

Improvement & Transformation Delivery Plan 2025-27

Enabling prosperity
and wellbeing for all



OFFICIAL



Foreword

Cheshire East Council is committed to change. We are committed to delivering the best possible services, protecting our most vulnerable residents and ensuring our borough is an even better place to live, work and thrive.

Our vision for Cheshire East's communities and places, set out in the [Cheshire East Plan 2025-29](#), is enabling prosperity and wellbeing for all. However, this has become increasingly difficult. The financial environment in which we operate has shifted dramatically. We no longer have the resources to meet rising demand in the way we would like. Pressures in areas such as children's social care, adult services and special educational needs are growing faster than our funding. At the same time, the complexity of the challenges we face has increased, and we have not adapted quickly enough to deliver services differently or in partnership with others.

We are now at a pivotal moment in our history following the issuing of a [non-statutory Best Value Notice](#) in May 2025 by the government and the stark financial challenges we face. We know that we must improve and must do so quickly. The next few years will be critical in determining our financial sustainability and delivery for our communities. That is why we have developed a comprehensive **Improvement and Transformation Delivery Plan** to which our Medium-Term Financial Strategy is aligned. This Plan sets out how we will move from crisis to stability and build a more resilient, efficient and effective Council, removing the barriers that have slowed our progress.

This journey will not be easy. Some services must be delivered differently and more efficiently. Others will need to reduce or stop altogether, and we will work with partners to find new ways of meeting local needs. It is not about small changes, it is about reshaping how we operate, how we prioritise and how we serve our communities. We are confident that with the right resources, focus and commitment, we can deliver the actions in our plan at the pace required, resulting in real improvements for our staff, Members, residents, businesses and partners across Cheshire East.

Councillor Nick Mannion
Leader of the Council

Councillor Michael Gorman
Deputy Leader of the Council

Rob Polkinghorne
Chief Executive

Contents

Section 1	Background, context and purpose	Page 4-8
Section 2	Our future direction and devolution	Page 9
Section 3	Our improvement priorities: Improvement Priority 1: Financial Sustainability Improvement Priority 2: Good governance and decision-making Improvement Priority 3: Leadership and culture change Improvement Priority 4: Improving Children's Services	Page 10-14 Page 15-18 Page 19-22 Page 23-24
Section 4	Delivery governance, oversight and resourcing	Page 25-26
Section 5	Measuring success	Page 26-27
Appendix A	Delivering our commitments in the Cheshire East Plan	Page 28-32

Section 1 – Background, context and purpose

In May 2025 we received a non-statutory Best Value Notice from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG), setting out clear expectations and priorities for improvement following a number of external inspections and assessments. These expectations are:

- Develop and agree a single **overarching improvement plan** which addresses recommendations from various external reviews and has clear milestones
- Continue taking urgent steps to improve its **financial sustainability**, by delivering against the agreed [Transformation Plan](#), delivering identified savings and addressing the recommendations made by [CIPFA](#) (Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy)
- Continue to comply with the Department for Education's [Improvement Notice](#) by delivering appropriate and sustainable improvements in relation to **children's social care services**
- Continue working with the **Independent Assurance Panel**, making full use of its expertise and responding to its recommendations
- Continue to increase **senior officer capacity and stability**, by making permanent appointments in a robust and timely manner and taking steps to reduce staff turnover in the longer term
- Ensure that there are **effective corporate, governance and scrutiny** processes that enable decisions and improvements to be made at pace and performance to be accurately monitored, including improvements to the committee system as recommended by the LGA following its [Corporate Peer Challenge](#)
- Continue to **embed organisational cultural change**, with focus on measuring impacts.

We fully accepted the need to address these challenges and developed a number of separate plans in response to recommendations from the external reviews. However, we are now at a key turning point. In bringing together all improvement and transformation plans into a single overarching plan, it gives us clarity and a clear direction for the next 18 months. It will help us focus our resources effectively, openly measure and report on progress both to government, on a quarterly basis, and to our residents, businesses, partners, Members and staff. Implementing these plans will improve our accountability, financial sustainability and service delivery.

We will continue to work with the Independent Assurance Panel we established in August 2024, making full use of their experience and expertise to support us. The areas of focus raised in the [first progress letter](#) from the panel in June 2025 are in line with the non-statutory Best Value Notice and are reflected in this plan.

The development of the [Transformation Plan](#) was a condition of Exceptional Financial Support (EFS) from government and intended to facilitate broader service redesign, supported by investment in digital technology, and contribute to the savings required over multiple years.

Inner Circle Consulting (ICC) were appointed in April 2024 to provide additional capacity and expertise to progress the development of the Transformation Plan, and to support some of its delivery. The Transformation Plan was submitted to government by the end of August 2024 deadline and identified opportunities within a range of £59-91m to help close the £100m gap over the coming four years. £68m was included within the MTFS 2025-29 and considered to be deliverable including £24.2m in 2025/26. We know there is significant work to be done to realise the savings identified in 2025/26 and ensure mitigations are in place if this cannot be achieved.

It has been timely to review the transformation programmes and progress to date in light of the current financial position and in developing this overarching Plan. We have revised the transformation programmes to focus our efforts on the most significant and impactful transformation. Some transformation projects have been delivered and are moving into 'business as usual' delivery such as the annual process of increasing fees and charges.

