

# Creating Central Bedfordshire

## ***Compass Workshop 1: Vision, Values and Innovations***

*Tuesday, 13 May 2008*

### SUMMARY REPORT

1. This first of three Compass Workshops focussed upon what councillors from the three constituent councils want for the new Council, namely their:-
  - Vision of what it will offer the communities of Central Bedfordshire in 2012;
  - Ideas for how it should be organised;
  - Views about its values, 'feel' and culture
2. The Workshop centred around small mixed groups drawn from the three constituent councils with feedback, comment and prioritising in the main group. Although principally an occasion for members there were number of key officers spread across the groups.
3. Councillor Tricia Turner and the IDeA speakers made several points which build on the experience of the last Local Government Reorganisation:-
  - The new council is new to all – there is no prior ownership;
  - Councils last time were established most effectively when they forged a clear political and managerial vision;
  - Councillors must take time early on to set out their vision and thinking even though those elected in 2009 will be the final arbiters;
  - Innovative ideas, vision and prioritising will need building in from the start of preparation as the detailed logistics will demand much of the time;
  - Emotions have been and will be strong and need careful handling if people are to commit to the changes;
  - There is a need for clarity about the councillor's role which balances strategy and delivery.

## Vision 2012

4. Groups were initially asked to make five **statements about the community and services of Central Beds today**. This reflects where you currently are. Key statements which were mentioned several times were:-

- Council tax and service costs are perceived as high;
- Lack of consistency and joined-up thinking on services;
- Waste improving but more can be done;
- Education underperforming;
- Poor highways, traffic control and rural public transport;
- Social care is a rapidly growing concern.

5. Groups were then asked to make five **statements about their 'vision' for 2012**. The intention was to get members' clarity and commitment for **what the Council will 'offer' its communities three years after vesting day**. The full results are in Annex 1. When prioritised by everyone the broad vision for Central Beds that emerged was:

- (a) **Successful management of the growth agenda** (14 votes) – bringing together the various aspects of sustainability;
- (b) **Closeness to the community** (13 votes) – a clear and agreed identity with our communities;
- (c) **Effective communication with our residents** (13 votes) – good two way communications and easy access for our customers e.g. one stop shop;
- (d) **Education markedly improved** (10 votes) - making progress on a clear roadmap;
- (e) **Value for Money** (9 votes) - reflected in service streamlining and re-engineering, lack of duplication;
- (f) **Reduction in Council Tax** (7 votes) – linked to VFM and aspects of efficiency;
- (g) **Waste handling** (5 votes) – more effective integration and successful movement beyond landfill

A number had one or two votes. These were: infrastructure led development, sustaining the natural environment, road and transport improvement. In addition there were a range of good governance - clear accountability – and management issues, internally and externally,

6. These clearly represent the strength of feeling for Central Beds priorities in 2012. However to be a compelling vision that will inspire the public, new members and new officers they need further work to create:-
- A greater focus on what **specific outcomes** this will mean for those living, working and visiting Central Beds – what will they see and receive;
  - A greater **shared passion** to carry these priorities forward if they are to shape the new authority – this will mean further debate and choice by members now, and an acceptance that new members will pick up the vision and modify it in 2009.

This sharpening of the vision does need a series of working sessions and we would suggest you return to the 'vision' in Workshop 3 to refine and focus it in these critical ways.

### **Milestones to getting there and particularly mid 2009**

7. Groups suggested a range of milestones, many by 2009 vesting day/elections. They are critical to the vision for 2012 and a high performing authority. These must be prominent early in the new authority:-
- **Visible and performing political leadership** –clear steer and shared vision, including clarity of the councillor roles (what the job would require, including time and travel), accountability for decisions, political structures allied to directorates, definition of locality/neighbourhood working, all members as genuine community champions, supported and trained in the role;
  - **New management structure with new styles of working** – including a well resourced strategic centre, balanced strategy and operations, capacity to deliver, eliminating silo working, skilled workforce and employer of choice;
  - **Good connections to the public** – including customer service strategy, a communications strategy, agreed community engagement, consultation and feedback, proactive media, and effective communication of service successes;
  - **Reliable partnerships** – including LSP and partner working, bringing together stakeholders – town and parish councils, action groups, NHS, police voluntary organisations etc
  - **Effective monitoring and feedback** – including effective overview and scrutiny, service and action reporting
  - **Financial strategy in place** – rethought service delivery, matching political aspirations;
  - **Specific action and policies on education, waste and growth**

## Culture or 'feel' of the Council in 2009

8. One sign of a well performing council is the concern about 'how' it does things as well as 'what' it does – this often referred to as the culture or 'feel' of the council. Groups were asked what they wanted **the 'feel' of the Council to be following the elections in 2009**. The results are available in full in Annex. From this groups were asked to give the top characteristics for the new Council. The new Council will be:-

