
FIT FOR 2024 – REVIEW OF AREA PARTNERSHIPS AND THE COMMUNITY FUND

Report by Service Director Customer & Communities

SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL

26 June 2019

1 PURPOSE AND SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report proposes the approach and methodology to be followed in undertaking the review, including public consultation, of the future governance arrangements for Area Partnerships, including the allocation and disbursement of the Community Fund.**
- 1.2 At the Council meeting on 28 March 2019, Members agreed the interim allocation and governance arrangements for the Community Fund at Area Partnerships along with a review with public consultation on the future governance arrangements for Area Partnerships, including the allocation and disbursement of the Community Fund.
- 1.3 Over the last few years there have been a number of important developments, nationally and locally, which have a critical bearing on issues of governance and community inclusion & empowerment. While these developments impact on the Council's work at the moment, there is a lack of certainty over the final implications both in terms of future legislation and wider governance arrangements which may come to fruition. However, it is not possible to wait for final outcomes but to progress those areas within the Council's remit - the Review of Area Partnerships and the Community Fund - while ensuring that any conclusions embody sufficient flexibility to allow arrangements to respond to this developing context.
- 1.4 It is proposed to carry out a consultation exploring how individuals, groups and communities can be more involved in Area Partnerships and decision making. It is further proposed that the Area Partnership Review encompasses the interim changes to grant funding and the future of the Community Fund. The consultation will seek to gather views regarding local decision making, including what the arrangements could look like in each locality (governance arrangements may vary in each area in order to best suit local circumstances), and the new Community Fund.
- 1.5 In order to ensure a full and robust response the consultation will be public, open to all members of our communities, and will include targeted engagement. To ensure that the review is completely impartial, clear and transparent, an external agency will be commissioned to undertake the

consultation work on behalf of Scottish Borders Council. It is envisaged that the consultation will take place during the summer/autumn with the results and any recommendations being incorporated into forthcoming budget discussions and reported back to Council before the end of 2019.

- 1.6 It is proposed that a "fast track" application process is brought in for the Community Fund for amounts of less than £1500, with a simplified application form. This will be assessed by officers in the usual way and an officer recommendation made. Further, delegated authority is sought for the Service Director Customer & Communities to decide such applications – in consultation with local Members – where the application cannot wait for the next Area Partnership meeting. Applications for amounts over £1500 will require to use the normal application route and decisions can only be made on these at Area Partnership meetings.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 I recommend that the Council agrees:

- (a) the scope, approach and timeline to the Area Partnership Review consultation, including the future allocation and governance of the Community Fund, as detailed in Section 5 of this report;**
- (b) that an external company is appointed to undertake the consultation work on behalf of the Council;**
- (c) that the consultation results, and arising recommendations, are presented at the December 2019 meeting of Scottish Borders Council; and**
- (d) that the following "fast track" application process is brought in for the Community Fund for 2019/20:**
 - (i) for amounts up to £1500;**
 - (ii) the application form being completed by a community group or by an Elected Member on behalf of a community group and an officer assessment/recommendation made;**
 - (iii) delegated authority is given to the Service Director Customer & Communities to decide on "fast track" applications – in consultation with local Members – where the application cannot wait for the next suitable Area Partnership meeting; and**
- (e) applications for amounts greater than £1500 to the Community Fund will require to use the normal application route and decisions can only be made on these at Area Partnership meetings.**

