

# COUNCIL



**THURSDAY, 6 AUGUST 2020 - 4.00 PM**

**PRESENT:** Councillor A Miscandlon (Chairman), Councillor R Skoulding (Vice-Chairman), Councillor I Benney, Councillor Mrs S Bligh, Councillor C Boden, Councillor G Booth, Councillor J Clark, Councillor S Clark, Councillor D Connor, Councillor M Cornwell, Councillor Mrs J French, Councillor K French, Councillor A Hay, Councillor Miss S Hoy, Councillor M Humphrey, Councillor Mrs D Laws, Councillor C Marks, Councillor A Maul, Councillor Mrs K Mayor, Councillor N Meekins, Councillor P Murphy, Councillor M Purser, Councillor C Seaton, Councillor W Sutton, Councillor M Tanfield, Councillor S Tierney, Councillor D Topgood, Councillor S Wallwork (*left at 5.30pm*), Councillor Wicks, Councillor Wilkes and Councillor F Yeulett

**APOLOGIES:** Councillor S Count, Councillor Mrs M Davis, Councillor D Divine, Councillor A Lynn, Councillor D Mason, Councillor D Patrick and Councillor W Rackley

Councillor Miscandlon welcomed members of the public and press watching the livestream of the Council meeting via YouTube due to Government guidance on social distancing. The meeting was held in accordance with the provision set out in the Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020 and with Fenland District Council's Virtual Meeting Protocol.

## **C9/20      PREVIOUS MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting of 17 June 2020 were confirmed.

## **C10/20      TO RECEIVE ANY ANNOUNCEMENTS FROM THE CHAIRMAN OF THE COUNCIL AND/OR THE HEAD OF PAID SERVICE.**

Councillor Miscandlon made the following announcement:

"Members may already be aware that I have had to take the difficult decision to postpone this year's Chairman's Civic Reception. As far as I am aware the Civic reception has never been postponed previously, however in light of the COVID-19 pandemic and Government guidance in relation to social distancing I thought it would be appropriate to postpone and rearrange a date in the future which will enable greater numbers of people to attend and enjoy the event.

Sadly I have also had to take the decision to cancel this year's annual charity coffee morning and will seek alternative opportunities to raise money for the Chairman's Charity Macmillan Cancer Relief.

Paul Medd, Chief Executive, made the following announcement regarding Customer Service Excellence re-accreditation:

I am delighted to announce that the Council has again been reaccredited for Customer Services Excellence or "CSE" following a remote annual inspection in June.

CSE is a national standard that recognises public bodies that provide customer-focused, high

quality, excellent services. Fenland is one of the few councils across the country that have consistently achieved this rigorous standard for all its services.

The CSE assessor said “despite working to tight budgets the Council has continued to deliver excellent customer focused services thanks to the tremendous resolve of staff who always strive to put the customer at the heart of everything”.

He added “Councils are by their nature required to interact with wider communities. However, with the onset of COVID-19 it is clearly apparent that Fenland has managed this situation extremely well.”

The assessment feedback noted the following strengths:

1. How the Council has utilised and extended consultation using social media platforms.
2. The success and effectiveness of a dedicated COVID-19 response hub.
3. The empowerment and use of staff insight in delivering and improving services.
4. Many customer access channels to enable residents to access services, including during the coronavirus pandemic.
5. Partnering arrangements remain strong with a wide range of partners working with the Council resulting in tangible benefits for customers and communities.

Moving forward, the Council is keen to explore new ways of working and technology to further improve the cost-effectiveness of services to residents post COVID-19.”

Councillor Miscandlon thanked Paul Medd and said on behalf of all the members he would like to thank all staff for their diligence and work ethic that has produced this excellent result for Fenland District Council. Councillor Mrs Dee Laws said she would like to second Councillor Miscandlon’s comment.

**C11/20 TO RECEIVE QUESTIONS FROM, AND PROVIDE ANSWERS TO, COUNCILLORS IN RELATION TO MATTERS WHICH, IN THE OPINION OF THE CHAIRMAN, ACCORD WITH THE PROVISIONS OF PROCEDURE RULES 8.4 AND 8.6.**

Councillor Miscandlon stated that no questions had been received submitted under Procedure Rule 8.6 and asked if there were any questions under Procedure Rule. 8.4 from Councillor Tanfield as Leader of the Opposition.

