

How to design the future of local government today?

A resilience framework for sustainable governance - and applied recommendations for the Think Communities approach.

James Baye, Helen Cook

Cambridge University Science and Policy Exchange (CUSPE) in collaboration with the
Cambridgeshire County Council

January 2020

Table of Contents

Introduction.....	3
1. A resilience framework for sustainable governance.....	4
2 Recommendations for Think Communities.....	13
Conclusions.....	16

Introduction

What will the future look like?

It has always been difficult to predict the future. Now, this is becoming increasingly difficult, as the amount of uncertainty in the future is growing rapidly. Demographic change is resulting in an ageing population, and with that comes a new set of economic challenges. The full economic effects of Brexit, and further the full effects on social cohesion of either Brexit or no Brexit will have lasting effects that are hard to predict. Climate change is slowly but increasingly more strongly starting to make its effects felt, and many of the resulting feedback loops, knock on effects, and amplifiers are still unknown to us.

These forces and more will continue to place stresses on society, and it will be local government's task to continue to effectively serve the population in the face of these challenges. To do so is going to require understanding these challenges, and knowing how to adapt to rapidly changing forces in society. It will take being creative about the best ways to improve life for citizens, and it will require bold action to put change in place. This will mean facilitating discussion between people with a range of different skills and expertise, understanding how change impacts the population, and collaborating across disciplines and across branches of government to best serve the population.

Local government can achieve this by developing its capacity for resilience. Resilience is the capacity to recover from stress, and to thrive in unstable environments. In these recommendations, we outline a framework that is a guide to resilience, which is very much in line with some of the initiatives that the Cambridgeshire County Council already has in place. We encourage further investment in these initiatives, such as Think Communities, and broader adoption of this style of project.

Scope and overview

In order to effectively implement change, we propose a model in which change is led by a coalition of people composed of members of the city and county councils as well as members of the community.

Being multi-faceted, this coalition will examine solutions from many perspectives to ensure their actions have a positive impact on the community immediately and that they will continue to do so going forward.

The Wayfinder guide to resilience describes such a system and is outlined in the next section of this document. Released in September 2018 by the Stockholm Resilience Centre and Australian Resilience Centre, it brings together 15 years of resilience science in a step-by-step format for policymakers. It lays out the process to build a coalition to investigate a given problem, and provides a detailed framework to help the coalition arrive at resilient solutions to that problem. The Wayfinder process involves stakeholders from the community, gathers input from a wide range of viewpoints, and identifies interventions most appropriate given the opportunity context and agency within the

community. This is an extensive guide, that can be adapted if necessary to work best for the Cambridgeshire County Council. The motivation and goals behind the Wayfinder guide are already closely aligned with that of the Think Communities effort, albeit more formalised. Thus, the Wayfinder presents an excellent resource to enable Cambridgeshire County Council to implement resilient, community focused solutions.

One of the main problems that Cambridgeshire County Council is facing is the increasing demand for elderly care under decreasing budgets. Here, we have identified the Think Communities project and its efforts to move elderly care into the community as an example application of the Wayfinder guide.

The work that has already been done by the Think Communities team aligns with stages 1 and 2 of the Wayfinder guide.

1. A resilience framework for sustainable governance

The Wayfinder guide

Wayfinder is a resilience guide for navigating towards sustainable futures. It has been developed by a group of resilience researchers and professionals from Stockholm Resilience Centre, Resilience Alliance and the Australian Resilience Centre. It was developed at the Stockholm Resilience Center program “Guidance for Resilience in the Anthropocene: Investments for Development”, which is funded by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency. Wayfinder is licensed under the Creative Commons License BY-NC-SA 4.0, making it free to use for non-commercial purposes. An in-depth description of the framework with relevant worksheets and step-by-step guides can be found online at www.wayfinder.earth.

Wayfinder is a guide to developing resilient solutions that will bring positive change into existing systems. It begins by building a coalition of interested parties who will work together to analyse the problem. The coalition will consult with experts where necessary as they consider possible solutions, and map the feedbacks and consequences of these solutions. It’s implementation includes a pilot project – and findings from the pilot phase will be fully analysed before putting larger scale change in place. Subsequent projects with new coalitions to put further change in place should be expected and planned for.

