

Closer to Communities

Evaluation paper

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Section 1: Executive Summary

The purpose of this report is to evaluate the Closer to Communities' pilots and to provide considerations on how the learning can inform the work of the council on an on-going basis, ensuring we continue to work Closer to our Communities. Through the pilots we have explored approaches of devolved decision-making, devolved power and funding, co-designed and co-produced and place-based and targeted approaches. This will inform how we operate as an organisation in the coming years.

Four themes were deployed to help frame how the County Council explored working Closer to Communities. Through this evaluation of the pilots, we will identify learning to inform the strategic direction and the operational changes the County Council can consider as it looks to its future programme of organisational change. The report will highlight the achievements and opportunities delivered through the pilots but also provide useful insights into the challenges encountered along the way, offering a valuable blueprint and knowledge base for future work in this space.

Section 2: The Background

The Strategic Framework

In February 2022, the Full Council of Cambridgeshire County Council agreed a comprehensive vision and set of ambitions designed to create a greener, fairer, and more caring Cambridgeshire. This vision, and the associated seven ambitions, have shaped the Council's business plan and informed how the council has allocated its budget.

Being Closer to Communities is fundamental to the delivery of the Council's Strategic Framework, the theme is woven throughout: <https://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/asset-library/Business-Plan-Section-1-Strategic-Framework-2023-to-2028-Refresh-for-2024-to-2025.pdf.pdf>.

In some cases, such as Ambition 4 (healthy, safe, and independent lives) being Closer to Communities is fundamental to the delivery of the ambition. In other areas, such as Ambition 2 (safe, sustainable travel), there are significant opportunities to deliver better outcomes through enhanced partnerships with parish and town councils, resident groups, and communities to design and maintain travel networks. In all cases, working with communities strengthens the council's ability to achieve complex strategic ambitions in a way that is more relevant to our residents.

Being Closer to Communities is an approach that enables the Council to use its convening power to:

- Encourage active and engaged communities to enhance accountability and improve outcomes.
- Convene place-based working in partnership with the wider system of public and voluntary and community sector partners to tailor our services to meet local need.
- Integrate and simplify local services for the end user to improve access to these services.
- Make the best use of resources across the council and its partners to give confidence to residents that we are using public money effectively.
- Create opportunities for a stronger strategic alignment across public sector partners to work better together.

Key elements of the Strategic Framework include:

- **Sustainability:** Policies and action plans targeting climate change mitigation, biodiversity enhancement, and sustainable development practices.
- **Social equity:** Work aimed at reducing inequalities, improving access to services, and supporting the most vulnerable populations in the County.
- **Community well-being:** Work focused on health, education, housing, and overall quality of life.

Woven throughout the Strategic Framework is the council's commitment to people-centred and place-based approaches, meaning that policies and actions are increasingly designed to respond to the strengths, diversity, and needs of local communities within Cambridgeshire. To ensure these tailored approaches are effective the County Council needs to ensure that the characteristics and requirements of each community are recognised and addressed effectively.

What does it mean to be Closer to Communities?

The Communities, Social Mobility and Inclusion Committee agreed the following high-level elements of Closer to Communities:

- To improve Council decision making, and outcomes for Cambridgeshire residents, by giving residents more opportunities to influence decisions that affect them.
- That the work of officers across the Council should be more embedded in local communities.

Also highlighting the following principles:

- Challenges are often best informed and addressed locally by services and partnerships that respond to the needs and motivations of the communities they serve.
- Council officers working more closely with local communities and local Councillors enables communities to influence decisions that affect them.
- Authentic, bottom-up, locally driven change amplifies the potential within communities and means the Council is more accessible to residents.

This committee agreed that pilots would be developed to explore, test, and develop the principles for Closer to Communities. 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. Importantly, many of the pilots reflect challenges that communities face in different parts of the county. 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 were delivered in partnership and in some cases the Council was not the lead.

The goal for the pilots was fundamentally to enable learning, which would be collated and reported to the Communities, Social Mobility, and Inclusion Committee. This report, therefore, is focused on the evaluation of these pilots.

Section 3: The Journey of Closer to Communities

The Mobilisation Phase

In July 2023, Cambridgeshire County Council took a significant step forward by driving the development of a range of pilot projects designed to test out aspects of how to bring council services Closer to Communities.

Pilot testing phase

Through the exploration of these pilot projects the County Council aimed to better understand how to create a more responsive, effective, and community-focused model of working with, and alongside, communities.

Project Management

To ensure the successful progression of Closer to Communities a Project Manager was recruited from October 2023 to March 2025. This Project Manager was pivotal in overseeing all the pilots to ensure that the Closer to Communities outcomes were clearly defined and that evaluation, and the subsequent learning from this evaluation, could be achieved.

Key responsibilities of the Project Manager included:

- **Knowledge and oversight:** The Project Manager held in-depth knowledge and oversight of all pilot projects and workstreams, ensuring any risks and challenges were monitored and addressed as and opportunities developed.
- **Coordination:** The Project Manager was connected to, and in communication with all projects, ensuring that work developed to timeframe.
- **Collective input:** The Project Manager was responsible for managing the collective input from various stakeholders, coordinating feedback, and aligning the aims of the wider portfolio and efforts at the organisation.
- **Central contact:** Serving as the central point of contact, the Project Manager facilitated communication and collaboration among different project teams, stakeholders, and in and around the Council.
- **Monitoring:** The Project Manager also developed and presented updates internally to colleagues, members and the governance board to track the progress on each pilot project, ensuring that milestones were met, and objectives achieved.
- **Evaluation:** The Project Manager held responsibility for developing the evaluation structure, process and writing the evaluation paper.

Closer to Communities Governance Structure

The County Council established officer governance arrangements across all directorates, overseen by a board, chaired by the Executive Director for Strategy and Partnerships. This

board played a crucial role in providing strategic oversight and direction for the Closer to Communities work.

Key elements of the governance structure included:

- **Strategic oversight:** The board was responsible for the strategic oversight and direction of the work, which involved setting priorities and ensuring alignment with the Council's broader vision and ambitions.
- **Evaluation and benefits realisation:** The board considered, assessed, evaluated, and ensured the realisation of benefits.
- **Embedding success:** The board supported efforts to embed successful approaches into service delivery, where appropriate integrating new methods and practices into the day-to-day operation of the Council.
- **Reporting:** The board reported progress to elected members through the Communities, Inclusion and Social Mobility committee to ensure transparency and shared knowledge of this work across the organisation.

Initial Learnings and Actions

As the pilots progressed, early findings were reported to the Communities, Social Mobility and Inclusion Committee in March 2024 ([Document.ashx \(cmis.uk.com\)](#)). These reflections provided valuable insights into the opportunities and challenges encountered during the mobilisation and early stages. The key themes of these early findings and opportunities included:

- **Reflection on culture:** Closer to Communities provided a space for reflection on how communities interact with the council, creating opportunities for cultural change.
- **One team approach:** Encouraging integration across the council and its services, created the adoption of a "one team" approach, which accelerated development, however, required significant investment of time through relationship building and the formation of strong trusted partnerships.
- **Locally based service areas:** Some service areas were already operating in a place-based or 'local' way and were enthusiastic about sharing their experiences across the organisation.
- **Rapid mobilisation:** Officers exploring place-based pilots which were co-produced with local communities and supported by small amounts of devolved budgets, reported the success of mobilising work quickly, which allowed them to focus efforts on what matters to local people and places.
- **Collaboration:** There was an emerging appetite to do more collaborative work across directorates and refine the approach to testing what it means to be Closer to Communities.

These early findings also highlighted several challenges and considerations that needed to

be addressed to enhance the effectiveness and sustainability of the approach. These insights were critical for refining the direction of the work and ensuring that the efforts expended achieved the intended benefits.

The key challenges and points of consideration include:

- **Resistance:** Some service areas felt they already operated in a place-based or “local” way and were initially resistant to the approach as they struggled to see how their work could be delivered differently.
- **Culture shift:** Supporting both services that already work in this way and those that are not, required significant time and skill.
- **Initial resource:** The approach required significant input in the initial stages in areas such as aligning priorities, designating resource and allocating roles and responsibilities, often before any benefits were realised.
- **Ongoing resource requirement:** When a pilot involves devolving power or funding to another organisation or partner, ongoing expertise and capacity from the council is likely to be required and although over time, this support may reduce, or the council may take on the role of facilitator or convener, this must be recognised.
- **Developing local plans:** Some pilots reported difficulties in developing local plans to spend devolved place-based budgets due to a lack of capacity and felt a broader approach across several teams would be more beneficial.
- **Inconsistency:** Some felt the council lacked a consistent approach to developing pilots, measuring their progress, and evaluating their outcomes.

In response to the initial findings and challenges identified, several actions were taken to address these issues and enhance the overall effectiveness of the work.

The key actions taken included:

- **Workshops for pilot leads:** The project manager introduced in-person workshops to ensure that pilot leads held a consistent understanding of the Closer to Communities approach, its vision, and its framework. These workshops aimed to align the pilot leads efforts with the overarching goals of the work and provide them with knowledge and tools in relation to evaluation.
- **Gaps in knowledge:** The gap in knowledge around evaluation and evidencing impact was addressed by providing pilot leads with good practice guidance and case studies from officers with expertise in this area.
- **Cross-service collaboration:** New opportunities for services to come together in meetings and workshops was creating a space for cross-service collaboration of workstreams and the alignment of priorities.
- **Wider examples of Closer to Communities work:** Recognition was given to the fact that the selected pilots represented only a selection of the Closer to Communities work happening across the Council.

