

CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE COUNCIL

At a meeting of the **CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE COUNCIL** held in the Priory House, Monks Walk, Shefford on Thursday, 21 July 2011.

PRESENT

Cllr P Hollick (Chairman)
Cllr Mrs R B Gammons (Vice-Chairman)

Cllrs	P N Aldis	Cllrs	Mrs D B Gurney	Cllrs	N J Sheppard
	R D Berry		Mrs C Hegley		I Shingler
	L Birt		D J Hopkin		M A Smith
	M C Blair		J G Jamieson		Miss A Sparrow
	D Bowater		D Jones		B J Spurr
	A D Brown		M R Jones		A M Turner
	Mrs C F Chapman MBE		I A MacKilligan		Mrs P E Turner MBE
	Mrs S Clark		K C Matthews		M A G Versallion
	J A E Clarke		Ms C Maudlin		P F Vickers
	N B Costin		D McVicar		N Warren
	I Dalgarno		J Murray		B Wells
	A L Dodwell		Mrs M Mustoe		R D Wenham
	Mrs R J Drinkwater		T Nicols		P Williams
	P A Duckett		R B Pepworth		J N Young
	Mrs S A Goodchild		B Saunders		A Zerny
	Mrs D B Green		J A G Saunders		

Apologies for Absence

Cllrs	Mrs A Barker	Cllrs	C C Gomm	Cllrs	Mrs J G Lawrence
	A R Bastable		K Janes		A Shadbolt
	Dr R Egan		D J Lawrence		R C Stay

In Attendance: –

Officers:	Mr J Atkinson	–	Head of Legal and Democratic Services
	Miss H Bell	–	Committee Services Officer
	Mr R Carr	–	Chief Executive
	Ms D Clarke	–	Interim Assistant Chief Executive (People & Organisation)
	Mr A Fleming	–	Acting Director of Sustainable Communities
	Mrs E Grant	–	Deputy Chief Executive/Director of Children's Services
	Mrs J Ogley	–	Director of Social Care, Health and Housing
	Ms M Peaston	–	Committee Services Manager
	Mr C Warboys	–	Chief Finance Officer

C/11/16 **Prayers**

Prayers were taken by Reverend Hathaway.

C/11/17 **Minutes**

RESOLVED

that the minutes of the meeting held on 19 May 2011 be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

C/11/18 **Members' Interests**

(a) **Personal Interests:**

There were no declarations made.

(b) **Personal and Prejudicial interests :**

There were no declarations made.

C/11/19 **Chairman's Announcements and Communications**

The Chairman reported the recent death of Gordon Colling, former Leader of the Labour Group on Bedfordshire County Council and Deputy Mayor of Kempston Town Council. The Council stood in silent tribute to his memory.

The Chairman asked Councillors to contact their respective Town and Parish Councillors to engage them in helping to fill School Governor vacancies.

The Chairman reported that the quality of construction and design in Central Bedfordshire had been celebrated in regional local authority Building Control awards with local projects achieving success in four categories. The Council's Building Control team had supported the projects at every stage from design to construction.

The Chairman also reported that:-

- together with Peter Smith, Chairman of the Greensand Trust, he had formally opened Rushmere Park, Leighton Buzzard
- Council appointments had now been made to participating local organisations
- he was pleased to commend the newly relaunched music service.

C/11/20 **Leader of the Council's Announcements and Communications**

The Leader had no announcements nor any matters of communication.

C/11/21 **Questions, Statements and Deputations**

Questions and statement were put by a member of the public under the Public Participation provisions set out at Annex 1 of Part A4 of the Constitution.

- (a) Mr Clarke asked whether the Independent Remuneration Panel had met to discuss the creation of a Special Responsibility Allowance for Executive Members without portfolios and what the views of the Panel were on the recent 2% reduction in Councillor allowances.

The Deputy Leader and Executive Member for Corporate Resources advised that an Independent Remuneration Panel meeting was scheduled to take place shortly.

- (b) Mr Clarke asked what contingency plans the Council had in place for dealing with illegal traveller encampments and referred to current events in Stotfold.

