

Closer to Communities - Final Considerations

To: Communities, Social Mobility and Inclusion Committee

Meeting Date: 16 January 2025

From: Executive Director of Strategy and Partnerships

Electoral division(s): All

Key decision: No

Executive Summary: For the committee to note the content of the report and how this work will inform and direct the implementation of Our Future Council

Recommendation: The committee is recommended to:

- a) Note the contents of the report; and
- b) Endorse the learning and considerations set out in Section 6 of the report.

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1. Creating a greener, fairer and more caring Cambridgeshire

- 1.1 The Closer to Communities portfolio demonstrates the progress of the Council's approach to bringing services and support closer to communities, through the delivery of a series of pilot projects, evaluation and considerations which align with the Council's strategic framework ambitions.
- 1.2 Working with communities strengthens the Council's ability to achieve complex strategic ambitions in a way that is more relevant to our residents. Alignment between the pilots and ambitions is illustrated below using a selection of examples. Pilot details can be found in Appendix 1 using the reference number listed in brackets below.
- 1.3 **Ambition 1: Net Zero**
This ambition was supported by the pilot projects related to climate and the environment, such as the Community Environment Project (Pilot 10) and Local Community Climate Campaigns (Pilot 15). These pilots worked to showcase the power of community-led green efforts and the importance of collaborative approaches when working alongside communities on this topic.
- 1.4 **Ambition 2: Greener, safer travel**
This ambition has been addressed by supporting communities to participate in decision making and working collaboratively with partners around local transport networks through pilots, such as the Cambridge Joint Area Committee (Pilot 8) and Facilitating and Empowering Communities in Highways (Pilot 21), enhancing local participation and engagement by tailoring delivery to communities.
- 1.5 **Ambition 3: Health inequalities**
This ambition was supported by responding to local priorities to act on wider determinants of health. The Smoking Cessation pilot (Pilot 7) explored this by creating a targeted and bespoke approach that addresses the specific needs of communities in Fenland.
- 1.6 **Ambition 4: Healthy, safe and independent lives**
To support healthy lives, pilots illustrated efforts towards deepening engagement and participation in the work of Integrated Neighbourhoods (Pilot 14), local partnerships of health, emergency services, voluntary and community sector and council services usually centred on local clusters of GP surgeries.
- 1.7 **Ambition 5: Anti-Poverty**
To support communities experiencing financial hardship, pilots such as the Huntingdon Council Tax project (Pilot 4) and the Supporting Families Fund (Pilot 18) worked to demonstrate the impact of devolved funding, allowing for a tailored, holistic support package for residents and a willingness to work flexibly and adapt to change, paving the way for ongoing innovation between the Council and its partners.
- 1.8 **Ambition 6: Places and Communities**
This ambition was addressed through place-based working, delivering high quality services closer to communities.

1.9 Ambition 7: Children and Young People

This ambition was supported through the pilots of Detached Youth Work (Pilot 1) and the Youth Survey (Pilot 5) where services and delivery were driven and designed in partnership with young people, their families and the strengths of local voluntary and community sector.

2. Background

- 2.1 In July 2023, the Communities, Social Mobility and Inclusion Committee approved proposals to test new ways of working through a series of pilots that support services to deliver their work 'Closer to Communities'.
- 2.2 A range of pilots were selected based on their alignment to the Council's strategic ambitions, their geographical spread and to provide a mix of strategic and tactical opportunities, with many of the pilots reflecting challenges that communities face.
- 2.3 It is important to note that whilst the Council led most of the pilots, most were delivered in partnership and in some cases the Council was not the lead.
- 2.4 The goal for the pilots was fundamentally to enable learning, which would be presented to the Communities, Social Mobility, and Inclusion Committee in this report.

3 Themes

- 3.1 To assist with learning and evaluation, four themes were identified to track the learning from the pilots about how the Council can work Closer to Communities and the potential positive outcomes:
 - Devolved decision making
 - Devolved funding
 - Co-designed and co-produced
 - Place-based and targeted
- 3.2 Further detail on the four themes is set out in the evaluation paper of Closer to Communities, which is attached at Appendix 1.

4. Main Issues

Project development

- 4.1 The Council endorsed the implementation of these projects, which were experimental in their nature, to test out the practicalities, opportunities, and challenges of working Closer to Communities across Cambridgeshire. The pilots were intended to provide valuable insights and lessons that could inform future working in this space.

Approach

- 4.2 The projects were centred around the principle of bringing services Closer to the Communities and improving delivery by responding and tailoring to community needs.

Collaborative effort

- 4.3 The development and implementation of this work involved listening and collaborating with local communities and partners.

