



Communities, Social Mobility and Inclusion Committee: Minutes

Date: Thursday 2nd September 2021

Time: 2:00pm – 3:50pm

Venue: Storey's Field Centre, Cambridge

Present: Councillors Tom Sanderson (Chair), Hilary Cox Condron (Vice-Chair), Henry Batchelor, Ken Billington, Adela Costello, Steve Criswell, Ian Gardener (substituting for Councillor Douglas Dew), Bryony Goodliffe, Ros Hathorn, Lucy Nethsingha, Keith Prentice, Philippa Slatter and Firouz Thompson

13. Apologies for Absence and Declarations of Interest

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Dew and French.

Councillor Sanderson declared a non-statutory disclosable interest in agenda item 4 (Voluntary and Community Sector Support and Development Services in Cambridgeshire Contract), as a Council representative on Hunts Forum.

Councillor Cox Condron declared a non-statutory disclosable interest in agenda item 4 (Voluntary and Community Sector Support and Development Services in Cambridgeshire Contract), as a Council representative on Hunts Forum.

14. Minutes – 8th July 2021

The minutes of the meeting held on 8th July 2021 were agreed and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

15. Petitions and Public Questions

There were no petitions or public questions.

16. Voluntary and Community Sector Support and Development Services in Cambridgeshire Contract

The Committee received a report which sought the award of a contract for the provision of voluntary and community sector infrastructure support services across Cambridgeshire. Following a procurement process that had resulted in only one bid

being submitted, it was recommended that the contract be awarded to the current provider, Support Cambridgeshire, although it was highlighted that the previous decision to award this contract with Peterborough City Council as part of a joint procurement exercise would be amended, enabling the County Council to make the decision itself.

While discussing the report, Members:

- Paid tribute to the work already carried out by Support Cambridgeshire under the current contract, particularly during the pandemic.
- Highlighted the importance of working with organisations such as Cambridgeshire ACRE and CAPALC to ensure the whole County received sufficient and equal levels of service provision. The Head of Think Communities acknowledged the strong relationship that the Council maintained with Cambridgeshire ACRE, particularly through the work of place coordinators, to ensure that it was connected to parish and town councils as well as the community and voluntary sector. He also noted that the purpose of the proposed contract was to provide overarching support across the whole County.
- Expressed concern about potential duplication of work between the different levels of local authorities, place coordinators and the voluntary sector. While acknowledging this, and that the nature of the Integrated Care System could lead to a certain level of additional duplication, it was emphasised that Support Cambridgeshire's work would be monitored regularly to identify and avoid such duplication where possible, and to ensure that there was clarity over boundaries of responsibility and duties.

It was resolved unanimously to:

Approve the awarding of the 'Voluntary and Community Sector Support and Development Services in Cambridgeshire' contract to Support Cambridgeshire for the period 1 December 2021 to 30 November 2025, valued at £640,000, for the reasons set out in the report. Annual value is £128,000.

17. Report of the Service Director for Communities and Partnerships

The Committee received a report from the Service Director for Communities and Partnerships which summarised information, opportunities and challenges relating to the cross-cutting work within the remit of the Committee and its service directorate. Attention was drawn to the five initial key areas of focus that had been agreed by the Committee at its previous meeting and which were set out in section 2.1.1 of the report, and it was noted that officers and other Council employees supporting the Committee's work would also share these focus areas. Members were also informed that since the report had been published, Cambridgeshire Skills had met its target threshold of 90%, as mentioned in section 2.3.2 of the report.

The Service Director for Communities and Partnerships updated the Committee on the Council's involvement in the national Afghan citizens' resettlement scheme.

While clarifying that details of the scheme were still to be confirmed by the government, he noted that up to 20,000 Afghan nationals would be arriving in the UK, and informed Members that the Council was keen to assist in any way that it could. Vacant properties would need to be made available, and he confirmed that discussions had been held with all the district and city councils about making this possible, building on the relationships that had been strengthened during the pandemic. All the councils had either offered accommodation or confirmed that they would provide support. Although the County Council was not a housing authority, it was looking to help provide temporary accommodation for families that would connect them to local services until permanent accommodation became available.

Aside from the issue of accommodation, the Council had identified four main areas in which it could provide support. The first of these was employment and opportunities, and Cambridgeshire Skills was developing work programmes that would align to the skills that Afghan nationals were likely to possess, along with bespoke English language courses. It was also suggested that the Council could offer internal employment or apprenticeships where possible and appropriate. The second area was the provision of physical goods for Afghan citizens that arrived with few personal belongings. This ranged from smaller items, such as nappies, toys and clothing, to furniture for the houses provided by other local authorities, and it was also suggested that vouchers used in the Covid Local Support Grant Scheme could be extended to include assistance for those arriving from Afghanistan. The third area was financial assistance, and it was anticipated that funding would be provided by the government for each individual person, as had been the case with previous similar schemes. The Council was therefore unlikely to be required to provide matched funding to district and city councils, but the Service Director confirmed that it would provide resources where necessary. The fourth area that had been identified was health and wellbeing, and work would be undertaken to connect Afghan nationals with local services, including Public Health, as well as the many opportunities provided by the library service and other Council services.