- **Friendly, vibrant and approachable** (3) – new dawn, buzzing, high energy, excitement, warm, pride, IT not dominant;
- **Professional and motivated** (3) – helpful, demonstrate knowledge and understanding, sense of challenge, purposeful, contact centres up to speed, organised;
- **Mutually respecting**(3) – we are a team of members and officers, the Council respects people and is respected
- **Honest** (3) – straight dealing between everyone internally and externally;
- **Respecting new ideas** (2) – flexible leadership not brittle and rigid, focus on outcomes not conformity to detail;
- **Have a common culture across sites** (1) – cohesive identity across strategy, vision and values, knowledge, communications, team building. family atmosphere;
- **Have a 'can do' state of mind** (1) – 'I know someone who can';
- **Be a 'no blame' culture** (1) –, especially between those who were on different sides of the one -unitary two-unitary debate, praise more than criticism, praise more than criticism.

9. Asked **what could stop this happening**, the following were mentioned by several groups:-

- Inability to leave the past behind;
- Lack of clarity, timetable and priorities;
- Members are uniformed and inflexible, carrying 'baggage' and 'chips on shoulder';
- Officers, as above, plus mortgage to pay and careers;
- Lack of a clear plan on the relocation across multiple sites;
- What goes wrong and how we cope – e.g. service failure;
- Capacity and wrong skills;
- Politics and party relationships.

## **Overall**

10. The Workshop was a very thorough and collaborative start to members spelling out their vision and priorities for the new Council. This summary report, together with the full workshop notes, should form a useful platform for the testing out process of preparation in Workshop 2 and a strong basis for establishing a convincing vision and plan in Workshop 3 on the 11 July.

Andy Holder, Malcolm Grimston and Chris Cardy  
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20 May 2009

## ANNEX 1 IDEAS FOR 2012

Task: Agree five statements about the successes on “today” May 2012

### Group 1

- Enhanced natural environment
- Reduction in council tax
- Closeness to communities, public and partners
- Services re-engineered
- Evidence of infrastructure led delivery

### Group 2

- Creation of “one new” council
- Accountability
- Consistent service levels, standards
- Joined up with partners, council as a catalyst
- Greatly improved accessibility to services and council

### Group 3

- Education – two or three tier (contentious)
- Transport improved
- Waste – decision on what replaces landfill
- Growth – including with reference to jobs
- Social care at all levels

### Group 4

- Holistic approach to growth and sustainability
- Better integration and co-ordination, BPR, feedback loop
- Well managed external contracts
- Employer of choice, best people, best service
- Opportunities register, to capture ideas

### Group 5

- Roads and transport improved
- Education – roadmap to two tier
- Recycling, eco-park
- One stop shop
- Low council tax
- Priorities clear, what we will/will not do
- Members’ roles understood by communities
- Managing growth

### Group 6

- Sound relationships and positive culture – members/officers working together
- HR function
- VfM and low council tax
- New LSP
- Vision and clear priorities
- Quality services delivered all over CB
- Managing growth
- Communication with residents – two way

### Group 7

- Streamlined, integrated services
- Clear and agreed identity – people believe in and belong to CB
- Responsibility at the most appropriate level, e.g. outsourcing
- Leadership

## ANNEX 2 THE 'FEEL' OF THE NEW AUTHORITY

Task: As you walk around the new Council following the election in 2009, what would want the "feel" of it to be?

Vibrant  
Welcoming  
Dynamic  
organisation  
Expectant  
Open/Accessible  
High energy/buzz  
Good dialogue/communications  
Air of expectation  
Confidence to put point of view  
Sense of responsibility and trust culture  
Purposeful  
Demonstrates knowledge/understanding  
Cohesive identity (location – strategy for short and long term, culture, sharing vision and values, knowledge of service/systems, communications, team building  
Can do attitude – deliver on promises – wealth of knowledge and ability "if not me, I know someone who can".  
Talking about Central Beds with pride, excitement, vibrancy (with reservations)  
Friendly, warm, professional, helpful, buzzing, approachable, "family atmosphere"  
Positive and confident  
Sense of Challenge  
Excitement and enthusiasm  
Approachable staff – especially at reception  
Professional and motivated  
Organised  
Leadership style – flexibility not brittle/rigid, consensus  
Staff – flexible and helpful, competent, reassured  
Contact centres – up to speed - trialled and practiced  
Open to change – incentives – praise more than criticise  
IT should not be dominant  
Non-conformity to the details of the bid, not the outcomes  
Excitement, optimistic, certainty, stable, opportunity  
We are a team (Members and officers)  
Excitement, new dawn, confidence and "can do"  
The council feels respected and that people want to approach us with confidence