

# **CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL**

Minutes of a meeting of the **Corporate Policy Committee**  
held on Thursday, 10th February, 2022 in the Committee Suite 1, 2 & 3,  
Westfields, Middlewich Road, Sandbach CW11 1HZ

## **PRESENT**

Councillor A Stott (Vice-Chair in the Chair)

Councillors C Browne, J Clowes, J P Findlow, K Flavell, R Fletcher,  
S Gardiner, N Mannion, A Martin, K Parkinson, J Rhodes, S Akers Smith (for  
Cllr Warren) and L Crane (for Cllr Corcoran)

## **Other Members Present**

Councillor D Brown

## **Officers**

Lorraine O'Donnell, Chief Executive  
Jane Burns, Executive Director of Corporate Services  
Alex Thompson, Director of Finance and Customer Services  
David Brown, Director of Governance and Compliance  
Hayley Kirkham, HS2 Project Director  
Sara Barker, Head of HR (attended via Microsoft Teams)  
Brian Reed, Head of Democratic Services and Governance  
Paul Mountford, Democratic Services

## **Apologies**

Councillors S Corcoran and M Warren

## **67 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillors J Clowes, S Gardiner and K Parkinson indicated for transparency that a public speaker due to speak at the meeting, Mr Andrew Needham, was known to them and that they had each spoken to him recently.

Councillors J P Findlow and R Fletcher indicated for transparency that they had served with Mr Needham as members of the former Cheshire County Council.

## **68 PUBLIC SPEAKING/OPEN SESSION**

Andrew Needham spoke in connection with Item 7 - High Speed Rail (Crewe - Manchester) Bill Petition. He asked if the Council was aware that there was financial uncertainty about the Crewe North Connection, and for the proposed HS2 stations from Crewe to Manchester. He felt that the matter should be the subject of a joint response to Government from the Cheshire councils through the Local Enterprise Partnership and that the

matter should be considered at the next meeting of the local transport body.

Mr Needham also expressed his support for Crewe to be the home of Great British Railways.

With regard to the question about HS2, the Chair responded that the hybrid bill was seeking the necessary powers to build the HS2 Phase 2b scheme which included the infrastructure for the Crewe northern connection. The funding for the Crewe north connection was included in the £96 billion Integrated Rail Plan core programme. The petitioning process outlined in the report would provide the opportunity for the Council to seek a clear and concise statement from the Government, via an assurance, on the funding and delivery of the Crewe hub and Crewe north connection.

The Chair indicated that if Mr Needham required a more detailed written response, this could be arranged through the relevant department. The response as given at the meeting would in any event be provided in writing.

## **69 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

### **RESOLVED**

That the minutes of the meeting held on 12<sup>th</sup> January 2022 be approved as a correct record.

## **70 COVID-19 UPDATE**

The Committee considered an update report on recent Covid developments.

England had moved to Plan B in response to the risk of the Omicron variant on 8<sup>th</sup> December 2021, and the implications for Council activities were summarised in section 5 of the report.

The Executive Director of Corporate Services advised that since the report had been published, England had moved back to Plan A. With regard to infection rates, case figures remained high at 836 per 100,000 population.

In response to questions from members, officers advised as follows:

- The business grants referred to in the report would all be distributed by the closing dates. It would be appropriate to consider how effective the grants had been once they had been distributed. A written response would be provided on the amounts of funding available for the Business Interruption Fund and the Recovery and Growth Grant.
- Details of the average length of stay in hospital would be provided in writing.
- Holiday activities were funded by government grant.

- Business continuity planning had included the possibility of other types of outbreak occurring at the same time as Covid.
- A written response would be provided on how the 'Say Hi to the High Street' scheme was funded.
- The Council had developed its own arrangements for awarding business grants in implementing the Government's grant funding schemes.
- The Council had developed recovery plans right from the start of the pandemic which addressed all aspects of the impact of the pandemic.
- The deep dive review of the current backlog of planning applications was well underway and was already reporting into the Environment and Communities Committee. The number of non-determination appeals would be confirmed in writing.