While discussing the report, Members:

- Welcomed the support that was being offered by the Council towards the resettlement of Afghan citizens, and noted that it was closely connected to the work of the Committee.
- Highlighted the importance of consulting Members on local issues, given their knowledge of their local area and need to remain informed.
- Emphasised that each library in the County was different and specific to the particular demands and requirements of its local area.
- Suggested that greater attention should be given to access to transport provision as a cause of inequality.
- Paid tribute to the work of officers in submitting a bid for the Council to the Libraries Improvement Fund.
- Welcomed that 96% of learners had completed their courses.

- Clarified that the 67% of learners that had progressed to a positive destination, as detailed in section 2.3.2 of the report, only included those learners that had completed their course, as opposed to the whole cohort of 3,240 enrolled learners. It was argued that although the figure did not appear to be particularly high, it should be considered as a significant achievement.

It was resolved unanimously to:

- a) Note and comment on the key themes discussed in the report; and
- b) Endorse the approaches being taken, and the specific actions proposed, against each of the main themes described in section 2.1 of the report.

18. Decentralisation of Services and Decision Making

The Committee received a report outlining the Council's commitment to seek to decentralise Council services and decision-making where practicable and appropriate, and which provided an update on the progress that had been made so far, while describing some of the emerging workstreams and priority areas of focus that were being considered. Attention was drawn to the resources that could contribute towards the approach, as set out in section 2.5 of the report, and the examples of functions that could be decentralised, as set out in section 2.6 of the report. It was noted that the Think Communities approach would be a key enabler to achieving decentralisation and that it would therefore be central to the Committee's work in the future.

While discussing the report, Members:

- Argued that decentralisation was not about saving money but rather developing partnership working, and it was noted that the response from district, city and parish councils had been positive.
- Suggested that it would be beneficial to receive a balanced presentation of the approach that included potential drawbacks, so that they could be identified and mitigated or prepared for, with a suggestion that the development of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) would help identify issues. The Service Director for Communities and Partnerships undertook to identify some suitable KPIs and provide the Committee with further information on risk once discussions had progressed with partner authorities in developing the approach. **Action required**
- Requested further information on the potential environmental impacts of decentralisation. The Service Director undertook to raise the issue with the Environment team. **Action required**
- Argued that the issues discussed by the Think Communities service with residents were vague and could be more specific in order to identify concerns more effectively. It was further suggested that the information gained from such discussions could be mapped and shared with partners.

- Highlighted the central role of decentralisation in the Council’s long-term agenda and acknowledged that it would continuously evolve in order to maintain strong partnership working with partner authorities. It was argued that it would bring communities closer to the Council’s work and allow them to better understand the decision-making process.
- Acknowledged that place-based working was already ingrained in the Council’s programme through Cambridgeshire Local.
- Expressed concern about potential additional levels of governance that would be required as a result of the proposed delegation of funding, service delivery and decision-making.
- Sought further information on the 22 community engagement events that had been held across Cambridgeshire. The Head of Think Communities informed Members that they had been held throughout the summer, with Place Coordinators holding a central role in their organisation. Noting that the events would be ending in mid-September, he undertook to provide Members with a briefing on the feedback that had been received from the events. **Action required**

It was resolved unanimously to:

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

19. Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Coroner Service Annual Report

The Committee received an annual report on the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Coroner Service, which provided an update on the service’s work over the past year and outlined plans to explore costed alternative office and inquest facilities with Property Services. Noting that a number of assistant and area coroners had been recruited from a pool of high calibre applicants in 2021, and that approval had also been obtained for the recruitment of additional support staff, the Assistant Director for Regulatory Services emphasised the difficulties faced by the service during the pandemic. A review of the service and its needs had looked at best practice of other areas, and identified office space and inquest facilities as the two main areas for improvement, with further proposals on these issues to be presented to the Committee once they had been developed. It was noted that the service had concluded against the Council building a dedicated mortuary and pathology facility.

While discussing the report, Members:

- Clarified that a location for the new accommodation had not yet been identified, and that any move would be unlikely to take place during the current financial year.
- Established that the findings and learning from inquests was used as proactively as possible to prevent similar future deaths. It was suggested that such

information could also be shared with other relevant committees, such as the Adults and Health Committee, and the Children and Young People Committee. The Area Coroner informed Members that coroners were legally required to compile a Prevention of Future Death Report after deaths, noting that these could be shared informally with committees when appropriate and be made publicly available.

- Paid tribute to the service for carrying out its work and adapting to the changes during the pandemic.

