



Report to Executive

Meeting Date – 17 September 2024

Key Decision – No

Is the matter included in the Forward Plan – No

Public/Private – Public

Portfolio – Deputy Leader (Statutory) and Adults and Community Health Portfolio.

Directorate – Public Health and Communities

Report Author – Paul Musgrave

Title – Community Panels and Associated Activity – The first 12 months

Brief Summary:

At its inception, Cumberland Council established 8 Community Panels as the mechanism for local decision making, influence and stakeholder engagement. This has now been in place for a full year.

The purpose of this report is to provide an overview to the Executive of what has been put in place, in particular; to provide feedback on what has worked well, what changes have already taken place and what still needs to be developed. The report does not consider the Community Panels in isolation but includes the infrastructure that surrounds and supports it.

A report was presented to Place Scrutiny at its meeting on 31 July where Members were able to discuss Community Panels from their own experiences.

In summary, Executive Members are asked if they feel that the framework established works effectively as the mechanism for local decision making, influence and stakeholder engagement for Cumberland Council.

Recommendation:

Members are asked to agree the proposals for the next phase for Community Panels as set out in the report including identifying what they consider to be good practice and what they

would like to see as part of the future development of the activity associated with the community panels.

Tracking

Executive:	17 September 2024
Scrutiny:	31 July 2024
Council:	N/A

1. Background

- 1.1 At its inception, Cumberland Council established 8 Community Panels as the mechanism for local decision making, influence and stakeholder engagement. We have achieved the first full year of this new way of working.
- 1.2 The purpose of this report is intended to look back on what has been achieved, what has worked well, what changes have already taken place and what still needs to be developed. It considers the associated activity, infrastructure and support around Community Panels.

Community Panels

- 1.3 Eight Community Panels were established on a geographic footprint and made up of the members whose wards fall within those footprints. The Community Panel formal meetings occur four times a year and these panels have now all met 5 times formally. Informal feedback from officers directly involved and Members would suggest that there is now shared understanding on the purpose of community panels.
- 1.4 Currently, there are two regular reports to each panel meeting. These are ***Investing in our Neighbourhood*** and ***Community Panel Update***. The former is currently focused on the applications from community organisations to the Neighbourhood Investment Fund. It is envisaged that going forward, this will include reporting on a wider range of investment within panel areas. The latter report is currently limited to but not restricted to community activities within the panel area. It was always the ambition that the Community Panel Update would present what Cumberland Council (rather than the Community Development Team) has achieved within a panel area and this remains an area for development.
- 1.5 Members have indicated that they still wish to receive reports that keep them informed about Council activity in their panel area so this will continue for now (Community Panel Update).

Officer Support

- 1.6 A Chief Officer supports each Community Panel and demonstrates the support for local community working at the highest level in the organisation. This has provided opportunities for individual Chief Officers to get to know parts of Cumberland better, not only geographically but what the particular issues are outside their usual remit / role.

- 1.7 Community Panels are supported by Democratic Services as the meetings are formal, governed by the Constitution and in legislation (where they are described as Area Committees).
- 1.8 They are also supported by a dedicated Community Development Officer, Area Planning Manager and Community Development Assistant from within the Community Development Team.

Funding / Priorities / Plans

- 1.9 At the commencement of Community Panels, a Neighbourhood Investment Fund of £541,661 was allocated across all 8 panels. The allocation was on the basis of the Standard Mortality Rate / Ratio (SMR) which not only considers deprivation in an area, but also population health. This was used as it is consistent with health and wellbeing being at the heart of everything the Council does. The table below shows the allocations across the eight panels together with the SMR % used.

