

# OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL



**28 JANUARY 2013 - 2.30PM**

**PRESENT:** Councillor J R Chambers (Chairman), Councillor A Miscandlon (Vice-Chairman), Councillor G G R Booth, Councillor Mrs V M Bucknor, Councillor D Hodgson, Councillor D Stebbing, Councillor W Sutton, Councillor G Swan

**OTHER MEMBERS IN ATTENDANCE:** Councillor M J F Cotterell MBE, Councillor P Jolley, Councillor D C Oliver, Councillor A K Melton, Councillor J F Clark, Councillor P Murphy, Councillor T R Butcher, Councillor K Owen.

**APOLOGIES:** Councillor M Cornwell, Councillor Miss S Hoy

**OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:** P Medd, R Bridge, G Garford, A Pain, R Cassidy, P Hughes, Miss C Pilson, M Mathews, M Saunders, Mrs A Goodall, Miss S Smith

## **OS28/12    COUNCILLOR SCRIMSHAW**

Members joined the Chairman in standing in remembrance of Councillor Scrimshaw, who sadly passed away very suddenly on 5 January 2013. He was a member of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel.

### **Accident in Fenland**

Councillor Melton stated that two Members of staff had been involved in an accident, both had sustained injuries and both are in Addenbrookes hospital. On behalf of himself and Members he wished the staff a full recovery. In the meantime he asked the Chief Executive and R Cassidy to ensure that the families of the injured are given all the support necessary and they confirmed that this is being done. Provision is being made for the families to access the hospital and the Council is working closely with the families, with the first thoughts of the Council being with the Refuse Operatives. Councillor Melton confirmed that he will keep Members fully informed of any progress in their recovery.

## **OS29/12    PREVIOUS MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting of 17 December 2012 were confirmed and signed, subject to the following comments and amendments:

- Minute number OS25/12, Update from Roddons Housing Association, bullet point 38

Councillor Booth asked that the minute be amended to say that Roddons are considering looking at smaller units and are bearing this in mind for all future developments.

- Minute number OS26/12, Older People Action Plan, bullet point 9

Councillor Mrs Bucknor stated that there are outstanding issues and information awaited about the re-enablement project and asked when this would be received. **Councillor Butcher answered that he is waiting for information from Cambridgeshire County Council (CCC) and will provide it to Members when he receives it.**

Councillor Mrs Bucknor made reference to the requirement for an over-arching action plan in relation to transport and other access to service issues and asked if this was progressing and not just leaflets. It was confirmed that over-arching action plans will be available in April after the Health and Wellbeing Boards have met. Councillor Owen pointed out that the leaflets are important as they raise awareness of what is available and compliment the action plan.

- Minutes number OS26/12, Older People Action Plan, bullet point 13

Councillor Mrs Bucknor asked if there was any progress regarding case studies and she has asked for an update on progress of the action plan before the end of the financial year. Councillor Butcher agreed that he will chase CCC for an update.

**\* FOR INFORMATION OF THE COUNCIL \***

### **OS30/12     DRAFT CORPORATE PLAN 2013-16**

Councillor Melton, Leader of the Council advised Members that the Draft Corporate Plan is out for consultation with local residents and said that he was happy to take questions from the Overview and Scrutiny Panel.

