


# Town & Parish Council Conference

5<sup>th</sup> 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 5<sup>th</sup> 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 fluid and stylized, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

## 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

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

- Many Town and Parish Councils can and want to deliver certain services themselves. Where appropriate, some are willing to consider collaboration to achieve economies of scale and minimise increases. Where this is the case, they would welcome assistance to broker discussions with other parishes.
- To devolve services we need to consider innovative funding packages / schemes to manage the transition and build capacity.
- Need to improve communication and engagement with Town and Parish Councils, and build and adopt a responsive and can do attitude that removes obstacles and delivers solutions.
- Need to address local capacity issues to deliver services efficiently and effectively.

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

## Village Care Schemes

Jon Boswell, Deputy Chief Executive of Bedfordshire Rural Communities Charity (BRCC) gave a presentation on Village Care Schemes. Mark Smith, Chair of Ampthill & District Good Neighbours, also spoke about his experiences of running a scheme. The key messages were:

- The network of 22 independent care schemes in towns and villages across Central Bedfordshire, staffed entirely by volunteers, provides low-level support which helps vulnerable people to continue living independently in their own homes
- Care schemes are a good example of local communities doing more for themselves, and require only minimal ongoing revenue commitment, in addition to support from BRCC
- Town & parish councils are often involved in setting up care schemes, whether through individual councillors in their capacity as local residents, or by contributing small amounts of money or officer time

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](http://www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/council-and-democracy/councillors/parish/default.aspx)

## Question Time

There was an opportunity to send questions in advance which could be answered on the night in a "Question Time" session. The questions and responses are set out below.

### Questions responded to during the conference

#### Toddington Parish Council - Cllr Jim Gledhill

***Q: Toddington Parish Council is concerned that there are proposals within the Localism Bill which would abolish Codes of Conduct for all councils.***

***We believe that Codes of Conduct protect councillors, and without them misconduct will be left in the hands of the courts.***

***Whilst we are aware that there is a cross party group in the House of Lords which is seeking to overturn this proposal, we ask how Central Bedfordshire Council will propose to deal with the matter should abolition be part of the Act?***

**A:** The Localism Bill is expected to receive Royal Assent in late November. The provisions relating to standards of conduct were recently debated in the House of Lords and, as a consequence, it seems likely that the Government will propose some further amendments to the Bill before it is enacted.

Central Bedfordshire Council's Standards Committee met recently to consider the implications of the Bill and what advice to offer the Council about the arrangements that should be put in place when the Localism Act comes into force. However, in view of the uncertainty about the final shape of the legislation, the Standards Committee has deferred this.

As drawn, the Localism Bill provided for the abolition of the Local Standards Framework set out in the Local Government Act 2000, whilst retaining a continuing responsibility for local authorities (including parish councils) to promote and maintain high standards of conduct.

During the recent House of Lords debate concerns were raised about the implications of the abolition of the existing framework, including the absence of a nationally recognised code of conduct and the fact that each parish council will be responsible for maintaining standards without any oversight by the District Council's Monitoring Officer and Standards Committee.

Concern was also expressed about the practical implications of imposing criminal sanctions for breaches of the new Register of Interests, which will apply to all councillors.

Central Bedfordshire Council will take a view on what arrangements it needs to put in place to comply with the new Act once the relevant provisions in the Localism Bill have been finalised, and having regard to any advice that is offered by its Standards Committee.

**Sandy Town Council - Delia Shepherd**

*Q: Local schools are at the heart of the community, and play an important role in teaching our future citizens and connecting different groups within the local population.*

*School buildings and physical facilities can also be important community assets, although the development of Trusts is resulting in many of these assets being transferred into independent ownership.*

*How does CBC plan to respond to the challenge of keeping schools actively involved in the community?*

**Harlington Parish Council - Cllr Mary Walsh**

*Q: How much responsibility and accountability would an Academy school have towards the local residents and Parish/Town Councils?*

*How is it best to establish a good working relationship between school and neighbourhood / Parish Council?*

*Who will deal if the relationship breaks down and local councils have an issue with the school?*

*Can Academy schools sell off land forming part of school grounds or playing fields?*

**A:** Schools - whether academies or community schools - will remain at the heart of our communities.

The transfer of land and property to Academies and trusts secures any pre existing legal agreements relating to community and/or leisure use and these schools cannot simply dispose of land and property which is protected, as are school playing fields, without a declaration that they are surplus to the educational requirements of the school and an assessment process that would follow.

