

AGENDA

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

MONDAY, 13 SEPTEMBER 2021

1.30 PM

**COUNCIL CHAMBER, FENLAND HALL,
COUNTY ROAD, MARCH PE15 8NQ**

Committee Officer: Niall Jackson
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- 1 To receive apologies for absence.
- 2 Previous Minutes. (Pages 3 - 8)

To confirm and sign the minutes of the meeting of 12 July 2021.
- 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 9 - 12)

Members to receive an update on the previous meeting's Action Plan.
- 6 Council Tax Support - 2022/23 scheme (Pages 13 - 24)

Each year the Council is required to review its Council Tax Support (CTS) Scheme. This report advises Overview and Scrutiny of the progress of the 2021 annual review and the proposals to amend the scheme for 2022-23.
- 7 Annual Ombudsman Letter and 3Cs process (Pages 25 - 38)

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

8 Future Work Programme (Pages 39 - 44)

To consider the Draft Work Programme for Overview & Scrutiny Panel 2021/22.

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

Friday, 3 September 2021

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

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL MONDAY, 12 JULY 2021 - 1.30 PM



PRESENT: Councillor D Mason, Councillor A Miscandlon, Councillor G Booth, Councillor M Cornwell, Councillor A Hay, Councillor Mrs K Mayor, Councillor M Purser, Councillor R Skoulding, Councillor R Wicks and Councillor F Yeulett

APOLOGIES: Councillor D Connor, Councillor S Count, Councillor M Humphrey and Councillor D Topgood

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE: Linda Albon (Member Services & Governance Officer), Peter Catchpole (Corporate Director and Chief Finance Officer), Anna Goodall (Head of Transformation, Customer Services & Democracy), Paul Medd (Chief Executive) and Carol Pilson (Corporate Director and Monitoring Officer)

OSC1/21 **APPOINTMENT OF CHAIRMAN FOR THE MUNICIPAL YEAR**

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

OSC2/21 **APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIRMAN FOR THE MUNICIPAL YEAR**

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

OSC3/21 **PREVIOUS MINUTES.**

The minutes of the meeting of 8 March 2021 were confirmed and signed subject to the following comments:

- Councillor Cornwell referred to the update on previous actions and said the panel had resolved to transfer to this list all unresolved items from a previous Anglian Water (AW) presentation and he asked if that had been done. Anna Goodall responded that AW have agreed to attend another O&S meeting as requested by members, and she is currently in discussions regarding a suitable date, when these items will be addressed. However, we are keen that some of those can be resolved before then and members will receive updates as soon as possible. Councillor Cornwell said members were concerned they were not getting updates from AW and did not want any item overlooked hence the request for items to be added to the action plan. Anna Goodall confirmed that she will ensure they are added to provide reassurance that these items will not be overlooked.
- Councillor Cornwell referred to item 14 in the minutes regarding the update on the CPCA Growth Service, which included a discussion around the Anglia University and skills etc. which he had found very interesting. The minutes suggested he was questioning why we do not have a marine centre in Wisbech, whereas he had in fact raised the point that the marine centres in Wisbech are currently underused. Suggestions had been made around trying to reintroduce skills such as boat maintenance. We have trawlers arriving from the eastern region for maintenance and the skills that are required come in with them and he was therefore trying to get that skillset requirement into the university. He is still waiting for a response from Councillor Benney in this matter and so would like this chased up.

- Councillor Cornwell also mentioned that under the Transformation and Communications Portfolio Holder update he had raised the possibility of having an opt-in mailing list for something like a regular newsletter for distribution. Councillor Tierney was going to look at that so he would also appreciate a chase up on this for a response.
- Councillor Booth referred to Councillor Cornwell's comments regarding AW. He said that many of the actions have been captured to some degree in item 6 of the actual action plan but there are still several items of which we are waiting for more technical information, such as the Friday Bridge pumping station. We were told there had been no plans to refurbish it in the next five years, but we are still suffering issues with the water pressure. He suggested we update item 6 on the actual plan and take it forward, but we need to keep it at the top of the agenda. Councillor Mason said we are endeavouring to bring a more engineering-based person from AW to a later meeting as mentioned by Anna Goodall in order to address those problems.
- Councillor Booth stated that in item 5 of the minutes, he had raised concerns regarding apprenticeships. The presentation had reiterated what the government schemes were, but he had asked specifically what the CPCA was doing about apprenticeships. Councillor Benney was going to provide some information about that, but he has not received this. However, he feels this is urgent given that the CPCA has now been running for four years and little action appears to have been taken in that area so he would appreciate action on that.
- Councillor Wicks referred to item 4 in the minutes regarding the CPCA Growth Update. He said that Mr Downton was going to come back to advise what is happening with a pool of business sites within our local area and would like an update.

OSC4/21 UPDATE ON PREVIOUS ACTIONS

Members considered the update on previous actions and made the following comments:

- Councillor Mason said that members had now received an update on young driver accident statistics as requested by Councillor Booth.
- Councillor Miscandlon said he would like to see these statistics broken down to show more detail, i.e., the number of accidents showing contributory factors such as where drink, drugs or speeding were involved and the number of no-fault accidents. Councillor Wicks asked if it was also possible to take into consideration when these accidents occurred, for example in the small hours, as tiredness could be a contributory factor.
- Councillor Booth said he had asked for the information because for several years Fenland was second or third in the number of highest fatalities in young drivers but one of the main reasons was because of crashes into dykes and ditches around the Fens. There have been many campaigns on these issues over the years.
- Councillor Miscandlon wondered how many of those accidents involved local drivers; it could be that some are new to the area and do not know our roads. He would like some form of monitoring on the decibel level of noisy exhaust systems. There is an antisocial behaviour issue with the revving of engines in particular; the police have told us they have the equipment to do this, and it has already been used in some areas.

OSC5/21 DRAFT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY ANNUAL REPORT 2020-2021

Member considered the draft Overview & Scrutiny Annual Report for 2020-21.

Councillor Mason thanked all members of the panel for their hard work over the last year under trying circumstances. Although technology is a wonderful thing, it is great to be meeting in person today. Regarding the report, he wanted to highlight the member-led review of the Anglia Revenue Partnership, with which he was particularly delighted; it was a very worthwhile exercise, and he stated his gratitude to Anna Goodall, officers and particularly Councillor Anne Hay for her Chairmanship of that review.

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

- Councillor Cornwell said the report is very comprehensive and reflects all that has been done.
- Councillor Boden thanked all members of the panel for their work over the last, difficult year. He finds the work done by O&S to be very constructive to ensure that the Council does things better and has its finger on the pulse. The panel also contributes to policy development and he welcomes all that was done last year and looks forward to the next.
- Councillor Booth stated that were several occasions during the year where the urgency decision making powers were utilised and he said the report does not capture that this was not a normal set of circumstances. Due to COVID-19, these issues had to be agreed rapidly; it is not usual to use these and in all the years he has been on panel, it is the only time O&S has had to use them. He thinks this comment should be captured within the report.
- Cllr Miscandlon said he endorsed the report but agreed with Councillor Booth's comment. The urgency decision making powers should be used sparingly and in these instances they were taken with great thought and under extreme circumstances.

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel AGREED to approve the annual report for forwarding to Council.

OSC6/21 COUNCIL RESPONSE TO COVID-19 - FUTURE IMPLICATIONS

Members considered the Council Response to COVID-19 – Future Implications Report.

Paul Medd confirmed the report had been circulated as a presentation in advance of the meeting and invited questions from the O&S Panel.

- Councillor Booth referred to the rollout of virtual council meetings and asked what the intention is going forward. Are we going to be a prudent authority and still have measures in place or go back to how things were? We need to lead by example.
- Councillor Boden responded that this was an appropriate question and he had been deeply disappointed that the opportunity to continue to have virtual meetings until such time we were all confident that it was safe to have unregulated meetings in person was not taken. He felt this to be a mistake by central Government, but we must abide by their decision and the legal situation. However, it is not a satisfactory position, and officers have been very careful to follow regulations. They have been able to find different locations to undertake larger meetings, but it has been very difficult. His understanding is that many of the legal restrictions will be lifted after 19 July. They may or may not relate to guidance about local government and their meetings in buildings, but our intention is to err on the side of caution whilst recognising the legal position.
- Paul Medd confirmed that we must undertake a pragmatic balance between meeting as normal but also seeking to uphold safety wherever possible. Any decisions will be kept under close review as we move forward.
- Councillor Yeulett asked about the work with the 57 rough sleepers as noted in the report. He asked if they have been embedded within society or as the pandemic becomes less severe will they return to homelessness going forward? He also asked what the plans are for the winter. Furthermore, has there been a surge in domestic violence within Fenland? Nationally people are talking about the effect on children, so do we have a handle on that? Also, what are the effects on our finances generally?
- Councillor Boden responded that there was great success 12 months ago in getting all rough sleepers off the streets, however that involves spending a lot of money which came from central Government. That funding is now not available so we cannot sustain this position. However, there are many initiatives to ensure that rough sleeping continues to be addressed; the problem generally is not one of housing but other issues. He cannot say how many of those 57 are still rough sleeping as he does not have access to their records.
- Councillor Boden confirmed that sadly there has been an increase in the nationwide reporting

of domestic violence. There has been some increase so far as requirements for intervention for children, but we have not seen an increase in the number projected. He is surprised that it has not been as great a problem with more prominence as he was expecting but he does not have the specific numbers in front of him. However, one case is one too many. We understand that there has been greater pressure upon many households over the last 15 months, and regrettably that pressure has resulted in violence. Even pre-COVID-19 the number of cases of domestic violence in Cambridgeshire and Fenland is appallingly high and grossly underreported

