



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: 28/03/2024, 6-7:30pm

Venue: Queens Park Family Hub, Marlborough Rd, Bedford MK40 4LE

Topic: Bedford Borough Council Corporate Plan 2023-27

Participants: 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), Carers In Bedfordshire, Residents of Kempston and Cauldwell.

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.

The Four Priorities:

Supporting Families and The Vulnerable

The group felt that this priority was reflective of the needs in the borough, however, they did feel that the language should be made more inclusive and concise. The residents in the room raised that they felt individuals were not covered within this priority, and that the words 'all individuals' or 'all types of families' should be included. They also felt that 'prevention' should be defined, or a more strengths-based phrase should be adopted - such as 'early intervention'.

The group raised the question of why primary education was more of a focus then secondary and higher education. Cllr Jim Weir was able to advise that Bedford Borough has one of the lowest attainment numbers for primary education within the UK, and that this needs to be a focus going forward to keep young people in schools. The point was also raised that many secondary schools are now academies, which mean that the Council have less involvement then with the primary schools. Carers in Bedfordshire shared the reflection that young carers are more likely to miss school and typically struggle within school, they felt that this must be considered within the detail of the relevant service plans. This led the group to a discussion about barriers, highlighting the fact that there is lots of work to be done to remove the barriers for these objectives to be achieved for young people and families (especially for young carers and within marginalised communities).

Protecting the Environment

The participants felt that the objectives were clear and concise here. The group felt that the Council's ambitions are more than 'protecting' the environment, with a focus on 'enhancing' it. *'Making it better, not just protecting what we already have'*. By adding the words enhancing or improving, it will let the internal team and the community know that the Council do want positive change.

The group commented that it is good to see the Council forward thinking about progression, and creating plans that will help not only address climate change, but also tackle loneliness, isolation, improve community spirit/pride, and much more.

Stimulating Economic Growth

Participants felt that this priority was important, and that residents need to be empowered to feel included within the community, which will encourage active citizenship. They feel that this priority needed to specify that the town centres are being improved, and the jobs and opportunities that will follow are for **all** Bedfordshire communities and not just those that live or work in the town centres. The group agreed that 'community feel' is what is needed within the town centres, to make it the 'vibrant hub' its described as in the plan.

Cllr Weir noted the four hours free parking scheme has increased footfall in the town centre. The group agreed that the Council still need to work on building closer partnerships with agencies such as the police and other organisations, to ensure the town centre is a safe place to visit.

Promoting Health and Wellbeing

The group were in agreement with the priority and objectives, however, it was felt that 'promoting' health and wellbeing did not emphasise the importance of the councils role to 'drive' or 'lead' on addressing health and wellbeing, as well as health inequalities.

Participants discussed the importance of partnership working to achieve the objectives, highlighting the need to work with social care and other services to remove barriers to accessing primary care services, as well as other support available within communities. The group felt that clarity was needed on the organisations and charities outside of the NHS that the Council will be partnering with, as well as a clear definition of what 'vital services' are.

This led to a discussion around the facilities and amenities on offer to communities to enhance their health and wellbeing. It was raised that safety is a huge factor of an individual's health and wellbeing – one of the participants raised an example of the lights being turned on at Wixam's astroturf, and although this is always there, when the lights were turned on by another group it meant that young people were starting to play football, women felt safer walking home, parents felt more at ease allowing their children out to play in the winter months after school etc.

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 about the draft corporate plan, although they do feel that the language used could be made more inclusive.

Further sessions include:

- 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.