

## Background

As part of the Central Bedfordshire implementation strategy the Transitional Task Force (TTF) for Customers & Community Engagement was established and first met on 23 April 2008. Following the decision to align Performance and Policy within this portfolio in line with the newly formed Directorate, the TTF was renamed Business Transformation in November. The Task Force met twelve times, the final meeting was on 9 February 2009.

The Task Force agreed the Project Initiation Documents (PIDs) for Customer Services, Partnerships & Community Engagement and Revenues & Benefits. The Task Force set up two sub groups: one on community engagement and one on the Third Sector; and also set up a Community Engagement and Partnerships stakeholders' sounding board to inform its proposals.

Drawing on the expertise of officers across its remit, the Task Force provided support to the Portfolio Holder(s) and made recommendations to the Shadow Executive on key policy and transitional issues to be achieved by the April 2009 timescale. The Task Force also provided guidance in progressing the formation of the Directorate and over the course of its meetings considered the Business Plans for Partnerships and Community Engagement, Customer Services and Revenues and Benefits.

## Section 1 – Key Issues Considered

### Customer Services

At its 6 May meeting the Task Force decided that rather than developing an integrated 'Customer First Strategy' there should be a Customer Service Strategy produced as well as a separate Community Engagement Strategy. The development of both these strategies will be a year one priority.

The Task Force kept the emerging **Customer Service Strategy** under close review, including the proposals to develop the Points of Presence and single number access to services. The Lead Officer outlined the need to harness all services within the Points of Presence and advised there was evidence of the success of other authorities that provided front-line staff who answered all questions. He also advised that having a Customer Relationship Management (CRM) would enable front-line staff to provide the service expected by residents.

The Task Force were advised of the proposal to implement the **0300 telephony range** introduced for the public sector and detailed costs were subsequently circulated.

The Task Force recognised that a key deliverable would be the implementation of **Customer Relationship Management** and in order to secure this part of the project it would be necessary to produce a sound business case for its implementation.

The Task Force made an early recommendation with regard to continuing the **Citizone Branding** concluding that the new authority should cease to retain the "Citizone" Brand and establish a new identity to indicate the transformation to a new unitary authority.

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The Task Force were advised that the existing authorities have different **Customer Charter and Customer Standards** and accordingly such standards would have to be rationalised for implementation by Central Bedfordshire. On 2 June, the Task Force received a presentation on a proposed Customer Charter and gave advice to officers as to the elements to be included.

The Task Force were kept informed of the proposals relating to the **Customer Service Centre/Points of Presence (PoP)** including:

- plans to deliver a face-to-face service at Houghton Regis Library, opening July 2009;
- the proposal to roll out this service to two mobile libraries which would become the property of Central Bedfordshire;
- a confidential report advising of the case for closure of the Citizone at Dunstable. The Task Force gave their approval to close this before 31 December 2008;
- progress being made on the alterations to the reception area at the Council Offices in High Street South to form the new Dunstable Customer Service Centre which opened on 26 January 2009.

The Task Force were informed of the intention to develop a shared **customer contact service** with Bedford Borough Council and others and gave consideration to the merits of sharing the contact centre services. Key to these considerations were the budgetary advantages of working in partnership and ensuring best value, whilst also considering the need to establish Central Bedfordshire as a 'best in class' authority in its own right.

The Task Force were kept apprised of discussions taking place between Central Bedfordshire and BBC and that initially expressions of interest were made by both authorities to act as host. As the customer contact centres at the County, Mid Bedfordshire and South Bedfordshire were successful there was a clear preference for Central Bedfordshire to be the host as its arrangements were the more advanced of the two unitaries. The Task Force supported the lead officer in making this recommendation.

The Shadow Executive on 30 September resolved that in respect of the contact centre, the first choice be for a shared service with Central Bedfordshire acting as host; but should this not be agreed with Bedford Borough Council then Central Bedfordshire proceed to work with Bedfordshire County Council (BCC) to disaggregate the BCC contact centre as a matter of urgency. Subsequently the decision has been taken to set up the contact centre for Central Bedfordshire and agree an SLA and a protocol for transferring calls between authorities.

### **One Stop Kiosk Pilot**

On 2 June, Jane Markham of the Bedfordshire Rural Communities Charity (BRCC) gave a presentation on proposals to establish a network of ISTOP Kiosks on a pilot basis offering the following benefits:-

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- Communities - improved access to national/local services, jobs, retail opportunities, especially for those without internet.
- Local Authorities - progress towards White Paper's emphasis on informing local communities.
- Rural retailers - increased footfall, commission on goods purchased at kiosk, chance to provide additional services to customers.

