

COUNCIL

MONDAY, 21 JULY 2025 - 4.00 PM



PRESENT: Councillor B Barber (Chairman), Councillor S Clark (Vice-Chairman), Councillor I Benney, Councillor C Boden, Councillor J Carney, Councillor J Clark, Councillor D Connor, Councillor S Count, Councillor D Cutler, Councillor Mrs M Davis, Councillor L Foice-Beard, Councillor Mrs J French, Councillor K French, Councillor G S Gill, Councillor A Hay, Councillor P Hicks, Councillor Miss S Hoy, Councillor S Imafidon, Councillor C Marks, Councillor N Meekins, Councillor A Miscandlon, Councillor P Murphy, Councillor Dr H Nawaz, Councillor D Oliver, Councillor M Purser, Councillor B Rackley, Councillor D Roy, Councillor C Seaton, Councillor E Sennitt Clough, Councillor M Summers, Councillor T Taylor, Councillor S Tierney, Councillor S Wallwork and Councillor A Woollard

APOLOGIES: Councillor G Booth, Councillor G Christy, Councillor R Gerstner, Councillor S Harris, Councillor M Humphrey, Councillor Mrs D Laws, Councillor J Mockett and Councillor D Patrick

C15/25 PREVIOUS MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of 19 May 2025 were confirmed and signed.

C16/25 CIVIC ENGAGEMENTS UPDATE.

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

C17/25 TO RECEIVE ANY ANNOUNCEMENTS FROM THE CHAIRMAN OF THE COUNCIL AND/OR THE HEAD OF PAID SERVICE.

The Chairman announced that her Civic Reception will take place at Gorefield Community Hall from 6.30pm on 19th September and her coffee morning in aid of Damsons will be in the Council Chamber from 10am on 23rd October. She thanked members for their support and looks forward to seeing as many of them as possible at these events.

There were no announcements from the Chief Executive.

C18/25 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. In the absence of Councillor Gavin Booth, Leader of the Opposition, and having been nominated by him to deputise, Councillor John Clark stated that he had no questions to raise under Procedure Rule 8.4.

Members asked questions of Portfolio Holders in accordance with Procedure Rules 8.1 and 8.2 as follows:

- Councillor Cutler thanked all involved in the Fenland Inspire! projects and asked if anything will be done about the lack of play equipment in Murrow. She understands that Cabinet had said it is not financially prudent to pursue all the proposed projects, but those going ahead all appear to be town-based. Councillor Boden agreed he had said it is not currently financially viable to proceed with all the projects, but the aim is to provide a legacy for all Fenland residents and there are several out-of-town schemes, one of which is the district-wide play equipment assessment. This will include the villages, particularly those that are currently poorly served. Furthermore, it is not a one-off project but will run to March 2028 and he will ensure that the villages are not disadvantaged in the order of which works will arise.
- Councillor Nawaz said it is commendable to provide play equipment for young children, and the Council must do its utmost to deliver outdoor facilities. He asked if the Station Road recreation ground in Whittlesey is on the list as well as the villages of Coates, Eastrea, Turves and Pondersbridge and if not, why not? Councillor Boden responded that a full assessment is yet to be completed but it will review areas where there is little or no provision, including those mentioned. Meanwhile Councillor Nawaz will be aware that members stopped the Station Road ground being sold some months ago and work is being done to make the area available for the public in the long term. However, this area has been subjected to repeated serious vandalism and so there is no appetite to invest further money there. Councillor Nawaz said that vandalism can occur anywhere and requested that this be reviewed. The better option would be to work with the community and police to get vandalism under control otherwise this could be perceived as a collective punishment for the community. He is aware this is taxpayers' money and knows how carefully it is scrutinised, but the money is being spent on them, and decent young people should not be punished. Councillor Boden said the extent of this vandalism is far greater than anywhere else in the whole of Fenland and in this case there is alternative provision available at the nearby Manor Leisure Centre. He does not like the idea of withdrawing a facility but ultimately if the community fails to ensure a resource continues to an operational standard, a decision must be made on cost. Based on the level of vandalism previously, how long would new equipment at this site last, nine months, six months, a week?
- Councillor Nawaz voiced his concern at the mixed feedback for customer satisfaction at the leisure centres, noting that Freedom Leisure's national average score is 21 compared to Fenland's average score of 13. He asked what the plans are to increase this score and how it will be monitored and requested that the Council be given a progress update in six months' time. Councillor Boden said the quality of leisure services needs to be taken up with Councillor Wallwork and he would encourage members to forward any complaints to her. Meanwhile the Council is offering the biggest investment in leisure centres in the region of tens of millions of pounds. He cannot promise results in six months but by 2028, Fenland's leisure centre facilities will be substantially greater than they are now. Councillor Mrs Davis pointed out that Freedom Leisure representatives recently attended an Overview and Scrutiny Panel meeting where all those questions were answered adequately and members can be reassured that Freedom Leisure remains under scrutiny.
- Councillor Nawaz was pleased to read that a health station is being placed in Wisbech and asked if this could be replicated in all the Fenland towns given the enormous health disparity in this region. Councillor Tierney said it is not always financially possible, but the concern should be more about trying to get everyone healthy, and not the disparity. Ultimately it is a matter of personal choice, and all FDC can do is provide information and get people to understand what will make them healthier, the rest is up to them.

