

# COUNCIL



**THURSDAY, 24 FEBRUARY 2022 - 4.00 PM**

**PRESENT:** Councillor A Miscandlon (Chairman), Councillor I Benney, Councillor Mrs S Bligh, Councillor C Boden, Councillor J Clark, Councillor S Clark, Councillor M Cornwell, Councillor S Count, Councillor Mrs M Davis, Councillor D Divine, Councillor Mrs J French, Councillor K French, Councillor A Hay, Councillor Miss S Hoy, Councillor M Humphrey, Councillor Mrs D Laws, Councillor A Lynn, Councillor C Marks, Councillor D Mason, Councillor Mrs K Mayor, Councillor N Meekins, Councillor J Mockett, Councillor P Murphy, Councillor D Patrick, Councillor M Purser, Councillor W Sutton, Councillor M Tanfield, Councillor S Tierney, Councillor S Wallwork, Councillor R Wicks, Councillor S Wilkes and Councillor F Yeulett

**APOLOGIES:** Councillor R Skoulding (Vice-Chairman), Councillor G Booth, Councillor D Connor, Councillor A Maul, Councillor W Rackley, Councillor C Seaton and Councillor D Topgood

## **C34/21      PREVIOUS MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting of 8 December 2021 were confirmed and signed.

## **C35/21      CIVIC ENGAGEMENTS UPDATE.**

Councillor Miscandlon drew member's attention to the civic activities undertaken by himself in the weeks preceding Full Council.

## **C36/21      TO RECEIVE ANY ANNOUNCEMENTS FROM THE CHAIRMAN OF THE COUNCIL AND/OR THE HEAD OF PAID SERVICE.**

Councillor Meekins was appointed Vice-Chairman for the meeting in the absence of Councillor Skoulding.

Councillor Miscandlon advised members that he will be holding his Civic Reception at the Eastrea Community Hall on Friday 18 March at 6.30pm and looked forward to welcoming members there on the evening.

He advised members that as part of the Queens Platinum Jubilee celebrations, he will be taking part in the Queens Green Canopy initiative and planting a tree in four of the District's secondary schools in each of the market towns. He added that he will be joined by staff and pupils at each of the schools to mark the special event.

## **C37/21      TO RECEIVE QUESTIONS FROM, AND PROVIDE ANSWERS TO, COUNCILLORS IN RELATION TO MATTERS WHICH, IN THE OPINION OF THE CHAIRMAN, ACCORD WITH THE PROVISIONS OF PROCEDURE RULES 8.4 AND 8.6.**

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

Councillor Cornwell stated that over the past few Council meetings he has raised a number of questions with regards to sustainable environmental issues and the responses he has received

have been mixed. He added that now the recovery and growth stage following the pandemic has been reached, many members consider that it is important that sustainable, environmental and climate change issues are considered as part of that direction. He stated that he has been particularly interested in the Cambridgeshire County Council's approach, including the publication of their Climate Change and Environment Strategy which he has found to be quite interesting. Councillor Cornwell stated that, in his opinion, the Council should accept and understand its community responsibility, both for the present and the future and he asked Councillor Boden to advise whether a strategy is being considered for the Fenland District including the associated timescales and if a strategy is not being considered he would like to know the reasons why. He expressed the view that consideration should be given for it to be added to the Council's Business Plan and as there is already a nominated portfolio holder for the subject it could be easily adopted in the portfolio workload.

Councillor Boden stated that, in his opinion, no one would advocate unsustainability and he apologised that Councillor Cornwell did not feel that his previous responses were satisfactory. He stated that it is important that the Council has the opportunity to debate and decide upon policies in this general area and added that Councillor Cornwell is correct that there is a Portfolio Holder for this particular subject matter, who is Councillor Tierney. Councillor Boden stated that he has discussed the subject with Councillor Tierney with a view of bringing something forward to a Full Council meeting in the future.

**C38/21      TO RECEIVE REPORTS FROM AND ASK QUESTIONS OF CABINET MEMBERS WITH PORTFOLIO HOLDER RESPONSIBILITIES, IN ACCORDANCE WITH PROCEDURE RULES 8.1 AND 8.2.**

Members asked questions of Portfolio Holders in accordance with Procedure Rules 8.1 and 8.2 as follows:

- Councillor Mrs Mayor stated that she noted from the report that numerous tree works have been completed across the district with a programme of new tree planting continuing during the Winter and questioned why new trees are being planted when existing trees that require works are not being maintained, which is necessary to allow proper growth and to ensure that trees remain safe. She queried why so many trees have been planted in Whittlesey Cemetery, when the existing trees that are already on site require works, and it is her understanding that the contractors do not have anybody qualified to undertake the tree works and in instances where urgent works are required the Council has to employ another contractor. Councillor Mrs Mayor stated that she has repeatedly asked for an oak tree which is sited in Queen Street in Whittlesey to be pruned, specifically prior to Remembrance Day in 2020 and 2021 and although she had been advised that the works had been undertaken, in her opinion, the tree had only received a light trim which ensured that the Union Flag at the site of the war memorial was able to fly freely. She explained that she has been advised that for a tree specialist to be able to undertake works to the tree a road closure is required and that although the road was closed in order to facilitate an event in December, the tree was unfortunately damaged as it was struck by a bus who inadvertently drove into the road and she stated that works to the tree have still not been undertaken as of the end of February 2022. Councillor Mrs Mayor questioned why so many trees have been planted in Whittlesey Cemetery specifically in the proximity of the very old graves, where the tree roots could cause issues to the plots and the remains contained within the plots. Councillor Murphy responded that when specialised tree works are required the Council's Parks and Green Spaces contractor, Tivoli, request that a specialist sub-contractor is called in to support them, with this being a cost effective arrangement that is working very well as the Council has not had a specialist tree contractor in place for over four years and the current approach is cost effective as a tree team consists of at least two specialist staff who would not be used all the time. He added that the Council undertakes tree work regularly to maintain the stock which consists of 3,500 trees, and he explained that a good example of this is the recent proactive works which were carried out at the Manor Field. Councillor

Murphy referred to the trees in Whittlesey Cemetery and stated that they are assessed informally on a regular basis by the Open Spaces Team. He added that any minor tree works can be undertaken by Tivoli, the Council's Parks and Green Spaces contractor and any works identified by the Council's Horticultural Officer has resulted previously in specialists being employed to deal with trees in high footfall areas and any necessary safety works which have been identified have been carried out. Councillor Murphy advised members that it is the intention of the Council to implement a tree safety assessment process which will include a formal safety assessment of trees and identify any safety works deemed as necessary. In relation to the tree in Queen Street that Councillor Mrs Mayor had highlighted, Councillor Murphy explained that the tree had been pruned to ensure that the Remembrance Day event and Christmas event arrangements went ahead without any tree issues but if any more comprehensive works are required then it can be arranged but it would be at an additional cost as it would necessitate a road closure and a tree team with specialist equipment to carry out the works. He stated that with regard to the volume of trees planted in Whittlesey Cemetery, it is not uncommon for trees to be planted within cemeteries and Yew trees are a traditional variety that are planted, with other significant species being planted for tree avenues, explaining that Fenland has many cemeteries and open spaces which can be used for reflection as well as the opportunity to enjoy nature. Councillor Murphy expressed the view that the three best cemeteries are Station Road in March and the two cemeteries in Chatteris, which all feature significant trees, with the trees that have been planted in Whittlesey will, over time, add additional character and enhance the biodiversity of the open space and encourage bird and insect populations and the trees have been planted in the manner so as not to interfere with historic plots.

- Councillor Miss French asked Councillor Boden if he could provide the details that has been paid out in respect of Covid Business Support grants? Councillor Boden responded that as of 22 February 2022 that total amount of money that the Council had paid out in respect of support grants and business grants was £36,419,607 with more than half of that being paid during the first lockdown. He explained that the funding payments are still ongoing for the final element of the additional restrictions grant and the Omicron grant and those funds will be paid by the end of March.
- Councillor Wicks asked Councillor Boden whether he will be considering appointing a member who has the empathy and drive to carry out the work required in promoting the military covenant for the Council? Councillor Boden stated that Councillor Tierney was appointed into that position over two years ago and that appointment remains.
- Councillor Count stated that in his role as a Cambridgeshire County Councillor there is an inexorable march towards congestion charging in the Cambridge City area and he asked Councillor Boden whether he had a view with regard to introducing congestion charging and road pricing in the Cambridge and Greater Cambridge area? Councillor Boden stated that it is a question that he fears will become very relevant in the near future and he feels that the concept that cars will be charged to enter the Cambridge City area will be problematic and discriminate against those Fenland residents who are low paid workers but who have no choice other than to use their cars to enter Cambridge City to get to their workplace. He expressed the opinion that it is a highly retrograde step for the suggestion of congestion charge to be considered to enter the city and other options should be investigated in the first instance. Councillor Boden expressed the view that he sees it as a regressive tax and he finds it astonishing that some individuals who claim to be progressive are advocating a tax which will mean that only the rich will be able to drive into Cambridge City, which he feels is wrong.
- Councillor Patrick referred to an area of open space in Petts Close in Wisbech where there are a number of trees and as a result there are a large number of leaves, which has been reported to officers and he has been advised that it is not policy to clear the leaves from open spaces and asked Councillor Murphy why this is the case? Councillor Murphy stated that leaf clearance does take place from town centre areas, but in parks and open spaces the leaves are left to mulch down as there are 3,500 trees within the District which would mean tonnes of leaves being collected and nowhere for them to be taken. Councillor Patrick

stated that he has spoken to the residents in Petts Close who have cleared the leaves in the past, placed them in the shrubbery where they have not mulched down and therefore he would like the area to be inspected by officers. Councillor Murphy agreed that the area could be looked at.

