

COUNCIL



MONDAY, 15 DECEMBER 2025 - 4.00 PM

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

APOLOGIES: Councillor J Carney, Councillor G Christy, Councillor D Connor, Councillor S Count, Councillor Mrs M Davis, Councillor K French, Councillor R Gerstner, Councillor M Humphrey, Councillor Mrs D Laws and Councillor C Marks

C36/24 PREVIOUS MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of 15 September 2025 were confirmed and signed.

C37/24 CIVIC ENGAGEMENTS UPDATE.

Councillor Barber drew attention to the civic activities undertaken by herself and the Vice-Chairman in the weeks preceding full Council.

C38/24 TO RECEIVE ANY ANNOUNCEMENTS FROM THE CHAIRMAN OF THE COUNCIL AND/OR THE HEAD OF PAID SERVICE.

The Chairman thanked all who attended her Carol Service on 5th December and Member Services for their assistance in organising the event. She also thanked Reverend Paul Kite, Paul Medd, Councillor Steve Tierney, Vanessa O’Keeffe, the Clarkson Singers and the children of Orchards Primary School, for their participation.

C39/24 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. Councillor Booth, as Leader of the Opposition, asked the following question under Procedure Rule 8.4:

- Could the Leader please provide an update on the Flag for the Fens? Council previously passed a motion on this and agreed to a flag design competition, but nothing has been heard since. Councillor Boden responded that despite Council’s resolution, there seemed to be little appetite for spending time and money on the competition, and whilst that is what the Flag Institute said it required, he had not seen any enthusiasm from members given the majority had voted in favour. If he is wrong, then he is happy to discuss with members how they may take part to move it forward but meanwhile he has more pressing matters to focus on such as the

budget and Local Government Reorganisation. Councillor Booth said that as Leader, Councillor Boden could have ensured its delivery following the Council resolution. Councillor Boden agreed that when Council decides on something, then every effort is made to deliver but repeated there no longer seems to be an appetite for this although if members are willing to assist with the time it will take without too much officer or financial resource, he will move it forward.

C40/24 TO RECEIVE REPORTS FROM AND ASK QUESTIONS OF CABINET MEMBERS WITH PORTFOLIO HOLDER RESPONSIBILITIES, IN ACCORDANCE WITH PROCEDURE RULES 8.1 AND 8.2.

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

- Councillor Oliver said he is aware that Stephen Barclay MP is discouraging organisations from using MVV presumably to make it unviable, so he would like to ask Councillor Tierney if there is any chance that Cambridgeshire County Council (CCC) would use MVV in the future. Councillor Tierney responded that he wished he could say there is no chance because in 2019 CCC passed a motion almost unanimously opposing the Wisbech incinerator, but at a recent Environment Committee meeting they said they wanted to save money by using incineration but did not indicate where. If it is built, one of the obvious places to use would be the Wisbech MVV incinerator so it worries him that they may do that, and pressure needs to be put on them not to. He added that FDC members all agreed not to support the incinerator, and he still hopes that will be the case, but he is very concerned about it.
- Councillor Imafidon referred to the building of the Fens Reservoir and asked if the Leader would write to Anglian Water to encourage their provision of apprenticeships, particularly considering the high number of youth unemployment in the area. Councillor Boden said that is a timely question as the Office for National Statistics has produced deprivation statistics showing Fenland ranked as one of the worst local authorities in the country in terms of skills out of an index of some 200. The Fens Reservoir is the largest infrastructure project ever seen in this region and given that there are massive commercial, employment and skills opportunities he will be happy to write to Anglian Water. He will also write to the Chief Executive of the Combined Authority to ask that he does the same as the more opportunities that can be provided for young people the better.
- Councillor Cutler said she appreciated the Leader commented at a previous meeting that Fenland Inspire will continue until 2028 and has said that all areas will be treated equally but it does not feel like it in the rural villages. She pointed out that Murrow is a village with community spirit and a high volunteer base, but residents resent that it is one of the most neglected. Little is provided for them other than waste bin collections and young families have to travel to find decent play equipment. She asked Councillor Boden what the status is of the district wide assessment and where Murrow is in relation to that, adding that some adult fitness equipment would also be appreciated. Councillor Boden responded that he cannot answer about the assessment as that will be done by officers, but the remit is clear and that is to thoroughly assess Fenland in its entirety to find cold spots of play areas, and he will need to see that report first. However, while it is necessary to have a phased timing of works under Fenland Inspire, it is fluid and having received notification of the £1.5m Pride in Place impact funding from Government which must be spent by March 2027, then play areas is one specific area where that money can be spent. Cabinet agreed earlier this afternoon for officers to produce an assessment of play area equipment and whilst he cannot promise that Murrow will be on it, he will ensure the money is spread fairly across the whole area, in the parishes and villages as well as the four towns. Meanwhile, Councillor Boden noted the comments made by Councillor Cutler.
- Councillor Miscandlon asked on behalf of Councillor Gerstner if the Leader accepted on behalf of FDC his responsibility to provide a foodbank in Whittlesey, given its notice to leave the Manor Leisure Centre, and what his plans are to provide a foodbank in Whittlesey. Councillor

