

OPEN

## **Corporate Policy Committee**

**6 February 2025**

### **Notice of Motion - Agreed Framework for Delivery of Services at a Local Level**

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**Report of: Karen Wheeler, Interim Assistant Chief Executive**

**Report Reference No: CPC/53/24-25**

**Ward(s) Affected: All**

**For Decision or Scrutiny: Decision**

#### **1. Purpose of Report**

- 1.1 To respond to the [Notice Of Motion submitted at Full Council on 16th October 2024](#), outlined in section 3.1 of this report, which proposes to develop an agreed framework for delivery of services at a local level. The framework, if agreed, would take into consideration both the existing ability for Cheshire East Council to work collaboratively with Town and Parish (local) councils and further opportunities that may arise from the delivery of the Transformation Plan and government's devolution agenda.
- 1.2 This report sets out a proposed approach using the LGA's "Local service delivery and place-shaping: A framework to support parish and town councils" to develop this within the borough.
- 1.3 This report also highlights the need for additional independent, external support and capacity through the Cheshire Association of Local Councils (ChALC) to coproduce this framework and embed implementation into the council's approach to partnership working.

#### **2. Executive Summary**

- 2.1 The report responds to the Notice of Motion raised at Full Council on 16th October 2024, which proposed developing an agreed framework for local service delivery and which was referred to the Committee by Council and

is outlined in section 3.1 of this report. The report suggests using the LGA's "Local service delivery and place-shaping: A framework to support parish and town councils" to create a framework which will guide the development of local service delivery within the borough, building on existing activity and considering opportunities from the Transformation Plan and devolution agenda.

- 2.2 The council is already able to work together with Town and Parish Councils to explore opportunities for delivering services differently for the benefit of residents and communities. A recent example is the Library Strategy, where the council is delivering services through a 'community managed' approach, meaning working in partnership with local councils, community groups and organisations, who help to maintain and enhance the services available.
- 2.3 There is a need to further consider innovative and different ways of working and service delivery models as part of the Transformation Plan and as an enabling and collaborative partner as set out in the new operating model. Establishing a framework will ensure a fair and consistent approach, including where devolution in Cheshire and Warrington could enable further opportunities at a local level to be considered following the Government's recently published English Devolution White Paper (December 2024). Section 4.1 of the White Paper specifically sets out the government's approach to communities and empowerment at a local level.
- 2.4 The report also emphasises the need for additional external support and capacity from Cheshire Association of Local Councils (ChALC) to co-produce this framework and integrate its implementation into regular operations and seeks agreement to enter a contractual arrangement to support this service.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

The Corporate Policy Committee is recommended to agree:

1. The development of a framework for delivery of services at a local level as set out in this report.
2. The proposed approach to develop that framework utilising the toolkit outlined in this report.
3. That support and capacity be provided by Cheshire Association of Local Councils (ChALC) to coproduce and implement this framework.

### **3. Background**

#### **3.1 Notice of Motion**

The Notice of Motion was submitted to Full Council on 16 October 2024:

##### Agreed Framework for Delivery of Services at a Local Level

Proposed by Councillor M Gorman and Seconded by Councillor K Edwards

The Council is about to embark on the devolution journey.

It is also entering a new realm of co-operation with our Parish and Town Councils, where increased co-operation and shared working needs to be explored in a planned and systematic way to secure the ongoing provision of services at local level in a co-operative partnership.

We therefore urge that as part of the Council's Transformation Programme Cheshire East Council approaches our local town and parish council partners to discuss developing an agreed framework to support the delivery of appropriate services at the local level. There are already good examples of such partnership arrangements in place in parts of Cheshire East.

Such a framework should have at its heart a balanced and equitable relationship, for the benefit of both councils and of local residents.

#### **3.2 Context**

There are 12 town councils, 90 parish or community councils and four parish meetings across Cheshire East. Each of these local councils play an important role in developing vibrant communities, working alongside voluntary and community sector organisations. They have a wide range of powers, some limited duties, and their size, capacity, and roles vary significantly. Some are small with part-time Clerks, while others are larger and can be more proactive.

