

# Council Agenda

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**Date:** Wednesday 17th July 2024  
**Time:** 11.00 am  
**Venue:** Council Chamber, SKA Observatory, Jodrell Bank, Lower Withington, SK11 9FT

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The agenda is divided into two parts. Part 1 is taken in the presence of the public and press. Part 2 items will be considered in the absence of the public and press for the reasons indicated on the agenda and at the foot of each report.

It should be noted that Part 1 items of Cheshire East Council decision making meetings are audio recorded and the recordings are uploaded to the Council's website

## **PART 1 – MATTERS TO BE CONSIDERED WITH THE PUBLIC AND PRESS PRESENT**

1. **Apologies for Absence**

2. **Declarations of Interest**

To provide an opportunity for Members and Officers to declare any disclosable pecuniary interests, other registerable interests, and non-registerable interests in any item on the agenda.

3. **Minutes of Previous Meetings** (Pages 5 - 16)

To approve as a correct record the minutes of the Mayor Making and Annual Council meeting and the Special Council meeting held on 15 May 2024.

4. **Mayor's Announcements**

To receive such announcements as may be made by the Mayor.

5. **Public Speaking Time/Open Session**

In accordance the Council Procedural Rules, a total period of 30 minutes is allocated for members of the public to speak at Council meetings. Individual members of the public may speak for up to 2 minutes, but the Chair will have discretion to vary this requirement where they consider it appropriate.

Members of the public wishing to speak are required to provide notice of this at least three clear working days' in advance of the meeting and should include the question with that notice. Questions should be submitted to: [katie.small@cheshireeast.gov.uk](mailto:katie.small@cheshireeast.gov.uk) or [brian.reed@cheshireeast.gov.uk](mailto:brian.reed@cheshireeast.gov.uk).

Petitions - To receive any petitions which have met the criteria - [Petitions Scheme Criteria](#), and falls within the remit of the Committee. Petition organisers will be allowed up to three minutes to speak.

6. **Leader's and Deputy Leader's Announcements**

To receive such announcements as may be made by the Leader and Deputy Leader.

7. **Recommendation from Corporate Policy Committee: Cheshire East Plan 2024-25** (Pages 17 - 52)

To consider the recommendation from the Corporate Policy Committee.

8. **Corporate Peer Challenge Report** (Pages 53 - 98)

To consider the Corporate Peer Challenge Report and agree the draft Corporate Peer Challenge Action Plan.

9. **Establishment of Assurance Panel** (Pages 99 - 108)

To approve the establishment of an Assurance Panel.

10. **Recommendation from Children and Families Committee: Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services Improvement Plan** (Pages 109 - 172)

To consider the recommendation from the Children and Families Committee.  
(*Minute Extact to follow*)

11. **Proposed New Senior Management Structure** (Pages 173 - 188)

To consider the update on the independent review of the current senior management organisational structure.

12. **Progress of Transformation** (Pages 189 - 202)

To consider the update on the progress of the transformation programme.

13. **Productivity Plan** (Pages 203 - 218)

To approve the publication of the Productivity Plan and submission to the Government.

14. **Recommendation from Adults and Health Committee: Cheshire and Merseyside Joint Health Scrutiny Arrangements Protocol** (Pages 219 - 238)

To consider the recommendation from the Adults and Health Committee.

15. **Recommendations from Finance Sub Committee: Final Outturn 2023/24 Approval of Supplementary Estimates and Virements** (Pages 239 - 252)

To consider the recommendations from the Finance Sub Committee.

16. **Supplementary Revenue Estimate - Supplementary Substance Misuse Treatment Grant** (Pages 253 - 258)

To approve the supplementary revenue estimate.

17. **Notices of Motion** (Pages 259 - 260)

To consider any Notices of Motion that have been received in accordance with the Council Procedure Rules.

18. **Questions**

In accordance the Council Procedure Rules, opportunity is provided for Members of the Council to ask the Mayor or the Chair of a Committee any question about a matter which the Council, or the Committee has powers, duties or responsibilities.

At Council meeting, there will be a maximum question time period of 30 minutes. A period of two minutes will be allowed for each Councillor wishing to ask a question. The Mayor will have the discretion to vary this requirement where they consider it appropriate.

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**CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL**

Minutes of the **Mayor Making and Annual Council** meeting  
held on Wednesday, 15th May, 2024 in the Tenants' Hall, Tatton Park,  
Knutsford WA16 6QN

**MAYOR MAKING****PRESENT**

Councillors R Fletcher, M Houston, S Adams, L Anderson, M Beanland, S Bennett-Wake, L Braithwaite, J Bratherton, M Brooks, C Browne, L Buchanan, C Bulman, R Chadwick, D Clark, J Clowes, P Coan, A Coiley, N Cook, S Corcoran, L Crane, T Dean, B Drake, S Edgar, D Edwardes, K Edwards, M Edwards, H Faddes, A Gage, S Gardiner, E Gilman, M Goldsmith, M Gorman, K Hague, E Hall, A Harrison, A Heler, C Hilliard, S Holland, T Jackson, R Kain, A Kolker, N Mannion, G Marshall, A Moran, R Morris, H Moss, M Muldoon, C Naismith, C O'Leary, J Pearson, J Place, B Posnett, J Pratt, J Priest, B Puddicombe, P Redstone, J Rhodes, J Saunders, H Seddon, M Simon, L Smetham, G Smith, J Snowball, R Vernon, L Wardlaw, M Warren, H Whitaker, F Wilson and J Wray

Mayor, Councillor Rod Fletcher in the Chair

**1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies were received from Councillors R Bailey, J Bird, D Brown, G Hayes, D Jefferay, M Sewart, John Smith, Julie Smith and Laura Smith.

**2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

It was noted that Councillor Marilyn Houston and Councillor David Edwardes had a personal interest in the appointment of Mayor and of Deputy Mayor, respectively.

**3 ELECTION OF MAYOR 2024/25**

Council was requested to elect a Mayor for the Borough of Cheshire East for 2025-25 Municipal Year, who would also act as Chair of the Council for that period.

It was proposed by Councillor Arthur Moran and seconded by Councillor Sam Corcoran that Councillor Marilyn Houston be elected as Mayor for 2024-25 Municipal Year.

The motion was put to the vote and declared carried.

**RESOLVED:**

That Councillor Marilyn Houston be elected Mayor of the Borough of Cheshire East for the 2024-25 Municipal Year and be appointed as Chair of the Council for that period.

The Mayor was invested with the chain of office and then completed the Declaration of Acceptance of Office.

The Mayor thanked the Council for electing her to this office and informed Members that her consort would be Pauline Kowalski. The Mayor reported that her chosen charity would be the Crewe and Nantwich Branch of Cancer Research UK.

Councillor Houston, as Mayor, took the chair.

**4 APPOINTMENT OF DEPUTY MAYOR 2024/25**

Council was requested to appoint a Deputy Mayor of the Borough of Cheshire East for the 2024-25 Municipal Year, who would also act as Vice-Chair of the Council for that period.

It was proposed by Councillor Reg Kain and seconded by Councillor John Wray that Councillor David Edwardes be appointed as Deputy Mayor for 2024-25 Municipal Year.

The motion was put to the vote and declared carried.

**RESOLVED:**

That Councillor David Edwardes be appointed as Deputy Mayor of the Borough of Cheshire East for the 2024-25 Municipal Year and as Vice-Chair of the Council for that period.

The Deputy Mayor was invested with the chain of office and then completed his Declaration of Acceptance of Office.

The Deputy Mayor thanked the Council for electing him to this office.

**5 VOTE OF THANKS TO RETIRING MAYOR**

Councillor Reg Kain paid tribute to the retiring Mayor, Councillor Rod Fletcher, for the dedicated work that he had undertaken during his term of office.

The Mayor presented Councillor Fletcher with a Past Mayor's Medal.

Councillor Fletcher then addressed Council, as outgoing Mayor.

**6 MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Mayor thanked all those who had attended the Mayor Making Ceremony and stated that the meeting would be adjourned for the Special Meeting of Council to take place and would be reconvened, following lunch.

*(The meeting was adjourned at 11.50 am and reconvened at 1.45 pm)*

## **ANNUAL COUNCIL MEETING**

### **PRESENT**

Councillor M Houston (Mayor/Chair)

Councillor D Edwardes (Deputy Mayor/Vice Chair)

Councillors S Adams, L Anderson, R Bailey, M Beanland, S Bennett-Wake, L Braithwaite, J Bratherton, M Brooks, D Brown, C Browne, L Buchanan, C Bulman, R Chadwick, D Clark, J Clowes, P Coan, A Coiley, N Cook, S Corcoran, L Crane, T Dean, B Drake, S Edgar, K Edwards, M Edwards, H Faddes, A Farrall, R Fletcher, A Gage, S Gardiner, E Gilman, M Goldsmith, M Gorman, K Hague, E Hall, A Harrison, A Heler, C Hilliard, S Holland, T Jackson, R Kain, A Kolker, N Mannion, G Marshall, A Moran, R Morris, H Moss, M Muldoon, C Naismith, C O'Leary, J Pearson, J Place, B Posnett, J Pratt, J Priest, B Puddicombe, P Redstone, J Rhodes, J Saunders, H Seddon, M Sewart, M Simon, L Smetham, G Smith, L Smith, J Snowball, R Vernon, L Wardlaw, M Warren, H Whitaker, F Wilson and J Wray

### **7 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies were received from Cllr J Bird, G Hayes, D Jefferay, R Moreton, John Smith and Julie Smith.

### **8 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

No declarations of interest were made.

### **9 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

#### **RESOLVED:**

That the minutes of the meeting held on 27 February 2024 be approved as a correct record.

### **10 ELECTION OF A LEADER OF THE COUNCIL AND DEPUTY LEADER OF THE COUNCIL 2024/25**

#### Leader of the Council

Nominations were invited for the election of the Leader of the Council.

It was proposed by Councillor C Bulman and seconded by Councillor M Gorman that Councillor Sam Corcoran be appointed as the Leader of the Council for the 2024-25 Municipal Year.

The motion was put to the vote and declared carried.

**RESOLVED:**

That Councillor Sam Corcoran be appointed as Leader of the Council for the 2024-25 Municipal Year.

Deputy Leader of the Council

Nominations were invited for the election of the Deputy Leader of the Council.

It was proposed by Councillor L Anderson and seconded by Councillor S Corcoran that Councillor Michael Gorman be appointed as the Deputy Leader of the Council for the 2024-25 Municipal Year.

The motion was put to the vote and declared carried.

**RESOLVED:**

That Councillor Michael Gorman be appointed as Deputy Leader of the Council for the 2024-25 Municipal Year.

**11 POLITICAL REPRESENTATION ON THE COUNCIL'S COMMITTEES**

Consideration was given to a report relating to the political representation on the Council's Committees.

The recommendation was moved and seconded.

**RESOLVED:**

That the committees set out in Appendix A to the report be appointed, with the same functions, roles and responsibilities as are currently set out in the Constitution; and that the political group and other representation, as set out in Appendix A and the methods, calculations and conventions used in determining this, as outlined in the report be adopted, and the allocation of places to Committees be approved.

**12 APPOINTMENT OF CHAIRS AND VICE CHAIRS OF COMMITTEES OF THE COUNCIL**

Consideration was given to the appointment of Chairs and Vice Chairs of the Council's committees.

The Appendix to the report set out the nominated persons for Chair and Vice-Chair for each committee.

It was reported that the nomination for the Vice Chair of the Appointments Committee was Councillor Michael Gorman and not Councillor David Jefferay as stated in the Appendix.

The appointments for Chairs and Vice-Chairs were moved and seconded and put to the vote and declared carried.

**RESOLVED:**

That the offices of Chair and Vice-Chair be allocated as detailed in the amended Appendix to the report.

**13 RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE CORPORATE POLICY COMMITTEE: REVIEW OF COMMITTEE STRUCTURE**

Consideration was given to the recommendations of the Corporate Policy Committee in respect of the Review of the Committee Structure.

The Corporate Policy Committee, at its meeting on 21 March 2024, had considered the report and made recommendations to Council, as set out on page 45 of the agenda pack.

**RESOLVED:** That

1. the Scrutiny Committee be retained.
2. the functions of the School Governor Nomination Panel be delegated to the Executive Director of Children and Families in consultation with the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Children and Families Committee.
3. the Cared for Children and Care Leavers Committee remain in place.
4. the General Appeals Sub-Committee remain in place.
5. the General Licensing Sub-Committee and Licensing Act Sub-Committee be amalgamated to form one sub-committee.
6. normally, only Directors, Regulatory or Statutory Officers (as required by good practice) should attend committee meetings.
7. working Groups and Boards be supported by the relevant service area and not Democratic Services.
8. reports “for noting” should not normally be placed on agendas, unless there is a statutory requirement to do so, or where they relate to Performance Monitoring, Finance, Risk or LGO complaints. Instead, they be placed on the Members’ Bulletin, stored on the Councillors hub and made available to the public on the Council’s Open Data and Transparency Webpage; and

9. the Director of Governance and Compliance be empowered to make any necessary changes to the Constitution to reflect the resolutions of full Council.

**14 RECOMMENDATIONS FROM CORPORATE POLICY COMMITTEE: PROPOSED CHANGES TO THE CONSTITUTION**

Consideration was given to the recommendations of the Corporate Policy Committee in respect of the Review of the Committee Structure.

The Corporate Policy Committee, at its meeting on 21 March 2024, had considered the report and made recommendations to Council, as set out on page 59 of the agenda pack.

**RESOLVED:** That Council approve:

- 1 the amendments to the provisions regarding Notices of Motion in Chapter 3 Part 1 Section 1 of the Council's Constitution, as set out in paragraph 9 of the report.
- 2 the amendments to the provisions regarding rescission of earlier resolution in Chapter 3 Part 1 Section 1 of the Council's Constitution, as set out in paragraph 9 of the report.
- 3 the amendments to committee terms of reference for matters that cover more than one committee in Chapter 2 Part 2 of the Council's Constitution, as set out in paragraph 10 of the report.
- 4 the amendments to the Rules of Debate for Motions and Amendments in Chapter 3 Part 1 Section 1 of the Council's Constitution, as set out in paragraph 11 of the report.
- 5 the amendments to the application of the 3-day rule for Notices of Motion of in Chapter 3 Part 1 Section 2 the Council's Constitution as set out in paragraph 12 of the report.

**15 RECOMMENDATION FROM HIGHWAYS AND TRANSPORT COMMITTEE: A500 CREWE CORRIDOR APPROVAL OF SUPPLEMENTARY ESTIMATE**

Consideration was given to the recommendation of the Highways and Transport Committee in respect of the approval of a supplementary estimate relating to the A500 Crewe Corridor.

**RESOLVED:**

That Council approve a Supplementary Capital Estimate for £2.435m, to a new capital scheme in the MTFS titled 'A500 Corridor OBC Update' that is fully funded by the DfT to provide funding for the preparation of the Outline

Business Case Update for a revised scheme. This forms a change to the MTFS approved at Council on 27 February 2024.

**16 RECOMMENDATION FROM CHILDREN AND FAMILIES COMMITTEE: HOUSEHOLD SUPPORT FUND GRANT - APPROVAL OF SUPPLEMENTARY ESTIMATE**

Consideration was given to the recommendation of the Children and Families Committee in respect of the approval of a supplementary estimate relating to the Household Support Fund Grant.

**RESOLVED:**

That Council approve the supplementary estimate of £2.2m.

**17 APPOINTMENTS TO CHESHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY AND CHESHIRE POLICE AND CRIME PANEL**

Consideration was given to a report inviting Council to make appointments to the Cheshire Fire Authority and the Cheshire Police and Crime Panel.

The nominations for the Cheshire Police and Crime Panel and the Cheshire Fire Authority were moved and seconded and put to the vote and declared carried.

**RESOLVED:** That

- 1 Councillors Steve Edgar, Rob Moreton and Judy Snowball be appointed to the Cheshire Police and Crime Panel, with Councillor Stewart Gardiner as nominated substitute.
- 2 Councillors Rachel Bailey, John Bird, David Brown, Peter Coan, Laura Crane, Nick Mannion, Margaret Simon, Geoff Smith and Mick Warren be appointed to the Cheshire Fire Authority.

**18 APPOINTMENTS TO THE ADOPTION PANEL, THE FOSTERING PANEL AND THE CHESHIRE AND MERSEYSIDE INTEGRATED CARE SYSTEM JOINT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

Consideration was given to a report inviting Council to approve a number of appointments to Statutory Panels which did not fall within the definition of "Committee" for the purpose of legislation.

It was moved and seconded that Councillor Brain Puddicombe be appointed to the Adoption Panel and that Councillor Carol Bulman be appointed to the Fostering Panel.

The motion was put to the vote and was declared carried.



With regards to the Cheshire and Merseyside Integrated Care System Joint Scrutiny Committee, It was reported that due to the political proportionality calculations across the Committee's nine authorities not yet having been confirmed, these appointments would be made by the Scrutiny Committee, as they had been in previous years. Council was therefore not being asked to make a decision on this matter.

**RESOLVED:** That

- 1 Councillor Brian Puddicombe be appointed to the Adoption Panel;  
and
- 2 Councillor Carol Bulman be appointed to the Fostering Panel.
- 3 the appointments to the Cheshire and Merseyside Integrated Care System Joint Scrutiny Committee be made by the Scrutiny Committee.

**19 REPORTING OF URGENT DECISION TAKEN BY CHIEF EXECUTIVE**

Council received a schedule of an urgent decision taken by the Chief Executive on behalf of the Council, which was reported for information in accordance with the Council procedure rules.

**RESOLVED:**

That the schedule of the urgent decision be noted.

The meeting commenced at 11.00 am and concluded at 3.03 pm

Councillor M Houston (Mayor/Chair)

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## **CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL**

Minutes of a **Special Meeting of the Council**  
held on Wednesday, 15th May, 2024 in the The Tenants' Hall, Tatton Park,  
Knutsford WA16 6QN

### **PRESENT**

Councillor M Houston (Chair)

Councillor D Edwardes (Vice-Chair)

Councillors S Adams, L Anderson, M Beanland, S Bennett-Wake, L Braithwaite, J Bratherton, M Brooks, C Browne, L Buchanan, C Bulman, R Chadwick, D Clark, J Clowes, P Coan, A Coiley, N Cook, S Corcoran, L Crane, T Dean, B Drake, S Edgar, K Edwards, M Edwards, H Faddes, A Farrall, R Fletcher, A Gage, S Gardiner, E Gilman, M Goldsmith, M Gorman, E Hall, A Harrison, A Heler, C Hilliard, S Holland, T Jackson, R Kain, A Kolker, N Mannion, G Marshall, A Moran, R Morris, H Moss, M Muldoon, C Naismith, C O'Leary, J Pearson, J Place, B Posnett, B Puddicombe, P Redstone, J Rhodes, J Saunders, H Seddon, M Sewart, M Simon, L Smetham, G Smith, J Snowball, R Vernon, L Wardlaw, M Warren, H Whitaker, F Wilson and J Wray

### **20 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies were received from Councillors R Bailey, J Bird, D Brown, G Hayes, D Jefferay, John Smith, Julie Smith and Laura Smith.

### **21 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

### **22 APPOINTMENT OF HONORARY ALDERMEN**

Consideration was given to the appointment of a number of Honorary Aldermen.

It was proposed and seconded and upon the agreement of more than two-thirds of the Councillors present it was:-

#### **RESOLVED:**

That Marc Asquith, Penny Butterill, Byron Evans, Peter Groves, David Marren, Andrew Martin, Don Stockton and Jacquie Weatherill be appointed as Honorary Aldermen of Cheshire East.

The Honorary Aldermen present were each presented with a commemorative certificate and a shield by the Mayor.

**23 VOTE OF THANKS TO FORMER MEMBERS**

Consideration was given to the recognition of meritorious services to Cheshire East Council of those who had been made Honorary Aldermen by former Councils.

It was proposed and seconded and upon being put to the vote was declared carried.

**RESOLVED:**

That Stan Davies, Paul Findlow, Alift Harewood and Steve Hogben be recognised for their meritorious service as Members of Cheshire East Council.

The Mayor presented each with a framed certificate.

The meeting commenced at 12.00 pm and concluded at 12.13 pm

Councillor M Houston (Chair)

**COUNCIL MEETING – 17 JULY 2024****RECOMMENDATIONS FROM CORPORATE POLICY COMMITTEE: CHESHIRE EAST PLAN 2024-25****RECOMMENDATION**

**That Council approve the Cheshire East Plan 2024-25, as set out in Appendix 1 to the report.**

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Extract from the Minutes of the Corporate Policy Committee meeting on 13 June 2024.

**5 CHESHIRE EAST PLAN 2024-25**

The Committee considered the report which presented an update to the Cheshire East Corporate Plan 2021-25 for the year 2024-25 and also set out the proposed next steps for the development of a new strategic plan for the Council to follow the current plan. Members noted that the plan would undergo minor editorial changes prior to its consideration at Full Council.

Members agreed that there would be a number of challenges both locally and nationally facing the authority over the coming months and queried the impact this would have on the proposed 2024-25 plan. It was highlighted that the future plan would continue to reflect the aims of the council and its priorities, and that the previous engagement undertaken had been taken into account in developing the 1-year plan and would be further built upon with further activity for a future 2025-onwards plan.

**RESOLVED (by majority):**

That the Corporate Policy Committee

1. Approve the development of a new Strategic Plan (Corporate Plan) for Cheshire East Council to follow the current plan.
2. Recommend to Full Council the Cheshire East Plan 2024-25 (Appendix 1).

**Note: since the meeting of the Corporate Policy Committee meeting, the Cheshire East Plan 224-25 has been updated and the updated version is attached to this minute.**

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OPEN

## **Corporate Policy Committee**

**13 June 2024**

## **Cheshire East Plan 2024-25**

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**Report of: Rob Polkinghorne, Chief Executive**

**Report Reference No: CPC/10/24-25**

**Ward(s) Affected: All wards**

### **Purpose of Report**

- 1 This report presents an update to the Cheshire East Council Corporate Plan 2021-25 for the year 2024/25.
- 2 Corporate Policy Committee are also asked to consider the development of a new strategic plan for the Council and the borough, to follow the current plan.

### **Executive Summary**

- 3 The draft Cheshire East Plan 2024-25 presents an overview of work delivered in the first three years of the Corporate Plan 2021-25, and priority actions planned towards delivering the vision, aims and priorities of the Corporate Plan for the final 12 months of that plan's duration.
- 4 The new draft document is intended to provide a simpler view of the structure of the council's strategic vision, aims, priorities and priority actions. This provides a model we can follow in the design and development of future strategic plans.
- 5 The new draft document also takes into account the financial context in which the Council is now operating and the need for whole organisation transformation and improvement.
- 6 Should the committee, and the Council, approve the updated plan for the final year of the current Corporate Plan period (2021-2025), we can then continue to develop a new draft strategic plan for following period.

- 7 This may prompt further engagement activity, building on engagement activity undertaken over the last year, to inform and help shape the Council's strategic vision, aims and priorities for the future.
- 8 There is also the opportunity to develop and introduce a new strategic outcomes framework to support understanding about the organisation's work towards its strategic vision, aims and priorities for the period of the plan. This would also support day-to-day decision-making around prioritisation of activity and areas of focus.
- 9 There will also be opportunities to review how the council's vision, aims, strategic priorities and outcomes are built into various aspects of business and performance management and reporting.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

The Corporate Policy Committee is recommended to:

1. Approve the development of a new strategic plan (corporate plan) for Cheshire East Council to follow the current plan.

The Corporate Policy Committee recommends to Full Council:

2. The Cheshire East Plan 2024-25 (Appendix 1).

### Background

- 10 The Cheshire East Council Corporate Plan 2021-25 is the council's overarching strategic document, setting out the vision, aims and priorities for the council. The current plan was approved in February 2021 and covers the period April 2021 to March 2025. By setting out a clear set of commitments and actions, a corporate plan enables residents to hold the council to account for its performance and allows everyone to see the ambitions for the borough.
- 11 In February 2024 Corporate Policy Committee resolved that a new Cheshire East Plan would be finalised following the approval of Medium-Term Financial Strategy 2024-28 (MTFS).
- 12 The MTFS, approved by Council in February 2024, recognises the need for whole-organisation transformation in order to reduce expenditure and redesign services as quickly as possible forecasting the requirement for budget savings of £100m over the next 4 years.



- 13 The Council has also applied for exceptional financial support from central government. The Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities has approved, in principle, exceptional financial support in the form of a capitalisation direction up to the value of £17.6m. A condition of this support is that the Council submits a transformation plan to the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) by August 2024.
- 14 In recent months, the Council has also been supported by a Local Government Association (LGA) Corporate Peer Challenge. This review will result in a set of recommendations from the peer team, and the Council will develop an action plan to deliver against those recommendations.
- 15 The draft Cheshire East Plan 2024-25 and, subject to committee approval, the development of a new plan to follow, should be considered in the context of the Council's financial position and the organisational transformation and improvement work already underway and being developed through the transformation programme and corporate peer challenge.

## **Consultation and Engagement**

- 16 Extensive engagement activity with a range of stakeholders, including general public, councillors, staff and partners was undertaken through 2023/24 to explore understanding of the Council's vision, aims and priorities, and to inform those priorities in future.
- 17 Should the committee approve development of a new strategic plan to follow the existing plan, further public and stakeholder engagement is advised to build on the findings of this earlier work.
- 18 Any engagement activity should seek to understand the expectations and priorities of the general population of the borough for the borough and for the Council itself, and how the priorities that are ultimately approved may impact on them. However, we should ensure that we effectively engage with seldom-heard populations in our communities, businesses and our partners, to establish a well-rounded view to inform the Council's vision, aims, priorities and outcomes for the borough for the next four years.

## **Reasons for Recommendations**

- 19 It is being proposed that we provide a final year update to the existing Corporate Plan 2021-25, to provide greater clarity about the Council's vision, aims, priorities and priority activities for the final year of the plan in the context of the financial challenge and the required transformation

and improvement. It will also allow sufficient time to develop a new plan for the following period.

- 20 The new plan will work alongside both the MTFS and the Council transformation plan. Put simply, the new plan will set out what the Council is aiming to deliver for the borough (vision, aims, priorities and outcomes). The MTFS sets out how the council's financial resources will be allocated to deliver that vision. The transformation plan will set out how we will reshape the council and its operations to deliver the vision with the available resources.
- 21 Development of a new plan will provide the opportunity to review vision, aims and priorities and to consider the outcomes the council is working to deliver for the borough, its residents, communities and businesses, and how we measure and monitor delivery. It will also provide opportunities to engage with residents and other stakeholders around vision and priorities for the borough.

### Other Options Considered

Option	Impact	Risk
Do nothing	The council's work programme would continue to be shaped by the original Corporate Plan 2021-25.	<p>The financial context in which the council is operating – both in the organisation itself and the wider context - has changed significantly since 2021.</p> <p>If we do not update and clarify the key deliverable activities that we will undertake in this final year of the Corporate Plan in response to the current financial context we risk prioritising the wrong things.</p>
Develop an entirely new plan now.	During the period of development for an entirely new plan, there may be confusion about the guiding vision, aims	It is important that the Council's activities and policies are shaped by clear and unambiguous

	<p>and priorities that shape the council's activities.</p> <p>Also, we would also be effectively cutting short the timeline for delivery of the priorities and activities set out in the Corporate Plan 2021-25 by one year.</p>	<p>priorities that have been agreed by Council.</p> <p>If we were to embark on creating an entirely new plan now, and not update the existing plan, we would risk introducing a period of ambiguity about the council's key priorities. This may impact on strategic focus and direction.</p>
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### **Implications and Comments**

#### *Monitoring Officer/Legal*

- 22 The Cheshire East Plan will be produced in accordance with legislative requirements and will be ultimately subject to approval by Full Council.

#### *Section 151 Officer/Finance*

- 23 The recommendations in this report are presented in the context of the MTFS 2024-28. There is no variation to or impact on the MTFS 2024-28.
- 24 As described in paragraph 19, development of a new plan for the following period will be undertaken alongside development of future iterations of the MTFS giving the opportunity to build in any proposals that, if approved, may result in variation for future years.

#### *Policy*

- 25 The development of the Cheshire East Plan 2024-25 supports the policy framework cited within the Council's constitution.
- 26 The document sets out the Council's agreed vision, aims and priorities, and provides examples of the work that has already been delivered towards that vision and key activities that the council plans to deliver in the final year of the Corporate Plan 2021-25.
- 27 As such it supports all Corporate Plan aims and priorities:

<b>Aim 1 - An open and enabling organisation</b>	<b>Aim 2 - A council which empowers and cares about people</b>	<b>Aim 3 - A thriving and sustainable place</b>
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<p>P1.1) Ensure that there is transparency in all aspects of council decision making</p> <p>P1.2) Listen, learn and respond to our residents, promoting opportunities for a two-way conversation</p> <p>P1.3) Support a sustainable financial future for the council, through service development, improvement and transformation</p> <p>P1.4) Look at opportunities to bring more income into the borough</p> <p>P1.5) Support and develop our workforce to be confident, motivated, innovative, resilient and empowered</p> <p>P1.6) Promote and develop the services of the council through regular communication and engagement with all residents</p>	<p>P2.1) Work together with residents and partners to support people and communities to be strong and resilient</p> <p>P2.2) Reduce health inequalities across the borough</p> <p>P2.3) Protect and support our communities and safeguard children, adults at risk and families from abuse, neglect and exploitation</p> <p>P2.4) Be the best Corporate Parents to our children in care</p> <p>P2.5) Support all children to have the best start in life</p> <p>P2.6) Increase opportunities for all children and young adults with additional needs</p> <p>P2.7) Ensure all children have a high quality, enjoyable education that enables them to achieve their full potential</p> <p>P2.8) Reduce the reliance on long term care by improving services closer to home and providing more extra care facilities, including dementia services</p>	<p>P3.1) A great place for people to live, work and visit</p> <p>P3.2) Welcoming, safe and clean neighbourhoods</p> <p>P3.3) Reduce impact on the environment</p> <p>P3.4) A transport network that is safe and promotes active travel</p> <p>P3.5) Thriving urban and rural economies with opportunities for all</p> <p>P3.6) Be a carbon neutral council by 2027</p>
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### *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion*

- 28 An updated Equality Impact Assessment will be completed to inform the development of a new Cheshire East Plan
- 29 As mentioned in paragraph 17, a key consideration in developing the new Cheshire East Plan will be to ensure that the views of all groups, including seldom-heard populations and those with protected characteristics under the Equalities Act 2010, are taken into account.

We need to be confident that we understand their priorities and the potential impact of decisions on different groups.

#### *Human Resources*

- 30 The workforce will be engaged throughout the development of the new plan and to build improved operational understanding of the current plan.
- 31 This will include ensuring awareness of any priority or proposal for activity that directly impacts on organisational structure or workforce strategy.

#### *Risk Management*

- 32 The delivery of the current plan and delivery of any new strategic plan for the council will be informed by the current and forecast strategic risk environment.

#### *Rural Communities*

- 33 The draft plan includes specific activities relating to rural communities.
- 34 The process will ensure that it is accessible to those living in rural communities to ensure their views are taken into account in developing the plan.

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

- 35 Children and Young People's groups, and their representatives, will be included as stakeholders in the co-creation of the new plan.

#### *Public Health*

- 36 The process of developing the new Plan will ensure that public health priorities are supported and reflected in the plan. The plan will have due regard to the Marmot principles and the priority to reduce health inequalities across Cheshire East.

#### *Climate Change*

- 37 The draft Cheshire East plan 2024-25 has been developed to reflect local priorities, including continuing the message that Cheshire East Council has one of the most ambitious net zero targets in the country. The plan will support achievement of net zero for the council and for the Borough.

- 38 Climate change and the Council's net-zero targets (for the organisation and for the borough) will be considered in the development of any new strategic plan for the borough.

Access to Information	
Contact Officer:	Michael Moore, Head of Communications <a href="mailto:Michael.moore@cheshireeast.gov.uk">Michael.moore@cheshireeast.gov.uk</a>
Appendices:	Appendix 1 – Draft Cheshire East Plan 2024-25
Background Papers:	None

# Cheshire East plan 2024-25



**Open**

**Fair**

**Green**

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## Foreword

In 2021 Cheshire East Council set out its vision for an **Open, Fairer and Greener Cheshire East** in the council's Corporate Plan 2021-25. The plan detailed priorities and activities to drive towards that vision.

At that time, we were emerging from the COVID-19 pandemic, which had a significant impact on the way we live our lives and people's expectations of local public services.

In the following years, a cost-of-living crisis has developed and councils across the country have been subject to escalating financial pressure, resulting from very high inflation and interest rates seen through 2023.

This updated plan reviews progress against the priorities set out in the Corporate Plan 2021-25 and updates on activities to deliver the plan in the context of the council's current financial position and the updated context in which it operates.

We can be proud of the progress we have made and our delivery against the priorities – this includes the council's move to an open committee system of decision-making, delivery of the Family Hubs, our work to support the Homes for Ukraine and Afghan resettlement schemes, the opening of Congleton Link Road, Poynton Relief Road and numerous active and sustainable travel routes, and the refurbishment of Congleton Leisure Centre.

However, our work towards our priorities has also been affected by a number of significant factors since we originally set out our plan.

This includes:

- Cancellation of HS2 Phase 2b
- National economy and impacts on the long-term financial viability of major regeneration and infrastructure projects
- Increasing costs, demand and complexity of need for our adult social care and children's services

We remain ambitious for the borough and for the council's role in delivering for people in Cheshire East. But we also must be realistic about what we are able to deliver in our work towards our vision.

The council's financial position has changed significantly since we set out the original plan. We are, at time of writing, forecasting a £100million shortfall in funding against forecast costs and demand. We must re-prioritise and redesign our services and support to ensure that we, working with partners and local communities, are providing the best value for Cheshire East residents. We have also applied for and secured agreement in principle for Exceptional Financial Support from central government. A condition of this support is to submit a transformation plan to DLUHC.

We are undoubtedly embarking on a period of significant change for the organisation, to ensure financial sustainability and to protect essential services and support for local people. There are many opportunities ahead to use new technologies and to radically rethink what a council can do for the borough it serves, and how we can put people at the heart of our plans.

Cheshire East is a thriving borough with significant potential – people want to live, work, visit and invest here. They have high expectations in terms of quality of life and life opportunities. There are many strengths we can build upon - we have great employment and education, exciting and high value science and technology industries, an important agricultural economy, we are well positioned and well connected and there are great cultural, heritage and leisure facilities.

However, health inequalities across the borough are stark, with a 12-year gap in life expectancy between different areas. As a local council we have significant influence over the many economic and environmental factors that impact on people's physical and mental health. To promote fairness, we need to work across the whole organisation to tackle these wider determinants of health.

In May 2019 Cheshire East Council set out its vision to be a carbon neutral organisation by 2025, the most ambitious target in the country. It is a measure of the financial challenges facing the Council that it has been agreed to relax that target to 2027 – still one of the most ambitious targets in the country.

**Councillor Sam Corcoran, Leader of the Council**

**Councillor Michael Gorman, Deputy Leader of the Council**

**Rob Polkinghorne, Chief Executive**

# Introduction - Welcome to Cheshire East

## Cheshire East Council

The council is the third largest unitary authority in the Northwest and the seventeenth largest in the country. Cheshire East sits in the historical county of Cheshire (created in its current form by the local government reorganisations of 1974) alongside Cheshire West and Chester, Halton and Warrington.

The council is responsible for providing approximately 500 local public services across an area of over 1,100km<sup>2</sup> for more than 398,800 residents, across a mix of rural and urban environments.

In November 2020, the Council resolved to implement a committee system for decision making, with the new arrangements taking effect in May 2021, with seven service committees replacing the previous cabinet model.

**Cheshire East Council, like councils across the country, has been experiencing unprecedented financial pressures.** This results, in part, from increased demand and costs for special educational needs. The borough has seen significant growth in the number of pupils with additional needs and limited in-borough specialist provision for SEND, which have not been met by increased high-needs funding. This has led to a significant deficit.

There is also continued uncertainty following the government's announcement, in October 2023, of the cancellation of HS2 north of Birmingham.

This is in addition to the financial pressures being experienced by councils across the country – increased demand and complexity of need for adult social care and children's services, and high inflation and interest rates over the last year affecting service delivery and borrowing costs.

The council approved a budget for 2024/25 in February 2024. These plans include spending money from reserves to cover the impacts of additional financial pressures. However, this means that the council's general fund reserve is now insufficient to adequately protect the council against future risks.

**Over the next four-years we are forecasting a funding gap of £100m.**

In February 2024, the Secretary of State agreed, in principle, exceptional support in the form of a capitalisation direction. It provides the council with the facility to spread the cost of any additional emerging pressures, up to £17.6m, to future years, effectively providing an alternative to reserves should the need arise. This reduces (*but does not eliminate*) the risk of a Section 114 (S114) notice.

Reducing these financial risks will enable investment in providing the required organisational capacity and resources in 2024/25 for a council-wide transformational change programme to create sustainability in the medium-term.

Securing financial stability and sustainability are key priorities for the council at this time. This updated plan reflects the re-prioritisation required in the context of this financial challenge.

## Cheshire East the place and people

Cheshire East is a great place that is full of potential. We have strong employment opportunities, attractive places to live and high standards of education.

The area has excellent national and international communications by rail including the Crewe Junction and the West-Coast mainline, by road on the M6 and M56 and by air from Manchester Airport on its northern edge.

The borough is made up of a number of small to medium sized towns, the largest of which are Crewe and Macclesfield. There are twelve towns with populations over 10,000, along with a large rural hinterland.

Cheshire East is a thriving area with a strong emphasis on industry, commerce and agriculture and sits at the heart of a region that has one of the strongest science and technology clusters in the UK. Local businesses include global employers, delivering supply chain opportunities for the borough's high number of small to medium enterprises (SME's) and high-quality jobs for our residents.

The borough has a higher-than-average older population. The over 65 population projection is estimated to rise by approximately 20% from 2021 to 2030.

Despite a good overall quality of life, there are some areas where the experience is different. The health inequalities across the borough are stark.

Our residents have a longer life expectancy than the national average. However, life expectancy varies widely across the borough. For females there is a 14-year difference in life expectancy between the highest and lowest wards, for males the figure is slightly less at 11 years.

The index of multiple deprivation 2019 ranked Cheshire East 228th out of 317 local authority areas, making it overall one of the least deprived areas of England. However, there are local areas within the borough which rank among most deprived areas nationally - the majority of these areas are located in Crewe, with small pockets in Congleton and Macclesfield.

Employment rates and household income levels are higher than average. However, there is a considerable range of average household income levels at ward level, from £18,000 in Crewe St Barnabas to £56,000 in Prestbury.

Cheshire East is becoming a more diverse borough due to its connections to Manchester, Birmingham and London. It is also the home of choice for many immigrant communities; towns in Cheshire East are home to varied communities from Eastern Europe, East Timor, Syria, India, Bangladesh and the Caribbean to name but a few.

The Council recognises that promoting equality, diversity and inclusion will improve public services for everyone. We want Cheshire East to be an area of equal opportunity where everyone has a fair chance and people from all backgrounds take part in community life. Our aim therefore is to make equality, diversity and inclusion an integral part of the way the Council works by putting it at the centre of everything we do.

We have active and vibrant communities in the borough, a strong town and parish councils' network, pro-active town partnerships such as Congleton and Sandbach, neighbourhood action groups from Macclesfield to Crewe, and a strong volunteer force.

Our place-based neighbourhood partnership and collaborative arrangements bring together a range of partners including the Voluntary, Community and Faith sector, public sector, private sector and local residents. As a partnership they collaboratively create and tailor projects to suit the communities' needs building on existing assets.

Cheshire East has been a key lead, as well as the accountable body, for the Cheshire and Warrington Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP). In partnership with the LEP, (later Enterprise Cheshire and Warrington), and its partner local authorities, (Cheshire West and Chester Council, and Warrington Borough Council), the Council has worked proactively to optimise the benefits of sub regional working in a positive and collaborative way. The Council has also supported the creation of Business Improvement Districts in both Wilmslow and Crewe.

The council has a leading role in the Cheshire East Place health and care partnership, as part of Cheshire and Merseyside Integrated Care System. Key areas of cross sector working include such things as the Integrated Care Partnership which will explore how commissioning activities can be developed, focusing on population health. The 8 Care Communities partnerships across health and social care understand local health inequalities and are identifying solutions to keep people fit and well.

Our ongoing partnership operations with Cheshire Police and Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service are making Cheshire East a safer borough.

## Vision

**An open, fairer, greener Cheshire East**

## Aims

### Aim 1 - An open and enabling organisation

We will provide strong community leadership and work transparently with our residents, businesses and partners to deliver our ambition in Cheshire East.

### Aim 2 - A council which empowers and cares about people

We aim to reduce inequalities, promote fairness and opportunity for all and support our most vulnerable residents.

### Aim 3 - A thriving and sustainable place

We will lead our communities to protect and enhance our environment, tackle the climate emergency and drive sustainable development.

## Priorities

P1.1) Ensure that there is transparency in all aspects of council decision making

P1.2) Listen, learn and respond to our residents, promoting opportunities for a two-way conversation

P1.3) Support a sustainable financial future for the council, through service development, improvement and transformation

P1.4) Look at opportunities to bring more income into the borough

P1.5) Support and develop our workforce to be confident, motivated, innovative, resilient and empowered

P1.6) Promote and develop the services of the council through regular communication and engagement with all residents

P2.1) Work together with residents and partners to support people and communities to be strong and resilient

P2.2) Reduce health inequalities across the borough

P2.3) Protect and support our communities and safeguard children, adults at risk and families from abuse, neglect and exploitation

P2.4) Be the best Corporate Parents to our children in care

P2.5) Support all children to have the best start in life

P2.6) Increase opportunities for all children and young adults with additional needs

P2.7) Ensure all children have a high quality, enjoyable education that enables them to achieve their full potential

P2.8) Reduce the reliance on long term care by improving services closer to home and providing more extra care facilities, including dementia services

P3.1) A great place for people to live, work and visit

P3.2) Welcoming, safe and clean neighbourhoods

P3.3) Reduce impact on the environment

P3.4) A transport network that is safe and promotes active travel

P3.5) Thriving urban and rural economies with opportunities for all

P3.6) Be a carbon neutral council by 2027

# Delivering together for Cheshire East – an overview of key corporate plan achievements

## Aim 1 - An open and enabling organisation

### P1.1) Ensure that there is transparency in all aspects of council decision making

**Implementation of committee system** – The Council now makes decisions through committees which have responsibilities for various Council functions. The committees and their responsibilities can be found in the Council's Constitution. Each committee is composed of elected Councillors with representation across all of the Council's political groups, in line with legislation.

Committee and Council meetings are open to the public to attend and are audio-streamed via the Council's website. Members of the public are entitled to speak at meetings. All reports to committees and Council are published at least five clear working days in advance of meetings and can be viewed on the Council website.

**Collaboration with Town and Parish Councils** – Town and Parish Council network established in 2022/23 – three expert network sessions delivered to date covering climate change, green spaces review and leisure services review. The councils are also engaged each year in the annual budget setting process. We have provided a monthly e-newsletter to Town and Parish Councils since October 2023.

**Open data site – Insight Cheshire East** – Data published on the site includes air quality data, procurement information including contracts register and expenditure exceeding £500. During 2023/24, Q3 there were 34,131 views on Insight Cheshire East, with an average of 375 per day.

Financial, performance and risk reports are provided every quarter to committees' public meetings with six-monthly compliments and complaints reporting.

### P1.2) Listen, learn and respond to our residents, promoting opportunities for a two-way conversation

**Budget consultation** – during the period of the Corporate Plan 2021-25 we have seen significantly increased public and stakeholder participation in annual budget setting process. In the most recent year, (budget

consultation for 2024/25) we saw 2,829 consultation engagements, including 1,351 survey completions.

