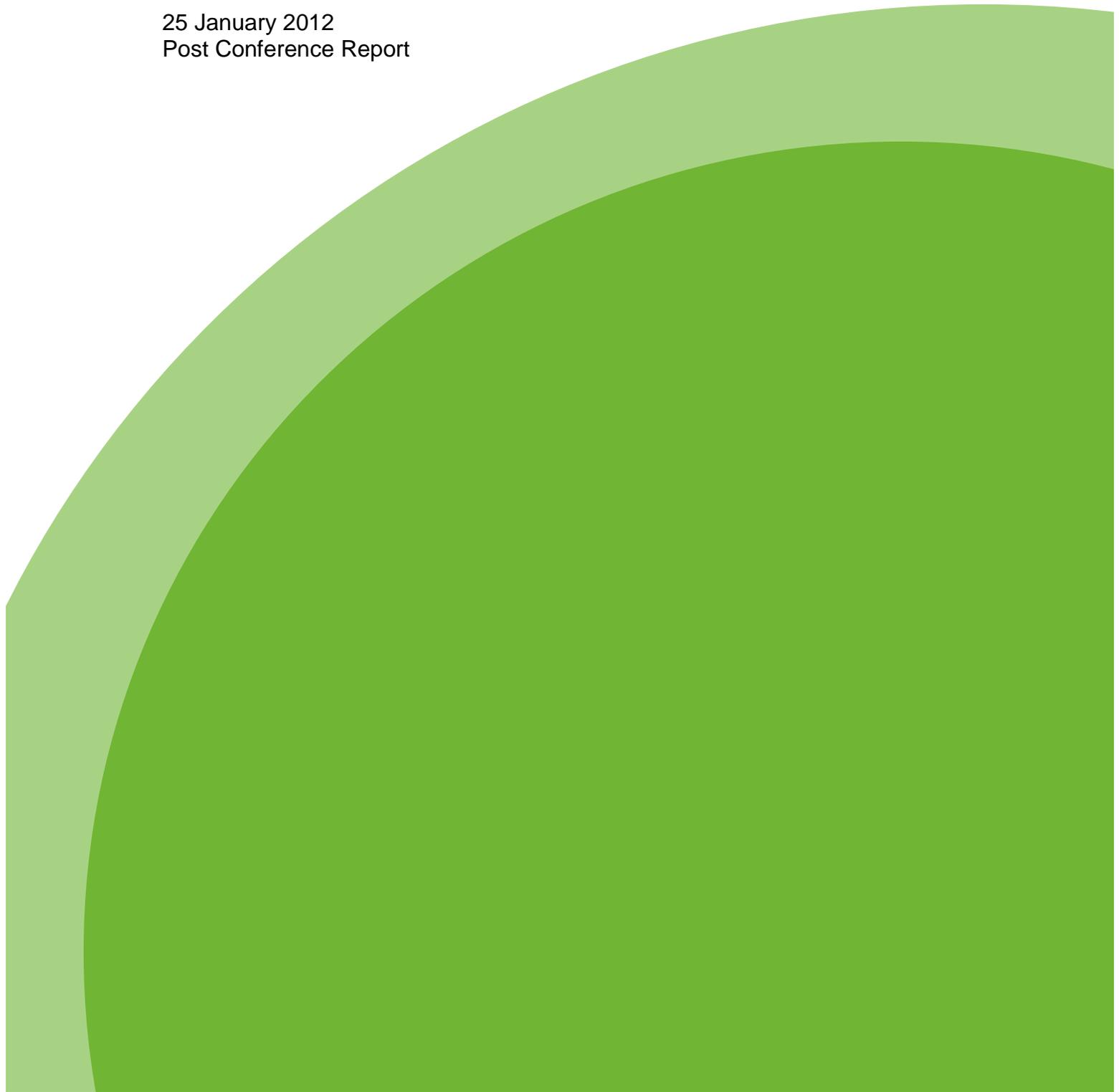


Town & Parish Council Conference

25 January 2012
Post Conference Report



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Introduction

Working closely in partnership with you is something we believe is important and it was a pleasure to see so many of you at this conference; the sixth we have held since Central Bedfordshire was formed.

This conference was different from those held previously because it focused on a single issue - the 2012/13 budget. Councillor Maurice Jones, who led on the budget strategy, set out the draft budget and invited feedback from you via the round table discussions. We all acknowledged that in these challenging economic times we need to work closely together to find innovative and creative ways of delivering high quality services to our residents.

We are committed to being more effective in communicating with you, our partners, to improve our working methods and to ensure improved outcomes for all of our residents.

Your feedback has indicated that a number of you would like to see the Localism Act discussed at future events. Therefore, this will be a key theme at our next event on 1 May 2012. Implementing new delivery methods can be a complex area to get right and work effectively, and we recognise the diversity in the needs and working methods of the town and parish councils in Central Bedfordshire. Preparations for the next conference are already underway, and in order to fulfill our undertaking to hold separate events for the larger and smaller councils, this conference will be aimed at Town councils.

