

7: GETTING CLOSER TO COMMUNITIES

- 1 The first Council Plan of this Administration set out two key aims:
 - How to make Council services better meet the needs of individual residents (as customers/clients); and
 - How to meet the needs and priorities of different communities
- 2 The first of these aims led to the development of the Customer First Programme and the second led to Getting Closer to Communities (GC2C).
- 3 This report summarises the current position with the GC2C Programme and the outcome of the recent consultation on the “Buckinghamshire Locality Strategy”. The GC2C programme is fundamentally about devolving decision making, influence and service delivery to the most appropriate level in the community. Local people will have more say in, and more choice about, local services in their local communities. Through implementing this programme the County Council as an organisation will be more locally focused, - it will think local and act local. It is, I believe, the best way forward for the residents of Buckinghamshire. Should any of our partners wish to join us in customizing their services for local communities they would be most welcome.
- 4 It also seeks Council approval of the Cabinet’s recommendations for taking forward the programme . The **attached** detailed report and Appendices set out the further information and background to this summary about:
 - How GC2C is delivering better outcomes for residents including highlights of achievements to date. This is both by service area and across the 19 local community areas
 - The Review of the Strategy and the organisational requirements for the next stage of delivery, including the formal establishment of Local Area Forums
 - The key issues from the consultation on a partnership approach to locality working.

- 5 Council approved the GC2C Strategy in July 2005. A comprehensive review of the Strategy was undertaken between June and December 2007. As part of the review:
- Discussions were held with all Members of the Council - the “57 Conversations” – about what GC2C should aim to deliver
 - Discussions took place with Members for the 19 local community areas (building on the 57 conversations) about how Local Area Forums (LAFs) would be established in the area
 - A number of new targets were included in the Corporate Plan by Council on 21 February 2008 for the delivery of GC2C
 - Consultation was undertaken on the “Buckinghamshire Locality Strategy” (ie: how the aims of GC2C might be delivered in partnership)
 - Reports have been submitted to the four Local Committees on the proposal to replace them with LAFs
 - An assessment of the “organisational requirements” to deliver GC2C has been undertaken

Key Issues and Recommendations for GC2C

- 6 The review of the Strategy and the 57 Conversations have confirmed that a locality strategy is the right approach and has the potential for the Council, working in partnership, to deliver service improvements to the people of Buckinghamshire at a local level. The foundations and a number of key building blocks are now in place, awareness has been raised, the culture within the Council is beginning to change and we have a clear set of actions in the revised Strategy to move to the next stage of delivering better outcomes for local residents. We also have a budget that supports that delivery.
- The budget approved by the Council for the GC2C programme in February 2008 was £913,000 some of which is transferred from existing budgets.
 - The majority of the budget (£800K) relates to staffing costs (some of which are already in post but others yet to appointed e.g. more area co-ordinators).
 - Other expenditure includes development and rollout of local delivery initiatives including the Needs Assessment methodology,

Service Excellence events, Member newsletters, Residents' Survey, Website improvements, including an enhanced consultation portal for parish councils, changes to internal systems, support to local Councils, costs of LAFs (Democratic Services, rooms, incidentals etc), Communications etc.

- 7 As with other County Council budgets the proposed GC2C budget was scrutinized as part of the MTP process.
- 8 The real difference to local service delivery and quality of life in the 19 areas through GC2C will be through the reshaping of existing Service budgets not simply increasing resources, by devolving budgets for people to make local choices about services . Some work has taken place to identify the Service budgets that can be devolved to the 19 local areas for local decision or consultation on local priorities and further work will be undertaken in this service planning year. The main budgets identified so far by Services are as follows:
 - £500k Transportation Capital devolved to Local Area Forums: the sum currently allocated to Local Committees, will, subject to the Council's decisions, be allocated to the 19 Local Area Forums. Over the years some Parishes Councils have added value by allocating additional funds from their own precepts where schemes are approved in their parish
 - Additional Highways Maintenance Funding: the Council agreed an additional £4.0m for highways maintenance to meet priorities within the 19 local community areas. This will also be allocated locally through the LAFs in 2009/10
 - Other budgets: there have been various commitments to invest in the 19 local community areas e.g. Adult Social Care have designated 19 employees with locality roles; Transportation have appointed Local Area Technicians with vans. Further work is being done on this and we look forward to more service areas devolving services and spend in the future.
- 9 The five Aims of the revised GC2C Strategy are broadly the same as the original aims, but the Objectives have been revised. Following the extensive engagement with all Members and the far reaching implications that this will have for the way in which the Council works it is important that the full Council reaffirms its commitment to the

Strategy,. The leadership aspect of the Organisational Requirements also addresses the Members' role in leading and supporting delivery of GC2C. (*Recommendation 1*).

- 10 A linked issue is whether to change the name "GC2C". This has been discussed previously within the Council and the consultation specifically sought views on a partnership brand. Although there were a few suggestions, and a number of comments were made showing a strong preference for the theme of "communities" or working together. Recognising that further discussions will be taking place in some parts of the County about the implementation of aspects of the programme e.g. Local Area Forums, the Cabinet felt that on balance and after consideration of these matters, it did not want to propose a change in the name for the programme at this stage.

