Scrutiny Review into Community Hubs

Interim report to note by the Children, Education and Communities Policy & Scrutiny Committee on 4 January 2022

Review group members: Cllr Webb, Cllr Fenton, Cllr Fitzpatrick.

Purpose

1. This paper provides members of the committee with an update on the progress of the scrutiny review and invites comments/questions.

Background to the topic

2. City of York Council has attempted to develop a 'Community Hub Model' to serve residents' needs for example;
    a. Food poverty
    b. Fuel poverty
    c. Loneliness
    d. Mental health
    e. Family support
    f. Housing support
    g. Budgeting advice

3. There is a view that by housing services near residents then they will be easier to access and can be targeted to local community need.

4. During the Covid19 pandemic existing community centres and buildings have to some extent been adopted as 'Community Hubs' by the City of York Council and these have helped provide the Covid19 relief to residents in need.

Background to the review

5. It was agreed by the Children, Education and Communities Policy and Scrutiny Committee to scrutinise what is meant by a Community Hub model and what opportunities and pitfalls there are for residents and the City of York Council.

6. Officers secured support for the Scrutiny Sub-committee in the form of an intern to help do some background research.

Joint-working approach

7. Members met to discuss what questions needed answering. After discussion the following was agreed:

1. Does CYC understand what best practise is when it comes to Community Hubs?
2. How is need assessed? And therefore would that effect what the model should deliver?
3. Is there a template for how to set up a Community Hub? Or is that something that could be developed?
4. How are the hubs to be funded and maintained?

These questions were further refined to a series of outline questions.

1. What can a Community Hub provide for its community?

It was agreed that there were a number of ways of finding evidence to this question:
- Visiting (virtually or otherwise) officers and members from other councils who had already had a Community Hub model
- Potentially surveying all CYC members for information regarding the need (and what is already offered) in their respective wards

2. How effective is the proposed Community Hub Model at identifying that need normally?
3. What are the requirements to make the Community Hub Model in York sustainable?

Members felt that this would include discussions regarding funding, staffing, visibility and usage.

Information Gathering

8. Members met with Charlie Croft in his role of head of Communities to discuss possible questions to ask around the Community Hub model (see above).

9. Members met with Mora Scaife to discuss how Community Hubs supported residents during the Covid19 pandemic.

10. Members were presented with a paper by an intern (see appendix 1).

11. Members asked to organise a meeting with officers and members of other councils as well as managers of Community Hubs elsewhere to discuss the use of Community Hubs around the country. Unfortunately these meetings have yet to take place but there is hope that they will take place in the New Year.

Appendix 1

Community hubs

What are community hubs?
There is no 'one-size-fits-all' definition for what makes a community hub, but put most holistically, they are a place that is a focal point for local activities, services and accessible to the local community. Community hubs are multi-purpose spaces that reflect the needs of the locality. From acting as a social space to tackle isolation, to providing vital services for community, community hubs offer spaces where everyone is welcome and bring the community together to help. Putting the community, services and businesses in one place, to facilitate the connection between those in need with those who can help.

The 'My Community' gateway run by Locality produced an overview guide to community hubs and the benefits they can offer to local communities[1]. In their conceptualisation of community hubs, they identify 4 key aspects of successful community hubs:

1) **Community Lead** – Both offering services for the community, but also guided by the community. Input of the needs of the community should be used to shape the hub to offer specific strength-based services.
2) **Multi-purpose** – Community hubs can provide and host a diverse range of activities, services and programmes to the community in order to reflect the local need. It is likely these will variegate between single hubs, as each area will present its own individual needs
3) **Makes use of local assets** – Local budlings are used to house the hubs, which can be acquired through asset transfer or local authorities can convert already owned assets. The services offered to fulfil the communities need are based on the strengths and scope of service pro-viders.
4) **Enterprising and resilient** – Community hubs need a constant income or funding to be sustainable. A range of sources of this income is usu-ally advocated for to offset the risk of one falling through. Uses their available spaces effectively is key to sustaining community hubs, with constant reviews promoting innovation to improve the working of the hubs.