- Councillor Boden advised that in respect of the financial impact, we provide monthly reports to the HMCLG about the effect that COVID-19 has had. Those effects have been highly negative to us; however, they have largely been offset by funding available from HMCLG. He added that regarding winter plans, we have learned much in the last 15 months and we will use what we have learned to be more prepared in the future to act as quickly as possible within the confines of the law.
- Paul Medd added that financially the ongoing legacy issues around COVID-19 are not yet fully known but we will continue to monitor that position closely to be ahead of any financial challenges it might present. However, on a positive note, there are signs of recovery; society is starting to reopen. A good example of where we are seeing recovery in our income stream is in leisure. Positively, statistics from Freedom Leisure reflect that customers are returning to using the leisure centres. Generally, the pandemic came about when the Government were looking to review local government finance with fairer funding, business rates retention and the new homes bonus for example, so we continue to work with the Leader on being aware of and understanding any central government policy changes that will influence our budget and medium-term financial strategy. In respect of winter, he advised Councillor Yeulett that if there are any changes to central government policy, we will swiftly act upon those to ensure we are fully legally compliant. We will continue to support and work closely with partners to ensure the vaccination programme rollout because scientifically it has been proved to have a positive bearing and we do recognise there are certain residents or communities that are hesitant. We will continue to work with partner agencies to reach out to encourage as many of those as possible to engage with the process in the coming autumn and winter months. For office-based staff, we are looking at a future way of working for the Council and whether there is an opportunity to become more efficient by creating a form of agile working. Reviewing our accommodation needs is something we are looking at as a result and we will engage more broadly with members when it is appropriate to do so.
- Councillor Yeulett thanked both Councillor Boden and Paul Medd for their very comprehensive replies.
- Councillor Miscandlon thanked officers, the Corporate Management Team, Member Services, and all staff for their prompt reaction to Government legislation changes and their ability to adapt to that new legislation. He said they have done an excellent job and he applauded them. He added that some years ago, chaired by Councillor Hoy and in conjunction with Cambridgeshire County Council and Huntingdon District Council, FDC produced a report on domestic violence which at the time was applauded and presented to the then Home Secretary, Theresa May. He believes we should look at producing a further report with some of the other local councils as this is a problem faced nationwide to raise awareness with the public in the proper way.
- Councillor Booth referred to the issue of homelessness and Councillor Boden's comments. The local press were indicating that homeless numbers were on the increase again, particularly in Wisbech. The point had been made that sometimes simply housing people did not resolve the matter. He said that partly people become homeless because of a myriad of bureaucracy, paperwork and rules and regulations that get in the way of helping people out in the first place. A lot of this creates a barrier to putting people on the waiting list and getting them housed; we need to be more proactive in future regarding that. There are two sides to the story.
- Councillor Boden thanked Councillor Booth for his point. It was correct but there is a difference between rough sleeping and homelessness. FDC officers work very hard, and in his opinion go above and beyond, to ensure people do not get lost in the system or buried by the bureaucracy

that must exist to manage the process; they do this exceptionally well in respect of homelessness. However, there are very few cases where people end up rough sleeping because of bureaucracy and the system which exists. In many instances it is a lifestyle choice, but each case is individual; behind every rough sleeper there is a separate story.

- Carol Pilson added that we are also reliant on other organisations to help provide support to individuals, for example in mental health. Often providing a set of keys is not the answer, there must be a whole package of assistance in place. We also have different age ranges to consider. Furthermore, all agencies are facing budget constraints and the thresholds for support are getting higher in terms of access to services. We do have a close-knit partnership with many organisations, not all of them statutory, we are heavily reliant on the goodwill of the voluntary and community sector.
- Councillor Cornwell said the NHS is very important in this and they are in a very difficult position currently. He asked if we are still engaged with the NHS locally regarding the services they are engaged in and are we in a position to influence and increase the service provision in areas such as mental health?
- Councillor Boden responded that we liaise with others in a multidisciplinary way to address the problems that individual rough sleepers may have. However, as far as mental health is concerned, the Government recently introduced the concept of parity of esteem. Under that concept health bodies were meant to give equal weight to both physical and mental problems. He does not think the parity has yet been fully achieved. This is an NHS matter and is overseen by the County Council but the impression he has is that officers have found the multidisciplinary approach works, it has been possible to engage with relevant bodies within the NHS structures on that issue. However, this is not enough and unfortunately waiting lists have increased and the danger is that mental problems continue to be invisible and out of mind. He stated that Councillor Cornwell's comment was a good example of the O&S Panel being helpful in trying to influence policy agenda, for which he is grateful for the comment. He added that this was an opportune moment to thank the Chairman of O&S for the support and flexibility he has shown over the last 15 months in dealing with the four requests for urgent action that did not go through the normal process and needed his support. These requests were rightly questioned by the Panel and in response to Councillor Booth's earlier comment that it be noted this is not the usual way of doing things; these were exceptional circumstances that we all hope will never occur again, and we will do our best to ensure that no further such requests are made.
- Councillor Wicks said he has a meeting next week with an NHS mental health prescriber regarding an initiative that is being rolled out in the Whittlesey area to support ex-servicemen with mental health issues. He will engage with Fenland officers and will report progress back to the panel.
- Councillor Booth referred to the part of the report highlighting the number of requests to the community hub. The weekly update shows a reduction in requests to the hub so is this an appropriate time to end singling out these requests and incorporate them into general customer services call data. Councillor Boden said as much as he agreed, unfortunately we are facing an increase in transmission of infection rates and now is probably not the time to do this.
- Paul Medd added that many residents are still likely to face ongoing issues, for example with furlough coming to an end, therefore the community hub will continue to be a vital function for some time. As a council committed to supporting residents affected by the pandemic, it would be responsible and prudent to keep that dedicated community hub offer live for the foreseeable future.
- Councillor Booth agreed that under the circumstances it would be prudent for the hub to carry on. However, as a member of a community group, he cannot recall the last communication received from the hub so he would suggest that be looked at. Many people are setting up their own support network now and so, unlike a year ago, not necessarily in need of the community groups either, but we do need to think about whether we should re-engage with those groups again given the messages we are getting from Government.
- Paul Medd responded that it was accepted that communication and engagement are important. Councillor Booth's observation is correct that since the start of the pandemic the amount of community resilience has strengthened daily and is almost embedded in our communities, so

the number of calls has reduced. However, one of the roles of the hub seen throughout is one of signposting, therefore it is still a useful point of contact.

Councillor Mason thanked the Leader and officers for their presentation. He also echoed Councillor Miscandlon's earlier comments; he would like to thank and congratulate every officer and member of staff in producing services to a very high standard in such challenging circumstances.

Paul Medd said part of the effectiveness of this Council's response is the support received from all members, who, rightly so, have been appropriately challenging where necessary and equally the exceptional support received from the Leader in such extreme times. It truly defines effective one team working. Councillor Mason thanked Paul Medd.

OSC7/21 FUTURE WORK PROGRAMME

Members considered the Future Work Programme.

- Councillor Mason said there has been concern in the past about the performance of Clarion and therefore the panel would like to bring forward the item on Clarion from March 2022 to December 2021; particularly with winter coming up.
- Councillor Booth endorsed Councillor Mason's comment, particularly in response to feedback from residents. He also asked if the number of items covered at each panel meeting could be spread more evenly throughout the year, with no more than three main topics at each meeting. He suggested the Planned Shared Service Review be moved from September, which has four substantive items, to the October meeting, which currently only has one substantive item. He also suggested the Culture Strategy item be moved to the December meeting.
- Anna Goodall confirmed that residents from Clarion have confirmed they will attend the December meeting.
- Councillor Boden said he noted the council tax support scheme had been deferred from today's meeting to September. He asked for this item not to be deferred beyond July in future as the timetable, if there is to be significant change, requires a period of consultation and the decision must be made in December before being brought about in April. Anna Goodall replied that she could reassure members after discussion with Peter Catchpole that if we deferred the item to September, it would still allow time to consult on minor changes.

