

# COUNCIL



**MONDAY, 11 DECEMBER 2023 - 4.00 PM**

**PRESENT:** Councillor N Meekins (Chairman), Councillor B Barber (Vice-Chairman), Councillor I Benney, Councillor C Boden, Councillor G Booth, Councillor J Carney, Councillor G Christy, Councillor J Clark, Councillor S Clark, Councillor S Count, Councillor D Cutler, Councillor Mrs M Davis, Councillor L Foice-Beard, Councillor Mrs J French, Councillor K French, Councillor R Gerstner, Councillor A Gowler, Councillor A Hay, Councillor P Hicks, Councillor Miss S Hoy, Councillor M Humphrey, Councillor S Imafidon, Councillor Mrs D Laws, Councillor Mrs K Mayor, Councillor A Miscandlon, Councillor J Mockett, Councillor P Murphy, Councillor D Patrick, Councillor B Rackley, Councillor D Roy, Councillor C Seaton, Councillor E Sennitt Clough, Councillor T Taylor, Councillor S Tierney, Councillor S Wallwork and Councillor Woollard

**APOLOGIES:** Councillor D Connor, Councillor S Harris, Councillor C Marks, Councillor Dr H Nawaz, Councillor D Oliver, Councillor M Purser and Councillor M Summers

## **C22/23      PREVIOUS MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting of 2 October 2023 were confirmed and signed.

## **C23/23      CIVIC ENGAGEMENTS UPDATE.**

The Chairman drew members' attention to the civic activities undertaken by himself and the Vice-Chairman in the weeks preceding Full Council.

## **C24/23      TO RECEIVE ANY ANNOUNCEMENTS FROM THE CHAIRMAN OF THE COUNCIL AND/OR THE HEAD OF PAID SERVICE.**

The Chairman paid respect to former District Councillors Barry Wales and Florence Newell who had recently passed away.

The Chairman stated that Barry Wales was a District Councillor from August 1997 until May 2003 for the March West/East ward and had served on various committees including Leisure, Policy, Environmental Services, Appeals, Best Value and Staff.

The Chairman advised that Florence Newell was a District Councillor from June 1992 until May 2003 and then again from July 2006 until May 2019 for the Chatteris South/Slade Lode ward and had served on a number of committees including Planning, Corporate Governance, Standards, Community Services, Development and Leisure, Leisure Services Board and Development Control Sub-Committee.

Members joined the Chairman in observing two minutes silence to commemorate Barry and Florence's lives and their service to Fenland District Council and its communities.

The Chairman thanked everyone who had attended his Carol Service that took place on 8 December 2023, which was an enjoyable event in the historic St Peter and St Paul's Church, Wisbech. He extended his thanks to Member Services for their assistance in organising the event as well as Reverend Canon Matthew Bradbury, the children of Elm Road Primary School and the

**C25/23**      **TO RECEIVE QUESTIONS FROM, AND PROVIDE ANSWERS TO, COUNCILLORS IN RELATION TO MATTERS WHICH, IN THE OPINION OF THE CHAIRMAN, ACCORD WITH THE PROVISIONS OF PROCEDURE RULES 8.4 AND 8.6.**

The Chairman stated that no written questions had been received under Procedure Rule 8.6. Councillor Booth asked the following question under Procedure Rule 8.4 as Leader of the Opposition:

- Councillor Booth referred to the Quality Organisation report where it mentions the work of the Audit and Risk Management Committee (ARMC), and feels from an independence perspective and with the ARMC being the critical friend, is it appropriate that the report comes from Councillor Boden, who is the finance portfolio holder and he would have thought it should have come from Councillor Miss French as Chairman of the ARMC. He expressed the view that there may need to be a separate section where updates are given on audit and risk management and also potentially Overview and Scrutiny from the Chairs of those committees in future so the differences can be delineated in the independence of those committees. Councillor Boden responded that the portfolio holder reports are reports from the portfolio holders and he is not only the portfolio holder for finance but also for governance. He stated that this does not mean he performs all or even the important parts of the governance of the Council merely that he has responsibility to ensure that governance and risk management are being carried out in the way in which they should be. Councillor Boden advised that this does not mean that he will agree with it and also means that he has to be subject to it but ultimately he has got a responsibility to ensure that the Council has a system in place for governance and of risk management which is appropriate for the Council. He added that where it is necessary, which happened at the last Full Council meeting, the Chairman of the ARMC, Councillor Kim French, does give a report and is able to be asked questions on the contents of the report and there may be other occasions where Councillor Miss French may also come forward, which may not be such a pleasant occasion as if something goes wrong. Councillor Boden made the point that as the portfolio holder with responsibility for ensuring that the overall system is in place he is pleased to say that it is in place, that the Chairman of ARMC is doing a very good job and he looks forward to the continuing challenge from the ARMC to ensure that both himself and the Cabinet continue to do their jobs as efficiently and effectively as they can.

