

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

MONDAY, 7 MARCH 2022 - 1.30 PM



PRESENT: Councillor D Mason (Chairman), Councillor A Miscandlon (Vice-Chairman), Councillor G Booth, Councillor D Connor, Councillor S Count, Councillor A Hay, Councillor M Humphrey and Councillor R Wicks

APOLOGIES: Councillor M Cornwell, Councillor M Purser and Councillor F Yeulett

Officers in attendance: Peter Catchpole (Corporate Director and Chief Finance Officer), Anna Goodall (Head of Transformation, Customer Services & Democracy), Stephen Beacher (Head of ICT Digital & Resilience), David Wright (Policy & Communications Manager), Simon Jackson (Economic Growth Manager), Ann Wardle (Business Account Manager), Kathy Woodward (Internal Audit Manager) and Niall Jackson (Member Services)

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: Councillor S Tierney

GUESTS: Steve Clark (CPCA Growth Service), Richard Cuda (CPCA Growth Service) and Ed Coleman (CPCA Growth Service)

OSC42/21 PREVIOUS MINUTES.

The minutes of the meeting of 7 February 2022 were confirmed and signed subject to the following comments:

- Councillor Booth referred to item OSC40/21 which stated that more research needed to be conducted. He explained that the point he was attempting to make was that the project was taking a long time and that there were further stages to go through.

OSC43/21 UPDATE ON PREVIOUS ACTIONS.

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

- Councillor Mason thanked Member Services for the concise action list produced.
- Councillor Miscandlon stated that the watching brief item regarding updates from the CPCA on skills, employment and apprenticeships was now complete and that any further updates would now come to the Panel via Councillor Booth and himself.

OSC44/21 UPDATE ON CPCA GROWTH SERVICE

Members considered the update on CPCA Growth Service. Steve Clark, Richard Cuda, Ed Coleman and Fliss Miller from the CPCA Growth Service were welcomed to the meeting.

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

- Councillor Count asked what the CPCA were doing specifically for Fenland? He identified that there was positive movement with the weightings which would allow Fenland to feature higher and receive more projects and recognised that Fenland had been awarded more funding than some Council's but less than others and argued that Fenland required significantly more than anyone else in terms of levelling up. Councillor Count stated that it would be helpful to see what the overall effect it was having arguing that they were not having the desirable effect as for Fenland to catch up with other areas they must be number

one for levelling up for years to come due to the current deficit compared to other areas. He noted that productivities for Fenland were £26 per hour compared to the second lowest which was £33 per hour for Peterborough and whilst the differences did not sound like much it still constituted a 27% increase. Councillor Count expressed his surprise that all programmes had a combination of Peterborough, Huntingdon and Fenland as the other areas perform much better and asked why Fenland had not been individually identified as needing further assistance compared to the other areas? He acknowledged that there was a vast proportion of work aimed at growth but asked what was being done in other areas such as upskilling workers and questioned whether the CPCA were looking at the possibility of growth through removing people from the chain and implementing automation. Councillor Count proceeded to clarify that there was a lot of good work being undertaken but reasserted that he wished to see more focus on Fenland. Ed Coleman explained that the biggest challenge they faced in terms of food production businesses was the perception they had of the growth services work. He identified that they need to overcome the inherent stereotypes of their service and develop relationships to enable them to establish a foothold and informed the Panel that they needed to place emphasis on local connections in years two and three. Steve Clark explained that regarding investing in automation, they had planned to have another stream of work around innovation funding but informed the Panel that they were unable to fund this in the overall package. However, he did state there was a possibility that this could be added in the future and since the levelling up agenda had evolved any new work streams would likely focus on Fenland. Steve Clark stated that with the Community Renewal Fund the Government had picked Fenland and Peterborough as the two places and Huntingdon had been tagged on. He informed the panel that they had given grants for business to invest into new technologies and automation through the agriculture scheme and that some investments had helped with productivity but identified that a balance needed to be struck with experts in this area. Richard Cuda admitted that they did need to build relationships with Councillors and explained that they were trying to attract people to Fenland. Fliss Miller stated that they work closely with providers and that they were supporting the North Cambridgeshire Training Centre at Metalcraft in Chatteris whilst also supporting the development of higher-level skills by putting forward a bid with the College of West Anglia. She added that there were also several adult education innovation pilots specifically targeted at the Fens and said that she could provide additional detail to show the targeted interventions into Fenland. Fliss Miller told the panel that a large proportion of the adult education budget was now being used in Fenland as they had recognised the need to invest in skills to shift the position of Fenland compared to the other areas.

