

AGENDA

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

MONDAY, 3 MARCH 2025

10.00 AM

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

Committee Officer: Helen Moore
Tel: 01354 622424
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- 1 To receive apologies for absence.
- 2 Previous Minutes. (Pages 3 - 12)

To confirm and sign the minutes of the meeting of 20 January 2025
- 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 Progress on Corporate Priorities - Communities (Pages 13 - 30)
- 6 Update on previous actions. (Pages 31 - 32)

Members to receive an update on the previous meeting's Action Plan.
- 7 Future Work Programme (Pages 33 - 34)

To consider the Draft Work Programme for Overview & Scrutiny Panel 2024/25.
- 8 Items which the Chairman has under item 3 deemed urgent.

Friday, 21 February 2025

Members: Councillor Mrs M Davis (Chairman), Councillor E Sennitt Clough (Vice-Chairman), Councillor B Barber, Councillor G Booth, Councillor J Carney, Councillor L Foice-Beard, Councillor A Gowler, Councillor A Hay, Councillor P Hicks, Councillor S Imafidon, Councillor Dr H Nawaz, Councillor D Roy and Councillor A Woollard

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

MONDAY, 20 JANUARY 2025 - 10.00 AM

PRESENT: Councillor Mrs M Davis (Chairman), Councillor E Sennitt Clough (Vice-Chairman), Councillor B Barber, Councillor G Booth, Councillor L Foice-Beard, Councillor A Hay, Councillor P Hicks and Councillor D Roy.

APOLOGIES: Councillor J Carney, Councillor S Imafidon, Councillor Dr H Nawaz and Councillor A Woollard

Other Members in Attendance: Councillors Boden, Mrs French, Hoy, Miscandlon, Murphy, Tierney and Seaton.

Officers in attendance: Paul Medd (Chief Executive), Peter Catchpole (Corporate Director), Carol Pilon (Corporate Director), Amy Brown (Assistant Director), Dan Horn (Assistant Director), Mark Saunders (Chief Accountant), David Wright (Head of Policy and Communications) and Helen Moore (Member Services and Governance Officer).

OSC25/23 PREVIOUS MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of 2 December 2024 were confirmed and signed.

OSC26/23 UPDATE ON PREVIOUS ACTIONS

Members considered the update on previous actions.

Councillor Booth asked about the business plan from Anglian Water and the upgrade of pipes in the rural areas which remains unanswered. Councillor Davis agreed to get this actioned.

OSC27/23 REVIEW OF FEES AND CHARGES 2025/26

Members considered the review of Fees and Charges 2025/26 report presented by Councillor Boden.

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

- Councillor Barber referred to 3.1 in the presentation, The Port of Wisbech Authority, and the 10% increase on statutory fees seems high after the 25% increase last year. She asked is this because the Council has been substantially undercharging in the past as all the other charges are 5% or less and might this have the effect of less usage of the Council's facilities and, therefore, a lower income over the year? Councillor Boden responded that in 2024/25 there was a proposal for the increase in fees particularly around the pilotage, boarding and landing due fees in relation to Sutton Bridge of 25%, but after discussions with the Port of Sutton Bridge during the course of 2024 and given how price sensitive the fees are in relation to the volume of business that goes through the port, it was agreed that the 25% would be reduced in December 2024 by 12% giving a net increase of 10% on the previous years figures. He stated that it is planned that there will be a further 10% increase which is likely to take place in December 2025 and not in April 2025, with the matter currently being looked into and will be reported at the next Cabinet meeting to determine.
- Councillor Booth asked when the review for the Wisbech Harbour is to be completed as the issue concerning funding was raised several years ago and there appears to still be no firm decision on the Port which does impact the decisions made on what fees and charges

should be made. He recalled having the same conversation last year and it appears that nothing has changed, potentially there is £50 million pounds of capital expenditure needed, and he feels a decision needs to be made so it does not keep being delayed year on year. Councillor Boden agreed with Councillor Booth that this is an urgent matter and confirmed that meetings are taking place on a weekly basis to progress on how to move forward and when any changes are made a report will be shared at Cabinet and Council. Councillor Booth asked when the target date is for getting the decision made and how long will the process take afterwards to implement the decision? Councillor Boden replied the target date is 'to progress with this as quickly as possible', when and if the Council are able to move forward then it depends upon the nature of any agreements which may be reached, but the timescale in terms of the final position could take as long as three years, depending upon whether Parliamentary approval is required.

- Councillor Sennitt Clough stated that as part of the Growth and Infrastructure she felt The Boathouse, South Fens and Fenland Hall were not marketed well enough to get bookings, especially The Boathouse at weekends due to staff not being available and wondered if the use of these buildings could be maximized with engagement from partner organisations such as the Federation of Small Businesses. Councillor Boden responded the reason weekend booking can be difficult is because the Council does not have the staff available to cover this, staff can be made available using overtime, but this is not compulsory for staff. He added that the plan is to maintain and improve the amount of usage there is in the various locations which have been mentioned but it is not easily cost effective for the Council to have a dedicated weekend facility available because there is not the demand for weekend usage.
- Councillor Booth stated that on 3.2 of the presentation it mentions the increases in fees for South Fens Business Centre of 18%, it has been much discussed in previous meetings that the intention of this centre being an incubator unit to encourage businesses to start up and then hopefully move on when established and asked, by increasing the cost by such a large amount, is that not contrary to the policy and aspiration to help with these start-up businesses. He stated the Council does need to ensure the costs and charges that are made are to a significant extent if not wholly able to cover the cost the Council incurs in various areas. Councillor Booth added that this was a different picture to the one originally given concerning helping new businesses start-up and supporting them to move to new premises where in the long term the Council would benefit from the business rates paid on other properties which would add as a profit for the Council. He reflected that the figures do not add up as suggested because ultimately the national non-domestic rate is showing as a zero gain because if people are moving out, they are moving to other premises which are already rated and to the best of his knowledge no new premises are being built in Chatteris to accommodate any business which are moving out of the business park. Councillor Booth continued if the Council were in a position of having a shortage of supply of units or rooms available for new businesses the Council would need to change its policy, but the Council is not looking to put a time limit on the amount of time a new business stays in the business park.
- Councillor Roy stated he noted the increase to the bulky household waste collection and is concerned this would have an impact on fly tipping as there are lots of issues around the district. He asked if there is any evidence that this is a fair increase and he would also like to understand why vans are being turned away at recycling centres, is this for personal reasons rather than business reasons? Councillor Boden confirmed that the recycling centres are run by Cambridgeshire County Council and not Fenland District Council and the Council has no control on what happens at these sites. Councillor Murphy stated the household waste collection is running well but to achieve this the prices have to be put up and will likely need to go up again next year due to inflation.
- Councillor Barber expressed the view that the bulky waste collection was exceptionally good for the price of up to 5 articles and the fact that residents and neighbours can combine their articles for one pick-up price is excellent when compared to what private companies are charging.