**C26/23**      **TO RECEIVE REPORTS FROM AND ASK QUESTIONS OF CABINET MEMBERS WITH PORTFOLIO HOLDER RESPONSIBILITIES, IN ACCORDANCE WITH PROCEDURE RULES 8.1 AND 8.2.**

Members asked questions of portfolio holders in accordance with Procedure Rules 8.1 and 8.2 as follows:

- Councillor Mrs Mayor referred to the fact that virtually all the bus services have been lost in Fenland and several large rural villages and settlements have no public bus service at all. She stated that bus services between Peterborough and Whittlesey have been reduced by more than half and the late weekday bus from Peterborough to Whittlesey is now non-existent, making it very difficult for young people and people working shifts to get to and from home. Councillor Mrs Mayor asked the Leader what action has been taken to reverse the rapid deterioration of bus services across Fenland generally and in Whittlesey in particular? Councillor Boden responded that it is not the responsibility of Fenland District Council to provide bus services, that responsibility has in recent years moved from the County Council to the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority (CPCA) and what has disappointed him is that much of the additional subsidy which has been given by the CPCA to bus services has gone to the south of the region rather than to Fenland or Peterborough. He stated that he has taken this up on several occasions with the Mayor and with the staff and the portfolio holder responsible, Councillor Seaton, together with officers

of Fenland District Council have also taken this matter up with the relevant officers and councillors at the CPCA. Councillor Boden expressed the view that it has got to the stage where now in meetings before he gets the chance to say his piece the Mayor interrupts and says I know what you are going to say about what is happening in Fenland and it is with some relief that he received a communication from the Mayor in the last couple of weeks, which stated "Your observations about the deterioration of bus services over the last 18 months in Fenland are ones of course that are a real concern to all of us, concerns also felt in other parts of Cambridgeshire and Peterborough and are part of a gradual and declining national trend in patronage. The impact in deprived rural areas is considerable as the availability of alternative modes is less, placing more need and dependency on buses for access to education, employment and other services. As you know the situation would have been even worse had we not stepped in to rescue the bus services terminated by Stage Coach last Autumn. Your advice on gaps in the current network across Fenland is helpful to see and I am grateful to you for sharing, the CPCA team met with your officers earlier this month to discuss and I will take each of the three points in turn. On a basic Sunday service it is my understanding that only two services across the subsidised network run on Sundays, one the CPCA inherited from the Peterborough City Council and the other introduced by the previous Mayor at Papworth, I think support for Sunday services is an important question for us to address in Fenland and across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough as part of the bus reform process, with your support we shall do that. Evening bus service between Whittlesey and Peterborough, FDC officers have agreed to find out more details on this including through discussions with Peterborough City Council and I would expect with key businesses in Peterborough as well, they will share further details with CPCA colleagues to inform opinions. Wisbech and Chatteris services, as above there was a proposal in the bus review paper for an introduction of a demand responsive transport trial in Fenland, I understand that the CPCA and FDC officers agreed to work up a DRT option to address these gaps you have identified and this may already have happened if not I will ask when. Assuming the funding for a DRT in Fenland is agreed by the Board we would look to introduce it as soon as possible in 2024/25. You also mentioned school and college services at Turves and Christchurch, the CPCA and CCC teams are meeting regularly now to look at how home to school and scheduled services can be better integrated. Route 7A in South Cambridgeshire is an example of where good progress has been made, that can be a template and I have asked that group to include Turves and Christchurch when looking at other options." Councillor Boden stated that he will continue to raise this issue on a regular basis at all possible opportunities.

