Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Agenda

Date:	**Thursday, 8th April, 2021**
Time:	**2.00 pm**
Venue:	**Virtual Meeting**

To view the meeting click the link below:

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Or alternatively you can dial in on 141 020 3321 5200 and input Conference ID: 904 509 533# when prompted.

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 at the foot of each report.

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

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

1. **Apologies for Absence**

2. **Minutes of Previous meeting**

   To approve the minutes of the meeting held on 30 March 2021.

   Minutes to follow.

3. **Declarations of Interest**

For any apologies or requests for further information, or to give notice of a question to be asked by a member of the public
Contact: Joel Hammond-Gant
Tel: 01270 686468
E-Mail: joel.hammond-gant@cheshireeast.gov.uk

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

4.   **Declaration of Party Whip**

To provide an opportunity for Members to declare the existence of a party whip in relation to any item on the agenda.

5.   **Public Speaking Time/Open Session**

A total period of 15 minutes is allocated for members of the public to make a statement(s) on any matter that falls within the remit of the Committee.

Individual members of the public may speak for up to 5 minutes, but the Chairman will decide how the period of time allocated for public speaking will be apportioned, where there are a number of speakers.

Note: In order for officers to undertake any background research, it would be helpful if members of the public contacted the Scrutiny officer listed at the foot of the agenda, at least one working day before the meeting to provide brief details of the matter to be covered.

6.   **Covid-19 Update**

To consider an update on the council's response to, and recovery from, Covid-19.

Report to follow.

7.   **Financial Implications of the Committee System** (Pages 5 - 12)

To consider a report on the financial implications of the incoming committee system form of governance.

8.   **Review of the Council's ICT Infrastructure Spend** (Pages 13 - 22)

To consider a report detailing the council's ICT infrastructure spend and whether cost-per-person value for money has been achieved.

9.   **Refreshed Equality Objectives and Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2021-25** (Pages 23 - 66)

To consider the council's proposed refreshed Equality Objectives and Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2021-25, prior to consideration by Cabinet on 13 April 2021.

10.   **Corporate Peer Challenge** (Pages 67 - 98)

To consider a report outlining progress made against the recommendations in the council's Corporate Peer Challenge, one year on from when it was undertaken in January 2020, prior to it being considered by Cabinet on 13 April 2021.

11.   **Corporate Performance Scorecard - Quarter 3, 2020/21** (Pages 99 - 106)

To consider the performance data from Corporate Services in Quarter 3, 2020/21.

12.   **Update from the (Best4Business) Joint Scrutiny Working Group**

       To receive a verbal update from the Joint Scrutiny Working Group in respect of the
       Best4Business Programme.

13.   **Task and Finish Group Report - Members' Facilities, Accommodation and
       Culture** (Pages 107 - 126)

       To receive the final report of the Task and Finish Group set up to review Members' Facilities,
       Accommodation and Culture.

Membership: Councillors Q Abel, C Bulman, JP Findlow, R Fletcher, M Hunter, A Moran,
B Murphy (Vice-Chairman), J Saunders, M Simon, R Vernon, L Wardlaw and J Clowes
(Chairman)

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Version
Number: 0.1

Corporate Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Date of Meeting: 8 April 2021

Report Title: Financial Implications of the Committee System

Portfolio Holder: Cllr Jill Rhodes – Portfolio Holder for Public Health and Corporate Services and Cllr Amanda Stott, Portfolio Holder Finance, ICT and Communications

Senior Officer: **Jane Burns – Executive Director Corporate**

1. Report Summary

1.1. The Committee has requested an update on the financial implications of the move to a committee system of governance as part of its oversight role.

1.2. The Council is moving to a Committee system of governance in May 2021 under the design principles agreed by Council at its meeting of 19 November 2020. The design principles included quick, streamlined decision making process, meaning the number of committees and number of meetings to be kept to a minimum, and technology will be used to provide instant access to information and avoid unnecessary paperwork.

1.3. The administration of the committee system as proposed, sits within the cost minimal design principles agreed by Council. The Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee should consider whether this is being managed appropriately.

2. Recommendations

That the Committee:

2.1. Note that the design principles of the Committee System in relation to affordability are being adhered to as agreed by Council at its meeting of 19 November 2020.

2.2. Notes the risks associated with breaching affordability and the action that would be taken to resolve this if it materialised.

3. Reasons for Recommendations

3.1. The Design Principles (Annex 1) confirmed that the costs of the Committee System would be 'kept to a minimum' and the work undertaken adheres to this. The officer project team have considered four potential causes of increasing costs and articulated how this would be addressed within the Financial Implications of Council Report of 19 November 2020 http://moderngov.cheshireeast.gov.uk/ecminutes/documents/s81706/Report.pdf

3.2. The first item of potential additional cost, contained within the report approved by Council in November 2020, was associated with one-off costs of the transition. In line with the design principles these are being kept to a minimum. One practical impact of the change in governance, is the need to update the Council's Constitution. The Council's website shows 31 versions of the Constitution since 2009. External consultants have previously been used to support this process of regular review which is therefore a feature of the Council's expenditure. The current review is the most comprehensive since Local Government Reorganisation and the current budget envelope for drafting is estimated at £30,000 which is below the previous 2017/18 cost.

3.3. Member Training is also a permanent feature of the Democratic Services budget, but this will be supplemented by additional external support to implement the new systems. Approximately £6,000 of the Democratic Services annual member training budget has been specifically allocated to the new committee system. Additional one-off costs of transition will be in the region of £2,000 on training currently commissioned and will be funded from the Transformation Reserve as it is categorised as a Brighter Future Transformation project. There will be additional training costs arising in the new financial year predominately relating to ongoing training for members post-implementation of the committee system. The continuing training will be met from the member training budget and any underspending within Democratic Services in the 2020/21 financial year, and therefore in line with the principle to keep overall costs to the Council to a minimum.

3.4. The second item of potential additional cost related to member allowances. Members will be aware that the Independent Remuneration Panel have the responsibility to review member allowances and make recommendations to full Council. The review of member allowances associated with the committee system will be considered by Council on 19 April 2021. It is anticipated that the revised proposals will be contained within the financial

envelope of the Medium Term Financial Strategy and does not present an additional cost compared to the current system of governance.

3.5. The third item of potential additional costs is related to capacity within the Democratic Services Team. There is a link between the number of formal meetings and the number of Democratic Services officers needed to support them. In order to fit within the design principles, the number of meetings proposed under the committee system is comparable to the calendar of meetings under the existing system. There is therefore no proposed increase in the staffing establishment of the team.

3.6. The fourth item of potential additional costs relates to access to senior officers. The revised constitution supports decision-making at appropriate levels and as mentioned above, the number of proposed meetings is consistent with the existing arrangements. Furthermore, the forward plan does not increase the number of decisions required. Again, the working assumption is that the productivity of officers should not be affected simply by the change in governance arrangements.

3.7. The financial implications also confirmed that any additional costs associated with the new governance arrangements would be expressed as a variation to the current budget. The 2021/22 Budget was set by Council on 17 February 2021 and did not include any additional budget growth as the project team were adhering to the agreed principles. If further costs were to be identified at a later date, they would be subject to a supplementary estimate, which would require approval in line with the Finance Procedure Rules.

3.8. In its design the new arrangements do not present a financial pressure to the Council. The risk of increasing costs would therefore only be associated with changes from the design principles and the proposed implementation of the design presented to members. If members choose to vary the design, for example:

- increasing the number of meetings,

- increasing the budget, special responsibility allowances or raising other connected allowances,

- extending the length of meetings or seeking evening meetings,

- increasing the number of reports for noting or information,

- altering delegations to require additional decision-making reports.

3.9 Any changes may represent direct additional costs which may be incurred and attributed to such member decisions. These would be dealt with through our existing budget monitoring arrangements, and ultimately through the MTFS process or they may represent opportunity costs where officers time is realigned to supporting increases in volume of member decision making or support. An example of this can be seen in the suggestion from the Scrutiny Chairs meeting (19 March 2021) to remove from the 'minimum number of meeting principle' to diarise more frequent meetings in advance of need.

4. Other Options Considered

4.1. This report is for information on a specific item and does not reflect other options

5. Background

5.1. This report focuses on a specific element of the design principles of the movement to a Committee System. The background to the design and implementation is contained within the Council Report dated 19th November 2020.

6. Implications of the Recommendations

6.1. Legal Implications

6.1.1. The Council has made the legally binding decision to change its governance arrangements from May 2021.

6.2. Finance Implications

6.2.1. No additional implications envisaged, as set out above.

6.3. Policy Implications

6.3.1. The new arrangements will deliver the new Corporate Plan.

6.4. Equality Implications

6.4.1. Not applicable

6.5. Human Resources Implications

6.5.1. No additional HR implications have been identified. Existing officer capacity and resources will be used to implement the committee system.

6.6. Risk Management Implications

6.6.1. The report to Council on 19 November 2020 included the following summary of the risks:

OFFICIAL

6.6.2. "There are strategic risks that the council is already managing ahead of implementing this proposed strategic change**.** The council has been managing its strategic response to the Covid-19 pandemic and has been working in the most challenging conditions experienced in at least a generation to understand, respond to and plan for recovery from an emergency that affects lives, health, care, education, businesses, livelihoods, culture and leisure. The council has been operating in this emergency mode for more than eight months and the next six months are expected to be even more challenging. The second wave of the pandemic will coincide with the period of EU transition, winter pressures for health and social care and combined with the additional risk of severe weather events

6.6.3. The Council has also had to adapt to fundamental changes in the way that decisions are made because of the coronavirus pandemic. The most obvious of these changes is the shift to online meetings which has required a concerted effort on the part of members and officers to ensure that the council could conduct its business whilst minimising the use of urgency powers. Less obvious changes include the speed and volume of decisions required as a result of the fast changing nature of the pandemic and associated changes to legislation and government guidance. Many of these decisions have profound implications for communities in Cheshire East and have required coherent, complex and fast interactions with central government and partner organisations. Adding to the complexity, these bodies have also had to adapt their own decision-making arrangements

6.6.4. Officer resources are stretched and this must be taken into consideration in any transition and operation of a new system of governance. The decision to change the system of governance is the only major change facing the council that is entirely under its own control.

6.6.5. The conditions under which the Council is considering the resolution could not have been foreseen when the motion was unanimously agreed in 2019. The council has never before had to navigate through such high levels of uncertainty where it is difficult to forecast even over the short term and this presents a number of strategic risks for the organisation."

6.6.6. Many of these risks are being mitigated through the detailed implementation work done since November 2020. However, members will appreciate that the risk environment is dynamic and will continue to be monitored.

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. There are no direct implications for children and young people.

6.9. **Public Health Implications**

6.9.1. There are no direct implications for public health.

6.10. **Climate Change Implications**

6.10.1.   There are no direct implications for climate change.

7. Ward Members Affected

7.1. None

8. Consultation & Engagement

8.1. There are no direct implications for consultation and engagement.

9. Access to Information

9.1. Full papers published with the Council Agenda 19th November 2020.

10. Contact Information

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

Name: Jane Burns

Job Title: Executive Director Corporate Services

Email: jane.burns@cheshireeast.gov.uk

Design Principles   **Annex 1**

Openness

The new form of governance (committee system) will be easy to understand and will include arrangements that enable people to easily find out about how decisions are made. Committee meetings will be held in public by cross party (politically proportionate) committees. However, as is the case in all local government decision-making there will be rare occasions upon which a particular report is private or confidential. In these instances the decision will need to be made in private and members of the public will not be able to be present during the meeting.

There will be the opportunity for Councillors and Members of the public to ask questions at committee meetings and it will be clear how complaints can be made about services and Members behaviour.

Quick Decision Making

The new arrangements will ensure that decisions are made quickly, to meet the needs of the council and local community. The number of committees and number of meetings will be kept to a minimum, and technology will be used to provide instant access to information and avoid unnecessary paperwork. Paper copies will be provided upon request by members.

There will be a process to deal with urgent decisions, which will be clear and, in most cases, open to the public. The need to make urgent decisions is, however, rare.

Affordability

Through the use of technology and a quick, streamlined decision making process, the cost of a committee system will be kept to a minimum.

Legal Requirements

The council must comply with all legal requirements and relevant legislation. Where required, legal advice will be available to all meetings, to make sure that legal requirements are met. The council will also follow best practice.

A Modern Committee System

The committee system will be modern, open and transparent. Public participation will be encouraged. There will be the opportunity for public speaking and petitions. There will also be a work programme outlining what decisions will be made and by which Committee. There will be a separate Scrutiny Committee to look at health partners, crime and disorder and flood risk management. The Scrutiny Committee will be able to look at future proposed decisions in these areas, and seek to influence them.

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Cheshire East Council

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Version Number: 1.0

BRIEFING REPORT

Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Date of Meeting:　08 April 2021

Report Title:　ICT Shared Services Investment Programme

Portfolio Holder:　Cllr Amanda Stott – Finance, IT and Communication

Author:　Gareth Pawlett – CIO and Head of ICT Shared Services

Senior Officer:　Jane Burns, Executive Director of Corporate Services

1.　Introduction and Policy Context

1.1.　This paper responds to a request made by the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 7 January 2021 to report on the specifics of the council's ICT infrastructure spend and whether cost-per-person value for money has been achieved.

1.2.　The Evolution Programme (formerly Infrastructure Investment Programme - IIP) is a joint investment programme which has enabled both Cheshire East and Cheshire West and Chester Councils to modernise, move from a legacy infrastructure, meet compliance standards and deliver a flexible environment to underpin service delivery.

1.3.　Over the preceding four years (2017/18, 2018/19, 2019/20 and 2020/21) the Evolution Programme has:

1.3.1.　Provided a stable, compliant, and secure technology platform that met the essential replacement needs of both Councils,

1.3.2.　Updated the remaining data centre components to enable a robust and resilient service connected via reliable local and wide area network services,

1.3.3. Created a contemporary and performing environment migrating viable applications and products to the cloud thereby ensuring remote and new ways of working throughout the pandemic.

1.3.4. Provided access to key applications hosted appropriately and in the most cost-effective manner i.e. on premises or in the cloud.

1.3.5. Supported both Councils through implementation with an updated incident management system (Halo), and a comprehensive training and communication plan (alongside planned-for and appropriate legacy application decommissioning and rationalisation) reducing the impact of change and helping services to make best use of the new technological capabilities provided.

1.3.6. Introduced an improved level of resilience and disaster recovery capability through the delivery of modern infrastructure technology.

1.3.7. Delivered the necessary tools and processes, which has enabled ICT Shared Services to be more efficient and effective in managing the new environments.

1.3.8. Produced an updated cost transparency model (Apptio) and Product Catalogue that outlines services and associated capabilities for both Councils, which will inform value for money cost models going forward.

1.3.9. Enabled both Councils to work in more agile and flexible ways in line with their ambitions for flexible and mobile working which have been business critical and successful during the pandemic.

1.4. The Evolution programme successfully achieved all this through robust procurements and within the jointly agreed funding envelope. Through strong programme governance, the budget and delivery of the project outcomes and objectives were closely monitored and reported. Through strong financial support and governance, the programme ensured that any implications of the pandemic were captured, tracked, and agreed with finance colleagues as appropriate to be recorded on the Covid-19 financial tracker.

2. Background

2.1. ICT Shared Service was formed following Local Government Reorganisation in 2009 as a joint delivery service for both Councils (Cheshire East and Cheshire West and Chester) to meet their ICT needs.

2.2. Over the last 12 years the Service has moved around from being hosted by Cheshire West and Chester Council (CWaC) to being formed into a company (CoSocius) and is currently a hosted shared service in Cheshire East Council (CEC) since April 2016.

2.3. Over that same period there have been many independent ICT specialist reviews and audits. A common conclusion was the lack of sustainable investment in ICT infrastructure to keep pace with the demands and expectations of the Council. This is evidenced throughout the years in a number of major incidents for both Councils (Gartner 2011 and 2013, Hewlett Packard Enterprises (HPe) 2016 and Ernst & Young (EY) 2017). The outputs and recommendations from these reviews were shared with Shared Services Joint Committee.

2.4. ICT Shared Services commissioned a data centre audit (November 2016) to provide assurance on the condition and quality of the data centre components or assets; this resulted in a report by HP Enterprise (March 2017) which concluded that a significant cliff-edge or disaster threshold had been reached and there was a significant risk that this situation compromised the Councils' compliance with statutory regulation and accreditation authorities. The audit also highlighted a heavy reliance on a single data centre with no disaster recovery provision. It also reported that 80% of the infrastructure was more than 5 years old and the headcount for support staff was well below established industry norms, making even a reactive support approach difficult to sustain.

2.5. As a result, ICT Shared Services engaged with both Councils and gained approval for a high-level business case and Cabinet paper (May 2017) for funding and to engage a strategic partner to address these issues. The overall aim was to stabilise (replace ageing infrastructure), rationalise (remove cost and complexity by design), optimise (move to more efficient and agile way of working) and provide a flexible base to respond to the changing business needs of both Councils.

2.6. The business case also addressed the need for ongoing essential replacement, completion of committed infrastructure projects and the future demands for a replacement public sector network including all local and wide area network infrastructure; the management of these services to both Councils and schools/academies; the need for more complex tools to manage and monitor a hybrid cloud environment; and the resourcing to deliver utility based product cost models.

2.7. If these risks were not addressed, a greater level of capital investment would ultimately be required to address system failure with the associated business continuity issues and potential liabilities that entails. In addition, there was a need for both Councils' to be able to deliver the wider objectives of a safe and secure, shared, and integrated working environment. These would be

seriously constrained if not addressed and would impact on the drive to transform frontline service delivery to residents across both boroughs.

3. Briefing Information

3.1. The Evolution Programme (formerly Infrastructure Investment Programme - IIP) is an investment programme which has enabled both Councils to modernise, moving from a legacy infrastructure, ensure compliance and deliver a flexible environment to underpin delivery.

3.2. ICT Shared Services engaged Microsoft as a strategic partner to support delivery of new cloud capability and the deployment of Windows 10 and Office 365. Our application estate has been reduced from over 1500 (May 2017) to 300 in March 2021, because of application rationalisation during Windows 10 deployment.

3.3. The programme has decommissioned over 160 key line of business systems, meeting the 25% decommissioning objective.

3.4. It was critical that we migrated from Exchange Server 2007 to Exchange Server 2013 to maintain compliance and provide a necessary step towards Office 365. Legacy Exchange 2007 servers have been powered down, with only a few servers retained to support ongoing external investigations.

3.5. New, more secure, compliant remote access service is in place, enabling the removal of legacy remote access solutions and providing essential hybrid cloud security and management capability has been delivered. This was critical in the Councils' response to the pandemic.

3.6. Two secure, compliant evergreen mobile device management solutions have been implemented, removing the need for frequent costly upgrades, exploiting the benefits of cloud, reducing on premise infrastructure, and providing significant improvements in management and reporting.

3.7. The programme has implemented new backup and storage infrastructure capability to provide off site back up and remove the reliance on tape, whilst ensuring General Data Protection Regulation compliance.

3.8. New quarterly IT Health Checks (increased from annual) have been established, significantly mitigating the risk of cyber-attack and other emerging cyber security threats, enabling ICT Shared Services to become more proactive and less reactive in managing security threats and issues.

3.9. McAfee security suite end client upgrades providing enhanced protection against zero-day threats and improved cyber security intelligence (migrated from Google to Central Government) have been implemented. We have reduced the threat of security vulnerabilities by the removal of old and non-compliant server software.

3.10. As part of the programme we have focussed on developing our network capacity and capability to provide more robust and resilient internet service. As part of this work we have established improvements including Microsoft Azure and Amazon Web Services.

3.11. The programme has undertaken a procurement to select a new wide area network strategic partner. The implementation of this project will be completed during the 2020-21 financial year.

3.12. The programme has been responsible for decommissioning or upgrading over 350 legacy databases and migrated over 250 servers to the latest operating system.

3.13. Statutory compliance has been maintained. We have ensured Public Service Network (PSN) code of connectivity certification achieved for both councils.

3.14. Significant improvements in overall resilience have been achieved. The Councils now have three data centres providing data centre services to the council, Kelly House, Microsoft Azure and Amazon Web Services. This has enabled the removal of aging server platforms, hosting the new strategic desktop environment, removed the need for Microsoft extended support, a significant step in addressing issues affecting service availability, whilst enabling both Councils to become cloud ready organisations. On completion of the programme the risk of losing the data centre completely will have been greatly reduced.

3.15. Responding to the Covid-19 major incident, supporting the Councils to work from home, when the incident required a change to Target Operating Model overnight. This was only possible due to the work that had been achieved in the previous years.

3.16. One of the programme's biggest achievements has been the modern desktop deployment. The migration team accelerating deployments through precision planning and migrated over 7,300 users since lockdown started in March 2020, including elected Members. This has included giving out new

devices using a no touch COVID secure approach. Over 99% of the estate is now on Windows 10, which is a significant achievement.

3.17. We have supported both Councils through the Covid-19 pandemic. This has been a huge challenge for the team, supporting two organisations whose ways of working changed so significantly overnight. As an indicator, below is a summary of activities undertaken in the first few weeks, which we were able to deliver because of the earlier investment in infrastructure:

- Over 4000 daily remote connections up from a previous maximum of 500 on a normal day
- 4,169 calls in to the Service Desk over an initial 2-week period - 50% increase
- 3,444 voice services (One X Communicator) deployed to devices
- 294 laptop rebuilds and encryption reassignment
- 215 new laptop requests
- 62 Citrix server builds
- 54 call forwarding requests fulfilled
- Secure remote access node rebuilt

3.18. We have enabled the adoption of virtual working at speed. A wide range of virtual meetings have been enabled including virtual Full Cabinet meetings, Court Adoption Hearings, School Admission Appeals, Planning Committees, School Transport Appeals, Training and Mediation Sessions to name a few.

3.19. As a result of the investment, made we have seen a significant reduction in IT service outages: Reducing the levels of aged infrastructure has led to a reduction in significant IT service outages (major incidents) from 146 in 2016/17, 60 in 2017/18 and 35 in 2018/19. In 2019/20 we had 32 major incidents and in 2020/21 there were 16 incidents – a 89% reduction.

3.20. In the recent customer satisfaction survey, we can evidence improvements across the board:

	2021 (Both councils)		2020 (CWC only)	2019 (Both councils)
BUSINESS ENABLEMENT	75%	+7%	68%	63%
ICT SERVICES	74%	+5%	69%	63%
ICT COMMUNICATIONS	76%	+4%	72%	68%
APPLICATION SUITE	74%	+6%	68%	65%

3.21. Quantifying the financial benefits, based on both Councils' ICT spend with respect to the Evolution programme and whether cost-per-person value for money has been achieved, is difficult. We believe that the Councils would not have been able to operate fully and meet their statutory responsibilities

during the pandemic under lockdown restrictions without this underpinning ICT investment. The Evolution programme however had total budget of £19.8m (for both Councils) serving approximately 384,200 Cheshire East residents; this equates to approximately £25.77/person since 2009 i.e. £2.15/person/year.

3.22. Based on the National Audit Office (NAO) definition which uses three criteria to assess the value for money of government spending i.e. the optimal use of resources to achieve the intended outcomes:

- Economy: minimising the cost of resources used or required (inputs) – spending less.
- Efficiency: the relationship between the output from goods or services and the resources to produce them – spending well; and
- Effectiveness: the relationship between the intended and actual results of public spending (outcomes) – spending wisely.

The Evolution programme provided access to key applications hosted appropriately and in the most cost-effective manner i.e. on premises or in the cloud, delivered a cloud operating framework supported by the necessary tools and processes which has enabled ICT Shared Services to be more efficient and effective, and enabled both Councils to work in more agile and flexible ways in line with their ambitions for flexible and mobile working which were critical during the pandemic.

4. Implications

4.1 Legal Implications

4.1.1 The changes to the Councils ICT infrastructure brought about by the Evolution Programme will enable the Councils to comply with the requirements of GDPR in particular Article 5(1)(f) that Personal Data is 'processed in a manner that ensures appropriate security of the personal data, including protection against unauthorised or unlawful processing and against accidental loss, destruction or damage, using appropriate technical or organisational measures ("integrity and confidentiality")'; and Article 32 Security of Processing specifically Articles 31(1)(b), (c) and (d):

(b) the ability to ensure the ongoing confidentiality, integrity, availability, and resilience of processing systems and services.

(c) the ability to restore the availability and access to personal data in a timely manner in the event of a physical or technical incident.

(d) a process for regularly testing, assessing, and evaluating the effectiveness of technical and organisational measures for ensuring the security of the processing.

4.1.2 The Evolution Programme has reduced the risk of the Councils failing to comply with GDPR that existed with the Councils legacy systems.

4.1.3 Failure to comply with the above Articles of GDPR has resulted in substantial penalties being issued by the ICO in 2020 in relation breaches by British Airways (£183 million reduced to £20 million) and Marriott Hotels (£99 million reduced to £18.4 million).

4.2 Financial Implications

4.2.1 The Evolution Programme was enabled through an approved budget for change and was fully utilised. Both capital and revenue budgets were monitored throughout by the Programme Board and proactively sought savings through detailed application assessment and strategy, joint procurements, and decommissioning.

4.2.2 However, growth in digital technologies are expected over the next 5-year period and costs for licencing will increase as demonstrated with end user computing Citrix licences. Again, these costs will be closely monitored and reported back to the Essential Replacement Programme Board going forward, Joint Business Design Authority (JBDA), Joint Strategic Board (JSB) and Shared Services Joint Committee. Archiving, security, encryption, business continuity, disaster recovery, tools and ICT Services applications will continue to require additional investment and have been costed separately whether undertaken by third parties and/or contractors.

4.2.3 The ICT Vendor Management Office (VMO) continues to ensure that procurements are undertaken in the most cost-effective manner to secure value for money in collaboration with legal, finance and procurement colleagues, securing the necessary supplies and services at best prices from the marketplace. This has also enabled ICT Shared Services to be more efficient and effective, and enabled both Councils to work in more agile and flexible ways in line with their ambitions for flexible and mobile working which were critical during the pandemic.

