

COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE	AGENDA ITEM No. 8
5 JULY 2021	PUBLIC REPORT

Report of:	Adrian Chapman, Service Director Communities and Partnerships	
Cabinet Member(s) responsible:	Cllr Steve Allen, Cabinet Member for Housing, Culture and Communities	
Contact Officer(s):	Matt Oliver, Head of Think Communities	07919213962

Taking a Think Communities approach to mitigate the impact of Covid19, including on economic, health and wellbeing factors, and to reduce inequality.

RECOMMENDATIONS	
FROM: Adrian Chapman, Service Directors Communities and Partnerships	Deadline date: N/A
<p>It is recommended that Communities Scrutiny Committee</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Note and comment on the contribution of the Think Communities approach to tackling the impacts of Covid19 2. Note and comment on the work preparations in place to deal with projected issues of evictions and equality 3. Consider how the Think Communities approach can support the wider needs of individuals and communities 	

1. ORIGIN OF REPORT

1.1 This report is presented at the request of the Scrutiny Committee.

2. PURPOSE AND REASON FOR REPORT

2.1 To brief Members on the approach to addressing the impacts of the pandemic on our communities, by adopting a Think Communities approach. It is envisaged that Members will be able to identify other areas of concern that the Think Communities team can help address.

2.2 This report is for the Communities committee to consider under its Terms of Reference No Terms of Reference No. 2.1, Functions determined by the Council:

2. Neighbourhood and Community Support (including cohesion and community safety);

2.4 There are key examples across this report which link to the following Corporate Priorities:

- Keeping all our communities safe, cohesive and healthy
- Achieving the best health and wellbeing for the city

3. TIMESCALES

Is this a Major Policy Item/Statutory Plan?	NO	If yes, date for Cabinet meeting	N/A
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4. BACKGROUND AND KEY ISSUES

4.1 The Think Communities approach has been developed with our partners over the past two years, and is based on the model of local design and delivery of services that place the resident at the centre and that make most sense to them. The approach uses three basic principles when we collectively consider and plan our responses to the needs of residents:

- **People** (understanding the root causes of need and helping people to find their own solutions where appropriate or ensuring they can access the right support as early as possible). People live in places...
- **Places** (focusing on the individual needs of a whole place and supporting community action). Supported by the system...
- **System** (joining up our work across the council, public, faith, community, and voluntary sectors to make the most sense to our residents)

4.2 We will know if we have been successful if the overall outcomes, health and wellbeing of our residents and whole communities improves, if inequalities reduce, and if we are able to prevent, reduce and delay the need statutory service interventions where other, more local solutions are available or could be developed.

4.3 Think Communities is led by a Head of Service who is shared with the County Council, supported by a dedicated core Peterborough team comprising a Place Coordinator, an Integrated Communities Manager, and two Community Connectors. Critically, the approach is endorsed by the whole organisation, meaning that the principles described above are expected to be seen in practice across all areas of our activity. This core team have been instrumental in setting up and delivering the Peterborough Covid response hub, which has enabled the Think Communities approach to be delivered in real time to support some of our most vulnerable residents. Figure 1 below illustrates some of the Peterborough-specific outputs from this work.



Figure 1

This way of working together across all local councils, services and communities has resulted in positive individualised outcomes for our residents around issues that would likely have been hidden to services and most likely would have contributed to pressures elsewhere in the system. It hasn't relied on public sector reform, but just a common-sense approach to working smarter together.

4.4 This way of working throughout the pandemic has enabled us to develop a framework for working together, side by side with agencies such as the NHS, other local government partners, social landlords, faith groups, the Police and Fire services, and the community and voluntary sectors. This means that the approaches we've developed will become mainstreamed business-as-usual, and will enable us to get upstream of potential issues, join up services and ensure that our voluntary and community sector has the support that it needs to help our vulnerable residents.