Boden responded that district councils do not have a statutory responsibility to provide foodbanks, however when the foodbank found itself potentially homeless a few years ago, FDC allowed the use of the leisure centre for emergency food aid, storage and distribution. He agreed it is an invaluable resource in Whittlesey, but when it was approved that the Manor would be refurbished, it was necessary to maintain it for the purpose of a leisure centre only. However, knowing the importance of the foodbank he was happy to assure former councillor David Mason that FDC would maintain the presence of it and he has since approached County Council officers who are looking into how they can assist. Whatever the outcome, FDC will ensure that the foodbank continues to operate despite not having a statutory duty to provide it.

- Councillor Booth referred to Councillor Boden's response to Councillor Cutler and said that back in 2019, then councillor Sarah Bligh raised a motion asking for a review of all play areas. He asked if Councillor Boden is therefore saying that six years later, a completed assessment has still not been done? Councillor Boden said he remembered the report, thinking how much data there was and how difficult it was to compare areas but that was some years ago. Things have changed and there has already been some refurbishment but also a massive increase in housebuilding and population in some areas. He would expect officers to use the previous report as a basis for the review going forward and it was said at Cabinet today that at the next meeting a report will be received giving guidance as to where the play equipment could and should go. One size will not fit all, and the Council needs to be more flexible in reflecting actual need in individual localities. Councillor Booth said in that case most of the data is already there and just needs updating so there should be no need to start from scratch on this.
- Councillor Hoy addressed the Leader in the absence of Councillor Mrs Laws. In Wisbech there is a development on the border called The Elms which sits in the Borough Council of Kings Lynn and West Norfolk (KLWN). Some years ago, residents of The Elms started discharging their surface water into the dyke behind Westmead Avenue. KLWN have done nothing about this despite complaints and the situation is getting worse with residents now discharging daily into the dyke and some 20-30 Fenland households are having their gardens flooded, causing a great deal of upset. Unfortunately, because The Elms sits in KLWN, FDC enforcement officers can take zero action so she would like to request a letter be sent to the Chief Executive at KLWN expressing disgust that they are doing nothing. Councillor Boden responded that he would write to both the Leader and Chief Executive of KLWN about this issue in the hope they will do the decent thing and stressed the importance of councils working collaboratively and in co-operation when necessary for the best outcome for all residents.
- Councillor Hoy addressed Councillor Mrs French and said that it had been announced in the budget the end to retail and hospitality business rate relief. She had been contacted by several businesses about their concerns for the impact this will have on them, and she would like to know if there are figures available for how much is expected, how many businesses will be affected and the cost it will be to them because it will be interesting to know how this will affect Fenland. Councillor Mrs French said she had contacted ARP who are working on this and they will be providing an update in a full report hopefully late January.
- Councillor Taylor addressed Councillor Boden regarding the drainage and flooding issue raised by Councillor Hoy and asked if that could not be referred to Middle Level and the Hundred of Wisbech Internal Drainage Board (IDB). Councillor Boden said in respect of the location it would not be an issue for them but more for the Kings Lynn IDB as IDB boundaries do not align with local authority boundaries. He would expect planning permission, which will have contained certain conditions, was given by KLWN; they will have been accepted by the local IDB, so it is for KLWN to enforce those conditions, and he is sure the Leader and Chief Executive of KLWN can use their knowledge and contacts to ensure whoever can, will take action.
- Councillor Mrs French advised Councillor Tierney she had been contacted over the last few months by several parents and young teenagers enquiring about work experience at FDC and he was going to see whether the council could re-offer this. Councillor Tierney apologised for his oversight regarding this and agreed the importance of providing work experience where possible; he will speak to officers and come back to her as soon as possible.