2.47 pm

Chairman

Agenda Item 5

| ACTION MEETING DATE MINUTE NUMBER | | UPDATE | TIMESCALE |
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| ACTION 1 08/06/2020 OSC43/19 | <p>Cllr Booth would like county council to state what rates they will charge pre-schools (this should have been an action recorded under OSC38/19, item 21).</p> | <p>Response from Sector Development and Funding Manager, Early Years' Service, Cambs County Council</p> <p>Cambridgeshire County Council wrote recently to a range of early years and childcare providers occupying buildings on school sites as part of its ongoing work to achieve consistent occupancy arrangements.</p> <p>The ongoing work looks at whether market rents are affordable for Early Years settings or not and then proceeds to adjust the rent downwardly if there is lack of affordability that would threaten the sustainability of the provision.</p> <p>This activity supports the Council's responsibilities for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintaining and developing the local economy for the benefit of all; • Obtaining best value in respect of all its financial dealings, including those in its role of being a landlord; and, • Maintaining its assets in order to protect their value over time. <p>This process has been extended to address the impact of the Coronavirus on early years provision, looking at rent deferment and rent holiday options. Both options were presented in the letter.</p> <p>These measures are designed to make occupancy easier for early years and childcare providers, with more consistent, realistic and affordable property charges. Providers will be asked for certain information relating to their business in order to access the remedial measures on offer. This again is in the interests of consistency and fairness. There is no intention to increase rents in any of this activity.</p> | <p>Cllr Booth requested a watching brief on this item and that it stay on the Action Plan</p> |
| ACTION 2 08/06/20 OSC44/19 | <p>Cllr Booth requested further information on what the police will be doing to enhance their enforcement role in relation to speeding</p> | <p>Response from Neighbourhood Inspector Ian Lombardo</p> <p>The team have been working on a bid for exhaust noise reading equipment and I'm pleased to say this has been successful and the kit has been ordered.</p> <p>A constant complaint is the drivers with loud exhausts driving at speed through the towns and villages and until now we didn't have a calibrated bit of equipment to register the level of</p> | <p>Cllr Booth requested a watching brief on this item and for it to stay on the Action Plan</p> <p>**see update</p> |

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| | prevention. | <p>excessive noise coming from these vehicles and therefore found it difficult to prosecute. It links in with the speeding aspect as the loud racing sound of the exhaust encourages the driver to driver faster. A day of action will be taking place in the near future.</p> <p>Norfolk have had this kit for a couple of years and have been extremely positive about it. It's especially useful at car cruises as it's a nice and simple way to break them up as the drivers don't want to get fined and as it's a calibrated machine, they can't argue with it at court. Local officers continue to target road related offences including speeding during their routine patrols.</p> <p>We regularly update the community about action that is taken regarding these matters via our social media pages and monthly councillor reports.</p> <p>The teams will and do undertake dedicated speed enforcement when other priorities allow and support local communities to set up their own speed watch schemes. We continue to look for new ways to work with our partners to ensure that the roads in the fenland area are as safe as possible. Work is developing to set up an email address for the Police neighbourhood teams dedicated to Local Councillors and partners to feed in concerns such as hot spots for speeding which the team can then respond to.</p> | <i>on noisy exhausts below</i> |
| ACTION 3 08/03/21 OSC45/20 | Councillor Connor asked when the infrastructure at Doddington is going to be updated and what will happen with future planning applications and how additional surface water will be dealt with | <p>Anglian Water is not a statutory consultee to planning applications. However, we actively engage in the planning process by responding to major developments of 10 or more dwellings or 0.5 ha and over for employment use. We will assess the impact of a development on existing Anglian Water assets and the foul and surface water network at the time of the planning application. In some cases, we may recommend a foul or surface water condition. This condition will ensure the applicant engages with us, giving us an understanding of build rates and phasing. We will work with the developer to ensure a sustainable drainage strategy is prepared that mitigates any risk of flooding or pollution and protects our existing and future customers.</p> <p>I can confirm that we have commented as follows on recent planning applications in Doddington.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planning Ref: F/YR18/3135/COND west of 17-37 Wood Street. We responded regarding conditions 7, 10 and | Anglian Water attending October meeting to provide more technical detailed response to outstanding queries |

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| | | <p>12 (surface water and foul water strategy). We recommended discharge of the foul water strategy with a connection to manhole 1902 at 7.5l/s. This is an acceptable strategy, and the local network has capacity to receive these flows. To slow down the flows before it reached manhole 1902 the developer is laying a section of gravity sewer prior to connecting. The developer did engage with us on the strategy. The surface water condition is not relevant to us as the strategy does not impact Anglian Water assets.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Planning Ref: F/YR19/1001/0 Land South of 63-77 Newgate Street. We assessed this application and can confirm that there is capacity within the local network to receive the additional flows. We note this is currently pending a decision. <p>Historically Doddington Water Recycling Centre (sewage works) had issues meeting the dry weather flow permit (the flow we are permitted to treat and return to the environment during normal operating parameters), we have recently had a new permit for this site (issued by the Environment Agency) which mean the site can now accept more flow.</p> | |
| ACTION 4 | Councillor Connor asked what is being done regarding movement of affluent from Doddington and Wimblington to March due to lack of local capacity. | The sites Councillor Connor is referring to are sewage pumping stations. We sometimes may have to tanker these stations to protect and minimise any impact on residents, either in the event of a pump failure or significant surface water flows infiltrating the network. The effluent must be taken to our Water Recycling Centre at March because there is no physical ability to do so safely at the Doddington site. This is not a routine occurrence and not due to lack of capacity in the foul network. | Anglian Water attending October meeting to provide more technical detailed response to outstanding queries |
| ACTION 5 12/07/21 OSC3/21 | Cllr Cornwell requested an update on skillset requirement suggestion for Anglia University | Awaiting a response from Cllr Benney | Outstanding |
| ACTION 6 12/07/213 OSC3/21 | Cllr Cornwell would like a response to his suggestion for an opt-in mailing list/newsletter for | Awaiting a response from Cllr Tierney | Outstanding |

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| | residents | | |
| ACTION 7 12/07/21 OSC4/21 | Cllr Miscandlon asked for breakdown of accident statistics concerning young drivers | Matt Staton of CCC Road Safety Partnership forwarded breakdown of statistics originally provided in response to Cllr Booth's request. Circulated 03/09/21 | COMPLETE |
| ACTION 8 12/07/21 OSC4/21 | **Cllr Miscandlon asked for update on noisy vehicle exhaust action | Alan Boughen of FDC Community Safety Partnership forwarded response as approved by Sergeant of local policing team Circulated 03/09/21 | COMPLETE |

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| Agenda Item No: | 6 |  |
| Committee: | Overview and Scrutiny Panel | |
| Date: | 13 September 2021 | |
| Report Title: | Council Tax Support – 2022/23 scheme | |

1 Purpose / Summary

Each year the Council is required to review its Council Tax Support (CTS) Scheme. This report advises Overview and Scrutiny of the progress of the 2021 annual review and the proposals to amend the scheme for 2022-23.

2 Key issues

- We are now in the ninth year of CTS; a locally set scheme that replaced the nationally set Council Tax Benefits (CTB) scheme from April 2013.
- In 2013-14 we were able to take advantage of a one-off Government grant that compensated in part for the reduction in Government funding that year. This meant that the maximum CTS awarded was the amount calculated, less 8.5% (Pensioners are protected by legislation and receive up to 100% CTS).
- In 2014-15, we initially proposed this reduction be increased to 20%. However a reduction in demand meant that we were able to revise this reduction to 14%.
- For 2015-16 and 2016-17 we kept the same scheme as 2014-15, except that allowances and premiums (the amounts of income from state-administered benefits such as Jobseekers' Allowance) were increased in line with other benefits such as Housing Benefit. This means that customers have a higher income before losing CTS.
- For the 2017-18 scheme, as part of the Council's Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR1), we consulted customers on a proposal to increase the CTS reduction for working age customers from 14% to 20% starting from 1 April 2017. Based upon feedback from customers and the potential impact on collection rates, Overview and Scrutiny members at their meeting on 28 November 2016, recommended to Cabinet and Council that the 14% reduction level be maintained. This recommendation was subsequently approved and the scheme contribution rate remained unchanged.
- For the 2018-19 scheme we consulted on a proposal to harmonise the scheme to DWP welfare reforms introduced for Housing Benefit and CTS for Pensioners, and introducing closer links to Universal Credit data share

for claims, thereby removing the stipulation to make a separate claim. This was subsequently approved and introduced.

- For 2019-20 we kept the same scheme as for 2018-19.
- For 2020-21 the only change was to introduce a fluctuating earnings rule to the treatment of Universal Credit. A weekly tolerance level of £15 (£65 monthly) was introduced to reduce the administrative burden of reassessing customers CTS every time a revised Universal Credit notification is received.
- For 2021-22 the minimum contribution percentage for working age claimants was increased from 14% to 20% and no other changes were made to the scheme.
- Councils are required to consider whether to review their LCTRS schemes annually. Where it is determined to retain the existing scheme this must be decided by 11 March of the preceding year.
- Where Councils seek to amend their scheme it will be necessary to consult preceptors and stakeholders prior to a wider consultation to inform a final scheme design by 28 February of the preceding year.
- The current Fenland CTS scheme provides a maximum benefit of 80% for working age claimants and our scheme also fully protects War Pensioners. The aim in designing the scheme was to achieve a balance in charging an amount of Council Tax to encourage customers back into work whilst setting the amount charged at an affordable and recoverable level.
- The impact of COVID-19 on working age claims has been significant during 2020-21 and is expected to continue to increase throughout 2021. To assist working age CTS claimants, the government announced the £500m COVID-19 Hardship Fund at the Budget on 11 March 2020. This Council's allocation was £907,222. This funding provided all recipients of working age local council tax support during the financial year 2020-21 with a further reduction in their annual council tax bill of up to £150, using their discretionary powers to reduce the liability of council taxpayers outside of their formal CTS scheme design.
- In 2020-21, £871,414 of the Hardship Fund was utilised with the remainder (£35,808) being carried forward into 2021-22 to provide Exceptional Hardship relief.
- For 2021-22, the government has provided a one-off grant to authorities in recognition of the anticipated additional cost of providing CTS, at a time when more households are likely to be facing financial difficulties as a result of the pandemic. The grant is for local authorities to keep and the funding is unringfenced. This Council's grant is £194,254 and the major preceptors (County, Police and Fire) have received their grants directly.