4.5 As described above, the Think Communities approach has shaped the unified response to the pandemic so far. The next section of this report focuses on some specific presenting needs and projected impacts of Covid-19 with a view to supporting discussion around how this approach may be used to address these issues. The report will focus on the needs of:

- People at risk from the economic impacts of Covid-19
- People at risk of poor health outcomes from Covid-19
- People at risk of poor mental health outcomes as a result of Covid-19

4.6 **People at risk from the economic impacts of Covid-19**

- 4.6.1 It is widely recognised that, in general terms, the economic impact of the pandemic is likely to be severe. One of the ways in which this might manifest itself is the potential for increased evictions from rented housing. The Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Covid-19 Needs Assessment predicted that there may be significant numbers of residents at risk of eviction due to rent arrears. During the pandemic the Government placed restrictions on evictions from rented sector accommodation, which were brought in to protect tenants from potential homelessness from their rented accommodation while the country was tackling the crisis.
- 4.6.2 Landlords have however still been able to serve notices to their tenants that they wanted possession of their property, albeit the notice period they had to provide was longer than usual at 6 months instead of 2. On expiry of the notice, they were only able to get assistance from the court in carrying out the eviction where the tenants were more than 6 months in rent arrears or where the tenant was guilty of serious anti-social behavior.
- 4.6.3 While these restrictions were welcomed, as we move out of the pandemic, we can predict that there are likely to be several cases pent up in the system. The Housing Needs service has remained open throughout the pandemic and so those cases who have already been served notice will likely be known to us. However, for many, they will be unaware that their landlord may want to seek possession of their property once the pandemic comes to an end.
- 4.6.4 On 1 June 2021 the restrictions on obtaining assistance from the court was lifted and landlords are now able to progress through the courts at the point the notice has expired, although there is still a longer notice period, now 4 months' notice as opposed to 2. As a consequence we expect to see an increase in the number of households presenting to us at risk of losing their rented home over the coming weeks and months.
- 4.6.5 After the initial wave of clients affected by this change, we are forecasting that there is likely to be a second wave of notices served as the furlough scheme comes to an end and households who were hoping to return to work may be made redundant. This is likely to be followed by a wave of evictions from households who are homeowners and for whom being made redundant means that they're no longer able to meet their mortgage repayments.
- 4.6.6 The housing needs service is prepared for the potential surge in demand and have several tools to support both tenants and landlords who may be faced with eviction:
1. Early intervention to support with benefit claims to reduce arrears to prevent eviction.
 2. Homelessness prevention grants to reduce arrears for those not eligible for benefits.
 3. Discretionary Housing Payments to support households from moving from their current property to another in the private sector where eviction cannot be prevented.
 4. Mediation support where relationships between landlord and tenant have broken down.
 5. Investigation into the potential of creating a mortgage rescue scheme for those households where they are at risk of losing the mortgaged property.
 6. Maintaining solid links between housing and the Peterborough Hub to ensure early support can be offered to those at risk, potentially running a communications campaign to reach out to those in need of support.

4.7 **People at risk of poor health outcomes from Covid-19**

- 4.7.1 Evidence shows that people who are already vulnerable or whose health is of concern are at

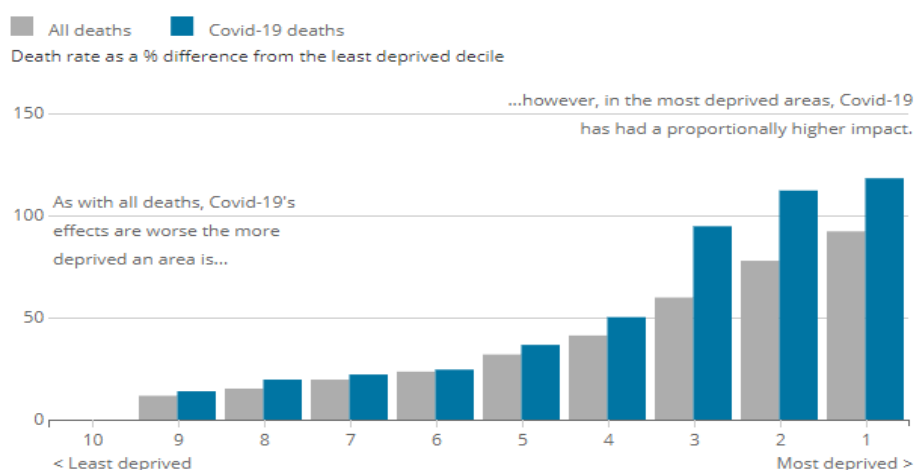
greater risk of severe outcomes from Covid-19. Those that have recovered or only had a mild case may go on to develop or suffer from issues long after the virus has passed and there are now reports emerging of longer-term damage.

