

CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the **Economy and Growth Committee**
held on Tuesday, 3rd June, 2025 in the Council Chamber, Municipal
Buildings, Earle Street, Crewe CW1 2BJ

PRESENT

Councillor M Gorman (Chair)

Councillors S Bennett-Wake, L Buchanan, A Burton, P Coan, A Farrall,
S Gardiner, A Heler, G Marshall, C O'Leary, J Pearson, P Redstone and
R Vernon

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE

Phil Cresswell, Executive Director Place
Peter Skates, Director of Growth and Enterprise
Charles Jarvis, Head of Economic Development
Karen Whitehead, Housing Standards and Adaptations Manager
Steve Reading, Finance Officer
Adrian Leslie, Legal Officer
Rachel Graves, Democratic Services Officer

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors D Brown and F Wilson.
Councillor S Gardiner and S Bennett-Wake attended as substitutes.

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

In relation to Item 5, Councillors S Gardiner and Garnet Marshall declared that they were members of the Strategic Planning Board and as there was a possibility that future planning applications in relation to the site would be considered by the Board, they would leave the meeting for this item.

In relation to Item 5, Councillor C O'Leary declared a non-registerable interest as he had been involved in the Save Danes Moss campaign.

In relation to Items 6 and 7, Councillor C O'Leary declared a non-pecuniary and non-registerable interest they covered areas of his funded and published research.

3 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 11 March 2025 be approved as a correct record.

4 PUBLIC SPEAKING/OPEN SESSION

Mr Thomas Eccles, Chair of Danes Moss Trust, spoke in relation to Item 5 – South Macclesfield Development Area. He referred to the recommendations and stated that a fourth option was missing which was for the full-scale restoration of the site to a natural peatland habitat with no urban development and he hoped that this would be considered in the review of options for the site.

5 SOUTH MACCLESFIELD DEVELOPMENT AREA

Having previously declared an interest Councillors S Gardiner and G Marshall left the meeting during consideration of this item.

The Committee considered the report which provided an update on the South Macclesfield Development Area project which included the planning history, land ownership, financial investment, and the next steps for the project.

During consideration of the report, it was asked if clarification could be provided on the planning implications of the withdrawal of the reserve matters applications and any new applications being submitted. Officers agreed to provide a written response.

Reference was made to the Council's investment of £3.283m to date in promoting the South Macclesfield Development Area for residential development in line with the Local Plan, and it was asked if a breakdown of the expenditure could be provided.

The Committee emphasised the importance of consultation with stakeholders, including local residents and environmental groups, on the development of alternative options for the site.

The recommendations were proposed and seconded and during the debate an amendment was proposed and seconded.

Amendment

Recommendation 1 to be amended as follows:

“Add after ‘Delegate to Director of Growth and Enterprise’ the words ‘in consultation with the chair, vice chair and opposition spokesperson for economy and growth’ and add after ‘on this site,’ the words ‘nature-led recovery option’.”

The proposer and seconder of the recommendations agreed to accept the amendment and therefore the amendment became part of the substantive motion.

RESOLVED (by majority): The Committee

- 1 delegate to the Director of Growth and Enterprise, in consultation with the chair, vice chair and opposition spokesperson for economy and growth, to take all actions necessary to review alternative options for the site. This will include disposal, development on this site, nature-led recovery option, or taking no further action, and bring forward a recommendation to Economy and Growth Committee.
- 2 approve further capital expenditure of up to £150,000 to fund a review of the alternative options and the associated due diligence against legal obligations and policy objectives.
- 3 approve the withdrawal from the Housing Infrastructure Fund agreement and continue to work with Homes England to identify alternative means of financial support.
- 4 Note that the current reserved matters planning applications will be withdrawn.

The meeting adjourned for a short break during which Councillor S Gardiner and G Marshall returned to the meeting.

6 INTERIM HOUSING STRATEGY 25-28

The Committee considered the report on outcome of the consultation on the Interim Housing Strategy 2025-2028.

An overview of the 229 responses to the consultation was provided which showed that 93% of the respondents were Cheshire East residents, with responses predominantly from those over the age of 55.

During consideration of the report, reference was made to the use of the term 'rough sleepers' and it was asked if this could be replaced with "people experiencing street homelessness." Officers undertook to see clarification on the definition to be used.

The Committee asked about the housing offer to young people leaving care to enable independent living. In response it was stated that a working group, which included the housing team and representatives from children's commissioning, had been established to work towards the commissioning of a revised housing offer for young people which would include an increase in the provision of emergency accommodation and supported accommodation for young people by 2026.

Reference was made to the options available for those wanting to downsize and it was noted that one of the actions in the Interim Housing

Strategy Action Plan was to explore downsizing and the opportunities available from housing providers.

It was asked if there was a register of empty houses and in response it was stated that the Council held a register, and information would be circulated to committee members on this.

RESOLVED (by majority): The Committee

- 1 note the consultation responses and amendments to the Interim Housing Strategy 2025-2028.
- 2 approve and adopt the final version of the Interim Housing Strategy 2025-2028.
- 3 delegate authority to the Director of Growth and Enterprise to approve any further updates to the Interim Housing Strategy Action Plan up and to 2028.

