

Town & Parish Council Conference

**08 November 2018
Conference Report**



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WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

Councillor Tracey Stock welcomed town and parish councillors to the 28th Town and Parish Council Conference. During refreshments and networking, delegates spoke to the Councils Fostering and Adoption team as well as with Consultants helping the Council with our Land, Property & Public Services project, which in broad terms is shaping the replacement of Acolaid and aligning how CBC works to deliver against customer demand.

Councillor Stock updated delegates on the timescale and process for completing the precept requirement form.

- the tax base information has been sent to each Town/ Parish Council for setting 2019/20 Precepts.
- Those who receive it by email only should have received it on Friday 2nd November.
- Those who requested the information via post should have received it on Monday 5th November.
- Towns and Parishes are assisted in calculating their Precept by using the individually tailored Precept calculators. Town and Parish councils must complete their precept requirement form (and where the precept exceeds £140k, the supplementary form as well)
- ***These must be returned via email or post by Friday 18th January 2019.***
- The submission must clearly state the Parish Council's requirements in terms of both the Band D figure and the overall precept, along with the percentage movement between years.
- The Tax Base issued reflects any applicable boundary changes, as well as estimated housing growth. Finance colleagues do not envisage any forthcoming changes regarding Town/Parish Council tax referendum limits, however this will be confirmed on the 6th December 2018 when the Local Government Finance Settlement is issued.
- Assistance in completing the Precept request form is available by contacting precepts@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk



Councillor Tracey Stock

Deputy Executive Member, Health and Stronger Communities
Central Bedfordshire Council

TOPICS AND SPEAKERS FOR THIS CONFERENCE

Health

- **Nicky Wadely, NHS Bedfordshire CCG** explained the new model for delivering Primary Care.
- **Alistair Bucknall and Helen Allen from Community Catalysts** introduced a new project to stimulate the market to create Community entrepreneurs who can deliver high-quality care services for people who need support, at the very local level
- **Tracey Cowan from Beds Rural Communities Charity** told delegates about Social Prescribing – whereby health and care professionals can refer people to non-medical community based support and services to meet their health needs.

Planning Administration

- **Alison Hunt from the Planning Business team** explained some of the necessary changes made to the administration of Planning applications – a key requirement being the need to reduce paper.

Highways 'Report It' Web Portal

- **Nick Shaw from Highways** explained the on line system to record highway issues from potholes to street lights.

Empty Homes

- **Nick Costin and Janice Edmond** described the problem of empty homes and how they can be turned into solutions

Become a CBC Councillor

- **Claire Carpenter** explained the paperwork required to become a Central Bedfordshire Council Councillor and Parish Councillor.

THE CHANGING LANDSCAPE FOR HEALTH

Changing face of NHS Primary Care

Nicky explained the NHS England General Practice Forward View, designed to address the key challenges which include the retirement of GP's and recruitment difficulties, increased patient demand, an aging population and growth, with patients experiencing long term health conditions and complex needs. Furthermore, GP's are handing their contracts back to NHS England, resulting in 'caretakers' (short term contracts) or at worst the list is dispersed and the practice closed.

So, the Forward View is focussed on

- Releasing capacity and reducing workload
- A commitment to strengthening the workforce, increase the number of doctors, the number of other health professionals and the general practice nursing workforce
- Developing new models of care to improve health outcomes
- Developing estates and digital infrastructure

The delivery of the forward view will be via Primary Care Home where *"Services will be designed to wrap around 30-50,000 cluster populations. These clusters will form the footprints for collaboration and new ways of working between practices, delivery of extended access, and the development of multidisciplinary primary care teams to deliver integrated out of hospital services to our local communities."*

More detail is set out in the [presentation](#)

Community Catalysts

The first of two presentations looking at community based approaches to better health was delivered by Helen Allen and Alistair Bucknall representing Community Catalysts. They gave a lively presentation about a new project in Central Bedfordshire which is aiming to stimulate the creation of new micro enterprises enabling local people to use their gifts, talents and imagination to set up sustainable social care and health enterprises so that more people needing care can get the support they need to live the life they want to live. The growing network of Community entrepreneurs will bring a real choice of personalised and high-quality services for people who need support and services.

The initial focus for the project is on the Ivel Valley but work can cover the whole of Central Bedfordshire. Several examples were given of emerging enterprises and included an ex-district nurse who alongside her husband supports local older people stay independent at home by helping them to do their shopping, food preparations, small home chores and companionship, to a

Music group, setting up sessions (Singing/instrumental) for adults with a disability focusing on socialisation, skills building and creativity. Community Catalysts are appealing to town and parish councils for people in their parishes who are helping (or would like to) older people or those with a learning disability who might be interested to do more and make it their occupation.