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

1. Councillor Booth made reference to the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment which shows areas of deprivation in Fenland and suggested that it would be beneficial to name the three wards and to know where they are;
2. Councillor Booth pointed out a typing error on page 21 of the report and asked that Cambs County Council and Peterborough Association of Local Councils **be replaced by Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Association for Local Councils**;
3. Councillor Booth requested that Parson's Drove on page 20 be corrected with Parson Drove and that the number of dwellings 'expected to increase to **51,400** by 2031';
4. Councillor Mrs Bucknor commented on the document identifying 'key challenges' but said that she said found it hard to see what the challenges were and believes that the statement 'To ensure the District continues to prosper in to the future' on page 17, paragraph 2 is an unqualified statement. Councillor Melton answered that historically Fenland compared well in relation to other areas. From the early 1980s there have been other periods of recession where growth has not been as high as liked however the current period, compared more favourably than during other periods of recession. There is a firm foundation in leisure and skills progress. Councillor Mrs Bucknor commented that the Council shows it is not sufficiently focussed as some wards in the district were in the top 20% and the same wards are now categorised as being in the top 10% of the most deprived areas. Councillor Melton responded that looking at the capital programme millions of pounds of investment is planned over the coming years, recognising problems ie the Wisbech 2020 Vision, with a view for equilibrium for the whole of the district being on a par with South Cambs and Huntingdonshire in the future. DTI funding and capital funding from Government has gone and European Funding is doubtful all of which are out of control of the District Council. Councillor Mrs Bucknor stated that she feels the Council may have directed money at problems but not in the right direction or the focus may have been incorrect. Councillor Melton responded that the Council acts on data and statistics that are available, the District Council cannot be prescriptive and do not always know what the outcomes are likely to be. Cambridgeshire County Council (CCC), Fenland District Council and Central Government

have invested in education and want to ensure that local people have skills required by local industry. The Council's commitment is shown by the huge sums of money that have been invested;

5. Councillor Mrs Bucknor commented that deprivation is statistically unfair. Councillor Melton responded that he has and is ready to 'push' the powers that be, Council Tax has been raised to invest in Fenland and it is a progressive process, however, Government as a whole do not recognise some areas of deprivation in Cambridgeshire;
6. Councillor Mrs Bucknor asked if the Fenland Strategic Partnership priorities for 2012 would be changed for 2013. Councillor Owen responded that if more urgent priorities arose the priorities would be changed, the 2012 priorities would remain unless new ones came to the fore;
7. Councillor Mrs Bucknor asked how Fenland will grow as a district between 2011 and 2031 if there is no proper infrastructure. Businesses cannot develop and prosper without infrastructure. Councillor Melton responded that work is required on the A47 and also the A605, both are important, it is an ambitious Corporate Plan and help is needed from Government Ministers for infrastructure, Fenland is ripe for major housing growth, the district is prepared to grow and we need to consider how we will get there. Councillor Mrs Bucknor stated that we need to have plans in place for when the economic downturn turns around. Councillor Melton agreed that it is time that Government invest in infrastructure. Councillor Owen confirmed that there are plans for the eastern region and these are being pursued;
8. Councillor Sutton pointed out that some areas of deprivation may have improved and not be worse, statistics are required not assumptions. Councillor Owen confirmed that money is being invested in deprived areas;
9. Councillor Booth commented on the Council's aspirations and achievements and he feels that including the statutory duties of the Council gives the wrong message as these should be done as a matter of course. **Councillor Melton responded that statutory duties continue to improve, some others are tied to growth and investment and agreed that statutory duties would be removed from the document;**
10. Councillor Miscandlon commented that the Corporate Plan is an aspirational document covering 20 years and this will take time, money and ability to achieve the outcomes;
11. Councillor Booth referred to the section on Localism which identifies vulnerable groups, he pointed out that it should also be there for ordinary residents which also needs to include empowering people to take over services as he feels that this is missing from the section and is not highlighting what the Council wants residents to do at a local level. Councillor Melton responded that he agrees with and supports the Localism Agenda and the opportunity is there for parishes and community groups to run local services and welcomes talks with them to discuss opportunities for facilities to be run by local communities. Councillor Melton made reference to the success of Chatteris Leisure Centre which has a Board of Trustees in place to scrutinise the operation of the Leisure Centre, ensuring that it is run by a trust of local people. Councillor Booth stated that Localism should be promoted across all communities. **P Medd confirmed that work is in progress to understand communities and with Cabinet approval a 'Statement of Communities Rights' will be included in the Corporate Plan;**
12. Councillor Mrs Bucknor referred to the Council's commitment to consult with young people, in particular Democracy Day, being only one day per year, and asked if the Council is proposing further engagement activities to raise awareness of democracy in schools as she