- It is too early to fully understand the impact of the 2021-22 increase to 20% in contribution rate on collection and recovery and given the extent of the impact of COVID-19 and the uncertainty regarding the numbers and cost of the current and future CTS, it is proposed that the current 20% contribution rate remains unchanged for the 2022-23 scheme.
- Four options for changes to the current scheme are presented for consideration, all of which will assist streamlining the process and improving the customer journey:
 - (i) to reduce the capital threshold to £10,000 and abolish tariff income;
 - (ii) to introduce a fixed rate deduction of £7.40 for non-passported non-dependents;
 - (iii) to streamline the claim process and
 - (iv) to increase the tolerance for Universal Credit data re-assessments.

3 Recommendations

The Panel is requested to:

- Review the CTS scheme for 2022-23 as outlined in this report and make recommendations to Cabinet of their preferred options.

| | |
|-------------------------------|---|
| Wards Affected | All |
| Forward Plan Reference | This item is included in the Forward Plan |
| Portfolio Holder(s) | Cllr Chris Boden, Leader & Portfolio Holder, Finance Cllr Mrs Jan French, Deputy Leader |
| Report Originator(s) | Sam Anthony, Head of HR & OD Mark Saunders, Chief Accountant |
| Contact Officer(s) | Peter Catchpole, Corporate Director and Chief Finance Officer; Sam Anthony, Head of HR & OD Mark Saunders, Chief Accountant |
| Background Paper(s) | None |

Report:

1 Introduction

- 1.1 Before April 2013, Council Tax Benefit (CTB) was a nationally controlled scheme administered by District and Unitary Councils that give reductions from Council Tax to people on low incomes according to set criteria specified by regulations. The maximum reduction was 100% of a person's Council Tax bill.
- 1.2 The costs of CTB were fully reimbursed to the Council by the DWP, so that if demand rose or fell, the Council did not bear the costs of these changes.
- 1.3 CTB was localised and replaced by CTS in April 2013. At the same time, Government funding was reduced and CTS was localised, coming under the control of District and Unitary Councils. Whilst pensioners were protected and regulations specified that they must still receive up to 100% CTS, this protection did not apply to working age people.
- 1.4 Unlike CTB, the costs of CTS are borne by Councils. Funding is given by the Government within the overall finance settlement, but this has reduced significantly over the years so that Councils bear the costs of an increase in demand but gain from reduced demand.
- 1.5 The implementation of CTS left Fenland with a funding gap, that potentially saw working age customers only being entitled to 80% CTS. However, Members considered the options available to help increase CTS and were able to implement a scheme in 2013-14 that saw working age customers be entitled to up to 91.5% of CTS; in two ways.
- 1.6 Members primarily met the funding shortfall by revising Council Tax exemptions on empty properties, permitted by regulations that changed in 2013. This meant that the Council would no longer give a Council Tax reduction for most empty domestic properties.
- 1.7 The funding shortfall was further closed by a one-off transitional Government grant that applied in 2013-14 only.
- 1.8 In 2014-15 this grant was not available. With demand for CTS not growing as much as was predicted for 2013-14, Members were able to revise the CTS scheme to feature a reduction of 14% CTS for working age customers.
- 1.9 Councils are required to review the operation of their CTS schemes annually. They are required to make any revisions no later than 28 February in the financial year preceding that for which the scheme will be revised (i.e. 28 February 2022 for the scheme relating to the 2022-23 financial year).
- 1.10 Further annual reviews determined that the CTS reduction remained at 14% since 2015-16, with further links to Welfare Reform and Universal Credit introduced for 2018-19. That scheme was retained for 2019-20.
- 1.11 For 2020-21 the only change was to introduce a fluctuating earnings rule to the treatment of Universal Credit (UC). A weekly tolerance level of £15 (£65 monthly) was introduced to minimise the number of reassessments imposed by monthly changes in a customer's UC payment. This was intended to reduce customer reassessments by a third and continues to work well.

- 1.12 For 2021-22 the only change was to increase the percentage for the minimum contribution rate from a baseline of 14% to 20%. It is too early to report the impact this has had on collection and recovery and it will take several months before we start to understand this. Many customers still have arrears from last year following the impact of COVID-19 and the suspension in recovery action throughout the year which could impact on their ability to pay this year.
- 1.13 We are now reviewing our CTS scheme for the 2022-23 financial year.

2 The 2021 review

- 2.1 Councils are required to review operation of their CTS schemes each year. Where a change is proposed, we are required to undertake customer consultation; the results of which assist in the final decision made by the Council regarding the CTS scheme next year.
- 2.2 Members will be aware that this Council is one of five partners forming the Anglia Revenues Partnership (ARP). The other four Councils are Breckland, East Cambridgeshire, West Suffolk (formerly Forest Heath and St. Edmundsbury) and East Suffolk (formerly Waveney and Suffolk Coastal). These Councils have maintained the contribution rate in their schemes at 8.5% since 2013. They are not proposing any changes to this rate for 2022-23.
- 2.3 Currently, apart from a different contribution rate, all other aspects of the CTS scheme are consistent across all of the ARP partners. This aids the efficient administration of the schemes across the partnership. This does not however preclude any of the partners amending their scheme independently of the others.
- 2.4 All partner authorities are currently considering the options to change the scheme for 2022-23 as detailed in Section 4 below.
- 2.5 Since 2018 the scheme has been harmonised to DWP welfare reforms introduced for Housing Benefit and CTS for Pensioners and introduced closer links to Universal Credit data share to claims, most notably removing the default stipulation for customers to make a separate claim to the Council. This has been of particular help to all the new customers impacted by Covid-19 needing to make a Universal Credit claim but not needing to make a further claim to the Council for Council Tax Support.
- 2.6 Since April 2020 we have strengthened our use of DWP Universal Credit data share links to further assist customers.
- 2.7 Both these initiatives continue to work well for customers, with other Councils either now introducing these changes or looking to do so.

3 The impact of CTS to date

3.1 CTS with its associated gap between Council Tax payable and the maximum help working age people can receive has been in operation now for eight full years and we are in the ninth year of operation.

3.2 The table below shows how the amount of CTS awarded and numbers of customers claiming it have changed since CTS was introduced in 2013:-

| CTS cases and amount awarded | | | |
|------------------------------|----------------|--------------------|------------------|
| Date | CTS awarded | Working age claims | Pensioner claims |
| 31/3/13 (CTB) | £8.16m | 4,682 | 4,727 |
| 31/3/14 | £7.89m | 4,755 | 4,667 |
| 31/3/15 | £7.45m | 4,620 | 4,431 |
| 31/3/16 | £7.21m | 4,450 | 4,202 |
| 31/3/17 | £7.02m | 4,228 | 3,998 |
| 31/3/18 | £6.91m | 4,189 | 3,827 |
| 31/3/19 | £6.98m | 4,227 | 3,629 |
| 31/3/20 | £7.39m | 4,244 | 3,472 |
| 31/3/21 | £8.65m | 4,823 | 3,334 |
| Covid-19 Hardship Fund | <u>-£0.87m</u> | | |
| Net Cost of CTS | 7.78m | | |
| Change 2013 to 2021 | - £0.38m | 141 | - 1,393 |
| | -4.66% | 3.01% | -29.47% |

3.3 The annual amount of CTS awarded since 2013 to the end of March 2021 has reduced as a result of both the increase in contribution rate to 14% in 2014-15 and a significant reduction in Pensioner claims. There was, however a significant increase in the number of working age claims during 2020-21 due to the impact of Covid-19.

CTS Current Position

3.4 Since March 2021, we have seen a reduction of 4.42% in the number of working age CTS claims as at the end of July 2021.

3.5 Figures for the amount of CTS awarded and numbers of customers claiming it at the end of July 2021 compared with March 2021 are detailed in the table below:

| CTS cases and amount awarded : March – July 2021 | | | |
|--|-------------------|--------------------|------------------|
| Date | CTS awarded | Working age claims | Pensioner claims |
| 31/3/21 | £7.78m | 4,823 | 3,334 |
| 31/7/21 | £7.49m | 4,610 | 3,298 |
| Change March to July 2021 | -£0.29m -3.73% | -213 -4.42% | -36 -1.08% |

- 3.6 Total CTS awarded has reduced over the first four months of 2021-22 due to a reduction in working age claims and the increase in contribution rate to 20%.
- 3.7 With the Government's Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme ceasing on 30 September 2021, there is potential for unquantifiable increases in Universal Credit claims, thereby increasing CTS claims.
- 3.8 Whilst we anticipate caseload will increase, it is too early to predict with any accuracy what the full impact will be for this year and the knock-on effect on next year.

Government Funding 2021-22

- 3.9 For 2021-22, the government has provided a one-off grant to authorities in recognition of the anticipated additional cost of providing CTS, at a time when more households are likely to be facing financial difficulties as a result of the pandemic. The grant is for local authorities to keep and the funding is unringfenced. This Council's grant is £194,254 and the major preceptors (County, Police and Fire) have received their grants directly.

