

Decentralisation of Services and Decision Making

To: Communities, Social Mobility, and Inclusion Committee

Meeting Date: 2 September 2021

From: Service Director - Communities and Partnerships: Adrian Chapman

Electoral division(s): All

Forward Plan ref: N/A

Key decision: No

Outcome: That the overall direction of travel and strategic intent for decentralisation is developed and understood.

Recommendation: Committee is asked to:

Note, comment on and endorse the key themes and approaches discussed in this report.

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1. Background

- 1.1 The Council Leadership's Joint Administration Agreement sets out a commitment to seek to decentralise council services and decision making where practicable and appropriate. This report describes progress made so far and describes some of the emerging workstreams and priority areas of focus being considered.

2. Main Issues

- 2.1 Decentralisation provides further opportunities to tackle inequalities, deprivation, and poverty, to reduce carbon, to increase nature, and to provide opportunities and better value for money rather than focusing on managing demand or saving money. We have seen the impact of support and service delivery being provided at the most local level by the most appropriate person or organisation throughout the pandemic, and we now seek to normalise that approach going forwards.

- 2.2 To do this:

- We will work collaboratively with elected councillors and district/city council officers to understand what already exists by means of local partnership and governance arrangements, as well as to identify and remove duplication;
- We will coordinate the mapping of public assets and services and present them in a dynamic mapped format, to ensure everyone knows where they can go for help or to take up opportunities, and that we spot gaps in provision;
- We will bring our resources to the table up front – data and intelligence, skills service, libraries, youth services etc - but also get to a shared understanding quickly of the challenges and issues so we can identify other resources that can be devolved or delivered differently;
- If a district/city wants or needs to focus on smaller geographies (e.g., a ward, a differently defined community, or a group of streets) we will point our resources there too - this means working in agreed boundaries that make most sense to our residents; and
- We will adapt our Adult Skills and Think Communities service offer to support the nurturing and development of new community leaders.

- 2.3 The County Council has defined statutory duties; these include the prevention of harm and meeting the assessed needs of vulnerable children and adults. We consider that working at place/neighbourhood level will improve the social and economic outcomes for not only vulnerable people, but those who are likely to become vulnerable, whilst also protecting the natural environment. This could also result in a proportion of the spend on statutory duties being re-invested in empowering communities to support residents to be more healthy, independent, and happy at home and in their local communities. This may also help to reduce demand for our stretched statutory adult and children social care services and the NHS.

2.4 District/City councils already operate at place level and provide many services that support vulnerable people such as welfare benefits, housing and homelessness, alongside universal services such as waste disposal. County councillors too support place-based activity and problem-solving in their Divisional work. It is paramount therefore for the County Council to work with Councillors, and District and City Council officers to establish what 'places' look like in their areas e.g., where residents consider their natural community/ place/ neighbourhood is – this may be a market town or parish. Building on the relationships that have been strengthened during the pandemic, we will find common ground on which those relationships can become even more developed, and will support our Councillors, District, and City Council partners to achieve their priorities where we too have a role to play. Once established we can work together with communities to develop plans to support each community/ place/ neighbourhood to find ways to improve their quality of life. This will rightly look different in every District/City.

2.5 At present we have several resources we can contribute towards this approach:

- Libraries
- Adult Skills Services
- Youth Workers
- Place Co-ordinators
- Children and Family Centres
- Highways Teams

Our partners, such as District/City Councils, voluntary, community and faith sector organisations, the Department for Work and Pensions, police and fire will also have resources they can bend towards this approach, and health and social care are moving towards more decentralised neighbourhood models of delivery as part of developing the Integrated Care System.

