

**Agenda Item: 11**

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**Meeting:** Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee

**Date:** 29 September 2009

**Subject:** Town Centre Management

**Report of:** Portfolio Holder for Economic Growth & Regeneration

**Summary:** The report outlines a suggested process for town centre management. It advocates moving away from the block allocation of revenue resources, presently received by three town centres, by developing a process that directs it to areas that have the greatest need.

Following instruction from the Constitutional Working Group to examine the constitutional arrangements for Town Centre Management Committees (TCMCs), it also proposes that TCMCs are formally constituted directly under Town Council Constitutions to ensure that Town Councils are put at the heart of decision making in terms of Town Centre Management.

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**Contact Officer:** Liz Wade, Assistant Director Economic Growth & Regeneration, Helen Shore, Head of Business Growth

**Public/Exempt:** Public

**Wards Affected:** Ampthill, Biggleswade, Dunstable Downs, Flitwick East, Flitwick West, Houghton Regis, Leighton Linlade Central, Potton, Sandy, Shefford, Stotfold & Arlesey

**Function of:**

**Reason for urgency**  
(if appropriate)

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**RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- 1. That the Sustainable Communities Overview & Scrutiny Committee is asked to consider and comment on the proposed new process for Town Centre management in Central Bedfordshire prior to the Executive meeting on 10<sup>th</sup> November.**
- 2. That the Sustainable Communities OSC recommends to the Executive that the process for town centre management in Central Bedfordshire be fully incorporated into the emerging Central Bedfordshire Community Engagement Strategy.**
- 3. That the Sustainable Communities OSC recommends to the Constitutional Working Group that the Town Centre Management Committees in Houghton Regis, Leighton Linlade and Dunstable are removed from the from the Central Bedfordshire Constitution under section J2 pages**

*Reason for Recommendations :* *To ensure that future funding for Town Centre management is channelled to areas that have the greatest need and that Town Councils are placed at the heart of future decision making regarding Town Centre Management.*

*To create consistency in terms of the Central Bedfordshire Constitution in relation to town centre management.*

## **1. Background**

- 1.1 The Sustainable Communities Economic Growth & Regeneration service is delegated under section H3 Paragraph 4.3.60 of the constitution with the role of Town Centre Management.
- 1.2 Central Bedfordshire has 11 Town Councils with corresponding town centres. As a result of legacy arrangement 3 of these, previously South Bedfordshire Town Centres, have Town Centre Management Committees (TCMCs) that have transferred from South Bedfordshire and are part of the Central Bedfordshire Constitution.
- 1.3 The three TCMC's in Dunstable, Houghton Regis & Leighton Linlade have historically received an annual allocation of funding from South Bedfordshire District Council £150,000pa capital and £101,000pa revenue between them for town centre based projects.
- 1.4 The funded projects have contributed to image development and have supported, especially in Leighton Linlade and Dunstable, the emergence of business forums. No evidence exists to show that wider economic outputs have been affected by this funding. In terms of job creation, retail trading and vitality the impact has not been directly measured. All three southern TCMCs have a desire and an expectation that an annual block grant funding arrangement should be in place under Central Bedfordshire.
- 1.5 The capital funding was deemed to be priority 6 in the capital programme in a report to the Central Bedfordshire Shadow Executive on 20 January 2009, and was therefore not funded in the Capital Programme 2009/10 to 2012/13. Although it should be noted that significant external capital and revenue resources have been committed to both Biggleswade and Dunstable for town centre masterplanning activity through GAF3 (Growth Area Funding) as has funding for the completion of the Houghton Regis Bedford Square project. Other services corporately and through the wider public partnerships also deliver direct services to support our Town Centres such as street cleaning and community safety activities.
- 1.6 Revenue funding for the three TCMCs has remained, based upon legacy arrangements, with the caveat that during 2009/10 a fresh look is taken at how we manage and fund town centre activity.

## **2. Our Aims**

- 2.1 Central Bedfordshire's corporate aim is to manage growth effectively, our town centres are at the heart of our growing communities. To thrive; employment needs to increase and investment is needed to strengthen our retail competitiveness and business sustainability. All of which complements our longer term investment in town centre masterplanning and helps us to prepare for a growing population, supporting successful places for our people to live, work and enjoy. Deploying the limited public resources for Town Centres we need to ensure maximum return for public sector funding and maximum leverage of private investment into our area.
- 2.2 A process has been developed by Economic Growth which advocates the following:
- Establishment of new partnership working arrangements with Town Councils that puts them at the heart of decision making supported by our own ward members as the first point of contact in handling local issues;
  - The introduction of a new annual Health Check for town centres;
  - A strategic & well planned approach to investment in town centres in the short, medium and long term;
  - Increased partnership working internally across departments and externally with partners and stakeholders;
  - Increased input and support from retail professionals;
  - Targeting investment to areas that need it most.

### **3. The Process**

- **Annual Economic Health Check for each Town Centre**

This will be carried out by mutual agreement by the Town Council or Central Bedfordshire Council officers on behalf of Ward Members. It will be used to:-

- guide the preparation of a Town Centre & Retail Management Plan for Central Bedfordshire
- highlight trends and issues;
- provide data for the preparation of town centre & retail management plans;
- guide town centre project funding decisions
- town councils will have the freedom to add to the indicators based upon their own requirements

An outline and rationale for the proposed indicators is shown in **Appendix A**.

- **Preparation of Individual Town Centre & Retail Management Plans**

This will be carried out by Town Councils supported by Central Bedfordshire Officers by request.

The plans will:-

- dovetail with masterplanning activity & Town Plan development;
- be clearly prioritised, costed and have specific and measurable outputs;
- include Town Council & other partner funding;
- address issues or trends identified in the annual health check.

