

CABINET

THURSDAY, 20 JANUARY 2022 - 4.00 PM



PRESENT: Councillor C Boden (Chairman), Councillor Mrs J French (Vice-Chairman), Councillor I Benney, Councillor Miss S Hoy, Councillor P Murphy, Councillor C Seaton and Councillor S Tierney

APOLOGIES: Councillor S Clark

CAB34/21 PREVIOUS MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held 8 December 2021 were agreed and signed.

CAB35/21 FREEDOM LEISURE JAN-MARCH

Members considered the Freedom Leisure - Covid-19 Impact and Fenland District Council Support Jan-March 2022 report presented by Councillor Boden on behalf of Councillor Clark.

Cabinet AGREED that:

- 1.1 Fenland District Council provides the Phase VII financial relief to Freedom Leisure set out in these recommendations and detailed in section 5 of the report.**
- 1.2 FDC defers the monthly management fee of £39,600 per month for January – March 2022, at an estimated cost to the Council of £118,800, repayable in accordance with the terms set out at paragraph 1.4 of these recommendations.**
- 1.3 FDC continues to support Freedom Leisure on an open book basis.**
- 1.4 Repayment of the £118,800 described in paragraph 1.2 of these recommendations shall become payable through an annual deduction of 75% of any profit generated in excess of the levels predicted in the LOBTA (Leisure Operators Base Trading Account). This is a change from the current 50/50 profit share and will be subject to the performance of the business over the contract period.**
- 1.5 The Monitoring Officer and s.151 Officer are authorised to put in place all necessary arrangements to give effect to the agreed recommendations to include entry into the necessary legal arrangements and expenditure of the amounts described from existing budget provisions.**

CAB36/21 MARCH HIGH STREET PROJECT UPDATE AND FUNDING REVIEW

Members considered the March High Street Project Update and Funding Review report presented by Councillor Seaton.

Councillor Mrs French asked Councillor Seaton when a decision is likely to be made on the planning application for Acre Road. She finds it disappointing that the applicant had not discussed this with Councillor Seaton before, as part of the land belongs to FDC and another to a third party.

She said we have been trying to talk to the applicant for over twenty years and it may have a knock-on effect on Acre Road. Councillor Seaton agreed and said he shared her frustration; he has received no date for when that application will come forward but will let everyone know when he finds out.

Cabinet AGREED to:

- 1. Note the positive progress of the project as detailed in the report.**
- 2. Authorise the Portfolio Holder for Social Mobility and Heritage to work with officers to enter into a memorandum of understanding with CCC to continue the collaborative partnership that already exists, taking the project through to its completion in 2023.**
- 3. Authorise the Portfolio Holder for Social Mobility and Heritage to work with officers to enter into an agreement with a CCC Joint Procurement Service Framework supplier to develop final designs and the open tender procurement package for the Broad Street public realm and Riverside workstreams, as approved by the Member Steering Group and Project Board.**
- 4. Authorise the Portfolio Holder for Social Mobility and Heritage to work with officers to expedite the most efficient way of procuring and entering into an agreement with a supplier to develop designs for the Market Place workstream as well as the construction of the final design, as approved by the Member Steering Group and Project Board.**

CAB37/21 AUTHORISATION TO DISPOSE OF PROPERTY BY AUCTION

Members considered the Authorisation to Dispose of Property by Auction report presented by Councillor Benney.

Councillor French asked Councillor Benney if he is aware that FDC rents the land on the site at Upwell Road to the dental surgery as they may like to buy it. Councillor Benney said he is aware they currently rent it as a car park and that they know we are looking to sell this land. If it does come up for sale, they will be contacted and will be given every opportunity to bid for it.

Cabinet considered the report and AGREED:

- 1.1 To approve the list of sites listed at Appendix 1 to the report as surplus and recommended for disposal.**
- 1.2 That authority to determine:**
 - a) The method and terms of sale either by way of auction, by openly marketed private treaty or by special purchaser private treaty and**
 - b) The reserve price at auction or acceptance of an offer pre or post auction the acceptance of an offer to purchase by private treaty**

is delegated to the Corporate Director and Chief Finance Officer in consultation with the Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Economic Growth in respect of properties where the likely and actual sale price exceeds the existing delegated authority of the aforementioned officers and members.

CAB38/21 FEES AND CHARGES

Members considered the Fees and Charges 2022/23 report presented by Councillor Boden.

Councillor Tierney referenced the proposed increase in Hackney Carriage/Private Hire Licence charges to include the recovery cost of new software. He said that if he was a driver and was told that fees are going up for new software, he may accept it because it will save money in the future, but will we see a lowering in costs in the future to reflect that? Councillor Boden thanked Councillor Tierney for the comment and said we must consider that point when setting the next budget. If less officer time is required for this matter because of the software purchase, then potentially we can look at less of an increase than otherwise for 2023/24.

Cabinet considered the recommendations of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel and AGREED to approve the Fees and Charges for 2022/23.

CAB39/21 COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT SCHEME

Members considered the Council Tax Support Scheme 2022/23 report presented by Councillor Boden.

Councillor Hoy asked how do we think that rates are going up given that the country's financial situation will become more difficult, causing more financial hardship and benefit claimants; will this have a massive impact or not? Councillor Boden responded that there was a lengthy discussion 12 months ago at the corresponding meeting of Cabinet and all that he said then turned out to be wrong. We underestimated the effectiveness of the furlough scheme and the way the country was going to bounce back after COVID-19. As a result, he is reluctant to give a forecast for the next year. Currently it is difficult to see how the labour market is going to easily satisfy the requirements that there are for the economy but there should not be a significant amount of additional pressure in terms of the numbers of benefit claimants, but we cannot be certain. However, we have carefully consulted with everyone, and we have not considered at this time that it is necessary to make any significant changes to the system.

Councillor Hoy said the report mentions about the shortfall last year being made up due to the change in the way we charged for council tax on empty homes. However, the Empty Homes Officer has been very proactive in bringing them back into use which means council tax on those properties reverts from the enhanced rate to the normal rate, therefore we will not have so much money coming in. Effectively this solves one problem in having less homes that are falling apart, but it creates another by creating a funding gap, so will this change much in the next year or two? Councillor Boden responded that although the report is factually correct, it can be argued we are not quite comparing like with like because there is no substantial correlation between the monies received by bringing empty homes back into use and the way the council tax support scheme works. Therefore, whilst he is not disputing the figures in the report, they are not entirely relevant.

Cabinet considered the report and consultation responses and AGREED to recommend to Council that the proposed changes detailed in Section 4 of this report be implemented in the Council Tax Support Scheme for 2022-23.

CAB40/21 DRAFT 6 MONTH CABINET FORWARD PLAN

Councillor Boden presented the Cabinet Forward Plan for information.