

Central Bedfordshire Council

Strategic Plan 2009-11

“Our Vision is to improve the quality of life of all in Central Bedfordshire, and enhance the unique character of our communities and our environment.”*

** As adopted by Central Bedfordshire Shadow Executive on 5 August 2008*

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1. Introduction from the Leader of Central Bedfordshire Council

- 1.1 Welcome to the first Strategic Plan for Central Bedfordshire Council. This plan represents a major milestone and is a clear statement of our medium term aspirations and priorities from April 2009. I am proud of the work being done to ensure that the new Council becomes a reality, but shortly the real task of delivering more effective and efficient services begins. I am under no illusion that the first years of Central Bedfordshire Council's life will be easy, but both Members and Officers are determined to rise to the challenge and make our Vision reality.
- 1.2 The creation of the Council comes at a critical time for our communities. The levels of housing growth which we are likely to see within the next decade must be very carefully planned to ensure that it does not have a detrimental impact. Managing this growth successfully is vital, especially in a period of possible national and global economic recession. Yet this growth cannot be at the expense of our unique environment. Striking an appropriate balance between the opportunities created through growth and the protection of the environment will be critically important to us in the coming years. We must not allow future generations to suffer from any decisions we take today.
- 1.3 The composition of communities is also changing for reasons other than just growth. The proportion of older people is increasing and this gives rise to increasing pressure, especially on care services. Also, our communities vary significantly, in terms of relative prosperity, diversity and health. I am determined to make sure we recognise and understand this, tackling any areas of deprivation or inequality appropriately.
- 1.4 One of the cornerstones of our original proposal to Government was to create a new Council capable of providing strong community leadership. Local elections in the spring of 2009 will provide us with the opportunity to put in place the democratic component of this leadership, when 66 Councillors formally take on the mantle of representing Central Bedfordshire's electorate. I would encourage everyone to make their voice heard on polling day.
- 1.5 Unsurprisingly, one of the ambitions I hold is for Central Bedfordshire to be a council that is well managed and provides high quality cost-effective services to customers. I do not however see this as enough in itself and I am equally determined to ensure we play a full part in shaping both the Bedfordshire sub-region and East of England region. We must also, where appropriate, seek to influence future Government policy. Central Bedfordshire is one of the larger unitary councils in the country and needs to make sure it uses the influence which this brings to best effect for residents.

- 1.6 Whatever the size of the Council, it is obvious that the support and goodwill of a wide range of partners is essential to our shared success. We must work closely with colleagues in other organisations including statutory partners such as the Police and Primary Care Trust, and also with the voluntary sector, if we are to get the best outcomes. Our newly emerging Strategic Partnership, and the Local Area Agreement, will help us here, bringing together not only the statutory agencies, but also representatives from Town and Parish councils, the business community, and other community groups.
- 1.7 Finally, no council can be successful without dedicated and skilled Members and Officers working in partnership and I am proud of the professionalism and enthusiasm shown in so many areas. For my part, I will do my utmost to put us in a position to deliver service excellence, encourage continuous improvement and establish a true “flagship” council for the people of Central Bedfordshire.
- 1.8 Although this is not a formal consultation document, if you have any comments on our aspirations and priorities, or any other aspects of this plan, I would be very pleased to hear from you.

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2.

About the Central Bedfordshire area

Note: CB location map to be inserted here

- 2.1 Central Bedfordshire is home to approximately 250,000 people¹ living in 105,000 households. It is estimated that housing growth will increase the population to over 280,000 in less than ten years. Central Bedfordshire lies in the heart of the county, covering some 712 square kilometres from Leighton Linlade and Dunstable in the west to Sandy and Arlesey in the east, and from Woburn to Whipsnade. The Chiltern Hills, an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, form a major feature in the west including chalk scarp and downlands and the Greensand Ridge runs eastwards throughout the area. The Grand Union canal also passes through.
- 2.2 The area is diverse with picturesque villages, hamlets and historic market towns. However, it is at the same time one of the most rapidly growing areas in England and is planning for substantial additional development as part of the Milton Keynes and South Midlands Growth Area. The largest communities within Central Bedfordshire are Ampthill, Biggleswade, Dunstable, Flitwick, Houghton Regis, Leighton Linlade, Sandy and Shefford.