Councillor Taylor presented his motion regarding meat labelling, which was seconded by Councillor Foice-Beard.

The item was opened for discussion and Members commented as follows:

- Councillor Carney said he would support this motion wholeheartedly, particularly due to dietary requirements and people becoming more aware of problems with food. However, he would ask for a recognised logo of halal friendly products as there are with other types of food.
- Councillor Tierney gave his support for the motion saying more information is needed regardless, but he gets frustrated when all Council can do is write to the Government, which he sees as virtue signalling. He would encourage members to think about what can be done within this Council's powers rather than just write to the Government as he believes they do not listen.
- Councillor Hay gave her support to what she said was a well written motion as she is against any unnecessary suffering to animals.
- Councillor Sennitt Clough agreed with Councillor Hay; however, she wonders if FDC has the leverage to lobby DEFRA. She is also concerned that halal practices are being singled out; it may be seen as targeting one religious group and where does this stop? It is a complex path that needs to be addressed with wider public engagement. She is not against supporting the motion but as stated, wonders if FDC has the lever to enact this through.
- Councillor Nawaz endorsed the points made by Councillor Sennitt Clough and Councillor Tierney. All members would be against suffering inflicted on animals. Halal has strict conditions but how many of us are aware of those? He echoes the points about the way this motion has been presented; it would appear that FDC is singling out one group in particular which may affect the credibility of the good cause being pursued. Would it apply to kosher meat, which also has a ritual attached to it? How effective is FDC going to be? He suggested consulting experts on both halal and kosher meats to find out exactly how they do things and then come back to Council with the motion. He asked if Councillor Taylor is seeking a simple labelling process. Councillor Nawaz added that the information he has is yes, it would benefit both but as far as he is aware halal is always marked otherwise Muslims would not buy it. He would agree that non-halal meat eaters have valid points. Halal is already labelled; non-halal is not and there may be some merit in ensuring non-halal is labelled as such.
- Councillor Boden said the situation is more complicated. As far as kosher is concerned the meat is slaughtered in ordinary slaughterhouses, but halal meat is only able to be slaughtered in houses that follow halal practices. That is why it is easy to indicate which are the halal slaughterhouses with an 'H'. In terms of consumer choice, the public should be able to see which ones are halal. He does not understand why this is being denied or restricted. People have ethical or religious reasons for doing so and those choices should be respected.
- Councillor Miscandlon said he does not believe the motion goes far enough and would like to see the labelling of kosher meat added to the motion.

Councillor Taylor summed up saying that the reason kosher is not being included in today's motion is because there is a large investigation ongoing regarding kosher meat. It has been found that traditional abattoirs kill kosher-style once or twice a week and knowing that the Jewish community only eat the front end of the cow down to the tenth rib, the back end of the cow ends up in the supermarket and in the human food chain. Because they are slaughtered in a traditional abattoir, they have that one traditional abattoir code. Both he and Rupert Lowe MP are trying hard to find out which abattoirs are killing kosher; it is a very long-drawn-out process, but the information will be released once all those abattoirs are known. This is a worldwide issue that people have got behind and is something that needs highlighting for all communities to get food labelled correctly to give all consumers a choice.

