

# COUNCIL



**WEDNESDAY, 19 MAY 2021 - 4.00 PM**

**PRESENT:** Councillor A Miscandlon (Chairman), Councillor R Skoulding (Vice-Chairman), Councillor I Benney, Councillor C Boden, Councillor G Booth, Councillor J Clark, Councillor S Clark, Councillor D Connor, Councillor M Cornwell, Councillor S Count, Councillor Mrs M Davis, Councillor Mrs J French, Councillor K French, Councillor A Hay, Councillor Miss S Hoy, Councillor M Humphrey, Councillor A Lynn, Councillor D Mason, Councillor A Maul, Councillor N Meekins, Councillor J Mockett, Councillor D Patrick, Councillor M Purser, Councillor W Rackley, Councillor W Sutton, Councillor S Tierney, Councillor D Topgood, Councillor S Wallwork and Councillor R Wicks

**APOLOGIES:** Councillor Mrs S Bligh, Councillor D Divine, Councillor Mrs D Laws, Councillor C Marks, Councillor Mrs K Mayor, Councillor P Murphy, Councillor C Seaton, Councillor M Tanfield, Councillor S Wilkes and Councillor F Yeulett

**C1/21      TO ELECT A CHAIRMAN FOR THE PERIOD TO THE NEXT ANNUAL MEETING AND TO RESOLVE THAT AN ALLOWANCE OF £4,116 PLUS TRAVELLING EXPENSES BE PAID TO THE PERSON ELECTED.**

It was proposed by Councillor Boden, seconded by Councillor Skoulding and resolved that Councillor Alex Miscandlon be elected as Chairman of the Council for the period to the next Annual Meeting and that he be paid an allowance of £4,116 plus travelling expenses.

The Chairman thanked everybody for their support and hoped that this would be a better year than 2020. He stated that he will do his best to uphold the high standards set by the previous Chairmen of this Council and going forward hopes for a better year for us all.

**C2/21      TO ELECT A VICE-CHAIRMAN FOR THE PERIOD TO THE NEXT ANNUAL MEETING AND TO RESOLVE THAT AN ALLOWANCE OF £1,000 PLUS TRAVELLING EXPENSES BE PAID TO THE PERSON ELECTED.**

It was proposed by Councillor Miscandlon, seconded by Councillor Purser and resolved that Councillor Rob Skoulding be elected as Vice-Chairman of the Council for the period to the next Annual Meeting and that he be paid an allowance of £1,000 plus travelling expenses.

The Vice Chairman thanked all of the members who voted for him as Vice Chairman. On a personal note he gave a big thank you to all of the Councillors who have phoned him, texted him and have sent Facebook messages to him, along with all of the staff and officers who have asked after him over the last ten weeks.

**C3/21      PREVIOUS MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting of 23 February 2021 were confirmed and signed.

**C4/21      TO RECEIVE ANY ANNOUNCEMENTS FROM THE CHAIRMAN OF THE COUNCIL AND/OR THE HEAD OF PAID SERVICE.**

The Chairman expressed his thanks to all of the Officers for their time and efforts in ensuring that the Annual Council meeting could be held in person, which is the first meeting of Full Council where members have been able to meet together since the lockdown

The Chairman took the opportunity to welcome the newly elected member to the Lattersey Ward of Fenland District Council, Councillor Mockett.

Members observed a two minute's silence in memory of His Royal Highness, the Duke of Edinburgh, who passed away on 9 April and also as a mark of respect for former Councillor David Wheeler who served between 2007 and 2011 and who sadly passed away on 23 April 2021.

## **C5/21            MEETINGS OF THE COUNCIL 2021/22**

The meeting dates for the Annual Meeting of the Council and for the ordinary meetings of the Council for 2021/22 were agreed as follows:

The Annual Meeting of the Council in 2022 to be held on Thursday 12 May 2022.

The ordinary meetings of the Council be held on:

Thursday 16 September 2021

Wednesday 8 December 2021

Thursday 24 February 2022

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

- Councillor Boden stated that on the original schedule of meetings, which had been published on the Council's website, there was a meeting listed for Full Council for the 15 July 2021, but due to the Covid arrangements that have had to be made to reduce the number of meetings and to reduce the potential spread of Covid a number of committee meetings have either been rescheduled or cancelled. Councillor Boden stated that he would like it recorded that the meeting scheduled for 15 July 2021 has been cancelled.

