

# **Town & Parish Council Conference**

1<sup>st</sup> May 2012  
Post Conference Report

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## Introduction

Thank you to all who were able to attend this conference where we discussed the Localism Act and the framework to devolve services to town and parish councils. In response to your feedback this event was aimed at larger councils and those with an interest in taking on the delivery of services. It was pleasing that so many of you could attend and contribute to this important agenda.

I would like to thank Councillor Tony Hansen, Councillor Ken Fossett, David Ashlee, Carol Carter and Delia Shephard for sharing their experiences. Feedback from delegates shows that you found this useful and we would like to build on this and make greater use of future conferences to develop a network to share ideas and develop joint plans.

In these tough times if we work together we can achieve more, which will improve value for money and ensure we are better able to respond to the needs of our communities. The framework to devolve services sets out how we intend to work with you to deliver high quality services that are responsive and cost effective, with clear lines of responsibility and accountability. It is a draft document and we welcome your feedback to ensure we develop a process that is straightforward and deliverable.

We encourage you to consider how you would like to work with us in delivering services in your area; whether that is by influencing the specification of a service and monitoring its delivery, or taking on all or part of a local service. If you want to explore any opportunities, please let us know.

Our next conference will be in the autumn and will more specifically address the issues of smaller councils. We welcome your thoughts on shaping the agenda for this event.

We look forward to hearing from you.



Councillor James Jamieson  
Leader, Central Bedfordshire Council

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read "James Jamieson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

## The Conference

The objectives of the conference were:

- to understand how the Localism Act is being implemented in Central Bedfordshire; and
- to understand the framework to devolve services to town and parish councils and how it can be applied.

The conference was targeted at town and parish councils with a desire for more involvement in service delivery.

The '*Delivery of services by Town and Parish Councils – a draft framework*' was circulated prior to the meeting and presented at the conference.

## Welcome

Attendees were welcomed by Richard Carr, Chief Executive of Central Bedfordshire Council. Richard set out the agenda and objectives of the conference.

## The Localism Act 2011

Councillor James Jamieson, Leader of Central Bedfordshire Council (CBC), gave an update on the Localism Act.

The key messages were:

- That although the Localism Act gained royal assent on 15<sup>th</sup> November 2011, some of it is work in progress and not all of it has been enacted yet.
- Localism is the ethos of doing everything at the lowest possible level; central government is seeking to give more power to individuals, professionals, communities and local institutions; Big Society is the vision of a society where people, neighbourhoods and communities have more power and responsibility and use it to create better services and outcomes.
- The new community rights in the Act are:
  - Right to challenge - town & parish councils, voluntary and community groups, social enterprises and employees can express an interest in providing or assisting in the provision of council services.
  - Right to bid – town & parish councils and voluntary and community organisations can nominate local land or buildings to be included on a list of community assets. If a property on the list comes up for sale community groups will have a period of 6 weeks to submit an intention to bid, after which there will be a moratorium period of 6 months to allow them to develop a bid and raise the money to buy the asset.

- Right to veto excessive Council Tax rises – anything set above the ceiling set by the Secretary of State will trigger a referendum of all registered electors in the area. The rate for 2012-13 was set at 3.5%.
- Neighbourhood planning - this enables communities to have a say in where they think new houses, businesses and shops should be built.
- Right to build - the planning process will be streamlined to bring forward the delivery of small scale development for the benefit of the local community, such as new homes, shops, sports facilities and community amenities.
- The National Planning Policy Framework sets new government policy on planning issues. It sets a positive framework for growth, especially housing and jobs. The emphasis is on a plan-led system with a short transition period.
- The CBC Core Strategy timeline is as follows:
  - Oct 2011 – Apr 2012 Evidence gathering
  - Feb/Mar 2012 - Initial stakeholder involvement
  - Jun 2012 - Consultation on draft plan
  - Dec 2012 -“Publication” stage
  - May 2013 - Submission to Secretary of State
  - Sept 2013 - Examination hearing sessions
  - Dec 2013 - Draft Inspector’s report
  - Feb 2014 - Adoption
- The social housing reform will give new freedoms to ensure that homes are provided for those in greatest need. This could be used as a lever to enable people to secure and sustain employment. We can develop a local approach to lettings and provide a bespoke offer to older people.
- For Central Bedfordshire, localism is about communities taking on the delivery of some services for themselves and ensuring services are delivered by the most appropriate organization. This will also mean exploring alternative models of delivery.