feels this is important and that the Youth District Council be expanded to include more youngsters. Councillor Melton stated that he does visit the Cromwell school every year in addition to local primary schools, he believes there should be no barriers to children engaging with local politicians prior to leaving education, however the Heads and Governors need to issue the invitations and the Councils needs to make it clear that we would like to engage with schools. Councillor Mrs Bucknor asked what we are doing as a Council to engage with young people. Councillor Melton confirmed that Councillor Garratt is very committed to engaging with young people and is in contact with schools all the time. Councillor Mrs Bucknor asked why the Thomas Clarkson Academy are not involved. Councillor Sutton stated that Thomas Clarkson were in attendance at the Youth District Council when he had attended. P Medd, as a Governor of the Thomas Clarkson Academy agreed to raise the issue of low attendance at democracy events. **Councillor Melton confirmed that he would make sure that engagement with young people be advertised in schools, libraries, through the internet and social media;**

13. Councillor Booth referred to the development of an advanced waste partnership and raised concerns regarding articles in the press that suggest that Fenland's recycling is going into landfill and the perception this is giving to residents. He asked if a statement could be published in the Fenlander to state that recycling is not going into landfill. P Medd confirmed that Fenland's recycling is being recycled in Kent, not at Donarbon. Councillor Booth asked when the Council would have the feedback from the consultation, stating that it needs to be measured, the aspirations and how the waste partnership in Cambridgeshire will work. P Medd confirmed that statutory priorities are endorsed by the Council, agreed that Performance Indicators (PIs) are required to back up the headline statement to show that we are accountable to the public and this can be strengthened by PIs and statistics;
14. Councillor Miscandlon raised concerns regarding failure to collect bins and residents being told that it would be collected and would go into landfill. Councillor Murphy and P Medd provided statistics on the number of bins collected per month in relation to the small amount of missed bins and stated that it is a very small amount in comparison to the overall bins collected and missed bins are usually collected next or same day.

Councillor Chambers thanked Councillor Melton for his presentation of the Corporate Plan and the responses made to questions.

**Members agreed the Final Draft Corporate Plan be considered by Cabinet and Council on 21 February 2013 incorporating feedback from the Overview and Scrutiny Panel and residents.**

## **OS31/12    DRAFT MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY AND GENERAL FUND BUDGET 2013/14**

Councillor Chambers thanked P Medd, R Bridge and M Saunders for the Members Budget Briefing and presentation on 24 January 2013 which had been invaluable.

Councillor Clark stated that the Council has an excellent financial management strategy with some difficult decisions taken during 2012-13 to the present time, predicting a breakeven position not using reserves and good results for the next financial year. The Governments financial settlement was finally received on 19 December 2012 and Councillor Clark congratulated the Finance Team on their estimates prior to receipt of the settlement. There are pressures due to a funding shortfall with the Pilots' National Pension Fund of £1million. There are changes to the collection of Council Tax and Business Rates, if not collected this will affect the Council's Forecast and there are some uncertainties expected during the next Budget cycle. P Medd announced that the 'Growing Cambridgeshire' business rates pooling of Districts had failed, but was not due to Fenland's withdrawal.

