
FIT FOR 2024 - REVIEW OF AREA PARTNERSHIPS - NEXT STEPS

Report by Service Director, Customer & Communities

SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL

27 August 2020

1 PURPOSE AND SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report outlines the next steps in evolving the Area Partnerships and, community capacity building arrangements, taking into account the recommendations of the report which was commissioned from the Scottish Community Development Centre (SCDC).**
- 1.2 At its meeting on 25 June 2020 the Council discussed, and agreed to note the results, findings and subsequent recommendations of the SCDC Report on the review of Area Partnerships and the Community Fund subject to a further report being brought to Council in August 2020.
- 1.3 It is proposed that the arrangements in each locality are developed at a grass roots level using a bottom up approach. Therefore this paper does not propose how the next steps, to the further development of the Area Partnerships, will take place but supports the empowerment of each Area Partnership to discuss, agree and implement improvement mechanisms for this in each locality.
- 1.4 The Council is continuing to respond to the current Covid-19 pandemic and there has been a great deal of learning and experience of working with our communities through the Community Assistance Hubs. This ongoing learning should be taken into account in these next steps and how ongoing arrangements evolve.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 I recommend that Scottish Borders Council:-

- (a) Agrees that the findings of the report by the Scottish Community Development Centre continues to be fed back, via a range of stakeholders, to the wider community for their consideration;**
- (b) Approves the Action Plan outlined in Appendix 1;**

- (c) Request that each Area Partnership establishes, at their next meeting, a mechanism to review the findings and make recommendations for further public consultation within each locality;**
- (d) Agrees to receive a further report from the Service Director Customer & Communities on the outcome and next steps.**

3 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 At its meeting on 25 June 2020 the Council discussed, and agreed to note the results, findings and subsequent recommendations of the report produced by the Scottish Community Development Centre (SCDC) on the review of Area Partnerships and the Community Fund subject to a further report being brought to Council in August 2020 which outlines the next steps in evolving the Area Partnership and Community Fund arrangements. For clarity, and ease of discussion, this has been split in to two reports covering Area Partnerships and the Community Fund separately.
- 3.2 Following the meeting on 25 June 2020, SCDC's Report was distributed to:
- a) Area Partnerships
 - b) Community Councils
 - c) Community Fund grant recipients
 - d) Community groups
 - e) Festival Committees
 - f) Localities Bid Fund applicants
 - g) Scottish Borders Community Councils' Network
 - h) Scottish Borders Community Planning Partnership
 - i) Scottish Borders Community Planning Partnership's People's Panel
 - j) Third Sector Interface (TSI)
 - k) Village Halls (via the TSI)
- 3.3 Scottish Borders Community Council Network, individual Community Councils and the Third Sector Interface have been consulted during the preparation of this report. Responses have been reflected in this report and the accompanying Action Plan and will be fed into the work undertaken by each of the Area Partnerships.

4 REVIEW FINDINGS – AREA PARTNERSHIPS

- 4.1 Although discussed at the meeting on 25 June 2020, the findings are presented here to provide context for the proposals.
- 4.2 The findings of the consultation tell us that after 18 months of operation, the Area Partnerships have yet to realise the level of community engagement and involvement that was envisaged when they were established. In general, results overall are mixed although the majority, of those that expressed a view, felt that the partnerships were very good/good or acceptable. Comments made include:
- a) "I have found the meetings informative and inclusive with everyone given a chance to discuss specified topics." (Berwickshire online survey response).
 - b) "Little usable feedback – or sense of progress." (Berwickshire Focus Group).
 - c) "I feel that the Area Partnership and its role is still evolving so expect to see greater impact as the partnership evolves." (Online survey response).