A recurring representation in the Wayfinder, embedded in resilience science, is that of trajectory space (Figure 1). The Wayfinder process intends to facilitate adaptation of a system in the face of complexity, in order to unlock new sets of trajectories. This in turn maintains the system in a safe operating space and avoids unsustainable practices that lead to runaway costs.

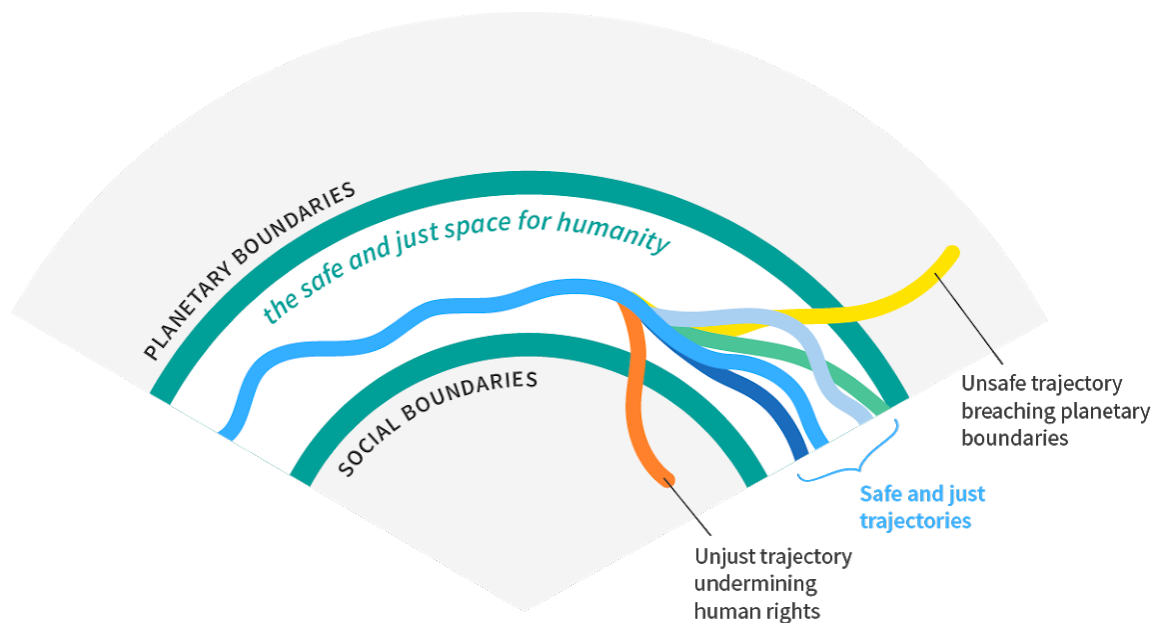


Figure 1: Sustainable governance trajectories. The Wayfinder resilience framework formalises structures and practices that facilitate adaptation and transformation, which in turn unlock a higher set of sustainable trajectory options for government. Image from wayfinder.earth.

There are 5 phases to the Wayfinder process, which will be summarised here. These are

1. Building the coalition,
2. Creating a shared understanding of the system,
3. Exploring the dynamics of the system,
4. Developing innovative strategies for change, and
5. Implementation, learning from the process and iteration.

Phase 1: Building the coalition

Getting people onboard

The Wayfinder process is best executed by a small group of key people, a coalition. People should be selected carefully to be on the coalition for the skills they bring such as leadership, facilitation, communication, and data analysis as well as for their different perspectives on the system. The coalition must also be representative in the sense that it has legitimacy with stakeholders at different scales. Stakeholders of different backgrounds (age, gender, ethnicity, culture, livelihood) will face different challenges and have different expectations of the system. Coalition members must also be selected strategically according to their influence and vested interests. Members with influence at

different scales will provide the agency to implement plans in reality. Some members with influence may also have vested interests in maintaining the system as it is and hinder the process.

