

CABINET



MONDAY, 23 FEBRUARY 2026 - 2.00 PM

PRESENT: Councillor C Boden (Chairman), Councillor Mrs J French (Vice-Chairman), Councillor G Christy, Councillor S Count, Councillor Miss S Hoy, Councillor S Imafidon, Councillor Mrs D Laws, Councillor C Seaton, Councillor S Tierney and Councillor S Wallwork

CAB51/25 PREVIOUS MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held 26 January 2026 were approved and signed.

CAB52/25 BUSINESS PLAN 2026/27

Members considered the Business Plan 2026/27 presented by Councillor Tierney,

Proposed by Councillor Tierney, seconded by Councillor Mrs French and AGREED to recommend to Council the approval of the Business Plan 2026/27.

CAB53/25 BUDGET & MTFS 2026/27

Members considered the Budget and Medium-Term Financial Strategy 2026/27 report presented by Councillor Boden.

Councillor Boden said this had been a very difficult budget to work on and he praised the Chief Accountant for working wonders under difficult circumstances, as well as the S151 Officer and Finance team. He added that this authority has the best record of any principal council in the country for reducing council tax, with an attitude opposite to those who always raise it by the maximum allowed.

Councillor Mrs Laws agreed and said FDC should do more to promote the good work that it does as most people just look at the end total on their bill without looking at the items between.

Councillor Tierney commented that every year FDC starts with a deficit, taking a pessimistic view to be sure that mistakes are not made, but then always ends in surplus. The history of this council's finances shows that they are very good, and he agrees with Councillor Mrs Laws that FDC should undertake more self-promotion. However, many people do not fully understand which council does what, who pays what and neither do they understand why it is said that Fenland has frozen council tax again when they only see it rising. It is hard to get the message across, but FDC always puts the public first and tries to absorb any additional costs through better work, careful administration and finding ways to do things well more cheaply.

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

- (i) The revised estimates for 2025/26 as set out in Section 6 and Appendix A showing an estimated surplus of £107k which will be transferred to the Budget Equalisation Reserve be approved,**

and to recommend to Council that:

- (ii) the General Fund revenue budget for 2026/27 as set out in Section 7 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 5 using Discretionary Relief Powers be approved
- (vi) the expenses detailed in Section 10 be approved to be treated as general expenses for 2026/27,
- (vii) the Port Health levy for 2026/27 be set as shown in Section 11
- (viii) the current working age Council Tax Support Scheme be adopted with effect from 1 April 2026 as set out in Section 13, with appropriate changes to the prescribed pensioner scheme as determined by regulations,
- (ix) the Treasury Management Strategy Statement, Minimum Revenue Provision Policy Statement (including amending the MRP calculation to be based on the 'Annuity method' from 2025/26 onwards), Treasury Investment Strategy, Prudential and Treasury Indicators for 2026/27 and Capital Strategy 2026/27 as set out in Section 14 and Appendix E be approved,
- (x) the Band D Council Tax level for Fenland District Council services for 2026/27 be set at £253.35, a reduction on the current year.

CAB54/25 RECAP WASTE STRATEGY

Members considered the RECAP Waste Strategy report presented by Councillor Tierney.

Councillor Hoy asked if she had correctly read in the report that energy from waste has been excluded from the RECAP waste strategy. Councillor Tierney replied that it is not exactly excluded but at this point the decisions are at too high a level to have decided which process will be used. He would like to stress that he will be opposing any use of energy from waste, particularly Wisbech energy from waste as agreed by this council in a previous motion. He has made a strong case to avoid using it wherever possible and has indicated at RECAP that FDC will not support it but for now the decision is not at that stage and FDC is not using energy from waste for waste disposal.

Councillor Mrs French asked whether the new food waste collections would be introduced in June as hoped. Councillor Tierney replied that the aim is to start sometime in summer but currently a national problem involving the supply of vehicles is affecting the start date. Councillor Boden said that FDC has been badly let down in this regard, having been advised the vehicles would not be delivered barely three weeks before the date expected, which is unacceptable. However, once delivered it may be more appropriate for the service to start in September after the summer holidays.