## Introducing the framework to devolve services

Councillor David Hopkin, Deputy Executive Member for Corporate Resources and lead Member for Localism, gave a presentation on the draft Localism framework.

The key messages were:

- The Localism Act 2011 and the Open Public Services White Paper support a national drive to shift power away from central government to local government, communities and individuals. Central Bedfordshire Council actively promotes this approach and welcomes the local aspiration to work closely with communities in the design and delivery of public sector services and to facilitate communities to take on the delivery of some services for themselves.
- The Central Bedfordshire Community Engagement Strategy (CES) encompasses working with town and parish councils to enhance, delegate

and where appropriate transfer services to those who want them in accordance with the Council's agreed priorities.

- The draft framework sets out how town and parish councils can engage at a level that suits them, from service monitoring and shaping contracts through to taking on and delivering some local services. In implementing this framework the aim is to:
  - improve community access to and satisfaction with services;
  - provide greater local influence over services;
  - maintain and enhance standards;
  - enhance the role of local councils in their communities;
  - generate greater community pride in local areas;
  - promote engagement of local communities in local government; and
  - achieve 'value for money'.
- There are four key ways town and parish councils can get involved in service delivery:
  - Influencing and monitoring service delivery
  - Joint delivery
  - Delegated service delivery
  - Transfer of service
- Feedback on the draft framework is welcomed to ensure the process is straightforward and deliverable.
- If town and parish councils want to get involved in service delivery please contact Peter Fraser, Head of Partnerships & Community Engagement; 0300 300 6740.

A copy of the draft framework can be found using the link below:

<http://www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/council-and-democracy/local-government-in-central-bedfordshire/town-parish-councils.aspx>

## Sharing Experiences

### Flitwick and Sandy

Carol Carter, Town Clerk for Flitwick and Chairman of The Society of Local Council Clerks for Bedfordshire (SLCC), and Delia Shephard, Town Clerk for Sandy and Secretary of SLCC, shared their experiences, and those of other local town and parish councils, of implementing localism.

Carol Carter referred to the facilities parish councils were already providing to their communities as part of their duties, and noted that this is something they have been doing long before it was called "localism".

In Flitwick this included building their own sports centre twenty years ago and later joining up with the District Council to build a swimming pool. Flitwick Town Council also maintains nine equipped play areas, provides dog litter bags and funds street lights in areas where a need is identified which is not under the provision of the principal authority.

The latest venture is a joint collaboration with CBC to convert a former public toilet block into a safe building for young people, where they can meet and receive information and advice on issues such as health, wellbeing and employment.

Delia Shephard acknowledged that many services are already being delivered to the community by the Town Council or in partnership with CBC. This includes managing the Sandy Tourist Information Centre, public toilets, footway lighting and grass cutting, and working in partnership with CBC on local countryside access projects.

### **Caddington and Slip End**

Councillor Tony Hansen, Chairman of Caddington Parish Council and Councillor Ken Crossett, Chairman of Slip End Parish Council, shared their experience of Localism in their areas.

Councillor Hansen described the event in Caddington in 2009 when a leaking water main burst, breaking a gas pipe which knocked out the supply to 1,500 homes, including those of a significant number of the elderly population, a week before Christmas. The increased demand this put on the electricity supply overloaded the transformers. The resulting community spirit and the initiatives generated included a collaboration with Slip End to purchase a gritter and enter into a Parish Gritting Scheme. This successfully provides ad hoc supplementary gritting on roads not covered by the highways Winter Maintenance Programme.

