

CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the **Corporate Policy Committee**
held on Thursday, 28th November, 2024 in the Committee Suite 1,2 & 3,
Westfields, Middlewich Road, Sandbach CW11 1HZ

PRESENT

Councillor N Mannion (Chair)
Councillor M Gorman (Vice-Chair)

Councillors C Bulman, J Clowes, M Goldsmith, A Harrison, S Gardiner,
J Pearson, J Rhodes, J Saunders, F Wilson, M Warren and L Crane

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE

Janet Witkowski, Governance, Compliance and Monitoring Officer
Karen Wheeler, Interim Assistant Chief Executive
Adele Taylor, Interim Executive Director Resources and S151 Officer
Peter Skates, Acting Executive Director, Place
Sara Duncalf, Head of HR
Kim Ashmore, Acting Customer Service Manager
Tom Moody, Director of Transport and Infrastructure
Hayley Kirkham, Head of Rail and Transport Integration
Josie Griffiths, Head of Audit, Risk and Assurance
Nikki Bishop, Democratic Services Officer

43 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors C O'Leary and D Clark. Councillors S Gardiner and L Crane were present as substitutes.

44 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor S Gardiner, in the interests of openness and transparency in relation to agenda item 5 (Cheshire East Council Support for Proposed Future Rail Schemes), declared that in previous employment he was involved in meetings on related matters with former government ministers.

45 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the previous meeting held on 3 October 2024 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

46 PUBLIC SPEAKING/OPEN SESSION

Mr S Bratt addressed the committee in relation to agenda item 5 (Cheshire East Council Support for Proposed Future Rail Schemes) on behalf of Crewe Branch,

Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen (ASLEF) and spoke in relation to condition c (paragraph 31 of the officer report) and stated that this Mid-Cheshire Line would be difficult to operate and cost significant monies, and referred to the work of the Local Rail Users Association who were campaigning for a different connection to Manchester Airport. Mr Bratt suggested that the committee explore this further before imposing the condition. Mr Bratt also spoke in relation to the Higgins report for Regional Mayors and stated that the Crewe Station section and upgrades needed were the responsibility of Network Rail, who had a track and signalling upgrade plan which had been developed following the HS2 cancellation announcements. Mr Bratt felt that the council should clarify the source of funding to allow this project to continue. Mr Bratt shared his concerns in relation to links between the Cheshire Connector and Network Rail at Crewe North, and finally, stated that there was a missed opportunity for a motorway linked Parkway station near the Lymm Interchange which would generate economic activity within the Cheshire East Borough.

47 CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL SUPPORT FOR PROPOSED FUTURE RAIL SCHEMES

The committee considered the report which set out work to date to establish a Cheshire East Council position on two emerging rail proposals impacting the borough (Liverpool to Manchester Railway section of Northern Powerhouse (NPR) project and the High Speed 2 (HS2) alternative Midlands – North-West Rail Link.

Having a clear council position on rail matters impacting the borough was essential to ensure Cheshire East could engage fully with key partners, including central government and sub-regional authorities and the Private Sector Consortium, to further understand the impact and benefits for the borough.

The committee agreed that the wider benefits for the borough and beyond needed to be considered and form part of the council's lobbying. Delivering capacity improvements at Crewe Station would support opportunities for new strategic connections at Crewe and free up capacity for other lines, unlocking wider benefits. It was confirmed that once the council had a clear agreed position, officers could begin to explore further costs, impacts and benefits that would be clearly communicated with members and local communities. Ensuring Cheshire East residents, and future generations, benefited from any proposals was important.

The committee welcomed the proposal to re-establish the Member Reference Group. The Member Reference Group would be key in sharing intelligence and seeking member views throughout the process. A friendly amendment was supported by the committee that the Member Reference Group Membership (Appendix 2) be expanded to include Councillor Stewart Gardiner as the local ward member for Knutsford, an area which would be impacted significantly by the proposals.

RESOLVED (by majority):

That the Corporate Policy Committee recommend to Full Council that:

1. The Council provisionally support:
 - a. the proposed Liverpool to Manchester Railway Section of the NPR.
 - b. the use of the High Speed Rail (Crewe – Manchester) Bill to deliver the Liverpool to Manchester Railway.