- Councillor Wicks referred to the reported creation of 139 jobs and asked how many of those were in Fenland? Ed Coleman informed the Panel that they were currently finalising the results and they would provide these when completed.
- Councillor Wicks referred to the 66 apprenticeships that had been created and asked how many of those were in Fenland? Fliss Miller responded that they did not have those details currently but that nearly 20 percent of the learning outcomes across the programme had been in Fenland. She explained that there was a specific focus on making sure that their teams were engaging with the businesses and assured the Panel that they would provide the apprenticeships statistics after the meeting. Councillor Wicks asked whether the list could outline what the apprenticeships were? Fliss Miller agreed and informed the Panel that she could provide the apprenticeship data by level and sector as well.
- Councillor Wicks asked how much more of the Bartlett site was being developed for use by other business? Simon Jackson stated that within three months 90 percent of Bartletts units had been let out, with 4 small units still being available on last check but these may have been let out since then. He informed the Panel that they had been attempting to persuade the Bartlett brothers to build more units on their empty land and said that the planning application for this was imminent. Councillor Wicks stated that he knew of companies that want to expand or find facilities to retain their business in Fenland.
- Councillor Wicks asked where people can find the information for the various grants? Anna

Goodall responded that with the start grow initiative they had put flyers in the residential Council Tax bills and that they were actively engaging with potential start-up businesses. She informed the Panel that there were already 21 businesses on the books without the use of communications and explained that this number would grow significantly once they began this process. Councillor Wicks explained that he had no knowledge of this and stated that Councillors should be part of the communication stream. Anna Goodall accepted the point around proactive communications and agreed that Councillors should also act as a conduit for information.

- Councillor Miscandlon supported Councillor Count's point about progression through the use of technology and the idea of employing an expert in this area. He also agreed with Councillor Wicks around his point regarding communications on the grants. Steve Clark informed the Panel that they had a suite of materials that had been built up over the past year and that this could be recirculated to the Council for dissemination to its Councillors. Ed Coleman added that they were actively engaging with the engineering community. Steve Clark informed the Panel that another big project is the University of Peterborough which launches in September and has a curriculum that is engineering manufacturing orientated with employer led courses. He encouraged businesses to get involved with this as it would be providing high level skill sets.
- Councillor Hay explained that it had been a big blow to Chatteris when the Bartletts site had shut and asked how many companies were on the site and how many people had been employed there? She asked if it was possible to get a list of the companies and the type of business they run? She also stated that she was interested to know how many of the companies qualified for grants or technical help through growth works within Chatteris as a whole. Ann Wardle informed her that there were around about 8 companies set up at the Bartletts site and stated that they had reached out for meetings with all of them and provided information regarding growth works. She stated that the type of businesses varied from construction to packaging companies with the largest occupant being MM Flowers.
- Councillor Hay pointed out that MM Flowers were originally based in Chatteris before moving to Alconbury, with the company having been offered a grant to move to Alconbury and asked whether it had been claimed? Ann Wardle informed her that they had retained their facility in Alconbury and expanded into Chatteris but she could not answer the question about the grant as it was outside the Council's remit.
- Councillor Booth made the point that figures had been provided regarding jobs and apprenticeships created but expressed the view that many of these would have been created organically anyway. He asked whether there was an indication of how much growth had been manufactured through the CPCA's work compared to what would have occurred naturally? Ed Coleman informed him that they were still exploring how they could quantify their effect on growth with the CPCA and that the jobs created was the only available figure currently. He stated that they will be able to provide more detail about the level of the jobs in future. Councillor Booth asked whether they would be able to provide a better indication in the following years presentation? Ed Coleman said that this would be available for the next presentation and explained that the position was developing constantly and it was simply a matter of when they will be able to give the exact GDP calculation.
- Councillor Booth identified that the target for diagnostics for businesses, which was 3,300, had not been met. He stated that later in the presentation they had provided a breakdown of the businesses in Fenland which appeared to total around 2,300 businesses. He asked how they ensured that the data was accurate, pointing out that there may have been a duplicate entry in the largest businesses section as Fenmarc was more than one legal entity and asked how they cross matched duplicates. Ed Coleman explained that with diagnostics they work on a 1 in 3 conversion and that they had outperformed the diagnostic conversion rate which meant that they had still hit the target. He noted that they did not record leads for diagnostics but that they had started to get quantifiable data around the biggest growth challenges that businesses face. Steve Clark explained that the point around Fenmarc showed how critically important links with people who have local knowledge are and whilst data was useful to an extent, it was the local intelligence on the ground which helped most