The Motion was approved.

(Cllr K French left the meeting at the end of this item).

Members considered the Treasury Management Annual Report 2024/25 presented by Councillor Boden.

Proposed by Councillor Boden, seconded by Councillor Mrs French and AGREED to note the report.

(Councillor Marks left the meeting at the end of this item).

Members considered the Local Government Reorganisation Update report presented by Councillor Boden, which was seconded by Councillor Mrs French.

Members commented as follows:

- Councillor Cutler thanked Councillor Boden for the update on the three options and asked if the fourth option being put forward by Peterborough is likely to get off the drawing board and if Council also need to consider this.
- Councillor Boden responded that it is true that the two labour MPs in Peterborough have decided they would prefer something different for Peterborough, and it is a very interesting proposal for three unitary authorities instead of two. Currently there are two upper tier authorities, and they are responsible for the overwhelming majority of spend, 80% of the spend being social services. If there are three instead of two, the area with the greatest amount of spend will have a lesser economy of scale and that is concerning. Especially seeing how the areas have been divided up – Fenland is with East Cambs with a slither of Huntingdon from Ramsey to St Neots. Ramsey would be included, Sawtry would not. It is a dog's dinner. What is worse is that LGR will force disaggregation of assets, liabilities and responsibilities. Assets which the County Council has will all need to be split up and this is a massively complex process. Northamptonshire, who had unitarisation thrust upon them three years ago have still not managed to resolve this. Peterborough MPs want to disaggregate not just Cambridgeshire County Council but also Huntingdonshire District Council. If his understanding of their map is correct, they also want to split Huntingdonshire Town Council into different areas. He sees this proposal as being one which is absolutely determined by a very Peterborough 'centric' attitude and has severe doubts it will get through Peterborough City Council when it is put before them, and it is necessary for at least one local authority to put forward a scheme for it to be considered. He doubts that any authority will.
- Councillor Taylor said this is something he has not agreed with, it is just political party point scoring but through his motion, members will know the people he is dealing with and there is a strong movement that this may not happen yet. Jim McManh seems to be doing things on his own, so he just sees this as major point scoring with no one having a specific plan of what they want to do and how, and no chance of it happening by November this year.
- Councillor Woollard said looking purely at the three proposals, personally he is in favour of Option C – combining FDC with East Cambs, unfortunately also Peterborough City Council. This combination will safeguard the rural nature of Fenland along with East Cambs and water down the effect of the urban takeover from Peterborough.
- Councillor Tierney commented that since the current government came to power, they have made a lot of mistakes, but he does not think many people realise this is the most destructive policy they have issued, causing the most damage to Fenland communities. This is such a disastrous idea that will damage the ability of local institutions to try different things, to know who your councillors are, to make a difference, for no known reason. He does not want to vote for any of the options although he does have a preference. However, in his opinion everything is presumptuous, the argument being if you do not speak up now, they will do something to you, but he does not see the value in supporting it.