More detail is set out in the [presentation](#)

Social Prescribing

Tracy Cowan representing Beds Rural Communities Charity introduced town and parishes to Social Prescribing. Tracy explained that social prescribing is a way in which GPs, nurses and other care professionals can refer people on for non-medical community - based support and services via Local Community Coordinators and Community Wellbeing Champions, instead of offering only medical interventions.

Social prescribing can help to tackle the demands on GP's and the NHS in particular the 20% of GP time which is spent with people whose worries around debts, benefits, or housing may make them ill (or undermine their ability to manage an existing condition).

The referral will come from the GP or other health professional into the Social Prescribing team who will undertake a 1-1 assessment with the client. They will develop a personal action plan including signposting onto community based services where appropriate.

Town and parish councils can assist the concept of social prescribing with local knowledge and expertise of services and groups, offering community facilities for community based consultations and working with the Social Prescribing team to develop inclusive services, helping to promote volunteering in communities e.g. Allotment schemes that clients could be referred to.

More detail is set out in the [presentation](#)

Planning Administration

Alison Hunt explained the necessary changes to the planning administration process. In response to Government and Corporate requirements to digitise and adopt electronic driven processes, business processes have been reviewed to determine where we can become more efficient, particularly with regards to:

- printing
- postage
- manual data entry

To reduce paper usage and manual aspects of the administration process, on receipt of an on line planning application town and parish councils will:

- be informed by email with a web link to the online case and timescales for comment and instructions on how to submit comments online.
- receive a paper version of plans (up to A3 only) and a copy of the public planning application form only, with a covering letter identifying the case details.
- access all supporting documents online via our website.

When a paper application is received these are scanned on receipt, email consultation will still happen and a paper application set will be posted to the town and parish council.

Alison explained that the Council is working towards fully electronic driven processes and encourage town and parish councils to accept paperless consultation in the future and reassured delegates that we are working with developers to submit applications electronically and label plans and supporting documentation in a customer friendly format.

In terms of receiving comments on planning applications Town & Parish councils are advised that the preferred method of receiving consultation responses is online via our Planning Register: <http://www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/PLANTECH/DCWebPages/AcolNetCGI.gov>. Emailed and posted comments have to be entered manually which is very time consuming.

To assist town and parish councils to submit comments electronically, accounts have been created on the online consultation portal for those that didn't already have one.

More detail is set out in the [presentation](#)

Highways 'Report It' Web Portal

Nick Shaw, Highways Business Support Manager updated delegates on the Highways 'Report It' portal which was introduced as part of the new Highways contract with Ringway-Jacobs. Modifications have been made to improve the system to enable better tracking of progress to resolve a reported issue. It has also been made more user friendly so that residents can report on line via their mobile or tablet device. We have also increased the number of characters in the free text section but Nick implored delegates to be succinct when reporting issues.

Nick explained that the asset management approach to managing our Highways network means that interventions are scheduled on the basis of priority need.

Empty Homes

Nick Costin and Janice Edmond explained the Councils approach to tackling Empty Homes.

The overall trend since 2009 has seen a reduction in the number of empty homes in Central Bedfordshire, in line with the national trend.

This is an achievement given the housing pressures – we have 180 households in temporary accommodation which includes 300 Children. We receive 34 new approaches each week and have experienced the 2nd highest increase in private rented sector (St Albans being the highest).

Despite this the Council has returned **368** long term empty homes back into use between 2012 – 2018. In 2017/18 alone, 93 properties were brought back into use.

Using a range of measures from negotiation advice and assistance through to Council Tax premium and enforced sale, the focus is on those homes empty for 2 years or more, with the priority on those that have been empty for 5 years+.

In the last few years we have successfully obtained six Empty Dwelling Management Orders (EDMO's) and all 6 properties have been renovated and let. We are planning more EDMO's which can prompt owners to take action themselves. We have also obtained Executive approval to pursue a Compulsory Purchase Order (CPO) in one extreme case, which was subsequently sold voluntarily. The Council are aiming to pursue a further CPO in the near future.

Local Government has been given new powers allowing them to triple the council tax on [homes left empty](#) for five to 10 years, which also confirmed councils can now double the rate of council tax on homes left empty between two and five years, and quadruple it on homes left empty for more than a decade.

Become a CBC Councillor

Claire Carpenter outlined the paperwork required to become a Central Bedfordshire Council Councillor. The key dates for prospective candidates are the **4 March** when Nomination papers are issued and **3 April** when nominations close at 4pm.

Claire explained that it can cost between £3,000 -£5,000 per polling station and overall 600 additional staff are required to administer the election. Claire emphasised the importance of completing and submitting nomination forms early to allow time for checking and the correction of any errors.

