
**CONCLUSION OF THE REVIEW OF THE COUNCIL'S SUPPORT TO
COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS**

**Responsible Cabinet Member – Councillor Andy Scott,
Communities and Engagement Portfolio**

Responsible Director – Chris Sivers, Assistant Chief Executive

SUMMARY REPORT

Purpose of the Report

1. This report presents to members the findings of the review of the Council's support to Community Partnerships and makes recommendations about the future.

Summary

2. There is a need for change to the current arrangements. This report sets out the way the Council should provide support to Community Partnerships in the future. Support will be based on an agreement about Community Partnerships' priorities, which will also involve other partners (eg the Police through PACTs). Support will be designed to foster resilience and strength among communities in disadvantaged wards. The benefits to Community Partnerships of participating in the new support arrangements will include receipt of grant, ongoing community worker support and a link into a senior Council officer mentor.
3. The conclusion demonstrates how these changes will help to foster stronger communities and deliver our One Darlington priority.

Recommendation

4. It is recommended that:
 - (a) Council support to Community Partnerships will be built upon agreements that are focused on outcomes and informed by ward level data and shared local priorities.
 - (b) The Assistant Chief Executive be authorised to conduct further consultation with existing Partnerships to finalise the arrangements, including the timetable.
 - (c) Appropriate training, mentoring and support arrangements are put in place for those partnerships, volunteers and staff that are affected by the changes.

Reasons

5. The recommendations are supported by the following reasons :-
 - (a) An outcomes-based approach to supporting Community Partnerships provides a framework for taking more relevant, timely and focused interventions and is the right tool to use during a time of very pressurised Council resources.
 - (b) It is not appropriate to set detailed delivery arrangements for a diverse range of partnerships centrally: bespoke consultation is needed to frame a process of change for each Community Partnership.
 - (c) Bespoke training, mentoring and support arrangements will be an important aspect of ensuring the success of a new approach.

Chris Sivers
Assistant Chief Executive

Background Papers

The Sustainable Community Strategy, One Darlington: Perfectly Placed
Darlington Locality Profiles

David Plews : Extension 2023

S17 Crime and Disorder	Improving our support to Community Partnerships will help to deliver safer communities in Darlington.
Health and Well Being	Improving our support to Community Partnerships better facilitates the delivery of the health and well-being agenda.
Sustainability	The recommendations made in this report facilitate the sustainability of important “grass roots” community organisations.
Diversity	Improving support to Community Partnerships and making better use of data to define local priorities will help to ensure that community development activity is socially inclusive and sensitive to the distinct needs of communities of interest where this is appropriate.
Wards Affected	Central, Cockerton West, Northgate, Bank Top, Lascelles, Park East, Eastbourne, Haughton East (Red Hall), North Road, Lingfield, Cockerton East
Groups Affected	Various communities of interest and identity across the above wards as well as individual third sector organisations who have a role to play in partnership delivery.
Budget and Policy Framework	The proposed changes will not affect the Council’s Budget and Policy Framework.
Key Decision	No.
Urgent Decision	This decision is not urgent.
One Darlington: Perfectly Placed	The changes proposed in this report are seen as instrumental in the delivery of the Council’s contribution to the One Darlington priority within the Sustainable Community Strategy.
Efficiency	The changes proposed will help to ensure that the Council is supporting Community Partnerships to tackle the right priority issues, ensuring the most effective use of scarce resources.

MAIN REPORT

Information and Analysis

6. There are a number of reasons driving the need to change the way the Council supports Community Partnerships:
 - (a) The current arrangements are based on out-of-date deprivation data and do not target resources to places where they could have the biggest impact;
 - (b) Our current support is based on the delivery of locally agreed action plans which do not necessarily deliver on the most tactically or strategically important issues from the Council's perspective;
 - (c) Our current support is based around actions and projects – which can mean that partnerships sometimes lose sight of outcomes;
 - (d) Stronger links between individual partnerships and senior Council staff are needed if partnerships are to be effective and sustainable;
 - (e) The current arrangements were partly developed to support Single Regeneration Budget expenditure and are inappropriate for a more financially challenging climate.

Delivering One Darlington and Moving Towards a New Business Model

7. The Sustainable Community Strategy is clear that improving attainment against the One Darlington priority will have many strands. A number are relevant here:
 - (a) Tackling deprivation wherever it exists;
 - (b) Nurturing a strong, vibrant and cohesive borough-wide community of town, villages and countryside;
 - (c) Valuing diversity and diverse needs and contributions;
 - (d) Opening up opportunities to volunteer;
 - (e) Regarding the happiness, fulfilment and well-being of individuals as a legitimate concern for the community as a whole.
 8. Supporting Community Partnerships underpins all of these strands. Indeed, Community Partnerships can be seen as one the key delivery mechanisms for One Darlington.
 9. But there is another argument for continued investment in support for Community Partnerships. It is that this continued investment should prepare the way for a long-term reduction in demand for Council services. We know that self-confident, active, cohesive and empowered communities with strong social capital are likely to be better equipped to be able to tackle their own problems. The maturity and effectiveness of Community Partnerships where a critical mass has been reached demonstrates this. We have anecdotal evidence in Darlington that this assumption works on an individual level, too. There are countless examples of volunteers using Community Partnerships and their related projects and activities as opportunities for self-development, which in turn can bring benefits to others in their household.
 10. In short, what we do, and how, where and with whom we do it needs to be considered in the light of the facts that the One Darlington agenda means that we are now more certain about why we are supporting Community Partnerships and that locality working is providing a
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changing context for our work. The Council’s new business model means that the “demand reduction” argument above has special relevance and currency. Worthy of further consideration here is the question of accountability.