The Executive Member for Sustainable Communities - Strategic Planning & Economic Development responded that he was aware of recent problems in Stotfold and advised that a protocol was currently being developed. A written answer would be provided to Mr Clarke.

- (c) Mr Clarke requested an explanation of payments made to two organisations, Deloittes and Mitie Plc, in which the Executive Member for External Affairs had registered an interest.

The Deputy Leader and Executive Member for Corporate Resources replied that he would provide Mr Clarke with a written response.

C/11/22 **Petitions**

In accordance with the Scheme of Public Participation set out in Annex 2 of Part A4 of the Constitution, the Council received notification of the following petition:

Save our Children's Music in Central Beds Schools

Councillor Zerny presented a petition which contained 400 signatures. He commented that he was aware of the relaunch of the music service but that the petition was a reflection of how much people cared about music in schools.

In response, the Executive Member for Children's Services commented on the benefits of the newly relaunched music service.

C/11/23 **Recommendations from Executive**

Luton and Southern Central Bedfordshire Core Strategy – Memorandum of Understanding with Luton Borough Council on continued Joint Working.

The Council considered the recommendations from the meeting of the Executive held on 12 July 2011.

RESOLVED

- (1) to note the current position in respect of the Core Strategy as outlined in the report submitted to the Executive on 12 July 2011, and the terms of the draft Memorandum of Understanding, in order to facilitate continued joint working between Luton Borough Council and Central Bedfordshire Council;**
- (2) that the Chief Executive be authorised, following consultation with the Leader of the Council, to approve the terms of the Memorandum of Understanding following further discussions with Luton Borough Council.**

C/11/24 **Report of the Police Authority**

A report of the Bedfordshire Police Authority held on 20 May 2011 was submitted.

Councillor Hollick, representative on the Police Authority, advised that further to difficulties in appointing Luton Borough Council representation to the Bedfordshire Police Authority, that Council had nominated two Labour and one Independent candidate(s) and the outcome was awaited. This would meet the criteria set for appointments across the Police Authority's area.

RESOLVED

that the report of the Bedfordshire Police Authority be noted.

C/11/25 **Report of the Fire Authority**

A report from the meeting of the Bedfordshire and Luton Combined Fire Authority held on 8 June 2011 was submitted.

Councillor McVicar advised that he had been appointed as the representative on the Bedfordshire and Luton Combined Fire Authority and would present future reports to Council.

RESOLVED

that the report of the Bedfordshire and Luton Combined Fire Authority meeting held on 8 June 2011 be noted.

C/11/26

Written Questions

A written question had been submitted under Rule 12.2 by Councillor Zerny, as follows:

Charities are currently being charged £150 for road closures when the true cost of advertising them in the paper is as low as £85. Is it really justifiable for a public service to levy such a high administration fee?

The following reply was received:

The charge is based upon the average cost of placing adverts in local papers. However, the cost of an advert varies from paper to paper and depends on the size of the advert.

The size of the advert depends on how complex the closure and diversion route is.

The true cost to the Council of processing a traffic order is in excess of £1000, which is reflected in our standard fees for such work. This covers the cost of officer time to:

- undertake liaison meetings with other bodies where appropriate
- analyse the closure to determine the appropriate diversion routes
- design the diversion route with the appropriate signage
- check there is no conflict with other diversions on the network
- book the road space
- write the order
- check the draft with the newspaper.

Unlike commercial enterprises, charities are required to pay only £150, representing a fraction of the true cost incurred by the Council.

C/11/27

Open Questions

The Chairman presided over Open Questions asked of Executive Members and Deputy Executive Members under Procedure rule 12.7.

1. Councillor Murray asked about employment issues at LuDun and whether any help was being provided to disabled employees to find employment.

The Executive Member for Social Care, Health and Housing advised that a LuDun employee had secured employment through the redeployment pool.

2. Councillor Mrs Chapman asked for an update on the position regarding Flitwick Town Centre Development.

The Executive Member for Sustainable Communities - Strategic Planning and Economic Development indicated that he would provide a written reply.

