

Cheshire West & Chester Council

Annual Report

2016 – 2017

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Cheshire West
and Chester

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Introduction

The first full year of working towards the Council Plan, Helping the Borough Thrive, has seen a range of initiatives and investment to make life better for our communities.

The Plan was developed in consultation with residents and partners in 2015/16 and outlines Cheshire West and Chester Council's vision for thriving communities, thriving residents and a thriving economy by 2020.

It sets out the 10 outcomes that we intend to deliver to help us achieve our overall goal to make Cheshire West and Chester a thriving borough.

During 2016/17 we have made significant progress in each outcome area. We also invited independent evaluation in three Local Government Association peer reviews to ensure that we are doing the right things in the right way to deliver those outcomes.

This report highlights our achievements and shows how we continue to deliver innovation and high quality services against a challenging financial climate.



Councillor Samantha Dixon
Leader



Gerald Meehan
Chief Executive

About us

West Cheshire has a population of 335,700¹ and is made up of the historic city of Chester, industrial and market towns and rural villages. It has a diverse range of communities, scenery and heritage.

During the 2016/17 financial year there were 75 elected members of Cheshire West and Chester Council representing the 46 wards that make up the area. This included 38 Labour, 36 Conservative and one independent.

Local Government Association peer reviews

The Council has been praised by its peers in three separate reviews in 2016/17. Teams from the Local Government Association (LGA) have looked at the Council as a whole, as well as specifically focusing on its Communication and Cultural services.

Each review was a voluntary process that the Council invited to gain an independent assessment of its strengths and areas for improvement.

The Council-wide review team comprised four experienced LGA peers who work in senior roles across local government. This group examined evidence and key documents and interviewed more than 120 members of staff, councillors and representatives from partner organisations.

The review praised the Council's leadership, financial management, high quality services and clear priorities. It also explored how the Council could benefit from

opportunities of sub-regional working, and its ambitions for transforming health and social care services.

The communication review looked at the work of the central Communication team and general communication across the Council. It praised the organisation's approach to communication and the leadership, motivation and skills of the team, as well as offering recommendations to help communication become more strategic to add even greater value.

The review of Cultural Services looked at the Council's vision for arts, festivals, museums, archives and libraries and the performance of the service. It found that there was much to celebrate, including excellent staff who embrace innovation, and that the Council had a good understanding of its leading role to promote culture. The review also offered recommendations around opportunities to develop the service.

¹ Source: Office for National Statistics licensed under the Open Government Licence V3.0



Thriving residents

Outcome: all our families, children and young people are supported to get the best start in life

- There are 478 looked after children in west Cheshire, many of them aged 11 and over. For the past year a **foster carer recruitment** campaign has targeted experienced foster carers able to provide the support and care that every child deserves. Early in 2017 the Council's Design team created a television advert to tell the story of 11-year-old Harry who dreams of having a family to care for him. This will be shown on a new, innovative media channel, Sky Adsmart. This technology sends adverts to the Sky box of those households with characteristics that match potentially suitable people.

2016/17 highlights.

- **14 new mainstream fostering households were recruited, taking the total to 119.** These are households where the foster carers are not related to the children and young people in need of care.
- **Nine households offered carer to carer respite and three households offered short breaks for children with disabilities.** Carer to carer respite allows foster parents to have a break while their children are looked after by others.
- **22 new family and friends households were added, making a list of 46.** These are households where the foster carers look after children and young people related to them.
- A total of **232 foster places** are available for local children and young people within the borough.
- **220 children were fostered with the Council's own carers at times during the 12 months,** including children being fostered by family and friends and those being fostered for adoption.
- A total of **26 west Cheshire children were successfully adopted in 2016/17.**