- Councillor Mrs Bligh stated that she is very pleased to hear that there is a new officer position being advertised which is due to be funded by the Police and Crime Commissioner Office and as she understands the role will link in with the Community Safety Partnership. As she represents a rural area, she asked Councillor Lynn how the Problem-Solving Coordinator Officer will act in the rural communities, who, in her opinion, already suffer from lower policing numbers? Councillor Lynn stated that the job description for that position is still to be determined and, therefore, once he has further detail, he will report back. Councillor Mrs Bligh stated that she would hope that when the job description is determined that the rural communities will be considered including liaison with the Parish Councils. She added that she is also aware of a £190,000 funding pot that the Police and Crime Commissioner is offering for communities alongside the new role, and she would hope that the Council takes full advantage of the funding opportunity and again considers the rural communities. Councillor Lynn advised that the pot of funding is for emergency response where an initial immediate impact is required. He added that officers are currently in discussion with the Police and Crime Commissioner office with regard to the finer detail for the funding and once that is made clearer, further information will be provided.
- Councillor Mrs Bligh stated that at the meeting of Full Council in December she had asked whether consideration could be given by the Council for the use of the 'What Three Words' app and she asked Councillor Mrs Laws whether there was an update on this. Councillor Mrs Laws stated that this is something that is still being considered and investigated.
- Councillor Sutton referred to Page 23 of the Portfolio Holder report where it mentions CELP2 in the performance indicators relating to the percentage of householders presenting to the Council as homeless and he questioned Councillor Hoy on the accuracy of the figures provided due to the fact that there is no detail with regard to the baseline or target numbers. Councillor Hoy stated that this is a new performance indicator, which is why there is no baseline or target. She added that it was changed because the old target was how many people presented to housing options and this detail did not prove to be a useful indicator and it was agreed that it would be more helpful to know how many people have received assistance that presented to housing options. Councillor Hoy stated that she agrees that it does appear to be confusing and that it does need to be looked at further.
- Councillor Sutton stated that he notes that within the transport report it provides detail of the Manea Station project and the progress being made, with previous reports always showing that Manea Parish Council were to assume responsibility of Manea Station, however, this report does not mention this and asked Councillor Boden why? Councillor Boden responded that Manea Parish Council have taken the decision not to take on the responsibility of managing the car park and an alternative solution is to be sought. Councillor Sutton stated that he has not seen any detail of the financing of the facility for the next five years in the Mid Term Financial Strategy and Councillor Boden explained that it is his understanding that the necessary finances for the management of the car park for the first few years have already been taken into account.
- Councillor Sutton stated that previously he has heard that when there are any land sales the local Councillor will be informed, and highlighted that there is some land surplus in Christchurch, and asked Councillor Benney why he has not been notified? Councillor Benney responded that he could not say for certainty that it has been agreed that Ward Members would be informed but he cannot see any reason why they should not be kept updated, and he will take steps to ensure that this happens going forward. He stated that he is aware of the piece of land that Councillor Sutton is referring to and that once he has a meeting with officers to discuss land sales he will advise Councillor Sutton of the details with regards to the method of sale of the piece of land in question.
- Councillor Sutton expressed the opinion that is very pleasing to see that the Boathouse Business Centre is fully occupied, but there does not appear to be any occupancy figures

against the South Fens Business Centre and asked Councillor Benney for transparency and for the figures to be provided. He stated that historically it was under performing and he questioned that if that is still the case should its usage now be reconsidered. Councillor Benney responded that he did not know why the figures had been omitted but is aware that one of the large units and one of the smaller units have been let. He stated that he is not aware of the current occupancy figures, but he can supply these and explained that officers have reviewed the way that the facility is marketed, which has proved to be successful. Councillor Benney expressed the view that with regards for an alternative use of South Fens Business Centre, it is an office space facility, however, he is willing to take suggestions from members as to how office space can be used in an alternative way. Councillor Sutton stated that consideration could be given to a conversion into possible residential usage or split into a business facility combined with residential usage, but he would be happy to discuss this with Councillor Benney at another time. Councillor Benney stated that it is just a clerical error as to why the figure is missing and he will obtain the figure and advise Councillor Sutton, but it is his recollection that the occupancy levels had increased. He added that, in his opinion, South Fens Business Centre is the wrong side of the bypass in order to convert the facility into residential use and to convert it would cause planning concerns as it is not situated in the best location for connectivity to the town of Chatteris.

