

CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the **Environment and Communities Committee**
held on Thursday, 25th September, 2025 in The Capesthorpe Room - Town
Hall, Macclesfield, SK10 1EA

PRESENT

Councillor D Jefferay (Chair)
Councillor H Seddon (Vice-Chair)

Councillors L Braithwaite, M Brooks, D Clark, M Houston, T Dean, H Moss,
B Posnett, M Warren, H Whitaker and P Redstone

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE

Chris Allman, Director of Planning and Environment
Ralph Kemp, Head of Environmental Services
Steve Reading, Finance Manager (Place & Corporate Services)
Phil Cresswell, Executive Director of Place
Mark Darbyshire, Bereavement Services Manager
James Thomas, Principal Solicitor
Frances Handley, Democratic Services Officer

11 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors A Moran and L Smetham and
Councillor P Redstone was present as a substitute.

12 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

13 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 5 June 2025 be approved as a
correct record and signed by the Chair.

14 PUBLIC SPEAKING/OPEN SESSION

Councillor Ken Edwards addressed the committee as a visiting Member in
relation to the closure of Bollington Household Waste Recycling Centre.
Councillor Edwards noted that the decision to close the site had been
taken some time ago and urged the committee to reconsider its decision,
proposing that the site remained operational for as long as it remained
available. It was highlighted that even if the site were to be transferred to
the Council's Assets portfolio, it would still be accessible for use.

Councillor Edwards commended the committee for its financial stewardship, noting that it was one of the few committees projecting a budget surplus. It was suggested that maintaining a modest waste service for the rural community around Bollington would not significantly impact the committee's financial position.

In addition, Councillor Edwards referred to the positive outcomes of shared service funding, particularly in relation to libraries. Reference was made to the financial report which included a contribution of approximately £154,000 from Parish and Town Councils towards library services. Cllr Edwards expressed appreciation for the continued operation of local libraries, particularly the opportunity for families to engage in literary activities on weekends and encouraged the committee to recognise this as a positive development.

15 FIRST FINANCIAL REVIEW OF 2025/26

The committee considered the report which provided an update on the current forecast outturn position for the financial year 2025/26 based on income, expenditure and known commitments as at the end of June 2025. It also identified actions that were being taken to address adverse variances to urgently improve the financial sustainability of the Council. The report formed part of the reporting cycle and provided a comprehensive overview of the Council's financial position, including revenue budgets, Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) items, capital programme, and reserves.

The committee queried whether the forecasted underspend (ranging from £2.1 million to £3.6 million) was due to operational efficiencies or transfers from the transformation budget. Officers clarified that the underspend was a combination of Exceptional Financial Support, operational efficiencies, one off grants and contributions from the transformation programme.

The committee queried the Extended Producer Responsibility Grant and why it had been considered a one-off if it was expected to recur. Officers highlighted that whilst the grant was recurring, the current year's allocation included additional funding based on estimation for councils and would be expected to reduce in future years once specific figures on tonnages, contamination rates and actual costs had been calculated alongside manufacturers improving packaging practices and aligning with policy goals of reducing waste.

The committee sought clarification on the variance between projected and actual transformation savings. Officers explained that the pessimistic scenario reflected the most cautious outlook. The savings were cross-cutting and would be realised over time as transformation projects were implemented across directorates.

RESOLVED (unanimously):

That the Environment and Communities Committee

1. Note the factors leading to a forecast adverse Net Revenue financial pressure of £3.1m against a revised budget of £440.5m (0.7%). and note the contents of Annex 1, Section 2 and review progress on the delivery of the MTFS approved budget policy change items, the RAG ratings and latest forecasts, and to understand the actions to be taken to address any adverse variances from the approved budget.

2. Note the in-year forecast capital spending of £205.5m against an increased capital budget of £208.5m. This was adjusted at outturn following an approved MTFS budget of £173m.

3. Note that Council will be asked to approve the Supplementary Revenue Estimate Request for Allocation of Additional Grant Funding over £1,000,000 as per Annex 1, Section 3, Table 1.

