

CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the **Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee**
held on Thursday, 4th June, 2020 at Virtual Meeting

PRESENT

Councillor J Clowes (Chairman)
Councillor B Murphy (Vice-Chairman)

Councillors Q Abel, C Bulman, JP Findlow, R Fletcher, A Moran, J Saunders,
M Simon, R Vernon and L Wardlaw

PORTFOLIO HOLDERS IN ATTENDANCE

Councillor J Rhodes, Portfolio Holder for Public Health and Corporate
Services
Councillor A Stott, Portfolio Holder for Finance, ICT and Communication

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE

Jan Bakewell, Director of Governance and Compliance
Jane Burns, Executive Director of Corporate Services
Frank Jordan, Deputy Chief Executive and Executive Director of Place
Mark Palethorpe, Executive Director of People
Alex Thompson, Director of Financial and Customer Services

1 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

2 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED –

That, subject to it being noted that Council Macfarlane had substituted for Councillor Butterill and Councillor Beanland had for substituted Councillor Saunders, and to the word 'earmarked' being deleted in bullet point one in respect of minute 63 2019/20- Quarter 3 Review (Finance), the minutes of the meeting held on 2 February 2020 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

3 DECLARATION OF PARTY WHIP

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

4 PUBLIC SPEAKING TIME/OPEN SESSION

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

5 CORPORATE PERFORMANCE SCORECARD 2019/20 QUARTER 3

The Committee considered a report of the Executive Director for Corporate Services containing performance data relating to the Corporate Directorate for period relating to quarter 3 in the 2019/20 financial year.

The Committee made the following observations:

- In future the committee would like to receive printed copies of performance information on A3 sized paper.
- Members requested additional Information on Housing Benefit over-payments relating to COVID in the context of the Council's financial year comparing past and future years.
- A written answer was sought to a question regarding the £1million overspend in relation B4B to clarify whether this was a result of consultancy fees or agency staff.

RESOLVED –

That the report be received and noted.

6 2019/20 OUTTURN

The Committee gave detailed consideration to the Financial Outturn Report 2019/20 and made the following observations:

- Members expressed concern regarding the Council's budgetary position on reserves and associated risks, as contained in the report of the Director of Finance and Customer Services.
- That In accordance with Government guidance and guidance from the Centre for Public Scrutiny (CfPS), this Committee would be reviewing Council spending on COVID-19 related matters and as such, this area of scrutiny would be included on future Committee agendas as a standing item.
- The Committee expressed concern regarding the level of overspend on Corporate Services.
- The Committee noted the level of overspend relating to the Best4Business programme,

RESOLVED –

- (a) That the report be received

- (b) That in view of the concern expressed regarding reserves, Cabinet be requested to provide up to date financial information on a regular basis, to allow the Committee to keep a watching brief on the reserve position in future.
- (c) That in view of the concern expressed regarding Corporate Services Directorate budget spending, assurances be sought from Cabinet that measures will be put in place to ensure that future policies obviate the need for overspends in the Corporate Services Directorate in the medium and long term.
- (d) That Cabinet be requested to provide more detailed information on the Best4Business programme in future to enable greater scrutiny of the programme as it affects this Council.
- (e) That COVID 19 Related Financial Matters be added to future agendas of the committee as a standing item for the foreseeable future.

7 BEST 4 BUSINESS (B4B) UPDATE

The notes of a meeting of the Best4Business joint scrutiny working group held on 15 May 2020 were submitted.

Councillor Paul Findlow a member of the joint working group also provided an oral update and explained that the two authorities had recently taken greater control of the B4B programme and it had been suggested that the terms of reference for the joint committee should be extended to match those of the joint services committee.

RESOLVED –

- (a) That the minutes of the Best4Business joint scrutiny working group held on 15 May 2020 be received, and the update provided by Councillor Findlow noted.
- (b) That Best4Business remain as a standing item on future agendas of this committee.

8 CORPORATE PEER CHALLENGE

The Committee considered a report of the Executive Director of Corporate Services relating to a Corporate Peer Challenge facilitated by the Local Government Association involving a peer team consisting of councillors and senior officers from local authorities around the UK. The report produced by the peer team was due to be considered by Cabinet on 9 June 2020

During the review, the peer team spoke to over 180 people and spent around 270 hours collectively on site to determine their findings.

RESOLVED –

That the following comments be submitted to Cabinet for consideration at its meeting to be held on 9 June 2020:

- (a) That Cabinet be invited to acknowledge Recommendation 8 of the report that Overview and Scrutiny is and will remain an important element of the Council's political management arrangements arising from processes of "internal challenge and improvement", as this Council moves toward the introduction of a new committee system. This Committee acknowledges the role that existing Scrutiny Members will contribute in leading that process by reviewing matters relating to strategy, finance and governance as the committee system proposals progress.
- (b) The Comments made by the Committee in relation to reserves and future budgets as described in the 19-20 outturn report (notwithstanding COVID related issues), suggest that it is timely for the committee to scrutinise the Corporate Plan and therefore Cabinet be requested to ensure that appropriate measures are put in place to allow adequate and timely scrutiny of this key policy document.

9 FORWARD PLAN

The Committee reviewed the Council's Forward Plan of key decisions.

RESOLVED –

That the forward plan be noted.

10 WORK PROGRAMME PROGRESS REPORT

The Committee reviewed its work programme.

RESOLVED –

That the following amendments to the work programme be approved:

- Corporate Peer Challenge and link this item to the item relating to the review of the Council's Political management structure– further update in 6 month's time
- Loan to Cheshire and Warrington LEP – delete

- That the item relating to Members facilities Accommodation and Culture task and finish group be held in abeyance.

The meeting commenced at 2.00 pm and concluded at 4.39 pm

Councillor J Clowes (Chairman)