delivering local improvements against the Area Action Plan
- Solving local problems

- Discussions with partner organisations (service-focussed representatives) around service issues and performance
- Manage and monitor AAP budgets
- Talking with county councillors to make sure the Area Action Plan and councillors' neighbourhood budgets are working together effectively
- Regular updates about performance and progress against Local Area Agreement targets
- Feedback on issues raised with the County Durham Partnership or to partner organisations.

Membership

We anticipate that the Area Forum would be open to everyone and in a workshop format rather than a formal decision-making committee.

We would need a more formal approach to the Area Board's arrangements, and the Board model must eliminate the potential for a single partner or sector to dominate membership. As a starting point for discussion, it is proposed that the Board's membership would be made up of 'thirds' outlined below:

- One third elected members
- One third members of the public
- One third representatives of partner organisations

We anticipate that that the size of membership would be limited, with each of the above 'thirds' nominating seven representatives, limiting the Board to 21 members. The Board may however co-opt individuals from outside of the full membership for specific 'task and finish' groups,

Boards will periodically review their membership.

Decision-making and representation

We anticipate that each Area Board will have a chairperson and two vice-chairs to reflect each of the 'thirds'. The membership of the Area Board would elect these time-limited roles.

Debate, shared understanding and consensus would be the main ways of making decisions, but if necessary, there would be one vote per individual with the chairperson having the casting vote.

If a member of the Board moves to a different employer, relocates, or loses their honorary position or paid post, their membership of the Board will cease. The vacancy will be referred back to the nominating organisation/sector.

The Board may terminate the membership of an individual or organisation acting by two-third majority of the members present and voting at a meeting of the AAP.

The AAP may resolve to remove any member of the Partnership who fails to attend (or send a substitute) for three consecutive meetings. In this case, the nominating organisation/sector shall be asked to appoint a new member. Members of the AAP unable to attend a meeting, may nominate a named substitute for up to three consecutive meetings.

Budgets

There will be two types of budgets in localities; Members' budgets and Area budgets.

Member Budgets: -

- It was envisaged in the unitary bid that each division would have an allocation of up to £50,000 (final amount will be subject to decision within the ongoing budget process)
- We would welcome stakeholders' views on the principle that members demonstrate community involvement in making investments against member budgets through discussion with the Area Action Partnership Board.

Area Budgets: -

- It was envisaged in the unitary bid that each 'area' (as defined by Area Action Partnership boundary) would have a budget of £250,000 of which £100,000 is to cover staffing costs and £150,000 is for local initiatives (final amount will be subject to decision within the ongoing budget process) .
- Decisions on expenditure from Area budgets would be made through the Area Action Partnership, and thereby demonstrate community involvement.

Next steps

A report will be presented to the county council's Cabinet on 22 January 2009 seeking agreement to the final geography, function, membership, governance arrangements and budgets for the 14 AAPs.

We are speaking to our partners at 12 local meetings to finalise views around preferred geographical boundaries, in areas where no consensus could be reached during the Summer consultation

A series of meetings are also being held with District Local Strategic Partnerships, key interested groups and the County Durham Partnership and the public to gather their views on function, membership, governance and budgets of the AAPs.

Your views on the information in this document will add to the information we gain at these meetings to propose a clear governance, membership and funding model for partner debate and influence.