Community Panel	SMR %	Amount
CARLISLE WEST	15	£81,330
PETTERIL	14.5	£78,619
BORDERS, FELLSIDE AND NORTH CARLISLE	8.7	£47,172
FELLS AND SOLWAY	11.2	£60,727
LAKES TO SEA	11.1	£60,184
WORKINGTON TOGETHER	14.5	£78,619
WHITEHAVEN AND COASTAL	13	£70,486
SOUTH CUMBERLAND	11.9	£64,523
	99.9	£541,661

- 1.10 During 2023/24, the Community Panels allocated £409,315 of the fund, equating to 75.6%. This represented a direct investment in 149 organisations who stated that in excess of 11,500 individuals would feel the benefit. Applications are accepted from properly constituted Not For Profit / Community organisations.
- 1.11 Each Community Panel has agreed a set of priorities specific to their area and in addition to the Council Plan. There was engagement activity in all areas to ensure that there was support from the public and local organisations that the priorities selected

were appropriate. In summary, all priorities could be allocated across 9 themes and this is shown at Appendix 1. Priorities were agreed at the December 2023 meetings and now guide decisions on applications to the Neighbourhood Investment Fund.

- 1.12 Organisations across the Cumberland area can apply for investment from the Neighbourhood Investment Fund where they are able to demonstrate that the work they do is consistent with individual panel priorities and how the local community will benefit from the investment.
- 1.13 Agreement of priorities has led to first drafts of Neighbourhood Investment Plans which were presented to and agreed by the Community Panel meetings in March as working documents. The first versions of these are at a very local level with some deliverables within the resources of each panel. So far, there has not been input from across the Council so this is an area for development in future iterations so that these become more strategic whilst maintaining a local focus. The plans across all eight panels are very similar though this will change over time. An example of a Neighbourhood Investment Plan has been included at Appendix 2.
- 1.14 At its meeting 13 February 2024, it was agreed to devolve the Community Centre grant funding totals of £185,200 to the Neighbourhood Investment Funds under the management of the corresponding 3 Community Panels (Carlisle West, Petteril and Border, Fellside & North Carlisle).
- 1.15 At its meeting 23 April 2024, the Executive allocated £387,000 of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund to Community Panels. Applications will be presented and potentially awarded in respect of this fund at the September tranche of meetings.

Co-opted Members

- 1.16 Community Panels had the option to recruit up to three co-opted members from the wider population to serve on the Community Panel. In the first year of doing this, there was one opportunity to recruit for all co-opted members. Five of the eight Community Panels took up the opportunity and recruited co-opted Members with all agreed at the formal meetings of the Community Panels in June this year. This process will be reviewed throughout this first year.

Community Networks

- 1.17 In addition to the formal Community Panels, the term 'Community Network' was used to describe how the Community Panels would speak with its residents, community organisations and third / voluntary sector. They were originally established as informal meetings that would take place up to 4 times a year. The intention of the networks was

that they would have a membership, drawn from individuals, organisations and businesses.

- 1.18 It became apparent early on that the Community Panel Members were looking for a more tailored approach for their Panel areas and initially, a number of formats for the Community Network events were trialled to ensure they would get the reach into communities that the Council was aspiring to. This has now evolved so that we talk about Network Activity. This can be far more frequent, in any format and it allows for participants to join or leave as it suits them. In this first year, the Community Development team have worked with Members and across the organisation to start to develop an approach that is more inclusive, where a representation of the local population can be reached, including those seldom heard and the organisations that support them.
- 1.19 The Community Development Team will still continue to use engagement as an effective tool within our communities but have identified that the approaches used will need to evolve with two main focuses:
- Widening the audience of who engages, to include going to where people are rather than expecting them to come to us
 - Greater focus on those with protected characteristics / lived experience / seldom heard
- 1.20 A Community Engagement Framework has been developed for implementation throughout the Council. This introduces some basics of engagement to enable more Cumberland Council officers to carry out successful engagement across Cumberland to help us achieve the Council ambitions. This has been introduced to all DMTs and a working group has been pulled together to enable Learning and Development team to develop a training package to support the framework. The framework has been presented to the Executive previously.

