

# **CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL**

Minutes of a meeting of the **Corporate Policy Committee**  
held on Thursday, 2nd October, 2025 in the Capesthorne Room, Macclesfield  
Town Hall

## **PRESENT**

Councillor M Gorman (Vice-Chair)

Councillors D Clark, J Clowes, L Crane, T Dean, S Gardiner, M Goldsmith,  
D Jefferay, J Rhodes, B Puddicombe, J Saunders, L Wardlaw, F Wilson

## **OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE**

Rob Polkinghorne, Chief Executive  
Karen Wheeler, Interim Assistant Chief Executive  
Ashley Hughes, Executive Director of Resources and S151 Officer  
Kevin O'Keefe, Interim Director of Law and Governance, Monitoring Officer  
Josie Griffiths, Head of Audit, Risk and Assurance  
James Boden, Health and Safety Manager  
Nikki Bishop, Democratic Services Officer

## **27 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies were received from Councillors C O'Leary and N Mannion (Chair). Councillors L Wardlaw and B Puddicombe were present as substitutes.

## **28 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

In the interests of openness and transparency, in relation to agenda item 5, Councillor S Gardiner declared that his husband was a childcare lawyer.

In the interests of openness and transparency, in relation to agenda item 5, Councillors Clark, Clowes and Gardiner declared that they were potential beneficiaries of the Cheshire Pension Fund.

## **29 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

### **RESOLVED:**

That the minutes of the meeting held on 6 August 2025 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

## **30 PUBLIC SPEAKING/OPEN SESSION**

There were no registered speakers.

## 31 FIRST FINANCIAL REVIEW 25/26

The committee considered the report which provided an update on the forecasted outturn position for the 2025-26 financial year base on income, expenditure and known commitments as at the end of June 2025. The committee noted that the First Financial Review (FR1) forecasted revenue outturn position as an adverse variance of £3.1m (after the application of planned use of conditional Exceptional Financial Support of £25.3m).

The overall forecasted revenue overspend remained a significant financial challenge for the Council. Reserves at outturn FR1 were reported to be £29.4m, being £6.3m of General Fund Reserves and £23.1m of Earmarked Reserves. The level of reserves was therefore insufficient to cover the current forecasted revenue outturn for the year without any further action.

The committee received an update on the mitigating actions that were being developed to address the shortfall including: a review of borrowing elements to the capital programme to minimise the minimum revenue provision and interest payable, vacancy management, line by line budget reviews and reviewing the costs of placements.

The committee queried the unexpected legal costs and noted that this mostly related to the use of agency staff, however plans were underway across the organisation generally to convert agency posts into permanent. It was acknowledged that it was difficult to recruit to some specialised roles such as Children Services lawyers. The committee queried the impact of vacancy management across services such as the Place Directorate which reported a £4.7m saving due to vacancy management. Officers committed to providing a written response.

Members discussed the financial risks and the need for continued scrutiny and transparency in budget monitoring. The committee agreed that it was essential that Members and Officers worked together to effectively manage the budget and that all mitigating proposals needed to be delivered effectively and safely.

### **RESOLVED (unanimously):**

That the Corporate Policy Committee

1. Note the factors leading to a forecast adverse Net Revenue financial pressure of £3.1m against a revised budget of £440.5m (0.7%). Note 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. Note the in-year forecast capital spending of £205.5m against an increased capital budget of £208.5m. This was adjusted at outturn following an approved MTFS budget of £173m.
3. Approve the Supplementary Capital Estimate Requests for Allocation of Additional Grant Funding over £500,000 and up to £1,000,000 as per Annex 1, Section 4, Table 4.
4. Recommend to Council to approve the Supplementary Capital Estimate Request for Allocation of Additional Grant Funding over £1,000,000 as per Annex 1, Section 4, Table 5.
5. Note the available reserves position as per Annex 1, Section 5.

### **32 MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLANNING ASSUMPTIONS UPDATE 2025/26 - 2028/29**

The committee considered the report which provided an update on the development of the Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) 2026-30 following the Finance Sub Committee Working Group meetings held in August and September 2025. It was noted that the budget gap, without mitigations, was £33.3m on the General Fund Revenue Budget for 2026-27.

The report outlined the key financial planning assumptions underpinning the MTFS, including inflation forecasts, interest rates, pay awards, and anticipated changes to government funding. It was noted that the financial environment remained challenging, with continued uncertainty around national policy and funding reforms. The committee acknowledged the importance of maintaining a robust and flexible financial strategy to support the delivery of Council services and priorities.

The committee queried the proposal to review the capital programme and reduce the borrowing associated with the current MTFS planned programme by a third and the impact this could have. It was confirmed that projects funded by external monies such as grant funding, CIL, S106 should continue. However, projects that were reliant on borrowing needed to be reviewed and supported by a robust high-level business case to understand to full revenue impact and if this outweighed the costs of funding the project.

The committee noted the Council wide transformation savings. It was queried if these were sufficient to deliver the transformation needed. Officers confirmed that the Transformation Programme was led by the Council, working alongside its transformation partner which provided the capacity and capabilities needed to deliver significant savings. Work was underway to change the Council's skill set internally.

The committee expressed its thanks to the Section 151 Officer and his team for the report, noting that it provided a clear and informative overview

of the challenges currently facing the Council. Whilst acknowledging the severity of the financial position, Members were confident that they understood the scale of the issue and the strategic plan in place to address it. The committee also emphasised the importance of ensuring that staff were supported throughout the process and actively engaged in the transformation journey.

An amendment was proposed and accepted by the committee as a friendly amendment, in relation to recommendation 3, as set out below.

