

# OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

MONDAY, 7 FEBRUARY 2022 - 1.30 PM



**PRESENT:** Councillor D Mason (Chairman), Councillor A Miscandlon (Vice-Chairman), Councillor G Booth, Councillor D Connor, Councillor M Cornwell, Councillor S Count, Councillor A Hay, Councillor M Purser, Councillor R Wicks and Councillor F Yeulett.

**APOLOGIES:** Councillor M Humphrey, Councillor R Skoulding and Councillor D Topgood.

Also in Attendance: Councillors Lynn, Murphy and Seaton.

Officers in attendance: Amy Brown (Head of Legal and Governance), Anna Goodall (Acting Assistant Director), Kathy Woodward (Internal Audit Manager), Dan Horn (Acting Assistant Director), Phil Hughes (Acting Assistant Director) and Aarron Locks (Shared Service CCTV Manager), Niall Jackson (Member Services, GDPR & Governance Officer) and Rowland Potter (Head of Transport, Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority).

## **OSC36/21 PREVIOUS MINUTES.**

The minutes of the meeting of 17 January 2022 were confirmed and signed.

## **OSC37/21 UPDATE ON PREVIOUS ACTIONS.**

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

- Councillor Miscandlon stated that it would be useful if the ongoing sections of the previous actions had completion dates so that members and the public could have an idea of when the actions were proposed to be closed.
- Councillor Hay asked what the situation was with Peterborough and whether they had completed their review? Councillor Connor confirmed that the Head of Planning was now solely working for Fenland District Council and had been since the start of January.
- Councillor Hay asked what the arrangement with Peterborough City Council was following this and asked what percentage of time the Head of Planning was now working? Dan Horn explained that there was no longer an arrangement with Peterborough City Council regarding the head of service but that the arrangement had continued as normal regarding the shared support manager and the delivery of the Local Plan.
- Councillor Yeulett asked whether the Council could inform members about the Head of Planning's working days? Dan Horn responded that the Head of Planning usually worked Tuesday and Wednesday with another half day during the week and said that he would look at how this could be conveyed to members.

## **OSC38/21 PROGRESS OF CORPORATE PRIORITY – ENVIRONMENT**

Members considered the Progress of Corporate Priority - Environment presented by Councillor Murphy.

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

- Councillor Cornwell asked what percentage of commercial and business collections were recycled? Councillor Murphy responded that any collections containing recyclables were recycled but that the recycling percentages for these areas were not in the report but committed to providing these figures to the panel.
- Councillor Hay commented that there was no RAG rating on page 36 of the report for

customer satisfaction. Councillor Murphy stated that the data was not available at the time and that the information would be provided when possible.