**Public consultation in development of key strategies, policy and service development through public consultation and engagement**, including Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy, Parking review, Digital Inclusion Plan, Carbon Neutral Action Plan and more.

**Customer experience strategy and customer charter** - developed and implemented, including a better understanding of our performance against customer contact measures, a review of our special contact measures policy, an improved adult social care complaints policy and customer journey mapping, with an approach to understanding and improving the experience our customers have when they contact us, and training for managers.

**Direct engagement** - The council has undertaken direct engagement exercises with residents, including establishing a people panel to generate ideas around how the council can support residents in the cost-of-living crisis. The council has also spoken with residents about their ideas for priorities for the council and borough.

**Work to support Armed Forces and veterans** - The council has been awarded the silver standard for the Ministry of Defence's employer recognition scheme (Armed Forces Covenant) and is now working towards the gold award.

The Council supports the annual Crewe Armed Forces Weekend, supporting local veterans and serving members of the armed forces.

We have created a veterans' staff network to identify and help veterans and serving families within the Council.

The Council's Veterans Officer continues to work with groups such as the Royal British Legion to organise Armed forces events across the borough. This includes continued support of the eight Veteran Breakfast clubs all throughout the borough.

### **P1.3) Support a sustainable financial future for the council, through service development, improvement and transformation**

**In 2023/24 the council addressed an in-year budget gap of £18.7m** (at Q2). The council, like others, was subject to financial pressures including high levels of inflation and interest rates driving increased costs and increased demand for a number of services.

The council implemented in-year emergency measures, including recruitment and vacancy management, non-essential spend direction, review of contracts and fees and charges. The council reduced the in-year gap and used reserves to balance at year end.

**The council has set a budget for 2024/25**, however this is reliant on timely delivery of a number of challenging budget proposals and organisational transformation, and the risk of s114 remains high. The council successfully applied to government for exceptional financial support and has secured agreement in principle to be able to capitalise revenue costs to the value of £17.6m if necessary to balance in-year.

**The council has a good record of council tax collection** with a rate maintained at around 99% over the last 5 years.

### **P1.4) Look at opportunities to bring more income into the borough**

The Council secures funding from a range of sources to support delivery of services and projects in Cheshire East. This includes Government funding for strategic infrastructure projects, Towns Fund, Future High Streets Fund, school building, green initiatives and others.

### **P1.5) Support and develop our workforce to be confident, motivated, innovative, resilient and empowered**

We have worked to deliver our Workforce Strategy objectives, including a range of activity to support workforce wellbeing, introduced an employee deal, established programmes of staff development and training and supported recruitment in a very challenging market for many roles.

### **P1.6) Promote and develop the services of the council through regular communication and engagement with all residents**

A Communications Strategy for Residents was approved in 2022/23, setting out aims and outlines priorities for communications activity that will

support the delivery of the corporate plan. It also sets out the principles we will follow when communicating.

The council delivers a comprehensive programme of communications activity across a range of channels to keep residents informed about their council, council services and council decisions and how to influence them.

## **Aim 2 - An organisation which empowers and cares about people**

### **P2.1) Work together with residents and partners to support people and communities to be strong and resilient**

**The Live Well for Longer Plan** was previously approved by the Adults and Health Committee and has now been adopted by the Cheshire East Place Partnership for Health and Social Care as our framework for co-production. The Live Well for Longer Plan is based on our TOGETHER in Cheshire East principles to ensure that we are able to develop our services together with local people.

**Engagement with young people** – We work with young people and their representatives through a number of groups, including 'My Voice', 'Jigsaw', Youth Council, and parent carer forum in developing services – for example, the Emotionally Healthy Children and Young People Service.

**Gypsy and Traveller transit site** - Work has started on the Gypsy and Traveller transit site, which will provide a safe place for the travelling community to stay whilst in the area, reducing the level of unauthorised encampments. This is due to open in 2024. Work is underway with local schools and GP surgeries to raise cultural awareness and a training programme is being developed for Adult Social Workers who work with Gypsy, Roma and Traveller families, to improve knowledge, skills and responses to assessed need.

**Social value** - As a council, we want to make a positive impact on people and places in Cheshire East. We call this impact social value.

We look at social value across 3 themes:

- social - creating healthier, safer, and more resilient communities
- economic - promoting local skills and employment growth, supporting inclusive diverse and responsible businesses



- environmental - supporting environmental sustainability

**ICB, Cheshire East place and care communities** – Cheshire East Place partners have co-designed a draft 'Blueprint for 2030', setting out a vision for healthy households, healthy neighbourhoods and health and care services. This recognises the need to address the root causes of poor health and wellbeing.

**Care Communities** - Care Communities continue to work across community partnerships, identifying local priorities and delivering projects to address areas of need:

- 20 projects are supporting marginalised/hard to reach communities.
- 25 projects are addressing Health Inequalities.
- 21 projects are supporting isolated residents.
- Seven community organisations have increased their volunteer programmes.
- Seven projects are directly supporting our most vulnerable residents.

**Connected Communities** - Cheshire East has partnered with a range of churches, community centres and other settings to enable them to become Connected Communities Centres/Venues. These buildings host a range of activities and support services closer to where people live. There are 34 Connected Communities Centres and Venues across Cheshire East.

#### Homes for Ukraine and Afghan resettlement schemes –

- Continued integration & development support within the ARAP (Afghan Relocation and Assistance Policy) scheme for Afghan families.
- 12 families resettled into Cheshire East.
- 282 Ukrainian guests with sponsors matched with 165 households (all in education, training or work.)
- A further 284 Ukrainian guests living independently in either social housing, or private rented sector accommodation.

"We saw the pictures on television and felt we had to do something to help. We made contact with Kate and her mum through video calls and began the process of DBS checks before meeting them at Liverpool Airport. They seemed so relieved to be here. They have been through such a traumatic time. They are a great asset to the family. My daughter Alice has a new friend and there is plenty of space in the house. They have their own bedroom and bathroom. We love having them here." - Homes for Ukraine host, Clare.



#### P2.2) Reduce health inequalities across the borough

The council is a key partner in the Cheshire East Plan health and care partnership, working to deliver the Cheshire East Joint health and Wellbeing Strategy. Key priorities include:

- Smoking cessation
- Substance abuse
- Cardio-vascular health
- Fighting obesity

Five joint strategic needs assessment (JSNA) reviews have been completed this year, through collaboration with partners on poverty, smoking, substance misuse, falls and Crewe

A refreshed 'Tartan Rug' has been published, demonstrating variation in health and wellbeing needs across the Cheshire East area.

**Lifestyle on prescription** - resource has been launched and is now being shared and socialised with health and care professionals across Cheshire East. This includes promotion of the Green Spaces for Wellbeing initiative.

Cheshire East Health and Wellbeing Board has endorsed the Mental Health Partnership Board 5-year plan and the Suicide and Self Harm Prevention Plan.

We have also worked closely with Cheshire and Wirral Partnership NHS Foundation Trust to who provide the Cheshire East Living Well bus which provides immunisations, health checks and wider wellbeing guidance at the heart of communities.

### **P2.3) Protect and support our communities and safeguard children, adults at risk and families from abuse, neglect and exploitation**

The council plays a key role in both Cheshire East Safeguarding Children Partnership and Cheshire East Safeguarding Adults Board.

In 2022, partnership arrangements for protecting children at risk of exploitation were inspected. This inspection found both strengths and areas for improvement in partnership arrangements. Since then, we have strengthened our multi-agency arrangements for children at risk of exploitation and, due to improvements made, additional monitoring has been lifted.

The Council is a key partner in the Cheshire East Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Partnership. New responsibilities were set out in the [Domestic Abuse Act](#) which was signed into law in April 2021. We received funding from the government to support this new Act. This has been focused on helping victims and their children into safe accommodation using a [Whole Housing Approach](#), meaning that services are strengthened to spot the signs of abuse and support families earlier.

### **P2.4) Be the best Corporate Parents to our children in care**

"It was 27 years ago when our daughters were aged four and two that we applied and were approved as foster carers for children between the ages of 0-18.

"We have seen about ten young people through to independence and most of them we are still in regular contact with, alongside their partners. They are still very much a part of our family as our own daughters are.

"The best thing about fostering is seeing the children we've cared for grow up and start to get on with their lives, making plans, being successful in their relationships, learning to be great parents and more – and we get to celebrate it all with them!

"Fostering has enriched and enhanced our lives not just as a couple, but as a whole family. We really enjoy spending time with the young people we have cared for in the past and those who we continue to care for." - Kerry and Graham Christopher from Nantwich.





## P2.5) Support all children to have the best start in life

**Family hubs and digital family hub** – We have now opened five Family Hubs and an online family hub resource. Family Hubs support children and young people from birth up until the age of 19 (or 25 for those with special educational needs and disabilities), and their families.

Physical Family Hubs are now open in:

- Oakenclough Family Hub
- Oak Tree Family Hub
- Monks Coppenhall Family Hub
- Ash Grove Family Hub
- Congleton Family Hub

"We are absolutely delighted to have the SEND family hub at the heart of Crewe and in such close proximity to Springfield.

"The hub is going to offer much needed support for young people and families within the locality. It was a pleasure for the Springfield choir to spread their joy at the opening event.

"We are really looking forward to working together with the hub in the future." - Lisa Hodgkison, executive headteacher at Springfield School



**Free childcare provision** - The number of children taking up the 3 and 4-year-old offer remains consistently high, ensuring where possible that children are accessing support from an early age to achieve their full potential.

**Crewe Youth Zone** - Delivered by the charity OnSide in partnership with Cheshire East Council, the vision for Crewe Youth Zone is to create an incredible space for young people that is packed with activities including dance, music and media skills.

Expected to open in 2025, the Youth Zone will be located on the Oak Street Car Park to the south of the town centre. Crewe Youth Zone will be open to young people aged 8-19, and up to 25 for those with additional needs, 7 days a week.

An additional boxing and recreation facility for young people is proposed for Mirion Street, which is being delivered by Crewe Youth Club, South Cheshire Amateur Boxing Club and Cheshire East Council.

## P2.6) Increase opportunities for all children and young adults with additional needs

**Special Educational Needs and Disabilities** – The Council is continuing to work with Department for Education (DfE) and Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) on funding and transformation of services for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). We are taking a number of steps to address the forecast deficit for these services and to ensure that children with SEND get the right support at the right time, in the right place. This includes a management plan to transform SEND services in the borough, applications to divert additional educational funding to high needs services and a capital bid to fund additional specialist SEND places in Cheshire East.

**In-borough SEND provision – schools** – In February 2024, we formally opened the newly expanded Springfield School site in Wilmslow, creating up to 80 much-needed local school spaces for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).

**Supported internship promotion** – We have continued to promote supported internships for interns with a disability to businesses across the borough. Most recently, this has included a business engagement event to mark National Supported Internships Day in 2024.

“I enjoy the role as a job coach because it’s such a rewarding thing to see the progress of the intern from the start of the journey all the way to see their confidence grow in themselves.” - Emma Beckley, supported internships job coach.



## **P2.7) Ensure all children have a high quality, enjoyable education that enables them to achieve their full potential**

**School places offered** – The number of parents receiving first choice offers for school places remains high, with 93% (primary) and 94% (secondary) of parents receiving a first choice offer in 2024.

**Good and outstanding schools** – Standards of education in Cheshire East remain high, with 94% of primary schools and 91% secondary schools judged as good or outstanding (2023/24 Q2).

**NEETs** – 1.7% of young people not in education, employment or training (NEET) (Years 12+13), against a national benchmark of 2.8%.

## **P2.8) Reduce the reliance on long term care by improving services closer to home and providing more extra care facilities, including dementia services**

**Home First** – helps people to be better supported in their own home and reducing hospital readmissions.

This initiative, which aligns with the NHS's long-term plan, aims to empower people to receive the right level of care and treatment for their health conditions within the comfort and familiarity of their own homes.

**Shared lives initiative** – In 2023 we launched a recruitment campaign to attract more Shared Lives carers.

Shared Lives is where carers share their home and family life with an adult who needs help or support to live well. The carer provides support and companionship to the individual, and they can also help with everyday tasks such as cooking, cleaning, and shopping.

Our **Extra Care strategy** was agreed at Adults and Health Committee in November 2023. We have seen a growth in domiciliary care capacity, in line with our strategy for people to receive care at home, with an 18% increase in the number of hours delivered by commissioned care providers

The Adults and Health committee endorsed the adoption of a new **Cheshire East Falls Prevention Strategy** for 2023-2026. The strategy has been co-produced by a multi-agency partnership steering group and refined via a formal consultation process that took place in quarter 4 of 2022/23.

## Aim 3 - A thriving and sustainable place

### P3.1) A great place for people to live, work and visit

**Affordable housing** - We continue to work in partnership with our Registered Housing Providers to increase the supply of affordable homes across Cheshire East. To date 451 new homes have been completed, which exceeds the affordable housing requirement of 355 per annum.

**Congleton Leisure Centre** – Re-opened following a major refurbishment in summer of 2023. Congleton Leisure Centre is the latest in the borough to undergo a large-scale refurbishment, which has completely transformed its exterior design and the interior activities space and facilities, taking the borough's leisure offer to a new level. Children from The Quinta Primary School were first to test the water in the new big pool at Congleton Leisure Centre, following a civic opening by the Mayor of Cheshire East, who was joined by Olympian Ann Brightwell MBE.

"It's been great for the school to become so closely involved with this project and I am sure many of them, and their families, will be taking advantage of the amazing facilities the centre has to offer." - Alison Cope, Head of PE, The Quinta School, Congleton



**The Learn to Swim scheme** has grown to 9,700 swimmers participating in weekly lessons and **leisure memberships** have exceeded 20,000 for the first time, with over 2.5 million individual visits to our leisure centre sites

**Empty homes** – We continue to work with owners of empty properties to try and bring properties back into use. The level of long-term empty homes continues to be maintained at below 1% (0.92%) of the total number of residential properties.

**Planning modernisation programme** - The modernisation plan has progressed on four main areas of focus. The new IT system has been delayed, but more recent positive engagement should see implementation in the summer; the staffing restructure is underway with a focus on retention and recruitment to fill vacancies; the backlog of applications has slowly reduced with focused effort on the oldest applications; and various customer improvements have been put in place including new validation checklists and information updates to the Council's website. Great progress had been made addressing the recommendations of the s106 audit, with updates to system and process and collaboration with other Services which will result in a much more effective and efficient service going forward. Many of the above changes coupled with progression of an updated pre-application process will see a significant service reset after the summer responding to Government planning reforms aligned with a more focused service improvement plan.

**Planning** - Significant strategic developments have received planning consent including further housing, employment and retail schemes in north Congleton, expansion and redevelopment of sites in Crewe for key existing employers, and further market and affordable housing schemes in Macclesfield. Proactive approaches have been incorporated to maximise design and environmental quality in place making, alongside a continued focus on biodiversity net gain. An increase in enforcement notices (50+ in 2023/24) also demonstrates the priority to also protect the natural and built environment.

An Issues Paper highlighting 10 key topic areas and a call for sites has been commenced to enable the process of the new Local Plan to begin early next year. A number of Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs) have been prepared and now adopted over the year providing detailed technical information and guidance to support Local Plan policies. Sustainable Drainage (SUDS), Developer Contributions and Environmental Protection are now all in place.



**Economic strengths** - the economy in Cheshire East remains strong and resilient, bolstered by global employers in science and manufacturing and over 19,000 small to medium enterprises. Businesses continue to commit to investing in Cheshire East, with Bentley Motors recently announcing their commitment to deliver a fleet of luxury electric vehicles in Crewe. While Cheshire East's employment count has not fully recovered from the pandemic when comparing to competing regions it should be noted that Cheshire East still performs strongly in comparison to the Northwest. Manufacturing proves to be a strong point for Cheshire East as it accounts for 10.2% of all employment in the area which is significantly higher than the England average of 7.3%. Furthermore, the manufacturing industry in Cheshire East contributes a Gross Value Added of 31.7% to Cheshire East's GDP, which is 20% more than the UK average of 11.2% in 2021.

**Visitor economy** - The value of the Visitor Economy for Cheshire East has recovered well since the Covid pandemic decimated the sector in 2020. The most up to date STEAM tourism economic impact modelling data shows an increase of 60% on 2020 figures and over 44% on 2021 figures. This provided a total of £879m of value to the Cheshire East economy in 2022, with almost 13 million visitors enjoying Cheshire East last year.

### **P3.2) Welcoming, safe and clean neighbourhoods**

**Safer Cheshire East Partnership Plan refreshed in 2022**, focusing on:

- Violence against women and girls
- Exploitation of adults and children
- Cybercrime
- Serious and Organised Crime
- Domestic Abuse
- Knife Crime
- Road Safety

**CCTV investment** - The CCTV wireless project is progressing on a town-by-town basis across the Borough in conjunction with our contracted provider. The project, which is set to complete by the end of the calendar year, will improve performance and security and greater functionality capitalising on technological advances.

**Air Quality** - Air Quality Annual Status Reports have been submitted to and approved by Defra each year. Projects within the Air Quality Action Plan are ongoing in conjunction with a range of internal and external partners and progress is reported to the Air Quality Steering Group on a

quarterly basis. A new continuous monitor has been commissioned and we are now measuring concentrations of Particulate Matter as well as Nitrogen Dioxide.

**Food Safety** - The commercial services team outturn for 2023-2024 was an achievement of 96.5% of all programmed A-D related food hygiene inspections; this figure includes inspections that were overdue following the reduced inspection requirements mandated by the Food Standards Agency during the Covid-19 pandemic and to the end of March 2023. This means that we start 2024-2025 in an excellent position to meet the requirements of the annual programme for the year. Of those premises that did receive a direct inspection, 97.7% are awarded 3 or above in the Food Hygiene Rating Scheme putting Cheshire East on a par with national standards.

**Licensing** - The Councils updated 'Taxi' Licensing Policy was approved in November 2022 leading to a significant change in processes and requirements for licence holders. One such change was the requirement for all drivers to undertake safeguarding training and with the support of colleagues in the Cheshire East Safeguarding Team and the benefit of external funding we delivered 23 free of charge training sessions to over 500 drivers. Additional support has been provided through two trade meetings with plans for further engagement sessions in 2024-2025 alongside our newly developed Taxi and Private Hire Newsletter aimed at addressing general enquiries, changes to legislation and good practice.

**Trading Standards** - Trading Standards continue to protect residents of the Borough from unscrupulous traders and scams. Between 2021-2024 the Banking Protocol supported by Trading Standards and the Police dealt with 160 referrals where staff in financial institutions flag instances where they believe a customer is being forced to hand over money in unusual circumstances. The average saving for each Cheshire East resident referral was £8200. In addition, the Older Persons Scams Awareness and Aftercare project, a partnership between Cheshire East Trading Standards and Age UK won the Chartered Trading Standards Institute Hero Award in 2023 and for two years running the Trading Standards Service won a national award in recognitions of its efforts to raise awareness of the dangers of using loan sharks.

**Cleaner Crewe** – Four years ago, many of the alleyways in Crewe were in a poor state of repair and the communities living in these areas were not able to enjoy the immediate locality of their homes.

Now, following on from the introduction of the Cleaner Crewe project, alleyways have gone from being filled with fly-tipped rubbish to being places residents can be proud of. The Council's support and direct involvement in the Cleaner Crewe Project completed on 31/03/2024. A detailed report was produced in relation to lessons learnt, how further support could be resourced in the future and also highlighted the continued success of the "Friends of Crewe South 1 Alleyways" committee. The Committee continues to meet on a regular basis and has actively sought various different grants and funding streams to continue to with engagement activities, clean ups events and sustainable activities and infrastructure to provide the best chance of those alleyways that have kept clean and well managed to stay that way, and also to engage future Alley Champions across the original "pilot area". Throughout April and May 2024 the residents, supported by local business, ward and town council members, other agencies and volunteers, have continued with clean up events, labelling of their plant pots and benches, and also some bank holiday street events.

The project itself was shortlisted in September 2022 for APSE 'Best Community & Neighbourhood Initiative' and also won first place in the LARAC Conference Celebration Awards in October 2022 for 'Best Partnership Award'.

As a result of the project, a clear model has been created as to what would be required should this be duplicated elsewhere in the borough and Crewe Town Council are currently reviewing what support they would also consider providing for the future in relation to similar issues and potential continued support of the original project area.

**Pocket Parks** – Four parks – McLaren Street, Derby Docks, School Crescent and Queen Street – will all see improvements that will allow these sites to be more accessible for residents and to create 'pocket parks'. McLaren Street 'pocket park' was the first of the parks to re-open in April 2024.

**Green Spaces for Wellbeing** - The innovative green spaces for wellbeing programme was launched in 2022.

"The alley regeneration project has been welcomed by Walthall Street and Westminster Street residents. Our alley was filthy and dangerous underfoot. We met our neighbours, they came out to chat and showed gratitude for the clean-up. Children were able to come out to play, this was lovely to see during the summer. Plants were added in containers, and residents looked after them. We saw a reduction in fly-tipping and dog fouling." - Denise Randle, a resident in Walthall Street, Crewe



Working in partnership, Cheshire East Council, the NHS, Ansa, Everybody Leisure and the voluntary sector, launched the 'Green Spaces for Wellbeing' programme to support people with long term health conditions and/or mental health needs to engage with nature-based activities.

**Green flag awards** - We have retained the prestigious National Green Flag Award for the quality, condition and overall cleanliness of its parks and open spaces in 11 of our towns, with three sites – Tatton Park, Congleton Park and Queens Park – also retaining their Green Heritage Site status.

### **P3.3) Reduce impact on the environment**

**Waste Strategy and recycling rates** - Our municipal waste management strategy sets out how we intend to reduce, reuse, recycle, recover and dispose of municipal waste between 2014 and 2030. Our strategy sets out

key aims and objectives for the management of waste. The Strategy seeks to identify key drivers and ensure the aspirations of the Council are still relevant in the changing waste industry following government consultations covering the following:

- Waste and recycling: making recycling collections consistent in England. Simpler Recycling – Food waste collections.
- Packaging waste: changing the UK producer responsibility system for packaging waste
- Introducing a Deposit Return Scheme (DRS) for drinks containers (bottles and cans)

The collection, treatment, and disposal of municipal waste in Cheshire East is underpinned by 18 high level strategic objectives that have been established by the Council. To read the whole strategy please go to : [Municipal Waste Management Strategy Review 2020 \(cheshireeast.gov.uk\)](https://www.cheshireeast.gov.uk/municipal-waste-management-strategy-review-2020)

The latest official figures (2022 – 23) show that our recycling rate is 52%

**Tree planting** - 30ha of tree planting has taken place and a further 15ha is currently in progress giving a total of 45ha against the total of 120ha required by the Carbon Action Plan. Work is underway to plan a pipeline of sites to complete the planting required over the next two planting seasons.

### **P3.4) A transport network that is safe and promotes active travel**

**Poynton Relief Road** - opened March 2023. The road relieves Poynton village of high volumes of traffic travelling between the Macclesfield and Poynton areas to Stockport, the airport, Manchester and the wider area.

**Congleton Link Road** opened April 2021, improving connectivity between Macclesfield, Congleton, the surrounding area and the M6. It has also reduced congestion and improved air quality in Congleton and released land creating the potential for jobs in the local economy.

**The North West Crewe highways package** that improves safe access to the hospital and enables economic growth remains on programme for completion in Spring 2024.

**EV charging points** - funding secured to meet the Council's aim to install 250 public EV points in the borough. This includes money from the Government's Residential On-street Charge Point scheme (ORCS) and the

Local Electric Vehicle Infrastructure (LEVI) scheme. A contract has been let to deliver c.15 sites through ORCS during 2024. Procurement of a charge point operator for LEVI delivery has begun.

**Parking review** – a Borough-wide review of Council-operated car parks was completed on a town-by-town basis with the outcomes agreed at Highways Committee in January 2024. This review will rationalise parking charges and provisions to support town centres, encourage sustainable travel choices and improve the efficiency of the Council's car park estate. The new Multi Storey Car Park in Crewe town centre is being integrated into the town's parking offer, alongside a number of car park closures to enable regeneration sites at Oak Street, Lyceum Square and the Library/Archive Centre.

### **Walking and cycling routes:**

- Manchester Road scheme between Handforth and Wilmslow has secured funding from Active Travel England to provide a safe Active Travel Corridor,
- Mill Street Corridor/Southern Gateway, in Crewe will link the town centre to the railway station, plans have been finalised and works to construct these facilities are being procured.
- Flag Lane Link: a highways and cycle scheme improving connectivity into the town centre from the west of Crewe. The main part of this scheme completed in summer 2023 and is now operational, including a new contraflow cycle lane giving priority access to cyclists and pedestrians.
- The final leg of Middlewood Way was opened with completion of the Black Lane Scheme in Macclesfield. The scheme received nearly £600k funding from Sustrans to create a safe link between Hurdsfield and the towns railway station.

**Bus services** - are benefitting from investment through the Bus Service Improvement Plan funding supported by the Council's own resources. In 2023/24 spending has focussed on Route 38 which links Crewe-Sandbach- Congleton and Macclesfield, where investment in bus stops/stations, passenger information and facilities is intended to complement the introduction of a new fleet of modern vehicles.

Flexilink and Go-Too have continued to provide demand-responsive transport services to residents. Flexilink operations have been extended to service Disley whilst Go-Too is our Rural Mobility Funded scheme serving



areas to the south and west of Nantwich. The council is consulting on options to better integrate these 2 services and connect into the commercial bus network.

The national £2 bus fare cap covers almost all scheduled bus services in Cheshire East (exceptions being where the fare is less than £2 already). The fare cap has been important in getting more people to use buses following the pandemic, with most local service now seeing fare-paying passenger numbers at or above pre-pandemic levels. The fare cap will continue until (at least) December 2024.

### **P3.5) Thriving urban and rural economies with opportunities for all**

**£100m regeneration programme for Crewe** - focused on delivering around 20 projects, including those funded by the Government's £14.1m Future High Streets Fund and £22.9m Towns Fund, which include new/improved active travel routes and public spaces, youth and community facilities, commercial floorspace (see TADIC below) and support to reuse vacant properties.

**Crewe bus station and multi-storey car park** - at the heart of the town's regeneration plans, a new bus station opened in May 2024, featuring an enclosed passenger concourse, with WC amenities. Located in the same structure, a new 389 space MSCP, with 20+ EV charging points and solar PV, will provide new capacity and allow some other town centre car parks to be released to support wider regeneration plans.

**Technology and Digital Innovation Campus (TADIC):** plans have advanced for the creation of new co-working space at the former Municipal Building offices (NB not the historic civic amenities). Contractors have been appointed to undertake works commencing 2024 and completing early 2025, whilst marketing of the opportunity for a tenant/operator is underway. Separately, although no longer expected to be co-working space, plans to improve and safeguard Christ Church have been developed.

**Sustainable Energy Network:** Investment in energy improvements being implemented including to Lifestyle Centre, Lyceum Theatre and Delamere House to deliver carbon reduction and enable future heat network.

**Cheshire Archives and History Centre** - The shared service 'Archives - A Story Shared' programme, including the building of the new History Centre in Crewe, was successful in achieving a £4.4 million grant from the

National Lottery Heritage Fund. The project is now at final building design stage with ongoing community engagement programmes. specifications being agreed for tendering.

**Crewe Market Hall** opened in May 2021 - it has become an anchor retail, leisure, and entertainment venue in the town.

**The Ly<sup>2</sup> project** at Lyceum Square launched in July 2023, providing a new public entertainment and performance space at the heart of Crewe town centre, adjacent to the Lyceum Theatre and Market Hall. The project includes stages, a giant video screen, new artwork, seating and planting areas to provide an attractive setting for visitors.

**Macclesfield town centre, public realm and changing places** – Building on the successful delivery of the Castle Street public realm improvement scheme and the Avanti funded Treacle TART (Treacle Town Art Trail), work is now progressing on developing designs for further 'light touch' public realm improvements across Macclesfield's pedestrian core.

A Changing Places Grant and a significant financial contribution from Macclesfield Town Council were also utilised in 23/24 to upgrade toilets at Macclesfield Indoor Market, formerly only accessible to market traders, to be upgraded and enlarged to provide modern facilities suitable for public use, including accessible changing places toilet and baby changing facilities.

Work has also started on design work and costings for the refurbishment of Macclesfield Indoor Market, and it is hoped that these can be delivered in 2024/25, although the project is extremely challenging given central government restrictions on the funding.

**Town centre vitality reports and Business Improvement Districts** - Town Centre Vitality Reports were finalised in 2022 for the nine key service centres in Cheshire East. These plans identify key opportunities to support town centre vitality in these centres as and when funding can be secured whether by the Council, Town Councils or others wishing to support the vitality of our town centres. Since the approval of these plans, a number of Town Councils, with support from CEC, have taken steps to develop new town centre Business Improvement Districts to generate more funding and capacity for town centre projects and stronger business networks. Following the establishment of the boroughs' first Business Improvement District in Wilmslow Town Centre in November 2022. 2023/24 has seen a

successful ballot for a second BID covering central Crewe and its commencement on 1 April 2024.

**Rural Action Plan** - Rural England Prosperity grant funding to support Cheshire East based rural businesses has supported small scale investment in micro and small rural enterprises and the development and promotion of the rural visitor economy. A review of the various cross cutting elements of the Rural Action Plan 2022-2026 is taking place during 2024 to identify progress to date and future priorities.

**Connecting Cheshire** - the Connecting Partnership is continuing to manage a number of Digital Connectivity projects covering the wider Cheshire region with the aim to improve connection speeds for residents and businesses. The partnership also has recently launched the latest programme of Digital 'Masterclasses' for locally based SMEs that are designed to provide support and assistance in ensuring that their business can benefit from current digital productivity improvements.

### **P3.6) Be a carbon neutral council by 2027**

**Solar farm, Leighton** - Work is almost complete on the council's first solar farm. Once complete the 4.1MW farm will provide the majority of the electricity required by the council's compost plant at Leighton, Crewe with some residual electricity being sold to the grid.

**Green vehicles in the council's fleet** - EV charging units have been installed across the council estate and 16 vans are currently on order, once delivered these will bring our total EV fleet to 19 vehicles.

**Solar Together promotion** – Working with Cheshire West, and Warrington Borough Councils, the first Solar Together scheme in Cheshire and Warrington has seen more than 6,000 registrations from local residents keen to install solar photovoltaic (PV) systems in their homes and has won a Green Expo Award for Innovation in Energy.

**Decarbonising heat/energy for the council's buildings** – 14 air source heat pumps have been installed on council's estate. Seventeen solar installations have been completed on council buildings, providing approximately 1GWh per year.



## Aim 1 - An open and enabling organisation

We will provide strong community leadership and work transparently with our residents, businesses and partners to deliver our ambition in Cheshire East.

Priorities	Where we are now
<p>P1.1) Ensure that there is transparency in all aspects of council decision making</p> <p>P1.2) Listen, learn and respond to our residents, promoting opportunities for a two-way conversation</p> <p>P1.3) Support a sustainable financial future for the council, through service development, improvement and transformation</p> <p>P1.4) Look at opportunities to bring more income into the borough</p> <p>P1.5) Support and develop our workforce to be confident, motivated, innovative, resilient and empowered</p> <p>P1.6) Promote and develop the services of the council through regular communication and engagement with all residents</p>	<p>Over the last 12 months, the council has seen a significant escalation in financial pressures, including inflation and interest rates and increase in demand and complexity of need. It has applied to central government for Exceptional Financial Support and the DfE Safety Valve programme. The council has recently undertaken a LGA Corporate Peer Challenge which has resulted in a number of recommendations.</p> <p><b>Opportunities and strengths</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Digital technologies and artificial intelligence</li> <li>• A workforce and elected members with a will for transformation and improvement.</li> </ul> <p><b>Challenges</b></p> <p>The council's financial position and low levels of reserves means that it is at an increased risk of s114. The council also has limited capacity for the required change, improvement and transformation. Understanding about the council's priorities, services, decision-making and opportunities for residents to be involved can all be improved.</p> <p><b>Drivers for change</b></p> <p>The key drivers for change for this aim are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Financial sustainability</li> <li>• Digital opportunities and artificial intelligence</li> <li>• Refreshing the relationship with residents</li> </ul>

What we will do - Priority actions for 2024/25			Lead Officer	Committee
<b>P1.1</b>	A1.1.1	Introduce a new decision-making framework to streamline the current arrangements and improve quality and clarity of reports.	Head of Democratic Services	CPC
	A1.1.2	Improve understanding of effective scrutiny in a committee system of decision-making	Head of Democratic Services	CPC
	A1.1.3	Member training to clarify roles and responsibilities for decision-making within the committee system	Head of Democratic Services	CPC
	A1.1.4	A clear and transparent budget setting process, where opportunities to inform and influence decision-making are clearly understood by stakeholders	Head of Finance	CPC
<b>P1.2</b>	A1.2.1	Review and embed consultation and engagement approach across the organisation to put resident and customer voice at the heart of evidence base for decisions, including assessing alternative approaches such as a 'people panel' to embed citizen voice into key decisions and policy development	Head of Communications	CPC
	A1.2.2	Review equality, diversity and inclusion strategy and EIAs to embed the voices of seldom-heard audiences and those with protected characteristics at the heart of decision-making and service redesign across the organisation.	Head of Business Change	CPC
	A1.2.3	Review and refresh the aims and priorities in the Customer Experience Strategy as part of a wider review of customer experience and resident engagement.	Head of Customer Services	CPC
	A1.2.4	Achieve the Armed Forces Covenant Gold Award	Head of Communities and Integration	E+C
<b>P1.3</b>	A1.3.1	Embark on a whole organisation transformation and improvement programme – The primary aim in the short term must be to ensure that the Council is financially stable and delivering support to those who need it most.	Director of Transformation	CPC
	A1.3.2	Review commissioning approach across all directorates	Head of Integrated Commissioning	A+H/C+F
	A1.3.3	Deliver the savings set out in MTFS 2024-28 proposals within the agreed timescales to contribute to a balanced the budget and build sustainable reserves	Head of Finance	CPC
	A1.3.4	We will refresh the council's Digital Strategy and delivery programme. The Digital Strategy identifies forty-seven digital projects and emphasises a digital-by-design approach to offering services to customers.	Head of ICT	CPC
<b>P1.4</b>	A1.4.1	Comprehensive review of each existing alternative service delivery vehicle (ASDV) including review of governance, management, business planning and performance management arrangements.	Director of Environment	FSC
<b>P1.5</b>	A1.5.1	Review Workforce Strategy and update for 2025 onwards.	Head of HR	CPC
	A1.5.2	Complete the office moves related WorkplaCE programme, making more efficient use of the council's office estate and technology to support modern ways of working	Executive Director – Place	CPC, E+G
	A1.5.3	Review and update the Brighter Future culture programme	Head of HR	CPC
	A1.5.4	Complete the DMA review of senior capacity and extend DMA across the organisation as part of service re-design	Head of HR	CPC
<b>P1.6</b>	A1.6.1	Review and refresh communications and engagement strategy and resourcing as part of a wider review of customer experience and resident engagement.	Head of Communications	CPC
	A1.6.2	Establish a range of subscriber e-newsletters and digital content to share key updates and council services, support and decisions with a range of stakeholders – to extend reach of messages	Head of Communications	CPC
	A1.6.3	Review and update the approach, across the organisation, to employee communications and workforce engagement	Head of Communications	CPC

## Aim 2 - A council which empowers and cares about people

We aim to reduce inequalities, promote fairness and opportunity for all and support our most vulnerable residents.

### Priorities

- P2.1) Work together with residents and partners to support people and communities to be strong and resilient
- P2.2) Reduce health inequalities across the borough
- P2.3) Protect and support our communities and safeguard children, adults at risk and families from abuse, neglect and exploitation
- P2.4) Be the best Corporate Parents to our children in care
- P2.5) Support all children to have the best start in life
- P2.6) Increase opportunities for all children and young adults with additional needs
- P2.7) Ensure all children have a high quality, enjoyable education that enables them to achieve their full potential
- P2.8) Reduce the reliance on long term care by improving services closer to home and providing more extra care facilities, including dementia services

### Where we are now

Cheshire East is a prosperous place, but it has pockets of deprivation in income, health and life chances. Standards of education and achievement for our young people are generally high, but some children with additional needs may not achieve their potential. We have an older-than-average, aging population and adults accessing care services have increasingly complex needs.

#### Opportunities and strengths

- Expand the use of technology-enabled care.
- An extensive and active VCFSE sector
- High standards of education generally
- Fairer charging for services.
- New Leighton hospital campus

#### Challenges

- Greater than expected growth in both cost and demand pressures for care services.
- Health inequalities, including life expectancy.
- Dedicated Schools Grant, high needs funding, deficit.
- Social care and social worker recruitment
- Fragile care market
- Digital connectivity and exclusion

#### Drivers for change

- Demand and complexity of need exceeding available funding.
- Technology
- Health and care system integration

Priority	What we will do - Priority actions for 2024/25		Lead Officer	Committee
P2.1	A2.1.1	Support VCFSE to build upon the People Helping People initiative and work collaboratively through 'Growing our communities'.	Head of Communities and Integration	A+H
	A2.1.2	Complete construction of the Traveller transit site	Head of Housing	E+G
	A2.1.3	Support and contribute to the achievements of the borough's eight care communities and neighbourhood partnerships	Head of Communities and Integration	A+H
P2.2	A2.2.1	Focus delivery of targeted activity to reduce alcohol and substance misuse, smoking, domestic abuse and violence and increase healthy eating and physical exercise in areas that experience worse health outcomes.	Director of Public Health	A+H
	A2.2.2	Continue to deliver activity to deliver the <a href="#">Cheshire East Harm and Suicide Prevention Action Plan 2023-2025</a>	Director of Public Health	A+H
	A2.2.3	Continue to deliver activity to deliver the <a href="#">Living Well in Crewe plan</a>	Director of Public Health	A+H
	A2.2.4	Continue to deliver activity to deliver the <a href="#">Cheshire East Place Mental Health Plan 2024-2029</a>	Director of Public Health	A+H
P2.3	A2.3.1	Continue to embed our Signs of Safety practice model	Principal Social Worker (Children)	C+F
	A2.3.2	Update the <a href="#">Cheshire East Safeguarding Adults Board Strategic Plan</a>	Head of Adult Safeguarding	A+H
	A2.3.3	Update the <a href="#">Cheshire East Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Strategy</a>	Head of Service Early Help and Prevention	C+F
P2.4	A2.4.1	Attract more foster carers to support Cheshire East children through the Foster4 collaboration	Head of Provider Services	C+F
	A2.4.2	Prioritise care experienced adults as part of our recovery work to improve employment and training opportunities.	Head of Service: Cared for Children and Care Leavers	C+F
	A2.4.3	Deliver the priorities of the <a href="#">Cared for children and care leavers strategy 2022-26</a>	Head of Cared for Children and Care Leavers	C+F
P2.5	A2.5.1	Continue to develop services and support offered through Family Hub model and promote the <a href="#">Parenting Journey</a>	Head of Early Years	C+F
	A2.5.2	Continue work to build Crewe Youth Zone	Director Education, Strong Start and Integration	C+F
	A2.5.3	Continue to deliver the <a href="#">Emotionally Healthy Children and Young People programme</a>	Director Education, Strong Start and Integration	C+F
P2.6	A2.6.1	Establish and deliver against the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) management plan	Strategic lead for SEND and inclusion	C+F
	A2.6.2	Capital programme to increase in-borough provision	Head of Education	C+F
	A2.6.3	Grow organisational capacity to support transformation of SEND support (MTFS 24)	Strategic lead for SEND and inclusion	C+F
P2.7	A2.7.1	Deliver the Kingsbourne Academy primary school in Nantwich	Head of Education	C+F
	A2.7.2	Process primary and secondary applications efficiently, offering parental choice places where possible.	Head of Education	C+F
P2.8	A2.8.1	Investment in Adult Social Care (MTFS 8)	Director of Adult Social Care	A+H
	A2.8.2	Continue to develop and promote the Shared Lives service	Head of Care4CE	A+H
	A2.8.3	Use technology to digitally enable people to support themselves ( <a href="#">Digital Inclusion Plan 2023 – 2026</a> )	Corporate Manager, Health Improvement	A+H
	A2.8.4	Deliver the objectives of the <a href="#">All Age Carers Strategy 2021-25</a>	Head of Integrated Commissioning	A+H

## Aim 3 - A thriving and sustainable place

We will lead our communities to protect and enhance our environment, tackle the climate emergency and drive sustainable development.

Priorities	Where we are now
<p>P3.1) A great place for people to live, work and visit</p> <p>P3.2) Welcoming, safe and clean neighbourhoods</p> <p>P3.3) Reduce impact on the environment</p> <p>P3.4) A transport network that is safe and promotes active travel</p> <p>P3.5) Thriving urban and rural economies with opportunities for all</p> <p>P3.6) Be a carbon neutral council by 2027</p>	<p>Cheshire East is a thriving area with a strong emphasis on industry, commerce and agriculture and sits at the heart of a region that has one of the strongest science and technology clusters in the UK. The strength of the science sector in Cheshire East is manifested through research and education facilities, such as Jodrell Bank Observatory and leading businesses such as AstraZeneca, Recipharm and the Waters Corporation. Cheshire East is the home to a number of major employers, including Bentley Motors, AO.com and Barclays.</p> <p>The borough has built and natural heritage that is highly valued by residents, and, along with proximity Greater Manchester and Liverpool and 360° connectivity, makes it a place people want to live.</p> <p>Economic ambition for the borough was in part built around HS2 Phase 2b and a hub station at Crewe, and the anticipated benefits to inward investment, employment and connectivity that would bring. We now need to refresh our economic and transport strategies in the light of this decision.</p> <p><b>Opportunities and strengths</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Handforth Garden Village</li> <li>• Sub-regional working</li> <li>• Economic performance exceeds both the regional and national average</li> <li>• Visitor economy</li> <li>• Cheshire East boasts one of the strongest GVA's outside of the south east</li> <li>• Large-scale global employers offering high quality jobs for residents</li> <li>• The Council has substantial landholdings and property ownerships across the Borough which it can use to influence positive change.</li> </ul> <p><b>Challenges</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• HS2 Phase 2b cancelled</li> <li>• Funding for highways maintenance</li> <li>• Limited public transport options</li> <li>• Demand for planning services</li> </ul> <p><b>Drivers for change</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Climate change and threats to environment and biodiversity</li> <li>• Health inequalities</li> <li>• A growing and ageing population</li> </ul>

Priority	What we will do - Priority actions for 2024/25		Lead Officer	Committee
<b>P3.1</b>	A3.1.1	Develop and begin consultation upon 'New style' Local Plan Strategy	Head of Planning	E+C
	A3.1.2	Deliver the Planning Service Improvement Plan	Head of Planning	E+C
	A3.1.3	Deliver cultural development activities, including continued activity towards the Cheshire Archives – a Story Shared project (MTFS 56)	Head of Rural and Cultural Economy	E+G
	A3.1.4	Update the Statement of Licensing Policy	Head of Regulatory Services	Council
<b>P3.2</b>	A3.2.1	Monitor the continued successful delivery of the Cleaner Crewe project.	Head of Neighbourhood Services	E+C
	A3.2.2	Update and deliver the Air Quality Strategy, following consultation.	Head of Regulatory Services	E+C
	A3.2.3	Update the <a href="#">Safer Cheshire East Partnership Plan</a>	Head of Neighbourhood Services	E+C
<b>P3.3</b>	A3.3.1	Continue implementation and monitoring of the Green Spaces Maintenance Policy	Head of Environmental Services	E+C
	A3.3.2	Update the Cheshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy	Head of Planning	E+C
	A3.3.3	Finalise and implement the <a href="#">Biodiversity Net Gain</a> Supplementary Planning Document	Head of Planning	E+C
<b>P3.4</b>	A3.4.1	Complete Bus Service Review and refresh Bus Service Improvement Plan	Head of Strategic Transport and Parking	H+T
	A3.4.2	Deliver an integrated borough-wide demand-responsive transport service (Go-Too and Flexilink)	Head of Strategic Transport and Parking	H+T
	A3.4.3	Secure further funding for active travel routes	Head of Strategic Transport and Parking	H+T
	A3.4.4	Update business cases for Middlewich Eastern Bypass and A500 dualling	Head of Strategic Infrastructure	H+T
<b>P3.5</b>	A3.5.1	Deliver the <a href="#">Cheshire East Rural Action Plan 2022-26</a>	Head of Rural and Cultural Economy	E+G
	A3.5.2	Continue to deliver Connected Cheshire digital infrastructure	Head of Economic Development	E+G
	A3.5.3	Continue to pursue a compensation package following scrapping of HS2 Phase 2	Programme Director HS2	E+G
	A3.5.4	Develop a clear place marketing approach	Head of Economic Development	E+G
	A3.5.5	Enable the delivery of Handforth Garden Village	Head of Economic Development	E+G
<b>P3.6</b>	A3.6.1	Deliver actions to achieve the objectives of the Carbon Neutral Action Plan 2027 (updated timescale)	Head of Environmental Services	E+C
	A3.6.2	Update the borough-wide Carbon-Neutrality Action Plan 2045 following public consultation	Head of Environmental Services	E+C

## How we will report progress

Corporate Policy Committee will receive reports for each quarter following approval and adoption of the plan, providing updates on delivery of the priority actions detailed under each aim.