Section 4: Themes

To explore the pilots, evaluate their successes and challenges and define what we mean by being Closer to Communities, the following four themes were deployed. Although these themes are not necessary mutually exclusive and some pilots had clear overlaps, the interactive nature of this work meant that the evaluation process has had to take a broad approach.

This section of the report will outline the theme, its definition, and the potential positive outcomes.

Devolved Decision-making approach

Devolved decision-making refers to a process in which the authority and responsibility for making decisions is distributed across authoritative bodies, groups, or individuals, rather than being concentrated in a single central authority. Decisions are made at various levels of an organisation, system, or community, allowing for a broader range of stakeholders to participate in the decision-making process. These stakeholders will have a more direct understanding of the specific context, and factors involved. Devolved decision-making can empower those closest to the issues to make choices that are better informed and aligned with the local need and context, leading to increased responsiveness and adaptability. Devolved decision-making will therefore be employed in situations where local knowledge, experience, capability, and agility are crucial.

Potential positive outcomes:

- Decision-making authority is given to local bodies, groups or partners within the system or community.
- Local communities, partners or individuals have a degree of autonomy to make decisions that are relevant to their specific roles and responsibilities.
- Allows and encourages a diverse range of perspectives to be considered in the decision-making process.
- Decisions can be made more quickly and effectively because they don't require approval from a central authority, though it is recognised that some decisions do have to be made formally by a central authority.
- Local bodies, groups and partners can adapt their decisions to suit their unique circumstances, fostering innovation and tailored solutions.
- Facilitates an enhanced resilience of the system by reducing dependence on a single point of control.

Devolved Power and Funding Approach

Devolved power and funding are defined as the distribution of authority and financial resources being moved away from a central governing body to various local or regional bodies, groups, and partners, empowering local communities, organisations and groups, giving them greater control within their specific remit.

Potential positive outcomes:

- Delegated financial decision-making, where appropriate, identifying opportunities for authority and responsibility to be shared to local bodies, groups, and partners.
- Autonomy to make choices relating to the priorities at the most local level, enabling better and tailored solutions for the specific needs and circumstances of their community.
- Ability to manage and allocate funds to support local projects, initiatives, and services according to the local need, leading to more efficient resource allocation and responsive decision-making.
- Enhanced resident participation and improved service delivery through innovation and reducing bureaucratic inefficiencies.

Co-designed and Co-produced Approaches

Co-designed services refer to services that are developed and designed collaboratively, involving both service providers (government bodies, organisations, or businesses) and communities. This approach aims to create services that are more user-centred, responsive, and effective by actively involving the people who will use the services in the design and decision-making processes.

Potential positive outcomes:

- Co-designed services prioritising the needs, preferences, and experiences of communities.
- Closer collaboration and partnership between service providers, communities, and other stakeholders empowering them in shaping the services they rely on, fostering a sense of ownership and engagement.
- Communities have a voice, contributing their insights, ideas, and feedback to shape the design, features, and delivery of the service leading to innovative solutions addressing specific user challenges resulting in more effective and efficient services.
- Services that are more adaptable to changing user needs due to ongoing collaboration and co-designed adjustments, leading to improved community satisfaction and better overall service delivery.

Place-based and Targeted Approaches

Place-based or targeted approaches focus on addressing specific challenges, needs, or opportunities in a particular geographical area or among a specific group of people. Instead of applying a one-size-fits-all approach, tailored interventions are aimed at the unique characteristics, circumstances, and priorities of the chosen location or target group.

Place-based approaches involve designing and implementing interventions that consider the distinctive features and context of a specific geographic area, such as a neighbourhood, community, city, or region and recognises that different places have unique assets, challenges, and resources that should be considered.

Targeted approaches focus on addressing the needs of a specific group of individuals, communities, or populations that share common characteristics or experiences. These characteristics can include factors such as income level, age, ethnicity, gender, or specific interests and/or challenges they face.

These approaches work well together to address the specific interests, challenges and needs of a geographical area and the people who live there.

Potential positive outcomes:

- Maximised and effective interventions tailored to benefit a specific set of people or geographical area.
- Improved service delivery, engagement and community satisfaction.

These themes provided the structure for the evaluation of the Closer to Communities portfolio to draw upon successes and challenges through the journey.

Section 5: Strategic Insights

Further learning was gathered through strategic insights from members of the Closer to Communities governance board which explored:

How members of the board drove this activity

- Identifying and including pilots into the portfolio where appropriate.
- Keeping Closer to Communities at the forefront of all activity in their directorate or service area and providing opportunities to engage.
- Holding accountability to drive this work within their services.
- Sharing learning and best practice across services.
- Setting the tone and approach to drive this style of working.

Accomplishments of working Closer to Communities

- **Place-based working:** Place-based forums and budgets were launched in each district and other pilots incorporated a focus on place, producing positive outcomes for the organisation and communities.
- **Validation:** The portfolio validated the methods and approaches by providing evidence for its learning and outcomes for communities.
- **Empowerment:** Enabled colleagues to feel empowered in progressive ways of working to solve challenges in a local government context.
- **Cross service collaboration:** Strengthened cross-directorate collaboration, resulting in a more integrated council and a more unified "one team" ethos.
- **Together is better:** Driving the narrative that together is better, recognising the diverse skill sets within the council, which have been broadened to allow for professional boundaries to be crossed around roles and responsibilities.
- **Driving ambitions:** Shaping the direction of the organisation by driving ambitions from within services which may not naturally align.
- **Mainstreaming success:** The ongoing process of shared learning across the organisation, along with consistent monitoring and evaluation, has been instrumental in refining the approach and ensuring its effectiveness in standardising approaches with successful outcomes.
- **Culture shift:** A culture shift has taken place as teams adapted and embraced new styles of working, driving freedom and autonomy in services to develop workstreams which align with motivations in their place and communities.
- **Workforce:** This work would not have been possible without the efforts of the colleagues and infrastructure of the Closer to Communities portfolio, particularly the Project Manager, who was instrumental in being the glue to the portfolio, driving efforts and energy within the timeframe and producing significant progress, development and outcomes in this journey.

- **Workforce development:** Has been enhanced through this approach by enabling colleagues to consider their professional development.
- **Enhanced community engagement:** As those involved in pilots and workstreams have listened, advocated and gathered community views to inform the work of the Council.

Challenges of working Closer to Communities

- **Shared ownership:** Ensuring ownership and drive of the portfolio does not fall back solely to one directorate or service area within the organisation.
- **Commitment to the approach:** Ensuring commitment from leaders and managers within the organisation to set the standard in embedding this approach. Examples of tangible actions taken by board members include incorporating aligned outcomes into employee Our Conversations and directing employees to attend carbon literacy training to drive forward our commitment to the council's ambitions.
- **Financial constraints:** Within this portfolio there was no dedicated budget and although this promotes creativity it did limit some possibilities.
- **Resource:** This approach requires greater effort in the early stages in driving new ways of working, which may not always be successful.
- **Communications:** Challenges of sharing success stories and learning with the wider organisation through internal communications.

Next Steps for the organisation in embedding the approach of working Closer to Communities

- **Embedding good practice:** Building on successful approaches and deploying the learnings across the organisation.
- **Flexibility:** Remaining flexible as the organisation deploys the learned approaches to identify opportunities for structural and process changes.
- **Further evaluation:** Continuing to evaluate and critically examine work within the organisation in relation to working Closer to Communities.
- **Refining budgets:** Clarifying the financial costs and implications of this way of working, ensuring the organisation can embed learnings.

Section 6: Future working for Cambridgeshire County Council

Our Future Council

From the work of the Closer to Communities portfolio, there are opportunities for the Council to mainstream, embed and continue this journey, building upon the successes and lessons learnt. These will be outlined as 'Considerations', see table below.

The main opportunity is through the council's Change Strategy 'Our Future Council' [Document.ashx](#) which was approved on 31 October 2024 by the Strategy, Resources and Performance committee. This sets out the organisation's high-level vision and approach to transforming the way it operates.

Our Future Council provides the future direction and the strategic alignment of all relevant change implementation programmes and projects across the organisation, allowing the council to:

- Embed a shared, organisation-wide vision for the future of the organisation to 2030.
- Establish a portfolio structure for change delivery so that programmes and projects are clearly organised and focussed on achieving cross-cutting financial and non-financial benefits that impact multiple directorates.
- Align change planning with the annual Business Plan and Budget cycle so there is an evolving pipeline of change programmes and projects year-on-year.
- Ensure accountability for the delivery of change through clear governance arrangements and standardised programme and project management standards.
- Support a culture change so that working cross-council, as we have seen in the Closer to Communities' pilots, can deliver productivity, efficiency and effectiveness become part of the organisation's 'DNA'.