provided that the conditions set out in paragraph 31 of the report are met.
2. The Council remains a member of the Liverpool to Manchester Partner Board, acting at all times, under the agreed positions set out above.
3. The Council welcomes the progression of alternative options to HS2, to improve rail connectivity and capacity between the Midlands and the North-West, but the Council would only lend its support to schemes that put Crewe at the heart of the solution and deliver:
 - a. Enhanced connectivity from Crewe with improved direct services to key conurbations including London, Birmingham and Manchester;
 - b. Enables, facilitates and delivers the necessary capacity, upgrades and rationalisation at Crewe Station to enable any new services on an alternative north-south link to call at Crewe;
 - c. Supports and enables investment and growth in Crewe including the regeneration of Crewe Town Centre and provision of high quality links to the Crewe Station and;
 - d. Provides appropriate and sufficient mitigation against the negative impacts of the scheme, and its construction, on the borough, its residents and business and on the local environment.
4. The Council only support the use of existing powers secured via the HS2 phase 2a hybrid bill to deliver part of any alternative north-south rail link if the scheme delivers the conditions set out above.
5. The HS2 Member Reference Group be re-established and refocussed to support the Council's strategic priorities and positions.
6. Approve the revised Terms of Reference and membership changes for the Member Reference Group as proposed in Appendix 2,

subject to the membership being extended to include Cllr Stewart Gardiner.

48 SECOND FINANCIAL REVIEW 2024/25 (CORPORATE POLICY COMMITTEE)

The committee considered the report which set out the current forecast outturn for the financial year 2024-25 based on income, expenditure and known commitments. The Second Financial Review (FR2) position shown an adverse variance of £20.1m (prior to the application of any Exceptional Financial Support) which was an improvement of £6.5m from FR1.

The committee requested an update on capital projects that had been delayed/reprofiled. It was highlighted that there was an ongoing review of the Capital Programme but currently, no projects had been stopped and that any decision relating to a project would be considered by the appropriate service committee. It was anticipated that a more detailed update on the Capital Programme would be provided in January 2025.

Members queried the use of Exceptional Financial Support and noted that a detailed piece of work on how it could be financed, including consideration of borrowing and capital receipts, how EFS would be calculated and its impact on the revenue account was underway. The S151 officer continued to meet frequently with colleagues from MHCLG where EFS would be discussed.

The committee acknowledged the difficult financial position the council was in and that many local authorities across the country were facing similar pressures, particularly in demand-led services. The committee agreed that transformation in those areas was critical, but costs needed to be reduced without having long-term consequences.

RESOLVED:

That the Corporate Policy Committee

1. Note the factors leading to a forecast adverse Net Revenue financial pressure of £20.1m against a revised budget of £395.4m (5.1%). 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 £157.7m against an approved MTFS budget of £215.8m, due to slippage that has been re-profiled into future years.
3. Note the available reserves position as per Annex 1, Section 5.

49 MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY UPDATE AND CONSULTATION 2025/26 - 2028/29 (CORPORATE POLICY COMMITTEE)

The committee considered the report which set out how the council would resource the achievement of the Cheshire East Plan and the process to be undertaken for budget consultation and stakeholder engagement for the financial year 2025-26 budget setting.

The committee noted the proposed budget change items detailed in Appendix A, and that the proposals compiled to date did not yet go far enough to balance the budget in line with the revised estimated funding envelope for 2025/26 as it was currently known. There were however a significant number of moving parts in terms of funding, that would have a significant amount of uncertainty in them, and further detail was awaited via the Provisional Local Government Settlement. The Chancellors Budget published on 30 October also did not give detailed settlement information in terms of the extra grant funding announcements. The committee noted that it was anticipated that this year would be the final one-year local government settlement and that in future years multi-year financial settlements were anticipated.

The committee highlighted concerns in relation to adult social care charging proposals and the potential impact this would have on self-funders. Officers committed to feeding back the concerns of the committee to the Executive Director with a view to a more detailed update/modelling being provided to the Adults and Health Committee. It was confirmed that increased client contributions reflected changes in benefit levels and inflation levels which would be built into fees and charges.

The committee noted the proposed budget changes relating to Corporate Policy Committee 'accelerating digital' and requested a more detailed update on this.

RESOLVED:

That the Corporate Policy Committee

1. Note the forecast revenue budget position for the medium-term as set out in Table 1 of the report, following the 30 October 2024 budget announcements.
2. Note the draft growth and savings budget proposals for 2025-26 to 2028-29 as included in Appendix A.
3. Note the detailed list of Capital Growth Requests in Appendix B.
4. Note that officers will continue to challenge draft proposals and develop further proposals in consultation with Members prior to approval by Full Council.
5. Note that discussions continue with central government about potential requirements around Exceptional Financial Support as part of the options to close the gaps in the budget.
6. Note the approach to budget consultation and engagement for 2025-26.

7. Note that Committees will be presented with the opportunity to review the full set of financial proposals, designed to achieve a balanced budget, as part of the January 2025 cycle of meetings prior to recommendations being made to Full Council for approval.

