

CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the **Corporate Policy Committee**
held on Wednesday, 21st August, 2024 in the Committee Suites 1,2,3,
Westfields, Middlewich Road, Sandbach, CW11 1HZ

PRESENT

Councillor N Mannion (Chair)
Councillor M Gorman (Vice-Chair)

Councillors C Bulman, D Clark, S Gardiner, J Clowes, M Goldsmith,
A Harrison, C O'Leary, J Pearson, J Rhodes, L Crane and M Warren

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE

Rob Polkinghorne, Chief Executive
Peter Skates, Acting Executive Director – Place
Adele Taylor, Interim Director of Finance and Customer Services
Karen Wheeler, Interim Director of Policy and Change
Chris Allman, Director of Transformation
Janet Witkowski, Head of Legal Services and Deputy Monitoring Officer
Nikki Bishop, Democratic Services Officer

18 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors Jos Saunders and Fiona Wilson.
Councillors Stewart Gardiner and Laura Crane were present as
substitutes.

19 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

20 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 13 June 2024 be
approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

21 PUBLIC SPEAKING/OPEN SESSION

Councillor M Beanland, Chair of the Audit and Governance Committee,
addressed the committee as a visiting member in relation to item 6
(Corporate Peer Challenge – Action Plan). Cllr Beanland welcomed the
scrutiny undertaken through the Peer Challenge and Transformation Plan
in relation to the council's key corporate processes and systems, including
risk management. Cllr Beanland referred to the latest RAG ratings

presented to the Audit and Governance Committee for the strategic risks relating to carbon neutrality and the protection of children and queried how these two risks could be allocated the same level risk score. Cllr Beanland stated that, in light of the recent Ofsted and ILACS inspection judgements, that an overhaul of risk policy was needed to ensure that the council worked to preserve residents services as a priority. Cllr Beanland asked the committee to consider producing a more efficient risk management policy as soon as possible. The Chair offered to provide a written response.

Councillor S Corcoran addressed the committee as a visiting member in relation to a number of items on the agenda. Cllr Corcoran referred to the County Councils Network and stated the importance of this cross-party organisation and the work he had undertaken on this body as Vice Chair. The role of the new Vice Chair would be key with the new Labour government and Cllr Corcoran hoped that the council would continue to support the new Vice Chair. In relation to the proposed senior management structure, Cllr Corcoran stated that it was important that the S151 officer role be given a stronger voice in the new permanent structure. Finally, Cllr Corcoran referred to the Corporate Peer Challenge Action Plan and Transformation Plan. Cllr Corcoran stated that officers had a good understanding of what needed to be done but work needed to progress quickly. Cllr Corcoran urged the committee to consider how they would allow officers to progress the transformation programme whilst maintaining member oversight.

22 SUBMISSION OF TRANSFORMATION PLAN

The Committee considered the report which set out progress of the council's transformation journey and the draft transformation plan that required submission to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) no later than 27 August 2024. It was noted that this submission was a formal requirement in order for the council to access Exceptional Financial Support.

The committee sought assurance around how elected members would be involved through the transformation journey and decision-making process. It was confirmed that policy decisions would be taken by elected members and officers would implement decisions as empowered to do so, under agreed Schemes of Delegation, in order to achieve the right balance of delivering the transformation programme and bringing key decisions back to elected members at the appropriate time. The Chair confirmed that the Leader of the Opposition Group would be invited to all future informal briefings with the Chief Executive, Leader and Deputy Leader. It was highlighted that there would be briefings for all elected members, staff and partners, at the appropriate stages along with a comprehensive communications plan.

The committee noted that the potential savings identified ranged between £59-£91m and queried the divergence in those figures. It was noted that

the potential savings had been identified based upon evidence of similar activities developed in other local authorities however the next phase, developing detailed business cases, would define this saving figure further and take into account local factors that would impact individual savings.

Some concerns were raised in relation to the number of vacancies and how this would impact the delivery of the plan. It was highlighted that significant resource would be provided by the council's external partner, Inner Circle, working across the council, however work would soon commence to prepare for March 2025 when this resource was due to end. The committee suggested that the second iteration of the plan provide more detail in relation of staffing.

The committee requested an update on the CIPFA review. It was noted that this had been directly commissioned by MHCLG and the report was still in the process of being finalised. Officers agreed to share further information with the committee once more information had been received from government.

