

Town & Parish Council Conference

13th January 2011
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Introduction

It was a pleasure to welcome you to our fourth Town & Parish Council Conference. These conferences continue to provide an excellent opportunity for us to develop our working relationship and to discuss some of the key challenges we need to tackle together on behalf of our residents.

In response to your feedback from the previous conference in June, we changed the format to ensure there was more two-way communication. This was achieved by keeping presentations to a minimum, re-instating and extending the time for round table discussions and responding to your questions in the “*Question Time*” session.

I would like to thank Councillor Ken Crossett and Councillor Adrian Besant for sharing with us some of the significant achievements they are making in Slip End and Tempsford, and Alf Hitchcock, the new chief constable, for giving us his early thoughts on the future of policing in Central Bedfordshire. I would also like to thank you for your attendance and participation. The Localism Bill and the Local Government Finance Settlement are critical issues that will significantly impact on Central Bedfordshire in the future. Your help in taking these issues forward is vital and the conference enabled us to explore how we can work together to do this.

Our next conference will be held on the evening of 5th October 2011 at Priory House, Chicksands. It is important we continue our dialogue and joint working so please put this date in your diaries.

This report provides a summary of the conference, and a write up of all the comments from the feedback forms, as well as responses to all of the questions you submitted.

I look forward to meeting you again in October. In the meantime, we will continue to work closely with you for the benefit of all our communities.



Councillor Tricia Turner MBE
Leader, Central Bedfordshire Council

P.E. Turner.

The Conference

The objectives of the Conference were to:

- understand the impact of the Council's cuts on local communities;
- understand the role that town & parish councils can play in helping communities do more for themselves;
- enable town & parish councils to share good news stories – helping town & parish councils to learn from each others' successes and achievements;
- understand the future of policing in Bedfordshire; and
- enable open communication between Central Bedfordshire Council and town & parish councils.

Welcome and introduction

Councillor Tricia Turner MBE, Leader of Central Bedfordshire Council (CBC) welcomed everyone to the conference and made some opening remarks.

Cllr Turner was encouraged by the government's intention to devolve power and autonomy to councils and local people, as ultimately this means we will be given more powers, freedoms and flexibilities to decide things locally. However, we need to understand the reality of what this really means for us in Central Bedfordshire and the conference gives us an opportunity to discuss how the Localism Bill and the Big Society can be implemented and rolled out locally.

Let's Talk Together meetings

As part of our approach to improve community engagement we have been working closely with our partner colleagues in the police, health service, fire and rescue service and voluntary and community sector to roll out a pilot of seven community meetings, called Let's Talk Together, across Central Bedfordshire over the next 3 months.

Partners have agreed to use the boundaries of the police's seven new Safer Neighbourhood Areas for the Let's Talk Together meetings.

Their purpose is to enable a dialogue with local communities about local priorities, and how they can be addressed, including helping individuals and communities to do more for themselves.

Further information can be found at www.centraltogether.org.uk/lets-talk-together/



The Impact of “Localism”

Councillor Richard Stay, Deputy Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Policy & Performance, gave a presentation on the Localism Bill and the Local Government Finance Settlement, which are critical issues that will impact on Central Bedfordshire in the coming years.

The key messages were:

- The Localism Bill marks the beginning of a shift of power from the centralised state to local government and communities.
- The Local Government Finance Settlement has confirmed cuts of 28% for local authorities, and a reduction of CBC funding next year of £14m.
- CBC is the lowest spending authority per head of population compared with our nearest neighbours and one of the most efficient in the country. We will continue to put value for money at the heart of everything we do.
- Our overall performance is rated independently as amongst the best in the country.
- Central Bedfordshire is already implementing the Big Society as many of our communities are already proactive in delivering services to improve their area.

Following the presentation delegates participated in a round table discussion to consider the following questions:

In partnership with Central Bedfordshire Council:

- What role can town and parish councils play in helping communities to do more for themselves?
- What actions can town and parish councils take to help manage the impact of budget cuts?

Feedback from the round table discussions can be summarised as follows:

- Need to know exactly what services CBC will be ceasing, and where there is scope for local communities to take on delivery, a need to understand what is involved.
- Need to understand what resources (and assets) will be transferred over, recognising the need for pump priming / start-up funding and the ongoing costs associated with volunteering.
- Request for ongoing support from CBC such as training, advice, guidance, expertise, facilities etc.
- Keen for CBC to work closely with town & parish councils and for town & parish councils to collaborate to deliver some services.
- Need to ensure services are transferred in a planned way. Improve communication and be proactive.

- Need to develop local models to stimulate, recruit, train, support and encourage volunteering. Help remove barriers to volunteering and find ways to reward / recognise volunteers.
- Need to engage town & parish councils earlier rather than later on “localism” matters.

Full details of the feedback on the round table discussions can be found in Appendix 1.

Town & Parish Councils In the Spotlight

The roundtable discussions and open feedback was followed by presentations from Councillor Ken Crossett, Chairman of Slip End Parish Council and Councillor Adrian Besant, Chairman of Tempsford Parish Council, to inform delegates of their approaches to galvanise the efforts of local residents and volunteers to bring about significant improvements in their areas.



An example of an improved play area in Tempsford

Copies of all of the presentation slides can be found on the Council's website - www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/council-and-democracy/councillors/parish/default.aspx

Question Time

There was an opportunity to send in questions in advance which could be answered on the night in a “Question Time” session. Although only some could be put forward on the night, the table below gives answers to all the questions received.

The following questions were responded to during the conference

Leighton Linlade Town Council - Cllr Brian Sadler

When CBC continually states that they would like better communication with town and parish councils, why do they make decisions affecting Leighton-Linslade without prior consultation with the Town Council?

The local government finance settlement came so late - in December - that we had to act very quickly in making some tough decisions across a wide range of services the Council provides. Unfortunately this has on occasions impacted on individual town & parish councils and we apologise for that. We are now adopting a much more proactive approach to engage with town & parish councils on any issues that may affect your local area and we welcome your co-operation in responding positively to this.

Billington Parish Council - Cllr Lorraine Mawer

Is it the intention of CBC to develop new council run Travellers Sites, and if so, how will local communities be consulted and can CBC refuse to allow further development?