In addition, a summary will be provided for other activities that have been identified that contribute to the priorities, aims and vision to give a rounded view of delivery.

The committee will also receive updates on the development of a new strategic plan for the council and the borough from 2025.

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OPEN

**Council**

**17 July 2024**

**Corporate Peer Challenge Report**

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**Report of: Rob Polkinghorne - Chief Executive**

**Report Reference No: C/8/24-25**

**Ward(s) Affected: All**

### **Purpose of Report**

- 1 To provide Council with the Corporate Peer Challenge report following the recent Local Government Association (LGA) review and opportunity to comment on the findings.
- 2 To provide Council with the approval route for the emerging draft action plan being developed in response to the LGA's recommendations to enable publication of the plan by 28 August 2024.

### **Executive Summary**

- 3 Cheshire East Council invited the LGA to undertake a Corporate Peer Challenge in March 2024.
- 4 The peer team considered the following five themes which form the core components of all Corporate Peer Challenges, and are key to councils' performance and improvement:
  - Local priorities and outcomes
  - Organisational and place leadership
  - Governance and culture
  - Financial planning and management
  - Capacity for improvement

- 5 Following a Corporate Peer Challenge, a report outlining the key findings and recommendations from the peer team is shared with the council and is required to be published. Cheshire East's report was published on the council and LGA websites on Monday 8 July 2024 and is at Appendix 1. Publication was delayed as the LGA did not publish any Corporate Peer Challenge reports in the lead up to the General Election.
- 6 Councils are required to develop and publish an action plan addressing the recommendations in the report within five months of the peer team being onsite so no later than 28 August 2024. The draft action plan in response to the 18 recommendations within the report is at Appendix 2.
- 7 Delivery of the Corporate Peer Challenge action plan is one of four critical improvement and transformation priorities requiring a council-wide response at this time, the others being ensuring financial sustainability, organisation wide transformation and Children's Services improvement.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

The Council is recommended to:

1. Note and comment on the [Corporate Peer Challenge report](#) at Appendix 1.
2. Agree the draft Corporate Peer Challenge Action Plan.
3. Delegate authority to the Chief Executive to finalise the Corporate Peer Challenge Action Plan and arrange for its publication by 28<sup>th</sup> August 2024 as required by the LGA.

#### Background

- 8 Cheshire East Council invited the LGA to undertake a Corporate Peer Challenge in March 2024. The peer team, made up of cross-party Members and officers from other councils and representatives of the LGA, were onsite from 25-28 March 2024.
- 9 The peer team considered the following five themes which form the core components of all Corporate Peer Challenges, and are key to councils' performance and improvement:
  - Local priorities and outcomes
  - Organisational and place leadership

- Governance and culture
  - Financial planning and management
  - Capacity for improvement
- 10 Following a Corporate Peer Challenge, a report outlining the key findings and recommendations from the peer team is shared with the council and is required to be published. Cheshire East's report was published on the council and LGA websites on Monday 8 July 2024 and is at Appendix 1. Publication was delayed as the LGA did not publish any Corporate Peer Challenge reports in the lead up to the General Election.
- 11 The peer team heard examples of good services that are appreciated by residents and that there is a willingness for improvement which is seen as a priority across the organisation. However, they also recognised that the council urgently needs to focus on significant challenges, including the financial position and longer-term transformation.
- 12 The report includes 18 recommendations which have been prioritised by the peer team on the grounds of urgency, sequencing, and importance.
- 13 Councils are required to develop and publish an action plan addressing the recommendations in the report within five months of the peer team being onsite so no later than 28 August 2024. The draft action plan is at Appendix 2 and progress is being made at pace in many areas.
- 14 The action plan also includes two additional actions relating to Children's Services improvement while not specific recommendations are significant issues referenced within the report and which the council is taking action to address closely linked to the overall transformation programme.
- 15 Development of the action plan is ongoing. The plan will be shared with the Assurance Panel (see separate agenda item) in August before publication as required by the LGA.
- 16 Progress against the action plan will be reported to the Assurance Panel and will be central to the LGA and peer team's Progress Review expected to be completed in winter 2024.

## **Consultation and Engagement**

- 17 The peer team spoke to approximately 165 people including a mixture of Councillors, officers, partners and residents during the peer challenge process to inform the report and recommendations.

- 18 The draft action plan has been informed by activity that is already planned and in progress. Engagement with Corporate Leadership Team and the Wider Leadership Community. The plan will be further informed by the feedback from the Member briefing sessions on 10 and 12 July.

### **Reasons for Recommendations**

- 19 To provide Council with the Corporate Peer Challenge report and emerging action plan in line with LGA expectations and good practice following the recent review.
- 20 To enable a decision route for approval of the action plan before publication on 28 August 2024 as required by the LGA.
- 21 Recommendations 1 and 2 ensure the Council is fully conversant with the information that will be published to meet the LGA's expectations by 28 August 2024. There is no Corporate Policy Committee meeting prior to that date. Unless Full Council wishes for final member approval via committee (example a potential date on 21 August 2024) the final document must be approved by the Chief Executive.

### **Other Options Considered**

- 22 No other options considered due to the need to meet the LGA's requirements of a Corporate Peer Challenge.

### **Implications and Comments**

#### *Monitoring Officer/Legal*

- 23 There are no legal implications arising directly from this report and whilst there is no statutory requirement to undertake a peer review the LGA Corporate Peer Challenge is seen as a valuable improvement and assurance tool.
- 24 The action plan contains proposed activity to improve governance and compliance, which will require advice and support from both Legal and Democratic Services as the final plan is confirmed and during implementation.

#### *Section 151 Officer/Finance*

- 25 There are no direct financial implications arising from this report. The action plan contains activity to address the council's serious financial situation, many of which are already actively in progress. Addressing the Corporate Peer Challenge recommendations through delivery of the action plan will be an important part of demonstrating the council's compliance with Best Value principles.

*Policy*

- 26 No direct impact. Addressing the recommendations will support the delivery of the council's overall vision and aims within the Cheshire East Plan 2024/25.

<b>An open and enabling organisation.</b>	<b>A council which empowers and cares about people.</b>	<b>A thriving and sustainable place.</b>
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*Equality, Diversity and Inclusion*

- 27 No direct impact. The report recognises the importance of equality, diversity and inclusion and need to ensure the council supports and embeds this agenda.

*Human Resources*

- 28 No direct impact. The report and action plan makes reference to work to ensure capacity and capability for change and improvement.

*Risk Management*

- 29 No direct impact. The action plan contains proposed activity to further ensure effective risk management.

*Rural Communities*

- 30 No direct impact.

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

- 31 No direct impact. The action plan includes additional actions relating to Children's Services improvement while not specific recommendations in the Corporate Peer Challenge report are significant issues referenced within the report which the council is taking action to address.

*Public Health*

- 32 No direct impact.

*Climate Change*

- 33 No direct impact.

Access to Information	
Contact Officer:	Karen Wheeler, Interim Director of Policy and Change <a href="mailto:karen.wheeler@cheshireeast.gov.uk">karen.wheeler@cheshireeast.gov.uk</a>
Appendices:	Appendix 1 – Corporate Peer Challenge Report Appendix 2 – Draft Action Plan
Background Papers:	None

# Cheshire East Council

## Corporate Peer Challenge Report

**25-28 March 2024**

Feedback report



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## 1. Executive summary:

Cheshire East Council (CEC) needs to address a number of significant issues, the most immediate being the organisation's financial sustainability which is in jeopardy. This will require concentrated and coordinated activity to resolve challenges of capacity, governance, and organisational culture over the coming months, as well as developing long-term transformation and improvement plans. Whilst the scale and complexity of these challenges cannot be understated, there is a shared desire and appetite for change by both Councillors and Officers which provides an important foundation for this work.

This Peer Review was completed in March 2024 following the appointment of a new permanent chief executive in January 2024. Prior to arriving the Peer Team were aware that the Council had recently applied to central government for exceptional financial support of £17.6 million and that the Council had just completed an OFSTED inspection earlier that month (report published on 16 May 2024) which confirmed that services had been downgraded from Requires Improvement to Inadequate. In this context, it is hoped that the Corporate Peer Challenge (CPC) will support the organisation in managing its concurrent challenges of financial sustainability and service improvement, recognising the relationship between these issues.

It is to the Council's credit that they have pro-actively engaged with the wider sector for support to identify and define these issues, including through the Corporate Peer Challenge process. However, given the scale and complexity of the challenges, the Peer Team believe that the Council would benefit from continued external input to provide support and ensure the necessary grip and pace in addressing the findings and recommendations identified. It is recommended this should be done through an independent and externally chaired Improvement or Assurance Panel: a model which has been effectively used elsewhere in the sector.

Throughout this review, the Peer Team have met with many committed, engaged, and hardworking staff and Councillors who have demonstrated their investment in the future of the organisation and their appetite for improvement. The Team also heard first-hand praise and appreciation from residents for examples of good service delivery in the borough. The Team would encourage the Council to build on these assets through a more cohesive engagement strategy, aligned to the Council's vision in order to extend good practice, empower staff, and create the trust required to deliver change.

Cheshire East Council was established through the process of Local Government Reorganisation in 2009, replacing three previous District Councils and the County Council services in the area. Historically, the organisation has had external investigations into the actions and conduct of senior Officers and Members regarding issues of procurement and

the treatment of whistleblowers. These issues have damaged the reputation of the Council, lowered the morale of staff, and in many respects stifled the organisation's ability to move on and focus on the future and areas of improvement. The Peer Team strongly encourage the Council to use the Public Interest Report covering 2012-2018 that was published in January 2023 to draw a line under this history, and proactively shift their focus, effort, and capacity to addressing the organisation's current challenges and ambitions for the future.

This focus should be built around a refreshed Council Plan that sets out the vision, priorities, and behaviours which the organisation will deliver against. The Team appreciate that the current Council Plan runs to 2025. The Team would recommend a new Council Plan is developed through to 2028 incorporating political priorities, necessary improvement, and longer-term transformation reflecting the Council's financial context and providing overlap with the Council's electoral cycle. This Plan should facilitate increased understanding with staff regarding prioritisation of resources and the alignment of their work and responsibilities to the organisation's goals. The Plan will need to be accompanied by an appropriate performance management framework, appraisal process, and medium-term financial strategy. This update should be aligned to a wider review of policy and procedures such as Workforce Strategy, Communications Strategy, and the Council's approach to Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion, to ensure that they are up to date, effectively communicated and embedded.

The Peer Team are seriously concerned about the immediate financial stability and sustainability of the organisation. In 2023-2024 the Council have used £11 million of their reserves to set a balanced budget and has a savings requirement of £20 million for 2024-2025. If these savings are delivered, it will still only leave the organisation with £2.1 million in reserve by the end of this financial year. In this context of low reserves, historic departmental overspends, and a lack of organisational confidence regarding the delivery of existing saving plans, if there is not significant change at pace, it is very likely that the Council will be required to issue a section 114 notice in the near future. Whilst the Council has been successful in applying for exceptional financial support for 2024-2025 (subject to development of a transformation plan), there is further work required to understand the implications of this capitalisation, including the accounting implications of the associated borrowing and increased pressure on future years' revenue budgets.

The immediate financial challenges facing Cheshire East are compounded in the medium-term as a consequence of the Council's Dedicated School's Grant Deficit which is currently forecast to be £89.6 million for the end of 2023-2024. Whilst the Council have engaged with the national Project Safety Valve<sup>1</sup> and developed a seven-year plan to address these

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<sup>1</sup> Project Safety Valve is a national programme from the Department for Education which provides additional support (including finance) to Councils to support the reform and redesign of Special Educational Needs and Disability Services to promote long-term sustainability.

issues, with the deadline of the national override being 2026, current assumptions would be that this issue would also require the Council to issue a section 114 notice, unless the override is extended. Central to addressing the immediate, medium, and long-term financial issues facing the Council is the requirement for the 'voice of finance' to be heard, respected, and responded to across the organisation. Given the current vacancies that exist at the Executive Director level of the Council, the Team would recommend the Council ensure that there is strong senior sponsorship for the financial health of the Council in their 'top team'.

The Peer Team were concerned by the variation in understanding that was heard regarding the Council's financial health, whilst recognised by senior political and managerial leadership, there are some staff and members seemingly comfortable with the current position. An important step in developing an organisation wide understanding of the Council's financial position is the necessary simplification of the Council's financial reporting and planning. The Peer Team were struck by the length, detail, and complexity of reports and believe that this undermines the clarity of messaging required and is to the detriment of constructive engagement, and scrutiny on content. These challenges are exacerbated by the Council's transition to a new finance system, which was a recurrent theme and frustration raised by staff through this review.

The Peer Team heard consistent feedback regarding three related cultural challenges facing the organisation. First is the siloed nature of the Council with poor joint working across (and within) departments contributing towards challenges of service delivery and communication. Secondly, where there have been poor working relationships across services, this has resulted in a lack of compliance with corporate requests and direction. Finally, this lack of compliance has resulted in gaps in information and delays in action which have weakened the Council's assurance framework undermining the organisation's ability to provide internal scrutiny, challenge, and assurance as a consequence. Moving forward, there is a need to reset expectations and behaviours at all levels of the organisation to support increased respect, compliance, and appropriate challenge.

In May 2021 the Council transitioned from the Leader/Cabinet model to the Committee System which now operates with seven service committees. In this context there is an additional challenge to the organisation to coordinate activity across these committees and ensure appropriate strategic oversight, to avoid Committees contributing towards siloed approaches, as illustrated by the Council's approach to budget disaggregation at a committee level. Throughout this review, the Peer Team have heard from senior Political Leaders about the need for improved approaches towards key aspects of governance. This should include ensuring that structures are appropriate but should begin with prioritising 'quick wins' regarding issues of process, report quality, and levels of decision making, alongside a wider programme of training and development.

The Council is required to develop a Transformation Plan by late August as a requirement of their application for Exceptional Financial Support. This programme of work will obviously be a corporate priority, and progress has been made in the procurement process to appoint a transformation partner. This work will require careful definition, scope, and alignment of capacity in order to progress at the required pace. The Peer Team understand there are a number of notable capacity gaps within the organisation, including vacant senior posts at the Executive Director and Director level, and recommend the gaps within the senior management structure are addressed as a priority. Finally, the delivery of a successful transformation programme is built on accurate and timely information and the ability to do the basics well (including budget reporting, performance management, and organisational establishment tracking). Therefore, it will be essential that the Council's transformation programme incorporates wider improvement work including the issues identified through this review. To this end, it is recommended that the transformation programme is reported to the external improvement board to support management of interdependencies and address transformation in the wider sense.

Cheshire East Council is led by a Labour and Independent joint administration that has been in-place since the all-out elections of May 2019, with a Labour Leader and Independent Deputy Leader. These leadership arrangements were renewed following the May 2023 elections, with the Council remaining no-overall control and the current distribution of seats being: Conservative 34, Labour 28, Independent 18, Liberal Democrat two. The Council operates on a four-yearly election cycle, and therefore is afforded some additional stability regarding their medium-term political framework.

## 2. Key recommendations:

The Executive Summary and main body of this report contain a range of findings and recommendations that are relevant to Cheshire East Council, many of these the Council will be able to address as "quick wins". The following are the Peer Team's key recommendations which have been prioritised on grounds of urgency, sequencing, and importance:

- 1. Recommendation One: Adopt a crisis management approach in responding to issues raised:** 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.
- 2. Recommendation Two: Urgently agree and recruit to the Council's Permanent Senior Leadership Officer Structure:** 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.

3. **Recommendation Three: Engage with external challenge, support, and oversight through an externally chaired Improvement / Assurance Panel:** 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 the board and consideration of potential members.
4. **Recommendation Four: Promote increased compliance across the organisation through visible senior leadership for the 'basics':** 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.
5. **Recommendation Five: Consistently apply principles of people and performance management for the year of 2024-2025:** 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.
6. **Recommendation Six: Develop a customer focused Transformation Plan to support longer-term improvement:** 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.
7. **Recommendation Seven: Develop and agree a new multi-year Council Plan:** 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 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.
8. **Recommendation Eight: Urgently review the Council's decision-making framework:** 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.



- 9. Recommendation nine: Empower the Corporate Policy Committee to lead on financial recovery:** The Corporate Policy Committee should have ownership for monitoring and recommending the budget to Full Council. The current disaggregation of the 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.
- 10. Recommendation 10: Give more time and emphasis to Scrutiny across the Council:** 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.
- 11. Recommendation 11: Improve the quality and clarity of reports presented to Committees:** This should include report writing training for officers and increased compliance with the Council's desired structure and length of reports.
- 12. Recommendation 12: Improve financial reporting mechanisms and training:** 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.
- 13. Recommendation 13: Review delivery and issues associated with the Council's new finance system:** The challenges associated with the Council's implementation of its new finance system should be reviewed, and an urgent action plan agreed for improvement.
- 14. Recommendation 14: Launch a programme of training and development for members and officers:** Deliver appropriate training for elected Members regarding roles and responsibilities, as well as leadership and management development training for officers.
- 15. Recommendation 15: Adopt a corporate approach to programme and project management:** 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.
- 16. Recommendation 16: Develop a clear communication and engagement strategy to support the Council's improvement and transformation proposals:** 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.

### **17. Recommendation 17: Act on the issues identified through the LGA's Decision**

**Making and Accountability (DMA) tool:** 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.

### **18. Recommendation 18: Consider the corporate capacity required to support the**

**Chief Executive:** 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.

## **3. Summary of the peer challenge approach**

### **3.1 Background and Overview:**

Corporate Peer Challenge (CPC) is a well-established, respected, and rigorous process designed to support improvement and assurance in local government. This was reflected in the draft Best Value Standards published by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing, and Communities in 2023. This guidance set-out the expectation for all Local Authorities to have a peer cheer challenge every five-years, recognising the benefit of external perspectives, ideas, and challenge. The Peer Challenge process is designed to support experience and expertise to be shared across the sector to enable sector-led improvement. Ultimately, the CPC process is locally led, with Councils requesting Peer Challenges, engaging actively in the process, and findings and the Council's response being locally owned.

### **3.2 The Peer Challenge Team:**

Each Peer Team is designed to reflect the context and scope of the review, drawing on relevant experience and expertise from across the sector. Ahead of the Cheshire East CPC, the LGA discussed the requirements for this team, including experience of working in the committee system, the implications of exceptional financial support, with dedicated peers to consider issues of governance, finance, and transformation. Reflecting the political make-up of Cheshire East, three political peers were included on the Team through Labour, Conservative, and Independent Councillors. The team for this review included:

- Jackie Yates (Chief Executive, Reading Council).
- Councillor Nick Kemp (Leader, Newcastle City Council).
- Councillor Adam Paynter (Cornwall Council).

- Councillor Rob Waltham MBE (Leader, North Lincolnshire Council).
- James Binks (Assistant Chief Executive, Manchester City Council).
- Cecilie Booth (Executive Director of Corporate Services, Peterborough City Council).
- Sharon Bridglalsingh (Monitoring Officer, Milton Keynes City Council).
- Ruby Peacock (Shadow Peer, Local Government Association)
- Matt Dodd (Peer Challenge Manager, Local Government Association).

### **3.3 The Peer Challenge Methodology:**

Peer Challenges are not inspections, and as such, the process is not designed to provide a technical assessment of specific plans, proposals, or individual services. Instead, the Peer Team drew on their experience to reflect on the information presented, documents reviewed, meetings and focus groups, and the culture they saw.

The Peer Team prepared for this work by reviewing the Position Statement which the Council produced specifically for the review, encouraging self-assessment and reflection across the organisation. Alongside this document, the Team reviewed key documents regarding the Council's operating context, priorities, and local issues. Independently, the LGA also completed a desktop assessment of the Council, this included benchmarking Cheshire East's performance in key service areas, produced through the LG Inform Intelligence tool. The LGA also commissioned an independent evaluation of the Council's Finances completed using publicly available documents. As part of this review, the Peer Team completed the following stages of the CPC process:

- Completed one-to-one phone calls with Council colleagues to support our understanding of local issues before arriving for the review.
- Benchmarked performance and finance information against 'statistical neighbours' through the LG Inform tool.
- Reviewed the Council's Position Statement which 'self-assessed' where the Council currently is, and where it is aiming to get to.
- Reviewed key documents, including a mixture of strategies, policies, and assurance framework reports provided by the Council.
- Gathered information and insight from approximately 48 interviews and focus groups.
- Spoke to approximately 165 people including a mixture of Councillors, Officers, Partners and Residents.

The Peer Team provided immediate feedback to the Council on the afternoon of Thursday



28 March. This session was attended by political Group Leaders and the Council's Senior Officers. A copy of the slides which were delivered during this meeting were shared with the Council to support their communication of findings and development of an Action Plan ahead of being provided the Team's written report.

### 3.4 The Peer Challenge Scope:

The peer team considered the following five themes which form the core components of all Corporate Peer Challenges, which are key to councils' performance and improvement:

- **Local priorities and outcomes:** Are the Council's priorities clear and informed by the local context? Is the Council delivering effectively on its priorities and achieving improved outcomes for all its communities?
- **Organisational and place leadership:** Does the Council provide effective local leadership? Are there good relationships with partner organisations and local communities?
- **Governance and culture:** Are there clear and robust governance arrangements? Is there a culture of respect, challenge, and scrutiny?
- **Financial planning and management:** Does the Council have a grip on its current financial position? Does the Council have a strategy and a clear plan to address its financial challenges?
- **Capacity for improvement:** Is the organisation able to support delivery of local priorities? Does the Council have the capacity to improve?

## 4. Feedback:

### 4.1 Understanding the local place and priority setting:

Cheshire East was established through local government reorganisation in 2009. The Council serves a population of 398,800 residents and covers an area over 1,100 square kilometres, making it the 17<sup>th</sup> largest unitary authority in England. The Council borders Greater Manchester to the North (Trafford, Manchester, Stockport), Cheshire Councils to the West (Cheshire West and Warrington), as well as the Peak District, Staffordshire Moorlands, and Shropshire to the East and South. The Borough is well-connected to these wider regions, with the M6 motorway running north-to-south, and Crewe train station being a major junction on the Westcoast mainline, and Manchester airport bordering the north of the Borough.

Despite strong external transport connectivity, journeys within the Borough can be more problematic, with travel by public transport between towns being particularly challenging. The Borough contains 12 market towns with populations over 10,000 residents, the largest

of which are Macclesfield and Crewe with 57,000 and 55,000 respectively, with other major conurbations in Knutsford, Sandbach, and Wilmslow. Throughout the review, the Peer Team were told that Cheshire East is a 'place of places' and recognise that these strong local communities create a challenge regarding identity and prioritisation at a Borough and Council level. In the context of the Council's relatively recent creation, this can contribute towards a nostalgia for the simplicity of district identities.

According to the most recent Census, only 5.6% of the population came from a black or minority ethnic background, however, many diverse communities have settled in the Borough with 108 languages being spoken. In this context, engagement with this small and diverse range of communities will continue to be an ongoing challenge.

The Council was able to evidence the needs of the Borough through their Position Statement, and this is further supported by their Joint Strategic Needs Assessment which is structured around: healthier places, starting well, mental wellbeing, and ageing well. This has illustrated some of the key social issues that exist locally:

- **Ageing population:** 22% of residents are over the age of 65, compared to 17.5% nationally, and forecast to grow by a further 20% by 2030.
- **Pockets of Deprivation:** The Council was ranked 228/317 authorities against the index of multiple deprivation. However, nearly 8% of lower super output areas are rated in the 20% most deprived areas nationally (and nearly 2% in the 10% most deprived).
- **Household Income Inequality:** Household incomes at a ward level vary significantly, from £56,000 in Prestbury to £18,000 in Crewe St Barnabas,
- **Life Expectancy Inequality:** There is a life expectancy gap of 14 years for women and 11 years for men between wards across the Borough.

The Council has a Corporate Plan which runs from 2021-2025 and is built around a vision of an open, fair, and green Cheshire East. Alongside this, the Peer Team heard of the Council's ambitions regarding climate change and addressing health inequalities as a priority. The Council began the process of developing a new Council Plan following all-out elections in 2023, recognising the potential for an updated plan to reflect post-election priorities and the new operating context of the organisation. This process was paused in October 2023 as a result of the Council focusing on 'the increasing risk in relation to delivering a balanced budget for 2023-2024' and a lack of corporate capacity to take this work forward.

The Peer Team heard from a number of sources that there was uncertainty and lack of clarity regarding the Council's vision which was well summarised as: "*we've got the pieces of the jigsaw but need the picture on the top of the box*". Therefore, the opportunity exists for the Council to refresh its Council Plan to provide a consistent and clear narrative

regarding its priorities and the difference it is seeking to make to the life of residents. This process will support staff, partners, and residents to be able to articulate and understand the ambitions of the organisation and will also support the Council to coordinate and corral organisational and individual contributions towards these goals. Given the strong social assets that exist in the Borough, the opportunity exists for the Council to enable community engagement and contributions towards their priorities through a social-value approach.

As previously planned, the updated Council Plan will need to incorporate the post-election priorities of the Council as well as reflect the organisation's new operating context. Clearly, the refreshed Plan will also need to be fully aligned with the Council's Improvement and Transformation Programme to ensure coherence, alignment and focus on key issues. This Plan has the potential to galvanise and support the Council in focusing on the future of the organisation and avoid energy being lost as a result of historic issues. However, how it is communicated and embedded will be key.

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. Underpinning delivery of the Council's priorities is the need to consider 'how' the Council works on issues and the wider support given to these services. The opportunity exists for the Council to use their new Council Plan and wider transformation programme to clearly set out the pillars and ways of working they want to see, including collaboration (both internally and externally), use of digital approaches, and increased focus on resident outcomes. There is strong cross-party support for this agenda which will enable its inclusion, but it will require visible leadership, the coordination of existing capacity as well as incorporation where appropriate, into staff performance frameworks.

It is good to see that the Council currently report progress against their Council Plan on a quarterly basis to their Corporate Policy Committee alongside financial information. These reports provide a great deal of detail against the priorities included in the 2021 Council Plan but would benefit from simplification and being more outcome focused. The current report structure is text based and reports activity against "key actions". However, there is a lack of milestone reporting which does not enable the reader to easily review progress against timelines, more importantly, the format does not report against genuine outcomes of performance. Moving forward, the Council would benefit from reviewing its reporting framework so that it is clearly able to track progress against delivery of the priorities included in their new Council Plan. Given that these reports are being presented alongside financial reports, the Council would also benefit from incorporating key metrics linked to saving delivery to support a more integrated approach to financial and performance management. Finally, the Peer team noted that the level of detail provided in the Council's

quarterly performance was inconsistent, as illustrated by only seven of 24 updates being provided for the priority of '*A Council which empowers and cares about people*' in their January 2024 report.

As part of the process, the Peer Team enjoyed meeting the Council's Young People's Panel who spoke highly of the services that they had first-hand experience of, and their appetite to engage with and support the Council more. The Team also met with two resident focus groups and heard praise for a number of specific service areas (e.g. library and leisure services) as well as positive feedback from many who had engaged directly with Councillors. Unfortunately, this feedback is not consistent with the Council's 2023 satisfaction levels which illustrate the Council performing below national averages in a number of key areas:

- 24% of residents very / fairly satisfied with how the Council run things (60% national average).
- 20% of residents very / fairly satisfied with value for money (42% national average).
- 26% of residents felt the Council acted to address concerns of residents (52% national average).
- 33% of residents feeling informed about the Council and their activities (55% national average).

These results illustrate the need for the Council to develop active two-way models of communication and engagement with residents, ensuring that this work is more focused, visible, and proactive. Integral to this new approach will be the ability to move beyond a broadcast communications model which is built around press releases and consultations towards a more informed model of co-design and engagement. To take this work forward the Council should consider the potential alignment of communication and engagement functions within their structures to maximise the capacity in these areas and support joint working. This will also require communications professionals being empowered to lead on some of these areas of engagement on behalf of wider services. Finally, the development of a new Council Plan presents the opportunity to give an increased emphasis to customer and resident outcomes and for the Council to refresh its Communication Strategy around its new priority issues, shared narratives, and key outcomes. The current Strategy is aligned to the previous Council Plan, and further work is required to ensure that the Council's priority outcomes are understood across the organisation.

## 4.2 Organisational and place leadership:

The Peer Team recognise that the organisational leadership of the Council has been impacted by instability in permanent roles at a senior level. This is illustrated by the Council's current Corporate Leadership Team (CLT), with four of the seven most senior officer roles vacant or occupied by interim's, new appointments, or officers who are leaving the organisation. As well as creating a sense of instability, it has also led to a lack of capacity to support and sponsor priority work programmes, with one of the participants of the review asking, *"who is going to lead us through this change or give us the tools to do the job?"*.

The appointment of a new Chief Executive presents an opportunity to revisit structures and to build the sense of 'team' across the senior officers of the organisation. Addressing these gaps in the Council's CLT should be an urgent priority and is necessary to provide the senior leadership and capacity required to the organisation. The Council has undertaken a decision making and accountability review of the top five tiers of the organisation, reviewing the structures and responsibilities for these roles. The Council should consider the wider findings included in this work. Following these appointments, it will be important for the Council to invest time into developing this sense of team, ensuring that CLT is used as a forum so support effective challenge, oversight, and the coordination of cross-cutting approaches central to corporate improvement.

The Peer Team recognise that through the Council's current structures, the Section 151 Officer is at the third tier in-terms of seniority (reporting into a vacant Corporate Executive Director role). Given the issues of financial sustainability facing the Council, the Peer Team would encourage any new arrangements ensure that the voice of Finance is heard within the CLT setting and bolsters the organisational focus on these issues with clear reporting into the Chief Executive. Increased stability of officers at the senior level of the organisation is essential to enable relationships to be built, ways of working to embed, and for ideas to progress over time. This stability in senior roles will need to be accompanied by regular and consistent staff communication, including a focus on behaviours, priorities, and compliance to provide a rhythm of engagement on the culture that the Council is seeking to both avoid and embed.

The recruitment of a new Chief Executive in January 2024 was accompanied by the appointment of a new Deputy Leader of the Council in March 2024, who also acts as the Leader of the Independent Group in the Council's joint administration arrangements. This joint administration has been in-place since the 2019 elections, and was renewed following the all-out elections in 2023. It will be essential that the Leader, Deputy Leader, and Chief Executive are visible in the organisation championing the Council's improvement and transformation imperative and the underpinning behaviours that are required to deliver it,



collaboration, customer excellence etc. Presenting as a united team will be essential to driving forward the political and managerial activity required to make progress. Politically, this joint work across Groups will be essential for ensuring that improvement is visible and clear as a shared priority across the Council's Groups.

Reflecting the Borough as a 'place of places', Cheshire East has more than 100 Town and Parish Councils in the Borough, and it is notable that more than 60 Cheshire East Councillors are also members of these forums. Whilst this presents the opportunity for close working relationships across these tiers of governance, it also presents a risk that Cheshire East's strategic goals and ambitions are disaggregated. This was described to the team as: "*we are too often focused on the local rather than the strategic*". In this context, the Peer Team recommend that training is offered to all-members to support their understanding of the different functions and responsibilities across these forums, this is especially important in the context of 38/82 councillors being in their first year in office. The Peer Team was told that there were mixed relationships with Town and Parish Councils across the Borough, with relationships varying from positive and constructive to more challenging, a consistent finding with the Council's previous peer challenge in 2020.

The proposed training should be designed to support Councillors in distinguishing strategic issues from local and community matters, recognising the different geographies that Councillors are working across and the relationship between Ward and Borough level decision making and engagement. This wider governance training will support improved understanding of roles, responsibilities, and decision making at different levels. The Peer Team were provided with a number of examples whereby decisions had been made at a Council level but challenged locally, including issues of car parking. This training should be delivered as part of a wider programme of member development and training. The Peer Team appreciate that the Council undertook a review of member training in 2020, and their current approach includes support for newly elected Councillors, as well as wider training structured around foundation skills, committee skills, and planning committees. However, the Team believe that participation in these training offers should be made a greater priority within the Council and include increased reporting on attendance, with sessions organised regarding priority issues and responsibilities (e.g., Corporate Parenting). Further training and development would also support elected members (and officers working with them) in having the skills and capacity necessary to improve the performance of the Council's Committee System.

The Peer Team also heard frustration from Councillors regarding issues raised through the Member enquiry system not being resolved, and Councillors having to invest additional time into gathering information on these issues. Going forward, increased responsiveness and

compliance with this system will make the system more effective and reduce the capacity that is currently being spent in both using it and workarounds.

Through the Review the Peer Team were told of improvements that were needed to the Council's approach to Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion. Further training for both Members and Officers on the Council's requirements under the Equality Act would support the organisation in addressing these matters. This training will be an important first step, but the Council should also illustrate their organisational support for this issue through clear leadership and sponsorship of the agenda. The Peer Team were told of the networks and groups which have been established to support this work, but of instances when officers had not been allowed the time to attend meetings or support this work.

Finally, partners that the Peer Team met with, told us that the Council was a valued partner that contributed proactively to joint working on a number of priority issues. These partners spoke of the 'trust' that they had in their relationship with the Council. This was illustrated through the partnership working which is taking place across health and social care partners in the borough (and as part of the wider Cheshire and Merseyside Integrated Care Partnership) with particular progress being made against issues of hospital discharge. The Peer Team appreciate that the Council have engaged positively with their Place lead through the Integrated Care Partnership structure to play an active role in shaping this agenda. This positive contribution to partnership working is also reflected in the Council's contributions at a sub-regional level. The Peer Team appreciate that the Council is engaging with neighbouring Councils on issues of devolution and sub-regional growth and would encourage Cheshire East to be clear about the objectives it is seeking through this work, including the contribution of growth to the Council's long-term financial position. Given the assets of the borough and the positive sub-regional relationships that exist, this agenda has significant potential, but taking it forward will create capacity challenges that will need to be considered in the round.

### **4.3 Organisational Governance and Culture:**

Despite instability and capacity challenges in senior roles, the Council has continued to deliver services to the benefit of local residents, often through significant contribution and commitment of officers and frontline staff. It is the view of the Peer Team that the opportunity exists to make substantial changes to corporate capacity, systems, and processes to better support these staff who are acting as the 'engine room' of the Council.

A striking feature of Cheshire East's organisational culture is the capacity which is being sapped by the long shadow that the Council's historic failings and issues has cast. The

Peer Team were regularly reminded of the long shadow of this history, and the impact it has on the current culture. Through the review the relationship between officers and members, as well as across political groups was described to the Peer Team as 'cordial', with one participant summarising it as: *'it is not an unpleasant place to work, it's just not ambitious'*. To this end, the Peer Team strongly recommend that the Council uses the January 2023 Public Interest Report to draw a final line under these issues and that the Leadership support the organisation to focus on its future, again recognising the potential of a new Council Plan to establish this vision and ambition for the borough and place.

The cultural challenges facing the Council are illustrated in the recent Staff Survey (October 2023) which set out that only 23% of staff felt positive about the future of the organisation, a 27% reduction in 12 months. This survey also illustrated that only 52% of staff felt well-informed regarding issues affecting the Council, and only 52% believing that they had opportunity for career growth with the organisation. These results illustrate the challenge that exists regarding staff engagement and communication. Worryingly, the Council is yet to develop an Action Plan in response to these findings as a result of capacity challenges. Furthermore, these results were submitted ahead of the Council's application for financial support and downgrading of Children's Services which will have likely had an additional negative impact.

Whilst progress has been made through the use of Chief Executive video messages and the weekly Team Voice newsletter, more work is required to move towards a two-way model of engagement with staff. In responding to these challenges, the Peer Team believe that the Council should develop a detailed Action Plan that incorporates the specific findings from the staff survey at a Directorate level. The Council should also consider the support required to reinvigorate the 'Brighter Futures' programme and network which had played a major contributory role in their previous programmes of behaviour change but has since stalled as a result of loss of focus and support (partially as a result of the COVID 19 pandemic and remote working). Sadly, instead of building on this forum's previous contributions to develop ideas and embody values, it has often been used as sounding board or as a convenient model of staff engagement. The Council should also consider how the use of events can be used to share and shape key messages, the contribution of wider staff networks (including Equality networks) to all agendas, and the consistent use of communications channels. The Council should also revisit their approach to staff recognition, with opportunities existing for low-cost approaches to give increased focus to the achievement of staff.

Engagement with staff will require carefully crafted key messages, the use of repetition, and the creation of spaces and opportunities to submit and respond to staff questions and



queries. Importantly, the Peer Team met with many representatives who recognise that change and improvement is required at the Council, and whilst this will not mitigate their concerns for the future, and the personal impact that it may bring, it does create an important foundation for change and reform. Importantly, the majority of those that the Peer Team met welcome the prospect of change and are excited for the benefits that it could bring.

The Peer Team were concerned that a clear performance management culture is not currently in-place across the Council. This was illustrated by partial data regarding the Council's establishment and issues of staff absence, as well as the information that the team received regarding the lack of appraisals, one-to-ones, and team meetings taking place. These features are essential in understanding, managing, and communicating issues across the organisation, and their absence undermines the internal assurance framework and delivery of the Council. The Council must introduce and embed a clear and consistent performance framework for all-staff and promote a performance management culture with clear expectations regarding compliance with standards and systems, and acceptable behaviour towards others if it is to deliver its objectives.

The Governance of Cheshire East Council is managed through the Committee System which was implemented in May 2021. The Council's Committee structure is larger than other upper-tier organisations that use this model, with six Policy Committees and nine sub-Committees. The size of this system means that 78/82 Councillors are engaged in Committee roles, illustrating the time requirements associated with this model. Through this review, the Peer Team were struck by the administrative burden which the current system places on both officers and members, as well as the inconsistency that exists across Committee practice. Positively, there is recognition and appetite from many senior political leaders and officers of the need to streamline the governance structure and to improve the timeliness of decision making. The Peer Team also appreciate that a significant number of meetings were cancelled in 2023-2024, with 55 formal meetings not taking place due to cancellation in 2023-2024 which is not good practice.

Cheshire East's improvement should include consideration of the governance structures and practice of the Council, with the Peer Team being regularly told of the siloes and fragmentation that are caused by the challenge of coordinating strategic issues across multiple Committees. The Team also heard many examples of Committees being presented with minor decisions through formal papers, including a report for the approval of under £100 spend. It is important that these Committees are supported to focus on the political and strategic issues facing the Council, and that their time, capacity, and work-programmes are better aligned to support discussion in these areas (the officer scheme of

delegation has an important role to play here). This will be a particular issue for the Council's Children and Families Committee which will be responsible for the improvement requirements of Children's Services following the Council's inadequate OFSTED rating.

There is a need for Committees to make a more consistent contribution to the Council's internal assurance framework. The Peer Team appreciate that the Council's Scrutiny Committee is focused solely on external issues such as health, crime, and flooding, with internal scrutiny occurring concurrently with decision making at Policy Committees. Scrutiny varies significantly across Committees, ranging from removing the guillotine to enable seven-hour questioning, to strict adherence to three-minute question time limits. The Council would benefit from further training regarding the benefits of Scrutiny to ensure a more consistent approach and understanding of how it can be managed to support improved decision making without the need for excessively long meetings.

Beyond the Council's formal Committee arrangements, there are a number of 'quick wins' which could support the organisation. This includes the internal processes which are used to approve papers for Committees. The Peer Team were told that it was not uncommon for reports to take more than four-months from development to presentation, with stages including approvals at Directorate Leadership Team, Executive Director, Corporate Leadership Team, Policy Briefing, Lead Member Briefing, and Committee Briefing prior to the formal meeting itself. This process is a burden on officer capacity and creates a significant challenge for timely decision making and reporting. Therefore, it is important for the Council to develop a more streamlined approvals process ahead of reports being presented in public. Furthermore, the complexity of these current arrangements alongside the scale of the Committee System contribute towards confusion regarding the Council's decision-making framework, which was described to the Peer Team as 'frustrating', 'tiring', and 'tricky'.

The Peer Team were also struck by the considerable length of reports presented to Committees. For illustration, the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy was presented to Full Council in March as part of a wider 1028-page agenda pack (which the Team was told was not uncommon). Whilst there is a natural balance to be struck between length of reports and volume of information, the current excessive length of reports makes them harder to navigate and interpret, and hence adversely impacts on scrutiny, the level of political discussion and ultimately potentially, the quality of decision making. It is essential therefore that officers writing reports become more comfortable with succinctly summarising issues, appending supplementary information if necessary, and focusing detail on key decisions. The Council should extend a programme of training to support officers with this, increased compliance with templates/style guides, and the robust engagement of statutory

officers to ensure adherence to appropriate practice.

Another important feature to the Council's internal assurance framework is the Council's use of audit. The Council's Audit and Governance Committee meets regularly and has engaged with national training and development offers, and the Council's risk reporting accurately captures some of the key challenges facing the organisation (dedicated school's grant deficit, delivery of the medium-term financial strategy, and increased pressure on demand led budgets). However, the Council would benefit from more proactive and constructive engagement from the wider organisation with these functions, as illustrated by the development of the Council's Annual Governance Statement, which, rather than being used as a process to share understanding and coordinate approaches, with key information and input not always provided from services following request.

#### **4.4 Financial planning and management:**

The financial position of Cheshire East is a significant concern to the Peer Team, with the context of low reserves, historic overspending, challenging saving targets and an Inadequate OFSTED rating creating an increasingly likely position whereby the Council will be required to issue a section 114 notice.

Cheshire East's net revenue expenditure is approximately £353 million, and the Council has a requirement to save £20 million in 2024-2025, with a cumulative gap of £81.5 million by the financial year of 2027-2028, with further work required to develop the savings proposals required for later years as these are not currently set out in the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy. These savings are set in the context of the Council having substantially reduced their reserves (by 50%) over the past two-years, including the use of £11 million to set a balanced budget in 2023-2024. The Council's budget for 2024-2025 is presented as balanced through the further use of £12 million reserves, forecasting available reserves to be £3.8 million by the end year (with £1.7 million being Public Health reserves) leaving the Council with £2.1 million in General Fund balances, with reserves such as insurance and Private Finance Initiative being removed. This will provide the organisation with very little margin for non-delivery, overspending of demand led budgets. The Council's Section 151 Officer's budget assessment has stated that the minimum General Fund balance should be £14.1 million. Therefore, the Council's proposed levels of balances is inadequate to address the immediate risks facing the organisation, but the Council's Section 25 Report does not set out the conditions that would require the Council to issue a Section 114 notice.

