

CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the **Corporate Policy Committee**
held on Thursday, 5th October, 2023 in Committee Suite 1, 2 & 3, Westfields,
Middlewich Road, Sandbach CW11 1HZ

PRESENT

Councillor S Corcoran (Chair)
Councillor C Browne (Vice-Chair)

Councillors C Bulman, D Clark, M Goldsmith, A Harrison, N Mannion,
C O'Leary, J Pearson, J Rhodes, J Saunders and M Warren

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE

Lorraine O'Donnell, Chief Executive
David Brown, Director of Governance and Compliance
Alex Thompson, Director of Finance and Customer Services
Sarah Bullock, Director of Policy and Change
Gareth Pawlett, Chief Information Officer
Dan Coyne, Head of Communities and Integration
Paul Mountford, Democratic Services

APOLOGIES

Councillor J Clowes

31 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

In relation to an item on the agenda on the Armed Forces Employer Recognition Scheme, Councillor J Pearson declared for the record that he was an Officer in the Army Reserves.

32 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the meeting held on 11th July 2023 be approved as a correct record.

33 PUBLIC SPEAKING/OPEN SESSION

There were no public speakers.

With the consent of the Chair, Councillor C Naismith spoke as a visiting member in relation to the Strategic Risk Register Assurance Report which showed a reduced risk in relation to HS2 infrastructure development. With regard to the Government's announcement the previous day that the northern leg of HS2 was being cancelled, he asked how many planned projects by the Council were dependent on HS2, how much the Council

had already spent, what prospects there were of recovering the money and what were the implications for Crewe and the wider Borough.

The Vice-Chair, Councillor C Browne, as Deputy Leader and Chair of the Highways and Transport Committee, responded that the decision would have an impact on a range of projects, including the redevelopment of Crewe Railway Station and the surrounding area, Middlewich Eastern Bypass and the A500 widening scheme. The Council had committed over £11m to HS2-related projects, of which £8m had already been spent. In Crewe alone, HS2 would have provided 5,000 new jobs and boosted the local economy by £750m. The Council would be discussing with its strategic partners what could be salvaged from the cancellation. The Council would also be seeking to recover from the Government the costs incurred. The Chair and Leader of the Council, Councillor S Corcoran, added that the way in which the decision to cancel the project had been taken without first speaking to local council leaders must leave the decision open to challenge. Other members present expressed their concern at the decision.

34 FIRST FINANCIAL REVIEW 2023/24

The Committee considered a report which provides an early overview of the Cheshire East Council forecast outturn for the financial year 2023/24.

The report highlighted the ongoing financial challenges resulting from inflation, interest rates and increasing demand for statutory services. The implications of the Government's decision on HS2 would now need to be factored in. The report set out a range of measures for mitigating the budget challenge facing the Council. Further details were set out in the Annex and Appendices to the report.

RESOLVED (unanimously)

That the Committee

1. notes the factors leading to a forecast adverse Net Revenue financial pressure of £12.8m against a revised budget of £353.1m (3.6%);
2. notes the forecast and further mitigations needing to be identified, aimed at bringing spending back in line with budget;
3. notes the in-year forecast Capital Spending of £205.8m against an approved MTFS budget of £214.7m due to slippage that has been re-profiled into future years;
4. notes the contents of Annex 1 to the report and each of the appendices contained therein, and notes that any financial mitigation decisions requiring approval will be made in line with relevant delegations;