3. Councillor Aldis asked when the vehicle that would enable local residents in a particular area to use re-usable bags for garden waste would be introduced.

The Deputy Executive Member for Sustainable Communities advised that the vehicle was due to be in use the week commencing 14 November 2011.

4. Councillor Smith asked a question about claims of staff bullying and harassment as referred to in recent press publications.

The Deputy Leader and Executive Member for Corporate Resources advised that he was satisfied that policies and procedures to prevent bullying were in place.

5. Councillor Murray asked whether it was fair to move employees' bases of work during the extensive restructuring process.

The Deputy Leader and Executive Member for Corporate Resources advised that a scheme for compensation payments was in place where staff were required to travel longer distances due to a change in their main place of work.

6. Councillor Bowater asked the Council to joint him in commending the Finance team who had worked hard to be the first Council in the East of England this year to complete and submit the end of year accounts.

7. Councillor Smith asked a question in relation to the provision of mobile phones for Council employees and Councillors.

The Deputy Leader and Executive Member for Corporate Resources advised that a review of the provision of mobile phones to staff had been undertaken and that the Executive would soon be considering a report reviewing Councillors' ICT allowances.

8. Councillor Aldis asked why the Mayor of Sandy had not received a response to a petition presented to Council in February 2010 and when a reply might be provided.

The Leader of the Council assured Councillor Aldis that he would follow up Councillor Aldis's query.

9. Councillor Zerny asked how council tax payers could be certain that there had been no irregularity in the process of an order given to Deloitte and Mitie to a value of £25,000, as the Executive Member for External Affairs had a registered interest in connection with that company.

The Deputy Leader and Executive Member for Corporate Resources advised that all appropriate procedures had taken place and undertook to look into this matter.

10. Councillor Murray commented on the increasing proportion of Academies locally and asked what the Executive Member for Children's Services was doing to prevent deterioration in schools' performance.

The Executive Member for Children's Services advised that schools in Central Bedfordshire were already of a good standard and were continually improving. Reference was made to the fact that some schools in Central Bedfordshire had been praised by Ofsted.

C/11/28 **Motions (if any)**

No motions had been received from Members of the Council under Procedure Rule No 16.

C/11/29 **Changes to Membership of Committees**

The Council considered a report of the Monitoring Officer outlining changes to the membership of Committees since the last meeting of Council and seeking an appointment to the vacant position of Vice-Chairman of Customer and Central Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Appendix A to the report, setting out changes in the membership of Committees since the last meeting, was tabled at the meeting.

RESOLVED

- (1) that changes to the membership of Committees be noted;**
- (2) that Councillor Mrs Ann Sparrow be appointed as Vice-Chairman of the Customer and Central Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee.**

NOTE: An updated schedule of committee membership is attached to these minutes.

C/11/30 **Annual Report of Overview and Scrutiny Committees**

The Council received and considered the Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report 2010/11 which presented a summary of the activities undertaken by the Overview and Scrutiny Committees during the municipal year 2010/11.

RESOLVED

that the Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report 2010/11 be noted.

C/11/31 **Annual Report from the Leader of the Council**

The Leader presented his annual report outlining policy priorities for the forthcoming year. A copy of the report is attached to these minutes.

RESOLVED

That the annual report of the Leader outlining policy priorities for the forthcoming year be noted.

(Note: The meeting commenced at 6.30 p.m. and concluded at 7.43 p.m.)

Chairman

Dated

CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE COUNCIL**Membership of Committees including Chairmen, Deputy- and Vice-Chairmen
2011/12****Council**

Chairman: Cllr P Hollick
Vice-Chairman: Cllr Mrs Gammons

**Executive
(8 Members)**

Leader of the Council and Chairman of the Executive: Cllr J Jamieson

Members:

Customer & Central Services:

Deputy Leader and Executive Member for Corporate Resources	Cllr	M R Jones
Deputy Executive Member for Corporate Resources	Cllr	D Hopkin
Deputy Executive Member for Corporate Resources	Cllr	R Wenham

Sustainable Communities:

Executive Member for Sustainable Communities – Strategic Planning and Economic Development	Cllr	K C Matthews
Deputy Executive Member for Sustainable Communities – Strategic Planning and Economic Development	Cllr	N Young
Executive Member for Sustainable Communities – Services	Cllr	B Spurr
Deputy Executive Member for Sustainable Communities – Services	Cllr	B Wells
Deputy Executive Member for Sustainable Communities - Services	Cllr	I Dalgarno

Children's Services:

Executive Member for Children's Services	Cllr	M Versallion
Deputy Executive Member for Children's Services	Cllr	Mrs A Barker
Deputy Executive Member for Children's Services	Cllr	T Brown

Social Care, Health and Housing:

Executive Member for Social Care, Health and Housing	Cllr	Mrs C Hegley
Deputy Executive Member for Social Care, Health and Housing	Cllr	A Turner

**Children' Services Overview & Scrutiny
(10 Members)**

Chairman: Cllr Mrs D Gurney
Vice-Chairman: Cllr N Costin

Members: Cllr N Aldis
Cllr Mrs S Clark
Cllr A Dodwell
Cllr P Hollick
Cllr K Janes
Cllr I MacKilligan
Cllr R Pepworth
Cllr A Shadbolt

Substitutes:
Conservative: Cllrs P Duckett, Ms C Maudlin, N Sheppard and D Bowater
Liberal Democrat: Cllr Mrs S Goodchild

Co-Opted Members

Ms H Copley	Until June 2011
Ms F Image	June 2011 – AGM in May 2015
Mr D Landman	Until June 2011
Mr J Reynolds	June 2011 – AGM in May 2015

**Customer & Central Services Overview & Scrutiny
(9 Members)**

Chairman: Cllr P Duckett
Vice-Chairman: Ann Sparrow

Members: Cllr Lewis Birt
Cllr J A E Clarke
Cllr Mrs R Drinkwater
Cllr Dr R Egan
Cllr R Johnstone
Cllr J Murray
Cllr Marion Mustoe

Substitutes:
Conservative: Cllrs Mrs F Chapman MBE, K Janes, J Saunders
(1 vacancy)
Liberal Democrat: Cllr D Jones
Independent: Cllr I Shingler

**Social Care, Health & Housing Overview & Scrutiny
(9 Members)**

Chairman: Cllr Mrs R Drinkwater
Vice-Chairman: Cllr N Sheppard

Members: Cllr A Dodwell
Cllr Mrs R Gammons
Cllr Mrs S Goodchild
Cllr Mrs D Gurney
Cllr K Janes
Cllr I MacKilligan
Cllr M Smith

Substitutes:
Conservative: Cllrs D Bowater, C Gomm, P Hollick, and A
Sparrow
Liberal Democrat: Cllr Dr R Egan
Independent: Cllr J Murray

**Sustainable Communities Overview & Scrutiny
(9 Members)**

Chairman: Cllr D McVicar
 Vice-Chairman: Cllr A R Bastable

Members: Cllr M Blair
 Cllr Mrs F Chapman MBE
 Cllr Mrs R Gammons
 Cllr Ms C Maudlin
 Cllr J Murray
 Cllr B Saunders
 Cllr P Williams

Substitutes:
 Conservative: D Bowater; R Johnstone, Mrs M Mustoe, A Shadbolt
 Liberal Democrat: Cllr D Jones
 Independent: Cllr I Shingler

**Licensing Committee
(12 Members & 6 Substitutes)**

Chairman: Cllr L Birt
 Vice-Chairman: Cllr K Janes

Members: Cllr R Berry
 Cllr D Bowater
 Cllr I Dalgarno
 Cllr Mrs D Green
 Cllr P Vickers
 Cllr C Gomm
 Cllr I MacKilligan
 Cllr N Warren
 Cllr J Saunders
 Cllr I Shingler

Substitutes:
 Conservative: Cllrs Mrs J Lawrence, Ms C Maudlin, D McVicar, M Mustoe and N Young
 Independent: Cllr A Zerny

