

CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the **Environment and Communities Committee**
held on Thursday, 2nd February, 2023 in the Committee Suite 1,2 & 3,
Westfields, Middlewich Road, Sandbach CW11 1HZ

PRESENT

Councillor S Akers Smith (Vice-Chair)

Councillors Q Abel, J Bratherton, J Buckley, L Crane, T Dean, A Farrall,
P Groves, C Leach, J Parry, S Holland, C Browne and K Parkinson

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE

Tom Shuttleworth – Interim Director of Environment and Neighbourhoods
Jane Gowing – Interim Director of Planning
Peter Skates – Director of Growth and Enterprise
Ralph Kemp – Head of Environmental Services
David Malcolm – Head of Planning
Tracey Bettaney – Head of Regulatory Services
Kim Evans – Licensing Team Leader
Chris Allman – Head of Neighbourhood Services
Tracy Baldwin – Principal Accountant
Wendy Broadhurst – Lead Finance Partner
James Thomas – Principal Solicitor – Planning & Highways
Josie Lloyd – Democratic Services Officer

ALSO PRESENT

Cllr Nick Mannion

54 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Benson, Cllr Gilbert and Cllr Warren. Cllr Browne, Cllr Holland and Cllr Parkinson attended as substitutes.

55 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

In the interest of openness and transparency in relation to item 5, Medium Term Financial Strategy 2023-27 Budget Consultation, Cllr Akers Smith declared that she was a Trustee of the Everybody Health and Leisure Board.

56 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 10 November 2022 be agreed as a correct record.

57 PUBLIC SPEAKING/OPEN SESSION

There were no public speakers.

58 MEDIUM-TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY 2023-27 CONSULTATION

The Committee received a report on the Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) for 2023-2027 and the revenue and capital proposals contained within the MTFS relating to the Committee's responsibilities. As part of the consultation process, Members were asked to consider the proposals within the remit of the Committee and provide comments and feedback to the Corporate Policy Committee for consideration on 9 February 2023 before a balanced budget was presented to the full Council meeting of 22 February 2023 for final review and approval.

The following comments were raised:

- Cllr Dean raised concerns around the consultation process and that Committee Members had not been consulted or involved in the drawing up of the proposals before them in the report. Committee Members requested that consideration is given to future consultation to ensure there is a clear process for the Committee to be properly consulted on the proposals and detail surrounding them.
- *Proposal 92: Review Waste Collection Service* – Cllr Dean queried how much it would cost for a green bin to be emptied, what the current position was across the wider local authority sector and what market research had been undertaken to date.
- Cllr Farrall referred to a similar project by Trafford Borough Council which appeared unsuccessful and was later withdrawn.
- Members felt that the proposals could be counterproductive and queried if the proposals would:
 - a) lead to an increase in fly-tipping and food wastage
 - b) lead to any public health consequences as a result of home composting
 - c) encourage residents to blow leaves and other debris onto the highway potentially leading to blocked gullies and flooding

Members expressed a view that waste collection was something Cheshire East did well so it was disappointing that savings could not

have been found elsewhere, particularly given the cost of living crisis and some residents struggling financially.

- *Proposal 83: Planning and Building Control Income* - Cllr Farrall queried if there was anything that Cheshire East could implement at a local level to generate revenue, such as adding a surcharge for fast-tracking planning applications. Members also suggested that the Council lobby Central Government further on the issue of planning application fees and the need to be able to vary these locally.
- *Proposal 90: Strategic Leisure Review* – Members received an update on the detail behind this proposal. Members raised concerns around some of the proposals being put forward to achieve the budget saving which they felt should have been shared at an earlier stage.

Cllr Groves felt that the introduction of a parking permit scheme would have a detrimental impact and further highlights the need for a fair car parking policy to be introduced.

Members highlighted the significant costs associated with heating swimming pools and queried if there was any work underway to actively reduce the cost of energy usage. Cllr Abel referred to the potential to use solar power to heat pools.