## **C6/21            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.**

Councillor Miscandlon stated that no questions had been submitted under Procedure Rules 8.6 and asked if there were any questions under Procedure Rule 8.4 from Councillor Cornwell as Leader of the Opposition Group.

Councillor Cornwell stated that he was disappointed that he had not received a written response to a letter he had sent Councillor Boden on 12 March following the Full Council Meeting held on 23 February 2021. Councillor Boden stated that he was under the impression that he had responded to the correspondence that Councillor Cornwell was referring too and gave assurances that he would ensure that a response was sent without any further delay.

Councillor Cornwell stated that in addition to the closure of its branches in Whittlesey, Chatteris and Ramsey, Barclays Bank have now announced the closure of their branch in March, which provides services to a very large part of Southern and Central Fenland and only leaves the Wisbech Branch in operation. He added that the branch is due to close in late June or early July and its closure will inconvenience local businesses and residents especially the elderly. Councillor Cornwell expressed the view that their decision to close seems to be based on several factors, which Barclays have determined and they have also used the pandemic as a contributing factor. He expressed the opinion that it is ironic given the location of the branch in the town centre and

directly in the area which is subject of £6.4 million pounds worth of investment planned to be spent on it, and is not supportive of the community, and he expressed the view that any company that provides a service to the community and relies on community support has a moral duty to support them. Councillor Cornwell asked Councillor Boden if it would be possible for a severe objection to be posed to Barclays on behalf of the Council expressing the concerns of the Council and asking them to reconsider their proposal? Councillor Boden stated that the situation is something which is not unique to March or Fenland and high street banks across the country are closing. He added that it is a shame that Barclays have made the decision to close their March branch and it is also clear that it is a decision which they have made and are not going to retract that decision. Councillor Boden stated that the decision may be due to the lease of the building ending in July, and it may be that they had commercial reasons to close the branch rather than a decision due to footfall. He stated that it is more important to protect the interests of residents and businesses of Fenland as far as possible to be able to access banking facilities in person, rather than to protest on a decision which has already been made. Councillor Boden stated that it is understanding that in Whittlesey and Chatteris those facilities have already been lost and there is the danger that Wisbech and March will follow suit. He stated that there needs to be an engagement process with the remaining High Street banks in March and Wisbech to ensure that these in person banking facilities are not lost. Councillor Boden stated that the commercial reality of the situation is that fewer and fewer branches will exist and the remaining branches need to be made aware of the commercial reality that Fenland is a growing area with a growth agenda and it is in their commercial interests to continue to maintain services rather than expect customers to travel to Peterborough, Kings Lynn, Ely or Cambridge.

Councillor Cornwell reiterated his initial question as to whether Councillor Boden is prepared to write to Barclays and then engage with the existing High Street banks? Councillor Boden stated that as Barclays is one of the High Street's major banking establishments they will of course be contacted, and he added that the letter to Barclays will also raise our disappointment and anger of the banks closure in March. He stated that looking forward the protection of in person banking facilities in Fenland is imperative where it still exists.

**C7/21**      **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:

1. Councillor Topgood stated that there appears to be an increase in vandalism in the parks in the district currently and he asked Councillor Murphy what steps are in place to rectify the issue? Councillor Murphy stated that he is aware that the issue of vandalism has escalated very quickly over the last three weeks and he explained that repairs are taking place as soon as is practicable. He stated that vandalism has taken place at different times of day and night and at various locations across the district and some of the instances of vandalism are dangerous and have meant that it has been necessary to advise the Police. Councillor Murphy added that the parks have always suffered from vandalism but on a far smaller scale than what has been experienced recently. Councillor Topgood asked whether the Police are increasing their patrols and questioned what steps are taking place to rectify the situation? Councillor Murphy stated that although the Police are being advised of the issues and instances of vandalism taking place, there is never any form of response received. Councillor Topgood expressed the opinion that the Council should pressurise the Police into undertaking more regular patrols and added that, whilst he appreciates that there is antisocial behaviour everywhere, the issues and instances in the local parks are now becoming very serious and it is going to cost a great deal of money to rectify the damage. Councillor Miscandlon stated that it is his understanding that there are liaison meetings between Councillors and the Police and it may be advantageous to raise the issue with one

of the members who can then raise it with the local Neighbourhood Inspector.