4.2.4 The various aspects of the programme were evidenced as being the right thing to do, from an 'improving VFM' perspective through the capture of the relationship between outputs and resources (efficiency) and the extent to which the objectives were achieved as referenced in section 3. For example, cloud infrastructure (or Infrastructure as a Service - IAAS) has enabled automation for both cloud deployments and monitoring. It has reduced the on-premises repetitive tasks undertaken by both ICT Operations and for Projects in terms of reduced provisioning time, reduced costs by eliminating manual processes and efficient management of cloud compute resources.

4.2.5 Another example was that lost time has been avoided through the introduction of the new infrastructure by the SQL Server team, as an estimated 10% of support hours were spent on recovering failed backups.

4.2.6 The required rapid response to the pandemic has been 'enabled' by the Evolution programme and has facilitated the new ways of working going forward for both Councils. Other benefits such as the reduced use of buildings; reduced business travel; etc. have been enabled and captured through the medium-term financial strategy by most service areas and will help to deliver even greater VFM in the longer term.

4.2.7 Benefits have also been measured including the reduction of cost per deployment and reduced project costs and timescales.

4.2.8 An estimated cost avoidance of £1m for the employment of agency staff to undertake business as usual tasks due to aging and complex legacy infrastructure has been achieved as proposed in the business case.

4.2.9 The HPe report also identified benefits from other Council exemplars which included a potential 30% reduction in deployment costs for new applications, 50-75% reduction in provisioning time and a 15-30% reduction in operations costs. These benefits are being examined through the maturing cost model work and have yet to be finally quantified.

4.3 **Human Resources Implications**

4.3.1 The ICT Shared Service is currently subject to a strategic review. It has a pending restructure which will ensure that the service provision is aligned to the needs of the business. The implementation of a new structure will enable the service to demonstrate value for money moving forward.

4.3.2 The ICT utilises a significant amount of agency staffing for specialist roles and for other roles pending the restructure. Due to the external market rates, the costs of some of the agency staff exceed that that of the internal evaluated grades/salaries for the roles. This contributes to higher costs within the Service.

4.3.3 The ICT service keeps the use of agency staff under review and, where possible, has permanently recruited to posts within the structure. This is limited because of the pending restructure.

4.3.4 The changes to the Councils ICT infrastructure brought about by the Evolution Programme will support the ability of the ICT Service to move forward to a fit for purpose structure. It will also enable the service to support and deliver on the Council's ways of working, including agile, flexible working practices.

Cheshire East
Council

Working for a brighter future together

| Version |
| Number: 0.1 |

| Key Decision N |
| Date First |
| Published: |

CABINET

Date of Meeting: 13 April 2021

Report Title: Refreshed Equality Objectives and Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2021-2025

Portfolio Holder: Cllr Jill Rhodes, Public Health and Corporate

Senior Officer: Jane Burns, Executive Director of Corporate Services

1. Report Summary

1.1   The Council recognises that promoting equality and inclusion will improve public services for everyone. We want Cheshire East to be an area of equitable opportunity, where everyone has a fair chance and people from all backgrounds take part in community life.

1.2   Over the lifetime of the previous equality objectives and its supporting strategy we have come a long way in embedding Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI). However, we recognise that there is more to do. We are committed to tackling inequalities, celebrating diversity and promoting equality – as an employer, in the services we provide, in partnerships, and in the decisions we make.

1.3   In accordance with Regulation 3 of the Equality Act 2010 (Specific Duties) Regulations 2011 ("the Regulations"), the Council must prepare and publish at least one equality objective once every four years.

1.4   In 2017, the Council published a set of four equality objectives and a supporting Equality and Diversity Strategy. These have informed the work that has taken place over the last four years and it is now time for these to be refreshed.

1.5   An officer EDI Board is responsible for the delivery of the Council's equality objectives and its supporting strategy and has guided and supported this refresh exercise.

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1.6   Initially, four equality objectives were proposed, and were presented for formal public and staff consultation which took place between the 6 June 2020 and August 31 2020.

1.7   Following the feedback on the consultation, a task and finish group was convened to review the findings of the consultation and consider how best to reflect them. As a direct result of the feedback, a fifth objective is now proposed for approval below. Appendix 1 gives the detail.

1.8   There have been two recent EDI developments. The first is a motion proposed by Cllr Stewart Gardiner and agreed by Council on 17 February 2021 to reaffirm support for the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) definition of anti-Semitism as a key pillar of the Council's equality and diversity policies. The second is a request by the Member Equality and Diversity Champion, Cllr Marilyn Houston, that the APPG definition of Islamophobia is adopted by the Council. This is in the context of the Council's commitment to celebrates all faiths and a willingness to respond as appropriate.

1.9   A refreshed Equality and Diversity Strategy is included as Appendix 2, for approval.

2. Recommendations

2.1   Cabinet is asked to:

2.1.1   Approve the following five equality objectives at Appendix 1:

- **Include -** Listen and involve all voices.

- **Inspire -** Celebrate and promote the diversity in our borough and surrounding areas and make the most of the positive opportunities this brings

- **Integrate -** Deliver and promote accessible and equitable services for all.

- **Inform -** Be a council which empowers and cares about people.

- **Impact -** Support and deliver meaningful change.

2.1.2   Adopt the All-Party Parliamentary Group on British Muslims' definition of Islamophobia.

2.1.3   Reaffirm support for the Innternational Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) definition of anti-Semitism.

2.1.4   Agree the Equality and Diversity Strategy 2021-2025 for Cheshire East (Appendix 2).

Reasons for Recommendations

3.1   Public bodies subject to the General Equality Duty must, in the exercise of their functions, have due regard to the need to:

- Eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the Act.

- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a relevant protected characteristic and people who do not share it.

- Foster good relations between people who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not share it.

3.2   Under the Equality Act 2010, the Council is required to produce and review every 4 years, a set of equality objectives.

3.3   Each of the five equality objectives make a direct contribution to supporting the delivery of the Council's Corporate Plan and its Vison for an Open, Fairer, Greener Cheshire East.

3.4   Council on 17 February 2021 reaffirmed support for the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) definition of anti-Semitism as a key pillar of the Council's equality and diversity policies. This was originally adopted in 2018. It would be sensible to formally include it within the updated Equality Strategy, hence inclusion here.

3.5   Cllr Marilyn Houston EDI Member Champion has asked that the Council adopts the All-Party Parliamentary Group on British Muslims' definition of Islamophobia by Cheshire East Council.

"Islamophobia is rooted in racism and is a type of racism that targets expressions of Muslimness or perceived Muslimness."

If we are to achieve an open and fair society, we must tackle the issue of Islamophobia in our midst, and in wider society with serious commitment and action.

The adoption of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on British Muslims' definition of Islamophobia by all local councils would contribute to this.

The APPG opened its enquiry into a working definition of Islamophobia in April 2018.

https://static1.squarespace.com/static/599c3d2febbd1a90cffdd8a9/t/5bfd1ea3352f531a6170ceee/1543315109493/Islamophobia+Defined.pdf

From hate crimes motivated by anti-Muslim feeling, buttressed by stereotypes and racist caricatures prevalent in social and media discourse, to policies which perpetuate discriminatory outcomes for Muslims, a definition of Islamophobia is vital if we are to take seriously an "explain or change" attitude

in response to inequalities faced by our British Muslim Citizens. The APPG was clear that the inquiry would be a widely consultative exercise to ascertain a working definition of Islamophobia which could be broadly accepted by British Muslim communities and operate across governmental, public, community and private sector organisations, with the aim of ensuring that any impairment of the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on an equal footing, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural or any other field of public life by British Muslims could be adequately addressed and dealt with by the relevant bodies appropriately. As was heard throughout the inquiry, how we define and understand an issue or problem informs how we then respond to it. The 'harm principle' guided the deliberations on the appropriate limits to free speech in arriving at the working definition of Islamophobia. The definition proposed has been developed through conscientious deliberation that has sought to negotiate the tensions arising between freedom of speech and freedom of religion in full recognition that in a democratic society these negotiations are not just possible, as evidenced by the adoption of definitions relating to other forms of group-based hostility such as anti-Semitism, but necessary at a time when Muslim communities in the UK are experiencing heightened levels of Islamophobia. The AAPG recommends the adoption of the following definition following widespread consultation with academics, lawyers, local and nationally elected officials, Muslim organisations, activists, campaigners, and local Muslim communities:

Islamophobia is rooted in racism and is a type of racism that targets expressions of Muslimness or perceived Muslimness.

Again, it would be sensible to formally include within the updated Equality and Diversity Strategy, hence inclusion here.

3.6   The updated Equality and Diversity Strategy 2021-25 is attached at Appendix 2. It reviews progress against the previous strategy, updates the demographic profile for our borough and identifies priority actions for the next 4 years. The actions will be supported by clear timelines and measures of success so that progress can be assessed.

3. Background

4.1   The Equality Act 2010 and the General Equality Duty requires public authorities to have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations, when making decisions and setting policy.

4.2   Guidance from the Equality and Human Rights Commission suggests that equality objectives should be viewed as part of an organisation's business planning processes, to ensure they are aligned to business priorities, and are an integral part of business performance.

4.3   A draft set of Equality Objectives for the Council were developed and agreed by the officer EDI Board and put forward for public consultation during the summer of 2020. Due to impact of COVID-19 and the recognised challenges

for robust consultation, it was agreed that the consultation would be extended to cover a 12-week period.

4.4   The consultation was promoted in many including;

- Feature articles in the Council's internal "Team Voice".
- Council website and internal staff Centranet.
- A Twitter, Instagram and social media "campaign".
- Direct email contact with various organisations to raise awareness of the consultation and for woder promotion with:
  - Town and Parish clerks
  - Leisure Centres
  - Communities and Partnerships newsletter and general email distribution list (over 300 individuals from strategic partnerships and the VCF sector)
  - South Cheshire Multi Cultural Forum
  - Services and teams within Cheshire East

4.5   There were 351 responses received to the online consultation survey. Based on the feedback received from both the survey and a task and finish group, five equality objectives for approval are proposed:

- **Include -** Listen and involve all voices.

- **Inspire -** Celebrate and promote the diversity in our borough and surrounding areas and make the most of the positive opportunities this brings.

- **Integrate -** Deliver and promote accessible and equitable services for all.

- **Inform -** Be a council which empowers and cares about people.

- **Impact -** Support and deliver meaningful change.

4.6   Appendix 1 includes a more detailed description of the objectives and what they mean in practice.

4.7   The EDI Board will be responsible for ensuring that the strategy is implemented, monitored, reviewed and updated, and will provide an annual report on progress.

5.   Wards Affected and Local Ward Members

5.1   Councillor Marilyn Houston is the Member Equality and Diversity Champion.

5.2   All wards and all members are affected by the refreshed equality objectives and the supporting EDI strategy.

6.   Implications of the Recommendations

6.1   Policy Implications

The implementation of the five equality objectives and the supporting Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy will provide a framework to ensure that the Council embeds the equality agenda and its obligations under the Public Sector Equality Duty throughout all of its policies and supporting procedures. There are close links to the "Tartan Rug" index of multiple deprivation.

6.2   Legal Implications

Under the Equality Act 2010, Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED), the Council is required to publish equality related information and its equality objectives.

6.3   The PSED requires the Council to evidence due regard to the need to:

- Eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation, and any other conduct prohibited by the Equality Act.

- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a relevant protected characteristic and people who do not share it. This involves:

    a) Removing or minimising disadvantages suffered by people due to their protected characteristics.

    b) Taking steps to meet the needs of people from protected groups where these are different from the needs of other people.

    c) Encouraging people from protected groups to participate in public life or in other activities where their participation is disproportionately low.

- Foster good relations between people who share a relevant protected characteristic and people who do not share it. This involves:

    a) Tackling prejudice.

    b) Promoting understanding.

6.4   Finance Implications

A revenue budget of £20,000 per annum has been allocated to support the delivery of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion activity across Cheshire East. All spend is reported to and monitored by the EDI Board.

6.5   Human Resources Implications

6.5.1   Promoting and celebrating Equality, Diversity and Inclusion is the responsibilty of all officers and members.

6.5.2   The Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy and the annual work programme will be delivered within existing resources. The Council's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion officer will be responsible for co-

ordinating key activity with the support of the Equality Champions network, directorate EDI groups and staff forums.

6.5.3   There will a requirement for staff and members to undergo training to support the delivery plan. This will include training on the legislative requirements, consultation and equality impact assessment.

6.6   Risk Management Implications

6.6.1   Non compliance with the Equality Act 2010 and the Public Sector Equality Duty and an inability to demonstrate 'due regard' to all nine protected characteristics yields a high risk to the Council re:

- Judicial review leading to key council decisions/policies/budget settings to be overturned.

- Significant financial penalties and legal costs.

- Reputational risk.

- Ineffectively targeted services (not knowing the protected characteristic needs of employees, customers and communities of Cheshire East). As a result, best value and cost-effectiveness is not achieved.The potential for the Council to be seen to endorse a discriminatory culture.

- A less diverse workforce could lead to a less creative workforce.

6.7   Rural Communities Implications

6.7.1   The Council is strongly committed to ensuring that our rural communities are not disadvantaged by any of our policies or changes in service delivery. The Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy builds on the work to date to "Rural Proof" our decision making and embed "Rural Proofing" within our equality impact assessments.

6.8   Implications for Children & Young People/Cared for Children

6.8.1   The refreshed equality objectives and overarching strategy will drive further improvements in how we engage and consult with our children and young people, ensuring that they are not disadvantaged on the basis of any protected characteristic they may have.

6.9   Public Health Implications

6.9.1   Reducing inequalities is at the heart of what the refreshed equality objectives and Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy aims to achieve. As reported in the Marmot review (2010), health inequalities are as a result of social and economic inequalities across the population. By ensuring that the Council proactively delivers on its Public Sector Equality Duty, the Council continues to support and address health inequalities in Cheshire East.

6.10   Climate Change Implications

6.10.1 The refreshed equality objectives whilst not directly having implications on climate change, will support the activity the Council wishes to take as it moves towards a carbon neutral Council by 2025. This includes the undertaking of robust consultation and engagement to ensure all voices are heard and that there are comprehensice equality impact assessments undertaken for all project and programme actiity associated with the environment strategy and carbon action plan.

7. **Access to Information/Bibliography**

https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/publication-download/technical-guidance-public-sector-equality-duty-england

8. **Contact Information**

Contact details for this report are as follows:

Name: Jane Burns
Designation: Executive Director of Corporate Services
Email: jane.burns@cheshireeast.gov.uk or equalityandinclusion@cheshireeast.gov.uk

Revised Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Objectives

Include
Listen and involve all voices

We will: ensure that all staff are treated equitably to allow them to undertake their roles to the best of their abilities.
- Develop our network of staff Equality Champions as advocates and promoters of equality and inclusion.
- Develop our staff peer networks to allow them to influence change for staff who identify with protected characteristics
- Ensure that all staff have the correct equipment they need to enable them to do their jobs.
- Make reasonable adjustments to ensure the work environment and culture meets the needs of all our staff.

We will: listen to, learn from and respond to our communities, promoting opportunities for a two-way conversation.
- Each take responsibility for our own learning to ensure that we acknowledge and understand our communities lived experiences.
- Know our communities through robust and up to date stakeholder mapping and management.
- Expand our opportunities and methods of engaging with stakeholders to ensure we are proactive and inclusive.
- Consider and use data and intelligence to inform our thinking and actions.
- Develop a collaborative way of working with partners to support communities to achieve their full potential

Inspire
Celebrate and promote the diversity in our borough and surrounding areas and make the most of the positive opportunities this brings

We will: promote events and activities across the borough that seek to reduce isolation, raise awareness of diversity and encourage the participation of our local communities.
- Develop a communications and engagement plan, to identify key events and activities that the Council will promote and support each year.
- Empower our communities and signpost them to resources to promote and help themselves.
- Support the education of our staff through peer networks and awareness events.

We will: take positive action to ensure that our diverse communities see Cheshire East council as an attractive place to work where anyone can thrive.

- Ensure that applicants can see their lived experiences amongst others in the workforce
- Empower the staff network groups to monitor and review employment practices, and the policies and procedures that support them to ensure that they are equitable for all.
- Empower the staff networks to have continued dialogue with the Senior Leadership team to ensure continued engagement with staff with protected characteristics.

Integrate
Deliver and promote accessible and equitable services for all

We will: ensure that we consider, communicate and consult with all residents and stakeholders when developing or changing our services.

- Undertake Equality Impact Assessments across relevant development and change activities including services we buy and commission.
- Provide training and guidance to ensure equality impacts are fully understood.
- Publish equality impact assessments to provide transparency, assurance and information on our decision making.
- Keep the EIA process under review to make sure it remains relevant.

We will: ensure that the services we commission meet their obligations under the Equality Act.

- Engage and work with our local communities to co-produce and co-design our local service offer and the design and delivery of major projects such as town centre regeneration schemes and improvements to local neighbourhoods.
- Require our suppliers to provide appropriate and timely equality monitoring information.
- Ensure that any supplier does not discriminate based on individuals protected characteristics.
- Ensure that our staff receive the training needed for them to work collaboratively with the diverse communities in the borough.

Inform
Be a council which empowers and cares about people

We will: use education to positively tackle discrimination

- Continue to reinforce and promote the Council's values and behaviours to promote a positive and inclusive workplace culture.
- Provide access to diversity training across all protected characteristics for all staff.
- Ensure that all staff are empowered through their Personal Development Programmes to take control of their learning about Equality, Diversity and Inclusion and Discrimination.
- Provide access to clear and robust HR policies and procedures to support officers and managers when challenging poor or unacceptable behaviour.

We will: work in partnership to keep people safe and connected
- Contribute and collaborate with communities and public sector partners to tackle discrimination through education.
- Take targeted action to inform and educate about the stereotypes faced by our marginalised communities (e.g. migrants, Gypsy, Roma and Travellers).
- Promote and signpost to networks that provide advice and support to anyone impacted or experiencing discriminatory behaviour or action.
- Encourage positive relationships between communities.

Impact
Support and deliver meaningful change

We will: be open and transparent in publishing the progress of our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Objectives
- Publish an annual report on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion at Cheshire East Council
- Publish the Gender Pay Gap report.
- Ensure that evaluations for each EDI event are available for publication.
- Commit to sharing and presenting information in appropriate and accessible formats.
- Ensure that there is transparency in all aspects of council decision- making

February 2021

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Cheshire East Council

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2021-2025

Open   **Fair**   **Green**

Cheshire East
Council

Contents

Foreword

As the Cabinet Member with responsibility for equality, diversity and inclusion, along with my joint administration colleagues and Member EDI Champion Cllr Marilyn Houston, we are absolutely committed to driving this agenda forward and delighted to introduce our updated strategy document for 2021 to 2025.

This new strategy builds upon the significant progress we have made and outlines our ambitions and plans to continue to promote and advance equality, diversity and inclusion throughout Cheshire East.

Equality, diversity and inclusion really does matter as every single person that we all work with, whether a fellow councillor, member of staff, resident or one of our many customers deserves to be treated fairly and with respect.

We believe we have made significant progress over the past few years. However, we also recognise this is not a start and stop exercise. It is, and needs to be an integral part of our culture and values - the way in which the council operates, placing it at the heart of all that we do.

We have the ambition that Cheshire East is known as a borough as rich in its heritage, as it is in removing barriers so creating real, equitable and lasting opportunities for everyone to thrive.

We also want Cheshire East Council to be an employer of choice and representative of the communities we serve. We will continue to work in partnership and collaborate effectively with stakeholders, partners and local communities to take forward this strategy. We will demonstrate we are monitoring and measuring the improvements we are making, showing successes where they are achieved and also those areas which still require further development.

Cllr Jill Rhodes
Portfolio Holder, Public Health and Corporate

1 Introduction

Cheshire East Council is committed to being an **Open, Fairer, Greener Cheshire East**.

Alongside this commitment the Council recognises that promoting equality, diversity and inclusion will improve public services for everyone. We want Cheshire East to be an area of equal opportunity where everyone has a fair chance and people from all backgrounds take part in community life. Our aim therefore is to make equality, diversity and inclusion an integral part of the way the Council works by putting it at the centre of everything we do.

Cheshire East is becoming an increasingly diverse borough due to its proximity and continually improving transport links to Manchester, Birmingham and London. It is also the home of choice for many migrant communities, towns in Cheshire East are home to varied communities from Eastern Europe, East Timor, Syria, India, Bangladesh and the Caribbean to name but a few and there are currently 108 languages spoken across the borough.

It is vital that the residents of Cheshire East see themselves reflected in the staff that provide their day to day services and to ensure that this happens we are committed to equality of opportunity for our entire workforce regardless of their protected characteristic including those who have hidden disabilities such as Asperger's syndrome, ADHD, Autism, Dyscalculia, Dyslexia and Dyspraxia as we work towards becoming a Disability Confident employer.

1.1 Purpose

The purpose of this strategy is to outline our plans for how we propose to deliver our refreshed equality objectives and build on the work of our previous Equality and Diversity strategy of 2017- 2020.

This strategy lays out a new set of commitments to guide us through 2021 to 2025 and is done so in the context of our obligations under the Equality Act (2010) and our Public Sector Equality Duty.

The Public Sector Equality Duty (Equality Act 2010) requires us to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Equality Act 2010.

- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

- Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

The recognised and legally protected characteristics

- Sexual Orientation
- Age
- Disability
- Gender Reassignment
- Marriage and Civil Partnership
- Pregnancy and Maternity
- Race
- Religion or belief
- Sex

Legend:

- Sex
- Sexual Orientation
- Age
- Disability
- Gender Reassignment
- Marriage and Civil Partnership
- Pregnancy and Maternity
- Race
- Religion or Belief

2 Our Vision for Cheshire East

2.1 Our Vision for the Council

Open

We will provide strong community leadership and work transparently with our residents, businesses and partners to deliver our ambition in Cheshire East

Fair

We aim to reduce inequalities, promote fairness and opportunity for all and support our most vulnerable residents

Green

We will lead our communities to protect and enhance our environment, tackle the climate emergency and drive sustainable development.

2.2 Our Vision for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

Our vision is to make Cheshire East a welcoming place, where equality, freedom, fairness and opportunity are open to all. We want everyone to feel valued, to celebrate diversity and to understand people's different needs and aspirations whether they are living, visiting or working here and we will celebrate backgrounds, experiences, beliefs and faiths, genders, sexual orientations, disabilities and ages.

- We will support the adoption of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on British Muslims' definition of Islamophobia - "Islamophobia is rooted in racism and is a type of racism that targets expressions of Muslimness or perceived Muslimness." If we are to achieve an open and fair society, we must tackle the issue of Islamophobia in our midst, and in wider society with serious commitment and action.

- We will reaffirm our support for the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) definition of anti-Semitism as a key pillar of the council's equality and diversity approach, which was originally adopted in 2018.

- We will celebrate the history, culture and language of Gypsy, Traveller and Roma communities, as well as other Travelling communities including Showmen and Boaters. Through celebration, education and raising awareness we aim to tackle prejudices, challenge myths and to raise the voices of Gypsies and Travellers in wider society.

- We are committed to being a council that helps to provide equal life opportunities for all of our residents. We know that lots of things affect a person's ability to have a fulfilling and happy life. This includes well-paid sustainable employment, good physical and mental health and access to educational opportunities. Some people are able to access educational opportunities and well paid employment more easily than others whilst others face additional barriers and challenges. We will focus upon tackling these inequalities.

- We will work with our partners to reduce the gap in life expectancy between the most and least deprived communities and improve educational outcomes and employment opportunities for disadvantaged children and young people in Cheshire East.

We will:

Include	Inspire	Integrate	Inform	Impact
Listen and involve all voices	Celebrate and promote our diversity and the positive opportunity it brings	Deliver and promote accessible services for all	Empower people to respectfully challenge discriminatory and poor behaviour	Support and deliver meaningful change

2.3 Our Values

Providing a great public service in an ever-changing world is something that we are passionate about in Cheshire East. Our promise of being an Open, Fairer, Greener Cheshire East is at the centre of this and can only be delivered upon by us all consistently living our five core values which we believe underpin our success.

Our values are embedded across the council and influence the behaviours of our staff as we work together internally and for the wider benefit of our residents through our front-line services.

Our Values

We are **flexible**

We **innovate**

We take **responsibility**

We deliver the **service** that customers need

We use effective **teamwork**

3 Our People and Place

Our borough is home to **380,800** residents and more than **175,000** households. It contains the major towns of Crewe, Macclesfield, Congleton and Wilmslow (with populations above 20,000). There are also a number of other significant centres of population (over 10,000) in Sandbach, Poynton, Nantwich, Middlewich, Knutsford and Alsager.

While most residents enjoy a good standard of living, there are pockets of deprivation, which impact on the quality of life and opportunities for some residents. Average life expectancy varies by around 12 years between the most deprived and most affluent areas, for both men and women.

Understanding our residents and communities is at the centre of everything we do and ultimately our decision making. We use a range of information to guide support and inform our policies and initiatives but recognise there is always more to do. The 2021 Census will give us an opportunity to better understand our residents and help us plan our services.

As our borough grows and changes, we want to be at the forefront of working together with all of our communities, to do this we need to be bolder, have a meaningful two-way conversation, and continue to strive to understand what will make the difference.

3.1 Our Borough Profile

Our Borough Profile provides a high-level overview of Cheshire East. It brings together data from multiple council and third-party sources into a single document. It contains information on demographics, learning, health and wellbeing, caring for children & adults, employment, households and crime.

Cheshire East Borough Profile

To understand the diversity of our borough a series of profiles have been prepared against each protected characteristic. These profiles have been built from existing data and aim to present a simple and easier to understand overview.

Cheshire East Joint Strategic Needs Assessment

The Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) or 'tartan rug' presents health and social care needs, ward-by-ward, across Cheshire East.

Cheshire East's Village of 100 people

The diagram on page 10 shows a pictorial representation of our Borough using a scenario of if there was a 100 people in a room what the breakdown would be by protected characteristic.

