

OPEN

Cheshire and Warrington Joint Committee

08 April 2024

Enterprise Cheshire and Warrington
(ECW) / Marketing Cheshire
Draft Business Plan 2024-25

Report of: Philip Cox, Chief Executive ECW

Report Reference No: CWJC/02/2023-24

Ward(s) Affected: All

Significant/Key Decision?	Yes/No	Definition (to be deleted once completed)
Cheshire West and Chester	No	Constitution Page 115.
Warrington	No	Constitution page 41
Cheshire East	No	Constitution Page 78

Purpose of Report

- 1 This report presents the draft business plan for ECW and Marketing Cheshire for 2024-25. This plan was approved by the Local Authorities as part of the agreements reached in February for ECW to move into Local Authority control. The report recommends that the Committee formally endorse the plan so that ECW can begin to carry out its work on the understanding that an updated, more detailed delivery plan will be presented to the committee at its next meeting. The updated version will confirm budget allocations and be discussed in advance with Growth Directors.

- 2 The proposed functions and activities are in accordance with shared economic vision for Cheshire and Warrington as "the healthiest, most sustainable, inclusive and growing economy in the UK". This vision is aligned with the initial findings of the Cheshire and Warrington Sustainable and Inclusive Growth Commission, which was led by elected representatives from each local authority in the sub-region.

Executive Summary

- 3 This report sets out that a draft business plan for ECW and Marketing Cheshire 2024-25 has been prepared which will provide a framework for objectives and activities during the year. The plan is attached in Appendix 1.
- 4 The draft plan was presented to the Local Authorities in February when they agreed for ECW to move under Local Authority control. Compared with the version presented in February, one small adjustment to projected expenditure has been made, so that the financial plan is for a surplus of £10k, instead of a deficit of £80k.
- 5 A more detailed and, if necessary updated, version of the plan will be presented to the Joint Committee at a future meeting, expected to be in June.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Joint Committee is recommended to:

1. Formally endorse the draft plan as a guiding document to the activities and objectives for ECW and Marketing Cheshire to be delivered during 2024-25, and to delegate to the board of ECW and MC the authority to deliver the activities described within the plan.
2. Note that ECW and Marketing Cheshire will present a more detailed delivery plan and objectives for 2024-25 at a future meeting of the Joint Committee and progress reports throughout the year.
3. Note that ECW and MC together will operate to a balanced financial position for the year 2024-25.
4. Approve that ECW can, as required by the Department for Education submit bids for additional grant funding in relation to the delivery of the Skills Bootcamps programme, provided that this is agreed by the Accountable Body acting by its S151 officer.

Background

- 6 Prior to becoming a local authority-controlled company, it was a requirement by DLUHC that LEPs prepared annually, in consultation with local authority colleagues, a delivery plan and budget which was approved the company board. Progress against the plan and budget was then monitored throughout the year. Under the new arrangements approval of the plan and budget rests with the Joint Committee.
- 7 The draft business plan for 2024-25 has been prepared on the basis that ECW and Marketing Cheshire shall continue to perform all the activities previously carried out and that funding for those activities, except for the Skills Bootcamps programme for 2024-25, will be of a similar level to that received in 2023-24. At this stage of the financial cycle, ECW and MC still await confirmation of funding from some Government departments.
- 8 The financial budget has been prepared based on what is known and by making reasonable assumptions regarding both income and expenditure. The budget comprises quite a wide range of funding sources including grants from central and local government, specific project and programme grants, retained business rates, and in Marketing Cheshire, commercial activities. The estimated budget out turn in 2024-25 for both organisations combined is balanced.
- 9 Included within the budget is the Department for Education (DfE) confirmed allocation to ECW for the Skills Bootcamp programme in 2024-25. The allocation of £2.5M represents a significant increase compared to the allocation of £1.2M in 2023-24. The increased funding will fund a larger programme in Cheshire and Warrington and support over 600 learners to develop skills that are in short supply. In addition, the DfE has already indicated that invitations to bid for additional resources, possibly £1M to £1.5M, may be issued early in the 2024-25 financial year.

Consultation and Engagement

- 10 Preparation of the draft business plan has been completed by officers of ECW and MC engaging with various stakeholders including council members, council officers, board members representing business and the visitor economy, schools, colleges and places of further education and the third sector. The plan remains a living document, and delivery of the activities contained within it will entail further consultation and engagement with a wide range of stakeholders. The plan therefore reflects as far as is possible within the limitations of ECW and Marketing Cheshire resources, the priorities of those stakeholders.

Reasons for Recommendations

- 11 ECW and Marketing Cheshire seek to operate and deliver a set of sub-regional functions, activities and objectives supported and approved by

the local authorities. The draft business plan provides a framework for that delivery and a tool against which to monitor progress.

- 12 In meetings between ECW and the Department for Education, DfE has already indicated that additional funding for the Skills Bootcamps programmes is likely to be available to be bid for during April or May 2024. Usually deadlines are on short timescales and a bid may need to be submitted before the next Joint Committee meeting.

Other Options Considered

- 13 No other options have been considered because the draft plan was previously included in the proposals regarding the transfer of ECW to local authority control and approved by the local authorities.
- 14 Should the joint Committee resolve not to approve the draft business plan:

Option	Impact	Risk
Do nothing	ECW and MC would lack clear direction until an updated and revised version of the plan is approved.	Less efficient use of resources and a delay to the delivery of at least some of the activities.

Implications and Comments

Monitoring Officer/Legal

- 15 There are no legal implications as a result of this report.

Section 151 Officer/Finance

16. There are no direct financial implications at this stage as the Accountable Body will consider each grant application before submission.

Policy

- 16 In its entirety the business plan supports the local authority policy framework and corporate priorities. The activities set out in the plan promote the sub-regional economy with a focus on sustainability, inclusion, health and economic growth.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

- 17 Equality, Diversity and Inclusion factors are considered as each activity or element of the business plan is developed and performed.

Human Resources

- 18 The combined workforce of ECW and Marketing Cheshire is approximately 40 employees (35 FTE).

Risk Management

- 19 Achieving the delivery plan is dependent on sufficient financial resources and appropriately knowledgeable officers being available to perform the activities. Key risks are therefore linked to funding and staff recruitment and / or retention.

Rural Communities

- 20 The economy in rural areas is a key consideration for the development of any policies or proposals relating to sustainable and inclusive economic growth in Cheshire and Warrington. Rural stakeholders are consulted when appropriate.

Children and Young People including Cared for Children, care leavers and Children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)

- 21 None

Public Health

- 22 None

Climate Change

- 23 Within the plan are several projects directly or indirectly relating to industrial decarbonisation, development of skills required by sectors engaged in improving energy efficiency and the promotion of active travel.

Access to Information

Contact Officer:	Philip Cox, ECW Chief Executive philip.cox@cheshireandwarrington.com
Appendices:	Appendix 1 – Draft Business Plan for ECW and Marketing Cheshire 2024-25
Background Papers:	An earlier version of this draft business plan for 2024-25 was included with the papers presented to the councils in February relating to the Local Authorities taking control of ECW.