

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

MONDAY, 19 JANUARY 2026 - 10.00 AM



PRESENT: Councillor B Barber, Councillor G Booth, Councillor L Foice-Beard (Vice-Chairman), Councillor A Hay, Councillor A Miscandlon, Councillor P Murphy and Councillor D Roy

APOLOGIES: Councillor J Carney, Councillor P Hicks and Councillor A Woollard (Chairman)

Officers in attendance: Paul Medd (Chief Executive), Carol Pilson (Corporate Director and Monitoring Officer), Amy Brown (Assistant Director), Anna Goodall (Assistant Director), Dan Horn (Assistant Director), Sian Warren (Chief Accountant), David Wright (Policy and Communications Manager) and Helen Moore (Member Services and Governance Officer).

OSC32/23 APPOINTMENT OF CHAIRMAN FOR THE REMAINDER OF THE MUNICIPAL YEAR 2025/26

It was proposed by Councillor Miscandlon, seconded by Councillor Murphy and resolved that Councillor Woollard be elected as the Chairman of Overview and Scrutiny for the rest of the municipal year 2025/26.

OSC33/23 APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIRMAN FOR THE REMAINDER OF THE MUNICIPAL YEAR 2025/26

It was proposed by Councillor Miscandlon, seconded by Councillor Murphy and resolved that Councillor Foice-Beard be elected as Vice-Chairman for the rest of the municipal year 2025/26.

OSC34/23 PREVIOUS MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of 1 December 2025 were confirmed and signed.

OSC35/23 REVIEW OF FEES AND CHARGES 2026/27

Members considered the Review of Fees and Charges 2026/27, presented by Councillors Boden, Seaton, and Tierney.

Members made comments, asked questions and received responses as follows:

- Councillor Murphy asked why the charges for the Whittlesey Fair are lower in cost than any of the other main towns? Councillor Seaton stated that the cost is reflected by the size of the Fair and the amount of time the Fair spends in the towns. He continued for Whittlesey this is a small Fair held over a couple of days using limited space which is why the charges are lower than other towns in the area.
- Councillor Roy stated that the garden waste charge is increasing to £49 for direct debit, whereas if the customer is paying cash or card it will be increasing to £60, which is significantly higher, which he feels is discriminatory due to the fact that they are paying £60 as opposed to £49 given that there are areas of deprivation and people are struggling to balance their budget, and feels this needs some consideration. He made the point that there is a cost of £40 for the bulky waste, which is a reasonable price to take away five items, however, there has been evidence that on a weekly basis councillors are contacting the fly tipping team with issues in their area and suggested considering having an amnesty once a

year where people can come and drop their rubbish at the dump in larger vehicles at a reduced rate. Councillor Tierney responded that the reason the prices are different for the Brown Bin garden waste is because the Council would like to encourage people to pay by direct debit which a lot of businesses and organisations are undertaking now as it is easier and cheaper with less to pass onto the taxpayer, however Fenland does still remain to be the cheapest in the East of England where this is concerned. He continued when thinking about the suggestion of an amnesty he recommended that O&S think about this separately and propose a full plan to the Council to see if this is a feasible option.

- Councillor Booth stated that a report was taken to Cabinet regarding the Port and asked if the action plans are going to be implemented this year as there has been several reviews and as, yet no action plans have been put in place. Councillor Boden responded that action has been taken but agreed it has been slow, as of today the Council are awaiting responses from interested parties concerning the Port, but discussions have not yet been concluded and until these discussions are concluded, a report will not be possible to be submitted to the Cabinet. Councillor Booth suggested that under commercial fees where it stated, 'a review of operations', this means that a decision is going to be made once the actions have been completed. Councillor Boden agreed that this is something worth thinking about but was not going to prejudice anything at this present time.
- Councillor Miscandlon stated that under the burial section of the fees and charges it states a child's plot but there is no definitive age, and asked should there be a definitive age because in the earlier paragraph it does state 0-12 years and at what ages does a child become eligible for a plot charge is it after 12 years old as this is not stated in the fees? Councillor Boden stated that he will take this back to officers as this is an anomaly and he was grateful that this has been pointed out.