We know changing our organisational culture is key to our success. Improving organisational culture whilst delivering significant improvement and transformation is challenging but necessary. To build trust in the new leadership team and guide the council through improvement and transformation delivery, a new set of values have been co-produced with staff to shape how we work and underpin the change in culture we need. [Our values](#) reflect our Target Operating Model (TOM) and design principles, which in turn guide our transformation.

The TOM was also co-produced with staff and Members, providing a framework for the organisation we want to be. It will help us navigate current and future challenges and position us for financial sustainability. We will be guided by 12 design principles that we will embed in every aspect of our work, ensuring that our approach remains focused, coherent and effective. However, achieving this will require a significant shift in how we operate. The TOM is structured around four interconnected building blocks that represent the essential components driving transformation, new ways of working and enabling the delivery of seamless, adaptable, and efficient services. Our next steps include developing a detailed roadmap to guide the implementation of the TOM and programme of service redesign. We will embed an integrated approach that breaks down traditional, siloed service delivery and fosters cross-departmental collaboration and partnerships with our stakeholders.

Target Operating Model



Whilst we are focused on delivering improvement and transformation, it is important to ensure alignment of the Plan to the three commitments in the Cheshire East Plan 2025-29. The following table shows how the delivery of the Improvement and Transformation Delivery Plan, focused on four improvement priorities, paves the way for achievement of the medium-term outcomes that contribute to delivery of the three commitments in the Cheshire East Plan 2025-29:

Improvement priorities	Outcomes Short-term expected by June 2027	Outcomes Medium-term expected by March 2029
1. Financial sustainability	A Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) with clear route to financial sustainability and realising financial benefits with measurable outcomes for residents through council-wide transformation	Financially sustainable council, enabled by council-wide service transformation and improvement
2. Good governance and decision making	Implemented changes to our governance model from May 2026 enabling more effective, timely decision-making and scrutiny	Effective and responsive governance, compliance, and evidence-based decision-making
3. Leadership and culture change	Embedding organisational culture change with visible leadership and collaboration supported by impactful communication and engagement	Innovative solutions are developed through a culture of collaboration across the council and with residents, businesses, and partners
4. Improving children's services	Demonstrable improvement in children's services recognised by Ofsted	Children and young people thrive and reach their potential with targeted support when and where they need it

More detail on how the delivery of this Plan specifically contributes to the achievement of the Cheshire East Plan 2025-29 is set out at Appendix A. The Improvement and Transformation Delivery Plan sets the operational focus for the next 18 months, while the Cheshire East Plan 2025–29 provides strategic direction for the next 3.5 years. Both plans are aligned.

Progress against the improvement projects and transformation programmes within the Plan will be reported monthly to the Improvement and Transformation Delivery Board chaired by the Chief Executive, with regular updates to the Independent Assurance Panel, Corporate Policy Committee (or relevant Committee as we move to Cabinet arrangements) and government. Improvement is usually an incremental ongoing process whereas transformation is likely to be larger scale with more fundamental changes. This is reflected in the programmes, projects, deliverables and timescales for delivery.

Timely, informative communication and effective two-way engagement with stakeholders will be key for delivery. The plan complements existing governance and reporting requirements from external bodies like Ofsted and the Department for Education.

Plan on a Page

Cheshire East Plan 2025-29	Our Vision – Enabling prosperity and wellbeing for all in Cheshire East			
	Commitment 1: Unlocking prosperity for all		Commitment 2: Improving health and wellbeing	Commitment 3: An effective and enabling council
Improvement & Transformation Delivery Plan 2025-27	Priority 1: Financial sustainability Sponsor: Executive Director of Resources & S151 Officer A Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) with clear route to financial sustainability and realising financial benefits with measurable outcomes for residents through council-wide transformation		Priority 2: Good governance & decision making Sponsor: Director of Law & Governance & Monitoring Officer Implemented changes to our governance model from May 2026 enabling more effective, timely decision-making and scrutiny	Priority 3: Leadership & culture change Sponsor: Executive Director of Resources & S151 Officer Embedding organisational culture change with visible leadership and collaboration supported by impactful communication and engagement
	Priority 4: Improving Children's Services Sponsor: Executive Director of Children's Services Demonstrable improvement in children's services recognised by Ofsted			
Improvement Priorities Outcomes & Projects	Budget Management Financial Leadership Unit 4/Enterprise Resource Planning		Leader and Cabinet Model Strategy and Policy Framework Performance Management Framework Consultation and engagement	People Strategy Children's Services Improvement
	Modernising Delivery Sponsor: ED, Adults, Health & Integration Resident Experience Modern Workplace		Workforce and Culture Sponsor: Executive Director of Resources & S151 Officer Workforce Benefits Culture & Organisational Development Service Design & TOM	Children's Services Sponsor: Executive Director of Children's Services Right Child, Right Home Birth to Thrive
Transformation Programmes & Projects	Enabling Communities Sponsor: ED, Adults, Health & Integration Adults Social Care Sponsor: ED, Adults, Health & Integration Prevent, Reduce, Enable Learning Disabilities			
	Place Sponsor: Executive Director of Place Corporate landlord Tatton Park Third Party Spend			

Section 2 – Our future direction and devolution

The Cheshire East Plan 2025-29 sits at the top of a hierarchy of strategic plans that set out the overarching vision '**enabling prosperity and wellbeing for all**' and commitments¹ so there is a 'golden thread' between the Improvement and Transformation Delivery Plan, organisational and partnership plans, such as the Health and Wellbeing Strategy, and the Medium-Term Financial Strategy. These plans guide director level service planning and individual performance development reviews so that every member of staff understands their part in delivery.

