

AGENDA

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

MONDAY, 7 SEPTEMBER 2020

1.30 PM

**A VIRTUAL MEETING VIA ZOOM VIDEO
CONFERENCING SYSTEM**

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Due to the COVID-19 outbreak and the restrictions by the Government on gatherings of people, this meeting will be conducted remotely using the Zoom video conferencing system. There will be no access to this meeting at the Council offices but you can view the meeting on YouTube, apart from any items marked confidential.

- 1 To receive apologies for absence.
- 2 Previous Minutes. (Pages 3 - 12)

To confirm the minutes of the meeting held 13 July 2020.
- 3 To report additional items for consideration which the Chairman deems urgent by virtue of the special circumstances to be now specified.
- 4 Members to declare any interests under the Local Code of Conduct in respect of any item to be discussed at the meeting.
- 5 Update on previous actions. (Pages 13 - 16)

Members to receive an update on the previous meeting's Action Plan.
- 6 Annual Update from Clarion

Members to receive a presentation from Clarion

7 Progress of Corporate Priority - Communities (Pages 17 - 30)

This report sets out the Council's progress in delivering the corporate objectives from April 2020 to July 2020. This is to ensure that Members have the most up to date information possible.

8 Local Government Ombudsman Annual Review of Complaints (Pages 31 - 36)

To update Members on the annual statistics in relation to the Local Government and Health and Social Care Ombudsman (LGO) and the Council's corporate '3Cs' procedure. This explains how we deal with the comments, compliments, correspondence and complaints we receive.

9 Future Work Programme (Pages 37 - 42)

To consider the Draft Work Programme for Overview & Scrutiny Panel 2020/21.

10 Items which the Chairman has under item 3 deemed urgent.

Thursday, 27 August 2020

Members: Councillor D Mason (Chairman), Councillor A Miscandlon (Vice-Chairman), Councillor G Booth, Councillor D Connor, Councillor S Count, Councillor M Cornwell, Councillor M Humphrey, Councillor M Purser, Councillor R Skoulding, Councillor D Topgood, Councillor Wicks and Councillor F Yeulett

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

MONDAY, 13 JULY 2020 - 1.30 PM



PRESENT: Councillor D Mason (Chairman), Councillor A Miscandlon (Vice-Chairman), Councillor G Booth, Councillor D Connor, Councillor M Cornwell, Councillor S Count, Councillor M Purser, Councillor R Skoulding, Councillor D Topgood, Councillor Wicks and Councillor F Yeulett

APOLOGIES: Councillor M Humphrey

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE: Sam Anthony (Head of HR and OD), Peter Catchpole (Corporate Director and Chief Finance Officer), Anna Goodall (Head of Governance and Customer Services), Phil Hughes (Head Of Leisure Services), Paul Medd (Chief Executive) and Mark Saunders (Chief Accountant)

OSC1/20 APPOINTMENT OF CHAIRMAN FOR THE MUNICIPAL YEAR

It was proposed by Councillor Miscandlon, seconded by Councillor Purser and resolved that Councillor Mason be elected Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel for the Municipal Year.

Councillor Mason thanked the Panel for the confidence bestowed upon him and paid tribute to Councillor Miscandlon for being an excellent Chairman during the past years, he had been a delight to work with and a lot had been done under his leadership. He also thanked Councillor Hay for all her efforts as Vice Chairman during that period.

Councillor Mason then welcomed members of the public and press watching the livestream of the Cabinet 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.

OSC2/20 APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIRMAN FOR THE MUNICIPAL YEAR

It was proposed by Councillor Mason and seconded by Councillor Skoulding that Councillor Miscandlon be nominated as Vice-Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel for the Municipal Year.

Councillor Miscandlon thanked the Panel and said he would do his best to support the Chairman this coming year.

OSC3/20 PREVIOUS MINUTES.

The minutes of the meeting of 8 June 2020 were confirmed as correct.

OSC4/20 UPDATE ON PREVIOUS ACTIONS.

Members were provided with an update on the status of actions raised at previous meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel.

1. Councillor Booth said that he does not think Action 1 relating to rent charged by the County Council to early years providers should be marked as completed. They state they are looking at a payment holiday for the rents but he believes there is an issue regarding affordability. One of the preschools in his village has expressed concern about future sustainability because of their tight budget and so he believes we need to keep a watching brief on this item.
2. Councillor Booth said that although he appreciates the time taken by Inspector Lombardo to respond to Action 2 regarding road safety and police enforcement of speed limits, he is concerned that speeding is still a big issue. Both he and Councillor Bligh's efforts to contact the police regarding speeding in their wards have remained unanswered, so he looks forward to the new email being set up as suggested. When the roads were quiet they were being abused by the minority even more and this became a national issue to the extent that some counties prioritised speeding. Therefore as the last action has not yet been delivered, he would like this issue to be marked as ongoing.

Councillor Miscandlon agreed with Councillor Booth but said that having spoken to the Police and Crime Commissioner on this issue within his ward, he was advised that if the speeding is considered to be legally dangerous than the advice is to call 999. Report on 101 otherwise. Police will respond to 999 where the situation is life threatening to other road users and pedestrians. Councillor Booth said he would still like the item left open to monitor for the future but he was thankful for this useful information. Councillor Purser also agreed as did Councillor Cornwell, who added that it should score quite heavily on the consultation that is out currently. Councillor Wicks said speeding in villages has been endemic for years and he has long campaigned over this. He agreed that we need a positive police response, but he had noticed that the villages had been amalgamated with the market towns so as to dilute the information presented in the survey.

OSC5/20 COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT SCHEME

Members considered the Council Tax Support Scheme report presented by Councillor Boden.

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

1. Councillor Mason said that we belong to the ARP as equal members but partner rates are set at 8.5% whilst ours is 14% and he asked Councillor Boden the reason for this. Councillor Boden said the decision to change was made in 2013/14 because 8.5% was felt to be not financially viable within Fenland. He added that each partner within ARP has the right to set whatever rates they wish.
2. Councillor Booth said that although Councillor Boden mentioned there is an impact on other authorities he felt the report lacks their thoughts on the scheme; although we are the setting authority we need to have a better understanding of the actual impact of the scheme on them. County Council gets the prime share of council tax we collect but it would be interesting to know the effect on other authorities particularly for future years. Councillor Booth said he also raised the issue of the percentage variance last year and would particularly like to know the implications regarding administration.
3. Councillor Boden said it is correct that we do not take into account or consult the other precepting authorities and agrees that is inappropriate, therefore Cabinet would welcome such a recommendation from the Panel.
4. In respect of Councillor Booth's comment regarding administration, Councillor Boden said the difficulty lies in making changes, which are always technical, but once put in place then the administration is relatively straight forward. If it is just having a difference in the discount rate, that is easy to administer. Councillor Boden added that he has already started talking to other council leaders regarding 2022/23 because all are now increasingly aware of the importance of getting this right. Additionally, with our system not having fundamentally changed for seven

years, we are out of step with a number of other authorities, Peterborough City Council being one. They have a very different scheme with different allowances and rules and a different discount rate. It will be inappropriate to look at this for 2021/22 because of our attention on COVID-19.

