

**OPEN**

**Corporate Policy Committee**

**13 February 2024**

**Developing the New Cheshire East Plan**

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**Report of: Rob Polkinghorne, Chief Executive**

**Report Reference No: CP/67/23-24**

**Ward(s) Affected: All**

**Purpose of Report**

- 1 The purpose of this report is to update on progress made in relation to developing a new strategic plan for Cheshire East, further to the introductory report that was presented in July 2023 and the update report in October 2023.
- 2 A new plan is being developed for several reasons. Firstly, that there are a significant number of new elected members of Cheshire East Council and that the plan needs to reflect post-election priorities. Secondly the context in which we are operating has changed and is one of financial challenge, rising inflation and increasing costs and demands, which means there is a greater need to focus our resources and potentially target services. There are also advancements being made in relation to digital capabilities and artificial intelligence that the council needs to safely and securely take advantage of to drive efficient service delivery.
- 3 However, since the original timescale for the development of the plan was established, there has been increasing risk in relation to achievement of a balanced budget. It is therefore deemed prudent to conclude consultation to inform the medium term financial strategy, and using this plan to refine and confirm the priorities of the refreshed corporate plan.

## Executive Summary

- 4 The new Cheshire East Strategic Plan will be a plan to outline the priorities and ambitions of Cheshire East. Consultation and engagement has taken place over the period September – December 2023. This has involved working with communities and stakeholders to understand what we want the Cheshire East of the future to look like, and what are the ingredients that make a good place to live, work and visit. Under these high level ambitions the plan will state priority areas for the long term, and actions that can be delivered in the medium term, by April 2028. What is feasible to be delivered will be dependant on our available resources over that period. This is the area which is currently uncertain due to ongoing financial challenges. It is due to this element that it is recommended to postpone the development of the final version of the plan, so we can ensure that we have a realistic and deliverable strategy. How we will deliver the plan will be informed by the refresh our organisational culture, striving for a high support and high challenge organisation.
- 5 **Appendix 1** is the Community Engagement Report, prepared by our partners PLACeD, who were commissioned to support the public engagement events.
- 6 **Appendix 2** are the headline findings from the “Shaping Our Future” survey which was open to members of the public until 15 December 2023. 1,472 responses were received.
- 7 Due to the resource challenges we face, there is a need to prioritise and to consider targeting areas of service delivery to areas that our evidence shows require them the most. In Phase 1, two key areas were been highlighted as key priorities to be developed: the need to reduce health inequalities and implement the outcomes desired by the recently updated health and wellbeing strategy, and to continue our commitments to achieving net zero for both the council and for Cheshire East.
- 8 One outcome of phase 1 was that there was unanimous agreement to move away from the term “corporate plan” as this can be seen as a barrier to people engaging with the plan. Therefore, the report refers to “Cheshire East Plan” and “Cheshire East Strategic Plan”. It is also recommended that the discussions with partners have recommended that no one organisation can achieve strategic objectives in isolation and therefore the Plan will be a key document for the area of Cheshire East, rather than just a council plan, and will support our role as a community leader and place shaper. The refreshed place will be used to set the ambitions of the council for the borough of Cheshire East, and to influence partners and stakeholders as to our strategic aims.

- 9 The main points arising from the public consultation were in relation to activities for children and young people and their desire for the quality of roads and pavements to be prioritised. Over 60% of respondents agreed that reducing health inequalities should be a key priority of the new plan.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The Corporate Policy Committee is recommended to:

1. Note the outcomes of the public consultation and engagement on the Cheshire East Plan.
2. Agree that the new Cheshire East Plan will be finalised following the approval of the Medium Term Financial Strategy and awareness of available resources.

## Background

- 10 The Cheshire East Council Corporate Plan is the council's overarching strategic document, setting out the vision and priorities for the council. The current plan was approved in February 2021 and covers the period April 2021 to March 2025. By prioritising a clear set of commitments and actions, the Corporate Plan enables residents to hold the council to account for its performance and allows all to see the ambitions for Cheshire East.
- 11 The Plan is the "umbrella" strategy that sits above, and informs, all other strategies and plans. All strategies produced by Cheshire East Council should reference, and support the achievement of, the Corporate Plan. All members of the council workforce should be able to see the "golden thread" of their day-to-day activities contributing to the achievement and success of the plan.
- 12 During July and August 2023, phase 1 was completed. Phase 1 focussed on engaging and gaining feedback internally prior to going out for external consultation and engagement.
- 13 The following groups of internal stakeholders were engaged with during phase 1; elected members through member engagement sessions (two face to face and one via Microsoft Teams), Corporate Leadership Team, Wider Leadership Team, Wider Leadership Community, the Brighter Futures Champions, "In the Know" staff information briefings,

Managers Share and Support sessions, individual internal meetings (where requested), team meetings and the Health and Wellbeing Board.

