

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

MONDAY, 11 OCTOBER 2021 - 1.30 PM



PRESENT: Councillor D Mason (Chairman), Councillor G Booth, Councillor D Connor, Councillor S Count, Councillor M Humphrey, Councillor M Purser, Councillor R Wicks and Councillor F Yeulett

APOLOGIES: Councillor A Miscandlon (Vice-Chairman), Councillor M Cornwell, Councillor A Hay, Councillor R Skoulding and Councillor D Topgood

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE: Linda Albon (Member Services & Governance Officer), Niall Jackson (Member Services, GDPR & Governance Officer), Amy Brown (Chief Solicitor and Deputy Monitoring Officer), Anna Goodall (Head of Transformation, Customer Services & Democracy), Paul Medd (Chief Executive) and Carol Pilson (Corporate Director and Monitoring Officer)

GUESTS: Anglian Water - Rose Schisler, Briony Tuthill, Hannah Wilson and Johnathan Glerum. Cambridge County Council – Hillary Ellis, Quinton Carroll and Martin Brooker

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: Councillor Boden

OSC14/21 PREVIOUS MINUTES.

The minutes of the meeting of 13 September 2021 were confirmed and signed.

OSC15/21 UPDATE ON PREVIOUS ACTIONS.

Members considered the update on previous actions and made the following comments:

- Councillor Count noted the actions around noisy exhaust and stated that these needed following up. He asked the panel to directly question the police on whether they have the noise monitoring kit available, if they are utilising the equipment and if they are not to provide their reasoning for this. He noted that a member of the public reported a car with a noisy exhaust and provided the registration number but had no reply from the police and asked the panel to follow this up.
- Councillor Booth reminded the panel that he was still waiting for the information regarding apprenticeships to be provided and asked for this to be added as a separate point in the action plan. He noted that this had been agreed in the previous minutes and a response was still to be received.

OSC16/21 DISCUSSION WITH ANGLIAN WATER

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

- Councillor Mason noted that a key concern raised by members was that the infrastructure across Fenland may be outdated due to the surge in growth across the area in recent years. He asked Anglian Water what their plans and associated timescales are to address this issue. Briony Tuthill answered that for infrastructure investment Anglian Water invest in 5-year asset management periods and that 9 million pounds had been allocated to the Fenland area for the current period. She explained that this figure was determined by regulatory guidance and the ongoing need for asset maintenance. With growth, Briony noted that improvements are made on a case-by-case basis and that these are completed

with the housing developer before construction begins. Hannah Wilson clarified that changes to infrastructure due to growth are funded by the infrastructure charge which is levied from all developers making a connection to Anglian Water systems.