5. approves fully funded supplementary revenue estimates over £500,000 up to £1,000,000 in accordance with Financial Procedure Rules as detailed in Appendix 1: Adults and Health Committee, Section 2 Corporate Grants Register, Table 3;
6. approves fully funded supplementary revenue estimates over £500,000 up to £1,000,000 in accordance with Financial Procedure Rules as detailed in Appendix 2: Children and Families Committee, Section 2 Corporate Grants Register, Table 3;
7. approves fully funded supplementary revenue estimates over £500,000 up to £1,000,000 in accordance with Financial Procedure Rules as detailed in Appendix 4: Economy and Growth Committee, Section 2 Corporate Grants Register, Table 2;
8. approves fully funded supplementary revenue estimates over £500,000 up to £1,000,000 in accordance with Financial Procedure Rules as detailed in Appendix 5: Environment and Communities Committee, Section 2 Corporate Grants Register, Table 2;
9. approves capital virements up to and including £5,000,000 in accordance with Financial Procedure Rules as detailed in Appendix 7: Finance Sub-Committee, Section 5 Capital Strategy, Table 5; and
10. notes that Council will be asked to approve:
 - (a) fully funded supplementary revenue estimates over £1,000,000 in accordance with Financial Procedure Rules as detailed in Appendix 7 Finance Sub-Committee, Section 2 Corporate Grants Register, Table 3; and
 - (b) capital supplementary estimates over £1,000,000 in Appendix 7 Finance Sub-Committee, Section 5 Capital Strategy, Table 6; and
11. approves a delegation to Executive Directors, in consultation with the relevant committee chair and vice-chair, to engage in formal consultations on proposals for budget mitigations if required.

35 DEVELOPING A NEW CORPORATE PLAN

The Committee considered an update report on progress in developing a new strategic plan for Cheshire East.

A draft refreshed strategic policy framework was set out in Appendix 1 to the report.

The report summarised the internal engagement activities that had taken place during July and August 2023 (Phase 1) to inform the next phases of developing the strategic plan.

Officers advised that they would await further details on the Government's announced cancellation of the northern leg of HS2 in order to assess the implications for the Council's plans and strategies.

RESOLVED (unanimously)

That the Committee

1. approves that the Corporate Plan will be referred to as the 'Cheshire East Plan';
2. approves the planned activities and timescale to implement phases 2 and 3 of developing the new strategic plan; and
3. remains committed to the previous decision of 11th July 2023 to agree to receive the draft Cheshire East Plan on 8th February 2024.

36 COMMUNITY GRANTS PROGRAMME 2023/24 AND 2024/25

The Committee considered a report on several community grant schemes provisionally scheduled to be delivered, and associated funding allocated, during 2023/24 and 24/25.

RESOLVED (unanimously)

That the Committee approves the community grant schemes for 2023/24 and 2024/25 as set out in paragraph 7 of the report.

37 ARMED FORCES EMPLOYER RECOGNITION SCHEME (ERS)

The Committee considered an update report on the Silver Defence Employer Recognition Award received by the Council in May 2022. The report also set out the requirements for applying for the Gold Defence Employer Recognition Award.

Officers advised that any references to 'Employee' in the report should read 'Employer'.

Officers undertook to take away for consideration a number of comments by members as follows:

- Members questioned the comparability of the roles of military reservist and special constable as referred to in the report.
- Further information was required on what support the Council would provide for any reservist mobilised for active service.
- The Council appeared not to have participated in Reserves Day on 21st June. It was suggested that this event be included in the calendar for future years.

RESOLVED (unanimously)

That the Committee agrees to

1. apply for the Gold Defence Employer Recognition Scheme; and
2. make the necessary policy changes as set out in Annex 1 of the report, to meet the requirements to achieve ERS Gold Award.

38 APPOINTMENT TO OUTSIDE ORGANISATION

The Committee considered an appointment to the Cheshire and Wirral Partnership NHS Foundation Trust Council of Governors.

The Committee at its meeting on 11th July had appointed Councillor L Wardlaw to the Council or Governors, However, as Chair of the Council's Scrutiny Committee, which scrutinised health matters, Councillor Wardlaw was ineligible under the Trust's constitution to serve as a Governor of the Trust. It fell to the relevant political group to nominate a replacement.

RESOLVED (unanimously)

That Councillor Sally Holland be appointed as the Council's representative on the Cheshire and Wirral Partnership NHS Foundation Trust Council of Governors.

39 DIGITAL STRATEGY UPDATE

The Committee considered an update report on the progress and achievements related to the Council's Digital Strategy 2022-24. The report also outlined the approach to accelerating digital innovation.