Appendix A sets out the key deliverables within the next 18 months demonstrating the work towards the delivery of the commitments and outcomes in the Cheshire East Plan 2025-29 which are intrinsically linked to overall improvement, transformation and our medium-term outcomes.

In partnership with Cheshire West & Chester and Warrington councils, we have approved the creation of a Mayoral Combined Authority for Cheshire and Warrington marking a major step in the sub-region's devolution journey. This will shift decision-making and funding from central government to local leaders, helping to improve transport, create jobs, boost skills, and support both town centres and rural communities – very much aligned to our vision and commitments for the place and communities of Cheshire East.

It will also offer huge opportunities for businesses with increased investment in key sectors. The deal includes over £650 million of capital and revenue funding over 30 years to support local priorities, with further partnership funding potential. The new authority is expected to launch early in 2026 and hold its first Mayoral election in 2027. With devolved powers, the sub-region and the Council can help shape policies in areas such as transport, regeneration, housing, skills, health and wider economic development to better reflect local needs and priorities. This would enable more integrated and responsive public services, foster innovation in tackling challenges like rural connectivity and aging populations, and support targeted investment in skills and infrastructure.

While devolution presents huge opportunities which we must take advantage of, it cannot distract us from our focus on the improvements we must make and achieving financial sustainability. By becoming a more resilient organisation that is operationally efficient and effective, we will be better able to drive forward the delivery of policy and priorities as they change over time and emerge through devolution. During the life of this Plan, we will have laid the foundations to maximise the benefits of devolution for Cheshire East ahead of the Mayoral election in May 2027.

¹ Unlocking prosperity for all; Improving health and wellbeing; An effective and enabling council.

Section 3 – Our improvement priorities

Improvement Priority 1: Financial Sustainability

We set a budget and Medium-Term Financial Plan for 2025-29 at Full Council in February 2025. The budget was only balanced through the use of an in-principle agreement to Exceptional Financial Support (EFS) totalling £25.3m for 2025/26. This follows the use of £17.6m of EFS to balance the budgets for 2023/24 and 2024/25. Weakness in the arrangements for financial management and budget stability were identified through a series of independent processes from the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA), the Local Government Association (LGA) and the external audit process. The non-statutory Best Value Notice highlights financial sustainability as requiring immediate attention.

We are now setting our budget for 2026/27 and Medium-Term Financial Plan to 2030. Underpinning this is a new Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) to deliver the following:

- A council that knows its budgets, and lives within the resource envelope without requiring EFS by 2028/29
- A council that knows how much it holds in reserves and has grown them to a level that is safe; a minimum of £25m in the General Fund balance by 2030
- A council that recognises the MTFS as its Corporate Plan in financial form as budgets are aligned to outcomes.

The MTFS is a five-year plan and includes underpinning plans such as the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) Management Plan (a seven-year plan to 2031) and the Capital Strategy (currently to 2030 but will move to a ten-year profile plus pipeline of works in 2026/27). By the very name, it is over a medium term. The Improvement and Transformation Delivery Plan is an 18-month timeframe, and we hold key financial deliverables in this timeframe.

Financial Sustainability: Improvement and transformation key deliverables

Committee: Corporate Policy Committee

Corporate Leadership Team Lead: Executive Director Resources/S151

Improvement Project	Key Deliverables	Delivered by	Lead Officer
Budget Management	Budget management included within budget holder's Personal Development Reviews as an objective and the budget is a standing item in one-to-one meetings	October 2025	Director of Finance (Deputy S151)
	Each budget holder will have signed a budget statement following budget setting in February 2026, including the phrase "I understand my budget, I understand I do not have the authority to overspend the totality of my budget, and I will undertake the relevant mitigations to remain within the agreed budget envelope for the financial year". Compliance will be monitored and reported to Executive Directors and will be managed through the Performance Development Review process.	March 2026	
	All elected Members will have received finance training, co-designed with the LGA Regional Finance Adviser, on their roles and responsibilities and what it means to be a Councillor for an organisation in financial distress.	March 2026	
	Finance training for officers delivered including Finance for Non-Finance Managers and the LGA's Finance Unpacked videos, as well as being included as part of all inductions.	March 2026	
Financial Leadership	Financial governance and financial management in place to improve and cement financial control and leadership to achieve financial sustainability as detailed within the Financial Leadership Improvement Plan .	March 2027	Director of Finance (Deputy S151)
	The Finance Team upskilled and developed to support our route out of EFS.	March 2027	
Unit 4/Enterprise Resource Planning	Re-implementation of the Financial Planning and Analysis module for Unit4 complete, mandatory use will follow training and development from December 2026 and support improved budget management.	April 2026	Director of Finance (Deputy S151)

Improvement Project	Key Deliverables	Delivered by	Lead Officer
	Improvements delivered to Unit 4 Middleware connect our main finance IT system with other key systems, like those used in social care, allowing information to move automatically, cutting down on manual work and improving accuracy.	June 2026	Director of Digital

