

COUNCIL



7 NOVEMBER 2013 - 4:00 PM

PRESENT: Councillor M I Archer, Councillor G G R Booth, Councillor D Broker, 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 Mrs C R Cox, Councillor M J Curtis, Councillor J R Farmer, Councillor Mrs J French, Councillor S Garratt, Councillor D Hodgson, Councillor Miss S Hoy, Councillor M J Humphrey, Councillor P Jolley, Councillor B M Keane, Councillor S J E King, Councillor K G Mayor, Councillor Mrs K F Mayor, 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 T E W Quince, Councillor C J Seaton, Councillor R Skoulding, Councillor D Stebbing, Councillor W Sutton, Councillor F H Yeulett.

APOLOGIES: Councillor P Hatton, Councillor G Swan

31/13 TRIBUTES TO COUNCILLOR COTTERELL

Councillor Mayor paid tribute to Councillor Cotterell who very sadly passed away on 24 October 2013, stating that Mac was a committed Member of this Council since his first election in 1979. He held numerous positions within the Council over the years including; being Leader on two occasions covering a ten year period in total; Mac was also Chairman of the Council for three years. One of his greatest achievements as Councillor was to set up the Golden Age project, a nationally recognised scheme which has provided advice and practical help to many thousands of older people throughout the district. Mac was awarded the MBE by the Queen in recognition of his outstanding service to the community, which he described as the proudest moment of his life. Mac's life long commitment to Fenland as a whole will be sadly missed and fondly remembered. Mac's funeral will take place tomorrow, Friday 8 November 2013 at 1pm at St Peters and St Pauls Church, Wisbech.

Councillor Melton echoed the points that Councillor Mayor had said and stated that Mac was a particularly special person to him and this was only the third Council meeting in 32 years that Mac had not been present at; he would miss him terribly and Fenland would not be the same again. He had joined Mac's wife, Madge, the previous night for a meal and a long chat with many laughs, memories and tears and she was doing extremely well and holding up but he was concerned for her after the funeral and was adamant that she would not be forgotten. He stated that he asked her permission to make a permanent memorial to Mac regarding the port and harbour of Wisbech, as this was his life and it would be a fitting tribute that a road around the Boathouse be named after him.

Councillor Keane stated that Mac regarded the Golden Age team as his family to which he had put a lot of hard work into and was very successful. He recalled the boat trips that he took with Mac and stated that he was thrilled the Golden Age Team would continue and asked all Members to support the Team and continue in Mac's memory.

Councillor Quince stated he would miss Mac terribly and that he had instigated the Golden Age Team and this would now carry on in his name.

Councillor Booth stated he would like to pay his respects to Mac and that as a newer Member of the Council, Mac had always treated him and everybody else with courtesy and respect and he would be sadly missed.

Councillor Sutton stated he would like to pay tribute to Mac and that the Golden Age team have suggested that the team be renamed to include Mac's name; to which his wife was overwhelmed with and he hoped both CMT and Council would support this.

Councillor Bucknor stated he had not known Mac long but felt he was a gentleman and although they were both on different political sides he always showed respect.

Members and Officers stood for a minute's silence.

32/13 TO CONFIRM AND SIGN THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF 19 SEPTEMBER 2013

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of 19 September 2013 were agreed and signed subject to the following amendments:

- **Minute 28/13 - Wisbech Court House; to add in the word "not" to the following - Councillor Mrs Bucknor stated she appreciated that further negotiations were ongoing but it does appear that possible options are "not" being looked at regarding the alternative uses for the Court House and this should be open and transparent to which Councillor Seaton responded stating this was nothing to do with the usage of the Court House, just part of the overall picture;**
- **Minute 28/13 - Jasmine Close; to now read "Councillor Patrick expressed his thanks regarding two new benches and requested a further two benches this year to which Councillor Melton responded stating that there was no reason why a bid cannot be made in the forthcoming round for further improvements to parks in that area".**

33/13 CIVIC ENGAGEMENTS UPDATE - INFORMATION ITEM

Councillor Mayor informed Members of the number of civic activities undertaken by himself and the Vice Chairman in the weeks preceding full Council.