2.6 The County Council can also consider moving much further forward towards decentralisation in the delivery of some of its functions. For example:

- Supporting people with physical and learning disabilities to live, work and thrive in their local communities. We can work with the District/City Councils and the Combined Authority in developing suitable housing and local care to wrap the support needed around this, including access to work.
- Mutual aid and community groups have been motivated and empowered to support their communities through the pandemic. We will support those who want to continue their great work with advice and guidance, streamlined health and safety and insurance arrangements, grant funding, sharing of information, and the ability for those groups to directly deliver services where they want to.
- Some communities want to set up their own groups and services – we will support them by getting our adult skills service to provide community leadership programmes to build skills and confidence, and task our locally based teams to provide advice, guidance, and practical support.

- Some people in our communities are socially isolated. We will support and encourage people to engage with their local community, create friendships, and jointly develop the resources they need. We will identify and where possible remove barriers to social inclusion by delivering projects which improve community transport, encourage active travel, create safe and inclusive spaces, and provide practical (and sometimes financial) help for clubs and activities which actively reduce social isolation.
- People need to have a voice and have control on what and how services are delivered in their local communities and we need to support them in being able to do this. We will develop clear communications channels and will focus on social value as seen through the eyes of the local community. Through a new communications strategy, we will develop and deliver creative, imaginative, and accessible ways of involving everyone, whether they currently have a voice or not, including talking with people in the places most familiar to them.
- Communities have inside knowledge of the issues and usually know best of all what needs to be done to address the environmental, highways and transport challenges in their neighbourhoods. We will co-produce and deliver plans at neighbourhood level to create opportunities and address these issues, whilst working together to address the climate and environmental crisis.
- People usually want to live and work in their own communities. We will look to support this through our recruitment function, and we will also work with our NHS colleagues to increase the opportunities for local health and social care work close to where people live.
- Keyworkers (e.g., social workers, teachers, health workers) usually want to work near to where they live, but in some areas of Cambridgeshire housing is too expensive. Working with Districts/City Councils and the Combined Authority we could develop affordable accommodation.

2.7 Residents usually know best about what would work for them in improving the quality of their lives, alongside locally elected councillors at all tiers of local government. Where information or support is needed to think about and agree what needs to be done, we will provide this. It is the role of the council to empower the community to decide where and how services and infrastructure should be developed – we can provide data on where there are areas of need, but even this will not tell the whole story; we can use it as a guide to have conversations with Councillors, District and City Councils and other partners, but we must engage with residents and make co-production ‘business as usual’.

2.8 Our current thinking is that decentralisation might take a number of different forms, depending on the needs of a community. For example:

- a) Joint decision making – whereby the county council works closely with the district or city council, town or parish councils, local voluntary, community and faith groups, and communities to identify priorities and agree how best to deliver to them.
- b) Service relocation – whereby county council services would be physically located within

the heart of communities where there is an evidenced need. This presents opportunities too for co-location between council departments and with partner agencies.

- c) Delegation of funding, service delivery and/or decision making – whereby a community or local organisation are given formal delegation to deliver a service or to make decisions relating to county council services.

The committee's views on these approaches are welcomed.

- 2.9 In all forms of decentralisation, communication and collaboration will be vital in overcoming challenges and obstacles, and we will be keen to establish new, or to join existing, district or city level partnership governance arrangements. The Chair, Vice Chair and Service Director have been meeting with each District/City Council to explore existing arrangements, and ways in which decentralisation might be achieved, and they will provide a verbal update at the Committee meeting on the outcomes of those discussions so far. Ongoing scrutiny and monitoring of the impact and effectiveness of decentralisation will also be vital, to ensure we are not inadvertently adding to an already complex system and that we are improving outcomes for our residents. We will agree a set of measures for each element of decentralised service provision or decision making so that we can monitor the impact we are making. Decentralisation will also form part of each Committee agenda to enable Members to maintain oversight and challenge, and to set direction.
- 2.10 Meanwhile, we are continuing to develop and evolve the service mapping work started earlier this year in close collaboration with our district and city colleagues, as this will provide a helpful guide to where possibilities for decentralisation and collaboration may best be focussed.
- 2.11 Our Think Communities approach is a key enabler to achieving decentralisation, with staff working closely alongside district and city council colleagues as well as those from other organisations based within communities. A summary of some of the relevant work of this service is included below.
- (i) A total of 22 community engagement events were held across Cambridgeshire during July, and our engagement vehicle was used for 10 of those. The Think Communities service continues to talk to residents about 3 main points: (i) what do you love about your community; (ii) what do you want to see change; (iii) how do you want to be involved. Place coordinators are working with district and city councils to ensure that there is no duplication of consultation with residents and that feedback can be collated in order to work together on areas for development.
 - (ii) The Chair and Vice-Chair of the Committee visited Fenland towns in July to see some of the local work, meet local projects, and discuss some of the local challenges.
 - (iii) Our Time Credits programme continues to play an important part in building community capacity and confidence, and some recent headlines include the following:

- New group leads have been trained, including from the Red Hen Project in Cambridge, the Spinney Adventure Playground in Wisbech, and the Cambourne Timebank
 - There are now 70 active groups
 - This year to date, 3,081 (652 in July) Time Credits have been issued
- (iv) To further enhance this work, we are developing a small pilot in Arbury library and Huntingdon library to engage more volunteers based on local needs.
- (v) As part of our Against Scams Partnership work, a presentation on ‘Stamping out Scammers as a Community’ was delivered at a series of six virtual briefings organised by the Police and Crime Commissioner’s Office. Three local councils in South Cambridgeshire have registered as partnership supporters this month - Sawston, Great and Little Chishill, and Willingham. Information on prevention of scams is now being shared across all three communities. Our July newsletter and three scam alerts have been issued to over 500 direct recipients this month.
- (vi) Youth Advisory Boards in Fenland and East Cambridgeshire have continued their planning for a Youth Food Poverty conference in August called ‘Feeding Futures’. This will be an opportunity for local businesses, schools, decision makers and councillors to hear what young people have to say about food poverty. The young people involved have participated in various workshops and training opportunities, to gain the necessary skills to facilitate all elements of the event. Businesses will be invited to use their corporate social responsibility policies and to use their networks to raise awareness and generate positive solutions and outcomes.
- (vii) The Think Communities service represented the county council at the National Youth Work Unit’s meeting in July with the Department for Education. Topics included funding for after school activities and discussions around the application of the funding announced for children and young people. We continue to support the council’s motion to advocate for sufficient funding for local youth services.
- (viii) Fusion (a youth project run in Oxmoor, Huntingdonshire) and Littleport Parish Council were supported to submit £50k applications to the UK Youth Covid resilience fund. As a team we have had successful bids with Waterbeach Action for Youth and 20Twenty Productions in the last 12 months. The relationship and journey travelled with these two groups through the Innovate and Cultivate process meant it was easier to encourage and support a relevant application and to ensure the opportunity was taken.
- (ix) The Cambridgeshire National Citizen Service team is in full swing with summer delivery. Whilst there have been the inevitable challenges due to Covid with bubble closures and the need for self-isolation, the outcomes for young people have been incredibly positive. A varied programme balancing self-development, personal challenge, and the development of teamwork skills, all essential for transition into adulthood, have led to meaningful Social Action Projects which are currently being delivered across the county at community level.
- (x) The ‘Be Part of the Solution’ young people’s campaign has been shortlisted for a Local Government Chronicle award in the ‘best campaign’ category. As part of this

campaign two short films were made in co-production with young people via a cross-system collaboration between our communications team, youth team, and Cambridge City Council. The film can be viewed at the following link:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rybq7TYuRNw>

- 2.12 A further report will be provided at the December Committee meeting, setting out progress made towards achieving decentralisation. Critically, we aim to develop actions towards achieving decentralisation that support and enable partners to deliver services or make joint decisions with us, rather than adding pressure and cost to those organisations. This will be an important principle to establish before firm decisions can be made and reflects some of the early feedback received from District and City Council colleagues.