4.7.2 It is now clear that older age groups and men are disproportionately affected by Covid-19, however the disparity increases if you are also from a deprived background or from certain ethnicities. Public Health England has reviewed risk factors for poor outcomes (*Disparities in the risk and outcomes of Covid 19*, June 2020), and found that key risk factors include age, sex, living in a deprived area and coming from a Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) group.

4.7.3 Additionally, the government has observed that people living in the poorest areas of England and Wales have been twice as likely to die from Covid-19 as those in less deprived areas. The analysis done by the Office for National Statistics highlights the disparity in deaths per 100,000 people from those areas with high levels of socio-economic deprivation compared with areas with low levels:

The coronavirus (COVID-19) has had a proportionally higher impact on the most deprived areas of England

Age-standardised mortality rates, all deaths and deaths involving the coronavirus (COVID-19), Index of Multiple Deprivation, England, deaths occurring between 1 March and 31 May 2020



Source: Office for National Statistics – Deaths involving COVID-19

4.7.4 The Think Communities approach is ideally placed to develop creative responses to these challenges, and to support that work the service has recently recruited ten Community Engagement workers from harder-to-reach communities across the city, funded using Government grants. This work has been commissioned through the voluntary sector, recognising their already established relationships. The role of these workers is to build confidence and support access to Covid-19 vaccinations, but importantly the contract runs until March 2022 enabling broader work to be undertaken to connect with key groups and understand the issues they face in accessing health, wellbeing and other services. The Think Communities team will then work within our partnerships to develop services that are accessible to those key groups, getting to the root of the issues and breaking down barriers to inequality.

4.7.5 Our work will also respond to the two recent and adopted council motions focussing on equalities, and two Scrutiny task and finish groups continue their work on these themes. Alongside their recommendations, which will be presented through the Scrutiny process, the proposed future course of action is to develop an equalities strategy and associated action plan that will further investigate:

1. Whether there is any systemic inequality for BAME communities which may affect health, wellbeing or social mobility
2. How council services are accessed by, and made available to, all our residents, ensuring that our BAME residents are not disadvantaged or prevented from accessing those services
3. How key council service data can be used to build an understanding of the ways in which BAME residents may be impacted, positively or negatively, by council services
4. The opportunities for our residents provided by the council for improving social mobility, to ensure that our BAME residents enjoy the same levels of access as others

4.7.6 To lead this work the recruitment of a Social Mobility and Cohesion Manager is underway to ensure that there is dedicated resource to lead this agenda and ensure that equality, diversity and inclusion are priorities as we grow together as a City.

4.8 **People at risk of poor mental health outcomes**

4.8.1 An important topic raised by many stakeholders has been the impact the pandemic has had on peoples' mental health. People may have developed mental ill-health as a wider result of the pandemic for a variety of reasons, including isolation, separation, loss of education, family stress, factors in adverse childhood experiences, social and economic restrictions, or as a result of general worry about Covid-19). Again, the Think Communities approach is ideally placed to support people affected in these ways.

4.8.2 The Think Communities service has worked hard to support the development of the "How Are You Peterborough" Website [Activities – How Are You Peterborough \(haypeterborough.co.uk\)](http://haypeterborough.co.uk) which aims to draw together a holistic range of activities that help people to get out and about, feel better about themselves, gain positive self-esteem and tackle isolation.

4.8.3 The council has also commissioned Youth Inspired to offer a range of online activities and outreach to young people across the City to help keep young people engaged, occupied and involved over the course of the pandemic.

4.8.4 The Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Community Resilience Group, which comprises c.50 cross sector partners, has also worked with mental health commissioners to pull together more targeted support information in an information sheet format for those experiencing more complex mental health issues and this was communicated through our community networks.

4.8.5 As we come out of lockdown we believe that there are multiple opportunities to support our residents to get involved in activities that they are passionate about, that support community action and at the same time help people come together, combat isolation, be active and support their mental health and wellbeing.

4.9 The issues summarised in sections 4.6, 4.7 and 4.8 above are all supported by the 'people' and 'systems' principles of the Think Communities approach. However, supporting residents to recover from the pandemic and to thrive and succeed in our city also requires a focus on 'place'. If people have access to opportunities to participate and are living in a community that feels and is safe, this provides a strong basis on which to build.

