

Corporate Policy Committee

Agenda

Date: Thursday, 30th November, 2023
Time: 10.00 am
Venue: Committee Suite 1, 2 & 3, Westfields, Middlewich Road,
Sandbach CW11 1HZ

The agenda is divided into 2 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 top of each report.

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

1. **Apologies for Absence**

To note any apologies for absence from Members.

2. **Declarations of Interest**

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

3. **Minutes of Previous Meeting** (Pages 5 - 12)

To approve as a correct record the minutes of the meeting held on 5th October 2023.

4. **Public Speaking/Open Session**

In accordance with paragraph 2.24 of the Committee Procedure Rules and Appendix on Public Speaking, set out in the [Constitution](#), a total period of 15 minutes is allocated for members of the public to put questions to the Committee on any matter relating to this agenda. Each member of the public will be allowed up to two minutes to speak; the Chair will have discretion to vary this 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.

Contact: Paul Mountford, Democratic Services
Tel: 01270 686472
E-Mail: paul.mountford@cheshireeast.gov.uk

5. **Second Financial Review 2023/24** (Pages 13 - 52)

To consider a report on the second review of the Cheshire East Council forecast outturn for the financial year 2023/24.

6. **Medium-Term Financial Strategy Consultation 2024/25 - 2027/28 (Corporate Policy Committee)** (Pages 53 - 66)

To consider a report on the indicative financial envelope for the Corporate Policy Committee to support consultation on the development of the Cheshire East Medium-Term Financial Strategy 2024/25 to 2027/28.

7. **Council Tax Base 2024/25** (Pages 67 - 74)

To consider a report on the Council tax base calculation 2024/25 for recommendation to Council in December 2023.

8. **Proposed Changes to the Constitution** (Pages 75 - 82)

To consider a report on proposed changes to the Constitution.

9. **Review of the Committee System and Medium-Term Financial Strategy Saving** (Pages 83 - 94)

To consider proposed improvements to the committee system.

10. **Cheshire East Council Electoral Review** (Pages 95 - 162)

To consider the recommendations of the Electoral Review Sub-Committee in relation to future council size for recommendation to full Council in December.

11. **Workforce Strategy 2021-2025** (Pages 163 - 172)

To consider a report on progress against delivery of Cheshire East Council's Workforce Strategy 2021-2025 up to October 2023.

12. **Six Months Complaints Report** (Pages 173 - 208)

To consider a report which provides a summary and analysis of complaints and compliments received by the Council during the period 1st April 2023 to 30th September 2023.

13. **Work Programme** (Pages 209 - 214)

To consider the Work Programme and determine any required amendments.

14. **Minutes of Sub-Committees** (Pages 215 - 228)

To receive the minutes of the following sub-committees:

Finance Sub-Committee – 2nd November 2023

General Appeals Sub-Committee – 10th October 2023

General Appeals Sub-Committee – 7th November 2023

15. **WorkplaCE (Estate Rationalisation)** (Pages 229 - 332)

To consider a report which proposes the closure of the Westfields offices in Sandbach following consultation with Cheshire East Council recognised trade unions, employees and members.

16. **Exclusion of the Press and Public**

The reports relating to the remaining items on the agenda have been withheld from public circulation and deposit pursuant to Section 100(B)(2) of the Local Government Act 1972 on the grounds that the matters may be determined with the press and public excluded.

The Committee may decide that the press and public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the following items 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 and 5 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972 and the public interest would not be served in publishing the information.

PART 2 – MATTERS TO BE CONSIDERED WITHOUT THE PUBLIC AND PRESS PRESENT

17. **WorkplaCE (Estate Rationalisation)** (Pages 333 - 336)

To consider Appendix 4 to the report.

18. **ERP Support Contract Extension** (Pages 337 - 344)

To consider a report on ERP Support Contract Extension.

Membership: Councillors C Browne (Vice-Chair), C Bulman, D Clark, J Clowes, S Corcoran (Chair), M Goldsmith, A Harrison, N Mannion, C O'Leary, J Pearson, J Rhodes, J Saunders and M Warren

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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)

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Corporate Policy Committee

30 November 2023

Second Financial Review 2023/24

Report of: Alex Thompson, Director of Finance and Customer Services (s151 Officer)

Report Reference No: CP/28/23-24

Ward(s) Affected:

Purpose of Report

- 1 This report provides Members with the second review of the Cheshire East Council forecast outturn for the financial year 2023/24. Members are being asked to consider the serious financial challenges being experienced by the Council (and other councils) and to recognise the important activities aimed at minimising the impact on services.
- 2 The Committee is being asked to consider the financial performance of the services relevant to its terms of reference.

Executive Summary

- 3 The Council operates a financial cycle of planning, monitoring and reporting. This review is part of the monitoring cycle and provides a forecast outturn position for the 2023/24 financial year. The information in this report also supports planning for next year's budget. This report supports the Council priority of being an open and enabling organisation, ensuring that there is transparency in all aspects of Council decision making.
- 4 The full report was received by the Finance Sub-Committee on 2 November 2023. Service Committees will receive the sections relevant to their committee (see Appendices).

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Corporate Policy Committee:

1. Consider the report of the Finance Sub Committee: [Finance Sub-Committee, 2nd November, 2023](#)
2. Consider the factors leading to a forecast Net Revenue financial underspend of (£0.5m) against a revised budget of £41.2m (1.2%).
3. Consider the forecast and any further mitigations to be identified.
4. Consider the in-year forecast Capital Spending of £11.7m against an approved MTFS budget of £12.8m, due to slippage that has been re-profiled into future years.
5. Scrutinise the contents of Annex 1 and Appendix 3 and note that any financial mitigation decisions requiring approval will be made in line with relevant delegations.

Reasons for Recommendations

- 5 Committees are responsible for discharging the Council's functions within the Budget and Policy Framework provided by Council. The Budget will be aligned with Committee and Head of Service responsibilities as far as possible.
- 6 Budget holders are expected to manage within the budgets provided by full Council. Committee and Sub-Committees are responsible for monitoring financial control and making decisions as required by these rules.

Access to Information

Contact Officer:	Alex Thompson, Director of Finance and Customer Services (s151 Officer) alex.thompson@cheshireeast.gov.uk Paul Goodwin, Head of Finance & Deputy Chief Finance Officer paul.goodwin@cheshireeast.gov.uk
Appendices:	1 Second Financial Review 2023/24 2 Annex 1 – Second Financial Review 2023/24
Background Papers:	Medium Term Financial Strategy 2023-27 First Financial Review 2023/24 Second Financial Review 2023/24

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Finance Sub Committee

2 November 2023

Second Financial Review 2023/24

Report of: Alex Thompson, Director of Finance and Customer Services

Report Reference No: [To be provided by Democratic Services]

Ward(s) Affected: Not applicable

Purpose of Report

- 1 This report provides Members with the second review of the Cheshire East Council forecast outturn for the financial year 2023/24. Members are being asked to consider the serious financial challenges being experienced by the Council (and other councils) and to recognise the important activities aimed at minimising the impact on services.
- 2 The report highlights the ongoing negative impact of high inflation, rising interest rates and increasing demand for services since the Council set its budget in February 2023. Annex 1 of the report highlights in detail what the Council is forecasting to achieve as part of the 2023/24 budget. Tables include updates to items identified in the MTFS plus further items identified in-year.
- 3 Reporting the financial forecast outturn 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.
- 4 The report also requests Member approval for amendments to the Council's budget in line with authorisation levels within the Constitution.

Executive Summary

- 5 The Council operates a financial cycle of planning, monitoring and reporting. This review is part of the monitoring cycle and provides a forecast outturn position for the 2023/24 financial year. The information

in this report also supports planning for next year's budget. This report supports the Council priority of being an open and enabling organisation, ensuring that there is transparency in all aspects of Council decision making.

- 6 The Council set its 2023/24 annual budget in February 2023. The budget was balanced, as required by statute, and included important assumptions about spending in the year. The budget is part of the Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) 2023 to 2027.
- 7 The MTFS for 2023/24 included £70m of service growth and £42m of service savings. The equivalent figures for 2022/23 were £21m of growth and £7m of savings. This highlights the challenge of delivering the 2023/24 budget even before the impact of increased demand, prevailing high inflation and rising interest rates.
- 8 The first financial review of 2023/24, reported to Corporate Policy Committee in October 2023, reported a pressure of £12.8m, reduced from £26.6m through potential mitigations. The report highlighted further activities that would be instigated to address current spending forecasts and income levels.
- 9 Prices, and demand, for services to support children and adults that require Council services continue to rise, reflecting complexity of care needs and market conditions.
- 10 Despite further savings of £4.3m being identified the overall spending forecasts have increased. The second financial review of 2023/24 is forecasting a pressure of £18.7m by 31 March 2024, an increase of £5.9m compared to first financial review.
- 11 The financial pressures being experienced by Cheshire East Council are not unique. Headlines published about local government finance including the BBC highlight that:
 - (a) councils will be £5.2bn short by April 2026 (after making £2.5bn of planned reductions),
 - (b) the average council facing a £33m deficit,
 - (c) £1.1bn of reserves will be required to balance in 2023/24.
- 12 Local authorities that have committed, or are likely to commit to, financial activities beyond their legal means must issue a s.114 notice. This has already happened for various reasons at eight local authorities to date (Birmingham, Northamptonshire, Nottingham, Northumberland, Croydon, Woking, Thurrock, and Slough). The pressures quoted in these councils are between £35m and £1.5bn.

- 13 Please see Financial Implications section for risks and consequences relating to a s.114 notice.
- 14 Press articles continue to report that more councils are concerned about further s.114 notices being issued. A search of such reports identifies Coventry, Derby, Havering, Medway, Leeds, Cheshire West and Chester, Warrington, Middlesbrough, Kirklees, Hastings, Kent, Stoke, Somerset, Guildford, Southampton as well as Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole, as all being linked to financial stress and potential s.114 notices. The pressures quoted in these councils range from £8.5m to £47m. This list has got longer since the First Financial Review and continues to grow.
- 15 Local authorities, including Cheshire East Council, therefore continue to liaise with Government departments over the severity of so many emerging financial issues. The Council achieves this liaison either directly or through professional or political networks. The focus of this lobbying for Cheshire East Council is on the following important local issues:
 - (a) **High needs / special educational needs deficit.** The Council reported a cumulative deficit of £47m from 2022/23, which is set to rise to £85.8m by March 2024 and to £243.5m by 2027. The cost of maintaining this deficit in interest payments is forecast to exceed £3m in 2023/24. The Council is also funding transport costs of over £1m in excess of the 2023/24 budget to manage demand. The Council has now begun conversations on entry to the DfE's Safety Valve Scheme.
 - (b) **Capital Funding and HS2.** Major infrastructure schemes are at risk due to construction costs inflation of 15% to 20%. Associated Government grants have not been revised to keep pace and do not reflect up to date costs forecasts. The Council is therefore having to manage all additional costs. The announcement of the cancellation of phase 2 of the HS2 project referred to escalating costs, and this also impacts on the Council's finances. Letters have been sent to Government ministers and officials to highlight the £11.2m spent by the Council on this project. The Government is looking at this issue as well as developing wider plans to provide additional funding for infrastructure projects in the North of England following the announcements about HS2.
 - (c) **Children's Services.** Although Government has previously provided additional funding for Adult Social Care, the costs of Children's Services are not being addressed. New burdens funding is not being provided, nor are capital grants that could potentially create new

provision of services reducing the reliance on private sector placements.

- (d) **Local Government Settlement.** Longer term settlements that address business rate retention, rurality and growth in demand are essential to providing longer term stability. Late and short-term settlements do not support the development of sustainable financial strategies.
- 16 The First Financial Review highlighted local mitigations that would be implemented to reduce expenditure. In October 2023, the Cheshire East Budget Response Team (CEBERT) was set up to lead on coordinating this work across the organisation. Weekly meetings are chaired by the Chief Executive with updates relating to the workstreams identified in the review.
- 17 The workstreams include:
- (a) Establishment Management: a full review of the Council's establishment is near completion. Recruitment controls have reduced the number of vacancies approved for recruitment from an average of over 20 per week to around 3 per week, with approved posts relating to essential safeguarding posts. All agency placements are also under review.
 - (b) Spending Control Panel: all Procurement Engagements are subject to additional review. Procurement has been rejected, with several others on hold requiring enhanced information as to the essential nature of the spending.
 - (c) Pricing Strategies: in many cases the cost of providing charged-for services has increased. This workstream is looking at price increases that may be required to reduce subsidising services that are unaffordable via local taxation.
 - (d) Capital Spending: a further £2.1m of transformation activity previously funded from revenue budgets is now being legitimately funded from Capital Receipts. Re-profiling Capital Expenditure has already reduced interest payments by £0.6m.
- 18 The impact of this work, as well as focused activity on services within each committee is reflected in Annex 1. Now that CEBERT has been established the Chief Executive will develop opportunities for frequent Member updates on progress. The results of further mitigations will also be factored into the third financial review.
- 19 The MTFs highlights that the Council has relatively low levels of reserves as annual funding is required to manage ongoing service demand. This means financial pressure requires changes to ongoing spending and income rather than relying on management via reserves.

Notwithstanding this issue all reserves held for specific purposes are under review through CEBERT.

20 **Annex 1: Second Financial Review 2023/24**

21 **Financial Stability:** Provides information on the overall financial stability and resilience of the Council. It demonstrates how spending in 2023/24 is being funded, including the positions on overall service budgets, centrally held budgets, council tax and business rates. Further details are contained in the appendices.

22 **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.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Finance Sub Committee:

1. Consider the factors leading to a forecast adverse Net Revenue financial pressure of £18.7m against a revised budget of £353.1m (5.3%).
2. Consider the forecast and further mitigations needing to be identified, aimed at bringing spending back in line with budget.
3. Consider the in-year forecast Capital Spending of £181.4m against an approved MTFS budget of £214.7m, due to slippage that has been re-profiled into future years.
4. Scrutinise the contents of Annex 1 and each of the appendices and note that any financial mitigation decisions requiring approval will be made in line with relevant delegations.

5. Approve 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.**
6. Note that Council will be asked to:
7. Approve fully funded supplementary revenue estimates over £1,000,000 in accordance with Financial Procedure Rules as detailed in **Appendix 1 Adults and Health Committee, Section 3 Corporate Grants Register, Table 2** and **Appendix 4 Economy and Growth Committee, Section 3 Corporate Grants Register, Table 2.**

Background

- 23 Managing performance is essential to the achievement of outcomes. This is especially important in evidencing the achievement of value for money across an organisation the size of Cheshire East Council. The Council is the third largest local authority in the Northwest of England, responsible for approximately 500 services, supporting over 398,000 local people. Gross annual spending is over £750m, with a revised net revenue budget for 2023/24 of £353.1m.
- 24 The management structure of the Council is organised into four directorates: Adults, Health and Integration; Children's Services; Place; and Corporate Services. The Council's reporting structure provides forecasts of a potential year-end outturn within each directorate during the year, as well as highlighting activity carried out in support of each outcome contained within the Corporate Plan.
- 25 The political structure of the Council is organised into six committees, with a single sub-committee, all with financial responsibilities acutely aligned to the management structure. Performance against the 2023/24 Budget within each Committee, and the sub-committee, is outlined in Table 1 below.

Table 1 – Revenue Outturn Forecast split by the Six Service Committees and the Finance Sub-Committee

2023/24	Revised Budget	Forecast Outturn	Forecast Variance FR2	Forecast Variance FR1	Movement from FR1 to FR2
	(NET)				
	£m	£m	£m	£m	£m
Service Committee					
Adults and Health	136.5	141.2	4.7	0.3	4.4
Children and Families	80.3	91.0	10.8	7.0	3.8
Corporate Policy	41.2	40.7	(0.5)	0.9	(1.4)
Economy and Growth	24.8	22.9	(1.9)	(1.8)	(0.1)
Environment and Communities	48.7	52.3	3.5	4.2	(0.7)
Highways and Transport	11.2	12.4	1.2	1.2	(0.0)
Sub-Committee					
Finance Sub	(342.7)	(341.8)	0.9	1.1	(0.2)
TOTAL	-	18.7	18.7	12.8	5.9

National Key issues causing the pressures

- 26 The national economic position of the UK has seen prevailing high inflation. The Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) forecast that inflation should reduce to 2.9% by quarter 4 of 2023. However, quarter 2 inflation was still at 7.7%, which is higher than the OBR forecast of 6.9% at this stage in the year. The Council is affected by inflation in wages (for Council staff and staff of contracted services), utilities and fuel. But the Council cannot inflate in-year income from Council Tax, Business Rates or Government Grants. The forecast impact of additional pay inflation above the estimates in February is £2.8m.
- 27 The national economic position of the UK is seeing increasing interest rates. In January 2023, when the current MTFS was drafted, interest rates were at 3.5%. Current interest rates are 5.25%. The Council has loans of £242m, mainly acquired to support important Highway and Regeneration schemes, and is therefore exposed to financial pressure from increasing borrowing costs. The Council is receiving more money from investments, but this does not offer adequate compensation. Interest rates are forecast to reduce once inflation is controlled which means a shift to long-term borrowing at this point is not a favourable option.
- 28 Demand for public services, particularly those that are required to support the health and wellbeing of local residents, has increased since the pandemic. Temporary grants associated with the pandemic have ended though. The Council is experiencing demand for care for more

individuals, which is driving up costs, as well as experiencing more complex demand that requires more hours of support in each case.

Consultation and Engagement

- 29 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

- 30 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.
- 31 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.
- 32 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.
- 33 In approving the Cheshire East Council Medium-Term Financial Strategy Members of the Council had regard to the robustness of estimates and adequacy of reserves as reported by the s.151 Officer. The s.151 Officer's report highlighted the importance of each element of the MTFS and the requirement to achieve all the proposals within it. The recommendations of this report highlight the need for ongoing activity to manage the financial pressure being experienced by the Council.

Other Options Considered

- 34 None. This report is important to ensure Members of the Committee are sighted on the financial pressure the Council is facing and the activity to date to try and mitigate this issue. Activity is required to ensure the Council balances its expenditure and income without serious impact on essential Council services.

- 35 Do nothing. Impact – Members are not updated on the financial position of the Council. Risks – Not abiding by the Constitution to provide regular reports.

Implications and Comments

Monitoring Officer/Legal

- 36 The legal implications surrounding the process of setting the 2023 to 2027 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 for 2023/24. Implications arising from individual proposals regarding service growth and savings have and will continue to be the subject of ongoing advice and support.
- 37 Implications arising directly from this report relating to the internal processes of approving supplementary estimates and virements referred to are governed by the Constitution and in particular the Finance Procedure Rules.
- 38 In relation the proposed review to ensure that all available resources are directed towards the delivery of statutory functions, savings and efficiency plans, it should be noted that local authorities are creatures of statute. They are created by statute and are regulated through the legislative regime and whilst they have in more recent times been given a general power of competence, this must operate within that regime. Within the statutory framework there are specific obligations placed upon a local authority to support communities. These duties encompass general and specific duties and there is often significant local discretion in respect of how those services or duties are discharged. These will need to be assessed and advised on as each circumstance is considered.

Section 151 Officer/Finance

- 39 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.
- 40 Reserve levels are agreed, by Council, in February each year and are based on a risk assessment that considers the financial challenges facing the Council. If spending associated with in-year delivery of services is not contained within original forecasts for such activity it may be necessary to vire funds from reserves.

- 41 The unplanned use of financial reserves could require the Council to deliver a greater level of future savings to replenish reserve balances and/ or revise the level of risks associated with the development of the Reserves Strategy in future.
- 42 As part of the process to produce this report, senior officers review expenditure and income across all services to support the development of mitigation plans that will return the outturn to a balanced position at year-end.
- 43 Forecasts contained within this review provide important information in the process of developing the Medium-Term Financial Strategy. Analysis of variances during the year will identify whether such performance is likely to continue, and this enables more robust estimates to be established.
- 44 The risk associated with the scale of these challenges is that the Council could act illegally, triggering the requirement for a s.114 report from the Chief Financial Officer. Illegal behaviour in this context could materialise from two distinct sources:
- i) Spending decisions could be made that exceed the available resources of the Council. This would unbalance the budget, which is unlawful.
 - ii) Spending decisions to restrict or hide pressures could be made that avoid an immediate deficit, but in fact are based on unlawful activity.
- 45 The consequences of the Council undermining a budget with illegal activity, or planned illegal activity, is the requirement to issue a s.114 report. Under these circumstances statutory services will continue and existing contracts and commitments must be honoured. But any spending that is not essential or which can be postponed must not take place.
- 46 Further consequences would be highly likely and could include the appointment of Commissioners from the DLUHC, and potential restrictions on the decision-making powers of local leaders.

Policy

- 47 This report is a backward look at Council activities and predicts the year-end position. It supports the Corporate Plan aim Open and priority to be an open and enabling organisation.
- 48 The forecast outturn position, ongoing considerations for future years, and the impact on general reserves will be fed into the assumptions underpinning the 2024 to 2028 Medium-Term Financial Strategy.

- 49 The approval of supplementary estimates and virements are governed by the Finance Procedure Rules section of the Constitution.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

- 50 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

- 51 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

- 52 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

- 53 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)

- 54 The report provides details of service provision across the borough and notes the pressure on Children in Care.

Public Health

- 55 This report is a backward look at Council activities at the first review and provides the forecast 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

- 56 There are no direct implications for climate change.

Access to Information	
Contact Officer:	<p>Alex Thompson</p> <p>Director of Finance and Customer Services (Section 151 Officer)</p> <p>alex.thompson@cheshireeast.gov.uk</p> <p>01270 685876</p>
Appendices:	<p>Annex 1 including:</p> <p>Section 1 provides information on the overall financial stability and resilience of the Council. Further details are contained in the appendices.</p> <p>Appendix 1 Adults and Health Committee.</p> <p>Appendix 2 Children and Families Committee.</p> <p>Appendix 3 Corporate Policy Committee.</p> <p>Appendix 4 Economy and Growth Committee.</p> <p>Appendix 5 Environment and Communities Committee.</p> <p>Appendix 6 Highways and Transport Committee.</p> <p>Appendix 7 Finance Sub-Committee.</p> <p>Appendix 7a Update to the Treasury Management Strategy.</p> <p>Appendix 7b Update to the Investment Strategy.</p>
Background Papers:	<p>The following are links to key background documents:</p> <p>Medium Term Financial Strategy 2023-2027</p>



Second Financial Review 2023/24

November 2023

This report receives scrutiny and approval from Members of Cheshire East Council. As a public report, the Council welcomes feedback to the information contained here.

Anyone wanting to comment is invited to contact the Council at:

RandC@cheshireeast.gov.uk

Introduction

Cheshire East Council is the third largest Council in the Northwest of England, supporting over 398,000 local people with annual spending of over £750m.

Local government is going through a period of financial challenges, with a combination of the impact of increasing demand for services and rising costs due to inflation and interest rates. There is also increasing uncertainty associated with income from business rates and government grants.

Demand for Council services is increasing, with more individuals and families needing support and services than ever before. This reflects an increase in population but also reflects changes in demographics and the national cost of living increases. This demand is resulting in a forecast outturn of £18.7m against a net revenue budget of £353.1m. The most significant impact is within the rising costs of Children's Social Care. Further activity is required to identify other mitigating measures.

When the 2023/24 budget was set, in February 2023, it was highlighted that the use of reserves was not sustainable in the medium term. Net spending therefore needs to be contained within the estimates of expenditure that form the budget. The forecasts at first review highlight pressures due to demand, inflation, interest rates and pay negotiations. These will almost certainly affect the medium term finances of the Council. This situation must be addressed now and as part of the MTFS process for 2024 to 2028.

To support openness and transparency, and provide evidence of strong governance, the report has a main section, to provide background and context, and then nine supporting appendices with detailed information about allocation and management of public money during 2023/24.

The **Financial Stability** section provides information on the overall financial stability and resilience of the Council. It demonstrates how spending in 2023/24 is being funded, including the positions on overall service budgets, centrally held budgets, Council Tax and Business Rates. 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.

Alex Thompson

Director of Finance and Customer Services
(Section 151 Officer)

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2023/24 Outturn Forecast - Financial Position

2023/24	Revised Budget (NET) £m	Forecast Outturn £m	Forecast Variance £m	For further information please see the following sections
SERVICE DIRECTORATES				
Adults, Health and Integration	136.5	141.2	4.7	Appendix 1
Children's Services	80.3	91.0	10.8	Appendix 2
Place - Directorate/Growth & Enterprise	24.8	22.9	(1.9)	Appendix 4
Place - Environment & Neighbourhood Services	48.7	52.3	3.5	Appendix 5
Place - Highways & Infrastructure	11.2	12.4	1.2	Appendix 6
Corporate Services	41.2	40.7	(0.5)	Appendix 3
Total Services Net Expenditure	342.7	360.5	17.8	
CENTRAL BUDGETS				
Capital Financing	19.0	19.4	0.4	Appendix 7 Section 5
Transfer to/(from) Earmarked Reserves	(7.4)	(7.4)	-	Appendix 7 Section 6
Transfer from MTFs Earmarked Reserve	-	-	-	Appendix 7 Section 6
Corporate Contributions / Central Budgets	(1.2)	(0.7)	0.5	Appendix 7
TOTAL NET EXPENDITURE	353.1	371.9	18.7	
Business Rates Retention Scheme	(55.3)	(55.3)	-	Appendix 7 Section 2
Specific Grants	(26.8)	(26.8)	-	Appendix 7 Section 3
Council Tax	(271.1)	(271.1)	-	Appendix 7 Section 2
Net Funding	(353.1)	(353.1)	-	
NET (SURPLUS) / DEFICIT	-	18.7	18.7	

Financial Stability

Introduction

1. The Council has a track record of sound financial management. Nevertheless, in common with all UK local authorities the Council finds itself in a position where pressures on the revenue budget are intensifying as a result of inflation, the legacy impact of the Coronavirus pandemic on people and on the economy and increasing cost of living pressure on households. These issues have the effect of increasing the demand for services and increasing costs of services.
2. Complexity and market sustainability in Adults' and Children's Social Care remains the most significant financial pressure for the Council in the medium term. The affects of inflation on contracts, utilities and wage levels are affecting costs across all services.
3. **Table 1** provides a service summary of financial performance. The current forecast is that services will be £18.7m over budget in the current year which includes mitigating actions identified to date. The 2023/24 Approved Budget Policy Changes and Forecast Variances provide further details and changes to service net budgets since the Medium-Term Financial Strategy (Section 2 in the **Appendices 1-6**).
4. It also shows that central budgets are forecast to be £0.9m over budget resulting in an overall forecast outturn of £18.7m against a net revenue budget of £353.1m.
5. Further items impacting on the level of the Council's balances are detailed in **Appendix 7**.

Table 1 - Service Revenue Outturn Forecasts

2023/24	Revised Budget	Forecast Outturn	Forecast Variance	Forecast Variance FR1	Movement from FR1 to FR2
	(NET)				
	£m	£m	£m	£000	£000
SERVICE DIRECTORATES					
Adult Social Care - Operations	137.9	142.6	4.7	0.2	4.4
Commissioning	(1.4)	(1.4)	0.1	0.1	-
Public Health	-	-	-	-	-
Adults and Health Committee	136.5	141.2	4.7	0.3	4.4
Directorate	0.2	0.4	0.1	0.7	(0.6)
Children's Social Care	49.4	58.8	9.4	4.8	4.6
Strong Start, Family Help and Integration	7.4	6.8	(0.6)	(0.6)	0.0
Education & 14-19 Skills	23.2	25.0	1.8	2.1	(0.3)
Children and Families Committee	80.3	91.0	10.8	7.0	3.8
Directorate	0.2	(0.0)	(0.2)	(0.2)	-
Growth & Enterprise	24.6	22.9	(1.7)	(1.7)	0.0
Economy and Growth Committee	24.8	22.9	(1.9)	(1.9)	0.0
Environment & Neighbourhood Services	48.7	52.3	3.5	4.2	(0.7)
Environment and Communities Committee	48.7	52.3	3.5	4.2	(0.7)
Highways & Infrastructure	11.2	12.4	1.2	1.2	0.1
Highways and Transport Committee	11.2	12.4	1.2	1.2	0.1
Directorate	0.6	0.5	(0.1)	0.2	(0.3)
Finance & Customer Services	12.8	12.9	0.2	0.5	(0.3)
Governance & Compliance Services	10.8	10.3	(0.4)	0.1	(0.5)
Communications	0.7	0.7	0.0	(0.0)	0.0
HR	2.6	2.4	(0.2)	-	(0.2)
ICT	11.8	12.0	0.2	0.3	(0.2)
Policy & Change	2.0	1.9	(0.1)	(0.1)	0.0
Corporate Policy Committee	41.2	40.7	(0.5)	0.9	(1.4)
TOTAL SERVICES NET EXPENDITURE	342.7	360.5	17.8	11.7	6.2
CENTRAL BUDGETS					
Capital Financing	19.0	19.4	0.4	0.4	0.0
Transfer to/(from) Earmarked Reserves	(7.4)	(7.4)	-	-	-
Corporate Contributions / Central Budgets	(1.2)	(0.7)	0.5	0.7	(0.2)
Finance Sub-Committee - Central Budgets	10.4	11.3	0.9	1.1	(0.2)
TOTAL NET EXPENDITURE	353.1	371.9	18.7	12.8	5.9
Business Rates Retention Scheme	(55.3)	(55.3)	-	-	-
Specific Grants	(26.8)	(26.8)	-	-	-
Council Tax	(271.1)	(271.1)	-	-	-
Finance Sub-Committee - Net Funding	(353.1)	(353.1)	-	-	-
NET (SURPLUS) / DEFICIT	-	18.7	18.7	12.8	5.9
General Reserves Balance					
2023/24 Budget					
£m					
Opening Balance April 2023	14.1	Actual			
2023/24 Impact on Reserves (see above)	(18.7)	Forecast			
Closing Balance March 2024	(4.6)	Forecast			

Appendices to Second Financial Review 2023/24

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November 2023

Appendix 3 : Corporate Policy Committee

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1. Changes to Revenue Budget 2023/24 since First Financial Review
2. 2023/24 Approved Budget Policy Changes and Forecast Variances
3. Corporate Grants Register
 - Table 1: Corporate Policy Committee Grants
 - Table 2: Delegated Decision Additional Grant Funding (Specific Purpose) £500,000 or less
 - Table 3: Delegated Decision Additional Grant Funding (Specific Purpose) previously named in the MTFS
4. Debt Management
5. Capital Strategy
6. Reserves Strategy

Appendix 3

Corporate Policy Committee

1. Changes to Revenue Budget 2023/24 since First Financial Review

	First Review Revised Net Budget	Adjustments to FR1 Budget	Second Review Revised Net Budget
	£000	£000	£000
CORPORATE			
Directorate	580	(10)	570
Finance & Customer Services	13,351	(587)	12,764
Governance and Compliance Services	10,768	(2)	10,766
HR	2,588	-	2,588
ICT	11,588	216	11,804
Communications	696	-	696
Policy and Change	2,004	10	2,014
Corporate Policy Committee	41,575	(373)	41,202

Note the unringfenced grants to be actioned column includes the expenditure part of centrally held unringfenced grants. These budget adjustments will take place once all second financial review approvals have been given.

Corporate Policy Committee

2. 2023/24 Approved Budget Policy Changes and Forecast Variances

Forecast Outturn Commentary:

The Corporate Policy Committee has responsibilities across the Corporate Directorate. Services cover support functions such as Finance, Legal, HR and ICT as well as front line services such as Customer Services, Revenues and Benefits, Registrations and Consultation Services. Services across the directorate are important in enabling activities, for example providing ICT Systems, project management, legal advice and HR support.

Taking the recruitment freeze into consideration, a review of vacancies has reduced forecast spend on staffing meaning that budget pressure relating to higher than forecast pay inflation can be met from in-year vacancies underspending. The main pressure is from a large reduction in commissioned shared ICT services that reduces the ability to charge costs to capital. Most of the financial changes identified within the 2023/24 budget are on track, although further work is required to achieve the cost of democracy savings. Mitigation for high spending will be achieved through reviewing non-staffing spend, and further vacancy and contract management.

MTFS Ref No	Detailed List of Service Budget Changes	2023/24 £m	2023/24 Variance £m	Commentary
	Corporate Policy Committee	2.551		
46	Pay inflation	2.587	0	The total cost of pay inflation may exceed 5% based on national pay negotiations. Figures produced at FR2 suggest that this will be mitigated in-year through management of vacancies. A budget pressure remains though.
47	Shared Services Review – move to hybrid model	0.39	-	Project has mobilised and identified appropriate resources. Financial profile is being analysed. NOTE: these costs are being funded from Capital Receipts which are shown outside of Corporate Services.
48	Revenue implications of capital: IT Procurements and Application Lifecycle Management	0.511	-	On track, subject to ongoing monitoring.

MTFS Ref No	Detailed List of Service Budget Changes	2023/24 £m	2023/24 Variance £m	Commentary
49	Infrastructure Investment Programme	0.239	-	On track, subject to ongoing monitoring.
50	Accelerate digital transformation / robotics and related Digital Savings	0.15	-	Structure of digital transformation is being reviewed. No growth incurred to date whilst plans are being developed.
51	Mitigation of reduction in the Dedicated Schools Grant	0.122	-	On track, subject to ongoing monitoring.
52	Remove Commercial Workstream Income Target	0.1	-	Action complete – budget adjusted.
53	Coroners Restructure Costs	0.06	-	Action complete – budget adjusted.
54	Improved Debt Recovery and correcting budgeted court costs income targets to reflect actual levels	0.013	-	On track, subject to ongoing monitoring.
55	Pension Costs Adjustment	-0.996	-	On track, subject to ongoing monitoring, dependent on in-year staffing costs.
56	ICT Operational Efficiencies	-0.31	-	Reduction in end user licence costs achieved. Further review of resources and third party contracts. Subject to ongoing monitoring.
57	Reduce cost of Democracy	-0.135	0.085	Report to Corporate Policy Committee on 15 June 2023 provided latest position.
58	Elections Act 2022 additional costs (funded by New Burdens grant funding)	-0.132	-	Action complete – budget adjusted.
59	Elections Act 2022 additional costs (funded by New Burdens grant funding)	0.132	-	Action complete – budget adjusted.
60	Revenue implications of capital: Vendor Management Phase 3 to drive improvements in procurement	-0.089	-	On track, subject to ongoing monitoring.

MTFS Ref No	Detailed List of Service Budget Changes	2023/24 £m	2023/24 Variance £m	Commentary
61	Brighter Futures Together Programme Customer Experience	-0.081	0.081	Savings relate to staffing reductions. These may not be appropriate in 2023/24 due to significant change projects requiring support to customers.
62	Across the board efficiencies, including procurement and income generation etc	-0.01	-	On track, subject to ongoing monitoring.
63	Review of leadership and management, including MARS and redefine 'core offer'	-	-	On track, subject to ongoing monitoring.
	In-year Directorate		-0.081	Underspend mainly due to vacant Executive Director post.
	In-year pressure Finance & Customer Services		0.07	TSC forecast to overspend by £190,000, Finance overspending by £73,000 mainly as a result of staffing costs. Customer Services reporting £130,000 overspend on staffing including the customer experience savings above. R&B - Pressure in Systems Development & small pressure in BIDs offset by underspends in HB Admin and Revenues Service = £79,000 underspend. Pressure in Systems Development & small pressure in BIDs offset by underspends in HB Admin and Revenues Service and £17,000 underspend in Procurement.
	Rent Allowances Under-recovery (Included in F&CS Team Plan)		-	Rent allowances under-recovery of £1.018m to be funded by Collection Fund Reserve

MTFS Ref No	Detailed List of Service Budget Changes	2023/24 £m	2023/24 Variance £m	Commentary
	In-year Governance & Compliance		-0.514	Registration Services forecast to over-recover the income budget by £235K due to increased number of ceremonies at approved premises. Elections overspent the budget/reserve available by £22K due primarily to increased costs of printing and postage. Members budget underspent on transport, communications and SRAs. £85K overspend due to inability of service to achieve MTFS savings on costs of democracy. Legal overspent by £137k due to counsel fees £72k, income shortfall of approx £88k, partially offset by staffing which is now forecast to underspend by approx £22k. A&R underspent by £263k Impact of majority of vacant posts remaining unfilled.
	In-year Policy & Change		-0.294	PMO improvement due to use of capital receipts, and use of reserves, Business Intelligence People balanced, Business Intel Research & Consultation underspent by £72,000, Subscriptions overspent by £50,000 partially offset by equality and diversity underspend £21,000. Further underspend of £88,000 due to vacant management post, restructure planned to go out to Consultation in 2023/24.
	In-year pressure Communications		0.001	Overspending on salaries - potentially increased due to return of fostering budget to Children's Services
	In-year HR		-0.23	Underspending on central training and organisational development budgets is predicted at £103K with the remainder primarily due to part and full year vacancies.

MTFS Ref No	Detailed List of Service Budget Changes	2023/24 £m	2023/24 Variance £m	Commentary
	In-year Pressure ICT		0.372	CEC 50% share of ICT Shared Service overspend position £572k. Forecast currently assumes 70,000 commissioned hours which is felt to be the worst expected position. Work packages for the hybrid model are being finalised and once this has been completed a firmer view will be available for the planned commissioned hours in the current year. Partially offset by ICT Strategy anticipating fully utilising the funding given for ALM due to dependencies on the hybrid programme and cyber security risk. Further mitigations: £30k transformational work being undertaken within ICT at management level which could potentially be supported by Capital Flexible Receipts, £200k forecast underspend on ICT Strategy due to Gemini project.
	REVISED FORECAST VARIANCE		-0.51	

Corporate Policy Committee

3. Corporate Grants Register

- 3.1 Cheshire East Council receives two main types of Government grants; specific purpose grants and general use grants. Specific purpose grants are held within the relevant service with a corresponding expenditure budget. Whereas general use grants are held in central budgets with a corresponding expenditure budget within the allocated service area.
- 3.2 Spending in relation to specific purpose grants must be in line with the purpose for which it is provided.
- 3.3 The increase in specific purpose grants relates mainly to a forecast increase in Housing Benefit which is being offset by a reduction in the Energy Bills Support Scheme Alternative Funding grant. Other additional specific purpose grants have

also been received, reflecting the latest allocations, and are detailed in **Table 2** and Table 3.

- 3.4 **Table 1** provides a detailed listing of all Corporate Policy related grants, their movements between the reporting period and the treatment of the grant.
- 3.5 **Table 2** shows additional specific purpose grant allocations that have been received which are £500,000 or less and are for noting only.
- 3.6 **Table 3** shows delegated decisions for additional specific purpose grants previously named within the MTFS.

Table 1 – Corporate Grants Register

Grants 2023/24	Original Budget	Revised Forecast FR1	Revised Forecast Mid-Year	Change from FR1	Treatment of Grant
	2023/24 £000	2023/24 £000	2023/24 £000	2023/24 £000	Notes 2 - 5
CORPORATE POLICY					
Specific Purpose (Held within Services)					
Revenues and Housing Benefits:					
Housing Benefit Subsidy	46,652	49,599	52,633	3,035	SRE
Discretionary Housing Payments Grant	314	349	349	0	
Housing Benefit (HB) Award Accuracy Initiative	29	21	30	1	SRE
LADS - VEP (RTI) funding	24	2	22	(2)	
New Burdens: Universal Credit, maintenance & natural migration	8	8	8	0	
LADS - New Burdens - Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP)	0	60	60	0	
LADS - New Burdens - Benefit Cap	0	1	1	0	
LADS - New Burdens - Welfare Reform Changes (S4/2022)	62	1	1	0	
LADS - New Burdens - Supported & Temporary Accommodation Change Request	2	0	0	0	
LADS - New Burdens - Supported & Temporary Accommodation	5	0	0	0	
LADS - New Burdens - Single Housing Benefit Extract Automation	5	0	10	5	SRE
Specified Accommodation (S3/2022)	0	0	0	0	
Incapacity Benefit Reassessment (S5/2022)	2	0	0	0	
Council Tax Rebate Scheme - New Burdens on Account Payment	0	0	94	94	SRE
Energy Bills Support Scheme Alternative Funding	0	2,089	325	(1,764)	
Democratic Services:					
Police and Crime Commissioner's Panel grant	65	65	65	0	
Electoral Integrity Programme - New Burdens (Voter ID)	132	132	132	0	
Electoral Integrity Programme - New Burdens (Postal Votes)	0	0	8	8	SRE
Total Corporate Policy - Specific Purposes	47,300	52,326	53,739	1,414	

Grants 2023/24	Original Budget	Revised Forecast FR1	Revised Forecast Mid-Year	Change from FR1	Treatment of Grant
	2023/24 £000	2023/24 £000	2023/24 £000	2023/24 £000	Notes 2 - 5
CORPORATE POLICY					
General Use (Held Corporately)					
Revenue Support Grant	388	388	388	0	
Housing Benefit Administration Subsidy	626	626	626	0	
NNDR Administration Allowance	587	578	578	0	
Council Tax Family Annex Discount	0	0	0	0	
New Homes Bonus	3,794	3,794	3,794	0	
Lower Tier Services Grant	0	0	0	0	
Services Grant	1,720	1,720	1,720	0	
Council Tax Support Fund	0	521	521	0	
Council Tax Support New Burdens	0	25	25	0	
Business Rates Reliefs Grant 2023/24	0	21,039	21,039	0	
Total Corporate Policy - General Use	7,115	28,692	28,692	0	
TOTAL CORPORATE POLICY	54,415	81,018	82,431	1,414	

Notes

- 1 The Dedicated Schools Grant, Pupil Premium Grant, Sixth Form Grant and Other School Specific Grant from the Education Funding Agency (EFA) figures are based on actual anticipated allocations. Changes are for in-year increases/decreases to allocations by the DfE and conversions to academy status.
- 2 SRE - Supplementary Revenue Estimate requested by relevant service.
- 3 ODR - Officer Decision Record to approve immediate budget change to relevant service.
- 4 Reserves - transfer to reserves at year end.
- 5 Balances - amount will be included as a variance to budget.

Table 2 – DECISION DELEGATED TO OFFICERS

Supplementary Revenue Estimate Requests for Allocation of Additional Grant Funding (Specific Purpose) £500,000 or less

Committee	Year	Type of Grant	£000	Details
Corporate Policy	2023/24	Council Tax Rebate Scheme - New Burdens on Account Payment (Specific Purpose)	94	This grant is from the Department for Levelling-Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC). The funding covers the costs of a range of tasks associated with the delivery of the council tax rebate core and discretionary scheme, including: staff time in processing and making payments, training, software costs, printing, reporting, assurance, and clawing back ineligible payments.
Corporate Policy	2023/24	Electoral Integrity Programme - New Burdens (Postal Votes) (Specific Purpose)	8	This grant is from the Department for Levelling-Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC). The funding has been made available by Central Government and is intended to assist the Electoral Registration Officer for the purpose of introducing the next new measures resulting from the implementation of the Elections Act 2022. Specifically, this grant covers the Postal and Proxy, Overseas Electors portions of the act.
Total Specific Purpose Allocations less than £500,000			102	

Table 3 – DECISION DELEGATED TO OFFICERS

Supplementary Revenue Estimate Requests for Allocation of Additional Grant Funding (Specific Purpose) previously named in the MTFS.

Committee	Year	Type of Grant	£000	Details
				On 22 nd February 2023 Council delegated authority to the Chief Finance Officer, to approve supplementary estimates if the value of any named grant changes from the figures contained within Appendix C, Annex 7 of the MTFS.
Corporate Policy	2023/24	Housing Benefit Subsidy (Specific Purpose)	3,035	Increase on MTFS 2023-27 estimate. This grant is from the Department for Work and Pensions. Payment of claims administration within Housing Benefits.
Corporate Policy	2023/24	Housing Benefit (HB) Award Accuracy Initiative (Specific Purpose)	1	Increase on MTFS 2023-27 estimate. This grant is from the Department for Work and Pensions. Housing Benefit Award Accuracy Initiative (HBAAI) allows local authorities to receive an allocation of funding from the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) to undertake specific activities to identify unreported changes and to ensure the correct amount of Housing Benefit is being paid.
Corporate Policy	2023/24	LADS - New Burdens - Single Housing Benefit Extract Automation (Specific Purpose)	5	Increase on MTFS 2023-27 estimate. This grant is from the Department for Work and Pensions. Additional New Burdens funding to meet the costs of implementing the Improvements to supported accommodation and temporary accommodation Single Housing Benefit Extract management information.
Total Delegated Decision Specific Purpose Allocations previously named in the MTFS			3,041	

Corporate Policy Committee

4. Debt Management

	Outstanding Debt £000			Over 6 months old £000		
	Jun-23	Sep-23	Increase / (Decrease)	Jun-23	Sep-23	Increase / (Decrease)
Corporate Policy Committee						
Finance and Customer Services	187	95	(92)	56	53	(3)
Governance and Compliance	3	13	10	2	-	(2)
Human Resources	18	9	(9)	-	-	-
ICT	350	8	(342)	1	1	-
	558	125	(433)	59	54	(5)

Note: Finance and Customer Services invoices tend to be paid in installments, 45 invoices out of 70 are currently part paid.

Governance and Compliance outstanding debt has increased, 1 invoice is overdue from last quarter, and 14 invoices from July & August are now 1-3 months overdue.

Human Resources - 6 invoices are now overdue, 2 invoices from last quarter are now 3-6 months overdue (£16,000 invoice partially paid, only £2,000 remaining)

ICT - Reduction in outstanding debt mainly due to 3 local authority (£349,000 total) being paid. 2 invoices now 9-12 months overdue.

Corporate Policy Committee

5. Capital Strategy

Corporate Policy								CAPITAL					
CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2023/24 - 2026/27													
Scheme Description	Forecast Expenditure							Forecast Funding					
	Total Approved Budget £000	Prior Years £000	Forecast Budget 2023/24 £000	Forecast Budget 2024/25 £000	Forecast Budget 2025/26 £000	Forecast Budget 2026/27 £000	Total Forecast Budget 2023-27 £000	Grants £000	External Contributions £000	Revenue Contributions £000	Capital Receipts £000	Prudential Borrowing £000	Total Funding £000
Committed Schemes in progress													
ICT Services													
Care Act Phase 2	6,314	4,130	826	1,358	0	0	2,184	0	0	0	0	2,184	2,184
Digital Customer - Delivery Programme Phase 1	250	129	121	0	0	0	121	0	0	0	0	121	121
Digital Customer Enablement	2,874	1,010	1,390	474	0	0	1,864	0	0	0	0	1,864	1,864
ICT Device Replacement	912	453	459	0	0	0	459	0	0	459	0	0	459
IADM (Information Assurance and Data Management)	19,465	15,183	1,600	1,200	1,100	382	4,282	0	0	0	0	4,282	4,282
Infrastructure Investment Programme (IIP)	36,371	30,068	2,396	2,094	1,814	0	6,303	0	0	0	0	6,303	6,303
Unified Communications Project	1,206	1,008	198	0	0	0	198	0	0	0	0	198	198
Vendor Management	1,006	743	263	0	0	0	263	0	0	0	0	263	263
Finance & Customer Services													
Core Financials	11,318	8,813	700	808	698	299	2,505	0	0	0	0	2,505	2,505
Strategic Capital Projects	18,858	8,578	3,193	4,000	3,087	0	10,280	0	0	0	0	10,280	10,280
Vendor Management - Phase 2	320	19	0	0	301	0	301	0	0	0	0	301	301
Total Committed Schemes	98,893	70,134	11,145	9,934	7,000	681	28,759	0	0	459	0	28,300	28,759
New Schemes													
ICT Services													
ICT Hybrid Model	1,556	0	510	1,046	0	0	1,556	0	0	0	0	1,553	1,553
Total New Schemes	0	0	510	1,046	0	0	1,556	0	0	0	0	1,553	1,553
Total Corporate Policy	98,893	70,134	11,655	10,979	7,000	681	30,315	0	0	459	0	29,852	30,312

Corporate Policy Committee

6. Reserves Strategy

Corporate Policy Committee

Name of Reserve	Opening Balance 1 April 2023 £000	Forecast Movement in Reserves 2023/24 £000	Forecast Closing Balance 31 March 2024 £000	Notes
<u>Directorate</u>				
Corporate Directorate	1,356	(365)	991	To support a number of widespread projects within the Corporate Directorate.
<u>Finance and Customer Services</u>				
Collection Fund Management	17,819	(7,216)	10,603	To manage cash flow implications as part of the Business Rates Retention Scheme. Includes liabilities that will not be paid until future years.
Capital Financing Reserve	12,886	(6,241)	6,645	To provide for financing of capital schemes, other projects and initiatives.
MTFS Reserve	5,147	(4,761)	386	To support the financial strategy and risk management.
Section 151 Revenue Grants	558	(558)	0	Unspent specific use grant carried forward into 2023/24.
<u>Governance and Compliance</u>				
Insurance Reserve - Cheshire County Fund	(647)	0	(647)	To settle insurance claims and manage excess costs - to be reviewed.
Insurance Reserve - Cheshire East Fund	5,623	0	5,623	To settle insurance claims and manage excess costs - to be reviewed.
Elections General	640	(640)	0	To provide funds for Election costs every 4 years.
Brexit Funding	13	0	13	
<u>Human Resources</u>				
HR (CARE4CE Review, Culture Change, Pay realignment, Learning Mgt System)	59	(59)	0	To fund HR expenditure in relation to the Care4CE review, culture change programme, pay realignment and the Learning Management System.
Pay Structure (M Grade Review)	306	(306)	0	This scheme has now come to an end and the balance can be returned to General Fund.
<u>Policy and Change</u>				
Brighter Future Transformation Programme	1,789	(1,271)	518	To fund the Council's four year transformation programme and its five outcomes of Culture; Estates and ICT systems; Customer Experience, Commercial Approach and Governance. £1.271m drawn down to date as per MTFS budget. However, there is some uncertainty regarding who controls this reserve and cannot get details of committed spend. To be reviewed.
CORPORATE POLICY TOTAL	45,549	(21,417)	24,132	

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OPEN

Corporate Policy Committee

30 November 2023

Medium-Term Financial Strategy Consultation 2024/25 - 2027/28 (Corporate Policy Committee)

Report of: Alex Thompson, Director of Finance and Customer Services (s151 Officer)

Report Reference No: CP/32/23-24

Ward(s) Affected: All Wards;

Purpose of Report

- 1 The Corporate Policy Committee is being asked to note the indicative financial envelope for this Committee to support consultation on the development of the Cheshire East Medium-Term Financial Strategy 2024/25 to 2027/28.
- 2 The Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) sets out how the Council will resource the achievement of the Corporate Plan and is subject to consultation and approval on an annual basis. The Finance Sub-committee approved the financial assumptions for the future MTFS at their meeting in June 2023, and this report goes further in recognising the need for financial targets that enable further development of the MTFS.
- 3 Developing the MTFS requires a wide range of stakeholder engagement. Members are key stakeholders in their capacity as community leaders, but also in their capacity as decision makers in setting the Council's budget. During this financial planning cycle there has been a series of all Member events to look at the current and future financial position. The Finance-Sub Committee formed a working group to scrutinise the financial assumptions underpinning the current MTFS.

- 4 Individual Committees are being asked to review the in-year budget positions and consider how this performance, and achieving the MTFS financial envelopes, will impact on services they are responsible for.
- 5 Public engagement will follow when financial proposals have been identified that could balance the Council's budget. The January cycle of Committee meetings will be the forum to scrutinise the draft balanced proposals put forward, alongside other feedback from consultees. All feedback will be collated and provided as evidence to the Corporate Policy Committee on 8 February 2024.
- 6 Final approval of the 2024/25 budget will take place at full Council on 27 February 2024 following recommendation from the Corporate Policy Committee.

Executive Summary

- 7 Financial strategies underpin how Cheshire East Council will allocate resources, achieve the Corporate Plan and provide in the region of 500 local services every day. The strategies must be affordable, based on robust estimates and balanced against adequate reserves.
- 8 In February 2021 the Council approved the Corporate Plan 2021-2025 which articulates the vision of how these services will make Cheshire East an Open, Fair and Green borough:
- 9 Open - We will provide strong community leadership and work transparently with our residents, businesses and partners to deliver our ambition in Cheshire East.
- 10 Fair - We aim to reduce inequalities, promote fairness and opportunity for all and support our most vulnerable residents.
- 11 Green - We will lead our communities to protect and enhance our environment, tackle the climate emergency and drive sustainable development.
- 12 A new Corporate Plan, referred to now as the Council Plan, is being developed to meet new criteria. These are identified as being: challenging but achievable; reflecting manifesto commitments to ensure that they are delivered to the electorate; to be co-created by a diverse range of stakeholders including Members, officers, residents, and partners; to be recognisable as uniquely Cheshire East, and; to have an outcomes framework that will allow measurement of results and review of success. The plan is expected to be approved alongside the budget in February 2024.

- 13 Committees are responsible for overseeing the achievement of the Council's priorities. Resources, including Revenue, Capital and Reserves were allocated by the Finance Sub-Committee in March 2023, following the budget Council. All resources are allocated to a specific Service Committee or the Finance Sub-Committee. This report sets out an early indication of the allocation of resources to support financial planning for the MTFS.
- 14 Each Committee is issued a separate report on the current forecast in-year financial position. As set out in the Second Financial Review report, at this point the forecast adverse variance of £18.7m represents a combination of the several issues:
- (i) National economic pressures facing all councils (such as pay inflation and interest rates).
 - (ii) Growing local demand for services which represents a permanent pressure, also being experienced locally in other councils.
 - (iii) Revised forecasts related to budget changes agreed through the MTFS process in 2022/23. This is a mix of additional growth pressures, or savings taking longer to achieve than originally envisaged.
- 15 The Second Financial Review forecasts are shown in the table below:

2023/24	Revised Budget	Forecast Outturn	Forecast Variance FR2	Forecast Variance FR1	Movement from FR1 to FR2
	(NET)				
	£m	£m	£m	£m	£m
Service Committee					
Adults and Health	136.5	141.2	4.7	0.3	4.4
Children and Families	80.3	91.0	10.8	7.0	3.8
Corporate Policy	41.2	40.7	(0.5)	0.9	(1.4)
Economy and Growth	24.8	22.9	(1.9)	(1.8)	(0.1)
Environment and Communities	48.7	52.3	3.5	4.2	(0.7)
Highways and Transport	11.2	12.4	1.2	1.2	(0.0)
Sub-Committee					
Finance Sub	(342.7)	(341.8)	0.9	1.1	(0.2)
TOTAL	-	18.7	18.7	12.8	5.9

- 16 Analysis of the in-year forecasts and reflecting on the outturn performance against the 2022/23 budget indicates that the most significant prevailing financial pressure is within Services that are the responsibility of the Children and Families Committee. This position is in line with top-tier Local Authorities across England where similar issues are being experienced.

- 17 The Second Financial Review also highlights the potential for very low levels of reserves being retained by the Council at year-end, with a potential £18.7m reduction being forecast. Any positive variations to the financial assumptions reviewed by the Committee should therefore be allocated to recover reserves in the first instance.
- 18 The adverse impacts in the financial review therefore need to be addressed through a re-allocation of resources from within the assumed budget for 2024/25 onwards. The immediate short-term risk to the Council's financial resilience must lead to a focus on budget setting for the 2024/25 budget only. Subsequent years of the medium term will present indicative values, with significant further work required to ensure a sustainable position can be achieved in the medium term. This is a position being widely experienced by councils across the country.
- 19 The initial reallocation of resources responds to pressure in the Children and Families committee, increasing the revenue budget for the committee by £7m compared to the MTFS presented to Council in February 2023. This transfer of resources results in a savings requirement in other Committee budgets to maintain the balanced budget requirement.
- 20 The Financial Reviews presented to Members raise awareness of the current financial position. The reports highlight that the Council has set up a series of Cheshire East Budget Emergency Response Team (CEBERT) workstreams to focus on various elements of spending and pricing controls. The work of CEBERT is focused on both the in-year position and the development of the 2024/25 budget.
- 21 This report sets out the indicative budget envelopes for all Committee budgets for 2024/25 and recommends that officers work with Members to develop further proposals to enable budgets to be set within each envelope for 2024/25.
- 22 The budget envelopes for 2024/25 for all Committees have been set as follows:

	2023/24 Original Approved budget £m	2024/25 Policy proposals* (as included in MTFS Feb 23) £m	2023/24 Pay inflation shortfall £m	2024/25 Target growth / savings £m	2024/25 Revised budget envelope £m
Adults and Health	136.3	+6.1	+0.8	-5.5	137.7
Children and Families	79.1	+2.9	+0.6	+6.4	89.0
Corporate	41.0	+1.0	+0.4	-1.2	41.2

Policy					
Economy and Growth	25.0	+2.4	+0.2	-0.7	27.0
Environment and Communities	48.3	-0.3	+0.7	-1.6	47.2
Highways and Transport	11.0	+1.5	+0.1	-0.4	12.3
Finance Sub (Central)	12.4	+6.1	-	-	18.4
TOTAL	353.1	+19.6	+2.8	-2.8	372.7

*full list of existing budget proposals for 2024/25 is included at Appendix A

Note – there may be roundings present in the table due to the presentation to one decimal place

- 23 It is proposed that a more detailed report of service budgets is shared with Members, to support their further engagement and understanding of service-level expenditure and income, over the coming weeks.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Corporate Policy Committee is recommended to:

- (a) Note the indicative budget envelope for this committee, as approved at the Finance Sub-Committee on 2 November, as a way of setting financial targets in support of achieving a balanced budget for 2024/25.
- (b) Note that officers will develop further proposals in consultation with Members to enable wider stakeholder consultation prior to approval by Council.
- (c) Note that Committees will be presented with the opportunity to further review financial proposals, designed to achieve a balanced budget, as part of their January cycle of meetings prior to recommendations being made to Council for approval.