- Councillor Yeulett asked whether there was a charge for a green bin to be provided where a household did not have one upon moving in? Councillor Murphy explained that the bins belong to the property and that they do need to be paid for by the property owner even in cases where they are taken as it was not possible to pinpoint who had taken the bin.
- Councillor Miscandlon commended the Environmental Services Officers for their prompt action in Whittlesey.
- Councillor Wicks noted that street collections were being rolled out for normal and recyclable street waste and asked how this was progressing? Councillor Murphy explained that they had almost completed the rollout, with around 50 bins still to be deployed, with them being placed throughout town and village centres along with some being placed in cemeteries. Councillor Wicks asked if they were providing a good opportunity for recycling in the areas they had been placed? Councillor Murphy confirmed that they were and had been full most days so far.
- Councillor Booth stated that the recycling rates for Fenland had previously been described as good and asked where they currently stood? Councillor Murphy responded that they were still in the same position and that this was well above average compared to where they should be. He explained that they were still performing better than any other area in Cambridgeshire. Councillor Murphy made the point that no days of collection were lost during the Covid-19 pandemic but that there had been more staff off due to Covid in the previous weeks than in the last two years. Despite this, he explained that there were sufficient contingencies with officers being drafted in to do certain jobs and loaders being moved from the brown bin service to cover the shortage as the collection rates for brown bins were low this time of year.
- Councillor Booth expressed his concern that the answer had been the same over several years, pointing out that the recycling rate was now 27 percent as a target where it used to be 52. He made the point that official sources stated Fenland were recycling 40-50 percent and that compared to all areas Fenland were 194 out of 398. Councillor Booth explained that these figures were different to what they were reporting and that other Cambridgeshire areas were also ahead of Fenland in the official tables including Peterborough and East Cambridgeshire and raised concern that the panel were not receiving the right figures. Councillor Murphy responded that the figures provided were taken at a specific time and that the two Councils mentioned have given money back as they could not complete their collections recently. He stated that in East Cambridgeshire bins had failed to be emptied for six weeks compared to Fenland who had not lost a single day. Councillor Booth expressed his appreciation that the collection services were doing a good job. He reiterated that when looking at overall performance for 2020-21 the figures provided were at odds with Government sources and the percentage had gone down. Councillor Murphy stated that they were always looking to improve. Dan Horn stated that he would get an explanation for the difference between the figures provided and Government figures.
- Councillor Miscandlon questioned how the Council was progressing with fly tipping issues and asked what was being done? Councillor Murphy responded that when fly tipping is retrieved, officers look for documents such as invoices which had names on and other personal identifiers so that they can identify the perpetrator. He informed the panel that instances of fly tipping were up slightly and explained that instances of fly tipping can be as small as a single bag. Councillor Murphy stated that there were four cases going through the courts at the time and that they were looking at fines of up to £1,500.
- Councillor Miscandlon asked how many successful prosecutions the Council had over the past year and how many were ongoing? Councillor Murphy responded that there were currently four to five cases ongoing but that he was unsure on how many had been successful in the last year as the cases take a while to go through the courts.
- Councillor Cornwell referred to the item regarding the response to the DEFRA Waste Resources Strategy and that DEFRA had delayed their response to the consultation until Spring 2022. He expressed the view that the waste resource strategy dealt with important

areas and asked whether they had any idea of when this strategy would come to fruition? Councillor Murphy informed the panel that he was Chairman of the Recap Board and acknowledged that progress was currently being delayed. He explained that DEFRA had kept blaming Covid for the delays and that he would not be surprised if there were further delays still. Councillor Murphy explained that some items were being pushed back to 2024-25 and there was an unawareness of the cost in these areas, noting that the brown bin service did not make any profit but still costs 900,000 per year to undertake. He explained that the Government was unsure on how they would fund the necessary changes and that certain elements had not been thought out very well causing the matter to drag on, but a close eye was being kept on the situation. Councillor Murphy explained some of the difficulties including that they want to collect food waste on the roadside which would require separate bins in these areas. He also stated that they wanted to move to electric vehicles but that this cost £400,000 per vehicle compared to £250,000 for the current vehicles and explained that they cannot switch to these overnight as they cost too much and so the change would need to be phased in. Councillor Cornwell asked whether the Council were putting pressure on DEFRA to try and improve situation? Councillor Murphy confirmed that they were along with putting pressure on the Government due to cost worries.

- Councillor Booth referred to the fact that it had previously been reported that replacing street lighting stock in rural areas would be completed by the end of December, but that work was still ongoing and asked if there was any update. In Councillor Mrs French's absence as portfolio holder, it was resolved that the information would be sought after the meeting.
- Councillor Yeulett referred to the appointment of a specialist contractor and asked how the costs were being paid for and what the cost to Fenland were? Phil Hughes explained that this was part of the Growing Fenland fund and that he would double check this with Councillor Mrs French. Councillor Miscandlon asked for a written update to confirm this.
- Councillor Mason congratulated the Environmental Services Team and officers on their performance and thanked the present officers and Councillor Murphy for their time.

**The progress of Corporate Priority – Environment was noted for information.**

### **OSC39/21 COMMUNITY SAFETY PARTNERSHIP**

Members considered the Community Safety Partnership presented by Councillor Lynn.