Councillor Tanfield said that she also wished to express her thanks to all the staff of Fenland District Council. The last few months have been unprecedented and service provision has been amazing. She also wanted to highlight the great work of getting grants to local businesses which has been vitally important; our businesses are the heart of Fenland and any issues have been dealt with efficiently and effectively.

Councillor Tanfield addressed Councillor Boden regarding rural broadband, saying that home working and zoom meetings may be here for some time to come and, although not something we deal with specifically, it has highlighted the struggle for decent internet connection in some rural areas. This issue has also been experienced by some members, and therefore she asked if this is something that could be pushed. Councillor Boden agreed the importance of broadband not only in rural areas but in towns also. He said understandably there has been a great deal of additional use of broadband over the last five months and there will be greater demand going forward. Therefore broadband provision is increasingly one of the vital infrastructure provisions which has to exist for business and community success. He agreed that unfortunately there are some rural “not spots” which are poorly served by broadband within the district but surprisingly on average Fenland does have remarkably good broadband support. However, he stated that we do have to do better and whilst it is not our responsibility we do have a voice at various tables of those who do have the

responsibility; the most important of which is the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority. Councillor Boden added that both he and Councillor Count, speaking on behalf of the County Council, never stop asking for further investment in broadband to make sure that it is brought up to adequate standard and continues to be improved. Councillor Boden thanked Councillor Tanfield for the question.

Councillor Tanfield said Councillor Wilkes had brought to her attention the isolation that people with disabilities feel during the pandemic. Councillor Tanfield therefore asked what facilities are in place for people with disabilities, particularly those who have been unable to get out because of the social distancing rules. She added that Councillor Wilkes had further experienced struggles when contacting local charities and so she wondered if the council could work to make more helpful information available in a better structured way. Councillor Boden said this was a very valid point with national and local implications. He agreed there are a number of communities that are particularly susceptible to isolation and loneliness and people with disabilities form a significant proportion of that number, and the situation can be very debilitating. However, the Local Resilience Forum is aware of this and has made attempts to reach out. We do also have a COVID-19 hotline available through the main Council telephone number and assistance can be given to put people in touch with volunteers. Many of these are available even to have a chat over the telephone just to relieve some of the isolation that people have felt. There are many communities, neighbours and friends and families that do help across Fenland to ensure that people are not isolated. Unfortunately some people do fall through the gaps but again he stressed the fact that the helpline is available. Councillor Tanfield thanked Councillor Boden.

Councillor Mrs French said that she had just this morning attended a Communities and Partnership meeting at County where it was discussed the amount of people who had been helped. The total number of residents shielding up to the end of July was 32,000. This number is now decreasing and although the number of hubs are slowly closing down, this help will always be there. Councillor Mrs French added that she was surprised and disappointed that nobody had picked up that Councillor Wilkes needed help. Over the last 4/5 months, FACT has been an absolute gem in March and other volunteer groups started up which have done a wonderful job and she apologised to Councillor Wilkes that he was missed out. She advised him to contact her direct if he does need any help. Councillor Tanfield thanked Councillor Mrs French.

Councillor Tanfield asked Councillor Boden what processes are in place if a local COVID-19 lockdown is required. Councillor Boden advised that there is a great deal of coordination at local resilience forum level, which for us is Cambridgeshire and Peterborough combined. The Cabinet Office identifies areas that may need local lockdown and then liaises with the local resilience forum and the individual local authority to ensure that all necessary steps are being taken. If necessary, more restrictive steps are then taken. However more localised lockdowns or actions can be taken by the local authority themselves, as seen recently for example with a factory within Wisbech. Therefore, it is a local coordinated matter between local authorities under the guidance of the local resilience forum, with the Cabinet Office watching all the statistics and intervening or expressing interest when it needs to. Councillor Tanfield thanked Councillor Boden.