Background

- 24 The Council's financial resources are provided from a combination of local taxes, government grants, investment returns on assets and other direct contributions from individuals or organisations. Financial plans are based on estimated spending and income over the next four years and the report of the Chief Finance Officer brings Members' attention to the processes and risks associated with developing these estimates.
- 25 The Council aims to achieve value for money based on Economy (how much we pay for things), Efficiency (how well we use things) and Effectiveness (how we use things to achieve outcomes). Public feedback and internal and external scrutiny create the necessary framework to hold the Council to account for achieving these aims.
- 26 All councils are legally required to set a balanced budget each year and the immediate focus will be on balancing the 2024/25 financial year rather than on the whole medium term as has been the case previously. This reflects the extremely challenging circumstances all councils are facing currently.
- 27 Finance Sub-Committee received a report on 7 June setting out the MTFS 2024-28 planned timetable and budget assumptions underpinning the current MTFS. A working group from that Sub-Committee then met on 6 September to discuss these assumptions and their suitability for the medium term. Feedback from this session was then provided verbally to the Sub-Committee on 7 September.
- 28 The Budget Setting Process 2024-2028 has so far identified additional pressure on budgets across all committee areas, especially within the Children and Families area as reported in the First and Second Financial Reviews. We are not anticipating additional funding to be announced as part of the Provisional Local Government Finance settlement due to be announced, at the earliest, in December 2023.
- 29 Should any benefits emerge from the Local Government Settlement the Council should look to recover reserves that are likely to be depleted based on the current year forecasts. Service budgets must be therefore balance within the current funding envelope as reported in the MTFS in February 2023.
- 30 In response to local financial pressure, identified in the financial reviews, and reflected in a national trend, the Children and Families committee will be allocated an additional £7m compared to the current MTFS to support a response to demand in this area. Allocations have also been made across all committees to address the shortfall in the

pay inflation budgeted for 2023/24. It must be noted that the final pay offer has not been agreed yet for “Green Book” employees, but the calculation is based on the announced offer of an additional £1,925, or 3.88% (whichever is the greater) per employee.

- 31 To accommodate the changes related to the Children and Families Committee budget the remaining service committees have been reduced pro rata based on net spending to rebalance the Council’s budget.
- 32 This has resulted in revised budget envelopes for 2024/25 for each service committee when compared to the published MTFS in February 2023. The revised budget envelope for the Corporate Policy Committee is included in the table above and at Appendix A – 2024/25 Budget Proposals as per MTFS February 2023, plus revised budget envelope.

Consultation and Engagement

- 33 This report forms part of the consultation process for Members on the budget setting for 2024/25. Each committee will receive a similar report covering their own area of responsibilities.
- 34 Once a set of draft budget change proposals have been agreed upon there will be further opportunity during the January cycle of Committee meetings to give formal feedback from each Committee to the Corporate Policy Committee which will then lead on to the full Council meeting in February 2024.
- 35 There are plans for a series of engagement events with wider stakeholders to gather opinion and collate ideas on the final budget for 2024/25.

Reasons for Recommendations

- 36 In accordance with the Constitution, Committees play an important role in planning, monitoring and reporting on the Council’s finances. Each Committee has specific financial responsibilities.
- 37 The Council’s annual budget must be balanced. The proposals within it must be robust and the strategy should be supported by adequate reserves. The assessment of these criteria is supported by each Committee having the opportunity to help develop the financial proposals before they are approved by Full Council.

Other Options Considered

- 38 The Council has a legal duty to set a balanced annual budget taking regard of the report from the Chief Finance Officer. As such options cannot be considered that would breach this duty. Any feedback from

the Committee must still recognise the requirement for Council to fulfil this duty.

- 39 There is no option to “do nothing”. The Council has statutory obligations to provide certain services, which would be unaffordable if the Council failed to levy an appropriate Council Tax.

Implications and Comments

Monitoring Officer/Legal

- 40 The Council should have robust processes so that it can meet statutory requirements and fulfil its fiduciary duty.

Section 151 Officer/Finance

- 41 The Council’s financial resources are agreed by Council on an annual basis 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.
- 42 Reserve levels are agreed, by Council, in February each year and are based on a risk assessment that considers the financial challenges facing the Council. If spending associated with in-year delivery of services is not contained within original forecasts for such activity it may be necessary to vire funds from reserves.
- 43 The unplanned use of financial reserves could require the Council to deliver a greater level of future savings to replenish reserve balances and/ or revise the level of risks associated with the development of the Reserves Strategy in future.
- 44 The risk associated with the scale of the current financial challenges both in year and in the setting of the 2024/25 budget is that the Council could act illegally, triggering the requirement for a s.114 report from the Chief Financial Officer. Illegal behaviour in this context could materialise from two distinct sources:

(a) Spending decisions could be made that exceed the available resources of the Council. This would unbalance the budget, which is unlawful.

(b) Spending decisions to restrict or hide pressures could be made that avoid an immediate deficit, but in fact are based on unlawful activity.

- 45 The consequences of the Council undermining a budget with illegal activity, or planned illegal activity, is the requirement to issue a s.114 report. Under these circumstances statutory services will continue and existing contracts and commitments must be honoured. But any spending that is not essential or which can be postponed must not take place.
- 46 Further consequences would be highly likely and could include the appointment of Commissioners from the DLUHC, and potential restrictions on the decision-making powers of local leaders.

Policy

- 47 The existing Corporate Plan and the new Council Plan due to be approved in February 2024 will drive and inform Council policy and priorities for service delivery. The priorities and actions may have direct policy implications and will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

- 48 Under the Equality Act 2010, decision makers must show “due regard” to the need to:
- (a) Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation;
 - (b) Advance equality of opportunity between those who share a protected characteristic and those who do not share it; and
 - (c) Foster good relations between those groups.
- 49 The protected characteristics are age, disability, sex, race, religion and belief, sexual orientation, gender re-assignment, pregnancy and maternity, and marriage and civil partnership.
- 50 Having “due regard” is a legal term which requires the Council to consider what is proportionate and relevant in terms of the decisions they take.
- 51 The Council needs to ensure that in taking decisions on the Medium-Term Financial Strategy and the Budget that the impacts on those with protected characteristics are considered. The Council undertakes equality impact assessments where necessary and continues to do so as proposals and projects develop across the lifetime of the Corporate Plan. The process assists us to consider what actions could mitigate any adverse impacts identified. Completed equality impact assessments form part of any detailed Business Cases.

- 52 The proposals within the MTFS include positive and negative impacts. A separate Equality Impact Assessment for the budget as a whole is routinely included in the full MTFS report each year.
- 53 The Corporate Plan's vision reinforces the Council's commitment to meeting its equalities duties, promoting fairness and working openly for everyone. Cheshire East is a diverse place and we want to make sure that people are able to live, work and enjoy Cheshire East regardless of their background, needs or characteristics.

Human Resources

- 54 Consultation on the budget change proposals will include staff. Any changes involving staff will be managed in consultation with staff and Trade Unions.

Risk Management

- 55 Cheshire East recognises that in pursuit of its objectives and outcomes it may choose to accept an increased degree of risk. Where the Council chooses to accept an increased level of risk it will do so, subject always to ensuring that the potential benefits and threats are fully understood before developments are authorised, that it has sufficient risk capacity and that sensible measures to mitigate risk are established.
- 56 The Council also establishes a level of reserves that are adequate to protect the Council against financial risks, such as emergencies, which are not specifically budgeted for in individual years.
- 57 The Council will continue to be flexible about investing revenue funding in maintaining sustainable services and reflecting changes to the risks facing the Council. The full Budget Report will include a revised Reserves Strategy for 2024/25 to provide further detail on estimated balances and the application of reserves in the medium term.

Rural Communities

- 58 There are no direct implications for rural communities.

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

- 59 Budget change proposals and further mitigations that need to be identified which will affect the Children's area of the budget have been set out in the report to the Children and Families Committee.

Public Health

- 60 There are no direct implications for Public Health due to the nature of this budget being ringfenced.

Climate Change

- 61 The current Corporate Plan has a very strong environmental thread throughout with a specific aim for the Council to be 'Greener'.
- 62 Budget change proposals which will support the Council's commitment of being carbon neutral by 2025 will be included in the relevant Committee report to which they relate.

Access to Information	
Contact Officer:	Alex Thompson, Paul Goodwin, Honor Field alex.thompson@cheshireeast.gov.uk, paul.goodwin@cheshireeast.gov.uk, honor.field@cheshireeast.gov.uk
Appendices:	Appendix A –2024/25 proposals as per MTFS February 2023, plus revised budget envelope (separate Appendix A per Committee area)
Background Papers:	Outturn Report 2022/23 Medium Term Financial Strategy 2023-27 First Financial Review 2023/24 Second Financial Review 2023/24

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Appendix A – 2024/25 budget proposals as per MTFS February 2023, plus revised budget envelope

Corporate Policy Committee Budget Change Proposal	Existing Revised New	2024/25 £m	2025/26 £m	2026/27 £m	2027/28 £m
Shared Services Review – move to hybrid model	Existing MTFS 47	+0.343	-2.205		
IT Procurements and Application Lifecycle Management (revenue implications of capital)	Existing MTFS 48	+0.084	+0.006		
Infrastructure Investment Programme	Existing MTFS 49	+0.023			
Accelerate digital transformation / robotics and related Digital Savings	Existing MTFS 50	-0.150			
Mitigation of reduction in the Dedicated Schools Grant	Existing MTFS 51	+0.136			
Improved Debt Recovery and correcting budgeted court costs income targets to reflect actual levels	Existing MTFS 54	-0.024			
Pension Costs Adjustment	Existing MTFS 55	-0.378	-0.396		
ICT Operational Efficiencies	Existing MTFS 56	-0.100			
Vendor Management Phase 3 to drive improvements in procurement (revenue implications of capital)	Existing MTFS 60	+0.071			
Across the board efficiencies, including procurement, income generation etc.	Existing MTFS 62	-0.010	-0.010		
Review of leadership and management, including MARS and redefine 'core offer'	Existing MTFS 63	-0.050	-0.050	-0.050	
Pay inflation	Existing MTFS 4,25,46,65,81,82,102	+1.040	+0.893	+0.915	
TOTAL CHANGE PROPOSALS FOR CORPORATE POLICY COMMITTEE AS PER MTFS FEB 2023		+0.985	-1.762	+0.865	

SUMMARY					
2023/24 Approved Budget		41.0			
Proposals for 2024/25 @ Feb 2023	As above	+1.0			
Additional pay inflation required for 23-24 shortfall	Revised MTFS 4,25,46,65,81,82,102	+0.4			
Savings still to find		-1.2			
2024/25 Revised Budget Envelope		41.2			

Appendix A – 2024/25 budget proposals as per MTFS February 2023, plus revised budget envelope

2023/24 FORECAST POSITION					
Favourable variance as per FR2		(0.5)			

OPEN

Corporate Policy Committee

30 November 2023

Council Tax Base 2024/25

Report of: Alex Thompson, Director of Finance and Customer Services (s151 Officer)

Report Reference No: CP/33/23-24

Ward(s) Affected: (All Wards);

Purpose of Report

- 1 This report sets out the Council taxbase calculation 2024/25 for recommendation from Corporate Policy Committee to Council in December 2023.

Executive Summary

- 2 The calculation sets out the estimates of new homes less the expected level of discounts and the level of Council Tax Support (CTS). This results in a band D equivalent taxbase position for each Town and Parish Council.
- 3 The taxbase reflects an increase of £2.5m (0.86%) on the 2023/24 budgeted position which is £0.9m lower than the £3.4m (1.1%) forecast increase reported in February 2023. Additional new homes and more properties brought back into use over the last fourteen years, have increased the taxbase by 21.0% since 2010/11.
- 4 No changes are proposed to the Council Tax Support Scheme for 2024/25 other than to increase the income bands and non-dependant deductions in line with CPI. This continues the higher levels of support provided since 2022/23 to allow up to 100% relief for those on the lowest income.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Corporate Policy Committee recommends to Council that:

1. In accordance with the Local Authorities (Calculation of Council Tax Base) Regulations 2012, the amount to be calculated by Cheshire East Council as its Council taxbase for the year 2024/25 as 160,151.52 for the whole area.
2. The Council Tax Landlord discount previously applied to empty rental properties be removed.

Corporate Policy Committee note that:

3. The Council Tax Support scheme is agreed for 2024/25 as unchanged other than the increases in line with CPI as agreed in the last consultation.

Background

- 5 Cheshire East Council is required to approve its taxbase before 31 January 2024 so that the information can be provided to the Cheshire Police and Crime Commissioner and Cheshire Fire Authority for their budget processes. It also enables each Town and Parish Council to set their respective budgets. Details for each parish area are set out in **Appendix A**.
- 6 The taxbase for the area is the estimated number of chargeable dwellings expressed as a number of band D equivalents, adjusted for an estimated number of discounts, exemptions and appeals plus an allowance for non-collection. A reduction of 1% is included in the taxbase calculation to allow for anticipated levels of non-collection.
- 7 Processes to collect Council Tax locally continue to be effective despite the challenges of the legacy of the covid pandemic and the impact on residents of the cost of living. Changes to Council Tax discounts, specifically the introduction and subsequent amendments to the CTS scheme are being managed and the forecast level of non-collection at Cheshire East has been maintained at 1% for 2024/25.
- 8 Analysis of recent trends in new homes, and homes being brought back into use, suggest an increase of nearly 4,700 homes is likely between the setting of the 2024/25 taxbase in October 2023 and the 31 March 2025. The impact of this growth is affected by when properties may be available for occupation and the appropriate council tax banding and this is factored into the taxbase calculation.

- 9 In common with most Billing Authorities, Cheshire East Council charges a Council Tax premium of 100% on property that has been empty for 2 years or more in order to encourage homes to be brought back into use. The Local Government Finance Act 1992 (amended) enables Councils to charge a premium on empty properties.
- 10 Additional flexibilities were introduced in subsequent Government budgets and Cheshire East now charges the following premiums for empty properties:

Time empty/unfurnished	Premium
2 to 5 years	100%
5 to 10 years	200%
Over 10 years	300%

- 11 The Government's Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill was published in May 2022 and includes further discretionary options for the application of Council Tax premiums on empty properties, reducing the qualifying period from two years to one year, and making premiums available for imposition on second homes. Subject to the Bill receiving Royal Assent the proposed changes will come into effect on 1 April 2024.
- 12 Cheshire East has offered the owners of rental properties a short-term discount to assist the refurbishment and maintenance of property between lets. The discount is discretionary and not offered by a significant number of other Billing Authorities. The total value of awards is approximately £540,000 per annum. It is proposed that this discount be removed as it is unsustainable and inequitable as the discount is not offered across all types of tenure.
- 13 The taxbase also reflects assumptions around CTS payments. The Cheshire East CTS scheme was introduced in 2013/14 and subsequently amended following consultations in 2016/17, 2020/21 and was amended again for 2022/23 to make the scheme more supportive in the light of funding being provided by central government (£3.3m) to be able to assist the pandemic recovery.
- 14 The funding for this Local Council Tax Support grant was received in 2020/21 and was transferred to the Collection Fund Earmarked reserve. The funding is being used over the medium term to support the revenue budget to compensate for suppressed council tax levels as a result of higher Council Tax Support payments.

- 15 No changes are proposed to the Council Tax Support Scheme for 2024/25 other than to increase the income bands and non-dependant deductions in line with CPI. This continues the higher levels of support for those on the lowest income.
- 16 The taxbase and subsequent collection of council tax is subject to overall risks from a variety of sources, such as inaccuracies within:
- Numbers of new homes forecast
 - Levels of discounts and premium charges estimated
 - Under collection rate
- 17 Risks particularly associated with Council Tax Support levels include:
- Challenges over the medium-term economic position, especially in the light of increased inflation and economic slowdown.
 - The risk of a major employer leaving the area.
 - The risk of delay in the significant development projects delaying employment opportunities.
 - The prospect of a greater number of residents becoming of pensionable age and potentially becoming eligible for CTS.
 - The risk of increased non-collection due to the increasing demand on non-protected residents.
 - Recovery following increase in caseload as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic resulting in reductions in earnings and increased redundancies.
- 18 Risks are managed throughout the year and regular monitoring and reporting takes place to ensure that preceptors are made aware of any shortfalls in the Collection fund.

Consultation and Engagement

- 19 The calculation of the taxbase is not subject to consultation.

Reasons for Recommendations

- 20 In accordance with the Local Authorities (Calculation of Council Tax Base) Regulations 2012 Cheshire East Council is required to agree its taxbase before 31st January 2024.

Other Options Considered

- 21 None.
- 22 Do nothing – Impact/risk would be high. Members would not be performing in accordance with the Local Government Finance Act 1992 (as amended); The Local Authorities (Calculation of Council Tax Base) (England) Regulations 2012.

Implications and Comments

Monitoring Officer/Legal

- 23 The recommendations are supportable.
- 24 In accordance with the Local Authorities (Functions and Responsibilities) (England) Regulations 2000 as amended and Chapter 4 of the Council's Constitution, the calculation of the Council taxbase is a matter for full Council following a recommendation by Corporate Policy Committee.

The Council Tax Landlord discount is discretionary, and its imposition or removal is permitted under the relevant legislation subject to the usual public law principle of irrationality. The reasons given for the removal in this Report do not give rise to any finding of irrationality on the part of the Council. *Section 151 Officer/Finance*

- 25 The calculation of the taxbase provides an estimate that contributes to the calculation of overall funding for Cheshire East Council in each financial year. The taxbase calculation as set out in this report will be used to calculate the council tax budgeted income for 2024/25 and will be included in the Medium-Term Financial Strategy 2024-28.

Policy

- 26 There are no direct policy implications arising from this report.
- 27 The report supports the Corporate Plan aim Open and priority to be an open and enabling organisation.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

- 28 There are no direct equality, diversity and inclusion implications arising from this report.

Human Resources

- 29 There are no direct human resources implications arising from this report.

Risk Management

- 30 Consideration and recommendation of the taxbase for 2024/25 to Council ensures that the statutory requirement to set the taxbase is met.
- 31 Estimates contained within the Council taxbase calculation, such as the loss on collection and caseload for Council Tax Support, will be monitored throughout the year. Any significant variation will be reflected

in a surplus or deficit being declared in the Collection Fund which is then shared amongst the major precepting authorities.

Rural Communities

32 This report provides details of taxbase implications across the borough.

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

33 There are no direct children and young people implications arising from this report.

Public Health

34 There are no direct public health implications arising from this report.

Climate Change

35 There are no direct climate implications arising from this report.

Access to Information	
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Appendices:	Appendix A – Taxbase 2024/25
Background Papers:	None

APPENDIX A

COUNCIL TAX - TAXBASE 2024/25

CHESHIRE EAST	BAND D EQUIVALENTS	TAX BASE 99.00%
Acton	143.65	142.22
Adlington	641.92	635.50
Agden	94.91	93.96
Alderley Edge	2,745.57	2,718.11
Alpraham	251.97	249.45
Alsager	5,730.16	5,672.85
Arclid	198.95	196.97
Ashley	175.64	173.88
Aston by Budworth	211.24	209.13
Aston-juxta-Mondrum	91.35	90.43
Audlem	1,045.38	1,034.93
Austerson	49.14	48.65
Baddiley	94.42	93.47
Baddington	59.85	59.25
Barthomley	105.00	103.95
Basford	94.44	93.49
Batherton	32.15	31.83
Betchton	300.65	297.64
Bickerton	132.80	131.48
Blakenhall	72.27	71.54
Bollington	3,206.38	3,174.32
Bosley	221.95	219.73
Bradwall	94.75	93.80
Brereton	860.64	852.04
Bridgemere	69.17	68.48
Brindley	67.17	66.50
Broomhall	90.24	89.34
Buerton	259.51	256.91
Bulkeley	141.24	139.82
Bunbury	734.14	726.80
Burland	337.66	334.28
Calveley	138.28	136.90
Checkley-cum-Wrinehill	48.81	48.32
Chelford	848.14	839.66
Cholmondeley	96.61	95.64
Cholmondeston	83.56	82.72
Chorley	284.64	281.80
Chorley (Crewe)	63.59	62.96
Chorlton	680.74	673.93
Church Lawton	874.27	865.53
Church Minshull	210.17	208.06
Congleton	11,320.23	11,207.02
Coole Pilate	38.38	37.99
Crnage	690.14	683.23
Crewe	14,554.98	14,409.43
Crewe Green	93.56	92.63
Disley	2,088.93	2,068.04
Dodcott-cum-Wilkesley	215.32	213.17
Doddington	19.11	18.92
Eaton	184.19	182.35
Edleston	37.63	37.26
Egerton	35.77	35.42
Faddiley	85.63	84.77
Gawsworth	831.20	822.89
Goostrey	1,099.45	1,088.46
Great Warford	460.84	456.23
Handforth	2,519.88	2,494.68
Hankelow	179.76	177.96
Haslington	2,795.39	2,767.44
Hassall	114.28	113.14
Hatherton	186.47	184.61
Haughton	103.97	102.93
Henbury	426.48	422.22
Enhull	21.05	20.84
High Legh	907.50	898.43
Higher Hurdfield	332.45	329.12
Holmes Chapel	2,922.41	2,893.18
Hough	342.76	339.33
Hulme Walfield & Somerford Booths	327.30	324.03
Hunsterson	78.93	78.14
Hurleston	36.76	36.39

COUNCIL TAX - TAXBASE 2024/25

CHESHIRE EAST	BAND D EQUIVALENTS	TAX BASE 99.00%
Kettleshulme	171.72	170.00
Knutsford	6,059.79	5,999.20
Lea	22.42	22.20
Leighton	1,998.18	1,978.20
Little Bollington	109.62	108.53
Little Warford	38.43	38.05
Lower Peover	73.20	72.47
Lower Withington	326.04	322.78
Lyme Handley	74.45	73.71
Macclesfield	19,239.12	19,046.67
Macclesfield Forest/Wildboarclough	123.27	122.04
Marbury-cum-Quoisley	140.78	139.37
Marton	123.06	121.83
Mere	461.76	457.14
Middlewich	5,099.99	5,048.99
Millington	89.30	88.41
Minshull Vernon	125.15	123.90
Mobberley	1,492.52	1,477.59
Moston	179.30	177.50
Mottram St Andrew	425.64	421.38
Nantwich	6,611.47	6,545.35
Nether Alderley	669.01	662.32
Newbold Astbury-cum-Moreton	358.81	355.22
Newhall	471.72	467.01
Norbury	107.32	106.25
North Rode	134.70	133.35
Odd Rode	2,020.70	2,000.50
Ollerton with Marthall	348.54	345.06
Over Alderley	291.74	288.82
Peckforton	73.60	72.86
Peover Superior	407.80	403.73
Pickmere	397.32	393.35
Plumley with Toft and Bexton	409.89	405.79
Poole	83.80	82.97
Pott Shrigley	162.51	160.89
Poynton with Worth	6,293.80	6,230.87
Prestbury	2,257.11	2,234.54
Rainow	613.63	607.49
Ridley	88.06	87.18
Rope	815.72	807.56
Rostherne	81.06	80.25
Sandbach	8,981.95	8,892.13
Shavington-cum-Gresty	2,643.04	2,616.61
Siddington	189.46	187.56
Smallwood	331.89	328.58
Snelson	85.17	84.32
Somerford	1,006.94	996.87
Sound	112.14	111.02
Spurstow	196.04	194.08
Stapeley	1,710.16	1,693.05
Stoke	113.75	112.61
Styal	374.20	370.46
Sutton	1,253.80	1,241.26
Swettenham	185.70	183.84
Tabley	242.21	239.79
Tatton	13.26	13.13
Twemlow	131.44	130.13
Walgherton	70.71	70.00
Wardle	81.29	80.48
Warmingham	116.57	115.41
Weston	929.76	920.46
Wettenhall	113.82	112.68
Willaston	1,588.00	1,572.12
Wilmslow	12,242.74	12,120.31
Wincle	95.38	94.43
Wirswall	42.46	42.04
Wistaston	3,403.15	3,369.12
Woolstanwood	240.56	238.15
Worleston	117.23	116.06
Wrenbury	530.72	525.42
Wybunbury	819.76	811.56
	161,769.22	160,151.52

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OPEN

Corporate Policy Committee

30 November 2023

Proposed Changes to the Constitution

Report of: David Brown Director of Governance and Compliance (Monitoring Officer)

Report Reference No: CP/62/23-24

Ward(s) Affected: All

Purpose of Report

- 1 The purpose of the report is to recommend the proposed changes to the Constitution, as agreed and recommended by the Council's Constitution Working Group (CWG) on 11 September 2023.
- 2 The changes proposed relate to various matters, administrative, procedural and to delegations in relation to staffing matters.
- 3 A detailed set of reports was provided to the CWG and the details within the report set out its recommendations for approval by the Corporate Policy Committee.

Executive Summary

- 4 The Constitution sets out the governance framework for decision-making within the Council. This provides for the consideration and recommendation for approval, of any proposed changes to Full Council.
- 5 On 11 September 2023 the Council's CWG received a series of reports detailing proposed changes to the Council's Constitution and the reasoning for such changes. These related to various matters that are in line with the Council's corporate priorities.
- 6 After careful consideration of each proposal, the CWG agreed with the proposals and that they should be recommended to the Corporate Policy Committee for consideration and in turn recommended to Full Council. These proposals relate to the following matters;
 - (a) Amendments to officer delegations to Directors relating to changes to staffing

- (b) Amendments to Officer Delegations relating to approval of settlement agreements
- (c) Amendments to decision making with regards to early retirement and severance packages
- (d) Inclusion of provisions to allow for electronic signing and sealing of documents
- (e) Amendments to the provisions regarding approvals of grants schemes.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Corporate Policy Committee is recommended to;

1. Consider the changes to the Council's Constitution in relation to Officer Delegations and Staffing as set out in paragraph 8 - a) of the report and recommend them for approval to Full Council.
2. Consider the changes to the Council's Constitution in relation to Officer Delegations to Executive Directors only and settlement agreements as set out in paragraph 8 - b) of the report and recommend them for approval to Full Council.
3. Consider the changes to the Council's Constitution in relation to decision making with regards to early retirement and severance packages as set out in paragraphs 8 - c) of the report and recommend them for approval to Full Council.
4. Consider the changes to the Council's Constitution to allow the inclusion of provisions to allow for electronic signing and sealing of documents as set out in paragraph 8 – d) of the report and recommend them for approval to Full Council.
5. Consider the changes to the Council's Constitution to the provisions regarding approvals of grants schemes as set out in paragraph 8 – e) of the report and recommend them for approval to Full Council.

Background

- 7 The Constitution sets out the governance framework for decision-making within the Council. This provides for the consideration and recommendation for approval, of any proposed changes to full Council, by Corporate Policy Committee.

- 8 On 11 September 2023 CWG received a suite of reports proposing changes to various parts of the Constitution. The CWG considered these and recommended the following proposed amendments identified as track changes;

- a) Amendments and additions to Officer Delegations relating to Staffing as set out in the Constitution at Chapter 2, Part 5, Paragraph 36, which provide for delegations to all Directors and any appointed deputy, as follows;

36. To implement changes to staffing structures subject to prior consultation with all appropriate parties affected by the decision, including any Trade Unions, except where the restructure:

36.1 Involves the overall loss of ~~more than one post~~ 10 posts or more not currently vacant; or

36.2 Involves re-grading of posts or the grading of new posts with a salary of £100,000 or more; or

36.3 results in the total cost of the change to the staffing structure being £500,000 or more; or

36.4 results in a major change to the service provision received by residents; or

36.5 involves changes to existing National or Local Agreements and policies; or

36.6 cannot be achieved within the delegated powers in respect of budgets

Reasoning - The proposed changes to paragraph 36, provide an appropriate framework for officer delegations for an organisation of the size of Cheshire East Council to allow delegated powers to its senior officers to implement changes to the staffing structure, especially given the safeguards in place. Through the MTFs process, elected members have approved a range of business proposals to advance the alignment of expenditure to the agreed budget. Any consequential need to change staffing structures to enable this to happen and the decisions about how this is achieved in a timely manner, will be supported by the implementation of such changes avoiding unnecessary delays in decision-making process and the period of uncertainty for staff.

- b) Amendments and additions to by way of an addition to Officer Delegations relating to approval of settlement agreements as set out in the Constitution at Chapter 2, Part 5, Paragraph 24 and 35, which

provide for delegations to all Directors and any appointed deputy, as follows;

24 The following delegations shall apply to all Directors (and any nominated deputies) except for paragraph 35 .1 which shall only apply to those officers with roles identified as Executive Directors.

35.1 *To sign settlement agreements for employees/ex-employees, in consultation with the Chair of the Corporate Policy Committee for settlements of under £30,000 (excluding any contractual payment such as pay in lieu of notice, untaken accrued annual leave).*

Reasoning - The recommended changes also give an additional delegation to Executive Directors to give them delegated authority to enter into a settlement agreement for employees/ex-employees, in consultation with the Chair of the Corporate Policy Committee relating to settlements under £30,000 (excluding any contractual payment such as pay in lieu of notice, untaken accrued annual leave). Lower value settlement agreements are often only based on contractual notice being paid in lieu of notice and outstanding contractual leave. The change would ensure that decisions to enter into settlement agreements are made in a timely manner without unnecessary delays. This would be beneficial as these can be sensitive situations with individuals feeling anxious to reach a resolution. A similarly worded amendment is proposed for the Chief Executive/Head of the Paid Service below to clarify the delegated authority relates to settlements of £30,000 and over (see 48.9 below).

- c) Amendments and additions to delegations to the Chief Executive/Head of the Paid Service in decision making with regards to early retirement and severance packages, as set out in the Constitution at Chapter 2, Part 5, Paragraph 48, as follows;

48.8 *To approve, in consultation with the Chair of the Corporate Policy Committee:*

- Voluntary and compulsory redundancies (with or without the early release of pension where the total cost is £95,000 or less)*
- Employee requested – Early retirement (where there is a pension strain cost)*
- Employer requested – Early retirement on grounds of ‘Efficiency of the Service’ retirement*
- Employee requested – Early retirement on compassionate grounds*
- Ill health retirement*
- Buy-out of hours*

- *Flexible retirement*

48.89 To sign settlement agreements for employees/ex-employees, in consultation with the Chair of the Corporate Policy Committee *for settlements of £30,000 and above (excluding any contractual payment such as pay in lieu of notice, untaken accrued annual leave).*

Reasoning - The recommended change to 48 will provide clarity for the approval route for a range of employment decisions including early retirement and severance. Within the Constitution the Corporate Policy Committee is responsible for making decisions in relation to proposed severance packages with a value of £95,000 or more as appropriate (excluding contractual and holiday pay), subject to the need to obtain an approval from full Council and central Government if required. However, it is silent on where approval lies for proposed severance packages with a value of lesser value. The recommendation is that the approval route is in line with the Financial Procedural Rules which set out the mechanism for how severance and early retirement proposals are brought forward from services. This will provide clarity and to ensure that the decision making for proposed severance packages, with or without early retirement, of less than £95,000 is made at an appropriate level within the constitution.

- d) Inclusion of provisions to allow for electronic signing and sealing of documents as set out in Chapter 2 Part 5 paragraph 64;

‘To attest the affixing of the Council’s seal to all documents approved for sealing. Such attestation and/or affixing may include by digital or electronic means in accordance with the provisions of the Electronic Communications Act 2000 or other legislative authority’

Reasoning - The Council’s Constitution delegates authority to witness and attach the Council’s seal to documents, to the Monitoring Officer. This has been delegated to individual lawyers within Legal Services and for many years the affixing of the Council’s seal has been done manually, with documents being printed off and paper seals being attached and embossed with the Council’s seal. The Electronic Communications Act 2000 introduced recognition of electronic seals and signatures as a method of authenticating documents required to be signed and/or sealed and since the Covid pandemic and the increase in hybrid working, the physical signing and sealing of documentation on behalf of the Council has become more onerous for those who have delegated authority. In response, many local authorities have moved to electronic signing and sealing and currently the Council uses electronic signatures within its Atamis system, for contracts, where no seal is required. The proposed changes will avoid any delays in sealing of documents, align with the Council’s Digital Strategy and it’s green agenda by reducing in printing.

- e) Amendments to the provisions regarding approvals of grants schemes as set out in Chapter 3, Part 4, Section 4 Paragraph 6.26 and 6.27;

6.26 The Corporate Policy Committee will on a periodic basis, agree a policy setting down the approach to be taken to the allocation of grants, donations and other contributions to outside bodies. A committee may approve a specific scheme that falls within its terms of reference and delegate to the relevant Executive Director a financial limit for the allocation of grants, donations and other contributions to outside bodies.

6.27 Grants, donations and contributions will be paid by the Council in accordance with the policies determined under paragraph 6.26 above, subject to there being adequate provision in service budgets and the appropriate approvals being sought. Where no other specific scheme has been approved by a committee the following limits will apply.

<i>Approval Level</i>	<i>Amount</i>
<i>Officers</i>	<i>Up to and including £50,000 (where grant is within approved grant policy and fully funded)</i>
<i>Relevant Corporate Leadership Team member in consultation with the Chair of the relevant Committee and Chair of Finance Sub-Committee</i>	<i>Between £50,000 and £100,000 (where grant is within approved grant policy and fully funded)</i>
<i>Committee</i>	<i>All Grants of £100,000 or more. All grants which do not fall within existing approved grant policy require Corporate Policy Committee approval.</i>

Reasoning - The reasons for this proposal is that there has been a lack of clarity as to when grants should be referred for committee approval. This amendment confirms that it is the size of scheme value that is relevant and committee may then delegate allocation etc to the director.

Consultation and Engagement

- 9 As stated the Constitution Working Group was consulted on these proposals on 11 September 2023 and their recommendations are as set out above.

Reasons for Recommendations

- 10 The reasons for each recommendation is set out above against each proposed change.

Other Options Considered

Option	Impact	Risk
1. Do nothing and leave the constitution unchanged.	This is not considered to be a suitable alternative option as there needs to be clarity within the constitution to enable the effective and efficient operation of the organisation with appropriate delegated powers for the size of organisation such as Cheshire East Council. The Constitution is a living document, which needs to be kept under review to ensure that it is fit for purpose and that it meets the needs of the Council.	Failure to achieve the outcomes identified and impacts stated.
2. Adopt only some of the proposed amendments	As for option 1.	As for option 1.

Implications and Comments

Monitoring Officer/Legal

- 11 The legal implications are set out within the report.

Section 151 Officer/Finance

- 12 There are no financial implications arising directly from the report.

Policy

- 13 The recommended changes to the Constitution will, if agreed, result in constitutional change. They will facilitate an open and enabling organisation

and ensure that there is transparency in all aspects of council decision making.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

- 14 There are no direct implications arising from this report. Equality, diversity and inclusion issues will be considered as part of any decision regarding the human resource implications set out within the report.

Human Resources

- 15 The human resources implications are set out within the body of the report.

Risk Management

- 16 There are no risks arising from this report.

Rural Communities

- 17 There are no implications arising from this report.

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

- 18 There are no implications arising from this report.

Public Health

- 19 There are no public health implications arising from the report.

Climate Change

- 20 There are no climate change implications arising from this report.

Access to Information	
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Appendices:	N/a
Background Papers:	N/a

Corporate Policy Committee**30 November 2023****Review of the Committee System and Medium-Term Financial Strategy Saving****Report of: David Brown – Director of Governance and Compliance****Report Reference No: CP/57/23-24****Ward(s) Affected: All****Purpose of Report**

- 1 This report updates the committee on the progress of delivering the Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) saving to reduce the cost of democracy, and proposes a recommendation for Council to consider as improvements to the future functionality of the Committee System, taking into account the MTFS saving agreed by Full Council in February 2023.
- 2 Without agreeing the recommendations within this report and the alternative proposals outlined, the MTFS budget saving will not be met.

Executive Summary

- 3 On the [22 February 2023](#), Full Council approved the MTFS for Cheshire East Council for the four years 2023/24 to 2026/27. The MTFS included the approved proposal to reduce the costs of democracy which provided a £135,000 saving. During the MTFS 2023 budget consultation and engagement process, this budget saving proposal received a high level of support from residents.
- 4 The MTFS proposal contained the following detail:
- 5 MTFS Saving Proposal 57: Reduce the Costs of Democracy: Review committee workloads against original design principles. Consider a freeze on member allowances. Reduce the use of external venues,

travel expenses and printing. Review the number of Committees through merging functions.

- 6 The budget papers at Appendix C page 71 item 57 states

“Post Consultation – This proposal has been clarified to confirm the merger of the Public Rights of Way Committee within the responsibilities of the Environment and Communities Committee, and the merger of the Strategic Planning Committee within the responsibilities of the North and South Planning Committees.”

- 7 Following the conclusion of the January 2023 MTFS budget consultation and engagement process, this proposal focussed upon the proposed merger of the Public Rights of Way Sub Committee functions into the functions of the Highways and Transport Committee and the merger of the Strategic Planning Committee within the responsibilities of the North and South Planning Committees.

- 8 At its meeting held on 19 July 2023, Council considered the recommendations of the Corporate Policy Committee to amend the terms of reference of the committees to reflect the Council decision of February 2023 and deferred consideration of the recommendation in relation to Planning Committees. Full Council resolved to:

“1. Approve the amendments to the Constitution as attached at Appendix 1 to the report to the Corporate Policy Committee.

2. Agree that the Public Rights of Way Sub-Committee functions be incorporated into the functions of the Highways and Transport Committee as shown in Appendix 2.

3. Agree to defer consideration of the realignment of the Planning Committees from 3 to 2 to the December meeting of Council to allow further consultation to take place, including with the Planning Committee Chairs, to fully understand the risks.

4. Delegate to the Monitoring Officer, the power to make such consequential changes to the Council’s Constitution as he deems necessary to give effect to the wishes of Council.

5. Note the savings in relation to venues for meetings and printing and postage of agendas.”

- 9 The amended terms of reference were not approved for the proposed changes to the Planning Committees and therefore the current committee structure remains in place unless changes to it are made when Full Council considers the deferred report on 13 December 2023.

- 10 The decision not to approve the revised terms of reference, means this saving cannot be achieved and represents an additional unplanned expenditure for the Council.
- 11 Since the approval of the MTFs in February 2023, further consideration has been given to the potential merger of Committee functions as set out within the report recommendations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

That Council be recommended to:

1. Note Council's agreed MTFs saving of £135,000 to reduce the costs of democracy and, in the light of this, and taking into account the Council's financial position:
2. Agree that the Finance Sub-Committee functions be incorporated into the functions of the Corporate Policy Committee, as shown in Appendix 1 and that the Corporate Policy Committee be renamed to become the Corporate Policy and Resources Committee.
3. Approve the undertaking of a further annual review and a report on its findings to be presented to the first scheduled meeting held after the Council AGM in 2024.
4. Delegate to the Monitoring Officer, the power to make such consequential changes to the Council's Constitution as he deems necessary to give effect to the decision/s of Council.

Background

- 12 On [22 February 2023](#), Council agreed the MTFs saving proposal to reduce the costs of democracy which committed to achieving a saving of £135,000 through a review of the committee structure and committee workloads to identify opportunities to merge functions, reducing the total number of committees.
- 13 The recommendation to accept the revised terms of reference which would have allowed the constitutional changes in relation to Planning Committees was not agreed by Full Council on [19 July 2023](#) and therefore the agreed MTFs saving has not been made to date. Full Council resolved to defer the decision to allow further consultation to take place. The delay to progressing the proposed MTFs budget saving to reduce the costs of democracy will require Full Council to

identify alternative proposals to rebalance the budget, complying with the budgetary framework.

14 Options:

1. Reducing the number of Place Service Committees from three to two, by incorporating the functions of the Economy and Growth Committee into the functions of the Highways and Transport Committee and the Environment and Communities Committee.
2. Aligning the functions of the Corporate Policy Committee and Finance Sub Committee to create a Corporate Policy and Resources Committee.
3. Incorporating the functions of the Scrutiny Committee within the relevant Service Committees.
4. Looking to a different service area to remove a post, however this may have a detrimental impact on meeting the business needs of the council.

15 Finance Sub Committee

- 16 The financial implications section of this report details the Special Responsibility Allowances which apply to the Chairs and Vice Chairs of the Finance Sub Committee, together with other meeting-related costs.
- 17 The Finance Sub Committee makes recommendations to the Corporate Policy Committee on the development of the MTFS, and the setting and monitoring of budgets in line with the Corporate Plan and Policy Framework. It also has its own exclusive responsibilities. The interplay between the Finance Sub Committee and the Corporate Policy Committee has been more evident in 2022/23, particularly in relation to managing the in-year budget and developing the MTFS. There is an opportunity to streamline knowledge and decision-making into a single Corporate Policy and Resources Committee, with the current Finance Sub Committee Working Groups being retained, which would naturally fall within the responsibilities of that Committee.
- 18 Appendix 1 shows how the responsibilities of the Finance Sub Committee could be incorporated within those of the Corporate Policy Committee, should Members choose to pursue this course of action. The Corporate Policy Committee would become the Corporate Policy and Resources Committee.

Consultation and Engagement

- 19 The proposal to reduce the costs of democracy was consulted upon in January 2023 as part of the Council's MTFS budget engagement. The

MTFS consultation received a total of 2,267 engagements with 665 survey responses made in relation to the proposal to reduce the costs of democracy. The proposal received strong net support (82%) during the consultation. Consultation responses highlighted that residents were supportive of this proposal as it was felt to have a lesser impact on local communities.

Reasons for Recommendations

- 20 To ensure that the Committee System remains fit for purpose, meeting the requirements of Cheshire East Council, partners, and residents.
- 21 To partially meet the saving identified in the MTFS.
- 22 It is best practice to regularly review the Council's Constitution.

Other Options Considered

Option	Impact	Risk
Identify a reduction of an alternative substantive committee	Will achieve the 2023 saving in the next financial year.	Negative impact on the MTFS saving.
Do nothing	<p>The required MTFS Saving will not be met</p> <p>The Constitution is a living document, which needs to be kept under review to ensure that it is fit for purpose and that it meets the needs of the Council. Doing nothing is not appropriate, as this would not result in the Council learning from experience and improving.</p>	<p>Negative impact on the MTFS</p> <p>That the Council will not implement changes to its decision-making structure in response to what it has learned from the experience of the last two years. Failure to meet Corporate Plan Priorities.</p>

Implications and Comments

Monitoring Officer/Legal

- 23 The proposed amendments to the Constitution are part of the continuing development of the Committee System, as well as required to meet the MTFs proposals as agreed by Council in February 2023. Although predominately to ensure consistency with a committee style of governance, changes require approval of Full Council such as those specifically relating to the amendments to terms of reference.
- 24 The Constitution contains details of how the Council works, how and by whom decisions are made as well as being the functioning rule book used by all officers and Members in driving forward the business of the Council. Like any set of rules, it needs to remain current and consistent with the intent of Council and practicable in the delivery of the Council's objectives.
- 25 The core elements of the Constitution are set through various legislative regimes and the current Constitution appears to meet the substantive legal requirements. In the areas in which the Council has a discretion, the Constitution must also remain broadly reasonable and consistent with the objectives of the Council.
- 26 Failure to keep the Constitution under review and adapt to the changing needs of the organisation will build in levels of risk into the decision-making process. Those risks may manifest themselves as delay, poor quality decisions or ultimately a challenge to the decision itself.

Section 151 Officer/Finance

- 27 The Finance Sub Committee has 8 Members and meets on a bi-monthly basis. The Chair receives a Special Responsibility Allowance (SRA) of £12,485, and the Vice Chair receives an SRA of £6,242 (subject to the established rule of no more than one SRA being paid to any Member). There are also meeting-related costs associated with travel, subsistence, and officer time.
- 28 The reduction in the number of committees would have direct impact on the budget in relation to Member allowances, Member and officer time and travel etc. The removal of the Finance Sub Committee plus the removal of an additional substantive committee would enable a vacant post within the Democratic Services Team to be removed from the structure, which would save approximately £52,500. This could not be achieved from the removal of Finance Sub-Committee alone.

- 29 The proposals give effect to the saving highlighted in the MTFS and the associated High Level Business Cases. If Members do not agree the proposals contained in this report, consideration would need to be given to additional changes to the MTFS to ensure that its proposals balance.

Policy

- 30 The recommended changes to the Constitution will, if agreed by Council, result in constitutional change.

An open and enabling organisation

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

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

- 31 An Equality Impact Assessment was completed for the original decision to change governance. The accessibility and intelligibility of the Constitution has remained at the forefront of the drafting process. Accessibility and transparency are core design principles and additional learning has been incorporated through the changes to and the review of remote meetings.

Human Resources

- 32 There are direct implications for human resources. Staff (and Members) have requested additional training. Training requests include process training on how decisions are made, and practical issues such as additional training on report writing given the change in audience from Cabinet to committee. Members have sought better understanding of how to obtain best results from officers who present reports, consistency in style of recommendations, to process and procedural issues.

Risk Management

- 33 The risks of changing systems of governance were set out in paragraph 1.6 onwards of the November 2020 [report](#). The Council has continued to effectively manage the strategic risks related to the wider pandemic, changes in legislation on meetings, resource constraints and the fixed time frame set by the November decision. At present these risks appear to have been successfully mitigated.
- 34 The review of the operational effectiveness of the Committee System and supporting Constitution is an essential component of ensuring the

efficacy of corporate decision making which is a key element of continuing risk mitigation.

Rural Communities

- 35 There are direct implications for rural communities, specifically in relation to the proposed retention and bolstering of the responsibilities of the two area planning committees. These committees would, essentially, retain their local focus, but would have enhanced powers, thereby enabling them to exercise those powers with local needs in mind.

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

- 36 There are no direct implications for children and young people.

Public Health

- 37 There are no direct public health implications.

Climate Change

- 38 There are no direct implications for climate change, although the Council would continue to pursue its climate change response by promoting paperless options to its approach to decision-making. Fewer committees would contribute to this.

Access to Information	
Contact Officer:	Brian Reed, Head of Democratic Services and Governance Brian.reed@cheshireeast.gov.uk
Appendices:	Appendix 1 - Proposed changes to the Constitution.
Background Papers:	Previous Full Council reports (as hyperlinked throughout this report)

Corporate Policy and Resources Committee - Incorporating the Terms of Reference of the Finance Sub-Committee.

Membership: 13 Members

Functions

1 The Corporate Policy and Resources Committee will provide strategic direction to the operation of the Council by developing and recommending the Corporate Plan to full Council and making decisions on policies and practice where such decisions are not reserved to full Council.

2 The Committee's responsibilities include:

2.1 formulation, co-ordination and implementation of the Corporate Plan and

2.2 corporate policies and strategies, ~~alongside development of the medium term financial plan (budget), and setting and monitoring the Capital and Revenue Budgets in accordance with the Corporate Plan and Policy Framework which is the responsibility of the Finance Sub-Committee.~~ In the discharge of those responsibilities the Committee shall determine such matters to the extent that they are not reserved to full Council.

~~2.3 determination of finance issues, including but not limited to Treasury Management, Insurance, Procurement, debt write off, settlement payments and virements in line with the constitution;~~

~~2.4 establishment of a Procurement Forward Plan;~~

~~2.5 oversight of the Investment Strategy;~~

~~2.6 grant awards for sums in excess of £50,000;~~

~~2.7 property transactions including buying selling and appropriation of land and property (including compulsory purchase where required);~~

~~2.8 management of the Council's involvement in ASDVs and overseeing the production of an Annual Report on performance; and~~

~~2.9 making decisions as Shareholder or owner, reviewing and approving Business plans, including risk registers and commissioning services.~~

~~3.0 Oversight, scrutiny and budgetary review of the following functions: Land and Property; Central Budgets; Pensions; Grants; Council Tax; Business Rates; Reserves; and Other Funding~~

3.1 Human Resources, Organisational Development and Health and Safety matters affecting the Council; including adopting HR policies and practices and assurance in relation to staffing related matters.

3.2 making recommendations to full Council in relation to the annual Pay Policy Statement and any amendments to such statement.

3.3 making recommendations to full Council in relation to decisions affecting the remuneration of any new post where the remuneration is or is proposed to be or would become £100,000 p.a. or more.

3.4 making decisions in relation to proposed severance packages with a value of £95,000 or more as appropriate (excluding contractual and holiday pay), subject to the need to obtain a approval from full Council and central Government if required.

3.5 exercising the functions relating to local government pensions, so far as they relate to Regulations made under sections 7, 12, or 24 of the Superannuation Act 1972 or subsequent equivalent legal provisions.

3.6 determining key cross-cutting policies and key plans that impact on more than one service committee.

3.7 determining policy matters not otherwise allocated to any other Committee.

3.8 determining any matter of dispute or difference between any Committees.

3.9 a co-ordinating role across all other committees and exercising a corporate view of outcomes, performance, budget monitoring and risk management.

3.10 determining any matter that has a major impact on a number of Council services or the Council as a whole.

3.11 oversight and monitoring of the Councillors' Allowances budget and keeping under review the scheme for the payment of allowances to Councillors through the appointment of an Independent Remuneration Panel (IRP) to advise full Council on the adoption and any proposed amendments to such scheme.

3.12 considering amendments to the Council's Constitution and the recommendation of any changes to full Council for approval except where specifically delegated to the Monitoring Officer.

3.13 considering recommendations and an Annual Report of the Council's involvement in ASDVs.

3.14 appointing representatives to serve on outside bodies and organisations (including education bodies and establishments) and reviewing the process for considering appointments to outside organisations.

3.15 appointing Lay Members (who shall not be Councillors) to serve on the Independent Admissions and Exclusion Appeals Panel as required under the relevant legislation; and

3.16 approving the payment of a reasonable and proper allowances and expenses for the work undertaken by the Council's Independent Persons.

3.17 Oversight, scrutiny, reviewing outcomes, performance, budget monitoring and risk management of the Directorates of Finance & Customer Services; Governance & Compliance Services and Transformation including the following functions: Legal, Governance and Compliance; Audit and Risk; Transactional Services;

Transformation; Business Change; B4B/ERP; Human Resources, ICT; together with Strategic Partnerships and shared services.

3.18 The Corporate Policy and Resources Committee shall be entitled to exercise: any function of the full Council not otherwise allocated; as well as the functions of all other Committees and Sub-Committees, particularly where plans, strategies or activities straddle a number of Committees.

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CORPORATE POLICY COMMITTEE – 30TH NOVEMBER 2023**CHESHIRE EAST ELECTORAL REVIEW****RECOMMENDATION****That the Corporate Policy Committee**

- 1. approve the attached council size submission for recommendation to full Council; and**
- 2. delegate authority to the Electoral Review Sub-Committee to make any further changes to the council size submission and related documentation prior to submission to the Boundary Commission.**

Extract from the Minutes of the Electoral Review Sub-Committee meeting on 30th October 2023

11. CHESHIRE EAST ELECTORAL REVIEW

The Sub-Committee considered the draft council size submission for recommendation to the Corporate Policy. It also considered the final version of the electorate forecasting methodology report.

At an informal meeting of the Sub-Committee on 22nd September 2023, members had considered and endorsed a report on the electorate forecast methodology and results. The final version of the electorate forecasting methodology main report, and its sister document Appendix 1, were now presented to the Sub-Committee for approval. Further proposed changes to the methodology report had been circulated to members following publication of the agenda. Officers advised that following feedback from the Boundary Commission, the forecast end date in the methodology report had been changed from December 2029 to January 2030; the change had no impact on the accuracy and interpretation of the forecasts.

At the informal meeting on 22nd September, members had also considered and endorsed a first draft of the council size submission. Officers undertook to ensure that each subsequent draft of the submission would show clearly, by the use of tracked changes, any amendments agreed by members to the previous draft.

Members now considered a revised draft council size submission, showing those sections of the submission that had been added, deleted or changed since the Sub-Committee's meeting on 22nd September. The submission included the results of a survey of all members regarding their workload. Further proposed changes to the submission had been circulated to members following publication of the agenda.

Officers advised that the revised submission stated that a reduction from the current council size of 82 was likely to result in unsustainable pressures on Members and that the current size of 82 members continued to reflect sufficient capacity in terms of members to electorate ratio and still provided sufficient room for growth.

Members agreed a number of amendments to the council size submission:

Agenda page:	Amendment
30	Insert: 'This model involves 80 of the 82 members of the Council serving on standing committees.'
32	Replace 'the Council has large committee memberships' with 'the Council has inclusive committee memberships'
37	Delete reference to a vacancy on the Southern Planning Committee.
38	Insert: 'The Borough also has (x) conservation areas and (x) SSSIs which further demonstrates the complexity of decisions taken by planning committees and places additional responsibilities on some ward members.'
43	Replace: The Council encourages residents to take up queries and complaints with officers, as opposed to directly with Members' with 'Residents are encouraged to contact the Council as appropriate.'
46	1 st sentence, replace: 'and its Members are frequently unable to serve and support residents, business and partner organisations effectively' with 'and its Members face frequent pressures on their workload in supporting residents, business and partner organisations'
78	Delete the sentence referring to discussions on a potential devolution agreement.

Members asked whether, once the Council had approved its recommendation on council size and had forwarded its submission to the Boundary Commission, there would be any scope or flexibility to adjust the council size figure if it became apparent during the subsequent review of warding arrangements that a different council size might be appropriate. Officers undertook to seek clarification from the Boundary Commission.

The Corporate Policy Committee would be recommended at its meeting on 30th November 2023 to approve the Council's draft council size submission for recommendation to full Council. A further meeting of the Sub-Committee was scheduled for 16th November which would provide an opportunity to agree any further changes to the submission before it was presented to the Committee.

The Boundary Commission had asked for earlier sight of the draft submission and had agreed that the Council could provide the draft submission by 22nd November, the date

of publication of the agenda for the Corporate Policy Committee. Any feedback from the Commission prior to the Corporate Policy Committee's meeting would be reported to the Committee together with any comments by the Sub-Committee.

It was agreed that the Sub-Committee should seek delegated authority to make any further changes to the council size submission prior to the submission of the documentation to the Boundary Commission by the deadline of 18th December.

RESOLVED

That the Sub-Committee

1. approves the draft council size submission for recommendation to the Corporate Policy Committee on 30th November 2023, subject to the amendments agreed at the meeting, and subject to any further content which may be brought to the Sub-Committee at its meeting on 16th November;
2. approves the final version of the electorate forecasting methodology main report and its sister document, Appendix 1; and
3. agrees to seek delegated authority to make any further changes to the council size submission and related documentation prior to submission to the Boundary Commission.

Note: the council size submission attached to this minute has been updated to incorporate all changes agreed by the Electoral Review Sub-Committee.

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Electoral Review Sub-Committee

30 October 2023

Cheshire East Electoral Review

Report of: David Brown, Director of Governance and Compliance

Report Reference No: ER/7/23-24

All Cheshire East Council wards are affected

Purpose of Report

1. To invite the Sub-Committee to consider and approve the Council's draft council size submission for recommendation to the Corporate Policy Committee, subject to any further content which may be brought to the Sub-Committee at its meeting on 16th November.
2. To recommend the final version of the electorate forecasting methodology report for approval.
3. In responding to the review, the Council will be fulfilling its Corporate Plan objective, to be "open" by providing strong community leadership and by working transparently with residents, businesses and partners, to deliver the Council's ambitions within the Borough.

Executive Summary

4. The Local Government Boundary Commission for England (the Commission) is an independent body set up by Parliament. Its main role is to carry out electoral reviews of local authorities throughout England. The Commission is undertaking a review of the Council's electoral arrangements. This Council is being asked to respond to the review as a consultee. The Commission will ultimately determine the outcome of the review, and its recommendations will be laid before Parliament for approval.
5. The review is in two stages. The first stage addresses the size of the Council: the number of councillors that Cheshire East Council should have in future. The second stage addresses the warding arrangements: the

number of wards, their boundaries and the number of councillors for each ward.

6. This report deals with the first stage of the review. It presents, for the Sub-Committee's consideration and approval, the Council's draft council size submission.
7. The report also recommends for approval by the Sub-Committee the final version of the electorate forecasting methodology main report and its sister document, Appendix 1.

RECOMMENDATION

The Sub-Committee is recommended:

1. to approve the draft council size submission for recommendation to the Corporate Policy Committee on 30th November 2023, subject to any further content which may be brought to the Sub-Committee at its meeting on 16th November; and
2. to approve the final version of the electorate forecasting methodology main report and its sister document, Appendix 1.