It is only through continuing to work together in partnership that we can truly understand and tackle the issues facing our communities, and bring about the changes necessary to make Central Bedfordshire a great place to live and work.



Councillor James Jamieson
Leader, Central Bedfordshire Council

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "James Jamieson". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping underline.

The Conference

The objective of the Conference was to understand the Council's budget priorities for 2012/13.

In doing so, it provided a platform to:

- update on our emerging priorities;
- discuss the 2012/13 budget and gather feedback on the budget strategy and proposals; and
- explore options for collaboration and engagement in the process of devolving services in the future.

Welcome and introduction

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

The key messages were:

- Since last surveyed in 2009, residents' perceptions of the Council had risen in many areas, including the proportion of residents that:
 - Agree that the council provides good quality services overall
 - Feel informed about the council
 - Are satisfied with the council overall
 - Are satisfied with the local area
 - Feel the council is efficient and well run
- The priorities for CBC in making Central Bedfordshire "a great place to live and work" are to:
 - Provide value for money
 - Enhance Central Bedfordshire as a place (homes/jobs/countryside/safety/culture)
 - Improve infrastructure (roads/broadband/transport/facilities)
 - Provide quality resident services (bins/leisure/libraries)
 - Promote health and well being and protect the vulnerable
 - Improve educational attainment

The Budget

Councillor Maurice Jones, Deputy Leader of the Council and Executive Member for Corporate Resources, gave a presentation on the Budget strategy.

The key messages were:

- There were three phases of engagement:
 - Listening to CBC stakeholders and residents
 - Consulting on the proposals
 - Communicating the final budget
- £42m had already been saved since 2009, but there were still significant financial challenges to be met, including:
 - 28% reduction in funding to 2016
 - 0% Council Tax increase for the second year
 - £40m savings target including £10.5m savings in 2012/13
- CBC had developed a clear insight into priority issues through a residents survey, listening to focus groups, and a household survey (News Central and online). The issues that mattered most to residents were:
 - Central Bedfordshire as a place
 - Council Tax
 - Job prospects
 - Roads and infrastructure

and the less significant issues were:

- How services are delivered
 - Cuts in management and support
 - Protecting cultural services
- The Council's targets are:
 - No Council Tax increase and harmonisation over a two year period
 - No negative impact on service outcomes
 - Improved access to services
 - Services delivered differently
 - Increased spending on the vulnerable in 2012/13
 - Capital investments four year programme for schools/extra care schemes/roads maintenance/street lighting/leisure.
 - Looking ahead to devolving services:
 - CBC's ambition is to ensure each service is delivered by the most appropriate council
 - So far, CBC has responded to requests for markets, public conveniences, grass cutting, play areas, street lighting and library services
 - We want to move towards a more proactive model in the future
 - We want to work closely with Town and Parish Councils to improve the outcomes for residents

A full copy of 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>

Round Table Discussions

Following the Deputy Leader's presentation delegates participated in round table discussions to consider two questions. Feedback can be summarised as follows:

Discussion 1 - Are there any comments or questions you would like to raise about the Council's proposed budget and financial strategy?

- There was broad support for the budget proposals and the need for significant further savings was acknowledged. It was accepted that there was a need to find different ways of delivering services. Concern was expressed on achieving "more for less" whilst recognising that a number of services were already under-resourced. More information was requested regarding the level of reserves CBC holds and policy for future years.
- The need to monitor and ensure that CBC contractors are performing to standard and providing value for money was stressed. It was suggested that there was an opportunity for Town and Parish Councils to be more involved and play a bigger part in monitoring the performance of contractors. The need for coordinating road maintenance with utilities planned works was also highlighted.
- Harmonising Council Tax was discussed especially in relation to parity between the North and South. Concern was expressed that resources, particularly in relation to regeneration, might be targeted to towns in the South, and that residents in the North might be subject to Council Tax increases as part of the harmonisation.

Discussion 2 - How would you like to be engaged in the process of devolving services in the future?

- It was noted there was a need to develop a clear process for devolving services. Currently the emphasis was on the Town or Parish Council to take the initiative to devolve a service, but discussions suggested there was an opportunity for larger towns and parishes, and/or groups of parishes to combine, to secure more viable arrangements. It was suggested that discussions could be held across the board with all Town and Parish Councils with services grouped in phases and interested parties brought together to explore options. Support would be needed from CBC to facilitate this.

- The importance of Parishes meeting with each other was stressed, and it was suggested that CBC could act as facilitator to establish Local Parish Forums. This would enable Parishes to share experiences, learn from those who already had devolved services, and help to understand the procurement process.
- Emphasis was placed on the need to establish financial, insurance and legal implications of devolving services early in the process by consultation, negotiation and agreement.