These figures provide the financial background to the Council's application to DLUHC for Exceptional Financial Support which was submitted in March 2024. This application, of

£17.6 million, represents £8.6 million linked to abortive costs associated with High-Speed Rail 2023-2024, and £9 million to support interest payments on the Council's High Needs Deficit. This application has been approved in principle, subject to the Council's development of an appropriate Transformation Plan. The Council's application for this support was developed in parallel to their 2024-2025 budget approval, and therefore it is natural that further work is required to understand the accountancy implications of this support, as well as the increased pressure that it may contribute to the revenue budget in future years. These costs, specifically the borrowing costs of the capitalisation directive are not currently included in the Council's Medium-Term Financial Strategy. Importantly, whilst this application does cover incurred cost pressures facing the Council due to High Speed Two and SEND interest rates, it does not address the structural financial challenges facing the organisation.

It is important that the Council understands that this funding provides an artificial and expensive safety net for the Council's finances, and should these resources be used, it will further impact their Medium-Term Financial Strategy. Moreover, this support will also bring increased external oversight regarding the Council's financial sustainability, including from central government and local press. Therefore, it will be important that the Council's financial reporting is accurate and timely, with well-developed forecasts informing assumptions to enable progress to be reported in real-time. The Peer Team was concerned that there was a mixed understanding across the organisation regarding Exceptional Financial Support, including the appetite for its use and the financial implications for the Council. This reflects a wider discrepancy that exists regarding understanding of the Council's financial context, which does not recognise how these issues place the organisation outside of sector norms.

As part of the review the Peer Team considered the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy. The Team found this document difficult to follow and navigate, this was due to the report being 464 pages, but also due to the structure which often disaggregated issues to a Committee level. The Peer Team recommend a significant simplification of this approach, including the use of clear summary tables to present an organisational wide overview. This will support an increased understanding of finances across the Council, and improved political engagement into key financial issues.

Through the review the Peer Team heard praise for members of staff working in the Finance Service, including the support that they provided to services on an individual basis. However, examples were provided whereby the advice, guidance, and direction provided had not been followed. This was summarised to the Peer Team through the analogy of a race "*with finance firing the starting gun, but no one deciding to run*". The Team was

provided with examples whereby this advice had been either misunderstood or ignored, including warnings about the in-year 2023-2024 overspend. It is essential that the Council respects the 'voice of finance' to support compliance, assurance and planning for future years. This should include more active engagement from budget holders with the department (with meetings currently happening quarterly) to support improved coordination, dialogue, and oversight, as this will enable budget holders to better respond to these issues. This will be further supported if the Chief Finance Officer has an equal standing amongst the Council's Senior Officer Leadership Team to ensure that financial issues are given appropriate consideration within wider discussions.

The Council's financial sustainability will be dependent upon the corporate ownership of its position and getting 'the basics' right (including reporting, budget management, and compliance). The Peer Team attended the Cheshire East Budget Emergency Recovery Team Meeting (CEBERT) during our time onsite and recognise the increased focus the Chief Executive is seeking to instil regarding the financial position. The Team encourage the Council to revisit this structure to move towards a broader crisis management approach towards budget management. This emergency footing is required to support the pace of oversight, compliance and decision making that is required. This structure will also support improved and consistent communications regarding the Council's financial context, addressing the mixed understanding that the Team found across the organisation.

The Council's current Committee System means that the budget is reported in multiple places, and therefore contributes to fragmented views of the overall position. The Council's Constitution places responsibility for the Council's budget framework with its Corporate Policy Committee. The Peer Team recommend that this is enacted to provide coordinated political oversight, and that it is reflected in the revised report clearance systems that are established.

The Council's external auditors updated the Council's Audit and Governance Committee that they expect to issue an unqualified opinion on the Council's financial statements, and that they were comfortable with the Council's value for money arrangements and internal controls having reviewed the activities of CEBERT. The Peer Team understand this is not a finalised position.

In addition to these short-term challenges, 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 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.

Finally, the Peer Team heard a lot of frustration from officers regarding the implementation of new Finance and Human Resource System (Unit 4). The Peer Team understand this implementation started four years ago, and there have been delays and increased spending on the project. Whilst the time and cost of implementation are concerning, the most worrying issues are firstly, the direct impact that it has had on staff morale: the Team were provided with examples of delays on remuneration and recruitment, as well as overpayments being made, which then had to be recovered, and secondly, the confidence that the Council can place in its reporting of staffing costs. Given how important these systems are it is essential that improvements are made, either through the previous plans or a new approach.

#### **4.5 Capacity for Improvement:**

The Peer Team were told of genuine commitment across all political groups to support improvement at Cheshire East. This will be essential to deliver improvement and to address the financial challenges the Council is facing and to ensure the best outcomes for residents.

The Council is demonstrating a willingness to engage in external challenge and learning. They have undertaken a range of 'diagnostic' exercises, including the Transformation reviews, Decision Making Accountability review, and inviting this Corporate Peer Challenge. Beyond commissioning these reviews, the Council needs to ensure that the outcomes from them are implemented in a co-ordinated and timely way.

Building on the above, looking outward more will provide the Council with wider insights and enable the organisation to capitalise upon the learning of others. The Peer Team heard from staff they felt unable to commit the time or were unable to prioritise joining regional networks or benefiting from national offers. Beyond the reviews, the Council also need to enable staff to learn from the wider sector and prioritise engagement in regional networks and wider learning opportunities.

As covered elsewhere in this report, there has been notable turnover and a high number of vacancies amongst senior officers at the Council, this has both impacted on capacity to deliver change and morale. Central to delivering improvement will be the timely definition of the Council's senior officer structure and recruitment to roles to support senior capacity and stability.

Beyond the top team, there are significant vacancies across the whole of the Council. Staff told the Peer Team of the impact, of teams having to share the same workload across a smaller number of staff, many people acting up into vacant roles for lengthy periods of time, and the use of agency staff. The Council need to address and understand their own establishment, including permanent structures, vacancy rates, and use of agency staff. Specifically, the Peer Team found the reporting of staff vacancies and the use of agency staff confusing and believe this may contribute towards a structural deficit in the Council's staffing budget. The Team were also provided with examples where attempts to permanently recruit staff had been subject to delays as a result of corporate processes which had exacerbated these issues and need to be addressed at pace.

The staff at Cheshire East are a key asset to the organisation, with talented people across the Council. There was a clear appetite from staff for improvement and transformation, but this will require visible leadership and effective communications. They need to be galvanised, focused, and clear about the priorities and behaviours that are expected.

Staff talked positively about the Brighter Futures programme and the changes it had delivered (this was also a key finding of the Council's 2020 Corporate Peer Challenge), but that this had not been prioritised in recent years. There is an opportunity to revisit and revitalise the Brighter Futures programme to support staff engagement with improvement and transformation across the Council. This will require sponsorship and corporate support but could deliver some 'quick wins' as well as contributing to long term programmes of improvement.

Enabling a more strategic approach to HR and organisational development (OD) will be important if the way the organisation functions is to change. At present there are just 25 staff within HR. It is unclear if the existing resource and skill set within the team will be sufficient to effectively carry out the workforce reviews and investment required in OD.

The challenge of capacity was a recurring theme throughout this review. Whilst the Peer Team can see the clear challenges of capacity that exist, illustrated through staff vacancies and temporary arrangements, there is also potential to better align existing structures and resources. There are skills and pockets of capacity in the organisation which could be brought together to support alignment, consistent oversight, and coordination across corporate functions. This should include consideration of the relationship between engagement, consultation, and communication. This issue will be important for the Council's progress on transformation, with resources currently dispersed across corporate and neighbourhood services, as well as a separate Programme Management Office. The Council also needs to consider the contribution that data analysis and performance information can bring to supporting their transformation objectives.

The Peer Team heard of multiple approaches to transformation and found across the organisation there was different understanding of transformation as a concept. Whilst the Council is embarking on a new corporate transformation programme, the Team were also told of sizeable programmes which had been commissioned at a Directorate level in recent years. There is a need to make sure that the Council's new programme builds on rather than duplicates previous findings, and that future approaches are gripped and owned at an organisational level.

The Council has delivered good examples of transformation, these were mainly from place-based or neighbourhood services, there was less of an understanding of transformation of people services. There were no clear or consistent corporate tools or approaches to service design to support a corporate approach to transformation across the Council. A more structured, systematic, and rigorous approach to programme management and reporting, including transformation will be essential for driving the progress required and supporting scrutiny and oversight requirements.

In the context of different definitions, understandings and appetites, there is a need for transformation to be clearly defined and scoped. This should be linked to a vision of improvement to support clarity and understanding across the whole of the organisation. Shifting to a corporate transformation programme, with the necessary resource to deliver it, would enable a more holistic approach to achieving major change that can contribute to addressing the Council's financial challenge.

Finally, it is important that transformation is not seen as the only approach to improvement at the Council. There is a need to create a permissive environment for officers to improve systems and processes beyond the scope of this programme, ensuring that the Council's approach to improvement is continuous and a shared cultural endeavour for the majority, rather than a methodology with milestones and measures that are owned by a minority.

## 5. Next steps

It is recognised that the senior political and managerial leadership of Cheshire East Council will want to consider, discuss, and reflect on these findings and recommendations. To promote the principle of transparency, it is a requirement of the Corporate Peer Challenge process that the final report of the Peer Team is published in-full within three months of the review being completed. In this instance, this requires the report to be published no later than 28 June 2024.

To illustrate the Council's responsiveness to the findings of this review, there is a requirement for the Council to develop and publish an Action Plan within five-months of the Peer Team being onsite, no later than 28 August 2024. This Action Plan should provide clarity on the



activity, milestones, and timelines that the Council will work to in responding to the Team's findings. The Action Plan will also be central to the Peer Team's re-engagement with the Council through a Progress Review which is due to be completed in the Winter of 2024.

The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities has published draft Best Value Standards for Local Authorities. This guidance describes arranging a Corporate Peer Challenge or Finance Peer Challenge at least every five-years as a characteristic of a well-functioning authority. The Peer Team recognise that Cheshire East Council's previous Peer Challenge was completed in January 2020, meaning that this review has been completed within cycle. In this context, it is expected that the Council would commission to undertake their next Corporate Peer Challenge no-later than March 2029.

Finally, Claire Hogan (Principal Advisor for the North West) is the main contact between the Local Government Association and Cheshire East Council. Claire is available to discuss the content of this report, and any further support that the Council may require or benefit from, and can be contacted by email on: [Claire.Hogan@local.gov.uk](mailto:Claire.Hogan@local.gov.uk)

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**Corporate Peer Challenge Action Plan**

	Recommendation	LGA Narrative	Cheshire East Council Action	Responsible Officer	Action completed by
1	<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

	Recommendation	LGA Narrative	Cheshire East Council Action	Responsible Officer	Action completed by
2	<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
			Recruitment to permanent Executive Director of Place	Chief Executive	October 2024
			Permanent senior management structure agreed informed by DMA and recruitment partner appointed	Chief Executive	October 2024
			Executive Director Corporate Services/s151 agreed at July Council and recruitment immediately afterwards	Chief Executive	December 2024
			Senior recruitment complete and postholders in place	Chief Executive	March 2025
3	<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 the board and consideration of potential members.	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

	Recommendation	LGA Narrative	Cheshire East Council Action	Responsible Officer	Action completed by
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 with 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> </ul>	Executive Director Place	Ongoing
			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

	Recommendation	LGA Narrative	Cheshire East Council Action	Responsible Officer	Action completed by
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.	Review existing 'Our Values' and behaviours framework <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
			Strengthen My conversation toolkit including 121s, use of 360 feedback and expectations of managers. 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
			Relaunch mentoring/coaching opportunities and reverse mentoring	Head of HR	September 2024
			Develop an action plan for the staff survey results 2023 building on new 'you said, we did' approach and work underway with staff 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
			Review capacity in HR/OD to support people performance management, leadership and organisational change informed by organisational readiness review	Interim Director of Finance/S151	August 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	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

	Recommendation	LGA Narrative	Cheshire East Council Action	Responsible Officer	Action completed by
		at the expense of focusing on the delivery of immediate budget savings and the short-term improvements and cultural changes required.	Transformation Plan submitted to Assurance Panel and DLUHC as condition of Exceptional Financial Support	Interim Director of Finance/S151	August 2024
			Develop and relaunch a cultural change programme to meet current organisational challenges	Director of Transformation	September 2024
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 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.	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 engagement with Members, staff, residents and partners	Interim Director of Policy and Change	September 2024
			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	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

	Recommendation	LGA Narrative	Cheshire East Council Action	Responsible Officer	Action completed by
		report approval arrangements ahead of committee meetings.	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 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.	Governance hierarchy for MTFS and budget framework: <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>	Interim Director of Finance/S151	June 2024
			Restructure financial reporting to all service committees. One single report to be used for all committees in regards to financial management, 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	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



	Recommendation	LGA Narrative	Cheshire East Council Action	Responsible Officer	Action completed by
		forward planning and agenda setting to maximise member input into the decision-making process.	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
			Refresh and relaunch report writing training and guidance for officers including style guide	Director of Governance and Compliance	September 2024
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.	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 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 need to be informed by the CIPFA financial governance review starting in July 2024 and reviewed alongside the operation of the shared transactional service team (shared with Chester West and Chester). All urgent actions to be resolved as per the timeline agreed.	Interim Director of Finance/S151	From July 2024

	Recommendation	LGA Narrative	Cheshire East Council Action	Responsible Officer	Action completed by
14	<b>Launch a programme of training and development for members and officers</b>	Deliver appropriate training for elected Members regarding roles and responsibilities, as well as leadership and management development training for officers.	Structured training programme for all Members to be delivered. Engage with external providers to include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strategic decision making for service committees</li> <li>• Strategic financial decision making</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>• Corporate parenting</li> <li>• Update the 2023 induction and refresher training</li> </ul>	Director of Governance and Compliance	From September 2024
			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>• Management and leadership development</li> <li>• Use of Unit 4 (finance/HR system)</li> <li>• Report writing</li> <li>• EDI</li> <li>• Corporate parenting</li> </ul>	Head of HR	October 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	From January 2025
			Encourage wider participation in sector/ professional networks and learning opportunities	CLT	Ongoing

	Recommendation	LGA Narrative	Cheshire East Council Action	Responsible Officer	Action completed by
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 management framework developed including principles, training and templates	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.	Dedicated comms support for Transformation Plan and Board in place. Improvement and transformation communication and engagement strategy developed to include: <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/ Director of Transformation	September 2024
			Visible leadership of the change agenda through Chief Executive, Leader and Deputy Leader at managers' sessions and ongoing through all communication channels	Chief Executive/ Head of Communications	From July 2024
			Develop and relaunch a cultural change programme to meet current organisational challenges (review of Brighter Futures programme)	Director of Transformation	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

	Recommendation	LGA Narrative	Cheshire East Council Action	Responsible Officer	Action completed by
			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
	<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	Executive Director Children's Services	July 2024

	Recommendation	LGA Narrative	Cheshire East Council Action	Responsible Officer	Action completed by
			needs to change, ensuring there is a joined up multi-agency and whole-council approach.		
			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 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.	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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**OPEN**

**Full Council**

**17 July 2024**

**Establishment of Assurance Panel**

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**Report of: David Brown – Director of Governance and Compliance**

**Report Reference No: C/7/24-25**

**Ward(s) Affected: All**

### **Purpose of Report**

- 1 In March 2024 Cheshire East Council undertook a Corporate Peer Challenge through the Local Government Association (LGA). This review highlighted a number of significant challenges facing the Council, including areas requiring improvement. One outcome of the Peer Challenge was a recommendation that an externally chaired independent Assurance Panel be established to support the Council with this work.

### **Executive Summary**

- 2 The above recommendation was made in response to the breadth of financial, cultural and transformation challenges facing the Council, and the urgent need for action to support the Council's financial sustainability.
- 3 This report sets out the reasons for the proposed establishment of the Assurance Panel (the Panel), its proposed Terms of Reference, and membership.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Full Council is recommended to:

1. Approve the establishment of an Assurance Panel.
2. Approve the membership and terms of reference of, and other arrangements for the Assurance Panel, as set out in the report.
3. Delegate authority to the Chief Executive to make all necessary arrangements to ensure that the Assurance Panel is appointed to and ready to begin its work with the Council, in accordance with the Terms of Reference, as quickly as possible.

## Background

- 4 The proposal for the establishment of the Panel arises from the recent Corporate Peer Challenge. It will consist of advisors to support, challenge, and advise the Council on issues and areas of overall improvement including the Council's response to the Corporate Peer Challenge findings and recommendations.
- 5 The Panel will provide two letters per annum on the Council's progress towards improvement and transformation. Additional reporting from the Panel will be via the Chief Executive to the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities and other stakeholders.
- 6 The Panel will also be empowered to provide such additional progress updates to Members of the Council as it considers to be necessary.
- 7 The Terms of Reference for the Panel, which includes details as to membership and other arrangements, are attached at Appendix 1 for consideration and approval.

## Consultation and Engagement

- 8 Members, officers and external stakeholders were consulted as part of the LGA Peer Review.

## Reasons for Recommendations

- 9 To comply with and address the findings of the LGA Peer Review.



- 10 To ensure financial sustainability of the Council is achieved through a financial recovery plan for years 2024/25 through to 2026/27.

### Other Options Considered

Option	Impact	Risk
Do nothing	The Council will not address the breadth of financial, cultural and transformation challenges facing the Council.	The Council will not achieve a balanced budget or meet the needs of residents and staff.

### Implications and Comments

#### *Monitoring Officer/Legal*

- 11 There are no direct legal implications relating to the establishment of the Panel. It is an advisory board. However, there may be legal implications resulting from its recommendations should these be followed. Further legal advice and support will be required in due course.

#### *Section 151 Officer/Finance*

- 12 Costs associated with the Panel, will in part be met by LGA support and the remainder met by Cheshire East Council. This includes the officer time required to support the Panel.
- 13 There will be financial implications resulting from the recommendations of the Panel.
- 14 No budget has been allocated for this panel and the costs will be a pressure against the Council's budget for the two years of operation.

#### *Policy*

- 15 There may be policy implications arising from the recommendations from the panel, which will need to be considered in detail at that stage.

<p><b>An open and enabling organisation.</b></p>
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*Equality, Diversity and Inclusion*

- 16 There may be equality implications arising from the recommendations from the Panel, which will need to be considered in detail at that stage.

*Human Resources*

- 17 There may be human resources implications arising from the recommendations from the Panel, which will need to be considered in detail at that stage.

*Risk Management*

- 18 There may be risk implications arising from the recommendations from the Panel, which will need to be considered in detail at that stage.

*Rural Communities*

- 19 There may be rural communities' implications arising from the recommendations from the Panel, which will need to be considered in detail at that stage.

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

- 20 There may be such implications arising from the recommendations from the Panel, which will need to be considered in detail at that stage.

*Public Health*

- 21 There may be public health implications arising from the recommendations from the Panel, which will need to be considered in detail at that stage.

*Climate Change*

- 22 There may be climate change implications arising from the recommendations from the Panel, which will need to be considered in detail at that stage.

<b>Access to Information</b>	
Contact Officer:	Brian Reed – Head of Democratic Services and Governance  Brian.reed@cheshireeast.gov.uk
Appendices:	Appendix 1 – Terms of Reference of the Assurance Panel.
Background Papers:	None

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**Independent Assurance Panel - Terms of Reference**

- 1 The purpose of the Panel will be to:
  - i. Provide external advice, challenge, and expertise to Cheshire East Council in driving-forward improvement, transformation, in developing its Corporate Plan and other plans, and in aligning its MTFS.
  - ii. Support the coordination and sequencing of activity central to the Council's improvement.

The Panel will draw upon a wide range of expertise to:

- a) Provide regular advice, challenge, and support to the Council on the full range of its improvement activities and specifically on the delivery of recommendations included in the Council's Corporate Peer Review and progress towards financial sustainability.
- b) Ensure financial sustainability of the Council is achieved.
- c) Support and monitor progress against the recommendations of the Peer Review and identify risks.

**Format and Frequency:**

- 2 It is intended that the Panel will convene for the first time before the end of August 2024, in order to consider the Council's Transformation Plan and Corporate Peer Review Action Plan, prior to their submission to Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities and the LGA. It is expected to conclude its work in May 2026, subject to the Panel and the Council being assured of the Council's ongoing stability.
- 3 It is anticipated that the Panel will initially meet monthly (more frequently if required). Meeting frequency will be reviewed after six-months with a view to moving to quarterly meetings, subject to appropriate progress being made.
- 4 Meetings will be held in private, and the minutes to support these meetings will not be published. Instead, the communications of the Panel will be set out through their formal update letters to Full Council, via the Chief Executive. Additional reporting from the Panel will be via the Chief Executive to the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities and other stakeholders.
- 5 Meetings will be supported by a secretariat provided by Cheshire East Council. This will include the coordination of papers and their distribution four working days in advance of the meeting.

- 6 Meetings of the Panel will be held either in person or online to allow flexibility and recognising the travel implications for many Panel members.
- 7 Subject to the proviso that the Panel may provide progress updates to the Council at any time, written update letters to Full Council will be submitted by the Panel twice a year.

**Membership and Alignment:**

- 8 The Membership of the Panel will comprise the following, who will be appointed for a two-year term. Importantly, these appointments will not be 'employee' appointments of the Council. They will be independent 'post-holders'.
  - Independent Chair
  - Independent External Finance lead
  - Independent External Transformation lead
  - Independent External Governance lead
  - Local Government Association (Regional Improvement Lead)
  - Local Government Associate Peer (Inde)
  - Local Government Association Peer (Lab)
  - Local Government Association Peer (Con)
  - Leader of the Council
  - Deputy Leader of the Council
  - Leader of the Opposition
  - Chief Executive

Substitutes will not be permitted.

- 9 Additional independent external or internal individuals may be appointed to the Panel if required or invited for specific meetings/agenda items to be agreed by the Chair and Chief Executive, as further progress is made with the Council's improvement journey.
- 10 The Panel will work closely with the Council. The relationship between the Panel and the Council will not be reflected in the Council's constitution.
- 11 As an advisory Panel, the Panel will not vote on formal committee and other decisions. However, it will provide challenge and advice.

**Costs and Support**

- 12 Costs associated with the Panel, will in part be met by LGA support and remainder be met by Cheshire East Council. This includes the officer time required to support the Panel.
- 13 Panel members will need to work flexibly as the demands of the role require. However, the Council may wish to agree in advance the number of days advice to be provided by each Panel member over each 12-month period. It should also be recognised that there is likely to be more need for input at the start of this process, and days should be weighted accordingly.
- 14 The Panel will be supported by an effective programme officer at Cheshire East Council to ensure that the overall programme plan is proactively tracked, kept up to date, and that issues and risks are managed on a day-to-day basis through officers.



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**OPEN**

## **Children and Families Committee**

**Tuesday 16 July**

### **Improvement Plan**

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#### **Report of: Deborah Woodcock, Executive Director Children's Services**

**Report Reference No: CF/22/24-25**

**Ward(s) Affected: All wards**

#### **Purpose of Report**

- 1 This report asks committee to approve the final version of the Cheshire East children's services improvement plan to address the findings from the Ofsted inspection of local authority children's services (ILACS) conducted in February and March 2024. It also asks committee to note and approve the approach to providing additional financial investment to ensure we can deliver the plan and the necessary improvements to the quality of services.
- 2 This report relates to the objectives in the Council's Corporate Plan 2021-25 to be a council which empowers and cares about people; that works together with residents and partners to support people and communities to be resilient; protects and supports our communities and safeguards children, adults at risk and families from abuse, neglect and exploitation; to be the best corporate parents to our children in care; and ensure all children have a high quality, enjoyable education that enables them to achieve their full potential.

#### **Executive Summary**

- 3 Cheshire East Council received an Ofsted inspection of local authority children's services (ILACS) between 19 February – 8 March 2024. As the inspection found our support to care leavers was inadequate, we are required to submit an action plan (to be referred to as an improvement plan thereafter) to Ofsted 70 working days after publication of the report.
- 4 Additional financial support is needed to ensure that we can deliver the necessary improvements at the required pace. The details of this have been

calculated with support from the finance team and the S151 officer. Committee is asked to approve the approach to funding the delivery of the improvement plan, as detailed in the S151/ finance section of this report and in appendix 2.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The Children and Families Committee is recommended to:

1. Approve the improvement plan (appendix 1) for referral to full Council on 17 July 2024 and recommend that Council approve the plan.
2. Approve the approach to funding the delivery of the improvement plan, as detailed in the S151/ finance section of this report and in appendix 2.

## Background

- 5 Cheshire East Council received an Ofsted inspection of local authority children's services (ILACS) between 19 February – 8 March 2024. The inspection findings are set out in a [report](#) which was published on 16 May 2024. Committee was briefed on the findings from the inspection, the plans in place to improve services in relation to the findings, and monitoring arrangements from Ofsted and the DfE in [a paper to committee on 3 June 2024](#).
- 6 In the meeting on 3 June, the Children and Families Committee agreed to:
  - Note the inspection findings, implications for monitoring from Ofsted and the DfE, and plans to improve services.
  - Hold a task and finish workshop for the Children and Families Committee on 2 July to review and scrutinise the draft improvement plan.
  - The onward referral of the improvement plan for approval at full Council on 17 July 2024.
  - Approve the terms of reference for the Improvement Board.
  - The development of the terms of reference for the Corporate Parent Working Group and agreed membership.
- 7 As the inspection found our support to care leavers was inadequate, we are required to submit an improvement plan to Ofsted 70 working days after publication of the report. The plan is due to be submitted to Ofsted by 23 August 2024. We propose to submit subject to committee and council's approval following full council on 17 July 2024.

- 8 The development of the improvement plan has been informed by feedback from Ofsted and other local authorities' improvement plans. A workshop was held on 2 July for members of the Children and Families Committee and Cared for and Care Leavers Committee to contribute to the development of the improvement plan (appendix 1).
- 9 The improvement plan is a live and responsive plan, so will adapt to incorporate new actions as need is identified, for example from quality assurance activity or through external monitoring activity.
- 10 Additional financial support is needed to ensure that we can deliver the necessary improvements at the required pace. The details of this have been calculated with support from the finance team and the S151 officer. Committee is asked to approve the approach to funding the delivery of the improvement plan, as detailed in the S151/ finance section of this report and in appendix 2.

### **Consultation and Engagement**

- 11 The views of children, young people and families, senior leaders, frontline practitioners and managers, and schools, were sought by inspectors during the inspection and have informed the inspection findings. We will continue to work together with children, young people, young adults, parents/carers, staff, and partners to develop, deliver and evaluate improvements.
- 12 The development of the improvement plan has been informed by feedback from Ofsted and other local authorities' improvement plans.
- 13 This plan has been developed together with and provided with scrutiny and challenge by:
  - service managers and service leads, including partners
  - the children's social care leadership team
  - the children's services leadership team
  - the council's leadership team
  - the Safeguarding Children's Partnership
  - the Improvement and Impact Board
  - elected members on the Children and Families Committee and Cared for Children and Care Leavers Committee.
- 14 A workshop was held on 2 July for members of the Children and Families Committee and Cared for and Care Leavers Committee to contribute to the development of the improvement plan (appendix 1).

### Reasons for Recommendations

- 15 Cheshire East Council's children's services has received an inadequate judgement from the recent Ofsted inspection. The inspection demonstrated that there are areas we need to address at pace to improve outcomes for children. The council needs to ensure the findings from the inspection are addressed in a timely way to ensure we achieve good outcomes for children and young people and members need to be assured that the arrangements in place to address the shortcomings and make the necessary improvements are sufficiently robust and will deliver good or better outcomes for our children within a reasonable timeframe.
- 16 In the meeting on 3 June, the Children and Families Committee agreed to the onward referral of the improvement plan for approval at full Council on 17 July 2024.

### Other Options Considered

Option	Impact	Risk
Do not approve the improvement plan	We will not have a robust plan in place to deliver improvements which will delay our submission to Ofsted and will delay implementing improvements	There is a risk that improvements are not achieved at the pace needed
Do not approve the financial support to deliver the plan	We will not have sufficient resources or support to deliver the plan at the pace needed	Improvements are not achieved at the pace needed

### Implications and Comments

#### *Monitoring Officer/Legal*

- 17 The committee report sets out the plans and proposed Improvement Plan for the local authority, in response to the outcome of the Ofsted inspection and inadequate judgement published on 16 May 2024.
- 18 Members of the committee need to be assured that all requirements of the recommendations within the report and any improvement notice served upon the council by the DfE resulting from the Ofsted inspection findings, are complied with and that the plans in place deliver the improvements required within any timescales set by the DfE.

- (a) The Improvement Notice served upon the council by the DfE will be published and have a number of requirements and is likely to require the creation of a focused improvement board, with a Secretary of State (DfE) appointed advisor, a clear Improvement Plan, and regular reviews to measure progress. Failure to comply or poor progress can result in the imposition of directions to secure performance, which can include that the DfE can intervene and nominate a person to act on its behalf to secure performance.
- 19 The protection of vulnerable people is a council responsibility. Oversight by members at full Council by way of the proposal to refer the final improvement plan for its consideration and approval, alongside the overall approach to improving service provision, aligns with this obligation.

*Section 151 Officer/Finance*

- 20 The revenue costs associated with the improvement plan are expected to be for additional resources required for an 18-month period. The costs are anticipated to start in September 2024, resulting in 7 months of costs in 2024/25 and a further 11 months in 2025/26.
- 21 The revenue costs are estimated to be £1.987m in total, profiled as £628k in 2024/25 and £1.359m in 2025/26.
- 22 The costings are based on Cheshire East Council employed staff being recruited to deliver the plan, and the intention is to recruit on a permanent basis to attract the best candidates. At the end of the 18-month period the staff will then be transferred to any existing vacancies within the directorate to avoid any risk of over-recruitment.
- 23 If the service are not able to recruit to these posts and need to utilise more expensive agency workers, then the service will need to consider how to mitigate any additional costs.
- 24 Funding for these costs is anticipated to be met through existing service budgets, utilising existing growth that had been built into this year's Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS). It is being targeted to this important work. Currently £1m per annum has been identified within existing budgets, meaning that the total costs over the 2 years could be funded from existing budgets as long as all other savings are delivered to plan and there is no additional growth required for placement costs in-year.
- 25 There are potentially some capital costs that could be required and alongside the use of existing budgets the service will continue to investigate if any alternative funding sources could be identified to support the plan, including S106 funding subject to the allocation criteria of the developer funding received. Finance and the service will continue to work closely together to monitor and manage expenditure and ensure that future years' costs are considered as part of medium term financial planning.

*Policy*

A council which empowers and cares about people

Work together with residents and partners to support people and communities to be strong and resilient.

Protect and support our communities and safeguard children, adults at risk, and families from abuse, neglect, and exploitation.

Be the best Corporate Parents to our children in care.

Ensure all children have a high quality, enjoyable education that enables them to achieve their full potential

*Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion*

- 26 Good quality practice with families ensures that all children and young people's needs are considered and supported.

*Human Resources*

- 27 Additional capacity has been requested to support the delivery of the improvement plan (as detailed in appendix 2).

*Risk Management*

- 28 There are reputational and financial risks to not providing good quality services, as well as risks to individual children and young people. The council must continue to ensure that these risks are mitigated by ensuring effective plans are in place to improve and that these make an impact on children's outcomes. The risk of failing to deliver the improvement plan will be added to the council's corporate risk register and this risk will be monitored quarterly through the Corporate Policy Committee.

*Rural Communities*

- 29 Vulnerable children and young people are present in all communities in Cheshire East.

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

- 30 The improvement plan aims to improve the outcomes for our most vulnerable children and young people.

*Public Health*

31 Same as the implication above.

*Climate Change*

32 There are no implications for climate change because of this report.

<b>Access to Information</b>	
Contact Officer:	Lauren Conway, Business Manager <a href="mailto:Lauren.conway@cheshireeast.gov.uk">Lauren.conway@cheshireeast.gov.uk</a>
Appendices:	Appendix 1: Improvement Plan Appendix 2: Finance information
Background Papers:	<a href="#">Report on the Ofsted inspection findings to the Children and Families Committee on 3 June 2024</a> <a href="#">Cheshire East's Ofsted Inspection Report published 16 May</a> <a href="#">Ofsted ILACS Framework</a> The Children Act 1989 guidance and regulations Volume 3: planning transition to adulthood for care leavers <a href="https://publishing.service.gov.uk">DfE (publishing.service.gov.uk)</a>



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# Children's Services Improvement Plan

**April 2024 – March 2025**

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# Introduction

This is our action plan to address the findings from the Ofsted inspection of children's services in Cheshire East which took place in February and March 2024. The findings from the inspection are available in a report on the [Ofsted website](#). The inspection gave Cheshire East's children's services an overall grading of inadequate and found that although some improvements had been made since our last inspection in 2019, the quality of practice and the experience and progress of children and young people was too variable, and for care leavers this was inadequate. We need to make significant improvements and this plan sets out how we will do this.

**We are committed to improving outcomes for children and young people.** We will use the inspection findings to continue to improve the support we offer. This plan responds to all the areas identified in the inspection report. Immediate action was taken to improve services, starting during the inspection, and this is reflected in the plan alongside longer-term actions and ambitions.

Through the delivery of our plan and our programme of improvement, we will continue to embed a culture of high support and high challenge and be a **child-focused** organisation that works together **with** people, through effective relationships that support positive change. We know our workforce is our most important asset and we will continue to support and regularly communicate with frontline practitioners and managers so everyone understands their role in improvement and we co-produce, deliver, evaluate and celebrate changes together.

# Context

This inspection, and previous inspections, have shown that Cheshire East's children's services have not provided consistently good quality support to our children and young people. We were judged inadequate in 2013 and 2024. In developing this plan, we have critically considered what barriers have prevented us from achieving good quality services to date. We have recognised that in the past we have moved from fixing problem to problem, which has led to a 'stop/start' approach. We now need to embed a systemic approach to improvement; changing our culture, developing the right systems and processes to ensure we routinely evaluate impact, and holding our shape around the changes we expect to see – holding the right people accountable consistently at every level.

We will be reviewing and changing our services in line with the [children's social care national framework](#) to ensure that we deliver consistently good quality practice that achieves strong outcomes for children and young people.

Cheshire East Council, like councils across the country, has been experiencing unprecedented financial pressures. In February 2024, the council approved a balanced budget for 2024/25, which included spending money from reserves to cover the impact of additional financial pressures. The level of reserves is now insufficient to adequately protect the council against future risks. Forecasts indicate there is four-year funding gap of £100m to balance the budget and hold an appropriate level of reserves.

Alongside the improvement programme in children's services, Cheshire East Council has embarked on a significant transformation programme. The council-wide transformation plan will aim to address the funding gap and will be submitted to the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) as part of the criteria for exceptional financial support from the government.

We calculate that additional investment will be required to support children's services to deliver our improvement plan at pace. A costed

proposal for additional capacity and expertise to support improvement will be received by the Children and Families Committee in July 2024.

Challenges for children's services are challenges for the whole council, and there is whole-council commitment and support for delivering this plan. This improvement plan is part of the council's transformation and has been informed by the findings from the LGA corporate peer review in March 2024.

The council's transformation plan will also support us to achieve our improvement plan. Cheshire East Council's transformation will include changes to the organisation's culture, embedding high standards and effective challenge and performance management where these are not met, focusing on outcomes, not process. These messages will be echoed through our children's leadership and management programme.

The council's transformational plan will also support improved working between council services and improve the support to services from enablers.

This plan also feeds into our wider strategy for developing the council's children's services, the Together Strategy, which has the following building blocks:

- **Together supporting and enabling our workforce:** we have the right people, with the right skills and support to improve the outcomes of our children and young people
- **Together connecting as one team:** we work as one team across children and adult services with shared skills, processes and communication to focus on the needs and experiences of children, young people and their families
- **Together improving and innovating our services:** our children, young people and their families have consistently good/ outstanding experiences of our services
- **Together collaborating with our families, colleagues and partners:** we adopt an 'experts by experience' approach that ensures that those receiving or delivering our services help to shape them.

## Coproduction

In Cheshire East, we aim to work [TOGETHER](#) and adopt an 'experts by experience' approach that ensures that those receiving or delivering services help to shape them.

We will engage children and young people throughout our improvement journey in developing and delivering improvements. Children and young people's views will influence our delivery on a child, service, and strategic level. We are developing a new Corporate Parent Working Group that will include care experienced young people as key members of the board. Young people will be involved in shaping and evaluating services through the Corporate Parent Working Group, our young people's participation groups, through our audits, young people's surveys, and the local offer app.

We will also continue to engage with practitioners and managers within our frontline teams to ensure we are all delivering improvements together, and we will ensure their feedback, and feedback from our partners, informs our evaluation of impact.

## Support and Challenge

We are committed to delivering this plan and achieving consistently good and better services that achieve strong outcomes for children and young people. We know that we cannot deliver this plan alone, and that we need to work together with our children, young people and families, with our teams, across the partnership and throughout the council.

Throughout the development of the plan, we have engaged with frontline practitioners and managers on the inspection findings and what support they need moving forwards, and we will continue to engage with our workforce throughout the delivery of the plan to ensure we are all on this journey together.



This plan has been developed together with and provided with scrutiny and challenge by:

- service managers and service leads, including partners
- the children's social care leadership team
- the children's services leadership team
- the council's leadership team
- the Safeguarding Children's Partnership
- the Improvement and Impact Board
- elected members on the Children and Families Committee and Cared for Children and Care Leavers Committee.

The final plan will be endorsed by full Council.

We will continue to invest in our workforce through training, development, and management and leadership support and challenge. Training has been tailored to the areas for improvement raised during the inspection and will continue to be responsive to development needs throughout the year as identified in quality assurance and monitoring activity. This includes a bespoke leadership programme for all leaders within children's services to embed a culture of high support and high challenge, and embedding restorative practice as our practice model so we build strong relationships that support effective change. The impact of training and support on practice will continue to be evaluated through the delivery of this plan so we can adapt and respond to areas for improvement.

We will also seek to 'infect our system' with good practice by collecting and sharing examples of good practice with teams.

We also recognise the enormous value from learning from other areas. We are currently working with Stockport through the sector led improvement programme (SLIP) around restorative practice, and we are looking at how we can tailor this support to help to address the inspection findings. We have reviewed successful improvement plans in other areas and sought advice from other authorities and external bodies with specialist expertise, including the LGA and DfE, to support the development of this plan and will continue to use these sources throughout our improvement journey. We will

continue to learn from innovative and best practice in other areas to improve our offer for children and young people in Cheshire East, for example Lincolnshire's apprenticeship scheme for care leavers.

## Monitoring Impact

The first chapter of the plan is structured under the seven areas for improvement highlighted in the 2024 Ofsted inspection report. It starts with senior manager oversight, to ensure this drives continuous improvement, followed by care leavers, as this is the area requiring the greatest improvement. The second chapter considers the additional areas for development from the inspection report.

The plan sets out the actions we will take to improve services. What is most important is that what we do makes a difference, so each month we will report on impact against the inspection findings. Progress against actions and impact against the inspection findings will be rated using the following:

### Actions

Colour	Definition
Grey	Action not started yet, no risk to implementation anticipated
Red	Action not on track, risk to implementation
Amber	Action progressing, some issues but realistic plans in place to recover
Green	Action not yet completed, but on track to be completed within timescales
Blue	Action completed

## Impact

Colour	Definition
Grey	Too early to measure impact
Red	No impact or very limited impact / improving outcomes for a few children and young people
Amber	Some positive impact but this is variable and does not consistently improve outcomes for children and young people
Green	Mostly positive and consistent impact which delivers improved outcomes for children and young people
Blue	Achieves consistently good and better impact that delivers improved outcomes for children and young people

Each section of the plan has a dedicated senior leader who is responsible for achieving and reporting on impact. The sources we will use to assess our impact for each area of the plan are outlined in each section. These include:

- Seeking and listening to children and young people's experiences
- Single agency and multi-agency audits
- Performance indicators
- Listening to practitioners and managers, including within partner agencies
- Recruitment and retention information.

Our impact on work with children and young people will also be evaluated through Ofsted monitoring visits.

The plan will be a live and responsive plan, so will adapt to incorporate new actions as needed. The plan covers the activity we will carry out over a 12-month period from April 2024 to March 2025. A new plan will be developed after this plan is completed for the period from April 2025 onwards.

The improvement plan will be supported by individual service plans which set out all the key activity required to continue to develop services.

## Governance and Accountability

Progress against the plan will be driven by senior leaders and will be assessed and monitored through usual management arrangements including senior management meetings and supervision.

The Corporate Parent Working Group will drive developments for cared for children and care leavers, and so will contribute to delivering improvements in relation to the inspection findings.

An independently chaired Improvement and Impact Board will formally scrutinise progress and impact monthly. Key members of the Safeguarding Children's Partnership and the council's senior leadership team are members of the Improvement and Impact Board.

The Safeguarding Children's Partnership will receive six monthly updates on progress enabling all members to scrutinise and challenge progress.

The Children and Families Committee will scrutinise impact against the plan at every committee meeting.

The Cared for Children and Care Leavers Committee will scrutinise progress pertinent to care experienced young people and will receive reports on the work of the Corporate Parent Working Group and its impact on improving outcomes for these young people.

The Children's Services Strategic Quartet, chaired by the council's chief executive, will scrutinise progress against the plan at every meeting.

Progress will also be reported into the corporate assurance panel, an external panel monitoring the council's transformation.

Key stakeholders, including our workforce, will be kept informed of progress through quarterly communications. Feedback from our workforce will continue to be sought through existing forums/ mechanisms such as team meetings, senior leaders walking the floor, councillor frontline visits, and #talktogether staff sessions.

# Glossary

The legal definition of a care leaver comes from The Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 which states that a care leaver is someone who has been in the care of the local authority for a period of 13 weeks or more spanning their 16<sup>th</sup> birthday.

Care leavers can also be referred to as care experienced young people or young adults, as they have had experience of being in care. This term tends to be preferred by young people/ young adults.

Both terms are used interchangeably within this plan.

Abbreviation	Expansion
CINCP	Child in Need and Child Protection
CYPMHS	Children and young people's mental health services
DfE	Department for Education
DLUHC	Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities
EET	Education, employment or training
ICB	Integrated Care Board
IRO	Independent Reviewing Officer
LGA	Local Government Association
MASH	Multi-agency safeguarding hub
NEET	Not in education, employment or training
NHS	National Health Service
PAs	Personal Advisors
PEPs	Personal education plans
RONI	Risk of NEET indicators
SLIP	Sector led improvement programme
SMART	Specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, time-based
UASC	Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children



# Improvement Plan

All ratings are accurate as at 24 June 2024.