Proposed Amendment to Recommendation 3 (Proposed by Cllr Gardiner)

*3. Delegate to the S151 Officer the permission to continue dialogue with MHCLG on the continued use of Exceptional Financial Support over the life of this MTFS (2029/30). Regular updates to be provided to the Corporate Policy Committee and Finance Sub Committee on any progress made.*

**RESOLVED (unanimously):**

That the Corporate Policy Committee

1. Note the updated budget assumptions for the period 2026/27 to 2029/30 including sensitivity analysis.
2. Note the Finance Sub Committee's recommendation that it work with Officers and Members to bring forward further budget change proposals to assist with presenting a balanced budget for 2026/27 (making use of Exceptional Financial Support) to the Corporate Policy Committee for consultation in November 2025.
3. To delegate to the S151 Officer the permission to continue dialogue with MHCLG on the continued use of Exceptional Financial Support over the life of this MTFS (2029/30). Regular updates to be provided to Corporate Policy Committee and Finance Sub Committee on any progress made.
4. Approve the approach to consultation and engagement:
  - To engage immediately from during October through a high-level prioritisation survey.
  - To undertake a full consultation on potential detailed budget change proposals from the beginning of November through to the end of January 2026

*The meeting adjourned for a short break at 11.36am and reconvened at 11.44am.*

### **33 CORPORATE DELIVERY AND IMPROVEMENT PLAN 2025-27**

The Committee received a verbal update on the development of the Corporate Delivery and Improvement Plan for 2025–2027. The Plan would be aligned with the Council's strategic vision and commitments and provide a framework for delivering improved outcomes for residents and communities.

The committee noted that the Plan would include a response to the Best Value Notice, CIPFA Review, LGA Corporate Peer Challenge and Transformation Plan ensuring clear links to other priority activity including work to support devolution, improvement into Children's Services and moving to a Leader/Cabinet form of governance. The draft Plan had also been shared, and feedback received, from the Assurance Panel.

The Corporate Delivery and Improvement Plan would be considered by the committee at its meeting on 30 October 2025 and Member Briefings would be arranged.

#### **RESOLVED:**

That the verbal update be noted.

### **34 VIOLENCE AND AGGRESSION - HEALTH AND SAFETY POLICY**

The committee considered the draft policy aimed at addressing violence and aggression in the workplace, as part of the Council's broader commitment to health, safety, and wellbeing. The policy set out clear expectations for staff conduct, outlined procedures for reporting and responding to incidents, and reinforced the Council's zero-tolerance stance on abusive behaviour towards its employees.

Officers highlighted a revised recommendation as set out below, following comments made during the informal Committee Briefing. The revised recommendation was supported by the Committee.

- 1. To note the draft Violence and Aggression Health and Safety Policy and delegate final approval of the Policy to the Chair and Vice Chair of the Corporate Policy Committee in conjunction with the Director of Law and Governance (Monitoring Officer).*

The committee raised a number of points in relation to the draft policy, as set out below, which officers committed to reviewing and amending the policy as necessary.

Section 4: Council staff would use car parks whilst carrying out their duties. Some of these car parks were not well lit and this should be incorporated into the policy.

Section 5: It was noted that an EU definition had been used. It was suggested that a UK definition also be included.

Section 7: It was suggested that this be expanded to reference visits that staff undertook offsite (such as visiting resident homes) and understanding exit points in the case of an emergency.

Section 8: The committee received assurance that staff were provided with the necessary first aid training to undertake their roles.

Section 11: The committee queried investigations post incident to ensure lessons learnt were considered to improve the way in which the Council operated. The committee requested that this section be expanded further to ensure robustness.

Section 13: The committee agreed that this section should also be expanded and more robust to ensure the Council was protecting staff and enabling them to carry out duties in an effective manner – such as staff removing children from homes.

It was noted by the committee that further small tweaks would be requested to the reporting software to make clearer incidents of a racial and homophobia nature.

It was queried how many incidents had been reported to the Police and what training was given to staff to understand when they should report incidents. Officers committed to providing a written response.

The committee referred to the modelling arrangements of the Committee Suites at Delamere house and sought assurance that emergency exits had been considered and requested that this issue be incorporated into the remodelling of any Council buildings going forward. Officers committed to providing a written response.

The committee thanked officers for bringing forward this important policy and agreed that the Council's staff were its greatest resource. It was agreed that the revised policy would be circulated to the committee once the above amendments had been made.

**RESOLVED (unanimously):**

That the Corporate Policy Committee

1. Note the draft Violence and Aggression Health and Safety Policy and delegate final approval of the Policy to the Chair and Vice Chair of the Corporate Policy Committee in conjunction with the Director of Law and Governance (Monitoring Officer).

### **35 MINUTES OF SUB-COMMITTEES**

#### **RESOLVED:**

That the minutes of the Finance Sub Committee held on 2 June 2025 and minutes of the General Appeals Sub Committee held on 16 September 2025 be received and noted.

### **36 WORK PROGRAMME**

The committee considered the Work Programme. The following was noted:

- The Corporate Delivery and Improvement Plan had since been added to the Work Programme for 30 October 2025.
- It was suggested at the previous meeting that the committee receive regular updates on Risk Management. It was confirmed that a significant piece of work was underway to revise the Strategic Risk Register which would be presented to the committee at the earliest opportunity. There would also be Member Briefings arranged.

#### **RESOLVED:**

That the Work Programme be received and noted.

The meeting commenced at 10.30 am and concluded at 12.28 pm

Councillor M Gorman, Vice Chair