CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the **Economy and Growth Committee**
held on Tuesday, 11th November, 2025 in the Committee Suite 1, 2 and 3, Delamere House, Delamere Street, Crewe, CW1 2JZ

PRESENT

Councillor M Gorman (Chair)
Councillor F Wilson (Vice-Chair)

Councillors L Buchanan, A Burton, P Coan, S Gardiner, A Heler, G Marshall, C O'Leary, J Pearson and R Vernon

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE
Phil Cresswell, Executive Director Place
Peter Skates, Director of Growth and Enterprise
Charles Jarvis, Head of Economic Development
Jo Wise, Development & Regeneration Delivery Manager
Steve Reading, Finance Officer
Adrian Leslie, Legal Officer
Rachel Graves, Democratic Services Officer

20 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies were received from Councillor P Redstone. Councillor S Gardiner attended as a substitute.

21 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

In relation to Item 5 – Knutsford Bid Ballot, Councillor P Coan declared an adverse pecuniary prejudicial interest and stated that he would leave the meeting during consideration of this item.

In relation to Item 5 – Knutsford Bid Ballot, Councillor S Gardiner declared a prejudicial non pecuniary interest and stated that he would leave the meeting during consideration of this matter.

22 **MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 9 September 2025 be approved as a correct record.

23 **PUBLIC SPEAKING/OPEN SESSION**

There were no public speakers.

24 KNUTSFORD BID BALLOT

Having previously declared an interest, Councillors P Coan and S Gardiner left the meeting during consideration of this item.

The Committee considered a report on the Knutsford Business Improvement District (BID) ballot and the way the Council should vote in the ballot.

The Council was responsible for the payment of business rates on seven business premises within the proposed BID area, six of which had rateable values above the confirmed minimum threshold, and therefore the Council would be entitled to six votes in the BID ballot.

The report recommended that the Council should vote ‘Yes’ in support of the Knutsford BID proposal in the ballot because the proposals were considered to align with the Council’s strategic commitments as set out in the Cheshire East Plan 2025-2029.

If the BID ballot received a ‘Yes’ vote, the Council would have to pay the BID levies of £5,455 annually from April 2026. This would be an extra revenue expense and because BIDs were not driven by the Council, the costs were not budgeted for at a service level.

RESOLVED (unanimously):

That the Committee

1 approve that the Council shall vote ‘Yes’ in support of the Knutsford BID proposal in the Knutsford BID ballot, delegating authority to the Director of Growth and Enterprise to complete, sign and return ballot papers on behalf of the Council.

2 Agree that in the event of the Knutsford BID proceeding to commencement:

   i. The Executive Director-Place shall, having regard to any advice given by the Monitoring Officer, determine, in consultation with the Chair of the Economy and Growth Committee

      a. Whether a CEC representative should be put forward for appointment onto the BID Board, and if so, select the appropriate appointee and empower them to make any decisions required on behalf of the Council.

      b. Agree any advisory officer support to be made available to the BID Body, empowering that officer to provide advice as needed.

ii. The S151 Officer shall write to the Director of Growth and Enterprise instructing that BID levies are paid for all eligible premises for which the Council is the BID levy payer and savings are made within the relevant service to offset the new burden.

25 SECOND FINANCIAL REVIEW 25/26

The Committee considered the report which set out the Second Financial Review 2025/26 position based on income, expenditure, and known commitments as at the end of August 2025. It also identified actions that were being taken to address adverse variances to urgently address the Council's financial sustainability.

The Second Financial Review 2025-26 reported a forecasted revenue outturn position as an adverse variance of £2.345m, after the application of planned use of Exceptional Financial Support) of £25.261m.

The Committee noted that the Economy and Growth second financial review position was a forecast underspend of £2.760m, reflecting an improvement since the Quarter 1 Financial Review of £0.475m.

During consideration of the report the Committee asked about the housing spend and were informed that this was mainly on homelessness and adaptions and that any properties acquired were managed by Facilities Management and kept to legal standards.