- 4.3 The recommendations from SCDC set out the need to involve Community Councils, along with other community groups, to shape the Area Partnerships going forward. The need for improved community engagement, support to enable a wider range of people to attend the meetings, agenda setting, meeting structure and ways in which the meetings are facilitated are all areas highlighted in the recommendations.
- 4.4 It is acknowledged that not one size fits all and that, through continued engagement with communities, separate operational and governance arrangements may develop across the five areas.
- 4.5 Good and real community empowerment is central to the success of the Area Partnerships. There is a desire from communities to be involved in shaping the Area Partnerships to ensure that they are effective forums for supporting and delivering the locality plans and wider community planning agenda. The Action Plan at Appendix 1 sets out the steps that will be required to develop an Improvement Framework for Area Partnerships.
- 4.6 As it is recognised that arrangements may differ between localities, it is proposed that each locality agrees and establishes a mechanism, with support from appropriate Officers, to consider improvements to the Area Partnerships. Each Area Partnership will develop an Improvement Framework to reflect local circumstances. It is proposed that this work should include Elected Members and Community Councillors with the numbers, and additional members, agreed by each Area Partnership. Options may include, but are not limited to:
- a) A short life working group
 - b) All discussions and decisions taking place at Area Partnership meetings
 - c) Workshops
 - d) Focus groups
 - e) Surveys/questionnaires
- 4.7 Following the receipt of SCDC's Report, it was possible to start to make changes to Area Partnerships, including:
- a) The inclusion of an update on the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 as a standing agenda item. A process was being put in place, prior to the Covid-19 emergency, to ask Area Partnership members what they would like covered as part of the update. This will resume as Area Partnership meetings are rescheduled.
 - b) The opportunity for those attending to say what they would like to be covered at the next, and future, Area Partnership meetings. Ideas can be submitted both at, and after, each meeting.
- 4.8 To evolve and develop the Area Partnerships, taking into account the recommendations of the SCDC report, the following actions are proposed

- 4.8.1 To share the SCDC Report as widely as possible with stakeholders in the next two months, seeking thoughts/comments/ideas on how we can progress the findings of the report in partnership.
- 4.8.2 Feedback from this wider consultation to be presented at the November Area Partnerships (or as soon as possible thereafter given the current situation).
- 4.8.3 That each Area Partnership, at their next meeting, establish a mechanism to review the findings and make recommendations at a local level for further public consultation within each locality.
- 4.8.4 Start to build a new Area Partnership model in Spring 2021. It is envisaged that this model will develop and evolve differently within each locality.

5 REVIEW FINDINGS – COMMUNITY CAPACITY BUILDING

- 5.1 Community capacity building is described as “the activities, resources and support that strengthen the skills, abilities and confidence of people and community groups to take effective action and leading roles in the development of communities.”¹ It is key to a sustainable, empowered community. We are aware that the level of community capacity varies widely across the Scottish Borders. It is therefore essential that community capacity building is available to support all our communities to play a central role in Area Partnerships.
- 5.2 Participants in the review process felt that there is not enough community capacity building support to sustain local activity. Comments included:
 - a) “We no longer have the community workers we used to have and I think people have really suffered from the fact that they no longer have the support from these posts. We need many more development and community workers to help with work on the ground and the voluntary sector are being asked to do too much.” **Local resident – Focus Group.**
 - b) “The capacity building is not what the Council’s delivering in the Borders. What I mean by Community Capacity Building CCB ... is standing alongside the community and helping to animate people to become activists to support everyone in their community and build their skills and confidence, knowledge and experience to take their ideas forward. This really isn’t happening in most places and the TSI hasn’t got the reach or resources to do it all. These gaps really restrict how communities can be involved in local structures and policy influencing roles.” **Local resident – Focus Group.**
 - c) “I think we need a common understanding of what CCB and empowerment means and how it links to inclusion and equality.” **Local resident – Focus Group.**

¹ Strengthening Communities, S Skinner, CDF Publications 2006

- 5.3 A Fit for 2024 review is already underway which will consider the recommendations within the report and will look at a range of options to improve capacity building within communities.

6 BEST VALUE ASSURANCE REPORT

- 6.1 The Best Value Assurance audit of Scottish Borders Council in 2019 was noted at the Council meeting on 19 December 2019. The Commission findings included:

The Council now needs to make better progress with its community planning partners in delivering crucial elements of their community empowerment obligations, including resourced locality plans which identify community need and help community wellbeing.

- 6.2 With the subsequent recommendation:

Improve how the Scottish Borders Community Planning Partnership involves communities and the third sector, through greater involvement in local decision-making and by accelerating implementation of the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015.

