

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

MONDAY, 26 JUNE 2023 - 2.30 PM



PRESENT: Councillor Mrs M Davis (Chairman), Councillor R Gerstner (Vice-Chairman), Councillor B Barber, Councillor G Booth, Councillor L Foice-Beard, Councillor A Gowler, Councillor A Hay, Councillor S Imafidon, Councillor Dr H Nawaz, Councillor E Sennitt Clough and Councillor Woollard

APOLOGIES: Councillor J Carney and Councillor D Roy

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE: Linda Albon (Member Services & Governance Officer), Amy Brown (Assistant Director), Sam Anthony (Head of HR and OD), Alan Boughen (Safer Fenland Partnership Development Officer), Dan Horn (Assistant Director) and Phil Hughes (Head of Leisure Services/SRO March Future High Street Project)

GUESTS: Councillor J French, Councillor S Wallwork, Lorraine King (Head of Benefits, Council Tax, Billing & Systems, ARP), Matthew Waite-Wright (Head of NNDR Recovery & Enforcement APR), Inspector Andy Morris (Fenland Neighbourhood Inspector), Sgt Chris Arnold, Matt Wickham (Operations Director, Freedom Leisure), Paul Doyle (Regional Manager, Freedom Leisure), Simon Pesic-Smith (Area Manager, Freedom Leisure)

OSC1/23 APPOINTMENT OF CHAIRMAN FOR THE MUNICIPAL YEAR

It was proposed by Councillor Hay, seconded by Councillor Sennitt Clough and resolved that Councillor Davis be elected Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel for the Municipal Year.

OSC2/23 APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIRMAN FOR THE MUNICIPAL YEAR

It was proposed by Councillor Davis, seconded by Councillor Hay and resolved that Councillor Gerstner be elected Vice-Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel for the Municipal Year.

OSC3/23 PREVIOUS MINUTES.

The minutes of the meeting of 27 February 2023 were confirmed and signed.

OSC4/23 UPDATE ON PREVIOUS ACTIONS.

Members considered the update on previous actions and made the following comments:

- Councillor Booth stated that in respect of the Planning matter between FDC and Clarion, he still believes there to be a disconnect between what officers are being told and Clarion members regarding whether pre-application discussions took place. Nick Harding was looking into that and as Councillor Booth is still waiting for a response, he would like this kept on the agenda.
- Councillor Hay asked if there is any further update regarding the attendance of the Mayor of the CPCA at an O&S meeting given that he was originally due to attend in December 2022. Amy Brown advised that this matter is in hand; his office has been contacted with the list of meeting dates and we are waiting to hear back.
- Councillor Booth said that the watching brief item on Planning can be taken off the agenda now the position with Peterborough City Council is known.

OSC5/23 ANNUAL REVIEW OF ANGLIAN REVENUES PARTNERSHIP

Members considered the annual review of Anglia Revenues Partnership (ARP), which updated the Panel on the performance of the Council's Revenues and Benefits Service since it became part of ARP on 1 April 2014.

The Chairman welcomed Councillor Mrs French, Sam Anthony, and Matthew Waite-Wright and Lorraine King from ARP to the meeting.

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

1. Councillor Hay said the report mentioned moving to digitalisation for the purpose of enhanced data share with the DWP and HMRC. Although it seemed to be working well with the DWP she noted that HMRC were now declining to release information without National Insurance (NI) numbers being shared and she asked what action was being taken to address this. Matthew Waite-Wright explained that as part of the Digital Economy Act, ARP had taken part in a Cabinet office pilot scheme where local authorities supplied lists of council tax debtors to the DWP and HMRC so ARP could obtain work details and identify vulnerable customers in receipt of benefits. However, HMRC had a change of heart and would not supply the work details of customers unless supplied with their NI numbers. Under Council Tax legislation there is no need for billing authorities to retain NI numbers because these are classed as personal data under general data protection regulations of which ARP would be in breach by collecting and storing this data. The pilot has now ended, and feedback has been given to the Cabinet Office; it is expected that further trials will take place when ARP will again state that work details will be required from HMRC. Matthew Waite-Wright added for context that the idea was that on provision of those work details, ARP would write to the individual customers with an invitation to undertake a payment arrangement, if no arrangement was forthcoming ARP could then use their powers to contact employers with an attachment of earnings order to have the monies deducted from wages. However, at this stage no further progress has been made as no response has been received from central Government.
2. Councillor Gerstner asked if ARP could provide members with a flowchart setting out their approach to enforcement. Matthew Waite-Wright agreed to send one out but in the meantime had tabled a chart for the meeting and he proceeded to explain the process of billing, recovery, and enforcement. He added that he could not stress enough that removal of goods is a very rare occurrence, and in most cases a payment arrangement is agreed and managed. However, as a last resort if, for any reason, a collection cannot be made, for example in the instance of death or bankruptcy, a debt will be written off but not before all other avenues have been explored. Councillor Gerstner thanked Matthew Waite-Wright for the explanation and asked what the time frame is from billing to enforcement. Matthew Waite-Wright stated this would be April to July.
3. Councillor Hay asked what is to stop people from continually having council tax debt written off? Matthew Waite-Wright said that there are specific procedures to follow and prior to every debt being submitted for write-off every conceivable action is taken; ARP are bound by legislation but the ultimate decision falls with Fenland District Council.
4. Councillor Nawaz asked what powers enforcement agents have when there is a case of genuine hardship and what happens with vacant properties that have seemingly been abandoned. Matthew Waite-Wright responded that their powers are limited, enforcement agents have no power to force entry, they can only knock on the door; at most they can take the car on the drive. ARP employ their own enforcement agents which means tighter control than if the work was referred to national enforcement agents. Also, ARP agents are fully certified and trained to pick up on areas of vulnerability. This is not specifically defined but if someone is elderly or disabled, quite often these facts are not known until agents turn up at the door; agents will then use their discretion and return the case to ARP. Empty properties are dealt with by the Council Tax team and for long-term empty properties, ARP will work closely