4. Approve the Supplementary Revenue Estimate Requests for Allocation of Additional Grant Funding over £500,000 and up to £1,000,000 as per Annex 1, Section 3, Table 2.

5. Note the available reserves position as per Annex 1, Section 5.

16 BEREAVEMENT SERVICES POLICY AMENDMENTS

The Committee considered the report which sought approval of key amendments to the Bereavement Services Policy in relation to pre-purchase grave sales, implementing a Memorial Safety Testing Policy and clarifying the approach to unauthorised memorials.

The committee raised concerns in relation to the sensitive handling of unauthorised memorials, particularly in cases involving young people and grieving families. Officers assured Members that engagement and communication would precede any enforcement, and that flexibility would be shown, particularly around the time of funerals.

The committee noted that the policy did not require complete removal of items but sought to manage the volume and placement of memorials to maintain cemetery standards.

The committee noted that a 10% premium on the price of pre-purchased graves had been implemented from 1 April 2025. The committee raised concerns regarding value for money and the time value of money, noting that residents were paying in advance for a service that may not be used for decades. Officers responded that historical comparisons suggested

pre-purchase remained a good investment and that the premium aligned with practices across other local authorities.

The committee highlighted the subjective nature of aesthetic judgments and the need for sensitivity, particularly in cases involving bereaved families and cultural practices. It was confirmed that cultural and religious considerations would always be considered and that the aesthetics referred to volume of items and potential littering issues rather than the specific items being placed.

The committee noted that the Equality Impact Assessment identified potential impacts on the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller community due to their cultural mourning practices. Officers confirmed that these practices remained respected and accommodated within the revised policy framework.

Members noted the health and safety testing methods and insurance involvement. Officers confirmed that current practices aligned with the Health and Safety Executive recommendations.

The committee expressed strong support for the revised policies, praising the work of officers in expanding cemetery capacity and improving safety.

RESOLVED (unanimously):

That the Environment and Communities Committee:

1. Approve the pre-need sale of graves to be suspended when a cemetery reaches 5-year capacity remaining rather than 20 years.
2. Approve the Memorial Safety Policy in Appendix A.
3. Note the Council's approach to unauthorised memorials.

17 REFUSE COLLECTIONS - UPDATE

The committee received a verbal update on the current status and challenges facing the waste collection service. The service handled approximately 250,000 bins per week, including residential, commercial, and assisted collections. Recent operational pressures had included staff shortages and additionally over the last two weeks - vehicle fires.

The committee was informed of ongoing staffing shortages, both drivers and loaders, which had led to missed collections. Recruitment is underway, but the competitive market for drivers posed some challenges. Recent issues had been exacerbated by peak holiday periods and sickness absences.

The committee were updated on missed rounds during week commencing 15 September, with two rounds remaining outstanding. Efforts to recover missed collections included weekend work and volunteer support. As of week commencing 22 September, all scheduled rounds had been completed.

The committee noted that a serious fire had occurred in the back of an RCV in Macclesfield, which had been suspected to be caused by batteries disposed of in household waste. The incident damaged vehicle hydraulics. This incident highlighted the need for public education on proper waste disposal. A campaign would be considered to raise awareness of hazardous items in waste.

The committee suggested improved communication with residents, enhanced training for staff, and collaboration with the fire brigade. The importance of route knowledge for drivers, especially in rural areas, was also emphasized.

The committee raised concerns regarding missed bin collections being due to road closures and queried how this can be avoided. Officers requested that members provide specific details of the issues and circumstances, and they would be investigated.

The committee discussed preparations for winter conditions, including identifying collection points to try and attempt to prevent slips and falls. Members were encouraged to assist in communicating with residents to ensure safe and accessible waste collection during adverse weather.

18 WORK PROGRAMME

The committee considered the Work Programme, the following was noted:

- Officers to refer back to June committee minutes in relation to items to be added to the work programme.
- Officers to follow up on the Cleaner Crewe Project due for circulation as a briefing report via the Members Hub.

RESOLVED:

That the Work Programme be received and noted.

The meeting commenced at 5.30pm and concluded at 6.30pm

Councillor D Jefferay (Chair)