Councillor Crossett described how the collaboration continued between the two Parishes and resulted in the development of a joint Neighbourhood Plan. To achieve this, they had already:

- set up a Steering Group with proportional representatives from both parishes;
- worked together across topic areas to build base evidence;
- implemented a one-off precept in both parishes to cover the cost; and
- received supported from a number of CBC Officers.

Councillor Crossett highlighted the importance of maintaining local engagement in the process, in order to reach out and make it a plan for everyone. He concluded that the Neighbourhood Plan document was the means, but it is the implementation that is most important for the good of the community.

### **Dunstable**

David Ashlee, Town Clerk for Dunstable, shared two experience of Localism in Dunstable; the management of Creasey park Community Football Centre, and the management of Dunstable Market.

The management of Creasey Park Community Football Centre was a £3million joint scheme between CBC, Dunstable Town Council (DTC), Brewers Hill Middle School and the Football Foundation, supported by local clubs. DTC manages the whole facility on a five year operating contract. The facility is required to generate £270,000 income per annum and operate at no direct cost to the council taxpayer. DCT is on track to achieve this, with income streams developing and the facility being well used by the local community.

In return for the right to manage Dunstable Market, DTC has agreed to commit £15,000 per annum to the Dunstable Joint Committee. Its business plan includes an investment of £40,000 for new stalls etc. and a challenge to achieve an income of circa. £60,000 per year.

## Ageing Well

The "Charlie and Marie" video was shown, which was commissioned from The Young Foundation by Local Government Improvement and Development as part of the Ageing Well programme for local government. The Young Foundation's conversations with both users and providers of services culminated in an animation and accompanying story of a fictional couple "Charlie and Marie" and their journey from the age of 60 onwards.

The video can be viewed by using the link below:

[www.youngfoundation.org/publications/talks/charlie-and-marie-a-tale-ageing](http://www.youngfoundation.org/publications/talks/charlie-and-marie-a-tale-ageing)

Councillor Andrew Turner introduced Alesha Janjua, Fellow of Health and Social Care, Office of Public Management (OPM) - a not-for-profit consultancy which provides support and advice to ten local authorities, including Central Bedfordshire. Alesha gave a presentation on the national Ageing Well programme, which is funded by the Department of Work and Pensions and led by the Local Government Group.

The key messages were:

- The programme is currently supporting 19 local authorities, including Central Bedfordshire, to promote the independence and wellbeing of older people (50+) to help them to age well and enjoy a good quality of life, and remain as independent as possible for as long as possible.
- Central Bedfordshire's approach recognises older people as resourceful, community contributors and older age as an opportunity. We are ensuring that both publicly funded and commercially provided universal services meet the needs of older people. We are working with older people on their priority prevention issues in one locality, building on the priorities identified by the Older People's Reference Group, and involving older people in leading the work in the project teams and key events throughout the project.



- The Ivel Valley project and how it was taking forward three key ideas: community / village agents; improving information, advice and guidance; and time banking.
- The role councilors can play as leaders, bringing communities together and working with them to develop local capacity and enable them to do more for themselves.

A full copy of all the presentation slides can be found using the link below:

<http://www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/council-and-democracy/local-government-in-central-bedfordshire/town-parish-councils.aspx>

## Submitted questions

**Hockliffe / Heath & Reach / Woburn Parish Councils - Sara Gordon, Clerk**  
[clerk@heathandreachpc.co.uk](mailto:clerk@heathandreachpc.co.uk)

**Questions:**

**Q: If a parish council wants to enhance or take over a service are they liable for both the legal costs (if any) of CBC and their own legal team?**

A: The parish council would only be responsible for their own legal costs.

**Q: Are there going to be any services currently carried out by CBC that will compulsory be taken over by town and parish councils?**

A: No. If CBC chooses to cease providing a non statutory service local town and parish councils will be notified and given the opportunity to take on delivery. Parish councils will need to make their own decisions about whether continuing a service, or taking over an existing service, benefits their community.

**Q: What is the timescale for the draft framework service delivery?**

A: The framework is now live and will be regularly updated to reflect changes in national policy (such as the community right to challenge) and local aspirations. We welcome feedback from town and parish councils to ensure the framework is straightforward and deliverable.

