

Agenda Item No:	5	
Committee:	CABINET	
Date:	20th February 2023	
Report Title:	FINAL BUSINESS PLAN 2023-24	

Cover sheet:

1 Purpose / Summary

For Cabinet to consider and recommend to Council the approval of the Final Business Plan 2023-2024.

2 Key Issues

- Our Business Plan 2023-24 identifies the key challenges and opportunities for Fenland. Its structure outlines our key Corporate Priorities (Communities, Environment, Economy and Quality Organisation), and an additional cross cutting 'Council for the Future' section. This section outlines transformative projects which aim to tackle areas of need within the district, or to transform services or the wider organisation to be fit for the future.
- Just as the country started to recover from the aftermath of Covid, the war broke out in Ukraine with profound economic consequences. Now the UK is facing a soaring cost-of-living crisis. This, partnered with over a decade of continued public sector austerity, is putting real pressure on local government resourcing. Nevertheless, the Council remains committed to delivering high-quality services and lobbying for appropriate investment to tackle important issues. Millions of pounds of investment is already secured and projects are underway as part of 'Partnership Investment in Fenland.'
- The Draft Business Plan was presented to the Overview and Scrutiny Panel on 16 January 2023. The Panel recommended a change to the wording on the 'Work with partners to promote Fenland through Culture and Heritage' priority, which has been updated and a design change for the Quality Organisation priority. There was also a request for a performance indicator change that will be incorporated into the Task and Finish Group which is looking at Corporate Performance Indicators.

3 Recommendations

For Cabinet to consider and recommend to Council the approval of the Final Business Plan 2023-2024.

Wards Affected	All
Portfolio Holder(s)	Councillor Chris Boden, Leader of the Council Cabinet Members
Report Originator(s)	Paul Medd, Chief Executive Peter Catchpole, Corporate Director Carol Pilson, Corporate Director David Wright, Head of Policy & Communications
Contact Officer(s)	Paul Medd, Chief Executive Peter Catchpole, Corporate Director Carol Pilson, Corporate Director David Wright, Head of Policy & Communications
Background Papers	Budget and Medium Term Financial Strategy Draft Business Plan 2023-24

Report:

1 BACKGROUND AND INTENDED OUTCOMES

- 1.1 Our Business Plan sets out the priorities we aim to deliver over the next 12 months. These priorities have been developed to address the most important needs of our communities.
- 1.2 Our priorities are split into three headings: Communities, Environment and Economy. The fourth priority, Quality Organisation, sits alongside everything we do. It aims to ensure that the Council runs effectively, transparently, and sustainably.
- 1.3 Each priority is underpinned by a series of performance indicators, which are reported to all Members at our Council meetings. These public reports are summarised to provide end of year performance updates in our Annual Report. This explains what the Council has been doing over the previous financial year to achieve its objectives.
- 1.4 We also have a fifth cross cutting priority: Council for the Future. This priority is formed from a selection of transformative projects which aim to address the future needs of residents and our organisation as a whole.

3 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 Cabinet is being asked to approve the Business Plan 2023-24 because it will provide a structure of proposed aspirations and outcomes which will guide

delivery of the council's core priorities. It will also aim to ensure that the Council runs effectively, transparently, and sustainably.

4 CONSULTATION

- 4.1 We ran an online public consultation about our Draft Business Plan and Budget 2023-24 between 3 January and 3 February 2023. It was publicised on the front page of our website, our news web page and FDC social media accounts and via press releases and circulated to our news distribution list. It was also available in paper format at the South Fens Business Centre, Chatteris, the Boathouse Business Centre, Wisbech, and Fenland Hall, March.

43 people responded to our survey. 67% said that our Draft Business Plan and Budget clearly explained the services we plan to provide and how we will use our resources over the next 12 months.

5 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 5.1 No alternative options were considered as the Council has made an ongoing commitment to produce an annual Business Plan.

6 IMPLICATIONS

6.1 Legal Implications

- 6.1.1 There are no specific legal considerations connected with the content of this report.

6.2 Financial Implications

- 6.2.1 The Business Plan 2023-24 sets out high level corporate priorities that are reflected in the Council budget.