5. Councillor Booth said he agreed that a recommendation regarding consultation should be put forward to Cabinet and also he takes on board Councillor Boden's comment regarding administration. We need to think about the socio-economic impact of changing the rate. For example, where does paying council tax lie in budgeting as a priority for people on limited budgets? This has got to be part of future consideration as it may be a lower priority for some than paying the rent and will impact on our collection rates.
6. Councillor Miscandlon said he supports the recommendation to talk to other partners in the ARP group. Quoting paragraph 2.4 of the report, he asked Councillor Boden what has been the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the number of claimants in Fenland?
7. Councillor Boden said that the number of working age claimants in Fenland has increased significantly but all councils have seen this increase and had we not made changes then the impact would be worse. However, this may change once the furlough scheme ends.
8. Councillor Miscandlon asked Councillor Boden why Fenland and the other partners within ARP had not worked together before in terms of making the percentages cohesive. Councillor Boden agreed there was a difference regarding the discount but it was relatively minor in terms of the administration of the scheme; however the impact of COVID-19 could now be the trigger for us to ask more fundamental and difficult questions regarding the whole scheme. However this review really needs to be for 2022/23 and not 2021/22 because officers are extremely busy right now. Councillor Miscandlon agreed that the impact of COVID-19 had been difficult for us all to deal with.
9. Councillor Yeulett said the recipients of council tax support would be the worst impacted financially as highlighted by Councillor Booth and asked if at the end of the current situation there would be a whole rethink of the scheme. Councillor Boden replied it is not for us to structure council tax support as we are constrained by central Government. He agreed that although we have to be aware of the effect on individuals' lives, it is also important to remember that it is other council tax payers who pay for the council tax support scheme. Therefore it is a matter of balancing the best interests of everyone.
10. Councillor Booth said he would like to recommend that a working group be set up to look at the complex set of options on offer and to consider the socio-economic impact and matters such as collection rates and how they will be impacted by any of the options being looked at. He said that realistically we cannot make any decisions today as we do not have the data in front of us and this is such a complex matter.
11. Councillor Mason said that a sub-committee was set up last year to review ARP and perhaps Councillor Booth's suggestion could be incorporated within that.
12. Councillor Boden responded that there is a very tight timetable about the setting of the council tax support scheme for next year and as part of that the purpose of O&S is take make a recommendation to Cabinet who are meeting in early August. Today is the opportunity for the Panel to give their input into the decision that Cabinet needs to make. A working party, although a fine idea, is difficult to tie in with the process we are talking about here, which is to determine what should be done about consultation and how we should consult, and that needs to be done at the beginning of August.
13. Councillor Booth said that he is not proposing the group look into the council tax scheme for this year; we do not have the information to make an informed decision for this year's scheme so it needs to stay as it is at the moment but the working group should be set up to look at the following year.
14. Councillor Count said that the partners have a different discount rate to us and that reflects on the ability to pay. People on Universal Credit are deemed by the system to have enough money to live on so the less they pay in council tax from one area compared to another would expect that it would mean that a greater percentage could be collected from people because they can afford it. Unfortunately, the reality is that human nature sometimes causes a reprioritising of spending habits which eventually results in non-payment. Therefore to be able

to inform our decision we certainly need to look at our collection rate and how that performs against other statistically comparable authorities.

15. Councillor Boden thanked Councillor Count for the interesting and helpful comment. The discount rate will have an effect on the collection rate but there is not a direct correlation. Unfortunately there is a relative lack of good quality research at national level to answer that question and we must make up our own minds based on our own experience. Undoubtedly one of the things we would need to take into account is the different collection rate but a lot depends on the effort put in by the collecting authority itself and in order to administer a council tax discount scheme which has a lower amount that is paid it is necessary to spend more money in order to get the collection rate back up.
16. Councillor Count said mention has been made of the timetable of when we have to make a decision; he has not seen this but when Cabinet come to look at this if they have a representation of that timetable which is written in stone, as opposed to that which can be flexible, then he would suggest they see if they can have more flexibility in their decision making so the information comes through as late in the calendar year as possible.
17. Councillor Boden said he would be happy for the O&S Panel to make that a recommendation to Cabinet as it is common sense. There are few actual fixed dates in this. We have not been in this position before and so we are uncertain about what the next year will bring and Councillor Count is correct to say we need to give ourselves as a council the maximum amount of flexibility so we have the greatest amount of knowledge we can have about the effects upon both the council and our tax payers of the decisions we make. There are few fixed dates in this but if we are proposing to make changes then by law the council tax support scheme must be set by 28 February 2021 and if not, then they have to be set by 11 March 2021. The Cabinet Office has suggested that if councils are going to propose a minor change they can have a shorter period of time than 12 weeks for consultation, but we would like to follow the full 12 weeks to ensure we are following the law properly.
18. Councillor Count said part of the discussion earlier was around what our partners think. As leader of the County Council he would suggest that the fairest way of taxation is to spread it across the fairest amount of people and Councillor Boden is quite right to suggest that the people who pay the council tax discount are the council tax payers themselves; it does not come out of our pockets. There has to be nuances and there are specific ideas coming forward for 2022/23 and he thinks additionally we should consider a council tax discount rate for buildings that are bought back into use, so would like to see that incorporated within the list of ideas.
19. Councillor Boden agreed that is a valid point for the record but it is more about council tax and how it is applied rather than the council tax support scheme. In view of Councillor Count's other comment this is the time to contact the other council leaders with a view to seeing if there is a widespread feeling that it may be helpful for us to work together collectively to re-examine these things for 2022/23 rather than piecemeal by FDC.
20. Councillor Count said it seems to him that a lot of people go onto Universal Credit than the council tax support scheme; one of the main considerations of Cabinet will have to be its affordability. He thinks that will be a major consideration for Cabinet when they are able to put a best estimate of what that might look like.
21. Councillor Booth suggested that as Councillor Boden said there have been no studies on the council tax support scheme it may be worth approaching a debt management company such as Step Change. They may have some evidence of how people prioritise the bills they have to pay. Are we going to make a situation worse by changing the discount rate?
22. Councillor Boden said there is a lot of data out there about the council tax support scheme and collection rates but there is not a rigorous and accepted analysis of that data to give correlation between the council tax support scheme discount and the collection rate. So yes, the data is available from those who give support to claimants and is important but we ourselves give information and we try and assist those individuals who have difficulty paying their council tax whether they are in receipt of the discount or not. He would not understate the amount of internal knowledge we already have.
23. Councillor Miscandlon said that as the data is available and there are a lot of statistics, so

would it be appropriate for the ARP Board to authorise a study within the area so we all have a better understanding of what is going on. It would be advantageous to Fenland and all other members of the ARP to have that data and he is sure County Council would also appreciate having it available.

24. Councillor Boden said we are talking about an organisation that is spread out over five different collection authorities and three county councils. Also, the four other councils are not our statistical neighbours so some of this data would not be directly attributable to us. If we wish to have a proper study that would have statistical significance, then it would have to be done with statistical neighbours rather than across ARP. It is an academic exercise more than anything and it should be central Government pushing strongly for this.
25. Councillor Miscandlon said therefore would it not be appropriate for the various councils to speak to the MPs and ask them to raise it with Government. Ultimately their access to data is greater than local councils and they could produce figures far more quickly and have facilities we not.
26. Councillor Boden agreed this was a sensible suggestion and said this would have far more resonance in six months' time when local councils begin to realise the potential implications the council tax support scheme may have on their budgets and on their council tax payers next year and possibly years to come.
27. Councillor Mason said he was getting the feeling that the proposal of no change to the current scheme should be recommended and upheld but maximum flexibility on decision making for future years to be applied. Also we would recommend that there is more communication with authorities and ARP in order to plan forward for 2022/23. He added that he would personally like to see that the work of the O&S ARP subcommittee continues and would be happy to take forward any further recommendations.
28. Councillor Count said his view in recommending that Cabinet looks at how much they can shrink the timetable by in order to come to a decision would be to allow them more flexibility for this year. We have to have trust in the Cabinet and allow them maximum flexibility as we are not in a position to make a recommendation either for a change or not and would just prefer the recommendation to be to say that we have noted the report, it is too early for us to come to a solid recommendation and we ask Cabinet to use its flexibility to the fullest extent.
29. Councillor Mason thanked Councillor Count and said that he was referring to the year 2022/23.
30. Councillor Booth thinks we should be saying no change for this year. He cannot see how we can get all this information although letting Cabinet have flexibility. But if we are talking a 12-week period for consultation and it has to be before the end of February and trying to gather all that information, it is probably unrealistic to achieve it. We will not know the impact of the furlough scheme until October. Therefore we continue with it as is at the moment but start working out now what we need to do for the following year.
31. Councillor Mason thanked Councillor Booth and said that is the point he was trying to make.
32. Councillor Cornwell said he fully supported Councillor Mason's summary. Remember we are making a recommendation not a decision. It is up to Cabinet, if circumstances change they should at least have the flexibility, which he thinks they still have but it is actually for them to make a firm decision before they come back to us again. He added that he has learned more during this session than many other sessions relating to council tax support over the years and found it to be an extremely good debate with very clear explanations.
33. Councillor Wicks said he agreed with Councillor Mason's approach; we are in an emergency situation and have no idea what the end game is. To keep it as it is at the moment and give Cabinet maximum flexibility to do what they have to do is the way forward.
34. Councillor Count said that it sounds like there is some confusion over what we are recommending. On the one hand we are saying to give maximum flexibility to Cabinet but on the other hand we are recommending a no change scenario for next year and those two statements are incompatible. His recommendation was to accept that we are not in a position, and whilst Cabinet may not be in a position in August, there is a possibility they are going to look at seeing if they can move that to perhaps a month later down the line or further. But the point is even if it is August they will have more information than us today so he is not sure if we can move the formal recommendation as there seems to be some disagreement. We are not

the decision makers, Cabinet will be. But if it is not a formal recommendation then he would like to put that forward and as a recommendation and propose that Cabinet be given full flexibility to make their mind up at their meeting.

