

# Cabinet Agenda

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**Date:** Tuesday, 9th March, 2021

**Time:** 1.00 pm

**Venue:** Virtual Meeting

For anybody wishing to view the meeting please click on the link below:

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The agenda is divided into 2 parts. Part 1 is taken in the presence of the public and press. Part 2 items will be considered in the absence of the public and press for the reasons indicated on the agenda and in the report.

It should be noted that Part 1 items of Cheshire East Council decision-making meetings are recorded and the recordings are uploaded to the Council's website.

## **PART 1 – MATTERS TO BE CONSIDERED WITH THE PUBLIC AND PRESS PRESENT**

- 1. Apologies for Absence**
- 2. Declarations of Interest**

To provide an opportunity for Members and Officers to declare any disclosable pecuniary and non-pecuniary interests in any item on the agenda.

- 3. Public Speaking Time/Open Session - Virtual Meetings**

In accordance with paragraph 3.33 of the Cabinet Procedure Rules, a period of 10 minutes is allocated for members of the public to address the meeting on any matter relevant to the work of the Cabinet. Individual members of the public may speak for up to two minutes. The Chairman or person presiding will have discretion to vary this requirement where he/she considers it appropriate.

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Please contact Paul Mountford, Executive Democratic Services Officer  
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Members of the public wishing to ask a question or make a statement at the meeting should provide at least three clear working days' notice in writing and should include the question with that notice. This will enable an informed answer to be given.

4. **Questions to Cabinet Members - Virtual Meetings**

A period of 20 minutes is allocated for questions to be put to Cabinet Members by members of the Council. A maximum period of two minutes will be allowed for each member wishing to ask a question. The Leader will have discretion to vary this requirement where he considers it appropriate. Members wishing to ask a question at the meeting should register to do so in writing by not later than 4.00 pm on the Friday in the week preceding the meeting. Members should include the general topic their question will relate to and indicate if it relates to an item on the agenda. Questions must relate to the powers, duties or responsibilities of the Cabinet. Questions put to Cabinet Members must relate to their portfolio responsibilities.

Where a question relates to a matter which appears on the agenda, the Leader may allow the question to be asked at the beginning of consideration of that item.

5. **Minutes of Previous Meeting** (Pages 5 - 18)

To approve the minutes of the meeting held on 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2021.

6. **Covid-19 - Update on Response and Recovery** (Pages 19 - 42)

To consider an update report on the Council's response to the Covid-19 pandemic.

7. **Dedicated Schools Grant Management Plan 2021/22 to 2024/25** (Pages 43 - 72)

To consider the Dedicated Schools Grant Management Plan 2021/22 to 2024/25.

8. **Flowerpot Junction Improvement Scheme** (Pages 73 - 88)

To consider a report on the Flowerpot Junction Improvement Scheme.

9. **Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans (LCWIP) for Crewe, Congleton, Macclesfield and Wilmslow** (Pages 89 - 108)

To consider a report on Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans for Crewe, Congleton, Macclesfield and Wilmslow.

10. **Home Repairs and Adaptations for Vulnerable People Financial Assistance Policy** (Pages 109 - 148)

To consider a report on the Home Repairs and Adaptations for Vulnerable People Financial Assistance Policy 2021-2026.

11. **Customer Experience Strategy** (Pages 149 - 192)

To consider a report on the adoption of a Customer Experience Strategy.

**THERE ARE NO PART 2 ITEMS**

**Membership:** Councillors C Browne (Vice-Chairman), S Corcoran (Chairman), L Crane, K Flavell, T Fox, L Jeuda, N Mannion, J Rhodes, A Stott and M Warren

**CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL**

Minutes of a virtual meeting of the **Cabinet**  
held on Tuesday, 2nd February, 2021

**PRESENT**

Councillor S Corcoran (Chairman)  
Councillor C Browne (Vice-Chairman)

Councillors L Crane, K Flavell, T Fox, L Jeuda, N Mannion, J Rhodes, A Stott  
and M Warren

**Councillors in attendance**

Councillors S Akers Smith, R Bailey, M Benson, J Clowes, T Dean, S Edgar,  
D Edwardes, J P Findlow, R Fletcher, S Gardiner, P Groves, M Houston,  
A Moran, D Murphy, J Nicholas, S Pochin, B Puddicombe, J Saunders,  
M Simon, D Stockton, L Wardlaw and P Williams

**Officers in attendance**

Lorraine O'Donnell, Chief Executive  
Frank Jordan, Executive Director Place  
Jane Burns, Executive Director Corporate Services  
Alex Thompson, Director of Finance and Customer Services  
David Brown, Director of Governance and Compliance  
Nichola Thompson, Director of Commissioning  
Brian Reed, Head of Democratic Services and Governance  
Paul Mountford, Executive Democratic Services Officer

The Leader welcomed Ged Rowney, interim Director of Children's Services, to his first meeting of the Cabinet. Mr Rowney introduced himself.

The Leader was pleased to announce that since the last Cabinet meeting, the numbers of Covid cases in Cheshire East had fallen significantly, and were currently the lowest in the Cheshire and Merseyside sub-region. However, the numbers were still high and there was no room for complacency.

The Leader highlighted the success of the vaccination programme led by Cheshire NHS Clinical Commissioning Group and delivered by primary care networks. He added that once the priority groups had been vaccinated, it would be necessary to review the vaccination programme and he and the Deputy Leader had written to the Secretary of State outlining their views.

Finally, the Leader thanked Council staff for their work in keeping residents safe during the recent storm and floods.

The Deputy Leader was pleased to report that the Council had reviewed its processes for administering business continuity support grants, and this had resulted in average waiting times being reduced from three weeks to two.

Since November, the Council had made grants with a cumulative value of £26.3m.

The Council had also recently revoked seven air quality management areas as a result of falling pollution concentrations. The Council was now reviewing its air quality action plan, a draft version of which was open to consultation until 12<sup>th</sup> March; the details were available on the Council's website.

#### **75 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

#### **76 PUBLIC SPEAKING TIME/OPEN SESSION - VIRTUAL MEETINGS**

Jane Emery asked if the Cabinet had plans to review the emergency assistance scheme, and if so, whether Nantwich and Middlewich foodbanks could be involved.

The Portfolio Holder for Finance, IT and Communication responded that a review of the scheme would be undertaken at the end of 2021 and would be subject to consultation. This would depend on funding still being available.

Nick Adams asked what social value elements the Council had secured with the signing of the recent £35m IT contract and £4.5m broadband contract and what learning could be taken from the contracts.

The Portfolio Holder for Finance, IT and Communication responded that as both contracts were for large items of IT infrastructure, various factors prevented the specific assignment of social value key performance indicators to the contracts themselves. However, both contracts formed the cornerstone for numerous Council services that would provide social value. The Portfolio Holder for Public Health and Corporate Services added that the Council would monitor contract performance against social value indicators and outcomes, and lessons learned would be reflected in updates to the Council's commissioning training package.

Sue Helliwell referred to a proposal in the budget to commercialise the Highway Service Contract by allowing the contractor to undertake external works for third parties in order to deliver savings for the Council. She asked who the third parties were.

The Portfolio Holder for Highways and Waste responded that the Council would secure income through its contract for highways based on work to be delivered to third parties including individuals, developers and businesses. Examples of such work included the provision of vehicle access crossings and the maintenance of private access roads and car parks.

Congleton Town Councillor Robert Douglas referred to a Freedom of Information request he had submitted requesting details of the new sites that Cheshire East Council was considering as suitable replacements for the existing Household Waste recycling site at Congleton. He said that the Council had refused to provide the information on grounds of commercial sensitivity. He repeated his request for the information which he said did not compromise commercial sensitivities.

The Portfolio Holder for Highways and Waste responded that, as mentioned at the previous Cabinet meeting, the Council had received a very good response to the consultation regarding the HWRC review and was now considering the results. The matter would be considered by the Environment and Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Commission on 12<sup>th</sup> February to enable pre-scrutiny of the issue before Cabinet considered the matter. She would not wish to comment further until she had considered the results of the consultation and the observations of scrutiny. The FOI request had been appropriately responded to through that process.

Caroline Whitney expressed concern at proposals to reduce the community grants budget from £200,000 a year to £150,000 a year in 2021/22, and to £50,000 a year in 2022/23. She asked that Cabinet change the recommendation and not make the larger planned reduction in 2022. She also queried a planned refocus of the Communities Team, and expressed disappointment that a service provider had learned from the budget document, rather than the commissioner, that their service was not being recommissioned.

The Leader asked that the full text of the question, which was quite lengthy, be published on the website for this Cabinet meeting.

The Portfolio Holder for Communities responded that Community Grants remained one of many key resources the Council provided to the Voluntary, Community and Faith Sectors. The decision to reduce the Community Grants budget over two years rather than with immediate effect had been made to ensure that the Communities Team could support the regular recipients of this grant to become more sustainable. In view of the need to respond to all three questions in detail, the Portfolio Holder undertook to provide a written response.

## **77 QUESTIONS TO CABINET MEMBERS - VIRTUAL MEETINGS**

Councillor S Akers Smith raised a number of questions in relation to a proposed greenway to be built south of the new Congleton Link Road and sought assurances regarding future development and commuted sums under S106 agreements.

The Portfolio Holder for Planning undertook to provide a written response.

The Portfolio Holder for Environment and Regeneration commented that additional tree planting was now planned along the link road. He would forward details to Councillor Fox for inclusion in her response.

Councillor J Clowes referred to flooding in the Wynbunbury and Stapeley wards, and in particular to problems with drainage and sinkholes in three specific areas. She commented that such problems required significant project management.

The Portfolio Holder for Highways and Waste undertook to provide a written response.

Councillor T Dean asked if the Council would support Option C on the list of proposed options for change of the rail services around Manchester, as this would provide an improved service on the Chester to Manchester Line serving Knutsford, Mobberley and Ashley.

The Deputy Leader responded that the Council needed to consider the impact of all three options relevant to Cheshire East. A technical rail assessment was being undertaken and a press release would be issued to encourage residents to respond to the consultation on the options.

Councillor D Edwardes commented that Macclesfield did not have one electric charging point for public use. He asked that the Council work with Macclesfield Town Council to address this issue.

The Deputy Leader responded that the Council was currently conducting a study with Zero Carbon Futures and local electricity companies to establish levels of demand and identify suitable charging locations, and Macclesfield was included in that study. The assessment would be completed by the end of March, and at that point the Council would expect to seek Government funding.

Councillor R Fletcher referred to a recent incident in Alsager when an emergency pendant worn by a vulnerable person failed late in the afternoon and due to the terms of the firm's contract with Cheshire East, the Pendant could not be repaired until the following day, placing the vulnerable person at risk overnight. He asked the Council as a matter of urgency to modify the contract to provide cover 24 hours a day 7 days a week.

The Portfolio Holder for Adult Social Care and Health responded that she had referred Councillor Fletcher's enquiry, along with the details of the individual concerned, to the Director of Commissioning and that Councillor Fletcher would be contacted by the Director.

Councillor S Pochin referred to ongoing drainage issues resulting in severe flooding in areas of her ward and asked that the Council take responsibility for addressing the issues.

The Portfolio Holder for Highways and Waste responded that in parts of the Borough the drainage infrastructure lacked sufficient capacity and that more investment, with Government support, was needed. The Council, working with the Environment Agency, United Utilities and riparian owners, was working through a prioritised list of affected areas.

The Deputy Leader added that the Council was currently undertaking a pilot scheme with his own parish council which, if successful, would enable a scheme to be developed whereby town and parish councils could buy into additional services such as gully emptying on secondary routes.

Councillor B Puddicombe asked about the timescale for the rollout of the '20isPlenty' motion passed by Council in December.

The Portfolio Holder for Highways and Waste responded that the motion was being taken forward as part of the speed management strategy review. As soon as a timetable was available, and details of how town and parish councils could become involved had been established, this information would be shared widely.

Councillor P Williams referred to the Children and Families services area and the need to make savings and economies in the face of grant reductions from central government. He asked what assurance could be given that crucial early intervention support would be protected and maintained.

The Portfolio Holder for Children and Families responded that despite significant reductions nationally in funding for early intervention services, the Council had consistently prioritised prevention funding to maintain this critical support. The Council also benefited from the Troubled Families Programme, where it had become the highest performing council in the north-west, bringing in additional payment by results funding.

Councillor L Smetham referred to the proposed removal of £110,000 for the Pathfinder contract from the Council's budget and the effect this would have on staff and residents. She asked that the Pathfinder project be incorporated into new social value initiatives.

The Portfolio Holder for Communities undertook to provide a written response.

### **78 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

#### **RESOLVED**

That the minutes of the meeting held on 12<sup>th</sup> January 2021 be approved as a correct record.

**79 COVID-19 - UPDATE ON RESPONSE AND RECOVERY**

Cabinet considered an update report on the Council's response to the Covid-19 pandemic.

**RESOLVED**

That Cabinet notes the issues outlined in the report.

**80 CORPORATE PLAN AND MEDIUM-TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY 2021-25**

Cabinet considered a report on the Corporate Plan and Medium-Term Financial Strategy 2021-25.

The Leader commented that for the first time, the Council would have both a four-year Corporate Plan and a four-year budget to take it to 2025, which would be a significant achievement, given the unprecedented circumstances the Council was facing.

The resolutions that Cabinet was requested to recommend to Council were set out at Appendix A to the report. The new Corporate Plan 2021/22 to 2024/25 was set out in Appendix B. The Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) Report (containing the Budget) for the period 2021-25 was set out at Appendix C.

The report had been considered by the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 28<sup>th</sup> January 2021. Councillor J Clowes, Chairman of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee, presented the Committee's comments on the report to Cabinet and asked that they be appended to the Cabinet minutes.

**RESOLVED**

That Cabinet

1. recommends to Council the items at Appendix A to the report;
2. notes the summary results of the Budget Consultation and Engagement exercise undertaken by the Council, as set out in the attached (Appendix C, Annex 2a and 2b);
3. notes the report of the Council's Section 151 Officer, contained within the MTFS Report, regarding the robustness of estimates and level of reserves held by the Council based on these budget proposals (Appendix C, Comment from the Section 151 Officer);  
and

4. notes that the Council's Finance Procedure Rules will always apply to ensure proper approval, should any changes in spending requirements be identified (Appendix C).

## 81 **THIRD QUARTER REVIEW (FINANCE) 2020/21**

Cabinet considered a report on the Third Quarter Review (Finance) 2020/21.

The report had been considered by the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 28<sup>th</sup> January 2021. Councillor J Clowes, Chairman of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee, presented the Committee's comments on the report to Cabinet and asked that they be appended to the Cabinet minutes.

The Portfolio Holder for Environment and Regeneration reported additional funding that was likely to be made available to support the Council in relation to the Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme and Green Homes Grant, which would require additional recommendations to Council for supplementary capital estimates. Further details were displayed on screen during the meeting and are appended to these minutes.

### **RESOLVED**

That Cabinet

1. notes the contents of the report, and annex, and the associated impact on reserves, and the Medium Term Financial Strategy, related to the outturn position and the deferral of certain Covid-19 related financial items;
2. approves the management of any variation to the outturn as follows:
  - Surplus / Deficit in non-Covid-19 related expenditure / income is allocated to the Medium Term Financial Strategy Earmarked Reserve; and
  - Surplus / Deficit in Covid-19 related expenditure / income is allocated to the Covid-19 Earmarked Reserve;
3. approves the supplementary revenue estimates of £620,000 relating to the Northern Powerhouse 11 grant and £921,000 Restrictions Support grant (Appendix 2 Table 1 to the report);
4. notes the supplementary estimates approved to date in relation to Covid-19 activity (Appendix 2, Table 2);
5. approves the supplementary capital estimates relating to schools condition capital grant £589,604, towns fund £750,000 and grant to

support our carbon neutral ambition up to the value of £932,661 (Appendix 4, Annex C); and

6. recommends to Council to approve:

- fully funded supplementary revenue estimates above £1,000,000 relating to Covid-19 grants in accordance with Financial Procedure Rules as detailed in Appendix 2 Table 1.
- supplementary capital estimate of £1,808,000 relating to Best4Business in accordance with Financial Procedure Rules as detailed in Appendix 4, Annex D.
- an additional Supplementary Capital Estimate of up to £3,500,000 from the Public Sector Decarbonisation Fund to further the Council's carbon neutrality objectives as detailed in the appendix to these minutes.
- an additional Supplementary Capital Estimate in relation to £1,523,750 from The Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) for Green Homes Grant, Local Authority Delivery Scheme Phase 1B (GHG LAD P1B) as detailed in the appendix to these minutes.

## **82 SCHOOL AND EARLY YEARS FUNDING FORMULA FOR 2021/22**

Cabinet considered a report on the School and Early Years Funding Formula for 2021/22.

### **RESOLVED**

That Cabinet approves:

1. the Schools Funding Formula:

- (a) The use of a funding formula that uses the national funding formula factors with any additional funding being allocated via the basic entitlement.
- (b) The transfer from the schools block to the high needs block of up to 0.5% to assist with pressures if the Council's application to the Department for Education is successful.
- (c) The use of +0.5% as the minimum funding guarantee percentage. Meaning that individual school funding levels should increase by +0.5% compared to the 2020/21 level (subject to the items included in minimum funding guarantee protection) and excluding pupil number changes.
- (d) The Growth Fund at £0.8m.

2. the Early Years Funding Formula:
  - (a) The continued use of the current funding formula and agrees to increase the hourly rates by the same percentage increase as the increased funding from the Department for Education.
  - (b) The use of summer 2019 rather than summer 2020 patterns of attendance to determine the level of deprivation funding from April 2021.
  - (c) The new funding rates. The rates for 2020/21 are shown at Appendix 4 to the report and the proposed rates for 2021/22 are set out at Appendix 5.
  - (d) Delegated authority to the Director of Prevention & Early Help to enter into revised contracts with providers in accordance with the Department for Education funding increase.
3. the request for the Leader of the Council to write to the Secretary of State to raise concerns over the impact of the national funding formula on small and rural schools.

### **83 DAY OPPORTUNITIES STRATEGY AND REDESIGN**

Cabinet considered a report on developing a strategic vision for all day opportunities services in Cheshire East.

#### **RESOLVED**

That Cabinet approves the development of a co-produced day opportunities strategy and redesign of the current day opportunities services offer across the Borough.

### **84 CARBON ACTION PLAN CAPITAL INVESTMENT**

Cabinet considered a report on a proposed solar photovoltaic array and tree planting project at Leighton Grange Crewe, as part of the Council's commitment to be carbon neutral by 2025.

#### **RESOLVED**

That Cabinet

1. approves that Council land at Leighton Grange as described in figure 1 at the end of the report be allocated for insetting purposes; and
2. delegates authority to the Executive Director Place to take all necessary actions, including without limitation contract award and the

execution of all necessary agreements and ancillary documentation, to implement the following carbon inseting projects:

- (a) the procurement, construction and operation of a solar photovoltaic array connected to the composting plant of approximately 5MW, subject to securing appropriate permissions and connections; and
- (b) the planting of up to seven hectares of natural assets to absorb carbon.

**85 CHESHIRE EAST CONTAMINATED LAND STRATEGY 2021**

Cabinet considered a report on the Cheshire East Contaminated Land Strategy 2021.

**RESOLVED**

That Cabinet

1. authorises the Director of Environment and Neighbourhoods to formally consult on the draft Contaminated Land Strategy for a period of 6 weeks;
2. notes that the Environment and Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee will consider the revised draft and result of consultation once that is completed; and
3. delegates authority to the Director of Environment and Neighbourhood Services in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Communities to consider the results of the consultation and to approve the final version of the strategy.

**86 OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH CONTRACT PROCUREMENT**

Cabinet considered a report on the procurement of an occupational health contract.

**RESOLVED**

That Cabinet delegates authority to the Executive Director of Corporate Services in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Public Health and Corporate Services to award and enter into the new contract following a tender exercise.

**87 POLICY ON THE PRE-PURCHASE OF GRAVES AT CHESHIRE EAST CEMETERIES**

Cabinet considered a report on the adoption of a policy to cease advance purchases of graves in all cemeteries where there was less than 20 years of capacity of new grave supply.

**RESOLVED**

That Cabinet

1. approves the revised Policy, as set out at Appendix 1 to the report, for the pre-purchase of graves at Cheshire East managed Cemeteries; and
2. delegates authority to the Executive Director- Place to take any necessary actions to implement the policy.

**88 SCHEDULE OF URGENT DECISIONS TAKEN ON BEHALF OF CABINET AND COUNCIL**

Cabinet received a schedule of urgent decisions taken on behalf of the Cabinet and Council which was reported for information in accordance with Appendix 4 of the Council procedure rules.

**RESOLVED**

That the schedule of urgent decisions be noted.

**89 ORBITAS BEREAVEMENT SERVICES CONTRACT EXTENSION**

Cabinet considered a report on the extension of the contract between the Council and Orbitas Bereavement Services.

Cabinet had regard to the legal implications relevant to the decision as set out in Appendix A to the report. The Appendix contained exempt information as defined in Paragraph 5 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 (Information in respect of which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained in legal proceedings) and was therefore not for publication.

**RESOLVED**

That Cabinet

1. approves that the contract between the Council and Orbitas Bereavement Services be modified by extending it by a period of one year, to 31 March 2022; and
2. delegates authority to the Executive Director Place to take all necessary actions to implement the contract modification.

The meeting commenced at 1.00 pm and concluded at 4.00 pm

Councillor S Corcoran (Chairman)

**Cabinet Portfolio Holder Script – 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2021**

**Cllr Nick Mannion – PH for Environment and Regeneration**

**Additional recommendations from Cabinet to Full Council**

With regard to item 8 [on the Cabinet agenda], it has come to our attention that additional funding is likely to be made available to support the council.

The first relates to our carbon neutral objectives through the Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme in 2021/22.

We have been notified of a grant award of £3.5m to enable the delivery of:

- Solar panels across selected 16 buildings to generate and supply renewable electricity for our leisure centres
- A renewable heat pump heating system at one of our offices
- An upgrade of lighting systems to LED across 14 of our most energy intensive buildings
- And a range of energy conservation measures like heating and lighting controls across various estate buildings

We anticipate these measure will reduce our carbon footprint by circa 350 tonnes of Co2 per annum – almost 5% of the energy efficiency needed by 2025.

To formally accept this funding I would like to propose an additional recommendation to item 8.

**Recommendation:**

**Recommend to Full Council the approval of an additional Supplementary Capital Estimate of up to £3,500,000 from the Public Sector Decarbonisation Fund to further our carbon neutrality objectives.**

In December 2020 Cheshire East submitted a consortia bids to The Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) for Green Homes Grant, Local Authority Delivery Scheme Phase 1B to apply for a share of £124million funding to be used to improve the energy efficiency of low income houses in their area.

The bid for GHG LAD P1B was for £1,523,750, to be distributed as follows:

Partner	Tenure	Number of properties Improved	Grant Funding (£)
Cheshire East	Homeowners	30	£517,500
	Private Rented	30	
Guinness Partnership	Social Rented	79	£454,250
Peaks & Plains Housing Trust	Social Rented	51	£293,250
Cheshire West & Chester	Homeowners	20	£258,750
	Private Rented	5	

There is no requirement for match funding from Cheshire East Council. A condition of the grant is that social and private landlords must contribute a minimum of 33% of the cost of works to their properties. The Guinness Partnership and Peaks & Plains Housing Trust have confirmed that they will provide the match funding for works to their housing stock. Contributions will be secured from all participating private landlords as part of the administration of the scheme.

On 27<sup>th</sup> January 2021, Cheshire East was advised that the bid had been successful. There is a requirement for Cheshire East Council to enter into a Memorandum of Understanding with BEIS (BEIS MoU) and will be the accountable body. The partners will all be required to enter into a further Memorandum of Understanding that reflects the BEIS MoU to receive funds from Cheshire East Council. There is a requirement to accept and sign all documentation by 19<sup>th</sup> February 2021 or the offer will be withdrawn.

To formally accept this funding I would like to propose an additional recommendation to item 8.

**Recommendation:**

**Recommend to Full Council the approval of an additional Supplementary Capital Estimate in relation to £1,523,750 from The Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) for Green Homes Grant, Local Authority Delivery Scheme Phase 1B (GHG LAD P1B).**

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*Working for a brighter future together*

Key Decision: Y
Date First Published: 31/7/20

## Cabinet

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**Date of Meeting:** 9 March 2021

**Report Title:** Covid-19 – Update on Response and Recovery

**Portfolio Holder:** Cllr Sam Corcoran - Leader of the Council

Cllr Craig Browne - Deputy Leader of the Council

**Senior Officer:** Lorraine O'Donnell - Chief Executive

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### 1. Report Summary

- 1.1. Cabinet have received seven detailed reports since June 2020 on how the Council, working with its partners, continues to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic and plan for the recovery from it.
- 1.2. In view of the enduring nature of the national and international public health emergency, this report provides a summary of key developments and by exception reporting since 1 February 2021.
- 1.3. On 22 February, the Government published a document called "COVID-19 Response Spring 2021" which includes a "roadmap" for easing restrictions in England, starting with schools and colleges on 8 March. [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/963491/COVID-19\\_Response\\_-\\_Spring\\_2021.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/963491/COVID-19_Response_-_Spring_2021.pdf) The Government will ease restrictions at the same time across the whole of England. The roadmap sets out four tests against which data will be reviewed – vaccine deployment, vaccine efficacy, infection rates and risk assessment of new variants of concern - and four steps over the period from 8 March until 21 June to gradually ease restrictions. Appendix 1 summarises the four steps.
- 1.4. The publication of the roadmap is welcome as it allows some preparatory time to manage the easings required on 8 March. However, it brings significant

pressure on schools, care homes and council staff providing advice and support, as well as the on-going pressures on Public Health colleagues.

- 1.5. The report also summarises the latest information on infection rates which have fallen considerably since last reported.
- 1.6. The financial impact of the pandemic on the council continues to be significant. A further update is provided in section 6.2. It is important to note that over £200m has been provided in ringfenced grants for specific purposes, the majority of which has been or is to be passported directly to other organisations. This may create an incorrect impression that all the council's COVID pressures are funded. Furthermore, the administration costs of passporting money directly to other organisations fall directly on the Council. This is significant in the case of business grants and infection control in care homes grants, for example.
- 1.7. The report will also be of interest to the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny and the Audit and Governance Committees.
- 1.8. It is important to note that there will be other new developments following the publication of this report. Verbal updates will be given at the meeting, as appropriate.

## 2. **Recommendation**

- 2.1 That Cabinet notes the issues outlined in the report.

## 3. **Other Options Considered**

- 3.1. Not applicable.

## 4. **Background**

- 4.1 The WHO Weekly Epidemiological Update issued on 16 February showed a continued fall in infections with 2.7 million new cases of Covid-19 reported in the previous week (9 - 16 February).
- 4.2 From 30 December 2019 through to 18 February 2021, over 109 million Covid-19 cases and 2.4 million deaths have been reported globally. (*From covid19.who.int*)
- 4.3 The latest international, national and local statistics are available from the following data dashboards:

<https://covid19.who.int/>

<https://coronavirus.data.gov.uk/>

[https://www.cheshireeast.gov.uk/council\\_and\\_democracy/council\\_information/coronavirus/latest-covid-19-figures-for-cheshire-east.aspx](https://www.cheshireeast.gov.uk/council_and_democracy/council_information/coronavirus/latest-covid-19-figures-for-cheshire-east.aspx)

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/the-r-number-in-the-uk>

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/statistics/statistical-work-areas/covid-19-vaccinations/>

- 4.4 Three vaccines to protect against Coronavirus are being rolled out nationally to priority groups. In the week ending the 14 February an additional 2,320,419 people received a vaccination for Covid-19 in England. This took the total number of people vaccinated to 12,844,193. 198,745 are in the Cheshire CCG area. Data are not published on a local authority level.
- 4.5 The UK Government National Restrictions continue at the time of writing. The Prime Minister announced changes on 22 February. Details of this change are found here: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/national-lockdown-stay-at-home>
- 4.6 The respective administrations of Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales have introduced measures that have been tailored to their country's circumstances.
- 4.7 In the last full week of data from 16 February 2021, 582 people in Cheshire East tested positive (up to February 2021). The local infection rate was recorded as 119 cases per 100,000 population. The corresponding rate for England was 124 cases per 100,000. The estimated R rate is 0.7 to 0.9 nationally and 0.6 - 0.9 regionally as of 19 February.
- 4.8 Within Cheshire East there had been a steep decline in cases from a rate of 498 per 100,000 seen on 4 January to the locally calculated rate of 119 per 100,000 as of 16 February; a 22% decrease on the previous 7 day period. Initially rates for Cheshire East were falling more rapidly than the England average; they are now converging. Hospital capacity is improving. As of 21 February, East Cheshire NHS Trust had 48 occupied COVID beds (17% of capacity) and Mid Cheshire Hospitals NHS Trust had 88 occupied COVID beds (15% of capacity). This indicates that the national lockdown introduced in January has been successful in reducing the epidemic and its impacts on the NHS. Unfortunately, COVID related deaths in Cheshire East have risen since the beginning of January and have plateaued with 42 deaths in the last week. As deaths follow the epidemic and hospital admission curve by a few weeks, a fall is expected in the next month.
- 4.9 Case rates in all age groups have steeply decreased. For under 25 year olds, the 19-24 age group has the highest rate at 217 per 100,000 as of 18 February, followed by those 17-18 at 75 per 100,000. All other age bands under 25 are

converging around 40 per 100, 000. Cheshire East is not seeing rises in school age infections reported in the national media. Rates are falling in all age bands for the 60+ group. The 20-29 and 30-39 groups have the highest rates at 221 and 164 per 100 000 respectively as of the 19 February.

- 4.10 Covid-19 infections linked to schools in both staff and pupils continue to fall. Whilst the National Lockdown has closed schools for the majority, nurseries and special provision have remained open, and all schools remain open for the children of key workers and vulnerable children. At 15 February, there were 13 pupils and 26 staff with current positive tests making 23 schools with positive cases. While evidence suggests that transmission amongst school age children increases during term-time it is difficult to quantify the level of transmission within schools compared to other settings. The risk of infection from behaviours and contacts within schools cannot be separated from that taking place outside of schools as detailed in the paper linked below.

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/948617/s0998-tfc-update-to-4-november-2020-paper-on-children-schools-transmission.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/948617/s0998-tfc-update-to-4-november-2020-paper-on-children-schools-transmission.pdf)

A new ECDC report from late December reinforces the messages from the SAGE paper about being unable to quantify transmission rate in schools:

<https://www.ecdc.europa.eu/en/publications-data/children-and-school-settings-covid-19-transmission>

Infection prevention and control within Care Homes and the weekly testing of care home staff has helped detect people who may not have symptoms and as a result reduces the risk of a serious outbreak. Adult social care data from 19 February showed 18 care homes with 2 or more cases.

- 4.11 Financial support for Local Authorities at Local COVID Alert Level Medium and High is to fund the following activities:
- a. Targeted testing for hard-to-reach groups out of scope of other testing programmes.
  - b. Additional contact tracing.
  - c. Enhanced communication and marketing e.g. towards hard-to-reach groups and other localised messaging.
  - d. Delivery of essentials for those in self-isolation.
  - e. Targeted interventions for specific sections of the local community and workplaces.
  - f. Harnessing capacity within local sectors (voluntary, academic, commercial).
  - g. Extension/introduction of specialist support (behavioural science, bespoke comms).

- h. Additional resource for compliance with, and enforcement of, restrictions and guidance.

**5. Update and by exception reporting on Council actions**

- 5.1 Cheshire East Council continues to respond to the Coronavirus pandemic. At the same time the Council has continued to strive to:
- deliver essential local services
  - protect our most vulnerable people
  - support our communities and local businesses.
- 5.2 A summary of the key changes since the February update that have continued to be delivered by the Council is provided below.
- 5.3 *Test and Trace and Outbreak Management* - In total, between the national and local contact tracing teams, as well as Cheshire & Merseyside Hub, 96% of positive cases are successfully closed in Cheshire East.
- 5.4 The TTCE Programme team are looking to pilot an enhanced contact tracing model in March to support the local contact tracing team. This pilot will utilise the Cheshire East Swab Squad and will involve deploying a small number of 'door knockers' to try and contact those individuals who have not been successfully contacted by telephone. Risk profiling will be undertaken to establish which individuals should be contacted by this team. If this is successful, it will be fully implemented in March 2021. Discussions are also underway with Cheshire Constabulary as an ultimate escalation point to refer cases to if the team are aware or concerned that an individual is not self-isolating.
- 5.5 The Cheshire East Swab Squad was established on Monday 11 January 2021 and is comprised of 11 individuals, including 2 team leaders, who have been trained to undertake lateral flow testing (LFT) in Cheshire East. They are an emergency response team who can respond to support with COVID outbreaks or areas/settings of concern and have also been undertaking LFT for priority cohorts and internal frontline staff during the lockdown period. The team also train other organisations to undertake LFT and distribute kits on a regular basis. The team are currently supporting over 65 organisations in Cheshire East. Alongside this testing team, the TTCE Programme team are looking to roll out a range of other LFT initiatives in March as part of a large de-escalation programme for general population testing as lockdown restrictions ease. This will include a pharmacy model, to enable participating pharmacies across Cheshire East to do LFT, and the implementation of a Dynamic Response Team who will manage several mobile LFT sites across Cheshire East. The

TTCE Programme team are also working closely with DHSC to hopefully pilot a dual use testing site at Crewe.

- 5.6 *Covid-19 Mass Vaccination* – Cheshire East received its first supplies of the Pfizer vaccine at the end of December 2020 and has subsequently received supplies of the Oxford Astra Zeneca vaccine. Since then our two local hospitals and our GP surgeries have been rolling out the local vaccination programme to the priority groups identified by national policy. Thanks to their efforts and those of the many volunteers who have assisted the sessions, vaccination coverage for the first four groups on this list has been successful with over 95% coverage in groups 1-3 and over 85% coverage in group 4. From 15 February the focus of the programme has moved to priority groups 5 and 6. This includes adults with significant longer term health conditions.
- 5.7 On 17 February a Mass Vaccination Centre opened at Alderley Park Science Centre. The centre will provide the additional capacity needed for the later phases of the programme, including the second doses of the vaccinations. Due to the success of the local campaign, the borough had a nationally determined reduction in its vaccine supplies to enable other areas of the country to catch up. Work continues to enable any eligible person from groups 1-4 who missed the initial call to be vaccinated, including any social care staff.
- 5.8 The Government set a target for all persons within priority cohorts 1 – 4 of the Covid-19 Vaccination Deployment programme to be offered their first dose of the vaccine by mid-February. Care home staff and residents are in Priority Cohort 1. At the time of writing, data obtained from care homes suggest that 92% of care home residents have been vaccinated and 72% of care home staff, although it should be noted that the data has not been verified by Health colleagues. Vaccinations in two homes were delayed because of active outbreaks. A survey of care providers is currently underway to understand the reasons why some staff are reluctant to have the vaccine.
- 5.9 The Council has taken a prominent role alongside CCG colleagues in offering vaccinations to frontline Health and Social Care workers, as defined by the NHS Green Book on Immunisations, who form part of Priority Cohort 2. This includes some Council staff as well as frontline staff working in CQC registered and non-registered care agencies, personal assistants as well as others working with clinically vulnerable people such as some Housing and Children’s Providers.
- 5.10 The Council is now required to report on the number of frontline Health and Social Care workers eligible for the vaccination, the numbers offered the vaccination and the number known to have had the first dose. Out of 1,704 CEC staff invited for the vaccination, it is known that at least 1,299 had received

the first dose by 11 February 2021 with data still to be submitted from some managers.

5.11 *Communities – Clinically Extremely Vulnerable (CEV) Support: People Helping People* was a service created by Cheshire East Council which works collaboratively with new and existing Voluntary, Community, Faith and Social Enterprise (VCFSE) sector partners and local volunteers to channel community-based support to meet the needs of our residents. This service is quickly becoming recognised amongst all residents across the borough as an essential community service. Some key recent updates associated with this service are as follows:

5.11.1 The Shielding guidance with the ‘Stay at Home’ message for the Clinically Extremely Vulnerable became effective on the reintroduction of the National Lockdown on 5 January 2021. 17,500 residents in Cheshire East that had underlying health issues were contacted by MHCLG informing them to take extra precautions and that if they require additional support to contact their Local Authority.