- 6.3 A number of recommendations within the SCDC report are in line with the 2019 Best Value Assurance Audit and these will be taken forward through actions already agreed at that meeting in the Best Value Audit Action Plan.

7 LEARNING AND OPPORTUNITIES FROM COVID-19 RESPONSE

- 7.1 The experience from setting up the five Community Assistance Hubs (CAH) has already provided significant learning and benefits, which we need to build on and maximise the opportunities for the future. Some of the benefits are:
- a) Our customers have been at the centre and focus of every CAH interaction;
 - b) A flexible and proactive, solution based response was created;
 - c) Multi agency working groups have been output/outcome focussed – these groups have worked together and complemented each other;
 - d) A flatter structure with less barriers – leadership and direction was clear and focussed;
 - e) Less process and formality in how we have worked with communities – navigation through systems has been quicker and more efficient;
 - f) Regular and ongoing dialogue and then quickly adapting the response according to the feedback;
 - g) Trust and relationships have been developed by working in partnership to achieve common goals;
 - h) Community groups have taken ownership and, because they could see the need and demand, have developed solutions supported by Scottish Borders Council and other partners;
 - i) The emergency response has created a very different type of engagement and enabled new voices to be heard;

- j) Direct contact between staff and customers, that may not usually have direct contact with the Council, has been taking place.

7.2 The findings from the SCDC Report, together with the benefits and experience of the Covid-19 response, provide a range of new opportunities. These should be considered as part of the work the Area Partnerships carry out and include the following:

- a) A reinvigorated Community Planning approach based on different ways of engagement and feedback;
- b) Services redesigned to reflect user and community needs/requirements in light of the pandemic;
- c) Locality Plans refreshed to reflect what communities require whilst both in recovery mode and longer term;
- d) How to build on the ways in which communities have been working which has seen them taking ownership to deliver Covid-19 related assistance in ways which best suit their town/village;
- e) Engagement with the wider community beyond the formal Area Partnership model;
- f) Live broadcast of meetings, building on experience of the broadcast of Council committee meetings and public feedback.

8 RECOMMENDATIONS AND ACTION PLAN

8.1 The recommendations and accompanying actions have been grouped within the Action Plan to reflect the Area Partnerships, Community Capacity Building and other findings. Recommendations and actions relating to the Community Fund and Participatory budgeting have been removed and will be considered in a separate report at the meeting on 27 August 2020.

8.2 A number of recommendations are in line with the 2019 Best Value Assurance Audit (see Section 6) and these will be taken forward through actions already agreed by Council on 19 December 2019 in the Best Value Audit Action Plan.

8.3 All actions and recommendations are numbered for ease of cross-referencing between the SCDC Report and attached Action Plan.

9 IMPLICATIONS

9.1 Financial

Staff resources will be required to support each of the Area Partnerships in the work being asked of them.

9.2 Risk and Mitigations

- a) Not acting upon the findings in the name of SCDC's Report would have a negative impact on the Area Partnerships and the Council's reputation as an organisation that listens to the community.

- b) Area Partnerships have not met for some time due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Arrangements are being considered on how to best facilitate the next round of meetings currently scheduled to take place in November.

9.3 **Integrated Impact Assessment**

- a) An Integrated Impact Assessment has been carried out on the proposals contained in this report and it is anticipated that there will be no negative impacts under either the Equality Duty or the Fairer Scotland Duty.
- b) IIA scoping has identified that in line with one of the recommendations contained within the SCDC Report, Area Partnerships will be involved in the co-production “of an enhanced equality impact assessment [Integrated Impact Assessment] which explores the extent to which community Empowerment processes, including Area Partnerships, deliver on equality duties and Community Empowerment Act requirements to tackle inequality.” The Scottish Borders Strategic Assessment 2020 will be used to inform the IIA and identify if targeted measures are required in any areas in the region.
- c) The aim is for the evolution of the Area Partnerships to be done at grass roots level. In order for this to happen, there can be no predetermined shape for the work to take, but rather the community representatives will be empowered to do this. Although the outcomes generated through this work are not known, it is anticipated that they, and the implementation of the wider recommendations, will identify and overcome any inequalities and/or discrimination, perceived or otherwise, that may exist.