Furthermore the evidence we have from the existing academies in Central Bedfordshire is that they are committed to playing a full partnership role with the Council and with community schools and other partners.

We are currently working with the entire community of schools in Central Bedfordshire to renew commitment to the education vision for Central Bedfordshire and to agree approaches and responsibilities schools now have to support each other's improvement and to take collective responsibility for the success of the most vulnerable children and young people in Central Bedfordshire.

An academy has the same responsibilities to its local community as a locally managed community school and will continue to draw its governance largely from the local community and parent body.

If relationships between any school and a parish or town council break down then the school's complaints procedures should be followed and in extremis the ombudsman can be contacted..

However, Central Bedfordshire Council is working to maintain very positive and



active relationships with all schools including academies and can also be approached for advice and support in moving matters forward.

#### Leighton-Linslade Town Council - Cllr David Bowater

*Q: As you are all aware, town and parish councils prepare their budgets and need to submit their precept requirements to CBC in mid-January.*

*In view of the fact that CBC is likely to be making 'cost savings', would it be possible for town and parish councils to be advised by no later than the end of December whether any of these 'savings' would directly and specifically affect services in their parish?*

*A town or parish council may wish to fund all or part of these services, but we obviously need to know in good time to be able to include funding within our budgets.*

**A:** A report on the draft budget recommendations, including proposed savings, will be going to Executive on 6 December. This should provide the means for towns and parishes to see how they might be affected by any of the proposals.

#### Shillington Parish Council – Cllr Sally Stapleton

*Q: When consulting neighbours on planning applications, the consultation letter issued by Central Bedfordshire Council states that 'a paper copy of the planning application has been sent to the Parish/Town Council for their comment which is available for public viewing'.*

*Whilst Parish councils have the right to be consulted on planning applications in their area, they do not have an obligation to make plans available to the community – that is the Planning Authorities responsibility.*

*Many town and parish councils want to make life easier for their residents and will let them come and view hard copy applications; but this is of course much easier to arrange when the parish council has an office and the clerk is not home based.*

*Also, Clerks' hours vary, so a Clerk who only works an average 10 hours a week is not as available as a full time Clerk in a parish office, or a full time Central Bedfordshire Council officer.*

*Why when composing their letter didn't Central Bedfordshire take these facts into account or consult with Town and Parish Councils? Of course it is good practice for local authorities to work in partnership, but that does not mean one partner taking another for granted.*

**A:** The consultation letter identifies that the principal source of viewing planning applications remains either the Council's website or at the Council's Offices. We have substantially reduced the number of paper copies of planning applications

and require all other statutory consultees to view the applications online.

However, we have continued to provide towns and parishes with a paper copy and to assist the local community have made them aware that their local Parish Council also have a paper copy sent to them.

This was designed to assist the members of the local community who may not be able to get access to the website or want to see a paper copy but are unable to travel a long distance to the Council's offices.

The letter does make clear that they should make prior contact with a Town or Parish Council to ask whether they can view a paper copy at the Town or Parish Council and it is hoped that a suitable and convenient time for all parties can be agreed. If the individual parish feels it cannot make its own paper copies of planning applications available for viewing, they can make their parishioners aware of this fact and continue to direct them to view application plans at the Council Offices.

In light of the comments received we will make an amendment to the consultation letter so that it says " We have also sent a paper copy to your Parish/Town Council which may be available for public viewing".

#### **Toddington Parish Council – Cllr Jim Gledhill**

***Q: Does Central Bedfordshire Council take seriously the need to consult Town and Parish Councils over planning matters?***

**A:** Yes, absolutely. We consult Town and Parish Councils on all planning applications in their area. We also involve Town and Parish Councils in the various stages of preparation of the Local Development Framework and Development Briefs. As far as planning applications are concerned, we ask for comments to come back from Town and Parish Councils within 21 days, in order to meet statutory requirements. However, if, occasionally this timescale proves difficult, Town and Parish Councils can always contact the planning case officer to see whether they can be given a little more time to respond. In most circumstances, a limited extension of time can be agreed. Where an application goes to Development Management Committee, Town and Parish Councils also have the opportunity to present their comments direct to members. In terms of responding to the Local Development Framework, most engagement exercises provide for between 4 and 8 weeks for all parties, including Town and Parish Councils, to respond.

