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Council
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**TO EACH MEMBER OF THE
CUSTOMER AND CENTRAL SERVICES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

21 February 2012

Dear Councillor

**CUSTOMER AND CENTRAL SERVICES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE -
Monday 27 February 2012**

Further to the Agenda and papers for the above meeting, previously circulated, please find attached the following report, which was listed to follow:-

11. Let's Talk Together Review

To consider the findings and recommendations of the Task Force established to review the Let's Talk Together meetings.

(Please note this report is to follow)

Should you have any queries regarding the above please contact Bernard Carter on Tel: 0300 300 4175

Yours sincerely

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Meeting: Customer and Central Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Date: 27 February 2012

Report of Cllr David Hopkin Deputy Executive Member for Corporate Resources (Localism)

Subject: Review of the Let's Talk Together (LTT) meetings

Summary: This report summarises the Member task force review of the Let's Talk Together meetings, which are run by the Central Bedfordshire Together Partnership. The report looks at actual delivery, attendance levels and outcomes to date. It analyses the role of Let's Talk Together meetings in the context of local and national policy as well as feedback from partners. The report concludes with a number of options as well as a specific recommendation for future delivery frequency and format for consideration by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Central Bedfordshire Together.

Advising Officer: Peter Fraser, Head of Partnerships and Community Engagement

Contact Officer: Sarah Hughes, Community Engagement Manager

Public/Exempt: Public

Wards Affected: All

Function of: Council and partner organisations through the Central Bedfordshire Together Partnership

CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS

Council Priorities:

1. The Let's Talk Together (LTT) meetings have implications for all of the Council's priorities, providing a valuable forum to seek views and receive feedback on priorities and services.

Financial:

2. There was a £2,000 operational budget in 2011/12 of which £1,053 has been spent. Funding is provided by the Central Bedfordshire Together Partnership. Costs are mainly associated with venue hire and refreshments. Staffing costs are met within existing resources.

Legal:

3. There are no specific legal implications. However, Let's Talk Together will help the Council to meet emerging responsibilities relating to the Localism Act.

Risk Management:

4. There are no specific issues. However, a risk assessment was undertaken as part of the LTT Development Plan using Council procedures.

Staffing (including Trades Unions):

5. Staff time to carry out the planning and operation of the meetings is equivalent to approx. 0.15 fte which is paid for by the Central Bedfordshire Together Partnership. Officer time to attend the meetings has been met within existing resources and has not incurred overtime.

Equalities/Human Rights:

7. Public Authorities must ensure that decisions are made in a way which minimises unfairness and without a disproportionately negative impact on people from different ethnic groups, disabled people, women and men.
8. The Let's Talk Together meetings are a key component of the Community Engagement Strategy, which ensures the Council adopts a variety of inclusive and appropriate engagement practises to ensure all groups are heard and treated with dignity and respect.

Community Safety:

9. Let's Talk Together meetings build on the previous Community Safety Forums and provide a partnership input to address a wider set of issues. They are an important opportunity for the police and residents to discuss community safety and policing priorities with local communities.

Sustainability:

10. Not applicable.

Procurement:

11. Not applicable.

RECOMMENDATION(S):

The Committee is asked to:

1. **Review the feedback from the Task Force and consider the options set out in paragraphs 32 - 38.**

Role of the Task Force review

12. The Task Force was set up to review the role and delivery of the Let's Talk Together meetings. Over two meetings the Task Force looked at attendance figures, location and venues, the geography of the seven LTT / Local Policing Areas as well as the resources used to set up and deliver the meetings.

13. The Task Force looked at the role of LTT meetings in the context of new and emerging legislation such as Localism, the Open Public Services White paper and the local Community Engagement Strategy; in particular the emphasis on enabling communities to do more for themselves. The Task Force also reviewed feedback from the survey of stakeholders and considered options for the future.
14. Let's Talk Together meetings were created by the Central Bedfordshire Together Partnership as a new approach to community engagement. LTT is based on wider partnership working and making better use of available resources and was developed and agreed by Central Bedfordshire Together in September 2010. The agreed model supported Bedfordshire Police in reducing its 33 quarterly meetings to seven in the revised Safer Neighbourhood Areas, whilst providing new opportunities for the Council and other partners, e.g Fire & Rescue Service and the NHS, to engage directly with the community on a range of issues.
15. The Let's Talk Together model was developed in partnership drawing on good practice from elsewhere (Newcastle); together with the experience of running the Community Safety Forums and the desire to achieve a joined up approach to engagement (including consultation) with communities.
16. Each meeting is chaired by an Executive Member and is in two parts. The first part is a 'drop in' and lasts for approximately one hour and is where residents can visit market stalls hosted by the services / partner organisations mentioned above. The second part of the meeting is more formal and specifically designed to gather feedback on local policing priorities. After the pilot series of meetings this was extended to provide an opportunity for residents to raise and discuss local issues of concern, identify future action and for the Council and its partners to update residents on important matters such as the recent Budget Strategy consultation.