with councils to identify these. The council tax records will show them as empty but there is a financial incentive for councils and ARP in the form of a government scheme called New Homes Bonus and if ARP identifies an empty property and finds that someone is living there, it is the equivalent of a new property being built in the district so ARP go to great lengths to identify empty properties and establish if anyone is actually occupying them.

5. Councillor Imafidon asked what the procedure is to bring back into use long abandoned properties that have recently been purchased at auction or reoccupied. He also wanted to know how a property is re-established for the purpose of charging council tax if it has previously been deleted by the Valuation Office Agency (VOA) and how ARP determine when a new occupier has moved in to be able to calculate the billing. Matthew Waite-Wright explained that the process of bringing empty derelict properties back into use is not the remit of ARP, but they rely on being informed from various sources that a property may be occupied; mostly people contact ARP to register themselves. Councils will usually know because they tend to receive a request for bins to be emptied and will then pass the information on. For a property to be removed by the VOA, it must be in an extreme state of disrepair to the point that it is uninhabitable, for example missing a roof or walls. Also, ARP have contact with planning and licensing departments so will be informed if a property is brought back into use.
6. Councillor Nawaz said that with the number of rented properties being higher these days, often with a quick turnover of tenants, he would like to know how long it takes to reach the stage from first receiving tenancy agreements to sending out demand notices, and what happens if the tenant has already left the property before the council tax bill can be generated. Matthew Waite-Wright explained that if landlords use letting agents, they have a legal obligation to tell ARP who is living in their property. Where there has been a quick turnover, then they would have to launch an investigation. In many circumstances an online automated process begins once notification is received. Lorraine King confirmed that on average this process can take about four weeks depending on what information is needed but work is being done to improve on that.
7. Councillor Gowler asked how fraud is identified and if figures are available on suspected fraud. Matthew Waite-Wright said that the main fraud identified is that of single person discount, which is a 25% discount on council tax. It is the most widely abused and it is found by employing credit reference agencies to identify these cases. Once ARP receive notification that something is amiss, they launch their own fraud investigation. The people concerned are written to, interviewed where necessary and then relevant adjustments are made. Other frauds identified involve housing tenancy for authorities that still have housing stock, business rates and local council tax support; ARP works closely with the DWP on joint investigations for benefit fraud.
8. Councillor Davis said she noted that the ongoing review and audit of Small Business Rate Relief (SBRR) is to be completed by October 2023 and asked if this is still on target given that there are shortages in the Finance Team. Matthew Waite-Wright said that internal audits are carried out by member councils own internal audit teams; this pertains to non-domestic rates which are audited by East Suffolk Council whilst Fenland District Council audits ARP's enforcement team. It is hoped that the SBRR audit will be completed by August or September as there are no staff shortages within the East Suffolk team.
9. Councillor Davis said she also noted from the report that there has been a steady increase in business hereditaments and asked why this was. Matthew Waite-Wright said there was no overall reason but there are now more buildings than four years ago, more homes and edge of town developments. Another factor is that farms have diversified into providing tea shops or other activities on site, and large properties have often been converted into smaller properties. Another factor is holiday lets; some people have been unscrupulously registering second homes as holiday lets because business rates do not have to be paid on small businesses, but they avoid the second home council tax charge. This will be combatted by a change in legislation that to be registered for a holiday let, the property has to be available for 20 weeks a year and has to actually be let for 70 days in a 12-month period.
10. Councillor Booth said that when ARP last met with the O&S Panel in December 2021 ARP were going to undertake a review of complaint handling. However, he could not see any mention of it within this report and asked what the result of that review was and if ARP could

provide that information consistently on an ongoing basis. Lorraine King responded that ARP do monitor complaints and report to a working group across the partnership to see that they look at lessons learned and record the outcomes. Councillor Booth said he noted last time that only two complaints had been reported which he felt was too low given there were 17,000 enforcement cases, which led him to believe that perhaps complaints were not being recorded proactively. He understands that complaints are not always valid but because council tax is an emotive subject, there must be a higher number of complaints than this. Lorraine King said the complaints she mentioned had come via the host authorities, but the enforcement agencies have their own separate complaints process and would have been recording the complaints that they received. Matthew Waite-Wright added that there is some double handling; ARP have their own complaints process for the enforcement team however enforcement complaints do also go through the host authority complaints procedure. A breakdown of enforcement complaints is undertaken quarterly and provided to the Operational Improvement Board, so they are analysed, and ARP have the stats to back that up.

