

CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the **Corporate Policy Committee**
held on Thursday, 2nd December, 2021 in the Committee Suite 1,2 & 3,
Westfields, Middlewich Road, Sandbach CW11 1HZ

PRESENT

Councillor S Corcoran (Chair)
Councillor A Stott (Vice-Chair)

Councillors C Browne, J Clowes, R Fletcher, N Mannion, A Martin,
K Parkinson, J Rhodes, M Warren, C Bulman (for Cllr Flavell), T Dean (for Cllr
Findlow) and S Edgar (for Cllr Gardiner)

Other Members Present

Councillors A Critchley, C Naismith and L Wardlaw

Officers

Lorraine O'Donnell, Chief Executive
Jane Burns, Executive Director Corporate Services
David Brown, Director of Governance and Compliance
Sara Barker, Head of HR
Paul Goodwin, Head of Financial Services & Deputy Chief Finance Officer
Helen Gerrard, Head of Customer Services
Paul Mountford, Democratic Services

Apologies

Councillors J P Findlow, K Flavell and S Gardiner

44 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

45 PUBLIC SPEAKING/OPEN SESSION

There were no public speakers

46 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the meeting held on 4th November 2021 be approved
as a correct record.

47 NOTICE OF MOTION: FIRE AND RE-HIRE

The Committee considered a report in response to a Notice of Motion
referred by Council on 20th October 2021. The Notice of Motion, which was
proposed by Councillor L Crane and seconded by Councillor C Naismith,

requested that consideration be given to a number of employment-related issues, namely:

- To seek to ensure local residents are protected against the use of 'fire and re-hire' and to protect their employment terms and conditions.
- That Cheshire East Council does not use fire and rehire itself as an employer and to prevent its use by council contractors.
- To promote the increasing number of progressive local employers prioritising their employees' standard of living and wellbeing and best practice.
- To support the TUC campaign for a 'New Deal for Working People'.

The proposer of the motion, Councillor L Smith, was unable to attend the meeting but had submitted a written statement which was read out by the Chair. Copies of the statement were circulated at the meeting.

The seconder of the motion, Councillor C Naismith, attended the meeting and spoke in support of the motion.

At the invitation of the Chair, Councillor A Critchley spoke on this matter as a visiting member.

RESOLVED

1. That the Leader of the Council be asked to write to the Prime Minister in support of the principles set out in the Private Members Bill Employment and Trade Union Rights (Dismissal Re-engagement);

RESOLVED (unanimously)

That the Committee

2. notes that the Council does not and would not use fire and re-hire practices to the detriment of staff terms and conditions;
3. notes that the Council as an employer, already attains all the standards recommended by the TUC campaign for a "New Deal for Working People"; and
4. notes the TUC campaign for a New Deal for Working People and encourages businesses in the Borough to consider how they may also support best employment practice.

48 COVID-19 UPDATE

The Committee considered an update report on the Covid-19 pandemic and the response of Cheshire East Council.

The Executive Director of Corporate Services advised that the report had been published before the new Covid-19 variant, Omicron, had become a variant of concern. The Government had since announced new restrictions including the mandatory wearing of face coverings in shops, some other settings, and on public transport. Pupils in secondary schools were being advised to wear face coverings in communal areas, an approach that Cheshire East Council had already taken locally. There had also been new requirements as regards self-isolation, new restrictions on international travel, and an extension of the vaccination booster programme.

Infection rates in the Borough remained high. The Council continued to provide public messaging around the need for vaccination and testing, and the need to exercise caution in public places.

The Executive Director drew attention to the new household support fund to which members were able to make referrals. She also advised that there were no major issues with staff absences. The report also provided an updated financial position and included details of the ongoing support for local businesses.

The information on the Council's website would be updated regularly to reflect the developing situation.

Members asked about the continuing backlog of planning applications. The Chair drew attention to the relevant section of the report. A number of measures were being taken to address the issue but it was likely to take about 12 months to resolve.

Concern was expressed that applications for recovery and growth grant were to close after 17th December. The Chief Executive undertook to arrange a written response to members regarding the take-up and capacity of the grant. The Chair asked that further publicity for the grant be arranged.