Other Informal Support

- 1.21 Community Panel members are brought together informally either in person or remotely to have conversations about projects / issues / investment applications etc where it is relevant to that Community Panel area.
- 1.22 Member briefings have also been introduced, where officers can present ideas or updates that affect the Cumberland area and discussion is encouraged. This keeps Members up to date and helps to shape service ideas going forward. Examples have included Electric Vehicle Charging Points and the Waste Service consultation. These

were initially planned to happen four times a year, but additional sessions have been planned in due to the demand from officers and Members.

Differences

1.23 A framework was developed for Community Panels but with a degree of flexibility for individual panels which has resulted in some differences which have been set out below.

- Some panels introduced an informal session prior to the formal panel meeting for the public to meet with the Members and officers. Four panels still have these and a further panel is planning to introduce them from September.
- Public Participation at Community Panels is not included in the Constitution as the early thinking was that network activity would provide those opportunities. Some Community Panels have specifically requested that this is introduced and work has commenced to facilitate that. The reason cited for introducing this at Community Panels is that the issue / question raised is formally, with a formal response that is also minuted in a public forum.
- With the exception of one panel, all Community Panel meetings are held in the evening.
- Five of the eight Community Panels chose to recruit Co-opted members and these have been formally agreed at the Community Panel meetings in June 2024.
- Although the Neighbourhood Investment Fund is allocated as a single pot to Community Panels, three agreed to allocate some of the fund to individual Members / wards in the first year though this has reduced to two panels which have continued this in the current financial year.
- As a result of only four meetings per panel, per year, this has reduced opportunities to award investment funding from what had happened prior to the new Council. With appropriate communication and planning with potential applicants, this should not present any problems. However, six of the eight panels have agreed that funding decisions up to £1,500 can be taken outside formal meetings by named Members / officers and all such awards are reported retrospectively to future formal meetings.

1.24 The information above has been summarised in a table at Appendix 3.

2 Proposals

2.1 The Community Panel areas are significantly different in size and demographics, with four being smaller in size but focused around the towns of Whitehaven and Workington and the city of Carlisle and the remaining four being large geographically and containing towns but being largely rural. Some Members in the larger panel areas have expressed a desire to split the panel area into smaller footprints.

- 2.2 Regarding reports to Community Panels, it was always the ambition that the Community Panel Update report in particular would present what Cumberland Council (rather than the Community Development Team) has achieved within a panel area and this remains an area for development.
- 2.3 Community Networks, as originally described have already evolved into a more flexible approach, tailored to the needs of our different communities. Although there have been some successes in terms of numbers attending / conversations held, these do not feel embedded or trusted by our communities yet. This experience resonates with the findings from the Community Power research conducted by UCLan in 2022 and 2023, which revealed a historic distrust and perceived distance from the Council ([Wilson, 2024](#)). The research did, however, suggest a willingness to develop relationships.
- 2.4 It is the intention to continue to develop the approach so that not only are we speaking to our communities on a regular basis, but those conversations are shared across the Council so that our communities can see that they are being listened to. This strategy responds directly to the findings from the UCLan research, where communities said they wanted an on-going relationship with the Council, where they felt heard and valued ([Wilson, 2024](#)).
- 2.5 The aspiration to get the views of the general public by meeting them where they already are and also ensure that there is greater ongoing engagement with those seldom heard needs to be developed further until it feels embedded. There is some way to go before our residents feels listened to and are influencing actions, investments and service delivery but the journey has commenced.
- 2.6 The priorities were developed early on in the Council and are all high level aspirations that were able to provide the Community Panels with a clear focus in the first year. These have guided the content of individual Neighbourhood Investment Plans and investments from the Neighbourhood Investment Fund. However, for Community Panels and the wider Council to be able to tackle these priorities, more conversations are needed to better understand what is meant at operational, tactical and strategic levels.
- 2.7 The Neighbourhood Investment Plans were developed within the first year as a 'starter for ten' with a clear intention that they would be reviewed and refined over time. This is a key area for development over the next few years to reflect better understanding the priorities, strategic funding and projects in an area and the intentions of the Council in specific areas.
- 2.8 The co-opted members attended their first meetings of the Community Panels in June. They are in post initially for 1 year. This first year is a pilot to test out whether the co-opted member approach works, not only for the Community Panels but for the co-opted

members themselves and the communities that they serve on the Community Panel. This will remain under review.