It was resolved unanimously to:

- a) Note the updates from the Coroner Service; and
- b) Note that the service will explore costed alternative office and inquest facilities with Property Services.

20. Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Strategy

The Committee received a report which presented the Council's draft Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Strategy, prior to its submission to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, as required by the Domestic Abuse Act 2021. Emphasising the importance of access to safe accommodation in breaking the cycle of abuse, the Assistant Director for Community Safety drew attention to the three key aims of the strategy detailed in section 2.2 of the report, and informed Members that the strategy aimed to increase the choices available to victims, including through relocation or remaining safely in their home.

While discussing the report, Members:

- Recognised that domestic abuse was a crime and not just a private matter, and noted that perpetrators were usually male, while victims were usually female. One Member noted her personal experience as a victim and welcomed being able to support such a strategy.
- Drew attention to the work carried out by White Ribbon in tackling male violence against women.
- Sought clarification on the housing stock that would be available for victims and who would provide the properties. The Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Partnership Manager clarified that while Tier 2 local authorities had a duty to house anyone fleeing domestic abuse, the Council, as a Tier 1 local authority, sought to provide additional support when that was not available. A number of properties would be made available and left vacant for people to move into, with financial support initially being provided by the Council until alternative support and income could be obtained. She emphasised that such a service was better than simply paying for a hotel or equivalent accommodation, although it was acknowledged that this option was also sometimes appropriate and preferable.

- Recognised that obtaining and developing the safe accommodation would be a long-term objective, with the underlying, more immediate goal being to improve the available provision in a coordinated and organised way.
- Suggested that estate agents could be consulted to advise on suitable properties.
- Clarified that further information on whether funding from the government would continue beyond 2022 would be available after the Autumn Budget and Spending Review.
- Highlighted the urgency in ensuring that homeless people were aware of how to apply for accommodation.
- Noted that library staff had been trained to signpost and provide support to victims of domestic abuse.

It was resolved unanimously to:

Approve the Domestic Abuse Safe Accommodation Strategy for submission to MHCLG.

21. Innovate and Cultivate Fund - Endorsement of Recommendations

The Committee received a report detailing six applications to the Cultivate funding stream, which had been supported by the Recommendation Panel at its meeting on 28th July 2021. It was noted that if the recommended applications were approved, the total amount of funding committed would reach £1,838,231 for 82 projects, which would leave approximately £260k to still be allocated. It was therefore suggested that a review of the fund and how it operated would provide the Committee with the opportunity to consider making any changes prior to a potential request for further funding resources.

While discussing the report, Members:

- Paid tribute to the success of the fund in supporting local initiatives while also leading to savings for the Council.
- Requested that the review include a breakdown of administrative costs. **Action required**
- Agreed that any Member would be able to provide feedback to the review, as well as officers, partners, past bid applicants and grant recipients.

It was resolved unanimously to:

a) Agree to fund the following six applications through the Cultivate funding stream:

- i) Abbeyfield Vietnamese Society
- ii) Concrete Rose Collective CIC
- iii) Grantchester Parish Council
- iv) Mepal Makers
- v) Safe Soulmates
- vi) Thera East Anglia

b) Agree for Group Spokes to carry out a review of the Innovate and Cultivate Fund programme and the need for potential additional investment, reporting back to the Committee at its meeting in December 2021 before submitting a report to the Strategy and Resources Committee.

22. Business Planning Proposals for 2022-27 – Opening Update and Overview

The Committee received a report which outlined the Council's current business and budgetary planning position and estimates for 2022-27, the principal risks, contingencies and implications facing the Committee and the Council's resources, and the process and next steps for the Council in agreeing a Business Plan and budget for future years. It was emphasised that within the current context, the scope for traditional efficiencies had diminished, and the development of the Business Plan was therefore focused on a range of more fundamental changes to the way the Council worked. The Service Director for Communities and Partnerships observed that the Committee operated with a smaller budget than other committees but created significant savings across the Council through its work, which would be further aided by the decentralisation of services. Attention was drawn to the business planning ideas in section 5 of the report that were currently being proposed, and it was clarified that the Committee would reconsider the proposals once they had been further developed.

While discussing the report, Members:

- Expressed concern about the significant budget gaps as a result of expenditure exceeding funding estimates in the Business Plan for 2021-2026 that had been approved by Full Council in February 2021.
- Argued that services could not be provided without sufficient taxation providing the financial resources to fund them.

It was resolved unanimously to:

- a) Note the overview and context provided for the 2022-23 to 2026-27 Business Plan; and
- b) Comment on the list of proposals (set out in section 5.3 of the report) and endorse their development.

23. Communities, Social Mobility and Inclusion Committee Agenda Plan

Acknowledging that an additional report providing an update on the decentralisation of Council Services would be presented at each future meeting, and that the Trading Standards Annual Report would be presented at the Committee meeting in December 2021, the Committee noted its agenda plan.

Chair
2nd December 2021