In the northern part of Central Bedfordshire, where work on the Gypsy and Traveller Development Plan Document has progressed to Draft Submission, no sites have been identified as council run sites. All the sites identified are for private management. In the southern part of Central Bedfordshire a report was taken to Executive on 11 January 2011 clarifying the level of need to be planned for. However, no decisions have yet been taken on how sites will be identified or what type of sites (either Council-run or privately managed).

Arlesley Town Council - Cllr Hugh Harper

Can you tell me why orange sacks are no longer available to residents, and specifically why the supply of stock has ceased to Town Council offices for distribution to our residents who request them?

The Council is keen to encourage residents to use a recycling bin instead of orange bags, where a property has adequate space. Recycling bins are more cost effective and environmentally sustainable over the long term and only requires one delivery run, instead of multiple runs for the continued supply of bags. However, it was agreed to review the specific case outside of the meeting.

It has now been confirmed that the supply of orange sacks has been limited to the Council's Waste Services Division so that officers have the opportunity for interaction and discussion with residents; offering a wheeled bin in place of bags and ensuring residents are aware of the benefits of having a recycling bin. Officers can also discuss the supply of a larger recycling bin, where additional

recycling is regularly presented in bags. Additionally this measure ensures some control over the amount of stock handed out and the correct use of recycling bags.

The Council is supportive of the town and parish councils who wish to continue with the supply of recycling bags. Moving forward it will be possible for the town or parish to continue to supply recycling bags to customers. In line with our corporate objectives town and parish councils are requested to promote the benefits of customers switching to a recycling bin or a larger recycling bin and arranging delivery (via the relevant team). Alternatively, if a customer wishes to continue to use orange sacks to record the customer's details. CBC will also ensure stocks are available at the Points of Presence located in Ampthill, Biggleswade, Dunstable, Leighton Buzzard and Houghton Regis.

Marston Moreteyne Parish Council -Cllr Mark Petty / Hazel Trustam

Why is it that during the recent snow and icy weather Central Bedfordshire Council have been unable to empty bins in some villages (ie Haynes) whilst Bedford Borough Council have been able to empty their residents bins, even down the smallest of cul-de-sacs?

Numerous other neighbouring authorities suspended collections during this period, including Bedford Borough Council. As did many across the country. We worked closely with our contractors to collect the priority materials across the area and were happy to take double collections from any property that missed a collection. Our contractors operate from Wilstead and Dunstable and made every effort to make collections during the snow and icy weather. On two occasions attempts to collect were made and called off as the situation was assessed as a significant risk to the general public / road users and employees, and was not deemed safe enough until road and pathway conditions improved.

Billington Parish Council - Cllr Don Brewin

What action has the senior paid executives of CBC taken (for example to adopt a pay freeze) in response to the requirement by central government to cut the deficit we are all facing at the present time?

We have taken £10m out of our base budget in our first year and forecast to achieve an additional £12m saving in this financial year. We are also planning to take out a further £20m+ next year. Delegates were assured that no stone will be left unturned in terms of identifying further efficiencies across the Council. As part of our efficiencies programme we have reduced the number of senior managers by over 20%. For the majority of staff there was a freeze, as part of the national pay agreement, on 'cost of living' pay increases for 2010/11. The exception being those earning less than £21k - who received a £250 increase. This will apply for a further year - again as part of the national pay agreement for local government.

We are currently exploring possible options for the Council in terms of having greater flexibility locally to deliver further pay related efficiencies outside of nationally set agreements.

Eggington Parish Council - Cllr John Westbury

Given the cuts in services already being considered by this Council, whilst being mindful of the government's decision to freeze Ministerial Pay and Expenses (notwithstanding the Prime Minister's personal Pay Cut) what arrangements is Central Bedfordshire making to reduce the remuneration of the Council's Executive, and reduce its councillors' allowances and expenses budget?

We have previously reduced the number of Councillors in the Central Bedfordshire area from 124 to 66, and will be reducing the number of councilors further from 66 to 59 following the forthcoming elections. As a consequence, Councillors are being asked to do far more than they've been asked to do previously.

Studham Parish Council - Cllr Des Salmon

What is the Council's policy towards supporting local fund raising groups?

The Council is keen to provide support for local fund raising groups, but also needs to recoup its costs when legal work is provided at the request of external bodies. Where the request comes from a fund raising group, we will look at such situations sympathetically. Each case will need to be treated individually.

Steppingley Parish Council - Dr John Eilbeck

In view of the elimination of the Standards Board for England what local arrangements are Central Bedfordshire Council intending to implement so as to ensure good governance and a robust code of conduct for elected members.

We have yet to consider what local arrangements we intend to put in place. This is something we will need to consider over the coming months. The current arrangements for the assessment, investigation and determination of complaints in the Local Standards Framework are complex and we will want to ensure that our local arrangements are simpler but at the same time effective in enhancing ethical standards.

The following questions were submitted but not answered during the conference

Eggington Parish Council - Cllr John Westbury

In the light of Secretary of State, Eric Pickles' statement of 31st December 2010 that "Every Council's New Year's resolution MUST be to open up their finance books to the public" - when can we expect to see Central Beds details of all expenditure over £500 publicly available via the website, in the way that neighbouring Bedford Borough Council's details already are?

In line with the requirements of the Bill, from 31st January 2011 we will begin publishing every item of Council expenditure over £500. The salaries of our senior management are already posted on our website and so are Members' allowances.

Details can be found on the Council's website using the following link:
http://www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/council-and-democracy/Council_departments/default.aspx

Is it the intention of CBC to develop new council run Travellers Sites, and if so, how will local communities be consulted and can CBC refuse to allow further development? Is it the intention of CBC to develop new council run Travellers Sites?

Please see previous answer on page 7.

If so where will these proposed new sites be situated, will local people be consulted and will travellers on illegal sites who have lost their appeals finally be moved on?

As set out above, no decisions have been made on how sites will be identified in the southern part of Central Bedfordshire. However, local people will be consulted as part of any site search process and any families on illegal or temporary sites will be accommodated on new authorised sites.

What is the policy with regard to the number of pitches?