The Task Force expressed support and subsequently received a report on 26 August inviting them to approve the recommendation to proceed with the pilot roll out of ten IStop Kiosks from October 2008. Subject to endorsement by the new Council it was then intended to implement a roll-out within the first three years of Central Bedfordshire. Members were advised that the pilot only committed Central Bedfordshire to 12 months deployment and that a full evaluation report of the pilot would be presented to the Central Bedfordshire Executive in the summer of 2009.

On 24 November, the Task Force were advised that four out of the ten identified retailers had signed up and those who had not were being pressed for a commitment. The progress report presented to the final meeting of the Task Force on 9 February 2009 updated that only three retailers had operational units and discussions were ongoing with the supplier. In light of this the Task Force accepted that the pilot size be reduced to five.

### Revenues and Benefits

The Task Force were informed of plans for **Harmonisation** and the impact on performance due to system changes. They sought assurances from the Lead Officer that:

- There should be no degradation in service provision with a seamless introduction as at 1 April 2009.
- There will be no delay in service delivery on 1 April 2009 and efficiency savings will be secured.
- Cash payment cards will be available to all non-Direct Debit payers in Mid Bedfordshire area by 1 April 2009.

The Task Force were kept apprised of arrangements, which included staff at South Beds working generically and their training completed, and that all process and procedures have been updated and are being implemented.

The Task Force received a presentation on the Revenues and Benefits System Evaluation that had been the subject of a tender procedure focussing on the financial comparison, competitive position, technology landscape and project risks. In the light of the significant issues raised by the Task Force the Lead Officer presented a further report at the following meeting, when the Task Force endorsed the recommendation to the Interim Head of Paid Service that Central Bedfordshire selects Supplier B's proposal for the reasons set out in that report. The Task Force were advised on 6 October that a contract had been agreed with the Revenue and Benefits System supplier.

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### Partnerships and Community Engagement

At its meeting on 16 June, the Task Force agreed the contents of a survey to be issued to **Town and Parish Councils** in the Central Bedfordshire area. The consultation ended on the 19 September 2008 and the results and an explanation of how these were being taken on board was given at the very first Central Bedfordshire Rural Conference.

The **Central Bedfordshire Rural Conference** was held on 11 October and over 130 people attended, mainly parish representatives from throughout Central Bedfordshire. As well as presentations on the growth agenda and feedback from the Town and Parish Survey there was a good discussion of the Community Network model. The findings of this conference are being analysed by Ian Porter, Head of Policy, Performance and Partnerships and will inform the ongoing development of the engagement framework. Arrangements are currently being made for a further **Town and Parish Conference** to be held on the 29 April 2009 to explore their involvement in the engagement framework.

### **Third Sector - Support and Funding**

The Task Force appointed a sub group to address actions to be implemented to support and fund the voluntary sector. This sub group recommended Central Bedfordshire adopt the Bedfordshire and Luton Compact as its framework for working with the Third Sector and also provide stability and security by honouring all existing contractual arrangements that are in place across all three authorities. It was also suggested a fundamental review of funding be carried out in the first year.

On the 28 July, the Task Force approved an officer report setting out these recommendations. This was subsequently approved by the Interim Chief Executive and a statement setting out Central Bedfordshire's commitments was issued by Richard Ellis to all managers in the existing authorities. At an event held on 14 January 2009, the Leader and Interim Chief Executive formally signed the Compact and Richard Ellis outlined the new Council's ongoing commitments. Key voluntary sector representatives were invited to this event which also gave them an opportunity to meet Richard Ellis and Ian Porter as well as network with each other.

### **CB Local Strategic Partnership arrangements (Community Network Model)**

The Task Force, in responding to the new CAA regime and the underpinning 'Duty to Involve' and 'Place-shaping' policy imperatives for Central Bedfordshire Council and its partners, regularly received proposals and updates on the emerging strategy for community engagement.

These included presentations on the subject of deprivation hot spots as well as the experiences of approaches in Neighbourhood Planning and the extent to which Parish Plans have been developed. The main focus was the work on community engagement and partnership arrangements for Central Bedfordshire and the draft proposals for Community Networks which were being developed by the Task Force Sub Group and being shared and informed through the stakeholder sounding board.