5.11.2 By the 15 February, 1,234 residents who asked for support were contacted through the Council’s People Helping People service, with the main request being linked to accessing food. During the calls to residents, other support needs were identified which often related to mental health, social isolation, fuel poverty and digital exclusion.

5.11.3 On 15 February, an additional 1.7 million people in England were added to the list of people advised to shield due to new criteria being added to identify those who may be clinically extremely vulnerable (CEV). This increased the number of people being asked to shield across England to 3.9 million. The new additions have been included as a new predictive risk model is being used to help clinicians identify adults with multiple risk factors that make them more vulnerable to Covid-19. This is called the QCovid algorithm. The algorithm takes into account ethnicity, sex registered at birth, BMI, medical conditions, and other socio-economic factors. In Cheshire East, 2,613 individuals aged between 18 and 70, have been added to the Shielded Patient List which will prioritise them in receiving a vaccination. Similar figures for the 70+ cohort are expected to be also added to the Shielded Patient List week commencing 1 March. Shielding for the new and existing cohort was extended from 21 February until 31 March.

5.11.4 MHCLG have stated that the funding per head of CEV population will remain the same to support Councils with additional capacity to meet the expected increased demand.

- 5.12 *Adult Social Care* - The Commissioning Team have provided significant support for the Adult Social Care Market during the Covid-19 pandemic to ensure market stability and the safe service delivery and provision of care for the residents of Cheshire East. This includes Care Homes, Care at Home (Domiciliary Care), Complex Needs, Extra Care Housing and Supported Living schemes.
- 5.13 Given the latest national lockdown, in addition to winter pressures to support the domiciliary care market we will re-commence payment for commissioned care and not claw back hours that are undelivered due to COVID-19 pandemic.
- 5.14 Cheshire East has received the second tranche of funding from Round 2 of the Infection Control fund in January. This will support care providers to limit staff movement, support safe visiting among other workforce resilience and infection control measures. The second tranche of funding has been passported to providers in accordance with the guidance.
- 5.15 The Council has also received the Rapid Testing Fund at the end of January. 80% of the fund has been passported directly to care homes and the remaining 20% will be issued to Extra Care Housing and Supported Living locations in the borough to support the increased testing of staff.
- 5.16 The Workforce Capacity Grant has also been received in February and a plan submitted to the Department of Health and Social Care conforming how this will be utilised. Providers wishing to access this fund will be required to apply using a short application form.
- 5.17 All of the additional funding streams must be spent by 31 March 2021.
- 5.18 Commissioners have formalised, in partnership with Health colleagues across Cheshire, a hospital discharge pathway for patients who are being discharged to a care home. The pathway, which reflects latest national guidance, is designed to provide guidance and assurance for care home providers. A Cheshire wide webinar was delivered to care homes on the 14 January 2021. The 'Working Together for Safe Transfers and Recovery' webinar was delivered in Partnership with Cheshire CCG, Infection Prevention control and Public Health. There were over 45 care homes who attended the webinar and feedback has been very positive particularly from providers who have adopted the hospital pathway.
- 5.19 A multi-agency Communications Task and Finish group has been established to co-ordinate and enhance joint communications between Cheshire East and Cheshire West and Chester Councils, Cheshire CCG, and other Health colleagues. This will support and supplement local ongoing communication methods such as monthly webinars, Mutual Aid calls and Provider briefings.

- 5.20 Whole home testing continues with care home residents and staff. This has proved effective in identifying asymptomatic staff members at an early stage enabling them to self-isolate to prevent onward transmission in the care home. Additional changes are to be made to coronavirus outbreak testing in care homes from Monday 22 February. The guidance from the Department of Health and Social Care has been issued to all care homes across the Borough and officers will work closely with homes to ensure the changes are implemented in a timely manner.
- 5.21 Care homes have now fully adopted the requirement to undertake Lateral Flow Device (LFD) for their workforce. This testing method compliments the current whole home testing programme that is in place within each home. LFD training webinars have been delivered to care at home providers and are scheduled in March for complex care providers.
- 5.22 Local care home visiting guidance has been revised to reflect the national requirements. Where possible, care homes are continuing to facilitate safe visiting of relatives and family members. Public Health and the Quality Assurance team are working closely with care homes to ensure they are doing all they can to support safe visiting arrangements in care homes for family members and relatives.
- 5.23 Commissioners are part of the Social Care Employment partnership task and finish group that is being led by Skills for Care. The focus of the group is to explore how to support career promotion and virtual meaningful work experience for people across Cheshire East provider services.
- 5.24 Infection Prevention Control Service (IPC) and the Care Quality Commission have undertaken focused IPC visits to a number of care homes across the Borough. The feedback and reporting detail from both agencies has been very positive in relation to the effective management of the homes outbreak IPC management plans and process they have in place.
- 5.25 The Quality Assurance Team continue to undertake weekly contact calls to all care homes across the Borough. The purpose of this contact call is to undertake a risk management assessment and seek assurance of the effective ongoing safe service delivery for residents. A care home visiting schedule has now been developed and Quality Assurance Officers will be undertaking onsite visits to homes starting from March 2021.
- 5.26 The Local Authority have been supplied with some PPE via the Local Resilience Forum (LRF) and the Department for Health and Social Care (DHSC) since the 24 March 2020. This arrangement with the LRF has been extended to the end of June, with the Council receiving fortnightly deliveries of PPE directly to our offices in Sandbach on a fortnightly basis. The Council continue to distribute

PPE to eligible organisations across Cheshire East. So far, the Council has distributed just under 5 million items of PPE locally.

- 5.27 PPE stock has been locally purchased and we have a sufficient supply in stores. As part of the Council's recovery and outbreak planning, we will continue to supply providers PPE on a mutual aid basis as and when required.
- 5.28 *Children's Services* – Our new interim Director of Children's Services (DCS), Ged Rowney, started at the beginning of February 2021, to maximise strategic capacity within Children's Services. This role will support services to continue to prioritise outcomes for children and young people while also responding to the changing demands and challenges as a result of the pandemic. This is an interim arrangement for the next six months while we work on developing a long-term structure that will enable us to deliver our ambitious plans for children and young people and the Council's Corporate Plan.
- 5.29 We know that for some vulnerable children and young people, attending education or an early years setting increases their safety. At the start of school closedown to all pupils in January, we assessed all the children and young people known to our services and determined which would be safer by attending education or a setting. We developed an individual plan for each child who was not attending to mitigate this risk and to encourage them to attend. We are continuing to monitor the children are not attending to ensure effective support is in place. Bi-weekly safeguarding partnership meetings continue to take place, and vulnerable children who are not in education continue to be a priority for the partnership. There is a shared partnership response to safeguarding all children, especially as some vulnerable children and young people may be less visible at this time.
- 5.30 Cheshire East has been asked to speak at an LGA conference on how we have mitigated the risk to babies and children under two throughout the pandemic, which is recognition of our work in this area.
- 5.31 *Children's Social Care* – We are continuing to see increased complexity in demand to domestic abuse services. Frontline workers have received vaccinations, however our foster carers have not as they are not in a priority group (as determined nationally). We feel it is important that they are prioritised for vaccination to enable children and young people to continue to access family homes and to experience stability in where they are living.
- 5.32 Rapid progress has been made in permanency planning for children, and our cohort of cared for children is reducing. We have now achieved 23 adoptions this year.

- 5.33 *Prevention and Early Help* – Child Health Hubs – a joint venture with the NHS to enable families to access medical clinics and support in a community setting rather than needing to attend a hospital – are now running from two of our Children’s Centres. The Jaundice Baby Clinic and Unsettled Infant Clinic are running from Monks Coppenhall, the Child Phlebotomy Clinic is running from Broken Cross. We have had positive feedback from parents on these clinics, and we put in a proposal bid to Nesta to be a centre of excellence for early years provision based on our work around Child Health Hubs and integration with the NHS.
- 5.34 A new mental health training pilot is taking place for Prevention staff to support practitioners working with children, young people and parents and carers who are experiencing mental health issues, particularly as the challenges of the pandemic have had an impact on residents’ mental health and wellbeing.
- 5.35 Joint youth patrols between the Youth Support Service and PCSOs have been taking place during lockdown to disrupt young people from mixing in groups.
- 5.36 Over 21,500 vouchers have been distributed to families and young adults in need through the Winter Grant Scheme since the beginning of December. The grant is to offer practical support in the form of food and utilities payments. This has included provision of food vouchers for families eligible for free school meals over the Christmas period and February half term. In January, the scheme was extended to include support for vulnerable families to replace or access white goods. The scheme will continue until the end of March. A referral process is in place for professionals to refer families who need this support which is working well.
- 5.37 *Education and Skills* – Attendance at Cheshire East schools has now stabilised (over 7,800 pupils were attending as at 8 February), and we are confident that the right children are in school, however we continue to monitor attendance on a daily basis.
- 5.38 The Prime Minister set out the 'roadmap' for the easing of restrictions on 22 February and confirmed during this announcement that all students would return to schools and colleges on 8 March. Planning is taking place to ensure we are ready to support schools with reopening.
- 5.39 Schools and colleges across Cheshire East are continuing to carry out Lateral Flow Tests on their staff twice a week. Staff within our Special Schools and those working on a one to one basis with clinically vulnerable children have had Covid vaccines as a significant number of children and young people they work with are at increased risk from the virus. Positive Covid cases within schools had reduced before half term. Media messages were shared over half term to encourage people to stay safe and stick to the rules to support schools to open

safely after half term to vulnerable pupils and children of keyworkers and to enable Cheshire East schools to open safely from 8 March.

5.40 The Department for Education (DfE) have asked us to share our training package for schools on supporting children's mental health and wellbeing on return to education as an example of good practice.

5.41 We are piloting a programme of support for parents to support children with phonics and reading at home and this has been well received to date.

5.42 *Business Support*

The Council is continuing to support those businesses required to close due to lockdown or similar measures through distribution of grants. The table below provides a breakdown of the allocation of the current grants available to businesses.

In council is continuing to engage with businesses throughout this period and is developing longer term support plans for the local economy to support economic recovery.

Total received @ 22 Feb 2021:		
	Applications Approved	Payments Made
<b>Mandatory Grants via Rates:</b>	<b>14,961</b>	<b>£ 28,319,810</b>
LRSG (open)	3,192	£ 2,255,235
LRSG (closed)#1 November	2,821	£ 4,524,324
LRSG (sector)	3	£ 2,286
CSP (wet led)	254	£ 254,000
LRSG (closed)#2 December	5,890	£ 7,786,965
CBLP	2,801	£ 13,497,000
<b>Discretionary Grants:</b>		
ARG	1,686	£ 3,199,857
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>16,647</b>	<b>£ 31,519,667</b>

5.43 *Leisure Centres* – the third lockdown is having further significant impact on Everybody Sport & Recreation (ESAR), the charitable leisure trust established by the Council to operate its leisure centres, with income from memberships and participation reduced to zero during periods of closure. The Council has applied for financial support through the £100m National Leisure Recovery Fund, originally launched to enable the reopening of public leisure facilities following the second national lockdown in November 2020. However, this funding is unlikely to be sufficient to support ESAR during the third lockdown and to recover in the medium term. If the council wishes to ensure that the Council's leisure centres are able to reopen following the latest lockdown and

that the trust is able to recover to a sustainable financial position during 2021/22, the Council will be required to provide additional financial support.

- 5.44 *Enforcement* – Over a two-week period in January, officers from Regulatory Services made visits to more than 1,000 businesses to offer them support and guidance to help keep their staff and customers safe. 97% of businesses were fully compliant with the current government restrictions to control the spread of the virus. Of those that were not fully compliant, these were for minor issues such as incorrect signage and were addressed through further advice and guidance. Further visits and patrols will take place to ensure compliance remains high.

## 6. **Implications of the Recommendations**

### 6.1 **Legal Implications**

6.1.1 The Coronavirus Act 2020 has been supported by a multiplicity of regulations which provide a legal basis for enforcement etc. Supported by copious and frequent guidance notes which purports to assist in the interpretation of the regulations.

6.1.2 Any necessary urgent decisions made by the Council in response to the pandemic have followed the relevant process set out in the Constitution.

6.1.3 As amendments are made to adapt to changing social circumstances, infection rates, new COVID variants and the vaccination programme, the definitive legal position is time-specific and subject to frequent change.

6.1.4 The tier restriction regulations (The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (All Tiers) (England) Regulations 2020) came into force on the 2 December 2020 and 4 substantive amendment regulations were made in rapid succession on 16, 19, 26 and 31 December 2020. The lockdown regulations came into force on 5 January 2021 which provide the legal framework for the implementation and enforcement of national restrictions. The key elements are the restrictions on individual freedom to associate, restrictions on travel, closure of non-essential retail and entertainment venues.

6.1.5 There have been significant new regulations prohibiting international travel, quarantine provisions for overseas visitors, increased fines for unlawful gatherings and regulations designed to clarify and extend the enforcement provisions, powers of police constables and PCSOs which have been extended from 2 Feb to 31 March 2021.

6.1.6 The Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings)

(England and Wales) Regulations 2020 remain in force and make provision for the conduct of local authority meetings up until 7<sup>th</sup> May 2021.

6.1.7 The vaccination programme success is likely to result in changes to the regulatory regime. The announcements made on 22 February 2021 setting out a 'roadmap' to ease lockdown restrictions in England will require crystallising onto a regulatory regime and any legislative changes will be disseminated as soon as reasonably practicable.

## 6.2 Financial Implications

6.2.1 The potential financial impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic are regularly reported to members via Cabinet with additional briefings provided via Audit and Governance and Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committees and Member written briefings.

6.2.2 This report presents the latest financial position and identifies Government funding already provided or claimed to date. Significant levels of uncertainty remain over the final projected financial implications for local authorities and the approach to funding costs and income losses associated with the pandemic, continue to change as the severity of the pandemic has changed. This creates issues with producing an accurate forecast of financial consequences compared to the Council's Medium-Term Financial Strategy.

6.2.3 The returns to Central Government identify three main types of financial pressure:

(i) **Un-ringfenced Expenditure and Income Losses**

The most recent forecast of financial pressures from COVID-19 on the Council's 2020/21 budget for Services is £34.1m. The figures are under frequent review. Grant funding to support expenditure and income losses is detailed in Table 1 below, in a format consistent with previous reports. £25m of un-ringfenced Support Grant has been allocated to date for the 2019/20 and 2020/21 financial years; and £3.5m has also been claimed so far under the Income Compensation Scheme. The Government also announced that £100m had been top sliced from national grant provision totals to provide support to keeping leisure centres open; and a claims process to access this funding is in progress. Table 1a identifies funding announcements provided as part of the Spending Review 2020, which will feature as part of the management of COVID related financial impacts in 2021/22 and potentially beyond.

**(ii) Collection Fund**

Potential losses on the Collection Fund relate to Council Tax and Business Rates income. The Government requires councils to spread the deficit over the next three years, although a compensation scheme has been announced, to cover up to 75% of irrecoverable losses. Cash shortfalls in-year are currently expected to be in the region of £10.9m, but this may rise as a consequence of the most recent national lockdown. The Council will continue to recover late payments where practicable, however some losses will be permanent; for example, where businesses have ceased trading, individuals are now entitled to Council Tax Support Payments, or where growth in the tax base has slowed down compared to forecasts.

**(iii) Ringfenced Expenditure**

Table 2 provides information about the activities the Council has been undertaking which have received specific Government funding.

**Table 1: The approach to un-ringfenced funding for 2020/21 has changed over time**

<b>Announced</b>	<b>Funding for CEC</b>	<b>Notes</b>
<b>(England total)</b>		
<b>19<sup>th</sup> March</b>	£9.150m (£1.6bn)	Adult Social Care based payment
<b>18<sup>th</sup> April</b>	£10.539m (£1.6bn)	Payment per capita to help reflect lost income
<b>Sub-Total</b>	<b>£19.689m (£3.2bn)</b>	
<b>2<sup>nd</sup> July</b>	£2.712m (£0.5bn)	Adult Social Care / deprivation based payment
<b>12<sup>th</sup> October</b>	£2.578m (£1bn)	To provide resources for winter. This tranche of funding has been used to equalise all payments using the same approach as the July payment, now referred to as the COVID Formula.
<b>Total</b>	<b>£24.979m (of £4.6bn)</b>	

<b>2<sup>nd</sup> July</b>	<b>£6m</b> (£n/k) for Income Compensation	Estimated total – subject to claims process. £2.1m claimed so far, in 1 <sup>st</sup> of 3 data collection rounds  Compensation at 75p in £1 for losses above 5% of sales, fees and charges budgets
<b>2<sup>nd</sup> July</b>	<b>£nil</b> for Collection Fund	Compensation at 75p in £1 for losses (to be received in 2021/22); and defer residual Collection Fund deficit over 3yrs

**Table 1a: Un-ringfenced support announced for 2021/22**

<b>Announced</b>	<b>Funding for CEC</b>	<b>Notes</b>
<b>(England total)</b>		
<b>18<sup>th</sup> December</b>	£8.508m (£1.55bn)	5 <sup>th</sup> Tranche of Emergency Funding Grant
<b>18<sup>th</sup> December</b>	(£n/k) for Income Compensation	Sales, Fees & Charges compensation scheme extended for April-June 2021

6.2.4 Un-ringfenced government funding received to date as detailed in Table 1 (above) is currently **£25m, of which £1m was utilised in 2019/20**; and the income compensation scheme is anticipated to bring in **£6m**, if settled in full. There is potential that there could be a shortfall in funding compared to the overall financial impact on the Council. This is a changing position and the MTFs and TQR reflect that costs that are deferred, such as capital spending impacts (of £8.7m) and Collection Fund losses which are managed through the Collection Fund Earmarked Reserve. This position will be subject to ongoing analysis and review as part of the outturn reporting.

6.2.5 Mindful of the possibility for further expenditure/net cost pressures going forward, it will be important to continue to review, understand and mitigate the potential shortfall between additional financial impacts and the funding provided by Government. The Council continues to engage in several activities:

1. Managing and reviewing the financial forecasts in response to guidance and the local response to the emergency, and how this affects the Council's revenue budget.
2. Further analysing the Government proposals to compensate losses from Sales, Fees and Charges.

3. Analysing the level of Collection Fund losses across the three financial years 2021/22 to 2023/24; and
4. Reviewing the consequences of funding shortfalls on the Council's Capital Programme and how this impact on the Council's long-term funding of capital expenditure.

**Table 2: Specific Grants are valued at c.£240m**

Activity (National Total)	Spending forecast*	Funding	Variance
Test & Trace (£300m)	£1,533,331	£1,533,331	£0
Towns Fund (Capital £5bn)	£750,000	£750,000	£0
Dedicated Home to School and College Transport (£67m)	£625,506	£625,506	£0
Rough Sleeping/ Next Steps Accommodation (£3.2m+£10m) **	£157,648	£68,400	£89,248
Active Travel (£225m)	£743,050	£743,050	£0
Re-Opening High Streets (£50m)	£339,533	£339,533	£0
Culture Recovery Fund (£1.57bn)	£180,000	£180,000	£0
Infection Control in Care Homes (£600m)	£5,320,292	£5,320,292	£0
Infection Control in Care Homes (£546m) 2 <sup>nd</sup> Tranche	£4,712,872	£4,712,872	£0
Business Grants (£12.3bn)***	£87,445,000 (spending to date)	£95,514,000	Awaiting guidance
Discretionary Business Grants (£617m)***	£4,357,000 (spending to date)	£4,372,250	
Local Restrictions Business	£59,181,176	£59,181,176	

Support Grants (£3.3bn) ***			
Christmas Support Payment (Wet-led pubs)	£236,800	£236,800	
Lockdown Grants (Businesses) (£4.6bn)	tba	tba	
Business Rate Holiday (£10.7bn)	£62,339,000	£60,561,068	£1,777,932
Council Tax Hardship (£500m)	£2,691,326	£2,062,635	£628,691
Local Bus Network (£167m)	£229,632	£229,632	£0
Emergency Assistance Food and basic necessities (£63m)	£326,293	£326,293	£0
Contain Outbreak Management Fund (£per/head, based on Tier) (3 tranches to 29 Dec)	£3,951,278	£3,951,278	£0
School Condition Grant (Capital) (£n/k)	£589,604	£589,604	£0
Wellbeing for Education Return (£8m)	£55,403	£55,403	£0
Compliance and Enforcement Grant (£60m)	£158,572	£158,572	£0
Bus Service Support Grant (CBSSG) Restart scheme (£n/k)	£671,101	£675,474	(£4,373)
Self Isolation Test and Trace Support Payment (n/k)	£310,141	£310,141	£0
Clinically Extremely Vulnerable Individuals (£32m)	£210,000	£210,000	£0
Covid Winter Grant Scheme (£170m)	£880,472	£880,472	£0
Domestic Abuse Building Capacity Fund (£6m)	£50,000	£50,000	£0

Leisure Centres (£100m)	£n/k	£n/k (pending claims process)	£n/k
Workforce Capacity Fund (£120m)	£725,319	£725,319	£0
Rapid Testing Fund (£149m)	£1,361,266	£1,361,266	£0
Vaccine Roll-out Funding (n/k)	tba	tba	£0

\* Note: where 'Spending Forecast' equals 'Funding' this does not necessarily indicate the full extent of spending to date but does demonstrate the expectation that funding will be fully utilised.

\*\* Whilst spending in relation to Rough Sleeping/ Accommodation exceeds specific Covid grant funding in this respect, the balance is being met by other Housing grants/ reserves, and as such there will not be an additional pressure on the Revenue Account.

\*\*\* Business Grant scheme funding has been combined to date. Scheme totals can also vary if payments are subject to review or appeal.

6.2.6 Further specific grants may become payable and require local administration in response to the emerging status of the pandemic response.

6.2.7 LGA and CCN collate returns from all member councils, though the types of financial pressure vary from council to council depending on their circumstances. For example, whether they provide social care, have a strong tourist economy, or the extent of deprivation. The overall impacts are similar across councils and Cheshire East Council is not an outlier. The Council will continue to support lobbying by the LGA and CCN in their aim to ensure fair settlement of the financial pressures facing local authorities.

### 6.3 Policy Implications

6.3.1 COVID-19 is having a wide-ranging impact on many policies. Any significant implications for the Council's policies are outlined in this report.

### 6.4 Equality Implications

- 6.4.1 Implications of any changes and restrictions will continue to be reviewed on a regular basis.
- 6.4.2 Vaccinations are prioritising older people (65 and older) and those who are clinically vulnerable. The Government has published the QCovid risk calculator created by the University of Oxford to support the NHS coronavirus response. It is an evidence-based model that uses a range of factors such as age, sex, ethnicity, and existing medical conditions to predict risk of death or hospitalisation from COVID-19. The model is being used to fast-track vaccinations and encourage more at-risk people to shield until 31 March 2021.
- 6.4.3 As mentioned in paragraph 5.36, over 21,500 vouchers were distributed over the Christmas period to families and young adults in need through the Winter Grant Scheme. The grant is to offer practical support in the form of food and utilities payments. The scheme will continue until the end of March
- 6.4.4 We carried out individual risk assessments for staff with protected characteristics, particularly in relation to BAME colleagues and staff with a disability and are issuing regular reminders to keep these under review as circumstances may change.

## **6.5 Human Resources Implications**

- 6.5.1 The latest data on staff absences on 18 February 2021 are 28 (*34 last month*) staff self-isolating and working from home, 34 (*28 last month*) staff self-isolating and not working from home (role doesn't allow), 9 (*27 last month*) Covid-related absences, and 106 (*91 last month*) non-Covid-related absences.
- 6.5.2 Staff vaccinations: as at 18 February 1858 staff are eligible for vaccinations due to their role. Of these, 80.6% have had a first vaccination.
- 6.5.3 There continues to be regular communication with staff and good co-operation with the Trade Unions.

## **6.6 Risk Management Implications**

- 6.6.1 Risk registers have been maintained as part of the Council's response to date and the plans for recovery. Business Continuity Plans are being kept under review and plans have been tested against concurrent risks of EU Exit and winter pressures which have materialised in the last month.

## **6.7 Rural Communities Implications**

6.7.1 COVID-19 is having an impact across all communities, including rural communities. The support for small businesses will support rural business.

## **6.8 Implications for Children & Young People/Cared for Children**

6.8.1 There are implications for children and young people. There are implications for schools, early help and prevention and children's social care which are summarised in the report.

## **6.9 Public Health Implications**

6.9.1. COVID-19 is a global pandemic and public health emergency. There are implications for Cheshire East which are summarised in the report.

## **6.10 Climate Change Implications**

6.10.1 There have been positive benefits of fewer cars on the road. This includes most staff who have been working from home. There has also been lower demand for heating/lighting offices.

## **7 Ward Members Affected**

All Members.

## **8 Consultation & Engagement**

8.1 Formal consultation activities were initially paused due to the lockdown restrictions. However, we are now undertaking all consultations following a review on a case by case basis to ensure that we can continue to operate effectively.

## **9 Access to Information**

9.1 Comprehensive reports on COVID-19 can be found on the Council's and the Government's websites.

## **10 Contact Information**

Any questions relating to this report should be directed to the following officers:

Frank Jordan, Executive Director Place and Deputy Chief Executive

Jane Burns, Executive Director Corporate Services

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APPENDIX 1 – STEP 1 TO 4

<b>STEP 1</b> <b>8 March</b>	<b>STEP 2</b> <b>No earlier than 12 April</b>		
<p align="center"><b>29 March</b></p>	<p align="center">At least 5 weeks after Step 1</p>		
<p> <b>EDUCATION</b></p> <p><b>8 MARCH</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Schools and colleges open for all students</li> <li>Practical Higher Education courses</li> </ul>	<p> <b>EDUCATION</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>As previous step</li> </ul>		
<p> <b>SOCIAL CONTACT</b></p> <table border="0"> <tr> <td data-bbox="252 629 478 824"> <p><b>8 MARCH</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Exercise and recreation outdoors with household or one other person</li> <li>Household only indoors</li> </ul> </td> <td data-bbox="502 629 729 801"> <p><b>29 MARCH</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Rule of 6 or two households outdoors</li> <li>Household only indoors</li> </ul> </td> </tr> </table>	<p><b>8 MARCH</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Exercise and recreation outdoors with household or one other person</li> <li>Household only indoors</li> </ul>	<p><b>29 MARCH</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Rule of 6 or two households outdoors</li> <li>Household only indoors</li> </ul>	<p> <b>SOCIAL CONTACT</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Rule of 6 or two households outdoors</li> <li>Household only indoors</li> </ul>
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<p> <b>BUSINESS &amp; ACTIVITIES</b></p> <table border="0"> <tr> <td data-bbox="252 927 478 1039"> <p><b>8 MARCH</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Wraparound care, including sport, for all children</li> </ul> </td> <td data-bbox="502 927 729 1249"> <p><b>29 MARCH</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Organised outdoor sport (children and adults)</li> <li>Outdoor sport and leisure facilities</li> <li>All outdoor children's activities</li> <li>Outdoor parent &amp; child group (up to 15 parents)</li> </ul> </td> </tr> </table>	<p><b>8 MARCH</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Wraparound care, including sport, for all children</li> </ul>	<p><b>29 MARCH</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Organised outdoor sport (children and adults)</li> <li>Outdoor sport and leisure facilities</li> <li>All outdoor children's activities</li> <li>Outdoor parent &amp; child group (up to 15 parents)</li> </ul>	<p> <b>BUSINESS &amp; ACTIVITIES</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>All retail</li> <li>Personal care</li> <li>Libraries &amp; community centres</li> <li>Most outdoor attractions</li> <li>Indoor leisure inc. gyms (individual use only)</li> <li>Self-contained accommodation</li> <li>All children's activities</li> <li>Outdoor hospitality</li> <li>Indoor parent &amp; child groups (up to 15 parents)</li> </ul>
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<p> <b>TRAVEL</b></p> <table border="0"> <tr> <td data-bbox="252 1368 478 1458"> <p><b>8 MARCH</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Stay at home</li> <li>No holidays</li> </ul> </td> <td data-bbox="502 1368 729 1458"> <p><b>29 MARCH</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Minimise travel</li> <li>No holidays</li> </ul> </td> </tr> </table>	<p><b>8 MARCH</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Stay at home</li> <li>No holidays</li> </ul>	<p><b>29 MARCH</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Minimise travel</li> <li>No holidays</li> </ul>	<p> <b>TRAVEL</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Domestic overnight stays (household only)</li> <li>No international holidays</li> </ul>
<p><b>8 MARCH</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Stay at home</li> <li>No holidays</li> </ul>	<p><b>29 MARCH</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Minimise travel</li> <li>No holidays</li> </ul>		
<p> <b>EVENTS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Funerals (30)</li> <li>Weddings and wakes (6)</li> </ul>	<p> <b>EVENTS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Funerals (30)</li> <li>Weddings, wakes, receptions (15)</li> <li>Event pilots</li> </ul>		

APPENDIX 1 – STEP 1 TO 4

**STEP 3**

No earlier than 17 May

At least 5 weeks after Step 2



**EDUCATION**

- As previous step



**SOCIAL CONTACT**

- Maximum 30 people outdoors
- Rule of 6 or two households indoors (subject to review)



**BUSINESS & ACTIVITIES**

- Indoor hospitality
- Indoor entertainment and attractions
- Organised indoor sport (adult)
- Remaining accommodation
- Remaining outdoor entertainment (including performances)



**TRAVEL**

- Domestic overnight stays
- International travel (subject to review)



**EVENTS**

- Most significant life events (30)
- Indoor events: 1,000 or 50%
- Outdoor seated events: 10,000 or 25%
- Outdoor other events: 4,000 or 50%

**STEP 4**

No earlier than 21 June

At least 5 weeks after Step 3

All subject to review



**EDUCATION**

- As previous step



**SOCIAL CONTACT**

- No legal limit



**BUSINESS & ACTIVITIES**

- Remaining businesses, including nightclubs



**TRAVEL**

- Domestic overnight stays
- International travel



**EVENTS**

- No legal limit on life events
- Larger events



*Working for a brighter future together*

Key Decision Y

Date First  
Published: 9/2/21

## Cabinet

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**Date of Meeting:** 9 March 2021

**Report Title:** Dedicated Schools Grant Management Plan 2021/22 to 2024/25

**Portfolio Holder:** Cllr Kathryn Flavell, Children and Families

**Senior Officer:** Ged Rowney, Director of Children's Services

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### 1. Report Summary

- 1.1. Many local authorities are experiencing financial pressures from expenditure on pupils with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) significantly exceeding the funding provided via the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) high needs block.
- 1.2. Where there is an overspend, this is held on a DSG Reserve and carried forward to the next financial year. In a survey of councils conducted in October / November 2020 by the F40 Group, 69 (90%) of the 77 councils who responded expected a deficit DSG reserve at the end of 2020/21.
- 1.3. In three cases the gap between high needs funding and actual spend is expected to be greater than the total amount of high needs funding received (the three councils in question have high needs funding ranging from £25m to over £40m). A further 11 councils have a gap that is expected to exceed 40% of their high needs funding. As the funding shortfall is carried forward as a pressure the deficit can quickly escalate when activity exceeds annual funding.
- 1.4. This is becoming an issue for Cheshire East Council and is caused by the number of pupils with an education, health and care plan (EHCP) increasing significantly in volume, complexity and cost compared to much lower annual increases in funding levels. It is therefore important we act swiftly to put in place mitigations.

- 1.5. The Council is forecasting a DSG Reserve deficit of £7.8m (20% of high needs funding) by 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021. Therefore, the Council has taken immediate action to forecast the deficit going forward and implement mitigating actions to manage expenditure.
- 1.6. These actions include the development of the Access to SEND Services framework which is focused on strategies to manage demand by better meeting needs of children and young people earlier and the SEND Sufficiency Review which aims to increase local provision to both reduce costs and improve the experience for children and young people. Both these documents were approved by the SEND Partnership and will be published soon.
- 1.7. To help councils with managing and presenting their high needs spending the Department for Education (DfE) released a “DSG Management Plan” template in autumn 2020. This aims to bring all the strategies, issues and mitigating actions into one place.
- 1.8. Cheshire East Council has produced a local version of the DSG Management Plan. This is based on a series of assumptions for pupil numbers and average costs for each area of high needs spend and the impact of mitigations that can be introduced to give both the unmitigated and mitigated positions. A prudent approach has been adopted and therefore the forecasts are a worst case scenario.
- 1.9. As part of the completion of the Management Plan it is expected that there is consultation with key stakeholders. Subject to approval of the draft Plan then that process will begin in due course.
- 1.10. Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny has had some discussion of the plan and proposals at a dedicated meeting on 26<sup>th</sup> February 2021.
- 1.11. It is acknowledged there are also issues arising from the additional spending in terms of cashflow and the impact on the Council’s balance sheet. These issues are being discussed with the Council’s auditors and relevant Government departments.

## **2. Recommendations**

2.1. Cabinet is recommended to:

- 2.1.1. Note the issues with the level of DSG high needs funding received by the Council and the potential impact on the Council’s DSG Reserve in terms of the position before and after mitigations.

- 2.1.2. Approve the underlying assumptions and strategies in the Draft DSG Management Plan for 2021/22 to 2024/25.
- 2.1.3. Note the mitigations that have been included and the necessary steps to deliver those projects.
- 2.1.4. Agree the Draft DSG Management Plan 2021/22 to 2024/25 as a basis for consultation with key stakeholders.
- 2.1.5. Agree to an annual update of the DSG Management Plan to enable progress to be monitored leading to necessary adjustment to plans.

### **3. Reasons for Recommendations**

- 3.1. The Council is facing increasing levels of pressure from expenditure on pupils with SEND. This exceeds the DfE's funding allocations and has led to the Council's DSG Reserve being in a deficit position. The expectation is that the deficit cannot be recovered in the medium term under current arrangements.
- 3.2. The Council does not have any provision with its Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) to assist with DSG spending.
- 3.3. The DfE has released a DSG Management Plan template and the Council is expecting to be required to submit an approved plan to form the basis of discussions with the DfE on the intended actions and assumptions.
- 3.4. Such a plan needs to be approved by Cabinet and used for consultation with stakeholders to ensure they are aware of the issues and the actions required.

### **4. Other Options Considered**

- 4.1. The Council needs a Management Plan to engage with the DfE and stakeholders on the expenditure projections and mitigation projects for high needs expenditure.
- 4.2. A local version of the DfE template has been generated given the need to reflect the current methods of collating financial data and to allow a range of summary information to be held in a single document. The DfE template did not provide that flexibility.
- 4.3. The option of "do nothing" is not considered acceptable in this situation given the scale of the issues.

## 5. Background

### Additional Responsibilities

- 5.1. The Council has a legal duty to meet the needs of children with SEND under the Children and Families Act 2014.
- 5.2. The Council's responsibility was significantly increased by the Act to change to deliver services up to age 25. That change coupled with a significant increase in the volume of needs assessments being submitted has led to a 25% increase in EHCPs over the period April 2016 to March 2019.
- 5.3. Based on that trend and the growth in the level of needs assessments submitted plus EHCPs allocated in 2020/21, the number of EHCPs is forecast to nearly double from 2,738 (November 2020) to 5,003 by 2024/25 with an associated increase in expenditure as the Council has to meet identified needs.
- 5.4. The increase in EHCPs is being seen across the Borough and not specific to an area. An examination of type of need by area is underway.

### Funding Issues

- 5.5. High needs funding is not expected to increase at the same rate. High needs funding is provided by the DfE through the national high needs funding formula. The formula currently has a number of issues:
  - it does not fully reflect EHCP volumes,
  - it includes factors relating to deprivation which penalise Cheshire East and it is not clear how these are directly linked to high needs.
  - the total amount going through the formula has not been increased to acknowledged demand,
  - a review of the national formula has been signalled but that is several years away and may not provide any assistance.
- 5.6. For 2020/21 and 2021/22 the DfE has responded to the concerns raised by local authorities and provided above inflation increases in high needs funding of 8.5% and 10% respectively. This is positive news but is not yet matching demand and also leaving the four previous years without sufficient funding. The position from 2022/23 in terms of high needs funding is not yet known. It has been assumed at 3% per annum which is a prudent assumption.