The recently published Localism Bill suggests that decisions on the level of housing (including Gypsy and Traveller pitches) to be provided in any area will no longer be taken at the regional level but will now be the responsibility of local councils. This means that local authorities are now responsible for determining the right level of Gypsy and Traveller pitch provision reflecting local need. Local authorities are required by Government through the Housing Act 2004 to assess the accommodation needs of Gypsies and Travellers alongside the assessment of the needs of the settled population. The Act further enquires that local authorities develop a strategy in respect of meeting such accommodation needs as are identified. In the absence of this regional target, the local Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment 2007 (GTAA) can be used to guide the authority on pitch provision. The Secretary of State has approved that Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessments can form a good starting point for determining local levels of need.

What determines the “need” and the number of pitches required? When the counts are done twice a year, it is possible for additional caravans to arrive which are not normally on site. Do they get counted and does that number then become “a need”?

Gypsy counts in January / July are carried out by the Council for the Government. These are only snapshots in time and by definition should pick up all caravans that are lived in at a site on that particular day - rather like a census. Over a period of stats, trends should be picked up and it is important that individual counts are looked at in this light and apparent anomalies picked up and explained. Authorities and Inspectors at appeal usually understand this. We have examples of excess numbers (and lower numbers) where we know there has been a big family gathering for wedding / funeral etc and skewed numbers accordingly.

Please refer to the Bedfordshire and Luton Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Needs Assessment -

http://www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/images/8%20Final%20Needs%20Assessment%20Report_tcm5-1927.pdf

This was prepared using caravan counts and comprehensive consultation with the Gypsy and Traveller Community in Bedfordshire and Luton. It was also prepared in accordance with national guidance on needs assessments. The Needs Assessment will eventually need to be done again to assess the level of need for future years.

What is the definition of “Traveller”? – most never travel anywhere other than to shop or work and return home each day. They are not travellers in the true

sense of the word.

The planning definition defines Gypsies and Travellers as: "Persons of nomadic habit of life whatever their race or origin, including such persons who on grounds of their own or their family's or dependants' education or health needs or old age have ceased to travel temporarily or permanently, but excluding members of an organised group of travelling show people or circus people travelling together as such." The housing definition is wider, defining Gypsies and Travellers as: "Persons of nomadic habit of life whatever their race or origin, including such persons who on grounds of their own or their family's or dependants' education or health needs or old age have ceased to travel temporarily or permanently, and all other persons with a cultural tradition of nomadism and / or caravan dwelling but not excluding members of an organised group of travelling show people or circus people travelling together as such."

If they are not true travellers should they be allowed to pitch up on green belt fields – legally or otherwise? A member of the settled community would not be allowed to do that. Why not offer them a choice of social housing and council run sites?

Government guidance in Circular 01/2006 indicates that new Gypsy and Traveller sites in the Green Belt will normally be considered inappropriate. Travelling and living in a caravan is part of the heritage of a Gypsy and Traveller and not a lifestyle choice. The lack of authorised public sites and the difficulties associated with getting planning permission for private sites, has meant Gypsies and Travellers have to set up home on land belonging to others or on their own land without permission. Gypsies and Travellers can sometimes find themselves in a cycle of 'enforced' nomadism, being continually moved on by the authorities because of the shortage of authorised sites. As a result, Gypsies and Travellers are often more disadvantaged than any other ethnic group in terms of access to healthcare and education.

Properties are more difficult to sell and prices can be affected when a traveller site is nearby. Could CBC compensate householders for the drop in their property value – particularly near sites which have been allowed to become legal by the Council because there was nowhere else for travellers to go at the time?

There is no statutory duty within the planning legislation for us to pay compensation in these cases as the lack of identified sites would be a material planning consideration to which regard would be had when considering any application. The Council does not have a separate policy to do so.

Can CBC refuse to allow further development?

No, the Council has a duty to consider any planning application, regardless of use type / applicant, on its merits.

Billington Parish Council– Cllr Lorraine Mawer

We have a speeding problem in Billington. Speed data box checks carried out over a week in June 2010 showed 62% of traffic along the A4146 exceeded the limit by over 5%. We need a safe crossing point from the village hall to the church, but are unable to have one because of the traffic speed. Why can't we have a safety camera to slow it down? Telling us that we have not had sufficient reported accidents or deaths is not helpful.

CBC accepts that speed limit compliance in Billington may be poor. However, the criteria for installing a permanent speed camera (for example existing speeds, accident record, etc.) are quite strict, and unfortunately this site does not meet

these requirements. This means that we are unable to provide a permanent speed camera at this time. However, officers are keen to work with the casualty reduction partnership to review “mobile” speed camera enforcement in Billington. Mobile cameras also help to reduce excessive speeding, but can be employed under slightly different traffic conditions.

We have tried everything and the Police have been very supportive, but nothing slows down the traffic on a regular, daily basis whereas cameras would solve the problem immediately. We have spoken to many people for advice and help - our MP, Casualty Reduction Department, Police, Amey, and Bedfordshire Police Traffic Management. In Stanbridge Road, Billington with 52% of non compliance to the speed limit, nobody can be ticketed by the Police because the length of road with a limit is only 195m. Why can't the length be changed as was promised in June 2010 or failing that put in some traffic calming?

Sections of speed limit are generally set to suit a community's geography, and typically reflect the adjacent land use. On Stanbridge Road the limit is positioned at an appropriate location which would reasonably be expected by highways users. Implementing a lower speed limit in a location not suited to the driving environment, does not correspondingly reduce drivers' speeds and hence leads to poorer compliance.

We asked for traffic calming in Slapton Road with 32% of non compliance to the speed limit. That was also refused - not enough reported accidents or deaths - but there are plenty of near misses and unreported accidents/incidents. We know better than anyone what our village problems are - we live with them daily.

The funding available for installing traffic calming schemes is limited, and so has to be prioritised carefully to ensure the best value for money. There are many requests for this type of work and so they are all assessed by an agreed method – primarily this relates to the number and severity of injury accidents. Naturally, areas demonstrating a clear history of injuries need to be given the greatest priority.

Will CBC be able to do something about them soon?

An initial assessment has been carried out for a pedestrian crossing of the A4146 in Billington. We have to ensure that anything we design is safe, and there are a number of significant issues (e.g. road alignment and gradient, footway widths, traffic volumes, etc.) that mean that we are unable to come up with an appropriate and safe design. We therefore regret to inform you that a pedestrian crossing in this location cannot be considered further.

