

CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the **Corporate Policy Committee**
held on Thursday, 27th November, 2025 in the Committee Suite 1, 2 and 3,
Delamere House, Delamere Street, Crewe, CW1 2JZ

PRESENT

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

Councillors D Clark, J Clowes, L Crane, T Dean, S Gardiner, M Goldsmith,
D Jefferay, J Rhodes, J Saunders and L Wardlaw (substitute for Cllr O'Leary)

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE

Chris Benham, Director of Finance
Nikki Burn, Democratic Services Officer
Helen Charlesworth-May, Executive Director of Adults, Health and Integration
Karen Grave, Director of People and Customer Experience
Julie Gibbs, Information Rights Manager
Josie Griffiths, Head of Audit, Risk and Assurance
Richard Hibbert, Head of Strategic Transport and Parking
Ashley Hughes, Executive Director of Resources and S151 Officer
Hayley Kirkham, Head of Major Programme Delivery
Kevin O'Keefe, Interim Director of Law and Governance (Monitoring Officer)
Gareth Pawlett, Director of Digital
Brian Reed, Head of Democratic Services
Paul Unwin, Community Protection Team Leader
Alan Ward, Complaints Manager
Karen Wheeler, Assistant Chief Executive

46 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors C O'Leary and F Wilson . Councillor L Wardlaw was present as substitute.

47 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

48 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 30 October 2025 be agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

49 PUBLIC SPEAKING/OPEN SESSION

There were no registered speakers.

50 PEOPLE STRATEGY

The Committee considered the report on the draft People Strategy 2025 –29 which set out the vision for the workforce and aligned people management practices with the Council's strategic objectives and the Improvement and Transformation Delivery Plan.

Members noted that the strategy had been co-produced with staff and focused on six outcomes supported by four core values, covering the full employee lifecycle. Key deliverables for year one included staff engagement events, a staff survey, leadership and manager development programmes, refreshed performance reviews, and career pathways. The strategy aimed to improve engagement, retention, performance, and wellbeing while ensuring legal compliance and best practice.

The Committee welcomed the strategy and confirmation that further work was underway to address particular areas within the organisation that had high levels of absence and that significant work had already taken place to improve resilience and support staff. The Committee also agreed that it was important for the authority to improve its diversity metrics and that this would be promoted through via methods including staff network groups, noting that Staff Networks and Trades Union representatives were invited to quarterly staff events. The Committee also agreed that exit interviews information was of particular interest as was visibility of leadership across the organisation.

Officers agreed to share a functional structure of the Council with Elected Members via a future Members Bulletin.

The Committee queried how the authority would assess and measure progress against the strategy. It was agreed that this would be reviewed further and that the appropriate Committee would be sighted on the delivery of the strategy in the future. Officers committed to providing clarity on the timing of future progress reporting via a written response.

RESOLVED (unanimously):

That the Corporate Policy Committee

1. Approve and adopt the People Strategy 2025-29 (Appendix 1 of the report) and note the additional appendices.

51 THE COUNCIL'S DECISION-MAKING ARRANGEMENTS

The Committee considered the report on the Council's decision-making arrangements in preparation for the transition to a Leader and Cabinet model of governance from May 2026.

Members noted that the Task and Finish Group (TFG) had reviewed and recommended the adoption of key constitutional documents, including Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules, Budget and Policy Framework Procedure Rules, Cabinet Procedure Rules, Local Choice Functions, and transitional provisions.

Councillor M Gorman, Chair of the TFG, proposed the recommendations from the TFG which comprised the first tranche of proposed 'building blocks' of the emerging Leader and Cabinet arrangements. Cllr Gorman thanked officers and members of the TFG for their hard work in preparing the documentation which provided a good and firm foundation for the development and implementation of the new governance model, ensuring clarity, accountability, and effective decision-making going forward.

The Committee debated the arrangements for public and member questions at Cabinet meetings. The Chair proposed that the Committee support the requirement for 3 clear working days' notice of public and Member questions to be given before Cabinet meetings, and that such questions should relate to items on the agenda for the meeting in question. The Chair also proposed that provision should be built-in to the Constitution to take account of matters which could not reasonably have been foreseen by the deadline for such questions. It was agreed that this wording would be drafted by the Monitoring Officer, in consultation with Group Leaders. It was further agreed that a review of the arrangements would be included in the October 2026 review of the new governance arrangements to ensure that they were working effectively for both Members and members of the public.