Once the coalition is formed, it is important to agree on **principles for good practice**. This is particularly crucial in the case of a framework that aims for systemic change and has the potential to change people's lives. These may involve the description of a shared ethics in the form of a signed charter, as well as clarifying the agile and reflexive mindset needed among coalition members. As the coalition forms, its members will also require **training in systems literacy and reflexive practice**. This may be done through a succession of workshops and reading groups.

Process design

By paying attention to the 5Cs (*context, culture, capacity, cognition and creativity*), **the Wayfinder process can be tailored to the needs, capacity and history of the system**. From this, **principles for stakeholder participation** can be defined in order to balance representativity and agility. Then, coalition and stakeholders may agree on **information management systems**.

Scoping report

A **scoping report** is recommended at this stage to articulate the main assumptions of the work and the previous attempts that have been made. The coalition will **map previous efforts, projects or interventions** to avoid frustration of stakeholders who have seen or been involved in similar efforts in the past and learn from past mistakes. This may then lead the coalition to form an internal **Change Narrative**.

Phase 2: Creating a shared understanding of the system

The purpose of this phase is to give the Wayfinder process its framing and scope, and provides a first agreement of a stakeholder-wide Change Narrative. Phase 2 requires engagement with a wide range of stakeholders outside the coalition.

For the coalition to start working together, their first task is to lay out their broad aspirations for the system in which they would like to drive change. Instead of focusing on the immediate problems they will focus on possibilities, and come together with a shared understanding of what could be possible. Even if different groups disagree and have competing aspirations at this point, the purpose is to find common ground and to build commitment to the process.

The coalition will map how the current system benefits different groups of people, and also what it is that people find problematic about the current system (Figure 2). They will also look at how the system has evolved, and it has responded to challenges in the past. This will give the coalition some

perspective to ask whether they are facing the same or novel challenges today, and the space to choose whether they will take a new approach.