(Councillor Booth declared an interest by virtue of the fact he is Chair of Murrow Community Facilities in respect of the discussions concerning play equipment in the district).

C41/24 MOTION SUBMITTED BY COUNCILLOR TIERNEY

Councillor Tierney presented a motion on Digital ID cards, seconded by Councillor Miscandlon.

Members made the following comments:

- Councillor Boden said in principal he has nothing against digital IDs, but the problem is the practice, and he is concerned the data collected would be utilised for purposes that nobody would agree with. This would be the largest IT exercise since the NHS system was upgraded and that was disastrous. He cannot see Government getting the IT right in this instance; it is not practical, now is not the right time and there is not the ability to commission it effectively, so he will support the motion.
- Councillor Taylor said how many IDs do people require? People already have a lot of ID, and digital ID is just a form of control. He will fully support the motion.
- Councillor Purser said he is in favour of ID cards but only in a voluntary capacity and he believes digital ID could potentially be a lifesaver. He wears an SOS Talisman that is not big enough for all the medical information he needs to have on it but in an emergency, he is identifiable with information that could potentially save his life. He does not feel information such as medication, allergies and emergency contact details are confidential. Much is said about data protection and breaches of privacy, and most people carry personal information on their passports so he cannot see what is wrong with a digital ID card. He has heard the argument that ID can be cloned, but so can driving licences and credit cards etc. and the information from these can be used for criminal purposes already. ID can prove who you are rather than who you are not. Therefore, as it is his view that an ID card could potentially save a life, he cannot support this motion.
- Cllr Nawaz stated that ID cards are an excellent idea for North Korea and China. The system began harmlessly enough in China, but evolved to a point where the authorities now record citizens' behaviour, including their banking and employment history, whether they are behind in payments or been in an accident etc. The information is analysed to calculate a score, the highest scores provides perks, lower scores leading to restriction placed on daily life. In his view, digital ID will leave individuals vulnerable to blackmail or fraud. The NHS will be producing the genome visit of everyone in the next ten years which will be linked to the digital ID card. He does not trust this government and wants to keep the freedoms this country has fought for, so he supports this motion.
- Councillor Roy said that he fully supports this motion; society is entering a time that will be different to that which all here have experienced in their lifetimes and the freedoms that are given up today will never be known by the generations to come.
- Councillor Hoy said she used to believe that if you have done nothing wrong then you have nothing to hide. However, on reflection if asked to provide access to her bank account, her response would be she does not want someone looking at her information. It is important that people have a right to privacy She never used to worry about overreach but as time goes on she becomes more sceptical. Digital systems can go wrong and they can be hacked; this is evidenced all the time on social media. The Horizons scandal is a case in point; people took their own lives over a computer system that went wrong. She does not think digital ID will stop migration which the Government are saying it will.
- Councillor Booth said in his youth he was more against ID cards but now if there was one, that would be better, but the problem is the mission creep that could happen. Councillor Purser gave an impassioned speech about medical data and he understands his argument, but this is about the right to work and anti-immigration rhetoric. All parties are trying to use it for their own ends. The whole thing will be an expensive waste of time; it will not deliver what it intended and is a waste of public money so he will support the motion.
- Councillor Cutler said Councillor Tierney has said it all quite clearly regarding digital ID and she fully supports the motion.

- Councillor Miscandlon referred to Councillor Hoy's point and said earlier this year the Government gave authority to look at private bank accounts. ID cards had a purpose in the Second World War, but the NHS IT system and Horizon scandal are classic examples of this country's abysmal record and he is sure that FDC's IT team know how many people have tried to hack this council. He fully supports this motion; digital ID is going nowhere and will cost an absolute fortune and Councillor Tierney is right to bring this motion forward.

