

OPEN

Corporate Policy Committee

30 October 2025

Improvement and Transformation Delivery Plan 2025-27

Report of: Rob Polkinghorne, Chief Executive

Report Reference No: CPC/53/25-26

Ward(s) Affected: All

For Decision

Purpose of Report

- 1 The report sets out the Improvement and Transformation Delivery Plan 2025-27 for approval in line with decisions made at previous Corporate Policy Committees and the expectations within the non-statutory Best Value Notice with regards to developing a single overarching plan incorporating transformation and improvement activity and quarterly reporting on delivery.

Executive Summary

- 2 The Improvement and Transformation Delivery Plan (The Plan) is focused on four improvement priorities and the action required to achieve the following outcomes within 18 months by June 2027:

Improvement Priority	Outcomes expected by June 2027
Financial sustainability	A Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) with a clear route to financial sustainability and realising financial benefits with measurable outcomes for residents through council-wide transformation
Good governance and decision making	Implemented changes to our governance model from May 2026 enabling more effective, timely decision-making and scrutiny
Leadership and culture change	Embedding organisational culture change with visible leadership and collaboration supported by impactful communication and engagement

Improvement Priority	Outcomes expected by June 2027
Improving Children's Services	Demonstrable improvement in children's services recognised by Ofsted

- 3 The Plan is a single overarching document to provide oversight of all significant improvement and transformation activity as well as the work taking place to deliver the outcomes in the Cheshire East Plan 2025-29 rather than a separate delivery plan. It will help us plan, prioritise and resource effectively as well as openly measure and report on progress and impact, significantly improving the Council's own oversight and assurance of delivery as well as meeting expectations in the non-statutory Best Value Notice received in May 2025.
- 4 We will continue to work with the Assurance Panel we established in August 2024, making full use of their expertise to support us. The Panel will provide feedback on the Plan at its next meeting on 30 October and through a further prioritisation session with the Corporate Leadership Team led by the Chair of the Panel.
- 5 Progress with delivery will be reported at least monthly to the Improvement and Transformation Delivery Board with regular reports to the Assurance Panel, Corporate Policy Committee and government. The plan will be regularly reviewed and refreshed by June 2027. The Plan is a live document and will continue to evolve as our improvement journey progresses and the non-statutory Best Value notice requirements are met.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Agree the Improvement and Transformation Delivery Plan 2025-27 at Appendix 1, subject to the feedback from the Assurance Panel meeting on 30 October 2025 and prioritisation session.
2. Delegate any final amendments to the Plan, and any updates throughout the next 18 months, to the Chief Executive in consultation with the Leader, Deputy Leader and Leader of the Opposition.

Background

- 6 The Improvement and Transformation Delivery Plan 2025-27 is focused on four improvement priorities – financial sustainability, good governance and decision-making, leadership and culture change, and improving Children's Services. The Plan is a single overarching document to provide oversight of all significant improvement and transformation activity as well as the

work taking place to deliver the outcomes in the Cheshire East Plan 2025-29.

- 7 The Plan brings together existing plans focused on financial, organisational and service challenges that followed multiple external inspections, peer reviews and assessments over the last 18 months including the Ofsted inspection of Children's Services, Local Government Association (LGA) Corporate Peer Challenge and CIPFA (Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy) review.
- 8 The Council also developed a Transformation Plan in August 2024 to meet the requirements of the application to government for Exceptional Financial Support (EFS) having identified a budget gap of £100m in the Medium-Term Financial Strategy 2024-28.
- 9 The transformation programmes have been reviewed alongside the development of this Plan, which also coincides with some of the initial projects drawing to a close, mostly within the Corporate Core programme. Having reviewed the remaining projects within that programme, digital projects will be realigned to Access to Services and the customer experience project creating a new Modernising Delivery programme. When the projects due to handover to 'business as usual' shortly finish, the Corporate Core programme will be formally closed. The remaining six transformation programmes and their projects are set out within the Plan.
- 10 This new Plan aims to enhance the work already underway, meet the expectations within the non-statutory Best Value Notice received in May 2025 and significantly improve the Council's own oversight and assurance of delivery. The government is seeking assurance of our improvement and has issued a non-statutory [Best Value Notice](#) formalising the oversight they would like to see. The areas of priority for improvement for the next 18 months are aligned to the non-statutory Best Value Notice.