The strategy includes two sets of principles. The Solid Foundation Principles, which are about getting the basics right across the organisation:

- Honest communication
- Trusting relationships
- Long term planning
- Strong scrutiny and audit
- Clear roles and accountability
- Appropriately skilled workforce
- Effective IT systems
- Evidence-based decision making

Secondly, there are four Innovation Principles which provide a framework for the council to use in transforming its services, so they are more:

- Preventative
- Place-based
- Digital

- Collaborative

At the heart of 'Our Future Council' are five change programme areas with high potential for realising the four 'Innovation Principles' and delivering financial and non-financial benefits for the council:

- **Target Operating Model:** Redesign how the council operates to deliver services Closer to our Communities in a 'place-based' way, breaking down professional silos and improving outcomes for residents.
- **Assets:** Maximise the use of our property assets to support efficient working and effective service provision, including in support of our place-based work.
- **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 that our commercial and commissioning activity meets the needs of our residents, including being actively shaped by these residents where appropriate.
- **Digital, Data and Technology:** Build the required foundations to leverage the use of data and technology to improve customer experience and drive efficiencies in service delivery based on taking a digital by design approach where customers can be involved in this design.
- **Customer Engagement/Experience:** Review how we engage with our 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 ensuring we actively involve customers in this activity so we can understand the barriers they experience.

The Target Operating Model programme is centred on being Closer to Communities. It is the lead programme out of the five cross-cutting programmes. As it is designed, developed and implemented it will shape how we use our assets, what and how we commission services, how we deploy data and digital technology and how we can improve our customer and residents' experience of inter-acting with the organisation, from initial contact through to the receipt of a service.

Considerations

The table below outlines the 'considerations', gleaned from the learnings of the pilots and work of Closer to Communities. Identifying the consideration, rationale, links to the themes, the principles, and to wider work across Cambridgeshire County Council.

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| <u>Consideration:</u> | <u>Rationale:</u> | <u>Links to Closer to Communities four themes (Devolved decision-making, Devolved power and funding, Co-designed and co-produced, Place-based and targeted approaches)</u> | <u>Links to the Our Future Council principles (Solid Foundations and Innovation principles)</u> | <u>Links to Our Future Council cross cutting programmes and other county council work</u> |
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| <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</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</p> | <p>Honest communication</p> <p>Trusting relationships</p> <p>Long term planning</p> <p>Clear roles and accountability</p> <p>Place-based</p> | <p>The Target Operating Model.</p> <p>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</p> |

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| | expertise, and the delivery of services that are truly responsive to community needs. | needs. | Collaborative | currently being carried out through a self-assessment process. The next steps will include looking for further opportunities with our partners. |
| 2. Cambridgeshire County Council should continue to adopt a “One Team” approach. | 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. | 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. | Trusting relationships Clear roles and accountability Appropriately skilled workforce Collaborative | The cross-cutting approach through Our Future Council will provide opportunities for officers to work across services. Target Operating Model. |

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| <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</p> <p>Preventative</p> <p>Place-based</p> <p>Collaborative</p> | <p>The Target Operating Model.</p> |
| <p>4. Cambridgeshire County Council should continue</p> | <p>This work is still in early stages</p> | <p>Place-based and</p> | <p>Honest</p> | <p>These findings should be</p> |

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| <p>Place-based forums and expand to invite appropriate officers from across the organisation.</p> | <p>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>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>communication</p> <p>Trusting relationships</p> <p>Appropriately skilled workforce</p> <p>Preventative</p> <p>Place-based</p> <p>Collaborative</p> | <p>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</p> | <p>Place-based and targeted: ensuring funding is used effectively, so work is designed and delivered in alignment</p> | <p>Collaborative</p> | <p>The Target Operating Model.</p> |

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| | <p>exploration is needed.</p> <p>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>with community motivation and need.</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</p> | <p>Co-design and co-production encourage the alignment of knowledge, context and meaningful interactions between officers and members.</p> | <p>Honest communication</p> <p>Trusting relationships</p> <p>Strong scrutiny and audit</p> <p>Clear roles and</p> | <p>The Target Operating Model.</p> <p>Possibilities to develop further training with democratic services.</p> |

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| | <p>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>accountability</p> <p>Appropriately skilled workforce</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</p> <p>Strong scrutiny and audit</p> <p>Clear roles and accountability</p> <p>Effective IT systems</p> <p>Evidence-based decision making</p> <p>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> |

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| <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</p> | <p>To enhance the efficiency and impact of commissioned services for communities,</p> | <p>Devolved power and funding and devolved decision-making: this</p> | <p>Trusting relationships</p> | <p>Commissioning and Commercial cross cutting programme in Our</p> |

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| <p>commissioning takes place.</p> | <p>where appropriate decisions should be made at a local level.</p> | <p>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>Long term planning Clear roles and accountability Evidence-based decision making Preventative Place-based Collaborative</p> | <p>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</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</p> | <p>Digital, Data and Technology cross cutting theme in Our Future Council.</p> |

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| | <p>organisation.</p> <p>By maturing the organisation in data and insight there are opportunities to embed evidence-based decision making at all levels.</p> | | Digital | |
| <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> |
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| <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> |
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| <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.</p> <p>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> |

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Section 7: Conclusion

This paper evaluated the Closer to Communities' 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.

Understanding and committing to work Closer to Communities, as articulated in 'Our Future Council' represents a transformative shift for the whole organisation. Providing the context to embed the learnings and considerations from the work of Closer to Communities through the Our Future Council change strategy and employing the solid foundation and innovation principles will drive alignment in the transformation of services council-wide.

This transformation will support the delivery of our shared vision, the alignment of change implementation with business planning, improved accountability and a changing culture based on our CARE values – to Collaborate, be Accountable, Respectful and working towards Excellence. By embracing this change, the Council has laid the foundations for its role in helping to foster empowered, inclusive and flourishing communities both now and in the future.



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Section 8: Closer to Communities Pilots

This section of the report outlines the pilot projects that tested aspects of how to bring council services Closer to Communities. Each pilot is looked at from a Closer to Communities perspective, exploring the approach, methodologies and ways of working to uncover learnings for the Council.

The pilots will also be explored around the themes of:

- Devolved Decision-making approach
- Devolved power and funding approach
- Co-designed and co-produced approaches
- Place-based and targeted approaches

1. Detached Youth Work

District: Cambridge and South Cambridgeshire

Directorate: Strategy and Partnerships

Themes:

- Devolved decision-making
- Devolved power and funding
- Place-based and targeted

Outline:

This pilot explored the commissioning of detached youth work, on behalf of the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC), targeting hot spot areas in Cambridge City and South Cambridgeshire, as part of the Serious Violence Duty (SVD). In September 2023, Cambridgeshire County Council awarded Romsey Mill, a local trusted youth charity serving the target areas for over 30 years, a contract, to deliver detached youth work and an outreach programme to primary schools for 18 months. The targeted focus was on Cambourne in South Cambridgeshire, the Abbey ward in Cambridge City, and an agreed area that combines both districts with Orchard Park and North City where young people and the community identify as one area. Cambridgeshire County Council are the lead statutory partner for youth work under the Youth Offer (Education Act 507b1996) and shared duty holders of the Serious Violence Duty (Section 17 of the 1998 crime and disorder act) which was amended to make preventing and reducing Serious Violence, a statutory requirement from January

2023. As a result of the shared duty the work was led by the Communities Service, with funding secured through the Home Office Serious Violence Duty Funding administered by Cambridgeshire's Office of Police Crime Commissioner to support the Counties Youth Offer and address growing risks of Serious Violence.

Learning:

Cambridgeshire County Council commissioned a provider with local knowledge and connections, embedded in the community and who were known to be able better outcomes and learning for young people in themes around anti-social behaviour and criminal behaviours. This ensured all stakeholders benefitted from the established and existing trusted relationships, which streamlined communication and collaboration through existing multi agency partnerships when addressing community safety issues, enhancing overall outcomes, and fostering a proactive approach to community safety. The commissioning of a local provider with established relationships improved the speed of mobilisation, recognising the importance of leveraging existing connections for effective service delivery.

Youth and Community engagement was strong which enabled significant learning outcomes, personal development and connection to youth workers for those deemed to be at risk of SVD. To sustain this relationship with service users and to support long term contextual safeguarding, access to safe spaces, trusted adults and support, Romsey Mill used their existing provision and enabled additional community-based services through partnerships to transition young people from the project to community-based provision. This approach offers a long-term connection to valuable support and specialist services for participants, reducing the need for higher tiered more costly statutory intervention from Cambridgeshire County Council. To further highlight the success of this project, it is important to note the holistic support provided by Romsey Mill which encompasses:

- Addressing underlying issues such as behavioural concerns and adverse childhood experiences (ACES) by leveraging positive development and resilience among participants.
- The expansion of their social networks and sense of belonging within the community.
- A reactive response, for example, the adjustment of detached youth work schedules to coincide with problematic behaviour patterns and engaging in local spaces. Evidence of this can be seen in an example of young people on a reduced timetable at North Cambridge Academy who had been participating in anti-social behaviour in Arbury Court Library. Due to existing relationships Romsey Mill were able to change their support time to coincide with the time

that these young people were negatively impacting upon the library and wider community. The direct benefits that can be seen from this, include the young people recognising this as a safe space to use and library staff are building relationships and better engaging with young people. Romsey Mill have advocated this space for safe and positive use by young people, and subsequently the library is no longer planning to employ a security guard but a librarian who can specialise in working with young people.