- Councillor Booth commented on the issue of low water pressure in rural areas and the concern about Friday bridge pumping station due to its age. He asked for clarification on the design life for Friday Bridge pumping station. Rose Schisler noted that Anglian Water had been undertaking refurbishment work in the Friday Bridge area which had slightly changed the way water moved around the system. She noted that normal service should resume imminently. Commenting on the water pressure issue, Rose said that Anglian Water had not received many complaints. She requested that any complaints received by Councillors be forwarded to Anglian Water so that they could look at feeding water from other areas to maintain the water pressure for the affected areas. Rose noted that there is no set time for an asset to be in service and that service life depends on the pressures put on the specific asset.
- Councillor Booth noted that complaints have been forwarded to Anglian Water from Councillor Bligh and that Councillors encourage residents to send their complaints to Anglian Water. He explained that complaints are not always directed to Councillors and mentioned that social media provides a good source for seeing how many people are affected. He also asked for a further update on the works around Parson Drove and Gorefield and when these would be delivered. Rose Schisler explained that the current schemes in this area will be delivered by November and that further investigation will be undertaken on whether more work is required after this date. She thanked Councillors for encouraging residents to send their complaints to Anglian Water.
- Councillor Wicks questioned the quality of water delivered from taps in remote areas and asked what guarantees there were that the water delivered was of a consistent quality. Rose Schisler reassured the panel that all water is treated to the highest standard and is regulated by the drinking water inspectorate. She explained that there are several stages to water treatment and is treated based on where it comes from. She noted that water is monitored to a high standard and all water is treated to the same standard irrespective of where the consumer lives. She encouraged residents to contact Anglian Water directly if they were worried about the quality of their water and noted that they run a 24/7 customer service.
- Councillor Wicks asked how old the infrastructure is in rural areas, what the quality of these assets are and what upgrades are due to take place in these areas. Rose Schisler noted that there is always a chlorine residual passing through the infrastructure to ensure the asset is kept clean. She explained that the infrastructure is replaced on a risk basis and that water quality is one of the areas considered when assessing the overall risk. She reminded the panel that they replace assets based on their risk score rather than on an age basis.
- Councillor Yeulett noted that following road gully flooding in Christchurch, highways had undertaken some exploratory work and found problems relating back to the First Time Sewerage scheme undertaken in 2009/2010. He asked what Anglian Water planned to do regarding the financing of rectifying these problems. Rose Schisler confirmed that the scheme was completed in 2009 and that Anglian Water would fully support further investigations. She guaranteed that if any problems were identified relating to this scheme Anglian Water would assist in rectifying the problem.
- Councillor Yeulett asked whether Anglian Water were happy with their systems after the flooding in March East. He noted that there may be problems with houses backing off Upwell Road and requested an update regarding issues in Morton Avenue. Jonathan Glerum stated that Anglian Water were fully aware of issues along Cavalry Drive, Upwell Road and Morton Avenue. He explained that following the Winter flooding lots of checks and works had been undertaken and that checks on Cavalry Drive didn't show any blockages or issues. He noted that work had been undertaken to remove a restriction on a manhole near Badgeney Road which made a small improvement to properties on Morton Avenue without increasing the flood risk elsewhere. He stated that this was not enough to fix the issue but that they were exploring other avenues to make properties in the area more

resilient to flooding. On top of this, Jonathan explained that there has been wider works to better understand the network and system across March through hydraulic modelling. Hillary Ellis further explained that Anglian Water had looked at options for Morton Avenue in the past however they had only ever found ways to reduce the risk of ground water flooding and not water coming up from below. She noted that the work being undertaken surveying the foul sewerage network will allow Anglian Water to understand why foul water is entering the drainage system and will allow them to either redirect or remove it from the drainage system.

- Councillor Yeulett asked whether Anglian Water were able to prove that the drain has had the blockage fully removed and that water was now flowing freely. He also asked whether Anglian Water were happy with their current systems for taking water away. Johnathan Glerum assured the Panel that they always make sure that the system is free flowing however it is a case of waiting until it rains to identify what impact it has made. He explained that March had a mixture of foul and surface water sewers and that during heavy rainfall lots of water finds its way into the foul sewerage system. He explained that this was not what the foul system was designed for and that there were plans in March to attempt to address this. Jonathan Glerum presented a survey map of the networks under March and explained their plans to address the issues of surface water entering the foul sewerage systems.
- Councillor Count requested a copy of the maps be sent to members of the Panel and asked for a briefing note regarding the planned extensive works in March. He noted that Cambridge County Council are responsible for surface water whilst Anglian Water are responsible for foul sewerage and questioned who had the power to change the surface water running into the foul system and who would have to fund the necessary works. Johnathan Glerum confirmed that he was happy to provide a briefing note along with the shared images to the panel. He stated that the works would be undertaken in a joint partnership. He explained the need to work together to remove surface water from foul sewerage system and that if they could not completely remove it, they would look at how the flow could be slowed to improve resilience during storms. Hillary Ellis noted that where there are flooding issues, Cambridge County Council have ways to provide funds that will be matched by Anglian Water and that the more parties involved the quicker the work could be undertaken.
- Councillor Booth expressed the worry that by pumping water from one place to another they would simply move the issue to another area. Hillary Ellis assured the Panel that any change in the movement of water would not affect the area it is being diverted to. She noted that there is now more modelling than ever before which ensured that the risk would be kept to a minimum when diverting water elsewhere. Johnathan Glerum expanded on this and stated that with Morton Avenue modelling was undertaken before to understand what impact it had downstream.
- Councillor Mason noted that in Tydd St Giles the Vacuum system was unreliable in wet weather such as during the Christmas period. He asked what the nature of the problem was and what steps were being taken to correct this. Briony Tuthill stated that Anglian Water had received a report for Tydd St Giles flooding on boxing day afternoon and that a technician had been sent on the morning of the 28th. She noted that the specific failure had been caused by excessive rainfall and surface water entering the vacuum system.
- Councillor Connor enquired whether any survey maps had been created for towns and villages other than March. Johnathan Glerum explained that the same survey had not been undertaken to this extent elsewhere in the district as the process was highly resource intensive. He stated that this type of survey may be undertaken elsewhere in future and that he would share any further updates when possible.
- Councillor Connor noted that there were no plans to update the infrastructure in Wimblington and Doddington in the next 5 years and questioned why plans were reactive rather than proactive when there were vast plans for growth in these areas. Hannah Wilson explained that growth is dealt with differently to the 5-year asset management plan as it can be speculative and that any improvements needed due to growth are funded by the