- Councillor Booth referred to the update regarding the Local Plan and the current recruitment taking place, asking Councillor Mrs Laws if there is a Plan B if suitable candidates cannot be found to fill those posts? He knows for example many years ago the Council hired a firm in its entirety to undertake the Local Plan work but does not think it progressed very far at that time but are there other options as the Council is probably a year behind its schedule and the situation does not seem to be getting much better unfortunately. Councillor Mrs Laws responded that there are advertisements out, disappointingly the Tree Officer vacancy has been advertised for some time with no response to it and there has been no response to the Section 106 Officer or to the Senior Enforcement Officer vacancies. However, she advised that two people have applied for the Principal Planning Officer, there are 9 Senior applications, for the Junior Enforcement there are 4 applications and most importantly which is needed for the Council's emerging Local Plan is that there are 6 applications for Policy Officers. Councillor Mrs Laws stated that there is always a Plan B and the Council will not be floundering, with it being very important to drive the Local Plan forward because the existing one is not fit for purpose, completely out of date but it has been held up with the staffing issues.
- Councillor Sennitt Clough asked Councillor Boden in relation to the CPCA that she understands there has been some complaints about the Mayor's conduct and wondered what has happened in relation to this? Councillor Boden responded that it is not necessarily the original activity which is so threatening not merely to the Mayor but also to the CPCA as

a whole, it is the cover up which has taken place since or the secrecy there has been. He stated that secrecy has been really counter productive for the Mayor personally and given the seriousness of what has got out into the public arena there have been quite a number of people on social media who have jumped to the conclusion in the absence of any other information that this is about sexual impropriety on the part of the Mayor and to the best of his knowledge that is totally wrong but people have jumped to that conclusion with the lack of information there has been and so long as there continues to be secrecy and obfuscation on the subject of what has actually happened there will continue to be speculation and people will continue to assume the worst. Councillor Boden advised that he was in a difficult position because he has seen some information in the CPCA Board meetings that have been exempt papers and considered in private session and he has also on occasion been shown reports which he has had to make a confidentiality agreement on that he would not say anything on the subject of what report has been given or shown to him and he is not going to break the confidentiality agreements that he has agreed to nor is he going to breach the requirements of keeping the contents of exempt papers confidential. He is not sure if those items will stay confidential and secret for too long because too many people know about them and are very angry about some of the activities which have taken place which have not come out into the public arena. Councillor Boden advised at the recent meeting of the Board there was a discussion which took place about the complaints which had been made against the Mayor and the report which was conducted by an independent examiner into those complaints but he has not seen this report as it was not made public and a summary was produced which was included in the papers of the CPCA Board, with the summary being quite damning as it said the matters involved were serious, that the Mayor had breached the Code of Conduct and it required the Mayor to make apologies for that but the detail of what was involved was not disclosed. He expressed the view that it seems to him on the spurious grounds of GDPR that the guilty are being kept hidden and the victims are being denied a voice and he is not quite sure how long the victims are going to continue to be denied a voice given how angry some of them are. Councillor Boden stated that he cannot reveal any of the information that he has obtained in those confidential manners but he has continued to receive information that he had not been provided with by the CPCA and he feels he is under no obligation not to say something about this, he has taken legal advice today from FDC officers about what he should and should not say and he is going to be extremely careful about what he does and does not say but even the summary report which was produced by the CPCA was quite damning, it talked about a henchman and it basically said that the Mayor had been aware of the henchman's behaviour, did not call out that behaviour nor did the Mayor take sufficient and appropriate steps to stop it and that his failure to intervene amounted to him condoning such behaviour and that behaviour was very serious, such as making extremely derogatory and potentially even threatening and defamatory remarks about members of staff. He referred to the statement of accounts produced by the CPCA and if you look at the staff notes you find some very strange entries and these are exit payments, they are not pay or pension, these are not the payments that you get if you are sacked and then you get the entitlement for back pay or for notice periods or for holiday not taken, these are exit payments and it is not unusual if someone departs an organisation for an exit payment to be a payment over and above the amount which they are statutorily entitled to but which has been agreed between the individual and the employer and very often this is connected to a non-disclosure agreement and an astonishing amount of £397,000 was disclosed in last year's accounts for these exit payments for 4-5 senior individuals and there were others as well. Councillor Boden stated that an authority will not spend that amount of money unless it believes it is effectively saving money by doing so which says something about the state of affairs that the CPCA has been in with some of its staff and with some of the departures and at the Board meeting he asked if it would be permitted for him to ask questions or make comments about the state of health of some of the former employees of the CPCA who were victims of the situation and he was told this was not appropriate to talk about in public and he further asked if it was appropriate to talk about the amounts of money which were spent on home

security for members of staff and was told again that this was not appropriate for public discussion. He has been provided with more information than he was provided with from the CPCA and some of the things he has seen have been absolutely appalling, such as the CPCA felt it was appropriate to pay for Amazon to deliver a personal alarm to a 21 year old young woman with autism who required it because of feeling under threat and he feels that things like this are outrageous and they should come out into the open but he is prohibited from saying anything which he has learned directly from the CPCA. Councillor Boden made the point that it is not alleged that the Mayor himself was responsible for those threats but he feels that the whole thing stinks, it stinks of a cover up and it stinks of secrecy and these things do come out in the end but it will not be from him. He expressed the view that the current position is wholly unsatisfactory and he believes further investigation is required and is quite confident that the truth will come out and it is better to be honest about what happened than to try and cover it up.

