

Cheshire East Council Budget Consultation 2009-10
Minutes of Town and Parish Councils Event – 12th January 2009

Cheshire East Council Councillors:

Councillor W Fitzgerald
Councillor F Keegan
Councillor D Brown
Councillor R Domleo
Councillor B Silvester

Parish and Town Council Representatives:

John Kemble	Audlem PC
Jean Batchelor	Betchton PC
Bill Brown	Betchton PC
Jackie Potts	Congleton TC
Lesley Smetham	Gawsworth PC
Malcolm Nicholls	Goostrey PC
Richard Harvey	Haslington PC
Philip Jackson	Haslington PC
Duncan Brock	Henbury PC
Mike Wootton	Henbury PC
Councillor M Hosker	High Legh PC
Councillor J Tuck	High Legh PC
David Cowgill	Holmes Chapel PC & Cranage
Matthew Jackson	Knutsford TC
John Gregg	Marbury & District PC
Geraint Jones	Marbury & District PC
Lucy Nixon	Marton PC
David Woolliscroft	Marton PC
Councillor T Hunt	Odd Rode PC
Councillor S Robinson	Odd Rode PC
Ron Sherwin	Odd Rode PC
Charles Gorst	Poynton PC
Brian Hogan	Poynton PC
Councillor L Burns	Prestbury PC
Ken Butler	Rainow PC
Bob Squirrel	Rope PC
Ann Banks	Sandbach TC
Councillor P Darnes	Sandbach TC
Councillor B Moran	Sandbach TC
Liz Allcock	Warmingham PC
Councillor N Higson	Warmingham PC
Councillor G Cook	Weston & Basford PC
Councillor J Cornell	Weston & Basford PC

Officers:

Erika Wenzel	Chief Executive – Cheshire East Council
Lisa Quinn	Borough Treasurer & Head of Assets – Cheshire East Council
Kirstie Hercules	Local Strategic Partnerships – Crewe & Nantwich Borough Council

Cllr Fitzgerald welcomed representatives from the Town and Parish Councils and introduced the speakers.

Erika Wenzel presented an overview of Cheshire East Council setting out the background, progress to date and vision of the new authority. This included the proposals for Neighbourhood Working and the Local Strategic Partnership. Cllr Keegan set out the aims and objectives of the consultation process and the future plans for Cheshire East including the devolvement of services to Town and Parish Councils.

Lisa Quinn provided an overview of the financial scenario for Cheshire East Council and the plans for the 2009-10 budget and Council Tax levels. Summary information was provided on the budget proposals for People, Places and Performance and Capacity.

Questions from the Town and Parish Council representatives were invited from Cllr Keegan.

Poynton PC – Will the devolution of services to Town and Parish Councils involve the transfer of operational budgets only or will there be some allocation for overhead costs?

Cllr Keegan responded that where Parish Councils take on additional responsibility they will receive the relevant budget to deliver that service. The overall aim is to achieve efficiencies, particularly on overhead costs so these will remain centralised. Parish Councils will receive what is deemed to be a 'fair' amount to run the service.

Goostrey PC – Devolved services will require more commitment from Parishes and it is increasingly difficult to find representatives for Finance Committee meetings. The Parishes will therefore require additional support from Cheshire East Council.

Cllr Keegan explained the consultation process that is currently taking place with Town and Parish Councils and invited representatives to view the maps available at the back of the room. The areas for neighbourhood working are currently in draft and trials are being discussed as part of the consultation process. He understood that not all parishes will want to take on additional service provision.

Haslington PC – Parish Councils will not want the additional management responsibility of taking on staff etc.

Cllr Keegan replied that the Council is not planning to pass on service delivery to Parishes who do not want it and full support would be given from the centre in respect of finance, human resources and legal services.

Holmes Chapel PC – Should the consultation on the grouping of Parish Councils have taken place before the consultation on the budget.

Cllr Keegan stated the consultation process started in early December with Cllr Brown and the Chief Executive therefore some parishes have already had some involvement.

Knutsford TC – Would this mean some parishes take on delivery of services outside their Parished area.

Cllr Keegan confirmed this would be the case and explained that this would be worked out through the pilot exercises.

Cllr Brown provided further information on the consultation process on neighbourhood and area working and encouraged representatives to get involved in the future meetings. The consultation process is to decide how services can best be provided and services will only be devolved if that is the decision of the Parish Council. It will not be forced on them.

Poynton PC – How is the issue of double taxation being dealt with.