- The Council's **Edge of Care** team supports families at significant risk of breakdown where other interventions do not appear to be making enough impact. The aim is to keep families together and make them more resilient to safely reduce the number of children entering the Council's care. In 2016/17 the team worked with 102 children and their families. During 2016 a further three Family Intervention Workers were appointed. The team is now providing additional support to families where children are moving back home.
- In 2016/17 the decision was made to retain an in-house **Youth Work Service**, including the direct delivery of targeted youth work and a quality assurance role to support third sector youth work providers. Targeted work includes youth groups and teams that help reduce anti-social behaviour by working with young people out in the community. The in-house service is integral to the Integrated Early Support Service and strengthens support offered through the Educational Welfare Officers and Transition and Participation Service.
- The take up of **free early education** for eligible two-year-olds from the borough's most deprived wards has improved since 2016, reaching 101 per cent in spring term 2017, a figure that takes population change into account. This exceeds the target of 83 per cent. 106 per cent of three and four year olds, including out of borough children, took their free early education entitlement during the same period.
- In September 2016 the Council approved the **Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Strategy 2016-20**. This aims to improve the educational, health and emotional wellbeing of children in west Cheshire with special educational needs and disabilities by developing well-planned provision from birth to 25. Integrated services will work closely with parents and carers to meet the child's needs.
- The Council helps **care leavers** to progress into adulthood in an inclusive and planned way. Its Leaving Care team supports young people to move to a setting appropriate to their needs, where they feel confident about the future and prepared for adult life. Care leavers are prioritised when applying for housing and are able to apply eight weeks before their 18th birthday. During the past two years, the Leaving Care team has increased accommodation choices, including a group home of five flats in Chester. Working with Housing Solutions and registered social housing providers, the team has developed a tenancy scheme to make it simpler for care leavers to get their own permanent accommodation. 97 per cent of care leavers now live in suitable accommodation, against a target of 90 per cent and national average of 81 per cent.
- The west Cheshire approach for tackling child poverty is set out in the **Child Poverty Strategy 2016-20**. This vision is of local and national partners working together to reduce child and family poverty and increase opportunities for children and young people. The aim is to ensure an ever-growing proportion of children and young people are ready for school and life while supporting families to increase their income and spend their money wisely. Through this strategy the Council has supported the West Cheshire Poverty Truth Commission detailed on the next page.



Outcome: older people and vulnerable adults are compassionately supported to lead fulfilled and independent lives

- Spearheaded by the Council, The **West Cheshire Poverty Truth Commission (WCPTC)** was established in 2016/17. The WCPTC aims to give a face to the facts about poverty by creating a safe space for people directly affected by poverty to tell their stories. It also creates an opportunity for those who influence and make decisions to listen and jointly tackle the root causes of poverty. The launch event saw real life experiences told by the self-named Community Inspirers to an audience of 200 attendees from a range of organisations. Following feedback from the event, the commission is developing recommendations to help tackle poverty and inequality and will present these in February 2018.
- The Council completed 180 major **independent living adaptations** to help residents live safely and independently at home. This is an increase of 30 per cent on last year and includes adaptations like stairlifts and bathing facilities. The Council also completed 1,900 minor adaptations, like ramps and widened doors, to help with daily living. These home adaptations help reduce the burden on the NHS and Social Care services. Work was carried out through the Home Assistance Hub and funded by Disabled Facilities Grants.
- The Council worked with West Cheshire Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) to establish the **Integrated Community Equipment Service**, which purchases, recycles and distributes equipment, from daily living aids to specialist equipment for people with complex needs. The cost of the contract, delivered by Ross Care, has fallen by 12 per cent from £93,000 per quarter in 2015/16 to £82,000 in the first quarter of 2017 while the number of people benefiting has increased. A total of 70 per cent of products issued are now recycled and this continues to rise, improving efficiency and savings.
- Since September 2016 the Countess of Chester Hospital (COCH) Rapid Response team and Cheshire West and Chester Reablement Service have been working to create a joint integrated service. This aims to **improve supported discharge from hospital** and help individuals maintain independence in their own home for up to six weeks. The service has removed duplication of assessment to improve customer service

and developed shared working that makes the most of resources. In the first five months, the service supported the safe discharge of 420 patients from the hospital. Feedback from service users between January and April 2017 shows 88 per cent of respondents are extremely likely to recommend the service to friends and family if they needed it.

- Social workers from Cheshire West and Chester and Cheshire East councils are working differently with NHS colleagues at Leighton Hospital to **speed up patients' discharge from hospital**. Teams are based at the hospital where they work closely with discharge nurses, regularly reviewing workloads, suggesting innovative solutions and designing individual care packages.



