Decentralisation in Action

To:	Communities, Social Mobility and Inclusion Committee
Meeting Date:	8 December 2022
From:	Interim Deputy Director of Communities, Employment and Skills, Paul Fox
Electoral division(s):	All
Key decision:	No
Outcome:	The outcome of a well implemented decentralisation approach will be services that are closely tailored to the needs and wants of local communities. They will make the most of existing assets, connections and expertise to drive a just transition to a greener, fairer, more caring Cambridgeshire.
Recommendations:	The Committee is asked to:

a) Note the report; and

b) Agree that the Cambridgeshire Priorities Capital Fund be strategically aligned with the Care Together Programme, as set out in section 2.9.5 of the report.

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1. Background

1.1 In February 2022, Full Council agreed a [vision and a set of priorities](#) to create a greener, fairer and more caring Cambridgeshire. These priorities drive the Council's business plan and budget, and flow through all its planning and service design activities.

1.2 The Council's strategic framework is made up of a number of policies, each with an associated action plan. Throughout the framework, emphasis has been put on people-centred, place-based approaches, which build on the strengths, diversity and needs of Cambridgeshire's local communities.

1.3 In March 2022, the Committee agreed the following high-level elements of an approach to 'decentralisation':

- That the overall purpose of decentralisation is to improve Council decision making, and thereby outcomes for Cambridgeshire residents, by giving residents more opportunities to influence decisions that affect them.

- That the work of officers across the Council being more embedded in local communities is one of the main ways for decentralisation to fulfil that overall purpose.

1.4 The Communities Social Mobility and Inclusion Committee also agreed that the next stages of the work should be considered by the Strategy and Resources Committee.

1.5 The relative responsibilities of the two relevant committees are therefore:

(i) Strategy and Resources Committee
The Committee has agreed a set of principles to deliver a cohesive approach to decentralisation across the Council, connecting with other strategic priorities, legislative changes and priorities across the Cambridgeshire public sector system.

(ii) Communities Social Mobility and Inclusion Committee
To pursue the Council's approach to decentralisation, based on dialogue with local communities and partners, rather than by a 'top-down' programme defined by the Council.

1.6 Given the above, the 'degree of differentiation' appropriate for a particular service, or approach to a particular policy or issue, may vary according to the service or issue itself.

2. Main Issues

2.1 As set out in paragraph 1.3, 'decentralisation' is not an outcome. Rather it is a means of delivering a greener, fairer, more caring Cambridgeshire. It aims to empower, enable, and listen to residents while reducing bureaucracy and disconnect across the county's local systems. This facilitates decision-making and services that are shaped around local needs and assets.

2.2 While such principles are generally applicable, the Council's approach to decentralisation, set out in sections 1.5(ii) and 1.6, will lead to an evolutionary and differentiated delivery of 'decentralisation'. In practice, this means rather than a 'one size fits all' approach, projects, programmes and service delivery may take different forms in different places. This might

have consequences in terms of geographical distribution of service provision, and may impact on the Council's desire to target geographical or other communities.

2.3 Such an evolutionary approach is necessary, and will not produce a 'big bang' of sudden change, but rather a change in the approach to policy development and service delivery across the Council.

2.4 There are many current examples of developing approaches to decentralisation across the Council. Sections 2.8 to 2.10 of this report consider multiple examples of this. However, at present there is no systematic mechanism to promote and embed decentralisation across the organisation. One element of this has been the lack of a common assessment methodology by which the degree to which a service or approach can be, or has been, 'decentralised', can be assessed.

2.5 Decoding Decentralisation – An Assessment Framework

2.5.1 There is no universal definition of decentralisation, and no single road map to its achievement. Furthermore, approaches that seek to achieve markedly similar outcomes to decentralisation (set out in paragraph 2.1), are known by different terms, such as localism and devolution. However, the principles underpinning all approaches of this type are broadly consistent.

