
FIT FOR 2024: REVIEW OF AREA PARTNERSHIPS – OUTCOMES AND NEXT STEPS

Report by Service Director, Customer & Communities

SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL

25 MARCH 2021

1 PURPOSE AND SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report presents the outcomes of each Area Partnership’s review in relation to the report from the Scottish Community Development Centre (SCDC).**
- 1.2 At its meeting on 27 August 2020, Council agreed that each Area Partnership established a mechanism to review the findings of the SCDC Report regarding the future of Area Partnerships and to make recommendations for further public consultation within each locality.
- 1.3 It was agreed that arrangements in each locality are to be developed at a grass roots level using a bottom up approach. This paper presents proposals for wider public consultation, and supports the empowerment of each Area Partnership to discuss, agree and implement further improvement mechanisms within each of their localities.
- 1.4 Council agreed on 27 August 2020 to receive a further report on the outcome and next steps. This report also proposes the requirement to build community capacity in order to support the further development of Area Partnerships.
- 1.5 The Council is continuing to respond to the current Covid-19 pandemic and working with our communities through the Community Assistance Hubs. The learning from this work should be taken into account in regards to how ongoing arrangements evolve.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 I recommend that Scottish Borders Council:-

- (a) Notes the emerging common proposals from the recent review by each Area Partnership as detailed at Section 4 and the ongoing involvement of the current arrangements in line with community empowerment and the findings of the SCDC report;**

- (b) Agrees that the outcomes of the review are taken forward for local public consultation in each locality to be held from April – June 2021, with a further report being brought back to Council in the autumn;**
- (c) Notes that community capacity building requirements will be needed to fully support the further evolution of Area Partnerships within each locality; and**
- (d) Notes that digital requirements will be needed to fully support the further evolution of Area Partnerships within each locality, and that these will be addressed through the Council's Digital Strategy.**

3 BACKGROUND

3.1 At its meeting on 27 August 2020, Scottish Borders Council agreed that each Area Partnership establish a mechanism to review the findings of the Scottish Community Development Centre (SCDC) Report regarding the future model for Area Partnerships and to make recommendations for further public consultation within each locality.

3.2 The findings of the SCDC Report highlighted that:

- After 18 months of operation, the Area Partnerships had yet to realise the level of community engagement and involvement that was envisaged when they were established.
- In general, feedback overall was mixed although the majority, of those that expressed a view, felt that the partnerships were very good/good or acceptable.
- 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.
- It was 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
- 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

3.3 Following the receipt of SCDC's Report, immediate changes were made to Area Partnerships, including:

- a) Once Area Partnerships re-commenced in November 2020, all those attending are invited to suggest agenda items for future meetings, and an information pack regarding the Community Empowerment Act is included within every agenda.
- b) The inclusion of an update on the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 as a standing agenda item.
- c) Service information included within the agenda, and officer presentations as appropriate.
- d) Additional promotion of Area Partnerships is taking place within social media, but more needs to be done using digital tools to increase awareness and encourage more diverse groups to attend.

3.4 With regards to capacity building, officers 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. Participants

in the Area Partnership review process felt that there is not enough community capacity building support to sustain local activity.

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

4 THE APPROACH OF AREA PARTNERSHIPS INCLUDING KEY PROPOSALS

- 4.1 Berwickshire and Cheviot Area Partnerships agreed to form working sub-groups to consider the findings of the report and to make proposals to their next Area Partnership for further discussion.
- 4.2 Eildon and Tweeddale discussed the report within their Area Partnership meetings, and the Area Partnership Chairs held further community meetings to gather views for further discussion.
- 4.3 Community Councils within Teviot & Liddesdale met with Elected Members and agreed a proposal which was discussed with Council officers to obtain feedback and then presented to the Area Partnership for discussion.
- 4.4 All five Area Partnerships brought their initial findings and proposals back to their next Area Partnership for further discussion and agreement. These are detailed at **Appendix A**.
- 4.5 There are a number of common proposals received to date in relation to Area Partnerships:
- The majority would like to see Area Partnerships remain a committee of the Council, although some see this as an interim position until further capacity can be built to take on more of the Area Partnership functions in the future.
 - A consideration to be given for all Committee Members to have equal voting rights or the flexibility to establish a separate entity or body at a future date which focuses on strategic issues.
 - A revision and refreshment of Locality Plans & Action Plans to ensure that they are fit for purpose and reflect local needs and demands.
 - The flexibility to set up sub-groups or sub-committees in the future that could take on specific tasks or projects.
 - A desire to become more involved in setting the Area Partnership Agendas and to include other partners and agencies in relation to service updates.
 - Being consulted on the appointment of Area Partnership Chairs, and the flexibility of rotating Chairs or sharing Chairing responsibilities in the future.
 - The flexibility to hold Area Partnerships on different days and times and promotion of Area Partnerships to a wider audience.