Transformation Programme	Project	Key Deliverables	Delivered by	Lead Officer
Place Led	Corporate Landlord	A Corporate Landlord Asset Management Strategy 2026-29 and refreshed Corporate Landlord Model will be delivered to improve strategic asset management and support the delivery of financial and service outcomes.	June 2026	Director of Growth & Enterprise
	Tatton Park	A future operating model agreed for Tatton Park, building on the success of the Tatton Vision Investment Programme, aiming to enhance facilities, improve visitor experience, and ensure long-term financial sustainability in partnership with the National Trust.	March 2026	Director of Planning & Environment
	Third Party Spend	In-year third party spend savings delivered from the opportunities already identified and a clear timeline agreed for savings over the next three years.	March 2026	Head of Major Programme Delivery
Modernising Delivery	Resident Experience	The Resident Experience Strategy and action plan developed to deliver improvements, making it quicker and easier to access council services.	March 2026	Director of People & Customer Experience
		A resident survey completed to baseline resident satisfaction and experience to measure improvement and will be repeated bi-annually.	June 2026	Assistant Chief Executive
		Customer Service Excellence accredited.	June 2027	Director of People & Customer Experience
	Modern Workplace	Outline business cases developed for wider digital transformation within each service to deliver financial and non-financial benefits during 2026/27 supporting	March 2026	Director of Digital

Transformation Programme	Project	Key Deliverables	Delivered by	Lead Officer
		improvement in service outcomes and resident experience.		
		The adoption and extension of Artificial Intelligence in Customer Services, Adult Social Care and Children's Services will be progressed.	March 2026	
		A full rollout of the corporate Artificial Intelligence platform (Copilot and data warehouse through Fabric) will be completed across council services.	March 2027	
Adults Transformation	Prevent, Reduce, Enable	The Prevent, Reduce and Enable pilot completed and full rollout begun to enable residents to maintain their independence and prevent or delay users needing commissioned care.	April 2026	Director of Adult Social Care Operations
	Learning Disabilities	Care4CE modernisation delivered through culture change, workforce development, reducing voids and minor adaptations.	June 2026	
		Shared Lives (foster care for adults) expanded following a three-year trajectory (2025–28), with key milestones including the launch of recruitment campaign, carer onboarding and initial placement growth recruitment.	September 2025	
		An intensive six-month delivery phase targeting the top nine commissioned learning disability providers and Care4CE's Supported Living Network will be completed.	March 2026	
		The expansion of Shared Lives will continue to reach 35 long-term placements, with annual monitoring and evaluation.	June 2027	
Enabling Communities	Enabling Communities	Frameworks developed to work with the Voluntary, Community, Faith and Social Enterprise sector and local councils (Town and Parish) to embed community-centered, data-driven and relational approaches to provide targeted support to individuals with multiple needs or to areas of high need working collaboratively with communities to build resilience.	March 2026	Executive Director of Adults, Health & Integration

Transformation Programme	Project	Key Deliverables	Delivered by	Lead Officer
		Recommendations from the independent review of partnerships revisited, informed by the Enabling Communities frameworks to better support partnership working, service delivery and decision making across the council.	April 2026	Assistant Chief Executive
		Enabling Communities Grants Programmes delivered and review completed to support and develop the sector.	June 2026	Executive Director of Adults, Health & Integration

Improvement Priority 2: Good governance and decision making

The Local Government Association (LGA) Corporate Peer Challenge carried out in March 2024 clearly identified the need for us to urgently review our decision-making framework and recommended streamlining current arrangements to avoid siloed working and develop more effective work programmes across committees, as well as consideration of governance structures and schemes of delegation.

We have implemented an updated scheme of delegation, refreshed the Member development strategy and training programmes, and been considering options for improvement governance overall within the existing Committee system which has been in place since 2021. In light of the feedback from the Assurance Panel and Government's clear direction to move all councils to a Leader and Cabinet model of governance and decision-making as set out in the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill, we proactively made the decision in September 2025 to adopt this change at the earliest opportunity, May 2026, and we must prioritise implementing this change.

We also need to lay stronger foundations underpinning our decision-making through the development of a robust performance management framework and effective policy function as well as strong community engagement – also areas identified within the LGA Corporate Peer Challenge report are yet to be fully addressed.

Good governance and decision making: Improvement key deliverables

Committee: Corporate Policy Committee

Corporate Leadership Team Lead: Director of Law and Governance (Monitoring Officer)

Improvement Project	Key Deliverables	Delivered by	Lead Officer
Leader and Cabinet Model	The LGA Top Team development sessions for Group Leaders and Corporate Leadership Team (CLT) delivered.	March 2026	Assistant Chief Executive
	The Member Development Strategy 2025-27 refreshed and expanded including Member and officer training to support implementation of the new governance model with information sessions for officers from October 2025.	March 2026	Head of Democratic Services
	Constitutional recommendations made to Corporate Policy Committee during 2025/26 to support implementation of the new governance model informed by the Member task and finish group.	April 2026	
	Systems, processes and structures in place aligned to the new governance model to enable faster, more effective decision making and scrutiny.	April 2026	
	The Leader and Cabinet model of governance and decision making implemented at annual Council.	May 2026	
	A communication and media relations protocol developed to support the Cabinet and Leader model of governance and Cabinet Members.	May 2026	Assistant Chief Executive
	Three Cabinet and CLT awaydays held to build effective working relationships and support strategic decision making and delivery.	October 2026	
Strategy and Policy Framework	A Strategy and Policy Framework in place, setting out a consistent format, approval process and review cycle along with an accompanying implementation plan to ensure all existing strategies and policies are reviewed, aligned and assigned clear owners and review dates within six months.	December 2025	Assistant Chief Executive
	A corporate strategy and policy function implemented to support the delivery of the framework, policy development and effective horizon scanning, aligned to communication, consultation and engagement.	March 2026	