Background

8. The Sub-Committee was appointed by the Corporate Policy Committee at its meeting on 11 July 2023 'to make recommendations to the Corporate Policy Committee in respect of all matters relating to the Cheshire East Council Electoral Review'.
9. The Sub-Committee, at its meeting on 16th August 2023, considered a report on the background to, and proposed work associated with, the Boundary Commission for England's review of Cheshire East Council's electoral arrangements.
10. The Sub-Committee was advised that the Boundary Commission's review would focus on:
 - How many councillors the Council should have.
 - How many Council wards there should be, where their boundaries should be, and what the wards should be called.
 - How many councillors should represent each ward.
11. The Commission would decide how many councillors should be elected to the Council in the future. This decision would be based on information received from the Council (the Council-size submission), and any other

representations made. The Commission's view on Council size would be informed by:

- The governance arrangements of the Council
- The Council's scrutiny functions
- The representational role of Councillors
- Future trends and plans for the Council
- The Borough's geography, community characteristics, demographic pressures and any other relevant constraints, challenges, issues or changes

12. Information would be sought from the Council, including electoral forecasts and other data and documents. A model had therefore been prepared which had generated forecasts of future electorate numbers up to the end of 2029, for various geographical tiers. Officers had also prepared a detailed technical report that explained the forecasting methodology, and were preparing the other data and documents that the Commission required.
13. The Commission had provided some examples of what might be described as "best practice" submissions. The Commission had also identified CIPFA "nearest neighbours" as reference points for the Council's Council-size submission.
14. The Sub-Committee, at its meeting on 16th August 2023, endorsed the methodology adopted for the production of electoral forecasts. It also agreed that the officers should adopt an approach to the production of a draft council size submission, and warding arrangements submission, which is informed by the approaches adopted in best examples of comparator submissions supplied by the Commission to the Council. With regard to council size, officers were asked to adopt a similar approach to that of Central Bedfordshire.
15. The Sub-Committee also asked officers to conduct a survey of all members regarding their workload. The aim would be to use the survey results to provide evidence as part of the Council's submission to the Boundary Commission.
16. At a subsequent informal meeting of the Sub-Committee on 22nd September 2023, members considered and endorsed a report on the electoral forecast methodology and results. The final version of the electorate forecasting methodology main report, and its sister document Appendix 1, are attached for the Sub-Committee's formal approval.

17. At the informal meeting on 22nd September 2023, members also considered and endorsed a first draft of the council size submission. Officers undertook to ensure that each subsequent draft of the submission would show clearly, by the use of tracked changes, any changes agreed by members to the previous draft.
18. A revised draft council size submission is attached to this report for the Sub-Committee's consideration. There are two versions of the submission attached: a clean copy for ease of reference and a tracked change version, showing those sections of the submission that have been added, deleted or changed since the Sub-Committee's informal meeting on 22nd September.
19. The Corporate Policy Committee will be recommended to approve the Council's draft council size submission at its meeting on 30th November 2023. The Sub-Committee has another meeting on 16th November which will provide a further opportunity to agree any further changes to the submission before it is presented to the Committee. The Boundary Commission has asked for earlier sight of the draft submission and has agreed that the Council could provide the draft submission by 22nd November, the date of publication of the agenda for the Corporate Policy Committee. Any feedback from the Commission prior to the Corporate Policy Committee's meeting will be considered by the Sub-Committee, and any further comments by the Sub-Committee on the feedback will be reported to the Committee.
20. The Corporate Policy Committee will also be recommended to authorise the Electoral Review Sub-Committee:
 - a. to make any further changes to the council size submission following the Committee's meeting, arising from any amendments agreed by the Committee and/or any feedback received from the Boundary Commission following the Committee's meeting; and
 - b. to recommend the final council size submission to full Council for approval. Council would be asked to authorise the Sub-Committee to make any final changes to the submission which may arise following approval by Council, prior to submission to the Boundary Commission by its deadline of 18th December.

Consultation and Engagement

21. It is not anticipated that the Council will undertake any consultation work on the review, except internally, with its own Members. The review is being led by the Commission, not the Council, and the Commission has a clearly identified programme of consultation which it is understood will

include the list of stakeholders that the Commission has requested from the Council.

Reasons for Recommendations

22. The recommendation of this report seeks to ensure that the Council responds to the Boundary Commission's review of the Council's electoral arrangements in a timely way in accordance with the timetable laid down by the Commission.
23. In responding to the review, the Council will be fulfilling its Corporate Plan objective of being "open" by providing strong community leadership and by working transparently with residents, businesses and partners, to deliver the Council's ambitions within the Borough.

Other Options Considered

- 24 The Council could choose not to engage with the Commission's review, but this would be an unhelpful approach and would deprive the Council of the important opportunity to make submissions, and to influence its electoral arrangements which will apply from 2027.
- 25 *Impact assessment:*

Option	Impact	Risk
Do nothing (ie do not engage with the review)	The Council would be deprived of the important opportunity to make representations	The review would not secure the benefit of the Council's input as the key respondent. The resulting electoral review order, which will be implemented in 2027 would not be informed by the Council's views.

Implications and Comments

Monitoring Officer/Legal

- 26 The main piece of legislation governing the review is the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009 (the 2009 Act). This consolidates and amends provisions previously contained in the Local Government Act 1972, the Local Government Act 1992 and the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007.

- 27 Section 56 of the 2009 Act requires that the Commission carry out reviews ‘from time to time’, of every principal local authority in England and make recommendations about electoral arrangements (but not their external boundaries) (Period Electoral Reviews or PERs). In addition, the Commission can at any time review the arrangements for all or any parts of a principal local authority’s area if it appears to the Commission to be desirable.
- 28 Subsections 56(1) and (4) require the Commission to recommend whether a change should be made to the electoral arrangements for that area. Electoral arrangements include the total number of councillors to be elected to the council (known as ‘council size’); the number and boundaries of wards/divisions; the number of councillors to be elected for each ward/division; and the name of any ward/division.
- 29 In making its recommendations, Schedule 2 to the 2009 Act requires the Commission to have regard to—
- (a) the need to secure that the ratio of the number of local government electors to the number of members of the district council to be elected is, as nearly as possible, the same in every electoral area of the council,
 - (b) the need to reflect the identities and interests of local communities and in particular—
 - (i) the desirability of fixing boundaries which are and will remain easily identifiable, and
 - (ii) the desirability of fixing boundaries so as not to break any local ties,
 - (c) the need to secure effective and convenient local government,

Further information on the legal implications of the review can be found in the Commission’s Technical Guidance:

<https://www.lgbce.org.uk/sites/default/files/2023-03/technical-guidance-2021.pdf>

Section 151 Officer/Finance

- 30 There will be no impact on the council’s Medium-Term Financial Strategy. The proposal will be funded from within existing Democratic Services budgets, aided by internal officer resource contributions from various other departments, and it is not anticipated that any external spend will be required in order for the Council to respond to the review.

Policy

- 31 The key policy implication of this report is that, in responding to the review, the Council will be meeting one of its most fundamentally important objectives: providing strong community leadership and by working transparently with residents, businesses and partners, to deliver the Council's ambitions within the Borough. In doing so, the Council will be fulfilling the objective of empowering and caring about people within the Borough. The electoral representation of the Council is of key importance in this regard.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

- 32 Given that this report is a response to the Commission's review of the Council's electoral arrangements, and that it simply recommends the means by which the Sub-Committee will make recommendations upon Council size, there would appear to be no equality, diversity and inclusion implications.
- 33 However, in developing its recommendations, the Sub-Committee will be mindful of these important considerations. Undoubtedly, the Commission will be equally mindful of these matters when making its final recommendations on the Council's electoral arrangements.

Human Resources

- 34 There are no direct human resources implications.

Risk Management

- 35 There are no direct risk management implications arising from this report, other than the matters referred to within it. However, the risks associated with any decision of the Council not to engage with the review are set out above.

Rural Communities

- 36 There are no direct implications arising from the recommendations of this report in respect of rural communities, however, there will be such implications as the work in response to the review gets underway. These will be addressed in future reports.

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

- 37 There are no such direct implications.

Public Health

- 38 No direct public health implications arise from the recommendations of this report.

Climate Change

- 39 There are no direct climate change implications, which arise from the recommendations of this report.

Access to Information	
Contact Officer:	Contact Officer: Brian Reed Brian.reed@cheshireeast.gov.uk
Background Papers:	Background Papers: Report to Corporate Policy Committee, 11 July 2023 Local Government Boundary Commission for England website
Appendices	Electorate forecasting methodology main report and Appendix. Draft council size submission (clean copy and tracked change copy)

Cheshire East Council

Council Size Submission: Template

[Cheshire East Council]

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Appendix 5: Council sizes and ratios for Cheshire East and similar local authorities 36

Appendix 6: Workload per councillor, by council size 37

Appendix 7: Member Survey results 39

How to Make a Submission

It is recommended that submissions on future governance arrangements and council size follow the guidance provided and use the format below as a template. Submissions should be treated as an opportunity to focus on the future needs of the council and not simply describe the current arrangements. **Submissions should also demonstrate that alternative council sizes have been considered in drawing up the proposal and why you have discounted them.**

The template allows respondents to enter comments directly under each heading. It is not recommended that responses be unduly long; as a guide, it is anticipated that a 15 to 20-page document using this template should suffice. Individual section length may vary depending on the issues to be explained. Where internal documents are referred to URLs should be provided, rather than the document itself. It is also recommended that a table is included that highlights the key paragraphs for the Commission's attention.

'Good' submissions, i.e. those that are considered to be most robust and persuasive, combine the following *key success components* (as set out in the guidance that accompanies this template):

- Clarity on objectives
- A straightforward and evidence-led style
- An understanding of local place and communities
- An understanding of councillors' roles and responsibilities

About You

The respondent should use this space to provide the Commission with a little detail about who is making the submission, whether it is the full Council, Officers on behalf of the Council, a political party or group, a resident group, or an individual.

This submission is made on behalf of Cheshire East Council, following its approval by Full Council on 13 December 2023.

Under the Council's Constitution, Full Council is responsible for "approving the Council's response to any issues or proposals in relation to local government boundaries including Electoral Wards, the conduct of elections and community governance functions".

On 11 July 2023, in order to inform the Council decision, the Council's Corporate Policy Committee appointed an Electoral Review Sub-Committee to make recommendations upon all matters relating to the Boundary Commission's Review. These recommendations were considered by the Corporate Policy Committee, prior to the Committee making recommendations to Council. On 30 November 2023, in order to ensure that the Council could comply with the Boundary Commission's deadlines for depositing the final Council size submission, the Committee delegated authority to the Sub-Committee to finalise the submission, taking into account any comments from the Commission, or any final amendments which the Committee might suggest.

As the Council has a Committee system of decision-making governance, the Sub-Committee and Council committees are required to reflect the Council's overall political proportionalities.

Officers advised the Sub-Committee, Committee and Council throughout the Review process.

Reason for Review (Request Reviews Only)

Not applicable to Cheshire East Council.

The Context for your proposal

Your submission gives you the opportunity to examine how you wish to organise and run the council for the next 15 - 20 years. **The consideration of future governance arrangements and council size should be set in the wider local and national policy context.** The Commission expects you to challenge your current arrangements and determine the most appropriate arrangements going forward. In providing context for your submission below, please demonstrate that you have considered the following issues.

Q: When did your Council last change/reorganise its internal governance arrangements and what impact on effectiveness did that activity have?

The Council was created on 1 April 2009 following local government reorganisation in Cheshire. Initially it had a Leader and Cabinet system of decision-making governance. However, on 19 November 2020, the Council resolved to implement a Committee system model of governance (following consideration of this report: [Public Pack\)Agenda Document for Council, 19/11/2020 14:00 \(cheshireeast.gov.uk\)](#)). This governance change took effect in May 2021. This was a choice made by Council following a change of political control in May 2019 and a subsequent period of 18 months of careful consideration of the proposed change in governance. One of the aims behind the change in decision-making arrangements was to ensure political proportionality in the making of decisions which had previously been the responsibility of the majority Council political group.

The Council's political proportionality arrangements must comply with relevant legislation. The Council's "service committees", which decide those matters which were previously the responsibility of the Council's Cabinet, have a membership comprising members of the Council's three main political groups.

Much work went into the design of the new committee structure and the new committee responsibilities. As set out in the Design Principles which Council adopted:

- The new form of governance (Committee system) will be modern, open, transparent and easy to understand. It will include arrangements that enable people to easily find out about how decisions are made. Committee meetings will be held in public by cross party (politically proportionate) committees.
- The new arrangements are intended to ensure that decisions are made quickly, to meet the needs of the Council and local community.
- The number of committees and meetings will be kept to a minimum, and technology used to provide instant access to information and avoid unnecessary paperwork.
- There will be a process to deal with those rare instances where urgent decisions are needed. This process will be clear and, in most cases, open to the public.

Council decision-making and business planning arrangements are working effectively and are delivering services in line with the Council's policy framework as set out in the Council's Constitution. The key strategic document is the Council's Corporate Plan which covers the period 2021-2025. All Committee decision reports state how the decision supports achievement of the priorities of the Corporate Plan. Resources to support decisions are determined through the Council's budget and Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS). Organisational performance against Corporate Plan priorities is reported to the Corporate Policy Committee on a quarterly basis. Each individual staff member has a personal development review, setting objectives which link into a Service Plan, Directorate Plan and the Corporate Plan. This ensures that everyone can see the "golden thread" of how their work contributes to the overall success of the Council. The Council's Corporate Plan is currently being refreshed and a revised plan is scheduled to be launched by 1 April 2024.

Whilst, following a resolution to do so, the Council could not choose to change its decision-making arrangements for a period of five years, the way in which its Committee system operates could be changed: for example, by making changes to the number of service committees and their functions/ responsibilities, or to the Council's Constitution, so as to improve the Council's Committee system arrangements.

The Council's committee structure has already been reviewed, resulting in the removal of one sub-committee from the structure. A further review of the structure is taking place, taking into account the Council's Medium-Term Financial Strategy and the Design Principles. Full Council has already considered the Council's planning committee structure and a proposal to reduce the number of planning committees from three to two

and a further report will be considered by Council in due course. This demonstrates that the existing arrangements are being assessed against the Design Principles agreed by Council, in order to ensure that they are effective.

It also demonstrates that the Council actively reviews its arrangements in order to ensure that they are generally fit for purpose.

Q: To what extent has transference of strategic and/or service functions impacted on the effectiveness of service delivery and the ability of the Council to focus on its remaining functions?

The management of the Council's involvement in wholly owned companies, which are referred to in the Council's Constitution as 'ASDVs' (Alternative Service Delivery Vehicles), is overseen by the Council's Finance Sub-Committee, the responsibilities of which are set out in paragraph 2.6 of chapter 2, part 4 of the Constitution. A small number of Cheshire East Council services are shared with Cheshire West and Chester Council, for example ICT and transactional services such as payroll. Cheshire East Council must take decisions by a politically proportionate committee, or by an officer with delegated powers from the Council to do so.

These shared service arrangements are delivered in line with the responsibilities of the Shared Services Joint Committee, whose purpose is "to oversee the management of those services which are provided on a Cheshire wide basis on behalf of Cheshire West and Chester Council and Cheshire East Council to ensure effective delivery of such services and to provide strategic direction." The Committee is administered on alternate years by each Council.

Q: Have any governance or capacity issues been raised by any Inspectorate or similar?

The Council received a report following a Joint Targeted Area Inspection in September 2022. Although this did not identify governance or capacity issues for the Council directly, it did find strategic weaknesses in the Local Safeguarding Childrens Partnership, a multi-agency partnership of which the Council is a member. Over the past year the Partnership have been progressing an Improvement Plan to address the challenges identified.

A Public Interest Report on the impact of the council's culture and governance arrangements during 2014-2018 was published in January 2023. The issues identified during this period led to the Council transitioning its governance arrangements from the Leader and Cabinet system to the current Committee system. The Public Interest Report states that "it is clear that the Council has done a great deal to move on from this period in its relatively short lifetime".

Q: What influence will local and national policy trends likely have on the Council as an institution?

Policy trends, and any necessary changes in strategy, are managed in accordance with the Council's constitution and governance arrangements. Current policy challenges include the impact of the cancellation of the HS2 route from Birmingham to Manchester, the dissolution of Local

Enterprise Partnerships, the development of Integrated Health and Social Care systems, and the Levelling up/ devolution agenda. Any influences of these emerging policies are presented through the decision-making processes of the Council.

Q: What impact on the Council's effectiveness will your council size proposal have?

It will maintain sufficient provision to ensure that:

- Members and Committees have sufficient time and resources to consult residents and other stakeholders adequately and make informed, evidence-based decisions. The Council's recent survey of Members (summarised later in this submission) shows a large proportion (over a third) of Members currently feel they have insufficient capacity to undertake their duties properly.
- Council services are scrutinised through the relevant service committee.
- The scrutiny committee is limited to examining external partnerships of health, crime and disorder and flooding.
- Members have sufficient time to engage with residents, businesses, town/ parish councils and external partner organisations, and to tackle casework, rather than having little or no time spare outside of Committee meetings and preparation for those meetings.
- Members have sufficient time to assess and address the needs of the Borough's most vulnerable residents, such as those in deprived areas of Cheshire East and older people/ children.
- Councillor workloads are manageable enough to attract a diverse array of people (different age groups, social/ ethnic groups, household types, occupations, etc), who can offer a broader range of skills/ experience and be more representative of the local community.
- Rural wards cover a manageable area with communities that councillors can reach within a reasonable travel time and adequately serve.
- Rural ward Members representing large numbers of parishes have adequate time to meet and support their parish councils.

Local Authority Profile

Please provide a short description of the authority and its setting, in particular the local geography, demographics and community characteristics. This should set the scene for the Commission and give it a greater understanding of any current issues. The description should cover all of the following:

- Brief outline of area - are there any notable geographic constraints for example that may affect the review?
- Rural or urban - what are the characteristics of the authority?
- Demographic pressures - such as distinctive age profiles, migrant or transient populations, is there any large growth anticipated?
- Community characteristics – is there presence of “hidden” or otherwise complex deprivation?
- Are there any other constraints, challenges, issues or changes ahead?

Further to providing a description, the Commission will be looking for a submission that demonstrates an understanding of place and communities by putting forth arguments on council size based upon local evidence and insight. For example, how does local geography, demographics and community characteristics impact on councillor casework, workload and community engagement?

Current population and general overview of the Borough¹

Cheshire East is the third largest unitary authority (in population terms) in the North West, with a population of 398,800 at the time of the 2021 Census and 400,500² as of mid-2021. It covers an area of 1,166 square kilometres.

The whole of Cheshire East is parished. Following the Community Governance Review changes that came into effect in April 2023, there are 12 town councils, 90 parish councils and four parish meetings. A number of parishes group themselves together for administrative purposes. In total, there are 120 parishes in the Borough.

The Borough has very good transport links: nearly all its towns are close to the M6 or M56 and all but one have a train station. These transport links, along with the Borough's attractive rural areas and proximity to major cities such as Manchester, contribute to its overall economic strength, with major employers such as Bentley and AstraZeneca located in Cheshire East and many highly-qualified workers choosing to live here.

Cheshire East also contains attractions and institutions that are of national or international importance³:

- Tatton Park is one of England's 20 most popular "paid" visitor attractions, with around 700,000 to 800,000 visitors a year.
- The Jodrell Bank Observatory site, which is part of the world-renowned Jodrell Bank Centre for Astrophysics. The site receives up to 150,000 or more visitors a year.

Lyme Park & Gardens also has large numbers of visitors (over 325,000 in 2022), as do Quarry Bank Mill & Gardens (nearly 250,000) and the Peak District National Park area of the Borough.

The Borough consists of several towns of varying sizes, along with an extensive rural area covering many villages and smaller settlements. As the 2021 Census results show, Crewe (population 75,700)⁴ and the town of Macclesfield (population 53,200) are the largest conurbations. The other main centres of population are the towns of Alsager, Congleton, Knutsford, Middlewich, Nantwich, Poynton, Sandbach and Wilmslow (each

¹ Except where specified otherwise, the population data cited in this section are from 2021 Census tables, Office for National Statistics (ONS), NOMIS.

² Mid-year population estimates for 2021, ONS, December 2022.

³ Visitor number figures taken from the data files (covering 2017-22) released as part of the 2022 Annual Survey of Visits to Visitor Attractions, VisitBritain & VisitEngland, July 2023.

⁴ This "Crewe" definition covers the whole of Crewe Town Council, but also the whole residential population of the parishes of Rope, Willaston, Wistaston and Woolstanwood, most of the residential population in the parish of Leighton, and parts of the parish of Shavington (the Gresty Brook parish ward and the part of the Chatsworth Park housing estate).

with populations between 12,000 and 30,000) and Bollington and Handforth (with populations of 7,000 to 8,000). (For a map showing the geographical areas these settlement figures relate to, see Appendix 1.⁵) However, nearly two fifths of the population (38.9%, based on 2021 Census data) live in rural areas⁶ and these rural areas include some sparsely populated and in some cases relatively isolated settlements, particularly in the areas to the west of Nantwich and to the east of Macclesfield. (For a map showing how these rural areas are defined, see Appendix 2.)

The Peak District National Park covers an extensive area of Cheshire East, including parts of three Borough wards (Gawsworth, Poynton East and Pott Shrigley, and Sutton). Some of the parishes in the Peak Park area are geographically large and include some very isolated hamlets, often at high elevations. Settlements at high altitudes, along with physical barriers, geographical distance and the level (or lack) of local infrastructure, amenities and service provision mean that some of these rural communities have quite different interests and ties than do other parts of the same Borough ward. This can add to the workload faced by Members in this part of the Borough.

Compared to England as a whole, Cheshire East has a relatively old population, with 22.5% of residents aged 65 and above as of mid-2021 (against the England average of 18.5%).⁷ The population is somewhat older still in rural parts of the Borough (where 24.9% are aged 65 and above). This is likely to increase the demands on rural ward Members, given the presence of many elderly residents (whose age and health may restrict their ability to travel) in more remote areas where transport links are limited.

Only 5.6% of the Borough's population classify themselves as non-white, compared to an England average of 19.0%. However, the non-white proportion is significantly higher in the towns of Handforth (13.3%), Wilmslow (11.5%), Crewe (8.6%) and Alderley Edge (7.8%), reflecting the ethnic diversity of these urban areas of the Borough.

Like many other parts of the UK, Cheshire East saw a significant inflow of migrants from Eastern Europe in the early 2000s. Many are still living in the Borough and are very heavily concentrated in Crewe.

⁵ In this submission, the geographical definitions used for each settlement are (except where stated otherwise) those set out in Appendix 6 of the Cheshire East 'LDF Background Report: Determining the Settlement Hierarchy', Cheshire East Council, November 2010. For all towns apart from Crewe, these Settlement Hierarchy definitions correspond very broadly to the areas covered by Cheshire East's town councils.

⁶ The rural-urban classification used here is the 2015 Rural-Urban Classification produced by the Research & Consultation Team, Cheshire East Council.

⁷ Mid-year population estimates for 2021, ONS, December 2022.

Crewe is one of several UK towns where there is a significant East Timorese community.⁸ Local community leaders estimate that as many as 2,000 East Timorese live in Crewe.⁹ 2021 Census statistics (using the number of Portuguese passport-holding residents as a proxy) suggest a lower, but still very large number of East Timorese (around 900) living in the town's six wards (and predominantly in Crewe South).

In some parts of the Borough, particularly areas of deprivation, evidence suggests that electoral registration rates are relatively low and therefore elector numbers significantly understate the volume of work that Members face. An indication of these geographical variations in electoral registration rates can be obtained by calculating, for each Borough ward, the ratio of the electorate to the adult (age 18 and above) resident population. For this purpose, the Borough Council has used 2021 Census population data and the closest matching date for which Electoral Register data were available (December 2020¹⁰). For the Borough as a whole, this ratio is 0.96, but for five wards, including four of Crewe's six wards (all of which contain neighbourhoods that rank among England's most deprived 20%), it is below 0.90¹¹ and is only 0.79 in Crewe Central and Crewe South.¹²

Recent and future population growth

Evidence from the 2011 and 2021 Censuses indicates that, between 2011 and 2021, Cheshire East's population increased by 7.7%, which was above the England average (6.6%). Whilst the population rose in the vast majority of the Borough's main 24 settlements (see the map in Appendix 1 for a list and definition of these settlements), this growth rate varied significantly across the Borough, largely reflecting the geographical distribution of new housing developments. Shavington (up 46.5%), Chelford (25.3%), Sandbach (22.0%), Holmes Chapel (19.0%), Alsager (13.7%), Audlem (11.9%) and Disley (11.3%) all saw population increases of more than 10%. In absolute terms, population growth during 2011-21 was greatest in Sandbach (3,900) and Crewe (3,000). (These figures are based on settlement boundary definitions developed by the Borough Council in 2010 – and shown in Appendix 1 – so some would be much higher still if adjusted to include new housing developments that have expanded the Borough's main urban areas outwards.)

The Office for National Statistics' latest (2018-based) subnational population projections (SNPPs)¹³ provide the most recently published official statistics on projected future population numbers at local authority level. However, these projections were released in early 2020 and the 2021

⁸ 'Backing themselves: East Timorese labour migrants in Oxford', COMPAS, 14th April 2015: <https://www.compas.ox.ac.uk/2015/backing-themselves-east-timorese-labour-migrants-in-oxford/>

⁹ Source: Public Health Team, Cheshire East Council, August 2023.

¹⁰ Census Day 2021 was 21st March 2021.

¹¹ Sources: [1] Electoral Register data, Cheshire East Council. [2] 2021 Census tables, Office for National Statistics (ONS), NOMIS; [3] English Indices of Deprivation 2019, Ministry of Communities and Local Government (now the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities), September 2019.

¹² These ratios should be seen only as indicative of registration rates, given that (a) the population and electoral data relate to dates a few months apart, (b) Census Day 2021 coincided with a COVID-19 lockdown and hence affected some people's Census responses about their place of residence and (c) ONS made minor adjustments to some 2021 Census statistics prior to publication, in order to avoid disclosing personal information about individuals.

¹³ 'Subnational population projections for England: 2018-based', ONS, March 2020.

Census evidence now available indicates that the SNPPs have (so far) been significantly underestimating Cheshire East's population growth since 2018.

For Cheshire East, the 2018-based SNPPs projected that the population would increase from 380,800 (2018) to 387,000 by 2021 and would not exceed 400,000 until 2029. However, ONS' population estimate for mid-2021 (published in December 2022 and factoring in the 2021 Census evidence) puts the mid-2021 population at 400,500. In other words, it appears that, even by mid-2021, the 2018-based SNPPs were underestimating the Borough's population by around 13,500 (about 3.4%).

Furthermore, the 2018-based SNPPs' projected population growth for 2021-29 equates to an annual average growth rate of 0.44%. It is reasonable to question whether the growth rate over this period will turn out to be that low, given that:

- (a) Population growth in Cheshire East has historically been somewhat higher, averaging 0.78% a year between 2011 and 2021 and 0.52% a year between 2001 and 2011.¹⁴
- (b) Cheshire East's high volumes of housing completions, which began in the later 2010s, have continued up to 2023 and may persist beyond that. During the 10 years from 2011/12 to 2020/21 inclusive, net completions averaged 1,740 per annum and in 2021/22 they reached 2,779.¹⁵ Furthermore, the Borough Council housing database actual housing completions figures and forecasts used for this Review's electorate forecasting work point to around 2,300 net completions between April 2022 and March 2023, with 2,700 more forecast for the period April to December 2023 and an average of around 2,100 a year forecast for the period January 2024 to January 2030.

In contrast, the population forecasts produced in 2015 by Opinion Research Services (ORS) for the Local Plan Strategy, which are based on the level of housing provision proposed (and later adopted) for the 2010-30 Local Plan Strategy, indicated that Cheshire East's population would reach 401,100 by mid-2021 (close to ONS' mid-2021 estimate of 400,500).

Hence the Borough Council believes that ORS' forecasts are currently the most reliable indicator of likely future population change, up to 2030. With this in mind, it should be noted that the ORS forecasts¹⁶ predict that:

- the Borough's population will reach 404,300 in 2022 and 427,100 by 2030;
- whilst the total population will increase by 6.5% between 2021 and 2030, the number of residents aged 65 and above will grow by 23.4%.

¹⁴ ONS mid-year population estimates (December 2022 release).

¹⁵ The historic housing completions figures quoted here relate to 12-month periods running from April to March.

¹⁶ Population and housing forecasts produced by Opinion Research Services (ORS) for the Cheshire East Housing Development Study 2015, ORS, June 2015.

The ORS forecasts for the Local Plan did not produce population forecasts below local authority level. However, the electorate forecasts produced for this Review are heavily informed by the Borough's forecasts of future housing development, which provide a guide as to the scale and geographical distribution of housing and population growth up to 2030. These housing forecasts indicate that the total number of residential properties across the Borough will increase by around 8% between July 2023 and January 2030, but with wide variations between Borough wards, ranging from less than 0.5% in some wards to around 50% in Brereton Rural and Leighton. Members in Borough wards with the highest housing growth rates will face increased workloads, both in the short term (as they are required to deal with issues arising during the construction work on the new housing sites) and in the longer term (because of the larger electorates arising from a much-increased local housing stock).

Deprivation¹⁷

Despite its economic strengths, Cheshire East contains some of England's most deprived neighbourhoods, most of them in Crewe, but with some in other (mainly urban) parts of the Borough (see the map in Appendix 3). Furthermore, some areas of Cheshire East rank among England's worst 1% for specific kinds of deprivation.

The latest (2019) English Indices of Deprivation shows that, of Cheshire East's 234 Lower Layer Super Output Areas (LSOAs), 18 (7.7%) ranked among the 20% most deprived LSOAs in England for overall deprivation.¹⁸ These included 13 (more than quarter) of the 47 LSOAs in Crewe, as well as two LSOAs in Macclesfield and one each in Alsager, Congleton and Wilmslow. Of the 18 LSOAs that are among England's most deprived 20% for overall deprivation, four (three in Crewe and one in Macclesfield) rank among the worst (most deprived) 10% of LSOAs nationally and one of these (in Crewe) ranks among the worst 5% nationally.

There are five LSOAs in the Borough which are within England's most deprived 1% for one of Indices of Deprivation's sub-domains. Four of these – all in rural areas - are in the worst 1% of the Barriers to Housing & Services domain's 'Geographical Barriers' sub-domain (which measures the proximity of key services, such as a GP surgery and a general store/ supermarket). The other one, in Crewe, is in the worst 1% for the Education, Skills & Training Deprivation domain's 'Children and Young People' sub-domain (which measures the educational performance of young people).

Council Size

The Commission believes that councillors have three broad aspects to their role.

These are categorised as: **Strategic Leadership, Accountability (Scrutiny, Regulatory and Partnerships), and Community Leadership.**

Submissions should address each of these in turn and provide supporting evidence. Prompts in the boxes below should help shape responses.

¹⁷ English Indices of Deprivation 2019, Ministry of Communities and Local Government (now the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities), September 2019. The figures cited here are based on the numbers and boundaries of Cheshire East Lower Layer Super Output Areas (LSOAs) in existence at the time the 2019 Indices were produced, rather than to the revised LSOA boundaries that came into being in the wake of the 2021 Census evidence.

¹⁸ In this context, "overall deprivation" means the English Indices of Deprivation's Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD).

Strategic Leadership

Respondents should provide the Commission with details as to how elected members will provide strategic leadership for the authority. Responses should also indicate how many members will be required for this role and why this is justified. **Responses should demonstrate that alternative council sizes have been explored.**

Topic	
Governance Model	<p><i>Key lines of explanation</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <i>What governance model will your authority operate? e.g. Committee System, Executive or other?</i> ➤ <i>The Cabinet model, for example, usually requires 6 to 10 members. How many members will you require?</i> ➤ <i>If the authority runs a Committee system, we want to understand why the number and size of the committees you propose represents the most appropriate for the authority.</i> ➤ <i>By what process does the council aim to formulate strategic and operational policies? How will members in executive, executive support and/or scrutiny positions be involved? What particular demands will this make of them?</i> ➤ <i>Whichever governance model you currently operate, a simple assertion that you want to keep the current structure does not in itself, provide an explanation of why that structure best meets the needs of the council and your communities.</i>
	<p>Analysis</p> <p>The key strategic document for the Council is the Corporate Plan, which was adopted in 2021: Corporate Plan (cheshireeast.gov.uk). The policy framework for the Council is contained within the Council's Constitution: Cheshire East Council Constitution</p> <p>The Council proposes that its Committee system model of governance be retained, given the evidence (cited earlier in this submission) that this model has proved to be effective. This model enables 80 of the 82 councillors to serve on service committees, which make decisions previously made by the Council's Cabinet.</p> <p>Chapter 2, Part 4 of the Council's Constitution shows the responsibilities of all of the Council's committees, from the service committees of 13 Members, and the Scrutiny Committee of 13 Members, to the regulatory committees, such as the planning and licensing committees, which have 12 and 15 Members respectively. In total, there are 23 committees. 14 of these are "standing committees" (those appointed by Council, not including sub-committees, outside organisations or working groups). Appendix 4 of this submission lists each committee, its number of Members and gives an indication (based on the 12-month period ending mid</p>

		<p>July 2023) of the frequency of its meetings. More detailed information on the Council committees can be seen here: cheshire-east-council-constitution-chapter-2-july-2023-v2.pdf (cheshireeast.gov.uk)</p> <p>A structure chart of the Council's committees can be seen in Chapter 2, Part 1 of the Constitution. From time to time, the standing committees appoint sub-committees to undertake specific work. One example of this is the appointment by the Corporate Policy Committee, of the Electoral Review Sub-Committee, which was specifically appointed to make recommendations to the Committee in respect of the Boundary Commission's review of the Council's electoral arrangements.</p> <p>Upon the introduction of the Committee system of governance, the Council retained many of its standing committees. When the arrangements changed, the Council's Cabinet was replaced by six "service committees" of 13 Members and a Finance Sub-Committee of eight Members.</p> <p>For the committees which were retained under the new governance arrangements, the approach taken was not simply to replicate the previous structure and membership numbers for convenience.</p> <p>The committee structure and number of committees have been found to be robust and effective (taking into account committee workloads and the need for political balance).</p> <p>The Council actively pursues change, where this is felt to be needed. In particular, as noted earlier, the planning committee structure is currently under review, with a proposal to reduce the number of planning committees from three to two.</p> <p>Turning to the six service committees and the Finance Sub-Committee, which replaced the Council's Cabinet under its previous governance arrangements, the Council recognises that it must also keep these under review. This was noted in the report to Full Council on 19 November 2020, in relation to the Design Principles (referred to above).</p> <p>Indeed, the Council has already agreed one change to the original service committee structure and their responsibilities, by removing the Public Rights of Way Sub-Committee, and by empowering the Council's Highways and Transport Committee to take over its functions.</p>
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		<p>Officers continue to explore whether the number and size of the service committees should change and, in doing so, are guided by the Design Principles referred to. In the light of the Medium-Term Financial Strategy, agreed by Council in February 2023, officers are exploring whether savings can be made by reducing the number of service and regulatory committees.</p> <p>In short, the Council is (and can demonstrate that it is) prepared to make changes to the Committee structure and membership numbers of committees, where required to ensure that the Council is effective and efficient in making decisions.</p> <p>The member survey evidence possibly suggests a shortage of capacity among Members. It is not clear if this relates to the size and number of Members on each committee or other factors.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Although there are, on average, approximately two standing committee places per Councillor, 29 Members sit on only one (and two are on none at all). • As shown in Table 1 below, the number of committee positions (including all types of committees) averages out at 2.6 per Member. However, Members' capacity to undertake committee work depends on their commitments to other meetings and the roles they fill within local partner organisations. As Table 1 also indicates, the number of non-committee positions averages out at around one working group/ board/ panel, one town/ parish councillor position (62 of the Council's 82 Members are town/ parish councillors) and one other outside organisation per Member. Hence there is an overall average (including committee positions) of 5.6 positions per Member, but with some Members holding many more positions than that (one, for example, is appointed to 10 outside organisations). • As noted later in this submission, there are existing difficulties in filling some committee positions, notably the Licensing Act Sub-Committee. <p>As these issues appear to stem, at least in part, from a shortage of capacity, not from the model of governance, the Council believes that they are best addressed through ongoing reviews of and adjustments to the committee structure.</p>
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		<p><i>Table 1: Summary of Members’ internal and external positions</i></p> <table><tr><th></th><th>Number of positions</th><th>Number of Members involved</th><th>Average number of positions held per Member**</th><th>Highest number of positions held by any one Member</th></tr><tr><td>Standing committees</td><td>167</td><td>80</td><td>2.0</td><td>5</td></tr><tr><td><i>of which: involved in making 'major' decision-making committees*</i></td><td>86</td><td>64</td><td>1.0</td><td>4</td></tr><tr><td>Other committees (including sub-committees)</td><td>50</td><td>38</td><td>0.6</td><td>2 to 4***</td></tr><tr><td>Working groups/ boards/ panels</td><td>78</td><td>40</td><td>1.0</td><td>5</td></tr><tr><td>Outside organisations (excluding town and parish councils)</td><td>98</td><td>50</td><td>1.2</td><td>10</td></tr><tr><td>Town and parish councils</td><td>70</td><td>62</td><td>0.9</td><td>3</td></tr></table> <p>*Figures for ‘major’ decision-making committees relate to membership of the six service committees and the Finance Sub-Committee (which comprise some but not all of the standing committees). Apart from this, all the categories listed in Table 1 are mutually exclusive.</p> <p>**The averages shown in the fourth column are averaged across all Members, including those not involved in the specified type of meeting/ organisation: that is, they are calculated by dividing each of the figures in the second column by 82.</p> <p>***The figure for the highest number of “other” (non-standing) committee positions depends on the allocation of positions on the General Licensing Sub-Committee and Licensing Act Sub-Committee (whose membership is drawn from the 15-Member Licensing Committee), as one Licensing Committee Member also belongs to two of the “other” committees.</p> <p>It can also be seen from the Council’s decision-making structure that the Council has inclusive committee memberships and, therefore, high levels of engagement in the decision-making process by the Council’s members. The Council believes that this is a feature of Committee system decision-making, in comparison with lower levels of engagement of “backbench” members in the decision-making processes of Leader and Cabinet forms of governance.</p>		Number of positions	Number of Members involved	Average number of positions held per Member**	Highest number of positions held by any one Member	Standing committees	167	80	2.0	5	<i>of which: involved in making 'major' decision-making committees*</i>	86	64	1.0	4	Other committees (including sub-committees)	50	38	0.6	2 to 4***	Working groups/ boards/ panels	78	40	1.0	5	Outside organisations (excluding town and parish councils)	98	50	1.2	10	Town and parish councils	70	62	0.9	3
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Town and parish councils	70	62	0.9	3																																	
Portfolios	Key lines of explanation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ <i>How many portfolios will there be?</i>➤ <i>What will the role of a portfolio holder be?</i>➤ <i>Will this be a full-time position?</i>➤ <i>Will decisions be delegated to portfolio holders? Or will the executive/mayor take decisions?</i>																																			

	Analysis	Not applicable to the Council in the strict sense of a portfolio holder under a Leader and Cabinet style of decision-making governance. However, the chairs and vice chairs of the Council's service committees, as well as the lead opposition members, have key roles as a consequence of these positions. The chairs of the service committees are all members of the Council's Corporate Policy Committee, which deals with the overarching policy matters, and has power to determine matters which cross over the responsibilities of one or more of the service committees.
Delegated Responsibilities	Key lines of explanation	<p>➤ <i>What responsibilities will be delegated to officers or committees?</i></p> <p>➤ <i>How many councillors will be involved in taking major decisions?</i></p>
	Analysis	<p>Chapter 2, Part 2 of the Council's Constitution sets out the decision-making arrangements of the Council: cheshire-east-council-constitution-chapter-2-july-2023-v2.pdf (cheshireeast.gov.uk). This Chapter includes the delegations to committees and to officers of the Council and committees' terms of reference.</p> <p>As noted earlier in this submission, the Council keeps its decision-making arrangements under review. The Corporate Policy Committee appointed a Constitution Working Group (CWG) of Councillors to undertake this role, and it meets regularly throughout the year. Since the introduction of the Committee system of governance, the CWG has received reports on revisions to the Constitution, outside bodies and the committee structure. Whilst, upon review by the CWG, it has been decided that no changes should be made to the Council's decision-making arrangements in certain instances, changes have been made in relation to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Notices of motion • Amendments • Closure motions • Public Speaking and questions • Six Month rule in relation to decisions made by service committees • Referral of decisions to Full Council procedure • The removal of the Public Rights of Way Committee – incorporating its remit within the functions of the Highways and Transport Committee. <p>Full details can be found here: Agenda for Council on Wednesday, 19th July, 2023, 11.00 am Cheshire East Council Agenda for Council on Wednesday, 27th April, 2022, 11.00 am Cheshire East Council Agenda for Corporate Policy Committee on Thursday, 15th June, 2023, 10.30 am Cheshire East Council</p>

		<p>The CWG continues to review the effectiveness of the Constitution and the decision-making structure of the Council. A further report will be considered by the Corporate Policy Committee and Full Council in due course.</p> <p>The CWG has a worklist of items for consideration in the future, which includes reviewing the committee structure, schemes of delegation, terms of reference of committees and timing of meetings.</p> <p>This demonstrates that the Council is constantly examining whether or not its decision-making arrangements, including delegation of powers to committees and officers, are fit for purpose. The recent transfer of the Public Rights of Way Committee’s responsibilities to the Highways and Transport Committee, and the ongoing consideration of the planning committee structure, is evidence of this process working effectively.</p> <p>“Major” decisions may be best defined as those undertaken by the Council’s service committees, which make those decisions previously made by the Council’s Cabinet. As shown in Table 1 above, there are 86 Councillor places on these committees.</p> <p>However, the Audit and Governance Committee also has responsibilities in fulfilling its terms of reference, namely: audit, assurance and reporting; review of governance, risk and control arrangements; and promotion of high standards of ethical behaviour. The same is true of the planning committees, which are responsible for determining large scale major development applications, major mineral or waste development applications, and other matters with strategic or significant policy implications.</p> <p>Full Council is also involved in deciding matters of key importance: those which are stipulated by legislation or otherwise, such as the Budget and Policy Framework, statutory officer appointments, and the Local Plan.</p> <p>Turning to the powers of officers, reference is made earlier in this submission to the relevant delegations. Taking all of the above issues and the Committee system Design Principles into consideration, and in the light of the regular examination of the Council’s decision-making arrangements, the Council firmly believes that the responsibilities delegated to committees, the number of members involved in making major decisions and the powers delegated to officers should not change, except where the continuing process of review of the committee structure and responsibilities determines that this should be the case.</p>
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Accountability

Give the Commission details as to how the authority and its decision makers and partners will be held to account. The Commission is interested in both the internal and external dimensions of this role. **Responses should demonstrate that alternative council sizes have been explored.**

Topic	
Internal Scrutiny	The scrutiny function of authorities has changed considerably. Some use theme or task-and-finish groups, for example, and others have a committee system. Scrutiny arrangements may also be affected by the officer support available.
Key lines of explanation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ How will decision makers be held to account? ➤ How many committees will be required? And what will their functions be? ➤ How many task and finish groups will there be? And what will their functions be? What time commitment will be involved for members? And how often will meetings take place? ➤ How many members will be required to fulfil these positions? ➤ Explain why you have increased, decreased, or not changed the number of scrutiny committees in the authority. ➤ Explain the reasoning behind the number of members per committee in terms of adding value.
Analysis	<p>As the Council operates a Committee system of governance, the Council's service committees are expected to undertake self-scrutiny through performance monitoring etc.</p> <p>However, the Council recognises that the work of its service committees needs to develop, in order fully embrace their internal scrutiny role. Indeed, further training is being planned for the Council's service committee members in this role, which will take place during winter 2023.</p> <p>The Committees are able to establish Task and Finish Groups/ Working Groups as and when required. These can be established for internal scrutiny purposes: for example, to review the</p>

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	<p>effectiveness of policy etc. A maximum of three to four per committee at any one time is recommended. Usually they consist of around three to eight Members.</p> <p>Task and Finish groups are established to focus on a specific issue in detail, the members of the group become experts in the subject matter and report their findings back to the formal Committee. This allows the Committee itself to concentrate on the items of business identified within its work programme. It is the responsibility of the group to determine its own methodology for carrying out its work, developing a scope that outlines objectives and how the work will be undertaken, including frequency of meetings. They are time limited as they have been established to undertake a specific piece of in-depth work, usually between six or 12 months; and for this reason there can be a high frequency of meetings over a short period of time.</p> <p>Since the inception of the Council up until the introduction of the Committee system, the Council had four bespoke scrutiny committees, with a dedicated Scrutiny Team of officers who were specialists in scrutiny work. There is now no longer dedicated officer scrutiny support. The absence of resource for internal scrutiny will place new and challenging demands upon the knowledge, skills and time of service committee Members.</p> <p>The Council now has one externally focussed Scrutiny Committee (13 Members), which is responsible for the Council's statutory scrutiny functions including health, crime and disorder and flooding.</p> <p>In response to the establishment of Integrated Care Systems (ICS), the nine Merseyside and Cheshire local authorities agreed several actions to ensure that joint health scrutiny arrangements in</p>
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		<p>Cheshire and Merseyside are fit to meet the challenge of the new statutory arrangements. A standing joint health scrutiny committee has been established to take on the Authorities' collective statutory responsibility to oversee and scrutinise the operation of the ICS at Cheshire and Merseyside level. The host Authority for this committee is Knowsley BC Browse meetings - Cheshire and Merseyside Integrated Care System Joint Health Scrutiny Committee - Knowsley Council</p> <p>The overarching role of the Joint Committee is to scrutinise the work of the ICS in the discharge of its statutory responsibilities and functions at Cheshire and Merseyside level in order to support their effective exercise and, where appropriate, to make reports or recommendations to the ICS. It also considers any proposals for changes in health services that not only impact all nine local authority areas but are also considered to be a substantial change by each of the nine.</p>
Statutory Function		This includes planning, licencing and any other regulatory responsibilities. Consider under each of the headings the extent to which decisions will be delegated to officers. How many members will be required to fulfil the statutory requirements of the council?
Planning	<i>Key lines of explanation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <i>What proportion of planning applications will be determined by members?</i> ➤ <i>Has this changed in the last few years? And are further changes anticipated?</i> ➤ <i>Will there be area planning committees? Or a single council-wide committee?</i> ➤ <i>Will executive members serve on the planning committees?</i> ➤ <i>What will be the time commitment to the planning committee for members?</i>
	Analysis	The Strategic Planning Board (SPB), which meets around nine times a year, considers larger, more strategic planning

		<p>applications. The other two planning committees are area planning committees – North and South (each holds 10-12 meetings a year) – which consider the remaining applications that are not covered by the scheme of delegation or are ‘called in’ by a Member for the Committee to determine. There are 12 Members on each of the three committees.</p> <p>As part of the Council’s drive to reduce the costs of democracy and develop more efficient decision-making, the Corporate Policy Committee has recently approved a proposal (subject to a final decision by Full Council in December 2023) to reduce the number of planning committees from three to two.</p> <p>Cheshire East is consistently among the top 10 busiest local authorities in England for planning applications (ranked seventh for 2020-22) and by far the busiest in the North West region.¹⁹ With 17.8 applications per 1,000 population in 2020-22, Cheshire East is similar to comparable authorities such as Dorset or the East Riding of Yorkshire.²⁰</p> <p>2% of applications are determined by the committees. This proportion has remained fairly consistent over the past four years. On average there are between three and six applications for consideration on each area planning committee agenda and two to three on SPB. As the Local Plan has been progressed and larger schemes are being developed out, the number of applications considered by SPB has fallen in recent years.</p> <p>Average time duration for each of the three committees’ meetings is four hours (excluding Members’ reading/ preparation time and</p>
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¹⁹ Planning/ Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities data.
²⁰ Rates based on data from 'Population and household estimates for England and Wales: Census 2021' (the first release of results from the 2021 Census of Population for England and Wales), Office for National Statistics (ONS), 28th June 2022).

		<p>the occasional site visit). However, meetings can last far longer and this is a particular issue for Cheshire East: during the 12 months to mid July 2023, there were five planning committee meetings in excess of five hours, with one SPB meeting lasting six hours 40 minutes.</p> <p>As parts of the Borough fall within the Peak District National Park, Members' workloads are higher because of the need to understand and adhere to two separate planning regimes. The Borough also has 77 Conservation Areas and 33 Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs), which further demonstrates the complexity of decisions made by planning committee Members and places additional responsibilities on Members.</p>
Licensing	Key lines of explanation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ How many licencing panels will the council have in the average year? ➤ And what will be the time commitment for members? ➤ Will there be standing licencing panels, or will they be ad-hoc? ➤ Will there be core members and regular attendees, or will different members serve on them?
	Analysis	<p>The statutory requirements of the Licensing Act 2003 requires that the Council have a Licensing Committee with 10 to 15 Members. As required by the Constitution, the Council has a Licensing Committee with 15 Members. This is scheduled to meet around five times a year, but in practice tends to meet only twice a year.</p> <p>The majority of business is conducted at the sub-committee level. There are two standing sub-committees:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The General Licensing Sub-Committee (GLSC), which has five Members. It is scheduled to meet monthly, but due to a lack of business it has met only once in the last 18 months. 2. The Licensing Act Sub-Committee (LASC), which has three Members. It meets on an ad hoc basis and the frequency of

		<p>meetings varies a lot. During the current year, it has so far met only twice but sometimes (like last year) there can be 15-20 or more meetings a year.</p> <p>Most Licensing Committee meetings last less than an hour. The Sub-Committee meetings tend to last half a day.</p> <p>Given the ad hoc nature of LASC meetings and the limited statutory timescale that they can be called within, it can be difficult to populate them with Members. Therefore officers would not advocate reducing the number of Members on the full Committee.</p>
Other Regulatory Bodies	<i>Key lines of explanation</i>	<p>➤ What will they be, and how many members will they require?</p> <p>➤ Explain the number and membership of your Regulatory Committees with respect to greater delegation to officers.</p>
	Analysis	Not applicable: no other such bodies.
External Partnerships		Service delivery has changed for councils over time, and many authorities now have a range of delivery partners to work with and hold to account.
<i>Key lines of explanation</i>		<p>➤ Will council members serve on decision-making partnerships, sub-regional, regional or national bodies? In doing so, are they able to take decisions/make commitments on behalf of the council?</p> <p>➤ How many councillors will be involved in this activity? And what is their expected workload? What proportion of this work is undertaken by portfolio holders?</p> <p>➤ What other external bodies will members be involved in? And what is the anticipated workload?</p>
Analysis		There are at present 54 outside bodies (excluding school governing bodies and local resident associations) which require or expect the Council to appoint representatives. The total number of appointments made to such bodies (excluding school governing

	<p>bodies) is 98: an average of 1.2 per Member (see Table 1 above). The total number of outside body meetings Members are required to attend per year is around 300: Appointments to Outside Organisations - report v3 final.pdf (cheshireeast.gov.uk)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Some councillors also are School Governors in their Borough wards.• Members are also appointed to the governing bodies of wholly-owned Council companies, which meet frequently: Report Template v5.1 (cheshireeast.gov.uk)• The Police & Crime Panel requires the councillor appointed to attend many meetings and liaise with other public bodies in the local area: report.pdf (cheshireeast.gov.uk)• Councillors are also on the Cheshire Fire & Rescue Authority, which meets frequently: report.pdf (cheshireeast.gov.uk)• Councillors sit on the Fostering and Adoption Panels, which also meet frequently: Report.pdf (cheshireeast.gov.uk) <p>Based on the responses to the Members survey undertaken by Cheshire East in September-October 2023 (to inform this Review), it is estimated that, over a typical three-month period, Members spend an average of 2.4 hours/ week on dealing with work for outside bodies that the Council has appointed them to.</p> <p>As set out in detail earlier in this submission, Cheshire East also shares some services, such as ICT and payroll, with Cheshire West and Chester Council.</p>
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The Commission understands that there is no single approach to community leadership and that members represent, and provide leadership to, their communities in different ways. The Commission wants to know how members are required to provide effective community leadership and what support the council offers them in this role. For example, does the authority have a defined role and performance system for its elected members? And what support networks are available within the council to help members in their duties? The Commission also wants to see a consideration of **how the use of technology and social media by the council as a whole, and by councillors individually, will affect casework, community engagement and local democratic representation. Responses should demonstrate that alternative council sizes have been explored.**

Topic		Description
Community Leadership	Key lines of explanation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ In general terms how do councillors carry out their representational role with electors? ➤ Does the council have area committees and what are their powers? ➤ How do councillors seek to engage with their constituents? Do they hold surgeries, send newsletters, hold public meetings or maintain blogs? ➤ Are there any mechanisms in place that help councillors interact with young people, those not on the electoral register, and/or other minority groups and their representative bodies? ➤ Are councillors expected to attend community meetings, such as parish or resident's association meetings? If so, what is their level of involvement and what roles do they play? ➤ Explain your approach to the Area Governance structure. Is your Area Governance a decision-making forum or an advisory board? What is their relationship with locally elected members and Community bodies such as Town and Parish Councils? Looking forward how could they be improved to enhance decision-making?
	Analysis	<p>Areas of the Borough are covered by local Neighbourhood Partnership meetings, which are chaired by councillors.</p> <p>A regular "members bulletin" digital newsletter is issued to Members from the communications and media team, to support Members with their community engagement.</p> <p>The Council have a Youth Council, supported by a participation officer, which Members can attend to discuss subjects with children and young people. The participation officer can also enable engagement with cared-for children, local schools and other community groups.</p> <p>62 Members (76%) are also members of the town and parish councils within Cheshire East. This impacts on the affected Members' workloads and how much capacity they have to support residents. Whilst their membership of these bodies is legally separate from their role on and membership of Cheshire East Council, many Members</p>

		<p>see the role as a dual one: not only to discharge town and parish council business, but also acting as a conduit through which the voice of town and parish councils can be heard, at Borough Council level, and via which important Cheshire East Council issues can be raised in town and parish council meetings. Therefore, town and parish council membership cannot be divorced from the issue of Cheshire East Members' workloads.</p> <p>Town and parish councils are supported by the Cheshire Association of Local Councils (CHALC). CHALC are commissioned by the Council to facilitate engagement through the Council's Communities Team. A Town and Parish Councils Network has been established to support communication and engagement between Cheshire East Council and local councils.</p> <p>Many councillors are involved in local community and voluntary sector organisations.</p> <p>The Leader of the Council chairs the Cheshire East Leaders Board, which is group of Chief Executives from a range of key organisations across Cheshire East including the NHS, Police, Fire, housing providers, colleges and local businesses.</p>
Casework	<i>Key lines of explanation</i>	<p>➤ <i>How do councillors deal with their casework? Do they pass it on to council officers? Or do they take a more in-depth approach to resolving issues?</i></p> <p>➤ <i>What support do members receive?</i></p> <p>➤ <i>How has technology influenced the way in which councillors work? And interact with their electorate?</i></p> <p>➤ <i>In what ways does the council promote service users' engagement/dispute resolution with service providers and managers rather than through councillors?</i></p>
	Analysis	<p>Since the inception of the Council, Members have largely taken responsibility for their own casework and for the means by which they deal with it. However, some support is provided to Members in dealing with resident queries:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Members' Enquiries Service is a service administered by the Council's Democratic Service, which enables Members to raise "ward-based, service-related" enquiries via a central email address. Officers then provide a unique reference number for each enquiry and send them to the relevant Council service for response. Reminders are issued if responses are overdue. This is clearly a key facility for Members in dealing with casework. The Members' Secretary is an officer based in Democratic Services whose work is largely based upon support for Members. This facility is used by Members to deal with a range of queries, including casework which doesn't fall within the scope of the Members' Enquiries Service.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Leader and Deputy Leader of the Council, together with the chairs and vice chairs of the service committees also have personal assistant support. But, whilst these Members have access to the Members' Enquiries Service and Members' Secretary, there will undoubtedly be some casework which finds its way to them via their personal assistant. <p>Residents are encouraged to contact the Council as appropriate. Residents and Members see their direct relationship, lines of communication and accessibility within the community to be of key importance in the democratic process. Hence it is not anticipated that current patterns of resident/ Member engagement will significantly change.</p> <p>Based on the responses to the Members survey undertaken by Cheshire East in September-October 2023 (to inform this Review), it is estimated that, over a typical three-month period, Members spend an average of 7.3 hours/ week on casework/ ward issues, but nearly half (46%) said they spent an average of more than eight hours a week on this type of work.</p>
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Other Issues

Respondent may use this space to bring any other issues of relevance to the attention of the Commission.

The Council has no issues to raise here.

Summary

In following this template respondents should have been able to provide the Commission with a robust and well-evidenced case for their proposed council size; one which gives a clear explanation as to the governance arrangements and number of councillors required to represent the authority in the future.

Use this space to summarise the proposals and indicate other options considered. Explain why these alternatives were not appropriate in terms of their ability to deliver effective Strategic Leadership, Accountability (Scrutiny, Regulation and Partnerships), and Community Leadership.

One useful guide to appropriate council size is the average (Borough-wide) electors-per-councillor ratio and how this compares to local authorities that are similar to Cheshire East in terms of population and character, as these are councils that are likely to have a broadly similar workload to Cheshire East. The data table in Appendix 5 shows how Cheshire East's electors-per-councillor ratio (3,800 as of December 2022) compares to those for similar councils. For eleven of the other 16 authorities in this table, the LGBCE has published Electoral Review final

recommendations within the last six years (January 2018 onwards); for three others, a Review is underway and has already reached a stage where the LGBCE has published its provisional view on the appropriate council size. Hence for 14 of these other 16 authorities (all except the East Riding of Yorkshire and North Somerset), the council size and electors-per-councillor ratios take account of recent LGBCE judgements.