- The Brightlife project is one of 14 national programmes aiming to develop community-led **improvements for socially isolated people** aged 50 and over. In west Cheshire, a new management structure was established and the foundations laid for commissioning local projects and for social prescribing, which allows healthcare professionals to refer socially isolated patients to community-based services. The social prescribing scheme saw almost 250 referrals handled during the year in the three targeted areas of Malpas, Winsford and Chester. In addition, around £500,000 was allocated to commission 14 local projects. Led by Age UK Cheshire, Brightlife is worth more than £5m for the five year period and is managed by a local partnership which includes the Council and the NHS.
- In October 2016 people with **learning disabilities** were invited to meet the Council's Senior Leadership team and discuss the everyday issues they face. Around 30 service users attended, asking questions and exploring what has worked or not worked for them in the past. A second meeting will take place in November 2017 to ensure the Council's commitments have been delivered.

Outcome: vulnerable adults and children feel safe and are protected

- In November 2016 the Winsford and Northwich Children in Need team won the 'Team of the Year' accolade at the national **Social Worker of the Year Awards**, placing the Council among the highest achieving authorities in the sector. The team, which offers support to families and children to reduce the likelihood of them needing social care in the future, was praised for its tight-knit relationships with partners, which help to improve the lives of children and families in their area. This builds on the Council's rating of good with outstanding features judged by Ofsted in 2016.
- A dedicated **Carer Liaison Officer**, working alongside the Social Care, Strategic Commissioning and Health teams, is now providing information, advice and guidance to carers across the borough. A total of 897 carers have used the service in 2016/17, an increase of more than 40 per cent from the previous year, and 2,619 assessments were completed, an increase from 1,276 the previous year. Following positive feedback, the initially temporary role has been made permanent.
- Archangel Care has been commissioned to provide a **short break and respite service for adults with a learning disability, autism spectrum disorder, physical disability and mental health needs** in Winsford. This flexible service aims to meet individual needs, offering respite for up to four people at any one time at a specially adapted house in Winsford. One place is reserved as emergency provision so that people can be cared for outside potentially unfamiliar and distressing hospital situations.
- The Council commissions organisations to provide **short break services for disabled children and their families**. One service, Short Break Individual Payments, delivers up to £1,000 a year via a managed bank account which families can use to fund the services they choose. The service has seen 232 families on high rate Disability Living Allowance enjoy short breaks. In 2016/17 the Council delivered its biggest number of short breaks to date, totalling more than 4,800 days.
- The Council has worked closely with NHS Clinical Commissioning Group partners to design a **new commissioning framework for residential care**. The contract is worth £27m per year over three years and covers the full range of residential care, including dementia and NHS continuing health care for people with long term conditions or complex needs. The framework is linked to UNISON's Ethical Care Charter, detailed below, and also sets a fair cost of care for care homes. The care rate increase benefits employees and adds to the financial viability of providers, which have been able to grow, improve conditions and increase their ability to offer care in a timely manner. The commissioning framework ensures residents receive the best value for money when engaging with care homes through the Council or privately.
- The Council signed up to UNISON's **Ethical Care Charter** in October 2015 and now adopts this charter in all its Care at Home and care home contracts, supporting the conditions and quality of services. The charter means staff in the care sector are reimbursed for travel time. The way Care at Home is commissioned means carers do not have to rush from one client to the next and residents have the same carer as far as possible. Contracts encourage improved pay and guaranteed hours for staff, rather than zero hours contracts. The Council's adoption of the charter has led to improvements in terms and conditions for employees across the care sector through competition to recruit staff.
- The **Local Offer website**, launched in 2016, provides a comprehensive online directory of care and support information and services available for adults and children in west Cheshire. It features information and factsheets from public, private and third sector providers, as well as a self-assessment tool. A paper Care and Support Directory has also been published.

Thriving economy

Outcome: people are well educated, skilled and earn a decent living

- During 2016/17 work progressed well on the rebuild of schools that were part of the Government's **Priority Schools Building Programme**. Dee Point Primary School, Blacon High School and Ellesmere Port Christ Church CE Primary School opened to pupils in September 2016, while work started at Neston High School in December 2015.
- The vast majority of Reception and Year Seven children are able to **study at their first choice of school** this year, with 91 per cent of pupils allocated their first choice place.
- During 2016/17, 90 per cent of children attended a good or outstanding primary school as judged by **Ofsted**, which is down one per cent from the previous year. 92 per cent of children attended a good or outstanding secondary school, which is up 14 per cent from the previous year.
- New annual performance indicators (see opposite) were introduced nationally in summer 2016 in relation to performance at the end of both Key Stage Two (KS2) and Four (KS4). These changes mean that in 2016 meaningful comparison with many 2015 outcomes is not possible. At KS2, 53 per cent of children achieved the expected standard for reading, writing and maths, in line with the national average. However, only 34 per cent of disadvantaged children achieved this measure which is below the national figure for this group. In west Cheshire, the new Progress 8 score was 0.04 at KS4, which means that pupils made more progress, on average, than pupils across England who got similar results at the end of KS2. However the score for disadvantaged students was -0.47 which is below the national figure for this group. Closing the gap between the **educational attainment** of pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds and their peers continues to be a priority. A Closing the Gap strategy and action plan has been developed to support the Council's efforts. Work continues to assess the use and impact of Pupil Premium Funding, which schools can use to help raise the attainment of disadvantaged pupils. A virtual school supports the education of children in care and the staff that work with them.