Improvement Project	Key Deliverables	Delivered by	Lead Officer
Performance Management Framework	A new Corporate Performance Management Framework implemented with key performance indicators linked to the Cheshire East Plan and Improvement and Transformation Delivery Plan with a golden thread through Director Plans and Personal Development Reviews.	January 2026	Assistant Chief Executive
	A Digital and Data Programme Board established to drive a corporate approach to data, digital and technology.	March 2026	Director of Digital
	Director Plans completed for 2026/27	April 2026	Assistant Chief Executive
	At a strategic and operational level across all directorates incorporating performance, risk and financial reporting, progress against KPIs will be reviewed by Corporate Management Board (CLT and Directors) on a monthly basis, and by Corporate Policy Committee (Cabinet post May 2026) on a quarterly basis.	April 2026	
	Management information dashboards, using PowerBI, used by CLT, Directors and Heads of Service enabling the use of data insight to understand performance and demand trends to take corrective action.	April 2026	
	Benchmarking and trend analysis will be taking place routinely across all service areas with highlight information being reported to Corporate Management Board.	April 2026	
	Personal Development Reviews in place for all staff for 2026/27.	June 2026	Director of People & Customer Experience
	A Data Strategy and Maturity Improvement Plan developed having undertaken a review of data in line with the Local Government Data Maturity Assessment Tool.	March 2027	Assistant Chief Executive
Consultation and Engagement	A Communication and Engagement Strategy 2025-27 agreed setting out a strategic approach to communications and engagement 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.	December 2025	Assistant Chief Executive

Improvement Project	Key Deliverables	Delivered by	Lead Officer
	MTFS budget consultation delivered including prioritisation survey, community assembly and stakeholder engagement programme to inform decision making.	January 2026	
	A Cheshire East community assembly and programme fully established that will meet at least quarterly to provide feedback and views on policies, strategies and plans underpinning the Cheshire East Plan and refresh of the Digital Influence Panel.	March 2026	
	An engagement and participation community of practice will be created to ensure we are capturing and using data and insight from our consultation and engagement activity to inform policy and strategy development and decision making.	March 2026	
	Borough profile updated to provide insight into Cheshire East the place and people, and will be refreshed annually.	April 2026	
	An updated participation and engagement toolkit developed to support embedding a culture of co-production across the council.	June 2026	

Improvement Priority 3: Leadership and culture change

The LGA Corporate Peer Challenge in 2024 told us that there is significant work for us to address the challenges and opportunities we face including the siloed nature of the Council with poor joint working across (and within) departments contributing towards challenges of service delivery, communication and lack of compliance. There is a need to reset expectations and behaviours, and for staff to feel that they have the tools, support and confidence to fulfill their roles. That also means that we are clear about the skills, experience and knowledge we need to deliver our services.

We know there is significant work to do for employees to feel their voices are heard, to have trust in senior leaders, and to be an advocate and recommend working here. Our staff have said we need to do better in supporting professional and personal development; creating a better working environment in our offices and depots; supporting more modern, flexible and mobile working practices; making better use of the skills and experience staff already have and recruiting the permanent workforce we need for the future.

We know we need a stronger performance culture. We should hear the voices and ideas from all of our colleagues and take action in response. We need to be more diverse and inclusive, more closely connected to and responsive to the needs of our different communities and ensure that those who are most vulnerable are prioritised.

Changing the culture of an organisation takes time but we are now able to look forward with confidence and have developed a strong People Strategy to support the resetting, reimagining and reshaping of the Council. Our People Strategy has been co-produced with colleagues from across the organisation and sets out how will work to improve performance, support the well-being of our staff and deliver a whole career development offer that will deliver a step change in our organisation. We will work towards becoming an employer which we are all proud to work for – and where we serve the people of Cheshire East with commitment, pride and dedication meeting the commitments set out in the Cheshire East Plan.

The stability, visibility and transparency of senior leaders has improved through the permanent recruitment to senior roles including at Executive Director level during 2025 following a senior management restructure in 2024. Feedback from the most recent in-person staff events in September 2025, has acknowledged a more cohesive and collaborative CLT.

We have co-produced a set of **values** that guide and shape how we work, and are critical to underpinning our culture:

Drive | Integrity | Respect | Collaboration

Drive illustrated by ...	Integrity which means ...	Respect shown by ...	Collaboration demonstrated by ...
• A desire for growth, innovation and high performance • Striving for a culture of excellence • Developing a sense of purpose and engagement • Working towards our objectives with determination	• Acting ethically and transparently • Prioritising doing the right thing through your words, actions and beliefs • Being accountable for our actions • Fostering trust and building strong relationships	• Treating everyone with dignity, kindness and empathy • Showing genuine care and appreciation for others • Acknowledging individuals' unique contributions • Fostering a positive and inclusive environment	• Promoting a culture of teamwork, shared knowledge and learning from each other • Improved problem solving • Working together to deliver better outcomes • Developing innovative solutions

By investing in culture, leadership and development we will foster a more engaged and committed workforce. This approach will reduce agency costs, improve continuity of service, and strengthen organisational resilience - delivering long-term value and supporting financial sustainability.