- 2.9 The application process for investments from the Neighbourhood Investment Fund utilises the previous approach used by local committees for grants. There has been a shift from what happened previously in the sovereign authorities from grants to investments. The Community Development Team continue to talk to Members about offering investments to community groups and organisations but being clear about how that will benefit the community. They are also trying to move Members to invest in longer term projects and schemes as opposed to consumables or one day events. This will take time to embed, particularly where Members have been used to making awards against looser criteria. Greater clarity about what headline priorities actually mean in practice will encourage an investment mindset. This is an area for further development.
- 2.10 Although those directly involved with Community Panels understand the purpose and the governance arrangements, there is a view that better knowledge and understanding across the wider Council is an area for improvement. The establishment and ongoing support of the Community Panels is viewed as being driven by the Community Development Team who are not always the best placed to plan for and deliver services across the Cumberland area. There is knowledge and specialist skills across the organisation that could be shaped by the priorities of individual panels and also help to shape the priorities based on that knowledge and expertise.
- 2.11 These developments are currently unfunded and any improvements would need to be within existing resources.

3 Alternative options considered (this must not be deleted and **must** be answered)

- 3.1 Given the number of proposals made, further options have not been considered .

4 Reasons for recommendations (this must not be deleted and **must** be answered)

- 4.1 Members of the Executive are being asked to agree proposals for taking Community Panels forward to ensure that they achieve what they set out to (local decision making, influence and stakeholder engagement). Although all of these are being achieved to some extent, there is scope to improve on this but this needs to be balanced against the available resources.

Implications:

Given that Community Panel activity is a key mitigation to the corporate risk described below, the implications of not developing Community Panels further may result in this risk being realised.

Contribution to the Cumberland Plan Priorities -

The Council Plan aims to improve the health and wellbeing of our residents through the following priorities:

- Addressing inequalities
- Local economies that work for local people
- Environmental resilience and the climate emergency
- Delivering excellent public services

The Community Panels, set up on much smaller footprints than the previous Local Committees, together with the related network activity provide more opportunities to focus on specific communities. The framework established enables the Council to listen to communities at a more local level and better understand what needs to be done locally in the achievement of the Council's priorities.

Relevant Risks and explain how risks can be mitigated -

The relevant risk in the Corporate Risk Register is Risk 21 – Community Engagement.

There is a risk that the Community Panels and Community Networks do not effectively engage with and/or represent the views of local residents, partners, businesses and third sector organisations.

This risk is regularly monitored as part of the Corporate Risk Register and a target risk score of 9 has been achieved. There is ongoing activity to reduce / mitigate the impacts of this risk.

Consultation / Engagement –

No specific engagement or consultation in the preparation of this report.

Legal – There are no significant legal or governance implications arising from this report.

Finance – The Neighbourhood Investment Fund sits within Communities & Localities in the Public Health & Communities Directorate. In 2023/24 the budget for the Neighbourhood Investment Fund was set at £541,660 of which £409,315 was spent.

In 2024/25, the budget for the neighbourhood Investment Fund is set at £726,860 which includes an allocation of £185,200 budget for Community Centre grants, responsibility for which has been devolved to 3 of the 8 Community Panels (Carlisle West, Petteiril & BFNC). An allocation of £387,520 UKSPF funding has been awarded to the Community Panels in 2024/25. UKSPF expenditure must meet the specific criteria for which it was awarded and must be fully spent by the deadline provided.