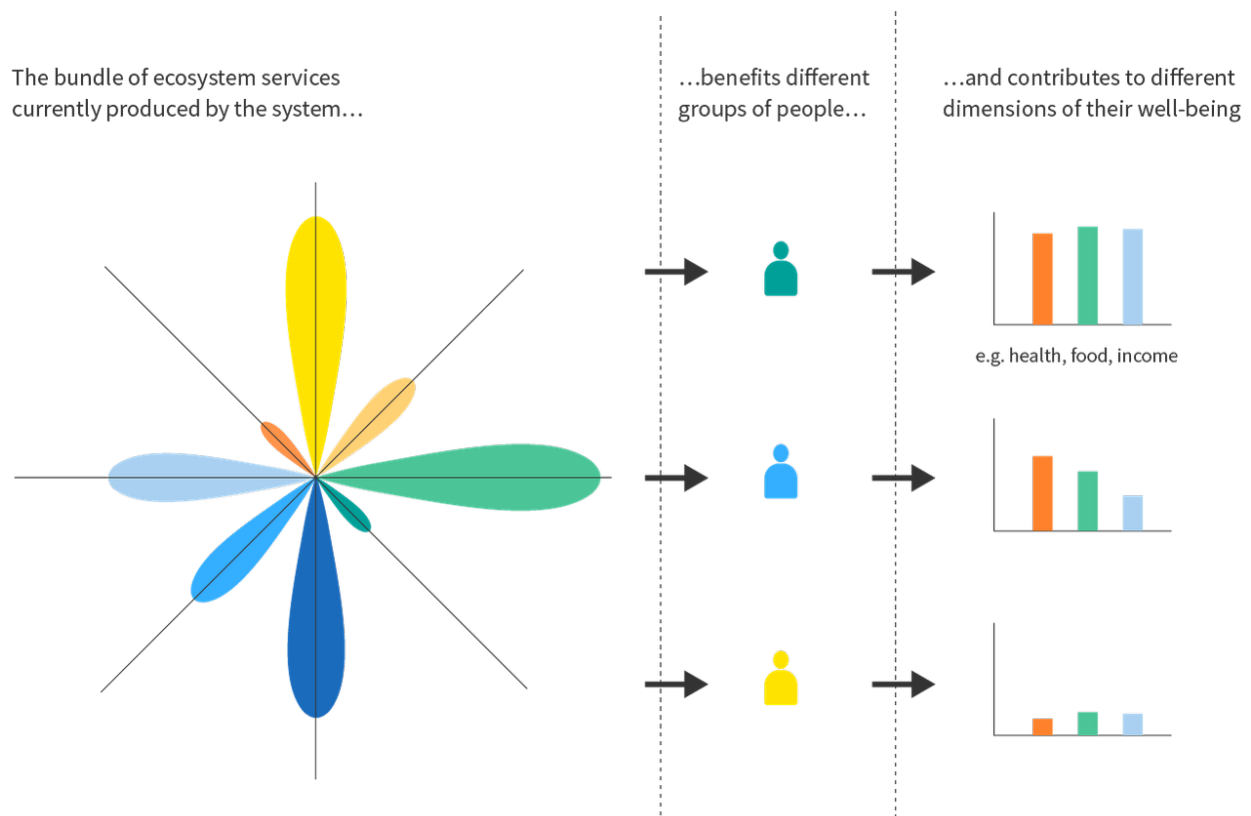


Figure 2: Schematic of systems identity. Different groups of people in the system will benefit from the bundle of services in different ways (food, health, income) and to different degrees. Image from [wayfinder.earth](https://www.wayfinder.earth/).

In considering the new approaches that are available, the coalition will begin to consider the social and ecological system boundaries framing the development of solutions. These boundaries, as well as the connections between them will be essential in the next phase of exploring the options that are possible solutions. Finally, the coalition will want to consider how cross-scale interactions can cause emerging trends that are geographically distant today to become local game changers tomorrow.

To conclude this phase, the coalition will synthesise all the gathered information into a conceptual model of the social-ecological system that will include the major actors, governance bodies, resources, action outcomes, and change drivers.

Phase 3: Exploring the dynamics of the system

Phase 3 begins to use the model generated in the previous phase to model the dynamics of this system and to describe alternative future scenarios. The purpose of this phase is to understand how the system will change once an intervention is put in place, and to anticipate any second order effects of the intervention that may not be immediately obvious. This phase will start to distinguish between true evidence and assumptions that have been made in the previous phase, and to identify where the key uncertainties lie. During this phase, coalition members can identify the key people and organisations who will be responsible for bringing about change.

