

CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the **Corporate Policy Committee**
held on Thursday, 20th March, 2025 in the Capesthorne Room, Macclesfield
Town Hall

PRESENT

Councillor N Mannion (Chair)
Councillor M Gorman (Vice-Chair)

Councillors C Bulman, D Clark, S Gardiner, M Goldsmith, A Harrison,
C O'Leary, R Chadwick, J Rhodes, J Saunders, F Wilson and G Marshall

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE

Rob Polkinghorne, Chief Executive
Dami Awobajo, Assistant Chief Executive
Karen Wheeler, Interim Assistant Chief Executive
Adele Taylor, Executive Director of Resources and S151 Officer
Phil Cresswell, Executive Director of Place
Gareth Pawlett, Director of Digital
Chris Allman, Director of Planning and Environment
Josie Griffiths, Head of Audit, Risk and Assurance
Hayley Kirkham, Project Manager
Nikki Bishop, Democratic Services Officer

78 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors J Clowes, M Warren and J Pearson.
Councillors S Gardiner, G Marshall and R Chadwick were present as substitutes.

79 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Josie Griffiths, Head of Audit, Risk and Assurance declared, in the interests of openness and transparency in relation to agenda items 13/16 (ASDV Review: Update on ASDV Transfer and Alliance Environmental Services), that a close family relative worked for ANSA.

80 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 6 February 2025 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

81 PUBLIC SPEAKING/OPEN SESSION

There were no registered speakers.

82 SERVICE BUDGETS 2025/26 (CORPORATE POLICY COMMITTEE)

The committee considered the report which set out the allocation of the approved budgets for 2025-26 for the committee, following approval of the Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) 2025-26 to 2028-29 at Full Council on 26 February 2025.

It was confirmed that the full council held responsibility for setting the council's overall budget framework and that treasury management responsibilities sat with the Finance Sub Committee. However, as the parent committee to the Finance Sub Committee, the Corporate Policy Committee had a role in retaining a holistic view of budget monitoring across the council. Assurance was provided that there were regular budget monitoring meetings and appropriate steps were in place to identify emerging issues which would be identified and communicated with members at the earliest opportunity.

The committee noted that during Financial Review 3 (FR3) reserves balances were forecasted to be £9.2m however this had since increased to £15.2m. The committee queried if this improvement was the result of the use of Exceptional Financial Support. Officers committed to providing a detailed written response.

It was highlighted that Collection Fund reserves were anticipated to reduce during 2024-26 despite gross council tax rates are going up and queried why. It was confirmed that the Collection Fund also included business rates and likely reflected changes following appeals. Officers committed to providing a detailed response.

The committee noted the capital programme included £14.5m for new ICT schemes and queried when the committee would receive a detailed report back on what these schemes were delivering and the link to transformation. It was confirmed that more detailed information would be provided in future finance reports which would include capital schemes and their link to transformation.

RESOLVED:

That the Corporate Policy Committee

1. Note the decision of the Finance Sub-Committee to allocate the approved revenue and capital budgets, related budget changes items and earmarked reserves to the Corporate Policy Committee, as set out in Annex A.
2. Note the financial reporting timetable for 2025/26 set out in Annex B as approved at Finance Sub-Committee on 10 March 2025.

83 PERFORMANCE REPORT - CHESHIRE EAST PLAN Q3 2024/25

The committee considered the report which provided an update on organisational performance against the priorities and vision set out in the Cheshire East Plan 2024-25. The report covered the 1 October 2024 – 31 December 2024 2024-25 Quarter 3 (Q3) period.

The new Cheshire East Plan 2025-29 was agreed by Full Council last month, and the delivery plan and final Q4 report of the 2024-25 Cheshire East Plan, would be considered by the committee in June.

The committee noted that the Q3 report presented a similar position to Q2. The committee raised a number of questions/comments, as summarised below:

- A2.3.3 Update the Cheshire East Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Strategy: this priority action was listed as 'on-track' however it was highlighted that strategy expired in March 2023 and it was queried if this should be rated 'Red'. Officers committed to discussing this matter with the relevant leads and providing a written response.
- A2.4.2 Prioritise care experienced adults as part of our recovery work to improve employment and training opportunities: The committee were pleased that positive progress had been made in this area with the council now having five Care Leaver ambassadors which had attended a number of activities and meetings to help shape the service.
- It was queried why there appeared to be a reduced level of priority actions 'green – on track' for Q3 compared to Q2 and what the 'to be updated' category meant. It was confirmed that this was the result of awaiting up-to-date information however these areas were anticipated to remain 'green – on track'. Officers committed to updating the committee on progress of these priority actions once the updated information had been received, prior to the next committee meeting.
- A2.4.1 Attract more foster carers to support Cheshire East children through the Foster4 collaboration: the committee were pleased that the RAG rating had improved to 'green – on track' for Q3 and noted the positive work being undertaken to attract new foster carers. The committee asked that their thanks were passed onto the staff in these areas.

