

CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the **Environment and Communities Committee**
held on Thursday, 13th November, 2025 in the Committee Suite, Delamere
House, Delamere St, Crewe CW1 2JZ

PRESENT

Councillor H Seddon (Vice-Chair)

Councillors L Braithwaite, M Brooks, T Dean, M Houston, A Kolker, A Moran,
H Moss, L Smetham, S Bennett-Wake, M Goldsmith, J Clowes and
D Edwardes

19 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors M Warren, D Clark, D Jefferay
and H Whittaker and Councillors M Goldsmith, S Bennett-Wake, D
Edwardes and J Clowes were present as substitutes.

20 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

21 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED (by majority):

That the minutes of the meeting held on 25 September 2025 be approved
as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

22 PUBLIC SPEAKING/OPEN SESSION

Robert Douglas addressed the committee in relation to agenda item 7, as
a local Town Councillor for Congleton. Mr Douglas expressed concern that
residents could not easily identify affected sites because the published list
did not specify the relevant town or parish council. He urged that future
documents include this information. Mr Douglas highlighted the scale of
proposed development in Congleton and raised issues about inadequate
infrastructure, particularly schools and healthcare, and the impact of
government-imposed housing targets. Mr Douglas asked the Council to
resist pressure for excessive development and protect countryside, Green
Belt and biodiversity.

Officers responded, acknowledging the points Mr Douglas had made. It
was explained that the Local Plan process is long-term and includes
infrastructure planning to ensure sustainable development. It was noted
that the current stage in the process involves gathering information and
that no assessments of sites have yet been undertaken.

Kay Wesley addressed the committee in relation to agenda item 7, as a local resident, who objected to the inclusion of site HE39 near Congleton. Ms Wesley emphasised its Green Belt status, ecological value, and proximity to a Site of Special Scientific Interest. Ms Wesley urged the Committee to remove the site from consideration.

Officers advised that no sites could be excluded at this stage and all submissions must go through an assessment process.

23 SECOND FINANCIAL REVIEW 25/26

The Committee considered the report which provided members an update on the current forecast outturn for the financial year 2025/26. It was highlighted that there was an improvement from Financial Review 1.

The committee queried overspends in specific service areas including Environment Operations and the Strategic Leisure Review. It was noted that environmental operations pressures were linked to staffing and inflation a detailed update would be provided at the January meeting on the Strategic Leisure Review.

It was requested that clarity is provided in relation to Environmental Services and Environmental Operations. Officers confirmed that a wider briefing, including definitions, will be provided on the team structures at the January meeting.

The committee queried the capital schemes, reserves, and the impact of vacancy management.

Officers committed to providing a written response in relation to a query of a capital scheme in Wybunbury and identify specifically what the money was spent on.

The committee were updated that there is approximately £2.6 million of vacancies within the Place Directorate and that as part of the Cheshire East This changes by the week with leavers and joiners, plus also some agency strain, which is inevitable. The Councils Transformation programme will propose structures for every service within the Directorate and that budget monitoring was ongoing and improvements were expected by year-end.

In relation to the Best Value Notice there was no significant change other than progress is being made, however there is a monitoring period which is ongoing and the committee were informed that the Council are engaged in the Governments process.

The committee queried the waste collection service and whether there would be an adverse cost in the current year and asked about the amount of redundancy payments made to affected employees and referred to the

inflationary increase in income from fees and charges, specifically the decision to raise the garden waste subscription charge.

The committee were updated that the redundancy position was a small residual cost that the Council would pick up as the parent organisation, and this had been forecast. The majority of costs were dealt with by Ansa, with only a minor impact on the Council's position.

Regarding the garden waste charge, analysis had been undertaken, including benchmarking against neighbouring authorities, and the current charge reflected the cost of providing the service. It was noted that the uptake was currently around double that of the previous year's subscriptions.

RESOLVED (by majority):

That the Environment and Communities Committee:

1. Note the overall Council's Financial Position as described within the Executive Summary – Council Financial Position.
2. Scrutinise the latest revenue forecast for Environment and Communities Directorate, review progress on the delivery of the MTFS approved budget policy change items (Table 3), the RAG ratings and to understand the actions to be taken to address any adverse variances from the approved budget.
3. Note the overall in-year forecast capital spending for Environment and Communities Directorate of £15.284m against a revised MTFS budget of £18.606m in Tables 4 and 5.
4. Note the Capital Budget reduction in Table 6.
5. Note the available reserves position in Table 7.