Explaining Attainment 8 and Progress 8

Performance measures at KS4 now include Attainment 8 and Progress 8. Attainment 8 measures the achievement of a pupil across eight qualifications, including English, mathematics, three qualifications that count in the English Baccalaureate and three further qualifications that can be GCSEs or technical awards. Progress 8 is the key accountability measure for secondary schools. This aims to capture the progress pupils make from the end of primary school to the end of secondary school and is calculated by comparing Attainment 8 scores with the average Attainment 8 scores of all pupils nationally that had a similar starting point based on the end of KS2 results.

- Reports about the skills of **working age** people, measured over a three-month period, showed that 55.3 per cent of adults are qualified to at least NVQ Level Three or equivalent qualification in west Cheshire, which is a similar level to 2015/16.
- The Council has recorded improvements in the proportion of people within a disadvantaged groups in **Education Employment or Training (EET)**. During 2016/17, 58 per cent of care leavers were in EET, compared to 50 per cent the previous year. The proportion of Key Stage Four Special Educational Needs (SEN) who are in EET at the age of 17 ended the year at 88.8 per cent, higher than the 82.3 per cent target.
- At the end of November 2016 the Council was the fourth highest performing area nationally for **children not in education, employment and training (NEET)**. At the end of March 2017 the NEET figures stood at 2.4 per cent, with a further 0.3 per cent not known. The overall figure of 2.7 per cent continues a year-on-year reduction.
- During the year the Council's Skills and Employment team commissioned or directly delivered 7,991 hours of **adult learning** across the borough, focusing on supporting unemployed adults back into employment. Working closely with providers and Job Centre Plus to engage learners within the community resulted in 3,061 people enrolling in adult learning and 98 per cent of learners completing their course. Where the course was nationally certificated, 96 per cent of people achieved their qualification and, for non-certificated programmes, 98 per cent of learners achieved their individual learning goals.
- The Council's four **Work Zones** supported 700 residents into jobs, resulting in a 19 per cent reduction in the long term unemployment figure for the borough. By the end of March 2017 only 465 people were reported as long term unemployed. Work Zones have now supported 2,001 residents into jobs since they started in February 2013, focusing on people who have been out of work for longer than six months and those facing multiple barriers to getting into work.
- A Careers Leads' network has been established with school headteachers supporting the **careers education programmes** in schools and colleges, raising awareness of apprenticeships and supporting collaboration. The group has engaged with the national careers service and targeted schools have received additional support. Four schools, Ellesmere Port Catholic High, Neston High, Weaverham High, and The Bishop Bluecoat Church of England High, have recently achieved the Full Quality Careers Award. Four apprenticeship events were facilitated and two Make It in Manufacturing events took place in March 2017, sponsored by local businesses.