As Appendix 5 indicates, the Borough's ratio is broadly in line with those for most of these 'similar' authorities and particularly with those seven councils (indicated by the shaded rows in Appendix 5) that have a population within 20% of Cheshire East's. These seven councils' ratios range from 3,200 to 4,000, or from 3,400 to 4,000 if the LGBCE's proposals from ongoing reviews are taken as the most up-to-date guide to these authorities' appropriate council size. However, it is notable that for the nine authorities (shown in bold in Appendix 5) that are identified by CIPFA as a 'nearest neighbours' of Cheshire East, the ratios cover a much wider range, from 3,200 (Solihull) to 5,000 (Cornwall). Of the 17 authorities listed in Appendix 5, Cornwall is one of two (along with Buckinghamshire) for which the ratio exceeds 4,000.

If, as the electorate forecasts for this Review indicate, the Borough's electorate grows to 337,300 by 2030, that would mean a ratio of 4,100 in 2030 if the current number of seats is left unchanged. Hence, if its size remains at 82 seats and allowing for electorate growth in similar authorities up to 2030, Cheshire East's ratio is likely to remain within the range of ratios for those similar authorities, but is likely to err increasingly towards the high end of that range, exceeded perhaps only by two of the other authorities listed in Appendix 5 (Cornwall and Buckinghamshire).

Another indication as to the appropriate council size is data on Members' overall workloads. The bulk of the evidence on this comes from the Council's recent survey of Members, which was undertaken to provide important data that would inform the Council's response to the Electoral Review. This survey was open from 8th September until 4th October 2023 and 57% (47) of Cheshire East's 82 Members responded.

Key survey findings that highlight workload levels are as follows²¹:

- 38% of the respondents (18 out of 47) had been a Member for a year or less, but 36% (17) had served for six years or more.
- The respondents had, on average, 2.7 committee positions (close to the average of 2.6 for all 82 Members). 63% (29 out of 47) had been appointed by the Council to one or more outside bodies.
- It was estimated from the survey responses that, over a typical three-month period, Members spend an average of 26.6 hours a week on council business. (The commentary further below, on the data table in Appendix 6, breaks down the 26.6 hours/ week into its component parts.)
- As an indication of the ranges reported in workload levels (rather than just averages), it is notable that:
 - Some Members (though only a small minority) said it took six to eight hours to travel from home to some of their committees' locations and some (three) reported spending an average of more than eight hours preparing for certain committees' meetings.

²¹ As indicated by the summary that follows, the sample sizes were below 47 in some cases, due to some questions not being answered by or not being applicable to some Members.

- Nearly half (46%, or 21 respondents out of 46) spent an average of more than eight hours a week dealing with casework/ ward issues.
- Nearly a quarter (24%, or 11 out of 45) spent an average of more than twenty hours a week dealing with their areas of additional responsibility (such as committee chair/ vice-chair, Group Leader or town/ parish councillor).
- 62% (29 out of 47) were town/ parish councillors, which was lower than the proportion for Cheshire East Members as a whole (76%).
- 64% (30 out of 47) said they spent more time on council business than they had expected when they were first elected.
- 70% of Members (33 out of 47) reported that their workload levels had risen by more than a fifth since they were first elected, of whom ten (21% of all the respondents) reported an increase of more than 60%.
- 33% (15 out of 46) felt “very over occupied”.
- 60% (27 out of 45) said workload demands were high at all days and times of the week, rather than being limited to certain parts of the week.
- 70% (32 out of 46) said workload demands had a “significant” or “very significant” impact on their work-life balance and wellbeing.
- 36% (17 out of 47) had insufficient time and capacity to carry out their duties properly.
- In response to an invitation for general comments, a number of respondents expressed a view that Member workloads make it either impossible or very difficult for full-time workers to serve as Members. Some said they could undertake the role only because they were not in a paid job, while some others reported having to switch to part-time employment/ reduced hours and hence reduced pay, to accommodate council business.

These survey results provide compelling evidence both that the Borough Council and its Members face pressures in terms of time and workload in supporting residents, businesses and partner organisations. Bearing in mind the expected growth in housing, population and the number of electors up to 2030, this will exacerbate this situation.

The estimate of average hours worked per week on council business (26.6), which itself excludes some Members’ work²², also demonstrates how a Member’s work (allowing for substantial variations from this high average) often equates to a full-time role in itself. This means serving as a Borough ward councillor is not a practical option for many people in full-time paid employment.

The full results from this survey can be found in Appendix 7.

However, in determining the optimal council size, it is important to consider potential alternative sizes and the workload implications these would have. The data table in Appendix 6 therefore presents key measures of Cheshire East councillors’ workloads, in terms of Committee work and

²² In response to the final question in the survey, which invited general comments, some Members noted that the questionnaire did not ask about time spent in parish council meetings, or in Member training, or on site visits, dealing with emails and phone calls, social media monitoring work (to help keep track of local residents’ key issues) or follow-up work. It is clear, therefore, that at least some respondents did not include these activities in the estimates the time they spent on council business (though others may have allowed for these in their responses). This is an indication that the survey statistics may, if anything, understate Members’ workload levels.

current and future numbers of electors, for various council sizes (from 77 up to 87 seats). This includes workload statistics derived from the Members survey, as well as others derived from the Council's administrative records.

As Appendix 6 shows:

- The Borough's Members currently hold an average of 2.6 positions, in addition to attending Full Council. Members hold, on average, a total of 5.6 positions (2.6 on committees and 3 elsewhere) when working groups/ boards/ panels and outside organisations (including town and parish councils) are factored in. It is estimated that, over a typical three-month period, they spend an average of 26.6 hours/ week on council business, of which 3.8 hours are on preparing for, travelling to/ from and attending committee meetings, 7.3 hours on casework/ ward issues, 13.1 on additional responsibilities (including any town/ parish councillor positions) and 2.4 on work for outside bodies that the Council has appointed them to.
- Currently (as of July 2023), the average number of electors per councillor is 3,800 and this is forecast to increase to 4,100 by 2030 as a result of the expected growth in the number of electors.

Taken together, the evidence from Appendices 5 to 7 provides an indication as to what would be an appropriate increase in the number of councillors. Looking at the evidence from Appendix 5:

- The seven authorities that are closest in size to Cheshire East all have electors-per-councillor ratios in the 3,400 to 4,000 range (allowing for the impact of LGBCE proposals from ongoing reviews) and 3,400 to 3,900 if the East Riding of Yorkshire (not reviewed since 2001) is excluded.
- The nine authorities identified by CIPFA as Cheshire East's nearest neighbours have ratios covering a much wider range - 3,200 to 5,000 - though it should be noted that the two with ratios in excess of 4,000 (Cornwall and Buckinghamshire) both have populations substantially (over a third) greater than Cheshire East's. If the Cornwall figure were adopted, the number of Councillors would be reduced significantly.

It is appreciated that these other authorities' populations and electorates will also grow in number over time and that the LGBCE's review decisions allow for some of those authorities' electors-per-councillor ratios increasing, within a few years, beyond the ranges quoted above. Allowing for this growth over the longer term and factoring in the evidence from the Members survey, a ratio of around 4,100 would allow Cheshire East Members to carry out their duties properly whilst preserving their wellbeing and a reasonable work-life balance. It is a suggested a ratio as high as 5000:1 would not.

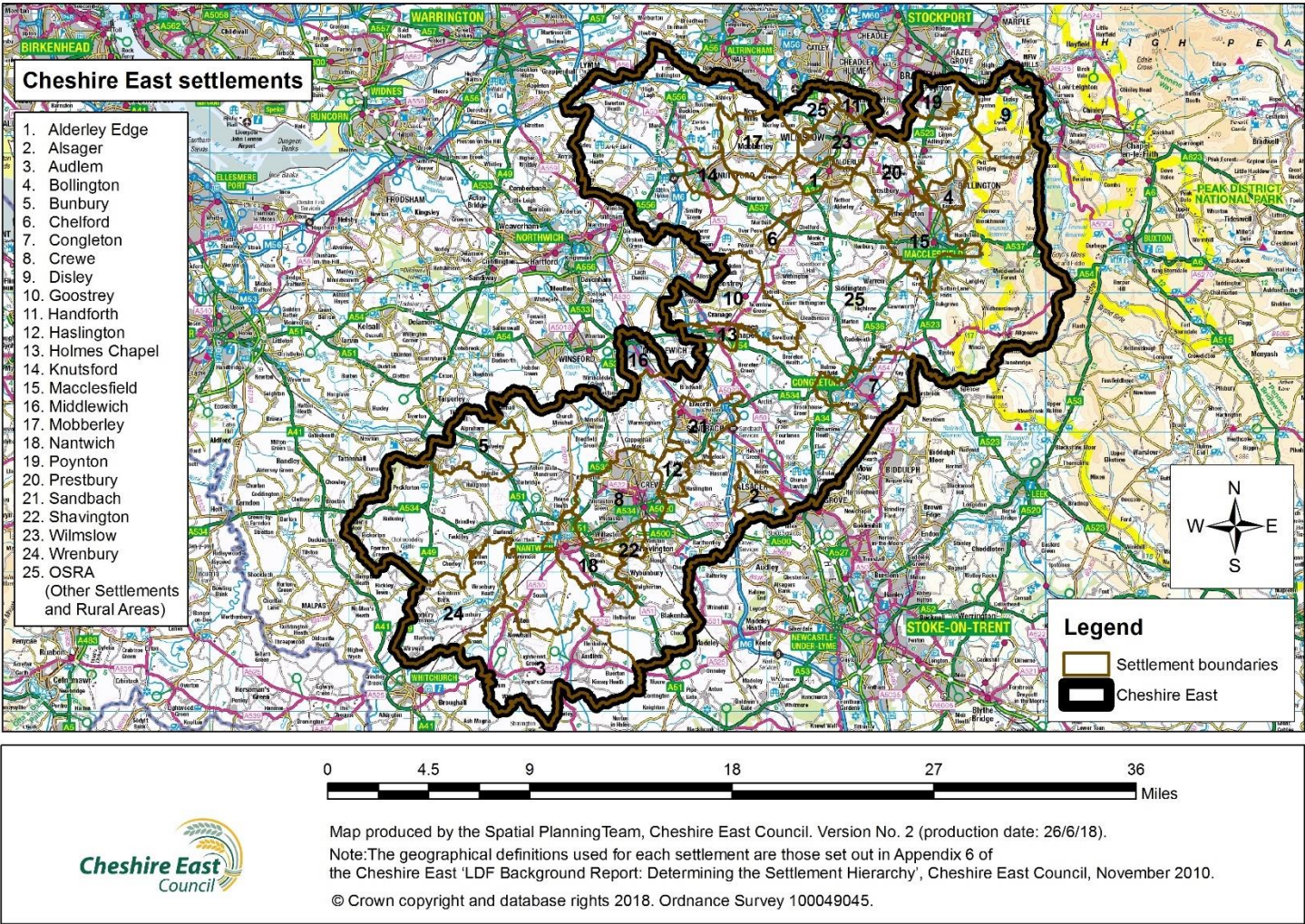
As noted above, the electorate forecasts indicate a ratio of 4,100 by 2030 if the current size (82 Members) is retained. It is considered that this would be sustainable and further reviews and adjustments to the committee structure could enable more efficient decision-making that reduces Members' workloads. However, a reduction from the current council size of 82 is likely to result in unsustainable pressures on Members that structural changes to the Committee system could not resolve.

Therefore the current size of 82 continues to reflect sufficient capacity in terms of members to electorate ratio and still provides sufficient room for growth.

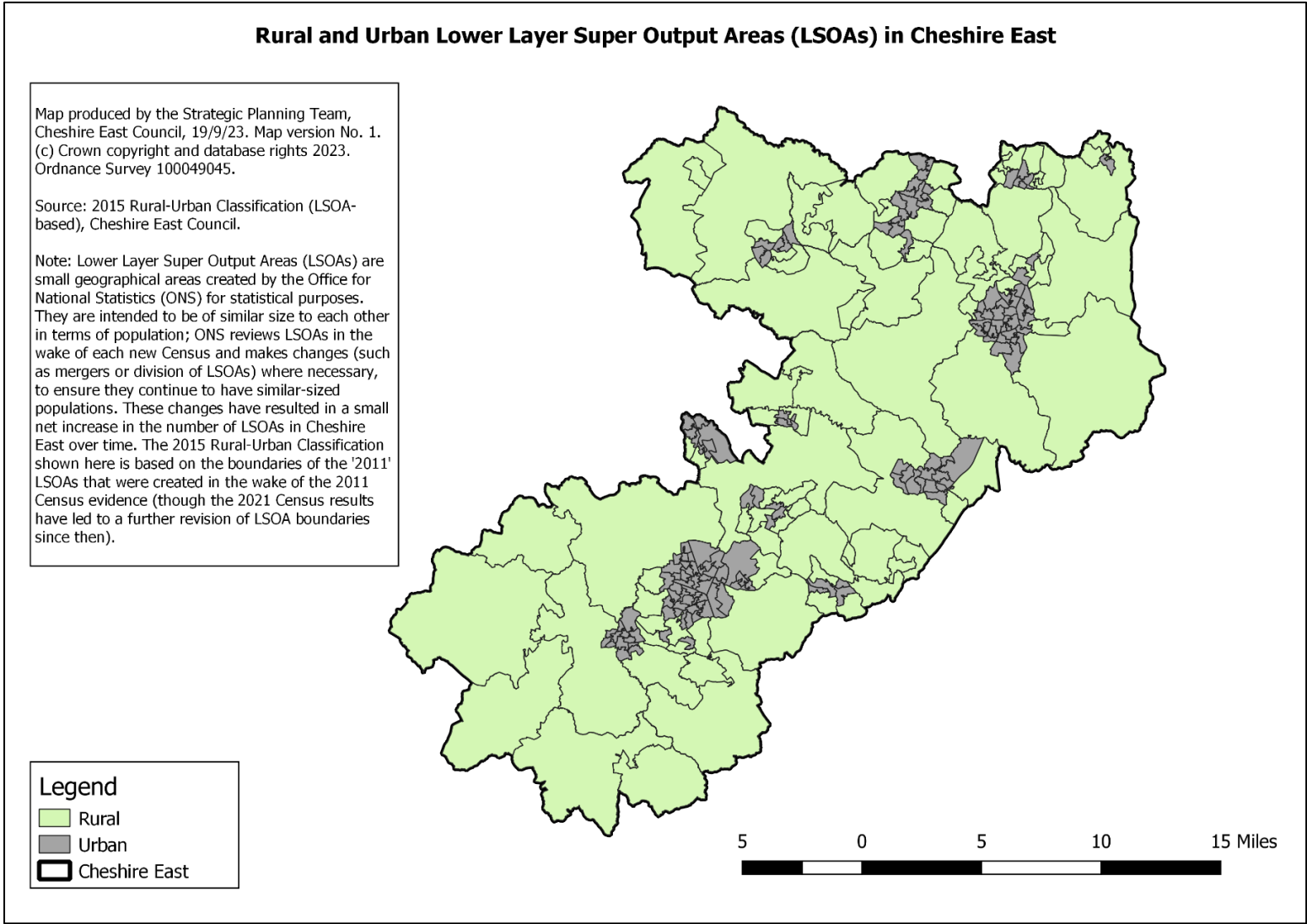
In reaching its decision about the appropriate council size, the Council has taken a long-term view, based upon what it understands of the likely national and local policy context, over the next 15-20 years, particularly in the context of an anticipated increased population and also the local impact of any sub regional devolution agreements.

In summary, having 82 councillors would help to avoid the risks set out above and should ensure a diverse range of Members with complementary skills and backgrounds and who have sufficient time and resources to perform all their duties properly, without neglecting any local communities, vulnerable residents or partnership organisations. It would also help to ensure high quality, accountable service provision and efficient use of the Council's finances.

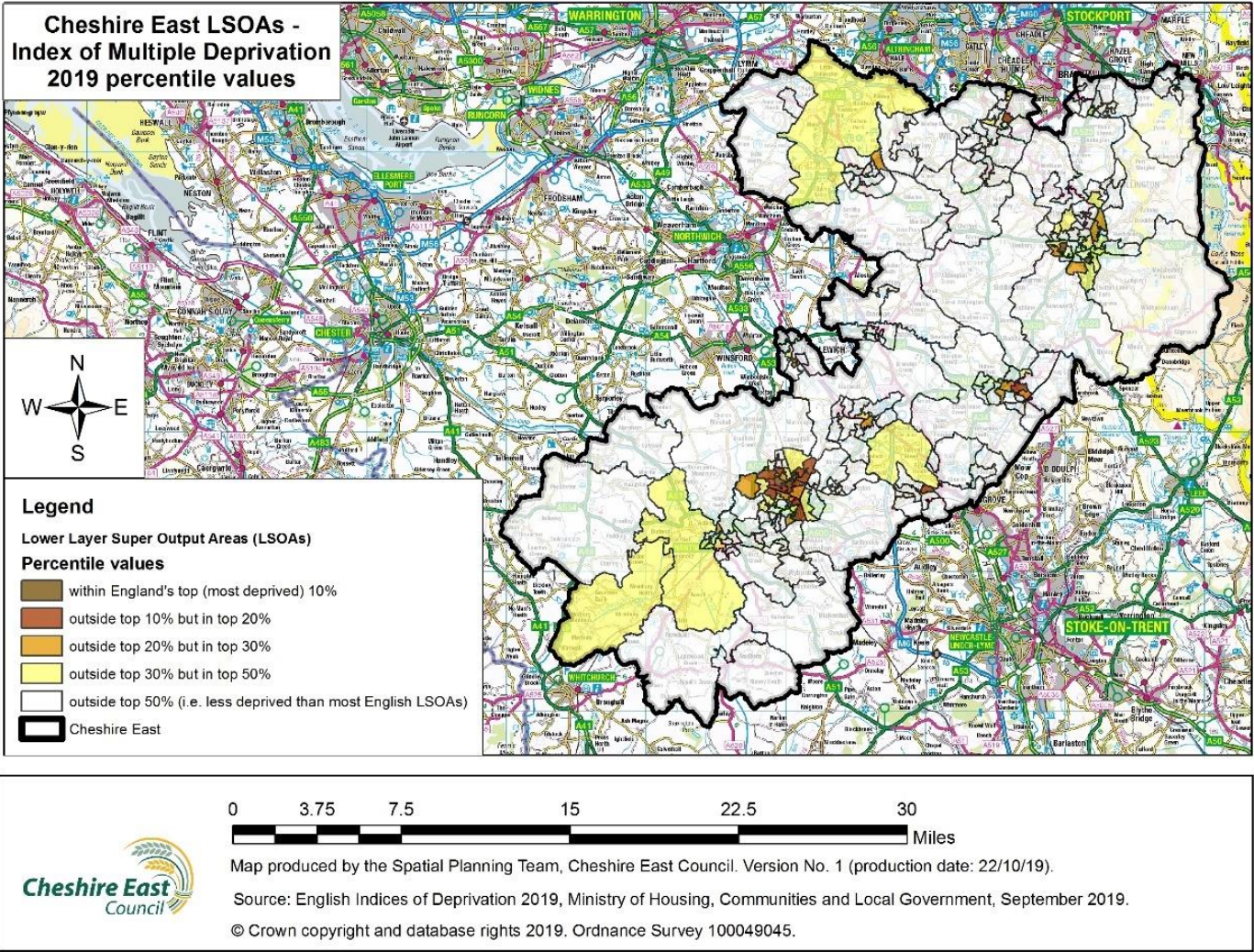
Appendix 1: Cheshire East main settlements



Appendix 2: Rural and urban areas of Cheshire East



Appendix 3: Deprivation in Cheshire East



Appendix 4: Committee names, types, sizes and frequency of meetings

	Committee name	Standing committee	Committee/ meeting category	Number of Members	Number of meetings held in last year
1	Adults and Health Committee	Yes	Service Committees	13	6
2	Children and Families Committee	Yes	Service Committees	13	8
3	Corporate Policy Committee	Yes	Service Committees	13	7
4	Economy and Growth Committee	Yes	Service Committees	13	6
5	Environment and Communities Committee	Yes	Service Committees	13	8
6	Finance Sub-Committee	Yes	Service Committees	8	6
7	Highways and Transport Committee	Yes	Service Committees	13	6
8	Licensing Committee	Yes	Regulatory (Licensing)	15	3
9	Northern Planning Committee	Yes	Regulatory (Planning)	12	12
10	Southern Planning Committee	Yes	Regulatory (Planning)	12	10
11	Strategic Planning Board	Yes	Regulatory (Planning)	12	9
12	Scrutiny Committee	Yes	Scrutiny Committees	13	4
13	Appointments Committee	Yes	Other Committees	8	0
14	Audit and Governance Committee	Yes	Other Committees	9	6
15	Cared For Children and Care Leaver Sub-Committee	No	Other Committees	12	5
16	Health and Wellbeing Board	No	Other Committees	4	5
17	General Appeals Sub-Committee	No	Other Committees	5*	7
18	Electoral Review Sub-Committee	No	Other Committees	10	N/A
19	Shared Services Joint Committee	No	Other Committees	3	4
20	Staffing Appeals Sub-Committee	No	Other Committees	3*	4
21	General Licensing Sub-Committee	No	Regulatory (Licensing)	5**	0
22	Licensing Act Sub-Committee	No	Regulatory (Licensing)	3**	10
23	Local Authority School Governor Nomination Sub-Committee	No	Other Meetings	5	4

*General Appeals Sub-Committee and Staffing Appeals Committee Members chosen from a pool of 10.

**General Licensing Act Sub-Committee and Licensing Act Sub-Committee Members chosen from among the 15 Licensing Committee Members.

Source: Democratic Services team administrative data (provided during July-October 2023). Notes: [1] Figures include reserves and non-voting members. [2] Figures in the last column based on meetings held in the 12-month period ending mid July 2023. [2] Electoral Review Sub-Committee not appointed until July 2023. [3] As noted in the “Licensing” section of this submission, the General Licensing Sub-Committee has met only once in the last 18 months, due to a lack of business.

Appendix 5: Council sizes and ratios for Cheshire East and similar local authorities

(Shaded rows indicate councils with a population that was within 20% of the Cheshire East as of 2021. Bold font indicates those authorities identified by CIPFA modelling (<https://www.cipfa.org/services/cipfastats/nearest-neighbour-model>) as most comparable to Cheshire East.)

Name	Population (from 2021 Census)	Local government electors as of Dec 2022	Current number of councillors	Ratio of electors to councillors	New number of councillors proposed or recommended by LGBCE, if applicable (see Note [3] below)	New ratio, if applicable (see Note [3] below)
Buckinghamshire	553,100	412,800	147	2,800	97	4,300
Central Bedfordshire	294,200	219,900	63	3,500	N/A	N/A
Cheshire East	398,800	310,600	82	3,800	N/A	N/A
Cheshire West and Chester	357,200	262,600	70	3,800	N/A	N/A
Cornwall	570,300	431,200	87	5,000	N/A	N/A
Dorset	379,600	297,500	82	3,600	N/A	N/A
Durham	522,100	390,300	126	3,100	98	4,000
East Riding of Yorkshire	342,200	270,100	67	4,000	N/A	N/A
North Northamptonshire	359,500	264,500	78	3,400	68	3,900
North Somerset	216,700	165,500	50	3,300	N/A	N/A
Northumberland	320,600	251,600	67	3,800	69	3,600
Shropshire	323,600	250,100	74	3,400	74	3,400
Solihull	216,200	160,800	51	3,200	51	3,200
South Gloucestershire	290,400	212,000	61	3,500	N/A	N/A
Stockport	294,800	222,800	63	3,500	N/A	N/A
West Northamptonshire	425,700	298,500	93	3,200	76	3,900
Wiltshire	510,400	382,700	98	3,900	N/A	N/A

Sources: [1] List of comparable local authorities identified by CIPFA, LGBCE email to Cheshire East Council, 21st July 2023. [2] 'Population and household estimates for England and Wales: Census 2021' (the first release of results from the 2021 Census of Population for England and Wales), Office for National Statistics (ONS), 28th June 2022. [3] December 2022 local government elector data: 'Electoral statistics, UK, December 2022' data file from ONS' 'Electoral statistics for the UK' release, 20th April 2023: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/elections/electoralregistration/datasets/electoralstatisticsforuk> [4] Councillor numbers: LGBCE electoral data spreadsheet file, downloaded on 14th April 2023 from <https://www.lgbce.org.uk/electoral-data>

Notes: [1] These authorities are ones that were either identified by CIPFA as being comparable to Cheshire East, or which met all the following criteria: English unitary authority; a substantial rural area/ rural population; population (as of 2021) at least half that of Cheshire East, but no more than 50% greater than Cheshire East. [2] Ratios based on local government electorate as of December 2022. [3] Entries in the final two columns applicable only where a review is currently underway or changes from a concluded review have yet to take effect. These two columns take account of LGBCE review proposals and decisions published up to 11 October 2023.

Appendix 6: Workload per councillor, by council size

			Average number of hours spent per week (over a typical three-month period) – see 'CALCULATION APPROACH' note below						
Number of councillors	Average number of Committee positions per councillor (i)	Average number of positions held, including outside organisations (i, ii)	Committee work (iii)	Casework/ ward issues	Additional duties (iv)	Work for outside bodies (v)	Total (all council business) (vi)	Electors per councillor, July 2023	Electors per councillor, January 2030
77	2.8	6.0 (5.1)	4.0	7.8	14.0	2.6	28.3	4,087	4,381
78	2.8	5.9 (5.0)	3.9	7.7	13.8	2.5	27.9	4,034	4,325
79	2.7	5.9 (5.0)	3.9	7.6	13.6	2.5	27.6	3,983	4,270
80	2.7	5.8 (4.9)	3.8	7.5	13.5	2.5	27.2	3,934	4,217
81	2.7	5.7 (4.9)	3.8	7.4	13.3	2.4	26.9	3,885	4,165
82	2.6	5.6 (4.8)	3.8	7.3	13.1	2.4	26.6	3,838	4,114
83	2.6	5.6 (4.7)	3.7	7.2	13.0	2.4	26.3	3,791	4,064
84	2.6	5.5 (4.7)	3.7	7.1	12.8	2.4	25.9	3,746	4,016
85	2.6	5.4 (4.6)	3.6	7.0	12.7	2.3	25.6	3,702	3,969
86	2.5	5.4 (4.6)	3.6	6.9	12.5	2.3	25.3	3,659	3,923
87	2.5	5.3 (4.5)	3.5	6.9	12.4	2.3	25.0	3,617	3,877

CALCULATION APPROACH: Apart from Democratic Services team administrative data recording the average length of Committee meetings, the statistics on the average number of hours spent on council business are derived from the Members Survey undertaken in September-October 2023. As the survey questions asked Members to select a time band (e.g. “Up to two hours”, “Two to four hours”, etc), it has been assumed for the purposes of the above calculations that the time spent by Members on each activity will, on average, fall within the middle of the band they selected. For example, it is assumed for the above calculations that Members who spent “Four to six hours” a week on casework/ ward issues worked an average of five hours a week on these issues. In cases where Members picked a time band with no upper limit (e.g. “Over twenty hours”), the assumed average for the responses within that band is based on the overall distribution of times selected by the Members who answered that particular question. In particular:

- For preparation/ reading time for each committee meeting, nine hours was taken as a reasonable average to assume for those who said "More than eight hours". This was because only 2% of the committee meetings that Members reported on in the survey were within this band and so the average time taken in these cases is unlikely to be much more than eight.
- When asked about the average amount of time spent per week on casework/ ward issues, nearly half of respondents (46%) said "More than eight hours". Hence it was assumed that the average time for the respondents in this band would be significantly greater than eight. An average of 10 hours is therefore assumed, though this could potentially be an underestimate.

- Given that nearly a quarter (24%) of Members reported spending "Over twenty hours" on dealing with additional duties, it is assumed that the average time spent by the Members in this band is significantly above 20. Given the lack of information about how far beyond 20 hours these working hours might range, it has been assumed that the averages for Members in this band are evenly distributed between 21 and 25 and therefore average out at 23.

Sources: [1] Committee structure and meetings web pages (<http://moderngov.cheshireeast.gov.uk/ecminutes/mgListCommittees.aspx?bcr=1>). [2] Democratic Services Team, Cheshire East Council, July-September 2023. [3] Electorate forecasts produced by Cheshire East Council for the current electoral review. [4] Members Survey, September-October 2023.

Notes relating to specific data columns: (i) Figures for committee positions exclude Full Council, which meets an average of six times a year. (ii) For each council size, there are two figures given for the average number of positions held. The first figure (outside the brackets) includes all internal committees/ working groups/ boards/ panels and other outside organisations, including town/ parish council positions. However, the figures in brackets exclude town/ parish council positions. (iii) The figures for hours spent on Committee work include reading/ preparation and travel time as well as time spent in the actual meetings. (iv) 'Additional duties' includes the following roles: Committee chair/ vice-chair, Executive Board member, Group Leader, Group Administrator, Mayor, Town/ Parish Councillor. (v) 'Outside bodies' means only those that Members have been appointed to by the Borough Council. (vi) The figures in the 'Total (all council business)' column are the sum of those in the preceding four columns.

Appendix 7: Member Survey results

Overview

This Appendix sets out in detail the results from the Council's recent survey of Members, which was undertaken to inform the Council's response to the Electoral Review. This survey was open from 8th September until 4th October 2023 and 57% (47) of Cheshire East's 82 Members responded.

Assessment of the survey's representativeness

Comparisons of the survey data with the Council's administrative data suggest that those who responded were broadly representative of all 82 Members. For example, the 47 survey respondents had, on average, 2.7 committee positions (excluding Full Council), which closely matched the average shown in the administrative records (2.6). In addition, the proportion of survey respondents who said they had been appointed to outside bodies (63%) was close to the proportion for all 82 Members (with 50 of them, or 61%, being on such bodies). "Twin-hatted" Members (those who are also town or parish councillors) were a little under-represented: as noted earlier in this submission, 76% of all Members are twin-hatted, but only 62% (29) of the survey respondents were. In that respect, the survey responses may understate the average volume of work arising from town/ parish councillor positions. However, the survey respondents' answers (based on their personal estimates or recollections of meeting frequencies) indicated an average of 8.1 meetings per year for the committees they sat on, compared to administrative records showing this average to be 6.2 when all Members are included. Therefore the survey responses may overstate the average volume of work arising from committee positions. Taking all the survey sample's variances from the 82-Member "population" into account, though, there is no reason to think that the total workload levels indicated by the survey data are significantly skewed, either upwards or downwards, by who did or did not respond to the survey.

Other notes

The final survey question ("Do you believe that you currently have sufficient time and capacity to properly undertake your Councillor duties?") was followed by an invitation for Members to add any comments. To avoid potentially identifying individuals, these comments are not listed in full in this submission. However, some key points are cited in the 'Summary' section of the submission and the collective feedback from these open comments will be followed up internally.

Q1. Please provide your name and the name of the ward which you represent in the space below.			
Answer Choice		Response Percent	Response Total
1	Name (First name, Family name)	100.0%	47
2	Ward Name	100.0%	47
<i>answered</i>			47
<i>skipped</i>			0

Q2. How long have you been a ward Councillor?			
Please select one option only			
Answer Choice		Response Percent	Response Total
1	1 year or less	38.3%	18
2	2 - 5 years	25.5%	12
3	6 - 10 years	14.9%	7
4	11 + years	21.3%	10
<i>answered</i>			47
<i>skipped</i>			0

Q3. What were your reasons for seeking election to Cheshire East Council?			
Please tick all that apply			
Answer Choice		Response Percent	Response Total
1	To make a difference	91.5%	43
2	Develop my leadership skills	12.8%	6
3	Have a direct involvement in local decision making	85.1%	40
4	Improve my skills and knowledge	31.9%	15
5	Serve my ward/community	93.6%	44
6	The political "cut and thrust"	14.9%	7
7	Other (please specify):	10.6%	5
		answered	47
		skipped	0

Q4. In addition to your role as a ward Councillor, what other position(s) do you hold within the Council?			
Please tick all that apply			
Answer Choice		Response Percent	Response Total
1	Chair of Committee	27.7%	13
2	Vice Chair of Committee	19.1%	9
3	Executive Board member	6.4%	3
4	Group Leader	6.4%	3
5	Group Administrator	6.4%	3
6	Mayor	6.4%	3
7	Parish/ Town Councillor	61.7%	29
8	None	12.8%	6
9	Other (please specify):	29.8%	14
		<i>answered</i>	47
		<i>skipped</i>	0

Q5. On average, how much time per week do you spend dealing with your areas of additional responsibility?			
Please select one option only, and estimate your average weekly workload, over a typical three-month period			
Answer Choice		Response Percent	Response Total
1	Up to five hours	8.9%	4
2	Six to ten hours	26.7%	12
3	Eleven to fifteen hours	13.3%	6
4	Sixteen to twenty hours	22.2%	10
5	Over twenty hours	24.4%	11
6	N/A	4.4%	2
		<i>answered</i>	45
		<i>skipped</i>	2

Q6. Have you been appointed by the Council to any outside bodies?			
Please select one option only			
Answer Choice		Response Percent	Response Total
1	Yes	63.0%	29
2	No	37.0%	17
		<i>answered</i>	46
		<i>skipped</i>	1

Q7. On average, how much time per week do you spend dealing with work for outside bodies?

Please select one option only, and estimate your average weekly workload, over a typical three-month period

Answer Choice		Response Percent	Response Total
1	Up to five hours	45.5%	20
2	Six to ten hours	13.6%	6
3	Eleven to fifteen hours	2.3%	1
4	Sixteen to twenty hours	0.0%	0
5	Over twenty hours	0.0%	0
6	N/A	38.6%	17
<i>answered</i>			44
<i>skipped</i>			3

Q8. How many Committee(s) are you appointed to?

Please select one option only

Answer Choice		Response Percent	Response Total
1	1	12.8%	6
2	2	21.3%	10
3	3	46.8%	22
4	4	19.1%	9
<i>answered</i>			47
<i>skipped</i>			0

Q9. Thinking about the committees which you have been appointed to, how often do they meet?

If you are appointed to one Committee, please complete the first row, two Committees rows 1 and 2, three Committees 1, 2 and 3 and four Committees 1, 2, 3 and 4.

Answer Choice		Each month	Every other month	Quarterly	Twice a year	Ad hoc	N/A	Response Total
1	Committee 1	25	18	2	0	2	0	47
2	Committee 2	13	19	6	0	3	1	42
3	Committee 3	6	13	8	0	4	2	33
4	Committee 4	3	4	2	0	2	3	14
<i>answered</i>								47
<i>skipped</i>								0

Q10. Thinking about the committees to which you have been appointed to, at what time of the day are the meetings usually held?

If you are appointed to one Committee only, please complete the first row, two Committees rows 1 and 2, three Committees 1, 2 and 3 and four Committees 1, 2, 3 and 4.

Answer Choice		Morning	Afternoon	Evening	N/A	Response Total
1	Committee 1	33	13	0	1	47
2	Committee 2	23	15	0	2	40
3	Committee 3	14	15	1	2	32
4	Committee 4	3	7	0	2	12
<i>answered</i>						47
<i>skipped</i>						0

Q11. Thinking about the committees to which you have been appointed to, at which venue are the meetings usually held?						
If you are appointed to one Committee, please complete the first row, two Committees rows 1 and 2, three Committees 1, 2 and 3 and four Committees 1, 2, 3 and 4.						
Answer Choice		Municipal Buildings, Crewe	Town Hall, Macclesfield	Westfields, Sandbach	N/A	Response Total
1	Committee 1	5	10	31	1	47
2	Committee 2	2	11	27	2	42
3	Committee 3	1	2	25	5	33
4	Committee 4	0	1	8	4	13
					<i>answered</i>	47
					<i>skipped</i>	0

Q12. On average, how much time do you spend travelling from your home to each Committee location?								
If you are appointed to one Committee only please complete the first row, two Committees rows 1 and 2, three Committees 1, 2 and 3 and four Committees 1, 2, 3 and 4.								
Please estimate your average travel time, to each committee that you are appointed to, over a typical three-month period								
Answer Choice		Up to two hours	Two to four hours	Four to six hours	Six to eight hours	More than eight hours	N/A	Response Total
1	Committee 1	39	3	1	3	0	0	46
2	Committee 2	35	3	0	3	0	1	42
3	Committee 3	26	2	0	2	0	3	33
4	Committee 4	10	0	0	1	0	2	13
							<i>answered</i>	46
							<i>skipped</i>	1

Q13. On average, how much time per week do you spend preparing/ reading papers for a meeting?								
If you are appointed to one Committee only, please complete the first row, two Committees rows 1 and 2, three Committees 1, 2 and 3 and four Committees 1, 2, 3 and 4.								
Please estimate your average weekly workload over a typical three-month period								
Answer Choice		Up to two hours	Two to four hours	Four to six hours	Six to eight hours	More than eight hours	N/A	Response Total
1	Committee 1	17	17	7	3	3	0	47
2	Committee 2	15	17	6	2	0	2	42
3	Committee 3	15	10	3	1	0	3	32
4	Committee 4	4	7	0	0	0	2	13
							<i>answered</i>	47
							<i>skipped</i>	0

Q14. On average, how much time per week do you spend dealing with case work/ ward issues?			
Please select one option only and estimate your average weekly workload over a typical three-month period			
Answer Choice		Response Percent	Response Total
1	Up to two hours	6.5%	3
2	Two to four hours	10.9%	5
3	Four to six hours	13.0%	6
4	Six to eight hours	23.9%	11
5	More than eight hours	45.7%	21
		<i>answered</i>	46
		<i>skipped</i>	1

Q15. On average, how much time per week do you spend (if you are able to tell) on dealing with *unregistered voters?			
*"unregistered voters" i.e. those who are eligible to vote, but who choose not to be on the Electoral Register, or inadvertently fail to get themselves on the Register			
Please select one option only and estimate your average weekly workload over a typical three-month period			
Answer Choice		Response Percent	Response Total
1	Up to two hours	17.8%	8
2	Two to four hours	4.4%	2
3	Four to six hours	4.4%	2
4	Six to eight hours	0.0%	0
5	More than eight hours	0.0%	0
6	Don't know	73.3%	33
		<i>answered</i>	45
		<i>skipped</i>	2

Q16. Is the time you spend on council business (work as a Councillor) what you expected when you first became a Councillor?

Please select one option only

Answer Choice		Response Percent	Response Total
1	Yes	36.2%	17
2	No – I spend more time on council business	63.8%	30
3	No – I spend less time on council business	0.0%	0
		<i>answered</i>	47
		<i>skipped</i>	0

Q17. Has the time you spend on council business (work as a Councillor) increased from when you were first elected?

Please select one option only

Answer Choice		Response Percent	Response Total
1	Yes	89.4%	42
2	No	10.6%	5
		<i>answered</i>	47
		<i>skipped</i>	0

Q18. If yes, by how much has your workload increased?

Please select one option only

Answer Choice		Response Percent	Response Total
1	Up to 20%	21.4%	9
2	21 - 40%	33.3%	14
3	41 - 60%	21.4%	9
4	61 - 80%	9.5%	4
5	81 - 100%	14.3%	6
<i>answered</i>			42
<i>skipped</i>			5

Q19. When considering what you believe to be a reasonable expectation of a Councillor, and taking into account work/life balance and other considerations, do you consider that your workload as a Councillor keeps you:

Please select one option only

Answer Choice		Response Percent	Response Total
1	Under occupied	0.0%	0
2	Appropriately occupied	21.7%	10
3	A little over occupied	45.7%	21
4	Very over occupied	32.6%	15
<i>answered</i>			46
<i>skipped</i>			1

Q20. When are workload (working as a Councillor) demands placed on you the most?

Please tick all that apply

Answer Choice		Response Percent	Response Total
1	All days/ times of the week	60.0%	27
2	Monday - Friday daytime	35.6%	16
3	Monday - Friday evening	13.3%	6
4	Saturday – daytime	11.1%	5
5	Saturday – evening	0.0%	0
6	Sunday – daytime	11.1%	5
7	Sunday – evening	4.4%	2
answered			45
skipped			2

Q21. Do your workload demands impact upon your work-life balance and wellbeing?

Please select one option only

Answer Choice		Response Percent	Response Total
1	Yes	76.1%	35
2	No	23.9%	11
answered			46
skipped			1

Q22. If yes, how significant is this impact?

Please select one option only

Answer Choice		Response Percent	Response Total
1	Not at all significant	9.8%	4
2	Significant	73.2%	30
3	Very significant	4.9%	2
4	N/A	12.2%	5
<i>answered</i>			41
<i>skipped</i>			6

Q23. Do you believe that you currently have sufficient time and capacity to properly undertake your Councillor duties?

Please select one option only

Answer Choice		Response Percent	Response Total
1	Yes	63.8%	30
2	No	36.2%	17
If you have any comments, please use the space provided below			33
<i>answered</i>			47
<i>skipped</i>			0

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OPEN

Corporate Policy Committee

30 November 2023

Workforce Strategy 2021-2025

Report of: Alex Thompson, Director of Finance & Customer Services

Report Reference No: CP/25/23-24

Ward(s) Affected: All

Purpose of Report

- 1 The purpose of this report is to update members on progress against delivery of Cheshire East Council's Workforce Strategy 2021-2025 up to October 2023.
- 2 The Strategy sets out how the Council will develop the capacity and capability of its workforce to support the priorities identified within the Corporate Plan and deliver our Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS).
- 3 The Strategy supports the Council's vision for an open, fairer, greener Cheshire East. In particular, it supports the priorities for an open and enabling organisation, by putting in place plans to support and develop our workforce to be confident, motivated, innovative, resilient, and empowered.

Executive Summary

- 4 The Workforce Strategy was agreed by Corporate Policy Committee in November 2021. Progress is reported below against the Strategy's four agreed strategic themes.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Corporate Policy Committee is recommended to:

1. note progress in delivering the Workforce Strategy; and
2. agree to receive further updates every six months to monitor progress; and
3. agree with the implementation of the strategy as set out in the paper.

Background

- 5 Our four-year strategy was approved in November 2021 and builds on the previous workforce strategy, its achievements, and our organisational cultural change programme. It is built around four Workforce Priorities: Delivering Our Future; Living Our Values and Delivering Our Employee Deal; Inclusive Workforce - Ensuring Everyone has a Voice, and; Empowering Our Workforce.
- 6 An update against each of these themes up to 31 October 2023 is covered below, with the corresponding action from the Strategy's plan indicated at the end of each paragraph.
- 7 **Theme One - Delivering Our Future**
 - (a) Strategic workforce planning is critical to our longer-term success, using the insight and data that is available. Work has been completed on the establishment of a monthly workforce dashboard for each of the four directorates, setting out key HR metrics. These metrics will be used by HR Business Partners to support directorates in tighter control and financial management, supporting the Council in addressing its current financial challenge (1.1).
 - (b) Another cycle of the Mutually Agreed Resignation Scheme (MARS) has been completed successfully with 90 applications made and 44 approved. The cost of one-off MARS payments was £734,441 and the related annual savings will be £930,601 in a full year, saving nearly £3m over a 4 year MTFS cycle. The scheme is due to be run again in 2023/24 (1.1).
 - (c) An updated programme of face-to-face senior leadership engagement and development has been delivered for both the

Wider Leadership Team and the Wider Leadership Community, with external expert speakers introduced where appropriate (1.4).

- (d) Post Covid, national challenges in the recruitment market, particularly around hard to fill posts in planning, social care and ICT have been exacerbated. As a direct response to this HR set up a recruitment and retention programme to encourage take up of permanent positions as opposed to more expensive agency placements. This programme has delivered:
 - (i) Additional career pathways (1.9);
 - (ii) A reviewed and re-aligned recruitment process for the Council (1.12);
 - (iii) Employee profile videos on social media and on Cheshire East Council's website to enhance the recruitment process (1.11);
 - (iv) A new programme of local and regional recruitment fairs (1.12);
 - (v) The introduction of a social work academy in Children's (1.1).
 - (vi) An improved employee benefits offer including agreement to introduce a green car scheme, a white goods salary sacrifice scheme and an expanded flexi time scheme (1.11).
- (e) There have been 38 new apprenticeship starts at the Council since April 2023 and there are an additional 13 planned starts in place over the coming weeks. The government withdrew the public sector apprenticeship target in 2022 and there is no longer a statutory requirement for local authorities to report on their apprenticeship take-up.
- (f) The social work degree apprenticeship scheme has progressed significantly with additional cohorts each year across two universities. There are 26 currently on programme and a further 10 planned to start in January 2024 (1.8).
- (g) Following the resignation of Dr Lorraine O'Donnell, officers have supported the Appointments Committee with the recruitment and selection process for the post of Interim Chief Executive and permanent Chief Executive position. David Parr was appointed as Interim Chief Executive by Council on 18 October 2023. A review of comparative salaries was undertaken, and a new salary band

was approved by Council increasing the salary range for the Chief Executive to £170,000 - £190,000 to ensure that the recruitment process was competitive and attracted the best calibre candidates. Assessments were undertaken during October and final interviews took place on 27 November 2023 (1.11).

- (h) A new process for recruitment approval for all permanent, temporary and agency positions has been introduced as a mechanism to help address the Council's budget pressures (1.2).
- (i) We are planning to:
 - (i) Implement a range of cost-neutral additional staff benefits over the next six months, including the expansion of the current flexi scheme to senior managers in November 2023, introduction of a green car salary sacrifice lease scheme and white goods scheme in early 2024, and introduction of a new benefits platform in December 2023, subject to procurement processes (1.1, 1.11, 2.7);
 - (ii) Support the Council to address its current financial challenge by working with services to review their establishments and undertake restructures where appropriate (1.2);
 - (iii) Use the new workforce dashboards to support service areas in identifying and delivering initiatives that will reduce their spend on agency staff (1.2);
 - (iv) Develop manager workforce planning toolkits (4.3);
 - (v) Expand social work academies (1.1, 1.5, 1.9);
 - (vi) Support colleagues in Adults, Health & Integration with a bespoke Workforce Strategy (1.5);
 - (vii) Continue to use a programme of local and national recruitment fairs (1.11);
 - (viii) Further streamline recruitment processes within Hireserve in conjunction with Cheshire West and Chester Council (1.11, 1.12).

- (a) The Council has implemented an updated Agile Working Policy, with 87% of staff surveyed in 2022 taking up a revised offer of mobile or hybrid working (2.1).
- (b) The Council has made a clear commitment to every member of staff, through the Employee Deal, to care for their health and wellbeing. Support to staff stepped up during last winter around the cost of living (2.8).
- (c) The Corporate Leadership Team (CLT) has considered approaches to the next phase of our cultural transformation journey and begun to move towards a model of 'high support and high challenge' which closely mirrors the 'Restorative Practice' approach to enable further transformation. The Wider Leadership Team and Wider Leadership Community have both held workshops with experts in this field to explore its introduction at Cheshire East Council (1.4, 2.2).
- (d) Engagement with the Made My Day during 2023-2024 has remained steady, with approximately 163 sent each month. Additionally, a Cheshire East Council New Year Honours Event to recognise staff and thank them for their contributions was held virtually on 31 January 2023, with members of CLT chairing the event and members of the Wider Leadership Community hosting various categories. All 350 nominations were invited to attend. The feedback from all those involved whether putting a person forward for recognition or receiving the recognition was very positive (2.4).
- (e) A Pulse staff survey 'Shaping Our Future' was launched in November 2023 to all staff, to understand the views on the new Corporate Plan and the support required from a workforce perspective to deliver this together (3.4).
- (f) We are planning to:
 - (i) Review the current suite of team conversations, to include additional team conversation toolkits to support the Council with its current budget challenge and additional wellbeing conversation toolkits that support staff (2.8);
 - (ii) Continue to use the Brighter Future Champions as a valuable tool to engage with the wider organisation (3.4);
 - (iii) Introduce an updated induction process, via the Council's e-learning platform, Learning Lounge, with refreshed communications as part of the on-boarding process (2.3);
 - (iv) Explore the introduction of 'stay and grow interviews' as a tool to improve retention (2.7);

- (v) Continue to deliver our wellbeing in work programme, using our Mental Health First Aiders and direction to our Employee Assistance Programme (2.8).

9 Theme Three - Inclusive Workforce - Ensuring Everyone has a Voice

- (a) HR has supported the EDI Board with a number of initiatives. The Sunflower lanyard scheme has been introduced and training is now available to support the scheme via Learning Lounge. Work is underway to gain the MoD Armed Forces Gold Award and an application to renew the Council's Disability Confident Employer status is progressing (3.1).
- (b) Manager Share and Support sessions continue on a weekly basis for all line managers as a mechanism for cascading initiatives. Each week, an average of 100 managers attend and the success of the sessions has now been replicated for all staff with the introduction in the Summer of monthly 'In the Know' sessions. These are used to cascade and share information on key projects or initiatives (3.6).
- (c) 'Coffee with the Chief Executive' sessions have run throughout the year for small groups of staff to engage informally and directly with the Chief Executive. These monthly sessions are held face-to-face in different locations across the borough. Again, the sessions have been very well received by those staff that have attended (3.6).
- (d) Since 2018, our Champions Community has continued to play a key role in our culture journey, as an important link between staff and the organisation. They have provided feedback on different initiatives, raised concerns and shared information with their teams when required. They have also participated in the selection process of the Council's next Chief Executive (3.4).
- (e) Work has been undertaken on the Council's WorkplaCE programme, supporting the delivery of phase one of the consultation process with staff and developing the WorkplaCE principles (2.1).
- (f) Mandatory e-learning for equality and diversity is now in place, with tracking of completion rates (3.5).
- (g) We are planning to:
 - (i) Deliver the annual pay gap action plan (3.2);

- (ii) Deliver further updated recruitment and selection training workshops (1.13, 3.4);
- (iii) Continue to work with trade union colleagues to maintain effective employee relations (3.8).

10 **Theme Four - Empowering Our Workforce**

- (a) The Council's updated e-learning platform, Learning Lounge, now provides electronic recording of PDR conversations, with the functionality for managers to track completion rates for both PDRs alongside training. An additional dashboard has been built for Directors and results are published within the Council's Performance Reports. This provides oversight of completion rates for training courses and PDR conversations in their respective areas (4.1, 4.2, 4.10).
- (b) Training programmes have been commissioned across all directorates in line with identified skills requirements. Continuing Professional Development (CPD) requests continue to fund individual development needs not available via the apprenticeship levy (4.5, 4.6).
- (c) Work has been undertaken to explore the development of a skills gap analysis toolkit and a wider workforce planning toolkit for use across the Council (4.6).
- (d) We are planning to:
 - (i) Include an introduction to customer experience in the corporate induction. All new employees, agency staff and contractors will spend time listening to customer calls made to the contact centre as well as completing customer experience e-learning (4.9);
 - (ii) Implement mandatory customer experience e-learning for all staff (4.9);
 - (iii) Roll out customer experience training for managers (4.9);
 - (iv) Review and refine current training plans in line with the Council's current budgetary position (4.5, 4.6);
 - (v) Introduce a Workforce Planning Toolkit, including a skills gap analysis toolkit (4.3);
 - (vi) Refresh the Council's coaching pool and continue to offer internal coaching and mentoring (4.7).

Consultation and Engagement

- 11 The Council consults with the trade unions on an ongoing basis on all work undertaken for the Workforce Strategy. Engagement with staff through staff forums and regular staff surveys is a crucial element of each area of activity.

Reasons for Recommendations

- 12 The Workforce Strategy outlines a clear vision for the development and retention of our workforce, to enable the Council to have in place the resources required to deliver against its commitments as set out in the Council's Corporate Plan 2021-25. Corporate Policy Committee has oversight of progress against the actions contained within the Strategy as part of the Council's commitment to openness and transparency.
- 13 Achievement of the specific actions within the strategy would be reported via the frequent performance reports to Committees as necessary. This approach links the actions to wider Council performance matters and demonstrates the strategic importance of implementing the Strategy. Updates to the Strategy would still require approval from the Committee.

Other Options Considered

- 14 Not applicable.

Implications and Comments

Monitoring Officer/Legal

- 15 There is no legal requirement to produce a Workforce Strategy. However, it is necessary to provide a clear articulation of our workforce priorities and to ensure alignment with the Corporate Strategy.
- 16 Any proposed changes to Council policies or decisions which impact staff terms and conditions will require consultation and engagement with the trade unions and relevant staff groups before any changes are implemented.
- 17 The requirement for Equality Impact Assessments should be considered to ensure any specific actions do not disproportionately impact any staff member with a protected characteristic.
- 18 The MARS scheme is not contractual and does not form part of staff terms and conditions. All applications are monitored to ensure that

decisions taken are not directly or indirectly linked to a protected characteristic, for example age, sex or disability.

Section 151 Officer/Finance

- 19 The delivery of the actions set out in the Workforce Strategy is within existing budgets and approved business cases.
- 20 The Workforce Strategy will be reviewed to align remaining deliverables with the current financial environment and climate.

Policy

- 21 The Workforce Strategy supports the Corporate Plan and the Council's vision for an "Open, Fairer, Greener Cheshire East". The Strategy supports the priorities for an open and enabling organisation, by putting in place plans to support and develop our workforce to be confident, motivated, innovative, resilient, and empowered.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

- 22 The Workforce Strategy aims to improve the experience of working for the Council for all members of staff. It also sets out key priorities and actions to ensure our workforce is inclusive and our recruitment and selection processes promote recruitment and selection for all underrepresented groups. It supports the delivery of the Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Strategy.

Human Resources

- 23 The Workforce Strategy covers the breadth of services with HR and sets the priorities for Human Resources.
- 24 An Equality Impact Assessment for MARS was updated taking into account any exclusions of staff/services who may be undergoing restructuring.

Risk Management

- 25 There are risks to service delivery across the Council if plans are not put in place to address skills gaps and work is not undertaken in relation to recruitment and retention in an increasingly competitive market.

Rural Communities

- 26 There are no specific implications for rural communities.

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

- 27 The delivery of the Council's Action Plan for Apprenticeships includes work to increase the number of apprenticeships available across the Council for our cared for children.

Public Health

- 28 *There are no public health implications.*

Climate Change

- 29 The delivery of the priorities within the Workforce Strategy that are focussed on the delivery of the agile working policy will contribute towards our workforce becoming more carbon neutral, through reduced commuting into work and commuting in between buildings to attend meetings in person.

Access to Information	
Contact Officer:	Sara Barker, Head of HR Sara.barker@cheshireeast.gov.uk
Appendices:	None
Background Papers:	Workforce Strategy

Corporate Policy Committee**30 November 2023****Six Months Complaints Report****Report of: Alex Thompson, Director of Finance and Customer Services****Report Reference No: CP/51/23-24****Ward(s) Affected: All****Purpose of Report**

- 1 This report provides a summary and analysis of complaints and compliments received by the Council during the period 1st April 2023 to 30th September 2023.
- 2 The report highlights any areas of concern and examples of good practice. It provides assurance that matters raised as complaints by customers are being addressed; that action has been taken to rectify issues and that information arising from complaints has informed service improvements. Responsibility for services rests with the relevant service committee and members may wish to seek additional assurances from those service committees.
- 3 The report supports the strategic aims and objectives in the Council's Corporate Plan 2021-25 to become an open and enabling Council and specifically supports the objectives of the Council's Customer Experience Strategy.

Executive Summary

- 4 The Council provides the facility for customers to report compliments and complaints in relation to Council services in an accessible and consistent way. Improvements have been made to the processes for these customer engagements following the approval of the Customer Experience Strategy by the Corporate Policy Committee. As part of this

approval the Committee continues to receive updated performance information on progress.

- 5 The Council provides in the region of 500 different services across a population of almost 400,000 residents. These range from place-based services, such as waste collection and highways management which are universal, to individual services such as social care and housing.
- 6 The Council received 1,060 complaints and 390 compliments in between April and September 2023 (see Appendix 9 for examples of compliments received).
- 7 In Quarter 1, 469 complaints were received compared to 591 in Quarter 2. This is an increase of 26%. In terms of compliments, 170 were received in Quarter 1 compared to 220 in Quarter 2. This is an increase of 29%. Of the 1,060 complaints received over the two quarters, 84 were rejected, withdrawn or not pursued; and the remaining 976 were processed as official complaints. Of the 976 complaints, 81 were Stage 2 complaints and 1 was a Stage 3 complaint.
- 8 Customer feedback is very important in the future development of services and this report provides data and activities related to feedback in the period 1st April to 30th September 2023, focusing on those services which received a comparatively high volume of complaints (compared with other services in the same committee); or where complaint volumes have significantly increased for a service. The Customer Services Team has increased engagement with service leads throughout this period in line with the strategy. This has led to process changes, increased awareness and insight as well as additional training.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Corporate Policy Committee is recommended to:

- 1 Note the Committee complaints and compliments data, and the briefing material in this report relating to first half of the 2023/24 financial year.
- 2 Note the issues raised and improvements made in respect to the management of complaints across the Council contained within the briefing material in this report.
- 3 Note the Council's compliance with the Corporate Complaints Policy, and with the recommendations of the Ombudsman.