- Councillor Booth agreed the service was good but did not feel Councillor Roy's question was answered which was will the price increase effect fly tipping in the local area as this is a massive problem in the villages and must cost the Council more money to clear the fly tipping. He also added that he felt the brown bin should be free of charge.
- Councillor Davis asked if there was anyway the Council could liaise with Cambridgeshire County Council as there have been reports of people being turned away who own big trucks or very large vehicles as their daily vehicle and the recycling centre is assuming they are a business and not allowing them to enter the site which she feels is encouraging fly tipping. Paul Medd stated if there are people who are not operating as a business but turn up to the recycling centre in what looks to be a commercial vehicle, they can apply for an exemption which will allow access to the tip. Councillor Davis stated that this does not seem to be the case. Councillor Murphy added that if they apply for an exemption, they will be issued with paperwork to allow them on site legally. Councillor Booth added he believed the process was to apply online and this can be repeated up to 10 times a year to take a commercial vehicle or trailers to the site, but feels the public are not fully aware of system in place and it comes down to knowledge which is an area which could be streamlined.
- Councillor Murphy addressed the question regarding free brown bins, stating that at the end of last year 24,500 people paid subscriptions to have their brown bins emptied, this saved the Council increasing Council Tax by £1.25 million pounds. Councillor Booth responded that this was a backdoor Council Tax increase for Council Tax payers because they would be forced to have to pay for it unless there are other means to dispose of their garden waste, which equates to about a 10% Council Tax rise for having to pay for a brown bin. Councillor Murphy responded he felt that people who use the brown bin service like the service and it is down to personal choice.
- Councillor Hay stated she felt it necessary to let the public know that the staff at the recycling centres are Cambridgeshire County Council and not Fenland District Council staff.
- Councillor Hay stated the Council have recently issued a revised set of fees and charges for taxis and she has picked up that in the original paperwork Hackney Carriages and Private Hire all had charges around 2% and one at 4%. She asked what the reasoning was for the revised Fees and Charges to all read zero increases now? Councillor Hoy responded that she had asked for the prices to be held, as the thought was to not give the taxi drivers any extra burden given how few there are at present plus the Council are investigating how the process can be streamlined.
- Councillor Tierney stated that he would like to address some of the issues Councillor Booth raised in regard to collections at the recycling centres, he agreed it was getting harder to drop things off and this is creating an increase in fly tipping, but those decisions are not made by this Council, but the County Council and the pressure should be directed at them. Councillor Booth responded his question was about the increase in price for bulky waste collection from household waste which this Council provides which could lead to people fly tipping because they will not want to pay the increased charge. Councillor Tierney referred to Cambridgeshire County Council and its commercial waste. Councillor Booth referred back to his original question. Councillor Boden stated there needs to be a balance drawn between the cost to the Council and the service which is provided to people and that it is good value for money compared with the alternatives. Councillor Murphy added that some of the issue behind the fly tipping is Facebook, as there are a lot of people now asking for household goods to be removed from their houses or driveway, which is being carried out by people with a van, but as a Council there is no way of telling where these household goods are ending up and there has been evidence of items being fly tipped elsewhere.
- Councillor Sennitt Clough recognised that the discussion was focused on FDC waste but did not believe the two could be separated because fly tipping is a drain on FDC staff resources. She continued that she would like to address the bureaucracy around these tips as on the one hand there is a lot of bureaucracy and on the other hand the people who work at these sites are selling the good which raises all kinds of issues in terms of if they are selling on white goods as they may not be checked and may have electrical faults etc. Councillor Hicks questioned if anything is purchased at the tip it is always cash and where

does that cash go? Councillor Davis stated that reflects what was said earlier that this is a County Council issue and not a Fenland District Council issue and all that can be achieved is for the Council to keep raising these issues with the County Council. Councillor Booth recommended that a letter be sent to Cambridgeshire County Council from the committee raising the concerns around the bureaucratic process for residents to drop off bulky items and could they please look at that process again.

Members agreed to recommend that Cabinet include the proposed fees and charges in the budget for 2025/26.

OSC28/23 DRAFT BUSINESS PLAN 2025/26

Members considered the Draft Business Plan 2025/26 report presented by Councillor Boden.

Councillor Davis stated that items 7 and 8 have been impacted by the pending Local Government reorganisation and the Leader, Councillor Boden, would like to take this time to share the significant changes that may arise relevant to these agenda items. She proposed items 7 and 8 be considered before raising any specific questions for members and officers.

Councillor Boden informed members that:

- the Council has had for six years or more a consistent policy which has been followed in about how to move forward, prudently, cautiously and carefully looking after the assets of the Council and at the same time making sure the burden on the Council Taxpayer is kept as low as possible, and when things have to change policies have to change, too.
- the Council has experienced a significant change in the last month, a week before Christmas the Government issued a White Paper which was called 'Devolution' which informed the Council that it was going to create Mayoral Combined Authorities across the whole of England, and it was going to institute Local Government reform such that all of the Councils which currently are two tier authorities together with some of the neighbouring smaller unitary authorities would all be subject to a reorganisation so that there would be a consistent pattern of unitaries right across the Country
- the Government advised that these unitaries would have a population of between 500,000 and 1 million each, with District Councils such as Fenland being abolished, the County Council such as Cambridgeshire would be abolished, and the timescale involved is that it would be in two phases, one phase involved the changes taking place on the 1 April 2027 and the second phase on the 1 April 2028.
- County Councils were asked which of the two tranches they wish to go in, the County Councils were meant to consult with their District Councils, but that process of consultation has not worked particularly well in several areas of the Country. Nevertheless some 16 of the 21 County Councils gave notice by the 10 January that they wish to cancel their election this year and to proceed in the first tranche of changes.
- in addition to those 16 Councils two unitary authorities, Thurrock and the Isle of Wight, also gave notice that they wish to cancel their elections this year and move towards the fast track of being part of the new Unitary Authorities.
- a great deal of conversation has taken place between Council Leaders and between Chief Executives of various Councils all around the Country and there has been particular concern that the Councils do not know the rules of the game as far as how these changes are going to take place.
- Cambridgeshire decided because of the uncertainties involved and because there is already a Mayoral Combined Authority, there was no advantage to move to the quicker first tranche and that the second tranche was more appropriate which is why the County Council elections will be taking place.
- the incentive that Central Government gave towards Councils to move more quickly was that if they got their Mayoral Combined Authorities in place quickly then they would get more funding at an earlier stage which a lot of County Councils across the Country have taken

advantage of.

