

AGENDA

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

MONDAY, 7 DECEMBER 2020

1.30 PM

VIA ZOOM

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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 of 9 November 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 Discussion with Anglian Water

This item will be in the form of a question and answer session with a representative

from Anglian Water.

7 Culture Strategy Update (Pages 17 - 42)

This paper outlines FDC's approach to developing a draft Creativity and Culture Strategy for Fenland and the key outcomes as well as the approach to delivery that the Strategy will address.

8 Anglia Revenues Partnership Member-led Review (Pages 43 - 52)

To report the findings of the Member-led review of the service provided by the Anglia Revenues Partnership to ensure it continues to achieve value for money for Fenland in comparison with the other member Councils.

9 Annual review of Anglia Revenues Partnership (Pages 53 - 66)

To update Overview and Scrutiny on performance of the Council's Revenues and Benefits service, since it became part of ARP on 1 April 2014.

10 Future Work Programme (Pages 67 - 70)

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

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

Friday, 27 November 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 R Wicks and Councillor F Yeulett

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

MONDAY, 9 NOVEMBER 2020 - 1.30 PM



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

APOLOGIES: Councillor M Cornwell, Councillor S Count and Councillor M Humphrey

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE: Anna Goodall (Head of Governance and Customer Services), Phil Hughes (Head Of Leisure Services), Paul Medd (Chief Executive), Wendy Otter (Transport Development Manager) (*left 14.46*) and Carol Pilson (Corporate Director and Monitoring Officer)

GUESTS: Councillor C Boden (*left 13.55*), Councillor S Clark, Councillor J French (*left 15.17*), Councillor D Laws, Councillor P Murphy (*left 15.03*), Councillor C Seaton (*left 15.06*), Councillor S Wallwork (*left 14.00*), Russell Beal (Anglian Water), Rowland Potter (Cambs & Peterborough Combined Authority), Ivan Horsfall Turner (Freedom Leisure), Dan Palframan (Freedom Leisure) and Matt Hunt (Freedom Leisure)

Councillor Mason welcomed members of the public and press watching the livestream of the Overview & Scrutiny 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.

OSC19/20 PREVIOUS MINUTES.

The minutes of the meeting of 12 October 2020 were confirmed subject to the following amendment:

- Councillor Booth asked that the words "to some degree" be removed at point 11. (OSC17/20).

OSC20/20 UPDATE ON FENLAND PROJECTS

Councillor Mason welcomed members of Cabinet and Russell Beal from Anglian Water to the meeting. He also thanked Russell Beal for providing a presentation prior to the meeting.

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

1. Councillor Miscandlon asked how COVID-19 had affected the Fenland projects. Councillor Mrs Laws said that from a Whittlesey perspective, approval has already been gained for the interactive flood signs; land has been awarded and permission given for the power source, with 24/7 staff support. It will not affect the installation as the contractors are still operating following social distancing and safety guidelines. Should approval be given for the Heritage Centre and Heritage Walk then these will have to go out to tender and we will have to wait to see how the contractors will manage that.
2. Paul Medd said that it is remarkable that given the unprecedented nature of the pandemic all

the projects have continued with the minimum of disruption. There was some impact during the first lockdown when the trades and builders' merchants had to shut but this second lockdown some of the original restrictions do not apply so we are hopeful that these projects will be able to continue without much further disruption.

3. Councillor Mrs French said that March had put £100k towards civil parking enforcement but they were not aware until recently that they may have to match fund the High Street bid, for which a bid had been put in for £11.3m. However, the Mayor of the Combined Authority has agreed to give another £1.1m, so we have £2m hoping to match fund and wait anxiously to see if we will get anything.
4. Councillor Booth said he was frustrated over the lack of detail about anything being done for the villages in Fenland, saying they make up over a quarter of the population yet are scantily mentioned. The applications on the few projects stated in the report have been generated through those local communities. He pointed out that he has also repeatedly commented in respect of Wisbech 2020 Vision; it is not just Wisbech but also the surrounding area where there are also areas of multiple deprivation. Also, the primary schools in the surrounding area feed into the secondary schools at Wisbech. The issue of attracting the best teaching talent is one across the whole of the north of Fenland. More attention needs to be paid to the villages who are the poor relatives when it comes to receiving funding in our area.
5. Councillor Yeulett said given the current and future national funding problems, how sure are we that these projects will come to fruition and is the funding readily available for them? Councillor Boden said the funding for the county council projects has already been set aside in the budget for this year so is guaranteed; the money put forward for the Combined Authority has also been budgeted for so is also confirmed as available.
6. Councillor Boden addressed Councillor Booth's comment and said that the CPCA money is specifically for the market towns rather than Fenland as a whole; unfortunately, Councillor Booth is therefore correct that this money is not being targeted at the villages. That was the decision made by the Mayor and the Combined Authority and is part of a much larger project across the whole of Cambridgeshire and Peterborough and is not restricted to Fenland.
7. Councillor Miscandlon thanked everyone for their updates so far. He is glad to see the projects are still going forward with minimal delay; we all accept that due to COVID-19 there will be some delay. He thanked officers and Cabinet members for their progression of the projects within the Fenland area.
8. Councillor Wicks said there is one project that he does not think falls within the remit of this area, being more Highways England. There is the upgrade to the Guyhirn roundabout. He asked how we are moving forward with the dualling of the A47 through to at least Wisbech to start with. Rowland Potter advised that Highways England are continuing to progress the Guyhirn roundabout project and he will circulate more comprehensive details post meeting. In respect of the dualling works, he said they did progress a Project Control Framework State Zero Highways England standard of documentation to get that scheme into their programme and negotiations are ongoing. Highways England are proposing to undertake a review of that project control framework documentation work internally with their own consultants. We are negotiation whether that will be fully funded by themselves or if they will seek funding from us to enable that to happen. The purpose of that review will be for them to identify whether additional work will be required for them to include it in their own development programme. This may not be the outcome that members expect to hear but the Combined Authority will continue to push hard for that scheme and our negotiations have borne fruit in terms of engagement with Highways England. He will keep members informed of progress. Councillor Mason thanked Rowland for his update and welcomed him to the meeting.
9. Councillor Seaton said that it should not be underestimated the frustration of the A47 alliance that comprises of all the councils and districts that surround the A47. Ongoing talks are happening, it is still on the radar and it has the full support of the Mayor and the CPCA and it will create opportunities for housing and commerce along that dualling when, not if, it happens.
10. Councillor Mrs French said she has a meeting on 18th November on the A47 and although she is not sure of the agenda hopes there may be some update then.
11. Councillor Booth asked if any members aside from Councillor Boden had any comment to

make regarding the rural areas. He also asked if any of the main Wisbech 2020 projects had been progressed bearing in mind the issue with COVID-19 as he understood the project group had not been meeting. Russell Beal said the work is continuing but more in the background this year; although the steering group has not been meeting the individual organisations have been doing a lot of support work around COVID-19, particularly for the Ferry Project, Wisbech Community Farm, and the College of West Anglia.

12. Councillor Miscandlon said he was concerned that we have to come to a meeting such as this for an update and asked if all councillors could be kept informed more regularly with basic updates, barring any commercially sensitive information. Councillor Mason endorsed Councillor Miscandlon's view and said regular information would be useful.
13. Paul Medd agreed that there is a whole range of projects going on that members should be regularly briefed on. In respect of Wisbech 2020, one of the things FDC was tasked to do prior to the pandemic was to undertake a governance review. The core vision group tasked officers to undertake a review on what may exist post 2020 and this work has been impacted upon by the pandemic but it is still a piece of work that is progressing and he should hope to have that brought forward soon. Councillor Booth thanked Paul Medd for his update, saying members need to see progress against delivery on this project.

Councillor Mason thanked everyone for their attendance at today's meeting.

OSC21/20 WISBECH RAIL UPDATE

Councillor Mason thanked Rowland Potter for providing members in advance with the progress update report on this item

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

1. Councillor Booth said he wanted to explore the point in the update regarding feasibility, i.e. aspirations on services per hour to Cambridge. He said that Greater Anglia had recently announced they were going to cut services until there was an intervention, so what safeguards or guarantees can be put in place to ensure that once funding is received and the rail line is delivered there are no cuts to services later on, particularly in respect of protecting the public purse. Rowland Potter said unfortunately he cannot give any guarantees, however he is a passionate defender of maximising capacity through the Ely Junction and will continue to argue for that case. He is also passionate about the Wisbech to March rail link and is arguing strongly for that maximum service, also he will continue to fight for the Wisbech rail line to be developed and built. It is a complex process, but he will continue to engage positively with the various bodies involved.
2. Councillor Mason said there are two strong business cases, one for trains from Wisbech to Cambridge and the other a shuttle service between Wisbech and March, and he asked for more detail on the benefits of both. Rowland Potter advised the most commercially viable is the two trains per hour direct to Cambridge however there is a medium business case value for the shuttle service for at least ten years pending that availability. Network Rail creates the capacity and the Department of Transport approves the timetabling for the train operating companies. Unfortunately, services have been cut lately due to the pandemic and we have been arguing the need for those services to at least be reinstated and for additional services to be provided. Our strongest case is for the two trains to Cambridge however there is a case for an interim solution. Post COVID-19 we do not know what the timetable will look like, but he argues for a railway line between Wisbech and March going onto Cambridge and will continue to do so.
3. Councillor Topgood said the Ely North Junction is one of the biggest projects that will help

capacity on the line but there is also the plan to replace the signalling of the whole line which will also increase capacity. We must remember that this project is far wider, it is a major infrastructure improvement to Growing Fenland. Fenland has been starved of investment for many years and we are now beginning to see major investment coming in. The shuttle service is going to be the first phase, and future extensions could see trains from Wisbech to further north, and he thinks this is a great idea for the future growth of Fenland.

4. Councillor Skoulding asked Rowland Potter if he knew the numbers of people travelling by bus from Wisbech to March onto Peterborough or Cambridge for work on a full price ticket. Rowland Potter advised that he did not have that level of detail to hand but would be able to provide that information from the business case post meeting.
5. Councillor Miscandlon said that it is incumbent on everyone at this meeting to promote the use of the rail service once it is completed. It is a case of use it or lose it, and if we can encourage people to use rail services then the train operating companies will see the financial benefits to them to keep the capacity.
6. Councillor Booth mentioned the access to the Restoring Your Railway Fund. Given the extortionate cost of reinstating a railway line he asked if we have missed out on access to central Government funding as they have received so many bids, but this project is not listed on their website. Rowland Potter responded that the restoring railways fund is complex and is in several phases. The current phase announced today is for innovation fund applications but the Wisbech to March proposal would come under accelerated projects, which has not yet been announced or promoted. However, we applied early once we had heard of it but the list that Councillor Booth refers to is for those applications that come under the category of innovation. Councillor Booth asked if any money is allocated to the phase this project would come under or would it all be used up on the earlier applications. Rowland Potter said unfortunately this has not been clarified by the Department of Transport but irrespective of the allocation of funding, we have submitted a passionate application and have had several discussions with Network Rail to put a strong argument for this case and for funding. Other potential means of funding have yet to be announced or decided. Councillor Booth thanked Rowland Potter for the clarification.
7. Russell Beal added that from an Anglian Water point of view they have been working with Rowland Potter and the Combined Authority on a number of things in the Fenland area, and as part of the Wisbech 2020 work he is doing, particularly in relation to the Wisbech Garden town project, he has seen nervousness by the Government in terms of investment in the Fens. This is due to the flood risk issue and finding a long-term solution. We know the sea level is rising and the potential of enormous impact from climate change in the Fens. He is currently leading on the Future Fenland project, which is an ambitious project that looks to link together climate change resilience for the Fens and integrate that with the work Rowland Potter has been doing in terms of road and rail connectivity. A budget of £200m has been announced by the Government towards a flood and coast resilience programme and there is an opportunity to get the Fens identified as one of 25 locations to benefit from that funding. He is working on that now and it is important to link the work that we are all doing to make that bid more powerful.
8. Councillor Booth asked what is happening with the Wisbech Garden Town as it had been some 18 months since the bid had been submitted. Russell Beal said we are doing everything possible, as is Rowland Potter and his team, but it is important to find the long-term resilience to climate change. The Fens is at or below sea level which is rising so the risk is increasing. The garden town was not refused, but it was but more a question of what the long-term solution is. Anglian Water has an ambitious plan to construct a new reservoir in the Spalding area, with potential for a second reservoir south of Kings Lynn. Traditionally these would have been looked at in isolation by Anglian Water, but the way forward is to combine these proposals with the future flood risk resilience strategy. New reservoirs will not only be good for public water supply but will aid land irrigation and there is a concept on the drawing board that looks to combine future water supply strategy with a climate change resilience strategy, and put together with the CPCA's green transport strategy we

can unlock potential growth. There is a window over the next 12 months to make a strong case to Government which will hopefully give them confidence to accept the Wisbech Garden Town. It also builds confidence particularly with new businesses potentially looking to come to the Fenland area which will provide further economic and sustainable growth.

9. Councillor Booth referred to Russell Beal's point around flood risk and said that in respect of the Garden Town, work was commissioned to do some modelling with funding from the Dutch government and he asked if the Government had not accepted the new modelling provided or were they questioning its robustness. Russell Beal said the modelling went a long way to outline a way forward in the immediate future, but it is the long-term solution they are looking for, particularly when looking at the long-term projections on climate change. The Government does not want to approve mass house building only to see it all underwater in 50 years' time. A high-level meeting is proposed for next spring and they are already speaking to Government about the longer-term proposals such as enhanced sea defences to look at the benefits of an integrated approach and the cost savings.
10. Councillor Seaton said, to follow up on Russell Beal's points, the proposals of the reservoir south of Kings Lynn would be of immense assistance to furthering the duelling of the A47 and the associated developments that would entail.
11. Councillor Yeulett agreed with councillor Topgood's comments, saying this is a long-term project with difficult negotiations going forward. If it goes ahead it will benefit the whole district and we should all get behind it. He was particularly interested in what Russell Beal had said but did not think the Government would want to sacrifice all the valuable arable farming land in the area and they must think this through.
12. Councillor Topgood referred to Councillor Skoulding's earlier query about footfall to catch trains. He said that not many people go to March to catch trains, they either go to Peterborough or Kings Lynn. He mentioned the sparseness of the bus services, if getting to March after 5pm you cannot get back to Wisbech anyway so the figures will not be of any help. Referring to the Restoring Your Railways Fund, it clearly states that the first round was to get projects to where they have already been, with the second phase to get the funding for railways. He is pleased that Rowland Potter has said that the Combined Authority has applied for the second tranche of money already. Clearly, we need to look at bus services and the upgrade of roads in one go and that is why we need major infrastructure improvements because one will bring the other.
13. Councillor Skoulding said he believed there had been a speed limit on the old Wisbech to March line due to silt and asked how this will be overcome on the new line. Rowland Potter said we know there are topographical and geotechnical challenges. Within the design, we have put in a design that is of greater speed than warranted but we wanted to put forward a business case that is of higher grade rather than a lower one that may need to be changed later. There are challenges with ground conditions for road and rail in Fenland, but we will use experts to ensure suitable solutions in place when required. However, he does not see the Wisbech to March line being of a high speed because of the short distance involved.
14. Councillor Miscandlon mentioned the correlation between bus, taxi and train fares. The prices will need to be competitive and affordable to ensure the services are used. Rowland Potter agreed and said the local transport plan produced by the Combined Authority has a vision of an integrated transport solution that looks at all these. There is a bus reform task force looking at current and future bus provision and a rail enhancement strategy and we want to give public transport solutions that gives people real alternatives to the car. Details still need to be established, but the individual services cannot work in isolation and as Russell Beal said earlier, all these activities need to be linked.
15. Councillor Topgood referred to the condition of the railway line between March and Wisbech as mentioned by Councillor Skoulding and said it is no different to the line between Peterborough and Ely. The reason for the lower speeds is because there is a big difference between the maintenance on a passenger line and a lightly used goods line. The line will be re-laid in modern materials and will be maintained as a passenger line.

Councillor Mason thanked Rowland Potter and Russell Beal for their attendance at today's meeting

and for the information provided.

(Rowland Potter and Russell Beal left the meeting).

OSC22/20 FUTURE WORK PROGRAMME

Councillor Mason confirmed representatives from Anglian Water will be attending the December meeting to answer questions.

Confirmation has been received from Councillor Hay that she will be attending the December meeting in her role as Chairperson of the Member led review into the Anglia Revenue Partnership. The review meetings have concluded, and a review report is being written.

Councillor Booth said that although the Panel had recently met with representatives from Clarion he asked if we would be seeing them early next year. Councillor Miscandlon said it was not on the list and raised the possibility of an additional meeting being arranged. They had been due to attend the meeting in March 2020 which had been cancelled due to the pandemic and the programme was already looking very full for next March. Councillor Mason said an additional meeting could be arranged if members required it and asked them to contact him with their preferences.

Councillor Skoulding said that members had been expecting Clarion to provide a telephone number for councillors and asked if that had been provided. It was confirmed that Clarion had previously provided an email that had been recirculated to members.

OSC23/20 FREEDOM LEISURE REVIEW

Councillor Mason welcomed Ivan Horsfall Turner, Dan Palframan and Matt Hunt from Freedom Leisure to the meeting and for the presentation that had been provided in advance.