- Councillor Sutton asked Councillor Boden to provide an update with regard to Vertical Waste Integration (VWI) and the withdrawal of charging for the brown bin waste collection, which he stated had been referred to previously. Councillor Boden responded that he has not distributed any literature himself where he has promised VWI and, therefore, he is not accountable for any progress on the subject. Councillor Sutton asked Councillor Mrs French if she had any comment to make as he was aware she had made reference to it on social media? Councillor Mrs French stated that the literature being referred to was circulated in the 2019 elections and was something that the Government was looking at to assist taxpayers, but to date nothing has happened further.
- Councillor Sutton stated that he notes from the HPT that there is a short coming of 62 dwellings a year and questioned Councillor Mrs Laws on whether over the 5-year term that will be achievable? Councillor Mrs Laws responded that she has every confidence this will be achieved, Fenland is open for business and the Council is receiving record numbers of planning applications and also build outs. She added that the only problem she can foresee is with developers struggling for materials. Councillor Sutton asked Councillor Mrs Laws for an update with regard to validation timescales? Councillor Mrs Laws responded that two new members of staff have joined the Technical Support Team and the timeframe has now reduced to just less than a three week period for validation.

#### **C39/21      FINAL BUSINESS PLAN 2022-23**

Members considered the Final Business Plan 2022-23 report presented by Councillor Boden.

Councillor Boden highlighted that the Overview and Scrutiny Panel requested that a change be made to the Promoting Health and Wellbeing for all priority and that change has been made. He added that they have also asked for a Task and Finish Group to look at Key Performance Indicators which has also been agreed.

Councillor Boden stated that specific reference has also been made with regard to meeting the net carbon zero target of the Government and also agreeing to support the Combined Authority in developing a people focussed climate action plan.

**Proposed by Councillor Boden, seconded by Councillor Lynn and AGREED that the Business Plan 2022-2023 be approved.**

#### **C40/21      GENERAL FUND BUDGET ESTIMATES 2022/23 AND MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY (MTFS) 2022/23 TO 2026/27; CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2022 - 2025**

Members considered the General Fund Budget Estimates 2022/23 and the Medium-Term Financial Strategy 2022/23 to 2026/27; Capital Programme 2022-2025 report presented by Councillor Boden.

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

- Councillor Cornwell stated that he supports the fact that Council Tax is not increased as, in his opinion, the Council has a duty to protect residents, with the pressures on domestic budgets being high, living costs continuing to rise and people have some hard decisions to make and anything that the Council can do to help ease the pressure on its residents is the right thing to do. He expressed his disappointment that the Statutory Bodies consider it acceptable to raise their demands such as the County Council raising their demands by 5%, Police and Crime Commissioner by over 4% and the Fire Authority by 2%. Councillor Cornwell stated that he takes issue with the fact that when he has reviewed the budget he has seen that an increase of 8% within the Council's budget for drainage board levies up to £1.72 million, which causes him concern and annoyance. He highlighted that within the report it states that drainage board levies will account for almost 22% of the Council Tax figure and, in his view, this cannot continue for very much longer. Councillor Cornwell stated that he understands the need for sustainable drainage, and he has raised the problem in the past and was advised that meetings were due to take place at a high level to see if a more acceptable approach could be achieved for the small number of authorities affected by the drainage rate system. He questioned whether the high-level meetings took place and if so, what was the outcome and if they are still to take place he would like to know it will be so that the Council can look to change the unfair system in this area. Councillor Cornwell asked whether Councillor Boden would give advice to the members who are representatives on the various Internal Drainage Boards prior to the rate levels being set, which will take place over the next few weeks. He further asked that consideration be given for the Council Tax demand notices to give a clear explanation which includes the separate details of the drainage board levies, so that the residents of Fenland can be aware of the monies payable to the drainage boards, which is outside of the Council's control. Councillor Boden stated that he agrees wholeheartedly with the comments made by Councillor Cornwell and that he shares the concerns raised by him. He expressed the view that the drainage board levies are a serious issue as far as Fenland is concerned and attempts that were made a year ago to look at some leverage with other affected local authorities, which did not progress due to the pandemic, but he explained that he has already made contact with senior councillors elsewhere in the country for this to be taken forward in a structured way. Councillor Boden advised that both himself and the Chief Executive have advised the local MP to express concerns over the drainage board levies in Fenland and to request changes to be made and a paper will be provided to the MP to provide further detail. He stated that he would encourage all members who sit on Internal Drainage Boards as representatives for the Council to ensure that no local drainage board puts in a very significant increase in its levy. Councillor Boden stated that the drainage boards are set up so that there is a majority of local authority members on each drainage board but not everyone has its full complement of local authority members and in some drainage boards the membership is split over a number of local authorities, but he would hope that our members would carefully consider any excessive demands and avoid them if possible. He referred to the point made by Councillor Cornwell with regard to the detail contained on residents' Council Tax demand notices and stated that it is an excellent idea, however, it would require a change to legislation to allow it to come into effect due to the fact that the format of Council Tax demands is very strictly prescribed.
- Councillor Count stated having reviewed the figures before him and is in firm agreement with the proposals agreed by Cabinet. He referred to the comments made by Councillor Cornwell with regards to the drainage boards and added that he is a member of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel who have been involved with discussions with Anglian Water concerning issues surrounding flooding in the March area. Councillor Count stated that at a recent County Council meeting, four areas within the County have been identified as being at risk of flooding and March was one of those identified. He explained that as a result it was noted that Anglian Water