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Although members of the Task Force had expressed scepticism as to whether the approach being proposed would deliver outcomes in the short-term, they felt that the adoption of the Community Network Model after extensive consultation would enable Central Bedfordshire to establish a workable relationship with communities sufficient to enable the new Unitary Authority to engage with its communities.

A joint Mid/South Beds LSP meeting was held on 11 September where support was given to establishing a Central Bedfordshire LSP Board. Both the Mid and South Beds LSPs then had one final meeting before the end of October 2008. A presentation was also made to County-wide partnership on these proposals on 17 September.

At its meeting on 6 October, the Task Force considered the report of the Director of Business Transformation that was to be presented to the Shadow Executive on 28 October. This report, which has now been agreed by Shadow Executive, set out the proposed Partnership arrangements and Community Network Model; sought delegated authority to the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) for the Sustainable Community Strategy and Local Area Agreement; and set out the timetable and process for the review and refresh of the Sustainable Community Strategy and Local Area Agreement.

Since October

- The shadow LSP Board with 14 members has met twice and a forward plan of meetings has been established for the next 12 months. Its remit is to act as a strategic decision making body and the core areas of work being Vision, Leadership and Strategy. A Growth Sub-Committee will also be in place.
- A Strategic Implementation Group (SIG) will be established to co-ordinate the work of theme and area groups. This will address cross-cutting issues, share agendas and develop and build joint working arrangement between partners.
- Five Thematic Partnerships, which are aligned to SCS and LAA priorities have been established. The partnerships will lead on the development and implementation of detailed action plans for their LAA targets and SCS priorities. Theme Leads are in place and are now engaged in the refresh of the LAA.
- The development of the Community Network model is still ongoing. The aim in taking this forward is to be less rigid about the geographical boundaries and to be more focused on how we can enable communities and the public sector to work together to deliver real and lasting community outcomes. In view of this, the initial CaN model is now being reviewed to ensure it builds on existing engagement mechanisms and neighbourhood governance through an enhanced role for ward councillors and Town & Parish Councils. We also intend to put in place effective arrangements to enable our communities to be involved in the consultation and decision-making processes. Area based local groups and organisations who will be involved in our consultation and engagement activities will also feed into these Community Networks.
- We will also be developing a comprehensive community engagement strategy for the authority and its strategic partners to make sure we are able to listen to all members of our community and gain a deeper understanding of their issues. A principles paper will go to Shadow Executive in March and the final strategy will be in place post-elections.

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- Not only have we set out our commitment to this community empowerment agenda but we will also measure delivered outcomes and have included indicators relating to civic participation and community engagement in the refreshed LAA which will be signed off with Go East in March 2009.

### **Communications - Corporate Identity/ Reputation Management**

On 24 November, the Task Force considered a paper presented by the Director of Business Transformation, Richard Ellis, as to how Central Bedfordshire's Corporate Identity would provide the means to communicate the vision, values and priorities of Central Bedfordshire Council. The Task Force were made aware that this had been agreed by Shadow Executive and a Communications Strategy and Plan were being developed.

The Task Force received a presentation outlining how the brand identity would be implemented and their views and feedback were sought on the brand design guidelines, the communication of the guidelines internally and with stakeholders, and the implementation of the new branding (what, how and when). The Task Force accepted the approach and timetable, recognising that there would be a fundamental change in emphasis from the beginning of 2009 from one of 'Creating Central Bedfordshire' to one of 'Implementing Central Bedfordshire' and that it would take between 2/5 years for the identity of the new unitary authority to become fully established.

### **Section 2 – Key Immediate Issues of Concern before Vesting Day**

The issues that needed to be progressed before vesting day and their current status are set out in the table below. Whilst the status report indicates these activities are on target there is still significant work to be completed to deliver these before the 31st March 2009.

<b>Key Issues</b>		<b>Status</b>
Staffing	Finalise Directorate structure, 3 <sup>rd</sup> tier managers appointed and line management agreed and communicated.	On target
	Mapping of teams agreed and capacity issues identified.	On target
	Development of a workforce accommodation plan.	On target
arrangements/	Customer Service Strategy and associated budgets developed.	In hand - 1 <sup>st</sup> Q
	Arrangements in place to have payment cards rolled out across Central Bedfordshire from the 1st April 2009.	On target
	Contact Centre disaggregation progressing with CB Contact Centre operational and SLA and protocols agreed for dealing with calls both with CB services and with Bedford Borough and other partners.	On target
Working regulations	Position statement on Equalities and Diversity presented to Shadow Executive for approval (programmed 17 March 2009).	On target
	Scrutiny approach agreed.	Done