5 AREA PARTNERSHIPS – FURTHER DEVELOPMENT AND NEXT STEPS

- 5.1 It is proposed that public consultation is undertaken on all of the above within each locality from April-June 2021. This will include as wide engagement as possible with Community Councils, Community Planning and other third sector partners, access groups, other key organisations and

stakeholders. A report will be brought back to Council which will detail the outcomes of the consultation for further discussion.

- 5.2 Alongside the consultation, officers will give further consideration to the proposals and how these could be implemented given the types of models in operation in other areas.
- 5.3 The experience from setting up the five Community Assistance Hubs (CAHs) has already provided significant learning and benefits, which we need to build on and maximise the opportunities for the future. There is wide acknowledgement that the Community Assistance Hubs are a very successful and effective model at providing a sense of community, and they should continue to input to Area Partnership agendas in relation to providing a co-ordinating role for local issues and solutions.
- 5.4 Since Area Partnerships re-commenced in November 2020, all those attending are invited to suggest agenda items for future meetings, and an information pack regarding the Community Empowerment Act is included on every agenda. Promotion of the Area Partnership is taking place within social media, but more needs to be done using digital tools to increase awareness and encourage more diverse groups to participate.
- 5.5 It is acknowledged that there will be a number of areas that will require further support in order to build capacity, engage with more diverse communities and develop the Area Partnerships for the future to ensure that they are fit for purpose and reduce inequalities.
 - i. Investment in digital technology is required to enable better connectivity and engagement with our communities, which will be addressed within the Council's Digital Strategy.
 - ii. Communication platforms and tools will require to be developed and invested in, to provide seamless ways of engaging and interacting with communities, and in specific relation to Area Partnerships, to provide a one stop portal where relevant community information, advice and support can be easily accessed.
 - iii. Investment in resources to build capacity to ensure that we have strong community networks that have the skills and expertise to deliver the aims and aspirations of their locality plans and projects to completion.
- 5.6 As part of the place making approach to community engagement and participation that will be required to fully support the review and refreshment of each Area Partnership's Locality Plan, the engagement model approved by Council on 25 February 2021 will provide additional skills, facilitation, resource and knowledge to undertake this work.
- 5.7 High level place briefs setting out needs and priorities would be completed at locality level via Area Partnerships and enable a high-level, Borders-wide picture to be formed that will, in turn, identify priorities for more detailed community engagement. The output would be a place brief, setting out an agreed shared story and articulation of priorities for the localities and its communities.

- 5.8 This place making approach will be mindful that not all communities or localities are starting from the same position and that some will already have – or be developing community led action plans. The output will also allow services to be redesigned to reflect user and community needs and requirements in light of the pandemic.
- 5.9 As requested by Council, this report gives details of the approach that each Area Partnership has undertaken, the findings from each Area Partnership, and next steps in regard to further public consultation and future development of Area Partnerships.

6 IMPLICATIONS

6.1 Financial

There are no further financial implications other than those detailed within the body of the report. It is acknowledged that investment will be required as detailed in section 7, but the implications of this overall investment is still to be determined.

6.2 Risk and Mitigations

Not acting upon the recent review of the findings of the SCDC Report by each Area Partnership would have a negative impact on the development of Area Partnerships and the Council's reputation as an organisation that listens to the community.

6.3 Integrated Impact Assessment

- (a) It is anticipated that there will be no negative impacts under either the Equality Duty or the Fairer Scotland Duty.
- (b) It is anticipated that the ongoing development of Area Partnerships will help to eliminate discrimination, help to promote equality of opportunity and foster good relations with those who have equality characteristics as the way in which the recommendations are addressed will be chosen and agreed by the membership of the Area Partnership and the wider community. The development and aims of Area Partnerships will be working to avoid exclusion, tackle inequality and empower local communities.
- (c) The aim is for the evolution of the Area Partnerships to be undertaken at grass roots level, and that communities and their 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 any future recommendations, will identify and overcome any inequalities and/or discrimination, perceived or otherwise, that may exist.

6.4 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 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.

6.5 Carbon Management

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

6.6 Rural Proofing

It is anticipated that the ongoing evolution of Area Partnerships will have a positive effect in enabling more rural locations to participate in the process and encourage local action and decision making.

6.7 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.

7 CONSULTATION

- 7.1 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 the final report.
- 7.2 Scottish Borders Community Councils' Network, individual Community Councils and the Third Sector Interface have been consulted on the review of the findings of the SCDC review and inclusion of information in this report.

Approved by

Jenni Craig

Service Director, Customer & Communities Signature

Author(s)

Name	Designation and Contact Number
Jenni Craig	Service Director Customer & Communities
Shona Smith	Communities and Partnership Manager

Background Papers: None

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Contact us at Shona Smith, Council Headquarters, Newtown St Boswells, TD6 0SA.
Tel: 01835 826916 Email: smsmith@scotborders.gov.uk