We know budgets have been cut – but our problems were discussed long before that happened. How will Localism and the Big Society help us?

A number of road safety measures have already been installed in Billington in recent times, for example the 30mph limit itself, the Vehicle Activated Sign, lining and road surface improvements, as well as entry treatments. When comparing to other road safety issues within the Authority, these features are considered to adequately reflect the scale of the problem in Billington.

With the introduction of the Localism Bill – will Central Bedfordshire's Planning Department now take some notice of local council's concerns on planning matters?

CBC's consideration of planning matters, whether that relates to planning applications or the preparation of the development plan, will always take into account the comments expressed by stakeholders and local people. Coming to a decision on any planning issue requires the Council to balance all of the advice and views it receives. We always welcome local views on planning applications and plans we are preparing and are pleased, for example, that we received several thousand comments in response to the recent Local Development Framework (LDF) consultations that were undertaken. However, inevitably, we will not be able to support all of the comments all of the time, so cannot guarantee that the LPA will always "agree" with the perspective of a town and parish council on a particular planning issue.

Furthermore when officers intend overriding or ignoring local opinion, could they communicate their reasoning to those local councils prior to any final decision?

In respect of the Localism Bill, we hope that local communities will be encouraged to take the opportunity that Neighbourhood Planning presents. Officers are planning some workshops for town and parish councils in March which will provide further information to help understand whether they wish to prepare a Neighbourhood Plan when the Bill receives Royal Assent in due course.

It is important to recognise, however, that Neighbourhood Plans will still need to conform with the Local Development Framework which CBC prepares. It cannot therefore say "no" to the principle of development where the LDF says "yes". Neighbourhood Plans will therefore have a particularly important role in setting local policy for how development allocated in LDFs should best come forward.

The suggestion that "officers" specifically override or ignore local opinion is not something we accept. Officers use their skills objectively to recommend how to determine planning applications and issues. In some instances their professional view will not accord with a local view. In other instances their professional view or recommendation might be in accord with local opinion, but elected Members might take a different view. Even with changes to the planning system which will come forward with the Localism Bill, officers and councillors will need to remain objective and impartial and decisions made by the Council won't necessarily agree entirely with a local view.

Delegates were encouraged to leave on the tables any questions that they were unable to raise and have answered during the conference. The following provides details of those questions and the responses to them.

The outcomes achieved by our Upper Schools in CBC – published today – are not encouraging. Does CBC accept that there is a problem? If so, what is being done, what should be done?

The Local Authority is always striving to improve performance in all of our schools. This year we carried out some focused work with some of our Upper Schools, as well as schools in other phases. We are pleased that there is evidence of real improvement this year in the results achieved by our Upper Schools.

Overall results in Central Bedfordshire were above the national average in 2010 and increased by 4.5% using the commonly used measure of the proportion achieving five or more GCSE grades at C or above, including English and mathematics. Nine out of the ten schools improved their performance. Some by as much as 10 or 11%. We feel sure that this improvement trend can continue this year, although it will be difficult for schools to increase at quite the same rate.

This year the Government has introduced a new measure of performance. This is called the English Baccalaureate. It measures the proportion of students who achieve English, maths, two sciences, a language and a humanities subject (history and geography). Schools have been evaluated using this indicator even though the measure was not planned two years ago when the students started their courses. It is therefore too early to evaluate performance against this indicator, although we will be working with our schools to continue to improve performance further against all indicators.

Why has the application for planning consent for a new Tesco store in Sandy been stalled? It was to have been considered at February Committee & we are now told it is going to the March Committee. 94% of residents want the store.

The application is being progressed and there are a few important issues that still need to be resolved before it can be formally presented to the Committee. The retail impact assessment has only recently been received from the agents and this will need to be fully considered prior to making a recommendation to the Committee. In addition, some initial archaeological investigations have identified some important remains on the site which have required the submission of a further report for the archaeologists to have regard to. Finally, at this time we have a holding direction from the Highways Agency which lasts to the end of January and prevents us from presenting the application to Committee until the holding direction expires or is withdrawn. Once all of these issues are resolved the application will be presented to the Development Management Committee for consideration. It is anticipated that the outstanding issues will be resolved in time to be present to the March Committee.

Do we have to use the highways contractor (Amey) for everything ie. roads, grass cutting etc?

The broad answer is “yes”. For all highway works the authority should be carrying out the work via its partner, Amey. This is for reasons of liability, legal capacity, accountability, measurability, national standards, economies of scale and quality of work etc.

The traditional argument against this is that small contractors can undercut some unit rate prices. Whilst this might be true for small scale, one-off works small contractors are not accountable to the same degree of risk as our long-term partner. They have less capacity to work to national standards of health and safety, CDM, professional indemnity insurance and CBC standards. They are more at risk of insolvency and can't benefit from the wider efficiencies provided by a larger contract. Consequently, an authority would be taking a greater risk by using other contractors, hence why CBC insists upon carrying out the work ourselves (albeit with Amey doing the actual delivery on site).

What is the future of the CBC Standards Committee?

We have yet to consider what local arrangements we intend to put in place. This is something we will need to consider over the coming months. The current arrangements for the assessment, investigation and determination of complaints in the Local Standards Framework are complex and we will want to ensure that our local arrangements are simpler but at the same time effective in enhancing ethical standards.

What will the Council do to help support / facilitate schools to maintain music services having withdrawn funding?

Central Bedfordshire has been looking at options for the future provision and management arrangements for this service when the agreement with Bedford Borough comes to an end in 2011.

We want to ensure that an appropriate offer is in place that meets the needs of children and families in Central Bedfordshire for music education. We are intending to consult with schools and interested parties about ways in which we can meet these needs.

The Henley Review of Music Education was published on 7 February. The report has recommended that music education should continue to be funded through a mixed economic model, including grant from central government, as well as funding from the Arts Council, local authorities, the National Lottery, fees from parents and private sources, including charities.

The Secretary of State for Education has responded to the Henley review of music in schools by announcing that £82.5m will be given to music services across England next year. It is expected that this funding will be targeted at increasing access and supporting children in disadvantaged areas. At this stage it is not clear what funding Central Bedfordshire might receive for 2011/12.