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

1. Councillor Miscandlon asked how COVID-19 had affected overall business and the future business plan of Freedom Leisure in the Fenland area. Ivan Horsfall Turner said it has impacted on them hugely both as a company and within Fenland. Membership had grown substantially in the first year of 2019/20 but has now dropped, and income in the last month or two has been around 40% of what would have been received previously. The second lockdown will impact even further. He thanked the Council, particularly Carol Pilson and Phil Hughes, for their support since March. He said the support of all 20 local authorities has been crucial to maintain Freedom Leisure's viability and sustainability. Income and customer numbers are likely to be extremely low at least until next March so it is a very challenging time.
2. Councillor Miscandlon said when the original lockdown ended, there was negative press over Freedom's handling of the swimming teaching clubs, particularly in Whittlesey and asked Ivan Horsfall Turner if he felt this could have been handled better and what has been done to ensure it does not happen again. Ivan Horsfall Turner agreed that in hindsight this situation could have been handled better; the reality is that it has been a challenging year and perhaps what was a significant change for the programming of the swimming clubs would have had more corporate oversight, and communication and discussion through FDC officers in a normal series of events. Matt Hunt confirmed that dialogue with the clubs is ongoing; they are working hard with one club which was specifically unhappy with the situation and hopefully what Freedom put in place on reopening was a reduced programme reflective of the level of support that Fenland was offering. It meant changes for all their customers, but we all have to accept changes, and work is ongoing to ensure the club is as happy as can be in this scenario. Councillor Miscandlon thanked Freedom Leisure for the answer, saying we can all move forward.

3. Councillor Booth referred to the audit scores for reviews that have been conducted and said it was concerning to see an external audit raised some red and amber issues. He asked what the nature of those issues are and if they have been rectified. Matt Hunt said the area manager audit is an internal audit conducted by a manager from another area and we would generally expect an audit in the first year of operating a new contract to be lower, the benchmark being against a site that has been operating since 2002 where systems and procedures have been embedded. There is some room for improvement on the leisure client scores across the sites and the biggest issues are always in relation to safety and customer service but there is nothing overly concerning in these scores. Dan Palframan said there is a lack of an automatic front door in Chatteris which the auditor noted and led to the lower score for Chatteris, but it is not a priority to install one and there is no concern over this. Matt Hunt repeated that health and safety is the most important score and he encourages the health and safety manager to be overly critical in this respect rather than an issue be identified as the result of an accident; again there is nothing to be concerned about in this respect but it is expected that all the audit scores will increase over time. Councillor Booth said the health and safety scores were graded as green but they were relatively low scores in comparison to some other grades but he assumes that is because no critical issues have been found in those audits but rather an accumulation of small issues that can be remedied quickly. Matt Hunt agreed that this was correct. The internal company target is 60% and there is an automatic fail for certain items, and this has not happened.
4. Councillor Topgood said FDC had provided Freedom Leisure with substantial funding during the pandemic. He asked how much has been learned since the last lockdown and how confident are Freedom that they are going to get through this further period of four weeks and any further period of lockdown after that. Ivan Horsfall Turner said it is a different scenario, back in March the leisure centres were closed with five hours' notice. There was no warning then, but there was a little more notice this time which allowed them to plan. Equally they were different lockdowns in terms of profiling of costs. For example, the first lockdown took place during summer and Freedom saved on utility costs by shutting the buildings completely; however, in this current lockdown they need to protect the centres, assets of FDC, by keeping them heated, therefore, the cost profile is different. Also, the real cost is in terms of the reduction of users which will continue during the rest of this financial year and most certainly have an impact into next year. It will take some time to increase user numbers so the reality is that Freedom will need ongoing financial support into next year as indeed the whole sector will. However, in terms of the importance of this service in aiding people's health and well-being, it is vital to the long-term security of the service.
5. Councillor Yeulett asked how Freedom are coping financially now, having provided figures for 2019/20, and how will FDC be reimbursed in due course. Ivan Horsfall Turner said they are in monthly discussions with officers to give details on an open book basis but it is challenging; Freedom is struggling to maintain a decent level of viability but he assured Councillor Yeulett that the organisation is viable and stable having had a strong year in 2019/20. FDC's current agreement runs to the end of March 2021 but it is inevitable that Freedom will not be in contract position next year as they will not be able to recover membership numbers by the end of the year. COVID-19 has not only created a capacity issue as centre user numbers needs to be strictly controlled, but there will also be an impact on customer confidence. In terms of repaying FDC for the financial support, in the longer term it is envisaged that they will repay by delivering a vitally important leisure and fitness service to the residents of Fenland.
6. Councillor Mason said that he understands that there is a legal limit to the financial support that FDC can offer to Freedom. Carol Pilson confirmed that FDC has a well-documented leisure contract with Freedom Leisure and although there is no specific limit on the financial support FDC can give them, Cabinet has a number of factors they can look at and a series of options to consider, for example if Freedom cannot continue to run the service, then who will. Their conclusion is that they do wish Freedom Leisure to continue running the leisure service but will have to reconsider this at every point that additional financial support is given. Carol Pilson added that we are in a good position in terms of how Freedom Leisure

may financially repay FDC as when the pandemic began, we were only one year into a fifteen-year contract, so there is plenty of time to look at how the business performs over the longer term, which other Councils were not able to do.

7. Councillor Yeulett observed that there are many demands on FDC funding and this will be scarce going forward, so we must look very carefully at areas of need.
8. Councillor Booth said at last year's meeting it was highlighted that there was a lot of comment on social media regarding showers not working properly or leaks in the main halls etc. Regarding the feedback collated this year within the report, can he assume that will include both compliments and complaints and is an action plan drawn up as a good quality service organisation to improve the delivery of the service? Matt Hunt agreed that all comments are collated and placed in a site-specific contract-wide business plan that Dan Palframan leads on. Most issues previously identified have been rectified through capital investment. There is work planned for the year ahead, with money allocated for roof replacements and repairs.
9. Councillor Booth asked if Freedom are looking to be more proactive in acting upon social media comments and demonstrating that issues are being dealt with. Matt Hunt agreed that this is very much part of the ongoing development work around improving the service. Freedom is not a one-size fits all operation but works around the individual needs of each different community and that is one of their strengths. Dan Palframan agreed and said there had been a culture shift where formerly staff may have taken criticism personally and shied away from it but they now actively seek feedback and then act on it where it is relevant and justified, however there is caution over how much engagement they undertake on social media and there is a hierarchy of how certain issues are dealt with. Overall, he is proud of how customer complaints are dealt with.
10. Councillor Miscandlon thanked Carol Pilson for her well researched and comprehensive answer to the question regarding whether there was a legal limit to the amount of financial support that FDC could give to Freedom Leisure.
11. Councillor Purser asked how Freedom encourages people to use their facilities. Ivan Horsfall Turner said they are not commercial fitness operators and whilst they need to increase membership numbers, they work in consultation with local authorities specifically on local schemes, issues and demographics. Trying to encourage the inactive to be more active is exactly where we should be, with a whole range of concessionary schemes. Dan Palframan confirmed that Freedom accepts GP referrals and work with local clubs for example; and one of their biggest successes last year was Active Communities in terms of engaging harder to reach users, actively targeting certain areas rather than taking a blanket approach.

Councillor Mason thanked Ivan Horsfall Turner, Dan Palframan and Matt Hunt for their attendance at today's meeting and for the information they had provided.

(Ivan Horsfall Turner, Matt Hunt and Dan Palframan left the meeting)

OSC24/20 URGENCY POWERS - PUBLIC SPACE PROTECTION ORDERS (PSPOs), WISBECH

Councillor Mason advised Members that this update encompasses agenda items 9 and 10. He advised the Overview and Scrutiny Panel that he was asked as Chairman of Overview and Scrutiny to waive the Forward Plan notice period and subsequent call in period in relation to the Portfolio Holder decision, to enable the Cabinet Member, Councillor Sue Wallwork, to take a decision in relation to four Public Spaces Protection Orders (PSPO's) in Wisbech.

The PSPO's in Wisbech were agreed by Cabinet in 2017. These orders need to be reviewed every three years to be either extended, amended or deleted. A consultation has taken place and all stakeholders including the Town Council unanimously agreed the Orders should be extended for a further three years.

It was originally thought this was an officer decision as an extension to the original Order that was agreed in 2017, however, to ensure we are taking a legal decision, officers decided the decision is required to be taken by a Cabinet Member. All key decisions are required to be advertised on the Council's Forward Plan for 28 days, however due to change of mind on the most appropriate governance process, this item did not appear on the Forward Plan for the full 28 days. It would have been on the forward plan for 20 days.

The reason this decision was so urgent is the Orders expired on 20th October 2020 therefore a decision was required before then to extend the Orders otherwise they would have lapsed, and the powers would no longer be enforceable to control alcohol related issues in Wisbech.

Councillor Mason added that he was keen for Members to understand the rationale behind his decision to utilise his delegated urgency powers in this instance.

Carol Pilson added that this had been an unfortunate set of circumstances and she was very grateful to Councillor Mason for his consideration on the matter and making that decision so that we did not have to go back through consultation and allow those powers to lapse.

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

1. Councillor Booth said he agreed the Order should have been put through and the use of emergency powers was appropriate, but this was the third instance this year where the orders had to be used. He understands that the pandemic has been in part responsible but as a long-term member of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel these powers have not really been used up until this year. He would not like to see this become a regular occurrence and asked for assurance from officers that this is not going to become the norm. There should be a series of checks and balances to ensure Council business is conducted in the appropriate manner. Carol Pilson said that officers do their utmost not to call upon these urgency powers and the appropriate provision is set out in the constitution which for this situation has a defined set of rules, which includes the reporting today as a safeguard for when these rules have to be called upon. However, she understands Councillor Booth's point that these powers have been used several times recently and added that as Monitoring Officer responsible for good governance, it is certainly not a position she nor her colleagues would want to encourage regularly. Unfortunately, these situations do sometimes arise though, and these powers are the best use for the best outcome for the council and the community although we would like to use them to a minimum. Councillor Booth said he did not disagree with the decisions made but reiterated it is a matter of checks and balances to be used appropriately but thanked Carol Pilson for her answer.
2. Councillor Miscandlon said that he was involved in one of the previous emergency powers when COVID-19 struck. He said that he fully supports the actions taken this time with the appropriate safeguards as he did previously. He can assure the Panel that prior to authorising the emergency powers, he knew there was a lengthy discussion with the legal officer in an attempt not to use or overuse the powers that were available.

Members confirmed that they were happy with the use of the urgency powers available in this instance.


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ACTION NUMBER MEETING DATE MINUTE NUMBER		UPDATE	TIMESCALE
ACTION 1 07/09/20 <u>OSC11/20</u> Q1	Councillor Skoulding asked that a follow up letter is sent to all the residents of Lake Close, March giving them an update of when the unfinished road works will commence	Daniel Read advised he would circulate a letter after the meeting.	
ACTION 2 07/09/20 <u>OSC11/20</u> Q2	Councillor Connor requested that elected members be provided with a direct contact number and dedicated person to be able to report issues and concerns to.	Members have a dedicated email address that they can use and this has been circulated by Member Services: regionaldirector@clarionhg.com	Complete

ACTION 3 07/09/20 <u>OSC11/20</u> Q5	Councillor Wicks asked for clarification with regard to the Military Covenant Scheme	Dan Horn agreed to circulate the specific references in local policy that Fenland has with regard to the armed forces and affordable housing.	
ACTION 4 07/09/20 <u>OSC11/20</u> Q11	Councillor Booth asked for an update with regard to the information which was provided last year with regard to the provision of 422 houses proposed to be delivered over a 5-year period.	Daniel Read stated that he will look into this further and provide the information to members through Dan Horn.	
ACTION 5 07/09/20 <u>OSC12/20</u> Q7	Cllr Mrs Mayor - There appears to have been an increased incidence of vandalism in some of the open spaces in Whittlesey Members are keen to understand what is being done to ensure there is a deterrent for this kind of behaviour.	<p>It is important that every incidence of ASB is reported to the Police and to get a crime report number...this helps direct police resources. If there are particular hotspot areas please report this to antisocialbehaviour@fenland.gov.uk and the Council will look at the issue in partnership with the Police and landowners.</p> <p>Discussions have also taken place re:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Removal of damaged picnic tables (any replacements need to be Broxap or similar anti-vandal units) - CCTV unit in Manor car park being serviced - <p>Consideration of signage and CCTV unit linked to internal swimming pool CCTV (not an FDC monitored system) for the rear of the leisure centre.</p>	Complete

<p>ACTION 6</p> <p>07/09/20</p> <p><u>OSC12/20</u></p> <p>Q8</p>	<p>Cllr Mrs Mayor</p> <p>- The report states that Vivacity has handed the assets back to Peterborough City Council and refers to another trust and area which has taken similar action, where is this and what is the trust involved?</p>	<p>The other Trust was in southern England.</p> <p>https://www.worthingherald.co.uk/business/adur-leisure-centres-go-liquidation-over-150-people-made-redundant-2918215</p>	<p>Complete</p>
<p>ACTION 7</p> <p>07/09/20</p> <p><u>OSC12/20</u></p> <p>Q10</p>	<p>Cllr Cornwell - Does this corporate priority include Health and Wellbeing more generally as there is very limited information about health and wellbeing other than from a COVID perspective and members would have liked to have received a more general update.</p>	<p>Unfortunately, due to the Covid-19 Pandemic, work to develop the health and wellbeing strategy has been put on hold, as has the County Council Health and Wellbeing Strategy and associated projects. The Health and Wellbeing Board did meet to consider the outbreak plan in July as a stand-alone item.</p> <p>As communities, economies and workplaces begin to return to normal these pieces of work will resume.</p> <p>During this time however health and wellbeing has been at the forefront of actions delivered by the Council through our services supporting communities via the hub, volunteers, advice and support for safe workplaces and ensuring our residents and businesses are able to access all available funding and support.</p> <p>Work has already started to deliver winter warmth projects as usual linked to winter flu and it is likely the usual financial support packages will be available to residents in hardship.</p> <p>The Council's recovery plan also includes actions for community support and development, volunteering capacity and outbreak management and therefore health and wellbeing is a focus of actions across council services</p>	<p>Complete</p>

ACTION 8	<p>Cllr Cornwell - Members have not received an update in relation to Wisbech 2020 for some time and therefore would have preferred to have received a more comprehensive update as part of this report</p>	<p>Prior to lockdown, a meeting was held with the Core Vision Group to discuss to the future direction of travel of the Wisbech 2020 Vision project. Members of the Core Vision Group were keen that their political leadership group continued to meet to discuss initiatives associated with Wisbech. However, the progress of other local schemes such as Growing Fenland and I Love Wisbech, and the role that the CPCA now play in delivering infrastructure projects, meant that a different format may now be more appropriate.</p> <p>Officers are working on proposals to ensure all that these Wisbech projects play a complimentary role in delivering improvements in the town whilst including appropriate updates and feedback opportunities to the Core Vision Group and other partners.</p>	
ACTION 9 09/11/20 <u>OSC21/20</u> Q4	<p>Councillor Skoulding asked Rowland Potter if he knew the numbers of people travelling by bus from Wisbech to March onto Peterborough or Cambridge for work on a full price ticket.</p>	<p>Rowland Potter advised that he did not have that level of detail to hand but would be able to provide that information from the business case post meeting.</p>	

Agenda Item No:	7	
Committee:	Overview and Scrutiny Panel	
Date:	7 December 2020	
Report Title:	Culture and Creativity - A Strategy for Fenland	

1 Purpose / Summary

This paper outlines FDC's approach to developing a draft Creativity and Culture Strategy for Fenland and the key outcomes as well as the approach to delivery that the Strategy will address. The draft Strategy is attached at Appendix 1.

2 Key issues

The Council recognises the importance of creativity and culture for our local communities. This is a broad area of activity and includes the heritage of Fenland and the communities living here. Developing a vibrant creative and culture sector in the District will ensure that Fenland continues to be a great place to live, attracts more inward and intra-District tourism, generates jobs and supports the local economy, creates strong and cohesive communities and supports people's mental health.

Now more than ever a robust approach to developing creative and cultural opportunities across the District is necessary as the area recovers and moves forwards following the COVID-19 pandemic.

Creativity and Culture in Fenland has been identified by the Arts Council England as an area requiring more support and funding as creative organisations in Fenland have an opportunity to work more closely together and be better able to access funding opportunities where possible.

FDC recognised the importance of improving creative and cultural opportunities for the area in 2019 and has been working towards a strategic guiding document. A good example of an area that has seen incredible benefits from improving creative opportunities is Great Yarmouth. If a similar approach could be utilised across Fenland in the coming decade the impact on local communities will be significant.

FDC is working with the Arts Council and a number of other partners to develop a Creativity and Culture Strategy. The Arts Council has funded an arts sector specialist, ArtReach, to understand what is happening in the creative world in Fenland, consult with local groups and Members to develop a draft Strategy. This is not a Fenland District Council Strategy document but a document for all Fenland for a wide variety of agencies to use and draw upon in their work to develop cultural activities in Fenland.

3 Recommendations

For Overview and Scrutiny Panel to comment on the draft Culture and Creativity Strategy for Fenland.

Wards Affected	All
Forward Plan Reference	
Portfolio Holders	Cllr Chris Seaton - Portfolio Holder for Social Mobility & Heritage
Report Originators	Phil Hughes - Head of Leisure Services Carol Pilson - Corporate Director
Contact Officers	Phil Hughes Tel: 01354 622520 Email: phughes@fenland.gov.uk Carol Pilson Tel: 01354 622360 Email: cpilson@fenland.gov.uk
Background Paper	Draft Creativity and Culture Strategy

1 Creativity and Culture Strategy for Fenland

1.1 The draft Strategy highlights four key outcomes to aspire to:

Connections

- Assets in the cultural sector will be well networked, both within Fenland and further afield, in order to build partnerships that can lever in funding and build infrastructure across the District.
- Networks share skills and support volunteers.
- Opportunities to access cultural opportunities is addressed in order to make cultural activity in Fenland more accessible.