Outcome: a great place to do business

- The Council's Growth Strategy team secured £1.8 million from the European Regional Development Fund, to help meet the costs of **developing workspace for small and medium sized enterprises** at locations in Bumper's Lane, Chester, Dutton's Business Centre, Northwich, and Winsford 1-5 Industrial Estate. The next stage is to attract growth businesses to the units, specifically in advanced manufacturing, energy and technology sectors. Business support is also available for these companies.
- The **Constellation Partnership** has been formed to develop a HS2 Growth Strategy that directs growth and regeneration to where it is most needed and will have the greatest impact. Made up of two local enterprise partnerships (LEPs) and seven local authorities, the partnership is supported by the government to develop the strategy, which will also ensure regeneration is delivered to the highest standards of design and sustainability. The partnership's ambition is to deliver 100,000 new homes and 120,000 new jobs by 2040. It is recognised as a key priority for this LEP area.
- The **Mersey Dee Alliance** is a partnership supporting strategic economic activity across the North Wales and north west England border and helping to promote north east Wales, Cheshire and Wirral as a major economic area. A prospectus identifies some of the next steps needed to help unlock its economic potential. The Council is working with partners to agree major development opportunities and the supporting infrastructure needed. This includes a focus on Ellesmere Port, Chester and the Cheshire Science Corridor Enterprise Zone.
- The **Cheshire Science Corridor** was awarded Enterprise Zone status in May 2016. Covering more than 100 hectares, the corridor stretches over three local authority areas including Cheshire West and Chester. It has the potential to attract 20,000 jobs and 500 businesses to Cheshire and Warrington through business incentives and the ability to retain and reinvest new business rate revenue. The Enterprise Zone sites provide opportunities for collaborations between businesses, institutions and research establishments. A range of sites will benefit from business incentives like Enhanced Capital Allowances (ECAs) or business rate discounts. The sites offer a unique opportunity for businesses wishing to establish production facilities alongside centres of science excellence.
- The £400m **Northern Powerhouse Investment Fund**, including £13m investment from Cheshire and Warrington European funds, was launched at Chester Racecourse in March 2017 by the LEP and British Business Bank. The fund provides microfinance from £25,000 to £100,000, business loans from £100,000 to £750,000 and equity finance up to £2 million. It aims to support small and medium businesses in the north of England to release their potential by offering money to help them start up or grow.
- Since 2013, more than £250 million of public and private sector funds have been invested in the **city of Chester**. More than 1,000 new jobs have been created or are forecast to be delivered. Chester's new Business Quarter includes One City Place, a 70,000 sq ft office building next to Chester Station completed in February 2016, and Carriage Shed, a semi-covered event space that opened in April 2016. Nearer the city centre, Fountains Health, which houses four GP surgeries, a dentist, a sexual health clinic, podiatry and physiotherapy, was completed.
- In 2016/17 The Council's **Business Growth Service** has supported 450 businesses, secured £320m private sector investment into the borough and overseen the creation of more than 1,000 jobs.



Outcome: a well connected and accessible borough



- In 2016 Chester became the first British city to win the European Commission **Access City Award** for its commitment to ensuring that the historic environment continues to be more accessible for all. The award recognises cities' efforts to make it easier for disabled and older people to access public areas and those with clear plans for further improvements. Chester was one of seven shortlisted from the 43 cities that entered.
- Frodsham Street** in Chester reopened in spring 2017 following improvement works that created a shared space for people and traffic. Inspired by Chester's architecture, a series of unique bollards were designed for the street which highlight architectural features found across the city.
- Chester Bus Interchange** opened in the city centre, providing services 24 hours a day, with 13 bus stands and an average of 90 buses per hour in the daytime. A free and accessible shuttle bus service runs from the interchange to the town hall for shoppers. Information screens give passengers live updates on arrival times and the interchange features free wifi, public toilets with changing facilities, a newsagent and an information desk. A café opens in autumn 2017. The interchange replaces the former site on Princess Street that is part of the Chester Northgate development.
- During summer 2016, the Council launched an improved **Park and Ride service** for Chester. The new contract, with partners Stagecoach, uses a fleet of 12 new buses with features including climate control, free 4G wi-fi, USB charging, CCTV, premium quality seats and the latest enviro clean engine technology. Two new routes operate across the city with more stops for passengers. In October 2016, automatic number plate recognition technology was introduced at Chester's four park and ride locations. The Park and Ride service was extended to support the Chester Business Improvement District's (CH1 Chester BID) Head Out Not Home campaign during the summer and was also available for free to support Small Business Saturday in December 2016.
- A new **weekend bus service**, called Nightlife Express, was introduced between Winsford and Northwich to provide an evening service between the towns and make leisure and cultural activities at Barons Quay, in Northwich, more accessible. The service was expanded to also include Davenham and Moulton.
- £1.5 million deck repairs to **Acton Swing Bridge** near Northwich, funded by the Council, began in January 2017. The work was arranged by the Canal and River Trust and contractors, Kier, carried out the repairs. The 84-year-old bridge carries the A49 over the River Weaver. The works included a fully refurbished bridge deck, strengthening works to the underside of the bridge and improvements to the bridge appearance.
- Section 106 agreements** are made between councils and developers to provide funding for infrastructure if a development is likely to have a significant impact on the local area. In 2016/17 the Council received approximately £2.5m in Section 106 contributions to deliver highways, education and play area or open space projects across the borough. A total of £1.3m was spent in the last financial year. The money has been used to improve play areas across the borough including in Blacon, Farndon, Northwich, Cuddington and Hoole. Work has also started on a new cycling and pedestrian route between Winnington Urban Village and Northwich town centre, and the funding has provided new pedestrian facilities on Victoria Road and Brook Lane, Chester.