## Chapter 1

### 1. Senior Leaders' Oversight

What needs to improve				
Senior leaders' oversight of performance to ensure that there is a coherent approach to continuous improvement.				
Section Lead	Director of Family Help and Children's Social Care			
What inspectors found	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Senior leaders had not recognised, until this inspection, the extent of improvement required in services for care leavers. Systems to monitor and track groups of individual children have not been effective in identifying vulnerable care leavers who are not receiving the services they need. As a result, too many vulnerable care leavers are not getting the right level of help, support or protection.</li><li>• Despite improvements, the quality of practice is still too variable. Improved timeliness has not been achieved for all children. Implementation of improvement plans needs to accelerate across teams but in particular within the care leavers service.</li><li>• Leaders have recognised in their self-evaluation that more needs to be done to ensure that quality assurance activity is identifying all areas of poor practice and that it is consistently having an impact on outcomes for children.</li><li>• Not all young people are informed of, or understand, the pledges contained within the cared for children and care leavers' strategy.</li></ul>			
Ref	Action	Action Owner	Due by	Rating
SL1	Ensure there is effective line of sight from frontline practice through to the Executive Director of Children's Services through a review of reporting and governance arrangements, including a review of the performance framework.	Executive Director of Children's Services	September 2024  Review effectiveness each quarter	Green

SL2	Develop a forward plan of participation activities where senior leaders will hear the experiences of children and young people directly, work with them in shaping services, and give feedback on improvement progress.	Executive Director of Children's Services	July 2024	Green
SL3	Refresh the terms of reference for the Improvement and Impact Board, and expand the board to incorporate partners, to ensure there are robust arrangements in place to drive and scrutinise impact for children and young people in response to the inspection findings.	Executive Director of Children's Services	July 2024	Blue
SL4	Establish a Children's Services Strategic Quartet to provide improved leadership and accountability for children's services in line with best practice in the <a href="#">LGA guide for Chief Executives</a> , and <a href="#">for council leaders</a> , and <a href="#">DfE statutory guidance on the roles and responsibilities of the Director of Children's Services and the Lead Member for Children's Services</a> .	Executive Director of Children's Services	July 2024	Blue
SL5	Step-up a multi-agency corporate parent working group, chaired by the council's chief executive, to drive and scrutinise progress for cared for children and care experienced children and young people and ensure there is a whole council and partnership approach to supporting our young people.	Executive Director of Children's Services	October 2024	Green
SL6	Commission LGA corporate parenting training for senior leaders across the partnership and all elected members.	Executive Director of Children's Services	September 2024	Green
SL7	Develop care leaver champions across the council to increase awareness and support for care experienced young people and young adults.	Director of Family Help and Children's Social Care	October 2024	Green
SL8	Refresh and relaunch the cared for children and care leavers strategy 2022-26 and action plan.	Head of Service Cared for Children and Care Leavers	November 2024	Green
SL9	Revise the quality assurance framework to include thematic audits in line with the improvement plan and to strengthen the impact of audits on practice.	Head of Service Children's Safeguarding and Quality Assurance	May 2024	Blue
SL10	Establish a service manager thematic audit group to understand our support to specific cohorts/ within specific areas and drive improvements.	Service Managers CINCP	July 2024	Green

SL11	Develop mechanisms to ensure audit findings are routinely shared with teams to strengthen the impact of audits on practice.	Head of Service Children's Safeguarding and Quality Assurance	September 2024	Green
SL12	Develop a vital signs performance report in line with the improvement plan areas to support effective evaluation of improvement activity and drive improvements.	Business Intelligence Manager	September 2024	Green
SL13	Review the programme for elected member visits to frontline services, expanding these to cared for and care leaver services, to ensure there is member oversight of quality of practice and outcomes for children and young people.	Head of Service Children's Safeguarding and Quality Assurance	November 2024	Green
SL14	Review the <a href="#">children's social care national framework</a> and its implications for practice and processes, to embed consistently good practice that achieves strong outcomes for children and young people.	Director of Family Help and Children's Social Care	November 2024	Green
SL15	Embed 'Doing the Basics Brilliantly' through our culture, leadership, and developing and sharing key communications on practice. Continually evaluate impact and reinforce messages through monthly performance meetings and quality assurance activity.	Head of Service Children's Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Principal Social Worker	Key communications in place by September 2024	Green
SL16	Collate and share examples of good practice to embed understanding of good practice across teams and to celebrate good work.	Principal Social Worker	Start sharing practice by August 2024 and continue throughout the year	Green
<b>How we'll assess if we've addressed this area</b>	<p>The pace and impact of changes will be evaluated through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>monthly reports against the improvement plan</li> <li>monthly performance indicators in the vital signs performance report</li> <li>monthly practice review audits which assess the quality of practice across services</li> <li>monthly thematic audits to understand our support to specific cohorts/ within specific areas</li> </ul>	<b>What we will see when we've addressed this area</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improvements result in consistently good quality practice - over 80% of audits will be good or better quality.</li> <li>Senior leaders have an accurate understanding of children's outcomes and areas for development.</li> <li>Senior leaders have an accurate understanding of the practice and development needs of staff on both an individual and workforce level.</li> <li>Quality assurance activity drives improvements to the quality of practice, resulting in improved outcomes for children.</li> </ul>	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• feedback from children and young people from our participation groups and through audits.</li><li>• Ofsted monitoring visits will demonstrate whether our understanding of improvements are accurate.</li></ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 90% young people tell us they understand the pledges contained within the cared for children and care leavers’ strategy.</li><li>• The council will have at least 20 care leaver champions across all the directorates.</li></ul>
<b>Impact to date as at June 2024</b> <i>Our assessment of where we are in relation to what the inspectors found</i>			<b>Impact Rating</b>
<b>Key improvement activities delivered this month</b>			
<i>Reporting to start from July 2024</i>			
<b>What impact we are achieving for children and young people</b> <i>What our quality assurance activity tells us – including audits, surveys, feedback from children, young people and families, and feedback from our workforce. Include any risks or if any new actions have been identified.</i>			
<b>What our performance indicators show</b>			

## 2. Care Leavers

### What needs to improve

The quality, consistency and responsiveness of support, advice and guidance for care leavers, including those who are homeless, with additional vulnerabilities, and those who are over 21 years of age.

### A. Quality of practice

<b>Section Lead</b>	Head of Service for Cared for Children and Care Leavers
<b>What inspectors found</b>	<p>The quality of practice for care leavers is inadequate.</p> <p><b>Relationships and transition to the care leavers' service</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not all children in care have the opportunity to get to know their personal advisers (PAs) to build a relationship with them before they are 18 years old. Planning for young people who transition to the leaving care service is not always robust. For some, their voice is not evident and plans lack detail which means their individual needs are not always sufficiently understood. This means that there are some young people who leave care with too much uncertainty about how they will be supported.</li> <li>• Not all PAs know their young people well enough to have trusted and meaningful relationships with them. For some young people, PAs do not know their stories of why, or when, they came into care.</li> <li>• Case records do not reflect the work undertaken with young people.</li> </ul> <p><b>Pathway plans</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pathway plans do not consistently cover all the important elements of young people's lives. Wishes and feelings are not always clearly expressed. They do not consistently include other professionals, they are not sufficiently ambitious for young people and they do not always capture young people's voices.</li> <li>• Plans for unaccompanied asylum-seeking care leavers do not consistently acknowledge their unique cultural heritage, or identify how young people can access support for the trauma they have experienced.</li> <li>• Plans are not always effective in helping young people to make meaningful change in their lives.</li> <li>• Support for care leavers is not effective enough, which means that many do not access employment, further education or training.</li> </ul> <p><b>Recognising and responding to risk</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Risk of harm is not always recognised or responded to effectively.</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>For some young people, there is a lack of professional curiosity about their day-to-day lives and living arrangements. This has resulted in a lack of understanding of risk, or a clear recognition of how best to support young people when they are at their most vulnerable.</li> <li>When potential risk of harm for care leavers is identified, it is difficult to see how this risk is managed or mitigated effectively. This means that some care leavers may be exposed to risky situations and people. This was not fully understood by senior leaders until this inspection.</li> </ul> <p><b>Management oversight</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>PAs receive supervision, however the quality of supervision was variable. Most supervision is brief and task focused. Significant gaps in supervision exist on some young people's care files meaning there is a lack of consistent management grip on driving young people's plans forward and ensuring they are safe.</li> </ul>				
Ref	Action	Action Owner	Due by	Rating
CLA1	Develop and launch practice standards for the cared for and care leavers service to support consistently good practice. This will include clear standards on recording, visiting, transitions, and responsibilities when cases are jointly held.	Service Manager Care Leavers	June 2024	Blue
CLA2	Develop and roll out a mandatory training plan that is specific for the care leavers service to support practitioners to deliver consistently good practice. This will include planning, professional curiosity, adult/ transitional safeguarding and culture/diversity.	Principal Social Worker Service Manager Care Leavers	Launch in June 2024 and deliver over the year	Green
CLA3	Change the management structure of the care leavers service, removing the role of senior PAs, ensuring that all PAs receive direct oversight and supervision from a team manager (who are qualified social workers) to support good quality supervision and drive improved outcomes for care leavers.	Service Manager Care Leavers	April 2024	Blue
CLA4	Revise the format of the pathway plan with young people to ensure it supports good practice. The new plan will include sections for multi-agency professionals' views, and contingency plans.	Service Manager Cared for Children	May 2024	Blue
CLA5	Deliver restorative practice training to the whole care leavers service together to support a change in culture and consistency in practice.	Head of Service for Cared for Children and Care Leavers together with Stockport SLIP support	November 2024	Green

CLA6	Formalise arrangements around young adults where there are safeguarding concerns to ensure senior leaders have oversight of these young adults and that multi-agency team around the adult meetings are held to develop safety plans with them.	Head of Service for Cared for Children and Care Leavers	September 2024	Green
Please also see the section on management oversight and supervision				
How we'll assess if we've addressed this area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Monthly practice review audits will tell us about the quality of practice and plans and will assess if PAs can tell young people's stories.</li><li>Monthly thematic audits will conduct deep dives to understand our support to specific cohorts/ within specific areas, for example UASC young people.</li><li>Some of the thematic audits will involve phone calls to young people to understand their experience of services, the impact of their plan, and their relationships with their PAs.</li><li>The percentage of young people with PAs and pathway plans at 16.</li></ul>	What we will see when we've addressed this area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Practice to support care leavers will be of consistently good quality and will support young people to achieve good outcomes. Over 80% audits will be good or better quality.</li><li>Management oversight is good quality and drives improved outcomes. Over 80% of management oversight in audits will be good or better quality.</li><li>100% of young people will get to know their PAs from age 16. 90% young people will tell us they have good relationships with their PAs and know how they will be supported once they leave care.</li><li>100% PAs will be able to tell young people's stories.</li><li>100% case records will accurately reflect work with young people.</li><li>Pathway plans will cover all the important elements of young people's lives, and will reflect their voices and their individual needs, including their cultural heritage. Plans will consistently include other professionals and will be ambitious for young people. Over 80% plans audited will be good or better quality.</li><li>There is appropriate professional curiosity, which means risk of harm is recognised and responded to swiftly and effectively. When potential risk of harm is identified, it is managed or mitigated effectively. 100% audits will show appropriate professional curiosity and that risk of harm is responded to.</li></ul>	
Impact to date as at June 2024				Impact Rating
Our assessment of where we are in relation to what the inspectors found				
Key improvement activities delivered this month				
Reporting to start from July 2024				

<b>What impact we are achieving for children and young people</b>	
<i>What our quality assurance activity tells us – including audits, surveys, feedback from children, young people and families, and feedback from our workforce. Include any risks or if any new actions have been identified.</i>	
<b>What our performance indicators show</b>	

## B. Planning for Adulthood

<b>Section Lead</b>	Head of Service Cared for Children and Care Leavers			
<b>What inspectors found</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Transition planning into adulthood for most care leavers is variable. There is some proactive planning for disabled care leavers with complex physical needs, and young people with neurodiverse needs. However, for other care leavers such as those with complex mental health and emotional needs, proactive transition planning does not always take place. This means that these care leavers do not access the help and support that they need.</li> <li>Not all care leavers have access to their full health history. This means important information that could be used to provide ongoing support to them as they transition to adulthood is not available or used to inform care planning for them.</li> <li>Not all PAs spoken to by inspectors could describe the local offer to care leavers or explain how care leavers could benefit from it. Not all young people are accessing the full range of entitlements or services available to them. The local offer is not communicated effectively to all care leavers, which means that they are not all aware of, nor do they access, their full range of entitlements.</li> <li>Care leavers can access community-based resources but do not have a dedicated place they can go to which provides a safe space for them to receive support. The plan is for the newly opened family hubs to provide this in the coming months but at present this is not available.</li> </ul>			
<b>Ref</b>	<b>Action</b>	<b>Action Owner</b>	<b>Due by</b>	<b>Rating</b>
CLB1	Embed within our culture and approach that we start planning for adulthood as soon as a child or young person enters care.	Head of Service Cared for Children and Care Leavers Head of Service Inclusion	Review impact in October 2024	Green



CLB2	Review terms of reference and membership for Ignition Panel to ensure young people's post 18 plans are effectively tracked and reviewed from age 16 to ensure proactive transition plans are in place.	Head of Service Cared for Children and Care Leavers	July 2024	Green
CLB3	The practice standards will specify which preparing for adulthood roles should be undertaken by social workers and which by PAs and will set clear expectations on what care leavers should receive/ have in place.	Service Manager Care Leavers	June 2024	Blue
CLB4	Develop a care leavers hub as a safe space for care leavers to access support and advice.  Advice sessions will be offered from the hub to support preparation for adulthood, including housing, finances, drug and alcohol support, parenting support, careers advice, CV workshops, and interview preparation. Emotional health and wellbeing support will be available at the hub through Pure Insight and health support through the cared for nurse.	Service Manager Care Leavers Area Delivery Manager Targeted Youth Work	Interim hubs in Crewe and Macclesfield by July 2024	Green
		Head of Service for Education Participation and Pupil Support	Permanent hub from the Crewe Youth Zone by the end of 2025	Green
CLB5	Review the transition policy.	Service Manager Cared for Children	December 2024	Green
CLB6	Engage and consult with care experienced young people on how they want to understand their health histories and adapt the current process in line with their feedback.	Designated Nurse Safeguarding and Looked After Children	October 2024	Grey
CLB7	Deliver training to PAs on arrangements to support young people to understand their health histories.	Designated Nurse Safeguarding and Looked After Children	June 2024	Blue
CLB8	Launch an app for the local offer. This will ensure all care leavers have immediate access to the local offer and their entitlements through their mobile. It will also support us to keep in touch with young people and gain their feedback and allow young people to develop peer support groups.	Service Manager Care Leavers	July 2024	Green
CLB9	Review the local offer together with young people and partners.	Service Manager Care Leavers	December 2024	Green
CLB10	Deliver training on the local offer to all PAs.	Service Manager Care Leavers	July 2024	Green

<b>How we'll assess if we've addressed this area</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Monthly thematic audits will conduct deep dives to understand our support to specific cohorts/ within specific areas. One theme will be planning for adulthood.</li><li>• The thematic audit will involve phone calls to young people to understand their experience of services, what they know about the local offer, and how their plan is preparing them for adulthood.</li><li>• The percentage of young people who have access to their health histories.</li><li>• PAs can describe the local offer and explain how care leavers can benefit from it.</li><li>• Feedback from young people accessing the care leaver hubs.</li></ul>	<b>What we will see when we've addressed this area</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Proactive planning takes place for all care leavers ensuring they are prepared for adulthood. Over 80% audits will be good or better quality.</li><li>• 90% young people tell us they feel well supported and have the information they need to be prepared for adulthood. 90% tell us they know about the local offer, the care leavers hub, and their entitlements.</li><li>• 100% care leavers have access to their health histories.</li><li>• 100% PAs can describe the local offer and explain how care leavers can benefit from it.</li><li>• 90% young people will tell us they know about the care leavers hubs.</li></ul>
<b>Impact to date as at June 2024</b> <i>Our assessment of where we are in relation to what the inspectors found</i>			<b>Impact Rating</b>
<b>Key improvement activities delivered this month</b>			
<i>Reporting to start from July 2024</i>			
<b>What impact we are achieving for children and young people</b> <i>What our quality assurance activity tells us – including audits, surveys, feedback from children, young people and families, and feedback from our workforce. Include any risks or if any new actions have been identified.</i>			
<b>What our performance indicators show</b>			

## C. Education, Employment and Training

<b>Section Lead</b>		Director of Education, Strong Start and Integration		
<b>What inspectors found</b>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Too many care leavers are not in education, employment or training (NEET). They are not being encouraged and well supported to improve their life chances in order to achieve their aspirations for a better future.</li> </ul>		
Ref	Action	Action Owner	Due by	Rating
CLC1	All young adults who are NEET and able to work will have a EET plan to support them towards gaining EET. Plans will be reviewed every 12 weeks.	Service Manager Care Leavers	September 2024	Green
CLC2	Deliver our version of the Lincolnshire care leavers' scheme in which apprentices are employed by the council but are seconded out to carefully selected businesses in the young person's chosen field.	Service Manager Care Leavers	December 2024	Green
CLC3	Increase apprenticeship opportunities and other route to employment opportunities, such as work experience opportunities, both within and outside of the council.	Service Manager Care Leavers	March 2025	Green
CLC4	Work with local businesses and organisations, including the chamber of commerce, to secure additional corporate parenting support for cared for children and care leavers and to prepare employers for supporting young people in employment.	Service Manager Care Leavers	March 2025	Green
CLC5	Provide bespoke support to enable young people to be prepared for entering employment through job readiness training, CV and interview support.	Service Manager Care Leavers	October 2024	Green
<b>How we'll assess if we've addressed this area</b>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The percentage of young people who are in EET.</li> <li>Monthly thematic audits completed by the service managers audit group will conduct deep dives to understand our support to specific cohorts/ within specific areas. One theme will be EET.</li> </ul>	<b>What we will see when we've addressed this area</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The percentage of care leavers who are in EET will increase – we want to increase to above 75% in EET.</li> <li>By April 2025, we would have at least 10 new apprenticeship opportunities for young adults.</li> <li>90% young people will tell us they are encouraged and well supported to improve their life chances and access EET.</li> </ul>	
<b>Impact to date as at June 2024</b>				<b>Impact Rating</b>

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<i>Reporting to start from July 2024</i>	
<b>What impact we are achieving for children and young people</b>	
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<b>What our performance indicators show</b>	

D. Accommodation				
<b>Section Lead</b>	Head of Service for Cared for Children and Care Leavers			
<b>What inspectors found</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• For care leavers who live out of the area, accessing suitable housing is challenging and some wait for extended periods in supported accommodation until suitable permanent accommodation becomes available.</li> <li>• A small number of care leavers are homeless. This group includes some care leavers with the greatest needs, including those who struggle with their mental health, those who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) or those who are in unsuitable accommodation, or have no fixed abode.</li> <li>• Information about where young people are living is not routinely updated. This means that the local authority cannot be assured that these vulnerable young people are safe and well cared for.</li> </ul>			
Ref	Action	Action Owner	Due by	Rating
CLD1	Refresh and relaunch the protocol for care leavers in emergency accommodation, with clear escalation requirements, to ensure all practitioners are working to expected practice standards and there is senior leadership oversight of any young adults in emergency and unsuitable accommodation.	Service Manager Care Leavers	August 2024	Green

CLD2	All young people who are homeless, at risk of homelessness, or in emergency accommodation will be reviewed in weekly performance clinics and by the monthly risk management forum to ensure effective plans are in place to support and protect them.	Service Manager Care Leavers	June 2024	Green
CLD3	The weekly temporary and emergency accommodation meeting will consider any care leavers who need accommodation.	Housing Options Manager	June 2024	Green
CLD4	Deliver training for PAs on supporting young adults with housing concerns, including how to support young people to meet the criteria for housing allocation in other areas, so they can provide bespoke support tailored to young adults' needs.	Housing Options Manager	July 2024	Green
CLD5	Establish a director level project group for accommodation for cared for young people and care leavers to drive increased sufficiency.	Interim Director of Commissioning	July 2024	Green
CLD6	Explore and review the suitability of temporary and emergency accommodation options across Cheshire East to increase options for care leavers. Identify gaps in provision to inform commissioning to ensure we can meet young people's needs.	Service Manager Care Leavers Head of Housing Head of Commissioning Children, Families and Adults with Complex Needs	September 2024	Green
CLD7	Develop proposals to address 16-18 and 18-25 accommodation shortages.	Head of Housing Head of Commissioning Children, Families and Adults with Complex Needs	July 2024	Green
CLD8	Mobilise additional accommodation options for cared for young people aged 16-18 using flexibilities/ modifications in current contracts.	Head of Commissioning Children, Families and Adults with Complex Needs	October 2024	Green
CLD9	Implement a wider 18-25 accommodation offer.	Head of Housing Head of Commissioning Children, Families and Adults with Complex Needs	March 2026	Green

<b>How we'll assess if we've addressed this area</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Monthly thematic audits will conduct deep dives to understand our support to specific cohorts/ within specific areas. One theme will be accommodation.</li><li>• The thematic audit will involve phone calls to young people to understand their experiences.</li><li>• The number of young people who are homeless.</li><li>• The number of young people in unsuitable accommodation.</li></ul>	<b>What we will see when we've addressed this area</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Over 80% care leavers who live out of area access suitable housing in a timely way.</li><li>• 90% care leavers tell us they are well supported.</li><li>• Effective plans and contingency plans prevent care leavers from needing to access emergency or unsuitable accommodation. Over 80% audits will be good or better quality.</li><li>• Records on where young people are living are accurate and there is effective oversight of young people's accommodation.</li></ul>
<b>Impact to date as at June 2024</b> <i>Our assessment of where we are in relation to what the inspectors found</i>			<b>Impact Rating</b>
<b>Key improvement activities delivered this month</b>			
<i>Reporting to start from July 2024</i>			
<b>What impact we are achieving for children and young people</b> <i>What our quality assurance activity tells us – including audits, surveys, feedback from children, young people and families, and feedback from our workforce. Include any risks or if any new actions have been identified.</i>			
<b>What our performance indicators show</b>			

## E. Care leavers aged over 21

<b>Section Lead</b>	Head of Service for Cared for Children and Care Leavers
<b>What inspectors found</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>For care leavers over the age of 21, persistent efforts to engage them are not routinely made.</li> <li>When young people become 21, unless they are in education or highly vulnerable, they are no longer provided with a PA or leaving care services unless they contact a duty worker and explicitly request help. At the time of this inspection, there were over 200 young people in</li> </ul>

	<p>this category, and this included very vulnerable disabled young people. Some of these care leavers have not been receiving the services they need, or are entitled to, and the local authority cannot be assured that they are safe.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>It was not evident on young people's records that discussions had taken place to inform a decision as to young people's informed choice to move from having a personal advisor to the 21+ offer.</li> <li>Disabled care leavers who are open to the 21+ offer are not prioritised as a vulnerable group and as such the local authority cannot be assured that their needs are being met. In cases seen there was not enough evidence of persistence or curiosity in where they may be now, despite histories of having extensive engagement with services as children.</li> <li>The quality assurance of the care leaver cohort aged 21+ needs strengthening.</li> </ul>			
Ref	Action	Action Owner	Due by	Rating
CLE1	Contact all 209 care leavers aged over 21 to ensure they are aware of the support available to them and offer them an allocated worker.	Service Manager Care Leavers	March 2024	Blue
CLE2	Review the 21+ offer and approach, formalising this in a protocol and ensuring it is clear on the local offer. The protocol will include continued proactive communication post 21 so young people know what support is available.	Service Manager Care Leavers	July 2024	Green
CLE3	Review cases for care leavers with a disability who are open to the 21+ offer to ensure their needs are being met.	Service Manager Care Leavers	June 2024	Blue
CLE4	Develop a tracker for care leavers aged over 21 and monitor through weekly performance clinics to ensure there is regular oversight of engagement and support with these young people.	Service Manager Care Leavers	May 2024	Blue
CLE5	Establish regular quality assurance around care leavers aged over 21 to ensure there is effective oversight of their outcomes and that this drives improvement.	Head of Service for Cared for Children and Care Leavers  Head of Service for Safeguarding and Quality Assurance	August 2024	Green
<i>Please also see CLB5 – Review the Transition Policy.</i>				
<b>How we'll assess if we've</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Monthly thematic audits will conduct deep dives to understand our support to specific cohorts/ within specific areas. One theme will be support to those 21 and over, including those with a disability.</li> </ul>	<b>What we will see when we've addressed this area</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Persistent efforts to engage young adults over 21 are routinely made. We are in touch with over 90% of care leavers over 21 in the last 3 months.</li> </ul>	

addressed this area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The thematic audit will involve phone calls to young adults to understand their experience of services.</li><li>• The percentage of care leavers over 21 who we were in touch with within the last 3 months.</li></ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Over 90% young adults will tell us they know that support is available if they need it.</li><li>• There is effective oversight of young adults aged 21+ and their outcomes, including young adults with a disability.</li></ul>
Impact to date as at June 2024 <i>Our assessment of where we are in relation to what the inspectors found</i>			Impact Rating
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What impact we are achieving for children and young people <i>What our quality assurance activity tells us – including audits, surveys, feedback from children, young people and families, and feedback from our workforce. Include any risks or if any new actions have been identified.</i>			
What our performance indicators show			



### 3. Quality of plans

What needs to improve				
The quality of plans for children to ensure that they are more child-focused and drive forward positive change in a timely way.				
Section Lead	Head of Service for Child in Need and Child Protection			
What inspectors found	<p><b>Child in need and child protection</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The quality of child protection plans is inconsistent. Some are outcome focused although some lack purpose and urgency. Some children have been subject to protracted child protection planning.</li> <li>The quality of safety plans is inconsistent, mostly relying on vulnerable parents and are overly optimistic. The use of jargon makes it difficult for parents to understand what is required.</li> <li>Multi-agency core groups meet regularly to review progress however social workers do not routinely update children's experiences against the child protection plan.</li> <li>For some children who have been known to services for several years and have been the subject of repeat child protection and child in need plans, the quality of practice is too variable. Contingency thinking and planning are not strong enough for these children. This means that, for some children, plans are not effective in improving their outcomes.</li> <li>When child in need and child protection plans do not progress, there was drift and delay for children, and ineffective challenge from the chair and multi-agency group in child in need meetings, core groups and review conferences.</li> </ul> <p><b>Cared for children</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The quality of care plans for children is inconsistent.</li> <li>Consideration is not routinely given to permanence planning for children from an early stage.</li> <li>Some children are subject to statutory intervention for longer than they need to be. This is due to delays in the discharge of care orders.</li> </ul>			
Ref	Action	Action Owner	Due by	Rating
P1	Embed the agreed restorative practice model approach to support requirement for consistently good practice.	Principal Social Worker	August 2024	Green

P2	Continue to provide masterclasses – short in-house training sessions for practitioners and managers on specific topics. This will include planning.  The masterclass programme will continue to be responsive to audit findings to support improved practice.	Principal Social Worker	Starting in April 2024 and running throughout the year	Green
P3	Hold a management and leadership session on planning to ensure there is a shared understanding on what constitutes a good quality plan, and that the role of team managers and IROs is clear in scrutinising plans to ensure all plans are good quality.	All Service Managers	September 2024	Green
P4	Establish a panel to consider longer child protection plans and repeat plans. This will include reviews of previous plans to ensure this shapes stronger planning.	Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Manager, Child Protection	July 2024	Green
P5	Review the permanence policy to ensure permanence planning is considered and progressed from an early stage, with permanence plans being in place at the second cared for review. The permanence policy should consider all routes to permanence, including reunification.	Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Manager Cared for Children  Service Managers for Cared for Children	August 2024	Green
P6	Refresh the practice standards on care planning in line with the refreshed permanence policy to ensure expectations on practice are clear.	Service Managers for Cared for Children	August 2024	Grey
P7	Review permanence decision panels to ensure effectiveness of permanence planning.	Service Managers for Cared for Children	October 2024	Green
P8	Explore within the multiagency safeguarding group what training is needed to support effective partnership challenge.	Children's Safeguarding Partnership Training Manager	December 2024	Grey
<i>Please also see action MO5 - Embed the permanence tracker to monitor achieving permanence planning within statutory and children's timescales.</i>				
<b>How we'll assess if we've addressed this area</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Monthly practice review audits will tell us about the quality of plans across all service areas.</li> <li>Multi-agency audits will tell us about the quality of multi-agency challenge in supporting plan progression.</li> </ul>	<b>What we will see when we've addressed this area</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Plans will be consistently good quality, with effective contingency plans, child-focused and result in good outcomes for children and young people. It will be easy for everyone to see what needs to happen from the plan. Over 80% plans audited will be good or better quality.</li> </ul>	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Permanence planning will be a focus of thematic audits.</li><li>• The percentage of plans judged good or better.</li><li>• The percentage of plans within timescales.</li><li>• The percentage of children on repeat child protection plans.</li><li>• Number of children on CP plans over 15 months.</li><li>• The percentage of permanence plans in place by the second review.</li><li>• The number of children on care orders and number of care orders discharged.</li></ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Drift and delay is prevented through effective management oversight and partnership challenge.</li><li>• Consideration is routinely given to permanence planning for children from an early stage and children achieve permanence in a timely way.</li><li>• Repeat child protection plans will be under 15%.</li><li>• 100% permanence plans will be in place by the second review.</li></ul>
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<b>What impact we are achieving for children and young people</b> <i>What our quality assurance activity tells us – including audits, surveys, feedback from children, young people and families, and feedback from our workforce. Include any risks or if any new actions have been identified.</i>			
<b>What our performance indicators show</b>			

## 4. Quality and frequency of visits

What needs to improve				
The quality and frequency of visits to children so that they are purposeful and in line with assessed needs.				
Section Lead	Head of Service for Child in Need and Child Protection			
What inspectors found	<p><b>Child in need and child protection</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Visits to children in need and those subject to child protection plans are not always carried out at a frequency reflecting assessed need. Not all visits are carried out within local authority prescribed or statutory timescales. There is a lack of clarity on the expected visiting times for children in need.</li> <li>• Some children are not visited often enough for social workers to build trusting relationships with them. Changes in social workers impacts this.</li> <li>• Visits to children do not always have purpose and do not link to their plans clearly enough. Records of visits vary in depth and quality of detail. Some visits are very brief, and their contribution towards the assessment or progress of the plan is limited.</li> </ul> <p><b>Cared for children</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Visits to children in care are not always carried out in line with statutory visiting schedules or their assessed need.</li> </ul>			
Ref	Action	Action Owner	Due by	Rating
V1	Strengthen the performance framework to ensure robust performance management of visits to children.	Director of Family Help and Children's Social Care	September 2024	Green
V2	Support improved visiting practice through the masterclass training programme and briefings to team meetings.	Principal Social Worker	September 2024	Green
V3	Reissue the visiting template to practitioners to ensure consistency in recording.	Principal Social Worker	July 2024	Green
V4	Develop and roll out e-learning on visiting to support purposeful visits that are carried out with a frequency that reflects children's needs.	Principal Social Worker	July 2024	Green

How we'll assess if we've addressed this area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Monthly practice review audits will tell us about the quality of practice and visits, and the quality of relationships with children and young people.</li><li>Timeliness of visits.</li></ul>	What we will see when we've addressed this area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Visits to children are carried out at a frequency reflecting assessed need and this is clearly recorded on their files. Over 80% visits will be in line with need as shown through audit.</li><li>Children are visited often enough for social workers to build trusting relationships with them. 90% of young people will tell us they trust their social workers.</li><li>Visits to children are purposeful and clearly link to their assessments or plans.</li></ul>
Impact to date as at June 2024			Impact Rating
Our assessment of where we are in relation to what the inspectors found			
Key improvement activities delivered this month			
Reporting to start from July 2024			
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What our performance indicators show			

## 5. Management Oversight and Supervision

What needs to improve				
The quality of management oversight and supervision to ensure that consistent, good social work practice is in place.				
Section Lead	Head of Service for Child in Need and Child Protection			
What inspectors found	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Management oversight and challenge are not fully embedded across all service areas. Management oversight across all service areas does not provide sufficient challenge or reflection to improve social work practice. For some children, this has led to their needs not being recognised or acted upon in a timely way.</li> <li>The quality of supervision is too variable. Supervision is not always sufficiently analytical or reflective. Supervision is not consistently driving children's plans forward, actions although timebound roll over for many months without completion. This means not all children's circumstances are sufficiently understood.</li> <li>For a small number of young children who live in children's homes there have been significant delays in driving their care plans forward to secure long-term permanence. This is because there has not been effective management oversight and supervision of children's care plans, and IROs do not routinely challenge drift and delay.</li> <li>Recent arrangements to track permanence for children have been introduced, but it is too soon to see the impact of this, and some children continue to experience drift and delay.</li> </ul>			
Ref	Action	Action Owner	Due by	Rating
MO1	Commission a bespoke leadership development programme to support all leaders in children's services (from team leaders and above) to develop their leadership, reflective skills, and confidence in effective challenge to improve practice and outcomes for children.	Principal Social Worker	Running between March 2024 - June 2025	Green
MO2	Deliver an in-house leadership and management development programme for children's social care, tailored to our areas for improvement, to support a culture of high support and high challenge and embed consistently good quality practice.	Principal Social Worker	To commence in April 2024 and run throughout the year	Green
MO3	Update the supervision policy and develop practice guidance on reflective supervision based on best practice.	Principal Social Worker	September 2024	Green

MO4	All managers to complete supervision training to support them to deliver reflective supervision that considers children’s lived experiences, supports learning and improves practice.		Principal Social Worker	October 2024	Green
MO5	Embed the permanence tracker to monitor achieving permanence within statutory and children’s timescales.		Service Manager Cared for Children	Evaluate impact in October 2024	Green
MO6	Review the care plans for all cared for children who are not currently in foster care or planning to return home to ensure they are on the right plan.		Head of Service Safeguarding and Quality Assurance	July 2024	Green
<div><div><div>How we’ll assess if we’ve addressed this area</div><div><ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Monthly practice review audits will tell us about the quality of practice and management oversight. These audits include a review of case supervision which informs the judgement on management oversight.</li><li>The percentage of supervision within timescales.</li></ul></div></div><div><div>What we will see when we’ve addressed this area</div><div><ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Management oversight and challenge are embedded across all service areas. Over 80% of management oversight in audits will be good or better quality.</li><li>Supervision is consistently good quality, analytical and reflective.</li><li>Management oversight improves social work practice, leading to children and young people receiving timely support and experiencing good outcomes.</li><li>Children achieve permanence in a timely way.</li><li>100% children will have a permanence plan by their second review.</li><li>Over 90% supervision will be within timescales.</li></ul></div></div></div>					
Impact to date as at June 2024 <i>Our assessment of where we are in relation to what the inspectors found</i>					Impact Rating
Key improvement activities delivered this month					
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What impact we are achieving for children and young people <i>What our quality assurance activity tells us – including audits, surveys, feedback from children, young people and families, and feedback from our workforce. Include any risks or if any new actions have been identified.</i>					

What our performance indicators show

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## 6. Effectiveness of IROs

What needs to improve				
The effectiveness of child protection chairs and independent reviewing officers (IROs) to escalate, challenge and scrutinize plans for children.				
Section Lead	Head of Service for Children's Safeguarding and Quality Assurance			
What inspectors found	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Child protection chairs are not consistently effective in driving forward plans for children. Some children have been subject to protracted child protection planning, some plans lack purpose and urgency. They do not consistently advocate for children. Consequently, there are missed opportunities to act when risks increase, or changes have not happened within the child's timeframe. For example, for children who experience long-term neglect.</li> <li>Child protection chairs recognise they need to be more specific about what needs to change within the timeframe for children. Some plans are lengthy and opaque, the use of jargon makes it difficult for parents to understand what is required.</li> <li>Permanence plans are not routinely identified by the time of children's second reviews, leading to drift and delay of children's plans. For some children, IROs were not seen to actively raise this within the cared for children's review.</li> <li>IROs do not always robustly challenge the appropriateness of plans, which are not always-outcome focused, or challenge drift.</li> <li>The quality and impact of care planning for cared for children was variable. For some children, the impact of multiple social workers and IROs has resulted in drift and delay of their plans and permanence.</li> <li>For a small number of young children who live in children's homes there have been significant delays in driving their care plans forward to secure long-term permanence. This is because there has not been effective management oversight and supervision of children's care plans, and IROs do not routinely challenge drift and delay.</li> </ul>			
Ref	Action	Action Owner	Due by	Rating
IR1	Review the performance management framework for IROs to ensure that we can evidence their impact in children's plans and children's lives.	Head of Service for Children's Safeguarding and Quality Assurance	September 2024	Green
IR2	IROs will be included in the in-house and commissioned leadership and management development programme. This will ensure we have a consistent understanding of quality and expectations on practice and joint approach to improvement.	Principal Social Worker	IROs to be included by April 2024	Blue

IR3	Review and refresh the IRO practice standards to embed consistently good quality practice.		Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Managers	Review quarterly at service development days	Green
IR4	Hold an IRO service development day every 3 months to embed consistently good practice.		Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Managers	Every 3 months from June 2024	Green
IR5	Revise the guidance on IRO quality assurance alerts to support improved outcome-focused practice in line with our key improvement areas, e.g. planning, tailored visiting, and preventing drift and delay.		Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Managers	August 2024	Green
IR6	Explore and challenge performance around permanence in performance clinics with IROs to ensure this is achieved within children’s timescales.		Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Manager, Cared for Children	May 2024	Blue
<b>How we’ll assess if we’ve addressed this area</b>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Monthly practice review audits will tell us about the quality of practice and plans.</li><li>Themes and impact of IRO quality assurance alerts.</li><li>Percentage of plans that are good or better quality.</li><li>Number of children on CP plans over 15 months.</li><li>Percentage of repeat child protection plans.</li><li>Percentage of permanence plans at the second review.</li></ul>	<b>What we will see when we’ve addressed this area</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>IROs consistently drive forward plans and advocate for children. Plans are good quality, outcome-focused, and result in good outcomes for children. Over 80% plans audited will be good or better quality.</li><li>Children achieve long-term permanence in a timely way.</li><li>100% children will have a permanence plan by their second review.</li><li>Repeat child protection plans will be under 15%.</li></ul>	
<b>Impact to date as at June 2024</b> <i>Our assessment of where we are in relation to what the inspectors found</i>					<b>Impact Rating</b>
<b>Key improvement activities delivered this month</b>					
<i>Reporting to start from July 2024</i>					
<b>What impact we are achieving for children and young people</b> <i>What our quality assurance activity tells us – including audits, surveys, feedback from children, young people and families, and feedback from our workforce. Include any risks or if any new actions have been identified.</i>					

What our performance indicators show	

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## 7. Sufficiency of placements

What needs to improve				
The sufficiency of suitable placements that can meet children and young people's assessed needs.				
<b>Section Lead</b>	Head of Service Children's Provision			
<b>What inspectors found</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>When children cannot remain in the care of their birth parents, there is variability in how quickly potential carers from within the extended family are identified.</li> <li>Challenges to sufficiency impact on the choice of placements and the quality of children's experiences. Some children still live in homes that do not match their needs, due to a lack of choice. Sufficiency of in-house foster carers is a challenge.</li> <li>Some children experience multiple placement moves, which are unsettling for them. There are inconsistencies in management oversight and recording as to the rationale for this.</li> <li>A small number of young children who now live in children's homes have experienced frequent moves in foster care placements and too many changes in social worker. Some young children live in residential children's homes for long periods of time.</li> </ul>			
Ref	Action	Action Owner	Due by	Rating
S1	Embed a culture of considering support from the family network at the earliest opportunity, including identifying potential carers from within the extended family where children can't remain in the care of their birth parents.	Head of Service Child in Need and Child Protection Head of Service Cared for Children and Care Leavers	September 2024	Green
S2	Join Foster4, which will provide additional resources for fostering recruitment and training.	Head of Service Children's Provision	May 2024	Blue
S3	Work in partnership with the other local authorities to build our Foster4 offer, ensuring there is an effective front door to the fostering service so we can effectively support those who make an enquiry and increase the number of foster carers within Cheshire East.	Head of Service Children's Provision	October 2024	Green

S4	Explore opportunities within the council to increase fostering marketing and raise awareness of fostering to increase the number of people considering fostering.	Head of Service Children's Provision	October 2024	Green
S5	Develop specialist foster carers to support children and young people to step down from residential care.	Head of Service Children's Provision	December 2024	Green
S6	Develop our third Mockingbird constellation to increase support for foster carers and children and young people in foster care.	Service Manager for Fostering	August 2024	Green
S7	Open three Cheshire East Council residential children's homes, which will include one emergency bed, to increase the placement options for Cheshire East's young people.	Head of Service Children's Provision	Flude House to open in April 2024	Blue
			Claremont House to open in July 2024	Green
			Victoria Lodge to open in September 2024	Green
S8	Carry out a deep dive on reunification and step down for children from care as part of the council's transformation programme.	Head of Service Children's Provision	December 2024	Green
S9	Investigate the potential for joint commissioning of high needs placements for children with relevant system partners, developing costed business cases where required, to support increased placement options for young people.	Strong Start Programme Lead  Head of Service Children's Provision	December 2024	Grey
<b>How we'll assess if we've addressed this area</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Increase in in-house fosters and increase in range of foster carers to support different groups, for example older young people.</li><li>• Percentage of children and young people in foster care with Cheshire East carers.</li><li>• Reduction in the timeframe to bring in new foster carers.</li><li>• Number of children and young people with 3 or more placement moves.</li></ul>		<b>What we will see when we've addressed this area</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• When children cannot remain in the care of their birth parents, their networks are explored at an early stage to support them to remain with their wider family where possible.</li><li>• There is sufficient choice of placements to meet children and young people's needs, which means children are placed in a home that is right for them.</li><li>• Children and young people experience stable homes and placement moves are prevented/ limited wherever possible.</li></ul>		

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Children and young people will report that their placements meet their needs and they feel safe and supported.</li></ul>		
<b>Impact to date as at June 2024</b> <i>Our assessment of where we are in relation to what the inspectors found</i>			<b>Impact Rating</b>
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<b>What our performance indicators show</b>			

# Chapter 2

## 1. The Front Door

Section Lead		Head of Service Early Help, Prevention and Domestic Abuse			
What inspectors found		<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>For some children and families, there is a delay in the step-up from early help services to statutory services. The step-up process is not as streamlined as it should be.</li><li>For a small number of children, obtaining information from partner agencies and the voice of the child can lead to a delay in decision-making when the threshold is clearly met.</li><li>Issues relating to parental consent are not always well recorded.</li><li>The multi-agency partnership is not routinely included in social care decisions about next steps to help and protect children, or, when managers make decisions to close referrals.</li></ul>			
Ref	Action	Action Owner	Due by	Rating	
FD1	Update the contact guidance to include that where the threshold for a referral is clearly met, cases must be actioned immediately. This guidance will also include ensuring consent is clearly recorded. Embed the guidance to support consistently good practice.	Service Manager Integrated Front Door	July 2024	Green	
FD2	Review multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH) arrangements in other local authorities to learn from good practice and inform the development of multi-agency decision making in the front door.	Head of Service Early Help, Prevention and Domestic Abuse  Service Manager Integrated Front Door	July 2024	Green	
FD3	Hold a collaborative workshop to review the current front door provision and agree actions to establish multi-agency decision-making, informed by the inspection findings and observation of good practice in other areas.	Head of Service Early Help, Prevention and Domestic Abuse	September 2024	Grey	
FD4	Consider chapter 3 of Working Together 2023 in the safeguarding partnership to establish agreed multi-agency working arrangements.	Head of Service Children's Safeguarding and Quality Assurance	December 2024	Green	

		Chair of the Safeguarding Partnership and statutory partners within the partnership		
How we'll assess if we've addressed this area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Monthly multi-agency front door thematic audits will conduct deep dives to understand our support to specific cohorts/ within specific areas. One theme will be step up to social care. These audits also consider consent and timeliness of decisions.</li><li>The percentage of contacts that are referred to children's social care completed within 24 hours.</li></ul>	What we will see when we've addressed this area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Families stepping-up from early help services to statutory services will swiftly receive support. Over 90% of referrals to children's social care will be within 24 hours.</li><li>90% parental consent will be well recorded.</li><li>All decisions for referrals to children's social care will be made swiftly. Over 80% referrals audited will be good quality.</li><li>The multi-agency partnership is routinely included in social care decisions about next steps to help and protect children and when managers make decisions to close referrals.</li></ul>	
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## 2. Strategy Meetings