RESOLVED (unanimously)

That the Committee

1. notes the progress made in respect of the aims of the Digital Strategy, and the proposals to accelerate digital transformation; and
2. notes the re-shaping of the Digital Strategy Board and the introduction of a Digital Design Authority, with an initial focus on financial sustainability through digital transformation.

40 CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE STRATEGY UPDATE

The Committee considered an update report on achievements in relation to the Council's Customer Experience Strategy.

It was suggested that the Council could track the numbers of people using its website to provide an indication of the level of digital interaction.

RESOLVED (unanimously)

That the Committee

1. notes the progress made in respect of the aims of the Customer Experience Strategy;
2. notes the improved performance of the Council's approach to, and delivery of, an improved customer experience; and
3. approves the proposed future focus for the Customer Experience Programme as contained within the report at Paragraph 13 (a to c).

41 PERFORMANCE REPORT - QUARTER 1 2023/24

The Committee considered a report on organisational performance against the priorities and vision set out in the Council's Corporate Plan 2021-25 for Quarter 1 of 2023/24.

There were two additions to the performance report this time:

- Health and safety data had now been incorporated into the report.
- Data from the newly-established Office for Local Government had been attached at Appendix 2.

Members were pleased to note significant progress in relation to regeneration and the net zero target, improvements in children's services and a further reduction in the number of planning applications in hand.

The Chair also drew attention to the support that the Council had given to Afghan interpreters and their families in the Borough. An event had been held in Sandbach yesterday to thank those Council officers and volunteers who had given their support. The Chair placed on record his thanks to them.

Officers confirmed that the panel established to consider the management of vacancies and agency staff would be starting work next week.

RESOLVED (unanimously)

That

1. the Committee confirms its understanding of organisational performance in quarter 1 of 2023/24; and
2. officers note and take on board the comments of members in relation to additional data and intelligence that should be included within performance management and reporting during 2023/24.

42 STRATEGIC RISK REGISTER ASSURANCE REPORT Q1 2023/24

The Committee considered an update report on the activity of the Council's Strategic Risk Register for Quarter 1 2023/24.

Officers advised that the reduction in the risk score for HS2 Infrastructure and Investment (SR10) during Quarter 1 was based on the Government's commitment at that time to HS2 Phase 2. Members noted there would be significant changes to SR10 following recent announcements.

Members also noted the high risk scores relating to Council funding, children's services and cyber security.

RESOLVED (unanimously)

That the Committee notes the position of the Strategic Risk Register for Quarter 1 2023/24, in respect of the content, description, scoring and risk management activity outlined.

43 WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee reviewed its work programme for 2023-24.

RESOLVED

That the work programme be noted.

44 MINUTES OF SUB-COMMITTEES

RESOLVED

That the following sub-committee minutes be received and noted:

- General Appeals Sub-Committee – 22nd August 2023
- Finance Sub-Committee – 7th September 2023

45 REPORTING OF URGENT DECISIONS

RESOLVED

That the Committee notes an urgent decision taken under Procedure Rules 2.10 and 2.11 by the Chief Executive on 6th July 2023 to appoint up to three lay members from neighbouring authorities to sit on the independent review panel.

Before closing the meeting, the Chair commented that this would be the last meeting of the Corporate Policy Committee attended by the Chief Executive, Dr Lorraine O'Donnell, before taking up her new post at Bradford. The Chair placed on record his thanks to Dr O'Donnell for her support to the Committee over the last three and a half years, and for

steering the Council through the Covid pandemic and financial challenges. Dr O'Donnell responded by saying that it had been a challenging three and a half years but that she had enjoyed her time at Cheshire East and she thanked members for their support.

The Chair ended the meeting with the comment that the Council was facing a significant financial challenge and was doing what it could to protect the most vulnerable in society. He thanked the officers for what they were doing to address the challenge.

The meeting commenced at 10.00 am and concluded at 12.17 pm

Councillor S Corcoran (Chair)