- Fenland District Council are now facing a situation where this Council will cease to exist on 31 March 2028. The policies that the Council has been following for the past few years have always been much longer term than just the next two or three years and the Council has always looked at the very long term in relation to the interest of the Fenland people and now this timetable has changed and the Council has a very different timetable to work upon and the implications of which way the Government is doing this is such that there are dangers to the interest of the people of Fenland which, in his opinion, is the Council's job to mitigate as far as possible.
- he is not advocating the Council campaigns against what the Government is doing as they have a large majority in Parliament and even though this was not part of their manifesto and just a couple of months before they made the announcement at the Local Government Association Conference which Paul Medd attended on the Councils behalf, the Secretary of State gave no inkling that this was in the offing but despite all of that it is clear that they are putting a large amount of political capital into this set of changes and they are not going to change their minds.
- Local Government reform does not happen very often but it can give the opportunity to make fundamental changes where it is appropriate to do so, however, the way Government is doing this does not allow those fundamental changes to take place because it is being rushed, which will affect Fenland because those authorities which are going to have their elections cancelled this year and are going forward for the first tranche of changes will not be able to work with those authorities which are in the second tranche in order to look at opportunities which may exist across current County boundaries.
- it is not merely the two-tier areas which are involved in this Government has said that those smaller unitaries which have a boundary with the two-tier areas are also part of the potential change and can also come into the calculations which are involved, and Government says that they have come to the opinion that smaller unitaries may not have the financial standing to be able to be sustainable and it is known that several smaller unitaries have had financial difficulties in recent times, with most local to Fenland has been Peterborough, which is why Government has said those unitaries under 500,000 population may also be part of this reorganisation and be part of the calculation when it comes to the establishment of new Unitary Authorities.
- it has not been made clear what the decision-making process is for this but it will be the Government Ministers that will decide what the new Unitary Authorities will look like, what they have asked for is for existing Counties, existing Districts and the existing neighbouring Unitary Authorities with small populations to talk to each other to come to some sort of consensus about what is appropriate for their areas.
- within Cambridgeshire and Peterborough that process has taken place on an entirely non-party political basis, the Chief Executives and the Leaders have come together and have talked about this issue, looking at the interests of the people that they represent and looking at the interests of Cambridgeshire and Peterborough as a whole.
- it has been agreed that no local council wants to see a Unitary Authority which covers the whole of Cambridgeshire and Peterborough as it would mean that Local Government would be massively removed from the individuals it is meant to serve.
- when studying what the Government originally stated in terms of its population size targets for unitaries where it said that a new Unitary Authority should have between 500,000 and 1 million population given that the whole of Cambridgeshire and Peterborough has a population of 903,000 then technically the only option the Council has would be to have a single Unitary Authority covering the whole of Cambridgeshire and Peterborough which none of the political parties or Leaders of local councils want to see a council as remote as that, however, it would be necessary for at least one of any two Unitary Authorities to be significantly under that 500,000 figure.
- Central Government did say in a Ministerial webinar that in exceptional circumstances there would be some flexibility on the 500,000 figure, and the flexibility mentioned could be as low as 450,000 having said that it is just not known what is going to happen as the vital details

have not been shared yet.

- all Councils are expecting to receive a letter by the end of this month (January) giving more details to allow Councils to make firm recommendations when it comes to decision making, but ultimately the Government can do what it wishes.
- when looking at the economic geography of the area and the functional geography of the area it is largely based around Peterborough but extends into Lincolnshire, South Holland, all of Rutland and some of the Huntingdon area.
- the Government have said they would entertain consensus locally even if they do cross traditional County boundaries, which is not the preference, but a possibility and not impossible that the existing District Councils may be able to be split between two Unitary Authorities.
- local lines of communication have been established between the local authorities while waiting for a decision to be made.
- Lincolnshire has chosen to take the fast-track route and if accepted then Fenland District Council will not be part of that despite any logic for Peterborough to be a functional economic area for the Unitary Authority, this should be announced by the 24 February 2025 along with the rest of the 16 counties across the Country who will be cancelling their elections and in the first tranche.
- if Fenland are in a new Unitary Authority all of its assets and liabilities will be transferred on 1 April 2028 to the new Unitary Authority and depending on the size of the Unitary Authority Fenland will constitute between 10% and 20% of the population of that new Unitary Authority, giving an example of how this could look if 15% of Fenland was in the Unitary Authority then 85% will effectively be for the benefit of people outside Fenland rather than inside Fenland and if a neighbouring authority which Fenland is merged into has a large amount of loans outstanding which it has taken out, effectively Fenland will inherit 15% of those loans shares within the whole new Unitary Authority which he feels will create some problems.
- there are already great pressures on Social Services finances and what will happen in the new Unitary Authorities takeover is those financial pressures concerning Adults, Children and SEND will be squeezed out because of the desperate need to make sure the statutory requirements to look after adults, to look after Children and to accommodate the SEND provision, with those statutory provisions being all encompassing.
- the Council now faces a situation where as a Council it has been prudent over a long period of time, there are reserves which have built up over a number of different ways and there was a plan in place and some of those plans were scheduled to come to the next Cabinet meeting, but now the Council faces a situation that if some of those plans were to take place this now needs to be actioned quickly rather than waiting otherwise all of the Unitary Authority with all of the concentration on adults, children and SEND and the nice things the Council thinks should happen are not going to be available.
- this is not because the Unitary Authority will discriminate against Fenland, it is that the new Unitary Authority will not have the resources to be able to look at those sorts of things, particularly, Sports and Leisure, and Heritage and the Built Environment which are the two areas the Council is aware of that will be affected and affect local residents.
- as it stands presently there are significant issues with the three Leisure Centres and a long standing ambition within Chatteris to have a swimming pool, the Council also know that throughout the area but particularly in March there is an under provision of sports facilities, as far as this Council can influence that as local Councillors the opportunities to achieve this is now limited to the 31 March 2028.
- this is similar to Heritage and the Built Environment, if this Council does not ensure that some of the things planned are not achieved by 31 March 2028 then sadly they will not happen.
- everything that has been shared today shows the whole outlook both in terms of the Business Plan 2025/26 and in terms of the Budget 2025/26 and beyond, the whole method of thinking is having to change, there have been lengthy conversations with the Chief Executive over the past few weeks about how this needs to be planned for, which means

the Business Plan is going to need to be changed significantly for the year 2025/26 and the same goes for the Budget as well.

- the changes will need to happen in two different ways, the first being to bring in the desired capital expenditure the Council wishes to see over the course of the next three years but also to ensure that on the revenue side that the revenue cost the Council has are reduced where possible and if the Council can increase revenue where possible whilst at the same time providing the basic services that need to be provided for this Council and for the residents of the Fenland area.
- this is more difficult than it might sound because whilst in some areas there will be no problem at all and there will be a seamless transition, with Fenland staff being moved over on 1 April 2028 to the new Unitary Authority and residents will not notice any difference from the week before to the week after. In other places he was sorry to say other members of staff may look for more assured employment and there may be a pressure from losing staff in some key areas, which may mean some difficulties in maintaining the basic services that the Council wants to maintain, and these are problems that will affect every County and District Council across the Country.
- that the existing Budget and draft Business Plan has changed fundamentally in the last four weeks and as a Council, Fenland need to make the best of it for the Fenland residents which is the most important thing.

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

- Councillor Hay asked if the Capital Projects the Council are already committed to are safe? Councillor Boden responded at this point no they are not safe until the Capital Programme is re-evaluated and given that there may be different priorities now it may be that some things take over from other things, but this will be re-evaluated based on the re-prioritisation this Council needs to do.
- Councillor Hay stated within the Business Plan it mentioned that transformation continued to be at the heart of the Business Plan, considering that in some cases transformation meant re-organisation of staff and re-organisation of buildings how will this be affected by this announcement? Councillor Boden responded fundamentally everything that this Council has done and everything the Council has been planning has been for the medium to long term with a view of any changes made having a payback period which has now gone out of the window as Fenland District Council will cease to exist in three years and two months' time so there has to be a fundamental re-evaluation of what will happen within transformation and accommodation including all the land assets the Council owns and the move to Hereward Hall as there is now no longer a future to plan for.
- Councillor Sennitt Clough asked how the Town and Parish Councils fit into the proposed centralisation and what their future relationships will look like with the new Unitary Authority? Councillor Boden responded the White Paper did mention that Local Councils in some cases could take on some responsibilities, but in practical terms he could not see this working because the Town and Parish Councils do not carry the infrastructure or the sustainability, expertise or knowledge if significant powers were transferred as they would have to employ a lot more people, they would have to spend a lot more money and they would have to levy a lot more in their precept.
- Councillor Booth stated there has been plenty of announcements regarding Local Government over the time he has been a councillor, and they do not always come to fruition on the dates that have been indicated and he would propose they are not definite dates which have been spoken about at this time and could change after the consultation. He continued the main point he wanted to address today was the Business Plan because that is the main agenda item and Councillor Boden has stated that that is going to have to change quite substantially, is this from next year onwards or is he stating that there will need to be substantial changes before it goes out as a final item for this year? Councillor Boden responded it has been reported that there is not going to be any local consultation but the Government will organise public consultations itself at a national level on these changes, but that consultation will not allow anyone to challenge the principles behind what