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

- Councillor Hay noted that the Community Safety Partnership funding originally came via the County Council from Central government but that once the Police and Crime Commissioner was created it was delivered through them. She asked why no funding had been received from them from April to December 2021? Councillor Lynn explained that they had not received any funding as it was awarded on a year-by-year agreement and when the last commissioner finished his term the funding also stopped, which was due to the election and the appointment of a new commissioner. He stated that the new commissioner undertook many consultations to decide on his strategy going forward and that funding was lost during this period as they were told it was changing. Councillor Lynn explained that once they had set out the new Local Plan they had put a new agreement in place to offer funding on a three yearly period which covers his term of office. Councillor Hay queried that if Fenland District Council did not have the funding, then no work must have taken place to which Councillor Lynn informed her was not the case. Councillor Hay asked why they had not insisted on the funding being backdated to cover this period? Dan Horn informed her that they had made representations prior to the new funding agreement and that this was essentially the point that had been made. He explained that they had been able to fund the work from residual reserves to cover the gap in costs.
- Councillor Hay stated that the Police and Crime Commissioner is elected every 4 years and raised concern that should it be a different person elected the Council would lose funding

again. Councillor Lynn agreed that this would be the case. Councillor Hay suggested that they should be making representations to suggest that funding be carried over whenever a new commissioner takes office so that they have time to look at the details without Fenland losing out. Dan Horn responded that they would need to be making representations like last time but that they were not persuasive enough last time. Councillor Hay expressed the view that if this occurred again and further funding was held back then this would need to be made known to the general public.

- Councillor Hay referred to page six of the report where it mentions talking to sports clubs linked to Polish schools. She queried whether there were any Polish schools in the area? Dan Horn explained that there was not a Polish school but there was a Saturday school held at the Rosmini centre and that there was a similar provision in Huntingdon. Councillor Hay requested that they make this clear in the future.
- Councillor Hay stated that there were partners RAG rated red but that there was no narrative in there to explain why. Dan Horn explained that this area was still incomplete which was why it was rated red and informed her that they would come back with a timescale on when they are likely to complete this area. Councillor Hay made the point that there were also no RAG ratings against drug and alcohol. Dan Horn informed the panel that this was an oversight in terms of this rating and explained that the first should be green and the next two amber.
- Councillor Hay referred to the fact that CCTV in Fenland had merged with Peterborough City Council in January 2020, but Chatteris Town Council did not feel like they were getting value for money, with there being 93 incidents with only 1 arrest or fine. She pointed out that this seemed to be a low number compared to the number of incidents. Aarron Locks explained that the number of cameras does not always relate to the number of incidents as it is more to do with the environment they are in. He stated that Chatteris had one of the lowest crime rates in the area and that in comparison to March it was lower due to the lack of nightlife. Aarron Locks explained that a lot of incidents caught in Chatteris were dealt with differently due to their nature and did not lead to arrests. Councillor Hay made the point that there had been incidents of criminal damage and drug dealing in certain areas and asked who was responsible for the cameras being placed in the correct areas? Aarron Locks responded that the CCTV provide lots of evidence to find and educate perpetrators and that the age and offences did not constitute arrest. He explained that old cameras were not easy to redeploy but that new cameras were moveable and in the future they can respond quickly to new developing trends. Councillor Hay asked who would pay for the cameras? Aarron Locks explained that this would be discussed with partners when necessary but that in Peterborough they had been funded by Peterborough City Council. Councillor Mason thanked them for the explanation as the figures had been a worry at face value.
- Councillor Miscandlon expressed his concern around e-scooters and their prevalence in the market towns. He stated that there was currently a pilot scheme in Cambridge City but that they were illegal to use outside of this area and made the point that it was easy to spot them on CCTV and asked what the Police were doing about the issue. Andy Morris agreed with Councillor Miscandlon's comments and that they had also been an issue in Peterborough. He stated that they were working with educating retailers to make them accountable as they are illegal unless used in private spaces, but retailers were currently failing to make this known. Andy Morris informed members that they had a team who were proactively focusing their attention on this and explained that some people will not know that they are illegal, with e-scooters being seized where necessary if deemed proportionate. He made the point that the issue was not going away and that they needed to find a balance of education and punitive action. Andy Morris explained that if they put up posts every day regarding e-scooters it gives the impression that this is their only focus which so this was being avoided.
- Councillor Miscandlon stated that most riders were school children and asked whether they would consider going into schools and educate them as it was an issue that needed serious consideration as there had already been 16 deaths and around 500 accidents. Andy Morris responded that he would take the recommendation on board and that they do have educators that already visit schools. He explained that they had recently obtained the