- 5.7. This gap between expenditure and funding has taken the Council's DSG Reserve balance into a deficit position of -£2.6m at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2020. Based on the third quarter review forecasts reported to Cabinet on 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2021 this deficit balance will increase to -£7.6m at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021.
- 5.8. The forecasts based on expenditure data at the end of December 2020 reflect the same overall figure. This is broken down into:
- High Needs Pressure +£9m
- Early Years / Central Block underspend -£1.1m
- 5.9. This is based on indications are that the pressure has increased with the number of EHCPs nearing 3,000. However, underspending on early years has offset that increase.
- 5.10. It is important to note that there is a difference between the forecast DSG reserve balance of £7.6m for 2020/21 quoted here and the results from the management plan (which are based on numbers of pupils multiplied by average costs). The model has to use average costs but final 2020/21 outturn information will be used to update the plan. Overtime we will be able to adjust the average costs to ensure the management plan reflects the outturn.

### DSG Management Plan

- 5.11. The (DfE) has released a "DSG Management Plan" template to help councils present all the strategies, issues and mitigating actions into one place.
- 5.12. Cheshire East Council has produced a local version of the DSG Management Plan from 2021/22 to 2024/25. This is based on a series of assumptions for each area of high needs spend and the impact of mitigations that can be introduced to give both the unmitigated and mitigated positions. The unmitigated position is set out below:

	<i>Unmitigated Forecast</i>					4 year
	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	% Change
EHCPs	2,738	3,187	3,683	4,278	5,003	83%
Unmitigated Spend £m	50.0	57.2	66.0	77.4	92.3	85%
DSG Reserve £m *	-13.0	-26.5	-47.6	-78.7	-123.4	

\* Note - the 2020/21 DSG Reserve Balance quoted here is based on average costs rather than actuals and will be updated using the 2020/21 outturn in due course.

- 5.13. A key headline is that without mitigations the Council's DSG Reserve will have a potential deficit balance of £123m by 31<sup>st</sup> March 2025. As set out below, even after making challenging assumptions around new provision to ensure best value is achieved, without a substantial increase in DSG funding, the Council is facing a potential DSG Reserve deficit of £81m by 31<sup>st</sup> March 2025 on the **mitigated** position.
- 5.14. The mitigations contained within the plan will be taken forward and appropriate approvals will be requested as part of normal business.
- 5.15. The DSG Management Plan figures are based on the number of EHCPs multiplied by the average cost for each type of placement. This reflects a higher DSG Reserve deficit for 2020/21 of -£13m in the table. This difference to the DSG reserve balance is either a result of underspending on other areas of DSG, mainly early years, or suggests the Council is providing services at lower than average cost levels in some areas of the SEND service.
- 5.16. Given the existing shortfall plus future demand projections the expectation is that the deficit DSG Reserve balance cannot be recovered in the medium term.

### **Meeting SEND Needs**

- 5.17. The Council has a scaled approach to meeting the needs of pupils with EHCPs. This is outlined in the Council's SEN Toolkit and summarised as:
- SEND support in mainstream schools.
  - Mainstream school with additional support.
  - Resource provision within a mainstream school.
  - Special school.
  - Private / independent specialist provision.
- 5.18. This tiered approach is also matched in the increasing cost of each type of provision.
- 5.19. While the Council has to consider parental preference it has a finite amount of SEN places available in the borough and once these are full then options such as places in nearby local authorities or independent / private providers are considered. Other local authorities will also be looking to place pupils in Cheshire East Schools.

- 5.20. The level of need is determined by the SEND Panel based on the needs assessment information and draft EHCP. Schools can trigger a needs assessment at any point and the Panel decision will determine the best local setting for the child.
- 5.21. A key part of the Council's plan to reduce high need spend is by increasing the Council's own level of provision. Certain elements of this work have already begun and these are factored into the unmitigated position.
- 5.22. The Council recognises that additional work is required and the plan outlines the following measures. It is important to note that the expansion of local provision also brings significant levels of additional costs, however, these are invest-to-save projects when set against the target reduction in the forecast DSG deficit of £42m.

## **The Mitigations**

### **Mainstream Provision**

- Improvements to SEND support specifically around autism and education psychology.
- Introduce additional Enhanced Mainstream Provision.

### **Resource Provision**

- Additional RP places in mainstream primary and secondary schools.

### **Special School Provision**

- Additional special school places.
- Introduce three additional special schools / expand existing sites.
- Additional Supported Internship places.

### **Private / Independent Specialist Provision.**

- Reduce the use of these settings where possible as a result of the increase in the Council's own provision.
- Challenge price rises and not supporting independent school requests for annual inflationary increases unless evidence based.

### **Further Education**

- Additional Supported Internship places to assist transition to adulthood.

- 5.23. These are in addition to an annual line by line budget review of high needs to establish if any reductions to spend could be achieved.

- 5.24. Further details of the DSG Management Plan and the impact of the mitigations are contained within **Appendix 1**.
- 5.25. The impact of the mitigations is complex as it reflects the new costs and resulting savings compared to higher cost provision. Inevitably some of the mitigations impact on more than one area.

### Closing the Funding Gap

- 5.26. If the mitigations are delivered within the timescale in the plan it will result in savings with a total benefit on the reserve of £42m by 2024/24, however that still leaves a potential DSG Reserve deficit of £81.2m at March 2025.

	2020/21	<i>Mitigated Forecast</i>			2024/25	4 year % Change
		2021/22	2022/23	2023/24		
EHCPs	2,738	3,063	3,483	4,054	4,748	73%
Mitigated Spend £m	49.9	53.4	57.8	64.3	75.3	51%
DSG Reserve £m *	-12.9	-22.7	-35.5	-53.5	-81.2	

\* Note - the 2020/21 DSG Reserve Balance quoted here is based on average costs rather than actuals and will be updated using the 2020/21 outturn in due course.

- 5.27. Further illustrations of how to close the gap are set out below however, none of these are realistic options:
- funding from high needs would have to increase by 20% per annum from 2021/22 to 2024/25 to start breaking even, or
  - EHCP volumes would have reduce by over 600 down to 2,700 in 2022/23 to match funding, or
  - Significant reductions of £3,600 per EHCP would be needed to reach an average cost level of £12,900 per EHCP in order to match **expected funding levels in 2022/23** . Further reductions in average cost would be required in 2022/23 to 2024/25 to match available funding.
- 5.28. It is unlikely these would be possible and further work is needed to assess options and engage with the DfE.
- 5.29. As further context, the table below sets out the 2024/25 DSG reserve deficit using greater annual increases in high needs funding:

<b>Impact of High Needs Funding Increases</b>		
	<b>Mitigated</b>	<b>Un-mitigated</b>
	<b>Reserve Deficit</b>	<b>Reserve Deficit</b>
10% increase pa	£61,218,779	£103,411,674
15% increase pa	£45,856,837	£88,049,732
20% increase pa	£29,524,896	£71,717,791

### **Additional Support**

- 5.30. Delivery of the mitigations will be a challenge and the intended actions will need support from the Government in terms of additional capital funding for the Council and support with the establishment of additional special schools / special school places in the Borough. The Council will need to review the allocation of capital resources for the next few years to prioritise special schools / SEND provision.
- 5.31. It would be helpful for the DfE to also recognise that placing limits on year on year changes to special school funding limits the scope for savings where lower levels of need are being met.

### **Summary**

- 5.32. The plan is a complex document with a large number of assumptions that use average costing levels to general expenditure figures. As such it is sensitive to EHCP forecasts and the basis for the average costs.
- 5.33. A significant programme of change is needed to deliver the mitigated position. However, that will not close the gap.
- 5.34. The Council cannot deliver the plan in isolation, it will require support from settings, regular monitoring and support from the DfE to deliver it.

## **6. Implications of the Recommendations**

### **6.1. Legal Implications**

- 6.1.1. The right to an assessment of a child or young person's special educational needs, the production of an Education, health and care plan (EHCP) which meets those needs and the commissioning of the required provision to meet those needs as set out in the EHCP are statutory requirements under the Children and Families Act 2014.

## 6.2. Finance Implications

6.2.1. The Council's DSG Reserve has a deficit balance of -£2.6m at 1<sup>st</sup> April 2020.

6.2.2. The third quarter year review figures for DSG are predicting that the DSG Reserve deficit will increase to -£7.6m at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021 due to high needs pressure. That is after restating the DSG Reserve back to nil.

6.2.3. If the pressure on high needs funding continues to exceed the annual increases in DSG (which are not certain over the medium term) the deficit will quickly escalate in value as significant amounts of funding are needed to correct the deficit balance.

6.2.4. There could be implications on the Council's base budget as a result of:

6.2.4.1. Increased transport costs due to increases in pupils with an EHCP and additional settings. This could be partially offset by the use of local provision meaning less distance is travelled and costs are reduced.

6.2.4.2. Additional SEND Service staff resources to manage the additional EHCPs and the programme of mitigations.

6.2.5. Both of the issues have been recognised in the Council's budget plans for 2021/22 in terms of additional growth for transport and the SEND service. Given the levels of growth being forecast in the management plan it is expected that further growth will be needed from 2022/23 onwards.

## 6.3. Policy Implications

6.3.1. The SEND Code of Practice (January 2015) provides statutory guidance on duties, policies and procedures relating to Part 3 of the Children and Families Act 2014 and associated regulations and applies to England.

## 6.4. Equality Implications

6.4.1. The SEND Code of Practice looks to ensure the assessed additional needs of Children with special education needs are provided for to enable them to reach agreed outcomes.

## 6.5. Human Resources Implications

6.5.1. Due to the increased demand for needs assessments the workloads of staff remain high and ability to meet legal and statutory requirements

remain a challenge. Volumes increased by 18% in 2019 and are forecast to increase by more than 25% in 2020.

#### **6.6. Risk Management Implications**

6.6.1. The key risks are:

6.6.2. An impact on the Council's base budget (Council Tax, NNDR and general grants) as a contribution may be required to manage the high needs pressures or DSG Reserve balance.

6.6.3. Service levels reduce as funding is not sufficient and the Ofsted revisit raises further issues which damage reputation and result in the Council remaining in "improvement".

#### **6.7. Rural Communities Implications**

6.7.1. There are no direct implications for rural communities.

#### **6.8. Implications for Children & Young People/Cared for Children**

6.8.1. It is essential that the Council makes best use of resources to ensure that children and young people receive the services they need and must be provided.

#### **6.9. Public Health Implications**

6.9.1. There are no direct implications for public health.

#### **6.10. Climate Change Implications**

6.10.1. Many pupils are educated out of borough at high costs and with long travel journeys. The SEND Provision plan is generating additional in borough school places, but this is unable to match the increased level of demand. We do however have a high proportion of SEND pupils in our mainstream schools compared to other authorities.

### **7. Ward Members Affected**

7.1. All Members are affected as a result of high needs funding paid to schools, specific settings and to fund high needs related services across Cheshire East.

### **8. Consultation & Engagement**

8.1. The report has been subject to internal consultation. However, Cabinet approval will start a process of consultation on the Plan for 2021/22 to 2024/25.

8.2. The DfE template recommends consultation with the following groups:

- Elected members of the Council.
- Schools Forum.
- Education institutions.
- Parents and carers.
- Children and young people.
- Health partners.

## **9. Access to Information**

9.1. The DfE Management Plan guidance can be found at this [site](#).

9.2. The Schools Forum papers are available at this [site](#).

## **10. Contact Information**

10.1. Any questions relating to this report should be directed to the following officer:

Name: Jacky Forster

Job Title: Director of Education and Skills

Email: [jacky.forster@cheshireeast.gov.uk](mailto:jacky.forster@cheshireeast.gov.uk)

## **Appendix 1**

### **Cheshire East Council – Summary of DSG Management Plan 2021/22 to 2025/25**

#### **Introduction**

This Appendix provides a summary of the Council's Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) Management Plan for the period 2021/22 to 2024/25.

The DSG Management Plan itself is based on a detailed spreadsheet template issued by the DfE which is not practical to share. This document outlines the basis for the calculations and provides a summary of the results. An extract of the DfE guidance is provided at **Annex 1**.

#### **Scope**

The Management Plan considers expenditure and income in relation to the DSG high needs block. This includes placements of pupils with an education, health and care plans (EHCPs) and funding for services such as autism and speech and language therapy. It does not cover Early Years or Central Block DSG funded services.

It does not cover services funded from the Council's base budget. However, the growth identified will impact on base budgets in terms of SEND transport and finding appropriate sites for expansions with the associated costs.

Where changes to provision are identified they remain subject to consultation and sufficient Capital funding where applicable.

#### **Approach**

The plan reflects a limited number of mitigations to reduce spend. This reflects the number of options open to the Council and helps to keep the explanation of the plan simple given that one change can have several saving impacts.

Average unit costs have been used to assist transparency of the plan – these will change over time.

The plan does not introduce further complications relation to matching financial years and academic years or profiling the import / export adjustments as they are things that will correct over time.

A prudent approach has been adopted where any percentage estimates have been used. These are open for discussion and feedback. A key assumption is the use of 3% per annum growth in high needs funding. It is accepted that 8% and 10% have been applied for 2020/21 and 2021/22 but there is no certainty beyond 2021/22.

#### **Summary of the Plan**

The plan reflects the following key issues:

- High needs funding for 2020/21 is £40m with EHCPs of 2,738 resulting in a forecast deficit reserve balance of -£8m at 31/3/21.
- The gap for high needs is around £9m (being reduced by underspending on other DSG blocks). Therefore, the plan begins with the Council being 23% overspent on high needs.

- If nothing else changed and the £9m deficit carried forward each year to 2024/25 then the deficit would be £45m.

However:

- EHCPs are forecast to nearly double by 2024/25 to almost 5,000 and spend will rise as services are delivered if the current trajectory continues.
- Without mitigations the funding gap will be £123m.
- This reduces to £81m after the mitigations are applied.
- Those figures would form the deficit balance on the Council’s DSG reserve that would be carried into 2025/26.

Therefore, without further changes (reduced demand / reduced spend / more funding) the position will not be balanced in the medium term. In order to close the gap completely the following actions would be needed:

- Funding from high needs would have to increase by 20% per annum from 2021/22 to 2024/25, or
- EHCP volumes would have reduce by over 600 down to 2,700 in 2022/23 to match funding,
- Significant reductions of £3,600 per EHCP would be needed to reach an average cost level of £12,900 per EHCP in order to match funding levels in 2022/23.

These are not realistic and would need to be discussed with the DfE. As further context, the table below sets out the 2024/25 DSG Reserve deficit using greater annual increases in high needs funding:

<b>Impact of High Needs Funding Increases</b>		
	<b>Mitigated Reserve Deficit</b>	<b>Un-mitigated Reserve Deficit</b>
10% increase pa	£61,218,779	£103,411,674
15% increase pa	£45,856,837	£88,049,732
20% increase pa	£29,524,896	£71,717,791

**CIPFA Guidance**

The public sector accountancy body CIPFA has provided confirmation of the approach to DSG Deficit Reserves.

At the end of 2020/21 a negative DSG balance it can’t be funded from the General Fund. Instead the Council has to create an unusable reserve to hold the balance.

**KEY ASSUMPTIONS IN THE MANAGEMENT PLAN**

**1. Education Health and Care Plans**

The position for the period 2016/17 to 2019/20 is a 25% increase.

The forecasts going forward are set out below:

Type	2020	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
Mainstream	1,174	1,381	1,634	1,923	2,252	2,635
Special Schools	647	681	681	681	681	681
NMSS & Independent	147	196	261	347	461	613
Post 16 & FE	287	388	485	606	758	947
RP / SEN Units	100	82	116	116	116	116
Alternative Provision	9	10	10	10	10	10
Unspecified	103	0	0	0	0	0
Total EHCPs	2,467	2,738	3,187	3,683	4,278	5,003

The basis for these assumptions is set out in the next table:

Type	Basis
Mainstream	January 2020 to Oct 2020 SEND System data trends: Under 5 – increase of 17% Primary – increase of 16% Secondary – increase of 18% Sixth Form – increase of 17% Applied each year.
Special Schools	Assume full capacity – including other LA special schools. In borough capacity is being increased in the plan.
NMSS and independent	Predicting a 33% increase per annum based on rise from 2020 to 2021.
Post 16 and FE	Assume 25% increase per annum based on advice from colleges in October 2020.
RP / SEN units	Assume full capacity for RPs (excluding HI – where current occupancy levels have been retained – 20 of 38 places filled) - in borough capacity is being increased in the plan. Low numbers in other LA RPs.
Alternative Provision	Assume average of 10 high needs pupils in the PRU – currently have 9. Also assuming that PRU is set at 60 pupils for the period of the plan.
Other	103 not specified plans in SEND system that mainly relate to Educated at home, NEET, apprenticeships, awaiting provision. These have not been included in the forecasts going forward as they either have no cost or they will be picked up in other growth forecasts.

The rise in pupils and the location of their placement and the impact on the high needs national funding formula have been factored into the relevant mitigation line rather than a separate item.

### Average Cost Calculations

The Management Plan is based on average costs for the placement of additional pupils. This is the only basis available as the destination of each child and their needs cannot be determined at this stage. The average costs used in the plan are summarised below. This does not cover all high needs spend.

Area	Average Cost	Basis
Mainstream top up	£6,850 per pupil	Average placement is 25 hours for age 5-16 based on review of activity in 2020/21 to date.
Other Local Authorities Mainstream	£8,751	Based on SEND system data as at November 2020.
Independent Mainstream	£17,593	Based on SEND system data as at November 2020.
Enhanced Mainstream	£50,732 per EMP	Established cost based on UPS1 qualified teacher . Rate applied from September 2020.
Resource Provision	£10,000 Place £10,500 Pupil (£10,000 per Hearing Impaired)	Established rates in CE
Special Schools including other local authorities (maintained, academies and free special schools)	£10,000 Place Pupil funding varies by type of school: £13,800 (for new provision)	Established rates in CE  A single figure has been used to keep the modelling simple. It is acknowledged that rates vary across Special Schools based on the needs being met. This has been set at £13,800 as the average cost plus £25,000 for Church Lawton places.
Non Maintained and independents – Specialist Provision	£49,500 Pre 16 £56,664 Post 16	Based on SEND system data as at November 2020.
Post 16 – sixth form	£6,850	Based on 25 hours average
Post 16 - further education colleges	£6,000 per pupil place funding Top up : £6,377 per pupil	An element of the place funding is adjusted for through the “import/export” adjustment.
Supported Internships	£10,000 Place funding £3,750 Pupil Funding	

### Summary of the Management Plan

Based on that rise in EHCPs and using the existing levels of SEND provision the Council has access to the expected financial impact is summarised below:

**Unmitigated Position**

Provision Type	Unmitigated Forecast				
	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
	£	£	£	£	£
Mainstream Total Expenditure	11,816,951	13,466,866	15,318,580	17,420,447	19,868,367
RP Total Expenditure	1,885,167	2,151,000	2,151,000	2,151,000	2,151,000
Special Total Expenditure	16,022,600	16,122,600	16,122,600	16,122,600	16,122,600
NMSS & Independent Special Schools Total Expenditure	10,563,312	14,450,035	19,767,644	27,043,175	36,997,874
FE Colleges Total Expenditure	5,076,776	6,347,845	7,932,931	9,918,664	12,397,213
Alternative Provision Total Expenditure	2,885,496	2,885,496	2,885,496	2,885,496	2,885,496
Sensory & SALT Total Expenditure	1,353,323	1,380,389	1,407,997	1,436,157	1,464,880
Social Care Total Expenditure	383,000	383,000	383,000	383,000	383,000
<b>Total Expenditure</b>	<b>49,986,625</b>	<b>57,187,231</b>	<b>65,969,249</b>	<b>77,360,539</b>	<b>92,270,430</b>
<b>Total DSG Income</b>	<b>(39,635,978)</b>	<b>(43,595,437)</b>	<b>(44,903,300)</b>	<b>(46,250,399)</b>	<b>(47,637,911)</b>
<b>In Year Surplus -/ Deficit +</b>	<b>10,350,647</b>	<b>13,591,794</b>	<b>21,065,949</b>	<b>31,110,140</b>	<b>44,632,519</b>
<b>Surplus / Deficit Brought Forward</b>	<b>2,600,000</b>	<b>12,950,647</b>	<b>26,542,441</b>	<b>47,608,390</b>	<b>78,718,531</b>
<b>Total Deficit Reserve Balance</b>	<b>12,950,647</b>	<b>26,542,441</b>	<b>47,608,390</b>	<b>78,718,531</b>	<b>123,351,050</b>

**Mitigated Position**

Provision Type	Mitigated Forecast				
	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
	£	£	£	£	£
Mainstream Total Expenditure	11,816,951	13,155,480	15,171,245	17,252,562	19,664,177
RP Total Expenditure	1,845,167	3,442,500	3,190,500	3,190,500	3,190,500
Special Total Expenditure	16,062,600	18,167,800	18,847,200	19,270,200	20,305,200
NMSS & Independent Special Schools Total Expenditure	10,563,312	7,850,838	8,475,148	10,912,950	16,438,219
FE Colleges Total Expenditure	5,006,236	6,123,765	7,397,926	8,926,003	10,928,974
Alternative Provision Total Expenditure	2,885,496	2,885,496	2,885,496	2,885,496	2,885,496
Sensory & SALT Total Expenditure	1,353,323	1,380,389	1,407,997	1,436,157	1,464,880
Social Care Total Expenditure	383,000	383,000	383,000	383,000	383,000
<b>Total Expenditure</b>	<b>49,916,085</b>	<b>53,389,268</b>	<b>57,758,513</b>	<b>64,256,868</b>	<b>75,260,446</b>
<b>Total DSG Income</b>	<b>(39,635,978)</b>	<b>(43,595,437)</b>	<b>(44,903,300)</b>	<b>(46,250,399)</b>	<b>(47,637,911)</b>
<b>In Year Surplus -/ Deficit +</b>	<b>10,280,107</b>	<b>9,793,831</b>	<b>12,855,213</b>	<b>18,006,469</b>	<b>27,622,535</b>
<b>Surplus / Deficit Brought Forward</b>	<b>2,600,000</b>	<b>12,880,107</b>	<b>22,673,937</b>	<b>35,529,151</b>	<b>53,535,620</b>
<b>Total Forecast Reserve Balance</b>	<b>12,880,107</b>	<b>22,673,937</b>	<b>35,529,151</b>	<b>53,535,620</b>	<b>81,158,155</b>

## Mitigations

Provision Type	Variance/Saving				
	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
	£	£	£	£	£
Mainstream Saving	-	(311,386)	(147,335)	(167,885)	(204,190)
RP Saving	(40,000)	1,291,500	1,039,500	1,039,500	1,039,500
Special Schools Saving	40,000	2,045,200	2,724,600	3,147,600	4,182,600
NMSS & Independent Special Schools Saving	-	(6,599,198)	(11,292,496)	(16,130,225)	(20,559,655)
FE Colleges Saving	(70,540)	(224,080)	(535,005)	(992,661)	(1,468,239)
<b>Total Saving due to mitigations</b>	<b>(70,540)</b>	<b>(3,797,964)</b>	<b>(8,210,736)</b>	<b>(13,103,672)</b>	<b>(17,009,984)</b>
<b>Total Forecast Reserve Balance Variance</b>	<b>(70,540)</b>	<b>(3,868,504)</b>	<b>(12,079,239)</b>	<b>(25,182,911)</b>	<b>(42,192,895)</b>

The cumulative impact of the mitigations results in the change to the DSG Reserve Balance.

To manage that level of expenditure the Council is working to introduce a number of mitigations. Further details are set out below.

## MITIGATIONS

### 1. Mainstream Provision

The Council successfully supports over 1,400 children with an EHCP in mainstream settings. It is recognised that it is a cost effective method of managing need but is challenging in terms of schools budget levels and funding for top ups allocations from the high needs block.

The use of mainstream is considered to be the best outcome for the children with EHCPs and also those who require SEND Support in the majority of cases.

The Council is able to introduce measures to ensure that needs of children and young people are met at SEND support and therefore reduce the rate of increase for requests for EHCPs. These include:

- Improvements to SEND support specifically around autism and education psychology.

This is using high needs funding to support inclusion which in turn reduces escalation to higher cost provision. The service is rolling out training to schools through the accredited Autism training hub for school staff to improve their skills in this area.

- Introducing additional Enhanced Mainstream provisions.

#### 1.1. Improvements to SEND support in schools specifically around autism and education psychology

This provides a focus on SEND Support in schools to be further developed with training for staff in schools to deliver better services. This will lead to enhanced delivery in schools with needs of children being met without the need for an EHCP. Further details are provided below:

Cost of implementing	No additional costs have been factored in on the basis the autism team are able to support more children by operating differently and the EP service is looking to adopt a traded service model to recover costs for additional support provided.
The impact	The target is to reduce the growth in EHCPs by 10% per annum.
Outcomes	The expectation is that this could lead to a reduction of <b>125 plans over a 5 year period</b> (between 25-38 plans per year) This figure could increase if the support provided proves more successful than is forecast. However, a prudent approach has been adopted

### 1.2. Enhanced Mainstream Provision

The aim is to increase Enhanced Mainstream Provision (EMP) at mainstream schools in the Borough.

EMP currently features two types of provision where a cohort of pupils are provided with additional support and, depending on the type, can either:

- **Type 1:** help manage any escalation to an EHCP, or
- **Type 2:** help manage any need for a change of placement to a higher level of provision for a pupil with an EHCP and for them to continue in mainstream.

The actions in the plan include the expansion of EMP from the existing set up of support for 42 pupils across 5 providers to support for 192 pupils across 15 providers in 2021/22 rising to support for 308 pupils across 24 providers from 2022/23. These are not necessarily high needs places; it is additional support for pupils.

Cost of implementing	The annual cost of an enhanced mainstream provision is £50,732, which is intended to provide the school with funding to implement and run the provision. An additional 10 provisions would cost £0.5m per annum and an additional 19 provisions would cost £1m per annum from 2022/23.
The impact	<b>Type 1:</b> aimed to help manage any escalation to an EHCP – to provide additional support to pupils who may be classed as SEN support pupils or on the cusp of requiring an EHCP.  <b>Type 2:</b> help manage any need for a change of placement to a higher level of provision for a pupil with an EHCP and for them to continue in mainstream. The cost avoided by implementing this type of enhanced mainstream provision results in savings achieved in specialist provisions – independent/NMMS settings. This saving covers the cost of running of an enhanced mainstream provision.

Outcomes	<p><b>Type 1:</b> pupils have additional support to meet their needs. This type of EMP is an intervention model to reduce the escalation of requiring an EHCP. The cost incurred will be recovered if at least 8 pupils do not escalate to requiring an EHCP. If more than 8 pupils, further savings would be achieved. This is a non-cumulative total as the enhanced mainstream provision will be supporting the pupils during their time at school.</p> <p><b>Type 2:</b> pupils are able to stay in a mainstream setting, with their peers and within their local community, by avoiding a change of placement to a specialist setting. This model does not impact on the savings of EHCP funding in mainstream settings, however it does increase costs of funding an EMP but significantly impacts on the reduction of costs incurred in Independent / NMSS (see section below).</p>
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### Section 1 Mainstream Provision ~ Financial Summary

The difference between the two tables show a reduction of EHCPs of 151 by year 2024-25 which represents 3 mitigations (detailed in the report) SEND Support 38 plans, EMP's 80 plans and RP's 33 plans, equating to a saving / cost avoidance of approx. £204,000 in year 2024-25.

Description	Unmitigated Forecast				
	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
	£	£	£	£	£
Place funding, Top Up Funding based on average of 25 hours and Targeted SEN funding	9,934,781	11,604,101	13,449,491	15,544,906	17,986,246
CEAT, SENCO, EY SEN Practitioners and Virtual Schools	1,052,172	1,058,373	1,064,697	1,071,149	1,077,729
Enhanced Mainstream Provision	429,998	404,392	404,392	404,392	404,392
EY SEN Inclusion Fund (statutory requirement)	400,000	400,000	400,000	400,000	400,000
<b>Mainstream Total Expenditure</b>	<b>11,816,951</b>	<b>13,466,866</b>	<b>15,318,580</b>	<b>17,420,447</b>	<b>19,868,367</b>
<b>Mainstream pupils with EHCPs</b>	<b>1,381</b>	<b>1,634</b>	<b>1,923</b>	<b>2,252</b>	<b>2,635</b>
<b>Mainstream Pupils in receipt of top-up without EHCPs</b>	<b>202</b>	<b>202</b>	<b>202</b>	<b>202</b>	<b>202</b>

	Mitigated Forecast				
Description	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
	£	£	£	£	£
Place funding, Top Up Funding based on average of 25 hours and Targeted SEN funding	9,934,781	10,887,591	12,491,176	14,566,041	16,971,076
CEAT, SENCO, EY SEN Practitioners and Virtual Schools	1,052,172	1,058,373	1,064,697	1,071,149	1,077,729
Enhanced Mainstream Provision	429,998	809,516	1,215,372	1,215,372	1,215,372
EY SEN Inclusion Fund (statutory requirement)	400,000	400,000	400,000	400,000	400,000
<b>Mainstream Total Expenditure</b>	<b>11,816,951</b>	<b>13,155,480</b>	<b>15,171,245</b>	<b>17,252,562</b>	<b>19,664,177</b>
<b>Mainstream pupils with EHCPs</b>	<b>1,381</b>	<b>1,528</b>	<b>1,781</b>	<b>2,107</b>	<b>2,484</b>
<b>Mainstream Pupils in receipt of top-up without EHCPs</b>	<b>202</b>	<b>202</b>	<b>202</b>	<b>202</b>	<b>202</b>

## 2. Additional Resource Provision Places

By March 2025 the Management Plan assumes that an additional 63 RP places are created and operational from September 2021 at a cost of £1m per annum ..This avoids 33 pupils staying in mainstream, and 30 pupils going into non-maintained and independent special schools.

	Unmitigated Forecast				
Description	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
	£	£	£	£	£
High Needs Place Funding	983,167	892,000	892,000	892,000	892,000
Top Up Funding	902,000	1,259,000	1,259,000	1,259,000	1,259,000
<b>RP Total Expenditure</b>	<b>1,885,167</b>	<b>2,151,000</b>	<b>2,151,000</b>	<b>2,151,000</b>	<b>2,151,000</b>
<b>RP pupils with EHCPs</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>116</b>	<b>116</b>	<b>116</b>	<b>116</b>

	Mitigated Forecast				
Description	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
	£	£	£	£	£
High Needs Place Funding	943,167	1,522,000	1,270,000	1,270,000	1,270,000
Top Up Funding	902,000	1,920,500	1,920,500	1,920,500	1,920,500
<b>RP Total Expenditure</b>	<b>1,845,167</b>	<b>3,442,500</b>	<b>3,190,500</b>	<b>3,190,500</b>	<b>3,190,500</b>
<b>RP pupils with EHCPs</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>179</b>	<b>179</b>	<b>179</b>	<b>179</b>

The Council currently has 130 Resource Provision (RP) places in mainstream schools (90 primary and 40 secondary). These cost £10,000 per place and £10,500 for each full time pupil (except hearing impaired RPs where pupil funding is £10,000). The provision is also split by need and further work is underway to refine the forecasts by type of need.

Cost of implementing	63 additional RP places would cost £1.3m in a full year.
The impact	This will then provide placements for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Pupils currently being managed in mainstream – so their top up funding would cease – replaced by RP funding.</li> <li>- Pupils who would otherwise be placed in independent special provision (as CEC special schools are full) – so the cost of independent provision would reduce.</li> </ul>
Outcomes	Pupils will be placed in the correct type of provision to meet their needs. The assumption is a 50:50 split saving between mainstream and Independent / NMSS resulting in a net saving of £0.7m per annum. In RP terms the costs of provision will increase in line with more places as shown below.

### 3. New Special School Places

There are several strands to this mitigation:

- The assumption of additional places at the existing provisions of Park Lane and Axis to provide an extra 73 places over the period.
- The assumption that three new special schools can be created to give 150 places by 2025. The profile of the new schools is to start with 10 places in 2023 increasing to 20 places in 2024 and 2025.
- This represents additional places of 223 by 2025.
- Offering additional Supported Internship places of 10 initially rising to 15 extra per year.

Therefore, there is a significant cost impact of the additional places – but this is offset by the savings from a reduction in Independent/NMSS provision equivalent to 223 places.

	Unmitigated Forecast				
Description	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
	£	£	£	£	£
High Needs Place Funding (CEC Maintained, Free & Academy as well as cost of placing CE Pupils in other LA schools)	5,908,000	6,008,000	6,008,000	6,008,000	6,008,000
Top Up Funding Average cost £13,800	10,114,600	10,114,600	10,114,600	10,114,600	10,114,600
<b>Special Schools Total Expenditure</b>	<b>16,022,600</b>	<b>16,122,600</b>	<b>16,122,600</b>	<b>16,122,600</b>	<b>16,122,600</b>
<b>Special School Pupils with EHCPs</b>	<b>681</b>	<b>681</b>	<b>681</b>	<b>681</b>	<b>681</b>

	Mitigated Forecast				
Description	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
	£	£	£	£	£
High Needs Place Funding (CEC Maintained, Free & Academy as well as cost of placing CE Pupils in other LA schools)	5,948,000	7,158,000	6,968,000	6,218,000	6,218,000
Top Up Funding Average cost £13,800	10,114,600	11,009,800	11,879,200	13,052,200	14,087,200
<b>Special Schools Total Expenditure</b>	<b>16,062,600</b>	<b>18,167,800</b>	<b>18,847,200</b>	<b>19,270,200</b>	<b>20,305,200</b>
<b>Special School Pupils with EHCPs</b>	<b>681</b>	<b>741</b>	<b>804</b>	<b>889</b>	<b>964</b>

Cost of implementing	<p>The cost of the additional capacity is £3.3m in terms of pupil funding.</p> <p>This assumes no change to the number of CE pupils in other LA special schools.</p> <p>Additional Supported Internships will cost £1m over the 5 years in terms of Place funding at £10k per place and £3,750 per pupil. This is only paid if the place is occupied.</p>
The impact	<p>This will allow more complex pupils with an EHCP to access a place in Cheshire East provision.</p> <p>The mitigation to grow the Supported Internship offer will aid the ceasing of EHCPs and therefore reduce overall numbers.</p>
Outcomes	<p>This should reduce expenditure in independent and non-maintained special schools.</p>

	<p>This should also reduce travel costs which impacts both on base budget and pupil welfare.</p> <p>This will positively impact not only on high needs funding but also on the Adult Social Care budgets as young people will be in full time employment.</p>
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#### 4. Non-Maintained and Independent Special Schools

There are a few points to note under this section:

- The increase in the Council's own provision is intended to reduce the use of independent settings.
- The Council is facing annual price increases from providers that need to be challenged. A regional purchasing framework is also being looked into to assist that process.

The aim is to reduce spend from £37m to £16m through use of own provision.

	Unmitigated Forecast				
Description	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
	£	£	£	£	£
High Needs Place Funding (Cost of placing pupils in NMSS via import/export adjustment)	517,440	688,195	915,300	1,217,348	1,619,073
Average cost of fees (Pre-16 £49,500, Post-16 £56,664)	10,045,872	13,761,840	18,852,345	25,825,827	35,378,800
<b>NMSS &amp; Independent Special Schools Total Expenditure</b>	<b>10,563,312</b>	<b>14,450,035</b>	<b>19,767,644</b>	<b>27,043,175</b>	<b>36,997,874</b>
<b>NMSS &amp; Independent Special Pupils with EHCPS</b>	<b>196</b>	<b>261</b>	<b>347</b>	<b>461</b>	<b>613</b>

	Mitigated Forecast				
Description	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
	£	£	£	£	£
High Needs Place Funding (Cost of placing pupils in NMSS via import/export adjustment)	517,440	368,755	389,940	493,988	737,313
Average cost of fees (Pre-16 £49,500, Post-16 £56,664)	10,045,872	7,482,082	8,085,209	10,418,962	15,700,906
<b>NMSS &amp; Independent Special Schools Total Expenditure</b>	<b>10,563,312</b>	<b>7,850,838</b>	<b>8,475,148</b>	<b>10,912,950</b>	<b>16,438,219</b>
<b>NMSS &amp; Independent Special Pupils with EHCPS</b>	<b>196</b>	<b>140</b>	<b>148</b>	<b>187</b>	<b>279</b>

Cost of implementing	The costs involved in the actions are included in earlier sections of the plan and relate to growing local provision.  No costs have been included for the challenge element.
The impact	The aim is to reduce the number of pupils with an EHCP attending independent provision by 334.  More pupils attending colleges from other LA's increases our High Needs Funding.
Outcomes	This will generate a cost saving of £20.6m.  The plan assumes that the annual price increase can be halved from a typical 3% to 1.5%. This would provide savings of up to £1m by 2024/25 depending on other changes to that type of provision.

