

CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the **Corporate Policy Committee**
held on Thursday, 30th October, 2025 in the Committee Suite 1, 2 and 3,
Delamere House, Delamere Street, Crewe, CW1 2JZ

PRESENT

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

Councillors S Adams (sub for Cllr O'Leary), D Clark, J Clowes, L Crane,
T Dean, S Gardiner, J Bird (sub for Cllr Jefferay), J Rhodes, J Saunders,
F Wilson and A Moran (sub for Cllr Goldsmith)

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE

Rob Polkinghorne, Chief Executive
Karen Wheeler, Assistant Chief Executive
Ashley Hughes, Executive Director of Resources and S151 Officer
Chris Benham, Director of Finance
Peter Skates, Director of Growth and Enterprise
Brian Reed, Head of Democratic Services
Sam Jones, Democratic Services Officer
Nikki Bishop, Democratic Services Officer

37 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors M Goldsmith, D Jefferay and C O'Leary. Councillors S Adams, J Bird and A Moran were present as substitutes.

38 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

39 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 2 October 2025 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Vice Chair.

40 PUBLIC SPEAKING/OPEN SESSION

There were no registered speakers.

41 MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLANNING CONSULTATION (CORPORATE POLICY COMMITTEE)

The committee received an update on the development of the Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) for 2026–2030. Members noted that the Council continued to face significant financial challenges, with a forecasted budget gap of £18.2m for 2026/27, reduced from £33.3m following recent refinements.

The report outlined key updates to financial assumptions, including revised growth allocations for Adult Social Care and Children's Services, the introduction of a 5% vacancy factor across staffing budgets, above-inflation increases in fees and charges, and the reprofiling of transformation pump-priming budgets funded through capital receipts. Additional service budget adjustments and contingency for inflation were also highlighted. It was clarified that senior managers would apply professional judgement when considering the application of a 5% vacancy factor to ensure that critical frontline services, such as refuse collection and children's social care, were not impacted. Further assurance was provided in relation to Children's Services and Members noted that the Children's Improvement Board (Chaired by the Department of Education) considered regular performance reports particularly in relation to workforce which provided a further level of scrutiny around this process.

The committee considered the draft savings proposals, which totalled £57.8m for 2026/27, with further savings planned through to 2029/30. It was emphasised that successful delivery of the proposals would require robust programme management, clear delivery plans, a strong performance culture, and regular Member oversight through quarterly review sessions. Members were informed that a programme of public consultation and engagement would take place between November 2025 and January 2026.

Members welcomed the commitment to making significant improvements to consultation and engagement noting that this included Members of Parliament, the Youth Council, Adult Services Reference Group, online surveys, residents, businesses and key stakeholders. Members were pleased to learn that to date, over 2000 responses had been received in response to the budget prioritisation survey and urged officers to continue to encourage participation. The committee noted that the budget prioritisation survey remained open until 9am on Monday 3 November 2025

The recommendations were proposed and seconded and debated by the committee. Members were encouraged to submit further proposals during the consultation process. The S151 Officer also confirmed that he would be happy to attend political group meetings to ensure that Members were fully informed throughout the consultation and budget-setting process.

RESOLVED (by majority):

That the Corporate Policy Committee

1. Note the updated budget position for the period 2026/27 to 2029/30 as set out in Table 3 of the report.
2. Approve the list of budget savings proposals ready for consultation launch in November 2025 as contained in Annex 1 of the report.
3. Note and approve the conditions for successful budget delivery as noted in paragraph 8 of the report.

42 COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT SCHEME

The committee considered the report which provided an update on the Council Tax Support (CTS) scheme and the approach for potential future changes. Members noted that no changes were proposed for the 2026/27 financial year due to statutory constraints and the significant modelling and consultation required for any revisions.

The committee noted that CTS schemes could not be amended mid-year and that preparatory work would be undertaken during 2026/27 to model potential changes, including adjustments to banding and income disregards, with a view to informing decisions for the 2027/28 financial year.

The committee was advised that Cheshire East's current scheme offered up to 80% support, placing it above the national average but not among the most generous. Opportunities for reform were outlined and the legal risks associated with any changes were highlighted, particularly the need for robust equality impact assessments and compliance with legal statutory requirements to inform evidence-based decision-making.

RESOLVED (unanimously):

That the Corporate Policy Committee

1. Agree to review the Council's CTS scheme during 2026-27, and direct a further report to enable this to come to the first meeting of the relevant decision making Committee (be that this Committee or Executive Cabinet) in the 2026- 27 Municipal Year.

43 UPDATED DRAFT FEES AND CHARGES POLICY

The committee considered the report which sought approval for a new Fees and Charges Policy to replace the Council's Charging and Trading Strategy from 2017. In presenting the report to the committee a minor

amendment to the original officer recommendation (2) was highlighted and it was clarified that recommendation 2 should read as follows:

1. Recommend the proposed changes (as set out in paragraph 7 of the report) to the Council's Finance and Contract Procedure Rules to the next Full Council meeting.