## **RESOLVED**

That the ongoing implications of Covid-19 and Cheshire East Council's response be noted.

### **71 MEDIUM-TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY 2022-26**

The Committee considered the Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) for Cheshire East Council for the four years 2022/23 to 2025/26, together with the feedback from the budget consultation. This was the first time that the MTFS had been reported through the new committee system. The Committee was asked to make recommendations to Council as set out in Appendix A to the report.

The Director of Finance and Customer Services advised that the figures within the financial settlement announced by the Government in December for the 2022/23 financial year, which had at the time been provisional, had now been confirmed.

Councillor D Brown spoke as a visiting member and referred to the underfunding of roads, giving rise to excessive amounts of costly pothole repairs. Whilst recognising that his concerns on the matter, as expressed at meetings of other committees, had been addressed by increased capital expenditure on highways over the next four years, he felt that this was still insufficient. He asked the Committee to consider making two additional recommendations to Council as follows:

- (a) That the Committee request the Highways and Transport Committee to carry out an immediate and major review of the local and national funding of expenditure of Cheshire East Highways, and that this lead to decisions or recommendations to enhance services and value for money to local residents.
- (b) That the Capital Programme, on Page 218 of the MTFS agenda pack, be amended so that Managing and Maintaining Highways expenditure is increased to £6m in each of 2023/24 and 2024/25

instead of £4m in each year. To balance this amendment, the borrowing costs will be funded from correlated savings over the three-year period, achieved from the revenue budget allocated to pothole repairs.

Whilst concern was expressed about the increased borrowing that this would involve, the need to safeguard savings earmarked for public rights of way and active travel, and the absence of any capital allocation for highways in year four, there was broad support among members for Councillor Brown's proposal, which was moved and seconded by members of the Committee.

The Director of Finance and Customer Services had examined Councillor Brown's proposals and confirmed that the proposals were legal and were technically and financially valid .

In response to questions from members, officers advised as follows:

- The MTFS Reserve was in accord with the constitution.
- All Council money, including reserves, was allocated to committees.

Councillor Fletcher raised concerns about delays in capital expenditure to make improvements to Alsager Town Centre and sought assurances that the matter was progressing. The Chair suggested that he pursue the matter further with officers.

The Chair asked that an item on Movements within the MTFS Reserve be added to the work programme of the Finance Sub-Committee.

## **RESOLVED**

That

1 the Committee notes:

- (a) the year-end forecast outturn position for 2021/22 (Appendix C, Section 2);
- (b) the summary results of the Budget Consultation and Engagement exercise undertaken by the Council, as set out in the attached (Appendix C, Annex 2a and 2b);
- (c) the report of the Council's Section 151 Officer, contained within the MTFS Report, regarding the robustness of estimates and level of reserves held by the Council based on these budget proposals (Appendix C, Comment from the Section 151 Officer); and
- (d) the Council's Finance Procedure Rules will always apply to ensure proper approval should any changes in spending requirements be identified (Appendix C, Annex 14); and

2 the Committee recommends to Council the items at Appendix A to the report, subject to the following additional recommendations:

- (a) the Highways and Transport Committee be asked to carry out an immediate and major review of the local and national funding of expenditure of Cheshire East Highways, and that this lead to decisions or recommendations to enhance services and value for money to local residents; and
- (b) the Capital Programme, on Page 218 of the MTFS agenda pack, be amended to provide that Managing and Maintaining Highways expenditure is increased to £6m in each of 2023/24 and 2024/25 instead of £4m in each year. To balance this amendment, the borrowing costs be funded from correlated savings over the three-year period, achieved from the revenue budget allocated to pothole repairs.

Note: Councillor R Fletcher asked that it be recorded in the minutes that he abstained from voting on this matter.

## **72 HIGH SPEED RAIL (CREWE - MANCHESTER) BILL PETITION**

The Committee considered a report which outlined the process the Council needed to follow to petition against the High Speed Rail (Crewe - Manchester) Bill to enable the Council to negotiate enhancements and mitigations for the benefit of Cheshire East residents and businesses. The report also outlined the proposed approach to member engagement in preparing and progressing a petition. The Committee was asked to make a recommendation to full Council.

