Decentralisation – The Communities, Social Mobility and Inclusion Committee Perspective

To:	Communities, Social Mobility and Inclusion Committee
Meeting Date:	21 July 2022
From:	Interim Director of Communities and Partnerships, 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) Endorse the policy framework, design principles and next steps for the Council's approach to decentralisation agreed by the Strategy and Resources Committee;

b) Support the potential role that the Think Communities service can play in delivering the policy framework for decentralisation;

c) Agree that the Communities, Social Mobility and Inclusion Committee will oversee learning from the decentralisation pilots on the principles set out in Paragraph 2.3.2 of the report; and

d) Note the current operational model and funding arrangements for the Think Communities service.

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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 To deliver this vision for Cambridgeshire, the Council has a strategic framework, made up of a number of policies, each with an associated action plan. Throughout the framework, the Joint Administration has put particular emphasis on people-centred, place-based approaches, which build on the strengths, diversity and needs of Cambridgeshire's local communities.

1.3 In May 2021, as part of the Joint Administration Agreement, officers were asked to consult with partners and communities on ways to devolve more of the Council's services and budgets to be managed locally. The Communities, Social Mobility and Inclusion Committee was asked to advance this approach in an evolutionary and differentiated way, according to dialogue with local communities, varying powers according to local demands and different sized areas based on local identity.

1.4 At its meeting on 10th March 2022, the Committee agreed the following high-level elements of this decentralisation approach:

- 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.

1.5 The report at that meeting ([Agenda Item 7 - Decentralisation](#)) also highlighted the following principles of decentralisation:

- Even global or national challenges are often best addressed locally by services and partnerships that respond to the needs and goals of the people they serve.

- The design of Council services should be as informed as possible by the residents and communities they affect.

- Council officers working more closely with local communities and members enables residents to have a higher quantity and quality of opportunities to influence decisions that affect them.

- Genuinely bottom-up, local-driven change can reach its full potential when the expertise and resources of the Council are more accessible to residents.

- The term 'communities' must be understood in both its geographical and non-geographical senses, to recognise that some residents, such as those in marginalised groups, do not yet have equal access to opportunities to influence decisions.

1.6   The Committee also recommended that the next stages of the work should be considered by the Strategy and Resources Committee to ensure that it connects with other strategic priorities, legislative changes and priorities across the Cambridgeshire public sector system.

1.7   The meeting of the Strategy and Resources Committee on 27th June 2022 received a report ([Agenda Item 5 - Decentralisation](#)) that set out the policy framework, design principles and next steps for the Council's approach to decentralisation. The report also provided a more detailed exploration of these issues.

1.8   The Strategy and Resources Committee agreed the following design principles to deliver a cohesive approach to decentralisation across the Council:

   a) A greater proportion of our resource (workforce and budget) will be invested through decentralised approaches and structures.

   b) The Council will involve communities in its decision making and design. It will particularly seek to involve and assist disadvantaged communities, groups and individuals in line with the Council's commitment to combat poverty and promote inclusion.

   c) The Council will deepen relationships with voluntary and community sector organisations, district, parish and town councils and other public sector partners, working together through the democratic roles and most suitable governance structures to deliver the best outcomes for communities.

   d) Social, economic, and environmental impacts will be given equal consideration in the Council's decision-making processes.

   e) The Council's local presence should seek to be a navigator and reference point for all local public services. Opportunities to apply this approach should be pursued by the Council's land and property functions.

1.9   The Strategy and Resources Committee then considered the Council's current position regarding those principles, using a number of case studies as examples.

1.10   The Strategy and Resources Committee then set out a number of next steps:

   • Deepen engagement and consultation on the Council's approach to decentralisation with district, parish and town councils, as well as voluntary and community groups;

   • Strengthen the Council's communities approach and team, so that it has capacity to develop specific decentralisation activity with communities and partners;

   • Establish a series of pilots to test and learn from the principles of decentralisation;

   • Increase opportunities for engagement and participation, with an open and rolling invitation to citizens' groups everywhere in the County to take part in decentralisation arrangements;

- Look for 'force multipliers' - in terms of resource, expertise and innovation - with partners and communities, so that the Council amplifies its efforts, increases its impact and avoids wasting system resources;

- Map and review the physical assets the Council has in each area to ensure that they are effectively used to support the principles and aims of decentralisation;

- Further develop the hub and spokes model into physical community hubs for multi-disciplinary staff teams to be co-located within the places they serve, flexibly coordinating their work around local need and improving their accessibility to local residents;

- Review and enhance the co-production practices of front-facing services;

- Stand up a dedicated team to work with services on new decentralised models which move more services, funding and power to local communities, with ambitious targets and delivery timelines; and

- Ensure that the Council's strategic framework and Medium Term Financial Strategy for future years fully reflect the Council's commitment to decentralisation, community wealth-building, triple bottom line, deliberative democracy and codesign with communities.

