

# **CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL**

Minutes of a meeting of the **Economy and Growth Committee**  
held on Tuesday, 12th November, 2024 in the Committee Suite 1,2 & 3,  
Westfields, Middlewich Road, Sandbach CW11 1HZ

## **PRESENT**

Councillor M Gorman (Chair)  
Councillor F Wilson (Vice-Chair)

Councillors D Brown, L Buchanan, A Burton, D Clark, J Clowes, P Coan,  
G Marshall, C O'Leary, P Redstone and R Vernon

## **OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE**

Peter Skates, Acting Director of Place  
Karen Carsberg, Head of Housing  
Karen Whitehead, Housing Standards and Adaptations Manager  
Adrian Leslie, Legal Officer  
Steve Reading, Finance Officer  
Rachel Graves, Democratic Services Officer

## **27 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies were received from Councillors B Drake and A Heler. Councillor D Clark attended as a substitute.

## **28 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

In relation to Item 5 – Housing Strategy 2025-2028 Consultation, Councillor C O'Leary declared a non-pecuniary and non-registerable interest as he had published research relevant to housing strategy, most recently research commissioned by Greater Manchester Combined Authority and Centre for Better Ageing on older people's housing options.

In relation to Item 6 – Home Repairs and Adaptations for Vulnerable People Policy 2024, Councillor C O'Leary declared a non-pecuniary and non-registerable interest as he published research relevant to adaptations, including on financial benefits of low level adaptations.

## **29 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

### **RESOLVED:**

That the minutes of the meeting held on 25 September be approved as a correct record.

### 30 PUBLIC SPEAKING/OPEN SESSION

There were no public speakers.

### 31 HOUSING STRATEGY 2025-2028 CONSULTATION

The Committee considered the report which sought approval of the draft Interim Housing Strategy 2025-2028 for consultation.

It was reported that there were some typos in the draft strategy and that these would be corrected before it went out to consultation.

It was asked if the consultation would include a wide range of groups such as Cheshire Women's Aid and CPRE. In response it was stated that a wide range of organisations would be consulted which would include internal council services, registered housing providers, health and community partners, local charities and support groups.

It was suggested that the Vulnerable and Older Persons' Housing Strategy should be included in the list of strategies in the diagram in the introduction to the Housing Strategy. In response it was stated that the overarching strategies had been listed and that officers would look again at the strategies listed before the consultation went out.

Reference was made to the number of affordable homes in rural areas, and it was asked how many rural properties had been recently built. It was agreed that a written response would be circulated.

It was asked if the committee members could have sight of the consultation questions before the consultation went live. Officers agreed to circulate them.

Reference was made to modern day slavery and seasonal workers living in caravans who could be exploited, and it was asked if this was an issue in Cheshire East. In response it was said that the housing team worked closely with safeguarding colleagues and the community safety team and that there was a protocol in place to what would happen if a case was found, and that help would be provided with rehousing.

It was asked if the Council would consider introducing a register of private landlords under the selective licensing scheme. In response it was stated that a report had been brought to the Committee back in March 2024 on this and that were waiting for the Government to introduce their scheme and details of it to be made available.

**RESOLVED** (by majority): That the Committee

- 1 approve public consultation on the draft Interim Housing Strategy 2025-2028.

- 2 the final version of the Interim Housing Strategy 2025-2028 would be presented to a future meeting of Economy and Growth Committee to seek approval to adopt.

### **32 HOME REPAIRS AND ADAPTATIONS FOR VULNERABLE PEOPLE POLICY 2024**

The Committee considered the report which set out details of the proposed consultation on revisions to the Home Repairs and Adaptations for Vulnerable People Policy to provide a targeted focus on the most financially vulnerable households, enabling them to live independently in their own home, reducing health inequalities and reducing reliance on long-term care.

The demand for the Disabled Facilities Grant was exceeding the budget allocation. As the Council was facing unprecedented financial circumstances, it was necessary to review the discretionary financial assistance give to residents through the Home Repairs and Adaptions Policy 2021-2026.

