

Closer to Communities

To: Communities, Social Mobility and Inclusion Committee

Meeting Date: 6 July 2023

From: Executive Director Strategy and Partnerships
Service Director Policy and Communities

Electoral division(s): All

Key decision: No

Outcome: The development of a range of projects that will pilot decentralised approaches to bring Council services closer to communities.

Recommendation: The Committee is recommended to:

- a) Endorse the Council defining and delivering a series of pilot decentralisation projects, starting in July 2023; and
- b) Endorse the development of proposals for library-led front door services.

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1. Background

- 1.1 The Council has committed to encourage and participate in place-based partnerships and to devolve power as close as possible to people and local communities. The Committee has previously received two previous papers defining decentralisation and significant progress has been made on redefining services, notably through Care Together and ongoing work with Integrated Neighbourhoods. This paper sets out the framework for a series of pilot projects to test and evaluate the concept further.

2. Main Issues

- 2.1 Decentralisation is fundamental to the delivery of the Council's Strategic Framework. In some cases, such as Ambition 4 (healthy, safe and independent lives), it is difficult to imagine achieving the goal without being closer to communities. In other areas, such as Ambition 2 (Safe, Sustainable Travel), there are significant opportunities to deliver better outcomes through decentralisation, for instance through enhanced partnership with parish and town councils, resident groups and communities to design and maintain travel networks. In all cases, the Council's ability to achieve complex strategic ambitions on its own is limited (see Table 1 below).
- 2.2 Decentralisation can therefore be viewed as an approach that uses the Council's services and convening power to:
- Encourage active and democratically engaged communities
 - Convene place-based initiatives in partnership with the wider system
 - Integrate and simplify local services for the end user
 - Make the best use of resources across the whole system
 - Create stronger strategic alignment across the whole Cambridgeshire public service system.
- 2.3 Over the next two years, the Council will take forward a series of pilot projects that will help it learn what works. These have been divided into tactical and strategic pilots. The former are smaller-scale pilots that can be delivered quickly, for instance Child and Family Centres engaging local communities in climate action. The strategic pilots are larger and more complex pieces of work that will take longer to establish, but which may open broader opportunities to align the Council's work strategically with partners. These might include, for instance, deepening the Council's engagement with integrated neighbourhoods.
- 2.4 To support this, options will be brought forward to consolidate the Council's customer-facing universal or whole population services and its properties in each town or city into a smaller number of higher quality buildings. As far as possible, this will be done alongside partners, such as the Integrated Care System. This will support decentralisation by providing access to more services in one location and providing an opportunity to integrate the Council's services, for instance by using libraries as a front door for a wider range of public health and wellbeing functions.

Strategic Framework 7 Ambitions	Possible benefit of decentralisation
1 - Net zero by 2045	Facilitate more parish/community-led plans for decarbonisation and biodiversity.
2 - Travel is safer and environmentally sustainable	Communities able to take more decisions about their local transport networks.
3 - Health inequalities are reduced	Creation of place-based partnerships to act on wider determinants of health such as loneliness or opportunities for exercise.
4 - Healthy, safe and independent lives	Continuing to deepen engagement with Integrated Neighbourhoods, which are small teams of health and care services usually centred on clusters of GP surgeries.
5 - People are helped out of poverty and income inequality	Facilitate data sharing to identify those people who are at risk and create place-based partnerships that can provide wrap-around support.
6 - Places and communities prosper	Council participates in local community wealth building partnerships, where large institutions such as health trusts and universities use their spending to encourage more locally-owned businesses.
7 - Children and young people have opportunities to thrive	Youth services designed in partnership with young people, their families and the local voluntary and community sector.

Table 1

2.6 Pilots

2.6.1 A range of potential pilots have been selected based on their alignment to the Council's strategic ambitions (as set out Appendices 1 - 17), their geographical spread (see Figure 1 below), and to provide a mix of strategic and tactical opportunities. Importantly, many of the pilots reflect particular challenges that communities face in different parts of the county. In developing these schemes, officers deliberately sought pilots that will meaningfully engage the community, that work through existing public service geographies and that enable the Council to establish its right role in a complex public service landscape.

2.6.2 It is important to note that the goal of delivering services closer to communities is shared across Cambridgeshire's public services. This means many of the Council's pilots will be delivered in partnership and in some cases the Council will not be the lead organisation. The goal for the pilots is fundamentally to enable learning. Each scheme will be evaluated to generate lessons for future partnership working with the aim of creating a consistent, strategic cross-council framework for decentralisation by 2025.