RESOLVED:

That the Corporate Policy Committee

1. Note the progress and performance against delivery of the Cheshire East Plan 2024/25 in Quarter 3 2024/25.

84 RESPONSE TO GOVERNMENT CONSULTATION FOR PRINCIPLES OF DEVOLUTION IN CHESHIRE & WARRINGTON

The committee considered the report which set out the proposed response from Cheshire East Council to a consultation on the principles of a proposal, developed by government, for devolution in the Cheshire and Warrington area.

The committee noted that government published its Devolution White Paper in December 2024 and later announced details of a Devolution Priority Programme for those areas wishing to proceed as soon as possible. Cheshire and Warrington had been confirmed as part of the government Devolution Priority Programme on

5 February 2025. As part of the priority timetable, the government launched its consultation on the principles of devolution within the Cheshire and Warrington area, and responses to this consultation were required by 13 April 2025. The Governance, Compliance and Monitoring Officer confirmed to the committee that, due to the urgent nature of this item and the tight timetable, the referral process would not apply.

Two amendments were proposed by Councillor C O'Leary and seconded by Councillor S Gardiner in relation to the council's proposed response to the consultation, as set out below

Response 2: To add that Cheshire East Council's preferred election date for the new Mayor is May 2027.

Response 2: To add that Cheshire East Council's preferred arrangements for the combined authority

In support of the proposed amendments, it was stated *that* the current proposed date of May 2026 for the election of a Mayor could result in Cheshire East Council spending over c£1m on election costs, and that holding the Mayoral elections on the same day as borough elections in Cheshire East and Cheshire West and Chester would greatly reduce the cost to Council taxpayers and increase overall turnout. Secondly, it was suggested that a Combined Authority with a total of six members, two from each constituent authority, was too small. The committee debated the two amendments and noted that the requirements/timescales were set by government and therefore there would be little to no flexibility as this would be set in the statutory instrument, part of the bill making for the Act. Officers continued to seek further confirmation in relation to the requirements for an election and funding.

The amendments were voted upon and subsequently lost.

The committee agreed that communications was critical to ensuring both elected members, and residents of Cheshire East were kept informed.

The Chair highlighted that the consultation was open to everyone and urged all to respond and share their views before mid-night on 13 April.

RESOLVED (by majority):

That the Corporate Policy Committee

1. Note that the Cheshire and Warrington area, including Cheshire East, has been confirmed as part of the Devolution Priority Programme.
2. Approve the submission of the Council's response to the seven questions requested as part of the government consultation as outlined in the report.

85 GENERATIVE AI POLICY BRIEFING

The committee considered the report which updated on the use (and potential use) of Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) by the council. The committee noted the issues, opportunities and ethics that would need to be considered in a local government setting to support the council's corporate plan.

The committee queried the consultation that had taken place with staff and how informed they were of changes to their work areas and how engagement would continue. It was confirmed that there had been 10 proof of concepts across a range of business areas and levels within the council and over 20 engagement workshops with staff on how AI could be utilised and improve the way in which services were delivered – there had been significant support across the council so far.

An amendment was proposed by Councillor S Gardiner that section 10 of the report be amended to confirm that the policy would be reviewed twice-annually, rather than periodically. This was accepted by the committee as a friendly amendment.

RESOLVED (unanimously):

That the Corporate Policy Committee

1. Approve the Corporate GenAI Policy (subject to section 10 of the policy being updated, as set out above) and underpinning governance and related usage guidance, within the context of the background information within this report.
2. Note that SIGG has corporate responsibility for data governance and that it will implement mechanisms for effective GenAI data strategies, policies, and procedures to ensure data accuracy, ethical use and individual privacy whilst ensuring adequate data collection and the means to regulate its use.
3. Note that the Digital Workstream is responsible for maintaining the GenAI Policy and that risks and issues will be managed as the technology matures.
4. Note that IADM continues to manage guidance and assurance to successfully adopt GenAI across the authority and will work with the Digital Delivery Programme to ensure that both AI technical solutions and the underlying information are compliant and secure.

86 ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI) DEPLOYMENT

The committee considered the report which sought approval to commission and subsequently award a contract for the deployment of an Artificial Intelligence (AI) platform and framework. The report set out the need to enhance the council's digital capabilities and address the pressing demographic and financial challenges facing the local authority.

The committee agreed that the deployment of AI presented significant opportunities for efficiencies and noted that the Digital Acceleration Programme was designed to modernise the council's operations and ensure long-term sustainability. The committee agreed that it was important to ensure that the deployment of AI functions across services was fully understood by both officers and members, and that limitations were fully understood. It was clarified that human-oversight would still be required over any decision-making and that approval to commission a contract to support the design, delivery and setup of an AI platform and Framework in Cheshire East, and did not commit the council to pursuing any proposals until such a time that detailed businesses cases / workshops had taken place.

Officers confirmed that more briefings would be scheduled with both members and officers as proposals develop overtime.