Key Findings

17. During 2011, 21 LTT meetings have been organised; taking place three times each in each of the Police's Safer Neighbourhood Areas.
18. The Task Force recognised that LTT meetings are a unique opportunity for communities to engage face to face with their local Councillors (Parish and Ward) as well as a host of public services provided by the Council, Police, Fire, NHS, Town and Parish Councils and voluntary sector organisations.
19. The Task Force recognised the partnership nature of the Let's Talk Together meetings (they are not Council meetings) and the value of face to face communication, but were concerned about the low attendance by local residents. Appendix 1 sets out how many people attended each meeting whilst Appendix 2 details the delivery of the meetings
20. It was agreed that Let's Talk Together meetings provide a valuable platform for local communities to influence how services are delivered and raise and discuss local issues of concern; stimulating and enthusing community action to do more for themselves e.g. in response to a particular issue such as speeding, inconsiderate parking or anti social behaviour.

Stakeholder feedback

21. As part of the review the Task force considered feedback from a survey of LTT

stakeholders, partner organisations, Town and Parish Councils, Ward Councillors and attendees. From the feedback it was able to draw conclusions and shape some options for discussion. The table in Appendix 3 summarises the feedback received from stakeholders.

22. **Attendees (public)**

The feedback from attendees is varied. Some clearly like the format and found the meetings to be valuable opportunities for face to face discussion. Some felt that there was too much talking from 'officials' and expressed preference for a specific topic based discussion. Concern was frequently expressed at the lack of residents in attendance, supported by a comment that 'public participation is important'. The majority of residents said that they found out about the meetings from local newspapers and parish newsletters. The majority said they would attend future meetings.

23. **Partners and Town and Parish Councils**

Overall, partners were positive about the LTT events. There was a feeling that there were several things that could be changed or amended to make them better, such as introducing different times and going to where the people are rather than expecting them to come to us, but generally partners liked the LTT concept.

24. **Councillors**

Councillors felt the meetings were a good opportunity to listen to the views of residents, understand local issues better and have an exchange of information. Their main concern was the need to get more members of the public to attend.

25. **Venue / Location / LTT Geography**

Where the meeting is being held is important and should determine the nature of the meeting, topics discussed and the range of market stalls.

26. Consideration should be given to introducing smaller road show events at popular venues such as Libraries / Children's Centres / Supermarkets etc. or existing community events such as fetes.

27. All were concerned at the LTT geography which is based on the Local Policing Teams and felt that the map should be redrawn.

28. **Format**

This should remain broadly the same but with more time for two way discussion.

29. **Marketing**

The Town and Parish Council newsletters and press releases were suggested as key communication tools to publicise and promote the meetings.

30. **Attendance**

Lack of attendance by residents is the main issue for all stakeholders. This could be improved with earlier and proactive marketing in the locality where the meeting is to be held, introduction of smaller roadshow type events and an agenda determined by local people via the Parish or Town Council.

31. **Branding and partnership**

The feedback shows there is a misconception that LTT meetings are Council meetings. This is in part because of the lead role of the Ward Councillor as the Chairman of each meeting. Let's Talk Together is a partnership brand for community engagement and was developed to support the Community Engagement Strategy principle of having a co-ordinated approach to community engagement. This needs to be reinforced with partners and the Council. More effort is needed to encourage partner input at each meeting

Future Delivery Options

32. The task force considered a number of options for future delivery recognising that face to face communication is important.

33. **Frequency**

It is recommended that the frequency of the formal round of meetings should be reduced to one per year and timed to coincide with major events/issues such as Budget Strategy and Business Planning cycles

34. There was support for a *mini / light version of Let's Talk Together*, which would concentrate on the market stall component, be strongly linked to local issues and focus on a few key partner services e.g. Police, align with Pride In Community Safety days and other local events such as village fetes

35. There was also support for a *rapid response style of LTT meeting* to respond to a particular local community issue and to support communities and colleagues to find solutions to local problems

36. **Format**

It is recommended that the current format for the formal LTT meetings should be kept, but ensure more time is allocated for two way discussion by reducing the market stall time. More should be done to enable residents to be involved in deciding what they would like to discuss at each meeting. The 'light' version would need to adopt a roadshow format.

37. **Branding and Partnership**

The LTT brand is well known by partners and the community but partners should be encouraged to input more to the organisation of meetings and ensure they use them more proactively as a communication and engagement tool.

