

# COUNCIL

17 DECEMBER 2015 - 4:00PM



**PRESENT:** Councillor M G Bucknor, Councillor Mrs V M Bucknor, Councillor M Buckton, Councillor T R Butcher, Councillor J F Clark, Councillor S Clark, Councillor D W Connor, Councillor M Cornwell, Councillor S Count, Councillor S R Court, Councillor Mrs C R Cox, Councillor Mrs J French, Councillor S Garratt, Councillor A Hay, Councillor Miss S Hoy, Councillor M J Humphrey, Councillor S J E King, Councillor D Laws, Councillor D Mason, Councillor Mrs K F Mayor, Councillor A Miscandlon, Councillor P Murphy, Councillor Mrs F S Newell, Councillor D C Oliver, Councillor C C Owen, Councillor A Pugh, Councillor C J Seaton, Councillor R Skoulding, Councillor W Sutton, Councillor M Tanfield, Councillor G Tibbs, Councillor S Tierney, Councillor F H Yeulett.

**APOLOGIES:** Councillor S Bligh, Councillor G G R Booth, Councillor C Boden, Councillor M Davis, Councillor D Hodgson, Councillor D Green

**44/15            TO CONFIRM AND SIGN THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF 5 NOVEMBER 2015**

The minutes of the meeting of 5 November 2015 were agreed and signed.

**45/15            CIVIC ENGAGEMENTS UPDATE - FOR INFORMATION ONLY**

Councillor Mrs Cox updated Members on the Civic Engagements undertaken by herself and the Vice-Chairman since the last Full Council.

**46/15            TO RECEIVE ANY ANNOUNCEMENTS FROM THE CHAIRMAN OF THE COUNCIL AND/OR THE HEAD OF PAID SERVICE.**

**Carol Service** - Councillor Mrs Cox thanked all who attended her Chairman's Annual Carol Service on Sunday 13 December at St Peter's & St Paul's Church, Wisbech; the event was extremely well attended.

**Chairman's Christmas Visits** - Councillor Mrs Cox thanked all staff who attended the Chairman's Christmas Visits; these were well attended and Councillor Mrs Cox was very impressed with staff's enthusiasm and commitment to delivering the best services to Fenland's residents.

**Chairman's Afternoon Tea Event** - Councillor Mrs Cox stated she would like to give advance notice that she would be jointly hosting with the Chairman of the Fenland Twinning Association, a Chairman's Afternoon Tea at 5:30pm on Wednesday 20 January 2016, invitations would be sent out in the New Year.

Lastly, Councillor Mrs Cox thanked the Corporate Management Team for providing mince pies and sherry to all those who attended Council.

**47/15            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.**

Under Procedural Rule 8.4, the Leaders of the Main Opposition Groups put their questions to the Leader as follows:

Councillor Booth was not present at the meeting.

Councillor Mrs Bucknor asked if Members could receive papers in good time before the Comprehensive Spending Review Meeting that has been scheduled for the 14 January 2016. Councillor Clark stated these papers would be distributed the week beginning 4 January 2016.

**48/15**            **TO RECEIVE REPORTS FROM AND ASK QUESTIONS OF CABINET MEMBERS WITH PORTFOLIO HOLDER RESPONSIBILITIES, IN ACCORDANCE WITH PROCEDURE RULES 8.1 AND 8.2.**

Under Procedure Rule 8.2, Members put questions to Portfolio Holders as follows:

- Councillor Mrs Bucknor stated that Cambridgeshire children receive on average the lowest funding in the country for their education and action was being taken within the Wisbech 2020 project to target families who were entitled to free school meals; this would automatically trigger an increase in pupil premium. Currently schools ask parents whether they have signed up for free meals but often parents did not respond to the request therefore she asked Councillor Cornwell that if parents do not apply now despite being asked, how would this new software system help; why would schools who were already seriously unfunded be asked to pay a contribution to the software. Parents would still be required through some form of declaration to sign up and therefore asked how this would be achieved. The report stated new benefit claimants so would this not cover those who were currently entitled but were not claiming and if the software was developed, could it not benefit other councils therefore offsetting any charge or alternatively had it been looked at that another council may have already developed this software that could be purchased from them. Councillor Cornwell stated this was not under his portfolio. Councillor Tanfield stated as portfolio holder for Young People that this came under her remit and she would meet with officers and come back to Councillor Mrs Bucknor with the answers.
- Councillor Mrs French stated that in February the SPD for contributions was adopted and within this document it stated that there should be a Flood and Water SPD which would be adopted by the end of 2015; could Councillor Sutton provide an update regarding this. Councillor Sutton stated that the Flood and Water SPD was at the consultation stage and would come forward to Council in February 2016.
- Councillor Mrs Bucknor asked if the borrowings within the report included contributions to the A14, she would like to see a breakdown of them. Councillor Seaton stated this did not include the A14 but he would ensure she received a breakdown of the figures.

