

**DRAFT**

**Corporate Peer Challenge Action Plan**

	<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>LGA Narrative</b>	<b>Cheshire East Council Action</b>	<b>Responsible Officer</b>	<b>Action completed by</b>
<b>1</b>	<b>Adopt a crisis management approach in responding to issues raised</b>	Given the pace required to address these issues, the Council should consider moving towards a more ‘command and control’ approach to provide clear ownership, oversight, and grip through a clear hierarchy and rhythm.	Weekly officer CEBERT (Cheshire East Budget Emergency Recovery Team) replaced by Strategic Finance Management Board with clear hierarchy, membership, roles and responsibilities and sub-group structure including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Procurement Group</li> <li>• Strategic Asset Group</li> <li>• Workforce Oversight Group</li> <li>• Finance Management Group</li> </ul> Short term task and finish groups to tackle particular issues are also included in the structure including where any Directorate is more than 5% off target. Weekly financial recovery meetings chaired by the S151 officer will take place to ensure recovery actions are put in place and monitored. Expenditure control panel also in place.	Interim Director of Finance/S151	July 2024
			Recovery element of crisis management response delivered through weekly Transformation Board and emerging plan	Director of Transformation	Ongoing
			Standing items on Corporate Leadership Team (CLT) for Corporate Peer Challenge action plan, Children’s Services improvement plan progress, finance updates, providing clear leadership and oversight of issues faced	Chief Executive/CLT	Ongoing
			Children’s Services Improvement and Impact Board in place providing additional oversight of improvement	Executive Director Children’s Services	July 2024
			Assurance Panel established to bring independent external strategic oversight – to be endorsed at Full Council	Chief Executive	July 2024

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<b>2</b>	<b>Urgently agree and recruit to the Council's Permanent Senior Leadership Officer Structure</b>	The Council needs to consider the corporate capacity, requirements, and stability necessary to support their improvement and transformation, including where statutory officers sit within this structure.	Urgent recruitment to interim senior vacancies to support pace of change is complete (Director of Finance/S151, Director of Policy & Change, Director of Transformation, Director of Commissioning)	Chief Executive	May 2024
			Inner Circle appointed as transformation partner	Chief Executive	April 2024
			Organisational transformation readiness exercise completed by Inner Circle to inform revised transformation PMO and governance framework to ensure capability and capacity to deliver	Director of Transformation	July 2024
			Senior management structure agreed at Corporate Policy Committee for consultation	Chief Executive	August 2024
			Recruitment to permanent Executive Director of Place	Chief Executive	September 2024
			Senior management structure agreed at Corporate Policy Committee and recommended to Full Council, and recruitment partner appointed	Chief Executive	October 2024
			Recruitment campaign and related recruitment activity	Head of HR/recruitment partner	December 2024
			Senior recruitment complete and postholders in place	Chief Executive	March 2025
<b>3</b>	<b>Engage with external challenge, support, and oversight through an externally chaired Improvement/Assurance Panel</b>	The Council should establish an external assurance board, initially for a two-year period to provide additional grip and oversight of the Council's transformation improvement, with representatives from across the sector providing focus on issues of finance, governance, culture, and transformation. The LGA can support this work, including the establishment of	Assurance Panel Terms of Reference and membership endorsed at Full Council	Chief Executive	July 2024
			First Assurance Panel meeting to review Terms of Reference, Transformation Plan and CPC Action Plan for submission	Chief Executive/ Assurance Panel Chair	August 2024
			Twice yearly reports to Full Council	Assurance Panel Chair	TBC

