

# OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

MONDAY, 10 OCTOBER 2022 - 1.30 PM



**PRESENT:** Councillor D Mason (Chairman), Councillor A Miscandlon (Vice-Chairman), Councillor G Booth, Councillor D Connor and Councillor M Purser

**APOLOGIES:** Councillor A Hay, Councillor M Humphrey, Councillor R Skoulding, Councillor R Wicks and Councillor F Yeulett

**OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:** Anna Goodall (Head of Customer Services & Transformation), Dan Horn (Head of Housing & Neighbourhood Services), Paul Medd (Chief Executive), Annabel Tighe (Head of Environmental Health and Compliance Manager), David Wright (Policy & Communications Manager) and Linda Albon (Member Services & Governance Officer)

**GUESTS:** Councillor C Boden, Dr Jyoti Atri (Director of Public Health) and Val Thomas (Public Health Consultant, Cambridgeshire County Council)

## **OSC8/22    PREVIOUS MINUTES.**

The minutes of the meeting of 18 July 2022 were confirmed and signed subject to the following comment:

- Councillor Booth asked it to be noted that he had given his apologies prior to the meeting, which had not been recorded in the minutes.

## **OSC9/22    UPDATE ON PREVIOUS ACTIONS.**

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

- Councillor Miscandlon asked that any updates to the action plan are kept in alignment and dealt with, so members do not miss them.
- Councillor Mason requested an update on the Task and Finish Group. Anna Goodall advised that numerous dates have been circulated to the Group members in relation to their availability to conduct the review. Time is of the essence because for the review findings to be fed into the draft Business Plan, the Group needs to have concluded that work by the end of October so it can feed into Cabinet and full Council. Further dates can be circulated but if not, for the governance process to take place, members may need to reconsider whether the results from the Task and Finish Group will feed into the Plan for 2023/24 or if it will be delayed and therefore influence the Plan for 2024/25. Councillor Mason thanked Anna Goodall for the clarification.
- Councillor Booth pointed out that he had given his availability, but half the dates have now passed. He added that the goal posts are already changing to complete this task because a meeting has been diarised for 21<sup>st</sup> November. The main feeding point for the Business Plan is the Key Performance Indicators for measuring the objectives. If the objectives are okay, then do we have the KPIs to support the objectives? This is a point he has been raising all along. Councillor Booth added that he believes the Business Plan can still go ahead for consultation but wonders if we are setting too challenging dates to get this process finished. If the objectives are the right ones, then we need to ensure we have the right KPIs. He believes the end of October is not correct; the issue is if we can get usable KPIs by the time the new Business Plan

is adopted but it takes time to develop those.

- Anna Goodall advised the dates of either 31<sup>st</sup> October or 21<sup>st</sup> November were the potential for the additional meeting date of Overview & Scrutiny so the panel could agree whether the outcome of the review was acceptable to them and therefore those recommendations go to Cabinet. The potential meeting date of 21<sup>st</sup> November was a full O&S panel meeting for that reason rather than a Task and Finish Group. So, the results of the Group would need to be concluded by then to feed into that for that agreement for the Cabinet papers to be published on 2<sup>nd</sup> December.
- Anna Goodall confirmed the core Group consisted of Councillors Booth, Connor and Miscandlon, with subs being Councillors Hay and Wicks. Both Councillors Connor and Miscandlon advised they would be on leave during October. Anna Goodall said that If members are agreeable and still wish to pursue the Task and Finish Group and achieve the output to contribute to the Business Plan for 2023/24 then further dates can be circulated and we can work to that but there will be a point by which this will not be achievable within the timeframe, and we will have to postpone until 2024/25.
- Councillor Booth said he took Anna Goodall's points on board, but his point around KPIs measuring the objectives is still valid. Members will be consulted on the Business Plan anyway so by saying the end of October, this is too unrealistic a date. The key thing is are the objectives okay but that was not what part of the Task and Finish Group was looking at, it is looking at what the KPIs are. There is some leeway with these dates to feed into the process because with going to Cabinet for December, Cabinet will then go out for consultation with the public so the public could come back with comments. Not everything has to be concluded by December. The purpose was to have a workshop for each of the key priorities and we have not had any yet. Anna Goodall advised that if the Task and Finish Group are keen to pursue the outcome to influence the Business Plan for 2023/24, then new dates will be circulated accordingly.