3 Our People and Place

Cheshire East's Village of 100 People
(EDI Edition)

Sex
51 Females
49 Males

Disability
8 Limited a lot
82 Not limited
10 Limited a little

Pregnancy and Maternity
8 Pregnant within a year

Sexual Orientation
2 Lesbian, Gay or Bi

Gender Reassignment
1 Trans

Race
1 Asian/ Asian British
2 Mixed Ethnicity
2 Other White Ethnicity
94 White British/English/Welsh/Scottish/Northern Irish/Irish

Age
18 aged 0-15
59 aged 16-64
23 aged 65+

Marriage and Civil Partnership
52 Married

Religion or Belief
69 Christian
23 No religion
7 Not stated
1 Muslim

Sex and Age

0 to 24	25 to 64	65+
100,600	**193,500**	**86,700**
Cheshire East 26%	**Cheshire East 51%**	**Cheshire East 23%**
North West 30%	**North West 51%**	**North West 19%**
England 30%	**England 52%**	**England 18%**

49% 51%   49% 51%   54% 46%
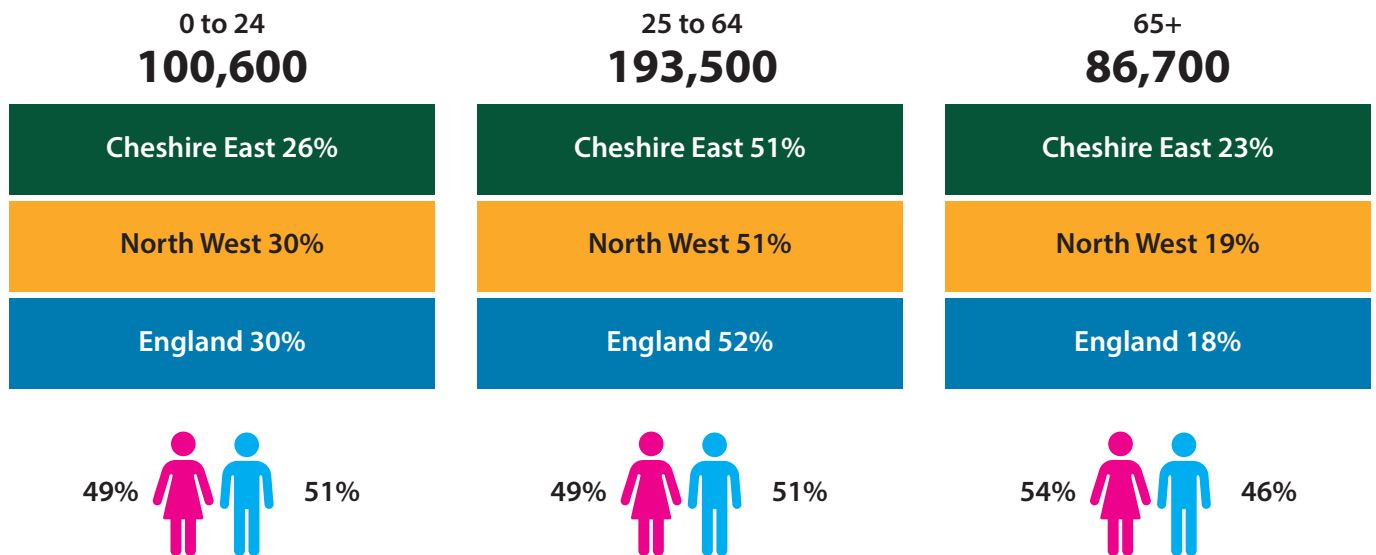
The total population of Cheshire East is 380,800. Residents aged under 25 represent 26% of this total population, which is significantly lower than figures for both the North West (30%) and England (30%). There are more residents over the age of 65 in Cheshire East (23%) compared to both the North West (19%) and England (18%). There is little difference in gender between the age groups shown, with the exception of residents aged over 65 where the female population (54%) is notably higher than the male population (46%) partly reflecting differences in life expectancy between females and males.

Source: Mid-year population estimates 2018, Office for National Statistics

3 Our People and Place

Age

Proportion of residents under 25 years of age
Source: Mid-year population estimates 2018

The proportion of residents under 25 in Cheshire East (26%) is lower than the figures for both the North West (30%) and England (30%).

The map to the right shows the population under 25 by ward, with high proportion wards being orange and low proportion wards being green. This map shows that the under 25 population in Cheshire East is predominantly in Crewe wards and represents a much lower proportion of the ward populations in rural areas.

The wards with the highest proportions of residents under 25 were **Crewe St Barnabas ward (36%)** and **Crewe Central (36%)**. The proportion of residents under 25 was lowest in **Mobberley (21%)** and **Gawsworth (21%)**.

Region	Proportion under 25
Cheshire East	26%
North West	30%
England	30%

Crewe St Barnabas

Crewe Central

Residents aged under 25

High %

Low %

Age
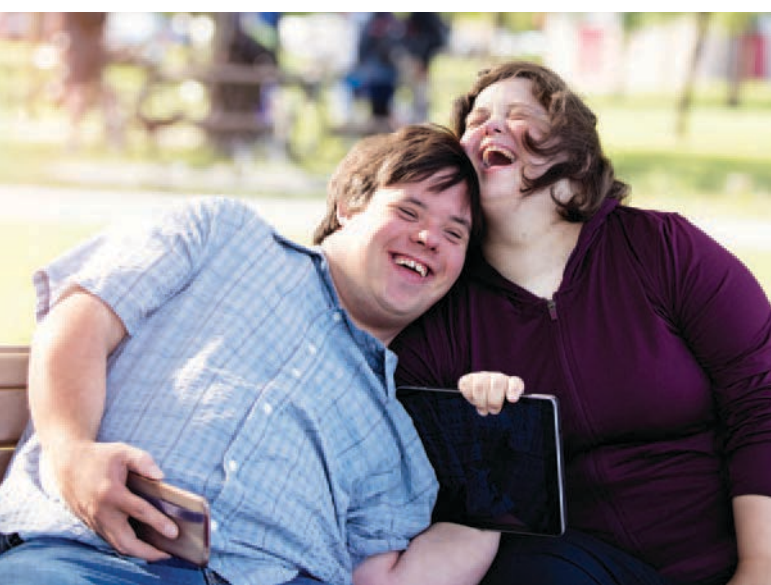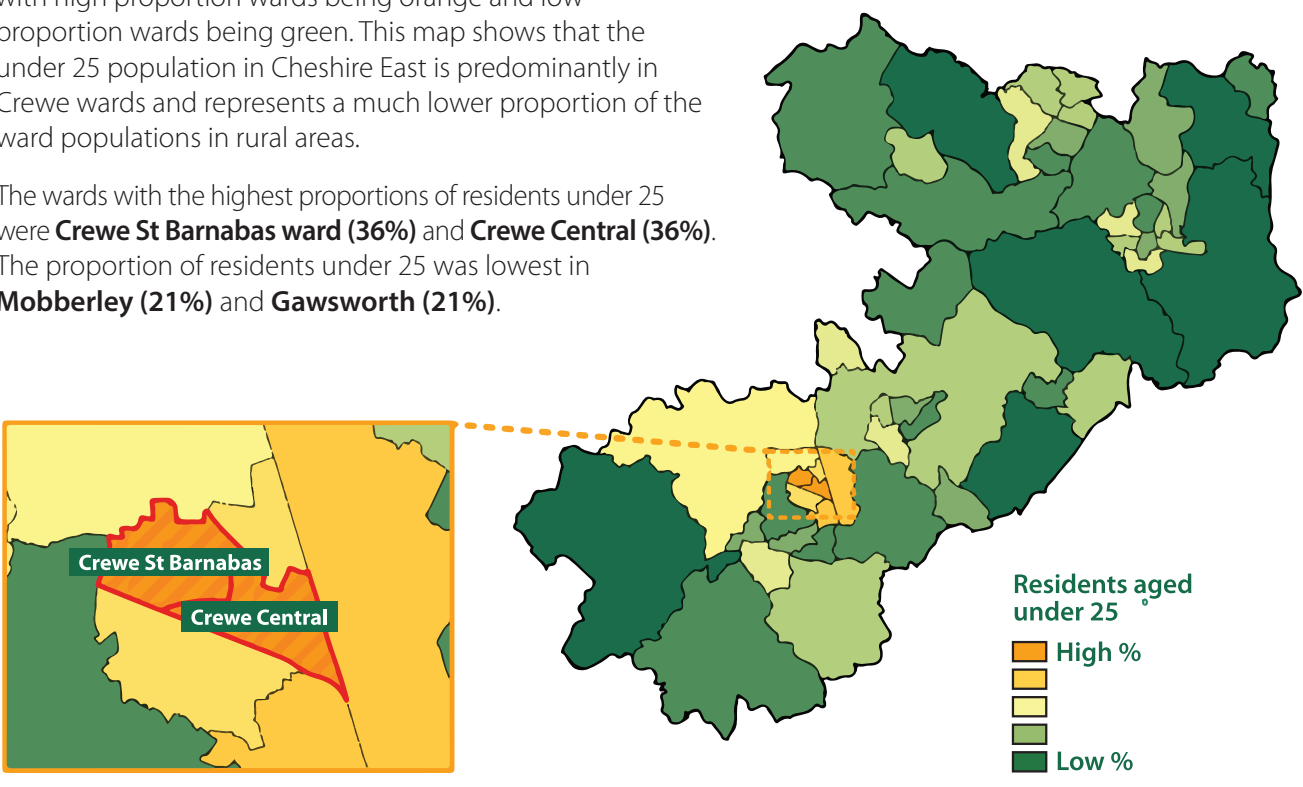
Proportion of residents aged 65 and over
Source: Mid-year population estimates 2018

Region	Proportion aged 65+
Cheshire East	23%
North West	19%
England	18%

The proportion of residents aged 65 and over (23%) is significantly higher than the figures for both the North West (19%) and England (18%).

The map to the right shows the population aged 65 and over by ward, with high proportion wards being orange and low proportion wards being green. This map shows that the 65 and over population in Cheshire East is predominantly in rural areas and represents a higher proportion of ward population in the north.

The wards with the three highest proportion of residents aged 65 and above were **Poynton East and Pott Shrigley (33%)**, **Prestbury (32%)** and **Gawsworth (31%)**. The proportion of residents aged 65 and above was lowest in **Crewe Central (10%)**, **Leighton Ward (11%)** and **Crewe South (12%)**.

Poynton East and Pott Shrigley

Residents aged over 65

High %

Low %

3 Our People and Place

Race

In the Equality Act, race can mean your colour, or your nationality (including your citizenship). It can also mean your ethnic or national origins, which may not be the same as your current nationality. Typically, Ethnicity is the most commonly used measure; however Ethnicity is not a single measure, but a composite measure of many different factors that make up an individual or community. Ethnicity is not fixed and is a transient state making it difficult to measure.

Region	Born outside UK
Cheshire East	5.5%
North West	8.2%
England	13.8%

Proportion of usual residents who are 'born outside the UK'
Source: 2011 Census

The proportion of the population in Cheshire East that were born outside the UK is 5.5%, significantly lower than the figure for both the North West (8.2%) and England overall (13.8%). The highest proportion of residents born outside the UK was in the Crewe Central ward (17%) followed by Crewe South (16%). Thirty two (62%) of Cheshire East's wards' proportion of residents born outside the UK less than five percent.

Region	Born in EU	Born outside EU
Cheshire East	2.8%	2.7%
North West	2.7%	5.5%
England	4.4%	9.4%

Crewe Central

Residents born outside the UK

■ High %
■
■
■
■ Low %
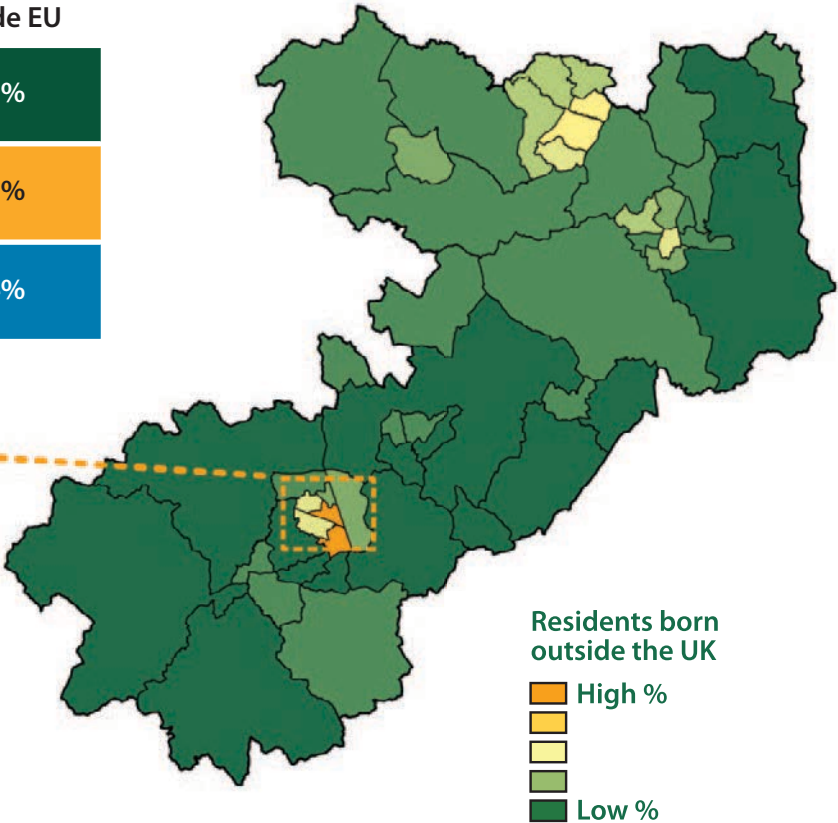
Race

Ethnicity refers to a category of people who identify with each other based on a shared commonality. These can include such factors as cultural heritage, language or ancestry for a few examples. Ethnicity is therefore not a single measure at its core but a composite measure of many different factors that make up an individual.

The most reliable source for data on ethnicity remains the 2011 Census. This is an 18 category self report measure with an 'any other' write in option. Cheshire East has a high propor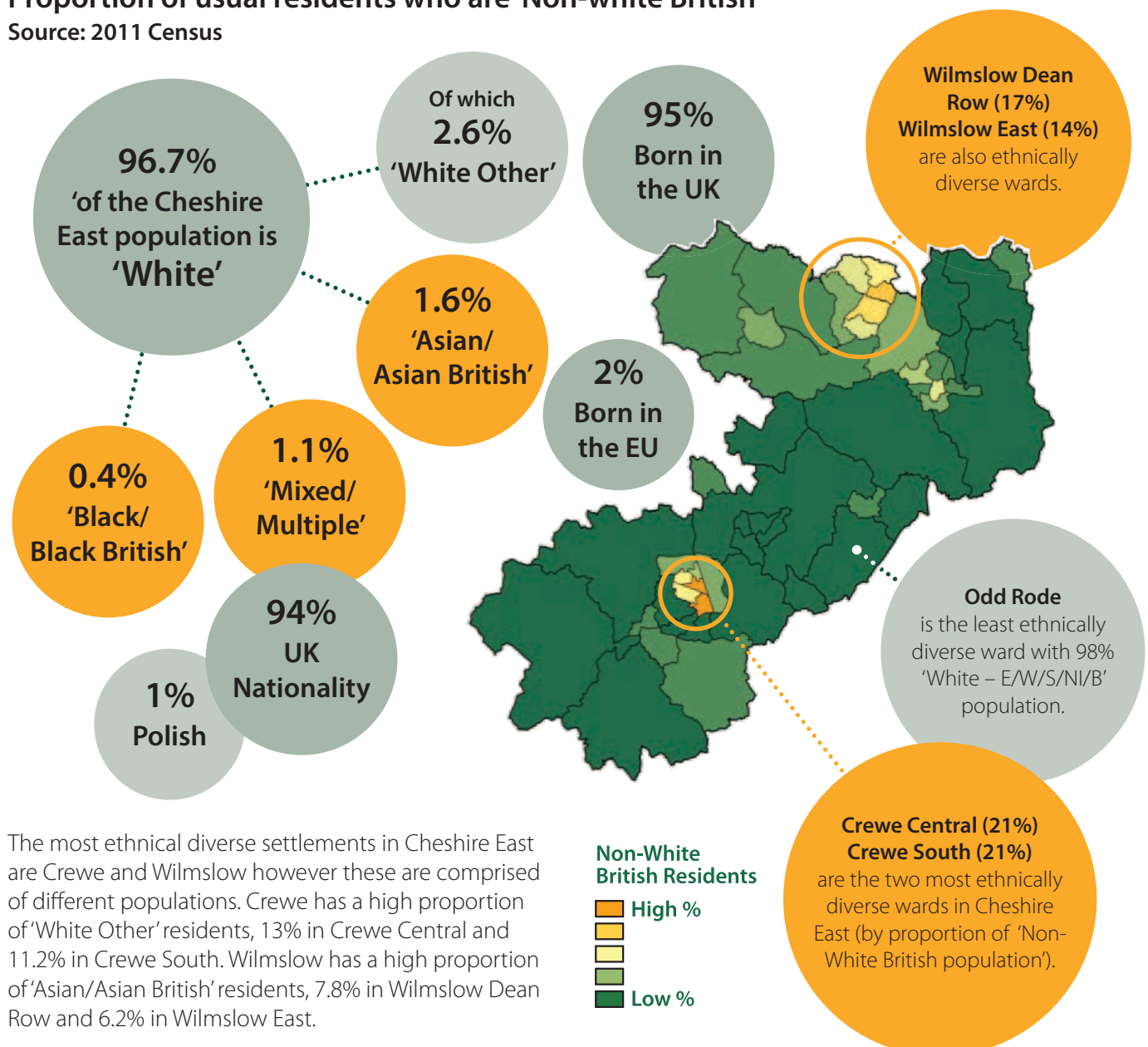tion of 'White' residents at 96% of the population, higher than the national (86%) and regional average (90%). The figure for 'White: other' population is included above as this represents the largest minority group population in Cheshire East (2.6%) but is hidden due to the way 'White' is considered a single homogenous group when reported.

Proportion of usual residents who are 'Non-white British'
Source: 2011 Census

96.7%
'of the Cheshire East population is **'White'**

Of which **2.6%** 'White Other'

95% Born in the UK

Wilmslow Dean Row (17%) Wilmslow East (14%) are also ethnically diverse wards.

1.6% 'Asian/ Asian British'

2% Born in the EU

0.4% 'Black/ Black British'

1.1% 'Mixed/ Multiple'

94% UK Nationality

1% Polish

Odd Rode is the least ethnically diverse ward with 98% 'White – E/W/S/NI/B' population.

Crewe Central (21%) Crewe South (21%) are the two most ethnically diverse wards in Cheshire East (by proportion of 'Non-White British population').

The most ethnical diverse settlements in Cheshire East are Crewe and Wilmslow however these are comprised of different populations. Crewe has a high proportion of 'White Other' residents, 13% in Crewe Central and 11.2% in Crewe South. Wilmslow has a high proportion of 'Asian/Asian British' residents, 7.8% in Wilmslow Dean Row and 6.2% in Wilmslow East.

Non-White British Residents
High %
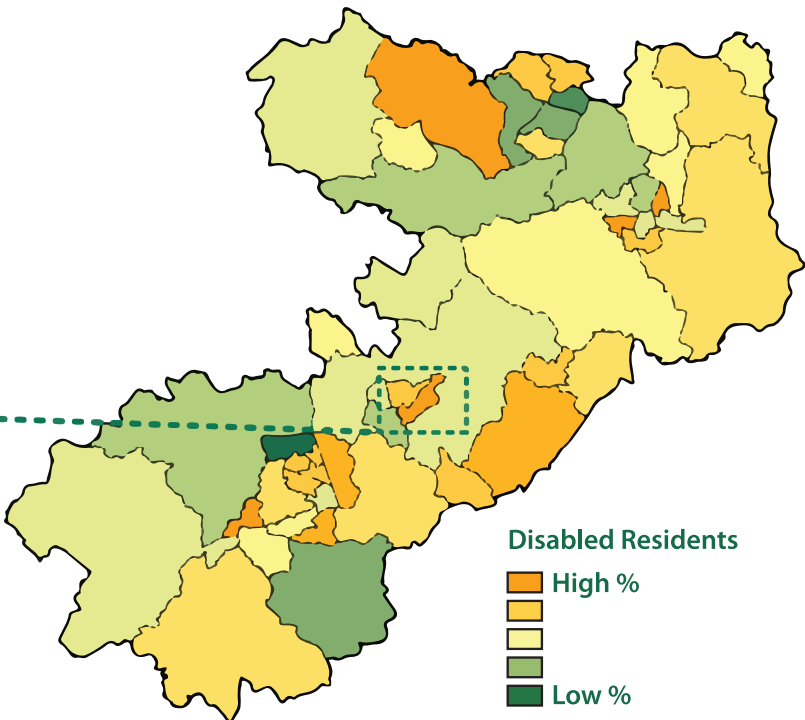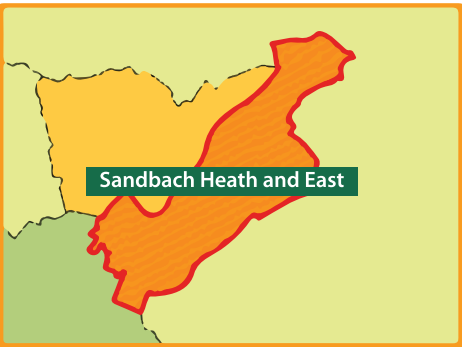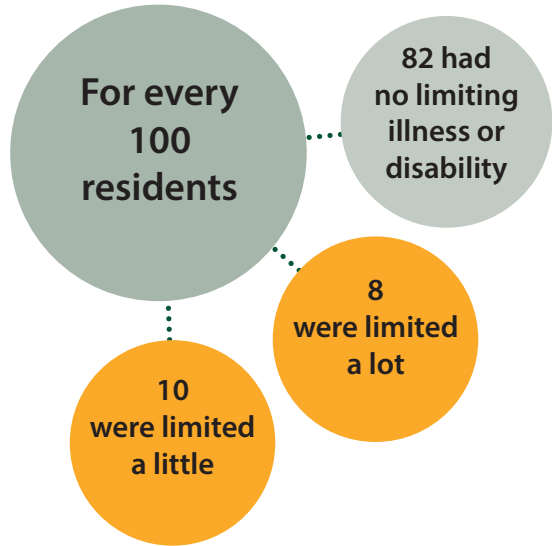Low %

3 Our People and Place

Disability

The term 'disability' is used to refer to a limiting long term illness, health problem or disability (LLTI) which limits a person's day-to-day activities. This is usually captured using the decennial Census.

The proportion of LLTI residents was 18%, equal to the national figure (18%) but slightly lower than the North West average (20%). Ten percent of residents stated their activities were limited a little and eight percent stated their activities were limited a lot.

The wards with the three highest proportion of LLTI residents were **Sandbach Heath & East (22.4%)**, **Macclesfield Hurdsfield (21.7%)** and **Macclesfield West & Ivy (21.6%)**. The proportion of residents with LLTI was lowest in **Leighton Ward (9.9%)** and **Wilmslow Dean Row (11.6%)**. As might be expected, the prevalence of LLTI broadly increases with an areas' average (median) age.

Proportion of usual residents with a 'limiting long term illness or disability'
Source: 2011 Census

Region	Residents with a limiting long term illness or disability
Cheshire East	18%
North West	20%
England	18%

For every 100 residents

82 had no limiting illness or disability

8 were limited a lot

10 were limited a little

Sandbach Heath and East

Disabled Residents

High %

Low %

Religion

Region	Religious	Religion not stated	No Religion
Cheshire East	70.7%	6.7%	22.7%
North West	74.0%	6.2%	19.8%
England	68.1%	7.2%	24.7%

The majority of the Cheshire East population is religious (71%). Whilst this figure is lower than the figure for the North West (74%), it is higher than England overall (68%). Additionally, the proportion of the population that is not religious is lower in Cheshire East (23%) and the North West (20%) than in England overall (25%). These figures come from the 2011 Census and are the most reliable and accepted figures on religion.

Region	Christian	Muslim	Hindu	Buddhist	Jewish	Sikh	Other
Cheshire East	68.9%	0.7%	0.4%	0.2%	0.2%	0.1%	0.3%
North West	67.3%	5.1%	0.5%	0.3%	0.4%	0.1%	0.3%
England	59.4%	5.0%	1.5%	0.5%	0.5%	0.8%	0.4%

Considering the total population, the majority of Cheshire East residents are Christian (68.9%), which is marginally higher than the figure for the North West and significantly higher than the figure for England overall (59.4%). The second most practiced religion in Cheshire East is Islam (0.7%). However, while Islam is also the second most practiced religion in both the North West and England, the percentage of the population it represents is much higher in the North West (5%) and England overall (5.1%). These figures also come from the 2011 Census.

3 Our People and Place

Sexual Orientation

Sexual orientation is an umbrella concept, which includes sexual identity, behaviour and attraction. There are no reliable local, Cheshire East estimates for the proportion of residents identifying as Lesbian, Gay or Bisexual (LGB). However, over the last five years national estimates of LGB have increased from 1.5% in 2012 to 2.0% in 2017 for the population aged 16 years and over.

Using these prevalence rates, **more than 6,000 Cheshire East residents aged 16 and over may be estimated as identifying as LGB**.

Nationally, Males (2.3%) were more likely to identify as LGB than females (1.8%) in 2017. Also people aged 16 to 24 years were most likely to identify as LGB in 2017 (4.2%).

Gender Reassignment

There is no accurate figure for how big the transgender community is. Research funded by National Government, carried out by Gender Identity Research and Education Society (GIRES) **estimated the trans population as approximately 0.6%-1% of the UK adult population, this would equate to 1,900 to more than 3,000 of Cheshire East adult residents**.

The Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) reported that 100 people out of 10,000 (1%) answered yes   to undergoing part of the process of changing from the sex you were described as at birth to the gender you identify with, or do you intend to.

Gender variant people present for treatment at any age. Nationally the median age is 42.

Pregnancy and Maternity

In 2017 there were 4,607 conceptions to women in Cheshire East.

This equates to conception rate of 75.5 per 1,000 or approximately 8% of women aged 15 to 44.

Marriage and Civil Partnership

At the time of the 2011 Census, **52% of adult residents were married and a further 0.2% were registered in a same-sex civil partnership**.

Since 2009, there have been a total of 167 civil partnerships. Most of these partnerships were formed before 2014 when same-sex marriages were introduced.