infrastructure charge. Councillor Connor asked for more information to be provided to the planning committee around the effect of passing large building sites on the current infrastructure when consultations take place with Anglian Water.

- Councillor Connor commented on the removal of sewerage from the treatment centres in Wimblington and Doddington and asked for clearer consultation on whether the infrastructure could cope with extra growth in housing. Hannah Wilson explained that they undertake monthly meetings with the local flood authority which looks at site specifics and how they can improve engagement. She offered to engage with the relevant Fenland officers monthly to look at general concerns. She noted that Anglian Water cannot object to planning applications due to capacity issues as the right to connect to their infrastructure is absolute. She explained that with surface water issues they can only comment when they are connecting to current assets. Hillary Ellis explained that they are working on a way to confirm that whilst there is a right to connect there may still be issues in order to better inform planning decisions.
- Councillor Connor disagreed that there was further capacity available in the Doddington and Wimblington area due to the use of sewerage tankers and asked why they believed there to be capacity when commenting on a recent planning application for 47 houses. He argued that the system needs to be viewed in light of heavy rain and the effects of climate change in order to understand whether there was true capacity. Briony Tuthill stated that the tanker movements were not due to capacity problems and that movements were either routine or due to periods of high rainfall where water entered the foul system. Hannah Wilson explained that with regard to foul capacity the response to planning is based on the current tide and flow within the system and how the proposed change will affect the existing network. She noted that Anglian Water can only account for the foul sewerage and are unable to take surface water into account as this was not what the system was designed for. Councillor Connor suggested a joint approach needs to be looked at with Cambridge County Council as surface water still enters the foul sewerage system causing flooding to which Hannah Wilson agreed.
- Councillor Count noted that in a previous meeting it had been agreed that sewerage tankers would be containerised to help contain the smell which had been affecting residents livelihood but that recently these had returned to curtain topped. He asked whether the use of containerised vehicles was a question of cost and asked for reasons why containerised vehicles were not being used. Briony Tuthill stated that she had spoken to operational managers and that an agreement had been made previously around vehicles being sheeted and that they should be regularly washed down to help reduce the smell. She noted that this had not changed and that the process was still being followed. She assured the panel that staff would be re-briefed regarding these matters.
- Councillor Count noted that the vehicles were sheeted and not containerised and expressed the concern that this would not contain the smell. Briony Tuthill confirmed that sheeting vehicles does prevent smell but that she would follow up this point about the possibility of using containerised vehicles.
- Councillor Count asked what actions were being taken to address the significant surface water flooding, what the associated costs and timescales were and what contingency plans they had in place. He requested an update on when the action plan surrounding the 2021 flooding will be published. He also noted that the Cambridgeshire flood risk management strategy 2021-2027 had no reference to flood prevention and argued that the action plan did not have any significant actions. Finally, he informed the attendees that March Broad Street is due to undergo significant change which would provide an opportunity for surface water issues to be dealt with at the same time. Hillary Ellis stated that the flood action report had already been drafted and was awaiting final comments before publication. She assured that despite the fact this had not been published, action had already been taken in certain areas including engagement with landowners where ditches had been blocked. She noted that in some areas they are unable to identify who owns the land but that there was funding available to clear these areas. She stated that prevention was not included in the action plan as it is almost impossible to achieve. She noted that there had been engagement with

Fenland District Council around using the works in broad street to address some of the surface water and foul sewerage system issues.

