

CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the **Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee**
held on Thursday, 26th November, 2020 at Virtual Meeting

PRESENT

Councillor J Clowes (Chairman)
Councillor B Murphy (Vice-Chairman)

Councillors Q Abel, C Bulman, JP Findlow, R Fletcher, M Hunter, A Moran,
J Saunders, M Simon, R Vernon and L Wardlaw

PORTFOLIO HOLDERS IN ATTENDANCE

Councillor J Rhodes, Portfolio Holder for Public Health and Corporate
Services
Councillor A Stott, Portfolio Holder for Finance, ICT and Communication

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE

David Brown, Director of Governance and Compliance
Jo Brown, Director of Transformation
Jane Burns, Executive Director of Corporate Services
Paul Goodwin, Head of Financial Services
Frank Jordan, Deputy Chief Executive and Executive Director of Place
Alex Thompson, Director of Financial and Customer Services

30 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence.

31 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Chairman reported that at the 6 October 2020 meeting of Cabinet, they had not received the same apportioned time as other speakers, and as a result had not been able to provide a full report of the considerations and feedback of Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee regarding the Mid-Year Review (FINANCE) 2020/21 report.

RESOLVED –

That the minutes of the previous meeting held on 1 October 2020 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

32 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor A Moran declared a non-pecuniary interest in Minute No. 37, due to being a member of Mid Cheshire NHS Foundation Trust.

Officers noted that dispensation had been granted that ensured that this declaration of interest would not prevent Councillor A Moran from partaking in the debate on this item.

RESOLVED –

That Councillor A Moran's declaration of a non-pecuniary interest, and the dispensation for this, be noted.

33 DECLARATION OF PARTY WHIP

There were no declarations of a party whip.

34 PUBLIC SPEAKING TIME/OPEN SESSION

There were no members of the public present who wished to speak.

35 COVID-19 UPDATE

Consideration was given to the Cabinet (1 December 2020) that provided an update on the work undertaken by the council to respond to, and recover from, the Covid-19 pandemic.

Members asked questions and put comments in relation to;

- the up-to-date Covid-19 rate of infection in the borough;
- whether PPE could be recycled and/or re-purposed;
- the range of grants and financial support that the council had received to support its response to the pandemic;
- whether the council would be able to continue to fund and keep open the libraries and leisure centres in the borough; and
- the forthcoming Covid-19 mass vaccination programme and what plans had been made to ensure the council had the resources to support the programme.

It was noted that the 25 November 2020 release of the Government's Autumn Statement would potentially impact the budgetary proposals within the council's Pre-Budget 2021/22 Consultation.

RESOLVED –

That the update report be received and noted.

36 COUNCIL TAX BASE 2021/22

The committee considered the Council Tax Base 2021/22 report. The committee put questions and comments in relation to;

- whether there was intelligence that showed how successful the council's policy with regards to charging premiums had been, and

- the council's approach to managing the collection of council tax on empty properties.

RESOLVED –

That the report and its recommendations be received and noted.

37 PRE-BUDGET CONSULTATION 2021/22 - 2024/25

Consideration was given to the proposed Pre-Budget Consultation 2021/22 documentation, which was due to go out to public consultation following the 1 December 2020 meeting of Cabinet.

Members asked questions and commented in relation to;

- concern that, due to the unforeseen increase in the numbers of cared for children in the borough since the Covid-19 pandemic, it may not be possible for the council to achieve its proposed savings through a reduction in the number of cared for children
- the technical language within the documentation and whether it could have been worded in a simpler, more understandable way; and
- whether this was a suitable document to consult with the public on.

RESOLVED –

That the following recommendation, agreed unanimously, be forwarded to Cabinet to consider:

The Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee understands the difficulties currently faced by the Council due to the Covid-19 pandemic, however, it has concerns that at this early stage of the Pre-Budget Consultation 2021/22 to 2024/25, there is insufficient detail about where specific budgetary actions are planned to take place, and that this does not enable objective and meaningful comments to be made. The committee understands that, in light of the Government's Spending Review presented to Parliament on 26 November 2020, further work will be done on this council's Pre-Budget Consultation documentation and it hopes that this will be brought forward as soon as possible during the consultation process so that it can be incorporated into the committee's reflection on it.

38 WORKPLACE RECOVERY

The committee gave consideration to an update on how the council had supported its workforce and ensured the safe management of its buildings, since the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Members asked questions and put comments in relation to;

- how the council had ensured that managers had the support available to effectively transition to line managing in the new virtual working world;
- had consideration been given to how the council could increase its response rate to officer surveys; and
- that the virtual working arrangements had shown that in the long-term, there was a need to achieve an effective balance between homeworking and ensuring people achieve the social benefits of interacting with colleagues in person.

RESOLVED –

That the update be received and noted.

39 UPDATE FROM THE (BEST4BUSINESS) JOINT SCRUTINY WORKING GROUP

An update was provided to the committee by members of the Joint Scrutiny Working Group – jointly set up with Cheshire West and Chester Council – to monitor and scrutinise the progress of the Best4Business Programme.

The update provided members with information on where the project was, and what the planned next steps were. It was noted that, due to the pandemic, the two authorities had changed from the planned programme of ‘classroom training’ to virtual training.

RESOLVED –

That the update be received and noted.

40 FORWARD PLAN

Consideration was given to the council’s Forward Plan of key decisions.

RESOLVED –

That the Forward Plan be noted.

41 WORK PROGRAMME

Consideration was given to the committee’s work programme.

RESOLVED –

1. That the work programme be noted.
2. That the Members’ Facilities, Accommodation and Culture Task and Finish Group report be picked up and progressed, with the aim of finalising it by the end of the 2020/21 municipal year.

The meeting commenced at 12.30 pm and concluded at 3.40 pm

Councillor J Clowes (Chairman)