Sources:

Race: Ethnic Group Census 2011 (QS201EW)

Religion: Religion Census 2011 (KS209EW)

Age: Population estimates - local authority based by single year of age (2018)

Day to Day Activities: Long-term health problem or disability Census 2011 (QS303EW)

Pregnancy: Based on female population of child bearing age (15 - 44). Population estimates - local authority based by single year of age (2018). Conception Statistics, England and Wales, 2017

Marriage: Marital and civil partnership status Census 2011 (KS103EW)

Sex: Population estimates - local authority based by single year of age (2018)

Sexual Orientation: UK Prevalence Rate, no data for Cheshire East level only (2017) **(https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/culturalidentity/sexuality/bulletins/sexualidentityuk/2017)**

Gender Reassignment: No data for Cheshire East, UK prevalence rate from Stonewall: **https://www.stonewall.org.uk/truth-about-trans#trans-people-britain**

3.2 Hate Crime

Hate crime is any criminal offence committed against a person or property that is motivated, or perceived to be motivated, by hostility or prejudice based upon the victim's:

- Race, colour, ethnic origin, nationality or national origins
- Religion or belief
- Gender or gender identity
- Sexual orientation
- Disability
- Age

Everyone has a right to live without fear and harassment and if an offender targets a victim because of how they look their gender identity, sexuality or because of their beliefs, the law provides additional penalties.

Hate crimes are one of the highest priorities for Cheshire Constabulary. In partnership with external agencies, they support the needs of victims, their families and their communities to make them safer and prevent re-victimisation.

Hate crime can take many forms including:

- physical attacks - such as physical assault, damage to property, offensive graffiti, neighbour disputes and arson

- threat of attack - including offensive letters, abusive or obscene telephone calls, groups hanging around to intimidate and unfounded, malicious complaints

- verbal abuse or insults - offensive leaflets and posters, abusive gestures, dumping of rubbish outside homes or through letterboxes, and bullying at school or in the workplace

Hate crime can be reported Online, by ringing 101, by visiting a police station or by visiting a hate crime reporting centre.

In Cheshire East, there are 17 hate crime reporting centres, these are places that are open for advice from trained people if a person doesn't want to go to the police.

https://www.cheshire.police.uk/advice/advice-and-information/hco/hate-crime/how-to-report-hate-crime/

2018/2019 Data

The total number of recorded hate crimes for the 12-month period ending March 2020 for Crewe and Macclesfield (Cheshire East Local Policing Units) was 636. In terms of specific 'offence' types the most frequent hate offence related to causing 'public fear alarm or distress'.

Hate crime reporting specific to a protected characteristic for Crewe and Macclesfield for the 12-month period ending March 2020 is as follows:

Year	Month	Racial	Religion or Belief	Disability	Sexual Orientation	Transgender
2019	Apr	32	4	6	8	2
2019	May	41	3	6	6	1
2019	Jun	38	1	4	10	4
2019	Jul	32	1	3	19	7
2019	Aug	23	1	5	9	1
2019	Sep	28	1	8	10	2
2019	Oct	46	2	7	8	4
2019	Nov	28	3	10	6	4
2019	Dec	36	1	5	5	1
2020	Jan	36	4	8	9	1
2020	Feb	28	1	9	10	2
2020	Mar	28	4	4	10	0
Total		396	26	75	110	29

Hate Crime: Cheshire Constabulary

3 Our People and Place

3.3 Our Workforce Profile

At Cheshire East Council we employ around 3,500 staff; who are our most important asset in delivering the outcomes we want to achieve for the people of Cheshire East.

The Council is committed to fairness and equality and in particular, promoting equality of opportunity for all and a culture that values differences. As an employer, we want to ensure our workforce is representative of the community it serves and that we attract and retain talented employees from a wide range of backgrounds and with diverse skills and experience. Our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy is an important part of achieving this.

We are aware that our workforce profile data needs improving. We need to build confidence and trust with our staff so that they feel comfortable to share this information with us. In line with a lot of large organisations we continue to see a large number of records where data is not reported or disclosed (indicating that they 'prefer not to say') especially in relation to sexual orientation, gender reassignment and disability.

This needs to be taken into account when considering the following information. All data presented is correct as of September 2019.

3.3.1 Age

The age profile of the Council shows that nearly 74% of our workforce is over the age of 40, with only a small cohort of staff under the age of 20.

Age Group	Workforce %
Under 20	0.6%
20 – 29	9%
30 – 39	17.6%
40 – 49	25.7%
50 – 59	33.5%
60 – 69	13.5%
Over 70	1.1%

3.3.2. Sex

Around 75% of our staff are female and 25% are male. The majority of our part time staff are female meaning that the average gender pay gap for the council for 2019/20 is 14.5%, which means that female employees receive 14.5% less average pay than male employees.

3.3.3 Race

In terms of ethnicity, 86% of staff have reported as White British, with Black, Asian, Minority Ethnic (BAME) staff accounting for just 3% of our workforce. The remaining 11% of staff have not reported their ethnicity.

3.3.4 Disability

We have limited information on the disability status of our workforce, with only 1% of staff reported as having a disability, and the remaining 99% either not reported or not disclosed.

3.3.5 Religion or belief

Of the staff that has reported their religious belief, 24% of staff reported that they are Christian, 8% state that they don't have a religion, and only 1% of our staff report as either Muslim, Sikh, Jewish, Buddhist and other. 61% of our staff have not reported their religion and 6% did not want to disclose this information.

3.3.6 Sexual Orientation

Similar to religious belief, 62% of staff have not recorded their sexual orientation with 4% preferring not to disclose. 33% of staff reported that they are heterosexual and 0.75% of staff reported that they identify as gay, lesbian or bi.

3.3.7 Gender Reassignment

Reported and recorded responses to this protected characteristic are not sufficient or reliable for consideration. Further work is needed to understand how we can encourage our workforce to feel that they would like to respond and to therefore improve our response rates.

3.3.8 Marriage & Civil Partnership

Just over half of our workforce are married or in a civil partnership (51%), with 15% of staff reporting that they are single, and 18% of staff not disclosing their status. The remaining 16% report a variety of relationship status such as; divorced, widowed, separated, partner or not married.

3.3.9 Pregnancy & Maternity

Our current HR workforce data system does not collect council wide pregnancy and maternity data; this is collected and understood at a service level, with team managers being responsible for ensuring that we meet our equality obligations under this protected characteristic. Our maternity policy (2019), outlines our commitment to ensuring that our staff are fully aware of their rights and our responsibilities for staff that are pregnant or have recently given birth. This is complemented by the Council's Health and Wellbeing Strategy.

3.4 Gender pay gap

The gender pay gap shows the difference between the **average** (mean) earnings of men and women. This is expressed as a percentage of men's earnings e.g. women earn 15% less than men. Used to its full potential, gender pay gap reporting is a valuable tool for assessing levels of equality in the workplace, female and male participation, and how effectively talent is being maximised.

Gender pay gap reporting legislation requires employers with 250 or more workers to publish specific data in relation their workforce.

These requirements include how large the pay gap is between male and female staff along with the distribution of male and female workers in the organisation.

It is important to note that the gender pay gap is different to equal pay. Equal pay relates to men and women receiving equal pay for work of equal value where a direct comparator must exist.

3.4.1 Gender pay gap in Cheshire East Council

For 2019/20 the average gender pay gap for the Council is 14.5% which means that female employees receive 14.5% less average pay than male employees.

The average pay gap increased by 0.8% between 2017/18 and 2018/19, producing similar figures to those reported for 2016/17. The average pay gap remained at 12.7% in 2018-19; this is the same as 2017/18, during which period it had reduced by 0.7% since 2016/17

These pay gaps do not indicate that male and female employees are being paid differently for equal work. The Council operates a robust grading structure based on a non-discriminatory job evaluation scheme to ensure that it complies with equality legislation and provides equal pay for work of equal value.

Reporting for the 2020/21 gender pay gap is not due to be published until October 2021 in line with reporting requirements.

4 Our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Journey

In February 2017 our first Equality and Diversity strategy was launched to deliver the following Equality Objectives.

1. **Strengthen our knowledge and understanding of our communities**

2. **Listen, involve and respond to our communities effectively**

3. **Improve the diversity and skills of our workforce to ensure equality of representation at all levels across the organisation.**

4. **Demonstrate a positive culture with strong leadership and organisational commitment to excellence in improving equality outcomes, both within the council and amongst partners.**

5. **Ensure that the Council's services are responsive to different needs and treat service users with dignity and respect.**

To deliver the strategy an **Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Board** was established which is chaired by the Executive Director of People and has senior representation from across the Council. We appointed our first Equality, Diversity and Inclusion officer who, alongside 40 staff Equality Champions, has raised the profile of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion amongst our residents and staff.

4.1 Our Achievements 2017-2020

As part of the **Armed Forces Covenant**, a pledge that together we acknowledge and understand that those who serve or who have served in the armed forces, and their families, should be treated with fairness and respect in the communities, economy and society they serve with their lives, we achieved the MoD Employers Recognition Scheme.

Recruited and trained 50 Mental Health First Aiders to support our staff.

In 2018 we signed the Time To Change pledge
to commit to changing the way mental health is perceived and talked about within the council and wider borough. In 2020 we held a 'no email' day to encourage staff to talk to each other.

In 2018 we held our first International Women's Day event in Macclesfield. A successful event which is now an annual fixture on our EDI calendar. The events have included presentations from influential and motivational women from within the council, ward members and within the community to talk about their experiences of gender balance in the workplace. Each year this event is oversubscribed with 100+ delegates.

Each year Cheshire East Council holds an event to remember the Holocaust of World War II
and various other mass genocides that have happened since. Hosted by the Cheshire East mayor, we are proud to welcome Holocaust survivors to the event to share their experience.

Every two years we hold a multi-faith conference organised by our Communities team.
This brings together our faith organisations from across the borough, working together to identify and agree the opportunities to help our more vulnerable residents. The 2019 event focussed on tackling social isolation with over 140 people attending.

In July 2019 we worked with the charity Mandela8 to provide primary and secondary schools in the borough with lesson resources and copies of Nelson Mandela's 'Long Walk to Freedom'.
A total of 15 schools and 6,679 pupils were involved. This supported work that the schools were already undertaking about respect and inclusivity. We also celebrated Nelson Mandela day within the council, encouraging staff to give 67 minutes of their time to do something good for someone.

In 2019 we held our first International Men's Day event at Nantwich Football Club. Guest speakers included senior officers from Cheshire East Fire and Rescue, Cheshire Constabulary, Body Positive and Cheshire East Council Public Health. The session was focussed on male role models and men's health. The event was attended by 50 staff (90% male) and is now an annual event in our EDI calendar.

Over the last three years we have flown the rainbow flag at our corporate buildings to celebrate and acknowledge LGBT+ history month. This is in addition to wider social media campaigns and internal staff events.

Each October we celebrate Black History Month with a social media campaign and internal learning and awareness raising.

A Council led borough wide, community LGBT+ Pride event is held each year.
This has grown in momentum since our first event in 2018 and our ambition is that it will continue to grow and eventually achieve its own charitable status. We have also supported the independent local Pride organisations in Congleton, Macclesfield and Nantwich.

4 Our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Journey

4.1.1 Staff Network Groups

As part of our commitment to a positive workplace culture, we actively encourage our staff to connect with each other through peer networks and staff events. There are many now active and well attended across the council.

We are looking to expand the range of groups that take place with a specific focus on equality and inclusion and for 2021/22 we will be supporting the launch of a new Men's staff network group to compliment our existing groups.

- **Equality Champions Forum** – The Equality Champion role is voluntary for staff and supports the work of the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion officer. We have 40 active Equality Champions and the forum provides a chance for them to meet and discuss what is happening in EDI within the council and the wider community. During each forum we take the opportunity to refresh skills and understanding across all protected characteristics.

Training has been delivered on the following subjects:

- – Hate crime
- – Gypsy, Roma and Travellers
- – History of Pride and LGBT+ issues
- – Being a Cancer Champion
- – Mental Health Awareness

- **Mental Health First Aiders Forum** – This forum allows our Mental Health First Aiders protected time to network and support each other whilst discussing any emerging themes or concerns that they are aware of across the council.

- **LGBT+ & Allies Group** – The LGBT+ group, VibranCE, meets at all our corporate buildings across the council. This is an open network group for our LGBT+ staff and their Allies, and provides peer support to each other and anybody else within the council who needs a friendly ear, help or advice on LGBT+ issues.

- **Menopause Network Group** – After a successful Menopause Awareness Day event in 2019 we now run a Menopause Group where staff can meet up informally to support each other and share their own experiences.

- **Disability Network Group** – Our Differently Abled group was set up in October 2020 to provide peer support for Disabled and Neurodivergent people and carers working across the authority

- **BAME Network Group** – The BAME network group meets informally to provide peer support and regularly meets with senior leaders to share their experiences of living and working in Cheshire East.

Holocaust Memorial Day January ▼	International Women's Day March ▼	International Men's Day November ▼

Holocaust Memorial Day 2021
Be the light in the darkness

4.2 Equality and Diversity Events

Each month we celebrate and promote a range of awareness days and events, and host four larger annual borough wide events for our staff and residents.

A full month in November celebrating children's rights and participation, including takeover of key roles in the Council.

4 Our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Journey

4.3 Working with and for our communities

The Council delivers and commissions a wide range of support services for our communities. The People Directorate lead on commissioning, community cohesion and integration, and are committed to:

- Providing organisations, public services, voluntary and faith sector an opportunity to have a voice to help shape service delivery.

- Working together to identify gaps in knowledge on the diverse communities in Cheshire East.

- Enhancing partnerships to create strong, integrated communities, as well as calling out practices and behaviours which impede integration.

In the last 18 months, there have been many achievements, a few examples being:

- **38 Connected Communities Centres**, which provide a single point of contact in a community, enabling people to access local services and connect with local people.

- Successful in a bid to support community cohesion in Crewe and were **granted £122,961 via the Government Controlling Migration Fund (CMF).** These funds have been used to support improved health and wellbeing for migrant families. There are

three Community Liaison Officers (CLOs) who speak a total of seven languages, who work with schools and migrant families to improve wellbeing.

- **My Life, My Choice** a Strategy for people with Learning Disabilities in Cheshire East has been produced which sets out the vision, ambitions, and commissioning intentions for people with learning disabilities of all ages living in Cheshire East. The strategy was co-produced with individuals who have a learning disability and their parents and carers, and organisations that support people with a learning disability.

- A **Mental Health Floating Support Service** has been established in Cheshire East. The service has a preventative focus and works to empower people to remain independent, improve health and wellbeing and use strength-based approaches to build resilience and reduce the requirements for long term intensive support services. The service also helps people to improve their own social relationships and connections and prevent social isolation and loneliness

- We continue to support our **Gypsy and Traveller community** through our contribution to the Cheshire and Warrington Traveller Team (CWTT). The team are hosted by Cheshire West and Chester Council but work across the Cheshire sub-region in partnership with the four local authorities and Cheshire police.

Community support

The aims of the CWTT are to:

a. Deal speedily and effectively with unauthorised encampments in line with agreed protocols;

b. Improve services to travelling communities, the settled communities and other public bodies, by acting as a single point of contact with a consistent approach, balancing the rights and responsibilities of all;

c. Manage local authority owned sites, both permanent and transit, applying a consistent approach to all;

d. Facilitate Travellers' to access appropriate services; health, education, social care and accommodation, ensuring appropriate support, if necessary, is in place;

e. Make savings through economies of scale with better outcomes for all in a more effective and efficient manner;

f. Reduce friction between Travellers and the settled communities in order to bring forward new sites and increase community cohesion;

g. Offer training to all agencies in particular around new policy development and legal implications;

h. Access funding to support new developments;

i. Support the strategic work of the Parties around Gypsy and Traveller accommodation and local plan agendas.

4.4 Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA)

An equality impact assessment (EqIA) is an analysis of a proposed organisational policy, or a change to an existing one, which assesses whether the policy has a disparate impact on persons with a protected characteristic.

Assessing the impact on equality of proposed changes to policies, procedures and practices is not just something the law requires, it is a positive opportunity to help us make good decisions and evidence how we have reached these decisions, saving money and time.

We use EqIAs to identify and remove barriers in services which might stop people knowing about the service, using it and getting the best from it. This is part of our legal duty under the Equality Act.

In 2021 we will be refreshing our EqIA process and will be providing guidance and training for all staff that are required to undertake an assessment.

We are committed to publishing all EqIA's on our council website, providing transparency for residents and interested parties to access and gain a wider understanding of what we have and have not considered as part of our decision-making journey.

Pictured from left to right:
- Gypsy and Traveller community support
- My Life, My Choice Strategy for people with Learning Disabilities

5 Our Equality Objectives 2021-2025

....

1 Include

Listen and involve all voices.

....

2 Inspire

Celebrate and promote our diversity and the positive opportunity it brings.

....

3 Integrate

Deliver and promote accessible services for all.

....

4 Inform

Empower people to respectfully challenge discriminatory and poor behaviour.

....

5 Impact

Support and deliver meaningful change

....

In delivering our Equality Objectives we have identified a number of aims and supporting actions for delivery. These will be continually reviewed and supported by an annual work programme, and are not in any way the only things we will be doing but serve as worked examples in the short term. We will continue to engage over the lifetime of the strategy to ensure we are focussing on the right things.

Our equality objectives were developed in collaboration with our equality champions, council staff and members and a public consultation exercise. They have been developed to be clear and simple to understand.

5.1 Include

Listen and involve all voices

....

We will:
Promote inclusive opportunities for two-way conversations.

- Develop our network of equality champions both internal and external to the council, as advocates and promoters of equality and inclusion.

- Commit to sharing and presenting information in appropriate and accessible formats.

- Work collaboratively with voluntary, community and faith organisations to share key messages and opportunities for engagement.

We will:
Seek to listen in order to understand.

- Expand our opportunities and methods of engaging with residents, partners and stakeholders to ensure we are proactive and inclusive.

- Know our audience and communities through robust and up to date stakeholder mapping and management.

- Use and consider information including data and intelligence to inform our thinking and action.

5.2 Inspire

Celebrate and promote our diversity and the positive opportunity it brings

We will:

Promote local events and activities that seek to reduce isolation, raise awareness and encourage participation.

• Develop a communications and engagement plan, to identify key events and activities that the Council will promote and support each year.

• Support and promote community action and cooperation across our partnerships to improve cohesion.

• Support our staff through peer networks and events.

We will:

Proactively take action to ensure our workforce is diverse and representative of the communities we serve.

• Apply fair recruitment and selection procedures.

• Make reasonable adjustments to ensure the work environment and culture meets the needs of all our staff.

• Monitor and review employment practice and our policies and procedures that support them.

5.3 Integrate

Deliver and promote accessible services for all

We will:

Ensure that we consider, communicate and consult with all people regardless of their protected characteristics when developing or changing our services.

• Undertake Equality Impact Assessments across all development and change activities including services we buy and commission.

• Provide training and guidance to ensure equality impacts are fully understood.

• Publish all equality impact assessments to provide transparency, assurance and information on our decision making.

We will:

Ensure that all services we commission meet their obligations under the Equality Act.

• Engage and work with our local communities to co-produce and co-design our local service offer and the design and delivery of major projects such as town centre regeneration schemes and improvements to local neighbourhoods.

• Require our suppliers to provide appropriate and timely equality monitoring information.

• Ensure that any venue we use or event we promote does not discriminate on the basis of an individual's protected characteristic.

5 Our Equality Objectives 2021-2025

5.4 Inform

Empower people to respectfully challenge discriminatory and poor behaviour

We will:

Take a zero-tolerance approach to discrimination, taking positive and immediate action where possible.

- Continue to reinforce and promote the Council's values and behaviours to promote a positive and inclusive workplace culture.

- Provide access to clear and robust HR policies and procedures to support officers and managers when challenging poor or unacceptable behaviour.

We will:

Work in partnership to keep people safe and connected

- Contribute and collaborate with partners and stakeholders to tackle hate crime and promote hate crime reporting.

- Take targeted action to educate, inform and challenge the stereotypes faced by our marginalised communities (e.g. migrants, Gypsy, Roma and Travellers).

- Promote and signpost to networks that provide advice and support to anyone impacted or experiencing discriminatory behaviour or action.

5.5 Impact

Support and deliver meaningful change

We will:

Be open and transparent in publishing the progress of our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Objectives

- Publish an annual report on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion at Cheshire East in the public domain.

- Publish the Gender Pay Gap report in the public domain.

- Ensure that evaluations for each event are available for publication.

- Commit to sharing and presenting information in appropriate and accessible formats.

6 Next steps and Conclusion

Next steps

Our refreshed equality objectives are at the starting point of our next chapter. They will be supported by an annual work programme which is monitored by the EDI Board.

An annual report of progress will be prepared and published on the Council's website.

Delivery of the activities within the work programme aspires and aims to bring people along on the journey that Equality, Diversity and Inclusion at Cheshire East is taking.

It is also the role and responsibility of everyone at the Council to deliver our vision for equality and inclusion.

Conclusion

We recognise that the diversity of Cheshire East's communities is expanding and that this should be welcomed and valued. There will be many opportunities and challenges over the next four years as we work with residents to improve their lives and reduce the incidences of discrimination and harassment.

Our refreshed equality objectives will allow us to build on the achievements of the previous three years and continually improve.

Our five keywords, **include**, **inspire**, **integrate**, **inform** and **impact** will underpin everything that we do, allowing us to achieve the highest standards in service delivery, decision making and employment practice.

This will make Cheshire East a great place to work, live and visit where people feel safe, valued and supported, wherever they go and whoever they come into contact with.

If you would like to contact us about any of the information contained
in this strategy please email: **EqualityandInclusion@cheshireeast.gov.uk**

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**

If you would like to view the results of previous consultations undertaken by Cheshire East Council, please visit **cheshireeast.gov.uk/consultations**

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Agenda Item 10

Cheshire East Council

Working for a brighter future together

Key Decision N
Date First Published: >

CABINET

Date of Meeting: 13 April 2021

Report Title: Cheshire East Council Corporate Peer Challenge Report – One Year On

Portfolio Holder: Cllr Jill Rhodes, Public Health and Corporate Services

Senior Officer: Jane Burns, Executive Director of Corporate Services

1. Report Summary

1.1 In January 2020, Cheshire East Council hosted its first Corporate Peer Challenge (CPC). Facilitated by the Local Government Association (LGA), a peer team consisting of councillors and senior officers from local authorities around the UK examined the Council's leadership, governance, financial planning and capacity to deliver its priorities. This is part of a commitment to local government leading its own improvement.

1.2 The team spent four days on-site in Cheshire East, during which they:

- Spoke to over 180 people including a range of council staff together with councillors and external stakeholders.

- Gathered information and views from more than 40 discussions, focus groups and observing regular meetings as well as additional research and reading.

- Visited key sites of the borough to look at practice in action and engaged with staff at other locations.

- Collectively spent c. 270 hours on-site to determine their findings, the equivalent of one person spending eight weeks in Cheshire East.

1.3 A final report of their findings was received and reported to Cabinet in June 2020.

1.4   The CPC Peer Team, in its feedback presentation when on site and in a written report (Appendix A), delivered the following key observations and recommendations:

2. Key recommendations:

2.1   Continue with the Council's commitment to staff culture and wider workplace wellbeing.

2.2   Develop and launch a new Corporate Plan.

2.3   Provide clarity regarding the process, decisions and timelines for the introduction of the Committee System.

2.4   Finalise technical and political decisions that will underpin the new Committee System.

2.5   Consider the strategic and operational context in which the Committee System will be operating.

2.6   Refine the council's approach to strategic finance and create dialogue regarding collective appetite to risk.

2.7   Communicate priorities for working in a partnership environment and learn the lessons of historic practice and approaches.

2.8   Refine the work programme and focus of Scrutiny Committees to support internal challenge and improvement.

2.9   Develop new approaches to engage councillors in neighbourhood working.

2.10   Review the findings of the 2019 Resident Survey to inform future relations with residents.

3. Recommendations

3.1   That Cabinet notes the progress to date, and the delivery of key actions to respond to the Corporate Peer Challenge recommendations.

4. Reasons for Recommendations

4.1   The recommendations made by the Corporate Peer Challenge Team reflect what the Council fed back at the time on the LGA's 'healthcheck' on our overall strategic direction and planning. They have been used to reflect on the future direction of the Council and to inform the refresh of the council's Corporate Plan for 2021-2025.

5. Other Options Considered

5.1   None. The Council welcomed the opportunity to host a Corporate Peer Challenge visit and would want to demonstrate positive action to respond to the recommendations.

6. Background

6.1   Since 2012 the Local Government Association (LGA) has provided, as part of its support to the sector, the facilitation of Corporate Peer Challenge (CPC) reviews whereby senior members and officers from other local authorities, supported by LGA staff, visit the Council with the objective to provide constructive feedback to inform improvement plans and support corporate learning.

6.2   The peer team considered the following five lines of enquiry which form the core components of all CPCs. These are the areas believed to be critical to councils' performance and improvement:

- **Understanding of the local place and priority setting:** Does the Council understand its local context and place and use that to inform a clear vision and set of priorities?

- **Financial planning and viability:** Does the Council have a financial plan in place to ensure long term viability and is there evidence that it is being implemented successfully?

- **Capacity to deliver:** Is organisational capacity aligned with priorities and does the council influence, enable and leverage external capacity to focus on agreed outcomes?

- **Political and managerial leadership:** Does the Council provide effective political and managerial leadership through its elected members, officers and constructive relationships and partnerships with external stakeholders?

- **Governance and decision-making:** Is political and managerial leadership supported by good governance and decision-making arrangements that respond to key challenges and enable change to be implemented?

6.3   In addition to these, the Council asked the peer team to provide feedback on the workforce culture, as well as the organisational approach to internal assurance.

6.4   This has been subsequently followed by a formal report (Appendix A), summarising the peer team's feedback with their recommendations for improvement. There was a delay between the date of the visit and the receipt of the report because of the impact of COVID-19.

6.5   During the last 12 months, the Council has made considerable progress on all of the key recommendations, as follows;

6.5.1 Recommendation 1: Continue with the council's commitment to staff culture and wider wellbeing.

The following extract from the report provides a helpful summary:

The Corporate Peer Challenge Team spent four days on site in Cheshire East. During this time the Team spoke to a broad range of stakeholders, including staff, councillors, and partner organisations. The team received a broad range of feedback and were struck by the positivity of the staff working for the organisation, and the remarkable progress that has been made in improving workforce culture in a relatively short space of time. The importance of this work was illustrated by clear leadership and commitment, including the determination of councillors to drive and prioritise improvement. These messages were received from multiple levels within the organisation and this improvement has been embedded across multiple teams and locations. These improvements in culture have also supported the council to advance their internal assurance, with officers stating their comfort to 'call out' and 'professionally challenge' practice when appropriate. Alongside this cultural shift, the Team recognised the practical actions that have been taken, including improved management oversight and the development of supporting assurance frameworks and action plans.