Communication

- A focused communications campaign celebrates the culture of Fenland, and key people and their achievements.
- Marketing shows Fenland as a cultural destination, linking it to the strong heritage and unique nature of Fenland traditions and natural landscapes.
- Information about cultural activity in Fenland will be centralised, creating an information Hub with a dedicated coordinator to promote Fenland's culture and join up marketing of culture into a multi-faceted offer across the District.

Empowerment

- Community Connectors will be identified and supported to work with communities in order to develop their skills and confidence in creating cultural opportunities.
- Young people are supported to be heard within cultural plans, as well as supported to achieve their own cultural ambitions.
- Address the skills gap within Fenland's cultural sector, identifying opportunities to support young people to train in the sector and gain experience and skills as well as uplifting the skills of existing practitioners and cultural sector workers in Fenland.

Inspiration

- Inspiring events and activities will take place in Fenland on a regular basis, bringing high quality arts to the District, co-programmed with communities and appropriate for the different towns, and drawing larger audiences from further afield to engage with it. Fenland has great potential for outdoor events, such as festivals, with its market places, fields and green open spaces.
- A Creative Hub will be developed, perhaps making use of an existing venue to become an arts centre, hosting regular activities and attracting creative people to work and programme there.

2 Delivering the Strategy

2.1 Delivering this Strategy cannot be achieved without focus and community buy-in. This is not a Council strategy, but a Strategy for Fenland. In order to move the area forwards and achieve the key outcomes over the coming years, an infrastructure needs to be built that will drive and deliver this Strategy over the next 10 years, embedding it into the whole of Fenland:

Leadership

- Leadership Steering Group; The Steering Group that loosely exists should be formalised, sustained and developed to provide the necessary leadership to drive this Strategy forwards. The Steering Group will connect existing cultural providers in the District to deliver towards the Strategy outcomes. In the initial stages, the Council would facilitate the Group to ensure it is formalized leading to its self-sustainability.

Development post

- Through external funding, an Arts & Heritage Development officer will be established who can facilitate key actions of this Strategy in the first three years, working with the community to bring people together to create sustainable growth in creative activity and heritage.

Community Connectors

- The Steering Group will identify and support, accessing funding where possible Community Connector roles with a remit to develop community groups in cultural activity. (Existing roles include Care Network Community Development Workers, Fascinating Fens, Fenland 6 Museums, Festival Bridge, Young Fenland Cultural Consortium, Cambridgeshire)

3 Considerations

- 3.1 To deliver the Strategy support from an Arts Development officer will be required to join up the creative community, improve skills development opportunities and offer guidance and support, certainly early on, with funding applications. It is anticipated that the bulk of funding for such a post would come from third party funders such as Arts Council England.
- 3.2 It is worth emphasising that this Strategy is not an FDC strategy. It is a Strategy for Fenland that should be led by a group of people involved in the creative and heritage sector within Fenland, not an FDC group. This leadership will strengthen the possibilities that the Strategy can offer, ensuring community ownership to effect positive change within the sector in Fenland.

4 Effect on corporate objectives

- 4.1 An effective Creativity and Culture Strategy will improve opportunities for the community in Fenland to enjoy art and heritage activities, ensuring that Fenland remains a great place to live and work in.

5 Community impact

- 5.1 A strategic approach to creativity and culture in Fenland will offer residents more diverse, exciting and interesting opportunities to take part in arts activities. This in turn will increase the attractiveness of Fenland as a place to live and work in, strengthening communities and ensuring that Fenland's unique culture and heritage are enjoyed by more people.

6 Conclusions

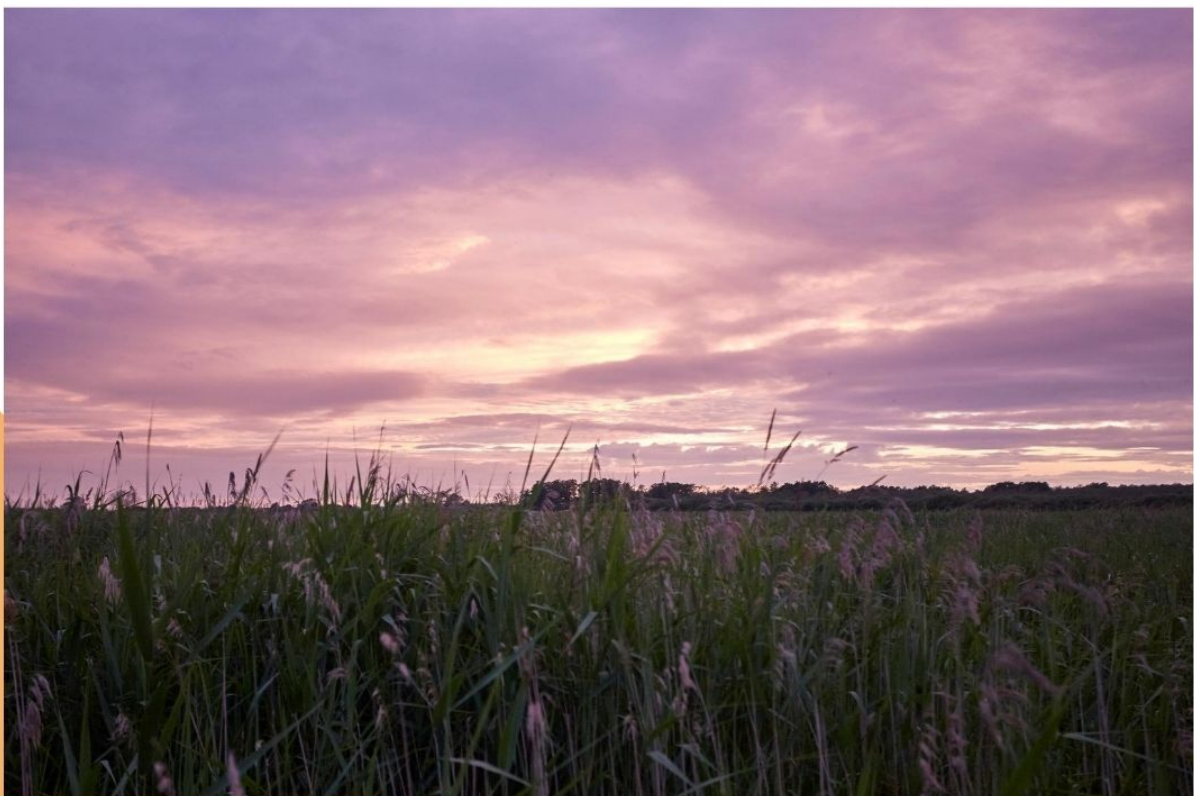
- 6.1 The Creativity and Culture Strategy is expected to lead to more effective and joined up opportunities for the Fenland community to take part in creative, cultural and heritage activities. This type of activity will be very important to help the local community recover from social isolation during the pandemic, improving personal resilience and creating a more cohesive community.

- 6.2 It is anticipated that the Strategy would facilitate the establishment of an Arts and Heritage Development Officer who would work with local creative practitioners to further develop opportunities to enjoy creativity and culture in Fenland.
- 6.3 A key aspect of early wins for the strategy will be the upskilling of the creative community in Fenland. Skills to be targeted will include;
- Communication and marketing skills
 - Fund finding and effective application skills
- These skills will ensure that activities are better promoted, more joined up across Fenland and better supported by external funding sources. Creative practitioners in Fenland do not attract significant third-party funding. This is primarily due to a lack of applications from the Fenland area, not the result of unsuccessful applications.
- 6.4 Longer term the strategy highlights the wider opportunities that a facility in Fenland for creative practitioners could deliver. Whilst it is likely that this is a longer-term ambition, it should be borne in mind as a possible goal for the future.

Broad Horizons

Forging Fenland's Future

A Creativity and Cultural Strategy
2021 – 2030

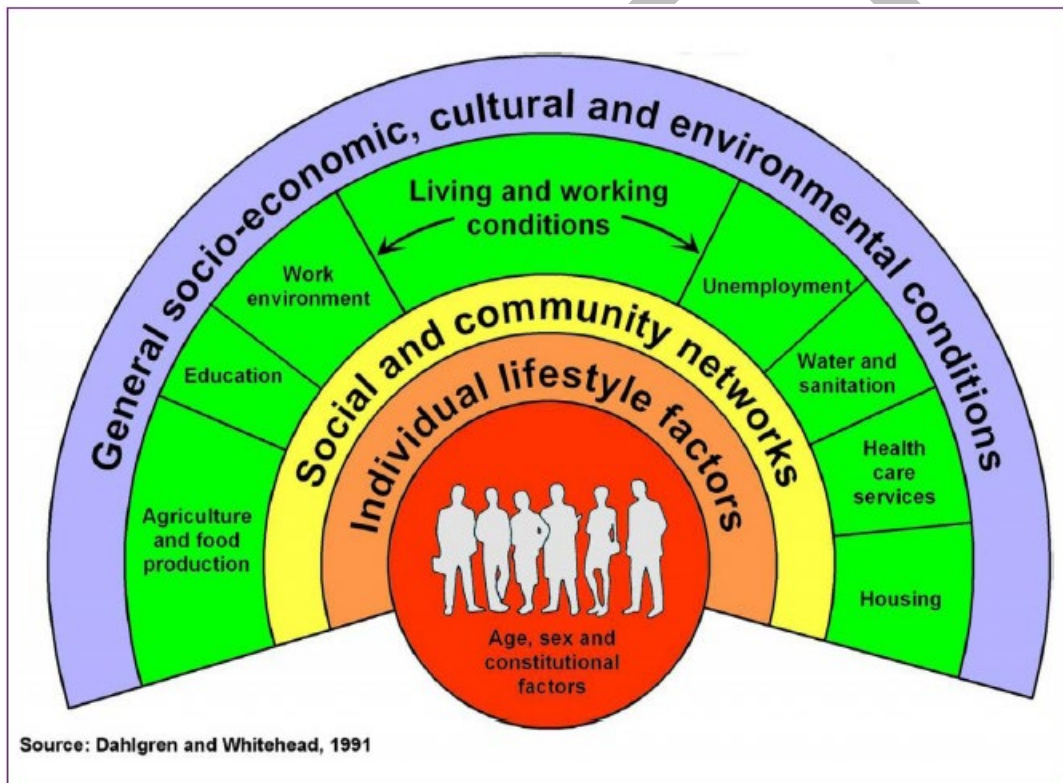


Introduction

This strategy has been developed for Fenland's communities, proposing how they can work together to strengthen cultural opportunities, creative activity and heritage within Fenland.

This is a broad area of activity and includes the heritage of Fenland and the communities living here. Developing a vibrant creative and culture sector in the District will ensure that Fenland continues to be a great place to live, attracts more inward and intra-District tourism, generates jobs and supports the local economy, creates strong and cohesive communities and supports people's mental health.

Culture sits firmly within the wider determinants of health model, as detailed in the following diagram under both 'social and community networks' and 'general socio-economic, cultural and environmental conditions'.



Arts Council England's Let's Create strategy highlights that the cultural sector plays a critical role in regeneration, place making, engagement, employability, community cohesion and resident wellbeing.

Now more than ever a robust approach to developing creative and cultural opportunities across the District is necessary as the area recovers and moves forwards following the COVID-19 pandemic. Creativity and Culture in Fenland has been identified by the Arts Council England as an area requiring more support and funding as creative organisations in Fenland

have an opportunity to work more closely together and be better able to access funding opportunities where possible.

Fenland District is a rural area with villages around four market towns. There are strong local cultural and heritage traditions, such as the community run Straw Bear Festival in Whittlesey, Rose Fair in Wisbech, Chatteris Summer Festival and St George's Day celebrations in March and several independent museums across the district. The landscape has its own unique beauty, with wide open skies and fields, and the towns have kept many attractive heritage buildings. Market places in the towns offer the potential for communal centres, and there are creative companies who are doing exciting work in their local area such as 20Twenty Productions in March, who support young people working in the creative industries through their exciting initiatives.

However, connections between the towns, particularly transport, mean the towns' and villages' creative endeavours can be isolated from each other. As a result, it is difficult for creative and heritage organisations to connect with each other and grow partnerships across the District.

There are several exciting initiatives being taken forwards within Fenland by different groups, demonstrating that people in Fenland support the development of creativity, culture and heritage in their area. However, these initiatives remain localised and allowing greater collaboration will significantly increase their impact on the community within the district as a whole.

There is a lack of capacity within the creative and heritage sector as many active groups are run by volunteers operating with little financial or infrastructure support. There are professional artists within Fenland, however they are also unsupported and their capacity to work across the whole district is limited, which inevitably results in areas of Fenland that do not have access to the arts. There are no Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisations (NPO's) within Fenland, and fewer arts venues or facilities than elsewhere.

People in Fenland access cultural activities outside of the District's boundaries. This is important within the cultural sector, as many of the cultural assets available to the people of Fenland exist just outside the district, such as Flag Fen Archaeology Park (who run a cultural programme) and Babylon Arts in Ely (who are the lead organisation for Market Place, the Creative People and Places project that crosses Fenland and Forest Heath). There are opportunities here, as there is expertise around the District which could be brought into Fenland more effectively through partnership working to benefit the people of Fenland. An example of this is the recent £100,000 grant from Arts Council England that has been secured by Cambridgeshire ACRE in partnership with Creative Arts East, who are an NPO, to deliver a three year Rural Touring Scheme, bringing professional performing arts to village halls including in Fenland, working with local communities to devise their own local programmes. This scheme shows the potential for

partnership working, with experts such as Creative Arts East bringing relevant and high-quality arts to Fenland, working with local communities.

Fenland has huge untapped potential in the creative and heritage sectors. There are a number of excellent creative people and heritage volunteers doing great work, but their capacity is limited. The area has potential as a unique landscape with distinct cultural traditions, and an enthusiasm to do more shown by people who engaged with the consultation for this study.

Fenland is a place where people want to come together, to celebrate and be inspired as a community. The cultural sector needs to develop the confidence to be more ambitious. Through culture and creative activity, communities can be strengthened and connected more. People have willingness and energy to make things happen. With the right support and infrastructure, with coordination and leadership within culture in the district, Fenland can successfully match its wide horizons in the landscape for its creative future.



Vision

Fenland's *Broad Horizons* brings together the districts unique landscape heritage with people's creative aspirations to support strengthened communities.

*In ten years' time, more people in Fenland will be **connected** by coming together for **inspiring**, enjoyable and widely known creative and heritage activity that **supports communities** to achieve and grow their ambitions.*

Themes

Connections – There are many great cultural activities already happening in Fenland, often undertaken by volunteers with limited resources but with great support from local people. More could be achieved if organisers and key community players worked together across the District. This would allow them to achieve activities and events with greater impact, draw down funding from major national funding bodies and share resources and skills.

Communication – The interesting and exciting cultural activity already going on in Fenland is well supported by those who know about it. However, there is a lack of communication beyond people already involved. Fenland's geography of numerous villages which are far apart, makes it difficult for cultural workers to communicate what they do widely across Fenland. There is a perception both within and beyond Fenland that there is not much cultural activity taking place, however the consultation shows that this is not the case. This perception needs to be challenged and the cultural activity in Fenland needs to be better communicated, celebrated and amplified, both within the district and beyond.

Empowerment – Many people in Fenland are actively involved in cultural activity, ranging from keeping traditional events alive, creating new arts activity opportunities, energising museums, generating new creative work and supporting young people in creative careers. However, many of these people are volunteers and have limited resources, would benefit from skills development as well as funding support, and have ideas but not the knowledge of how to make their ideas happen. People need support and empowerment to grow their ideas; where there are community brokers in place such as Festival Bridge and the Care Network, these organisations have the knowledge and connections to support people in starting new ventures, with seed funding and help in building infrastructure. However, the resources of these organisations only stretch so far, and they need to find a variety of sources of funding for them to continue their work.

Inspiration - Focused coordination can bring inspirational, high quality events and activities to Fenland to inspire people and encourage participation. A Development Officer for Fenland would assist with access to regional and national funding to do this, bring people in Fenland together

to enable small ideas to grow into bigger ones, and to promote the great work that is already happening underneath the surface.

Fenland's Priority Areas

Culture is well placed to contribute towards a number of Fenland's priority areas.

- **Changing population: community cohesion**

Fenland has a changing population, with new homes being built and large migrant communities. Cultural activity is a great way of building community cohesion, by bringing communities together through shared cultural experiences. Additionally, there is potential for communities from other countries to share their own proud cultural traditions with Fenland residents and celebrate their own rich arts and heritage. Not only could this reaffirm migrant communities' own sense of pride, but also promote understanding between people of different cultural backgrounds. Key community workers who support migrant communities could work with them to identify key events or festival opportunities to share cultures within Fenland. More events that share heritage and cultural activity would help to bring new settlers together with established residents in sharing a common sense of place.



- **Aging population: physical and mental health**

Fenland has an aging population, which brings with it expected health issues that people experience as they grow older. In addition, there is potential for many older people in Fenland to experience isolation and loneliness, especially in rural areas. Culture has a part to play in supporting people through social activity that can be healthy both physically and mentally, giving people the opportunity to spend time with others and take part in enjoyable and creatively expressive activity.