A full write up of the notes from the round table discussions can be found in Appendix 1.

Feedback from the Round Table Discussions

Richard Carr, Chief Executive, facilitated feedback from the round table discussions. This included a number of questions that were responded to by the Leader and Deputy Leader.

The questions, which have been grouped together where possible, and their responses can be summarised as follows:

Budget

Questions:

Can the figures be trusted? How much is new and how much legacy? What is the rate of interest on capital borrowings and is the council paying down existing debt? Can you confirm receipt of the £3.2m from central government for not increasing council tax? How is council tax being harmonized? Is the level of reserves sufficient?

Response:

The figures presented today are not legacy but new figures for Central Bedfordshire. They have been prepared following a rigorous process involving senior managers and Members and provide robust estimates of the requirements for next year's budget.

Capital borrowings are currently at £156.1m and the average rate of interest is 3.4%.

The £3.2m from government is a one off payment for not raising council tax next year.

We are required by law to complete harmonisation by 2014. The process has started and there is work still to be done.

We are steadily building reserves at a rate of £1.4m per annum but we are still below where we would like to be, given the national financial climate and the anticipated funding changes in future years for local government.

Value for money

Questions:

How does CBC ensure it is getting value for money from its contractors, particularly highways? Is there an opportunity for Town and Parish Councils to be involved and play a bigger part in monitoring the performance of contractors?

Response:

All of our contracts include detailed specifications and service standards that providers should adhere to, and they are regularly monitored.

We welcome the opportunity for Town and Parish Councils to be our eyes and ears on the ground locally to help ensure good outcomes are delivered for our residents.

Community Infrastructure Levy

Question:

What is the Community Infrastructure Levy and how will it be applied?

Response:

Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) is a new planning charge that came into force on 6 April 2010. CIL is a tariff based charging scheme which allows Central Bedfordshire Council to raise funds from developers undertaking building projects in the area, in order to assist the funding of a wide range of infrastructure projects needed as a result of development. Such projects could include, for example; new and safer roads, flood defences, schools, health and social care facilities, parks and green spaces.

The levy must be charged in pounds per square metre on the net additional increase in floorspace of any given development. This will ensure that charging the levy does not discourage the redevelopment of sites. Extensions of 100 sq metres or more will be chargeable.

We are waiting for the DCLG to publish more guidance on neighbourhood funding. There is therefore currently no guidance on how Town and Parish Councils will apply for the funding or what proportion of the CIL receipts will be used for this purpose.

Protecting the vulnerable

Question:

We are concerned about the proportion of spend on services to protect the vulnerable. Efficiency savings are critical in all areas. How are you getting costs down and getting the message across?

Response:

There are increasing demands on our services with the rise in numbers of older people, and the need to respond to children at risk. However, all of the Council's services are being reviewed to ensure they are delivered in the most cost effective way and this will be an ongoing process in the years to come.

Questions:

Don't do everything on line. Can you please maintain face to face contact for vulnerable groups such as the elderly?

Response:

Our drive to increase the amount of services which are accessible online is in response to demand, but we will always maintain traditional, face to face, communications.

Many of our customers, who want to access services at times which best suit them. Web enabled services allow residents to access the services that they need 24 hours a day, and 7 days a week. However, we recognise that many of our customers have a strong preference to access our services by way of telephone, or walking into one of our Customer Services Centres. To ensure that we meet the requirements of all of our customers we will continue to offer services through these channels.

Devolving services**Question:**

How will budgets be transferred to Town and Parish Councils? Can you impose these services on smaller Town and Parish Councils and what can be done to support them? Can we have a clear and transparent process for taking on services?

Response:

If a continuing service is transferred CBC will only pass on the proportionate amount of funding it uses to deliver that service. No services will be imposed on any Town or Parish Council. Where a Town or Parish Council wishes to take on the delivery of a service they will be supported to do so. The level of support required will differ depending upon each service. In the first instance Town and Parish Councils should contact Cllr David Hopkin. Officers are currently working on a framework to support the transfer of service delivery which will be made available shortly.

Question:

How can devolved street lighting be made fair in terms of equal costs?

Response:

We are examining different models and funding packages to support the transfer of services. Arrangements could include swapping services which incur similar costs. Each case would need to be considered on an individual basis and may need to take into account ongoing capital requirements – such as street lighting.

Other

Questions:

We are concerned over the lack of response to emails by Portfolio Holders and Chief Officers – how do we get a response?

Response:

We want to ensure speedy and timely communications with Town and Parish Councils and have made a number of changes to our policies and procedures to support this. However, we acknowledge that there is still room for improvement and encourage you to let us know where we can do better.

Question:

Will the Localism Act ensure development is where parishes want them?