Note: chart showing population growth projections to be inserted here

¹ "Population Estimates & Forecasts 2007" from Luton BC/Beds CC estimate a population of 252,00 in 2007 growing to 280,400 by 2016.

- 2.3 Around 6% of people living in the area are from black or ethnic minority communities. Overall health is better than the UK norm whilst in terms of deprivation no part of Central Bedfordshire is within the worst 10% nationally. However, this overall picture of affluence masks some aspects of deprivation and some communities within Dunstable, Flitwick, Houghton Regis and Sandy face particular challenges relative to the rest of the area.
- 2.4 Central Bedfordshire has good north to south communication routes including the M1 in the west and A1 in the east with the A507 being the main east to west route. Car dependency is high with the majority of work journeys being made by car, with limited alternatives available for people without a vehicle in rural areas.
- 2.5 Other transport links include good regional and national rail lines and nearby Luton and Stansted airports. A large number of residents work outside the area in the surrounding employment centres of Bedford, Luton, Milton Keynes and Letchworth as well as London itself, 40 miles to the south. Unemployment is low and major employers located in Central Bedfordshire include Amazon, Cranfield University, Millbrook Proving Ground, Renault Trucks UK, the RSPB and Whitbread Group PLC.
- 2.6 In the near future, we will have a major new visitor attraction in the new Centre Parcs Holiday Village near Flitwick and, potentially, the NIRAH aquatic life centre. These will increase both employment and visits to the area, complementing the well known Woburn Safari Park & Abbey, Whipsnade and Dunstable Downs.
- 2.7 In environmental terms, much of Central Bedfordshire has a suburban or rural feel and is a highly desirable place to both live and work. Affordable housing is however an important local issue, as house prices are in general above the norm compared to other areas within the East of England and nationally.
- 2.8 A range of further social and demographic information about Central Bedfordshire is available on www.centralbeds.gov.uk

3. The new Council and our values

- 3.1 The creation of Central Bedfordshire Council provides an unparalleled and exciting opportunity to improve the quality of life of local people. The Government decision for the new unitary council to go ahead was confirmed in March 2008. Since that date a significant programme of activity has been put in place to ensure that the opportunity to remodel services to align with best practice is taken. This programme has included consideration of the political and management structures for the new council. In doing this work, close attention has been given to the principles of being cost effective, taking advantage of the synergy which comes from new ways of grouping services and focusing on the needs of our customers.

- 3.2 66 Councillors will be elected in the summer of 2009 for an initial two year period. Further elections will take place in 2011 and at four yearly intervals thereafter. The Council will elect a Leader who will nominate cabinet members to take specific responsibility and be accountable for a selected portfolio of services. Working alongside the cabinet will be Overview and Scrutiny committees which will assist in policy development and the monitoring of performance.
- 3.3 At operational level, services will be grouped into five Directorates. For the medium term there will be three main administrative offices, these being located in Dunstable, Shefford and Bedford. The management team will be based at Priory House in Shefford. In total, excluding teachers and school based staff, the Council will employ approximately 2,700 staff. The five Directorates are:
- Children, Families and Learning;
 - Social Care, Health and Housing;
 - Sustainable Communities;
 - Corporate Resources; and
 - Business Transformation.
- 3.4 Portfolio holders, working with Directors, are responsible for the delivery of services in each area. Further details of the Council's governance arrangements, including the constitution that sets out the way in which the Council will operate and all committee papers, can be found on the Council's website www.centralbeds.gov.uk as and when they are published.
- 3.5 In delivering our Vision, Central Bedfordshire is keen to adopt an open and inclusive approach to its work. Following a series of workshop sessions, our core values as an organisation are:
- We will be close to our communities by being communicative, approachable and aware of the needs of all of our customers;
 - We will be caring, responsive and trustworthy;
 - We will innovate, embrace change and strive for efficiency;
 - We will work with our partners and be valued by them for service delivery and for being a team player.
- 3.6 These values will underpin what we do in delivering services and working with our partners. Making these reality will be essential in ensuring that Central Bedfordshire becomes a top performing authority as rapidly as possible.