## **OSC10/22 PUBLIC HEALTH PRESENTATION**

Councillor Mason welcomed Dr Jyoti Atri and Val Thomas from Public Health, and Annabel Tighe to the meeting.

Dr Atri shared a presentation giving some of the key health outcome data and gave a brief introduction to the Health and Wellbeing Strategy and the statutory Director of Public Health Annual Report.

Some key points from the demographic data:

- The population of Fenland is aging.
- Fenland Life Expectancy for both males and females is shorter in Fenland compared to Cambridgeshire and England.
- Fenland has one of the highest rates of early death (under 75) from cardiovascular disease in the East of England, much of which is preventable and linked to deprivation and behaviour.
- Since 2013, rates of premature mortality, not just caused by cardiovascular disease, have been increasing. Rates are significantly higher in Fenland than England and this is not declining.
- Childhood obesity is worse in children in Fenland than Cambridgeshire with about 20.5% of year 6 children being obese (up to 36% if looking at overweight and obese) and 15% of Fenland children are living in absolute low-income families.
- 2018 against 2021 data shows a decrease in children's wellbeing and mental health
- Fenland has one of the highest rates of death by suicide in the East of England.

Dr Atri explained that both Peterborough and Cambridgeshire Health and Wellbeing boards have merged to form a single entity that meets as a committee in common with the Integrated Care

Partnership, with representation from the Combined Authority and Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner. The mission statement is 'All together for healthier futures' with three overarching ambitions:

1. Have better outcomes for our children
2. Reduce inequalities in deaths under 75 years
3. Increase the number of years that people live in good health.

Dr Atri further outlined a series of priorities that have been agreed to fulfil these ambitions and the approach to health inequalities.

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

1. Councillor Mason said he thinks the report and presentations identifies the problems; it is a matter of getting to the solutions.
2. Councillor Booth thanked Dr Atri for the presentation. He said what Dr Atri is basically saying is that different tools are used to target different issues. In terms of using a universal approach to make improvements, it is his view that it is more at government level where that needs to be led. He would like a better understanding of what is being done to improve Fenland health outcomes. In the past there has been a list of action plans, and he remembers hearing a few years ago that smoking cessation was going in the right direction, but last year's report indicated that smoking was increasing in the working population so he would like to know what is happening there. The previous action plans involved holding workshops to target large employers to encourage smoking cessation in the workplace. So, it is more of an understanding of what is happening in Fenland to tackle the issues; it is his view that the current report is quite nebulous in what we are trying to achieve so would like to know more about what is happening for our district.
3. Dr Atri said that unfortunately the last two years have been distracted by Covid. Public Health is only now starting to recover activity and reinvigorate the Health and Wellbeing Strategy post Covid. Obesity is now the priority in Fenland as it affects many more people than smoking does, although that is still important, but obesity is the bigger risk factor.
4. Val Thomas added that smoking cessation is still on the agenda and work is continuing. GPs services are still commissioned for smoking cessation, but this has been hampered by the pressure on GP practices currently. Lifestyle services has picked up on this and looking at the data from last year we are starting to see a slight improvement, but we do rely on GP support, and they are compromised by multiple demands. There have been a few discreet projects in Fenland to tackle smoking in pregnancy, with targeted approaches in Wisbech involving health visitors and other professionals working with pregnant women and their families in the community. The Tobacco Control Alliance is being supported by the whole integrated care system, and the NHS has a focus on prevention of smoking currently, with a tobacco control plan. We are also looking at young people, although the landscape has changed due to the uptake of vaping, and we are concerned with some of the vaping practices and the way they have been targeted at young people. In addition, we are still looking at illegal tobacco sales, working with Trading Standards and traders. Our lifestyle services do go into workplaces, but we do not always find them receptive to stop smoking services, although they do like NHS health checks, but the offer is there and publicised.
5. Councillor Mason said there are two sides to health, physical and mental and Fenland District Council has a responsibility to assist with physical health and he thinks the Council is doing that. For example, upgrading the Manor Leisure Centre in Whittlesey. However, he has concerns about residents' ability to access healthcare across Fenland, particularly GPs and minor injury units due to capacity resourcing problems etc. and he asked Dr Atri what is being done to tackle these accessibility issues.
6. Dr Atri responded that this is not her responsibility but that of the Integrated Care Boards (ICB). However, they have been called to County Scrutiny and questioned over this and she believes a number of measures have already been put in around supporting people's access at the right