2.6.3 The tactical pilots can be taken forward rapidly, with the majority in delivery by autumn 2023. They include a wide range of different services. Examples include:

- Devolution of the Supporting Families personalisation budget, allowing families and their lead worker to allocate funding to achieve the goals identified in their family plan. This will enable lead workers employed by partner organisations, such as schools or the voluntary sector, to access funding previously only available to families with a lead worker from the Council.
- Locally designed targeted support services, family learning and youth work. These pilots will enable services and support to be tailored to respond to what local people need or local issues, as opposed to a countywide approach.
- Local community climate campaigns, designed by local families and led by child and family centres. These pilots will deliver communications that are meaningful to the community who create them and provide insight into the most effective methods to engage local people in ways to support the Council to achieve its ambitions.

2.6.4 The strategic pilots are a particularly important part of this work as they are designed to explore system-wide collaboration around themes that align to the Council's Strategic Framework, with many of these themes also aligning with the priorities of its partners. While discussions remain at an early stage, likely themes for strategic pilots include:

- (i) Poverty: with the possible end of the Household Support Fund, the Council needs to establish its ongoing role in supporting poverty alleviation as part of the wider network of partners who are also deeply involved in this work. This will be supported by pilots in Huntingdonshire and South Cambridgeshire.
- (ii) Climate change: developing a community-led approach to the green transition, supporting communities to access advice and financial support to secure locally-owned renewable generation, to support active travel and to facilitate behavioural change so people are better able to reduce their carbon footprint.
- (iii) Community wealth building: the Council is committed to resilient and inclusive economies and needs to define the role it seeks to play here. To explore this, the Council will work with Cambridge City Council to support its Abbey pilot on community wealth building.
- (iv) Integrated neighbourhoods: the Council will work with the southern area of the Integrated Care System to pilot deeper integration of public services at the neighbourhood level focused on a small number of key health and wellbeing outcomes.

2.6.5 A full list of pilots is included attached at Appendices 1-17 of this report. Subject to the committee’s endorsement, business cases and evaluation approaches that cover the full range will be developed. Key evaluation criteria will include the extent to which the pilots have actually engaged communities in the design and delivery of the pilots.

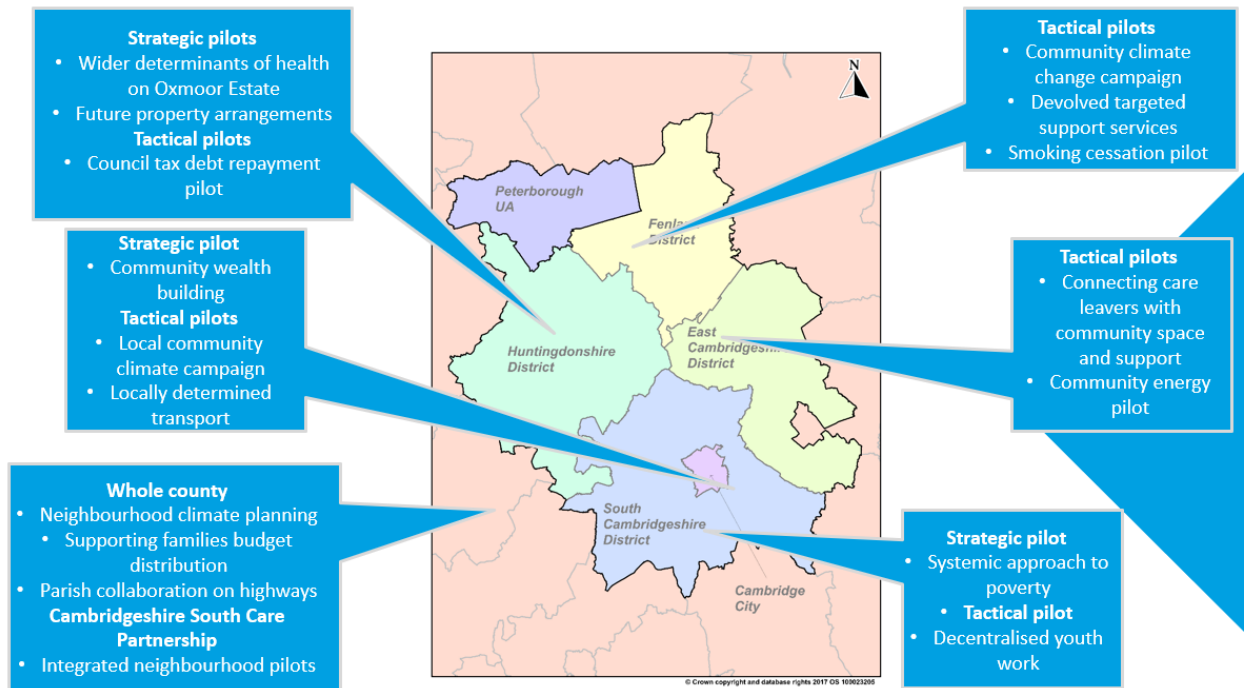


Figure 1: Pilot Map

2.7 Property

2.7.1 The Council’s decentralisation agenda will be supported by a new property assets strategy that will align the Council’s property assets, and how they are managed, with the strategic needs of the Council. The Council has multiple assets across the county, which are in varying states of repair and not all in the best location to deliver the decentralisation agenda (see Figure 2 below).