9.4 **Acting Sustainably**

A sustainable development assessment has been carried out on the proposals contained in this report and it is anticipated that there will be a positive effect on the following community and participation outcomes:

- a) involve the community in developing and implementing the project;
- b) take into account under-represented or excluded groups;
- c) take into account equal opportunities;
- d) improve community quality of life;
- e) improve community capacity;
- f) encourage local action and decision making.

9.5 **Carbon Management**

There are no anticipated effects on carbon emissions as a result of the recommendations made in this report.

9.6 **Rural Proofing**

Not applicable.

9.7 **Changes to Scheme of Administration or Scheme of Delegation**

There are no changes required to either the Scheme of Administration or the Scheme of Delegation as a result of the proposals in this report.

10 CONSULTATION

10.1 The Executive Director (Finance & Regulatory), the Monitoring Officer/Chief Legal Officer, the Chief Officer Audit and Risk, the Service Director HR & Communications, the Clerk to the Council and Corporate Communications have been consulted and any comments received have been incorporated into this report.

10.2 The Corporate Equalities and Diversity Officer has been consulted during the Integrated Impact Assessment of this report.

10.3 Scottish Borders Community Councils' Network, individual Community Councils and the Third Sector Interface have been consulted on the results of the SCDC review and inclusion of information in this report.

Approved by

Jenni Craig

Service Director, Customer & Communities

Signed

Author(s)

Name	Designation and Contact Number
Jenni Craig	Service Director, Customer & Communities, 01835 825013
Shona Smith	Communities & Partnership Manager, 01835 824000 Ext 5504
Clare Malster	Strategic Community Engagement Officer, 01835 826626

Background Papers: None

Previous Minute Reference: Scottish Borders Council, 25 June 2020

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Contact us at: Clare Malster, Scottish Borders Council, Council HQ, Newtown St Boswells, Melrose TD6 0SA. Tel: 01835 826626 Email: cmalster@scotborders.gov.uk

Appendix 1: Area Partnership Action Plan

Action Plan by theme

Action reference	Recommendation number	SCDC Recommendations for Area Partnerships	Action	Timescales
A	1	Establish a short life working group, including Scottish Borders Council (SBC) staff, Community Planning Partnership (CPP) partner reps and local community reps, to feedback the results of the research via a local seminar and look at short term improvements to the Area Partnerships	Each Area Partnership to agree a mechanism to review findings and recommend improvements (support to be provided)	Short term
B	2	<p>Establish a longer-term working group of community reps, officers and Elected Members to discuss how APs can be more effective using the Scottish Community Development Centre (SCDC) research to guide discussions.</p> <p>The working group should look at issues such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The relationship to the Scheme of Administration - Increasing transparency of decision making - Engaging the community in setting the agenda for the meetings - Extending decision making to community groups/representative - Ensuring that the contribution of community members, officers and Councillors are accurately recorded and publicised 	Agree proposals for any required working group once Area Partnerships have agreed their recommendations. This will be covered in further report to Council.	Medium term
C	3 4	<p>The short life working groups and the overarching reference group should also consider the following SCDC recommendations within the improvement framework:</p> <p>Each AP should consider whether fixed locations or rotating the venue increases access to the process. In doing so they should consult with potential participants and not just those who attend regularly.</p>	Recommendations from actions to be considered by each Area Partnership & longer-term working group, if required.	Short & Medium term

	5	Area Partnerships should consider the impact of their boundaries on local participation and have clearer relationships with more local community-based organisations and partnerships in their areas.		
	6	APs should also be encouraged to seek assistance or views from other local engagement processes to take forward issues they are dealing with and pay due regard to local experience.		
	8	Opportunities should be created to help this wider range of local stakeholders feed into locality plans.		
	9	They should improve communication with well-established community councils and community groups at more local levels to more effectively link local concerns to the agenda of the Area Partnerships.		
	13	They should also involve other local groups including those working on specific issues, local service developments and those representing people experiencing inequality or discrimination		
	14	Look at ways to remove transport and finance barriers to ensure people can attend.		
	15	Consider the support needs of those who want to attend, and how these can be resourced e.g. BSL interpreting, language interpreting, advocacy support.		
	18	Co-produce an enhanced equality impact assessment which explores the extent to which Community Empowerment processes, including the Area Partnerships, deliver on equality duties and Community Empowerment Act requirements to tackle inequality		
		Encourage greater networking and shared learning between Area Partnerships and other groups in each area.		
D	1	A new participation and engagement model to be established from the outcomes of the Improvement Framework	SBC Officers to develop alongside Area Partnerships.	Medium term