2. Councillor Sutton stated that two years ago he had raised the subject of the Forgotten Corners Local Highway Improvement (LHI) project and at that time he had asked Councillor Seaton whether there was the possibility of the Council joining the group. He stated that at that time Cambridgeshire County Council Officers had advised that each member of the bid would receive a financial contribution and added that it has now become apparent that the financial contribution is no longer expected. Councillor Sutton stated that the six interested authorities, including this Council, were all willing to contribute £1666, which was very much appreciated. Councillor Sutton stated that there has been a recent notification that costs have substantially increased and there is likely to be a financial shortfall of £5,000 to £10,000 despite in the region of £56,000 being raised outside of the bid and he asked Councillor Boden whether consideration could be given to the Council contributing towards that shortfall, so that the scheme can move forward? Councillor Boden stated that he was disappointed to hear about the issues concerning the funding and added that, even though it is a highways matter and not a Council issue, he was very pleased to support the LHI project along with other authorities due to its importance and he stated that it is regrettable that after a great deal of work it was determined that it was not possible to have a joint LHI project. He stated that with regards to the shortfall, he would be grateful if he can be supplied with further details concerning the current status of the project, including the costs, associated risks and the shortfall so that further consideration can be given to the request.

## **C8/21            MOTION SUBMITTED BY COUNCILLOR TIERNEY**

Councillor Tierney presented a motion with regard to the Fens Biosphere. He expressed the opinion that the recent member seminar concerning the Biosphere in his view did not provide any information and that, after listening to the three speakers, it appeared that the same questions were asked, and the responses received were very vague and it was not clear how the Biosphere would benefit Fenland and what the consequences would be for Fenland. Councillor Tierney expressed the opinion the motion highlights the views of other members and he asked members to support it.

Councillor Boden seconded the motion and Councillor Miscandlon opened the motion for debate.

1. Councillor Boden stated that everybody wants to see improved biodiversity, less pollution and more open spaces and added that many of these aspects are already provided or being planned for by Local Authorities or other bodies. He added that it is very unclear as to what additionality would be created by the Fens Biosphere Project. Councillor Boden expressed the view that by having the designation of a biosphere could be valuable and helpful in terms of tourism and reputation and Fenland is the only Local Authority which falls totally within the planned area of the Fens Biosphere. He stated that he does not know, as it is currently constituted, where the Fens Biosphere would go and how far it will go. Councillor Boden questioned whether input would commence with the Planning process and whether representations would be made regarding Economic Growth or with the required new Infrastructure. He stated that all these questions were asked, but answers were never provided. Councillor Boden stated that he is not against the concept of the Biosphere, but it is what comes with it which needs to be limited. He stated that it is pleasing to know that in the last few days the Biosphere Steering Group have contacted the Council, asking for discussions to take place to discuss the project and he expressed the view that it is a shame that the discussions have not taken place previously. Councillor Boden welcomes the opportunity for discussions to take place to see if there are any areas of commonality, which he is sure will happen, however, the current proposal is so uncertain and open ended, it would be irresponsible for a Local Authority to agree and adopt such a proposal.
2. Councillor Count stated that he would like the newly formed administration at the County Council, Councillor Lucy Nethsingha, Councillor Elisa Meschini, Councillor Tom Sanderson, and Cambridgeshire County Council Officer Executive to be added to the circulation list. He

stated that the newly formed administration has already publicised their plans to oppose the Fens Biosphere across the whole area, however, that opposition does need the agreement of all relevant parties. Councillor Count stated that the previous administration had requested extra time during debate to consider further information with regard to the proposal, however, the new administration have disregarded this request. He expressed the view that the Fens Biosphere does have aspirations, including biodiversity and green space, and he has been looking at this project for over four years since they first approached the Combined Authority for extra money to keep themselves in a position where they could promote the Fens Biosphere. Councillor Count added that at that time the same questions concerning the project were asked and four years later there are still no answers and he expressed the view that it does appear to be a branding exercise in terms of the benefits, however, the disbenefits will place a number of restrictions which will be placed on the area which do not line up with the aspirations of the local people and it appears to only suit people outside of the area to determine that the proposal is the best thing for Fenland. He stated that at the recent Annual Council meeting of Cambridgeshire County Council, the new administration spoke at length with regard to the importance of collaboration and communication and their press statement appeared to state what their intentions are for Fenland by imposing the biosphere on the district, when in fact there have been no discussions. He stated that he cannot agree to the biosphere from the evidence he has seen to date, as the benefits are far outweighed by the tenuous links that have been stated with regard to what will happen to the area. Councillor Count expressed the view that Fenland is a great place to live, and the Biosphere is not necessary to achieve what can be attained anyway and he will support the motion.

