

CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the **Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee** held on Thursday, 1st February, 2018 at Committee Suite 1,2 & 3, Westfields, Middlewich Road, Sandbach CW11 1HZ

PRESENT

Councillor M Simon (Chairman)
Councillor M Grant (Vice-Chairman)

Councillors Rhoda Bailey, S Corcoran, H Davenport, B Dooley, S Gardiner, J Nicholas, S Pochin, L Smetham and B Walmsley

7 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Councillor T Dean.

8 ALSO PRESENT

Jan Willis- Interim Executive Director of Corporate Services
Alex Thompson- Finance Lead Strategy and Funding
Jill Broomhall- Director of Adult Social Care Operations
Sean Hannaby- Director of Planning and Sustainable Development
Gill Betton- Head of Service- Children's Development and Partnerships

9 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Committee noted two sets of minutes from previous meetings. There were wording changes from the set of minutes for the 11 January 2018 under the item that related to Crewe Fire Station Second Pump.

Bullet point one stated "It appeared that the west side of Cheshire, which included Ellesmere Port and Warrington...Cheshire East would only have one whole-time pump in Crewe." this should read "It appeared that the north and north west of Cheshire, which included Ellesmere Port and Warrington...Cheshire East would only have one whole-time pump which would be based in Crewe."

Bullet point six stated "...the response times to fire incidents in Crewe compared to those of neighbouring forces." this should read "...the response times to fire incidents in Crewe compared to those areas."

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the minutes of the meetings held on the 11 January 2018 and the 19 January 2018 be confirmed as correct records and signed by the Chairman.

10 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

11 DECLARATION OF PARTY WHIP

There were no declarations of the existence of a party whip.

12 PUBLIC SPEAKING TIME/OPEN SESSION

There were no members of the public present who wished to speak.

13 QUARTER THREE PERFORMANCE REPORT

Councillor Paul Bates, Portfolio Holder for Finance and Communications introduced the item for the 3rd Quarter Review of Performance. Councillor Bates highlighted the good performance outlined in the covering report alongside areas that required further improvement.

Jan Willis, Interim Executive Director of Corporate Services advised the Committee of changes since Quarter 2, the major improvement being the review of reserves had completed, the revenue budget had been balanced which resulted in a £5.7million improvement. Jan expected a more balanced outturn by Quarter 4.

The Committee considered that following the review to the capital programme and as part of the business planning process for 2018-21 a number of schemes, totalling £12.3million have been removed from the programme. On further analysis of Appendix 5, the Committee requested detail of £9.4million removed under the budget line for Education Community Hub.

The Committee asked for further explanation of paragraph 119 that stated it was unlikely that further income from the investment portfolio would be realised before the end of March, this had created an income shortfall of £0.3million. Jan advised there was a report going to Cabinet in respect of taking investment forward.

Paragraph 206 stated there was a noticeable increase in the number of agency worker assignments within the People directorate between October and December 2017; this was due to new C.Net assignments being created towards the end of the period to provide short term emergency cover for sickness absence within Adult Services (Care4CE). Jill Broomhall, Director of Adult Social Care Operations, advised this was because of winter bugs. Councillor Janet Clowes, Portfolio Holder for Adult Care and Integration, added that although the flu jab was offered to employees who worked in care homes, early uptake was poor. This will be followed up for the same period next year.

The Committee acknowledged the Council's significant pressures and challenges and noted the much improved position of the predicted overspent being currently estimated at £100K. The Committee congratulated the Directorates and the Finance Team for their continued efforts to find efficiencies to mitigate the overspend whilst continuing to provide services and perform strongly. Council Tax collection was highlighted by the Committee for its continued increased high performance.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That Jan and contributing officers be thanked for their attendance and contributions;

- (b) That the report be received and noted;
- (c) That Helen Davies provide the Committee with details of the £9.4million relating to the Education Community Hub.

14 MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY 2018-21

Councillor Paul Bates, Portfolio Holder for Finance and Communications introduced the Medium Term Financial Strategy 2018-21. Councillor Bates outlined that Cheshire East Council delivered approximately 500 local services daily and reflected some of the positive key performance, he also acknowledged that local government grant funding would continue to reduce throughout 2019-20 with no confirmation of funding levels. Central Government continued to build in flexibility to enable local authorities to use local tax raising powers to fund services such as Adult Social Care.

Jan Willis, Interim Executive Director of Corporate Services, outlined the main changes to the budget since the Pre-Budget report. The Strategy reflected the provisional settlement however the final settlement was yet to be confirmed which meant the final changes could not be incorporated into the report before going to February Cabinet.

Jan noted that the provisional settlement showed the New Homes Bonus was in a better financial position than previously forecast in the Pre-Budget Report.