Within the evaluation of this pilot, it felt key to consider the difference this work has made through feedback from partners and communities.

Mrs Hubbard, Designated Safeguarding Lead, Inclusion and Family support Lead, Jeavons Wood Primary school: *“Our Year 5/6 children who accessed the support offered by Romsey Mill outreach benefitted hugely from this support. They are now really looking forward to being old enough to access Cambourne Soul as they know more about what is offered. They have built positive relationships with the team who came out and have been able to use the knowledge and skills they learnt within their sessions and apply that to their everyday lives”*.

Parent of a young person supported through 1:1 work: *“Romsey Mill was amazing and willing to work with my son. I reached out to Romsey Mill as I felt that my son needed some good positive male role model. Gareth has been mentoring my son for 3 months. He has one hour a week with him and do a range of activities like pool, basketball, darts, and boxing. My son loves going to see Gareth it is a 1 to 1 time to burn off energy and if needed a male confident. We have noticed a positive change in his behaviour since he has started”*. This young person is currently closing their 1-2-1 engagement but because the provider of the commissioned contract is local to him, they are being transitioned into a community sports project, resulting in regular support with his youth worker, where cost is absorbed through the Romsey Mill programme at no cost to Cambridgeshire County Council.

Conclusion:

This pilot offers Cambridgeshire County Council a valuable insight into potential opportunities in promoting community safety and well-being, highlighting the importance of devolved power and decision making, enabling holistic support, community driven solutions and collaborative partnerships in addressing serious violence. This is evidenced by local expertise, trusted relationships, and tailored interventions, creating lasting positive impacts and sustainability. Overall, extending the impact of this work far beyond the initial 18-month project duration, leaving a legacy of empowerment, trust, and resilience among the young people and communities.

2. Commissioned Contracts

District: Countywide

Directorate: Strategy and Partnerships

Themes:

- Devolved decision-making
- Devolved power and funding
- Co-designed and co-produced
- Place-based and targeted

Outline:

Through the revised Community Reference Group (CRG) for Cambridgeshire County Council, and alongside district council colleagues and Citizens Advice Bureau, this pilot explored options to review commissioning arrangements for poverty related contracts, with the aim of reducing gaps in provision and duplication. The baseline of this pilot, began from a place of confusion between partners around procurement and commissioning across organisations, with plans focussing on the development of a tool that supports devolved budgets and place-based decision making.

Learning:

One of the achievements of the work was the involvement of partners in the mapping process, where it was highlighted that funding decisions do not always optimise resource. As this work was starting, the ICB initiated a system-wide conversation around addressing this very issue. Rather than duplicate through this pilot, the work has continued under the "Aligning Support to the VCSE sector". Work is underway to refresh the Cambridgeshire Compact agreement, and to align contracts and reporting requirements.

Conclusion:

This project only scratched the surface of this approach, which is now part of a bigger piece of system wide work led by the ICB. As the project progresses, the potential for clarity for communities regarding available support systems may emerge.

3. Simplifying Referrals

District: Countywide

Directorate: Strategy and Partnerships

Themes:

- Co-designed and co-produced

Outline:

This pilot explored a collaboration between Cambridgeshire County Council and district councils to develop a portal, offering residents a comprehensive way to access support services, eliminating the need for redirection across various agencies within the system. The motivation behind this from partners in the system, was the recognition of a lack of a centralised support platform for communities, drawing inspiration from a successful model implemented by Kent County Council. It was hoped that learnings from Kent, would support partners to co-design the simplification of access to support services in Cambridgeshire, identifying barriers, conducting a systematic review to determine the suitability of a tool, and mapping pathway.

Learning:

Upon investigation, colleagues were able to understand that this workstream could be a helpful way that the County could support the development of place-based working and service delivery by holding the mechanics of a referral system. Despite recognising the value of the initiative, there was insufficient capacity and prioritisation across the system to drive this work forward and given the wealth of directories within the local government system, further exploration was required.

Conclusion:

Although the work was not progressed, there may be possibilities for development, with consideration given to investment, coordinating efforts and buy in across the system.

4. Huntingdon Council Tax

District: Huntingdonshire

Directorate: Strategy and Partnerships

Themes:

- Devolved decision-making
- Devolved power and funding
- Co-designed and co-produced
- Place-based and targeted

Outline:

This pilot explored the devolution of funding held by Cambridgeshire County Council, to Huntingdon District Council, who identified a target group of residents experiencing council tax arrears and entrenched debt, providing them with a holistic package of support including:

- Ensuring they are digitally connected with the best tariffs.
- Money health checks and action plans with Citizen's Advice Bureau.
- Skills MOT with a skills and employment advisor.
- Support with stop smoking services.
- One Leisure (gym) offers.
- Referral for health checks for weight management and/or alcohol reduction.
- Activities to support good mental health.

If residents engaged with this offer of support, there was potential for them to receive repayment of their accumulated debt using the funding from the Household Support Fund, which was devolved to Huntingdonshire District Council to allow them to test out a case worker model, as well as a financial incentive to encourage engagement.

Learning:

This collaborative design enabled Huntingdonshire District Council to utilise a devolved budget in a way most aligned to community need in a place, to a targeted cohort. This is also highlighted in local decision making, at a district level which allowed support to be tailored in a way that was most suited to the targeted group's needs. This pilot experienced minimal governance associated with the devolved budget, which allowed for maximum flexibility and creativity as the grant nature of the funding, through the Household Support Fund, meant there were few restrictions. Consequently, there were fewer requirements from finance and audit departments, which simplified fund transfers.

Cambridgeshire County Council colleagues attributed the success of the pilot to the willingness of Huntingdonshire District Council to engage in progressive approaches and the strong, trusted relationship between the two authorities. It is key to consider how when engaging in this way of working, there will be varied readiness from districts and it's crucial to ensure fairness across all districts when responding to future opportunities. A further consideration is that of the communication and political risks in

this work due to the subject matter.

Feedback from Huntingdonshire District Council identified how the project would not have formed without the devolved funding, as this approach was the driver behind the development of expertise, highlighting that they would explore similar future workstreams if the opportunities arose, as this approach sets a clear direction and supports other work. It was highlighted that the role of the Closer to Communities programme allowed Huntingdonshire to concentrate and refine their efforts in this space, demonstrating a willingness to embrace change, with emphasis given to the role of the Antipoverty lead at Cambridgeshire County Council, who had been instrumental, leveraging their knowledge and experience to collaboratively drive the project. This change was further enhanced by the governance which felt relative, allowing the project's scope to extend beyond initial objectives, addressing wider determinants of health such as smoking and mental health.

Conclusion:

This method of devolution was unusual in its nature; however, the success of the pilot was significantly attributed to collaborative working relationships between the district and the County, which fostered trust and professional challenge throughout the development of the targeted work. This work successfully demonstrated 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 at a local government level between County and districts.

5. Youth Survey

District: Fenland

Directorate: Children, Education and Families and Strategy and Partnerships

Themes:

- Devolved decision-making
- Devolved power and funding
- Co-designed and co-produced
- Place-based and targeted

Outline:

This pilot explored a collaboration between Cambridgeshire County Council and voluntary sector (VCS) organisations to deliver a Youth Survey, aiming to gather

insights directly from young people in the target areas March, Chatteris, Whittlesey and the surrounding villages, to inform practice and service provision. This work was initially led by Targeted Support Services and the Communities Service, ensuring that the work intrinsically linked to the Communities Service role to undertake a County wider consultation with young people, as part of the statutory duty, updated in November 2023, highlighting the need for youth voice.

Learning:

A key accomplishment of this work was the successful collaboration between Cambridgeshire County Council and the 15 VCS organisations which completed the survey set up, delivery and analysis within a two-month period. The survey gained a high response rate of 980 detailed and high-quality responses from young people, allowing for a fruitful insight into young people's needs and the alignment of activity. Partners were involved in the work from the beginning, ensuring genuine and authentic engagement took place by listening to them through the planning process. This work has strengthened relationships and provided opportunities to co-produce between Cambridgeshire County Council, and its partners within the VCS, Police and education partners. Each partner played to their strengths, bringing their expertise to the collaboration. The Communities Service provided connections and drove the VCS involvement, working out in the community to promote the work. The VCS were able to respond quickly using their staff and resource to deliver against the priorities, recognising how the work was driven by community efforts in the VCS and not held by Cambridgeshire County Council. Targeted Support utilised their relationships by connecting with schools, utilising data and providing access to funding. Without the individual contributions this work would not have been possible.

Youths of Fenland C.I.C reported positive experiences with this collaborative process of developing and delivering the Youth Survey, identifying how *“It was well-planned and organised, with everyone’s opinions and ideas considered. Young people felt valued and appreciated, with sufficient time to provide feedback on the questions”*. Here it is also key to note the impact on capacity and resource at Cambridgeshire County Council, as initially, this work required substantial coordination and reprioritisation, especially for data analysis, however over time it became more manageable. Challenges were also experienced in obtaining support from schools for data collection and ensuring engagement post survey to implement outcomes.