- Councillor Count asked for clarification on whether the report had to pass through the Council committee before being published to which Hannah Wilson explained that this was not a requirement. He asked whether this document will be shared with local members to which Hannah Wilson also confirmed.
- Councillor Purser stated that he had also received some complaints about the smell of sewerage removal tankers. He also noted that another issue was presented by open water swimmers who had heard that several water companies can discharge foul waste into rivers. He asked to what percent this was being allowed, whether there were any plans to stop this process and what the associated timelines for taking action were. Briony Tuthill noted that there were a number of legacy assets where there was a discharge of combined water into rivers which would cost in excess of 500 billion to remove. She explained that Anglian Water aimed to reduce the environmental impact as much as possible and had spent over 800 million on environment protection. She noted that these legacy assets contribute to 4% of the environmental harm and whilst these were unacceptable assets the harm reduction was not high enough to prioritise the full removal of these assets.
- Councillor Mason noted the government permission to discharge foul water into open water and asked whether this exemption will be renewed once it expires. Briony Tuthill explained that this referred to treated sewerage and that Anglian Water had not invoked this exemption and had zero plans to do so.
- Councillor Connor questioned what action Fenland District Council could take to apply pressure on the government to make developers more financially liable to contribute to drainage and sewerage infrastructure in larger developments. Briony Tuthill noted that charges are established under the water industry act and that the income from this covers 100 percent of costs for infrastructure upgrades. She noted that the Council could help by applying pressure on planning policies including the automatic right to connect and changing legislation in order to make Anglian Water a statutory consultee. Hannah Wilson added that in relation to surface water management it would be useful for minor planning developments to also have a requirement to take this management into account. Johnathan Glerum gave a further update on the recent movement on the automatic right to connect and noted that the government have agreed to relook at this area of legislation. He suggested that this area only required support for the current work and that further lobbying of the government on this area was not currently required.
- Councillor Booth requested that the leader write to the relevant government departments based on the above suggestions.
- Councillor Booth requested that following the floods of December 2020 communication and coordination should be improved between Anglian Water, the Fire Service, County Council and Fenland District Council. He noted that modelling utilises a 1 in 100 year event and asked whether this was determined by legislation. Hannah Wilson confirmed that the 1 in 100 year event is legislative. She did note that in the development of the next local plan they can look at altering this to a 1 in 200 year event. She agreed with the need for better communication between organisations and explained that there was a plan to develop a website to inform exactly who was responsible for what. Alongside this Anglian Water were looking at the possibility of developing flood community groups to centralise a point of contact for residents.

OSC17/21 ANNUAL MEETING WITH THE LEADER AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE

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

- Councillor Count noted that the annual report stated that highway schemes under the Wisbech Access Strategy were fully funded. He questioned this believing that only the purchase of land and design were fully funded, and other further funds had to be obtained

from elsewhere. Councillor Boden confirmed this and stated that the report had not been updated from a previous one. He explained that the schemes would be ready to commence in 2022 but that bids could only be made for government funding once the sites are shovel ready.

