

CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the **Economy and Growth Committee**
held on Tuesday, 12th March, 2024 in the Committee Suite 1,2 & 3,
Westfields, Middlewich Road, Sandbach CW11 1HZ

PRESENT

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

Councillors S Adams, R Chadwick, J Clowes, B Drake, A Heler, G Marshall,
R Moreton, C Naismith, C O'Leary, P Redstone and F Wilson

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE

Peter Skates, Acting Executive Director Place
Charles Jarvis, Head of Economic Development
Karen Carsberg, Head of Housing
Nic Abbott, Housing Options and Homelessness Manager
Jo Wise, Development and Regeneration Manager
Steve Reading, Finance Officer
Adrian Leslie, Legal Services
Rachel Graves, Democratic Services Officer

The Chair invited Councillor M Goldsmith to speak. Councillor Goldsmith thanked officers for their support whilst he was Chair of the Economy and Growth Committee. He stated that during the previous committee meeting on 26 January 2024, some of those in attendance had thought he had been rude to speakers from the Friends of Poynton Pool. He apologised if he had given that impression, but his intention had been to convey the legal obligations of the Council regarding public safety, and he apologised for falling below the standards expected at that meeting.

51 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors D Brown and R Morris.
Councillors S Adams and R Chadwick attended as substitutes.

52 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor C O'Leary declared a non-pecuniary interest in agenda items 5 and 11.

In relation to Item 11, Councillor N Mannion declared that he was a Trustee for the Fence Trust and Stanley and Brocklehurst Almshouse Trust. Councillor F Wilson declared that she was employed by the Fence Trust and Stanley and Brocklehurst Almshouse Trust.

53 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 26 January 2024 be confirmed as a correct record.

54 PUBLIC SPEAKING/OPEN SESSION

There were no members of the public in attendance.

55 CHESHIRE EAST COMMON ALLOCATIONS POLICY

The Committee considered the report on the review of the Cheshire East Common Allocations Policy.

It was a statutory requirement for every council, whether they have housing stock or not, to have an allocations policy in place which outlined how social housing located within their authority was allocated.

The Committee, at its meeting in July 2023, had approved consultation on changes to the policy. The report and appendices before the Committee set out the outcome of the public consultation and the changes to the Cheshire East Common Allocations Policy.

Reference was made to the British Legion response to the consultation, and it was asked if the Council intended to conduct and publish the results of any pieces of work to record the number of ex-service personnel who were currently homeless and what steps did the Council take to identify if an applicant was an ex-service person.

In response it was stated that the Council did not get a large number of homeless ex-service personnel, and that there would be a concern about publishing information as needed to be compliant with data protection rules, but the Council did use the data held to inform and commission accommodation especially for armed forces personnel. There had recently been an opportunity to apply for capital funding for accommodation specifically for armed forces personnel. The data held had identified a need and the service had spoken to registered providers to see if they would be happy to work with the Council. In relation to identifying an ex-service person, there was a field on the application form which enabled the applicant to state whether or not they were actually serving or whether or not they were ex-military. It was up to the applicant to decide whether or not they wanted to disclose this information.

RESOLVED (unanimously): That the Committee

- 1 note the outcome of the Public Consultation, as set out in Appendix 1 to the report.

- 2 approve the revised Cheshire East Common Allocations Policy, as set out in Appendix 2 to the report.
- 3 delegate authority to make any future minor amendments or legislation changes to the Policy to the Director of Growth and Enterprise in consultation with the Chair of the Economy and Growth Committee.

56 RENTERS REFORM AND SELECTIVE LICENSING SCHEME UPDATE

The Committee considered the update report on the Renters Reform Bill and the Selective Licensing Scheme.

The private rental market was now the second largest tenure behind homeownership, overtaking social housing provision. Whilst it was acknowledged that many private landlords managed their tenants and maintained properties to a good standard, there was also a number of landlords whose management and properties did not meet acceptable standards.

Local Authorities had a discretionary power under Part 3 of the Housing Act 2004 to introduce a Selective Licensing Scheme in an identified priority area. In 2019 the Nantwich Road area of Crewe was identified as a priority area for intervention as it was displaying multiple issues around poor property conditions, higher levels of deprivation, crime and of anti-social behaviour that was considerably higher than other areas of Cheshire East. A two-stage approach was agreed for the area and a working group was established to develop a collaborative plan across a number of Council services to co-ordinate services and develop a detailed interventions to drive improvement in the Nantwich Road area. The report before the Committee detailed the work undertaken to improve conditions. However, one key essential component was unable to be progressed due to an ongoing challenge to secure funding for the resources required to undertake proactive housing enforcement work. This meant the Council was not able to progress to the next stage of the implementation of a Selective Licensing scheme.

The Renters (Reform) Bill was introduced to Parliament in May 2023 and was presently at the report stage. A key proposal in the Bill was the introduction of a new Government Landlord registration scheme for the UK which would negate the need for a Selective Licensing scheme to be introduced in the Nantwich Road area, as once introduced all landlords would be legally required to register themselves and their properties on a Property Portal and could be subject to fines if they marketed or let out a property without registering it and providing the required information.

RESOLVED (by majority): That the Committee

- 1 note the work being undertaken by the Crewe Neighbourhood project working group and progress made to date to help improve the area.
- 2 agree to wait the Royal Assent of the Renters (Reform) Act and the introduction of a new Government Landlord registration scheme for the UK, which would remove the need for a Selective Licensing scheme to be introduced in the Nantwich Road area.
- 3 note, that while awaiting implementation of the Renters (Reform) Act, the Council shall continue to assess and evaluate available evidence and options to facilitate effective oversight and licensing of landlord properties in the area.