Action reference	Recommendation number	SCDC recommendations linked to Best Value (these are in line with the findings of the 2019 Best Value Assurance Audit of Scottish Borders Council and these recommendations will be taken forward through actions already agreed by Council on 19 th December 2019 in the Best Value Audit Action Plan)	Action	Timescales
G	7	Reforming and strengthened Area Partnerships should be part of a broader discussion about delivering community empowerment in the SBC area as described in the SCDC report.	Work with the Improvement Service and Scottish Government to provide guidance and support to gain insight into best practice in the implementation of the Community Empowerment Act	April 2021
	10	Community empowerment action should not always require issues to be initiated at AP meetings. Mechanisms should be found for ideas and proposals to emerge from local community-led processes and seek support from the AP to achieve change.		
	30	Use the Audit Scotland principles to develop discussion involving community representatives, partner organisations, Elected Members and others to develop local principles for community empowerment.		
	31	Co-produce a local scrutiny process which builds confidence in the empowerment processes for community planning, including the Area Partnerships, and which provide routes to raise issues and resolve disputes.		
	32	Develop a local programme of key knowledge for Community Empowerment, engagement and deliberative democracy aimed at local people, officers, partner agencies and Elected Members.		
	33	Develop a programme of learning visits to other areas of Scotland where good practice may be developing as described above, and lessons are being learnt.		
H	39	Identify, audit and promote existing opportunities for engagement and empowerment as part of an ongoing improvement plan linked to the Community Planning Partnership's (CPP) aims and responding to the recent Best Value Review.	Develop regular reporting of progress on Community Engagement across the whole council, for inclusion in reports to members	June 2021

			and CPP Strategic Board.	
I	11	Continue to develop a range of innovative facilitative techniques for use in the APs and broader participation environment.	Promote stakeholder engagement through Area Partnerships and community engagement events, with training around leadership/national standards of engagement.	December 2021
	12	Commission training for partners in using good deliberative dialogue techniques. Here are useful training opportunities and facilitation tools which could be explored.		
	17	Provide joint training for councillors, community reps and officers on the National Standards for Community Engagement.		
	32	Develop a local programme of key knowledge for Community Empowerment, engagement and deliberative democracy aimed at local people, officers, partner agencies and Elected Members.		
K	16	The Council and its partners should review how communities are supported to participate in the partnerships and participate more generally in terms of community capacity building support.	As part of the Fit for 2024 programme undertake a review to consider how best to improve community capacity building across the Borders.	June 2021
	21	The shortage of capacity building support for organisations seeking funding, identified in this research, should be further explored and addressed. Solutions should be explored with capacity building organisations locally.		
	24	Review the local Community Learning & Development Plan to assess where the relative strengths challenges in Community Capacity Building (CCB) are.		
	25	Develop a CCB working group involving Community Representatives the TSI, SBC other CPP partners e.g. NHS health improvement.		
	26	Consider strategic investment by SBC in capacity building services.		
	27	Initiate discussion with CPP partners, Scottish Government and other possible funders about where resources to support increased local CCB could be sourced.		
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	<p>29</p> <p>38</p> <p>41</p>	<p>Support communities themselves to access resources to develop their own community capacity building resources.</p> <p>Lay the foundations for a holistic community development strategy for the Borders with corresponding local iterations linked to the Community Learning & Development Partnerships.</p> <p>Review existing community capacity support across the CPP with a view to improving co-ordination and increasing resources to support community empowerment at grassroots level - and participation in wider decision-making processes.</p> <p>Additional resources for removing barriers to participation and delivering community capacity building should be identified by the CPP as a whole as well as SBC. In recognition of severe pressure on public sector budgets this may require bids to external funder.</p>		
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