#### **Moggerhanger Parish Council – Daphne Payne**

***Q: We receive details of planning applications for our parish, which is very helpful. Why don't we get to hear about applications in the nearby vicinity that also impact upon us?***

**A:** We would always consult with the individual Parish/Town Council within which the development was taking place.

Other than in cases of major applications where there are clear implications for an adjoining parish, we generally do not consult an adjoining Parish/Town Council because of the costs of the additional paperwork involved. However, where a Town/Parish Council believes there will be a potential impact from a development outside their area which they have not been consulted on, they are welcome to contact us and we can point them to where the plans are shown on the website.

The information on all applications received in adjoining Parishes is available on the Council's website and the Parishes are free to review the applications on the website in the surrounding parishes both for information or comment.

We would suggest that all Town and Parish clerks regularly check the website to look at planning applications submitted in adjoining parishes to help identify any applications where they feel, from their own local knowledge, that the application would be of interest to their Council.

#### Harlington Parish Council – Cllr Mary Walsh

***Q: With regard the new planning laws – how can parishes protect themselves from unwanted/inappropriate developments?***

**A:** Existing planning policies, including Green Belt will continue to protect the countryside from inappropriate development.

One of the best ways for parishes to "protect themselves from unwanted or inappropriate development" will therefore continue to be for local communities to engage positively with the Local Development Framework process and make sure that the right policies to protect important areas are included. For Central Bedfordshire this is the new Development Strategy.

There will be opportunities during Development Strategy preparation for Parish and Town Councils to express how their vision and aspirations for their places can be incorporated into a Central Bedfordshire-wide plan for the period to 2031.

In addition, Neighbourhood Plans have been introduced by Government as a way for local communities to have a greater say in what goes on in their area. Those Plans must be produced to take account of the strategic needs and priorities of the wider area and must be in "general conformity" with the strategic policies in the area-wide plan (the Core Strategy for example).

They cannot therefore be "anti-development", but can be used to direct development to the most suitable sites and help to shape the type of development that emerges. Parishes with a clear and realistic vision of what development they do want to see will be better placed to resist that which they do not want to see.

#### Harlington Parish Council – Cllr Laurence Bathurst

***Q: Harlington Parish Council's understanding of "No Cold Calling" when it was first introduced in the village was that no company/individual was allowed to cold call and there was a dedicated number for reporting cold callers.***

***However, this is not what HPC is now being told as it is understood that companies can seek permission from CBC – is this case, because if so, surely the scheme loses all substance?***

**A:** Central Bedfordshire Council has continued the good practice started by the then County Council when No Cold Calling Zones were introduced with the intention of deterring businesses and individuals from cold calling, and supporting victims of cold calling.

The No Cold Calling Zones themselves are not and have never been areas where it is illegal to cold call, the zones are used as a preventative measure, to help residents say no to unwanted callers and where necessary report any potential

illegal activity.

When a resident contacts Trading Standards on the hotline, we can give advice about how to deal with the caller and we can come out to help if the trader is causing a problem. We have successfully intervened when traders have tried to charge too much or fraudulently claimed to have carried out work. In these circumstances we have been able to stop people paying or obtained a refund and taken action against the trader.

The Council has no responsibility or duty to give permission to businesses to cold call and does not do so. Any business that chooses to cold call must provide a notice of cancellation rights to the consumer. These rights apply to nearly all contracts agreed following a cold call and they afford the consumer up to seven days to cancel the contract. Failure to supply this notice is a criminal offence.