Conclusion:

This pilot demonstrates a collaborative effort between Cambridgeshire County Council and voluntary sector organisations to engage young people in a place, aligning local activity and outcomes. This work also highlights the contributions of partners in cross-

directorate working which would not have been possible without one another. This collaboration is ongoing and have together secured 50k for the area to deliver projects which meet identified needs, resulting in the model being rolled out across the County. Within the survey results, young people expressed a desire for more surveys like this in the future, highlighting the importance of continuing this approach.

6. Locally Designed Family Learning

District: Huntingdonshire

Directorate: Strategy and Partnerships

Themes:

- Co-designed and co-produced
- Place-based and targeted

Outline:

Through the work of Cambridgeshire Skills, this pilot explored the development and delivery of family learning opportunities, designed in collaboration with local partners, targeting parents who typically do not engage with education and training services. This pilot was informed by the needs of the community to foster greater participation and the development of more aligned learning opportunities.

Learning:

This pilot created clear pathways to inspire individuals to thrive within their communities, most notably due to the personalised approach, meeting the unique needs of individuals in the Oxmoor area. These learners often experienced low confidence, but became engaged in education or training settings, supported by the aspirations of case workers, resulting in a strong environment of trust and motivation, collaboration and alignment of priorities. A crucial element for encouraging enquiry and engagement from potential learners, was the established trust between Cambridgeshire County Council and the stakeholders of nurseries, case workers, and learners which was maintained through communication and gathering feedback. A significant learning from this pilot, was where the learning took place, as opportunities were delivered in nurseries, making the environment familiar, accessible, and supportive for parents with children. Partnering with nurseries provided childcare for learners, benefiting both the nurseries and the learners, leading to positive outcomes and surfacing a potential to break generational cycles through continuous learning opportunities, highlighting the importance in identifying and acting upon

barriers faced by communities using local intelligence. This learning can be illustrated in feedback from a learner:

“The experience of stepping back into a classroom after so long was very scary. After a week or so everything relaxed for me. To know you could arrive to class after having had a bad start to the day and be supported through this to learn was amazing. They bring you out of it and you feel like you’ve been listened to. Everyone on the course has said the same thing.”

Challenges faced in the development and delivery of this work, include sourcing qualified staff in this sector, and capacity to meet growing demand, particularly where there is a need for increased staff presence, to help support with pastoral challenges such as confidence building, and complex learner needs.

Conclusion:

This work required a creative, learner-led approach to meet the demands of the community which paves the way for a roll out of the approach across the organisation. Consideration must be given for the funding of this work, which is by the combined authority, who set the parameters for what can be delivered.

This pilot, co-designed with key local partners, has demonstrated significant success in engaging parents who are typically disengaged with education and training opportunities. By tailoring the design of the delivery, to community need, the pilot was able to increase participation and learning, setting a strong foundation for future family learning possibilities. Finally, demonstrating the power of community-informed and collaborative approaches in transforming educational engagement and outcomes when working Closer to Communities.

7. Smoking Cessation:

District: Fenland

Directorate: Public Health

Themes:

- Devolved power and funding
- Place-based and targeted

Outline:

The aim of this pilot is to develop a bespoke service to target vulnerable groups such as the homeless community and migrant workers, who are at increased risk of smoking-related health issues. A service specification was agreed upon with a local homeless organisation, the Ferry Project, to deliver tailored smoking cessation support, appointing a dedicated Stop Smoking Advisor. Additionally, a smoking cessation model was agreed with the Integrated Neighbourhood Manager to ensure alignment with wider health service frameworks. Alongside this work, behavioural science research is being undertaken, which will inform work in this space. The existing model for stop smoking services is for smokers to receive support from their GP practice or the Behaviour Change Service Healthy You. This challenge is that population groups that have rates of smoking such as the homeless do not have any contact with or do not access these services. This new model is devolving the power to deliver the stop smoking services to services that work closely with these groups as a place-based approach to delivery and working Closer to Communities.

Learning:

A bespoke service has been developed to increase access for the target population, for example. the offer of a vape quit kit with a longer battery life, as part of the 12-week program, recognising the needs of the homeless community in experiencing limited access to charging facilities.

The co-design process has been a core element of this pilot, as The Ferry Project have actively engaged with service users, attending existing services such as art groups, cookery school sessions, and migrant worker drop-ins. This engagement has provided valuable insights into the barriers faced by this unique demographic in accessing stop smoking services and illustrating efforts of working Closer to Communities to address these.

Conclusion:

This pilot project is in the process of creating a targeted and bespoke smoking cessation service that addresses the specific needs of communities in Fenland. By focusing on engagement, unique barriers, and tailored interventions, this project aims to improve smoking cessation outcomes in this high-risk population.

8. CJAC (Cambridge Joint Area Committee):

District: Cambridge City

Directorate: Place and Sustainability

Themes:

- Co-designed and co-produced
- Place-based and targeted

Outline:

This pilot explores Cambridge Joint Area Committee (CJAC) which was reintroduced, with endorsement of the full council, as part of efforts to bring decision-making Closer to Communities. Fostering a collaborative environment where authorities work together on local issues, addressing the specific place needs of Cambridge communities.

CJAC represents a joint effort between Cambridgeshire County Council and Cambridge City Council, to focus on matters including transport. The CJAC had functioned historically but had been disbanded in 2019/2020. The CJAC has been revisited and reinstated, playing a key advisory role, supporting the Highways and Transport decision-making process, and ensuring that the Council is closer to the community. The first meeting took place in June 2024, during which a Chair and Vice Chair were elected, terms of reference were drafted, and meetings have been regular with co-designed agendas.

Learning:

Learnings demonstrate how the committee's terms of reference may need to evolve over time, offering flexibility and adapting to the growing need for devolved decision-making. To maximise impact of CJAC meetings, resource is required to drive preparation and ensure follow-up decisions are made and as committee members hold varied expectations regarding the scope of issues the CJAC would address, clarity is required to ensure expectations are aligned. This alignment and collaboration are also driven through providing Cambridge City Councillors with greater visibility and influence in decisions regarding County Highways and Transport. This collaboration drove success due to the development of joint ownership and strong, trusted working relationships.

Conclusion:

To conclude, it is evident that the reintroduction of the Cambridge Joint Area Committee (CJAC) has successfully enhanced local participation and engagement by tailoring to communities. The committee marks a step towards a path to evolving the organisation's role in working Closer to Communities.

9. Care Leavers:

District: Huntingdonshire

Directorate: Children's Service and Strategy and Partnerships

Themes:

- Co-designed and co-produced

Outline:

This project worked to establish a joint and targeted offer for Care Leavers between the Leaving Care Service and Cambridgeshire Libraries, aimed at connecting them with broader support networks. Exploring access to digital devices, safe spaces, and resources that assist young people in connecting with their family history through the library and archive resources. Huntingdon Library was chosen as the initial hub based on a review of homes of Care Leavers as a significant number of young people lived in or could easily commute to Huntingdon. Additionally, Huntingdon Library is one of the main hub libraries in the region, providing a wide range of services, making it an appropriate place to launch the hubs to young people.

Learning:

The project successfully established a Care Leavers Hub at Huntingdon Library which led to the formation of drop-in sessions with Personal Advisors, a skills and employability officer, and the introduction of the first Tenancy Ready course in partnership with a District Council Housing Officer. This use of library spaces will allow Care Leavers to gain a better understanding of the resources available to them and an improved the understanding among Children's Services staff regarding the resources available for Care Leavers. This also increased awareness within libraries about the needs of children in care and Care Leavers, whilst also potentially reducing costs for the Leaving Care Service by eliminating the need for sourcing support. Further support for this understanding, comes from the wider organisation and the five district councils who all passed motions to consider care leavers as a protected characteristic, supporting the multiple disadvantages they face and bringing a focus in knowledge and understanding.

Within the learning from this pilot, it is also important to note the multiple leadership changes within Children's Services, and how this impacted the continuity of the project. High staff turnover in the Leaving Care team required the initial training to be revisited before the project could fully launch and the engagement of front-line staff to

encourage their engagement, all led to further delays to the project development. To minimise challenge, regular monthly board meetings played a crucial role in relationship-building, goal setting, and accountability, allowing for clear actions and timelines to be established, ensuring that momentum was maintained.

The development of the Hub took longer than anticipated, with the number of young people engaging with the Hub being lower than expected, though through services are confident that this will increase as the project embeds within the Leaving Care Service. It is important to note here, as the pilot was not co-designed with Care Leavers during the setup phase due to time requirements, plans are in place to gather feedback from young people who attend the Hub and use their insights to guide the rollout of future hubs in other libraries across the County.

Conclusion:

This project has been a positive step for the Leaving Care Service, which had not previously undertaken this approach, as it encouraged reflection and evaluation of what services are offered and where. Furthermore, demonstrating the efficient use of existing resources through reallocation and redistribution without the need for additional funding to drive decentralised opportunities. The project has led to a significant improvement in understanding between the two services, who are both recognising the opportunities in collaboration, whilst feeling optimistic to roll out the model in other libraries across the county. Continuing to enhance the relationship between Cambridgeshire County Council and Care Leavers in their journey of working Closer to Communities.