4.10 This Committee has previously discussed the 'broken window theory' which shows that unless physical decline in a community is addressed rapidly and then prevented, this negativity can become entrenched. Officers from across different council services are meeting throughout the next few weeks to review and reset our approach to many of the issues faced by communities such as fly tipping, littering, graffiti and anti social behaviour. Further details of this work will be presented to the Committee.

4.11 An excellent example of how a different approach, using the Think Communities principles, can positively affect a place, whilst also supporting the people that live there is a litter-picking project being developed through the Prevention and Enforcement Service.

- 4.12 More than two million pieces of litter are dropped in the UK every day. Litter can be anything from a cigarette butt or crisp packet to a whole bag of rubbish. Common litter items include fast-food packaging, sweet wrappers, drink cans, bottles, and cigarette butts.
- 4.13 In Peterborough sweepers removed 1044.12 tons of litter and detritus from our streets last year and the local authority spends circa £1.2 million annually removing litter and seasonal detritus in communities and highways across the city, and an additional £130k on emptying litter and dog bins. It is not just the cost of removing litter but also the impact litter has on the local environment and the quality-of-life of our residents.
- 4.14 If we are to really make an impact in the long term, we need to bring together communities in a joined-up approach to change the way people think and feel about their area. We are therefore working across the city to establish a litter picking partnership to tidy up areas and promote community-based efforts to keep our streets and parks clean.
- 4.15 Peterborough has numerous litter picking groups set up across the city which have been formed by dedicated community volunteers who give up their spare time to clearing litter in neighborhoods in both urban and rural areas.

One of these, Peterborough Litter Wombles, already has well over 300 members and are active across the city, and other litter picking groups, including PE4 Wombles, Hampton in Action, RSA Cardea, various Rivercare groups (Thorpe Gate, Potters Way, Werrington Brook, Cuckoos Hollow), Pride in Ortons, Peterborough in Transition, and Community First carry out similar extensive voluntary action, supported by the local authority and Aragon if required.

- 4.16 The local authority recognises the importance of these community groups and how litter picks can lead to further community-based engagement and activities. A new litter picking partnership has recently been formed, with membership to date including the local authority, Aragon, Peterborough Litter Wombles, Neighborhood Watch, Peterborough Environment City Trust, Thomas Deacon Academy and other community organisations. The partnership aims to link community groups together, promote their excellent work, recruit volunteers, collate a timetable of litter picks, educate people about the impact of litter and to also have a voice in the litter strategy for Peterborough.
- 4.17 Litter picks encourage individuals to take pride in their communities by empowering residents. Evidence suggests that people who initially volunteer for litter picks become more involved in other community-based activities which links to the objectives and aims of Think Communities.
- 4.18 The work of these vital volunteer groups will be considered as part of the review work referred to above, to ensure that the council and other services are providing the best support possible to eradicate the blight of littering across our communities. The same approach will be applied to the other forms of environmental crime contributing to the broken window theory.

5. CONSULTATION

- 5.1 Stakeholder consultation has been undertaken in the formulation of the Think Communities approach and continual stakeholder engagement is ongoing through our partnership groups.

6. ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES OR IMPACT

- 6.1 Continued development of the Think Communities approach and the Peterborough hub as a way of tackling emerging as well as entrenched issues.

7. REASON FOR THE RECOMMENDATION

- 7.1 To support the improvement and continuation of the Think Communities approach.

8. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

8.1 Discontinue the Think Communities Approach to our work. As written in this report the Think Communities Approach has been able to achieve significant outputs and outcome for residents and has proven the concept in response to the pandemic, therefore this option has been rejected.

9. IMPLICATIONS

Financial Implications

9.1 Think Communities seeks to improve outcomes and to prevent, reduce and delay the need for costly specialist services where appropriate, and is therefore at the heart of the council's strategy to robustly manage costs.

Legal Implications

9.2 *None*

Equalities Implications

9.3 A positive effect on equality and diversity is expected as expressed in the report.

Rural Implications

9.4 *None Identified*

Carbon Impact Assessment

9.5 There are no direct carbon impact implications from considering the report's recommendations.

10. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Used to prepare this report, in accordance with the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985

10.1 None

11. APPENDICES

11.1 None

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