

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL



16 JANUARY 2017 - 2.30PM

PRESENT: Councillor Yeulett (Chairman), Councillor Booth, Councillor Buckton, Councillor Count (until 4.20pm), Councillor Mrs Laws and Councillor Mason

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: Councillor Butcher, Councillor Clark, Councillor Murphy, Councillor Seaton and Councillor Sutton.

APOLOGIES: Councillor Mrs Hay (Vice-Chairman), Councillor Mrs Davis, Councillor Mrs Mayor and Councillor Pugh

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE: Jane Bailey (Member Services and Governance), Rob Bridge (Corporate Director), Richard Cassidy (Corporate Director), Gary Garford (Corporate Director), Anna Goodall (Head of Legal and Governance), Paul Medd (Chief Executive), Carol Pilson (Corporate Director) and Mark Saunders (Chief Accountant)

OSC27/16 PREVIOUS MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of 28 November 2017 were confirmed and signed.

Matters Arising and Updates:

- Councillor Yeulett confirmed that a Paperless Review Group Meeting has been scheduled to take place on Monday 23 January 2017;
- Councillor Yeulett confirmed that the panel can discuss the Wisbech 2020 Item scheduled in April despite being in the period of Purdah as long as the discussion is not politically motivated;
- Councillor Yeulett asked if there had been any outcomes from a meeting scheduled for January with MMUK. Gary Garford stated that MMUK have cancelled all 4 meetings that have been offered, he confirmed that he has been unable to engage with them;
- Councillor Count stated that it is his understanding that MMUK are relocating to Alconbury in Huntingdonshire stating that this might be the reason for their lack of response;
- Councillor Booth stated that according to the press, the local MP will be asking the LEP some questions around their practices to effectively draw businesses away from Fenland to areas where the LEP are as they will get 5 years business rates free. Councillor Yeulett stated that as the Overview and Scrutiny Panel we should monitor that moving forward;
- Councillor Count stated that there is some clarification required with regards to the information given to the LEP Board when the move happened, he added that the next meeting of the LEP board is tomorrow and that he intends to follow this up;
- Councillor Yeulett asked the Chief Executive and the Leader monitor this situation on behalf of Fenland;
- Councillor Yeulett referred to a request from Councillor Booth with regards to deprivation in the villages. Carol Pilson confirmed that this has now been circulated;
- Councillor Yeulett asked about responses to enquiries made to Roddons. He stated that he intends to write a letter to Roddons to draw their attention to recent issues, he asked members to pass any details to Anna Goodall if they would like specific cases raised in the correspondence. Councillor Sutton stated that under the new set up for Roddons will be

known as Clarion now, he confirmed that as Portfolio Holder for Housing he will be a member of the Regional Board and the first meeting is scheduled for February, he agreed that if members have anything that they would like him to raise at those meetings he would be happy to. Councillor Yeulett agreed to discuss further following the meeting;

- Councillor Yeulett stated that at the last Council Meeting Councillor Booth suggested that this Council look at their Call In process. He stated that it is his intention to discuss this further with his Overview and Scrutiny Panel after the meeting;
- Councillor Yeulett stated that he has asked officers to look into member training for the panel with an emphasis on 'Overview'. Councillor Booth stated that there had previously been a training session set up with all Cambridgeshire Councils and this had been very successful. Anna Goodall agreed to investigate further.

OSC28/16 DRAFT BUSINESS PLAN 2017 - 2018

Councillor Clark presented the Draft Business Plan 2017 - 18. He stated that this is not a new plan but is refreshed from the previous plan, there are some priorities set that we can deliver during the period but some are a rolling progress year on year. A lot of the business plan is dictated to us due to financial constraints, and we have to consider the financial resources that we have to deliver the Business Plan.