10. Community Environment Project:

District: East Cambridgeshire

Directorate: Strategy and Partnerships

Themes:

- Co-designed and co-produced
- Place-based and targeted

Outline:

In May 2024, the Communities Service team at Cambridgeshire County Council, co-produced the Greener Together event to showcase community-led green initiatives. This event was co-hosted by Cambridgeshire County Council, Burwell Parish Council,

East Cambridgeshire District Council, East Cambs Climate Action Network and Cambridge Carbon Footprint. The aim of this collaboration was to reduce fossil fuel dependence, restore wildlife spaces, and accelerate the transition to net-zero carbon emissions, exploring the role Cambridgeshire County Council can play in enabling and supporting communities around a theme, work alongside them to inspire action.

Learning:

The event was successfully co-hosted, attracting over 50 attendees and involving five partners. Internally, collaboration took place between Communities, Libraries and the Learning and Development teams, and the Climate Change and Energy Service. This successful collaboration saw significant engagement, leading to various follow-up activities and opportunities, such as the Imaginarium pop-up events, which encouraged the communities to envision and discuss a better future for green outcomes. This work also sparked a Community Reach Fund bid by Cambridge Carbon Footprint to teach communities how to run an Imaginarium, a follow-on activity from Greener Together, which engaged approximately 100 residents at the Burwell Carnival, capturing community voices and encouraging active participation. Demonstrating how the events success was attributed to the time and energy invested in building relationships based on shared values and listening, alongside authentic co-production, in ensuring that communities are heard.

Attendees gained knowledge and confidence, which can be seen in the results from using a Mentimeter, a self-reflective tool which showed that residents felt more informed and motivated to set up green initiatives, more connected and hopeful for positive action.

Further feedback was gathered from partners who worked alongside the Communities Service on the development of the event:

“Initiatives like Greener Together help connect active people in the district, we get to know both know more about how we might be able to support those individuals/groups to reach net zero whilst simultaneously building community and CCF gets to learn about and maybe replicate good work that’s already happening”

“The Greener Together Event was a fantastic example of how communities can come together to share stories, learning and build connections, all for the benefit of creating a more healthy, equitable and sustainable world. The talks at the start were informative and the various workshops fostered collaboration and creativity from participants”

“As a co-host of the project, I found the overall experience inspiring and worthwhile. The Greener Together event created the ripple effect of further events and actions that

I hoped it would.”

Acknowledgement must also be given to the resource and capacity required to drive efforts in this space, as the event required significant capacity from the Communities Service team and community partners, with increased meeting frequency, and resource intensive visions, which produces strong collaborative relationships.

Furthermore, establishing equal partnerships took time, as the Communities Service team was initially seen as the lead but emphasised a co-hosting approach to foster equality and reach the desired power dynamic between stakeholders.

Conclusion:

It is important to note here that the nature of this work is at the core of the work of the Communities Service and is their natural state and approach when working with and alongside communities across Cambridgeshire.

The legacy of the event led to collaboration among co-hosting partners, including follow-up activities in Burwell, co-hosting a stall at Ely Cathedral Eco-Fair, and strengthening of the East Cambs Climate and Nature Partnership and the Library Green Network. Demonstrating the power of building strong and trusted partnerships through collaborative efforts. Pathways for further collaboration have emerged as partners are exploring local ideas and suggestions that were made at the Burwell Imaginarium, with further place-based Imaginariums planned. Additionally, the Communities team at Cambridgeshire County Council are collaborating with Libraries and Learning and Development colleagues to explore potential to support the [Great Collaboration](#) with a Regional Pilot to grow local community action.

This event showcased the power of community-led green efforts and the importance of collaborative approaches when working alongside communities. The event's success highlights the potential for continued community engagement and environmental action, supported by strong partnerships and responsive planning.

11. Community Wealth Building:

District: Cambridge City

Directorate: Strategy and Partnerships

Themes:

- Co-designed and co-produced

- Place-based and targeted

Outline:

This pilot explored the commitment from Cambridgeshire County Council to support and play an active role in a system-wide partnership alongside Cambridge City Council as they embarked on a community wealth building project, Focus on Abbey. The overall aims of this work were to bring people together from across the community, voluntary, charitable, public, and private sectors, to identify opportunities to work together to improve quality of life in the targeted area and address entrenched inequalities. The Abbey ward has been neglected for a long time in terms regeneration but also in terms of supporting the local community to thrive.

Learning:

Accomplishments in this pilot highlight the work of the Cambridgeshire County Councils Communities Service team in supporting the development of funding, which was allocated to community projects from Cambridge City Council, aiming to address key issues identified by the local community, such as food poverty, social mobility, and the development of community champions. The Communities team played a role in assessing the applicants for the Focus on Abbey funding and participated in the selection process.

The Communities team also found ways to contribute mindfully such as representing on the steering group for the Action in Abbey Project, in collaboration with Together Culture and facilitating group work at the first two public engagement events.

Additionally, the direct engagement by the Communities Service, with individual Focus on Abbey projects allowed the team to offer their knowledge and expertise particularly to those projects aimed at building community capacity. This approach ensured that their contributions align with the needs of the community. Furthermore, the County team helped to unlock access to a range of wider county council services, including education, skills development, school partnerships, and funding opportunities. The Communities Service also supported wider work in this space through the Shaping Abbey work, which involved engaging with the community on the development of the area and Focus on Abbey projects, driving collaborative efforts. This united approach has been especially valuable in building trust, as when the community and key stakeholders see public services working together toward a shared vision, it reinforces trust, a key concern in Abbey Ward.

Conclusion:

The Focus on Abbey pilot demonstrates the value of a collaborative, system-wide partnerships in addressing long-standing inequalities in a place, reflecting the importance of taking tangible steps to address deep-rooted issues in the Abbey ward and foster long-term community resilience. Concluding how appropriate contributions from Cambridgeshire County Council in terms of resource and energy, can drive wider system efforts in working Closer to Communities.

12. ICS Data Integration

District: Huntingdonshire

Directorate: Strategy and Partnerships

Themes:

- Place-based and targeted

Outline:

With Oxmoor in Huntingdonshire as a key area of focus, this pilot proposal explored how Cambridgeshire County Council could contribute data to support the delivery of the ICS public service data integration. The strategic aim was to understand communities better through data, enabling a more localised approach to support through services. The vision was that as the pilot evolved, the possibility to drill down to Local Super Output Areas (LSOA) and target resource accordingly would arise, concluding possibilities for what might be possible in terms of data integration.

Conclusion:

The decision was made for this work to no longer continue as part of the Closer to Communities portfolio, due to initial workshops and staffing changes.

13. Utilising Our Estate

District: Huntingdonshire

Directorate: Strategy and Partnerships and Finance and Resources

Themes:

- Place- based and targeted

Outline:

Working with communities and partners, this pilot proposal aimed to review how and where Cambridgeshire County Council delivers services from across Huntingdonshire to best meet local need. whilst utilising libraries as a point of access to support.

Conclusion:

The decision was made for this work to no longer continue as part of the Closer to Communities portfolio, with business planning agreeing to incorporate it within the Accommodation Improvement Programme work at Cambridgeshire County Council.

14. Integrated Neighbourhood:

District: Cambridge City

Directorate: Strategy and Partnerships

Themes:

- Co-designed and co-produced
- Place-based and targeted

Outline:

This pilot explored the work of Cambridgeshire County Council in supporting the development and efforts of a “One Team” in the Northeast Integrated Neighbourhood, alongside Integrated Care System (ICS) colleagues. The focus was to identify shared priorities, utilise population health management data and engage communities to uncover local solutions to local priorities. The development of the Integrated Neighbourhood is in its early stages, introducing new ways of working to the system.

Learning:

The Communities Services’ main contribution to this work, was the facilitation of connections between the community and the Integrated Neighbourhood board, cultivating spaces for collaboration to take place. The Communities Service also provided guidance and support in ensuring that communities are represented at a decision-making level and are informing the development of the work. Highlighting the importance of addressing health needs through place-based and collaborative approaches, often slow in their progress as the system is shifting to a systematic way

of working. The role in this project was mostly advisory, driving the representation of community voice, ensuring priorities shaped the development of the Integrated Neighbourhood. Another vital learning, focusses on the maturity between partners, reflected in their ability to embrace actions driven by the priorities of others, functioning as an extended member of the team. Cambridgeshire County Council played a key role in supporting partner priorities by working collaboratively in a place-based approach, with fluid engagement and trust.

Conclusion:

This pilot at time of evaluation was still in its early stages of development, however the vision will provide better health outcomes for communities by working in a place-based way to address local health needs through collaborative working and engagement with communities. Furthermore, highlighting Cambridgeshire County Council resource, operating at a local neighbourhood level and integral to driving the one team approach across organisational boundaries.

15. Local Community Climate Campaigns:

District: Fenland and Cambridge City

Directorate: Children, Education and Families

Themes:

- Devolved funding
- Co-designed and co-produced
- Place-based and targeted

Outline:

This work explores the devolution and distribution of centrally held funding to place-based teams to co-design projects that meet the needs of communities. The pilot explored in this evaluation explores the Child and Family Centres (Family Hubs) in Wisbech and Cambridge City and their work in supporting local families around climate and the cost-of-living crisis, with the aim of co-production, providing them with the opportunity to 'Reconnect' with Nature, 'Repurpose' what they no longer need and 'Reuse' to mend things that are broken or old.