Background

- 9 The Council has a Corporate Complaints Policy covering all complaints about Council services other than Adults & Health and Children's Social Care complaints, which each have separate statutory complaints process.
- 10 The Policy provides for members of the public to contact the Council in several different ways. Most complaints are received either by email, via the Customer Contact Centre or are self-logged via the Council's website. Appendix 8 shows the volume of telephone contact with the Council for each committee, as well as the specific contact count for customer feedback.
- 11 The Council has a two-stage complaints procedure. Most complaints are resolved at Stage 1 where a complaint is investigated and responded to by a manager from the service being complained about. The council's Customer Charter sets a standard of 10 or 20 days to respond to a complaint (depending on the stage and whether statutory or non-statutory). The customer will generally receive a written response within 10 working days, unless the matter has been resolved and the customer has been contacted directly by the service via telephone or email. It should be noted that the statutory complaints process for Children's Social Care has the option to go to Stage 3 if required.
- 12 If the customer remains unhappy following the Stage 1 response and outcome, they can request that the complaint is considered at Stage 2. At this stage a review of the complaint is carried out by a manager who has not previously been involved with the complaint.
- 13 The Local Government Act 1974 established the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman. It empowers the Ombudsman to investigate complaints against councils and adult social care providers and to provide advice and guidance on good administrative practice. Once a complainant has exhausted the Council's Complaints procedure, their next recourse, should they remain dissatisfied with the Council's response, is to contact the Ombudsman.
- 14 The Ombudsman will assess the merits of each case escalated to them and seek clarification from the Council as necessary before making the decision to investigate a complaint. Once the Ombudsman decides to investigate, they will try to ascertain if maladministration/Fault has occurred and whether there has been any resulting injustice to the complainant because of the maladministration/Fault.
- 15 In instances where maladministration/Fault with Injustice is found, the Ombudsman will usually make non-legally binding recommendations

which they consider to be appropriate and reasonable. Although not legally binding, refusal to accept the Ombudsman's recommendation(s) will trigger a Public Report. A Public Report is a detailed account of the complaint, outlining the failures by the Council in the investigation.

- 16 All complaints are a useful indicator of performance and provide the Council with an opportunity to review the quality of service provided and to make improvements. The Customer Relations Team within Customer Services reports the volume, outcome and time taken to resolve complaints to each Directorate on a quarterly basis. The volume of compliments, overall customer contact and, where appropriate, areas of concern and potential for service improvements are also reported.
- 17 Colleagues from a number of services have attended 'Effective Complaint Handling' workshops run by the LGSCO and also the in-house Customer Experience Training for Managers; and the response to both of these has been very positive.
- 18 At the start of Quarter 2, the Complaints Team introduced a 'themes tracker' to assist in understanding the root of complaints. This is referenced in the Briefing section below.
- 19 Data provided within this report relates to the 'static' SLAs – which are set out by the Charter. Two services (SEND and Development Management) currently have temporary Stage 1 complaint SLAs of 20 working days rather than 10 working days; and on occasion, services may agree a different SLA with the complainant / correspondent. Appendix 5 gives details of the static SLA data; Appendix 6 gives the 'non-static' SLA data – SLAs which have been agreed between the complainant and the responder which may fall outside the Charter's SLAs.
- 20 The current Adult Social Care policy is being reviewed and one of the main changes will be that the current Stage 2 option will be removed. Relatively few adult social care complaints are escalated to Stage 2, with the majority being resolved at Stage 1. In anticipation of the new policy being implemented, with effect from 1 October 2023 we will not be escalating any complaints for a formal Stage 2 review. Instead, further work at Stage 1 – including the offer of a meeting and a further written response – will be completed where deemed necessary to provide further clarification to the complainant. They will then be referred to the Local Govt & Social Care Ombudsman if they remain dissatisfied.
- 21 It is noted that the LGSCO has launched a consultation on a joint complaint handling code together with the Housing Ombudsman. The Ombudsman believes that a single code that applies to all councils in

England will make it easier for customers to know what to expect in terms of how their complaint is going to be dealt with; and that it will improve complaints handling and standards, resulting in better services. The consultation closes on the 23rd of November 2023.

- 22 It is further noted that the Office for Local Government (OFLOG) are consulting on next steps and draft new metrics. The draft metrics include the percentage of Ombudsman complaints upheld and the number of upheld ombudsman complaints per 10,000 population. OFLOG have not yet confirmed how it will support local authorities with high or low performance against the metrics. The consultation closes on the 22 November 2023.

Briefing

Adults and Health

- 23 Adults and Health received 65 complaints in Quarters 1 and 2 of 2023/24, 6% of the total received by the council. Of these, 14 complaints were rejected, withdrawn, or not pursued; the remaining 51 were processed as official complaints.
- 24 Quarter 2 saw a 22% increase in processed complaints compared with Quarter 1 (28 and 23 respectively). There were 3 Stage 2 complaints in the 6 months.
- 25 57% of complaints were answered within the static 10-working day SLA. It is noted that officers responding to complaints notify the Complaints Team upon receipt of a complaint that they will be unable to respond within the 10-working day SLA. The reason most frequently given for this is officer availability and staffing. On average, Stage 1 complaints in Q1 took 11 working days to respond to; the longest taking 22 working days. For Stage 2 complaints in Quarter 1, there was only one complaint which took 8 working days. In Quarter 2, the average response time was 11 working days; the longest taking 39 working days. There were 2 Stage 2 complaints, the average response time was 17 working days; the longest taking 19 working days.
- 26 Seven service areas within Adults and Health responded to complaints between April and September 2023. Social Care Business Support and Finance accounts for 37% of all Adults and Health complaints (19). 89% of these were about 'payments or disputed charges' and the remaining 11% were about 'service quality'. 79% of complaints were responded to within the 10-working day SLA. 63% of complaints were upheld or partly upheld.

- 27 The themes tracker for Quarter 2 details that 55% (6) of complaints to the service were about social care contributions – of these 66% were upheld or partly upheld. 3 complaints were around overpayments – 66% were partly upheld. And there were 2 complaints about home care costs – both were partly upheld.
- 28 The Adults service accounts for 24% of all Adults and Health complaints (12). 53% of these were about 'service quality' / 'service failure' (23% and 31% respectively); 'staff conduct' and 'communications' both accounted for 15% of all complaints; and 'policy and procedure' and 'payments or disputed charges' accounted for 8% each. 50% of complaints were responded to within the 10-working day SLA. 25% of complaints were upheld or partly upheld.
- 29 There are 4 themes in the themes tracker for the Adults service in Quarter 2. 2 complaints were around care home costs – one was partly upheld, the other was not upheld. The other themes all had one complaint logged against them – safeguarding (not upheld); care assessment incorrectly carried out (partly upheld); complaint against an individual social worker (not upheld).
- 30 Adults and Health received 120 compliments between April and September 2023, spread across 21 services. The Dementia Reablement South team received the highest number (22); followed by the Adults service (17); and Dementia Reablement North team (16).

Children and Families

- 31 Children and Families received 264 complaints in Quarters 1 and 2 of 2023/24, 25% of the total received by the council. Of these, 30 complaints were rejected, withdrawn, or not pursued; the remaining 234 were processed as official complaints.
- 32 Quarter 2 saw a 49% increase in complaints compared with Quarter 1 (140 and 94 respectively). There were 29 Stage 2 complaints and 1 Stage 3 complaint in the 6 months.
- 33 24% of complaints were answered within the static 10-working day SLA. This percentage is impacted by SEN having a temporary 20-working day SLA. If this is considered, 56% of Children and Families complaints were answered within SLA.
- 34 Children's Social Care staff have continued to deal with increasing demand which impacts on caseloads, which combined with staff turnover and absence has affected the ability to respond to complaints

in a timely manner. The Complaints Team have been proactive in trying to help teams respond to complaints.

- 35 Thirteen service areas within Children and Families responded to complaints between April and September 2023. The SEN team accounts for 48% of all Children and Families complaints (113). 67% of these were around 'service quality'; 'communication' accounted for 20%; 'service failure' 7%; both 'policy and procedure' and 'payments or disputed charges' accounted for 2% and 'legal and regulatory' and 'staff conduct' accounted for 1% each. 8% of complaints were responded to within the static 10-working day SLA; though as previously noted this service has a temporary SLA of 20 working days and 71% of responses were made within this SLA. 81% of complaints were upheld or partly upheld.
- 36 The top 5 themes in the themes tracker for SEND in Quarter 2 are: 13 complaints were around school placement, 11 of the 12 that have had a response were upheld or partly upheld. There were 14 complaints about required support for an EHCP plan not being provided, of the 11 that have had responses 8 were upheld or partly upheld. Complaints about EHCP plans being inappropriate numbered 12 – 66% were upheld or partly upheld. There were 7 complaints regarding annual review timescales not being followed, 6 of these were upheld or partly upheld. And there were 6 complaints about EHCPs not being created, 100% of these were upheld.
- 37 The SEN team commenced using the new complaints process at the start of Quarter 3. Whilst going into this process will not result in an immediate reduction in complaints, it is expected that the department and the Complaints team will identify key areas for service improvement which will reduce complaints in the future.
- 38 CIN/CP Crewe complaints account for 14% of all Children and Families complaints (33). 38% were around 'service quality'; 36% were around 'staff conduct'; 'policy and procedure' accounted for 13%; 'communications' 8% and 'service failure' 5%. 33% of complaints were responded to within the 10-working day SLA. 68% of complaints were upheld or partly upheld.
- 39 The Quarter 2 themes tracker identified 3 common themes – there were 4 complaints around safeguarding, of these 3 were upheld or partly upheld. There were 4 complaints about a section 47 investigation; of the 3 that have had a response all were upheld or partly upheld. And there were 3 complaints against an individual social worker, 66% were not upheld.

- 40 It is worth highlighting that Education Travel accounts for 11% of all Children and Families complaints (25). This service only received complaints in Quarter 2 in the lead up to the start of the new school year. 69% of complaints were around 'service quality'; 'communication' accounted for 15% of complaints; 'payments or disputed charges' 12%; and 'policy and procedure' 4%. 82% of complaints were responded to within the 10-working day SLA.
- 41 Complaints were primarily relating to delays in getting home to school transport organised before the start of term at the beginning of September; and concerns about providers being changed from the previous year along with unsuitable transport arrangements being made.
- 42 Customer journey maps have been created for the service, and members of the Continuous Improvement team will be meeting with colleagues from Education Travel to see what suggestions can be made to improve the customer experience during peak times and help reduce complaints.
- 43 Children and Families received 112 compliments between April and September 2023, spread across 7 services. The SEN team received the highest number (49); followed by Family Services (40); and Education (11).

Corporate Policy

- 44 Corporate Policy received 137 complaints in Quarters 1 and 2 of 2023/24. 13% of the total received by the council. Of these, 7 complaints were rejected, withdrawn, or not pursued; the remaining 130 were processed as official complaints.
- 45 Quarter 2 saw a 6% decrease in complaints compared with Quarter 1 (62 and 67 respectively). There were 9 Stage 2 complaints in the 6 months.
- 46 75% of complaints were answered within the static 10-working day SLA.
- 47 Thirteen service areas within Corporate Policy responded to complaints between April and September 2023. The Council Tax Billing and Collections team account for 45% of all complaints (62). Of these, 55% were around 'service quality'; 28% were about 'communication'; 15% were about 'payments or disputed charges' and 1% 'policy and procedure'. 85% of complaints were responded to within the 10-working day SLA. 42% of complaints were upheld or partly upheld.
- 48 In Quarter 2, 28% of complaints received by the Council Tax Billing and Collections team were about the involvement of bailiffs – 63% of these

were upheld. 21% of complaints were around the receipt of a reminder, final notice or summons letter, with customers disputing whether these should have been sent. None of these complaints were upheld. There were also complaints about council tax reductions – customers disputing how the 25% single person discount was calculated (not upheld); and questioning why SMI had not been applied to an account (upheld).

- 49 Corporate Policy received 84 compliments between April and September 2023, spread across 4 services. The Council Tax Billing and Collections team received the most compliments (54); followed by Customer Service Centres (16); Business Rates Billing and Collection (13) and Blue Badge (1).

Economy and Growth

- 50 Economy and Growth received 39 complaints in Quarters 1 and 2 of 2023/24. 4% of the total received by the council. Of these, 7 complaints were rejected, withdrawn, or not pursued; the remaining 32 were processed as official complaints.
- 51 Quarter 2 saw a 13% increase in complaints compared with Quarter 1 (17 and 15 respectively). There was 1 Stage 2 complaint in the 6 months.
- 52 72% of complaints were answered within the static 10-working day SLA.
- 53 Three service areas within Economy and Growth responded to complaints between April and September 2023. Strategic Housing accounted for 53% of all Economy and Growth complaints (17). 63% of complaints were around 'service quality'; 'staff conduct' accounted for 15%; and 'communication' and 'legal and regulatory' both account for 11% each. 81% of complaints were responded to within the 10-working day SLA. 38% of complaints were upheld or partly upheld.
- 54 In Quarter 2, the themes tracker recorded disparate causes for complaints, for example 2 complaints were around lack of help / support regarding homelessness; and also referenced staff attitude (both were upheld). There was 1 further complaint which was solely about staff attitude (not upheld). 2 complaints disputed priority banding for HomeChoice applications – one customer felt they'd been misinformed by HomeChoice regarding the number of bedrooms they were eligible for (both were not upheld). There was also a complaint around Health and Safety and works done in a property's bathroom (partly upheld at Stage 1 and upheld at Stage 2).

- 55 Assets and Property accounted for 34% of all Economy and Growth complaints (11). 'Service quality' accounted for 54%; 'service failure' 30%; and 'communication' and 'policy and procedure' both accounted for 8%. 60% of complaints were responded to within the 10-working day SLA. 40% of complaints were upheld or partly upheld.
- 56 There were a number of causes for complaint in the Quarter 2 theme tracker for Assets and Property. For example - 2 complaints were about the perceived lack of maintenance of properties owned by CEC (neither were upheld). Another was around council owned trees being chopped down (not upheld) and 2 were complaining regarding a lack of response to communication (50% were upheld).
- 57 Economy and Growth received 2 compliments between April and September 2023, Economic Development and Public Rights of Way received one each.

Environment and Communities

- 58 Environment and Communities received 424 complaints in Quarters 1 and 2 of 2023/24. 40% of the total received by the council. Of these, 12 complaints were rejected, withdrawn, or not pursued; the remaining 412 were processed as official complaints.
- 59 Quarter 2 saw a 30% increase in complaints compared with Quarter 1 (233 and 179 respectively). There were 31 Stage 2 complaints in the 6 months.
- 60 59% of complaints were answered within the static 10-working day SLA. This percentage is impacted by Development Management having a temporary 20-working day SLA. If this is considered, 74% of Environment and Communities complaints were answered within SLA.
- 61 Seventeen service areas within Environment and Communities responded to complaints between April and September 2023. Waste and Recycling accounted for 47% of all Environment and Communities complaints (194). The main cause of complaint was 'service quality' and 'service failure' - 55% and 39% respectively. 'Staff conduct' accounted for 3%; and 'communication'; 'payments and disputed charges'; and 'policy procedure' accounted for 1% each. 91% of complaints were responded to within the 10-working day SLA. 94% of complaints were upheld or partly upheld.
- 62 According to the themes tracker, of the 125 complaints received about Waste and Recycling in Quarter 2, 100 (80%) were about repeated missed collections. This is where a customer experiences two or more

missed collections over a short period of time. Several customer journeys about missed collections have been produced by the Continuous Improvement team. These have been supplied to the service, along with recommendations for improvements.

- 63 Development Management accounted for 24% of all complaints to Environment and Communities (97). 72% were around 'service quality'; 25% were around 'communication'; 'staff conduct' 2% and 'service failure' 1%. 25% of complaints were responded to within the static 10-working day SLA, though as previously noted this service has a temporary SLA of 20 working days and 89% of responses were made within this SLA. 47% of complaints were upheld or partly upheld.
- 64 In the last quarter of 2022/23, Development Management took part in a new complaints process pilot, one of the key objectives being a reduction in Stage 2 complaints. Once the pilot ended, the service remained in the process. Prior to the pilot, the service was receiving an average of 14 Stage 2 complaints per quarter. This fell to 7 Stage 2 complaints in Quarter 4 of 2022/23. In Quarters 1 and 2 of 2023/24 respectively, the service received 10 and 11 Stage 2 complaints respectively. Although this is an increase on Quarter 4, it is still a decrease of 29% (Q1) and 21% (Q2) compared with the average before the pilot commenced.
- 65 46% of complaints received by Development Management in Quarter 2 were about delays with a planning application – 50% of these were either upheld or partly upheld. 15% were disagreeing with a planning decision, 71% of these were not upheld.
- 66 It is worth highlighting that Environmental Services (Waste Strategy) accounted for 10% of all Environment and Communities complaints (42). The service saw an increase of 400% in Quarter 2 compared to Quarter 1 (35 complaints versus 7). 'Service quality' accounted for 51%; 'policy and procedure' 26%; 'payments or disputed charges' 14%; 'service failure' 7% and 'communication' 2%. 12% of complaints were responded to within the 10-working day SLA. 48% of complaints were upheld or partly upheld.
- 67 44% of complaints received by the service in Quarter 2 were about the introduction of the garden waste scheme – it is anticipated that this figure will increase in the coming months. The service has now acquired extra staff to assist with responding to these complaints.
- 68 Environment and Communities received 60 compliments between April and September 2023, spread across 9 services. Waste and Recycling received the most compliments (24); followed by Grounds Maintenance (14); and Libraries (11).

Highways and Transport

- 69 Highways and Transport received 131 complaints in Quarters 1 and 2 of 2023/24. 12% of the total received by the council. Of these, 14 complaints were rejected, withdrawn, or not pursued; the remaining 117 were processed as official complaints.
- 70 Quarter 2 saw a 5% increase in complaints compared with Quarter 1 (60 and 57 respectively). There were 8 Stage 2 complaints in the 6 months.
- 71 56% of complaints were answered within the static 10-working day SLA.
- 72 Three service areas within Highways and Transport responded to complaints between April and September 2023. Highways accounted for 81% of Highways and Transport complaints (95). 85% were around 'service quality'; 8% 'communication'; 4% 'staff conduct'; and 3% around 'policy and procedure'. 65% of complaints were responded to within the 10-working day SLA. 53% of complaints were upheld or partly upheld.
- 73 The Quarter 2 themes tracker does not highlight any standout cause for complaint - 25 different themes are identified in the tracker. 10 complaints were about flooding or flooded gullies. 7 were around trees, hedges or shrubs and their maintenance. 4 complaints were about potholes – either no action being taken, or the repair had failed – and a further 6 were regarding surfaces of roads or footways. 4 complaints were about road markings or road signs. And 3 were about no action being taken on requests for street light maintenance.
- 74 Highways and Transport received 12 compliments between April and September 2023, spread across 3 services. Highways received the most compliments (10); and Parking Services and Strategic Infrastructure both received 1.

Consultation and Engagement

- 75 Quarterly reports on complaints and compliments are provided to all Directorates highlighting areas of concern and of good practice specific to their Directorate; and enabling Management Teams to consider opportunities to drive improvements and to share best practice.

Reasons for Recommendations

- 76 To ensure that the Committee is provided with assurances of service departments use of complaints to deliver service improvements in line with the Customer Experience Strategy.
- 77 To ensure that the Committee is kept informed of the Ombudsman's findings and to provide assurance that the Council is complying with the Corporate Complaints Policy and any recommendations made by the Ombudsman.

Option	Impact	Risk
Do nothing	Poor customer experience would not be addressed, lessons would not be learned and service improvements would not be made	Likely increase in complaints to Local Government Ombudsman with the potential for financial penalties and poor reputational impact

Implications and Comments

Monitoring Officer/Legal

- 78 There are no legal implications flowing directly from the content of this reports.

Section 151 Officer/Finance

- 79 If Fault causing Injustice is found, the Council can be asked to pay compensation to a complainant, the level of which is determined on a case by-case basis. The cost of such compensation is paid for by the service at fault. In 6 cases where the Ombudsman found Fault with Injustice between April and September 2023, the Council was required to make compensation payments totalling £1,050 – a decrease of 77% on the last 6 months of 2022/23.

Policy

- 80 Analysis of complaints enables services to identify and deliver improvements in service aligned with the Council's Customer Experience Strategy. If a high volume of complaints were received about a specific policy, a review of the relevant policy could be triggered and referred to the relevant service committee.

An open and enabling organisation 1.Listen, learn and respond to our residents, promoting opportunities for a two-way conversation	A council which empowers and cares about people	A thriving and sustainable place
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Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

- 81 When responding to complaints, the Council must ensure that people are treated fairly and that we comply with the Equality Act 2010, making reasonable adjustments where necessary. This may include providing responses in large font, using coloured paper, or communicating by specific means such as email only.

Human Resources

- 82 Whilst the primary purpose of this report is to inform Members of the outcome of complaints and to seek to secure improvements in performance, resource implications arise from the high numbers of complaints. These relate to the increased demand upon officers in researching the background to complaints and responding appropriately. Where complaints relate to specific staff members, for example because of behaviour or attitude, these are escalated to the appropriate manager.

Risk Management

- 83 If recommendations made by the Ombudsman are not followed, this could trigger a public report, as detailed in paragraphs 14 to 15.

Rural Communities

- 84 There are no direct implications for rural communities.

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

- 85 Implications for Children and Young people are included in paragraph 34 of this report – particularly relating to lack SEND provision or social care support.

Public Health

86 *There are no direct implications for public health.*

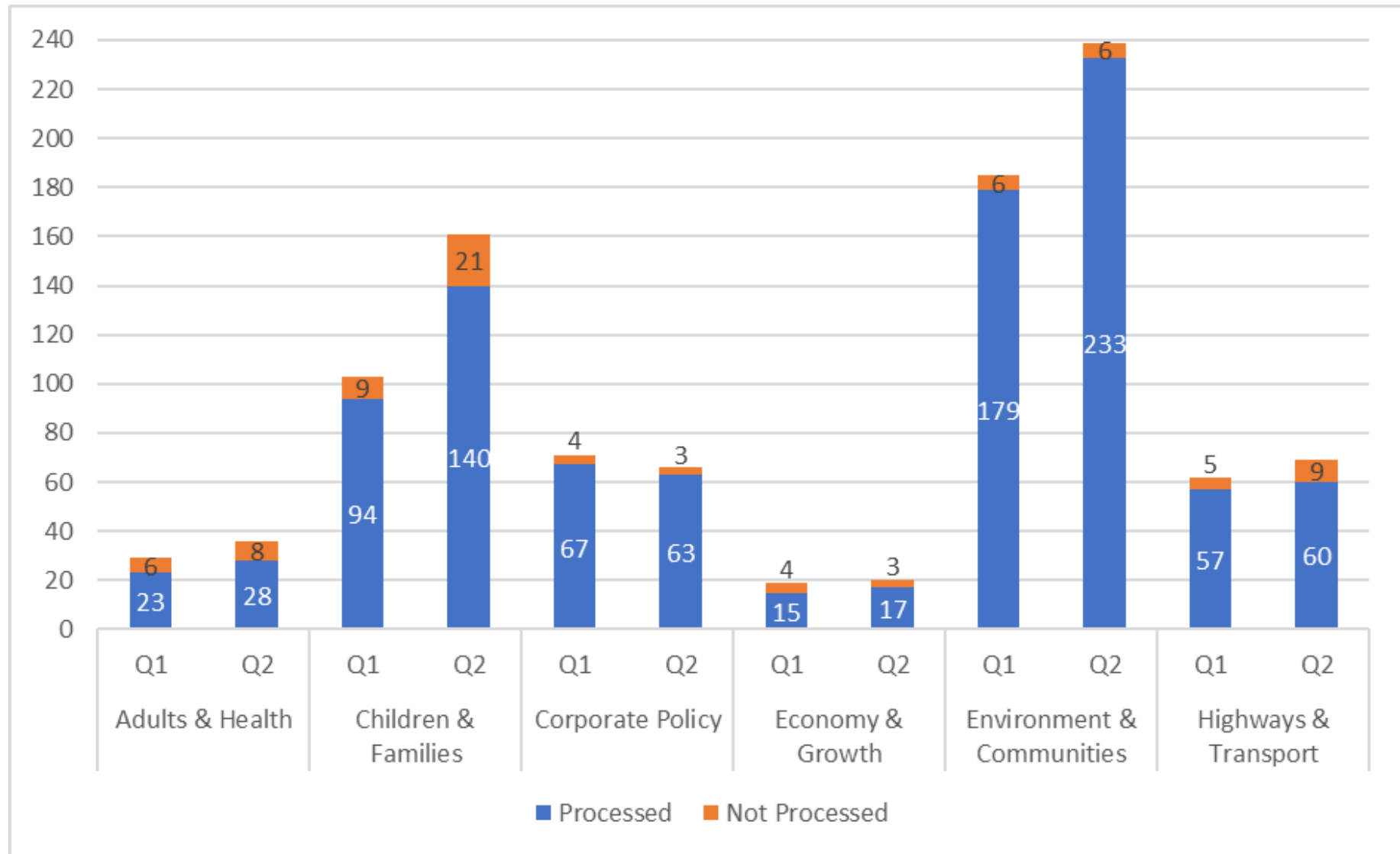
Climate Change

87 *There are no direct implications for climate change.*

Access to Information	
Contact Officer:	Jane Farnworth, Acting Head of Customer Services Jane.farnworth@cheshireeast.gov.uk
Appendices:	<p>Appendix 1 - Comparison of total complaints by committee Quarter 1 & Quarter 2</p> <p>Appendix 2 - Comparison of complaint outcomes by committee Quarter 1 & Quarter 2</p> <p>Appendix 3 - Comparison of complaint outcome distribution by committee Quarter 1 & Quarter 2</p> <p>Appendix 4 - Processed complaint outcomes by committee, per complaint stage</p> <p>Appendix 5 - Complaint response timeframe performance April – September by committee (static)</p> <p>Appendix 6 - Complaint response timeframe performance April – September by committee (non-static)</p> <p>Appendix 7 - Compliments received April – September by committee</p> <p>Appendix 8 - Contact volumes April – September by committee</p> <p>Appendix 9 - Examples of compliments received, by committee</p> <p>Appendix 10 - Outcome of complaints to the LGSCO by committee</p>

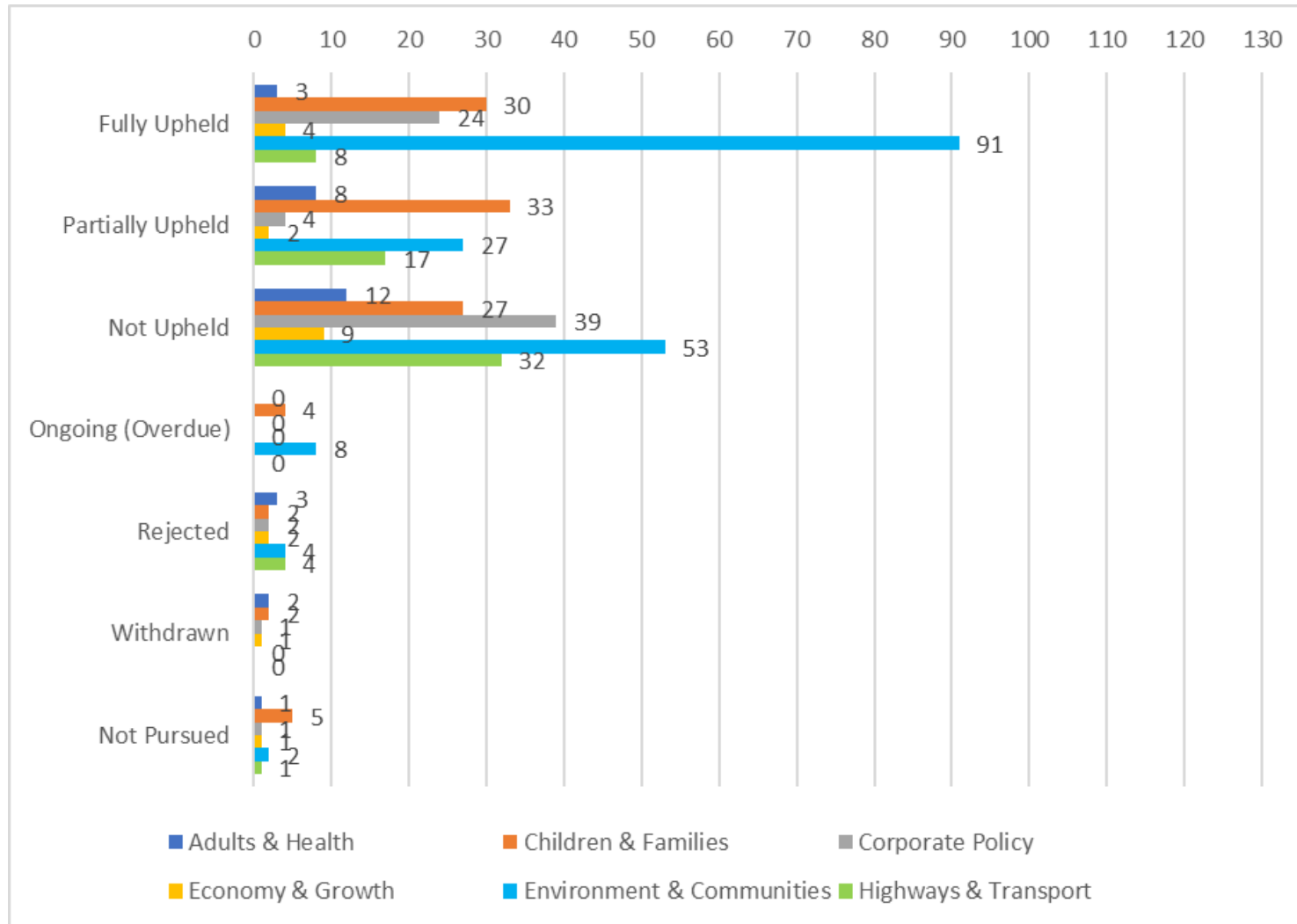
	Appendix 11 - Summary of Recommended Actions from Ombudsman Decision Notices where Fault was found (as per Appendix 10)
Background Papers:	N/A

Appendix 1 - Comparison of total complaints by committee Quarter 1 & Quarter 2

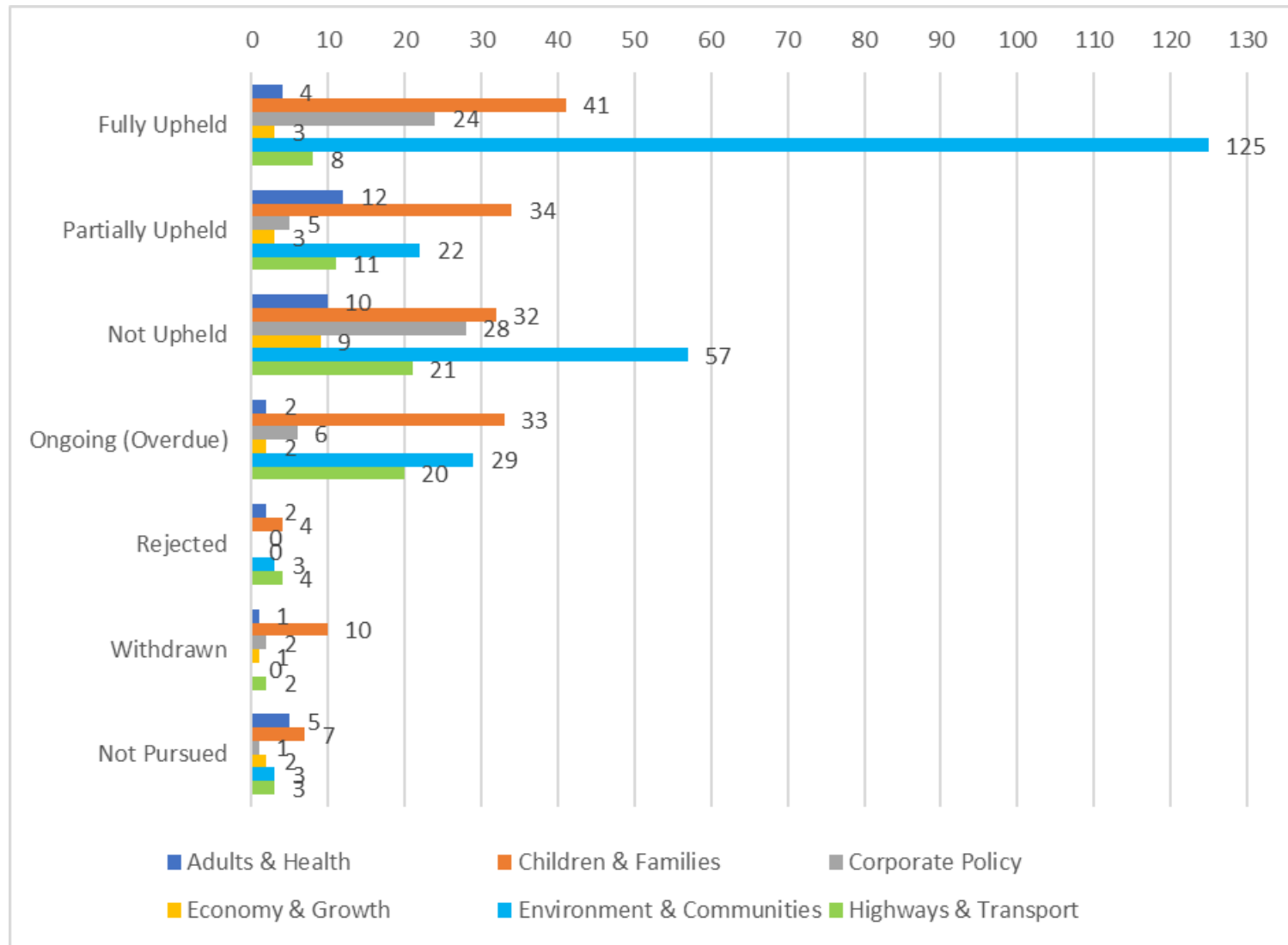


Appendix 2 - Comparison of complaint outcomes by committee Quarter 1 & Quarter 2

Quarter 1

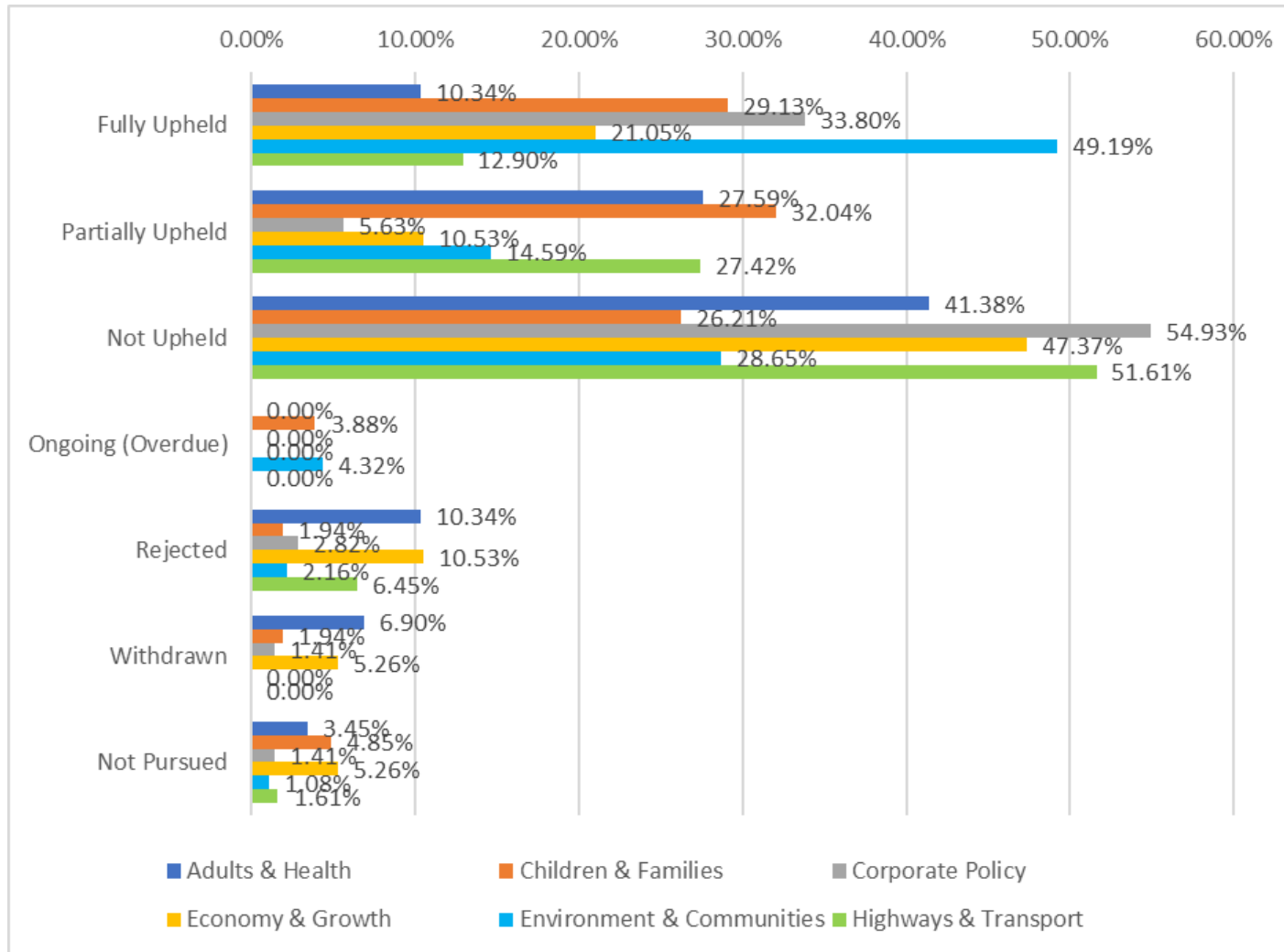


Quarter 2

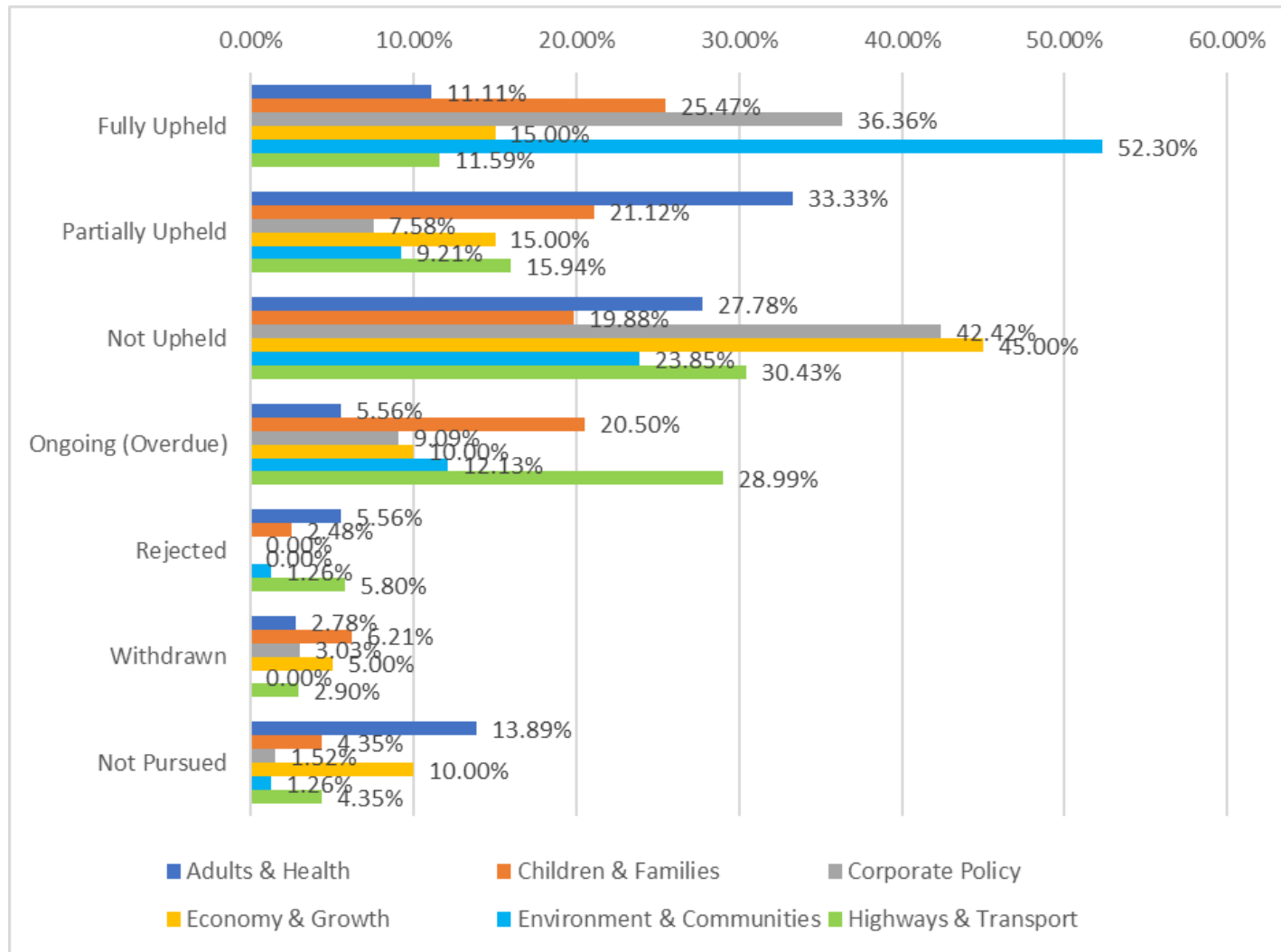


Appendix 3 - Comparison of complaint outcome distribution by committee Quarter 1 & Quarter 2

Quarter 1



Quarter 2



Appendix 4 - Processed complaint outcomes by committee, per complaint stage

Stage 1

Committee	Upheld	Partly Upheld	Not Upheld	Ongoing
Adults and Health	7	20	19	2
Children and Families	67	56	55	26
Corporate Policy	45	8	62	6
Economy and Growth	7	5	18	1
Environment and Communities	213	45	88	35
Highways and Transport	14	27	50	18

Stage 2

Committee	Upheld	Partly Upheld	Not Upheld	Ongoing
Adults and Health	0	0	3	0
Children and Families	4	10	4	11
Corporate Policy	3	1	5	0
Economy and Growth	0	0	0	1
Environment and Communities	3	4	22	2
Highways and Transport	2	1	3	2

Stage 3

Committee	Upheld	Partly Upheld	Not Upheld	Ongoing
Children and Families	0	1	0	0

Appendix 5 - Complaint response timeframe performance April – September by committee (static)

Committee	Processed Complaints	Ongoing	On Time	Overdue	% On Time
Adults and Health	51	2	29	20	57%
Children and Families	234	37	55	142	24%
Corporate Policy	130	6	98	26	75%
Economy and Growth	32	2	23	7	72%
Environment and Communities	412	37	244	131	59%
Highways and Transport	117	20	65	32	56%

Appendix 6 - Complaint response timeframe performance April – September by committee (non-static)

Committee	Processed Complaints	Ongoing	On Time	Overdue	% On Time
Adults and Health	51	2	44	5	86%
Children and Families	234	37	138	59	59%
Corporate Policy	130	6	114	10	88%
Economy and Growth	32	2	24	6	75%
Environment and Communities	412	37	322	53	78%
Highways and Transport	117	20	77	20	66%

Appendix 7 - Compliments received April – September by committee

Committee	Total Compliments
Adults and Health	120
Children and Families	112
Corporate Policy	84
Economy and Growth	2
Environment and Communities	60
Highways and Transport	12

Appendix 8 - Contact volumes April – September by committee

Committee	Total Telephone Contacts	Complaints and Compliments
Adults and Health	22,506	185
Children and Families	28,501	376
Corporate Policy	62,548	221
Economy and Growth	40,777	41
Environment and Communities	26,702	484
Highways and Transport	11,327	143

Appendix 9 - Examples of compliments received, by committee

Adults & Health

- *I just want to thank you so much for everything you helped me with, I am forever grateful.*
- *I would just like to express the hard work and so much kindness and hard work X carried out with my late brother who was found dead on Monday. She is a credit to you and deserves some recognition for all her hard work. She told me of my brother's death on the phone, so I didn't have to hear it from the police.*
- *I am very pleased with the help my mum has received off the reablement team. They are very friendly and kind. The only comment I would say is that a space for notes beside the signing sheet would be a good idea. Thanks.*

Children & Families

- *I just wanted to say you have been amazing for our family, I really don't know what I would have done without you. Your support has been invaluable, the children have accepted you and have felt comfortable to share their worries and dreams.*
- *I'd just like to share with you how seriously grateful I am to you and your team for sorting X out with the placement at Emerge! He's coming on so well after just 3 short weeks! Thank you for the work you did to get him into this school!*
- *Compliment for X -feedback from a father passed on by the independent reviewing officer about the work that social worker X is doing with a family. I was struck by the comment...'I have met X a few times, I like her and can talk to her' - demonstrating that building trusting relationships is at the core of most of what we do, and these relational skills are what really makes a difference. Many thanks.*

Corporate Policy

- *You cannot imagine my relief at receiving your e-mail dated 5 July 2023. It brought tears to my eyes. I can now retire without that problem hanging over me. Your analysis, action and speedy resolution were most impressive.*
- *I spoke to X who was incredibly helpful and patient with my enquiry. He is an excellent asset to the Council, and I hope he continues being as helpful as I found him.*
- *As a business rates customer, I'd like to give a special mention to X, who whenever I have any issues across our accounts with Cheshire East is always able to provide a good and efficient solution and responds extremely promptly, demonstrated again this morning. Perfect customer service!*

Economy and Growth

- *Impressed by the service I received from Tourist Information in Nantwich. Both on the phone and in person. Similarly, PROW were prompt and helpful.*
- *Just to say that we had a lovely couple of days walking the Gritstone trail - the footpaths were well maintained, and it was really well signposted. Thanks!*

Environment & Communities

- *The bin collectors came into the development and collected all the bins - so wanted to say a big thank you to them - they were so lovely and a credit to your team - Thank you.*
- *So pleased that the groundsmen have been kept on at this park - they do a fantastic job! The floral displays are always stunning.*
- *I just wanted to say a big thank you for your team's time today. Public bodies and specifically planning departments often receive a lot of bad press however my little enquiry could not have been dealt with more professionally.*

Highways & Transport

- *Just to say that we bumped into X parking warden X and he helped answer some questions we had around the permit bays. He was really informative and helpful and really just wanted to feedback that it was nice to see such a positive representation.*
- *Just wanted to say a huge thank you on how quickly you repaired the carriageway on a500 this week...I reported it by e mail last week....so impressed.*
- *We used the flexi link bus service for the first time yesterday and want to say how helpful and how nice Kevin the driver was. He was brilliant with everyone.*

Appendix 10 - Outcome of complaints to the LGSCO by committee

Committee	Total number of final decisions	Outcomes of final decisions				Total Compensation Awarded
		Rejected	No Fault	Fault but no Injustice	Fault with Injustice	
Adults & Health	7	5	0	0	2	£500
Children & Families	8	5	1	0	2	£150
Corporate Policy	5	3	1	1	0	£0
Economy & Growth	0	0	0	0	0	£0
Environment & Communities	13	11	1	0	1	£400
Highways & Transport	6	4	0	1	1	£0

Appendix 11 - Summary of Recommended Actions from Ombudsman Decision Notices where Fault was found (as per Appendix 10)

Adults and Health Committee

Service	Summary and Ombudsman's Final Decision	Agreed Action	Action Taken
Social Care Business Support and Finance	<p>The Ombudsman's final decision – 3 April 2023</p> <p>Summary: Mrs L complained about the way the Council handled her mother, Mrs X's direct payments. Mrs L said the Council was misleading and confusing in its communication and demanded payment Mrs X did not owe.</p> <p>The Council failed to provide clear and transparent financial information, incorrectly calculated Mrs X's account three times and delayed in pursuing the debt for 20 months.</p> <p>The Council will write off Mrs X's outstanding charges and pay Mrs X and Mrs L £200 each to recognise the frustration and uncertainty this caused.</p>	<p>Within one month the Council agreed to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Write to Mrs X and Mrs L and apologise for the confusion, frustration and uncertainty caused to them and pay them £200 each to recognise the same; and Cancel the outstanding invoice against Mrs X's account. <p>Within three months the Council agreed to remind relevant staff:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Where discrepancies arise in audits to ensure the reasons for this are clearly explained to the person; and Of the importance of providing clear and transparent information to ensure people understand their responsibilities when accessing direct payments both at the point of arranging them and following any audit. 	<p>Apology letters issued on 5 April 2023.</p> <p>Payments made on 28 April 2023.</p> <p>Debt confirmed as written off 19 May 2023.</p> <p>The minutes from a recent audit meeting have been shared with the team, and these discuss the corrective actions.</p>

Service	Summary and Ombudsman's Final Decision	Agreed Action	Action Taken
South Learning Disability Team	<p>The Ombudsman's final decision – 14 April 2023</p> <p>Summary: Ms K complained the Council and its social worker failed its social care duties towards her daughter. We did not find enough evidence of fault in the processes the Council followed to reach its view. We cannot therefore criticise the merits of its decision. There was some fault in how it progressed and communicated a charity's grant. The Council agree to make payment to acknowledge the distress and uncertainty this caused Ms K.</p>	<p>Within one month of the final decision:</p> <p>a) apologise in writing to Ms K and pay £100 to acknowledge the distress and uncertainty and time and trouble its failure to progress and follow up on the charity's grant and the confusion it caused her; and</p> <p>b) contact the Charity to agree how the approved grant payment can be used to purchase the epilepsy band for Miss X and inform Ms K if no agreement can be reached.</p>	<p>Payment made 17 May 2023.</p> <p>Pendant subscription was added to the customer's Direct Payments.</p>

Children and Families Committee

Service	Summary and Ombudsman's Final Decision	Agreed Action	Action Taken
SEND	<p>The Ombudsman's final decision – 24 May 2023</p> <p>Summary: The Council gave flawed advice that a transition review to name a post-16 placement would be completed earlier than usual due to the complainant's anxiety.</p> <p>This raised expectations and caused disappointment and distress when the advice was reversed.</p> <p>The Council will apologise, pay £150 to acknowledge the distress caused, and make service improvements.</p>	<p>Within four weeks of the final decision:</p> <p>The Council will apologise to Ms X and her daughter again to acknowledge the period of raised expectations was from July to September and not just after the meeting in September.</p> <p>The Council will pay Ms X's daughter a symbolic payment of £150 to acknowledge the frustration, distress and disappointment caused by the flawed advice.</p> <p>The Council will share learning from this complaint with its SEN staff so that early reviews are only offered in appropriate circumstances and where there is a genuine intention to complete the review (which includes follow up actions) within a faster timeframe. While it may be appropriate to hold early meetings about transition to explore options, staff should be careful not to raise expectations that decisions about placement will be made outside the Council's usual timescale.</p>	<p>Apology letters issued 21 June 2023.</p> <p>Payment made 12 June 2023.</p> <p>From email issued to SEND staff 21 June 2023:</p> <p>Reviews are only offered in appropriate circumstances and where there is a genuine intention to complete the review (which includes follow up actions) within a faster timeframe. While it may be appropriate to hold early meetings about transition to explore options, staff should be careful not to raise expectations that decisions about placement will be made outside the Council's usual timescale.</p>

Service	Summary and Ombudsman's Final Decision	Agreed Action	Action Taken
SEND	<p>The Ombudsman's final decision – 24 July 2023</p> <p>Summary: Mrs X complained the Council delayed issuing her child, Child Y's amended Education, Health and Care (EHC) plan following an annual review in March 2022.</p> <p>The Council was at fault for the delay in issuing Child Y's EHC plan following the annual review. The Council has already apologised to Mrs X for the delay, which was an appropriate remedy for the injustice caused.</p> <p>Child Y was not caused an injustice by the delay. The Council will provide evidence of how it will reduce similar delays to prevent a reoccurrence of the fault.</p>	<p>Within three months of the final decision the Council will provide us with evidence of how it has reviewed its procedures to reduce delays in issuing final EHC plans following annual reviews.</p> <p>It will provide us with an action plan of any actions it has taken or intends to take going forward.</p>	Due by 24 October 2023.