#### **Flitwick Town Council – Cllr Ann Kelly**

***Q1: The £90m investment in the Luton Dunstable Busway improves the bus service for the south/west of the Central Beds area.***

***What is Central Bedfordshire Council's commitment both, financial and other, to supporting bus services for the rest of the Central Beds area, particularly as there are many rural villages?***

***Q2: Would CBC consider, as part of all S106 agreements, to include funding for Real Time Passenger Information units at bus stops throughout the area?***

a) The current budget is £1.3m for supporting bus services across Central Bedfordshire.

A survey is currently being undertaken on our subsidised services to ensure that we are spending where there is demand across Central Bedfordshire. Consultations will be held with town & parish councils and other interested parties on any changes to support for bus services.

These are expected in November 2011 and February 2012. However, it should be noted that support for rural buses is deemed important.

b) Central Bedfordshire Council will consider the provision of real time information displays at bus stops throughout the area when funding is secured via the S106 agreement process.

This will be done so in the context of understanding the transport issues and priorities for Flitwick which are being identified through the production of the Local Area Transport Plan for the area.

As such the need for real time information provision will be viewed against all other potential transport interventions which may be required to mitigate against the adverse impact of any new development and that provide the greatest benefit to local residents.

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

**Sheffield Town Council – Cllr Russ Leith**

***Q: Who will be the voice of the disadvantaged and inarticulate?***

**A:** The Council and its partners have developed a comprehensive Community Engagement Strategy, which is designed to ensure that the views of all sections of the community are sought and taken into account when developing policies, plans and strategies.

The Council's stakeholder database includes the details of many local and national voluntary organisations that represent the interests of disadvantaged groups, whom we regularly communicate with on relevant issues.

**Shillington Parish Council – Cllr Sally Stapleton**

***Q: Why can't the already completed parish plans already bearing residential views in full consultation be adapted / updated to form the basis of neighbourhood plans?***

**A:** There is no reason why not as long as they comply with our development strategy.

**Meppershall Parish Council – Cllr Peter Chapman**

***Q: If a parish council objects to a scheme and CBC agrees to the plan could a note be sent to the parish council explaining why the objections were overruled?***

**A:** Planning Officer reports indicate why we refuse or permit an application. Those reports are available to read on the website.

**Sundon Parish Council – Cllr Julie Dearn**

***Q: Why is scaffolding left up for three weeks to do four hours work as it is paid for daily and a waste of money?***

***Also when you live in a small village we do need our lights working and some councillors think this is petty and get fed up with us complaining.***

**A:** The Council pays only for the erection and dismantling of scaffolding. This is funded from the rental income received on council owned property. The contractor bears the cost of how long the scaffolding is up for.

For street lights managed by Central Bedfordshire Council, Parish Councils should register any lights that are not working via the Highways HelpDesk: [Highways@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:Highways@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk) 0300 300 8049

#### Clifton Parish Council – Cllr Barry Livesey

***Q: Green spaces and open countryside are the most important part of Central Bedfordshire. However, a large amount is not green belt land.***

***How is it to be protected in the new scheme of things? All people need access to high quality green space. It must not be trashed by uncontrolled development.***

**A:** Outside of green belt, Central Bedfordshire Council has a range of adopted planning policies which seek to protect the countryside from development, although to meet its housing targets, some greenfield land adjacent to existing settlements has been identified for new housing and employment provision.

In addition, there is also raft of national legislation which protects the environment, together with a number of adopted local planning policies which also seek to protect landscape and biodiversity, as well as increase the amount of "green infrastructure" provision so that people have access to high quality open space.

The Council will seek to maintain protection of the countryside and has raised strong concerns about the new draft National Planning Policy Framework and the "presumption in favour of sustainable development" in its response to the consultation.

#### Clifton Parish Council – Cllr Barry Livesey

***Q: What is the definition of sustainable development?***

**A:** The term first emerged in the Brundtland report and the well known definition often cited is:

"Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs".

We do not however, have a local definition of sustainable development. This is something we will work on if the Draft National planning policy framework fails to provide a precise definition. In our response to the latter we have raised concern about the lack of a precise definition and have requested that provision be made for suitable definitions to be provided at the local level.

#### Aspley Heath Parish Council – Denise Batchelor

***Q: Is there a list of departments & officers contact names/numbers? How should parishes deal with the lack of response from CBC officers?***

**A:** We have prepared a key contacts list of services and help lines for those most frequently used which was sent to Town and Parish Council clerks in February 2011. It is currently being updated and will be forwarded to clerks again shortly.