capacity to do proactive work around issues affecting the public and have officers planning on tackling these issues. Andy Morris stated that people are being prosecuted were appropriate and that he would get the data on the number of prosecutions, referrals and education programmes for the panel.

- Councillor Yeulett acknowledged the effect of Covid on implementing plans and measures for the Police and asked what they were seeing regarding domestic abuse rates and whether there was an upwards trend, questioned what they were doing to prevent and challenge these issues. He recognised that street drinking in Wisbech had decreased and asked whether they had a plan to help keep it that way and build on the already decreasing problem? Regarding domestic violence, Councillor Yeulett asked whether there was a strategy in place and a team focusing on that and whether they were educating people on how to recognise it. Andy Morris explained that he could not provide a response regarding domestic violence as they were not a response team who dealt with those issues, it was however a force priority to reduce domestic violence and that they had a vulnerability focus department. Councillor Yeulett asked who was responsible for taking action in this area? Andy Morris explained that it was a Police responsibility but that they did not respond directly to 999 calls as there are specialist teams for these circumstances. He explained that every domestic incident must be reviewed and signed off by a supervisor and he could not answer whether the figures were increasing or decreasing as they did not have that data. Councillor Yeulett asked where the link with County was and how the schemes here were helping and preventing cases of domestic abuse? Dan Horn responded that the Community Safety Partnership brought all work together and allowed them to ask the country wide board what help is needed on a local level. He stated that the actions were set out in the action plan and one example of Fenland work in this area was the Domestic Abuse Housing Accreditation which was working with the Housing Options Team and training them to ensure that any resident presenting as a victim of abuse would be dealt with appropriately.
- Councillor Yeulett asked whether they had a handle on the volume of domestic abuse and questioned whether they were making a difference and if there were any statistics to show this was happening. Dan Horn responded that he would take this away and provide figures around the trends. He stated that they had received a presentation on familial domestic abuse and that Fenland had been highlighted as a pinch point and that he would provide the trends from this.
- Councillor Yeulett reiterated that street drinking was down and asked how they would keep it that way? Councillor Lynn agreed that street drinking had decreased but explained that they were unsure about how much of this was due to Covid as it goes down during the Winter period anyway. Andy Morris explained that they were taking a partnership approach to look at why people were on the streets, which he had brought with him from his time in Peterborough, and that they are looking at providing support and looking at rehabilitative measures before taking punitive action. He stated that there were 46 people on the Peterborough scheme and only 4 refused any help and in these cases, they would be banned from the Town Centres. Councillor Yeulett commented that it was currently a very good base to work from as offences were low at the moment.
- Councillor Purser expressed the view that he had witnessed an alarming amount of antisocial driving with people driving too fast late at night and was concerned that someone might get hurt. He asked whether there was a possibility of a Police presence to help reduce the risk as it was always too late by the time it was reported. Andy Morris responded that this fits in line with Vision Zero, if specific details of where and when it was occurring were provided and it was blatantly clear then they could send someone out the next day to deal with it. He encouraged the reporting of any instances and was happy to give his personal details and have conversations with those people but explained that there may be reasons for not being able to be present or deal with the offence. Councillor Purser stated that he had seen the offences himself and that those showing off was a worry. He reiterated that having an officer or car there will deter people from committing the offence in the first place. Andy Morris explained that the positive news was that from the start of January they were up to full capacity and they now have the ability to start to undertake this work. He stated

that he could check the work shift patterns and when people are working late shifts he could feed back to focus on these areas.