What can community hubs offer?
Community hubs can offer a wide range of benefits to the community shaped by the unique needs of the community. They can either provide their services by incubating or hosting other organisations or they can deliver services themselves, decided by considering strength-based approaches to the specific requirements of the community. By offering a physical space for local

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[1] https://www.salfordcvs.co.uk/sites/salfordcvs.co.uk/files/Community-Hubs-FINAL.pdf

organisations and the local authority to work together under one roof to extend their services to all who need them and create more cohesive communities by making connections between individuals.

The Community Hub Handbook by Power to Change[2] suggests a community hub can provide the following:
- Facilities for the use of the local community to ensure a healthy, active and economically thriving population.
- Services for the local community, directly or indirectly.
- Opportunities for community engagement, volunteering, the empowerment of local people.
- The 'added value' of a thriving community hub which enhances community life, e.g. providing a focal point for local people, providing a sense of community, providing spaces for people to meet, etc.

The guide reports the most common offering of community hubs in the UK are community hall or meeting space (59%), health or well-being activities (17%), educational activities (13%), skills and employment training (12%) and community café (11%).

It is important for the leaders of community hubs to consider the needs of the community when deciding what hubs should offer. As a result, community hubs in York, do not work on a one-size-fits-all approach, rather allow the community to lead in identifying the services and programmes which should be provided.

Community hubs in York
In York there are currently community hubs set up at Sanderson Court House, Foxwood Community Centre, Red Tower, as well as Tang Hall Community Centre through working with Tang Hall Big Local. The community hubs in York were set up in response to 30-month trial of a particular approach to community hub provision, 4Community Growth Area-Based Financial inclusion Project (4CGY). From this trial, the community hubs were created through assessment of the needs based on the area the hub is situated in, being led by the community. The report produced by City of York Council's Corporate Director of Children, Education and Communities[3] further details the 4CGY and how the community hubs are modelled in York as a result.

The hubs offer a range of services in key locations in the community from advice services, such as benefits advice, to schemes to improve community skills such as cooking workshops. Additionally, community cafés have been created as part of the hubs, offering members of the community spaces to come to together and share ideas and have social contact, aiming tackling widespread isolation.

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[2] https://www.powertochange.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Community-Hubs-Handbook-Final.pdf
[3] https://democracy.york.gov.uk/documents/s136045/Report.pdf

While each hub differs in its approach to serving its community, a report by the City of York council in 2021 detailed key principles which are used in the roll out of all hubs[4]:

i. **Place** - A successful community hub will be located in an area where there is a need for services in an accessible, safe space which is either already at the heart of community activity or has the potential to develop a positive identity within the local community. The venue will be community managed. The strategy must be community led, responding to the ambitions of the community, rather than focussing on finding solutions for particular buildings.

ii. **People** – The strategy must be co-produced in a partnership of resident volunteers and front line service providers building relationships and trust and encouraging active citizenship. The hubs are about and growing social connections and relationships and connecting resources in new and productive ways: relationships, time, skills, gifts, etc.

iii. **Purpose** - The established community hubs have been developed in response to particular local needs, for example connecting people to financial inclusion support. A clear initial purpose galvanises activity and motivates people to volunteer and engage. A common theme has been a basic food offer on a free or pay-as-you-feel basis including cooked meals and 'food shops' utilising food donated by supermarkets. The benefits of this being three-fold, forming part of the welcome offer, helping household finances go further and creating a social setting where people can relax, feel supported by peers and the wider community.

In addition to the main community hubs, York houses hubs tailored to specific groups within the community. In illustration, the York Migrant Hub has been set up to serve the migrant community in and aid with accessing services in the UK. In partnership with York Explore and other volunteer groups, the hubs run on Saturday's, respond to the specific needs of migrants in York. Furthermore, the Community Covenant project, has created hubs for the armed forces to reduce isolation and encourage wellbeing, which include running breakfast clubs.

In response to the Covid-19 pandemic, emergency hubs and virtual hubs have been set up to offer emergency aid to communities in York. Hotlines coordinating aid such as prescription pickups and shopping drop-off services for the community were opened to help provide essential services for those isolating or in need within the community. For information on the changes that have been made by the hubs, a report by York City Council explains these in further detail[5].