Thriving communities

Outcome: cleanest, safest and most sustainable neighbourhoods in the country



- The Council's Food Safety team is helping businesses boost their food hygiene rating. Currently, following an inspection by a food safety officer, businesses are awarded a nationally recognised rating which is published on the Food Standards Agency website. Ratings are between zero and five, with five being the top score. The Council's **GET 5 service**, which stands for Gaining Excellence Together, helps food businesses achieve and maintain a five rating. For a small charge, food safety officers visit businesses to provide tailored advice during a two-hour coaching and follow-up session.
- The annual **Big Dee Day** to help clean up the River Dee, surrounding areas and waterways saw hundreds of volunteers getting involved. To mark the event's 10th anniversary a celebration was held at Edgar's Field Park in Handbridge, Chester, in September 2016 with activities and stalls connected with the river and its communities.
- A joint campaign to deter people from urinating on walls and buildings was launched by the Council and Chester's Business Improvement District CH1ChesterBID. As part of the **Pee-back campaign**, walls in secret locations were coated with liquid-repelling paint which causes splash back. An animated film was used to promote the campaign and obtained substantial national coverage. Urinating in public is a criminal offence and the Council will prosecute individuals caught in the act. In September 2016, three offenders received combined fines of more than £1,000.

- More than 24,000 **street lights** are being upgraded in a £5.1m programme which began in 2016. Street lighting in residential areas is being changed from sodium lamps to more energy efficient LED (light-emitting diode) lights to reduce carbon emissions and energy consumption costs. The new LED lights should save around 40 per cent of the Council's energy consumption. The programme began in Winsford and Northwich and will move to Chester and Ellesmere Port. The schedule is based on the age of the current lamps, which are usually replaced every three years. The LED technology has manufacturers' warranties for 12 years, and could last as long as 20 years. The Council has around 50,000 street lights in total.



- Streetscene teams have joined the national **Hedgehog Preservation Society's Roll of Honour** – a list of organisations which help prevent hedgehogs being injured when grass is cut. The society's warning stickers have been applied to trimmers and lawn mowers to remind staff to check for hedgehogs before they start work.
- The Council has taken steps to tackle **fly-tippers** more quickly and effectively by adopting new powers to issue fixed penalty notices. Changes to the Environmental Protection Act 1990 came into force in 2016 and allow the Council to issue fixed penalty notices for fly-tipping, with a £400 penalty for offenders.

Outcome: good quality and affordable housing that meets the needs of our diverse communities