6.3 Equality Implications

[Consider whether there are any specific equality implications and if so, how these have been met otherwise put N/A].

Draft Business Plan and Budget Feedback 2023

Our consultation survey ran between 3rd January – 3rd February 2023. The survey was available to complete digitally and in paper format at the South Fens Business Centre, Chatteris, the Boathouse Business Centre, Wisbech and Fenland Hall, March. It was well advertised via a press release, on the front page of our website and through our Twitter and Facebook channels. The press release was also circulated to our news distribution list and to Town and Parish Councils.

We received 43 responses from across the district. Residents were asked:

1. Does our Draft Business Plan and Budget clearly explain the services we plan to provide and how we will use our resources over the next 12 months?

67% of respondents said yes, 33% said no. 11 people left comments, as follows:

- The obsession with trying to avoid a ride means services are being cut.
- Be a lot more honest about what you can no longer provide
- I support bringing new businesses into the community but this should not be detrimental to local residents. The circular economy in Whittlesey Saxon Pit has affected amenity to residents currently matters are improving but the current situation should never have occurred in the first place
- The business plan is easy to read and understand. It would be good if some of the budget information was included so there wasn't 2 documents.
- Make it less jargon!! I've read all of the 37 pages in both documents and I haven't a clue what you are proposing. It reads as an internal document not information for the public. Where is the easy read version?
- Provide an easy to understand version of the budget for people who do not have a very good grasp of the technical , budgetary or accountancy terms
- Both the 'Draft Business Plan & Budget' need to be made more 'reader' friendly. Just the initial look puts one off reading it.
- Try in layman's terms, very confusing for a lot of people, old and young.
- More explanation on how you will meet significant changes that have developed over the last 3 years
- Plainer language

2. Whilst being mindful of our financial and resource constraints, do you have any further comments about our Draft Business Plan and Budget?

26 people left comments, as follows:

- The services Cesar being provided are deteriorating. Maintenance of cemeteries and open spaces needs better funding
- Council tax needs to rise if public services are to be maintained.
- Show some ambition and imagination
- A tiny increase in fdc element of council tax should be included, albeit residence will see it as unnecessary, I believe it should be expected, it won't be as much as police/fire etc.

Fdc are not valued for previously 0 increases so why not give council a chance to improve services by gaining a little extra from council tax.

- It will be as always: Whittlesey itself will miss out to March.
- More money needed to maintain playgrounds, cemeteries and open spaces
- Lower the rates for high street shops
- In current climate you should be looking to reduce costs
- Teachers have received a 5% pay rise during covid and provided a poor service to pupils in Whittlesey during covid. We already have low education in fenland you say I would like to see teaching standards raised also the provision of youth services run and managed by properly qualified professionals
- Would suggest there was more money invested into our roads (pot holes). Is there a need for FDC and Town/Parish councils. Couldn't the all be merged?
- No because I haven't a clue what its actually trying to say
- I think it will be very difficult to balance the books, as it were. There are financial constraints everywhere, costs rising and there are continual reports of "we don't have the money to do A, B, or C." There has to be a recognition that if services are to be maintained, and improved, then Joe Public has to pay for them. If it was just this year that the rate was frozen, I could understand it, but it is proposed to freeze for the fifth successive year.
- Surely, with the pressures of inflation and interest rate rises, this freeze is impossible to maintain without cutting services.
- No
- No Indication of reversing cuts in support that have endangered the continued existence of local museum's etc
- Lack of support to Heritage eg museums
- Why publish a draft version without input from the December 2022 government announcements? Why not wait and incorporate those announcements into the document even if it means putting the document out for public comment is delayed slightly. As it is, this could change completely once this information has been fed into the budgetary process, making any public comments on this current draft document immediately obsolete.
- No
- See comment above....
- Looking forward to the March high street developments and bringing the town into modern times. Let's hope all the local residents support the changes and use the local shops and businesses - there's too much negativity about the changes so far.
- Removing graffiti. This has become a blight to the whole area over the last year.
- Utter madness. You have the council being propped up by a man and a dog, relying on their goodwill to keep the plates spinning. Even a 4.99% increase is less than half the rate of inflation, so would be a real terms cut to your spending power. Google "section 114 notice", read about Northamptonshire County Council's self imposed bankruptcy because it deprived itself of money by not keeping up with inflation, and you will see Fenland's future.