Councillor Miscandlon invited Councillor Wilkes to speak on the issue previously raised by Councillor Tanfield regarding people with disabilities. Councillor Wilkes said he had felt forgotten with these new measures and had called the hotline for help to get exercise given that people had permission and unfortunately is not something he can do independently. The helpline told him to ring Cam Sight who said they could not provide him with the help he was asking for due to the rules on social distancing, therefore he received no help. He felt that he had been passed from pillar to post and his main concern is that as restrictions start to be eased, there will be heavier reliance on assistance outside of one's house-hold. Generally he relies on a cab to get about with assistance at the start and end of journeys from taxi drivers and venue staff. He is not getting any answers as to what legal rights people like himself have to get the assistance needed that could be received pre-COVID. He feels that if disabled people are not going to have their independence

stolen from them, we need those answers. Councillor Miscandlon thanked Councillor Wilkes and invited Councillor Boden to reply having responded to Councillor Tanfield previously.

Councillor Boden thanked Councillor Wilkes for his extremely valuable feedback. He said that the COVID-19 hotline does not provide services itself but acts as a signpost towards service providers and he is sorry to hear that Cam Sight were not able to assist; however he will ensure that Councillor Wilke's experience will be fed back. Furthermore he will ask officers to contact Councillor Wilkes to discuss this further and see where it might be possible to find assistance so that individuals are in a position of being able to rely on others so they do not have their independence stolen from them. Councillor Wilkes said he would welcome that; it would be a great help to him and others within the community.

**C12/20**      **TO RECEIVE REPORTS FROM AND ASK QUESTIONS OF CABINET MEMBERS WITH PORTFOLIO HOLDER RESPONSIBILITIES, IN ACCORDANCE WITH PROCEDURE RULES 8.1 AND 8.2.**

Members asked questions of Portfolio Holders in accordance with Procedure Rules 8.1 and 8.2 as follows:

- Councillor Purser addressed Councillor Sam Clark and asked what has been the feedback and attendance since the leisure centres reopened. Councillor Clark said the response had been overwhelming; there has been no negativity and the staff are doing an excellent job. They are pleased to be back at work and have adapted to the new way of working. The attendance has been positive in that sessions were booked to capacity in the first week of reopening so extra hours have now been added in the second week. Councillor Purser thanked Councillor Clark.
- Councillor Purser asked Councillor Tierney how the new pay point systems had been received by customers. Councillor Tierney said he is pleased with the way they are working; we have had to adapt and move forward with the times to give customers more ways to pay, whilst also maintaining face to face contact for those that need it. He can report that the first week some 70 people used the new pay point system, mostly for council tax totalling over £17,000 of bills so overall it is a good, solid start. Councillor Purser thanked Councillor Tierney.
- Councillor Miss French asked if Councillor Mrs Laws could share any further updates of the emerging Local Plan. Councillor Mrs Laws said members may recall that in February 2019 Council approved the Local Development Scheme which confirmed commencement of a new Fenland Local Plan. In accordance with the scheme, the council issued a public consultation document in October 2019 and carried out a call for sites exercise with local land agents, owners and developers. In February 2020, a key report was published with the results of the consultation along with the Strategic Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment report. In early 2020 work commenced on the draft version of the Local Plan and work is well underway on the various evidence-based documents to support it. The Council has also commissioned a strategic flood risk assessment and a water cycle study. The Local Plan team has engaged with neighbouring districts and County Council to fulfil its obligations under the Duty to Cooperate, and identify both infrastructure and housing needs across Cambridgeshire through preparation of a strategic housing marketing assessment. The work to assess 425 individual sites through the call for sites exercise is at an advanced stage. Due to COVID-19 delaying work on aspects of the Local Plan and the additional call for sites process, the timetable has been delayed by approximately 8 months, and this was approved by Cabinet on 28 July 2020. Councillor Mrs Laws added that members are encouraged to visit [www.fenland.gov.uk/newlocalplan](http://www.fenland.gov.uk/newlocalplan) for the latest information on the emerging plan. Councillor Miss French thanked Councillor Mrs Laws.
- Councillor Miss French addressed Councillor Benney and asked how the Economic Growth Manager and Business Account Manager are settling into their new roles and what have they achieved so far. Councillor Benney said they had settled in very well and he would like to thank them for the work they have undertaken providing grants to local businesses. Unfortunately due to the lockdown the number

of business enquiries has been lower than he would have liked but now things are gradually opening up again, there has been a number of positive enquiries. Furthermore, with the work done to contact as many local businesses as possible we now have a comprehensive database of businesses within Fenland which we did not have before and they will use it as a tool to contact and work with businesses to try and develop further business growth within Fenland.

