

<b>Agenda Item No:</b>	<b>5</b>	
<b>Committee:</b>	<b>Cabinet</b>	
<b>Date:</b>	<b>30 September 2024</b>	
<b>Report Title:</b>	<b>Annual Report 2023/24</b>	

**Cover sheet:**

**1 Purpose / Summary**

- 1.1 To present the Annual Report of the Council for Cabinet to note the achievements made in delivering the Council's corporate priorities in 2023/24.

**2 Key Issues**

- 2.1 The Annual Report of the Council 2023/24 sets out the Council's performance over the last year, linking to the priorities detailed in our Business Plan. These priorities are designed to deliver outcomes that improve the quality of life for Fenland residents and are listed under the key headings of Communities, Environment, Economy and Quality Organisation.
- 2.2 The achievements outlined in the Annual Report are not exhaustive but reflect some of our successful projects over the last year. Notable examples are given of how we have worked closely with the community and partners to tackle important local issues in a collaborative and efficient way.
- 2.3 Like other local authorities, Fenland District Council faces significant financial challenges and increased demand upon services. Nevertheless, we continue to provide high quality services whilst keeping our budget balanced.
- 2.4 Our Cabinet members have also committed to building on the success of the transformation agenda and to develop a second phase. Spanning across all services within the council, the Transformation Agenda 2 programme ties together all major change initiatives that are looking to improve how the council works and delivers services. The programme will aim to ensure we are an effective and efficient council for the future.

**3 Recommendations**

- 3.1 It is recommended that Cabinet approves the Annual Report of the Council 2023/24.

Wards Affected	All
Forward Plan Reference	N/A
Portfolio Holder(s)	Councillor Boden, Leader of the Council Cabinet Members
Report Originator(s)	Paul Medd, Chief Executive Peter Catchpole, Corporate Director Carol Pilson, Corporate Director David Wright, Head of Policy & Communications
Contact Officer(s)	Paul Medd, Chief Executive Peter Catchpole, Corporate Director Carol Pilson, Corporate Director David Wright, Head of Policy & Communications
Background Papers	Business Plan 2023/24

## 1 BACKGROUND AND INTENDED OUTCOMES

1.1 The Annual Report of the Council 2023/24 summarises key examples of the Council's performance against each of our corporate priorities over the past year. This document is published and circulated on an annual basis to provide a summary of performance for councillors, customers and partners.

In addition, our Cabinet members have also committed to building on the success of the transformation agenda and to develop a second phase. Spanning across all services within the council, the Transformation Agenda 2 programme ties together all major change initiatives that are looking to improve how the council works and delivers services. The programme will aim to ensure we are an effective and efficient council for the future.

1.2 The Council continues to deliver high quality services and effective projects within each of its corporate priorities. Key examples include:

## 2 Communities - highlights

2.1 Our Housing Options team received 2201 requests for homeless advice and assistance (up 7.3% from last year); 1,143 of these approaches were resolved through the advice provided. 275 households were prevented from becoming homeless through various forms of intervention including (but not limited to) mediation, emotional support, budgeting advice, financial support and assisting with sourcing alternative accommodation.

2.2 Through our Disabled Facilities Grants scheme, the Council provides home adaptation works for elderly, disabled and vulnerable householders to help

them continue to live safely and independently in their homes. Last year we assisted 141 households with adaption works.

- 2.3 The 16th Pride in Fenland awards was held in March 2024 to celebrate individuals and groups that give selflessly to others. There were a record 117 nominations for 79 different groups and individuals.
- 2.4 Our Golden Age project, which helps provide older residents with advice on services and support available to them at events across Fenland, hit a remarkable 20 years of service to the community in 2023. Over the past year, events have been held in Whittlesey, Christchurch (where our first ever event was held in 2003), Wimblington, March and Parson Drove, attracting over 500 visitors in total. The events were supported by 35 different organisations and providers of care, financial assistance, social activities, health provision and other services for the over 60s. To date, almost 7,500 visitors have attended the Golden Age events.
- 2.5 Our Active Fenland team successfully secured grant funding from the Integrated Care System and Cambridgeshire County Council Public Health to help people of all ages and backgrounds to get more active, more often, and to lead healthier lifestyles. The funding helped to deliver 590 sports and physical activities to Fenland communities.
- 2.6 We have continued to invest in our parks and open spaces. Together with our contractor Tivoli, we look after more than 135 hectares of parks and open spaces across Fenland. Work in the past year has included the opening of a new community pavilion joint funded by Fenland District Council, Cambridgeshire County Council and the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority, and an extensive play area makeover in Wisbech Park.

### **3 Environment – highlights**

- 3.1 We carried out more than 2.9 million bin collections from across the district, in all weathers, and collected more than 8,450 tonnes of materials for recycling. This generates more than £318,000 of income to support our services. Customer satisfaction with our Refuse and Recycling and Garden Waste (Brown Bin) services remains high with 94% and 90% respectively. The Garden Waste service has continued to remain popular with subscriptions at an all-time high of over 24,212 in 2023/24.
- 3.2 We delivered a competitive trade waste service to almost 600 business customers, collecting over 1,260 tonnes of waste, including 133 tonnes of recycling and 98 tonnes of food waste. The service generated more than £522,600 of income to support our services
- 3.3 Our Cleansing and Rapid Response team continued to provide the excellent seven-day street sweeping, litter picking and fly-tipping removal service in our towns and villages. Last year they responded to 2,006 service requests from the public, with 93% actioned on the same or next day. Over 1,200 quality inspections were made in areas of high footfall – 97% met cleansing standards first time.
- 3.4 Our Street Scene team spent 4,500 hours out and about in the community, in all weathers, working on various proactive environment and street scene enforcement projects.

- 3.5 Our shared CCTV service with Peterborough City Council maintained its 100%, round-the-clock service function – operating 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. The service delivered over 4,300 pro-active camera patrols, responded to over 1,100 incidents of crime and disorder across the district and supported our policing partners to make over 150 arrests for offences, helping to protect local communities and make the district safer.

## **4 Economy – highlights**

- 4.1 The Economic Growth team awarded:
- £194,910 to eight Fenland businesses through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund. The funding helped businesses to invest in new technology, diversify their income or create new employment opportunities.
  - £75,005 to fifteen businesses through the UK Rural England Prosperity Fund. The funding helped rural businesses to develop new products and facilities that will be of wider benefit to the local economy, including farm businesses looking to diversify income streams).
  - Launched three additional grants through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (year three) in December 2023, with expression of interest applications closing on 6 April 2024.
  - For the Investment in Business Fund - 123 expressions of interest were received. Grants requested totalled £2,632,284 with a projected return of investment totalling £4,513,000. Though, only £316,500 is available.
  - For Fenland Start-Up Business Support Programme – 26 expressions of interest received.
  - Fenland Rural England Prosperity Fund – 20 expressions of interest received.
- 4.2 2023/2024 saw a significant uplift in the delivery of affordable dwellings in Fenland in comparison to the previous two years. 16 of the affordable ownership units in 2023/2024 were delivered as part of the First Homes scheme and were the first ones within the district. In total, there were 244 affordable homes delivered (144 affordable rented and 96 affordable other tenures e.g. Shared Ownership).
- 4.3 Our planning team determined 645 major, minor and other planning applications – between 67% and 92% of these were decided on time, depending on application type. The team also dealt with 674 other types of application (such as prior notifications, certificates of lawfulness, discharge of condition, general enquiries, and licensing requests) and received 81 pre-application enquiries, in addition to ‘traditional’ planning applications. We also received 214 planning enforcement complaints and resolved 143 cases.
- 4.4 Work continued on March town centre’s multi-million pound regeneration, a programme of inter-related schemes being delivered by various partners to transform and futureproof the town centre. Highlights of 2023/24 include:
- Completion of the Market March Place improvements scheme.
  - Purchase of the former Barclays Bank in Broad Street, to prevent it falling into disrepair and secure the site for future development.

