

COUNCIL



13 SEPTEMBER 2012 - 4.00PM

PRESENT: Councillor G G R Booth, Councillor M G Bucknor, Councillor Mrs V M Bucknor, Councillor T R Butcher, Councillor J R Chambers, Councillor J F Clark, Councillor D W Connor, Councillor M Cornwell, Councillor M F J Cotterell, Councillor Mrs C R Cox, Councillor M J Curtis, Councillor J R Farmer, Councillor Mrs J French, Councillor S Garratt, Councillor P Hatton, Councillor M J Humphrey, Councillor P Jolley, Councillor B M Keane, Councillor A K Melton, Councillor A Miscandlon, Councillor P Murphy, Councillor Mrs F S Newell, Councillor D C Oliver, Councillor C C Owen, Councillor D R Patrick, Councillor R E Scrimshaw, Councillor C J Seaton, Councillor R Skoulding, Councillor D Stebbing, Councillor W Sutton, Councillor P A Tunley .

APOLOGIES: Councillor M I Archer, Councillor D Hodgson, Councillor S J E King, Councillor K G Mayor, Councillor Mrs K F Mayor, Councillor T E W Quince, Councillor H B Wegg, Councillor F H Yeulett

Members joined the Chairman in standing for a minute's silence in remembrance of Councillor Ken Peachey who very sadly passed away on 31 July. Ken was a committed member of the Council since his first election in 2007. He was a member of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, a member of Staff Committee in addition to being a member of the Planning Committee. Ken's commitment to Fenland as a whole as well as his home town of Whittlesey will be remembered.

Members joined the Chairman in celebrating the coming marriage of Councillor Chambers and Heather Thomson, wishing them both congratulations for Saturday.

24/12 TO SIGN AND CONFIRM THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF 26 JULY 2012

Councillor Booth raised three typographical errors within the minutes, these were noted and agreed.

Resolved that the minutes of the Council Meeting on 26 July 2012 be confirmed and signed.

25/12 TO RECEIVE ANY ANNOUNCEMENTS FROM THE CHAIRMAN OF THE COUNCIL AND/OR THE HEAD OF PAID SERVICE.

1. **REQUEST TO MOVE THE NEXT COUNCIL MEETING** - The Leader of the Council requested that the next meeting of the Council is moved from 1 November 2012 to 25 October at 4pm. Members agreed to move the next Council meeting to 25 October 2012.
2. **MACMILLAN COFFEE MORNING** - The Chairman reminded Members that his coffee morning in aid of MacMillan Cancer Support will take place on Friday 28 September 2012, with all proceeds donated to MacMillan Cancer Support.

26/12 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 Booth asked the Leader if the policy had changed regarding announcing any changes to positions within the Council as he had not received an official announcement about the recent changes but had become aware of them via the local press. He stated there should be transparency and any announcements should be made to all Members. Councillor Melton stated there would be an official announcement made after today's meeting when the changes came into force.

Councillor Booth stated that it would have been courteous to have been told that there was a new Chairman of Overview and Scrutiny who was already taking decisions. The Leader explained he had taken the decision that as Councillor Jolley has now joined Cabinet and Councillor Chambers would be on honeymoon.

27/12 TO RECEIVE REPORTS FROM AND ASK QUESTIONS OF CABINET MEMBERS WITH PORTFOLIO HOLDER RESPONSIBILITIES, IN ACCORDANCE WITH PROCEDURE RULES 8.1 AND 8.2.

Councillor Mrs Bucknor asked Councillor Melton the following, stating that she had been informed that there are 80 outside bodies that people attend on behalf of this Council and as far she was aware, no official reports are received, or any kind of feedback from our representative to these organisations.

- Is there an archive of any reports that have been brought back to the Council in the last 15 months - she did not believe there was a conspiracy but believed that if no reports are provided then it could be seen as somewhat secretive, losing the spirit of transparency and not best practice. When this was raised a few months ago, a draft form was circulated that was not complicated or onerous.
- Will this form be adopted? If not, why not?
- If it is adopted, will its completion be a mandatory requirement?
- How many people represent this Council on outside bodies who are not elected members or officers?
- How can these people be democratically representing this Council if they have not been elected or asked to provide reports or feedback to this Council?
- What has it cost the Council in travel and any other expenses for representatives to outside bodies since May 2011?
- If no reports are provided, we do not even know if our representative is even attending the meetings?
- Do we actually need nearly 80 outside body representations if we can reduce them, then surely there are savings that can be made?