with some activities such as grants. He explained that this was supported by a lot of due diligence which can help identify duplicate areas but stated that they also rely a lot on the local intelligence. Councillor Booth asked whether they used methods such as looking for repeat data sets. Richard Cuda confirmed that they do use a tool for this called credit safe and that they check for updates overnight but that information is only taken from known available sources such as Companies House. He stated that where possible they do cleanse data but that it was reliant on the data provided and they were trying to implement new methods such as building an API from credit safe into hubspot but that data cleansing had been a challenge.

- Councillor Booth also reiterated the point made by Councillor Count about the prioritisation of Fenland and stated that this did need relooking at as Fenland should be receiving more than the other areas. He also recognised that they had redacted where the money or grants had been paid too and asked whether this information would be available under FOI as it was public money and was not covered by GDPR as the businesses are not identifiable people. He asked why they were not using these organisations receiving grants to market the service being provided? Ed Coleman stated that their marketing priority for the quarter was to get a case study bank and get people talking about the scheme on camera where they agreed to. He explained that they had redacted the information as they felt it was currently commercially sensitive and they did not want the information to be released into the public forum without the businesses being aware of this. Ed Coleman informed Councillor Booth that the Council did have access to the unredacted report and that this had also been made available to the relevant CPCA officers. Anna Goodall also mentioned that with the amount of information gained on businesses since the Covid pandemic and the amount of business grants administered there was now a far greater depth of information and accuracy of information which can be shared with the CPCA.
- Councillor Booth stated that Councillors should be acting as business champions and that this was an area that Fenland needed to learn from and take forward. Anna Goodall agreed with this point and noted that Councillor Benney was very proactive in his engagement with the team and was constantly aware of what was going on. She stated that they were keen to build on their network and accepted the point made previously by Councillor Wicks on missing the opportunity to engage with Councillors before contacting the public.
- Councillor Mason asked whether the situation in Ukraine would affect grant funding investment? Steve Clark noted that it could affect the Government's thinking on where they want to spend their budget but explained that they had already produced their spending reviews so they had an idea of what they would receive in the coming years. He explained that the CPCA have their own budgets and they know what they are for the next three years but in terms of private sector investment it remained to be seen whether the situation makes them nervous and hold back. Steve Clark stated that there were always pros and cons but it was difficult to see what these would be and they would need to see how it plays out. He informed the Panel that there were no significant Russian investments in the companies in Fenland as far as they knew. Richard Cuda explained that they run checks on every business that they deal with so any sanctions would be flagged and that no Russian investment or ownership had been identified as of yet.
- Councillor Wicks stated that he had been in regular contact with Simon Jackson since his appointment and that he was slightly concerned that the information regarding the grants had not been shared with him. He also expressed the view that Peterborough University was not a good option for everyone. Councillor Wicks pointed out that skill upgrading can be done outside a university, with upskilling being part and parcel of the Fenland community and that the path forward should be visible and available to everyone. He asked where the courses were and where the information on these were so that they could point businesses towards them? Steve Clark stated that it was within the growth work to promote the courses, with a lot of marketing communication going out to targeted firms and individuals on the skill side but agreed that it needed to be fixed so that Councillors also had access to that information. He explained that the training delivery was a mixture of private providers such as West Suffolk College and that not all training came from within Fenland as providers

were picked based on what needed to be taught.