Impact of changes affecting amounts paid by recipients

- 3.10 Members are reminded of the potential impact resulting from any changes to the scheme which affects the amounts paid by recipients (eg. contribution rate). Any savings/additional cost would be shared between the major preceptors in proportion to their Council Tax requirements in the Collection Fund. The proportions based on 2021/22 Council Tax, is detailed in the table below. This shows that any changes (to the contribution rate for example) would generate significantly more savings/more cost to the County Council, as they receives a much higher proportion of Council Tax receipts overall.

| How Council Tax allocated is split | |
|--|-------|
| Authority | % |
| Cambridgeshire County Council | 68.97 |
| Cambridgeshire Fire Authority | 3.62 |
| Cambridgeshire Police & Crime Commissioner | 12.20 |
| Fenland District Council | 15.20 |

- 3.11 This contrast's to the financial impact of any changes to Peterborough City Council's CTS scheme (whose current contribution rate is 32%) which is significantly different to this Council. Peterborough as a Unitary Council receives the majority of any savings realised from any changes, around 82%, whereas this Council only benefits from around 15% of any changes.
- 3.12 Increasing the rate of contribution for working age customers also increases the potential for additional arrears and subsequent recovery action. Additional bad debts provision would be required for non-payment and to help maintain expected collection levels, extra resources would be required to undertake recovery work in respect of additional arrears that would accrue from working age customers having payment difficulties as a result of the proposed changes. This would significantly reduce the benefits to this Council of increasing the contribution rate, as we are responsible for collecting Council Tax and administering CTS. The net benefit could be reduced by up to 50%.

4 Options to consider - improving the customer journey

OPTION 1 - Reduce the capital threshold from £16,000 to £10,000 and abolish tariff income

- 4.1 This option would result in:
- A simplified scheme reducing the burden on customer and evidence requirements;
 - Reduced number of claim adjustments as there would be no requirement to notify changes in capital of £250 or more;
 - More streamlined customer experience and reduced processing times for universal credit claims as tariff income details are not provided in DWP claim records;
 - Targeting help to those most in need as those with less capital will receive increased awards and those who no longer qualify will have more than £10,000 capital.
- 4.2 A by-product of implementing this change would be that our options to automate and provide decisions to customers in one day would be extended to those with Capital over £6,000 as the need to manually calculate tariff income would be removed.
- 4.3 This option focuses on improved customer journey and although indicating some savings it is likely to be relatively cost neutral to the Collection Fund as detailed in the table below:

| Option | Saving | Gains | Reductions |
|---|--------|-------|------------|
| Capital upper threshold £10,000 with no tariff income | £7,492 | 11 | 11 |

NB: Tariff income is the notional income used to take into account capital for means-tested benefits such as CTS. Currently, any capital below £6,000 is completely ignored. For any capital between £6,000 and £16,000 (the current upper limit), tariff income applies at a rate of £1.00 per week for every £250 (or part of £250) of capital. For claimants with capital of £6,000.01 their benefit would be reduced by £1.00 per week and for those with capital of £16,000, their benefit would be reduced by £40.00 per week.

OPTION 2 – Introduce a fixed rate non-dependant deduction

- 4.4 This option would result in:
- A simplified scheme reducing burden on customer and evidence requirements.
 - Reduced number of claim adjustments as there would be no requirement to notify changes in non-dependant income. This is something the customer is not always aware of or able to obtain verification of themselves.
 - The functionality to verify and receive automatic income updates from DWP and HMRC does not extend to non-dependants meaning verification is always a manual process and the onus is solely on the customer to identify and report changes for their adult household members.
 - More streamlined customer experience and reduced processing times for Universal Credit claims as DWP do not gather details of non-dependant's income and the responsibility on the Local Authority to obtain this missing information delays claim processing.
 - Delays in and failure to provide non-dependant income details results in incorrect CTRS awards, payment failure and Council Tax arrears.
- 4.5 A by-product of implementing this change would be that our options to automate and provide decisions to customers in one day would be extended to those with non-dependants as the need to request follow up details would be removed.
- 4.6 Any customers who are entitled to a severe disability premium within their Council Tax Support assessment will continue to be exempt from non-dependant deductions.
- 4.7 It is recommended that a safety net is provided for customers who will lose out initially by offering an Exceptional Hardship award to help bridge the gap.
- 4.8 This option focusses on an improved customer journey and reduction in administration resource and although indicating some savings the proposed deduction rates have been modelled to provide a relatively cost neutral option as detailed in the table below:

| Options | Saving | Gains | Reductions |
|---|---------|-------|------------|
| Fixed non-dep deduction £5.30 for all non-deps | £14,555 | 103 | 250 |
| Fixed non-dep deduction to £7.40 for those not passported | £4,324 | 99 | 58 |

NB: The first option is to apply one fixed rate deduction of £5.30 for all non-dependants including those on passported benefit and the second option is to apply a fixed rate deduction of £7.40 for non-dependants but retain a £0.00 deduction for non-dependants in receipt of passported benefits.

OPTION 3 – Streamlining the claim process

- 4.9 Currently anyone who claims Universal Credit (UC) is signposted to the Local Authority to make a separate application for CTRS. However, our scheme allows us to treat the DWP notification of UC outcome as a claim in its own right and the Local Authority, therefore, often receive duplicate claims.

- 4.10 Making the claim process more streamlined by restricting use of our direct claim route to those already in receipt of UC or a legacy benefit and signposting everyone else to make a claim for UC if they haven't already done so, thereby, not accepting a duplicate direct claim with the LA would have the following impact:
- More streamlined customer journey by preventing duplication of claims.
 - Reduce burden on customer to provide evidence through making a non-UC claim.
 - Removes requirement for both DWP and Local Authority to verify income details.
 - Maximises income by signposting customers to claim Universal Credit.
 - Reduces administration resource requirements.
- 4.11 A by-product of implementing this change would be that our opportunity to automate DWP first payment files would increase if more claims came through this verified route in the first instance rather than via our online claim form.
- 4.12 Reporting has indicated that for this financial year to date only 3 customers have applied directly to the Local Authority without being in receipt of a legacy benefit or UC or making a fresh claim for UC at the same time. Implementing this change would signpost all 3 to claim directly with the DWP, resulting in 2 of them being entitled to UC and CTRS and 1 not being entitled to UC but still being entitled to CTRS. Therefore, 66% of the few people we would signpost to claim UC as they haven't already done so, would be better off as a result and we would no longer receive duplicate claims for those who have already claimed UC.
- 4.13 This option focusses on improved customer journey and reduction in administration resource and there are no financial implications.

OPTION 4 – increase tolerance for Universal Credit data re-assessments

- 4.14 In April 2020 a tolerance of £65 per month was introduced which meant that income changes of less than £15 per week were no longer re-assessed for UC customers.
- 4.15 Universal Credit (UC) is designed to be paid monthly, calculated on the customer's circumstances, including Real Time Information (RTI) earnings data from HM Revenue and Customs. Given customers' circumstances, especially earnings, fluctuate, this leads to monthly revised UC awards sent to the Council by the DWP.
- 4.16 Due to the tolerance rule, customers have seen a reduction by one third in Council Tax adjustment notifications, and a reduction in direct debit amendments and the need to request a refund. This has provided greater certainty to customers to enable them to manage their payments and household budgets.
- 4.17 The introduction of a fluctuating earnings rules last year has been particularly beneficial given the significant increase in the COVID-19 workload for Anglia Revenues Partnership, which peaked at a 500 per cent increase compared to the same point last year, before reducing to 200 per cent and now starting to return to normal levels.

- 4.18 By increasing the tolerance rule from £65 per month to £100 per month a further 16% of re-assessments would be avoided, providing customers with more consistent payments, fewer adjustments and improved financial certainty. By retaining the discretion to review exceptional cases we will be able to override the rule in the case of a single beneficial change being reported. However, we are yet to see a case where discretion has been needed with the current £65 tolerance as most cases have monthly fluctuations reported which evens out any impact of applying the tolerance over the course of a year.

5 Recommendation

- 5.1 It is recommended that the Panel consider implementation of the following options:
- Reduce the capital threshold to £10,000 and abolish tariff income.
 - Introduce a fixed rate deduction of £7.40 for non-passported non-dependants.
 - Streamline the claim process.
 - Increase tolerance for Universal Credit data re-assessments.
- 5.2 These options are being proposed in order to improve the customer journey and reduce customer contact and the burden of evidence requirement.


6 Consultation about our proposals

- 6.1 If there are no changes proposed to the CTS scheme for 2022-23, there will be no requirement for any customer consultation.
- 6.2 Should the Panel approve the recommended changes detailed in Section 4 and 5 above, then a consultation exercise will be required with preceptors and stakeholders. A consultation period of six weeks is considered proportionate for the changes proposed.
- 6.3 Consequently, any consultation exercise would need to meet the statutory timescales for Council to approve its' CTS scheme for 2022-23 as detailed in 1.9 above.

