

CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the **Corporate Policy Committee**
held on Wednesday, 12th January, 2022 in the Council Chamber, Municipal
Buildings, Earle Street, Crewe CW1 2BJ

PRESENT

Councillor A Stott (Vice-Chair)

Councillors C Browne, J P Findlow, K Flavell, S Gardiner, N Mannion,
A Martin, K Parkinson, M Warren, C Bulman (for Cllr Corcoran), A Critchley
(for Cllr Rhodes) and J Saunders (for Cllr Clowes)

Officers

Lorraine O'Donnell, Chief Executive
Jane Burns, Executive Director Corporate Services
Alex Thompson, Director of Finance and Customer Services
David Brown, Director of Governance and Compliance
Michael Moore, Head of Communications
Josie Griffiths, Head of Audit and Risk
Paul Mountford, Democratic Services

Apologies

Councillors J Clowes, S Corcoran, R Fletcher and J Rhodes.

58 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillors S Gardiner and N Mannion declared personal interests as
future recipients of a pension from the Cheshire pension fund.

Councillor J P Findlow declared a personal interest as a current recipient
of a pension from the Cheshire pension fund.

59 PUBLIC SPEAKING/OPEN SESSION

Sue Helliwell asked about the Council's policy on the disposal of Council-
owned land, with particular reference to public open space. She asked
who took decisions to release land and whether there were any prior
discussions with local ward members, the Leader, planning committees
and the relevant committee chairs.

The Director of Governance and Compliance responded that the
publication of notices advertising the potential loss of open space was a
statutory process and followed a set procedure. The Director confirmed
that in the case of a recent disposal of open space in Alsager, the process
had been followed. A detailed written response to the question would be
provided.

60 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the meeting held on 2nd December 2021 be approved as a correct record.

61 MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY 2022/23 - 2025/26

The Committee considered the Medium-Term Financial Strategy 2022 to 2026 as part of the budget consultation. The consultation document included proposals to update the current MTFS that was approved by Council in February 2021.

All Committees were being asked to provide feedback in relation to their financial responsibilities as identified within the Constitution and linked to the budget alignment approved by the Finance Sub-Committee in July 2021. Responses to the consultation, including those of all service committees, would be reported to the Corporate Policy Committee at its meeting on 10th February 2022 with a view to the Committee making recommendations to Council.

Appendix 1 to the report contained the Budget Engagement document, including the survey questions that had been used during the consultation period, which closed 4th January 2022.

The Provisional Settlement announced on 16th December 2021 had varied the assumptions contained in the Budget Engagement document. Appendix 2 to the report, which had been circulated to members before the meeting, set out the changes announced and the impact on the estimated funding envelope.

The Executive Director of Corporate Services informed the Committee that the budget for Corporate Services remained fairly static over the four year period of the MTFS, at £36m next year, rising to £38m largely as a result of inflation. There was some growth attributable to the revenue consequences of capital expenditure on ICT and to pay inflation and increased national insurance contributions. The Executive Director briefly discussed the proposals within the consultation document that were relevant to the responsibilities of the Committee.

Members raised the following matters in relation to the consultation document:

- Members asked whether the mitigation to address reducing levels of Dedicated Schools Grant was as up to date as it could be. The Executive Director of Corporate Services would ensure that this was addressed in the report back to the Committee in February.

- The question was asked whether there was sufficient flexibility to allow for a smaller increase in Council tax, for instance by utilising money currently intended for the General Reserves? Officers responded that the Government had an expectation that councils would increase Council tax to achieve financial sustainability. Members would have to consider any flexibility in Council tax rises in relation to risks such as the pressure on the Adult Social Care budget and inflation.
- The question was asked whether the Government would be moving to a deprivation-based model of assessing the needs of local authorities from 2023. The Director of Finance and Customer Services replied that this had been a feature of the fairer funding consultation that had taken place in recent years. Whilst it was not certain when any such change would take place, the Government did appear to be moving towards a deprivation-based model.
- Concern was expressed about the energy consumption of the cloud-based platform Atamis and the green credentials of the company providing the system. The Executive Director of Corporate Services undertook to look into the matter and write to all members of the Committee.

RESOLVED

That the Committee

1. notes the MTFS 2022 to 2026 Consultation Document (Appendix 1) and the proposals relevant to the responsibilities of the Committee as set out in the following paragraphs and on the following pages of the Consultation Document:
 - 1) Improving Digital Customer Experience (page 11 of the report)
 - 2) Pay inflation (page 11)
 - 3) National Insurance increase at 1.25% for social care funding (page 11)
 - 4) Improved Debt Recovery and correcting budgeted court costs income targets to reflect actual levels (page 11)
 - 5) Transactional Service Centre additional funding (page 12)
 - 6) Vendor Management Phase 3 (page 12)
 - 7) Unified IT Communications (page 12)
 - 8) IT Security and Compliance (page 12)
 - 9) IT Procurements and Application Lifecycle Management (page 12)
 - 10) Information Assurance and Data Management Phase 3 (page 12)
 - 11) Removal of temporary implementation budget and investment to run the new Financial System (page 14)
 - 12) Staff Travel and related savings (page 14)