Response:

There is nothing in the Localism Act (as it currently stands) that would allow communities to prevent development going ahead - as long as the planned development is in line with national planning policy, with the strategic vision for the wider area set by the local authority, and with other legal requirements. However, if a community (through the Parish Council) wanted to develop a Neighbourhood Plan it would allow them to say where they think new houses, businesses and shops should be located.

The proposed neighbourhood planning regulations have recently been consulted on, so more guidance is likely to follow in the next few weeks.

A number of additional questions were raised during the round table discussions that there wasn't time to respond to on the night. These are detailed below:

Question:

Harmonisation – is it really going to happen? £5.6m figure for harmonization was quoted last year, how come you are quoting £1.6m now?

Response:

The total cost of harmonising downwards would be £3.2m. Since this budget is proposing to go half way in 12/13 and then the remaining half in 13/14, the cost for next year is £1.6m

Question:

Will residents in the North see Council Tax increases as part of the harmonisation?

Response:

The budget and Medium Term Financial Plan as set out in the Executive report do not envisage any increases in the North rate.

Link to Executive Report (see pages 43-44):

<http://www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/modgov/documents/g3746/Public%20reports%20pack,%20Tuesday,%2014-Feb-2012%2009.30,%20EXECUTIVE.pdf?T=10>

Question:

What is the breakdown of the debt?

Response:

All of our current debt relates to the General Fund (i.e. basic Council services and capital programme). For next year we will be taking on c. £165m debt due to the reform of council housing finance. This is explained in the relevant report on the Executive agenda.

Link to Executive Report (see page 221):

<http://www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/modgov/documents/g3746/Public%20reports%20pack,%20Tuesday,%2014-Feb-2012%2009.30,%20EXECUTIVE.pdf?T=10>

Question:

Will there be (are there) grants included in the budget (to encourage the voluntary sector)?

Response:

Grants are currently provided to three voluntary and community sector (VCS) infrastructure organisations. The combined value of these grants for 2012/13 is £125,000.

There are circa 2,500 VCS organisations in Central Bedfordshire and the funding is provided to help build the capacity of the sector by enabling organisations to work collaboratively together to maximise value for money, innovate and improve service delivery. This includes supporting:

- the provision of training, information and advice;
- The Third Sector Assembly, which holds two conferences per year;
- the implementation of a Volunteering Strategy and a Volunteer Bureau Service; and
- the implementation of an Advice Strategy.

Question:

How is the £100m spent on schools? What is the process to access this funding? Are there grants for schools (revenue)?

Response:

A report will go to Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee on February 28 2012 and to the Council's Executive on the 27 March 2012 that will outline a five year programme to provide new school places across Central Bedfordshire. The report will outline where and when these places are required and also outlines the funding that will support the expansion of existing schools and the establishment of a number of new schools.

To read the report as it is presented to Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee please follow the link:

<http://www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/council-and-democracy/committees-and-decision-making/overview-and-scrutiny-committees-structure.aspx#>

Question:

CBC reserves – how thin are these? Please can you send details which confirm the level of reserves CBC hold and policy for future years?

Response:

This is set out in the Budget report, paragraphs 31 & 32. We currently have a general fund reserve of £7.0m and anticipate adding £1.4m in the current financial year. The policy for the future is to add £1.4m each year until the minimum prudent level is reached, of £11.2m. This is subject to review and will change as circumstances change eg the transition of public health to the Council.

Link to Executive Report (see pages 46-47):

<http://www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/modgov/documents/g3746/Public%20reports%20pack,%20Tuesday,%202014-Feb-2012%2009.30,%20EXECUTIVE.pdf?T=10>

Question:

More for less – how will this be achieved when there are already a number of services (ie planning) already under resourced?

Response:

The budget has put an emphasis on efficiency savings rather than service cuts. All the detailed proposals are set out in the budget report, appendix I.

Link to Executive Report (see pages 103-129):

<http://www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/modgov/documents/g3746/Public%20reports%20pack,%20Tuesday,%202014-Feb-2012%2009.30,%20EXECUTIVE.pdf?T=10>

Question:

Are CBC resources particularly in relation to regeneration being targeted to towns in the South?

Response:

There is no deliberate strategy or plan to do so. The Economic Development Plan lays down the agreed Council approach to delivering economic growth, and this is not geographically determined but needs-led, using the Local Economic Assessment as the evidence base for any intervention.

Our plans cover five Town centre Masterplans and briefs cover the whole area - Biggleswade, Dunstable, Leighton Buzzard, Houghton Regis and Flitwick.

Our Business Investment and Marketing work covers the whole area.

Our programmes that support adult skills apply to the whole area.

Question:

Are we modernising street lighting? How are the Parish/Town Councils going to access the additional Capital funding for street lighting, roads etc (especially as some Parishes already pay for these)?