**Q: Who pays for referendums?**

**A:** In the context of the Localism Bill and the reference to local referendums, the principal authority will be required to pay. Principal local authorities must hold a local referendum if certain conditions are met, such as:

- a valid petition from local people (at least 5% of electors);
- a request from one or more members; or
- if the council passes a resolution.

The principal authority must provide a facility for electronic petition and publish criteria for a valid electronic petition. Upon receipt of a petition or request the principal authority has a duty to determine whether to hold a referendum.

The principal authority is responsible for arranging the referendum and there are very detailed procedures and criteria to be met. Referendums can also be held on a ward basis. The result of a referendum is not binding on the authority but it will be required to take the outcomes into account in decision making.

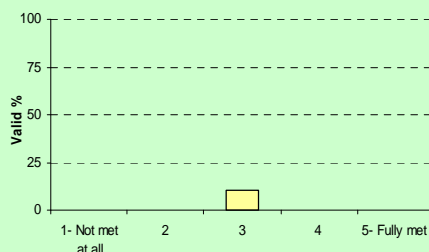
## Feedback on the conference

A conference feedback form was provided in the delegate packs, and below are the results from the 39 completed forms received.

### Meeting the conference objectives.

**Enable open communication between the Council and Town and Parish Councils\***

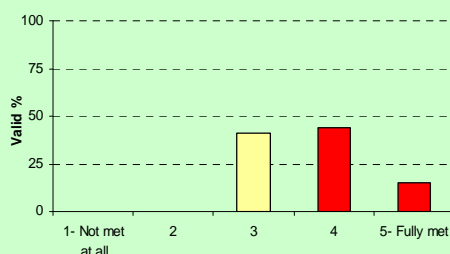
	Count	%
1 – Not met at all	0	0
2	0	0
3	4	10
4	0	0
5 – Fully met	0	0
Total	39	10
Missing	35	90
Total	39	100
Mean score	0.31	



\* A formatting error on the feedback form affected the number of responses received to this question

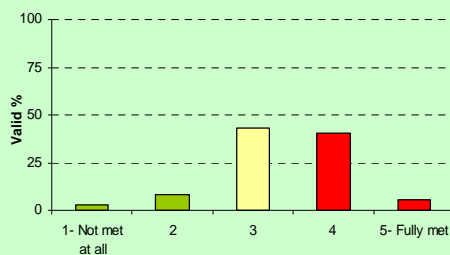
### Hear about the Council's budget process

	Count	%
1 – Not met at all	0	0
2	0	0
3	16	41
4	17	44
5 – Fully met	6	15
Total	39	100
Missing	0	0
Total	39	100
Mean score	3.74	



### Discuss the Open Public Services White Paper and its implications for Central Bedfordshire

	Count	%
1 – Not met at all	1	3
2	3	8
3	16	43
4	15	41
5 – Fully met	2	5
Total	37	95
Missing	2	5
Total	39	100
Mean score	3.38	

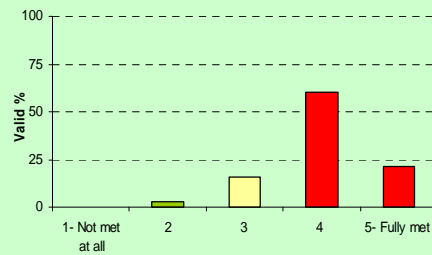




## Meeting the conference objectives cont'd....

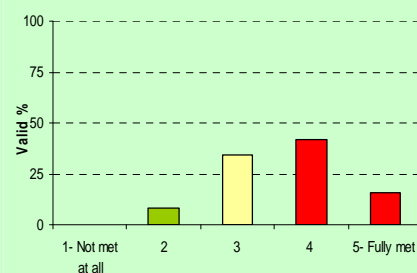
Understand how Town & Parish Councils can support some of the more vulnerable members of their communities through a village care scheme

	Count	%
1 – Not met at all	0	0
2	1	3
3	6	16
4	23	60
5 – Fully met	8	21
Total	38	97
Missing	1	3
Total	39	100
Mean score	4	