- **Outstanding heritage - supporting tourism**

Heritage in Fenland is rich and varied. The landscape is unique and a key feature of Fenland, bringing with it its own traditions as well as natural heritage. There are several independent Museums across the district, as well as archaeology groups promoting Fenland's history and heritage.

- **March – A Destination Market Town**

The Growing Fenland report for the town of March aims to develop the town as a destination. Culture can contribute towards this aim, particularly by contributing towards the development of evening economies through evening events, as well as through signage to amplify the town's heritage.

- **Chatteris – An Aspirational Community**

The Growing Fenland report for Chatteris proposes that Chatteris develops as an aspirational community, including cultural activity such as a new community festival to bring people together in inspirational events, and to re-imagine the high street, which should include arts and creative input.

- **Whittlesey – A Market Town Fit for the Future**

The Growing Fenland report for Whittlesey proposes that the town can become fit for the future by making more of its assets. These include the town square, to develop as a community 'piazza', which would be supported by cultural activity that encourages the use of the square. Also proposed is the development of a heritage centre at Kings Dyke Nature Reserve, as well as a trail to amplify the town's heritage, and links to nearby Flag Fen's developing cultural programme.

- **Wisbech – A Resilient Town for the Future**

Drawing on historical inspiration, Wisbech will embrace heritage and cultural opportunities to encourage tourism, support a resilient town centre, and support community cohesion realising the potential of the town's economy.

- **Four Seasons Events**

Fenland District Council organises the Four Seasons events programme in the four market towns with support from Town Councils and volunteers. These events are platforms for creativity, including showcasing local talent, encouraging more local participation through creative activity and linked projects, and introducing new and inspirational creative events and artists from further afield to engage with Fenland's communities.

- **Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Business Plan**

The joint authorities' business plan aims to encourage a visitor economy for the area. Fenland's heritage, creative and cultural activity and events should be amplified in order to contribute towards the area as an attraction to bring in more visitors and boost local economies.

- **Fenland District Council Business Plan**

The Council's Business Plan recognises the potential to promote Fenland through its culture and heritage. It also aims to strengthen links between Fenland communities which can be achieved through creative and cultural events and activity that brings people together to share common experiences. The Council also aims to support the numerous voluntary groups who wish to organise events, which, with the right support, can grow and contribute towards a new narrative for Fenland as a cultural place, supported by its community.

- **The Fens Biosphere**

The Fens Biosphere project aims to achieve UNESCO Biosphere designation for the Fens as a unique and valuable landscape. If successful, this will bring international recognition to the Fens, the partnership managing the project recognises the potential for cultural and creative activity within the project. Creative activity will help link the community to the economic and environmental developments in the project, essential for its success.

The Biosphere project hinges on creating a strong identity for the Fens. It responds to the heritage of food production and land and water management in the Fens, which has developed Fenland's unique heritage and culture. The project could provide a strong brand and community pride to the area, galvanising communities to be involved in a project that will support tourism and celebrate its cultural traditions.

Creative organisations within Fenland may wish to get involved with the project to support its aims, for example they are already involving local people in photographing the distinct landscape in the Fens to create beautiful images that celebrate the natural heritage.



National Cultural Context

Covid-19

At the time of writing, the world is engulfed in the coronavirus pandemic, resulting in lockdown in the UK. The full effects of this will become clear in time, however there are already two apparent impacts on the cultural sector that are evident.

The lockdown has affected creative practitioners and cultural venues hugely. Many cultural venues rely on visitors to raise their revenue and continue their reason for existing but have been forced to close due to the coronavirus lockdown. Theatres and arts venues were the first to be shut down. In addition, most creative practitioners in the UK are self-employed, freelancers or on short term contracts. Again, this has disproportionately affected cultural sector workers who have seen their income drop substantially. The cultural sector is hugely threatened by the lockdown and many organisations will not survive.

However, the crisis has also highlighted the huge benefit of the cultural sector to communities. Creative people have quickly adapted their ways of working in order to continue to support the wellbeing of people through the crisis. Many have relied on the arts and entertainment to get them through the period of isolation. A statement on creativity and culture from Ernesto Ottone, UNESCO Assistant Director-General for Culture, said:

"COVID-19 has brought into stark relief, as crises often do, the necessity of culture for people and communities. At a time when billions of people are physically separated from one another, culture brings us together. It provides comfort, inspiration and hope at a time of enormous anxiety and uncertainty... Now, more than ever, people need culture. Culture makes us resilient. It gives us hope. It reminds us that we are not alone. That is why UNESCO will do all it can to support culture, to safeguard our heritage and empower artists and creators, now and after this crisis has passed. We hope you will join us in this effort, by supporting culture in your own community, however you can."

Culture and creativity has an important role, not just to support people through the crisis, but to re-build as we emerge from it. As Darren Henley, CEO for the Arts Council England, observed,

"...people and communities have turned to culture and creativity in this crisis... they will surely turn to it again and again as we begin the work of restoring our sense of wellbeing and our sense of our place in the world. Through the creativity of our artists, arts organisations, museums and libraries, we will be heard, and we will explore the meaning of all this. We will celebrate, console, commemorate and come together. Through creativity and culture, we will heal."

Mr Henley sees the role of creativity and culture as even more important to communities now, with a vital role that goes beyond the sector and supports all aspects of our lives: "Imagine then the compelling story we could tell about how we brought our precious communities back together and helped to heal the emotional, social and economic scars left by this terrible virus."

It is within this context that this strategy needs to address the short-term emergence from the coronavirus lockdown, as well as the long-term vision for Fenland's creativity and heritage.

Arts Council England

Arts Council England recently published their 10-year strategy, Let's Create, 2020-2030.

The strategy has three outcomes and four investment principles:

Outcomes:

- **Creative People:** everyone can develop and express creativity throughout their life;
- **Cultural Communities:** villages, towns and cities thrive through a collaborative approach to culture;
- **A Creative & Cultural Country:** England's cultural sector is innovative, collaborative and international.

Investment Principles:

- **Ambition and Quality:** cultural organisations are ambitious and committed to improving the quality of their work;
- **Inclusivity & Relevance:** England's diversity is fully reflected in the organisations and individuals that we support and in the culture that they produce;
- **Dynamism:** cultural organisations are dynamic and able to respond to the challenges of the next decade;
- **Environmental Responsibility:** cultural organisations lead the way in their approach to environmental responsibility.

Fenland's Creative and Cultural Strategy needs to describe clearly how it will support these outcomes and principles if it is to draw down investment from Arts Council England.

Creative People:

Let's Create wants more people to have access to creative activity and be able to participate. The Arts Council lists Fenland as an area where participation in the arts is lower than the national average. Initiatives such as MarketPlace CPP already exist to address this, however their reach is limited. Creative thinking needs to be undertaken to find innovative ways to allow access to creative activity for more people in Fenland, which is especially difficult with a lack of venues and public transport links. We should be asking ourselves: if people are not able to come to us, how can we bring culture to them? There are pockets of isolated communities in Fenland and aging populations. Cultural activity could be mobile and touring to reach more places, and this requires a well networked infrastructure which does not currently exist. Outdoor events and festivals can be developed where there is a lack of indoor venues. In other parts of the country, outdoor events have been shown to be particularly effective in getting people involved. There is already good practice, such as

Cambridgeshire's Libraries Presents touring programme, however, there needs to be expansion beyond the library venues to reach community centres, empty spaces and outdoor spaces. There are also large travelling communities and migrant communities in Fenland. Cultural events and activities should make efforts to connect with migrant and travelling communities and include them, integrating them into the cultural activity of Fenland. This will, over time, support community cohesion. Work in other areas of the country have shown that sharing of diverse cultural traditions has supported understanding between different communities.

Cultural Communities:

Let's Create recognises that more can be achieved when people and organisations work together. By building those networks, as stated above, more arts can tour in Fenland and reach more people.

In addition, different sectors can come together to support each other's aims: creative activity can support:

- health
- heritage
- economic regeneration
- social cohesion
- environment
- place-making

These sectors need to involve creative practitioners at the planning stages of projects allowing creative thinkers to come up with innovative solutions using culture to connect people and encourage engagement. Over the long term, Fenland's community could develop cultural hubs that can bring a number of creative and heritage practitioners together to generate exciting and varied programmes that create a buzz of creativity and encourage community involvement.

A Creative & Cultural Country:

Let's Create recognises that a creative and cultural country will only develop if all children and young people, regardless of their background, are given the opportunity to develop their talent. For them to take up these opportunities, they need to understand the opportunities available to be able to have a vision of what is possible. They need inspiration from a variety of quality artists and creatives and need to be introduced to the possibilities of varied creative careers. The excellent practices of organisations such as 20Twenty, who provide supported work experience for young people, need investment as their work has limited capacity without additional help. Let's Create also wants to see cultural organisations using more digital media and technology to be innovative and reach larger audiences. Young people need to be supported to take on this challenge and become technology innovators to support cultural organisations in Fenland into the future. This could be done through traditional education or by connecting technology businesses with young people in Fenland.

Historic England

Historic England's Corporate Plan includes the following aims:

- Championing heritage: this includes working in partnership with cultural and creative sectors, promoting the value of heritage to our cultural life and increasing cultural uses of and responses to the historic environment: "Closer working with arts and culture organisations will enable us to build active participation among diverse communities, enabling more people to understand, enjoy and care for the historic environment.";
- Wider Engagement and Diversity: Reaching more people and more diverse audiences all over England: "We need to engage with more diverse audiences, and in different ways, to fulfil our remit to champion and protect England's historic environment."
- Strengthening national capacity and resilience of the heritage sector, includes:
 - Grants and collaborative working to sustain and strengthen capability and effectiveness of heritage sector and community groups
 - Sustaining local authority contribution to delivering heritage protection through strategic support for the planning system, training, guidance and digital access to data
 - Developing heritage apprenticeships and craft skills, supporting High Streets, supporting Place-making and Rural heritage.

Heritage Lottery Fund

The Heritage Lottery Fund Strategic Funding Framework 2019-2024 lays out its two priority areas:

- landscapes and nature
- community heritage

There are six objectives:

- continue to bring heritage into better condition
- inspire people to value heritage more
- ensure that heritage is inclusive
- support the organisations they fund to be more robust,
- enterprising and forward looking
- demonstrate how heritage helps people and places
- to thrive
- grow the contribution that heritage makes to the
- UK economy.

The Heritage Fund's definition of heritage is broad:

"The National Lottery Heritage Fund will continue to fund the full breadth of heritage across the whole of the UK, enabling people to define heritage for themselves, so that what they value can be enjoyed and passed on to future generations. This scope and reach is essential to our role as a distributor of National Lottery funding for heritage, and our approach is recognised as having made heritage more democratic and widely appreciated than before."

The Fund's new outcome is: "People will have greater wellbeing", thus they link heritage with people's enjoyment and sense of pride in their community and locality.

The priority areas are applicable to Fenland in that it involves communities and landscape/natural heritage, both of which should also be priorities for Fenland. Initiatives like the Biosphere paired with strong community traditions such as the Straw Bear Festival makes Fenland an area that the Heritage Lottery should be interested in supporting. Heritage Lottery Funding has already been secured for Wisbech to invest in the High Street. Other projects identified in the Growing Fenland town plans include heritage to boost visitor numbers and local economies, and to celebrate heritage with new signage, trails and community festivals.

Most of Fenland's heritage provision is run by volunteers including Angles Theatre and four of the five museums. These groups have ambition but lack support. Investment from sources such as the Arts Council should be identified to support links between local assets enabling resource sharing, encouraging more ambitious and enterprising work to be undertaken to enhance the good practice already achieved with limited resources. A key priority would be to enhance heritage in the area with technological innovation, digital initiatives and better online presence and marketing, which will be most effective shared between them. Links between the heritage that exists in the area and the wellbeing of the community that engage with it should be amplified; connecting people to heritage through their own stories, ensuring that heritage remains relevant to people in all their diversity. Making this case for local heritage collections and museums, Angles Theatre and the natural landscape, should ensure that the Heritage Lottery Fund would be drawn to investing in Fenland projects.



Fenland's Cultural Assets

Venues

- Angles Theatre
- Community Centres
- Libraries
- Luxe Cinema Wisbech and The Light Cinema Wisbech
- Market places
- March Town Hall

Organisations

- 20Twenty Productions
- Blackfield Creatives
- Fascinating Fens
- Care Network
- Cambridgeshire ACRE
- Market Place CPP / Babylon Arts
- Libraries Service (The Library Presents)
- Young Fenland Cultural Consortium
- Fens Biosphere project - Ouse Washes Landscape Partnership
- Cambridgeshire Community Arts
- Red Barn Creative
- Town Councils

Heritage

- Museums
- Landscape and Natural Environment
- Archaeology
- Cultural traditions e.g. Straw Bear Festival
- The Castle (Wisbech, Grade II listed, owned by Cambridgeshire County Council and run by Wisbech Town Council)



Challenges

- Creativity and heritage in Fenland is not perceived as exciting enough by consultation respondents. Though this may be a perception rather than reality, it indicates a need to grow creative aspiration and introduce inspirational events and activities into the district. There is little capacity to influence arts coordination which would enable inspirational activities to be developed, attracting high quality art to Fenland.
- There is no central hub for cultural activity in the district. Young people particularly expressed a wish to have a central place as a creative hub where people could get involved in a range of activities. Hubs would need to develop over time with several organisations coming together to deliver creative hub activity.
- Transport is a challenge in Fenland to support attending venues, activities and events, especially for people without access to their own transport, e.g. young people and those in rural areas.
- People in Fenland are used to operating with low financial support and they feel that Fenland cannot attract investment into the cultural sector. This is not the case, with Arts Council England and the Heritage Fund both keen to invest in Fenland. Coordination is required to match expertise to draw down funding with local communities who have ideas and want to make things happen.
- Migrant workers from Europe are essential to the agricultural industry in Fenland and community relations with residents are complex. "The impact of migration in the Fenland area: A scoping report" 2019, commissioned by the Rosmini Centre as part of the Migrant Workers' Mapping Project, recognised that there are conflicting conclusions on the overall effect of migrant labour on community cohesion, often depending upon whether migration is permanent, seasonal or cyclical, with greater social cohesion found to occur over time as migrants become more established in communities. There are case studies around England where sharing and celebrating cultural activity from different countries has contributed towards better community cohesion and understanding between nationalities, and this potential should be investigated further with the migrant communities in Fenland.

Outcomes

Connections

- Assets in the cultural sector will be well networked, both within Fenland and further afield, in order to build partnerships that can lever in funding and build infrastructure across the District.
- Networks share skills and support volunteers.
- Cultural activity in Fenland more accessible.

Communication

- A focused communications campaign celebrates the culture of Fenland, and key people and their achievements.
- Fenland is a cultural destination, linking it to the strong heritage and unique nature of Fenland traditions and natural landscapes.
- Information about cultural activity in Fenland will be centralised, creating an information Hub with a dedicated coordinator to promote Fenland's culture and join up marketing of culture into a multi-faceted offer across the District.

Empowerment

- Community Connectors will be identified and supported to work with communities in order to develop their skills and confidence in creating cultural opportunities.
- Young people are supported to be heard within cultural plans, as well as supported to achieve their own cultural ambitions.
- Address the skills gap within Fenland's cultural sector, identifying opportunities to support young people to train in the sector and gain experience and skills as well as uplifting the skills of existing practitioners and cultural sector workers in Fenland.

Inspiration

- Inspiring events and activities will take place in Fenland on a regular basis, bringing high quality arts to the District, co-programmed with communities and appropriate for the different towns, and drawing larger audiences from further afield to engage with it. Fenland has great potential for outdoor events, such as festivals, with its market places, fields and green open spaces.
- A Creative Hub will be developed, perhaps making use of an existing venue to become an arts centre, hosting regular activities and attracting creative people to work and programme there.

Delivering the Strategy

An infrastructure needs to be built that will drive and deliver this Strategy over the next 10 years, embedding it across Fenland:

- **Leadership Steering Group.**

The Steering Group that loosely exists at present, should be formalised and sustained and developed to provide the Leadership to drive this Strategy. The Steering Group will connect existing cultural providers in the District to deliver against the Strategy.

It is anticipated that the work of the Steering Group will be broad. To ensure that local expertise, with a local approach (not necessarily linked professionally to the culture sector) is used to move the cultural agenda forwards, the Steering Group will use sub-groups to drive progress with specific local input from time to time.

Additionally, it is expected that areas within Cambridgeshire and Peterborough that have a more mature and experienced cultural offer, may be able to work together with those that are still developing. Members of the Steering Group will work together across the County to bring knowledge into Fenland, learning from our neighbours. This approach should fit well with Area Partnership Funds that the Arts Council is considering for their Let's Create Strategy delivery model – due in Spring 2021.

- **Development post**

External funding will be sought to establish an Arts & Heritage Development officer who can facilitate key actions of this Strategy in the first three years, working with the community to bring people together to create sustainable growth in creative activity and heritage.