3. Alignment with corporate priorities

3.1 Communities at the heart of everything we do

This report describes progress and plans to ensure the needs and aspirations of our communities are at the core of the Committee's work, by ensuring we adopt a local approach to council service design and delivery.

3.2 A good quality of life for everyone

The benefits of local, collaborative working have been proven throughout the pandemic, and this report seeks to mainstream that approach.

3.3 Helping our children learn, develop and live life to the full

Decentralisation seeks to positively affect all residents, regardless of age. Ensuring access to services, support and opportunities is simple and fast, and that there is a single shared plan for a place will help ensure our resources and those of our partners are focussed on the things that matter most.

3.4 Cambridgeshire: a well-connected, safe, clean, green environment

Fundamental to our work to support communities to thrive, and alongside working closely with our local partners to decentralise our approaches, is the need to ensure the environment within which they live and work is safe and clean with opportunities to connect to one another.

3.5 Protecting and caring for those who need us

For citizens to be confident, healthy, safe, and secure, they need to live in communities that mirror those attributes, and where there is a strong sense of local identity and cohesion. The principles of decentralisation set out in this report seek to support the development of a strong local identity, helping to create thriving places for people to live in.

4. Significant Implications

4.1 Resource Implications

There are no significant implications within this category.

4.2 Procurement/Contractual/Council Contract Procedure Rules Implications

Any purchases to support the service directorate's work will be carried out in accordance with the Council's Contract Procedure Rules.

4.3 Statutory, Legal and Risk Implications

There are no significant implications within this category.

4.4 Equality and Diversity Implications

Ensuring and achieving equality of opportunity to all of our residents is central to the work of the Committee and its service directorate.

4.5 Engagement and Communications Implications

There are a number of communications and engagement aspects to the work of this Committee that our Communications team are aware of, and they are working closely and proactively with relevant officers where appropriate.

4.6 Localism and Local Member Involvement

Local Members need to be at the heart of our work on decentralisation and are vital in their role as community leaders in helping make sure we identify challenges, risks, and opportunities early and that we deliver a real and lasting change for our residents.

4.7 Public Health Implications

Key to Public Health is the improvement of health and wellbeing across the whole population. Developing locally provided services with our partners and communities will have greater impact and encourage and enable those facing the biggest challenges to engage.

4.8 Environment and Climate Change Implications on Priority Areas:

4.8.1 Implication 1: Energy efficient, low carbon buildings.

Positive/neutral/negative Status: NA

Explanation: There are no significant implications within this category.

4.8.2 Implication 2: Low carbon transport.

Positive/neutral/negative Status: N/A

Explanation: There are no significant implications within this category.

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

Positive/neutral/negative Status: N/A

Explanation: There are no significant implications within this category.

- 4.8.4 Implication 4: Waste Management and Tackling Plastic Pollution.
Positive/neutral/negative Status: N/A
Explanation: There are no significant implications within this category.
- 4.8.5 Implication 5: Water use, availability and management:
Positive/neutral/negative Status: N/A
Explanation: There are no significant implications within this category.
- 4.8.6 Implication 6: Air Pollution.
Positive/neutral/negative Status: N/A
Explanation: There are no significant implications within this category.
- 4.8.7 Implication 7: Resilience of our services and infrastructure, and supporting vulnerable people to cope with climate change.
Positive/neutral/negative Status: N/A
Explanation: There are no significant implications within this category.

Have the resource implications been cleared by Finance? Yes
Name of Financial Officer: Clare Andrews

Have the procurement/contractual/ Council Contract Procedure Rules implications been cleared by the Head of Procurement? Yes/No
Name of Officer: Henry Swann

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

Have the equality and diversity implications been cleared by your Service Contact? Yes
Name of Officer: Adrian Chapman

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: Adrian Chapman

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

5. Source documents

5.1 None