

CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the **Environment and Communities Committee**
held on Wednesday, 27th November, 2024 in the Committee Suite 1,2 & 3,
Westfields, Middlewich Road, Sandbach CW11 1HZ

PRESENT

Councillor M Warren (Chair)
Councillor L Braithwaite (Vice-Chair)

Councillors M Brooks, A Farrall, S Gardiner, H Moss, D Jefferay, B Posnett,
H Seddon, L Smetham, J Clowes, L Crane and A Heler

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE

Tom Shuttleworth, Interim Director of Environment and Neighbourhoods
Ralph Kemp, Head of Environmental Services
Joanne Shannon, Library Services Manager
Nicola Stoddard, Environment Project Officer
Steve Reading, Principal Accountant
James Thomas, Principal Solicitor
Josie Lloyd, Democratic Services Officer

ALSO PRESENT

Councillor Dawn Clark
Councillor Ken Edwards
Councillor John Smith

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors J Bratherton, T Dean and H Whitaker. Councillors L Crane, J Clowes and A Heler attended as substitutes.

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

3 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 26 September 2024 be agreed as a correct record.

4 PUBLIC SPEAKING/OPEN SESSION

Mr Stuart Redgard spoke in relation to item 7 – Libraries Strategy. Mr Redgard felt that the proposed changes were not in line with the Council's Corporate Plan which sought to reduce inequalities and support vulnerable residents and felt that the equality impact assessment appeared flawed.

Cllr David Kent, on behalf of Bollington Town Council, spoke in relation to item 8 – Residual Waste Collections. Cllr Kent raised concerns in relation to the awaited position of the current government around two-weekly collections, issues associated with the disposal of feminine hygiene and absorbent hygiene products and the validity of the projected savings.

Mr Jon Park spoke in relation to item 8 – Residual Waste Collections and highlighted concerns of vulnerable residents. Mr Park asked that the Council commits to establishing a procedure in order to assure residents that a database of those eligible for two-weekly collections would be kept accurate and up to date.

Cllr Vince Fogharty, on behalf of Alderley Edge Parish Council, spoke in relation to item 7 – Libraries Strategy. Cllr Fogharty raised the following queries, to which it was agreed a written response would be provided:

- Why would volunteer groups be charged for the issuance of a licence that permits them to open the library for an additional afternoon each week, as the license was already in use in Alderley Edge and other Cheshire East libraries
- What contingency plans were in place for if a rostered employee failed to attend to open the library
- Can Cheshire East Council provide a commitment that there will be no reductions in the currently agreed-upon funded hours for the library during the three-year term of the contract
- Could assurances be given that there would be no further increases in the costs, other than those attributed to payroll costs, that the Parish Council would be required to fund for the agreed sessions throughout the duration of the three-year term

5 SECOND FINANCIAL REVIEW OF 2024/25 (ENVIRONMENT AND COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE)

The committee received the report which provided the current forecast outturn for the financial year 2024/25 based on income, expenditure and known commitments at the end of August 2024. The report also identified actions that were being taken regarding adverse variances to urgently address financial sustainability.

Paragraph 28 of the report stated that any directorate identified as being off target by more than 5% was now subject to a detailed finance and performance review on a weekly basis through a financial recovery review process. It was queried why this was set at 5% and whether a lower

percentage would be more beneficial in addressing overspend. It was agreed that a written response would be provided.

Paragraph 85 of the report referred to the cost of short-term borrowing which was expected to reduce with falling interest rates. A request was made for more information about interest rates, and what had been built into the forecasting, to be shared with the committee. Officers undertook to provide this detail in a written response.

A further query was raised regarding the graphs on page 24 of the agenda which referred to weekly trends in finance monitoring for Adults Services with regard to distinct clients and total weekly costs. It had been noted that there appeared to be a drop in the number of clients during summer but it was not clear why there was no corresponding reduction in weekly costs. Officers undertook to provide a written response.

RESOLVED (unanimously):

That the Environment and Communities Committee:

1. Review the factors leading to a forecast adverse Net Revenue financial pressure of £20.1m against a revised budget of £395.4m (5.1%). To scrutinise the contents of Annex 1, Section 2 and review progress on the delivery of the MTFS approved budget policy change items, the RAG ratings and latest forecasts, and to understand the actions to be taken to address any adverse variances from the approved budget
2. Review the in-year forecast capital spending of £157.7m against an approved MTFS budget of £215.8m, due to slippage that has been re-profiled into future years
3. Note the available reserves position as per Annex 1, Section 5
4. To delegate to the Interim Director of Environment and Neighbourhood services to undertake all necessary steps to enter into a grant funding agreement with The Mersey Forest in order to accept a Trees For Climate grant offer of £647,173.91 for woodland creation at Buttertons Lane Farm

6 MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY UPDATE 2025/26 - 2028/29 (ENVIRONMENT & COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE)

The committee received the report which set out progress and further development activity required before the final MTFS 2025-29 would be presented for approval to the budget setting Council meeting in February 2025.

RESOLVED:

That the Environment and Communities Committee:

1. Note the progress to date on the development of the MTFs for 2025-29
2. Note that officers will continue to challenge draft proposals and develop further proposals in consultation with Members prior to approval by Council
3. Note that Committees will be presented with the opportunity to review the full set of 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

7 LIBRARIES STRATEGY - IMPLEMENTATION

The committee considered the report which sought approval to implement the Cheshire East Libraries Strategy 2024-28. This followed approval of the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy 2024-28 by Full Council in February 2024 and a public consultation which was carried out between 5 August and 15 September 2024.

Cllr Ken Edwards attended as a visiting member and spoke as ward member for Bollington. Cllr Edwards was pleased to see the relationship between local communities and libraries working together and hoped this would continue.