Corporate Policy Committee

Service	Summary and Ombudsman's Final Decision	Agreed Action
Council Tax	<p>The Ombudsman's final decision – 12 September 2023</p> <p>Summary: Mr X complains the Council took recovery action on a historic Council Tax debt that he was not liable for. The Ombudsman finds fault with the Council for failing to contact Mr X before restarting recovery action. However, no injustice has been caused to Mr X as it would not have changed the action taken.</p>	<p>No corrective actions, but the following advice provided by the Ombudsman in relation to historic Council Tax debt:-</p> <p><i>If the Council's query is for historic Council Tax debt in general, the Ombudsman has some guidance on what he expects Councils to consider before recommencing action. If no action has been taken for some time we always expect a council, before taking any recovery action, to contact the debtor first to remind them of the existence of the debt. We do not have a blanket rule on council's pursuit of historic debt. But councils need to consider if it is fair and reasonable to enforce a specific liability order. Some factors to consider are –</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>• If the debtor contested liability for the debt did the council tell them clearly at the time of their appeal rights?</i> <i>• If the debtor seems to have moved without telling the council what efforts, if any, did the council make at the time to trace their new address?</i> <i>• Does the council's delay mean the debtor will be unable to challenge liability now, as evidence may be no longer available?</i> <i>• If the debtor says they paid the debt has the passage of time meant the debtor's financial records are no longer available?</i> <i>• Has the council been actively pursuing the debt, so the debtor had ample opportunity to raise any queries?</i> <i>• Does any delay by the council justify giving a longer period to pay the debt than the council might normally consider?</i> <i>• The debtor may not contest they owe the debt. So as long as the council has considered the above factors and come to a reasoned decision, we would not criticise them for taking recovery action.</i>

Environment and Communities Committee

Service	Summary and Ombudsman's Final Decision	Agreed Action	Action Taken
Community Enforcement	<p>The Ombudsman's final decision – 28 April 2023</p> <p>Summary: Mr Q is making a complaint on behalf of his daughter (Miss G). He says the Council has failed to resolve issues relating to household bins being left for collection at a designated site which is close to Miss G's home.</p> <p>We found the Council was at fault for not taking agreed enforcement action for apparent breaches to the rules which were repeated and long lasting. The Council had agreed to control this problem when we investigated the issue in 2019. It failed to do so and bins and household waste has often been left outside Miss G's home for days unchallenged. This caused her an injustice because the fault adversely impacted on the use and enjoyment of her home.</p> <p>The Council has agreed to our recommendations for the Council to remedy the injustice suffered.</p>	<p>The Council will perform the following actions by 26 May 2023:</p> <p>a) Provide a written apology to Miss G and Mr Q which acknowledges the fault and injustice identified in this statement.</p> <p>b) Pay Miss G £400 to serve as an acknowledgement of the impact of the failings and the injustice caused to her.</p> <p>c) Clarify to Miss G and Mr Q how evidence of non-compliance with the bin rules should be submitted to the Council. It will also arrange to have a telephone call with either of them at the end of each month for the next three months to review and discuss any problems.</p> <p>The Council should also perform the following actions by 26 July 2023:</p> <p>d) The Council will arrange to monitor the situation with the bins in Miss G's area within the limited resources available to it. Patrols will be put in place by officers from the relevant Council department to monitor fly-tipping and we will use this resource as a way to monitor the situation, as well as to encourage Miss G and Mr Q to report instances of bins not being collected.</p>	<p>Apology letter issued 12 May 2023.</p> <p>Payment of £400 made.</p> <p>Miss Q has been advised that she can submit her own photos of any bins left out on her street direct to the Council.</p> <p>Miss Q had telephone conversations with a senior officer in May and June 2023.</p> <p>Monitoring completed during May, June and July 2023. The situation with the bins had improved following the period of monitoring.</p>

Highways & Transport Committee

Service	Summary and Ombudsman's Final Decision	Agreed Action	Action Taken
Highways	<p>The Ombudsman's final decision – 24 May 2023</p> <p>Summary: Mr X complains the Council entered his land without giving notice. We found the Council was at fault, but the apology it provided to Mr X in response to his complaint was an appropriate remedy to the complaint.</p>	<p>No specific actions as the fault had already been remedied via an apology:-</p> <p><i>As the visit on this occasion did not cause significant injustice, the Council accepted it needs to give notice to Mr X and the Council provided an apology to Mr X, I have now completed my investigation and closed my file. This is on the basis the Council is at fault, but a suitable remedy has already been provided.</i></p>	N/A
Highways	<p>The Ombudsman's final decision – 24 August 2023</p> <p>Summary: We found fault on Mr J's complaint about the Council failing to investigate reports of water ponding on the road outside his home following road works. It failed to explore this when he complained.</p> <p>The agreed action remedies the injustice caused.</p>	<p>The Council agreed to take the following action within 4 weeks of the final decision on this complaint:</p> <p>a) Send Mr J a written apology for its failure to have clarified and explored the issue of potential ponding when he made a formal complaint.</p> <p>b) Remind complaint officers of the need to ensure new reports raised during the complaints procedure are referred promptly through to the appropriate department.</p>	<p>Letter issued to Mr J on 12 September 2023.</p> <p>Reminder issued to Highways Formal Correspondence staff 12 September 2023.</p>

CORPORATE POLICY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME 2023-24

Report Reference	Corporate Policy Committee	Title	Purpose of Report	Lead Officer	Consultation	Equality Impact Assessment	Part of Budget and Policy Framework	Corporate Plan Priority	Exempt Item
CP/30/23-24	18/01/2024	Performance Report Quarter 2 2023/24	To update on performance against the Corporate Plan to include H&S accident and incident statistics. This report will also include OFLOG metrics CLT report (15-11-23) as an Appendix.	Director of Policy and Change	No	No	No	Open; Fair; Green	No
CP/29/23-24	18/01/2024	Strategic Risk Register Assurance Report Q2 2023/24	This report provides an update on the activity of the Council's Strategic Risk Register for Quarter 2 2023/24	Head of Audit and Risk	No	No	No	Open	No
CP/37/23-24	18/01/2024	Third Financial Review of 2023/24 (Corporate Policy Committee)	This report outlines how the Council is managing resources to provide value for money services during the 2023/24 financial year. The purpose of the report is to note and comment on the Third Financial Review and Performance position of 2023/24 and approve Supplementary Estimates and Virements.	Director of Finance and Customer Services	No	No	Yes	Open	No

CORPORATE POLICY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME 2023-24

CP/35/23-24	18/01/2024	Medium Term Financial Strategy Consultation 2024/25 - 2027/28 Provisional Settlement Update (Corporate Policy Committee)	All Committees were being asked to provide feedback in relation to their financial responsibilities as identified within the Constitution and linked to the budget alignment approved by the Finance Sub-Committee in March 2023. Responses to the consultation would be reported to the Corporate Policy Committee to support that Committee in making recommendations to Council on changes to the current financial strategy.	Director of Finance and Customer Services	Yes	No	Yes	Open	No
CP/36/23-24	18/01/2024	Pay Policy Statement (PPS) 2024/25	To seek approval of the Pay Policy Statement 2024/25. The changes from the 2023/24 PPS will be highlighted in the report and a copy of the revised PPS will be enclosed once drafted.	Head of HR	Yes	No	No	Open; Fair; Green	No
CP/65/23-24	18/01/2024	Appointment of New Member to the Independent School Admission Appeals Panel and Independent Review Panel for Exclusion Reviews	To appoint members to the independent school admissions appeals panel and independent review panel for exclusions reviews	Head of Democratic Services and Governance	No	No	No	Open	No

CORPORATE POLICY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME 2023-24

CP/38/23-24	08/02/2024	ICT Hybrid Programme implementation update	To provide an update on progress with the implementation of ICT Hybrid Programme	Head of ICT	No	No	Yes	Open	No
CP/39/23-24	08/02/2024	Medium Term Financial Strategy 2024/25-2027/28	To recommend the Medium-Term Financial Strategy for 2024 to 2028 to Council for approval. The report will incorporate the Council's Priorities, Budget, Policy Proposals and Capital Programme. The report will also include the Capital, Treasury Management, Investment and Reserves Strategies.	Director of Finance and Customer Services	No	No	Yes	Open	No
CP/59/23-24	08/02/2024	Southern Gateway Pedestrian and Cycleway Connectivity Scheme – Land and Rights	The making of a Compulsory Purchase Order (CPO) pursuant to section 226(1)(a) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) and pursuant and Schedule 3 to the Acquisition of Land Act 1981 and all other powers as appropriate for the purpose of acquiring the land and new rights for the purpose of	Director of Growth and Enterprise	Yes	No	Yes	Open; Green	TBC

CORPORATE POLICY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME 2023-24

			facilitating the development, redevelopment, and improvement of the land by way of highway and public realm works.						
CP/63/23-24	08/02/2024	Calendar of Meetings 2024/25	To approve the calendar of meetings for the municipal year 2024/25.	Head of Democratic Services and Governance	TBC	No	No	Open	No
CP/64/23-24	08/02/2024	Local Enterprise Partnership Functions - Transition Arrangements	For the Council to consider options for delivery of the Local Enterprise Partnership functions from 1 April 2024.	Director of Growth and Enterprise	Yes	Yes	TBC	Open	No
CP/67/23-24	08/02/2024	Developing a new Corporate Plan	Update on progress against development of the new Corporate Plan	Director of Policy and Change	No	No	No	Open; Fair; Green	No
CP/53/22-23	21/03/2024	Annual Review of Committee Decisions	To report on the decisions made by Service Committees during 2021/22 and 2022/23.	Director of Policy and Change	No	No	No	Open	No
CP/31/23-24	21/03/2024	Equality, Diversity and Inclusion - annual report	To update on EDI in line with our statutory duty to report annually	Director of Policy and Change	No	No	No	Open; Fair; Green	No
CP/40/23-24	21/03/2024	Performance Report - Quarter 3 of 2023/24	To report on performance against the Corporate Plan. To include H&S accident and incident statistics.	Director of Policy and Change	No	No	No	Open; Fair; Green	No
CP/41/23-24	21/03/2024	Strategic Risk Register Assurance Report Q3 2023/24	This report provides an update on the activity of the Council's Strategic	Head of Audit and Risk	No	No	No	Open	No

CORPORATE POLICY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME 2023-24

			Risk Register for Quarter 3 2023/24						
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CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the **Finance Sub-Committee**
held on Thursday, 2nd November, 2023 in Committee Suite 1, 2 & 3,
Westfields, Middlewich Road, Sandbach CW11 1HZ

PRESENT

Councillor N Mannion (Chair)
Councillor M Gorman (Vice-Chair)

Councillors D Brown, J Clowes, B Drake, R Kain, C O'Leary and F Wilson

OFFICERS

Paul Goodwin, Head of Finance and Deputy Chief Finance Officer
David Brown, Director of Governance and Compliance
Julie Gregory, Legal Team Manager - Place/Corporate
Paul Mountford, Democratic Services
Paul Manning, Acting Head of Revenues and Benefits
Helen Charlesworth-May, Executive Director of Adults, Health and Integration
Deborah Woodcock, Executive Director of Children's Services
Josie Griffiths, Head of Audit and Risk
Michael Todd, Acting Internal Audit Manager
David Malcolm, Head of Planning
Tom Shuttleworth, Interim Director of Environment and Neighbourhoods

ALSO PRESENT

Councillor M Warren

25 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor M Gorman declared an interest as a member of the Cheshire Pension Fund Committee in relation to an item on the agenda about the Fund.

26 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the meeting held on 7th September 2023 be approved as a correct record.

27 PUBLIC SPEAKING/OPEN SESSION

There were no public speakers.

28 SECOND FINANCIAL REVIEW 2023/24

The Sub-Committee considered a report on the second review of the Cheshire East Council forecast outturn for the financial year 2023/24.

Performance against the 2023/24 Budget within each service committee, and the Finance Sub-Committee was outlined in Table 1 of the report.

Members sought further information regarding the current revenue forecasts for Adults and Health and Children and Families which showed in-year forecast pressures of £4.7M and £10.8 respectively.

The Executive Director of Adults, Health and Integration outlined the factors driving increased costs in adult social care. These included price inflation in social care, with staffing costs in the care sector running ahead of headline inflation; the rate of growth of the aging population in Cheshire East which was higher than other parts of the country; more complex needs leading to higher unit costs; and the numbers of people being released from hospital into the community and requiring care.

The Executive Director outlined measures that were being taken to address budget pressures, including a reduction in the use of short-term residential and nursing placements, investment in domiciliary care, and capping price increases, with investment in a pricing tool to scrutinise provider costs.

The Executive Director of Children and Families advised that key factors underlying cost pressures in children's services included increasing demand for, and the rising cost of, social care agency placements, with costs increasing above headline inflation and a significant number of asylum-seeking children in Cheshire East; the increased use and cost of agency staff; increasing home to school transport costs and the cost of school catering.

Measures being taken to address budget pressures included a recruitment drive to reduce the need for agency workers, a review of funding relating to school catering, seeking additional funding through grant applications, and increasing the number of safe walking routes to school to reduce transport costs. Further mitigations were being explored, including the possibility of early receipt of safety valve funding.

RESOLVED (unanimously)

That the Sub-Committee

1. notes the factors leading to a forecast adverse Net Revenue financial pressure of £18.7m against a revised budget of £353.1m (5.3%);
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 £181.4m 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 of the report and each of the appendices therein, and notes that any financial mitigation decisions requiring approval will be made in line with relevant delegations;
5. 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
6. notes that Council will be asked to approve fully-funded supplementary revenue estimates over £1,000,000 in accordance with Financial Procedure Rules as detailed in Appendix 1 Adults and Health Committee, Section 3 Corporate Grants Register, Table 2 and Appendix 4 Economy and Growth Committee, Section 3 Corporate Grants Register, Table 2.

The meeting was adjourned at 11.25 am for a five minute break.

29 MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY CONSULTATION 2024/25 - 2027/28

The Sub-Committee considered a report on indicative financial targets to support consultation on the development of the Cheshire East Medium-Term Financial Strategy 2024/25 to 2027/28.

The Head of Finance advised that the focus was on producing a balanced budget for the 2024-25 financial year only. In the current committee cycle, committees would consider their budget envelopes. They would then consider budget feedback in the January cycle before final recommendations were made by the Corporate Policy Committee to Council.

The Head of Finance also confirmed that officers would if requested be able to assist political groups with alternative budget proposals, and that further budget proposals could be considered during the January committee cycle, before the budget Council meeting in February. The Chair added that groups could start the conversations now and did not need to wait until January.

RESOLVED (unanimously)

That the Sub-Committee

1. approves the indicative budget envelope for all committees as a way of setting financial targets in support of achieving a balanced budget for 2024/25;
2. notes that officers will develop further proposals in consultation with members to enable wider stakeholder consultation prior to approval by Council; and
3. notes that Committees will be presented with the opportunity to further review financial proposals, designed to achieve a balanced budget, as

part of their January cycle of meetings prior to recommendations being made to Council for approval.

30 CIPFA FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT CODE (FM CODE) PROGRESS UPDATE

The Sub-Committee considered an update report on the Council's progress in implementing the Chartered Institute of Public Finance & Accountancy (CIPFA) Financial Management (FM) Code.

It was suggested that informal meetings be arranged for members of the Sub-Committee to receive briefings on the principles of the Financial Management Code.

RESOLVED (unanimously)

That the Sub-Committee

1. notes the contents of the report and the requirement for a full self-assessment against the principles of the CIPFA FM Code;
2. notes the plan to complete the current re-assessment by 31st March 2024 and that there will be annual updates thereafter;
3. notes the existing initial officer self-assessment at Appendix 2 of the report;
4. approves Appendix 3 – Interim review of Cheshire East Council's current level of compliance with the CIPFA Financial Management Code Framework – Principle 1 – Leadership; and
5. agrees that informal meetings be arranged for members of the Sub-Committee to receive briefings on the latest officer review in respect of all principles in the Financial Management Code and to provide an opportunity for members to engage in the re-assessment.

31 BUSINESS RATES DISCRETIONARY RELIEF REVIEW - RECOMMENDATIONS

The Sub-Committee considered a report which provided feedback from the Business Rates Working Group on the business rates discretionary relief review, and which sought a decision in relation to the Discretionary Relief Policy.

Councillor M Gorman, who attending the Working Group meeting, thanked the officers for their work.

RESOLVED

That the Sub-Committee

1. approves the amendment of the Business Rates Discretionary Relief Policy to include leisure centres at page 17 where sports and social clubs are referenced; and
2. delegates authority to the Head of Revenues and Benefits to amend page 11 section 5.9 of the Policy, to allow backdating of relief in certain circumstances, once the Non-Domestic Rating Bill receives Royal Assent.

32 CHESHIRE PENSION FUND BRIEFING

The Sub-Committee considered a briefing report on matters considered by the Cheshire Pension Fund Committee.

The Vice-Chair, Councillor Gorman, who was also a member of the Cheshire Pension Fund Committee, commented that at present the Fund was not invested in businesses and enterprises in Cheshire or the North-West. He advocated the setting up of an investment vehicle that would enable the Fund to invest in local businesses whilst satisfying the regulations. Other members expressed sympathy with the principle of the proposal, provided it did not place the pensions of public servants at risk and that returns on investment were maximised.

RESOLVED

That the Sub-Committee

1. notes the briefing paper, summarising the key points in the items presented to the Cheshire Pension Fund Committee on 8th September 2023; and
2. asks officers to facilitate a conversation with the Cheshire Pension Fund and officers at Cheshire West and Chester and Warrington Borough Councils on the possibility of Cheshire Pension Fund investments being made in Cheshire and the North-West, and report back to the Sub-Committee at a future meeting.

33 SECTION 106 KEY FINDINGS - INTERNAL AUDIT REPORT

The Sub-Committee considered the report to the Audit and Governance Committee on 28th September 2023 setting out the key findings from Internal Audit's review of arrangements for the management and monitoring of Section 106 funds.

Internal Audit had completed an extensive review of the Council's arrangements for the management and monitoring of Section 106 agreements. The key findings of the review were set out in Appendix 1 to the Audit and Governance Committee report. The overall assurance opinion for the review was "No Assurance". This reflected the view that

there were currently significant areas of risk which were not being managed effectively in relation to the use of S106 agreements and contributions. The audit report findings also referred to a lack of strategic oversight in place for senior officers and service committees.

The Audit and Governance Committee at its meeting on 28th September 2023, having considered the findings of the internal audit review, asked for an initial progress report in March 2024, and a further update on the implementation of actions in 12 months' time.

The matter had been referred to the Finance Sub-Committee with a view to understanding the financial implications of the review, and how the planned changes should drive more effective recording, use, and timely spend of S106 contributions.

The Head of Planning assured members that no monies had been returned to developers as part of the process.

Members noted that the Environment and Communities Committee as the committee responsible for this area of work was to set up a member/officer working group to oversee the implementation of the actions arising from the review and to consider how information could be more pro-actively shared with members regarding section 106 contributions.

Members made the following comments in relation to the report and its findings:

- Members should be consulted on all stages of the S106 process and should be provided with information, including a process diagram, to assist their understanding of the process.
- The Finance Sub-Committee should receive regular reports in relation to the financial aspects of S106, which should be added to the work programme for future meetings.
- Assurances were needed regarding staffing, training and the effective use of software in relation to the management of S106 obligations and contributions.
- Members should receive lists of all S106 agreements affecting their wards.

The Head of Audit and Risk undertook to take these comments forward.

With regard to staffing, the Head of Planning advised that the recruitment process would commence next week.

RESOLVED

That the Sub-Committee notes the report.

34 WORK PROGRAMME

The Sub-Committee considered its work programme for 2023-24.

Officers confirmed that, as requested earlier in the meeting, items would be included on the work programme for future meetings relating to Section 106 and the Cheshire Pension Fund.

RESOLVED

That the work programme be noted.

35 EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED

That the press and public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the final item on the agenda pursuant to Section 100(A)4 of the Local Government Act 1972 on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972 and the public interest would not be served in publishing the information.

The meeting was adjourned at 12.51 pm.

During the adjournment, members of the Sub-Committee received an informal briefing on the strategic options review of the Council's wholly-owned companies.

The meeting reconvened at 2.25 pm.

36 WHOLLY-OWNED COMPANIES - STRATEGIC OPTIONS REVIEW

The Sub-Committee considered a report on a strategic options review of the Council's wholly-owned companies.

Councillor M Warren remained present for this item as Chair of the Environment and Communities Committee.

Members asked that the review include the option of testing the private market.

RESOLVED (unanimously)

That the recommendations in the report be approved.

The meeting commenced at 10.00 am and concluded at 2.28 pm

Councillor N Mannion (Chair)

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CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the **General Appeals Sub Committee**
held on Tuesday, 10th October, 2023 in the Committee Suite 1,2 & 3,
Westfields, Middlewich Road, Sandbach CW11 1HZ

PRESENT

Councillors R Bailey, S Edgar (Chairman) and E Gilman.

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE

Sue Keyon, Legal Clerk
Nikki Bishop, Democratic Services Officer
Helen Rawlinson, Transport Manager
Ian Marshall, Operations Support Manager, Transport

1 APPOINTMENT OF CHAIR

RESOLVED:

That Councillor Steve Edgar be appointed as Chair of the meeting.

2 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence.

3 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

4 PUBLIC SPEAKING TIME/OPEN SESSION

There were no members of the public registered to speak.

5 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 as amended on the grounds that it involves the likely discussion of exempt information as defined in Paragraphs 1 and 2 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972 and the public interest would not be served in publishing the information.

6 SCHOOL TRANSPORT APPEALS

Consideration was given to the following school transport appeals.

7 CASE 1 - 10.05AM

The Sub-Committee considered an appeal against a decision made by the Council's School Transport Team not to offer assisted school transport.

The Sub-Committee heard the appeal based on the written and oral evidence of the Presenting Officer, who detailed the local authority's case, and the written and oral evidence of the appellant. Members of the Sub-Committee asked questions by way of clarification.

The Presenting Officer and the appellant withdrew from the meeting, following which the Sub-Committee reached its decision.

RESOLVED:

That the appeal be partially upheld with travel assistance being provided for a one-year period and to be reviewed once medical assessments were made available.

8 CASE 2 - 10.50AM

The Sub-Committee considered an appeal against a decision of the Council's School Transport Team not to offer assisted school transport.

The Sub-Committee heard the appeal based on the written and oral evidence of the Presenting Officer, who detailed the local authority's case, and the written and oral evidence of the appellant. Members of the Sub-Committee asked questions by way of clarification.

The Presenting Officer and the appellant withdrew from the meeting, following which the Sub-Committee reached its decision.

RESOLVED:

That the appeal be dismissed.

9 CASE 3 - 11.35AM

The Sub-Committee considered an appeal against a decision of the Council's School Transport Team not to offer assisted school transport.

The Sub-Committee heard the appeal based on the written and oral evidence of the Presenting Officer, who detailed the local authority's case, and the written and oral evidence of the appellant. Members of the Sub-Committee asked questions by way of clarification.

The Presenting Officer and the appellant withdrew from the meeting, following which the Sub-Committee reached its decision.

RESOLVED:

That the appeal be dismissed.

10 CASE 4 - 12.20PM

The Sub-Committee considered an appeal against a decision of the Council's School Transport Team not to offer assisted school transport.

The Sub-Committee heard the appeal based on the written and oral evidence of the Presenting Officer, who detailed the local authority's case, and the written and oral evidence of the appellant. Members of the Sub-Committee asked questions by way of clarification.

The Presenting Officer and the appellant withdrew from the meeting, following which the Sub-Committee reached its decision.

RESOLVED:

That the appeal be upheld.

The meeting commenced at 10.00 am and concluded at 13.15pm

Councillor S Edgar (Chair)

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CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the **General Appeals Sub Committee**
held on Tuesday, 7th November, 2023 in the Committee Suite 1,2 & 3,
Westfields, Middlewich Road, Sandbach CW11 1HZ

PRESENT

Councillors S Edgar, E Gilman and L Smetham

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE

Ian Marshall, Operations Support Manager, Transport
Karen Shuker, Democratic Services Officer
Shona Waby, Legal Clerk

OTHERS IN ATTENDANCE

Rebecca Airey, Legal (Observer)

11 APPOINTMENT OF CHAIR

RESOLVED:

That Councillor Steve Edgar be appointed as Chair of the meeting.

12 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence.

13 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

14 PUBLIC SPEAKING TIME/OPEN SESSION

There were no members of the public registered to speak.

15 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 as amended on the grounds that it involves the likely discussion of exempt information as defined in Paragraphs 1 and 2 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972 and the public interest would not be served in publishing the information.

16 SCHOOL TRANSPORT APPEAL

The Sub-Committee considered an appeal against a decision of the Council not to offer assisted school transport. The Sub-Committee heard the appeal based on the written and oral evidence of the Presenting Officer, who detailed the local authority's case, and the written and oral evidence of the appellant and the appellant's supporter. Members of the Sub-Committee asked questions by way of clarification.

The Presenting Officer, the appellant and the appellant's supporter withdrew from the meeting, following which the Sub-Committee reached its decision.

RESOLVED

That the appeal be upheld.

The meeting commenced at 10.00 am and concluded at 10.45 am

Councillor S Edgar

Corporate Policy Committee**30 November 2023****WorkplaCE (Estate Rationalisation)**

Report of: Alex Thompson, Director of Finance and Customer Services (s151 Officer)]

Report Reference No: CP/54/23-24

Ward(s) Affected: (All Wards);

Purpose of Report

1. This report seeks member approval to close the Council's Westfields Offices in Sandbach. The decision follows completion of the recommendations made by the Corporate Policy Committee at its meeting of 11 July 2023. Those recommendations focused on noting analysis that had already been completed and approved the launch of further consultation. The results of the consultation feedback can be seen at Appendices 1a (Employees) and 1b (Members).
2. The recommendations will enable implementation of the approved budget item [No. 68] "Office Estate Rationalisation" within the Medium-Term Financial Strategy.
3. It is further recommended that the future of the Westfields site is managed by the Economy and Growth Committee, with a minimum requirement to achieve a financial return that is adequate to support the WorkplaCE project.
4. The approach contributes to the strategic aims and objectives set out in the Council's Corporate Plan 2021-25, by: supporting a sustainable financial future for the council, through service development, improvement, and transformation, reducing our impact on our environment, and to be carbon neutral by 2025.

Executive Summary

5. The Medium-Term Financial Strategy 2023 to 2027 included a proposal for:

“Rationalisation of the Council’s office space buildings to reflect increased hybrid working, and to secure reduction of business rates and holding costs. Also targeting additional Carbon benefits in retained buildings. Key assets in the North and South of the borough will be retained and invested in to provide modern workplaces for staff, Members and stakeholders. Consultation will also consider the option to relocate Macclesfield Library to the nearby Town Hall. Surplus assets will be considered for alternative use to generate income through rental or a capital receipt” (MTFS– approved February 2023).

6. Following the Corporate Policy Committee of 11 July 2023, approval to consult with trade unions, employees, third parties and members was secured on an option to close the Westfields Offices, Sandbach.

7. Employee consultation commenced on 24 July 2023 and concluded on 17 September 2023. This included an extension of time from 6 September to increase opportunities for responses from employees unable to contribute during the summer holiday period, especially term time employees. A report detailing the employee consultation process is provided at Appendix 1a.

8. Member consultation commenced on 8 September 2023 and concluded on 17 September 2023. A report detailing the member consultation is provided at Appendix 1b.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Corporate Policy Committee is recommended to:

1. Consider the results from the consultation with Cheshire East Council recognised trade unions, employees and members provided at Appendices 1a and 1b.
2. Approve the option to close the Westfields offices in Sandbach.
3. Note that the Head of Human Resources and Head of Democratic Services will progress further consultation with trade unions, employees, third parties and members, on the impact of closing the Westfields offices in Sandbach on those

groups as it relates to relocation within other areas of the corporate estate.

4. Note the findings of the market testing at Paragraph 21, and that the Head of Estates/ Executive Director of Place will report to the appropriate Committee on the future use of the Westfields Site in a timely manner to achieve best consideration from the asset.
5. Note that the Monitoring Officer will carry out all necessary communications to alert relevant individuals and organisations that the Post Room, located at Delamere House, Crewe, will be the registered address for all statutory correspondence.

Background

9. The detailed and historical background information can be found in the 11 July 2023 Corporate Policy Committee Report; please see Appendix 2.

Consultation and Engagement

10. Formal employee consultation commenced on 24 July 2023. This included an online survey for employees to complete, consultation and engagement with the trade unions, three drop-in sessions on Teams and the ability to respond via email to a dedicated WorkplaCE mailbox.
11. The employee consultation encompassed much of the summer holiday period and, because of employee feedback, the period was extended to 17th September 2023. This allowed employees, particularly those working on a term time only basis, to have the opportunity to participate in the consultation. A detailed report outlining the employee consultation is provided at Appendix 1a.
12. Members were consulted between 8th September and 17th September 2023. A detailed report outlining the member consultation is provided at Appendix 1b.
13. Several alternative options were identified during the consultation period. These are set out within Appendix 1a with appropriate responses provided in the 'Other Options Considered' section of this report (Paras 22 to 23). It is important for members to review the responses and alternative options put forward as part of their consideration of the recommendations.

14. The closure of the Westfields Offices will mostly impact employees and members. Subject to approval of recommendation 2, further and more detailed consultation will take place with Trade Unions as well as individuals and services impacted.
15. Recommendation 3 asks members to note that further consultation will be led by the Head of HR and Head of Democratic Services as appropriate. For both employees and members this will involve consultation on the impact of the decision, relocation within other areas of the corporate estate and any appropriate mitigation measures in this regard.
16. The Head of HR will work with Trade Unions and employees to manage the potential impact of new ways of working and changes in location for office-based work. The Head of Democratic Services will work with members and meeting Chairs to manage changes to office-based work as well as changes to locations for public meetings. This may require further use of the Council's wider estate or work with other property owners to accommodate meetings. The Executive Suite and Members Area would cease from Westfields and the proposed option would see these facilities replicated (and improved) in both Delamere House and Macclesfield Town Hall. The Executive Suite would be a bookable area that staff and members could access when not in use. The financial implications of all these changes are still expected to be managed within the MTFS proposals.
17. Engagement with partners continued throughout the Summer in line with recommendation 3.9 of the July report when members of the committee were asked to: *Note the ongoing partnership working with the NHS to provide joint accommodation that supports integrated working.* At present this work has not secured any lease arrangements between CEC and the NHS. Although future arrangements continue to be discussed this is unlikely to result in any significant joint use of collaborative space in the short term.
18. A comprehensive timeline of activity and communication plan will be developed to support consultation with staff, members and trade unions.

Reasons for Recommendations

19. The Corporate Policy Committee has responsibility, within the Constitution, to determine key cross-cutting policies and key plans that impact on more than one service committee.
20. The recommendations set out provide a way to ensure a consistent approach is taken to office rationalisation that achieves the

requirements set out in the MTFS. The approach will be supported with the appropriate policies to ensure staff and members are treated fairly.

21. In line with the recommendations from the July Committee meeting the Head of Estates has carried out soft market testing of the Westfields site. The requirement was to establish whether the site could realise sufficient funding for the WorkplaCE project. The approach involved contacting agents as well as reviewing professional catalogues and published economic indicators. The site is large and in a good location, so presents many options to release funding. Soft market testing identified that the site could realise the required funds, depending on what approach the Council takes to dealing with this site. The next steps, if the Committee decide to close the Westfields offices, will be to develop an options appraisal for consideration by the relevant Committee. Options could include sale, lease or re-purposing arrangements.

Other Options Considered

22.

Option	Impact	Risk
Do nothing	High	The MTFS would be adversely impacted by continuing to maintain offices with a much-reduced workforce operating in these assets where energy prices are increasing substantially. The investment in new ICT (Laptops) would not present value for money and the reputational risk to the council would be significantly impacted as retaining underutilised assets such as these would have a damaging effect on the environment and impact the ability to be carbon neutral by 2025.

23. Options provided by staff during the Consultation (to be read in conjunction with the wider feedback provided at Appendix 1a):

Option/Suggestion	Management Response
Close one floor of Westfields to council employees and use it to generate income by renting out space to businesses, holding	<p>Closing under-utilised floors in Council buildings saves £000's on utility bills. Recovering costs through leasing space to other organisations can also create additional financial benefits.</p> <p>However, the investment required to update the work environment and provide ICT equipment and</p>

<p>clinics, hosting partner services, hosting a family hub</p>	<p>infrastructure in the proposed retained offices, of Macclesfield Town Hall and Delamere House, could not be met through the income generated by leasing a single floor of Westfields.</p> <p>The retaining of Westfields would not achieve the approved MTFs savings in 2024 – 2026.</p>
<p>Provide workspaces in other council buildings, such as libraries, town halls, leisure centres and other smaller council buildings</p>	<p>Staff can work in alternative locations. The most effective locations are those that have access to the Council's secure network and all staff and members will be informed how they can identify the location of all such sites.</p> <p>Meeting rooms in venues such as Libraries and Leisure Centres are often used by third party organisations who pay fees to cover the Council's costs. Care must be taken to manage the risk of making savings in one area of the Council but reducing income in another area. In the next phase of Consultation (subject to the recommendations as set out in paras 3.1 – 3.3) the project will explore the options available to include a range of safe and accessible locations across the borough with access to corporate Wi-Fi and potential bookable workspaces.</p> <p>This option supports employees across all services. There remains a core need for office space but, as this is less than the current offer, this option does not impact on the recommendations.</p>
<p>Encourage more working from home, encourage people to only come into the office when needed</p>	<p>Applying the agreed WorkplaCE principles, we are encouraging Services to optimise outcomes with the provision of fixed and hybrid working environments with collaboration areas. One size does not fit all, and service areas will need to determine appropriate ways of working based on the needs of the business and its customers,</p> <p>Staff can use the new desk/room booking system to ensure when they need a dedicated space as</p>

	<p>appropriate.</p> <p>This option supports the MTFS business case by reducing carbon and expenditure. As employees still require office space the recommendations are not impacted by supporting this option too.</p>
<p>Close Delamere House instead, as the Delamere House building is not as good as Westfields, and it has no car parking</p>	<p>From the options appraisal and needs assessment undertaken with Heads of Service, Delamere House provides the space required for the working principles to be embedded. The location of Delamere House is also closer to where most Council employees and customers live (<i>source data Establishment by Post Code for staff working from Municipal Buildings, Delamere House, Westfields and Macclesfield Town Hall c2020</i>).</p> <p>From the soft market testing and analysis carried out, closing Delamere House would not generate the level of financial returns required to invest in the retained corporate estate to provide the work environment and infrastructure required.</p> <p>Improvements have been possible to Delamere House to improve the standard and carbon efficiency of Delamere House. This has been funded through external grants.</p> <p>Free parking provides a benefit to employees at the Westfields site, so this option would continue to offer that benefit. But otherwise, this option does not achieve the policy or financial benefits associated with the recommendations of the report.</p>
<p>Close Municipal Buildings instead</p>	<p>Municipal Buildings provides good office accommodation, with potential income benefits from disposal. But this option has been superseded by the WorkplaCE project approach to Municipal Buildings approved at Economy and Growth Committee in March 2023.</p> <p>Municipal Buildings is being repurposed as the Technical and Digital Innovation Centre (TADIC) from Spring 2024. This means that CEC will have</p>

	limited space available in the Municipal Buildings in the future and could not realise the MTFS financial targets.
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Implications and Comments

Monitoring Officer/Legal

Legal

24. Please see confidential Appendix 4 which contains legally privileged advice.

Consultation has taken place with trade unions and employees on the option to close Westfields. Feedback on the proposals can be seen in the table at paragraph 18 on page 5 which includes alternative options put forward and the Council's responses to these in discussions with the trade unions.

25. All consultation feedback should be considered before any final decision is made. If the decision is made to close Westfields, there will need to be on-going individual consultation with staff on the impact of the relocation on individual circumstances and mitigation methods considered.
26. The Council is under a legal obligation to ensure public money is used properly and the report evidences that rationalisation of the estate will assist in meeting that obligation. The consultation will help inform the final decision and allow all views to be appropriately considered.
27. If the decision is made to close Westfields, further consideration will need to be given to any potential change in health and safety obligations and associated costs (for example provision of suitable equipment for home working) if there is an increase in the amount of time employees spend working from home.

Section 151 Officer/Finance

28. The Council's 2022-26 Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) included a savings target for 'Estates Transformation – Office Accommodation' of £460,000. Recognising the impact of the pandemic and the subsequent review of the requirements of this project has led to

a reset. Savings were achieved through this project as part of the ongoing activities of the Facilities Management Team. This included procurement and efficient consumption of utilities and efficient maintenance programmes. The Council's 2023-27 MTFS sets out the revised budgets for this project. The increased budget in 2023/24 recognises the need to remove unachievable savings from the 2022 to 2026 MTFS. Savings in 2024/25 and beyond reflect the financial benefits of a reduction in the estate. The current MTFS calculations are based on:

- Estimated running costs to assets in scope c£2,098,000 in 2023/24
- 2023/24 No anticipated reduction in the occupied office/workspace and associated subsequent running costs of assets in scope, +£210k relates to the Neighbourhood Estates Review (£260k) which is now deferred plus anticipated income from tenant(s) c£50k.
- 2024/23 A reduction in the occupied office/workspace and associated subsequent running costs by c26% estimated to be -£550k.
- 2025/26 A further reduction in the occupied office/workspace and associated subsequent running costs c7%. Estimated be -£150k.

2023/24	2024/25	2025/26
£210k	-£550k	-£150k

29. The estimated costs of the refurbishment of the offices in scope, including associated ICT costs, will require funding from the savings generated from the repurposing of assets. The ED Place will take this into consideration when producing options for repurposed assets. The estimated costs of the project are in the region of £2.2m. This will be subject to further review as part of the consultation process, but the clear principle is that any costs must be balanced by associated financial benefits from the repurposed estate. The ED Place may take action to minimise net costs through arrangements with 3rd parties to lease surplus office space.
30. Costs are expected to be split approximately 25% on ICT, 70% on refurbishment and furniture and 5% on management of change and

project management support. The costs below are estimated against an option as an indication of affordability and may be subject to inflation and or market conditions and be subject to further review.

Item(s)	Comments	Estimated Costs
Standard workstation - Monitors & Peripherals	Costs are for monitors and peripherals including docking and secure cabling to an anchor point. Estimated additional workstations required as some new monitors have already been provided.	£122,500
Fixed workstation - Desktop PCs	Costs based fixed workstations, i.e. Desktop PC, peripherals and secure cabling.	£80,230
Room /desk Booking System	Estimated costs will depend on phase 2 requirements capture from the Facilities team (est.300 hours) and roll out to other services, e.g. Childrens Services, (est. 240 hours)	£34,000
Large Meeting room equipment	Cost based on equipment similar to what has already been provided in 3 of the core buildings. Please note there is a MS Teams Meeting Room Subscription Licence = £11per Month Estimate based on 7 rooms	£42,000
Medium Meeting room equipment	Cost based on equipment similar to what has already been provided in 3 of the core buildings. Please note there is a MS Teams Meeting Room Subscription Licence = £11per Month Estimate based on 7 rooms	£30,450

ICT Resource costs	For project management and technical resources for the roll-out of the required equipment and solutions, plus removal and re-allocation of equipment from sites to be decommissioned. This estimated cost is based on the current cost model for charging for ICT resources.	£94,500
Site closure - decommissioning of ICT equipment. Per site.	Westfields - £74K Circuit cancellation fee Crewe Muni - £20k Circuit cancellation fee	£94,000
Sub Total ICT Related Costs (minimum estimate)		c£497,680
Item(s)	Comments	Estimated Costs
Delamere House	Refurbishment to include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Building works to remodel Reception Area (Delamere House) • internal decoration to all floors including walls & flooring. • Includes a 10% Contingency & a 10% associated Fees 	£1,375,000
FM & Removal Costs	Costs to relocate items from Westfields & Crewe Municipal Offices	£125,000
Project Delivery Costs	Costs associated with delivery of the project, post approval(s)	£100,000
Sub Total FM & Asset Related Costs (minimum estimate)		£1,600,000
CCTV Hub	Potential costs associated with the relocation of the CCTV Hub in Westfields identified as part of the consultation process in August 2023.	c£100,000
Total Estimated Costs		c£2,197,680

31. Until an asset is disposed of or repurposed, a minimum of 70% of the annual running costs would be required to maintain the asset. This will be reflected in the Council's MTFS as part of the budget monitoring reported to the Economy and Growth Committee.
32. Current estimated reductions in running costs in relation to a disposed asset will produce annual net savings, after cost of borrowing and estimated increases in running costs, beginning the year after the disposal of the asset.

Policy

33. The proposal within this report supports achievement of the "Open" and "Green" elements of our vision and the following specific priorities in the Corporate Plan: 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, reduce impact on the environment and to be a carbon neutral council by 2025.
34. The proposal also supports our Workforce Strategy 2021-2025 identified actions to "embed modern and agile working practices to support future ways of working" and to "introduce an agile working policy to facilitate an environmentally considerate, post Covid working environment that promotes a healthy work-life balance."
35. It is understood that the recommendations contained in this paper will result in changes to travel behaviour by staff, when commuting to and from work and also when undertaking business mileage. In response the council intends to carry out a review of existing staff travel and parking provisions and make recommendations to this committee (CPC) in quarter four of this financial year in the form of an action plan which will form the basis for sustainable travel aligned to the Council's accommodation strategy.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

36. Initial equality, diversity and inclusion implications were identified through the "Spring Back Together" events in May and June 2022. Generally, staff recognise that a hybrid working model supports greater workforce inclusivity.

37. The proposals particularly in supporting staff with physical and mental disabilities to balance health conditions with working, for example being able to work from home when this does not impact on service delivery. Staff with caring responsibilities are also supported to work flexibly, and this flexibility should also benefit customers, through extended service delivery hours where possible. In developing a refreshed working environment for staff there may be opportunities to enhance facilities for those with protected characteristics, for example, by adapting wellbeing rooms so that they may also function as multi faith prayer spaces.
38. There may also be some negative equality, diversity and inclusion implications of the options for any staff who may have additional travel and accessibility pressures if they are required to travel to another council building that is further away from their current base.
39. The staff consultation identified some concerns, particularly from female members of staff, regarding the safety aspects of walking to the car parks adjacent to Delamere House. This feedback has been shared with colleagues working on the transformation of parking across Cheshire East to understand what mitigating actions can be implemented to reduce these concerns.
40. An Equality Impact Assessment on the proposal can be found at Appendix 3 which has been reviewed and updated following staff consultation. From the Phase 1 Consultation with trade unions and staff, no further specific equality, diversity and inclusion issues were identified. If an approval to declare Westfield as a surplus asset was reached, there would be individual consultation to understand and, where needed, mitigate against the impact on an individual level. At this stage, given the size and make-up of the workforce, it is anticipated that there may be staff with caring responsibilities and disabilities who may be negatively affected by the decision as a result of increased distance and travel time to the office (impacting on working time and transport options), and lack of on-site parking. As part of the individual consultation, there would need to be careful consideration for appropriate measures to mitigate against the impact on them.

Human Resources

41. If the decision is taken to close Westfields, a further consultation (Phase Two) will be required. This will be individual consultation in respect of the impact on affected employees due to a change of work base and with the trade unions.

42. The Phase Two consultation will consider mitigation to reduce the impact on affected staff where possible.
43. The Relocation and Excess Travel Policy applies to those employees whose work base is moved because of circumstances beyond their control and at the direction of management, but who are not forced to move their homes.
44. Excess travel allowance will be paid to employees who have had their base changed because of organisational change and where the distance between their new base is greater than the distance between home and their old base for a maximum of two years, based on a maximum of two journeys per day.
45. The effects of the relocation may be mitigated by re-evaluating the working arrangements to consider whether flexible and mobile working solutions could be applied.
46. Excess travel costs will be paid but not parking costs at the new base. However, where there are parking spaces available at the new location, the relocated employee will be reassessed against the relevant parking criteria to determine their eligibility for parking. Consideration will need to be given to the separate consultation in relation to proposals for car parking across the borough.

Risk Management

47. There is robust governance in place for this project, where risk is identified and managed at Project Board, the Brighter Futures Programme Board and more recently at Corporate Leadership Team (CLT) under the MTFS proposals.
48. There is a risk that the asset will not be disposed of in a timely fashion in the current financial climate, which would have the implication that the funding would not be received to implement the project.
49. There is a risk that staff living closely to the Westfields site may leave the organisation. This risk will be mitigated through individual discussions with impacted staff to understand the impact on them and agree any necessary mitigations.

Rural Communities

50. No implications for our rural communities.

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

51. Teams from Children and Families have been impacted by the closure of Cledford House, however, full consultation had taken place and teams have moved to Delamere House and Macclesfield Town Hall as appropriate.

Public Health

52. No implications for Public Health.

Climate Change

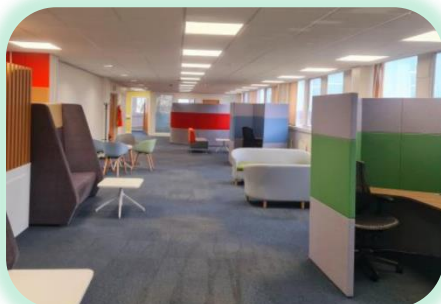
53. The decision to close a corporate asset would see a reduction in the carbon footprint and associated CO² emissions.
54. Reduced travel between meetings, together with potential increased use of car club activity, would give savings on the Council carbon footprint.

Access to Information	
Contact Officer:	Alex Thompson, Director of Financial and Customer Services, alex.thompson@cheshireeast.gov.uk,
Appendices:	Appendix 1a Staff Consultation Report, WorkplaCE Appendix 1b Member Consultation, WorkplaCE Appendix 3 Equality Impact Assessment Appendix 4 Legal Implications – (Part 2 item)
Background Papers:	Appendix 2 Corporate Policy Committee Report 11.07.23

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Summary of responses to Cheshire East Council's

WorkplaCE Consultation 2023



Executive Summary

Introduction

Between 24 July and 17 September 2023 Cheshire East Council conducted phase 1 of a WorkplaCE Consultation. The purpose of phase 1 of the consultation was to gather initial views on the potential closure of Westfield Offices in Sandbach, with staff potentially being relocated to other corporate offices within the borough.

On 6 September 2023 the consultation closing date was extended until 17 September 2023, to enable extra responses from members of staff who are only employed during school term time.

In total there were 795 consultation engagements, including 578 online survey responses, 216 online event attendees, and 1 email response. These response numbers include a total of 61 extra responses which were received during the period the consultation was extended between 6 and 17 September.

Consultation responses were invited from anyone who wished to respond – the consultation was not run as a referendum nor as a statistically robust random sample survey.

About the survey respondents

Of the survey respondents:

- 45% had Westfields as their assigned workplace, with 41% assigned to Delamere House or Macclesfield Town Hall.
- 63% go to their assigned workplace at least once a week.
- 86% travel to work by car, with 10% travelling by public transport, on foot or by bike.

Although many survey respondents live within Cheshire East, significant proportions of respondents live outside the borough in places such as Stoke, Chester, Ellesmere Port, Greater Manchester, North Wales, the Peak District, and even as far away as places such as Lincoln and Hereford.

Level of support for the closure of Westfields

Overall, 47% of survey respondents supported the closure of Westfields, with 35% opposed to it. This gave overall net support for the proposal of +12%.

Support for the closure of Westfields was dependent on employee type – respondents more likely to support the closure of Westfields included those:

- Based in Delamere House, Crewe (+51% net support)
- Working in the “Place” directorate (+49% net support)
- Living in:
 - “Peak District” (+60% net support)
 - “Crewe, Nantwich” (+44% net support)
 - “Chester, Ellesmere Port, Neston” (+35% net support)
 - “Macclesfield” (+28% net support)
- Working in the teams:
 - “Corporate; ICT” (+80% support)
 - “Corporate; Financial support and procurement” (+78% support)
 - “Place; Housing” (+74% support)

Reasons given for supporting the proposal included that respondents felt the Westfields office is underutilised and often empty, and that it will help save money.

However, it was noted that support for the proposal is dependent on relocation specifics, particularly depending on where people are relocated to.

Level of opposition to the closure of Westfields

Opposition to the closure of Westfields was also dependent on employee type – respondents more likely to oppose the closure of Westfields included those:

- Working in the teams:
 - “Corporate; Legal Services” (-69% opposition)
 - “People - Children's services; Children's Development and Partnerships” (-50% opposition)
 - “Corporate; Human Resources” (-35% opposition)
 - “People - Adult Social Care and Health; Adult Social Care (South)” (-35% opposition)
- Living in:
 - “Sandbach” (-46% net opposition)
 - “Stoke, Stone, Newcastle” (-16% net opposition)
- Currently based in Westfields (-18% net opposition)

Reasons given for opposing the proposal included that respondents felt:

- Westfields is central, accessible, and people will have to travel further to get to another office
- Westfields has good and free car parking
- Westfields is a useful and versatile space, and a modern office
- The closure of Westfields and relocation could impact employee wellbeing, both mentally and financially

Relocation preference for Westfields staff

65% of current Westfields staff that completed the survey would prefer to be relocated to the South of the borough (Crewe), and 20% would prefer to be relocated to the North of the borough (Macclesfield), if Westfield were to close.

However, the relocation preference of employees was often split within individual teams. For example, 65% of “Corporate; Human Resources” staff that completed the survey would prefer to be relocated to the South (Crewe), compared to 25% who would prefer to be relocated to the North (Macclesfield) if Westfields were closed.

Suggested alternatives to the proposal

Respondents suggested a number of alternatives to the closure of Westfields which they felt should be considered, including:

- Close one floor of Westfields to council employees and use it to generate income by renting out space to businesses and other organisations
- Provide workspaces in other council buildings, such as libraries, town halls, leisure centres and other smaller council buildings, including for hotdesking
- Encourage more working from home, and change contracts to reflect this
- Close Delamere House or Municipal Buildings instead, as those buildings are not as good as Westfields, and have worse car parking

The WorkplaCE principles

Respondents listed things they felt were missing from the WorkplaCE principles, including:

- Staff considerations including:
 - the financial impact of this proposal on staff
 - staff wellbeing
 - career development / progression
 - ensuring there are enough staff to cover workloads
 - improving the council culture
 - indicating whether staff are being encouraged back into the office or not

A suggestion was also received by email that the council should reintroduce staff canteens to help improve the culture within the council – see email 1 for detail

- Ensuring the work locations are accessible for staff and residents, and that they have ample car parking
- Ensuring office spaces are fit for purpose, accessible, inclusive, flexible and allow for collaboration, sharing and learning

- Ensuring IT / office equipment is fit for purpose and supports flexible working

Summary of event feedback

216 staff and trade union representatives attended one of a number of online events held during the consultation. The following themes were raised at these events:

Car parking – It is felt there is a lack of convenient car parking provision at alternative locations, particularly Delamere House. Poor parking provision adds stress to journeys and to the working life and puts people off attending offices. Poor parking provision also impacts on flexible working if a first come, first served approach is taken. Will there be relocation mileage? Will parking permits be issued, and if so how? A bad car parking offer may lead to a loss of staff.

Poor equipment / ICT in offices – It is felt there is a lack of equipment such as monitors, keyboards, mice and chairs across the estate. There is poor lighting in some offices. Poor equipment in offices puts people off attending.

Access to offices within local communities – Some staff, especially frontline staff (e.g. social workers) need local offices to be able to pop into to access toilets, refreshments, printers and to have confidential conversations. Closing Westfields would leave a large area in the middle of the borough without any office.

Consultation cynicism – This decision is seen as a fait accompli, that a decision has already been made.

Working from home Vs Working in offices - What is the council policy on this? Are we encouraging people back into offices or not? If yes, how does closing Westfields help that? Working from home is lonely for some people. The booking system / poor ICT equipment is a barrier to people coming in. Concern the new Chief Executive might want people to start coming into offices more.

Conclusions

Consultation response

The response to the consultation has been fairly good, though it should be noted that it is likely those who responded were more likely to be those based in Westfields and those who are opposed to the proposed closure of Westfields.

+12% overall net support for the proposals

It is important to note the overall net positive support of +12% for the proposal to close Westfields, indicating a general acceptance among many for the need to reduce the office estate and make savings.

Strong opposition to the proposals from some

However, it is clear that there is strong opposition to the proposal to close Westfields among some groups of staff, with 53% of current Westfields staff who responded to the survey opposed to its closure.

It is noted that the strongest levels of opposition are seen among those who would be most inconvenienced by relocation, especially for those who might have to travel further, who might have a less convenient journey, or for those who might have to spend more to get to work.

It is clear that for a certain proportion of staff the closure of Westfields and subsequent relocation would have a negative mental and financial impact on them, and could lead to employees leaving the council altogether. The closure of Westfields may reduce the appeal of working for the council.

If Westfields is to close, the council should explore how to mitigate the impacts of this, perhaps by looking at how to make the journey from areas such as Sandbach and Stoke to alternative offices easier, by looking at how to ensure car parking provision at alternative offices is plentiful and easily accessible, and by looking at providing smaller office spaces in towns around the borough that teams could access instead of Westfields, especially for front line teams such as social care teams who need a local base, and for teams strongly opposed to relocation from Sandbach such as Legal Services. The council should also put in place measures to assist the wellbeing of those who might be adversely affected by relocation.

The South (Crewe) is the preferred relocation destination

It is noted that if Westfields were to close, indications are that staff would prefer to relocate to the South (Crewe) of the borough at a ratio of more than 3:1 compared to the North (Macclesfield) – Does the council have enough office provision in the South of the borough to accommodate that volume of relocation?

Relocation preference splits within individual teams

It is also noted that there are significant splits within individual teams over relocation preference, with some members of the same team preferring to be relocated to the South of the borough, and some preferring to be relocated to the North. Some staff suggested that people working from home much of the time should be assigned to the council office closest to their home address.

Is the council proposing a flexible relocation policy, willing to let members of the same teams relocate to different offices? Or will the council relocate entire teams to specific offices? If the latter, this may lead to greater opposition to the relocation process, could lead to greater turmoil within the council and make staff retention even more difficult.

Other issues raised during the consultation

A number of key themes arose during the consultation outside the scope of the closure of Westfields, which may need addressing within a wider cultural review of the council.

These key themes included:

- Staff wellbeing and career development
- Perceptions of poor car parking provision in our main towns, which it is felt doesn't allow for flexible working
- Comments on the poor quality of ICT and office equipment across the estate
- Questions around what the council's policy towards working from home Vs coming into the office is
- That the Cledford House closure and relocation had not being well managed
- That Active Travel and better transport links should be promoted, with large proportions of staff travelling to work by car as opposed via public transport, on foot or by bike.

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Report produced 18 September 2023 by Ben Buckley of the Research and Consultation Team, Cheshire East Council. Email RandC@cheshireeast.gov.uk for further information.

Introduction

Purpose of the consultation

Between 24 July and 17 September 2023 Cheshire East Council conducted phase 1 of a WorkplaCE Consultation.

The purpose of phase 1 of the consultation was to gather initial views on the potential reduction of council office space, through the closure of Westfield Offices in Sandbach, with staff potentially then being relocated to other corporate offices within the borough.

The decision to consult on this proposal had been agreed at [Full Council on 22 February 2023](#), with this proposal included within [the Medium Term Financial Strategy \(MTFS\) for 2023 to 2027](#). The proposal included within the MTFS was the “Rationalisation of the council’s office space buildings to reflect increased hybrid working, and to secure reduction of business rates and holding costs. Key assets in the North and South of the borough will be retained and invested in to provide modern workplaces for staff, Members and stakeholders”.

Consultation methodology

The consultation was promoted through direct emails to all council staff, through promotion on the council’s staff webpages (centranet), and through word of mouth via managers.

On 6 September 2023 the consultation closing date was extended until 17 September 2023, to enable extra responses from members of staff who are only employed during school term time.

Consultation responses were invited from anyone who wished to respond – the consultation was not run as a referendum nor as a statistically robust random sample survey.

Staff could give their feedback either by filling in a short online survey, by attending an online event hosted by the Director of Finance & Customer Services, by writing an email or letter, or by giving their feedback to their manager or Trade Union representative.

Consultation responses

In total there were 795 consultation engagements, including:

- 578 online survey responses
- 216 online event attendees

- 1 email response

These response numbers include a total of 61 extra responses which were received during the period the consultation was extended between 6 and 17 September.

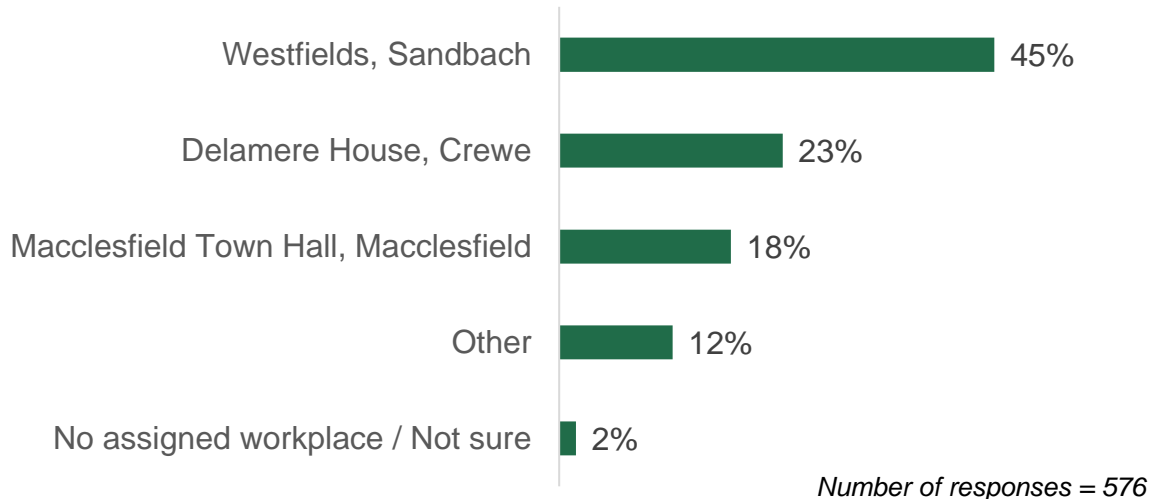
Throughout the report, survey analysis of questions has only been presented by individual council team, or home town, if there were at least 10 responses for that team or home town. This has been done to protect the anonymity of individual respondents.

Survey respondents – Current behaviours

Assigned workplaces

45% of survey respondents had Westfields as their assigned workplace, 23% had Delamere House, while 18% had Macclesfield Town Hall as theirs.

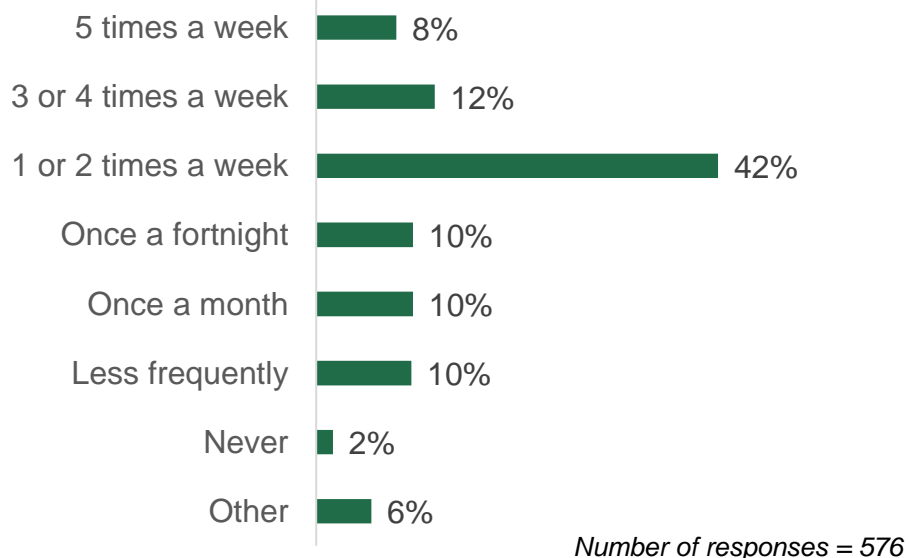
Which of the following Cheshire East Council offices is your assigned workplace, even if you work from home most of the time?



Frequency of office visits

21% of survey respondents go to their assigned workplace at least 3 times a week, with 42% going 1 or 2 times a week, 30% go less frequently, while 2% never go to their assigned workplace.

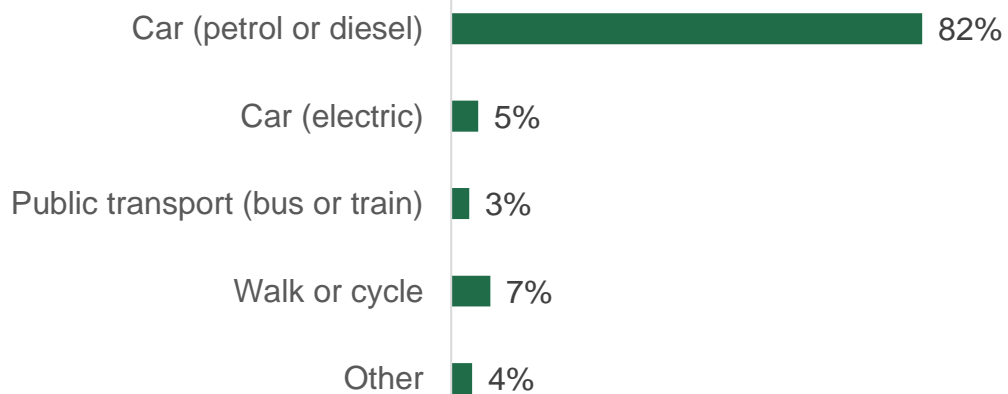
Generally speaking, how often do you go to your assigned workplace for work purposes?



Method of travel

A very high proportion of survey respondents, 86%, travel to work by car. 10% travel to work by public transport, on foot or by bike.

How do you usually travel to your assigned workplace when you do go?