## **C27/23      MOTION SUBMITTED BY COUNCILLOR TAYLOR**

Councillor Taylor presented his motion regarding supporting local farmers.

Councillor Woollard seconded the motion and it was opened up for debate. Members made comments as follows:

- Councillor Tierney stated that he is going to support this motion as he thinks it is important that people have the free choice to eat what they want to eat, it is not the job of councils or Government to instruct people on how they should feed themselves and if someone wants to be a vegan, vegetarian or to follow a keto diet then good for them. He made the point that there are all sorts of medical advice which is quite different and they all have experts backing them up but people should read what they can and make their own decisions as adults and for their children for what is best for them. Councillor Tierney expressed the view that whilst it does seem to be coming from the left, the left in this Council Chamber is normally more reasonable than the left seen elsewhere.
- Councillor Sennitt Clough stated that she fully supports the motion as the minute people's choice is taken away from them it is a slippery slope.
- Councillor Carney expressed the view that it is greatly important that a local authority should be seen to supporting its local food and drink producers and as has already been said there is a good number of them in this District. He feels it is important to remember that there is a choice out there and it is good to highlight the fact that this Council does support lesser food miles. Councillor Carney referred to Hertfordshire County Council who were going down the route about a year ago where they were going to be completely plant based which effectively denies people who do not want to eat plant based products so he thinks this motion is the way forward and he does not know what the Council food and drink procurement policy is but he thinks it is worth throwing weight behind it to show that the Council is doing the right thing by supporting its local producers.
- Councillor Booth stated that he supports the motion, he is a liberal and believes in free choice and the benefits of supporting the District's local economy is great. He expressed surprise that a few years back the Council looked at its procurement policy and the whole aim of that was to try and buy more locally produced goods but it appears that this might not being achieved.
- Councillor Woollard stated that being a lifelong Fenlander he appreciates the impact that the farming community has within the area and the Council must be seen to support individual choices and on this particular issue it is important that this Council supports a very key factor within the community which is the farming sector.
- Councillor Taylor thanked members for supporting the motion and stated that he is working closely with the Countryside Alliance as this is a nationwide problem and there are various councils up and down the country that are already going dairy and meat free. He expressed the view that this Council is not only now leading Fenland but Fenland is now in charge of the whole of Cambridgeshire through this motion.

## **Members AGREED to**

- **recognise and note the huge contribution made by Fenland's farmers, growers and wider food and drink industry to the local economy, environment and rural communities;**
- **commit to further enhancing partnerships with local arable, livestock and dairy farmers to enhance Fenland's magnificent countryside;**
- **commit to supporting local farmers, growers and food and drink sector by, where possible, ensuring that food and drink provided at Council organised events are sourced from local suppliers. If plant based produce is provided, meat and dairy options should also be provided; and**
- **as part of furthering environmental priorities, the Council will consider ways to encourage residents, where possible, to shop locally, taking advantage of home-grown, affordable, and nutritious produce, including meat, dairy and plant-based options thus reducing food miles to the table and boosting the local economy.**

*(Councillors Clark and Humphrey declared that they own land that is farmed but will approach the item with an open mind)*

*(Councillor Sennitt Clough declared that she does own agricultural land but not in the Fenland District and will approach the item with an open mind)*

*(Councillor Taylor declared that he is a farmer but will get no benefits from the motion personally as it is concerning the industry)*

## **C28/23      IRP RECOMMENDATIONS/MEMBERS ALLOWANCE SCHEME REVIEW**

Amanda Orchard, Chairman of the Independent Remuneration Panel (IRP), presented the recommendations of the IRP review of Members' Allowances. She stated that whilst she is no longer a resident of Fenland she does have strong links to the District and does have a soft spot for Fenland as she grew up and went to school in the area.

Amanda Orchard advised that the IRP met to conduct a statutory review of Member Allowances as requested by the Council, with a statutory review having to be conducted every four years. She advised that the IRP consisted of herself, Ged Dempsey and Nicky Blanning, all of whom are experienced remuneration panel members having worked on other local reviews in this area and she thanked both of them for their input into this review and the officers of the Council for their support.

Amanda Orchard thanked all the councillors who provided their views into this review, either in written format or via the virtual meetings. She stated that councillors were very candid in their thoughts and not only provided views around the allowances in the context of the financial climate but also regarding the time commitment required to effectively fulfil the role of District Councillor.