Learning:

A main accomplishment of this project was the co-design of services based on local

needs, identified through a community survey, where need was addressed by acknowledging high levels of deprivation and responding with financial management and personal well-being opportunities. Positive feedback came from participating families and the ripple effect of these efforts has been significant, as families shared the lessons learned with their children, promoting sustainable practice. The collaboration between partners in the delivery of services was another notable achievement, as localised planning and reduced bureaucracy allowed services to be delivered more efficiently. This approach demonstrated the benefits of working together to tailor support to community demand and how a more environmentally friendly service was developed to support families to make changes in their lives.

It is also key to identify success in terms of service delivery:

- Let's Get Growing Course: Two cohorts of this 4-week course taught parents and children how to grow their own food, care for the environment, and develop a connection with nature. A total of 13 adults and 16 children completed the course in Wisbech, in partnership with adult learning providers.
- Ready, Steady, Recycle Sessions: Five recycling sessions were conducted, where families had 60 minutes to create items from recycled materials. Across these sessions, 42 adults and 57 children participated (Wisbech), also in collaboration with adult learning providers.
- Forest School Sessions: All eight Children and Family Centre Workers (CFCWs) were trained since July 2024, forest school-themed sessions have been offered in various outdoor spaces in Wisbech and Cambridge, in partnership with the district council and local charities. Over 200 people have attended these sessions.
- Sewing Skills Workshops: Links with community groups have helped 10 families learn sewing skills, with additional sessions planned in the city.

In addition, there have been impacts which include:

- Partnerships with local groups, district councils and the Greater Cambridgeshire Partnership encouraged families to use safe walking routes rather than drive, supported through face-to-face engagement and social media publicity - Cambridge City.
- Links made with local schools and through social media to organise redistribution of preloved school uniform during the summer holidays - Wisbech and Cambridge City.
- Work on child and family centre spaces to include planters to grow fruit and vegetables, bug hotels and pollinator areas - Wisbech and Cambridge City.
- Festival of Stories events are planned for all centres during February 2025, covering all 3 key areas of project - Wisbech and Cambridge City.
- All group activities use recycled materials for crafts - Wisbech and Cambridge

City.

- No meat products are used for any group activities - Cambridge City.
- All families requesting food and fuel vouchers are signposted to additional services (including DWP SO officer) to promote financial recovery, accessibility to employment and training and or correct benefits - Cambridge City.

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Challenges identified through this work, include how there was strong engagement from staff at 82 responses, but only 12 from communities, highlighting the difficulty of engaging with parents on the theme of climate change, and the need for further action. Additionally, sourcing local and eco-friendly resources to the budget constraints, as they often did not align.

Conclusion:

It is important to note here that the nature of this work is at the core of the work of how Child and Family Centres are delivered at Cambridgeshire County Council and is their approach when working with and alongside communities.

This work demonstrates significant learning from the distribution of centrally held funding to place-based teams to co-design projects that meet the needs of communities, which has had significant and rippling benefits for residents. Creating an environmentally conscious service that supports families in making sustainable lifestyle changes.

16. Local Projects Targeted Support: NEET Project

District: Huntingdon - St Neots, Ramsey, Sawtry and Yaxley

Directorate: Children, Education and Families

Themes:

- Devolved decision-making
- Co-designed and co-produced
- Place-based and targeted

Outline:

The aim of this pilot was to drive equal opportunities for young people aged 16 -24 in Paines Mill supported housing, aligning their opportunities with peers who live at home and may pay minimal or no rent. Utilising funding from the Communities team and from Huntingdon District Council's Prosperity Fund, the hypothesis was that by

removing this financial barrier, young people will be more likely to seek employment sooner, maintain their role and transition to independent living more effectively. Whilst also teaching budgeting skills and preparing young people for rental responsibilities that they will experience after leaving supported accommodation. This support was tailored through a collaboration with Paine's Mill, St. Neots Town Council, CCC Targeted Support, and CCC Communities Service.

Learning:

As the work developed, the steering group was instrumental in driving efforts and guiding the projects vision, managing expectations, roles and responsibilities across the place and local context. The place-based approach was effective in engaging a target group of young residents at Paines Mill, addressing the specific barriers they faced and creating a comfortable and welcoming space. Engagement with the young people took place to capture their voice, understand barriers, and identify motivations related to education, employment, and training, using group sessions and Microsoft Forms. This collaborative approach meant engagement was most successful as it was authentic, built trust and aligned priorities, leading young people to engage in activities like a plate smashing session (focused on mental well-being), cooking sessions and interview panels. Feedback from young people engaged with the project highlighted a positive impact on their mental health, with some residents noting visible improvements in their peers. This work also demonstrates opportunity, as a core group of young people regularly attend sessions, trust has been established, which is infiltrating other residents who are becoming more aware and engaged in the efforts of this work.

It is also important to recognise the challenges faced within this pilot, with consideration to the complex barriers these young people face, affecting their ability to sustain employment, education or training. Recognising the need for preventative support in addressing challenges which may arise before employment can be achieved. It was identified that these barriers can be overcome through collaboration a collaboration of stakeholders including CCC colleagues (social care, targeted support, communities' services) and external organisations (HDC, St Neots Town Council, Job Centre Plus. To ensure success, alignment and communication are key in understanding priorities, expectations and governance structures.

Conclusion:

As a result of this work, one young person has gone into employment and is accessing the fund to support the rent payment, this is having a positive impact on the group and helping to motivate them further. Progress is visible, and notes how achieving desired

outcomes for young people requires patience in establishing strong partnerships, clear communication, and the sharing of resources, funding, and expertise. The continued engagement with residents is planned to take place, exploring how this work can develop and continue to deliver aligned priorities, with the steering group meeting to drive the work and next step possibilities.

In conclusion, this pilot has demonstrated the effectiveness of a place-based, co-designed approach in addressing the unique challenges faced by young people in supported accommodation, creating a pathway for long-term success in supporting these the transition to employment and housing and working Closer to Communities.

17. Street Lighting

District: Countywide

Directorate: Place and Sustainability

Themes:

- Co-designed and co-produced

Outline:

This pilot explored the provision of Street lighting at Cambridgeshire County Council and how the organisation can inform and empower communities on the topic. In Cambridgeshire, Street lighting is provided by a mix of County, parish and town councils, district councils, National Highways, and private owners, therefore, issues arise when communities report faults, as ownership and responsibility is not always clear. A request from Girton Parish Council was raised to the organisation, highlighting how there was not a central register or mapping of streetlights and their ownership, stressing the challenges for clerks to identify and report faults. Cambridgeshire County Council came Closer to Communities by listening, engaging and taking action. In response, and in collaboration with communities, Cambridgeshire County Council embarked on an action plan to provide information on street lighting and energy procurement for parish and town councils to be published on Cambridgeshire County Councils website.

Learning:

Major accomplishments of this work include the provision of information available for communities and parish and town Councils, which included detail on operational requirements for streetlights, maintenance and guidance on required timescales and

industry standards. The development of this information was co-designed through the relationship between the street lighting team and parish and town Councils. This was to ensure the information aligned with the request from communities, by collaborating on what information would be most useful.

Collaboration took place with the Information Services Team, ensuring the information added to the street lighting webpage was correctly worded and presented for all users that may access the information. Cross service working also took place when working with the Councils Energy team who advised on the possible energy procurement routes for parish and town Councils and agreed they could be signposted as a contact for further advice on energy procurement if required.

Feedback was positive from the Parish Clerks, and this work has highlighted the importance of ensuring information is shared with communities, so they feel informed, empowered and supported on local authority delivery.

Conclusion:

Next steps for this work, includes the potential rollout of new customer reporting and data base. Although the work began in Girton Parish Council and the Orchard Park Community Council, Cambridge, the information was added for all districts across Cambridgeshire.

This work has demonstrated how engaging and listening alongside sharing information and knowledge with parish and town Councils wherever possible supports the organisation to work Closer to Communities. Demonstrating how successful collaboration supports the empowerment of communities, and the alignment of priorities between Cambridgeshire County Council and its residents.

18. Supporting Families Fund

District: Countywide

Directorate: Children, Education and Families

Themes:

- Devolved decision-making

Outline:

Building on the success of personalised budgets for families in the national Supporting Families programme, this pilot drove collaboration by extending access to the fund,

enabling families to receive funding from partner organisations, including schools, nurseries and the voluntary sector. This was due to consistent communication to partners about the available funding and how they could access it on behalf of the families they support. By widening the scope of the funding process, more families were able to access the fund, as it was not restricted to those already allocated a local authority worker at Cambridgeshire County Council. This approach allowed families to receive financial support to achieve co-designed desired outcomes in their family plans, within the framework of the national programme.

Learning:

A key learning from this work was the need for consistent communication with partners, identifying how they could access the fund and empowering them to work in this new way. This led to receiving external applications, meeting the needs of individual families, and opening access for partner organisations to request funding on a family's behalf.

Another significant learning highlights how partners within educational settings considered the needs of the families they support through their Early Help offer (open Early Help Assessment), applying for items that support families in making positive changes to their identified needs. For example, the purchase of a dehumidifier improved a child's mental and physical health by reducing allergies and asthma symptoms caused by mold and dust in the home. Additionally, the purchase of a dining table booster seat and play mat helped a family eat together and provided a safe, easy-to-clean area for the child to play, supporting a mother's challenges from an Osteoporosis condition. Identifying how this person-centered approach enables better alignment with community need.