Response:

CBC is modernising its street lighting stock. We are doing so by identifying assets in poor condition and replacing them with more efficient lanterns on a new column at the same time. This ensures the minimum amount of visits for maintenance throughout its life. The new lanterns emit white light which is not only electrically more efficient but also offers improved lighting performance.

We will continue to consider all Town and Parish Council input in designing and delivering our future programmes of work. All enquiries are welcome and can be made via the Highways Helpdesk (Tel: 0300 300 8049), your Area Team or the Watchman.

The following questions were submitted via the Question Cards provided during the conference and have been responded to below:

Clifton Parish Council – Barry Livesey

Question:

Years ago Biggleswade RDC would borrow money from individuals giving the individual a good return and a saving to the Council. Why is that not being done now?

Response:

We are not aware of any council borrowing from an individual. All our borrowings are with the Public Works Loan Board, where we can obtain the best available rates.

Flitwick Town Council – Carol Carter**Question:**

Flitwick want to understand what the £8M for leisure is for. Is some of this for Flitwick Centres?

Response:

Members have identified £8m for leisure infrastructure projects in the Capital Programme for the next 4 years. Leisure services is developing options for consideration for improvements/investment in our existing leisure facilities, taking into account findings from condition surveys currently underway as well as embarking upon the development of a leisure strategy for the area.

Opportunities for investment/improvement in the Flitwick centre will be considered in both pieces of work.

Marston Moretaine – Hazel Trustam**Question:**

Capital programme for schools. Is some of the investment going to Marston Moretaine?

Response:

A report will go to Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee on February 28 2012 and to the Council's Executive on the 27 March 2012 that will outline a five year programme to provide new school places across Central Bedfordshire. The report will outline where and when these places are required and also outline the funding that will support the expansion of existing schools and the establishment of a number of new schools.

To read the report as it is presented to Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee please follow the link:

<http://www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/council-and-democracy/committees-and-decision-making/overview-and-scrutiny-committees-structure.aspx#>

Chalgrave PC – Roger Mence

Question:

Would like to see detailed budget MTFP proposals. Process 6th December Exec, O&S then full Council 23/2/12.

Response:

All of this is set out in the Budget report that went to Executive on 14 February 2012.

Link to Executive Report

[:http://www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/modgov/documents/g3746/Public%20reports%20pack,%20Tuesday,%2014-Feb-2012%2009.30,%20EXECUTIVE.pdf?T=10](http://www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/modgov/documents/g3746/Public%20reports%20pack,%20Tuesday,%2014-Feb-2012%2009.30,%20EXECUTIVE.pdf?T=10)

Fred Newport-Hassan

Question:

Polythene – what can be recycling (supermarket bags, bread bags)? Advice please - also would like a talk.

Response:

Any polythene can be recycled including any type of plastic bag from sandwich bags, bread bags etc. to shop and supermarket carriers. This also includes cling film wrap so long as it's clean.

Our Waste Education Officer Michelle Marley is the contact to provide talks to groups; email michelle.marley@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk.

General

Question:

What about separate meetings/conferences for Town Councils and Parish Councils as needs are very different?

Response:

We recognise that there is an emerging agenda that is changing the relationship with the larger councils. In response to this we propose to hold a separate event for Town Councils in the future.

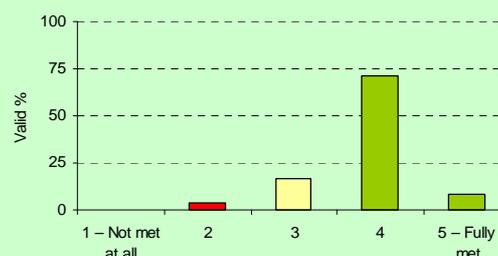
Feedback on the conference

A conference feedback form was provided in the delegate packs, and below are the results from the 24 completed forms received.

Meeting the conference objectives

To understand the Council's budget priorities for 2012/13

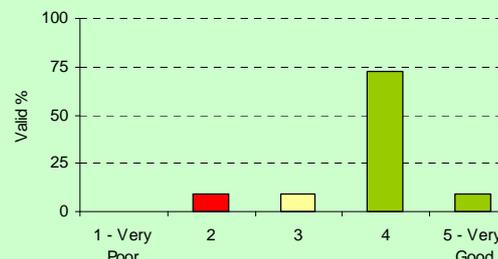
	Count	%
1 – Not met at all	0	0
2	1	4
3	4	17
4	17	71
5 – Fully met	2	8
Total	24	100
Missing	0	0
Total	24	100
Mean score	3.83	