point. For example, 111 has been strengthened and people are directed to call that number first if they need minor injuries. In terms of access to primary care in the form of GP appointments, they are reporting that they are offering as many appointments now as they did pre-pandemic. Dr Atri suggested that it may be worth the Panel inviting the ICB to a meeting to ask them directly. Councillor Mason said although he accepted that this is not Dr Atri's remit it needs flagging up that it is not acceptable that people are having to queue for several hours to have a flu vaccination.

7. Councillor Mason said in respect of mental health, he understands there is a service provider, Centre 33, providing a drop-in centre. Dr Atri responded that this service is commissioned by the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG), and Public Health pays a small contribution, to improve mental health provision for young people. There is a keen interest in this area as children and young people are waiting too long to be seen. There is a strategy around early access and prevention as this leads to better mental health outcomes; discussions are ongoing to improve this issue, but part of the problem is that there is not enough money in the system. Needs have increased but the budget has not. Public Health are looking at interventions to support people on the waiting lists. Councillor Mason said that there has been talk of inequalities in health and deprivation in Fenland, but he had noted that Centre 33 is open for 23 hours a week in Cambridge, but only 4 hours in Fenland and that needs to be addressed.
8. Councillor Miscandlon asked what is being done to target groups who either drink, smoke or eat unhealthily to help them control their lifestyle. He stated that the district has many immigrants who bring their problems with them. Dr Atri advised that nobody is called a problem group or individual; people have different needs across the population. Needs assessments are routinely carried out so if there is a higher prevalence of smoking in Eastern Europeans, services are promoted in those languages. Val Thomas added that they have health trainers with appropriate language skills realising a variety of needs to try to shape the service accordingly.
9. Councillor Purser stated that he had mixed views on the statistics shared in the presentation. He has never smoked but has health problems so good health and a good lifestyle are not always linked. Councillor Purser commented that March has a free park run and wondered what Dr Atri's thoughts were on that sort of scenario. Dr Atri agreed that there are many cheaper, free, or cost-effective interventions for exercise. Obesity has become the priority over and above smoking because of the number of people affected; it has become normalised, and people do not recognise it. It is a fact that 60% of our population are obese or overweight. Although Public Health is tackling both, in terms of strategy then obesity is the focus. Early intervention in schools will help, for example introducing a daily mile walk, reducing sugar in school meals, and looking at tuck shop/vending machine provision.
10. Councillor Miscandlon asked what is being done by the medical services to alleviate the problem of increased air pollution in our towns. Dr Atri advised that this is an issue for national Government to cap pollutants. However, Public Health advocates active travel, promoting improved public transport and encouraging good routes for walking and cycling and this is something that they are working on with the Combined Authority.
11. Councillor Miscandlon stated that as he lives in a rural area, unfortunately public transport is not an option and there is no infrastructure for electric cars. Travel in rural areas will not change.
12. Councillor Mason commented that there is a lull in the recruitment of GPs and asked what is being done nationally to address this. Dr Atri responded that this is a matter for the ICB and not something she has any control over.
13. Councillor Booth said that although Dr Atri made the comment about not having control or involvement, he got the impression from the report that they are working much more closely together now, but this is not the impression he is getting from her answers. He asked if there is still more work to do to overcome these structural and bureaucratic barriers. Dr Atri responded that they are working together on health and wellbeing, but not the entirety of the health service remit. There has been agreement to work more on preventative and public health measures. As Director of Public Health, Dr Atri does have an interest in primary care and GP recruitment, recognising that easy access is important. However, she does not have direct control over this,

and she would suggest the Panel approach the ICB.