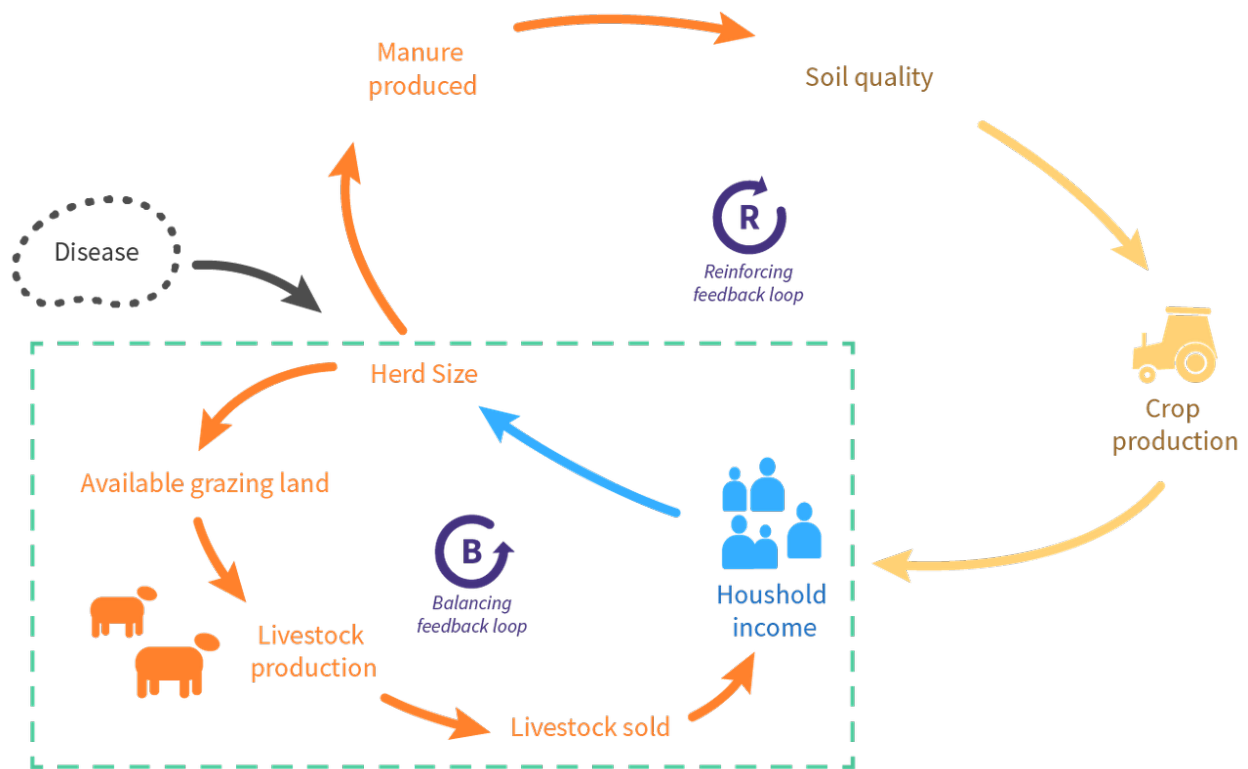


Figure 3: Schematic of system dynamics. Example of the dynamics of a household farm showing two feedback loops, an external influence (disease). Image from wayfinder.earth.

Understanding interactions across scales

The coalition will continue to work together, and will identify key interactions of the system. One strategy for this is to ask and answer “Why?” 5 times to understand what is happening at a deeper level. Through this process, the system will be examined to see how it will evolve over time. For example, identify where cycles will emerge, are what the thresholds are that lead to step functions, or

traps (for example, a family who cannot afford to invest in education will have earning potential that stays low).

Exploring option space

After these interactions have been identified, options for solutions can start to be explored. There are several criteria that our options should meet, given that our goals from the beginning were to satisfy social needs while staying within planetary boundaries. Further, we want to understand how these trends can evolve over time. The coalition will approach this by looking backwards to understand how the system has changed in the past, and then will use the interactions that they have defined in previous steps to extrapolate out to future scenarios.

Phase 4: Developing innovative strategies for change

Over the previous phases, the coalition has worked to understand how changing the system will impact stakeholders and the environment in the short and long term. The task in phase 4 is to implement resilient solutions that maintain the largest option space, improve human well-being, and use resources sustainably.

Actions will target leverage points, places where small changes can have large impacts. The coalition may have the option of many different points to target, and some may be more effective than others. For example, targeting the way decisions are made are likely to have longer lasting effects compared with targeting a single decision.

The larger context of the change, including formal institutions as well as social norms may be more or less conducive to the change that the coalition wants to bring about. The coalition should consider strategies that will increase the chance that their proposed actions will be adopted across the wider community. For example, timing the action plan to coincide with other expected changes may be an effective strategy, and training specifically for marginalised groups make change take hold faster.

The coalition should also consider the unintended consequences of the change they are proposing. Using the work from the previous sections, the impact the action will have on the rest of the system can be scrutinised for unintended consequences. Of course there will also be uncertainties in the future that cannot be predicted, and therefore the change should be designed to be as robust as possible across a range of possible futures.

The result of this phase will be a refined list of actions that target leverage points for systemic change, that consider agency and opportunity context, that are feasible and effective, and that handle unintended consequences, uncertainty and option space in a satisfying way. Lastly, the action plan will be communicated to stakeholders and to the wider community.

