

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

5 DECEMBER 2011 - 5.00PM



PRESENT: Councillor P Jolley (Chairman), Councillor M I Archer, Councillor G G R Booth, , Councillor M Cornwell, Councillor J R Farmer, Councillor A Miscandlon, Councillor K G Peachey, Councillor R E Scrimshaw, Councillor D Stebbing.

APOLOGIES: Councillor J R Chambers (Vice-Chairman), Councillor Mrs V M Bucknor

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE: P Medd - Chief Executive, C Pilson - Head of Policy and Communications, S Smith - Member Services Officer

* FOR INFORMATION OF THE COUNCIL *

OS25/11 CALL IN OF CABINET DECISION IN RESPECT OF AGENDA ITEM 6 ON 17 NOVEMBER 2011 - LPSA REWARD GRANT UPDATE

Members discussed the call-in of the Cabinet decision from 17 November 2011 in respect of the paper concerning LPSA Reward Grant Update.

Members asked questions made comments and received responses as follows:

Councillor Booth commented that the grant was a large amount of money and asked if the Council had done the right thing by the residents of Fenland by investing this in broadband as opposed to other projects. Councillor Booth was concerned that money should be awarded to the right area, and represent the best outcome for Fenland and value for money. The original funding was allocated to a number of projects, lots of these ceased to continue, why has the funding been put into another use;

Councillor Melton answered that the LPSA funding was allocated prior to the Coalition Government and when they came into power the LPSA funding to Fenland District Council was suspended with immediate effect and in light of this the Council's Capital Programme was readjusted. There was a lot of lobbying by Fenland District Council and Cambridgeshire County Council. After many months Cambridgeshire County Council were notified that the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) had reinstated the LPSA Reward Grant Funding. Many organisations had already made adjustments to their spending programmes and agreed to look at other ways of spending it, after giving up hope of receiving it. As a result Leaders from across the County discussed the future of the funding and made a collective decision to spend the funding to deliver Superfast Broadband to the whole of Cambridgeshire, towns and rural areas, with aspirations for the whole of Fenland to receive it.

Councillor Melton stated that the delivery of Superfast Broadband represents best value for the whole of Cambridgeshire and Fenland to the benefit of all wards, and every Leader agreed to the proposal apart from one. Fenland have received £100,000 to offset the funding deficit costs previously incurred. Fenland has one appointee for the Broadband Delivery Board, this Board has agreed that Fenland will be the first area to get the full Superfast Broadband. Councillor Melton explained the areas it will be delivered to by 2013 with 40 meg and up to 80 meg. New developments will have access to 100 meg broadband and this is why Councillor Melton has supported the proposals and why he is welcoming and promoting it. Although no decision has

been made regarding the £100,000 at the present time, it will be spent with the best interests of Fenland.

Councillor Booth asked why the Council had taken the decision to fund the provision of broadband when the funding could have been used for other services. Councillor Melton asked what other services could be provided that would benefit all of Fenland. Councillor Booth confirmed that he supported the roll out of Superfast Broadband, his concern was that Fenland was losing out on the opportunity for other services to be provided. Councillor Melton stated that Fenland had not expected to receive the funding and it was the view of Cabinet and the Conservative Group that the provision of Superfast Broadband will provide benefits for all residents in Fenland.

Councillor Archer agreed that there are many benefits and he could see the importance of Superfast Broadband in Fenland but questioned the change in priorities between the LPSA Funding being withdrawn and then reinstated and asked why. Councillor Melton referred to the change in leadership and policies at CCC and agreed that the funding could have been put towards other smaller projects, which would only benefit a minority of residents, the provision of Superfast Broadband will benefit every person in Fenland, it is good value for money.

Councillor Peachey asked what was meant by the term underwriting in relation to £100,000. Councillor Melton confirmed that there was no underwriting, the £100,000 had been set aside to offset the funding deficit.

Councillor Farmer expressed his displeasure at the decision to call-in, making reference to those members that had called in the decision, saying that the discussion had little substance and he felt that it was a completely pointless exercise. Councillor Jolley stated that any member can exercise their democratic right to call-in.

Councillor Melton agreed to the right of call-in by members, however if the Overview and Scrutiny Panel were saying that the Cabinet decision was wrong and they would like him to go back on the decision reiterating that all members should be supportive as Fenland will be the first recipient to receive Superfast Broadband. Councillor Archer asked if the scheme will actually achieve value for money. Councillor Melton stated that the question of finances had been questioned and had been scrutinised by CCC.

Councillor Miscandlon asked whether the principles of the LPSA original agreement had been adhered to when agreeing the change to where the funding should be spent. Councillor Melton confirmed that the principles of the original agreement had been considered thoroughly by all Leaders and the project has to be coordinated by CCC as a countywide project.

Councillor Cornwell agreed that the Cabinet proposal represents and is applicable to the whole of Fenland and must represent value for money and asked why members were debating the decision and recommended that the Cabinet decision be accepted.

Councillor Booth asked if the project represents best value and had it been subject to a cost benefit analysis. Councillor Melton confirmed that the project had not been subject to a cost benefit analysis, however the project would provide everyone in Fenland with access to Superfast Broadband, by either fibre or to remote locations via a wireless system on a mast. He stated that CCC, British Telecom and Government will have used the best analysers money can buy, this kind of system works very well in Cornwall and Councillor Melton has asked to visit to see the system in action.

Councillor Booth pointed out that it is the role of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel to discuss the issue. Councillor Melton stated that this project is aspirational and Fenland residents will be the first in Cambridgeshire to get major investment in infrastructure and should be proud to be first, it would be difficult to make changes as the 'deal' had been agreed.

Councillor Peachey commented that proposed Broadband coverage for Fenland is good.

Councillor Jolley stated that the Cabinet decision was called in and procedures have to be followed. Councillor Farmer said that there was also the option not to scrutinise. Councillor Jolley said that he would look into the validity of this statement.

Councillor Farmer proposed that the decision should not be discussed further and no further action should be taken, the meeting be closed and the original decision be accepted. Councillors Cornwell and Stebbing supported this proposal and it was agreed by majority vote to accept this proposal.

Members agreed that the original Cabinet decision be accepted.

5.45pm

Chairman