## Question Time

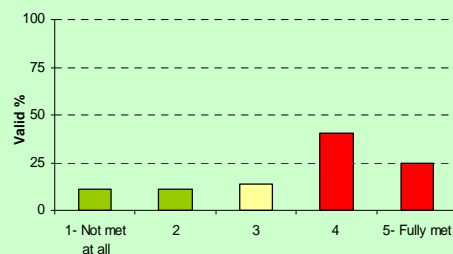
	Count	%
1– Not useful at all	0	0
2	3	8
3	13	34
4	16	42
5 – Very useful	6	16
Total	38	97
Missing	1	3
Total	39	100
Mean score	3.66	



## Organisation of the conference

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

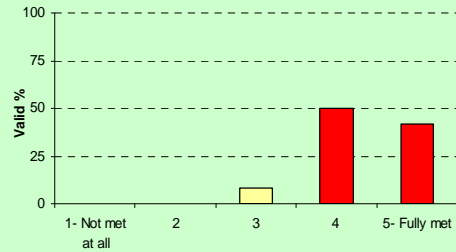
	Count	%
1 – Not met at all	4	11
2	4	11
3	5	14
4	15	40
5 – Fully met	9	24
Total	37	95
Missing	2	5
Total	39	100
Mean score	3.57	



## Organisation of the conference cont'd ...

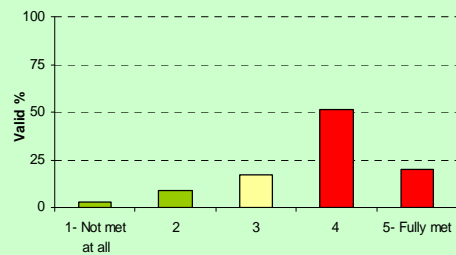
### Venue

	Count	%
1 – Not met at all	0	0
2	0	0
3	3	8
4	19	50
5 – Fully met	16	42
Total	38	97
Missing	1	3
Total	39	100
Mean score	4.34	



### Catering

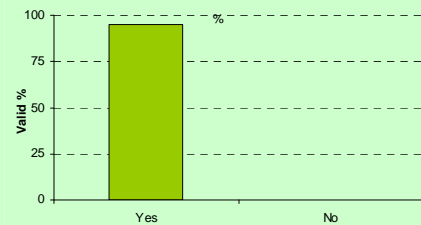
	Count	%
1 – Not met at all	1	3
2	3	9
3	6	17
4	18	51
5 – Fully met	7	20
Total	35	90
Missing	4	10
Total	39	100
Mean score	3.77	



## Views of the event overall

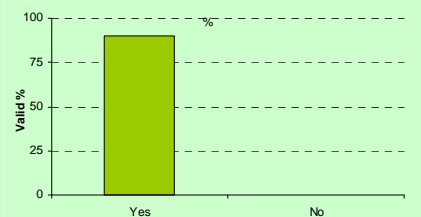
### Did you find this conference useful?

	Count	%
Yes	37	95
No	0	0
Total	37	95
Missing	2	5
Total	39	100



### Would you recommend attendance to future conferences?

	Count	%
Yes	35	90
No	0	0
Total	35	90
Missing	4	10
Total	39	100



### Please make any other comments about the conference

Separate conferences for town & rural parishes  
Facilitator allowed discussion to wander off the subject  
A start time of 6.30-7pm is very difficult if one works full-time and then has to travel miles to get here  
Should have some open question time involving the whole group. Set questions are too easy for the panel. Lets get some real interaction going  
Became much too hot  
The question section was tedious and much too parochial  
Need to be sat at named places with regions together  
My one concern was that the unitary councillors may have outnumbered the town and parish councillors  
On the spot question time  
Glad there will be a split between town and parish councils  
Time constraints precluded going into the topics in much depth and cut short discussions. Where a presentation includes factual information, dates, figures it would be good to have something in writing to take away  
Answers to questions were a bit fudged  
Village care schemes presentation interesting but overly long. Question Time was a useful opportunity but the questions were not all answered either in general or specific detail. If you are offering the opportunity please give us a decent answer, even if we won't like it!  
It was good to hear a range of 'general' questions during question time rather than the 'parish specific' questions we have heard before  
Should not conferences be more specific in their organisation to focus separately on town or parish councils?  
I didn't receive any information in advance – clerk may have been out of circulation  
Would prefer meeting to finish at 9pm  
Please remember there is a huge difference between town councils and parish councils. Please remember the villages. I saw little need for the BRCC presentation and its relevance

### Conclusion

The general consensus is that the Conference met its objectives and you found the event useful.