- **Community Connectors**

The Steering Group will identify and support, accessing funding where possible Community Connector roles with a remit to develop community groups in cultural activity. (Existing roles include Care Network Community Development Workers, Fascinating Fens, Fenland 6 Museums, Festival Bridge, Young Fenland Cultural Consortium, Cambridgeshire ACRE)



DRAFT Action Plan

Years 1-2

- **Arts and Heritage Development Officer (AHDO)** post established to drive the strategy action plan and connect cultural organisations across the district, enabling more creative and cultural activity to take place, whilst also supporting identification and the drawdown of external funding. The post should be a 3-year post to embed cultural activity into Fenland and ensure its sustainability. Funding from Arts Council England and Historic England to support this post, with some local matched funding identified;
- The AHDO post will focus on supporting the cultural sector recovering from the pandemic; building resilience and infrastructure into the sector, **enabling connections** between organisations in order to strengthen them and putting in place the means to communicate more effectively about culture in Fenland; and to **represent culture within other sectors**, using creativity to support the economy, tourism, wellbeing, skills development and the environment;
- **Support existing groups** and initiatives to grow and be sustainable, such as 20Twenty, Angles Theatre, Rural Touring Scheme, Blackfield Creatives, Museums etc. Work with these organisations to support **opportunities for young people** to develop skills in the cultural sector;
- **Establish the cultural infrastructure** necessary to drive the strategy, addressing Leadership and the Steering Group, and Community Connectors;
- Potentially make use of the **apprenticeship levy** to lever in match funding to support an apprentice to work with the AHDO, investing in the skills gap and developing future expertise in this area;
- Develop opportunities to **address skills gaps** in the cultural sector, for existing practitioners but also for young people. Make use of networks, local organisations and organisations from outside Fenland who can provide training and develop skills in the cultural sector. Encourage initiatives to involve young people in heritage, perhaps modelled on the Kick the Dust initiative (by The National Lottery Heritage Fund, 2016-2019) as an example of innovative practice.

Years 2-5

- **Conduct a study into the feasibility of an independent, sustainable Arts Centre** with cultural facilities. An arts centre would need to support a number of cultural organisations who can use the venue to make it viable. A long-term plan would need to be developed if this is to become a reality;

- **Marketing campaign** that joins up all cultural activity in Fenland, linking it to tourism;
- Give creative and community led activity the support and encouragement to use creativity to **celebrate Fenland's natural heritage** and visibility as a tourist destination, where appropriate supporting the Fens Biosphere project and other projects or opportunities that raise Fenland's profile;
- Work with **migrant communities** to develop events and projects to share cultural traditions with the wider population of Fenland;
- Develop initiatives to **improve transport links** that support cultural activities and venues, enabling more people to access these offers across Fenland;
- Develop **Information Hubs** in key local places, such as village noticeboards, pubs, community venues, and through word of mouth, making use of Community Connectors to ensure that information is shared across the District into very local areas;
- **Develop links with national and international organisations** who can bring new, inspiring work to Fenland. These should include outdoor arts / festival networks and rural touring networks;
- Develop **new events and activities** and expand existing ones to include new, inspiring creative work, co-produced by communities and young people. This should include outdoor arts and festivals, linking the existing Seasons Festivals in the towns with the apprenticeship post to develop Producers of the future;
- **Lever in funding** from Heritage Lottery Fund and elsewhere to support **heritage** organisations in Fenland. Network these organisations to enable them to work together to access larger, more ambitious funding.
- Develop projects to upgrade the use of **new technology** for heritage venues, including establishing their presence online as well as integrating new technology into their venues, displays and operations, and developing digital skills for heritage workers.

Years 5-10

- Build on successes to introduce **new activities** into Fenland and to grow existing ones;
- **Link with national and international cultural organisations** to bring high profile artistic works to Fenland;

- Have established the **unique selling point** of Fenland and be communicating this to the world;
- Build on opportunities to have more **apprenticeships** and develop **career opportunities** in arts and heritage within the District, investing in young people to develop skills and continue cultural growth into the future;
- Establish an **Arts Centre** and/or other cultural facilities, if deemed feasible, within the District with good links for it to be accessible to as many residents of Fenland as possible. Continue to develop the offer of these facilities, establishing programmes of activities and events.

DRAFT

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Overview and Scrutiny Member Led Review of the Anglia Revenues Partnership

1 Background

1.1 Members raised questions regarding the performance of the Anglia Revenues Partnership (ARP) at a meeting of Full Council in January 2020. In addition, The Overview and Scrutiny Panel recently considered the Annual Report in respect of ARP during their February 2020 meeting. During those discussions Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel agreed that as the partnership had been in existence of the past 6 years without a formal review it would be timely to conduct a Member Led Review of the Service to ensure the partnership continued to achieve value for money for Fenland in comparison with the other member Councils.

1.2 A Member Led Review Group was formulated in February from Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel, comprising of the following elected members

Cllr Anne Hay – Review Chairperson

Cllr David Mason

Cllr Mike Cornwell

Cllr Bob Wicks (Substitute Member)

Cllr Robert Skoulding (Substitute Member)

1.3 The review group held an initial meeting in February 2020 which included all members of the group including the substitute members. During the initial meeting the scope for the review was agreed, which comprised of the following aims and objectives

1. To examine the current Anglian Revenues Partnership including its structure, performance and governance arrangements.
2. To consider each constituent councils audit plan where relevant to the ARP including their respective findings and recommendations in relation to ARP.
3. To consider the current vision and aims of the partnership to ensure relevant and up to date.
4. To consider feedback from key internal and external stakeholders received in relation to the Anglian Revenues Partnership.

5. To consider the current and future direction of the partnership to ensure aligned to Fenland priorities.
 6. To consider wider issues that might impact the performance of the partnership including the wider rollout of Universal Credit.
- 1.4 The initial meeting also made successful progress in relation to understanding the ARP structure, performance and governance arrangements with a second meeting planned to consider the other review objectives.
- 1.5 The global COVID 19 pandemic resulted in a national lockdown during March 2020 which had a detrimental impact on the original timescales for the completion of the review. Furthermore, during the Annual Council in May 2020 changes to the membership of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel were agreed, with Cllr Anne Hay no longer being a member of the panel and Cllr Mason becoming Chairman. During the September Overview and Scrutiny Panel meeting, Members agreed the ARP review should recommence, Cllr Mason confirmed that Cllr Anne Hay had kindly agreed to continue as a co-opted Chairperson for the review, in order to ensure continuity with Cllr Skoulding (former substitute member) taking Cllr Mason's place within the review group and Cllr Wicks (former substitute member) replacing Cllr Cornwell for the final meeting of the review group. It was also agreed that the final review report would be submitted to the December meeting of Overview and Scrutiny Panel including any findings and associated recommendations, as the annual review of the Anglia Revenues Partnership is scheduled to take place then, which the review findings would help to inform.
- 1.6 The Member led review group met again in October 2020 with ARP colleagues Paul Corney, Adrian Mills and lead FDC Officers Sam Anthony and Peter Catchpole. The group were successfully able to consider the remaining review objectives and agreed to draft the final report accordingly.

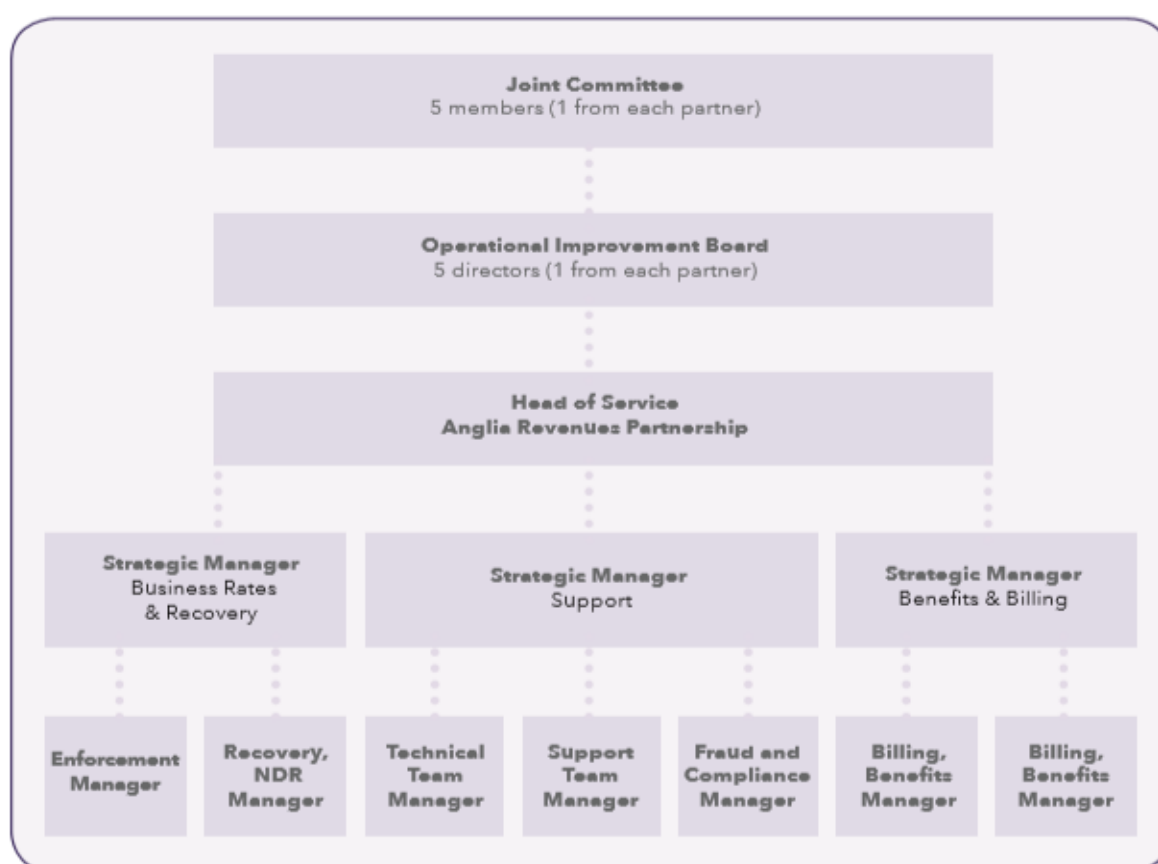
2 Introduction

- 2.1 At the 19 December 2013 meeting of Full Council members endorsed the Council's approach to service transformation including the way forward in respect of Shared Services. This meeting approved that the Council's Revenues and Benefits service joined the Anglian Revenues Partnership (ARP) as of 01 April 2014.
- 2.2. The business case for Fenland joining ARP generated savings to ARP of £272,000 per full year, of which Fenland receives £136,000 per full year.

- 2.3 In addition to the original savings outlined above, ARP has achieved efficiency targets of £531,000 in respect of 2017/18 rising to £1.017million for 2018/19. By comparison Fenland's contribution is still lower than it was when joining the partnership in 2014.
- 2.4 ARP is a shared Revenues and Benefits service that comprises of five partners authorities (Breckland, East Cambs, Fenland, West Suffolk and East Suffolk Council's). ARP is responsible for making benefits awards (Housing Benefit and Council Tax support, as well as billing and collecting Council Tax and Business Rates
- 2.5 ARP in itself is not an entity however there is a section 113 agreement in place to enable all Councils to work on behalf of each other. Fenland currently employs 29 staff that prior to the current pandemic were based at Fenland Hall, however since the initial lockdown period all staff across the wider partnership have been homebased. All 29 FDC staff contribute to the work of the partnership, this is the same approach adopted by each of the other partners. The 29 FDC staff may deal with FDC cases or cases related to any of the other Local Authorities within the partnership, which is the case for all staff. This approach enables all partners to benefit from economies of scales, whilst also benefitting from resilience and the ability to access a greater pool of staff during peaks in service demand.
- 2.6 The teams issue council tax bills to 343,914 properties, rates bills to 29,246 businesses, and support around 52,810 customers' benefits claims (based on figures as at September 2019).
- 2.7 The ARP shared service arrangement generates £680k of savings to Fenland over 5 years by:
- Reductions in staff by sharing activities across Councils, achieving economies of scale
 - Councils sharing contracts for certain services such as computer systems, print and post costs in order to reduce unit costs
 - Additional savings as processes and functions merge between ARP partners.
- 2.8 The ARP Enforcement Agency Service has been active since the end of July 2015 and has collected over £13million in respect of Council Tax and Business Rates arrears, of which £1.7M has been for Fenland. In 2017 South Norfolk District Council and in 2019 Norwich City Council delegated their enforcement work to Breckland Council so their cases are also dealt with through the ARP Enforcement Service.

- 2.9 The Enforcement Service is able to charge fees in respect of the cost of collection, previously these fees were charged and retained by the external baliff companies. It is estimated that for 2019/20 there will be a surplus of fees collected in comparison to costs of over £800k which will be shared by the ARP partners, of which Fenland share is estimated at over £90k.

3 Governance Arrangements (Review objectives 1 and 4)



3.1 Joint Committee

Fenland is a full member of the Anglia Revenues Partnership and as such has joint control over its governance and future direction. This is achieved by having an FDC elected member on the Joint Committee along with the four other full partners. The Joint Committee is enabled by legislation to make decisions on behalf of all the Councils that are part of ARP with regards Revenues and Benefits service provision. The Joint Committee has recently decided to consolidate ARP services at present to ensure core service delivery is at its optimum before considering a wider roll out to other potential partners. Cllr Mrs Jan French is the current FDC Cabinet representative on the Joint Committee.

3.2 Organisational Improvement Board and Sub Committees

Fenland has Senior Officer representation on the ARP Organisational Improvement Board (OIB), which focusses on performance and the creation of performance indicators which are relevant to each partner authority. The OIB reports to the Joint Committee. Furthermore there are other sub committees including; the Finance Officers Group; a Data Protection Officers Group; a Customer Services Group; a Communications sub Committee in addition to a newly formulated Information Technology Group. All of the sub committees are created to ensure that all partner organisations influence all aspects of ARP current and future service delivery.

4 Audit Approach (Review objective 2)

4.1 The Internal auditing arrangements for ARP systems take the form of a joint approach. Since 2017/18 the 5 authorities (previously 7) signed an SLA to agree a systems approach to auditing rather than the traditional authority-based approach used in the past.

4.2 This means that each organisation audits a full system across all organisations rather than their own and the approach has been split out as follows:

- Council Tax – West Suffolk audit team
- Housing Benefits – West Suffolk audit team
- Overpayments – West Suffolk audit team
- NNDR – East Suffolk audit team
- ARP Enforcement – Fenland audit team
- (West Suffolk undertake the audit work for ARP on behalf of Breckland and East Cambridgeshire (LLGS), through a separate SLA)

4.3 This approach allows all systems to be audited every year. Before the SLA for joint auditing, Fenland only had enough resources to audit these systems 1 in every three years.

4.4 The joint approach means that every scope and results of audits for each system are reviewed by each organisations audit manager. The findings and actions plans are discussed and agreed with ARP managers. Draft reports are sent to each organisations S151 officers for consideration before any final reports are issued. This approach gives enhanced assurance on the processes being followed and any issues that have arisen as a result of the audit work are known to each organisation.

4.5 The arrangement has been in place for three years and works successfully. All reports and action plans are discussed, agreed and monitored with ARP colleagues and each audit team reports the overall findings to their own sovereign authorities Audit Committees / Corporate Governance Committees.

- 4.6 In addition to the monitoring by the audit teams and progress presented to audit committees / corporate governance committees, the final reports are presented, by ARP Management, to the ARP OIB and Joint committee for internal monitoring

5 Audit Results

- 5.1 Below is a table containing a summary of the last three years audit results for each system including the number of recommendations and their classification of risk (High, Medium or Low).

<u>Council Tax and Overpayments</u>	Overall Assurance rating	High	Medium	Low
2017/2018	Adequate / Reasonable	2	25	10
2018/2019	Adequate / Reasonable	3	24	13
2019/2020	Adequate / Reasonable	0	11	6

(Council Tax and Overpayments reporting are combined due the nature of the tasks and testing carried out.)

<u>Housing Benefits</u>	Overall Assurance rating	High	Medium	Low
2017/2018	Adequate / Reasonable	0	17	8
2018/2019	Adequate / Reasonable	1	14	10
2019/2020	Adequate / Reasonable	0	10	6

<u>NNDR</u>	Overall Assurance rating	High	Medium	Low
2017/2018	Adequate / Reasonable	0	10	6
2018/2019	Adequate / Reasonable	0	6	5
2019/2020	Adequate / Reasonable	0	7	6

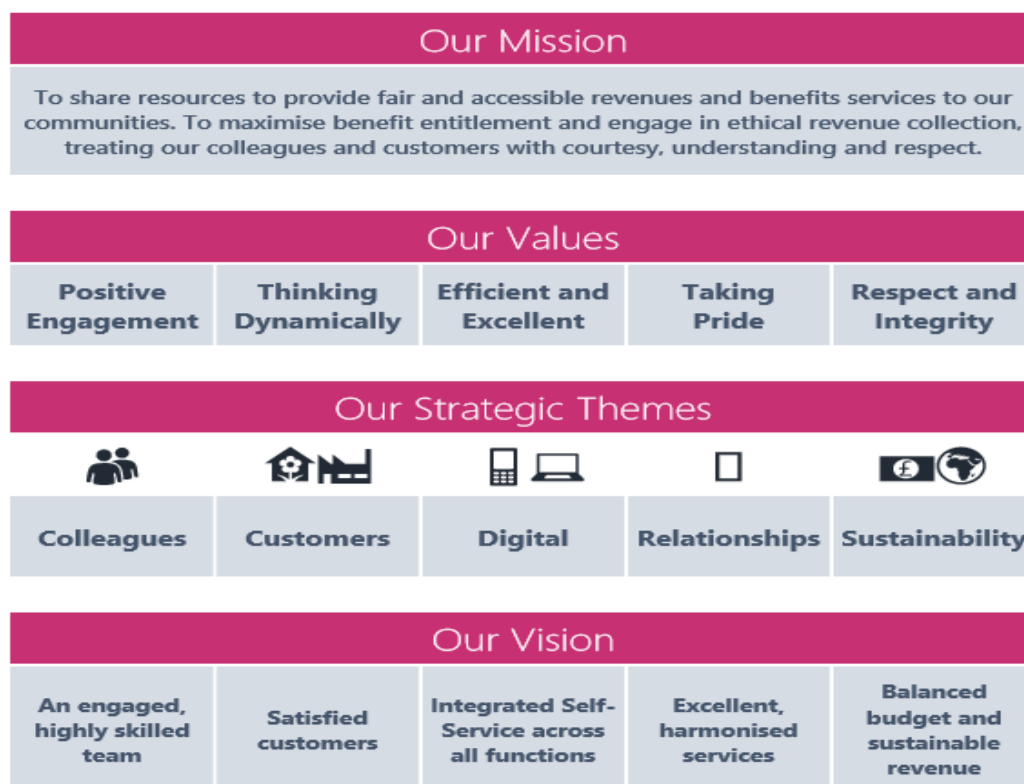
ARP Enforcement	Overall Assurance rating	High	Medium	Low
2017/2018	Adequate / Reasonable	0	5	1
2018/2019	Good / Substantial	0	1	1
2019/2020	Good / Substantial	0	2	1

5.2 Generally, the overall trend over the last three years is an improving one, the number of recommendations are reducing and the risk associated to those recommendations are also reducing.