More detail is set out in the [presentation](#)

QUESTIONS

A number of questions were asked following the presentations and also submitted on the feedback forms. Answers to both sets of questions have been collated and are listed below.

Questions at the Conference

Changing face of Primary Care

Q: Cllr. John Westbury – Eggington PC Early on in the slides there was a reference to digital infrastructure. However, in reality, it is the elderly and difficult to reach people who are the ones who need the help but they often cannot get it. It is an aspiration to provide everyone with digital access but this is not the reality.

A: Nicky Wadely NHS We need a lot more people to use the technology which means this can free up appointment time for those patients who do not or cannot use the technology. Agreed the use of Alexa would greatly benefit those who need digital access. The support of community catalyst could address a lot of these issues in our local rural communities.

Q: Ampthill Town Council / Stondon Parish Council – Are the practices joining Primary Care Home voluntarily or on a locality basis? The Ampthill and Shefford practices were cited as examples along with other surgeries which are full and need to increase the size of the surgery.

A: Beth Collins NHS Primary Care Home is voluntary. Beth Collins will follow up and respond on individual cases.

Q James Stirling Stondon / Clophill PC How is the NHS using S106 money to enable new surgeries

A. NHS / CBC – all 106 monies secured for health have been mapped.

Q Is Primary Care Home a national exercise ?

A NHS. Yes the changes are nationwide and happening in other counties.

Q: Villages close to neighbouring authority borders who are registered with GP surgeries in another authority – how will the proposals interface with neighbouring authorities?

A NHS: We are working with Milton Keynes and other areas as we are aware this can happen. Working to resolve; a network of practices are being built.

Community Catalysts and Social Prescribing

Q: Cllr Chris Martin MMPC How does Social prescribing connect with Mid Beds Citizen's Advice

A Tracy Cowan BRCC A client would be referred to the CA if e.g a need for debt advice was required.

Planning Administration Improvement Processes

Q: Cllr Roddell Clophill There is a problem in receiving 360 pages electronically which is difficult to read on a small screen. There is a need to look at plans in paper format so would prefer a larger than A3 plan rather than a small one on the screen

A: Used to provide this but it is now proving cost and time prohibitive. We can provide up to A3 in hard copy but nothing bigger

Q: Cllr Roddell Clophill PC / James Stirling Stondon PC/ Clophill PC With large developments, can the cost of providing hard copies be passed on to the developer to cover. There are also problems with the portal in waiting to sort documents, it is also hard to know if you are looking at latest versions. Notifications of changes need to be better communicated and explanations of what has changed need to be conveyed. Version control is an issue.

A: Where large developments are involved, the developers are asked to provide hard copies of documentation and these are already forwarded as part of process

Q Stondon PC Quite a lot are viewing applications online, but scaled plans are needed for larger developments

A There is no plan to revert back to providing scaled plans, unless provided in paper format – Large Application Agents are asked to provide a full hard copy set for T&P consultation.

Q: James Stirling Stondon / Clophill What is considered a large development?

A: 50 dwellings

Q Eggington Parish There is poor internet connection in the village, so how can they view online?

A The issue has been reported to CBC Enabling Team who are responsible for the Broadband strategy.

Q Clophill PC A lot of Parish Cllrs are not computer literate when it comes to submitting comments online, the online consultation portal only allows for one comment per application to be submitted at a time, they want to be able to submit all of the applications they have commented on in one go.

A Unfortunately the current system is unable to accommodate this, requirement has been noted for the replacement system.

Q Eggington PC Document portal is very slow to load and displays in alphabetical order

A IT colleagues are looking into this

Q Stondon PC / Clophill PC Cannot view 2 planning applications side by side on a small screen and PC's are not informed by the Planning Officer when revised plans are received. They cannot find revised files/plans on the online register - They are poorly named, need to start with date. Online planning system is very poor there are quick and simple solutions available that would improve this

A A replacement planning system is being sought, it is planned to go out to procurement around May 2019

Q Totternhoe PC Response time to submit comments has been reduced from 28 days to 21 days

A No change has been made to the time limit to submit comments. It remains at 28 days

Q Clophill & Stondon Parish Clerk – Online consultation portal doesn't acknowledge receipt.

A Acknowledgment of comments was not possible and is advised in letters/website.

Q Parish councils are not informed when cases go to committee.

A T&P Cllrs are notified when applications go to committee along with all consultees and neighbours who have commented on the case

Q Do not consult neighbours correctly, do not place notices on lamp-posts, small parish's (Ken Green) are not notified in time – informed 2 weeks later?

A Neighbours consulted are those who share a boundary with the site, following site visit if the planning officer request additional neighbours to be added this is done

Q: Stondon / Clophill PC We get a lot of planning applications; it would be helpful if updates were provided to keep people informed. The ability to print lists of applications and knowing what and when changes are made are needed

A: The council's current systems are old and the existing systems cannot give the T & P councils the information they would like. The council are looking at replacements systems which should make these issues possible to resolve.