35. Councillor Mason said his proposal was that we recommend no change to the current scheme at the present time but give Cabinet maximum flexibility for the decision making for future years. Councillor Booth seconded the proposal.
36. Councillor Booth said that if Councillor Count wished to amend the proposal he would have to do it now.
37. Councillor Count said he can only make an amendment if it does not substantially change the original motion. The original motion is for no change and his is for maximum flexibility so it is not an amendment but a different proposal.

Proposed by Councillor Mason, seconded by Councillor Booth and AGREED that the Overview and Scrutiny Panel recommend no change to the Council Tax Support Scheme at the present time and that Cabinet be given maximum flexibility for decision making in future years.

Councillor Boden said with the agreement of the Chairman he would listen carefully to the contributions from everyone at today's meeting and take it all into account. Councillor Mason thanked Councillor Boden.

(Councillor Count reported a conflict of interest as Leader of the County Council saying this item will have major implications for the County Council. However, as it is a non-pecuniary interest he will be able to debate fully and will remember which hat he is wearing today).

OSC6/20 COUNCIL RESPONSE TO COVID-19 - FUTURE IMPLICATIONS

Members considered the Council Response to COVID-19 - Future Implications report presented by Councillor Boden.

Councillor Boden said it is unprecedented for local Government to be so unsure about what the future holds either financially or otherwise. We face significant challenges in managing our finances and setting our budget next year. However many other local authorities are in a worse financial position than we are and more financial support is required from central Government. The position will be made worse if there is a second or even third wave of COVID-19, not just for this Council but for the economy of the country. Councillor Boden apologised for the negativity of the report but he needed to stress the scale of the issue and uncertainty we face. He added that officers have been working exceptionally hard to mitigate the issues we are facing and continue to do so in a fast-changing environment.

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

1. On behalf of all members, and as Chairman of FDC, Councillor Miscandlon thanked all FDC staff for going above and beyond to make the pandemic as bearable as possible for all the residents of Fenland.
2. Councillor Topgood concurred with Councillor Miscandlon's comment; local traders had told him it had been a pleasure dealing with FDC in regards to the grant aid on offer.
3. Councillor Mason agreed and thanked officers for chasing up those businesses who had not applied for grants.
4. Councillor Wicks complimented FDC staff for being so proactive with businesses and community organisations; they did not wait for the applications to arrive but went out and openly encouraged them to apply for grants.
5. Paul Medd said it cannot be underestimated the effect that positive feedback will have following the impact on staff of nearly 5 months of delivering day to day services along with key projects.

He will ensure the Panel's comments are fed back to staff. However, we would not have been able to do this without strong and supportive political leadership from Cabinet, Councillor Boden and all members.

6. Councillor Count echoed all the positive comments that had been expressed. However, he has just received the unsettling news that Fenland is now above the national average for coronavirus; it may be that this is in part due to the outbreak at the Princes Factory and he is currently waiting analysis on this but we had been fairly confident that we had previously been in a low coronavirus area. However, even if it was still low we have to work on the assumption that it is prevalent in our communities. The number of asymptomatic carriers is higher than estimated. He cannot stress how strongly he feels that public health information and messages must continue as a priority to get out the message that the virus is still amongst us and shows no sign of going away.
7. Councillor Count added that it is encouraging to read in the report the work undertaken with the homeless. He gave his compliments and thanked staff for their work on that issue.
8. Councillor Booth said that as we move towards providing more online services we must not forget that there are still a lot of people in our area who do not have access to the internet. We must be able to provide them with suitable alternative options to be able to contact the Council.
9. Paul Medd responded to Councillor Count's comment regarding the increase in coronavirus cases within Fenland. He said that the Council constantly monitors the local data and the position changes frequently. However, it highlights the importance of the local outbreak control plan that was recently adopted by the Health Protection Board and the importance of track and trace and practical interventions that we will implement locally to ensure that if there is a local case outbreak, for example the Princes Factory, we can reduce those numbers and the impact as quickly as possible. We are becoming more accomplished at identifying and intervening where local outbreaks are identified. Councillor Mason agreed that we are all learning all the time.
10. Councillor Miscandlon commented regarding Zoom meetings. Fenland needs a better internet infrastructure to support working remotely. It is the future and we need to be part of it and not left behind.
11. Councillor Wicks said that in respect of the statistical increase in coronavirus cases within Fenland, this news should be communicated to the public to reiterate that the virus has not gone away and they still need to be vigilant. He added that in respect of Councillor Miscandlon's comment, it is not only the internet that needs improving within Fenland but also mobile phone coverage.
12. Councillor Wicks said that he understood that because of the virus FDC had to make changes to the way that staff worked and he was sure risk assessments and analysis had been undertaken in respect of the maximum number of staff allowed to work in all FDC buildings. He asked Paul Medd whether CMT were looking at the viability of the buildings and if so, could he give an insight into how that is going.
13. Paul Medd thanked Councillor Wicks and agreed that the public do need to be aware of the latest situation, given that the virus has not gone away despite the lifting of restrictions. There continues to be an ongoing communication's campaign from Government, Public Health England, local public health colleagues and this council in terms of making it clear to residents that they need to continue to stay alert. Regarding another way of working, he added that Councillor Wicks made a valid observation but we have been exploring new ways for the past decade in response to austerity. We are continually reviewing that as we continue to be customer focussed and deliver member priorities. Under our recovery plan we are reflecting on the percentage of people home working now out of necessity, and what percentage might we choose to continue working from home but in a way acceptable to the council and how we deliver services, instead of rushing to repatriate all staff to council buildings. It is not safe or appropriate at present but we are reviewing it. If we do take everyone back when safe to do so we will then assess our accommodation. Assuming we identify extra space, we can look to rent that out or consider if the buildings are fit for purpose. This will take some time but is something that he discusses regularly with the Leader.
14. Councillor Wicks thanked Paul Medd for his comprehensive response.

15. Councillor Mason asked if distance working would create implications for South Fens and the Boathouse in respect of small businesses not returning. Councillor Boden said that we have lost a small number of businesses which are no longer trading, but we also have some new ones coming in. There is actually a greater percentage of the Boathouse in occupancy now than at the start of COVID-19 but we do not know how the future will look.
16. Councillor Boden responded to Councillor Miscandlon's comment about internet connection and said that thanks to the county wide programme in general, Fenland does actually benefit from a reasonable and reliable high speed internet service across the district. Unfortunately there are pockets in the area to which that does not apply hence Councillor Miscandlon's comment. Continued rollout of the fibre network across the district is helping to ensure that Fenland remains competitive. FDC continues to work with Connecting Cambridgeshire in connecting "not spot" locations in the district and seeks to address those, and it is the same with mobile phone coverage. Part of the answer to that is in our hands and we need to look carefully at future planning applications for mobile phone masts which previously might have been treated more negatively.
17. Councillor Boden said that he agreed with Councillor Booth's comment regarding internet access. Channel Shift is not a matter of pushing people towards the internet and with our new appointments system at the customer service centres we are trying to design this so that those people who do not have internet access get a better service than they did before. He agreed that there will always be people who do not interact with the internet.
18. Councillor Boden referred to Councillor Count's comment regarding Fenland having above national average COVID figures and said that this is a marginal figure only; they are only slightly above average. All the numbers are available on the internet. However, we must continue to reiterate the messages regarding social distancing and handwashing and as councillors we are all in a position to spread that message in our local communities.
19. Councillor Yeulett added his thanks to all at FDC for their work during this pandemic and also thanked Councillor Boden for his stark presentation on the economic situation. He wanted to highlight concerns raised in the national media regarding the lack of income from commercial agreements that councils have and asked if we are experiencing similar problems and what effect that may have on our future investments.
20. Councillor Boden responded that we are not in the same situation as many other local authorities. Our level of commercial income from third parties whilst small has largely been preserved. All conferences have stopped so we are not getting that income in our business centres but we are not losing income, say, from car parking charges as we do not charge for this. In that sense we are far stronger for not going down that route and previous decisions on car parking have therefore stood us in greater stead. Therefore however bad our financial position currently looks, so many other councils are in a far worse position than we are. Our position, with the exception of the conferences, has been largely stable.
21. Councillor Booth said he was concerned that the report lacked detail of where extra costs have come from and where income has been lost. It would therefore be useful for future reports to contain budget headings.
22. Councillor Boden said the difficulty with this is that there are some items where confidentiality is involved but will endeavour to make details clearer in future meetings. He could say that just over half of our additional costs are to do with housing in respect of homelessness and rough sleeping. Also, in respect of income the main reductions are due to the reduction of business rates and council tax that we may be able to collect this year. We do not know how far under budget we will be as of 31st March 2021, but also remember we are collecting not on our own behalf but of other precepting authorities, hence the shortfall looks enormous.
23. Councillor Mason thanked Councillor Boden and said that he too, as Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel would like to express his thanks and appreciation to the staff of FDC.