6 Vision and Aims of the Anglia Revenues Partnership (Review Objective 3 and 5)

6.1 During the Autumn of 2019 ARP undertook a review of its strategic priorities. In order to effectively inform the review the ARP management team analysed each partner's senior strategy documents, looking for themes and excerpts that inform ARP's work. As a result the partnership proposed a new statement of its mission, revised priorities stated as strategic themes, and a new vision for its service offer. The resulting proposal were presented and subsequently agreed by the OIB during their December 2019 meeting and are outlined below.

6.2



- 6.3 The performance management framework is currently being reviewed in relation to 2021/22, however the emergence of the COVID pandemic has taken up significant resource, which would otherwise have been focussed on the updated performance management framework. A project plan is scheduled to be presented to the OIB illustrating where ARP are in relation to each of the service areas regarding performance management to ensure greater transparency concerning how performance is managed individually and at team level, and what parts of that data are relevant for the OIB to look at regularly or may need to consider as an exception.

7 Findings

- 7.1 The Review group identified that the COVID pandemic undoubtedly has had an impact on the work of the ARP. As a result the partnership is seeking to further improve the digital offering to customers therefore ensuring that those who can self-serve do so, which then feeds into the strategic priority to release resources to better help those who find it more difficult to access ARP services. (Link to objective 5 and 6)
- 7.2 The use of 'friendly reminders' in terms of non-statutory reminders for council tax has shown that people can change their behaviour without receiving statutory notices, which are harsher in nature because of the legislative information they have to contain. Therefore, ARP have identified that more people respond positively and pay when targeted with the 'softer' approach and ARP are investigating that further (Link to objective 5 and 6)
- 7.3 Regular data cleansing is required as during the work to provide business rates relief it is evident that ARP are not always notified when one business leaves a premise and another moves in. (Link to objective 5)
- 7.4 ARP has taken a more holistic approach to help more vulnerable customers who cannot engage digitally; it is therefore not a case of just ensuring these customers pay their council tax but also seeing how they can be signposted to other areas of support, be they working age or pensioners as a form of help in the community. (Link to objective 5)
- 7.5 The situation over the last six months has made FDC and the partnership work more closely together and in terms of the grants available, track and trace payments, hardship fund, council tax support consultation and the various reliefs. This close working partnership approach has made service delivery seamless. (Link to objectives 5 and 6)
- 7.6 The review team learnt that good work is being done with the FDC empty homes officer and the staff at ARP to build a complete picture in relation to

empty properties which has resulted in successfully bringing a number of these properties back into use within the district.(Link to objectives 5 and 6)

- 7.7 A disaster recovery process exercise had been undertaken just prior to the start of the initial national lockdown. One of the outcomes was the need to provide laptops for staff should a requirement arise for them to work from home if an office had to be shut down. As a result, and with the relevant IT teams working together, almost half the staff had already been issued with the equipment before and there was already a programme in place to supply remaining staff with laptops before the pandemic peak hit the Country initially. ARP are now considering a longer-term series of projects in respect of what working arrangements for staff will look like as part of the 'new normal'. Staff have been consulted regarding the future and 75% would like to work more from home. ARP will be reviewing desk sharing and accommodation requirements, which could bring about further potential savings. Early indications are that people find the work/life home balance is better and where measurable, it has been found that productivity has been higher. (Link to objectives 5 and 6)
- 7.7 Members previously raised questions during the January 2020 Council meeting in relation to perceived performance issues within the partnership. ARP acknowledge that they had several vacant posts across the service, which was impacting performance in some areas. A successful recruitment exercise took place during the spring of 2020. All staff have been successfully inducted and trained electronically during the pandemic. In addition generic roles were created a year ago where colleagues are trained in benefits and council tax billing; this creates upskilling but also greater resilience and flexibility to deal with peaks and troughs of work. Feedback from staff is that they have welcomed that, and it has provided them with reassurance that as housing benefit claims reduced due to the onset of universal credit, there was no need for uncertainty in respect of their job security or the ability of the partnership to accommodate this change of focus. (Link to objectives 5 and 6)
- 7.6 Members of the review team noted that at one time Cambridgeshire County Council in addition to FDC provided funding in respect of Council tax debt recovery work as both organisations benefit from collecting any associated outstanding debts. Currently CCC do not fund debt recovery within Fenland which has impacted the approach to debt recovery in this area in spite of the fact that FDC do continue to fund this work. (Link to objectives 5 and 6)

8 Recommendations

The Review group recommend to the Overview and Scrutiny Panel the following;

That the Overview and Scrutiny panel encourage the relevant Portfolio Holder and officers to continue to encourage the County Council to provide funding for the Council Tax debt recovery work.

The group also recommend that when the Anglia Revenues Partnership is considered on an annual basis within the Overview and Scrutiny Panel that the Panel are provided with a broader context of the partnership to help inform their understanding and associated discussions.

Agenda Item No:	9	
Committee:	Overview and Scrutiny	
Date:	7 December 2020	
Report Title:	Anglian Revenues Partnership (ARP) Update	

1 Purpose / Summary

To update Overview and Scrutiny on performance of the Council's Revenues and Benefits service, since it became part of ARP on 1 April 2014.

2 Key issues

- At Council on 19 December 2013, Members endorsed the Council's approach to Service Transformation including the way forward in respect of Shared Services. This meeting approved that the Council's Revenues and Benefits service join ARP as of 1 April 2014.
- The Business Case for Fenland joining ARP, as previously advised to Council at its 19 December 2013 meeting generated savings to ARP of £272,000 per full year, of which Fenland receives £136,000 per full year over five years.
- In addition to the original savings detailed above the ARP have achieved efficiency targets of £531k in respect of 2017/18 rising to £1.017 Million for 2018/19. The table below shows that Fenland's contribution in 2020/21 is still lower than it was when joining the partnership in April 2014 and the draft budgets show this will continue into 2021/22.

ARP Partner Budgeted Contributions from 2014 to 2020							
By Partner	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
Breckland	1,960,573	1,909,805	1,930,732	1,864,022	1,822,280	1,843,132	1,960,626
East Suffolk	2,975,533	2,884,600	2,970,894	2,829,300	2,690,957	2,985,568	3,093,230
Fenland	1,306,332	1,172,954	1,203,425	1,171,988	1,120,962	1,235,370	1,255,238
East Cambs	1,143,817	1,113,589	1,129,429	1,062,654	1,043,406	1,056,788	1,121,411
West Suffolk	2,413,053	2,315,883	2,339,784	2,282,698	2,209,892	2,238,331	2,378,288
	9,799,308	9,396,831	9,574,263	9,210,662	8,887,497	9,359,189	9,808,793

- At Council on the 6 November 2014, Members approved the introduction of an in-house ARP Enforcement Agency Service (previously called Bailiffs). The service is being run by ARP to ensure that customers are treated fairly and are not overcharged fees.
- As full members of the ARP, the Council has joint control over its governance and direction, with a Member (the Deputy Leader) sitting on the Joint Committee together with Members from the other four main partner Councils.
- Joining ARP demonstrates the Council's open-minded approach to shared services. Discussions will continue in other areas where a robust business case can be developed which delivers savings and maintains a high quality service to residents and local businesses.

3 Recommendations

That Overview and Scrutiny are requested to:

- Note the attached report.

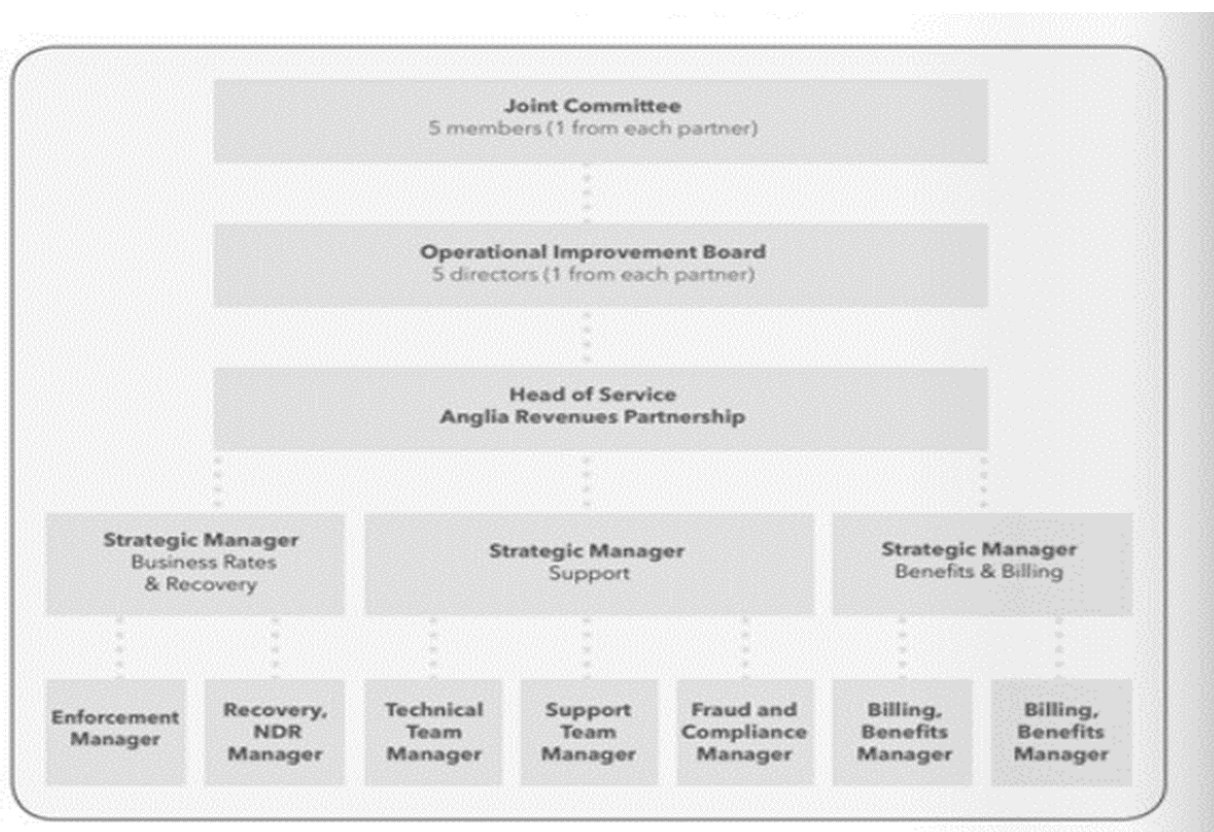
Wards Affected	All
Forward Plan Reference	N/A
Portfolio Holder	Councillor Chris Boden – Leader and Strategic Portfolio Holder Councillor Mrs Jan French – Deputy Leader and Operational Portfolio Holder
Report Originator(s)	Paul Corney, Head of Anglia Revenues Partnership Email: paul.corney@angliarevenues.gov.uk Tel: 01842 756437
Contact Officer(s)	Paul Corney, Head of Anglia Revenues Partnership Email: paul.corney@angliarevenues.gov.uk Tel: 01842 756437 Sam Anthony, Head of HR & OD Email: santhony@fenland.gov.uk Tel: 01354 622268 Peter Catchpole, Corporate Director Email: petercatchpole@fenland.gov.uk Tel: 01354 622201
Background Paper(s)	

1 Background

- 1.1 ARP is a shared Revenues and Benefits service that from April 2014 comprised five partner authorities (Breckland, East Cambs, Fenland, Forest Heath and St Edmundsbury). It also had a partnership working arrangement with Suffolk Coastal and Waveney District Councils. From April 2015 Waveney and Suffolk Coastal also became full members of the ARP.
- 1.2 In April 2019 Waveney and Suffolk Coastal merged to become East Suffolk Council and St. Edmundsbury and Forest Heath merged to become West Suffolk Council
- 1.3 The ARP has the 3rd largest caseload for Revenues and Benefits in England as shown below: -

	*Ctax properties	**Business rates	***Housing Benefit	Total
Birmingham	440,950	47,270	103,155	591,375
Leeds	352,370	29,380	60,410	442,160
ARP	338,560	28,440	50,364	417,364
Cornwall UA	270,090	31,550	37,601	339,241
Sheffield	247,440	18,880	45,763	312,083
Manchester	228,300	26,610	52,427	307,337
County Durham UA	244,120	15,490	42,719	302,329
Liverpool	227,240	18,790	53,156	299,186
* Source: Valuation Office Agency (20 Sept 2018)				
** Source: MCHLG Local Rating List (31 March 2018)				
*** Source: DWP Housing Benefit Caseload Statistics (14 August 2018)				

- 1.4 ARP operates a Joint Committee to facilitate the delivery of the Revenues and Benefits service for each of the five full member authorities of ARP, which is delegated through Section 101 (5) of the Local Government Act 1972 and regulations made under section 20 of the Local Government Act 2000. At its meeting on 27 February 2014, Council resolved to agree to the arrangement above.
- 1.5 The arrangements outlined in section 1.4 above mean that the Joint Committee is enabled by legislation to make decisions on behalf of all the Councils that are part of ARP with regards Revenues and Benefits service provision.
- 1.6 The Council is represented at Joint Committee by the Deputy Leader. The five members, one from each Council, who form the Joint Committee meet at Breckland House in Thetford four times annually (although more recently meetings have been held remotely). Meetings have been attended by Fenland Members quarterly since the 30 June 2014. The Leader noted the effective running of meetings and is confident that the Joint Committee allows Fenland's interests to be fully represented as part of ARP.



- 1.7 The shared service generates £680k of savings (and this assumes no inflationary increase since 2014/15 so the actual savings are far greater) to Fenland over five years by:
- Reductions in staff by sharing activities across Councils, by economies of scale.
 - Councils sharing contracts for certain services such as computer systems, print and post costs, etc. to reduce unit costs.
 - Additional savings as processes and functions merge between ARP partners.
 - Income generated from work that would not be in-house if we did not have the economies of scale we have (such as Further Recovery, Enforcement and Fraud work)
- 1.8 The ARP Enforcement Agency Service has been active since the end of July 2015 and over £18.4 Million has been collected in respect of Council Tax and Business Rates arrears, of which over £2.4 Million has been for Fenland. Performance has been monitored and compared with the performance when the service was provided externally. The in-house team has achieved a collection rate which compares favourably with external providers previously used by the Partnership.
- 1.9 The Enforcement team is working much more closely with the Council Tax teams than the external providers were able to. We are better able to respond in cases where vulnerable people are involved to help those people who are genuinely having difficulty in paying and where appropriate the team can withdraw statutory fees and extend recovery into a new financial year.
- 1.10 In 2017 South Norfolk District Council, and in 2019 Norwich City Council, delegated their Enforcement work to Breckland Council and so their cases are also dealt with through the ARP Enforcement team.

- 1.11 From late 2020/21 East and West Suffolk will also be passing cases for parking enforcement to the ARP enforcement team. This will increase the team's resilience and improve the collection of fines and fees.
- 1.12 The Enforcement Agency Service charges fees in respect of the cost of collection, in the past these fees were charged and retained by the external bailiff companies, for 2019/20 there was a net surplus of fees collected in comparison to the cost of the service of over £740,000 which will be shared by the partner councils of the ARP. Fenlands share of the surplus is estimated at over £80K. The 20/21 value will be seriously affected by Covid restrictions.
- 1.13 ARP represented the first major shared service initiative for the Council. Following a robust Business Case, it is delivering significant financial savings whilst at the same time maintaining the high standards of performance and customer service that underpin Council services.