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[4] https://democracy.york.gov.uk/documents/s148607/Community%20Hubs%20Report.pdf
[5] https://democracy.york.gov.uk/documents/s142666/Community%20Hubs%20-%20Post%20Covid%20report%20PHCMT%2020200825%20ds%20comments.pdf

What does a successful hub look like?
Every community has different needs, and therefore the provision each hub being born out of these requirements, differs substantially and so does what constitutes success. The Community Hubs in York each tailor their provision to the area they serve, with outputs from each hub varying. A difficulty in measuring the output of community hubs comes from the hidden impacts of the social aspects of community hubs. The connections made at the hubs are deeply impactful but are hard to quantify. This is an area which should be explored further, to fully describe the impacts and outputs of the community hubs in York.

A study by Power to Change in 2016[6] argued that for asset-based community business (e.g., community hubs) to be successful and resilient, a common vision must be built up with the community. A co-operative approach with the local authority, businesses and other public bodies must be established. It also highlighted the need for innovation and creativity to make services more affordable and tailored to the community, e.g., the use of surplus food from local businesses.

A report by the social enterprise Renasi[7] explains there are 2 main models of community hubs:
Community hubs with the public sector – Run by public sector organisations which bring together different services under one roof
Community hubs run by community organisations – projects run with much input from the local community organisations without help from the public sector
However, often community hubs effectively allow public sector to work in tandem with community organisations to offer the community vitally needed services. A cooperative relationship between the public bodies and community bodies is seen as the best practice, where both act to serve the community with knowledge of what the community best needs.

There are a number of different approaches to community hubs which can be utilised within a community hub network, such as that run by City of York council. Library and Family hubs are two basic models which can be utilised to provide community hubs:

Library hubs
This involves using libraries as community hub bases; either a library set up within community hub spaces, but more likely, community services brought into existing libraries. As libraries are often known as a place to go to access a free resource and are well known facilities within the community, they well placed to house hubs.

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[6] https://www.powertochange.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Report-14-Success-Factors-Community-Hubs-DIGITAL.pdf
[7] https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/download-file/Libraries-CommunityHubs-Renaisi.pdf

A report by Renasi in 2017 (seen under footnote [7]) looks at the use of libraries as community hubs through a number of existing case studies. The report details that co-locating a library in a community hub can take many different forms in response to the community need. They can offer additional services related to health and wellbeing, employment and culture and leisure for the community. Moreover, while the community may visit for the use of the library service, having other additional provisions present, might push those in need to seek help which they were not otherwise comfortable enough to access. Offering 6 case studies of varying presentations of the library model, the report offers interesting insight into how the library model can be used to promote other key aims for the community such as increasing exercise or healthy eating.

Family hubs

Family community hubs are centres which offer a number of family services in one location ensuring families with children and young people aged 0-19 to are supported sufficiently. The Family hubs network[8] denote these hubs can facilitate early interventions for families at risk which have been shown to improve children's educational attainment, wellbeing and overall life chances.

A 2016 discussion paper by the Children's Commissioner[9] details the services which can provided by family hubs, including parenting support and childcare services, and how these can enhance the lives of children around the country. A case study looking at Family hubs on the Isle of Wright showed that within sixth months of using the services 54% of families had improved scores on children services outcome measures. However, the authors note the need for further evaluation as this was an initial review of the family hubs.