24 MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY CONSULTATION 2026/27 - 2029/30

The committee received a report on the development of the Cheshire East Medium-Term Financial Strategy 2026/27 to 2029/30.

The committee considered proposals for savings and income generation and noted that more savings were needed to address a forecast funding gap of £18.2m for 2026/27.

The committee discussed the approach to household waste recycling centre savings, mobile household waste recycling centre provision, and the need for evidence-based decisions. The committee were updated that savings were primarily due to contract efficiencies and that service changes were based on fly-tipping data and usage evidence. The

committee requested that in future, savings for reduction in services versus income are made clear.

Officers committed to providing a written response to confirm that the mobile waste sites are visiting sites that were originally agreed.

The committee raised concerns about consultation items already implemented, such as garden waste charges. Officers agreed to review presentation of these items prior to being published.

The committee queried debt provision and write-off policy. It was confirmed that the Council has a write-off policy in place and can be shared with the committee. Officers committed to provide a written response in relation to the increase in budgeted figure for the next year.

RESOLVED (by majority):

That the Environment and Communities Committee

1. Note the updated budget position for the period 2026/27 to 2029/30 as set out in Table 3.
2. Scrutinise and feedback on the list of Environment and Communities budget savings proposals that are contained in the budget consultation launched in November 2025 as contained in Annex 1.
3. Note the conditions for successful budget delivery, as approved by Corporate Policy Committee on 30 October 2025, which are set out in paragraph 12.

25 LOCAL PLAN UPDATE

The committee considered a report on the progress in delivering the new Local Plan.

The Committee received an update on the preparation of the new Local Plan under the provisions of the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act. It was noted that the new style plan would be subject to forthcoming regulations, expected by the end of the year, and that the process was anticipated to take approximately 30 months. The approach would be digitally focused, with opportunities for face-to-face engagement, and much of the evidence base would be prescribed nationally.

The committee were informed that the Local Plan would cover a minimum 15-year period and would address significant increases in housing need following recent changes to the National Planning Policy Framework. The updated requirement for Cheshire East is 2,603 homes per year, compared to the previous figure of 1,800, which necessitates a further call for sites to ensure sufficient land availability. It was noted that sites

submitted through the call for sites process have no planning status and do not imply allocation or consent.

The Committee was advised that delegated authority was sought for operational elements of the plan-making process, such as evidence gathering and stakeholder engagement, while key decisions on draft and final plans would remain with Members. A Members' Reference Group would continue to provide oversight and ensure transparency.

The committee raised questions on the rationale for a further call for sites, the inclusion of Council-owned land such as car parks, and the implications of recent policy changes. Officers confirmed that the updated National Planning Policy Framework and increased housing requirement justified a new call for sites. Officers committed to providing written clarification on specific submissions including car parks.

The committee queried the review of Green Belt and Grey Belt land. The committee were informed that the work was being commissioned for assessment of the land and will provide a further update on the expected timescales but that the target was by the middle of the next year. It was noted that individual planning applications would continue to be assessed on a case-by-case basis during this process.

The committee raised concerns such as the Jodrell Bank consultation zone, the potential impact on housing numbers, and whether sites already subject to planning applications were included in the list. The committee were updated that many sites had progressed through the development management process since the previous call for sites and reiterated that inclusion in the Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment (HELAA) does not determine planning status.

The committee emphasised the importance of providing clear public communication to avoid misunderstanding about the purpose of the call for sites. Officers agreed to consider issuing a press release to clarify that no decisions on site allocations were being made at this meeting.

The Committee acknowledged the need to progress the Local Plan swiftly to maintain control over development and ensure sustainable growth.

An amendment to recommendation 2 was proposed, seconded and carried unanimously:

Agree to delegate the following decisions associated with the production of the Council's New Local Plan to the Head of Planning, in consultation with the Chair, Vice Chair and Opposition Spokesperson of the Environment and Communities Committee.

A further amendment to add a recommendation was proposed and seconded and carried unanimously;

To agree a consultation mechanism in which all elected members are engaged in the site collection for their ward and will be fed into the Local Plan Member Reference group.