Members asked that future reports contain clearer and more detailed maps and plans.

Members agreed on the importance of clear communications on this matter so as not to give an inadvertently misleading impression to the public regarding the Council's position on HS2. In this respect, it was suggested that the term 'petition against' should perhaps be reconsidered.

Councillor S Akers Smith referred to paragraph 4.5 of the report relating to HS2 Phase 2a and asked if the mitigation could be increased by £100,000 to fund a feasibility study for the Great North Way. The HS2 Project Director undertook to investigate and provide a written response to Councillor Akers Smith and the Committee.

Councillor C Browne reported that on Tuesday he had made a presentation to Ministers regarding the Crewe Hub Station and had also shared the presentation with local MPs.

On a related matter, Councillor J Clowes referred to the Government launch of the Great British Railways HQ Competition for Sites which commenced on 5<sup>th</sup> February. She asked for

1. an update on progress made by the Council since the Notice of Motion was raised at the October Council meeting.
2. a progress reporting strategy for members, to assure members that a robust and convincing Expression of Interest was ready for submission by the due date of 16<sup>th</sup> March.
3. a proposed strategy for raising public awareness of their role in supporting the bid in May (subject to Crewe being selected to the short-list).

The Chief Executive responded that the criteria for bidding for the Great British Railway had been announced last week. She outlined the six criteria. Part of the process would involve a non-binding online public vote. The Council had been working with the Local Enterprise Partnership and neighbouring authorities on a joint campaign to promote Crewe, and had taken the opportunity to raise the matter at a meeting with Ministers last week and with local MPs. The Council with its partners was in the process of finalising a PR campaign. Expressions of interest were due by 16<sup>th</sup> March and a shortlist would be announced in May. The decision would be made during the summer. Briefings on the campaign and bidding process would be arranged for members.

## **RESOLVED**

That Council be recommended to

- 1 support the principles of the High Speed Rail (Crewe - Manchester) Bill;
- 2 resolve that it is expedient to petition against the High Speed Rail (Crewe – Manchester) Bill introduced in the 2021-22 session of Parliament;
- 3 delegate authority to the Executive Director of Place, in consultation with the Chair of the Corporate Policy Committee and the Chair of the Highways and Transport Committee, to take all necessary and expedient steps to give effect to the resolution above;
- 4 delegate to the Director of Governance and Compliance the authority to seal any necessary documents and confirm that Sharpe Pritchard LLP (Parliamentary Agents) be authorised to deposit and, if necessary, sign the Petition of the Council against the Bill;
- 5 delegate authority to the Executive Director of Place, in consultation with the Chair of the Corporate Policy Committee and the Chair of the Highways and Transport Committee, to withdraw any aspect of the Council's Petition against the Bill if this is no longer the

appropriate course of action, and to settle or agree any basis for the withdrawal; and

- 6 note the member engagement in the preparation and progress of the Bill as outlined in Section 7 of the report.

### **73 UPDATE ON SHARED SERVICES JOINT COMMITTEE**

The Committee considered a report on the recent work of the Shared Services Joint Committee with Cheshire West and Chester Council.

The Joint Committee was playing a key role in overseeing the implementation of the Best for Business Programme and the Shared Services Review of all eight shared services. The report summarised key updates from the most recent meeting, held on 21 January 2022.

In response to members' questions, the Executive Director of Corporate Services confirmed that the lessons learned review for Best for Business would cover the whole life of the project. She also clarified the roles of the Shared Services Joint Committee and the Economy and Growth Committee in relation to the Farms Estate with the former being responsible for policy and the latter for performance against the budget and performance indicators.

Councillor J Rhodes spoke on this matter as Chair of the Shared Services Joint Committee.

#### **RESOLVED**

That the progress in the delivery of shared services, the shared services review, and the Best for Business Programme be noted.