- You should INCREASE the precept for the current rate of inflation plus the lost assets over previous years
- None
- There is no real detail about the future of the Wisbech High Street Project. I am concerned that most of the money being spent on consultancy and subsidising absentee landlords.
- Absolutely brilliant and very well done not to increase the charge

Demographic information (optional)

Table 1: Where respondents live

In or near to Chatteris	5%	In or near to March	25%
In or near to Whittlesey	19%	In or near to Wisbech	35%
Village or rural location	14%	Outside of Fenland	2%

Table 2: Answering as a:

Resident	Group or organisational representative	Business representative
98%	2%	0%

Table 3: Respondent age group:

Under 16	2%	16-24	0%	25-44	26%
45-59	23%	60-74	42%	75+	7%

Fenland District Council Business Plan 2023/24



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Introduction by the Leader and Chief Executive

Welcome to Fenland District Council's Business Plan for 2023/24.

When we published our 2022/23 Business Plan last year, setting out our ambitions and priorities for the coming 12 months, little did we know that a health pandemic wouldn't be the only crisis to impact us all so greatly, so quickly.

Just as the country started to get back on its feet in the aftermath of Covid, the war broke out in Ukraine, with profound economic consequences. Energy markets and supply chains have destabilised the world over, leaving the UK and many other European countries facing a soaring cost-of-living crisis.

Inflation is at its highest rate in three decades; fuel, food, gas and electricity prices are rising, and millions of households across the country are in need of help.

We understand that many residents and businesses in Fenland are struggling to cope, especially those in more deprived communities and including those experiencing financial difficulties for the first time, and we are fully committed to doing everything we can to help.

Through our ongoing Cost-of-Living Support Campaign we will ensure that everyone who needs help has access to the support and guidance available to them both in the short-term and long-term as we learn more about how this crisis



Paul Medd
Chief Executive



Chris Boden
Leader of the Council

will impact our economy, our health and social wellbeing.

We know the cost-of-living will impact our own finances as it now costs far more to provide the essential services that people rely on.

But while we can't solve the national or international problems, we are on the side of our residents and businesses and will do everything we can with the resources available to help our communities through these difficult times.

As you'll see in this Business Plan, we have set out how we will continue to work in collaboration with partners, businesses and our communities to deliver important services for local people whilst lobbying for appropriate investment to tackle important issues.

We're also emphasising the fundamental and vital importance of transformation of service provision by the Council to achieve a long-term sustainable model of operation.

Times may be challenging but we will continue to seek opportunities to sustainably maximise Fenland's potential and make it a great place to live, work and visit: both now, and for future generations to come.

About Fenland

Fenland has strong community spirit and pride in its heritage. There are 102,500 people living in the Fenland District (ONS: 2021), which covers 211 square miles within North Cambridgeshire. Over 70% of residents live within our four market towns of Chatteris, March, Whittlesey and Wisbech. Our beautiful rural landscape is home to 29 villages and attracts visitors from nationwide.

Fenland has the lowest house prices in Cambridgeshire, with the average house priced at £239,184 (UK HPI May 2022); 23% less than the national average. This, along with plentiful commercial land and proximity to large urban centres such as Cambridge and Peterborough, contributes to Fenland's rapid population growth. By 2041, it is expected that our population will have increased by 23% to 126,160 (ONS: 2020). As outlined within this plan, we have plans in place to maximise the positive opportunities that growth could bring.

Our population is getting older. 30,000 residents (29%) are aged over 60; above average compared to Cambridgeshire and the UK (ONS: 2021). Alongside partners, we are working to enable residents to access the support they need to live happily, healthily and independently.

We also face some challenges around deprivation, particularly around education and health. We are the 80th (out of 326) most deprived area in the country (IMD: 2019) and have England's lowest primary literacy attainment rate at 64.5% (UK Prosperity Index: 2022). Nevertheless, we continue to work closely with other organisations to positively overcome these challenges.