**Q: CBC are not very obliging when it comes to obtaining information about specific village services. Who can we contact for the information if involved department won't provide it?!**

A: Please contact Peter Fraser, Head of Partnerships & Community Engagement, tel: 0300 300 6740, email: [peter.fraser@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:peter.fraser@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk)

**Aspley Heath Parish Council - Denise Batchelor , Clerk**  
[Clerk@aspleyheath.org.uk](mailto:Clerk@aspleyheath.org.uk)

**Q: Please can we have a list of departments and contact names across CBC.**

A: A list of CBC departments and senior officer contact details will be sent out to town and parish clerks.

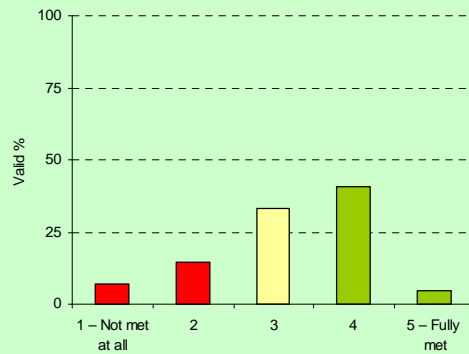
## Feedback on the conference

A conference feedback form was provided in the delegate packs, and below are the results from the 42 completed forms received.

### Meeting the conference objectives

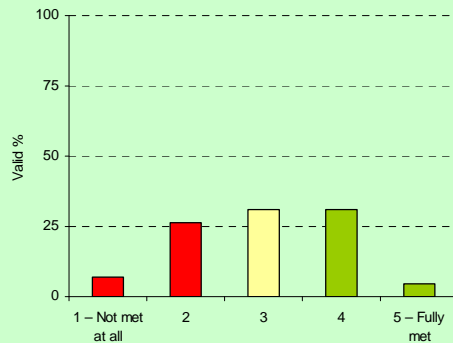
To understand how the Localism Act is being implemented in Central Bedfordshire

	Count	%
1 – Not met at all	3	7
2	6	14
3	14	33
4	17	40
5 – Fully met	2	5
Total	42	100
Missing	0	0
Total	42	100
<b>Mean score</b>	<b>3.21</b>	



### To understand the framework to devolve services and how it can be applied

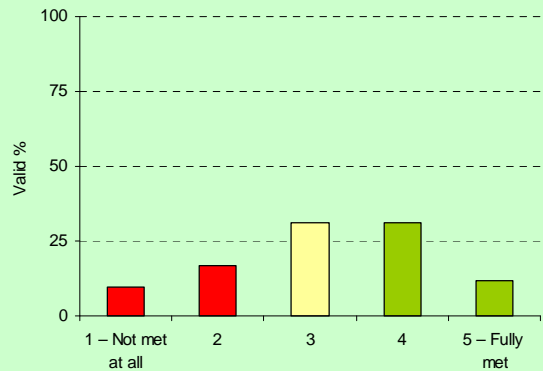
	Count	%
1 – Not met at all	3	7
2	11	26
3	13	31
4	13	31
5 – Fully met	2	5
Total	42	100
Missing	0	0
Total	42	100
<b>Mean score</b>	<b>3.00</b>	



## Usefulness of following aspects of the event

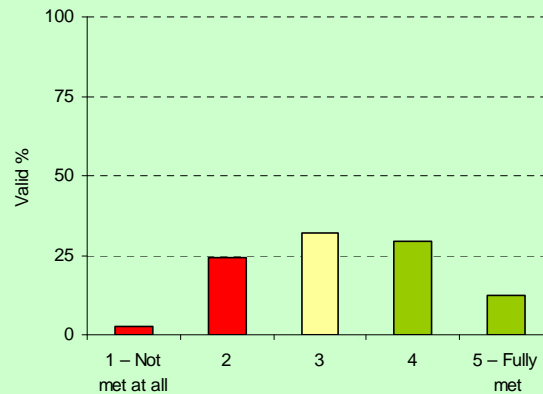
### Localism Act

	Count	%
1 – Not met at all	4	10
2	7	17
3	13	31
4	13	31
5 – Fully met	5	12
Total	42	100
Missing	0	0
Total	42	100
<b>Mean score</b>	<b>3.19</b>	