Lisa Quinn explained that this will be taken forward and examined in more detail. Cheshire East Council will either provide the resources to the Parish providing the service or take the service back therefore eliminating the instances of double taxation.

Betchton PC – Will the website hosting facility operated by Cheshire County Council continue.

The Chief Executive confirmed that the service would continue to be provided by Cheshire East Council.

Betchton PC – Information was requested on the cost of providing the Budget Consultation events.

Lisa Quinn confirmed that details would be provided.

High Lea PC – Cllr Hosker thanked the panel for the detailed information provided but stated that the Parish had not heard anything since July 2008 and there had been no Cheshire East Member representation at High Lea meetings.

Cllr Fitzgerald explained that the process has only just commenced and will be ongoing over several years. Meetings have taken place during December with Cllr Brown and will continue.

Marton PC – Many parishes are made up of small villages in rural areas who will not want to take on devolved responsibilities.

The panel explained that the smaller parishes will form part of a Local Area Partnership, which could consist of say 15 in one area. This will mean a Parish taking on services on behalf of others and providing them across the whole partnership area.

Henbury PC – What will happen on Day 1 regarding the delivery of services, for example, refuse collection.

The Panel confirmed that services will continue as normal from Day 1 but from a unitary council rather than district and county. The service users should not see any changes. He pointed out that the contact numbers may change and they would try to ensure any such information was circulated widely in advance. Refuse collection is not a service that would be devolved.

Cllr Fitzgerald explained that change was an evolutionary process and would continue following dialogue with the Parish and Town Councils.

Information was requested on the directorship of Cheshire East Council and which services they were responsible for.

The Chief Executive confirmed that the new structure charts will be available on the website.

Odd Rode PC – Cllr Robinson requested details of the plans for Cheshire East Council and how it is managing the change process.

The Chief Executive explained that the plans are in place and are progressing. The Council has to report to the Department for Communities and Local Government and the Audit Commission on a regular basis. The Cabinet reports contain details of the planning process and progress to date and are available on the Cheshire East Council website: www.cheshireeast.gov.uk

Poynton PC – What procedures will be in place for the devolvment of services and what are the existing costs.

Cllr Keegan explained that Poynton will be one of the trial areas and will be informed of the available resources.

Rainow PC – How will the Local Area Partnerships work and will the increased role of Town and Parish Councils be recognised?

Cllr Brown explained that Cheshire East Council will have 81 members who will represent an area and belong to a Local Area Partnership. The aim is to work in new ways to provide benefits to the local area and all parishes will have an elected representative on Cheshire East Council.

Warmingham PC – If the Parish have three representatives on the Council whom should they use.

The Panel confirmed they can use any one or all of their representatives on the Council and can invite their Cheshire East Council representatives to Parish meetings. One Parish Council confirmed that a Shadow Councillor had attended every meeting and noted that they may need to be invited.

Betchton PC – The parishes can currently request a loan from the District Council if they have unexpected expenditure during the year, will this continue.

Cllr Keegan confirmed that this would continue.

Poynton PC – The Chief Executive has a major role in the creation and transformation of Cheshire East Council, how will this be achieved.

The Chief Executive explained her background and experience from working in Tameside where she devolved £12m - £13m of services to Town and Parish Councils.

Marbury PC – Information was requested on Cheshire East Council's plans for road improvements.

The Panel responded that the Council's objectives are to reduce costs and operate more efficiently enabling them to put money back into front line services such as roads. However, this would take time to implement.

Knutsford TC – The Town Council would welcome more devolved functions and requested that the consultation is extended to involve more Town and Parish Councils to make them bigger and better.

Cllr Brown explained that the next round of meetings on the Local Area Partnerships will give the representatives the opportunity for further discussion and the first meeting is set for 20th January.

Information on the events and Local Area Partnerships was requested as not all parishes have web access.

Cllr Brown confirmed that the parishes would receive information in the post.

Henbury PC – Why has Cheshire East Council gone for Borough Status.

Cllr Keegan explained that the County's Aldermen could continue into the new Council. However, the Freemen from the District's could not be taken into the new Council if it did not have Borough status. Therefore, a successful application had been made.

Sandbach PC – Information was requested on participatory budgeting.

Lisa Quinn reported that pilots were taking place across the country and Cheshire East Council would look into the outcomes.

Conclusion

Cllr Fitzgerald summed up the evening and thanked the Town and Parish Council representatives for their participation.