Section Lead		Head of Service Children's Safeguarding and Quality Assurance			
What inspectors found		• Strategy meetings do not consistently capture the discussion about risk, which means that the rational for decisions made, and next steps, is not always clear.			
Ref	Action		Action Owner	Due by	Rating
SM1	Deliver a workshop on strategy meetings for team managers to support consistently good practice.		Service Managers CINCP	August 2024	Green
SM2	Deliver training for unit coordinators on minute taking to support consistently good practice across the team in capturing discussions on risk.		Children and Family Service Business Support Lead	August 2024	Green
SM3	A management analysis box to be added to the strategy discussion form to ensure a clear rationale for decisions is included.		Service Managers CINCP	June 2024	Blue
How we'll assess if we've addressed this area		• Strategy discussion audits within the 8-weekly multi-agency liaison meetings will tell us about the quality of strategy discussions and whether the rationale for decisions is clearly recorded.	What we will see when we've addressed this area	• Strategy meetings consistently capture the discussion about risk which means that the rational for decisions and next steps is clear. 90% strategy discussions will have a clear rationale for decisions.	
Impact to date as at June 2024					Impact Rating
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What our performance indicators show	

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### 3. Life-story work and later-life letters

Section Lead		Head of Service for Cared for Children and Care Leavers			
What inspectors found		• Life-story work and later-life letters are not usually started in a timely way. This means that children have limited opportunities to understand their journey into care at a time that is right for them.			
Ref	Action		Action Owner	Due by	Rating
LS1	Commission external training on life-story work to ensure practitioners understand the expectation, importance, and how to complete it.		Principal Social Worker	July 2024	Green
LS2	Include in the permanence policy and practice standards for care planning that the expectation for every child is that life story work and later life letters are started early.		Service Managers Cared for Children  Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Manager Cared for Children	August 2024	Green
LS3	Establish a process for monitoring and reviewing life-story work and later-life letters.		Service Managers Cared for Children	August 2024	Green
How we'll assess if we've addressed this area		• Feedback from children and young people, and their carers – children will tell us they have a better understanding of their life stories.	What we will see when we've addressed this area	• Life-story work and later-life letters are started early so children understand why they are in care.	
Impact to date as at June 2024 <i>Our assessment of where we are in relation to what the inspectors found</i>					Impact Rating
Key improvement activities delivered this month					
Reporting to start from July 2024					

**What impact we are achieving for children and young people**

*What our quality assurance activity tells us – including audits, surveys, feedback from children, young people and families, and feedback from our workforce. Include any risks or if any new actions have been identified.*

**What our performance indicators show**

## 4. Health of Cared for Children

Section Lead		Associate Director Quality and Safety Cheshire East, Cheshire and Merseyside NHS		
What inspectors found		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Waiting lists result in some delay in children accessing emotional support services.</li> <li>A small number of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) and young people wait too long to access emotional support and counselling due to waiting lists.</li> <li>Initial and review health assessments are not always completed within appropriate timescales.</li> </ul>		
Ref	Action <i>What we will do</i>	Action Owner	Due by	Rating
H1	Develop prioritisation matrices/ approaches to ensure the most vulnerable children and young people are prioritised for support based on an understanding of the additional and differing needs and risks for children with experience of the care system.	Head of Commissioning Children, Families and Adults with Complex Needs Programme Lead for Mental Health and Neurodiversity – Cheshire East NHS ICB	March 2025	Green
H2	Develop 'waiting well' initiatives with key health providers and third sector provision to support children and young people while they wait based on an understanding of protective factors and how they can be increased and developed in response to needs.	Head of Commissioning Children, Families and Adults with Complex Needs Programme Lead for Mental Health and Neurodiversity – Cheshire East NHS ICB	March 2025	Green
H3	Review the current emotional support offer for UASC young people in Cheshire East, taking into account any recommendations/ good practice from the Cheshire and Merseyside scoping exercise on support to UASC young people.	Designated Nurse Safeguarding and Looked After Children	March 2025	Green
H4	Health and children's social care to jointly review the timeliness of health assessments on a six-weekly basis to support improved timeliness.	Service Manager Cared for Children Designated Nurse Safeguarding and Looked After Children	May 2024	Blue
H5	Develop a single point of contact for health assessments within the local authority to support increased timeliness.	Service Manager Cared for Children	May 2024	Blue

H6	Report quarterly to NHS England on out of area initial and review health assessments that are out of timescale to drive improved timeliness.		Designated Nurse Safeguarding and Looked After Children	May 2024	Blue
How we'll assess if we've addressed this area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Waiting lists for children and young people's mental health services (CYPMHS).</li><li>• Timeliness of annual health assessments, initial and review health assessments.</li></ul>	What we will see when we've addressed this area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Children and young people access children and young people's mental health services (CYPMHS) without delay. 90% of non-urgent referrals receive an assessment within 6 weeks. 90% wait no more than 6 weeks between assessment and treatment.</li><li>• 90% annual health assessments will be completed within timescales.</li></ul>		
Impact to date as at June 2024					Impact Rating
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## 5. Education for Cared for Children

Section Lead		Head of Service for Inclusion		
What inspectors found		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Too many primary-aged children in care experience attendance issues as they move into secondary school.</li> <li>Personal education plans (PEPs) contain the required information, but outcomes for children in care overall are low.</li> <li>Many children in care are ill-prepared for adulthood and struggle to cope with the challenges that they face when they leave care.</li> <li>The identification of children and young people who are at risk of not being in employment, education or training (NEET) does not begin early enough.</li> </ul>		
Ref	Action	Action Owner	Due by	Rating
ED1	Review attendance through education advisors' fortnightly attendance meetings and determine clear actions for young people to improve their attendance.	Head of Service for Inclusion	April 2024	Blue
ED2	Review the plans for those with lower than 50% attendance, in alternative provision, or not in full time education, in a forum chaired by a head of service, to ensure there are clear actions on what needs to happen and there is senior leader oversight of these young people.	Head of Service for Inclusion	April 2024	Blue
ED3	Hold multi-disciplinary team meetings for individual children and young people when required to improve attendance. These meetings develop a plan to improve attendance and continue to meet until attendance has improved.	Head of Service for Inclusion	April 2024	Blue
ED4	Improve the quality of PEPs through delivering training, ensuring we are ambitious for young people, targets are SMART, and there is a clear early planning for preparing young people for adulthood and securing EET.	Head of Service for Inclusion	Delivery from September - December 2024	Green
ED5	Review the PEP form to ensure that this supports improvement in areas where care experienced young people attain less well than their peers, for example reading.	Head of Service for Inclusion	September 2024	Green
ED6	Report cared for children's attainment against their peers within scorecards and performance reports to drive improved performance.	Head of Service for Inclusion	September 2024	Green

ED7	Audit young adults who are NEET at 20 and look what learning can be taken from their preparation for adulthood to improve our support.		Head of Service for Inclusion Service Manager for Care Leavers	August 2024	Green
ED8	Use the risk of NEET indicators (RONI) to identify which cared for young people in Year 11 are at risk of NEET and ensure that the right support is in place to support them into EET.		Area Delivery Manager Youth Support Service – NEET and Preparing for Adulthood	November 2024	Green
How we'll assess if we've addressed this area		<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Percentage attendance for cared for children.</li><li>• Educational outcomes for cared for children.</li><li>• PEP audits will tell us about the quality of PEPs and impact, and how well they support preparation for adulthood and prevent young people becoming NEET.</li><li>• Percentage of PEPs that are good or better quality.</li><li>• Percentage of young people in care in Year 12 and 13 that are NEET.</li></ul>	What we will see when we've addressed this area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 95% attendance for all cared for children</li><li>• Educational outcomes for cared for children are good and in line with their peers.</li><li>• Cared for young people are well prepared for adulthood.</li><li>• Children and young people who are at risk of NEET begins early and helps to prevent them becoming NEET.</li><li>• 95% of PEPs are graded as good or better</li><li>• 90% of young people in care in Year 12 and 13 are EET.</li></ul>	
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What our performance indicators show					



## 6. Workforce

Section Lead		Director of Family Help and Children's Social Care		
What inspectors found		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Frequent changes in social workers impact on the quality of relationships and the progress of plans for some children, leading to delay.</li> <li>Too many children have experienced changes in social worker, which means they must retell their story, and this prevents them from being able to build trusting relationships.</li> <li>The impact of multiple social workers and IROs on care planning has resulted in drift and delay for some children in achieving permanence.</li> </ul>		
Ref	Action	Action Owner	Due by	Rating
W1	Review capacity across children's social care and supporting services to deliver the improvement plan and develop a costed proposal to the Children and Families Committee.	Director of Family Help and Children's Social Care	July 2024	Green
W2	Assess demand to the care leavers service and determine what capacity is needed to support allocation at 15 years 9 months and to increase support to care leavers aged 21+.	Service Manager Care Leavers	July 2024	Green
W3	Review capacity across the two IRO teams to look at how we can create dedicated time for supporting and driving improved outcomes for care leavers.	Head of Service Children's Safeguarding and Quality Assurance	July 2024	Green
W4	Reestablish a workforce, recruitment and retention group for children's social care.	Director of Family Help and Children's Social Care	September 2024	Grey
W5	Refresh the recruitment and retention strategy.	Head of HR Principal Social Worker	December 2024	Grey
W6	Develop and launch a refreshed recruitment campaign to attract high quality practitioners and managers to Cheshire East.	Head of HR Principal Social Worker	January 2025	Grey
W7	Develop reporting on caseloads specific to each service on what we would expect to see to support effective oversight.	Executive Director of Children's Services	August 2024	Green

		Business Intelligence Manager			
W8	Launch a level 7 apprentice scheme (a masters equivalent programme, so a shorter programme than our current BA equivalent level 6 apprenticeships) to supplement our current scheme supporting people to train as social workers with Cheshire East.		Principal Social Worker	To start in March 2025	Green
W9	Seek practitioners' views on the support they receive to deliver good practice, workloads, and progress to date, through the practice review audits, elected member frontline visits, and walking the floor.		Executive Director of Children's Services	Quarterly review	Green
W10	Keep the children's workforce updated on developments around the inspection findings through the monthly children's newsletter and monthly talk together sessions with the DCS to ensure there is a joined up approach to improvement.		Executive Director of Children's Services	Quarterly review	Green
<b>How we'll assess if we've addressed this area</b>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Monthly practice review audits will tell us about the quality of practice across all service areas and include feedback from children and families on their relationships with their workers.</li><li>• Caseload data.</li><li>• The percentage of social worker vacancies, and the percentage turnover rate for social workers.</li></ul>	<b>What we will see when we've addressed this area</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Social workers build effective and trusting relationships with children and families, which supports improved outcomes for children and young people. 90% young people tell us that they trust their social workers.</li><li>• Teams are stable, meaning children and young people don't experience frequent changes in social worker or IROs.</li><li>• Average caseloads are 15 for AYSEs, 20 for cared for, and 23 for CINCP.</li><li>• 80% practitioners tell us that their caseloads are manageable and they feel well supported by managers.</li></ul>	
<b>Impact to date as at June 2024</b> <i>Our assessment of where we are in relation to what the inspectors found</i>					<b>Impact Rating</b>
<b>Key improvement activities delivered this month</b>					
<i>Reporting to start from July 2024</i>					
<b>What impact we are achieving for children and young people</b> <i>What our quality assurance activity tells us – including audits, surveys, feedback from children, young people and families, and feedback from our workforce. Include any risks or if any new actions have been identified.</i>					

What our performance indicators show	

DRAFT

## Appendix 2: Financial Support to the Improvement Plan

### Purpose of Report

- 1 This report sets out the additional financial support needed over the next 18 months to ensure we can deliver the necessary improvements following the Ofsted ILACS inspection.
- 2 Cheshire East Council's Children's Services has received an inadequate judgement. This inspection outcome has demonstrated that there are areas that must be addressed at pace, to improve outcomes for children and young people. The service is committed to taking the necessary steps to improve all areas identified within the inspection, in a timely way to ensure good outcomes for children and young people and to provide assurance to elected members that the arrangements in place to address the shortcomings and make the necessary improvements, are sufficiently robust and will deliver good or better outcomes for children and young people of Cheshire East.
- 3 Committee is recommended to approve the financial support outlined in this paper.

### Cost of inadequate judgements

- 4 The council is experiencing significant financial challenge and Children's Services recognise the role that it has in ensuring good provision of services to children and young people whilst also demonstrating effective financial management. From the experiences of other local authorities, inadequate judgements bring additional costs. Advice from the sector is that the costs to council's judged inadequate can range from £5m-£15m.
- 5 We estimate that the costs for Cheshire East will not be as significant, as only one of our service areas was judged to be inadequate and we have demonstrated that we already have effective processes in place to deliver improvements.
- 6 There is a significant reputational and financial risk to not delivering improvements. If services remain inadequate at the next inspection, further intervention measures may need to be put in place, for example escalation to a Statutory Direction notice, or Direction that another person or organisation performs the functions on the local authority's behalf. These measures will have a significantly higher cost. The identified funding at this stage is to

reduce the risk of Cheshire East Children's Services moving in and out of inadequate Ofsted judgements and to support the service to achieve good or better outcomes for children and young people.

### **Additional capacity to support achieving consistently good practice**

- 7 Having sufficient frontline practitioners to work directly with children, young people and families is critical in supporting consistently good quality services. Whilst we note that the inspection report identified manageable caseloads, it is also the case that they didn't find consistently good practice. We propose to increase capacity to enable practitioners to have time to conduct good quality work, accurately record this, and have time to undertake training and development and reflect on practice with their managers and teams.
- 8 Additional roles are also recommended to support our transformation to a Children's Services that benefit from tried and tested models of working that support children to be supported within their own families and networks. The Independent Review into Children's Social Care and subsequent government pathfinders [Families first for children \(FFC\) pathfinder programme and family networks pilot \(FNP\) - GOV.UK \(\[www.gov.uk\]\(http://www.gov.uk\)\)](#) is leading the way in local authorities supporting families and kinship carers to be able to care for their children at home. Developing approaches around Family Group Conferencing, including lifelong support for Care Leavers, strong edge of care offer and capacity within Connected Carer Services will strengthen our programme to support children at home, reduce demand into services and help to manage the council expenditure on placement costs.
- 9 Additional posts have been costed for 18 months with an approximate start date of 2 September 2024, to allow for time to recruit.
- 10 It is proposed that the core social care posts of social workers, Personal Advisors (PAs), Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) and Team Leaders will be recruited to on a permanent basis. This will make the posts more attractive to recruit to in a challenging market and will prevent post holders leaving posts early as they look for new work before their contract ends. It avoids the need to recruit to these posts on a costly agency basis. We know we can expect movement within the system and these posts will be used to fill vacancies created by the normal flux in the workforce as people move to new opportunities, as we come to the end of the 18-month period. There is also an opportunity to utilise posts as part of a bank of workers as an alternative to using agency workers at a higher cost to the authority.
- 11 These core social care posts will be critical in supporting care leavers, by ensuring caseloads for PAs and social workers supporting cared for children and care leavers, are maintained at a sufficiently low level to allow for good practice to flourish and ensuring that there is sufficient time to build and sustain relationships with young people. Having sufficient capacity in the IRO Service will ensure independent oversight of care leaver's pathway plans and

the additional Team Leaders capacity will be used to develop a Family Group Conferencing offer that will include development of an approach to support care leavers to build and sustain lifelong relationships with their birth families and networks.

- 12 Advice has been provided by the DfE Advisor to Children's Services, the Local Government Association (LGA) and the DfE in relation to the need to consider the current capacity and resources within the Directorate. This report is to ensure transparency to elected members, that in order to progress improvements at pace and deliver services that are good or better for the children of Cheshire East, we need to identify additional funding. The table below sets out what will be required to improve services.

13 Revenue costings

<u>Roles required</u>	<u>Grade</u>	<u>Rationale</u>	<u>2024/25</u>	<u>2025/26</u>	<u>Improvement plan ref</u>
Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO) x 2	11	Additional IROs will bring Cheshire East in line with the IRO Handbook recommendation for the number of children allocated to an IRO. This will ensure independent reviews of Care Leaver's Pathway Plans. Further work in relation to reunification, edge of care and support to families will reduce Cared for Children numbers.	£82,842	£133,434	IP Ch.1, S. 6
Connected Carer Assessors x 2	10	Additional capacity to build on existing work to support children to remain in the care of Connected and Kinship Carers, as per the recommendation of the Independent Review into Children's Social Care.  This will ensure that we can reduce reliance on the external market, providing long term sustainable homes for children in care and care leavers.	£71,212	£114,702	IP Ch.1, S.3, P.5
Social Worker x 6	10	Manageable caseloads for social workers across the system, with responsibility for cared for children, is essential to ensure time for good care	£213,636	£344,106	IP Ch.2, S.6

		<p>planning and permanency planning.</p> <p>Having the capacity for good planning at the earlier stages of a child coming into care, will ensure that where children can be supported to return home to family or family networks, this will be achieved in a timely manner. This will result in the right children remaining in our care.</p> <p>Where children do need to remain in our care and become our care leavers, social workers and their Team Managers, will have the capacity to develop good relationships with them and provide quality support as they progress into adulthood.</p>			
Team Leaders x 2	11	Additional Team Leader capacity is needed to support transformation work of Edge of Care and Family Group Conferencing.	<i>Starting in April 2025</i>	£133,434	IP Ch.2, S.6
PAs x 3	7	The Care Leavers Service was inadequate in the recent Ofsted inspection. Additional PA support is needed to ensure that the service has sufficient capacity to support care leavers, including 21+ appropriately.	£77,517	£124,860	IP Ch.1, S.2
Quality Assurance Officer	11	<p>Having an effective quality assurance framework is essential to truly know ourselves and understand the quality of practice across services.</p> <p>The QA Framework has evolved to ensure that a wider range of QA activity is taking place, including themed practice audits of the support and</p>	£41,421	£66,717	IP Ch.1, SL1

		intervention being offered to care leavers.			
Family Group Conference (FGC) Support Workers x 4	7	FGC and lifelong support to care leavers, is important to improve the numbers of children remaining with and in contact with their birth family/networks.	<i>Starting in April 2025</i>	£166,480	IP Ch.1, S.3, P.5
Edge of Care Support Workers x 5	7	Strengthening our Edge of Care Service to offer support to children, young people and families, where they require additional support to care for their children at home and to manage risk in the community.	<i>Starting in April 2025</i>	£208,100	
Project Manager to lead development of 18-25 accommodation	11	To develop accommodation sufficiency for 18-25 year olds as identified by Ofsted. Lack of sufficiency in Cheshire East is leading to higher costs for accommodation.	£41,421	£66,717	IP Ch.1, S.2, D
Specialist expert support		Additional expert capacity as and when necessary, to support quality of practice in specialist areas	£100,000		P Ch.1, S.1
Total Cost over 2 years		<b>£1,986,599</b>	<b>£628,049</b>	<b>£1,358,550</b>	

- 14 Where possible, we will utilise any free resources that are available from the DfE, LGA or Sector Led Improvement Partner (SLIP) arrangements, to support the improvement journey. We are keen to continue learning from best practice elsewhere.

#### **How this will be managed within the current budget**

- 15 The additional costs to support the improvement programme will be met through the diversion of underutilised growth, achieved through prudent budget management of a commercially sensitive area.
- 16 If there are any in year adjustments within the budget for children's services, any surplus will be returned to offset any pressures due to the improvement activity.
- 17 As part of the MTFS, Children's Services will continue with work to reduce the costs of placements through developing robust edge of care services, permanency and reunification to families and connected carers.



**Capital investment to improve placement sufficiency**

- 18 The challenges associated with sourcing suitable accommodation should not be underestimated and interdepartmental and partnership work will be required to ensure that the right solution is arrived at, at pace within the parameters of the challenging financial situation.
- 19 There may be a strong case for invest to save propositions which will need to be considered in year to avoid any drift in delivery. We are exploring the use of s106 funding and capital receipts to increase sufficiency for young people aged 18+, which was a key deficit highlighted within the inspection.
- 20 Any proposal, as required will be presented to the necessary committees.

**Access to Information**

Contact Officer:	Andrea Stone – Interim Director of Family Help and Children’s Social Care  <a href="mailto:andrea.stone@cheshireeast.gov.uk">andrea.stone@cheshireeast.gov.uk</a>
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## **Council**

**17 July 2024**

## **Proposed New Senior Management Structure**

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**Report of: Rob Polkinghorne, Chief Executive Officer Report**

**Reference No: C/10/24-25**

**Ward(s) Affected: All wards**

### **Purpose of Report**

- 1 The report provides an update on the independent review of the current senior management organisational structure conducted by the Local Government Association as well as the next steps in the process to bring the necessary senior management capacity to deliver transformation over the next four years and thereafter.
- 2 The report requests approval for the delegation to the Chief Executive to progress the creation of a draft senior management structure and provides an update on the recruitment for the post of Executive Director Place.
- 3 This contributes to the Council's Corporate Plan 2021-25 and the strategic aim to be an open and enabling organisation.

### **Executive Summary**

- 4 At the request of the Chief Executive, the Local Government Association has conducted an independent review of the current senior management organisational structure at Cheshire East Council, making recommendations to help to creating the right conditions for stability and sustainability to lead the organisation through necessary change.
- 5 This review, together with the feedback from the recent Corporate Peer Review, has informed further discussions with the Chief Executive and the Corporate Leadership Team about a proposed new senior management structure.

- 6 There are a significant number of vacant posts and acting up arrangements within the whole organisation but also within the current senior leadership team. Feedback from the independent review and the Corporate Peer Challenge is that this has created a lack of capacity and stability to enable the strategic and operational leadership to address the fiscal pressures and the need to transform to meet current and future challenges.
- 7 The report requests approval for the delegation to the Chief Executive for the next steps following the LGA independent review with an indicative timeline.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

The Council is recommended to:

1. Note the update on the independent review of the current senior management organisational structure.
2. Delegate authority to the Chief Executive to
  - produce a draft new senior management structure,
  - undertake consultation with affected employees and trade unions on the draft, and
  - present a final structure to Corporate Policy Committee for recommendation to Full Council for approval, including approval of any new positions with salaries in excess of £100,000 per annum.
3. Note the update on the recruitment to the post of Executive Director Place.
4. Note the indicative timetable required to conclude the review.

#### Background

- 8 The current operating environment for local government in general, and for Cheshire East Council, in particular requires the Council to adapt to circumstances. The current fiscal pressure requires Cheshire East Council to change and adapt at pace.
- 9 As part of this process, the Local Government Association was invited by the Chief Executive to conduct an independent review of the current organisational structure at Cheshire East Council. Using decision making accountability methodology (Appendix 1), the review explored the senior organisational structure and to identify opportunities to transform services, review acting up arrangements and vacant roles to

achieve capacity and capability and provide recommendations for a stable and sustainable organisational structure.

- 10 This review, together with the feedback from the recent Corporate Peer Review, has informed further discussions with the Chief Executive and the Corporate Leadership Team about a proposed new senior management structure.
- 11 Currently there are a significant number of vacant posts and acting up arrangements within the whole organisation but also with the senior leadership team which has resulted in a lack of capacity and stability to enable the strategic and operational leadership to address the fiscal pressures and the need to transform to meet current and future challenges. The current senior management structure is shown in Appendix 2.
- 12 Further work is currently being undertaken to refine the proposed new senior management to ensure that it is linked to the transformation programme.
- 13 The final recommendations from the review will inform the Chief Executive in the development of the proposed draft senior management structure, which will be the subject of formal consultation with affected employees and trade unions.
- 14 This is a precursor to further transformational change and has a direct impact to the success of any transformation programme.
- 15 The initial feedback from the corporate peer challenge has acknowledged the urgent need to commence recruitment to permanent roles. The lack of capacity across the organisation at the senior level is hindering the Council ability to respond to the current fiscal situation.
- 16 Recommendation 2 ensures the Chief Executive is able to present a final structure to Corporate Policy Committee for recommendation to Full Council for approval, including obtaining approval for any new positions with salaries in excess of £100,000 per annum in October 2024.
- 17 As there is no Corporate Policy Committee meeting scheduled prior to the date of the next Council meeting, unless full Council wishes to have final member approval via committee (for example a potential date on 21 August 2024) of the proposed senior management structure, the Chief Executive requires this delegation to ensure that consultation is completed, and the final structure is presented to Corporate Policy Committee for recommendation to Full Council for approval as outlined above. It is also to ensure that we are able to commence timely recruitment.

- 18 The Chief Executive would undertake this delegation in consultation with the Head of Human Resources and, where needed, external verification and support.
- 19 It is also proposed that there will be an all member briefing on 21 August 2024 prior to commencing formal consultation with affected employees and trade unions.
- 20 The indicative timeline can be seen in Appendix 3.
- 21 In relation to the recruitment to the role of Executive Director Place, at the meeting on 29 April 2024, the Appointments Committee approved the appointment of a recruitment partner for the permanent recruitment of any Executive Director (and subsequent other vacant director or equivalent roles).
- 22 Penna Executive Search has been appointed as the recruitment partner for the recruitment of the Executive Director Place.
- 23 Recruitment for the post is underway with the closing date for applicants being 19 July 2024.
- 24 The Appointments Committee will meet to undertake long-listing of applicants who will then undertake a technical assessment with support from Penna, the executive search partner.
- 25 The Appointments Committee will then shortlist candidates to be invited for an assessment centre and final interviews in August 2024.

## **Consultation and Engagement**

- 26 Following the conclusion of the LGA review, the subsequent new senior management structure will be subject to formal consultation with affected staff and the recognised trade unions.
- 27 After the close of consultation, consideration will be given to the feedback and the structure will be finalised, subject to CPC recommendation to Full Council for approval.

## **Reasons for Recommendations**

- 28 The key reasons for the recommendations are linked to the Council's Corporate Plan 2021 – 25, strategic aims and objectives:
  - An enabling organisation:
    - Ensure that there is transparency in all aspects of council decision making.

- Listen, learn and respond to our residents, promoting opportunities for a two-way conversation.
  - Support a sustainable financial future for the council, through service development, improvement and transformation.
  - Support and develop our workforce to be confident, motivated, innovative, resilient and empowered.
- 29 The decision-making and accountability report in relation to the independent review by the Local Government Association to Corporate Policy Committee 21 March 2024, stated the review would inform decisions on resourcing and capacity for transformation and the initial draft recommendations are being considered by the Chief Executive.
- 30 The initial feedback corporate peer challenge has acknowledged the urgent need to commence recruitment to permanent roles. The lack of capacity across the organisation at the senior level is hindering the Council ability to respond to the current fiscal situation. It has been suggested “the current management structure resembles Swiss cheese, by virtue of gaps appearing through people leaving the organisation and not being replaced rather than through any coherent design”.
- 31 The current structure shown in Appendix 2 identifies the senior management posts that are currently vacant or have been filled on a temporary basis.
- 32 The Chief Executive will develop a new senior management structure, subject to consultation with trade unions and affected staff, to reflect the need for capacity and cohesion as identified through the LGA independent review and the corporate peer challenge.
- 33 The risk of not being able to present the final senior management structure with recommendation from CPC for approval by Full Council in October 2024 would be that commencement of any subsequent recruitment would be January 2025 at the earliest. There will be on-going expenditure on interim arrangements as well as the council not being able to secure the capacity and stability it needs at a senior level.

## **Other Options Considered**

- 34 There is a need to fill vacant posts and address temporary acting up arrangements to provide capacity and stability within the senior management structure.
- 35 The current senior management structure has evolved over time and is no longer considered fit for purpose.
- 36 There was a review of the senior management team in 2019 with further changes being made in 2021. However, since then temporary arrangements have been put in place and a number of posts are vacant.
- 37 The option to recruit to the current structure would be a straightforward and time effective solution for the council. However, through the work of the LGA review and corporate peer challenge, it is clear that the current structure does not provide the necessary capacity or focus for the programme that is required to identify opportunities to transform services and address the council's financial stability for an effective, stable and sustainable organisational structure.

## **Implications and Comments**

### *Monitoring Officer/Legal*

- 38 The proposals within the report regarding the senior management structure particularly those as to consultation, are in line with the Council's policies regarding organisational change and restructures,.
- 39 It is noted that following consultation, the results and final draft structure will be reported back to Corporate Policy Committee for consideration and recommendation to full Council for final approval, including for any new positions with proposed salaries in excess of £100,000 per annum.
- 40 Any new posts with a proposed salary of £100,000 or more will need to be approved by Full Council, in accordance with the Constitution and the Council's Pay Policy Statement.
- 41 Recruitment must be undertaken in accordance with the Constitution, which requires recruitment to the roles of designated statutory officers, (DSO i.e. Head of the Paid Service, Monitoring Officer and Chief Finance Officer) statutory directors and Executive Directors to be undertaken by the Council's Appointments Committees with formal appointments to the DSO roles to be made by full Council. The recruitment must also comply with the Employment Procedure Rules as well as appropriate HR policies and Procedures.

- 42 All appointments as part of the senior management restructure must be in accordance with the budget and pay policy statement.

*Section 151 Officer/Finance*

- 43 The proposals within this report are contained within existing budgets.
- 44 By completing the restructure in a timely way, this will ensure that there is sufficient capacity to lead the change required to deliver financial sustainability within the organisation including identifying and delivering the reductions in budget required in the future years of the Medium Term Financial Strategy.

*Policy*

- 45 The restructure process and consultation will be undertaken in line with the Council's Organisational Change Policy and Procedure.
- 46 The appointments will be made with reference to the pay policy statement to provide transparency to the Council's approach to setting the pay of its senior managers.
- 47 The senior management positions are subject to the Hay job evaluation scheme to allocate them into the Cheshire East Senior Management pay bands.
- 48 The report supports the following priorities in the [Corporate Plan](#)

<b>An open and enabling organisation</b>	<b>A council which empowers and cares about people</b>	<b>A thriving and sustainable place</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure that there is transparency in all aspects of council decision making.</li> <li>• Listen, learn and respond to our residents, promoting opportunities for a two-way conversation.</li> <li>• Support a sustainable financial future for the council, through service development, improvement and transformation.</li> <li>• Support and develop our workforce to be</li> </ul>		



confident, motivated, innovative, resilient and empowered.		
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### *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion*

- 49 The recruitment and selection process will be open, fair and inclusive which reflect our vision, values and Employee Deal, ensuring objective recruitment decisions are made.
- 50 An Equality Impact Assessment will be conducted in as part of the preparation for the subsequent restructure consultation.

### *Human Resources*

- 51 Actions will be undertaken in accordance with the Constitution and the Employment Procedure Rules as well as appropriate HR policies and Procedures.
- 52 Necessary consultation will take place with staff and the recognised trade unions.

### *Risk Management*

- 53 As identified in the strategic risk register, the impact of restricted recruitment (and spending) has been identified as a significant risk in relation to both the Leadership Capacity and Ability to Achieve Organisational Change risks. This report assists in the mitigation of the strategic risk reported to Corporate Policy Committee on 21 March 2024, specifically SR07 and SR09.

### *Rural Communities*

- 54 None

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

- 55 The new proposed structure for the overall council, in particular Children's Services, will enhance service delivery for all Cheshire East children and young people.

### *Public Health*

- 56 None

*Climate Change*

57    None

<b>Access to Information</b>	
Contact Officer:	Sara Barker, Head of Human Resources <a href="mailto:Sara.barker@cheshireeast.gov.uk">Sara.barker@cheshireeast.gov.uk</a>
Appendices:	Appendix 1 – Decision-Making Accountability Methodology Appendix 2 – Current Senior Manager Structure Appendix 3 - Indicative Timeline for the DMA Review and the Senior Management Structure
Background Papers:	None

## LGA Review: Decision Making Accountability



## Cheshire East Council – Senior leadership

### DMA Review – Approach and Methodology



#### Introduction

The Local Government Association was invited to assist with an independent review of the current organisational structure at Cheshire East Council. The brief was to explore the senior organisational structure with Directors and to identify opportunities to transform services, review acting up arrangements and vacant roles to achieve capacity and capability and provide recommendations for a stable and sustainable organisational structure.

The review focussed on analysing the appropriate layers and spans of management for the Senior Leadership Team. It looked at how greater strategic and operational capacity could be found by identifying synergies, whilst ensuring the effective future strategic leadership of the council and the delivery of good outcomes for residents and communities within Cheshire East.

It should be noted that the OFSTED inspection prevented us exploring Childrens Services in more detail, but we would recommend investing in capacity to drive improvement.

#### Methodology

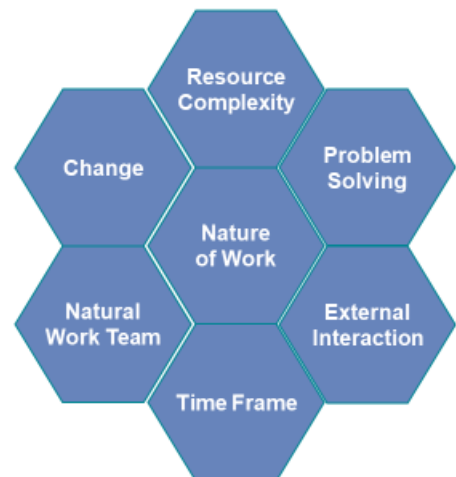
We spoke to the Chief Executive and members of the Senior Leadership Team individually about the current senior management structure, the service areas and the associated benefits and challenges. We also held a drop-in session for Heads of Service to have their say.

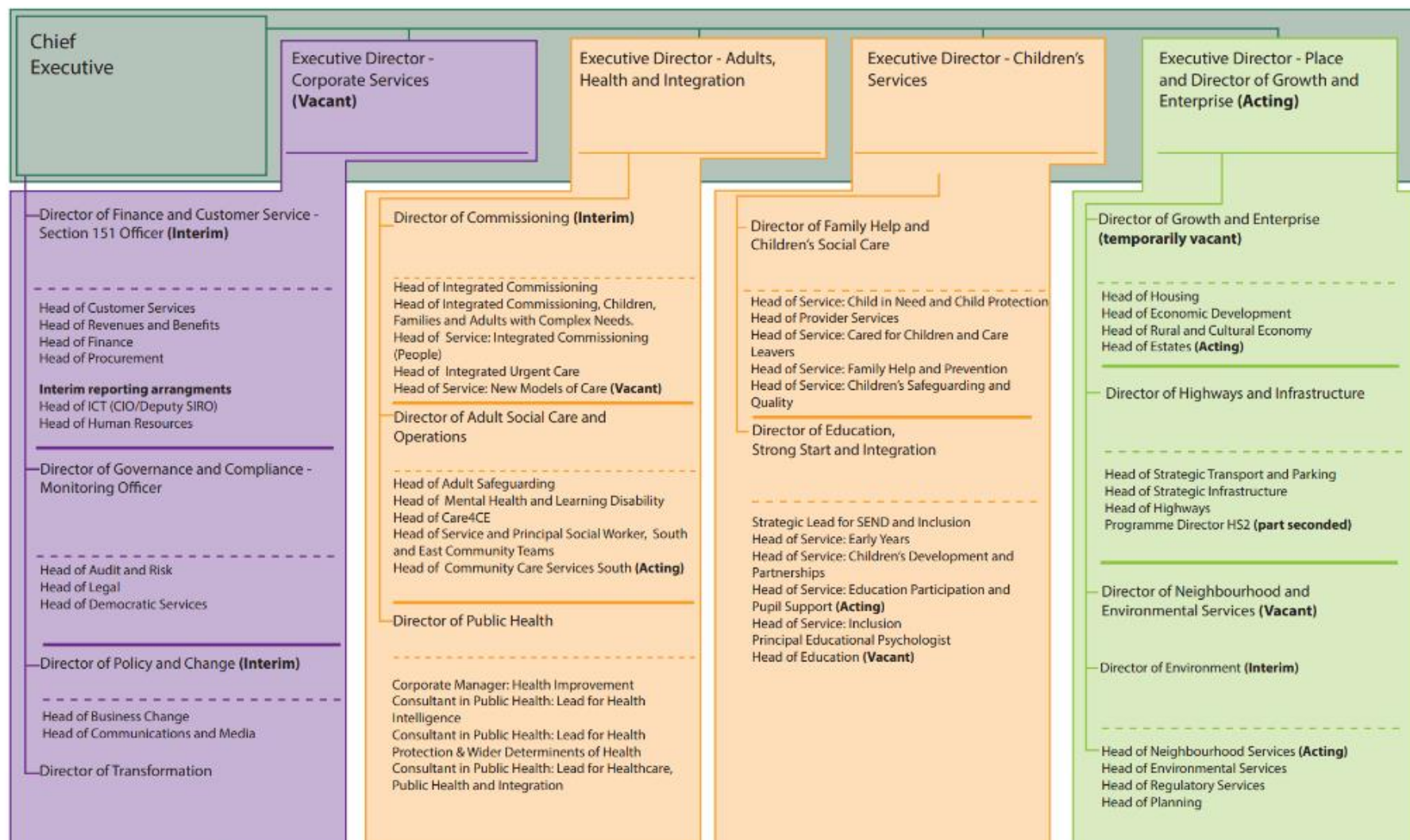
The structured conversations gathered evidence from the senior management team about their experience of working practice, future needs, and we have incorporated their suggestions regarding a new organisational structure within a shrinking budget envelope into this report.

We very much appreciated the welcome we received, the openness and honesty with which everyone engaged in the process and the support provided in the lead up to and during the project.

## DMA Approach

- Decision Making Accountability (DMA) is a methodology which supports effective organisational design.
- Developed by Brian Dive in Unilever, DMA has successfully been applied across many private and public sector organisations (amongst others, Unilever and Tesco).
- Adopted as an Organisational Design tool by LGA, it is now used in numerous councils of all types to identify efficient and cost-effective organisational structures which are fit for the future.
- It is a robust, proven framework to help diagnose and design healthy management hierarchies.
- DMA determines the number of organisational levels based on decision-making accountability. The approach argues that only one layer of management is required for each DMA level.
- DMA analysis begins at the Frontline (whether internally or externally facing these are the roles at the 'bottom' of the hierarchy that do the core work of the organisation). Each management tier in the hierarchy should add clear value to the Frontline, or to the layer of managers below it – "is every management layer adding value for the residents and the work of others?"





## Indicative Timeline for the LGA Review and the proposed new Senior Management Structure

Potential Date / Timescales	Activity
17 July 2024	<b>Council – report to update on LGA Review</b>
Mid July – Mid August (1 month minimum)	<b>HR / Chief Executive</b> <b>Preparation for the new proposed senior management structure and consultation</b> To compile: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Job Descriptions and Person Specifications and complete job evaluation</li> <li>b. Draft senior management structure and document for consultation</li> </ul>
21 August 2024	<b>Chief Executive</b> Provides a member briefing on the new senior management structure and formal staff and trade union consultation
22 August – 20 September 2024 (30 days minimum)	<b>Chief Executive</b> Consultation with Directors and their direct reports
September 2024	<b>HR / Chief Executive</b> Procure an executive search partner for Senior Management Restructure (final number of jobs TBC)
23 – 24 September 2024	<b>Chief Executive / HR</b> Finalises new structure and proposed salaries for posts. (some job may need to be reviewed / re-evaluated)

<b>25 September 2024</b>	<b>CPC papers need to be published</b>
<b>3 October 2024</b>	<b>Corporate Policy Committee – outcome of consultation and recommendations to Council</b>
<b>16 October 2024</b>	<b>Council – recommendations from CPC</b>
<b>21 October 2024 and w/c 28 October 2024</b>	<b>HR / Chief Executive / Recruitment partner (all jobs)</b>  To confirm: <b>Project plan, design of campaign and exact timescales for recruitment processes</b> c. Search strategy d. Advertising materials and media, microsite content Tailored search to begin after the meeting to produce initial search ID
<b>November 2024</b>	<b>Executive Search Agency (all jobs)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Advert to go live in print (online) including Microsite</li> <li>• Search reports issued weekly with regular updates</li> <li>• Confidential conversations organised with key stakeholders and potential strong candidates that exec search partner have identified</li> <li>• Closing date (all jobs)</li> <li>• Search concluded</li> </ul>

<b>December 2024</b>	<b>Executive Search Agency Chief Executive / HR (and other officers)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sift reports (“A, B, C”) produced for all applicants with comments and recommendations</li> <li>• Meetings organised to finalise candidates being taken forward to next process for each role</li> <li>• Successful candidates made aware and informed of further progress</li> <li>• Assessment Centre and Final Panel Interviews – appointment (dates in diary asap)</li> <li>• Post appointment support, negotiations and candidate care for all candidates.</li> </ul>
<b>Post recruitment processes - December 2024</b>	<b>Likely timescale for successful candidates take up posts to be confirmed subject to notice periods</b>



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**Council****17 July 2024****Progress of Transformation**

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**Report of: Rob Polkinghorne, Chief Executive****Report Reference No: CP/06/24-25****Ward(s) Affected: All****Purpose of Report**

- 1 The report provides an update on the progress of the transformation programme and highlights two key areas that council is asked to consider:
  - (a) The approval route for the transformation programme plan to enable submission to the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) by the 27 August in order to secure the requested Exceptional Financial Support.
  - (b) The risk appetite of the council in relation to the significant change that will be needed as a part of the transformation of the organisation.

**Executive Summary**

- 2 The report sets out the progress to date of the transformation programme and outlines the key activity that has been undertaken over the last few months, to identify and quantify the required opportunities that will be needed to ensure the council meets the requirements of the Exceptional Financial Support requested.
- 3 The financial situation of the council means that it has no option but to transform the way it delivers its services. The requirement for a transformation programme has been established through the approval of the Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) in February 2024, the S151 Officer's Section 25 report, and through the conditions that need to be met as part of the Exceptional Financial Support from DLUHC (Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities).

- 4 The transformation programme will facilitate deeper and broader service redesign, supported where appropriate by the investment in enhanced digital capabilities which will be required to contribute to the savings for the next 5 years from 2024/25 to 2028/29 as set out in the MTFS.
- 5 The primary objectives of the transformation programme being:
  - (a) Support the council to address the 4-year funding gap of £100m as outlined in the MTFS.
  - (b) Invest in digital technologies to enable services to adopt technology for various activities and processes, thus enabling the council to fully leverage technological opportunities to accelerate its processes.
  - (c) Develop an organisational workforce that is flexible, ensuring all staff have the necessary skills to work effectively within a transformed council.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Council is recommended to:

1. Note the progress of Phase 1 of the transformation and that it will be submitted to DLUHC by 27 August 2024.
2. Delegate authority to the Chief Executive to finalise the transformation programme plan and to submit to the Department for Levelling Up, Housing, and Communities to meet the requirements for utilisation of the Exceptional Financial Support as required.
3. Agree the Chief Financial Officer will utilise any agreed Exceptional Financial Support as needed to support the council.
4. Agree the funding envelope of £3M for Phase 2 transformation as outlined within the S151 section of the report.

## Background

### *Progress of Phase 1 Transformation*

- 6 In March this year, the transformation approach for the council was approved by Corporate Policy Committee. As part of that report the appointment of a delivery partner to help the council with its transformation journey was approved. Inner Circle, following a competitive procurement process, were appointed as the council's transformation partner on the 29 April 2024.

- 7 The first stage of the transformation process has been to identify those opportunities that offer the greatest value as well as the initial quantification of the resource that will be required to implement those changes.
- 8 Over the last seven weeks a significant amount of work has been undertaken, and more than 100 opportunities have been identified, with potential savings identified of £71.5m to £101.5m; these are now going through a validation and sensitivity analysis during July which is being undertaken via a joint team approach between the council and Inner Circle
- 9 Several deep dives into service areas are also being undertaken to explore the opportunities in more detail, these include:
  - (a) Early intervention and prevention
  - (b) Strategic asset management and economic growth
  - (c) Becoming a digital first organisation
  - (d) Adult social care commissioning and brokerage
  - (e) Children services placement optimisation

#### *Phase 2 Transformation*

- 10 The transformation programme will support the delivery of approved/proposed savings, cost avoidance, cost mitigation and identifying new savings for the coming years. The strategic business analysis, which is intrinsic in the programme, will act as a focal point of data and information to inform future change initiatives, savings and efficiencies and support medium-term financial planning.
- 11 Additional support will be required across all services to support the change process and implement new ways of working, particularly if this is to happen at the pace required to ensure financial stability in the short-term as well as over the longer-term.