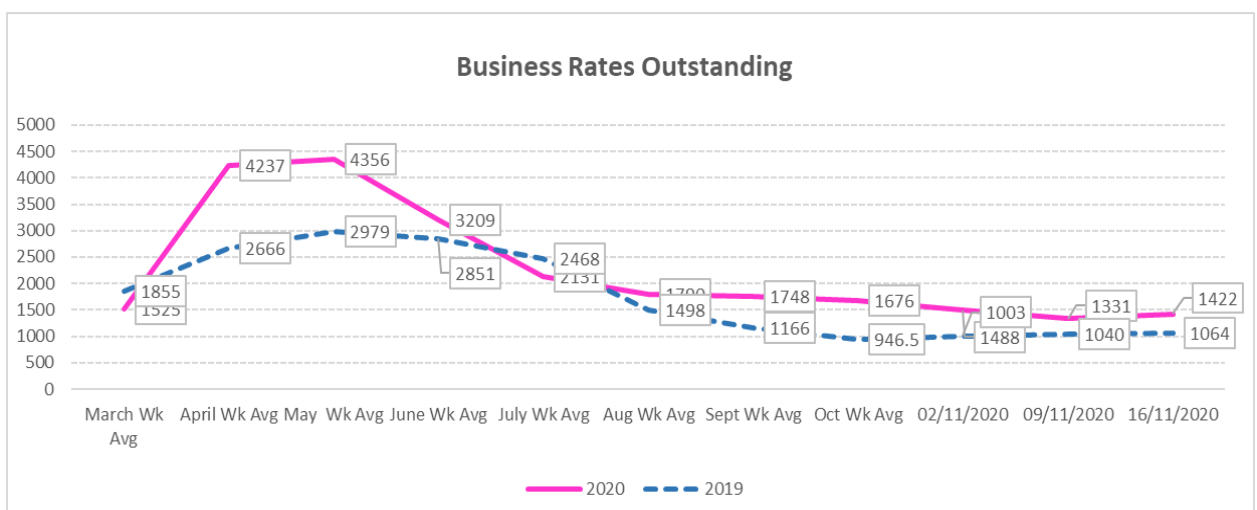
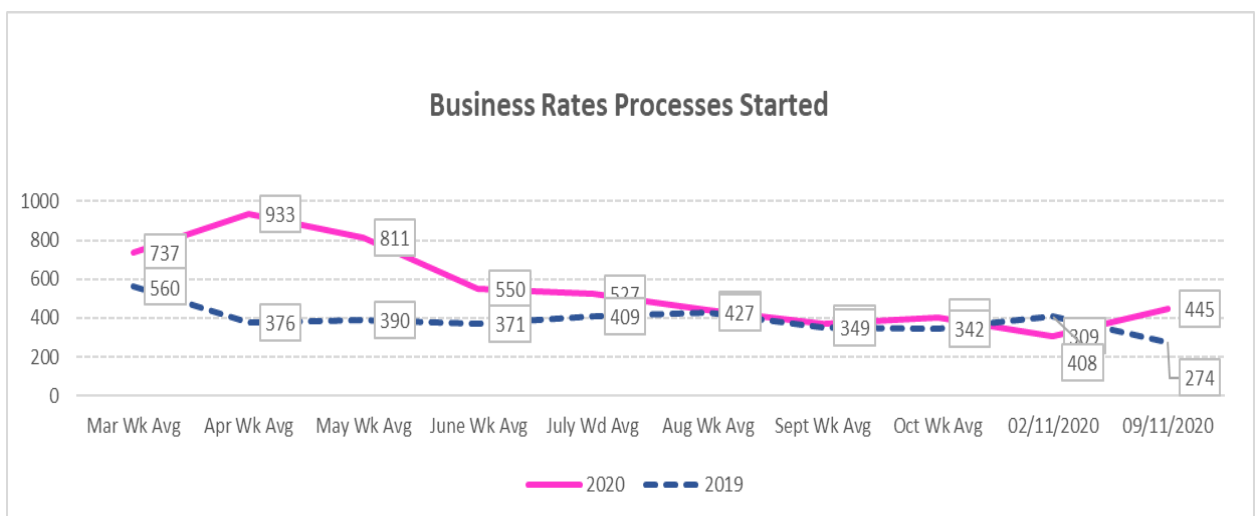
2 Revenues and Benefits performance and the response to Covid

2.1 Business Rates

- 2.2 2020/21 has so far seen an unprecedented increase in workload and calls. There has been an effective response from the ARP and all partners in paying grants whilst maintaining business as usual at the same time
- 2.3 At the budget in March, Government announced that it was going to expand the existing Retail Relief scheme by removing the Rateable Value limit for relief, increasing relief to 100% and including business involved in leisure and hospitality. This is to be fully funded by the Government. Later the Government announced that 100% rate relief would be provided to childcare nurseries.
- 2.4 Relief has been granted to 5,444 businesses across the partnership amounting to over £100M. In Fenland the figures are 553 and £8,776,015 respectively.
- 2.5 Government also announced that certain businesses would be entitled to grants. Funding was provided by Government to each authority to make these payments: -
- Businesses in receipt of Retail, Hospitality & Leisure (RHL) relief would be entitled to a grant of up to £25K, dependant of rateable value. Businesses whose rateable value was above £51K were not entitled to the grant.
 - Those businesses entitled to Small Business Rates Relief were also awarded grants of £10K

- Charities who would have been entitled to RHL grant had they not received charitable relief were added later.

- 2.6 All the above measures required a significant amount of resource to achieve. Accounts were reviewed for entitlement to relief and lists prepared of those entitled to grants. The Government issued updated guidance frequently which then had to be reflected in the accounts and qualifying grants lists.
- 2.7 The NNDR team worked closely with all partners to facilitate payment of the grants, dealing with numerous queries as they arose. The team received over 1700 queries for resolution over and above the incoming work described further on in this report.
- 2.8 The Government announced a discretionary grants scheme in May. Following guidance issued on 13 May, a new set of qualifying properties had to be identified and passed to each partner to help inform their schemes.
- 2.9 As a result of the new reliefs and grants for business rates payers there was significant increase to the number of phone calls and correspondence to The Business Rates team. At its peak up by 300% at the same point last year as demonstrated below: -



2.10 There have also been many other demands on our resource since March in order to communicate with and update customers, Government and the partner authorities. These include: -

- Updates to website
- Updates to recorded messages on the telephones (RAD messages)
- Amendments to templates which mention recovery action/costs
- Additional web forms published to allow ratepayers to request payment arrangements
- Provision of statistical data for comparison & monitoring of progress
- Regular review meetings with partner authorities for Grant application queries
- Daily monitoring of info from the Government
- Government returns
- New round of grants due to second lockdown

2.11 Business Rates Collection

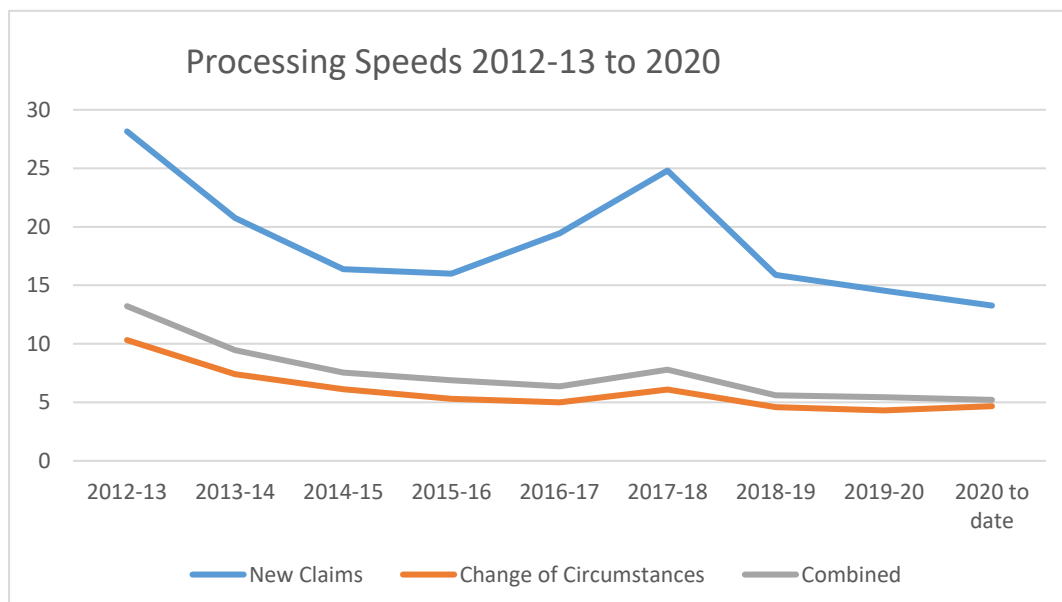
Magistrates Court Hearings for Liability Order applications have only just re-commenced which will impact on collection and recovery of both business rates and council tax this financial year. The first Court this year will be on 2 December 2020; the summonses were issued on 30 October 2020. Until we were able to re-commence formal recovery actions, accounts were reviewed regularly, and a series of statutory reminders and soft reminders were sent for outstanding instalments.

However, despite the restriction to recovery mentioned above, business rates collection is on target for the current financial year. Targets have been adjusted to reflect the 100% retail, leisure and hospitality relief awarded this year which is fully funded by The Government and has helped to maintain collection.

Target October 2020	Collected	Variance
£10,586,019	£11,279,721	+ £693,702

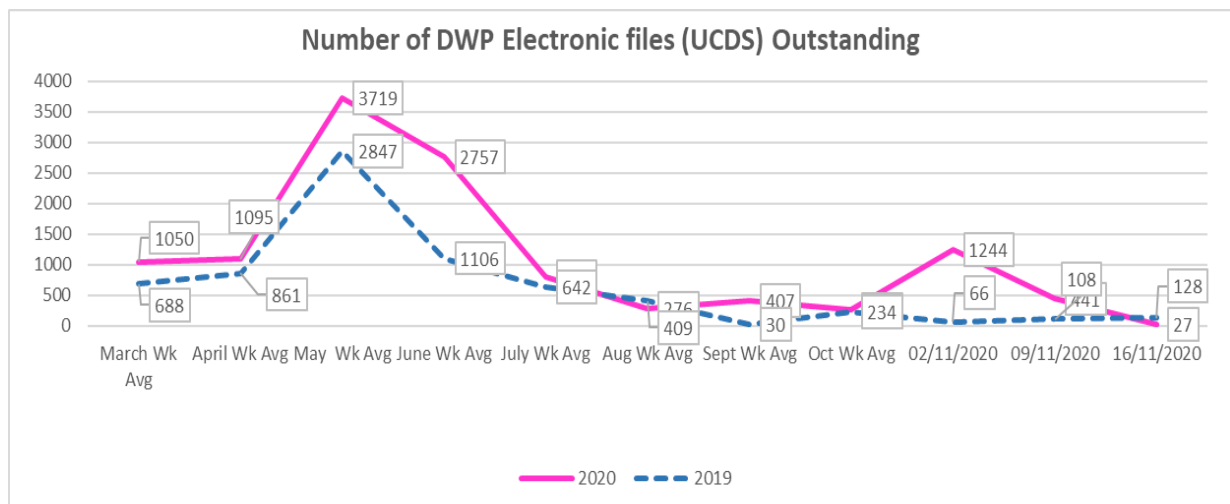
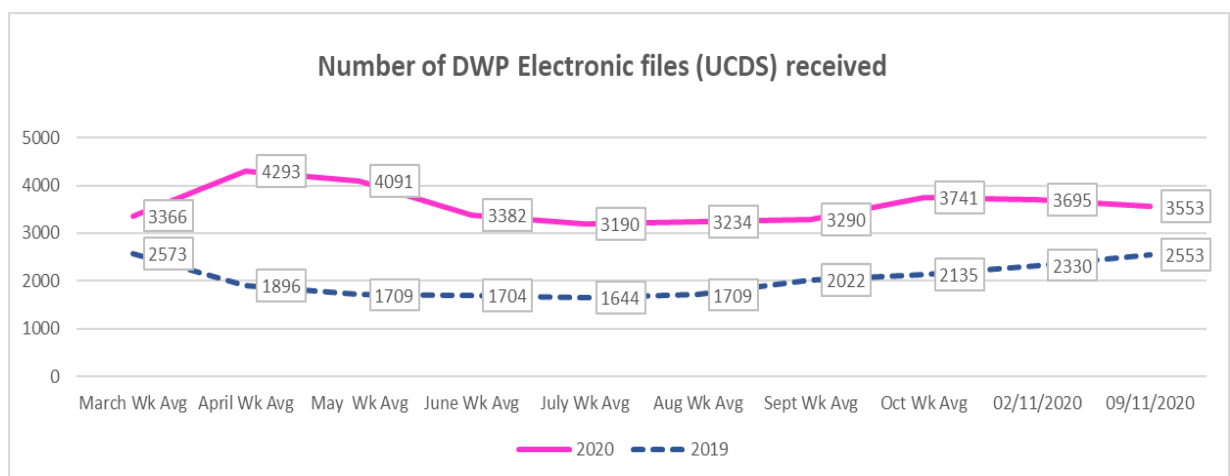
2.12 Billing and Benefits

Benefits performance continues to achieve agreed targets each year. In 2012/13 new claims were being processed in just under 30 days and change of circumstances in over 10 days. Performance this year is under 15 days for new claims and less than 5 days for change of circumstances. The chart below shows the performance since 2012/13: -



2.13 When the lockdown was implemented, we immediately saw an increase in new Universal Credit claims and monthly award revisions, peaking at a five-fold increase in new claims in mid-April compared to the same time last year. This has since settled to approximately double the volume we received last year.

2.14 Due to previous changes we had introduced to our Local Council Tax Support schemes, the impact on customers has been significantly reduced given we do not require customers to complete a separate application form to claim Support. Instead, we take DWP data to trigger a claim for Council Tax Support. It should be noted that most Councils still insist on an additional claim form, thereby placing unnecessary further burden on customers at these difficult times.



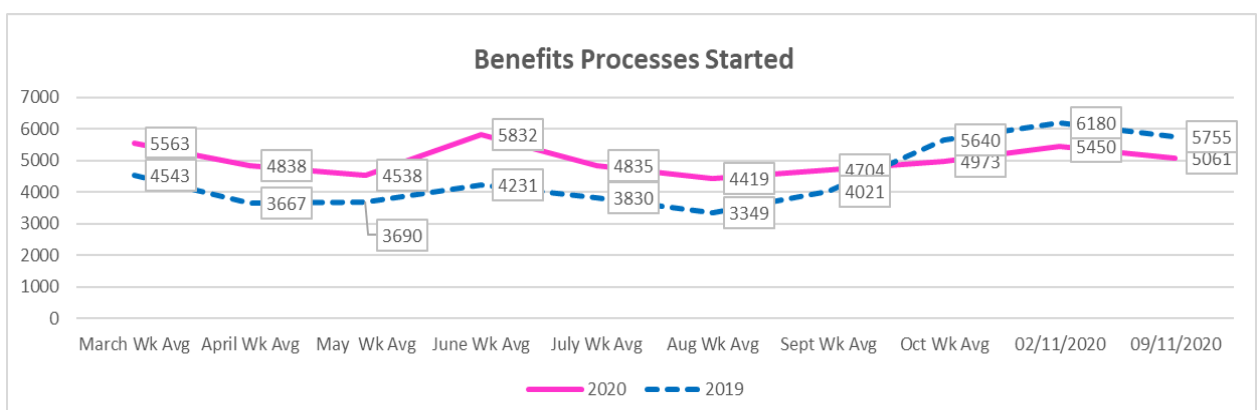
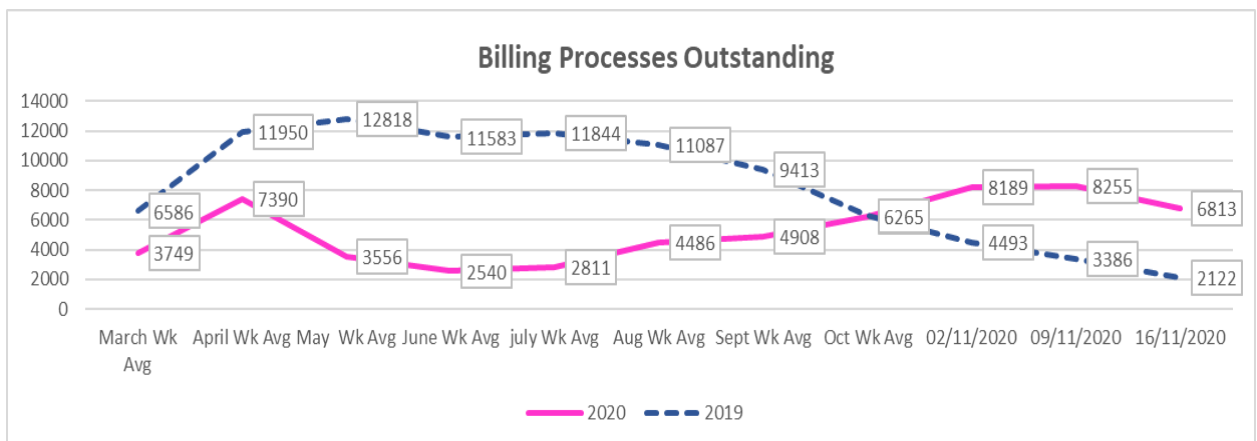
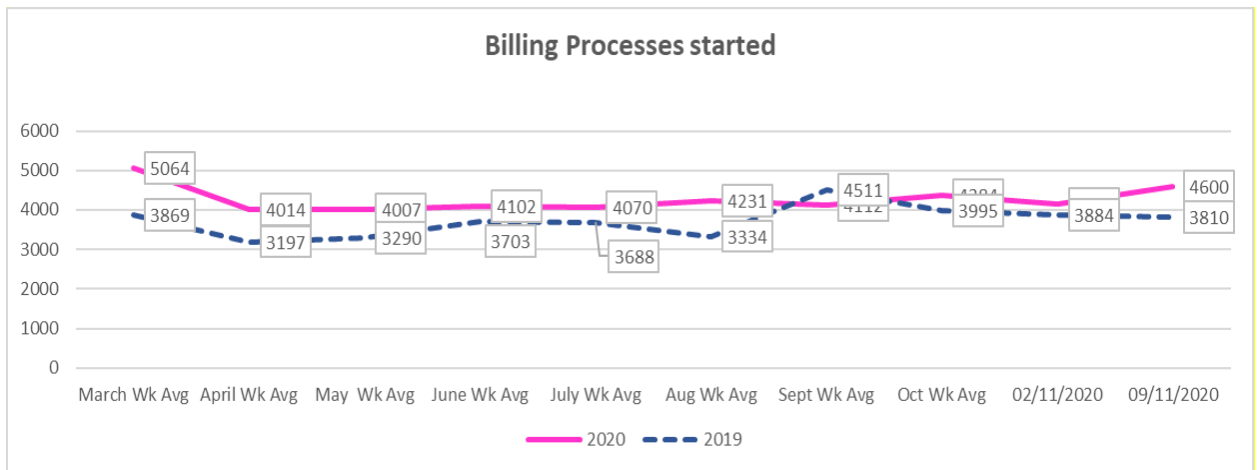
2.15 The impact of the increased UC change notifications has significantly reduced following the implementation of our project to automate these changes. We are presently automating approximately 55% and continue to work with our software supplier and the DWP to configure further functionality to increase automation opportunities. The DWP Housing Benefit speed of processing average for new claims in 2019/20 was 18 days.