RESOLVED

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

49 2021/22 FINANCIAL YEAR REVIEW

The Committee considered a report considered by the Finance Sub-Committee at its meeting on 1st December 2021 in relation to the 2021/22 Financial Year Review.

The report outlined how the Council was managing resources to provide value for money services during the 2021/22 financial year. It set out the financial performance of the Council with and without the impact of Covid-19.

Further details of how the Council was performing in 2021/22 were set out in the Annex to the report. Appendix 2 to the Annex contained information specific to the Corporate Policy Committee.

Councillor A Stott, as Chair of the Finance Sub-Committee, reported the outcome of the Sub-Committee's consideration of the report and commended the Sub-Committee's recommendations to the Committee.

Arising from members' consideration of the report, the following comments were made:

- Any underspends/overspends by service committees would be reported at year end.
- It was important to note that each service committee was responsible for its own budget, although it was important to manage the budget as a whole.
- Officers and members were congratulated on achieving a budget variance of less than 1% in the difficult circumstances of the pandemic.

Councillor T Dean referred to the capital strategy of the Environment and Communities Committee and asked about the scheme for the Knutsford Leisure Centre which did not appear on the list. The Chair asked that a written answer be provided.

RESOLVED (unanimously)

That the Corporate Policy Committee

1. notes the report and specifically the recommendations of the Finance Sub-Committee as follows:

Finance Sub-Committee recommends Service Committees to:

- (a) note the financial update and forecast outturn relevant to their terms of reference; and
- (b) note that officers will seek to improve outcomes and the financial outturn across all Committees to mitigate the overall forecast overspend of the Council.

2. notes the Annex to the report;

3. notes Appendix 2 and the following sections specific to the Committee:
 - Changes to Revenue budget 2021/22
 - Policy Proposals Update
 - Corporate Grants Register
 - Debt Management
 - Capital Strategy
 - Reserves Strategy

50 **MID-YEAR REVIEW OF THE CORPORATE PLAN AND PERFORMANCE REPORTING UPDATE**

The Committee considered a report on the Mid-Year Review of the Corporate Plan and Performance Reporting Update.

The report provided an initial assessment of progress as at the end of September 2021.

A summary of progress and future activity was set out in paragraph 5.7 of the report, with further detail set out in the Appendix.

The context for the review was one of ongoing significant challenges, with the Council, working with its partners, continuing to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. There would be a further update in the new year.

Members noted in particular the significant challenges of developing an Integrated Care System for Cheshire East in the timescale envisaged.

RESOLVED

That the Committee notes the progress in delivering the Corporate Plan.

51 **CHESHIRE EAST - DIGITAL STRATEGY**

The Committee considered a report on the Draft Digital Strategy.

It was intended to issue the Draft Strategy for formal consultation with a view to submitting a final version to the Committee in March 2022.

Officers corrected an error in paragraph 1.3 of the report, which should have stated that the Committee had approved a recommendation to develop a single overarching Digital Strategy in September 2021.

Arising from members' consideration of the report, the following comments were made:

- Consideration should be given to how people in rural areas would be made aware of the public consultation and to how would they be able to make their views known.
- Attention should be given to the way in which digital systems worked in practice. As an illustration of this, reference was made to recent instances in which the recordings of committee meetings had not been available on the website. The Executive Director of Corporate Services responded that officers were seeking to resolve the technical issues, including with the Council's new firewall.
- The proposal to develop a community grant scheme to fund equipment, subsidise broadband and install wi-fi was welcomed.

At the invitation of the Chair, Councillor L Wardlaw spoke on this matter as a visiting member.

RESOLVED (unanimously)

That

1. the Draft Digital Strategy be approved for formal consultation; and
2. the final version of the Digital Strategy be submitted to the Committee following consultation in March 2022.

52 COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT SCHEME 2022/23

The Committee considered a report on proposed amendments to the Council Tax Support Scheme for 2022/23 following public consultation. Council was required to approve the Scheme each year.

Officers advised that there were mechanisms in place to monitor progress with the operation of the Scheme.