is being proposed it will be a matter of how what the Government wants will be implemented not whether it should be implemented. He continued as far as this not taking place the Government is investing an enormous amount of political capital into this change, and he believes this will be pushed through regardless of unforeseen hurdles as Central Government has stated that in the longer term there will be a savings made but he feels in the short term over four years the costs will be substantial. Councillor Boden referred to the question on the Business Plan and it will need a significant change before it is finally agreed, and discussions are ongoing. Councillor Booth responded based on that answer is there any point in members considering this if it is going to all be changed as he assumed it would have to go to Full Council to discuss the final version. Councillor Boden responded that this is part of the reason the Chairman asked for an explanation to take place at today's meeting, so members knew how things stand now and what the fundamental changes are for the future of Fenland District Council

- Councillor Hicks stated that 2027 is going to be very close to a General Election bearing in mind what has happened so far this may all be forgotten about as a point of interest. Councillor Boden stated that Councillor Booth mentioned earlier that there has often been talk about Local Government reorganisations which often came to nothing at all and since the major organisations which took place in the 1880s the vast majority of the initiatives which have been started have not come to fruition for exactly the reason Councillor Hicks has just been mentioning that the electoral timetable at a national level has derailed any suggestions that people have had but there have been changes which have taken place successfully, like the changes which took place in 1963 in London and the changes which took place in 1974 and the 1972 act. He added that the Government has already addressed this issue, and it is specifically stated that because its mandate runs until 2029 that it is determined to complete this whole exercise at least a year before its mandate comes to an end. Paul Medd commented that Councillor Boden's overview is helpful and is word perfect in terms of everything that happened today, there are many unanswered questions that will start to evolve from this point forward probably starting with the Ministerial letter which the Council is due to receive by the end of the month and in terms of where the Council is now Councillor Boden has covered everything. He reinforced a couple of points that Councillor Boden mentioned, that any consultation will be undertaken by Central Government that is correct, when that came up in a conversation with Ministers and Senior Civil Servants they made it very clear that the consultation should not be seen as a referendum as to whether a move to unitarization is something the public will be asked to give feedback on. Paul Medd added that Councillor Booth is correct in the past when Government have set out timetables or time targets, they do various things and often they have not been met but again Senior Ministers and Senior Civil Servants have made it very clear that it is their expectation that a model of unitarization will exist across all existing two-tier areas before the end of this Parliament.
- Councillor Booth referred to the current Business Plan making the point that one of the comments he makes every year is that not enough effort is made on the rural areas and villages and looking at the draft plan for today it makes one reference to the rural area and one reference to the villages and there is no substance throughout the rest of the document as to where the objectives are. He feels if this document is going to be looked at again could the Council please give some consideration to the rural areas and villages as he keeps asking every year and every year he is assured that this will be looked into. Councillor Boden responded that thinking in the longer term in relation to Councillor Booth's question in relation to the boundaries pre-1 April 1974 and how that discussion and what the then rural District Councils might think about what happened after the change to Fenland District Council, how that might reflect what the Fenland of today might think in terms of what happens after unitarization so with caution the Council has to understand that many of the services which Fenland provide are provided in the towns and utilised by people not just from the towns but also from the villages and that there are some particularly local requirements in the parish areas rather than the towns which must not be ignored. He continued that there has to be a balance and maybe some of the bigger ticket items are

going to be in the towns because they do service the whole of Fenland but that's not to say the Council ignores the parish areas and there will be areas within the re-prioritisation that will relate to specific needs.

- Councillor Hay asked if the newly written Business Plan will be re-submitted before Cabinet and Council? Councillor Boden responded that there will be significant revisions to the paper ready for the Cabinet and Council meeting next month.
- Councillor Sennitt Clough stated that this draft Business Plan sets out the priorities for the next 12 months but clearly those priorities may shift based on the information that Councillor Boden has just provided and it is her view that while the committee could ask questions priorities are shifting and it is an ever changing set of circumstances and suggested that this is something the committee revisit after Cabinet has met. Councillor Boden emphasised while there will be a significant re-prioritisation in view of the termination of this Council over the course of the next three years and two months and the Council must continue to need to provide services to residents and to continue to ensure that those services are provided as efficiently and effectively as possible up to the very last day of the existence of this Council, but over and above that the Council has to consider the re-prioritisation in light of the changes which will take place on the 1 April 2028.

Members noted the information reported.

OSC29/23 REVISED GENERAL FUND BUDGET AND CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2024/25; DRAFT GENERAL FUND BUDGET ESTIMATES 2025/26 AND DRAFT MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY (MTFS) 2025/26 TO 2029/30; CAPITAL PROGRAMMES 2025/26-2027/28

Members consider the Revised Budget and Capital Programme 2025/26 report presented by Councillor Chris Boden

Councillor Boden paid tribute to the work undertaken by Mark Saunders stating his expertise and knowledge is second to none and made reference to the White Paper and the future plans of the Council.

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

- Councillor Hicks stated that in light of the information shared in the budget plan it shows that over the next two years there will be a £2.5 million pound deficit, and he would like to know how this was going to be addressed and how will the shortfall be made up in the time the Council has left? Councillor Boden responded the Council has to be aware of the revenue accounts position, the revenue savings that were made and the reserves created, specifically the budget equalisation reserve, all of these things will need to be taken into account in the new balance that the Council will create between the different priorities that the Council will be putting forward for next year and for the years following up until 2028.
- Councillor Booth raised a point on the budget that it does appear that the Council are getting into a worse position and asked if the Council should not be a little more cautious particularly with the point around Council Tax given that it will be around £5 million in deficit before this Council ceases to exist and obviously the Council as it is right now does not want to be seen as not providing the best governance for the Fenland residents. Councillor Boden responded there needs to be a definition between dept and revenue deficit and agreed the Council has to bear in mind the revenue account and it needs to look at the expenditure that it was going to occur which now may no longer be appropriate to do, some of that is on the capital side which would have had revenue implication. He stated that it is difficult to overstate just how fundamental the change of mindset has to be as a result of what has now been announced which means the Council now has to look out for the best interests for the longer term of the people of Fenland and the services this Council provides at a standard that the Fenland people expect right up until the 31 March 2028 with the Council needing to be prudent with the resources on the Council Tax side and on the assets

side in the Council with the resources which belong to Fenland which should be used for the benefit of the people of Fenland. Councillor Boden continued there is an interesting set of choices to make between priorities to achieve the best outcome that is possible for the people of Fenland when Fenland District Council becomes 15% of a new Unitary Authority on 1 April 2028.

- Councillor Roy stated given the amount of work that goes into the Business Plan and the Budget and that the Council are heading into so many unknowns and is in a state of flux, he felt it needed to be applauded the work that officers have put in up to this stage as it must be a tremendous ask to get to this point not knowing what lies in the future.

Members considered and noted the draft budget proposals for 2025/26 and the updated capital programme.

OSC30/23 FUTURE WORK PROGRAMME

Members consider and note the Future Work Programme.