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel AGREED to note the content of the Council Response to COVID-19 – Future Implications report.

Members considered the Draft Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report.

Councillor Mason thanked Councillor Miscandlon as the previous Chairman, plus Councillor Hay and all who contributed during the past year towards the content of the report.

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

1. Councillor Booth said that although he broadly agreed with the draft report, his only comment would be in relation to the call-in at Section 6 of the report. The majority talks about the process but there is little actual wording around the debate that took place in relation to the call-in and he feels it would be useful to expand paragraph 6.7 to include this. Although the Panel decided not to refer the matter back to Cabinet, Councillor Boden subsequently made changes to the Scheme of Delegation for the Investment Board and it would be useful to capture that. It would show that the Panel played a role in relation to that and feedback was taken on board by the Leader.
2. Councillor Boden said that although it was for the Panel to decide what to include in the report, he could understand Councillor Booth's suggestion.
3. Councillor Miscandlon said that in co-editing the report he wished to express his personal thanks to Councillor Ann Hay as his Vice-Chairman during his tenure as Chairman and everyone, be they officers, members or external agencies and local residents, who contributed to the Panel's work last year and for a sterling job.
4. Councillor Cornwell said there was confusion as to whether Overview & Scrutiny was called a Committee or Panel and asked that one term only be used going forward.
5. Councillor Booth said he wished to move a recommendation that the Panel adopt the report but on basis we amend Section 6.7 as he had highlighted.

Proposed by Councillor Booth, seconded by Councillor Wicks that the Overview and Scrutiny Panel approve the annual report for forwarding to Council on the basis that there be an amendment to Section 6.7.

A vote was taken on the proposal which was defeated.

Proposed by Councillor Mason, seconded by Councillor Connor, the Overview and Scrutiny Panel AGREED to approve the annual report for forwarding to Council.

OSC8/20 FUTURE WORK PROGRAMME

Members discussed the Future Work Programme.

1. Councillor Mason said that he endorsed concerns Councillor Wicks had previously expressed that Clarion are not coming to a Panel meeting this year. They had been due to attend an earlier meeting that had been cancelled due to the lockdown. Councillor Mason said that it could be two years before they came again. Anna Goodall said there had been a discussion around this and if members are in agreement they can be invited to the December meeting.
2. Councillor Booth said that December would be far too late and that this would be almost two years anyway. He felt an earlier date should be agreed; particularly given issues that have previously arisen around winter time.
3. Councillor Mason said this could be discussed further but we have to consider that we also need to accommodate a meeting with Freedom Leisure.
4. Councillor Miscandlon said that he had previously discussed with Anna Goodall and Councillor Hay the possibility of having an extra meeting for sensitive items as we lost two meetings early on in lockdown.
5. Councillor Mason agreed that was an alternative and he would discuss this with Anna Goodall in due course.

6. Councillor Mason said it had been previously discussed that Anglian Water may be asked to attend a meeting. Anna Goodall said that they are under no legal obligation to attend an Overview and Scrutiny meeting but is sure they would be willing if approached.
7. Councillor Wicks said that with the evolving situation there could be other subjects that come up in the near future. Councillor Mason asked that they be submitted for future consideration.

Councillor Mason ended the meeting with his thanks for everyone attending today.

3.35 pm

Chairman

Agenda Item 5


Outstanding actions from Overview and Scrutiny – July 2020

ACTION NUMBER MEETING DATE MINUTE NUMBER	RECOMMENDATION/ ACTION	UPDATE	TIMESCALE
ACTION 1 08/06/2020 OSC43/19	<p>Councillor Booth would like county council to state what rates they will charge pre-schools (this should have been an action recorded under OSC38/19, item 21).</p>	<p>Response from Sector Development and Funding Manager, Early Years Service, Cambs County Council</p> <p>Cambridgeshire County Council wrote recently to a range of early years and childcare providers occupying buildings on school sites as part of its ongoing work to achieve consistent occupancy arrangements.</p> <p>The ongoing work looks at whether market rents are affordable for Early Years settings or not and then proceeds to adjust the rent downwardly if there is lack of affordability that would threaten the sustainability of the provision.</p> <p>This activity supports the Council's responsibilities for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintaining and developing the local economy for the benefit of all; • Obtaining best value in respect of all its financial dealings, including those in its role of being a landlord; and, • Maintaining its assets in order to protect their value over time. <p>This process has been extended</p>	<p>ONGOING – Formerly marked as complete - a watching brief to be kept on this item</p> <p>(OSC4/20)</p> <p>13/07/20</p>

		<p>to address the impact of the Coronavirus on early years provision, looking at rent deferment and rent holiday options. Both of these options were presented in the letter.</p> <p>All of these measures are designed to make occupancy easier for early years and childcare providers, with more consistent, realistic and affordable property charges. Providers will be asked for certain information relating to their business in order to access the remedial measures on offer. This again is in the interests of consistency and fairness.</p> <p>There is no intention to increase rents in any of this activity.</p>	
<p>ACTION 2 08/06/2020 OSC44/19</p>	<p>Councillor Booth requested further information on what the police will be doing to enhance their enforcement role in relation to speeding prevention.</p>	<p>Response from Neighbourhood Inspector Ian Lombardo</p> <p>The team have been working on a bid for exhaust noise reading equipment and I'm pleased to say this has been successful and the kit has been ordered.</p> <p>A constant complaint is the drivers with loud exhausts driving at speed through the towns and villages and until now we didn't have a calibrated bit of equipment to register the level of excessive noise coming from these vehicles and therefore found it difficult to prosecute.</p> <p>It links in with the speeding aspect as the loud racing sound of the exhaust encourages the driver to driver faster.</p> <p>A day of action will be taking</p>	<p>ONGOING</p> <p>Formerly marked as complete - a watching brief to be kept on this item</p> <p>(OSC4/20)</p> <p>13/07/20</p>

		<p>place in the near future.</p> <p>Norfolk have had this bit of kit for a couple of years and they have been extremely positive about it.</p> <p>It's especially useful at car cruises as it's a nice and simple way to break them up as the drivers don't want to get fined and know that as it's a calibrated machine they can't argue with it at court.</p> <p>Alongside this local officers continue to target road related offences including speeding during their routine patrols.</p> <p>We regularly update the community about action that is taken in regards to these matters via our social media pages and monthly councillor reports.</p> <p>The teams will and do undertake dedicated speed enforcement when other priorities allow and also support local communities to set up their own speed watch schemes.</p> <p>We continue to look for new ways to work with our partners to ensure that the roads in the fenland area are as safe as possible.</p> <p>Work is developing to set up an email address for the Police neighbourhood teams dedicated to Local Councillors and partners to feed in concerns such as hot spots for speeding which the team can then respond to.</p>	
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Agenda Item No:	7	
Committee:	Overview & Scrutiny	
Date:	7th September 2020	
Report Title:	Progress in Delivering the Communities Corporate Objectives 2020-2021	

1 Purpose / Summary

This report sets out the Council's progress in delivering the corporate objectives from April 2020 to July 2020. This is to ensure that members have the most up to date information possible.