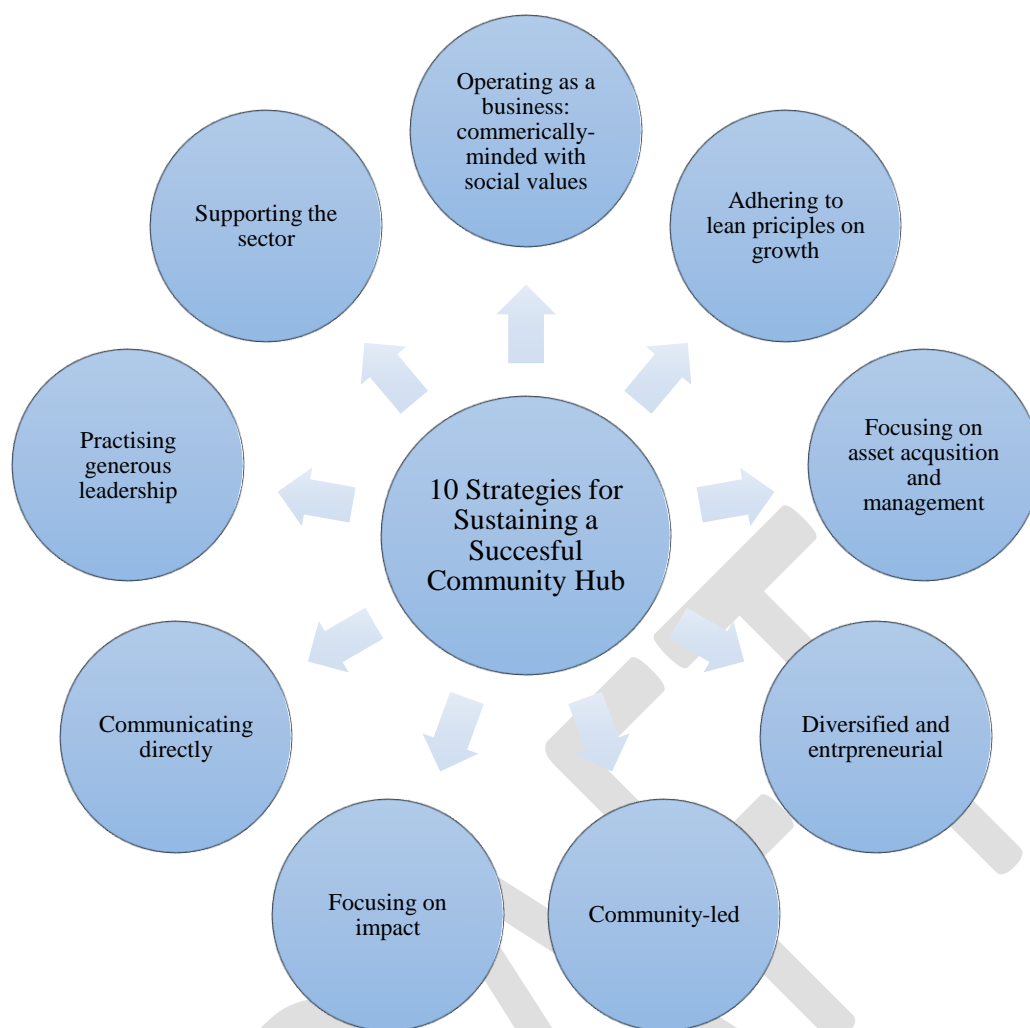**Case study – Safe Regeneration Liverpool**

Safe Regeneration (Safe) is a community hub organisation managing two community hubs: St Mary's Complex a former primary school building which now houses more than a dozen creative and social organisations and The Lock and Quay community pub. Safe has operated for over 20 years 'to foster community cohesion, social inclusion and individual well-being whilst contributing to economic and environmental regeneration'. They offer participatory arts programmes, community events and employment skills programmes for the local community. The University of Liverpool studied what allowed Safe to succeed in its aims in the long term, creating 10 strategies which sustain a successful community hub[10].

[8] https://familyhubsnetwork.com/
[9] https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Family-Hubs-A-Discussion-Paper-2016.pdf
[10] https://livrepository.liverpool.ac.uk/3076632/1/Community%20hubs%20-%20ten%20strategies%20for%20sustainability%20%28Digital%29.pdf

Central circle: **10 Strategies for Sustaining a Succesful Community Hub**

Surrounding circles:
- Operating as a business: commerically-minded with social values
- Adhering to lean priciples on growth
- Focusing on asset acqusition and management
- Diversified and entrpreneurial
- Community-led
- Focusing on impact
- Communicating directly
- Practising generous leadership
- Supporting the sector

For more examples of well-established community hubs nationwide, the following offer in-depth look at the models utilised by the Thurrock Council[11], whose pathfinder hub attracted 135,238 visits over its first year of operating and established regular services from over 30 separate advisory and social groups and Netherton Community Centre which has been offering a range of community activities for over 15 years[12].

