



Total Place: Central Bedfordshire and Luton pilot

News release

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Total Place identifies expensive system failures and some cost-effective solutions

Radical new models for better local services in Bedfordshire were unveiled this week by a combined taskforce of local government, voluntary organisations, police, criminal justice, probation, employment and benefit agencies.

A packed meeting of local public service executives, councillors and senior officers from Whitehall received a detailed presentation on how a locally co-ordinated and governed system for managing prolific and priority offenders (PPOs) could greatly improve the way resources are used and dramatically reduce crime and re-offending rates. They also heard proposals for improvements to the welfare benefits system that could cut administration costs by 40 per cent, slash the time taken to pay out benefits by 75 per cent and speed up payments to claimants by 25 days.

The presentation was part of Central Bedfordshire and Luton's Total Place pilot, one of 13 across the country set up by the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government to get central government and local agencies working together and finding ways of delivering better value services on priority local issues. The theme for Central Bedfordshire and Luton is *From dependence to self-reliance*. Its two sub-themes - integrated offender management and access to benefits - both reflect major concerns for local residents and are issues where Total Place partners felt that a real, positive impact could be made.

Delegates were told that current procedures for dealing with offenders are expensive and often completely fail to break the cycle of re-offending. Recent Home Office figures reveal that 45,000 crimes were committed in Bedfordshire last year (2008-09), costing the community and taxpayer an estimated £131 million. But in the Central Bedfordshire and Luton area, official figures show that a mere two per cent of offenders are known to have committed 4,400 crimes over the past three years - mainly burglaries and vehicle crime - which costs the community £5 million a year. National research suggests that they could in fact be responsible for up to 22,000 crimes, costing the taxpayer as much as £26 million. Over eight out of ten of these persistent offenders have a drug dependency. Five come from one local family alone.

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A feature of the Central Bedfordshire and Luton pilot has been the use of powerful *Customer Insight* social marketing research to ensure a sharp focus on the perceptions and needs of the offenders themselves. One offender spoke of being released from prison late on Friday afternoon, after most support services had closed for the weekend, with no accommodation, very little cash and the prospect of having to wait over a month to get his benefit entitlements. Within days, he said, re-offending was a financial imperative.

Meanwhile, the welfare benefits system does little or nothing to encourage self-reliance. The complexities, fragmentation and duplication of the various processes – plus the inherent delays, the 85p benefit reduction for every £1 earned over the basic needs allowance and the high marginal rates of taxation - actively discourage many people from coming off benefit and returning to work. There are 51 different welfare benefits in England and Wales but no single, official picture to show the public how they inter-relate. Claimants are confused – local citizens advice bureaux estimate that nearly a third of their advisers' time is spent signposting benefit entitlements and helping people complete the forms - and many miss out altogether. So complex is the system that benefits administrators have their own professional organisation but recommendations for improvement are too often thwarted by legislation and a labyrinth of official “guidance”.

But the Total Place team are confident that a high number of service improvements are available now: some at little or no additional cost, others requiring further investment. Overall, the team identified over 50 service improvements and new ways of working, 15 of which could be delivered locally in the short-term and 21 in the medium term. Nine key proposals, involving pooling of resources, could require structural change and 12 would require change at central government or legislative level. However, with strategic commitment and operational support, the Total Place team feel strongly that dramatic and cost-effective results could be achieved.

Said Richard Ellis, Central Bedfordshire Council's director of business transformation and Total Place project sponsor: “Rather than ‘just another initiative’, Total Place is a strong indicator of how central government will expect public services to operate over the next decade. It could be the start of a new and better way of delivering public services, with the Central Bedfordshire and Luton pilot a forerunner of the way we will all do business in the future.

“We are convinced that improvements to service quality and delivery are achievable and that opportunities exist to make efficiency savings across the wider public sector, at both local and national level.”