Leadership and culture change: Improvement and transformation key deliverables

Committee: Corporate Policy Committee

Corporate Leadership Team Lead: Executive Director Resources/S151

Improvement Project	Key Deliverables	Delivered by	Lead Officer
People Strategy	The People Strategy 2025-29 and Employee Experience approved including new values and behaviours and staff engagement approach.	December 2025	Director of People & Customer Experience
	Staff Survey completed and conversations held about the results in Manager Share and Support and In the Know sessions which will inform the three-year People Strategy delivery plan and support successful culture change as part of embedding an approach to staff engagement.	December 2025	
	Wider Leadership Community will have completed the Cheshire East Leader development programme.	April 2026	
	Values and behaviours embedded into all staff objectives through the values-based competency framework as part of the annual Performance Development Review (process).	June 2026	
	The Cheshire East Manager leadership development programme delivered throughout 2026/27.	March 2027	

Transformation Programme	Project	Key deliverables	Delivered by	Lead Officer
Workforce and Culture	Culture and organisational development	Implementation of a workforce academy with a clear approach to training for transformation and improvement and professional development including business analysis, data science, digital, process and service redesign, programme and project management, and social care.	March 2026	Director of People & Customer Experience
		Whole career development offer for all staff developed, providing a clear approach to talent management, succession planning, career development and strategic workforce planning aligned to business planning.	March 2026	

Transformation Programme	Project	Key deliverables	Delivered by	Lead Officer
	Service Design and Target Operating Model	A programme of service redesign developed, building on the target operating model and design principles, rapid reviews of corporate services and informed by the cross-council co-design group.	January 2026	Assistant Chief Executive
		Informed by the rapid review, completed a service redesign for People Services to support the transformation and change required across all services recognising the dependency on the improvement programme for Unit 4 and Transactional Shared Service.	April 2026	Director of People & Customer Experience
	Workforce Benefits	A scoping of the strategic approach to a review of wider terms and conditions completed to ensure we are in line with our peers to support staff retention, while continuing to deliver benefits through our Vivup benefits platform and reduce costs.	June 2026	Director of People & Customer Experience
		Reliance on interim and agency staff will have significantly reduced in high demand services including spend through targeted reductions, workforce strategies and succession planning.	March 2027	

Improvement Priority 4: Improving Children's Services

Our children's services received an inadequate judgement following the Ofsted ILACS (inspecting local authority children's services) inspection in 2024. The inspection clearly demonstrated areas that we need to action at pace to improve outcomes for children. We need to ensure the findings from the inspection are addressed in a timely way and that the necessary improvements are sufficiently robust and sustainable so that we deliver good or better outcomes for our children.

We are continuing to make progress in delivering our children's services improvement plan, with almost half of the actions complete by September 2025. The Ofsted monitoring visits to date have found progress is being made with improved practice in some areas and that there are appropriate plans in place to further develop and embed improvements, but there is much more to do. We continue to work with our sector-led improvement partner who has found strengths in our support and is helping us to make further improvements to services.

We have revised the Children's Services transformation programme to ensure it delivers the best outcomes for children and young people and delivers financial savings. Our data tells us the two cohorts most likely to be in care or on a child protection plan, are under 5s and teenagers, therefore our immediate focus is on the Right Child Right Home project.

Additional capacity has been provided from across the Council to support the scale of the work required in the coming 12-18 months and to enable a reset of Children's Services improvement and transformation so that it better reflects the link between improvement, good practice and a sustainable financial position with the ability to reduce spend over the medium to longer-term.

The Children's Services Impact and Improvement Board, which is independently chaired by the Department for Education Children's Improvement Advisor, provides oversight of the delivery of the Children's Services Improvement Plan.

Improving Children's Services: Improvement and transformation key deliverables

Committee: Children and Families Committee

Corporate Leadership Team Lead: Executive Director Children's Services

Improvement project	Key Deliverables	Delivered by	Lead Officer
Children's Services Improvement	The refreshed Children's Services Improvement Plan will incorporate all improvement and transformation activities including the delivery plan for the Families First Programme.	December 2025	Director of Quality, Partnerships and Commissioning
	A revised SEND sufficiency strategy approved to effectively plan SEN provision within the borough.	January 2026	Director of Education
	Locality model for social care and family help services implemented across the borough as part of our Families First implementation.	April 2026	Director of Family Help & Children's Social Care

Transformation programme	Project	Key Deliverables	Delivered by	Lead Officer
Children's Services	Birth to Thrive	Birth to Thrive project scope to be developed for delivery in 2026/27 aligned to the SEND sufficiency strategy and Dedicated Schools Grant Management Plan – dependent on Joint Area SEND inspection and Government White Paper on Education and SEND reforms.	June 2026	Director of Education
	Right Child, Right Home	Key elements of the Right Child, Right Home project delivered with a focus on edge of care, recurrent care, 16-25 accommodation commissioning and sufficiency tracker to improve the commissioning of placements over time.	March 2027	Director of Family Help & Children's Social Care

Section 4 – Delivery governance, oversight and resourcing

Bringing all transformation and improvement plans, as well as the work taking place to deliver the outcomes in the Cheshire East Plan, together under one plan will support clear governance and decision making across all change activities. It will enable us to have strategic oversight, support prioritisation, improve the consistency of approach to delivery, monitoring and transparent reporting.

As the Plan brings together change activity from across the council, it is important that the governance and oversight arrangements are clear to avoid duplication and identify interdependencies. This will be achieved through ensuring clear accountability and responsibility for delivery with lead officers identified within the Plan as well as the relevant Committee.

There has been Member input into 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.

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.

The Children's Services Impact and Improvement Board will continue to oversee the delivery of the Children's Services Improvement Plan with regular updates to the Children and Families Committee.