3 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 At the Council meeting on 28 March 2019, Members agreed the interim allocation and governance arrangements for the Community Fund at Area Partnerships. There was to be no change to the membership of Area Partnerships meantime, but a review with public consultation was agreed to include all stakeholders (Elected Members, Community Councils, community organisations, Community Planning Partners and other interested partners) on the future governance arrangements for Area Partnerships, including the allocation and disbursement of the Community Fund.
- 3.2 Over the last few years there have been a number of important developments, nationally and locally, which have a critical bearing on issues of governance and community inclusion & empowerment. The Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 aims to improve outcomes for communities by improving the process of community planning, ensuring that local service providers work together even more closely with communities to meet the needs of the people who use them.
- 3.3 In December 2017, the Scottish Government and COSLA jointly launched the Local Governance Review with the express aim of reviewing “how powers, responsibilities and resources are shared across national and local spheres of government and with communities in the context of significant change to the governance of Scotland over the last two decades, and in recognition that outcomes for citizens and communities are best when decisions are taken at the right level of place.”
- 3.4 Since 2014 the Scottish Government has invested in a range of measures to support the introduction and development of participatory budgeting (PB) in Scotland. In 2015, the Community Choices Fund was introduced as a means of direct financial support and match funding to local authorities and community organisations to support local activity and services. CoSLA Leaders’ agreed in October 2017 to the PB framework and specifically, that 1% of council budgets should be devoted to PB by 2021.
- 3.5 On 28 February 2019, Council agreed Fit for 2024, a new Transformation Programme for the organisation. Characterised as the ‘next generation’ of transformation, the programme aims to fundamentally reshape the Council, from its engagement with citizens and communities to the way it goes about its business. The aim is to deliver a Council that is adaptable, efficient and effective and capable of not only meeting the challenges ahead, but of fully optimising outcomes for the citizens and communities for which it is responsible. The formation of the Community Fund is one of the first of a series of practical measures to emerge from Fit for 2024.
- 3.6 While the above mentioned developments impact on the Council’s work at the moment, there is a lack of certainty over the final implications both in terms of future legislation and wider governance arrangements which may come to fruition. However, it is not possible to wait for final outcomes but to progress those areas within the Council’s remit - the Review of Area Partnerships and the Community Fund - while ensuring that any conclusions embody sufficient flexibility to allow arrangements to respond to this developing context.

4 INTERIM REVIEW OF AREA PARTNERSHIPS

- 4.1 In November 2017, the Council agreed to replace its existing structure of locally devolved forums, known as Locality Committees, from 1 January 2018 with Area Partnerships. The style and content of meetings was changed to a more informal discussion setting. It was also agreed at that time to review Area Partnerships after 18 months of operation.
- 4.2 A small interim review of how Area Partnerships were working was carried out with Community Councils in summer 2018. Responses were received from 18 Community Councils (out of a possible 68), with mixed reviews. Of those that had attended Area Partnerships, 15% said they did not feel involved as nothing was happening with no outcomes; set agendas were not relevant; and there was little opportunity to engage on matters such as policing, housing and road safety. 50% of Community Councils responded to say they did feel involved in the round table discussions, which provided a good opportunity to contribute; meetings were less stuffy; there was an opportunity to network and an emphasis on Councillors/Partners/Officers listening.
- 4.3 Over the last year following that interim review, meetings of Area Partnerships have concentrated on the four themes in the Scottish Borders Community Plan (Our economy, skills and learning; Our health, care and wellbeing; Our quality of life; and Our place) to allow the development of the Locality Plans.

5 SCOPE OF PROPOSED REVIEW AND CONSULTATION APPROACH

- 5.1 To support the Council's duty under the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015, it is proposed to carry out a consultation exploring how individuals, groups and communities can be more involved in Area Partnerships and decision making. It is proposed that the Area Partnership Review encompasses the changes to grant funding in order to better understand any possible impact on groups previously in receipt of funding from the previous individual funding streams.
- 5.2 The consultation will seek to gather views regarding local decision making, including what the arrangements could look like in each locality (governance arrangements may vary in each area in order to best suit local circumstances), and the new Community Fund namely:
- a. Membership of Area Partnerships and decision making/voting rights/agenda setting within the partnerships;
 - b. Role of communities within the Community Planning Partnership;
 - c. Role of communities and other partners to deliver actions and meet priorities identified in each area's Locality Plan;
 - d. Training required to develop skills/competencies required to support changes and enable effective community level governance;
 - e. Support required to enable the shift to community level governance;
 - f. General decision making process;
 - g. Impact of the combining of funding streams to form the Community Fund;

- h. Decision making arrangements and allocation of the Community Fund; and
 - i. Community Fund criteria, including support grants for groups in need and decision making arrangements for decisions required between scheduled meetings.
- 5.3 In order to ensure a full and robust response the consultation will be public, open to all members of our communities, and will include targeted engagement with:
- a. SBC Elected Members
 - b. All active Community Councils (68),
 - c. Third Sector Interface and other third sector groups,
 - d. Federations of Village Halls,
 - e. Local festival committees,
 - f. Previous grant recipients,
 - g. Scottish Borders Community Planning Partners, and
 - h. All those, groups and individuals, who have attended at least one Area Partnership meeting (and supplied their contact details).
- 5.4 To ensure that the review is completely impartial, clear and transparent, an external agency will be commissioned to undertake the consultation work on behalf of Scottish Borders Council. They will bring a wealth of experience and expertise on this subject which will enhance the consultation process. Six companies were approached to bid for this work and an assessment is currently underway to determine which is the best option.
- 5.5 It is envisaged that the consultation will take place during the summer/autumn with the results and any recommendations being incorporated into forthcoming budget discussions and reported back to Council before the end of 2019. The timeline proposed is therefore:

What	When
Scoping	April/May 2019
Report to Council	26 June 2019
Consultation	July – September 2019
Analysis of consultation results and development of future governance arrangements	October 2019
Draft paper developed for Council	November 2019
Report to Council	December 2019

6 COMMUNITY FUND 2019/20 – FAST TRACK APPLICATION PROPOSAL

- 6.1 At the meeting on 28 March 2019, Council agreed to the allocation and governance arrangements for the Community Fund. That included agreement on the criteria for applications and a new application form was made available from 1 April 2019.
- 6.2 Since the new Fund has come into operation, officers have recognised that completion of the form for small amounts could be seen as being too onerous for some community groups when the amount sought is small, and the gap between Area Partnership meetings could be such that groups are

discouraged from applying or may miss the opportunity for funding for time-bound projects or events. With this in mind, it is proposed that for 2019/20, a "fast track" application is added to the Community Fund in addition to the current application process. There is no proposed change to the criteria for these "fast track" applications.

- 6.3 It is proposed that "fast track" applications would be accepted for amounts of up to £1500. A simplified application form would be used which can be completed by a community group or an SBC Elected Member on behalf of a community group. This will be assessed by officers in the usual way and an officer recommendation made. In recognition of the gaps between Area Partnership meetings, it is further proposed that authority is delegated to the Service Director Customer and Communities to make decisions – in consultation with local Members - on those "fast track" applications which cannot wait until the next suitable Area Partnership meeting.
- 6.4 Applications for amounts greater than £1500 will require to use the normal application route and decisions can only be made on these at Area Partnership meetings.

7 IMPLICATIONS

7.1 Financial

- (a) The cost of employing an external organisation to undertake the consultation will be met by the Transformation Programme budget.
- (b) There are no financial implications arising from the "fast track" application process for the Community Fund. No additional budget is required.

7.2 Risk and Mitigations

- (a) Not reviewing the Area Partnerships following 18 months of operation as agreed would have a negative effect on the reputation of the Council, and could leave the validity of other Council-made decisions open to challenge.
- (b) Area Partnership meetings have received criticism from some attending groups. If Council staff were to carry out the consultation, and for example the findings result in little or no change, accusations of bias may be received. In order to mitigate against this, and deliver a completely impartial approach, costs must be incurred to employ an external consultant. It is acknowledged that employing an external consultant at a time of reducing public sector funding may also receive criticism. However, they will bring a wealth of experience and expertise on this subject which will enhance the consultation process.

7.3 Equalities

It is anticipated that there are no adverse impact due to race, disability, gender, age, sexual orientation or religion/belief arising from the proposals in this report.

7.4 Acting Sustainably

There are no significant impacts on the economy, community or environment arising from the proposals contained in this report.

7.5 Carbon Management

There are no significant effects on carbon emissions arising from the proposals contained in this report.

7.6 Rural Proofing

This report does not relate to new or amended policy or strategy and as a result rural proofing is not an applicable consideration.

7.7 Changes to Scheme of Administration or Scheme of Delegation

Should Members agree to the "fast track" application process for the Community Fund then changes will be required to the Scheme of Delegation.

8 CONSULTATION

8.1 The Chief Financial Officer, the Monitoring Officer, the Chief Legal Officer, the Chief Officer Audit and Risk, the Service Director HR, Communications and the Clerk to the Council have been consulted and any comments received have been incorporated into the final report.

Approved by

Jenni Craig

Service Director Customer & Communities

Signature

Author(s)

Name	Designation and Contact Number
Michael Cook	Corporate Policy Advisor, 01835 825590
Clare Malster	Strategic Community Engagement Officer, 01835 826626
Shona Smith	Communities & Partnerships Manager, 01835 824000 ext 5504

Background Papers: N/A

Previous Minute Reference: Scottish Borders Council, 28 March 2019

Note – You can get this document on tape, in Braille, large print and various computer formats by contacting the address below. Clare Malster can also give information on other language translations as well as providing additional copies.

Contact us at Clare Malster, Scottish Borders Council, Council HQ, Newtown St Boswells, Melrose TD6 0SA. Tel 01865 826626

Email: cmalster@scotborders.gov.uk