11. Councillor Imafidon asked if there is a period of time that a partner can live with someone claiming single person discount before the discount ends and what is the situation if that partner has their own property but spends a few nights a week in the property of someone claiming single person discount, does that person have to declare this? Matthew Waite-Wright responded that Section 6 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 refers to solo main residents. Is it that person's sole residence or main residence if they have more than one property? The practice to discerning somebody's main residence include: do they own it, are they in a relationship with people who live there, are their doctors and dentists nearby, how many nights a week do they spend there? So, if there is a lodger in the property who has their main residence elsewhere, stays Monday to Friday in the other property but goes home at the weekend, he would say the home address is the main residence and not where they are lodging. However, each case must be decided on its own merits. Under Inland Revenue regulations, when determining someone's residence they define it by the number of nights spent at a property. For Council Tax it is more determined by the home address, not where someone is lodging if they are working away. However, each case is looked at on merit.
12. Councillor Booth referred to alternative fuel payments and asked if it is correct that only a quarter of eligible people have claimed this. Lorraine King agreed there had been a low take up, but they have been working on publicity to try and increase that. It is a two-stage process, the application goes directly to the Government and following a filtering process and series of checks, eligible applications are referred to ARP. Councillor Booth said he had been contacted by a resident who had been told his claim had been lost in the system and he was asked to complete a second claim. However, that was declared void because it was stated he had made two claims and was therefore trying to claim too much. The scheme has now finished but what lessons can be learned going forward as this resident was penalised for following instructions and that is not right. Lorraine King responded that ARP took part in a pilot, with the entire process set up by Government who check for duplicates before anything reaches the local authorities, but ARP are working closely with Government as they themselves have identified some loopholes, and each time something has been put in place to resolve that. ARP have also instigated a meeting which will take place next week with the Government to go through lessons learned and see what can be done better if they were to do a similar scheme in the future. Councillor Booth thanked Lorraine King.
13. Councillor Hay commented that part of the problem she found was that there was no number with which to contact ARP having heard nothing herself about the fuel payment. As a councillor she was able to get the assistance of Member Services who contacted ARP who then rang her. It transpired that the oil company she uses relies on a delivery note that contains her name and address as well as the price paid but she was told that was not sufficient as an invoice is required. However, the fuel company do not issue invoices because she pays before delivery which acts as an invoice and she was only able to gain resolution through Member Services, without this she may still be waiting and there must be many other people in the same position but without the same recourse to assistance that she received. Lorraine King responded that as this is a government scheme, they have their own national call centre for enquiries hence why

ARP do not advertise a number. Regarding delivery notes, invoices and receipts, they had numerous meetings as part of the pilot explaining the types of evidence they were receiving, asking for some discretion as there were five strict criteria to be met. ARP has done a lot of work to try and work through this. If the set of criteria are not met, then the claim must be cancelled and again notifications come from Government, and ARP has no control over this.

14. Council Booth said the experience relayed to him was like that experienced by Councillor Hay. Unfortunately, it was a classic example of the Government setting rules and not seeing how it works practically, with people being sent round the houses trying to speak to someone. Lorraine King said ARP were able to have some influence on shaping the process and raising anomalies and although the scheme has closed, the date for final payment has not been reached yet so she welcomes receiving any examples which she will take forward.
15. Councillor Nawaz asked if ARP get cases of multiple applications which could be considered fraudulent. Lorraine King said they do but there are a lot of checks in place as there are across all benefits that they administer.
16. Councillor Davis said that despite the issues members have heard about regarding fuel payments, generally the team have done a fantastic job of making sure that all the money that could go out does and she would like this to be noted.
17. Councillor Booth requested that for future meetings, regular attendees such as ARP be given a copy of the minutes of the last meeting they attended as a reminder of the discussions that took place previously; this would also be of particular benefit to new members. Councillor Davis agreed and requested this be formally noted.
18. Councillor Davis thanked ARP, Sam Anthony and Councillor Mrs French for their time.

The annual review of Anglia Revenues Partnership was noted for information.

OSC6/23 COMMUNITY SAFETY PARTNERSHIP

Members considered the Community Safety Partnership report.