and the Environment Agency have capital funds which are match funded but was disappointed to note that a proposal of £4.1 million at the County Council, to try and alleviate flood pressures, was rejected by them, especially when they are the Lead Local Flood Authority. Councillor Count expressed the opinion that when you compare the size of the County Council to the size of the District Council, it is difficult to comprehend that even though the County Council have a sizeable amount of funding in their bank accounts, they are still increasing their Council Tax contributions by 4.99% for adult and social care whilst the District Council is trying to keep a 0% Council Tax increase. He added that he agrees with the comments made by Councillor Cornwell with regard to the public's perception that the Council Tax payments that they make all come to the District Council. Councillor Count expressed the opinion that the Business Plan, in his view, was very easy to read, well prepared document and he congratulated Councillor Tierney for this as it makes a difference to residents as they can have a clear understanding on how their monies are being spent. Councillor Count made reference to the Council's own reserve policy which Councillor Boden had highlighted and had stated that the Council's own reserves need to be considered. He expressed the opinion that it is a wise step but added that unlike other reserves it will not solve a structural deficit and that structural deficit should not be confused with the amount held in reserves which is a separate issue. Councillor Count expressed the view that he totally agrees with the statement that Councillor Boden made with regard to the consideration of budgets, and that income generation also has to be looked at to close the gap together with transformation and efficiencies. He feels that only after all of those factors are considered should the taxpayer then be looked to and, in his view, unfortunately this does not appear to be the case with the County Council. Councillor Count expressed the opinion that a 0% Council Tax increase is the right thing to do for Fenland based on the information before members and he will support the proposal.

- Councillor Yeulett stated that he will support the proposal and he expressed the opinion that Councillor Boden has done a good job under the circumstances and is pleased to see that the budget deficit has been reduced to £203,000. He asked Councillor Boden to explain how long the Cambridgeshire Horizons money will last and whether there are any further monies anticipated going forward which can be guaranteed? Councillor Yeulett agreed with the point raised by Councillor Boden that much of the financial information provided is based on assumptions, which are wholly or partly influenced by external factors and interest rates, and inflation is rising so questioned how Councillor Boden is going to deal with this going forward when considering future budgets and also what effects future interest rates will have on the Council's Investment Strategy. Councillor Yeulett also asked for assurances that the Council will not be out of pocket for financial assistance given to Freedom Leisure.
- Councillor Boden stated that he agrees with the points raised by Councillor Count and that he is particularly disappointed that March does not have the opportunity to share in the potential £12 million funding pot which would have been available had the County Council agreed with the proposal put forward by Councillor Count and which he had supported. In relation to the question raised by Councillor Yeulett about Cambridgeshire Horizons Ltd (CHL), Councillor Boden stated that after a lot of hard work the Council received almost £3.9 million pounds, with Cambridgeshire Horizons being a company that was set up twenty years ago to promote growth within Cambridgeshire and was very active initially but then went into a state of dormancy, whilst holding a significant amount of money within its bank accounts. He stated that the Council have now received those monies and out of that funding more than £1,000,000 has been set aside already to support financing on the A14 and he explained that there is £1,000,000 which will gradually diminish over 20 years, but it will not only earn interest but can also be used to fund other matters. Councillor Boden advised that there is a surplus of £2.4 million pounds remaining from the Cambridgeshire Horizons money, but it must be spent in accordance with the objectives of CHL itself and whilst the objectives are widely written, the Council's Section 151 Officer has to justify every penny that is spent from the CHL money on an annual basis. He stated that there is a period of five years left to spend the money and he gave assurances to Council that all of the money will be spent and none of it will be returned. Councillor Boden referred to the point made by Councillor Yeulett with regard to increasing interest rates and stated that rates are predicated to rise significantly over the next two years

and external events can change the expectations as far as interest rates are concerned. He added that given the cash equivalent that the Council holds there is a gain for the Council in an environment of increased interest rates, which will be obscured by the fact that the Council is working hard to ensure that it receives higher returns on the monies that the Council holds and therefore there is the expectation to see a significant increased return to the Council on the liquid assets that it holds. Councillor Boden stated that with regard to the point raised concerning Freedom Leisure Ltd it is unfortunate that no guarantee can be made that the Council will not find itself out of pocket due to the financial assistance given to them. He added that due to contractual agreements, the Council found itself in a position where it was obliged to provide financial support to them which commenced with grant aid and then as time has gone on the support has evolved into loans which are repayable when certain targets are met by Freedom Leisure. Councillor Boden stated that the amount loaned equated to £1.2 million pounds and £400,000 of that figure was off set with the Government support which came through to Councils such as Fenland who has contracted out their leisure services, however, there is still an outstanding amount in loans of £800,000 and this is being closely monitored along with support being provided to Freedom Leisure to meet and exceed their targets and there is every hope that during the course of the remaining term of the contract the outstanding monies will be paid.

