

CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the **Corporate Policy Committee**
held on Thursday, 23rd March, 2023 in the Committee Suite 1,2 & 3,
Westfields, Middlewich Road, Sandbach CW11 1HZ

PRESENT

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

Councillors C Browne, D Brown, J Clowes, JP Findlow, K Flavell, N Mannion,
A Martin, J Saunders, M Warren, P Williams and C Bulman (for Cllr Rhodes)

Other Members present

Councillor L Smetham

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE

Jane Burns, Executive Director of Corporate Services
David Brown, Director of Governance and Compliance
Paul Goodwin, Head of Finance
Sarah Bullock, Director of Policy and Change
Phil Christian, Acting Head of Business Change
Gareth Pawlett, Chief Information Officer
Josie Griffiths, Head of Audit and Risk
Katie Small, Democratic Services Manager
Paul Mountford, Democratic Services

Apologies

Councillor J Rhodes, Lorraine O'Donnell - Chief Executive, and Alex
Thompson - Director of Finance and Customer Services and S151 Officer

71 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

72 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the meeting held on 9th February 2023 be approved as
a correct record.

73 PUBLIC SPEAKING/OPEN SESSION

There were no public speakers.

74 CHESHIRE EAST PEOPLE'S PANEL

The Committee considered a report on the recommendations of the Cheshire East People's Panel on the cost of living, which included an update on the actions that were progressing and planned as a result of the recommendations.

The Chair welcomed three members of the People's Panel to the meeting: Stuart, Susan, and Anthony. At the invitation of the Chair, each addressed the Committee.

The Panel representatives felt that the People's Panel was an innovative and inclusive approach to consultation and engagement. It gave citizens who usually felt excluded from the democratic process a proper voice. It enabled issues to be explored in depth and in a non-adversarial way and focussed on agreement and consensus. The Panel representatives had been encouraged by the Council's positive response to their recommendations.

Officers advised that this was a pilot scheme to test out a participatory democracy process, as part of the refreshed approach to consultation and engagement. The Council was already working on, or considering plans to take forward, 10 of the Panel's 12 recommendations. The reasons for not pursuing the other two recommendations were given in the report.

Officers advised that the criteria used to select members of the Panel in order to ensure a fair representation included people living in rural areas.

With regard to a Panel recommendation to maximise the use of land for community food growing, members suggested that planning policies should be reviewed to encourage the provision of more allotments. In addition, the Chair undertook to provide the Panel members with details of the Council's green spaces scheme.

The Chair thanked all members of the People's Panel, and the three representatives who had attended the meeting.

RESOLVED (unanimously)

That the Committee

1. notes the report of the Cheshire East People's Panel and thanks the Panel for their participation, report and recommendations, as set out in Appendix 1 to the report;
2. agrees the actions proposed in response to the recommendations as set out in Appendix 2; and
3. asks that the report be shared with all members of the Council.

(The People's Panel representatives left the meeting at this point.)

75 CENSUS 2021 RESULTS

The Committee considered a report which provided a summary of the key data released to date from the Census 2021 for the Cheshire East area.

Members felt that the Census data on levels of deprivation in Cheshire East was misleading and that deprivation had not decreased and may have increased. It was suggested that care be taken in updating the 'tartan rug' to ensure that other relevant data sources were used.

Members were advised that the ward profiles would be updated as soon as possible, and a link to the website would be included in the members' briefing. Details of the new wards would also be included in the induction for members following the local elections. The Chair undertook to provide members with the data source for the wards.

RESOLVED (unanimously)

That the Committee

1. notes the headlines in the Census 2021 releases made to date as set out in paragraph 6.5 and Appendix 1 of the report;
2. notes the release timetable for the Census 2021 data, as detailed in paragraph 6.4; and
3. agrees to utilise the Census 2021 data in all new strategies and plans, including developing proposals under the MTFS, within the refresh of the Health and Wellbeing strategy and when looking to review and refine the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy.

76 ICT STRATEGY

The Committee considered a report on an ICT Strategy for Cheshire East Council for the period 2023-2027.

Officers gave an assurance that the four-year strategy would be sufficiently flexible to allow for advances in technology.

RESOLVED (unanimously)

That the ICT Strategy 2023–27 for Cheshire East Council be approved.

77 ICT HYBRID MODEL UPDATE REPORT

The Committee considered a report on progress with the mobilisation of a new hybrid model for ICT and proposals for a joint Cheshire East/Cheshire West and Chester Council scrutiny task and finish group to provide

member oversight. The draft terms of reference for the task and finish group were set out in paragraph 2.3 of the report.

Appendix 1 to the report set out a report to be considered by the Shared Services Joint Committee on 17th March 2023 which provided an update on the work to mobilise the change programme.

Officers advised that further reports on progress with the cost and benefits of the new hybrid model would come forward to future meetings both as part of the quarterly performance reports and as reports to the Shared Services Joint Committee. Therefore, ongoing member oversight was assured.

RESOLVED

That the Committee

1. notes the actions taken to mobilise the programme to move to new hybrid model for ICT; and
2. endorses the draft terms of reference for the Joint Scrutiny Task and Finish Group.

78 CYBER SECURITY UPDATE

The Committee considered a report which provided an update on the status of cyber security within the Council. The report provided assurance about the protections in place to mitigate risk.

Officers outlined the phishing tests that were being conducted with members and staff, and the measures that were taken where an inappropriate response to a phishing email had been made. This included further training on cyber security.