1.11 Decentralisation is likely to take a variety of forms, both for different services and in different places. To explore aspects of community co-design, deliberative democracy, shared governance and decentralised resources, the Strategy and Resources Committee agreed to a series of pilots. These pilots will be established to test and develop the design principles for decentralisation as set out in paragraph 1.8 of this report.

1.12 More detail on pilot projects and the governance of decentralisation work, will be taken to the Strategy and Resources Committee meeting on 20th September 2022.

1.13 This report considers how the next steps and design principles agreed by the Strategy and Resources Committee might be best enhanced by the Council's Think Communities approach. It also considers the potential role of the Communities, Social Mobility and Inclusion Committee in relation to the governance process for the pilot projects.

2. Main Issues

2.1 There are a number of strategic priorities (e.g. anti-poverty, community wealth building, etc.) and services (e.g. Think Communities, libraries, etc.) under the remit of the Communities, Social Mobility and Inclusion Committee that can inform the Council's approach to decentralisation and can support its delivery. For example, the Think Communities team has been 'an early adopter' of the decentralisation approach and is already designing projects with communities and partners through discussions about local decision making, place needs and local ownership. These projects and examples are helping the Council to describe what decentralisation means on the ground.

2.2 Think Communities

2.2.1 The Think Communities model was established prior to the Covid-19 pandemic as a means of fostering more effective and equal relationships with our district and city council partners. It is based on the principles of place-based working, responding to a shared set of priorities with delivery carried out by the most appropriate organisation.

2.2.2 The bulk of the Think Communities service is built around a small core-funded community development team. The current service model comprises one Place Coordinator and two Community Connectors in each of the five district/city council areas of the County. The service is funded for the 2022-23 financial year as a result of a one-year business case agreed by the Council on 8th February 2022.

2.2.3 The Think Communities approach is a placed-based, people centred way of working that is designed to create the right conditions for citizens to take greater control and to make informed choices about their own future.

2.2.4 The Think Communities service works in an 'organisationally agnostic' way, collaborating with district, city and parish councils, as well as the Council's broader statutory and non-statutory partners, to address the key challenges within the County's places and communities. To this extent, the service has been developed as a 'systems enabler' or 'systems connector'. Staff within this service therefore do not hold caseloads of individuals, nor are they project managers available to deliver policy initiatives or lead on significant service developments.

2.2.5 It is therefore clear that the relatively small Think Communities service cannot be expected to deliver decentralisation in isolation. Rather, a Think Communities approach, embedded across the Council, can help deliver a cross-cutting approach to support the principles of decentralisation.

2.2.6 However, the Think Communities service can play a central role in the direct delivery of the agreed design principles for the delivery of cohesive approach to decentralisation.

- Paragraph 1.8a) of this report sets out the intention to invest a greater proportion of the Council's resource through decentralised approaches and structures. This principle captures the deployment of people and budget in local places, as well as how communities can increase their control of and access to their local services. One such way to deliver this is the planned programme of community hubs, where public sector teams can be co-located to advance the aim of flexible, coordinated working which is responsive to local need. The Think Communities service plays a vital role in this approach, providing a bridge between co-located services and the communities they seek to serve.

- Paragraph 1.8b) of this report sets out the intention to involve communities in the Council's decision making and design. The Think Communities service can be at the forefront of this approach, linking the Council to the voice of its communities. It can also, as part of a more cross-cutting and place-based approach to the Council's partnership activity, support the organisation with creative and innovative ways to identify community priorities and to coproduce the Council's services and approaches to decentralisation.

- Paragraph 1.8c) of this report sets out the intention to deepen relationships with voluntary and community sector organisations, district, parish and town councils and other public sector partners. Such partnerships are often defined by the alignment of broad priorities at a corporate level. The Think Communities service already works with many of these partners on a place-based level, and is ideally placed to broaden and deepen engagement with these partners through its interactions 'on the ground'.

- Paragraph 1.8e) of this report sets out the intention to use the Council's local presence as a navigator and reference point for all local public services. While the Think Communities service may also be able to support the development of this approach, the current nature of the service as 'systems glue' (interaction at the level of the organisation rather than the individual), should be valued and carefully considered. Indeed, it will be vital for the Council to recognise that its ambitions require it to acknowledge that the Council is part of a complex system that already involves the development of place-based approaches as visualised by others (e.g. district and city councils, the local NHS through the Integrated Care Systems, the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority, etc.).