- Councillor Mrs Mayor addressed Councillor Murphy saying that we have received regular press releases regarding refuse collections and asked how they have managed during this pandemic. Councillor Murphy said that he is extremely proud of how hard the frontline staff have worked. They have been dealing with the highest level of waste ever seen before here for example, an extra 92 tonnes a day of green bin waste, 39 tonnes a day of blue bin waste and 48 tonnes a day of brown bin waste. They have worked their days off and cancelled leave and have received a high level of support and compliments from customers. Additionally, we have had drivers from within the community willingly come and work for us on a temporary basis to help us keep delivering our services at this key time and he would like to thank those as well. We now also have our highest level of garden waste customers; the majority of whom took advantage of the reduced direct debit offer which he extended during the lockdown period. He would like to say thank you once again to the hardworking staff who have made 110% effort.
- Councillor Mrs Mayor thanked Councillor Murphy for his response to her last question and asked if the replacement scheme for high street bins had started, and if not when. Councillor Murphy said there are 900 litter and dog bins in the district, of which 341 have been identified as requiring replacement. Cabinet supported a two-year capital project to update, renew and replace the oldest and most worn of these bins. The plan will now commence this autumn, with 175 being replaced in 2021 and 166 in 2022. Councillor Mrs Murphy thanked Councillor Murphy.
- Councillor Wicks addressed Councillor Wallwork regarding the Community Safety Survey saying he had previously emailed his concerns that approximately 80% of the land mass of Fenland will have no account taken of their individual concerns as all rural areas and villages are lumped in with the four market towns. He said this was a distortion and dilution of the concerns of those of us living in these areas and he asked what action is being taken to rectify this concern. Councillor Wallwork said that she had previously replied to the email but reiterated that just because the villages had not been asked specifically it did not mean their concerns were ignored. It was just that they have been trying to get a picture of the whole of Fenland and will then break that down to deliver specific work areas or specific safety events. Realistically to do what Councillor Wicks suggests would treble the workload and the system is working well as it is. However, she had taken on board his suggestion but after some preliminary investigation has decided to keep to the current method. Councillor Wicks said he was still concerned as the villages and rural areas are a much neglected area for a number of aspects.
- Councillor Hay addressed Councillor Boden and said that she was pleased to hear the Combined Authority mention that the CAM Metro was coming to Fenland, although it is not known where. Since the CAM was first mentioned, Councillor Hay has lobbied the Mayor to include Chatteris on the network as it is the only market town within Fenland not to have a railway station or the prospect of one. Bringing the CAM to Chatteris would not only create wide-ranging economic benefits for the people of Chatteris, but could also have the effect of providing better or more affordable housing to those living closer to Cambridge. Councillor Hay said she is proud to live in Chatteris and would like to see her town grow, provide more housing, more industry and better amenities and it is with this in mind that she would ask that Councillor Boden, in his role as leader of FDC and as a member of the CA, that he also brings up the benefits of including Chatteris in the CAM network at every opportunity. Councillor Boden responded that Councillor Hay was indeed the champion for the connectivity of the network to Chatteris but the Mayor had actually said there would be connection to the Fens and Peterborough, not Fenland specifically. He explained that CAM, or Cambridgeshire Autonomous Metro, is designed to link people across the county in a faster and more reliable way via a driverless vehicle primarily utilising dedicated track which will operate on the core network on a 24/7 basis. Both Councillor Boden and Councillor Count have also been lobbying the Mayor and they are determined to get an announcement that Chatteris can be included. The Mayor's office is currently looking at the technical feasibility of this. Therefore, he would invite Councillor Hay to ask the same question at every

full Council meeting going forward, subject to the Chairman's agreement, which will push the initiative onto him to get some positive progress. He could not agree enough about the importance not only for Chatteris but for Fenland as a whole and it would absolutely transform the opportunities for the people of Chatteris.