Officers had also conducted an investigation to identify former employees and external consultants who had continued potentially to have access to the Council's financial systems. It was confirmed that there had been no access, however processes had been reviewed and this would be subject to ongoing audit.

RESOLVED

That the report be noted.

79 2022/23 FINANCIAL UPDATE

The Committee considered a report which provided an update on financial management for 2022/23. The report included as an appendix the report to the Finance Sub-Committee on 8th March 2023, the recommendations of which had been approved by the Sub-Committee at that meeting.

Appendix 3 to the Finance Sub-Committee report set out those matters which came within the remit of the Corporate Policy Committee.

Officers advised that recommendation 1.1.1.2 in the report should refer to Tables 2-4 and not just Table 4.

In response to a question from members, Councillor A Stott, Chair of the Finance Sub-Committee, advised that the forecast overspend of £7.7M in 2022-23 would be met from the MTFS and General Fund Reserves. Hopefully, those Reserves would be rebuilt over time. Increasing fees and charges for services in order to generate additional income was a matter for individual service committees.

In response to a question from members, the Head of Financial Services advised that there was a direct relationship between Housing Benefit Subsidy grant and the cost of the benefits paid out and therefore the receipt of such grant would not have an impact on the outturn position.

RESOLVED

That the Committee

1. notes the report to the Finance Sub-Committee on 8th March 2023 and specifically the recommendations to service committees contained therein, and accordingly:
 - (a) notes the financial update and forecast outturn relevant to the Committee's terms of reference; and
 - (b) notes the delegated decisions relating to supplementary revenue estimates for specific grants coded directly to services in accordance with Financial Procedure Rules as detailed in Appendix 3, Section 2, Tables 2-4; and
2. notes Appendix 3 and the following sections specific to the Committee:
 - Changes to Revenue budget 2022/23
 - Corporate Grants Register
 - Debt Management
 - Capital Strategy
 - Reserve Strategy

80 PERFORMANCE REPORT - QUARTER 3 2022/23

The Committee considered a report which provided an oversight of organisational performance for the third quarter of 2022/23 against the priorities in the Council's Corporate Plan 2021-25.

Officers advised that the Council was continuing to make progress against the Corporate Plan, despite challenging circumstances.

Officers responded as follows to members' questions and comments:

- The Council had developed a communications strategy, a customer experience strategy and a digital inclusion strategy to help residents, including elderly people who have found it difficult to access Council services or report matters to the Council.
- With regard to the discharge of people from hospital to short term residential care, there was a need for closer working with the NHS. The Council had a home first policy which sought to enable people to remain in their own homes. However, workforce shortages in the domiciliary care sector were causing issues for the Council.
- The issue of whether to fill staff vacancies or recruit agency workers was complex. The Council did try to recruit to critical posts where possible but had to work against the background of a challenging labour market and financial constraints, and staff vacancies had to be dealt with on a case-by-case basis.
- The issue of attendance by people at library events, and other aspects of library usage, would be considered carefully as part of the forthcoming consultation on library opening hours.
- A written response would be provided on whether leisure centres for Knutsford, Middlewich and Poynton were to go forward.
- A written response would be provided on schemes coming forward in relation to the Macclesfield Regeneration Scheme.

RESOLVED (unanimously)

That the Committee notes the performance against Quarter 3 of 2022/23 of delivery of the Corporate Plan.

81 STRATEGIC RISK REGISTER ASSURANCE REPORT Q3 2022/23

The Committee considered an update report on the activity of the Council's Strategic Risk Register for Quarter 3, 2022/23.

Members noted that the Council continued to face unprecedentedly high levels of risk.

Officers confirmed that the data for Quarter 4 would be carried forward into the new municipal year to enable the comparison of strategic risk data to continue.

RESOLVED

That the Committee notes the position of the Strategic Risk Register for Quarter 3, 2022/23.

82 CALENDAR OF MEETINGS 2023-2024

The Committee considered a report on the Calendar of Meetings for 2023-2024.

Officers reported two changes to the draft calendar:

- The Council meeting scheduled in the draft calendar for 21st February 2024 had been rescheduled to 27th February to avoid the school half-term break.
- The General Appeals Sub-Committee meeting scheduled for 13th June 2023 had been rescheduled to 20th June.

Officers advised that the Constitution Working Group had agreed to undertake a survey of members in the new Council on the question of whether some committee meetings should be moved to evenings.

It was noted that the Cared for Children and Care Leaver Committee may decide to review the start times for its meetings so that some were held in the morning.

RESOLVED (by majority)

That subject to the changes reported at the meeting, the draft calendar of meetings for Cheshire East Council for the period May 2023 to October 2024 be recommended to Council for approval.

83 WORK PROGRAMME

Officers reported that the work programme for 2023-24 would be presented to the Committee's first meeting of the new municipal year.

RESOLVED

That the report on the future work programme be noted.

84 MINUTES OF SUB-COMMITTEES

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the following sub-committee meetings be received:

General Appeals Sub-Committee – 10th January 2023
Finance Sub-Committee – 8th March 2023

As this was the last meeting of the Corporate Policy Committee for this municipal year and before the local elections, the Chair thanked all Members for their helpful and constructive contributions. He also thanked the officers for their support, in terms of preparing and presenting the reports, answering Members' questions, and supporting the meetings.

The Chair also said farewell to all members, and in particular paid tribute to Councillor Paul Findlow, who was not seeking re-election in May, having served as a councillor since 1976.

The meeting commenced at 10.00 am and concluded at 12.17 pm

Councillor S Corcoran (Chair)