4. The “big picture” – national influences on our work

- 4.1 Central Bedfordshire, as well as having its own priorities, will work within a framework of national priorities determined by Government. Emerging legislation and guidance constantly impacts upon the duties and responsibilities of the council and the way in which services are delivered. Some key national influences include:
- The need to respond to national initiatives which impact upon specific services, especially those relating to education, social care and community safety;
 - The introduction of a new national performance management framework for local government, incorporating a set of around 200 national performance indicators, a revised Local Area Agreement regime and continuing external scrutiny of performance through Comprehensive Area Assessment;
 - An increasing desire on the part of Central Government to encourage community engagement at a local level. This gives rise to a host of new duties and responsibilities such as the Councillor Call for Action and new duties to increase the involvement of local people in decision making and local accountability in budget setting;
 - A continuing drive to improve efficiency in the public sector including local government, with an overall cash target of 3% annual efficiency gains across the sector and an expectation of future restrictions on public spending throughout the 2007-10 spending review period;
 - The identification of growth areas such as Central Bedfordshire for very significant housing growth and potential EcoTowns;
 - The emerging importance being placed upon tackling climate change and the likely emergence of a compulsory carbon trading scheme involving all major energy users, including local authorities.
- 4.2 In addition to the national Government agenda, there are many issues which impact upon Central Bedfordshire which require a regional solution. Planning, managing housing growth and transportation are obvious examples and the council is determined to play its part in contributing to the debate on such issues at regional and sub-regional level with appropriate partners in other areas.

5. Our Vision for Central Bedfordshire

- 5.1 The Council’s vision is to improve the quality of life of all in Central Bedfordshire, and enhance the unique character of our communities and our environment.
- 5.2 To deliver this vision requires us to have a thorough understanding of our communities and to consider the evidence of need carefully in determining our priorities. The development of the Bedfordshire Sustainable Community Strategy, and the Community Strategies of the former district councils, provides us with a comprehensive evidence base and have been the subject of considerable discussion with partner agencies. The five themes which emerged from the analysis of this evidence, and which have been agreed across Bedfordshire are:

- Growing our economy and raising the profile and identity of the county as a great place to live, work and visit;
- Protecting and enhancing our environment, green infrastructure and spaces, promoting sustainable housing growth and preparing for climate change;
- Raising the aspirations of our children and young people;
- Building cohesive, strong, safe and sustainable communities with well planned, decent and affordable housing, where people have a shared identity and sense of belonging; and
- Reducing health inequalities and delivering good health and well being for our communities.

5.3 It is important to translate these themes into action and this is done through Local Area Agreements (LAAs). LAAs are three year agreements between local authorities (and their partners) and central government. They set out explicit targets for improvement. Some of these targets relate directly to council services and some are relevant to partner agencies or require action by a number of different organisations working together. The current Bedfordshire LAA runs from 2008-11 and sets out a range of 32 performance targets aligned to both local and national priorities, plus a further 16 indicators relating to education which are mandatory for all LAAs.

5.4 The creation of two new unitary authorities in Bedfordshire from April 2009 requires the existing Bedfordshire wide LAA to be split into two separate agreements. This work will be concluded by January 2009. Where appropriate, the currently agreed LAA targets have been included within this strategic plan to show clearly the contribution the Council will make to delivering the Local Area Agreement themes.

5.5 Overseeing the LAA process is the job of the Local Strategic Partnership and discussions are underway about how the Central Bedfordshire LSP will be set up for the future. This work will be completed by April 2009.

Note: diagram showing "golden thread" between community strategy to council vision and priorities to be inserted here

5.6 In choosing the areas to be priorities for the Council in the coming years, Members have had regard to the community strategy and evidence base, LAA targets and public priorities. Unsurprisingly, many priorities of the Council coincide exactly with LAA themes. The five agreed council priorities for 2009-11 (the first two full years of the new Council) are:

- 1. Supporting and caring for an ageing population**
- 2. Educating, protecting and providing opportunities for children and young people**
- 3. Managing growth effectively**
- 4. Creating safer communities**
- 5. Promoting healthier lifestyles**

- 5.7 How we deliver our priorities is important to us and requires a particular style of operation. In particular, the Council recognises that it needs to encourage greater involvement and engagement in local communities and to further strengthen partnership working. The Council is also mindful that delivery of its priorities must take place having regard to the financial resources at its disposal and the need to both restrain growth in Council Tax and provide value for money.
- 5.8 There are of course many more services which must be delivered by the council that have not been included in the listing above, but clarity on top priorities is helpful for guiding both business and financial planning and providing a focus on performance. These initial priorities will be subject to periodic review, the first of which will take place following the local elections in 2009.
- 5.9 The Council will be preparing directorate and business unit plans for 2009/10 over the next few months and as these are finalised they will be placed on the Council's website. These will provide additional information on how services are configured and the detailed issues being addressed in delivering our priorities. These operational documents will be reviewed annually.
- 5.10 The following section looks at each of the five priority areas in turn and provides an overview of the issues involved, what we propose to do and how we will measure progress.