The Council had been operating a policy of topping-up £30,000 grants up to £50,000. Demand for this discretionary supplement had increased year on year, with 17% of the Disabled Facilities Grant budget in 2023/24 being spent on the discretionary supplement. The proposal to amend the Policy to remove the discretionary element would enable the Council to utilise the capital grant funding it received to assist more households at a lower average grant per household and would align with standard practice in other local authority areas.

The Committee suggested that healthcare partners should be involved with the consultation as there was evidence which showed the effectiveness of housing adaptations reducing the risk of falls at home.

Reference was made to the timescales for grant applications and work being carried out. In response it was stated that it depended on the type of work requested. Some applications were exceeding the 6 months from when received. There was a process for very urgent works which could be approved within a matter of days.

**RESOLVED** (by majority): That the Committee

- 1 delegate authority to officers to conduct a public consultation on the proposed revisions to the Home Repairs and Adaptations for Vulnerable People Policy 2021-2026 and return to Committee to report on the outcome of the consultation and seek approval for a final revised policy.
- 2 approve the virement of £458,000 budget from Green Homes Grant to Home Repairs for Vulnerable People in the capital programme.

### 33 SECOND FINANCIAL REVIEW OF 2024/25

The Committee considered a report which provided the current forecast outturn for the financial year 2024/25 based on the Council's income, expenditure and known commitments as at the end of August 2024. The report also identified actions that were being taken to address adverse variances to urgently address financial sustainability.

The Second Financial review forecast revenue outturn was forecasting an adverse variance of £20.1m. This was before the application of any exceptional financial support. The Economy and Growth Committee were reporting an underspend of £3.3m against the net budget of £28.1m. The key reasons for the underspend were underspends from vacancy management and lower gas and electricity prices.

An amendment was proposed and seconded to Recommendation 2 as follows:

The addition of the following at the end of recommendation 2

*“To facilitate this review, establish a task and finish group, consisting of five councillors (2 Labour, 2 Conservative, 1 Independent) to review and provide scrutiny to the changes in timing and funding of, reasons for, risks and consequences of Economy and Growth Committee capital projects and to report back to the committee on its findings and recommendations by the end of this financial year.”*

The amendment was put to the vote with 6 voting for, 6 voting against and no abstentions. In accordance with the Council's Constitution/Procedural Rule 2.36, the Chair exercised their casting vote and voted against the amendment. The amendment was therefore declared lost.

**RESOLVED (by majority):** That the Committee

- 1 note the factors leading to a forecast adverse Net Revenue financial pressure of £20.1m against a revised budget of £395.4m (5.1%) and note the contents of Annex 1, Section 2 of the report on the progress of the delivery of the MTFS approved budget policy change items, the RAG ratings and latest forecasts and the actions to be taken to address any adverse variances from the approved budget.
- 2 note the in-year forecast capital spending of £157.7m against an approved MTFS budget of £215.8m due to slippage that has been re-profiled into future years.
- 3 note the available reserves position as per Annex 1, Section 5 of the report.

### 34 **MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY UPDATE 2025/26 - 2028/29**

The Committee received the report which set out progress and further development activity required before the final MTFS 2025-29 would be presented for approval to the budget setting meeting of Council in February 2025.

**RESOLVED:** That the Committee

- 1 note the progress to date on the development of the MTFS for 2025-29.
- 2 note that officers will continue to challenge draft proposals and develop further proposals in consultation with Members prior to approval by Council.
- 3 note that Committees will be presented with the opportunity to review the full set of financial proposals, designed to achieve a balanced budget, as part of their January cycle of meetings prior to recommendations being made to Council for approval.

### 35 **WORK PROGRAMME**

The Committee considered the Work Programme for the remainder of 2024/25.

It was noted that an update report on the closure of Westfields would be brought to the January meeting of the Committee. This meeting would also receive reports on the West Park Museum, a feasibility study on Macclesfield car parks and MTFS 2025/26 – 2028/29 consultation.

**RESOLVED:**

That the Work Programme be noted.

The meeting commenced at 2.00 pm and concluded at 3.22 pm

Councillor M Gorman (Chair)