The Chairman welcomed Councillor Sue Wallwork, Alan Boughen, Dan Horn, and Inspector Andy Morris to the meeting.

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

1. Councillor Hay asked what is being done to get out the message that e-scooters are illegal to use on public highways unless part of a scheme in the inner cities, as not everyone is aware they are breaking the law. Inspector Morris agreed e-scooters do present a challenge, and in Fenland police use the '4 E' approach, that is to educate, encourage and explain before using enforcement. They have an operation that works closely with their prevention hub, which is doing a lot of work to address retailers, manufacturers, insurance companies, schools, and parents. The Safer Schools Officer repeatedly gives presentations in schools about the use of e-scooters, one school was encouraging their use as a safe mode of transport so that had to be addressed quickly. It is a constant battle but statistically, Fenland is the safest of the six district areas across the force in terms of how many road traffic collisions have involved e-scooters and how many of them have been used in crime. A further challenge is that in Cambs City they are legal; eventually it is likely they will be made legal more widely but in the meantime he would expect officers not to turn a blind eye unless something more pressing takes their attention. If they come across someone who has already been spoken to, they will look at them more punitively. In essence therefore, the police are doing what they can in terms of education and enforcement, in terms of awareness there is a quarterly corporate communications campaign. Meanwhile, retailers continue to sell them as it is not illegal to do so, and they can be used on private land.
2. Councillor Hay thanked Inspector Morris and mentioned that Chatteris also has a problem with off-road bikes, but it is difficult to ring the police for action as many do not have number plates.

Inspector Morris said tactics to deal with off-road bikes are quite challenging because unless there is an immediate risk to life which they are made aware of, the consequences of going after someone are greater than the initial threat. There is a problem-solving plan in place for that very issue in Chatteris, working with the community and the Problem-Solving Group to identify those involved and working with the schools, as it is likely the perpetrators are in education. The Safer Schools officer is on the case as are the March Neighbourhood Policing Team and Inspector Morris said he would like for members to encourage their constituents to report the matter as well because although they may not be able to do anything there and then, he can raise that there have been an excessive number of service requests in so many days and would then be able to call it in for additional support. There is a wider network of resources available to him that must be backed up by data. He meets regularly with Sgt Arnold to review calls for service and discuss the issues and sometimes what the community is telling them is different to what is in front of them, and it is therefore often challenging to justify putting resources into something if the calls for service are not being received.

3. Councillor Booth expressed his thanks to Sgt Arnold and the Wisbech team regarding the issue of road safety because he has seen an increase of police enforcement checks being undertaken in rural areas and is grateful for the support given to Community Speedwatch. He would like assurance that the police will continue with this strategy as it is starting to work and can be seen in their figures. Inspector Morris said all the neighbourhood policing team are trained to use speed guns and he thanked Councillor Booth for the recognition which he will feed back. They set quarterly engagement priorities based on what communities say what they want the police to address, and speeding is mentioned each time. Hence there is a lot of focus on speeding enforcement, and when looking at what has been done, the team has spent over 400 hours on speed enforcement since the start of the year and have reported over 100 drivers for summons and issued over 200 fixed penalty notices and this work will continue to support Vision Zero.
4. Councillor Barber said there has been a marked increase in anti-social behaviour in villages around Wisbech over the last few months; police are coming to talk about this in Leverington, but what is happening to try and stop it? Inspector Morris said it had been highlighted to him as having escalated about two months ago and he referred to his earlier point about off-road biking and the importance of calling in. Firstly, he asked Sgt Arnold to commission a problem-solving plan, the purpose of which is to understand the scale of the issue, this involves research into the offenders, calls for service and feedback received from the community to understand what is going on. He agreed it is a priority to tackle ASB in the rural areas and has the Safer Schools Officer going into the schools to speak to students. A meeting is being planned with those identified to understand why they are behaving as they do; he has dealt with similar issues before where sometimes funding bids have been productive in getting young people occupied and out of antisocial behaviour taking place because of boredom, but sometimes it does purely involve criminal intent which of course will then be dealt with differently. If the police can support an issue by reducing boredom risk then they will; resources are deployed currently to Leverington with a dedicated special constable, and there is a crossover between neighbourhood policing teams to support each other. Inspector Morris added that he will be at that meeting in Leverington himself next week to explain more.
5. Councillor Gerstner acknowledged the comprehensive 'You Said, We Did' in the report pack and stated he feels sympathetic for the police. Until government legislation is made clearer for police forces then they are in a very difficult position. That said, it is a case of waiting for an accident to happen, and he feels that is when action will be ramped up. Also, he understands the issue of resources as Chairman of Neighbourhood Watch for 14 years. In respect of Whittlesey, the perpetrators know what time the police work and at a town council meeting it was asked whether consideration could be given to funding being made available to extend those hours on an ad hoc basis, particularly in summer when people congregate later at night. He would not like to target a specific group of people, but anti-social behaviour and damage tends to occur more often in the summer months. Inspector Morris said he appreciated the feedback, there are provisions under the Police Act where local authorities can make applications in terms of funding. It is not something he would consider a long-term fix, but he is

giving consideration to changing hours for that reason to provide a more visible town presence. Officers do have to balance work and personal life, but policing does need to be more flexible to meet and support demand.