Cllr John Smith attended as a visiting member and spoke as ward member for Handforth. Cllr Smith felt that the site assessment scoring matrix was biased towards towns with larger populations and did not account for the percentage of active library users in the towns. Cllr Smith asked the committee to secure the continued use of Handforth library by voting against the recommendations, and to ensure the matrix was reviewed.

An amendment to recommendation 4, as set out in the report, was put forward which sought the inclusion of the wording '*in consultation with the committee Chair, Vice-Chair and Opposition Spokesperson*'. This became part of the substantive proposition.

During the debate, it was proposed and seconded that a recorded vote be carried out. The following results were recorded:

For:

Cllr Liz Braithwaite
Cllr Mary Brooks
Cllr Laura Crane
Cllr Ashley Farrall
Cllr David Jefferay
Cllr Heather Seddon
Cllr Mick Warren

Against:

Cllr Janet Clowes
Cllr Stewart Gardiner
Cllr Alison Heler
Cllr Becky Posnett
Cllr Lesley Smetham

Abstaining:

Cllr Hannah Moss

RESOLVED (by majority):

That the Environment and Communities Committee:

1. Note the feedback from the recent public consultation exercise
2. Approve the Cheshire East Libraries Strategy 2024-28, as contained at Appendix C
3. Approve the final details of the changes to library opening hours, as included at Appendix E
4. Delegate authority to the Interim Director of Planning and Environment, in consultation with the committee Chair, Vice-Chair and Opposition Spokesperson to:
 - a) take all necessary steps to implement the Libraries Strategy, and, to make all consequent changes to service provision including staff restructure and consultations
 - b) take all necessary steps to enter into top up funding agreements with Town and Parish Councils

8 WASTE COLLECTION - RESIDUAL WASTE

The committee considered the report which sought approval to implement three-weekly residual waste collections. This followed a public consultation which had been carried out during September and October 2024.

Cllr Ken Edwards spoke as a visiting member and stated that there were currently 217 people in Bollington with special collection arrangements and asked would these special arrangements be looked at carefully and adapted to meet residents' needs when the three-weekly collection would be introduced. The Chair suggested that a written response could be provided.

A statement was read out by Cllr Edwards on behalf of Cllr Dawn Clark. Cllr Clark was asking for the committee to write to government and local MPs to ask to halt the implementation of the weekly food waste collections until the impact on local authorities' finances was understood and for an immediate review of the legislation.

A request was made for details of the weight limit for wheelie bins and whether the reason for the limit was mechanical or due to health and safety. Officers undertook to provide a written response.

A further request was made for information on the current gate fee for processing food and garden waste at the Council's composting plant. Officers advised that this was commercially sensitive information which could not be provided in a public committee meeting. A written response could be provided on the basis that the information remained confidential.

An amendment was put forward which sought to make the following changes to the recommendations as set out in the report:

- That recommendation 3 reads '*Delegate authority to the Head of Environmental Services, in consultation with the committee Chair, Vice-Chair and Opposition Spokesperson, to:*'
- That recommendation 3b reads '*introduce service improvements to the 'Waste Management and Flytipping Policy' to require a specific service level improvement by introducing a return for a missed bin within 3 days, amend criteria to permit a larger residual bin in specific circumstances and introduction of missed bins performance measures. Introduce those measures described on pages 258-260 of this report.*'
- That an additional recommendation be included to read '*Delegate authority to the Head of Environmental Services to work with ward members through the Member Enquiries Service to mitigate any waste collection issues caused by the changes when identified, where practicable*'

This amendment became part of the substantive proposition.

During the debate, it was proposed and seconded that a recorded vote be carried out. The following results were recorded:

For:

Cllr Liz Braithwaite
Cllr Mary Brooks
Cllr Laura Crane
Cllr Ashley Farrall
Cllr David Jefferay
Cllr Heather Seddon
Cllr Mick Warren

Against

Cllr Janet Clowes
Cllr Stewart Gardiner
Cllr Alison Heler
Cllr Hannah Moss
Cllr Becky Posnett
Cllr Lesley Smetham

RESOLVED (by majority):

That the Environment and Communities Committee:

1. Note the outcomes of the recent public consultation exercise
2. Approve the move to a three-weekly frequency for the kerbside collection of residual waste, for all properties within Cheshire East
3. Delegate authority to the Head of Environmental Services, in consultation with the committee Chair, Vice-Chair and Opposition Spokesperson, to:
 - a) Take all necessary actions to deliver 3 weekly residual waste collections
 - b) introduce service improvements to the 'Waste Management and Fly-tipping Policy' to require a specific service level improvement by introducing a return for a missed bin within 3 days, amend criteria to permit a larger residual bin in specific circumstances and introduction of missed bins performance measures. Introduce those measures described on pages 258-260 of this report
4. Delegate authority to the Interim Director of Planning and Environment to amend the enforcement policy on the basis of having a defined staged education through enforcement process including the issuing a borough wide Section 46 notice with the introduction of a performance measure and reporting on the number of live cases and their status with a monthly officer case management meeting

5. Delegate authority to the Head of Environmental Services to work with ward members to mitigate any waste collection issues caused by the changes when identified

9 **WORK PROGRAMME**

The committee considered the work programme.

It was noted that there was a Local Plan update report scheduled for January and that this would be subject to when national planning reforms would be announced by government.

A concern was raised regarding the planning appeals process when an application is refused by a planning committee in contrast to officer recommendations and it was queried whether this would fall under the remit of the Environment and Communities Committee or the Audit and Governance Committee. It was agreed that this would be looked into outside the meeting.

RESOLVED:

That the work programme be noted.

The meeting commenced at 14:00 and concluded at 17:32

Councillor M Warren (Chair)