## 5. Further Education

The key changes relate to a reduction in pupils due to supported internships and the import / export adjustment.

Description	Unmitigated Forecast				
	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
	£	£	£	£	£
High needs place funding	2,602,500	3,255,000	4,066,875	5,086,094	6,356,500
Top up funding average cost £6,377	2,474,276	3,092,845	3,866,056	4,832,570	6,040,713
<b>FE Colleges Total Expenditure</b>	<b>5,076,776</b>	<b>6,347,845</b>	<b>7,932,931</b>	<b>9,918,664</b>	<b>12,397,213</b>
<b>FE Pupils with EHCPS</b>	<b>388</b>	<b>485</b>	<b>606</b>	<b>758</b>	<b>947</b>

Description	Mitigated Forecast				
	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
	£	£	£	£	£
High needs place funding	2,584,500	3,211,000	3,871,375	4,632,219	5,676,148
Top up funding average cost £6,377	2,421,736	2,912,765	3,526,551	4,293,784	5,252,825
<b>FE Colleges Total Expenditure</b>	<b>5,006,236</b>	<b>6,123,765</b>	<b>7,397,926</b>	<b>8,926,003</b>	<b>10,928,974</b>
<b>FE Pupils with EHCPS</b>	<b>388</b>	<b>465</b>	<b>561</b>	<b>682</b>	<b>832</b>

There has been significant growth in high needs provision within FE settings.

There are several mitigations being applied:

- The introduction of Supported Internships to reduce numbers accessing colleges. (see section 6).
- The impact of the import / export adjustment.

CEC is paying for the places which are registered as CE but we expect half of the places will be occupied by Cheshire West and Chester pupils. This makes CE a net importer of place funding. As the number of places increase CE will receive funding back through the adjustment. This reduces the Council’s spend.

### 6. Supported Internships

A supported internship is one type of study programme specifically aimed at young people aged 16 to 24 who have an EHCP, who want to move into employment and need extra support to do so.

Internships normally last for a year and include unpaid work placements of at least six months. Wherever possible, they support the young person to move into paid employment at the end of the programme. Students complete a personalised study programme which includes the chance to study for relevant substantial qualifications, if suitable, and English and maths to an appropriate level.

These would be based at a mix of settings:

- **Special schools** – where the intention is to create SI places with a lower top up value. This will then reduce the number of EHCPs in specialist independent provision when the young person is 19+ years (normally leaves special school and goes to independent provision).
- **Further Education providers** – where this forms an alternative to a course and is a lower cost option. As a result the number of EHCP pupils requiring a second year of study programme in FE should reduce.

The intention is to fund SIs at a lower top up value as support is claimed from DWP and SI programme by the setting for 1 year, therefore assisting the process of ceasing a plan which in turn reduces the overall number of EHCPS in the age group of 19+.

Cost of implementing	Intention to run own CEC 10 place SI programme at the national agreed amount of £10,000 per place funding, equating to £100,000 per annum.
The impact	<p>The Supported Internship means the individual has reached the end of their education and have the skills to seek employment.</p> <p>The plans cease after 1 year, therefore education in FE college does not continue.</p> <p>Supported Internships have lower than average top up funding.</p>
Outcomes	<p>Support the young person to move into paid employment.</p> <p>Reduction of 20 EHCPs per year for FE and 15 for special schools.</p>

The costs and savings from Supported Internships are reflected in the figures in above sections.

### 7. High Needs Budget Challenge

The Council will review all high needs budgets on an annual basis and ensure that the necessary amounts are provided for place and pupil funding. In addition, any service contributions are reviewed to ensure that only essential posts are funded.

Cost of implementing	Nil – undertaken as part of existing budget setting work.
The impact	Scope to make reductions to DSG service contributions that can be applied to placement budgets.
Outcomes	Ensure effective use of funding and maximise the amount available for placements.

## **Annex 1 ~ Extract from [DSG Management Plan](#) site**

### **Details**

The Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG): conditions of grant 2020 to 2021 paragraph 5.2, requires that any local authority (LA) with an overall deficit on its DSG account at the end of 2019 to 2020 financial year, or whose DSG surplus has substantially reduced during the year, must be able to present a plan to the Department for Education (DfE) for managing their future DSG spend.

In response to feedback from LAs and other stakeholders, we have designed a template to help LAs manage their DSG deficit management plan.

### **Management plan template**

The template has been designed to help LAs to develop evidence-based and strategic plans covering the provision available for children and young people (CYP) with special education needs and disabilities (SEND).

We encourage all LAs to use the template as a planning tool: we believe this will be particularly useful when discussing and sharing complex funding information with internal and external bodies, parent and carer forums and elected members. It should be kept updated throughout the year to reflect the most recent forecast position and be viewed as an on-going live document including being presented at schools forum meetings and any high needs sub-groups at least on a termly basis.

## **Extract from [Schools Operational Guidance](#)**

### **DSG management plans (page 49)**

An increasing number of local authorities have been incurring a deficit on their overall DSG account, largely because of overspends on the high needs block.

In 2019 to 2020, local authorities with a cumulative deficit of 1% or more at the end of the financial year (31 March 2019), were required to submit a recovery plan to the department to outline their plan to manage their DSG spend.

In 2020 to 2021, DfE extended the rules under the DSG conditions of grant so any local authority with an overall deficit on its DSG account at the end of the 2019 to 2020 financial year, or whose DSG surplus has substantially reduced during the year, must cooperate with the department in handling that situation by:

- providing information as and when requested by the department about its plans for managing its DSG account in the 2020 to 2021 financial year and subsequently
- providing information as and when requested by the department about pressures and potential savings on its high needs budget
- meet with officials of the department as and when they request to discuss the local authority's plans and financial situation
- keep the schools forum regularly updated about the local authority's DSG account and plans for handling it, including high needs pressures and potential savings

DSG management plans will need to be discussed with the schools forum and should set out the local authority's plans for bringing the DSG spend back into balance.

The department expects the chief financial officer and appropriate special education needs (SEN) colleagues to review and sign off the report periodically.

Where a local authority has a substantial in-year overspend or cumulative DSG deficit balance at the end of the financial year, its management plan should look to bring the overall DSG account into balance within a timely period.

The department recognises that this may prove difficult for some local authorities, particularly where they are accelerating moving their schools to mirror the NFF allocations in full. Where this is the case, the department would be open to receipt of evidence explaining the pressures and will consider management plans that leave some or all of the deficit accumulated to date outstanding.

In all cases, the department expects local authorities' management plans to focus on how they will bring in-year spending in line with in-year resources. DfE expects a range of evidence to support local authority management plans.

The department will continue to review the management plan process and has provided a template DSG deficit management plan for local authorities to use. DfE expects all evidence to have been presented to schools forums.

The department is aware that DSG deficits are usually caused by high needs pressures, and in these cases the evidence required in the management plans will typically include what the department already looks for in block movement disapplication requests.

Local authorities will, however, need to address whatever the main causes of overspending on the DSG have been.

The evidence should include:

- A full breakdown of specific budget pressures locally that have led to the local authority's current DSG position. Where this has resulted from high needs pressures, information should include the changes in demand for special provision over the last 3 years, how the local authority has met that demand by commissioning places in different sectors (mainstream and special schools, further education and sixth form colleges, independent specialist provision and alternative provision), and if there have been any reductions in the provision for mainstream school pupils with high needs.
- An assessment and understanding of the specific local factors that have caused an increase in high needs costs to a level that has exceeded the local authority's high needs funding allocations; and a plan to change the pattern of provision where this is necessary, as well as to achieve greater efficiency and better value for money in other ways; together with evidence of the extent to which the plan is supported by schools and other stakeholders.
- Evidence of how the local authority intends to bring its DSG account back into balance within a timely period, clearly showing clearly how expenditure will be contained within future funding levels. This should also show how the additional funding provided in 2020 to 2021 is intended to be spent to support the local authority to balance its in year spend.

- Details of any previous movements between blocks and any proposed block movements. A detailed explanation of why these have not been sufficient in the past and why they will be needed going forward to meet the local authority's high needs pressures is required. Further information is included in the movements between blocks section of this guidance.



*Working for a brighter future together*

Key Decision: Y
Date First
Published: 11/01/21

## Cabinet

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**Date of Meeting:** 9 March 2021

**Report Title:** Flowerpot Junction Improvement Scheme

**Portfolio Holder:** Cllr Laura Crane – Portfolio Holder for Highways & Waste  
Cllr Craig Browne – Deputy Leader

**Senior Officer:** Frank Jordan – Executive Director Place

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### 1. Report Summary

- 1.1. The Flowerpot Junction is a signalised junction of the A536 Congleton Road / Park Lane, the B5088 Oxford Road, and the Ivy Lane. It is located adjacent to the Flowerpot Public House to the south-west of Macclesfield town centre. The Flowerpot Junction Improvement scheme (“the Scheme”) is an important project for Macclesfield. A location plan of the Flowerpot junction is included as Appendix A.
- 1.2. The Flowerpot junction experiences regular extensive traffic queues during peak periods. There are proposed developments in the area which would increase pressure on this junction.
- 1.3. A design for the Scheme has been developed which will balance the needs of all road users and address the capacity issues identified at this junction. See Appendix B.
- 1.4. An engagement exercise with Local Members was undertaken in February 2020. Further engagement is planned during Spring 2021, with the Members, stakeholders, local residents and road users to provide more details on the construction works and traffic management arrangements. During the

construction stage, a Public Liaison Officer will be appointed to manage ongoing engagement and updates to interested parties.

- 1.5. The Scheme requires the acquisition of third-party land. Negotiations are ongoing with the landowners affected to acquire the land necessary to deliver the Scheme by agreement. If these negotiations are unsuccessful a further report may be required to consider next steps, including consideration of the use of compulsory purchase powers to deliver the Scheme.
- 1.6. The overall scheme development programme is progressing towards completion of detailed design. The total cost to deliver the Scheme is estimated at £5.0m including risk allowance and the necessary funding is identified in the Council's Capital Programme. This has been secured from a combination of Government grant from the National Productivity Investment Fund ("NPIF"), developer contributions and a capital contribution from the Council.
- 1.7. This report seeks approval to procure the delivery of the scheme through the Council's Highway Service (NEC Term) Contract, 2018 ("the Highway Service Contract"), subject to satisfying the Council's value for money requirements. The report also seeks delegated approval to progress the scheme including the preparation of a compulsory purchase order, a side roads order to acquire the required land by negotiation if possible.

## **2. Recommendations**

That Cabinet:

- 2.1. Approve the delivery of the Scheme shown in Appendix B. (As the proposed scheme is above £1.0m pursuant to the Council's Constitution approval to proceed with the Scheme is defined as a Key Decision.)
- 2.2. Approve delivery of the Scheme through the Highway Service Contract, subject to the Ringway Jacobs target costs for the Scheme satisfying the contract's value for money requirements.
- 2.3. Approve the preparation of a Compulsory Purchase Order in respect of land and/or rights required to deliver the Scheme, where such land and/or rights cannot be acquired by agreement. If this is required a further Decision Report will be prepared and submitted seeking authority for the making of a Compulsory Purchase Order but this recommendation is not being sought at this stage.
- 2.4. Approve the preparation of a Side Roads Order in respect to stopping-up and/or amendments to private means of access, and re-provision of private means of access (in the event land is acquired under a Compulsory Purchase Order).

- 2.5. Authorise the Head of Estates to negotiate terms and to acquire land and/or rights required for the Scheme by agreement and to pay such reasonable and proper professional costs as are associated with those agreements and to instruct the Director of Governance & Compliance to draft, advise upon and enter into the legal agreements necessary to complete such acquisitions including but not limited to licences, leases, transfers, easements, wayleaves, deeds of release and/or variation and the making and submission of applications to HM Land Registry to affect the registration of any unregistered land within the Scheme.
- 2.6. Authorise the Head of Estates to negotiate and agree terms for the necessary legal agreements required to document any apparatus diversion works required by Statutory Undertakers or other utility providers in order to deliver the Scheme and to instruct the Director of Governance & Compliance to draft, advise upon and enter into the legal agreements necessary in relation to any such diversions.
- 2.7. Authorise the Head of Estates to dispose of any land currently in the ownership of the Council or to grant rights over the Council's land, as may be necessary in respect of any element of "land swap" which may be agreed as part of the assembly of land required for the Scheme. In the event that any such land is open space the Head of Estates is authorised to commence the statutory disposal process, to consider all objections and representations to the disposal of open space and to make the final decision (after having considered all objections and representations) as to whether or not to dispose of any part of land which is open space.
- 2.8. If no objections are received to the statutory notices, authorise the Executive Director of Place to dispose of the open space.
- 2.9. Note that if objections are received the decision regarding the disposal of open space will be taken by the relevant service committee.
- 2.10. Approve the forward funding of the developer contributions in accordance with the capital programme (noting that the council is one of the potential developers that would contribute to the scheme and that the funding for this is included in the council's capital programme).

### **3. Reasons for Recommendations**

- 3.1. The Scheme aligns with key policies of the Council and is consistent with the aims and objectives set out in the Council's Corporate Plan, Local Plan and Local Transport Plan. It addresses both provision for pedestrians and cyclists and capacity constraints at a key junction on Macclesfield's road network.
- 3.2. The improvement works for the Scheme are within the scope of the Council's Highway Service Contract.

- 3.3. The Highway Service Contract includes key requirements to provide value for money, efficient service delivery and innovation. Through this contract the Council has access to all costs and supporting information, enabling checks and audits to ensure that the contract provides value for money and good contract and financial management.
- 3.4. The Highway Service Contract is available to the Council to deliver construction and improvement works on the highway network up to a threshold value of £5.0m (indexed linked). The value of the construction work procured through the Highway Service Contract for the Scheme is forecast to be approximately £2.3m.
- 3.5. To ensure that the infrastructure can be delivered in time and therefore in advance of the receipt of the developer contributions, it is envisaged that the Council will forward fund the scheme so that contracts for the delivery of the infrastructure can be entered into, subject to planning approval, if required.
- 3.6. If delivery through the Highway Service Contract cannot demonstrate value for money, the contract allows the Council to explore alternative delivery options such as undertaking separate procurement exercises for each of the schemes or using a suitable alternative route. This would require resource from the Council's Highways and Infrastructure, Procurement and Legal teams as well as separate authority to proceed on this basis

#### **4. Other Options Considered**

- 4.1. Do not undertake the improvements at Flowerpot Junction.
  - 4.1.1. Not undertaking the proposed junction capacity improvement works will result in traffic congestion causing long delays in the morning and evening peak periods.
- 4.2. Undertake a different junction improvement scheme.
  - 4.2.1. Different layout options were considered including other small-scale changes to the junction layout and operation, widening schemes, roundabout and/or alternative junction forms. All alternative options apart from the do-nothing option required more third party land to be acquired to deliver junction capacity benefits.
- 4.3. Undertake a separate procurement exercise to deliver the Scheme
  - 4.3.1. Other procurement options were rejected as these would require the Council to expend time and expense on undertaking a procurement exercise. This would potentially require a large number of tenderers to be assessed and the protracted tender procedure that would be required, potentially delaying the start of the construction of the project. A delay to

the start of the construction phase may result in loss of NPIF contribution to the Scheme. The Council's Highway Service Contract allows the Council to procure the construction works without undertaking a separate procurement exercise. This offers a time and expenditure saving to the Council, whilst still ensuring a market competitive construction cost due to the requirements contained in the Highway Service Contract to demonstrate value for money.

## **5. Background**

- 5.1. The Scheme would provide additional capacity to the existing traffic signal-controlled junction by providing extra lanes for vehicles turning right out of Ivy Lane and left out of Park Lane and Oxford Road. Toucan crossing facilities will be added to the Ivy Lane and Congleton Road arms of the junction to provide enhanced cycle crossing facilities on these arms to link in with the existing shared footway/cycleway facilities along Ivy Lane and through the Public Open Space to the rear of Macclesfield Learning Zone. This will create a more direct route to cross the junction for cyclists using the shared paths. New traffic islands will be constructed on Park Lane and Oxford Road arms to aid pedestrians crossing the widened junction. The existing narrow footpath around the corner of Park Lane and Congleton Road will be replaced with a new 3m wide path, providing an improved connection with the Public Open Space.
- 5.2. During development of the Scheme, the Council is making all reasonable efforts to contact all affected landowners to secure the land required to deliver the Scheme by agreement. Two third-party landowners have been identified and negotiations are progressing. Work is also ongoing to identify the ownership of an unregistered piece of land within the Scheme boundary. If it is not possible to secure all the land required by agreement, a further report may be required to consider next steps, including consideration of the use of compulsory purchase powers.
- 5.3. The Scheme is exempt from planning permission under Part 9 of the General Permitted Development Order "Development relating to roads" Class A – development by highway authorities, however an area of land that may be disposed of as part of a "land swap" with an affected landowner and this will require planning permission for change of use. If through negotiations the "land swap" is agreed, a planning application will be made. Works to mitigate impact to the open space to the south east corner of the junction may also require planning permission dependent on the final proposals, and a planning application will be made if necessary.
- 5.4. The Council's Highway Service Contract was developed from learning gained from the previous 2011 contract. One of the improvements in the current contract is to increase the value of maintenance and improvement works that could be

directly delivered through the contract from £250k to £5m in order to enable slightly larger value highways and infrastructure schemes to be delivered efficiently through the Contract to provide value for money to the Council.

5.5. The use of the Highway Service Contract also offers efficiencies to the Council in time, cost and quality as a result from not needing to undertake separate procurement exercises for each new scheme, which require resources from the Council's highways, legal, and procurement teams to deliver. Schemes delivered through the Council's Highway Service Contract also benefit from being delivered by the Council's integrated highway service provider who is in a long-term contract relationship with the Council and not a short-term scheme specific contract.

## **6. Implications of the Recommendations**

### **6.1. Legal Implications**

6.1.1. The proposed Scheme is above £1.0m and, as such, under the Council's Constitution is defined as a Key Decision. Key Decisions require advanced notice and the provisions concerning Key Decisions (as set out in the Constitution) must be complied with.

6.1.2. As set out in the body of this report, the Scheme can be compliantly procured via the Highway Service Contract. If the Highway Service Contract is not used, further advice from Procurement and Legal Services will be required on the most appropriate procurement route and further authority to proceed with the chosen route will be required.

6.1.3. In the event that a Task Order is issued under the Highway Service Contract for delivery of the scheme, the Task Order will be in accordance with the conditions of contract as set out in the Highway Service Contract.

6.1.4. The Council's Highways, Planning and Property Lawyers are advising the project team in relation to this matter and will continue to provide advice as the Scheme progresses. In addition to this, initial advice has been taken from Counsel as to the overall assembly of the land and rights necessary to deliver the Scheme and the potential use of compulsory purchase powers. This will be reviewed as matters progress.

6.1.5. With regard to the acquisition of land by agreement, the Council has powers to purchase land by agreement pursuant to s120 of the Local Government Act 1972.

6.1.6. In relation to the disposal of the Council's land section 123 of The Local Government Act 1972 provides the necessary statutory powers to do this

subject to any disposal for 7 years or more being at the best consideration that can reasonably be obtained. S123 also contains the statutory procedure for the proposed disposal of open space and this procedure must be complied with prior to any decision to dispose of land owned by the Council and classified as open space.

- 6.1.7. The General Disposal Consent 2003 authorises the disposal of land for 7 years or more at less than best consideration if the undervalue is £2million or less, if the undervalue is higher than £2 million consent to the disposal is required from the Secretary of State.
- 6.1.8. In addition to the above and in consideration of any agreement to dispose of land if the Council disposes of land at an undervalue then it must also ensure that it complies with State aid rules.
- 6.1.9. Notwithstanding the above powers the Council has a fiduciary duty to the taxpayers and must fulfil this duty in a way which is accountable to local people.
- 6.1.10. The Legal Department will continue to advise on these matters as the Scheme progresses.

## 6.2. Finance Implications

- 6.2.1. There is a budget allocation of £5.5m in the current approved Council's Capital Programme. The budget of £5.5m is allocated for delivery of 3 improvement schemes in Macclesfield as shown in the table below.

<b>Scheme</b>	<b>Cost</b>
Silk Road (constructed 2019)	£237,439
Mill Lane (constructed early 2020)	£251,785
Flowerpot Junction	£5,010,776
<b>Total</b>	<b>£5,500,000</b>

- 6.2.2. The total Flowerpot Junction Improvement scheme cost is estimated at £5.0M, including risk allowance. A high-level cost estimate has been prepared by specialist engineering and property consultants. The scheme actual cost will depend on finalisation of the target cost and any further savings opportunities realised during preconstruction and construction

implementation stages. The following table summarises the main cost elements for the Scheme.

<b>Scheme Element</b>	<b>Estimated Outturn Costs</b>
Development Stage costs	£1,000,000
Preliminary Works, Statutory Undertakers diversions	£900,000
Construction	£2,300,000
Post Construction costs	£300,000
Risk Allowance / Inflation	£510,776
<b>Total</b>	<b>£5,010,776</b>

6.2.3. The Scheme funding includes contributions from the National Productivity Fund, the Council and developer sources. The following table summarises the funding sources.

<b>Funding Source</b>	<b>Value</b>
National Productivity Fund	£3,500,000
Developer Contributions	£1,200,000
Cheshire East Council Contribution	£800,000
<b>Total Scheme costs</b>	<b>£5,500,000</b>

6.2.4. The developer contribution of £1.2M is linked the development of the South Macclesfield Development Area which the council is acting as lead developer for. This potential contribution is included in the council's capital programme.

### 6.3. Policy Implications

6.3.1. The Scheme is in line with the aims and objectives set out in the Council's Corporate Plan, Local Plan and Infrastructure Delivery Plan.

#### **6.4. Equality Implications**

6.4.1. An Equality Impact Assessment will be undertaken for the Scheme during the design stage. The Scheme will be delivered in line with the Council's current policy and practice, taking account of the needs of all residents and all types of users of the public highway.

#### **6.5. Human Resources Implications**

6.5.1. It shall be necessary to ensure that sufficient resource is allocated in Estates, Highways and Legal Services to support delivery of the scheme. If additional temporary resources are required, these will be met from the project budget.

#### **6.6. Risk Management Implications**

6.6.1. Robust governance arrangements have been operating for the project and a risk register is in place and monitored on a regular basis. Mitigation measures; monitoring and effective control will continue to be exercised.

6.6.2. The three principal risks identified are safety in construction; timely completion and delivery within budget. They have all been considered in the selection, design development and construction planning and programming of the scheme.

6.6.3. A risk allocation of approximately £500,000 has been assigned to the Scheme to cover for any additional costs arising during delivery of the scheme. The largest risk relates to the number of utility diversions that may be required. Discussions are ongoing with the Statutory Undertakers to confirm costs and agree a programme for any diversions.

6.6.4. The Council is in negotiation to acquire the majority of the land required for the scheme and the negotiations shall continue with the objective of securing the land required by agreement.

6.6.5. Third Party Funding from s.106 commuted sums developer contributions (£1.2 million) is secured from the SMDA for a junction improvement scheme at the Flowerpot Junction, Congleton Road, Macclesfield. There is a risk of paying back the developer contribution in part or in full if the Scheme was not delivered.

6.6.6. Should the Scheme not be delivered, the £3.5m NPIF grant from the Department for Transport would be lost and there is a risk of a requirement to pay back the grant in part or in full. The DfT have been kept informed of our scheme progress and raised no issues, but if the scheme is not delivered and repayment is required then the Council would have to fund

any shortfall .Benefits related to the easing congestion at the junction would therefore not be realised.

#### **6.7. Rural Communities Implications**

6.7.1. There are no direct implications for rural communities. The Scheme is designed to improve the efficiency and safety of the Flowerpot Junction and through flow of traffic on this part of the highway network, which is open to use by all residents and visitors to the borough.

#### **6.8. Implications for Children & Young People/Cared for Children**

6.8.1. The Scheme design will enhance the walking and cycling facilities at the Flowerpot Junction by providing improved pedestrian and cycling crossing facilities for all non-motorised users at the junction. There are many young people using the crossing facilities at the junction as it is a key route to various schools and Macclesfield College.

#### **6.9. Public Health Implications**

6.9.1. The reduction in the number of killed and seriously injured as a result of road traffic collisions on the public highway in Cheshire East is a key aim of the Council and external stakeholders.

6.9.2. The Scheme will have public health benefits by enhancing road safety for motorised and non-motorised users by easing congestion and the associated reduction in incidents that results when compared with congested highways.

6.9.3. The Scheme will have public health benefits by providing freer flowing traffic using the junction and encourage sustainable forms of transport such as walking and cycling through enhanced crossing facilities and junction arrangements.

#### **6.10. Climate Change Implications**

6.10.1. The Council has committed to becoming Carbon neutral by 2025 and to encourage businesses, residents and organisations in Cheshire East to reduce their carbon footprint. The Scheme provides for methods of travel that support carbon reduction and sustainable transport.

### **7. Ward Members Affected**

7.1. The wards affected are Macclesfield Central, Macclesfield West and Ivy, Macclesfield South and Macclesfield East within the borough but provide wider benefits for all residents of Cheshire East.

## **8. Consultation & Engagement**

- 8.1. An engagement exercise was undertaken with Local Councillors in February 2020. Feedback received has been used to inform the subsequent design.
- 8.2. Cheshire East Highways will be engaging with Members, stakeholders, local residents and road users as part of an ongoing communications exercise to be continued during 2021. This will advise on scheme proposals and give further details on the construction works and traffic management arrangements to enable the safety of residents, road users and constructions teams and the efficient delivery of the works to minimise disruption. A scheme webpage will be added to the Cheshire East Highways website as part of the communications exercise.

## **9. Access to Information**

- 9.1. The background papers relating to this report can be inspected by contacting the report writer.

## **10. Contact Information**

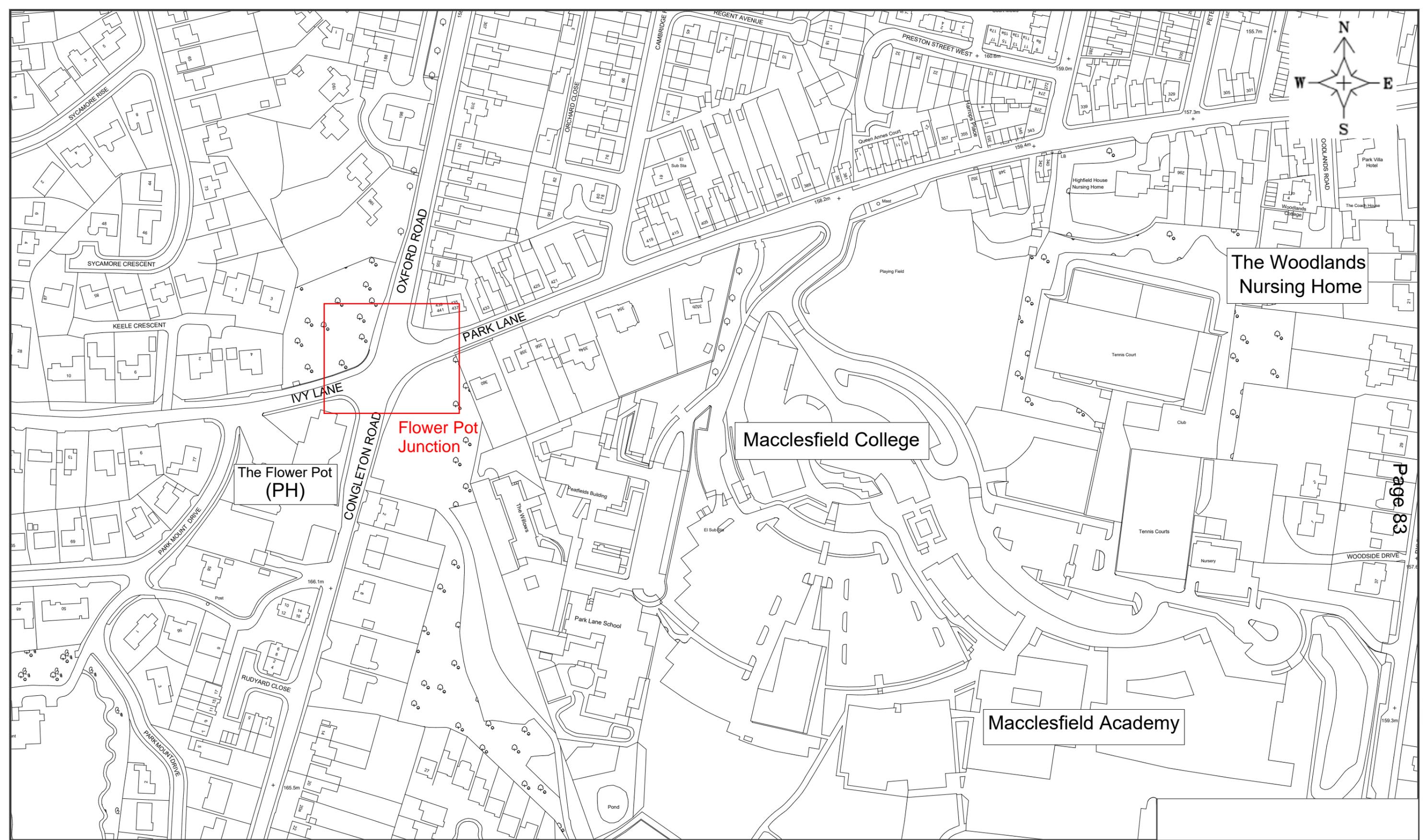
- 10.1. Any questions relating to this report should be directed to the following officer:

Name: Chris Hindle

Job Title: Head of Infrastructure

Email: [chris.hindle@cheshireeast.gov.uk](mailto:chris.hindle@cheshireeast.gov.uk)

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Project: **The Flowerpot Junction**  
 Site Location

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 Ordnance Survey 100049045.

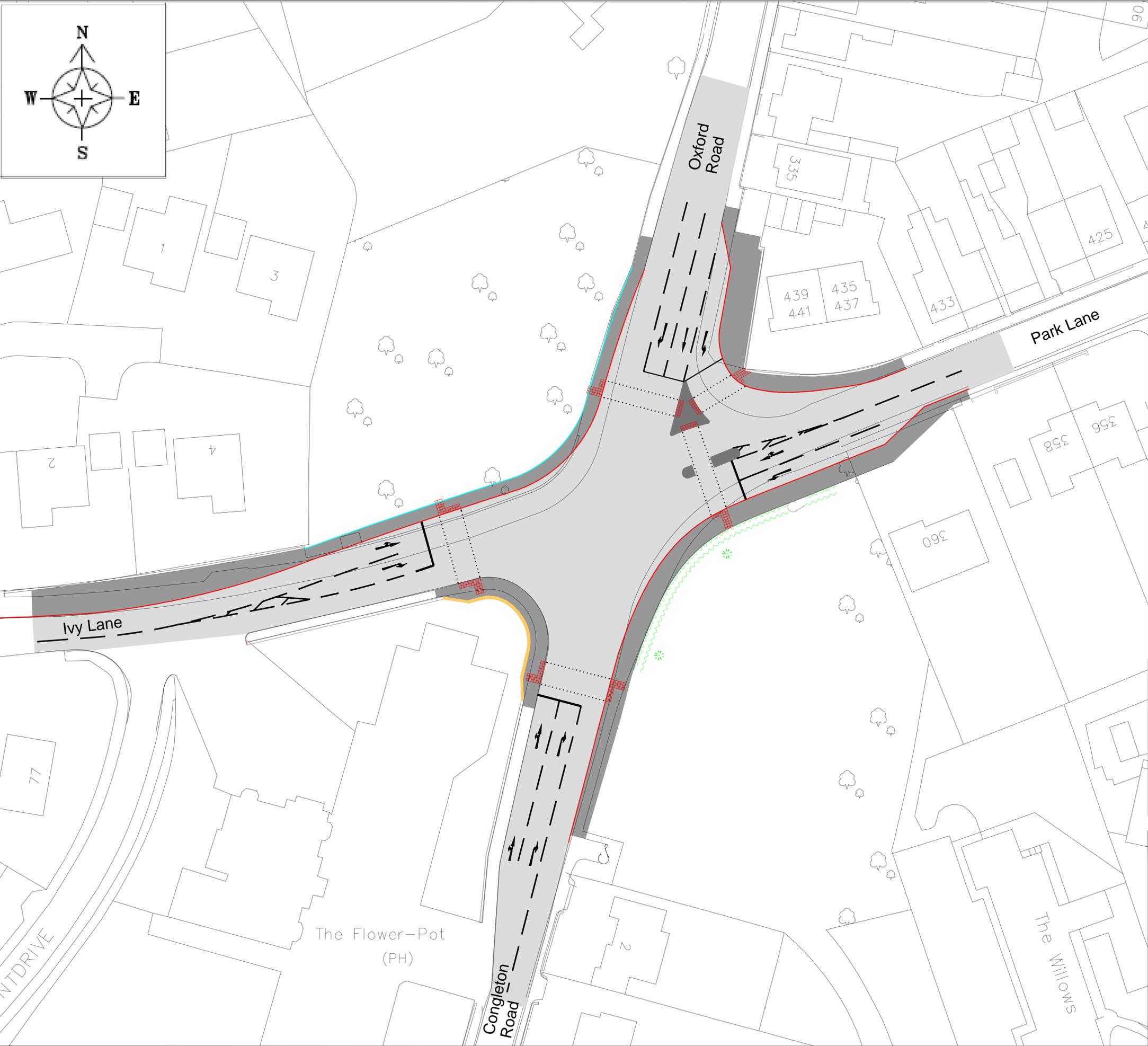
THIS IS A COLOUR PLAN.

[cheshireeasttraffic@cheshireeast.gov.uk](mailto:cheshireeasttraffic@cheshireeast.gov.uk)

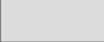
Cheshire East Council Highways  
 6th Floor, Delamere House, Delamere Street, Crewe, Cheshire, CW1 2LL

Contact Name:	
Tel:	Date: July 2020
Drawn by: TP	
Checked by: JC	
Approved by:	
Drawing Status:	
Scales at A3: NTS	Sheet 1 of 1
Drawing No:	Phase/Rev:
For Information	D/-

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**Key:**

-  Carriageway surface
-  Footpath and designated pedestrian/cycle shared use
-  Pedestrian island and refuge
-  Wall amendment
-  New kerb line
-  New fence line
-  New carriageway lining
-  Pedestrian crossing
-  New hedge line
-  Replaced planted tree

Ph/Rev.	Revision Details	Rev.by	Date



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**Appendix B**

**The Flowerpot Junction**

<b>THIS IS A COLOUR PLAN.</b>		<a href="mailto:cheshireasttraffic@cheshireeast.gov.uk">cheshireasttraffic@cheshireeast.gov.uk</a>	
Cheshire East Council Highways - 6th Floor Delamere House, Delamere Street, Crewe, Cheshire, CW1 2LL			
Contact Name:	Telephone: 0300 123 50 20	Date: July 2020	
Drawn by: TP	Checked by:		
Approved by:	Drawing Status:		Sheet 1 of 1
Scales at A1: NTS	Drawing No:	For Information Only	Phase/Rev: D/-

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Working for a brighter future together

Key Decision: N
Date First Published: N/A

## Cabinet

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**Date of Meeting:** 9 March 2021

**Report Title:** Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans (LCWIP) for Crewe, Congleton, Macclesfield and Wilmslow

**Portfolio Holder:** Cllr Craig Browne – Deputy Leader & Portfolio Holder for Strategic Transport

**Senior Officer:** Frank Jordan – Executive Director Place

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### 1. Report Summary

- 1.1. The Council has clear ambitions for delivering sustainable and inclusive economic growth and environmental improvement. A key element of achieving these ambitions is delivering investment in transport infrastructure that supports cycling and walking. Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans have been developed for Crewe, Congleton, Macclesfield and Wilmslow, setting out ambitious programmes to deliver high quality walking and cycling networks. These four towns were selected for the development of an LCWIP following an evidence-based review, which identified them as having the highest potential in the borough to increase walking and cycling.
- 1.2. A step change in levels of walking and cycling across Cheshire East will contribute to the Council's strategic outcomes for environmental improvement, health and wellbeing, the local economy and communities. Cheshire East Council has committed to delivering local action to tackle the climate change emergency and increasing levels of walking and cycling can make a substantial contribution to this imperative.
- 1.3. Department for Transport has provided technical support to develop LCWIPs, stating that *'whilst the preparation of LCWIPs is non-mandatory, local authorities who have plans will be well placed to make the case for future*

*investment*'. Following the Comprehensive Spending Review in November 2020, this continues to be the approach. There are clear indications that authorities with complete and adopted LCWIPs are more likely to receive DfT funding in future years, as part of national funding programmes such as "Gear Change".