Councillor Hoy asked if the new food waste collection service could potentially impact council finances received from the brown bin service, if people use the new service, they may not want to purchase a brown bin. Councillor Tierney responded that it is unlikely to have a massive effect, the brown bin is primarily for garden waste. He would not encourage the use of the brown bin for food waste and the new system is a free service.

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

- **that the revised Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Joint Waste Strategy be approved, subject to any final drafting amendments to be made by the Director responsible for Environmental Services in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Recycling & Refuse**

Collection.

- **that the updated Fenland Recycling Plan be approved,**

and to note that that the development and approval of a shared waste strategy for Cambridgeshire and Peterborough fulfils a Business Plan objective for 2025/26.

CAB55/25 NEW AND UPDATED INTERIM PLANNING GUIDANCE

Members considered the New and Updated Interim Planning Guidance report presented by Councillor Mrs Laws.

Councillor Hoy commented that the HMO guidance is a good addition and notes that the cumulative impact of other HMOs in the vicinity can be considered. However, she wondered how cumulative impact can be determined if an HMO's existence is unknown, as a property containing less than five people would not need a licence and if they are not in an Article 4 area, planning permission will not be required. Councillor Mrs Laws said in these instances there will be a reliance on neighbours to report that information directly or through their ward councillors.

Councillor Hoy said she also liked the addition of the information about parking provision because it comes up time and again and the guidance is very useful. However, her slight concern is that when parking has been questioned before, members have been told it cannot be queried because it goes against the national planning policy framework for town centre parking. The parking survey method statement gives instructions on what to do but she would like some further clarification on what happens if an HMO does not meet the parking survey and how this works with town centre parking. Councillor Mrs Laws said she would come back to Councillor Hoy on this.

Councillor Mrs French said the report should be very helpful for the Planning Committee as there are many grey areas currently, especially regarding flats in town centres. The Committee cannot insist on them having parking spaces and residents take up spaces in FDC car parks. It may be that parking permits may need to be considered if Civil Parking Enforcement comes in.

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

- **Revoke the 2015 Developer Contributions Supplementary Planning Document, the 2014 Resource Use and Renewable Energy SPD, the 2004 Nene Waterfront Development Brief and the 2015 Interim Guidance on Policy LP4 Part B**
- **Approve the publication of an Interim Planning Guidance Note on Planning Obligations**
- **Approve the publication of an Interim Planning Guidance Note on Best and Most Versatile Agricultural Land.**
- **Approve the publication of an Interim Planning Guidance Note on Houses in Multiple Occupation, and to**
- **Delegate authority to the Head of Planning, in consultation with the relevant Portfolio Holders, to make minor updates to the Interim Planning Guidance Notes as required, ensuring they remain up to date and fit for purpose.**

CAB56/25 FENLAND TRANSPORT ECONOMIC ASSESSMENT INCLUDING MARCH TO WISBECH RAIL FUNDING FROM CPCA

Members considered the Fenland Transport Economic Assessment report presented by Councillor Christy.

Councillor Count said the money will be very welcome as the area is desperate for transport improvements. It is unfortunate that whilst the public would say the biggest improvement would be for the County Council to get potholes fixed, the money cannot be used for that. He would,

however, like to seek assurance that this is not going to delay the works relating to the March Area Transport Strategy (MATS). Councillor Chisty said hopefully this assessment will help the MATS progress, it is a vital part of the overall scheme and will be used to inform that assessment rather than hold it up.

Councillor Tierney said he hopes that Councillor Christy can push this forward but as a long-standing councillor himself, he has seen this many times before. The authority can consult, plan, study and talk about getting funding but projects like the railway or dualling of the A47 will cost multi-millions of pounds for each project and the problem has always been that nobody wants to put their hands in their pockets for money of that level. However, he does support this and just hopes that a change can be made this time.

Councillor Mrs French referred to Councillor Count's comments about the MATS and said work commenced on the scheme back in 2018. Whilst some of the work has progressed, the work to install traffic lights at Hobbs Lot Bridge has only just started. Unfortunately, county council officers decided to delay the Peas Hill roundabout, but it is in a dreadful state, and with the volume of traffic it needs to be pushed forward again so she would appreciate any help that Councillor Christy can give to progress the MATS.