Organisation of the conference

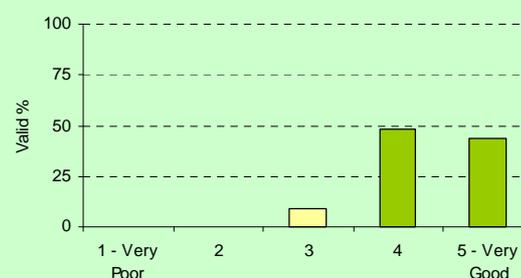
Information sent to you before the event, e.g. booking form, confirmation etc

	Count	%
1 - Very Poor	0	0
2	2	8
3	2	8
4	16	67
5 - Very Good	2	8
Total	22	92
Missing	2	8
Total	24	100
Mean score	3.82	



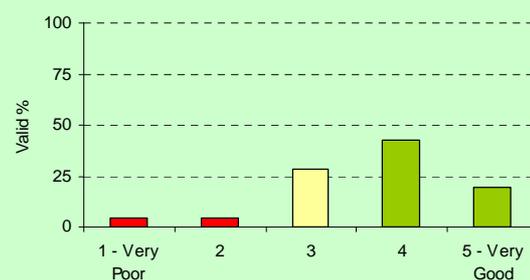
Venue

	Count	%
1 - Very Poor	0	0
2	0	0
3	2	8
4	11	46
5 - Very Good	10	42
Total	23	96
Missing	1	4
Total	24	100
Mean score	4.35	



Catering

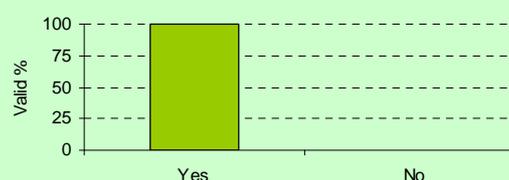
	Count	%
1 - Very Poor	1	4
2	1	4
3	6	25
4	9	38
5 - Very Good	4	17
Total	21	88
Missing	3	13
Total	24	100
Mean score	3.67	



Views of the event overall

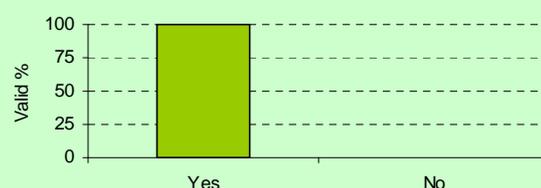
Did you find this conference useful?

	Count	%
Yes	24	100
No	0	0
Total	24	100
Missing	0	0
Total	24	100



Would you recommend attendance at future conferences?

	Count	%
Yes	23	96
No	0	0
Total	23	96
Missing	1	4
Total	24	100



Please make any other comments about the conference

Comment on what could be done that might encourage you to attend :

We have asked for a separate Parish Council Conference - towns have different interest.

Cups of tea far too small.

But v. concerned that "consultation" with Towns/Parishes is still not effective and there is lack of understanding of our role. I find these events a bit patronising which puts me off attending.

It always seems to end up as a 'talking shop' as to questions being answered - how can they be answered when we don't know who is looking into them.

What you would like discussed at future events :

Core strategy - planning - CIL

Aggregating lighting power

Highways and transport issues - planning for the future
Devolving responsibilities. Greater information on when and services and take place (street cleaning) drain cleaning etc.
Specific impact of future cutbacks on smaller Parishes.
Harmonise grass cutting into one contractor.
Broadband. Recycling.
Neighbourhood planning. Localism Bill update putting into action. CIL.
Planning!
Relationships and practical working arrangements between Towns and Parishes. Sharing of expertise, compact between CBC and parishes. Methods of consultation with parishes, communication in all its aspects.
Localism Bill. Swapping services between town and parish councils and CBC.
Any new decisions that need to be made by CBC that should be influenced by public opinion.

Conclusion

The general consensus from your feedback was that the conference objective was broadly met, and overall you found the event useful.

We recognise the importance of having an open dialogue and to make more room at future events for this to happen. We have also taken into account the overwhelming support for a separate event for town councils, due to the emerging agenda, and this has been scheduled for 1 May 2012 at Priory House, Chicksands.

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/local-government-in-central-bedfordshire/town-parish-councils.aspx>

Appendix 1: Feedback from the round table discussions

Discussion 1 - Are there any comments or questions you would like to raise about the Council's proposed budget and financial strategy?

What is the breakdown of the debt?

Confirm that CBC receives £3M from central government for not increasing the council tax?

What rate of interest will CBC pay on the additional borrowing and is the council paying down existing debt?

Why is the improvement figure of 5% so low? How can we trust figures?

How many of the proposed savings are 'new' (ie not savings that were sold as benefits of disaggregation from the old shire council)?

Challenge controls

Benchmark councils

Reserve

CIL policy

Savings real

Can we trust the figures?

£3.2M

Effectiveness eg street clean –schedule

Interest £165M debt

Issues Raised:

Financing of capital programme

Financing of housing debt

How does CBC ensure contractors are performing? Value for money.