- Councillor Miscandlon stated that they now had a considerable amount of data regarding speeding with instances of people speeding up to 105 MPH. He explained that the speed cameras do not record the registration numbers, only speeds and times, although caveating that some speeding may be from blue light vehicles on occasion. Councillor Miscandlon explained that the Police and Crime Commissioner had been promising days of action where the appropriate paperwork would be issued to those speeding and noted that he could arrange for the data to be sent to the Police if they had not already seen it. Andy Morris explained that they can analyse this data, look at key times and direct teams to work at those times and places. He stated that new officers had been undertaking their initial induction and had received specific training around neighbourhood policing so he expected to begin to see tangible results that he could share with the panel in future in this area. Councillor Miscandlon stated that if he provided his details they would get the data to him.
- Councillor Connor made the point that there had been a meeting a few months ago where a promise of a few days of action were made and asked whether they could chase up this up to see where they stood regarding this? Councillor Miscandlon stated that he was with them the previous day and that he had chased this up. Andy Morris responded that he would find out when the days were and confirmed that Councillors would be allowed to attend on the day. Councillor Mason made the point that they had spent a lot of time and money on this and that all that was needed was the support for the end product.
- Councillor Booth made the point that road safety had been raised by the Overview and Scrutiny Panel for a number of years and asked whether the action plan was effectively saying that road safety is now the remit of community groups. He also pointed out that in the previous year this had been placed on the action plan as a priority area but it seemed to have dropped off which was a disappointment. Dan Horn responded that, regarding the Road Safety Partnership, officers from Cambridgeshire County Council had come before the panel a year ago to detail the Vision Zero Strategy that was being launched at the time. He explained that the Council had asked the Road Safety Partnership where they needed support from a Community Safety Partnership perspective and a lot of focus had been around assisting with the recruitment of volunteers, support for the Vision Zero scheme in Fenland had been offered and if there was a gap where support was required. Dan Horn said that it was an area they could take away and revisit if it remained a real concern and they could come back and show what progress there had been as a Vision Zero partnership if they so wished. Councillor Booth welcomed this and stated that the communities that he represented also see it as a problem and that Fenland was in the top 3 for fatalities amongst young drivers which was an issue that needed to be addressed. He said that it was unfortunate that the assistance from the Police had reduced on this matter due to more urgent issues in the past few years. Councillor Booth explained that it did not look like they were getting more Police resources for these community-based issues, acknowledging that some issues were due to Covid which had stopped the Community Speed Watch for a while but expressed his concern that they did not seem to be moving forward with this issue which he believed to be an urgent issue.
- Councillor Count asked whether the Road Safety Partnership made any bids for funding as Cambridgeshire County Council had £454,000 that had been specifically allocated to new scheme development and that they had predicted that they would not have spent any of this by April 2022. He had been informed that this was because the Combined Authority and the Greater Cambridge Partnership had not approached them with any new schemes so there had been no use for the money and asked why this money had not been used on safety measures as Cambridgeshire County Council are responsible for highways safety, but they had never received a response back. Dan Horn explained that the relationship with county wide partnership for road safety is that they ask where they need support and he could take back the feedback and enquire as to whether there are plans for Fenland in relation to that which fits in with the Vision Zero action plan.
- Councillor Wicks asked what action had been undertaken in primary schools as children did

not like speeding and had organised their own march previously which lasted 2 years before Police time was taken elsewhere. He questioned where the primary school engagement was going to come from and what engagement there was with youth at clubs and events? Andy Morris explained that the neighbourhood change programme had hurt resources and they now only had 3 officers covering Fenland. He stated that they used to spend significant time on this area and that it was hard to admit they did not have the necessary resources as he was a big believer in social mobility. Andy Morris stated that he wanted to incorporate a model to turn visions of Police on their head by building relationships with the Police and younger people. He explained that the role of a Police Officer was more than just enforcement and that he wanted to change mindsets of what it means to be an officer, with other areas having moved forward like this and he wants this to be replicated across the market towns.