- Councillor Sutton stated that he will reserve his support for this agenda item, although he supports the no increase to Council Tax, but would like to have seen a decrease as, in his opinion, Fenland's proportion of the Council Tax is far higher than neighbouring authorities. He referred to page 92 of the report, where it mentions £1,000,050 being set aside for the A14 upgrade, expressing the view that historically under a previous leadership, that figure had been negotiated down to £800,000 and he is concerned that in the 2021/22 budget report there was a sum set aside of £32,000 per annum whereas in the report for 2022/2023 the figure is shown as £42,000 and questioned how that figure has changed and why the Council is paying £250,000 more than was previously agreed. Councillor Boden stated that the point that Councillor Sutton has made is incorrect as he has stated that the amount of liability going toward the A14 improvements has increased to £250,000, when the correct amount is actually £1,000,050, with the £800,000 and the £32,000 figures that Councillor Sutton had quoted still in existence and will continue year on year as the £1,000,050 is an additional liability due to the fact that when the monies were received from Cambridgeshire Horizons Limited, they had already committed to just over £5,000,000 of support to the A14 project and, therefore, when the £2,840,000 from CHL was received to be used for the Council's benefit, at the same time £1,000,050 liability was also taken on for the A14, with the Council receiving the cash for this. He expressed the opinion that it is a good position for the Council to be in as it provides the Council the opportunity to use the funds even though it diminishes by £42,000 over the next 20 years. Councillor Boden explained that the Council were given the additional funds by CHL, this is what is reflected in the budget figures within the report and the Council has the opportunity to utilise the money over the specified period of time albeit an additional liability for the A14, but it is fully funded in advance.
- Councillor Sutton asked for clarification that Councillor Boden's explanation means that there is still the £800,000 liability plus the £1,000,050 which is cost neutral as the money has been given to the Council. Councillor Boden stated that it is not cost neutral it is cost beneficial to the Council as the Council has the advantage of using the cash whilst it is being paid back over the 20-year period. He clarified that the £800,000 is unchanged and will be re-paid at £32,000 per year and the £1,000,050 has been paid to the Council up front and has to be repaid to the Department of Transport at the rate of £42,000 a year. Councillor Sutton thanked for Councillor Boden for the explanation and confirmed he would be happy to now support the recommendations within the report.
- Councillor Tierney thanked Councillor Count with regard to his praise concerning the clarity and improvements to the presentation of the Business Plan document and stated that it is mainly down to officers for the way the document is prepared, and his input is minimal. He expressed the view that he is pleased to see the members of the opposition supporting the budget proposals and low tax ambitions as the attitude of the opposition at Fenland is different to the



opposition members at the County Council. Councillor Tierney stated that, in his view, the Council are doing the right thing with regards to a no Council Tax increase as the financial situation is only going to get worse for those members of the public who are already on the breadline. He added that there are the consequences of environmental net zero policies which are going to cost a great deal of money, the costs of Covid spending and international conflicts which will all prove to be costly and, in his opinion, if ever there was a time for Councils to tighten their belts to take the pressure off the public that time is now. He stated that he is proud of the Leadership, of officers and of the opposition and he will be supporting the recommendation.

- Councillor Cornwell asked for it to be recorded that the Fenland Independent Alliance have no links whatsoever with those County Councillors who claim to be Independent or members of other political parties.

**Proposed by Councillor Boden, seconded by Councillor Tierney and AGREED that**

- (i) the General Fund revenue budget for 2022/23 as set out in Section 9 and Appendix A be approved;**
- (ii) the Medium-Term Financial Strategy as outlined in this report and Appendix B be adopted;**
- (iii) the Capital Programme and funding statement as set out in Appendix D be approved;**
- (iv) the adoption of the additional Business Rates Relief measures as detailed in Section 6 and Appendix H using Discretionary Relief Powers be approved;**
- (v) the expenses detailed in Section 12 be approved to be treated as general expenses for 2022/23;**
- (vi) the Port Health levy for 2022/23 be set as shown in Section 13;**
- (vii) the Treasury Management Strategy Statement, Minimum Revenue Provision, Treasury Investment Strategy, Prudential and Treasury Indicators for 2022/23 and Capital Strategy 2022/23 as set out in Section 15 and Appendix E be approved;**
- (viii) the Band D Council Tax level for Fenland District Council Services for 2022/23 be set at £260.46, no increase on the current year.**

**The Local Authorities (Standing Orders) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2014 impose an obligation on Local Authorities (after 25 February 2014) to record all votes on decisions on budget and Council Tax, with this in mind Members voted on this item as follows:**