Channel shift – not all residents access internet. Need to maintain face to face contact too.

What is CIL?

Explain harmonisation

How are we harmonising council tax?

Devolving budget – is budget going to be transferred to P&TCs?

Smaller towns/parishes do not have these facilities, or financial capacity.

Can you impose these services to smaller P&TCs – what is being proposed.

Financial implications are really crucial – who bears this?

Reflects consultation results.

Concern about limited capital funds.

More co-ordinated roads maintenance – aspirational!? Easier said than done.

Quality of workmanship re above (sealing potholes).

Quality v cost in general.

Better communications with Highways.

How are the Parish/Town Council going to access the additional Capital funding for street lighting, roads etc... (especially where some Parishes already pay for these)?

Are we modernizing street lighting?

Will there be (are there) grants included in the budget? (to encourage the voluntary sector).

How is the £100M spent on schools? What is the process to access this funding? Are there grants for schools (revenue)?

This feedback comes from delegates from Ampthill Town, Sandy Town and Barton le Clay Parish Councils.

Amey – recurrent theme.

Proposals “broadly sensible”. Pro Capital and economic regeneration (roads)/ extra care. Vulnerable – do people really understand/want us to be investing.

Efficiency is critical in all areas including protecting vulnerable. How are you getting costs down and getting the message across.

Harmonisation – is it really going to happen?

Question - £5.6M figure for harmonisation was quoted last year, how come you're quoting £1.6M now?

Market research phase – not appropriate for organisations.

Policing – perception that it's gone off at a tangent. Influence police. Crime agenda.

We can usually deal with our problems.

Council tax harmonisation in context of devolving services. Clear message don't want to see CT increase.

Street lighting excellent.

Examine Amey (2 people/1 person job).

Highways money going to doing the job – better value for money – not thrown at Amey.

Not value for money on social work.

Maurice's experience coming to bear.

Further savings have to be made.

Perception of the Council having done a phenomenal job.

Saw what you expected!! (Budget welcomed).

Bang on the button.

Brought out things I'd looked for – council tax (leave price as it is) – significant savings – get the budget down – happy with different ways of delivering services

Concern about language used by Maurice Jones regarding getting more money for ANPR parking fines.

Real concern that holding council tax will mean a sudden hike in rates is necessary.

How we (CBC) present information.

0% council tax – impact on PC and TCs.

Youth services

School crossing patrols

Double taxation.

Cost of capital debt CBC has

CBC reserves - How thin are these?

Please can you send details which confirm the level of reserves CBC holds and policy for future years? (Q from Harlington and Studham PC's)

Spending more on roads/highways maintenance programme

All shared the view that the roads maintenance needs more co-ordination with Utilities planned works

Harlington expressed concern that high priorities for Harlington villages are waiting 4 years to be completed when low priorities for the village are being done first.

Houghton Regis TC highlighted that they had a useful meeting with

Highways/Amey to explore priorities and get agreement for the forthcoming programme.

(Studham and Harlington PC's) Need to ensure we can have a similar dialogue so we have an opportunity to share their local issue/priorities and influence the priorities in the programme.

More for less

Comment - How will this be achieved when there are already a number of services (i.e. Planning) already under-resourced? (All shared this view).

CBC Budgets

Studham PC highlighted the need for CBC to confirm budget proposals in advance of precepts being set by Parish Council in November, so these can be confirmed with full knowledge of any CBC impact.

Parity between North and South - Q's from Harlington PC

- Are CBC resources particularly in relation to regeneration being targeted to towns in the South?
- Will residents in the north see Council Tax increases as part of the harmonisation?

CBC contractors -

- Helpful if CBC had a policy of right first time
- How do you determine that you get VFM and quality from contractors?
- Are you monitoring them closely enough?

All shared the view that there is an opportunity for P&T councils to be involved and play a bigger part in monitoring of contractors

Grass Cutting Contracts

- Studham PC expressed their disappointment that they are still trying to sort out the contract differences inherited and the handover of grass cutting contracts to one contractor has still not been resolved.
- These to be centralised/harmonised
- Need to recognise that once devolved the specification/standards delivered at a local level are higher than those on main roads managed by CBC - so a driver leaving a village can be faced with overgrown vegetation on the road side which are impairing sight lines.

Tackling fly- tipping and "non domestic waste"

All agreed there is an economic argument to tackle this:

- Using enforcement and prosecution as a deterrent - more to show this will not be tolerated.
- providing alternative ways for collection and disposal.

Community Infrastructure Levy

Q from Harlington - Please let us know how CIL is to be applied (CBC's Policy) and what is the cut off date to propose schemes

Discussion 2 - How would you like to be engaged in the process of devolving services in the future?