Councillor Hoy agreed all Fenland needs transport improvements, but she would like to focus on the Wisbech Access Strategy. She finds it frustrating that £10.5m has been spent and yet not a single piece of road has been laid. All that was achieved was an old shop being knocked down that nobody wanted to be knocked down. Without wanting to be too negative, the local plan says none of the broad concept plans for Wisbech will be delivered without the additional road improvements and what infuriates her is that because County will not object to any of the Highways works, FDC cannot turn them down at Planning. She was told that their view is that because the bulk of dwellings will be in Norfolk rather than Fenland, they do not think it will impact on the local roads which she finds incredulous as residents of Elm or Emneth will certainly be using Wisbech services. She is very worried that, whilst appreciating it is not this authority's money, spending £500,000 on yet another study and more fees for consultants will be wasted at a time when the country has little money.

Councillor Mrs Laws said it is important for Whittlesey to get a southern relief road, not just to assist economic growth in Fenland but because she gets so many calls from frustrated drivers who sit for hours just trying to get to Peterborough. She agreed with Councillor Hoy's comment about consultant fees, they gain so much money from councils, and she is sure they inflate their prices when they see that is where the money is coming from. However, she applauds Councillor Christy and supports this work and, like many other long-standing councillors who have seen money wasted through nothing coming from it, hopes it works this time.

Councillor Boden thanked everyone for their comments and said this is somewhat unusual compared to what has been seen before. Fenland is getting a transport economic assessment project, and similar things are also happening in other parts of Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, but this project is being devolved and will be controlled by some members of this council and Cabinet. They will be voting members of the project board, so this will be in their hands. It will provide the opportunity to make clear the requirements of Fenland residents, and that the obsession with active travel in some parts of the county is not appropriate here and that the idea that transport policy should be determined by net zero targets is also not appropriate for Fenland. The transport policy will need to be set on transport targets and the narrative from some parts of the county that are anti-car is also inappropriate here, for example any proposals for road charging would be rejected. It gives the opportunity for members of this council and cabinet with voting rights to make abundantly clear what is appropriate for Fenland.

Councillor Christy said he fully appreciates the comments made but would like to reiterate what Councillor Boden has just said; this is now an opportunity for FDC to progress matters in its own

way with terms that are suitable for Fenland.

Proposed by Councillor Christy, seconded by Councillor Seaton and AGREED to:

- **Subject to the final confirmation from CPCA, confirm the acceptance of £500,000 between 2026 and 2028 from CPCA for FDC to deliver the Fenland Transport Economic Assessment Project.**
- **Confirm the establishment of the Project Board to oversee the business case project, confirm the board's remit, including its terms of reference and membership.**
- **Note the procurement exercise to select a contractor to deliver the Fenland Transport Economic Assessment project and give approval for delegated authority to the Portfolio Holder for Transport and the S151 Officer to award the contract.**
- **Subject to the final confirmation from CPCA, third party funding has been approved for this work. A Grant Funding Agreement between CPCA and FDC is required. Delegate approval to the Portfolio Holder for Finance and S151 Officer to sign the agreement on behalf of FDC and complete all other documentation necessary to bring this arrangement into effect.**

(Councillors Boden, Christy and Seaton declared that they are Trustees of FACT Community Transport)

CAB57/25 FENLAND INSPIRE! - PLAY EQUIPMENT

Members considered the Fenland Inspire! Play Equipment report presented by Councillor Imafidon.

Councillor Hoy said she is pleased to see Westmead Avenue included separately and wants it on record that Fenland should not be waiting for pots of money in order to undertake basic maintenance work. The council is obligated to maintain services in order not to allow things to go to rack and ruin and there must be a budget for maintenance. Councillor Mrs French advised that this was looked at last June and has nothing to do with Inspire or Pride in Place; a swing has now gone but hopefully more equipment should be included soon under budget maintenance.