3. Councillor Benney stated that he attended the seminar and expressed the opinion that the representatives who presented to members on the Biosphere did not seem to understand their subject matter. He added that they kept referring to Fenland as special and he stated that Fenland and the whole of East Anglia is special as it feeds the rest of the country. Councillor Benney expressed the view that their proposal would be economically harmful to the area as they referred to tourism being a replacement for farming. He expressed the view that Fenland is a farming area, and an economy cannot be dismantled that is good on the hope that something else will better it. Councillor Benney added that the proposal would be very detrimental to the core business of the area which is agriculture and to jobs and he fully supports the motion.
4. Councillor Sutton stated that he would support the motion if he felt that the fears of other members would come to fruition, but he does not. He added that the motion is incorrect in three places as it refers in Section 8 as David Thomas being the Chairman, which he is not, in Section 14 it states that at the seminar members were wholly against the proposal, which is not true, and at Section 18 it states that the proposal does not have community support, however, there is no evidence to support this fact. Councillor Sutton added that the Middle Level Commissioners administer over 30 Internal Drainage Boards (IDB) and he has been advised that every one of those IDB's support the proposal in principle. He expressed the opinion that the motion is slightly premature, and a decision should not be made currently as the application will not be submitted until the last quarter of 2022 and further discussion and information is needed before a decision is made. Councillor Sutton referred to the earlier comments made by Councillor Count regarding the new administration and made reference to their press statement, which does not categorically state that they agree with the proposal and have stated that they will work with them and other partners and he expressed the view that is what the Council should be doing.
5. Councillor Cornwell stated that the idea of the biosphere has been in place for some time and if it was ever to come to fruition, in his opinion, it would have been in place by now. He added that the Internal Drainage Boards that he is a representative for the Council on have only noted the report. Councillor Cornwell expressed the opinion that unless there is further movement on the proposal within the next three months there is no merit in moving the

project forward. He expressed the view that he does not understand what the benefits are in the proposal.

6. Councillor Hoy stated that she did not know what the Biosphere was initially, and had been looking forward to the seminar, so she was able to obtain a better understanding of the proposal, however, that did not happen. She added that the biosphere representatives stated that the Fens have no real green space which she finds meaningless. Councillor Hoy referred to a response she was given with regard to a question she had asked concerning re wetting the Fens and the reply she was given in her opinion was evasive. She referred to a BBC Radio Cambridgeshire debate that she had listened to earlier where Pippa Haylings from South Cambridgeshire District Council was quite animated over the topic of rewetting the Fens who had stated that it is something that should be done as the carbon capture is needed. Councillor Hoy stated that those comments worried her and added that one of the aspects that the people of the Fens should be proud of is the amount of agriculture and farming in the area, which help to feed people. She added that it was interesting listening to some of the Councillors at the seminar, who have links to the farming community and to hear their expertise and knowledge was interesting. Councillor Hoy stated that regarding the point made by Councillor Sutton about supporting the proposal in principle is that sometimes the contributing factors associated with proposals and projects may change in the future. She added that further questions and requests for detail have been requested, but there has been no further information received. Councillor Hoy made reference to the Rainbow Coalition at Cambridgeshire County Council with regard to the fact that they are not in support of the proposal and stated that at a previous County Council meeting Councillor Lorna Dupre was very much in support in everything she said with regard to the Biosphere and had made reference to the fact that Fenland District Council did not know enough about the proposal.
7. Councillor Booth stated that he agrees with the comments of Councillor Sutton and added that he attended a presentation from the Biosphere project representatives held at North Level Internal Drainage Board. He expressed the opinion that he was sceptical of what the obligations would be to the area if the Biosphere was adopted and after asking questions and carrying out some further research it has become apparent that the project would have no legislative power or impositions on the local area and would only be a designation. Councillor Booth added that the only way the Biosphere could enter discussions with the Planning Team is if the emerging Fenland Local Plan states that the Biosphere should be recognised. Councillor Booth expressed the opinion that there is a need for further information before the motion is put forward and he added that there is more background information that Councillors need to be made aware of and it is not necessarily the Fens Biosphere that could bring about changes referred to in the motion, such as re wetting the Fens, it is also Central Government. Councillor Booth made reference to George Eustice, the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, who has published the Peat Action Plan which refers to re wetting of the Fens to bring peat back into better condition. He stated that Central Government are taking this very seriously and have set up a specific taskforce which will specifically look at the Fens. Councillor Booth stated that there is the assumption that the Internal Drainage Boards are dormant, however, he expressed the opinion that they still manage the water very well in our area, including dealing with the recent extreme weather events where some of the pumping stations were 40mls away from being flooded in the North Level catchment area. He added that the drainage boards are reviewing how the area can be protected against flooding and other possible mitigation needs to be considered, including the need to recognise that there needs to be change and the realisation that the drainage boards are going to operate differently with regard to the Peat Action Plan and also the fact that tax will no longer be able to be claimed for red diesel costs, which will have a direct financial impact. Councillor Booth expressed the view that the motion is too premature, and he agrees with Councillor Boden, that there should be further dialogue. He stated that the possibilities it could present is about more investment and he expressed the view that the Council is being poorly served by the Combined Authority