6. **Our priorities**

6.1 *Priority 1: Supporting and caring for an ageing population*

Key issues for Central Bedfordshire:

- People are living longer and the proportion of older people in the population is growing. This places increasing pressure on organisations which provide services to older people and carers;
- The Council recognises that it needs to plan for these demographic changes with its partners and provide sufficient resources to ensure that quality of care for vulnerable older people is not compromised and individuals are given the right to exercise degrees of choice and control over their care;
- The number of vulnerable people among younger age groups is also rising.

What we are going to do:

- We will enable service users or carers to be independent and have choice and control over their care and the money that pays for it;
- We will improve support to carers in their key role in supporting vulnerable people through provision of “carer breaks” or other specific services following individual carer needs assessments;
- We will provide support for people to maintain independent living;
- We will provide opportunities to engage older people in positive cultural activities.

How we are going to measure our success:

- An increase in the number of carers assessed as a percentage of the number of people receiving a community based service (local LAA indicator-NI 135);
- An increase in the number of adults, older people and carers receiving social care through a Direct Payment and/or individual budget (LAA-NI 130);
- An increase in the percentage of vulnerable people who are supported to maintain independent living (local LAA indicator-NI 142).

Responsibility for delivery of this priority

- Portfolio Holder for Social Care, Health and Housing
- Portfolio Holder for Children, Young People and Families
- Director of Social Care, Health and Housing
- Director of Children, Families and Learning

6.2 *Priority 2 – Educating, Protecting, and Providing Opportunities for children and young people*

Key issues for Central Bedfordshire:

- Whilst overall the population may be ageing, the number of 0-19 year olds in Central Bedfordshire is forecast to increase by around 2% in the period to 2016 as a result of housing growth ;
- The welfare of children and young people is both a local and national top priority;
- A range of Government led initiatives (as outlined in Building Brighter Futures and Every Child Matters) mean that Central Bedfordshire will need to consider if existing school organisation and the three-tier education system of lower, middle and upper schools will meet the future needs of local children.

What we are going to do:

- We will improve educational attainment in areas where there is underperformance and also raise the educational attainment of vulnerable children, young people and looked after children;
- We will ensure that parenting support and specialist services focused on children's welfare and child protection are adequately resourced;
- We will develop a Central Bedfordshire Children's and Young People's Plan building on work already done in the County and fully involve children and young people in its development. In doing this we will look to make the most of the opportunity to link children's services to other Council services;
- We will work with partners to establish a new Children's Trust to further promote joint working between all those who can make a contribution to child welfare and so offer a better, more joined up service to customers;
- We will develop a new approach to commissioning services to maximise effectiveness and value for money;
- We will complete the implementation of the children's centres programme;
- We will transform the fabric of our schools through the Building Schools for the Future programme when access to funding becomes available;
- We will encourage young people to participate in education employment or training and to live healthier lifestyles.

How we are going to measure our success:

- Improvement in our self-assessment score regarding the effectiveness of children and adolescent mental health services (LAA-NI 51);
- Reducing the number of children who are obese (LAA-NI 56);
- Increasing proportion of young people participating in positive activity (LAA-NI110);
- Reducing substance misuse by young people (LAA - NI 115);
- Reducing the number of young people aged 16 to 18 years who are not in education, employment or training (LAA - NI 117);

- Improving educational performance (LAA - NI 72, 73, 74, 75, 83, 87, 92-101);
- Reducing the proportion of children living in poverty (Local LAA-NI 116).