Consultation and Engagement

- 11 Engagement with staff, Members, partners and stakeholders has taken place in the development and delivery of the individual plans that inform this Plan.
- 12 Members have been engaged in different components of the Plan including through Member briefings, service committees such as Finance Sub-Committee and Children's and Families Committee, a cross-party Member task and finish group, and oversight through the Corporate Policy Committee. However, Member engagement and policy development is recognised as an area for improvement and reflected in the good governance and decision-making improvement priority within the Plan.
- 13 Decisions will be taken through the relevant Service Committees and Corporate Policy Committee as required for policy change and expenditure

or savings including the financial and non-financial benefits of the transformation programmes, or officer delegations where appropriate. Significant expenditure will go through the appropriate decision making, including as part of the budget setting process and development of the MTFS in line with the Constitution and Schemes of Delegation.

- 14 Engagement has taken place with strategy, programme and project leads including relevant Directors and Heads of Service as well as Corporate Leadership Team. An early draft was also shared with the Assurance Panel with an online session held in September providing valuable feedback that has been incorporated into the Plan. The first quarterly formal meeting with MHCLG is taking place on 23 October and the Assurance Panel meets on 30 October – their feedback will be incorporated into the final Plan. A further prioritisation session with the Corporate Leadership Team led by the Chair of the Panel.
- 15 A Communication and Engagement Strategy is in development that will underpin this Plan and set out the council's strategic approach to communications and how we will engage with key stakeholders to improve understanding of the council's priorities and programmes, and ensure policies, strategies and services are informed by the people and organisations who will be affected by them and involved in delivery. The strategy will come forward to Corporate Policy Committee in November 2025.
- 16 We know we must improve our engagement with staff, Trade Unions and Members, and develop our relationships with residents, communities, businesses, visitors, partners and other key stakeholders, including the media, focusing on what they need to know and understand about the organisation, the impact of the council's work and the role they play in shaping the outcomes we want to deliver for Cheshire East.

Reasons for Recommendations

- 17 The report sets out the Improvement and Transformation Delivery Plan 2025-27 for approval in line with decisions made at previous Corporate Policy Committees with regards to developing an overarching plan, incorporating transformation activity and quarterly reporting on delivery. An overarching improvement plan is also an expectation of the non-statutory Best Value Notice received by the Council from government in May 2025.

Other Options Considered

Option	Impact	Risk
Do nothing	No single overarching improvement plan meaning no oversight of all significant	No corporate visibility and focus to better enable the required pace of delivery

Option	Impact	Risk
	improvement plans and activity	Non-compliance with the Best Value Notice leading to further measures from MHCLG

Implications and Comments

Monitoring Officer/Legal/Governance

- 18 A Best Value notice was issued to the Council in May 2025 and is outside the statutory powers held by the Secretary of State under the Local Government Act 1999 to inspect or intervene in local authorities where there is evidence of best value failure and, separately, under section 230 of the Local Government Act 1972 to request information from local authorities. However, a failure to demonstrate continuous improvement including delivery of this overarching plan may be judged to contribute to best value failure and the Secretary of State may consider using these powers as appropriate.
- 19 Under the Local Government Act 1999, all councils have a general Duty of Best Value to “make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the way in which its functions are exercised, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness.”.
- 20 The delivery of this plan and individual programmes and projects will require individual consideration, decision making and reporting. Where appropriate, Member decision-making or officer delegations will be used in line with the Constitution and Schemes of Delegation. Relevant decision making and scrutiny will be through Service Committees, Corporate Policy Committee and full Council as appropriate and as part of the budget setting process.
- 21 Progress in delivering the plan will be reported at least quarterly to the Improvement and Transformation Delivery Board, Assurance Panel, Corporate Policy Committee and government. It is also noted that the Assurance Panel will provide ongoing support and challenge to aid the delivery of the plan.
- 22 This overarching plan will enhance not duplicate or undermine the governance or reporting and progress visits required by specific external agencies such as Ofsted.

Section 151 Officer/Finance

- 23 There are no direct financial implications within this report and recommendations. The Cheshire East Plan 2025-29 has a commitment to be an effective and enabling council including outcome 3.1 Financially

sustainable council, enabled by council-wide service transformation and improvement.