- 1.4. The plans prepared in Cheshire East have identified a sequenced programme of potential routes and infrastructure improvements for future investment. These improvements take account of the volumes of cycling and pedestrian movements in Cheshire East, and the potential to increase these mode shares to achieve wider strategic outcomes. All schemes identified in LCWIPs will be subject to further detailed development and design work, with extensive public consultation necessary before schemes are implemented.
- 1.5. It is important to recognise that the LCWIPs are not fully funded at this stage. They establish a plan for improvements that can help in securing future funding from a wide range of sources. Funding to deliver schemes would be drawn from existing budgets, such as the Local Transport Plan and external sources such as Department for Transport specific grants or developer contributions. Delivery of projects will be embedded into the annual capital programmes and be responsive to take maximum advantage of available funding opportunities as they arise.
- 1.6. Appendix 1 includes summary LCWIP maps for Crewe, Congleton, Macclesfield and Wilmslow, and Appendix 2 includes the full LCWIP documents. Note: owing to their size, the documents comprising Appendix 2 are not included in the agenda papers but are available on the agenda web page.

## **2. Recommendations**

### **2.1. That Cabinet:**

- 2.1.1. Approve the Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans for Crewe, Congleton, Macclesfield and Wilmslow as the basis for future development and planning of sustainable transport infrastructure within Cheshire East.
- 2.1.2. Note that the Plans will be an integral part of the Council's local transport strategy, alongside the Cycling Strategy and the Local Transport Plan.

### **3. Reasons for Recommendations**

- 3.1. The LCWIPs are evidence-based plans that have identified an integrated and high quality walking and cycling network necessary to achieve the Council's wider environmental, economic and community objectives.
- 3.2. The adoption of the LCWIPs will provide a strategic approach to the Council's investment in walking and cycling infrastructure from both internal budgets and external funding sources.

### **4. Other Options Considered**

- 4.1. The DfT has noted that LCWIPs are not mandatory documents but that local authorities who have plans will be well placed to make the case for future investment. Therefore, not developing LCWIPs would likely result in avoidable constraints for securing external funding. Additionally, failure to develop a strategic network plan may lead to future investment being uncoordinated and poorly integrated.

### **5. Background**

- 5.1. It is the Council's ambition to improve walking and cycling facilities within the Borough. Investing in good quality cycling and walking infrastructure to give people safe and attractive routes is an important factor in encouraging the uptake of walking and cycling for commuting and leisure.
- 5.2. The Cheshire East Cycling Strategy, adopted in 2017, outlines the target to double the number of people cycling once per week for any journey purpose in Cheshire East by 2027, which also aligns to the Government's ambition.
- 5.3. Following the publication of the Cycling and Walking Investment Strategy (CWIS) by the DfT in 2017, LAs have been encouraged to develop LCWIPs to provide a strategic approach to identify walking and cycling improvements which are required at a local level.
- 5.4. Local Authorities (LAs) have been advised by the Department for Transport (DfT) to develop Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans (LCWIPs); which should provide a strategic approach to identify walking and cycling improvements needed at a local level to increase the number of people cycling and walking for journeys to employment, education and other everyday purposes.
- 5.5. LCWIPs have been developed for Crewe, Congleton, Macclesfield and Wilmslow, setting out ambitious plans to deliver high quality walking and cycling networks, with schemes consistent with Local Transport Note 01/20, including segregated cycling infrastructure where possible. Local Transport Note 01/20 is the latest guidance for local authorities on designing high quality, safe cycle infrastructure. The Local Transport Delivery Plans process

is identifying similar high quality walking and cycling infrastructure that is required in other areas of Cheshire East.

## **6. Implications of the Recommendations**

### **6.1. Legal Implications**

6.1.1. As the local transport authority, Cheshire East Council has a legal duty to maintain a safe and efficient highway network. Developing a coordinated, high quality walking and cycling network will contribute to fulfilling this legal duty.

6.1.2. In developing future schemes, the appropriate legal processes will need to be followed for the implementation of schemes e.g. Traffic Regulation Orders. This will be completed for specific schemes as they come forward for development and implementation.

### **6.2. Finance Implications**

6.2.1. There are no direct finance implications from the adoption of the LCWIPs, however, adoption of the plans will put the Council in a stronger position to gain external funding.

6.2.2. Upon adoption by the Council, the LCWIPs will provide a framework of prioritised schemes that could become part of the approved Capital Programme for Transport and Highways once a funding stream has been formally agreed and the necessary financial approvals are in place.

6.2.3. Schemes are anticipated to be funded from a range of sources including: Local Transport Plan Integrated Transport Block; developer funding such as Community Infrastructure Levy, Section 106 & 278 Agreements; the Council's own resources, and any other external funding that is available.

### **6.3. Policy Implications**

6.3.1. Adopting the LCWIPs will assist in the delivery of the Local Transport Plan (LTP) and routes identified in the LCWIPs have been included in the Local Transport Delivery Plans options lists for the respective towns.

### **6.4. Equality Implications**

6.4.1. An Equality Impact Assessment has been developed and is included as Appendix 3 to the report.

6.4.2. Audits of routes were completed as part of the development of the LCWIPs including the consideration of accessibility issues for a range of users. The Council's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Officer was involved in this process.

6.4.3. The EIA has identified that:

- Residents should benefit from schemes that will be delivered, helping to improve levels of physical activity, with benefits to physical and mental health.
- Research has shown that a higher proportion of men than women cycle in the UK. It is anticipated the delivery of higher quality and safer infrastructure would help to address this imbalance.
- People with disabilities, such as sight loss and physical mobility impairments, can be negatively affected by some highways and transport schemes. Appropriate mitigation measures will be put in place when individual schemes are brought forward for further design, development and implementation. As part of scheme development appropriate design guidance should be followed alongside early and proactive engagement with these groups to understand their needs and requirements.

#### **6.5. Human Resources Implications**

6.5.1. There are no Human Resources implications associated with the adoption of the LCWIPs.

#### **6.6. Risk Management Implications**

6.6.1. Risk registers and risk assessments will be produced as part of the Council's standard approach to project management and governance as schemes come forward for delivery.

#### **6.7. Rural Communities Implications**

6.7.1. The routes proposed in the LCWIPs have been fed into the Local Transport Delivery Plan process to ensure that routes are co-ordinated with other transport improvements connecting into rural areas.

#### **6.8. Implications for Children & Young People/Cared for Children**

6.8.1. The standard of cycling infrastructure is aimed to be suitable for a competent 12 year old child (as per DfT Guidance document Local Transport Note 01/20 – Cycle Infrastructure Design). Pedestrian infrastructure should follow best practice including guidance set out in the Manual for Streets 1 & 2. Route sections identified in the vicinity of schools will be considered for inclusion within the Council's Sustainable Modes of Travel to School programme.

#### **6.9. Public Health Implications**

6.9.1. The public health benefits of active travel are well established. Travelling actively helps people meet the recommended physical activity

targets, improves physical and mental health, whilst reducing the risks of poor health and premature death.

## **6.10. Climate Change Implications**

6.10.1. The Council has committed to becoming carbon neutral by 2025 and to encourage all businesses, residents and organisations in Cheshire East to reduce their carbon footprint. The LCWIPs have been aligned with the LTP and therefore wider Council strategies. The LCWIPs set out measures to improve walking and cycling infrastructure, which will enable more sustainable travel.

## **7. Ward Members Affected**

7.1. All wards in Crewe, Congleton, Macclesfield and Wilmslow.

## **8. Consultation & Engagement**

8.1. From the 1<sup>st</sup> May to 25<sup>th</sup> June 2018 the LTP went through a public consultation. Representatives from local walking and cycling user groups in Congleton, Macclesfield and Wilmslow were invited to attend their local LTP consultation drop-in sessions to specifically help inform development of the LCWIPs covering those areas.

8.2. A workshop was held with local user groups in April 2020 to inform development of the Crewe LCWIP.

8.3. Workshops were held in January 2021 with representatives from local community user groups (including Active Travel Crewe, Active Travel Congleton, Macctastic, Cycle Wilmslow) to gain feedback on the proposed LCWIP to inform the final documents.

8.4. Proposals from the LCWIPs have been discussed with Town Councils as part of wider transport discussions, including during the preparation of Neighbourhood Plans.

## **9. Access to Information**

9.1. The background papers relating to this report can be inspected by contacting the report writer.

## **10. Contact Information**

10.1. Any questions relating to this report should be directed to the following officer:

Name: Richard Hibbert

Job Title: Head of Strategic Transport and Parking

Email: [Richard.Hibbert@cheshireeast.gov.uk](mailto:Richard.Hibbert@cheshireeast.gov.uk)

# Crewe LCWIP Walking and Cycling Proposals

Proposed schemes within Crewe aim to improve connectivity across the town, including links between the town centre and Crewe Station and links to Nantwich. Some of the main schemes are highlighted below with more detail on the following slides.

A new cycle and walking route beside the A530, connecting with the existing off road cycle and pedestrian route between Nantwich and Crewe and linking to the North West Crewe development area and Leighton Hospital.

Enhanced cycle facilities on Vernon Way and West Street to improve safety on this route.

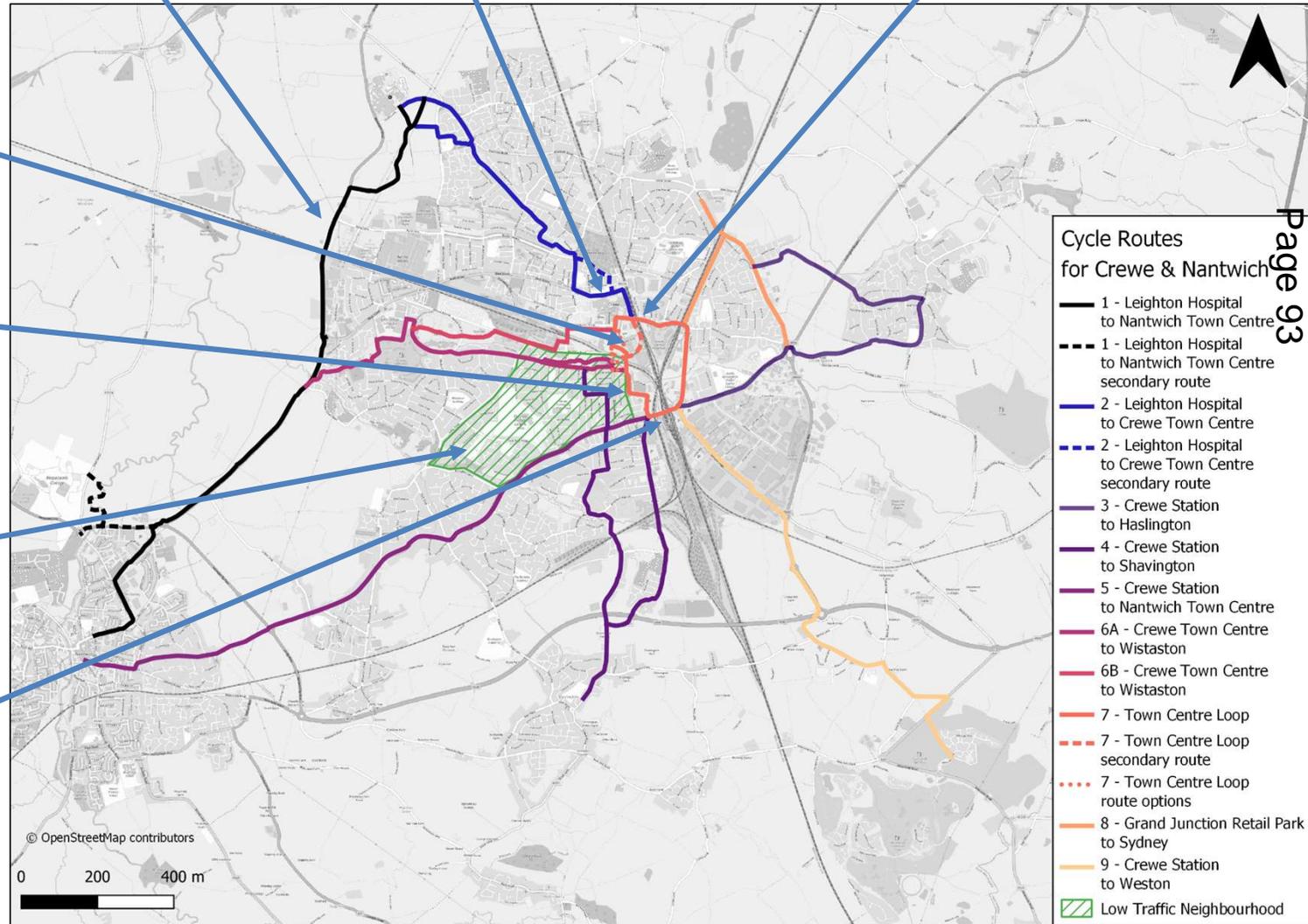
Improvements on the route from the town centre to Grand Junction Retail Park, including provision of a new bridge structure dedicated to cyclists and pedestrians parallel to the Earle Street bridge.

Route connecting from High Street / Vernon Way roundabout towards the town centre routing past the Leisure Centre as part of regeneration proposals for the area.

Mill Street Corridor – provision of a green link connecting from Nantwich Road towards the town centre and enhanced route under the railway bridge.

Consider feasibility and options for 20mph speeds limits at various locations and improved urban realm.

As part of the Crewe Station works, an additional separate structure parallel to Nantwich Road across the railway is planned with high quality segregated cycling/walking routes.



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# CONGLETON LCWIP - KEY SCHEMES PROPOSALS

Proposed schemes within Congleton focus on improving connections from the rail station to the town centre, creating a sustainable connection to future development sites, and creating an east-west walking and cycling corridor. Delivery of the Congleton Link Road creates an opportunity to improve walking and cycling links along existing traffic routes through Congleton.

Wayfinding improvements



Toucan crossings to support cyclist and pedestrian movements and improving the National Cycle Network

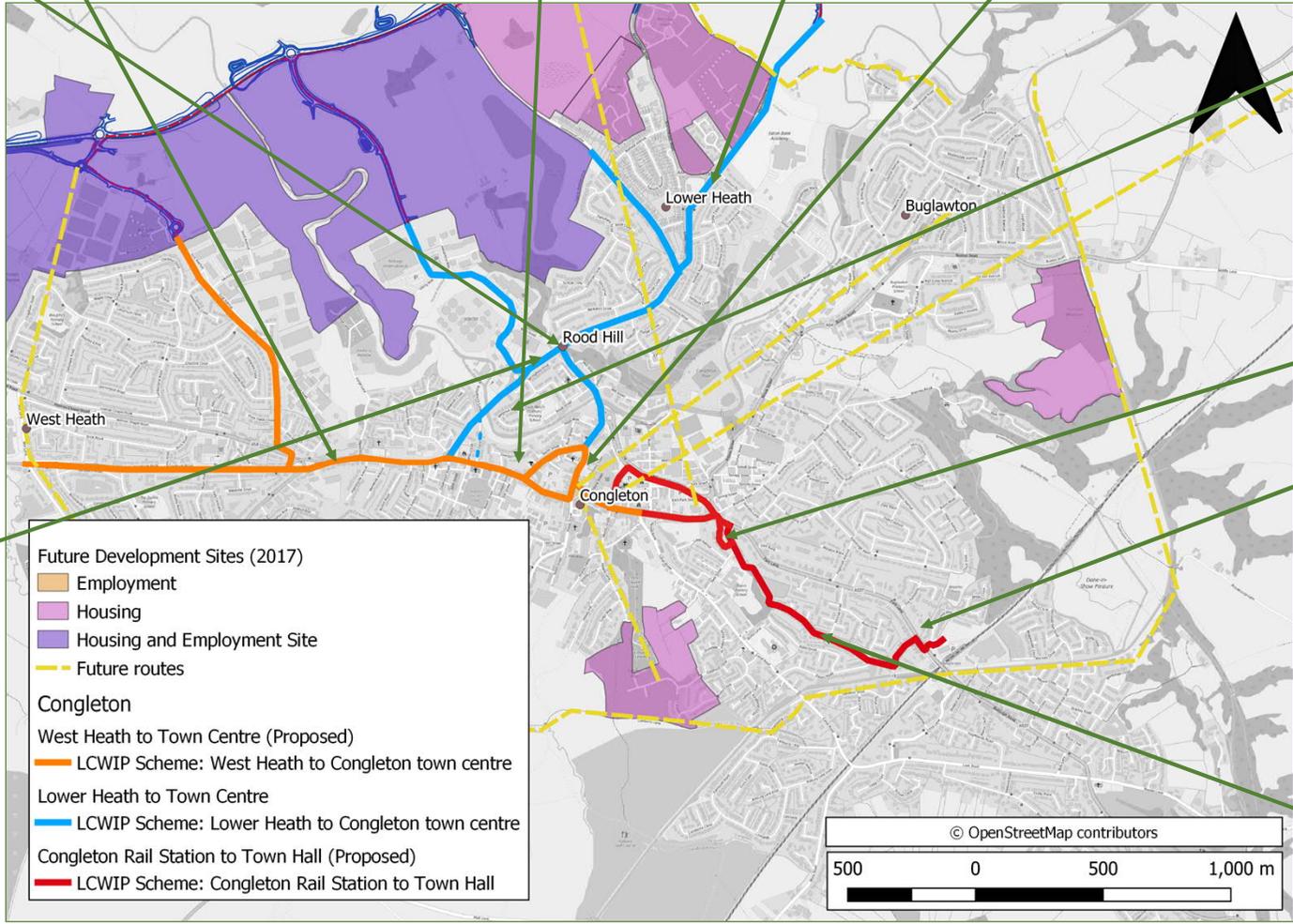
Improving pedestrian crossing points on Mill Street / Antrobus Street



Segregated two-way cycletrack

Proposed Rood Hill junction improvements including walking and cycling crossing points

Introduce informal streets scheme and/or traffic calming / traffic management approaching Town Centre on West Street



Proposed segregated cycle tracks and crossing points

Improve existing route through lighting improvements and vegetation maintenance

Crossing and access improvements at Congleton Rail Station, with a singular vehicle entrance introduced



Side road priority from Congleton rail station to town centre

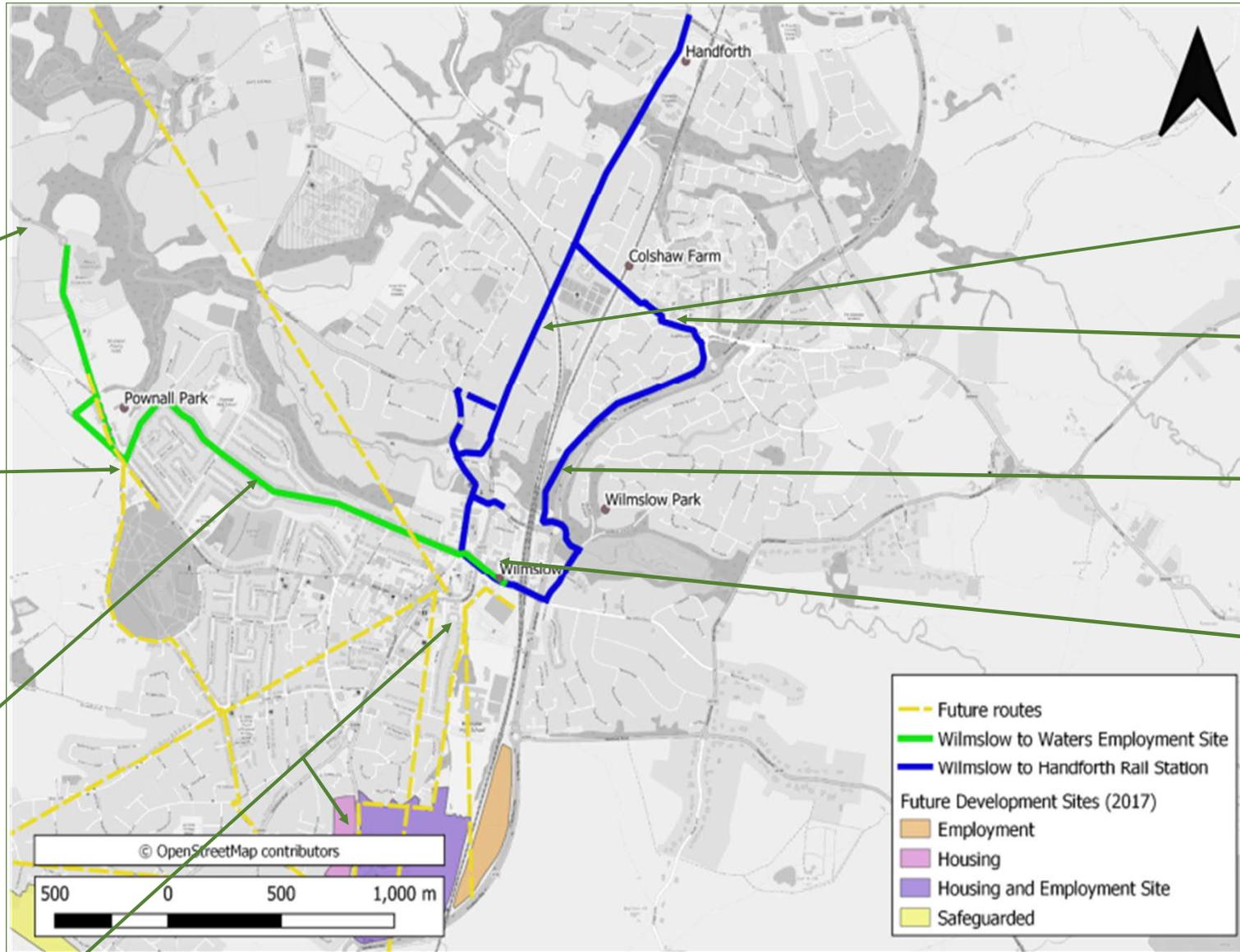
# WILMSLOW LCWIP - KEY SCHEMES PROPOSALS

Proposed schemes within Wilmslow focus on creating sustainable connections between the rail station, town centre, future proposed development sites, employment and communities. These schemes will create a more coherent walking and cycling network, enabling greater trips to be made by more sustainable modes of transport. The schemes will also enable longer distance connections to Alderley Edge, Alderley Park, Handforth and Manchester Airport Enterprise Zone.

A538 shared path scheme due to be constructed in 2021

Various options to fill missing link in cycle route on A538

20mph speed limit with traffic calming along Hawthorn Lane/Broad Walk/King's Road



Upgrading existing advisory cycle lane on Manchester Road

Extension of shared path on Dean Row Road

Potential to introduce ramp to replace existing steps and create an accessible off-road route

20mph speed limits on key links within town centre and improving crossing points

LGF funded scheme due for construction in 2021 to create high quality walking and cycling route from Wilmslow rail station to Wilmslow High School, Royal London Campus and Alderley Park

# MACCLESFIELD LCWIP - KEY SCHEMES PROPOSALS

Proposed schemes within Macclesfield incorporate improved connections between the rail station, town centre, Macclesfield District General Hospital, South Macclesfield Development Area and Hurdsfield Industrial Estate. Schemes will also improve the north-south National Cycle Route 55 through Macclesfield and support access to Macclesfield station.

Install toucan crossing across northern arm of A523/Hulley Road/Brocklehurst Way roundabout to support movements to Hurdsfield Industrial Estate and AstraZeneca

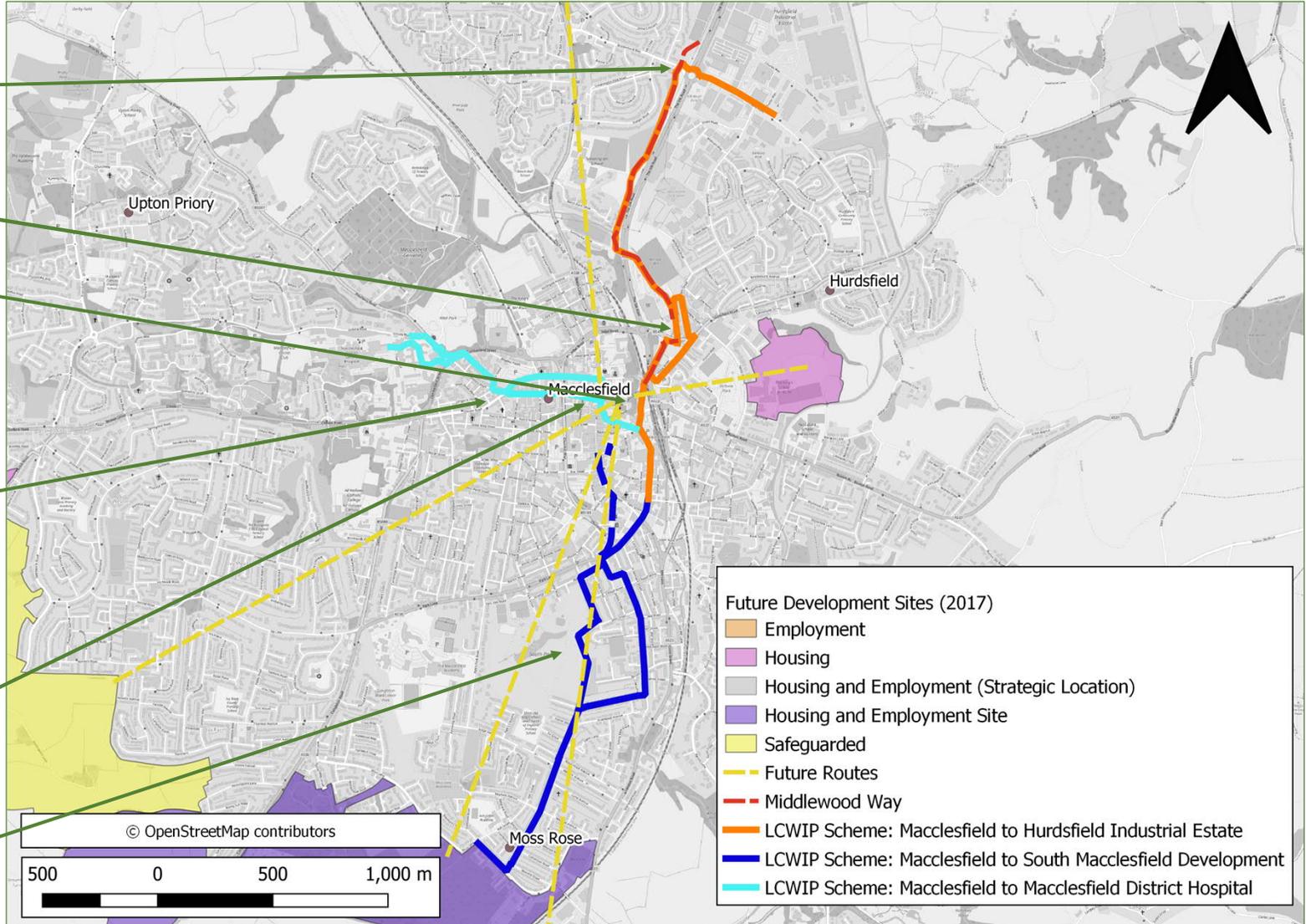
Improve connection between Middlewood Way and town centre

Public realm improvements to Macclesfield rail station, improving cycle parking and cycling links on Water Green / Sunderland Street

On-road signed cycle route with various options to be considered. Feasibility study needed to identify appropriate crossing points of Cumberland Street and links into the hospital.

Improving pedestrian and cycle links through the town centre as part of the Strategic Regeneration Framework

Improving the cycle route and pedestrian links to the south including traffic reduction / calming on Lord Street / High Street.



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# EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

**TITLE: Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans**

## VERSION CONTROL

<b>Date</b>	<b>Version</b>	<b>Author</b>	<b>Description of Changes</b>
<b>08/01/2021</b>	<b>0.1</b>	<b>Clair Visco</b>	<b>First Draft</b>
<b>05/02/2021</b>	<b>0.2</b>	<b>Clair Visco</b>	<b>Amended draft following comments</b>

## CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL – EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

Stage 1 Description: Fact finding (about your policy / service /

Department	Place		Lead officer responsible for assessment		Clair Visco	
Service	Strategic Infrastructure		Other members of team undertaking assessment		John Davies	
Date	05/02/2021		Version 0.2			
Type of document (mark as appropriate)	Strategic	Project	Function	Policy	Procedure	Service
Is this a new/ existing/ revision of an existing document (please mark as appropriate)	New		Existing		Revision	
<p>Title and subject of the impact assessment (include a brief description of the aims, outcomes, operational issues as appropriate and how it fits in with the wider aims of the organisation)</p> <p>Please attach a copy of the strategy/ plan/ function/ policy/ procedure/ service</p>	<p><b>Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans</b></p> <p><b>Background</b>                      The Council has clear ambitions for delivering sustainable and inclusive economic growth and environmental improvement. A key element of achieving these ambitions is delivering investment in transport infrastructure that supports cycling and walking. A step change in levels of walking and cycling across Cheshire East will benefit the environment, health and wellbeing, the local economy and communities. Cheshire East Council has committed to delivering local action to tackle the climate change emergency and walking and cycling will play a crucial part in this.</p> <p>Local Authorities (LAs) have been encouraged by the Department for Transport (DfT) to develop Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans (LCWIPs) to provide a strategic approach to identify walking and cycling improvements which are required at a local level. LCWIPs are intended to identify the infrastructure required to increase the number of people cycling and walking for journeys to employment, education and for other everyday purposes.</p>					

	<p>The DfT has provided technical support to development the LCWIPs and has stated that 'whilst the preparation of LCWIPs is non-mandatory, local authorities who have plans will be well placed to make the case for future investment'. Following the Comprehensive Spending Review in November 2020, this continues to be the approach, with a strong indication that LAs with completed LCWIPs are more likely to receive DfT funding for 2021/22 onwards.</p> <p>The plans have identified a sequenced programme of potential routes and infrastructure improvements for future investment. Proposed schemes will be subject to public consultation and design / planning work to assess feasibility and costs before schemes are taken forward.</p> <p>Funding to deliver schemes would be drawn from Council budgets such as the Local Transport Plan Integrated Block and external sources such as active travel grant funding from the Department for Transport or developer contributions. A degree of flexibility will be needed to take advantage of funding opportunities as they arise.</p> <p>LCWIPs have been developed for Crewe, Congleton, Macclesfield and Wilmslow, setting out ambitious plans to deliver high quality walking and cycling networks, with schemes consistent with LTN 01/20, including segregated cycling infrastructure where possible. The Local Transport Delivery Plans process is identifying similar high quality walking and cycling infrastructure that is required in other areas of Cheshire East.</p> <p>At this stage, no schemes will be planned or delivered as part of the current work programme. The LCWIPs identify projects/schemes with work required to plan, design and deliver investment. As such, EIAs will be needed for the planning and delivery of projects/schemes when funding is secured for development and construction.</p>	
<p><b>Who are the main stakeholders and have they been engaged with? (e.g. general public, employees, Councillors, partners, specific audiences, residents)</b></p>	<p>Main stakeholder groups include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ General public (including residents and visitors to the Borough);</li> <li>○ Cheshire East Council stakeholders;</li> <li>○ Local Town Councils;</li> <li>○ Active Travel community groups;</li> <li>○ Sustrans</li> <li>○ Schools and education establishments.</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Consultation/ involvement carried out.</b></p>	<p><b>YES</b></p>	<p><b>NO</b></p>

<p><b>What consultation method(s) did you use?</b></p>	<p>Engagement to date has included the public consultation of the Local Transport Plan in May and June 2018. Representatives from local walking and cycling user groups in Congleton, Macclesfield and Wilmslow were invited to attend their local LTP consultation drop-in sessions to specifically help inform development of the LCWIPs covering those areas.</p> <p>The Council's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Officer was involved in the early stages of the LCWIP development.</p> <p>A workshop was held with local user groups in April 2020 to inform development of the Crewe LCWIP.</p> <p>Workshops were held in January 2021 with representatives from local community user groups (including Active Travel Crewe, Active Travel Congleton, Macctastic, Cycle Wilmslow) to gain feedback on the proposed LCWIP to inform the final documents.</p> <p>Proposals from the LCWIPs have been discussed with Town Councils as part of wider transport discussions.</p> <p>Regular dialogue with Sustrans has shared the development of the LCWIPs, allowing their knowledge and feedback to be included.</p>
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**Stage 2 Initial Screening**

<p><b>Who is affected and what evidence have you considered to arrive at this analysis? (This may or may not include the stakeholders listed above)</b></p>	<p>Residents, local businesses/employers, people who live or work in the borough, education and training providers and anyone with a travel need in Cheshire East may be impacted by the projects which are eventually delivered through the LCWIPs. The LCWIPs have identified a high quality network of walking and cycling improvements that, subject to funding, could be delivered.</p> <p>National research has shown that a higher proportion of men than women cycle in the UK and it is anticipated that high quality and safer infrastructure would help to address this imbalance.</p> <p>People with disabilities such as sight loss and physical mobility impairments can be negatively affected by some highways and transport schemes.</p>
<p><b>Who is intended to benefit and how</b></p>	<p>Residents should benefit from the schemes that will be delivered, with access to a high quality walking and cycling network. This will help to improve levels of physical activity, with benefits to physical and mental health.</p>

<p><b>Could there be a different impact or outcome for some groups?</b></p>	<p>There is a potential for there to be a different impact for people with disabilities or older residents.</p>							
<p><b>Does it include making decisions based on individual characteristics, needs or circumstances?</b></p>	<p>All the decisions will be based on assessment of all characteristics. Should there be a negative impact this will be looked at and mitigation put in place as individual schemes are brought forward for further design, development and implementation.</p>							
<p><b>Are relations between different groups or communities likely to be affected? (eg will it favour one particular group or deny opportunities for others?)</b></p>	<p>There should be no effect on relations between different groups or communities.</p>							
<p><b>Is there any specific targeted action to promote equality? Is there a history of unequal outcomes (do you have enough evidence to prove otherwise)?</b></p>	<p>In the past walking and cycling infrastructure has inadvertently restricted access to some routes for people with wheelchairs and non-standard cycles due to physical barriers intended to restrict access to motorised vehicles. Best practice has been developed that shows how these unintended impacts can be avoided, including guidance from the Department for Transport in Local Transport Note 01/20 that has been used in developing the LCWIPs.</p> <p>People with disabilities such as sight loss and physical mobility impairments can be negatively affected by some highways and transport schemes. Appropriate mitigation measures will be put in place when individual schemes are brought forward for further design, development and implementation. As part of scheme development appropriate design guidance (e.g. national Local Transport Notes and RNIB) should be followed alongside early and proactive engagement with these groups to understand their needs and requirements.</p>							
<p><b>Is there an actual or potential negative impact on these specific characteristics? (Please tick)</b></p>								
<p><b>Age</b></p>	<p><b>Y</b></p>	<p><b>N</b></p>	<p><b>Marriage &amp; civil partnership</b></p>	<p><b>Y</b></p>	<p><b>N</b></p>	<p><b>Religion &amp; belief</b></p>	<p><b>Y</b></p>	<p><b>N</b></p>
<p><b>Disability</b></p>	<p><b>Y</b></p>	<p><b>N</b></p>	<p><b>Pregnancy &amp; maternity</b></p>	<p><b>Y</b></p>	<p><b>N</b></p>	<p><b>Sex</b></p>	<p><b>Y</b></p>	<p><b>N</b></p>

Gender reassignment	Y	N	Race	Y	N	Sexual orientation	Y	N
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Stage 3 Evidence

What evidence do you have to support your findings? (quantitative and qualitative) Please provide additional information that you wish to include as appendices to this document, i.e., graphs, tables, charts		Level of Risk (High, Medium or Low)
<b>Age</b>	<p>Different age groups have differing travel needs. Younger people need safe routes to school and education and would benefit from streets that are safer in general sense. Young adults rely on public transport and active travel to access education, employment and services – this programme aims to give people who can walk and cycle the ability to do this by providing safer routes.</p> <p>Older people may have specific mobility needs and may find it difficult to safely access lower quality walking and cycling infrastructure. The delivery of schemes identified in the LCWIPs aim to address this imbalance.</p>	<b>Medium</b>
<b>Disability</b>	<p>People with disabilities such as sight loss and physical mobility impairments can be negatively affected from some highways and transport schemes. Developing an EIA and consulting with disabled people in an accessible way is recommended by the RNIB.</p> <p>People with sight loss can sometimes find it difficult to navigate areas which do not have tactile paving or kerbs. This group of people can have issues when navigating through spaces in which cyclists are moving as limited sound is emitted. Scheme designers will use guidance from the RNIB in designing the schemes to avoid these conflicts.</p> <p>People with mobility impairments can find level differences challenging to navigate. Scheme designers will use national highway design guidance / standards to avoid level differences and obstacles that would restrict access, including the Department for Transport guidance document LTN 01/20.</p>	<b>High</b>
<b>Sex</b>	<p>Research nationally has found that a higher proportion of men cycle due to their willingness to cycle with motorised traffic. Additionally, in countries where high quality cycling infrastructure is provided there is a more even balance of men and women cyclists with greater gender equality. The schemes being designed aim to give higher quality cycle routes that may contribute to addressing this gender equality.</p>	<b>Medium</b>

## Stage 4 Mitigation

Protected characteristics	Mitigating action <i>Once you have assessed the impact of a policy/service, it is important to identify options and alternatives to reduce or eliminate any negative impact. Options considered could be adapting the policy or service, changing the way in which it is implemented or introducing balancing measures to reduce any negative impact. When considering each option you should think about how it will reduce any negative impact, how it might impact on other groups and how it might impact on relationships between groups and overall issues around community cohesion. You should clearly demonstrate how you have considered various options and the impact of these. You must have a detailed rationale behind decisions and a justification for those alternatives that have not been accepted.</i>	How will this be monitored?	Officer responsible	Target date
<b>Age</b>	Engaging with the teams delivering the Sustainable Travel to Schools Strategy (SMOTS) and Available Walking Routes to Schools workstreams to ensure schemes close to schools are appropriate. Also engaging with Transport Service Solutions to ensure schemes do not negatively impact on passenger transport access to schools.	Monthly STEPS Programme Board	Clair Visco / John Davies	Ongoing for delivery of schemes identified in LCWIPs.
<b>Disability</b>	Using RNIB and other DfT design guidance to design schemes. Engaging with RNIB and other umbrella groups on scheme design and trials to understand any potential impacts and to mitigate these.			
<b>Sex</b>	Schemes are being designed in accordance with the DfT's Local Transport Note 01/20 to give high quality routes that can help address the gender imbalance for cycling.			