The Leader replied stating:

- He had today asked for all mileage claim forms to be examined to calculate an exact figure of expenses paid out to representatives which would be circulated to all Members;
- He agreed there were too many representatives which is neither sustainable nor justifiable and this needs looking into;
- People who are not Members of the Council are allowed to be appointed as representatives and are chosen for their expertise but these positions would be looked at;
- He took on board what Councillor Mrs Bucknor had said regarding reporting and stated that there had always been representatives on national and regional bodies but that they do not

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report back enough to the council and under the review it will be proposed that this becomes mandatory.

Councillor Connor asked Councillor Melton that although Mepal Outdoor Centre is not part of Fenland and is set to close, would the Council be prepared to do anything to ensure that it either remains open or could be reopened. Councillor Melton responded stating that the freehold lease of Mepal Outdoor Leisure Centre is the responsibility of East Cambs District Council and not Fenland District Council but whilst the Centre was closed it would give those in local government an opportunity to relook at the situation; a letter has already been written and sent to the Leader of East Cambs. Councillor Melton explained he was not proposing that Fenland District Council should invest any monies but to investigate a possible sustainable business plan or another method of managing the centre and to look at accessibility because at present this can only be achieved via vehicle.

Councillor Connor asked Councillor Clark if anything could be done to improve the wood cladding on The Boathouse in Wisbech. Councillor Clark explained that the wood cladding was cedar which contains oils and resins and over a period of time weathers to a silver colour. Architects usually do not ask for any treatment as this does not extend its life. There is degradation of colour and the ageing process depends on its position to the sun. Kier Construction have been using cedar on high profile jobs such as the Boathouse, the new stadium at Newmarket Racecourse and Cambs County Council have used it in their Building Schools for the future programme and it is currently being used on a new school in East Road, Cambridge with no specific treatment. He explained that once treatment was started it would need repeating every three to five years at a significant cost but adding little or no life to the wood. Councillor Melton explained that cedar had been used on the Boathouse and other buildings within Fenland due to a specification from EDDA to be sustainable.

Councillor Booth asked Councillor Murphy:

- He noted in the Cabinet report for today's meeting that it stated recycling credits had been paid into a number of organisations, could he have confirmation that payments have been made to all Town/Parish Councils and voluntary organisations participating in the scheme and the dates the payments were made?
- He understood that payments had not been made for the scheme for approximately nine months and asked the reason for the delay;
- As a comparison, could he have confirmation of the total equivalent payments for the corresponding periods last year.

Councillor Murphy replied stating:

- Recycling credits are paid at the discretion of the Council to charities, community groups and not for profit organisations who collect certain types of recycling waste from domestic properties in Fenland;
- The organisations need to prove that the material collected has been passed on to an approved merchant who will ensure that the items are made into new products;
- Recycling credits are paid as a bonus - over and above the value for the material the organisation will have already received from the merchant;
- In the last financial year Fenland paid a total of £2,159 in Recycling Credits to 16 organisations, including many Charities and Parish Councils;
- So far this financial year a total of £2,164 has been paid to 19 similar organisations;
- Payments are made on a batch basis twice a year. The last payments were made in August, so if there are any particular organisations where payments are outstanding and they have not been contacted them, Councillor Murphy would be happy to look into the matter.

Councillor Farmer asked Councillor Murphy if Wisbech Town Council were eligible for recycling credits on the Market Place to which he replied that the Market Place was a private concern.