7 Next steps

- 7.1 This report has given the Panel an update on progress of the annual review of the Council's CTS scheme, with options to improve the customer journey and reduce customer contact and the burden of evidence requirement.
- 7.2 The recommendations from this Panel will be reported to Cabinet at their meeting on 16 September 2021. If Cabinet approve any changes that require consultation, it is anticipated that this consultation will occur over a six week period beginning mid/late-October 2021.
- 7.3 The final proposals, would then be recommended to Council at their meeting on 20 January 2022.

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| Agenda Item No: | 7 |  |
| Committee: | Overview and Scrutiny | |
| Date: | 13 September 2021 | |
| Report Title: | Annual Ombudsman Letter and 3Cs process | |

1 Purpose / Summary

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

2 Key issues:

- On an annual basis the Ombudsman forwards to the Council a summary of complaints received from members of the public. This is also copied to the Chairman of Overview and Scrutiny.
- The LGO investigated 11 complaints relating to Fenland District Council during 2020/21. Anyone can refer a complaint to the LGO as long as they have been through the Council's 3C's process. No complaints were upheld. In 2019/20 we had 0 upheld decisions.
- In 2020/21, 3Cs received 600 pieces of contact. 224 were complaints; a 21% decrease from 2019/20. 82 pieces of correspondence (4% more than in 2019/20) and 294 compliments (5% more than in 2019/20) were received. Overall, contact through 3Cs was down by 7% compared to the previous year.

3 Recommendations

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

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

| | |
|----------------------------|--|
| Contact Officer(s) | Peter Catchpole - Corporate Director Anna Goodall – Head of Transformation, Customer Services and Democracy agoodall@fenland.gov.uk David Wright – Head of Policy & Communications |
| Background Paper(s) | LGO Annual Report 2019/20 https://www.lgo.org.uk/information-centre/reports/annual-review-reports/local-government-complaint-reviews |

An overview of the Council's 3Cs process

1. Our 3Cs process

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

1.2 Customers can contact the 3Cs team by:

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

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

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

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

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

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

- 1.5 The table below provides a comparison of contact between 2020/21 and 2019/20:

| | 2019/20 | 2020/21 | Variance |
|----------------|------------|------------|------------|
| Compliments | 280 | 294 | +5% |
| Correspondence | 79 | 82 | +4% |
| Complaints | 284 | 224 | -21% |
| TOTAL | 643 | 600 | -7% |

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

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

2. The Local Government Ombudsman (LGO)

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

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

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

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

2.9 Between April 2020 and March 2021, the LGO made 11 decisions relating to services provided by Fenland District Council. The table below shows the complaints that the LGO made a decision on in 2020/21:

| Service | Decision made | Decision |
|----------------------------|----------------|------------------------------------|
| Benefits & Tax | September 2020 | Not Upheld |
| Corporate & Other Services | April 2020 | Closed after initial enquiries |
| Planning & Development | April 2020 | Closed after initial enquiries |
| Highways & Transport | April 2020 | Closed after initial enquiries |
| Benefits & Tax | August 2020 | Closed after initial enquiries |
| Benefits & Tax | August 2020 | Closed after initial enquiries |
| Planning & Development | February 2021 | Not Upheld |
| Planning & Development | September 2020 | Referred back for local resolution |
| Benefits & Tax | December 2020 | Advice given |
| Housing | January 2021 | Referred back for local resolution |
| Planning & Development | March 2021 | Referred back for local resolution |

2.10 Between April 2020 and March 2021 we had no LGO complaints upheld.

Annual Report April 2020 – March 2021



Compliments, Correspondence and Complaints (3Cs)



Why we produce this report

We are proud to publicise our Compliments, Correspondence and Complaints (3Cs) Annual report to the public, to ensure that our customers can see how we are performing and the level of service they can expect if they do contact us. We want to encourage our customers to give feedback, which we use to monitor and improve the services provided. Our 3Cs process monitors the number of Compliments, Correspondence and Complaints we receive and the time it takes for us to reply to those enquiries. This helps us to understand the levels of enquiries we receive, whether we are providing a timely service and if we are getting it right first time. Monitoring this information allows us to identify trends and adapt our service to the needs of our customers, which enables us to provide an efficient service.

Compliments

During 2020/21 the Council received 294 compliments from members of the public. The number of compliments received during 2020/21 reflects our commitment to provide services that our customers want and our efforts to provide excellent customer service and go that extra mile.

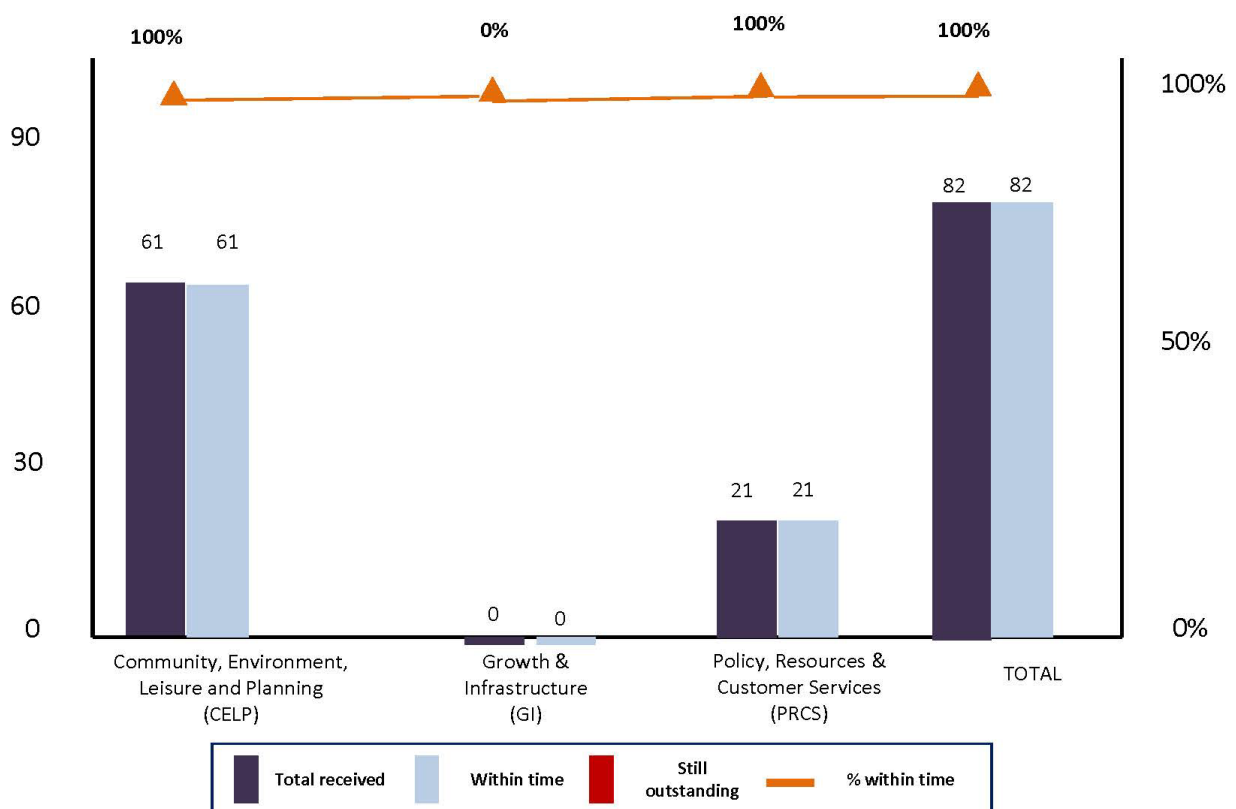
All compliments received are shared with staff and are used to help us understand what our customers perceive our strengths are as a Council. This helps us to continue to do more of what we are good at and exceed our customers' expectations.

Correspondence

During 2020/21, 3Cs set a target for the Council to respond to 90% of all customers Correspondence within 10 working days. We felt that if we achieved this target we would be providing excellent customer service. During 2020/21, the Council replied to 100% of correspondence within 10 working days as detailed in the tables below.

The data collected has provided us with valuable information on which services our customers contact most frequently and the reasons for this contact. This data is used by each team to review the information that is available for customers to access themselves at our Customer Service Shops, Leisure and Business Centre's in addition to our Website and Social Media sites. Further detail and information is also available via our telephone contact centre. This proactive approach has reduced the number of written enquiries coming in.