Supporting Community Partnerships to be Accountable for Outcomes

11. It is clear that in the context of a strongly supported Sustainable Community Strategy and very pressurised Council finances, structuring our support for Community Partnerships in a way that pays no account to the outcomes they achieve is no longer either affordable or justifiable.

12. Outcomes Based Accountability (OBA) is a tool that could be used to good effect to structure the Council’s support to Community Partnerships. This model is already widely used within Children’s Services and elsewhere internationally. It is a model that will be used more widely across the Council’s operations in the future. Of particular use is the way that population and performance accountability can be broken down to provide a very clear picture, on a partnership-by-partnership basis, of the outcomes on which each is focused. For the purposes of illustration, Central Community Partnership is used as an example below.

13. Population accountability

a) What are the quality of life conditions we want for the children, adults and families who live in Central ward?
b) What would these conditions look like if we could see them?
c) How can we measure these conditions?
d) How are we doing on the most important measures?
e) Who are the partners that have a role to play in doing better?
f) What will work to do better, including no cost/low cost options?
g) What does the Central Community Partnership propose to do?

14. Performance accountability

a) Who are Central Community Partnership’s customers?
b) How can we measure if our residents are better off as a result of what Central Community Partnership is doing?
c) How can we measure if we are delivering services well?
d) How are we doing on the most important measures?
e) Who are the partners that have a role to play in doing better?
f) What will work to do better, including no cost/low cost options?
g) What does the Central Community Partnership propose to do?

What will our support for community partnerships look like on the ground?

15. The above questions are deliberately plainly worded and grounded in simplicity and common sense. It is suggested that answers to these questions should be used as the basis to provide an agreement between the Council and individual Community Partnerships. This way the Council’s support to partnerships is grounded in working towards achievable

outcomes, and these outcomes can be negotiated according to priorities in particular wards. This approach comprises a logical “next step” from the individual action plans which each partnership currently produces and, crucially, it introduces a basis for negotiation and agreement so that, for the first time (on a formal basis at least), the Council has a say in the type of development activity it will support. The idea is that support from the Council, principally through a community development worker, would be predicated upon the OBA agreement.

16. What difference will this make on the ground? It should mean that Community Partnership outcomes are focused and consistent with Council and Darlington Partnership aims and more transparently linked to the One Darlington agenda. It should mean that partnerships are challenged to face the difficult local issues that previously may have been in the “too hard to do” pile. This could lead to more innovation and should be a way of reinvigorating existing partnerships. Existing partnerships will need to be supported through an introduction to the new approach. We will deploy Connecting with Communities staff to support this in the most effective way. The new way of working could mean that some partnerships respond to the challenge by becoming more ambitious and as a result will be seeking further support for their activities; conversely, some may feel the challenge of outcome-based accountability is one that they prefer not to face and so the Council may decide to deploy its resources for community development elsewhere.
17. Further engagement with partnerships on an individual basis will be necessary to arrive at a more complete understanding of the impact of the new arrangements on each partnership. Nominating a senior manager from the Corporate Managers’ Network to act as a mentor to support the community worker with broader strategic issues where appropriate will help to provide advice to unblock problems that may arise in relationships between the Council and individual partnerships. Mentors will also have a role in feeding back to Council colleagues relevant local intelligence that derives from their mentoring role with a particular partnership.
18. Engagement with individual partnerships will then inform the production of bespoke arrangements for each Community Partnership that wishes to continue to work with the Council on this basis. The prompts at paragraphs 13 and 14 could be useful as a way of providing focus for an agreement between a Community Partnership and the Council. In reality, these would be neighbourhood charters by another name.

What intelligence would inform the development of agreements with individual Community Partnerships?

19. Darlington’s updated locality profiles, augmented with additional data where appropriate from the Office of National Statistics, the Tees Valley JSU and the Council’s own Policy Unit, are rich sources of relevant information. It is felt that the development of links through Community Development Workers back to members of CMN will also enable information, knowledge (and wisdom) about other “live” issues to be fed in and out of Community Partnerships. This CMN link could be a key tool for developing responsiveness between Community Partnerships and the Council. Any links made will need to connect to the relevant integrated service managers as appropriate.