- A total of 457 **affordable homes** were completed in the borough in 2016/17, with 271 for affordable rent and 186 low cost home ownership properties.
- An innovative **Housing Delivery plan** was produced with different ways to bring forward mixed tenure housing schemes, including a Housing Revenue Account scheme, a Housing Land Lease scheme and funding for rural communities. The Housing Revenue Account scheme delivered its first five shared ownership properties at Woodford Lodge, Winsford. Through the Housing Land Lease scheme, Cabinet approved 200 homes at Handley Hill, in Winsford, Rivacre, in Ellesmere Port, and the former Acorns School, in Ellesmere Port, 75 of which will be for affordable rent. Financial assistance has been introduced for Community Land Trust schemes for rural communities to build affordable housing with a grant of up to £25,000 per unit to make a scheme financially viable. This will empower communities to identify sites to meet specific local need for affordable rented accommodation.
- The Council was selected as a partner by the government for **starter homes** in January 2017 and is progressing a scheme in Winsford. A successful Capacity Fund Bid for £224,000 will help to bring forward the Council's housing delivery programme and support communities who are looking into self and custom build projects.
- The Council's housing register **West Cheshire Homes** received 6,389 applications for social housing, which is 928 less than 2015/16, and helped 2,258 people avoid homelessness, 825 more than in the past year. It assessed 297 homelessness applications and the Council accepted a full statutory duty to 99 homeless households, which means it has a duty to provide temporary accommodation to the household until their homelessness is resolved. This is an increase of 36 applications and 12 acceptances than in 2015/16.
- The Council has agreed a new 10-year contract for the management of its stock of 5,500 properties. This contract will be signed early in 2017/18 and will include all **housing management, repairs and maintenance** for Council tenants and leaseholders. It will cover new Council homes currently being built, as well as repairs and maintenance of the two Council Gypsy and Traveller sites.
- The Council launched the **Empty Homes Strategy** last year with a target to bring 900 empty homes back into use by 2021. Since then, 150 empty homes have been brought back into use. In 2016/17, 24 private sector homes had repairs and improvements with the help of grants or loans. The Council also launched the Empty Homes Matching Service, and the Buy and Sell Service designed to match empty home owners wishing to sell their home with accredited landlords or property developers who buy empty homes and bring them back into use.
- The **Private Landlord Service** launched to provide information and resources for landlords, including the latest news about the private rented sector, a tenant finding service, tenancy support or sign up services, training and access to property improvement grants. Free advertising is provided for vacant properties on the Council's West Cheshire Homes website and access is provided to the Council's Bond Guarantee Scheme. The Private Landlord Service was set up after consultation identified that landlords wanted more advice and support from the Council. The service also provides help and support to tenants and prospective tenants including Housing Benefit advice and affordability checks.
- The Council, in partnership with Warrington and Cheshire East councils, won £366,000 funding from the Department for Communities and Local Government to help those at imminent risk of sleeping rough. This will help the Council reduce the number of **rough sleepers** through more targeted prevention work. Mentors will support people to make the most of their income or find employment, help with family mediation and referrals to supported housing projects, or help with finding private rented accommodation. The new service, called Upstream, is being delivered by Forum Housing until 2019.





Outcome: vibrant and healthy communities with inclusive leisure, heritage and culture

- The £80 million **Barons Quay** development, in Northwich, launched with the opening of Asda, the Odeon cinema, Wildwood restaurant and multi-storey car park in November and December. Weaver Way was also re-paved and re-opened in December.
- A former art deco Odeon cinema in Chester city centre was transformed into a cultural centre called **Storyhouse**, which brings together theatre, cinema and the city library under one roof. More than 79,000 people visited Storyhouse in the first month and the opening season saw sell out performances of *The Beggar's Opera*, *Alice in Wonderland*, *Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Julius Caesar*. There were 126 theatre performances over 109 days, film festivals, the Women of the World Festival which welcomed more than 5,500 visitors, cinema screenings, music concerts, storytelling, workshops and a raft of community events. The library has welcomed 2,500 new members and 3,400 children have visited the children's library.
- The annual Scarborough Tourism Economic Activity Monitor (STEAM) report, an independent analysis of the Cheshire and Warrington economy (2016), highlights that total **visitor numbers** are up 7.7 per cent to 62.18 million and employment in the visitor sector up by 6.1 per cent at an estimated 42,615. There were approximately 35 million visits to the borough last year. Day trips make up the majority of visits, however hotels have seen a 6.1 per cent growth. Chester has seen an average year-on-year 13.5 per cent increase in footfall (April 2016 to April 2107). Monthly footfall figures in Northwich exceeded 300,000 for the first time in April 2017.
- Self-service technology has been installed in the borough's **libraries**, making it quicker and easier to issue and return books and multimedia. This also allows for smaller counters, leaving more room for visitors.