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

1. R Bridge confirmed that the Council will receive a safety net payment if business rates income is 7.5% or more below funding baseline, this was in response to a question from Councillor Stebbing;
2. Councillor Mrs Bucknor commented that the challenges faced are horrendous and would like more done as services still have to be delivered to Fenland residents despite the low financial settlement from Government and asked why Middle Level drainage board levies are not identified in the document. It was confirmed that R Bridge and M Saunders have appealed against the settlement. **R Bridge confirmed that the final budget will have more detail about service areas and drainage board levies which are built into the budget;**
3. Councillor Booth asked why there are no expenditure costs in the General Fund Reserves for Section 106 Contributions. R Bridge confirmed that Section 106 Contributions are specific to schemes going ahead, the Capital Programme changes throughout the year and the Council will continue to negotiate Section 106 Contributions for planning agreements;
4. Councillor Booth asked for an explanation of the Forecast for Wisbech Park Phase 1. P Medd confirmed that this is money to improve schemes, a contingency but not specific at the present time. Councillor Booth asked how difficult it is to look at schemes. Councillor Melton responded that there is an ongoing review regarding the need for investment to bring in revenue, looking at assets in the district, how investments of resources should be made and Members were asked to remember that if revenue increases it will benefit all of the district;
5. Councillor Booth asked if it would be prudent to put money by to cover any damage that may occur in relation to Street Name Plates/District Facilities Signage Councillor Melton responded that capital bids are under consideration at the present time;
6. Councillor Booth commented that there is a dramatic rise relating to ICT Infrastructure, Replacement and Upgrade Programme, is this an area where overheads reduce over time? Councillor Melton referred to regular increases in relation to IT and the need to update with new technology, new ways of reducing overheads are being considered and this may lead to partnership arrangements but problems with data sharing will need to be considered. There is a capital expense linked to all Councillors having up to date technology, it will lead to better, faster and cheaper ways of working and this is the way forward Members were asked to recognise that less paper and ink cartridges are being used due to improved technology across the Council and outside bodies. There is evidence that the effective use of technology can lead to a reduction in the cost of printing and stationery;
7. Councillor Swan asked what the Parks and Open Spaces allocation is for. Councillor Melton confirmed that this money is open for bids from Members;
8. Councillor Booth asked what is planned for the Social Housing - Support for New Affordable Housing Contingency. Councillor Owen confirmed that this is a primer for potential developers to start building works;
9. Councillor Mrs Bucknor commented that investments should show improvements that generate a return and it should be clear and measurable in financial terms and should be invested for the better of the community. Councillor Melton agreed that it makes good business sense to invest capital and investments will be considered in broad terms and it is important that there is added value to the community, any asset belongs to the council tax payers of Fenland;

10. Councillor Miscandlon commented that Officers, Cabinet and the Corporate Management Team should be congratulated on the balanced budget taking into consideration the financial constraints place on the Council.

**Members agreed that the draft budget proposals for 2013/14, the revised estimates for 2012/13 and the revised Capital Programme be considered by Cabinet taking into account any previous recommendations made by the Overview and Scrutiny Panel at this meeting.**

### **OS32/12 REVIEW OF FEES AND CHARGES 2013/14**

Councillor Clark, Portfolio Holder for Finance informed Members that the Council's Fees and Charges feed into the Draft Medium Term Financial Strategy and General Fund Budget 2013/14 and advised Members that if they were mindful to make changes it would have an impact on that document. He asked Members to consider Fees and Charges alongside the budget making it easier for them to see the proposals. He informed Members that Cabinet Members were in attendance to answer any questions related to their individual portfolios.

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

1. The proposals will generate £71,000 which have been incorporated in the budget. General increases are around 2.7%, Port fees will have to increase but remain competitive. Cemetery Services are looking to create a breakeven service. Leisure Services are researching why people are not taking advantage of membership and are looking to encourage those who are able to take advantage of daytime attendance;
2. Councillor Stebbing asked why there was no increase in Traveller Site charges. Councillor Owen responded that the service has been regularised and is less costly;
3. Councillor Mrs Bucknor asked why rental of temporary accommodation properties, leased from Roddons are increasing, as Roddons had previously confirmed that there would be no rental increases in Fenland and asked R Bridge to clarify if this increase was only in relation to temporary accommodation as C Smith had previously confirmed that Circle Anglia are making inflationary rises to rents but not in Fenland;
4. Councillor Mrs Bucknor stated that meeting rooms are available for hire at One-Stop Shops and asked if it would be useful to let people know that this service is available to boost fees. **Councillor Clark said he would pursue this;**
5. Councillor Mrs Bucknor informed Members that she had made a number of telephone calls to undertakers regarding the cost of cemetery services, one such cost being £260 at Parson Drove, half the price of Fenland and said she was shocked that prices did not compare within Fenland. Councillor Booth added that Parson Drove is looked after by the Parochial Church Council, the Parish Council contributes to maintenance and said he did not think this was a fair comparison. Councillor Murphy confirmed that there are six cemeteries each run in a different way. The Council has four town and two village cemeteries with no volunteer help. Peterborough has a similar system for comparison. Councillor Mrs Bucknor asked is it feasible to have a template online relating to available plots. Councillor Murphy responded that Eastwood Cemetery is being expanded and if a plot is bought in that expansion area people would have the option to tend their own plot;
6. Councillor Booth asked if the increase in cemetery charges would cover the deficit and had Councillor Murphy considered phasing the increase in over a period of time, ie 3 years. Councillors Murphy and Clark confirmed that the charges could only be increased on a one off basis as any other option would cause a pressure in other areas of the budget;

