

CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the **Corporate Policy Committee**
held on Thursday, 9th February, 2023 in the Committee Suite 1,2 & 3,
Westfields, Middlewich Road, Sandbach CW11 1HZ

PRESENT

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

Councillors C Browne, J Buckley, J Clowes, JP Findlow, K Flavell, S Holland,
N Mannion, A Martin, J Rhodes, J Saunders and M Warren

Other Members present

Councillor L Crane

Officers in attendance

Lorraine O'Donnell, Chief Executive
Jane Burns, Executive Director of Corporate Services
David Brown, Director of Governance and Compliance
Alex Thompson, Director of Finance and Customer Services
Michael Moore, Head of Communications
Sara Duncalf, HR Operations Manager
Gareth Pawlett, Chief Information Officer
Peter Lloyd, Head of Transformation and Technology, Cheshire West and
Chester Council
Paul Mountford, Democratic Services

Apologies

Councillors D Brown and P Williams

The Chair announced that the British Red Cross had launched an appeal in relation to the devastating earthquakes that had hit southern Turkey and north-west Syria killing thousands of people and injuring many thousands more. Contributions could be made through the British Red Cross website, a link to which would be placed on the Council's website shortly.

Four Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service fire fighters were helping with the rescue effort.

59 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

60 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the meeting held on 1st December 2022 be approved as a correct record.

61 PUBLIC SPEAKING/OPEN SESSION

Charlotte Peters Rock spoke in relation to the Stanley Centre, Knutsford, and the potential impact that the closure of the Centre would have on the community, and particularly disabled residents.

In response, Councillor J Rhodes, Chair of the Adults and Health Committee, advised that the closure of the Stanley Centre was one of a number of suggestions for consideration at this stage and that any proposals in relation to the Centre would require full consultation with residents.

Councillor L Crane asked if the Council would consider using receipts from the sale of assets to mitigate or prevent some of the proposed spending cuts in the budget. She also asked whether this would constitute a valid amendment to the budget either today or at full Council, given that a full business case could not be developed in time.

The Director of Finance and Customer Services advised that any anticipated asset disposals or acquisitions were built into the budget figures to be considered by the Committee at today's meeting and there were no outstanding business cases at present that could be accelerated in order to provide mitigation within the budget. The Finance Sub-Committee recently reviewed asset disposals at its meeting on 19 January 2023. Any variations to the proposed use of capital receipts from the sale of assets would need to be considered by the Finance Sub-Committee which was responsible for reviewing the asset management plan.

62 MEDIUM-TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY 2023-27 CONSULTATION ON THE RESPONSIBILITIES COVERED BY THE CORPORATE POLICY COMMITTEE

The Committee considered a report which sought feedback from the Committee, as a consultee, on the development of the Cheshire East Medium-Term Financial Strategy 2023/24 to 2026/27 in relation to the Committee's responsibilities.

With regard to Item 57 in the revenue proposals: Reducing the Cost of Democracy, the Executive Director of Corporate Services advised that the proposals related to the abolition of the Public Rights of Way Committee and the transfer of its functions to the Highways and Transport Committee, and the reduction in the number of planning committees from three to two.

The following comments, questions and responses were made in relation to the Corporate Services revenue proposals within the MTFS:

Item 52 (Remove Commercial Workstream Income Target), a question was asked about why the income target relating to Adults services was not achievable.

Officers advised that this was a workstream within the Brighter Futures transformation programme which had now come to an end.

Item 55 (Pension Costs Adjustment), with regard to the reduction in pension contributions by the Council, the Chair expressed his thanks to those members who sat on the Cheshire Fund Pension Committee.

Item 57 (Reducing the Cost of Democracy), some members expressed concern about the proposal to reduce the number of committees.

The Chair of the Highways and Transport Committee, Councillor C Browne, confirmed that the Committee had the capacity to absorb the functions of the PROW Committee. He added that the proposals on the reduction in committees had received the highest level of support during the consultation.

Officers advised that the proposals would be considered by the Constitution Working Group and would require full Council approval. There was therefore an opportunity for further member involvement.

In relation to proposals to freeze members' allowances for the next year, it was suggested that Special Responsibility Allowances and the roles of chairs and vice-chairs should also be considered.

Officers advised that any proposals in relation to members' allowances would be for consideration by the Independent Remuneration Panel and would require full Council approval.