Correspondence Received April 2020 – Mar 2021

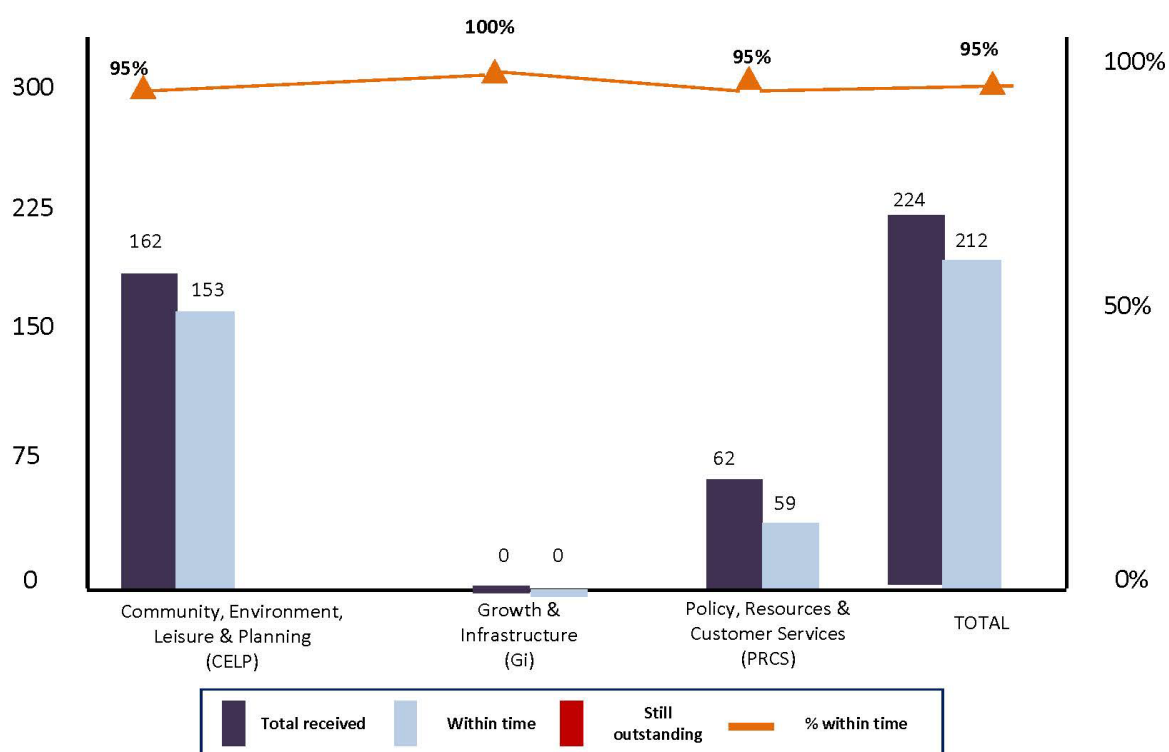


Complaints

During 2020/21, the Council received 224 complaints. Our 3Cs complaints process has three stages in total. The Council aims to fully resolve issues at Stage one.

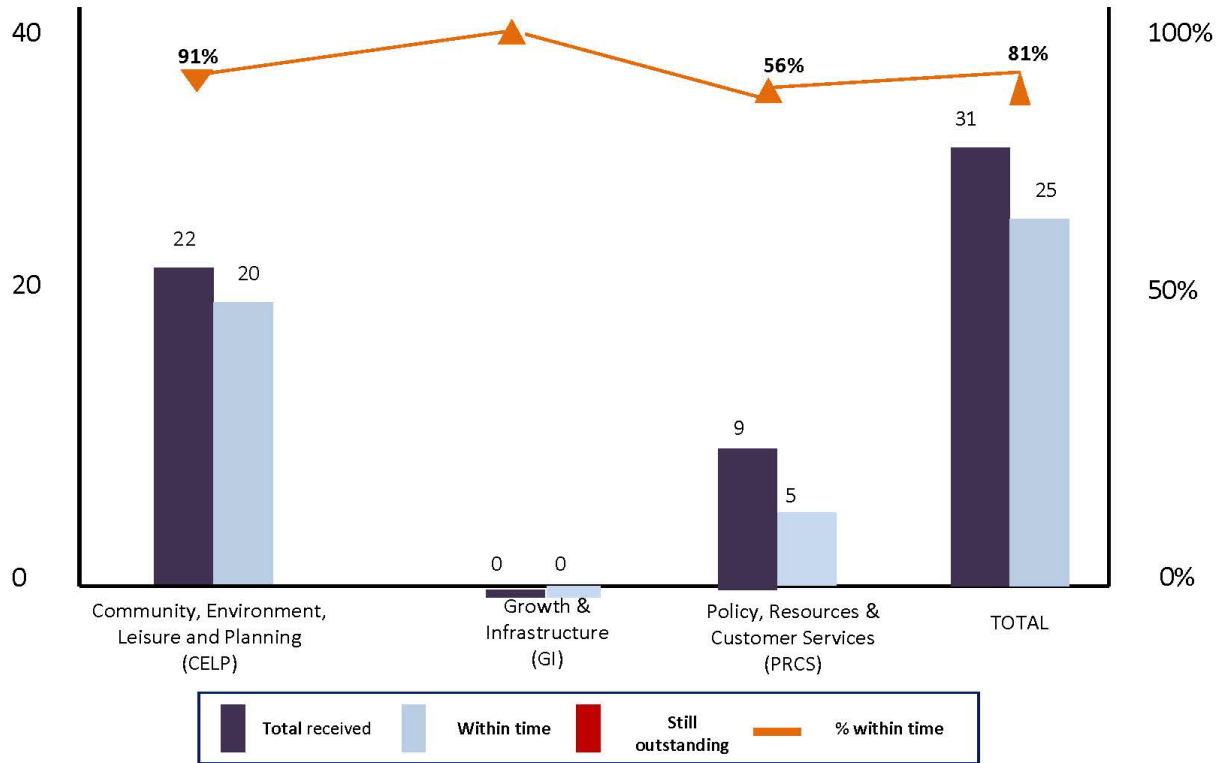
Of the 224 complaints received, 212 were dealt with at Stage 1, 31 customers escalated their complaint to Stage 2 and 12 escalated their complaint to Stage 3.

Stage 1
April 2020 – March 2021
Total Number of Complaints received & responded to within 10 days



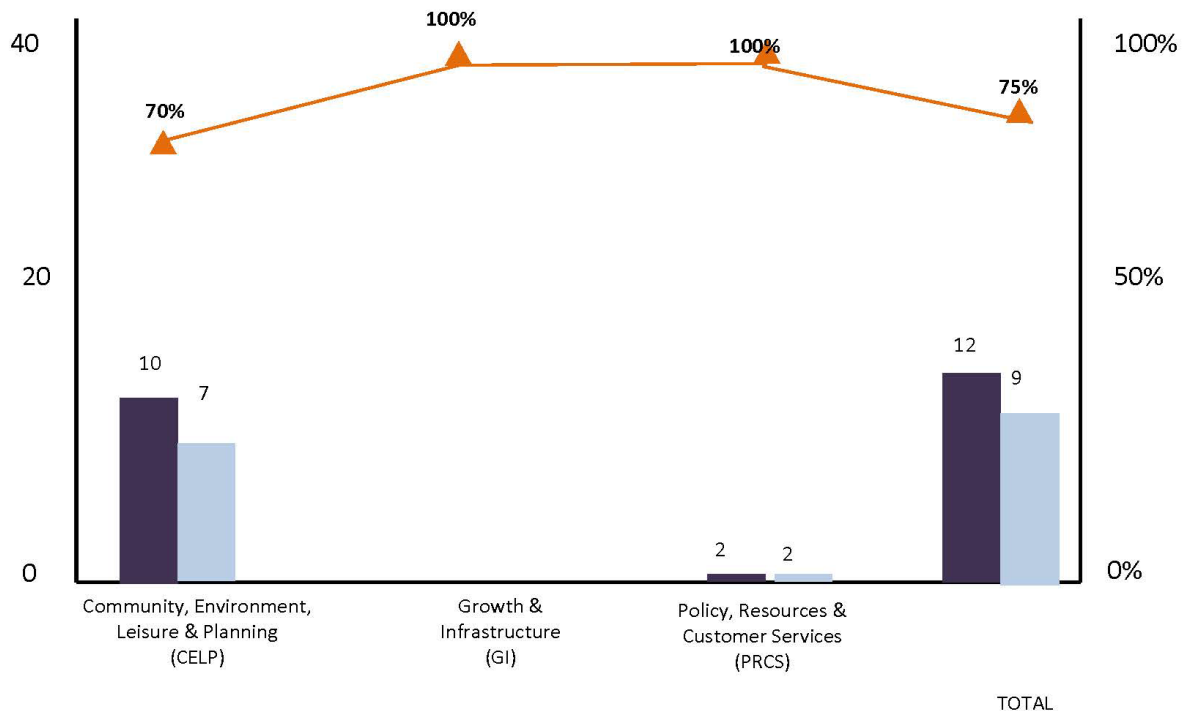
The above table shows the number of complaint by service area, received and responded to within set performance targets; this is also shown as a percentage.

Stage 2
April 2020 – March 2021
Total Number of Complaints received & responded to within 10 days



The above table shows the number of complaints by service area, received and responded to within set performance targets; this is also shown as a percentage.

Stage 3
April 2020 – March 2021
Total Number of Complaints received & responded to within 15 days



The above table shows the number of complaints by service area, received and responded to within set performance targets; this is also shown as a percentage.

During 2020/21, we monitored the complaints process to ensure the public were kept informed, treated with respect and dignity and to ensure a consistent approach was being applied. When a complaint was received a discussion was held with the service team in order to resolve the complaint as soon as possible. This has had a positive effect for both the customer and the Council, and is reflected by the number of people escalating their complaint past Stage 1.

A further part of the Council's 3Cs process is to gain an understanding from the service teams about the actions they have taken to reduce a repeat occurrence. This small review after each complaint this has enabled the teams to identify potential future issues.

Each complaint that has escalated past Stage 1 is reviewed. The focus is on understanding the issues that are affecting the complainant and to explore all possible avenues to remedy the complaint.

Local Government Ombudsman Complaints and Enquiries

A part of the 3Cs service is the investigation and response management of all Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) enquiries that Fenland District Council (FDC) receives.