**Licensing Sub Committee
(3 Members)**

Members: Any member of the Licensing Committee

**General Purposes Committee
(7 Members)**

Chairman: Cllr Mrs J Lawrence
Vice-Chairman: Cllr R Stay

Members: Cllr J A E Clarke
Cllr J Jamieson
Cllr D Jones
Cllr M Jones
Cllr K Matthews

Substitutes:
Conservative: Cllrs L Birt, Mrs F Chapman MBE, R Johnstone
Liberal Democrat: Cllr N Aldis

**Development Management Committee
(18 Members)**

Chairman: Cllr A Shadbolt
Vice-Chairman: Cllr P Vickers

Members: Cllr P N Aldis
Cllr A R Bastable
Cllr R Berry
Cllr D Bowater
Cllr T D Brown
Cllr Mrs F Chapman MBE
Cllr Mrs S Clark
Cllr I Dalgarno
Cllr Mrs R Drinkwater
Cllr Mrs R Gammons
Cllr K Janes
Cllr D Jones
Cllr Ms C Maudlin
Cllr T Nicols
Cllr I Shingler
Cllr N Young

Substitutes:
Conservative: Cllrs L Birt, P Duckett, C Gomm, R Johnstone, K Matthews, B Saunders, B Spurr, N Warren
Liberal Democrat: Cllr P Williams
Independent: Cllr J Murray

**Audit Committee
(7 Members)**

Chairman: Cllr D Bowater
Vice-Chairman: Cllr M Blair

Members: Cllr L Birt
Cllr Mrs D Green
Cllr A J Shadbolt
Cllr D Lawrence
Cllr A Zerny

Substitutes:
Conservative: Cllrs R Berry, N Costin and N Warren
Independent: Cllr M Smith

**Appeals Panel
(9 Members)**

Members: Cllr Mrs F Chapman MBE
Cllr I Dalgarno
Cllr Mrs R J Drinkwater
Cllr Dr R Egan
Cllr K Janes
Cllr K C Matthews
Cllr J Murray
Cllr N Warren
Cllr N Young

Substitutes:
Conservative: Cllrs R Johnstone, L Birt, David Bowater and
Andrew Turner
Liberal Democrat: Cllr P Williams

**Corporate Parenting Panel
(8 Members)**

Members: Cllr Mrs A Barker
Cllr D Bowater
Cllr N Costin
Cllr Mrs S Goodchild
Cllr Mrs D Gurney
Cllr N Sheppard
Cllr M Versallion
Cllr B Wells

Substitutes:
Conservative: Cllr I Mackilligan + 3 vacancies
Liberal Democrat: Cllr N Aldis

**Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education (SACRE)
(5 Members)**

Members: Cllr Mrs A Barker
Cllr C Gomm
Cllr Mrs D Gurney
Cllr D Jones
Cllr D Lawrence

Substitutes:
Conservative: Cllrs J Jamieson and M Versallion
Liberal Democrat: Cllr Mrs S Goodchild

**Wixams Joint Development Control
(9 Members)**

Members: Cllr P N Aldis
Cllr Mrs A Barker
Cllr A Bastable
Cllr P Duckett
Cllr J Jamieson
Cllr K Matthews
Cllr M Smith
Cllr A Turner
Cllr P Vickers

Substitutes:
Conservative: Cllr M Blair, Lewis Birt, C Gomm (1 vacancy)
Liberal Democrat: Cllr D Jones

**Standards Committee
(5 Members)**

Chairman:	To be elected at meeting
Deputy Chairmen (Ind):	To be elected at meeting
Deputy Chairman (Elected):	To be elected at meeting
Members:	Cllr L Birt Cllr R Johnstone Cllr Mrs J Lawrence Cllr N Warren Cllr P Williams
Independent Persons:	Mr J Dann Mr K Frazer Mr M Jones Mr K Ford Miss D Maggs
Town & Parish Members:	Mr B Collier Dr J Eilbeck Mrs J Hughes Mr J H Lewis Mr A B Saunders

**Houghton Regis Town Centre Management Committee
(4 Members)**

Members:	Cllr K Matthews Cllr Dr R Egan Cllr Mrs Goodchild Cllr P Williams
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**Dunstable Joint Committee
(5 Members)**