Responsibility for delivery of this priority

- Portfolio Holder for Children, Young People and Families
- Director of Children, Families and Learning

6.3 *Priority 3 - Managing growth effectively*

Key issues for Central Bedfordshire:

- By 2031 the population of the Central Bedfordshire area will have grown to over 325,000 people². This must be well managed, as the impact of this scale of growth in a relatively short time scale will place additional pressures on local services and infrastructure in areas that already have recognised deficiencies;
- Out commuting is already high, causing pressure and congestion on the strategic road network, compounded by leisure and main shopping needs being met in the surrounding sub-regional centres;
- In order to make the most of growth, Central Bedfordshire will need to develop effective planning policies to ensure that the necessary social, community, and physical infrastructure is delivered in parallel with new development. Critical elements include the increased provision of affordable housing, the development of an integrated transport strategy for the conurbation of Luton / Dunstable and Houghton Regis and tackling traffic congestion at hot spots throughout the area;
- Delivery of growth will require extensive partnership working with utility companies, service providers, developers, landowners and the third sector. This will be co-ordinated through the Local Delivery Vehicles in the north (Renaissance Bedford) and the new LDV in the south for Luton and South Bedfordshire;
- The need to boost economic prosperity and balance new housing growth, whilst protecting the character of our communities and high quality of the countryside is a particular challenge. New local jobs are key to sustainable growth and the new Council will expect developers to bring forward plans that create high quality business environments that are accessible by public transport;
- The current downturn in the economy will pose particular challenges in meeting the Government targets for growth and the Council will need to explore with partners new models of delivery, particularly to meet the housing needs of our communities.

What we are going to do:

- We will work to enhance the environment of our towns, villages and rural areas;
- We will take an active and leading role in discussions within the sub-region and beyond to ensure that the needs and aspirations of Central Bedfordshire are recognised;
- We will continue to engage residents in work associated with the local development frameworks for Central Bedfordshire in order that people are given a full voice in the development process and shaping the future;
- We will take an active role in discussions regarding the potential development of an Eco-Town within Central Bedfordshire;
- We will use the planning process to maximise the proportion of new homes which are affordable and the number of local jobs provided;
- We will be represented on the Boards of the two LDVs ensuring that Growth

² "Population Estimates & Forecasts 2007" from Luton BC/Beds CC estimate population of 325,600 in 2031

Area Funding is channelled towards the Council and community priorities;

- We will work with our partners to attract businesses to Central Bedfordshire, develop those which already exist and improve the skills within the workforce;
- We will encourage and support opportunities for creating and facilitating sustainable living.

How we are going to measure our success:

- Net increase in housing (LAA-NI 154);
- Number and proportion of homes built which are affordable (NI 155);
- Increase in the use of public transport (local LAA indicator NI 175);
- Reduction in the proportion of children travelling to school by car (LAA-NI 198);
- Reduce the number of people claiming out of work benefits (LAA-NI 152);
- Increase the proportion of people aged 19-64 with the equivalent of at least 5 GCSE's, 2 A/S levels or equivalent qualification (LAA-NI 163);
- Increase the proportion of people aged 19-64 who have first degrees or degree level qualifications (LAA-NI 165);
- The average journey time per mile (NI 167);
- The condition of A-roads (NI 168);
- The condition of B and C-class roads (NI 169);
- Increase in new businesses registering for VAT (local LAA indicator-NI 171);
- Increase in the number of local businesses showing a growth in employment (LAA-NI 172).

Responsibility for delivery of this priority:

Portfolio Holder for Sustainable Development;
Director of Sustainable Communities.

6.4 *Priority 4 – Creating Safer Communities*

Key issues for Central Bedfordshire:

- In general, Central Bedfordshire is a relatively safe area, although the fear of crime and anti-social behaviour remain important issues. Also, some communities are much more likely to suffer from the impact of crime and disorder than others;
- The existing statutory partnerships co-ordinating multi-agency work to fight crime are being reorganised and Bedfordshire Police are reviewing the Police command structure across the former Mid and South Beds areas. The opportunity needs to be taken to ensure that the efforts of all partners are aligned;
- The Casey Report (examining how to better engage communities in the fight against crime) contains over 30 proposals and Government is likely to implement at least some of these in the near future.

What we are going to do:

- We will work with partners to reduce crime and the fear of crime, with a particular focus on acquisitive crime (burglary, robbery and theft of/from motor vehicles), criminal damage, domestic violence, substance & alcohol abuse and tackling prolific offenders;
- We will review the use and application of CCTV across Central Bedfordshire;
- We will continue to work with communities in priority estates to tackle crime and anti-social behaviour and pilot community led schemes where it is appropriate to do so;
- We will ensure that considerations of crime and disorder are embedded within the culture of Central Bedfordshire by development of a Section 17 plan designed for the needs of the authority.