- Councillor Mason thanked all attendees for their time and their presentation.

The update on CPCA Growth Service was noted for information.

(Councillor Count left the meeting at 14:30 due to a conflicting pre-arranged meeting)

OSC45/21 TRANSFORMATION & COMMUNICATIONS PORTFOLIO HOLDER UPDATE

Members considered the Transformation & Communications Portfolio Holder update.

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

- Councillor Miscandlon stated that the Council were currently attempting to move services online and become fully internet integrated but asked what they were doing for residents who either had no access to the internet or did not wish to use the internet, stating that he did not wish to see people left behind. Councillor Tierney stated that this was an area that was important to him, explaining that they were not doing away with the old methods of communication and service and that they were keeping the traditional routes open alongside moving to a greater online presence. He stated that the Council were not trying to move everyone online. Councillor Miscandlon agreed with this approach but that the perception was that the Council was becoming fully internet based. He was glad for the confirmation that this was not the case as many of the older generation do not wish to move online. Councillor Tierney responded that he had a dual role as portfolio holder for IT and communications and that whenever the Council do a press release regarding this matter, they always assert that they will not be leaving people behind.
- Councillor Mason explained that there had been a lot of pressure on the local Council offices with residents calling in with all sorts of queries. He explained that they were often directed to the central number and asked what the process was from this point onwards. Councillor Tierney explained that changes had been made so that more could be done via the internet to reduce pressure on the traditional routes and that they had also introduced new call handling systems and software to help manage the way information is handled so that fewer people are needed but they can work faster and respond more quickly. Anna Goodall explained that the Council went live with My Fenland in July 2021 which brought together teams that had been customer facing under one umbrella, with the previous system involving the customer having to interpret which service they needed and then find the relevant number or email address for that service whereas the new system required no interpretation as there is now one central point of contact. She explained that as part of the process they changed the job descriptions to make them much more customer focused, eliminating single points of failure and took full advantage of the enhancements in technology and the digital process. Anna Goodall outlined the process for the panel stating that the new process involved customers phoning in via the 01354 654321 number to access the contact centre where they can then hold to get through to staff, with there now being two levels of staff within the structure, including advisors and technical officers. She explained that advisors deal with a wide range of questions and can reply to any query relating to the Council to a certain level and technical officers provide more in-depth responses as they work closely with services. She informed the panel that this freed up professional officer time and that feedback had been positive so far.
- Councillor Wicks questioned what feedback they provided to people who need assistance regarding a highly specialist area? He asked whether there was a confirmation email and asked what form of follow up there was for these types of contact? Anna Goodall explained that they respond in the manner that they were initially contacted in, with the key point being that they were avoiding customers ringing in and progress chasing as this was seen as an avoidable contact, so they try to manage customer expectations at first point of contact. She informed the panel that in cases where they do need to provide further information, they do provide timescales for a response.