2.7.2 As part of the pilot programme, the case for taking a decentralised hub approach in Huntingdon will be explored. This would use one of the Council’s libraries as the front door for a wider range of Council services, including public health, climate advice and support, and children’s and family facilities. As far as possible, this work will be done alongside the Council’s public sector partners, to maximise the potential for integrating services and simplifying access for residents. The Council will engage with communities and service users to ensure that any changes meet their needs.

2.7.3 The One Public Estate (OPE) programme, which celebrates its first decade this year and is backed by the Local Government Association, and the Cabinet Office supports locally led partnerships of public sector bodies to collaborate around their public sector delivery strategies and estates’ needs. OPE will help bring public sector partners together to pursue decentralisation benefits. One partner will be the NHS, which has launched its Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Integrated Care Board Estate Strategy, which complements the Council’s decentralisation vision.

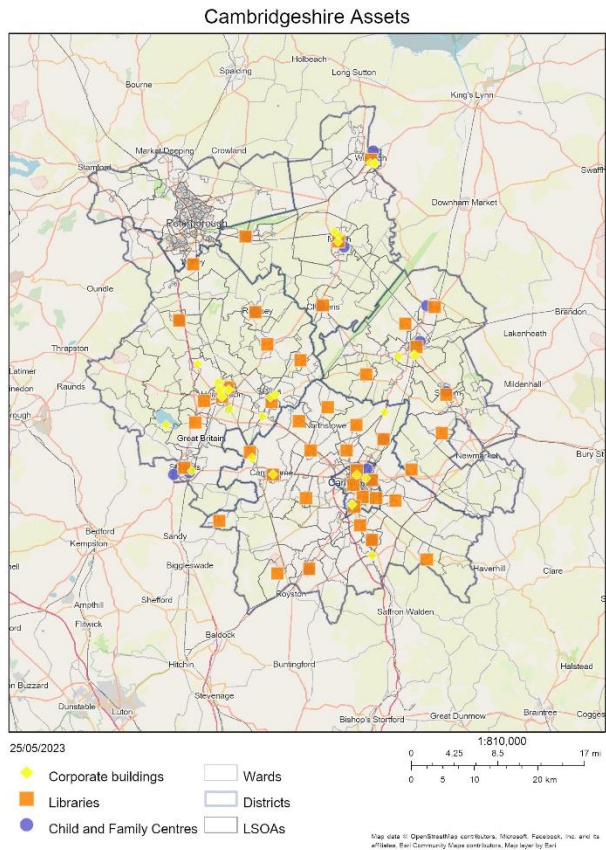


Figure 2: Cambridgeshire Assets Map

2.8 Enabling activity

2.8.1 To support the pilot activity, and to ensure that decentralisation becomes a core part of the way the Council operates, this programme will be supported with two key strands of enabling activity. The first is a new participation strategy to spell out the Council’s approach to public engagement and deliberative democracy. This will be a broader document looking at, for instance, how the Council can engage people in a range of its core strategies, but it also provides a key underpinning for decentralisation. The second strand is the work of the newly restructured Communities Service, which will be focused on supporting this activity.

2.8.2 As the Council’s current consultation and engagement strategy is due to expire in September 2023, a new strategy for participation presents a timely opportunity to support the development of the decentralisation framework. Defining participation as any activity that involves local people and communities in decisions that affect them, this strategy will outline how the Council will expand and align its methods for doing this and what it hopes to achieve by them.

2.8.3 This will primarily involve:

- Using the proposed decentralisation pilots to test new methods of engaging communities and supporting local people to deliberate on policies, strategies, or service design and delivery.

- Building the skills, capacity, and resources within the Council to practice these new methods, which includes staff training, governance of activity, and developing the use of the Council's assets as participation spaces for communities.
- Gathering the data and intelligence on all relevant activity in Cambridgeshire to ensure the Council's current and future activity simplifies and build synergies with that of partners and communities.

2.8.4 The ultimate aim is to support decentralisation by establishing an ongoing dialogue with a diverse range of community voices who are informed and empowered to drive the Council's decision making and co-deliver positive outcomes for Cambridgeshire.

2.8.5 Following earlier approval at Full Council to permanently invest, the restructured Communities Service brings together the work of the previous Think Communities and Youth in Communities teams. The Communities Service deploys its resource in a decentralised way, with teams located in each of the five district/city council areas and working alongside key partners such as the Integrated Neighbourhood leads and parish councils.