2 Key issues

- Since April we have worked with 79 landlords to improve housing conditions and management standards for people living in private sector properties.
- Since the start of the Empty Homes project in November 2019, 191 empty properties have been brought back into use.
- The work of early homeless prevention continues to make a valuable difference to people's lives and wellbeing.
- Due to Covid-19, we have not been able to hold any Golden Age Fair events.
- We have worked closely with Freedom Leisure during the pandemic and during their reopening from 25th July to ensure that they are Covid secure. All four leisure centres have attracted customers back to the facilities and even secured some new members. Income levels and usage is being closely monitored.
- The time taken to process benefits claims is exceeding targets.

3 Areas for focus

- Covid-19 has impacted on many services across the Council, however most services are operating normally.
- Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Covid-19 Outbreak Plan details how partners are working together to restrict and contain the rate of infection in our communities.

4 Recommendations

It is recommended that the Panel considers the progress made by the Council in delivering the corporate objectives in the Business Plan.

Wards Affected	All
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Portfolio Holder(s)	<p>All Cabinet; main responsibilities from:</p> <p>Councillor Chris Boden, Leader and Portfolio Holder for Finance</p> <p>Councillor Jan French, Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Benefits & ARP</p> <p>Councillor Sam Clark, Portfolio Holder for Social Housing & Leisure</p> <p>Councillor Susan Wallwork, Portfolio Holder for Communities</p> <p>Councillor Sam Hoy, Portfolio Holder for Housing</p>
Report Originator(s) And Contact Officer (s)	<p>Carol Pilson - Corporate Director cpilson@fenland.gov.uk</p> <p>Peter Catchpole - Corporate Director petercatchpole@fenland.gov.uk</p> <p>Phil Hughes</p> <p>Dan Horn</p> <p>Annabel Tighe</p> <p>Sam Anthony</p> <p>Jo Blackmore</p>
Background Paper(s)	Business Plan 2020-2021

Overview & Scrutiny

Progress Against Communities Corporate Priority

September 2020
(For performance in April to July 2020)

Portfolio Holders



**Councillor
Chris Boden**
Leader of the Council
& Portfolio Holder for
Finance



**Councillor
Jan French**
Deputy Leader of the
Council
& Portfolio Holder for
Benefits & ARP



**Councillor
Sam Clark**
Portfolio Holder for
Social Housing &
Leisure



**Councillor
Miss Sam Hoy**
Portfolio Holder for
Housing



**Councillor
Susan Wallwork**
Portfolio Holder for
Communities

Projects from Business Plan:

Work with landlords to improve housing conditions and management standards in the district's private sector, including using the Council's enforcement powers (Cllr Sam Hoy)

The Council has undertaken 9 positive interventions in response to new requests for service for Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) across the district.

The Council has also investigated 70 complaints from tenants occupying privately rented accommodation in the same period. Council officers intervened to remove Category 1 hazards (serious faults) and Category 2 hazards (less serious faults) from properties to make them safe for the residents.

The geographical spread is as follows:

Town	HMOs investigated	Privately Rented Homes investigated
Wisbech	9	36
March	0	15
Chatteris	0	4
Whittlesey	0	1
Villages	0	14 Manea =3 Leverington =4 Guyhirn = 2 Wimblington =1 Murrow = 2 Parson Drove =1 Christchurch = 1

Private Sector Housing enforcement 01 April 2020 - 31st July 2020

	Numbers since 01 April 2020	Raised charge total £	Income received £
Improvement Notice	7	1680	£720.00
Prohibition	0	0	0
CPN (Intent)	4	38,000	£9,500
CPN (Final)	9	97,000	£5,152
Other	3	180.00	£60.00
HMO applications	2	1,500	£1,500

Support property owners to bring long-term empty homes back into use, helping to address the district's housing needs (Cllr Sam Hoy)

Since November 2019, the Empty Homes Officer has recorded 191 properties over 6 months empty being brought back into use, of which 52 were as a result of the officer's intervention.

Recently the officer has worked successfully with the owner of a 2yr+ property and facilitated the sale via auction and is now working with the new owner to ensure its occupation.

The officer is also focusing on ensuring all council tax data is up to date in preparation for the yearly New Homes Bonus submission in September.

Prevent homelessness and reduce rough sleeping through working with individuals, families, landlords, housing associations and providers to meet the housing needs of residents in crisis (Cllr Sam Hoy)

The Council undertook a night time rough sleeper count in late July with 5 found on the count. The outreach team will continue to work with these individuals.

Rough Sleeper Case Study

The Ferry Project and CGL Outreach were aware of a rough sleeper with a broken leg who refused to engage with their services. During the peak of COVID-19 the individual would still not engage with any authority figure and would not accept any medical support for his leg. The client refused accommodation and there were growing concerns around the individual's welfare as the plastic cast had been on their leg for several months.

However, with persistence and continued support from CGL Outreach they brought the client food and went to see the individual on a regular basis. Since this, and with the new Outreach worker coming in to post who spoke the same language as the individual, the client accepted accommodation and is engaging well. Since being placed in accommodation, the client's alcohol misuse has greatly lessened and they are also hoping to find work once their leg is healed. This was a great outcome for the client after several weeks of concern and the client's support continues to finding long term suitable housing.

Housing Options Team

Alongside the rough sleeper project the Council have also prevented 73 families from becoming homeless.

As an example of their work; a homeless family (one who was pregnant and a baby of 1 year old) approached the Council Housing Options team. The investigation established that they were potentially being exploited.

The family have engaged well with multi agencies including operation pheasant with regard to the allegations of exploitation.

They have recently been rehoused with tenancy support.

The Ferry Project (FP) was contacted as the family had very few clothes and no furniture for their new home. The FP, within a matter of a couple of hours, had provided the family with all the donations they had available – this included white goods, beds, settee, crockery, cutlery and a food parcel. They were successful with a Cambs Local Assistance Support grant as part of this. The family has been so thankful for all the professionals involved in resolving their homelessness and are now happy in their new home.

Deliver four Golden Age Fairs across the district (Cllr Susan Wallwork)

As a result of the pandemic no events have been held.

The Council is holding a virtual Senior Citizens Advisory Board meeting in September to explore the use of the brand and to work to support the community impact from Covid-19.

Increase the use of local open spaces and collaborate with local activity providers and other partners to address health inequalities (Cllr Sam Clark & Cllr Susan Wallwork)

Since 2003, a number of wind turbine developments have arisen in Fenland, whereby the Council has negotiated annual contributions from these developments. Volunteer committees are established for three of the funds; Glassmoor, Whitemill and Ransonmoor, where residents are engaged in judging applications made by community organisations for these funds.

There are 8 further Section 106 agreements which relate to wind turbine developments from which an annual payment is given to the Council from the owner. Although the amount received from developers is too small to warrant establishing a grant committee, there was a need for the Council to ensure that these funds are spent in accordance with the original agreements so these contributions were pooled in order to procure an annual environmental education programme within Fenland.

In order to achieve this, the Council advertised for provider(s) of environmental education services to deliver a one-off programme within the localities of the turbines.

Following the success of previous environmental education programmes, a tender was advertised in March 2020 for a new programme to run over the next 2 years. Five organisations were successful, and contracts were awarded in July for projects to start in the coming months once project plans are finalised and where COVID-19 government guidelines allow. Three of these contracts focus on local open spaces and improving wellbeing:

Groundwork East will be running a series of **Community Tree Planting Days** in the Parish of Elm and North Ward of March that focus on creating new pocket woods or orchards. Other activities may include conservation tasks, such as: coppicing and scrub clearance, general green space improvements, re-wilding, bulb planting and path creation.

Peterborough Environment City Trust's 'Caring for Nature' project will upskill young adults and the unemployed in land management skills. Four 6-week courses will be run; two will be open to unemployed adults and adults not in work, with two focussing specifically on young people not in education or training (NEETS). Each group will create a taskforce of 10-12 learners that will learn about and restore the natural environment in the project area.