How we are going to measure our success:

- Reduction in the number of serious acquisitive crimes (including burglary, robbery and theft of/from motor vehicles) per 1,000 population (LAA-NI 16);
- Reduction in the re-offending rate of prolific and other priority offenders (LAA-NI 30);
- Reduction in the number of repeat incidents of domestic violence (LAA-NI 32);
- Increasing the number of drug users in effective treatment (LAA-NI 40);
- The introduction of the national assessment scheme, APACS, (Assessment of Policing and Community Safety) will provide an independent view of the progress being made by the Police, the Council and other community safety partners.

Responsibility for delivery of this priority:

- Portfolio Holder for Safer and Stronger Communities
- Director of Sustainable Communities

6.5 *Priority 5 - Promoting healthier lifestyles*

Key issues for Central Bedfordshire:

- Reducing health inequalities is a national and local priority;
- Nationally, reducing obesity and the incidence of smoking, are priorities.

What we are going to do:

- We will work with our partners, particularly the Bedfordshire Primary Care Trust, to determine appropriate measures to ensure care services reflect the changing demographic profile of the area and that care services and health services work effectively together. This will include joint funding for the post of Director of Public Health for Bedfordshire who will help to achieve the synergies necessary for effective care provision;
- We will develop a Central Bedfordshire cultural strategy to encourage participation in a wide range of activities linked to healthier lifestyles;
- We will invest in new or improved leisure facilities in Stotfold, Flitwick, Biggleswade, Tiddenfoot and Dunstable;
- We will invest in libraries in Sandy and Cranfield.

How we are going to measure our success:

- Increase in life expectancy (LAA-NI 120);
- Increase in the numbers of people who have stopped smoking (LAA-NI 123);
- Increase in adult participation in sport (LAA-NI 8);
- Increase in engagement in the arts (local LAA indicator-NI 11).

Responsibility for delivery of this priority

- Portfolio Holder for Social Care, Health and Housing;
- Director of Social Care, Health and Housing.

How we will deliver these priorities

7. Working together

Formal partnerships

- 7.1 The delivery of the Council's priorities, and the delivery of excellence in services, cannot be achieved by working in isolation. A network of formal partnerships is already in place and Central Bedfordshire will look to use and develop existing partnership arrangements wherever it is sensible to do so. Work is underway to restructure the Local Strategic Partnerships across the county area and part of this work will result in establishing a new LSP fit for purpose for Central Bedfordshire.
- 7.2 The Council is also mindful of the important role played by Town and Parish Councils, the business community and the "third sector" of voluntary and community groups operating across Central Bedfordshire. Community engagement and partnership working are at the heart of how Central Bedfordshire will operate and resources will be made available to undertake this effectively.

Sharing services with others

- 7.3 The creation of two unitary councils in Bedfordshire requires Central Bedfordshire and Bedford Borough Council to work together to provide cost effective services in a range of specialist areas to minimise risk of service disruption and costs. Discussions on the exact nature of these shared services is still underway, but both councils are committed to working together to ensure that good quality value for money services are delivered to the residents of both authorities. It is likely that sharing arrangements between the councils will include specialist aspects of children's services, school transport, minerals & waste planning, archaeology, archives and registrar services. This is by no means an exhaustive list and discussions are continuing on other potential areas.
- 7.4 There may also be future opportunities to work with other authorities such as Luton Borough Council and Milton Keynes Council, or other public sector partners, to share services and thereby maximise efficiency and value for money. Central Bedfordshire will approach all such discussions with an open mind on the best model to adopt.

Valuing Members and Staff

- 7.5 As well as external partners, the Council is mindful that suitably trained, motivated and qualified staff are vital to quality service delivery. An Organisational Development strategy and training plan will therefore be put in place before April 2009.

- 7.6 Alongside this, the Council will support Members to empower them to make a real difference within their communities. This will include the provision of appropriate support, a training and development programme and specific initiatives such as consideration of ward “fix it” budgets and ward walkabouts.

Assessing if our partnerships are effective

- 7.7 The effectiveness of how the Council and its partners work together will be assessed by the Audit Commission and other inspectorates through a rigorous examination known as Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA). CAA represents a fundamental change in the way councils and partners are assessed and it will involve a forward looking assessment of the prospects for the future achievement of shared priorities. It is anticipated that the first such assessment of Central Bedfordshire will take place in 2009/10 with the report due out in November 2009.