6. Councillor Davis said some of the villages are not getting the speed checks they would like to see and asked if there are any plans for moving around the villages. Inspector Morris said yes, but it must be intelligence-led, therefore let him know of specific times and he will put officers in place.
7. Councillor Nawaz asked if speed cameras are monitored and enforced, stating that if police are seen to be more vigilant perhaps drivers would take more notice. He quoted a particular stretch of road on the A605 leading into Whittlesey from Coates and Eastrea where drivers do not observe the speed limit and pedestrians are frightened to walk on the pavement. Inspector Morris responded that he could not answer about speed cameras, they are commissioned through Highways. He can talk about resources and provide data collated from speed enforcement checks in the villages but again can only look at an area when the team are on duty against other competing demands. However, he is happy to look into this further. In terms of speeding, Fenland statistically for the last year had the lowest number of slight injury road traffic collisions with 92. The lowest across the six districts for serious accidents had 31 and it was the third lowest fatal with eight fatal collisions last year but the majority of those can be contributed to the A47 and A141 and Fenland also had the lowest overall total of 131 road traffic collisions compared to the six other districts. He would like to think the speed enforcement work contributes to those numbers in some way.
8. Councillor Sennitt Clough confirmed the two speed cameras in Whittlesey do work, and data can be found online about how many fines have been issued in any month. However, she wonders whether the ones in the villages that inform drivers what speed they are doing are effective enough to deter speeders, as this is something she has also witnessed on many occasions. Inspector Morris said speed detection recorders as they are termed do provide an indication but if looking at getting these installed in Coates maybe it is something that he can speak to the Vision Zero team about.
9. Councillor Gerstner said the Police and Crime Commissioner funded three speed camera vans mainly for Cambridgeshire. He asked Inspector Morris if there is a joined-up approach with the PCC on speeding issues and identifying problem areas as they feed back to the Speed Watch team at Cambridgeshire all the data. Inspector Morris said yes that is the Vision Zero team he alluded to earlier. They campaign to have zero fatalities by 2040 and so have access to those vans across the whole constabulary area.
10. Councillor Gowler said that looking at the CCTV statistics, it records -653 patrols over the year which is concerning. He represents Chatteris and the town council contributes about £20,000 yearly towards CCTV and have discussed at meetings what they get out of it. Over the course of a year there have been six arrests and fines. Dan Horn said in terms of the Chatteris Town Council contribution, there was a meeting with all town council members in the last 12 months to explain the context around the work with CCTV and what they do. There are incidents spotted and referred on and then actual convictions and this is where the Council integrates to work as one team with police colleagues. There is a meeting this week and he would suggest Councillor Gowler attend this for more detail and all funding partners are going to be invited to an event in early autumn about this also which aims to justify the investment that the towns are making. He would say it is a good news story for Chatteris that it is a safe place and that CCTV acts as a deterrent. Councillor Gowler asked for clarification of what the -653 patrols over the year meant. Dan Horn said he would think it is to do with a short period of time where there was an issue on the police antenna in March which meant some patrols in some parts of the county could not be done for that period. However, since the shared service began with Peterborough, performance on patrols has gone up.
11. Councillor Gowler mentioned illegal and dangerous parking and his feeling that the police do not put a high priority on this. If, or until, civil parking enforcement comes in, this is a major problem throughout Fenland. Unfortunately, the public's impression is that the police do not care; he hopes this is not correct but would like to know if action is taken when reports are received. Councillor Morris agreed that it is widely acknowledged that there is no civil parking

enforcement, but he needs to weigh up priorities. The PCSOs in March, Chatteris and Wisbech are more focussed on parking enforcement but again it goes back to community engagement; the police seek priorities through customer engagement. Parking was identified as a problem in Whittlesey but not in Chatteris due to the number of reports received, hence that received more focus. However, the caveat is that the police must give way to something more harmful, but people do have to take responsibility so if the police can do some educational work with bad parkers then it may reduce the problem a little. He added that if Councillor Gowler has a specific area that he can deploy PCSOs to, then let him know. Councillor Gowler thanked Inspector Morris.