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		the board and consideration of potential members.			
4	<b>Promote increased compliance across the organisation through visible senior leadership for the 'basics'</b>	Establish stronger senior leadership and managerial 'grip' across a range of key corporate processes and systems including budget and performance management and reporting and risk management.	Officer Strategic Finance Management Board in place with clear hierarchy, membership, roles and responsibilities and sub-group structure. New task and finish activity commenced enabling a flex up and down of resources and focus.	Interim Director of Finance/S151	July 2024
			Line by line budget reviews taking place with each Directorate including establishment review	Interim Director of Finance/S151	July 2024
			New cross-council officer boards established for Performance and Improvement, Strategy, Policy and Legislation, Risk and Assurance with Executive Director chairs/sponsors and highlight reports to CLT	Chief Executive/ Executive Directors	From April 2024
			Performance and Improvement Board work programme includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improved performance reporting for Cheshire East Plan 2024/25</li> <li>New performance management framework aligned to new Corporate Plan 2025+</li> <li>Organisational health, workforce and manager dashboards</li> </ul>	Executive Director Adults, Health and Integration	Ongoing
			Strategy, Policy and Legislation work programme includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strategy mapping exercise</li> <li>Policy review</li> <li>Updated policy framework</li> </ul>	Executive Director Children's Services	Ongoing
			Risk and Assurance Board work programme includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Updated Assurance Framework</li> <li>Internal Control Environment review</li> <li>Internal Audit Annual Opinion report and actions</li> </ul>	Executive Director Place	Ongoing

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			Standard council-wide programme and change management framework developed including principles, training and templates to improve delivery with consistent reporting, appropriate escalation and oversight	Director of Transformation/ Interim Director of Policy and Change	September 2024
			SOLACE leadership development programme for Wider Leadership Community (WLC) - Heads of Service and above - following implementation of the DMA recommendations and recruitment	Head of HR	January 2025 onwards
5	<b>Consistently apply principles of people and performance management for the year of 2024-2025</b>	The people management arrangements need to be refreshed and consistently embedded. This includes clarity around expected behaviours of both staff and managers at all levels.	<p>Review existing 'Our Values' and behaviours framework</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Simplify existing framework</li> <li>Develop new values and behaviours framework aligned to Corporate Plan 2025+ and operating model</li> </ul>	Head of HR	September 2024 March 2025
			Monitor manager compliance through KPIs in new manager PowerBI performance dashboards e.g. all staff have annual PDR and 6-month reviews.	Head of HR	September 2024
			Update the conversation toolkit, based on the revised values and behaviours, including use of 360 feedback as part of a new competency framework	Head of HR	April 2025
			Relaunch mentoring/coaching opportunities and reverse mentoring	Head of HR	September 2024
			Review the completed council-wide action plan for the staff survey results 2023 building on new 'you said, we did' approach to include actions identified in the service Workforce Plans and work underway with staff champions and networks	Head of HR	September 2024
			New Workforce Strategy 2025-28 in development including actions under three pillars Capability, Capacity and Culture, for agreement at Corporate Policy Committee	Head of HR	January 2025

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			Review capacity in HR/OD to support people performance management, leadership and organisational change informed by organisational readiness review and senior management structure	Interim Director of Finance/S151	September 2024
6	<b>Develop a customer focussed Transformation Plan to support longer-term improvement</b>	The Council is required to develop this plan in order to access Exceptional Financial Support, and it needs to be completed by August. Whilst the completion of this Plan (and work with a transformation partner) will support the Council in the medium-term, it cannot be at the expense of focusing on the delivery of immediate budget savings and the short-term improvements and cultural changes required.	Appoint external transformation partner (Inner Circle) and Transformation Board established	Director of Transformation	April 2024
			Combined MTFS and transformation timetable showing complementary activity and alignment	Head of Communications	June 2024
			Organisational transformation readiness exercise completed by Inner Circle to inform revised transformation PMO and governance framework to ensure capability and capacity to deliver – recommendations implemented	Director of Transformation	August 2024
			Transformation Plan submitted to Assurance Panel and MHCLG as condition of Exceptional Financial Support	Interim Director of Finance/S151	August 2024
			Begin the co-design of a cultural change programme through conversations with staff to meet current organisational challenges and support transformation	Director of Transformation/ Head of HR	From September 2024
			Develop new Customer Experience Strategy aligned to Corporate Plan 2025+, Transformation Plan and new operating model	Interim Director of Finance/S151	March 2025
7	<b>Develop and agree a new multi-year Council Plan</b>	The current Council Plan is due to expire in 2025, presenting the opportunity to articulate clear priorities and the Council’s vision for the future. This should be an outcome focused document supported by an updated performance management framework. There will need to be	Refreshed Cheshire East Plan agreed at Full Council for 2024/25 to better reflect existing pressures and priorities	Chief Executive/ Head of Communications	July 2024
			Refreshed performance reporting 2024/25	Interim Director of Policy and Change	September 2024
			Agree timetable and approach to develop new outcome focussed corporate plan including	Interim Director of Policy and Change	September 2024