regarding Agritech up until now as there has only been one application to date in the Fenland Area for £68,000. Councillor Booth stated that the motion refers to the lack of public engagement, but consultation took place for the Wisbech Garden Town Project which was submitted to the Government having only consulted 150 people on one day in Wisbech Market Place, and that report stated the project had the overwhelming support of the Fenland, which in his opinion is incorrect. He stated that the Biosphere Project has probably consulted more people than the Garden Town project did and stated that the Wisbech 2020 Vision recently listed the Fens Biosphere as being on the Council's agenda moving forward as it is being listed as project that the Council wants to take forward in one document and there is now a motion to oppose it.

8. Councillor Topgood stated that during the debate it has been mentioned that the Biosphere Project are not looking for any public funding and he asked Councillor Tierney for clarity as the documentation following the seminar states that the project are looking for funding only for the public consultation process? Councillor Tierney stated that he does not recall and added that the information presented was so vague it was hard to tell.
9. Councillor Murphy stated that he is still unsure about the detail of the Biosphere and he asked at the time how much it was going to cost the Council. He added that the representatives from the Biosphere have never been able to answer any questions or provide the information requested. Councillor Murphy expressed the opinion that Fenland is a unique area and that is how it should stay, and Fenland does not want a World Heritage Site.
10. Councillor Sutton stated that the funding for the project so far has derived from the National Lottery and at this stage there has been no request for funding from Fenland.
11. Councillor Count stated that when the Biosphere project presented to the Combined Authority, there was a direct request for funding of public money.
12. Councillor Lynn stated that at the seminar he questioned the representative over funding, and he was advised that they needed the Council to join with them so that they could apply to the Government for future funding.
13. Councillor Tierney stated that Councillor Booth has advised the Biosphere Project would not have any legislative powers and although that may be the case to start with, the same could be said for the Centre for Disease Control, however, that agency has very much been in control globally for the last year. He added that when an emergency is declared, power is directed to all different types of agencies and bodies to deal with. Councillor Tierney referred to the comments made with regard to the Wisbech Garden Town Project and stated that many members had stated at the time that they were not ready to support the project as it was felt that there had not been enough public consultation and he added that he never supported the project.
14. Councillor Tierney referred to the point made by Councillor Sutton with regard to waiting to see what happens. He stated that there are consequences to taking no action and he added that the representatives who came to the seminar asked members whether they supported the proposal and, in his opinion, as Fenland were the authority they needed to have on side with the project he would have expected them to come fully prepared with information and answers, however, this was not the case. Councillor Tierney expressed the view that there is nothing stopping the representatives of the project from coming back to the Council in the future with clearer or different proposals, which would give the Council the opportunity to reconsider, however, based on what members were told, there was not enough information provided to enable members to make an informed decision.
15. Councillor Booth stated that he wished to respond to the point that Councillor Tierney made with regard to the Wisbech Garden Town Proposal. He stated that contained within

documentation provided to members it stated that 68% of respondents supported the proposal and that data was submitted by the Council to the Government as part of the submission bid and request for funding and as part of that it stated that it had public support.

