

CABINET



MONDAY, 17 JULY 2023 - 2.00 PM

PRESENT: Councillor C Boden (Chairman), Councillor Mrs J French (Vice-Chairman), Councillor I Benney, Councillor Miss S Hoy, Councillor Mrs D Laws, Councillor A Miscandlon, Councillor P Murphy, Councillor C Seaton, Councillor S Tierney and Councillor S Wallwork

CAB8/23 PREVIOUS MINUTES

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 12 June 2023 were approved and signed.

CAB9/23 ANNUAL REPORT 2022/23

Members considered the Annual Report of the Council 2022/23 presented by Councillor Boden.

Proposed by Councillor Boden, seconded by Councillor Mrs French and AGREED to approve the Annual Report of the Council 2022/23.

CAB10/23 COUNCIL REVENUE AND CAPITAL OUTTURN 2022/23

Members considered the Council Revenue and Capital Outturn Report 2022/23 presented by Councillor Boden.

Councillor Mrs French said that Councillor Boden and officers involved in the work on the A14 contribution should be congratulated, it is a fantastic saving for the Council.

Councillor Tierney said it is easy to get lost in the detail of financial reports such as this, but it is important to highlight that something extraordinary is occurring at Fenland District Council. Many other local authorities are increasing their council tax in the belief that something catastrophic will happen if they do not, but this council is doing something different in not doing what is easy, but is showing good political leadership and clear direction, and with strong teamwork officers are providing great services at affordable prices without the idea that council tax must keep going up. Councillor Boden agreed, saying that the work of officers is crucial, and Fenland is the only principal council in England and Wales to have a lower council tax now than six years ago.

Proposed by Councillor Boden, seconded by Councillor Hoy and AGREED that:

- (i) The Outturn for the Council's General Fund services in 2022/23, as detailed at Appendix A and Section 2 of the report be noted and that Members note the transfer of the underspend to the Budget Equalisation Reserve;**
- (ii) The reasons for the variations from revised estimate be noted;**
- (iii) The current position on the Cambridgeshire Horizons Reserve, as detailed in Section 3 of the report be noted;**
- (iv) The payment and funding of the A14 contribution, as detailed in Section 4 of this report be noted;**
- (v) The proposed Capital Funding schedule for 2022/23 at Appendix B(i) be approved.**

CAB11/23 UPDATE TO MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY (MTFS) 2024/25 TO 2027/28

Members considered the Update to Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) 2023/25 to 2027/28 report presented by Councillor Boden.

Councillor Tierney commented that officers deserve the commendation they have been given because they have been set an even harder target but ultimately the Council is doing this for the people of Fenland.

Proposed by Councillor Boden, seconded by Councillor Tierney and AGREED to recommend to Council that:

- (i) **The Medium Term Financial Strategy be repositioned by keeping the cash amount of Council Tax raised at the current level rather than the previously adopted 0% increase, while recognising that the Council continues to face significant financial challenges and uncertainties that may not allow this ambition to be met.**

CAB12/23 ON AND OFF-STREET PARKING ENFORCEMENT UPDATE PAPER (INCLUDING CPE)

Members considered the On and Off-Street Parking Enforcement Update paper presented by Councillor Mrs French.

- Councillor Boden said it is disappointing that there is still no reasonable agreement from County Council about a draft agency agreement or proposed service level agreement, neither about meeting the shortfall in funding required to bring the road signs and markings up to the necessary standard to hand them over under civil parking enforcement. He would suggest to members that County Council be told it is their responsibility; Fenland District Council are already putting £400,000 of market town monies into this, it is up to County to bring this up to the acceptable standard and failure to do so is unacceptable.
- Councillor Mrs Laws said the County Council surely have a duty of care and legal responsibility for this. Councillor Boden responded that legal advice is currently being sought on this very issue.
- Councillor Tierney said it is his opinion that County Council are failing in almost every respect regarding Highways; the paths and roads are in a terrible state, and the signs are all wrong for civil parking enforcement, all of which is a symptom of deterioration of the Highways Service. This is a statutory responsibility and County's priorities are wrong; he is glad that legal advice is being taken because they should at least be putting the signs right according to the law.
- Councillor Miscandlon said he echoed Councillor Tierney's comment and is glad that legal advice is being sought.
- Councillor Mrs Laws agreed, saying she has never seen the towns and villages look so appalling. Weeds are growing through drains which need to be kept clear to be able to dispose of surface water. There has been a complete deterioration over the last few years, and she is pleased that action is being taken.
- Councillor Hoy said there is a view that the weeding is not being done because it is more bee friendly, however she wishes Fenland could make cuts to service in the guise they were environmentally friendly. For example, in respect of leisure centres it could be argued the most environmentally carbon friendly thing to do would be to close them down, but she doubts that would receive any support. There will be no resolution with Highways because the County Council have made no secret that they want to discourage car ownership. She has recently heard the argument that Fenland has one of the lowest levels of car ownership in the county so it is being said that because people cannot afford to drive in Fenland there should be more public transport. She would not disagree with that, but it is not recognised how many people locally rely on their cars to get to work and it is her opinion that nothing will change; Fenland will receive nothing from the County Council because they have no interest in this area at all.

- Councillor Boden agreed this seems to be part of a war on motorists by those who see themselves as the best arbiters as to what people can do, what they should do and how they should do it. This is something that needs to be resisted as far as possible.