2.8.6 The service employs two voice and participation officers, dedicated to ensuring the Council develops approaches to engage with residents and support local people to share their thoughts and solutions to local issues. The wider Communities Service officers will act as an enabler to the wider Council, providing the necessary resource to broker relationships in local communities, offering advice and guidance to officers, elected members, partner organisations and communities.

2.8.7 The service is designed to complement the community development role carried out by district and city councils, and assist the development of local groups to meet local need through the provision of seed funding and start up support. The Communities Service will focus on supporting wider services in the delivery of tactical and strategic pilots.

3. Alignment with ambitions

3.1 Net zero carbon emissions for Cambridgeshire by 2045, and our communities and natural environment are supported to adapt and thrive as the climate changes

The report above sets out the implications for this ambition in the appendices.

3.2 Travel across the county is safer and more environmentally sustainable

The report above sets out the implications for this ambition in the appendices.

3.3 Health inequalities are reduced

The report above sets out the implications for this ambition in the appendices.

- 3.4 People enjoy healthy, safe, and independent lives through timely support that is most suited to their needs

The report above sets out the implications for this ambition in the appendices.

- 3.5 Helping people out of poverty and income inequality

The report above sets out the implications for this ambition in the appendices.

- 3.6 Places and communities prosper because they have a resilient and inclusive economy, access to good quality public services and social justice is prioritised

The report above sets out the implications for this ambition in the appendices.

- 3.7 Children and young people have opportunities to thrive

The report above sets out the implications for this ambition in the appendices.

4. Significant Implications

- 4.1 Resource Implications

The following bullet points set out details of significant implications identified by officers:

- These recommendations will be delivered within existing resources, but may have financial implications for other Council strategies. For instance, any property rationalisation taken forward as a result will be subject to a separate business case.

- 4.2 Procurement/Contractual/Council Contract Procedure Rules Implications

No significant implications

- 4.3 Statutory, Legal and Risk Implications

The following bullet points set out details of significant implications identified by officers:

- The key risk for this programme is low partner capacity to work with the Council, resulting in either slow progress or low quality of work. The proposed pilots can largely be delivered either by the Council or with existing, trusted partners. Where work is undertaken with community groups, towns and parish councils or the voluntary and community sector, the Council will need to undertake due diligence to manage statutory or legal risks.

- 4.4 Equality and Diversity Implications

No significant implications

- 4.5 Engagement and Communications Implications

The following bullet points set out details of significant implications identified by officers:

- Many of the pilots will seek to engage local residents in co-design. This engagement will be designed with support from the Communities Service, calling on communications and web support as necessary.

4.6 Localism and Local Member Involvement

The following bullet points set out details of significant implications identified by officers:

- The pilots provide a significant opportunity for local member involvement. Relevant members will be briefed about the tactical pilots in their area and their views will be sought on the development of strategic work.

4.7 Public Health Implications

- Decentralisation has the potential to identify and focus on health and wellbeing needs in different areas and shape interventions that best meet them

4.8 Climate Change and Environment Implications on Priority Areas

4.8.1 Implication 1: Energy efficient, low carbon buildings.

Positive Status:

Explanation: opportunity to ensure Council property is more energy efficient.

4.8.2 Implication 2: Low carbon transport.

Positive Status:

Explanation: several pilots may result in plans for lower carbon transport.

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

Neutral Status:

Explanation: No obvious implications

4.8.4 Implication 4: Waste Management and Tackling Plastic Pollution.

Positive Status:

Explanation: several pilots may result in plans for reducing waste

4.8.5 Implication 5: Water use, availability and management:

Neutral Status:

Explanation: no obvious implication

4.8.6 Implication 6: Air Pollution.

Positive Status:

Explanation: several pilots may result in plans for reducing air pollution

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

Positive Status:

Explanation: Community climate campaigns can be expected to increase resilience to climate change.

Have the resource implications been cleared by Finance? Yes
Name of Financial Officer: Stephen Howarth

Have the procurement/contractual/ Council Contract Procedure Rules implications been cleared by the Head of Procurement and Commercial? 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: Emma Duncan

Have the equality and diversity implications been cleared by your EqIA Super User?
Yes
Name of Officer: Sue Grace

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

Have any localism and Local Member involvement issues been cleared by your Service Contact?
Name of Officer: Sue Grace

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

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

5. Source Documents

5.1 [Agenda Item 6 \(Decentralisation – The Communities, Social Mobility and Inclusion Committee Perspective\) – Committee Meeting on 21 July 2022](#)

5.2 [Agenda Item 5 \(Decentralisation in Action\) – Committee Meeting on 8 December 2022](#)