



Town & Parish Council Conference

5th October 2011
Post Conference Report



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Introduction

It was a pleasure to meet with so many of you at the Conference on 5th October. This was the fifth Town and Parish Council Conference since Central Bedfordshire was formed, and was the best attended so far.

As the new Leader of the Council, I welcomed the opportunity to share with you some of my aspirations for the future.

Councillor Maurice Jones, who is leading on the budget strategy, set out some of the financial challenges over the next few years and the process we are going through to set the budget for next year. In these challenging economic times we need to work closely with you to find innovative and creative ways of delivering high quality services to our residents.

We have reflected on the views expressed during the round table discussions and in the questions that were asked to the Panel. We take seriously the frustrations that some of you have experienced when dealing with the Council and we are committed to addressing this. Please contact Councillor David Hopkin if you have any specific concerns you want to discuss.

Your feedback also highlights the different relationship that is beginning to emerge between Central Bedfordshire Council and some of the larger town and parish councils. In response to this we are proposing to organise a separate event for the larger councils in the future. We will let you know the date of this meeting as soon as possible. In the meantime, you should have already received an invitation to the next meeting for all town and parish councils on the evening of 25 January 2012, to discuss the budget.

We hope you will be able to attend this important event and look forward to meeting you there.



Councillor James Jamieson
Leader, Central Bedfordshire Council

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read "James Jamieson". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping underline.

The Conference

The objectives of the Conference were to:

- enable open communication between the Council and Town & Parish Councils;
- hear about the Council's budget process;
- discuss the Open Public Services White Paper and its implications for Central Bedfordshire; and
- understand how Town & Parish Councils can support some of the more vulnerable members of their communities through a village care scheme.

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:

- Central Bedfordshire is a wonderful place in which to live, work and to grow up. It has fantastic countryside, charming towns and villages, good schools and great transport links, and is ideally placed to become an economically thriving community.
- The Council's overriding ambitions are to maintain and develop services to residents, build on the area's potential and continue to provide value for money.
- Just as we believe Central Bedfordshire can better make local decisions than Central Government, so towns and parishes can often provide a better local solution than Central Bedfordshire Council.
- Town and Parish Councils have a vital role to play in transforming the delivery of services in Central Bedfordshire, and we need to work much more closely together to deliver better and more effective services at lower cost, to engage more with our residents and to further build on the great strengths of Central Bedfordshire.

The Budget Process

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

The key messages were:

- There will be at least a 28% reduction in the Government grant over 4 years, and with demand for services increasing CBC must continue to reduce spending in 2012/2013.
- CBC has a positive track record of efficiency with a £10m reduction in the first year of existence, £12m savings in 2010/11 and is on track to save £19m this year, with a 0% council tax rise.
- In setting out the 2012/2013 budget CBC will be undertaking a two-phased consultation with local residents and key stakeholders, which will help to shape the Council's budget decisions.
- An additional Conference for Town and Parish Councils has been arranged for 25 January 2012 to discuss the budget.

Open Public Services

The Leader gave a presentation on Open Public Services. The key messages were:

- The Localism Bill will provide new rights for communities to ensure power is transferred to the lowest appropriate level, which could mean individual citizens, neighbourhoods, or local councils.
- Open Public Services puts decentralization at the heart of the Government's modernization agenda and sets out the important role that strong local government has to play in the new landscape of open public services.
- The emerging national policy provides us with an opportunity to develop new, creative and innovative approaches to the delivery of local services, involving a broader range of delivery partners – including Town and Parish Councils.
- Following the Leader's presentation delegates participated in two round table discussions to consider the following questions:

Discussion 1

- How to enhance the role of Town & Parish Councils
- What are the key challenges / obstacles?

Discussion 2

- Share 2 challenges or obstacles from the first discussion and discuss what might be the drivers and solutions that may help to overcome them