- Councillor Wicks asked how they were progressing with regards to modified cars and noisy exhausts? Andy Morris explained that the monitoring equipment was shared between Fenland and Peterborough but that they try to keep it in Fenland and use it as much as possible. He stated that monitoring is intelligence led and that they focus their attention on specific problems at specific locations.
- Councillor Booth stated that he had been informed that the Police and Crime Commissioner had agreed to fund a problem-solving coordinator for Fenland for 3 years to enhance the work of the safety partnership. He asked how they were going to recruit to that and noted that there would also be a pot of funds for community schemes and asked how they would ensure that Fenland would get their fair share of that? Dan Horn confirmed that they had received funding for the next three years and that part of that had been put aside to recruit to the role. Regarding the additional fund, he informed the panel that they had already set up a working party to look at this, but they were still awaiting final guidance around the use of the funds. Councillor Booth reminded them that they should engage with Town and Parish Councils as they may have links to groups and organisations that could help with certain schemes. He also stated that they would benefit from an increased presence at events such as the Golden Age Fairs as they could receive feedback from communities on what they think the priorities are. Dan Horn accepted the feedback and he would take engaging with Town and Parish Councils back after the meeting. Councillor Lynn noted that they were waiting on confirmation of how the fund could be used and committed to sharing the information with the panel when provided.
- Councillor Count referred the previous point that exhaust noise was intelligent led and explained that a resident had reported an incident and felt that he was not looked after. He explained that the registration number had been given and asked whether they could go to the house and investigate this in that circumstance or what the normal process was. Andy Morris noted that the response from the Police has to be proportionate and that going to the house would not be unreasonable if it was causing distress. As for the response at the time, he explained that he could only assume that they did not have the officers to respond to it. Andy Morris informed the panel that if the correct team was on duty people are likely to get a response but if they are not then there would be no response as the incident is of low threat, harm and risk. He did expect the team to be reviewing calls and seeing if there are any ways they can help retroactively when they are on duty. Andy Morris explained that the offence needs to take place on the road but that they can go and talk to them about it if reported, which may not be the response that they wanted, it gives people confidence in calling again and provides a response. Councillor Count thanked Andy Morris and stated that continued reporting of the persistent offender might get a response eventually.
- Councillor Count informed the attendees that in the previous year the County Council had introduced a community capital scheme of 5 million pounds to be used across the whole of the County, with the brief being fairly open as to what it could be used for and was open to any scheme that would improve people's lives. He stated that there should be a new community capital fund pot approved shortly but that the criteria might change. He informed the attendees that this would be good to keep in mind when putting their bids together.
- Councillor Booth stated that lots of work had taken place with younger people regarding

loan sharks and asked whether they are actively targeted by loan sharks and why they were looking at that age group. Dan Horn explained that there was a rationale behind this and that the funding had been provided from a bid to the illegal money lending team. He explained that the national team thought engagement through schools would be a good route as they take this information home and share it with their families and it also allows them to be aware of the issue when they get older in later years. Councillor Lynn made the point that there had been lots of publicity and that lots of people knew the work was going on which helped raise the profile.

- Councillor Booth stated that they were working with a new credit union and asked what had happened to the old arrangement with Rainbow? Dan Horn informed the panel that Rainbow was no longer around and so they needed to find a new company to work with.

**The Community Safety Partnership report was noted for information.**

### **OSC40/21 WISBECH RAIL UPDATE**

Members considered the Wisbech Rail Update presented by Rowland Potter. Councillor Mason introduced Rowland Potter and welcomed him and Councillor Seaton to the meeting.