57 UPDATE OF UK SHARED PROSPERITY FUND

The Committee considered the update report on the progress made with the allocation of UK Shared Prosperity Funding (UKSPF).

The Council was the accountable body for the UKSPF in Cheshire East and was responsible for the management of UKSPF allocation for 22/23-24/25, which amounted to £13,948,936.

The funding was divided into three elements:

- Core UKSPF allocation of £11,585,762 split across three years, which would be spent on defined types of interventions within three categories – People and Skills, Communities and Places, and Business Support.
- Rural ‘top up’ allocation of £827,627 for years 23/24 and 24/25 only to be spent on capital schemes supporting rural business, communities, and place.
- £1,563,749 to be spent exclusively on the Multiply (Adult Numeracy) Programme.

Due to the tight timescales imposed centrally for the delivery of key workstreams and spend, Council on 20 July 2022 had delegated authority to various officers the management of the funds. Projects led by the Council and from wider call outs for further projects from suitable organisations across the Borough had been selected to receive UKSPF funding in several tranches. The appendices to the report set out the schemes to which funding was allocated to and the progress with these schemes.

It was noted that funding constraints to spend the UKSFP had been set by the Government which had caused delays in funding being allocated. The Committee felt that parish councils and community groups may not have the knowledge or resources to respond quickly to calls for interest and

applications, and it was suggested that engagement and training be done with parish councils and community groups.

It was noted that the Town Centre Vitality Plans set out ideas for improvement and a supporting Tool Kit had been developed which could be used to help develop bids for UKSPF funding. It was agreed that that a link to these would be circulated to committee members.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee note the progress made in allocating and utilising the 2022-25 Cheshire East UKSPF allocation; together with the issues faced in pursuing spend by March 2025; the risk of underspend; and the mitigation proposed to reduce that risk.

58 MACCLESFIELD INDOOR MARKET REFURBISHMENT

The Committee considered the report on the proposals to refurbish elements of Macclesfield Indoor Market utilising UK Shared Prosperity Funding (UKSPF) and approval was sought to enter into a contract with a value of over £1m for the refurbishment work.

The approved Macclesfield Town Centre Strategic Regeneration Framework identified the desirability of investment in Macclesfield Indoor Market to increase its attractiveness to a wider range of residents and visitors.

The refurbishment project had been awarded £1,349,400 from the UKSPF in November 2023 with an additional £229,100 for branding and capital works in February 2024. There was a tight timescale for delivery of UKSPF funded projects with the current rules requiring spend of all UKSPF allocations by the end of March 2025.

The Committee were supportive of the project which would help towards the Town Centre regeneration and followed on from the provision of the Changing Places Toilet in the Indoor Market. It was noted that Macclesfield now had more independent shops and a revamped indoor market would offer opportunities for people to start businesses who could not afford to lease shop premises. It was asked if the Indoor Market would have the opportunity to open in the evenings to allow it to be used for events, like at Crewe Market Hall, as at present it closed when the shopping centre closed. In response it was stated that the shopping centre owners had been included in discussions and were supportive of the proposals as it would improve footfall within the shopping centre.

RESOLVED (unanimously):

That the Committee authorise the Head of Economic Development to select and enter into a contract with a provider to deliver refurbishment

works to Macclesfield Indoor Market, noting the value of the contract will exceed £1,000,000.

59 WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee considered the Work Programme for the 2024/25 municipal year.

The Chair stated that he was open to new ideas for the work programme and had already been approached by committee members with ideas, which he would discuss with officers. He stated that there would be a move away for having reports for 'noting only' on the agendas.

It was reported that the Work Programme on the agenda was limited and not all future decisions had been feed through to the document. The focus would be on reports coming to Committee that required a decision. For matters that did not require a decision briefing sessions would be arranged. Handforth Garden Village was a continuous project, and an update on the high-level business case, options appraisal and recommended delivery strategy would be brought to the Committee in either June or July 2024. The Rural Action Plan would be brought back to the Committee in the next 12 months. Other items coming forward were the Farm Strategy and the Housing Strategy.

It was asked if the Farms Working Group had met yet, and if not, could this be facilitated. In response it was stated that the Group had not yet met. It was confirmed that the following committee members were on this working group – Councillors J Clowes, B Drake, A Heler, G Marshall and C Naismith.

It was noted that the budget proposals, including the future use of Westfields, which were accepted by the Committee had not yet come through onto the Work Programme and it was asked if these could be added so that the Committee knew when they would be coming to committee or briefing so that members could have oversight and scrutiny to make sure they were being delivered in a timely way to meet budget requirements.

In response in relation to the future use of Westfields, it was stated that it was the intention to bring a fully worked up business case to the Committee for approval. These proposals were presently undergoing detailed analysis.

Reference was made to the Royal Arcade Reference Group, and it was reported that the Group had not yet been convened and work was being undertaken to confirm the final membership for the Group, which would not just be members of the Committee.

The Rural Action Plan Member Advisory Group had been established to help develop the Rural Action Plan 2022/23 -2025/26, which had been

approved by the Committee in September 2022. A take-off paper for the next Rural Action Plan would be brought during the year, which was expected to instigate a new Member Advisory Group.

RESOLVED:

That the Work Programme be noted.

60 EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED:

That the press and public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the following item pursuant to Section 100(A)4 of the Local Government Act 1972 on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraphs 2, 3 and 4 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972 and public interest would not be served in publishing the information.

61 RE-COMMISSIONING OF HOUSE RELATED SUPPORT CONTRACTS

The Committee considered the report on the Re-Commissioning of Housing Related Support Contracts.

RESOLVED (unanimously):

That the recommendations be approved as set out in the report.

The meeting commenced at 2.00 pm and concluded at 3.43 pm

Councillor M Gorman (Chair)