50 COUNCIL TAX BASE 2025/26

The committee considered the report which set out the council taxbase calculation 2025-26. It was clarified that the council taxbase had been calculated as 163,261.10. The taxbase reflected an increase of £5.9m (1.9%) on the 2024/25 budgeted position which was £2.7m higher than the £3.2m (1%) forecast increase reported in February 2024. £1.2m of this improvement related to the introduction of the new 100% premium chargeable on second furnished homes from April 2025. A further £1m income was also being raised from the introduction of the empty homes premium for properties over 1 year which commenced in April 2024 but had not been included in the taxbase calculation for 2024/25.

Charging Town and Parish Councils for all-out Borough Elections was raised. It was confirmed that officers were continuing to work on calculations, and this would be shared at the earliest opportunity. It was anticipated that payments would be phased.

RESOLVED (unanimously):

That the Corporate Policy Committee

1. Recommend to Full Council, in accordance with the Local Authorities (Calculation of Council Tax Base) Regulations 2012, the amount to be calculated by Cheshire East Council as its Council taxbase for the year 2025-26 as 163,261.10 for the whole area.
2. Note the Council Tax Support scheme is agreed for 2025-26 as unchanged other than the increases inline with CPI, as agreed in the last consultation.

The meeting adjourned for a short break at 11.56am and reconvened at 12.08 pm.

51 PERFORMANCE REPORT - CHESHIRE EAST PLAN, QUARTER 2 2024/25

The committee considered the report which provided an overview of organisational performance against the priorities and vision set out in the Cheshire East Plan 2024-25 during the period 1 July 2024 – 30 September 2024.

The committee welcomed the report and the positive update that out of the 66 priority actions included within the Cheshire East Plan 2024/25, 50 were on track – an improvement from Q1. The committee queried the number of actions 'not yet started' and noted that the increase from Q1 was the result of more accurate ratings resulting from a review of the RAG rating system applied.

There had been an increase in the levels of staff turnover during Q2. The committee noted that within the Children and Families Directorate, the staff turnover rate was 10.3% during Q2. The committee requested more information on this along with comparative statistics from previous years. Officers committed to providing a written response.

Priority action A1.1.3 referred to scrutiny training for committee members by December 2024. It was confirmed that this date wouldn't be achieved as options were being explored further to ensure that members received quality training. A new revised programme would be developed and whilst the Council had an overall member development strategy, this had not been reviewed for a number of years and therefore it was in the process of being revised and refreshed.

RESOLVED:

That the Corporate Policy Committee note the progress and performance against delivery of the Cheshire East Plan 2024-25 in Q2 2-24-25.

52 HR POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

The committee considered the report and proposed new Sexual Harassment Policy and Procedure and the Social Media Policy, as well as changes to the current Dignity at Work Policy and Procedure and the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy.

The committee welcomed the policies and agreed that the introduction of training would be important in ensuring the successful implementation and that any future member training programme should reflect the introduction of these new/amended policies.

The role of Elected Members was raised. It was confirmed that the Member Code of Conduct and Member / Officer Protocol, set out in the Council Constitution would assist members in understanding their roles and responsibilities. It was highlighted that a number of Elected Members received regular communication via various platforms including Whatsapp and Twitter. The committee agreed that this was an area that should be considered further, with coping strategies and guidance made available for members.

RESOLVED (unanimously):

That the Corporate Policy Committee

1. Approve the Sexual Harassment Policy and Procedure.
2. Approve the Social Media Policy.
3. Approve the changes to the Dignity at Work Policy and Procedure.
4. Approve the changes to the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy.

53 SIX MONTHLY COMPLAINTS AND COMPLIMENTS UPDATE 2024-25

The committee received a summary and analysis of complaints and compliments received by the Council between 1 April 2024 – 30 September 2024.

It was noted that a significant number of correspondence received often related to registering issues on council application sites, such as Fix My Street. Concerns were raised in relation to the Fix My Street / Confirm API system and automated messaging not providing residents with updates. Officers committed to exploring this issue further and providing a written response. It was noted that for Highways, the service would move to a new reporting system which was currently being tested, before being rolled out.

It was noted that a number of complaints received related to adult social care. The committee queried if this related to changes in the way the service operated as a result of transformation initiatives or a reflection of the private care market where there was often a lack of understanding around responsibilities. Officers committed to providing a written response.

RESOLVED:

That the Corporate Policy Committee

1. Note the complaints and compliments data, and the briefing material set out within the report relating to the first half of the 2024-25 financial year.
2. Note the issues raised and improvements made in respect of the management of complaints across the Council contained within the report.
3. Note the Council's compliance with the Corporate Complaints Policy, and with the recommendations of the Ombudsman.

54 CHANGES TO THE COUNCIL'S CONSTITUTION

The committee considered the report which set out proposed changes to the Constitution, as agreed and recommended by the Council's Constitution Working Group, relating to Notices of Motion, the Petitions Scheme, revised Job Descriptions for the Leader, Deputy Leader, Chairs, Vice Chairs and Opposition Spokespersons, significant decisions and electronic voting.