- 14 A cross council officer group has also been established with an approved terms of reference to coordinate work across the council directorates and ensure that a collaborative “one council” approach is achieved.
- 15 There has been many sources of information and intelligence gathered on priorities, themes and specific projects and initiatives that will be referenced within the plan. There was also discussion around the need for the plan to be realistic and achievable within the current resource constraints. Therefore, it is recommended that the key priorities of the plan are around health and wellbeing and around achievement of net zero targets and sustainability. The Health and Wellbeing strategy that has recently agreed is a key foundation document that informs the plan. The plan is being co-created around six key themes (exact wording to be developed and refined); health and wellbeing, children and young people, net zero and sustainable communities, improving the economy, transport and accessibility and continuous improvement of the council.
- 16 Consultation and engagement activities took place from September to December 2023. These included four public drop in sessions and an online “Shaping Our Future” survey.
- 17 The report on the outcomes of the public engagement workshops is as **Appendix 1**.
- 18 The key findings from the public engagement workshops were as follows:
  - the public had concerns around the quality of roads and pavements
  - residents felt that public transport in the borough was not affordable and frequent enough
  - there is a demand for better quality shopping facilities and more independent and local businesses
  - there was significant interest in car parking and a desire for consistent, affordable parking across the borough
  - residents suggested that there are a lack of groups and activities for children and young people
- 19 **Appendix 2** gives the headlines of the “Shaping Our Future” survey.
- 20 The key headlines from the “Shaping Our Future” survey feedback are:

- 59% of residents were satisfied with their local area
- 64% of respondents agreed that “reducing health inequalities” should be a key theme of the new Cheshire East Plan
- The four themes most supported by residents for inclusion within the refreshed Plan were: Improving connectivity, travel and transport (87%), Improving the way services are delivered (85%), Enhancing our communities and have thriving places (84%) and Improving opportunities for children and young people (81%).

## **Consultation and Engagement**

- 21 Consultation and engagement took place in accordance with the refreshed Consultation and Engagement toolkit agreed by Corporate Policy Committee in 2022.

## **Reasons for Recommendations**

- 22 The recommendations have been made to offer an oversight into the feedback received from the public consultation and engagement exercises, and in light of dynamic position around the councils financial challenges.

## **Other Options Considered**

- 23 An alternative option would be to roll over and continue with the current Corporate Plan. This option was discounted as the operating context of the council is different to the environment and context in 2020/21 when the current plan was produced.

## **Implications and Comments**

### *Monitoring Officer/Legal*

- 24 The Cheshire East Plan will be produced in accordance with legislative requirements and will be ultimately subject to approval by Full Council.

### *Section 151 Officer/Finance*

- 25 The activities within the report can be funded from within existing budgets for resident surveys and consultation. The activities will also support development of proposals to achieve a balanced budget within the Council’s Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS).

## *Policy*

- 26 The development of the Cheshire East Plan supports the policy framework cited within the Council's constitution. It also supports the current Corporate Plan, particularly in relation to the "Open" strategic theme and the priority to "listen, learn and respond to residents".

<b>An open and enabling organisation</b>	<b>A council which empowers and cares about people</b>	<b>A thriving and sustainable place</b>
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## *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion*

- 27 The process to develop the Cheshire East Plan will ensure that it is as accessible and inclusive as possible. This will include consideration of different channels and methods of consultation and engagement. The process will also have due regard to ensuring that diverse communities can support the co creation of the plan. An Equality Impact Assessment will be completed alongside the plan.

## *Human Resources*

- 28 The workforce will be engaged within the development of the new plan using existing staff engagement networks.

## *Risk Management*

- 29 A risk management implication has been identified with regards to consultation activity on MTFS items occurring at the same time as the engagement on the plan. All staff volunteer ambassadors will be briefed on this subject in order to mitigate the risk. Where appropriate, stakeholders will be referred to any statutory consultation proposals.

## *Rural Communities*

- 30 The process will ensure that it is accessible to those living in rural communities to ensure their views are taken into account in developing the plan.

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

- 31 Children and Young Peoples groups, and their representatives will be included as stakeholders in the co creation of the new plan.

### *Public Health*

- 32 The process of developing the new Plan will ensure that public health priorities are supported and reflected in the plan. The plan will have due regard to the Marmot principles and the priority to reduce health inequalities across Cheshire East.

### *Climate Change*

- 33 The new Cheshire East plan will be developed to reflect local priorities, including continuing the message that Cheshire East Council has the most ambitious net zero target in the country. The plan will support achievement of net zero for the council and for the Borough.

<b>Access to Information</b>	
Contact Officer:	Michael Moore Head of Communications
Appendices:	<b>Appendix 1</b> – Placed Report <b>Appendix 2</b> – Headline “Shaping Our Future” survey results
Background Papers:	Corporate Policy Committee report reference: CP/14/23-24