- Councillor Tanfield addressed Councillor Sam Clark saying that she is pleased to hear the leisure centres are back open and that demand for the facilities is increasing. However, what are the implications for Fenland District Council financially or otherwise should we have to go into a further lockdown in the near future? Councillor Clark said this is a worry and she will get back to Councillor Tanfield regarding this.
- Councillor Cornwell asked Councillor Wallwork about the 'Think Communities' update in the portfolio holder report. Originally it was planned for Wisbech and was then to be extended to the other towns but this has not happened. He asked if this was still planned because a lot of the advantages of this would be equally important for the other three towns. Councillor Wallwork said that she has a meeting soon regarding this and will get back with an update once that has taken place. Councillor Cornwell said he would look forward to that.
- Councillor Cornwell addressed Councillor Mrs French about the car parking element in the portfolio holder report. The report stated that there had been no progress and a steer was awaited from members. However, he was not aware that members had been engaged in the next stage of the process so presumably we are waiting for engagement so we can give a steer. Councillor Mrs French said that all members will be included and she had been talking to Inspector Lombardo about combining this with work that he was doing to recruit highly trained special volunteers, but unfortunately due to COVID-19 this was put on hold. As soon as she gets a steer from the police it will come back to all members for further discussion. Councillor Cornwell said he appreciates that priorities have been in other directions over the last few months but hopefully we are now getting to a stage where we can begin to approach a new normal.
- Councillor Cornwell addressed Councillor Murphy regarding enforcement saying that he understands our own officers have been trying to undertake some of the work that Kingdom used to do. He asked how many FPNs had they issued since we stopped working with them. Councillor Murphy said he did not have that information to hand and asked to get back to him on this. Councillor Cornwell thanked Councillor Murphy.
- Councillor Booth addressed Councillor Murphy saying that he had read that CCORRN are now issuing Eco boxes therefore they have recommenced some activity. Although he understands it is County's responsibility, he asked Councillor Murphy if he knows when CCORRN will be taking paint again. The County website still says they are unable to take paint or textiles although he was under the impression that textile banks are now being emptied across the district. Councillor Murphy said the March household waste recycling centre had recently accepted paint from him, however they were unable to take textiles or old TV sets, videos etc. because the people that take those are not working currently. Councillor Booth said it was at March that he was told the paint goes to CCORRN, who are just around the corner and they are not open but as the report shows they are undertaking some activity so there appears to be a little bit of disconnect with information given from the March site. His main concern is still that we may see fly tipping rates increase further as people get more frustrated and we want to avoid that as we have already seen an increase in fly tipping over the last few months.
- Councillor Bligh agreed with Councillor Booth that due to the household recycling sites being closed in lockdown there had been an increase in fly tipping within the villages. She wanted to give her thanks to the Rapid Response team for their speed in clearing this up and asked Councillor Murphy if there had been any successful prosecutions. Councillor Murphy said that there had not been any prosecutions but thanked Councillor Bligh for her comment; fly tipping had increased but not as much as had been thought. He agreed it is still prevalent and is not something that will ever stop unfortunately but we have been able to keep on top of it. Councillor Bligh said the team at the Base have been brilliant for the way they have dealt with fly tipping, particularly regarding recent incidents involving asbestos as it has been particularly prevalent in the villages.
- Councillor Connor asked Councillor Seaton how the regeneration of Wisbech High Street is progressing.

Councillor Seaton said that he is pleased to report that the National Heritage Lottery Fund has agreed to a project extension, with the new expiry date being 31<sup>st</sup> December 2022. This is welcome news and provides reassurance to grant applicants so they can now progress with their projects in confidence. He thanked officers for lobbying long and hard to get this extension through. On 11-12 High Street, the developer has progressed well with the plans for demolition, which they are paying for, and tenders for construction are being assessed and once a contractor is approved and appointed the grant application can be assessed which will enable the funding agreement and build lease to be completed. On 24 High Street, FDC has issued an invitation for project management services and once a project manager is appointed plans will be progressed which will allow for FDC to apply for funding from the NHLF, who have already confirmed they are in support of this scheme. On 13-17 High Street, the applicants can now make a start on the site and the funding agreement is being updated to reflect the revised project end date. On 18-19 High Street, as with 13-17, the applicants were waiting for the project extension to be agreed before proceeding with the work. The owner has been advised to update the funding agreement as soon as possible. There are reserve properties, but the owners have failed to advise of their intentions and officers are working to get a response on these. Officers have issued letters of improvement works to the owners of some properties and if not undertaken then S215 notices will be served. Grants are available from the project for the works outlined in those schedules.