102,500
population



211
square miles
incorporating
4 towns
& 29 villages

House prices
23%
lower than the
national average



135

hectares of open
green spaces



Our Priorities

Our Business Plan sets out the priorities we aim to deliver over the next 12 months. These priorities have been developed to address the most important needs of our communities.

Our priorities are split into three headings: Communities, Environment and Economy. These priorities primarily focus on the statutory and wide variety of core services that we provide day-to-day. In a typical year we empty 3 million bins, clean 210 square miles of town centres and open spaces, answer 78,000 telephone enquiries and determine 1,300 planning applications – and more!

The fourth priority, Quality Organisation, sits alongside everything we do. It aims to ensure that the Council runs effectively, transparently and sustainably. We invest in and support our workforce to ensure they have the skills and resources they need to work to the best of their ability. Our unique 'one-team' culture enables officers, elected members and partners to work effectively together without the constraints of traditional department silos.

This approach results in excellent staff satisfaction, with 87% of staff saying they were proud to work for us in our latest Staff Survey (2022).

Each priority is underpinned by a series of performance indicators, which is reported to all Members at our Council meetings. These public reports are summarised to provide end of year performance updates in our Annual Report, which is available to download on our website. This explains what the Council has been doing over the previous financial year to achieve its objectives.

We also have a fifth cross cutting priority: Council for the Future. This priority is formed from a selection of transformative projects which aim to address the future needs of residents and our organisation as a whole.

Summary of our Corporate Priorities

Communities

- Support vulnerable members of our community
- Promote health and wellbeing for all
- Work with partners to promote Fenland through Culture and Heritage

Environment

- Deliver a high performing refuse, recycling and street cleansing service
- Work with partners and the community on projects that improve the environment and our street scene
- Work with partners to keep people safe in their neighbourhoods by reducing crime and anti-social behaviour and promoting social cohesion

Economy

- Attract new businesses, jobs and opportunities whilst supporting our existing businesses in Fenland
- Promote and enable housing growth, economic growth and regeneration across Fenland
- Promote and lobby for infrastructure improvements across the district

Council for the Future



Our Cabinet members have selected a number of projects to contribute towards our 'Council for the Future' agenda. These projects have a variety of aims; from tackling areas of particular need within the district, to transforming services and the wider organisation sustainably to be fit for the future. Although these projects are influenced by external factors, the aim is to have a programme of projects completed by the end of the current Council leadership term.

Modernising council services

Cllr Steve Tierney
Transforming council services to improve customer experience and make it even easier for people to interact with the Council.

A more commercial outlook

Cllr Chris Boden & Cllr Ian Benney
Identifying external investment opportunities and developing our own sites and assets in order to generate additional income for our services and help deliver our growth and regeneration aspirations.

Protecting our environment

Cllr Peter Murphy & Cllr Samantha Hoy
Delivering and developing a wide range of environmental services to help protect our open green spaces, tackle environmental nuisances and issues, and improve air quality – ensuring a clean, safe, and healthy environment for all.

Better railways for Fenland

Cllr Chris Seaton
Delivering on our Fenland Railway Station Masterplans to upgrade and improve facilities at March, Manea and Whittlesea railway stations, on behalf of the Hereward Community Rail Partnership, and pushing forward ambitions for the March to Wisbech railway line.

Better online services

Cllr Steve Tierney
Developing the Council's website to provide residents and businesses with even better online services.

Healthy you

Cllr Sam Clark
Working with partners to provide sports and physical activity sessions in community settings across Fenland and supporting residents to lead more physically active and healthier lifestyles.

Putting communities first

Cllr Steve Count
Delivering the Community Safety Grant Agreement with the Police and Crime Commissioner between January 2022 and March 2025.

Safer homes for tenants

Cllr Samantha Hoy
Working with property owners, landlords and letting agents to raise standards within the private rented sector, ensuring that tenants are provided with safe, warm, and healthy homes.

Clamping down on poor parking

Cllr Jan French
Developing plans for Civil Parking Enforcement (CPE) in order to assume responsibility from the police and enforce against poor and dangerous parking across the district.

Competitive trade waste service

Cllr Peter Murphy
Developing services to better support our commercial waste customers.

Planning for the future

Cllr Dee Laws
Developing a new Local Plan for Fenland, which will set out the strategic priorities for development in the future, covering housing, commercial, public and private development, including transport infrastructure, and protection for the local environment.