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Added co-sponsor Steve Heappey, Luton Council's director of corporate and customer services: "The genie is out of the bottle. Having pinpointed the cause of so many problems within the system, we are duty bound to find solutions. Some of our proposals will be solutions we can make locally, others will be a matter for central government decision and even legislative change. Some of our proposed solutions will be fairly easy to administer, others will require further investment. As always, the devil will be in the detail. But what is clear to all the Total Place partners in this area is that we cannot now just sit back and preside over the same old ways of working."

The findings and recommendations are the result of over a hundred senior managers from local authority, police, probation, courts, health and benefits services in the Central Bedfordshire and Luton area working together throughout November to examine, in detail, two key issues – dealing with offenders and access to welfare benefits – to identify problems in the system and come up with better, more cost effective solutions. The Total Place team will now, over the next few weeks, be seeking views, comments and support for the proposals and recommendations prior to sending a final report to the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government at the start of February.

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Notes for editors

1. Total Place partners for the Central Bedfordshire area include: Bedfordshire Police, Luton and Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue Service, NHS Luton and NHS Bedfordshire, the Chamber, HMCS, DWP, JobCentre Plus, HM Revenue and Customs, Ministry of Justice, CPS, Probation Service, together with a wide range of local third sector agencies and organisations. Central Bedfordshire Council (CBC) and Luton Borough Council (LBC) are the joint leads.
2. Total Place has strong government backing and cross-party support. Communities and local government secretary John Denham has stressed it is an opportunity for councils to develop a 'whole area' approach to public services and the chance to identify, through working together, big, transformational changes that deliver better services at less cost.
3. Through examining the totality of public spending on a number of key issues in this area - and the outcomes - we see a clear opportunity to identify radical new ways of working that will deliver vital services more effectively and for less. Our objective is that the Total Place pilot will: have significant impact; be deliverable within time and resource constraints; be of interest across local organisations; be customer focused; change the way we do business and deliver efficiencies.
4. Our initial report was sent to the Treasury and the Department of Communities and Local Government on Friday, September 18. To meet the government's timetable and deliver the final report on February 5, some highly intensive work is now well underway.
5. Two sub-groups, involving senior operational managers and decision-makers from the partner agencies and employing a 'lean thinking methodology', have worked together for four

consecutive weeks during November. Both studied, in sharp detail, the current way of working in terms of access to benefits and integrated offender management, looking particularly at the weaknesses, duplication and problems within the current system. They then re-designed working methods to remove the previously identified weaknesses.

6. The groups have identified challenges for central government as well as local issues. The detailed findings – including clear, well-evidenced and considered recommendations for real, deliverable change - will now inform and shape the final report to Whitehall.

7. In addition, there will be some detailed *Customer Insight* social marketing research to capture accurate and meaningful data - quantitative and qualitative - on customer profiles, their aspirations and their experience of the current system(s). This too will inform proposals for service re-design and future partnership working, including local strategic partnership community strategies and delivery plans.

8. The high level count for the area has identified £3.434bn of government spend locally, equating to £6,853 per head of population, or £16,778 per household. The biggest spending organisations (by revenue) in the area are:

1. Department of Work and Pensions - £746.331m (24.37%)
2. Central Bedfordshire Council - £459.837m (15%);
3. Luton Borough Council - £421.597m (13.77%);
4. NHS Bedfordshire - £326m (10.64%);
5. NHS Luton - £296m (9.66%); and
6. HMRC (tax credits/child benefit) - £245.88m (8%).

Current estimates indicate that over £146.8m a year is spent on dealing with crime and administering the criminal justice system in this area, equating to 4% of the total spend. On benefits, over £987.7m is spent per year, equating to 28.75% of the total public sector spend. A detailed count for each of the pilot sub-themes is underway.

9. Contacts

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The national Total Place picture: www.localleadership.gov.uk/totalplace/

More details on the Luton and Central Bedfordshire pilot:
www.localleadership.gov.uk/totalplace/pilot/luton-and-central-bedfordshire/