2.5.2 Locality (the national network of community organisations) and the National Association for Voluntary and Community Action have set out the following key principles that underpin devolution:

- Creating a Social Economy - creating an economy that works for the people in it, strengthening communities and prioritising social justice

- VCS Leadership - Giving people a strong voice through their voluntary and community organisations

- Effective Community Engagement - Strong and identifiable power structures that are responsive to the needs of the community.

- Decision Making at Local Level - Decision making and spending powers at the most appropriate local level

- Working with Local Organisations to Transform Public Services - public service innovation through local commissioning and delivery.

2.5.3 Such a lens (or a slight variation on it), could be used to consider future strategy and policy developments, as well as service design, commissioning, procurement and service delivery across the Council. Assessing against these criteria, in the same way as the Council seeks to assess the equality impacts and health impacts of its activity, should allow the Council to make a more consistent and comprehensive assessment of how it is progressing the decentralisation agenda.

2.6 Governance and Delivery

2.6.1 While the delivery of decentralisation may be evolutionary and differentiated, adopting and embedding its principles should not be. Officers will therefore establish a cross-Council

decentralisation programme board, which will ensure systematic consideration, assessment, evaluation and benefits realisation of the Council's decentralised approaches. This operational board will report progress to Members through the Council's committee structures.

2.7   Decentralisation in Action

2.7.1   The remainder of this paper will be split into three sections to consider three different aspects of decentralisation:

- Services that operate, and issues that are addressed, in ways that meet the criteria set out in paragraph 2.5.2 of this report, and are therefore decentralised. This is an illustrative list and is not exhaustive.

- A closer examination of current developments, including those arising from the recent restructure that resulted in the closer alignment of the Library, Skills, Communities and Anti-Poverty services.

- Whole systems enabling activity to support decentralisation.

2.8   Currently Operating in a Decentralised Way

2.8.1   Community Safety

As indicated in paragraph 2.4, service delivery should not be viewed as either 'centralised' or 'decentralised' in a binary manner. The Council's approach to community safety has a core, consistent, countywide offer, which is enhanced by localism.

The Council's Independent Domestic Advisory service, Outreach service, approach to domestic homicide reviews, and the Target Hardening service (improving security of properties to the vulnerable), all work across the County. These services are then enhanced locally by community groups that provide peer support and group programmes for domestic abuse victims (for example, The Meadows in Cambridge, Cambridge Women's Resource Centre, Property Angels in Huntingdonshire).

2.8.2   Locally Led Nature Recovery

Work in this area also has a Countywide approach that is responsive to local need and the priorities of partners. Linking with the developing Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority Local Nature Recovery Strategy, the Council's Natural and Historic Environment service is working with Natural Cambridgeshire to model a County scale, community-led nature recovery approach.

A Local Nature Partnership Toolkit will be developed that will be useful for both urban environments and areas with unique nature opportunities, such as the Fens. This will be supplemented by action to set up and support local nature groups to manage and enhance their communities' green spaces.

2.8.4   Anti-Poverty Work

The Council's anti-poverty hub delivers direct financial support to households in need, as well as a more holistic personalised approach designed to provide a more sustainable form

of support. This approach was co-designed with the Council's partners, and service improvements continue to be made based on ongoing feedback from them and user-evaluation of the service. Central to its delivery are the Council's Trusted Partners – a network of statutory and voluntary service providers that have access to the Council's financial resource, and which can make financial awards to those in need, which the Anti-Poverty Hub processes and pays on their behalf. The Council has developed an approach specific to those in need who are of pensionable age, and has partnered with Age UK Cambridgeshire & Peterborough, who deliver this on its behalf.