Amanda Orchard stated that she often gets asked what is the benefit of the IRP being convened to consider remuneration rather than it being set at a national level and she feels there is a couple of advantages as they can tailor the requirements specifically to the authority as every authority is different in terms of geography, financial position and Council make up and they look at all those factors to ensure the remuneration recommendations are fair and proportionate. She advised that all issues that are brought to the IRP are considered and discussed fully and the other difference to an IRP v national Government is that they listen and react accordingly.

Amanda Orchard stated that the IRP considered not only the impact of the Combined Authority on members, but the new Executive Advisory Committees as well as the matter of annual increases particularly given that public sector staff have been awarded lump sum annual increases in more

recent years. She added that the IRP were keen to recommend a formula on which to calculate the Basic Allowance to ensure transparency and the Basic Allowance was then used as the basis for calculating Special Responsibility Allowances (SRA).

Amanda Orchard stated that the IRP recommended the introduction of new SRA in respect of the Combined Authority and whilst it is recognised that not all councillors who took part in the review were supportive of this change all recognised the significant extra responsibilities the Combined Authority roles required as well as additional time commitment and the benefits that being involved in the Combined Authority had for the District. She made the point that it was not a decision that the IRP took lightly as she can recall at the very beginning that the Combined Authority was not to cost constituent councils any more, however, the authority has evolved over time and has not quite panned out as people saw it initially but the IRP considered it fair and proportionate to allocate allowances to those that undertake that work which is considered to be quite substantial. She added that the IRP also made recommendations in respect of the basis for parental leave policy for members as a means of improving the diversity of councillors.

Amanda Orchard hoped that members consider the package of recommendations contained within the review to be useful in providing direction and clarity in the next few years with regard to remuneration of the Council.

Councillor Boden proposed the report and thanked the IRP for the hard work and thoughts that went into undertaking the review. He stated that the report produced by the IRP must be presented in full as it was written and within that report there are changes to be made that will mean that the remuneration will approach the average of the other five districts that make up Cambridgeshire and he feels that the structure and formula that has been set up will stand the test of time.

Councillor Mrs Laws seconded the report.

Councillor Mrs Davis recommended an amendment to the proposal as follows:

- the Vice-Chairman of the Planning Committee to receive an SRA of 0.4 x the Basic Allowance (£2,122).
- the additional SRA for membership (or substitute membership) of the Planning Committee should be allowed to be claimed in addition to any other SRAs claimed (other than SRAs as Chairman or Vice-Chairman of the Planning Committee).
- the Chairman of the Planning Committee shall be deemed to be fulfilling an approved duty for the purposes of mileage allowance is, in his consideration of whether a proposed refusal under delegated powers should be referred to the full Planning Committee, he travels to the site of an application.
- the Chairmen of the Culture, Arts and Heritage and Rural and Farming Executive Advisory Committees should each receive an SRA amounting to 0.35 x the Basic Allowance (£1,856 each).
- amendments 1 and 2 to be backdated to 1 April 2023. Amendment 3 to be backdated by 3 months as per the current mileage policy. Amendment 4 to be backdated to the date of appointment as Chairman by the relevant committee.

She advised that the additional cost of these proposals is £7,365 plus any mileage claimed throughout the year.

Councillor Miss French seconded the amendment and the item was opened for debate. Members made comments as follows:

- Councillor Booth stated he would be interested to know if these amendments were run past the IRP, he suspects it was not and if that is the case he cannot support the amendment as the whole point about having an IRP is that its independence sets the pay and when the Council starts to interfere it takes away from the whole principle of how these panels were created and set up. He added that he believes that there should probably be a national scale because otherwise you get these types of amendments

being brought forward. Councillor Booth stated that he personally disagrees with allowances for the CPCA but he would be willing to support the findings of the independent review even if he disagrees with elements of it. He reiterated that he will not be supporting this amendment as members should not be setting this and they should be listening to the IRP.