- Start of work on the Broad Street scheme in June 2023, including transformation of the road layout and new public realm area. The scheme is due for completion in October 2024.
- Specialist removal of historic Grade II Listed fountain for careful storage, ready for specialist repair and reinstatement once Broad Street works are complete.
- Redevelopment of partially derelict and one of March's oldest Conservation Area buildings, 26 Market Place, into retail and residential use, with support from the regeneration project's grant scheme.
- Grant funding investment into March Dental, now a flagship business on Broad Street.
- Demolition of old toilet block to enable redevelopment of the riverside and further progress on Broad Street.
- Design and costing of a new toilet block will be built in Grays Lane.
- Increase in car parking spaces in the City Road car park, on the site of the old recycling centre.
- Increase in the number of taxi bays within the town centre.

## **5 Quality Organisation – highlights**

- 5.1 We collected over £68.3million in Council Tax and £25.46million in Business Rates. This plays a major part in funding the key services we provide to the community.
- 5.2 The MyFenland team answered more than 50,800 phone calls and resolved 99% of customer queries at the first point of call. We also received 6,653 payments via PayPoint, totalling over £850,000.
- 5.3 Our website saw over 335,000 visits and received over 21,750 online form submissions across 49 different topics.
- 5.4 The Licensing team issued 520 licences and dealt with 123 service requests for a variety of licensable services including Taxi, Premises, Alcohol, Scrap Metal and Animal Licensing, to help ensure such businesses are well managed and operating safely and legally. As part of the Responsible Authority Officer group, the team also worked with internal and external partners to deliver multi-agency enforcement days within the district.
- 5.5 Our Environmental Health team has delivered a wide range of services, including giving advice and undertaken inspections at more than 350 business premises, ensuring the highest of standards can be achieved. A large number of these businesses received a food hygiene rating of 5, the highest award possible under the national scheme. We've also investigated more than 1,800 reports of noise or other environmental problems that may be affecting residents, the majority of these being resolved informally.

## **6 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 6.1 The Annual Report of the Council 2023/24 shows clear performance towards the achievement of our corporate priorities. It is only a summary document;

many more projects are ongoing that aim to improve quality of life for Fenland residents.

- 6.2 For Cabinet to note the achievements made in delivering the Council's corporate priorities and for Cabinet to approve the Annual Report of the Council 2023/24.

## **7 CONSULTATION**

N/A

## **8 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED**

- 8.1 No alternative options were considered as the Council has made an ongoing commitment to produce an Annual Report of the Council.

## **9 IMPLICATIONS**

### **9.1 Legal Implications**

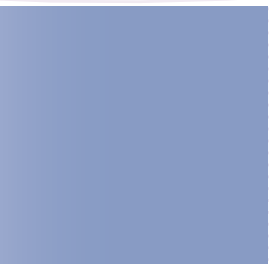
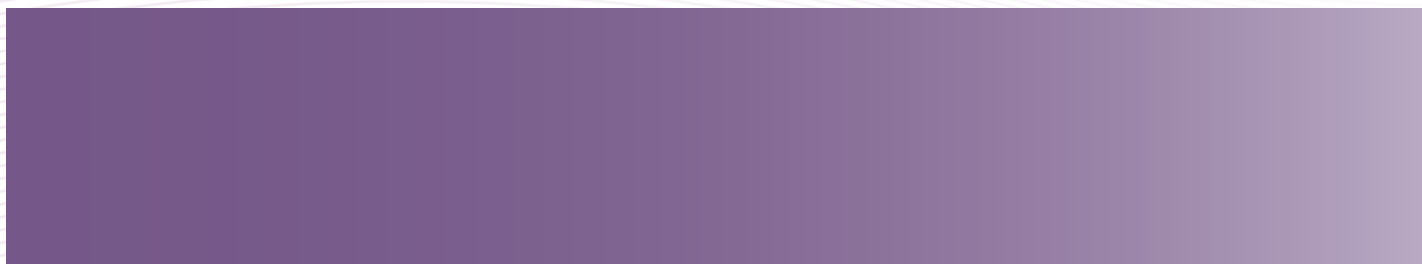
- 9.2 There are no specific legal considerations connected with the content of this report.

### **9.3 Financial Implications**

- 9.4 The Annual Report 2023/24 sets out high level corporate achievements that are linked to the priorities in our business plan which are reflected in the Council budget.

### **9.5 Equality Implications**

- 9.6 N/A



# Fenland District Council Annual Report 2023/24

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## Welcome to Fenland District Council's Annual Report for 2023/24

We are pleased to introduce you to our Annual Report, reflecting upon our achievements and performance and the many services and activities we have delivered to communities across Fenland over the past 12 months.

It has once again been an incredibly challenging year. With ongoing global emergencies and conflicts, persistent inflation, cost of living pressures and continued increased demand on our services, we continue to live through a period of significant financial and economic uncertainty.

These challenges resonate up and down the country and throughout our district, impacting residents and businesses alike, including the council itself. Despite these exceptional difficulties, we have remained resolutely steadfast in our commitment to serve the needs of our district, made good progress towards our ambitions and taken steps to mitigate the financial impacts on our budget.

Supporting our communities has remained our top priority and we have continued to work hard with our partners to do everything in our power to provide the support our residents need.

We froze the portion of our council tax to lessen the financial burden on taxpayers – the sixth consecutive year of no rises in our share of the bill – and we have helped people to claim the support they are entitled to.

We have helped provide secure, well managed and affordable housing, ensuring more families have a safe place to call home, and invested in our parks and open spaces, recognising their importance for the wellbeing and enjoyment of all our residents.

We also invested in our leisure centres, delivered much-loved community events, and launched a pilot 'Early Help Hub', a bespoke 'one stop shop' of support and advice.

We also successfully secured more funding for Fenland, to deliver thousands of pounds of grant funding for businesses, boost arts, culture and heritage activities, tackle fly-tipping, help reduce youth anti-social behaviour, and much, much more.