14. Councillor Connor said that Dr Atri had commented that she has no say in the minor injury units, but he has been trying to get in touch with the CCG. They are doing some work in Wisbech, but no mention has been made for the upgrade of Doddington. Fenland will be building several thousand more homes and so we need to make gains with those services. People now need to travel further afield just to get their Covid vaccinations and it is a job for some people to get to other hospitals. Given the deprivation levels in Fenland, he had thought this would be something that Dr Atri could assist with. Dr Atri responded that Public Health are trying across the country to ensure that when developments are planned, then health provision is linked in at an early stage.
15. Councillor Purser said that he wanted Dr Atri to report back that he has personally received superb medical treatment and he cannot thank medical staff enough.

Councillor Mason thanked Dr Atri, Val Thomas and Annabel Tighe for their attendance and contribution to the meeting.

*(Dr Atri, Val Thomas, and Annabel Tighe left the meeting).*

## **OSC11/22 LOCAL GOVERNMENT OMBUDSMAN - ANNUAL REVIEW OF COMPLAINTS**

Councillor Boden presented the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) Annual Review of Complaints report to members.

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

1. Councillor Mason said he was pleased to see there were more compliments than complaints and was keen to note that senior officers are very helpful in addressing and resolving complaints, for which he would particularly like to thank Dan Horn and Phil Hughes. It was also pleasing to see that officers are attempting to identify themes resulting from complaints in the last 12 months. Councillor Mason asked if these could be broken down into some form of data so the Panel can see where most complaints are coming from.
2. Councillor Boden said we need to think about what we are trying to do. It is not merely that we have a process in place to deal with complaints, and that so long as they are dealt with satisfactorily, they progress no further and do not end up going to the Ombudsman. So far as the three Ombudsman complaints are concerned, they are assessed, and it is not just about resolving the individual problem that exists but looking to see if there are underlying themes within those problems that need resolution to ensure change takes place to prevent problems reoccurring. It is by being open and positive about dealing with complaints, that changes to the good do take place. So, the grouping together in themes is valid, and there is no reason why that information cannot be more available. We want to better publicise our 3Cs service; complaints can be productive, and the Council wants to hear from people if things go wrong because we want to do better than we do now. There are always things that can be done better. Our attitude is that we will listen to people, and we will respond to them.
3. David Wright stated that every complaint is logged under a service and then broken down into areas or topics. After examination, there are no topics in each area that have recurring themes this year, although that is not to say that has not been the case in previous years.
4. Councillor Mason said looking at the data, most complaints seem to be for Refuse and asked if they are common or multiple complaints. David Wright advised that because Refuse is a frontline service, many complaints relate to missed bins. However, an online missed bins form has been developed for customers to report quickly and if it is a correct missed bin, the issue can be resolved quickly by going back to them for collection. If it is not a correct missed bin, then this can be followed up with the customer to explain why it has not been done.
5. Councillor Boden added that the figures relating to missed bins are slightly misleading, it is not that a certain number of bins were missed, but these are complaints where people felt that the

service provided was wrong. When investigations take place, it is interesting how often we find that it was not the Council's service at fault. This is also one area of work which interacts with the public daily, far more than anything else we do, but put in perspective, when comparing Fenland's performance with some other local authorities, ours for missed bins is much better.

6. Councillor Booth said having a breakdown in the statistics is a step in the right direction and this is something he has been asking to see for years. He asked if there are any outliers in the figures that we feel do not represent what the true situation might be; there could be an issue whereby complaints are not being recorded in the first place. For example, Benefits is quite a contentious area yet only ten complaints are recorded, therefore it is probably something we need to look at around the culture of getting complaints recorded. It is not just about looking at the figures but about how we improve going forward which is what he has been espousing for years.
7. Councillor Boden responded that he has seen for himself when officers have taken it upon themselves to treat something as a complaint. They recognise it is to our advantage for complaints to be investigated. It is ingrained in the culture at Fenland District Council, and it is one of openness. The complaints procedures are clearly advertised, and officers are willing to advertise even further.
8. Councillor Connor commented that he agreed with Councillor Boden and said that he has very few complaints regarding missed bins. Each time a resident contacts him about a missed bin, he calls Adam Pratt who then deals with it straight away and when he goes back to the resident, they are very happy. This is one of the things that Fenland does exceptionally well, and he would like it placed on record that Adam is a great ambassador for Fenland District Council.
9. Councillor Miscandlon agreed, stating he had a vulnerable lady in his ward who had an issue with her bins; the problem was resolved by Adam who gave her his direct number. He paid credit to the services that Environmental Services provides.
10. Councillor Purser said that the service developed a special app for reporting missed bins or finding out which bin is due to be collected. The app works superbly, and it is a credit to whomever set it up and added that out of everything negative comes something positive.
11. Councillor Boden commented that this just shows what a large percentage of interaction there is regarding bins. No complaints have gone to the Ombudsman that have been upheld recently, the last one upheld was in 2018 and officers must be congratulated on in the way they deal with complaints. Unfortunately, some people go to the Ombudsman because they do not like what we do, but the Ombudsman finds our processes to be right time after time. He added that if comparing to other councils, it would be a surprise to see how much better ours is. It is something to be proud of and live up to but not to become complacent.
12. Councillor Mason said this is a very encouraging report.