Any grant funding made available to Central Bedfordshire will be used to re-shape the service to meet local aspirations for music education.

Future delivery models for Music Education are likely to include organisations working together. The Government also intends to draw up a national plan for Music Education. The re-structuring of the Central Bedfordshire service will take account of these developments.

If we use the word “dialogue” why has it not filtered through to the Amey employees of Bedfordshire Highways. Is it just our Council that fails to get either an acknowledgement or a response from them even when they initiated the exchange? What level of control is being exercised over their performance? I can provide examples of these criticisms. Don’t let me down by failing to give me an answer.

The Bedfordshire Highways Contract is controlled in many ways, which can probably be summarised as follows:

- A well-informed and technical embedded client team overseeing, policing and advising Amey staff and approving projects for delivery
- Strategic or policy officers overseeing the direction of service (if not specific projects)
- A series of performance indicators
- A full programme of audit; self-certification, client inspection and external audit
- A Network Board, made up of officers and PFH (port folio holder)
- Network Board approval of the annual programme of works, with external consultation beforehand
- A performance clinic, made up of officers
- A series of project controls, or 'gateway' points within the life of a project
- Control over the level of budget ultimately coming to the contract

Officers would be happy to discuss any specific concerns or issues. Please contact Lee Baldry, Senior Project Manager on 0300 300 4863, lee.baldry@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk

Why can't we have salt bins on salting routes in order to salt the footways?

Town and parish councils and schools can request salt bins for use within their community either on or off the highway. These are in addition to those that are placed on the highway by CBC.

Requests should be made via the Highways Helpdesk, Tel: 0300 300 8049 or by email: highways@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk.

The site for a bin will be considered by Central Bedfordshire Council taking into account factors such as:

- The bin must not obstruct sight lines
- There must be sufficient space for the bin and for safe salt replenishment

- The bin must not be placed on an existing Priority 1 salting route.

Once approval has been granted to the town or parish council, the following shall apply:

Town or Parish Council responsibilities:

- Purchase of lockable salt bin. CBC can provide a recommended style and list of suppliers.
- Holding the key to the lockable salt bin and directing salting as they consider necessary bearing in mind they are responsible for the cost of salt used.
- Monitoring usage to ensure as far as possible that salt is only used on the highway or other community areas and not private residences or businesses.
- Topping up bins with their own salt or to make requests to CBC Highways for the replenishment of salt bins. Replenishment by CBC Highways is estimated at £150 per top up for a 250l bin.

CBC Highways responsibilities:

- Replenishment of salt at town council, parish council or school request. It should be noted that CBC Highways cannot guarantee refilling within two weeks of a request. This may be longer during times of heavy ice or snow.

If there is regular evidenced use of salt for the treatment of private residences or businesses, CBC Highways reserves the right to refuse replenishment.

Could the Council provide an update on the status and likely feedback timetable to the “site applications” process recently reviewed by the inspector?

Following the recent public examination into the Site Allocations Development Plan Document (DPD) for the north of Central Bedfordshire, the Inspector submitted his binding report to the Council on 25th January. The Inspector has found the document to be 'sound' and no changes are required. The DPD will shortly be presented to Executive on 15th March in advance of consideration by Council for formal adoption. A copy of the Inspector's report is available on the Council website and interested parties, including town and parish councils, have been informed of its availability.

The document can be accessed using the following link:
http://www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/images/Draft%20Site%20Allocations%20DPD_tcm5-29146.pdf

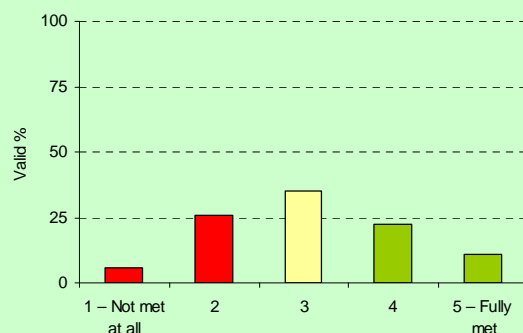
Feedback on the conference

A conference feedback form was provided in the delegate packs, and below are the results from the 55 completed forms received.

Meeting the conference objectives.

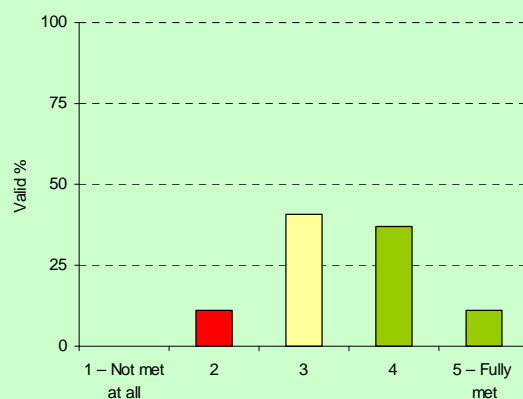
Understand the impact of the Council's cuts on local communities

	Count	%
1 – Not met at all	3	5
2	14	25
3	19	35
4	12	22
5 – Fully met	6	11
Total	54	98
Missing	1	2
Total	55	100
Mean score	3.07	



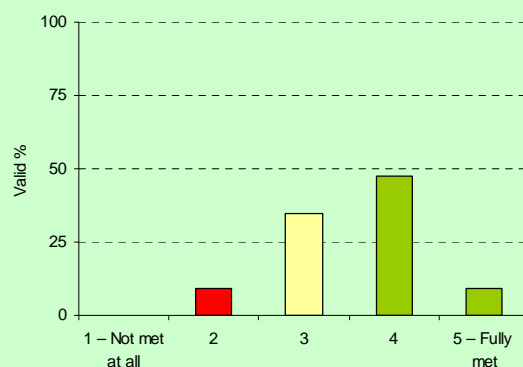
Understand the role that Town & parish councils can play in helping communities do more for themselves

	Count	%
1 – Not met at all	0	0
2	6	11
3	22	40
4	20	36
5 – Fully met	6	11
Total	54	98
Missing	1	2
Total	55	100
Mean score	3.48	