RESOLVED (by majority):

That the Corporate Policy Committee recommend that Full Council

1. Agree and adopt the following procedure rules and other constitutional documents and provisions, as appended to the report; these to take effect at the Council's Annual General Meeting on 13 May 2026:

- a) Appendix 1: Recommendations arising from the deliberations of the T&F Group.
- b) Appendix 2: Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules and Arrangements. c.
- c) Appendix 3: Budget and Policy Framework Procedure Rules.
- d) Appendix 4: Executive Arrangements and Cabinet Procedure Rules, these to include the following provisions:

I. 3 clear working days' notice of public and Member questions should be given before Cabinet meetings, and

II. such questions should relate to items on the agenda for the meeting in question.

(subject to provision being built-in to the Constitution to take account of matters which could not reasonably have been foreseen by the deadline for such questions. It was agreed that such provision would be drafted by the Monitoring Officer, in consultation with Group Leaders, and presented to Council at its December meeting).

- e) Appendix 5: Local Choice Functions.
- f) Appendix 6: Leader and Cabinet Transitional Provisions.

2. Authorise the Monitoring Officer, in consultation with the Council's political group leaders, to make such general and consequential changes to the Council's Constitution:
 - a) as he deems are necessary to give effect to the wishes of Council;
or
 - b) as may become necessary at short notice, as referred to in paragraphs 9-11 of the report, and which may be required to be put in place to ensure the efficient and effective administration of the Council's decision-making arrangements with effect from 13 May 2026; or
 - c) which arise from provisions of legislation.
3. Note that the remaining Leader and Cabinet documents and arrangements will be presented to the meeting of Council on 25 February 2026.
4. Agree that the implemented Leader and Cabinet arrangements will be reviewed in or around the autumn of 2026, with a view to introducing changes and improvements, where these are deemed to be necessary or desirable.

52 APPOINTMENT OF A NEW MEMBER TO THE INDEPENDENT SCHOOL ADMISSION APPEALS PANEL AND INDEPENDENT REVIEW PANEL FOR EXCLUSION REVIEWS

The Committee considered the report seeking approval to appoint a new member to the Independent School Admission Appeals Panel and the Independent Review Panel for Exclusion Reviews. Members were advised that the Local Authority had a statutory duty to ensure sufficient trained panel members were available to hear school admission appeals and exclusion reviews. It was noted that an application had been received, the applicant had been interviewed and assessed by Legal Services, and all necessary checks had been completed in line with the Safer Recruitment Policy. The Committee agreed that the individual was qualified for the role and that the appointment would support the Council in meeting its legal obligations.

RESOLVED (unanimously):

That the Corporate Policy Committee

1. Approve the appointment of one individual to become a member of the Independent School Admission Appeals Panel and Independent Review Panel for Exclusion Reviews.

53 STRATEGIC RISK UPDATE

The Committee received an update on the Strategic Risk Register following a review by the Corporate Leadership Team to ensure alignment with the Cheshire East Plan and the Improvement and Transformation Delivery Plan.

Members noted that the register now contained 16 strategic risks, including financial sustainability, the Dedicated Schools Grant deficit, organisational change, leadership capacity, and information security. Two new risks were highlighted: devolution and the transition to the Leader and Cabinet governance model. The Committee discussed the interdependencies between risks and the importance of robust mitigation and monitoring arrangements.

The committee reviewed the Strategic Risks and identified that SR15 Capital Projects Management and Delivery should be added to the Committee Work Programme for detailed consideration during its meeting in March 2026. It was agreed that this deep dive should also include Children's and Adults and that social care should be looked at holistically. Officers agreed to draft the scope for the session and share with Committee Members in advance.

Some concerns were raised with the combining of three key Children's risks into one (SR03 – Complexity and Demand for Children's Services, SEND Inspection and Delivery of the ILACS Improvement Plan) and the impact this would have on monitoring risk levels in three separate areas. Officers agreed to pass this feedback onto the Executive Director – Children's Services, for further consideration.

RESOLVED (unanimously):

That the Corporate Policy Committee

1. Note the position of the Council's Strategic Risk Register to the end of Q2 2025-26 in respect of the content, description, scoring and risk management activity outlined.
2. Agree that SR15 be added to the Committee Work Programme for detailed consideration during the Corporate Policy Committee meeting in March 2026.

54 REGULATION OF INVESTIGATORY POWERS ACT 2000 (RIPA) POLICY AND PROCEDURE AND ONLINE INVESTIGATIONS POLICY

The Committee considered the report seeking endorsement of updated policies relating to the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 (RIPA) and the Online Investigations Policy as recommended by the Audit and Governance Committee.