Our ongoing transformation agenda has continued to be another key area of focus. By further enhancing our online platforms, developing more modern and resilient working practices for staff and improving customer experience, we have made it easier for residents to access the information and support they need, ensured greater efficiency and accessibility, and provided even better value for money.

We know there is more work to be done, but we're confident we are in a strong position to achieve it in the coming year.

Thank you to all our residents, businesses, members, staff, partners and colleagues for their support and resilience over the past year and the fundamental role you play as we continue making our district the best it can be.



Paul Medd  
Chief Executive



Chris Boden  
Leader of the Council

## About Fenland

Fenland is renowned for its vibrant community spirit, rich heritage and picturesque land and skylines. Located in North Cambridgeshire, the Fenland District spans 211 square miles and is home to 102,500 residents (ONS: 2021). Over 70% of the population resides in the four market towns of Chatteris, March, Whittlesey, and Wisbech, while the picturesque rural areas encompass 29 villages.

Fenland has some of the most affordable housing in Cambridgeshire, with an average house price of £225,000 (UK HPI June 2024), 22% less than the national average. Its close proximity to large urban centres like Cambridge and Peterborough contributes to a growing population, projected to reach 118,826 by 2043, a 16% increase (ONS: 2021).

Additionally, 23% of residents (23,400 people) are aged over 64, a figure that surpasses both the county and national averages (ONS: 2021). We are committed to working with our partners to ensure residents have access to the necessary support and resources for a happy, healthy, and independent life.

Despite deprivation challenges (we are the 80th most deprived area out of 317 in the country (IMD: 2019)), we are dedicated to collaborating with partner organisations to effectively address and overcome these issues.



Fenland covers approximately 211 square miles



Over 200 miles of beautiful waterways



Over 135 hectares of open green space



The population is around 102,500\*



Average property price is £225,000\*\*



Over 3,160 businesses in Fenland

\* Office for National Statistics  
\*\* UK House Price Index

## Cabinet



**Chris Boden**  
Leader of the Council  
Whittlesey East  
and villages



**Jan French**  
Deputy Leader of the Council  
March South



**Ian Benney**  
Chatteris South



**Peter Murphey**  
Chatteris South



**Chris Seaton**  
Leverington and  
Wisbech Rural



**Alex Miscandlon**  
Whittlesey East  
and villages



**Dee Laws**  
Whittlesey North West



**Sam Hoy**  
Wisbech South



**Steve Tierney**  
Wisbech South



**Susan Wallwork**  
Wisbech South

## Other Councillors



**James Carney**  
Chatteris North  
and Manea



**Alan Gowler**  
Chatteris North  
and Manea



**Charlie Marks**  
Chatteris North  
and Manea



**Anne Hay**  
Chatteris South



**David Conner**  
Doddington and  
Wimblington



**Maureen Davies**  
Doddington and  
Wimblington



**Dal Roy**  
Elm and  
Christchurch



**Matthew Summers**  
Elm and  
Christchurch



**Brenda Barber**  
Leverington and  
Wisbech Rural



**Sam Clark**  
Leverington and  
Wisbech Rural



**John Clark**  
March East



**Stuart Harris**  
March East



**Mark Pursar**  
March East



**Steve Count**  
March North



**Kim French**  
March North



**Paul Hicks**  
March North



**Gary Christy**  
March South



**Tim Taylor**  
March West and  
Benwick



**Andrew Woollard**  
March West and  
Benwick



**Gavin Booth**  
Parson Drove and  
Wisbech St Mary



**Dianne Cutler**  
Parson Drove and  
Wisbech St Mary



**Michael Humphrey**  
Parson Drove and  
Wisbech St Mary



**Dr Haq Nawaz**  
Whittlesey East and  
villages



**Jason Mockett**  
Whittlesey Lattersey



**Elisabeth Sennitt Clough**  
Whittlesey North West



**Roy Gerstner**  
Whittlesey South



**Gurninder Singh Gill**  
Whittlesey South



**Lucie Foice-Beard**  
Wisbech North



**Nick Meekins**  
Wisbech Riverside



**David Oliver**  
Wisbech Riverside



**Sidney Imafidon**  
Wisbech Waterlees and  
Walsoken



**David Patrick**  
Wisbech Waterlees and  
Walsoken



**Billy Rackley**  
Wisbech Waterlees and  
Walsoken

Conservative   
Independent   
Liberal Democrat 

## Money Matters

### Where your Council Tax goes

In 2023/24, the Band D Council Tax bill was set at £2,162.55 (plus Parish amounts). In 2024/25, this increased to £2,278.35 (plus Parish amounts). Fenland District Council collects money through Council Tax on behalf of other authorities, as shown on the diagram.

**Fenland District Council reduced its element of Council Tax in 2023/24 by 2% following four years of no increases.**

**Members decided to further reduce the financial burden on taxpayers in 2024/25 when it cut its element of the Council Tax bill by 0.2%.** Just 10.9% of each household's Council Tax bill goes to Fenland District Council, with the remainder going to the other authorities.

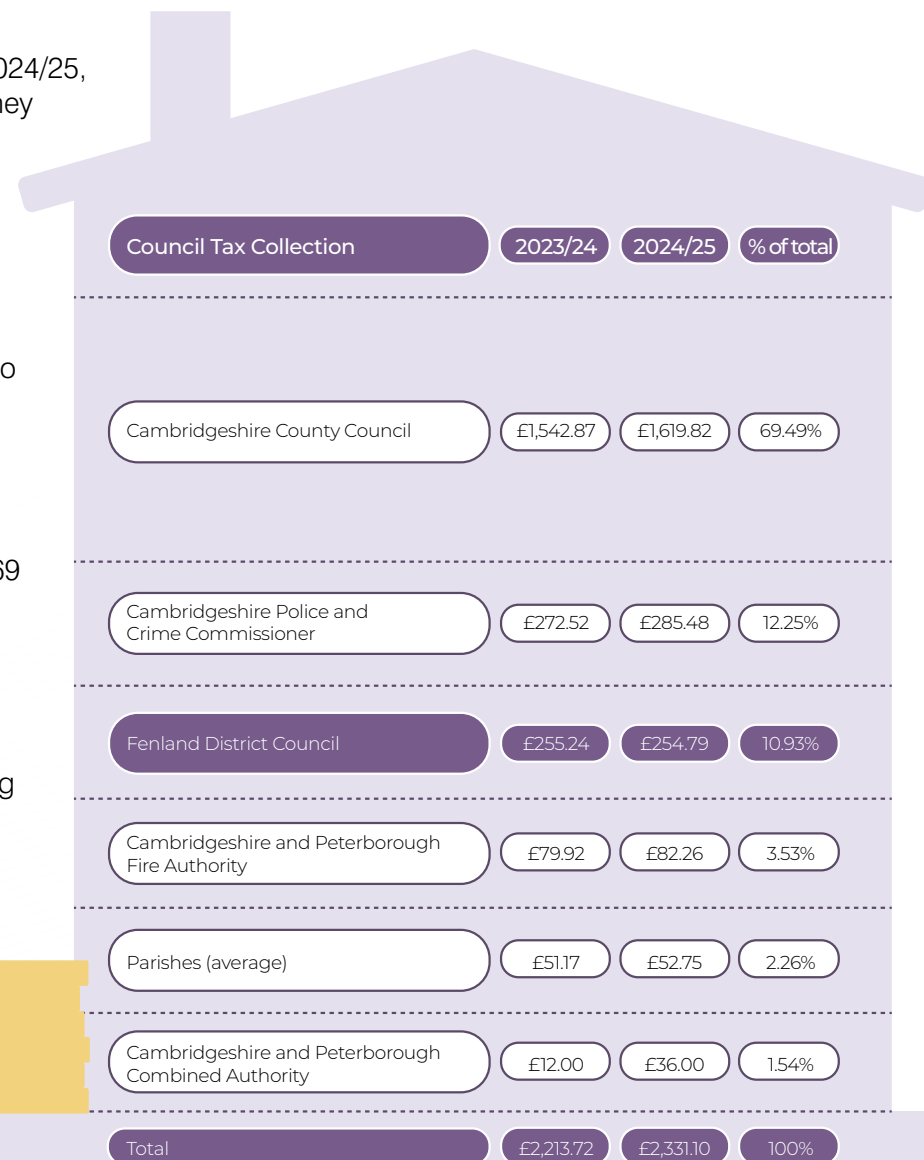
The numbers above relate to a Band D property. However, 83% of properties in Fenland are in Bands A-C. The average Council Tax per property in Fenland was £1,492.10 in 2023/24 and is £1,585.11 in 2024/25 and is the lowest average per property in Cambridgeshire. This also compares to an average Council Tax per property of £1,667.69 in 2024/25 across all English authorities.