Councillor Davis stated that the members are still working to the proposed timetable at present and ahead of the next meeting arrangements will be made to incorporate meeting dates for 2025/26 once they have been finalised, and with what has been heard today, this will have an impact on what comes before Overview and Scrutiny and a few items may need to be moved around throughout the year.

12.05 pm

Chairman



Overview & Scrutiny Panel

Progress Against the Communities Priorities

**For performance from
April 2024 to January 2025**

Cabinet Members



Cllr Chris Boden
Leader of the Council
& Portfolio Holder for
Finance



Cllr Jan French
Deputy Leader of the
Council, Portfolio Holder
for Revenues & Benefits
and Civil Parking
Enforcement



Cllr Sam Hoy
Portfolio Holder for
Housing & Licensing



Cllr Dee Laws
Portfolio Holder for
Planning & Flooding



Cllr Alex Miscandlon
Portfolio Holder for
Leisure & Internal
Drainage Boards



Cllr Peter Murphy
Portfolio Holder for
Refuse & Cleansing,
Parks & Open Spaces



Cllr Chris Seaton
Portfolio Holder for
Transport, Heritage &
Culture



Cllr Susan Wallwork
Portfolio Holder for Community,
Health, Environmental Health,
CCTV, Community Safety &
Military Covenant

Communities

Projects from Business Plan:

Support Vulnerable Members of Our Community

ARP updates (Cllr French)

ARP continue to work to identify and prevent fraud leading to an increase in Council Tax income in the following areas:

- Local Council Tax Support
- Single Person Discount
- Council Tax
- Non-Domestic Rates.

The review of Single Person Discounts continues to provide positive outcomes. The ARP team are also working with the largest Social Housing provider in the Authority to tackle Right to Buy and subletting abuse.

The team continue to seek opportunities to identify dwellings and businesses not registered or having had an undeclared change in use, leading to increased charges, including possible retrospective charges.

The Fraud teams work, also jointly funded by the County Councils, identified over £3.8 Million in fraud and error last year, an increase on the previous year. This is due to the further resource funded by Cambridgeshire County Council and has allowed ARP to expand proactive fraud and error identification.

We are now preparing for the Annual Billing process, which will continue to offer PDF attachment e-bills.

In terms of performance in 2024-25 so far, Business Rates Collection is on target; Council Tax Collection remains on target year to date. Days taken to process Local Council Tax Support and Housing Benefit is not currently on target. This is due to the ongoing rollout of Universal Credit as migration files have increased, and staff have targeted new claims, so therefore volumes remain high. The staff continue to have focus days to target areas of work to address this issue over the coming months.

Supporting residents to manage the effects of the costs of living (Cllr Boden)

Our customer facing teams provide support to residents struggling with cost-of-living issues in many ways:

- Issuing food vouchers
- Advising on additional benefits they can claim
- Signposting to other partners who can support
- Assisting with on-line Universal Credit (UC) applications
- Working closely with our ARP colleagues we signpost to avenues where discretionary benefits might assist

- We work with a huge range of partners who can also provide additional support, and we will link our customers into these channels
- Our Early Help Hub (operating within our My Fenland customer facing team) to provide an additional channel of support to residents who may be ready to return to the work environment, having has a protracted spell of ill-health has provided support to 265 customers since June 2024.
- Our Work Well Hub (also operating within our My Fenland customer facing team) was launched in October 2024 has provided support to 181 customers since its launch at the end of last year. The aim of Work Well is to support people with health conditions and disabled people to start, stay or thrive in work, offering a range of support including:
 - A personal assessment of an individual's needs to understand 'what matters to you' and what support might work best for their circumstances.
 - Personalised, goal-based plans to address physical health, mental wellbeing, and social needs to help individuals to thrive in and/or return work.
 - Connect people with local and community-based work and health support services
 - Support for employers to understand their employee's needs and advice on how to provide workplace adjustments that support individuals to thrive at work.

Homelessness (Cllr Hoy)

In 2024/25 (Apr – Jan) the Housing Options team has successfully addressed the housing issues for 217 households where we assessed they were owed a duty to either remain in their own home or found alternative accommodation within either a 56-day prevention period or 56-day relief period. This is broken down to 123 at the prevention stage and 94 at the relief stage.

Prevention means the household has accommodation but are threatened with homelessness. Here we usually attempt to keep the household in their current accommodation.

Relief means they have left that accommodation therefore there is a need to source some alternative accommodation. This is usually the point at which a household would go into temporary accommodation.

Number of households seeking advice (homeless presentations) for this period were 1641. The figure last year for the same period was 1844. This represents a decrease of 11% and a change in an upward trend from the last 2 years

Housing advice has been given to 1086 households where no duties were owed by the Council. This means that following a housing needs assessment and any interventions there was no need to issue a formal homeless decision. This is an adjusted figure from what was previously reported to Full Council following further checks (714 reported December Full Council).

So far in 2024/25 we accepted 159 prevention duties and 288 relief duties with 95 households being owed a main housing duty (the latter means the Council could not resolve the housing issues presented by the household in either the prevention stage nor the relief stage and we now have a legal duty to find permanent accommodation and must accommodate them until so).

The best outcome is to resolve the housing issue for as many households as possible within

the prevention stage as this keeps them in their current accommodation. The second-best outcome is finding alternative accommodation for the household within the relief stage prior to having to make a main housing duty decision. The latter means that we sometimes need to make an adverse decision for the household such as not being in priority need or that they are intentionally homeless. If a household is owed a main housing duty, then the Council must accommodate the household until we are able to end the duty (usually by an offer of accommodation).

This context is important as it not only demonstrates our commitment to preventative work and that we are keeping people in their home but that we are able to get involved in a household's homelessness situation early. Our prevention success rate so far in 2024/25 is 77% (the number of households prevented at this stage [123] divided by the number of prevention duties owed [159]).

We are trying our utmost to bring this successful prevention work into resolving more households' issues at the relief stage. Our relief success rate so far in 2024/25 is 33%. (the number of households prevented at this stage [94] divided by the number of relief duties owed [288]).

Performance has improved this year and positively impacted our reported performance indicator metric, which is;

The proportion of households presenting to the Council as homeless whose housing circumstances were resolved through Housing Options work for the year
= 49% (217 preventions divided by 447 households where duties were owed)

We continue to work hard to reduce B&B use for emergency accommodation. For example, the average stay for a family household in B&B is 10 days less than compared to this time last year.

Reducing Rough Sleeping (Cllr Hoy)

As at January 2025, the Rough Sleeper Initiative (RSI) 5 Project were supporting a total of 16 clients. Of the 16 clients supported during this time; 4 were placed in off the street accommodation, awaiting their move on; 11 were street homeless and 1 was sofa surfing.

To date from this financial year, RSI have supported a total of 66 clients. Of the 66 individuals, we have successfully supported 29 into stable move on accommodation. This includes projects such as; Housing First, Supported living routes such as Ferry Project or Amicus, the Rough Sleeper Accommodation Programme with Clarion or reconnected with family or abroad. Of the total 66, 21 have disengaged with services and contact was lost. This means they are no longer rough sleeping in Fenland, and either sourced own accommodation or had an alternative outcome such as prison or left area. For those that have disengaged and remain on the periphery of rough sleeping, they remain on our radar with a focus from the RSI team on prevention work. It is our aim to encourage these clients to re-engage with support services to prevent them from returning to the streets.