Members noted that the Council made limited but lawful use of covert surveillance powers for enforcement purposes and that the policies were reviewed regularly to ensure compliance with legislation and best practice. Key amendments included guidance on the use of drones, clarification of the roles of the Senior Responsible Officer and RIPA Co-ordinator, and the introduction of management oversight for the use of social media during investigations. It was confirmed that training and awareness sessions would be provided for relevant officers.

The Committee thanked officers for their work in this area.

RESOLVED:

That the Corporate Policy Committee

1. Endorse the updated RIPA Policy and Procedure and Online Investigations Policy.

55 THE FUTURE MODEL FOR ICT: RETAINED SHARED SERVICE AND GEMINI PHASE 2

The Committee considered the report on the future model for ICT, focusing on the retained shared service and progress on Gemini Phase 2 of the ICT Shared Services Programme.

The Committee welcomed the report and noted that Phase 1 had successfully delivered core infrastructure improvements and that Phase 2 aimed to enhance resilience, modernise systems, and support digital transformation across Cheshire East and Cheshire West and Chester Councils. The report outlined governance arrangements, financial implications, and key milestones for implementation. It was confirmed that the approach would enable efficiencies while providing greater flexibility for both Councils.

It was clarified that whilst direct support was no longer provided to schools post 1 September 2025, ICT colleagues were working closely with Children's Services colleagues to identify vulnerable schools facing challenging to support them.

RESOLVED: (unanimously):

The Corporate Policy Committee

1. Approve a move away from the Retained Shared Service model by March 2026 via the delivery of Gemini Phase 2.
2. Approve the ultimate disaggregation of the Retained Shared Service for ICT, subject to consultation with Trade Unions and staff.

56 CORPORATE COMPLAINTS POLICY

The Committee considered the report on the updated Corporate Complaints Policy, which has been revised to align with the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code and best practice standards.

Members noted that the updated policy aimed to provide greater clarity for residents, improve accessibility, and ensure a consistent approach to complaint resolution across all services. Key changes included clearer definitions of complaints, streamlined processes for escalation, and enhanced monitoring and reporting arrangements to support learning and service improvement.

It was highlighted that the address for the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) would need updating following their move from Wilmslow to Manchester. Officers agreed to amend this before publication of the new policy.

The committee noted the revised policy still reflected the 2-stage process, however included extended timeframes for acknowledging complaints from 3 working days to 5 working days. The complaint investigation Service Level Agreement (SLA) would commence from the date of acknowledgment as opposed to the date the complaint was received. This update would provide the

Customer Feedback Team more time to acknowledge the complaint and ensure that Council services were able to utilise the full 10 working day SLA to investigate and respond to the complaint providing better investigations and responses for complainants. The Committee noted that acknowledgements to complainants would include updated timescales. It was agreed that the updated timescales would be shared with all Elected Members once live.

RESOLVED (unanimously):

That the Corporate Policy Committee

1. Approve the new Corporate Complaints Policy.
2. Note the LGSCO's Complaint Handling Code.
3. Agree standardising acknowledgement and response times for formal correspondence in line with complaints and the LGSCO's code.

57 SECOND FINANCIAL REVIEW OF 2025/26

The Committee considered the Second Financial Review for 2025/26, which provided an update on the Council's financial position at mid-year. Members noted that the net revenue budget for the year was £360.2m and that a forecasted overspend of £2.345m remained after applying mitigation measures. Key pressures were highlighted in Children's Services and the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG), with the DSG deficit projected to rise to £145.9m by year-end.

The Committee noted progress on delivering savings, with £11.8m achieved against a target of £24.4m and that further actions were being implemented to manage demand and reduce costs.

The Committee thanked officers for the report and agreed that the report and information provided Members with much more clarity on the financial position of the Council.

RESOLVED:

That the Corporate Policy Committee

1. Note the overall Council's Financial Position as described within the Executive Summary – Council Financial Position, of the report.
2. Note the latest revenue forecast for the Corporate Policy Directorate, review progress on the delivery of the MTFS approved budget policy change items (Table 3), the RAG ratings and to understand the actions to be taken to address any adverse variances from the approved budget.
3. Note the overall in-year forecast of capital spending for the Corporate Policy Directorate of £13.298m against a revised MTFS budget of £10.125m in Tables 4 and 5 of the report.
4. Note the available reserves position in Table 6 of the report.

58 MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY CONSULTATION 2026/27 - 2029/30 AND COUNCIL TAX BASE 2026/27

The Committee considered a report on the Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) Consultation for 2026/27–2029/30 and the Council Tax Base for 2026/27.