Members noted the information provided.

OSC36/23 REVISED GENERAL FUND BUDGET AND CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2025/26, DRAFT GENERAL FUND BUDGET ESTIMATES 2026/27 AND DRAFT MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY 2026/27 TO 2030/31 AND CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2026/27 TO 2028/29

Members considered the Revised General Fund Budget and Capital Programme 2025/26, Draft General Fund Budget Estimates 2026/27 and Draft Medium Term Financial Strategy 2026/27 to 2030/31 and Capital Programme 2026/27 to 2028/29 presented by Councillor Boden and Paul Medd

Members made comments, asked questions and received responses as follows:

- Councillor Murphy pointed out a typo error on pages 49 and 50 Councillor Boden assured this would be amended before it is submitted to Council.
- Councillor Barber stated that the Council has a good record for keeping Council Tax low and asked if this will be able to continue? Councillor Boden responded that Council Tax can be a major drain on a family budget and residents in Fenland are very sensitive to change, with the Council having a responsibility to manage this money and make it work as efficiently and effectively as possible plus to keep the Council Tax as low as possible for as long as possible and this is why the Budget Equalisation Reserve Fund was set up to bank any surplus money that was generated each year. He continued that this was, so that the Council could manage when times became more difficult and where costs escalate to the extent that the Council could no longer manage to keep costs down, with this in place the Council could insulate people against future Council Tax increases and this method has proved to be a success with a two million pound cushion so far. Councillor Boden continued the Council works hard throughout the year to keep Council Tax costs down with the aid of this fund and Council Tax will be a matter for Full Council to decide with updated figures being submitted at the next Council meeting, but he is confident that with the reserves that

the Council has in place, it is his hope and intention that Council Tax should not be increasing for 2026/27.

- Councillor Booth stated that currently it is predicted that the Council has a £300,000 deficit but there is an expectation this will become a surplus, He asked where will this extra funding be coming from to cover the shortfall? Councillor Booth continued that the budget states that there will be a two million deficit for next year and he would like to understand where the Council will be making additional savings? is there a plan in place as to how the Council are going to cover that shortfall and if so, can this be shared with members? Councillor Boden responded, in relation to the first question, every year there is a pattern of going from significant deficits being budgeted for to projected outturns ending up as surpluses, which is due to be over cautious in certain areas which can lead to a six-figure sum which the Council benefits from. He continued that he has put forward for the next Cabinet meeting a recommendation which will need to go to Full Council in February for the creation of a new LGR reserve which he is suggesting be populated with £1.4 million pounds to cover the anticipated cost that the Council may have in preparing for LGR over the course of the period between now and the termination of Local Government Councillor Boden explained that this should act as protection for the Council should LGR be completed, these prudent figures will produce a better figure later on in the year and after the end of the year than the Council had previously and is the difference between the 15 December projected outturn and what the Council will end up with. He continued, with regard to the second and third part of the question, within the budget of 2025/26 there were things that were assumed a year ago that now look much better, especially for the current financial year, the same process will continue this year because the assumptions which have been made have been prudent. Councillor Boden gave an example of how the Local Government Settlement can add to the Council figures beneficially but this grant money comes in small amounts and the Council does not know when it is arriving until it hits the Councils bank account, he cannot predict what it will be and can make budgeting tricky so as a Council prudent decisions have been made with the plan of having a surplus at the end of the year.
- Councillor Booth stated that every council Reform UK have taken control of instead of carrying out the promise of cutting Council Tax they are in fact increasing it and this demonstrates the complexity of Local Government and the effects of not delivering on a promise. Councillor Boden responded that he has never had the privilege of running the finances of a County Council and accepts that County Councils are more difficult to run financially than District Councils as they have different spending pressures and demands and stressed the importance of having experience which a lot of the Reform councillors lack which is why they are falling short on their promises.
- Councillor Foice-Beard asked what the future is for the Fenland Future Ltd? Councillor Boden stated that companies that are owned by councils exist across the country and if LGR goes ahead it is going to pose some challenges, risks and choices so far as those companies are concerned. He continued that Fenland Future Ltd is a stand-alone company which is fully owned by the Council and that means it will not need to be split up or divided between the new unitary authorities, all the assets and liabilities to do with that company will flow through seamlessly to the new unitary authority if LGR takes place. Councillor Boden added that what Fenland Future Ltd will be obliged to do is to produce a business plan by the 31 January 2026 for the forthcoming year, which takes into account all of the changes there have been and all of the progress that has been on the two significant sites and produce a blue print for how they are planning to move forward into the year 2026/27 and once the Council has an idea of its future this blueprint will be analysed again.
- Councillor Booth referred to James Cleverly asking a question regarding LGR and he would like to understand the basis of what make Councillor Boden think things will look like in 2028? Councillor Boden stated that since it was announced that 2028 was the projected vesting date and as late as December 2025, the department for Ministry, Housing, Local Government and Communities (MHLGC) were giving out this date, since then there has been no further communication other than to push this idea that the vast majority of councils would be having their vesting date on the 1 April 2028 and having elections to shadow