- Councillor Count questioned whether it would be useful to put a time limit on obtaining the external funding before looking elsewhere to attain the necessary funds. Paul Medd noted that there was potential for the Wisbech Access scheme to be entered for the levelling up fund but that this was not guaranteed. He stated that this would provide another potential route to obtain the funding for the schemes.
- Count questioned why the target number for action taken on safety issues in private rented homes had dropped from 400 last year to 250 this year when only 226 houses had action taken last year. Councillor Boden explained that the figures were not comparable as the target set last year was pre-Covid. He noted that Covid had made it difficult to access houses to take action, time taken on investigations had increased, and that there were also additional new houses to consider. He clarified that there had also been a change in approach to programme of work allowing for a more targeted approach meaning that less properties had to be visited.
- Councillor Count commended the Council on receiving the Customer Services Excellence award. He noted the figures provided showing how many calls were answered within 20 seconds but questioned whether stats could be provided for those with an elongated wait which he had heard reports about. He asked what guarantees the Council had that customers who were answered quickly are not then hung up on. He also questioned whether the Council had the facility to implement a call back system for those kept on hold for a long time due to excessive queues. Councillor Boden suggested that Councillors try to use the customer services on occasion to see the process first-hand. He noted that he occasionally did so and usually received a quick response. He noted that the annual customer satisfaction survey had only achieved 75% satisfaction in the previous year but that this had been skewed as most negative responses were concerning the second lockdown and people's dissatisfaction with this. Councillor Boden informed the panel that the average length of calls stood at 5 minutes. He explained that this was previously longer, but average times had dropped due to staff gaining experience in dealing with requests. He also noted that the time taken to respond to calls had increased during the implementation of the My Fenland project due to training needs removing staff from roles for a period of time, but that performance was now returning to expected standards. He further explained that call wait times vary depending on departments as certain calls such as payments and appointments are prioritised. Councillor Boden informed the Panel that there were current improvements being made such as Digital Journeys which will reduce time for action to be taken as it removes the need for duplicated data entry. Finally, he explained that the current telephony system does not support a call back function, but the telephony providers will be asked whether this would be possible in future. Paul Medd commented that the My Fenland transformation project represents a move to a more efficient modern-day process involving interactive online systems and that this change was currently working well and provides better flexibility and choice to residents in how they communicate with the Council.
- Councillor Count asked a further question on whether it would be possible to monitor those who have waited on hold for over 10 mins? Paul Medd noted that comprehensive scripts have been provided to advisors to help reduce call times and that there has been a reconfiguration of the front and back office to streamline more complex issues to officers. Councillor Boden explained that officer capacity is not the only reason behind excessive waits and that there can be technical reasons behind these waits.
- Councillor Count asked the attendees what the one area was that will be keeping them awake at night. Councillor Boden answered that there were two things. One was the fear of failing to act properly resulting in someone falling through the system when they needed help and suffering harm due to this. The second was the management of risk with Council investments. He explained that the potential for getting it wrong would have long term financial impacts on the Council and that there was a fine balance between risk and reward.

Paul Medd seconded Chris Boden's first point. He noted that despite the Council being in a good position financially there was a great degree of uncertainty going forward due to the pandemic's impact. He also recognised that with recruitment the Council are in a tough labour market when attempting to attract the right type of talent. He noted that the Council were doing their utmost to retain officers whilst also attempting to create a track record with the unprecedented regeneration opportunities provided to the Council over the past few years to entice new recruits to come to Fenland District Council.