Members noted that the Council continued to face significant financial challenges, with a forecast budget gap of £18.2m for 2026/27, reduced from £33.3m following recent refinements. The report outlined key assumptions, including growth allocations for Adult Social Care and Children's Services, a 5% vacancy factor across staffing budgets, and above-inflation increases in fees and charges.

Members were advised that a programme of public consultation and engagement would run from November 2025 to January 2026, and that the Council Tax Base for 2026/27 had been calculated in accordance with statutory requirements.

RESOLVED (unanimously):

That the Corporate Policy Committee

1. Note the current budget position for the period 2026/27 to 2029/30 as set out in Table 1 of the report.
2. Note the list of Corporate Policy budget savings proposals that are contained in the budget consultation launched in November 2025 as contained in Annex 1 of the report.
3. Note the Council Tax Support scheme is agreed for 2026/27 as unchanged other than the increases in line with CPI as agreed in the last consultation.

Corporate Policy Committee recommends to Council that:

- 4) In accordance with the Local Authorities (Calculation of Council Tax Base) Regulations 2012, the amount to be calculated by Cheshire East Council as its Council taxbase for the year 2026/27 as 165,549.87 for the whole area (Annex 2).

59 WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee considered the Work Programme the following was noted:

Strategic Risk 15: Capital Projects Management and Delivery to be added to the Work Programme for March 2026.

RESOLVED:

That the Work Programme be received and noted.

60 MINUTES OF SUB-COMMITTEES

RESOLVED:

That the Committee receive and note the minutes of the Finance Sub Committee held on 10 September 2025 and General Appeals Sub Committee held on 16 September 2025.

61 BUDGET APPROVAL AND ACCEPTANCE OF DFT GRANT FOR THE MIDDLEWICH EASTERN BYPASS

The Committee considered the report relating to the Budget Approval and acceptance of the Department for Transport (DfT) grant for the Middlewich Eastern Bypass (MEB). Members reviewed updated cost estimates, funding options, and associated financial implications, noting that the scheme remained a critical strategic infrastructure project for unlocking economic growth in the borough.

Members noted the risks of delay or cancellation and that the contractors final cost for the scheme was yet to be provided. Members confirmed that the preferred approach was to agree the funding adjustments within the Medium-Term Financial Strategy. It was noted that the Council had received £46.78m of DfT grant funding and that the Council had invested, to date, £27m through borrowing. Officers committed to providing a more detailed breakdown.

The Committee welcomed the report and agreed that it was essential to deliver the project for not just Middlewich and for the wider borough which would see improved connectivity, development opportunities and economic growth. It was noted that the final decision would be made, once the contractors final cost was known, at the Highways and Transport Committee in January.

RESOLVED (unanimously):

That the Corporate Policy Committee recommend to Full Council

1. To accept the remaining £23.304m grant monies payable over 26/27 and 27/28 from the Department for Transport to be spent on the delivery of the scheme, when received to:
 - a) Authorise the Executive Director of Resources and Section 151 Officer to:
 - i. accept the DfT Grant allocation of £22.876m in 26/27 and £0.428m in 27/28. towards the MEB.
 - ii. sign and return the Grant Letter by the DfT Page 276
2. to approve a supplementary capital estimate for remaining grant monies.
3. to approve an increase in the allocated budget for the MEB from £97.94m to £107.67m for inclusion on the Council's Capital Programme. To agree that the increase of £9.73m be obtained from allocations from the 2025/26 Local Transport Fund of £1m and a request to the Shadow Board of the new Combined Authority in the near future for a minimum of £5.54m allocation of the Local

Transport Capital Grant as detailed in the report and to authorise a supplementary capital estimate/ virement of the monies to the scheme.

4. to allocate £1.24m surplus monies contained within the Congleton Link Road major highways scheme towards the project and authorise a supplementary capital estimate / virement of the monies to the scheme.
5. to allocate any future proceeds from the sale of the land and property acquired in addition to the land acquired under the Compulsory Purchase Order during scheme development to the MEB project.

62 EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED (unanimously):

That the press and public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the final item on the agenda pursuant to Section 100(A) 4 of the Local Government Act 1972 on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraphs 3 of the Local Government Act 1972 and the public interest would not be served in publishing the information

63 DEMAND RESPONSIVE TRANSPORT (DRT) MODERNISATION

The Committee considered the Part 2 report.

RESOLVED (unanimously):

That the Corporate Policy Committee

1. Agree the recommendations as set out within the Part 2 report.

The meeting commenced at 9.00 am and concluded at 12.00 pm

Councillor N Mannion (Chair)