Funding

The funding for community hubs can come from a myriad of sources, varying greatly on a hub-by-hub basis. This is due to the great diversity in the services offered, costs and service users, among many other factors which impact the requirement for funding and how much can be secured. A report of the community business market by Power to Change in 2019 noted the 2000 community hubs in the UK are estimated to generate £247 million annually and own assets of £98 million[13]. Due to the variety in services provided it is not recommended to provide a generalised cost of community hubs per annum, as this can change at each hub depending on size and provision.

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[11] https://democracy.thurrock.gov.uk/Data/Cabinet/201211141900/Agenda/$3128%20-%2017234.doc.pdf
[12] https://www.powertochange.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Netherton-Community-Centre-Case-Study-1.pdf
[13] https://www.powertochange.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/CBM-19-Report-DIGITAL-1.pdf

Future cost estimates should be drawn up for each hub individually in order to examine what funding is needing to sustain the provision.

The 'Community Hubs: Understanding Survival and Success' report[14] details research by the Local Trust in partnership with Power to Change surveying community hubs reported a variety of sources of income (page 19-34). The figure below highlights the community hub surveyed primary and secondary income sources.

Type of income source	% (both primary and secondary income sources)
Meeting room or hall hire	89
Grants from trusts and foundations	50
Office hire	46
Donations from local people	41
Sales from food or drink	40
Public sector grants	38
Income generated by activities beyond the building	30
Other sales of goods or services	29
Public sector contracts	23
Grants from Big Local/Big Local £1m	21
Loans	13
Grants from businesses	11
Membership fees	11
Crowdfunding or community shares	4
Income from an endowment or investments	1

Additionally, of the community hubs surveyed, 71% owned their own building (41%) or have a long lease (30%) on the building utilised for the hub. This allowed them to create sources of income that supported the running of the community services and building. Owning of the building was judged to be a solid asset to the community hub, with renting out parts of the hub creating reliable and long-term revenue streams, which was key to the sustainability of the community hubs.

For community hubs to survive long-term, providing paid services is deemed as essential due to the constant expenses to provide services. Often this occurs through asset transfer of the buildings the hubs are housed into whomever operates the hub, thus facilitating income to be made through renting out the space for use by external groups, for example exercise classes.

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[14] https://localtrust.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Community-Hubs-Report.pdf

This said, it is important to distinguish between customers and beneficiaries of the space, as if in an endeavour to raise funds, the community hubs shift to customer focused activity provision, the service those vulnerable and in most need in the community may be lost.

Acknowledgment must come that community hubs are expensive to run the report notes, and under-funding is common and undermines the success of the hubs. To target this, it is good practice for hubs to run strict business models to ensure funding is located effectively.

The community overview (listed under footnote [1]) produced by community research group Locality highlight the importance of diversifying funding/income sources as a factor in making a community hub resilient and sustainable. They suggest these can come from a range of sources including:
- Grants
- Contracts and service delivery
- Trading income
- Asset based income

They highlight that while many models rely on solitary grants, especially in starting up the hubs, to be sustained in the long-term community hubs must move beyond relying solely on grants.

Case study: Leeds City Council Community Hubs[15]

Rolling out a city-wide community hubs scheme in 2016, Leeds city council operates a network of 37 hubs, with 20 large sites. The hubs are council operated, integrating key stakeholders under one roof, including welfare rights, legal clinics and ESOL lessons. The hubs are majority funded by 17-million-pound investment by the council. The large public funding for the hub reflects the local council control of their hubs, using them as a base for many of the council offered services. By making the large investment the community hubs have been able to expand to include mobile hubs facilitated in trailers which can be used to access the hardest to reach in the community.

How to measure output?

As aforementioned one of the challenges regarding community hubs is measuring their outputs. This is because much of their impact is hidden and hard to quantify. Often outcomes from community hubs are measured either by figures surrounding service use (e.g. how many people attended a hub) or case studies from users, as can be seen in many of the hub case studies presented above. While these offer useful insights to the workings of community hubs, they can often fail to illustrate the connections made through the hub and to show wider impacts on people's lives. An area for further discussion and research is how best to capture the outputs of community hubs and in particular, how they are fulfilling the needs of York's community.

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[15] https://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/W2.%20Community%20hubs%2C%20health%20and%20wellbeing%20-%20Leeds%20City%20Council.pdf