

CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the **Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee**
held on Thursday, 9th July, 2015 at Committee Suite 1,2 & 3, Westfields,
Middlewich Road, Sandbach CW11 1HZ

PRESENT

Councillor M Simon (Chairman)
Councillor M Grant (Vice-Chairman)

Councillors C Andrew, Rhoda Bailey, S Corcoran, D Flude, A Moran,
J Saunders, B Walmsley, H Wells-Bradshaw, L Wardlaw and J Wray

Apologies

Councillors G Barton, G Baxendale and J Weston

1 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting held on 30 March 2015 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

2 ALSO PRESENT

Councillor Rachel Bailey Children and Families Portfolio holder.

3 OFFICERS PRESENT

Caroline Simpson - Director of Economic Growth & Prosperity
Alex Thompson - Corporate Manager Strategy & Reporting
Angharad Jackson - Business Manager Adult Social Care
Steve Reading - Principal Accountant

4 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

5 DECLARATION OF PARTY WHIP

There were no declarations of the existence of a party whip.

6 PUBLIC SPEAKING TIME/OPEN SESSION

There were no members of the public present who wished to speak.

7 FINAL OUTTURN REPORT 2014/15

The Committee considered a report of the Chief Operating Officer.

The report set out the Council's performance for 2014/15, and highlighted the latest progress towards achieving the Council's Residents First Outcomes as described in the Council's three year plan 2013 to 2016. Permanent savings of £5m in management costs had been achieved from 2013/14 to 2014/15.

The Final Outturn showed how the Council was continuing to build on the position for last year. The 2013/14 outturn position was signed off by the Council's external auditors, without qualification, and demonstrated that the overall financial health, performance, resilience and value for money at Cheshire East Council was strong despite taking £50m out of its cost base from 2011/12, and freezing Council Tax for the fourth consecutive year. The Council Tax freeze had been maintained for 2015/16.

Savings had been consistently achieved through efficiency, removing any duplication of effort, making reductions in management costs, and a planned programme of asset disposals. This approach had protected funding provided to front line services. The Council's strong financial position reflected its enhanced governance, innovative delivery arrangements and effective stewardship of public money.

At the end of 2014/15 the Council's reserves strategy remained effective with an underspend of £0.7m being produced. This represented only a 0.3% variance from a budget of £253.8m.

Members of the committee were invited to ask questions about the report.

RESOLVED –

- (a) That the report be received;
- (b) That the committee is of the opinion that the 2014/15 final outturn report reflects positively on the progress being made by the Council towards achieving the Council's residents first outcomes, but would offer the following two additional comments:
 - That there are still concerns about the Council's ability to recruit and retain social workers in Crewe;
 - That changes in the Care Act as they relate to adult prisoners will have an impact on the authority as HMP Styal is located within the Borough and as initial findings suggest that 10-25% of those assessed meet the Council's eligibility thresholds, this matter will have to be monitored thoroughly

8 LOCAL PLAN

The Children and Families portfolio holder attended the meeting to provide an update of the latest position in respect of the work the Council had been undertaking in response to the Inspectors formal suspension of the examination of the Local Plan Strategy in December 2014.

She informed the committee that the task force set up by her predecessor Councillor Peter Raynes to undertake this additional work had made significant progress and was now in a position to make a formal recommendation to Cabinet .

RESOLVED –

- (a) That the report be received:
- (b) That the Local Plan Review process remain as a work programme o item on this committee.

9 BUSINESS PLANNING PROCESS 2016/19

The committee considered a report of the Chief Operating Officer relating to the Council's Business Planning Process for 2016/17 to 2018/19.

Each year the Council operated a rolling Business Planning Process to match resources. The process addressed these requirements through four stages:

- **Set parameters** - by assessing funding levels through reviewing corporate funding assumptions in relation to Council Tax etc. and agree the Council's priorities - May to June
- **Gather Evidence and Develop Proposals** – through managing the reduction in resources and additional growth pressures through changes to services, efficiency savings, increasing income etc. - July to September
- **Consult and Refine** - by sharing the proposals with this committee Members and interested parties for comment and an invitation for further suggestions for making savings or changes. Further internal challenge would develop the detail behind the proposals including consideration of detailed Business Cases in accordance with the principles of the Council's corporate project gateway model (as overseen by the Executive Monitoring Board) - October to January
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- **Approve** – by finalising the funding position and proposals, culminating in a report to Cabinet and Council to set the Budget.in February 2016.

Alex Thompson referred to the Chancellor's budget statement given on.....*July*. and explained that that there appeared to be no impact on the local government settlement. On that basis, it was anticipated that additional information on the likely settlement for next years budget would not be released before in December 2015.

In response to a question about whether the council tax freeze grant would continue for next year, Alex informed the committee that the budget speech made no reference to this particular grant

RESOLVED –

- (a) That the report be received;
- (b) That the Chairman and Vice Chairman be requested to consider how best the committee can feed into the early stages of the budget consultation process during the summer recess

10 WORK PROGRAMME PROGRESS REPORT

The committee reviewed its work programme.

Mark Nedderman informed the committee that in connection with item listed under digital customer services, that there would be an opportunity in September for members of this committee to be involved in testing some new developments.

Also, the Communities Committee Chairman had referred to this committee for guidance a cross cutting issue relating to indiscriminate parking around schools at drop off and pick up times.

RESOLVED –

- (a) That the report be received
- (b) That an item be placed on the 3 September agenda to consider developments connected with the digital customer development proposals
- (c) That the Communities committee be informed that although it is recognised that there are cross cutting issues connected with the potential review of indiscriminate parking around schools, that it is the view of this committee that the communities committees the most appropriate committee to take the lead on this in this matter.

The meeting commenced at 2.00 pm and concluded at 3.30 pm

Councillor M Simon (Chairman)