Councillor Booth asked Councillor Owen for his initial thoughts on how the Council can overcome the issues highlighted by the transport pressure group Sustrans which stated that nearly half of the Fenland population is at serious risk of being cut off because of the high and rising costs of travel leaving them in "transport poverty" and is the worst affected across the whole of the United Kingdom. Councillor Owen replied the report only considered conventional public transport and he did not think that Fenland was the worst but did state there were a significant amount of people on housing benefit that did not live near a bus stop. Fenland does have an alternative system called taxis and the FACT Bus, which can be joined for a year enabling residents to book their journey the day before and then be taken door to door; this was not referred to within the report. Councillor Owen added that the report did not state how the figures had been calculated and Fenland will reply to this.

Councillor Mrs Bucknor stated:

- That there were no transport facilities in Wisbech;
- She had read a report that was written 25 years ago stating that Wisbech was only 42 miles from Cambridge, yet access to the city was poor; 25 years later there has been no change or improvement;
- Every workshop she attended raised the problem of lack of transport for Wisbech;
- She has to take a resident to Addenbrokes due to poor transport;
- There are new roads appearing in Cambridge and not Wisbech and this needs to be pushed forward stating it is unacceptable where transport is concerned;
- FACT bus is support but not adequate to encourage the economy in Wisbech.

Councillor Owen responded stating:

- Buses were the main transport facility within Wisbech but there were also taxis and the FACT bus;
- Councillor Mrs Bucknor was only talking about Wisbech to Cambridge but the report was based on the whole of Fenland;
- The Rail Strategy is working closely with Network Rail, Norfolk Green and Greater Anglia Trains.

Councillor Booth stated regarding benefit payments, he was concerned about the report relating to improvement in the timescale of the processing of applications and had the same concerns four meetings ago.

Councillor Owen responded stating:

- Cumulative figures are now 38 days for new claims (compared to 17 target), 14 days for changes (compared to 10 target) and 17 days overall (compared to 12 target);
- The number of claims in payment now at 10,181 which is 1% higher than 1/4/12;
- The recovery plan is still progressing with the oldest items not yet worked on now 28 days old, which is the best so far in the current financial year;
- Sickness in the team in recent weeks coupled with one of the temps leaving has slowed the rate of further improvement and Fenland is currently looking at candidates for an additional temp to join the team to help move work finally up to date.

Councillor Booth congratulated Councillor Jolley on his new role within Cabinet and asked if there were any plans/ideas on how Fenland could build on the momentum that developed whilst the Olympics and Paralympics were taking place. Councillor Jolley replied stating that a new Leisure

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Strategy is currently being developed. Councillor Garratt stated that Fenland wanted to keep the momentum of the Olympics going with children and young people and that there would be an announcement shortly. Councillor Curtis added that he was the lead on the GOLD Coordinating Group within Cambridgeshire County Council regarding the Olympics which aims to increase inclusive participation in sport, culture and healthy activity and to maximise the opportunities that would be provided through business and tourism. Fenland is very active within this group, holding successful open weekends and there is an active legacy programme which has been worked on for some years.

Councillor Murphy stated that Anglia in Bloom Results for 2012 had been announced and thanked all those involved for their time and effort especially as it had been a hard season because of the weather:

- Large Village - Winner and Silver Gilt Award - Manea/Silver Gilt Award - Parson Drove
- Town - Silver Gilt Award - Chatteris
- Large Town - Silver Gilt Award - March/ Silver Award - Whittlesey
- Urban Community - Silver Award - Waterlees (Wisbech)
- Best Conservation Project - Winner - Manea Pit
- Best Drought/Sustainable Garden - Nominated - Fenland/Osbourne Park, Waterlees
- Environmental Quality Award - Nominated - Wisbech
- Best Young Persons Project (12 to 18yrs) - Neale Wade Community College, March
- Best Young Persons Project (12yrs and under) - Winner - Jubilee Garden, Payne Primary School, Parson Drove/Nominated - Glebelands Primary School, Chatteris

Councillor Humphrey congratulated all those involved in Anglia in Bloom.

28/12 BUSINESS RATES RETENTION – POOLING SUBMISSION

Councillor Clark presented the Business Rates Retention Pooling Submission report.

Councillor Mrs Bucknor asked:

- For clarification on whether all involved had agreed or was there the possibility that it would collapse if other districts pulled out of the scheme.
- What caveats were in place as it is assumed that the economy will grow but if the opposite occurs then Fenland could find itself in a negative position;
- Were other councils acting in a similar manner.