Two amendments were proposed by the Conservative Group in relation to recommendations 2 and 3. These amendments were proposed, seconded and voted upon but were not carried.

Proposed amendment 1:

Delegate authority to the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Leader and Deputy Leader of the Council, to implement the transformation plan.

Proposed amendment 2:

Agree that the committee will meet informally in between scheduled meetings, to review and scrutinise proposed decisions, as often as is necessary, to implement the transformation plan at pace.

The committee voted upon the recommendations set out below separately.

RESOLVED (by majority):

That the Corporate Policy Committee

1. Approve the transformation plan contained at Appendix A and the submission of the plan to MHCLG by no later than 27 August 2024.

RESOLVED (by majority):

That the Corporate Policy Committee

2. Delegate authority to the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Leader and Deputy Leader of the Council, to take all necessary

steps including the relevant decisions to implement the transformation plan.

RESOLVED (by majority):

That the Corporate Policy Committee

3. Agree that the committee will receive regular updates on the progress of the transformation plan.

Councillor C O’Leary and Councillor S Gardiner voted against recommendations 2 and 3 and requested that this be formally recorded in the minutes.

23 CORPORATE PEER CHALLENGE - ACTION PLAN

The committee considered the report which set out the latest draft Corporate Peer Challenge Action Plan which had been developed in response to the Local Government Association’s (LGA) report and recommendations, following the Peer Review undertaken in March 2024. The Committee also noted the update provided following the first meeting of the Assurance Panel held on Friday 9 August 2024.

The need for capacity to drive change and improvement was discussed. It was agreed that there needed to be synergy between the various improvement plans to ensure actions were not duplicated and that the role of members in supporting the delivery of the plans was clear. It was noted that a number of actions were ongoing and the committee agreed that a deeper-dive into these areas was needed to understand what ongoing meant and what ‘good’ looked like.

It was suggested that a briefing for all members would be arranged on the final action plan which covered the role of elected members on its delivery, what could be expected going forward and how the action plan linked to various other plans and strategies across the council.

The establishment of the Independent Assurance Panel who would provide external challenge, support and oversight of the council’s transformation improvement was welcomed by the committee.

RESOLVED:

That the Corporate Policy Committee

1. Note the draft Corporate Peer Challenge Action Plan and feedback from the Assurance Panel.
2. Note that the Chief Executive will finalise the Corporate Peer Challenge Action Plan taking account of the Assurance Panel’s

feedback and publish the plan by 28 August 2024 as required by the LGA and in line with the delegated authority from Full Council in July 2024.

24 DEVOLUTION - FURTHER UPDATE

The Committee considered the report which provided a further update on the devolution direction from government following the outcome of the general election. The committee noted that engagement indicated that the new government wished to move at pace and that Cheshire and Warrington had been identified as a potential candidate to progress an agreement.

The committee noted the proposal to establish a Member Reference Group in order to assist with the increased level of pace and engagement required, and to provide advice and guidance to officers. The final proposal would be considered by the Corporate Policy Committee for review and scrutiny. It was proposed, seconded and carried that the membership of the Member Reference Group be expanded to six elected members, to include the Chair or Vice Chair of the Highways and Transport Committee.

Some concerns were raised in relation to the council's readiness for devolution and that an understanding of the opportunities and the asks of the council were needed. It was highlighted that the Member Reference Group would assist in progressing these discussions to understand the further detail and what powers and financial benefits there could be. The committee agreed that any devolution agreement needed to be the right agreement for Cheshire East.

RESOLVED (by majority):

That the Corporate Policy Committee

1. Note the new Government's intention to engage with local authorities to develop early devolution proposals.
2. Approve the setting up of a Member Reference Group to assist in providing guidance and advice in the development of proposals, enabling officers to further progress opportunities and discussions with government officials.
3. That the membership of the Member Reference Group be expanded to 6 elected members to include the Chair or Vice Chair of the Highways and Transport Committee

The meeting adjourned for a 10-minute break.

25 MEMBERSHIP OF DECISION MAKING AND OTHER BODIES, CHAIRS AND VICE CHAIRS

The committee considered the report which set out changes to Chairs and Vice Chairs, Member Champions and sought agreement to membership changes of outside bodies, as set out in the revised Appendix circulated to the committee.

Membership of the Health and Wellbeing Board was raised. It was confirmed that advice had been provided and that the membership of this body did not need to change following the change in Leadership, however clarification would be sought, and a response sent to the committee.