- All of the recommendations set out in the LGA culture review have now been addressed and work continues to embed the vision for workplace culture, values, behaviours and employee deal across the Council.

- The Council has done a considerable amount of work to support wellbeing and a large proportion of the workforce working remotely. A Pulse survey of staff carried out in July 2020 was positive for example 83% of staff agreed communications has been effective and 75% agreed the Council has provided effective wellbeing support.http://moderngov.cheshireeast.gov.uk/ecminutes/documents/s79451/Covid%20Report%20-%20app%202.pdf A second Pulse survey is underway which will give further insight.

- The wellbeing of staff has been an essential part of the Council's Covid-19 response. This has included weekly Talk Listen and Chat (TLC) meetings and weekly Manager Support calls. These forums have fed into the workplace workstream to inform the planning towards new ways of working and has also resulted in the

development of a workplace wellbeing conversation toolkit for staff, additional e-learning and virtual training and the introduction of 'Golden Practices' 1 and 2, which focus on staff wellbeing.

- The Brighter Future Champions continue to support the other work streams within the Brighter Future Transformation Programme. Virtual meetings of the Champions have continued to be held on a monthly basis throughout the Covid pandemic with the Chief Executive, providing a valuable source of staff engagement.

6.5.2 Recommendation 2: Develop and launch a new Corporate Plan.

- The Cheshire East Council Corporate Plan for 2021-2025 has been developed following consultation and engagement between 1 October 2020 and 27 November 2020. The feedback was positive, with the clear support for the Council's proposed vision and the main priorities.

- In February 2021, both Cabinet and full Council approved the Corporate Plan for 2021-2025. By developing the Corporate Plan alongside the MTFS, we have ensured that the plan is resources. The full engagement reports on both documents were published. The new Corporate Plan promotes a vision of an Open, Fairer, Greener Cheshire East.

- The Corporate Plan will now provide the foundation and basis for all business planning and will inform the development of a new performance framework to measure the success of the plan and support the delivery of the new committee structure of governance.

6.5.3 Recommendations 3, 4 & 5: Provide clarity regarding the process, decisions and timelines for the introduction of a committee system.

- On 19th November, a special meeting of Council took place, specifically convened to consider recommendations from the Council's Constitution Committee, relating to a proposed change of governance arrangements, from the existing Leader and Cabinet model of decision-making, to a Committee System of decision-making.

- Council agreed the Constitution Committee's recommendations, and also agreed that the new

arrangements will be implemented with effect from the Council's Annual General Meeting in May 2021.

- Preparations are happening at pace to secure implementation which will be considered by Council on 19 April. Members and officers will undertake training and further work will be undertaken to ensure that the Council's Constitution is suitably amended in line with the wishes of Council.

6.5.4 Recommendation 6: Refine the council's approach to strategic finance and create dialogue regarding collective appetite to risk.

- 2020/21 has seen unprecedent financial challenges for all councils, including Cheshire East. The financial implications of COVID-19 started to emerge in March 2020 and have been regularly tracked and monitored since then. Regular reports have been brought to Cabinet, Corporate OSC and the Audit and Governance Committee.

- Within year budget forecasting and reporting demonstrates that the council has lived within its budget for the first time in many years.

- A new four-year balanced Medium-Term Financial Strategy has been developed and approved by Cabinet and Council in February 2021. This aligns to the new Corporate Plan and reflects investment in services to support those most in need, vital infrastructure and essential services. It has a focus on modern and efficient working practices.

6.5.5 Recommendation 7: Communicate priorities for working in a partnership environment and learn the lessons of historic practice and approaches.

- The local response to the COVID-19 pandemic has been a partnership response which has strengthened working across Cheshire East and the wider sub-region. This has been vital to the delivery of the borough-wide response to protect our residents.

- There continues to be regular communication and engagement with partners on their priorities and opportunities for support and joint working.

- The new Corporate Plan clearly articulates the ambition and the vital importance of for partnership working to deliver priorities as they are laid out.

6.5.6 **Recommendation 8: Refine the work programme and focus of Scrutiny Committees to support internal challenge and improvement.**

- Overview and Scrutiny Committees have continued to set and drive their own agendas. A full report was presented to Council on 21 October 2020.

- Scrutiny arrangements in the new Committee System will focus on a single scrutiny committee covering statutory scrutiny functions.

6.5.7 **Recommendation 9: Develop new approaches to engage councillors in neighbourhood working.**

- This has been identified as a priority in the new Corporate Plan. Further work will be taken forward through the new committee system.

- Council on 17 February 2021 agreed to devolve Ward Member Budgets for highways-related activities in 2021/22.

6.5.8 **Recommendation 10: Review the findings of the 2019 Residents Survey to inform future relations with residents.**

- The Residents Survey concluded in November 2019 with a 46% response rate, (an improvement on the 2017 survey). The results of the survey have been shared with relevant service leads, including planning, customer services, highways and countryside rangers.

- The key findings have all been considered and have been included as areas for action in the refreshed **Corporate Plan 2021-25.**

- In addition to this, the Cabinet has recently approved a **Customer Experience Strategy.** The strategy shows a clear link to the Residents survey and how we can improve the customer journey and the overall experience and expectations of the council.

- We will continue to measure resident satisfaction and experience across our services to drive change and improvement.

6.6 The ten key recommendations from the CPC reflected back the issues of the day. Since then, the unprecedented circumstances of and response to Covid-19 has highlighted a need for further improvement which have informed the development of the Council's newly published Corporate Plan for 2021-2025.

6.7 Corporate Peer Challenges would ordinarily be followed up after 18-24 months. Again, Covid-19 has impacted on that expectation. Discussions are ongoing with our LGA Principal Adviser about appropriate arrangements in the circumstances.

7. Implications of the Recommendations

7.1. Legal Implications

7.1.1 Engaging in the LGA Corporate Peer Challenge and acting on the feedback is not mandated. The actions taken and progress to date, will however, assist the Council to meet its duty to secure continuous improvement in the way in which its functions are exercised having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness (s 3 LGA 1999).

7.1.2 As work continues and actions are identified, any direct legal implications which will be considered individually and in line with the actions required.

8.2 Finance Implications

8.2.1 The cost of the Corporate Peer Challenge was included within the authority's annual subscription to the LGA. Other costs are internal and related to officer time. The cost of implementing the actions resulting from the recommendations continue to be met from current budgets (unless separately identified and agreed as part of the budget setting and approval process).

8.2.2 There is no direct impact on the council's Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) arising from this report.

8.3 Policy Implications

8.3.1 The findings from the Corporate Peer Challenge supports. continue to be used to drive improvement and are reflected in the new Corporate Plan.

8.4 Equality Implications

8.4.1 The CPC feedback report was published on the council's website ensuring compliance with the Public Sector Bodies (Websites and Mobile Applications) (No. 2) Accessibility Regulations 2018.

8.5 Human Resources Implications

8.5.1 Implementing the required actions has required the support and contribution of several officers and members, including the Brighter Future Champions, equality champions and named officers linked to ongoing programmes of work such as the implementation of the committee system and the culture programme. This has been achieved within existing resource with management arrangements in place to consider skills and capacity.

8.5.2 The feedback report has clearly recognised the positive contribution of the council staff and members in engaging with the workforce culture programme, and a key recommendation is to ensure that this progress is continued and sustained.

8.6. Risk Management Implications

8.6.1 The Corporate Peer Challenge report did not identify significant risks.

8.7 Rural Communities Implications

8.7.1 Implementing any required actions will have indirect implications for our rural communities, which will be considered individually and in line with the actions required. For example, the Corporate Plan 2021-2025 includes priorities and commitments which will impact rural communities. These impacts will be considered and reported through individual work programmes as they are developed.

8.8 Implications for Children & Young People/Cared for Children

8.8.1 Implementing any required actions will have indirect implications for children and young people/cared for children, which will be considered individually and in line with the actions required. For example, the Corporate Plan 2021-2025 includes priorities and commitments which will impact children and young people/cared for children. These impacts will be considered and reported through individual work programmes as they are developed.

8.9 **Public Health Implications**

8.9.1 Implementing any required actions will have indirect implications for public health which will be considered individually and in line with the actions required. For example, the Corporate Plan 2021-2025 includes priorities and commitments which will impact the wider public health of the borough. These impacts will be considered and reported through individual work programmes as they are developed.

8.10 **Climate Change Implications**

8.10.1 Implementing any required actions will indirectly support the Council to reduce its carbon footprint and achieve environmental sustainability. For example, the Corporate Plan 2021-2025 includes priorities and commitments which will directly and specifically support environmental priorities and initiatives.

9.0 **Ward Members Affected**

9.1 Developing new approaches to engaging local members has been identified as a priority in the new Corporate Plan. Further work will be taken forward through the new committee system.

10.0 **Consultation & Engagement**

10.1 In preparing for the Corporate Peer Challenge the Council engaged with all officers and members, not only to raise awareness and understanding of the challenge week, but to seek representation and support to attend the 1-1 and focus group discussions.

10.2 As reported by the LGA over 180 people were spoken with during the four-day visit, and feedback sessions were offered to those that attended the meetings.

10.3 The Council will continue to consult, engage and collaborate with residents, officers and key stakeholders to determine the scope and focus of the work to be delivered over the short to medium term.

11.0 **Access to Information**

11.1 Further information on the LGA's Corporate Peer Challenge programme can be found at:

https://local.gov.uk/our-support/peer-challenges

12.0 Contact Information

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

Name: Jane Burns
Job Title: Executive Director of Corporate Services

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Corporate Peer Challenge

Cheshire East Council

13-16 January 2020

Feedback Report

1. Executive Summary:

Cheshire East council has made significant improvements in recent years to address issues of misconduct and to transform the culture of the organisation.   This reform has been made whilst managing wider financial pressures, increased demand and maintaining service standards. The opportunity now exists for Cheshire East to build on these foundations. The council can use their successful approach to organisational change to make wider reforms and service transformations to improve outcomes for residents.

Cheshire East was established in 2009 and covers 450 square miles, with a population of 380,800 residents in 175,000 households. The largest proportion of residents live in the Crewe and Macclesfield areas, with significant settlements in market towns such as Sandbach, Knutsford and Wilmslow. The borough is well connected through road and rail links, including Crewe railway station, which serves as a major junction on the West Coast Mainline, supporting travel to Manchester, Liverpool, North Wales and the Midlands.

Cheshire East has a strong social and economic base, illustrated by several indicators, including the low levels of free school meal eligibility (8.7% against a North West average of 16.2%), high levels of owner-occupied housing (75% against a North West average of 64%), and average household income (£35,800 against a North West average of £27,200). However, there is a considerable range to household income in the borough, varying from £19,900 to £66,600 between the most and least deprived wards. This demonstrates a level of inequality that exists within the borough, with six areas within the most deprived 10% nationally. This, alongside the geographic diversity of the borough has contributed to the notion amongst officers and members that Cheshire East is a "*place of places*", made-up of multiple identities, issues and needs.

The council was led by a Conservative administration from 2009-2019. However, the 'all-out' elections of May 2019 resulted in the council entering 'no-overall control', with there being no individual majority party across the 82 councillors. Since the election, the council has been led by a Joint-Administration comprising Labour and Independent councillors, with a Labour Leader and Independent Deputy Leader.

Historically, Cheshire East has faced a number of internal and external investigations into the practice of the council and the conduct of senior officials and elected members. These investigations were identified and referred for investigation by senior officers regarding matters of procurement, land transactions and the treatment of whistle blowers, and have undoubtedly been damaging to the reputation of the council and the morale of staff. However, it was not the role of the Corporate Peer Team to revisit any individual instances or issues but instead to consider any subsequent learning and improvement that had been applied by the council.

Following the appointment of the Acting Chief Executive in 2017 the council requested a review of the workplace culture that was completed by the LGA. In addition to the themes covered in all corporate peer challenges (CPC), this CPC provides an opportunity to assess progress against the findings and recommendations in culture review. The Peer Team also

reviewed the wider corporate health of the organisation, with a specific focus on the processes of internal assurance and audit.

Shortly prior to the CPC, the council's Acting Chief Executive announced that she would be leaving the organisation to take up a Chief Executive post at another council. The Peer Team heard a range of positive comments regarding the contribution that she had made to the council's improvement, emphasising the importance of securing the correct replacement.

The Corporate Peer Challenge Team spent four days on site in Cheshire East. During this time the Team spoke to a broad range of stakeholders, including staff, councillors, and partner organisations. The team received a broad range of feedback and were struck by the positivity of the staff working for the organisation, and the remarkable progress that has been made in improving workforce culture in a relatively short space of time. The importance of this work was illustrated by clear leadership and commitment, including the determination of councillors to drive and prioritise improvement. These messages were received from multiple levels within the organisation and this improvement has been embedded across multiple teams and locations.

These improvements in culture have also supported the council to advance their internal assurance, with officers stating their comfort to '*call out*' and '*professionally challenge*' practice when appropriate. Alongside this cultural shift, the Team recognised the practical actions that have been taken, including improved management oversight and the development of supporting assurance frameworks and action plans.

The council has a good understanding of the socio-economic needs of the borough and undertakes regular activities to gather the views of residents including resident surveys, and thorough approaches to budget consultation. However, as a new administration, there is naturally further work to be done to set-out the priorities of the organisation following the May 2019 elections. The renewal of the council's Corporate Plan provides an opportunity to communicate these priorities within the context of needs, resources, and local partnerships.

Following the May 2019 election, the joint administration confirmed their commitment to operate an "inclusive model of governance". Following the Peer Review on 30 January, Group Leaders have agreed to defer a decision to change the Council's model of governance; moving from a Cabinet and Leader model to a Committee System with a view to implementation in May in 2021. The importance of this transition cannot be overstated. The council needs to be assured regarding the impact of any changes on timeliness of decision making and collective oversight. It is also important that the appropriate training for members and officers is undertaken and capacity is in place so that the Committee System is successful.

Cheshire East has a net revenue expenditure of approximately £270 million. There has been an estimated reduction in Government funding to Local Government of 49.1% from 2010-2018, this equates to a reduction of 28.6% in the council's spending power. Whilst the council has been required to make savings in recent years, there remains a strong local financial base, including council tax, business rates and new homes bonus. This has resulted in the council having a low exposure to settlement funding assessments from

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Central Government, and wider grants. These grants currently account for approximately 15% of the council's income.

However, the council had forecast to overspend their budget for the past two years (but balanced at year end) and is forecast to overspend for 2019-2020 which clearly needs to be addressed. Finally, unallocated reserves are currently at £10.3 million, this is below the comparator figure for other Unitary Authorities, and the council needs to consider their wider approach and strategy for increasing these reserves. Within this context, the challenge remains for Cheshire East to ensure that they are managing the finances of the council as effectively as possible, and the opportunity exists to review approaches and appetites towards risk across councillors and senior managers to reflect the priorities of the organisation.

The Peer Team recognise the progress that has been made by the council in addressing historic issues and improving the culture of the organisation. The team were also impressed that whilst these improvements were delivered, the council had continued to deliver effective services, including high-performance in areas such as housing delivery. As the Council builds on the progress made to date, the opportunity exists to apply the skills and experience of cultural change initiatives to wider change programmes. This will involve managing the implementation of the Committee System and being prepared for the associated transition. Furthermore, the Joint Administration is presented with the exciting opportunity to communicate medium- and long-term ambitions for the borough through a new Council Plan and aligning resources to these goals through the Medium-Term Financial Strategy. This will support partners and residents to better understanding the aims of the council, whilst also setting out an approach to wider improvements and transformation.

2.   Key Recommendations:

There are a range of suggestions and observations that are included within the main body of this report, that will help to inform potential 'quick wins' and practical actions. The following notes represent the key recommendations from the CPC Peer Team to Cheshire East Council, and reflect the feedback delivered on Thursday 16 January:

1. **Continue with the council's commitment to staff culture and wider workplace wellbeing:** This includes making sure that the progress made to date extends to all teams and considering how shared practice within the organisation could support any outstanding pockets. There is also a need for the council to mitigate the risk of regression following the departure of the Acting Chief Executive who has been central to this work. Finally, the council implement plans for what the next wave of the "Brighter Futures" programme considering how this capacity and momentum could be used to address other issues.

2. **Develop and launch a new Council Plan:** The current corporate plan expires in 2020. This presents an opportunity to progress the work underway to set out the priorities of the new administration, including their commitment to addressing climate change, in a clear and consistent manner to residents, staff and partners. This corporate plan should be set within the context of the needs of the borough, the views of residents, the resources available, and the political priorities for the coming years.

3. **Provide clarity regarding the process, decisions and timelines for the introduction of the Committee System:** The Peer Team recognise that the Joint Administration is committed to replacing the Cabinet and Leader model with the Committee System. The committee system has set out a clear timeline for any transition, however, ongoing work is required to provide clarity to staff regarding the date of implementation as well as training opportunities and requirements.

4. **Finalise technical and political decisions that will underpin the new Committee System:** There remain several key decisions that need to be made regarding the transition towards the Committee System. This includes technical decisions regarding the number and scope of committees, the role of Committee Chairs, and the size of each Committee. However, there also remain several important political decisions that need to be finalised regarding the structure and operation of the new system. Alongside these political decisions associated with the new approach to governance, the council needs to consider the levels of decisions and delegation which it is comfortable to be made by officers across the organisation, reflecting the recent staff survey finding to empower staff and distribute decision making across the organisation. This should include reflecting on current arrangements in-light of proposed reforms.

5. **Consider the strategic and operational context in which the Committee System will be operating:** It is important that the implementation of the Committee System is not viewed as a technical process in isolation alone. Therefore, the council will need to assure themselves of the following alongside the new model of Governance:

   – The timeliness of decision making.
   – Collective oversight for strategic issues that cut across multiple Committees.
   – The impact of the new model on partnership working.
   – The relationship of decision making with neighbourhood forums.
   – The training and development required for councillors and officers.
   – The communication and engagement required with staff throughout this process.

6. **Refine the council's approach to strategic finance and create dialogue regarding collective appetite to risk:** The council has taken a very prudent approach in addressing financial challenges to date. However, further improvements could be made including:

   – The relationship between transformation programmes and budgetary pressures.
   – The monitoring and tracking of benefits and savings across the organisation.
   – Review the council's appetite towards risk in core budget assumptions, and the relationship with reserves.
   – Simplifying the council's Medium-Term Financial Strategy to ensure that it is more focused and succinct.
   – Review the medium-term financial strategy to ensure resources reflect the content of a newly developed corporate plan for a four-year period.

7. **Communicate priorities for working in a partnership environment and learn the lessons of historic practice and approaches:** The council works in a complex partnership context and should consider the areas of work that it wants to prioritise. This

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should be communicated clearly to partners to support clarity on ambition. The council should also consider the lessons learnt from successful partnership projects, as well as instances which have not gone to plan.

8. **Refine the work programme and focus of Scrutiny Committees to support internal challenge and improvement:** The council may benefit from considering the relationship between breadth and depth within Scrutiny Committees, and the topics and issues that would most benefit from Scrutiny input or working groups. The council should also be proactive in identifying their approach to enabling effective challenge within any Committee System in the future.

9. **Develop new approaches to engage councillors in neighbourhood working:** The council should consider new ways of working that give more focus to the role of councillors as community leaders. This could potentially include the development of neighbourhood budgets, providing the opportunity for councillors to support local schemes, including the development of a new conversation with residents regarding expectations as the council moves forward.

10. **Review the findings of the 2019 Resident Survey to inform future relations with residents:** The council is currently processing the results from their most recent resident survey since 2017. This information should be used to identify areas of improvement in customer relations and support the council's next wave of cultural change.

3.   Summary of the Peer Challenge Approach:

3.1   The Peer Team:

Peer Challenges are delivered by experienced councillor and officer peers from across the sector. The make-up of the peer team reflects the requirements of the council and the specific focus of the peer challenge. Members of this team were selected based on their relevant experience and expertise, and their involvement was agreed with the Council prior to arriving on site. The peers who delivered the Cheshire East Corporate Peer Challenge were:

• **Tracey Lee** – Chief Executive of Plymouth City Council;

• **Cllr Hannah Dalton** – Epsom and Ewell Borough Council;

• **Sarah Messenger** – Workforce Consultant Local Government Association;

• **Cllr Chris Read** – Leader of Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council;

• **Neil Thornton** – Executive Director Corporate Services, Rochdale Borough Council;

• **Tim Watkinson** – Principal Advisor Local Government Association;

• **Matthew Dodd –** LGA Challenge Manager.

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3.2   Scope and focus

The peer team considered the following five questions which form the core components looked at by all Corporate Peer Challenges that the LGA undertakes. These are the areas that are critical to a councils' performance and improvement:

1. **Understanding of the local place and priority setting:** Does the council understand its local context and place, and use that to inform a clear vision and set of priorities?

2. **Leadership of Place:** Does the council provide effective leadership of place through its elected members, officers and constructive relationships and partnerships with external stakeholders?

3. **Organisational leadership and governance:** Is there effective political and managerial leadership supported by good governance and decision-making arrangements that respond to key challenges and enable change and transformation to be implemented?

4. **Financial planning and viability:** Do the council have a financial plan in place to ensure long term viability and is there evidence that it is being implemented successfully?

5. **Capacity to deliver:** Is organisational capacity aligned with priorities and does the council influence, enable and leverage external capacity to focus on agreed outcomes?

Additionally, Cheshire East asked for the CPC process to consider two additional areas:

1. **Workforce and Culture:** What progress has been made following the 2017 Workforce Review into issues of bullying, harassment and working environment?

2. **Internal Assurance and Audit:** How effective are the systems and processes that the council has put in place following investigations into areas of historic practice?

3.3   The Peer Challenge Process:

It is important to stress that the CPC process is not an inspection. Peer challenges are designed to focus on improvement, and each is tailored to meet individual councils' needs and context. They are designed to complement and add value to a council's own performance and improvement. The process is not designed to provide an in-depth or technical assessment of plans and proposals. The peer team used their experience and knowledge of local government to reflect on the information presented to them by people they met, things they saw and material and evidence that they read.

The current LGA sector-led improvement support offer includes an expectation that all councils will have a Corporate Peer Challenge every four to five years. This was the first CPC which Cheshire East has undertaken, but where appropriate these findings have been

cross-referenced against other external reports. There is an expectation that the Council will consider a further CPC from 2023 onwards.

Prior to arriving on site, the Peer Team were provided with a Self-Assessment developed by the council. This document is designed to highlight good practice and the current issues of the council in order to support the peer team to identify emerging questions and themes. Moreover, this document provides an important opportunity for Cheshire East Council to reflect on their achievements and progress to-date and consider their ambition and actions for future years. In addition to this Position Statement, the Peer Team prepared for this challenge by reviewing a wider range of supporting documents and information, in order to ensure that they were familiar with the council and the challenges it is facing. The team then spent four days onsite, during which they:

- Spoke to **more than 180 people** including a range of council staff, elected Members, external partners and wider stakeholders.

- Gathered information and views from **more than 40 meetings, focus groups and discussions**. This including **attending and observing business meetings** of the Council, including Cabinet on Tuesday 7 January.

- **Visited key sites of the borough** including Crewe Lifestyle Centre, Jubilee House, and Nantwich Library to look at the practice of the council in action. Members of the team also visited other council locations and offices, including Westfields and Delamere House to engage with **staff at other locations.**

- Collectively spent **c. 270 hours on-site to determine our findings,** the equivalent of one person spending **eight weeks in Cheshire East.**

This report provides a summary of the Peer Team's findings. It builds on the feedback presentation provided by the peer team at the end of their on-site visit (16 January 2020). In presenting feedback to you, they have done so as fellow local government Officers and Members, not professional consultants or inspectors. By its nature, the peer challenge is a snapshot in time, and we appreciate that some of the feedback may be about issues that you are already addressing and progressing.

4. Feedback:

4.1 Understanding of the local place and priority setting:

As the only organisation that works across the specific geography of "Cheshire East", the council is unique in serving the population of the borough. The council was able to provide a depth of information regarding the needs of the borough. This information helped the Peer Team to better understand the profile of Cheshire East, and the population that the council serves:

- **Ageing Demographics:** The age profile of the borough is older than the national average with 22.5% of residents over the age of 65, compared to an average across England of 18%. This profile is due to become more prominent over coming years,

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with a forecast increase in residents over the age of 65 by 17,000, compared to a decrease of over 6,000 in working age residents.

– **Housing and Development:** Over the past three-years there have been 7,145 new homes that have been built in the borough. This included the delivery of 1,737 affordable homes during the same period. Approximately 28% of the houses in the borough are detached, compared to a North West average of 13%.

– **Business and Economy:** It is estimated that there are approximately 20,000 businesses that are located within the borough across several sectors. This has continued to the economic strength of the borough, estimated at £14.4bn.

Beyond an understanding of the population and needs of residents at a borough level the council has a very strong understanding of the needs and variations that exist between wards. Over the course of the time spent in Cheshire East, the Peer Team heard frontline staff, managers and councillors all refer to the tools and processes which are used to capture the different issues and needs at a ward level. The "tartan rug" which assesses wards through a red, amber, green system is an effective way for the council to understand local issues.

As well as the socio-economic needs of the borough, the council has in-place a robust scorecard approach to assessing the performance of services across Directorates. This helped the Peer Team to understand areas of both good and challenging performance for the council. This included the increasing visitor numbers to council owned leisure facilities (1,786,656), the strong local tax base for the authority (98.65% collection), and the average response time for answering calls within the customer contact centre (116 seconds). Throughout the team's time on site, a number of participants also raised issues regarding the levels of customer service and stated their ambition to improve council performance in this area. It was also clearly articulated to the Peer Team that issues of climate change are a priority area for the council moving forward.