8. Involving and Engaging local communities

- 8.1 Encouraging greater involvement and engagement of local communities cuts across the delivery of all of our priorities. In the recent Government White Paper “Communities in Control” the empowerment of communities has been recognised as a national priority. It is also a local priority for Central Bedfordshire and the Council is committed to ensuring that the involvement and engagement of local communities underpins all that it does.
- 8.2 A new legal duty comes into force in April 2009 which requires the Council to inform, consult and involve local people in exercising all of its functions. Encouraging citizens to be actively engaged in the governance of their communities is recognised as vital in tackling increasing disenchantment with formal political mechanisms and allowing local people greater say and influence over decision making;
- 8.3 An aspiration of the Council is to make Central Bedfordshire an organisation which listens to its community and to lead the way in ensuring that local people have the opportunity to engage with its work at a community level. To this end, we will set up new Community Area Networks and these will be one of the key mechanisms for enabling decisions to be taken closer to the communities they affect and for empowering communities to take local action. They will provide the basis for local decision making and influence service delivery across Central Bedfordshire. Consultation is currently taking place on how this will work in practice.

What we are going to do:

- We will develop, through widespread consultation, a new Community Engagement strategy. At the heart of this strategy is a commitment to establish a community engagement team with the specific remit of encouraging dialogue and consultation between statutory partners, voluntary organisations and local communities. As part of this strategy, the Council is committed to consulting widely on how Community Area Networks might assist in achieving this objective and also how a new Local Strategic Partnership should operate;
- We will adhere to the principles set out within the agreed local COMPACT which governs relationships between the Council and its partners in the voluntary and community sector;
- We will develop a new local Charter to set out clearly relationships between the Council and Town & Parish Councils;
- We will use the development of a new Central Bedfordshire Sustainable Community Strategy and Local Area Agreement as an opportunity to further engage local people in a debate about our future aspirations;
- We will work towards the achievement of excellence in terms of delivering services equitably to all sections of the community. This will be achieved through the adoption of a new Equality & Diversity strategy and associated action plan.

How we are going to measure our success:

- Increase in the level of civic participation in the area (LAA-NI 3);
- Increase in the level of regular volunteering (local LAA indicator-NI 6);
- Improving the environment for a thriving third sector (local LAA indicator-NI 7);
- The level of the Equality Standard for Local Government which the Council achieves;
- Increasing participation in the Central Bedfordshire Local Strategic Partnership.

Responsibility for delivery

- Portfolio Holder for Customers and Community Engagement;
- Director of Business Transformation.

9 Managing our finances, restraining Council Tax and delivering value for money

- 9.1 Restraining Council Tax and delivering value for money is a theme which impacts upon the delivery of all our priorities. Budget allocations for 2009/10 and beyond will be determined by Members early in 2009, but a priority of the Council is to restrain Council Tax by seeking efficiency savings and simultaneously ensuring long term viability is built into its finances. The Council's medium term financial strategy, and asset strategy, will be developed alongside the first budget.

- 9.2 The Government has made it clear that it expects local authorities to deliver 3% cashable savings year on year. Whilst establishing Central Bedfordshire will deliver revenue savings of £11.5m (at 2006/07 prices) when compared with the total costs of running the three former authorities, in the medium term further efficiencies will be essential if this target is to be met. This expectation of efficiencies, coupled with anticipated limited future growth in central grant settlement, makes it important to ensure value for money throughout all aspects of service delivery. Transforming services in this way relies upon a suitably skilled, flexible and motivated workforce.
- 9.3 The Council must also ensure that Council Tax levels are appropriate and that its financial strategy is sustainable. Government has made it clear that it will not hesitate to use capping powers if local authorities seek to impose significant increases in Council tax upon local residents

Note: chart showing likely proportion of budget spending by service area to be inserted here

What we are going to do:

- We will establish a medium term financial strategy that will provide the basis for sustainable and affordable budget setting based on the priorities set out in this Strategic Plan;
- We will provide opportunities for local residents and businesses to contribute to discussions relating to budget setting;
- We will introduce a business transformation programme with the twin aims of improving service to customers and delivering financial efficiencies. This will include remodelling of service processes to maximise efficiency;
- We will develop an Organisational Development strategy to ensure that the skills and enthusiasm of staff are harnessed;
- We will take the opportunity offered by the creation of the unitary council to provide an improved customer service;

- We will develop an approach to procuring services that ensures Value for Money. As part of this, we will work in partnership with others, sharing services wherever it is sensible to do so;
- We will review the Council's property and investment portfolio.