### Our finances

The Council's net spending on services in 2023/24 was £15.985m. This sum is financed by the Council's share of Business Rates (£7.585m), Council Tax (£8.014m) and Government Revenue Support Grant (£0.173m) which resulted in a deficit of £212k being returned for 2023/24. At the budget meeting in February 2024, a net deficit of £548k was forecast at the year end. The deficit of £212k has been funded from the Budget Equalisation Reserve. This reserve represents the amount taken in tax which has not been spent and now stands at £1.654m.

Full details of the Council's Budget for 2023/24 and Medium Term Financial Strategy can be found at: [www.fenland.gov.uk/finance](http://www.fenland.gov.uk/finance)

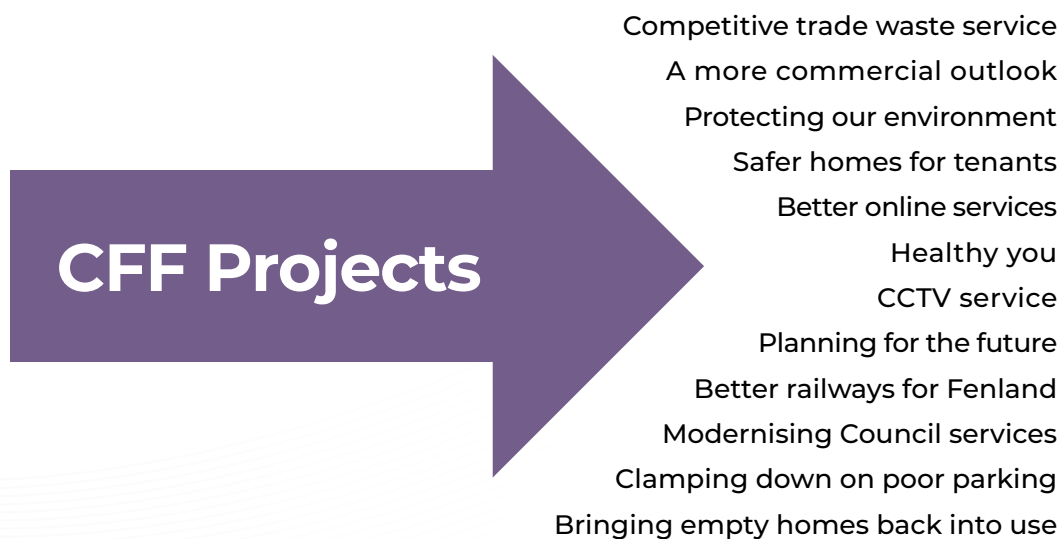
You may also wish to read our Business Plan. This explains our organisational priorities for the next financial year: [www.fenland.gov.uk/businessplan](http://www.fenland.gov.uk/businessplan)



## Council for the Future

In 2019, we began our Transformation Agenda programme when our Cabinet members selected a number of projects that would help contribute towards our 'Council for the Future' ambitions.

Although varied in scope and complexity, these 12 projects tackled areas of particular need in Fenland, and helped to sustainably transform our services whilst ensuring our organisation was fit for the future. Outcomes for each of the projects can be viewed in our 2022/23 Annual Report.



In 2023, at the start of a new term of office following the Local Elections, our members committed to building on the successes of the Transformation Agenda, and to develop a second phase – Transformation Agenda 2.

Spanning across all services within the council, the Transformation Agenda 2 programme ties together all major 'change' initiatives that are looking to improve how the council works and delivers services.

Whether this is reviewing a service, how systems support delivery or how staff are able to conduct their jobs in a more effective and flexible manner, the programme will aim to ensure we are an effective and efficient council for the future.



## Our Communities

### Support vulnerable members of our community

- With many people under financial pressure due to the ongoing cost-of-living crisis, we continued to help those in need of support. Together with our partners, we helped people to claim the financial support they are entitled to, know how to make their homes warmer and cheaper to run, manage debt or know where to turn if they need advice. Work has included additional training for customer services staff, helping them to identify those who may be struggling with the cost of living and equipping them to process applications for financial support, and continued funding for Citizens Advice Rural Cambs, helping ensure they can carry out their activities supporting Fenland residents. We also administered our Council Tax Support Fund for vulnerable households and provided additional support through our Council Tax Reduction scheme and exceptional hardship funds. In October 2023, following Storm Babet, we also assisted customers affected by flooding, providing impacted households and businesses with support.
- Our Housing Options team received 2201 requests for homeless advice and assistance (up 7.3% from last year); 1,143 of these approaches were resolved through the advice provided. 275 households were prevented from becoming homeless through various forms of intervention including (but not limited to) mediation, emotional support, budgeting advice, financial support and assisting with sourcing alternative accommodation.
- Through our Disabled Facilities Grants scheme, the Council provides home adaptation works for elderly, disabled and vulnerable householders to help them continue to live safely and independently in their homes. Last year we assisted 141 households with adaption works. These included the installation of walk-in showers, stairlifts, ramped access facilities and specialist equipment such as person hoists.
- The 16th Pride in Fenland awards was held in March 2024 to celebrate individuals and groups that give selflessly to others. There were a record 117 nominations for 79 different groups and individuals. Brave and selfless children, an octogenarian, who has spent decades running her chapel - and still varnishes the floors herself, and groups and individual volunteers who go to amazing lengths to get food to struggling families, elderly people and the homeless were among those celebrated.
- Our Golden Age project, which helps provide older residents with advice on services and support available to them at events across Fenland, hit a remarkable 20 years of service to the community in 2023. The events were launched in 2003 by the late Cllr Mac Cotterell MBE and have continued to be valuable to residents – and an enduring Council priority – ever since. Over the past year, events have been held in Whittlesey, Christchurch (where our first ever event was held in 2003), Wimblington, March and Parson Drove, attracting over 500 visitors in total. The events were supported by 35 different organisations and providers of care, financial assistance, social activities, health provision and other services for the over 60s. To date, almost 7,500 visitors have attended the Golden Age events.
- The Council recognised the substantial use of bed and breakfast accommodation for families whilst they were being supported through the homelessness process. This type of accommodation is not only unsuitable for families but also incurs significant costs. In response, the Council submitted bids to the Government's Local Authority Housing Fund and successfully secured a grant to contribute towards the purchase of 33 properties. These properties will offer safe and comfortable temporary housing for homeless families while their situations are assessed and addressed. This initiative aligns with the Council's Medium Term Council Strategy, providing both better living conditions for families and cost savings for the Council.