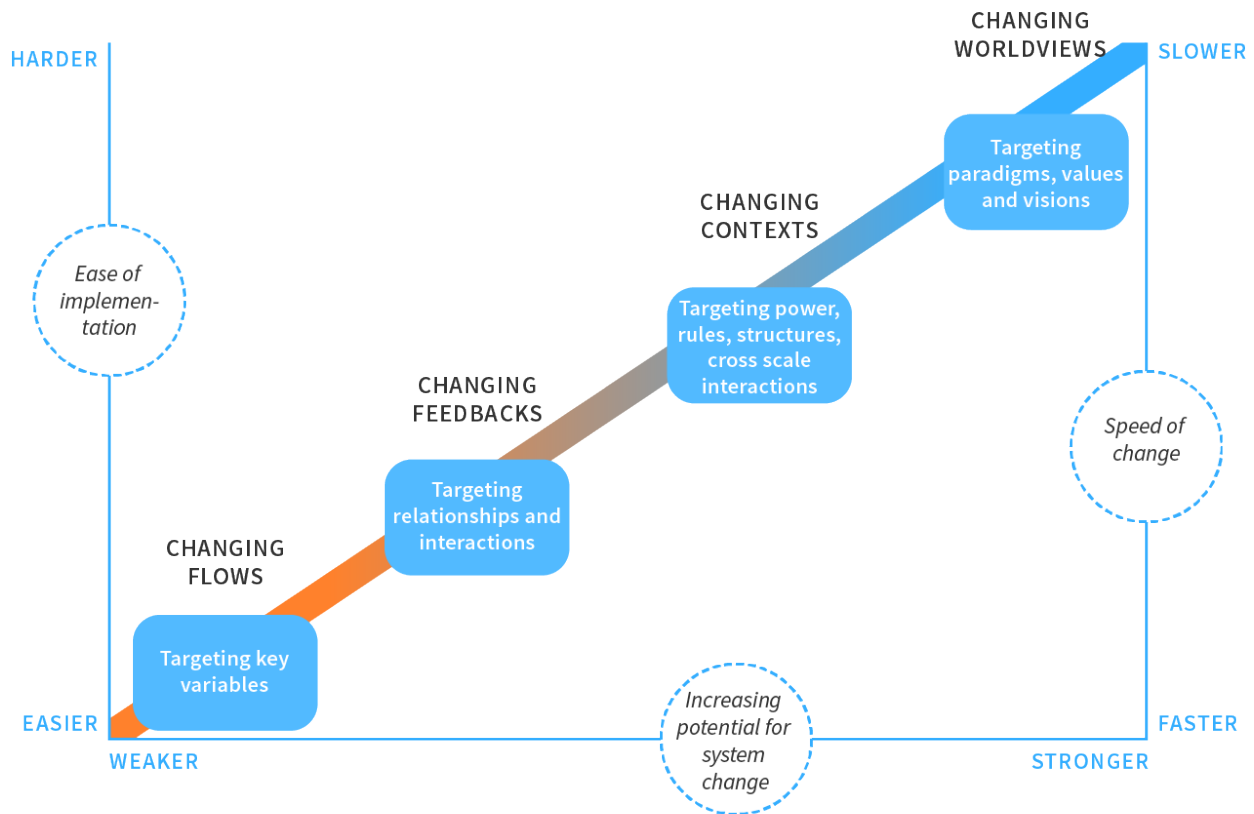


Figure 4: Trade-off between the scale of system change and ease of implementation. Image from *wayfinder.earth*

Phase 5: Implementation, learning from the process and iteration

The final phase encompasses large scale implementation of the plan that has been developed in the previous stage. The plan may be adapted if the situation has changed since originally doing the planning. Refining the plan should not be viewed as failure, instead it is an essential part of working in a complex system.

One of the last tasks of the coalition will be to define the implementation team, which will include all stakeholders — members of the coalition, others with specialist knowledge, and those with agency to enact change.

Instead of a rigid monitoring system, the coalition will develop a framework that encourages asking the right questions to determine the effects of the change. For example, questions to be asked could

include: what other effects has the intervention had? who was or may be disadvantaged by the changes? was the transformation process fair and transparent? The questions should be developed to assess how critical system dynamics change following interventions. The questions should aim to address the earliest indicators that can be observed, and should cover human well being as well as ecological and environmental variables. Questions should also cover long term indicators such as changes in feedback, flows and changes in the system option space — by putting this change in place, which future options are being excluded, and which are being made possible?

Implementation plan — short term pilot

The purpose of the short term pilot is to target interventions that may reveal new insights about any new leverage points, or dynamics that may have the potential to contribute to a sustainable, safe and just future, or new implications for scaling, or new barriers or challenges before moving on to large scale implementation. This is the chance to apply the questions developed in the previous stage to refine the plan for large scale implementation.