Evaluation and refinement

- 4.4 The work in this space was closely monitored and evaluated by a Project Manager at the Council, with the learning being crucial in refining and scaling up successful methods and approaches.

Focus of the work

- 4.5 It is critical for the committee to note that the pilot outcomes themselves are not the key driver of this work and whilst they have been evaluated, what is being tested through this work is how the Council can work differently across its directorates to bring services Closer to Communities and the approaches and methods used.

5. Findings:

- 5.1 Overall findings from the work identified how efforts to work Closer to Communities:

- **Empowers communities**
Giving them greater opportunities to shape their lives, fostering a sense of ownership and participation.
- **Encourages innovation**
In addressing challenges and opportunities within the community, as stakeholders are empowered to explore new approaches.
- **Strengthens social capital**
Within communities by fostering a culture of collaboration, trust, and engagement, leading to cohesion and resilience.
- **Enables communities to develop tailored solutions**
To address their unique needs, priorities and place contexts.
- **Leads to more responsive and efficient service delivery**
As the organisation is better positioned to understand and address the specific needs of their communities, resulting in improved access to essential services.

- **Promotes accountability and transparency**
When decision-making authority is shifted closer to communities, building and maintaining trust.

6 Considerations from the Closer to Communities Portfolio

- 6.1 From the work of the Closer to Communities portfolio, there are opportunities for the Council to mainstream, embed and continue its journey of working Closer to Communities, building upon the successes, challenges and lessons learnt.
- 6.2 Set out below are a series of 'Considerations' from this work, which will underpin, and in some cases specifically direct, aspects of the Council's Our Future Council change strategy, which was approved at the meeting of the Strategy, Resources and Performance Committee on 31 October 2024.
- 6.3 This strategy identifies five cross cutting themes:
- **Assets**
Maximise the use of all the Council's property assets to support efficient working and effective service provision.
 - **Commissioning and Commercial**
Ensure the Council gets the best value out of public money, takes an active role in the economic development of the area it is responsible for and achieving social value, and that its commissioning and commercial activity meets the needs of residents.
 - **Customer Engagement / Experience**
Review how the Council engages with residents across the county to ensure that access is easy to use and designed around residents and their needs, achieving the right outcome without the need for repeat referrals or contacts, essentially creating a 'no wrong door' approach for residents.
 - **Digital, Data and Technology**
Build the required foundations to leverage the use of digital, data and technology to improve customer experience and drive efficiencies in service delivery and a digital by design approach, whilst exploiting new opportunities such as Artificial Intelligence.
 - **Target Operating Model**
Redesigning how the Council is organised and operates to deliver its services closer to communities, removing professional silos and creating integrated teams that work together to improve outcomes for residents, both locally and at a countywide level.
- 6.4 The following Considerations are intended to help inform the strategic direction, identifying how the organisation should approach its next steps in its journey of working Closer to Communities.

Consideration:	Rationale:	Links to Closer to Communities four themes (Devolved decision-making, Devolved power and funding, Co-designed and co-produced, Place-based and target approaches)	Links to the Our Future Council principles (Solid Foundations and Innovation principles)	Links to Our Future Council cross cutting programmes and other county council work
<p>1. Cambridgeshire County Council should continue to actively strengthen partnerships through collaboration with existing and potential stakeholders.</p>	<p>Evidence from many pilots included references to the effectiveness of developing partnerships and collaborative approaches across organisations.</p> <p>This is because it provided a powerful foundation for pooling resources, leveraging expertise, and the delivery of services that are truly responsive to community needs.</p>	<p>Co-design and co-production: drawing on the strengths of all and creating more adaptable and innovative services through regular communication and collaboration, ensuring alignment with ever evolving community needs.</p>	<p>Honest communication Trusting relationships Long term planning Clear roles and accountability Place-based Collaborative</p>	<p>The Target Operating Model. Potential opportunities for coordinated training through Learning and Development.</p> <p>Alignment with the Consultation and Engagement strategy.</p> <p>Work to review partnerships is currently being carried out through a self-assessment process. The next steps will include looking for further opportunities with our partners.</p>