In addition to the use of needs and performance information, the council has a clear commitment to engaging and consulting with residents. This has included the operation of a Digital Influence Panel which contains approximately 1,400 members and has been used to inform a broad range of consultations. This Panel replaced the previous Citizen's Panel and is used as a contact list and starting point for consultations. This includes the budget consultation which closed shortly before the peer team arrived on-site. The Peer Team also saw first-hand examples of high-quality community engagement through the work of the Connected Communities Programme during our time on-site.   The Peer Team recognises the appetite and ambition of council to improve and extend consultation and engagement, and the ongoing work that the council is undertaking to develop a framework to support this.

The council's commitment to conducting bi-annual resident attitude surveys makes a strong contribution to their insight into the opinions and aspirations of residents. This survey was distributed to approximately 8,000 households (4.5% of the borough) in late 2019 and results will be available in early 2020. This process will provide a valuable update on the findings from the 2017 survey, which included 81% satisfaction with Cheshire East as a place to live, but a much lower satisfaction rate of 56% with "how Cheshire East runs things". This reflected a response of 56% for those who said that they did not believe the council "acts on the concerns of local residents".

These results were produced in September 2017 at the height of several high-profile local issues for the council. However, it is important that the results from the 2019 survey are distributed and understood across the organisation. This intelligence will indicate the extent to which the council's improvements in workforce culture have extended to external customers and residents and will provide essential information for were the efforts of the next wave of cultural transformation should be applied.

The current corporate plan for Cheshire East runs from 2016-2020. It includes core values and strategic outcomes and is well understood within the organisation. However, the process of developing a new corporate plan presents a timely opportunity for the Joint Administration to set out future priorities and focus and communicate the type of council that they want to create in line with the financial challenges facing the organisation, the needs of the borough, and the strategic context in which the council is working. This process will also enable the council to consider how priorities relate to the ambition of partners, and the aspirations of residents. However, it is important that the council distinguishes between the long-term corporate objectives that need to be included in a new council plan, and the short-term opportunities that can be progressed in the interim, and to avoid the risk of missing immediate opportunities for improvement or the clear short-term priorities of councillors.

It was recognised across the organisation that councillors have a unique understanding of their local ward and issues. There is an opportunity to bring together councillors with the wider engagement work that is taking place through the Connected Communities Programme and Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Champions. This work could be extended through the introduction of local neighbourhood budgets to support councillors in their role as community leaders to broker a new conversation with residents.

4.2   Leadership of Place:

The Peer Team recognise the complexity of partnership working in Cheshire East and support the pragmatic approach that has been taken to date. The council has made significant contributions to local forums for partnerships working including:

- The Constellation Partnership;
- The Cheshire East NHS Place Partnership Board;
- The Cheshire and Warrington Local Enterprise Partnership Board;
- The Cheshire East Health and Wellbeing Board;
- The Cheshire and Warrington Sub-Regional Leaders Board;
- The Cheshire East Leaders Board;
- The Place Board.

The Peer Team noted the complex structures and multitude of forums for partnership working in the borough and felt that they may benefit from being reviewed or simplified to ensure that they are effective and that there are clear lines of accountability.

The positive contribution that the council has made to the sub-region was confirmed throughout the course of the review. This included significant praise for the contribution that the council has made as Chair of the Sub-Regional Leaders Board; with specific

praise for the annual conference, and the increased focus on bringing together the people and place agendas through the concept of inclusive growth. This positive approach towards partnership working was recognised by council staff in both operational and management positions, who spoke about the importance of working with partners.

Outside the contribution that the council has made to partnership forums, the Peer Team also heard positive examples of direct partnership working. This was illustrated by the work that was conducted by Cheshire East Council in partnership with Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service following the Beechmere Care Home Fire. Following the fire in August 2019, the Council worked in partnership with Fire and Rescue, as well as the wider care market to support the 123 residents of the extra care village who were affected.

However, despite some strong examples of partnership working, the Peer Team recognised that relationships across all local partners are mixed and includes instances and programmes of partnership working which have not run smoothly, including work on shared services and systems with some partners. As a learning organisation, it is important that the council continues to consider any lessons learnt from these programmes, and how these issues could be resolved or avoided in future. These lessons should be shared internally to support continuous improvement.

The partner organisations that the Peer Team spoke to through this process were keen to develop long-term strategic relations with the council. This could be supported through the clear articulation of the council's priorities through a new council plan, enabling a structured conversation built around long-term goals. This approach will also enable relationships between organisations to be grounded in the needs of communities, rather than being transactional in nature, or based on individual councillors or members. We also note, however, that the geography of Cheshire East inevitably gives rise to complex partnership arrangements, and that the Council will wish to prioritise how and when different relationships develop in order to secure maximum value. Given the resources and capacity implications of partnership working, it is important that the council considers which partnership initiatives are a priority, and resources them appropriately.

The council may also wish to consider and communicate its appetite for shared roles and shared services. There are several legacy arrangements that are in place that would benefit from a formal review, including the formal footing which underpins shared services with neighbouring authorities. Progress has been made through the establishment of a Shared Services Committee with Cheshire West and Chester. However, the opportunity exists for this forum to not only support accountability for current models, but to consider their strategic fit and the future appetite of the council. This work should be clearly communicated to partner organisations to support their understanding of prioritisation and pace within this context.

Finally, the opportunity exists for Cheshire East to play a more active role in engaging with local Members of Parliament. Following the 2019 General Election it is recognised that there will be potential changes to the policy context for local government, and it was felt by the Peer Team that the council may benefit by working closer with local MPs to set out their asks and offers to central government.

4.3 Organisational leadership and governance:

Following the suspension and subsequent resignation of the former Chief Executive in 2017 the council appointed an Acting Chief Executive. She is positively regarded by members of staff across the organisation, and partners, and has played a pivotal role in the council's approach to addressing workplace culture.   The acting CEX was praised by officers and partners for her transparency, openness and has modelled many of the behaviours that the council is keen to embed within the workforce. However, the acting Chief Executive will be leaving Cheshire East in the spring of 2020, and the appointment of a new individual will be an important cross-roads for the council.

These improvements in workforce culture are also reflected in improved relationships between councillors and officers. The previous nature of these relationships was particularly damaging and detrimental in 2017, and the Peer Team recognise the stark improvements that have been made. As well as the recognition for the contribution made by the Acting Chief Executive and Senior Leadership Team, the Team heard positive feedback for the leadership demonstrated by the current and previous Leader of the Council on this topic. The Team witnessed first-hand the approach and respect that exists between officers and members throughout the week. This progress has been because both officers and councillors have recognised the key role and responsibility that they have in driving and modelling change.

Following the 'all-out' local elections for all 82 councillors in May 2019 the council moved from being a Conservative administration to no-overall control. A Joint Administration was formed comprising 41 members of the Labour and Independent Groups, including 25 Labour and 16 Independent Group Members. The remaining 41 councillors represent the Conservative, Liberal Democrat, Real Independent and Non-Grouped Independents by 34, four, two and one seats respectively. This included the election of 38 new councillors who had not previously held office. Given the number of newly elected councillors the council should be live to considerations regarding the ongoing training, development and support.

The Joint Administration has settled into new roles and responsibilities well, and there is a clear commitment from the Leader and Deputy Leader to work effectively together. There has been a mature approach to joint working across the Joint Administration, as illustrated by the commitment to appoint Cabinet roles based on skills rather than political interest. The Peer Team appreciated the collegiate relationships that were in-place across Cabinet, and the enthusiasm that existed for the subject matters discussed.

In May 2019 the council passed a Notice of Motion supporting a change in the decision making and governance arrangements for the council. This motion stated that they would move towards a Committee model subject to a legally and constitutionally robust process. Following the CPC process the Council has confirmed that they are planning to implement this system from May 2021.   A change in governance models such as this is a major undertaking that will be central to the council's success over coming years. There are also several risks which need to be managed throughout this process. The Council has made good progress through the Working Group of the Constitution Committee to develop proposals, timelines, and the details of such a system. This has

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included independent advice, visits to other councils that currently operate this system and several councillor engagement sessions.

During the Peer Challenge, there was ongoing discussion regarding the date and process for implementing this new system. Therefore, there is an urgent need to provide clarity regarding this process. This includes making several political and organisational decisions such as the implementation date, the structure and size of Committees, the role of Chairs, and the process for selecting them. It will be important for the culture of the organisation that this information is communicated to staff clearly, and that officers across the council and from multiple levels are engaged in the process. This should also include consideration of any additional capacity that is needed, and the additional training that will be needed for members and officers.

When moving towards the Committee System the council needs to also consider the levels of decision making and delegation that will be applied. It will be central to the success of the new system that decisions are taken at the lowest appropriate level, and that there is understanding of the due processes and approaches. This was illustrated in the 2019 staff survey when only 33% of respondents felt that decisions were taken at the right level.

Beyond the technical process of designing and introducing the Committees, due thought needs to be given to how they will operate within the current context of local government. Whilst many representatives of the council spoke of the need for a 21st century Committee System, this needs to include consideration of issues of collective oversight, timeliness of decision making, accountability and transparency. There will also need to be clarity regarding the relationship between Committees and how councillors work in partnership forums and local area arrangements.

Although the peer team did not explore the operation of scrutiny in depth, the Team recognise that the council has moved towards best practice by allowing opposition councillors to Chair Scrutiny Committees following the May 2019 elections. The Team praise this development in supporting political challenge to drive improvement. Further consideration is needed towards the wider approach of Scrutiny within these new arrangements, including the potential to focus on a smaller number of issues in greater depth, and having fewer items presented for updates on activity (which could be dealt with through group briefings). However, beyond these marginal improvements, a more fundamental decision is required regarding the approach, scope and functions of Scrutiny under any Committee System.

4.4 Financial planning and viability:

The council has an annual turnover of approximately £700 million, and a net revenue expenditure of approximately £270 million. The council is largely financed from local sources of revenue, with council tax accounting for 77% of all funding, and government grants only accounting for 5% of overall funding. The council also enjoys strong business rate growth, with an indicative increase of 5% a year. This has limited the level of reductions that the council has had to make in response to austerity, and they have been able to protect several service areas.

Historically, the council's budget has over-spent by £0.4 million in 2017-2018 and by £1.1 million in 2018-2019. In October 2019 the Council reported that they were forecasting to overspend by £7.5 million for the financial year of 2019-2020. This forecast was largely due to budget pressures from demand-led services within the People's Directorate, previous pension costs, and the achievability of saving targets. These reflect challenges which are faced by many organisations, and the council should consider their approach towards savings across the organisation to share ownership and encourage informed approaches to financial risk.

In previous years there have been transfers from earmarked reserves to address these issues. The council currently has low levels of reserves (£10.3m) for an organisation of their size, and these levels have reduced over recent years. The Chief Finance Officer is aware of this and has publicly stated the intention to act to increase reserve levels in future.

The Medium-Term Financial Strategy reports a budget gap of £11million in 2020-2021, and on Monday 6 January the council closed their budget consultation which included emerging information on proposals to address this gap. The MTFS also provides information on the cumulative savings of £19.9 million that need to be delivered between 2021-2024. It is also believed that the MTFS would benefit from being simplified, presenting a clearer narrative on the council's strategy and use of resources whilst also supporting improved member engagement on content.

Total capital expenditure in 2017-2018 was £88.2million compared to the budget of £120.4million. Expenditure on the capital programme in 2018-2019 was £96.8million compared to the revised budget of £153.8million. Given that the council has benefited to date from significant investment in infrastructure and has a high-level of aspiration for this programme in the future, it is important that the council balances this ambition with the practicalities and capacity to support delivery.

The council takes a pragmatic approach to the delivery of services, and this includes several alternative service delivery vehicles (ASDV) that deliver services on their behalf, including Ansa Environmental, Transport Service Solutions, Orbitas Bereavement Services, and Civicance, which are overseen by a Shareholder Committee. These Vehicles are currently generating a profit, and those with which the peer team engaged were delivering high-quality services. Moving forward, the council should consider their medium-term and long-term goals for their growth and operation.

The council will need to consider the decisions and analysis related to the development of any further ASDVs, including the risks, return, and relationship with wider commissioned services. The council is currently in the process of developing an ASDV for adult social care services (Care4CE) and will need to assure itself regarding the transition of staff to this new organisation and the associated organisational development work. Finally, this transition will require the council to develop new methods to monitor performance and manage quality within a contractual relationship, for services which had previously been under direct control.

The council has a "Brighter Future" Transformation Programme which contains five core work streams:

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- Culture;
- Estates and ICT;
- Customer Experience;
- Commercial;
- Governance.

The Peer Team recognise the importance of these workstreams and that they have been prioritised as a result of their cross-cutting nature and impact on multiple services in the council. However, given the annual overspends within the budget that have been created due to demand led services, the council he council may wish to consider how best to support service transformation linked to existing budget challenges as well as the Brighter Futures Transformation Programme.

Moreover, further work is needed to fully identify and quantify the potential cashable and non-cashable benefits to transformation programmes. This should include an agreed approach to tracking benefits to ensure that it supports councillors to make future decisions regarding invest to save, and wider budgetary decisions. Beyond the strategic input of councillors on these decisions, the potential also exists to introduce neighbourhood budgets to support local schemes and initiatives, including the potential to link with other local funding sources and approaches.

The council would benefit from agreeing and defining their appetite and attitude towards risk financially. This includes consideration of risks from both a management and political perspective. This approach will be central to future transformation programmes and policy objectives but should also be embedded within all of the council's financial assumptions (such as future years income through New Homes Bonus, or the longevity of additional funding announcements). The council may benefit from support to developing their strategic approach to financial management that supports these conversations and enables closer alignment between the budget and priorities.

4.5 Capacity to Deliver:

Cheshire East employs approximately 3,800 staff (this does not include staff in Alternative Service Delivery Vehicles). The Peer Team could not help but notice the energy, passion and commitment of staff working for Cheshire East. It was clear to members of the team that they care hugely about the work that they do and the people of the borough. However, 74% of the council workforce is over the age of 40. This creates natural challenges for succession planning within the council. Whilst staff turnover has remained both stable and low between 10-11%, the council does face challenges due to the number of working days lost due to sickness and ill-health, this was narrowly above 10 days per employee in 2018-2019 against a public sector average of 8.5.

The Acting Chief Executive and wider Leadership Team are visible throughout the organisation and this is appreciated. Staff throughout the organisation spoke with respect for wider members of the Leadership Team, and the actions and behaviours which they have modelled. This has set a high standard for managers across the organisation.

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Cheshire East has a track record of delivering behaviour and culture change. This has been evidenced through the cultural transformation at the council, and the progress of the Brighter Futures Programme. The network of officers that have been created through the Brighter Futures Champions is a valuable resource, these officers have developed their skills and confidence, and are 'bought-in' to the organisation. This network provides an important tool as capacity for future work in this area.

Whilst great progress has been made through the Brighter Futures Programme, the council is clear that culture change is ongoing. With this in-mind, the council needs to continue to invest time, effort and energy into sustaining the change that has been achieved to date. This has been recognised as a key theme within the council's transformation programme and has been resourced appropriately.

The new member enquiry system that has been developed and implemented in 2019 appears to provide a streamlined way of managing queries and questions across a range of service areas. As with all new initiatives such as this, there will need to be a periodic review to ensure that the operation of this approach does not undermine the quality of councillor and officer relationships, and to capture the continuous improvements that can be made to systems.

Staff across the organisation recognised the potential for I.C.T to support their effectiveness in their roles. There were some frustrations with the current ICT systems, including confusion regarding the use of 'bring your own device' and the relationship with flexible mobile working and clarity is needed on this without delay.

The Peer Team noted the publication of the OFSTED report into children's services which was published the week before the CPC took place and rated the council as "requires improvement to be good". The council will need to consider the capacity requirements that are required to act on the findings of this report, and any wider corporate support and approach that may be needed for further progress over coming years. This will require careful balancing with the wider capacity required for corporate transformation, the delivery of savings, and wider service improvement.

The council's transformation plan includes a dedicated workstream on customer experience. As part of this work there is a need to define the standard of customer experience that the council wants to deliver. This work should involve reviewing current standards and focusing on services with known issues of poor customer experience. The planning service was one such area that was identified area which would benefit from an external review.

However, the biggest issue that has the potential to impact upon the capacity of officers and members will be the introduction of the committee system. This is likely to require more members to attend formal meetings, and careful consideration is needed for the corporate support and resources that will be required to support this new system, including the impact on key services such as; finance, policy, legal, and democratic services. Consideration is also needed for the practicalities of this transition, including the timing of meetings, and the potential impact of evening meetings on officers' wider commitments. The Council also raised the potential to 'double run' systems as part of

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their governance transition, this has the potential to place further demands on the capacity of officers.

4.6 Workforce Wellbeing and Culture:

The transformation of the organisational culture within Cheshire East has been profound. When the LGA undertook a workforce review in 2017 it was clear that there were several staff who had experienced or witnessed bullying, felt unsupported by their line manager, or were fearful of the impact of change. This culminated in an unhealthy working environment, and in some cases, staff saying that they were 'ashamed' to admit they worked for the council.

Two years following this review, the council has been able to demonstrate the action plan that they put in place in response to the report, the changes in practice that have been made, and, importantly, the progress that has been made.

The challenge of changing an organisational culture cannot be overstated. This process can often be simplified to communication campaigns, relaunched values or training courses. But it is about changing the emotional relationship between the employee and employer, for example how staff feel when they enter the office, their relationship with their manager, and their wider psychological contract. This emotional relationship does not change easily or quickly.

Cheshire East Council understood that and put in place the key ingredients for success by having visible leadership at the top of the organisation modelling the behaviours that they wanted to embed. By encouraging and facilitating people to talk openly and honestly with each other, and equipping managers with the skills and confidence to manage people well, changing policies and procedures to ensure they are fair and easily understood. By seeking feedback and acting on what people say. The views of staff two years later illustrated that they had experienced and felt the difference.

Importantly, councillors from across all parties are positive about this programme of culture change and understand the ongoing role that they play in 'setting the tone' of the organisation. This was witnessed by the team first hand when watching officers and councillors interact. It is important that there is an ongoing conversation between members and officers to support this relationship. This staff survey also includes challenges for future improvement, such as 30% feeling that the council effectively managed change.

The council has also introduced practical changes to support this improvement, including wellbeing areas to offer a break to staff, and the development of a network of Mental Health First-Aiders.

A healthy organisational culture should be constantly evolving. Whilst there is still further work to do at Cheshire East to make sure that these improvements are made in every team and function, the council should be extremely proud of the progress made to date.

4.7 Internal Audit and Assurance:

In light of the historic investigations the council was keen for the Team to give some attention to internal processes and assurance. Linked to the progress made on workforce culture, the environment within the organisation is now such that any identified concerns are very likely to be 'called out' or challenged, and staff are confident that senior managers would listen to their concerns.

There is also improved management oversight over the identified areas of historic concern. Most notably, procurement and land and property transactions. These controls provide more assurance to the council and should be kept in place to ensure that they are effective and proportionate. This oversight has been accompanied by improvements in systems and processes, including the development of a clear 'Assurance Framework' for Land and Property Transactions, that is in effect an action plan to ensure the necessary actions are implemented. The council have also set up an Asset Board to support the governance on these decisions. These processes have been recognised by both internal and external audit who have carried out reviews and test-checked the operation of the controls. Both internal audit and external audit have confirmed that the controls are now adequate and that the controls are operating as expected.

The required statutory roles of Monitoring Officer and Section 151 Officer are now both held by substantive officers rather than interims, with the importance of these roles recognised by senior management, including the Chief Executive Officer. The appointment of new individuals in key roles (e.g. Head of Audit and Risk, and the Chair of the Audit Committee) provides an opportunity to develop strong relationships across key roles. It was clear to the Peer team that internal audit is recognised and respected within the council.

As with all councils, there is ongoing work to maintain the progress made in this area. This includes regular reviews of core policies and practices to make sure that they remain fit-for purpose and are understood by staff. A review and subsequent awareness campaign of the whistleblowing policy would be particularly helpful. The wider Risk Management Framework of the council would also benefit from a refresh, this could be done in conjunction with the development of an Assurance Framework across all key risk or business areas, potentially utilising the three lines of defence model.

The Audit and Governance Committee of the Council has made improvements in recent years with much more effective challenge being provided through this committee, including reviews of contracts due for renewal. There is currently one 'independent person' on the Committee who is not a member of the council and can therefore help to provide independent challenge. However, the size and membership of the committee may benefit from review to ensure the committee can operate effectively and provide sufficient challenge across all areas of responsibility, including on financial matters.

5 Next steps

5.1 Immediate Next Steps:

We appreciate the senior managerial and political leadership of Cheshire East Council will want to reflect on these findings and suggestions in order to determine how the organisation wishes to take things forward.

As part of the peer challenge process, there is an offer of further activity to support this work. The LGA is well placed to provide additional support, advice and guidance on a number of the areas for development and improvement and we would be happy to discuss this offer. Claire Hogan, (North West Principal Adviser) is the main contact between your authority and the LGA, and her email address is: Claire.hogan@local.gov.uk.

Claire will arrange to meet with recently recruited Chief Executive to discuss this final report, and any support needs that the LGA or those elsewhere in the sector may be able help with. Throughout the Peer Team's time on site, regular feedback was given to the Leader, Deputy Leader, Acting Chief Executive and Executive Director for Corporate Services.

The LGA are also are keen to continue the relationship that has been formed with Cheshire East Council through the peer challenge, building on the openness, transparency and principles of improvement. This will include signposting to examples of best practice in the sector, identifying opportunities, and communicating policy changes in-line with the issues raised within this report. This approach may also include instances when the practice of Cheshire East is communicated to other Councils in the sector to support their improvement journey.

5.2   Follow up visit:

The LGA Corporate Peer Challenge process includes a follow up visit. The purpose of the visit is to help the Council assess the impact of the peer challenge and demonstrate the progress it has made against the areas of improvement and development identified by the peer team. It is a lighter-touch version of the original visit and does not necessarily involve all members of the original peer team. The timing of the visit is determined by the Council. Our expectation is that it will occur within the next 18-24 months

5.3   Next Corporate Peer Challenge:

The current LGA sector-led improvement support offer includes an expectation that all councils will have a Corporate Peer Challenge or Finance Peer Review every four to five years. It is therefore anticipated that Cheshire East Council will commission their next Peer Challenge to take place from 2023-2024.

Finally, all the Peer Team would like to thank the officers and Members of Cheshire East Council for making us feel so welcome during our time on-site and for contributing towards the process.

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Cheshire East Council

Corporate Overview and Scrutiny

Date of Meeting: 08 April 2021

Report Title: Corporate Performance Scorecard 2020/21 Quarter 3

Portfolio Holders: Councillor Amanda Stott – Cabinet Member for Finance, IT and Communications

Councillor Jill Rhodes – Cabinet Member for Public Health and Corporate Services

Senior Officer: Jane Burns – Executive Director for Corporate Services

1. Report Summary

1.1 The report and the attached scorecard provide an update on the latest available performance data enabled by the Corporate Directorate for 2020/21, relating to quarter three.

2. Recommendation

2.1 That the Performance Scorecard 2020/21 Quarter 3 be noted.

3. Reasons for Recommendation

3.1 This report is part of the Council's performance management framework.

4. Other Options Considered

4.1 There are no further options to consider.

5. Background

5.1 The Corporate Directorate Scorecard was first developed in 2017/18.

5.2 The measures included are regularly reviewed by Corporate Leadership Team as part of their quarterly 'Performance Stocktake' meetings and updated regularly in line with the Council's annual business planning process. The most recent Scorecard (relating to quarter three) is presented to Scrutiny for review.

5.3 The Scorecard provides an accessible summary of perfomance against targets within the Corporate Directorate, as well as those enabled by the Corporate Directorate on behalf of the whole Council. The key performance indicators included in the Scorecard support delivery of

business plan objectives and contribute to overall monitoring of the Council's journey towards achieving its Corporate Plan ambitions.

5.4 Multiple services and performance measures were impacted by the COVID 19 pandemic, and the traditional Scorecard was therefore adapted in-year to visually illustrate where performance had been impacted across traditional data sets, using 'blue' colouring for those measures, rather than the traditional 'RAG' ratings.

5.5 We are looking at ways of developing integrated finance, performance, and risk scorecards for 2021/22 in line with the priorities set out in our new Corporate Plan 2021-25.

5.6 In Quarter 3, a few examples of good performance were:

- Our target to reduce the number of calls received to the customer contact centre by 10% was on track at the end of Q3, with a 20% year-on-year reduction.

- Turnaround of Freedom of Information requests continues to exceed targeted response rates required by the Information Commissioner's Office across all directorates.

- Overall, staff sickness rates at the end of Q3 stood at 7.06 days, an improvement on the same period in 2019/20 (7.83 days).

5.7 At the end of Quarter 3, overall performance is mixed. Areas requiring further improvement to achieve targets include:

- Many of our services and traditional Scorecard performance measures were impacted by the COVID 19 pandemic, including an ongoing need to deploy agency staff, including for new areas of work, e.g. Test and Trace.

- The number of apprenticeships continued to climb during Q3, but was severely impacted by the pandemic during Q1, and only 33 out of our target of 82 are in place at the end of Q3. We continue to look at how we can improve take up rates.

6. Implications

6.1. Legal Implications

6.1.1 There are no legal implications arising from this report.

6.2. Finance Implications

6.2.1 The third quarter finance position excluding Covid-19 presents a balanced position (to within budget by 0.4%). However, the Council's budget is under unprecedented pressure due to the Coronavirus and the response required to protect both the health and economic wellbeing of local people and businesses during the Covid-19 Pandemic. To date the Council has received funding related to an array of activities in response to the crisis, although at this current time it is not expected to fully cover all of the costs. The Council will continue to manage and review the financial forecasts in response to the emergency and how this affects the Council's revenue budget to mitigate this position and protect General Reserves.

6.3. Equality Implications

6.3.1 There are no equalities implications arising from this report.

6.4. Human Resources Implications

6.4.1 Human Resources data is integrated into the Corporate Directorate Scorecard, and analysis of performance may identify areas for improvement or actions needed in order to achieve agreed targets.

6.5. Risk Management Implications

6.5.1 The directorate performance reporting process supports the Council's wider performance management arrangements and provides opportunities for the Council to identify and focus on areas for improvement to support achievement of its strategic ambitions. Timely performance reporting mitigates risk of the Council not achieving its outcomes by providing the opportunity to review performance outputs and trends, identify areas for improvement, and introduce corrective and/or proactive actions wherever necessary to address areas of poor - or under - performance.