Implementation plan — at broader levels

As the implementation plan increases in scale, control of the process can move from the implementation team to people in the system to 'own' the process and adjust the action to their needs. The implementation team will work with decision makers to change any existing laws, rules, and guidelines in favour of the action, and similarly with other change-makers to change social norms in support of the action. This will bring about change in the structure of the existing system in a way that makes the intervention and its impacts more likely to persist and spread. For example, forming a new cross-scale governance structure, or reintroducing a cultural practice that would support the change.

Finally, through reflection and further evaluation of the implementation on this change, the entire process can be iterated on with the new information gained, and with strengthened understanding of the system, and how change affects people and communities associated with the system.

2 Recommendations for Think Communities

2.1 Background

The Think Communities approach presents itself as a reform to the organisation and delivery of public services in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough. Endorsed in September 2018 by the Communities and Partnership Committee, it emphasises the importance of place-based models to identify strengths and specific needs of communities, as well as foster closer interactions between and within communities, partners and the public sector. It argues that partners and the public sector may work more effectively in delivering services to the same communities if appropriate alignment of planning and resources is performed at a local and combined-authority level. It also calls for a shift in the relationship between communities and public sector, in which the public sector should provide agency to communities so that services may be designed and delivered with and by the community.

To drive the Think Communities approach forward, eight workstreams have been developed (Figure 5). Each workstream is driven by a combined-authority level officer leadership group and supported by an operational team. To initiate place-based service delivery, workstream officers and partners have agreed that community boundaries will match those defined by the NHS Primary Care Networks, leading to 21 communities of 30,000-50,000 citizens each for Cambridgeshire and Peterborough. It is planned that local multi-agency teams be formed in each community, each led by a Think Communities Place Lead post-holder.

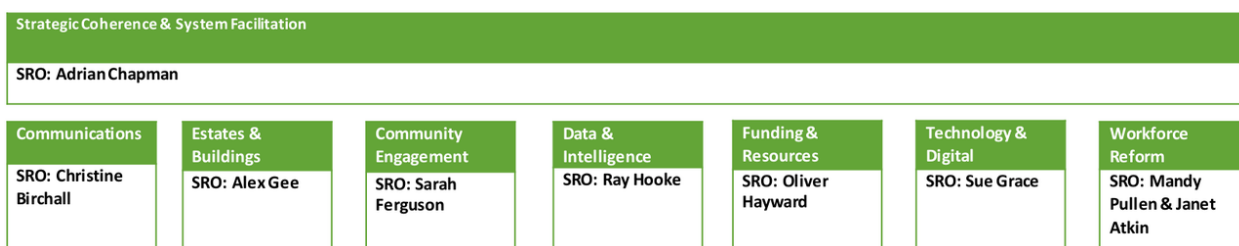


Figure 5: Think Communities combined-authority level workstreams.

Currently, efforts are under way to organise and set up community teams (Community Engagement), communicate the Think Community approach to citizens (Communications), map public assets (Estates & Buildings), define sources and mechanisms for funding (Funding & Resources) and facilitate work by and between stakeholders (Workforce Reform) whilst understanding what currently hinders them (Data & Intelligence).

Our current understanding of the Think Communities program brings us to think that it is very well aligned with the Wayfinder framework and in particular, appears to be exploring phases 1 and 2 of the Wayfinder cycle (Figure 5). A combined-authority level coalition has assembled, and place-based coalitions are still to be formed (Phase 1). Alongside this, stakeholders are being engaged by the combined-authority coalition to create a shared understanding of system identity (Phase 2).

Furthermore, pilots such as that in Soham, led by the Neighbourhood Cares initiative, have started to map issues relating to adult social care by describing the relationships between the healthcare system, carers, patients, acute treatment and preventative care.

To move forward, the multi-scale nature - combined-authority, partners and districts - within which Think Communities operates implies that careful coalition coordination and design will be required. In the following, we will therefore outline our main recommendations for the formation of place-based teams as well as initial interactions with stakeholders. Whereas these will mainly cover phases 1 and 2 of the Wayfinder framework, we expect that further phases may be explored by the Think Communities workforce on their own accord by exploring the in-depth resources available at www.wayfinder.earth.