Outcomes from the task force

38. The task force stated a preference for LTT meetings to "piggyback" existing community events, such as the Amptill Festival, Woburn Oyster Festival, Linslade Canal Festival, Aragon Fun Day, Farmers markets, etc, and supported a "rapid response" team to deliver ad hoc meetings when important and topical local issues arise.

Appendices

Appendix 1 - LTT Attendance

Appendix 2 - LTT Delivery

Appendix 3 - LTT Stakeholder feedback

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Appendix 1

Attendance record at all LTT meetings

Date of meeting	Total (recorded) number of people attending each meeting	How many of these were also specifically identified as Parish Cllrs / Members / Parish Clerks etc?
Cranfield / Marston / Woburn		
17.01.11	20	6
06.06.11	24	8
04.10.11	19	9
Sandy / Biggleswade		
24.01.11	36	8
07.06.11	19	9
20.10.11	12	4
Shefford / Stotfold / Arlesey		
01.02.11	23	9
09.06.11	15	9
25.10.11	10	
Leighton Buzzard / Linslade		
15.02.11	26	3
05.07.11	6	1
01.11.11	9	
Dunstable / Houghton Regis		
28.02.11	49	9
23.06.11	58	20
29.11.11	18	15
Amphill / Flitwick		
08.03.11	21	9
16.06.11	18	0
15.11.11	17	5
Leighton Rural		
22.01.11	67	4
30.06.11	23	0
06.12.11	25	6
TOTAL	544	

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**Appendix 2
Summary table of actual delivery**

Item	Delivery
1. Venues	Schools and Village Halls were used as low cost and offering appropriate facilities in locations to ensure all points of the Local Policing area could be reached
2. Times	Following the pilot series when a number of different times were trialled, feedback indicated 7-9pm was preferred as most accessible
3. Frequency	Initially 3 rounds of meetings per year were planned (June, October, January – February) this was reduced to two rounds per year following the May election.
4. Format / Structure	In line with the principles of the CES, each meeting was chaired by an Executive Member, briefed prior to the LTT meeting, Part 1 of LTT involved drop in to visit market stalls whilst Part 2 focused on police priority setting, an update from the Council and a presentation on a topical issue / opportunity e.g The Big Library Debate and Car Parking
5. Market Stalls / Staff resource	Partner organisations staffed market stalls and included, NHS, Police, Fire Service, Council for Voluntary Services, Aldwyck Housing Association and Town and Parish Councils. On average 6-7 Council staff represented Waste, Planning, Highways, Children and Young People, Adult Social Care and Housing and Economic Growth in response to local issues The most popular stalls were Roads and Transport, Planning and Housing, and Community Safety
6. Town and Parish Councils	The role of Town and Parish Councils proved invaluable throughout the series both as a communication channel and source of information about local issues . Attendance and support from Town and Parishes was excellent with some (mainly the larger councils) using the market stall with a display.
7. Brand, Marketing and Communications	The Let's Talk Together brand was developed to embrace partnership with communities and the desire to engage and discuss local matters. The brand is recognised and well known for this purpose A marketing plan is attached in Appendix C and was prepared to direct publicity for the meetings and using all channels including those of our partners. Events were marketed via local newspapers, the CBT Partnership e-zine and website, Let's Talk Central; posters and flyers, News Central, Town and Parish Councils newsletters and notice boards, Police Ringmaster messaging system, other stakeholder groups such as school governors and carers.
8. Welcome (Meet and Greet)	Attendees were welcomed by a CBC officer or partner organisation representative, the meeting format was explained and advice given to help people identify the appropriate service area. Attendees were asked to complete a form to capture contact details and how they heard about the meeting. This information has been entered onto a data base and is used to circulate other relevant information such as the quarterly CBT e-zine

Item	Issues	Recommendation
9. Issues and Follow Up	<p>During the three rounds of meetings 334 issues were logged and have been followed up or were dealt with at the meeting ..</p> <p>The most popular / common issues related to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Highways and Transport ● Budget reductions (e.g. school crossing patrols / H. Regis Leisure Centre ● Changes to Bus routes ● Policing matters. 	<p>A summary of each meeting was written up within a week of the meeting having taken place, approved by the Chairman and posted on the Central Bedfordshire Together website.</p>

