

CABINET

MONDAY, 20 FEBRUARY 2023 - 2.00 PM



PRESENT: Councillor C Boden (Chairman), Councillor I Benney, Councillor S Clark, Councillor S Count, Councillor Miss S Hoy, Councillor Mrs D Laws, Councillor P Murphy, Councillor C Seaton and Councillor S Tierney

APOLOGIES: Councillor Mrs J French (Vice-Chairman)

CAB59/22 PREVIOUS MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held 30 January 2023 were approved and signed.

CAB60/22 BUSINESS PLAN 2023/24

Members considered the Business Plan 2023/24 report presented by Councillor Boden.

Proposed by Councillor Boden, seconded by Councillor Tierney and Cabinet AGREED to recommend to Council the approval of the Final Business Plan 2023-24.

CAB61/22 BUDGET AND MTFS 2023/24

Members considered the Budget and Medium-Term Financial Strategy 2023/24 report presented by Councillor Boden.

Councillor Tierney said many of the public are unaware of how unusual a situation we have whereby financially, the Council is doing very well. Services have not been dramatically cut and we continue to deliver great services to local people, and it now appears in our council tax suggestion that we can even give some money back. This is uncommon and he commends it. He added that we could take a very risk-averse view as some councils have and deliver a massive council tax rise every year or cut services or just store money in reserves. Of course, we do need to be cautious and hold some back for resilience, but thanks to very good financial management we are seeing that we can do all those things, but the risk balance is just right so that we do not take money from people during this difficult economic time.

Councillor Boden pointed out one error in section 3(xi) of the recommendations on page 30 of the report, which should read Section 16, and not Section 15.

Proposed by Councillor Boden, seconded by Councillor Count and Cabinet AGREED that:

- (i) The revised estimates for 2022/23 as set out in Section 7 and Appendix A showing an estimated surplus of £69,000 (transferred to the Budget Equalisation Reserve), be approved:**

And to recommend to Council that:

- (ii) The General Fund revenue budget for 2023/24 as set out in Section 8 and Appendix A be approved**

- (iii) The Medium-Term Financial Strategy as outlined in the report and Appendix B be adopted
- (iv) The Capital Programme and funding statement as set out in Appendix D be approved
- (v) The adoption of the additional Business Rates Relief measures as detailed in Section 6 using Discretionary Relief Powers be approved
- (vi) The expenses detailed in Section 11 be approved to be treated as general expenses for 2023/23
- (vii) The Port Health levy for 2023/24 be set as shown in Section 12
- (viii) The adoption of the Council Tax Support Fund proposals as detailed in paragraphs 3.16-12.22 of this report, using discretionary powers be approved
- (ix) The current working age Council Tax Support Scheme be adopted with effect from 1 April 2023 as set out in Section 14, with appropriate changes to the proscribed pensioner scheme as determined by regulations.
- (x) That subject to the relevant legislation being passed and as detailed in Section 15:
 - (a) To agree to shorten the period that a 100% Council Tax premium on long term empty dwellings is payable from the current 2 years (empty) to 1 year from 1 April 2024.
 - (b) To agree to implement the 100% Council Tax premium on all second homes from 1 April 2024 (if legislation passed by 31 March 2023)
- (xi) The Treasury Management Strategy Statement, Minimum Revenue Provision, Treasury Investment Strategy, Prudential and Treasury Indicators for 2023/24 and Capital Strategy 2023/23 as set out in Section 16 and Appendix E be approved
- (xii) The Band D Council Tax level for Fenland District Council Services for 2023/24 be set at £255.24, a decrease of 2% (£5.22) on the current year.

CAB62/22 UK SHARED PROSPERITY FUND (SPF)

Members considered the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF) report presented by Councillor Benney.

Proposed by Councillor Benney, seconded by Councillor Hoy and Cabinet AGREED the legal, financial and governance arrangements in relation to the administration of Fenland District Council's SPF allocation.

CAB63/22 WHITTLESEY - GROWING FENLAND MARKET TOWN FUNDING FROM CPCA

Members considered the Whittlesey – Growing Fenland Market Town Funding from CPCA report presented by Councillor Boden.

Councillor Boden pointed out an error on page 105 of the agenda pack where mention is made of the cancellation of the Whittlesey Heritage Centre project. This should instead read 'the suspension of the Whittlesey Heritage Centre project'. The project has not been cancelled; a lot of work has already gone into it, and it is hoped that at some stage in the future by some other funding means, it may be possible to go ahead.

Proposed by Councillor Boden, seconded by Councillor Mrs Laws and Cabinet AGREED to note the revised Whittlesey Growing Fenland projects and to authorise the S151 officer to enter into Grant Funding Agreements (GFA) with CPCA to allow the delivery of the projects within each GFA, with each project managed using the FDC project management methodology and any cost limited to the total sum of grant funding available.

CAB64/22 PUBLIC SPACES PROTECTION ORDER FOR WISBECH

Members considered the Public Spaces Protection Order report for Wisbech presented by

Councillor Count.

Councillor Hoy said she thinks this is a good way forward, unfortunately people do urinate and defecate in the passageway, and she asked if that area could be looked at in the Community Safety Partnership meetings. Local people are doing a lot of work to clean up and improve that area and to make it feel safer. It was included in our levelling up bid so it would be nice if FDC could help that as well going forward.

Councillor Count thanked Councillor Hoy for enforcing the message about what the area is like. He pointed out the success of Operation Luscombe in the town centre and he will speak to officers about whether that can be expanded into this area to see what other impact we can have to create a safer and more positive image. He will also engage with Councillor Murphy to discuss street cleaning.

