

PRESENT: **Cheshire West and Chester Council:**
Councillors Carol Gahan (Chairman), Paul Donovan and Karen Shore

Cheshire East Council:
Councillors Paul Findlow, Jill Rhodes and Amanda Stott

Officers in attendance: **Cheshire West and Chester Council:**
Laurence Ainsworth – Director of Public Service Reform
Lyn Brown – Democracy and Elections Officer
Jude Green – Head of Transactional Services
Courtney Hill – Legal Services
Peter Lloyd – Head of Change and Technology
Paul Newman – Interim County Archivist

Cheshire East Council:
Jane Burns – Executive Director of Corporate Services
Heather Grove – Business Assurance, Development and Collaboration
Gareth Pawlett – Chief Information Officer
Alex Thompson – Director of Finance and Customer Services
Janet Witkowski – Head of Legal

27 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

Councillor Carol Gahan, Chairman, welcomed everyone to the meeting and introductions were made.

28 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence from Committee Members.

29 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No Declarations of Interest were made.

30 MINUTES

DECIDED: That

The minutes of the meeting held on 26th January 2023 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

31 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME/OPEN SESSION

No members of the public were in attendance and no questions had been submitted prior to the meeting.

32 ARCHIVES PROJECT UPDATE: SUCCESSFUL NATIONAL LOTTERY HERITAGE FUND GRANT APPLICATION

The Committee considered a report which provided an update on the next steps with the Archives project. Paul Newman, Archives and Local Studies Manager, reminded Members that the Archives project involved relocating the service to new premises and that £4.45m funding had been secured from the National Lottery Heritage Fund to support the delivery of the project. This would see two new history centres being built in Lightfoot Street, Hoole, Chester and on the site of the old Crewe Library in Crewe town centre as well as the service extending its digital and community engagement work through new outreach programmes.

Members were informed that planning applications for the respective proposed history centres had been submitted to Cheshire West and Chester and Cheshire East Councils in November 2022 and permission had recently been granted from each council for both centres. Project staff would be appointed from summer 2023, procurement of the main contractor was now underway, with separate contracts for each centre, and construction was expected to run from September 2023 to winter 2024/25. Members noted the financial implications for each council as detailed in section 5.2 of the report and the risks set out in section 5.6, including a significant inflation allowance within the project cost estimate which would continue to be subject to scrutiny as the project progressed.

In response to questions around staffing, Members were assured that temporary project staff would be appointed and funded through the project budget, staffing requirements for the new service would continually be reviewed and the likely staffing budget required to deliver the service from 2025 onwards had been included in the growth requests.

Members very much welcomed the update report and were pleased to see the positive development of the project which would benefit residents of both boroughs. They expressed their thanks to all the staff and officers involved in getting the project to this point and looked forward to seeing this improve residents' understanding of the information held by the Archives Service.

DECIDED: That

the status of the project be noted.

33 THE FUTURE MODEL FOR ICT: MOBILISATION UPDATE

The Committee considered a report which provided a summary of the work underway to mobilise the Hybrid ICT programme following recent decisions made at each council's respective decision-making bodies to proceed with the new service model. Members were reminded that the new model involved retaining a shared network and data centre and a separation of other ICT functions currently shared. It was noted that the Joint Committee would play a key role in providing oversight throughout the programme over the next two years and would receive regular updates on progress.

Laurence Ainsworth, Cheshire West and Chester Council's Director of Public Service Reform, reported on a very productive mobilisation workshop held in February with senior officers from across both councils focusing on the principles to guide the programme, Member and officer governance and resourcing.

Members were informed of discussions around the establishment of a joint scrutiny task group which would hold the Joint Committee and the programme to account and this would be progressed after the local elections in May. In addition, at officer level, a programme board would be formed which would report to the Joint Committee on a regular basis.

Members further noted that the process to appoint a suitable Programme Director with the appropriate skills and experience would soon begin. In relation to workforce support, the importance of engaging and supporting the workforce throughout was recognised, as was ongoing dialogue with the Trade Unions.

In the ensuing discussion, Members welcomed the update report and thanked officers for the good progress made to date. They acknowledged that the key lessons learned from the implementation of Unit4 ERP meant this programme was starting from a more firm grounding and positive place and they looked forward to regular future updates.

DECIDED: That

the latest update on the mobilisation phase of the programme be noted.

34 SCHOOLS INCOME UPDATE

The Committee considered a report which provided information which Members had previously requested regarding the loss of schools income within Transactional Services Shared Service along with the mitigations in place to reduce the impact.

Jude Green, Head of Transactional Services, Cheshire West and Chester Council, reminded members that Transactional Services Shared Service had an income target to achieve each financial year in relation to services provided to external organisations and schools. It was noted that unfortunately, due to loss in schools income, this target had not been achieved over recent years. Members' attention was drawn to the table in 4.3 which detailed the variance between income target and actual buy back income since 2018. Members also noted table 4.8 which listed the main reasons why schools/academies had chosen to move their payroll services to another provider. Members noted the leading reason was the trend of schools converting to academies and joining a Multi Academy Trust (MAT), thereby making it difficult for councils to retain their business as it was common for there to already be a payroll provider in place.

Members welcomed the report and felt it had given them a much better understanding of all the issues being faced. They acknowledged that this was a difficult area and thanked officers involved for producing the report which clearly set out the issues identified and looked for solutions. Members noted the mitigations in sections 4.12 to 4.19 and welcomed the processes in place to try and work with individual schools who no longer wished to buy back services from the council and tried to identify the reasons behind this. However, Members acknowledged that the trend of schools moving to academies and joining a MAT was largely out of council control.

Members requested sight of the results of the satisfaction survey being undertaken in April 2023 of all Unit4 ERP users to provide baseline information on the delivery

of services and it was agreed to share this with the Committee when available. In addition, it was also acknowledged that there were many different school support package arrangements in place across the two councils around buy-back of services and it was suggested that a complete picture be shared with the Committee at a later date.

DECIDED: That

the reasons behind reducing buy back services be noted.

Chairman

Date