- Councillor Hoy stated that she agrees with Councillor Booth's comments in relation to the CPCA because she remembers when the CPCA was formed it was said that it was going to be costing more money and there was going to be lots of allowances and every time there has been an IRP a number of members have said there should not be an allowance for the CPCA. However, she feels the problem now is that each constituent council has their own IRP and there is a situation now where every single authority board member is receiving an allowance except for Fenland and that is not very fair and the Leader does a really good job for Fenland on the CPCA as has been heard today as he has his finger on the pulse and is listening to what goes on there representing Fenland and what does it say about Fenland's Leader if they are not remunerated as every other leader in the county is.
- Councillor Tierney stated that he remembers when the CPCA was discussed and he did not vote for it, being the only person who did not, and the reason he did not vote for it is because he said what is going to happen is it will become more and more complex and eventually they will be wanting SRAs and this is exactly what has come about. He made the point that what Councillor Hoy has said is correct, it is not fair given the situation, he would personally prefer to do away with it entirely and then nobody would get an SRA but while that work has to be undertaken it is correct that the person who has to do that work is remunerated for it. Councillor Tierney advised that he wrote to the IRP stating that he does not think members should receive any rise as he always has because he thinks it shows good leadership to not take a rise when people are struggling but he will support the recommendations this time as you cannot forever say nobody has a rise as he always thinks that councillors deserve to be remunerated for what they do, councillors all work hard regardless of the party and they all do the best they can for people, the only thing for him is showing leadership in difficult times but those difficult times have been existence for a while, they effect members as well as everyone else so as long as members can carry on delivering good work and freeze Council Tax again then he is happy to support the proposals, but if the Council is unable to freeze Council Tax next year then he will not take it. He stated that he feels the amendments are very fair and astute, with the Planning Committee having much more additional responsibilities and this reflects this and of course the two committee chairmen should be remunerated in the same way as other committee chairmen are.
- Councillor Boden stated that he fully respects the comments made by Councillor Booth and they are consistent with comments that he has made before and are a perfectly reasonable position to take but he accepts that members should be listening to the IRP and that is exactly what has happened. He made the point that due regard has been paid to the recommendations and it is agreed that the IRP have undertaken a very good job and that is why he was more than happy to propose the report but ultimately the responsibility does not lie with the IRP but with this Council and with any individual council as to what system of remuneration exists and members in this Council do know on a personal basis the amount of work that is put in by some individuals and which is involved in some particular positions. Councillor Boden expressed the view that the Vice-Chairman of the Planning Committee has to be prepared to stand in at any time at short notice and be able to chair meetings which can be highly contentious and very difficult so all the preparatory work has to be made that the Chairman puts in and the Vice-Chairman has had to step in on more than one occasion this year and it is realised by members that this position of Vice-Chairman does involve a significant amount of time and work, which generally applies to the Planning Committee which is why it is unfair to say that some members of the committee should not receive a relatively small SRA to recognise that members of this committee have to attend more meetings and spend



more time researching for meetings than any other committee that the Council has. He added that the Chairman of Planning Committee does put in a considerable amount of time in fulfilling the duties that members of the Council gave him to examine those applications which are scheduled to be refused under delegated powers and to decide whether they are appropriate or not to go to the Planning Committee itself or whether they should be refused under delegated powers and on occasion in order to do this the Chairman says he needs to be able to see the site itself and he notes that the same has applied for Councillor Davis and given this it seems that the Council have asked him to do the job and are then saying that mileage will not be paid so that you can do it properly, which does not seem right so point 3 on the amendment seems acceptable. Councillor Boden expressed the view that it is unfair that there are two new committees where the Chairmen will not receive an SRA, where a significant amount of work has already been undertaken and there is more to come forward in the future so it seems appropriate to recognise the amount of work already undertaken and for what is expected.

**Proposed by Councillor Davis, seconded by Councillor Miss French and AGREED that the amendments outlined above to the recommendations of the IRP be approved.**

Members made comments on the original IRP recommendations as follows:

- Councillor Count thanked the IRP who put together this package and he thinks they have done a very good job of putting this together. He is glad the amendment was approved, which he fully supported, and if these recommendations are approved today he does not think members should lose sight of where the Council is in the grand scheme of things as if approved a 3.5% cut is being made to the basic allowance compared to inflation and an additional 3-4% on last year so although an increase in actual basic allowance is proposed it is a reduction in real terms and there is nothing wrong with this as the UK at the moment is full of people who are not getting full inflationary increases and it would have been wrong for the Council to demand 6.7% and say this is what is expected as this is what inflation is and members do not want their roles to be any more diminished by inflation so it is right for members to take a cut but it is also right for there to be recognition of the value it has. Councillor Count expressed the view that if you look at the Council and the cost of this proposal compared to the way the Council has behaved in recent years by not putting up Council Tax and in fact reducing Council Tax he thinks the public should see the just reward that they are getting by investing some money in the people that are trying so hard on their behalf alongside officers to make a difference and to do the very best, which he feels is succeeding in Fenland. He questioned how some of the figures were arrived at in the IRP report, recognising that there is very robust thinking identified in the formula and it works very well to give the basic rate and this is based on a lot of information the IRP receives from councillors, other councils, legislation but one of the fundamental pieces of information that they get which he finds difficult is that they always get the previous recommendations so there is an element of the allowances used to do this so how much is it tinkered with or changed as a starting point rather than a fresh sheet of paper and that is why there is largely a very similar IRP report to the previous one. Councillor Count stated that whilst he does not disagree with that being used he thinks it is quite helpful that there are some areas where at the next IRP there could be some improvements to the way that it is approached, not on the basic formula but in terms of the SRAs because if you take the Leader's SRAs, which is 3.5 times the basic allowance, with the basic allowance being based on 20 hours but the IRP are not saying that the Leader does another 70 hours work on top of this and what would happen if you worked in a large company everybody would do a basic week of 35 hours but as you move up through the tiers you get more responsibility, there are more people underneath and more management there has to be a greater skill set and that is where the 3.5 comes in and the 1.4 for the Chairmen and it would be useful in the future that it is defined how the IRP arrived at these figures, all of which he agrees with, so the public can see the rationale and not that the Leader does a 90 hour week, although he is