Alongside the focus on prevention outcomes, RSI continues to support our core group of entrenched rough sleepers who do not actively engage with support. We speak regularly with our MHCLG advisor regarding these clients who suffer from multiple complex needs and liaise

with partners such as Changing Futures. This cohort is known as our Target Priority Group with MHCLG and we continue to adopt a multi-agency approach with partners to ensure the most support is being delivered to these individuals.

Housing Enforcement Policy & Empty Homes (Cllr Hoy)

Housing Enforcement - April 2024 – December 2024

Town	HMOs investigated	Other Homes investigated
Wisbech	24	85
March	6	33
Chatteris	8	11
Whittlesey	2	19
Villages	4	32

Total homes investigated is 224.

VILLAGE BREAKDOWN

Benwick = 1
 Coates = 1
 Coldham = 0
 Christchurch = 2
 Doddington = 2
 Eastrea = 1
 Elm = 2
 Fridaybridge = 2
 Foul Anchor = 0
 Gorefield = 5
 Guyhirn = 3
 Leverington = 4
 Manea = 1
 Murrow = 0
 Newton = 1
 Parson Drove = 1
 Stonea = 0
 Throckenholt = 0
 Thorney Toll = 1
 Tydd = 3
 Turves = 0
 Wimblington = 2
 Wisbech St Mary = 4

No.s of Notices Served April - Dec 31st 2024	S.11 Improvement Notice *	S.12 Improvement Notice **	Notice of Intent ***	Final Civil Penalty Notice ****	EICR *****	MEES *****	EPC *****	Prohibition Orders
April	2	1	0	0	2	0	1	2
May	2	0	0	0	1	0	1	2
June	0	1	1	0	2	0	1	0
July	0	1	3	0	2	0	0	0
Aug	0	1	0	2	2	1	3	0
Sept	2	4	0	0	0	0	0	0
Oct	2	1	0	0	0	2	2	0
Total	8	9	4	2	9	3	8	4

* Notices served in relation to Category 1 (serious) hazards identified during inspection

** Notices served in relation to Category 2 hazards identified during inspection

*** Notice issuing intent to serve a civil penalty fine due to a breach of legislation & can be reviewed by Assistant Director upon appeal if a request is submitted by the landlord.

**** Final Civil Penalty fine issued after review by Assistant Director- (landlord can only make a further appeal to the First Tier Tribunal)

***** EICR- Requirement for Landlord to comply with Electrical Installation Regulations- Final Number of fines issued after internal review

***** MEES- Requirement for Landlord to comply with Minimum Energy Performance Regulations- Final Number of fines issued after internal review

***** EPC- Requirement for Landlord to comply with Energy Performance Certification Regulations- Number of fines issued after internal review

In summary, since the new approach to enforcement was implemented in September 2019, out of the 162 Enforcement Notices served:

- 126 have been paid in full.
- The remaining debts will continue to be registered as a Local Land Charge on the title deeds until they are paid, or the property is sold, at which stage the debt will be recovered.

Of the 67 Final Civil Penalty Notices served:

- 40 have been paid in full,
- 10 are subject to payment arrangements,
- 2 are subject to formal court action,
- 4 are with the High Court Bailiff,
- 3 are proposed to be written off as not recoverable
- 6 are subject to an ongoing appeal.
- 2 subject to early enforcement
- Of the 15 fines issued due to EPC breaches, 12 have been paid. (total £2,400)

- Of the 23 CPN's served for breaches of Electrical Safety Regulations (totalling £114,018) £27,859 has been paid with the remaining debts subject to formal enforcement action
- Of the 11 Penalty Notices served for breaches of Minimum Energy Efficiency Regulations, totalling £32,500, £19,500 has been paid with the remaining debts subject to formal enforcement action

Empty Homes

Table below represents the total number of properties brought back into use through officer involvement.

From 1 April 2024 to 31 December 2024

	LTE 6-11MTHS	LTEP 12MTHS +
Total Officer involvement	17	35
Total for the period	1.4.24 – 31.12.24	52

The Compulsory Purchase Order (CPO) for a property in March was confirmed on the 29 November 2024. There is a 6-week challenge period between the 24 December 2024 and 4 February 2025. Once this is completed and if there are no challenges then the final part of the CPO process takes place for the Council to take ownership of the property.

Case study:

Empty Property since February 2022. Owner died, son lived abroad, and family friend lived in the North and they were managing the estate with no local knowledge or support. Property was in a poor state of repair prior to owners' death. Empty homes officer liaised with Executor and eventually supported them to contact local landlords, one of whom purchased the property on 6 January 2025 and the renovation is already underway to bring the 3-bed family home back into use as a rental property.

Golden Age & Supporting older people (Cllr Wallwork)

More than 140 older people attended the most recent Golden Age event in Friday Bridge. The Golden Age Fair took place on Monday 10 February 2025 at the Friday Bridge Tower Hall with 34 partners in attendance with the following organisations attending providing vital information, advice and guidance;

Alright Mate, Cllr Dal Roy for Neighbourhood Watch, Cambridgeshire County Council Armed Forces Covenant Officer, Careline, APS Associates, PeoplePlus, HowAreYou Fenland, Clarion Housing, Read Easy, Cambs Fire and Rescue, Fenland Volunteer Centre, Wisbech Rotary, TECS, Camsight, Cambridgeshire Libraries, March Armed Forces Veterans Hub, AgeUK, Wisbech PCN Social Prescriber, CCVS, SunNetwork, The Bobby Scheme, Healthy You, Wisbech Lions, Cambridgeshire ACRE, Active Fenland, PECT, March Model Railway, Citizens Advice Bureau, CPFT, Orchard Activities, Community Safety, Care Microenterprises, WEA.

Our next event will be held on Friday 20 June 2025 at the Manor Leisure Centre in Whittlesey as part of the Big Bash week long celebrations...

Promote Health & Wellbeing for all

Leisure & Freedom Updates (Cllr Miscandlon)

As Members will be aware, a lot of maintenance work has been completed, remains ongoing and is planned within the leisure centres. The paper that was presented at January Cabinet highlights the works in question - [270125 Leisure Condition Survey Work 1.pdf](#)

A further Cabinet Paper regarding longer term improvements to the leisure centres is being presented at February Cabinet which sets out a range of possible improvements to all leisure centres as part of the Fenland Inspire! - [240225 Leisure Facility Investment Proposals Shared.pdf](#)

The Council is continuing to work with the Football Foundation on the Playzone projects for Barton Road in Wisbech and Manor Field in Whittlesey.

In regard to day-to-day management, Freedom remains committed to providing good services to our communities. Recently the centres have lost two managers to similar roles in different organisations. Missing the leadership of key staff has impacted on service delivery, with recruitment proving challenging. As a result, Freedom is planning to implement a differing staffing structure to add resilience and capacity into the management teams across the Fenland centres. Officers are liaising regularly with senior Freedom leisure staff to address recent feedback in regards to the centres.

Active Fenland (Cllr Miscandlon)

Portfolio Holder Update: January Highlights and Future Focus

1. Sustainability for Community Provision

As two key projects near their conclusion, our primary focus is on ensuring sustainability for the future. We are aiming to maintain and expand provision that delivers long-term health benefits to the community with funding from third parties.

2. January Sessions Overview

A total of 40 sessions are on offer across Fenland this January, with several already fully booked. This demonstrates the growing demand and community interest in our health and wellness initiatives.