6.6. Rural Communities Implications

6.6.1 There are no implications for rural communities.

6.7. Implications for Children & Young People

6.7.1 There and no direct implications for children and young people at this stage.

6.8.   Public Health Implications

    6.8.1   There are no direct implications for public health at this stage.

7. Ward Members Affected

    7.1   Performance measures from Directorate Scorecards from a supporting role in production of the quarterly performance reports to Scrutiny. The Directorate Scorecard approach enhances the process of performance reporting to Members.

8. Access to Information

    8.1   Background information can be inspected by contacting the report author.

9. Contact Information

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

    Name: Jane Burns

    Job Title: Executive Director for Corporate Services

    Email: Jane.Burns@cheshireeast.gov.uk

Corporate Directorate Scorecard 2020 - 2021 Q3

Ref	Lead Department	Measure	Portfolio	Responsible Officer	Data Owner	Data Frequency	Directorate Category	Quarter 3 2019/20	Quarter 1 2020/21	Quarter 2 2020/21	Quarter 3 2020/21	Quarter 4 2021	Annual Target 2020/21	RAG/ Covid-19 Impact	Commentary
CS01	Financial and Customer Services	% variance between forecast outturn and total net budget	Finance, IT and Communication	Alex Thompson	Kathy Oliver	Quarterly	Cheshire East	2.4%	N/A	(0.2%) 8.5%	(0.4%) 0%		0%		In black font normal activities. Figures in blue font are extra costs due to Covid-19. The third quarter position excluding Covid-19 presents a balanced position (to within budget by 0.4%). However, the Council's budget is under unprecedented pressure due to the Coronavirus and the response required to protect both the health and economic wellbeing of local people and businesses during the Covid-19 Pandemic. To date the Council has received funding related to an array of activities in response to the crisis. The Council will continue to manage and review the financial forecasts in response to the emergency and how this affects the Council's revenue budget and protect General Reserves.
							Corporate	3.9%	N/A	3.2% 18.5%	2.6% 19.2%		0%		
							People	2.9%	N/A	1.2% 6.8%	1.3% 5.4%		0%		
							Place	-0.1%	N/A	(4.0%) 26.1%	(2.9%) 22.5%		0%		
CS02	Financial and Customer Services	% variance between outturn and budget for capital schemes	Finance, IT and Communication	Alex Thompson	Samantha Oakden	Quarterly	Cheshire East	-11%	N/A	-10%	-20%		15%		As per the narratives below as you can see the capital programm has slipped again since approved at the MTFS stage due to a number of factors including the effect of COVID and having to re-tender some contracts and delays such as obtaining planning consents. At TQR also budgets are closely examined and re-profiled for the MTFS 2021/25. **Corporate:** The reason for the major swing from the Mid-Year review position to the Third Quarter Position was a transfer from the Addendum from the Strategic Commercial Activities allocation for a capital loan of £8m to the Cheshire and Warrington Local Enterprise Partnership for Enterprise Zones. **People:** Since MYR the People Directorate has slipped forward a further £5.3m of their budgets at the TQR position to be spent in 2021/22 onwards. This is across the whole People Directorate programme leaving a forecast outturn position of just over £14.5m opposed to the MTFS starting position of £24.5m. **Place:** In line with the TQR and reprofiling for the MTFS also - the Place Directorate has slipped a further £19m since the Mid-Year Review stage, with Highways & Infrastructure slipping £11.8m, and Growth & Enterprise £6.2m, Environment and Neighbourhood Services increased slightly by £0.800m.
							Corporate	-57%	N/A	-27%	10%		15%		
							People	-32%	N/A	-13%	-41%		15%		
							Place	1%	N/A	-7%	-22%		15%		
CS03	Financial and Customer Services	Recovery of invoiced Housing Benefits overpayments (reported in-year as year-to-date)	Finance, IT and Communication	Paul Manning	Paul Manning	Quarterly	Cheshire East	£634k	£138.2k	£307k (Cumulative)	£448k (cumulative)		£1.1m		Covid-19 has had an impact on this debt stream. CEC took the stance in March 2020 to stop all proactive recovery action on debts and as of the end of June 2020 this restriction was still in place. This meant that no debts were being chased and the only money that was coming in was via actions that had already been put in place. Many customers contacted us during this period to ask for reduced payment arrangements or payment holidays due to changes in financial circumstances. During the first quarter the DWP also suspended its Payment Deduction Programme where money is deducted at source from customers' benefit and they also suspended the arrangement via HMRC where we can obtain employment details to assist with the collection of monies owed. The invoice function for OHB debts was resumed in June and recovery action has recommenced on these debts in line with the Council's stance on recovery action. However, there is little likelihood of reaching target.
CS04	Financial and Customer Services	% of Local Taxation collected within 2 years (Council Tax & Business Rates combined)	Finance, IT and Communication	Paul Manning	Paul Manning	Quarterly	Cheshire East	98.92%	98.13%	98.30%	98.55%		99%		This is an annual outturn figure, which rises in-year. The figure of 98.55% is down on 2019/20 when the figure stood at 98.92%. The indicator has been significantly impacted by reduced payments during the current pandemic. Efforts to encourage payment have recommenced but it is unlikely that previous year's levels will be achieved.
CS05	Financial and Customer Services	% return on the Council's financial investments	Finance, IT and Communication	Alex Thompson	Harvey Woodward	Quarterly	Cheshire East	2.07%	1.50%	1.85%	1.42%		Bank Base Rate + 0.50% (0.10% + 0.50% = 0.60%)		In 2020/21 the Council has received significant amounts of Government funding partly to meet increased emergency COVID expenditure, partly to compensate for future reduced income and, significantly, advanced funding for a Business Grant and Local Restrictions Grant payment schemes to be administered by the Council. The result has been higher cash balances in short term call accounts which pay a lower rate than longer term planned investments. At the same time the bank base rate was reduced from 0.75% to 0.10% leading to reduced rates of interest. The expectation was that cash levels would reduce during 2020/21 leading to an increase in the average rate bolstered by the returns on strategic investment funds. However, continuing funding of COVID measures by the Government has seen on-going higher short term investments.
CS06	Financial and Customer Services	% of net housing benefit payments recovered by subsidy (forecast)	Finance, IT and Communication	Liz Rimmer	Liz Rimmer	Quarterly	Cheshire East	98.3%	97.2%	97.26%	97.3%		98.4%		Increase in supported accommodation claims which do not receive 100% subsidy & increase in customers receiving Universal Credit which results in delays in being identified as protected.
CS07	Financial and Customer Services	Amount of debt recovered as a % of all debt outstanding	Finance, IT and Communication	Alex Thompson	Paul Manning	Quarterly	Cheshire East	N/A	3.4%	9.1%	19.2%		30%		This measure reflects the percentage of total council tax arrears collected during the year. Due to the covid pandemic it is unlikely the at the target will be reached as residents are impacted by the effects on business and employment.
CS08	Financial and Customer Services	Reduce the number of calls received to the customer contact centre	Finance, IT and Communication	Jane Farnworth	Jane Farnworth	Quarterly	Cheshire East	98,570	69,568	97,142	85,762		10% reduction		There was a 13,105 reduction of call volumes in Q3 compared to the same period last year. The main reason for this is the high volume of waste and recycling calls taken in Q3 2019 during the roll out of the new W&R collection rounds. Furthermore, there has been little recovery action taken in relation to C/Tax bills during the pandemic and therefore customers have not routinely been contacting the Council about their bills. With the recovery process restarting in January 2021 there will be an above average increase in calls to the C/Tax line as customers start to seek assistance with their payment arrangements. The overall year-to-date figure in call volumes is 252,472 compared to 318,726, a reduction of 66,254.
CS09	Financial and Customer Services	% of waivers compared to contracts awarded	Finance, IT and Communication	Alex Thompson	Lianne Halliday	Quarterly	Cheshire East	3.61%	11.7%	13.8%	1.85%		TBC		11 waivers for the 1st quarter. 9 of these were due to COVID-19 and having to directly award contracts for PPE, accommodation and care support. Without COVID-19 we would have only reported 2 waivers. 10 waivers for the 2nd quarter, 2 due to COVID-19 and 8 BUA Waivers. There have been 10 COVID waivers in total this year. If these were removed to compare with previous years then the total would be 12 for 2020/21 (compared with 10 for the same period in 2019/20). 1 waiver approved in the 3rd quarter - ICT.
							Corporate	0%	1.06%	6.94%	1.85%		TBC		
							People	3.61%	10.6%	6.94%	0%		TBC		
							Place	0%	0%	0%	0%		TBC		
CS10	Financial and Customer Services	Number of non adherence to Contract Procedure Rules (Cumulative data)	Finance, IT and Communication	Alex Thompson	Lianne Halliday	Quarterly	Cheshire East	0	1	2	2		0		1 Non adherence for Executive search and selection for the position of Director of Governance and Compliance. 1 School governor training using 'Modern Governor' By Herts For learning Ltd – within Children's services.
							Corporate	0	1	1	1		0		
							People	0	0	1	1		0		
							Place	0	0	0	0		0		
CS11	Financial and Customer Services	% Spend with local providers	Finance, IT and Communication	Alex Thompson	Lianne Halliday	Quarterly	Cheshire East	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A		45%		This is an annual figure so only reported once a year. The local spend for 2019/20 was 43%

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Ref	Lead Department	Measure	Portfolio	Responsible Officer	Data Owner	Data Frequency	Directorate Category	Quarter 3 2019/20	Quarter 1 2020/21	Quarter 2 2020/21	Quarter 3 2020/21	Quarter 4 202021	Annual Target 2020/21	RAG/ Covid-19 Impact	Commentary
CS12	Governance and Compliance Services	% of complaints resolved within timescales - Stage 1	Public Health & Corporate	Sandra Smith	Juan Turner	Quarterly	Cheshire East	70% (Q3) 79% (Cumulative)	88%	84% (Q2) 86% (Cumulative)	81% (Q3) 84% (Cumulative)		90%		Total number of complaints received in Q3: Cheshire East - 373 Corporate - 51 People - 69 Place - 253
							Corporate	92% (Q3) 92% (Cumulative)	93%	86% (Q2) 89% (Cumulative)	90% (Q3) 90% (Cumulative)		90%		
							People	72% (Q3) 74% (Cumulative)	68%	67% (Q2) 67% (Cumulative)	64% (Q3) 66% (Cumulative)		90%		The majority of complaints received continue to be for the Place directorate with 68% of the complaints received in Q3. Waste and Recycling, Highways and Planning are the top three areas which received complaints in the directorate during the quarter.
							Place	67% (Q3) 78% (Cumulative)	92%	87% (Q2) 89% (Cumulative)	84% (Q4) 88% (Cumulative)		90%		
CS13	Governance and Compliance Services	% of complaints resolved within timescales - Stage 2	Public Health & Corporate	Sandra Smith	Juan Turner	Quarterly	Cheshire East	67% (Q3) 69% (Cumulative)	84%	87% (Q2) 86% (Cumulative)	84% (Q3) 85% (Cumulative)		90%		The Council issued 45 Stage 2 responses in Q3 of which 7 were issued late. Nevertheless there was an improvement overall when compared to the previous quarter.
							Corporate	100% (Q3) 92% (Cumulative)	100%	100% (Q2) 100% (Cumulative)	100% (Q3) 100% (Cumulative)		90%		
							People	77% (Q3) 75% (Cumulative)	100%	89% (Q2) 94% (Cumulative)	78% (Q3) 86% (Cumulative)		90%		
							Place	57% (Q3) 63% (Cumulative)	76%	84% (Q2) 80% (Cumulative)	88% (Q3) 83% (Cumulative)		90%		
CS14	Governance and Compliance Services	% of Freedom of Information requests completed within timescales	Public Health & Corporate	Sandra Smith	Helen Sweeney	Quarterly	Cheshire East	96% (Q3) 96% (Cumulative)	97%	96%(Q2) 97% (Cumulative)	97% (Q3) 97% (Cumulative)		90%		The regular reminders to all teams and regular follow up by the Compliance and Customer Relations team ensures that the Council continues to exceed the response rates required by the Information Commissioner's Office.
							Corporate	99% (Q3) 98% (Cumulative)	92%	99% (Q2) 96% (Cumulative)	98% (Q3) 97% (Cumulative)		90%		
							People	98% (Q3) 96% (Cumulative)	100%	95% (Q2) 97% (Cumulative)	100% (Q3) 98% (Cumulative)		90%		
							Place	93% (Q3) 95% (Cumulative)	100%	95% (Q2) 97% (Cumulative)	95% (Q3) 96% (Cumulative)		90%		
CS15	Governance and Compliance Services	Number of Freedom of Information requests received	Public Health & Corporate	Sandra Smith	Helen Sweeney	Quarterly	Cheshire East	390 (Q3) 1,239 (Cumulative)	243	363 (Q2) 606 (Cumulative)	371 (Q3) 977 (Cumulative)		N/A		There has been a slight increase in the number of cases received during Q3. It is worth noting that compliance in responding to requests shown in CS15 continues to exceed the rate required (as shown in CS14).
							Corporate	122 (Q3) 372 (Cumulative)	86	101 (Q2) 187 (Cumulative)	129 (Q3) 316 (Cumulative)		N/A		
							People	90 (Q3) 322 (Cumulative)	51	79 (Q2) 130 (Cumulative)	89 (Q3) 219 (Cumulative)		N/A		
							Place	178 (Q3) 545 (Cumulative)	106	183 (Q2) 289 (Cumulative)	153 (Q3) 442 (Cumulative)		N/A		
CS16	Governance and Compliance Services	% of Agreed Internal Audit Recommended Actions implemented within agreed timescales (of reports issued in year)	Public Health & Corporate	Josie Griffiths	Michael Todd	Quarterly	Cheshire East	75%	Nil	Nil	Nil		80%		Internal Audit resource has been focussed on supporting other areas of the business with their response to the Covid-19 situation and as such no core audit work was undertaken during the first two quarters. The impact of this is that no follow up reviews have been undertaken to determine the % of actions implemented and no reports have been issued. The service has provided resource to the following areas: • Pre payment checks in relation to business grants • Business Continuity • Risk Management • Advice and guidance in relation to changing/new processes to ensure appropriate controls are in place Audit work recommenced in Q3, and reporting will be reflected in Q4 relating to actions from reports issued.
							Corporate	85%	Nil	Nil	Nil		80%		
							People	N/A	Nil	Nil	Nil		80%		
							Place	33%	Nil	Nil	Nil		80%		
CS17	Governance and Compliance Services	Number of audit reports published	Public Health & Corporate	Josie Griffiths	Michael Todd	Quarterly	Cheshire East	Assurance reports - 7 School reports - 4 External Body - 3 Total - 13	Nil	Nil	Nil		N/A		No reports have been issued during the first two quarters (see CS15 commentary)
CS18	Governance and Compliance Services	Number of Riddor reportable accidents	Public Health & Corporate	Josie Griffiths	Paul Ridings	Quarterly	Cheshire East	16	2	3	3		0		3 RIDDOR reportable accidents in Q3: * Tatton Park: 62 year old male came off bike after pedestrian stepped out in front suddenly; knock on arm; member of public taken to hospital * Elm Terrace: 59 year old female; Care4CE support worker slipped on wet slabs; hurt shoulder; off work over 7 days * Tatton park: 27 year old male slipped on gravel injuring ankle; member of public taken to hospital
CS19	Governance and Compliance Services	Number of accidents and incidents requiring the involvement of the Health and Safety Executive	Public Health & Corporate	Josie Griffiths	Paul Ridings	Quarterly	Cheshire East	0	0	0	0		0		Reports instances where the HSE, having received a RIDDOR report from us, decide to investigate further themselves. CLT will be aware that HSE are investigating a separate Ansa issue.
CS20	Governance and Compliance Services	% of deaths Registered within 5 days (no coronial involvement)	Public Health & Corporate	Brian Reed	G Hughes/ J Farrall	Quarterly	Cheshire East	89%	71%	77%	76%		90%		Death registrations are still by telephone only. There are continuing issues with getting doctors to sign the Medical Cause of Death certificate and send it to us in a timely way. All Medical Practices have been remined of the process so we hope for an improvement.
CS21	Governance and Compliance Services	% Births registered within 42 days*	Public Health & Corporate	Brian Reed	G Hughes/ J Farrall	Quarterly	Cheshire East	99%	36%	70%	90%		98%		Birth registrations were allowed again from 17 June, at which point there were just over 900 outstanding births that needed to be registered. *The 42-day target has been removed during lockdown.
CS22	Governance and Compliance Services	Number of ceremonies delivered	Public Health & Corporate	Martin Smith	Martin Smith	Quarterly	Cheshire East	443	0	270	300		> 2019/20		Government stopped all ceremonies in late March, and the first ceremonies of the year were conducted on 4th July. Where ceremonies have been allowed in line with national guidance, severe restrictions over numbers able to attend ceremonies were in place.
CS23	Governance and Compliance Services	Number of enquires received to the member enquiry service	Public Health & Corporate	Martin Smith	Martin Smith	Quarterly	Cheshire East	476	416	684	521		N/A		Members receive training relating to the enquiry service as part of their induction.

Ref	Lead Department	Measure	Portfolio	Responsible Officer	Data Owner	Data Frequency	Directorate Category	Quarter 3 2019/20	Quarter 1 2020/21	Quarter 2 2020/21	Quarter 3 2020/21	Quarter 4 202021	Annual Target 2020/21	RAG/ Covid-19 Impact	Commentary
CS24	Governance and Compliance Services	% of member enquiries completed within 10 working days	Public Health & Corporate	Martin Smith	Martin Smith	Quarterly	Cheshire East	88%	89%	85%	88%		TBC		Consistent performance year-on-year, with 456 enquiries completed within timescales.
CS25	Governance and Compliance Services	Number of Committee meetings held	Public Health & Corporate	Martin Smith	Martin Smith	Quarterly	Cheshire East	49	14	39	49		N/A		A significant reduction in the number of committee meetings in Q1 as a result of Covid-19. All meetings were held virtually, and all Member meetings are now operating remotely.
CS26	Governance and Compliance Services	Number of Childcare proceedings	Public Health & Corporate	Deborah Nixon	Deborah Nickson	Quarterly	Cheshire East	15 (50 cumulative)	12	12	16		N/A		The trend is still that we are issuing but cases are not finishing, due to COVID impact on social care and, in particular, HMCTS's capacity to manage case progression (also due to COVID). We are still mainly operating remote court hearings, though some hybrid (combined presence of some parties, with other parties remote) is also common. The target length of time for completing care and supervision (s31) cases, as set out in the Public Law Outline (PLO), is 26 weeks. Almost every Care Centre area in England & Wales is running at a far higher rate – only one is under 26 weeks and all but 5 areas are over 30 weeks average case duration. Our area is under the jurisdiction of Liverpool's Designated Family Judge and is running at 35 weeks; within that, CEC is running at around 31 weeks.
CS27	Governance and Compliance Services	Number of Employment Tribunals	Public Health & Corporate	Naomi Clarkson	Naomi Clarkson	Quarterly	Cheshire East	1	2	0	1		N/A		As at 31 December 2020, there was one Employment Tribunal case. It is listed for a preliminary hearing on 26 February 2021 in order to determine whether it can proceed to a final hearing on a jurisdictional issue (time limits).
CS28	Transformation	Number of data incidents that are reported to the Information Commissioners Office	Finance, IT and Communication	Gareth Pawlett	Julie Gibbs	Quarterly	Cheshire East	1	0	0	1		0		One incident reported to ICO in Q3 - detail suppressed due to low number. NFA (no further action) by ICO.
CS29	Transformation	Availability of critical systems and services (ICT)	Finance, IT and Communication	Gareth Pawlett	Gerry Holton	Quarterly	Cheshire East	95.7%	100%	99.8%	99.6%		99.0%		Q1: There were two major incidents within Q1 (lower than normal), with only one qualifying for this KPI. Both were resolved quickly. Q2: There were six qualifying major incidents within Q2. All within ICT Services control were resolved within the four-hour SLA. Availability was therefore exceptionally good during this period. Q3: There were six qualifying major incidents in Q3. Five were within ICT Services control of which three were resolved within the four-hour SLA and two outside SLA. Availability therefore remains exceptionally good during this period.
CS30	Transformation	Number of working days lost to staff sickness (Cumulative data)	Public Health & Corporate	Natalie Robinson	Rob Barnett	Monthly	Cheshire East	7.83 days	2.97 days	4.98 days	7.06 days		10 days		**Corporate:** 4.20 days **People:** 8.87 days **Place:** 4.99 days Excludes self-isolation Overall cumulative Q2 performance is lower (i.e. 'better') than 2019/20 Q2 (7.06 days versus 7.83 days). Work continues with DMTs and services to maximise attendance on a service, team and individual basis.
CS31	Transformation	Total Comensura agency spend (£) (Cumulative data)	Public Health & Corporate	Sara Barker	Emma Cornwell	Quarterly	Cheshire East	£6,667,468	£2,412,924	£4,976,285	£7,452,638		<£9,053,016		Targets based on a decrease on previous year spend. Overall, the Cheshire East figure is higher at the end of Q3 than in Q3 2019/20 (£7.4m vs £6.7m). Q3 spend is lower year-on-year in the Place directorate. RAG based on comparison with previous year figures; i.e. although spend is higher overall in the Corporate directorate, the increase is within 10% tolerance.
							Corporate	£4,196,524	£1,464,902	£2,934,132	£4,387,146		<£5,691,626		
							People	£2,283,976	£893,036	£1,935,980	£2,890,004		<£3,085,504		
							Place	£186,968	£54,986	£106,173	£175,488		<£275,885		
CS32	Transformation	Number of Comensura agency staff	Public Health & Corporate	Sara Barker	Emma Cornwell	Quarterly	Cheshire East	169	168	166	175		<157		The overall number of active agency assignments at the end of Q3 equates to 4.8% of the total workforce. Within Corporate Services, the majority of agency workers are engaged by ICT (62) with a further 12 workers in Legal services. There are a small number of agency worker in other service areas. Within People Services, there is a fairly balanced split of agency workers between Adult Social Care and Health and Children's Services. These are predominately frontline workers such as social workers and other social care roles e.g. social care assessors, occupational therapists and support workers as well as for educational psychologists.
							Corporate	95	90	87	94		<83		
							People	67	74	74	75		<68		
							Place	7	4	5	6		<6		
CS33	Transformation	% of PDRs in progress this year	Public Health & Corporate	Sara Barker	Mel Schofield	Quarterly	Cheshire East	77%	25%	42%	52%		80%		At the end of Q3, 52% of PDRs were in progress for 2020/21. It is believed that the move to working from home and roll out of ICT upgrades for some teams running into September/October have increased logistical difficulties of initiating PDRs in 2020/21.
							Corporate	89%	46%	70%	78%		80%		
							People	69%	13%	30%	39%		80%		
							Place	80%	26%	36%	54%		80%		
CS34	Transformation	Number of apprenticeships (Cumulative data)	Public Health & Corporate	Sara Barker	Abigail Rushton	Quarterly	Cheshire East	40 in place out of 82 (Cheshire East) + 6 in place out of 73 (Schools) + 2 in place out of 12 (ASDVs)	8 in place out of 82 (Cheshire East) + 1 in place out of 73 Schools + 0 in place out of 13(ASDVs)	19 in place out of 82 (Cheshire East) + 4 in place out of 73 Schools + 0 in place out of 13(ASDVs)	33 in place out of 82 (Cheshire East) + 8 in place out of 73 Schools + 1 in place out of 13 (ASDV's)		168 total: 82 Cheshire East 73 Schools 13 ASDVs		Work continued to introduce new apprenticeships across the Council, with the introduction of a degree apprenticeship in Occupational Therapy. The Council had a target of 168 new apprenticeship starts. This total is disaggregated across each area of the Council resulting in 95 new apprenticeship starts required across the Council and its ASDVs and 73 across maintained schools. Progress this year has been severely affected by Covid-19. There has been a noticeable improvement with increased activity over quarter two and three in terms of planned new starts. This includes a new cohort of social work degree apprentices starting on 15th January 2021, who will be reported in Q4.
							Corporate	15 in place out of 20	1	5	5		16		
							People	11 in place out of 50	7	8	21		49		
							Place	14 in place out of 12 + 2 in place out of 12 (ASDVs)	0	6	7 + 1 ASDV		17 + 13 (Place Directorate ASDVs)		
							Schools (Maintained)	6 in place out of 73	1	4	8		73		

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Ref	Lead Department	Measure	Portfolio	Responsible Officer	Data Owner	Data Frequency	Directorate Category	Quarter 3 2019/20	Quarter 1 2020/21	Quarter 2 2020/21	Quarter 3 2020/21	Quarter 4 202021	Annual Target 2020/21	RAG/ Covid-19 Impact	Commentary
CS35	Transformation	% Staff Turnover Rate	Public Health & Corporate	Sara Barker	Rob Barnett	Quarterly	Cheshire East	10.1%	9.7%	9.0%	8.3%		<12%		Quarterly returns are calculated as rolling 12 month figure and provide another measure of workforce health when considered against other corporate measures. Staff turnover % has steadily decreased as a rolling 12 month figure throughout 2020/21, a reflection of the pandemic changing the jobs market and the ways in which we work. Turnover will be a key indicator to track for longer-term impacts when national and organisational approaches to working practices change.
							Corporate	8.9%	8.5%	7.5%	8.5%		<12%		
							People	10.8%	10.4%	9.5%	8.7%		<12%		
							Place	9.1%	8.5%	9.1%	6.8%		<12%		

Cheshire East
Council

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Key Decision N

Date First Published:

Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Date of Meeting: 8 April 2021

Report Title: Overview and Scrutiny Task and Finish Group – Members' Facilities, Accommodation and Culture Recommendations

Report Author: Joel Hammond-Gant, Scrutiny Officer

Senior Officer: Jane Burns, Executive Director of Corporate Services

1. Report Summary

1.1. This report introduces the findings, conclusions and recommendations made by the overview and scrutiny task and finish group, set up by the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee to review Members' Facilities, Accommodation and Culture.

1.2. The original remit of the task and finish group has been overtaken by time and events. However, members' views on the issues raised remain important and can be taken into consideration as the council plans its recovery from Covid restrictions, as they relate to members' facilities.