2.8.5   Integrated Care System (ICS)

The ICS continues to develop its work on integrated neighbourhoods. This is led by the North and South Integrated Care Partnerships, and is focused on developing neighbourhood-based solutions that improve health and wellbeing and develop proactive, preventative and integrated responses to needs for health and social care support. The Council is an active partner in this endeavour, contributing to place-based plans to deliver most of an individual's care needs in their community. This will reduce the need for hospital care. The approach is based on the principles of shared planning and decision making with residents.

2.8.6   Youth in Communities

This model is based on a core professional youth work team that informs and supports the development and practice of voluntary and community sector led youth service organisations. The offer is rooted in an asset-based community development approach which puts young people and communities at the heart of all developments. The aim, although focused on young people, is to engage communities in the development of services and positive activities for 0–19 year-olds and their families. The core team provides resource and capacity to respond in partnership to external funding opportunities. The service also delivers the Community Reach Fund as a flexible, responsive tool to enable new and establishing community groups to apply for seed funding of up to £1,000 to support activity in this area.

2.8.7   Improved decision making with district and city council partners

By working together more effectively across tiers of local government the Council aims to improve how it engages with its residents in planning and delivering services. This report contains several examples of that approach. However, the nature of decentralisation means that this approach will differ between areas, resulting from discussion with partners based on factors, including their own appetite for decentralised approaches to service delivery and policy development. One example of this is the developing approach to working with Cambridge City Council.

Cambridge City Council is moving forward with an organisation redesign that would put partnership working with communities, public sector and business at the forefront of its structure and ways of working – 'Partnership by Default'. This is an opportunity to consider how County and City services can work more effectively together, for example taking a more collaborative approach to the planning and delivery of smaller scale transport infrastructure improvements and how this activity relates to the work of the Greater Cambridge Partnership. The County Council's aim is to simplify decision making and make what it does more accessible to residents. By working together more effectively with local government partners, the Council aims to improve how it collectively engages with residents.

2.9   Developing and Enhancing Decentralisation

2.9.1 Local Highways Improvement (LHI) Scheme

A member-led working group has already generated a number of recommendations to enhance the accessibility and effectiveness of this popular community-driven initiative. Further consideration will be given as to how the LHI process can become even more transparent and community driven.

2.9.2 Care Together

The Council's Care Together programme aims to drive a switch from social care based on large County-wide contracts to one in which people living and working in their own communities will be empowered to support older and vulnerable people. This will help residents to remain living in their own homes and reduce the risk that people will need to leave home to go into residential care or hospital. This will include voluntary and paid services in those communities creating local employment opportunities. This approach therefore has many of the elements of decentralisation set out in section 2.5.2 (creating a social economy; decision making at local level; community and VCS leadership; working with local organisations to transform public services).

2.9.3 Libraries, Communities and Skills

An organisational restructure in September 2022 brought together libraries, skills and communities services. The change also relocated the services within the new Strategy and Partnerships directorate. This change places these services, which are fundamental to the Council's approach to localism, at the centre of the organisation. This change is already producing positive developments, including:

- A new and coordinated approach to support the Care Together programme, is developing a package of offers from these services to:
  - o Support developing microenterprises and Voluntary and Community Sector organisations to deliver the Care Together approach.
  - o Provide offers and support directly to older and vulnerable people in the community.

- The identification of a gap in the 16-19yrs skills offer will be addressed by joint working between the Skills, Libraries and Youth in Communities teams.

- The libraries and skills services have worked together to access funding to retain the Business and Intellectual Property Centres (business start-up support) that were previously funded through a British Library grant.

- Further funding is being sought to increase the delivery of both accredited courses and non-accredited 'community learning' courses in libraries that focus on developing life skills.

- Wisbech Library: The consultation on the use of this community facility will engage both geographical communities and communities of interest over and above those who are already library users, or members of a cohort already likely to use a library.

The Think Communities team is part of the consultation planning and delivery, which will include existing users of the skills service and recipients of anti-poverty support.

