

# CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the **Corporate Policy Committee**  
held on Thursday, 13th June, 2024 in the Committee Suite 1,2 & 3,  
Westfields, Middlewich Road, Sandbach CW11 1HZ

## PRESENT

Councillor S Corcoran (Chair)

Councillors C Bulman, D Clark, J Clowes, M Goldsmith, A Harrison,  
N Mannion, C O'Leary, J Pearson, J Rhodes, L Wardlaw, A Moran and  
D Edwardes (substitute for Cllr Gorman)

## OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE

Rob Polkinghorne, Chief Executive  
David Brown, Director of Governance and Compliance  
Adele Taylor, Interim Director of Finance and Customer Services  
Brian Reed, Head of Democratic Services and Governance  
Karen Wheeler, Interim Director of Policy and Change  
Phil Christian, Acting Head of Business Change  
Michael Moore, Head of Communications  
Josie Griffiths, Head of Audit and Risk Management  
Nikki Bishop, Democratic Services Officer

### 1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors Michael Gorman, Mick Warren and Jos Saunders. Councillors Arthur Moran and Liz Wardlaw were present as substitutes. Councillor David Edwardes was expected as substitute and would arrive late to the meeting.

### 2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor A Moran declared an interest in item 17 (Strategic Risk Register Assurance Report relating to ANSA, Orbitas and Tatton Park Enterprises). Councillor Moran stated he was an Executive Director and Chair of ANSA and would therefore leave the room and not participate in the debate on this matter.

Councillor M Goldsmith declared an interest in item 17 (Strategic Risk Register Assurance Report relating to ANSA, Orbitas and Tatton Park Enterprises). Councillor Goldsmith stated he was a Board Director of Orbitas and would therefore leave the room and not participate in the debate on this matter.

### 3 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

**RESOLVED:**

That the minutes of the meeting held on 21 March 2024 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

#### **4 PUBLIC SPEAKING/OPEN SESSION**

There were no members of the public registered to speak.

#### **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).

#### **6 DEVOLUTION - UPDATE AND NEXT STEPS**

The committee considered the report which provided an update on the current position and proposed next steps for the Council with regard to devolution.

Members noted that devolution presented an opportunity for significant financial benefits and powers for the local authority and sub regional area however agreed that the makeup of any potential deal would need further consideration and scrutiny by the committee. Members agreed that the makeup of any deal should be of benefit to all local authorities and that member involvement was critical as discussions developed.

Members noted that whilst some adaptations would be needed, a devolution deal for a committee system local authority was achievable and that the financial challenges facing the authority would not stop discussions with government from progressing as many local authorities across the country were facing similar pressures.

*Cllr David Edwardes arrived at 10.44am*

**RESOLVED:**

That the Corporate Policy Committee

1. Authorities engagement by the Council with Government to discuss and explore the potential options and structure of a proposal that would be achievable under future sub-regional working and a devolution platform.
2. Note that any final offer of a proposal from Government will be reported back to the Corporate Policy Committee for consideration, review and scrutiny.

**7 ANNUAL COMPLAINTS AND COMPLIMENTS REPORT 2023-24**

The committee received the report which provided a summary and analysis of complaints and compliments received by the Council during 1 April 2023 – 31 March 2024.

Members queried the increase in complaints during 2023-24 and if this was linked to resource gaps across the authority and recent pulse survey results. It was confirmed that trends/themes of complaints were monitored and any complaints relating to time delays as a result of staffing gaps would inform discussions on resourcing and if this was sufficient.

Members asked for the total costs to the council in dealing with complaints and an indication of the impact of complaints on individual committee budgets. Officers committed to providing a written response.

*Cllr Pearson arrived at 10.58am*

Members queried highways related complaints and noted that these were dealt with by Ringway Jacobs. It was confirmed that not all enquiries to the council were dealt with as formal complaints, and these were often routine 'Service Requests' or 'insurance complaints'. Officers committed to providing a written response which would include a process chart for highways related enquiries and how these were dealt with. Officers also agreed to provide a written response in relation to the process for dealing with damage to cars as a result of potholes and the cost implications arising from these claims/the budget this came from.