Members asked questions made comments and received responses as follows:

1. Councillor Buckton asked for clarification around the formulation of the draft plan and asked who has input into it. Councillor Clark stated that we all own this Business Plan and have put our views into the draft; he added that we welcome the Panel's views and recommendations today. He stated that the CSR discussions have all influenced the Business Plan and although a lot are standing items from year to year it is the level of priority that we deliver them at that might change. For example the brown bins, this has been a priority of the Portfolio Holder which is hopefully going to be delivered on behalf of the Council. However there are some priorities around Health and Wellbeing that will be on-going. Paul Medd confirmed that the process starts in October giving us an early position on the things that need to run on into the next years plan, and we start to get a sense of new areas of business priorities. Cabinet members and CMT come together to formulate a very early draft and there are a number of working sessions to arrive at a draft plan ready for consultation. The draft plan comes to Overview and Scrutiny to look for recommendations for refinement of the final plan;
2. Councillor Buckton asked if we have a consultation strategy. Paul Medd stated that given the challenges that we have and the fact that we have limited resources consultation now is as important as it has ever been. We have something in place but this could be strengthened and this is something that Carol Pilson is looking at now;
3. Councillor Buckton asked who devises questions for consultations. Paul Medd confirmed that we have officer expertise with regards to devising questions for consultations in terms of what constitutes appropriate questions, if it is linked to a specific area of business like the recent brown bins proposals we have officers that appreciate the practical issues of that scheme and the practical issues that may appear to the residents. We can commission to external providers however they are as good as the scope that you give them, and it is costly, so for the most part we have used the capacity and skill set in-house to undertake effective consultation;
4. Councillor Buckton asked if we talk Town Councils as part of a consultation exercise. Councillor Clark stated that this is something that we have not done in the past but agreed to consider it as an option. He added that consultation is a very expensive process the recent CSR consultation was given a budget and this enabled us to send out to all households, one of the questions asked was if people wanted to be contacted in future consultations. As we get a bigger email base we can ask more questions and target them more directly via email, which is very cost effective. He added that we cannot expect the

electorate to make the decisions for us, looking at cost savings measures such as brown bins, parking charges and leisure, if we had consulted with the public the answer would have been no for all 3. So you can only take the consultation as an indication, there will always be people that will be against what we are consulting on and we will never be able to keep everyone satisfied with the outcome of a consultation;

5. Councillor Buckton asked are we satisfied that the consultation method that we use is the best way to get the best results and have we thought about using focus groups and targeting the people that we think might give us the most meaningful information. Councillor Booth stated that it is only worth consulting if we are going to take note of what the public say and there is a perception that these questionnaires get ignored, sometimes that can be due to the structure of the questionnaires. We need to structure the questionnaires so that they do not include conditional responses. Councillor Count stated that if we get the consultation wrong we run the risk of Judicial Review, with this in mind he asked, once the questions have been formulated does someone with legal training review them to ensure that it is a balanced consultation. Paul Medd confirmed that consultation questions are reviewed and depending on what we are consulting on the legal risks can be lesser or greater, but we are all mindful of what the statutory obligations with regards to consultation are;
6. Councillor Yeulett stated that we had a very successful seminar on Health and Wellbeing and members fed some very good ideas into that seminar, the CSR consultation was also very productive and suggested that we could develop that type of session moving forward to feed into the Business Plan development;
7. Councillor Yeulett stated that following that seminar Councillor Mrs Hay suggested developing Golden Age, with a view to it being more embracing of other community members. Councillor Sutton stated that this has been suggested before but the concern is around finance and staffing. He stated that in his view he feels that linking Golden Age into the wider community would be the wrong move as we know through many years of running events when the best times are and this does not tie with the best times to involve the rest of the community. He agreed to investigate further but stated that it would be expensive and in his opinion would not demonstrate value for money. Councillor Booth stated that Councillor Mrs Hay was referring to including vulnerable people rather than the wider community. Councillor Sutton stated that there would still be an issue around timing of events as vulnerable people also go to work every day;
8. Councillor Buckton stated that the discussion was around having a Health and Wellbeing Events which would run along the same lines as Golden Age Events where partner groups could come together so that we would get the benefits that currently are provided for older people on a broader scale and rebranded under Health and Wellbeing. This supports one of our priorities, to improve the health and wellbeing of the people who live in Fenland. He stated that he feels that this is how business planning should work, we set out priorities and then decide on initiatives based on those priorities and then decide if they would be cost effective. Councillor Clark agreed to investigate further as a suggestion. Councillor Mason stated that Councillor Mrs Hays suggestion was also based on cost effectiveness, combining various groups together to save money;
9. Councillor Mason stated that he has been involved in reviving the Business Forum in Whittlesey for the past 18 months, which has been very successful so far. Each Fenland town has its own Business Forum and he asked if FDC have a policy to link together each of the forums so that they can tie into aspirations for economic development for the district moving forward. Councillor Clark stated that the LEP do some work to bring this type of work together and it will be something that will come forward with the business support as part of the combined authority work. As well as the Business Forums there are also the Chamber of Commerce Groups and it is looking at how they could all interact. Councillor Mason stated that there are lots of issues and the most common are the threats from online shopping, the statistics show that 60% of the revenue of local shopping goes back into the community compared to online shopping where only 5% goes back into the community, so it is an important area so we need to be dove-tailing into our neighbourhood plan and the local