Conclusion:

When exploring future work, consideration could be given to the possibility of allocating general purchase cards rather than sharing with social care, due to challenges of disseminating funding. And, redefining the restrictions on the fund to make it easier for the local authority to purchase goods, such as bikes, which currently must be new and sourced from certain providers. Consideration could also be given to allocating funds directly to educational settings, a key stakeholder in the work, allowing them more autonomy in the utilisation the funding.

This pilot successfully extended funding access to families through a collaboration of Cambridgeshire County Council and partner organisations, highlighting the importance of consistent communication with partners and the involvement of educational settings in addressing the needs of families in Cambridgeshire. As the current funding

concludes in March 2025, adopting the proposed considerations could foster a more community focussed and efficient support system for the dissemination of potential funds.

Refining the approach

In April 2024, during a time of cross directorate and strategic reflection, an addition to the portfolio was made which included the workstreams of Place-based forums, Place-based working and facilitating and empowering communities in the highways space. These additions provided further investigation and evidence in the learning of how Cambridgeshire County Council can work Closer to Communities.

19. Place-based Forums

District: Countywide

Directorate: Strategy and Partnerships

Themes:

- Devolved decision-making
- Devolved power and funding
- Co-designed and co-produced
- Place-based and targeted

Outline:

This work explores the development of place-based forums, led by the Communities Service to bring together internal staff working in a district from across different service areas. The forums operate in a place-based way, coming together to identify local priorities and solutions, with the over-arching aim being for the organisation to provide a better and more aligned service to local communities. The approach focuses on working collaboratively around a place, using existing resource to meet need and to take advantage of opportunities using a small ringfenced budget.

Learning:

Although it is still early to draw definitive conclusions, there has been an elevated level of connection, knowledge and awareness across services, leading to more effective collaboration. By working together across different teams, possibilities arose to share capacity and resources, allowing a blended response that drew on differing skill sets and positively impacted outcomes. This system-wide approach paves the way for the

delivery of joint projects that directly respond to local need, with this alignment supporting the overarching organisational objectives. Project planning and decision-making processes were conducted democratically, allowing officers to find solutions creatively and collaboratively, identifying the potential for this approach in preventing the unnecessary procurement of skills, services, or resources that already exist within the council.

The availability and flexibility of the ringfenced budget, enabled faster decision-making, unlike traditional funding, which often comes with strict criteria and lengthy approval processes, or sometimes no budget at all. It is also key to identify the limited governance around spending the budget, which allowed an informal nature of spending to take place, which was tailored to need and more efficient in its ability to support developing ideas and projects.

Here it felt important to explore feedback from members of the forums:

“Our connection and learning with the libraries have been great. They are such a proactive team. We have managed to book Milton Road library and Cambridge City library for some of our NCS sessions. We also have bookings with Huntingdon library in the works too. We can book these for free, which is a massive help to our budget. For every NCS session we do, we book a youth space/venue, at the very minimum this is £15 per hour. With so many programmes across the county, this soon adds up. By getting venues for free, this allows us to use those funds to provide a better curriculum for our young people, which results in better outcomes. For example, we could then afford to get specialists in to deliver core themes, which we couldn't usually afford”

“We are doing a social action project in Ely, all designed and delivered by young people, to raise awareness and donations for a local/new charity in the area. Following us attending a placed based forum, we have been offered a band to play at this Community Fun day, for free! A proper band. How awesome”

“The chats in the forums have been so helpful with getting courses advertised and shared amongst professionals”

“Very enabling of the ‘One Cambridgeshire – We Are Cambs’ aspiration and ethos”
Furthermore, statistics from a survey shared with the forums identified how 77% of respondents felt better connected because of their participation in the Place-based Forum and 69% had developed a positive working relationship with a new colleague, team or service.

Conclusion:

It is expected the place-based forums will evolve differently over time, beginning with the services of Communities Service, Libraries and Cambridgeshire Skills (Strategy & Partnerships), Targeted Support and Family Hubs (Children, Families & Education) and Care Together (Adults, Health & Commissioning). Next steps for the development of this work, include the widening of the forums to invite more internal colleagues and opportunities to hold meetings in person, with a rotating chair, to allow a variety of services to lead and drive efforts. The forums present a clear development in place-based working at Cambridgeshire County Council, identifying the successes and opportunities of the approach in aligning priorities with communities, driving internal collaboration and strengthening efforts.

20. Place-based Work (Wisbech)

District: Fenland

Directorate: Strategy and Partnerships

Themes:

- Co-designed and co-produced
- Place-based and targeted

Outline:

The initial focus for this pilot, was to address the education, skills, and training domain, mobilising a cross-directorate workstream to develop targeted, place-based interventions that respond directly to the challenges identified through IMD (Indices of multiple deprivation) analysis. Wisbech was selected as the place of focus, based on the indicators from the IMD, which highlight significant need. This work aimed to improve access to adult education for individuals most in need, the NEET population of 16–18-year-olds, by aligning their personal goals with local opportunities, utilising a collaboration between the community, local stakeholders, and employers.

Learning:

A new collaborative approach has been established, forming a partnership between various stakeholders such as Children's Services, the Communities Service, as well as external partners like Fenland District and an evolving network of support to drive the project forward. The community has been actively involved, fostering a sense of ownership and empowerment as they influence the type and nature of provisions offered. This approach drives a community-led strategy, which has proven to be

effective, though it requires significant time and effort. A key component of this strategy is the development of Community Leaders, who act as advocates for the project, shaping and recruiting for the educational provisions. This focus on community voice has been critical in designing and delivering aligned provision to meet local need and provides the bridge between individuals and opportunities, leading to better and more sustainable outcomes.

The first course, developed in partnership with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and Seetec (an independent training provider), was oversubscribed. Historically, ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) courses have struggled with low enrolment numbers, making this a significant achievement.

To reduce NEET it will commission specialised provision, that is specific to the needs of the place and those young people where college or apprenticeships are not yet suitable for them. The idea is that this provision will kick start an unused funding stream, that is available to CCC from the Department for Education, so this becomes sustainable through grant funding in the long term

It is key to note that there have been several initiatives in Wisbech in recent years, leaving residents with a sense of "being done to" which can lead to a reluctance in engagement, posing a challenge to building trust and participation. Additionally, there is a shortage of post 16 teaching professionals therefore it will be vital to ensure sufficient teaching capacity.

Conclusion:

This work, although in its early stages has successfully adopted lessons from other Closer to Communities projects and similar initiatives across the organisation, highlighting the importance of investing time in engaging with communities, which delivers intended outcomes for them and the broader system. By building trust, fostering community leadership, and aligning educational offerings locally, the project has laid foundations for long-term, sustainable success in accessing adult education in Wisbech.

21. Facilitating and Empowering Communities in Highways

District: Countywide

Directorate: Place and Sustainability

Themes:

- Devolved decision-making
- Co-designed and co-produced

Outline:

This pilot explored process changes to how third parties commission and deliver changes to the public highway in their own areas via the counties PFHI (Privately Funded Highway Improvement) route. The motivation for this work, came from a request from a parish council in Fenland, who queried what options were available to third parties to deliver highway infrastructure improvements themselves. The ambition of this work is to allow as much decision making and autonomy at local level as possible to implement highway changes. Utilising co-design approaches to:

- Improve accessibility
- Streamline processes
- Improve community understanding
- Implement changes based on community feedback (where appropriate/possible)

Learning:

A scoping exercise was conducted with a small number of parish councils, with possible changes to the existing PFHI process discussed and taken away by officers to review, this focus on community voice, built trust with authentic conversation. Third parties were encouraged to trust that officers will provide informed, professional, and technical advice related to this process, which will combat mistrust around the cost of the work, addressing any concerns. The key benefit will be the possibility for a process where third parties can make changes to the public highway in their own areas, delivered in a way that they choose and are confident they can achieve best value through, whilst meeting the authorities' standards around quality, specification and health and safety. The proposed changes and approach of this work will mean consideration must be given for how third parties work on the public highway in a controlled way which does not present undue risk or liability to the authority. Additionally, consideration must be given to the reactive nature of this work, being completely third party funded and delivered, and the possibility of further resource being required depending on the volume of applications.

Conclusion:

These proposed changes to process, once realised will result in a countywide impact for third parties seeking to make highway improvements in their own areas, through

tested improved ways of working with local communities when identifying and implementing transport schemes. It is evident that this pilot has provided Cambridgeshire County Council with insights into how services within the highways and transport space can align and bring the organisation Closer to Communities.

Conclusion of the Closer to Communities Pilots

Through the exploration of these pilot projects the County Council gleaned knowledge and understanding in how to create a more responsive, effective, and community-focused model of working with, alongside and Closer to Communities.

This work provided valuable insights into the opportunities and challenges when experimenting with approaches of working Closer to Communities, identifying how this journey:

- **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.

This evidence identifies pathways for the organisation to build upon existing efforts, adapt where it is appropriate, and understand the journey of Closer to Communities at Cambridgeshire County Council as it looks to its future of organisational change.