Finance input is provided quarterly on each of the 8 panel reports and reconciliations are undertaken monthly as part of Cumberland Council's budget monitoring policies and procedures. Evidence of qualifying UKSPF spend will be provided for audit purposes. There are no financial risk implications arising from this report.

Information Governance –

Corporate Landlord – N/A

Impact Assessments –

Have you completed an Impact Assessment. NO – no decision

If no, please state why.

If yes, please provide a summary of key findings.

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Background papers:

Note: in compliance with section 100d of the Local Government Act 1972 the report has been prepared in part from the following papers:

Appendices attached to report:

- Appendix 1 – Community Panel Priorities and Themes
- Appendix 2 – Community Panel Neighbourhood Investment Plan (example)
- Appendix 3 – Table of Differences across Community Panels

Cumberland Council Community Panel Priorities 2023-2025

	Border, Fellside & North Carlisle	Carlisle West	Fells and Solway	Lakes to Sea	Petteril	South Cumberland	Whitehaven and Coastal	Workington Together
Accessibility and Connectivity	<i>Highways</i>		<i>Highways, Transport & Environmental Issues</i>	<i>Transport for the Community</i>		<i>Accessibility and Connectivity</i>		
Children and Young People					<i>Children and Young People</i>	<i>Supporting Children, Families and Young People</i>		<i>Empowering Children and Young People to be the best</i>
Community Facilities and Activities	<i>Community Facilities and Support</i>	<i>City and Town Centre</i>	<i>Community Infrastructure</i>	<i>Community Involvement</i>			<i>Addressing inequalities through improved access to services and opportunities</i>	
Community Resilience				<i>Community Resilience</i>				<i>Supporting Communities to Help Themselves</i>
Community Safety		<i>Crime and Anti-Social Behaviour</i>	<i>Community Safety and Rural Crime</i>					
Economy							<i>A Local Economy that is thriving and benefits everyone</i>	
Environment	<i>Environment</i>	<i>Environmental Issues</i>			<i>Environment</i>	<i>Improving local Living Environment</i>	<i>A Local Environment where individuals, households and communities can live well and thrive</i>	
Health and Wellbeing		<i>Public Service Framework</i>	<i>Priorities to run alongside Cumberland Council's aim of improving the health and wellbeing of residents.</i>	<i>Community Health and Wellbeing</i>	<i>Emotional Wellbeing and Mental Health</i>	<i>Health & Wellbeing</i>	<i>Better Health and Wellbeing for all</i>	<i>Food Poverty</i>
Housing		<i>Housing</i>						



**Cumberland
Council**



FELLS AND SOLWAY NEIGHBOURHOOD INVESTMENT PLAN 2024-2025

Cumberland Council - Vision and Values

Cumberland Council Plan 2023-2027 sets out what we will focus on in the first four years, how we want our new council to work and what residents can expect from us.

The council have identified the following priorities for 2023-2027:

- Addressing inequalities
- Local economies that work for local people
- Environmental resilience and the climate emergency
- Delivering excellent public services

We want to take a fresh approach to the delivery of inclusive services. Services that will be shaped by our residents and communities. By focusing on health and wellbeing, we will unlock the potential in our communities – supporting the environment and driving investment.

We will be:

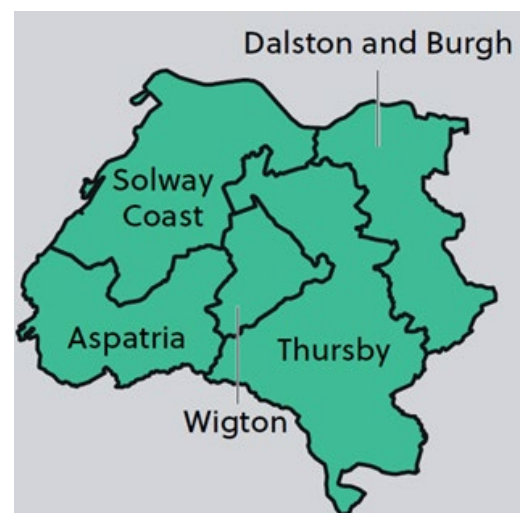
- Ambitious
- Collaborative
- Compassionate
- Empowering
- Innovative

Fells and Solway Community Panel

Community Panels are a new concept that was introduced with the start of the Cumberland Council. The council has eight Community Panels operating on a small footprint, contributing to the achievement of the council plan while focusing on local need. Each Community Panel has also set its own priorities specific to the geographical area covered by the panel.