**RESOLVED:**

That the Corporate Policy Committee

1. Note the complaints and compliments data, and the briefing material provided for 2023-24.
2. Note the issues raised within the report and improvements made in respect to the management of complaints across the council.

3. Note the council's compliance with the Corporate Complaints Policy and recommendations of the Local Government Ombudsman.

## **8 FINAL OUTTURN 2023/24**

The committee received the report which set out the final outturn for 2023-24. Members considered the financial challenges being experienced by the Council and recognised the important activities aimed at minimising the impact on council services. Members noted that the final outturn for the council would be considered by the Finance Sub Committee on 25 June 2024.

Members noted corporate policy committee services had reported an underspend of £4.5m as a result of vacancy management, increased income, reduction in spend and underspend in ICT contact expenditure.

Members queried the underspend relating to vacancy management and noted that whilst the local authority had not stopped recruitment, a more rigorous approach to recruitment was in place to ensure that when a vacancy arose, senior officers considered the full options before progressing to replace leavers (if the role needed to be replaced like for like, or if it could be done differently, and consideration of acting up arrangements).

Members acknowledged that not all savings/underspend was positive and noted that there had been an underspend on staff training. Members agreed that staff development was critical and that individuals should be encouraged and supported to develop the expertise needed to deliver good services.

### **RESOLVED (by majority):**

That the Corporate Policy Committee

1. Noted the factors leading to a positive Net Revenue final outturn of £4.5m underspend against a revised budget of £41.9m (10.7%) for Corporate Policy Committee Services.
2. Note the contents of Annex 1 and any financial mitigations decisions  
The committee received the report which set out the final outturn for 2023-24.

## **9 PERFORMANCE REPORT – Q4 2023/24**

The committee considered the report which provided an overview of organisational performance against the priorities and vision set out within the Council's 2021-25 Corporate Plan during Quarter 4 2023-24.

Members noted that the overall number of apprenticeships had decreased during Q4 due to the financial pressures facing the local authority and ongoing service restructures. It was confirmed that the number of supported internships would be expanded from September 2024 from 40, to 65.

Members noted that during Q4 the Council had contracted 237 agency workers totalling £3.6m. Members queried the total number of agency staff/consultants employed over the last year and the impact this has had on the budget. Officers committed to providing a written response.

It was confirmed that there had been a gradual increase in the number of EHCPs during Q4. Members requested further detail around the cause of the increase and the direction of travel for Q1 2024-25. Members raised concerns in relation to the performance of EHCPs being completed on time and noted this had significantly reduced during Q4. Officers committed to providing a written response.

Members highlighted that the council was a member of APSE which was a large voluntary public sector benchmarking service and queried why no benchmarking had been included in the report. Members agreed that it would be helpful to have this information in future. Officers confirmed that an updated approach would be taken to future performance reports, and these would include benchmarking data where possible.

The committee thanked staff across the organisation for their hard work, and recognised the pressure that vacancies had upon them. Members were pleased to note that staff turnover had improved, and that the number of agency staff had reduced during Q4.

**RESOLVED:**

That the Corporate Policy Committee note the organisational performance for Q4 of 2023-24.

## 10 **SERVICE BUDGETS 2024/25 (CORPORATE POLICY COMMITTEE)**

The committee considered the report which set out the allocation of the approved budgets for 2024-25 to the Corporate Policy Committee.

The Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) for Cheshire East Council for the four years 2024/25 to 2027/28 had been approved by full Council on 27 February 2024. Service committees were being allocated budgets for 2024/25 in line with the approved MTFS. The financial reporting cycle would provide regular updates on progress on delivery of the budget change items, the forecast outturn position, progress on capital schemes, movement on reserves and details of any supplementary estimates and virements.