- Councillor Wilkes addressed Councillor Sam Clark saying if he would be interested to know what Freedom's policy is on those who require extra assistance, for example to be guided around the leisure centres which could be done quite easily pre COVID-19 and the current rules on social distancing. Councillor Clark said she would look into that and get an answer; she said that although Freedom staff would be happy to help she agreed that the current rules would be an issue. Councillor Wilkes thanked Councillor Clark.
- Councillor Wilkes said he was assuming that now that everything has to be pre-booked to manage capacity, he asked if the facility was available for people with disabilities not to have to access online services but to be able to use the telephone for example. He gave an example of his experience with another authority where their booking procedures are not accessible for a blind user and he felt there was no interest in providing extra help or making any reasonable adjustments to adhere to the Equality Act 2010. Councillor Clark confirmed that there is a reception facility at each of the leisure centres who will take telephone bookings from people who cannot use the app. Councillor Wilkes thanked Councillor Clark.
- Councillor Sutton asked Councillor Seaton if FDC applied to the Rural Mobility Fund and if so, did we get through to the second round and if not why not. Councillor Seaton said he thought he had the information but would like to check it and get back to Councillor Sutton.
- Councillor Sutton thanked Councillor Sam Clark in her position as Portfolio Holder for Leisure for sending a congratulatory letter to the Wisbech Boxing Club on their fantastic achievement of receiving the Queens Award. He shared a pride in the club, having previously been involved with them for many years and he knows they were really pleased to receive the letter.
- Councillor Sutton asked Councillor Boden about when some of the smaller committees can meet again in person, although he understands it is not practical for full Council to meet face to face given the number of members involved. Councillor Boden said that the statutory instrument has been written in a way to make it possible to hold hybrid meetings at least until 7 May 2021, and any member of the Council can attend a meeting remotely. Therefore we cannot force any meeting to be held in person. He said although it would be possible for some smaller committees to meet, central Government have only recently announced that they strongly recommend digital meetings. He is disappointed but cannot ignore government advice regarding social distancing. Councillor Sutton thanked Councillor Boden and said he is disappointed too but accepts the decision.
- Councillor Sutton addressed Councillor Mrs Laws saying that he had noticed that planning validations seem to have gone awry. He suspected this may be due to COVID-19 but asked for comment. Councillor Mrs Laws agreed that COVID-19 has had a serious impact on the team in terms of staffing but we are looking at IT and whether some of the validation work can be undertaken at home, therefore it is an issue she is on top of. Councillor Sutton thanked Councillor Mrs Laws.

- Councillor Sutton also said that given we are in a shared planning partnership with Peterborough, is there any chance of having someone help out from there? Councillor Mrs Laws said this had been explored but they are in a similar situation. Councillor Sutton asked that if applications are as they should be, could Councillor Mrs Laws confirm that the clock would start ticking on the deadline once we validate, and not from when they are sent in. Councillor Mrs Laws said she could confirm that but unfortunately only about 4% of applications are correct upon first submission; most are of a very poor standard. She applauded the team because their brief from her is to do everything possible to bring those applications forward for validation but they are being used as an extension to agents' professional offices by even having to check scale drawings etc. She is nearly at the point of refusing some applications and sending them back which may lead to an improvement of the applications submitted. However, the team are very professional and have a lot of experience, they are trying to be helpful and this does impact on the validation process and dates. Councillor Sutton thanked Councillor Mrs Laws, saying this had been his experience in previous years also.
- Councillor Sutton asked Councillor Mrs Laws for an update on the Level 2 Flood Risk Assessment across the district. Councillor Mrs Laws said that this is running about 8 months behind but hopes that by the next meeting of full Council she will be able to provide an update.
- Councillor Sutton asked what effect the latest Government White Paper will have on our Local Plan. Councillor Mrs Laws said that this is so new that she has had no time to look at it; however she will read it and will answer the question at next full Council.
- Councillor Sutton addressed Councillor Tierney regarding the forthcoming new FDC website. He asked for a better interactive section regarding, for example, the reporting of street lights. He reported an issue some months ago and found it hard to go through; subsequently he found that others had also reported it. Could there perhaps be a system so that we can see if an issue has already been reported? Councillor Tierney said that the FDC website had previously been layered with years of information which has taken time to strip back, but will be much more responsive and user friendly with a 'magazine feel'. The new website can be updated as we go along and he will be interested in members' views when they see it as it will go live in a week or two. We can then be reactive to any changes suggested. However, in regards to the mapping facility, that is not something that we are currently planning to do as we are not dealing with Highways.
- Councillor Mrs French asked Councillor Hoy for updates on Private Sector Housing Enforcement and the Empty Homes Project. Councillor Hoy said the project is progressing well and the new Empty Homes Officer has now been in post for some time; she has been meeting with home owners and investors and a number of properties have already been brought back into use as a result. Regarding the private sector, the team has embraced a change to the way enforcement is undertaken. There are still fines waiting to be collected and some are in the appeals system. Property inspections are now underway again having been stopped due to COVID-19 and in all, things are very positive.
- Councillor Seaton referred to Councillor Sutton's earlier question regarding the Rural Mobility Fund. He had now checked his information and said only the Transport Authority could apply for this funding; it was based on-demand services. Fenland District Council is not a transport authority and there are on-demand services within FDC. The CPCA are running a bus review and as he sits on the task review group, that is where efforts have been concentrated. He apologised for not having the information to hand earlier.

