



# BEDFORD BOROUGH COUNCIL

*Borough Charter granted in 1166*



*Chief Executive: Laura Church*

## Information Session

### Have your say on Bedford Borough Council's Priorities

**Date and Time:** 19/03/2024, 6-8pm

**Venue:** Online

**Topic:** Bedford Borough Council Corporate Plan 2023-27

**Participants:** Jacqueline Gray (Senior Officer & Policy Advisor), Claire Halliwell (Communications and Communities Manager), Antigua Riley Corion (Community Engagement Officer), Deborah Shrimpton (Community Engagement and Social Action Officer), Cllr Jim Weir (Deputy Mayor), Food Etc, Tibbs Dementia, All Nations Church, BRCC, Be Active, Stroke Association, Carers in Beds, Peabody Housing, BLCF, ACCM UK, BLMK Place Team, Healthwatch, HUC NHS.

### Introduction

Residents, community groups and services were invited to meet with Bedford Borough Council's Communities Team to discuss the priorities and objectives listed in the Council's draft corporate plan on a page. The plan consists of four main priorities, each with a series of objectives:

- Promoting Health and Wellbeing
- Supporting Families and the Vulnerable
- Stimulating Economic Growth
- Protecting the Environment

These priorities will act as the golden thread aligning all council departments, ensuring that these priorities are at the heart of everything we do, and every service that we provide. For this reason, we want to hear from our partners, the voluntary sector, residents, and young people to hear the voices of our wonderfully diverse community, and ensure that our priorities reflect the needs of Bedford Borough

### What is a Corporate Plan, and How Does It Affect Me?

The corporate plan is an internal planning document that outlines Bedford Borough Council's priorities, objectives, and approach to collaborating with communities, partner organisations, and businesses.

The service plans throughout the Council will follow the corporate plan and should reflect the values and priorities of the work of all Council departments and employees.

The aims of these external engagement sessions are to ensure that the corporate plan reflects the needs of the community.

External engagement will take place between March and June and during July/August the results will be analysed. In September, the cabinet will consider the final draft and the Full Council will consider the draft in the Autumn.

### **Do you feel that these priorities reflect the needs of the community in Bedford Borough?**

The group were invited to read the priorities and reflect whether they felt these priorities reflected the needs of the borough's residents. Many of the attendees said that they felt that more detail was needed under each priority and Jacqueline Grey noted that these priorities do not cover everything that the Council will be doing, these are the key things of focus that will steer each directorates' workplan.

The group felt that the priorities did not mention young people, minority communities as they need support and the voluntary/community sector as they give a lot of support to the residents of Bedford.

The language used in the priorities was also discussed and it was felt by the group that the objectives needed to make the community more responsible, particularly for their own health and wellbeing, so the objectives should reflect more about enabling residents to do this.

### **The Four Priorities:**

#### **Promoting Health and Wellbeing**

The group felt that this priority was reflective of the needs in the borough as they understood that this covered everyone, but they did feel that as young people were not mentioned, maybe this needed adding as they also need support. There was also a question of why there was no objective around tackling the health inequalities within diverse and marginalised communities.

Although the group felt that it was good that the objectives recognised the need for this partnership with NHS to achieve objectives, there was consensus that the Council should not be funding all of this. There is a wealth of funders out which can support the voluntary and community sector to engage with this.

The language used in this priority was seen as very important and it was felt that the use of the word 'promote' was not strong enough as this title doesn't give the sense that the Council is driving the borough to be healthy. It was suggested that it could be something around "drive, leadership and vision from the Council through the Council working with partners". Participants also asked if a definition of 'vital services' could also be included to clarify exactly what services are included.

#### **Supporting Families and The Vulnerable**

Participants felt that it was good to see an objective around schools but felt that it was missing language around skills and opportunities. There was a view that maybe 'school' is

too narrow as education happens outside of schools as well and education could perhaps be broadened to include skills, learning, talent development and learning opportunities.

Cllr Weir noted that Bedford Borough has one of the lowest attainment levels in the country and the Council is focused on this behind the scenes trying to move that forward and support schools in a better way. It was questioned how the Council is going to achieve better school attainment as some families are hard to reach.

The importance of a multi-disciplinary approach was raised, and it was felt that this needed to be added within the objective of partnering to prevent homelessness as well as incorporating working within multi-disciplinary teams, not just partnering with NHS under the promoting health and wellbeing priority.

The language in this priority was also discussed, particularly questioning who are the 'vulnerable?' and it was asked whether it could be a bit more focused as we recognise that there are vulnerable people within families as well as vulnerable people outside families.

### **Protecting the Environment**

The group were invited to discuss this priority and they expressed that they felt the objectives under this priority could be used to encourage the community to work in partnership with the Council, to get together to improve the environment and protect and enhance the green spaces we have and reduce carbon footprints generally. Agreement was that wording around partnership, working together and collaborative working needed to be much stronger in this section than it is. There was a lot of discussion about carbon reduction as lots of big organisations have their own net zero goals and ambitions and there is an opportunity here for partnership working. Luton was used as an example as they have a monthly litter pick in the town centre which is used as a business networking opportunity. A suggestion was made to measure the Council's carbon footprint to give a starting point so the impact of projects going forward could be measured. Cllr Weir noted that the Council does have a net zero target and these targets are regularly reviewed. There is also a climate change committee that meets regularly and there are currently 15 monitoring points for air quality across the town.

### **Stimulating Economic Growth**

Participants said they felt that this priority did link to the environment priority because if we are increasing footfall into the town centre (via car/bus) this will have an impact on the Council's environmental objectives, so there needs to be balance.

Cllr Weir noted the Council has just introduced 4 hours free parking scheme and footfall in the town centre has increased. Cllr Weir said he feels that the Council still need to work on building closer partnerships with agencies such as the police and other organisations that make the town centre a vibrant place and help people to feel that the town centre is a safe place to visit.

### **Moving Forward**

Thank you to all those that came along to represent their communities, and the groups that they support. We have received great feedback about the overall experience engaging with the Council on this topic, and want to give the community, our partners, and other statutory

services the opportunity to have their voices heard and support us in getting our internal plans right.

The group felt positive overall about the draft corporate plan, although they do feel that some of the objectives are ambitious and will take time, dedication, and money to achieve alongside a service plan that is aligned with these priorities and objectives.

Further sessions include:

- Meeting with family groups and youth services: Monday 25<sup>th</sup> March, 6-8pm, The Queens Park Family Hub
- Meeting with older people, vulnerable adults, carers and unpaid carers: Thursday 28 March, 6-8pm, The Queens Park Family Hub
- Meeting with environmental groups and Park Friends: Time and location TBC
- Meeting with local businesses and landlords: Time and location TBC
- June Community Network Event: meeting with the wider community and voluntary sector.