The following table shows the total LGO enquires that FDC received for individual service areas and decisions made during 2020/21.

LGO Decisions made

Between April 2020 and March 2021, the LGO made 11 decisions relating to services provided by Fenland District Council. The table below shows the complaints that the LGO made a decision on in 2020/21:

| Benefits and Tax | Corporate and other services | Environment Services | Highways and Transport | Housing | Planning and Development | Other | Total |
|------------------|------------------------------|----------------------|------------------------|---------|--------------------------|-------|-------|
| 4 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 4 | 0 | 11 |

| Service | Decision made | Decision |
|----------------------------|----------------|------------------------------------|
| Benefits & Tax | September 2020 | Not Upheld |
| Corporate & Other Services | April 2020 | Closed after initial enquiries |
| Planning & Development | April 2020 | Closed after initial enquiries |
| Highways & Transport | April 2020 | Closed after initial enquiries |
| Benefits & Tax | August 2020 | Closed after initial enquiries |
| Benefits & Tax | August 2020 | Closed after initial enquiries |
| Planning & Development | February 2021 | Not Upheld |
| Planning & Development | September 2020 | Referred back for local resolution |
| Benefits & Tax | December 2020 | Advice given |
| Housing | January 2021 | Referred back for local resolution |
| Planning & Development | March 2021 | Referred back for local resolution |

Between April 2020 and March 2021, we had no LGO complaints upheld.

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Overview and Scrutiny – Draft Work Programme 2021-2022

**All Informal pre-meetings are held via Zoom until further notice,
but Formal meetings 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 3 June 2021 | Monday 7 June 2021 - Cancelled | 2.00pm | Room 38 | Monday 14 June 2021 - Cancelled | 1.00pm | 1.30pm |
| Thursday 1 July 2021 | Monday 5 July 2021 | 2.00pm | Via Zoom | Monday 12 July 2021 | 1.00pm | 1.30pm |
| Thursday 2 September 2021 | Monday 6 September 2021 | 2.00pm | Via Zoom | Monday 13 September 2021 | 1.00pm | 1.30pm |
| Thursday 30 September 2021 | Monday 4 October 2021 | 2.00pm | Via Zoom | Monday 11 October 2021 | 1.00pm | 1.30pm |
| Thursday 28 October 2021 | Monday 1 November 2021 | 2.00pm | Via Zoom | Monday 8 November 2021 | 1.00pm | 1.30pm |
| Thursday 25 November 2021 | Tuesday 30 November 2021 | 2.00pm | Via Zoom | Monday 6 December 2021 | 1.00pm | 1.30pm |
| Thursday 6 January 2022 | Monday 10 January 2022 | 2.00pm | Via Zoom | Monday 17 January 2022 | 1.00pm | 1.30pm |

| | | | | | | |
|---------------------------|------------------------|--------|----------|------------------------|--------|--------|
| | | | | | | |
| Thursday 27 January 2022 | Monday 31 January 2022 | 2.00pm | Via Zoom | Monday 7 February 2022 | 1.00pm | 1.30pm |
| Thursday 24 February 2022 | Tuesday 1 March 2022 | 2.00pm | Via Zoom | Monday 7 March 2022 | 1.00pm | 1.30pm |
| Thursday 28 April 2022 | Tuesday 3 May 2022 | 2.00pm | Via Zoom | Monday 9 May 2022 | 1.00pm | 1.30pm |

13 September 2021

| Time | Agenda Item | Fenland Corporate Priority | Portfolio Holder/ Officer/ External Witness |
|-------------------------------|--|----------------------------|---|
| 1.00 – 1.30pm Pre Briefing | | | |
| | | | |
| 13.30 to 15.30 Meeting | Council Tax Support Scheme | | Cllr Boden Cllr French Mark Saunders Peter Catchpole |
| | Local Government Ombudsman annual review of complaints | | Councillor Tierney Peter Catchpole David Wright |
| | Matters arising – Update on previous actions | | Amy Brown / Anna Goodall |
| | Future Work Programme 2021/22 | Quality Organisation | Chairman Amy Brown / Anna Goodall |

11 October 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 | Annual Meeting with the Leader and Chief Executive | Quality Organisation | Councillor Boden Paul Medd Cabinet and CMT |

| | | | |
|--|--|----------------------|--|
| | Anglian Water | Communities | Attendees to be confirmed by Briony Tuthill of Anglian Water |
| | 2021 Planning Shared Service Annual Review | Economy | Nick Harding Councillor Mrs Laws Carol Pilson |
| | Matters arising – Update on previous actions | | Amy Brown / Anna Goodall |
| | Future Work Programme 2021/22 | Quality Organisation | Chairman Amy Brown / Anna Goodall |

8 November 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 | Freedom Leisure Review | Communities | Councillor Sam Clark Carol Pilson Phil Hughes Simon Bell Representative from Freedom |
| | Progress of Corporate Priority – Communities | Communities | Councillor Lynn Councillor Miss Hoy Councillor S Clark Councillor Seaton Dan Horn, Phil Hughes, Annabel Tighe Carol Pilson |
| | Wisbech 2021 Vision & Wisbech Rail Update | Communities | Councillor Boden Councillor Seaton Simon Machen Wendy Otter Russell Beal (Anglian Water) Adrian Chapman (Cambs County Council and Peterborough City Council) Rowland Potter (CPCA) |
| | Matters arising – Update on previous actions | | Amy Brown / Anna Goodall |
| | Future Work Programme 2021/22 | Quality Organisation | Chairman Amy Brown / Anna Goodall |

6 December 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 | Annual review of Anglia Revenues Partnership | Communities | Sam Anthony / Peter Catchpole Councillor Mrs French Paul Corney (ARP) Mark Saunders |
| | Review of Clarion | Communities | Sally Greetham/Daniel Read/Yvonne Ogden (Clarion) Dan Horn Councillor S Clark Carol Pilson |
| | Culture Strategy | Quality Organisation | Carol Pilson Phil Hughes Councillor Chris Seaton |
| | Matters arising – Update on previous actions | | Amy Brown / Anna Goodall |
| | Future Work Programme 2021/22 | Quality Organisation | Chairman Amy Brown / Anna Goodall |

17 January 2022

| Time | Agenda Item | Fenland Corporate Priority | Portfolio Holder/ Officer/ External Witness |
|--------------------------------|--|----------------------------|--|
| 13.00 to 13.30 Pre Briefing | | | |
| 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 | | Amy Brown / Anna Goodall |

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|--|-------------------------------|----------------------|--------------------------------------|
| | Future Work Programme 2021/22 | Quality Organisation | Chairman Amy Brown / Anna Goodall |
|--|-------------------------------|----------------------|--------------------------------------|

7 February 2022

| 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 Lynn Carol Pilson, Dan Horn, Alan Boughen, Aarron Locks Police |
| | Matters arising – Update on previous actions | | Amy Brown / Anna Goodall |
| | Future Work Programme 2021/22 | Quality Organisation | Chairman Amy Brown / Anna Goodall |

7 March 2022

| Time | Agenda Item | Fenland Corporate Priority | Portfolio Holder/ Officer/ External Witness |
|--------------------------------|--|----------------------------|---|
| 13.00 to 13.30 Pre Briefing | | | |
| | | | |
| 13.30 to 15.30 Meeting | | | |
| | Transformation & Communications Portfolio Holder update | | Councillor Tierney David Wright Peter Catchpole |
| | Update on CPCA Growth Service and impact on Economic Development in Fenland | Economy | Simon Machen Councillor Benney Justin Wingfield |

| | | | |
|--|--|----------------------|--------------------------------------|
| | Commercial Investment Strategy | Economy | Councillor Boden Peter Catchpole |
| | Matters arising – Update on previous actions | | Amy Brown / Anna Goodall |
| | Future Work Programme 2021/22 | Quality Organisation | Chairman Amy Brown / Anna Goodall |

09 May 2022

| Time | Agenda Item | Fenland Corporate Priority | Portfolio Holder/ Officer/ External Witness |
|--------------------------------|--|----------------------------|---|
| 13.00 to 13.30 Pre Briefing | | | |
| | | | |
| 13.30 to 15.30 Meeting | | | |
| | Private Sector Landlord Scheme | | Cllr Hoy Dan Horn |
| | Matters arising – Update on previous actions | | Amy Brown / Anna Goodall |
| | Future Work Programme 2021/22 | Quality Organisation | Chairman Amy Brown / Anna Goodall |

TBC July 2022

| Time | Agenda Item | Fenland Corporate Priority | Portfolio Holder/ Officer/ External Witness |
|--------------------------------|--|----------------------------|---|
| 13.00 to 13.30 Pre Briefing | | | |
| | | | |
| 13.30 to 15.30 Meeting | Appointment of the Chairman and Vice-Chairman for the Municipal Year | | |
| | Council Tax Support Scheme Report | Quality Organisation | Councillor Mrs French Councillor Boden Peter Catchpole Mark Saunders |
| | Draft Overview & Scrutiny Annual Report | | Amy Brown / Anna Goodall |
| | Matters arising – Update on previous actions | | Anna Goodall |
| | Future Work Programme 2022/23 | Quality Organisation | Chairman Amy Brown / Anna Goodall |