Councillor Clark replied stating:

- It had been indicated that all districts would go in together but if in a year's time it was not something Fenland wished to be part of then Fenland could withdraw with notice;
- This benefits Cambridgeshire if all districts are included but there is flexibility built in and therefore Fenland is not bound indefinitely;
- Cambridge are experienced in growth and are leading the country out of recession therefore it has helped to be involved with Cambridge;
- Fenland has been at the forefront of this scheme with its officers leading.

Councillor Booth stated that he had no real objection as this would benefit Fenland but would have liked to have seen it calculated on a basis of need instead of population, but this had not been negotiated; with the county element being 50% he hoped part of it could be spent in Fenland. Councillor Clark explained that the 50% is from Cambridgeshire and Fenland would need to fight to benefit from it and with regard to how this would be divided, it was thought that the fairest means was by population. A lot of work was involved and Councillor Clark explained he would personally

recommend that Fenland should enter into this.

Councillor Sutton explained he was pleased to see that "a way out" had been included. Councillor Clark replied stating this was a risk that Fenland had identified and therefore a reverse deal had been included.

Councillor Melton stated:

- He was pleased to move this and congratulated Councillor Clark and officers as this has been worked on for months with a lot of detail involved;
- All districts have agreed to sign up to the scheme;
- The recession has hit hard however the Cambridge economy is the first one to start pulling out and therefore Fenland is happy to join the discussions to be involved;
- Cambridgeshire have a very good record regarding finances;
- An exit strategy has been included: if one partner pulls out then the existing partners are able to reform the scheme;
- He believed Fenland will benefit well from the scheme;
- He understood Councillor Booth's remark regarding deprivation and there has been much discussion regarding it but this will be subject to review as the scheme progresses. Councils will have the opportunity to review this and Leaders and Chief Executives will review this as part of the monthly monitoring arrangements.

It was **AGREED** that:

- **The benefits and risks of pooling business rates, as set out in the report, be NOTED;**
- **The business rate pooling and governance proposal, as set out in the report, be APPROVED;**
- **Authority be delegated to the Chief Executive and Chief Financial Officer, in consultation with the Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Quality Organisation, for agreeing minor changes as appropriate following other partner's member approval processes in time for sign-off to be secured and the proposal be submitted to the DCLG.**

29/12 CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENTS - REVISION OF MEMBERS' ALLOWANCES SCHEME

Councillor Melton presented the Constitutional Amendments Report and stated:

- Councillor Cotterell had formally left his Cabinet position, however no Leader would want to dispense of the expertise and knowledge that Councillor Cotterell has;
- There will be dramatic changes around the port area which will be driven through by Councillor Seaton. There are many issues around the port and Councillor Cotterell is the only one who has extensive knowledge regarding this;
- Councillor Cotterell has also been the driving force around the Golden Age initiative which has been admired throughout the region;
- Following the Peterborough model, Fenland has now appointed a Special Advisor for specific projects, from outside the Cabinet. This position will not attract any Cabinet monies therefore a sum has been allocated to Councillor Cotterell for special projects;
- There will be savings of a few hundred pounds and there will be no intention to ask for further monies.

Councillor Booth asked if this allowance was for one person to which Councillor Melton confirmed that it was. Councillor Booth stated:

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- He was concerned regarding the legislation that Cabinet was only allowed a maximum of ten members and if this additional role was so important it should be part of Cabinet;
- He did not doubt the expertise and knowledge of Councillor Cotterell but the role should be a fully paid member of Cabinet;
- He thought Councillor Melton was "bending the rules to fit" and therefore would not support the amendment.

It was DECIDED that:

- **The amendments to the Members' Allowances Scheme be APPROVED;**
- **The Chief Solicitor be authorised to make such typographical amendments as are necessary to produce revised clean text copies of the Constitution.**

(Councillor Booth requested that it be noted he did not support the recommendation to approve the amendments to the Members' Allowances Scheme as recommended by the Leader of the Council.)

5:05pm

Chairman