- Councillor Booth stated that he felt that the performance indicator regarding the percentage of queries resolved at first point of contact was a misnomer as it only showed that the call was not passed on to another part of the Council. He felt it was a crude indicator and that it failed to give right impression and that the indicator needed to be reviewed as he felt that it was giving a false impression. Councillor Tierney argued that it was unfair to state that it gives a false impression. He welcomed Councillor Booth suggesting a different performance indicator after the meeting and stated that it was always good to provide more information providing it was not impacting officer time. Councillor Booth stated that as the panel were setting up a task and finish group to revise KPI's this was an area they could review.
- Councillor Miscandlon referred to calls answered within 20 seconds had a baseline of 74.81 percent but that they had only achieved 30.3 percent and asked whether this should be a red rating rather than an amber as performance was well below target? Councillor Tierney explained that the baseline was not the target in this case due to the previous year's figures being artificially inflated because of the Covid pandemic and having more staff available to deal with calls and the major change in structure with the My Fenland team. He informed the panel that they had set a 40 percent target as they had expected a dip in calls answered within 20 seconds with the new system and the percentage was beginning to improve now. Councillor Miscandlon agreed with Councillor Tierney's explanation for the lower target but added that they should have made the reasons behind the rating clearer in the report. Councillor Tierney accepted that it should have been made clearer why the target for the year was 40 percent.
- Councillor Mason questioned whether it was possible to record the number of calls made that the customer ended up hanging up on before being answered? Councillor Tierney stated that they do record calls in but if customers hang up it is hard to know the reason behind this. Anna Goodall explained that there was not a KPI for this but they do record the percentage of calls handled. She informed the panel that if they identify a high abandonment level then they would investigate this as they want to understand what affects customer behaviour so that they can make improvements and that they were constantly looking at improving the system along the journey.
- Councillor Booth made the point that the green ratings had an allowance of 5 percent, with most companies not applying an allowance and that the target should take this into account as it simply lowers the target by 5 percent. He suggested that this be looked at and that there should be no tolerance level on green ratings. Councillor Tierney explained that this was the corporate way in which the Council worked and it was how the statistics were interpreted and not what tolerance they had for ratings that mattered. He stated that the information was there and that it was relatively clear and if the Overview and Scrutiny panel suggested it be reviewed at a corporate level then it could be looked at. Councillor Booth suggested that it could be added to the task and finish group.
- Councillor Booth asked what had been done to improve risk and compliance management within the ICT service? Stephen Beacher explained that with compliance the Council meets all the PSN and PCIDSS compliance ratings and that they always look out for more risks such as extra cyber risks with the Russia Ukraine conflict. Councillor Booth asked for clarification that they had not introduced a new way of looking at risk and compliance in ICT and that it was just that the day to day management of it was keeping up to speed with new and emerging threats? Stephen Beacher explained that this was down as a future project. Councillor Booth asked how confident were ICT that they have achieved compliance and whether they have had a review? Stephen Beacher responded that they were currently working with an external penetration service who would provide a review that would then be handed on to the Cabinet Office and if anything was identified that needed fixing this would be completed before the submission was sent to the PSN.
- Councillor Booth noted that new complaints data was going to be provided on the first of April and expressed his disappointment that nothing had been made available for this meeting. He asked for reassurance that from 1 April regular updates on complaint data will be received? Councillor Tierney gave his apologies that data had not been provided for the meeting and confirmed that they will be sending the reports in the future. He stated that if

members were unhappy with the way it was presented then they will work to keep improving it.

- Councillor Tierney explained that the Council had developed a lot of online forms and stated that it would be useful if the Panel could take a look and see if they could identify any issues with them and provide some feedback. Councillor Miscandlon responded that they would be happy to do so and asked whether a list of forms could be provided that they wished to be tested. Councillor Tierney agreed to provide a list of forms for testing.
- Councillor Mason stated that the panel were pleased with the progress that had been made.

The Transformation & Communications Portfolio Holder update was noted for information.

OSC46/21 FUTURE WORK PROGRAMME

Members considered the Future Work Programme:

- Councillor Mason made the point that the programme had been extended for the following year and asked if members had any comments on what had been included.
- Councillor Miscandlon expressed the view that the agenda for the meeting of 9 May 2022 seemed to be pretty full with the Cultural Strategy and Commercial Investment Strategy and Investment Board and asked whether there was enough data available to fill the meeting. Councillor Mason responded that they would not know until the day. Councillor Booth stated that the Commercial Investment Strategy and Investment Board would be the main topic of discussion with a year's worth of work to be covered. He said that the Cultural Strategy is more driven by the Arts Council with Fenland District Council acting as custodians and suggested that there may be less to discuss on this item.
- Councillor Miscandlon expressed the view that the Housing Enforcement item would also be short as he doubted that there would be much of an update. Councillor Mason stated that he believed it would be quite a full meeting and that the agenda would be left as it is.
- Councillor Booth asked whether the Task and Finish item would be to agree the terms of reference to allow them to move forward. Councillor Mason confirmed that this was the case.

3.31 pm

Chairman