7 HOME REPAIRS AND ADAPTATIONS FOR VULNERABLE PEOPLE POLICY

The Committee considered the report on the outcome of the consultation on the Home Repairs and Adaptations for Vulnerable People Policy.

During consideration of the report concern was raised that the £30,000 Disabled Facilities Grant cap had not been uplifted since 2008 and the Committee suggested that the Chair write on their behalf to the Government requesting an inflationary increase to the Grant cap, as without this there could be situations where people would not be able to afford necessary adaptations.

The Committee emphasised the need for coordination with adult social care and occupational therapists and asked that the policy aligned with broader health and housing strategies.

RESOLVED (unanimously): That the Committee

- 1 note the consultation responses and amendments made to the Home Repairs and Adaptations for Vulnerable People Policy.
- 2 approve and adopt the final version of the Home Repairs and Adaptations for Vulnerable People Policy 2025-2028.
- 3 the Chair of Economy and Growth Committee to write to the government on behalf of the Committee requesting an inflationary uplift to the £30,000 Disabled Facilities Grant cap.

The meeting adjourned for a short break.

8 FINAL OUTTURN 2024/25

The Committee received the report which provided an overview of the Cheshire East Council final outturn for the financial year 2024/25 and the financial performance of the Council relevant to the committee remit.

It was reported that the Growth and Enterprise Department and Place Directorate were reporting an underspend of £5.3m against a budget of £28.2m. This was a £1.5m improvement from Quarter 3. The main reasons for the underspend were savings against gas and electricity compared to higher budgeted costs, an underspend on business rates, reduction in maintenance spend and vacancy management.

The Committee acknowledged the efforts of staff in achieving the savings despite the high vacancy levels.

During discussion concerns were raised on the sustainability of relying on vacancies to achieve savings and the impact of adjusting capital projects expenditure on future costs.

The Committee asked if information could be provided on benchmarking against other councils using reliance indicators and if additional training could be provided for councillors on financial matters.

RESOLVED (by majority): That the Committee

- 1 note the overall financial performance of the Council in the 2024/25 financial year, as contained within the report, as follows:
 - a) a Net Revenue Overspend of £17.6m against a revised budget of £365.8m (4.8% variance) funded by conditional Exceptional Financial Support (Capitalisation Direction) via borrowing
 - b) General Reserves closing balance of £6.3m
 - c) Capital Spending of £88.4m against an approved programme of £215.8m (59% variance)
- 2 note the contents of Annex 1
- 3 approve the new Reserves in the Reserves Section, as set out in Annex 1 to the report at Section 5, Table 1, which includes proposed movements to the reserves.
- 4 note that Council will be recommended to approve the Supplementary Revenue Estimate Request for Allocation of Additional Grant Funding over £1,000,000, as per Annex 1 to the report at Section 3, Table 1.
- 5 approve the Supplementary Capital Estimates and Capital Virements between £500,000 and £1,000,000 in accordance with the Financial Procedure Rules, as detailed in Annex 1 to the report at Section 4, Table 4.

- 6 note the Council will be recommended to approve the Supplementary Capital Estimates over £1,000,000 in accordance with Budget and Policy Framework Rules, as detailed in Annex 1 to the report at Section 4, Table 5.

9 APPOINTMENTS TO MEMBER ADVISORY GROUPS

The Committee considered the report on the appointment of the Handforth Garden Village Member Advisory Group and the Farms Policy Member Advisory Group for the municipal year 2025-26.

RESOLVED (unanimously):

That the Committee appoint the Handforth Garden Village Member Advisory Group and the Farms Policy Member Advisory Group for the municipal year 2025-26 with the following memberships:

Farms Policy Member Advisory Group

1. Councillor Linda Buchanan
2. Councillor Anna Burton
3. Councillor Alison Heler
4. Councillor Garnet Marshall
5. Councillor Chris O'Leary.

Handforth Garden Village Member Advisory Group

1. Councillor David Brown
2. Councillor Michael Gorman
3. Councillor Patrick Redstone
4. Councillor Rob Vernon
5. Councillor Fiona Wilson

10 WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee considered the Work Programme.

It was reported that there was an additional item for the September 2025 meeting in relation to an update on the Crewe Town Centre Regeneration Programme.

The Committee was asked to approve the establishment of the Task and Finish Group for the Rural Action Plan, which would help shape the Rural Action Plan for 2026 -2030. The Group would be made up of 5 members of the Committee and was expected to run from June 2025 to January 2026.

Following full Council's resolution "*that each committee determine whether their committee meetings during the 2025-26 municipal year should include twilight meetings, which should start no earlier than 5.30 pm*", it

was proposed that the September meeting of the Committee be held as a twilight meeting, starting at 5.30 pm.

RESOLVED: That the Committee

- 1 note the Work Programme 2025-26.
- 2 approve the establishment of a Rural Action Plan Task and Finish Group on a 2:2:1 basis, with membership nominations submitted to Democratic Services.
- 3 agree the 9 September 2025 meeting of the Economy and Growth Committee be held as a twilight meeting commencing at 5.30 pm.

The meeting commenced at 2.00 pm and concluded at 4.40 pm

Councillor M Gorman (Chair)