Cllr J Pearson was not present during the debate and vote on this item.

RESOLVED (unanimously):

That the Corporate Policy Committee

1. Note the changes to chairs, vice chairs and member champions as set out in the Appendix to the report.
2. Agree the changes to outside organisations as set out below:

Outside Body	New Appointment
Transport for the North: Partnership Board (Substitute)	Cllr Nick Mannion (replacing Cllr S Corcoran)
Transport for the North: Rail	Cllr Nick Mannion (replacing Cllr S Corcoran)
Cheshire and Merseyside Health and Care Partnership	Cllr Nick Mannion (replacing Cllr S Corcoran)
County Council Network	Cllr Laura Crane (replacing Cllr S Corcoran)
Unitary Council Network	Cllr Nick Mannion (replacing Cllr S Corcoran)
Cheshire East Combating Drugs Partnership	Cllr Anna Burton (replacing Cllr J Place)
Cheshire East Safeguarding Adults Board	Cllr Hazel Faddes (replacing Cllr R Vernon)
Environment Agency Regional Flood and Costal Committee	Cllr Laura Crane (replacing Cllr N Mannion)
LGA General Assembly	Cllr Rob Vernon (replacing Cllr S Corcoran)
Tatton Park Board	Cllr Mary Brooks (replacing Cllr N Mannion)

26 WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee considered the Work Programme. The following updates were noted:

- Cllr O’Leary referred to his request at the last meeting in relation to a paper on horizon scanning identifying key policy changes being introduced by the new government. Cllr O’Leary requested an update on this matter and how this work would be scheduled into the Work Programme. It was highlighted that a brief update had been included in a recent member briefing however further analysis would be undertaken and a report added to the work programme. It was agreed that service specific issues would be scheduled for the relevant service committee.
- Cllr Clowes referred to the Health and Care Blueprint Operating Model which was due to be considered by the committee in October. The significance of this item was raised and the implications this would have on the way in which health and social care partnerships were undertaken. It was suggested that an in-depth briefing be arranged for the committee with the Executive Director – Adults, Health and Integration.
- The committee requested that the agenda for October be reviewed as there were a number of items scheduled for consideration.

27 MINUTES OF SUB-COMMITTEES

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the Finance Sub Committee (25 June 2024) and General Appeals Sub Committee (9 July 2024) be received and noted.

28 PROPOSED NEW SENIOR MANAGEMENT STRUCTURE

The committee considered the report which set out the proposals and timescales to review the senior management structure following the recommendations from the LGA’s Decision Making Accountability Review (DMA) and the Corporate Peer Challenge. The committee noted that the proposed structure would ensure there was sufficient capacity and skills to address the recommendations within the Peer Challenge and meet the requirements to achieve financial stability, deliver the Children’s Services Improvement Plan and the Council’s Transformation Programme.

The committee welcomed the proposed new structure and agreed it was clear where specific responsibilities would rest, especially for statutory officers. The committee queried the costs of an employment partner and noted that whilst there would be costs associated with the recruitment process, it was significantly better value for the council to recruit

permanent staff than to employ interim staff. Assurance was provided that the financial costs associated with Phase 1 would not jeopardise the transformation plan and 20234-25 MTFS.

The committee noted that due to the decision-making framework and formal consultation period, it was unlikely that permanent staff would not join the organisation earlier than March 2025. It was confirmed that a report would be considered by Council in October 2024 and the recruitment process, both internally and externally, would commence in November 2024.

RESOLVED (unanimously):

That the Corporate Policy Committee

1. Approve the proposed senior management structure produced by the Chief Executive subject to consultation and agree that the Chief Executive commences formal consultation with affected employees and recognised trade unions on the proposed changes to the senior management restructure.
2. Note the overall implementation timeline for a new senior management structure.
3. Note that, following formal consultation, the outcome of the senior management structure review will be considered by the Corporate Policy Committee and presented to full Council for approval, including approval of any new positions with salaries in excess of £100,000 per annum and statutory officers, prior to implementation.
4. Note the interim and temporary senior management arrangements across the organisation outlined in paragraphs 45 - 48 and that these will continue until implementation of and appointment to the new structure including any additional interim capacity to support the Chief Executive within the current financial envelope.

The meeting commenced at 5.30pm and concluded at 8pm

Councillor N Mannion (Chair)