- 24 The Cheshire East Plan was developed alongside the Medium-Term Financial Strategy 2025-29. The MTFS is the resource and financial plan for delivery of the Corporate Plan. The council will use its resources to deliver the commitments and required improvements. Transformation savings are built into the MTFS and now reported regularly to Corporate Policy Committee.
- 25 Areas for improvement identified through the CIPFA review are set out in the Financial Leadership Improvement Plan and reflected in this Plan.

Human Resources

- 26 There are no direct implications from this report. The Plan provides clarity on the overall strategic direction of the council's improvement aligned to the Cheshire East Plan 2025-29 and will be reflected in service plans and personal development reviews (PDRs) as part of the 'golden thread' where appropriate. The use of the transformation reserve will help to secure capacity and expertise to support the implementation of the transformation programme and improvement priorities. Embedding culture change and the workforce transformation programme are key within the Plan.

Risk Management

- 27 The Council's Strategic Risk Register is being reviewed and updated to ensure close alignment between the priorities and outcomes set out in the Plan, and the content of the Strategic Risk Register, which will be regularly reported upon to Members.
- 28 An overarching plan will help to inform the identification and management of corporate risks with risk assessments taking place for individual projects where appropriate. The plan will help the council further drive its own improvement, ensure effective strategic oversight and comply with the expectations of the non-statutory Best Value Notice. The risk of a lack of progress and delivery at the required pace could result in further measures and an escalation from MHCLG which is identified as a risk and will be added to the Strategic Risk Register.

Impact on other Committees

- 29 There is no direct impact on other Committees, however, updates or decisions relating to delivery, transformation or improvement activity for specific service areas would be taken by the relevant committee where appropriate including policy changes and as part of the budget setting process.

Policy

- 30 The Cheshire East Plan 2025-29 includes a commitment to be an effective and enabling council with an emphasis on being financially sustainable, aided by council-wide service transformation and improvement. This improvement plan primarily focuses on this third strategic commitment which underpins the success of the other two commitments in the Cheshire East Plan – Unlocking prosperity for all and Improving health and wellbeing.
- 31 The Council understands the improvements it needs to make and has made some progress in addressing the challenges with a focus in this plan on financial sustainability including delivery of the transformation plan, sustainable improvements in Children's social care services, leadership capacity and culture change, effective governance and decision making. The plan will help the council to deliver value for money, continuous improvement and better outcomes for Cheshire East's residents.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

- 32 There are no direct equality, diversity and inclusion implications, however, the development of a new Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy is included within the plan for development within 2025/26.
- 33 Strategies, programmes and projects within the overarching plan will help improve the culture and processes, systems and structures as part of the Council's overall transformation and improvement journey underpinning the delivery of the Cheshire East Plan 2025-29, enabling improved outcomes for all residents, businesses and communities. Equality impact assessments will be completed for individual projects.

Other Implications

- 34 N/A

Consultation

Name of Consultee	Post held	Date sent	Date returned
<i>Statutory Officer (or deputy):</i>			
Ashley Hughes	S151 Officer	13/10/25	20/10/25
Kevin O'Keefe	Interim Monitoring Officer	13/10/25	17/10/25
<i>Legal and Finance</i>			

Chris Benham	Director of Finance/Deputy S151	13/10/25	13/10/25
<i>Other Consultees on the Plan:</i>		<i>Executive Directors/Directors</i>	
Chief Executive and Executive Directors	Corporate Leadership Team	17/09/25 (CLT) 08/10/25 (Transformation Board)	10/10/25 20/10/25

Access to Information	
Contact Officer:	Karen Wheeler, Interim Assistant Chief Executive karen.wheeler@cheshireeast.gov.uk
Appendices:	Appendix 1: Improvement and Transformation Delivery Plan 2025-27
Background Papers:	Agenda for Corporate Policy Committee on Wednesday, 6th August, 2025, 5.30 pm Cheshire East Council Agenda for Council on Wednesday, 16th July, 2025, 11.00 am Cheshire East Council Agenda for Corporate Policy Committee on Thursday, 12th June, 2025, 10.30 am Cheshire East Council