## 5. Review and Conclusion

**Summary: provide a brief overview including impact, changes, improvement, any gaps in evidence and additional data that is needed**

<b>Specific actions to be taken to reduce, justify or remove any adverse impacts</b>	<b>How will this be monitored?</b>	<b>Officer responsible</b>	<b>Target date</b>
EIAs to be developed for LCWIP schemes when funding is confirmed for development and delivery	Via monthly STEPS Board	Clair Visco/John Davies	ongoing
<b>Please provide details and link to full action plan for actions</b>			
<b>When will this assessment be reviewed?</b>			
<b>Are there any additional assessments that need to be undertaken in relation to this assessment?</b>	No		
<b>Lead officer sign off</b>	Clair Visco	<b>Date</b>	05/02/2021
<b>Head of service sign off</b>	Richard Hibbert	<b>Date</b>	

Please publish this completed EIA form on the relevant section of the Cheshire East website



*Working for a brighter future together*

Key Decision: Y

Date First

Published: 3/12/20

## Cabinet

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**Date of Meeting:** 9 March 2021

**Report Title:** Home Repairs and Adaptations for Vulnerable People Financial Assistance Policy

**Portfolio Holder:** Councillor Nick Mannion, Environment and Regeneration

**Senior Officer:** Frank Jordan, Executive Director Place

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### 1. Report Summary

- 1.1. This report sets out how Cheshire East Council will exceed its statutory duty to enable vulnerable residents to live independently in suitable, well maintained homes through a revised Home Repairs and Adaptations Policy for 2021-2026.
- 1.2. The Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England & Wales) Order 2002 removed most of the prescriptive housing renewal grant legislation and introduced a wide-ranging discretionary power for local housing authorities to develop a local policy to meet local need. The Council has successfully operated such a policy since 2009, facilitating investment into improving homes and drawing in Government grants, landlord contributions and funding from charitable trusts.
- 1.3. The financial help set out in the proposed Policy will enable vulnerable people to improve and adapt their homes which will result in improved health and wellbeing, reduce the demand on health and social care and contribute to the regeneration and sustainability of our communities.

### 2. Recommendation

- 2.1. That Cabinet approve the Home Repairs and Adaptations for Vulnerable People Financial Assistance Policy 2021-2026.

### 3. Reasons for Recommendation

- 3.1. The Council cannot provide discretionary grants and loans without formally adopting a policy that sets out the eligibility criteria.

- 3.2. The Council is committed to investing in early intervention and prevention services to help residents live well and for longer. By choosing to invest in home repairs and adaptations through this Policy, the Council will empower and motivate people to manage their own care and wellbeing at home and reduce the need for paid care in accessible and safe home environments.
- 3.3. There is a strong policy drive for integrated approaches across housing, health and social care to prevent hospital admissions and expedite hospital discharge, none more so than in the current pandemic. Housing's role in supporting health is becoming more prominent, with research demonstrating the causal link between poor housing conditions and ill health.
- 3.4. The Policy delivers on many of the recommended actions within NHS England's guide to how housing can support health and social care systems, including improving suitability and accessibility, affordable warmth, enabling hospital discharge and supporting people to live independently in the community.
- 3.5. The Council makes a significant financial investment through its capital programme to enabling disabled people to achieve independent living and to improve housing conditions. The policy provides a clear framework to ensure that financial resources are directed to the people who need it most and that resources are used effectively to achieve outcomes that support the Council's three year plan.
- 3.6. Reducing vacancy rates, improving the quality of the existing housing stock and preserving the built environment all lead to an improvement in quality of place and quality of life, creating attractive, safe and well-maintained neighbourhoods. Bringing empty homes back into use has many benefits, including increasing housing availability, supporting sustainable development, increasing footfall and spending in the local area and improving perceptions of community safety.

#### **4. Other Options Considered**

- 4.1. The statutory duty placed on local housing authorities by the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996 means that the Council cannot opt out of investment in Disabled Facilities Grants.
- 4.2. The Council could choose not to publish a policy for discretionary grants and loans. Without a policy, we would not be able to provide help to vulnerable people to carry out urgent adaptations and essential repairs to their home, which would result in unnecessary hospital admissions and increased care costs.

#### **5. Background**

- 5.1. The coronavirus pandemic has reinforced the importance of good quality homes for our physical and mental wellbeing. Cold, damp, poorly ventilated homes can cause or worsen the health conditions that put people at high risk from the effects of Covid-19. An overcrowded home reduces a household's ability to isolate those at particular risk or displaying symptoms. Spending

long periods indoors in poor housing conditions can exacerbate poor mental health. Good housing benefits people's mental and physical wellbeing, it enables informal carers to provide care, and it underpins older people's ability to live independently, safely and as part of the wider community.

- 5.2. The Council has adopted and published home repair and adaptation policies to meet local need since 2009. The most recent iteration of the policy was adopted in 2017 and expires on 31 March 2021. An updated policy is needed to be able to continue to provide support to improve housing conditions.
- 5.3. A review of the policy's operation has been completed and has identified several necessary amendments to reflect changes in government policy and the social landscape, in particular the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on household finances and the Council's ambition to be carbon neutral by 2025:
  - 5.3.1. The proposed eligibility criteria for the Healthy Homes Loan have been simplified to make it easier for residents to understand and to ensure that help is targeted to the people who need it most. The Healthy Homes Loan will enable people who are in receipt of income related welfare benefits, and/or are over state retirement pension age, and have insufficient savings, to be able to afford the repairs to make their homes weathertight and safe. The loan will provide up to £15,000 funding and will be secured as a legal charge at the Land Registry and repaid when the property is sold, or repaid on a monthly interest-free basis.
  - 5.3.2. The proposed eligibility criteria for the Affordable Warmth Grant have been amended to align with the myriad of existing and emerging external grants available for energy efficiency. Most funding schemes require a financial contribution from the homeowner, however by the nature of the low-income eligibility criteria most eligible householders are unable to afford this contribution, making the Affordable Warmth Grant an important tool in enabling people to access other grant funding and draw in extra funding to the local area.
  - 5.3.3. Introducing an Urgent Adaptations Grant into the proposed policy will enable us to direct time-critical support to disabled people where it is most needed. This new non-means tested grant of up to £10,000 will be used in circumstances such as hospital discharge, for people who need support with safe moving and handling, and people who are experiencing a rapid deterioration of function because of a life limiting illness, such as Motor Neurone Disease. Adaptations that will be eligible for this support are ones that can be delivered quickly such as stairlifts, specialist toilets, temporary ramps, ceiling track hoists and level access showers.
  - 5.3.4. Widening the purposes to which the Empty Homes Loan can be used in the proposed policy will encourage greater use of the loan and assist more property owners to bring their property back into use. The previous loan criterion was too restrictive; by making it available to anyone who intends to live in, let or lease the property when it is renovated will increase the number of empty homes we can bring back into use.

- 5.3.5. A Targeted Regeneration Grant has been introduced into the proposed policy. This grant will enable us to take advantage of any external funding streams and opportunities to target housing improvement support in local communities. The grant will only be made available where specific funding is secured for an area and is flexible enough to be able to respond to issues specific to the housing in that area. The grant is based on a premise of 30% match funding from people who can afford, or 100% grant funding for low income households living in the area, and will be repayable if the property is sold within five years.
- 5.4. The proposed policy continues to provide a framework of help for disabled people to adapt their homes or move to a more suitable home. Cheshire East provides help that exceeds its statutory duty by providing disabled facilities grants of up to £50,000 to meet local need, and providing help to families to adapt a second property for shared care arrangements.
- 5.5. The Policy includes equity share loans, interest free repayment loans and grants. Consideration has been given to the costs of delivering grants and loans and the borrowing costs, set out below.
- 5.6. *Equity share loans*: There is no regular repayment due on the loan, instead a charge is placed on the property equivalent to a percentage of the value of the property which is derived from the value of the loan compared to the market value of the property, which is taken from the RCIS valuation. Repayment of the loan is deferred until the property is next sold. The expectation is that the property value will increase over time thereby enabling full recovery of the loan amount plus additional funds in lieu of interest covering the lost investment opportunity of tying up capital in the loan. However, there is a risk that the property value may not increase or could fall resulting in a loss on the loan. This arrangement has the advantage of no monthly repayments so is relatively easy to administer.

It will, however, require maintenance of detailed and accessible records over a long period as repayment may not occur until many decades after the loan is provided. An agreement creating a charge on the property can only be entered into by an owner so the legal ownership will require investigation by the Council's legal department and the applicant will require independent legal advice. Equity share can also be a disincentive to the householder later carrying out further self funded improvements if the Council have a fixed percentage share of the property

- 5.7. *Interest free repayment loans*: The applicant would make monthly repayments until the loan is repaid in full or upon sale of the property, whichever is the earlier. The loan term will range from between one and ten years based on a test of affordability for the applicant. Although these are also secured upon the property in the same manner as set out in 5.6 above, (a mortgage), the administration of these loans could be dealt with in the same way as a normal debtor to the Council. There is an opportunity cost of offering interest free

loans: by tying up the capital in interest free loans, the Council loses the opportunity to invest the money and receive interest on its investment.

5.8. *Grants* are the most costly to the Council as the expenditure is only recouped in the event of a breach of grant conditions, but are easy to administer. Grants will only be awarded where loan options have been exhausted first or where specific external funding is secured.

5.9. We have discounted using interest-bearing loans as these would take the form of a mortgage. Mortgages in general are difficult to administer and arrangements and resources would need to be made available to administer repayments, which will become more onerous if repayments are not maintained.

## **6. Implications of the Recommendation**

### **6.1. Legal Implications**

6.1.1. The Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England & Wales) Order 2002 contains wide-ranging powers to provide assistance for housing renewal, including for the purpose of adapting or improving or repairing living accommodation. The Order also states that before the powers contained within it can be used, the Council must publish a policy on how it intends to use them.

6.1.2. The Council is under a statutory duty to provide grant aid to disabled people for a range of adaptations to their homes (Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996).

6.1.3. A local housing authority does not have a duty to assist a grant applicant in meeting any share of the costs which the applicant is financially assessed to be responsible for. The housing authority may however consider using its discretionary powers of assistance provided for by the Regulatory Reform Order.

6.1.4. Under the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 (Exemption) (Amendment) (No2) Order 2003, local authorities offering mortgages have been exempted from the financial regulatory regime on the basis that a comparable quality of service is provided to customers in accordance with the mortgage sales guidance for local authorities and registered social landlords. The Council has put in place documents and procedures which meet its responsibilities as a lender.

6.1.5. Transactions must comply with the rules that came into force on 1st January 2021 under the World Trade Organisation agreement on subsidies and Countervailing Measures (with the previous legislation being the EU State Aid rules) and various financial regulations which the Council must comply with in order for it not to be acting ultra vires

6.1.6. By putting in place a policy which meets its statutory duties and sets out the extra discretionary investment that it will make for vulnerable residents, the Council is meeting its legislative responsibilities and its overarching local priorities.

## **6.2. Finance Implications**

6.2.1. Delivery against the policy is funded by rolling capital programmes in the Council's budget: Disabled Facilities Grant and Home Repairs for Vulnerable People. Unspent funds from previous years are carried forward to subsequent years where the funds are committed but works are incomplete at the end of the financial year.

6.2.2. The total approved funding for the discretionary Home Repairs for Vulnerable People programme for 2021-22 including carry-forwards is £300,000. An additional £200,000 per annum is included in the capital programme until 2025 which will be subject to further approval as part of the budget setting process.

6.2.3. In 2021-22, the approved Disabled Facilities Grant programme is £2,400,000 which will be partially funded by a Government grant, the amount of which is yet to be finalised. However it should be noted that the future allocation of Government capital grant is not guaranteed. The statutory duty placed on local authorities to award Disabled Facilities Grants determines that should the Government not allocate capital grant to the Council in the future, funding will need to be provided from the Council's own resources or through prudential borrowing. The grant determination for the capital allocation contains a grant condition that any money paid must only be used for the specific purpose of providing adaptations for disabled people who qualify under the scheme.

## **6.3. Policy Implications**

6.3.1. The Policy contributes to the overall vision of the 2021 -2025 Corporate Plan to be an open, fairer, greener Cheshire East. It also supports the Council's priority to empower and care about people, and to make Cheshire East a thriving and sustainable place. We are committed to supporting the most vulnerable residents, whilst enabling others to support themselves and lead a prosperous and healthy life, and reduce carbon emissions.

6.3.2. People need health, social care, housing and other public services to work seamlessly together to deliver better quality care. The policy expands on the whole system approach through the focus on enabling care to be provided at home and facilitating hospital discharge. Disabled Facilities Grant is a part of the Better Care Fund and, together with discretionary grants and loans for vulnerable people within the policy, is very much-in keeping with the whole system approach of more joined up services that help improve the health and care of local populations and make more efficient use of available resources.

**6.4. Equality Implications**

6.4.1. The Policy will enable the Strategic Housing service to deliver efficient and effective services to groups with protected characteristics who are vulnerable, in particular but not limited to older people and people with a disability.

6.4.2. An Equality Impact Assessment is being completed for the proposed policy, and will consider how the objectives of the policy will affect those who fall within the definition of protected characteristics.

**6.5. Human Resources Implications**

6.5.1. The Policy will be administered by Strategic Housing officers within existing resources.

6.5.2. There is also a requirement for the Legal Property Team to draw up the required legal documentation, liaise with the applicant's legal representation and register the legal charge on behalf of the Council.

**6.6. Risk Management Implications**

6.6.1. The Council must publish a housing renewal policy to be able to administer grants and loans.

**6.7. Rural Communities Implications**

6.7.1. The proposed amendments to the eligibility criteria for the Affordable Warmth Grant will widen the help available for residents in both urban and rural communities, however the greatest benefit will be felt by rural off-gas communities where heating system costs and energy bills tend to be higher.

6.7.2. The provision of adaptations to keep people living independently in their own home supports the sustainability of rural communities.

**6.8. Implications for Children & Young People/Cared for Children**

6.8.1. The Policy will provide opportunities for disabled children and young people to live in suitable housing, and protect the health of children and young people in low income vulnerable families through improved living conditions.

**6.9. Public Health Implications**

6.9.1. The Policy will enable the Strategic Housing service to provide services which directly impact on public health. Housing improvements will benefit vulnerable residents' mental and physical wellbeing and reduce demand on health and social care services.

6.9.2. Cold and damp homes increase the risk and effects of cardiovascular, respiratory and rheumatoid diseases, as well as hypothermia and mental ill health. Young children, older people and people with an illness or disability are more likely to suffer the effects of cold and damp housing.

6.9.3. The exact relationship between poor housing and ill health is complex. 45% of accidents occur in the home, and accidents are among the top ten causes of death for all ages. Local data suggests that around 3,500 to 4,000 older people attend Accident and Emergency (A&E) departments each year as a result of a fall.

## **6.10. Climate Change Implications**

6.10.1. Energy efficiency and carbon reduction are a consideration throughout the proposed Policy, with help targeted to assist households to reduce energy use and utilise low carbon heating systems. Building sustainability is a consideration in the specification of housing repairs, ensuring that every opportunity to reduce building operating costs are evaluated in order to tackle fuel poverty for residents and tackle climate change.

## **7. Ward Members Affected**

7.1. All wards.

## **8. Access to Information**

8.1. The full proposed Home Repairs and Adaptations for Vulnerable People Financial Assistance Policy 2021-2026 accompanies this report.

## **9. Contact Information**

9.1. Any questions relating to this report should be directed to the following officer:

Name: Karen Whitehead

Job Title: Housing Standards & Adaptations Officer

Email: [karen.whitehead@cheshireeast.gov.uk](mailto:karen.whitehead@cheshireeast.gov.uk)



# **Home Repairs and Adaptations: Financial Assistance Policy**

1 April 2021 – 31 March 2026

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## Purpose of the Policy

With 80% of the homes that people will be living in by 2050 already built, the condition of existing homes is a critical determinant of health and quality of life for all ages. The coronavirus pandemic has reinforced the importance of good quality homes for our physical and mental wellbeing. Cold, damp, poorly ventilated homes can cause or worsen the health conditions that put people at high risk from the effects of Covid-19. An overcrowded home reduces a household's ability to isolate those at particular risk or displaying symptoms. Spending long periods indoors in poor housing conditions can exacerbate poor mental health. Good housing benefits people's mental and physical wellbeing, enables informal carers to provide care, and underpins older people's ability to live independently, safely and as part of the wider community.

Reducing vacancy rates, improving the quality of the existing housing stock and preserving the built environment all lead to an improvement in quality of place and quality of life, creating attractive, safe and well-maintained neighbourhoods. Bringing empty homes back into use has many benefits, including increasing housing supply without the need to build, reducing carbon emissions associated with the building process, increasing footfall and spending in the local area and improving perceptions of community safety.

The primary responsibility for maintaining and improving housing rests with the owner, however there are occasions where it is necessary to intervene, including where vulnerable people are unable to afford to carry out urgent repairs that are affecting their health and safety, and to support disabled people to overcome functional difficulties created by an unsuitable home environment.

The Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England & Wales) Order 2002 removed most of the prescriptive housing grant legislation in the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996 whilst retaining the mandatory Disabled Facilities Grant, and introduced a wide ranging discretionary power for local housing authorities to develop different forms of financial assistance to meet local needs.

To provide financial assistance for housing repairs and improvements, the local housing authority must first adopt and publish a policy setting out how it intends to use this general power to award assistance. This Policy sets out the grants and loans that the Council will make available to residents, subject to resources, and builds on our experience of delivering previous schemes for home repairs and adaptations that secure positive outcomes for vulnerable residents.

This Policy details the ways in which the Council will assist people to repair or adapt their homes. These products are in the following formats:

- **Interest free loan:** The Council offers the financial assistance on a repayable basis over a period of no more than ten years (five years for Empty Homes loans), but without any interest or additional premium upon repayment.

- **Equity share loan:** The Council offers the financial assistance in exchange for a share in the value of the property. There are no regular repayments, and no interest is added to the loan. The loan becomes repayable when the property is sold or transferred, and the repayment will be based on the value of the property. For example, where a property is valued at £100,000 and the person borrows £10,000, the Council takes a 10% stake in the property. When the property is sold, the Council's stake is 10% of the sale price, so if the property is sold for £110,000, the Council receives a repayment of £11,000.
- **Grant:** The Council offers the financial assistance as a grant which is only repaid if any of the repayment conditions are triggered.

The Policy also details how the Council will act as a responsible lender and have regard to the applicant's ability to make repayments before we offer them a loan. As any loans are secured on the property, applicants are strongly advised to seek independent legal and financial advice, and the costs of professional advice can be included in their loan. We have developed two loan repayment options to maximise choice for applicants and to tailor our loan offer to their circumstances.

The Policy will be in operation from 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2026, subject to adequate funding being available.

# 'Healthy Homes' Loan

## 1. Eligible Applicants

Any individual(s) who has a qualifying owner's interest in the property and is over the age of 18, and has lived in the property for at least 12 consecutive months at the date of application, **and:**

- 1.1 Has insufficient savings to be able to afford to carry out the repairs, **AND**
- 1.2.1 Is in receipt of an income related welfare benefit provided by the Government, **OR**
- 1.2.2 Has reached state retirement pension age.

## 2. Eligible Properties

- 2.1 The property must be situated in Cheshire East and must be registered at the Land Registry.
- 2.2 The loan will not normally be available where repairs have previously been completed and financed by a loan from the Council under this or previous Policies where the condition relating to future applications has not yet expired.

## 3. Eligible Works

- 3.1 The following types of works are eligible for assistance:
  - i. Repairs that will make the main structure of the property weather tight. For example, typical repairs that could be considered, based on the severity of the disrepair, include roofing, windows, doors, and preventing damp penetration.
  - ii. Repairs that will eliminate a significant hazard within the living accommodation. Typical repairs that could be considered, based on the severity of the disrepair, include electrics, gas, fire prevention and falls prevention.
  - iii. Measures to reduce the consequences of flooding in areas designated by the Council as at risk of flooding.
- 3.2 The following areas of the home are excluded from being eligible for assistance with repairs: gardens, yards, annexes, garages, sheds, porches and conservatories, except where they form a fundamental part of the living accommodation and are creating a significant hazard to the health and safety of the occupants.

Assistance will not be provided for kitchen or bathroom upgrades, or for decorative or cosmetic works that are not as a result of the assisted repairs.

- 3.3 A loan will not be given where there are other suitable forms of financial assistance available, for example but not limited to energy supplier schemes, or household insurance.
- 3.4 Loans will not be approved retrospectively; any works that have been started or completed prior to a valid loan application will not be considered.
- 3.5 Eligible works will be determined by the Housing service.

4. **Amounts**

- 4.1 The maximum loan amount that will be considered is £15,000, and a loan will not normally be considered for less than £1,000. These thresholds may only be waived at the Council's absolute discretion where no other suitable sources of funding can be identified, and the Council considers that financial hardship has been demonstrated.
- 4.2 Eligible costs that can be included in an application for assistance are:
  - i. Reasonable cost of eligible works and VAT
  - ii. Eligible fees as set out at Appendix C

5. **Application Process**

- 5.1 Applications must be made on the Council's official application form and accompanied by:
  - i. evidence supporting financial eligibility
  - ii. at least two written quotations on contractors' letter headed paper
  - iii. proof of owner's interest
  - iv. permission of all people who have an interest in the property
  - v. a valuation of the property for money lending purposes carried out by a RICS qualified surveyor
  - vi. proof of identity
  - vii. any other documents reasonably required by the Council to process the application.
- 5.2 Before approving a loan application, the Council will have regard to the applicant's ability to repay the loan. The Council will take account of any charges already secured on the property, and any information obtained in the course of its checks which reveal financial difficulties within the last six months. The Council will not normally award a loan where the existing charges registered on the property combined with the loan amount would reduce the available equity in the property to 10% or less of the property value.
- 5.3 Before a loan application is approved, the applicant and the Council must enter into a loan agreement and a legal charge must be registered at the Land

Registry in favour of the Council. The owner(s) must be party to the agreement.

6. **Carrying out and Completion of the Works**

6.1 Details are set out at Appendix D.

7. **Loan Conditions**

7.1 The loan must be secured by way of a legal charge registered at the Land Registry.

7.2 The loan must be repaid by one of the following methods:

- i. Interest-free repayment loan, as set out at Appendix A, or
- ii. Equity share loan, as set out at Appendix B.

7.3 The applicant must live in the property as their only residence.

7.4 A valid policy for buildings insurance enough to reinstate the building must remain in force until the assistance is repaid, with the Council's interest in the property noted on the policy.

7.5 Where an applicant has provided false or misleading information in their loan application or in their request for payment, the approved loan will be withdrawn, and a demand made for repayment of any monies already paid. The Council's interest in the property will not be removed from the Land Registry until all monies have been repaid. The Council reserves the right to apply interest at the Bank of England base rate plus 0.5% which will be charged daily from the 29<sup>th</sup> day after the demand for repayment is made until the loan is discharged in full.

7.6 The Council may by written notice require the applicant to provide a statement within 21 days showing how the loan conditions are being fulfilled. In the event that the loan conditions are breached, the Council reserves the right to make a demand for repayment of any outstanding monies, and interest at the Bank of England base rate plus 0.5% will be charged daily from the 29<sup>th</sup> day after the demand for repayment is made until the loan is discharged in full.

7.7 Further applications for financial assistance for repairs to the same property will not be considered under this Policy and subsequent versions of this Policy, for a period of ten years from the certified date of completion, or until the loan is discharged, whichever is the earlier.

7.8 In the event that the applicant seeks to remortgage the property or to secure further charges on the property, the Council will at its absolute discretion consider written requests to allow its charge to be postponed, taking into

account all relevant information and consideration of the risks to the Council's interest.

## **'Affordable Warmth' Grant**

### **1. Eligible Applicants**

- 1.1 Any individual(s) who has a qualifying owner's interest in the property, and is over the age of 18, and:
  - 1.2.1 Qualifies by way of ill health or low income for funding from another fuel poverty related domestic energy improvement scheme for which they are required to make a financial contribution (for example, but not limited to, Energy Company Obligation (ECO), Green Homes Grant, and any other funding schemes which may become available from time to time), **OR**
  - 1.2.2 Is unable to return home from hospital until a working heating system is in place, **OR**
  - 1.2.3 Has an illness that places them as 'clinically extremely vulnerable' to Covid-19 as defined by the NHS.

### **2. Eligible Properties**

- 2.1 The property must be situated in Cheshire East.

### **3. Eligible Works**

- 3.1 The following types of work are eligible for assistance:
  - i. Heating and/or hot water repairs
  - ii. Boiler replacements
  - iii. Installation of an appropriate heating system or appliance in an inadequately heated room(s), for example additional radiator, first time central heating system, storage heater or gas fire
  - iv. All types of building insulation
  - v. Low carbon heating and hot water solutions.
- 3.2 Grants will not be approved retrospectively; any works that have been started or completed prior to a valid grant application will not be considered.
- 3.3 Eligible works will be determined by the Strategic Housing service in consultation with a Council-appointed contractor.

4. **Amount of the Grant**

4.1 The maximum grant amount will normally be 75% of the cost of the works, up to a maximum of £2,000. All other potential sources of funding must be exhausted first; the grant may only exceed 75% or £2,000 where the works are needed to enable a person to return home from hospital, or at the Council's absolute discretion where no other suitable sources of funding can be identified, and the Council considers that financial hardship has been demonstrated.

4.2 The maximum amount will include the cost of eligible works and any VAT. A fee in accordance with the Council's Fees and Charges schedule can be included as part of the grant, for technical and professional services provided by the Council to facilitate the application process.

5. **Application Process**

5.1 Applications must be made on the Council's official application form and accompanied by

- i. evidence supporting financial or health eligibility
- ii. proof of identity
- iii. one quote provided by a Council-appointed contractor or at least two written quotations on contractors' letter headed paper provided by the applicant
- iv. proof of owner's interest
- v. and any other documents reasonably required by the Council to process the application.

6. **Carrying out and Completion of the Works**

6.1 Details are set out at Appendix D.

7. **Conditions of Assistance**

7.1 Where an applicant has provided false or misleading information in their grant application or in their request for payment, the approved grant will be withdrawn, and a demand made for repayment of any monies already paid.

## 'Disabled Facilities' Grant

The primary legislation for Disabled Facilities Grants is the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996 (as amended).

### 1. Eligible Applicants

- 1.1 Any person with a qualifying owner's, tenant's or occupier's interest in the property who is over the age of 18.

### 2. Eligible Properties

- 2.1 Dwellings, qualifying houseboats and caravans are eligible for assistance.
- 2.2 The property must be situated in Cheshire East.
- 2.3 The property must be the only or main residence of the disabled person for whom the adaptation is intended.

### 3. Eligible Works

- 3.1 The works must be necessary and appropriate to meet the needs of the disabled person.
- 3.2 It must be reasonable and practicable to carry out the works, having regard to the age and condition of the property.
- 3.3 The works must be for at least one of the following purposes:
- a) Facilitating access by the disabled person to and from the dwelling, qualifying houseboat or caravan, or the building in which the dwelling is situated;
  - b) Making the dwelling, qualifying houseboat or caravan, or the building in which the dwelling is situated, safe for the disabled person and other persons residing with them;
  - c) Facilitating access by the disabled person to a room used or usable as the principal family room;
  - d) Facilitating access by the disabled person to, or providing for them, a room used or usable for sleeping;
  - e) Facilitating access by the disabled person to, or providing for them, a room in which there is a lavatory, or facilitating for the disabled person the use of a lavatory;
  - f) Facilitating access by the disabled person to, or providing for them, a room in which there is a bath or shower (or both), or facilitating for the disabled person the use of a bath or shower;

- g) Facilitating access by the disabled person to, or providing for them, a room in which there is a wash hand basin, or facilitating for the disabled person the use of a wash hand basin;
- h) Facilitating the preparation and cooking of food by the disabled person
- i) Providing or improving any heating system in the dwelling to meet the needs of the disabled person
- j) Facilitating the use by the disabled occupant of a source of power, light or heat by altering the controls or the position of the controls, or providing additional controls
- k) Facilitating access around the dwelling, qualifying houseboat or caravan for the disabled person to enable them to provide care for another person who is normally resident there
- l) Facilitating access to and from the garden for the disabled person
- m) Making access to and from the garden safe for the disabled person
- n) Such other purposes as may be specified by order of the Secretary of State.

3.4 Grants cannot be approved retrospectively; any works that have been started or completed prior to a valid grant application will not be considered.

3.5 Eligible works will be determined by the Strategic Housing service.

3.6 When determining eligible works, regard will be had to value for money and establishing the most cost-effective method of overcoming the disabling environment. The Council will always consider making adaptations within the existing footprint of the property first, and where this is not possible, only then will it consider extending the footprint of the living accommodation, apart from in exceptional circumstances where extending the footprint is the more cost-effective option.

3.7 It is recognised that applicants may wish to carry out adaptations which are not the most cost-effective approach. The Disabled Facilities Grant can be used flexibly to provide the applicant's preferred adaptations where the proposals will meet the needs identified by the Council-appointed Occupational Therapist. In these circumstances, the maximum grant awarded will be restricted to the value of the most cost-effective adaptations and any eligible fees, to the maximum grant specified in paragraph 4.1 below.

#### 4. **Amounts**

4.1 The maximum amount of grant allowed is £50,000. At the time of publication of this Policy, the maximum mandatory grant is £30,000. The Policy provides for an additional discretionary grant of a maximum of £20,000. In the event that the mandatory maximum grant limit be adjusted to an amount exceeding £50,000, the higher limit will apply.

- 4.2 The additional discretionary grant will not be awarded in conjunction with the use of the flexible Disabled Facilities Grant option outlined at paragraph 3.7, other than in exceptional circumstances where the most cost-effective option would exceed the mandatory maximum grant limit. In these circumstances, the discretionary grant will be capped at the value of the most cost-effective option.
- 4.3 Applicants will be subject to a Test of Resources in accordance with the Housing Renewal Grants Regulations 1996 (as amended) to determine whether all or any assistance will be made available. Where the applicant is in receipt of a means-tested benefit or the adaptations is for a disabled child under 16 years of age or a young person in full-time education under 20 years of age, there will be no Test of Resources.
- 4.4 Where applicants are assessed as having to make a financial contribution following a Test of Resources, the amount of grant to be awarded for eligible works will be reduced by an amount equivalent to the assessed contribution.
- 4.5 The maximum amount of grant will include the cost of eligible works, VAT and eligible fees. Eligible fees are detailed at Appendix C.

## 5. **Application Process**

- 5.1 Applicants must submit a valid application, consisting of:
- i. a completed application, together with evidence of any welfare benefit entitlement, income, savings, shares and capital
  - ii. details of the works to be carried out,
  - iii. two written quotations for each type of work from contractors, unless otherwise directed by the Council,
  - iv. owner's, tenant's, and/or occupier's certificate,
  - v. details of any eligible fees, and
  - vi. proof of ownership and /or written consent of all owners.
- 5.2 The Council will approve or refuse a grant application in writing not later than six months from the date of a valid application. Where a grant application is refused, the Council will provide a written statement of the reasons for refusal, and details of any appeals procedure.

## 6. **Carrying Out and Completion of the Works**

- 6.1 Details can be found at Appendix D.

## 7. **Conditions of Assistance**

- 7.1 In accordance with the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996: Disabled Facilities Grant (Conditions relating to approval or payment of grant) General Consent 2008:

- 7.1.1 If the applicant disposes of the property within 10 years of the certified date of completion, and the applicant has a qualifying owner's interest in the property, any grant in excess of £5,000 will become repayable, subject to a maximum amount repayable of £10,000.
- 7.1.2 The Council may, at its discretion, waive any demand for repayment of assistance once it has considered:
- i. the extent to which the grant recipient would suffer financial hardship were they to be required to repay all or any of the grant;
  - ii. whether the disposal of the premises is to enable the grant recipient to take up employment, or to change the location of their employment;
  - iii. whether the disposal is made for reasons connected with the physical or mental health or wellbeing of the grant recipient or of a disabled occupant of the premises; and
  - iv. whether the disposal is made to enable the grant recipient to live with, or near, any person who is disabled or infirm and in need of care, which the grant recipient is intending to provide, or who is intending to provide care of which the grant recipient is in need by reason of disability or infirmity.
- 7.2 Requests for exemptions to repayment must be made in writing.
- 7.3 The Council reserves the right to remove equipment, such as lifts, when it is no longer required by the disabled person. Where the equipment cannot be reused due to its age or condition the Council may waive its right to recover such equipment.
- 7.4 Where an applicant has provided false or misleading information in their grant application or in their request for payment, the grant approval will be withdrawn, and a demand made for repayment of any monies already paid.

# 'Urgent Adaptations' Grant

## 1. Eligible Applicants

- 1.1 Any person with a qualifying owner's, tenant's or occupier's interest in the property who is over the age of 18, AND
  - 1.1.1 Needs urgent adaptations due to a rapid deterioration of function because of a life limiting illness, OR
  - 1.1.2 Needs a ceiling track hoist for safer moving and handling, OR
  - 1.1.3 Is unable to return home from hospital until urgent adaptations are completed.
- 1.2 Applicants will not be subject to any financial assessment.

## 2. Eligible Properties

- 2.1 Dwellings, qualifying houseboats and caravans are eligible for assistance.
- 2.2 The property must be situated in Cheshire East.
- 2.3 The property must be the only or main residence of the disabled person for whom the adaptation is intended.