Proposed by Councillor Count, seconded by Councillor Hoy and Cabinet AGREED to approve the introduction of the PSPO for a 3-year period in Norfolk Street to restrict access to the passageway as shown on Appendix A and to delegate authority to a Corporate Director to extend the order for up to 3 years at a time (in line with appropriate legislation) in the future if following the result of the consultation the portfolio holder for Community Safety agrees that a further extension is required. If the consultation suggests a need to amend or discharge any of the orders to bring that back to Cabinet for consideration.

CAB65/22 ENERGY SUPPLY CONTRACT 2024-28

Members considered the Energy Supply Contract 2024-28 report presented by Councillor Boden.

Councillor Tierney said he had previously brought a motion to Full Council regarding climate change where it was said that we would focus on cost to our taxpayers and it had been resolved to promote green measures to alleviate the anticipated effects of global warming that are affordable and financially viable, therefore he agrees with the report.

Councillor Count said he had not initially understood the difference in options when reading the report. The contract we have is 100% renewable energy but then there is the option to expand that to something else and spend more money. His thought was how can you expand on 100%. Despite research, he had found it difficult to find out what the difference was. His opinion eventually was that the 100% renewable would be operated by green sources such as wind and solar power but the carbon zero were from other sources. However, he has found that climate change experts are not agreeing that these measures are all carbon net zero. We are already buying green energy supply so he agrees that we will not be getting good value for money by extending to this further step. However, that is not a negative, we should be proud that we have a 100% renewable contract and that is the appropriate place for us to be.

Councillor Boden thanked Councillor Count for his helpful comment, saying County Council also have some concerns about ESPO and the categorisation of the different types of renewable and or non-zero carbon energy which is available through ESPO to them.

Proposed by Councillor Boden, seconded by Councillor Tierney and Cabinet AGREED that FDC enter in a renewal agreement with ESPO to continue with the current arrangement to allow them to make prudent purchases on our behalf for the period 2024-2028 and determined that there should not be a specific requirement that the electricity supplied should come from a zero-carbon source.

CAB66/22 24 HIGH STREET, WISBECH UPDATE

Members considered the 23 High Street, Wisbech update report from Councillor Seaton.

Cabinet AGREED to note the current position in relation to the 24 High Street construction project in Wisbech High Street.

CAB67/22 DRAFT 6 MONTH CABINET FORWARD PLAN

Councillor Boden presented the Cabinet Forward Plan for information.

CAB68/22 LOCAL AUTHORITY HOUSING FUND

Members considered the Local Authority Housing Fund report presented by Councillor Hoy.

Councillor Tierney said he will support this, but he wants to place on record his reservations. He has no problem with helping legal migrants get housing, or the idea in principle of the Government helping us to do so with this money, which we would be foolish to turn down, but the criteria placed on this, that it must initially be used for refugees from two countries, is divisive and unwise. He would have preferred that they suggested it might be a good use but then to have left the final decision to us to categorise according to need. There are plenty of local people desperate for housing who will be angry about this, so he wishes the Government had not done this.

Councillor Count said he welcomes this but largely agrees with Councillor Tierney. Whilst the money is welcome, he wonders if clarity of thinking is the right approach; we have the money and this is how we must spend it, but it will overheat the market. It is not increasing the amount of housing stock; what we need is more housing full stop. Government needs to increase the housing stock for everyone to access. He welcomes this money; we will be better off for it by being able to place some families in these homes but he hopes there is more longer-term strategic thinking coming from Government.

Councillor Mrs Laws said she was in total agreement with Councillors Tierney and Count. There needs to be some forward thinking and Government strategy on this; her heart goes out to our local residents; they have a need, and it will be difficult for them to comprehend this.

Councillor Hoy said she does not disagree with this, but she is in a difficult position; it is her portfolio, and she needs to present it and why would we turn government money down? Nevertheless, she agrees with all that has been said. People came here legally under EU treaty rights but cannot get any funding and are sleeping in what she would say are self-made shacks in town, but we are spending public money buying houses for additional people to come. Then we have our own local population, and we all know how long the housing list is and how desperate people are. She is loath to say no but she echoes the thoughts of her fellow councillors, this is not a good situation, and the Government needs to get to grips with it.

Councillor Boden said he agreed with all the comments made. From the Council's point of view, given that we would have a liability anyway for refugees which is imposed by Government, this money will help offset some of that and it is a cost-effective way of doing that from our perspective. However, this is a sticking plaster on a serious wound that Government will have to solve. As far as Afghanistan is concerned we have taken on various liabilities and requirements which is appropriate given the history and our involvement there, and in respect of Ukraine, our hearts reach out to those displaced by the terrible events there. Nevertheless, comments about how this will be seen are completely valid and ultimately this is something Government will need to address. We must play our part based on what opportunities we have available to us. It will help in terms of the liability we have to house refugees; it makes economic sense from the Council's point of view

to accept this; it is not ideal but is better than any alternatives that could be forced on us by Government.

Proposed by Councillor Hoy, seconded by Councillor Seaton and Cabinet AGREED to:

- **Approve receipt of the LA Housing Fund grant in the sum of £873,932 for the purposes described.**
- **Authorise entry into the prescribed Memorandum of Understanding with DLHUC for receiving the grant as set out in Appendix A; and**
- **Fund the residual element for the 9 properties to be purchased, delegated to the Section 151 officer to determine in consultation with Investment Board Members. Range of funding needed has been identified in the confidential Appendix B**
- **Purchase properties outside PE13 and PE14 post code areas.**

CAB69/22 CONFIDENTIAL MINUTES

The confidential minutes of the meeting held 30 January 2023 were approved and signed.

2.43 pm

Chairman