12. Councillor Booth said he was interested to hear the statistics provided regarding road accidents. It was not long ago that Fenland were recording the second or third highest number of young fatalities because of roadside drains and ditches. It does appear to have been turned round; he believes the research was done by Brake although he has not seen any reports on that lately. Maybe that is something the Council could obtain because he thinks that is quite useful and would imagine Vision Zero will be looking at that. Regarding community engagement, Councillor Booth suggested the police think about attending large scale events in the rural communities, such as the Parson Drove Car Show, Gorefield Show and Manea Gala, as they would provide a great opportunity to speak to a lot of people in one place and would be cost effective. Inspector Morris said for reassurance that he had picked up that he was not receiving operational plans for events so commissioned some work to get the events register circulated and get duties changed for the summer so policing teams attended the March and Chatteris summer festivals and will attend as many as they can, including the March Armed Forces Fair in September and Wisbech Rock Festival. However, he is relying on the information to come to him. Events are risk assessed based on the necessity for police to attend, normally community events do not meet the threshold for police attendance because there is not a risk of crime or disorder, and the advice is to step away because it is the event organiser's responsibility. If the police attend there might be a sense of implied liability so if something goes wrong it is on the police to pick it up. However, he is now fully supportive of his officers attending public events because of the benefit of community engagement, particularly with the younger generation. Councillor Booth thanked Inspector Morris.
13. Councillor Davis said she is Chairman of Wimblington Parish Council and was unaware of a community engagement event in Wimblington and Doddington as mentioned in the presentation. She agreed it is probably easier for the police to attend the larger scale events but in some of the smaller villages like Wimblington there was a fun day with 800 people so even if the police had a couple of officers walking around, they could glean a lot. Inspector Morris said that Wimblington and Doddington are supported by the two Sgt Arnolds, so please feed into the small parish meetings and talk about forthcoming events. With a little notice he can change the team's duties to provide cover; but now with some infrastructure in place to horizon scan for events, he can ensure they attend more than they have in the past.
14. Councillor Gerstner said he would like to express his thanks for the regular enforcement of parking in Whittlesey Town Council's car park. It has been a priority in the area and a very emotive subject as always you are wrong if you do and wrong if you don't. But again, there has been a marked increase in parking enforcement, and he hope it continues because people need to know what the law is. Inspector Morris thanked Councillor Gerstner and said he would feed that back.
15. Councillor Booth said years ago he asked about the possibility of getting mobile CCTVs to rural areas, but having been quoted some £100k it was too costly; he knows it must be demand-led but sometimes issues arise that need to be reacted to, for example surely it would help to get some mobiles into Leverington for a few weeks to put some focus there and act as a deterrent. Dan Horn said there is a cost, but it is more manageable now than previously quoted. He highlighted that Doddington now has a camera installed around the play area, which they fund, and this is due to the wi-fi connectivity linked to the antenna mentioned earlier. So, there is the ability for all parish councils to look at that now and he would encourage them all to see if they can work with the district council to attract funding. In terms of reporting incidents, Dan Horn mentioned that sometimes people get frustrated with trying to get through on the telephone and

he stressed the importance of using the online reporting tools available if people have that option. Inspector Morris agreed that does make a difference as his teams daily scan calls for service; he has a regular debrief of what is going on and then sets their focus on those issues. Councillor Booth said that was a fairly encouraging response, but he is concerned by the implication that the parish councils pay the costs. Fenland District Council represents the whole area, with 25% of the population living in the rural areas so it is disappointing to hear they can only get a mobile CCTV if the parish councils fund them. Surely FDC should be able to fund a mobile CCTV that can go anywhere within the district. Dan Horn responded that the difficulty is for FDC to find the funding for any time, there are a lot of demands for new CCTV cameras which is why FDC has relied upon and received support from town councils who have paid for cameras which FDC then monitor. Chatteris is a good example, and Doddington looked at the funding options to do that. FDC has a tight capital programme, and the history of cameras is that they have always been around the town centres, much of it initially due to the assets of the Council and then expanded into becoming a tool to tackle crime and disorder. Councillor Wallwork said that she met with the Police and Crime Commissioner's team recently and they have three mobile cameras they are willing to lend for up to 12 weeks. This is not a long-term response but may help with the ASB problem in Leverington. An application would need to be made first, but she can look into this further if required. Councillor Booth said that is his point, there is talk of the parish councils funding it but what would happen is with a spate of ASB it then calms down because those involved move onto other things and it starts relaxing, particularly over the summer holidays which is when there is a tendency to see a spike. But it could be that all that is required is a camera that can be moved around the district to any current hotspot and then moved on to another location, the prime example being Leverington. Councillor Booth added that the PCC is looking after the whole of Cambridgeshire, and with only three cameras for six districts there will be competition for them which is why he thinks FDC should be looking at getting a mobile CCTV camera itself. Councillor Wallwork suggested that the cameras are borrowed first and see what the competition is like.