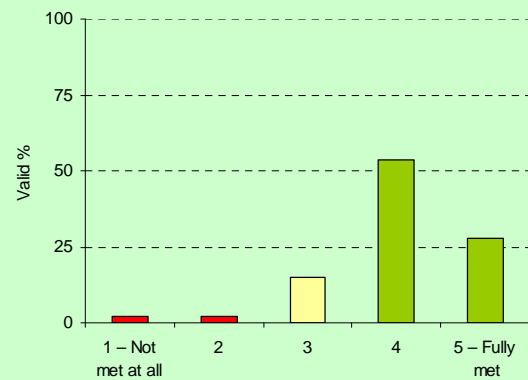
Helping Town & parish councils to learn from each others' successes and achievements

	Count	%
1 – Not met at all	0	0
2	5	9
3	19	35
4	26	47
5 – Fully met	5	9
Total	55	100
Missing	0	0
Total	55	100
Mean score	3.56	



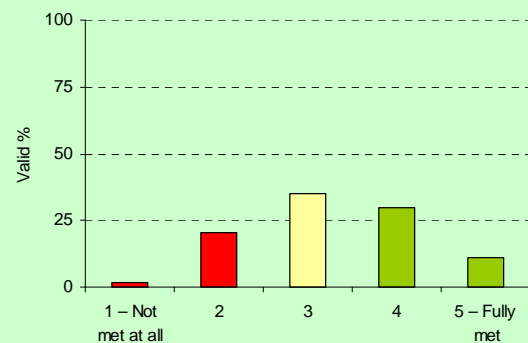
Understand the future of policing in Bedfordshire

	Count	%
1 – Not met at all	1	2
2	1	2
3	8	15
4	29	53
5 – Fully met	15	27
Total	54	98
Missing	1	2
Total	55	100
Mean score	4.04	



Enable open communication between the Council and Town & parish councils

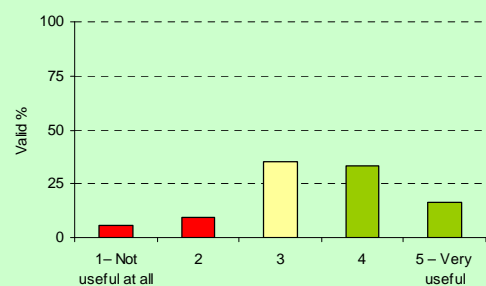
	Count	%
1 – Not met at all	1	2
2	11	20
3	19	35
4	16	29
5 – Fully met	6	11
Total	53	96
Missing	2	4
Total	55	100
Mean score	3.28	



Aspects of this event.

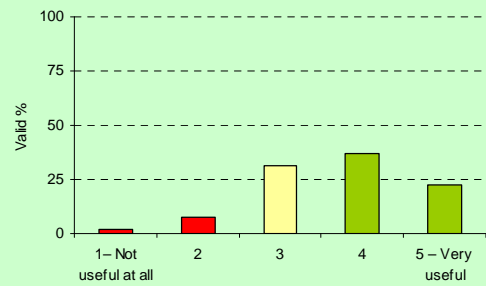
"In the Spotlight" session

	Count	%
1 – Not useful at all	3	5
2	5	9
3	19	35
4	18	33
5 – Very useful	9	16
Total	54	98
Missing	1	2
Total	55	100
Mean score	3.46	



“Open Forum” session

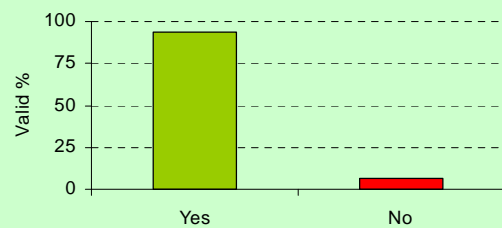
	Count	%
1– Not useful at all	1	2
2	4	7
3	17	31
4	20	36
5 – Very useful	12	22
Total	54	98
Missing	1	2
Total	55	100
Mean score	3.70	



Views of the event overall

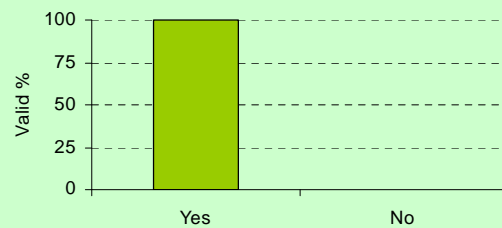
Did you find this conference useful?

	Count	%
Yes	45	82
No	3	5
Total	48	87
Missing	7	13
Total	55	100



Would you recommend attendance to future conferences?

	Count	%
Yes	49	89
No	0	0
Total	49	89
Missing	6	11
Total	55	100



If no to the question “did you find this conference useful?”, please comment on what could be done that might encourage you to attend

Please allow round the table chats - it is a great help to all.

In the hope that they will be better.

Seek to develop an atmosphere of mutual respect between CBC, Town Council & Parish Councillors which can lead to intelligent cooperation and experiment.

Many of the questions were not relevant to parish council - police were more interested in saving money stated in monetary terms but little in front line services - Understand about collaboration & benefits but when would this apply & benefits more depth.

I heard nothing from anyone of which I was not already aware.

The booking form was received by email on 6/1/11 said "return by 5th January" - impossible. Not the first time that we receive poor papers with ridiculous deadlines. PA System - as last time sometimes faint. The operator in black gear was not very efficient - especially when operating the microphones on the stage. Question Time - there should be time restriction on the replies. Several were long-winded. Also should be one person replying - not two!! Just cuts down time for questions from the floor.

Please make any other comments about the conference

Please do not preach to us but talk. ASK NOT TELL.

The person controlling the sound system needs to be away from the speakers as what he thinks is loud enough is not on the other side of the hall.

Almost totally failed to meet the objectives largely because they were not properly addressed. There was no attempt to explain bullet points one and two, or to facilitate bullet point five. And inability to control the temperature in a new fancy building !!!!!!!!!!!

Better than before!

I thought the table discussions were especially useful. The Chief Constable's points would be useful to have as a leaflet to file.

Do Beds Councillors have prior warning of question from parish councils? Should not always have prior notice.

Improvements to content to conferences are noticeable & welcomed.

More professional presentation by CB Officers. Poor sound reproduction due to lack of voice production when talking to a room full of people.

See copy of each table's summaries as an email distribution.

Spring & Autumn conferences would be better weather-wise for travel.