authorities for those new authorities in May 2027. He continued that on Thursday there was a Parliamentary announcement from Alison McGovern the Minister at the MHLGC which has hinted a change to the timetable. Paul Medd added that this news is very timely as there is an LGR meeting next week which the Leader and himself are attending which will give them a chance to ask directly what was meant by the announcement.

- Councillor Booth stated that the Council has indicated that it would defer the 2027 elections and would like to understand what that means as holding elections is an expensive exercise, and how would this change the thinking and plans moving forward? Councillor Boden stated that the assumption has been based on what has happened in previous LGR's that the Government would cancel the elections due to the shadow elections taking place for the new unitary authorities however, there has been a notification that no elections are going to be cancelled by Government except in exceptional circumstances, which means that the Council's elections would go ahead in 2027 so in terms of cost this can be relatively low and would not apply. Paul Medd added that inevitably with complex projects like LGR there is an element of uncertainty and it makes the process even more difficult when there is a degree of speculation, the Council does know that for those councils that have elections in 2026 they have been invited by the Government to cancel their elections or go ahead with them which is their discretion. He continued that Fenland's elections are discretionary then they would be run in 2027 and is something the Leader and himself are keeping an eye on.

Members noted the information provided.

(Councillor Miscandlon declared an interest on any items concerning Middle Level as he is a member of Middle Level Commissioners)

OSC37/23 DRAFT BUSINESS PLAN 2026/27

Members considered the Draft Business Plan 2026/27 presented by Councillors Boden and Tierney.

Members made comments, asked questions and received responses as follows:

- Councillor Booth commented that the Council has put in place the performance measures but was not sure if the business plan has been looked at alongside the performance measures as a dedicated item and this could be something that the committee could consider for the future looking at all the KPI's together as a whole. Councillor Foice-Beard agreed that this could be looked at when putting the plan together for next year.

Members noted the information provided.

OSC38/23 USE OF WAIVER PROVISIONS

Members were provided with details of the one decision that the former Chairman had waived the need for notice to be given on the Forward Plan and for call-in procedures.

Members made comments, asked questions and received responses as follows:

- Councillor Miscandlon stated that the use of waivers should be used minimally and only on special occasions.
- Councillor Boden agreed that the waiver process should only be used minimally and sometime things are unexpected or are unanticipated, and the waiver process is there to provide a degree of democratic control over decisions which are made in such circumstances, both in terms of the decision being made itself but also on it being reported to the Overview and Scrutiny Panel so that late decisions can themselves be subject to scrutiny if necessary.

Members noted the waiver permitted by the former Chairman since the date of the last meeting.

OSC39/23 **UPDATE ON PREVIOUS ACTIONS**

Councillor Booth asked for his question from the last meeting to be chased and an answer provided.

OSC40/23 **FUTURE WORK PROGRAMME**

Councillor Booth asked if there has been any confirmation that Vision Zero will be attending the next meeting as he felt it important that they attend. Amy Brown confirmed she has been in contact with the relevant officers about attending and that this will be a combined presentation with the Road Safety Partnership.

11.33 am

Chairman