2. notes those proposals that are rolling forward from the MTFS 2021-25 relevant to the Committee (as part of Appendix 1 (Appendix A)):
 - 6) Mitigation of reduction in the Dedicated Schools Grant (Corporate Services) (page 33)
 - 7) Mitigation of the year-on-year reduction in the Dedicated Schools Grant (ICT) (page 33)
 - 13) Efficiency savings and Restructures within Corporate Services (page 33)
 - 15) Shared services review (page 33)
 - 21) Review of corporate subscriptions (page 33)
 - 34) Brighter Futures Together Programme Customer Experience (page 34)
 - 43) Infrastructure Investment Programme (page 34)
3. notes the impact of the local government financial settlement as provided at Appendix 2 on the MTFS Consultation Document;
4. notes the other elements of the MTFS Consultation Document related to the responsibilities of the Committee (including WOC Business Plans, and Reserves levels); and
5. notes that the minutes of this meeting will form the consultation response of this Committee, and along with feedback from all the other Committees, will be considered at the Committee's next meeting on 10th February 2022.

62 COMMUNICATIONS PLAN FOR RESIDENTS

The Committee considered a report which set out proposals for how the Council would meet its Corporate Plan commitment to communicate effectively with residents. The report explained the approach for communicating with residents and highlighted priority communications activity for January 2022 – March 2023.

Members raised the following matters in relation to the report:

- The comment was made that some residents did not have access to digital technology and might therefore be excluded from certain forms of engagement. The Head of Communications responded that the communications plan would sit alongside the Digital Strategy which aimed at improving access across the board. On being asked whether digital equipment could be provided by the Council for those in deprived circumstances, the Executive Director of Corporate Services explained that this was not currently planned and that some community-based projects might assist. .
- The comment was made that town and parish councils and local volunteers would be willing to assist with the distribution of hard copies of documents to residents where necessary.

- Some members of the public were still finding it difficult to access Cheshire East committee meetings over the Internet. The Executive Director of Corporate Services responded that there were ongoing technical issues involving the Council's firewall and that a solution was being sought; she undertook to pursue the matter and report back to Members.
- Greater emphasis should be placed on residents in particular, as opposed to other stakeholders, and recognition should be given to the communication difficulties experienced by older people.
- The communications plan should also address the needs of minority groups such as travellers.
- With regard to a question about how robust social and digital media platforms were against attempts by third parties to influence and disrupt communications, the Executive Director of Corporate Services suggested that the Committee might wish to add an item on cyber security to its work programme.
- In response to a comment about the difficulty in contacting officers, for example in the highways and planning services, the Chief Executive reiterated the importance of customer service and explained that work was underway to make improvements.

The Head of Communications advised that the next step would be to conduct a survey of residents and customers to understand their communications preferences and needs. The results of that survey, and a draft communications strategy, would then be brought back to the Committee.

Members asked if the results of the survey could be published on the Council's website. The Director of Governance and Compliance undertook to work with Democratic Services to ensure that this was done.

On a related matter, Councillor C Browne advised that he and the Leader of the Council were planning a Q&A session for residents.

RESOLVED (unanimously)

That the Committee

1. approves the development of a communications strategy for residents, including undertaking a survey of residents and customers to understand their communications preferences and needs; and the results of the survey, together with the draft communications strategy, be brought back to the Committee;

2. approves the principles and approach for communications activity set out in paragraphs 5.7 and 5.8 of the report; and
3. notes the planned priorities for the communications programme for 2022-23.

(At this point, the Committee adjourned for 10 minutes.)

63 HEALTH AND SAFETY UPDATE QUARTER 2

The Committee considered an update report on the health, safety and wellbeing of the organisation. The report and Appendix provided a summary of data regarding accident and information data for the Council and maintained schools for Quarter 2 2021/22, the year to date and comparative data for the same periods in the last two years.

Members asked the following questions in relation to the report:

- With regard to staff currently working from home, what arrangements were in place to monitor accidents at home, and what risk assessments were in place. The Head of Audit and Risk responded that risk assessments were in place and were reviewed with line managers. Accident reports were required to be completed where accidents occurred.
- What arrangements were in place to ensure that Council equipment provided for home working was safety-checked.
- How staff absences and shortages, particularly in schools, were being addressed.
- Whether some form of post-assessment would be undertaken to assess the lessons learned from staff working from home. The Head of Audit and Risk undertook to provide members with a written response.
- Whether the statistics relating to academies could be made available. The Head of Audit and Risk replied that she would see if this information could be shared with the Committee; she undertook to report back as part of the next update at the March meeting.
- If a definition of 'accident' could be provided. The Head of Audit and Risk replied that this would be included in the next update report.

RESOLVED (unanimously)

That the report be noted.

64 WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee considered its work programme for 2021/22.

The Executive Director of Corporate Services reported that a Covid Update report would be included on the work programme for the February meeting. The report on EDI Strategy and Objectives would be deferred to the March meeting.

Members noted the significant workload for the February meeting and suggested that the meeting start at the earlier time of 10.00 am. The Executive Director of Corporate Services undertook to discuss the matter with the Chair and Vice-Chair.

RESOLVED

That the work programme be noted.

65 MINUTES OF SUB-COMMITTEES

The minutes of the following sub-committee meetings were received:

- Finance Sub-Committee – 1st December 2021
- General Appeals Sub-Committee – 7th December 2021

66 REPORTING OF URGENT DECISIONS

There were no urgent decisions to report.

The meeting commenced at 10.30 am and concluded at 12.30 pm

Councillor A Stott (Chair)