At their best, local councils bring close knowledge of community needs, the ability to mobilise communities and can use precepts to raise funds locally.

The Localism Act 2011 has empowered local councils, leading to a significant increase in parish precepts. Many local councils are now in the

position to take on delegated or devolved assets and services, which, in turn, is empowering for local communities. However, any decisions to delegate or devolve responsibilities from Cheshire East Council would also need to demonstrate Best Value and be sustainable.

Defining the roles of the local councils is challenging due to their discretionary powers. Some councils take on wide-ranging responsibilities, from town centre management to social impact initiatives while others focus on local amenities such as allotments. The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the importance of local action, with local councils playing key roles in community response.

Establishing a framework will ensure a fair and consistent approach, including where devolution in Cheshire and Warrington could enable further opportunities at a local level to be considered following the Government's recently published English Devolution White Paper (December 2024). Section 4.1 of the White Paper specifically sets out the government's approach to communities and empowerment at a local level.

The White Paper acknowledges that communities need power returned to them, enabling them to impact decisions made in their local area. The government's approach to community empowerment will therefore focus on putting people in control of their own lives, alongside devolving power from government.

### **3.3 The need for a framework**

The need for a framework is due to the number and complexity of the local councils across Cheshire East and to ensure a consistency and fairness of approach.

Currently, there are different approaches to working with local councils across differing departments of Cheshire East Council. A framework would ensure improved and consistent engagement which can avoid a patchwork of services. Establishing a clear process for communication with local councils on both strategic and operational matters, including devolution discussions would be beneficial.

As the framework is developed the council can:

- Utilise existing Town and Parish Council Network meetings for sharing information
- Coordinate individual conversations through Cheshire Association of Local Councils (ChALC).

- Ensure provision of clear information to improve understanding and help to alleviate current challenges such as inconsistent service provision, concerns about accountability, capacity of small councils and financial pressures.

### 3.4 The proposed framework

The proposed framework aims to be a guide to collaborating more effectively with local councils across Cheshire East. It acknowledges varying levels of interest in transferring responsibilities and focuses on overcoming barriers, engaging the sector and building capacity.

Key components include:

1. **Building Trust:** Establishing principles, shared commitments, and ongoing dialogue.
2. **Implementation Toolkit:** Outlining how devolution and responsibility shifts will be achieved, including a transparency procedure and process for addressing issues.
3. **Other Enabling Factors:** Supporting a partnership context.

The framework emphasises the importance of mutual trust, open dialogue, and clear joint working principles. It highlights the need for intent, understanding local council variations, providing clear information, and supporting sustainable arrangements. Successful actions and outcomes are crucial for sustaining progress and engaging more local councils. There is a need for Cheshire East to clearly define the stance on delegation or devolution of assets and/or services to local councils. This clarity will shape the approach, structures, processes, and any investment.

This toolkit for developing and implementing the framework provides guidance on how to manage the process of devolution to local councils.

**Process:** Outline clear steps to manage expectations, such as expressions of interest, business case creation, decision making, and transfer agreements.

**Mechanisms:** Different types of agreements for service delivery and asset management, including:

- a. **Joint Delivery or Topping Up:** Enhancing existing services through additional funding or community participation.

- b. **Service Delivery Delegation:** Agreements for discretionary or statutory services, with monitoring and potential termination clauses.
- c. **Agency Agreements:** Allowing parishes to perform functions they otherwise couldn't.

**Forms:** Structured provision of information through forms for expressions of interest and applications, aiding in early engagement and practical considerations.

**Approval Criteria:** Transparency about the considerations for approval.

**Capacity Building:** Creating the infrastructure necessary for successful devolution.

The toolkit highlights the importance of clear processes and documentation to facilitate efficient discussions and manage expectations, ensuring Cheshire East and local councils can work together effectively.