3. New Sessions Introduced

We are excited to announce the addition of new sessions to address specific community needs:

- a. **Diabetic Class:** A new offering aimed at supporting individuals managing diabetes.
- b. **Obesity Support Classes:** Expanded to new locations, including Whittlesey and Chatteris, with returning sessions in March and Wisbech.
- c. **Dementia Support Session:** Now available in an additional location to improve accessibility.
- d. **Strength and Balance Class:** An extra session added at Doddington Hospital to

meet the increasing demand.

4. **Active for Health Success**

Our **Active for Health sessions** continue to grow in popularity, with over 100 participants signing up for obesity support classes across the district. These sessions are vital in promoting healthier lifestyles and have received positive feedback from attendees last time round.

Integrated Care Partnership (Cllr Boden)

Help Hub

There was a total of **266** people supported by the Fenland Help Hub between June 2024 and January 2025. Employment needs and Mental Health were identified most as a need in the 266 clients worked with by Fenland Help Hub. This reflects the target audience of people experiencing health issues affecting their work or ability to work. It is also reflective of the reason for people in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough being signed off as unfit to work with 70% of those due to mental health issues.

The service has now transitioned into the WorkWell funded project which runs until the end of March 2026. The website was launched in December [WorkWell Fenland - Fenland District Council](#)

Work with partners to promote Fenland through Culture & Heritage

Delivering the Creativity & Culture Strategy (Cllr Seaton)

Working with partners to promote Fenland through Culture & Heritage (Cllr Seaton)

Place Partnership Fund – Following a huge amount of work completed in collaboration with several partners, an application for a Fenland Place Partnership project was submitted to Arts Council England. Clarion Futures is the lead applicant and Fenland District Council is a strategic partner. The project 'At a Glance' will invest in current and future cultural leaders of Fenland through a 3-year Cultural Leadership Development programme culminating in a 6-week multi-arts festival in summer 2027 drawing together a diverse programme of productions, exhibitions, events and community creative activity. We will invest in young people as future arts leaders, build new networks, and provide skills & training support to grow the resilient, confident and ambitious cultural landscape of Fenland. We expect to hear a decision in February 2025. If this application is successful, the project will begin in April 2025 and run through until March 2028.

Fenland Culture Fund – In November we held an in-person launch event for the second round of the Fenland Culture Fund. The event was well attended and received fantastic feedback. We brought people together to celebrate those projects and activities that were successfully funded in round one, heard their stories and showcased the ambitious potential that could be achieved in round two. The launch event successfully opened the £50,000 fund for applications which has received a wonderful response. Decisions have been made, and applicants have been contacted.



Fenland Culture Partnership – In November, the communications and marketing sub-group of the Fenland Culture Partnership held the first in a series of free high-quality, professional training. The sessions are open to anyone working or volunteering in the arts, culture and heritage sectors in Fenland. The first session in November was held at Wisbech Gallery and saw a range of artists, creative practitioners, event organisers, and trustees and volunteers from cultural organisations come together for an educational workshop. Industry specialists, Indigo, delivered a session called ‘Understanding Audiences’ and the participants had the opportunity to access this professional and often expensive training at no cost to them, upskilling the cultural workforce in Fenland, as well as bringing people together to broaden their network and encourage a shared learning mentality.

Fenland Poet Laureate – The Fenland Poet Laureate Award 2025 opened for entries in December. The 2024 winner Hannah Teasdale supported events by attending and performing a reading including at the Fenland Culture Fund launch and at the Chairman’s Community Carol Service.



Working with town councils and the community to provide local markets and market town events (including Four Seasons events) (Cllr Murphy)

November and December were extremely busy for Fenland. Significant work took place to organise March and Wisbech Christmas events, which take place 1 week apart. Over 200 local businesses booked to attend many of which make and sell their own products. Town centre businesses were very pleased to see March Christmas Market back in the town centre following the Broad Street improvement works, as the event day is one of the best in the year for their takings.

Highlights from March included gaining corporate sponsorship to offer free children's rides and Santa's grotto which was welcomed by many families. March library also opened to the public

offering an indoor winter wonderland in the newly refurbished space.

Regrettably Wisbech Christmas Fayre was cancelled this year owing to storm Darragh. The Council worked hard to arrive at a decision as early as possible, notifying stallholders promptly to reduce complaints and retain custom. Many of the stallholders agreed with the decision as they too had safety concerns, and were happy to carry their booking to 2025. Following consultation with the Council, Wisbech Museum and Wisbech Library did proceed with their planned indoor festive activities and the committee were pleased to learn that these events were still very well attended.

There were many activities planned for 2024 that the volunteer committee are keen to still deliver in 2025 including an art installation of scarfs and exciting street performances. We are looking forward to bringing them to fruition in 2025.

Pride In Fenland Awards (Cllr Wallwork)

The next event will take place on Wednesday 25 June 2025 at Wisbech St Mary Sports and Community Centre and nominations will open on 5 May 2025.

5 Market Place Wisbech – Fire Damaged Building (Cllrs Laws & Seaton)

An application to discharge the requirements of Condition 3 (reference F/YR25/3002/COND) is currently with the Council. This application relates to the detailed specification of the improved façade retention scaffold system, which must be installed before commencing works on Phase 3. Historic England have raised some points with the submission and the Council is currently working with the Applicant to facilitate the approval of the application.

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deliver in 2025 including an art installation of scarfs and exciting street performances. We are looking forward to bringing them to fruition in 2025.

Deliver the Council's carbon reduction and climate adaption plan (Cllr Tierney)

Net Zero Village Fund

In December 2024 the council received £90,000 from the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority through the Net Zero Village Fund.

Parish councils and village and rurally based community groups in Fenland can apply for the funding for projects that improve energy efficiency of public buildings or increase access to public or low carbon transport.

Grants of up to £25,000 are available through Net Zero Villages Grant Funding. The Net Zero Villages Grant Funding can provide up to 100 per cent of the project costs (no match funding is required).

Net Zero Villages Grant funding can fund projects for community buildings such as solar panels or double glazing, underfloor heating, energy efficient lighting or water saving measures. It could also fund projects like a community led shuttle bus or cycling related facilities.

In January 2025 six expressions of interest were received for a variety of projects meeting the grant criteria. The six projects are now being developed into full applications. Funding is to be approved by March 2025 with projects completed over the following 12 months.

Home Upgrade Grant

The scheme being delivered by Cambridgeshire Energy Retrofit Partnership will end in April 2025 and the partnership are waiting for government announcements regarding any new funds for 2025-26. In the meantime, to ensure continuity of the scheme locally, the combined authority have offered funding to bridge any gap and ensure those households who have expressed an interest in energy saving measures are able to continue with their applications.

Fenland residents have received a large proportion of this countywide funding over the past year.

During November and December 145 different measures were installed in 51 properties. Many of these were energy efficiency measures and some were heat generating measures. For example, loft and wall insulation, solar panels and air source heat pumps in properties where the main heating fuel is not gas. The existing fuel source being 'off gas' is a criteria for receiving the funding and why Fenland has benefited greatly from this grant.

The total fund made available for these works in November and December is £1,120,537.00

Over the lifetime of the project 2024-2025 the value of grant funds made available in Fenland is nearly £4 million.

Review the current arrangements for parking enforcement in Fenland (Cllr French)

Progress on the implementation of civil parking enforcement (CPE) has currently been paused until such time as additional funding is found or committed. The shortfall in funding was last estimated in December 2023 to be in the region of £500,000, however this figure would likely have now increased should CPE be implemented in the near future. Any increase in cost would mostly be associated with additional sign and line corrective works being required since the 2022 survey was undertaken.