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		a clear relationship between the Council Plan, Improvement Plan and Transformation Plan to avoid causing confusion and the necessary read across and alignment with the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy.	engagement with Members, staff, residents and partners		
			New Corporate Plan 2025+ aligned to MTFS, transformation plan and operating model	Interim Director of Policy and Change	March 2025
			Agree new performance management framework including strategy mapping/hierarchy and associated governance	Interim Director of Policy and Change	March 2025
8	<b>Urgently review the Council's decision-making framework</b>	The Council needs to streamline current decision-making arrangements to avoid siloed working across committees, ensure that Committees are working through effective work programmes, and reduce confusion and lost capacity caused by the current system. This should include consideration of governance structures, schemes of delegation, and report approval arrangements ahead of committee meetings.	Through Constitution Working Group (CWG) agree an updated Scheme of Delegation to be incorporated into the constitution. Review of the financial procedure rule limits – dedicated support lawyer identified to progress at pace – CWG recommendation to Corporate Policy Committee and to Full Council	Director of Governance and Compliance	October 2024
			Mandate all significant decisions are made via Committee or where delegated under a committee decision they are clearly recorded. Remove the previous transitional arrangements. Review significant decision threshold.	Director of Governance and Compliance	October 2024
			Internal audit of Officer Decision Record (ODR) compliance mechanisms and process, reporting and compliance	Head of Audit and Risk	October 2024
			Strengthen report sign off processes and decision pathways through Heads of Service, Directors and Executive Directors with clear consistent routes and timelines including for implications, involvement of statutory officers where relevant and oversight at CLT	Director of Governance and Compliance/CLT	September 2024
9	<b>Empower the Corporate Policy Committee to lead on financial recovery</b>	The Corporate Policy Committee should have ownership for monitoring and recommending the budget to Full Council. The current disaggregation of the	Clarity of governance hierarchy for MTFS and budget framework:	Interim Director of Finance/S151	June 2024

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		budget across Committees creates confusion and a loss of oversight. Empowering the Corporate Policy Committee would be in line with the Council's Constitution, as well as the oversight of the Council's wider transformation programme.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Corporate Policy Committee confirm strategic ownership and oversight role for the MTFS and budget framework</li> <li>Finance Sub-Committee make recommendations to the Corporate Policy Committee on development of MTFS, setting and monitoring of the capital and revenue budgets</li> <li>MTFS working Group established from Finance Sub-Committee</li> </ul>		
			Restructure financial reporting to all service committees. One single financial management report to be used for all committees to improve financial awareness of the complete financial health of the council.	Interim Director of Finance/S151	September 2024
10	<b>Give more time and emphasis to Scrutiny across the Council</b>	The Council would benefit from increased Scrutiny of decisions through their existing governance structures. This should include more consistent approaches to Scrutiny at Committee, and improved forward planning and agenda setting to maximise member input into the decision-making process.	Provide further training including role of scrutiny within a Committee system in policy development and decision making with example scenarios, complexity of scrutiny, internal and external scrutiny. Continue to include Scrutiny as part of Member induction. Promote scrutiny roles in committee.	Director of Governance and Compliance	From September 2024
			Improved forward planning to include scrutiny items on Committee work programmes and clarify Lead Member role and role of Chairs in agenda setting	Director of Governance and Compliance	September 2024
11	<b>Improve the quality and clarity of reports presented to Committees</b>	This should include report writing training for officers and increased compliance with the Council's desired structure and length of reports.	Enforce report sign off processes and decision pathways through Heads of Service, Directors and Executive Directors with clear consistent routes and timelines including for completion of implications, involvement of statutory officers where relevant and oversight at CLT	Director of Governance and Compliance	September 2024