Members thanked officers for the report and the RAG ratings/commentary which set out clearly the progress on implementation of MTFS proposals for 2024-25.

Members discussed the recommendation to remove the saving relating to the parish compact item from the MTFS. Some concerns were raised in relation to the proposal as it was felt that this would generate savings for 2025-26 onwards. It was confirmed that this item had been investigated which highlighted that the proposal would require growth funding for an additional post to administer the service and therefore the proposal was to remove the item at this time however officers were committed to working more closely with town and parish councils.

**RESOLVED (by majority):**

That the Corporate Policy Committee

1. To note the decision of the Finance Sub Committee to allocate the approved revenue and capital budgets, related budget policy changes and earmarked reserved to the Corporate Policy Committee as set out in Appendix A.
2. To note the financial reporting timetable for 2024-25 set out in Appendix B as approved at Finance Sub Committee on 22 March 2024.
3. To note progress on the delivery of the MTFS budget policy change items, the RAG ratings and latest forecasts, and the actions to be taken to address any adverse variances from the approved budget.
4. Agree to remove the parish compact item from the MTFS as it is not deliverable at present.

## **11 APPOINTMENTS TO SUB-COMMITTEES, WORKING GROUPS, PANELS, BOARDS AND JOINT COMMITTEES**

The Committee considered a report on the appointment of and appointments to sub-committees, working groups, panels, boards and joint committees for the 2024-25 municipal year. A list of nominations submitted by the political groups was circulated at the meeting.

Members noted the proposal that an Electoral and Polling District Review Sub Committee be appointed, with the same roles and responsibilities as the existing Electoral Review Sub Committee, together with additional powers to undertake a polling district review by 2025, as required by legislation.

### **RESOLVED (unanimously):**

That the Corporate Policy Committee

1. agrees the appointment of and appointments to sub-committees, working groups, panels, boards and joint committees for 2024-25, as set out in the report, as follows:

#### **Constitution Working Group (6 members) (2:2:2:0)**

Councillor J Clowes  
Councillor L Crane  
Councillor K Edwards  
Councillor D Jefferay  
Councillor C O'Leary  
Councillor M Warren

#### **Staffing Appeals Sub-Committee (pool of 10) (4:4:2:0)**

Councillor L Anderson

Councillor R Bailey  
Councillor D Clark  
Councillor N Cook  
Councillor E Hall  
Councillor C Naismith  
Councillor J Pratt  
Councillor G Smith  
Councillor L Wardlaw  
Councillor F Wilson

**General Appeals Sub-Committee (pool of 10) (4:4:2:0)**

Councillor R Bailey  
Councillor S Bennett-Wake  
Councillor T Dean  
Councillor S Edgar  
Councillor H Faddes  
Councillor E Gilman  
Councillor R Moreton  
Councillor C Naismith  
Councillor B Puddicombe  
Councillor L Smetham

**Shared Services Joint Committee (3 members) (1:1:1:0)**

Councillor J Bird  
Councillor P Redstone  
Councillor J Rhodes

**Electoral and Polling District Review Sub Committee (7 members) (3:3:1)**

Councillor S Corcoran  
Councillor F Wilson  
Councillor J Bratherton  
Councillor D Jefferay  
Councillor J Clowes  
Councillor C O'Leary  
Councillor J Pearson

**Joint Member Scrutiny Task Group (3 members) (1:1:1:0)**

Councillor B Drake  
Councillor A Moran  
Councillor J Pearson

**Cheshire East Health and Wellbeing Board (1 member)**

Councillor S Corcoran

**Joint Extra Care Housing Management Board (1 member)**

Councillor N Mannion

**Cheshire East Health and Care Partnership Board (3 members)**

Councillor J Clowes  
Councillor A Moran  
Councillor J Rhodes

**Mental Health Partnership Board**

Councillor J Snowball  
Councillor M Edwards

### **Safeguarding Adults Board**

Councillor R Vernon

2. Agrees the replacement appointments to the outside organisations to represent the local authority until May 2027, as follows:

#### **Tatton Park Board**

Councillor H Moss (Independent representative)

Councillor A Harrison (Conservative representative)

#### **Manchester Airport Consultative Committee**

Councillor L Braithwaite

3. Agrees that a sub-committee be appointed (Electoral and Polling District Review Sub-Committee) with the same roles and responsibilities as the existing Electoral Review Sub Committee, to make recommendations to the Corporate Policy Committee in respect of all matters relating to the Cheshire East Council Electoral Review and also to formally determine all matters relating to the Cheshire East Council Polling District Review, without any further reference to the Corporate Policy Committee.

4. Note the terms of reference of the bodies referred to in the report.

## **12 WORK PROGRAMME**

The committee considered the Work Programme and noted the following:

- Workforce Terms and Conditions report would be considered by the committee in October 2024.
- Implementation of an Assurance Panel – the committee noted that due to pre-election restrictions, the LGA would not publish the Corporate Peer Challenge results until 8 July 2024 and therefore proposed that, due to the urgency of this matter, that the report be taken to Full Council in July. Members agreed that a briefing with all members as soon as possible after the LGA publication on 8 July would be needed, prior to debate at Full Council.
- The committee agreed that the Financial Outturn reports for the entire council, as well as corporate policy committee services, should be received by the committee going forward with the Q1 outturn scheduled for October 2024. Members stated that a summary indication of the direction of travel for Q2 would also be helpful in October.
- The committee agreed that horizon scanning was a critical part of the role of councillors and the committee and asked that consideration be given to preparing a report which sets out, post 5 July 2024 election/King's Speech a summary of the key announcements, changes and impact of services. Officers agreed to consider this further.

**RESOLVED:**

That the Work Programme be noted.

**13 MINUTES OF SUB-COMMITTEES**

**RESOLVED:**

That the minutes of the Finance Sub Committee held on Friday 22 March 2024 be received and noted.

**14 REPORTING OF URGENT DECISIONS**

**RESOLVED:**

That the committee note the urgent decision made by the Chief Executive on behalf of the committee relating to the Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme Grant.

**15 STRATEGIC RISK REGISTER ASSURANCE REPORT Q4 2023-24**

The committee considered the report which set out the activity of the council's Strategic Risk Register for Quarter 4 2023/24; January to March 2024.

Members stated that a number of risks set out within the report had remained unchanged since Q1 2023-24, such as 'Failure to adhere to governance processes' and queried if the mitigation actions needed to be reviewed. Officers confirmed that a detailed piece of work was underway to review the actions associated with strategic risks and provide assurance on the progress on actions identified, in terms of implementation and the impact they achieve.

The committee noted that Strategic Risk 13, Information Security and Cyber Threat and agreed that risk was a very real threat, which would have significant impact for the organisation. The committee welcomed the opportunity to receive a briefing on this matter and noted that a number of officer business continuity workshops were being held this month with colleagues from the Emergency Planning Service, which included a focus on cyber-attacks.

**RESOLVED:**

That the Corporate Policy Committee

1. Note the position of the Council's Strategic Risk Register for Q4 2023-24.

Councillor A Moran and Councillor M Goldsmith left the meeting at 12.18pm and did not return.

**16 EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC**

**RESOLVED:**

That the press and public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the following item pursuant to Section 100(A)4 of the Local Government Act 1972

on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraphs 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972 and public interest would not be served in publishing the information.

## **17 STRATEGIC RISK REGISTER ASSURANCE REPORT**

The committee considered the Strategic Risk Register for the council's wholly owned companies ANSA, Orbitas and Tatton Park Enterprises for the period Q4 2023-24.

### **RESOVED:**

That the Corporate Policy Committee

1. Note the Strategic Risk Registers for Q4 2023-24 of ANSA, Orbitas and Tatton Park Enterprises.

The meeting commenced at 10.00 am and concluded at 1.10 pm

Councillor S Corcoran (Chair)