2.2 Recommendations

First, to enable effective place-based insight and progress at pace, we recommend according to the Wayfinder framework that place-based teams be formed as coalitions that combine through its members the required skills, representativity and agency to maximise internally its capacity to enact change (see section 3.1 for more details). The recruitment of place-based coalition members may be facilitated by the combined-authority coalition's *Communications* and *Community Engagement* workstream officers. Agency and representativity requirements may inform which networks to advertise to whereas skill requirements will help shape expectations for hired personnel.

Once the place-based coalitions form, the Wayfinder framework suggests that principles for good practice be agreed within the coalitions. As the Think Communities approach also involves work between combined-authority and place-based coalitions, we recommend that a common *Principles for Good Practice* charter be signed between both to form an implicit contract. This charter will provide unity to the approach as it will clearly define a shared vision and ethics. Furthermore, it will provide an opportunity to ensure that both combined-authority and place-based work benefit from the multi-scale agency it requires to enact change. This may include mechanisms for training of place-based coalitions (in the form of workshops or reading groups), access to information management systems and network contacts, and sources of funding.

An initial task for the place-based coalitions will be to clearly define the scope of their work. According to the Wayfinder framework, we recommend that this take the form of a Scoping Report that may be submitted to the combined-authority coalition. In this report, place-based coalitions will outline past related projects or interventions and articulate a Change Narrative proposition. They will also identify the key stakeholders concerned with public service delivery within their district. This initial work is of importance as it will identify the knowledge gaps in the community, as well as the main assumptions that can then be investigated through interactions with the wider set of district stakeholders.

As place-based coalitions then engage with district stakeholders, a first aim according to the Wayfinder framework is to create a shared understanding of system identity and formulate a stakeholder-wide Change Narrative much like the Wigan Deal. The Wayfinder framework describes defining the broad aspirations of stakeholders, listing which services are being provided in the system and which people are benefiting from them, to then identify the dilemmas that exist within the system (see section 3.2 for more details). The aspirations and the dilemmas then form the basis for the stakeholder-wide Change Narrative which itself will build stakeholder-wide support for the Think Communities approach. We have been made aware of stakeholder work being currently undertaken in the Huntingdon district, and would recommend that these interactions implement some of the tools in the Wayfinder to work towards defining a local Change Narrative for Huntingdon.

We summarise our four main recommendations as follows:

Recommendation 1: Structure Think Communities place-based teams in light of the coalition model of the Wayfinder framework: focusing on recommended skills, representativity and agency of its members.

Recommendation 2: Ensure a shared vision and multi-scale agency within the Think Communities approach by defining a *Principles for good practice* charter, signed by combined-authority and place-based teams.

Recommendation 3: Define mechanisms for funding of place-based teams. Explore options around increasing flexibility of funding.

Recommendation 4: Set out place-based teams to establish local *Change narratives* through interactions with combined-authority and place-based stakeholders, to build support for the Think Communities approach and define a shared understanding of system strengths and needs.

Conclusions

In summary, there are many advantages to adopting place-based models, and the Wayfinder framework provides a detailed guide to implementing change structured around a place-based model.

Establishing a coalition to implement change draws on the local lived experience of the community, which will help ensure that the proposed solutions are relevant to that community. By adopting the structure of a coalition, this will help identify the vision and aspirations of the community, and drive collaboration within it.

Once the coalition has been established, they will turn to understanding how the system that is to be changed behaves so that any unintended consequences can be anticipated early. This will ensure that the coalition develops a solution that really works for the people they intend to help, because they will be able to foresee potential feedback loops, pitfalls and traps. The plan the coalition ultimately develops will have been tested against a wide variety of perspectives, and will have community buy-in and be ready to implement.

Finally, in terms of evaluating the outcome, having an adaptive system is more important than choosing the perfect metrics to measure. Wayfinder recommends finding the right questions to ask that will help listen to the concerns of stakeholders throughout the implementation process, and encourages iteration of the implementation plan in response to new information. This provides agency to the community, and ultimately unlocks lower-cost interventions with support from the community.