RESOLVED (unanimously):

That the Environment and Communities Committee:

1. Agree to publicise and undertake a further call for sites.
2. Agree to delegate the following decisions associated with the production of the Council's New Local Plan to the Head of Planning, in consultation with the Chair, Vice Chair and Opposition Spokesperson of the Environment and Communities Committee. The delegation is proposed to be limited to the following:
 - a. Decisions to engage and consult with stakeholders on activities which support the production of the New Local Plan (workshops and focus groups for example)
 - b. Decisions to publish documents and material which support the production of the New Local Plan (including evidence and draft plans that set out options), and seek feedback on their content The following are proposed to be exempt from the delegation:
 - i. Consultation on a final draft New Local Plan
 - ii. Submission of the New Local Plan to government
 - iii. Submission of the post-examination New Local Plan to Council for consideration to approve
3. Agree a consultation mechanism in which all elected members are engaged in the site collection for their ward and will be fed into the Local Plan Member Reference group.

26 LOCAL NATURE RECOVERY STRATEGY

The committee considered the report which sought approval to adopt the Local Nature Recovery Strategy.

The committee raised questions regarding the omission of references to nationally designated sites, including Ramsar areas and nature improvement zones, and queried why Cheshire West and Chester had led the process. The committee were updated that all existing designations are captured within the digital mapping that underpins the strategy and that the document focuses on thematic priorities for nature recovery rather than repeating statutory protections. It was noted that Cheshire West and Chester were best placed to lead due to their organisational structure and experience in delivering environmental functions.

The committee expressed concern about the scale of housing required, the impact on Green Belt and biodiversity, and the tension between national policy and local priorities. It was noted that while the Committee had limited discretion, a plan-led approach was essential to retain control and mitigate unplanned development. The importance of sustainable development, infrastructure provision, and neighbourhood planning was emphasised.

The committee raised concerns about the low level of public responses to consultation, particularly from younger age groups. The committee were updated that that consultation had included workshops across the three boroughs and engagement with key stakeholders such as the Farmers' Union and environmental groups, in addition to online responses.

The committee sought clarification on future updates to the strategy and the inclusion of additional sites for biodiversity net gain. Officers confirmed that the Local Nature Reserve Strategy will be subject to review and that habitat providers will have opportunities to contribute to future updates.

The committee discussion covered issues such as water quality, air pollution from wood burners, and enforcement of hedgerow protection. The committee were advised that enforcement matters should be referred to the Council's enforcement team and confirmed that existing statutory protections remain in place.

The committee noted the importance of the strategy as an ambitious framework to restore natural habitats, improve biodiversity, and provide better public access to nature. The document was commended for its comprehensive approach, including measures to increase woodland, hedgerows, and urban trees, reconnect floodplains, and reduce flood risk. The committee noted the significant loss of grasslands since the 1940s and welcomed the opportunity to reverse this trend.

RESOLVED (unanimously):

That The Environment and Communities Committee:

1. Agree that the final Local Nature Recovery Strategy for Cheshire and Warrington should be published by the Responsible Authority (Cheshire West and Chester Council).
2. Agree to host the LNRS and supporting material on the Cheshire East website.

27 STATEMENT OF GAMBLING PRINCIPLES

The committee considered the report which sought approval of the Statement of Gambling Principles 2026-2029 which is required under the Gambling Act 2005 to be published by all licensing authorities every three

years. The document sets out how the Council will exercise its functions under the Act, focusing on the three licensing objectives and providing a local decision-making framework alongside national guidance and legislation.

The committee were advised that the revised statement remains largely unchanged from the previous version, with amendments limited to correcting grammatical errors. The draft statement had been considered by the Licensing Committee on 8 September 2025 following a statutory consultation process and was approved for submission to this Committee prior to onward recommendation to Full Council for adoption in December.

The committee queried the use of demographic data within the document and noted that some figures dated back to 2015. It was noted that updates are dependent on census data and advised the committee that future revisions should hopefully include more comprehensive and current information.

The committee thanked the officers for the work that had been put into the report and understood the importance and requirements for it to be brought to the committee for approval.

RESOLVED (unanimously):

That the Environment and Communities Committee:

1. Note the draft revised Statement of Gambling Policy as set out at appendix 1 to the report
2. Recommend the draft revised Statement of Gambling Policy to Council for formal adoption.

28 WORK PROGRAMME

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

- Local plan update in January 2026 to be removed as no longer required
- Cleaner Crewe report is now available on the members hub [Library folder - Reports for Noting - Reports for Noting | Cheshire East Council](#)

The committee asked that regular updates should be provided in relation to the Local Plan. The committee were advised that a briefing would be provided at the March meeting and updates would be shared via the Members' Hub. It was also noted that all member briefings and reference group meetings were looking to be scheduled, with the possibility of sessions before Christmas to keep Members informed.

The meeting commenced at 10.30am and concluded at 12.45am

Councillor Heather Seddon