<p>9. Issues and Follow Up</p>	<p>During the three rounds of meetings 334 issues were logged and have been followed up or were dealt with at the meeting .. The most popular / common issues related to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Highways and Transport ● Budget reductions (e.g. school crossing patrols / H. Regis Leisure Centre ● Changes to Bus routes ● Policing matters. <p>A summary of each meeting was written up within a week of the meeting having taken place, approved by the Chairman and posted on the Central Bedfordshire Together website.</p>
<p>10. Dialogue with Communities</p>	<p>The meetings took place on neutral ground and provided an opportunity for general dialogue and engagement with communities, parish and town councils, Ward Councillors and officers. They provided a valuable opportunity to consult on specific matters such as the Big Library Debate and the future approach to car parking They were also an opportunity for partners to inform local residents about matters such as the Councils Budget, changes to the structure of Local Policing teams</p>
<p>11. Geography of 7 Safer neighbourhood Areas</p>	<p>Let's Talk Together meetings are partnership not Council meetings although the Council does play a pivotal role in terms of the Chairman and organisation of each meeting. A key partnership input is the areas where the meetings took place, these are the areas covered by Local Policing Teams (Appendix B) and therefore reflected the key requirement to set local policing priorities at these meetings.</p> <p>A couple of areas however proved difficult from a marketing perspective namely Leighton Buzzard and Linslade and Leighton Rural and might have affected attendance levels.</p> <p>A review as to what areas are covered by each meeting should be clarified for future meetings.</p>
<p>12. Equipment</p>	<p>The 'pop up' stands were purchased using external Targeted Support regional funding. They have a long shelf life and have been used at other events by partners.</p>

Appendix 3 LTT Public feedback

Issue	Key Message	Conclusion	Comments
Location / Geography of Local policing / LTT areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Issues raised are only relevant to the town the meeting is held in. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Location of the meeting greatly influenced who / how many attend, people are reluctant to travel out of their immediate vicinity, continue the policy of moving meetings around to ensure fair access to residents. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 'It should go back to separate meetings in each town. Issues raised are only relevant to the town they meeting is held in.'
The way we communicate / marketing and who attends	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Newspapers, Town and Parish Council newsletters were how the majority of people found out about the meeting. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Press releases and articles in Parish newsletters should be targeted for marketing the meetings. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 'A lot of residents do not have internet access and social networking skills and you cannot beat face to face interaction.'
Why the public attended	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Opportunity for people to express their views It was local, keeps residents informed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Opportunity for 'active citizens' to keep in touch 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 'A realistic opportunity to...' 'Public participation is important.'
Partnership working, format and content	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Preference for the old Community Safety Group meetings. Some liked the variety of topics. Informality, good way to find out information, helpful and informative staff, good range of information available 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Overall people liked the format and variety of service representatives to talk to. Need to create more time for two way discussion. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 'Good attendance from villages and lots of relevant people to talk to.' 'The chance to put faces to names and to chat to people to influence my community.' 'More listening and less presentation / talk from the front.'

LTT Councillor feedback

Issue	Key message	Conclusions	Comments
Location / venues / geography of local policing / LTT areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rural vs urban venues Some areas are too wide Hold meeting in the heart of an area, or at local events Mobile events 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Need to rethink current format of using very low cost local amenities Need to rethink areas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 'Venue to be in the heart of the community they serve...' '...frequency does not need to be as often'
The way we communicate / marketing and who attends	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mistaken belief that meetings are CBC led when they are in fact CBT led Must get more residents and members of the public to attend Consider more publicity beforehand Better clarification on what LTT is about and what is going to 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 58% of councillors who responded were satisfied with the marketing and promotion tools, while 17% were very satisfied. Increase publicity beforehand, and better clarify what the event is all about Greater partner involvement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 'More publicity beforehand.' 'Still getting low / poor turnout, maybe due to marketing / promotion but more likely just apathy.'

LTT Partner feedback

Issue	Key message	Conclusions	Comments
Location / venues / geography of local policing / LTT areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Go to where the people are, rather than expect them to come to us Rural vs Urban Change areas Specific meetings for specific areas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Need to rethink current format of using very low cost local amenities Need to rethink areas Mobile event? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 'We should go to where people are already meeting and tag onto that rather than expecting a representative cross-section of CB residents to come out to us at 7pm in the evening.'
The way we communicate / marketing and who attends	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mistaken belief that meetings are CBC led when they are in fact CBT led Must get more residents and members of the public need to attend 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Greater partner involvement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 'I enjoyed meeting other service providers as we do not always meet them in our everyday work and was pleased to answer queries from members of the public that attended.'
Why Partners attended	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Meet, listen to and engage with residents Exchange of information Understand local issues better Networking 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Overall partners found engagement with those members of the public who did attend very useful and worthwhile 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 'To meet the public and answer their questions or direct them to someone who could even if this means contacting them after the meeting.'
Partnership working, format and content	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> More guidance about what to expect prior to meeting Don't like other partners walking out while the meeting was still continuing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consideration to be given to new format 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 'It is not appropriate that we allow members of the public to believe that the priorities raised at LTT meetings (usually parking problems and speeding) are going to be given a higher level of priority than the reduction and detection of SAC.' (Serious Acquisitive Crime). 'To see them skulking off whilst the meeting was still in progress showed just how much they cared.'
Frequency and timings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Try different times 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consideration to be given to new format 	