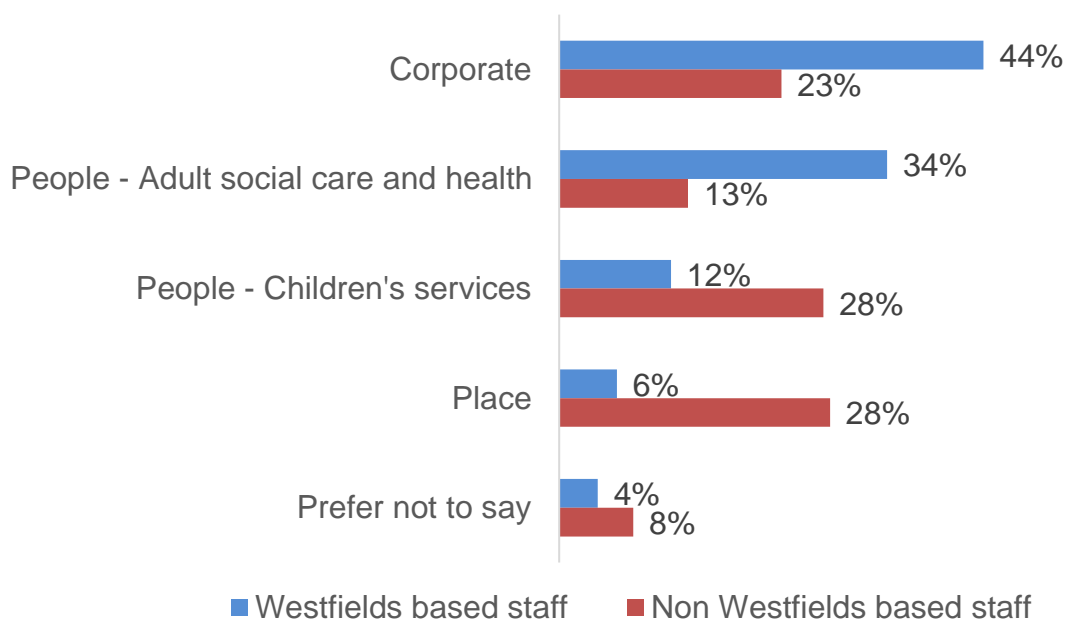


Number of responses = 575

Directorate of Westfields staff

44% of survey respondents based in Westfields work in the "Corporate" directorate, while 34% of Westfields staff work in the "People – Adult Social Care and Health" directorate.

Which Directorate within the council do you work? *By work location*



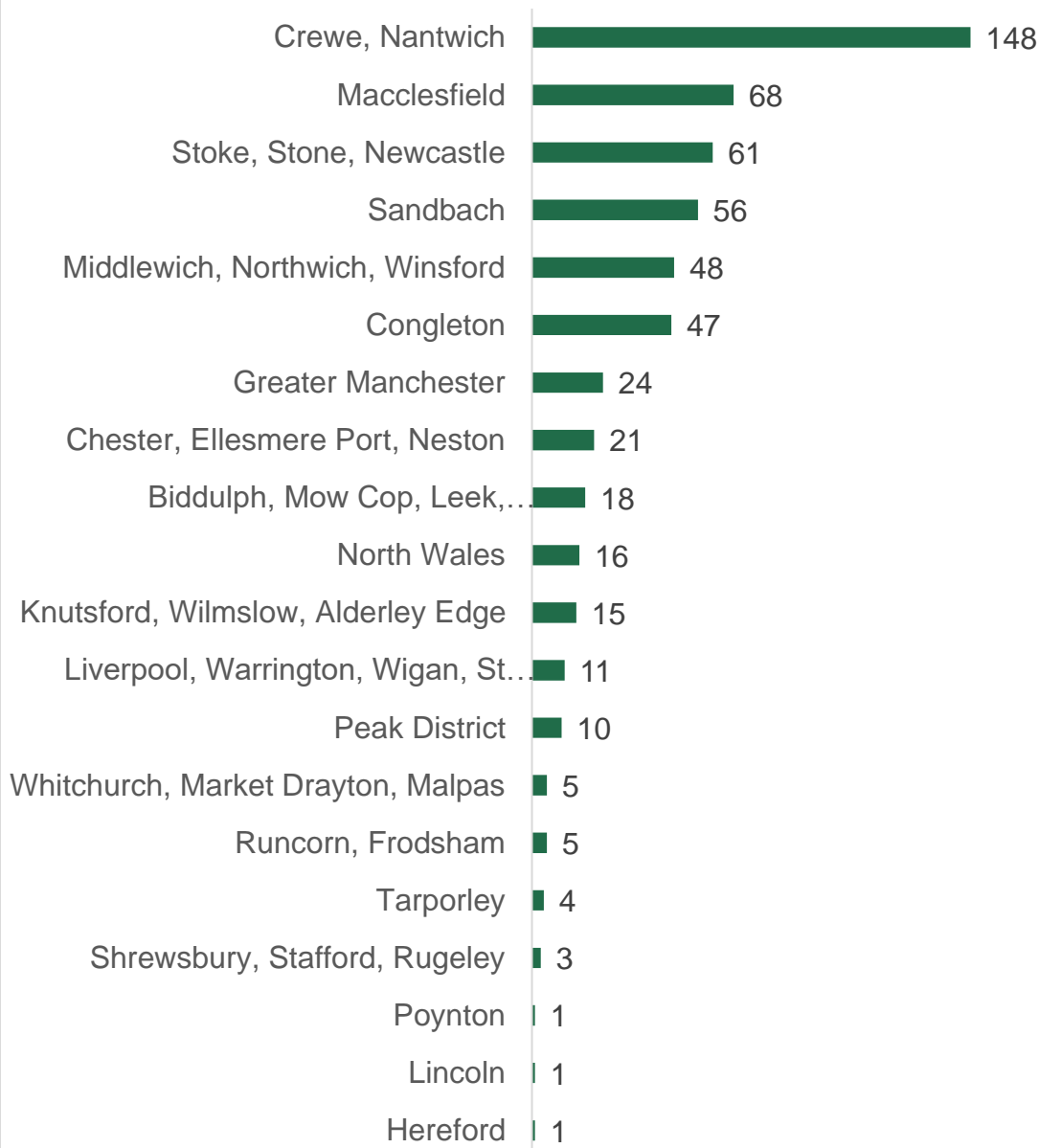
Number of responses = 547

Home town locations

Many survey respondents live in one of the Cheshire East towns of “Crewe” (148), “Macclesfield” (68), “Sandbach” (56), “Middlewich, Northwich, Winsford” (48), or “Congleton” (47).

However, many survey respondents live in areas outside Cheshire East, including “Stoke, Stone, Newcastle” (61), “Greater Manchester” (24), “Chester, Ellesmere Port, Neston” (21), “North Wales” (16), the Peak District (10), Lincoln (1) and Hereford (1).

Repondent home town (grouped where convenient):



Number of responses = 563

Survey respondents – Support and opposition to the closure of Westfields

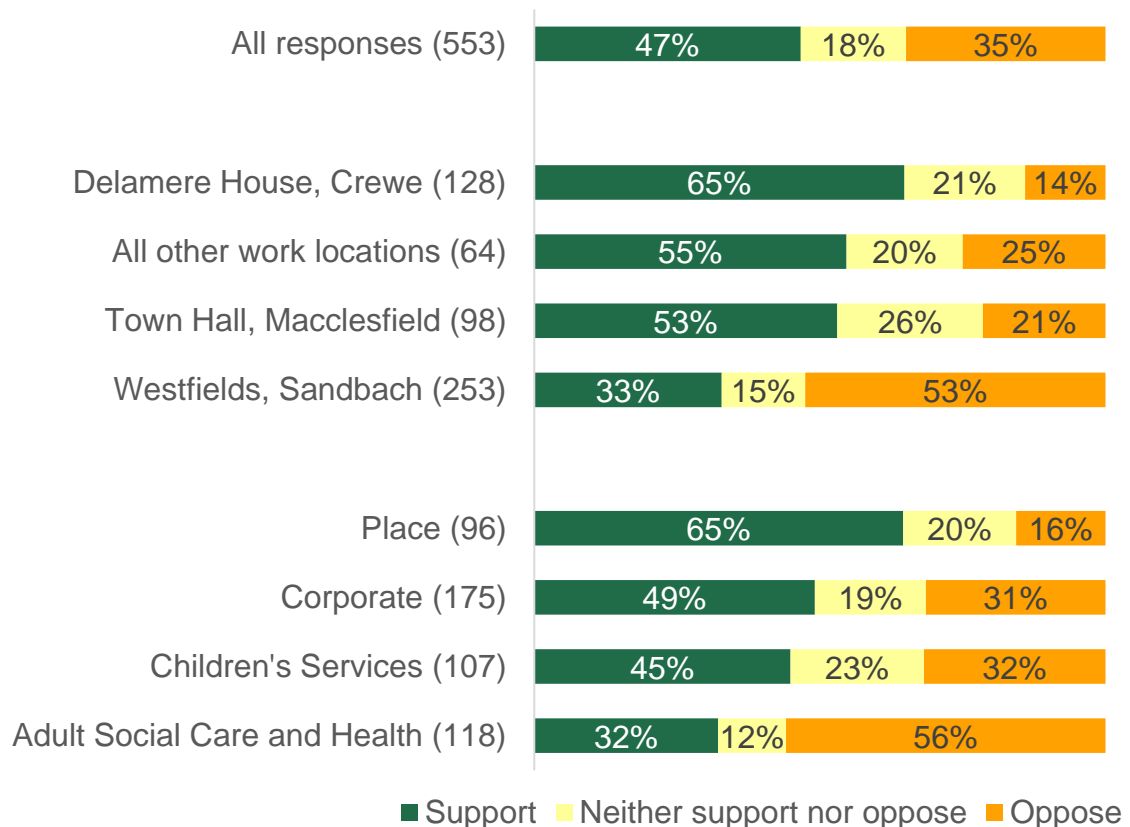
Overall level of support / opposition to the proposal

Overall, 47% of survey respondents supported the proposal to close Westfields offices in Sandbach, with 35% opposed to this proposal. This gave overall net support for the proposal of +12%.

Survey respondents currently based in Westfields were most likely to oppose the proposal to close this office, with 53% of those currently based in Westfields opposed to its closure, giving an overall -20% net opposition to the proposal. Those based in Delamere House were most likely to support the proposal, with net support of +51%.

Survey respondents in the “Place” directorate has the strongest net support for the proposal of +49%, while survey respondents in the “People – Adult Social Care and Health” directorate had strongest net opposition to the proposal of -24%.

Generally speaking, how strongly would you support or oppose a proposal to close Westfield offices in Sandbach?



Number of responses in brackets

Support and opposition to the proposal by service / team

The individual teams most opposed to the proposal to close Westfields offices included:

- Corporate; Legal Services (-69% net opposition)
- People – Children's Services; Children's Development and Partnership (-50% net opposition)
- Corporate; Human Resources (-35% net opposition)
- People - Adult social care and health; Adult social care (south) (-35% net opposition)

Service; Team	% support	% neither support nor oppose	% oppose	Net support / opposition	No. of responses
Corporate; ICT	87%	7%	7%	80%	16
Corporate; Financial support and procurement	83%	13%	4%	78%	23
Place; Housing	79%	16%	5%	74%	20
Corporate; Business change	67%	15%	19%	48%	27
People - Children's services; Education partnership and pupil support	50%	40%	10%	40%	11
Corporate; Customer services	63%	13%	25%	38%	25
Place; Development management	58%	17%	25%	33%	14
Corporate; Audit and risk	42%	33%	25%	17%	14
People - Children's services; Special education needs and disabilities	50%	14%	36%	14%	14
People - Children's services; Preventative services	53%	6%	41%	12%	17
People - Children's services; Prefer not to say	44%	22%	33%	11%	10
People - Adult social care and health; Adult social care	43%	21%	36%	7%	18
Corporate; Governance and democratic services	35%	20%	45%	-10%	20
People - Adult social care and health; Commissioning	35%	18%	47%	-12%	17
People - Children's services; Cared for children and care leavers	31%	25%	44%	-13%	16
People - Adult social care and health; Care4CE	31%	23%	46%	-15%	13
People - Adult social care and health; Public health	38%	0%	62%	-23%	13

People - Adult social care and health; Adult social care (south)	30%	4%	65%	-35%	25
Corporate; Human resources	15%	35%	50%	-35%	20
People - Children's services; Children's development and partnerships	10%	30%	60%	-50%	10
Corporate; Legal services	6%	19%	75%	-69%	16

Support and opposition to the proposal by home town

Survey respondents who lived in the following areas were more likely to support the proposal to close Westfields offices:

- Peak District (+60% net support)
- Crewe, Nantwich (+44% net support)
- Chester, Ellesmere Port, Neston (+35% net support)

Survey respondents who lived in the following areas were more likely to oppose the proposal to close Westfields offices:

- Sandbach (-46% net opposition)
- Stoke, Stone, Newcastle (-16% net opposition)

Respondent postal town	% support	% neither support nor oppose	% oppose	Net support / opposition	No. of responses
Peak District	80%	0%	20%	60%	10
Crewe, Nantwich	63%	19%	19%	44%	148
Chester, Ellesmere Port, Neston	55%	25%	20%	35%	21
Macclesfield	51%	27%	22%	28%	68
Liverpool, Warrington, Wigan, St Helens	55%	18%	27%	27%	11
North Wales	53%	13%	33%	20%	16
Knutsford, Wilmslow, Alderley Edge	43%	21%	36%	7%	15
Biddulph, Mow Cop, Leek, Kids Grove	44%	11%	44%	0%	18
Congleton	41%	16%	43%	-2%	47
Greater Manchester	33%	29%	38%	-4%	24
Middlewich, Northwich, Winsford	35%	20%	46%	-11%	48
Stoke, Stone, Newcastle	33%	19%	48%	-16%	61
Sandbach	22%	9%	69%	-46%	56

Reasons for support for the proposal

Survey respondents were asked to give reasons why they supported the proposal to close Westfields office. 296 comments were made in reply, and these comments have been summarised into the below categories.

If you wish to, explain why you support this proposal:	
Westfields office space is underutilised, surplus to requirements, and always empty	68
It will save money / save on costs. Keeping it open would be a waste of public money	52
Support for the proposal is dependent on relocation specifics – Which office we are reassigned to, what facilities there are like and the quality of the offices, as well as whether there is ample parking provision at the new office	38
General support for the closure, even though Westfields suits me and I use it. Generally understand the need for the closure and support it	33
Utilising free space elsewhere (North or South) would be more effective. This would also bring teams together in 2 locations rather than 3.	27
I mainly work from home, more people are working from home now, and so the proposal will have less of an impact than it would have pre-covid. More people can work remotely.	22
I dislike the building, it is an unpleasant environment, has no historic importance and is bland	19
The land where Westfields is located would be the most attractive to buyers, would sell for most, and has most commercial potential	16
This will reduce the carbon footprint and environmental impact of maintaining an empty building	7
Crewe / Macclesfield – These are good / better alternative locations	7
Crewe / Macclesfield – These have good / better public transport provision and links	4
What will happen to the building / hope put to better use	3

Reasons for opposition to the proposal

Survey respondents were asked to give reasons why they opposed the proposal to close Westfields office. 520 comments were made in reply, and these comments have been summarised into the below categories.

If you wish to, explain why you oppose this proposal:	
Westfields is central, accessible, and people will have to travel further to get to another office. It is centrally accessible for large teams. Westfields is known as the HQ. The easily accessible location is a perk of the job for those that live close.	133
Westfields has good, plentiful and free car parking, you have to pay to park elsewhere. Taking this away would have an impact on the employee offer.	91

Westfields is a useful and versatile space – It has good facilities and good / large meeting rooms, it does blue badge assessments and is a “key services” workbase. It is a good drop in place during the day to access printing etc. It is the nicest workspace the council has, with light and modern offices. It is a good building to meet customers and service users in. Westfields also has good storage.	80
The closure of Westfields and relocation of staff could impact employee wellbeing, both mentally and financially	65
The other office buildings will become overcrowded	25
Closing Westfields doesn't support collaborative working / cohesion	18
It might lead to even more people working from home more, which would be a negative	15
It will increase the carbon footprint and go against the green agenda as it will mean more travelling (e.g. across town to print then back to Sandbach to visit service users)	15
I would struggle to carry equipment and bags if have to travel further	14
Close Delamere House instead as that is old, in need of repair and costs more to maintain. No matter what you spend on Delamere the building is still depressing	14
There needs to be an accessible alternative for local residents	13
This could force people to leave the council to find better alternatives	13
It would have a negative impact the Sandbach's economy	13
Utilise empty space at Westfields instead – Rent out office space / hubs	10
Building Westfields, then closing it, would be a waste of money and would not look good	1

Neutral comments made about the proposal

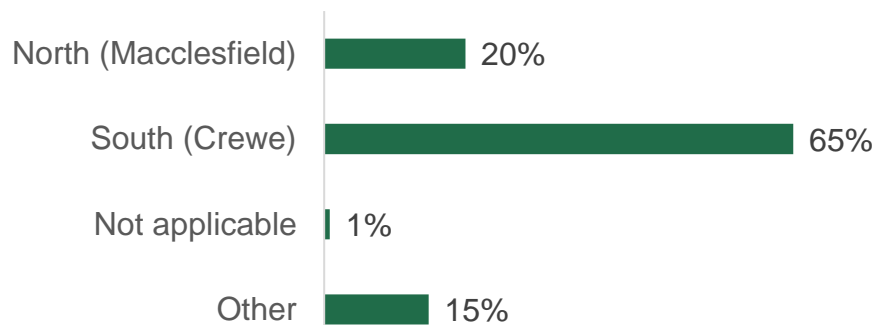
Survey respondents were asked to give reasons why they supported or opposed the proposal to close Westfields office. 12 neutral comments were made in reply, and these comments have been summarised into the below categories.

If you wish to, explain why you support or oppose this proposal:	
Westfields office use assessments used to support this proposal were conducted during an unrepresentative period, either during the pandemic or in its aftermath	4
Put in place a better working structure around coming into the office and around use of office space / home working	4
More detail and clarity is needed on the proposals	2
Transition to new office needs to be managed properly, including an induction, welcome pack and communication of the layout	1
Provide better laptops and homeworking equipment	1

Survey respondents – Relocation preference for Westfields staff

65% of current Westfields staff that completed the survey would prefer to be relocated to the South of the borough (Crewe), and 20% would prefer to be relocated to the North of the borough (Macclesfield), if Westfield were to close.

If the Westfields office were to be closed, would you prefer to be relocated to one of the remaining offices in the North (Macclesfield) or South (Crewe) of the borough? *Current Westfields staff only*



Number of responses = 255

The relocation preference of employees was usually split within individual teams, for example:

- 65% of “Human Resources” staff that completed the survey would prefer to be relocated to the South (Crewe), compared to 25% who would prefer to be relocated to the North (Macclesfield) if Westfields were closed

Relocation preference, by Service; Team	North (Macclesfield)	South (Crewe)	Other	No. of responses
Corporate; Human resources	25%	65%	10%	20
Corporate; Legal services	19%	69%	13%	16
People - Adult social care and health; Adult social care	17%	67%	17%	12
Corporate; Business change	17%	74%	9%	23
People - Adult social care and health; Public health	15%	85%	0%	13
Corporate; Audit and risk	15%	77%	8%	13
People - Adult social care and health; Adult social care (south)	14%	68%	18%	22
Corporate; Governance and democratic services	12%	88%	0%	17
People - Adult social care and health; Commissioning	8%	54%	38%	13

Survey respondents – Suggested alternatives to the proposal

Survey respondents were asked if they had any suggested alternatives to the proposal which they felt should be considered. 227 comments were made in reply, and these comments have been summarised into the below categories.

Do you have any suggested alternatives to this proposal which you think should be considered?	
Close one floor of Westfields to council employees and use it to generate income by renting out space to businesses, community based services, holding clinics, hosting partner services, hosting a family hub. Repurpose the top floor as a council chamber and committee rooms.	51
Provide workspaces in other council buildings, such as libraries, town halls, leisure centres, children's centres and other smaller council buildings. More contact rooms are needed with service users. Provide hotdesking facilities for council staff in libraries	42
Encourage more working from home, encourage people to only come into the office when needed. Create new contracts which reflect working from home as the main work location. Many people work better at home. Don't assign people to offices, or if so, assign them to the office nearest their home	34
Close Delamere House instead, as the Delamere House building is not as good as Westfields, and it has no car parking. Sell Delamere House as a residential conversion	22
Retain Westfields, as it has good car parking and is a good building	20
Close Municipal Buildings instead	4
Concerns around relocation – Lack of space, lack of parking, office not fit for purpose, more travel	24
Concerns around impact on wellbeing, both financial and mental	11
Encourage staff into the office more, improve public transport and cycling links to encourage more people into offices. Travel into offices has to be more sustainable, transport hubs are needed close to offices	6
Concerns around increasing carbon footprint	5
Encourage more collaborative working	4
Would like use of Delamare House and Municipal Buildings / keep all 3	2
Consider a 4 day working week (increased profits / productivity / staff retention)	1
Close each location one day a week (no running costs)	1

Survey respondents – The Workplace principles

The WorkplaCE programme focuses on five principles:

- Improve productivity, value for money and services to residents
- Reduce the environmental footprint of our working practices
- Meet staff aspirations for an improved work life balance
- Provide a safe creative environment to work together in and drive innovation and transformation
- Optimise the use of our office workspace and reduce our costs

Survey respondents were asked if they felt anything was missing from these principles. 154 comments were made in reply, and these comments have been summarised into the below categories.

Is there anything you feel is missing from these principles?	
Staff considerations including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The financial impact of this proposal e.g. for parking and extra travel • Ensuring the general wellbeing of staff is looked after • Career development, career progression and training • Ensuring there are enough staff to cover the workload • Improving council culture – setting out our behaviours and values • Indicating whether staff being encouraged back into the office or not • Employing local staff 	52
Ensuring the work locations: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are accessible / within reach for staff • Are accessible / within reach for residents and service users • Provide ample car parking provision 	31
Ensuring office spaces: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are fit for purpose, accessible, inclusive and flexible • Allow for collaboration, sharing and learning 	31
Ensuring IT and office equipment: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is fit for purpose • Supports a hybrid way of working and the digital strategy 	20
Environmental impact / Carbon footprint. Ensuring sustainable transport and Active Travel	10
Equality, diversity and inclusion	4
Principles should be sustainable / and measurable	3
More detail / clarity is needed on the proposals	2
Include reference to our role in supporting town centre economy / vitality	1

Survey respondents – Final comments

Survey respondents were asked if they had any further comments on the proposals, including any comments on how the council could make better use of vacant space in existing buildings. 264 comments were made in reply, and these comments have been summarised into the below categories.

Please add any further comments you wish to provide on the proposals here, including any comments on how the council could make better use of vacant space in existing buildings:	
Utilise empty space better, share it with other organisations, service providers, and small businesses. Make better use of space in other council buildings like libraries etc for hotdesking, meeting spaces, printing etc. Utilise current vacant buildings for staff use. Thought needs to be given to smaller local hubs to send items for posting, do scanning/printing. Maybe the libraries could accommodate these needs? It would reduce travel.	86
Ensure buildings are fit for purpose – Have adequate meeting rooms and areas for collaboration, especially when confidential, accessible and inclusive spaces are needed	47
Consider wellbeing impact on staff relocating, particularly the mental, financial and travel impact	24
Ensure ample car parking is provided at all office buildings. Parking in Crewe is very difficult, limited and costly. There may be some excess parking space available at Crewe Lifestyle Centre	24
Ensure the IT and office equipment provided in offices is fit for purpose	19
Provide desk space / hot desking in other council buildings e.g. libraries	14
Encourage staff to come into the office more	10
Sell off vacant spaces	9
Distribute IT / office equipment across sites (e.g. to Broken Cross), including unused equipment	6
Encourage more working from home	5
Close Delamere House, as it is dilapidated	4
Consider the impact on carbon emissions	3
Offer agency staff permanent jobs / make jobs more attractive	2
Move the library to the town hall	2
Be clear about hybrid working mixed messages. Consideration needs to be given for where staff are relocated to – is it based on personal preference, rather than where the team will be based? Also what is the corporate policy / guidance on coming into the office, should staff be attending the office, if so how often or is the message to work from home? It's currently very conflicting.	2
Disagree with the mobility clause in contracts. Staff should be able to choose their designated office as the one which is closest to where they live	2
A better desk booking system is needed, as is better desk share	1
Monitor over time and see how the landscape develops	1

Consider impact on Sandbach town centre, for businesses and footfall	1
Macclesfield Library should be protected	1
Have the running costs / maintenance been compared across sites?	1

Events attendees – Summary of event feedback

During the consultation a number of face-to-face events took place between the project management team and staff and trade union representatives. In total there were 216 attendees of these events.

Full notes from these events can be found in Appendix 1.

Summary of the key themes arising during the events

The key themes are listed in general order of how frequently they were mentioned.

Car parking

- Access concerns – Delamere House especially has limited parking especially if more people are moved there, there isn't enough room.
- Poor parking provision adds stress to journeys / working life. It puts people off attending offices.
- Limited parking impacts on flexible working if it is a case of first come, first served
- Will there be relocation mileage?
- Will parking permits issued, and if so who to / how?
- A bad car parking offer may lead to a loss of good staff / Free car parking is seen as a perk of the job

Poor equipment / ICT in offices

- There is a lack of monitors, keyboards, mouses, good quality chairs across the estate
- People are working on Surface Pros in offices or are having to bring in their own equipment from home which is not good
- There is poor lighting in some offices,
- Poor equipment in offices puts people off attending
- Can we have standing desks?

Access to offices within local communities

- Some staff, especially front line staff (e.g. social workers) need local offices to be able to pop into to access toilets, refreshments, printers and to have confidential conversations
- Closing Westfields will leave a large distance in the middle of the borough without any office
- This proposal has been put forward by people who are desk based

Consultation cynicism

- This decision is seen as a fait accompli, a decision has already been made
- Delamere House is being renovated and Westfields is being run down in preparation for the move

Working from home Vs Working in offices

- What is the council policy on this? Are we encouraging people back into offices or not? If yes, how does closing Westfields help that?
- Working from home is lonely for some people
- The booking system / poor ICT equipment is a barrier to people coming in
- Concern the new chief exec might want people to start coming into offices more

Working from home concerns

- Will the council reward people for working from home instead of coming into the office?
- Working from home is too expensive for some people during the cost of living crisis, hence people will need to come into offices more
- Has the council considered schemes encouraging people to make their homes greener?

Carbon emissions

- How does this policy help with carbon net zero, when hundreds of people are heating / lighting their own homes rather than the council heating / lighting one building?

Cledford House relocation

- That the Cledford House closure and relocation had not being well managed
- The ICT equipment transfer had not been conducted well during this relocation

Conclusions

Consultation response

The response to the consultation has been fairly good, though it should be noted that it is likely those who responded were more likely to be those based in Westfields and those who are opposed to the proposed closure of Westfields.

+12% overall net support for the proposals

It is important to note the overall net positive support of +12% for the proposal to close Westfields, indicating a general acceptance among many for the need to reduce the office estate and make savings.

Strong opposition to the proposals from some

However, it is clear that there is strong opposition to the proposal to close Westfields among some groups of staff, with 53% of current Westfields staff who responded to the survey opposed to its closure.

It is noted that the strongest levels of opposition are seen among those who would be most inconvenienced by relocation, especially for those who might have to travel further, who might have a less convenient journey, or for those who might have to spend more to get to work.

It is clear that for a certain proportion of staff the closure of Westfields and subsequent relocation would have a negative mental and financial impact on them, and could lead to employees leaving the council altogether. The closure of Westfields may reduce the appeal of working for the council.

If Westfields is to close, the council should explore how to mitigate the impacts of this, perhaps by looking at how to make the journey from areas such as Sandbach and Stoke to alternative offices easier, by looking at how to ensure car parking provision at alternative offices is plentiful and easily accessible, and by looking at providing smaller office spaces in towns around the borough that teams could access instead of Westfields, especially for front line teams such as social care teams who need a local base, and for teams strongly opposed to relocation from Sandbach such as Legal Services. The council should also put in place measures to assist the wellbeing of those who might be adversely affected by relocation.

The South (Crewe) is the preferred relocation destination

It is noted that if Westfields were to close, indications are that staff would prefer to relocate to the South (Crewe) of the borough at a ratio of more than 3:1 compared to the North (Macclesfield) – Does the council have enough office provision in the South of the borough to accommodate that volume of relocation?

Relocation preference splits within individual teams

It is also noted that there are significant splits within individual teams over relocation preference, with some members of the same team preferring to be relocated to the South of the borough, and some preferring to be relocated to the North. Some staff suggested that people working from home much of the time should be assigned to the council office closest to their home address.

Is the council proposing a flexible relocation policy, willing to let members of the same teams relocate to different offices? Or will the council relocate entire teams to specific offices? If the latter, this may lead to greater opposition to the relocation process, could lead to greater turmoil within the council and make staff retention even more difficult.

Other issues raised during the consultation

A number of key themes arose during the consultation outside the scope of the closure of Westfields, which may need addressing within a wider cultural review of the council.

These key themes included:

- Staff wellbeing and career development
- Perceptions of poor car parking provision in our main towns, which it is felt doesn't allow for flexible working
- Comments on the poor quality of ICT and office equipment across the estate
- Questions around what the council's policy towards working from home Vs coming into the office is
- That the Cledford House closure and relocation had not being well managed

That Active Travel and better transport links should be promoted, with large proportions of staff travelling to work by car as opposed via public transport, on foot or by bike.

Appendix 1 – Full events feedback

During the consultation a number of face-to-face events took place between the project management team and staff and trade union representatives. In total there were 216 attendees of these events – details of these events are provided in the table below.

Date	Meeting type	Who with	No. attendees
28/07/2023	Online Employee & Trade Union Event	Open to all staff & Trade Union reps	27
31/07/2023	Online Employee & Trade Union Event	Open to all staff & Trade Union reps	108
04/08/2023	Online Employee & Trade Union Event	Open to all staff & Trade Union reps	81

Notes taken from these events are presented below.

Full notes from the virtual consultation event on 28 July 2023

Number of attendees: 27

Vocal comments, questions and answers arising during the event:

Comment: The Adult social care team based in Westfields has already been relocated there from Congleton already, now we could be relocated to Delamere House.

Question: Westfields is a lovely building, the most modern of the 3 buildings, including from a green perspective. Have we ever considered extending Westfields rather than moving to Delamere House, considering the money that would have to be put into Delamere House to modernise it, as Delamere House is a very old building and will need a lot of investment.

Answer: There are positives and negatives with Westfields, that site is worth a lot of money. Also, to extend Westfields is the most expensive option, in terms of building something. So what is putting us off is that we have existing buildings we can use without having to spend without having to spend a lot of money. The money we put into the project will be used to refurbish the existing sites, so new desks, new computers, access to better meeting rooms. If we did a rebuild, the money we have available would be for the building. It is something that may still be considered.

Question: There's a lot of space and car parking at Westfields for staff, the other concern is if we go to Delamere House there is really limited car parking, and the building is 7 floors that will be occupied but there is no parking there, there is limited parking as it is.

Answer: Car parking is not as convenient at Delamere House as it is at Westfields, but there is adequate parking there. Part of the reasons there has been such good parking at Westfields is because we have used sites which were just empty, but realistically that's not a good use of that spare land. The car park at Westfields is rarely half full. This is something we will feedback to council.

Comment: Not sure about that, as we were in Delamere House pre-covid and it was full.

Question: Has there been any thought about using buildings differently. We thought at Westfields about maybe closing one floor off and hiring out meeting rooms to generate income?

Answer: Yes the scope of the consultation is not restricted, the estates team are looking at what we can do with all of our space. Looking at moving Macclesfield Library into the Town Hall, if we can't do that we are looking at whether we can partition space off in the Town Hall if it doesn't relocate, maybe for community facilities, or being let out to the private or public sector. We could do that across the entire estate, where we rent off bits of our buildings, to maximise the use of them so they are full. We only occupy little bits of each building. Part of the problem with using each of our properties is that in estates terms it is not as efficient, you get more income if you rent out the whole building, rather than just little bits. If you sell a whole building you get quite a lump sum of capital receipt. So yes it is something we have considered, we are open to out of the box ideas. For example some Councillors have asked if we can sell the old town hall as a hotel.

Question: I agree with Liz, Westfields is the nicest building, though we do understand selling Westfields would bring in more revenue. Although this feels like a consultation process, there is already a lot of work going into updating Delamere House, new windows being put in – is this a done decision already?

Answer: We had a long debate at CLT about whether we should refurbish Delamere House, some of that was around what if we don't retain it. Our aim is to be Carbon Neutral by 2025, and for the borough to be Carbon Neutral by 2045. The works that are being done on Delamere House will contribute towards these carbon targets either way, and the works being done are government funded, it is not costing the council anything to replace those windows. That comes from a multi-million pound de-carbonisation grant. In terms of bang for buck, that was the most efficient spend of money, Westfields already has good carbon efficiency. We already rent out space in Delamere House to Ringways Jacobs and the NHS are requesting space to move

in there as well. So no, this isn't already a done deal. This is a consultation. We are conscious what this looks like, but that is not the case.

Question: What you say about better equipment, in future will monitors be put back on desks, the same as it was pre-covid, where we are using the office space?

Working there at the moment isn't the most practical or health and safety conscious, for staff working with little Surface Pros, the desks aren't set up right, you can't follow the PSE guidelines that are supposed to keep us fit and well, for posture etc.

Conditions there are not good without screens, we all need extra screens but not everyone has the opportunity to have one, very conscious of health and safety and welfare, and what is available for them to use, will that be looked at?

Answer: Yes in the report we included costs for an ICT fit out based on feedback we have had from staff. Based on HoS feedback, and the occupation of the buildings, we're working on a 60:30:10 split, so 60% of desks will have screens, mouse, keyboard etc, 30% with nothing, 10% with fixed equipment. It might be that split isn't the same across all teams, as some teams might need more than 10% fixed equipment if they have more permanent office-based staff. We've also been investing in meeting rooms across the whole estate. That equipment is transferrable.

Comment: No one should be working at this time without the right equipment, anyone who needs equipment they need to speak to heads of service and ask for what they require. This is important that people have the right equipment, the council are responsible for your wellbeing when you're working from home, as they are in the office. Don't work on an ironing board, or at a kitchen table. Don't sit on Surface Pros for 6 hours, that is not what they are designed for, never were, never will be.

Comment: Just to reiterate what Andy said, I use a Surface Pro, but ICT don't provide stands for Surface Pros, when you go in the office you get a cricked neck as you can't always get on a big screen, this is a big issue.

Question: In terms of timescales if this does get approved by committee, realistically when do you think a move might take place?

Answer: Realistically it wouldn't be an immediate decision, followed by immediate action. It would be a decision based on best value. We would consult with staff that are affected if a decision came back that we were closing a building, staff would be consulted on the impact on them as individuals. Refurbishment would need to take place before relocation, and that process is likely to take a year minimum. It will be probably a minimum of 18 months till relocation.

Question: Thinking about getting best value for money, have we looked at whether people can get paid to work from home full time, with just essential services coming in, to reward people who are working from home to get some financial reward for

using their own electric and gas. Will there be any financial incentive for staying at home? This would also save on Carbon footprint too.

Answer: Yes it has pros and cons – Some national government politicians don't like people working from home, they want them in the office all day long and seen to be there. At this point in time we recognise we can make the savings we need to with a reduced office estate. We didn't present an option to pay people to stay at home, at this moment in time that isn't an option. Property always has a value. Maybe this is something we will look at in future, but I am minded that some politicians will want people in.

Comment: Thinking about desk setup, I have a standing desk at home, I know we couldn't get that for every desk, but a small area for standing desks would be good, they help with back pain, they improve productivity. It's good to be able to stand up. They can raise quite easily.

Answer: That is a good point. We consulted with a movement group, some desks in Delamere House are designed for that. What we are looking at in that 60:30:10 split we would include more accessible desks, or different styles of desks. We aim to have a mixture. Hopefully we will have a good choice. Not sure if those different desks can be booked on the booking system. That is something we need to look at – can people book accessible desks.

Comment: Yes being able to book such a desk for a few hours throughout the day would be useful.

Answer: Yes I will check.

Question: What will the phase 2 consultation look like?

Answer: If a decision was made after phase 1 consultation that people are to be relocated, phase 2 would involve those being relocated, we would have individual consultation with the directly affected staff, through current management structures. When people relocate there are things like relocation mileage if people are having to travel further, for up to 2 years.

Full notes from the virtual consultation event on 31 July 2023

Number of attendees: 108

Vocal comments, questions and answers arising during the event:

Comment: This is a huge issue, especially after the Cledford consultation. When a building is closed and staff are distributed across other sites, car parking just isn't taken into account. We have not got enough parking at Delamere House, so if we relocate more people there, there isn't enough parking. Parking permits only apply to

certain people, so for example they don't apply to coordinators, so they will lose money, a lot of money, by having to a) travel further and b) stress and worry about parking, they're going to have to travel further, park further away, again desk space has been an issue so we're working on ratios and I think we've done that from covid, our staff are telling us they want to be in work, it's too expensive for them to work at home, heating bills, lighting bills are going up, they can't afford to work at home, so they're coming into the building and finding there aren't enough desks. They then have to go and sit somewhere else, so they can't work as a team as they intended. This is especially a concern during winter – have they got parking, have they got desk space, have they got ICT. I've seen all this with Cledford and I think it will happen again.

Answer: We have had this feedback quite a lot already, we are looking at creating an FAQ specifically for car parking. People who have worked at buildings with free parking have had significant benefits, compared to others elsewhere who have had to pay. We need a consistent approach for all staff that is fair.

Comment: We do but people took jobs based on them receiving free car parking – free parking makes a job viable. I understand there needs to be equity, but Westfields is one of the best places for parking, it's one of our better locations, and people may choose to leave as a result if they have to start paying for car parking. Parking in Macclesfield is terrible, Delamere is being swamped and we have had residents complaining, we've had increases in complaints from staff.

Answer: Yes we are aware of it, and we are factoring this in. Stage 1 of this consultation is related to an option to close Westfields, and if that decision was made stage 2 would be consultation with individual staff. It is definitely a factor, that is why we're trying to develop those FAQs to make it clear what the decision involves. The point about space, if you walk around most buildings they are very, very sparsely populated, and if we haven't got the desk balance wrong we need to look at that. We need to have a look to see if we have the overall balance right, and that is why we looked at the option of having designated floors for different teams. Historically we tried to create pods for teams, but that wasn't very effective because if one team wasn't in, other teams could be struggling for space. So that is why we have introduced a booking system.

Comment: I just want to echo what Sam just said, particularly in Macclesfield. If the weather is bad, it's not a great journey, I think a lot more people will start working from home more, when I thought the idea was we were encouraging more people to come into the office more often. And parking is a massive thing, if you've had a bad journey into work, and then you're trying to find a parking space.

Answer: Yes we have heard this thanks.

Comment: Yes just to reiterate what Sam said again, I took my job based on the free car parking. Free car parking at Westfields is brilliant. I also do a job where I need to nip into Westfields just to print as the clients I work with have to sign documents, so you literally park for free, whiz in for maybe 10 or 15 minutes. Also, if I get moved to Crewe I will be doing a lot of free miles. The council seems concerned about their carbon emissions, but what about people like us who are all heating our houses, all using our own electric, it's not a job I chose to do at home, it's quite a lonely job at home. To go to Crewe there are issues with parking. Also the businesses that are close to Westfields are in jeopardy. All Westfields needs is windows that open. It's sad.

Answer: This is a consultation process, that's why we want feedback. Lets be cautious that a decision has already been made here, this is still a consultation, we will listen, capture this feedback, and we will consider how we can deal with these things. The drop off point for people being able to have short term access to buildings, so people can access buildings for a short space of time – this is a new point and a really good point which we can look at. We will need to look at how we can accommodate that at all buildings. In terms of being able to work from different locations, we have had to limit this consultation just to the corporate offices, but part of the conversation is about how staff can use different facilities, libraries or day centres, the council has a lot of buildings and are looking at how people can access these buildings, so they have somewhere to touch down and have access to warm places and network facilities. Carbon emissions are for all, so CE as an area which has a carbon net zero target, shunting carbon from the council into the community gives us no gain whatsoever. We are trying to push people towards using pool cars, more efficient vehicles, promote Active Travel. In terms of the local economy – whatever happens Westfields will be occupied by someone, so the local economy should not be badly affected. Even if the council relocates, someone will be there. When speaking to local business people try and put their mind at rest, because even if the council moves out of Westfields, other people will occupy the space.

Comment: I agree with everything Sam and Kate said. Re. net zero, if it's supposed to be Cheshire East wide, rather than 1 building being kept warm you've got hundreds of houses being kept warm, and people driving around, so there's no way it's efficient to have 3 floors of workers wfh rather than working from one building, so I don't understand how that stacks up.

Comment: Re. Adults Directorate moving to the 5th floor of Delamere, I don't understand how they'd all fit in, I'm not sure you understand the amount of people that work in Adults Services? They certainly won't all fit on one floor.

Comment: When I've been in the Municipal Buildings I've not seen that much spare space, it seems to be mainly meeting rooms and offices at the back, so I don't understand how you could accommodate many more people in Municipal Building than in Westfields.

Comment: You say the decision is not made, yet you go to Westfields it looks like it is being run into the ground, the equipment is gone, chairs are broken and not fit for purpose, cables are all missing, the stuff you need to be able to work there has gone. What I do see is a lot of investment in Delamere House, the reception has been done, new windows are being put in, like it is being prepared.

Comment: You talk about people being able to use other buildings such as Libraries and Day Centres, but what about GDPR? You're going in there printing personal document and stuff, if there's even any space to use, you can't just rock up and expect them to find you a desk. Also warm spaces, that relates to net zero.

Answer: In terms of the number of employees in Adults, these plans have been seen by Exec Directors who decided based on the numbers that go in the plans were appropriate, but we know we would have to flex it if we found that some teams were working more in the office than others. We also have to recognise to get the best use out of our buildings we have to fill them on a Mon to Fri 9 to 5 basis, to get the best use out of them. Hopefully the booking systems will give us some more information about how much those are being used on a daily basis.

Comment: The largest population base is in the South, so Crewe is your biggest area, and you've got Nantwich, Sandbach, the biggest population is in the South not the North, so you'll need more space in the south.

Answer: The office space in Municipal Buildings is being taken away over time, so the comparison is Delamere and Westfields and Macclesfield Town Hall, which are the 3 remaining office spaces. That facility is effectively taken out, so sorry for the confusion about that.

Answer: Re. equipment, the ICT equipment we looked at what people require to come in to sit at a desk and we've done a calculation that suggested 60% of desks would have ICT equipment provided on them (a screen, mouse and keyboard), 30% would be for people to bring their own devices in to plug in / touch down, and 10% would have fixed equipment that people could log onto. That ties in feedback we have had from the Spring Back events, and that will be different for different teams, and that's how we have calculated the amount of money required to provide that equipment.

Answer: Re. the investment in the new windows at Delamere House, this is actually government funding to help us with our carbon emissions, that's where that money has come from, that's not Cheshire East Council investment. The energy efficiency of Delamere House was poor, and we were able to get grant funding to improve that facility. That came as an assessment of which of our buildings needed most improvement. CLT did debate that and didn't get the Comms right about it.

Answer: Re. GDPR – We are considering how we need more space for certain teams to be boxed off so they could have that privacy, so that's another reason why we looked at having floors for certain services, as opposed to a completely open space where anybody can go, we got that from certain teams, particularly children's services who need that privacy. So teams with those needs will have to be able to get that functionality from the buildings they use. This isn't a one size fits all.

Question: I work in Westfields most days and can appreciate the position we are in. The biggest risk we have is with car parking, and the knock on effect of that – I've worked before for employers that struggle with parking, and one of the biggest benefits we have is flexible working, if we then go to locations where we have to pay for parking, where in Crewe at the moment the amount of long stay parking is nominal, there is a lot of short stay where you have to move every 2 or 3 hours which is not an efficient use of peoples time, but if we have to be in by 8am to get a parking spot, the flexible working offer is then completely redundant, which is a big risk. So one of our biggest benefits is completely gone, and then the private sector offer becomes a lot more enticing for people. At other places I have worked car parking was the biggest issue that people moved on for. So this comes back to "what is our employee offer"?

Answer: We are looking at our workforce strategy, and how that employee offer is more complete and more transparent, and we know there have been a lot of conversations about staff and resident parking, and we know there's a way to go.

Question: These proposals are put forward by people whose jobs are 100% office based, who are now working from home. I work in the Adult Social Care Team, where we do a lot of community visits, so it's important to be able to pop into the office for 5 or 10 minutes, to print something off, how does that work if the parking is really difficult?

Comment: People tend to work in the areas where their community team is, so between meeting you can go home. If your office base isn't in the community, say it's in Macclesfield, you need a base in Macclesfield in between visits where you can go and use toilets, grab a coffee. Especially for someone who is disabled who needs disabled toilets, that is going to be a massive issue.

Comment: Also I do think the carbon emissions thing – swapping targets from one big building to lots of smaller buildings doesn't seem to stack up statistics wise at all.

Comment: Re. being transparent about pay – We have been having pay rises not in line with inflation, so a technical pay cut anyway, we're now paying mileage, for occasionally car use, working from home, and for car parking costs. Will there be a legacy mileage agreement if they do have to move?

Answer: Yes there is a relocations policy which would apply, but that is time limited. Re. having drop off points for people to check in, that is a new point that we can have a look at. In terms of carbon emissions like I say, transferring carbon emissions somewhere else doesn't assist the council, being able to fit more of our staff into more carbon efficient buildings because we can use our money more efficiently, then that is a positive benefit to the environment, so that is what we're trying to do. Also having pool cars and electric cars is something we're trying to do.

Comment: Re. offices being wound down, the desks we have at Macclesfield Town Hall, they come complete with a possibly broken chair and a plug socket, that's all we get, we don't get a monitor, we don't get any IT, we bring everything in from home, and that's been that way since Covid.

Answer: I understand what you're saying but those issues are not to do with office relocation, that is partly one of the problems we are trying to solve, that we can make sure the offices are properly fitted out.

Comment: Just to echo on that in Cledford House that's not been the case in buildings, we've not had the IT follow us, 100% that hasn't been the case.

Answer: I understand that, the point is the proposal that went to committee is that there is investment for that in future. We are trying to ensure those issues from the past don't happen in future. The fact things aren't right now, all I can do is work towards improving that.

Comment: The reason why we're saying is if we're being asked to make a decision about whether we would prefer to wfh or work from an office, if we're asked to choose between a good office space or an inadequate office space, those answers are going to be different.

Answer: Yes we have listened to this feedback in the past, and that is why we are proposing to invest in upgrading offices. That is really important to create nice working environments, they will be better places to work in.

Comment: It feels like the council is trying to make it so that Westfields closes, the lighting is not working, since this consultation started things aren't being fixed, it feels like it is being left to go, all we hear is Delamere House is getting this and that, it feels like Westfields is being forgotten about on purpose.

Answer: If we get anything reported in Westfields, we repair it, we are maintaining Westfields.

Answer: I need to squash that one, because it's just not the case, that is an absolute no, there is no activity that is leading towards a decision having been made already, because the decision hasn't been made already and that is why we are consulting. We are being as open as we can possibly be, if it is being interpreted any other way

that is wrong and that is poor communication from the council. That is just not the case. There is no pre-determination.

Comment: I'm very disappointed about Cledford House, because they were told they were going on the same floor, they were having their equipment moving, and so on. So what is a concerns is that if a building is closed, and we're promising the equipment to be there, but we have been promised this in the past, so that gives people a lack of confidence it will be there.

Comment: A lot of people would like to work back in the buildings because of the costs (of wfh), but if the equipment isn't in the buildings this isn't possible.

Comment: I mentioned on Friday if we are going to do it, if people are going to wfh we should be paying them for the electric and stuff like that. It is really important people have these conversations.

Comment: People are aware they can claim car parking back I hope, because they can claim it back even if they haven't got a parking permit. There are a lot of issues here that really need to be resolved. This is a good debate, and I know you have been put under the cosh, but it's the right way to be as people are showing they're passionate over this.

Answer: Yes that's why I want to make it clear that a decision hasn't already been made. That was a really helpful summing up, what we have identified is things from the past which need to be fixed now.

Comment: The biggest concern from that meeting is the impact of phase 2. You can't decide to close a building and not know what the solutions and impact is going to be and that needs to be clearly communicated to reassure people if the building is being closed that it's all been thought through.

Answer: Just to be clear, the decision is made on the back of all the information we are gathering, and that's why the questions are so wide open, it's only if a decision is made, it's not instantly implemented without further consultation with staff on what the impact of that decision might be, so we can address all of those. If a decision is made in October, we would still go through another process with staff about that decision. All this information now is what goes into the consultation feedback, and that's why we've done it using the Consultation Team because they're used to this approach, and used to capturing all this information. I also want to assure you that if a decision was made not to close Westfields, we will still want to address all of these other issues that have been raised.

“Chat” comments and questions arising during the event:

Sorry I missed where Care4ce would be based?

Cost of living for employees needs to be considered - the cost of parking, the cost of travelling. cost of living should be a key priority.

Staff who have previously always paid for parking have now got used to not travelling therefore not paying for parking - this money has now been consumed within other household pressures. so equity is important but it will impact on all staff

Apologies if this has already been asked..... have the council considered renting floor space out to external companies to use?

I also feel that the amount of equipment needed to work in the office instead of home is a lot to carry. Then there's also not always the correct leads/plugs to be able to log in. This will have a greater impact in the winter having to walk further from car parks to offices.

I doubt a small business would cope till it is occupied.

Could we not make better use of Westfields and rent space out? Make more of a community hub? As a local resident, the thought of more houses being built there is worrying!

Withdrawing the salary sacrifice scheme for an option for hybrid/ electric vehicles wasn't a great idea now CEC want workers to travel more across the authority

Also what if your team needs store cabinets for documents?

Regarding parking, other than Westfields car park isn't there a plan to introduce paying for parking in Sandbach?

That would have a huge negative impact on the town.

It does feel like a done deal

I made the same comment last week *[redacted]*

Also we closed Cledford (against a lot of feedback and concerns) and told our Foster Carers they could use Westfields for their training with the fostering service, but this would now be Crewe, which is again too far for most of our foster carers.

What about confidential phone calls that social services need to make. That won't be possible if the office spaces are shared with other teams/public.

Hi *[redacted]*. Has it been considered to rent out private offices in co-working spaces? Or a salary sacrifice scheme for staff to purchase coworking space at a reduced cost via CEC? Or, perhaps improve marketing the community spaces available for people to drop into with parking and printing etc.

The desk booking system is now a barrier to staff coming into Westfield's, not enough IT equipment on the desks etc, however seems like CEC chose a great time to introduce it, as these figures are now going to inform the consultation. Most of my team need to nip in to complete assessments/ to use a printer / for peer support, having very personal conversations and dealing with sensitive information, not the kind of thing you'd discuss in a library or any other warm space

What is happening to like buildings Mountview and Lincoln house. They have been empty for years

Have we considered the current energy efficiency of the buildings under consideration or just the floor space?

Hi [redacted]. I haven't read all the documents associated with this consultation, but a lot of it refers to an option for Westfields to be 'closed' - can we assume this is the same as Westfields being 'sold'? If so, does this include all the land it sits on, do we have an approximation of the total sale value and what can we do with any money generated - does it just go into reserves or can we use it for frontline services?

I agree with all that has been said about parking and travel costs and extra time that would take in relation to the work life balance point - this could mean people would need to pay for more childcare with breakfast/after school clubs. Another concern is if the new chief exec would want people to start coming into the office more which would increase the impact.

My other point would be about the reputation of the council with our residents/customers, there is a lot of negative talk in Sandbach about how we knocked down a historical building that people loved to build Westfield's and for what if this happens - as mentioned above has letting out space been considered.

That would have a huge negative impact on the town.

it's in the budget plan I think (the MTFS)

Public transport is also not great, particularly since the withdrawal of arriva bus services, so people would also be restricted in terms of using alternatives to private cars

it's in the budget plan I think (the MTFS)

Whatever the plan is, it probably won't entice people into town if they have to pay for parking. It's a benefit for people visiting Sandbach. Plans are all well and good but the reality is usually different.

There is no decent public transport in Cheshire either so people are quite dependent on driving everywhere.

Public transport is also not great, particularly since the withdrawal of arriva bus services, so people would also be restricted in terms of using alternatives to private cars

I think there's a consultation on buses out atm

Reputation is a concern, I'm on a local residents group and it's not gone down well.

Using a pool car is great - but we still need to travel to collect the pool cars.

Westfields has a number of large rooms for training, will there be additional training facilities in Delamere House as this will be the more popular venue for training.

Not sure CEC understand the concept of pool electric vehicles for front line workers, CEC would be bankrupt in providing enough cars just to cover this option

has the Council considered a scheme to help employees with the cost of installing solar panels to assist with elec. bill increases from working from home ... it could also contribute to the borough's carbon reduction targets? like the Green car scheme / salary sacrifice but with a contribution from CE?

I have to leave but thank you for your time today. useful to share views and hear feedback. Really appreciate you taking the time to put this on.

Hi [redacted] - My question is how has the m2 been calculated? Is this based on staff attending the office 1 day per week or 5? If so, this will affect the amount of space available for staff to use? I guess the question is what is the expectation for staff being required to attend their potential new office base?

Not all people want to come back to the office full time. I appreciate some people do, for me it is more cost effective to work from home, despite heating bills but the cost of travelling and parking costs 5 days a week would outweigh my utility bills

The information gathered about demand for office space - does this need to be revisited given the changes in the cost of living and both managers wanting employees to be in the office more and some employees wanting to be in the office more?

The point about equipment investment is that we are currently being told we will have the equipment we need to do the job if we agree to the move, but the offices will remain like they are now (re broken chairs, no monitors etc) if we prefer to stay - that's the issue i was trying to raise rather than questioning current investment - it doesn't seem fair

I support rationalisation of buildings but I do think that how it will impact on myself will impact on whether I support the closure of Westfields.

Thanks for your honesty and patience [redacted]!

Thankyou to everyone for comments. All comments will be copied into a consultation report anonymously (individual names will not be included). This report will then be considered alongside all other feedback by Councillors and key decision makers, before any final decisions are made. The report may also be published on the council's website at some point as part of committee agenda packs. If you do not wish for your comment to be published in this summary report please let the Research and Consultation Team know by emailing RandC@cheshireeast.gov.uk.

Complete the consultation survey at

https://surveys.cheshireeast.gov.uk/s/WorkplaCE_Consultation_July_2023/.

Thank you

i really appreciate the opportunity for consult - thank you

Thank you [redacted], really useful session

Full notes from the virtual consultation event on 4 August 2023

Number of attendees: 81

Comments, questions and answers arising during the event:

Question: What consideration has been given to Care4CE services, where we have registered addresses within Westfields, but to services, and Westfields is the registered address for the Care4CE service, there are requirements around CQC for us to have distinct office space for those which is separate.

Question: Is the Enterprise Centre in Sandbach still available to use, or has that now gone?

Answer: In terms of the registered office, yes, if you have Westfields as the registered office we would have to relocate those if Westfields is closed. We would have to name a different HQ if we closed the building entirely.

Answer: In terms of office touchdown space we have quite a broad estate. This consultation is only looking at the office space, the 5 main offices, but there are other touch down spaces in hubs, libraries or leisure centres where people might be able to access touch down space. I can't answer the questions about the Enterprise Zone in Sandbach. I don't recall a disposal in terms of sale, I thought it was let out. I will have to take that one away.

Comment: We have people who come to Westfields to collect their weekly spends, these are members of the public that we manage their monies for, so we would need

some space in Sandbach for 30 or so people who come twice a week to get their cash handouts, there is the option to go to places like libraries.

Answer: That's useful to be reminded of that, if people can't get to Crewe or Macclesfield, then yes we have space in libraries, and in other spaces too that they could use.

Question: If we would have a space to see clients, we would also need somewhere to have storage for monies, so in Westfields we have a safe in Westfields, so that would need consideration as well.

Answer: Yes I remember moving the safe from Congleton to Sandbach. That is something that would need moving, and something we would bare in mind.

Question: Slide 12 about Delamere House and the different floors, was that illustrative, or was that just a proposal to feed back on. Has the same activity been done for Macclesfield Town Hall?

Answer: Yes that was included as an illustration as to how we could set out both buildings. We would appoint floors, rather than having everyone working on one floor. We find different services / teams have different requirements. For example, we found that more desk space and worksurfaces are needed for Corporate Services, as opposed more collaborative space required in Children's Services who have confidentiality requirements, so it is better they have their own floor. It was purely for illustration, we are more than happy to have feedback on the design principles.

Question asked in the meeting chat: Is it proposed that Public Health would be on floor 5 with all of adults services? How does that fit space wise with number of staff and number of available desks?

Answer: The floor plan was set out by Directors, so Exec Directors would have floor space. We were looking at Adults and Health along with NHS space in there too, but when we talked about that we also found that Children's also have a similar touch down space with the NHS, so we have been working with the NHS around how their staff will access our buildings, whether they would be in a partition space, but the favoured response was that they would have the same access rights and freedoms as our own staff.

Question: For me it will be a considerable increase in travel time, so there will be an extra cost for petrol and parking. What will the situation be for parking?

Question: Also, how will it work within teams if some people want to be based in Macclesfield, some want to be based in Crewe, when obviously that will effect teams and how they work, and when it splits teams up?

Answer: It is important to recognise first off that this is just phase 1 of the consultation, so those more detailed conversations about individuals, and the specific details about how they might be effected, would come if there is a phase 2 consultation. So if Corporate Policy Committee did decide to close Westfields, there will be further consultation with staff about how we manage the implications. The standard package is that where people are assigned further away from their home there is a 2 year compensation package for that additional mileage.

Answer: In terms of parking, we are trying to put together a detailed response for parking, we got a lot of questions about that at the previous events. Whatever we do for parking we have to create something that is equitable for all staff. There will be a bigger response coming on car parking. What we have been looking at is where car parks are in relation to buildings. The conversation about staff being assigned North or South, that would be a phase 2 conversation. We need to work with the Exec Directors, as to how best to innovate, they need to be in 2 places at once, and we need to improve the visibility of our leaders, but Exec Directors will want to consider how they will want to assign teams North and South, whether it's nearest the customers, or nearest where the majority of the team live. But that is a phase 2 conversation.