Proposed by Councillor Mrs French, seconded by Councillor Boden and AGREED to:

- 1. Note the progress being made by FDC and CCC in respect of moving the introduction of CPE forward.**
- 2. In respect of the recommendation to note the predicted increase in budget in relation to the scheme and request that further updates are brought forward as they become available and prior to a final decision being taken as to how this will be funded, to give some advice about how to proceed with the estimated CPE project funding shortfall and have officers go back to County Council to tell them it is their responsibility to pay up, they are getting £400k of money from Fenland which could have been spent on something else so this is their best opportunity to do what they have a legal obligation to do at a cost which is less than would otherwise be the case.**
- 3. That the member/officer CPE project team meet to discuss and agree the draft agency agreement and service level agreement red flags.**

CAB13/23 RURAL ENGLAND SHARED PROSPERITY FUND (RESPF)

Members considered the Rural England Shared Prosperity Fund (RESPF) report presented by Councillor Benney.

Proposed by Councillor Benney, seconded by Councillor Boden and AGREED that for 2023-24 the RESPF monies should be allocated exclusively for business growth purposes. The split of the 2024-25 RESPF to be allocated between business growth and community and place and will be determined at a future meeting of the Cabinet.

CAB14/23 DRAFT CONSULTATION STATEMENT OF COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Members considered the Draft Consultation Statement of Community Involvement report presented by Councillor Mrs Laws.

Proposed by Councillor Mrs Laws, seconded by Councillor Mrs French and AGREED to approve the draft Statement of Community Involvement for the purposes of public consultation.

CAB15/23 WISBECH HIGH STREET UPDATE

Members considered the Wisbech High Street Update presented by Councillor Seaton.

Councillor Hoy thanked everyone that made it possible in getting to this stage; she did not think the work would ever be started but she was wrong. Councillor Tierney agreed, it has been a long time coming with a lot of hurdles along the way, but it is good to see the work finally starting. He was further pleased to see the High Street did not need to be closed which was important to local people and businesses and everybody is looking forward to seeing the results.

Proposed by Councillor Seaton, seconded by Councillor Tierney and AGREED to note the current position in relation to the two key Wisbech High Street sites and ongoing work to extend the NLHF High Street project to November 2024 and beyond.

CAB16/23 DRAFT 6 MONTH CABINET FORWARD PLAN

Councillor Boden presented the draft 6 Month Cabinet Forward Plan for information, which was agreed with an amendment to note that the item on Freedom Energy Costs Update in September should read Councillor Miscandlon and Councillor Boden.

CAB17/23 LOCAL AUTHORITY HOUSING FUND 2 (WITH CONFIDENTIAL APPENDIX)

Members considered the Local Authority Housing Fund 2 report presented by Councillor Hoy.

Councillor Tierney said he does not like the Government's approach to this, not that he does not think the Council has a duty to help people who need housing and he welcomes additional funding in that respect, but the idea that the Council is going to purchase houses for use by people who have come from other places without putting local people first or at least on an equal footing is not something he can support. He would have preferred if an equal number of houses could have been purchased for both. Furthermore, when buying houses from the private market it increases demand and costs for people looking for homes. So many people are desperate for places to live, and it is time for the Government to take a much stronger view on how much immigration can be allowed. He does not support this, not that he does not support the principals but the Government's thinking behind it is wrong. Councillor Tierney reiterated that he would not support the report recommendation.

Councillor Boden thanked Councillor Tierney but said that if the Council does not go down this route then Government will force it by other means but without the financial incentive, so basically it is an offer that cannot be refused.

Councillor Hoy said the figure related to how much the Council is given per house is the same across the country, and because it is only allowed to be 40% of the total cost price of the house that does not work. Local authorities are all receiving the same amount of funding but there is disparity in house prices around the country. So, for example, when looking at the figures given to purchase a house, it will buy more in Fenland compared to Cambridge City. Councillor Hoy stated that she feels Government need to be written to with the points made by Councillor Tierney but also requesting that they look at this on an area-by-area basis, rather than making a set figure for all authorities.

Councillor Miscandlon said he is concerned about who will be responsible for the maintenance and running of these properties. Councillor Hoy responded that the Council will be responsible, but officers are confident they can manage with their existing team and resource given the small number of properties it will involve. Councillor Hoy added that the right to buy will not apply on these properties; people will be housed under a licence rather than a tenancy agreement.

Proposed by Councillor Hoy, seconded by Councillor Mrs French and AGREED to:

- **Approve receipt of the LA Housing Fund 2 grant in the sum of £559,000 for the purposes described.**
- **Authorise entry into the prescribed Memorandum of Understanding with DLUHC delegated to the Monitoring Officer in Consultation with the Investment Board; and**
- **Fund the residual element for the 5 properties to be purchased, delegated to the Section 151 officer to determine in consultation with the Investment Board members and delegate purchase of individual properties to the S151 officer in consultation with Investment Board.**
- **Delegate acceptance of a further allocation from the LAHF fund if additional funding becomes available either through this funding round or future LAHF funding rounds to the Section 151 officer in consultation with the Investment Board and Portfolio Holder for Housing.**
- **Properties to be purchased outside PE13 and PE14 post code areas.**