plan and all going forward in the same way, he added that these are also groups that should be approached during consultation;

10. Councillor Yeulett asked how will FDC benefit from the combined authority. Councillor Clark stated that it is very early days, the next meeting is on 31 January and this will be the second meeting of the combined shadow authority so it is too early to say what the combined authority is going to deliver, but there are lots of aspirations with the additional money and we hope that it is going to improve our buildings and developments, but that decision has not been taken yet. Moving forward there is an absolute commitment to divert more finances our way, but we will have to wait and see. He added that he does not want to make promises that he cannot deliver on but there is every reason to be optimistic at this stage. Paul Medd stated that for clarity we are not being evasive, the reality at this point is that we know the key headlines; we are looking at our share of at least £600m over 30 years and we are looking at a share of £100m for housing, there are great opportunities around the adult skills budget and there are issues around integrated transport that could be improved. Work is on-going to start to identify where this money could be allocated, but we are not at the point that the detail is known. There is going to be due process to follow and there is likely to be consultation and or engagement with the appropriate communities in terms of what those plans will look like moving forward;
11. Councillor Booth stated that we cannot guarantee the £600m. Paul Medd confirmed that potentially there is at least £600m but that is not guaranteed;
12. Councillor Sutton stated that with regards to the Golden Age proposals, Councillor Cornwell is the Portfolio Holder and he agreed to pass on the comments from the meeting today. He stated that we must be careful that we are not duplicating something that is already available at this time and that is something we will look into, he also agreed to raise this at the next partners meeting;
13. Councillor Yeulett asked if there is anything that can make a difference and raise some finances, maybe some grants are still available from somewhere. We are doing very well to preserve what we have but we need to find something that will make some difference. He asked what the outcomes will be of the corporate priorities. Councillor Sutton stated that all teams across all areas of the Council are looking for grants all the time. FDC led on a DCLG area bid for £737,000 to Central Government to help with a range of issues with housing. We have a very good relationship with DCLG and officers were alerted early to that programme coming forward and had a bid ready to submit. He offered his congratulations to officers on their work on this project. Councillor Clark stated that there comes a time when you have to start to look further afield. There has been a lot of officer time spent on the devolution deal and that time has been taken away from this Council but after May 2017 the devolution will be up and running and it will be time to look forward for this Council;
14. Councillor Count stated that this is very encouraging, some of the funding in the future that will enable us to carry out some of the priorities of this Council will come from the new homes bonus and business rates retention. Presuming Councillor Clark takes on the role of Economic Development Business Support Portfolio Holder it will be important for everyone, if we can get greater increase in business in the area the income into the District Council will increase moving forward. Councillor Clark stated that will not be easy as there is a cluster of high-tech jobs around Cambridge, hopefully we can identify businesses that can relocate to Fenland. There is an item on the Cabinet Agenda this week regarding letting office space, we need to be more business focussed, we need to generate income rather than accepting the cuts, we have to be proactive and go out and help ourselves. Paul Medd stated that within the business plan there should be an output and or an outcome to everything that is in there. Part of the process is to scrutinise on that basis. There should be something that we can performance manage that year. One headline outcome would be around CSR as a whole. Assuming that we continue to deliver the member decisions around CSR that will result in a continued balanced budget, resulting in an on-going sustainable Council;
15. Councillor Buckton asked what happened when the Business Plan has been agreed in terms of directing activity, formulation of business area plans and directing priorities for Cabinet. Paul Medd stated that once we, as a Council, formally adopt the Business Plan

and Budget in February it connects with our service planning process, which indicates what our individual service teams need to do to start delivering these outputs and outcomes. Throughout the year we have Portfolio Holder reports to Council and we also have a mid-point review. When we come back in October it is your role to ask what difference has that made and it is down to us to account for those outcomes and outputs;