Councillor Tierney said given the short timeframe, it is important that this project is member-led. Councillor Boden pointed out that not all Fenland play areas are owned, maintained or controlled by FDC; some are funded by local developers, residents' organisations or local charities. It is a complicated picture which makes it difficult for the authority to take an overview of the whole district, and he agreed with Councillor Tierney of the importance of this being member-led. Members know their local wards and communities and where there is a need that should be targeted.

Councillor Seaton said that he had emailed all district councillors asking them for their proposals but has only received two responses so far. The information is required as soon as possible for this to be progressed.

Proposed by Councillor Imafidon, seconded by Councillor Mrs French and AGREED:

- **To note that the deadline for committing the Pride in Place Impact Fund that is funding open space and play area improvements should be committed by no later than 31 March 2027**
- **To note that work to replace Westmead play area is underway and is outside of the Pride in Place Impact Fund play area budget**
- **That the Portfolio Holder for Finance Inspire! – Play Equipment immediately contacts all FDC members to request ideas of specific locations where the funding should be spent. There are significant constraints set by Government on how this grant money may be spent, FDC members suggesting that money in their area should be spent on schemes other than play areas should carefully check that any such alternative spending falls**

within the Government's criteria. Schemes generally must also be deliverable relatively quickly to satisfy the Government's timing criteria for spend to be completed.

- That, in the interest of fairness across the district, an indicative split of spend shall be that £250,000 shall be spent in each of the four towns, whilst £500,000 shall be spent in the parished areas outside the boundaries of the four Fenland towns. It is appreciated that this precise split will not be able to be achieved because of the discreet individual cost of each selected scheme, but this split is an initial guide to assist in creating a fair allocation across the district.
- That proposals will be submitted to Cabinet in March 2026 for approval to progress.

CAB58/25 MANOR LEISURE CENTRE REDEVELOPMENT PROJECT - UPDATE AT THE COMPLETION OF RIBA STAGE 3

Members considered the Manor Leisure Centre Redevelopment Project update report presented by Councillor Count.

Councillor Count advised the timetable for completion of the new building is on schedule for December 2027. In the meantime, Freedom Leisure will work with FDC to protect all jobs where possible during the build as staff will still be required to operate the dry side activities and prepare the new facility to open upon completion. Redeployment to other local facilities would also be an option and staff may have opportunities to take up vacancies at FDC where appropriate. Long term, the new upgraded facility will create more employment opportunities in Whittlesey and the surrounding area. He added that this project represents a once in a generation opportunity to deliver something transformative, a modern and vibrant leisure centre that the whole community can be proud of, and he thanked officers, partners and his predecessor for the significant work that has led to this point.

Councillor Mrs Laws said she is very supportive of this; Whittlesey residents are very much looking forward to the improved facility. The new commercial kitchen is much needed; it will be well supported and will bring in revenue.

Proposed by Councillor Count, seconded by Councillor Mrs French and AGREED:

- to note the report and progress of the project
- to note the redevelopment project scheme details and the expectation of a firm cost for the redevelopment project to be presented to Cabinet for a construct or do not construct decision in June 2026, for a start on site in late July/early August.
- to note the significant financial pressures that the Council faces and pays close attention to Section 3 and the financial assessment section of this report in Section 12.
- to note The Council is working with Sport England to secure supportive funding that will offset design improvements required by Sports England that have enhanced initial designs.
- that Cabinet authorises, in advance of Cabinet's June 2026 decision regarding the construction project, the Monitoring Officer to prepare all requisite legal documentation required to ensure that the Council will have received the necessary legal advice, completed all necessary procurement documentation and prepared all necessary legal documentation and will be in a position to move forwards into contract for the main Development Management Agreement of the leisure centre project in a prompt and efficient manner, following Cabinet's decision in June, if that decision is to proceed with the redevelopment.

CAB59/25 DRAFT 6 MONTH CABINET FORWARD PLAN

.Noted for information.

CAB60/25 CONFIDENTIAL MINUTES

The confidential minutes of the meeting held 26 January 2026 were approved and signed.

3.12 pm

Chairman