RESOLVED (by majority)

That the Corporate Policy Committee

1. Approve the commission of a contract to support the design, delivery, and setup of an AI Platform and Framework within Cheshire East Council; and,
2. Delegate authority to the Director of Digital of Cheshire East Borough Council to award a contract to the successful bidder following the competitive procurement process.

87 MINUTES OF SUB-COMMITTEES

Councillor S Gardiner requested that two minor amendments be made to the minutes of the Finance Sub Committee held on 9 January 2025:

- That he be referred to within the minutes as the Vice Chair of the Strategic Planning Board (under DOIs) rather than Chair.
- That he be referred to as a 'prospective' recipient of the Cheshire Pension Fund.

Officers committed to making these amendments.

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the sub-committees be received and noted.

88 WORK PROGRAMME

The committee considered the Work Programme, the following was noted:

- Councillor Fiona Wilson provided an update on the work of the Harassment, Abuse and Intimidation Task and Finish Group. Cllr Wilson highlighted key statistics arising from the recent member survey and thanked members for completing the survey. Cllr Wilson confirmed that the survey would be issued to members today, along with encouragement to sign-up to the LGA Debate Not Hate Public Statement. The committee thanked Cllr Wilson and the Task and Finish Group for all their work to date.
- The committee agreed, due to the number of items scheduled for the June 2025 meeting, that an additional meeting of the committee would be arranged and details of this would be shared as soon as possible.
- The committee noted that there was ongoing work to review report writing across the council and this involved looking at current guidance and e-learning facilities.
- The committee further noted that there was a Governance and Decision-Making Task and Finish Group due to meet for the first time on 21 March 2025, to review and make appropriate recommendations to the Corporate Policy Committee regarding the Council's governance and decision-making

arrangements, both in terms of the current committee structure and any proposals for change in the short and long term.

89 STRATEGIC RISK ASSURANCE REPORT Q 3 2024/25

The committee considered the Strategic Risk Register update during Q3 2024-25 (October – December 2024).

The committee noted that there had been no new additions to the Strategic Risk Register following the Q3 review, with one change in the net ratings (SR08 Ability to achieve organisation change), and one removal (SR10 – Failure to manage the consequences of policy uncertainty).

Members raised a number of comments/questions as summarised below.

- There had been a lack of change in a number of risks and members asked what they could do to help shift the RAG ratings in a positive direction. A comprehensive review of the council's strategic risks was scheduled to take place in a workshop with the Corporate Leadership Team, in April 2025. The Q3 update therefore presented on the existing content of the register.
- SR04 Dedicated School Grant Deficit: it was anticipated that this risk would be reduced to 12 by March 2025 and an acceptable level by March 2026. The committee queried if this was achievable. Officers committed to providing a written response.

RESOLVED:

That the Corporate Policy Committee

1. Note the position of the council's Strategic Risk Register and those of the wholly owned companies for Q3 2024-25, in respect of the content, description, scoring and risk management activity outlined.

90 ASDV REVIEW - UPDATE ON ASDV TRANSFER AND ALLIANCE ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES LTD

The committee considered the report which provided an update on the transition of the staff and services provided by the council's two wholly owned companies, ANSA Environmental Services Ltd and Orbitas Bereavement Services Ltd following the decision of the Finance Sub Committee in June 2024 to insource the services and staff.

The committee noted that on 1 February 2025, the council had successfully transferred 42 members of staff from Orbitas. The bereavement services element had been transferred into the council's environmental services and the handypersons service was transferred under the Housing team.

RESOLVED:

That the Corporate Policy Committee

1. Note the progress against plan made to date in transferring the services provided by ANSA and Orbitas into the Council and next steps.
2. Note the initial management structure arrangements for the insourced services from the two companies, as shown at Appendix A.
3. Note the work underway to conclude the insourcing of the ANSA services and the potential financial aspects of the change process as further set out in the confidential Part 2 paper, including the impact of the transfer on Alliance Environmental Services Ltd.

91 EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED:

That the press and public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the final item on the agenda pursuant to Section 100(A) 4 of the Local Government Act 1972 on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraphs 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 of the Local Government Act 1972 and the public interest would not be served in publishing the information.

92 ASDV REVIEW - UPDATE ON ASDV TRANSFER AND ALLIANCE ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES LTD

RESOLVED (unanimously):

That the Corporate Policy Committee approve the recommendations as set out within the Part 2 report, as summarised below:

Members were updated on the Council's proposed future involvement with, and shareholding, in the Joint Venture company Alliance Environmental Services and approval was sought to enter into several updated/or new legal agreements to facilitate that relationship and to take direct control of the shareholding in the company.

Members were provided with further detail as to the future of the Council's wholly owned company ANSA and noted that the company would continue for as long as there was an on-going need to operate certain services post 1 April 2025.

This included appropriate officer delegations to an officer management board and the Executive Director, Place in consultation with the Governance, Compliance and Monitoring Officer, to take these matters forward.

The meeting commenced at 10.00 am and concluded at 1.36 pm

Councillor N Mannion (Chair)