It was proposed that the Job Description for the Leader and Deputy Leader (Appendix 2) be renamed from "Role and Powers of the Leader and Deputy Leader of the Council" to "Role of the Leader and Deputy Leader of the Council". This was accepted by the committee as a friendly amendment.

It was clarified that item K, within the Job Description for Opposition Spokespersons, was proposed to remain within the JD as opposition members now attended 'Opposition Briefing' meetings with senior officers across the council.

It was clarified that Appendix 1 (Revised Petition Scheme) contained a typing error and that the final sentence of the first paragraph should read "subject to the decision of the Monitoring Officer as to **which** meeting will receive it".

RESOLVED (unanimously):

That the Corporate Policy Committee recommend to Full Council that:

1. The revised Petition Scheme, as appended to this report at Appendix 1, be approved, with the typing amendment being made as set out above.
2. The revised Job Descriptions for the Leader and Deputy Leader, Chairs and Vice-Chairs and Opposition Spokespersons, as appended to this report at Appendices 2,3 and 4, be approved, subject to the title of the Leader/Deputy Leader JD being amended to 'Role of the Leader and Deputy Leader of the Council'.
3. The amendments to the Constitution in relation to rules of Notices of Motion, Significant Decisions and electronic voting as set out in paragraphs 17 to 19, 26 to 28 and 32 to 35 of the report be approved.
4. The Acting Governance, Compliance and Monitoring Officer be given delegated powers to make any necessary changes to the Council's Constitution as she deems are required to implement the decision of Full Council.

55 APPOINTMENTS TO OUTSIDE ORGANISATIONS

The committee considered the report which set out proposed changes to appointments to outside organisations.

An amendment was proposed in relation to recommendation 4 by the Independent Group. It was proposed that Councillor Hannah Moss be the council's representative on the Manchester Airport Consultative Committee. This was accepted by the committee as a friendly amendment.

RESOLVED (unanimously):

That the Corporate Policy Committee

1. Approve the appointment of Councillor Ben Wye as one of the Council's representatives on the Cheshire Brine Subsidence Compensation Board.
2. Approve the appointment of Councillor Michael Gorman as the Council's representative on the Transport for the North: General Purposes Committee.
3. Approve the appointment of Councillor Cllr Joy Bratherton as one of the Council's representatives on the Cheshire Pension Fund.

4. Approve the appointment of Councillor Hannah Moss as the Council's representative on the Manchester Airport Consultative Committee.
5. Note that these appointments will run until the Council's representation on all outside organisations is reviewed following the election of the new Council in 2027.

56 WORK PROGRAMME

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

- It was agreed that a piece of work on harassment of councillors should be undertaken with an update reported back to Corporate Policy Committee in approx. six months. Members referred to a report recently prepared by the Local Government Association on this matter which would assist in exploring options available.

RESOLVED:

That the Work Programme be received and noted.

57 MINUTES OF SUB-COMMITTEES

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the General Appeals Sub Committee held on 5 November 2024 be received and noted.

58 STRATEGIC RISK ASSURANCE REPORT QUARTER 2 2024/25

The committee considered the report which provided an update on the activity of the strategic risk register during July – September 2024.

The committee noted the strategic risk register, which contained 20 risks. During Quarter 3, a review of the risk register would be undertaken with the Corporate Leadership Team, and it was anticipated that the content, risk descriptions and scoring matrix would change for Quarter 3 reporting. Corporate Leadership Team will consider the strategic risk register alongside key areas and priorities set out in the Corporate Plan and MTFS.

The following comments were noted from the committee:

- SR16 Failure of the Local Economy – it was noted that this risk was proposed to be removed from the strategic risk register as a result of the net score of this risk being assessed at 2 during the last two quarters, considerably lower than the target risk score of 12.
- SR0 Failure to Protect Vulnerable Children – concerns were raised in relation to staffing within the Contextual Safeguarding Team, which was currently led by a single member of staff. The committee requested an update on plans to reduce the risk that this posed to the organisation and

to its vulnerable children, Officers committed to providing a written response.

- SR02 Fragility and Failure in the Social Care Market – concerns were raised in relation to the recent budget announcements and the impact this would have on the financial viability of the care market. It was agreed this needed to be monitored closely, and an update on mitigations included in Quarter 3 reporting.

RESOLVED:

That the Corporate Policy Committee

1. Note the position of the Council's Strategic Risk Register and those of the wholly owned companies for Quarter 2 2024-25, in respect of the content, description, scoring and risk management activity outlined within the report.

The meeting commenced at 10.00am and concluded at 1.30pm

Councillor N Mannion (Chair)