

CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the **Corporate Policy Committee**
held on Thursday, 1st February, 2024 in Committee Suite 1, 2 & 3, Westfields,
Middlewich Road, Sandbach CW11 1HZ

PRESENT

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

Councillors S Adams, C Bulman, D Clark, J Clowes, M Goldsmith, A Heler,
C O'Leary, J Pearson, J Rhodes, M Warren and F Wilson

Officers in Attendance

Rob Polkinghorne, Chief Executive
David Brown, Director of Governance and Compliance
Paul Goodwin, Head of Finance
Rachel Graves, Democratic Services Officer

72 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors A Harrison, N Mannion and
J Saunders. Councillors S Adams, A Heler and F Wilson attended as
substitutes.

73 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

74 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the meeting held on 18 January 2024 be approved as
a correct record.

75 PUBLIC SPEAKING/OPEN SESSION

There were no public speakers.

76 MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY CONSULTATION 2024/25 - 2027/28 PROVISIONAL SETTLEMENT UPDATE (CORPORATE POLICY COMMITTEE)

The Committee considered a report which sought feedback on the
responsibilities of the Committee as consultees, on the development of the
Cheshire East Medium-Term Financial Strategy 2024/25 to 2027/28.

The Corporate Policy Committee budget for 2023/24 was £41m. Expenditure was forecast to increase by £2.5m next year. The budget envelope proposed for the Committee could enable an increase of £0.2m due to funding constraints, and as a result this would mean that savings of £2.3m would need to be identified. A total of 7 savings proposals had been put forward and these were set out in Appendix A to the report.

Members asked questions and provided comments in relation to the proposals. These included:

Table on Paragraph 12 – reference was made to the table which showed the shortfall exceeding target by 12.7m and it was asked if this was before or after the 3m of additional government funding announced recently? In response it was confirmed that the figure was before the additional funding.

CPC 3 Reduction of election costs and increase charges were possible – concerns were raised that this could have a detrimental effect on the smaller parish councils and the elections costs could be disproportionately high compared to their overall budget. In response it was stated that at present town and parish councils were re-charged for by-elections but were not charged for non-contested elections. These had a significant cost to the elections team, so it was being proposed that they would be charged for. For all-out town and parish elections, which coincide with the Borough Council's elections, it was being proposed that town and parish councils are charged an appropriate share of the costs. It was noted that there would be further consultation with the town and parish councils on this proposal.

Legal Services capacity – the Committee asked for further details on this proposal. In response Members were informed that the capacity issue arose in two areas. The first being an increased demand in adult and children's social care services which required legal services to support cases involving court proceedings. Also, there were special needs assessment disagreements which could go to tribunal and legal services participated in the resolution of them. The second element of legal services budget increase was in relation to capacity for change, as the Council was putting forward a number of significant proposals for changes to services e.g., changes to buildings, and changes to work contracts, and many of these change proposals would require additional legal support.

CP2 reduction in emergency funding – the Committee asked what the take-up of scheme was in the previous year, this year and if it was oversubscribed. In response it was stated that the figures were not to hand, and Officers agreed to provide a written response to the committee.

CP7 Reduce additional spending on staffing and agency staff – it was reported that the Corporate Leadership Team had been reviewing staffing budgets and the approaches to ensuring sufficient staff resources were available to meet existing service requirements and demand; consequently

on reflection it was noted that, whilst management of the use of agency staff and overtime was ongoing, a savings figure of this order would not be achieved

A list of the additional budget proposals put forward by the Conservative Group was circulated to the Committee. The proposals had been submitted to officers for comments in December. These proposals had also been considered by the Finance Sub-Committee. The proposals included:

Early Committee Oversight and Scrutiny of MTFS implementation – it as proposed:

Ai) that clear decision / delivery schedules for MTFS proposals are identified as part of the CLT masterplan, clearly articulated to the relevant Service committee(s) and incorporated into the appropriate service committee work programmes.

Inclusive Pay Terms and Conditions – it was proposed:

Bi) that Human Resources investigate consistency in payments for evening and weekend working, together with appropriate 'inclusive salary' contracts.

Bii) that Human Resources incorporate this work under the Workforce Strategy related to recruitment and retention, any changes to be subject to discussion with recognised trade unions.

Biii) that any related budget implications are reported to Corporate Policy Committee / Finance Sub-Committee.

Parish Compact System Extension – it was proposed:

Ci) that the Finance Team support Environment and Communities colleagues in conducting a cost-benefit analysis of the Parish Compact model for those smaller parish councils that express an interest.

Council Tax and Business Tax Collection – it as proposed:

Ei) that the Sub-Committee establish a working group to review current debt management and retrieval practices and to make appropriate recommendations for change.

Adult Social Care Debt Management – it was proposed:

Gi) that this item should remain 'on the radar' throughout this fiscal year with a view to bringing forward, if indicated, any potential additional savings in 2024/25.

Council Tax Support – Reduction to Pre-Covid Levels – it was proposed:

li) that this item is recommended as part of the 2024/25 Budget proposals in order that (a) appropriate consultation can be triggered, and (b) a full fiscal study of the uptake of Council Tax support (since its most recent increase to 100%) is undertaken, whilst ensuring protection of the most vulnerable.

Cllr J Clowes reported an additional Conservative Group proposal which would also be considered by the Adults and Health Committee on 2 February:

Children/Adults Social Workers “Bank” - It was proposed:

- i. that Corporate Policy Committee work collaboratively with ASC & H Committee to explore the establishment of a CEC Social Workers/ Care Workers Agency to be included under the Workforce Strategy (Retention and Recruitment).
- ii. to provide a cost savings analysis over 2024/25 with a view to bringing forward for consideration as part of the 2025/26 MTFS proposals.

RESOLVED (by majority)

That

- 1 the Committee recommends, for the meeting on 13th February 2024, all proposals within the budget consultation, as related to the Committee’s responsibilities, for inclusion in the Council's budget for 2024/25; and
- 2 the additional proposals from the Conservative Group be recommended to the Corporate Policy Committee for inclusion in the Council’s budget proposals.

The meeting commenced at 3.00 pm and concluded at 4.05 pm

Councillor S Corcoran (Chair)