Question: What about meeting rooms, we struggle to get meeting rooms in Westfields now even though it doesn't appear there are many people in, meeting rooms already seem to be full. Will there be extra provision at Crewe or Macclesfield?

Answer: The floor plan that was created, when we did the needs assessment we asked about what was required in terms of collaborative space, as well as just desk space, and when we looked at the principles for design, what we felt was there was a need for certain teams to still be able to break away from their desks and go into meeting rooms. Then we looked at the fact that one of the benefits of putting everyone in a number of spaces was that they could collaborate together. So Childrens & Adults, or Corporate would be able to get together more often, and the collaborative space for that would be separated out on another floor, so you get a bit more of people bumping into others from different teams by having those flexible space facilities. Now when we were talking at the Spring Back Events, there was a lot of feedback in terms of different styles of rooms, and whether it's just 2 sofas facing each other, or whether it's a booth that you need to sit in, or whether it's an office, or whether it's a mix of that, and our intention would be that some of that would be bookable, some would be free space that people can just go and sit in. In terms of how busy that space is, it's difficult to tell and it's difficult to understand how we manage to book out all the meeting rooms when there's no staff in the building. I think there's a little bit of discipline around how many rooms are booked out that have no one in. We need to consider how best to get that message out, as space becomes more precious in a way. Pre pandemic when there were more people in the

building was it such a problem. But yeah, good point. We maybe need to be more disciplined about only booking space that is needed.

Comment: Yes people need to remember to cancel bookings too.

Comment: Care4Ce operate 24 hour services, would Delamere House be safe for people to be working till 10 o'clock at night, what security measures will be in place. We also have poor cars which are based at Westfields at the moment, which are there throughout the day or throughout the night, will there be a space for them to be kept without a fee? Car parking has been raised, some of the things that Members have raised is that they have to come into the office quite a lot throughout the day, will they have to pay multiple parking throughout the day as they are in and out. Also, access arrangements in terms of locations, you wouldn't want to be trying to find a space across Crewe as we literally are on a rota, as we literally just pop in, do our thing and then go straight back out. These are some of the issues I can foresee for Care4CE if we were based there hence why we have asked about the site that's at Sandbach as an alternative, given the numbers of staff – 50+ just for reablement services, then there is shared lives who have 200 carers, so it's big numbers.

Answer: In terms of safety, that was a line in our principles and we are aware of that, that's safety of people in the building as well as in peripheral areas, we will look towards having safer walking route and car parks, what sort of outside the building security we will have access to, that is in the minds of the project team to look at that. We do have staff in our buildings that are there throughout the night, whether they are operating machinery or whether they have more specific duties.

Answer: Re. car parking I can't add any more than I have said in previous events, we are looking at this. If there are not enough car parking spaces near the building, that is a surprise. There is enough parking generally close to our main buildings, we need to try and explain what the options are, and what availability is.

Answer: We are trying to promote pool cars, we can have electric pool cars which can be charged up on site, and in particular for Delamere House, being able to park close is something we will need to have to reserve places for as that will start to become more common. With the national scheme that we are signing up to, where you can rent the cars, that presents an opportunity to go to an out of town location, pick up a car, use it all day long, then come back to your own car, so that potentially gives an opportunity to be parking in an out of town safer environment, to then be able to use the pool cars.

Answer: The ability to pop into offices came up in the last meeting, we need to understand the scale of that, how many people do it and how often. We will be asking for more information on that. That is something that has only just cropped up in this particular conversation we are having. You mentioned about the Enterprise Centre in Sandbach, we can't answer that one yet, but one of the things we need to

wider this conversation out to is about community facilities, and understanding whether there are opportunities for staff to meet in hubs or libraires, as we have a lot of meeting rooms, we have function rooms which are frequently unused, so being able to access those more frequently would be helpful.

Question asked in the meeting chat: Will relocation and excess travel expenses be paid to staff previously based in Westfields (if they are all relocated)? Has this been factored into the budgeting exercise and how was this done (without using all individual staff addresses?)

Answer: Yes we shall respond to that one in the FAQs.

Question asked in the meeting chat: I remember pre Pandemic, there was a plan for Delamere House to be demolished and rebuilt by CEC. I appreciate the council are looking to save money and use available resources currently, but is the use of the existing building a long term one? due to the age of the building, will it incur ongoing maintenance costs (thinking Westfields is a much newer, modern building)?

Answer: Those plans never really came to fruition, that was part of a wider redevelopment of Crewe Town Centre, there were various proposals to make significant changes in the town centre beyond just the Royal Arcade and the bus station which is the only bit which has been redeveloped. Recently the windows in Delamere have been replaced, we are committing to upkeeping it. As for a demolished and rebuilt building, I can't see that possibly being affordable. So we are refurbishing what we have got, and the refurbishment for Delamere House has come from central government, so isn't costing us any money.

Question asked in the meeting chat: Where has the data/figures come from which have provided the evidence for the building changes. There was something about percentages of use of the office for example. How has that data been recorded?

Answer: Data has come from occupancy rates in buildings, and from future needs assessments. They looked at the numbers of staff we need on a permanent basis, the number on hybrid etc. We used a proxy square metres of staff to be able to understand how much that would come up in total to what was required. We're working on a ratio of 60:30:10, so 60% of desks that are available would have a screen, a keyboard and a mouse that people can take their devices in to plug into, 30% the desks would be empty where people can touch down and bring their own devices, and 10% would be for people who are permanently based in the office or who can't bring equipment easily with them, so they can log onto the specific connected device that is permanently on the desk. This ratio is an average across the council and not specifically related to individual teams, so some teams might have different percentages, but overall that was the percentage we were working

towards. And the costs for that where I referred to the MTFS having savings targets, but also some of the funding that was going to provide the new technology, or the change to the offices, that was going to come out of letting out the office space.

Question asked in the meeting chat: Is there consideration for staff who require specific equipment from their DSE such as chairs etc if having to share space?

Answer: We are trying to be clear on the safe and accessible elements of the principles, that came from conversations with the differently abled team, we want to be sure people can book tall desks or adjustable desks through the booking system, and that that's done responsibly, and if anyone has specific needs or a specific set up, that that will be reserved permanently through the booking system, if they need it so they know they will have it when they get into the office. We're trying to address that.

Answer: Re. DSE assessments, everyone is responsible for their own DSE assessment, and needs to take responsibility as to how they work. The space in offices should support a good environment that supports DSE needs.

Question: People with physical conditions who can reserve a desk permanently, does that work the same for people with mental health conditions. I come into the office 4 days a week because I don't like working from home it doesn't suit me, I like the routine because I do have mental health issues, is that something that is going to be taken into consideration too? I would like a permanent desk.

Answer: Yes it is, that is something we want to identify where some of those needs aren't being met, that is something we want to consider for the future design. Any design sign-off we will talk to different groups and unions, and if we're missing anybody let me know. We want the booking space to be as inclusive as possible, but we also don't want people to use reserved desks if it is better to have those desk permanently set aside. But we also want flexibility where if there is a space set up for a particular individual, if they're not there 26 days of the year because they're on leave then we don't want to waste that space.

Unanswered "chat" comments and questions arising during the event:

What will happen regarding car parking for staff at Delamere House.

Apologies having connection issues (so using chat instead of raising hand)

2) Is there any consideration to comparable meeting space available elsewhere? We often have to use CS1,2,3 as it's the only room big enough across the estate (we have had very poor feedback for rooms in 'old' Macclesfield Town Hall in terms of acoustics)

The proposals state 'For 2025/26, there will be a further reduction in our office/workspace and associated subsequent running costs around 7%. This is estimated to be a £150k saving'. Is there any information on what this relates to?

Why have we bought B and Q?

Will that be the new screens Alex? Some laptops don't now work with the older kit?

Appendix 2 – Email feedback

Email response #1

Date letter received: 8 August 2023

Summary of content:

Suggests the reintroduction of canteens in council offices to encourage staff socialisation, senior management engagement with staff, and to improve the workplace culture to encourage more people to come into offices to make them places where people want to go. Suggests this could be achieved at little cost to the council, and would be a step change to the current approach which seems to be so trip back everything to the minimum.

Full email:

Not expecting the survey questions to finish so quickly, I missed these comments out:

Probably to be resolved if a Phase 2 happens and we look at how we use the space... but back in my County Council days, the one space where 95% of the most effective collaboration took place was... the bustling staff canteen! It was like Chester/Crewe market on a good day... a respected asset which was full to capacity (sometimes with a queue going out the door!) every lunchtime. I knew all of the canteen staff by name and they knew mine. Friday was always fish and chip day, Wednesday pizzas. I still remember that in 2023! When I visited County Hall and had lunch there, same thing but I would meet different people and have lunch with them. I made it my mission to book meetings which gave me the canteen in between.

If you weren't in a canteen at sometime between 12-2pm, you were literally sat on your own having butties in the quiet office getting major FOMO. The younger usually on the apprenticeship and development programmes would meet at 12pm usually. The next big intake usually more senior managers and those wanting a slightly quieter canteen would come in at 1pm. There was a firm culture that no one booked (or accepted) meetings between 12-2pm. In fact, I think it was policy! You watched the clock approach 12pm when the canteen opened to get the fresh food. You rang round those friend colleagues in other depts to confirm they too were meeting you there.

It would not be unusual to be eating lunch opposite the County Engineer [redacted] (Tier 2) or one of his well known, usually by name, senior managers. The management team knew everyone by name and they introduced themselves to the new faces so they always made new staff feel welcome while learning who they are too. Senior Management made it their purpose through CLTs leadership culture to

make the time to come and have lunch with the team members; to hear about the real issues impacting the 'shop floor'. It was almost deafening the chatter amongst staff as they collaborated and communicated as much about work and not. Especially in the first hour when many of the younger, confident officers were putting the worlds to right. Many a time I voiced my (sometimes) controversial opinion to *[redacted]* and he always listened and sometimes acted on what I said. I felt listened to and more likely to speak up when I saw something not working. If you want to see a recent example, visit the regional Police/Fire HQ in Winsford. See how busy their canteen is at lunch and the collaboration that takes place there. All ranks mingle together.

So if there is a phase 2, and there are revenue savings from the loss of buildings, I encourage CEC to look very hard (again maybe) at the workplace culture and behaviors CLT need to embrace to encourage collaboration. Leading by example. Yes - the old canteen was subsidised, but not massively, just enough to help with cost of living and make you eat there rather than leave site to buy a butty. But most importantly the canteen was part of the office. It was a meeting point and encouraged staff to mingle. You could easily achieve this by using a fraction of the revenue savings from closing Westfields to make those canteen spaces in other buildings attractive and available (and make sure senior managers are visible in them!). You want them big, a whole large wing of Delamere for example. You want Senior managers as well as everyone to use them.

Workplaces should be a destination that our staff want to be in, and so consider other means making them attractive with 'perks' such as free drinks. Even consider making it policy to mandate staff to be in their key hub for at least 3 days a week. It will drive up the office population, collaboration and reignite both innovation and the desire to be in the office. It will be a step change from the current driver which so far appears only to react to the fact the buildings are empty by stripping back everything including fridges and water coolers. Then you wonder why there is no-one in work, where is the incentive?

Appendix 3 – Survey respondent demographics

Counts of survey respondents are presented by gender, age group and health / disability status below.

Gender

What is your gender identity?	Count	Percent
Female	383	69%
Male	108	20%
Prefer to self describe (write in below)	3	1%
Prefer not to say	58	11%
Total valid responses	552	100%

Age group

What age group do you belong to?	Count	Percent
16-24	12	2%
25-34	77	14%
35-44	119	21%
45-54	151	27%
55-64	114	21%
65-74	8	1%
Prefer not to say	74	13%
Total valid responses	555	100%

Health / disability status

Are your day-to-day activities limited because of a health problem or disability which has lasted, or is expected to last, at least 12 months? This includes problems related to old age.	Count	Percent
Yes	49	9%
No	458	82%
Prefer not to say	49	9%
Total valid responses	556	100%



Summary of responses to Cheshire East Council's

Members Office Use Survey 2023



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Introduction

Purpose of the survey

During 2023 Cheshire East Council conducted a WorkplaCE Consultation on the future of corporate offices across the borough, including exploring the potential to reduce office space across the estate.

As part of this consultation the council also sent out a short survey to all elected Council Members, to help understand their use of council offices. Results from the survey would be considered alongside other feedback received during the WorkplaCE Consultation, before any decisions on the future of the council's estate were made.

The Members Office Use Survey was conducted between 8 and 17 September 2023.

Survey methodology and response

86 Cheshire East Council Members were invited to complete the survey by email on 8 September 2023, with a reminder to complete the survey sent out on 14 September 2023.

In total, 31 Members responded to the survey, giving a 36% response rate.

Responses included:

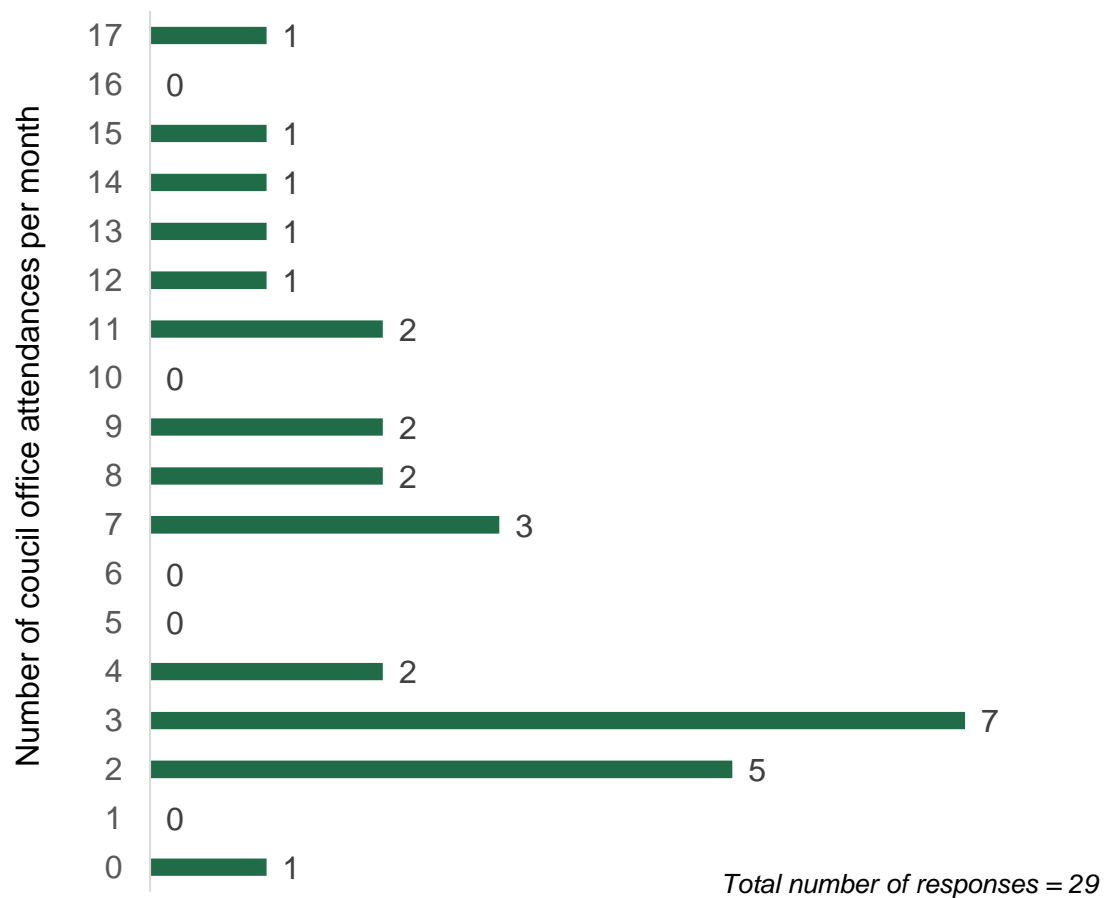
- 29 online survey completions
- 2 email responses

Survey respondents – Attendance at council offices

Average number of attendances at council offices per month

15 of the 29 Members that answered the survey attended a council office on average up to 4 times a month. 7 of the 29 Members attended a council office 11 or more times a month.

Average number of council office attendances per month, per Member

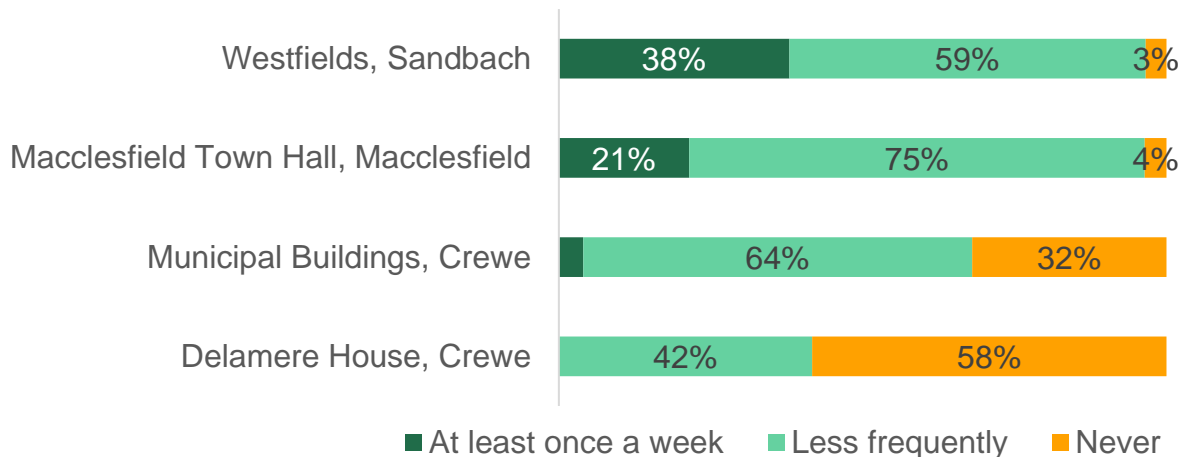


Attendance at the four main council offices

Member attendance at the four main council offices, from most frequently attended to least, was:

- 97% attend Westfields, with 38% doing so weekly
- 96% attend Macclesfield Town Hall, with 21% doing so weekly
- 68% attend Municipal Buildings in Crewe, with 4% doing so weekly
- 42% attend Delamere House in Crewe, with 0% doing so weekly

Generally speaking, how often do you attend each of the following Cheshire East Council offices?



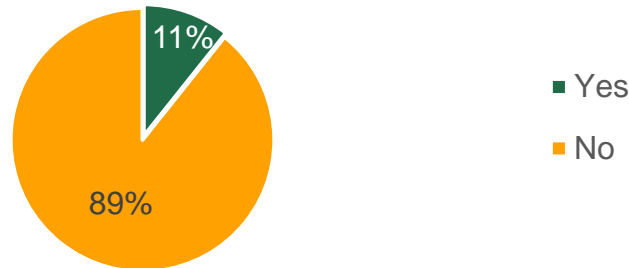
Number of responses between 24 and 29

Survey respondents – Use of office facilities

Desk and monitor usage

Just 11% of Members use a desk and a monitor when attending a council office, with 89% not doing so.

When you attend the offices do you use a desk and a monitor?



Number of responses = 28

Other facilities needed

Other facilities that Members require when visiting offices included:

- Kitchen facilities, including the supply of refreshments, snack and drinks
- Internet / WiFi access
- Toilet facilities
- Meeting rooms, a Members rooms and private working areas

What other facilities do you require access to when you are in any of the council offices you visit?	No. of comments
Kitchen facilities, water supply, beverage / drink facilities, refreshments, snacks,	7
Internet / WiFi access	6
Toilet facilities	4
Meeting room spaces / A Members room	4
An empty desk space, including a chair, power supply	2
Opportunity to meet council Officers / Democratic Services staff	2
Private working rooms / areas, where laptops can be used for meetings	2
Printer / photocopier	2
Committee rooms	1
Shredding facility	1
Telephone	1
Car parking	1

Email respondents – All feedback

2 Councillors fed back on the survey via email. Both email responses have been printed verbatim below.

Councillor John M. Smith, Handforth Ward, 13 September 2023

Have not to date used any offices within the CE estate. I only use Westfields or other CE facilities when attending meetings.

Councillor Mary Brooks, Macclesfield West & Ivy Ward, 14 September 2023

Comment 1: Just to add I would be very pleased if my E&C committee was moved to Macclesfield as I could walk whereas Sandbach is a 32 mile trip. Have done bus on occasion but missed an important briefing due to bus no show. Wouldn't be happy travelling to Crewe as that's an even longer journey by car and bus.

I was in Macclesfield corporate offices last week and there was hardly anyone there so the usage may be even less than stated.

Comment 2: Just thought in my role as environment champion I think it might be useful to have access to a meeting room if meeting people from voluntary sector involved in this area wanted to meet with me.

Comment 3: Although it wouldn't be great travelling to Crewe I recognize that it is likely for some meetings – Crewe Members won't be delighted travelling further to Macclesfield.

However when we move I think the start time of some meetings should be reviewed to facilitate them being possible to travel by public transport or avoid peak time congestion e.g. I had considered travelling by bus to Sandbach which would have just about got me there for 10am however another meeting ironically on carbon reduction was shoe horned in at 9.30am so I ended up driving as bus would have meant a very early departure time.

Conclusions

31 out of the 86 Members invited to complete the survey did so, giving a 36% response rate, which is enough to give the results some validity, though results should be treated with caution.

Westfields in Sandbach, and Macclesfield Town Hall, were the most popular offices for Members to use, with Delamere House in Crewe being the office least used by Members. Indeed 58% of Members never use Delamere House. More work may be needed to understand the reasons why Members do not use Delamere House as often as the other offices.

Few Members require a desk and monitor when coming into offices, with kitchen facilities, WiFi and toilet facilities the most popular requirements listed. Members also suggested that private rooms for working and for meetings are required, and perhaps even a “Members Room”.



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Working for a brighter future together

Corporate Policy Committee

Date of Meeting:	11 July 2023
Report Title:	Office Estate Rationalisation - WorkplaCE
Report of:	Alex Thompson, Director of Finances and Customer Services
Report Reference No:	CP/1/23-24
Ward(s) Affected:	All Wards in the Borough

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1.** This report sets out the approach to optimising the Council's workplaces and reviewing the size of the useable office estate. The approach has been developed to date by listening to staff, champions and employee networks as well as taking on board positive lessons learnt over the last three years, particularly where working practice has been impacted by the pandemic.
- 1.2.** The recommendations of this report will support the design of a modern workplace that supports fairness, accessibility and productivity. This approach will implement the approved budget item [No. 68] "Office Estate Rationalisation" within the Medium-Term Financial Strategy. The approach also contributes to the strategic aims and objectives set out in the Council's Corporate Plan 2021-25, by:
- 1.3.** Supporting a sustainable financial future for the council, through service development, improvement and transformation.
- 1.4.** Reducing our impact on our environment.
- 1.5.** To be carbon neutral by 2025.

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1** Transforming the Council's estate had been a feature of the Council's workplace strategies prior to the pandemic. Improved ICT, including mobile technology, enhanced a hybrid way of working that supports efficient use of Council office space. The pandemic forced an acceleration of homeworking, using new technology, to protect the health and wellbeing of customers and staff. During that period from 2020 to 2022 the Council has gained a greater understanding of alternative ways of working.
- 2.2** Hybrid working mixes an office workplace with home working and has become an established way of working for most council staff since the pandemic. How we utilise our corporate offices has been under continual review, both pre and post pandemic, which evidenced under-utilisation of the available workspace even prior to 2020. The current way of working has increased this under-utilisation, which has enabled the Estates Transformation Programme, now called the WorkplaCE Project, to be accelerated.

The Medium-Term Financial Strategy 2023 to 2027 included a proposal for:

"Rationalisation of the Council's office space buildings to reflect increased hybrid working, and to secure reduction of business rates and holding costs. Also targeting additional Carbon benefits in retained buildings. Key assets in the North and South of the borough will be retained and invested in to provide modern workplaces for staff, Members and stakeholders. Consultation will also consider the option to relocate Macclesfield Library to the nearby Town Hall. Surplus assets will be considered for alternative use to generate income through rental or a capital receipt" (MTFS– approved February 2023)

- 2.3** A review of office accommodation presents further opportunities to increase achievement of the Council's Environment Strategy. The strategy targets carbon reduction through improvements in our buildings and our approach to transport. Whilst a significant amount of work has already been undertaken to reduce carbon within our buildings, the under-utilisation of office space makes buildings highly inefficient. This is also important when considering the large increases in energy costs caused by inflation, improved management of under-utilised space will help to reduce both carbon and cost.
- 2.4** The approach to "provide modern workplaces for staff, Members and stakeholders" has continued via needs assessment and building relationships with partners. The assessment identified that there is no 'one size fits all' solution for services to meet the demands of our customers. But that a reduction in office space is clearly appropriate. There may be future options for incorporating partners within our corporate estate, although it is essential that we are certain the Council's requirements are met.
- 2.5** The needs assessed data determined a total requirement of 10,176 m² for Council Staff in corporate offices. This was compared to an estate provision of 21,000 m² across five main offices located across Macclesfield, Middlewich, Sandbach and Crewe. The options appraisal considered what could be an

appropriate mix of accommodation, whilst maintaining a presence at either end of the Borough (Macclesfield and Crewe) in accordance with the MTFS...

- 2.6** Decisions to date have included the closure of Cledford House (Middlewich), where staff relocation is currently underway; and the re-purposing of offices at the Municipal Buildings (Crewe) to make way for the Technical and Digital Innovation Centre (TADIC) - approved by the Economy and Growth Committee in March 2023. This reduces the available office space by 5,102 m².
- 2.7** Further assessment also considered the most appropriate location for corporate offices based on reducing travel, space availability within buildings as well as providing access to facilities and accessibility for customers. The data supported a presence being required in the north and the south within the borough's largest towns, supporting regeneration.
- 2.8** A feasibility study is being considered regarding the relocation of Macclesfield Library to the nearby Town Hall. However, there is much to do before this could be presented for decision. Estate rationalisation related to the Town Hall should therefore ensure changes to the building allow for future proofing. This approach can enable this work to take place, should the Council wish to do so at a later date. This future proofing could include a short-term lease of available, vacant, space.
- 2.9** Further decisions on office accommodation require additional consultation. This report articulates an option to reduce the estate and the implications to; enhance the residual estate; review staff terms and conditions to ensure they are fit for purpose for the current ways of working; and review IT equipment to access the future ambitions of the workplace project.

3. Recommendations

- 3.1.** Note the findings from the needs assessment and the emerging options to support the WorkplaCE Project.
- 3.2.** Note the MTFS requirement for overall financial savings as set out within Proposal 68 Office Estate Rationalisation (MTFS February 2023).
- 3.3.** Note the baseline data identifying the required office space to support the WorkplaCE Project and therefore the anticipated footprint for the council in the future.
- 3.4.** Based on the findings of the needs assessment Committee approves progressing consultation with trade unions, employees, third parties and members by the Head of HR and the Head of Democratic Services on an option to close Westfield Offices Sandbach and, in that event, relocate staff within other areas of the corporate estate subject to consultation,.
- 3.5** Delegates authority to the Head of Estates to market test and conduct consultation and feasibility studies in relation to surplus facilities, subject to the following requirements:

- 3.5.1 Options must achieve financial benefits over an appropriate period to help cover the costs of the office rationalisation project.
- 3.5.2 Options must achieve best value from such assets.
- 3.5.3 Options must be reported to the Economy and Growth Committee for approval prior to implementation.
- 3.6 Approve the Principles attached at Appendix 2 and agrees that the Chief Executive, will implement changes to working practices, HR Policies, and the Employee Handbook, subject to consultation and engagement with employees and third parties.
- 3.7 Note that feasibility work on the option to relocate Macclesfield Library to the nearby Town Hall will continue and be subject to further reporting to the Economy and Growth Committee prior to consultation.
- 3.8 Delegates authority to the Head of Estates to provide flexibility in the workplace design at Macclesfield Town Hall offices that could effectively accommodate appropriate space for the library if necessary.
- 3.9 Note the ongoing partnership working with the NHS to provide joint accommodation that supports integrated working.

4 Reasons for Recommendations

- 4.1 The Corporate Policy Committee has responsibility, within the Constitution, to determine key cross-cutting policies and key plans that impact on more than one service committee.
- 4.2 The recommendations set out in paragraphs 3.1 to 3.9 provide a way to ensure a consistent approach is taken to office rationalisation that achieves the requirements set out in the MTFS. The approach will be supported with the appropriate policies to ensure staff and members are treated fairly.
- 4.3 Recommendations within this report will support further decision making to provide a clear identification of the corporate offices that will be retained and invested in. Investment will exist both in terms of ICT and infrastructure but also any further energy efficient improvements to reduce the ongoing running costs.
- 4.4 Delegating authority to the Head of HR and Head of Democratic Services will enable a full period of consultation with potentially affected staff and members that can support further decision making on rationalisation of the office estate.
- 4.5 Delegating authority to the Head of Estates Place will test the market to help achieve best value from the residual estate and to clarify the final business case

for the costs of rationalisation and to provide potential further benefits to the MTFS.

- 4.6** The recommendations outlined, reinforce the councils aims as set out in paragraphs 3.1 to 3.9 of this report.

5 Other Options Considered

Option	Impact	Risk
Do nothing	High	The MTFS would be adversely impacted by continuing to maintain offices with a much-reduced workforce operating in these assets where energy prices are increasing substantially. The investment in new ICT (Laptops) would not present value for money and the reputational risk to the council would be significantly impacted as retaining underutilised assets such as these would have a damaging effect on the environment and impact the ability to be carbon neutral by 2025.

6 Background

- 6.1** Even before the impact of the Covid pandemic we had acknowledged that the corporate estate was not fully utilised, with office space occupied on at an average of 50% capacity on a regular basis. Internal meetings were primarily face to face and often in several locations across the borough and beyond, which necessitated a high level of travel. These practices are not sustainable for a modern council with a diverse workforce delivering a range of council services committed to being carbon neutral by 2025.
- 6.2** The global pandemic accelerated the opportunity to embrace new ways of working through enforced home working for staff and services not directly reacting to and supporting the Covid response. Investment in ICT and infrastructure has enabled home working and hybrid working on a scale not previously envisaged. The findings show that embracing our Digital Strategy, and the increase in virtual meetings, supports a material reduction in the need for staff to attend corporate offices – with an average utilisation rate of around 25%. Services continue to deliver from locations outside of the main corporate offices, although they will retain and need some access to workspace in these locations for collaboration and face to face meetings periodically in the future.
- 6.3** The Council has actively recognised its requirements for accommodation are changing and has already developed and approved plans for Cledford House, Middlewich and Municipal Building offices, Crewe. These proposals will see these assets being repurposed for SEN provision and to create a Technical and Digital Innovation Centre (TADIC) respectively. These will access available government funding to improve services to residents and generate employment opportunities in the Borough.

- 6.4** Elected members of the Council, and our key stakeholders and partners have adapted to new ways of working with many meetings being conducted via Teams to enhance flexibility and reduce carbon intensive travel.
- 6.5** There remains a requirement for face-to-face meetings, for committees and full council, as well as the social and operational benefits of retaining such interaction. A needs assessment for Members has been carried out with Democratic Services to ensure that future workplace options can support Members in carrying out their role with the requisite ICT and meeting space.
- 6.6** The needs assessment undertaken with Heads of Services, provided a forward-looking breakdown of worker styles by location and gives a pen picture of the demand for workspace and meeting spaces within the borough. This information provided by services enabled the project team to map the required footprint for the Council to provide the necessary environment and equipment to work within. Appendix 1 sets out this information from the assessment in more detail.
- 6.7** Informed assumptions have been used to identify the overall corporate office space needed in the future. We are using a calculated average m² per person for bookable workspace alongside a requirement for collaboration space, meeting spaces and breakout space. The quality of breakout space was informed by 'Spring Back' events that the Council carried out with staff to increase the learning about improving the workplace.
- 6.8** Table 1 shows the available workspace within each corporate office. The table also shows that the single use of such offices for staff accommodation presents only one option to achieve the needs assessed demand of 10,176m². This leads to an option for consultation although flexibility of the entire estate can be taken into consideration when making a final decision.

Table 1: Office Accommodation by m²

Options	Asset(s) in scope	GIAm ² Available	Variance on GIAm ²
1	Macclesfield TH & Delamere	11,831	1,655
2	Delamere & Westfields	10,205	29
3	Macclesfield TH & Westfields	9,760	-416
4	Delamere & Municipal	8,030	-2,146
5	Macclesfield TH & Municipal	7,585	-2,591
6	Delamere only	6,138	-4,038
7	Westfields & Municipal	5,959	-4,217
8	Macclesfield TH only	5,693	-4,483
9	Westfields only	4,067	-6,109
10	Municipal only	1,892	-8,284

- 6.9** The policy direction is to retain accommodation in the North and South of the borough, whilst reducing overall costs. Consultation must take place in advance of any further decision making to ensure views of potentially affected staff are taken into consideration.
- 6.10** The results of the consultation will be presented to the Committee along with further analysis to support the committee in making decisions that can achieve the requirements of the MTFS.
- 6.11** Council employees and members work across a highly varied buildings estate which includes libraries, children and adult's day centres, depots and offices. The learning from the assessment impacts on all workplaces, but changes to the size of the estate at this stage are focused on the largest capacity buildings, which are our corporate offices.

7 Staff Consultation

- 7.1** There will be a formal period of consultation on the options undertaken with CEC's recognised trade unions, the staff groups and with members. The outcome of that consultation will then need to be considered before any potential changes to the Council's existing office estate is made.
- 7.4** The detail of the consultation plan will be developed setting out the key stages of the consultation

8 Implications

8.1 Legal

- 8.1.1** There is a legal requirement to consult with recognised unions and staff on any option which may affect staff terms including workplace location. The outcome of that consultation will in turn inform next steps of the estates rationalisation programme and further legal advice should be sought at each stage.
- 8.1.2** The Council is under a legal obligation to ensure public money is used properly and the report evidences that rationalisation of the estate will assist in meeting that obligation. The consultation will help inform the final decision and allow all views to be appropriately considered.
- 8.1.3** The consultation period may also be used to inform issues such as the registered office, proposed mitigation on any equality impacts etc. all of which are important elements of any final decision.

8.2 Finance

The Council's 2022-26 Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) included a savings target for 'Estates Transformation – Office Accommodation' of £460,000. Recognising the impact of the pandemic and the subsequent review of the requirements of this project has led to a reset. Savings were achieved through this project as part of the ongoing activities of the Facilities Management Team. This included procurement and efficient consumption of

utilities and efficient maintenance programmes. The Council's 2023-27 MTFS sets out the revised budgets for this project. The increased budget in 2023/24 recognises the need to remove unachievable savings from the 2022 to 2026 MTFS. Savings in 2024/25 and beyond reflect the financial benefits of a reduction in the estate. The current MTFS calculations are based on:

- Estimated running costs to assets in scope c£2,098,000 in 2023/24
- 2023/24 No anticipated reduction in the occupied office/workspace and associated subsequent running costs of assets in scope, +£210k relates to the Neighbourhood Estates Review (£260k) which is now deferred plus anticipated income from tenant(s) c£50k.
- 2024/23 A reduction in the occupied office/workspace and associated subsequent running costs by c26% estimated to be -£550k.
- 2025/26 A further reduction in the occupied office/workspace and associated subsequent running costs c7%. Estimated be -£150k.

8.2.1

2023/24	2024/25	2025/26
£210k	-£550k	-£150k

8.2.2 The estimated costs of the refurbishment of the offices in scope, including associated ICT costs, will require funding from the savings generated from the repurposing of assets. The ED Place will take this into consideration when producing options for repurposed assets. The estimated costs of the project are in the region of £2m. This will be subject to further review as part of the consultation process, but the clear principle is that any costs must be balanced by associated financial benefits from the repurposed estate. The ED Place may take action to minimise net costs through arrangements with 3rd parties to lease surplus office space.

8.2.3 Costs are expected to be split approximately 25% on ICT, 70% on refurbishment and furniture and 5% on management of change and project management support. The costs below are estimated against an option as an indication of affordability.

Item(s)	Comments	Estimated Costs
Standard workstation – Monitors & Peripherals	Costs are for monitors & peripherals including docking and secure cabling to an anchor point. Estimated additional workstations required as some new monitors have already been provided.	
Fixed workstation – Desktop PCs	Costs based fixed workstations, i.e. Desktop PC, peripherals and secure cabling.	
Room /desk Booking System	Estimated costs will depend on phase 2 requirements capture from the Facilities team (est.300 hours) and roll out to other services, e.g. Childrens Services, (est. 240 hours)	
Large Meeting room equipment	Cost based on equipment similar to what has already been provided in 3 of the core buildings. Please note there is a MS Teams Meeting Room Subscription Licence Estimate based on 7 rooms	
Medium Meeting room equipment	Cost based on equipment similar to what has already been provided in 3 of the core buildings. Please note there is also a MS Teams Meeting Room Subscription Licence Estimate based on 7 rooms	
ICT Resource costs	For project management and technical resources for the roll-out of the required equipment and solutions, plus removal and re-allocation of equipment from sites to be decommissioned. This estimated cost is based on the current cost model for charging for ICT resources.	
Site closure – decommissioning of ICT equipment. Per site.	Circuit cancellation fees	
Sub Total ICT Related Costs (minimum estimate)		c£500,000
Item(s)	Comments	Estimated Costs
Delamere House & Macclesfield Town Hall	Refurbishment to include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Building works to remodel Reception Area (Delamere House) • internal decoration to all floors including walls & flooring. • Includes a 10% Contingency & a 10% associated Fees 	£1,375,000
FM & Removal Costs	Costs to relocate items between offices	£125,000
Project Delivery Costs	Costs associated with delivery of the project, post approval(s)	£100,000
Sub Total FM & Asset Related Costs (minimum estimate)		£1,600,000
Total Estimated Costs		c£2,100,000

- 8.2.3** Until an asset is disposed of, by way of sale or lease, a minimum of 70% of the annual running costs would be required to maintain the asset. This will be reflected in the Council's MTFS as part of the budget monitoring reported to the Economy and Growth Committee.
- 8.2.4** Current estimated reductions in running costs in relation to a disposed asset will produce annual net savings, after cost of borrowing and estimated increases in running costs, beginning the year after the disposal of the asset.

9.0 Policy

- 9.1** The proposal within this report supports achievement of the following priorities in the Corporate Plan.
- 9.2** Support a sustainable financial future for the council, through service development, improvement, and transformation.
- 9.3** Support and develop our workforce to be confident, motivated, innovative, resilient, and empowered.
- 9.4** Reduce impact on the environment.
- 9.5** Be a carbon neutral council by 2025.

10. Equality

- 10.1** Initial equality, diversity and inclusion implications were identified through the "Spring Back Together" events in May and June 2022. Generally, staff recognise that a hybrid working model supports greater workforce inclusivity.
- 10.2** The proposals particularly in supporting staff with physical and mental disabilities to balance health conditions with working, for example being able to work from home when this does not impact on service delivery. Staff with caring responsibilities are also supported to work flexibly, and this flexibility should also benefit customers, through extended service delivery hours where possible. In developing a refreshed working environment for staff there may be opportunities to enhance facilities for those with protected characteristics, for example, by adapting wellbeing rooms so that they may also function as multi faith prayer spaces.
- 10.3** There may also be some negative equality, diversity and inclusion implications of the options for any staff who may have additional travel and accessibility pressures if they are required to travel to another council building that is further away from their current base.

11. Human Resources

- 11.1** There is a legal requirement to consult with recognised unions and staff on any option which may affect staff terms including workplace location. The outcome of that consultation will in turn inform next steps of the estates rationalisation programme and further human resources advice should be sought at each stage.

12. Risk Management

- 12.1** There is robust governance in place for this project, where risk is identified and managed at Project Board, the Brighter Futures Programme Board and more recently at Corporate Leadership Team (CLT) under the MTFS proposals.

13. Rural Communities

- 13.1** No implications for our rural communities.

14. Children and Young People/Cared for Children

- 14.1** Teams from Children and Families have been impacted by the closure of Cledford House, however, full consultation has taken place and teams are in the process of moving.

15. Public Health

- 15.1** No implications for Public Health.

16. Climate Change

- 16.1** The options could see a reduction in the council's corporate asset footprint which in turn would reduce the carbon footprint and associated CO² emissions.
- 16.2** Reduced travel between meetings, together with potential increased use of car club activity, would give savings on the Council carbon footprint.

Access to Information	
Contact Officer:	Alex Thompson, Director of Finance and Customer Services Alex.Thompson@cheshireeast.gov.uk 01270 685867
Appendices:	Appendix 1 Heads of Service Needs Assessment summary Appendix 2 WorkplaCE Agreed Principles
Background Papers:	N/A

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Equality Impact Assessment (EIA)

Engagement and our equality duty

Whilst [the Gunning Principles](#) set out the rules for consulting ‘everyone’, additional requirements are in place to avoid discrimination and inequality.

Cheshire East Council is required to comply with the Equality Act 2010 and the Public Sector Equality Duty. The Equality Act 2010 simplified previous anti-discrimination laws with a single piece of legislation. Within the Act, the Public Sector Equality Duty (Section 149) has three aims. It requires public bodies to have due regard to the need to:

- eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct prohibited by the Act, by consciously thinking about equality when making decisions (such as in developing policy, delivering services and commissioning from others)
- advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it, by removing disadvantages, meeting their specific needs, and encouraging their participation in public life
- foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not

The Equality Duty helps public bodies to deliver their overall objectives for public services, and as such should be approached as a positive opportunity to support good decision-making.

It encourages public bodies to understand how different people will be affected by their activities so that policies and services are appropriate and accessible to all and meet different people’s needs. By understanding the effect of their activities on different people, and how inclusive public services can support and open up people’s opportunities, public bodies are better placed to deliver policies and services that are efficient and effective.

Complying with the Equality Duty may involve treating some people better than others, as far as this is allowed by discrimination law. For example, it may involve providing a service in a way which is appropriate for people who share a protected characteristic, such as providing computer training to all people to help them access information and services.

The Equality Act identifies nine 'protected characteristics' and makes it a legal requirement to make sure that people with these characteristics are protected from discrimination:

- Age
- Disability
- Gender reassignment
- Marriage and civil partnerships
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Race
- Religion or belief
- Sex
- Sexual orientation

Applying the equality duty to engagement

If you are developing a new policy, strategy or programme you may need to carry out an Equality Impact Assessment. You may be able to ascertain the impact of your proposal on different characteristics through desk-based research and learning from similar programmes, but you also need to carry out some primary research and engagement. People with protected characteristics are often described as 'hard to reach' but you will find everyone can be reached – you just need to tailor your approach, so it is accessible for them.

Contacting the [Equality and Diversity mailbox](#) will help you to understand how you can gain insight as to the impacts of your proposals and will ensure that you help the Council to comply with the Equality Act 2010 and the Public Sector Equality Duty.

Section 1 – Details of the service, service change, decommissioning of the service, strategy, function or procedure

Proposal Title	WorkplaCE (Estate Rationalisation MTFS #68)
Date of Assessment	12.07.23 (Reviewed 9/11/23)
Assessment Lead Officer Name	Alex Thompson
Directorate/Service	Director of Finances and Customer Services
Details of the service, service change, decommissioning of the service, strategy, function or procedure.	<p>Please provide a summary of your proposal.</p> <p>Transforming the Council’s estate had been a feature of the Council’s workplace strategies prior to the pandemic. Improved ICT, including mobile technology, enhanced a hybrid way of working that supports efficient use of Council office space. The pandemic forced an acceleration of homeworking, using new technology, to protect the health and wellbeing of customers and staff. During that period from 2020 to 2022 the Council has gained a greater understanding of alternative ways of working.</p> <p>Hybrid working mixes an office workplace with home working and has become an established way of working for most council staff since the pandemic. How we utilise our corporate offices has been under continual review, both pre and post pandemic, which evidenced under-utilisation of the available workspace even prior to 2020. The current way of working has increased this under-utilisation, which has enabled the Estates Transformation Programme, now called the WorkplaCE Project, to be accelerated.</p> <p>The Medium-Term Financial Strategy 2023 to 2027 included a proposal for:</p> <p>“Rationalisation of the Council’s office space buildings to reflect increased hybrid working, and to secure reduction of business rates and holding costs. Also targeting additional Carbon benefits in retained buildings. Key assets in the North and South of the borough will be retained and invested in to provide modern workplaces for staff, Members and stakeholders. Consultation will also consider the option to relocate Macclesfield Library to the nearby Town Hall. Surplus assets will be considered for alternative use to generate income through rental or a capital receipt” (MTFS– approved February 2023).</p>

	<p>A review of office accommodation presents further opportunities to increase achievement of the Council's Environment Strategy. The strategy targets carbon reduction through improvements in our buildings and our approach to transport. Whilst a significant amount of work has already been undertaken to reduce carbon within our buildings, the under-utilisation of office space makes buildings highly inefficient. This is also important when considering the large increases in energy costs caused by inflation, improved management of under-utilised space will help to reduce both carbon and cost.</p> <p>The approach to "provide modern workplaces for staff, Members and stakeholders" has continued via needs assessment and building relationships with partners. The assessment identified that there is no 'one size fits all' solution for services to meet the demands of our customers. But that a reduction in office space is clearly appropriate. There may be future options for incorporating partners within our corporate estate, although it is essential that we are certain the Council's requirements are met.</p> <p>The needs assessed data determined a total requirement of 10,176 m² for Council Staff in corporate offices. This was compared to an estate provision of 21,000 m² across five main offices located across:</p> <p>Macclesfield, Middlewich, Sandbach and Crewe.</p> <p>The options appraisal considered what could be an appropriate mix of accommodation, whilst maintaining a presence at either end of the Borough (Macclesfield and Crewe) in accordance with the MTFS.</p> <p>Decisions to date have included the closure of Cledford House (Middlewich), where staff relocation is currently underway; and the re-purposing of offices at the Municipal Buildings (Crewe) to make way for the Technical and Digital Innovation Centre (TADIC) - approved by the Economy and Growth Committee in March 2023. This reduces the available office space by 5,102 m².</p> <p>Further assessment also considered the most appropriate location for corporate offices based on reducing travel, space availability within buildings as well as providing access to facilities and accessibility for customers. The data supported a presence being required in the north and the south within the borough's largest towns, supporting regeneration.</p>
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<p>Who is Affected?</p>	<p>Please include details of all those affected by the service/strategy/function or procedure. In some cases, the proposal could affect all Cheshire East residents and/or Council staff.</p> <p>All staff that currently operate from the Westfields, would be impacted if an approval to declare this asset as surplus is reached. There would also be an impact on staff based in Delamere House and Macclesfield Town Hall as staff were relocated to these workplaces. This would also affect Members and stakeholders that currently interact at this site. Residents and members of the public may also be impacted, though it should be noted that the Westfields offices do not offer a formal public facing Customer Service facility.</p> <p>Please include evidence of how you believe that these groups will be affected.</p> <p>Approval of Westfields as a surplus asset will necessitate a physical relocation to Delamere House and or Macclesfield Town Hall. In some instances, this could see an increase in travel to an alternative office for staff, members and or residents.</p> <p>From the Phase 1 Consultation with trade unions and staff, no specific equality, diversity and inclusion issues were raised. If an approval to declare Westfield as a surplus asset was reached, there would be individual consultation to understand and, where needed, mitigate against the impact on an individual level. At this stage, given the size and make-up of the workforce, it is anticipated that there may be staff with caring responsibilities and disabilities who may be negatively affected by the decision as a result of increased distance and travel time to the office (impacting on working time and transport options), and lack of on-site parking. As part of the individual consultation, there would be careful consideration for appropriate measures to mitigate against the impact on them.</p>
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	<p>In the case of a specific service, strategy, function or procedure please include details of the customers and/or staff affected.</p> <p>Democratic Services and the various Committees that they support would need an alternative venue to conduct these from. Alternative facilities are built into the proposed option that we are consulting on, which includes an option to conduct these meetings & committees from either Crewe (Delamere House) or Macclesfield Town Hall.</p> <p>The Executive Suite & Members Area would cease from Westfields and again, the proposed option would see these facilities replicated (and improved) in both Delamere House and Macclesfield Town Hall. The Executive Suite would be a bookable area that staff & members could access when not in use.</p>
<p>Links and impact on other services, strategies, functions or procedures.</p>	<p>Does the proposal link to other areas of the council's work?</p> <p>WorkplaCE encompasses the council's approach to service delivery throughout the borough, focusing more on 'how we work' rather than 'where we work'.</p> <p>Could the proposal impact on other services, functions or procedures?</p> <p>A new Head Quarter postal address would be required if, subject to approval, Westfields was deemed surplus and repurposed in any way. There is potential within the proposal for key stakeholders and partners to integrate into the rationalised estate, creating greater synergies in working practices.</p> <p>How does it link to the Corporate Plan and other major council policies?</p> <p>The WorkplaCE project aligns and supports the council's commitment to reducing its Carbon emissions to nett neutral by 2025. It further supports the Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) for 2023- 2027.</p>


<p>How does the service, service change, strategy, function or procedure help the Council meet the requirements of the Public Sector Equality Duty?</p>	<p>The Public Sector Equality Duty is a legal requirement contained within the Equality Act 2010 which requires public authorities and others carrying out public functions to have due regard to the need to:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation. • Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not. • Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not. <p>The above aims may be more relevant to some proposals than others, and they may be more relevant to some protected characteristics than others. However, it is advisable that the proposal be assessed against each of the above aims.</p>
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Section 2 - Information – What do you know?

What do you know?	What information (qualitative and quantitative) and/or research have you used to commission/change/decommission the service, strategy, function, or procedure?
<p>Information you used</p>	<p>Please include details (including weblinks) of the information you have used to inform your proposal. This should include information relating to relevant protected characteristics which are covered in the Equality Act 2010. These are: - age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnerships, pregnancy and maternity, race, religious or faith groups, sex and sexual orientation. In many cases a proposal will be relevant to more than one protected characteristic.</p>

	<p>You should consider the information and research already available locally, regionally and nationally. This can include equality monitoring information, Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) information, performance monitoring reports, inspection reports and desktop research (local, regional and national).</p> <p>A needs assessment survey was carried out with Heads of Service across the corporate assets. This identified the anticipated daily demand for office space for services including fixed working, hybrid working as well as collaboration and meeting space. Within the questionnaire was a specific question in relation to:</p> <p>Are there any equality, diversity, and inclusion requirements of members of your team to be aware of when developing our future workplace? For example, assistive technology and adaptations, cultural or religious requirements. If so, please give details below:</p> <p>In addition to this, Heads of Service were also asked to provide details (i.e. numbers) of staff that had specific ICT requirements such as, equipment following any Display Screen Equipment (DES) assessment or an Occupational Health assessment/referral.</p> <p>To further supplement the approach, we have undertaken a number of weekly desk occupancy surveys throughout the day, identifying the volume of desks occupied in four key office locations. This has provided a consistent working baseline to build from, though it should be noted that the proposal is looking to meet (and where practicable) exceed the 'ask' set out from the needs assessment.</p>
Gaps in your Information	<p>Please include details of any gaps in information. Is it possible to undertake further research to fill these gaps?</p> <p>It is recommended that a proportional approach be undertaken. If the impact is likely to be significant for a specific protected group measures should be undertaken to collect the information.</p> <p>Are there impacts which you believe will impact stakeholders, however you are not sure how this impact will impact people.</p>

3. What did people tell you?

What did people tell you	What consultation and engagement activities have you already undertaken and what did people tell you? Is there any feedback from other local and/or external regional/national consultations that could be included in your assessment?
Details and dates of the consultation/s and/or engagement activities	<p>Please include details of all consultation and engagement activities which you have already undertaken to identify the impacts already noted in earlier sections of the assessment.</p> <p>This should include the date, type of consultation i.e. online survey, focus group, virtual consultation, face to face (please exclude personal information), customer satisfaction surveys etc.</p> <p>The number of respondents and a summary of the feedback received should be included</p> <p>Feedback from other local and/or external regional/national consultations could also be used to assess the impact of your proposal on different protected groups.</p> <p>This section needs to be based on what you have already done, not what you are intending to do.</p> <p>In addition to the Heads of Service Needs Assessments, engagement with staff and unions has taken place through the Spring back events and the Pulse surveys. More recently the initial consultation with staff and members has concluded and these reports are included as appendices to accompany the Corporate Policy Committee Report for the meeting scheduled on 30.11.23</p> <div>  </div> <p>Appendix 1 - HoS Needs Assessment Su</p>

	<p>The feedback from the WorkplaCE Phase One Consultation is provided in the document below</p>  <p>WorkplaCE Phase One Consultation 202.</p>
Gaps in consultation and engagement feedback	<p>Based upon the evidence that you have used to arrive at a need for change and any engagement with stakeholders which you have already done – where do you think that there are gaps in your knowledge?</p> <p>Following on from the initial consultation we know that further consultation (subject to approval to progress) with individuals, teams & services is critical to ensure that we mitigate any impacts felt as a consequence of the proposal to close a corporate asset.</p> <p>We will need to establish that best location(s) for individuals and teams to relocate to and in what sequence so that staff have sufficient notice of where and when they can expect to work from a new location when they need to work in a corporate asset in Crewe and or Macclesfield.</p> <p>From the Phase 1 Consultation with trade unions and staff, no specific equality, diversity, and inclusion issues were raised. If an approval to declare Westfield as a surplus asset was reached, there would be individual consultation to understand and, where needed, mitigate against the impact on an individual level. At this stage, given the size and make-up of the workforce, it is anticipated that there may be staff with caring responsibilities and disabilities who may be negatively affected by the decision as a result of increased distance and travel time to the office (impacting on working time and transport options), and lack of on-site parking. As part of the individual consultation, there would be careful consideration for appropriate measures to mitigate against the impact on them.</p>

4. Review of information, consultation feedback and equality analysis

Protected characteristics groups from the Equality Act 2010	What do you know? Summary of information used to inform the proposal	What did people tell you? Summary of customer and/or staff feedback	What does this mean? Impacts identified from the information and feedback (actual and potential). These can be either positive, negative or have no impact.
Age			Given the size and make-up of the workforce, it is anticipated that there may be staff with caring responsibilities and disabilities who may be negatively affected by the decision. As part of the individual consultation, there would be careful consideration for appropriate measures to mitigate against the impact on them.
Disability			There is potential for staff with a disability requiring parking in close proximity to their workplace. Westfields does afford this in an area used by staff and members of the public. There is some capacity at Macclesfield Town Hall at the rear of the office. Delamere House has no on site parking other than 2 EV charging spaces. There is a public car park at the front of the office with disabled parking bays which the public also utilise and there is a private car park adjacent to the offices.

Gender reassignment			No impact anticipated at this time.
Pregnancy and maternity			No impact anticipated at this time.
Race/ethnicity			No impact anticipated at this time.
Religion or belief			Need to review access to prayer facilities
Sex			Given the size and make-up of the workforce, it is anticipated that there may be staff with caring responsibilities and disabilities who may be negatively affected by the decision. As part of the individual consultation, there would be careful consideration for appropriate measures to mitigate against the impact on them.
Sexual orientation			No impact anticipated at this time.
Marriage and civil partnership			No impact anticipated at this time.

5. Justification, Mitigation and Actions

Mitigation	What can you do? Actions to mitigate any negative impacts or further enhance positive impacts
<p>Please provide justification for the proposal if negative impacts have been identified?</p> <p>Are there any actions that could be undertaken to mitigate, reduce or remove negative impacts?</p> <p>Have all available options been explored? Please include details of alternative options and why they couldn't be considered?</p> <p>Please include details of how positive impacts could be further enhanced, if possible?</p>	<p>No specific issues have been raised. However, as consultation progresses, it is anticipated that there may be staff with caring responsibilities and disabilities who may be negatively impacted by the proposal. Consultation with staff will take place before implementation of any relocation to identify and address any negative impact through appropriate mitigation methods which may include more flexibility, altering hours, flexible locations, provision of equipment or other appropriate measures.</p> <p>Alternatives have been explored but would not achieve the approved MTFS savings required.</p> <p>More flexible and hybrid working arrangements arising out of the proposal can support those with protected characteristics and will be explored further as individual consultation progresses.</p>

6. Monitoring and Review -

Monitoring and review	How will the impact of the service, service change, decommissioning of the service, strategy, function or procedure be monitored? How will actions to mitigate negative impacts be monitored? Date for review of the EIA
Details of monitoring activities	<p>Please include details of how the impact of the proposal will be monitored e.g. performance monitoring, analysis of complaints, equality monitoring data etc.</p> <p>Monitoring should include information on whether actions to mitigate negative impacts have achieved their desired outcome</p> <p>Staff Surveys & Pulse Surveys will be used to monitor the impact of the relocation of staff.</p>
Date and responsible officer for the review of the EIA	Please include the date, responsible officer and department. It is recommended that the EIA be reviewed approximately 6 months after it has been signed off.

7. Sign Off

When you have completed your EIA, it should be sent to the [Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Mailbox](#) for review. If your EIA is approved, it must then be signed off by a senior manager within your Department (Head of Service or above).

Once the EIA has been signed off, please forward a copy to the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Officer to be published on the website. For Transparency, we are committed to publishing all Equality Impact Assessments relating to public engagement.

Name	
Signature	
Date	

8. Help and Support

For support and advice please contact EqualityandInclusion@cheshireeast.gov.uk

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