

Consultation Feedback on Draft Five Year Plan

Supplementary Report to Executive – 6th October 2015

In addition to the consultation process with Overview and Scrutiny Committees, the high level priorities within the draft five year plan were circulated and discussed with various partner organisations, community groups and stakeholders during August and September.

Such groups included:

- Bedfordshire Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG)
- All Town and Parish Councils (and the Clerk Champions Group)
- The Voluntary Sector
- Fire Service
- Police
- Luton and Bedford Borough Councils
- Child Poverty Action Group
- Youth Parliament
- Social Care Independent Provider Forum
- Our Tenants Panels
- The Equalities Forum

Feedback from Community Groups, Partners and Stakeholders:

Comments and suggestions on the plan have been diverse.

Whilst some partner organisations, such as the **CCG** responded positively to the plan, both in terms of its purpose and its substance. Others were more questioning.

Comments from some **Parish Councils** (and specifically Marston Moreteyne) suggest that they were less interested in high level statements of intent from the Council than a more practical focus on improved service delivery, with a particular emphasis on Highways.

Correspondents from various groups suggested the detailed programmes to support the high level priorities needed to be developed and shared.

Partnership and collaboration was a theme that was repeatedly suggested from many of those who participated in the exercise.

Members of the **Tenants Panels** spoke positively about the way that the Housing Service engages with its customers in all aspects of the services development. This was seen to be hugely beneficial and other Council teams and services were recommended to follow the Housing Services lead in greater partnership with users.

A colleague from our largest **Town Council**, Dunstable, indicated that the plan had been noted and whilst no formal Council response had been agreed, it was suggested that their authority would always be pleased to explore opportunities and discussions about those services that could be delivered most effectively at a local level.

Representatives of the **Clerk Champions Group** also called for engagement with Towns and Parishes to be a “high priority”. They suggested that Central Bedfordshire officers who are planning works or other activities in a particular location should always approach the clerk of the local council to advise them of the plans, seek information and otherwise engage with them.

In discussing the plan at the **Child Poverty Action Group**, members of the group were pleased to see the emphasis on early intervention in the proposed focus around tackling vulnerability. A representative from the **Citizens’ Advice Bureaux** emphasised the importance of advice and encouraging people to seek help as soon as possible to avoid situations becoming more complex.

Whilst the focus on creating resilience was welcomed, some concern was expressed about an over emphasis on voluntary action. Whilst there is support for building resilience in communities, there was a call for realism about the need to facilitate and manage this process and the resource implications of doing so. This sentiment was echoed by the **Youth Parliament** correspondents.

A respondent from a **local charity** also suggested that the resource implications of the Council’s priorities were important, proposing that the Council should set a five year budget plan alongside priorities and consult the public on both.

Members of the **Equality Forum** endorsed the approach on building resilience in communities, helping the vulnerable and those in poverty but were keen to see how the high level aims would translate into practice, particularly in the context of austerity and financial constraints.

The need to improve our responsiveness as a Council was soundly endorsed by members of **Tenants Panels** and a Parish Council correspondent. Specific improvement to our on line presence and telephone services were requested.

In terms of supporting older people, the positive developments in housing and extra care were recognised, although a member of a Parish in the north questioned whether there was a balanced approach across the whole of Central Bedfordshire.

The Youth Parliament also provided substantial feedback on specific priorities as follows:

On building resilient communities, they called for more detail on exactly what the priority would entail. Whilst volunteering was supported, it was suggested that volunteer opportunities should not be regarded as low cost alternatives for paid employment.

On supporting the education and prosperity of residents, the sentiment of the priority was applauded but there was some scepticism about how realistic universal prosperity could be.

On nurturing sustainable growth, young people agreed that protecting heritage was important and called for Central Beds to act responsibly in terms of planning future development to meet housing and employment needs.

The ambition to take care of the vulnerable was supported, but young people challenged the credibility of some of the statements, indicating that what people want and what they are entitled to can be very different.

On becoming more efficient and responsive, young people were keen that the council should retain conventional communication channels whilst also encouraging digital engagement.

The challenge of tackling barriers to prosperity, including transport, was a key priority for this group. A young person, currently on an apprenticeship with the Council, referred to the fact that it takes him two hours to commute each way from Leighton Buzzard to Chicksands using public transport. The Youth Parliament have previously tried to tackle the issue and would welcome the opportunity to be involved in the Council's strategy for improving local transport and defining what is reasonable.

In terms of improving skills, the Youth Parliament, which has been campaigning for better work experience, welcomed the emphasis on life skills and employability rather than academic achievement alone.

On healthy lives, the members of the Youth Parliament felt they would like more information on specific programmes.

The need to reduce risks to vulnerable children was regarded as a very important priority. Those involved in the consultation suggested services must be fit for purpose with staff who are well trained. They suggested that the profile of CSE should be increase in schools and the policies, guidelines and processes for managing such issues should be well understood by staff.