- *Proposal 91: Maintenance of Green Spaces* – Members queried the savings attached to this proposal and the proposed operational review which will look at reducing existing maintenance regimes. Members requested further background information to the proposal and queried what the anticipated outcome of the review was. Members were advised that the proposal had not been changed but was re-profiled to develop a more considered implementation process.
- *Proposal 93: Libraries – Service Review* – Members raised concerns around the potential reduction in opening hours during the week and the impact this would have on the use of the buildings as ‘warm spaces’ and their intended use for other key services to be delivered within them. Members stressed the importance of libraries and how they are a hub for local communities including children, students and the elderly.

Cllr Buckley suggested that there should be a review of library services across the borough including looking at technological development.

Cllr Browne referred to Hartlepool Council which recently converted their libraries into community hubs and delivered a vast range of local services to residents. This generated significant savings for the local authority and also enabled longer opening hours. Cllr Browne welcomed the approach to review the use of Cheshire East's buildings. Cllr Browne also referred to the use of volunteers at the local library within his Ward and how this had enabled the library to remain open.

Cllr Abel suggested that revenue generation within libraries is explored further, including the sale of refreshments.

- *Proposal 97: Review closed landfill sites* – Members requested that the landfill site list be shared with all Committee Members.

RESOLVED:

1) That the Committee notes:

- a) the year-end forecast outturn position for 2022/23, as set out in Appendix 1 to the report.
- b) the financial context and proposals contained within the Executive Summary of the Medium-Term Financial Strategy (as set out in the MFTS report at Annex C, Section 1).
- c) the Revenue Grant Funding, as set out in Appendix 4 to the report.
- d) the Earmarked Reserves, as set out in Appendix 5 to the report.

2) The Committee feedback be noted on the proposals within the MFTS, as related to the Committee's responsibilities, that can support and advise full Council in fulfilling its responsibilities to approve a balanced budget for 2023/23 in the following areas:

- a) Revenue Proposals, as detailed in Appendix 2 to the report
- b) Capital Programme, as detailed in Appendix 3 to the report.

59 MID-YEAR PERFORMANCE REVIEW - ENVIRONMENT AND NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES

The committee received the report which provided an update on the performance across Environment and Neighbourhood Services for the first half of 2022-23 against the relevant priorities, actions and measures of success within the Council's Corporate Plan 2021-25.

A query was raised as to vacancies within the Planning team and the current backlog of planning applications. The committee were advised that there were vacancies across the service which had not been possible to fill and that there was a contract with Capita to assist with the backlog. The contract was due to end in the next few months due to existing officers

having gained more experience. It was agreed that a breakdown of the cost of this contract and how many applications it had dealt with would be shared with the Committee. A further request was made by Cllr Dean for the Committee to receive figures on what the backlog was and what it is now.

A query was raised regarding the prices for hackney carriage hire in Congleton as this appeared to be lower than other areas in the borough and could create an issue with retaining taxi companies in the town. The committee were advised that the set prices were subject to consultation with the companies in the town and that previously Congleton had objected to increases on the basis that they were too high. The Licensing Committee could look at reviewing this if taxi companies in the area wish to raise this.

RESOLVED:

That the committee note the performance of the department.

60 ANIMAL WELFARE LICENSING POLICY

The committee received the report which sought approval of a new Animal Welfare Licensing Policy. Following this, the policy would be published and implemented by the Animal Welfare Team as part of animal welfare licensing activities.

RESOLVED (unanimously):

That Environment and Communities Committee approves the proposed Animal Welfare Licensing Policy contained as Appendix 1 to this report.

61 CARBON NEUTRAL PROGRESS UPDATE

The committee received the report which provided an update on the progress the Council had made towards being a carbon neutral council by 2025 and a carbon neutral borough by 2045.

A query was raised regarding peat restoration and the report which the Council had commissioned to evaluate peatland and mosses within the borough. It was noted that this piece of work would fall under the Economy and Growth Committee but it was agreed that the Environment and Communities Committee could be provided with a copy of the report.

A further query was raised regarding tree planting in Congleton and whether that had been included in the figures presented. Officers undertook to provide a written response to confirm this detail. The Council was currently working with Mersey Forest to assess the failure rate of the tree planting and to re-plant so information on this and lessons learned could be shared once the assessment was complete.