Didn't deal with the main issues. We didn't come here to spend time at a workshop discussing normal P. C. business.

There were issues re being shown in attendance, but this was discussed with a CB agent and was addressed. eg. access through the disabled access with her guide dog.

Lack of information about where cuts will take place - no direction.

No name badge despite acknowledging attendance.

It may be useful to have table groups of T/P councils with similar size / problems to enable effective brainstorming to take place.

Useful to know in advance what subsequent paperwork (powerpoint

presentations, Q&A etc) will be available after the event to avoid unnecessary (illegible) note taking.

Conclusion

The general consensus is that the conference met most of its objectives. However it is appreciated that discussions around budget cuts could not fully be explored due to the limited time available.

What Next?

We will build on all of the feedback we have received to continue to improve how we work together, and to ensure that future conferences better meet your needs.

We look forward to meeting you all again at our next conference on the evening of 5th October 2011 at Priory House, Chicksands. In the meantime, a full copy of this report and the presentations can be found on the Council's website - <http://www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/council-and-democracy/councillors/parish/default.aspx>

Appendix 1 – Feedback from the round table discussions

Table 1

Numerous community events in towns and parishes, supporting people's well being, community involvement, citizenship etc :

- Sandy: "Get Involved" day, helping hands group
- Haynes: Haynes 100 car rally, cycle forum, model railway day, youth project group – children's play area
- Pottton: Twinning Association, History Society, "Party at Pottton"
- Clifton: regatta, litter pick, Historic Society
- Henlow: Scouts, Guides and Brownies centre, elderly care-scheme.

However, some issues raised over doing more:

- Reluctance of people to participate – it is always the usual, few people
- Particular difficulties in getting youngsters to participate
- Concerns over funding – if towns and parishes take over services or do more how will it be funded?
- If it means putting up the precept the council taxpayer will pay in the end
- Do we follow the example of LB Barnet – "easy council" model? Gives people choice to pay more for services above basic level.
- What services does CBC envisage towns and parishes doing?

Table 2

- Willingness to get involved in B.S.
- Ask a busy person – work done by few
- Joined up communities making better use of facilities
- Start up costs – library (mobile)
- Desire to be taken serious. How can we generate interest?
- Finding something to hang a hat on ie. scheme that makes a difference
- List of volunteers

Table 3

- Adv. Parish Council get out from Parish what needs to be done. Priorities. Parish Plan.
- Youth Association volunteers. Can bring in volunteers & Parish Council fund. Work together to get grants.
- Hedges, litter pick-up, salting, care scheme. Try to exploit these changes.
- Mill. 200 volunteers. Litter 50 people turned up.
- Youth Club
- Library run by Parish Council
- Planning Dept. Local Council take it on
- Taking bureaucracy out – managed local level less of a cost
- Street cleaning
- Gritting

Table 4

- School Perspective – what sessions are going to be continued / discontinued?

- Grass cutting – have topped up Central Beds in some instances. Will need to prioritise.
- Allocation of Central Beds – parish
- Understanding what the Council is intending to spend on highways in their areas
- Merging services that town and parishes and Central Beds do? eg. playground maintenance
- Positive – info on footpath maintenance
- Asset transfer
- More involvement with S106 funds
- Encouraging groups of residents to get together, take a more proactive role. (Leighton Linlade)
- There are individuals – sometimes don't know where to start. Have arranged coffee morning to try and help groups establish. (Compton)
- Parish Plan
 - How do we help the elderly
 - Identify potential for a “helping hands” scheme (council care scheme in Henlow), grant linked (Compton)
- Parish magazine, essential / useful tool
- Websites – new Leighton Linlade – no adverse comments
- Litter picking – difficulty in organising
- Barriers
 - Insurance
 - Health & safety – understanding where the danger may be!
- Ability to be able to engage with all parishioners – maybe at street level

Table 5

- Break into commuter community
 - Identify challenges
 - Busy people
 - Core people who engage
- Communities engage in matters they are exercised about
- Care groups – encourage all communities to do the same
- Have thriving volunteer groups – scouts – thinking how to expand volunteer. Examples of young people – skatepark
- Promote the work already completed
- Being creative – making better use of what is already there eg. local post office / book lending
- Volunteers, litter picking
- Run a “pride in your village” to encourage people to take responsibility – focus on positive reason to get positive outcome
- Encourage residents to take “ownership”. Clean a dirty sign.

Table 6

- Merge services that are provided by both eg. playground maintenance
- Helping the elderly - “Helping Hands”
- Publicity
 - Web sites
 - Magazines
 - Encouraging groups of residents to get together
 - Coffee mornings

- Grass cutting
 - Have previously topped up
 - Priorities more essential
- Barriers
 - Health & safety eg. clearing snow
 - Insurance
- Asset transfer
- Understanding
 - What council is spending on highways work
- More involvement in S.106
- School perspective – understanding what services will be provided

Table 7

- Back up from CBC staff resources
- Relationships & dialogue between officers & T&PC's & Residents
- Events eg. "Anglia in Bloom"
- Speeding – resident tracking
- Communication on what withdrawing from – examples
- What is Central Beds doing to assist T&PCs to do more?
- More proactive with T&PCs
- "Can do" culture – enable – rather than can't do!
- More volunteers – youth clubs – weeding etc
- Meaningful dialogue – timely
- Local initiative with professional support eg. parish planning
- Look at wastage & efficiencies
- Involve more volunteers

Table 8

- Funding
 - Key issue – what financial support might be available, even volunteering need some funding
- Changing behaviour – pride in all parts of Central Beds
- Earlier Communication – Build relationships & trust – also with residents groups
- Expertise – guidance, support, advice, training
- Innovation – think differently ie. Streetwatch
- Build Community in Houghton Regis
 - Community awards
 - Let's Talk Together – galvanise community action, appreciation & recognition
 - "Talk Up" the area – be proud of our achievements
 - Recognise the area – don't abbreviate to "HR"

Table 9

- Ambitions will depend on size – role will differ – capacity issues for small
- Could small join together. Is this practical given history?
- Don't take role of T&P in localism for granted – role may become too onerous and put Cllrs off from involvement
- Issues of finance & expertise
- Could services currently delivered by T&PC be shared? – some services are voluntary