## **C13/20      TREASURY MANAGEMENT ANNUAL REPORT 2019/20**

Members considered the Treasury Management Annual Report 2019/20 presented by Councillor Boden.

Councillor Yeulett asked for clarification of the last sentence of 5.12 of the report, "It is clear that the Treasury intends to put a stop to local authorities borrowing money from the PWLB to purchase commercial property if the aim is solely to generate an income stream". He asked if that affects Fenland in any way in terms of the industrial and commercial strategy going forward. Councillor



Boden responded that unfortunately he cannot answer that question as we do not yet know what Government are going to do about the PWLB. Councillor Yeulett thanked Councillor Boden.

**Proposed by Councillor Boden, seconded by Councillor Skoulding it was AGREED that the report be noted.**

#### **C14/20      BUDGET UPDATE**

Members considered the Budget Update Report by Councillor Boden.

Councillor Booth asked how much lobbying we are doing through the Local Government Association to get better clarity from the Government around what additional payments they may be making. Councillor Boden said there are 300 local authorities around the country all having financial issues at the moment. All have different issues. And they are all being taken up by others who have the same problem, for example leisure services. The financial support given under the income loss scheme does not cover our additional costs because they are set up in such a way that they only really apply to those authorities who still run their own leisure services. We have contracted ours out so, along with many other authorities who have done the same, are liaising together to lobby Government on the same issue. The LGA is doing a good job of lobbying but we are being served well by the Association of District Councils who are lobbying on our behalf on issues that we as a district council have got. We have also been gently lobbying our local MP on the issues that we, as his own local council, are facing.

Councillor Sutton said that he believes that the figures presented before us are made worse due to the actions of Councillor Boden, when as Vice-Chairman of Corporate Governance, he insisted that we have a vacancy factor built into the budget. At that time many of us were not keen on this but we gave way and now the crows have come home to rest.

**Proposed by Councillor Boden, seconded by Councillor Booth it was AGREED that the report be noted.**

#### **C15/20      PARSON DROVE NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN**

Members considered the Parson Drove Neighbourhood Plan presented by Councillor Mrs Laws.

Councillor Mrs Laws said this plan was the result of several years of hard work of the Parson Drove Parish Council and the local community who have taken the opportunity to shape their local area through the neighbourhood planning process. On behalf of Fenland District Council she would like to congratulate the Parish Council on this important achievement.

Councillor Booth thanked Councillor Laws for her kind words. He said the plan was part of the Localism Act and he would encourage other parishes and villages to follow the same route to help influence the way they can grow their communities.

Councillor Bligh said she has seen the outstanding work that has gone into this plan and to allow the community to have a say in the future development of their village is really important.

Councillor Mrs Laws said she fully appreciated the amount of work that has gone into this and would agree with Councillor Booth that she would encourage any village to go through with a neighbourhood plan. It can take a lot of time and be very challenging but is worthwhile when it comes to planning decisions and taking local people's views into account.