**The Overview and Scrutiny Panel AGREED to note the draft Overview & Scrutiny Annual Report for 2021-22.**

## **OSC12/22 ANNUAL MEETING WITH THE LEADER AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE**

Members had received the presentation from the Leader and Chief Executive prior to the meeting.

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

1. Councillor Boden said he noted that several of the questions received from the pre-meet are more operational than strategic and asked if the report is being produced in a way which is not helpful for the Overview and Scrutiny Panel to question the strategic side of what the Council does.
2. Councillor Mason said he was satisfied with the presentation of the report as it highlights the indicators, although it was important to concentrate on the RAG. However, there are only two

- points to bring up on this, one being the homeless situation, which is being dealt with positively.
3. Councillor Boden said this is not an easy area to work in and it is getting more rather than less difficult for various reasons; he has a great deal of respect for the officers working in this field, they do a lot of work behind the scenes daily to prevent further homelessness. Councillor Boden added that it is recognised there is insufficient resource, which is why we have acted with many partners to have greater resource available so we can deal with individuals who find themselves in that terrible situation of being statutorily homeless more efficiently, effectively, and compassionately.
  4. Councillor Mason said the other red area relates to Planning. Minor issues seem to be in the red as opposed to major planning applications and he would like to know why.
  5. Paul Medd responded that is always a concern when performance targets are either amber or red. In respect of the minor planning applications, this can be put down to two key issues, namely the unprecedented volume of applications over the last 12 months, although it is good to see active development in the district, coupled with a degree of staff turnover, which impacts on continuity and time taken to induct new staff.
  6. Councillor Mason asked if there are the staff to deal with minor applications. Paul Medd responded that there is a continuum, always making sure there is a fit-for-purpose staff structure to deliver on Council objectives, but it is also about finding the balance between having adequate skills and capacity against the sustainable financial situation and challenges the Council is confronted with. One of the other issues that impacts on timescales is that applications need to be validated which puts further pressure on the system.
  7. Councillor Boden said that the importance of looking at the planning team processes cannot be overemphasised, streamlining to achieve more with the same number of staff. There is currently a lot of work going on behind the scenes which will lead to a significant improvement of team performance overall. He is not sure that that the numbers always tell the truth that may be useful to us, and they are not always direct measures of our failure; in some cases it is down to third parties, and it may be better to produce some statistics to show where we have failed rather than a failure to achieve a particular target. It should not be assumed that every failure to achieve a target is a failure of the Planning team itself.
  8. Councillor Booth said that we do have an annual review of the planning service, but he would like to point out that he has stated before that he has received feedback that the actual validation process can be quite pedantic at times. There is a balance to be had but when looking at other authorities, they do not have as many rejected applications as we do. This goes back to the point around the shared service with Peterborough and how it is working and the impact there, i.e., have they had a massive increase in applications, so we are not seeing the benefits of this shared service. Councillor Boden agreed that was a valid point and commented that we are a victim of our own attempts to be helpful but that is nothing new. The Council's planning team have been as helpful as possible to applicants, repeatedly assisting people to put in valid applications but because they have been so helpful, they are now being used by many professional planning companies effectively to do their validation for them which is work they should be doing for their clients. Interestingly, the best rate of first-time success comes from applicants themselves when they follow the tick-box plan provided by Planning to what they need to do to put in a successful application. The percentage of first-time right applications from agents remains low but the Council is taking action on this and have started rejecting more applications to encourage them to get it right first time.
  9. Paul Medd stated that Councillor Booth's point is fair, we want to strive to find the right balance. Validation needs to be robust, but we do not want to be over bureaucratic.
  10. Councillor Miscandlon referred to the homeless statistics and asked if the Council is expecting more money from central government. Councillor Boden said there has been a failure in the way in which central government has dealt with local government in recent years in respect of lack of transparency over future funding. We are finding more cases where funding was made available at too short notice to put in the budget. That makes it difficult to answer Councillor Miscandlon's question, so he has no information currently. Paul Medd said we do expect further relief from government, we would not expect it, but we demonstrate proactivity around seeking government funding or whatever external funding may exist. This is a demand-based pressure

