

You asked – we've answered!

At December's Vision Conference you asked how we could improve Bolton. Many of your questions were answered by panel members on the day, but here are some of those that time did not allow us to tackle.

Your questions have been arranged under the six priority themes of the community strategy: "Bolton: Our vision 2007-2017" and the responses have been provided by a number of the agencies who are part of the Bolton Vision partnership.

Healthy Bolton

Q. What are the health issues in Bolton?

The gap in life expectancy between the most and least well off – around 15 years between some areas of Bolton – is one of our biggest concerns. Increasing the average life expectancy so that that gap is decreased and Bolton is more in line with the national average is a key priority.

Areas that are being addressed by the community strategy – poverty, poor housing, unemployment, fear of crime, being excluded from society and low aspirations – are the root causes of many of the conditions causing people to die early in Bolton.

Supporting people to improve their lifestyles – including encouraging them to stop smoking, be a healthy weight, drink within the recommended limits, manage stress, be more

physically active and eat a healthy diet – will reduce the risk of death from diseases such as coronary heart disease, stroke, cancer and those illnesses associated with alcohol misuse.

As poor health in childhood can have a negative affect on health in later life we need to improve the health of pregnant women and babies in their first year of life, tackle childhood obesity, promote sexual health and reduce teenage pregnancy.

Substance misuse – be that alcohol or drugs – is also a priority because of its impact on health, crime and communities.

Q. What are partners doing about these problems?

Bolton's life expectancy strategy will promote prevention activity with those most at risk, encouraging those with longer term health issues and symptoms to come forward so that health services can intervene early.

Bolton's Primary Care Trust will also be taking steps to improve access to GP and other primary care services.

Prosperous Bolton

Q. How will we ensure that the workforce has the right skills for the jobs that will be created?

Bolton has strong economic prospects. Over the next 10 years 15,000 to 20,000 new jobs will be created in Bolton with a further 150,000 across the Manchester city region. New skills will be needed and individuals, employers and those providing learning and training must act so that Bolton can reap these economic benefits.

The Bolton Skills Board is working with employers to improve the skills of the local workforce, and to help economically inactive residents benefit from the new jobs being created. But ever greater economic competition, at home and abroad, means that individuals and employers need to take greater responsibility for ensuring that they are equipped with the skills required to compete in the labour market.

A wide range of programmes exists to support individuals and employers, including the expansion of apprenticeship programmes and free access to Level 2 qualifications for employees via the national Train to Gain programme.

Educational improvements will include a £250 million investment programme for Bolton's schools, leading to new diplomas and business-led curriculum innovations, major improvements in school facilities and new and expanded College and University facilities to be located at the heart of the Bolton Innovation Zone.

Q. How will this prosperity help us to narrow the deprivation gap?

Bolton is poised to reclaim its position as one of the North West's most important economic centres. The growth in employment will create job opportunities for all residents with the right skills and attitudes. The majority of these new jobs will offer higher wages and salaries but will also require higher level skills.

It will be important to ensure that residents and communities in the greatest need have much better access to the prosperity being created.

The focus will be on lifting the ambition of people in Bolton, improving educational performance, and improving the skills of adults both in and out of work. One such example is the Work Shop on Newport Street in the town centre which has worked with more than 1,000 economically inactive residents in its first year.

Most of Bolton's new employment growth will be in the renewed town centre, which is accessible to all, particularly some of Bolton's most deprived communities. This will ensure that the new jobs will be close to where employment needs are greatest. As a result we expect Bolton's employment rate to exceed the national average in the coming years.

Achieving Bolton

Q. How can we improve aspirations among young people?

We need to make sure all young people are aware of the new opportunities coming to Bolton, and how they can access them. We also need to convince families and communities that Bolton's future prosperity is for them, and of the importance of education in enabling young people to take advantage of the opportunities. We will get this message across using our network of children's centres, libraries, schools and through our services for young people.

Q. How can we create positive role models for young people?

Many schemes already promote positive role models for young people. Examples include mentoring schemes, the teaching of citizenship in all schools and using successful people from all walks and areas of life, both local and national, as positive role models. A specific example includes the use of local and national business expertise to work with young people from an early age through the Building Schools for the Future and Academies programme.

It also has to be recognised that all communities have a role to play in what they model and expect of young people in their neighbourhoods.

Q. How do we promote the involvement of young people?

Young people must own and believe in the future vision for Bolton. For this to happen they need to know that their views and comments are taken seriously, have an impact and make a difference. This is achieved by young people playing a key role in Bolton's Children's Trust, advising on policy and service changes and by them also providing the Council and its partners with feedback, comments and advice on the development of services. The Youth MPs are working on the development of Youth Forums to support this.

Safe Bolton

Q. What is the strategy to reduce crime by 25% by 2012?

We will continue to build on the successful work of the Be Safe partnership, which performs well compared with other partnerships in the North West and nationally. Over the past three years crime has reduced by 35%, compared with a Home Office target of 21%. Domestic burglary has reduced by 65%.

These huge reductions have been achieved through having a good understanding of where and when crime and disorder occurs and its root causes. This assists us in co-ordinating partnership resources and targeting interventions on individuals, groups, specific locations and neighbourhoods.

In addition we have successful programmes to manage offenders, prevent and tackle anti-social behaviour and address drug and alcohol misuse. The Be Safe partnership is also focusing on the needs of young people, making our neighbourhoods safer and working more closely with our communities.

The Be Safe Partnership is one of only four nationally to be awarded Beacon status for preventing and tackling anti-social behaviour as well as Beacon status for reducing re-offending.

Cleaner and Greener Bolton

Q. How can we ensure economic and environmental sustainability & reduce our carbon footprint?

Bolton Vision is committed to ensuring Bolton lives within environmental limits. Bolton Vision and the Council have developed and adopted a Sustainability Appraisal toolkit that will be used to test all key plans that support the community strategy

The Council is also committed to taking a lead on tackling environmental issues and reducing its own carbon footprint. For example, its environment strategy contains a wide range of tough targets relating to global challenges, such as climate change

The Council has shown this commitment by signing up to the North West Climate Change Charter and the Nottingham agreement (a public declaration that the Council is actively tackling climate change). Practical achievements have included the use of bio-diesel for the Council's vehicle fleet (a 5% bio diesel blend has been used since March 2007), the borough's recycling rate has reached 31% in January 2008 and in the year from April 2006-April 2007, there was a 16.6% reduction in CO2 emissions from the Council's five largest buildings.

In addition, the Sustainable Development Forum will support and challenge the actions of partnerships and agencies to help make them more sustainable.

Q. Will we include green spaces within the public realm in the town centre?

A Public Realm Implementation Framework for the period to 2012 has been produced and this recognises the special character of the Town Centre as a whole and the varied character of the different quarters within it.

The Framework includes proposals for improvements to existing spaces such as Cheadle Square and Blackhorse Street, and the street scene within the wider Town Centre. Future development within the town centre will also include new open spaces and squares and opportunities to improve access to waterfronts such as the River Croal and existing open spaces such as Queens Park and St Peters churchyard.

Strong and Confident Bolton

Q. Where does community engagement sit with Bolton's plans for the future?

At the heart of it! The Council and its partner organisations have an excellent understanding of local needs and priorities are based on this understanding.

We have asked local communities what issues matter most to them so that we can concentrate our efforts in proportion to this. Methods used include use of our Citizens Panel and Young People's Panel, the General Residents Survey and other surveys, Area Forums and the many local events and activities about particular issues.