

CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the **Highways and Transport Committee**
held on Tuesday, 30th January, 2024 in the Capesthorpe Room, Macclesfield
Town Hall

PRESENT

Councillor C Browne (Chair)
Councillor L Crane (Vice-Chair)

Councillors M Brooks, L Braithwaite, R Chadwick, P Coan, A Coiley,
D Edwardes, H Faddes, A Gage, A Moran, H Moss and M Sewart

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE

Tom Moody, Director of Highways and Infrastructure
Richard Hibbert, Head of Strategic Transport and Parking
Domenic De Bechi, Head of Highways
Hayley Kirkham, Programme Director HS2
Mandy Withington, Legal Services
Steve Reading, Principal Accountant
Rachel Graves, Democratic Services Officer

34 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors C Hilliard and J Priest.
Councillors M Brooks and D Edwardes attended as substitutes.

35 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made.

36 PUBLIC SPEAKING/OPEN SESSION

Councillor J Clowes spoke in relation to the Conservative Group proposals relating to the Highways and Transport budget proposals which she had circulated to the Committee. She stated that she had taken advice from officers and the S151 Officer and that they were proposals which could be added to the MTFS. The projects may not realise actual savings in year but needed preparation in time for future MTFS discussions and budget programming.

37 MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY CONSULTATION 2024/25 - 2027/28 PROVISIONAL SETTLEMENT UPDATE

The Committee considered a report which sought feedback on the responsibilities of the Committee as consultees, on the development of the Cheshire East Medium-Term Financial Strategy 2024/25 to 2027/28.

There remained a shortfall of £12.7m across all committees to be resolved and further budget change proposals were sought to help present a balanced budget. The Highways and Transport budget for 2023/24 was £11.0m. Expenditure was forecast to increase by £5.8m next year. The budget could increase by £1.2m due to funding constraints and as a result Highways and Transport would need to find savings of £4.6m to reduce the £5.8m growth pressures to an affordable level of £1.2m. At this stage £1m of savings had been identified.

Officers reported that the High-Level Business Cases would be available for Members in time for the Corporate Policy Committee on the 13 of February.

Members asked questions and provided comments in relation to the proposals. These included:

Pay Inflation –it was asked why 3% figured was being used as in previous year had used 5% and this was below what the actual pay award had been. In response it was stated that the pay award was subject to negotiation and the percentage was difficult to predict particularly when it was a fixed sum. The existing MTFS forecast that the average increase would be around 3% for 2024/25.

High Level Business Cases – it was stated that reference had been made previously to the business cases being considered by the Committee, but they were not included in the report. In response it was reported that the process had changed and that the high level business cases were being collated for the meeting of the Corporate Policy Committee on 13 February.

Ongoing funding for highways – it was asked how much money the Council needed to put into the highways budget to have an adequate maintenance plan. In response it was stated that the funding received was not adequate compared to the level of work necessary to maintain the highways network to the standard the Council would like to achieve. 12 months ago the Council had a £180m backlog of repair work which was now closer to £200m.

Public Consultation – it was asked how the public views would be reflected in the final budget proposals. In response it was stated that the public consultation had closed on 29 January and the outcomes would be reported to the Corporate Policy Committee on 13 February.

Bus Service subsidy – it was asked how the savings were going to be made. In response it was reported that there was £2.5m growth for local buses. The savings related to the level of supported local bus services and the recent tendering offered up savings of £250k.

Conservative Group Highways and Transport budget proposals – Cllr M Sewart reported that the number in the proposals was out of sync and that they should read as follows:

- Provision of Car Parks – it was proposed:
 - Ai) that the parking disposal strategy be included on the Highways and Transport Committee work programme with clear times schedules for completion, related consultations, outcomes and implementation.
 - Aii) that this work recognised the synergies between other Council areas (assets, planning) and consequently the need for cross-committee engagement (Economy and Growth, Finance Sub Committee, Corporate Policy Committee and other committees impacted by end-use proposals)
 - Aiii) that the Parking Disposal Strategy be identified as a prospective MTFS item to be clearly noted in the current 2024/25 MTFS documentation.

- Permit system for Pay and Display car parks – it was proposed :
 - Bi) as this had direct implications for the Highways and Transport Committee Budget, it should be included in the quarterly MTFS reports coming to the Committee so that the Committee could offer robust oversight and scrutiny on the progress of the Implementation Plan. Savings could be made by moving to the National Parking Platform (NPP) at some point in 2024.
 - Bii) proposed that the Council registers its interest in the NPP with the relevant NPP implementors at the earliest opportunity.
 - Biii) the Implementation Plan should include the NPP within its implementation schedules (to commence post September 2024), including the graduated move from cash to alternative payment options.
 - Biv) no fiscal evaluation has been made of the impacts of cash-payments in relation to reduced enforcement costs. This should be conducted to further support the NPP business case.
 - Bv) a review of the proposed permit system be further evaluated in lines with other Local Authority systems in order to create a cash-free ‘permit options’ alternative that was sufficiently flexible to incentivise (not disincentivise) its use.

- Lane Rental Scheme – it was proposed
 - Ci) that the item be added to the 2024/25 MTFS as no financial element was accounted against this item in 2023/24.
 - Cii) was expedited in readiness for the April 2024 meeting when a report would be brought to the Committee.
 - Ciii) a realistic financial appraisal be conducted to set a realistic fiscal target against the Highways and Transport Committee Budget in 2024/25.

- Civ) the item be included as part of the quarterly MTFS reports to Committee in order that Members were able to offer early and continuing scrutiny and oversight of the policy and its implementation.
- Cv) the Council respond to the 'Open Consultation' and that Members be involved in the process where possible.
- Government Pothole Funding – it was proposed
 - Di) that the Committee sought further financial advice from the S151 Officer that enables the Council to optimise “the resurfacing of carriageways, cycleways, and footways to prevent potholes and other road defects from occurring”, with a focus on resilient repairs that offer extended functionality.
 - Dii) as the grant impacted of the 2024/25 MTFS, the planned and implemented spend be reported to the Committee as part of the MTFS quarterly reviews
- A500 Dualling Middlewich Bypass – it was proposed:
 - Ei) the item be included as part of the MTFS and included on the Work Programme, enabling the Committee to have early sight and involvement in these developments prior to the recommendation stage.
 - Eii) the project had synergies with other Service Committees (eg: Economy & Growth, Finance Sub-Committee) and this should be recognised in any proposals going forward.

It was proposed and seconded that the Conservative Group proposals and the proposals in the budget consultation be recommended to the Corporate Policy Committee for inclusion in the Council's budget 2024/25.

RESOLVED: That the Committee

- 1 recommend to the Corporate Policy Committee, for their meeting on 13 February 2024, all proposals within the budget consultation, as related to the Committee's responsibilities, for inclusion in the Council's budget for 2024/25.
- 2 the additional proposals from the Conservative Group be recommended to the Corporate Policy Committee for inclusion in the Council's budget proposals.

The meeting commenced at 10.00 am and concluded at 10.38 am

Councillor C Browne (Chair)