Members:	Cllr Mrs C Hegley Cllr P Hollick Cllr D McVicar Cllr Miss A Sparrow Cllr N Young
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**Leighton-Linslade Partnership Committee
(5 Members)**

Members: Cllr D Bowater
Cllr D Hopkin
Cllr R Johnstone
Cllr A Shadbolt
Cllr B Spurr

**Luton and South Bedfordshire Joint Committee
Section 29 Committee
(6 Members)**

Members: Cllr Mrs C Hegley
Cllr M Versallion
Cllr K Matthews
Cllr A Shadbolt
Cllr B Spurr
Cllr N Young

Substitutes: Cllrs M Jones, D McVicar, D Bowater, B
Wells, N Warren (1 Vacancy)

**Luton and South Bedfordshire Joint Committee
Section 101 Committee
(3 Executive Members)**

Members: Cllr Mrs C Hegley
Cllr K C Matthews
Cllr B Spurr

Substitutes: Cllr J Jamieson, A Shadbolt and N Young

**Constitution Advisory Group
(6 Members)**

Members: Cllr Mrs C Hegley
Cllr D Jones
Cllr M Jones
Cllr D Lawrence
Cllr P Hollick
Cllr A Shadbolt

Substitute: Cllr Dr R Egan

**Member Development Champions
(4 Members)**

Members: Cllr P N Aldis
Cllr Mrs C F Chapman MBE
Cllr M Jones
Cllr A Turner

**Joint Adoption Panel
(1 Member)**

Cllr Mrs D B Gurney

**Fostering Panel
(1 Member)**

Cllr A Dodwell

**Fostering Permanence Panel
(1 Member)**

Cllr A Dodwell

I promised when I was elected as leader in May that I would talk to you tonight about the ambitions for this new Council - what we want to achieve in the coming four years.

Before doing so, I would like to reflect on the legacy the new Council has inherited.

It is just over two years since Central Bedfordshire was created on April 1st 2009. In that time we have come a long way, having successfully transitioned from the three predecessor councils, while maintaining all our key services to residents. To do this seamlessly is a great credit to all involved.

From our focus on efficiency, we have driven out savings of £22m from the base budget and this year we are aiming to deliver a further £19m. I was delighted that this success allowed Central Bedfordshire, for the first time in a generation, to have a zero increase in council tax bills.

But it is not just about efficiency. We have improved standards in Adult Social Care as evidenced by the recent excellent Safeguarding Peer review, increased educational attainment, with the best GCSE results ever last year; and have received national recognition for our planning service.

I'm very aware that I am in a privileged position taking on the leadership of a Council that has been well managed.

How different an experience to that of our Coalition Government who have inherited such a massive challenge following 13 years of Labour Government.

I believe our thanks should go to my predecessor Tricia Turner and her Executive colleagues for having successfully led this transition, and providing a strong platform upon which we can develop. Thank you Tricia – the residents of Central Bedfordshire have much to be grateful to you for.

So, looking to the future, what next?

In setting out this agenda, I want to share with you some of my own perspectives on this area and what this Council can and should be looking to achieve.

Central Bedfordshire is a great place. I have now lived here for over 20 years. It is a wonderful area to live, work and to grow up.

We have fantastic countryside and charming towns and villages. By way of example on Saturday I was delighted to attend the opening of Rushmere Park, in Leighton Buzzard – a stunning 400 acre country park that epitomises why this is a great place to be – even in the rain!

We also have good schools and – critically – a great location supported by major trunk roads, railway lines and an Airport, which means that we are ideally placed to become an economically thriving community.

The residents of Central Bedfordshire have put their trust in us to protect and enhance this great place – and that is the responsibility of this new Council. Our primary focus will be on our residents, serving their needs and building Central Bedfordshire.

However we face severe challenges.

As the Government seeks to reduce the Country's deficit of over £900bn - a move we can increasingly see the necessity of with recent events in Greece, Italy and Spain - unfortunately the impact on us is tough, as we experience a 28% reduction in our Government grants over four years.