<p>2. Cambridgeshire County Council should continue to adopt a “One Team” approach.</p>	<p>Bringing project leads together as part of the Closer to Communities pilots revealed that work with our communities can be delivered in service specific silos. Bringing together a governance board from across the organisation highlighted the usefulness of sharing the learning from one pilot with other services and drive a shared vision.</p>	<p>Co-design and co-production: this collaboration paves the way for the development of cohesive teams across services, enabling a more responsive and agile organisation to thrive in meeting community need.</p>	<p>Trusting relationships Clear roles and accountability Appropriately skilled workforce Collaborative</p>	<p>The cross-cutting approach through Our Future Council will provide opportunities for officers to work across services. Target Operating Model.</p>
<p>3. Cambridgeshire County Council engaging in more localised planning and delivery.</p>	<p>Pilots highlighted the importance of responding to local need in the design of service delivery. For example, engaging with local groups to consider relevant activities and solutions for residents. Understanding that local communities are not homogeneous.</p> <p>Pilots identified how this enabled tailored services to meet the specific needs and priorities of communities, enhancing trust as community voice informed future work.</p>	<p>Place-based and targeted: drove delivery in alignment with local challenges, and resource where it is needed most.</p>	<p>Evidence-based decision making Preventative Place-based Collaborative</p>	<p>The Target Operating Model.</p>

<p>4. Cambridgeshire County Council should continue Place-based forums and expand to invite appropriate officers from across the organisation.</p>	<p>This work is still in early stages of encouraging internal organisation join up. The forums have allowed for the alignment of priorities and cross cutting insights into specific communities which can vary greatly across the County.</p> <p>These forums are already showing indications that this is increasing knowledge of communities, decreasing duplication between services and enhancing connections for officers within the council.</p>	<p>Place-based and targeted: this approach allowed flexibility to address issues quickly and efficiently, as they arise in communities as forums can adapt to changing needs of a place.</p>	<p>Honest communication Trusting relationships Appropriately skilled workforce Preventative Place-based Collaborative</p>	<p>These findings should be considered alongside the implementation of Our Future Council and the move to place-based working within the Target Operating Model.</p>
<p>5. Cambridgeshire County Council should continue to explore place-based budgets alongside the place-based forums.</p>	<p>Through the learning gathered from the place-based budgets, it is clear they are a useful contribution to place-based working; however, further exploration is needed. This ensures the forums encourage innovation and tailored solutions, alongside the flexibility of new ideas and approaches to community need which may not emerge from a top-down approach or silo working.</p> <p>This approach will also reduce bureaucracy and governance by allowing decision making at a local level.</p>	<p>Place-based and targeted: ensuring funding is used effectively, so work is designed and delivered in alignment with community motivation and need.</p>	<p>Collaborative</p>	<p>The Target Operating Model.</p>

<p>6. Cambridgeshire County Council should enhance officer/ member engagement by reviewing and developing the guidance and exploring awareness and training opportunities for officers.</p>	<p>Feedback from pilots has highlighted gaps in communication in relation to place based activity across service areas and Members. Ensuring officers and Members are well informed will ensure opportunities for join up are not missed.</p> <p>Further training for officers will ensure there is consistency across the organisation around elected member engagement and communication, in line with the constitution.</p>	<p>Co-design and co-production encourage the alignment of knowledge, context and meaningful interactions between officers and members.</p>	<p>Honest communication Trusting relationships Strong scrutiny and audit Clear roles and accountability Appropriately skilled workforce</p>	<p>The Target Operating Model. Possibilities to develop further training with democratic services.</p>
<p>7. Cambridgeshire County Council should explore opportunities to test the development and delivery of Place based teams and priorities, based on community input and needs assessments.</p>	<p>The pilots provided a wealth of evidence for place-based working, the council can use this existing evidence for future development.</p>	<p>Place-based and targeted: providing a roadmap of activity aligning priorities and enabling collective responsibility for a place.</p>	<p>Long term planning Strong scrutiny and audit Clear roles and accountability Effective IT systems Evidence-based decision making Place-based</p>	<p>The Target Operating Model programme to receive a full debrief to feed learning from Closer to Communities into future work.</p>

<p>8. Cambridgeshire County Council should enhance the use of their assets in ways that support communities.</p>	<p>This is a key driver of delivering services Closer to Communities, through the pilots it was highlighted that the use of our estate to deliver aligned services, provide integration opportunities and for teams to improve collaboration was essential.</p> <p>Pilots gave evidence to support the learning using child and family centres and libraries as assets to deliver work Closer to Communities.</p>	<p>Place-based and targeted: this lays the foundations for the development of flexible, multi-purpose approaches to asset usage, ensuring that assets can be adapted over time.</p>	<p>Long term planning Preventative Place-based Collaborative</p>	<p>The Assets cross cutting programme in Our Future Council, specifically through the Accommodation Improvement Programme.</p>
<p>9. Cambridgeshire County Council should ensure that where appropriate local commissioning takes place.</p>	<p>To enhance the efficiency and impact of commissioned services for communities, where appropriate decisions should be made at a local level.</p>	<p>Devolved power and funding and devolved decision-making: this localised approach will drive tailored services to the unique characteristics of a place, foster stronger partnerships, and enable more responsive, effective service delivery.</p>	<p>Trusting relationships Long term planning Clear roles and accountability Evidence-based decision making Preventative Place-based Collaborative</p>	<p>Commissioning and Commercial cross cutting programme in Our Future Council</p>