- Cambridgeshire Community ARC (Activities and Resources Centre) provides a range of resources linked to youth work and positive activities. Collaboration between the Youth in Communities team and libraries service has improved access to these resources by developing a mechanism by which they can be collected from local libraries rather than just the ARC site in Histon.

- Building on a successful trial event in Ely library, the Think Communities and the Libraries services and Anti-Poverty Hub are working together to organise a series of 'cost of living' events in local libraries. This will bring advice and access to support (such as the Household Support Fund) closer to the communities that are suffering the adverse impacts of the cost-of-living crisis.

2.9.5 Cambridgeshire Priorities Capital Fund

At its meeting in July 2022, the Committee agreed to the creation of a Cambridgeshire Priorities Capital Fund (CPCF), using resources unallocated from, or returned to, the Communities Capital Fund that funded projects in 2020. The total resources available for allocation through this new fund are around £700,000.

It is recommended that the CPCF be aligned with the Care Together Programme and used to provide small capital grants to make community venues more accessible to frail older people, wheelchair users, dementia sufferers, people with visual and other sensory impairments and those with personal care needs. Supporting accessibility and use of community venues by such groups supports the Care Together principles of empowering local communities to support older and more vulnerable people. More detailed criteria and details of the fund's governance and application process will be presented at the Committee meeting in March 2023.

2.10 System enablers to Support Decentralisation

2.10.1 Decentralisation underpinned by System-wide Business Intelligence

Open data about local places

Local data is key to a localised approach to service delivery. Such data must be accessible and organised in a way that that enables individuals and local organisations to access key facts and investigate detail. The Council's shared platform, Cambridgeshire Insight, provides this function and provides access to open datasets that are published by the Council and other partners. The Covid-19 pandemic showed that people are very interested in data about their local area, and this approach supports citizen engagement, as well as service delivery.

Combining and linking data to improve system-wide partnership working

Data sharing is frequently cited as fundamental to the system-wide partnership working. At a strategic level, the Integrated Care System is building on a pilot which brought together GP, community care and hospital medical data, to combine social care and other data to support health and care service planning across the whole system, to improve wellbeing. The Council is also working with partners of the Cambridgeshire Public Services

Board to look at how it can develop a 'system analytics' capability, which provides data analysis to support solving problems that cut across agencies. Therefore, it is the centralisation of data, through large, scale automated data sharing between data-rich public services organisations, that will be useful in identifying geographical areas for targeting or enhancement of services. That service delivery may then be undertaken at the local level by the most appropriate local organisation.

Many of the approaches above make use of aggregated data. Where identifiable data is used, this will be informed by the principles of confidentiality and consent and undertaken within the legal framework of the General Data Protection Regulations.

2.10.2 Decentralisation underpinned by Community Input and Deliberative Democracy

There is a significant amount of activity across the Council that involves communities and/or service users shaping its services and service delivery. These initiatives include user acceptance testing for digital developments and behavioural insights activity to overcome barriers to effective service delivery of lifestyle services. The Council's social care offers are similarly influenced by the Adult Social Care Forum and participation boards.

In the County's libraries, service users and local communities are helping the Council create innovative, flexible and inclusive spaces at Cambridge Central and March libraries as part of the EverySpace project. Similar input is influencing the planning of new library offers at Histon and Sawston. The Library Presents is a programme of arts activities, online and in locations around Cambridgeshire. This programme of events is chosen by library users and communities.

The Council's Youth in Communities service runs the Youth Engagement Partnership and Youth Voice, which ensures it hears the voices of young people in shaping local youth activity. This gives an opportunity to hear the voice of young people between the ages of 11 and 19 and is supplemented with thematic focus groups for young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities, Children in Care and Young Carers. Geographically, Youth Advisory Boards are supported, or are being developed, in Fenland, East Cambridgeshire, Cambridge City, South Cambridgeshire and Huntingdonshire. The Youth Engagement Partnership therefore works to enable young people to contribute to the design, commissioning, inspection and evaluation of services.