#### **Consultation and Engagement**

- 12 A Series of Manager “Share and Support” and staff “In the Know” sessions have been arranged in early July, to connect, inform and update the workforce on the transformation programme and potential changes ahead.
- 13 All members will receive July briefings, with events taking place face-to-face and via Teams. These will communicate the roles and responsibilities as well as outlining the pace of change required to

support financial stability whilst providing the opportunity for members to have visibility and engagement regarding the proposals.

- 14 The briefings will be provided by the transformation board and transformation partner alongside the leader and deputy leader.
- 15 The information shared, to all stakeholders, will be imperative to the success of the transformation programme and to establish a shared understanding of the scale of the challenge that the local authority is undertaking. The various events will also clearly communicate that transformation, and the associated planned change activities, are everyone's role, to consolidate how all the workforce and members need to work together, as we move in to Phase 2 of the programme. Monthly Trade Union briefings are arranged to update on the progress of the plan.

### **Reasons for Recommendations**

- 16 The current financial situation of the council means it has no option but to transform the way it delivers services.
- 17 Transformation on this scale represents a new and difficult challenge for the council. The programme will be delivering an ambitious and far-reaching portfolio of change programmes and projects, which address a range of fundamental issues the council faces in responding to the changing needs and expectations of residents and communities.
- 18 Recommendations 1 and 2 ensures the Council is fully conversant with the information that will be provided to central government in support of the current conditional agreement to provide Exceptional Financial Support. This information must be provided to government prior to the 27 August 2024. There is no Corporate Policy Committee meeting prior to that date. Unless full council wishes for final member approval via committee (example a potential date on 21 August 2024) the final document must be approved by the Chief Executive Recommendation 3 that allows for the deployment of the Exceptional Financial Support as required, acknowledging the potential risk mitigation that maybe required as set out in the legal and risk implications.
- 19 As part of any large scale and dynamic change programmes, it is important to continue to flex and adapt to ensure that the council continues to meet strategic objectives and the changing operating environment.
- 20 Research from a joint Charter Institute of Management Accounts and the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy study identified that transformational change and medium to long term financial sustainability are inseparable, stating. "Transformation involves a significant change in approach to an organisation's operating model,

technology, process and/or service delivery, in order to deliver better outcomes and improve efficiency.”

- 21 It is important that the future transformation plan is compiled with this in mind as it will require us to effectively manage change, alongside building and maintaining relationships with external partners and developing new financial and staffing structures.
- 22 The emerging opportunities will require a structured transformation approach and assessment is currently under way by Inner Circle as to the likely level of the resource that will be needed to deliver required changes.
- 23 Additional capacity and capability will be needed in order for the required savings to be achieved in a timely manner.
- 24 We are now starting to look ahead to the medium term, setting our strategic direction and ambitions for the organisation through a defined operating model which is likely to need to be fundamentally different to the one today. This will be developed alongside a new Cheshire East Corporate Plan for 2025 and beyond.
- 25 A new operating model will articulate how the organisation will run at a future point in time when the transformation from the ‘As-Is’ state to the ‘To-Be’ has been achieved. The basic parameters that need to be considered in that model are:
  - (a) The outcomes and benefits of what we offer, including Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)
  - (b) The target client(s), customer(s), and resident(s) that the model is looking to address.
  - (c) Relations with key stakeholders including the motivations to work in partnership.
  - (d) The structure of the organisation to ensure that the core capabilities are in place to deliver.
  - (e) Configuration of activities and services and how we deliver systems through the use and adoption of technology.
  - (f) The overall cost and core financial structure of the organisation.
- 26 The council will need to deliver at pace the opportunities that have being identified; it is important to recognise that the transformation programme is one of several elements that need to be progressed in parallel to deliver stability in the council's financial position, the others being:

- (a) Sound day-to-day budget management.
  - (b) Monitoring delivery of savings, growth, and income in MTFS 2024-28.
  - (c) Developing robust proposals (business cases) for MTFS 2025-29; and
  - (d) Recommendations from LGA Corporate Peer Challenge
  - (e) Establishment of the independent assurance panel.
- 27 As part of the submission of a transformation programme plan to DLUHC it is important to recognise that over the past 18 months Adults, Health and Integration, Children and Families, Corporate services and the Place directorates have all been undertaking bespoke, service specific programmes of improvement, change and transformation.
- 28 Whilst each of these standalone programmes will individually deliver efficiencies and improve outcomes, we are missing opportunities to identify those changes that will deliver the greatest benefit. We must adopt consistent approaches to change, deploy time and resource appropriately and ensure that we prioritise the actions that will make the biggest difference to deliver savings and change in the most effective and efficient way.

### Other Options Considered

- 29 The council, to achieve the required savings identified within the MTFS must transform how it currently delivers its services, there is not an option to do nothing. The only viable option to enact the transformation programme as quickly as possible is to bring in additional capacity and expertise.

Option	Impact	Risk
Do nothing	The council would not meet the conditions for Exceptional Financial Support. There would be no access to the capitalisation of revenue expenditure that was required to manage in-year financial risks.	Insufficient funding to fulfil statutory requirements of the council. This could lead to an unlawful financial position that requires the issue of a s114 report.

Option	Impact	Risk
	Without the change required to create sustainable finances the council may be unable to fulfil its statutory obligations.	
Transformation, resourced in house	Reduced costs associated with procurement of a delivery partner, development, and ownership within existing resource.	Existing capacity and/or capability is insufficient to deliver the transformation programme resulting in the required level of savings not being achieved.
Transformation resourced completely externally	Rapid deployment of resources to achieve savings, up-front cost required and ongoing costs.	This option is not financially sustainable in the long term.

## Implications and Comments

### *Monitoring Officer/Legal*

- 30 There are legal considerations as part of this report. The request for Exceptional Financial Support within the amended legislation introduced under The Levelling-up and Regeneration Act 2023, which inserted an amended Section 12A is a trigger event section 12A (2)(c)(i).
- 31 The legislation also provides for risk mitigation directions to be given to the council which limit the ability to undertake certain financial action. The limitations are based on identified risk thresholds set out in section 12B.
- 32 Council will need to agree the budget for Phase 2 of the transformation programme.
- 33 The transformation programme has a governance structure consisting of a board which answers (currently weekly) to the corporate leadership team. The delivery of individual programmes or activities under the transformation programme will require individual consideration decision making and reporting.



*Section 151 Officer/Finance*

- 34 The council has set a balanced budget for 2024/25. In section 25 of the MTFS report, the section 151 officer stated:
- (a) The council must transform to create sustainable services and support infrastructure projects that reflect 'whole life' costs. This must cover the medium to long term and be backed by reserves that can manage any emerging risks.
  - (b) It is highly likely that the council will require additional capacity to manage this programme, in a way that is yet to be determined, but it will inevitably require additional funding, which will need to be met from within existing resource.
- 35 The council received a grant award from the LGA for £100,000 to support the transformation programme which is being used to offset the Phase 1 costs.
- 36 The council received confirmation from DLUHC that they are minded to approve the council's request for Exceptional Financial Support. However, there are several conditions that will need to be met prior to formal approval, in summary the council must:
- (a) Undergo an external assurance review on the council's financial position and financial management policies, and the council's work to improve its productivity and efficiency.
  - (b) Produce an improvement and transformation programme within six months (27 August 24) that is focused on delivering the council's key objectives and securing the medium-term financial position.
  - (c) The programme should incorporate any recommendations identified as part of the external review.
- 37 Further funding will be required to support Phase 2 of the transformation programme, the costs associated with this are being defined currently and will be presented alongside the transformation programme.
- 38 Members are asked to establish a budget envelope of up to £3m to fund Phase 2 of the transformation programme. This will be funded through existing reserves of the council in the first instance. This funding will need to be replaced either through any initial delivery of in-year savings or through identifying any additional flexible capital receipts that can be used to fund transformation work. Without this investment, the council will not have the capacity to deliver the required level of savings that have been identified in the Medium-Term Financial Strategy, of at least £100m over the life of the MTFS.

- 39 The use of this transformation fund will be reported through the standard budget management reporting to Finance Sub Committee and Corporate Policy Committee. The funding will provide the capacity to support delivery of transformation projects as well as support the seed funding for some invest to save proposals, supported by proper business cases identifying how the money will support longer term transformational change, and deliver sustainable reduced costs overall.
- 40 This transformation plan links closely with other improvement work, particularly in Children's services where the council must respond to the external inspection and the need to improve outcomes for our children and young people. This transformation programme includes investment across all service areas but is also aligned with the improvement plan following our ILACS inspection.

### *Policy*

- 41 The principle and themes of the transformation programme are aligned with the council's vision, priorities and values as outlined in the Corporate Plan 2021-2025 and refreshed Cheshire East Plan 2024/25.
- 42 The transformation programme seeks to directly support the aims of being an open and enabling organisation, a council which empowers and cares about people, working together with residents and partners, and a thriving and sustainable place.

### *Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion*

- 43 The fundamental principles underpinning the need to transform have equality, diversity, and inclusion as a golden thread at the heart of all plans for change.
- 44 At all stages of transformation, consideration is given to the Public Sector Equality Duty under s.149 of the Equality Act 2010 and it is recognised that we must remove or minimise disadvantage and take steps to meet the needs of persons sharing all protected characteristics such as a disability or age.
- 45 The duty also provides that public authorities must encourage persons with a protected characteristic to participate and influence where participation and engagement by such persons is disproportionately low.
- 46 The previous periods of public service change have impacted disproportionally across communities. At times, those stakeholders and residents who have the greatest needs have lost out relative to others.
- 47 The Transformation programme has an aim to improve the experience of all customers when interacting with the council and will seek to ensure

that the council recognises and addresses individual needs and/or barriers to accessing services now and in the future.

- 48 It is expected that an Equality Impact Assessments will be completed at key stages of the transformation programme and will ensure that the impacts of change, on both internal and external stakeholders, will form an essential part of decision making,
- 49 An equality impact assessment will be undertaken and presented along with the transformation plan to Corporate Policy Committee in August.

#### *Human Resources*

- 50 It is important to recognise when an organisation embarks on transformation of this scale, it can either have a positive or negative impact on culture depending on the approaches taken therefore, it is critical that the transformation programme builds on the culture and behaviour work which has already been embedded into the organisation.
- 51 The work on the decision-making accountability work, will help to stabilise the organisation ensuring that there is buy-in from all levels of the organisation to contribute to the success of the overall programme.
- 52 The transformation programme will establish a target operating model for the council, which will be fundamentally different to the one in place now.

#### *Risk Management*

- 53 To successfully achieve the objective of the transformation programme, each of the opportunities that have been identified will need to be delivered, and there remains the distinct possibility that further measures will need to be taken. The council will therefore need to consider and define its appetite for risk as part of its transformation programme to support informed decision making, reduce uncertainty, and to ensure focus on priorities.
- 54 A risk appetite defines the amount and type of risk that an organisation is willing to take to meet strategic objectives, and risk thresholds establish the boundaries outside of which an organisation is not prepared to venture in the pursuit of long-term objectives. Table 1 sets out the descriptions of risk appetites in the council's risk management framework.
- 55 Whilst the council is not averse overall to taking risks, there are individual aspects of risk appetites where a more cautious, or risk averse approach has been appropriate, for example, in relation to statutory obligations, legal responsibilities, and fraud.

- 56 In other areas, a minimalist, cautious, and open appetite can be appropriate – particularly where existing operational systems of work can be developed or enhanced.

TABLE 1	
Appetite	Description
<b>Hungry</b> / High Risk Appetite 5	Eager to be innovative and choose activities that focus on maximising opportunities to achieve objectives (with additional benefits and goals) and offering potentially very high reward, even if these activities carry a very high residual risk that may result in reputation damage, financial loss or exposure.
<b>Open</b> / Moderate Risk Appetite 4	Willing to undertake activities seeking to achieve a balance between a high likelihood of successful delivery and a high degree of reward and value for money. Activities themselves may potentially carry, or contribute to, a high degree of residual risk.
<b>Cautious</b> / Modest Risk Appetite 3	Willing to accept / tolerate a degree of risk in certain circumstances when selecting which activities to undertake to achieve key objectives, deliverables, or initiatives, where we have identified scope to achieve significant reward and/or opportunity. Activities undertaken may carry a high degree of inherent risk that is deemed controllable to a large extent.
<b>Minimalist</b> / Low Risk Appetite 2	Preference to undertake activities considered to be very safe in the achievement of key deliverables or initiatives. Activities will only be taken where they have a low degree of inherent risk. The associated potential for reward / pursuit of opportunity is not a key driver in selecting activities.
<b>Averse</b> / Zero Risk Appetite 1	Avoidance of risk and uncertainty in achievement of key deliverables or initiatives is paramount. The council is not willing to accept risks under any circumstances and activities undertaken will only be those considered to carry virtually no inherent risk.

- 57 In the context of the objective of the transformation programme, the wider financial position of the organisation, and the decision making required to achieve successful delivery, understanding the risk appetite in relation to an individual decision, and its part in the wider transformation programme will be key information. The specific nature of the risk category relevant to the decision should also be considered, for example, governance risk, financial risk, people risk, reputational risk, and partnership risk.
- 58 Several of the opportunities being considered will be subject to business case development, and approval at the relevant committees will form part of a critical path; members should take due regard to the risk that if a decision is not progressed then equivalent savings will need to be identified.

59 The council's Strategic Risk Register includes those risks which materially threaten the organisation's ability to achieve its strategic goals, and the mitigation action for each of those risks will have dependencies on the transformation programme. There are specific risks associated with the organisation's ability to transform, which are currently rated as critical risks.

- (a) **SR07 – Leadership Capacity:** There are a number of vacancies and temporary acting up arrangements in place in Cheshire East council's leadership team, which limits its capacity and prevents the team from operating as effectively as possible. Without the right capacity across the leadership team, the organisation is unable to flex and respond to its challenges.
- (b) **SR08: Ability to Achieve Organisation Change:** The council is unable to achieve organisational change due to a lack of resources and capacity to focus on transformation as people focus on the delivery of business as usual. Recently received advice from government commissioners advised that organisational change capacity is a key ingredient to support the council in delivering transformation to achieve medium to long term change that will support achievement of savings and also, in the event of a section 114 notice being issued, organisational change capacity is also essential to deliver necessary actions arising from interventions.

### *Rural Communities*

60 Any impact on rural communities will be considered as part of the transformation programme. Children and young people including cared for children, care leavers and children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).

### *Children and Young People.*

- 61 In Children and Families significant work reviewing SEND services has been undertaken in conjunction with the Department of Education to identify what change is required to ensure long-term financial affordability and sustainability of services for the council.
- 62 Also, a broader programme of service transformation under the banner of the Together Strategy – a 4-year programme to excellence is part of the MTFS to ensure we are doing different for less with further integration and practice improvement.
- 63 Adults, Health, and Integration have reviewed social work practice and commissioned care services. Through targeted activities they are supporting more people to stay in their own homes where that is the most cost-effective option, supporting more people to train to work in social

care services, and developing business cases to build new accommodation, so that people can have the right home for each stage of their lives. The department is also adopting new tools to support the development of pricing strategies and negotiating approaches for commissioned services.

### *Public Health*

- 64 A key consideration of the transformation programme must be on addressing the large difference in residents' health across the borough, this will involve the council working with partners to improve health outcomes.
- 65 Health improvements will only be made by embedding public health considerations across all local authority functions where appropriate.

### *Climate Change*

- 66 The transformation programme will focus on all aspects of the council's plan, this must include the activities that are required to achieve carbon neutrality by 2027.

<b>Access to Information</b>	
Contact Officer:	Christopher Allman, Director of Transformation Christopher.allman@cheshireeast.gov.uk
Appendices:	None
Background Papers:	None

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OPEN

Council

17 July 2024

Productivity Plan

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**Report of: Rob Polkinghorne - Chief Executive**

**Report Reference No: C/9/24-25**

**Ward(s) Affected: All**

**Purpose of Repor**

- 1 To provide Council with an oversight of Cheshire East Council's Productivity Plan prior to submission to government on 19 July 2024.

**Executive Summary**

- 2 This report provides a response to the request from the Minister of State for Local Government, for local authorities to provide Productivity Plans to set out how they will improve service performance and reduce wasteful expenditure.

RECOMMENDATIONS
<p>The Council is recommended to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Approve the publication of the Productivity Plan by the Council and submission to the government by 19 July 2024 deadline, as set out at Appendix 2 to the report.</li></ol>



**Background**

- 3 On 24 January 2024, the then Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities (DLUHC) announced further financial support for local government with a requirement for local authorities to produce Productivity Plans setting out how they will improve service performance



and reduce wasteful expenditure to ensure every area is making best use of taxpayers' money.

- 4 The announcement was followed in April by a letter from the Minister for Local Government setting out the information expected to be reflected in the Productivity Plan and requiring them to be submitted by all local authorities by 19 July 2024. The letter is attached at Appendix 1.
- 5 The plans are expected to provide a summary of what councils are already doing and cover four main areas:
  - (a) transformation of services to make better use of resources
  - (b) opportunities to take advantage of advances in technology and make better use of data to inform decision making and service design
  - (c) ways to reduce wasteful spend within systems
  - (d) barriers preventing activity that the Government can help to reduce or remove.
- 6 Cheshire East Council's Productivity Plan is at Appendix 2 and reflects current challenges and work underway to make improvements in the context of the four areas set out above.

### **Consultation and Engagement**

- 7 Not applicable. The plan provides a summary of information already available or signposts to emerging work also on this agenda such as the council's Transformation Plan.

### **Reasons for Recommendations**

- 8 Council is asked to provide oversight and endorsement of Cheshire East Council's Productivity Plan as requested in the letter from DLUHC.

### **Other Options Considered**

- 9 Not applicable.

### **Implications and Comments**

*Monitoring Officer/Legal*

- 10 There are no legal implications arising from this report.

*Section 151 Officer/Finance*

- 11 There are no direct financial implications arising from this report. However, the Productivity Plan is an important part of demonstrating our compliance with Best Value principles.

*Policy*

- 12 No direct impact. The plan references the Cheshire East Plan 2024/25.

<b>An open and enabling organisation.</b>	<b>A council which empowers and cares about people.</b>	<b>A thriving and sustainable place.</b>
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*Equality, Diversity and Inclusion*

- 13 No direct impact

*Human Resources*

- 14 No direct impact

*Risk Management*

- 15 No direct impact

*Rural Communities*

- 16 No direct impact

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

- 17 No direct impact

*Public Health*

- 18 No direct impact

*Climate Change*

- 19 No direct impact

Access to Information	
Contact Officer:	Phil Christian – Acting Head of Business Change <a href="mailto:Phil.christian@cheshireeast.gov.uk">Phil.christian@cheshireeast.gov.uk</a>
Appendices:	Appendix 1 – Letter from DLUHC Appendix 2 - Cheshire East Council Productivity Plan
Background Papers:	None



## Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities

**Simon Hoare MP**  
Minister for Local Government  
2 Marsham Street  
London  
SW1P 4DF

16 April 2024

*Dear Chief Executive*

### Productivity in Local Government

As you know, the Government is reviewing productivity across all public services and local government is, of course, part of that exercise. The recent [Local Government Finance Settlement](#) announced that councils would be asked to produce productivity plans. This letter formally begins that process.

May I first thank you for your very helpful engagement with my officials. Your views and thoughts have been valuable in shaping this approach to make it as useful as possible for all of us.

Local government has already done a huge amount in recent years to improve productivity and efficiency. However, lockdown and post-lockdown has proved challenging, and you are looking for new ways to go further. These new plans will help us understand what is already working well across the whole country, what the common themes are, whether there are any gaps and what more we need to do to unlock future opportunities. We will share these important lessons across the sector.

Productivity is not one-dimensional, and I would encourage you to consider the various facets that encompass the drive for greater productivity. When developing your plans, please think broadly and include reference to not only how you run your organisation, but also how you run the public services you provide and how you provide place leadership. It is with this wide view that we can ensure we are providing value for money for residents.

I am not looking to impose excessive burdens. I am not issuing you with a formal template or a detailed list of criteria to meet. I expect your plans to be three to four pages in length, and to set out what you have done in recent years, alongside your current plans, to transform your organisation and services. I do not want to specify a list of metrics you must report, but I do want to understand how you will monitor and assess your plans to assure yourselves and your residents that they will be delivered.

The plans should consider the below themes and where appropriate, should reference the work your council undertakes alongside other public services, such as the NHS and police.

#### **1. How you have transformed the way you design and deliver services to make better use of resources.**

Questions to consider:

- how has the organisation changed in recent years to become more productive? You may wish to consider what you have done around staffing, structures, operating models etc;
- how do you measure productivity in your organisation?
- what changes have you made to improve services, and what effects have those had?
- what are your current plans for transformation over the next two years and how will you measure the effects of those changes?

- looking ahead, which service has greatest potential for savings if further productivity gains can be found? What do you estimate these savings to be?
- what role could capital spending play in transforming existing services or unlocking new opportunities? If you have already used capital spending to boost growth or improve services, we would be interested in learning more;
- what preventative approaches you have undertaken and can the value of these be quantified?
- are there wider locally-led reforms that could help deliver high quality public services and improve the sustainability and resilience of your authority?

## **2. How you plan to take advantage of technology and make better use of data to improve decision making, service design and use of resources.**

Questions to consider:

- what are your existing plans to improve the quality of the data you collect; how do you use it and how do you make it available to residents?
- are there particular barriers from legacy systems?
- how often do you share data with other organisations, and do you find this useful?
- Are there opportunities to use new technology to improve workflows and systems, such as predictive analytics and AI?

## **3. Your plans to reduce wasteful spend within your organisation and systems.**

I know we will share the aim to reduce waste wherever we can and, while you have all made huge strides in recent years, no organisation is ever 100% efficient. You should set out your plans to reduce wasteful or “gold-plated” spend.

Questions to consider:

- how do you approach identifying and reducing waste in the organisation? How do you monitor progress?
- where have you followed invest to save and what was the result?
- how much time and money do you spend on staff EDI training (internal and external), networks, and other programmes? How many EDI Champions do you have as an organisation? How do you log and report the time and money spent on EDI related activity? How do you assess the effectiveness of that training?
- what percentage of total staff budget is spent on a) agency and b) consultants? How do you assess value for money on agency & consultancy spend and what are your plans to reduce use / costs? How many of those consultants or agency staff have been in place for over a year?
- what governance structures do you use to ensure accountability of spend?
- do you share office functions with other councils and if so, how useful do you find this?
- if you share external training costs with neighbouring councils, how do you factor out duplications of service between your council and your upper-tier council (if you have one)?



- if you have one, what is your assessment and experience of working with an elected mayor, combined authority, or devolution deal?
- what proportion of your paybill is spent on trade union facility time?

#### 4. The barriers preventing progress that the Government can help to reduce or remove.

There will be barriers preventing you from going as far or as fast as you would like to. I would like your plans to set those out, so that we can understand how government, or the market, can help you overcome these barriers to go even further.

Questions to consider:

- what are the barriers preventing you from improving productivity further within your organisation?
- what are the barriers preventing you from improving services further?
- are these barriers consistent across multiple services?
- what would you need to remove those barriers? What do you need from government, the market or elsewhere?

Your plans must be returned by 19 July 2024, by email to [productivityplans@levellingup.gov.uk](mailto:productivityplans@levellingup.gov.uk).

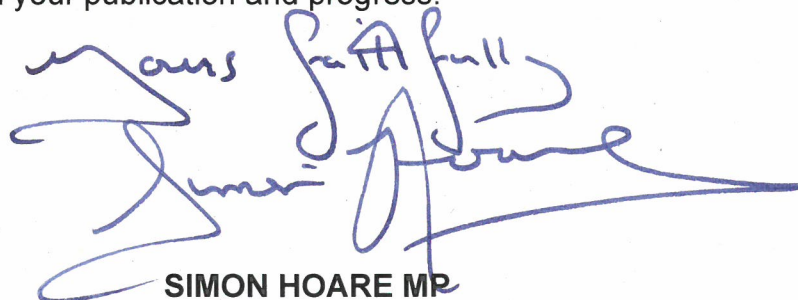
You must ensure that there is member oversight and endorsement of the plan before it is submitted, and the plan must also be uploaded to your website so that residents can see it. You should consider how you will update the plans and report on progress on a regular basis. The plans should also contain relevant metrics and key performance indicators to allow you and your residents to monitor progress.

Once received, we will review the plans to identify common themes and issues across the sector. We are keen to highlight best practice that others can learn from.

Individual plans will not be rated or scored, and we will not produce any kind of league tables. We are interested in understanding what is happening across the sector.

We are setting up a panel to consider the themes and evidence that comes from the plans. I will chair the panel and bring together experts from the sector and beyond, including Oflog and the LGA. They will consider the issues emerging from the plans, the implications for future national policy design, the role of government in supporting further change and the role of the sector in going further. The panel will advise national government and local government, and I believe this collaborative approach will ensure the most effective outcomes.

I look forward to updates on your publication and progress.



**SIMON HOARE MP**  
Minister for Local Government

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# PRODUCTIVITY PLAN

DRAFT July 2024



## Introduction

The Minister for Local Government asked all local authorities to produce productivity plans setting out how they will improve service performance and reduce wasteful expenditure to ensure every area is making best use of taxpayers' money.

This plan explains the significant challenges Cheshire East Council faces and how we are addressing those challenges head on to ensure we will deliver efficiencies and increase productivity against national targets, ensure a balanced budget and deliver better outcomes for our local communities.

The council is in a very serious financial position. The budget for 2024/25, agreed in February, was balanced using reserves and relies on us delivering a demanding set of proposals for savings alongside transformation of the organisation. Uncertainty about future government funding, the existing financial pressures and critically low levels of reserves continue to present a significant challenge.

Over the next four-years we are forecasting a funding gap of £100m and have proactively sought, in principle, Exceptional Financial Support of £17.6m from government. We are working with a transformation partner to develop a comprehensive Transformation Plan alongside in-year spending controls.

The Council's new Chief Executive has engaged the wider sector for support since his arrival in January 2024 to help us define and mitigate the issues. These actions include a [Corporate Peer Challenge](#) and Decision-Making Accountability (DMA) assessment through the LGA to help ensure strategic ambitions, leadership, governance and the [Medium-Term Financial Strategy](#) align and that the council is fit to tackle the problems effectively at pace.

Our [Corporate Plan 2021-25](#) has three key themes - Open, Fair and Green - which guide everything we do and provides us with the strategic direction for our performance framework and a focus for the design and delivery of our services. The [Cheshire East Plan](#) has been refreshed for 2024/25 to better reflect the financial context and a new Plan will be developed for 2025 onwards.

We also know we need to address service performance in some areas and recently received an inadequate judgement from Ofsted for our Children's Services [Inspection of Cheshire East](#). The inspectors rated the first three areas of the inspection as requiring improvement to be good. This was due to the amount of variability in practice. Ofsted rated the experiences and progress of care leavers as inadequate, therefore our overall judgement was inadequate.

The inspection highlighted areas of strength, including where we have changed services and achieved improved outcomes for children and young people, so we know we can and will continue to improve working collaboratively across the council and with partners to do so.

We have a relentless focus on getting the basics right to deliver value for money, continuous improvement and good outcomes for Cheshire East's residents. We are creating an ambitious transformation programme that will make us more productive and effective, and we will embrace the strength of our communities to shape the things that matter most to the people we serve.

## **Transformation**

The critical financial position in terms of our financial sustainability means that we urgently need to transform the organisation.

We need to write a transformation and improvement plan and submit it to government by 27 August. We are working with our transformation delivery partners (Inner Circle) to do this. In parallel, action is being taken in response to the Corporate Peer Challenge recommendation and an action plan is being developed to the same timescales to ensure alignment across the Cheshire East Plan, MTFS, transformation and other improvement activity.

A significant number of opportunities have been identified through the initial stage of Inner Circle's activity and engagement with services and key stakeholders including cashable savings, cost avoidance and income generation. Some can be expedited immediately, others require further investigation and 'deep dive' activity, and many are strategic cross-cutting initiatives. There are also several initiatives in children's and adults which could reduce demand for services in these areas over subsequent years whilst ensuring we maintain the quality of services for our most vulnerable residents.

This will inform the development of the [Transformation Plan \[link to Full Council update paper 17/7 to be added\]](#) in the coming weeks. By pursuing the range of initiatives identified and commitments already in the MTFS, we could achieve financial recovery and growth underpinned by key strategic change including the overall operating model. This is to include key service design principles, with every service to undertake a whole systems redesign, incorporating a fundamental review of systems and processes.

The Council's transformation is led by the Transformation Board, supported by management delivery boards to ensure a Council wide approach to strategy, performance and risk, all of which have clear terms of reference, are chaired and sponsored by a member of Corporate Leadership Team, with the Chief Executive chairing the brighter futures cultural programme.

Additional support will be required across all services to support the change process and implement new ways of working, particularly if this is to happen at the pace required to ensure financial stability in the short-term as well as over the longer-term. Understanding organisational readiness and capacity are key pieces of analysis

which are already underway to support key transformation plans in the short to medium term.

The immediate priority of the programme is to ensure that the Council is financially stable. This will require rigorous prioritisation to focus on only those activities that add value and are affordable and consequentially explicit disinvestment from activities that are not affordable. The areas of focus will be:

- Intelligence and evidence led decision-making and approaches to service development;
- A digital programme to improve customer experience, and automate processes;
- Developing our approach to co-production, working alongside communities, partner organisations in the voluntary, public and private sectors to deliver social value;
- Developing the Asset Management Plan; and
- Streamlining of organisational structures to support good governance.

This will need to be under-pinned by culture change supported by a programme of staff development to create a genuinely great place to work for every member and employee of the council, with opportunities for progression.

### **Digital and Data**

Our digital vision is to “Use the power of digital innovation to redesign the council and the services it provides – making Cheshire East a better place to live and work and supporting our residents and businesses to thrive.”

The Council published its [Digital Strategy](#) in March 2022, which set out our digital vision, aims, principles and actions. Our Digital Platform delivery is ongoing and on target, with accelerated delivery of digital options across council services planned to continue throughout 2024/25.

In our journey towards being financially sustainable, we are committed to making the most of digital and technological solutions as part of our wider transformation programme. Building on the existing strategy and to help us better understand what we can improve, we are working with Triple Value Impact (TVI) to support us by developing a ‘digital blueprint’. The blueprint focuses on three core areas which will underpin our wider transformation plan and achieve a significant impact:

1. **Outcomes:** Establishing and pursuing ambitious outcomes.
2. **Experiences:** Transforming experiences to exceed expectations for both customers and employees
3. **Efficiency:** Ensuring best use of our resources to add value and generate a positive financial return, which may include creating efficiencies or additional income.

This work has identified a range of digital products and solutions that may be suitable for Cheshire East Council, leading to discussions around the importance, suitability and priority of each proposal. Once fully identified, the projects to be taken forward will be part of our wider transformation plan while also seeking to offer additional benefits to the communities that we serve.

Business process transformation will change how many council services function, aiming to increase efficiency and reduce cost, by using information and technology to help staff perform tasks, gather data, and deliver smarter business decisions.

We need to ensure that we have effective engagement with customers which will help us to fully understand their needs and aspirations, and we will use the data we gather to design services around customers true needs.

We are reviewing the council's performance framework to ensure that we can demonstrate accountability and transparency through the information we provide to residents and Members and enable officers to lead and manage their services effectively through informed decision making. We have comprehensive [quarterly performance reports](#) to Committee and closely manage financial spend and forecasts, workforce information including use of agency staff as well as demand, performance and other organisational health measures. Further work is required to ensure the approach is robust, consistent and embedded to address the challenges faced. We recognise the need to be cognisant of the risk of discriminating against those who are digitally excluded and will ensure that non-digital options to transact, communicate with or receive a service from the council are available to those who cannot use digital tools and solutions. This is reflected in the Cheshire East Partnership [Digital Inclusion Plan 2023-26](#).

We compare our costs and performance activities against our statistical neighbours, using tools such as LGInform and OFLOG, which provides us with a clear view of our relative position. Most of our services perform well. However, recent benchmarking through our transformation partner indicates that some services are provided at a higher cost than our comparators. This is being explored and will further inform the transformation priorities and plan.

## **Communities and Diversity**

A key part of being efficient and effective, isn't just about delivering services – it is to work alongside the people we serve and empower them to have greater resilience and independence. This means working alongside communities to encourage them to share their views, to help to inform and influence local decisions, and to get involved in the solutions to local challenges. This covers everything from communities playing their part in tackling climate change through to addressing the cost of living.

Our aim is to make equality an integral part of the way the Council works by putting it at the centre of everything we do. We are committed to celebrating diversity and promoting equality as an employer including through our staff networks, in the services we provide, in partnerships and in the decisions we make.

We recognise that promoting equality and diversity will improve public services for everyone. We want Cheshire East to be a place of equal opportunity, where everyone has a fair chance and people from all backgrounds take part in community life. Our [Equality and Diversity Strategy](#) is delivered through an annual work programme.

The council should also continue working efficiently and effectively with partners and stakeholders both within the borough and the wider Cheshire and Warrington and Cheshire and Merseyside geographies.

### **Tackling national barriers to productivity**

We welcome the opportunity to identify national barriers which would be key for Government to focus upon. For Cheshire East we would welcome consideration of the following areas:

- Multi-year financial settlements for local government would provide an opportunity to focus upon more robust multi-year financial planning and would enable local authorities to better strategically plan for the longer term.
- Revisit the Fair Funding review to ensure that it provides a current assessment of need and ensure that the funding is sufficient to make local services fair and achievable.
- Enable, through additional funding, councils to be able to invest in prevention and early intervention rather than a reactive approach to increased need for services. Protection of investment into preventive services will stop more people falling into crisis situations. This should include the reinstatement of the cuts made to Public Health Grants since 2015.
- The Government's SEND and Alternative Provision improvement plan rightly acknowledges that while councils and their partners are working hard to meet the needs of children with SEND in their local areas, not all children and young people with special needs are able to access the support they need. Councils, with their democratic mandate, are best placed to lead local SEND systems, bringing health and education partners together to quickly deliver the right support to the children that need it. However, councils need the powers to hold partners to account. Without further change, sufficiency of funding will remain a major concern, as well as hampering efforts to ensure the needs of all children with SEND can be met effectively.
- Intervention in the care market at a national level and a focus upon the degree of profit making by private care providers (both adults and children's, but a specific focus upon children's) would be welcomed. Particularly as the care reform cap in Scotland and not-for-profit requirements in Wales come into

force. The council will also have an Improvement Board for Children's Services.

- Clarification of Social Care Reforms, including charging and ensure adequate funding is provided and support around social care recruitment, which is a national issue. There is currently significant national attention and drive around NHS, teaching and adults social care staffing (and funding) but a lack of focus on the crisis linked to children's social care recruitment. The option of capping agency rates nationally would be a key option to consider.
- The competitive bid grant model primarily used for carbon and regeneration funds is resource intensive and would be better replaced with funding allocations across all councils to achieve the government objectives in these areas.

## **Conclusion**

Cheshire East Council faces a number of challenges and has taken action to address them in the immediate short-term and to transform the organisation over time whilst maintaining the quality of services our most vulnerable residents need. Progress will be monitored both internally through newly established cross-council boards to support improvement including Transformation Board and the council's existing committees. The council will also have an external Improvement Board for Children's Services. A comprehensive action plan in response to the Corporate Peer Challenge is also being prepared.

These governance arrangements will be used to monitor and challenge the deliver of the improvements required and associated metrics including later iterations of the productivity plan if required by government.

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**COUNCIL MEETING – 17 JULY 2024****RECOMMENDATION FROM THE ADULTS AND HEALTH COMMITTEE: APPROVAL OF CHESHIRE AND MERSEYSIDE JOINT HEALTH SCRUTINY ARRANGEMENTS PROTOCOL****RECOMMENDATION:**

That Council approve the revised Joint Health Scrutiny Protocol for joint health scrutiny arrangements for Cheshire and Merseyside, as set out in Appendix 1 to the report.

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Extract from the minutes of the Adults and Health Committee meeting held on Monday 24 June 2024.

**6 CHESHIRE AND MERSEYSIDE JOINT HEALTH SCRUTINY ARRANGEMENTS PROTOCOL**

The Committee considered the report which sought approval to recommend, to Full Council, a revised Protocol for joint health scrutiny arrangements for Cheshire and Merseyside.

The Committee noted that the protocol and establishment of the Cheshire and Merseyside Integrated Care System Joint Health Scrutiny had previously been agreed by Full Council in July 2022, however changes to the Protocol were required following legislative changes introduced in January 2024, as summarised within the report.

The Committee noted that the Protocol required approval from all 9 local authorities that formed the Cheshire and Merseyside joint health scrutiny committee.

**RESOLVED (by majority):**

That the Adults and Health Committee recommend the revised Joint Health Scrutiny Protocol for joint health scrutiny arrangements for Cheshire and Merseyside (Appendix 1) to Full Council for approval.



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OPEN

## **Adults and Health Committee**

**24 June 2024**

### **Cheshire and Merseyside Joint Health Scrutiny Arrangements Protocol**

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**Report of: Helen Charlesworth-May, Executive Director Adults,  
Health and Integration**

**Report Reference No: AH/08/24-25**

**Ward(s) Affected: All**

### **Purpose of Report**

- 1 This report seeks approval from the Adults and Health Committee to recommend to Full Council approval of a revised Protocol for Joint Health Scrutiny Arrangements for Cheshire and Merseyside.

### **Executive Summary**

- 2 In July 2022, Full Council agreed the establishment of the Cheshire and Merseyside Integrated Care System Joint Health Scrutiny and approved the Joint Health Scrutiny Protocol.
- 3 Following legislative changes, the Health Scrutiny Committee no longer has the power to refer substantial variations in health service directly to the Secretary of State for Health. These changes came into effect at the end of January 2024. This has necessitated the requirement for the protocol to be revised and for it to be approved by all nine local authority areas across Cheshire and Merseyside. Some text has also been added to the protocol on the ability to request a “call-in” by the Health Secretary.
- 4 In order for Cheshire East to continue to play a role in joint health scrutiny arrangements, it is recommended that the Council approve the attached revised Protocol for the Joint Health Scrutiny Arrangements in Cheshire and Merseyside **(Appendix 1)**.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The Adults and Health Committee is recommended to:

1. Agree that the revised Protocol for Joint Health Scrutiny Arrangements for Cheshire and Merseyside, as attached to the report, be recommended to Full Council for approval.

### Background

- 5 Where health providers, such as NHS Hospital Trusts, propose changes in the provision of service(s), health providers are obliged to consult with local health overview and scrutiny committees as to whether the changes are deemed to be “substantial”.
- 6 The term “substantial” is not defined in legislation. However, it is generally considered that a substantial change or variation to a health service is one that has a major impact on services experienced by patients and/or future patients. In considering whether a proposal is substantial, local authorities are encouraged to consider the following criteria:-
  - Changes in accessibility of services – any proposal which involves the withdrawal or change of patient or diagnostic facilities for one or more speciality from the same location.
  - Impact on the wider community and other services – this could include economic impact, transport, regeneration issues.
  - Patients affected – changes may affect the whole population, or a small group. If changes affect a small group, the proposal may still be regarded as substantial, particularly if patients need to continue accessing that service for many years.
  - Methods of service delivery – altering the way a service is delivered may be a substantial change, e.g. Moving a particular service into community settings rather than being entirely hospital based;
  - Potential level of public interest – proposals that are likely to generate a significant level of public interest in view of their likely impact.
- 7 Where a proposal impacts on more than one local authority area, there is a requirement for local authorities to form a joint health scrutiny committee, to consider the proposals in detail and, where appropriate, to make recommendations.
- 8 There are nine local authority areas across Cheshire and Merseyside, as follows:-

- Cheshire East Council
  - Cheshire West and Chester Council
  - Halton Borough Council
  - Knowsley Council
  - Liverpool City Council
  - St. Helens Metropolitan Borough Council
  - Sefton Council
  - Warrington Borough Council
  - Wirral Borough Council
- 9 The Joint Health Scrutiny Arrangements protocol has been developed as a framework for the operation of joint health scrutiny arrangements across the local authorities of Cheshire and Merseyside.
- 10 The Cheshire and Merseyside Joint Health Scrutiny Protocol was first adopted by all nine local authorities in 2014. It covers both mandatory and discretionary joint health scrutiny. It was last reviewed in 2022 to reflect the introduction of the new Joint Health Scrutiny Committee. Since that time, legislative change to the powers of Health Scrutiny Committees to refer health service reconfigurations directly to the Secretary of State for Health came into effect at the end of January 2024. This coincided with the issue of updated guidance on such matters to both local authorities and the NHS.

### **Agenda Item Consultation and Engagement**

- 11 The Monitoring Officer and Executive Director of Adults, Health and Integration has been consulted on the revised Protocol.
- 12 Discussions have taken place between officers responsible for health scrutiny arrangements across Cheshire and Merseyside.
- 13 The Cheshire East Scrutiny Committee will receive the revised Protocol for noting at its meeting on Thursday 27 June 2024.

### **Reasons for Recommendations**

- 14 The Protocol has been revised to take into account recent statutory changes and requires approval by all nine local authorities across Cheshire and Merseyside.

- 15 Health scrutiny regulations require the establishment of joint health scrutiny committees where more than one local authority's health scrutiny arrangements consider a proposed change or development in NHS services to be "substantial" in terms of the impact on its area.
- 16 Agreeing the protocol will ensure that any future considerations of substantial health variations that impact on Cheshire East residents will be taken into account.

### Other Options Considered

17

Option	Impact	Risk
Do nothing	Future considerations of substantial health variations that impact on Cheshire East residents may not be taken into account.	Refusal to approve the revised protocol could result in difficulties for Cheshire East representatives to be part of joint health arrangements, particularly if other Cheshire and Merseyside local authorities agree the protocol.

### Implications and Comments

#### *Monitoring Officer/Legal*

- 18 The Joint Health Scrutiny Protocol was last reviewed in 2022 to reflect the introduction of the new Joint Health Scrutiny Committee. Since that time, legislative change to the ability of Health Scrutiny Committees to refer health service reconfigurations directly to the Secretary of State for Health came into effect at the end of January 2024. This coincided with the issue of updated guidance on such matters to both local authorities and the NHS.
- 19 It is therefore recognised that a further review of the Protocol is needed to ensure that the Joint Committee complies with changes to legislation. The proposed amendments are in line with the changes to the referrals and call-in powers of the Secretary of State.

*Section 151 Officer/Finance*

- 20 There are no financial implications, or changes required to the MTFS as a result of the adoption of the revised Protocol.
- 21 Each of the nine Local Authorities affected currently support the Joint Health Scrutiny Committee by contributing a total of £10,000 to the Host Authority.

*Policy*

- 22 This report and its recommendations are within the Council's existing policy framework, and it supports the priorities set out in the Corporate Plan.

<b>An open and enabling organisation</b>	<b>A council which empowers and cares about people</b>	<b>A thriving and sustainable place</b>

*Equality, Diversity and Inclusion*

- 23 There are no direct equality implications arising from the recommendations of this report, but the work of the joint committee will undoubtedly have such implications.

*Human Resources*

- 24 There are no human resources implications of this report.

*Risk Management*

- 25 Failure to adopt the revised Protocol of the Cheshire and Merseyside Integrated Care System Joint Health Scrutiny Committee would deprive the Council of having a voice in respect of joint health scrutiny matters at a regional level.