We have taken into consideration the overwhelming support for separate town and parish council conferences and, following the joint Budget meeting in January, there will be a separate event for larger councils. The date for this will be circulated as soon as possible.

### What Next?

We look forward to meeting you all again on 25<sup>th</sup> January 2012 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

### **What could you do better?**

- Clearing snow/gritting
- Local procurement
- Grass cutting
- Rights of way
- Rationalise provision
- Galvanising the local community
  - local knowledge
  - local contacts
  - flexibility

### **How could you do it?**

- Using centralised buying
- Menu purchasing
- Sinking fund (paid over a period of time)
- Clustering parishes – single issue – clusters of interests – sharing equipment/joint procurement/shared back office
- Snow guide
- Brokerage
- Sharing good practise & expertise
- Cultural change – behaviours and beliefs

Table 2

### **Which services?**

- Grass
- P3 - Footpaths, styles – 12 (Billington)

### **Challenges and Solutions**

- Lack of volunteers – ‘younger people busy’
- Planning bill, localism bill, core strategy – can these join up more?
- Can payment for opted out services be index-linked?
- Combined approach – e.g. health visitors (primary nursing carers)
- Listen to T&P council views T&P councils want more influence with the planning system but not responsibilities.
- Synchronising consultations with T&P council meeting
- Broadband – end of line
  - Can councils work on broadband issues – local knowledge
- Financial guarantees
- Community apathy
  - Magazine –help Parishes meet the production costs
  - Facebook campaigns – skate park
- Hold subject specific meetings
  - Joint problem solving meetings
- CBC responsiveness – has improved in some areas recently
- Local knowledge/opinion – join up the thinking

Table 3

**Enhancing the role**

- Need to be able to raise more money. Could T&P councils take a bigger share?
- If services are to be transferred, they must be able to deliver at a lower cost
- Could some communities 'join together' to deliver a service?

**Challenges**

- Some services need an 'economy of scale' to deliver efficiently
- Can dilute the local expertise available
- SLAs to devolve funding need to cover a longer period (gives certainty)

Table 4

**Enhancing the role**

- Parish councils have to have the power to enhance role
- Some issues enthuse parish councils
  - Speed limit
  - Success (HC)
- Requires interest & keenness – what is on offer?
- Capacity
- Something real – belief/process/messaging
- Can small parish councils deliver – e.g as a consortium
  - Neighbourhood plan (means by which)
- Rural/urban different

**Key challenges**

- Interest, key issues, something real/relevant & important
- Capacity & cash
- Time is precious and limited
- Overcoming cynicism
- Getting through bureaucracy
  - Onerous
- Establishing priorities (library)
- Integrity of deliverers

**Drivers & solutions and overcoming obstacles**

- Motivation
- Devolved, specific budgets to deliver solutions – road traffic, catering, footpaths, maintenance
- Take care of basics
- Communities prepared to contribute money – incentive/pump priming
- Simple menu – basics
- Real conversations/solutions – affordable housing
- Creating space in conservation areas to be more self sustaining

Table 5

**Enhancing the role**

- Comms

- Inclusive briefings – true consultation
- Community liaison forum with timetable of meetings
- Listening and understanding local needs
- CBC has experience/skills in this area– can advise town and parish councils
- Town & parish councils to have spokespeople into CBC & vice versa
- If local providers can do it better/more cheaply than CBC then it should lead to council tax savings