- Councillor Nawaz commented that as a principle he does not agree with this because despite the Government propaganda about local democracy, he believes it will damage it because the representatives will become increasingly remote. Huge wards are being proposed, currently the South Whittlesey ward is 9 miles long and 6-7 miles in width, how it would be possible to represent the widespread rural areas is open to question. He thinks it will put the representatives further away from the residents and therefore will be more difficult to articulate their hopes, aspirations and concerns. The fourth option, there is a prima facie case for that, and Councillor Boden has quite rightly poured cold water over it but that said, there are important differences between each of the councils. They are widespread rural areas with cultural differences, he knows, he grew up in Peterborough, but the temperament, expectations, cultural understandings and needs are not the same as those of Fenland or even Huntingdonshire. They are under huge debt, they put up their council taxes to the maximum, they have huge parking charges, Fenland does not and has kept council tax down for the seventh successive year. For all these reasons, he would be opposed to all three options.
- Councillor Hoy said that she similarly agrees with Councillor Nawaz. Going in with Peterborough will be a disaster, particularly for Wisbech, the reason being that so many of their rough sleepers will come to Wisbech. She worries that because of Fenland's cheaper housing many more landlords will pop up here, they will pick the cheapest place to live, it will exacerbate all this area's existing problems and make things worse. She has seen some people online saying the reasons, but they are overlooking the facts, it is strange that they are so scared of outsiders but also fiercely loyal, sceptical but would give you the shirt off their back. Wisbech is a beautiful town, a diamond in the rough, Chatteris, another lovely local town. Whittlesey, so much going on with beautiful buildings and lovely residents. March, another lovely useful place with lots of people who have lived there for years. Fenland is a wonderful place, if we lose sight of that, our villages, and the older she is getting the more she recognises the value of that lifestyle, if that is lost, we will never get it back, we will just become a massive enclave of Peterborough. It will just be Peterborough with Fenland's history lost forever.
- Councillor Mrs Davis said Government talks about localism but what this does is take that away from rural areas, it is vital for Fenland to have a voice at the table, but the voice will be very limited. FDC has not increased council tax and provides free parking, this will go, and there is talk about devolving some of the jobs down to parish level so the precepts will have to go up. It is bad for rural areas. She likes none of the options but if pushed, she would choose Option C as it gives rural areas more chance.
- Councillor Hay commented that she also thinks this is disastrous, so much for localism, it is as far away from that as you can get but if having to put in a proposal, she would be against proposal B which puts Fenland with four whereas the other options put us with three. She would like to keep the new authority as small as possible and would also favour Option C.
- Councillor Miscandlon recalled when he was Chairman of FDC, people used to say what is Fenland; four market towns and 13 villages and every one of them is different and he wants to keep it that way, he does not support this, it will be a mish mash. Government announced this just before Christmas and ruined it for people and they have been doing it ever since.
- Councillor Count commented that like many people, he does not agree with the proposals, but Fenland has to be at the table regardless. The three options presented have been narrowed down, members are not at the stage yet of saying which option they want, and they need the business plans to understand the financial and geographic synergies, and he thinks that will come along later. He sympathises with the person who said that it does not matter what you say because Government will pick the options, and he agrees with that but the main point about being at the table is being part of the voice as to what comes after. None of the proposals leave Fenland with Cambridgeshire County Council, that will be gone. All of them put Fenland with Peterborough City Council and he knows from experience the bones have always been at CCC, if Fenland is not at the table afterwards to argue its corner, then the damage comes. When £300m of the deficit is on Fen roads, Fenland needs a strong powerful voice to be involved all the way along to highlight the inconsistencies, it cannot be done at local level and government level, he is going to wait for the business plans. No matter how much members resent it, the Leader needs to be given an opportunity to engage.

- Councillor J Clark pointed out that local government reorganisation is not new, his father was part of this, and he is sure the comments at the time of the last review were the same. Personally, his business sense tells him it would be better staying connected to Cambridge but that is not an option. The Leader has been the one sitting in the meetings and getting the feedback, and so he would like to ask Councillor Boden what his feeling is about what the other councils may prefer that may probably help Councillor Clark to make up his mind.

Councillor Boden summed up that it had been a very useful and helpful debate, all comments will be considered but the Council has until 28th November to make a submission. In response to Councillor Clark asking what other leaders are saying, he can only say that South Cambs met and agreed to Option B, but he cannot speak for the others. Several members today have reluctantly mentioned their preference for Option C, and he agrees that this will give FDC the greatest voice and there is no option but to go with Peterborough regardless. Despite all this, the Government will end up doing what it wants anyway. However, FDC has to play the game to have any say at all and exercise what influence it can and ensure it has a say. Once more information is available, members can look again at what stands out as being best for this area. Another meeting will be held in the autumn to discuss further and choose options.

AGREED for Full Council to provide their feedback to Cabinet to support ongoing dialogue within the LGR process.

(Councillor Marks left the meeting at the end of this item).

C23/25 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY ANNUAL REPORT

Members considered the Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report presented by Councillor Mrs Davis as Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel.

Proposed by Councillor Mrs Davis, seconded by Councillor Meekins and AGREED to note the report.

C24/25 CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT

Members considered the Constitutional Amendment Report presented by Councillor Hoy.

Proposed by Councillor Hoy, seconded by Councillor Sennitt Clough and AGREED to approve the amendments to the Constitution and Street Trading Policy as set out in the appendices, and to delegate to the Monitoring Officer to update the Council's Constitution accordingly.

5.37 pm

Chairman