*Rural Communities*

- 26 There are no direct implications for rural communities as a result of this report.

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

- 27 There are no direct implications for children and young people/cared for children which arise from the recommendations of this report.

*Public Health*

- 28 Whilst the work of the joint health scrutiny committee is directly focussed upon public health matters, there are no direct public health implications arising from the recommendations of this report. *Climate Change*

## Climate Change

- 29 There are no direct implications for climate change as a result of this report.

<b>Access to Information</b>	
Contact Officer:	Brian Reed  Head of Governance and Democratic Services
Appendices:	Appendix 1 – Revised Joint Health Scrutiny Protocol
Background Papers:	N/A

## **PROTOCOL FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF JOINT HEALTH SCRUTINY ARRANGEMENTS IN CHESHIRE AND MERSEYSIDE**

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 This protocol has been developed as a framework for the operation of joint health scrutiny arrangements across the local authorities of Cheshire and Merseyside. It allows for:
- scrutiny of substantial developments and variations of the health service; and,
  - discretionary scrutiny of local health services.
- 1.2 The protocol provides a framework for health scrutiny arrangements which operate on a joint basis only. Each constituent local authority should have its own local arrangements in place for carrying out health scrutiny activity individually.

### **2. BACKGROUND**

- 2.1 The relevant legislation regarding health scrutiny is:
- Health and Social Care Act 2012,
  - The Local Authority (Public Health, Health and Wellbeing Boards and Health Scrutiny) Regulations 2013; and
  - The Health and Care Act 2022.

This is supplemented by relevant guidance:

- Local Authority Health Scrutiny (DHSC, updated 2024)
  - Statutory guidance: “Reconfiguring NHS services – ministerial intervention powers” (DHSC, 2024).
- 2.2 In summary, the statutory framework authorises local authorities individually and collectively to:
- review and scrutinise any matter relating to the planning, provision and operation of the health service; and,
  - consider consultations by a relevant NHS commissioning body or provider of NHS-funded services on any proposal for a substantial development or variation to the health service in the local authority’s area.
- 2.3 Ultimately the regulations place a requirement on relevant scrutiny arrangements to reach a view on whether they are satisfied that any proposal that is deemed to be a substantial development or variation is in the interests of the health service in that area. In instances where a proposal impacts on the residents of one local authority area exclusively,



this responsibility lays with that authority's health scrutiny arrangements alone.

- 2.4 Where such proposals impact on more than one local authority area, each authority's health scrutiny arrangements must consider whether the proposals constitute a substantial development or variation or not. The regulations place a requirement on those local authorities that agree that a proposal is substantial to establish, in each instance, a joint overview and scrutiny committee for the purposes of considering it. This protocol deals with the proposed operation of such arrangements for the local authorities of Cheshire and Merseyside.
- 2.5 Whilst it is recognised that the previous power of a health scrutiny committee or joint health scrutiny committee to refer a service change proposal to the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care has been removed, such committees will now possess the ability to request formally that the Secretary of State "call-in" a service change proposal. The ability to "call-in" a proposal should only be used in exceptional circumstances where all efforts to resolve issues locally have been exhausted.

### **3. PURPOSE OF THE PROTOCOL**

- 3.1 This protocol sets out the framework for the operation of joint scrutiny arrangements where:
- a) an NHS commissioning body or health service provider consults with more than one local authority on any proposal it has under consideration, for a substantial development/variation of the health service;
  - b) joint scrutiny activity is being carried out on a discretionary basis into the planning, provision and operation of the health service.
- 3.2 The protocol covers the local authorities of Cheshire and Merseyside including:
- Cheshire East Council
  - Cheshire West and Chester Council
  - Halton Borough Council
  - Knowsley Council
  - Liverpool City Council
  - St. Helens Metropolitan Borough Council
  - Sefton Council
  - Warrington Borough Council
  - Wirral Borough Council
- 3.3 Whilst this protocol deals with arrangements within the boundaries of Cheshire and Merseyside, it is recognised that there may be occasions

when consultations/discretionary activity may affect adjoining regions/ areas. Arrangements to deal with such circumstances would have to be determined and agreed separately, as and when appropriate.

#### **4. PRINCIPLES FOR JOINT HEALTH SCRUTINY**

4.1 The fundamental principle underpinning joint health scrutiny will be co-operation and partnership with a mutual understanding of the following aims:

- To improve the health of local people and to tackle health inequalities (outcome-focussed);
- To ensure that scrutiny activity adopts an appropriate balance between a focus on future service delivery and a focus on responding to immediate concerns/ issues (balanced)
- To represent the views of local people and ensure that these views are identified and integrated into local health service plans, services and commissioning (inclusive);
- To scrutinise whether all parts of the community are able to access health services and whether the outcomes of health services are equally good for all sections of the community (evidence-informed); and,
- To work with NHS bodies and local health providers to ensure that their health services are planned and provided in the best interests of the communities they serve, taking into account any potential impact on health service staff (collaborative).

#### **5. SUBSTANTIAL DEVELOPMENT OF /VARIATION TO SERVICES**

##### **5.1 Requirements to consult**

5.1.1 All relevant NHS bodies and providers of NHS-funded services<sup>1</sup> are required to consult local authorities when they have a proposal for a substantial development or substantial variation to the health service.

5.1.2 A substantial development or variation is not defined in legislation. Guidance has suggested that the key feature is that it should involve a major impact on the services experienced by patients and/or future patients.

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<sup>1</sup> This includes NHS England and any body commissioning services to the residents of Cheshire and Merseyside, plus providers such as NHS Trusts, NHS Foundation Trust and any other relevant provider of NHS funded services which provides health services to those residents, including public health.

- 5.1.3 Where a substantial development or variation impacts on the residents within one local authority area boundary, only the relevant local authority health scrutiny function shall be consulted on the proposal.
- 5.1.4 Where a proposal impacts on residents across more than one local authority boundary, the NHS body/health service provider is obliged to consult all those authorities whose residents are affected by the proposals in order to determine whether the proposal represents a substantial development or variation.
- 5.1.5 Those authorities that agree that any such proposal does constitute a substantial development or variation are obliged to form a joint health overview and scrutiny committee for the purpose of formal consultation by the proposer of the development or variation.
- 5.1.6 Whilst each local authority must decide individually whether a proposal represents a substantial development/variation, it is only the statutory joint health scrutiny committee which can formally comment on the proposals if more than one authority agrees that the proposed change is “substantial”.
- 5.1.7 Determining that a proposal is not a substantial development/variation removes the ability of an individual local authority to comment formally on the proposal.. Once such decisions are made, the ongoing obligation on the proposer to consult formally on a proposal relates only to those authorities that have deemed the proposed change to be “substantial” and this must be done through the vehicle of the joint committee. Furthermore the proposer will not be obliged to provide updates or report back on proposals to individual authorities that have not deemed them to be “substantial”.
- 5.1.8 For the avoidance of doubt, if only one authority amongst a number being consulted on a proposal deem it to be a substantial change, the ongoing process of consultation on the proposal between the proposer and the remaining authority falls outside the provisions of this protocol.

## **5.2 Process for considering proposals for a substantial development/variation**

- 5.2.1 In consulting with the local authority in the first instance to determine whether the change is considered substantial, the relevant NHS commissioning body / provider of NHS-funded services is required to:
- Provide the proposed date by which it requires comments on the proposals
  - Provide the proposed date by which it intends to make a final decision as to whether to implement the proposal
  - Publish the dates specified above

- Inform the local authority if the dates change<sup>2</sup>

5.2.2 NHS commissioning bodies and local health service providers are not required to consult with local authorities where certain 'emergency' decisions have been taken. All exemptions to consult are set out within regulations.<sup>3</sup>

5.2.3 In considering whether a proposal is substantial, all local authorities are encouraged to consider the following criteria:

- *Changes in accessibility of services:* any proposal which involves the withdrawal or change of patient or diagnostic facilities for one or more speciality from the same location.
- *Impact on the wider community and other services:* This could include economic impact, transport, regeneration issues.
- *Patients affected:* changes may affect the whole population, or a small group. If changes affect a small group, the proposal may still be regarded as substantial, particularly if patients need to continue accessing that service for many years.
- *Methods of service delivery:* altering the way a service is delivered may be a substantial change, for example moving a particular service into community settings rather than being entirely hospital based.
- *Potential level of public interest:* proposals that are likely to generate a significant level of public interest in view of their likely impact.

5.2.4 These criteria will assist in ensuring that there is a consistent approach applied by each authority in making their respective decisions on whether a proposal is "substantial" or not. In making the decision, each authority will focus on how the proposals impacts on its own area/residents.

## **6. OPERATION OF A STATUTORY JOINT HEALTH OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

### **6.1 General**

6.1.1 A joint health overview and scrutiny committee will be made up of each of the constituent local authorities that deem a proposal to be a substantial development or variation. This joint committee will be

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<sup>2</sup> Section 23 of the Local Authority (Public Health, Health and Wellbeing Boards and Health Scrutiny) Regulations 2013

<sup>3</sup> Section 24 *ibid*

formally consulted on the proposal and, in exceptional circumstances, formally request that the Secretary of State to “call-in” a proposal, where local consultation has failed to resolve significant outstanding issues.

- 6.1.2 A decision as to whether the proposal is deemed substantial shall be taken within a reasonable timeframe and in accordance with any deadline set by the lead local authority (see section 6.6), following consultation with the other participating authorities.

## **6.2 Powers**

- 6.2.1 In dealing with substantial development/variations, any statutory joint health overview and scrutiny committee that is established can:

- require relevant NHS bodies and health service providers to provide information to and attend before meetings of the committee to answer questions
- make comments on the subject proposal by a date provided by the NHS body/local health service provider
- make reports and recommendations to relevant NHS bodies/local health providers
- require relevant NHS bodies/local health service providers to respond within a fixed timescale to reports or recommendations
- carry out further negotiations with the relevant NHS body where it is proposing not to agree to a substantial variation proposal.

- 6.2.2 A joint health overview and scrutiny committee has the ability to request the Secretary of State to “call-in” a service change proposal where it has not been possible to resolve significant outstanding issues during the course of local consultation. The ability to request the “call-in” of a proposal should only be exercised in exceptional circumstances where all possible efforts to resolve the matter locally have been exhausted, as outlined in 6.2.3 and 6.2.4 below.

- 6.2.3 Where a committee has made a recommendation to a NHS commissioning body/local health service provider regarding a proposal and the NHS body/provider disagrees with the recommendation, the local health service provider/NHS body is required to inform the joint committee and attempt to enter into negotiation to try and reach an agreement.

- 6.2.4 In any circumstance where a committee disagrees with a proposal for a substantial variation, there will be an expectation that negotiations will be entered into with the NHS commissioning body/local health service provider in order to attempt to reach agreement.

- 6.2.5 Where local authorities have agreed that the proposals represent substantial developments or variations to services and agreed to enter into joint arrangements, it is only the joint health overview and scrutiny committee which may exercise these powers.

- 6.2.5 An ad-hoc statutory joint health overview and scrutiny committee established under the terms of this protocol may only exercise the powers set out in 6.2.1 to 6.2.4 above in relation to the statutory consultation for which it was originally established. Its existence is time-limited to the course of the specified consultation and it may not otherwise carry out any other activity.

### 6.3 Membership

- 6.3.1 The participating local authorities must ensure that those Councillors nominated to a joint health overview and scrutiny committee produce a membership that reflects the overall political balance across the participating local authorities. However, political balance requirements for each joint committee established may be waived with the agreement of all participating local authorities, should time and respective approval processes permit.

- 6.3.2 A joint committee will be composed of Councillors from each of the participating authorities within Cheshire and Merseyside in the following ways:

- where 4 or more local authorities deem the proposed change to be substantial, each authority will nominate 2 elected members
- where 3 or less local authorities deem the proposed change to be substantial, then each participating authority will nominate 3 elected members.

(Note: In making their nominations, each participating authority will be asked to ensure that their representatives have the experience and expertise to contribute effectively to a health scrutiny process)

Local authorities who consider change to be 'substantial'	No' of elected members to be nominated from each authority
4 or more	2 members
3 or less	3 members

- 6.3.3 Each local authority will be obliged to nominate elected members through their own relevant internal processes and provide notification of those members to the lead local authority at the earliest opportunity.
- 6.3.4 To avoid inordinate delays in the establishment of a relevant joint committee, it is suggested that constituent authorities either arrange for delegated decision-making arrangements to be put in place to deal with such nominations at the earliest opportunity, or to nominate potential

representatives annually as part of annual meeting processes to cover all potential seat allocations.

## **6.5 Quorum**

- 6.5.1 The quorum of the meetings of a joint committee shall be one third of the full membership of any Joint Committee, subject to the quorum being, in each instance, no less than 3.
- 6.5.2 There will be an expectation for there to be representation from each authority at a meeting of any joint committee established. The lead local authority will attempt to ensure that this representation is achieved.

## **6.6 Identifying a lead local authority**

- 6.6.1 A lead local authority should be identified from one of the participating authorities to take the lead in terms of administering and organising a joint committee in relation to a specific proposal.
- 6.6.2 Selection of a lead authority should, where possible, be chosen by mutual agreement by the participating authorities and take into account both capacity to service a joint health scrutiny committee and available resources. The application of the following criteria should also guide determination of the lead authority:
- The local authority within whose area the service being changed is based; or
  - The local authority within whose area the lead commissioner or provider leading the consultation is based.
- 6.6.3 Lead local authority support should include a specific contact point for communication regarding the administration of the joint committee. There will be an obligation on the key lead authority officer to liaise appropriately with officers from each participating authority to ensure the smooth running of the joint committee.
- 6.6.4 Each participating local authority will have the discretion to provide whatever support it may deem appropriate to their own representative(s) to allow them to make a full contribution to the work of a joint committee.

## **6.7 Nomination of Chair/ Vice-Chair**

The chair/ vice-chair of the joint health overview and scrutiny committee will be nominated and agreed at the committee's first meeting.



## **6.8 Meetings of a Joint Committee**

6.8.1 At the first meeting of any joint committee established to consider a proposal for a substantial development or variation, the committee will also consider and agree:

- The joint committee's terms of reference;
- The procedural rules for the operation of the joint committee;
- The process/ timeline for dealing formally with the consultation, including:
  - the number of sessions required to consider the proposal; and,
  - the date by which the joint committee aims to reach its final conclusion on the proposal – which should be in advance of the proposed date by which the NHS commissioning body/service provider intends to make its final decision on it.

6.8.2 All other meetings of the joint committee will be determined in line with the proposed approach for dealing with the consultation. Different approaches may be taken for each consultation and could include gathering evidence from:

- NHS commissioning bodies and local service providers;
- patients and the public;
- voluntary sector and community organisations; and
- NHS regulatory bodies.

## **6.9 Reports of a Joint Committee**

6.9.1 A joint committee is entitled to produce a written report which may include recommendations. As a minimum, the report will include:

- An explanation of why the matter was reviewed or scrutinised.
- A summary of the evidence considered.
- A list of the participants involved in the review.
- An explanation of any recommendations on the matter reviewed or scrutinised.

The lead authority will be responsible for the drafting of a report for consideration by the joint committee.

6.9.2 Reports shall be agreed by the majority of members of a joint committee and submitted to the relevant NHS commissioning body/health service provider.

6.9.3 Where a member of a joint health scrutiny committee does not agree with the content of the committee's report, they may produce a report



setting out their findings and recommendations which will be attached as an appendix to the joint health scrutiny committee's main report.

## **7. DISCRETIONARY HEALTH SCRUTINY**

- 7.1 More generally, the Health and Social Care Act 2012 and the 2013 Health Scrutiny Regulations provide for local authority health scrutiny arrangements to scrutinise the planning, provision and operation of health services.
- 7.2 In this respect, two or more local authorities may appoint a joint committee for the purposes of scrutinising the planning, provision and operation of health services which impact on a wider footprint than that of an individual authority's area.
- 7.3 Any such committee will have the power to:
- require relevant NHS commissioning bodies and health service providers to provide information to and attend before meetings of the committee to answer questions.
  - make reports and recommendations to relevant NHS commissioning bodies/local health providers.
  - require relevant NHS commissioning bodies/local health service providers to respond within a fixed timescale to reports or recommendations.
- 7.4 Ordinarily, a discretionary joint committee would not have the ability to request the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care "call-in" a service change proposal. However, please note section 8.3 below.
- 7.5 In establishing a joint committee for the purposes of discretionary joint scrutiny activity, the constituent local authorities should determine the committee's role and remit. This should include consideration as to whether the committee operates as a standing arrangement for the purposes of considering all of the planning, provision and operation of health services within a particular area or whether it is being established for the purposes of considering the operation of one particular health service with a view to making recommendations for its improvement. In the case of the latter, the committee must disband once its specific scrutiny activity is complete.
- 7.6 In administering any such committee, the proposed approach identified in sections 6.3 – 6.9 of this protocol should be followed, as appropriate.

## **8. SCRUTINY OF CHESHIRE AND MERSEYSIDE INTERGRATED CARE SYSTEM**

- 8.1 Further to this protocol and in particular section 7 above, the nine local authorities have agreed to establish a discretionary standing joint health scrutiny committee in response to the establishment of the Cheshire and Merseyside Integrated Care System.
- 8.2 A separate Joint Scrutiny Committee Arrangements document has been produced in line with the provisions of this protocol to outline how the standing joint committee will operate.
- 8.3 In summary, the “Cheshire and Merseyside Integrated Care System Joint Health Scrutiny Committee” has the following responsibilities:
- To scrutinise the work of the Integrated Care System in relation to any matter regarding the planning, provision and operation of the health service at footprint level only; and
  - To consider the merits of any service change proposals that have been deemed to be a substantial variation in services by all nine authorities.

## **9. CONCLUSION**

- 9.1 The local authorities of Cheshire and Merseyside have adopted this protocol as a means of governing the operation of joint health scrutiny arrangements both mandatory and discretionary. The protocol is intended to support effective consultation with NHS commissioning bodies or local health service providers on any proposal for a substantial development of or variation in health services. The protocol also supports the establishment of a joint health overview and scrutiny committee where discretionary health scrutiny activity is deemed appropriate.
- 9.2 The protocol will be reviewed regularly, and at least on an annual basis to ensure that it complies with all current legislation and any guidance published by the Department of Health and Social Care.

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**COUNCIL MEETING – 17 JULY 2024****RECOMMENDATIONS FROM FINANCE SUB COMMITTEE: OUTTURN REPORT 2023/2024****RECOMMENDATIONS****That Council:**

- 1 Approve the Children and Families Committee Supplementary Capital Estimates over £1,000,000 and Capital Virements over £5,000,000 in accordance with the Financial Procedure Rules, as detailed in Annex 1: Appendix 2, Section 4, Table 4.**
  - 2 Approve the Highways and Transport Committee Supplementary Capital Estimate (SCE) over £1,000,000 as detailed in Annex 1: Appendix 6, Section 4, Table 4.**
- 

Extract from the Minutes of the Finance Sub-Committee meeting on 25 June 2024.

**5 FINAL OUTTURN 2023/24**

The Sub-Committee considered a report which provided an overview of the Cheshire East Council Outturn for the financial year 2023/24.

Referring to the PFI payments, which had been inherited from Cheshire County Council, it was asked how much longer the Council had to pay these. Officers undertook to provide a written response.

The report referred to the grants received, and it was asked if details could be provided on all the grants the Council received. The Chief Finance Officer undertook to provide a written response but noted that the Council received hundreds of grants, some very small and other very large.

Reference was made to underspends due to vacancies not being filled and it was noted whilst this helped the budget position it was not sustainable.

It was noted that the first quarter review 2024/25 report would be brought to the September meeting of the Sub Committee.

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

- 1 note the overall financial performance of the Council in the 2023/24 financial year, as contained within the report, as follows:**

- a) a Net Revenue Overspend of £8.5m against a revised budget of £356.2m (2.4% variance) funded by drawdown from General Reserves.
  - b) General Reserves closing balance of £5.6m
  - c) Capital Spending of £136.9m against an approved programme of £171.1m (18% variance)
- 2 note the content of each of the following annexes:
  - a) Annex 1 – Financial Stability section provides information on the overall financial stability and resilience of the Council. Further details are contained in the appendices:
    - Appendix 1 Adults and Health Committee
    - Appendix 2 Children and Families Committee
    - Appendix 3 Corporate Policy Committee
    - Appendix 4 Economy and Growth Committee
    - Appendix 5 Environment and Communities Committee
    - Appendix 6 Highways and Transport Committee
    - Appendix 7 Finance Sub Committee
    - Appendix 7a Update to the Treasury Management Strategy
    - Appendix 7b Update to the Investment Strategy
- 3 Recommend to Council the approval of the Children and Families Committee Supplementary Capital Estimates (SCE) over £1,000,000 and Capital Virements over £5,000,000 in accordance with the Financial Procedure Rules, as detailed in Annex 1: Appendix 2, Section 4, Table 4.
- 4 Recommend to Council the approval of the Highways and Transport Committee Supplementary Capital Estimate (SCE) over £1,000,000 as detailed in Annex 1: Appendix 6, Section 4, Table 4.
- 5 Note the Environment and Communities Committee Capital Budget reductions, as detailed in Annex 1: Appendix 5, Section 4, Table 3.
- 6 Note the Highways and Transport Committee Capital Budget reductions as detailed in Annex 1: Appendix 6, Section 4, Table 5.

OPEN

**Finance Sub Committee**

**25 June 2024**

**Final Outturn 2023/24**

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**Report of: Adele Taylor, Interim Director of Finance and Customer Services (s151 Officer)**

**Report Reference No: FSC/25/24-25**

**Ward(s) Affected: Not applicable**

**Purpose of Report**

- 1 This report provides members with an overview of the Cheshire East Council final outturn for the financial year 2023/24. Members are being asked to consider the financial performance of the Council. The report also proposes treatment of year end balances that reflects risks identified in the Medium-Term Financial Strategy which was approved by Council on 27 February 2024.
- 2 To highlight financial performance across all Departments, and within Central Budgets shows how the Council is achieving its financial strategies and managing financial control and accountability.
- 3 To reporting the financial outturn at this stage, and in this format supports the Council's vision to be an open Council as set out in the Corporate Plan 2021 to 2025. In particular, the priorities for an open and enabling organisation, ensure that there is transparency in all aspects of Council decision making.

**Executive Summary**

- 4 This report outlines how the Council managed its resources through sound financial planning, monitoring, and reporting to achieve outcomes and value for money.
- 5 The Outturn is reported as part of the Statutory Accounts and is therefore subject to audit. The audited Accounts will be presented to the Audit and Governance Committee on 30 September 2024.

- 6 The annex and appendices attached to this report set out details of the Council's financial performance:
- 7 **Annex 1** – Sets out the financial stability context and reasons for the outturn position. The annex contains an appendix for each service committee relating to revenue and capital budgets, debt and reserves. It also includes appendices with updates to the Treasury Management Strategy and Investment Strategy as at 31st March 2024.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The Finance Sub Committee is recommended to:

1. Consider the overall financial performance of the Council in the 2023/24 financial year, as contained within the report, as follows:
  - a) A Net Revenue Overspend of £8.5m against a revised budget of £356.2m (2.4% variance) funded by drawdown from General Reserves.
  - b) General Reserves closing balance of £5.6m.
  - c) Capital Spending of £136.9m against an approved programme of £171.1m (18% variance).
2. Consider the contents of each of the following annexes:
  - a) **Annex 1 – Financial Stability** section provides information on the overall financial stability and resilience of the Council. Further details are contained in the appendices.
    - **Appendix 1** Adults and Health Committee.
    - **Appendix 2** Children and Families Committee.
    - **Appendix 3** Corporate Policy Committee.
    - **Appendix 4** Economy and Growth Committee.
    - **Appendix 5** Environment and Communities Committee.
    - **Appendix 6** Highways and Transport Committee.
    - **Appendix 7** Finance Sub Committee.
    - **Appendix 7a** Update to the Treasury Management Strategy.
    - **Appendix 7b** Update to the Investment Strategy.
3. Approve the **Children and Families Committee** Supplementary Capital Estimates (SCE) over £1,000,000 and Capital Virements over £5,000,000 in accordance with Financial Procedure Rules as detailed in **Annex 1: Appendix 2, Section 4, Table 4**.

4. Approve the **Highways and Transport Committee** Supplementary Capital Estimates (SCE) over £1,000,000 as detailed in **Annex 1: Appendix 6, Section 4, Table 4.**
5. Note the **Environment and Communities Committee** Capital Budget reductions as detailed in **Annex1: Appendix 5, Section 4, Table 3.** Note
6. Note the **Highways and Transport Committee** Capital Budget reductions as detailed in **Annex1: Appendix 6, Section 4, Table 5.**

## Background

- 8 The recommendations within the 2023/24 Financial Reviews and the Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) were clear in the treatment of the outturn and future reserve balances.
- 9 The MTFS recognised emerging risks such as inflation and particularly the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) deficit, which highlighted there is no alternative funding.
- 10 The financial outturn for Cheshire East Council is an overspend of £8.5m. This is net of appropriate allocations to useable reserves. Further detail is provided in **Table 1** and **Annex 1.**

**Table 1:** Total Net Revenue Budget is overspent by £8.5m

2023/24	Revised Budget	Outturn	Variance	Forecast Variance FR3	Movement from FR3 to Outturn
	(NET)				
	£m	£m	£m	£m	£m
<b>Service Committee</b>					
Adults and Health	138.0	149.8	11.8	5.0	6.8
Children and Families	81.9	90.1	8.2	10.0	(1.8)
Corporate Policy	41.9	37.3	(4.5)	(1.0)	(3.6)
Economy and Growth	24.9	20.4	(4.5)	(2.8)	(1.6)
Environment and Communities	48.2	50.5	2.3	3.1	(0.8)
Highways and Transport	21.1	19.6	(1.5)	(0.2)	(1.3)
<b>Sub-Committee</b>					
Finance Sub	(355.9)	(359.3)	(3.3)	(1.1)	(2.2)
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>(0.0)</b>	<b>8.5</b>	<b>8.5</b>	<b>13.0</b>	<b>(4.5)</b>



- 11 To balance this position £8.5m was drawn down from the General Fund Reserve (£4.5m less than forecast at Third Financial Review). General reserves have decreased from £14.1m to £5.6m following the utilisation of £8.5m as noted above.
- 12 During 2023/24, a net total of £29.3m was drawn down from Earmarked Reserves and applied to fund the service expenditure specifically provided for. Service outturn forecasts take account of this expenditure and funding. The closing balance at 31st March 2024 was £32.3m, excluding balances held by schools.
- 13 Expenditure on the capital programme is £136.9m against a revised budget of £171.1m that was reported to the Finance Sub Committee on the 11 January 2024. The underspend of £34.2 will be slipped into 2024/25 and future years. Budgets will be re-profiled as part of the outturn reporting. This level of slippage, at 18%, is a higher variance than 2022/23 (7%).
- 14 The original budget set in February 2023 was £214.7m, during 2023/24 project managers were asked to re-profile their forecasts resulting in the revised forecast of £171.1m. Capital receipts in year amounted to £3.5m against a forecast of £1.0m, in the first instance this improvement reduces potential borrowing costs. Treatment of capital receipts will be considered as part of the review of the Capital Strategy.

**Table 2:** Total Capital Expenditure and Funding for the financial years 2023/24, and 2024/25 to 2026/27.

	Outturn 2023/24 £m	Three Year Forecast			Total £m
		2024/25 £m	2025/26 £m	2026/27 £m	
<b>Expenditure</b>					
Children and Families	29.0	56.3	32.1	12.3	129.7
Adults and Health	0.1	0.8	0.0	0.0	0.9
Highways and Transport	57.4	66.4	51.4	154.6	329.8
Economy and Growth	39.0	92.6	67.6	22.3	221.5
Environment and Communities	5.6	14.6	17.5	1.4	39.1
Corporate Policy	5.9	14.8	6.5	2.5	29.7
	136.9	245.5	175.1	193.1	750.7
<b>Funding</b>					
Grants and Other Contributions	70.0	189.7	94.5	167.9	522.1
Capital Receipts and Reserves	2.3	3.6	32.0	2.1	40.0
Borrowing	64.6	52.2	48.6	23.1	188.5
<b>Total Funding</b>	136.9	245.5	175.1	193.1	750.7

- 15 The Council's wholly owned companies' core contract expenditure was £45.05m in 2023/24, relating to services provided at cost for the Council. This position includes a net £2.4m of additional costs in year, relating to pay award pressures, significant inflation against contracts and materials, recycling income decline and increased demand for services; partly offset by improvements against fuel spend, income, staffing vacancies, and other mitigations and efficiencies.
- 16 The net increase in cost is reflected in the Council's outturn position, mainly against Environment & Communities Committee services, but also partly against Adults & Health with a net reduction against Highways & Transport Committee functions.
- 17 Ansa and Orbitas realised £0.173m in profits (after tax) from commercial activities. Although Transport Service Solutions (TSS) ceased trading on 31 March 2022, there were residual transactions in 2023/24, as part of winding down the company, generating a £0.023m final dividend payment.
- 18 The budget and policy framework sets out rules for managing the Council's financial affairs and contains the financial limits that apply in various parts of the Constitution. As part of sound financial management and to comply with the constitution any changes to the budgets agreed by Council in the MTFS require approval in line with the financial limits within the Finance Procedure Rules.

## **Consultation and Engagement**

- 19 As part of the budget setting process the Pre-Budget Consultation provided an opportunity for interested parties to review and comment on the Council's Budget proposals. The budget proposals described in the consultation document were Council wide proposals and that consultation was invited on the broad budget proposals. Where the implications of individual proposals were much wider for individuals affected by each proposal, further full and proper consultation was undertaken with people who would potentially be affected by individual budget proposals.

## **Reasons for Recommendations**

- 20 The recommendations in this report support the 'Reporting' element of the financial cycle.
- 21 The overall process for managing the Council's resources focuses on value for money, good governance, and stewardship. The approach to these responsibilities is captured in the Medium-Term Financial Strategy. Financial changes take place during the year and are

authorised in line with the Constitution. This report sets out where further approvals are required.

- 22 This report provides strong links between the Council's statutory reporting requirements and the in-year monitoring processes for financial and non-financial management of resources.
- 23 Outturn reporting provides an opportunity to check performance and management of risks against the Medium-Term Financial Strategy. The four-year MTFS is balanced and approved by Council, but risks were identified as part of this process which could require access to reserves. Members had regard to such risks as the deficit in Dedicated School Grant reserves and potential liabilities associated with the Extra Care Housing PFI (Private Finance Initiative) Scheme when approving the budget. To ensure transparency on management of such risks it is proposed that the improvement in the outturn supports an increase in the General Reserves of the Council which enhances overall financial stability.

### **Other Options Considered**

- 24 Outturn reporting could be delayed until post audit, to avoid the risk of provisional figures changing. This is not a recommended option as the audit completion certificate is not expected until September 2024. Delaying the reporting element of the financial cycle minimises the ability to react to issues during in-year monitoring. Provisional reporting has historically been accurate, so it is appropriate to react to the financial information provided in this report.
- 25 Positive variances, compared to the third quarter forecasts in 2023/24, could be allocated to budgets or reserves other than general reserves. This is not recommended as the MTFS has been agreed by Council with clear recognition of emerging risks that require mitigation.
- 26 General Reserves are used to manage risk, in accordance with the Reserves Strategy. In the Planning cycle for the 2025/26 MTFS members will have to re-consider the robustness of all estimates and the overall adequacy of reserves based on up-to-date information and forecasts, which will include a review of the level of General Reserves

### **Implications and Comments**

#### *Monitoring Officer/Legal*

- 27 The legal implications surrounding the process of setting the 2023 to 2028 Medium-Term Financial Strategy were dealt with in the reports relating to that process. The purpose of this paper is to provide a progress report at the final outturn stage in 2023/24.

- 28 Other implications arising directly from this report relate to the internal processes of approving supplementary revenue estimates, supplementary capital estimates and virements referred to above which are governed by the Finance Procedure Rules.

*Section 151 Officer/Finance*

- 29 The Council's financial resources are agreed by Council and aligned to the achievement of stated outcomes for residents and communities. Monitoring and managing performance help to ensure that resources are used effectively, and that business planning and financial decision making are made in the right context.
- 30 The Council's Audit & Governance Committee is responsible for reviewing and analysing the Council's audited position at year-end. Final Group Accounts are due for approval by 30 September 2024 following public scrutiny, external auditing, and any associated recommendations to the Committee.
- 31 The forecast outturn for 2023/24, as reported within the MTFS, was used to inform the budget setting process for 2024/25. Analysis of the final outturn helps to inform the Council of potential issues arising for the 2024/25 budget or highlights potential underlying issues that can be managed in future budget setting cycles.
- 32 At this stage further work is underway to identify whether the variations reported at outturn will form a significant risk to the 2024/25 budget.

*Policy*

- 33 This report is a backward look at Council activities during the final quarter.
- 34 The final outturn position, ongoing considerations for future years, and the impact on general reserves will be fed into the assumptions underpinning the 2025-29 Medium-Term Financial Strategy.

*Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion*

- 35 Any equality implications that arise from activities funded by the budgets that this report deals with will be dealt within the individual reports to Members or Officer Decision Records to which they relate.

*Human Resources*

- 36 This report is a backward look at Council activities at outturn and states the year end position. Any HR implications that arise from activities funded by the budgets that this report deals with will be dealt within the

individual reports to Members or Officer Decision Records to which they relate.

### *Risk Management*

- 37 Financial risks are assessed and reported on a regular basis, and remedial action taken if required. Risks associated with the achievement of the 2022/23 budget and the level of general reserves were factored into the 2023/24 financial scenario, budget, and reserves strategy.

### *Rural Communities*

- 38 The report provides details of service provision across the borough.

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

- 39 The report provides details of service provision across the borough and notes the overspend on Children in Care.

### *Public Health*

- 40 This report is a backward look at Council activities at the fourth quarter and provides the year end position. Any public health implications that arise from activities funded by the budgets that this report deals with will be dealt within the individual reports to Members or Officer Decision Records to which they relate.

### *Climate Change*

- 41 There are no direct implications for climate change.

<b>Access to Information</b>	
Contact Officer:	Adele Taylor, Interim Director of Finance and Customer Services (s151 Officer) <a href="mailto:adele.taylor@cheshireeast.gov.uk">adele.taylor@cheshireeast.gov.uk</a> Paul Goodwin, Head of Finance & Deputy Chief Finance Officer <a href="mailto:paul.goodwin@cheshireeast.gov.uk">paul.goodwin@cheshireeast.gov.uk</a>
Appendices:	<b>Annex 1</b> – Final Outturn 2023/24
Background Papers:	<a href="#">Medium Term Financial Strategy 2023-27</a> <a href="#">First Financial Review 2023/24</a> <a href="#">Second Financial Review 2023/24</a>

	<a href="#"><u>Third Financial Review 2023/24</u></a>
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## Requests for Supplementary Capital Estimates (SCEs) and Virements for Finance Sub Committee to recommend to Council to approve

Committee	Amount Requested £	Reason and Funding Source
<b>Finance Sub Committee to recommend to Council to approve the Capital Virements and SCEs</b>		
<b>Supplementary Capital SCEs over £1,000,000</b>		
<b>Children and Families</b>		
<b>Education and 14-19 Skills</b>		
Safety Valve High Needs Funding allocation 24-25	16,574,250	Additional funding awarded to support SEN capital schemes as part of Safety Valve support from DFE
Additional High Needs allocation for 23-24	4,125,537	Additional High Needs Capital funding awarded by DFE for 23-24 in March 24 not included within the MTFS
High Needs allocation for 24-25	1,677,718	New High Needs Capital funding awarded by DFE for 24-25 in March 24 not included in the MTFS
<b>Total Supplementary Capital Estimates Requested</b>	<b>22,377,505</b>	
<b>Supplementary Capital Virements over £5,000,000</b>		
<b>Education and 14-19 Skills</b>		
HNPCF - Safety Valve Capital Schemes	16,000,000	Virement from Safety Valve High Needs Funding to the specified capital projects approved within the funding allocation.
<b>Total Supplementary Capital Virements Requested</b>	<b>16,000,000</b>	
<b>Total Supplementary Capital Estimates and Virements</b>	<b>38,377,505</b>	



**Requests for Supplementary Capital Estimates (SCEs) and Virements for Finance Sub Committee to recommend to Council to approve**

Committee	Amount Requested £	Reason and Funding Source
<p><b>Finance Sub Committee to recommend to Council to approve the Capital Virements and SCEs</b></p> <p><b>Supplementary Capital SCEs over £1,000,000</b></p> <p><b>Highways &amp; Transport</b></p> <p><b>Highways</b></p> <p>Network North</p> <p><b>Transport</b></p> <p>LEVI Capital Fund 23/24</p>		
Network North	3,316,000	Additional allocation of funding via the Network North initiative.
LEVI Capital Fund 23/24	2,172,000	Grant funding received in respect of the Local Electric Vehicle Infrastructure (LEVI) fund.
<b>Total Supplementary Capital Estimates Requested</b>	<b>5,488,000</b>	
<b>Total Supplementary Virements Estimates</b>		
	<b>5,488,000</b>	

OPEN

**Council**

**17 July 2024**

**Supplementary Revenue Estimate –  
Supplementary Substance Misuse  
Treatment Grant**

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**Report of: Adele Taylor, Interim Director of Finance and Customer Services (s151 Officer)**

**Report Reference No: C/5/24-25**

**Ward(s) Affected: All wards**

**Purpose of Report**

- 1 This report seeks approval from Council for a supplementary revenue estimate as part of the Financial Review reporting for 2024/25.
- 2 The report supports the Council's vision to be an open Council as set out in the Corporate Plan. In particular, the priorities for being an open and enabling organisation, and ensuring that there is transparency in all aspects of Council decision making.

**Executive Summary**

- 3 Council is being asked to approve increased expenditure related to one fully funded supplementary revenue estimate; Supplementary Substance Misuse Treatment Grant.
- 4 Supplementary revenue estimates relate to expenditure budgets for grants that are in addition to those approved in the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) report in February 2024.
- 5 Approval is sought from Council, as the next Adults and Health Committee meeting is in late September 2024.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Council is recommended to:

1. Approve the fully funded Supplementary Revenue Estimate of £524,528 for the Supplementary Substance Misuse Treatment Grant.

### Background

- 6 The budget and policy framework sets out rules for managing the Council's financial affairs and contains the financial limits that apply in various parts of the Constitution. As part of sound financial management and to comply with the Constitution any changes to the budgets agreed by Council in the MTFS require approval in line with the financial limits within the Finance Procedure Rules.
- 7 The Council has been successful in securing a maximum of £524,528 in 2024/25 from the Department of Health & Social Care revenue funding. This funding is managed by the Office for Health Improvement & Disparities (OHID) and is awarded for the Supplementary Substance Misuse Treatment & Recovery Grant (SSMTR Grant). The grant will be provided pursuant to section 31 of the Local Government Act 2003.

### Consultation and Engagement

- 8 As part of the budget setting process the Pre-Budget Consultation provided an opportunity for interested parties to review and comment on the Council's Budget proposals. The budget proposals described in the consultation document were Council-wide proposals and that consultation was invited on the broad budget proposals. Where the implications of individual proposals were much wider for individuals affected by each proposal, further full and proper consultation was undertaken with people who would potentially be affected by individual budget proposals.

### Reasons for Recommendations

- 9 The Council monitors in-year performance through a reporting cycle, which includes Financial Review reporting. Reports during the year reflect financial and operational performance and provide the opportunity for Members to consider, approve or recommend changes in line with the Council's Financial Procedure Rules.
- 10 The overall process for managing the Council's resources focuses on value for money and good governance and stewardship.

Financial changes that become necessary during the year are properly authorised and this report sets out those areas where any further approvals are now required.

- 11 This report provides strong links between the Council's statutory reporting requirements and the in-year monitoring processes for financial and non-financial management of resources.

### **Other Options Considered**

- 12 Not applicable.

### **Implications and Comments**

#### *Monitoring Officer/Legal*

- 13 Under section 2B of the National Health Service Act 2006 (as amended) the Council must take appropriate steps to improve the health of the people who live in their area and these steps may include -
- (a) providing information and advice;
  - (b) providing services or facilities designed to promote healthy living (whether by helping individuals to address behaviour that is detrimental to health or in any other way);
  - (c) providing services or facilities for the prevention, diagnosis or treatment of illness;
  - (d) providing financial incentives to encourage individuals to adopt healthier lifestyles;
  - (e) providing assistance (including financial assistance) to help individuals to minimise any risks to health arising from their accommodation or environment;
  - (f) providing or participating in the provision of training for persons working or seeking to work in the field of health improvement;
  - (g) making available the services of any person or any facilities.
  - (h) providing grants or loans (on such terms as the local authority considers appropriate ).
- 14 The requirement for Council to approve the supplementary revenue estimate referred to above is in accordance with the Finance Procedure Rules in the Constitution.

- 15 Whereas it is anticipated that the grant in so far as it to be provided pursuant to section 31 of the Local Government Act 2003 will be on standard terms, it would be prudent for the grant terms to be reviewed in due course by the Council's Legal team to ensure that there is awareness of any key provisions that the Council will need to comply with.

*Section 151 Officer/Finance*

- 16 This is a statutory service, fully funded by an additional ring-fenced Public Health grant received directly from Central Government which has specific governance requirements surrounding it, including adherence to grant conditions which must be certified by the S151 officer through a statement of grant usage.
- 17 This modification has no impact on either the Council's current financial position or its existing Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS).
- 18 The Council's financial resources are agreed by Council and aligned to the achievement of stated outcomes for local residents and communities. Monitoring and managing performance helps to ensure that resources are used effectively, and that business planning and financial decision making are made in the right context.
- 19 The requirement for Council to approve the supplementary revenue estimates and supplementary capital estimates referred to above is in accordance with the Finance Procedure Rules.

*Policy*

- 20 Financial management supports delivery of all Council policies. The 2024/25 forecast outturn position, ongoing considerations for future years, and the impact on general reserves will be fed into the assumptions underpinning the 2025 to 2029 Medium-Term Financial Strategy.

*Equality, Diversity and Inclusion*

- 21 Any equality implications that arise from activities funded by the budgets that this report deals with will be covered within the individual reports to Members or Officer Decision Records to which they relate.

*Human Resources*

- 22 Any HR implications that arise from activities funded by the budget that this report deals with will be covered within the individual reports to Members or Officer Decision Records to which they relate.

*Risk Management*

- 23 Financial risks are assessed and reported on a regular basis, and remedial action taken if required. Risks associated with the achievement of the 2024/25 budget and the level of general reserves will be factored into the 2025/26 financial scenario, budget, and reserves strategy.

*Rural Communities*

- 24 The report provides details of service provision across the borough.

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

- 25 The report includes expenditure relating to grant funding in respect to services to children and young people.

*Public Health*

- 26 Public health implications that arise from activities that this report deals with will be covered within separate reports to Members or Officer Decision Records as required.

*Climate Change*

- 27 Climate change implications that arise from activities that this report deals with will be covered within separate reports to Members or Officer Decision Records as required.

<b>Access to Information</b>	
Contact Officer:	Adele Taylor, Interim Director of Finance and Customer Services (s151 Officer) <a href="mailto:adele.taylor@cheshireeast.gov.uk">adele.taylor@cheshireeast.gov.uk</a>
Appendices:	Not applicable.
Background Papers:	<a href="#">Medium Term Financial Strategy 2024-28</a>

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**COUNCIL – 17 JULY 2024**

**NOTICES OF MOTION**

**Submitted to Council in Accordance with the Council Procedural Rules**

**1      No Confidence in the Leader of the Council**

**Proposer by Councillor J Clowes and Seconded by Councillor C O’Leary**

This Council has no confidence in the Leader of Cheshire East Council.

We call upon Council Members to propose and elect a new Leader.



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