Corporate building review

Cllr Chris Boden & Cllr Ian Benney
Undertake a strategic review of the Council's property portfolio to ensure most effective use; adapting, investing in, and reducing the existing estate where a strong and clear business case exists.

Bringing empty homes back into use

Cllr Samantha Hoy
Working with property owners to bring empty properties back into use as much-needed new homes for the district.

Partnership Investment in Fenland

We're working hard to attract the crucial external funding needed to unlock Fenland's potential and bolster its prosperity and resilience in the coming years.

Our previous policy of applying for any and all funding opportunities will now have to be tempered by any potential financial liability that the Council could face, particularly in respect of rising capital costs and the new requirement upon the s151 Officer to guarantee that the Council will meet any additional unanticipated costs when applying for some Government funding opportunities.

The diagram shows some of the projects currently in progress across the district thanks to millions of pounds worth of inward investment already secured.

The projects include development and regeneration of key sites, investment to improve transport and digital connectivity, and innovation and technology centres.

The opportunities will help to boost our economy, support new skills opportunities, and create much-needed new jobs.

Although many of these funding schemes are focused on our four market towns, our local villages will also benefit, as will neighbouring communities across Cambridgeshire, Norfolk, and Lincolnshire. Improvements to our rural communities are equally as important and are included in our investment work.



Our Priorities - Communities

Support vulnerable members of our community

- Enable residents to claim the Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support they are entitled to through our shared service (Anglia Revenues Partnership; ARP)
- Support residents to manage the effects of the cost of living
- Use our housing powers to prevent homelessness, reduce rough sleeping, meet housing needs, improve housing conditions and keep homes safe and accessible
- Encourage a range of partners to support the delivery of the Golden Age programme and support older people

Promote health and wellbeing for all

- Update the Council's Leisure Strategy in 2022 and work collaboratively with Freedom Leisure and other partners to deliver the Strategy

- Work collaboratively within the Integrated Care Partnership to tackle local health and wellbeing priorities to give people the information to enable them to make healthier choices
- Create healthier communities through activities developed by Active Fenland

Work with partners to promote Fenland through Culture and Heritage

- Work with local stakeholders to deliver an action plan to support the aims of the Creativity and Culture Strategy
- Support community groups to hold safe and successful public events
- Proportionate support and advice for community groups to hold safe and successful public events

Performance Indicators

- Days taken to process new claims to changes for Council Tax Support
- Days taken to process new claims and changes for Housing Benefit
- Total number of private rented homes where positive action has been taken to address safety issues
- The proportion of households presenting to the Council as homeless whose housing circumstances were resolved through housing options work
- Number of empty properties brought back into use
- Number of Active Fenland sessions delivered per year
- Customer satisfaction: Net promoter score for Freedom Leisure Centres

Our Priorities - Environment

Deliver a high performing refuse, recycling and street cleansing service

- Work with partners, the community and volunteers to divert at least 50% of Cambridgeshire's household waste from landfill
- Maximise the value of materials collected for recycling, including through Getting It Sorted Recycling Champions
- Deliver our effective, self-funding Garden Waste collection service
- Deliver clean streets and public spaces as set out in the national code of practice
- Work with key stakeholders to deliver an effective waste partnership and update the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Waste Strategy

Work with partners and the community on projects to improve the environment and streetscene

- Use education, guidance and Council powers to fairly enforce environmental standards and tackle issues such as fly tipping, illegal parking, dog fouling,

littering and antisocial behaviour

- Ensure well maintained open spaces by working with our grounds maintenance contractor and through supporting community groups such as Street Pride, In Bloom, Green Dog Walkers and Friends of Groups
- Work with Town Councils and the community to provide local markets and market town events

Work with partners to keep people safe in their neighbourhoods by reducing crime & antisocial behaviour and promoting social cohesion

- Manage the Community Safety Partnership to reduce crime, hate crime and anti-social behaviour
- Support the Fenland Diverse Communities Forum to deliver the Fenland-wide Community Cohesion Action Plan
- Deliver the Community Safety Grant Agreement with the Police and Crime Commissioner