Reference can be made to the joint portfolio holder report for May 2024 and the Cabinet report dated 18/12/2023 - Property, Assets & Major Projects – On and Off-Street Parking Enforcement Update Paper.

An alternative for regulating FDC's off-street car parks could be to implement a District Wide off-street parking places order across all FDC owned car parks. The cost has been estimated to be in the region of £75,000. Whilst this would not provide enforcement for on-street highway areas, this would enable off-street parking areas owned by FDC to be regulated and enforced which in turn would free up parking spaces associated with misuse and help reduce the number of on-street parking contraventions.

Street Lighting (Cllr French)

Streetlight Repairs & Maintenance

A total of two-hundred and eleven streetlight faults were reported and have been attended to during the period April 2024 to January 2025 by Fenlands streetlight maintenance contractor on behalf of FDC, Clarion Housing Association and the seven Parish Councils that FDC provide streetlight services for. One hundred and twenty-eight of the reported faults related to District Council streetlights during this period.

An overview of the fault attendance can be seen below. These figures exclude any capital-programmed replacement or upgrade works undertaken by the Councils streetlight contractor.

Fenland DC -	128 Fault Reports
Clarion -	6 Fault Reports
Parishes -	77 Fault Reports

The streetlight faults above combine the rectification works undertaken on behalf of the Council by both the former streetlight service provider (Cable Test Ltd) and the current service provider (Woodstock Streetlighting Services Ltd).

Both mandatory electrical and structural testing works associated with streetlights owned or managed by the Council have recently been completed. The data is currently being collated and will be shared with third party asset owners over the coming weeks. Details of streetlights that failed the structural test have already been shared with the relevant asset owners and communications are ongoing in relation to asset removal or replacement.

Capital Streetlight Replacement Works

Some legacy streetlight works have been carried forward from the former streetlight contract with CTL and are currently being fulfilled by Woodstock Streetlighting Services. These schemes will be subject to repricing at the new contract rates, but the number of schemes

carried forward were very low.

The Engineering Team are currently analysing the structural and electrical testing data to determine the next phase of capital streetlight replacement or upgrade works associated with FDC assets. In addition, there are a number of streetlight replacements required by various Parish Councils.

FDC Car Park Maintenance (Cllr French)

The next asset inspections for FDC's car parks are due to take place in March and any associated defects shall be quantified and actioned. The detailed inspection information is used to inform minor improvement, and maintenance works for the Councils public car parks.

Car Park gully cleansing works are scheduled to commence on 3rd February and are anticipated to be completed at the end of the month.

The recent cold spells have seen an increase in the number of grit runs being undertaken for FDC's car parks compared to the same period last year. The winter gritting contract continues to operate on a every other run basis for weather alerts, however additional runs have been undertaken when severe weather warnings have been in place.

Key PIs:

Key PI	Description	Baseline	Target 2024/25	Cumulative Performance	Variance (RAG)
ARP1	Days taken: new claims and changes for Council Tax Support	9.52 days	9.00 days	10.57	
ARP2	Days taken: new claims and changes for Housing Benefit	7.37 days	8.00 days	12.10	
CELP1	Total number of private rented homes where positive action has been taken to address safety issues	294	250	244	
CELP2	The proportion (%) of households presenting to the Council as homeless whose housing circumstances were resolved through Housing options work	45%	53%	52%	
CELP3	Number of empty properties brought back into use	86	50	55	
CELP4	Number of Active Fenland sessions delivered and total attendance per year	621	600	1032	
CELP5	Satisfaction with our leisure centres (Net Promoter Score)	47	38	N/A (March 2025)	N/A
CELP20	Value of Arts, Culture and Creativity Grants achieved in Fenland	£199,000	£201,000	N/A (March 2025)	N/A

Key:

	Within 5% of target
	5-10% below target
	10% or more below target

Comments

The time taken to assess Council Tax Support new claims/changes (ARP1) has not been achieved this month. This is partly down to an increase in claims as Universal Credit migration continues, as well as some host-based system issues experienced in the early part of the year. Focus days have been put in place to address this, the impact of which is starting to be seen (with the in-month performance for December achieving 5.70 days).

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UPDATE ON PREVIOUS ACTIONS

Agenda Item No. 5

REF	Date Requested	Question	Target Date
COMPLETED ACTONS			
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 02/12/24 	<p>Anglian Water Questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cllr Carney was asked to provide an example to help Anglian Water answer his question in more detail: The specific example I have is in Church Lane Chatteris where there is a historic issue with part of the street having a slump, widely thought to be a result of a collapsed drain, and in periods of heavy rain it floods Sometime last year Highways filled in the pothole that emerged; one of the residents asked the Highways Team whether the drain beneath the hole could be repaired and was promptly told "no, that's a job for Anglian Water". Further back in time, one of my former neighbors tried, along with the Chatteris Town Council clerk, to get AW to repair the drain only to be told "no, that's a Highways issue". And so, it went on. I asked the resident who spoke to the Highways Team last year to send me pictures of any flooding and if they are required. Sent 12-01-25 On the 2nd of December 2024 at the FDC O&S meeting Councillor Booth asked about the business plan from Anglian Water and the upgrade of pipes in the rural areas which remains unanswered would you be able to supply your business plan to show these plans please. AW responded I have checked my notes and cannot see if he was referring to clean water pipes or sewer pipes? Would you be able to clarify please and then I can see what I can find out and report back. Cllr Booth replied, "It is clean water pipes in the villages to the west of Wisbech. Parson Drove has been experiencing low pressure issues due to old pipes bursting. Sent 31-01-25 <p>I've now caught up with our Network Supply team and our Capital Investment Portfolio team to see what we have planned for the water main network in parts of Fenland.</p> <p>We are looking at the areas around Guyhirn, Murrow and Parsons Drove in particular for water mains renewals during the next five year investment plan. At the moment we cannot say when and would say we are probably between six</p>	<p>12/01/25</p> <p>31/01/25</p> <p>05/02/25</p>

		<p>and nine months off knowing how we will proceed in the area, but as soon as plans are ready, we will share with the community and local stakeholders of course.</p> <p>Also, Wisbech St Mary saw considerable investment over the last five years, which has driven improved performance, but, again, we may return to carry out further upgrades if required. And there may be the possibility of smaller areas of renewal around other villages too, such as Leverington and Gorefield over the next five years.</p> <p>As I say, specific schemes have not yet been agreed, designed or scheduled in, but improvements across the rural parts of Fenland are certainly in our plans. - received 05/02/25</p>	
ONGOING ACTIONS			
.		None at present	
.			
WATCHING BRIEF ITEMS			
		None at present	

Overview and Scrutiny – Draft Work Programme 2024-2025

**All Informal pre-meetings are held via Teams until further notice,
but Formal meetings will be held in the Council Chamber at Fenland Hall**

Meeting Dates

<u>Agenda Despatch Due 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>Meeting</u>
April 2025	22 April 2025	2.00pm	Via Teams	29 April 2025	10.00am

29 April 2025 (Boat house)

Time	Agenda Item	Fenland Corporate Priority	Portfolio Holder/ CMT/Officer/Guest
10.00 -12.00 Meeting	KEEP CLEAR IF POSSIBLE		
	Matters arising – Update on previous actions	All	Amy Brown
	Future Work Programme 2023/24	All	Chairman Amy Brown