Challenges of delegation and devolution to local councils include focusing on the need to enhance their capacity which could be supported via the extensive offer already provided by ChALC and it is therefore important to involve them on the development of the framework itself. This approach aims to build a shared understanding of capacity needs and ensure sustainable service delivery through enhanced local council capabilities.

### 3.5 **Additional external support and capacity through the Cheshire Association of Local Councils (ChALC)**

A survey conducted by Cheshire Association of Local Councils (ChALC), in October 2024 indicated that local councils are now more open to using local precepts to deliver on behalf of their communities and are becoming less reliant upon Cheshire East. There is a willingness among many local councils to engage with Cheshire East on the challenges and opportunities of transformation and devolution, as there is a desire to ensure that as many local resources as possible are retained for the benefit of local communities who need them. The survey indicated that 50% of councils responding to the survey said that they had either agreed to additional funding to support services or were considering it. Currently, libraries and visitor information centres are the main recipients.

The survey report also concluded that there is a requirement to develop better ways of working together in the future which supports the recommendations of this report to create a framework for the delivery of

services at a local level which can be supported through an organisation such as ChALC.

By working with ChALC, a statement of intent can be developed to guide conversations with local councils. This approach aims to manage expectations, provide clear direction, and facilitate realistic discussions, ensuring both Cheshire East Council and local councils can align their visions and capacities effectively. This builds on the existing relationship between ChALC and through the council's Communities Team.

It is proposed to contract ChALC to support the implementation of the framework for the delivery of services, including improved engagement, at a local level will cost £15,000 per year for 3 years and will be funded from within existing budgets.

This also enables an understanding of whether there are any wider opportunities with Cheshire West and Chester Council as ChALC work across the county area.

### **3.6 The Cheshire East Plan 2025 - 2029**

The current Cheshire East (Corporate) Plan 2021-25 has three key themes - Open, Fair and Green - and was refreshed for 2024/25 to better reflect the financial context. A new Plan for 2025 to 2029 to provide our residents, partners and the organisation with clarity of purpose and strategic direction aligned to a new operating model and MTFS has been developed. The plan, informed by the new operating model created as part of the Transformation Plan, reflects a commitment to working collaboratively with partners and community capacity building. If agreed, we will be an enabling organisation, focussed on working alongside our partners to deliver services that achieve the best possible outcomes for Cheshire East's residents. The approach to the Plan and the aspirations and principles for the organisation, were shared with the Town and Parish Council Network in November 2024.

A small Member task and finish group was set up to support the process and development of the plan. The draft new plan is on the agenda for this Committee for recommendation to Council in February 2025 alongside the MTFS for approval. The framework and approach proposed in this report is aligned to the draft plan and its priority themes.

## **4. Consultation and Engagement**

- 4.1 This report and approach has been informed by extensive engagement with staff on the council's operating model which emphasises the need for improved collaboration, partnership working and engagement, as well as ongoing discussions with ChALC and individual local councils. Further consultation and engagement will take place as part of developing the framework.

## **5. Reasons for Recommendations**

- 5.1 The council is exploring new ways of working and service delivery as part of its Transformation Plan, building on existing partnership working across a range of sectors including with local councils. It is also about to embark on a devolution journey. If devolution in Cheshire and Warrington is delivered, it could enable further opportunities at a local level to be considered.
- 5.2 The council is also entering a new realm of co-operation with our Parish and Town Councils, where increased collaboration and shared working needs to be explored in a planned and systematic way to secure the ongoing provision of services at local level. This is not an enforced or mandatory process, but an opportunity for improved engagement and co-production.
- 5.3 Currently, team/departmental conversations are taking place with individual local councils, leading to an un-coordinated and inconsistent approach, which the proposed framework would mitigate.
- 5.4 ChALC have previously been contracted for a number of years to provide infrastructure support for local councils. Therefore, they are uniquely placed to co-design and implement a framework that works for both Cheshire East Council and the local councils across the borough.