### **74 PAY POLICY STATEMENT 2022/23**

The Committee considered a report which outlined changes to the Pay Policy Statement for 2022/23.

The Pay Policy Statement for 2022/2023, which reflected the expected position as at 1st April 2022, was attached as Appendix 1 to the report. Changes since last year's Statement were outlined in section 7 of the report.

Members asked how many settlement agreements had been entered into in the last two years. The Executive Director of Corporate Services undertook to provide a written response.

#### **RESOLVED**

That

- 1 the in-year changes since the 2021/22 Pay Policy Statement be noted as outlined in section 7.4 and 7.5 of the report;
- 2 the changes in the 2022/23 Pay Policy Statement (Appendix 1) be noted in section 7.6 of the report;
- 3 the Pay Policy Statement for 2022/23 be recommended to Council for approval and published accordingly; and
- 4 the agreed Pay Policy Statement for 2022/23 be reviewed in-year and any further changes be approved by the Monitoring Officer and published accordingly.

## **75 CALENDAR OF MEETINGS 2022-23**

The Committee considered the draft Calendar of Meetings for Cheshire East Council for the 2022-23 Municipal Year for recommendation to full Council. The Calendar had been shared with the Group Leaders, Chairs and Vice-Chairs of Committees.

The Committee also considered a provisional draft calendar of dates for the period May to October 2023 which was intended to assist members in planning their diaries further ahead. It was proposed that from 2023 onwards an 18-month calendar of meetings would be produced.

The Head of Democratic Services and Governance advised that since the report had been published, the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Audit and Governance Committee had asked that meetings of the Committee be moved from 2.00 pm to 10.30 am. This had been accommodated in some but not all cases, owing to clashes with other meetings.

In response to a question from members, the Head of Democratic Services and Governance confirmed that the draft calendar avoided any clashes with meetings of the Police and Crime Panel and the Cheshire Pension Fund Committee.

### **RESOLVED**

That

- 1 the draft Calendar of Meetings for Cheshire East Council 2022-23, be recommended to Council for approval subject to the following:
  - meetings of the Audit and Governance Committee commencing at 10.30am on the stated meeting dates, except for 29<sup>th</sup> September and 24<sup>th</sup> November, when the start-time will be 2.00pm;
  - subject to the agreement of external partner organisations where appropriate, the meeting of the Shared Services Joint



Committee and planning site-visits currently scheduled to take place on 27<sup>th</sup> January 2023 being rescheduled to avoid Holocaust Memorial Day;

- the Constitution Working Group giving consideration, prior to the 2023 elections, to the question of whether some formal meetings should be “twilight” or evening meetings; and
  - the Constitution Working Group giving consideration, prior to the preparation of the Calendar of Meetings for 2023, to the question of whether it would be appropriate to introduce a standard commencement time of 10.00 am for all morning meetings of formal bodies; and
- 2 the draft Calendar of Meetings for the period of May to October 2023, be recommended to Council for noting.

## **76 WORK PROGRAMME**

The Committee considered its work programme for 2021/22.

The Executive Director of Corporate Services advised that an additional meeting of the Committee had been scheduled for 14<sup>th</sup> April 2022 to consider the Community Governance Review and a review of the Codes and Protocols within the constitution. There was therefore an opportunity to review the distribution of business for the two remaining meetings in the current municipal year.

### **RESOLVED**

That the work programme be noted.

## **77 MINUTES OF SUB-COMMITTEES**

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

Finance Sub-Committee – 5<sup>th</sup> January 2022

## **78 REPORTING OF URGENT DECISIONS**

The Committee was informed of an urgent decision taken on behalf of the Committee in accordance with paragraph 2.11 of the committee procedure rules. The decision was to approve a supplementary revenue estimate for the 2021/22 financial year of £827,108.95 to be funded from the Additional Restrictions Grant, and to authorise the relevant officers to distribute funding from the Grant.

### **RESOLVED**

That the urgent decision be noted.

The meeting commenced at 10.00 am and concluded at 12.55 pm

Councillor A Stott (Chair)