Independent assurance and peer support will be provided by the existing Assurance Panel as their purpose is to provide external advice, challenge and expertise in supporting us to deliver the four improvement priorities. In addition, we meet with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) monthly to provide updates and assurance on delivery against the expectations in the non-statutory Best Value Notice and will provide more formal updates on our progress with this Plan each quarter.

The Improvement and Transformation Delivery Board, chaired by the Chief Executive, has responsibility for delivery and ensuring resources are effectively managed to deliver the benefits which contribute to financial sustainability and better outcomes for residents, businesses, and staff. This means it will maintain oversight to ensure that progress is being made, and that the interdependences and cross-cutting risks are appropriately managed.

Having brought together our improvement and transformation plans into a single overarching plan and set clear priorities for the next eighteen months we are reviewing how the Plan is resourced – we must ensure we have the capacity and capability to deliver.

We have already invested in additional capacity through our transformation partners, Inner Circle Consulting, and short-term senior interim roles to lead programme delivery in Adult Social Care and drive improvement in Finance alongside the delivery of transformation and other savings. We have recruited a new senior leadership team with all four permanent Executive Directors in place for the first time in well over a year. New roles were created as part of the senior management restructure including the Head of Strategy, Policy and Performance and Head of Transformation and Improvement bringing much needed expertise in areas recognised for improvement through the LGA Corporate Peer Challenge. We have also established a PMO (Programme Management Office). We have allocated additional resources to support the improvement of Children's Social Care services, including dedicated roles in HR, finance, legal and business intelligence.

Our approach going forward will increase the focus on developing our internal capability and capacity to deliver improvement and transformation. Whilst we develop our internal capacity, we have earmarked £8.8m in transformation reserves for 2025/26 to support the significant change we need to make in the immediate short-term and invest to save where appropriate to accelerate delivery. The Medium-Term Financial Strategy includes further funding over three years, through contingency, of £20m.

Section 5 – Measuring success

Reporting on our progress on delivering the commitments and outcomes will be aligned with a quarterly performance reporting cycle and emerging performance management framework – this is recognised as an area for improvement both in terms of processes, practice and culture which is reflected in the Plan. The framework will enable us to measure success as well as provide the controls and transparency which will enable progress to be assessed and managed. Areas of poor performance will be highlighted and mitigation identified.

Performance will be benchmarked against our nearest neighbour and best performing councils to gain insight into comparative service delivery, identify areas for improvement and drive continuous improvement. We will align our performance monitoring with the government's Local Government Outcomes Framework key performance indicators to ensure transparency, consistency and accountability in service delivery. This will strengthen our ability to demonstrate value for money and inform funding decisions by evidencing performance against outcomes that matter to central government and local communities.

In addition, the Strategic Risk Register will be closely aligned to the Cheshire East Plan, ensuring that the risks to achieving the improvement priorities and outcomes, and our ability to transform and deliver, are reported upon. Operational level risk

registers will be used to monitor and manage challenges to the delivery of individual projects and programmes, with escalation through internal governance arrangements where necessary.

Delivering our commitments in the Cheshire East Plan 2025–29

Commitment 1 – Unlocking Prosperity for All

Outcome	Key Deliverables	Delivered by	Committee	CLT Sponsor	Lead Officer
1.1 Opportunities created for all communities across the borough working with our world-leading industries and local businesses	A sub-regional Inclusive Growth Strategy developed.	January 2026	Economy & Growth Committee	Executive Director of Place	Director of Growth & Enterprise
	The final year of the Rural Economy Action Plan 2022-26 <u>(and Rural Needs Assessment for devolution)</u> delivered including improved access to superfast broadband and active travel initiatives, and complete a refresh for approval including any implications of the national Digital Switchover planned by January 2027.	March 2026			
1.2 Child, family and adult poverty is reduced through a coordinated approach with partners	Direct support delivered to vulnerable households through grants and programmes including the Holiday Activity and Food Fund, Household Support Fund, Cost of Living Grants and Free Childcare Programmes.	March 2026	Adults & Health Committee	Executive Director Adults, Health & Integration	Director of Public Health
	Opportunities identified (through participation in the All Together Fairer Commission Poverty Review mapping) for current local authority and community poverty interventions. This will inform a future piece of work to address any duplication or gaps.	March 2026			
1.3 Education, skills and life-long learning leads to employment and roles in the community	A Local Employment & Skills Assessment completed alongside the Get Cheshire and Warrington Working Plan and Cheshire and Warrington Skills Plan.	December 2026	Economy & Growth Committee	Executive Director of Place	Director of Growth & Enterprise
1.4 Shared vision for Crewe delivers a masterplan for jobs, affordable homes, and	Crewe Town Centre Regeneration Programme expanded and a charter agreed, or equivalent collaboration agreement, with Network Rail and West Coast Partnership to support the delivery of the Crewe 360 project.	March 2026	Economy & Growth Committee	Executive Director of Place	Director of Growth & Enterprise