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

- Councillor Booth asked where the timescales for the project were and expressed the view that more research needed to be done. He asked when they would see the project undertaken and asked for more context around timings. Rowland Potter appreciated the frustration over the time taken and explained that there had been challenges due to the line being out of use. He explained that a detailed business case had been created for the heavy rail option and that this had been put forward. Rowland Potter acknowledged that they had put in a strong submission for restoring the existing railways but this had been rejected on several grounds by the restoring railways fund application, including the high-cost estimate and the fact that the proposal suggested two services per hour from Wisbech to Cambridge which Ely Station did not have the current capacity for. He explained that they had been advised that they could continue developing a third-party scheme and that it would be reviewed once the Ely capacity issues had been resolved towards the end of year. Rowland Potter stated that after positive engagement with the relevant areas they went back to Board and requested further funds to progress to the next stage. He made the point that the first business case had failed to engage with Network Rail, explaining that Network Rail had a project control framework with a section called 3 and that they had opted to go down the 3b route which is the technical build up and Network Rail then completed 3c which was the review, with there being some challenges as they had gone directly for heavy rail and had discounted light rail early with Network Rail stating that there needed to be evidence of the review of light rail. Rowland Potter informed the panel that they had received one report back which was the technical report, summary of the business case and recommendations on how to progress and that they were awaiting the other report on demand modelling and how profitable it would be commercially, with it being the intention to return to the Transport Committee Board in March with the reports. With regards to the question about the programme, he stated that if they got approval then they were expecting that there would then be a recommendation for a refinement of the business case based on the recommendations that had been given which would lead into consultation and the consideration of light rail. Rowland Potter hoped that the process would be shorter as they already had a strong business case for heavy rail and predicted that it could be completed within six months.
- Councillor Booth stated that he had heard that the new Mayor was considering the light rail option and asked what the difference was to heavy rail? Rowland Potter responded that there were a variety of potential options, heavy rail was the traditional service that could run on main lines whereas light rail cannot run on the same rail as heavy rail due to safety concerns. He explained that the cost was a significant difference, with the heavy rail option

needing a significant upgrade to the current tracks and the problem with the heavy rail option lay with the crossings as the old ones could not simply be reopened as they would need full barriers. On the other hand, Rowland Potter informed the panel that light rail could work with crossings that have half barriers or traffic lights and that it could also potentially run on refurbished tracks. He made the point that they were also looking at whether a shuttle service would be possible and whether connectivity would be possible with an option to join the main line. Rowland Potter explained that they needed to present both the feasibility and affordability, but they also needed to consider whether the people of Wisbech want a shuttle service to just March or whether they want to travel to the rest of the country.

- Councillor Miscandlon asked whether they could come back to the panel with a definitive update on where they were once they had a better understanding as the Council and public need to understand what is going on. Rowland Potter stated that they could come before the panel again after the papers were published as they were still building up the details at the time. Councillor Seaton responded that as soon as the papers were published in March he would be happy to circulate the details to panel and members in detail.
- Councillor Count stated that he was disappointed about the update as it was very short and brief, making the point that light rail was not even mentioned in the report despite it seeming to be an option on the table. He expressed the view that there seems to be an old piece of paperwork on heavy rail and a new vision on light rail and also the mention of the possibility of new innovative mass transport. Councillor Count made the point that it had been quoted that by ruling out heavy rail the chances of the incinerator being built in Wisbech would be non-existent but that there had been nothing else mentioned about other alternative innovative means and it was a shame that the other options were not detailed as they seemed possible. He also noted the possibility of connecting other communities such as those in Friday Bridge and Coldham. Councillor Count expressed his worry that next paper would not give the options to allow people to pick a preference and questioned what the timescales for the different possibilities were and asked what position the Mayor was taking. He stated that it was previously part of the levelling up agenda and that without bringing Wisbech in via better transport links the issues there would never be solved, explaining that they wanted to put Wisbech residents in reach of better jobs. Rowland Potter accepted Councillor Counts point on the detail of the report and explained that in relation to the Mayor's position he would not predetermine the outcome and explained that it was and had always been his intention to get a connection between March and Wisbech. He explained that the lack of detail in the paper was down to the fact that they had not received the reports from Network Rail yet and that there were a variety of solutions, with some possibilities including an automated system with light rail that could have the technology for on demand stopping. Rowland Potter explained that all of that had to be looked at in the proposal and that there were different financial challenges with different possibilities. He explained that there were all sorts of possibilities, from heavy rail and new hydrogen trains down to revolution very light rail which for all intents and purposes looks and feels like a train and they needed to look at modelling for commercial viability for just the shuttle only service as the difference could be considerable based on the difference in expenses. Rowland Potter informed the panel that in terms of detail they were trying to give as much as possible but that they were still working on a lot of the detail at that time.
- Councillor Count expressed the view that any business case for rail would be aided by late rail services in March and people cannot work in Cambridge as it was not accessible by rail due to early and late trains being non-existent. He stated that it was important to get early and later trains for this reason. Rowland Potter explained that he was engaged in talks around this and that they had brought together the train operators to look at challenges with the last Mayor. He stated that they were looking at connectivity with buses alongside the railway times and that there had been recent meetings following the opening at Soham but whilst the issue was on his radar there had been challenges throughout the pandemic.
- Councillor Cornwell expressed the opinion that ultimately the decision would be financially driven and questioned whether they should be consulting with Wisbech residents already about what they want as there was no point going down certain routes unless the demand