**Proposed by Councillor Mrs Laws, seconded by Councillor Bligh Council AGREED to adopt the Parson Drove Neighbourhood Plan (Appendix 1) as a part of the Development Plan for**

**Fenland, and note the Reg. 19 Decision Statement (Appendix 2) which confirms the reasons for the Council's decision.**

*(Councillor Booth declared an interest in that he helped develop the Parson Drove Neighbourhood Plan therefore will not vote on the matter but reserves the right to speak if anyone has any questions).*

**C16/20      CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENTS (VIRTUAL MEETINGS PROCEDURE RULES & BUSINESS AND PLANNING BILL)**

Members considered the Constitutional Amendments (Virtual Meetings Procedure Rules & Business and Planning Bill) Report presented by Councillor Boden.

Councillor Booth thanked Councillor Boden for taking on board the comments raised at the last meeting and acting to give them the opportunity to help shape what he feels is a more democratic solution.

Councillor Sutton reiterated Councillor Booth's comments. They both made representations that were taken on board which was good. He added that 8.5c of the Constitution says that a written question should go to all members, so he hoped that Cabinet members responding in writing will take that on board and get back to all of us in a timely fashion. Councillor Miscandlon said that was duly noted. Councillor Boden added that for the sake of clarity he could assure members that the requirement for written responses to all members was not changed by the virtual procedure rules.

Councillor Booth said it was a minor observation but 19.1 mentions the raised hand function and we must remember that if we do change to a different method of meeting, this will have to be taken into account at that time.

**Proposed by Councillor Boden, seconded by Councillor Booth Council AGREED to note and ratify the changes that the Monitoring Officer has made to the Constitution in exercise of the authority delegated to her under Part 3, Table 4, paragraph 47 of the Constitution and as set out at Appendix A and B to the Report.**

**C17/20      CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENTS (AMENDMENT TO PLANNING SCHEME OF DELEGATION)**

Members considered the Constitutional Amendments (Amendment to Planning Scheme of Delegation) Report presented by Councillor Mrs Laws.

Councillor Sutton said he had a problem with the paper because the key issues at item 2 had used the term 'Members' as a sweeping statement. He said this should have read 'some Members' as he had not been asked and it did not reflect his thoughts. He also said he had a slight problem with the possibility of overloading the Planning Committee with applications that perhaps should not be there but could end up there. Therefore, whilst he will support the paper he would like to ask both the Leader and Portfolio Holder that we review this after six months. Already we are seeing uplift in applications through the extended time, which he had not agreed with. Every four weeks would be more suitable in his opinion.

Councillor Booth was going to suggest the same as Councillor Sutton, that this be reviewed in six months' time to see how it works in practice. However, his main concern is the member call-in process which was only changed a few years ago. His understanding at that time is that it would be a consultation between the heads of Planning and Legal and the Planning Chairman. This is a slight change but seems to put a lot of power on the head of Planning and feels that the other

changes put more power onto members' hands so we seem to be going in two different directions about how planning matters are dealt with. Therefore he would like a review in six months' time.

Councillor Boden said he had great doubts that there would be the number of occasions when these provisions would end up being used. That is why he believes Councillor Sutton's concern about the increasing workload on the Planning Committee is not based on reality. Nevertheless as we have a local plan that is out of date it will be the case on occasion that planning officers will have little option but to recommend refusal for some things that we really need to see approved. If in six months' time, Councillor Sutton or Councillor Booth wish to seek a revision then that is fine but he does not think we will be in that position then.

Councillor Hoy said she fully supported the report.

Councillor Mrs Laws said we have to be mindful that our local plan is not fit for purpose. Unfortunately however, it is what planning officers have to go by. These amendments she believes will be helpful and what we are all trying to achieve is suitable and sustainable development. Like Councillor Boden, she will be happy to receive a revision request in six months and is hoping that it will not be necessary. We also have to bear in mind we have had a sudden surge because many agents have been working from home and they found applications that have stalled or needed revitalising and she hopes this will address any misgivings that Councillor Sutton and Councillor Booth have.

**Council AGREED to revise the Planning scheme of delegation within the Council's Constitution as set out at Appendix A of the report.**

6.20 pm

Chairman