20. Darlington's 2008-9 locality profiles brim with information that, in future, effective Community Partnerships will want to both understand more fully and respond to. Some partnerships are currently better at doing this than others. This information will also help to provide answers to the challenge questions posed in paragraphs 13 and 14. The thinking is that a charter agreement between the Community Partnership and the Council will help keep a clearer focus on tackling these issues. Of course, the issues are different for each ward. For the purposes of illustration, a quick (and random) glance at the profiles reveals a number of salient issues.
- (a) Cockerton West and Park East have the highest number of first time entrants into the youth justice system.
 - (b) Haughton East (Redhall) has the highest percentage of adults with low numeracy skills.
 - (c) Literacy levels among the adult population are poorest in Cockerton West.
21. The most recent Indices of Multiple Deprivation (2007) show that the picture of disadvantage has improved from when Community Partnerships were originally established. Only ten rather than eleven wards are now in the most disadvantaged 25% of wards nationally. There have also been changes in the profiles across the borough, particularly with the impact of boundary changes that have taken place since the Community Partnerships were set up. The eleventh most disadvantaged ward is now Pierremont. Cockerton East has risen to become the fourteenth most disadvantaged ward in Darlington and is now in the most disadvantaged 45% of wards nationally, and no longer within the top 25% most disadvantaged.
22. Whilst the ranking of Cockerton East has changed in the past few years relative to other areas, there remains disadvantage within the ward. Good practice in community development would suggest that to withdraw Council support from independent community organisations would likely have a significantly detrimental impact on the future direction and performance of partnerships, as well as relationships with the Council. The Council has no desire to see such an impact in Cockerton East, and therefore we are proposing to treat Cockerton East Community Partnership in the same manner as we are proposing to work with the other partnerships, continuing our support. This is, of course, subject to Cockerton East Community Partnership wishing to continue such a relationship with the Council.
23. The other areas that have been highlighted in an analysis of the data as being potentially in need of additional support (the eleventh, twelfth, thirteenth most disadvantaged wards) are Pierremont, Haughton West and Haughton North. To provide the same level of support to these new areas would require an additional investment of £30,000, as there is no spare capacity within the team. The Council is not in position to increase its resourcing in this way.
24. As a separate initiative, the Council is reviewing the impact of the One Darlington approach within the Sustainable Community Strategy, and will be undertaking work with partner organisations to develop a refreshed approach to tackling disadvantage. As a part of this process, we will seek options for additional support for the three wards mentioned above, as a priority. Additionally, if any of the existing Community Partnerships no longer wish to have Council support under the relationship outlined here, then the three wards listed above have priority for additional support and action from the Connecting with Communities

team.

Where do the Problems Lie?

25. The implementation of a new approach will require strong buy-in from community development workers and committee members of existing partnerships. Consultation to date with the former suggests that this won't be a problem – and any issues that arise will be managed appropriately. Community Partnerships are likely to be unfamiliar with the processes of outcome-based accountability. It is important to remember that most partnerships have had most success on the crime and grime agendas – and this is often where volunteers' experience lies.
26. It is anticipated that with the right “negotiating and influencing” input from Connecting with Communities colleagues and elected members, the overwhelming majority of partnerships are likely to respond positively to the new challenges ahead. But many members and officers alike will need training to be able to bring an approach to outcome-based accountability to bear in our priority wards.
27. It is proposed that once this is approved by Cabinet, consultation is undertaken with each Community Partnership with a focus on implementation for each individual partnership. As these are external and independent partnerships, some may wish to take time to consult with their membership about whether they wish to work with the Council in this way. Additionally, this consultation will provide opportunity to discuss practical issues, such as when would Outcomes Based Accountability be introduced with partnership members, and how. The full implementation timetable is not best addressed centrally, given the independent nature of each partnership, and their specific local needs.

Outcome of Consultation

28. Formal engagement with members of Community Partnerships has taken place, involving several elected members. Key messages included: an observation that community development workers should work more closely with Locality teams; a request for a stronger focus on those communities most in need and a simplification of meeting agendas; and an idea that the feasibility of working more closely with the PCT should be examined. These conversations were part of a 360 degree review of the Council's support to Community Partnerships and the feedback has been used to develop this report.

Conclusion

29. To get the best value and generate the most worthwhile outcomes it is clear that the way that the Council supports Community Partnerships needs to change. Even though existing partnerships are all different and are likely to have a diverse range of priorities in the future, there will need to be a consistent approach to the way that the Council works with each. This change should be used as a way of inaugurating a new stage in the development of partnerships which for most could be a robust platform on which to build stronger partner involvement, a tighter focus on outcomes, better community representation and a greater likelihood of sustainability into the longer term.

30. The change will write in indelible ink a causal link showing that our ongoing support to Community Partnerships is directed and driven by the One Darlington agenda. It should also help Community Partnerships to become more responsive to a changing localities context.
31. This report does not pre-empt the outcome of the Connecting with Communities review, the recommendations from which may have an impact on the resources and officer capacity that the Council has available to deliver the proposed changes. Instead, this report sets a way forward that is consistent with the wider review of Connecting with Communities that is currently in progress.