A question was asked about why the agenda for the meeting had not been printed on the same recycled paper as was used generally in Council buildings.

The Director of Governance and Compliance undertook to provide a written response.

Items 58 and 59 (Elections Act 2022 Additional Costs), concern was expressed that there could be a late surge in applications for voter IDs for the local elections in May, and assurances were sought that the Council had the capacity to cope with the demand.

Item 63 (review of leadership and management, and MARS), caution was urged about how MARS was applied, given the current challenges around recruitment and retention.

Officers advised that MARS was a small but useful tool which was less costly to the Council than redundancy. Each case was considered from a business case perspective.

RESOLVED

That

1. the Committee notes:

- (a) The year-end forecast outturn position for 2022/23 (Appendix 1);
- (b) The financial context and proposals contained within the Executive Summary of the Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS report Annex C, Section 1);
- (c) Revenue Grant Funding (Appendix 4); and
- (d) Earmarked Reserves (Appendix 5).

2. the Committee's feedback on the proposals within the MTFS, as related to the Committee's responsibilities, be provided to support and advise Council in fulfilling its responsibilities to approve a balanced budget for 2023/24, in the following areas:

- (a) Revenue Proposals (Details are at Appendix 2); and
- (b) Capital Programme (Appendix 3).

63 NOTICE OF MOTION - LGA CAMPAIGN: 'SAVE LOCAL SERVICES'

The Committee considered a report in response to a Notice of Motion relating to the Local Government Association's 'Save Local Services' campaign. Council on 14th December 2022 had referred the Notice of Motion to the Corporate Policy Committee for consideration.

The motion, proposed by Councillor M Goldsmith and Seconded by Councillor A Moran, was as follows:

Cheshire East Council Supports the LGA Campaign to "Save Local Services" and asks the Government to provide immediate emergency support to address the funding gap for all local councils.

Councillors Goldsmith and Moran had been invited to the meeting to speak on the matter but were unable to attend.

RESOLVED (unanimously)

That the Committee agrees to support the LGA Campaign to “Save Local Services”.

64 MEDIA RELATIONS PROTOCOL

The Committee considered a report which presented an updated media relations protocol for Cheshire East Council.

The Chair drew attention to provisions within the protocol which would enable ward members to be credited in press statements for work they had done.

In response to members’ questions, the Director of Governance and Compliance advised that social media were covered by the Nolan Principles of public life and the member code of conduct.

RESOLVED (by majority)

That the Committee approves the updated media relations protocol.

65 PAY POLICY STATEMENT 2023/24

The Committee considered a report which outlined changes to the Pay Policy Statement for 2023/24.

Changes since last year’s Statement were outlined in section 7.4 of the report.

RESOLVED (unanimously)

That

1. the changes since the 2022/23 Pay Policy Statement be noted as outlined in section 7.4 of the report;
2. the Pay Policy Statement for 2023/24 as appended to the report be recommended to Council for approval and published accordingly; and
3. the agreed Pay Policy Statement for 2023/24 be reviewed in-year and any further changes be approved by the Monitoring Officer and published accordingly.

66 APPOINTMENT OF NEW MEMBER TO THE INDEPENDENT SCHOOL ADMISSION APPEALS PANEL

The Committee considered a report on the appointment of an individual to become a member of the Independent School Admission Appeals Panel.

The applicant had been interviewed and evaluated by a lawyer in the Legal Services Adults and Education Team as a result of which the appointment was recommended.

The applicant, Mr Paul Fagan, had consented to his details being divulged in public and these had been circulated to members of the Committee.

RESOLVED (unanimously)

That the Committee approves the appointment of Mr Fagan to become a member of the Independent School Admission Appeals Panel.

(At this point, the Committee adjourned for a five minute break.)

67 MEDIUM-TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY 2023-27

The Committee considered a report which presented the Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) for Cheshire East Council for the four years 2023/24 to 2026/27.

The Committee was asked to consider the feedback from the budget consultation and recommend an annual balanced budget to the full Council meeting on 22 February 2023.

The report summarised the resolutions that the Corporate Policy Committee was requested to recommend to Council at Appendix A. The report also provided the Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) Report (containing the Budget that would be part of the recommendations) for the period 2023/24 to 2026/27 at Appendix C.

Annex 2b, within Appendix C, provided information on the consultation responses, including the feedback from service committees. The feedback from the Environment and Communities Committee's meeting of 2nd February 2023 was circulated at the meeting.