**In Favour: Councillors Benney, Boden, J Clark, S Clark, Cornwell, Count, Mrs Davis, Divine, Mrs French, Miss French, Hay, Hoy, Humphrey, Mrs Laws, Lynn, Marks, Mason, Mrs Mayor, Meekins, Miscandlon, Mockett, Murphy, Patrick, Purser, Sutton, Tanfield, Tierney, Wallwork, Wicks, Wilkes and Yeulett.**

**Against: none**

**Abstentions: none**

*(Councillor Mrs Bligh left the meeting at 17.30 during consideration of this item and took no part in the vote on this item or the remaining agenda items)*

## **C41/21      COUNCIL TAX RESOLUTION**

Members considered the Council Tax Resolution 2022/23 report presented by Councillor Boden.

**Proposed by Councillor Boden, seconded by Councillor Tierney and AGREED to approve the resolution set out in the report to set the Council Tax requirement.**

**The Local Authorities (Standing Orders) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2014 impose an obligation on Local Authorities (after 25 February 2014) to record all votes on decisions on budget and Council Tax, with this in mind Members voted on this item as follows:**

**In Favour: Councillors Benney, Boden, J Clark, S Clark, Cornwell, Count, Mrs Davis, Divine, Mrs French, Miss French, Hay, Hoy, Humphrey, Mrs Laws, Lynn, Marks, Mason, Mrs Mayor, Meekins, Miscandlon, Mockett, Murphy, Patrick, Purser, Sutton, Tanfield, Tierney, Wallwork, Wicks, Wilkes and Yeulett.**

**Against: none**

**Abstentions: none**

## **C42/21      COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT SCHEME**

The Chairman advised members of Council that there was an alteration to the original recommendation for this report, which was made after the publication of the agenda and is as a result of the Government's recent announcement mandating that payments made under the Energy Rebate Scheme 2022 should be disregarded for the purpose of determining Council Tax reductions.

The Chairman stated that the Council's Constitution permits an alteration to the original recommendation with the consent of the meeting, which was received.

Members considered the Council Tax Support Scheme 2022/23 report presented by Councillor Boden.

**Proposed by Councillor Boden, seconded by Councillor Hoy and AGREED that:**

- **the proposed changes, detailed in Section 4 of the attached report, be implemented in the Council Tax Support Scheme with effect from 1 April 2022**
- **the Council Tax Support Scheme to take effect from 1 April 2022 be approved**
- **the provision that any payment made under the Energy Rebate Scheme 2022 is to be disregarded in determining Council Tax reductions be included within the scheme.**

**The Local Authorities (Standing Orders) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2014 impose an obligation on Local Authorities (after 25 February 2014) to record all votes on decisions on budget and Council Tax, with this in mind Members voted on this item as follows:**

**In favour: Councillors Benney, Boden, J Clark, S Clark, Cornwell, Count, Mrs Davis, Divine, Mrs French, Miss French, Hay, Hoy, Humphrey, Mrs Laws, Lynn, Marks, Mason, Mrs Mayor, Meekins, Miscandlon, Mockett, Murphy, Patrick, Purser, Sutton, Tanfield, Tierney, Wallwork, Wicks, Wilkes and Yeulett.**

**Against the proposal: none**

**Abstentions: none**

*(Councillors J Clark and Wilkes left the meeting at 17.55pm after this item and were not present for the remainder of the agenda items)*

## **C43/21      ECONOMIC GROWTH STRATEGIC REFRESH 2022-25**

Members considered the Economic Growth Strategic Refresh 2022/25 report presented by Councillor Benney.