7. Councillor Sutton informed Members that he had researched the increase in cemetery charges, results show that two Parish Councils run their own cemeteries, the proposed fee for Fenland District Council is £575, Parish Councils were £550 and £525 by comparison and Councillor Sutton said he supported the Councils proposals;
8. Councillor Miscandlon commented on 0% Licensing Fee increase and asked why. Councillor Owen confirmed that Licensing Fees are set by government and the Council has no control of Licensing fees There may be a Night Time Economy Tax if justifiable;
9. Councillor Mrs Bucknor asked if Port Fee increases in Wisbech compare to Port Sutton Bridge, taking into account the additional 8-11 miles travel required between the Ports, it is important that Wisbech Port remains competitive with Port Sutton Bridge. Councillor Seaton informed Members that the price increase was due to the deficit and negotiations to repay the Pilot Pension Fund which has been a long process and consideration is being given as to how increases are spread over the coming years and longer term, this will influence fees. Shipping has reduced over the years and ship sizes and cargo have changed, however the Port is trying to diversify;
10. Councillor Booth asked how many people have given up Leisure Membership. **Councillor Clark confirmed that he would provide the answer and then circulate to the Overview and Scrutiny Panel**, adding that numbers have been affected by the new gym at Chatteris. Councillor booth asked how we can make sure we do not exclude another set of users and figures are representative. Councillor Clark referred Councillor Booth to the Leisure Income Breakdown in the report, Councillor Booth said he would prefer the information in figures and not as a pie chart;
11. Councillor Sutton asked if it would be prudent for the Council to speak to Parish Councils that run their own cemeteries to consider making charges the same across Fenland. Councillor Murphy responded that fees do not begin level and this would not be feasible. Councillor Owen agreed that it would be wrong to increase fees to create a level across Fenland;
12. Councillor Booth stated that there are some areas that have no increases, eg garages and asked why this was. Councillor Seaton stated that the Council is trying to stay competitive and officers proposals aim to increase occupancy levels and hence increase revenue and he feels that rates are competitive;
13. Councillor Booth asked why some charges at The Boathouse are not increasing. Councillor Seaton stated that occupancy levels are lower than expected and the Council is aiming to align rates for South Fens Business Centre and The Boathouse. Councillor Booth commented that previous reports showed occupancy at The Boathouse were at the expected level. Councillor Seaton confirmed that the previous report referred to South Fens Business Centre, with some businesses moving out of The Boathouse due to growth reasons and agreed that there is some work required to raise occupancy levels at The Boathouse. Officers are meeting with NWES to consider other proposals and are keen that this happens quickly;
14. Councillor Booth asked why Leisure Charges were not kept at 0% increase and why the increased charges are considered acceptable. Councillor Jolley stated that a lot had been spent on Leisure Centres over the last twelve months and the George Campbell needs updating and income is required. Councillor Clark was in agreement and responded that he feels the Council has the budget right.

**Members agreed the Fees and Charges and recommended that they be included in the final budget proposals for 2013/14.**

## **OS33/12    FUTURE WORK PROGRAMME**

Members considered the Future Work Programme 2012/13 for the Overview and Scrutiny Panel.

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

1. Any comments on the future Work Programme should be forwarded to the Chairman prior to the next meeting;
2. Councillor Booth requested that the agenda items Draft Medium Term Financial Strategy and General Fund Budget and Review of Fees and Charges be considered in reverse on future agendas to allow Members to make comments on Fees and Charges;
3. Further to minute OS27/12, bullet point one, the Overview and Scrutiny Panel meeting due to take place on 22 April 2013 has been rescheduled to 15 April 2013.

**Members agreed the Future Work Programme 2012/13 for the Overview and Scrutiny Panel, subject to the comments agreed above.**

4.30pm

Chairman