<p>10. Cambridgeshire County Council should work across the organisation to ensure officers have access to relevant timely data and insight through a range of means.</p>	<p>Cambridgeshire County Council is a data rich organisation with expertise in analysing and providing evidence for decision making.</p> <p>An observation from the pilots is that there was an inconsistent understanding of data and insight across the organisation.</p> <p>By maturing the organisation in data and insight there are opportunities to embed evidence-based decision making at all levels.</p>	<p>Place-based and targeted: driving a focus on place is central as service delivery is led by local data and is evidence based.</p>	<p>Long term planning Appropriately skilled workforce Effective IT systems Evidence-based decision making Preventative Place-based Digital</p>	<p>Digital, Data and Technology cross cutting theme in Our Future Council.</p>
<p>11. Cambridgeshire County Council should weave the narrative of Closer to Communities throughout the organisation, moving the activity of Closer to Communities into an approach for the whole organisation.</p>	<p>Communication in a large organisation can be challenging, this was evident during the programme. As the programme tested a range of approaches, the pilots evidenced this challenge.</p>	<p>Codesign and co-production: empowering the organisation to engage in culture change and reinforcing the one team approach.</p>	<p>Honest communication</p>	<p>Digital, Data and Technology cross cutting programme in Our Future Council.</p> <p>Working with the communications service to drive the Closer to Communities narrative through future work.</p>

<p>12. Cambridgeshire County Council should ensure the community voice shapes decision making. The council has a range of tools to carry out engagement, but there are opportunities for the organisation to enhance these.</p>	<p>Evidence from pilots demonstrated that when communities were engaged with, they felt heard and that their contributions were valued in informing the delivery of services.</p>	<p>Co-design and co-production: empowering communities to play an active role in shaping service deliver and decisions which impact them.</p>	<p>Honest communication Long term planning Strong scrutiny and audit Evidence-based decision making Preventative Place-based Digital Collaborative</p>	<p>Customer Engagement/Experience cross cutting programme in Our Future Council. The Council's Strategic Framework. Quality of life survey. Business planning. Consultation and Engagement strategy.</p>
<p>13. Cambridgeshire County Council should drive a coordinated effort towards engagement.</p>	<p>Observations from the governance board identified lack of co-ordination of engagement across the organisation. It is essential to ensure best practice is being used, duplication is reduced, and engagement results are used across the council.</p>	<p>Co-design and co-production: empowering officers to make decisions on engagement and actively participating in it.</p>	<p>Long term planning Appropriately skilled workforce</p>	<p>Customer Engagement/Experience cross cutting programme in Our Future Council.</p>
<p>14. Cambridgeshire County Council should implement a consistent process of measuring impact, ensuring the organisation is evidence led.</p>	<p>Learning from the pilots identified that there was an inconsistent approach to evaluation and how to draw together meaningful impact from work.</p>	<p>Codesign and co-production: this approach will increase transparency, improve resource allocation, and measurable, positive change.</p>	<p>Clear roles and accountability Appropriately skilled workforce Evidence-based decision making</p>	<p>Customer Engagement/Experience cross cutting programme in Our Future Council.</p>

7. Conclusion

- 7.1 The work of Closer to Communities has evaluated the pilots and gathered learning to inform the strategic direction and the operational changes the County Council can employ as it looks to its future programme of organisational change. The success of this work highlights strong cross-directorate collaboration, driven by shared commitment and strategic alignment. Key stakeholders from multiple directorates actively contributed using their expertise, resources, and time, and their buy-in played a crucial role in shaping the direction of the work and ensuring successful outcomes for communities.

8. Alternative Options Considered

- 8.1 Not applicable. As this is the final evaluation of the work.

9. Significant Implications

9.1 Finance Implications

Place based/devolved budgets or the alignment of funding will require forward planning during budget preparation and clarity for officers around ringfenced money and related parameters.

9.2 Legal Implications

Not applicable

9.3 Risk Implications

Not applicable

9.4 Equality and Diversity Implications

An Equality Impact Assessment of the Closer to Communities work is attached at Appendix 2 of the report.

9.5 Climate Change and Environment Implications

Not applicable

10. Source Documents

- 10.1 [Agenda Item 5 \(Closer to Communities\)](#), Communities, Social Mobility and Inclusion Committee meeting on 6 July 2023