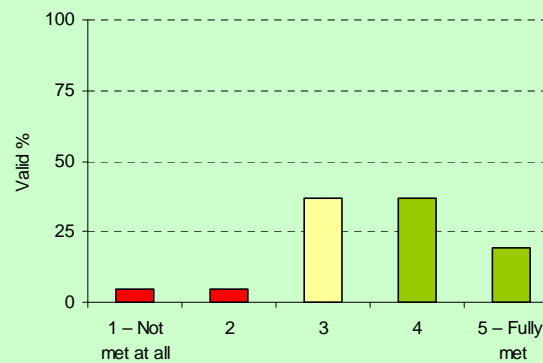
### Introducing the framework

	Count	%
1 – Not met at all	1	2
2	10	24
3	13	31
4	12	29
5 – Fully met	5	12
Total	41	98
Missing	1	2
Total	42	100
<b>Mean score</b>	<b>3.24</b>	



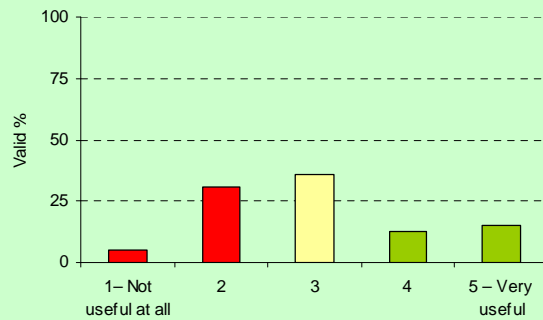
### Sharing experiences

	Count	%
1 – Not met at all	2	5
2	2	5
3	15	36
4	15	36
5 – Fully met	8	19
Total	42	100
Missing	0	0
Total	42	100
<b>Mean score</b>	<b>3.60</b>	



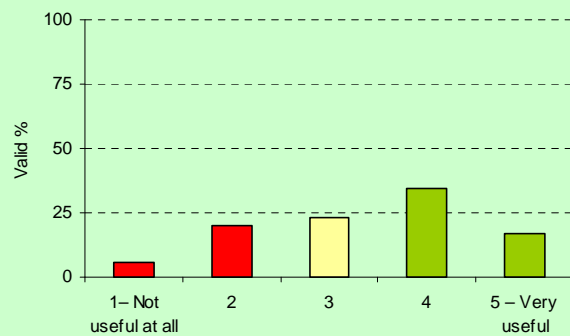
### Ageing well

	Count	%
1- Not useful at all	2	5
2	12	29
3	14	33
4	5	12
5 - Very useful	6	14
Total	39	93
Missing	3	7
Total	42	100
Mean score	3.03	



### Networking with senior managers and Ward Councillors from CBC

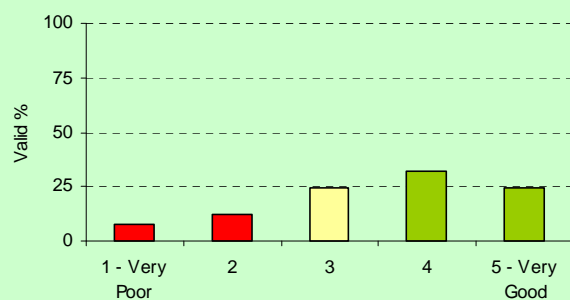
	Count	%
1- Not useful at all	2	5
2	7	17
3	8	19
4	12	29
5 - Very useful	6	14
Total	35	83
Missing	7	17
Total	42	100
Mean score	3.37	