and based on our experience, we are always making representation to government about the challenges we have, and we are on the front foot in terms of making our case.

11. Councillor Miscandlon suggested that planning applicants receive a holding email to advise their application is being dealt with and the projected timeframe of when they will hear back so they are not left in limbo. The lack of communication is a particular bugbear of his and it needs to be corrected for clients to be kept abreast of what is going on. Paul Medd agreed that to be a point well-made around effective communication, and this will be looked at as part of the ongoing service review.
12. Councillor Booth said he understands that the homeless KPIs involve a survey done once a year but asked if that is that a correct picture of what homelessness looks like. Paul Medd responded that homelessness is not measured in that way, that is a count of rough sleepers, and it is difficult to tie down the precise number of these. Although homelessness and rough sleeping are interconnected, there are different approaches to how these are measured.
13. Dan Horn commented that there is annual rough sleeper count, but there are also more counts during the year, and these are showing a reducing trend since Covid. The count led to the Council being able to secure bespoke funds for that aspect. It must be recognised though that there are often complex issues involved where loss of accommodation is a symptom not a root cause. Councillor Booth said in that case Dan Horn is talking about additional funding as opposed to the basic local government settlement, but does that not feed in? Dan Horn responded that the local government settlement figure is based on a different calculation.
14. Councillor Boden said that not all rough sleepers are statutorily homeless and in terms of the number of individuals, it is a small proportion of potential number of homeless in Fenland. Dan Horn agreed and said that there were around 10-12 rough sleepers at the last count, whereas the overall presentation of people threatened with homelessness is around 2000 households, which creates an enormous workload. The main reason for this is a loss of a private rented home.
15. Councillor Miscandlon said he was disappointed to read that South Fens business centre has an occupancy rate of 71% and asked if this relates to the main office building or small factory units, and what is being done to improve this figure. Paul Medd said it can be down to various factors, of course the Council wants to see high occupancy figures and the report does not provide this detail. However, some businesses cause turnover because they require larger accommodation as they become more successful, which will lead to a fluctuation in the occupancy figure.
16. Councillor Booth said these are effectively incubator units and not supposed to be long term, so having 71% occupancy is not a bad thing as it indicates success. It may be more prudent to examine the Boathouse rate of 95.8% and why businesses are not moving on. Paul Medd replied that we do know there is a shortage of move-on accommodation within the district, so we are trying to be proactive, whether that be work we do ourselves to bring forward move-on accommodation, and the extension of South Fens is an example. We are looking at drawing on £1m of regional growth funding that has been made available to us from the Combined Authority to further extend South Fens Enterprise Park, but we are challenged in other parts of the district as well. It is important to support that thriving small business network across the district to allow them to flourish and continue to grow and that we can provide suitable accommodation, otherwise the impact could be to stifle their growth or encourage them to seek other accommodation away from the district.
17. Councillor Boden said that the Council has been aware of these potential failings in the system in drawing up the draft local plan to encourage more units to be built to meet demand. Office based move-on accommodation is difficult to find in Fenland and that is why at the last full Council meeting a motion was put forward to give some NNDR relief to developers who want to build such units. Paul Medd added that the Council is also proactive in pursuing the government announcement on investment zones which seek to give incentives to businesses in a particular geographic area. This is likely to pass on business rate concessions as well as flexibilities around planning so we are looking at investment zones and where they may sit within the district. We are currently liaising with the Combined Authority who will submit our representations to Government in due course.

