

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/



**Let's 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