Froglife's 'Green Pathways' project is an outdoor therapy project working with vulnerable and / or disadvantaged young people up to age 18 or 24 if they have a learning disability and with people living with on-set dementia.

The weekly 2.5 hour sessions will be held in local green spaces. Kings Dyke Nature Reserve & Rings End Nature Reserve are current suggested sites. Participants will be involved in long-term projects and work as part of a team to achieve an outcome with wildlife and community benefits. Knowledge of wildlife is recorded at the start of the project and learning experiences evaluated through the project's lifespan.

It is hoped that these programmes will lead to an increase in use of local open spaces, additional volunteers for groups that manage such sites, and improve wellbeing.

Other Projects:

Leisure Update (Cllr Sam Clark)

Freedom Leisure

The past few months have been particularly tough on leisure centres across the UK. The closure and subsequent crash in income has impacted the industry heavily. Vivacity in

Peterborough has handed back their contract to Peterborough City Council, with another smaller trust doing similar further south.

Freedom Leisure is a healthy business and has reserves in place that they have had to access – despite financial support from all 19 local authority partners. Fenland is fortunate to be working with a large partner that has a management team with the skills and depth of knowledge, along with the financial wherewithal, to weather the Covid crisis.

Whilst leisure centres have reopened, capacities are limited and income is impacted accordingly. If there are no further closures and social distancing measures are relaxed in coming months, income is expected to continue to climb, matching 2019 levels around the new financial year. This means that there will continue to be a financial deficit within the contract with Freedom Leisure for several months. No agreement has been considered (at the time of writing) for the leisure centre operations from October onwards, with discussions taking place in late August.

All four leisure centres continue to attract customers back into Covid secure facilities. In the past week family swims (socially distanced in a family bubble) have been restarted and are proving popular, meaning that young people can access the pools during the holidays. Laned swimming continues for adults. Wisbech Swimming club are back at the Hudson, with March Marlins Swimming Club back at the George Campbell.

Gyms and exercise classes continue to attract customers. Capacities are reduced to allow for social distancing with occupancy rates remaining steady following the week 2 slight increase in opening hours. August is traditionally a slower time for gym and group fitness due to both holidays and the heat, but signs remain positive. The facilities are even picking up new members since reopening.

Current average occupancy rates across the four facilities since 25 July are:

- Group exercise 78.3%
- Gym 70.8%
- Swimming 41.2%

Early indications regarding membership direct debit uptake rates appears to indicate that memberships are approximately 31% lower than the March Direct Debit run. This comparison EXCLUDES swimming lesson direct debits that remain suspended, with lessons not returning until September at the very earliest.

August's promotion (1/2 price monthly payment) will have positively impacted on retention levels, but had a negative impact on overall income. However, retention of members is critical to the health of the overall business, with an income deficit in August being recovered by that better member retention rate (and corresponding income) in the following three months.

I Love Wisbech Update (Cllr Susan Wallwork)

A number of organisations are committed to working together in Wisbech. Feedback from funding bodies has been that in order to apply successfully that they wish to see agreements in place that illustrate that bodies are working together collaboratively across a range of organisations rather than in isolation. Therefore a number of interested organisations are prepared to sign up to a partnership agreement to illustrate a commitment to collaboration across the town which will hopefully lead to greater external investment.

Pride In Fenland Awards (Cllr Susan Wallwork)

The Pride In Fenland awards were postponed in March as a result of Covid-19 and will be rescheduled as soon as Government advice allows such an event to take place.

Health & Wellbeing Update (including Covid-19 Outbreak Plan implementation) (Cllr Susan Wallwork)

In April Upper Tier local authorities, and in particular Directors of Public Health, were tasked by central government with the publication of a Covid -19 Outbreak Plan.

In Cambridgeshire this plan was approved at the end of June by a newly formed Public Health Board. The plan is a public facing document and explains how Covid- 19 will be monitored and how outbreaks will be managed in certain high-risk settings (schools, workplaces, health and care settings and within more vulnerable communities).

The plan focusses on Prevention, Surveillance and Response and specific protocols exist for cases identified in high-risk settings.

Delivery of the plan is overseen by the Public Health Board and supported by the Programme Delivery Group, Local Resilience Forum Strategic Coordinating Group and the Member Led Engagement Board.

The plan can be found by following this link:

[-https://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/asset-library/Cambridgeshire-and-Peterborough-Local-Outbreak-Control-Plan-v12.pdf](https://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/asset-library/Cambridgeshire-and-Peterborough-Local-Outbreak-Control-Plan-v12.pdf)

District Councils have a role to play in the successful delivery of the outbreak plan in several ways; through the implementation of a community hub, through safe

workplace advice including enforcement and through their public health responsibilities to investigate and control outbreaks of infectious disease.

Early in the year Covid-19 was added to the list of diseases which council environmental health staff may need to investigate. The outbreak plan sets out this role more fully. Between April and July, the role of the council within this wider partnership agency structure has been developed and is now fully embedded within daily service delivery.

In order to resource the plan's requirements, the council, as well as all District Councils, applied to Cambridgeshire County Council for £150,000 cover additional staffing costs. This grant has been awarded and currently £75,000 has been transferred to Fenland.

There are 3 main areas of work within the plan:

1. Community hub

The Fenland community hub was set up very quickly in March 2020 as one of a network of national hubs. The hubs were designed initially to support shielded members of the community and were closely aligned to the county council hub which provided food parcels to those who could not access deliveries. The community hub helpline was able to support callers with various enquiries and between April and July helped more than 1,900 residents with issues such as food deliveries, delivery of prescriptions and many services being offered by registered community volunteers.

2. Outbreak management responsibilities

The outbreak plan sets out specific responsibilities for each partnership agency in a set of Memorandum of Understanding. The Council's role during April to July has focussed mainly on workplaces (for which environmental health staff are the lead agency) and residential settings such as houses in multiple occupation. The response service operates from 8am to 8pm 7 days a week.

Staff have supported 4 workplace outbreaks, all of which required daily contact with businesses, assessing safe working practices and advising on best practice. For some businesses who produced or packed food the officers advised about food safety and worked with the food standards agency and other agencies to ensure the businesses remained in production during this challenging time. Officers can be a local support and point of contact, which is appreciated by those businesses affected.

In all cases the businesses have had good covid secure measures in place and the investigations identified likely behaviour outside of the work environment (such as car sharing or socialising) as having been the likely cause of the cases. In these situations, public health colleagues have supported by drafting advice and guidance. For example, on car sharing or living safely with other households.

3. Individual cases within the community

Environmental Health and housing staff have received contact tracing training and several cases have emerged where local assistance has been requested. At the

current time this assistance has focussed on contacting tenants and landlords of houses in multiple occupation or providing information for public health England to complete risk assessments in relation to certain cases whom they have found difficult to contact through the national contact tracing system.

It is possible the council's role will expand to include contact tracing to support the national system however this work is currently only in the pilot stage within England.

In July government announced new local lockdown powers for upper tier local authorities to implement in partnership with partners within the local resilience forum. These powers would be called upon if local infection rates were increasing for example as in some north west areas of the country. The Cambridgeshire Covid19 outbreak control plan will be updated in August to incorporate these new local powers.

Prevention is a key workstream to the outbreak plan and a Fenland response group made up of officers from a variety of council services has been set up. The group are developing a prevention action plan taking account of local information about case numbers and locations and making sure staff are briefed and aware of what the council can offer in terms of community support.

Wisbech 2020 Update (Cllr Chris Boden)

Although the Covid-19 epidemic has impacted on the original timescales, plans are still in place to review the various Council projects being delivered in the town of Wisbech (including the Wisbech 2020 Vision), with a view to aligning them more closely. Discussions will be held with the Wisbech 2020 Core Vision Group in due course.