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			Refresh and relaunch report writing training and guidance for officers including style guide	Director of Governance and Compliance	September 2024
			Provide timely briefings for Members on strategic, complex or contentious council-wide and service issues prior to consideration at Committee/Council	Director of Governance and Compliance	Ongoing
12	<b>Improve financial reporting mechanisms and training</b>	Given the Council's financial context there is a need for accurate, timely and regular financial reporting. Financial training should be rolled out to officers and members to support their regular engagement with and scrutiny of this information.	Hold member engagement session on MTFS, structure of council finances, understanding s114 and budget setting process and timetable for 2025/26	Interim Director of Finance/S151	July 2024
			New report format to be discussed with informal MTFS Working Group of Finance Sub Committee alongside discussion on assumptions in the MTFS - agreed at June committee	Interim Director of Finance/S151	September 2024
			Single report format for all service committees relating to finance management reports to ensure whole council not silo view of financial health - new format in place from September	Interim Director of Finance/S151	September 2024
			A finance training programme to be delivered for officers and Members alongside other changes to financial reporting – informed by CIPFA financial governance review starting in July 2024 (requirement of Exceptional Financial Support)	Interim Director of Finance/S151	September 2024
13	<b>Review delivery and issues associated with the Council's new finance system</b>	The challenges associated with the Council's implementation of its new finance system should be reviewed, and an urgent action plan agreed for improvement	Unit 4 improvement plan to be scoped for both finance and HR. This will be informed by the CIPFA financial governance review starting in July 2024, Unit 4 health check feedback in August and reviewed alongside the operation of the shared transactional service team (shared with Cheshire West and Chester). All urgent actions to be resolved as per the timeline agreed.	Interim Director of Finance/S151	From July 2024
14	<b>Launch a programme of training and</b>	Deliver appropriate training for elected Members regarding roles and responsibilities, as well as	Structured training programme for all Members to be delivered. Engage with external providers to include:	Director of Governance and Compliance	From September 2024



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	<b>development for members and officers</b>	leadership and management development training for officers.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strategic decision making for service committees</li> <li>• Strategic financial decision making</li> <li>• Risk and assurance</li> <li>• Chairing skills for Committee Chairs and Vice Chairs</li> <li>• Leadership support for Committee Chairs</li> <li>• Scrutiny within a committee model of governance</li> <li>• Scrutiny support for lead committee members</li> <li>• Tiers and functions of local government</li> <li>• Members/officers working together, roles and responsibilities, overview of all services</li> <li>• Corporate parenting</li> <li>• Safeguarding</li> <li>• Equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI)</li> <li>• Update the 2023 induction and refresher training</li> <li>• Coaching and mentoring</li> </ul>		
			CLT development programme including facilitated team sessions and individual coaching/mentoring	Chief Executive/CLT	From April 2024
			Updated structured training programme for managers to include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use of Unit 4 (finance/HR system)</li> <li>• Report writing</li> <li>• EDI</li> <li>• Corporate parenting</li> </ul>	Head of HR	From October 2024
			Launch a revised leadership and management development programme for managers, aligned to the new values and behaviours, and competency framework	Head of HR	April 2025
			SOLACE leadership development programme for Wider Leadership Community (WLC) - Heads of	Head of HR	From January 2025

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			Service and above - following implementation of the DMA recommendations and recruitment		
			Encourage wider participation in sector/ professional networks and learning opportunities as well as internal cross-council engagement opportunities to further breakdown silo working	CLT	Ongoing
15	<b>Adopt a corporate approach to programme and project management</b>	Implement a standardised approach towards change management and programme management across the Council. A consistent approach, methodology, documentation, and reporting framework will support the Council to progress	Organisational transformation readiness exercise completed by Inner Circle to inform revised transformation PMO and governance framework to ensure capability and capacity to deliver – recommendations implemented	Director of Transformation	August 2024
			Standard council-wide programme and change management framework developed including principles, training and templates to improve delivery with consistent reporting, appropriate escalation and oversight	Director of Transformation/ Interim Director of Policy and Change	September 2024
16	<b>Develop a clear communication and engagement strategy to support the Council's improvement and transformation proposals</b>	Large sections of the organisation are keen to support this work, and good communication and engagement will be central to galvanising their support. This should include revisiting and refreshing the Council's use of the Brighter Futures Programme. As well as internal communication for staff, the Council should review external communication and engagement to support open dialogue with residents.	Refresh the internal communication and engagement strategy to clearly identify purpose, priorities and channels including cascade and network groups to better support the council's improvement and transformation journey	Head of Communications	September 2024
			Communication and engagement strategy developed to embed an improvement, transformation and financial sustainability narrative and messaging across all audiences especially residents including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Aims</li> <li>• Key messages</li> <li>• Approach/channels</li> <li>• Stakeholder mapping</li> </ul>	Head of Communications	September 2024
			Visible leadership of the change agenda through Chief Executive, Leader and Deputy Leader at	Chief Executive/ Head of Communications	From July 2024