Whilst there had been savings from closing Council office buildings, in the relation to Westfields there were holding costs whilst the SEND school option was considered. There was ongoing work to review the Council's office occupancy and rationalisation.

Concerns were raised about the number of vacancies and the length of time some of these posts had been vacant. In response it was stated that the vacancies were reviewed weekly to identify positions that needed to be filled. Under the workforce element of the Transformation Programme there would be a redesign of the staff structure which could result in some of the vacancies going forward into the new structure and some of the vacant posts being removed from the structure.

RESOLVED (unanimously): That the 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 Economy and Growth Directorate, the delivery of the MTFS approved budget policy change items (as set out in Table 3 in the report), the RAG ratings and the actions to be taken to address any adverse variances from the approved budget.

3. note the overall in-year forecast capital spending for Economy and Growth Directorate of £44.414m against a revised MTFS budget of £56.535m in Tables 4 and 5.4 of the report.

4 note the Delegated Decisions made for Supplementary Capital estimates and Capital Budget Virements up to £500,000 as per Table 6.5 of the report.

5 approve the Supplementary Capital Estimate above £500,000 up to and including £1,000,000 as per Table 7 of the report, as follows: -

Growth and Enterprise	£m
Crewe Towns Fund – Mill Street Corridor	0.571

6 note the available reserves position as per Table 8 of the report.

26 **MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY CONSULTATION 2026/27 - 2029/30**

The Committee received an update on the development of the Medium-Term Financial Strategy for 2026–2030.

The report outlined key updates to financial assumptions, including revised growth allocations for Adult Social Care and Children's Services, the introduction of a 5% vacancy factor across staffing budgets, above-inflation increases in fees and charges, and the reprofiling of transformation pump priming budgets funded through capital receipts. Additional service budget adjustments and contingency for inflation were also highlighted.

Members noted that the Council continued to face significant financial challenges, with a forecasted budget gap of £18.2m for 2026/27, reduced from £33.3m following recent refinements.

The Committee considered the draft savings proposals for the Economy and Growth area, as set out in Annex 1 to the report. During the discussions, the Committee asked questions in relation to the Tatton Park proposals to review the operating model which included looking at a trust model and partnership options. In response the Committee were informed that the savings figure was based on assumptions, and a detailed appraisal was due in March 2026. Engagement with the National Trust was ongoing and one of the options included closer collaboration with the Trust. It was suggested that an official campsite in the Park could be a potential income source.

The Committee referred to the assets' disposal programme and it was reported that the current disposals exceeded the target for this year.

Future disposals included farm buildings but there was no policy at present for disposal of the Farms Estate.

A request was made for improved reporting on the capital projects programme to allow for better scrutiny on the projects which could include costs, cost benefit ratio, risks, and delivery against project objectives as the timescale for these projects were often longer than the 4-year budget period.

RESOLVED: That the Committee

1 note the updated budget position for the period 2026/27 to 2029/30 as set out in Table 3.2 of the report.

2 note the list of Economy and Growth budget savings proposals that are contained in the budget consultation launched in November2025 as contained in Annex 1 to the report.

3 note the conditions for successful budget delivery, as approved by Corporate Policy Committee on 30 October 2025, which are set out in paragraph 12 of the report.

27 **WORK PROGRAMME**

The Committee considered the work programme.

It was noted that the next meeting in January 2026 would receive reports on Third Financial Review 2025/26 and the Medium-Term Financial Review Consultation.

Reference was made to the Review of the Farms Estate item, which had been originally scheduled for June 2025, then January 2026 and now March 2026 due to the work involved and concern expressed on the repeated delay and public interest in this item. In response it was confirmed that the delay was due to circumstances and not avoidance and that an explanation would be provided to the committee members outside of the meeting.

It was requested that items for the March 2026 meeting be moved to January 2026 to avoid an overloaded agenda and to ensure adequate time for meeting preparation. Officers undertook to review the items and consider moving items to the January 2026 meeting if feasible.

RESOLVED:

That the Work Programme be noted.

The meeting commenced at 2.00 pm and concluded at 2.55 pm

Councillor M Gorman (Chair)