At the same time we are also facing increasing demands on our services such as greater spending on Adult Social Care with an increasing elderly population.

Times may be hard, but we are optimistic, because we have a clear sense of how we will work together to address the challenges we face and what our approach will be.

As Leader, I would like to engender ways of working that are Inclusive, collaborative and focused.

As a recent backbencher, I know how disheartening it is, to feel unable to genuinely engage with and influence the direction of the Council.

This is not only frustrating for the Councillors – it is also hugely wasteful of the talents, experience and knowledge of all members.

We need to have as much engagement of elected representatives as possible in determining and delivering our strategy.

I've endeavoured to reflect this more inclusive approach in the way I have structured the new Executive.

In designing the new model, there were four key issues I wanted to address:

- To strengthen clear Directorate Accountability
- To enable a functional focus
- To address cross cutting issues
- To leverage members' skills

In the new model, we have reduced the number of Executive Members, including myself, from 10 to 8 with 5 having direct portfolio responsibilities and two having the cross cutting roles of Economic Partnerships and External Affairs. In addition we now have 8 Deputies who all have a particular functional focus. While I was convinced this was the right strategy, it is pleasing that in operation it is already delivering in practice. We are getting a greater operational focus, and progress in specific areas such as Localism and see the benefits of the cross cutting roles.

So – with the new team in place – we have been developing our plans.

Our overriding ambitions remain:

To maintain and develop our services to residents

To build on the potential of Central Bedfordshire - to be a great place and to develop its economy

To continue to lighten the burden of Council Tax - I have no desire to preside over a Council which puts increasing pressure on local people through increased council taxes, when I know many of them are already feeling the effects of the economic downturn. We need to have a focus on value for money. We can do it.

We will have to find more efficient and effective means of delivering services.

Some of the things we are currently looking at are:-

To save on back office functions, we are already making progress in areas such as IT, Finance and HR.

Rationalising our office structure, to focus on Priory House and Watling

House.

Improving procurement and reviewing all our contracts

But we also need to look at alternative delivery mechanisms. A focus on the outcomes we want from our services, rather than obsessing on how they are delivered.

I appreciate that some residents may feel unsettled when their much cherished services are provided by a new organisation – but I believe this is preferable to the alternative prospect of these services being cut.

This is not just about outsourcing, it will also be about working with other parts of the Public Sector including other councils, seeking economies of scale.

I'm conscious that many of these ideas have been discussed before. But whilst the concepts are not new, there has not in the past been enough focus on delivery. I fear that for too long vested interests that are resistant to change have successfully blocked it. And I also suspect that the culture of public sector organisations has been risk averse. Fear of failure has prevented success. While we must not fail in critical areas we have to accept that some strategies will work better than others and we need to build on these successes and refocus without recriminations.

We need to be an open and responsive council that seeks to help – in the tired old phrase – a “CAN DO ATTITUDE”. Often this is not necessarily about money but the willingness to explore alternatives, taking ownership of problems and helping.

Localism is a prime example of this. We recognise that just as Central Bedfordshire can better make local decisions than Central Government, local Towns and Parishes can often provide a better local solution than Central Bedfordshire. Hence we are and will continue to push forward on this agenda.

While I recognise the tough times we face, I believe we should seize the opportunity to transform how we operate as a council. To deliver better more effective services at lower cost, to engage more with our residents and to further build on the great strengths of Central Bedfordshire.

I make no apology for the entrepreneurial approach – we need to be more business-like. Focusing our energy on maximising value for money, good customer service, effective service delivery and serious assessment about what we do and how we do it.

And how will we know if we have succeeded?

We will rigorously review our performance on a monthly and yearly basis. We'll ensure budget management is paramount and we'll check our results in service areas are improving – including the crucial measure of customer satisfaction.

The judgement on this council will be the good opinion of the people of Central Bedfordshire. I make no assumptions about this and I will work diligently with my Executive colleagues, the wider council and its officers to win this good opinion through the delivery of excellent results.

We are privileged to have been elected and ultimately it is the electorate who will judge us.

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