**49/15**            **COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT - 2016-17 SCHEME**

Councillor Seaton presented the Council Tax Support 2016-17 Scheme.

It was clarified that the recommendation should read Section 12.5 and not Section 11.5.

The item was proposed by Councillor Yeulett and seconded by Councillor Sutton.

**It was AGREED that the Council Tax Support Scheme take effect from 1 April 2016 as set out in the report.**

**50/15**            **TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY STATEMENT AND ANNUAL**

## **INVESTMENT STRATEGY MID-YEAR REVIEW 2015/16**

Councillor Seaton presented the Treasury Management Strategy Statement and Annual Investment Strategy Mid-Year Review 2015/16 Report.

The item was proposed by Councillor Owen and seconded by Councillor Sutton.

Members asked questions and made comments as follows:

- Councillor Mrs Bucknor stated she understood that the three agencies have had to change the way they identify a number of the banks and asked if any of the rating agencies had severely down-graded any of the investments that the Council has. Councillor Seaton stated he would send the relevant information to Councillor Mrs Bucknor in an email.

**It was AGREED that:**

- **The report be NOTED**
- **The increase in CFR, gross borrowing and the capital prudential indicators be APPROVED;**
- **Changes to credit methodology be APPROVED.**

## **51/15 CHARGING FOR PRE-APPLICATION PLANNING ADVICE**

Councillor Sutton presented the Charging for Pre-Application Planning Advice Report.

The item was proposed by Councillor Mrs French and seconded by Councillor Miscandlon.

Members made comments and asked questions as follows:

- Councillor Mrs French stated she welcomed the report but was concerned that it must be a quality service and it be reported back to Council within six to twelve months to keep Members informed. Councillor Sutton stated that he fully supported Councillor Mrs French's comments and it would be reported back to the Overview & Scrutiny panel to ensure it was a quality service.
- Councillor Owen stated he welcomed this report and asked how the charges had been selected. Councillor Sutton stated that discussions had been undertaken with Kings Lynn and West Norfolk and it had been decided to following the Peterborough model as the administration teams work as a central point for both Peterborough and Fenland.
- Councillor Tierney stated he had no problem with this report but had an issue that Fenland should do this because everyone else was and thought that was a poor argument that in future should be avoided. Councillor Sutton stated that was not the opinion of the agents who had welcomed this as some agents had put through some very poor quality pre-applications which took up hours of officers' time.
- Councillor Owen stated he disagreed with Councillor Tierney as in his experience there were many people who had thought they were getting good quality advice when they were not even seeing a planning officer just a technical assistant or an administrator. This offers good quality advice at the right price and would stop anybody from being misled and therefore very welcomed.
- Councillor Mrs Laws stated that for years she thought Fenland Officers had been burdened with applications where developers had sought advice and expected that advice to be professional and if a fee was brought in then maybe developers would be a little sharper when they submitted their applications. Councillor Sutton stated that Councillor Mrs Laws was exactly correct and when the pre-application charges are brought in then this will reduce the applications by at least 50% and it is that 50% that has taken up a lot of officer

time.

- Councillor Tierney stated that he did support this report but the issue was with the generic argument that Fenland should do something because someone else has done it and there is no need to state that.
- Councillor Count asked at what point these charges would kick in. Councillor Sutton stated that the idea is for all landowners to ensure they had all the details prior to application but there would be no charge for generic telephone advice.

**It was AGREED that:**

- **The report and efficiency savings/income generation be NOTED;**
- **A pre-application charging scheme be ADOPTED from 1 April 2016 in accordance with Section 93 of the Local Government Act 2003.**

4:35pm

Chairman