### **Challenges to overcome**

- Policies set by Council etc don't necessarily support town or parish council work
- Taking over service responsibility – 95/98% of income from precept but cap on precept (14%?) and Town & parish councils don't want to be seen as increasing council tax
  - Something different to precept perhaps?
- Being seen to provide services to the community – but need finance to support
- Relationship with ward councillors is key
- Need Delegated budgets
  - Increased admin issues – related to town & parish service provision
  - Complexity of responsibilities CBC/T&PCs
  - Small niche services e.g. community grass cutting

Table 6

### **Enhancing the role**

- Localised management of contracts to improve quality of services (street sweeping)
- Pilot schemes to prove model
- Tourist information services
- Involved in decision making over service/contract provision

### **Challenges**

- CBC reluctant to let go of services
- Contract specification – funding/resources/capacity
- Manage 'markets' contract
- Car park in Town Centre
- Customer Service points

Table 7

### **How to enhance role of town & parish councils?**

- Taking account of feedback from town & parish councils on planning issues – greater accountability for town & parish councils in planning process
- CBC needs training/awareness as to how to engage and work with town & parish councils
- Town and parish councils would like more responsibility

## **Key challenges to overcome**

- Cultural change across all tiers of governance – need to work in partnership
- Defining the role of the ward councillor in relation to town & parish councils
- Time/legal/resource challenges – limits to capacity
- Transfer of funds from CBC to allow town & parish councils to carry out more duties

## **Drivers/solutions**

- Have a forum for town & parish councils where town and parish issues form the agenda and CBC officers are available to liaise with rather than CBC setting the agenda – more frequent and coming together in smaller groups
- Training for CBC in how to engage with town and parish councils

## Table 8

### **Enhancing the role**

- Affordable housing (Old Warden) – allocation – local need
- Economies of scale difficult to achieve at very local level – small band of active residents
- Road improvements/traffic calming/speeding
- Wind turbines not wanted
- Want to be taken notice of
- Planning – new homes – school places
- Time and effort to get things done

### **Obstacles to overcome and solutions**

- Better communication – find solutions that get directly to root cause
- Involvement in discussion e.g. S106s
- Involvement in solutions & their implementation
- Slick and quick

## Table 9

### **Enhancing the role**

- Neighbourhood plans – influence policy
- Devolved services – traffic calming

### **Obstacles**

- Cost – who will pay? Between £20k - £200k
- Capacity – resource in small communities

### **Solutions**

- More collaboration across parishes to work on plans (enabled by ward councillors and clerks)
- Proactive community engagement
- Referenda – bringing people with you

Table 10

**Enhancing the role**

- Budget must follow services
- Choice of provider – competitive quotes
- CBC to facilitate/co-ordinate on behalf of several parishes
- Identifying suitable services for transfer

**Challenges**

- Money
  - Identify true cost
  - Sharing between town/parishes
- Capacity to take on – knowledge – lack of councillors
- Public perception of changes in precepts – explain/manage % changes in £s
- Value for money/economies of scale
- Parishes wanting different services

Table 11

**Enhancing the role**

- Communications - Listen – show us – feedback on decisions made
- Simpler website/useful information for town and parish councils
- Councillors attending/representing village meetings – can't have a council meeting?
- Presumption to build → National → Cllrs → Town & Parish councils
- Why can't the neighbourhood plan be a natural evolution of the parish plan

**Challenges or obstacles**

- Residents survey – 10 copies sent only to parish councils
- Ask us how to communicate with our community – portal/emails – access to an intranet – clerks – getting access/internet to the community
- Problems raised – passive communication
- Parish meetings/letters/information ongoing
- Getting feedback – lack of interest & feedback & knowledge
- Councils website – too complicated, can't find information: fly tipping/refuse
- Easy access
- Another plan!
- Neighbourhood plans - £7000 to get updated

Table 12

**Enhancing the role**

- Information on services available
- What do town and parish councils feel able to take on



- Localising expenditure
- Insurance – support/reducing bureaucracy. CB providing insurance cover – corporate approach/ Training - safeguards
- Authority & money
- Training & global insurance – specific to the task
- Make decisions about wide ranging subjects
- Village Care schemes
- Could town and parish councils take control of lighting etc, establish list of menu/tasks?
- Using town and parish councils as eyes and ears – consent on key issues
- Thinking strategically – one size cannot fit all
- Ownership of projects
- Involving young people directly