### Organisation of the event

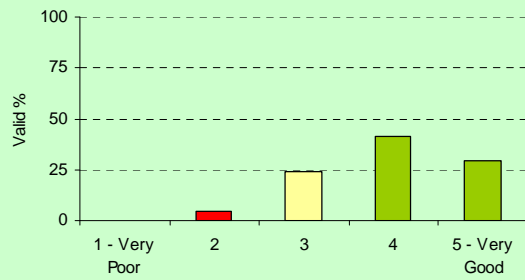
#### Information sent to you before the event

	Count	%
1 - Very Poor	3	7
2	5	12
3	10	24
4	13	31
5 - Very Good	10	24
Total	41	98
Missing	1	2
Total	42	100
Mean score	3.54	



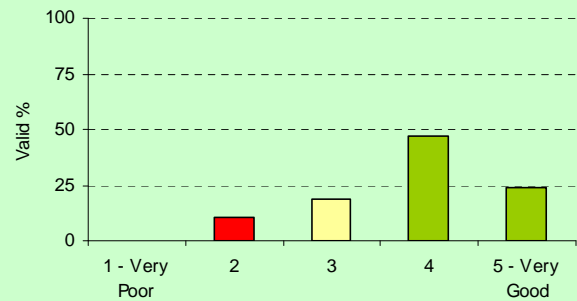
### Venue

	Count	%
1 - Very Poor	0	0
2	2	5
3	10	24
4	17	40
5 - Very Good	12	29
Total	41	98
Missing	1	2
Total	42	100
Mean score	3.95	



### Catering

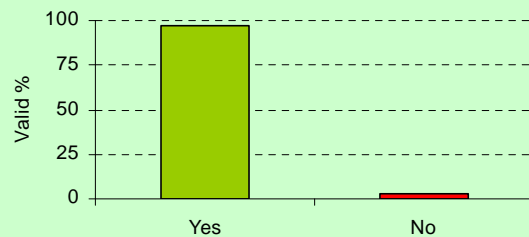
	Count	%
1 - Very Poor	0	0
2	4	10
3	7	17
4	18	43
5 - Very Good	9	21
Total	38	90
Missing	4	10
Total	42	100
Mean score	3.84	



### Views of the event overall

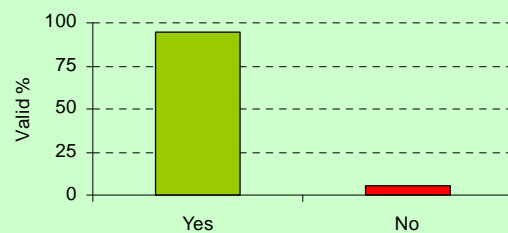
#### Did you find this conference useful?

	Count	%
Yes	34	81
No	1	2
Total	35	83
Missing	7	17
Total	42	100



#### Would you recommend attendance at future conferences?

	Count	%
Yes	37	88
No	2	5
Total	39	93
Missing	3	7
Total	42	100



## Feedback from delegates

### What other individuals, groups or organisations would you like to see at future events?

University of the Third Age. Good Neighbours.

Portfolio holders AND officers for individual departments, ie street cleaning, grass cutting - that are CLEARLY visible.

Planning

Good Neighbour Scheme volunteers - sharing case studies.

Information on potential funders would be a useful tool, ie LTP + ROWFT links etc.

Representatives of the private sector with ideas of how they could support/contribute. Parish Councils generally.

Only individuals and groups relevant to the agenda.

### Any other comments

Wellbeing speaker was very informative and useful. Behaviour of two CBC Councillors was unacceptable - should not be making sarcastic comments and talking over other speakers!

Vague. Questions not addressed. Not well answered.

Can we have the slides for the main presentation emailed to us? Localism presenters should have prepared better and earlier! Much of the required info just wasn't available to help us. 'Ageing Well' presenter was excellent -just a touch too 'business speak' and too long!

It is disappointing that other agencies still do not seem to know what we do. We do loads for older people. Concerned that the earlier questions were again an opportunity to refer to specific issues and have a go at CBC.

Improve PA system for delegates use. Very hard to hear speakers from the floor.

In my opinion the C Beds response was far too woolly - everything was answered in terms of information tomorrow / things in the pipeline / discussions later. Ageing Well - Overheads too complex & too many. Shorter crisper talk would have been better. Conference could have been a lot better.