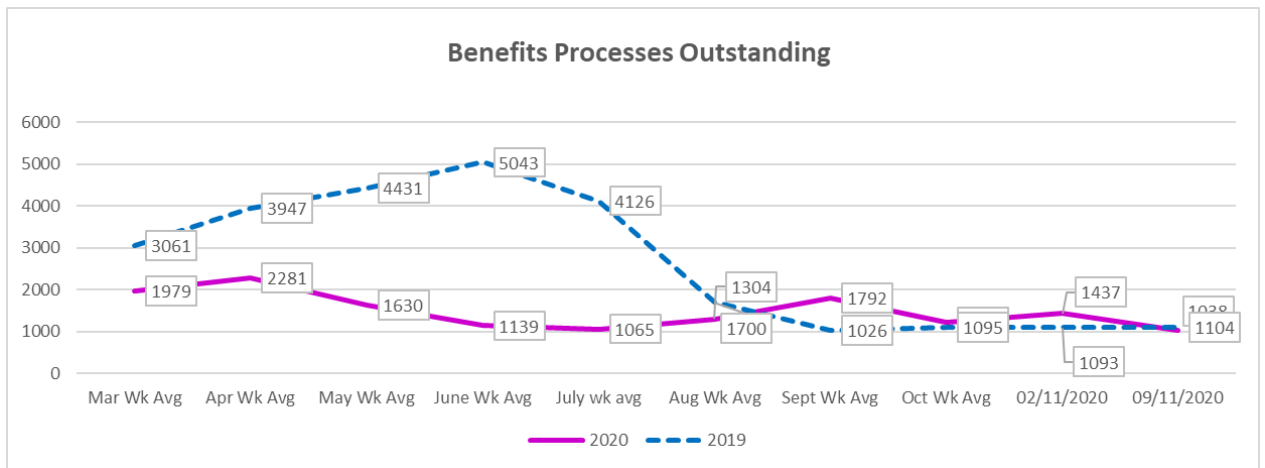
2.16 The further changes we introduced to this year's Local Council Tax Support scheme are working well, essentially the introduction of a tolerance rule to fluctuating earnings. This

results in reduced customer notifications and reduced requirement for us to frequently revise their instalment payments, thereby helping with their budgeting.

2.17 Whilst we have seen an increase in demand related to COVID-19, since March we have processed and cleared a greater volume of work, with less outstanding, when compared to last year.

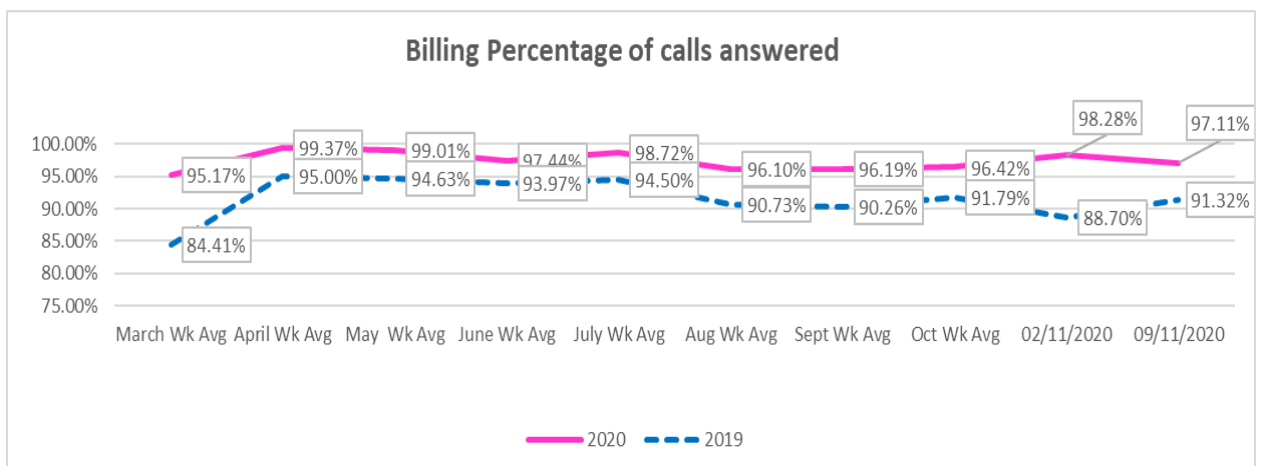
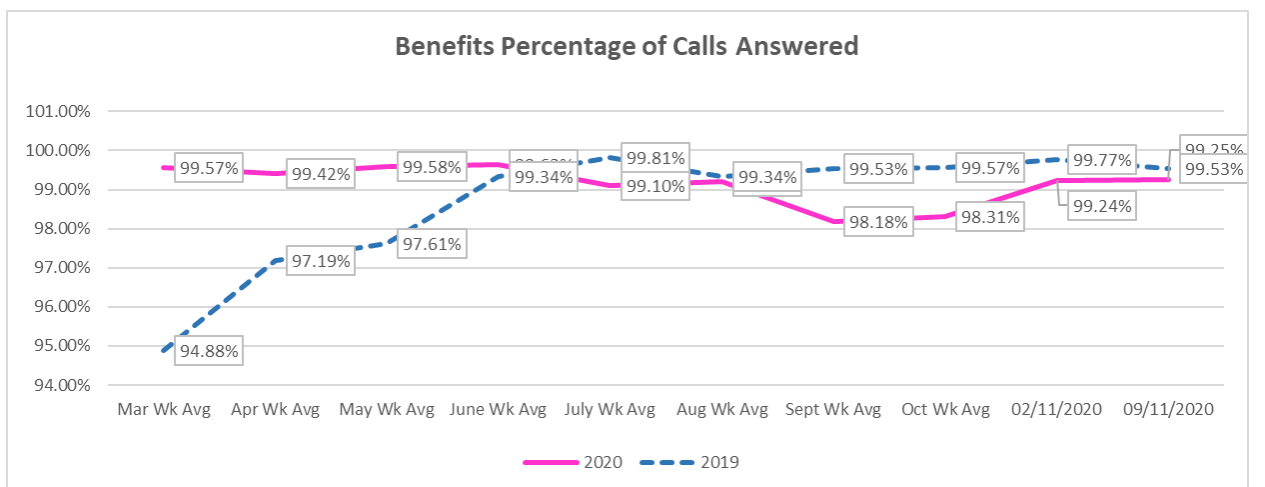
2.18 The following graphs show reductions in outstanding work when compared to last year. This is a direct result of the project we delivered last year where we introduced a new generic role to improve Council Tax Billing work, along with improved telephone call routing and handling





2.19 Without these improvements and given the increased demand caused by COVID-19, it is likely the overall picture would not be as strong for customers. Our agile approach along with performance management has been key to the improvement’s customers are seeing.

2.20 The improvement in work clearance and outstanding work has significantly reduced the volume of telephone calls we received this year when compared to last year, despite the increase in demand caused by COVID-19 and associated contact. The following graphs show reduced contact this year, assisted by improved call messaging and call routing along with shift to self-serve



- 2.21 Government launched the Test and Trace support payment scheme late September with a start date of 12th October. The scheme grants £500 to encourage people who have been in contact with someone who has tested positive for COVID-19 to self-isolate, providing they meet certain eligible criteria, are on a low income and cannot work from home.
- 2.22 In partnership with our partner customer service teams we were able to quickly design and implement a claim form and process in time for the scheme going live. We continue to participate in a high-level Department for Health & Social Care (DHSC) working group to iron out issues and to make improvements to the process, in particular as the scheme is proving administratively burdensome.
- 2.23 Whilst the main scheme is fully funded, the local discretionary scheme has fixed funding. We are monitoring claim volumes and values, highlighting the risk to funding given the number of people required to self-isolate exceeds initial DHSC projections. The scheme is currently set to run to 31st January 2021.
- 2.24 In October we signed up to a Government led initiative to reduce fraud and error in the benefits system. We receive monthly data lists to conduct customer reviews to ensure the right benefit. It should be noted this scheme is voluntary for Councils this year but will become mandatory for all Council next year and is funded by DWP New Burdens grant.

2.25 Council Tax Collection

- 2.26 Collection to the end of October is behind target by just over £1.1 million against the budgeted position. Targets have been adjusted to reflect the awards of Council Tax Support hardship fund grants, whilst the anticipated increase in claims and expenditure is forecast to further increase the deficit.
- 2.27 Forecasting the economic impact of COVID-19 in terms of increased claims and expenditure is difficult – DWP do not supply any intelligence concerning future forecasting. Because Covid restrictions earlier, we are seeing higher demand in the housing market we are currently seeing increased workloads as more people move to a new house.
- 2.28 On 24th March Government announced a £500m fund to assist Council Tax Support customers economically impacted by COVID-19, with the policy intention to award a credit up to £150 to all existing and new customers receiving support during this financial year.
- 2.29 ARP participated in HMCLG meetings to design the scope of the policy and to work through guidelines for Councils. Discussions also took place with our software supplier to design the system functionality to award the grant.
- 2.30 Modelling was undertaken to forecast options to spend the grant and to estimate the level of demand the grant could meet for each Council. Our estimates established limited capacity to cover the potential full extent of significant increases in unemployment caused by COVID-19 economic downturn.

- 2.31 We have shared our modelling forecasts with HMCLG and LGA to build a case to Treasury to commit to fully funding an award to every Council Tax Support recipient this year, given the caseload data HMCLG used as at October 2019 does not take into account increases in caseload attributed to COVID-19 economic impacts. At time of writing a response has not been forthcoming.

3 Other developments this year

- 3.1 The ARP have a programme of projects called the Customer Journey. The programme is made up of several projects designed to deliver digital solutions for customers to facilitate 24/7 services and automation, where possible, of back office processing
- 3.2 The Customer journey Programme looks to improve customers experience by using self-service and automation. In the first instance this makes services readily available to customers who can self-serve whilst, freeing resource to help those more vulnerable who need more assistance.
- 3.3 Some time ago a Customer Strategy Group was set up to discuss the relationship between front facing and back office functions, the group is made up of leading officers from each Council's Customer Team and leading officers from ARP. This group looks to make the process that we follow as efficient and effective as possible.
- 3.4 A gap analysis is taking place to identify what each Council wants to for customers and what is currently offered. Once complete the Customer Strategy Group will work to make the necessary changes and will develop performance measures to identify success in achieving the objectives agreed
- 3.5 Housing Benefit fraud transferred to the DWP on the 1 September 2015 for all partner Councils to become part of the DWP's Single Fraud Investigation Service (SFIS). ARP presented a business case to Joint Committee to fund a post within the Counter Fraud team to concentrate on other areas of fraud, retaining the skills of experienced investigators to maximise areas of fraud which affect the income of the Five partners and the three County Councils.
- 3.6 Despite the team only having been formed on 1 September 2015 they are consistently exceeding targets. Fenland and East Cambridge, together with all other Cambridgeshire local authorities are in advanced discussions with Cambridgeshire County Council regarding a Cambridgeshire Fraud Hub. The proposed model links to funding the review of Single Person Discounts at a local authority level, this project has been delayed by Covid but is making good progress.
- 3.7 The Fraud team have worked on tenancy fraud cases from April 2015, the National Audit Office state that the average saving from tenancy fraud to the public sector purse is £18,000 per case. The ARP continue to work with the annual NFI data extract to identify potentially fraudulent activity.

- 3.8 The table below shows the performance of the fraud team last year, The Single Person Discount fraud shows the amount saved from the date the discount is removed to the end of the financial year and assumes the saving will continue for a further year (as per National Fraud Initiative methodology): -

2019/2020	Overall fraud identified	Fenland Fraud Identified	Fenland preceptor
Single Person Discount	£1,868,895.16	£207,457.16	£35,661.88
Council Tax Support	£217,658.35	£19,631.33	£3,374.63
Tenancy Fraud	£108,000.00	£0	£0
Other Council Tax	£216,707.89	£41,095.05	£7,064.24
Other Business Rates	£259,812.33	£89,167.21	£35,666.88
Total identified	£2,671,073.72	£357,350.74	£90,684.36

This is the amount of income obtained by the Fraud team without the additional resource and work that will be carried out once funding is shared by Cambridgeshire County Council

3.9 Further recovery

In the absence of funding by Cambridgeshire County Council funding Fenland are now contributing to allow this work to continue. This year collection is less than in previous years due to Covid-19, however this work has now resumed and the results of collection this financial year to 31 October 2020 are shown in the table below with a comparison to 2019/20

	2019/20	October 2019	October 2020
Council Tax	£54,390.37	£33,564.46	£27,103.12
Business rates	£391,025.41	£182,381.37	£108,647.60
Total	£445,415.78	£215,945.83	£135,750.72

4 Future developments

- 4.1 Now that we have 5 partners in the ARP the Joint Committee have agreed that it is unlikely that we will agree to any further full members unless the benefits of doing so are significant. However, it is still the intention to look for future growth in other ways.
- 4.2 As previously mentioned, West Suffolk and East Suffolk will pass their parking enforcement work to ARP Enforcement and this will deliver additional income to the partners in 2021/22.
- 4.3 The great success of the Enforcement Agency has meant that, in addition to maintaining Council Tax and Business rates collection, the number of complaints has been low with only 2 complaints in the current financial year neither of which were justified nor concerning Enforcement Agent conduct. Body worn cameras mean that wherever

concern is raised with regards Enforcement Agent conduct managers can view the details of any conversations between enforcement agents and customers.

- 4.4 In the past private bailiff companies would carry out this work on our behalf for no charge. The companies made their profits from the statutory fees charged to debtors. Since the services were brought in house the enforcement team collect fees that lead to surpluses that go back to Councils to provide services for residents.
- 4.5 In 2016 South Norfolk District Council delegated their enforcement work to the ARP which added further resilience and efficiencies to the team.
- 4.6 Norwich City Council and the ARP entered a management sharing agreement from 01/04/2017 which reduces ARP costs by £80k per annum and Norwich also joined the ARP enforcement agency from July 2019. We have also secured funding from Norfolk County Council to enable us to undertake single person discount and LCTRS fraud work on behalf of Norwich City Council.
- 4.7 The Enforcement Agency is the likely area of further growth because the team are more responsive to customer needs and will make manageable arrangements for customers. In addition, the fees that are generated and collected provide a surplus that is retained by the Council Taxpayer.
- 4.8 The Fraud Hub in Cambridgeshire will offer opportunity to significantly increase the council tax base through identification of discounts and exemptions that have been erroneously claimed
- 4.9 The other major route to efficiencies and savings will come from online forms and back office automation. Through the Customer Strategy Group, we will seek to consolidate the use of online services we have seen during the pandemic. The use of online forms allows for data from the forms to be uploaded into the Capita system and from there to be processed through automation.
- 4.10 Automation and improved processes have already seen more than 4 posts saved in the establishment from 2021/22 and we anticipate far greater savings if customers transact through online forms going forward.

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	Via Zoom	Monday 8 June 2020	1.00pm	1.30pm
Thursday 7 July 2020	Monday 6 July 2020	2.00pm	Via Zoom	Monday 13 July 2020	1.00pm	1.30pm
Wednesday 26 August 2020	Tuesday 1 September 2020	2.00pm	Via Zoom	Monday 7 September 2020	1.00pm	1.30pm
Thursday 1 October 2020	Monday 5 October 2020	2.00pm	Via Zoom	Monday 12 October 2020	1.00pm	1.30pm
Thursday 29 October 2020	Tuesday 3 November 2020	2.00pm	Via Zoom	Monday 9 November 2020	1.00pm	1.30pm
Thursday 26 November 2020	Tuesday 1 December 2020	2.00pm	Via Zoom	Monday 7 December 2020	1.00pm	1.30pm
Wednesday 30 December 2020	Tuesday 5 January 2021	2.00pm	Via Zoom	Monday 11 January 2021	1.00pm	1.30pm
Thursday 28 January 2021	Monday 1 February 2021	2.00pm	Via Zoom	Monday 8 February 2021	1.00pm	1.30pm
Thursday 25 February 2021	Monday 1 March 2021	2.00pm	Via Zoom	Monday 8 March 2021	1.00pm	1.30pm
Thursday 6 May 2021	Monday 10 May 2021	2.00pm	Via Zoom	Monday 17 May 2021	1.00pm	1.30pm

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 Meeting	Draft Budget	Quality Organisation	Cabinet 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
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	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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