18. Councillor Mason asked if there is a reason why the Fenland Business Awards are not taking place this year. Councillor Booth suggested that it is because the main publication is no longer printed but is now a digital publication. Councillor Mason himself suggested it was likely budgetary constraints.
19. Councillor Mason commented that he noted contact centre figures had dropped against target and would like reassurance that these are now improving. Paul Medd responded that there had been an issue around resourcing which had an impact on continuity. We are looking at how we provide customer services, so there have been some channel shift changes also but his understanding is that performance is improving and recovering from where it was.
20. Councillor Mason asked if more information could be given on grant funding that is available. He is often alerted to funding opportunities by the MP's office but not through FDC. Paul Medd replied that there are many different sources of grant funding available but not all of which is appropriate to FDC and which we do not qualify for, so the Council needs to be selective in what it pursues and that they align with our key priorities. During the past year we have sought to be proactive around external funding and we have a successful track record, getting money for the Wisbech High Street project and the March Future High Street project for example. We are also putting in a significant bid to the government's Levelling Up programme. But also, the way we assess what is available, how much is available, the criteria for it and the information we put together along with a robust assessment of the cost of delivering a project is paramount. Unfortunately, nobody could have predicted the impact of inflation and a number of projects have been caught up in that inflationary environment. To safeguard against that we presented a report to Cabinet last week on project management. Councillor Boden added that the paper did not need to go before Cabinet and the public domain, but it was important that it did and that councillors saw it as we realised we had to tighten up our methods of evaluating, whether to bid, how to bid and how to deliver a project.
21. Councillor Boden added that some government departments are now putting in their bid terms a requirement that the Section 151 officer gives a guarantee that to the extent a project needs more money, that additional money will be found from the authority itself. That places a greater onus upon us and will cause us to be more risk averse; for an authority that wishes to be ambitious, it is a constraint he is not happy about.
22. Councillor Miscandlon said in view of that, do we have sufficient staff to alleviate the complexities of what is going on without putting too much strain on our Section 151 officer or would it be more prudent to engage someone specialised in that area of work. Councillor Boden responded that some city councils have departments devoted to this, but we are a small district council and not at that scale; it would be inappropriate to gear up to that and we need to act smarter. To do this, we are trying to get things in place in advance; we have flexible officers who prioritise what needs to be done and we have a very competent procurement officer, so we are going in the right direction now. Paul Medd agreed and added that pre-austerity we could have had dedicated funding officers, but this is no longer possible, and roles have developed in a way that service teams have all absorbed that responsibility, keeping an eye out for funding opportunities, submitting expressions of interests and formal bids, leaving only the most complex processes for external expertise.
23. Councillor Mason thanked the Chief Executive and Leader for their attendance, and presentation which was noted.

## **OSC13/22 FUTURE WORK PROGRAMME**

Members considered the Future Work Programme.

1. Councillor Mason said he would be keen to bring forward the Clarion review in terms of getting ahead of the winter period. Anna Goodall said Clarion had confirmed they would be attending the December meeting.
2. Councillor Connor suggested that, following the discussion with the Director of Public Health, the Panel should invite the Clinical Commissioning Group to get some clarification on what is

going on with Fenland health-wise. Councillor Booth said Dr Aytri had recommended the ICB should be invited rather than the CCG.

3. Councillor Miscandlon said the Panel needs either a written update or presentation from Anglian Water. Their response times to leaks in Whittlesey is abysmal. Ten days ago he reported a leak on the A605 opposite the end of Victory Avenue, they thanked him for reporting it but ten days on it is still gushing water. Councillor Connor said he would speak to the Regional Manager to see what he can do. Anna Goodall highlighted that Anglian Water are scheduled to attend the July 2023 meeting. Councillor Booth said they should be invited sooner rather than later; one of the things they reported to the Panel was that there would be no discharges of pollution into waterways, but they have been fined quite heavily for that so either we were not getting the full information, or something has happened. Councillor Connor agreed, adding that come July we do not know who will be on the Panel. Councillor Purser said the Panel needs to be mindful that Anglian Water are not beholden to us. Councillor Miscandlon agreed but added that they have been very cooperative with us previously, we have had excellent responses from them, and they deserve some credit.

3.42 pm

Chairman