- **Establishment of a Town Centre & Retail Management Plan for Central Bedfordshire**

A Town Centre Partnership (**Appendix B**) is proposed to develop a Town Centre & Retail Management Plan for Central Bedfordshire for recommendation to our Executive.

This group will:-

- Consider all individual Town Centre and Retail Management Plans on an annual basis and prioritises actions against the Health Check data;
- Develop an annual Town Centre & Retail Management plan for Central Bedfordshire including costed actions from individual town centres where prioritised;
- Highlight available CBC, partnership and external funding sources available for proposed projects;
- Submit plans and funding allocations to Central Bedfordshire Executive for consideration on an annual basis;
- Monitor the delivery of actions by Town Councils or where applicable Central Bedfordshire.

3.1 In addition to the process outlined above a key employers forum will be set up. This will aim to develop good working relationships between CBC and key retail chains and supermarkets. It will also help to guide strategic direction.

3.2 This proposed process is not intended to be an onerous task for Town Councils and will be supported as required by Economic Growth Staff. Baseline statistics have been prepared for Town Centres and are attached in **Appendix A**. They have been developed to be as simple but effective as possible. Likewise action plans can be as detailed as Town Councils require. For smaller Town Councils there may just be a few key actions annually as part of their overall town plans and priorities

#### **4. Constitutional Arrangements**

4.1 The current constitutional arrangements were the subject of debate by the Shadow Authority in January 2009. The Constitution and Member Working Group considered two options; continuing South Bedfordshire arrangements by including the TCMCs within the Central Bedfordshire Constitution or re-defining them as 'outside bodies' with Central Bedfordshire Members appointed to them. The Shadow Council on 26<sup>th</sup> February recommended retaining the TCMCs within the constitution to maintain the status quo, but it was an expectation by the Constitution Advisory Group that the issue would be addressed during 2009/10.

- 4.2 If the decision is taken to remove the TCMCs from the Central Bedfordshire Constitution, Town Councils who wish to have Central Bedfordshire Members on their town centre related forums or partnerships could request this through existing processes relating to 'outside bodies'. Members would be nominated to the town centre partnerships/forums following a request made by the Town Council. Whether they have voting rights, are non voting members or observers will depend upon the constitution and terms of reference of the body that they are being nominated to.
- 4.3 This has no implications in terms of funding. Central Bedfordshire funds many such outside bodies. If the Town Councils in Leighton Linlade, Houghton Regis and Dunstable wish to retain the TCMC model, Central Bedfordshire Ward Members currently sitting on these groups could be nominated to them as 'outside bodies' and would have voting rights or positions as outlined in the Town Council constitution and new TCMC terms of reference.
- 4.4 In terms of effective Town Centre Management guidance has been sought from the Association of Town Centre Managers on best practice for effective town centre partnerships. It is unusual for town centre 'partnerships' to have Councillors as sole voting members. **Appendix C** outlines common factors that successful Town Centre Management bodies exhibit.
- 4.5 Throughout the consultation for this report it has often been stated that 'one size does not fit all' in terms of Town Centre Management in Central Bedfordshire. We fully support this and following the ethos of the Community Strategy recommend that Town Councils are given the opportunity and freedom to develop and operate town centre management committees, forums or partnerships, if desired, in a way that suits them. Town Councils will be encouraged and supported to adopt a Town Centre model that is considered right for them and complements the overall community engagement strategy and partnership arrangements between the Councils.

## 5. Funding

- 5.1 At this stage we do not know the level of revenue resources available for 2010/11. We would advocate the development of action plans irrespective of available funding from Central Bedfordshire, to guide Town Council and partners funding for Town Centre development. The action plans and associated activity will also provide a robust evidence base for future external funding bids, local action or other local income generation.

## **CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS**

### **Council Priorities:**

Priority 3 – Managing growth effectively. The need to boost economic prosperity in our communities is a key council priority. The retail sector is one of our biggest employers, ensuring the economic viability of our town centres is essential to creating new jobs and safeguarding existing jobs in Central Bedfordshire.

### **Financial:**

Maintenance of current funding arrangements of £101,000pa represents a significant allocation of Economic Growth revenue resources 18.5% of the total non staff related budget of £550,000. Funding for 2010/11 is as yet unknown. This process advocates a methodology that gives clear priorities for action if funding is available through Economic Growth for 2010/11 and can form the basis for external funding bids.

### **Legal:**

The removal of TCMCs from the Central Bedfordshire constitution if agreed by Executive would require a formal change to the Central Bedfordshire Constitution. Town Councils, Central Bedfordshire Ward Members and TCMCs have been consulted as part of the preparation of this report in accordance with Central Bedfordshire democratic procedures. A full set of responses is still being gathered.

### **Risk Management:**

Decline of our town centres and the social implications of that decline, particularly during this time of economic recession, are wide and significant. The risks are best addressed through agreed joint action between Councils, public bodies, private and community and voluntary action. The evidenced based process proposed in this report seeks will be a foundation to monitoring and managing these risks at the local level.

### **Staffing (including Trades Unions):**

There are no staffing implications.

### **Equalities/Human Rights:**

The equalities implications are considered as part of the proposed Health Check process through ward level data and indicators such as unemployment levels.

### **Community Safety:**

Town centres are often a focus for anti social behaviour and the success of a town centre will have a direct impact on the actual and perceived crime and anti social behaviour levels.

### **Sustainability:**

Successful town centres are at the heart of a sustainable community by providing access to goods, services and local employment.

### **Appendices:**

Appendix A – Economic Health Check – Rationale and Outline Figure

Appendix B – Proposed Town Centre Partnership Membership

Appendix C – Effective Models for Town Centre Management