How can devolved street lighting be made fair in forms of equal costs?
When T&P councils take on new services how is the price determined?
Should the costs be paid for separately rather than through the precept?
Could T&PCs and CBC agree a price per job approach?
Parked cars mean that the road sweeper doesn't do a proper job. In Eastleigh residents get notice of a cleaner and move their cars and clear the area in front of their houses.
Street cleaning is best done locally.

Devolution – town focused
Financial investment/payment
Responsiveness
Capital
Localism
Monitor contractor
When service provided

Appetite for devolved services:
Depends on the size of the precept.
Street lighting good example
Economies of scale
Swap grass cutting for street lights.
Parish to pay for higher quality service.
May require full time clerk – more cost.
Litter picking – but how does CBC collect the rubbish?

Early consultation/agreement/negotiation.
Individually with each council not collectively. Brokering – bringing together similar parishes and possibly towns.
Determine criteria how these services are going to be devolved. Determine who would be legally responsible – reasonable and sensible. Liabilities – how are they going to be discussed in the process.
Early discussion around finances with each council – about financial incentives.
Implications – Amey's contract 2016.
Ask P&TCs what they would like to be consulted on. Don't give topics. Two-way communication process. Give feedback.
Portfolio holders and chief officers – how do we get a response? Concerns over lack of response to emails.

If pro-devolved – less talk, more action.
Concern re impact on precept.
Opportunity re neighbourhood plans – but cost issues!
Seamless, quick devolution.
Confirmation of what can be devolved.
Localism Bill – more understanding of rights/opportunities.

Broadband (Eversholt)
Service list is too limited – blank piece of paper – local capacity (1.8 tractors – unlike 0.2).
Listed (to our tow clerks too!!).

Basic list of services – what do you do now? – what would you be prepared to do?

Not always the need to devolve (smaller parishes).

Support to understand how to deliver some of these services – fear of the unknown – lack of experience.

Learn from services already devolved (share experiences).

Understand the procurement process.

What's happened so far hasn't really been mutually agreed devolution – do it or lose it.

What is the mechanism/process for devolving. Only have generic conversation. Need 1:1 contacts to follow up spec. Could local members perform this role – or decision maker.

Are Parishes and Towns getting a fair deal – “you do” – no money following – it should. Eg housing needs service.

Need to be straight and transparent.

Prospectus of the offer, the process and mechanism.

Could there be guidance about “how to” cluster Parishes.

CBC are looking to Towns and Parishes to take initiative – need more proactive engagement resource/help to work through contacts.

Must be cost effective.

Process of devolution – has to be involved?

Council makes it too hard to have the discussion about devolving services.

Leighton Buzzard – Can take on £90K of services – we can do it for

Parishes – there is more to do – gritting six parishes – not one cuts their own grass

Clophill – we already do – street lighting – grass cutting.

Barrier – we (in our parish) don't talk to next Parish. More Parishes sit down together.

Local Parish Forums (Council could do this “they'd be best facilitator” – no ward councillor could facilitate this).

Council to share comparative cost information (ie unit costs) in the key areas where interested in devolved services.

Speed limit - £7,000 cost (if all Parishes got together, it would be cheaper) Share via local Parish Forums.

Engagement – don't want to be rigid/fixed as to who you work with – Amey.

Comparative information with other councils

Explore how we can share experiences with other areas

Need to find different ways of meeting.

More engagement with those aged under 30.

Profile of town councils locally v central Beds.

Need to understanding what “alternative” looks like

Key role ward members have in representing residents and as community leaders.

Flitwick Town Council works with Ben Gadsby from Amey and he is most helpful. It is not all bad.

Cynical for T&PCs to collect money for services they take on.

T&PCs doing more. CBC should continue to collect for service and forward money to T&PC.

Issue about scale. Potential for a Town Council to be more efficient, but if a council is too small it's difficult to become efficient.

Unnecessary consultation. Could have guessed the outcome of the Council's

resident survey. Asking the obvious.

Having the appropriate conversation (information) – when, what, where – understanding.

Street cleaning.

Grass cutting.

Where information can be provided most helpfully – web – maps, frequency – location on website.

Monitoring opportunities if know when – quality – standards.

Facilitate reporting, gathering information. 'Piggy backing' on insurance.

New website very logical!

Phone numbers – need to be right!

Grass Cutting

Houghton Regis Town Council shared their experience of grass cutting using a local contractor.

Representatives on this table were in agreement that:

- There is an opportunity for larger towns and parishes and/or groups of parishes to join up to secure viable arrangements.
- More support is needed from CBC as previously requested to explore and achieve this.
- There is a need for a clear more transparent process for devolving services.
- Instead of doing this in an ad-hoc/random way that discussions be held across the board with all P&TCs with services grouped in phases and those interested groups brought together to explore options.

Community Centre in Houghton Regis

Houghton Regis Town Council is keen to explore this especially as the Youth Service contract tied in with this centre expires in 2013.