16. Councillor Hay asked if the town council funded the three new cameras in Wisbech. Dan Horn responded that these were to do with a specific external funding project called Safer Streets 4, which is evidence based across Cambridgeshire. Looking at the data around Fenland, Alan Boughen made the case for Medworth Ward because of the spike of incidents within it being vastly different to anywhere else in Fenland and across Cambridgeshire. Medworth was chosen by the police along with two wards in Peterborough and as part of that for Safer Streets 4, the Council made the case that three CCTV cameras would be good as part of a collective bid for a range of actions which are still ongoing in Wisbech.
17. Councillor Barber referred to speeding and commented how frustrating it is that whenever a police vehicle is checking speeding, social media gets flooded with warnings and she asked what could be done about that. Inspector Morris responded that there is a specific criminal offence of obstructing police if it can be evidenced, unfortunately it cannot. If someone flashes their vehicle with somebody who is, say, doing 38 miles an hour coming into a 30, the person who flashed their car is committing a criminal offence. If that person was driving at 30 and was flashed, then the person flashing their car would not be committing a criminal offence. It is about preventing a specific act there and then. He agreed the social media comments can be frustrating, but the police now look upon them as hopefully a means of slowing people down and they may just protect somebody from an accident.
18. Councillor Woollard said with the current traffic restrictions through the centre of March there is still a lot of parking on the yellow lines on the stretch between the Market Place and the bridge which creates havoc. Inspector Morris thanked Councillor Woollard and said Sgt Arnold would note this and will deploy his PCSOs.
19. Councillor Davis thanked everyone for their attendance. Inspector Morris advised members that he is more than happy for them to contact him directly with any issues and he would have his contact details circulated.
20. Councillor Booth said much of the discussion had referred to Vision Zero in respect of road safety and he suggested that they be invited to a future meeting as it had been some years since they last attended.

The Community Safety Partnership report was noted for information.

(Councillor Booth asked that it be noted he is a member of Community Speedwatch).

OSC7/23 FREEDOM LEISURE REVIEW

Councillor Davis welcomed Matt Wickham, Paul Doyle, Simon Pesic-Smith from Freedom Leisure and Phil Hughes to the meeting. Phil Hughes gave Councillor Miscandlon's apologies as Portfolio Holder for Leisure.

Members considered the Freedom Leisure Review report which was shared in the form of a presentation.

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

1. Councillor Sennitt Clough said that reducing the leisure centre opening hours to ease the effects of the rise in energy bills has impacted on customer membership. She is a member of the Manor and heard that a lot of customers discontinued their membership because the new opening times no longer fitted their working hours. She would be interested to know therefore how this has all balanced out, as attempting to save money on energy bills has ultimately led to a reduction in income. Simon Pesic-Smith responded that it was the right thing to do facing such an uncertain time and some of the measures agreed to put in place were to reduce the hours. He looked at the timetables and stripped out the gaps that should not have been there, so there was space not being used that could have been. He was aware that there would be an impact on customers but had to work within a particular framework. He worked with centre managers to ensure that they could maximise everything they did have. Now the gyms are open until 9pm and looking at the footfall between 9pm and 10pm at the Manor it was low anyway, and there is minimal change in terms of the target audience pre the change in hours. Generally, if someone wants to use the gym at 10pm at night they want one of the 24-hour gyms. He said that Councillor Sennitt Clough is correct that the Manor suffered from when the changes were made in October but that changed about six weeks ago and there is now a curve upwards. That is through adjustments to the timetable, increasing facilities, making sure there are as many classes as possible and promoting the different services, however it was the right thing to do at the time and in February the situation was assessed, and changes made that could be done without having any major additional costs. Matt Wickham added that Freedom is not planning on doing anything that would take commercial viability backwards; they have undoubtedly had to make changes across the portfolio but if a decision is not working, then they are flexible to change again. Not every decision will be right, but they will continue to review and monitor to ensure that they are getting the best commercial return possible for the facilities.
2. Councillor Hay asked what plans are in place for Freedom to start repaying the loans received from Fenland District Council now it is on more of an even keel. Matt Wickham responded that a contract agreement is in place regarding repayments based on viability and the more that can be done to make contracts viable the better.
3. Councillor Hay stated her concern that some of classes in Chatteris are inconsistent, particularly Pilates and what is being done to ensure that there is a consistent offer. Simon Pesic-Smith responded that unfortunately some staffing issues have impacted on classes, but they are aware of it and trying to find the best solution, looking at providing additional cover or training inhouse going forward.
4. Councillor Hay said it would be of benefit to the new members of the Council to have an explanation of the division of responsibility in the contract between Fenland and Freedom Leisure around maintenance and repair. Phil Hughes replied that the daily upkeep of the centres is the responsibility of Freedom, for example broken ceiling tiles, a dead light bulb, mouldy mastic in the shower, broken pool hoist and the annual maintenance of all equipment

such as boilers. The buildings remain the responsibility of Fenland District Council who maintain the building fabric, so although Freedom would replace a ceiling tile, Fenland would be responsible for replacing the entire ceiling if required. There is a capital programme in place and he is working closely with Mark Greenwood, Head of Property and Assets, to develop a programme of planned preventative maintenance.