## **6. Other Options Considered**

<b>Option</b>	<b>Impact</b>	<b>Risk</b>
1. Do nothing	An inconsistent approach to engagement with local councils across the borough.	Inconsistent information sharing and understanding of opportunities and processes.
2. Explore further options and different frameworks	A delay in response to the Notice of Motion and no other frameworks have been reviewed to date.	No clear mechanism to begin engagement with local councils until alternative frameworks are in place.



Option	Impact	Risk
3. Not to contract ChALC to support the implementation of a framework	ChALC have extensive knowledge in working with local councils and are best placed to facilitate conversations and implementation. If ChALC are not contracted to support this piece of work, this will reduce capacity of Council officers and result in an uncoordinated and inconsistent approach.	Gaps in information. A lack of understanding of processes.  Implementation of framework fails due to lack of capacity.

## 7. Implications and Comments

### 7.1 *Monitoring Officer/Legal*

The development and implementation of a framework supports clear and consistent engagement with Town and Parish Councils who wish to work with Cheshire East Council and proposals to devolve power can be developed and considered in this context. ChALC will be commissioned via a contract for services to support and deliver outputs over a 3-year period. Legal services should be consulted and advise upon the framework development and the duties and responsibilities aligned to service delivery that can and cannot be devolved.

### 7.2 *Section 151 Officer/Finance*

The proposal of contracting Cheshire Association of Local Councils to support the implementation of the framework for the delivery of services and improved engagement at a local level will cost £15,000 per year for 3 years and will be funded from within existing budgets of Communities, resulting in no additional impact on the MTFS (budget head – Dan Coyne).

Any decisions to delegate or devolve responsibilities from Cheshire East Council would need to demonstrate Best Value and be sustainable, benefitting both councils.

### 7.3 *Policy*

In accordance with the council's Procedural Rules, the Notice of Motion is to be referred to Corporate Policy Committee for consideration.

Committee and sub- committee Procedure Rules 2.39 and 2.40 Chapter 3- Part 1: Section 2 sets out the relevant procedural rules at Committee. [The Council's Constitution, Chapter 3 – Rules of Procedure](#)

This approach reflects the current priorities within the Cheshire East (Corporate) Plan 2021-25 below but also the priority themes in the draft new Cheshire East Plan 2025-29 also on the agenda for Corporate Policy Committee and subject to approval by Council in February 2025.

<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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#### *7.4 Equality, Diversity and Inclusion*

The implementation of a framework for the delivery of services and improved engagement at a local level will ensure a balanced and equitable relationship, between Cheshire East Council and local councils, for the benefit of both councils and local residents. An equality impact assessment would be completed for any specific proposals.

#### *7.5 Human Resources*

No direct human resources implications.

#### *7.6 Risk Management*

The risk of not implementing a framework for the delivery of services and improved engagement at a local level could result in inconsistencies in approach, services and information. Local councils could have a lack of understanding of the opportunities through service transformation and devolution processes.

There is a risk of the implementation of the framework failing due to a lack of officer capacity if ChALC are not contracted to support this piece of work.

#### *7.7 Rural Communities*

The implementation of a framework for the delivery of services and improved engagement at a local level will ensure that rural areas have equal access to information and procedures regarding the devolution of services across Cheshire East. It may enable issues particularly impacting rural communities to be considered such as digital inclusion and connectivity.

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

No direct impact on children, young people including Cared for Children and children with special educational needs and disabilities.

**7.9 Public Health**

The implementation of a framework for the delivery of services at a local level will have a neutral overall impact on the health and wellbeing of Cheshire East residents but may provide opportunities for improvements over time depending on any specific service delivery decisions that are made.

**7.10 Climate Change**

No direct impact on climate change.

Access to Information	
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Appendices:	N/A
Background Papers:	<a href="#">Notice Of Motion raised at Full Council on 16<sup>th</sup> October 2024</a>  <a href="#">Local service delivery and place-shaping: A framework to support parish and town councils   Local Government Association</a>  <a href="https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/english-devolution-white-paper-power-and-partnership-foundations-for-growth/english-devolution-white-paper">https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/english-devolution-white-paper-power-and-partnership-foundations-for-growth/english-devolution-white-paper</a>