Budget proposals had been modified based on the Pre-Budget Proposal Consultation to reflect savings made in Highways and modified proposals for libraries.

Councillor Davenport suggested that that Proposal 79- Community Library Provision should reflect the footfall of visitors. Sean Hannaby, Director of Planning and Sustainable Development, advised that the comments in the report related to all libraries and not just Prestbury, Alderley Edge and Disley as the three listed.

The Committee noted an overspend in the People directorate and asked if there was going to be further overspend in 2018/19 or if these pressures were being mitigated for 2019/20. Councillor Janet Clowes, Portfolio Holder for Adult Care and Integration advised that the pressures were ongoing and rising, by 2020 there would be a 30% increase in over 75 year olds which would result in more cases of complex health care needs. Also, there was a large cohort of young people transitioning into adulthood with complex needs, care packages to accommodate these people would be needed in 2018/19.

Jill Broomhall, Director of Adult Social Care Operations noted that the Association of Adult Social Care had published a paper that documented the dangers of people remaining in long term care. The biggest risk for this Authority was provider failure.

Councillor Davenport advised the Committee that the Environment and Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee had two proposals, one on a Highways Contract and the other on the Car Parking Strategy, to add to the overall recommendations to Cabinet from this Committee.

The Committee noted that on page 151, the pre-amble to the Community funding from New Homes Bonus was worded in a potentially leading way. Jan advised that the budget report would not specify a mechanism by which the funding would be spent, only that it should be made available to communities.

RESOLVED- That:

- (a) Jan and contributing officers be thanked for their attendance and contributions; and
- (b) the report be received and noted.

That the following comments be submitted to Cabinet for its consideration:

- 1) Further consideration be given to the proposed £500k revenue saving relating to the Highways Contract, and that if the saving was to be made, assurance be given that this would relate to efficiencies rather than a reduced level of service. However, it was noted in the meeting that this saving had since reduced from £500k to £150k;
- 2) the Car Parking Strategy ensures a Parking Policy that was fair to all residents of the Borough;
- 3) when the final version is approved, that consideration be given to the wording of the budget line “Changes to Community Libraries” to remove the references to Alderley Edge, Disley and Prestbury and instead to read as ‘All libraries’;
- 4) The Committee requested that analysis information be supplied to Corporate Scrutiny to show how the forecasted figures for the Parking Strategy were determined. Members noted the piece of work had not yet completed and queried how the -£0.355 had been reached;
- 5) consideration be given to the wording in the Forward from the Finance and Communication Portfolio Holder specifically the section Community funding from New Homes Bonus. The current wording “...to set aside £2m and allow local communities to determine how this money will be spent.” needs to be reconsidered particularly as Corporate Scrutiny has yet to offer suggestions for a scheme to establish how these funds could be spent. Similarly the budget line “New Homes Bonus Community Fund” is worded “...building on the Council’s participatory budgeting approach.” Could consideration also be given to this wording as Corporate Scrutiny has not yet carried out the piece of work to offer suggestions for how these funds could be spent.
- 6) Cabinet be asked to give consideration to the inclusion of Scrutiny in any future pieces of work or considerations on “External income-Fees and Charges”; and
- 7) the Corporate Scrutiny Committee ask that Cabinet be asked to formally acknowledge these comments in the minutes of the meeting.

The Chairman advised the Committee that following a discussion with Kath O'Dwyer, there was an opportunity for this Committee to be involved with a review of the culture across the organisation. Members were in agreement with this suggestion.

Jan Willis advised the Committee there could be scope for this Committee to scrutinise the use of technology across the organisation. The Chairman noted that there was a Joint Working Group currently operating with Cheshire West and Chester Council that had been formed to scrutinise the Best 4 Business, the Shared Service replacement for the current Oracle system. The Committee agreed that this work could be combined with a larger review of technology.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Work Programme be received and noted;
- (b) That the Chairman have further discussion with Kath O'Dwyer about the scope for work relating to a review of the culture across the organisation.
- (c) That the Scrutiny Officer speak to relevant officers to identify if there are any specific examples of technology that this Committee could agree to scrutinise.

16 FORWARD PLAN

The Committee reviewed the Forward Plan. Members noted the Early Help Framework as an item previously discussed at the meeting on the 19 January 2018 and agreed that this would be an item Health, Adult Social Care and Communities Overview and Scrutiny would continue to monitor.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Forward Plan be received and noted; and
- (b) That the Health, Adult Social Care and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee would continue to monitor the impact of the Early Help Framework.

The meeting commenced at 2.00 pm and concluded at 4.35 pm

Councillor M Simon (Chairman)