5. Councillor Gerstner thanked Freedom Leisure and the Council for keeping leisure facilities available during and after Covid, which is a fantastic testament. He also thanked them for catering for disabled customers and even increasing that provision, which he thinks goes unnoticed by many. However, he would like to ask why it takes so long to get small repairs completed, for example it took nearly four months to repair the shower in a disabled toilet. Is there a hierarchical system for maintenance facilities or is each site allocated work on a need to basis? Simon Pesic-Smith said it was a little of both, but that should not have taken so long. Without knowing the full details if it was a matter of replacing the shower head that should be days not months. In terms of hierarchy, sometimes yes things take greater priority. Other issues can involve a long wait for a contractor's quote or for parts. Councillor Gerstner queried a quote provided to fix the heating at Whittlesey and said he had been told it would cost £400 for an engineer to visit. Simon Pesic-Smith said it was £300 but that also involved an element of work; if the problem could be rectified there and then it will be. He added that the engineers are very good at what they do and will fix what they can, when they can and do their absolute best.
6. Phil Hughes commented that Freedom Leisure is a big organisation running many leisure centres throughout the country. They have a lot more purchasing power and more clout than Fenland District Council would have had with their contractors to get the job done. These engineers are servicing lots of different sites and as a commercial organisation, they will ensure they get a good deal for our contract. However, if members hear that something appears not to be getting fixed as quickly as it ought to be then please let him or the portfolio holder know and they will take this up.
7. Councillor Nawaz commented that the relationship between leisure exercise and health is undeniable. Public health is going to become increasingly important and greater focus being placed on it. It is encouraging to know that membership of the leisure centres is increasing, and it is commendable to see the number of children learning to swim at the Manor. However, it is concerning to see membership has decreased since 2022 by 100, particularly because Whittlesey has expanded considerably with many more new homes being built. He would therefore expect to see an increase rather than a decrease. He wondered if another reason for falling membership could be that customers are going to more modern facilities. Is not the Manor outdated and could this make a strong case for capital expenditure? Phil Hughes responded that there have been various challenges, firstly Covid, followed by both the energy and cost of living crisis, which will have put more pressure on gym membership. Freedom Leisure are doing all they can with the tools at their disposal. He agreed that in respect of capital expenditure there are some aging facilities. He has been looking at these with the portfolio holder and they are looking at a plan for improvement, but it will be a long-term project and has to be affordable.
8. Councillor Gowler asked how many staff are employed by Freedom Leisure and is there a problem with staff retention? Simon Pesic-Smith replied there are 200 staff but they do have some vacancies in reception and casual lifeguarding. There is little problem with staff retention as some stay for years but regarding recruitment it can be challenging. One person recently accepted a post and then turned it down the same day. On one occasion an applicant for a lifeguard post admitted they could not swim, so recruitment can be a challenge for that reason.
9. Councillor Booth said upon reviewing the minutes of November 2021 when Freedom Leisure last came before the panel, he noted that there was only positive feedback. He had asked for more balanced data to include complaints. He asked that this be provided going forward because it is from that that matters can be improved and possibly drive greater membership. He also suggested that comments on social media be noted rather than waiting for a formal complaint. Paul Doyle responded that they have a system whereby they record verbal complaints, they can do the same for social media so they can see patterns and ensure they put resources in the right places. They do not get so many complaints that they have to

instigate a formal procedure, most can be dealt with efficiently and quickly as a bespoke service. Phil Hughes said that if customers are not happy about the response they get from the centre manager then local councillors tend to hear or he gets a message and he can speak to the centre or regional managers. If the company is not responding as the customer wants then they do have recourse to FDC. However, the service is quite bespoke, and the complaint does tend to get to people who can act quickly.

10. Councillor Davis thanked everyone for their attendance.

The Freedom Leisure report was noted for information.

OSC8/23 TASK AND FINISH GROUP

Members considered the Task and Finish Group report presented by Amy Brown.

Councillor Booth suggested that the date be kept open rather than look to October to finish the work. The real deadline is the end of the year because that is when the Business Plan is fed into. Councillor Booth added that technically the group does not have to be set up on political proportionality, but he will ensure he attends the meetings. Councillor Roy could potentially be his substitute, but Councillor Gerstner is welcome to put himself forward. Councillor Gerstner said he would be happy to be appointed as substitute.

Members AGREED:

- **That Councillor Booth and Councillor Hay form part of the Task and Finish Group as former members of the Group and who remain on the Overview and Scrutiny Panel, along with Councillor Woollard, and that Councillor Lucie Foice-Beard and Councillor Gerstner be appointed substitutes.**
- **The proposed amendment to the Terms of Reference of the Task and Finish Group shown as track-changes to the section entitled Report and Timescales, with the change suggested by Councillor Booth to say by the end of 2023.**

OSC9/23 FUTURE WORK PROGRAMME

Councillor Davis advised that the Future Work Programme is to be updated and will comprise standing items such as the Business Plan and Budget items. Throughout the year members of the Panel will consider what additional items they may wish to see added.

5.07 pm

Chairman