16. Councillor Booth stated that he can see a number of woolly statements within the plan, which it would be difficult to put a measure against. He stated that we should have more targeted goals so we can measure more tangibly and if we are going to be more business like that should be the approach;
17. Councillor Booth stated that with regards to priorities from consultations previously economic development has not always been so popular with what people want to see to be delivered. The plan seems to be heavily focussed on economic and not so much on community which is an area that the public are saying we need to focus more on. He added that there are a number of things in the plan that are statutory duties and we have to deliver those anyway, he asked if these cannot be covered with a statement at the beginning that says 'to deliver our statutory duties' and therefore we could take out a number of points within the plan. Councillor Count stated that with regards to statutory duties, they are the number one priority 'we have to deliver what we have to deliver' if we do not list or break these down the people who read the Business Plan will ask about the missing items as they do not know what is or is not statutory. So it would be important to identify what they are before moving onto the other elements. He added that a few years ago business development could have taken a back seat within our business strategy but the way that we are going to be funded in the future this will be far more important moving forward. He stated that he agrees that strengthening communities does help public service delivery. Councillor Sutton stated that the public say that economic development is of no consequence to them, but maybe we should be clarifying to those people how important economic development is to all the other services we provide;
18. Councillor Booth asked if in future years we look at this after the public consultation has been completed, then we will understand their views too. Councillor Buckton stated that he feels that we should be involved prior to the draft plan being published for consultation otherwise this panel becomes part of the consultation;
19. Councillor Clark stated that we need to include the statutory services in the business plan as we need a measure of how those elements are performing Councillor Booth stated that he feels it would be beneficial to make it clear which are the statutory services. Councillor Clark confirmed that information is already available;
20. Councillor Yeulett asked Cabinet Members and Officers to consider if we are a commissioner or deliverer of services. Paul Medd stated that as a Council we will do both, we already commission services and are looking at commissioning other services too, but it is likely that we will continue to be a direct service provider. Councillor Clark agreed. Councillor Sutton stated that it is about the cost of delivering and making sure that when we commission services it is at the standard that we would offer ourselves. So far everything we have moved over to shared services has exceeded what we could have offered in house. Rob Bridge stated that from a financial point of view we have done a lot of work and we have some challenges but we are always considering what is the right thing for this Council in respects of commissioning and sharing arrangements. Paul Medd stated that for years Councils have commissioned services, many Council's commissioned social care so this is not something new within Local Government and it is becoming more commonplace.

Councillor Yeulett thanked Officers and Cabinet Members for attending.

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel recommended the following:

- **That the Business Plan makes a distinction between the statutory and discretionary services provide by the District Council;**
- **That a consultation Strategy is devised to ensure effective outputs;**
- **The District Council should take proactive steps to engage with the Town Council's**

- via the designated CMT leads in relation to the Draft Business Plan;
- Wider engagement with District Councillors should take place in relation to the Draft Business Plan building on the best practice regarding the Comprehensive Spending Review.

OSC29/16 DRAFT MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY AND GENERAL FUND BUDGET 2017/18

Councillor Seaton presented the Draft Medium Term Financial Strategy and General Fund Budget 2017.