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

- Councillor Yeulett asked what forums and meetings were in place for current business leaders to meet with the Council and if any were in place had they been useful? Councillor Benney stated that there were no specific meetings within Fenland which have been set up to invite businesses in to discuss their requirements, although it is something that has been discussed with officers. He added that he has discussed with officers the possibility of holding breakfast or lunch meetings, but one of the factors being considered is who to target and who to invite and although it is still being discussed it has not been brought forward to date. Councillor Benney added that the Economic Growth Team are pushing forward ideas and projects that the team have instigated and continue to work on those that have proved to be successful. He stated that if any meetings are arranged for businesses, he will ensure that all members are made aware. Councillor Yeulett stated that he is aware that businesses by their very nature are competitive and by meeting together there is the opportunity for expertise to be shared by networking. Councillor Benney stated that he has accompanied officers on a number of visits to local businesses and one of the common concerns for businesses appears to be problems surrounding recruitment and the trained staff that they require. He added that businesses are also finding it difficult in finding suitable premises when looking to relocate due to expansion. Councillor Benney stated that some businesses are in competition with each other and do not want to engage although he appreciates the point that businesses can learn from each other.
- Councillor Miscandlon stated that many businesses are considering employing apprentices in order to grow the skill set that their companies need for future development, and that the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority (CPCA) wholeheartedly support this.
- Councillor Benney stated in Chatteris there is the Stainless Metalcraft Training Centre and the CPCA have contributed £3.2 million pounds into that centre and the Growing Fenland Project has also assisted with computer equipment and desks for the building as it will be used by the whole area and local people, not just for the business. He stated that it is a big success for the area and Councillor Miscandlon stated that he applauds the project.
- Councillor Sutton asked Councillor Benney for responses and clarification on a number of points from within the report. He referred to Page 183 at 4.1 where it states that there is clear evidence that the Council plays a vital role with regards to economic growth, and he questioned where he can find the evidence? He also referred to page 197, point 3, and asked for clarification with regards to the figure shown for the number of persons employed within the hospitality business. In reference to Page 205, where it mentions flood risk, he feels that given that the biggest employment within the area is in agriculture, in his view, it should have stated flood risk and drought due to the fact that, in terms of food supply, drought would have a bigger risk than that of flood. Finally, he referred to Page 207 where it makes reference to outcomes, actions and measurables with a deadline date of June 2022 and asked how confident Councillor Benney is that the deadline date will be met as, in his opinion, the target date of the end of June appears to be quite ambitious. Councillor Benney stated that with regards to flood risk, a great deal of that is weather dependent which is something he has no control over. He added that with regard to the statement made by Councillor Sutton concerning targets, in his opinion, when working with economic growth, targets have to be set and he welcomes high targets and if they are not achieved then so be it but at least the aim is high and if the targets appear to be high that is because

the Economic Growth Team aspire to aim high and if necessary, the targets can be readjusted accordingly. Councillor Sutton stated that there is nothing wrong with aiming high but, in his view, he thinks some of the targets are unachievable.

- Councillor Sutton asked Councillor Benney how confident he is that from an economic growth perspective the Council can strive to get in the position it wants to be in without a member of the Corporate Management Team in post? Councillor Benney stated that he has the full support of the Chief Executive, Paul Medd, and that the whole of the Economic Growth Team work with the Chief Executive and, therefore, in his opinion, it is led from the top.
- Councillor Hoy stated that she had attended a recent meeting which Dr Nik Johnson, the Mayor of Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, was at and a member of the public had referred to the potential loss of a local bus service highlighting that if they cannot get to a town centre to use the facilities then that is an economic loss to that town. She expressed the view that when people talk about public transport, they state that it is good for their health and wellbeing or the carbon neutral effects, with the economic benefits never being mentioned and she would imagine that there should be a calculation to demonstrate the cost of running the service, against the loss of service and the impact that would have on local businesses. Councillor Hoy expressed the view that it maybe something that can be explored going forward.
- Councillor Benney stated that if data were to be analysed at that level there would need to be a specific team employed to look at data and statistics which, in his opinion, is not viable.

**Proposed by Councillor Benney, seconded by Councillor Mrs French and AGREED that the Economic Growth Strategic Refresh 2022-25 be approved.**

*(Councillor Tanfield left the meeting at 6.09pm and Councillor Patrick left the meeting at 6.15pm during the discussion on this item and were not present at the vote. They were not present for the consideration of the remaining agenda items)*

#### **C44/21      FUTURE ARRANGEMENTS FOR APPOINTING THE COUNCIL'S EXTERNAL AUDITORS**

Members considered the future arrangements for appointing the Council's External Auditors report presented by Councillor Miss French.

**Proposed by Councillor Miss French, seconded by Councillor Sutton and AGREED to opt-in to the PSAA sector led auditor appointment arrangements for the Council and to delegate acceptance of the invitation to the Corporate Director and Chief Finance Officer, as the Council's Section 151 Officer.**

*(Councillor Boden declared that he is a member of the Audit Registration Committee of The Institute of Chartered Accountants for England and Wales which has the responsibility on an annual basis for allowing auditors in the public sector to continue as auditors and took no part in the discussion or voting on this item)*

*(Councillor Benney left the meeting at 6.19pm during the discussion on this item and was not present at the vote. He was not present for the remaining agenda items.)*

#### **C45/21      CHANGE TO CONSTITUTION AND COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP**

Members considered the changes to the Constitution and committee membership report presented by Councillor Boden.

**Proposed by Councillor Boden, seconded by Councillor Lynn and AGREED that the**

**changes to the constitution and committee membership taken by the Chief Executive and Monitoring Officer under their respective delegations be approved.**

**C46/21      SENIOR MANAGER PAY POLICY STATEMENT**

Members considered the Senior Manager Pay Policy report presented by Councillor Boden.

**Proposed by Councillor Boden, seconded by Councillor Sutton and AGREED to adopt the Senior Management Pay Policy Statement for 2021/22 at Appendix 1 as required by the Localism Act 2011.**

6.27 pm

Chairman