



Policy and Finance Committee

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| Date: | 19th November 2018 |
| Title: | Resident's Survey in respects of the emerging Strategic Plan for the Town Council (2019-24). |
| Purposes of the Report: | To receive the headline findings from the resident's survey undertaken between September and November 2018. |
| Contact Officer: | Mark Saccoccio, Town Clerk Sarah Sandiford, Head of Democratic and Central Services |

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| Corporate Objective/s | | To promote and develop a vibrant town through partnership working and initiatives including management of the street market, provision of town and community promotions, town centre enhancements, tourism and practical support for local businesses. |
| Implications: | | |
| Financial | √ | The adoption of a 5 Year Plan has financial implications as new projects may well have a capital as well as staffing cost implications |
| Human Resources | | It is likely that as the parish expands together with the devolution of more services down to the town council, this will have human resource implications |
| Operational/Service delivery | √ | For the reasons set out above, |
| Procedural/Legal | √ | Public engagement legitimises and add greater weight to the 5 Year Plan |

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

Should members be minded:

- 1.1 To note the key findings from the resident's survey carried out between August and November 2018, in order to help inform the emerging Five Year Plan for the period 2019-2024.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 As Members are minded, the Town Council developed a 3 Year Plan (2015-18) to provide its residents with a clear understanding of what the Town Council was working towards and how it would be delivered over that period. With many of the objectives set out therein achieved, the Town Council wishes to create a new set of objectives for the coming 5 years which are representative of the parishes' status as a growth area.
- 2.2 As a growth area, the parish has experienced significant growth over the past decade and this will continue for at least another 10 years. It is estimated that the present population will increase by at least 5,000 residents taking the population to over 46,500 by 2023. Many younger people and families are attracted to the burgeoning parish and with this, comes new demands, expectations and needs. In addition, the oughtn't to lose sight of its responsibilities to the needs of its established residents also.
- 2.3 The purpose of the consultation exercise is to ensure that the emerging objectives as set out within the emerging 5 Year Plan align with the expectations of our residents (both established and recently arrived). Once adopted, it is hoped that the 5 Year Plan will help inform Section 106 Negotiations between Central Bedfordshire Council (The Principal Authority) and the developers.
- 2.4 In July 2018, "Howdo Research" consultants were appointed to carry out a resident's survey. As part of their brief, the consultants would carry out in the region of 500 face to face interviews at key locations agreed with the Town Council.

3. SURVEY OBJECTIVES

- 3.1 By way of face to face interview, the consultant was required to engage with as many residents as possible. For the reasons set out at paragraph 2.2, the views of new as well as established residents are equally as important. In addition, the expectation is that a healthy cross-section of the resident population by way of age profiling was also captured.
- 3.2 The objective being that the Town Council would glean a better understanding of resident's attitude, motivation and aspirations for the parish over the coming years. The conclusions arrived at will help the Town Council shape, develop and evolve the Town Council's services and facilities. Moreover, it will provide residents with a greater degree of certainty in terms of the Town Council's "direction of travel".
- 3.3 As experience demonstrates, the Town Council is not qualified to carry out a robust survey of this nature. From the discussions had with consultants, to be able to receive a truly representative spread of results, the traditional clipboard

method is the most valid and appropriate. The consultant in deliberation with the council was directed to locations around the parish to achieve a spread based on age and sex.

3.4 Careful consideration was afforded to an on-line survey as it would represent the most cost-effective way to engage. However, there is no control over who and how many times one individual may complete the survey. Moreover, when the Town Council has previously tried on-line consultation, the results have often disappointed given the lack of response or indeed the results received.

3.5 The further advantage in having a third party carry out a survey is that they are objective and free from challenge. Whilst on paper, carrying out a survey in-house by using existing resources sounds attractive, from the most recent experiences, it is a false saving. It is estimated that an in-house survey has the potential to cost the council over 3 times that of a consultant should complications be found both in execution and interpretation. The opportunity cost can be measured in delays caused as officers seek to address and remedy issues.