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	Governance structures agreed for developing corporate policies and procedures.	In hand - ongoing
	Information Management/Governance procedures presented to Shadow Executive for approval (programmed 17 March 2009).	On target
	Protocols and service level agreements to be in place for areas of shared/joint service provision.	On target
IT and information	Disaggregation of data to support key functions and activities for the new Central Bedfordshire Council.	On target
	Monitor implementation of Istop kiosk pilot and commence evaluation.	In hand - 1 <sup>st</sup> Q
	Select a comprehensive performance management system and agree an implementation plan.	In hand - 1st Q
Customer	Principles paper, setting out approach to develop and agree a comprehensive community engagement strategy with partners, to be presented to Shadow Executive for approval in March working towards the final strategy being in place post-elections.	On target
	Customer Charter developed and presented to Shadow Executive for approval (programmed 17 March 2009).	On target
	Complaints Relations Policy developed and presented to Shadow Executive for approval (programmed 17 March 2009).	On target
	Ongoing communication with communities, key stakeholders and partners.	On target
Performance	Set out the Corporate Performance Management Framework and agree 2009/2010 targets and priorities.	In hand - 1 <sup>st</sup> / 2 <sup>nd</sup> Q
	Sign off the refreshed LAA and disaggregate LAA targets and other performance related data to unitary level to enable priority setting for the new council.	On target
Financial	Security of contracts with existing providers.	Complete
	Secure growth for the scrutiny and community engagement teams and finalise budgets for services so we can meet emerging national and local priorities.	On target
	Establishment of service level agreements for shared/joint service provision.	On target

### **Section 3 – Key Medium Term Issues – The Legacy for the New Council**

Whilst the Task Force considered a wide spectrum of policies, strategies and operational imperatives the following issues were raised and still need to be progressed by the new Business Transformation Directorate.

#### **Business Transformation**

- Manage the Business Transformation programme, ensuring a cohesive and co-ordinated approach across the whole council and ensure the provision of consultancy support in reviewing business processes to improve service quality and deliver operational efficiencies and value for money. Monitor the delivery of the Business Transformation efficiencies.

#### **Customer Service**

- Finalise our Customer Service Strategy.
- Provide improved customer access to our services via a full “Front Office” for all service areas and develop and monitor the range of services available via our Points of Presence.
- Consider the use of the two mobile library vehicles for customer service delivery.
- Evaluate the success of the implementation of the Istop kiosk pilot and make a decision on further roll out.
- Ensure that the single Revenues and Benefits organisational structure is implemented and delivers reduced costs and the single Revenues and Benefits system is fully operational.
- Implementation of a Customer Relationship Management system enabling improved customer service delivery.

#### **Policy**

- Develop a refreshed Central Bedfordshire Strategic Plan after the 2009 local elections.
- Develop an Overview and Scrutiny function that provides members with opportunities and relevant information to challenge, act as a critical friend and add value to the work of the Council.
- Ensure the Council leads by example on the Sustainability/Climate Change agenda.
- Ensure the Council responds robustly to the requirements of the new Equalities Framework and develops and embeds a Diversity and Equalities Strategy and agrees an Equality Scheme.



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**Partnerships**

- Establish a community based data store to help inform policy making and service delivery. This will contribute to the key evidence bases required by our partnership (e.g. the Local Strategic Partnership and neighbourhood working).
- Produce a Central Bedfordshire Sustainable Community Strategy and monitor the Central Bedfordshire Local Area Agreement 2009-2011. Research, develop and negotiate a Central Bedfordshire Local Area Agreement for 2012- 2015.
- Embed the comprehensive community engagement strategy and ensure a multi-agency approach across Central Bedfordshire. Including the operation and ongoing monitoring, review and refinement of the Community Network framework.
- Carry out the fundamental review of Third Sector Funding; review and agree updated SLAs with the Third Sector during year 1 and thereafter agree and implement a rolling review programme.

**Performance**

- Embed the Corporate Performance Management Framework and ensure a performance management culture is embedded across Central Bedfordshire and that staff are suitably supported in achieving this aim.
- Ensure the Council and its partners are prepared for the new Comprehensive Area Assessment and the Use of Resources regime (major impact in 2009/10).

**Communications**

- Deliver the Communications Strategy Plan and monitor implementation of action so that the corporate identity of the new unitary authority becomes fully established.