- Libraries – librarians driving mobile libraries – not possible in past. Is it possible now?
- What would the financial support be to run services if run at local level?
- Difficult to understand where benefit would be for citizens? Already double paying in some cases
- How do get links back to central services eg. youth services? To council – T&PC – through ward councillor

Actions:

- Help CBC think more laterally eg. library – local trained volunteers to meet mobile service
- Do we have to use council contractors? – responsibility to T&PC
- Parishes have goodwill – need more of and CBC should support eg. legal advice – payment?
- Need to get balance right – putting more expectation onto rural where already paying for limited service
- CBC – need to communicate

Table 10

- Empowerment
- Strengthening local democracy
- Planning reform
- Inspire

Table 11

- Bring back ward community forums. Great communication tool.
- Better liaison with other agencies eg. civpal, contractors
- Gain knowledge to impart to our residents
- Litter picking – need to maintain support from CBC
- Running “youth clubs”
- Promoting wider community engagement and social integration
- Providing an inspiring vision for the community
- Communicate the impacts to the community – stimulate more volunteers to come forward

Table 12

- Encourage community to get involved in promotional events in towns & assist promotion of their activities in promotional events (Dunstable)
- Impressive no. of volunteers in the Town (100+) (Dunstable)
- Galvanise/involve communities to ensure they have a voice on key issues affecting the area (Dunstable)
- Spend money on initiatives that empower communities – direct service delivery (Dunstable)
- Motivator – role of facilitator, consulting local people, engage
- Finance (Aspley Guise)
- Support facilities & facilitate use by other groups (Aspley Guise)
- Direct & indirect support of the voluntary sector (Aspley Guise)
- Focus on locality / issues (Aspley Guise)
- Advocate / campaign on major issues (Aspley Guise)
- Encouraging active members of the community to actively participate (Aspley Guise)

- Ensure it's done in a planned and phased way – needs time (Dunstable)
- Absorb services with financial support from CBC – transfer expenditure within own budgets (Dunstable)
- Creative ways for further income generation:
 - Sponsorship
 - Donations etc (Dunstable)
- Raise precept to cover “cut” services (Aspley Guise)
- Cluster resources to take over eg. library services, rather than closing (Aspley Guise)
- Increase service charges
- Transfer expenditure / reassess priorities – make choice
- Town & Parishes actively work together
- CBC – change tactics – no dumping on Towns & Parishes
- Proactive discussions / planned action needed

Table 13

- Towns & Parishes can & do take a role lead
 - Facilities
 - Experience
- Parish plans can help
- Issue based involvement positive & negative
- Power & money – S106 opportunities & joint contributions
- Timing of communication & ability to respond
- Need to know what services proposed to be cut
 - Time to respond, allocate resources
 - Raising money & volunteers
- “Power of wellbeing” & constraints
- Individual involvement

Table 14

Concerns:

- Need to know what services CBC will offer
- A lot depends on size of Town & parish councils – capacity / resources
- Does funding come with additional responsibilities
- Need greater say in provision of services ie. Amey – standards / competition

Actions:

- Encourage “single issue” volunteers
- Removing the fear of doing things ie. snow removal of footpaths
- Addressing insurance concerns eg. farmers
- CBC could help indemnify volunteers ie. self insure (general power of competence)
- Group training schemes ie. grass cutting, hedge trimming
- Need to undo damage of concerns over loss of services
- Create better links with CAB etc
- Planning – local voice needs greater emphasis

Table 15

- Work together
- Common issues – S106s – have/have nots
- Ample development contributions – small things

- Volunteers / groups – seem to be same people
- Invest time / money
- Health check – involve others
- Parish Plan

Actions:

- Youth Service MP
- Response to cuts – money or voluntary help
- Timing
- School crossing patrols
- Legal “power of wellbeing” qualification
- Electors – power of wellbeing value
- Power – need money
- Potential running of leisure centre
 - Rate payer
 - Premium / discount
- Stakeholder involvement
- Information CBC – communication / tone of discussions
- Budget pressures
- Stay of execution medium to long term solution
- Problem is finance. Restriction - concerns
- Big challenges – 5 years
- Towns & Parishes working together
- Scales of working together
- Common interest
- Same changing opportunities
 - Infrastructure
 - Traffic calming
 - Joint funding
- Opportunities from changes in planning – common infrastructure

Table 16

Here the focus of discussion was on the importance of community / parish / town plans.

- These plans need to clearly identify the priorities for the parish.
- Whilst most parishes are capable of writing these on their own and this is important for ownership, the information that they contain needs to be shared and regularly referred to by Central Bedfordshire Council services.
- Reference to the plans will help to quantify the impact of CBC cuts on the community and will help to galvanise support for the formation of alternative service provision. This work can not happen until the Council provides Town and Parish council’s with detail on how the cuts will impact on frontline service delivery in their community.

This was a more difficult discussion, and whilst examples such as youth provision and the mobile library were discussed the following overriding points were made:

- Before any parish can consider how it can help manage the impact of budget cuts it needs to fully understand the nature and extent of those cuts on its community. Insufficient detail has been provided to Town and Parish Councils to date for them to make meaningful alternative proposals.

- The varying sizes of parish council's means that some of the smaller ones with very limited resources will struggle to develop any alternative provision.
- The announcements of the proposed 2011/12 cuts have come too late in the day for parish councils to develop meaningful alternatives. The precept has already been set so there is no chance to increase it.
- In the absence of detailed information on how the cuts will impact upon each community, the parishes will have to wait until the impact itself becomes apparent before reacting through possible precept changes in 2012/13.
- One of the problems we have is in securing the volume of volunteers. The public will often voice opinion on the withdrawal of a service, but there will be little in the way of support for the creation of an alternative until the service is actually withdrawn and the effects start to be felt.
- Where volunteers come forward it is normally for a specific type of work rather than forming part of a general pool of volunteers who can be called upon.

Table 17

- Devolved powers: Enhance services for residents but puts an increase on town & parish councils.
- Need more backup from Central Beds. Not necessarily financial. To make local things happen.
- Parish elections: Need to know where we are going. Need competent residents to stand.
- Need to be recognised and listened to. We are the local people
- Communication needs to be better. Better feedback.
- Don't tell / ASK!!
- Round table discussion a must.