### Promote health and wellbeing for all

- In December 2023, we celebrated five years of working in partnership with Freedom Leisure to provide leisure centre services across the district. Despite an extremely challenging few years for the leisure industry with the Covid pandemic, energy cost crisis and cost of living challenges, the partnership has not only ensured that our leisure centres stay open, when swimming pools elsewhere in the country have closed, but that provision continues to be delivered at reduced cost to the taxpayer (compared with the in-house arrangement prior to the partnership). In 2023/24, there were improvements to the gym changing rooms at the George Campbell Leisure Centre in March which has also seen a state-of-the-art Changing Places toilet and reception area improvements completed in May 2024. Major investment to improve energy efficiency at the three swimming pool facilities is also planned for 2024/25. Total visits for the year exceeded 500,000 across the four centres and membership has remained stable despite economic pressures on customers. Additionally, customer satisfaction remains above the industry averages.
- Our Active Fenland team successfully secured grant funding from the Integrated Care System and Cambridgeshire County Council Public Health to help people of all ages and backgrounds to get more active, more often, and to lead healthier lifestyles. The funding helped to deliver 590 sports and physical activities to Fenland communities, including badminton, running, walking football, table tennis, yoga and strength and balance sessions, as well as tea dances and 'Love to Move' classes. In 2024, the team will be launching specific Active for Health sessions to encourage inactive and overweight people to become healthier and more active.
- We have continued to invest in our well-used and highly valued parks and open spaces. Together with our contractor Tivoli, we look after more than 135 hectares of parks and open spaces across Fenland. Work in the past year has included the opening of a new community pavilion joint funded by Fenland District Council, Cambridgeshire County Council and the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority, and an extensive play area makeover in Wisbech Park. The team continues to manage our cemeteries and closed cemeteries, maintaining a good service to the local community of these important reflective green spaces.
- With funding from Public Health, we began work on developing the Fenland Early Help Hub, a pilot approach aiming to improve collaborative service delivery across organisations for the benefit of residents. The hub will bring together a network of partners and services including health, housing, benefits, voluntary sector, primary care networks and more to provide a bespoke "one stop shop" of support and advice to individuals or families in their times of need. The objective will be to connect people to help and support earlier to prevent issues escalating and reduce the need for higher cost interventions. Phase 1, due to launch in the summer of 2024, will focus on supporting residents into/back into employment and training – with a view to expanding if future additional funding can be secured.

### Work with partners to promote Fenland through culture and heritage

- We successfully delivered the first round of the new Fenland Culture Fund, granting 19 organisations funding of more than £34,000 to boost arts, culture and heritage activities across the district. Funded projects that have already taken place include art and photography exhibitions, a food and culture festival, remembrance murals, art workshops for students and the purchase of equipment to improve access to creative resources in Fenland. The second round of the grant scheme, funded by Arts Council England and the Government's UK Shared Prosperity Fund, is due to launch later in 2024.

- We secured £50,000 of funding from the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Integrated Care System and worked together with Fenland-based 20Twenty Productions, an Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisation, to enable the delivery of the 'Express Yourself' project. The project supports children and young people's health and wellbeing through arts and cultural activity, based on the NHS 'Five Ways to Wellbeing'. So far, the project has positively engaged 200 children and young people across the district and gained fantastic feedback. It has also provided freelance creative opportunities for nine artists and professionals who have delivered the sessions and received training to further their own skills and development.
- In partnership with the council's Culture, Arts and Heritage Executive Advisory Committee, we successfully delivered the 2024 Fenland Poet Laureate Awards. The prestigious competition saw a total of 63 entries across the two adult and young poet categories, with an awards ceremony held in March 2024. His Majesty's Deputy Lieutenant of Cambridgeshire, Dan Schumann, who was among the guests at the ceremony, said the creativity and talent shown on the night was "truly remarkable".
- We, once again, supported the delivery of March Christmas Market and the Fenland Four Seasons events: March St George's Festival, Chatteris Midsummer Festival, Whittlesey Festival (which returned for the first time since Covid) and Wisbech Christmas Fayre. Thousands of visitors attended, and hundreds of businesses and community groups were able to boost funds with stalls. Town centre footfall tripled on the day of Wisbech Christmas Fayre. A new online booking system for pitches at events was successfully launched at the beginning of 2024.
- The Council's long running commitment to improve Wisbech High Street as part of the National Lottery Heritage-funded Wisbech High Street Project, continued as contractors began work on developing 24 High Street, which has been a gap in the run of shops for 40 years. Building is expected to be complete by the end of 2024.

Architects worked on a plan for 11-12 High Street, a site also owned by the Council to prevent it being a continued blot on the High Street. The Council is also working closely with owners of fire damaged 5 Market Place.

## Performance Indicators

	Target 2023/24	Performance
Total number of private rented homes where positive action has been taken to address safety issues	250	294
Proportion (%) of households presenting to the Council as homeless whose housing circumstances were resolved through Housing Options work	57%	45%
Number of empty properties brought back into use	50	86
New Homes Bonus achieved as a result of bringing empty homes back into use	£45,000	£109,173
Number of Active Health local sessions per year that improve community health	650	621
Customer feedback across Freedom Leisure facilities in Fenland	30	47
Value of Grants for creativity and culture managed by FDC	£201,000	£199,000



## Our Environment

### Deliver a high performing refuse, recycling and street cleansing service

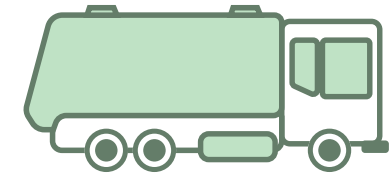
- We carried out more than 2.9 million bin collections from across the district, in all weathers, and collected more than 8,450 tonnes of materials for recycling. Cost of living pressures on residents resulted in less general waste and recycling being produced, but the majority of households continued to recycle their waste well – helping to generate more than £318,000 of income to support our services. Customer satisfaction with our Refuse and Recycling and Garden Waste (Brown Bin) services remains high with 94% and 90% respectively. The Garden Waste service has continued to remain popular with subscriptions at an all-time high of over 24,212 in 2023/24.