34/13 TO RECEIVE ANY ANNOUNCEMENTS FROM THE CHAIRMAN OF THE COUNCIL AND/OR THE HEAD OF PAID SERVICE.

MacMillan Cancer Relief - The Chairman thanked everyone who supported his coffee morning in aid of MacMillan Cancer Relief. The event was a roaring success due to the generosity of councillors, staff and community members with £536.72 raised in aid of this good cause.

Chairman's Christmas Carol Service - The Chairman reminded Members that the Chairman's Carol Service was on Sunday 8 December at 3pm at St Mary's Church, Station Road, Whittlesey; all Members are welcome to attend. He hoped that everyone would attend and join him at the service for a traditional pre-Christmas sign-song.

35/13 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:

- When would the outcome of the recent Peer Review be shared with Members to which Councillor Melton responded stating this would be available in three weeks and would then be shared with Members. The Council have taken up the LGA's offer of a free workshop; the dates of this will be shared as soon as available and arrangements will be made to release the report to the press and the wider public; some authorities have opted not to share this information but it was his belief it should be circulated. Councillor Booth welcomed this news;
- At the last Council meeting Councillor Melton had indicated that the next step in relation to the A14 was for a presentation to be made to Cabinet and to then be present to the Overview and Scrutiny Panel; what were the timescales of this to which Councillor Melton stated that he should be in receipt of draft reports by the close of tomorrow and therefore it would be included within the next Cabinet meeting, after which timescales would then be laid out. Councillor Booth thanked Councillor Melton for this news.

Councillor Booth informed Members that he would like to clear up the confusion with regard to planning committee members and confirmed that Councillor Archer was the substitute for his group on Planning Committee.

36/13 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 the following:

- Did Councillor Butcher attend the A47 Alliance Group workshop that took place in September; if so, could Members have a copy of the recommendations to which Councillor Butcher stated he did attend and this had been reported in the last Council meeting but he would ensure she received a copy of the recommendations;
- Could Councillor King clarify the meaning behind the first paragraph under the heading of Fenland Renaissance Programme as it did not make sense to which Councillor King stated that it was an expression that mean interim uses;
- Regarding Service Level Agreements; Overview and Scrutiny Panel Members have mentioned on several occasions the lack of detail contained within reports, it is appreciated that some information is confidential, but it is very uninformative and suggested it would be best to not include items until there is worthwhile information to circulate. Councillor Melton explained he had attended the previous Overview and Scrutiny Meeting and was aware that this had been a complaint made by the panel regarding the lack of detail and confirmed that more detail would now be included;
- Regarding the East Cambs and Fenland Children and Young People Area Partnership - September meeting; she had heard concerning issues from Cambridgeshire County Council with regard to Children's Services, especially regarding domestic violence. Councillor Mrs Bucknor asked who Fenland's representative was and it was important that Fenland focus on this to be as up to date as possible. Councillor Garratt made assurances that all partners at these meetings are very concerned about the different case reviews and they work very hard to close any gaps so that serious case reviews do not happen. He attended a conference yesterday where the objectives and priorities are looked at for Cambridgeshire as a whole and assured Members that Fenland was very much on the map as there was a need for more work to be done within Fenland. Councillor Garratt stated that if Councillor Mrs Bucknor wished to know any further information, to contact him and he would find this information if allowed, as some is confidential. Councillor Curtis added that he would like to correct Councillor Garratt and stated that it was not about having no serious case reviews as this cannot be guaranteed because if there is a death of a child and circumstances need exploring then there would be a serious case review. These reviews are published; it is about learning lessons to ensure mistakes are not repeated; Cambridgeshire County Council's financial situation is tough and with consultations and budget cuts it will be difficult

- but it will not compromise on the self-guarding on children and adults;
- Councillor Mrs Bucknor was extremely concerned regarding the amount of reminders sent out for outstanding Council Tax payments as this could highlight underlying problems; were there any proposals to deal with this. Councillor Humphrey stated he could not answer this precisely but would come back with further information. Councillor Mrs Bucknor stated she appreciated this was a challenging area but it was necessary that any problems causing these issues be highlighted and addressed. Councillor Melton stated that Fenland was still doing extremely well but was aware there were some difficulties which Fenland are continuing to monitor and appealed to the public: to not wait for court papers to arrive, if anyone is having difficulties then speak to Council officers regarding payment plans or to take their issues to their local councillor in confidence, who would take the case up on their behalf as court action is the last thing that Members wish to see.