How we are going to measure our success:

- Cashable efficiencies achieved (NI 179).
- The Audit Commission will periodically assess the arrangements for securing efficiency in Use of Resources (including Value for Money) and it is anticipated that the first such organisational assessment will take place in 2009/10.
- Customer satisfaction levels and levels of customer complaints.
- Staff satisfaction levels.

Responsibility for delivery

Portfolio Holder for Corporate Resources;
 Director of Corporate Resources;
 Director of Business Transformation.

10. Managing our performance

- 10.1 Delivering quality services requires good performance management at all levels of the organisation. A comprehensive performance management framework is in development and will be agreed by Members before April 2009. This will set out the structure for monitoring and measuring our performance and how the cycle for reviewing and monitoring plans at strategic, operational, team and individual level will contribute to delivering quality services. It will also set out the respective responsibilities of Officers and Members.
- 10.2 Allied to this, before the end of 2008/09 the Council will be setting targets against the 200 national performance indicators and a range of local indicators. Subsets of this information will be used to monitor progress against our priorities by, amongst others, the Management Team, Executive and Overview & Scrutiny Committees.
- 10.3 In addition to these internal processes, the Council will also be subject to periodic external challenge by the Audit Commission, the Office for Standards in Education, the Commission for Social Care Inspection and other inspectorates through Comprehensive Area Assessment. CAA will replace Comprehensive Performance Assessment, existing Children's Services Joint Area Reviews, Area Performance Assessments of services for children and young people and social services star ratings. Performance frameworks for specific services (e.g. schools, colleges, police, probation and health and social care) will however continue.

- 10.4 All Inspectorates will look for high quality local performance management data to underpin their assessments. The Council and partners will also need to demonstrate that this information is used routinely to manage the delivery of Local Area Agreement outcomes.
- 10.5 This performance framework will ensure that Central Bedfordshire is able to monitor its progress effectively, take early remedial action where this is necessary and deliver against the targets it sets itself. It will also encourage an environment where performance improvement is seen as a continuous process and a core competency. The Director of Business Transformation takes responsibility for this area of activity.
- 10.6 The Council is committed to the pursuit of excellence in service delivery. Good performance requires not only appropriate corporate systems, but also skilled and motivated staff who understand the critical importance of managing performance effectively at all levels. Achieving the right performance culture will be a top priority for the new management team to underpin the responsibility of the Executive to deliver a successful new local authority for the residents of Central Bedfordshire.

11. **And finally...**

- 11.1 This Strategic Plan can only give a flavour of the aspirations of Central Bedfordshire, but we hope it provides you with an indication of our medium term priorities and the way in which we intend to approach their delivery. If you would like further information on any aspect of the information contained within this plan please contact David Moores, Corporate Policy Manager at Mid Beds District Council in the first instance on 01462 611213 or by e-mail at david.moores@midbeds.gov.uk

This information can be provided in an alternative format or language on request: call 01462 611222

- ◆ যদি অনুরোধ করেন তাহলে অন্য কোনও আকারে বা ভাষায় এই তথ্য আপনি পেতে পারেন। 01462 611222 (Bengali)
- ◆ 你可以要求以另一種格式或語言提供這些訊息 01462 611222 (Chinese)
- ◆ ਏਹ ਜਾਣਕਾਰੀ ਬੇਨਤੀ ਕੀਤੇ ਜਾਣ 'ਤੇ ਕਿਸੇ ਹੋਰ ਸ਼ਕਲ ਜਾਂ ਬੋਲੀ ਵਿਚ ਮਿਲ ਸਕਦੀ ਹੈ। 01462 611222 (Punjabi)
- ◆ یہ معلومات آپ کے درخواست کرنے پر متبادل ڈیٹا یا زبان میں مہیا کی جاسکتی ہیں۔ (01462 611222) (Urdu)
- ◆ Questa informazione puo' essere fornita su richiesta in un altro formato o un'altra lingua telefonando al numero 01462 611222 (Italian)
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