Members asked questions, made comments and received responses as follows:

1. Councillor Hay submitted a question with regards to page 40 of the agenda pack where it appears that assumptions are being made in relation to Council tax collection rates even though members agreed for the Council Tax support scheme to remain the same. Councillor Seaton stated that this follows the introduction of the local council tax support scheme in April 2013, prior to this the assumed collection rate was 99%, in 2013 it was reduced to 98.5% and has remained unchanged. Rob Bridge stated that .5% of £40m is £200,000, so it is a significant amount in respects of a collection fund difference. For clarification if we had changed the Council Tax support scheme to 20% we might have seen a change to that collection rate and that is part of the risk that we would have encountered. He agreed that for clarity we will make it clear that is the assumption that was made in 2013 and it has not changed;
2. Councillor Yeulett stated that there are lots of unknowns associated with the current financial position of the council and indeed the country, how does this affect us going forward. Councillor Seaton stated that there are always unknowns in the medium term forecast due to uncertainties. Inflation is included in the forecast where we have contractual arrangements, for other elements there is no inflation allowance. He added that our largest element of cost is staff costs and these increases are largely dictated by Government spend reviews;
3. Councillor Yeulett asked if we, as a Council, are immune from some areas of inflation. Rob Bridge stated that we are not immune but we have contractual arrangements where the contract stated that things will go up by RPI and we have built those into the budget until those contracts finish, but things like utilities are difficult to predict and we have to estimate what they will be. With regards to supplies and services local authorities used to apply incremental budgeting and every year everything would get a form of inflation, but that is not a sensible way of budgeting, and budget holders have to think more smartly about how they spend their money, if there is an area that needed some more money then we would try to accommodate that from other areas and therefore take the general inflation approach out of the equation;
4. Councillor Booth asked what the reality has been of the 0% inflation. Rob Bridge stated that if we look at the last 4 years our outturn position where we have come in underspent and we have been able to make contributions to reserves, we have not had an issue where budget managers are saying because that inflation at zero we have had a problem. That is not to say that there will not be problems in the future if we see a change to inflation rates, and there might be changes which will mean we have to reassess that. There are a lot of unknowns and that is why the budget has caution in it because we have set figures from Government for our revenue support grant, we have an efficiency plan and we have got a multi-year settlement, so that is as set in stone as we are ever likely to get from Government. However if there is a massive drop in the economy the Government will have to do something about it and that will effect everybody. The new homes bonus was always going to be reformed but the disappointment is the last minute reforms in December and the effect that had, we lost £450,000 more than we expected for 2017/18;

5. Councillor Yeulett stated that he is concerned about the potential impact Central Government is making to the new homes bonus and how this might impact FDC's finances in the future. Councillor Seaton stated that table 2 within the report highlights the impact in the medium term financial budget, future years are difficult to forecast as we do not know what the situation will be. Rob Bridge stated that we always knew that the reforms would be introduced, and we predicted some of that within the CSR figures. It is disappointing that when they consulted they built in 0.25% and that when the reforms were announced they had increased that to 0.4%, when you look at our growth we might be 1% and for an area like Fenland, building in that minimum level of growth causes a problem to the amount of new homes bonus ;
6. Councillor Yeulett asked what if the planned 11,300 new homes are not built by the target date of 2031. Rob Bridge stated that we do not build in increases based on that plan. The local plan needs to be delivered and we need to be working with developers and agents to ensure that we can get the appropriate housing growth year on year, if this all happens we will see other things happening in the district. When it comes to the bottom line of our budget we are much more moderate about the growth and we review that every year to ensure that we do not have problems after setting the budget;
7. Councillor Count asked if we have an action plan that says that we will increase the rate of house building and do we measure as a target the rate of house building. He stated that traditionally we ask for master planning and we wait for them to come together, but if we know it is going to deliver the new homes bonus to us then perhaps we should offer to advance fund them on a contract basis;
8. Councillor Count stated that throughout the document the business rates retention is referred to as 100% and people think that we will get to keep all the money, we need to get the message out that it is a national scheme and we are affected by a funding pool. Once the rates is set we will get a percentage of the growth until they reset it, so we need to identify this. We talk a lot about the multi year settlement as a percentage and an amount of money, he suggested that we should also do this with Council Tax increases for a Band D household, as people need to know what this will mean to them financially. Councillor Booth stated that the majority of properties in Fenland are Band B so it would be better to show a figure against that banding. Councillor Count confirmed that the national indicator is based at Band D, but agreed that it would be useful for our residents if they could see the whole range. Rob Bridge agreed that the figures can be included and legislation says that we refer to Band D but we can also make reference to Band B to help people understand the real cost;
9. Councillor Yeulett raised a concern about planning permission for 1000 homes that was granted but no building has yet commenced. Councillor Seaton stated that with regards to the new homes bonus we do not take into account any building even if the planning permission has been granted until they start to build;
10. Paul Medd stated that we are proactive with regards to housing growth, we have a minimum target which is around 550 units per year, we deem that to be an appropriate target for Fenland, but that is not to say that through stimulating growth we would not accept a higher figure than that, it is not a cap. We have an adopted local plan that gives clarity and we are well served as an early adopter. We have previously discussed planning at this meeting, and Councillor Sutton's leadership has a very important role to play, it is not about saying yes to all forms of growth but being practical. The role of planning and the way in which our officers work is the third crucial aspect to underpin housing growth moving forward. This Council also has a good relationship with our agents and developers having an appropriate dialogue with them and the Forum contributes towards that. Another aspect is how we stimulate demand, and with regards to infrastructure, we know that Fenland is held back by virtue of the fact that our infrastructure is not good. If we can work to improve road and rail that will stimulate greater housing developments. We are working to make Fenland a fantastic place so that people want to live here, if we do not look to regenerate the district and attract the investments to create jobs housing demand is going to be constrained;