4. THE PROCESS

- 4.1
- i) Member workshop took place on Wednesday 25th July 2018. Its purpose: to agree the draft objectives and the questions to be asked as part of the public engagement exercise.
 - ii) Policy and Finance Committee agreed objectives and questions at its meeting held 30th July 2018.
 - iii) “Howdo” consultants appointed July 2018.
 - iv) Scoping meeting with appointed consultant took place in August 2018.
 - v) Public engagement took place in September, October and November 2018.
 - vi) Consultant presented key findings at a Chair/Officer Meeting held 9th November 2018.
 - vii) Policy and Finance Committee to receive a report setting out key findings at its meeting to be held 19th November 2018.
 - vii) Standing Committees to consider findings and future objectives at December/January committee meetings, to inform the draft new 5 Year Plan.
 - viii) 5 Year Plan to be presented to Council at its meeting to be held 28th January 2019 with a recommendation that it be adopted as working document to future town council priority projects.

5. KEY FINDINGS

5.2 A total of 488 face to face interviews were completed between September and November. The full report is **attached**, but key findings are as follows:

Resident Affinity to Leighton-Linslade Town Council

- Those that have been in the parish the longer (10+ years) claim to know the most about the purpose and function of the Town Council.

Awareness of Town Council communication methods

- 39% of those interviewed see the Leighton Buzzard Observer as their preferred method of communication
- 33% see the web site as their preferred method with About Town closely following behind
- Among those who have been in the parish for less than 5 years, the leading answer is social media.
- 43% of under 35s nominate Social Media as their first choice

Town Council responsibilities within the Council Tax Framework

- 66% of those interviewed recognised town council responsibilities

Reaction to Town Council share of the Council Tax Bill

- 81% of those interviewed claimed they knew a proportion of their council tax bill did come to the Town Council
- 68% of those interviewed believed they were getting either very good (26%) or quite good (42%) value for money
- Satisfaction with value for money is at its highest among those newest to the area
- By age, 75% of under 35s feel they are getting good value for money
- The least satisfied being the 45-54s with only 60% believing they are getting either very good or good value for money
- Only 26% were aware that the Town Council element of their bill had remained unchanged for the past 6 years

Areas of Focus (Unprompted)

- 17% believe more could be done to improve parks and open spaces (maintenance and development)
- 12% believe more could be done for young people
- Roads, traffic and infrastructure topped the survey (albeit not within our gift)

Reaction to Areas of Focus

- Keeping the Town and Town Centre Vibrant received the most support with 69%

Reaction to Devolution Issues

- 49% are very confident or confident at the suggestion that the Town Council (if offered) can take on more services devolved from the Principal Authority
- 34% of those interviewed remained neutral

6. WHAT DOES THIS MEAN

- 6.1 Whilst not a direct question, there is general satisfaction with the Town Council. Of those interviewed, 68% are of the opinion that they are getting good value for money from the services that the Town Council provides. In terms of the devolution agenda, 49% have confidence in the Town Council being able to deliver on future devolution with 34% being neutral.
- 6.2 A vibrant town centre remains a priority as well as quality parks and open spaces. As Officers, the belief that more could be done to improve parks and open spaces is surprising given the commitment the Town Council has made to improving play and open spaces (£45,000 per annum in play equipment and £45,000 in safety surfacing). It should be noted that Appenine Way, Riverside Walk, Nelson Road as well as several lesser open spaces are in fact the responsibility of the Principal Authority.
- 6.3 Within the older age group, the perceived lack of police resources and anti-social behaviour were raised as concerns. Significantly, one area of focus was a perceived lack of activities for young people.

7. NEXT STEPS

- 7.1 There is merit in trying to better understand what activities young people may wish to engage in and with and what (if at all) the Town Council can provide. Whilst some of the aspirations may be unrealistic from a town council delivery perspective, there is every reason to raise awareness with the Principal Authority. They may well have the appropriate mechanisms (land and S106) to help realise these aspirations.
- 7.2 Work will continue in terms of creating the next iteration of the 5 Year Plan and Objectives (2019-2024). This will be subject to consideration by each of the standing Committees and it is anticipated that the document will be presented to Full Council in January for its consideration.