- We delivered a competitive trade waste service to almost 600 business customers, collecting over 1,260 tonnes of waste, including 133 tonnes of recycling and 98 tonnes of food waste. The service generated more than £522,600 of income to support our services.

- Our Cleansing and Rapid Response team continued to provide the excellent seven-day street sweeping, litter picking and fly-tipping removal service in our towns and villages. Last year they responded to 2,006 service requests from the public, with 93% actioned on the same or next day. Over 1,200 quality inspections were made in areas of high footfall – 97% met cleansing standards first time.

### Work with partners and the community on projects that improve the environment and our street scene

- We worked with a number of community environmental volunteering groups, including Street Pride, In Bloom and Friends Of groups, who carried out litter picks, planting and other community projects to help to keep Fenland clean, green and safe for all to enjoy. We once again supported Keep Britain Tidy's national Great British Spring Clean campaign, with 13 Street Pride groups, residents and schools getting involved in the country's biggest environmental clean-up. Benwick Street Pride celebrated its 10th anniversary and scooped a Silver Gilt award in the Anglia in Bloom competition, winning the small village category, while Chatteris In Bloom won the town category with a prestigious Gold award. The council also secured funding from the Cambridgeshire Police and Crime Commissioner's Safer Communities Fund to purchase new trolleys and boost Street Pride volunteers' litter picking efforts. Over £37,000 was also awarded to community groups living within the vicinity of wind turbines to improve their local environment. Projects included enhancements to green spaces, water harvesting, installation of compost toilets, switching to LED lighting and upgrading a bowls club to double glazed windows and doors.



More than **2.9 million**  
bin collections

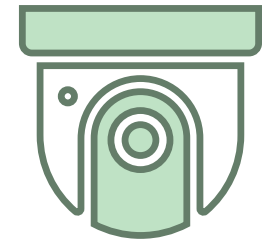


supported **13**  
**Street Pride** groups

- Our Street Scene team spent 4,500 hours out and about in the community, in all weathers, working on various proactive environment and street scene enforcement projects. Their work includes investigating fly-tipping and abandoned vehicles, carrying out littering and dog fouling patrols, enforcing dog control orders, and issuing fines to motorists parked illegally in our car parks. In 2023/24, the team issued 23 Fixed Penalty Notices for waste offences and successfully prosecuted two individuals for fly-tipping, with a combined fine total of £1,540 imposed by the courts. The team also investigated 236 reported abandoned vehicles and issued six car parking fines to drivers parked illegally at March Market Place. The team also successfully secured £3,900 from the Cambridgeshire Police and Crime Commissioner's Safer Communities Fund to tackle fly-tipping through signage, community engagement, waste removal and two new cameras for covert surveillance.

### Work with partners to keep people safe in their neighbourhoods by reducing crime and anti-social behaviour and promoting social cohesion

- Our shared CCTV service with Peterborough City Council maintained its 100%, round-the-clock service function – operating 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. The service delivered over 4,300 pro-active camera patrols, responded to over 1,100 incidents of crime and disorder across the district and supported our policing partners to make over 150 arrests for offences, helping to protect local communities and make the district safer. The CCTV service also provides the council's 'out of hours' telephone contact services, for example, homelessness, stray and lost dogs, cleansing incidents, dangerous buildings and structures, damaged trees, to name but a few areas. During 2023/24, the CCTV service has responded to over 388 calls for services from our telephone contact service.

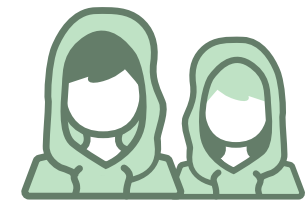


**4300** camera patrols

- Our Community Support and Community Safety teams successfully secured £84,000 from the Government's UK Shared Prosperity Fund to deliver two projects in Wisbech:

- £50,000 is being invested in youth provision, working with young people to enhance their life chances and choices. Work is ongoing to March 2025 but projects in 2023/24 included two 'Firebreak' fire service training courses with Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Service, football training with Peterborough United's POSH foundation, self-confidence, wellbeing and boxing training with Jordan Gill Next Generation, youth involvement in the development of a physical training programme with Living Sport, music production, coding and dance workshops and more.

- £34,000 is being invested to help reduce youth anti-social behaviour (ASB). The project is being delivered by Youth of Fenland CIC who completed 26 youth outreach sessions in Wisbech, engaging 347 young people on subjects that concerned them. Opportunities included individual support, referral to young people support services, supporting young carers and better access to education. The funding also supported the expansion of Operation Luscombe, a successful, police-led partnership response to street level ASB in Wisbech. From November 2023 to March 2024 there were 31 police patrols, providing opportunity for 169 individual community engagements, 13 ASB incidents dealt with, and 18 formal enforcement interventions. Enforcement interventions included the seizure of alcohol, cannabis and illegal vapes.



**£34k** to reduce youth anti-social behaviour

- Our Community Safety team received 247 referrals for anti-social behaviour (ASB) from various sources, including through our online reporting tool as well reports directly from councillors and partner agencies. Of the cases formally investigated by Community Safety, 60% related to nuisance behaviour, 23% were environmental ASB and 17% were considered to be personally directed at the person reporting. The team is also part of the Fenland Community Safety Partnership (CSP), a statutory group responsible for reducing ASB and crime and the fear of ASB and crime. In 2023/24, the partnership delivered a variety of projects with a focus on domestic abuse, serious organised crime, cybercrime, scams, and hate crime. Activities included community engagement sessions to raise awareness and give people the opportunity to discuss concerns, and training sessions for frontline professionals and volunteers. The partnership also worked with the retail sector to reduce shoplifting, linked with local taxi providers to help combat domestic abuse, supported Cambridgeshire Constabulary with their Business Against Abuse rollout in Fenland and worked with the Diverse Communities Forum and Cambridgeshire Constabulary to raise awareness of third party hate crime reporting centres. In addition, the CSP worked closely with the Office of the Police Crime Commissioner (OPCC) to deliver externally funded projects such as Safer Streets initiatives, and to support the OPCC Crime Plan.