1.3. The report is presented to the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee, as the "parent" overview and scrutiny committee, to comment on the findings and advise on the way forward.

2. Recommendations

2.1. That the report of the Members' Facilities, Accommodation and Culture Task and Finish Group be received.

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3. Recommendations from the Task and Finish Group

3.1. In light of the decision taken by Council on 19 November 2020 to move to a committee system form of governance from May 2021, the group would ask that as part of the council's various workstreams put in place to achieve a successful governance transition, consideration is given to the points raised in this report when determining how the council may re-arrange and re-use its members' facilities within the committee system.

3.2. Although there is no appetite to reserve certain rooms exclusively for member meetings, the group felt that prioritisation arrangements should be considered.

3.3. That consideration be given to determine any economical and affordable ways that the council could increase and improve the public display of the civic history, culture and heritage of Cheshire East Council and its three former authorities (Congleton Borough Council, Crewe and Nantwich Borough Council, and Macclesfield Borough Council).

3.4. The group would ask that the Council gives consideration to the longer-term goal of constructing its own purpose-built council chamber, to both improve the delivery of Council meetings and introduce a space within which the heritage and culture of Cheshire East and its three former authorities can be proudly displayed.

3.5. That as part of the preparatory work for implementing the committee system from May 2021, consideration be given to the availability of car parking spaces on busier meeting days i.e. when full Council is held, and that council determines if any priority parking arrangements should be put in place.

3.6. That the council continues to build on the great strides it made through 2020/21 – successfully completing its Digital Refresh Programme and transforming how it delivers its work and meetings – by ensuring that continued IT training is made available to support continued effective remote working and virtual meeting delivery.

3.7. That, in light of the rollout of laptops and IT equipment to all elected members and foficers, Council considers making a committed pledge to reducing the authority's use of paper, both in day-to-day work activities and for documentation for meetings.

3.8. That the council continues to periodically review the use of its facilities and accommodation, to make certain that cost and resource-efficacy is achieved.

4. Reasons for Recommendations

4.1. The recommendations made in this report aim to help Cheshire East Council to continue to review and improve the efficient, effective use of its facilities, accommodation and ICT equipment, and to improve its public display of the rich history, heritage and culture of Cheshire East, Congleton, Crewe and Nantwich, and Macclesfield.

5. Other Options Considered

5.1. No alternative options were considered.

6. Background

6.1. The Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee initially established this task and finish group in December 2016, with the purpose of reviewing whether the facilities, accommodation and cultural arrangements of Cheshire East Council were fit for purpose for the council's increased elected membership following the merging of the former Cheshire authorities (Congleton Borough Council, Crewe and Nantwich Borough Council and Macclesfield Borough Council) into the current unitary authority in 2009.

6.2. The work of the group was paused on two occasions, which led to the delay in the production of this final report. The two remaining members of the task and finish group (Councillors M Simon and A Moran) with the support of officers, reconvened this piece of work in November 2019 and produced the appended report.

6.3. The final report of the task and finish group (Appendix 1) was updated to ensure that the group's findings, conclusions and recommendations reflected the significant changes undertaken by the council both in response to the Covid-19 pandemic and in preparation for the its change in governance arrangements in May 2021.

7. Implications of the Recommendations

7.1. Legal Implications

7.1.1. There are no legal implications associated to the report and recommendations at this stage, however, there may be legal implications associated with the implication of any approved recommendations.

7.2. Finance Implications

7.2.1. The recommendations have not yet been financially assessed. Further work would be required to capture the specific financial implications of any approved recommendations.

7.3. **Policy Implications**

    7.3.1. There are no policy implications at this stage, however, the approval of any recommendations may result in policy changes.

7.4. **Equality Implications**

    7.4.1. There are no equality implications associated to this report.

7.5. **Human Resources Implications**

    7.5.1. There are no human resources implications associated to this report.

7.6. **Risk Management Implications**

    7.6.1. There are no risk management implications associated to this report.

7.7. **Rural Communities Implications**

    7.7.1. There are no direct implications for rural communities.

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

    7.8.1. There are no direct implications for children and young people.

7.9. **Public Health Implications**

    7.9.1. There are no direct implications for public health.

7.10. **Climate Change Implications**

    7.10.1. Some of the recommendations would have wider benefits in relation to potentially reducing vehicle emissions, as well as paper, printing and ink usage, which would help the council to achieve the objectives of the Cheshire East Carbon Action Plan, and to respond to its declaration of "an environment and climate emergency".

8. Ward Members Affected

8.1. No ward members are directly affected.

9. Consultation & Engagement

9.1. No formal consultation and engagement was required.

10. Access to Information

    10.1. The following documentation was used to support the development of the review.

10.1.1.   [The Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020](#)

10.1.2.   [Minutes of the virtual meeting of (Cheshire East) Council held on Thursday, 19th November, 2020](#) (regarding the resolution to introduce a committee system form of governance from May 2021)

10.1.3.   [Minutes of the virtual meeting of (Cheshire East Council) Cabinet held on Tuesday, 5th May, 2020](#) (regarding the approval of the Cheshire East Carbon Action Plan)

10.1.4.   [Minutes of the meeting of (Cheshire East) Council held on Wednesday, 22nd May, 2019](#) (regarding the council's declaration of "an environment and climate emergency")

11. Contact Information

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

Name: Joel Hammond-Gant

Job Title: Scrutiny Officer

Email: joel.hammond-gant@cheshireeast.gov.uk

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Members' Facilities, Accommodation and Culture
Task and Finish Group

Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Working for a brighter future together

Cheshire East
Council

1. Chairman's Foreword

Dear Colleagues,

This task and finish group began in December 2016. Although I have been its Chairman since its inception, the group has seen a number of changes to its membership and to the council officers who have supported it. I would like to take this opportunity to thank those officers who have worked with us throughout its duration and also those who have been involved in producing this final report.

The group felt that, although there is scope for this work to continue as the council's moves into its committee system in May 2021, it was timely to produce this report for wider consideration by the council. As the last two remaining members of the group, Councillor A Moran and I would hope to be invited to participate in any work undertaken by the council to take this group's recommendations forward.

I would finally like to give thanks to the membership of this task and finish group, all of whom have been enthusiastic throughout the duration of the review; bringing a wealth of knowledge and wide range of experience to it also. Each and every member of the group who undertook this piece of work was committed to improving members' facilities, accommodation and culture, with the aspiration of helping to make Cheshire East Council a place with its own strong heritage and culture that people can identify with.

I hope that you will enjoy reading our report.

Councillor Margaret Simon, Chairman of the Task and Finish Group

2. Introduction

2.1. This review commenced in December 2016 and has been carried out over a period of more than four years. Since May 2019, the council has undertaken significant work to prepare for moving to a committee system form of governance, which has fundamentally changed some of the

assumptions and motivations which formed the basis of the task and finish group's considerations.

2.2. The work carried out by this group was in response to council's cabinet system. Although this is referenced throughout the report, the Cabinet and cabinet model of decision-making will no longer apply to the authority from May 2021, however, some of the issues raised and brought forward by the group may still be relevant to the incumbent committee system.

2.3. In order to produce a report that both reflects and highlights the work that has been completed by the task and finish group, as well as the recent implications brought about by the council's change in governance arrangements and Covid-19 pandemic, key officers have suggested appropriate and consequential amendments to ensure that the content of the report reflects where the council will be moving to from May 2021.

3. Background

Rationale for the review

3.1. Cheshire East Council was formed in April 2009, following the joining-up of the three former local authorities: Crewe & Nantwich Borough Council, Macclesfield Borough Council and Congleton Borough Council. The main headquarters for the new unitary authority is Westfields, Sandbach, formerly the headquarters of Congleton Borough Council, with additional offices in Crewe and Macclesfield.

3.2. Westfields had provided modest facilities for the 48 elected members of the former Congleton Borough Council, however, did not necessarily sufficiently support the needs of the increased elected membership (82 councillors) of Cheshire East Council.

3.3. There was also a perception that the layout at Westfields – with facilities for non-executive and executive members being separated on different floors – had contributed to less effective communication and interaction between members.

3.4. The council's Members' Room is located on the ground floor of Westfields, but is unable to accommodate more than a small number of members comfortably; the group contended that this room was inadequate for the long term needs of the council's elected members.

3.5. Several members that had previously served the demised authorities had expressed a desire to improve the facilities at Cheshire East to provide conditions which would allow greater opportunities for daily informal interaction with colleagues across all political parties and with the council's executive.

Membership

3.6.   When this task and finish group was initiated in December 2016, it comprised four councillors, with two additional councillors later joining in September 2018.

3.7.   Further changes have been imposed to the membership of the group since this date, with Councillors M Simon and A Moran remaining as the only two members of the task and finish group in 2021. As such, this report and the finalisation of the task and finish work has been concluded and signed off by these two members.

The membership of the group when originally formed is set out below.

From left to right: Councillors Davenport*, Flude, Grant, Moran*, Simon and Wells-Bradshaw

*joined in September 2018

Methodology

3.8.   The group carried out a scoping exercise to develop its objectives and project plan. The group decided to limit its review to facilities at Westfields only, as this was because it was council's main headquarters where the majority of formal committee meetings took place, and was therefore the

most likely place that members would gather in significant numbers day to day.

3.9.	The group acknowledged that, whilst existing member facilities in Macclesfield Town Hall and Crewe Municipal Buildings could undoubtedly be improved, they were both superior to the facilities at Westfields, and the wider aim of this review was to address issues such as culture and civic pride at the council's headquarters.

3.10.	The group met with the council leader and various officers, including; the Chief Executive; Head of Governance and Democratic Services; Manager of the Chief Executive's Office; Facilities Manager; and Interim Chief Executive (following the departure of the former Chief Executive, Mike Suarez, in July 2018.)

3.11.	Over the course of these meetings, the group considered a range of information and evidence, including the maps and blueprints of the council's three major office sites, as well as floorplans for various potential options for how some of the meeting rooms could be revised and changed for different uses.

3.12.	Upon undertaking this review, the group ensured that its work was underpinned by a pragmatic and sensitive attitude in respect of the challenging financial climate for local authorities; there was no justification in this economic climate to incur significant expenditure. However, through this piece of work, it was hoped that the group could produce some workable recommendations and solutions that would deliver appropriate and sustainable improvements to members' facilities in Cheshire East.

3.13.	The group agreed that its final recommendations within this report be expressed as aspirations, and therefore have not been fully costed.

Objectives

3.14.	Upon initiating this project, the group agreed to the following key objectives:

- To provide a shared space for all elected members on the second floor of Westfields, as close to the Cabinet meeting room and executive officers as possible.

- To create a civic identity by displaying civic regalia and artefacts and other objects, and artwork displays, significant to the history of Cheshire East and its former authorities, on the ground floor at Westfields.

- To introduce standardised use of technology for members leading to largely paperless meetings and standardised layout for meetings.

3.15. Following a lengthy break in the middle of this review, the remaining two group members met in December 2019 to review the work previously completed by the group. In addition to agreeing that steps should be taken to close the review and produce a final report, members felt that the report should also incorporate the growing concern of members regarding the availability of car parking spaces for members at Westfields; a more recent, yet important issue to members of the council.

4. Findings

4.1. Following the group's first phase of meetings (through to approximately December 2017), it produced a number of recommendations in relation to members' facilities and accommodation, meeting rooms, car parking and IT equipment.

4.2. After the group reconvened and resumed its work on this project from November 2019, it made a conscious effort to contextualise its findings and reflect how some of these original recommendations may have already been addressed, or have been influenced by the council's decision to change to a committee system form of governance, or the Covid-19 pandemic.

Meeting Rooms, Members' Room and Cabinet Office

4.3. The group examined the adequacy of meeting rooms available at Westfields for formal meetings to which the public have access. Local authority meeting rooms are an integral part of the visitor experience of a civic headquarters, and are often the only part of the building that members of the public see and experience.

4.4. Of Cheshire East Council's newly elected membership after 2009, a considerable proportion had previously been elected to the council's three former authorities, including some of the members of this task and finish group. Arrangements had been made by some of these former local authorities to provide meeting rooms for both the leader of the council and leader of the opposition which, in addition to Members' Rooms provided more space for councillors to meet and/or carry out their work.

4.5. The Committee Suites at Westfields were – prior to the Covid-19 pandemic – often fully booked each day, consequently meaning that there is little flexibility to allow for additional meetings to be held which are not in the annually-approved schedule of council committee meetings.

4.6. The group considered whether the booking arrangements for the Committee Suites should be reviewed; although there is no appetite to reserve these rooms exclusively for member meetings, there is a case for consideration to be given to the introduction of a formal prioritisation

arrangement for meetings which are open to the public. This could be achieved by means of adding an advisory note to all confirmed bookings of the Committee Suites to the effect that if a meeting involving members open to public is organised subsequent to a booking already made, the meeting involving members will take precedence, should suitable alternatives at Crewe Municipal Buildings and Macclesfield Town Hall be unavailable.

4.7. As the group's original work was based on the assumption relating to the continuation of the work of Cabinet, it identified a few different options as to how facilities for non-executive members could be improved without impacting the facilities for Cabinet.

4.8. After considering the practical and financial implications of reconfiguring the use of the Cabinet Office, S10 and Members' Room in Westfields, the group acknowledged that the desired improvements could not be achieved without sacrificing available meeting room space, or incurring additional costs. The group agreed that any such reconfiguration of the above meeting rooms should not come at a cost to the council, and therefore was discounted, with the caveat that other options be looked at in the future should the need arise.

What has changed since the review began?

4.9. Since this review began and the floorplans were considered, the Members' Room was moved from its previous location to a slightly larger room also on the ground floor of Westfields. This group contended that, due to the still continued small size of the current Members' Room, some of the councillors may not view it as a suitable location to meet or carry out work in. A larger meeting room was felt to improve the number of councillors using it, which would in turn support more effective cross-party communication amongst the non-executive members of the council.

4.10. Further to this, the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic in early 2020 led to the speedy introduction of legislation to allow for remote, virtual decision-making local authority meetings to take place. By April 2020, the council had put in place provisions to enable decision-making meetings to be held virtually and remotely.

4.11. The council has monitored and maintained compliance with the social distancing guidelines and workplace guidance in all of its corporate buildings, since the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic.

4.12. At the time of concluding this piece of work, it was not known how the pandemic will impact how councils hold meetings in the long-term and whether future legislation will allow local authorities the flexibility to hold in-person, hybrid and virtual decision-making meetings. When future

legislation and guidance is released on this, it will be important for the council to review how it can use its meeting rooms and virtual meeting technology to ensure that its business is carried out in the most resource-efficient and environmentally-friendly way.

4.13. The group noted that accommodation is a costly commodity especially if left empty. As such, whatever potential change was to be made to the council's meeting room arrangements and prioritisation, it would be important to ensure that meeting rooms are being maximised for cost-efficiency.

4.14. On 19 November 2020, Cheshire East Council voted in favour of changing its form of governance from the existing cabinet/leader model to a committee system form of decision-making, with effect from May 2021. This will bring about a change to the authority's decision-making processes, and a potentially changed demand upon the need for Member facilities. As the new arrangements become established, consideration will need to be given by the authority upon how and when its meeting rooms andf acilities will be required for formal, informal and briefing meetings under the forthcoming committee system.

4.15. Further to this, the council will continue to manage and ensure the safe use of its meeting rooms and facilities to continue to comply with all Covid-19 social distancing and workplace guidance issued by government.

Council Chamber and Full Council Meetings

4.16. The group felt that one of the major downsides to the council's facilities and meeting rooms was that it could not facilitate full Council meetings; these meetings have had to be held at alternative venues including Sandbach Town Hall, with the venue hire being an additional cost to the council.

4.17. Although beyond the scope of this review, the group agreed that the council should have a long-term goal of having its own council chamber within the borough – either on its own or as a shared arrangement (with Cheshire West and Chester Council) – within the borough, which could easily accommodate all 82 elected members, officers, and members of the press and public.

4.18. The development of a new council chamber would need to be cost effective to the council and be a space that it can make regular use of, whether that be through the creation of a multi-purpose room made available for external hire when not in use by the council.

Car Parking for Members

4.19. Another concern raised by the group during this review was the difficulty that some members had experienced when trying to find a car parking space when attending Westfields for a committee meeting, either in the

private car park (for council staff and elected members only,) or the public car park next to it.

4.20. Members of the group noted that that in general it was most difficult to find a parking space on Monday through Thursday; the private car park was the most difficult to find a parking space in. In some instances, members had reported having to park further afield at the Chapel Street Car Park.

4.21. The group acknowledged that potential solutions to the car parking issues experienced by members included car-sharing, carpooling and public transport, all of which would also support the council's commitments and efforts to reduce its carbon outputs and achieve carbon neutrality by 2025.

<u>What has changed since the review began?</u>

4.22. Since March 2020, when the Government introduced restrictions in response to the Covid-19 public health emergency, the council's elected members and staff have predominantly worked remotely, including holding meetings virtually. This has significantly reduced the need for car parking spaces.

4.23. Depending on the content of future legislation in relation to local authority meetings/virtual meetings, and the council's approach to flexible homeworking arrangements, it is conceivable that more virtual meetings will result in a reduced demand on meeting rooms. If this is a long-term trend then it is possible that there will also be reduced demand on car parking spaces at Westfields.

Civic Pride and Image

4.24. Establishing and maintaining a sense of time and place, and civic identity, that are unique to Cheshire East is important to members, particularly as each of the three former authorities had their own longstanding civic identities and culture. Cheshire East has inherited these rich heritages and in its first 12 years has used these to develop its own civic culture.

4.25. Since its inception, this council has become a major contributor to many economic and cultural successes in the borough. Members, officers and the public should feel proud of its progress to date and the successes it has had. One of the key suggestions made by the group was that the council should, where cost-effective and appropriate, utilise the reception area at Westfields to outwardly display and celebrate this council's heritage and its positive impact on the Cheshire East area.

4.26. The group agreed that any display area should be held principally in the reception area, to allow it to be most visible to the public, but that the corridor adjacent to the Committee Suites could be used as well. The group believe that some of the major companies based within the borough should

be approached to ascertain whether they would be willing to provide displays.

4.27. The group discovered during its investigations that only a small number of artefacts from the former authorities have remained in possession of the council. This was largely because many items had been transferred to the new town councils in Crewe and Macclesfield. Nevertheless, there are some items that have been retained, particularly in connection with the Mayoralty, such as the mace, mayoral robes and tricorn that could be put on public display when not in use by the Mayor.

4.28. The displaying of such items could incur further cost to the council through insurance costs which, if explored by the council in the future, should be considered and cost analysed against the estimated numbers of public that would attend Westfields and experience these.

4.29. Elsewhere, the Council has won numerous awards since its inception and has been presented with many gifts from within the UK and abroad. The group believes that these awards and gifts should also form part of a public display at Westfields.

4.30. Many authorities display honours boards for Honorary Alderman and Freedom of the Borough. Whilst it is accepted by the group that an old fashioned wooden display board would be incongruous in the modern setting of a building like Westfields, there are other means available to put on public display these prestigious civic awards. The group's favoured option would be to provide an illuminated book which would list Honorary Aldermen and Freemen to be put on display in the reception area at Westfields. The group does, however, contend that a modern display board should be considered for the listing of the Mayor of Cheshire East.

<u>What has changed since the review began?</u>

4.31. Since this review began, changes have been made in the Reception area of Westfields: a cabinet has been provided for the purpose of displaying regalia, artefacts, awards and other such items relating to Cheshire East's historical and civic image. To date, there have not been many items brought forward to be displayed in this.

4.32. Considering how the council's corporate buildings may be used differently following the Covid-19 pandemic, the group felt that another way the council could raise awareness and appreciation for its own (and inherited) cultural heritage, by updating its public website to display images or information on key aspects of the borough's history and culture.

Improved Technology

4.33. Immediately following the outbreak of Covid-19 and sudden national lockdown restrictions, the council quickly responded to the challenge of transforming the use of its IT in order that officers can work remotely and meetings (public decision-making meetings and informal meetings) can be conducted through virtual meeting software. Prior to this, all councillors and officers attended all meetings in person at the council's corporate buildings.

4.34. The pandemic placed an acute pressure on the council to quickly complete the rollout of its Digital Refresh Programme and provide officers with laptops and other equipment necessary for elected members and officers to be able to work efficiently and effectively at home and away from the office.

4.35. As at the time of developing this report and finalising this piece of work, the legislation enabling legal virtual council meetings is due to expire on 6 May 2021. Whether, or to what extent, this legislation is extended after this date, the newfound experience in using virtual meeting technology will potentially afford the council greater flexibility in how it conducts its business, for example, for non-decision making meetings to take place remotely, which will help the council to manage the use of its meeting rooms for the future.

4.36. In addition to the group's ambition that elected members and officers would have improved use of, and accessibility to, IT equipment, it was hoped that this would help the council to reduce its use of paper and ink. This arguably became a matter of greater importance following the council's decision to declare an environment and climate emergency (Cheshire East Council, Council meeting, 22 May 2019), in addition to the commitment within its Environment Strategy to be carbon neutral by 2025 (Cheshire East Council, Cabinet, 5 May 2020).

4.37. In order to achieve the status of a paperless council, it is important that both members and officers receive the necessary support and training on how their IT equipment can be used in place of using paper, for example, reading and annotating meeting agendas, and making notes.

4.38. The group concedes that it would be difficult for some committee meetings, especially the planning committees, to be administrated without the use of paper as there is greater reliance on the use of paper plans and maps, which can sometimes be difficult to read on relatively small tablet or computer screens. In addition, consideration would have to be given to how facilities would be provided for members of the public at meetings.

4.39. One innovation the group felt might help to support reduced reliance on paper copies of agendas and other supporting documentation (e.g. maps and plans), would be to make use of its existing projectors and large TV screens in meeting rooms as a central viewing point for members of the

committee and public to follow during the meeting. This equipment could also enable the council to support flexible, virtual and/or hybrid meeting arrangements.

5. Conclusions

5.1.   Since its inception in April 2009, Cheshire East Council has not established a significant display exhibiting the broad civic history, culture and heritage of itself, as well as its three former authorities (Congleton Borough Council, Crewe and Nantwich Borough Council, and Macclesfield Borough Council).

5.2.   Before Covid-19, all formal and informal council meetings were held in person in the council's corporate buildings. In order to respond to the challenge presented by the pandemic and ensure business could continue in an efficient manner, the council's Digital Refresh Programme was quickly rolled out to provide elected members and officers with access to laptops and other equipment to support remote working.

5.3.   It is not known at the time of writing this report whether the present legislation enabling virtual meetings will be extended beyond its planned 6 May 2021 end date. Following the completion of its Digital Refresh Programme, the council is now equipped and upskilled to support in-situ and remote meetings and working. This will afford the council greater flexibility in how it manages the use of its meeting rooms.

5.4.   The group found that, prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, it was difficult at times to flexibly or easily rearrange formal, public committee meetings at the Committee Suites, Westfields, which would usually lead to senior officers and members travelling between the council's three corporate buildings (Crewe Municipal Buildings, Macclesfield Town Hall and Westfields) to attend meetings. It such meetings were more easily arranged and/or rearranged to continue to be held at Westfields, this could reduce both the amount of officer time spent away from work, and the emissions associated with the increased travel.

5.5.   With new and improved IT available to both officers and members, as well as the experience of conducting council business through online virtual meetings, the council has the IT infrastructure in place to support a move towards becoming a paperless authority, which would also help it to achieve its ambitious carbon reduction and carbon neutrality targets.

5.6.   One of the key drivers for this review was that the Members' Room was not sufficient for a council with 82 elected members, and that it was situated on the ground floor of Westfields at a distance from the Cabinet Office on the second floor, which the group felt inhibited effective communication between the council's executive and non-executive members. From May

2021, however, when the council formally transitions to a committee system form of governance, it will no longer have a Cabinet and consideration can be given to how the former Cabinet Office will be used.

5.7.	The group felt that if the council were to have its own dedicated council chamber, it would be easier to arrange and deliver Council meetings, and such a room would provide the council with another the council's lack of a dedicated council chamber arguably made it more difficult to arrange and deliver full Council meetings, and that it was one less way through which the council could display its heritage and culture.

5.8.	The majority of member meetings, including some full Council meetings, are held in Sandbach (at Westfields and Sandbach Town Hall), which in addition to being the main headquarters for officers, means that most weekdays both the private staff/member car park and adjacent public car park at Westfields are full. This has created issues for members when trying to find a parking space to be able to attend their meetings.

6. Recommendations

6.1. That consideration be given to economical and affordable ways by which the council could improve its public display of the civic history and cultural heritage, and 'placemaking', of Cheshire East Council and its three former authorities (Congleton Borough Council, Crewe and Nantwich Borough Council, and Macclesfield Borough Council).

6.2. That the council reviews its elected member and staff facilities – following the authority's transition to a committee system form of governance in May 2021, and in light of the virtual meeting legislation and remote working arrangements put in place due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

6.3. Although there is no appetite to reserve certain rooms exclusively for member meetings, the group would ask that, as part of any review of the council's facilities and accommodation, consideration be given to prioritising certain meeting rooms for elected members and member meetings.

6.4. That, in light of the changes and impacts brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic, virtual meeting legislation and successful deployment of virtual meeting technology, the council reviews its elected member and staff facilities, and gives consideration to the necessity of the longer-term aspiration of having its own, or shared (with Cheshire West and Chester), purpose-built council chamber.

6.5. That consideration be given to how the availability of car parking spaces at the private (elected member and staff) car park at Westfields could be managed so that on busier meeting days such as when full Council is held, elected members have no issue obtaining a car parking space.

6.6. That the council continues to build on the great strides it made through 2020/21 – successfully completing its Digital Refresh Programme and transforming how it delivers its work and meetings – by ensuring that continued IT training is made available to support effective remote working and virtual meeting delivery.

6.7. That, following Digital Refresh Programme, the council considers making a committed pledge to reducing its use of paper and printing ink, both from day-to-day work activities and documentation for council committee meetings.

6.8. That the council gives consideration to making use of its existing TV screen and projector equipment in meeting rooms and how this could support hybrid (in-person and virtual) meetings and provide members and officers with greater flexibility for how the authority can use its meeting rooms and facilities most efficiently and effectively.