pretty certain that he does. He referred to the CPCA and he has long been an advocate, ever since Cambridge City were the very first to introduce a members' allowance, for those people that suffer with the CPCA and all the demands it puts on them and if he had his chance tomorrow, being heavily involved in its set up, he would still vote for it today because despite the extra money involved for the allowances, if you take March for example, with 12 million pounds being invested that would not have happened and by providing Fenland's leadership with some extra resource they can dedicate extra time to the CPCA and will be able to fight as hard for this area as they already do without reward where other areas have been rewarded for years so he is very much in favour of this allowance and the overall position with the allowances.

- Councillor Booth thanked the IRP members for the work they have undertaken and he supported the recommendations as they were unadulterated but the amendments have been approved. He referred to the financial analysis that Councillor Count mentioned saying effectively it is a cut but brought to members attention Section 16.1 where it gives a breakdown that the increases relate to a 8.9% increase, which is before the amendment that has just been agreed to and with that amendment the increase is at 11% on the allowances being paid out by this Council so to say it is a pay cut is not correct.
- Councillor Boden thanked all that have spoken today as it is very important that all honest voices are heard and he reiterated his thanks to Amanda and to the IRP, having paid due regard not merely to the results of this report but also to the methodology used in order to reach it and he is very grateful for all of the work. He stated that very largely it has been accepted what is in the IRP, with there being four extremely specific amendments that have been agreed to none of which fundamentally change what the IRP suggested.

**Proposed by Councillor Boden, seconded by Councillor Mrs Laws and AGREED**

- **the conclusion and recommendation of the Independent Remuneration Panel (IRP) in respect of the review of the current Members' Allowance Scheme, to come into effect from 1 April 2023, together with the amendments agreed;**
- **authorises the Monitoring Officer to make such typographical amendments as are necessary to produce clean text copies of the Constitution; and**
- **to consider an interim review in two year's time with the suggested primary focus being the recently formed Executive Advisory Committees, with the next full review taking place no later than December 2027.**

*(Under Standing Order 2.3, this item was moved forward in the order of business)*

**C29/23      TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY STATEMENT & ANNUAL INVESTMENT STRATEGY MID-YEAR REVIEW 2023/24**

Councillor Boden presented the Treasury Management Strategy Statement and Annual Investment Strategy Mid-Year Review 2023/24.

Councillor Boden stated that the report lays out where the Council is as far as its treasury management function is concerned over the last six months and the Council is pretty much where it was expected to be, with there being three differences. He advised that one of the differences is that interest rates have remained higher than it was anticipated they were going to be so the Council is on track to earn more at the year end in investment interest and similar in revenue.

Councillor Boden added that secondly those who have any interest in UK commercial property will be aware funds have not been doing particularly well over the course of the last 9 months so the amount of money the Council is now expecting to receive from its property fund investment is somewhat lower. He stated the third area where there is a change is shown in Paragraphs 5.10 and 5.11 of the report which are the changes in the operational boundary and authorised limits for external debt and some members might have looked at this and thought why is there such big number changes and what does this mean but this basically relates to what is anticipated to be in

the capital programme and the authorised limit is always significantly higher than the operational boundary. He added that the reason that the numbers have gone down so far from the original estimate to the revised estimate is overwhelmingly because Fenland Future Ltd has not progressed with the speed envisaged some 9-10 months ago and where it was thought funding would be lent to Fenland Future Ltd for two developments this is not likely to happen until next year rather than this year so the numbers are anticipated to have an outturn significantly lower than was the case 9 months ago.