- Councillor Yeulett asked whether we are getting close to our targets in terms of housing development numbers and asked whether the Council were being proactive in getting younger people on the housing ladder? Councillor Boden replied that with the projected housing numbers the Council are in a good position compared to the government target set. He noted that the projections for the next 5 years are only projections and that the actual figures depend on what happens in planning committee. He further explained that the process of getting younger people on the housing ladder is much more difficult. He noted that there are various government schemes for affordable home ownership and that the previous scheme running in Fenland is currently being replaced by the national scheme. He argued that the political leadership should push affordable housing harder.
- Councillor Yeulett noted the increasing risk of domestic abuse during the Covid pandemic and asked what challenges this had posed and how they had been addressed by the Council. Councillor Boden confirmed that this is primarily a Cambridge County Council issue but that the Council do have a part to play and that the findings so far are worrying. He stated that the Council do have anecdotal evidence that cases of domestic abuse may have risen during Covid based on the small percentage of those who come to the Council for housing assistance. He noted intervention had been required in 131 households across Fenland which was a rise from 106 the previous year and 82 the year before but accepted that the real problem is far greater than these numbers suggest. Paul Medd noted that the pandemic had an impact on everyone and that discussions had taken place with Cambridge County Council to highlight the impact and how this has affected the mental health of families. He commended the rapid introduction of the Covid and Councillors roles as community leaders Hub in helping the community deal with the issues caused by Covid.
- Councillor Yeulett noted the government's current lack of HGV drivers and current issues with supply. He asked whether this had any affect on Fenland and how we would address this going forward. He also noted that there had been talks of big rises in council tax. Councillor Boden noted that there has been a shortage of HGV drivers in England for years and that this constituted a long-term issue that was not solely due to Covid and Brexit. He explained that the concern would be for refuse collection however the Council have a good retention rate for drivers. He also noted that Fenland is an area where people come to retire and that this provides a steady supply of HGV drivers to the area as they are an aging workforce. Likewise, Councillor Boden noted that the main concern with the fuel shortage was refuse collection. He explained that the Council have large tanks of stored fuel which are managed well reducing the risk of the shortage affecting the Council. Regarding Council tax, Councillor Boden explained that the government does not dictate how we manage our Council Tax and assured the panel this figure will be kept as low as possible whilst he remains leader of the Council.
- Councillor Booth noted that the contact centre's IVR messaging was clunky and that there was anecdotal evidence that residents had to wait a long time for contact centre responses. He also noted that the Council should consider having a measure for average call waiting times. Finally, he raised that the 97% of calls handled first time referred to residents who were provided an answer without being passed on and that this would not take into account those who had to have a call back from an officer at a later time. Paul Medd explained that the My Fenland project was aiming to create a standardised approach to try and drive down as many variants that can affect call waiting times as possible. He noted that the Council are attempting to create a more consistent customer experience through adding to advisors' skillsets and implementing the use of scripts. Chris Boden agreed that the messaging was clunky for him. However, he explained that this must be appropriate for residents who are

calling in and that it was not designed for Councillors. Councillor Boden supported the idea that it should be reviewed. He also noted that average wait times are measured but argued that lengthy delays were more concerning, and that priority should be given to reducing and eliminating these. Paul Medd interjected that there had also been significant upgrades to the Council's online systems to allow self-service and that the possibility of introducing live chat was being examined.

- Councillor Booth asked how long the hardship funds for self-isolation take to be paid to the claimants and how the scheme was progressing. Councillor Boden explained that there was a level of discretion in applying the funds but also specific rules on who can receive the funds. He stated that Fenland District Council had given out 715 grants, in some cases this was more than once to the same household. Paul Medd noted that the grants continue to be essential for those struggling. He explained that the time for the payment to be processed depends on the interaction with the individual making the request as certain evidence is required for a valid payment to be made. He noted that the Council conduct weekly pay runs and that certain people would get paid within 7 days if the evidence was provided within that time. He reassured the panel that the admin process is as fast tracked as possible.
- Councillor Booth asked what areas the Council have not performed so well in and what lessons have been learnt over the past year. Councillor Boden answered that compared to his expectations the Council had not increased the income of external funding from new sources as quickly as he would have liked. He explained that the Council were late comers to this source of financial income and that this had been pushed since he came in as Leader. He admitted that he may have been over optimistic but that the Council were redoubling their efforts to achieve something significant. Paul Medd stated that the one area he would like to see improvement in going forward was My Fenland and recognised that there was room for improvement. He noted that the team can work more efficiently through addressing some of the issues raised during the meeting. He supported Councillor Boden in the disappointment of the progress on the big projects and noted the fact that the Council is often reliant on the contributions of third parties to progress these projects. Paul explained that the Council had done well and that the process had taught good lessons. He hoped that there could be further improvement in staff turnover figures and recruitment and stated that the Council were continually assessing itself to ensure they remain a competitive employer.
- Councillor Mason thanked Councillor Boden and Paul Medd for their presentation of the report along with staff for contributing to the report.

OSC18/21 FUTURE WORK PROGRAMME

Members considered the Future Work Programme:

- Councillor Mason noted that the 2020/21 Planning Service Annual Review would be carried over to the meeting of 8 November. He stated that the Investment Board would attend the meeting in March to provide an update.
- Councillor Connor noted that he had been in communication with the road safety team and requested them to be invited to a future meeting.

4.27 pm

Chairman