In the coming months the Council will build on and enhance its outward-facing, people-centred approach to engagement and deliberative democracy by:

- Reviewing and refreshing its Consultation and Engagement Strategy to reflect the Council's ambition to make approaches, such as the examples given above, part of its core business;

- Establishing a residents panel that is representative of the geography and demography of the County to improve the way the Council consults and engages with people;

- Exploring and adopting other methods of improved community engagement;

- Creating dedicated corporate support for services wanting to use deliberative democracy methodologies; and

- Extending the 'Youth Voice' approach to the work of the Council's wider Communities' teams

3. Alignment with corporate priorities

3.1 Environment and Sustainability

There are no significant implications for this priority.

3.2 Health and Care

See wording under 3.1 above.

3.3 Places and Communities

See wording under 3.1 above.

3.4 Children and Young People

See wording under 3.1 above.

3.5 Transport

See wording under 3.1 above.

4. Significant Implications

4.1 Resource Implications
There are no new significant resource implications within this report. The capital available to the Cambridgeshire Priorities Capital Fund (paragraph 2.9.5) has already been allocated in previous budget rounds.

4.2 Procurement/Contractual/Council Contract Procedure Rules Implications
The criteria for the Cambridgeshire Priorities Capital Fund will be developed in accordance with the Council's 'Grants to External Organisations Policy'.

4.3 Statutory, Legal and Risk Implications
Care should be taken to ensure the decentralisation of services does not have unintended consequences relating to equitable access to services.

4.4 Equality and Diversity Implications
See wording under 4.3.

4.5 Engagement and Communications Implications
Meaning engagement with communities and service users is central to this process.

4.6 Localism and Local Member Involvement
Decentralisation and localism are complementary and overlapping approaches.

4.7   Public Health Implications
        Decentralisation affords the opportunity to meet local needs and this approach will engage
        residents to taking local action. However, there could be implications for health and other
        inequalities and the impacts of the grants should be monitored carefully.

4.8   Environment and Climate Change Implications on Priority Areas:

4.8.1   Implication 1: Energy efficient, low carbon buildings.
        Positive/neutral/negative Status: Neutral
        Explanation: While decentralised approaches to delivery of particular services or policies
        may have an impact in this area, this report contains no direct recommendations that relate
        to this implication

4.8.2   Implication 2: Low carbon transport.
        See 4.8.1

4.8.3   Implication 3: Green spaces, peatland, afforestation, habitats and land management.
        See 4.8.1

4.8.4   Implication 4: Waste Management and Tackling Plastic Pollution.
        See 4.8.1

4.8.5   Implication 5: Water use, availability and management:
        See 4.8.1

4.8.6   Implication 6: Air Pollution.
        See 4.8.1

4.8.7   Implication 7: Resilience of our services and infrastructure, and supporting vulnerable
        people to cope with climate change.
        See 4.8.1

        Have the resource implications been cleared by Finance?
        Yes
        Name of Financial Officer: Martin Wade

        Have the procurement/contractual/ Council Contract Procedure Rules implications been
        cleared by the Head of Procurement?
        Yes
        Name of Officer: Clare Ellis

        Has the impact on statutory, legal and risk implications been cleared by the Council's
        Monitoring Officer or Pathfinder Legal?
        Yes
        Name of Legal Officer: Fiona McMillan

        Have the equality and diversity implications been cleared by your EqIA Super User?
        No

        Have any engagement and communication implications been cleared by Communications?
        Yes
        Name of Officer: Amanda Rose

Have any localism and Local Member involvement issues been cleared by your Service Contact?
Yes
Name of Officer: Paul Fox

Have any Public Health implications been cleared by Public Health?
Yes
Name of Officer: Val Thomas

If a Key decision, have any Environment and Climate Change implications been cleared by the Climate Change Officer?
Yes
Name of Officer: Emily Bolton

5.   Source Documents

5.1   None