2.3 Pilot Projects

2.3.1 At its meeting on 27th June 2022, the Strategy and Resources Committee agreed that pilots would be developed to explore, test and develop the principles for decentralisation, as set out in Paragraph 1.8 of this report. It was also agreed that learning across the pilot programme would be collated and reported to the most appropriate committee of the Council.

2.3.2 Given the responsibilities of the Communities, Social Mobility and Inclusion Committee, as set out in the Council's Constitution, it is proposed that learning from the pilots on the following principles in Paragraph 1.8 be reported to this Committee:

   b) Involving communities in decision making and design.

   c) Deepening relationships with voluntary, community sector organisations, and public sector partners; identifying the most suitable governance structures to deliver the best outcomes for communities.

   e) The Council's local presence (including its land and property functions) acting as a navigator and reference point for all public services.

2.4 Summary

2.4.1 The Council's Think Communities service has been a key part of building place-based and place-focused teams, developing close and practical working relationships with district and parish councils, parts of the local NHS system, voluntary sector organisations and other public sector partners.

2.4.2 Local bases allow teams to develop a clear understanding of the community "landscape" in their area, and highlight the value of identifying and engaging with stakeholders to simplify access to services for our residents.

2.4.3 Such relationships enable locally based staff to link communities not only with the Council's functions, but also with other services that they may require. The Think Communities service is therefore ideally positioned to act to support the delivery of the Council's decentralisation agenda. However, it should be recognised that in a complex, multi-stakeholder system where communities and individuals are often not aware and/or do not care which organisation delivers their needs in a place, the impact of a decentralisation approach by a single entity may be limited by other actors in the system. A cross-organisational approach to decentralised delivery (and potentially funding) may therefore be required.

3. Alignment with corporate priorities

3.1 Environment and Sustainability

Section 2 of the report to the Strategy and Resources Committee at its meeting on 27th June 2022 ([Agenda Item 5 - Decentralisation](#)) sets out in detail the policy framework and principles for decentralisation, including implications for the Council's priorities. In addition, Section 3 of that report provides examples of where existing work is aligned to the principles of decentralisation.

3.2 Health and Care

See the wording in Paragraph 3.1.

3.3 Places and Communities

See the wording in Paragraph 3.1.

3.4 Children and Young People

See the wording in Paragraph 3.1.

3.5 Transport

See the wording in Paragraph 3.1.

4. Significant Implications

4.1 Resource Implications

The funding arrangements for the Think Communities Service are detailed in Paragraph 2.2.2. The continued funding of this service will need to be addressed in the business planning process of 2023/24 and beyond.

4.2   Procurement/Contractual/Council Contract Procedure Rules Implications

Any implications in this area will become clearer as the work develops.

4.3   Statutory, Legal and Risk Implications

Any implications in this area will become clearer as the work develops.

4.4   Equality and Diversity Implications

Equality and Diversity Assessments are undertaken as part of the development of business cases to ensure all implications are identified and understood.

4.5   Engagement and Communications Implications

To support the outcomes desired, residents should be consulted wherever appropriate and whenever possible.

4.6   Localism and Local Member Involvement

Decentralisation will involve all local areas and local Members. Members will be briefed through seminars, committee meetings and individual briefings on local pilots.

4.7   Public Health Implications

The identification of public health needs at a local level, and addressing them through local ownership and solutions, will bring a specific focus and contribute to the engagement of whole communities. Support for this engagement and ownership will be required to maximise potential and impact, but will vary across the many communities with differing levels of inequalities.

4.8   Environment and Climate Change Implications on Priority Areas (

The proposed decentralisation approach directly incorporates environmental principles. There will also be indirect impacts, which are likely to be predominantly positive, from the proposals. For example, further embedding of services within their target communities will likely result in decreased travel requirements and increased resilience to climate impacts. Specific implications from pilot projects will be considered in full as they emerge.

4.8.1 Implication 1: Energy efficient, low carbon buildings.

Specific implications from projects will be considered in full as they emerge.

4.8.2   Implication 2: Low carbon transport.

Specific implications from projects will be considered in full as they emerge.

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

Specific implications from projects will be considered in full as they emerge.

4.8.4   Implication 4: Waste Management and Tackling Plastic Pollution.

Specific implications from projects will be considered in full as they emerge.

4.8.5   Implication 5: Water use, availability and management:

Specific implications from projects will be considered in full as they emerge.

4.8.6   Implication 6: Air Pollution.

Specific implications from projects will be considered in full as they emerge.

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

Specific implications from projects will be considered in full as they emerge.

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 Services? Yes
Name of Legal Officer: Fiona McMillan

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

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

5.   Source Documents

5.1   Hyperlinks to source documents are embedded in the text of this report.