Members noted that the existing policy was outdated and did not reflect current practice or best practice across other Councils. The proposed policy introduced a consistent corporate approach to setting fees and charges, based on the principle of full cost recovery, annual inflationary uplifts, and benchmarking against other authorities.

It was noted that the new policy aligned with the Council's Medium-Term Financial Strategy and would support financial sustainability by maximising income and reducing reliance on council tax subsidies. It also set out governance arrangements for approving deviations from the policy. Members were advised that the policy would apply to discretionary services and certain statutory services where charges were locally determined, but would not apply to Council Tax, Business Rates, or nationally set fees.

The committee noted that the policy had not been updated for eight years and sought assurance that this would not lead to any legal challenge of past decisions. It was clarified that no decisions had been made that breached the Contract and Finance Procedure Rules set out within the Council's Constitution. The S151 and Head of Democratic Services confirmed that work undertaken on revising the policy and the Finance and Contract Procedure Rules would be done alongside the anticipated change of Council governance arrangements in May 2026 to a Leader/Cabinet model, and that this would ensure that such policies were regularly reviewed and considered by the appropriate decision-making body.

RESOLVED (unanimously):

That the Corporate Policy Committee

1. Approve the new Fees and Charges Policy as at Annex 1.
2. Recommend the proposed changes (as set out in paragraph 7 of the report) to the Council's Finance and Contract Procedure Rules to the next Full Council meeting.

44 IMPROVEMENT AND TRANSFORMATION DELIVERY PLAN 2025-27

The committee considered the report setting out the Improvement and Transformation Delivery Plan for 2025–27. Members noted that the Plan would bring together all significant improvement and transformation activity into a single overarching document, aligning with the Cheshire East Plan

2025–29 and meeting the expectations of the non-statutory Best Value Notice issued by government in May 2025.

Councillor K Edwards addressed the committee as a Visiting Member. Councillor Edwards welcomed The Plan and stated that culture change needed to be driven by the Chief Executive and his senior leadership team. Cllr Edwards queried the ordering of the priorities and asked why the need for culture change to improve public services was not priority one. Cllr Edwards queried the role of Elected Members and their strategic leadership role which he felt had not been referenced within The Plan. In response, the Chief Executive and Assistant Chief Executive stated that the four improvement priorities were not in priority order and that this was stated within The Plan. The Chief Executive would be responsible for all four priorities and additional resource had been created as part of the senior leadership restructure including the appointment of the Director of People and Customer Service with responsibility for staffing matters across the organisation. There were a number of actions within the plan, including good governance and decision-making, which would focus upon supporting Members in their roles and review how policy frameworks could be improved to ensure Members lead this going forward.

Members noted that The Plan focused on four improvement priorities: financial sustainability, good governance and decision-making, leadership and culture change, and improving children's services. It included clear milestones and deliverables for the next 18 months, supported by robust governance and oversight arrangements. The committee suggested that the numbering of the priorities be reviewed to ensure it was clear that the priorities were not ranked in terms of significance or importance.

The committee noted that progress would be monitored through the Improvement and Transformation Delivery Board, with regular updates to the Assurance Panel, Corporate Policy Committee, and MHCLG. The committee were pleased to learn that initial feedback on The Plan from the Assurance Panel had been positive and Assurance Panel members felt that The Plan clearly reflected areas of key focus going forward.

Member engagement and policy development were identified as areas for improvement, and the Plan set out actions to strengthen these alongside embedding a new governance model, implementing a corporate performance framework, and delivering transformation programmes across services. The committee acknowledged the importance of resourcing the Plan effectively and noted that transformation reserves and contingency funding have been earmarked to support delivery.

The committee noted that narrative had been included within The Plan in relation to Devolution and that this would be monitored and updated as roles and responsibilities became clearer in the future.

The committee requested that reference to budget management training be amended to ensure that training was delivered at appropriate level for

specific Member roles within the new Cabinet/Leader form of governance. Officers agreed to amend this.

It was agreed that future updates on the delivery of the plan would be presented to the committee alongside the Strategic Risk Register.

RESOLVED (unanimously):

That the Corporate Policy Committee

1. Agree the Improvement and Transformation Delivery Plan 2025-27 at Appendix 1, subject to the feedback from the Assurance Panel meeting on 30 October 2025 and prioritisation session.
2. Delegate any final amendments to the Plan, and any updates throughout the next 18 months, to the Chief Executive in consultation with the Leader, Deputy Leader and Leader of the Opposition.

45 WORK PROGRAMME

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

1. That the November 2025 meeting had a significant number of items scheduled. It was suggested by the Chair that the meeting should start at 9am with a scheduled break for lunch. Scheduling an additional meeting of the committee had been explored however this was not feasible due to existing commitments. It was agreed that officers should review the items scheduled for November and where possible reduce the size of the agenda.

RESOLVED:

That the Work Programme be received and noted.

The meeting commenced at 10.30 am and concluded at 1.05 pm

Councillor N Mannion (Chair)