**A recorded vote was taken on the Motion:**

**In Favour: Councillors Benney, Boden, J Clark, S Clark, Connor, Cornwell, Count, Mrs Davies, Mrs J French, Miss K French, Hay, Hoy, Humphrey, Lynn, Maul, Miscandlon, Mockett, Murphy, Purser, Rackley, Skoulding, Tierney, Topgood, Wallwork and Wicks.**

**Against: Councillors Booth, Patrick and Sutton.**

**The motion was approved.**

## **C9/21      COMMITTEE BALANCE, POLITICAL BALANCE AND ALLOCATION OF SEATS.**

Members considered and Committee Structure, Political Balance and Allocation of Seats report and received an update in relation to the Committee Structure.

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

- **increase the number of committee seats on the following committees to achieve political proportionality at an individual committee level in addition to globally across all committees:**
  - **Overview and Scrutiny Panel**
  - **Planning Committee**
  - **Licensing Committee**
  - **Audit and Risk Management Committee**
  - **Conduct Committee**
- **maintain the committees and panels set out in Appendix A to the report for the 2021/2022 municipal year**
- **continue with the terms of reference set out at Part 3 of the Council's Constitution in relation to the committees and panels**
- **the allocation of seats and position of Chairman and Vice-Chairman on those committees subject to political balance arrangements**
- **the appointment to seats allocated to include co-opted and non-members**
- **the list of Outside Bodies and allocation of seats in accordance with political balance as set out in Appendix C of the report for 2021/22, with appointments to be made at a subsequent Cabinet meeting**
- **delegate to the Monitoring Officer to make the appropriate changes to the Constitution.**

## **C10/21      COMBINED AUTHORITY MEMBERSHIP AND OTHER APPOINTMENTS**

Members considered the Combined Authority Membership and Other Appointments report presented by Councillor Boden.

Councillor Boden drew members attention to 3.5 of the report where it states that he is the substantive member for the Housing and Committees Committee, with Councillor Mrs Laws as the substitute member and he asked for it to be noted and amended to reflect that Councillor Mrs Laws should be shown as the substantive member and he is the substitute member.

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

- **the following appointments to the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority be made for the municipal year 2021/2022:**
  - **Council's appointee to the Combined Authority Board – Leader of the Council,**



**with substitute Deputy Leader**

- **Overview and Scrutiny Committee – Councillors Hay and Miscandlon, with substitutes being Councillor Tierney and one vacancy**
- **Audit and Governance Committee – Councillor Benney, with substitute being Councillor Hoy**
- **Employment Committee – Councillor Miss French, with substitute being Councillor Mrs Davis**
- **Housing and Communities Committee – Councillor Mrs Laws, with substitute being Councillor Boden**
- **Skills Committee – Councillor Seaton, with substitute being Councillor Mason**
- **Transport and Infrastructure Committee – Councillor Seaton, with substitute being Councillor Boden**
- **to authorise the Chief Executive to make any amendments to the appointments to the Combined Authority Board, all existing committees and any new committees which may be created in consultation with relevant Group Leader at any time throughout the municipal year.**

## **C11/21      REVIEW OF MEMBERS ALLOWANCES SCHEME**

Members considered the Members' Allowances Scheme Review report presented by Amanda Orchard, the Chairman of Independent Remuneration Panel.

Members made comments as follows:

1. Councillor Booth stated that he will support the report and added that the changes are modest which in his opinion is appropriate in the current situation. He added that although the Parish Councils were also consulted the report makes no reference to them and he asked when that information will be made available? Anna Goodall advised that the information will be available imminently.
2. Councillor Boden stated that it is important that the proposals detailed within the report are adhered to and he expressed the view that he has seen some small inconsistencies within the report, one of which he has noted by virtue of the fact that there is a position with additional responsibilities, which is now in receipt of a lower amount of allowance, than previously, which he knows was adjusted for mathematical reasons, but he finds it unfortunate. He stated that after reading the report, he has concluded that Councillor Sutton was correct when he had referred to the previous Independent Remuneration Panel report two years ago, with Councillor Sutton making the point that every four years following the elections, members allowances should be determined and as there is a democratic deficit in the process. Councillor Boden stated that on reflection he agrees with the view of Councillor Sutton and he added that he will be reviewing the process along with other members, to ascertain whether there is a more directive scheme, which is still legally compliant and where it may be possible for the electors of Fenland to know in advance what the expectation is of an Independent Remuneration Panel review.
3. Councillor Mrs French referred to page 68 of the report and questioned why the Independent Remuneration Panel are referring to electric charging points in their review and she added that she would like that aspect removed from the report, as it has nothing to do with the panel. She added that the subject of Civil Parking Enforcement is currently being looked into by the Council and she added that she has been advised that the £400,000 of funding which has been allocated by the Combined Authority for the project is still in place. Councillor Miscandlon added that Whittlesey Town Council have recently installed two electric charging points and they are not chargeable to members of the public as they are powered by solar panels on the roof of the Town Council offices. Councillor Mrs French stated that the project is being looked into for consideration across the whole of the district.
4. Councillor Tierney expressed the opinion that the report is reasonable, but he has always promised his constituents that he would never vote for a pay increase in members

allowances and for that reason he will abstain from any vote.

5. Councillor Hoy expressed the opinion, that looking forward, consideration should be given to forming a cross party working group when looking at member allowances and for those members who sit on the Combined Authority. She added that she can understand why the panel have recommended that those members who sit on the Combined Authority do not receive any allowance, because when it was set up, discussions took place with regard as to whether an allowance was paid and it was decided that an allowance should not be paid, however, that changed as time went on and an allowance was paid. She added that as it appears in the panel's report it may be shows a clearer picture of what the members actual wishes were when the Combined Authority was formed. Councillor Hoy added that she is aware how much time is spent by those members who sit on the Combined Authority and to not pay those members an allowance seems unfair, but to pay them would go against the decision made initially and, therefore, looking forward this should be an aspect of the scheme that should be reviewed.
6. Councillor Sutton stated that he has always had the opinion that the scheme should always be an independent review carried out by independent people and, in his opinion, their findings should be agreed. He stated that he will support the report and thanked the panel for their involvement and work in putting the report together.
7. Councillor Wallwork stated that she has read the review and added that the recommendations and increases appear to be fair. She added that she takes great honour in being a Councillor and agrees with the comments made by Councillor Tierney and for that reason she will not support the report.

**Proposed by Councillor Boden, seconded by Councillor Booth and Council AGREED:**

- **the conclusions and recommendations of the Independent Remuneration Panel (IRP) in respect of its review of the current Members' Allowances Scheme, to come into effect from 1 April 2021**
- **to authorise the Monitoring Officer to make such typographical amendments as are necessary to produce clean text copies of the Constitution.**

*(Councillors Lynn, Tierney and Topgood requested it be recorded that they abstained from voting on this item)*

## **C12/21      ELECTORAL REVIEW FOR FENLAND DISTRICT COUNCIL**

Members considered the Electoral Review for Fenland District Council report presented by Councillor Boden.

Members made comments as follows:

1. Councillor Booth stated that whilst he does not disagree with the content of the report and the mathematical formula as set out, he expressed the view that he does have concerns over the consequences of the review. He added that there is potentially going to be a review of Local Government, which will include a white paper due to be published and he questioned as to what the impact will be of that, if the electoral review is carried out. Councillor Booth also stated that previously when the Council undertook a boundary review, a year later the Boundary Commission undertook a review of the County Council divisions, which led to difficulties with regard to warding arrangements of surrounding parishes and wards within the district boundaries. He expressed the view that it may be better to undertake a combined County Council and District Council ward boundary review, but he realises it would be problematic as the County Council would need to be in agreement.
2. Councillor Boden stated that since the 1880's there have been 20 white papers that have been produced with regard to the review of Local Government and as a result there have been approximately four actual changes. He added that the point Councillor Booth made with regard to reviewing the County Council and District Council boundaries at the same

time is a logical approach and it is something that used to take place, however, it has now been agreed that County reviews and District reviews will now be undertaken separately, which, in his opinion, is a far less effective and efficient process.