Councillor Patrick referred to a question he asked regarding a Freedom of Information Request at the previous Council meeting that he had still had no response to. Councillor Melton responded stating he had approved a full and frank reply which he should have received and would ensure that this was circulated.

Councillor Mrs French asked the following:

- Comments have been made regarding the inconsistency of planning decisions; what steps are being taken to correct this impression. Councillor Melton responded stating that he had met with the Deputy Leader, Chairman and Vice-Chairman of Planning and with the CMT to discuss concerns from Members and Agents of inconsistencies and advice from the Planning Department but would like to make it clear that they have confidence in officers but there is a lack of capacity that will need to be addressed as the work increases. An Overview and Scrutiny review has been called for to report any issues as to how planning operates in Fenland, other authorities will be looked at and advice will be taken from the development industry; it will be open to all to make comments on how to streamline the process and ideally would like to have a set of criteria agreeable to Cabinet Members and officers and also acceptable to the development industry so there is a form of recognised criteria. Overview and Scrutiny will also be asked to look at the funding of the planning department, possibly following other districts where there is charge for pre-advice as Fenland is fully aware that neighbouring districts make this charge whereby they have Pre-Application Scrutiny Committees which involve local Members, Chairman of Planning, officers and agents. The Localism Act and Planning Act gives the public chance to have an input into this process. The relevance of Section 106s and CILs will be looked into which will have an impact on Fenland; this is owed to partners in the development industry so that there are a clear set of guidelines. Then once a planning application has been submitted to committee and determined it is important it is finalised; there should be no come back asking for further information on Section 106s or CILs; the conditions need to be decided at Planning Committee and agreed by the committee. Councillor Mrs French stated she was pleased Councillor Melton responded as this issue regarding the adding of further conditions had been highlighted at the last planning committee. Councillor Melton stated he was not prepared to discuss particular planning applications. He made assurances that there are currently terms of reference of that investigation being drawn up;
- She had been asked by March Town Council to look into the lack of courtesy shown to Town Councillors by not responding to correspondence from various departments. Councillor Melton stated he did not know who Councillor Mrs French was referring to but was happy to have a private consultation with her where she could bring him examples and this would be taken forward.

Councillor Archer referred to increased train service at Manea Train Station and asked if Fenland was planning any work to make the station more accessible regarding transport to the station. Councillor Butcher stated work was in progress as it is known that the station is quite a walk from

the village; a leaflet will be published and a date agreed with Manea Parish Council for a Launch Day. Councillor Archer stated that there needs to be an improvement in the bus services with links to the surrounding villages. Councillor Butcher stated that as well as working with the railways, meetings have taken place with bus operators and this will be looked into.

Councillor Owen stated that a planning applicant had a meeting with officers at the pre-application stage where all snags were ironed out but that these were added back in by the case officer for committee. Councillor Melton stated that several examples had been given in a similar vein which is why this needs to be reviewed; he added that he believed Fenland had a good Head of Planning and that the problem was lack of capacity in that department, with lack of tracking and applications taking too long. Under new rulings applicants will be entitled to all fees paid back if the 26 weeks is exceeded and Fenland needs to ensure it is not in that position. Councillor Owen stated it had been the philosophy of Fenland that planning officers should adopt a "can do approach" to applications; the review should iron out these issues resulting in better capacity involving pre-applications, whereby if a planning officer is on holiday or off sick, then someone else is able to retrieve the relevant information.