11. Rob Bridge stated that Councillor Count has made reference to the reforms around business rates and that we will be keeping 100% from 2020/21, the messaging of this is very important. The Government announcements need to be mindful of the reality as this will make people think that we have enough money to deliver services but the reality is that there will be so many elements within it that will mean that we will not get to keep all that we collect. There is good news around appeals as the appeals that we have to put into our collection fund are huge and recently the issue around doctor's surgeries has meant that we have had to pay back £1.5m. The Government are now accepting that appeals will be held centrally and that will take the risk away from all local authorities. We are due a technical consultation very soon on what this is going to look like but one of the questions that has yet to be answered is will it be 2020 or 2021. We also need to be mindful of engagement with our businesses as they will also think that we have 100% of the business rates but will not realise that it is paying for lots of different services;
12. Councillor Yeulett asked for an update on the CSR. Councillor Seaton confirmed that the efficiency plans are on track and some of the plans are in the process of being implemented. He confirmed that the draft budget takes into account that these savings will be made. Rob Bridge stated that officers spend a lot of time monitoring to ensure that we are on track. He stated that we use the CSR programme to populate the efficiency plan that we submitted to Government which they accepted and awarded a multi-year settlement. Councillor Clark stated that members have a part to play in this by making decisions that deliver these savings;
13. Councillor Yeulett asked for an update on the business rates pilot scheme. Rob Bridge stated that this pilot scheme was introduced 2 years ago and we achieved £300,000 in the last year, a new baseline was drawn for this local authority and each year there is 0.5% increase. We will be working on how that plays into what happens when the new scheme starts and revaluation of business rates for April 2017. We need to understand what that means to our baselines as they will have changed because the rateable value across the country has changed;
14. Councillor Yeulett stated that there is no mention in the capital budget about the maintenance for car parks. Councillor Seaton stated that the asset management plan approved by Council in December included the maintenance plans to address the repairs but this is dependent on what capital budget we have to spend and at the moment it is not included, unless we sell assets to cover the costs we have to wait until we are in the position to carry this out;
15. Councillor Yeulett stated that Councillor Mrs Hay asked about £900,000 contingency for Chatteris Leisure facility. Councillor Seaton stated that this was originally put in some years ago when there was a possibility there might be a swimming pool. Since then there has been an all-weather football pitch and the new gym which we contributed to along with the town council, which took away all the money that they had;
16. Councillor Mason stated that the figure seems disproportionate for a contingency and asked if it could be adjusted slightly. Councillor Seaton stated that in real terms this money is not actually there, it is not available to be redistributed;
17. Councillor Booth referring to page 47 and street name plates, stated that there is an amount included within the budget for 2016/17, he asked if it might be better to have a figure spread out over a longer period because we are going to need to replace street signs on a continual basis;
18. Councillor Yeulett asked where the budget would sit on a risk register. Paul Medd stated that we have a Corporate Risk Register and you would expect to see volatility and uncertainty around the Government Policy Agenda, he added that there is a scoring methodology to identify the things that we need to keep a close eye on. Rob Bridge stated that the risk register is reviewed twice a year by the Corporate Governance Committee and it sets out a number of corporate risks to the organisation and one is around the budget and finance, we set out a number of mitigations to try and minimise that risk. He reminded members that on the 27 January at 3pm there is a Risk Management Training session which is open to all members to give members a better understanding.