Councillor Boden made the point that the Council has stayed within its financial limits and remained on track with the exception of the timing difference in terms of funding Fenland Future Ltd.

**Proposed by Councillor Boden, seconded by Councillor Booth and AGREED to note the report.**

### **C30/23      POLLING DISTRICT REVIEW REPORT**

Councillor Boden presented the Polling Districts and Polling Places Review.

Councillor Boden made the point that this exercise had been undertaken recently so although it is a legal requirement for there to be a review at this time there was little that had to be changed. He stated that the main changes are in March South where there has been an increase in polling districts to reflect the significant residential expansion that is being made in this area and additionally in Wimblington parish it was no longer possible for a separate location to be found for residents of Stonea to vote so the whole of the parish of Wimblington will now vote together at Wimblington Village Hall.

Councillor Boden referred to two significant concerns in Whittlesey with the original report that was produced, the first was the suggestion that the residents of Turves would need to go to Coates to vote and the second was the lack of suitable polling stations in the Whittlesey North West ward. He stated that he was pleased that, with a lot of hard work from officers, that a location has been found in a private residential house in Turves and a location has been found for the eastern most of the two polling districts in Whittlesey North West, with it being possible to continue to have two polling stations to cover a two member ward.

Councillor Boden thanked the officers who played a large part in getting the report to this position.

Councillor Miscandlon seconded the proposal and the item was opened up for debate. Members made comments as follows:

- Councillor Booth stated that he is happy with the majority of the report but one area he has concern with is regarding the polling station for Guyhirn. He referred to Page 89 of the pack where it contains the response from Wisbech St Mary Parish Council and their recommendation was to move it to the community room because that is now established and recognised within Guyhirn as a hub, with it having a very active committee and the reason why it has been discounted again is that it was previously visited and if it had been visited recently officers would have found that the Parish Council have undertaken a lot of work on the access, there is more street lighting and an enlarged car park at the front of the facility. Councillor Booth referred to the fact that it says the tarmac roadway is blocked off, but it is not necessarily blocked off, it is locked and that can be overcome and there will be additional car parking outside the community room as the Parish Council is going through the process of expanding that car parking. He expressed the opinion that it is a pity that officers have not actually engaged with the community to see what has happened, with much of this taking place over the last year and he would like to see this report amended so that the community room at Guyhirn is included as a potential polling place as a lot of work has been undertaken to make it more accessible and there is more work ongoing, with it, in

his view, being a suitable venue.

- Councillor Miscandlon recognised how difficult it has been for officers to find appropriate polling stations throughout the area and he knows particularly the one in Turves, both Councillor Boden and himself drove around the area trying to find a solution so he is grateful to the household that has offered the premises as a polling station. He referred to the one that Councillor Booth has just mentioned he does not know whether that can be altered or whether it is appropriate enough, officers have obviously looked at it and turned it down at this moment in time, but it may come forward in future. Councillor Miscandlon stated he supports the recommendations wholeheartedly, he stated that it is known for a fact in Turves that the original polling station at the Three Horseshoes was central to the village, the new one is at the Old School House which is right down the other end of the village so people in Turves are slightly inconvenienced by the new polling station but it is in the village so they do not have to travel to Coates.
- Councillor Booth requested clarification as the point he was making is that the location in Guyhirn was made in a previous review and there have been substantial changes made to the access road and if officers worked with the Community Centre Committee they would make the tarmac access way open and they are very engaged in holding events at this new facility which is why he is concerned that they have not been engaged with.
- Councillor Boden stated that it would have been helpful to have heard about this before the meeting so officers could have had the opportunity to rectify this prior. He made the point that the actual allocation of polling places at any election is the responsibility of the Returning Officer and he has to be satisfied that what is being proposed is acceptable and that is why it is not possible to make this change at this time. Councillor Boden advised, however, he is happy to agree, if acceptable to Councillor Booth, that the Guyhirn Community Room be included as an option subject to further investigation by the Returning Officer and if that change could be delegated to the Returning Officer and himself to consider and if it is acceptable then this location will be inserted within the list of polling places.
- Councillor Booth indicated that he was happy with that proposal.

**Proposed by Councillor Boden, seconded by Councillor Miscandlon and AGREED to**

- **note the outcome of the review and the consultation undertaken;**
- **approve the changes recommended to polling districts and polling places as detailed in the report at Appendix C; and**
- **delegate authority to the Returning Officer and the Leader to investigate the feasibility and acceptability of using the Guyhirn Community Room as the polling place for Guyhirn.**

5.33 pm

Chairman