Councillor Farmer stated he had attended the Military Covenant Board whereby a representative from Cambridgeshire County Council explained the new process of a particular benefit for those who found themselves destitute called the Social Fund. The government have recently devolved this down to county level and each has developed its own scheme with Cambridge's approach being that it cannot be applied for directly but requires a sponsor which could be a military channel, another charity, town or parish councils or Fenland District Council. Councillor Farmer stated he mentioned this as all Members are involved in different organisations that may be able to persuade them to register; were Fenland registered. Councillor Yeulett stated that he had received a similar question at County and agreed to meet after Council to take this forward; he explained it was a charity that provides aid in lieu of cash. Councillor Curtis stated the government did delegate responsibility to local authorities at the same time as cutting the funding and agreed that sponsoring bodies would work well.

Councillor Booth referred to The Retention People Net Promoter System and stated this did not give details of those that were unhappy with their visits to the Leisure Centres. The commentary was very positive but there was no balance as to what the other views would have been and therefore no suggestions as to what to take forward to improve the service. Councillor Jolley agreed there should be more information available from the survey and would look into this.

Councillor Booth referred to Community House - Youth Service Providers (YPS) asking for an update as to how the review was progressing, as more wards would benefit from a Community House, to which Councillor Butcher agreed other areas needed help and all properties would be looked at but he could not say what would happen in the future but if there was anything Councillor Booth was particularly looking for then he would be pleased to help. Councillor Mrs Bucknor stated that the Community House was in her ward and asked Members to be mindful of the amount of deprivation and young people within this ward with nothing to do in the evenings. Councillor Butcher stated that this would be considered but that other villages also had the same problems.

Councillor Booth commended the report regarding the Refuse and Recycling Performance Update and stated this gave all the necessary information; which is how it should be presented to Members. He stated that there had been previous talk regarding the take up of commercial recycling to which Councillor Murphy stated that the Council already collects this.

Councillor Booth referred to Street Pride Refocus and asked if a decision had been made as to whether the Council would continue to provide insurance to protect the volunteers to which Councillor Murphy stated this was currently being looked into.

Councillor Booth referred to the report regarding the Contact Centre and acknowledged that their performance was improving but asked by how much to which Councillor Humphrey stated that he had this information which showed a continued improvement with calls being answered within 20 seconds 74% of the time in October as opposed to 68% in September. This improvement is being driven by a recovery plan consisting of the return of long term sick and colleagues stepping in at peak times; hopefully this would continue to show an improvement.

Councillor Curtis stated Members needed to be wary about being critical of planning officers as there is a lot of good work carried out. He stated four years ago he had put forward the idea regarding giving better advice at the pre-planning stage and that the issues now raised were fundamentally due to lack of capacity and there was a need to deal with this. Councillor Melton agreed and made it very clear this was not about being critical of officers was too easy to blame officers and Members should be mindful of this, the process does need to be looked at to see what help is required, this could result in a need for resources for capacity and training and therefore needs to be highlighted whilst the budget is being set. Councillor Archer stated there was an issue of inconsistency with regard to decisions regardless of capacity. Councillor Curtis explained this issue would still come down to the underlying cause of capacity to oversee these decisions. Councillor Melton stated the negative comments are in the minority and the majority of the work is carried out in a highly efficient and professional manner.

Councillor Sutton stated the report should be headed Fenland Dilapidated Buildings, as opposed to just Wisbech; he explained he had received a letter regarding the poor state of Elm Church Hall and asked what was being done to rectify this. Councillor King agreed the report should be headed Fenland and would be from now on as this was an issue for the whole district. There was a review in progress that will look at the process used to chase owners for repairs and how owners could be encouraged to be responsible. He agreed that Elm Church Hall would be included in the list of dilapidated buildings and more detail would be forthcoming shortly.

37/13 **NOTIFICATION OF APPOINTMENT OF DEPUTY MONITORING OFFICER**

Councillor Melton advised Members that Tom Lewis had been appointed as Deputy Monitoring Officer for Fenland.

Councillor Mrs Bucknor welcomed this news and asked for information regarding Tom Lewis who had taken up the position. Councillor Melton explained that Tom Lewis currently works in the Legal Team and has recently been promoted into the position of Deputy Monitoring Officer. A full report would have been included had an outside person been recruited.

5pm

Chairman