RESOLVED (unanimously)

That Council be recommended to amend the Council Tax Support Scheme for 2022/23 as follows:

- Increase the cap on the maximum award from Band B to Band D (those living in a property banded higher than a D will receive the same amount those living in a Band D)
- Increase the maximum award for those passported to 100% from 75%. Passporting covers those in receipt of Jobseeker's Allowance (Income-based), Employment and Support Allowance (Income-related) or Income Support. Also increase the maximum for other groups in the lowest income bands to 80% from 75%, and revise the bands as follows and continue to increase the income levels by CPI each year:

Single	Couple	Couple / lone parent with 1 child	Couple / lone parent with 2 or more children	Maximum award
£0 - £97	£0 - £140	£0 - £200	£0 - £290	80%
£97.01-£115	£140.01-£170	£200.01-£230	£290.01-£320	60%
£115.01-£140	£170.01-£200	£230.01-£260	£320.01-£350	45%
£140.01-£165	£200.01-£230	£260.01-£290	£350.01-£380	30%
£165.01-£190	£230.01-£260	£290.01-£320	£380.01-£410	15%

1 Income bands, categories, and awards for 2022/23

- Disregard Industrial Injuries Disablement benefit and Industrial Death benefit in full

- Deduct from earnings for child-care costs from those working and in receipt of Universal Credit: maximum of £175 for one child or £300 for two or more children each week
- Increase the fixed non-dependant deductions from £8 to £9 per week and increase each year in line with CPI (the same as the income bands)
- Reduce the earnings disregard for single people and couples without children to £20 instead of £25 per week
- Re-write the regulations in a clearer way and allow for more general disregards of new one-off grants.

53 DOMESTIC TAXBASE 2022/23 REPORT

The Committee considered a report on the Council taxbase calculation 2022/23 for recommendation to full Council.

Members congratulated the officers in maintaining a high collection rate.

Members also noted the reduction in the number of empty properties in the Borough and the increase in the number of empty houses that were being brought back into use. The Chair asked that a press release be issued, giving the figures for the reduction in the number of empty homes largely as a result of the increase in charges for long-term empty properties.

The Head of Customer Services confirmed that the numbers of new-build houses forecast for the 12 month period were also taken into account in calculating the taxbase.

The Head of Customer Services undertook to provide for members of the Committee a breakdown of the figures for new homes and homes being brought back into use.

RESOLVED (unanimously)

That Council be recommended that:

In accordance with the Local Authorities (Calculation of Taxbase) Regulations 1992, the amount to be calculated by Cheshire East Council as its Council taxbase for the year 2022/23 is 156,607.48 for the whole area.

54 APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAMME UPDATE

The Committee considered an update on the work carried out on the apprenticeship programme at Cheshire East Council and the plans in place to ensure that it continued to support the priorities set out within the Corporate Plan.

The report set out progress to date with the apprenticeship programme and an action plan for 2021-2023.

Members welcomed the work to support apprenticeships, particularly encouraging young people into work with the Council.

The Head of HR undertook to provide members with details of the numbers of individuals under the apprenticeships programme who were completely new starters as opposed to existing employees.

RESOLVED (unanimously)

That the Committee notes the position in relation to Apprenticeships and the further improvements set out in the action plan.

55 WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee considered its work programme for 2021/22.

RESOLVED

That the work programme be noted.

56 REPORTING OF URGENT DECISIONS

There were no urgent decisions to report.

57 INSURANCE CONTRACTS PROCUREMENT

The Chair had agreed that this item be added to the agenda following publication as it required an urgent decision and could not await the next meeting of the Committee.

The Committee considered a report setting out an approach to the re-procurement of the Council's insurance portfolio for contracts expiring in March 2022.

RESOLVED (unanimously)

That the Committee approves a one-year extension to the Council's current insurances and delegates authority to the Executive Director Corporate Services to approve the modification of the existing contracts of insurance to facilitate such an extension, with a formal report to come back to the Committee, seeking the delegation of authority to the Executive Director Corporate Services to undertake the procurement process using a framework for cover incepting 1st April 2023 and award the contracts following the procurement exercise.

The meeting commenced at 10.30 am and concluded at 12.30 pm

Councillor S Corcoran (Chair)