was there. Rowland Potter agreed that they did need to ask the people of Wisbech what their preference was, but they also needed to consider the people of Wisbech of the future. He explained that they want to bring new people in as well through the scheme and make Wisbech a more attractive place and the consultation would be aimed at the wider community and businesses as well. He referred the mention of freight being an option and explained that palletised freight was being considered and could be an area worth further exploration.

- Councillor Cornwell asked whether they were considering further links noting that if they went down light rail route they could link in with other areas such as Downham Market. Rowland Potter stressed caution on expanding the scope of the scheme as the focus had always been on Wisbech to March and he would be hesitant to widen the scope at this stage as it would slow down the whole process. He explained that there was the possibility of future links but that they wanted to focus on what they had currently. Councillor Seaton explained that they did not want to dilute what they were currently doing, with the project having been going on for a long time and that they did not want to lengthen the task further. He explained that until they knew what was feasible they could not go to consultation but that they would be undertaking this as soon as possible. Councillor Cornwell reiterated that there was little use in producing a business case for something that no one wants. Councillor Seaton explained that they would be presented with options and costings and that it would not be a single take it or leave it case.
- Councillor Wicks referred to the change from Network Rail to publicly owned rail and asked whether this would be another issue to overcome? Rowland Potter responded that Great British Railways were looking to streamline the processes and explained that they were already engaged with them but that they still needed to look at the process with Network Rail until the change was complete but the change to Great British Railways could be beneficial. He stated that there could be an opportunity to create further access but that it needs to be affordable and be a service that gets people to where they want to be and back when they want to come back. Rowland Potter explained that they were not looking at the transition to Great British Rail being a negative at this point.

**The Wisbech Rail update was noted for information.**

## **OSC41/21 FUTURE WORK PROGRAMME**

Members considered the Future Work Programme:

- Councillor Mason reminded the panel that they would be reconvening again before the next meeting to receive a briefing on the budget.
- Councillor Miscandlon noted that he would like to see Rowland Potter's offer of coming back before the panel taken up so that they can get a better understand of what is happening and when it is happening.
- Councillor Booth asked whether the Road Safety Partnership could come before the committee in the future as it had been close to a year since they had last been before the panel.
- Councillor Count asked whether the next time the Wisbech rail item came before the panel it could include more than just the rail update and focus on Wisbech schemes as a whole.
- Councillor Mason informed the panel that the Commercial Investment Strategy would be moved from March to May.
- Councillor Yeulett asked whether they could invite the Mayor to give a presentation on what his plans for Fenland were? Councillor Booth agreed that they should extend an invite to him. A discussion commenced on the scope of the invitation to the Mayor. It was resolved that officers would invite the mayor to present on levelling up and funding for the Fenland area and that this would be kept separate from Rowland Potter's presentation on Wisbech rail as this would provide more technical details.

3.53 pm

Chairman