## Performance Indicators

	Target 2023/24	Performance
Rapid or Village Response requests actioned the same or next day	90%	93%
% of inspected streets meeting our cleansing standards	93%	97%
% of collected household waste recycled through the Blue Bin service	28%	26.5%
Customer satisfaction with Refuse and Recycling services	90%	93.6%
Customer satisfaction with Garden Waste service	85%	89.8%
Number of Street Pride, Green Dog Walkers and Friends of Community environmental events supported	204	245
% of local businesses who thought they were supported and treated fairly	95%	100%
% of those asked who are satisfied with Fenland District Council's events	90%	97%

## Our Economy

### Attract new businesses, jobs and opportunities whilst supporting our existing businesses in Fenland

- The Economic Growth team, Fenland for Business, continued to provide advice and support to numerous businesses, including around funding, skills and training, business premises and research and development. Among the businesses supported were Whittlesey's Rai and Rai Bathrooms, which is deaf-led and provides inclusive employment opportunities, with several deaf team members. And Vita Nova Solutions, in Chatteris, which credits the support received as being a key contributor to its ongoing growth as a local employer. The team also engaged with 59 companies considering Fenland as an inward investment or expansion location, with three successful inward investments, one foreign direct investment from Peru and four expansions.

- The Economic Growth team awarded:

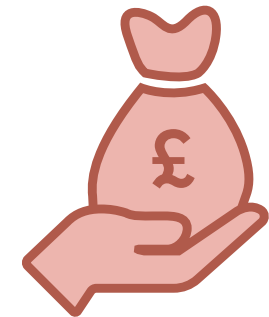
- £194,910 to eight Fenland businesses through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund. All available funds (for years one and two of the funding award) were distributed and projects delivered by the 31 March 2024 deadline. The funding helped businesses to invest in new technology, diversify their income or create new employment opportunities.
- £75,005 to fifteen businesses through the UK Rural England Prosperity Fund. The funding helped rural businesses to develop new products and facilities that will be of wider benefit to the local economy, including farm businesses looking to diversify income streams).
- Launched three additional grants through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (year three) in December 2023, with expression of interest applications closing on 6 April 2024.

- For the Investment in Business Fund - 123 expressions of interest were received. Grants requested totalled £2,632,284 with a projected return of investment totalling £4,513,000. Though, only £316,500 is available.

- For Fenland Start-Up Business Support Programme – 26 expressions of interest received.

- Fenland Rural England Prosperity Fund – 20 expressions of interest received.

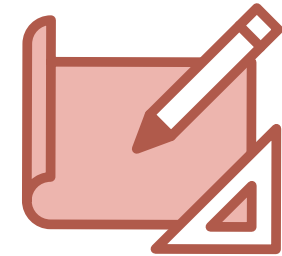
- The team engaged and informed businesses through their relaunched website, newsletter, social media, in-person meetings and business events held in association with partners such as the Chamber of Commerce, Smart Manufacturing Alliance, the Department for Work and Pensions and Innovate East. They also worked with skills organisations to help ensure they link with local businesses and their skills needs, including Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority Growth Hub, the College of West Anglia, the North Cambridgeshire Training Centre and Anglia Ruskin University in Peterborough.



**£269k to support  
local businesses**

## Promote and enable housing growth, economic growth and regeneration across Fenland

- 2023/2024 saw a significant uplift in the delivery of affordable dwellings in Fenland in comparison to the previous two years. 16 of the affordable ownership units in 2023/2024 were delivered as part of the First Homes scheme and were the first ones within the district. In total, there were 244 affordable homes delivered (144 affordable rented and 96 affordable other tenures e.g. Shared Ownership).
- Work continued on plans to develop two new housing schemes on sites formerly owned by the Council – The Elms in Chatteris and Nene Waterfront in Wisbech. The schemes, being developed by the Council's investment arm Fenland Future Ltd, will help to address local housing needs while generating a financial return that can be reinvested back into local communities.
- Work continued on projects outlined in our Growing Fenland masterplans, part of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority (CPCA) strategic Market Town Masterplans. In 2023/24, this included the relocation of Chatteris Museum into new premises (the former Barclays Bank building), improvements to the sports courts at the Manor Leisure Centre in Whittlesey, progress on the March Future High Streets Fund project, and work to develop the case for a Whittlesey Relief Road.
- Work continued on March town centre's multi-million pound regeneration, a programme of inter-related schemes being delivered by various partners to transform and futureproof the town centre. Highlights of 2023/24 include:
  - Completion of the Market March Place improvements scheme.
  - Purchase of the former Barclays Bank in Broad Street, to prevent it falling into disrepair and secure the site for future development.
  - Start of work on the Broad Street scheme in June 2023, including transformation of the road layout and new public realm area. The scheme is due for completion in October 2024.
  - Specialist removal of historic Grade II Listed fountain for careful storage, ready for specialist repair and reinstatement once Broad Street works are complete.
  - Redevelopment of partially derelict and one of March's oldest Conservation Area buildings, 26 Market Place, into retail and residential use, with support from the regeneration project's grant scheme.
  - Grant funding investment into March Dental, now a flagship business on Broad Street.
  - Demolition of old toilet block to enable redevelopment of the riverside and further progress on Broad Street.
  - Design and costing of a new toilet block will be built in Grays Lane.
  - Increase in car parking spaces in the City Road car park, on the site of the old recycling centre.
  - Increase in the number of taxi bays within the town centre.
- Our planning team determined 645 major, minor and other planning applications – between 67% and 92% of these were decided on time, depending on application type. The team also dealt with 674 other types of application (such as prior notifications, certificates of lawfulness, discharge of condition, general enquiries, and licensing requests) and received 81 pre-application enquiries, in addition to 'traditional' planning applications. We also received 214 planning enforcement complaints and resolved 143 cases. During 2023/24, the team also implemented efficiency improvements to planning processes as part of the council's ongoing transformation work.



Work continues on the **£8.4m regeneration** of March town centre



## Promote and lobby for infrastructure improvements across the district

- Supported by Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority funding, work continued to improve transport connectivity in Fenland. Highlights in 2023/24 include:
  - Progress on the Fenland Railway Station Masterplans project including the opening Manea Station car park. The car park, designed to serve the station's current demand and accommodate future growth, was opened as rail journeys from the station increased to over 21,000 a year for the first time.
  - Securing £3million for a programme of enhancements at Whittlesea Station (to be spent between April 2024 and March 2027). An Outline Business Case and option development work will form the first phase of work in 2024/2025.
  - Contractor appointed for the Whittlesey Relief Road project, as part of the town's Growing Fenland masterplan. Work on an Outline Business Case will begin evidencing the need for the relief road which would help to improve journey reliability, reduce congestion, and increase capacity for new housing as well as improve air quality and road safety conditions.
- A number of scheme recommendations from our Fenland Cycling, Walking and Mobility Aid Improvement Strategy were completed. These included lining and signage improvements across March, as part of the March Area Transport Strategy, and improved footpaths and bus stops on the A605, Whittlesey, as part of the new Aldi supermarket and residential development.
- The Hereward Community Rail Partnership, managed by Fenland District Council in partnership with train operators, railway user groups, station adoption groups and local residents, continued work to promote and enhance the Hereward railway line and its stations at Peterborough, Whittlesea, March, Manea and Ely. Highlights included regular 'Meet the Manager' events, securing funding for Manea walking and cycling map and a series of mini maps, and developing materials to promote the railway line including a drone video.