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			managers' sessions and ongoing through all communication channels		
			Begin the co-design of a cultural change programme through conversations with staff to meet current organisational challenges and support transformation (including review of Brighter Futures programme)	Director of Transformation/ Head of HR	From September 2024
			Better align the relationship between communication, engagement and consultation functions	Interim Director of Policy and Change	September 2024
			Explore options to strengthen resident engagement to inform decision making e.g. citizen/resident panel	Acting Head of Business Change	October 2024
			Develop a consultation and engagement programme	Acting Head of Business Change	October 2024
			Refresh the council's overarching communication strategy aligned to the new Corporate Plan 2025+	Head of Communications	March 2025
17	<b>Act on the issues identified through the LGA's Decision Making and Accountability (DMA) tool</b>	The Council have recently undergone a DMA review of senior structures and responsibilities; the Council should consider how best to incorporate these recommendations into their wider improvement work.	See all actions for Recommendation 2 re interim and permanent recruitment and timeline for senior structure decision making and recruitment.	Chief Executive	March 2025
18	<b>Consider the corporate capacity required to support the Chief Executive</b>	As part of the review of the senior officer structure the Council should consider what additional capacity will be required to specifically support the Chief Executive in Leading what is a significant organisational transformation agenda.	Consider as part of the DMA and development of the senior structure.	Chief Executive	October 2024

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	<b>Additional Actions</b>				
	<b>Children's Services Improvement</b>	A central theme to the Council's updated Council Plan will be the requirement to improve Children's Services following the Inadequate OFSTED rating in the March 2024 inspection. Engaging the whole Council in Children's Service improvement with a focus on corporate parenting will not only support pace in this important area but create a platform from which to start to change behaviours.	Develop an Improvement Plan in response to the OFSTED findings closely linked to the overall transformation programme to be monitored via the independently chaired Improvement and Impact Board	Executive Director Children's Services	July 2024
Establish an Improvement and Impact Board to monitor delivery of the improvement plan			Executive Director Children's Services	July 2024	
Introduce a Corporate Parenting Working Group chaired by Chief Executive which will work together with care experienced children, young people and young adults to understand what support they need, what is working and what needs to change, ensuring there is a joined up multi-agency and whole-council approach			Executive Director Children's Services	July 2024	
Reflect the priority to improve Children's Services in the new Corporate Plan			Interim Director of Policy and Change	March 2025	
	<b>Dedicated Schools Grant</b>	...the Council is also facing a significant deficit relating to its Dedicated School's Grant. This figure has risen from a £26 million deficit in 2022 to £86 million by 2024. The Council has engaged with the national Project Safety Valve and have developed a seven-year sustainability plan regarding these services. However, the national override for this deficit is due to expire in 2026, and based on current assumptions would require the Council to	Continue to deliver the high needs and transformation/sustainability plan which is reducing the deficit (end of year figure was £79.5m in 2024 down from £89m forecast) to support the overall MTFS and financial sustainability	Executive Director Children's Services	Ongoing
Establish a SEND Executive Oversight Panel chaired by the Chief Executive. The panel will provide support, challenge and scrutiny as appropriate to the SEND Partnership with regard to any risks or issues in achieving agreed improvements and delivery of the DSG High Needs management plan.			Executive Director Children's Services	Ongoing	

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		issue a section 114 notice. The Council's delivery of their seven-year plan is essential to their long-term financial viability, and similar to other authorities, they will be concerned by the 2026 deadline for the national override on this account.			

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