The Chair thanked all those who had responded during the consultation period. He also thanked the officers for producing a balanced budget for the next four years in conditions of great uncertainty.

Some members felt that under the new committee system they should have been more involved with the development of the budget rather than simply being asked to comment on it. It was suggested that for the future, a member workshop approach be adopted to allow more member involvement at the formulation stage.

Councillor Clowes stressed the need for more innovative thinking and in this respect referred to a scheme operating in Sussex whereby the council had introduced levies on its busiest roads and charged a daily rent to utility companies, providing much-needed revenue and ensuring that lanes were re-opened more quickly.

Councillor Browne, as Chair of the Highways and Transport Committee, undertook to discuss the matter with officers and to see if Cheshire East Council was already doing something similar.

He went on to say that service committees had provided an opportunity for members to make a greater contribution to the budget-setting process.

The Chair added that there had been two rounds of budget meetings through the committee system and that the earlier round had presented a 'blank page', with members being invited to make suggestions. He agreed that a workshop approach might be a way forward in future.

RESOLVED (by majority)

That

1. the Committee notes:

- (a) the year-end forecast outturn position for 2022/23 (Appendix C, Section 2);
- (b) the summary results of the Budget Consultation and Engagement exercise undertaken by the Council, as set out in Appendix C, Annex 2a and 2b;
- (c) the report of the Council's Section 151 Officer, contained within the MTFS Report, regarding the robustness of estimates and level of reserves held by the Council based on these budget proposals (Appendix C, Comment from the Section 151 Officer); and
- (d) that the Council's Finance Procedure Rules remain unchanged and will always apply to ensure proper approval should any changes in spending requirements be identified (Appendix C, Annex 14); and

2. the Committee recommends to Council the items at Appendix A.

68 WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee received an update on its work programme for 2022/23.

RESOLVED

That the work programme be noted.

69 MINUTES OF SUB-COMMITTEES

RESOLVED

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

70 THE FUTURE MODEL FOR ICT: SHARED SERVICE REVIEW

The Committee considered a report on a review of the arrangements for ICT between Cheshire East and Cheshire West and Chester Councils.

The report provided the final conclusions of an ICT Shared Service Review. It proposed moving from the current shared service to a hybrid model. This would involve retaining a shared data centre and network but would involve separation and reconfiguration of other functions that were currently shared.

Further details on the rationale, financial case, transition plan, and mitigations to any key risks were set out in the report.

The Shared Services Joint Committee at their meeting on 26 January 2023 had supported the new model.

Peter Lloyd, Head of Transformation and Technology, Cheshire West and Chester Council, reported that his Cabinet had met yesterday and had given unanimous support to the proposal.

In response to members' questions, Gareth Pawlett, Chief Communications Officer, advised that:

- The data centre in Chester would continue to be shared for some time.
- Two separate Cloud environments would be created.
- There would be more ICT roles in the future, and more permanent staff may be needed.
- The change should not present an increased risk of cyber attack. A detailed report on this subject would be presented to the Committee's next meeting.

RESOLVED (unanimously)

That the Committee

1. approves the move to a hybrid model for ICT to progress consultation with the trade unions based on all necessary considerations included in the report;
2. will progress full consultation and engagement with staff and trade unions, informing a more detailed design of a new hybrid model and the approach to the reconfiguration of the service;

3. agrees that a revised agreement setting out the future arrangements for ICT across both councils will be prepared and entered into following the above stages and the implementation of a new tenancy model;
4. commits the necessary resources to implement a new tenancy model and the mobilisation of the programme, subject to the approval of the additional investment as part of the MTFS;
5. approves the principle of shared employment related liability and costs between Cheshire East and Cheshire West and Chester Councils relating to the transitional period and any disaggregation process leading to the move to a hybrid model for ICT, and delegates authority to the respective Heads of Legal Services to agree the terms of any amendments to the Staff Transfer Agreement, ICT Services Agreement, or related documents;
6. delegates authority to the Executive Director of Corporate Services to procure and award contracts for relevant technical partner and transformation capacity; and
7. reaffirms that Member oversight will continue to be provided by the Shared Services Joint Committee and the Joint Member Scrutiny Task Group.

The meeting commenced at 10.00 am and concluded at 12.52 pm

Councillor S Corcoran (Chair)