Outcome	Key Deliverables	Delivered by	Committee	CLT Sponsor	Lead Officer
regeneration for the benefit of the whole borough	Governance framework and regeneration area for the Crewe 360 project agreed.	March 2026			
1.5 Communities connected through an improved, accessible rural and urban transport network including active travel	A single integrated Demand Responsive Transport service delivered.	April 2026	Highways & Transport Committee	Executive Director of Place	Director of Transport & Infrastructure
	New Local Transport Plan (LTP) approved.	July 2026			
	Bus service enhancement schemes within the Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) and Local Transport Grant (LTG) delivered.	March 2027			
	Highways Improvement Action Plan implemented.	March 2027			
	Construction of the Middlewich Eastern Bypass Scheme commenced.	October 2026			
1.6 Carbon neutral council with minimum offset by 2030, influencing carbon reduction and green energy production across the borough by 2045	Fleet Electrification Programme, including depot upgrades, charger installation and vehicle procurement, delivered.	March 2027	Environment & Communities Committee	Executive Director of Place	Director of Planning & Environment
	Business Mileage Reduction initiative, including a Car Club, Implemented.	April 2026			
	Building decarbonisation gas reduction review completed.	June 2026			
	Contractor appointed to deliver the Woodland Creation Bio-diversity Net Gain project.	April 2026			

Commitment 2 – Improving Health and Wellbeing

Outcome	Key Deliverables	Delivered by	Committee	CLT Sponsor	Lead Officer
2.1 Gap in health equalities is reduced across our diverse borough through a targeted approach	Pharmaceutical Needs Assessment, to support the delivery of the Health and Wellbeing Strategy, published.	December 2025	Adults & Health Committee	Executive Director of Adults, Health & Integration	Director of Public Health
	0-19 Service and Sexual Health Service recommissioned.	March 2027			
	Joint Strategic Reviews on Sexual Health, Early Years, Loneliness and Social Isolation, Healthy Ageing, Lifestyles, Protected Characteristics and Macclesfield published.	March 2027			
2.2 Improved independence, health and wellbeing through early intervention and prevention	<i>See Adult Social Care Transformation Programme within Improvement Priority 1 - Financial Sustainability.</i>	-	Adults & Health Committee	Executive Director of Adults, Health & Integration	Director of Adult Social Care Operations
2.3 Everyone feels safe and secure, difference is celebrated, and abuse and exploitation not tolerated	Cheshire East Safeguarding Adults Board Strategy 2026-29 Action Plan finalised.	March 2026	Adults & Health Committee	Executive Director Adults, Health & Integration	Director of Adult Social Care Operations
	Year one of the Safer Cheshire East Partnership Strategic Intelligence Assessment and Action Plan 2025-28 delivered.	March 2026			
	Domestic Abuse Strategy 2025-29 and Action Plan finalised for delivery.	March 2026	Children & Families Committee	Executive Director, Children's Services	Director of Family Help & Children's Social Care
	New contract in place from April 2026, subject to a successful procurement process, to increase specialist accommodation spaces and different accommodation offers, as part of our domestic abuse support offer.	June 2026			
	New Equality and Diversity Strategy 2025-29 and new Equality Impact Assessment policy and process approved.	March 2026	Corporate Policy Committee	Assistant Chief Executive	Head of Strategy, Policy & Performance

Outcome	Key Deliverables	Delivered by	Committee	CLT Sponsor	Lead Officer
2.4 Children and young people thrive and reach their potential with targeted support when and where they need it	<i>See Improvement Priority 4 – Improving Children’s Services.</i>	-	Children & Families Committee	Executive Director Children’s Services	Director of Quality, Partnerships & Commissioning
2.5 Communities build their capacity, with support to access information, guidance, and funding	Growing Communities Contract for local infrastructure organisations to support the Voluntary, Community, Faith and Social Enterprise sector reviewed. <i>See Enabling Communities Transformation Programme within Improvement Priority 1 – Financial Sustainability.</i>	June 2026	Corporate Policy Committee	Executive Director Adults, Health & Integration	Head of Service People & Communities
2.6 Lasting solutions are delivered through strong and committed partnerships	Partnerships with Town and Parish Councils strengthened through the implementation of a framework for the delivery of local services supported by Cheshire Association of Local Councils (CHALC). <i>See Enabling Communities Transformation Programme within Improvement Priority 1 – Financial Sustainability.</i>	June 2026	Corporate Policy Committee	Executive Director Adults, Health & Integration	Head of Service People & Communities

Commitment 3 – An Effective and Enabling Council

Outcome	Key Deliverables	Committee	CLT Sponsor	Lead Officer
3.1 Financially sustainable council, enabled by council-wide service transformation and improvement	<i>See Improvement Priority 1 – Financial Sustainability.</i>	Corporate Policy Committee	Executive Director Resources/S151	Director of Finance (Deputy S151)
3.2 Effective and responsive governance, compliance and evidence-based decision making	<i>See Improvement Priority 2 – Good governance and decision making</i>	Corporate Policy Committee	Director of Law & Governance (Monitoring Officer)	Head of Democratic Services
3.3 Innovative solutions are developed through a culture of collaboration across the council and with residents, businesses and partners	<i>See Improvement Priority 3 – Leadership and culture change.</i>	Corporate Policy Committee	Executive Director Resources/S151	Director of People & Customer Experience
3.4 Service delivery and new ideas are shaped by consultation and engagement	<i>See Improvement Priority 2 – Good governance and decision making.</i>	Corporate Policy Committee	Assistant Chief Executive	Head of Strategy, Policy & Performance
3.5 Contact with our and access to services is consistent and easy	<i>See Modernising Delivery Transformation Programme within Improvement Priority 1 – Financial Sustainability.</i>	Corporate Policy Committee	Executive Director Adults, Health & Integration	Director of People & Customer Experience
3.6 Service delivery and ways of working are improved through a digital first approach, while supporting residents who need it	<i>See Modernising Delivery Transformation Programme within Improvement Priority 1 – Financial Sustainability.</i>	Corporate Policy Committee	Executive Director Adults, Health & Integration	Director of Digital