Key PIs:

Key PI	Description	Baseline	Target 20/21	Cumulative Performance	Variance (RAG)
ARP1	Council tax support – days to process new claims and changes	8 days	8.0	7.9	
ARP2	Housing benefit – days to process new claims and changes	8 days	8.0	4.5	
CELP1	Total number of private rented homes where positive action has been taken to address safety issues	602	400	79	
CELP2	Number of people prevented from becoming homeless	390	300	73	
CELP3	Number of empty properties brought back into use	NEW	Baseline	October 20	
CELP4	Amount of New Homes Bonus achieved as a result of bringing empty homes back into use (Annual)	NEW	Baseline	TBA	
CELP5	Customer satisfaction with Golden Age events (as per event)	298	200	N/A	
CELP6	Number of Active Health local sessions per year that improve community health	NEW	600	N/A	
CELP7	Customer feedback across Freedom Leisure facilities in Fenland	NEW	80%	N/A	

Comments

ARP1 – The time taken to assess Council Tax Support new claims/changes target has been achieved this month, with the target being exceeded. The time taken to assess Council Tax Support claims and changes target for the year has also been achieved, with the YTD figure exceeding the target by 0.10.

ARP2 – The time to taken to assess Housing Benefit new/claims target still exceeds the target for the year by 3.50 days.


Fenland has managed to spend 19.80% of Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) funds. The Council is working with Fenland's Housing Team to ensure that DHPs continue to be promoted as an option for customers.

All Benefits staff to continue to work from home due to Covid-19.

As a result of recent remote recruitment exercise three candidates have been appointed as Council Tax Billing Officers. These officers will help to assess Council Tax Support entitlement and establish liabilities and discounts for customers.

CELP5-7 – No data collected during Covid-19

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Agenda Item No:	8	
Committee:	Overview and Scrutiny	
Date:	7 September 2020	
Report Title:	Annual Ombudsman Letter and 3Cs process	

1 Purpose / Summary

To update Members on the annual statistics in relation to the Local Government and Health and Social Care Ombudsman (LGO) and the Council's corporate '3Cs' procedure. This explains how we deal with the comments, compliments, correspondence and complaints we receive.

2 Key issues:

- On an annual basis the Ombudsman forwards to the Council a summary of complaints received from members of the public. This is also copied to the Chairman of Overview and Scrutiny.
- The LGO investigated 10 complaints relating to Fenland District Council during 2019/20. Anyone can refer a complaint to the LGO as long as they have been through the Council's 3C's process. No complaints were upheld. In 2018/19 we had 1 upheld decision.
- In 2019/20, 3Cs received 643 pieces of contact. 284 were complaints; a 28% decrease from 2018/19. 79 pieces of correspondence (45% less than in 2018/19) and 280 compliments (66% more than in 2018/19) were received. Overall, contact through 3Cs was down by 9% compared to the previous year.

3 Recommendations

- It is recommended that the Overview and Scrutiny Panel consider and note the statistics in relation to the Ombudsman and 3Cs process.

Wards Affected	All
Forward Plan Reference	n/a
Portfolio Holder(s)	Cllr Steve Tierney, Portfolio Holder for Transformation & Communications
Report Originator(s)	David Wright - Policy and Communications Manager dwright@fenland.gov.uk

Contact Officer(s)	Peter Catchpole - Corporate Director Anna Goodall – Head of Governance and Customer Services agoodall@fenland.gov.uk David Wright - Policy and Communications Manager
Background Paper(s)	LGO Annual Report 2017/18 https://www.lgo.org.uk/information-centre/reports/annual-review-reports/local-government-complaint-reviews

An overview of the Council's 3Cs process

1. Our 3Cs process

1.1 Our corporate 3Cs procedure is the framework used for managing comments, compliments, correspondence and complaints across the Council. We aim to provide a fair, consistent and structured process to enable customers to give their views and receive an accurate response. The feedback we receive is used to monitor performance and improve our services.

- 1.2 Customers can contact the 3Cs team by:
- Completing an online or paper 3Cs form
 - Emailing 3cs@fenland.gov.uk
 - Phoning our contact centre
 - Visiting a Fenland @ your service shop or Community Hub
 - Through their local councillor

1.3 The process for managing each type of contact is summarised in the table below:

Type of contact	Procedure
Comment	A comment is a brief statement of fact or a suggestion received by a customer. It is recorded under the 3Cs process and then passed to the relevant service area for consideration. If appropriate, the service area will contact the customer directly to discuss their comment further.
Compliment	A compliment is a positive comment about the service received. It may refer to an individual or a wider team. A compliment is recorded under the 3Cs process and is then passed to the relevant officer or team. We can use compliments from customers to improve what we do.
Correspondence	<p>Correspondence is two-way communication between a customer and the council. If its content forms a service request, it is referred directly to the appropriate service area for resolution outside of the 3Cs process.</p> <p>The majority of correspondence managed under the 3Cs system is from the MP's office and local councillors. Correspondence is acknowledged within five working days of receipt. It is passed to an appropriate officer who will respond within ten working days.</p>
Complaint	<p>A complaint is dissatisfaction with the service received from an individual, team or from the council as a whole. The complaints process can be up to three stages long.</p> <p>Stage 1</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Customer contacts 3Cs • 3Cs sends an acknowledgement to the customer within 5 working days. This contains the name of the officer responding to their complaint and the deadline for response (10 working days from acknowledgement) • Officer responds directly to customer. This is stored in the 3Cs system as a Stage 1 response

Type of contact	Procedure
	<p>If the customer is dissatisfied with the response, their complaint is escalated to Stage 2.</p> <p>Stage 2</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Customer receives acknowledgement within 5 working days • Complaint passed to manager of the officer who provided a Stage 1 response. The deadline for response is 10 working days from acknowledgement • Officer responds directly to customer. This is stored in the 3Cs system as a Stage 2 response <p>If the customer is dissatisfied with the response, their complaint is escalated to Stage 3. This is the final stage in the complaints process.</p> <p>Stage 3</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Customer receives acknowledgment within 5 working days • Complaint passed to CMT lead for response. The deadline for response is 15 working days from acknowledgement • CMT lead responds directly to customer. They state that this is final response within our 3Cs process and give contact details for the LGO as a final course of redress. Their response is stored in the 3Cs system as a Stage 3 response. <p>The next section explains the LGO process.</p>

- 1.4 Contact was split into three high level service areas:
- Communities, Environment, Leisure and Planning (CELP)
 - Growth and Infrastructure (GI)
 - Policy, Resources and Customer Services (PRCS)

Due to incorporating many frontline services, CELP has the largest volume of correspondence and complaints.

- 1.5 The table below provides a comparison of contact between 2018/19 and 2019/20:

	2019/20	2018/19	Variance
Compliments	280	169	+66%
Correspondence	79	143	-45%
Complaints	284	392	-28%
TOTAL	643	704	-9%

- 1.6 Members receive a quarterly performance report within the Portfolio Holder Briefing document. This provides a quarterly cumulative comparison of contact between the current and previous financial year.

- 1.7 A monthly report is produced to measure response times for correspondence and complaints. It also measures how many complaints are progressed past a Stage 1.
- 1.8 The Council produces an Annual Report after full complaints data is available for the previous financial year. This is available for the public to view on our website.

2. The Local Government Ombudsman (LGO)

- 2.1 Customers can contact the LGO if they have made a complaint and are dissatisfied with our response(s). The LGO will only investigate complaints that have fully completed our 3Cs procedure and relate to our services. They will *not* investigate if:
 - The complainant has known about the issue for over 12 months but hasn't complained
 - The matter has not affected the complainant personally or caused them an injustice
 - The issue affects most people in the Fenland area
 - The complainant should have appealed or taken legal action (e.g a tribunal, appeal to the Planning Inspectorate)
 - The complaint is about personnel matters (e.g employment issues)
- 2.2 If a customer makes contact, the LGO Assessment team will then ask us to check if the customer has completed our 3Cs process. They will ask for copies of customer contact and our responses.
- 2.3 If the Assessment team decides further investigation is needed, the complaint information will be passed to a LGO investigator. They will ask further questions and may request further information.
- 2.4 Once the investigator thinks they have got enough information to make a fair decision, they will share a draft with the Council and the complainant. Both parties then have the opportunity to comment on this decision and share further relevant information.
- 2.5 Following this, a final decision will be made. Depending on complexity, this process usually takes about 26 weeks. There are 6 possible decision types:
 - Uphold the complaint and give recommendation(s) about how the organisation should put it right
 - Uphold part of the complaint
 - Uphold the complaint but not make any recommendations as the organisation has already put things right
 - Uphold the complaint but not make any recommendations because the fault has not had a significant effect on the complainant
 - Not to uphold the complaint
 - The complaint cannot or will not be investigated
- 2.6 The LGO will write to the Council and customer to explain their decisions. If the Council is at fault, they may ask us to put things right (if we haven't already). This may involve:
 - Apologising to the complainant
 - Providing a service to the complainant that they should have had

- Making a different decision (that it should have made before)
- Reconsidering a decision that wasn't made properly
- Improving our procedures so similar issues don't happen again
- Making a payment

2.7 The LGO does not have legal powers to force organisations to comply with their recommendations – however, most Council's do. Their decisions are available to publically view on their website. They release an Annual Report for each authority every year.