Key Issues from the Consultation - Overview

- 11 It was agreed that we should consult on the Aims and Objectives of GC2C on the basis that better outcomes for residents can only truly be delivered in partnership. The attached detailed report sets out:
- the basis of the consultation, through the Bucks Strategic Partnership and all local councils
 - the comments received from consultees (75 responses at the time of writing)
 - the key issues raised (**Table 3 in the report**) and a suggested response to these (**Table 4 in the report**)
- 12 This consultation has produced a high level of support for the fundamental aims and objectives of the Strategy and an appetite for further discussions about how it would work. Comments have been received, in particular, about Local Area Forums (see further below), local community planning and the co-ordination of community engagement at different levels. Additionally, it is clear that a strategic local public service response is required in order to meet the changing needs of our residents and the expectations on all local partners to work together to assess and meet the needs of different communities through both the LAA and CAA.

- 13 A further issue, however, is the concern that many parish councils, who responded, appear to have about their relationship with the County Council and a strong view that we do not recognise or value the important role that parish councils have. In some cases I am informed that parishes have been told that there are plans that they are to be abolished, which is simply not possible as they are statutory bodies. However I cannot stress enough that the County Council has no wish to reduce the role of, or sideline, Parish Councils. The County Council wants the new arrangements to give parish councils more say and not less, more local influence, more local money and more local decision making. However it is clear that despite the “New Deal” and other initiatives, further work is needed to improve understanding and our working relationship and I as the responsible Cabinet Member will visit local associations of parish and town councils and groups of parishes to talk further about this if they would like to invite me. Due to other diary obligations this might take a while but I am happy to make a commitment to do this to ensure better understanding and awareness of the GC2C programme by parish councils.
- 14 The proposed recommendation to Council for **partnership working on a locality strategy** are set out in *Recommendations 2 and 3*

Key Issues from the Consultation – Local Committees and Local Area Forums

- 15 The views received in response to the Consultation are summarised in Appendices G and H of the detailed report. Without wishing to diminish the importance of any of the comments made from the consultation, the key issue that emerged was the roll out of Local Area Forums (LAFs) in place of the Local Committees. Agreement has been reached with Wycombe District Council and Aylesbury Vale District Council to replace the Local Committees with LAFs in Aylesbury Vale and Local Community Partnerships in the Wycombe District area.
- 16 However, strong comments were received from both Chiltern District Council and South Bucks District Council, supported by a number of parish councils, to retain the Local Committee structure and not to roll out LAFs (see the analysis in Table 3 of the attached report). Both Councils expressed the wish for further dialogue on a solution that would better meet the needs of their areas. Nevertheless within

Chiltern and South Bucks District areas, if the local county councillors are in agreement that they would like to proceed with establishing a local area forum in their area and they make representations to me as the responsible Cabinet Member I would give it most serious consideration.

- 17 The broad framework for the proposed membership of the Local Area Forums is set out in Appendix F. However because one size does not fit all, it is important to stress that the membership of specific forums can be locally determined by the local County Councillors and the LAF within this broad framework and I have asked that Appendix F be amended to clarify this.
- 18 The proposed recommendations to Council **for Local Committees and Local Area Forums**, are outlined in *Recommendations 5 to 12 below*.

RECOMMENDATIONS

That the County Council RESOLVES:

- 1 To approve the revised GC2C Strategy and the Organisational Requirements for delivery;**
- 2 To continue discussions with all partners about the development of the Buckinghamshire Locality Strategy as the Local Strategic Partnership approach to:**
 - **Empowering communities**
 - **Delivering better outcomes for residents**
 - **Preparing for the Comprehensive Area Assessment**
 - **Localised delivery of the Local Area Agreement**
- 3 To undertake further work with local councils to develop a better understanding of the relationship with the County Council and how we can support their fundamental role as the most local tier of community representatives;**
- 4 To replace Local Committees with Local Area Forums on a phased basis and to amend the Constitution accordingly;**

- 5 To approve the Terms of Reference, Constitution and Working Arrangements for Local Area Forums;**
- 6 To replace the Local Committees with Local Area Forums in Aylesbury Vale and Local Community Partnerships in Wycombe Districts from 1 September 2008;**
- 7 To defer the replacement of the Local Committees in Chiltern and South Bucks to allow further discussions to take place to try to identify an agreed way forward, but to permit the establishment of one or more LAFs in those Districts where there is support for this;**
- 8 To authorise the Leader and Deputy Leader to make changes to the arrangements for Local Area Forums in Chiltern and South Bucks on the basis of further discussions within those areas;**
- 9 To authorise the Deputy Leader to make minor changes to the terms of reference of Local Area Forums in the light of the operation of the Forums;**
- 10 To request the Head of Legal and Democratic Services to bring forward recommendations for any minor amendments to the Constitution resulting from these decisions, which will then come to full County Council for discussion and approval;**
- 11 To undertake a review of the operation of Local Area Forums and report to the Council on progress in 12 months time, taking into account the results of the Pathfinder Pilots in Wycombe and Aylesbury Vale.**

**DAVID SHAKESPEARE, LEADER
BILL CHAPPLE, DEPUTY LEADER**