RESOLVED (unanimously):

That the Environment and Communities Committee:

1. Note the progress made towards the Council's target to be carbon neutral for its own emissions by 2025.
2. Note the contents of the borough wide baseline report 2045 (Appendix 1) and authorise the Head of Environmental Services to develop proposals with regional and local partners for priority action areas to begin to influence a reduction in borough wide carbon emissions towards the 2045 target.

62 NOTICE OF MOTION: SAFE NIGHT-TIME TRAVEL FOR WORKERS

The Committee considered a report in response to a Notice of Motion put to full Council in October 2022. The motion, which had been proposed by Cllr Laura Smith and seconded by Cllr Sally Handley, proposed a number of actions to improve night-time travel for workers.

Cllr Bratherton, who addressed the Committee on behalf of Cllr Handley, asked what powers the Council had, if any, which would allow the Licensing Committee to include additional criteria when considering applications. It was requested that consideration was given to establishing a Working Group to look at this area of work.

Officers referred to the Statement of Licensing Policy which provided guidance for applicants and information relating to expectations under legislation. The Licensing Act restricted what could be taken into consideration. It was noted that Cheshire East was bound by case law that identified what could be included in the Statement of Licensing Policy. It was highlighted that, should any additional requirements be included in the policy that were wider than the Council's powers as the Licensing Authority, the policy would be deemed unlawful and decisions made under the policy would be subject to challenge.

Officers undertook to provide a written response to the questions raised by Cllr Handley.

RESOLVED (by majority):

That the Environment and Communities Committee:

1. Note the national and local policy and guidance in relation to licensing late night refreshment and the taxi and private hire vehicle regime.
2. Note the planned review of the Council's Statement of Licensing Policy during 2023.

63 NOTICE OF MOTION - HYDRAULIC FRACTURING (FRACKING)

The committee received the report in response to a Notice of Motion put to full Council in October 2022.

Members raised a concern that the recommendations were to note the report and that this could mean no further action is taken. A motion was therefore moved and seconded which sought to amend the second recommendation to strengthen the wording and refer the item to the Economy and Growth Committee, to explore the options available within that committee's remit. The motion was carried.

RESOLVED (by majority):

That the Environment and Communities Committee:

1. Note the national and local planning guidance and policy in relation to hydraulic fracturing.
2. Note there are more controls the Council can put in place on land within its ownership and refer the matter to the Economy and Growth Committee to be explored.

64 STANDING ITEM: MEMBERS ADVISORY PANEL: CHESHIRE EAST CEMETERIES STRATEGY REVIEW

Councillor Joy Bratherton, Chair of the Cemeteries Strategy Review Member Advisory Panel, provided a verbal update to the committee.

The public consultation had ended on 23 December 2022. The timeframe for this had been extended to allow proper consultation across the community and, as a result, had increased the number of responses by 42%.

The consultation of the evaluation report may have to be set back slightly from 1 March. It was hoped that a strategy document could be shared with the committee in June and be brought to committee for a decision in August/September.

The areas that were being looked at were changing needs and expectations in the public, a range of memorial options, expanding cemeteries where the land is available, planting trees and encouraging wildlife into cemeteries, looking into woodland burial sites and exploring the option of transferring cemeteries to town and parish councils.

65 STANDING ITEM: WORKING GROUP: HOUSEHOLD WASTE & RECYCLING CENTRES

Cllr Laura Crane, Chair of the Household Waste and Recycling Centres Working Group, provided a verbal update to the committee.

The group had met a couple of times but had taken a brief pause while consultation for the MTFSS was ongoing as a lot of the work may be dependent on the outcome. A further update would come to the next committee meeting.

66 **WORK PROGRAMME**

The committee considered the work programme.

It was noted that the Review of the Cemeteries Strategy would be deferred to August/September.

It was requested that a briefing be arranged on the Cleaner Crewe project.

RESOLVED:

That the work programme be noted.

The meeting commenced at 10:30 and concluded at 13:45

Councillor S Akers Smith