Councillor Tierney thanked members for their comments and an interesting debate. He agreed that a good outcome would be for digital ID not to work, if it works then that will be when things gets bad and a tool is just a tool until it gets into the hands of someone you do not want it to. Imagine the worst government who could have access to that information; it may sound like a conspiracy theory, but it is possible. ID cards were wound down after WW2 because there was no longer a need for them and in the words of George Orwell, 'imagine a boot standing on the human face – forever'.

The motion was approved.

C42/24 TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY STATEMENT & ANNUAL INVESTMENT STRATEGY MID-YEAR REVIEW 2025/26

Members considered the Treasury Management Strategy Statement and Annual Investment Strategy Mid-Year Review 2025/26 report presented by Councillor Boden.

Councillor Booth said that having noted what the Leader said about property funds, he raised his concerns at the time it was suggested going into property funds, believing it was too much of a risk for this authority. However, there is an opportunity to learn from mistakes. He asked if the Council is exposed through the financing provided to its LATCO, Fenland Future Limited (FFL), and if there will be any danger of a loss of capital or revenue from what it is lending to FFL as it is the investment vehicle for FDC.

Councillor Boden said risk is an interesting word that is much misunderstood; it is not bad; it needs to be managed; minimising risk would minimise return. This authority looks at every aspect of work and manages risk to a level, and having a risk appetite is appropriate. The LATCO will be producing a report at the end of January which will detail the company and the alternatives for its future progression. If it were not for local government reorganisation, he would have no doubt that it would have continued down the path it had been spread out some years into the future; that will now not be but will be subject to a decision made by this council.

Councillor Mrs French thanked the Leader and officers for their hard work in producing these financial statements.

Proposed by Councillor Boden, seconded by Councillor Mrs French and AGREED that the report be noted.

(Councillor Meekins left the meeting).

C43/24 LOCAL PLAN UPDATE

Members considered the Local Plan Update report presented by Councillor Boden.

Councillor Booth said he does not think there is any choice in the matter, but it has taken seven years to get this far so he is sceptical that the council will deliver a new version of the local plan in two years. What is missing in the report, and what would be useful for members, is what the process entails for development of the local plan under the new regime following local government reorganisation. He also notes the costs involved although the council was able to draw on several

grants to offset that, but he has discovered that about 100 local plans have been adopted since 2019. These would probably would have been started around the same time as the FDC local plan, so it is important to get a move on with this; there have been too many delays.

Councillor Mrs French said she fully supports this, she was originally against it because of cost, but the Government did keep changing the rules, and COVID-19 caused further delays. The council has received advice, but it has no choice.

Councillor Miscandlon said he is in support and agreed that COVID messed everything up. However, an up-to-date plan is needed for Fenland even under a new unitary authority.

Councillor Boden said if 100 local plans have been published as suggested, that number shows how many other authorities have not completed them and are facing difficulties with this process. He agreed with Councillor Mrs French about the cost, which is extortionate as a local plan cannot be done for less than £1m, but the council has some grant funding available and can build on reports from the previous draft local plan, so the cost will be less than that. Furthermore, Councillor Booth is correct about the speed and timing at which things should be done, but once the decision was made to recommend this course of action to full Council, officers were asked to provide comprehensive detail of what needs to be done by March 2028. Meanwhile Councillor Boden said he is sorry that this report is not what he wanted to bring before members but there is no choice because of the government changes that have only just taken place in the last few weeks.

C44/24 ADOPTION OF HACKNEY CARRIAGE AND PRIVATE HIRE LICENSING POLICY FOR 2026-2031

Members considered the Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Policy report presented by Councillor Oliver as Chairman of the Licensing Committee.

Proposed by Councillor Oliver, seconded by Councillor Hoy and AGREED the Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Policy for the period of 2026-2031.

(Councillors Roy, Gill and Patrick left the room for the duration of this item).

C45/24 REVIEW OF STATEMENT OF LICENSING POLICY (SLP)

Members considered the review of the Statement of Licensing Policy report presented by Councillor Oliver as Chairman of the Licensing Committee.

Proposed by Councillor Oliver, seconded by Councillor Imafidon and AGREED the Statement of Licensing Policy for the period of 2026-2031.

(Councillor Patrick left the room for the duration of this item by virtue of the fact he is a personal licence holder).

5.40 pm

Chairman