Detailed Feedback from Overview and Scrutiny Committees

General: context and priorities

General agreement of the five priorities and the use of "Great Place to Live and Work".

Queried the extent to which we were confident that the demographics and population trends on which the Plan was based were accurate. Can we

assume that we will continue to grow an ageing population or will there become a tipping point leading to us being unprepared for change (i.e. a younger population)?

Queried the extent to which the views of residents had been used to inform our priorities? There was a need to explain how we arrived at these priorities and the extent to which the public had driven our thinking.

Is there a need to prioritise some aspects of the plan over others, whilst we should aspire to deliver everything we need to be realistic about what we could achieve during the life of the plan. Whilst it was recognised we had reduced from eight to five priorities it was noted that nothing had really been lost from the Plan and it was queried whether we needed to be more selective.

Members commented on the complexity of rural communities and the need to ensure investment in rural as well as urban areas.

Concerns regarding those aspects of the plan over which we had little influence and the importance of understanding the levers we could pull to influence others (such as the NHS or police) to support delivery of the Plan.

General: language

The language in the document was too much “Council speak”. It was commented that language encouraging the public to engage in the public-focussed document was necessary, this included clear definitions of some aspects such as what we felt a resilient community looked like or who was a vulnerable resident. It was suggested that the plan be tested with residents to see if it could be understood before it was finalised and published. The memorable tag lines of strong communities, strong residents etc... were suggested in one Committee.

General: content

Members suggested that residents were only really interested in the difference that they would see on the ground (what we were going to deliver). The document produced for the public should focus more on the specific deliverables.

Members were keen to see the “killer metrics” that would sit behind each of the programmes enabling us to monitor progress and prioritise activity.

Resilient Communities

Members commented that many communities accept there is a need for them to be more self-sustaining so the time is right for this. Getting partners to buy into this approach (particularly Town and Parish Councils) will be critical to its successful delivery.

One Member queried whether volunteering would fit better under “prosperous and well educated residents”.

Prosperous and well-educated residents

Skills are a big issue for Members, we ought to emphasise the importance of skills training and career development for young people aged 14+ that avoids ‘the race to university’. There should be a section in which we focus on training and career development that is not academic in nature but focuses on the skills we really need in light of the levels of anticipated growth (bricklayers,

electricians, plumbers etc...). Making sure that children and young people are prepared to enter into “meaningful employability” is key.

Importance of developing children to their full potential, the school system needs to support this approach to ensure that we maximise potential throughout the education journey. We need a structure around the 16+ level that includes English and Maths as a must but doesn't marginalise other subjects such as art.

Importance of focusing on the management of schools and the willingness of governors to challenge and change.

Importance of an approach that encourages people to develop their skills in Central Beds and then stay to work in Central Beds, maximising the potential of our young people and then giving them jobs locally.

Consider whether “well-educated” is the right term, residents will feel they are well educated anyway so should we focus on people being happy and enjoying working and living here?

Sustainable growth & heritage

Residents are starting to understand the terminology around quadrants, so no need to change it.

Be aware that pushing Central Bedfordshire as a great place to live and work leads to more traffic and the need for more focus on infrastructure and the release of land for growth. The Council needs to be realistic about what we can deliver in terms of infrastructure and must tread the line between preserving the environment and building more houses and infrastructure. If a rise in Council tax would support more sustainable growth in Central Bedfordshire this is a debate the Council should have.

More emphasis required on the maintenance of bus, roads and rail routes.

There are lots of schemes being delivered in the area that will encourage growth and investment, the Council needs ensure that throughout this growth the movement of residents across our transport network is supported.

Car parking is a key issue for Members, in particular the Council being more proactive in its attempts to expand the levels of commuter car parking around rail stations.

Specifically Members commented on the potential benefit of a rail station next to J11a (M1) alongside the Sundon RFI and queried whether this should be detailed in the Plan.

Efficient & responsive Council

Good management and good leadership will ensure that this priority becomes part of the culture of the organisation without it needing to be a priority in the Plan. It becomes a subset of each of the other priorities and could be removed.

Taking care of the vulnerable, promoting independence

Consider whether the use of the term “poor parenting” is appropriate. Won't 'poor' lead people to think about money rather than skills.

Emphasise that we're focusing on healthy lives for everyone, not just the vulnerable and emphasise the importance of leisure activities. We should also consider emphasising the benefit of family activities and recreation in our open space as a way of enhancing healthy lives.

Consider the external influences involved in this area (such as the NHS and CCG) and consider where the Council really has influence to be able to deliver improved outcomes and where the actions of our partners will lead us to reconsider the services that we need to deliver.

Consider the importance of prevention as a means of influencing people's health in the future rather than taking a purely reactive approach.