Councillor Yeulett thanked Officers and Cabinet Members for attending.

OSC30/16 REVIEW OF FEES AND CHARGES 2017/18

Councillor Seaton presented the Review of Fees and Charges 2017/18 Report.

Members asked questions, made comments and received responses as follows:

1. Councillor Booth asked for clarification around port fees covering the cost of the services that we provide. Councillor Seaton confirmed that fees and charges have been changed to cover the costs;
2. Councillor Yeulett stated that we are keen to achieve a balance wherever possible, and what we like to see is that the costs of running a service are covered by the fees charges although we realise that some areas have to take account of competition and market forces;
3. Councillor Booth referring to swimming pool charges asked what is the rationale around reducing one of the annual membership costs. Richard Cassidy stated that the previous year's charges, compared to other memberships, were not quite right and nobody bought this deal, essentially we have reduced one of those charges to make it a fairer price;
4. Councillor Booth asked for clarification around the Leisure Services charges having a 0% increase. He asked that given the financial restraints of this council should we look at an increase on those fees, and although we have spoken about commercial factors but should we be making an increase as these services still cost the Council £500,000 to run per year. Richard Cassidy stated that the leisure fees that we charge are at the market rate, he added that membership rates this year are the highest that we have ever had. Councillor Booth asked if we should be covering the cost of this service as at the moment we are effectively subsidising this service. Richard Cassidy stated that it is a sensitive business, there is competition in the market and it is not a matter of just increasing the prices as we would lose membership, it is about keeping a balance between the 2. Councillor Booth stated that a few years ago the fees were increased. Councillor Seaton stated that we have more competition now, the Tesco gym at Wisbech had an effect on our business when it opened and although that has eased slightly now we have to be mindful that this is a competitive market;
5. Councillor Mason referring to the report stated that the leisure service income since 2010/11 has increased by 28%, so in effect it has decreased slightly each year but the figure for 2016/17 shows a marked increase and asked for clarification. Richard Cassidy stated that the drop over the previous 2 years is a direct result of the competition in Wisbech which took around £60,000 of business away, that has stabilised and we are now starting to take some of that business back as we have a competitive offer that the public want to see. This illustrates the point that it is a price sensitive market;
6. Councillor Booth stated that we increased Council Tax by 1.8% but we are not increasing the business centre rates and asked if that is something we should consider or effectively the Council Tax payer is paying towards those services. Councillor Seaton stated that just recently we have 100% occupancy at South Fens so once again this is very market driven and we have to be careful, we would rather be at 100% occupancy than some units left empty;
7. Councillor Yeulett stated that with regards to leisure centre charges we are attracting people in for exercise and the community benefits of that when thinking about health and wellbeing are good. Richard Cassidy agreed and stated that we also offer an exercise referral scheme in partnership with GP's where some people who are identified as people that might benefit from leisure activities can have a subsidised rate where appropriate.

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel having considered the proposals contained in the Report and Appendix A, AGREED to recommend to Cabinet the Fees and Charges to be included in the final budget proposals for 2017/18.

OSC31/16 FUTURE WORK PROGRAMME

Members considered the Future Work Programme 2016/17 for the Overview and Scrutiny Panel.

Councillor Yeulett explained that there has been a request from Officers that in order for the Leisure Services Management Options to come to us in time to make deadlines for subsequent meetings it is moved from the March meeting to the February meeting and to make space for this the Review of Planning Shared Services item would swap places and move to the March Meeting. Members agreed.

The Future Work Programme 2016/17 for the Overview and Scrutiny Panel was AGREED subject to the amendment above.

4.35pm

Chairman