## 3. Eligible Works

- 3.1 The works must be consistent with the purposes for which Disabled Facilities Grants must be given and must be for home adaptations that can be completed quickly to be able to meet an urgent need. Examples of adaptations that can be made quickly include, but are not limited to, stair lifts, wash dry toilets, ceiling track hoists, temporary ramps, and level access showers.
- 3.2 Grants will not be approved retrospectively; any works that have been started or completed prior to a valid grant application will not be considered.
- 3.3 Eligible works will be determined by the Strategic Housing service in consultation with a Council-appointed Occupational Therapist or hospital discharge service.
- 3.4 When determining eligible works, regard will be had to value for money and establishing the most cost-effective method of overcoming the disabling environment. Due to the urgent nature of works defined by the eligibility criteria, adaptations will be limited to the existing footprint of the property; works to extend living accommodation or make significant structural changes

are ineligible for this grant. The Disabled Facilities Grant is available for more extensive works, subject to eligibility.

4. **Amounts**

4.1 The maximum amount of grant allowed is £10,000. Any adaptation(s) that cost more than £10,000 are ineligible for this grant. The Disabled Facilities Grant is available for more extensive works, subject to eligibility. This grant and the Disabled Facilities Grant cannot be used in conjunction with each other for the same work.

4.2 The maximum amount of grant will include the cost of eligible works, VAT and eligible fees. Eligible fees are detailed at Appendix C.

5. **Application Process**

5.1 Applications must be made on the Council's official application form and accompanied by

- i. an Occupational Therapy / hospital referral
- ii. one quote provided by a Council-appointed contractor or at least two written quotations on contractors' letter headed paper provided by the applicant
- iii. proof of identity
- iv. proof of ownership and/or written consent of all owners.

5.2 The Council will approve or refuse a grant application in writing as soon as reasonably practicable. Where a grant application is refused, the Council will provide a written statement of the reasons for refusal, and details of any appeals procedure.

6. **Carrying Out and Completion of the Works**

6.1 Details can be found at Appendix D.

7. **Conditions of Assistance**

7.1 The Council reserves the right to remove equipment, such as lifts, when it is no longer required by the disabled person. Where the equipment cannot be reused due to its age or condition the Council may waive its right to recover such equipment.

7.2 Where an applicant has provided false or misleading information in their grant application or in their request for payment, the grant approval will be withdrawn, and a demand made for repayment of any monies already paid.

# 'Independent Living' Loan

## 1. Eligible Applicants

- 1.1 Any individual(s) who has a qualifying owner's interest in the property, and is over the age of 18, and is disabled, or a member of their household is disabled, and has been assessed by a Council-appointed Occupational Therapist as needing adaptations to their home.

## 2. Eligible Properties

- 2.1 The property must be situated in Cheshire East and be registered at the Land Registry.

## 3. Eligible Works

- 3.1 Adaptations that meet the purposes specified in the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996 (refer to 'Eligible Works' under Disabled Facilities Grants) are eligible, where:
- i. The applicant is unable to afford their assessed contribution for the mandatory Disabled Facilities Grant; or
  - ii. The applicant is utilising the flexible Disabled Facilities Grant option but is unable to afford their contribution to their preferred adaptations; or
  - iii. The adaptations are needed at a property that is not the main residence of the disabled person, but where the disabled person spends a significant proportion of their time receiving care (for example, in the home of a family member who provides regular respite care or support).
- 3.2 Loans will not be approved retrospectively; any works that have been started or completed prior to a valid loan application will not be considered.
- 3.3 Eligible works will be determined by the Strategic Housing service in consultation with a Council-appointed Occupational Therapist.

## 4. Amount of Loan

- 4.1 The maximum loan amount that will be considered is £15,000, and a loan will not normally be considered for less than £1,000. All other potential sources of funding must be exhausted first; these thresholds may only be waived at the Council's absolute discretion where no other suitable sources of funding can be identified, and the Council considers that financial hardship has been demonstrated using its standardised evaluation.
- 4.2 Eligible fees that may be included as part of the application for assistance are:

- i. Legal fees and disbursements incurred because of setting up the loan
- ii. Financial advice
- iii. Lenders' fees for registering a second charge

5. **Application Process**

5.1 Applications must be made on the Council's official application form and accompanied by:

- i. evidence supporting financial eligibility
- ii. at least two written quotations on contractors' letter headed paper
- iii. proof of owner's interest
- iv. permission of all people who have an interest in the property
- v. a valuation of the property for money lending purposes carried out by a RICS qualified surveyor
- vi. proof of identity
- vii. any other documents reasonably required by the Council to process the application.

5.2 Before approving a loan application, the Council will have regard to the applicant's ability to repay the loan. The Council will take account of any charges already secured on the property, and any information obtained in the course of its checks which reveal financial difficulties within the last six months. The Council will not normally award a loan where the existing charges registered on the property combined with the loan amount would reduce the available equity in the property to 10% or less of the property value.

5.3 Before a loan application is approved, the applicant and the Council must enter into a loan agreement and a legal charge must be registered at the Land Registry in favour of the Council.

6. **Carrying out and Completion of Works**

6.1 Details are set out at Appendix D.

7. **Loan Conditions**

7. **Loan Conditions**

7.1 The loan must be secured by way of a legal charge registered at the Land Registry.

7.2 The loan must be repaid by one of the following methods:

- i. Interest-free repayment loan, as set out at Appendix A, or
- ii. Equity share loan, as set out at Appendix B.

7.3 The applicant must live in the property as their only residence.

- 7.4 A valid policy for buildings insurance enough to reinstate the building must remain in force until the assistance is repaid, with the Council's interest in the property noted on the policy.
- 7.5 Where an applicant has provided false or misleading information in their loan application or in their request for payment, the approved loan will be withdrawn, and a demand made for repayment of any monies already paid. The Council's interest in the property will not be removed from the Land Registry until all monies have been repaid. The Council reserves the right to apply interest at the Bank of England base rate plus 0.5% which will be charged daily from the 29<sup>th</sup> day after the demand for repayment is made until the loan is discharged in full.
- 7.6 The Council may by written notice require the applicant to provide a statement within 21 days showing how the loan conditions are being fulfilled. In the event that the loan conditions are breached, the Council reserves the right to make a demand for repayment of any outstanding monies, and interest at the Bank of England base rate plus 0.5% will be charged daily from the 29<sup>th</sup> day after the demand for repayment is made until the loan is discharged in full.
- 7.7 Further applications for financial assistance for repairs to the same property will not be considered under this Policy and subsequent versions of this Policy, for a period of ten years from the certified date of completion, or until the loan is discharged, whichever is the earlier.
- 7.8 In the event that the applicant seeks to remortgage the property or to secure further charges on the property, the Council will at its absolute discretion consider written requests to allow its charge to be postponed, taking into account all relevant information and consideration of the risks to the Council's interest.

# 'Disability Relocation' Grant

## 1. Eligible Applicants

- 1.1 Any individual(s) who is over the age of 18, and is disabled, or a member of their household is disabled, and has been assessed by a Council-appointed Occupational Therapist as needing adaptations to their home, **and**
- 1.2 Is assessed as being unable to afford the full cost of the eligible relocation expenses. The Test of Resources set out in the Housing Renewal Grants Regulations 1996 (as amended) will be used to assess whether the applicant is able to afford to afford the full cost of the eligible relocation expenses.

## 2. Eligible Properties

- 2.1 The current property (that is, the property that the disabled person is moving from) must be situated in Cheshire East, **and**
  - 2.2.1 It must not be reasonable or practicable to adapt the current property, **or**
  - 2.2.2 The landlord has refused to give permission to adapt the property, **or**
  - 2.2.3 The property that the disabled person intends to move to offers a better suited solution for the disabled person, and the solution offers better value for money for the Council.
- 2.3 The new property must, in the reasonable opinion of the Strategic Housing service in conjunction with a Council-appointed Occupational Therapist, be appropriate to the needs of the disabled person, and any necessary adaptations to the new property must be reasonable and practicable.
- 2.4 The new property must be intended to be the only or main residence of the disabled person. There are no restrictions on the tenure or location of the new property.

## 3. Eligible Expenses

- 3.1 Assistance will be given towards reasonable removal costs associated with moving home, including:
  - i. Professional removal costs
  - ii. Disconnection and reconnection of household appliances
  - iii. Removal and reinstallation of disability equipment
- 3.2 Expenses that have been incurred prior to the application for assistance will not be considered.

3.3 Eligible expenses will be determined by the Strategic Housing service.

4. **Amounts**

4.1 The maximum grant amount will normally be £2,000. All other potential sources of funding must be exhausted first; the grant may only exceed £2,000 where no other sources of funding can be identified, and the applicant demonstrates financial hardship.

5. **Application Process**

5.1 Applications must be made on the Council's official application form and accompanied by

- i. an Occupational Therapy referral
- ii. proof of identity
- iii. a minimum of one written quotation on contractors' letter headed paper

5.2 The Council will approve or refuse a grant application in writing as soon as reasonably practicable. Where a grant application is refused, the Council will provide a written statement of the reasons for refusal, and details of any appeals procedure.

6. **Carrying out and Completion of Works**

6.1 Details can be found at Appendix D.

7. **Grant Conditions**

7.1 Where an applicant has provided false or misleading information in their grant application or in their request for payment, the approved grant will be withdrawn, and a demand made for repayment of any monies already paid.

7.2 Further applications for a disability relocation grant will not be considered from the same applicant under this Policy and subsequent versions of this Policy, except where there has been a change in the disabled person's or their carer's needs and the property cannot be adapted to meet those needs, or the needs of another disabled person residing at the property cannot be met within the property.

# 'Empty Homes' Loan

## 1. Eligible Applicants

- 1.1 Any individual(s) who has a qualifying owner's interest in the property and is over the age of 18.
- 1.2 The purposes for which an Empty Homes Loan may be given are:
  - i. For an owner of an empty home who intends to let the property on a tenancy that lasts for a minimum period of twelve months
  - ii. For an owner of an empty home who has entered, or intends to enter, into a lease agreement that lasts for at least the term of the loan agreement with a property management company or Registered Provider of social housing
  - iii. For an owner of empty home who intends to reoccupy the property as their main home

## 2. Eligible Properties

- 2.1 The property must be situated in Cheshire East and must be registered at the Land Registry.
- 2.2 The loan will not be available where repairs have previously been completed and financed by a loan from the Council under this or previous Policies where the condition relating to future applications has not yet expired.
- 2.3 The property must have been unoccupied for at least twelve consecutive months prior to the date of application.

## 3. Eligible Works

- 3.1 Works that will bring the property up to an acceptable living standard ready for occupancy are eligible.
- 3.2 The following areas of the home are excluded from being eligible for assistance with repairs: gardens, yards, annexes, garages, sheds, porches and conservatories, except where they form a fundamental part of the living accommodation.
- 3.3 A loan will not be given where there are other suitable forms of financial assistance available, for example but not limited to energy supplier schemes, or household insurance.
- 3.4 Loans will not be approved retrospectively; any works that have been started or completed prior to a valid loan application will not be considered.

3.5 Eligible works will be determined by the Housing service.

4. **Amounts**

4.1 The maximum loan amount that will be considered is £20,000, and a loan will not normally be considered for less than £1,000. All other potential sources of funding must be exhausted first; these thresholds may only be waived at the Council's absolute discretion where no other suitable sources of funding can be identified, and the Council considers that financial hardship has been demonstrated using its standardised evaluation.

4.2 Eligible costs that can be included in an application for assistance are:

- i. Reasonable cost of eligible works and VAT
- ii. Eligible fees, as detailed at Appendix C

5. **Application Process**

5.1 Applications must be made on the Council's official application form and accompanied by:

- i. at least two written quotations on contractors' letter headed paper
- ii. proof of owner's interest
- iii. permission of all people who have an interest in the property
- iv. a valuation of the property for money lending purposes carried out by a RICS qualified surveyor
- v. proof of identity
- vi. any other documents reasonably required by the Council to process the application.

5.2 Before approving a loan application, the Council will have regard to the applicant's ability to repay the loan. The Council will take account of any charges already secured on the property, and any information obtained in the course of its checks which reveal financial difficulties within the last six months. The Council will not normally award a loan where the existing charges registered on the property combined with the loan amount would reduce the available equity in the property to 10% or less of the property value.

5.3 Before a loan application is approved, the applicant and the Council must enter into a loan agreement and a legal charge must be registered at the Land Registry in favour of the Council.

6. **Carrying out and Completion of the Works**

6.1 Details can be found at Appendix D.

7. **Loan Conditions:**

- 7.1 The loan must be secured by way of a legal charge recorded at the Land Registry.
- 7.2 The loan will be provided as an interest-free repayment loan over a maximum term of five years as set out at Appendix A.
- 7.3 The property must be occupied by a tenant and remain available to let to tenants throughout the term of the loan. There must not be any restrictions that prevents a person in receipt of welfare benefits occupying the property.
- 7.4 A valid policy for buildings insurance sufficient to reinstate the building must remain in force until the assistance is repaid, with the Council's interest in the property noted on the policy.
- 7.5 Where an applicant has provided false or misleading information in their application for assistance or in their request for payment, the approval of assistance will be withdrawn and a demand made for repayment of any monies already paid. The Council reserves the right to apply interest at the Bank of England base rate plus 0.5% which will be charged daily from the 29<sup>th</sup> day after the demand for repayment is made until the loan is discharged in full.
- 7.6 The Council may by written notice require the applicant to provide a statement within 21 days showing how the loan conditions are being fulfilled. In the event that the loan conditions are breached, the Council reserves the right to make a demand for repayment of any outstanding monies, and interest at the Bank of England base rate plus 0.5% will be charged daily from the 29<sup>th</sup> day after the demand for repayment is made until the loan is discharged in full. The Council's interest in the property will not be removed from the Land Registry until all monies have been repaid.
- 7.7 Further applications for financial assistance for repairs to the same property will not be considered under this Policy and subsequent versions of this Policy, for a period of ten years from the certified date of completion.
- 7.8 The Council will normally only approve a maximum of three applications for Empty Homes Assistance from an applicant in any calendar year. This may only be waived where the applicant can demonstrate that no other suitable funding sources are available.
- 7.9 In the event that the applicant seeks to remortgage the property or to secure further charges on the property, the Council will at its absolute discretion consider written requests to allow its charge to be postponed, taking into account all relevant information and consideration of the risks to the Council's interest.

# 'Targeted Regeneration' Grant

## 1. Eligible Applicants

Any individual(s) who has a qualifying owner's interest in a property and is over the age of 18, who is:

- 1.1 An owner-occupier; **OR**
- 1.2 A private landlord; OR
- 1.3 An owner of a property that has been unoccupied for at least six months.

## 2. Eligible Properties

- 2.1 From time to time the Council may secure or allocate funding and designate a geographic area within Cheshire East that is eligible for a scheme of housing improvement or regeneration works. Residential properties within a designated area will be eligible for assistance.

## 3. Eligible Works

- 3.1 The following types of works are eligible for assistance:
  - i. Repairs that will make the main structure of the property weather tight. For example, typical repairs that could be considered, based on the severity of the disrepair, include roofing, windows, doors, and preventing damp penetration.
  - ii. Repairs that will improve the external appearance of the property. For example, fascias, gutters, downspouts, boundary walls or landscaping improvements that are sympathetic to the local heritage and street scene
  - iii. Measures that will improve the energy efficiency of the property. For example, loft insulation, cavity wall insulation, room in roof insulation, solid wall insulation, low carbon heating systems
- 3.2 Grants will not be approved retrospectively; any works that have been started or completed prior to a valid grant application will not be considered.
- 3.3 Eligible works will be determined by the Housing service.

## 4. Amounts

- 4.1 The maximum grant will be 70% of the cost of the works, up to a maximum of £10,000. Applicants will be expected to make a minimum of 30% contribution.
- 4.2 The maximum grant will be increased to £15,000 for the following applicants:

4.2.1 Is in receipt of an income related welfare benefit provided by the Government,  
**OR**

4.2.2 Has reached state retirement pension age and has insufficient savings to be able to afford to carry out the repairs.

4.3 Eligible costs that can be included in an application for assistance are:

- iii. Reasonable cost of eligible works and VAT
- iv. Eligible fees as set out at Appendix C

## 5. **Application Process**

5.1 Applications must be made on the Council's official application form and accompanied by:

- i. at least one form of identification
- ii. evidence supporting financial eligibility (for 100% grants of up to £15,000)
- iii. at least two written quotations on contractors' letter headed paper
- iv. proof of owner's interest
- v. permission of all people who also have an owner's interest
- vi. any other documents reasonably required by the Council to process the application.

## 6. **Carrying out and Completion of the Works**

6.1 Details are set out at Appendix D.

## 7. **Grant Conditions**

7.1 The applicant must enter into a written Agreement with the Council that sets out the terms and conditions of the grant.

7.2 If the applicant disposes of the property within 5 years of the certified date of completion, the full grant will become repayable.

7.3 Where an applicant has provided false or misleading information in their grant application or in their request for payment, the approved grant will be withdrawn, and a demand made for repayment of any monies already paid. The Council reserves the right to apply interest at the Bank of England base rate plus 0.5% which will be charged daily from the 29<sup>th</sup> day after the demand for repayment is made until the loan is discharged in full.

7.4 Further applications for financial assistance for repairs to the same property will not be considered under this Policy and subsequent versions of this Policy, for a period of ten years from the certified date of completion.

## **Applications for assistance falling outside of this Policy**

All grant and loan applications will be considered against the published criteria. If the application does not meet the criteria, the Council will inform the applicant in writing of the reason why their application is being refused.

Where an applicant is refused assistance and they wish to appeal against the decision, they should appeal in writing to the Council within 28 days of the date of refusal.

It is recognised that there may be situations where the refusal of assistance would disproportionately disadvantage the applicant. In these circumstances, the Council may waive or alter some or all of the eligibility criteria, minimum or maximum amounts, or conditions of assistance based on the individual circumstances, and approve the application for assistance.

## **Transitional Arrangements**

From 1<sup>st</sup> April 2021, all new applications for assistance will be considered against the criteria set out within this Policy.

All applications for assistance approved under the Home Repairs and Adaptations for Vulnerable People: Financial Assistance Policy 2017 will continue to be valid in accordance with the specific conditions of assistance contained within that Policy.

All valid applications received on or before 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021 under the Home Repairs and Adaptations for Vulnerable People: Financial Assistance Policy 2017 but not yet approved at 1<sup>st</sup> April 2021 will be processed in accordance with that Policy, except where the applicant requests that their application is assessed in accordance with this replacement Policy.

## Appendix A

### Interest Free Repayment Loans

1. Loans are offered as secured loans. The loan is secured by way of a legal charge registered at the Land Registry, until such time that the loan is repaid in full.
2. All joint owners and, where applicable, anyone with a legal interest in the property must give their consent to the works to be carried out and the registration of a legal charge.
3. The Council may request a written valuation of the property, carried out by a RICS qualified surveyor, to determine whether there is enough equity for its interest in the property to be secure.
4. The applicant must make monthly repayments of the loan in accordance with an agreed schedule. We will calculate the monthly payment so that the loan is repaid to us by the end of the term of the loan. The term of the loan will not exceed ten years (five years in the case of an Empty Homes loan).
5. Applicants can repay the loan early at any time without penalty.
6. We may withdraw the offer at any time before we make the loan for any of the following reasons:
  - a. The discovery of a defect in the title to the property
  - b. The deterioration of the applicant's financial position
  - c. The supply of false information in connection with the applicant's loan application
7. If the applicant experiences financial difficulty and has problems maintaining the repayments schedule at any time, the Council will, having regard to the applicant's financial circumstances, consider alternative payment options including:
  - a. Recalculating monthly payments to include any arrears
  - b. Extending the period of the loan beyond the maximum loan term of ten years
  - c. Terminating the interest free repayment loan and offering the outstanding balance as an equity share loan
8. The loan will become immediately repayable in the following circumstances:
  - a. Upon sale or transfer of the property
  - b. If the property is no longer the main residence of the applicant
  - c. In the event of a successful insurance claim related to the eligible works
  - d. Upon death of the applicant (or where there is more than one applicant, the death of the last surviving applicant).
  - e. In the event of a breach of a loan condition.

#### Illustration (example only)

Amount borrowed:	24 monthly repayments	60 monthly repayments	84 monthly repayments	120 monthly repayments	Total repaid:
£1,000	41.67	16.67	11.90	8.33	£1,000
£2,000	83.33	33.33	23.81	16.67	£2,000
£5,000	208.33	83.33	59.52	41.67	£5,000
£10,000	416.67	166.67	119.05	83.33	£10,000

## Appendix B

### Equity Share Loans

1. Loans are offered as secured loans. The loan is secured by way of a legal charge registered at the Land Registry.
2. All joint owners and, where applicable, anyone with a legal interest in the property must give their consent to the works to be carried out and the registration of a legal charge.
3. The Council will request a written valuation of the property suitable for money lending purposes carried out by a RICS qualified surveyor to determine the percentage share and whether there is enough equity for its interest in the property to be secure.
4. The principle amount borrowed (the loan) is secured as a percentage share in the property. The percentage share is calculated using the amount of the loan, and the value of the property.
5. The redemption value of the loan will be calculated based on the percentage share of the value of the property at the point of sale. If, at the time of redemption of the loan, the property value is less than when the loan was approved, the repayment amount will be less than the amount borrowed.
6. Applicants can repay the loan early at any time. A written valuation will be necessary to determine the repayment amount.
7. We may withdraw the offer at any time before we make the loan for any of the following reasons:
  - a. The discovery of a defect in the title to the property
  - b. The deterioration of the applicant's financial position
  - c. The supply of false information in connection with the applicant's loan application
8. The loan will become immediately repayable in the following circumstances:
  - a. Upon sale or transfer of the property
  - b. If the property is no longer the main residence of the applicant
  - c. In the event of a successful insurance claim related to the eligible works
  - d. Upon death of the applicant (or where there is more than one applicant, the death of the last surviving applicant)
  - e. In the event of a breach of a loan condition.

#### Illustration (example only)

	Example 1	Example 2	Example 3
Amount borrowed	£10,000	£7,000	£5,000
Value of property at date of loan offer	£100,000	£187,000	£150,000
Council's percentage share	10%	3.74%	3.33%
Value of property at date of repayment	£120,000	£200,000	£145,000
Amount repayable	£12,000	£7,480	£4,828.50

## Appendix C

### Preliminary and Ancillary services and charges

#### Disabled Facilities Grants

- Confirmation that an applicant has an owner's interest in the property
- Specialist, technical and/or structural surveys
- Design and preparation of plans and drawings
- Preparation of schedules of the relevant works
- Assistance in completing forms
- Advice on financing the cost of the relevant works which are not met by the Council's assistance
- Applications for building regulations approval or planning permission (including the application fee and the preparation of related documents)
- Obtaining estimates for the relevant works
- Advice on contracts
- Consideration of tenders
- Supervision of the relevant works
- Disconnection and reconnection of electricity, gas, water or drainage utilities where this is made necessary by the relevant works (but not charges arising from non-payment of bills)
- Payment of contractors
- Services and charges of an occupational therapist in relation to the relevant works

#### Healthy Homes, Independent Living and Empty Homes Loans

- i. Specialist, technical and/or structural reports that are required by the Council
- ii. Building Control fees for eligible works
- iii. Legal fees and disbursements incurred as a result of setting up the loan
- iv. Valuation fees
- v. Financial advice
- vi. Lenders' fees for registering a second charge
- vii. A fee in accordance with the Council's Fees and Charges schedule will be included as part of the loan, for technical and professional services provided by the Council to facilitate the application process.

#### Affordable Warmth, Urgent Adaptations and Targeted Regeneration Grants

- i. Specialist, technical and/or structural reports that are required by the Council
- ii. Building Control fees for eligible works
- iii. A fee in accordance with the Council's Fees and Charges schedule will be included as part of the grant, for technical and professional services provided by the Council to facilitate the application process.

## Appendix D

### Carrying out and Completion of Works

- 1 Works must be carried out by a contractor whose quotation was accepted as part of the grant or loan application. Any request to change the contractor must be made in writing. Consent will not be unreasonably withheld by the Council.
- 2 The timescales for the different grants and loans are set out below:

Grant/Loan	Work must be started by no later than -	Works must be completed by no later than -
Healthy Homes Loan	3 months from the date of approval	6 months from the date of approval
Affordable Warmth Grant	1 month from the date of approval	2 months from the date of approval
Disabled Facilities Grant	12 months from the date of approval	15 months from the date of approval
Urgent Adaptations Grant	1 month from the date of approval	2 months from the date of approval
Independent Living Loan	12 months from the date of approval	12 months from the date of approval
Disability Relocation Grant	1 month from the date of approval	1 month from the date of approval
Empty Homes Loan	3 months from the date of approval	6 months from the date of approval
Targeted Regeneration Grant	3 months from the date of approval	6 months from the date of approval

Requests for additional time to start or complete the works must be made in writing before the end of the relevant period. Consent will not be unreasonably withheld by the Council. If the timescales are not adhered to, the Council reserves the right to cancel the grant or loan approval.

- 3 In the event of unforeseen work or an increase in costs arising during the works the amount of the grant or loan may be increased at the discretion of the Council. The minimum amount of additional loan that will be considered is £200. The Council will only approve the request where the combined sum of the approved grant or loan with the additional request do not exceed the relevant maximum permitted grant or loan. Where the approved assistance is a loan, the applicant and the Council must enter into a revised loan agreement. Additional fees will be incurred for the registration of an amended legal charge.

- 4 Payment of assistance will be only be made where:
  - i. The eligible works have been completed in accordance with any statutory requirements and/or the Council's specification, and to the reasonable satisfaction of an appointed Strategic Housing officer, and
  - ii. The Council's standard payment request form has been completed, and
  - iii. The Council has received a valid invoice or receipt for the works. An invoice or receipt will not be considered valid where it is issued by a company that the applicant or a member of their family is a proprietor of.
- 5 Requests for interim payments will be considered. The value of interim payments will not exceed the value of the works completed and will not exceed 90% of the total value of eligible works that have been approved.
- 6 Requests for advance payments to make deposits for materials will not normally be considered and will only be allowed where the applicant demonstrates financial hardship.
- 7 Where requests are received for an increase to the grant or loan for unforeseen works, the Council will only approve the request where the combined sum of the approved grant or loan with the additional request do not exceed the relevant maximum permitted grant or loan. Where the approved assistance is a loan, the applicant and the Council must enter into a revised loan agreement.
- 8 In the event of a dispute between the applicant and the contractor about the satisfactory completion of works, the Council reserves the right to pay the grant or loan to the applicant or contractor if the works have been carried out to the satisfaction of a Strategic Housing officer.

## Contact details

This Policy is operated by the Housing Standards and Adaptations team, part of the Strategic Housing service:

By telephone: 0300 123 5017 Option 4

By email: [privatehousing@cheshireeast.gov.uk](mailto:privatehousing@cheshireeast.gov.uk)

By post: (Floor 1, Delamere House), c/o Municipal Buildings, Earle Street, Crewe, Cheshire, CW1 2BJ

Or visit our website: [www.cheshireeast.gov.uk/homerepairs](http://www.cheshireeast.gov.uk/homerepairs)

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*Working for a brighter future together*

Key Decision: N

Date First  
Published: N/A

## Cabinet

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**Date of Meeting:** 9 March 2021

**Report Title:** Customer Experience Strategy

**Portfolio Holder:** Councillor Stott, Portfolio Holder, Finance, IT & Communication

**Senior Officer:** Jane Burns, Executive Director Corporate Services

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### 1. Report Summary

- 1.1. The Customer Experience Strategy sets out the Council's vision to become an organisation which places the customer at the centre of everything we do. Where our customers' needs are central to the services we deliver and the way we deliver them and where every interaction a customer has with us is of a consistently high quality.
- 1.2. The Customer Experience Strategy supports the Council vision of an open, fairer, greener Cheshire East, set out in the new Corporate Plan. In particular the Strategy supports the "open" vision through increased transparency, listening, learning and responding to our residents, supporting and developing our workforce, promoting services through regular communication and engagement and delivering service development, improvement and transformation.
- 1.3. The Customer Experience Strategy is built around 7 key themes:-
  - Understanding what our customers need
  - Designing and delivering services to meet that need
  - Providing a consistent and high quality of service

- Working as one organisation and with our partners to provide a joined-up experience for customers;
  - Ensuring staff have the knowledge, skills, capability and tools to deliver a quality experience
  - Maximising the use of digital technology
  - Providing value for money
- 1.4. The Strategy has been developed in consultation with customers, partners, staff and members and is based on analysis of customer feedback from Residents Surveys, complaints, compliments and contact data. The draft Strategy has undergone internal consultation across the organisation and with partners and external consultation with residents and has been well received.
- 1.5. The Customer Experience Project, within the Brighter Futures Transformation Programme is responsible for implementing the changes required to achieve the commitments contained within the Strategy. Progress will be monitored through the Brighter Futures Transformation Strategic Board

## **2. Recommendation**

- 2.1. That Cabinet adopt the Customer Experience Strategy as attached at Appendix 1.

## **3. Reason for Recommendation**

To provide a clear vision for customer experience and to enable the Council to deliver against its commitments as set out in the Corporate Plan.

## **4. Other Options Considered**

- 4.1. The Strategy has been developed through consultation and considered many options to refine the final strategy. The option to not have a strategy is not considered reasonable based on feedback to date and was not therefore considered.

## **5. Background**

- 5.1. Improving the customer experience is one of the priority transformational aims of the Council as established within the Brighter Futures Transformation Programme. The overarching aim is to become a “customer centric” organisation, where our customers’ needs are central to the services we deliver and the way we deliver them and where every interaction a customer has with us is of a consistently high quality.

- 5.2. An external review conducted in 2019 into the extent to which the Council is “customer centric” identified a common desire across the Council to deliver excellent customer experience but a lack of a common approach to what that means in practice, leading to differing perceptions across the Council of “good” customer service.
- 5.3. The review also identified a number of opportunities to improve the customer experience across the Council including:-
- Listening to our customers, using that information to gain a better understanding of our customer needs (now and in the future) and designing and delivering services that meet that need.
  - Developing a cross Council view of our customers, understanding that customers have a relationship with the Council as a single organisation rather than with individual services.
  - Adapting the way in which we review our services to consider this from the customers perspective. Improving the full “end to end” journey for customers including any handovers within the Council or with partners.
  - Setting consistent standards of service across the organisation, being transparent about our performance against those standards and learning from our mistakes.
  - Improving the technology that supports our staff in delivering customer service and the technology that supports our customers to self-serve
- 5.4. Feedback from the customer data, surveys and consultations confirms that customer perceptions of the service the Council currently provides requires significant improvement. **Appendix 2** provides a summary of this feedback from both internal and external consultation.
- 5.5. The Customer Experience Strategy provides the common vision of the standard of service we expect to be delivered to all customers. A programme of activity, monitored through the Brighter Futures Transformation Programme, will build on this Strategy and deliver against its commitments. Much of this work is already underway with improvements to our training, technology and use of customer data all progressing and the drafting of a consistent charter of standards under development.

## **6. Implications of the Recommendations**

### **6.1. Legal Implications**

There is no legal requirement to produce a Customer Experience Strategy. However, it is helpful to have a clear articulation of the priority in the Council's Corporate Plan.

### **6.2. Finance Implications**

Activities associated with the development of the aims of the Strategy have been included within the Brighter Futures Transformation work programme. Where required, a business case has been completed to access funding via the Brighter Futures Transformation Reserve.

Efficiency savings associated with the activities of the Customer Experience Project have also been identified and included within the MTFS.

Adoption of the strategy, in accordance with the recommendations of this report will help to realise the benefits expected within the Medium Term Financial Strategy 2021 to 2025.

### **6.3. Policy Implications**

The Customer Experience Strategy will support the Council's "Open, Fairer, Greener Cheshire East. It supports the "open" vision through increased transparency, listening, learning and responding to our residents, supporting and developing our workforce, promoting services through regular communication and engagement and delivering service development, improvement and transformation

### **6.4. Equality Implications**

The Customer Experience Strategy aims to improve the experience of all customers when interacting with the Council and will ensure that the Council recognise, and address individuals needs and any barriers to accessing services. A full Equality Impact Assessment has been completed and is attached

### **6.5. Human Resources Implications**

The Customer Experience Transformation Programme is working closely with the Council's Organisational Development Team to improve the customer experience training provided to all staff

### **6.6. Risk Management Implications**

None

**6.7. Rural Communities Implications**

There are no direct implications for rural communities.

**6.8. Implications for Children & Young People/Cared for Children**

There are no direct implications for children and young people.

**6.9. Public Health Implications**

There are no direct implications for public health.

**6.10. Climate Change Implications**

None

**7. Ward Members Affected**

All

**8. Consultation & Engagement**

The Strategy was submitted for internal consultation between 9th and 30th October 2020 and for external consultation between 27th November and 15th January. Workshops were held with our Brighter Futures Champions and feedback was sought directly from partner organisations including Hidden Carers, Belong, Cheshire Equality Leads Forum and South and East Cheshire Chamber of Commerce

**9. Access to Information**

N/a

**10. Contact Information**

Any questions relating to this report should be directed to the following officer:

Name: Helen Gerrard

Job Title: Head of Customer Service

Email: [helen.gerrard@cheshireeast.gov.uk](mailto:helen.gerrard@cheshireeast.gov.uk)

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# Customer Experience Strategy 2021 - 2024



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# Introduction

Cheshire East Council is committed to delivering the best outcomes for the diverse range of people living and working in Cheshire East. Our values commit us to listening and understanding to what our residents and businesses need and responding appropriately to put in place affordable services fairly and responsibly. This strategy sets out our vision to deliver against this commitment and to provide the best possible experience for our customers, whoever they are and however they contact us.



## What does Customer Experience Mean?

'Customer Experience' refers not just to the services we provide as a council but also how we treat customers when they are trying to access those services. The Institute of Customer Service envisages an organisation which provides excellent customer services as: -

**"...honest, gives good value for money, has a high reputation, meets deadlines, has quality products and services, has easy to understand processes, responds to criticism, encourages complaints and handles them well, and demonstrates that it is passionate about customers."**

We know that we provide a wide range of services to our customers and we know that the experience will differ depending on the service accessed and the way in which it is accessed.

We also know that as a public service provider it is important that customers can trust us to design services which respond to their needs and the needs of the local area and that these are delivered in a way which provides value for their money.



## Our Vision

**We will put our customers at the heart of everything we do, reflecting their feedback in the design and delivery of services.**

Putting customer first or at the heart of the organisation are phrases often used but rarely realised. However, it's not that complicated, and in practice it means remembering that as a local authority service provider, our purpose is to provide public services to the residents, businesses and visitors to Cheshire East and therefore every decision, business action or procedure should be in support of this. We need to ensure that we have effective engagement with customers which helps us to fully understand their needs and aspirations and that we use the data we gather to design services around customers true needs.

**We will aim to provide a consistent and high quality of service wherever and however customers interact with us.**

We are a large organisation providing over 500 services to 384,000 residents with multiple means of contacting us. We know that there is inconsistency across the council and that can be confusing and frustrating for customers. Customers need to be confident that they will receive a consistent customer experience irrespective of the service they contact or how that service is delivered. Where our services are delivered in partnership with other organisations, they will also be expected to provide a consistent experience to customers where it makes sense to do so.

**We will ensure that our services are flexible and can adapt to the changing needs of our customers in the future.**

We know that our population and its needs are constantly changing. The growth of technology has meant that our customers are more likely to want to interact with us via digital means and our services need to reflect this. We also know that we have an aging population who may be less digitally aware. The experience of COVID-19 and other crises, also demonstrates that we need to be able to adapt to circumstances which cannot be predicted. We therefore need an organisation and services that can be flexible and can adapt to these changing and sometimes conflicting demands.

**We will continue to adopt a digital first approach, promoting and supporting self-service wherever possible.**

Digital technology has changed the way people interact both socially and when requesting goods and services. We need to ensure that our digital services can meet this demand and that they are easy to use, secure and available at times that are convenient for customers.

However, Digital technology is not right for everyone or for every situation. We will continue to provide services through other means and will work within our communities to provide support to those who are digitally excluded.