Q: Eggington PC We are a small parish and not always notified when the application has been submitted which means time is lost in considering for comment. There is a delay; Lamp post notifications are also not always posted in time. Paperless working for small parish councils will cause problems.

A: It is felt that the new process of emailing Parish Councils when applications are submitted will help to address this.

Comments:

Totternhoe PC Town and Parish Cllrs are important and are volunteers, they work full time, fit this in around their day job. Planning need to understand the nature of T&P's and be flexible and understanding the time needed to produce responses.

Totternhoe PC With large developments the current portal works well. It is possible that the users are not as able to use technology as they might be. With an on line portal, it is not as easy to use when dealing with several applications; the portal is not user friendly at the front end

Highways 'Report It' portal

Q: Cllr Ken Green, Chalgrave Currently, new highways are 'contracted out'; some local authorities have now brought this back 'inhouse'. Has CBC considered doing this?

A: CBC are currently mid-way through their existing contract. A number of highways services were brought back in house prior to the commission of the existing contract.

Q The portal for reporting blocked gullies is good but it doesn't work on all systems

A: The Report It portal has been tested across a number of platforms. In the first instance please ensure that you are using the most up-to-date version of the portal (<https://beta.cb-report-it.co.uk>). If there are specific issues, I would be grateful if you could email me directly outlining the issue and providing a screen-grab so that we are able to address this.

The gully programme is run on a 3 year cycle; when it was introduced it was found to identify significant numbers of gullies not previously on the asset list.

Q: Millbrook PC – Can you report more than one gully at a time?

A: No, must report one gully at a time. If the whole road is an issue, raise it with your Area Custodian of roads; each area has a nominated custodian.

Q: How do you report dead animals on the highway?

A: Dead animals on the highway is something that the CBC Waste Team look after. I will put a link on the web-page that will connect people to the team to report this to.

Q: Totternhoe PC –There have been instances where even when you can provide a reference number, the report has disappeared when you follow up on no action having been taken.

A: Will need to find out and report back. Please provide any specific details to me so that I can establish what has happened.

Q: Has the Houghton Regis/Woodside link been adopted yet?

A: Yes, the Woodside Link road is now fully adopted.

Q: Clophill PC –Problems experienced when trying to track an issue there are also delays in getting through on phones

A: Nick Shaw agreed to follow up

Q: Leighton Linslade TC What are the KPI's for the Highways contract and how are they performing and which are the most important?

A: If further information is sought please contact Paul Mason.

Empty Homes Strategy

Q: Clophill PC How do we report empty properties

A: via website or contact Janice Edmond direct

Q: In respect of the property where children were breaking in and the owner was residing in HMP, how is this being dealt with?

A: In exactly the same way as any empty property is deal with. Will follow process and if necessary will take to the courts etc.

Q: With the property in the slide show that has been empty for over 5 years, can anything be done about this?

A: Yes, this is known to the council; property is currently in probate and there have been restrictions to overcome. Negotiations are on-going.

Q: The Police Station in Ampthill; can this be taken over?

A: Janice will talk to Police colleagues about this property to explore the possibilities; however the council cannot use existing Housing powers as it is not a house.

Q: Can Parish Councils do anything with residents to help?

A: Yes, bring any queries and questions directly to Janice

Become a Councillor

Q: Very small councils – should election costs be on precept

A: Costs are apportioned as fairly as possible

Q: Standing as a Councillors – must the candidate represent a political party?

A: No, the candidate can stand as an independent

Q: Is there a check list for prospective candidates to help them submit their application?

A: There is a full action pack that can be provided. All T & P Clerks are sent a pack; additional packs can be requested.

Q: Elections are normally on a 4/5year cycle. In our Parish, we have not had an election for at least 25 years. If residents determine that the Parish Council are no longer doing a good job, can they force an election

A: Yes, they will need at least 10 signatories to support their action

CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS

The Conference was not as well attended as for previous conferences and only 16 feedback forms were completed.

Our analysis of the feedback forms indicates that those that did complete the form indicated that they found the Conference useful but there was a distinct variation in whether delegates felt their objectives had been met or not at all.

We will learn from this experience and will forward plan Conference dates for 2019.

The Spring Conference will take place on May 21st and the Autumn Conference will take place on November 14th .

We will consult town /parish councils beforehand for up to 2 priority items you wish to discuss and we will endeavour to arrange the Conference around your requests.

Councillor Tracey Stock

Deputy Executive Member, Health and Stronger Communities
Central Bedfordshire Council

A full copy of this report and the workshop presentations can be found on the Council's website:

<http://www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/council/councillors/conferences.aspx>

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