### Performance Indicators

% of major planning applications determined in 13 weeks

70%

92.3%

% of minor applications determined in 8 weeks

70%

67%

% of other applications determined in 8 weeks

80%

86%

% occupancy of our Business Premises estate

90%

94.2%

% occupancy Wisbech Yacht Harbour

95%

95%

## Quality Organisation

- We collected over £68.3million in Council Tax and £25.46million in Business Rates. This plays a major part in funding the key services we provide to the community. Over 85% of the council tax collected is also passed onto the Police, Fire Service, County and Parish Councils – see the 'Money Matters' section for more information.
- We continued to roll out our ongoing transformation agenda programme to optimise our workforce, improve services and customer experience and make it even easier for people to interact with the Council. Phase 1 and 2 of the programme is on track to deliver over £1m savings over the medium term and has not only helped develop more modern and resilient working practices for staff, but also improve customer experience. The MyFenland team also answered more than 50,800 phone calls and resolved 99% of customer queries at the first point of call. We also received 6,653 payments via PayPoint, totalling over £850,000.
- Our website saw over 335,000 visits and received over 21,750 online form submissions across 49 different topics. The front page of the website was regularly updated with the latest news, events and consultations to maintain and develop user engagement. As part of our ongoing work to improve our digital services and user journeys, we also expanded our suite of online forms, with a new bulky waste form and updates to our suite of environmental services. The forms enable residents to apply for services or submit information online 24/7, and automatically transfer information received directly to teams on the ground and into back-office systems – saving hours of resource in processing time.
- Our Social Media channels continue to thrive, with 8,850 followers on X (formerly Twitter), 7,700 on Facebook, and 1,670 on LinkedIn. Over the past year, we have utilised these platforms to help engage and inform residents and businesses alike, with council news, events, campaigns, service updates and awareness, and consultations. We also use the channels to promote our online services and customer self-service forms and advocate behaviour change to tackle issues such as fly-tipping and dog fouling and improve recycling rates. We have also increased our use of video content to further develop our online engagement.
- The Licensing team issued 520 licences and dealt with 123 service requests for a variety of licensable services including Taxi, Premises, Alcohol, Scrap Metal and Animal Licensing, to help ensure such businesses are well managed and operating safely and legally. As part of the Responsible Authority Officer group, the team also worked with internal and external partners to deliver multi-agency enforcement days within the district.



**50,800** phone calls answered



**335,000** website visits

- We consulted with residents, stakeholders and partners about a wide range of topics to help us understand local people's priorities and shape our service. Consultations included asking for views on our draft Budget and Business Plan and plans to extend Public Spaces Protection Orders (PSPOs) to help tackle issues associated with irresponsible dog ownership, such as dog fouling, and anti-social behaviour and street drinking in Wisbech. We also carried out regular satisfaction surveys for our green and blue bin service, garden waste service and street cleansing. In November 2023, our Environmental Health team also undertook a new initiative to engage with residents by asking them to suggest sites for air quality testing.
- We were reaccredited with the Government's prestigious Customer Service Excellence (CSE) award last year. The CSE standard serves as a national quality mark, recognising organisations in both the public and private sectors that embody a genuine customer-centric culture and strive for continuous improvement. The independent assessor also bestowed the Council with CSE 'Compliance Plus' accreditation in six areas, recognising its adherence to best practices.
- Our Environmental Health team has delivered a wide range of services:
  - Supported hundreds of food businesses to ensure compliance with a wide range of regulatory requirements. Given advice and undertaken inspections at more than 350 business premises, ensuring the highest of standards can be achieved. A large number of these businesses received a food hygiene rating of 5, the highest award possible under the national scheme. In 2023, we commenced a series of social media campaigns supporting those premises who receive the highest ratings.
  - Investigated more than 1,800 reports of noise or other environmental problems that may be affecting residents, the majority of these being resolved informally.
  - Carried out a review of air quality testing monitoring sites, informed by public consultation. The work included the identification of four new testing locations from residents, the relocation of 13 NO2 placements and locations that residents raised ongoing concerns about being retained. Work with the Combined Authority also saw the installation of three new air quality monitors across Whittlesey and Wisbech, with funding bids submitted for a further monitor in Whittlesey.
  - With the reopening of Port of Sutton Bridge, our international responsibility for Ship Sanitation Inspections recommenced at the beginning of 2024, with regained focus going into the next year. We are designated by the World Health Association to provide a port health function to international and domestic ships that access our ports.



**1,800** noise and environmental nuisance complaints investigated

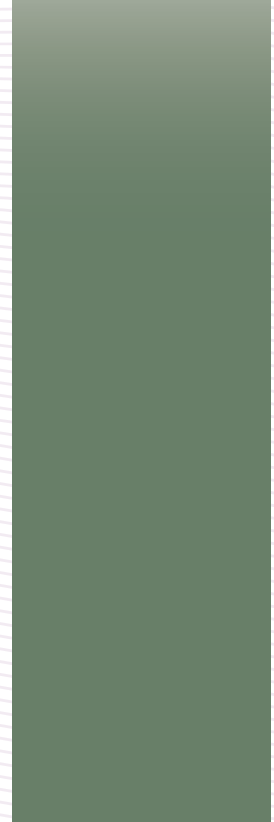


**350** business premises inspected

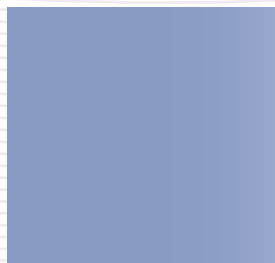


- We inspected 32 industrial processes, ranging from incinerators to maggot breeding facilities, seeing the application for one new process and the variation of four existing permits.
- Assisted UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) with infectious disease outbreaks including salmonella, norovirus, campylobacter and cryptosporidium, including proactive sampling of high-risk food products as part of a national sampling programme.
- Working with the Integrated Care Partnership, we introduced a new referral process for households suffering with environmental hazards such as rodents, bed bugs and other public health pests.
- Continued to support and advise those businesses licensed to undertake skin piercing, including tattooing, acupuncture, Botox and eyebrow microblading.

Performance Indicators	Target 2023/24	Performance
% of customer queries resolved at the first point of contact	90%	99%
% of customers satisfied by our service	90%	97.94%
% of contact centre calls answered within 20 seconds	46.5%	43.96%
% of contact centre calls handled	80%	83.46%
Days taken to process Housing Benefit new claims and changes	8.0 days	7.37 days
Days taken to process Council Tax Support new claims and changes	9.0 days	9.52 days
% of Council tax collected	95.72%	99.40%
Council Tax net collection fund receipts	£68,755,817	£68,341,134
% of NNDR Collected	96.79%	96.58%
NNDR net collection fund receipts	£24,779,458	£25,460,126
Number of online forms submitted via FDC website	21,000	21,848



Fenland District Council  
Fenland Hall  
County Road  
March  
Cambridgeshire  
PE15 8NQ



T: 01354 654321  
E: [info@fenland.gov.uk](mailto:info@fenland.gov.uk)  
W: [fenland.gov.uk](http://fenland.gov.uk)