We know that digital technology can help us to reduce costs, that by encouraging self-service by those who can, we will be able to focus resources on those more complex services and those customers less comfortable with digital technology.

**We will co-design service delivery with partners to provide a unified and joined up customer experience**

Many of our services are delivered in partnership with colleagues in Central Government, the Heath Service, the community and private sectors. We know that this can sometimes cause problems for customers when dealing with multiple organisations. We will work with partners to join up services where that makes sense.

We will also support individuals and communities to help themselves by providing a supportive environment where partners, the voluntary sector, businesses, and most importantly, residents can thrive independently.

**We will provide value for money**

We must balance the needs and aspirations of individuals with the needs of the wider population and of our most vulnerable customers. We have limited funds available to us however and that means we cannot always deliver everything to everyone. Where we cannot deliver a service we will always explain why and work with customers to identify any alternative options for them. We will make best use of the money available to us by working in the most efficient way we can. We need to take an in-depth look at our service delivery to review the customer experience and improve the way we work, removing any part of our processes which do not add value and adopting innovative technology where this can help.

# Understanding our area and people

With an estimated population of 384,000, Cheshire East is the third largest Local Authority in the North West, and the fifteenth largest in the country.

Cheshire East is a prosperous area where residents have high expectations for good quality services. However, we also have areas of significant deprivation within our communities where customers rely on us to provide the support they need.

We have a maturing population which it is estimated will continue to grow over the coming years whilst we also have a reducing percentage of working age customers.

## Our residents:<sup>1</sup> (see notes page 16)



Between the 2001 and 2011 Census, the average age of residents has increased from 40.6 years to

**43.6 years**

By 2030, the average age of residents is expected to further increase to approximately 47 years.

The most common non-British Isles countries for residents to have been born in are Poland and India.

**3%** of Cheshire East households have members for whom English is not the main language and, in half of these households, no members have English as their main language.

**20,225** active businesses

**17.5 %**

of Cheshire East residents have a long-term health condition/disability.



The proportion of Cheshire East residents who classed themselves as White British is

**93.6 %**



We know that our population, when compared to the region and the UK, has an older demographic profile.

**40,003**

residents are 'unpaid carers', with 8,024 providing at least 50 hours per week.

**5.1%** of Cheshire East residents were born outside the British Isles, with 2.7% born outside the EU.

We have fewer 'working age' and under 16s living in our area compared to North West

and national averages. However, our 65+ population is larger than average. This brings additional pressures for us in ensuring we have the capacity to deliver services to our residents as they need them.

**16m** visitors to Cheshire East

We have a smaller than average 'working age' population and more people in work (unemployment rate of 3.2%) - lower than regional and national averages and with a lower number of work-less households - those who are employed earn higher than average earnings.



# Our Customers

Our research has shown that we have seven main groups of customers who all have different needs and circumstances. These groups provide a way of testing our services to ensure they are meeting customers needs.

We also know that within these groups some people are comfortable with technology and some are not, this will always be taken into account across these groups.



## Living Well

(27% of population / 12% of council spend)



Adults living fulfilled lives with stable economic foundation and households like **Adam**

"I am a healthy adult. I enjoy my leisure time, particularly running in the park and keeping fit. Where possible, I would like to support my local community. I rarely contact the council but when I do it's because something has gone wrong or I need a service that only the council provides."

## Adult at Risk

(27% of population / 42% of council spend)



Adults living with a disability or illness (mental ill health or other condition) who need help to look after themselves, or protect themselves from harm or exploitation like **Brian**

"I live with a mental illness which means I can't always take care of myself. I need to help to stay safe and well although sometimes I don't want any help. I often feel lonely and not part of the community."

## Economically challenged Adult

(14% of population / 8% of council spend)



Adults with financial challenges like **David**

"Although I have always worked, my income barely covers my living costs. I have no savings to rely on for unexpected costs. I rely on welfare support, without which my situation would be unbearable."



## Community Champion

Individuals with a strong community interest like **Frances**

"I like to make sure my community is well looked after. When I see a problem, I will report it to the council. I like to have my say on any plans which affect my community and expect those views to be listened to."

.....



## Well Child

(14% of population / 6% of council spend)

Children with no long-term mental or physical ill health issues like **Chloe**

"I am a healthy child and live a care-free life, enjoy playing outdoors and swimming in the local pool. My parents organise a lot of my life such as ensuring I get a good education. I am really concerned about the environment and how to make it better."

.....



## Vulnerable Child

(8% of population / 24% of council spend)

Children with long-term mental or physical health issues or with educational needs like **Ellen**

"I live with a long term health condition. My home life is difficult."

.....



## Business Owner

(As of 2018 there were 20,225 businesses located in Cheshire East.)

Business owners operating within the Cheshire East area like **Gary**

"I run a business in the Cheshire East area. I spend a lot of time on administration which reduces the time I have for my business. I normally contact the council for services such as planning, licensing or food safety. I am interested in sharing ideas with other business leaders and would like to be involved in the regeneration of my area."

.....

## Customers of the future<sup>2</sup> (see notes on page 16)



The population of Cheshire East is estimated to grow by **31,000/8%** with the largest increase in the over 65 age group (24.5% increase).



Increasing numbers of customers are using (or want to use) digital means to contact us.



There will remain some customers who are unable or unwilling to use digital.



The number of working age residents (16-64) is estimated to increase by **4,500/1.9%**



Customer expectation in terms of speed of response and quality of service are continually increasing.



Customer priorities when dealing with organisations remain relatively unchanged.



## Our Services<sup>3</sup> (see notes on page 16)

We provide over 500 services in support of our communities, economy, health, education and environment.

### Key facts and figures 2019/20



**3,170**

Planning applications registered.



**3.5 million**

visits to council-owned leisure facilities.



**87%**

of our secondary schools are rated as good or outstanding (North West average 67%)



**560,000**

telephone calls answered.



**14 million**

bins emptied per year.



**40,000**

street lights maintained.



**72%**

of our social care users are satisfied with the service we provide (North West average 68%).



**1.4 million**

visits to our libraries.



**169,000**

digital forms completed.

## Our performance

The results from our Residents' Survey in 2019 show that customers rate some of our services highly such as waste and libraries, whereas others, such as planning and highways services, need improvement.

Feedback also showed that customers have concerns about the value for money provided by the council, how well informed the council keeps its customers and the extent to which we listen to and take account of customers concerns.

### Positives



**67%**  
attitude  
of staff.



**62%**  
ease of  
payment.



**77%**  
Library  
service.



**64%**  
ease of finding  
information.



**84%**  
Waste collection  
service.



**64%**  
Leisure  
services.

### Negatives



**48%**  
speed of  
fulfilment.



Issues not resolved/  
response/action late/  
contact not returned/  
unable to contact.



**53%**  
I am not well informed  
about the services  
and benefits  
Cheshire East provides.



**20%**  
Planning  
Services.



**40%**  
Fairness  
of charges.



**50%**  
Council does not  
listen to concerns  
of residents.



**46%**  
Parking  
services.



**28%**  
Highway  
Service.

# What do we want to achieve?

## An organisational culture that focuses on the customer and a consistent quality of service

- We will work as one organisation offering a clear and consistent experience
- Our staff will have the knowledge, skills, capability and tools to deliver a consistent and high quality of service wherever and however our customers interact with us
- Through understanding the customers' requirements, the customer experience will be right first time, delivering what they need at the first point of contact. As a result, they will benefit from a quick, efficient and responsive service
- Our services will be available in a way that allows all our customers to access clear information.
- Customers will be provided with information which clearly sets out our services, access routes and waiting times and will be kept informed of progress so they don't need to follow up enquiries unnecessarily
- To be seen as approachable by our customers, welcoming feedback, being willing to admit our mistakes and always learning from these

By 2022 our Customer Experience Strategy will be adopted across the organisation. We will have an agreed set of standards and will have a baseline of our current position across all services.

We will review the training we provide to all staff, embedding the values contained within our Customer Experience Strategy and ensure they have the knowledge and skills to deliver this.

We will have a culture where the needs and aspirations of customers are considered at every stage of our service design and delivery, where staff are encouraged to be innovative and to continuously improve the customer experience and where there is clear ownership of the customer experience across the organisation.



## Services that are based on our customers' needs

- We will use customer feedback and data to design and offer services based on what customers need and what works for them. Customer Feedback and data will enable us to continuously assess our services and influence the design of policies, services, systems and processes
- We will work with partners and residents to co-design services ensuring we maximise the skills available, supporting people to help themselves and creating a seamless customer journey
- We will review our existing services so we fully understand the customer journey from the customers perspective and will redesign these to make them simpler and easier for customers to use and for us to administer
- We will listen to what our customers are saying when they contact us and respond quickly. Customers will have timely and information and advice
- Sometimes our services are required to protect individuals or our environment. These will also be delivered in a clear and consistent way which makes it easy for customers to understand
- Through a better understanding of our customers, we will proactively identify and offer services that individuals might need from the council or our partners. We will provide them with the support they are entitled to and reduce the need to be reactive to situations which could have been prevented
- When things go wrong, we will learn the lessons and make changes to ensure they do not happen again
- We will have a transparent relationship with our customers where they will have the opportunity to assess our performance and will be provided with information to understand how money is being spent and how decisions are made. They will feel listened to and that their opinion counts
- We will also focus our efforts on preventive services providing recreational, educational, informative and informal services which improve our customers well being

### By 2022 we will have:-

- Completed an in-depth review and re-design of those services where feedback from customers has identified the need for an improved customer experience and we will have developed plans to review our remaining services
- Reviewed our customer engagement processes to ensure a wider participation and greater access to real time feedback
- Improved the information we provide to customers giving greater clarity on decisions made and how money is spent
- Created a customer insight tool where information can be shared across the organisation and with partners where appropriate to help to shape service design and delivery
- Developed an approach to personalised contact, enabling customers to receive proactive information on topics of interest to them or to their local area
- Reviewed our approach to complaints management ensuring all lessons learned are widely shared

## Solutions that promote self-service and help staff in providing a consistent, quality customer experience

- We will improve our digital offering for customers, enabling the majority of our services to be accessed easily on-line
- We will promote digital as the access channel of choice for most services, enabling customers to help themselves through self-serve first
- We will focus our resources on the more complex enquiries, where digital may not be appropriate and for those customers who are unable to use digital channels
- We will improve the technology that supports our Contact Centres, ensuring staff have the tools to support customers
- We will use innovative technologies to improve the customer experience and to provide value for money for customers

By 2022 we will have a new website, providing easy access to council services 24/7

We will have a "My Account" allowing customers to access personalised data and to track service requests

We will have updated technology within the Contact Centre that supports customer contact through a variety of methods

By 2023 we will be using technology in several ways to pro-actively identify and resolve issues, to reduce the cost of administering our services and to personalise our services



## Feedback

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### Be involved in decision making in Cheshire East...

If you would like to be involved in consultations undertaken by Cheshire East Council, you can do so by registering for updates on the Consultation pages or joining the Digital Influence Panel. Please visit [cheshireeast.gov.uk/consultations](https://www.cheshireeast.gov.uk/consultations)

If you would like to view the results of previous consultations undertaken by Cheshire East Council, please visit

[https://www.cheshireeast.gov.uk/council\\_and\\_democracy/council\\_information/consultations/consultation-results/consultations\\_results.aspx](https://www.cheshireeast.gov.uk/council_and_democracy/council_information/consultations/consultation-results/consultations_results.aspx)

[www.cheshireeast.gov.uk](https://www.cheshireeast.gov.uk)

## Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> Borough profile 2019/20; Place scorecard 2019/20; Economic Strategy for Cheshire East 2020 to 2025

<sup>2</sup> Cheshire East Borough Profile 2019/20

<https://www.instituteofcustomerservice.com/research-insight/uk-customer-satisfaction-index>

The 2019-20 UK Customer Experience Decision-Makers' Guide © ContactBabel 2019

<sup>3</sup> Borough profile 2019/20; Place scorecard 2019/20; Contact Centre data

# Customer Experience Strategy Feedback

Working for a *brighter future*  together

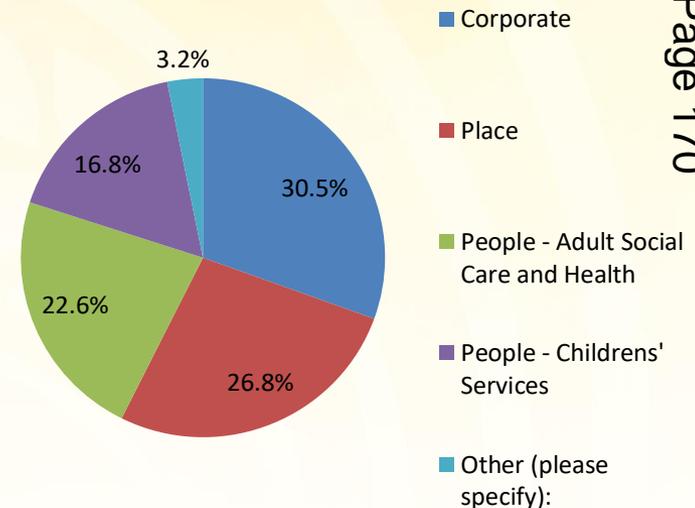
OFFICIAL

# Summary of internal responses

There were 190 responses across all directorates:

Which of the following best describes who you are you responding as?

Directorate		Response Percent	Response Total
1	Corporate	30.5%	58
2	Place	26.8%	51
3	People - Adult Social Care and Health	22.6%	43
4	People - Childrens' Services	16.8%	32
5	Other (please specify):	3.2%	6



56.9% of responses came from Neighbourhood Services

36.2% of responses came from ICT

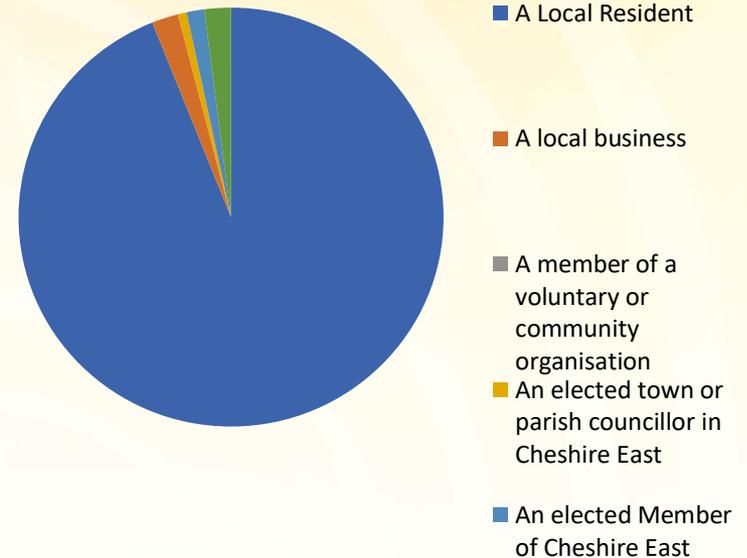
34.5% of responses came from Customer Services

# Summary of external responses

There were 149 responses:

Which of the following best describes who you are responding as?

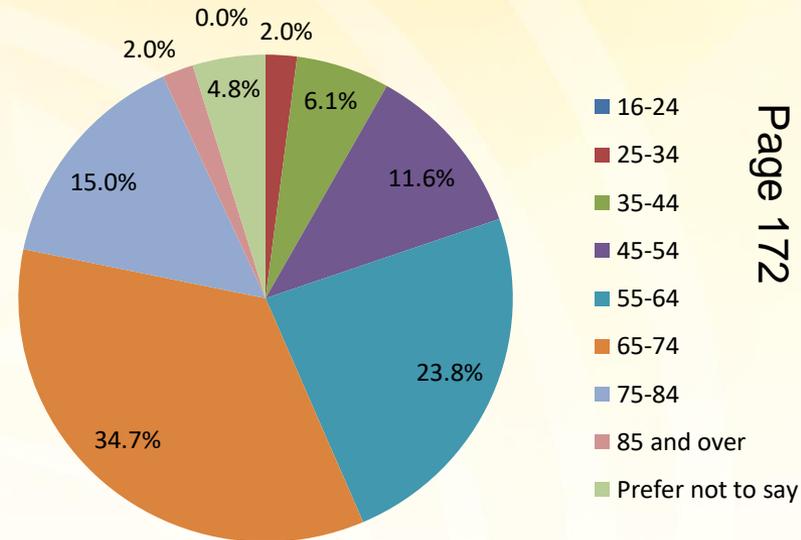
Which of the following best describes who you are responding as?			
Please select one box only			
Answer Choice		Response Percent	Response Total
1	A Local Resident	94.0%	140
2	A local business	2.0%	3
3	A member of a voluntary or community organisation	0.0%	0
4	An elected town or parish councillor in Cheshire East	0.7%	1
5	An elected Member of Cheshire East	1.3%	2
6	Other (please specify):	2.0%	3
		answered	149
		skipped	0



# Summary external of responses cont'd

## What age group do you belong to?

What age group do you belong to? Please select one option only			
Answer Choice		Response Percent	Response Total
1	16-24	0.0%	0
2	25-34	2.0%	3
3	35-44	6.1%	9
4	45-54	11.6%	17
5	55-64	23.8%	35
6	65-74	34.7%	51
7	75-84	15.0%	22
8	85 and over	2.0%	3
9	Prefer not to say	4.8%	7
		<b>answered</b>	<b>147</b>
		<b>skipped</b>	<b>2</b>



# Internal and External Feedback on vision statements

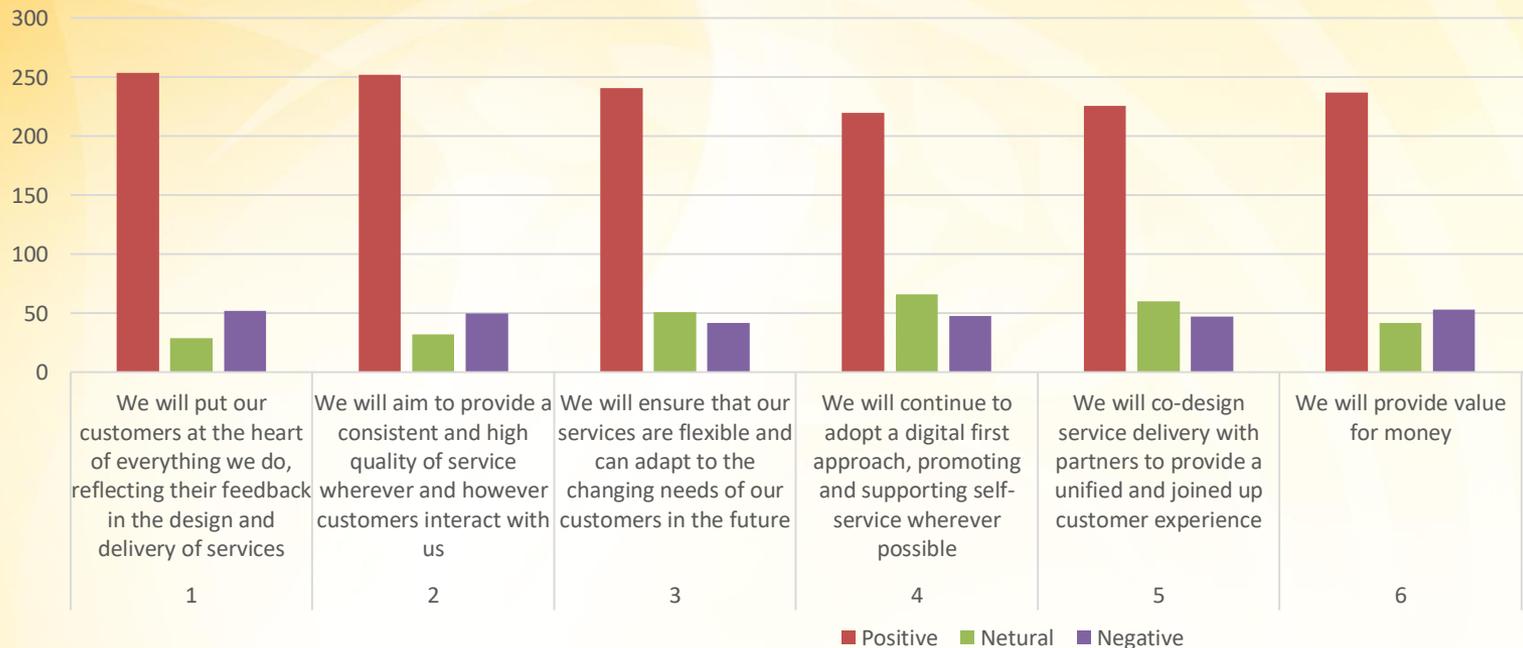
How strongly do you agree or disagree with each of the following vision statements?

	Positive	Netural	Negative
We will put our customers at the heart of everything we do, reflecting their feedback in the design and delivery of services	<b>76%</b>	9%	15%
We will aim to provide a consistent and high quality of service wherever and however customers interact with us	<b>75%</b>	10%	15%
We will ensure that our services are flexible and can adapt to the changing needs of our customers in the future	<b>72%</b>	15%	13%
We will continue to adopt a digital first approach, promoting and supporting self-service wherever possible	<b>66%</b>	20%	14%
We will co-design service delivery with partners to provide a unified and joined up customer experience	<b>68%</b>	18%	14%
We will provide value for money	<b>71%</b>	13%	16%

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# Internal and External Feedback on vision statements cont.

How strongly do you agree or disagree with each of the following vision statements?



# Internal Key Themes

## Six key themes were identified:

- Needs & Wants - Regulatory/Enforcement services
- Managing expectations
- Digital
- Culture
- Service Design

# Internal Key Themes cont.

Theme	Summary
Regulatory/Enforcement services	Need to better reflect regulatory and enforcement services. That the outcome may not be "positive" from the customers perspective but will still be delivered to a consistent & high quality of service
Managing expectations	That we frequently operate within a statutory environment and are restricted by budgetary constraints. We cannot always deliver everyone's needs and wants
Digital	Ensure ease of access for those who are digitally excluded and improve the current digital offering
Culture	Emphasise the need to learn from complaints and to be approachable
Service Design	Needs to be based on real data and real experiences and always from the customers view

# External Key Themes

## Five key themes were identified:

- Digital Access
- Listening
- Customer
- Lack of confidence/trust
- Lack of transparency

# External Key Themes cont.

Theme	Summary
Digital Access	Agreement that we need to improve our digital services but also make sure we retain other means of contact for those who cannot or choose not to use digital
Listening	A general perception that the Council should improve the way it listens to the views of all our customers
Customer	The Council should improve its focus on customers
Lack of confidence, trust	The Council should ensure that the aims of the Strategy are implemented to improve confidence and trust
Lack of transparency	The Council needs to be more open with customers on performance, decision making and consultations

# EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

**TITLE: BFTP – Customer Experience Strategy**

## VERSION CONTROL

Date	Version	Author	Description of Changes
06.10.2020	V1	Leeanne Forster	

EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

**CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL - EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

Stage 1 Description: Fact finding (about your policy / service /

Department	Corporate Services		Lead officer responsible for assessment		Leeanne Forster	
Service	<b>BFTP – Customer Experience Workstream</b>		Other members of team undertaking assessment			
Date	6 <sup>th</sup> October 2020		Version			
Type of document (mark as appropriate)	Strategy	Plan	Function	Policy	Procedure	Service
Is this a new/ existing/ revision of an existing document (please mark as appropriate)	New		Existing		Revision	
<p>Title and subject of the impact assessment (include a brief description of the aims, outcomes, operational issues as appropriate and how it fits in with the wider aims of the organisation)</p> <p>Please attach a copy of the strategy/ plan/ function/ policy/ procedure/ service</p>	<p>The Customer Experience Project forms a key strand within the Brighter Future Transformation Programme. Its overarching aim is to develop our organisation into one which “puts our customers at the heart of everything we do, reflecting their feedback in the design and delivery of services” and “ensures that every interaction a customer has with us is a consistently positive experience.”</p> <p>The Project was informed by a review of customer service and experience across the Council, conducted by Strasys Consultancy. This review identified issues with existing structures, processes, technology and culture all of which were impacting on our ability to understand customer needs and to appropriately respond to these.</p> <p>The Residents Survey Results in early 2020 provided further evidence of the need for fundamental change with relatively poor satisfaction in some service areas and a perception that the Council does not listen to customers.</p> <p>Customer expectations have also changed over time and many now expect to be able to interact with organisations digitally and at a time which suits them. Comparisons are made with organisations that customers regularly interact with such as on-line banks and on-line retail, Amazon being the often-quoted example. The current technology underpinning our customer contact has not completely kept pace with this expectation and there is a need for this to be reviewed and enhanced.</p> <p>The Customer Experience Project has developed workstreams to address or improve in each of these areas. The</p>					

## EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

following provides a summary of the key issues and areas to be addressed.

- 1. The lack of a clear vision and strategy; a lack of clarity as to how that links with other strategies (financial, transformational, digital) and what excellent customer service means in practice.**

The Customer Experience Project will develop a corporate Strategy for Customer Experience which will establish a clear and consistent expectation of the experience we expect a customer to receive when they interact with the Council. This will be underpinned by guidance which sets out what this means in practice. These will be adopted across the Council and all Departments will be expected to demonstrate compliance.

- 2. The lack of a customer centric culture across the organisation, no overall ownership of the customer experience, a lack of consistency and no overarching centre of excellence for customer service.**

Following the adoption of the Strategy a programme of training and awareness will be rolled out, building on the work underway within the culture workstream of the BFTP.

There is also a need to review structures and working practices related to customer services across the Council, particularly of those with a corporate responsibility. There is a lack of ownership of the customer experience across the Council and a perception that the Director of Finance & Customer Services has an operational rather than strategic responsibility for customers. There is evidence of good practice amongst several Services and many are driving improvements within their own areas of responsibility. This has led however to a lack of a cohesive and consistent offering for customers and the proliferation of “best of breed” solutions with little overarching framework.

- 3. A lack of understanding of who our customers are and the full end to end journey for our customers with handovers between services and partners not always managed; an element of duplication between services and a disjoint between initial contact and fulfilment**

We have developed an approach to service re-design which focusses on the experience the customer has throughout this journey. We will test this out in two areas which had particularly poor responses to the Residents Survey: Planning and Highways. This approach enables us to both map out the steps we require from a customer to access a service and what that process feels like from a customer’s perspective. It will allow us to remove unnecessary steps in a process, understand why customers may drop out of a request

**EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

and understand what, if any other services we should be offering at the same time.

This is an area which is likely to have been significantly influenced throughout the COVID crisis. Services have adapted to respond to the change in working practices and to enable services for the most vulnerable customers to be prioritised. In many Services this has highlighted those processes which do not add value and encouraged these to be removed. It is important as we recover from the crisis that these benefits are captured and retained as the new business as usual.

**4. A lack of a single cross organisation view of customers, content or services leading to missed marketing opportunities to manage demand or to influence the take up of services.**

Whilst the Council may operate within individual services, customers invariably have needs which cut across a number of those services. Viewing our services from the customer's perspective allows us to respond to these multiple demands. A change of address for example could include Council Tax, Housing and Waste services; a request for an assisted waste collection may indicate a vulnerable customer needing further support and a business may require licensing, business rates and business advice.

By recognising these needs from the customer's perspective, we can be proactive in offering related services or providing relevant advice which then manages future demand.

The COVID crisis has also highlighted a gap in our ability to contact specific or relevant groups of customers directly. The ability to reach customers with information, advice or requests which are specific to them helps to ensure messages are read and any action required is taken. The requirement to reach specific business eligible for the business grants and to request payment details would have been far easier with a method of directly messaging relevant businesses.

**5. Lack of technology to support multi-channel contact leading to a poor customer experience, inefficiencies within the contact centre and no central repository of customer data**

Customers increasingly use multiple channels to interact with organisations including the website, on line forms, chatbots, webchat, telephone, email and occasionally face to face. Customers also do not tend to stick with one channel, using whichever is most convenient or appropriate for their needs at any given time.

The technology within the Contact Centre is primarily telephony based and does not support the use of multiple channels. Nor is there a single repository for the recording of all contact from customers. From a

## EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

customer’s perspective this leads to frustrations in repeating information and as a Council it leads to a lack of information and an inability to learn from this to address needs proactively.

The Contact Centre is also only one area into which customer calls may be channelled. Several smaller contact hubs exist within other service areas with contact recorded within individual back office systems if at all further exacerbating this issue.

The Councils digital offering has primarily been led by ICT and the needs of individual services. Whilst good progress has been made there has been a lack of a corporate strategy and of a focus on the overall experience from the customer’s perspective.

Multiple “accounts” for customers have been created each of which may provide a good solution for a specific service but collectively they lead to a mixed and confusing experience for customers.

Our aim will be to review the technologies underpinning all customer contact to provide a single “portal” of information irrelevant of the method by which customers contact us. This should also feed into the digital offering so customers can see progress on reports they have made, information we hold about them e.g. Council Tax records and personalised information which is relevant to them, their interests and their location.



CEC Customer  
Experience Strategy FIN

**Who are the main stakeholders and have they been engaged with? (e.g. general public, employees, Councillors, partners, specific audiences, residents)**

The main stakeholders are the general public, residents, employees and those who interact with Cheshire East Council.

- Staff consultation (including Councillors) will be held 7<sup>th</sup> to 30<sup>th</sup> October 2020
- Public consultation will be held 27<sup>th</sup> November 2020 to 15<sup>th</sup> January 2021

**What consultation method(s) did you use?**

- Council staff will be consulted via an online survey.
- Public Consultation – It was intended that the public will have access to the survey digitally and via hard copy. However due to COVID it is unlikely that the option to complete a hard copy will be feasible.

## EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

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### Stage 2 Initial Screening

<p><b>Who is affected and what evidence have you considered to arrive at this analysis? (This may or may not include the stakeholders listed above)</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The way services are delivered and how customers interact with the Council has a significant impact on our communities and therefore may impact on different groups in the community, but is not intended to discriminate against different groups in the community</li> <li>• Changes in how services are provided, who they are delivered to and who receives the services</li> <li>• When making decisions that may affect people the Council will aim to ensure that their views are sought and considered so that we can understand the impact of decisions, what matters to them, what they consider as priorities, what areas are in need of improvement and how the choices made may impact on their lives</li> </ul>
<p><b>Who is intended to benefit and how?</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All stakeholder as referenced above are intended to benefit from a Customer Experience Strategy. Please see points 1 to 5 above.</li> <li>• Issues and concerns identified during this consultation will be used to develop mitigation where possible and will be used to inform further development of the Strategy.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Could there be a different impact or outcome for some groups?</b></p>	<p>There is likely to be little or no impact upon any specific groups.</p>
<p><b>Does it include making decisions based on individual characteristics, needs or circumstances?</b></p>	<p>No.</p>
<p><b>Are relations between different groups or communities likely to be affected? (eg will it favour one particular group or deny opportunities for others?)</b></p>	<p>No.</p>
<p><b>Is there any specific targeted action to promote equality? Is there a history of unequal outcomes (do you have enough evidence to prove otherwise)?</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Efforts are made to ensure that all groups have an opportunity to participate in the consultation.</li> <li>• As the consultation is likely to be accessible via digital means only, the following groups have been engaged:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Hidden Carers</li> <li>➤ Belong</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

## EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Cheshire Equality Leads Forum</li> <li>➤ South and East Cheshire Chamber of Commerce</li> </ul>							
<b>Is there an actual or potential negative impact on these specific characteristics? (Please tick)</b>									
<b>Age</b>	Y	N	<b>Marriage &amp; civil partnership</b>	Y	N	<b>Religion &amp; belief</b>	Y	N	
<b>Disability</b>	Y	N	<b>Pregnancy &amp; maternity</b>	Y	N	<b>Sex</b>	Y	N	
<b>Gender reassignment</b>	Y	N	<b>Race</b>	Y	N	<b>Sexual orientation</b>	Y	N	
<b>What evidence do you have to support your findings? (quantitative and qualitative) Please provide additional information that you wish to include as appendices to this document, i.e., graphs, tables, charts</b>							<b>Consultation/ involvement carried out</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review of customer service and experience across the Council, conducted by Strasys Consultancy.</li> <li>• Residents Survey feedback 2020</li> </ul>							<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	
<b>Age</b>	There may be an impact at the consultation stage. We are aware that some older residents may be less digitally functional and therefore to overcome this we have engaged with specific groups ahead of consultation.								
<b>Disability</b>	<i>It is not expected that this consultation will impact people who fall within this category.</i>								
<b>Gender reassignment</b>	<i>It is not expected that this consultation will impact people who fall within this category.</i>								
<b>Marriage &amp; civil partnership</b>	<i>It is not expected that this consultation will impact people who fall within this category.</i>								
<b>Pregnancy &amp; maternity</b>	<i>It is not expected that this consultation will impact people who fall within this category.</i>								
<b>Race</b>	<i>It is not expected that this consultation will impact people who fall within this category.</i>								
<b>Religion &amp; belief</b>	<i>It is not expected that this consultation will impact people who fall within this category.</i>								
<b>Sex</b>	<i>It is not expected that this consultation will impact people who fall within this category.</i>								
<b>Sexual orientation</b>	<i>It is not expected that this consultation will impact people who fall within this category.</i>								

**EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

<b>Proceed to full impact assessment? (Please tick)</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Date</b>
<b>Lead officer sign off</b>		<b>Date</b>	
<b>Head of service sign off</b>		<b>Date</b> 11 <sup>th</sup> February 2021	

**If yes, please proceed to Stage 3. If no, please publish the initial screening as part of the suite of documents relating to this issue**

## EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

### Stage 3 Identifying impacts and evidence

This section identifies if there are impacts on equality, diversity and cohesion, what evidence there is to support the conclusion and what further action is needed

Protected characteristics	<p>Is the policy (function etc....) likely to have an adverse impact on any of the groups?</p> <p>Please include evidence (qualitative &amp; quantitative) and consultations</p> <p><i>List what negative impacts were recorded in Stage 1 (Initial Assessment).</i></p>	<p>Are there any positive impacts of the policy (function etc....) on any of the groups?</p> <p>Please include evidence (qualitative &amp; quantitative) and consultations</p> <p><i>List what positive impacts were recorded in Stage 1 (Initial Assessment).</i></p>	<p>Please rate the impact taking into account any measures already in place to reduce the impacts identified</p> <p><b>High:</b> Significant potential impact; history of complaints; no mitigating measures in place; need for consultation  <b>Medium:</b> Some potential impact; some mitigating measures in place, lack of evidence to show effectiveness of measures  <b>Low:</b> Little/no identified impacts; heavily legislation-led; limited public facing aspect</p>	<p>Further action (only an outline needs to be included here. A full action plan can be included at Section 4)</p> <p><i>Once you have assessed the impact of a policy/service, it is important to identify options and alternatives to reduce or eliminate any negative impact. Options considered could be adapting the policy or service, changing the way in which it is implemented or introducing balancing measures to reduce any negative impact. When considering each option you should think about how it will reduce any negative impact, how it might impact on other groups and how it might impact on relationships between groups and overall issues around community cohesion. You should clearly demonstrate how you have considered various options and the impact of these. You must have a detailed rationale behind decisions and a justification for those alternatives that have not been accepted.</i></p>
Age				
Disability				
Gender reassignment				
Marriage & civil partnership				
Pregnancy and				

**EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

<b>maternity</b>				
<b>Race</b>				
<b>Religion &amp; belief</b>				
<b>Sex</b>				
<b>Sexual orientation</b>				
<p><b>Is this change due to be carried out wholly or partly by other providers? If yes, please indicate how you have ensured that the partner organisation complies with equality legislation (e.g. tendering, awards process, contract, monitoring and performance measures)</b></p>				

## EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

### Stage 4 Review and Conclusion

<b>Summary: provide a brief overview including impact, changes, improvement, any gaps in evidence and additional data that is needed</b>			
<b>Specific actions to be taken to reduce, justify or remove any adverse impacts</b>	<b>How will this be monitored?</b>	<b>Officer responsible</b>	<b>Target date</b>
<b>Please provide details and link to full action plan for actions</b>			
<b>When will this assessment be reviewed?</b>			
<b>Are there any additional assessments that need to be undertaken in relation to this assessment?</b>			
<b>Lead officer sign off</b>		<b>Date</b>	
<b>Head of service sign off</b>		<b>Date</b>	

Please publish this completed EIA form on the relevant section of the Cheshire East website

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