Not sure how helpful the Dunstable TC examples are for small parishes, but overall the case studies v. valuable.

Dispiriting that these events always turn into criticism of CBC. As a delegate I'm not quite sure how useful this is.

Also although Ageing Well was interesting - what do other agencies think we do all day? These events reveal how little our sector is understood.

Ageing well presentation too long and too technical.

The ageing DVD was morose! Patronising and pointless!

Too hot! Too long – break needed between the two subjects - ie Localism and Ageing Well.

Ageing well - lot of work (probably too much!) - can we have sent to us?

Hot & stuffy. Cold coffee.

Once again vast platefuls of veggie food but NO diabetic sweets. There are more diabetics than veggies 20% of CBC Councillors are diabetic.

How do we improve what we have without always reinventing the wheel. We stop people doing things saying they have not got the insurance or the qualifications or that they will be sued. Then we have to find other people to do this work that was already being done before!!

No details were provided on the timescales for the transfer of services and if there were to be any compulsory transfer of services that have been monitored by Ward Councillors, ie that by 2014/15 street cleaning will have to be done by Town & Parish Councils.

My final point "Trying to get factual information from CBC is almost impossible". Suggestion to CBC they prepare a report for each town and parish council detailing services and exact locations of those services & contractual rate for each service carried out by CBC.

My first conference - disappointed at lack of detail and 'wooliness' of answers relating to definition of services currently delivered, scheduled and costs.

Ageing well - video thought provoking but rest was full of management speak.

Ageing well was a very detailed presentation that was interesting but too late in the day to be absorbed.

Which section of framework is Leighton Buzzard Theatre in? Why can't we do parking? Why can't we manage and own open spaces eg Tiddenfoot Waterside Park?

Ageing well - too long presentation.

Well planned - informative and useful examples of local initiatives.

This was an excellent Town and Parish Conference.

Excellent event as usual.

Tea, coffee, juice should be the only catering at these events. It offends me that public money should go to giving me a free feed. Please consider this point for cost saving.

Loved to hear the positive thinking and ways of moving forward. A shame about the negativity of some Parish/Town Councillors and low level conversation from adjoining table!! Can we have an agreement on conduct at the start please.

Living in the Ivel Valley and was not aware of the workshops so how could we include our small village in the workshop. Sad and shameful - not happy we have nothing. What are the elected Councillors for. We did not need to be told. I am going home very sad!!

Better broadcasting facilities.

Ageing well film - useless at the speed shown. Not a clue what it was about! Visual aid not an aid at all! Speaker - dreadfully boring.

Framework - a detailed breakdown of services provided by Central Beds plus costings is needed to enable Town & Parish Councils determine which services (+costs) would be able to provide.

It would also be helpful to be given interim dates of the draft framework(s) so a time frame of when to reply and how updated drafts. It is important to remember that many Town/Parish Councillors are volunteering and unpaid, also these members may not have the expertise or time to provide services which paid members of Central Beds are able to provide. In addition, a Parish Council supporting services and providing services per se is very different, so too is raising the monies to pay for services where previously was provided 'free', especially difficult for a small parish.

Ageing well - it would have been useful to received a copy of this report prior to the conference and had a discussion on key areas.

Visuals were poor, difficult to read working in video and on AV screens. Why no copies of slides to enable individuals notes to verbals.

Ageing well - bit heavy to have second important issue for half an hour!?

## Conclusion

The general consensus from the feedback was that the conference broadly met its objectives and, overall, the event was useful.

We recognise the importance of having an open dialogue and will aim to make more room at future events for this to happen.

In accordance with the requests to have separate events for the larger and smaller councils, the next event will be aimed at the smaller councils, and will be scheduled in the autumn at Priory House, Chicksands. Details will follow as soon as possible.

A full copy of this report, the presentations and the draft framework can be found on the Council's website: <http://www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/council-and-democracy/local-government-in-central-bedfordshire/town-parish-councils.aspx>