2.8 The LGO states that complaint volume figures should not be used in isolation to evaluate corporate health. High volumes of complaints can show that an organisation is open to learning. In contrast, low complaint volumes can show that an organisation is not receptive to user feedback. By monitoring trends and customer feedback, we are able to quickly change processes if they are not working as well as they should.

2.9 Between April 2019 and March 2020, the LGO received 10 complaints and made 6 decisions relating to services provided by Fenland District Council. The table below shows the complaints that the LGO made a decision on in 2019/20:

Service	Decision made	Decision	Remedy
Null	August 2019	Incomplete/Invalid	Null
Corporate & Other Services	April 2019	Referred back for local resolution	Null
Corporate & Other Services	July 2019	Referred back for local resolution	Null
Planning & Development	March 2020	Not Upheld	Null
Planning & Development	December 2019	Closed after initial enquiries	Null
Benefits & Tax	February 2020	Closed after initial enquiries	Null

2.10 Between April 2019 and March 2020 we had no LGO complaints upheld.

Overview and Scrutiny – Draft Work Programme 2020-2021

All Formal meetings are held via Zoom until further notice,
and thereafter will be held in the Council Chamber at Fenland Hall

Meeting Dates

<u>Agenda Despatch Date</u>	<u>Informal pre-meeting</u>			<u>Formal Overview & Scrutiny Meeting</u>		
	<u>Date</u>	<u>Time</u>	<u>Location</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Pre-Brief</u>	<u>Meeting</u>
Thursday 28 May 2020	Monday 1 June 2020	2.00pm	Room 38	Monday 8 June 2020	1.00pm	1.30pm
Thursday 7 July 2020	Monday 6 July 2020	2.00pm	Room 38	Monday 13 July 2020	1.00pm	1.30pm
Wednesday 26 August 2020	Tuesday 1 September 2020	2.00pm	Room 38	Monday 7 September 2020	1.00pm	1.30pm
Thursday 1 October 2020	Monday 5 October 2020	2.00pm	Room 38	Monday 12 October 2020	1.00pm	1.30pm
Thursday 29 October 2020	Tuesday 3 November 2020	2.00pm	Room 38	Monday 9 November 2020	1.00pm	1.30pm
Thursday 26 November 2020	Tuesday 1 December 2020	2.00pm	Room 38	Monday 7 December 2020	1.00pm	1.30pm
Wednesday 30 December 2020	Tuesday 5 January 2021	2.00pm	Room 38	Monday 11 January 2021	1.00pm	1.30pm
Thursday 28 January 2021	Monday 1	2.00pm	Room 38	Monday 8	1.00pm	1.30pm

	February 2021			February 2021		
Thursday 25 February 2021	Monday 1 March 2021	2.00pm	Room 38	Monday 8 March 2021	1.00pm	1.30pm
Thursday 6 May 2021	Monday 10 May 2021	2.00pm	Room 38	Monday 17 May 2021	1.00pm	1.30pm

12 October 2020

Time	Agenda Item	Fenland Corporate Priority	Portfolio Holder/ Officer/ External Witness
13.00 to 13.30 Pre Briefing			
13.30 to 15.30 Meeting	Annual Meeting with the Leader and Chief Executive	Quality Organisation	Councillor Boden Paul Medd Cabinet and CMT
	Anglian Water??????		
	Matters arising – Update on previous actions		Anna Goodall
	Future Work Programme 2020/21	Quality Organisation	Chairman Anna Goodall

9 November 2020

Time	Agenda Item	Fenland Corporate Priority	Portfolio Holder/ Officer/ External Witness
13.00 to 13.30 Pre Briefing			
13.30 to 15.30 Meeting	Freedom Leisure Review	Communities	Councillor Sam Clark Carol Pilson Phil Hughes Simon Bell Representative from Freedom
	Wisbech 2020 Vision & Wisbech Rail Update	Communities	Councillor Boden Councillor Seaton

			Gary Garford Wendy Otter Russell Beal (Anglian Water) Adrian Chapman (Cambs County Council and Peterborough City Council) Rowland Potter (CPCA)
	Culture Strategy	Quality Organisation	Carol Pilson Phil Hughes Councillor Chris Seaton
	Future Work Programme 2020/21	Quality Organisation	Chairman Anna Goodall

7 December 2020

Time	Agenda Item	Fenland Corporate Priority	Portfolio Holder/ Officer/ External Witness
13.00 to 13.30 Pre Briefing			
13.30 to 15.30 Meeting	Annual review of Anglia Revenues Partnership	Communities	Sam Anthony / Peter Catchpole Councillor Mrs French Paul Corney (ARP) Mark Saunders
	Anglian Water?????		
	Matters arising – Update on previous actions		Anna Goodall
	Future Work Programme 2020/21	Quality Organisation	Chairman Anna Goodall

11 January 2021

Time	Agenda Item	Fenland Corporate Priority	Portfolio Holder/ Officer/ External Witness
13.00 to 13.30 Pre Briefing	Draft Overview and Scrutiny Future Work Programme 2017/2018	Quality Organisation	Councillor Miscandlon Anna Goodall
13.30 to 15.30	Draft Budget	Quality Organisation	Cabinet

Meeting			CMT
	Draft Business Plan	Quality Organisation	Cabinet CMT Dave Wright
	Fees and Charges	Quality Organisation	Councillor Boden Peter Catchpole Cabinet Mark Saunders & Neil Krajewski
	Matters arising – Update on previous actions		Anna Goodall
	Future Work Programme 2020/21	Quality Organisation	Chairman Anna Goodall

8 February 2021

Time	Agenda Item	Fenland Corporate Priority	Portfolio Holder/ Officer/ External Witness
13.00 to 13.30 Pre Briefing			
13.30 to 15.30 Meeting	FDC Enforcement Review	Communities	Councillor Murphy Carol Pilson Annabel Tighe
	Progress of Corporate Priority – Environment	Environment	Councillor Murphy Councillor Tierney Phil Hughes, Mark Mathews, Annabel Tighe Carol Pilson
	Community Safety Partnership	Communities	Councillor Mrs Wallwork Carol Pilson, Dan Horn, Alan Boughen and Aarron Locks Police
	Matters arising – Update on previous actions		Anna Goodall
	Future Work Programme 2020/21	Quality Organisation	Chairman Anna Goodall

8 March 2021

Time	Agenda Item	Fenland Corporate Priority	Portfolio Holder/ Officer/ External Witness
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13.00 to 13.30 Pre Briefing			
13.30 to 15.30 Meeting	Investment Board Annual Report	Economy	Justin Wingfield Councillor Benney
	Transformation & Communications Portfolio Holder update		Councillor Tierney David Wright Peter Catchpole
	Update on CPCA Growth Service and impact on Economic Development in Fenland	Economy	Gary Garford Councillor Benney Justin Wingfield
	Commercial Investment Strategy	Economy	Councillor Boden Peter Catchpole
	Matters arising – Update on previous actions		Anna Goodall
	Future Work Programme 2020/21	Quality Organisation	Chairman Anna Goodall

17 May 2021

Time	Agenda Item	Fenland Corporate Priority	Portfolio Holder/ Officer/ External Witness
13.00 to 13.30 Pre Briefing			
13.30 to 15.30 Meeting			
	Matters arising – Update on previous actions		Anna Goodall
	Future Work Programme 2020/21	Quality Organisation	Chairman Anna Goodall

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