Performance Indicators

- Rapid or Village response requests actioned the same or next day
- % of inspected streets meeting our cleansing standards
- % of household waste recycled through the blue bin service
- Customer satisfaction with our Refuse and Recycling services
- Customer satisfaction with our Garden Waste service
- Number of Street Pride, Green Dog Walkers and Friends of Community Environmental Events supported
- % of those asked satisfied with events

Our Priorities - Economy

Attract new businesses, jobs and opportunities whilst supporting our existing businesses

- Work with external stakeholders, local businesses and the Combined Authority to attract inward investment and establish new business opportunities
- Provide responsive business support to encourage business growth, job diversity, skills development and increased grant
- Promote and develop our Business Premises at South Fens, The Boathouse and Light Industrial Estates to encourage investment, business development, job creation and skills diversification

Promote and enable housing growth, economic growth and regeneration

- Enable appropriate growth, development and infrastructure through delivering a proactive and effective Planning service
- Drive forward the development and delivery of new homes and commercial space by using our surplus property and land assets to deliver sustainable economic and residential growth

- Identify and bid for external funding that aligns with and supports our housing, economic and growth objectives

Promote and lobby for infrastructure improvements

- Promote sustainable road, rail and concessionary transport initiatives to improve access to employment and local services
- Engage with the Combined Authority and Cambridgeshire County Council on the feasibility and delivery of major road and rail infrastructure projects
- Work with the Combined Authority to influence how housing and infrastructure funding is used to stimulate housing development and economic growth in the district

Performance Indicators

- % of major planning applications determined in 13 weeks
- % of minor applications determined in 8 weeks
- % of other applications determined in 8 weeks
- % occupancy of Business Premises estates
- % occupancy of our Wisbech Yacht Harbour
- Local businesses supported and treated fairly

Our Priorities - Quality Organisation

Governance, Financial Control and Risk Management

- Maintain robust and effective financial standards, internal controls and organisational management
- Comply with data protection and General Data Protection Regulation requirements

Transformation and Efficiency

- Sustainably deliver required savings whilst pursuing transformation and commercialisation opportunities to ensure the organisation is fit for the future
- Engage with the Combined Authority's Public Service Reform agenda

Performance Management

- Set relevant and robust performance targets to ensure the effective delivery of Business Plan priorities
- Report regularly on service performance to the Corporate Management Team, Councillors and the public

Consultation and Engagement

- Appropriately consult with residents about our service and proposals as outlined in our Consultation Strategy

Excellent Customer Service

- Maintain our Customer Service Excellence accreditation to ensure we continue to deliver the most effective service to our communities
- Help residents to self-serve and access our services digitally to allow us to provide greater support for vulnerable customers and complex queries

Equalities

- Meet our Public Sector Equality duty by delivering the requirements of the 2010 Equality Act and 1998 Human Rights Act through our core service delivery and publication of a statutory Annual Equality Report

Performance indicators

- % of customer queries resolved at first point of contact
- Contact Centre calls answered within 20 seconds
- Contact Centre calls handled
- Council Tax collected
- Council Tax net collection fund receipts
- NNDR collected
- NNDR net collection fund receipts
- Number of online forms submitted via FDC Website

Our Priorities - Quality Organisation

Asset Management and Commercialisation

- Ensure our asset base is sustainable, suitable and fully utilised to maximise income opportunities and financial efficiencies
- Deliver our adopted Capital Programme in line with our Corporate Asset Management Plan to maintain the integrity and safety of our assets
- Work jointly with public, private and third sector partners to improve access to our services, including from co-located facilities
- Continue with our Commercial Investment Strategy to make informed decisions about the purchase and management of property assets through Fenland Futures Limited

Workforce Development

- Equip our workforce with the right skills to effectively deliver our priorities
- Support and empower our staff to make effective decisions

Enforcement



- Use a fair and proportionate approach to improve living, working and environmental standards as set out in our Enforcement Policies

Health and Safety

- Maintain effective Health and Safety systems to comply with relevant legislation and local requirements
- Deliver all aspects of the Council's Health and Safety action plan to ensure the safety and wellbeing of our workforce, partners and wider community

CUSTOMER
SERVICE
EXCELLENCE[®]





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