3. Councillor Sutton asked Councillor Boden if he could advise him of what the aim and objective of the review is, and whether it includes reducing the number of members? He added that during the evolution of the Combined Authority, members all stated that four tiers of Local Government was too many and members were led to believe that the County Council or the District Council would be abolished and he has been an advocate of unitary authorities for a long time. Councillor Sutton questioned whether the outgoing Mayor had looked into that proposal? Councillor Boden stated that the process of a Local Government Boundary Commission for England Review involves firstly a request to be made for a scientifically produced estimate of the likely electorates due to be in place in 5 years' time. He added that consideration is then given with regard to Council size and when that takes place the Local Government Boundary Commission for England consults with all councillors and many others to determine based on the needs that there is in the area and the demand that there is within the Local Authority what the appropriate Council size is. Councillor Boden stated that to suggest any numbers would be premature until the electorate numbers for 5 years' time is known, but in his personal view a smaller Council would be better than the current size and he added that further discussion will take place at the second stage of the review. He stated that with regard to the four tiers of Local Government, along with the boundaries of the Council and the Town and Parish Council, they do not form part of the Local Government Boundary Commission for England review so are not allowed to change. Councillor Boden expressed the opinion that four tiers of Local Government is at least one too many and he would look for a change to that. He added that, in his view, changes to Government policy that have taken place in the last two years have not been conducive in his opinion when looking at the form of localism that he would like to see when there is a review to the tiers of Local Government.

**Proposed by Councillor Boden, seconded by Councillor Mrs French and Council AGREED to approach the Local Government Boundary Commission for England to request an Electoral Review of Fenland District Ward Boundaries in time for this review to inform the 2023 Fenland District Council elections.**

**C13/21      RESOLUTION TO APPROVE REASONS FOR ABSENCE UNDER S.85 OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972**

Members considered the resolution to approve reasons for absence under Section 85 of the Local Government Act 1972 report and amendment presented by Councillor Boden.

Councillor Boden stated that if any member is unable to attend a meeting due to Covid 19 reasons or if a meeting has been postponed or cancelled due to Covid 19 reasons then that will count as a qualifying reason for the six-month qualification to start rolling again.

Councillor Boden drew members attention to the tabled item which states that in respect of any of the first five bullet points in paragraph 5.2, being a reason for non-attendance at a relevant meeting, a member must advise Member Services in writing in advance of that meeting that one or more of those five reasons applies in relation to their non-attendance.

Councillor Boden stated that it had been agreed that an additional reason be added as provided by Councillor Booth, which would be listed as bullet point 6

- Has caring responsibilities that cannot be catered for due to Covid-19

Councillor Boden drew members attention to the tabled item which states that in respect of any of the first six bullet points in paragraph 5.2, being a reason for non-attendance at a relevant meeting,

a member must advise Member Services in writing in advance of that meeting that one or more of those six reasons applies in relation to their non-attendance.

Members made comments as follows:

1. Councillor Mrs French expressed the opinion that given the circumstances she thinks that the proposal is totally appropriate.
2. Councillor Sutton stated that he supports the proposal and it is wholly appropriate.
3. Councillor Cornwell stated that the proposal makes perfect sense and added that both himself and Councillor Boden both agreed that this was the right thing to do.
4. Councillor Hoy stated that she is pleased to see the amendment included, which gives members the opportunity to make contact to state that they are unwell.

**Proposed by Councillor Boden, seconded by Councillor Booth and members AGREED**

- **in relation to each and every member, as a reason for failure to attend any meeting of the Council, Cabinet, Committee or Sub-Committee (“a Relevant Meeting”) between 8 May 2021 and the day after its 2022 Annual General Meeting, the circumstances set out below, as a reason for non-attendance with Section 85 of the Local Government Act 1972**
- **the circumstances which comprise approved reasons for non-attendance at a Relevant Meeting are because the member:**
  1. **Has contracted or been infected by COVID-19**
  2. **Has tested positive for COVID-19**
  3. **Is suspected of having or suspects that he/she has contracted or been infected by COVID-19**
  4. **Has concerns that they may contract or become infected with COVID-19**
  5. **Is in quarantine or self-isolating in relation to COVID-19**
  6. **Has caring responsibilities that cannot be catered for due to COVID-19**
  7. **Is unable to attend the Relevant Meeting because the meeting is cancelled or postponed due to COVID-19**
- **in respect of the reasonable reasons 1-6 above for non-attendance, the member must advise Member Services in writing in advance of that meeting which one or more of those six reasons applies to their non-attendance.**

5.58 pm

Chairman