The Fells and Solway Community Panel represents the wards of:

- Aspatria
- Dalston and Burgh
- Solway Coast
- Thursby
- Wigton



Fells and Solway Community Network

It is the intention of Cumberland Council that our communities will be listened to and will help shape services. To help with this, each Community Panel has a Community Network as part of their engagement with communities. The Network is a series of interactions which range from small topical conversations to larger events open to all. The Network is anyone with an interest in the panel area, whether that be residents, partners, the voluntary or community sector or businesses. Network activities will develop and support the delivery of the Fells and Solway Neighbourhood Investment Plan.

The Community has helped to set the priorities for the area up to 2025, which form the basis for this Neighbourhood Investment Plan and subsequent influence and investment.

Fells and Solway Neighbourhood Investment Plan

The Neighbourhood Investment Plan sets out the panel priorities and key focus areas identified by the members and communities. This demonstrates the council's commitment for services to be shaped by our residents and communities. Creating a partnership approach to addressing local priorities and supporting investment within the local area will help to deliver locally and support local need.



The Fells and Solway priorities for 2023-2025 have been identified as:

- Community infrastructure
- Community safety and rural crime
- Highways, transport and environment

Fells and Solway Neighbourhood Investment Fund

Cumberland Council have allocated funding to help the panel directly support the achievement of the priorities. This is available for the Community Panel to invest in organisations who in turn deliver benefits within their community.

Fells and Solway priorities and key focus areas

Throughout engagement on the panel priorities, residents identified focus areas which were important to them. Below identifies the top focus areas for each priority.

Priority – Community Infrastructure

- Supporting community facilities and activities
- Promoting pride in your local area

Priority – Community Safety and Rural Crime

- Increasing community safety
- Community resilience

Priority – Highways, Transport and Environment

- Sustainable and accessible travel
- Improving the local living environment

Fells and Solway Neighbourhood Investment Plan - Action Plan

Date Identified	Action	Priority	Responsible	Timescale	Date Complete
01/04/2024	Distribution of the Fells and Solway Neighbourhood Investment Fund	All	Community Development Team	31/03/2025	
01/04/2024	Ongoing network activity, including activity based on the panel priorities.	All	Community Development Team	31/03/2025	
14.03.24	Emergency Response Groups (identify areas)	Highways, Transport and Environment	Community Development Team		
14.03.24	Mapping Community Assets	Community Infrastructure	Community Development Team		
14.03.24	Wigton Borderlands		Community Development Team		
14.03.24	Public Participation		Community Development Team		
14.03.24	Network event around Community Safety and Rural Crime priority	Community Safety and Rural Crime	Community Development Team		

SAMPLE

	Border, Fellside and North Carlisle	Carlisle West	Fells and Solway	Lakes to Sea	Petteril	South Cumberland	Whitehaven and Coastal	Workington Together
Community Panel informal pre-meeting?	No	No	Planned from Sept 24	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Public Participation requested / discussed?	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
Time of day for formal meetings	Evening	Evening	Morning	Evening	Evening	Evening	Evening	Evening
Co-opted Members	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Member Allocation from Neighbourhood Investment Fund	£5,000	No	£6,000	No	No	No	No	No
Agreement of £1,500 allocation outside formal meeting implemented? (Combination of chair / vice chair / local member / senior officer to make decision)	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes (but all panel members to be involved in the decision)	No	Yes