- The Council's **Mobile Library Service** launched new routes in November 2016, with an increase in the number of stops and extended stops in some locations to meet demand. The Mobile Library Service offers adult and junior books, audiobooks, internet access and access to the web-based Library Management System, which allows library users to make reservations and update their accounts.
- 2016 saw a record-breaking **Summer Reading Challenge** in the libraries. A total of 5,055 children started the challenge in 2016, an increase of 11 per cent from 2015, with 3,187 completers, an increase of 13 per cent from 2015. More than 30 young people aged between 12 and 24 volunteered as Reading Hacks, providing 280 hours of their time across 10 libraries to support the challenge. They registered children, gave out rewards and attended the awards ceremonies. 12 branches recorded their highest number of starters and nine their highest number of completers. Northwich Library had the biggest number taking part with 597, followed by Upton with 468 and Neston with 423. Libraries showing significant improvements on last year were Blacon, up 54 per cent, Chester, up 41 per cent and Tattenhall, up 91 per cent.
- The Council's Bridges and Structures team arranged for **original Roman masonry** to be used in repairs to the city walls, near to the Groves, in Chester. Repairs were carried out on the section of walls at the bottom of Barnaby's Tower which is thought to date from the 13th Century. The masonry was excavated from the Odeon site as part of the works on the new theatre. No Roman buildings were damaged during the excavations at the Odeon site – the masonry was from below-ground foundations and a Roman drain.
- In April 2016, the Council, working with volunteer group Friends of Anderton and Marbury (FoAM), opened **new facilities for park rangers and volunteers at Marbury Park**. The new connected blocks of office space, toilets and catering facilities were the result of a £70,000 investment by the Council. The new facilities mean FoAM could develop its group further, and provide improved facilities for schools and community groups to hold events within the country park, particularly those around education and health improvement.
- In February 2016, extensive works to stabilise a slipping stream bank at **Wades Clough Woodlands in Winsford** were completed by the Council following requests from local residents. Footpaths and steps in the woodland were also improved. Wades Clough is an area of semi-natural ancient woodland within a stream valley located in a residential area. Part of the site is designated as a Site of Biological Importance (SBI), recognising its local value in terms of the wildlife that the woodland supports. Gabions were installed along the banks of Wades Brook to prevent slippage affecting the gardens of nearby properties and to improve water flow.
- For the first time the Council has been included in **Stonewall's top 100 LGBT inclusive employers**. The Council has jumped 96 places from its rating the previous year to rank 75th in an assessment that covers some of the most prominent public, private and third sector organisations.
- Cheshire West and Chester Council is committed to promoting equal opportunities and valuing the diversity of its communities. The Council maintained its excellent accreditation from the **Equality Framework for Local Government** - an award only a handful of local authorities hold.





- The Council funded and supported a range of **events** that celebrated diversity in 2016/17, including Chinese New Year, Diwali, Eid, International Women’s Day, Black History Month, International Day of People with Disabilities and Chester Pride.
- The Council continued to run a **funding scheme** enabling voluntary and community organisations to deliver innovative services promoting equality and diversity across the borough. 2016/17 saw support for work programmes for people with autism and learning disabilities, support and advice to Gypsies and Travellers and improved disabled access. School projects included transgender awareness training and research, and celebrating cultural diversity in the area.
- A **Falls Prevention Strategy** was published in 2016/17, aiming to reduce the number and impact of falls among older people. In the previous year, falls accounted for nearly 1,600 hospital admissions in people 65 or over. The Public Health team has established a group representing many organisations, including health, fire and rescue, housing, third sector and the Older People’s Network, to drive the priorities in the strategy.
- In November 2016 the Council organised a **Mental Health Summit** to consider the opportunities and implications of the NHS Five Year Forward View, a plan that sets out how the NHS can deliver a more responsive service. More than 90 professionals and service users attended the summit, which led to the establishment of a new mental health partnership board, due to have its inaugural meeting in autumn 2017.

- **Dementia** is a priority across the borough as the population ages. It is predicted that the number of people aged over 65 will increase from 68,900 in 2015 to 100,700 in 2035 and the number of people aged 85 or above will more than double from 8,800 to almost 20,000 in the same time. The Council has led the development of a multi-agency Dementia Strategy looking at the services available to people with dementia and setting out an action plan. An updated strategy is expected to be available in spring 2018.
- The Council developed a **Modern Slavery Strategy** and action plan on behalf of Cheshire Police and four local authority areas. The aim is to raise awareness of modern slavery, enable partners and communities to identify where it might be happening and work together to address it. In 2016/17 the Council has been an active participant in police-led operations targeting some of the industries most at risk of exploitation and protecting those involved.
- A **Hate Crime Strategy** was approved by the Community Safety Partnership (CSP) in June 2016 and an action plan developed to help prevent hate crime, increase reporting and improve the response. The Council is a member of the county’s Hate Crime Scrutiny Panel, which monitors themes and trends and audits cases. It also set up community cohesion groups in Chester and Ellesmere Port following the EU Referendum to improve understanding of issues, offer reassurance, foster closer links with residents and proactively protect those most vulnerable.
- The Council’s **Domestic Violence and Abuse Strategy** 2016-20 underwent multi-agency review in 2016/17. The Domestic Abuse Family Safety Unit (DAFSU), which manages high risk cases, now sits alongside Children’s Services, Early Support Workers, the police, probation, drug and alcohol services and health, making it easier for domestic abuse staff to share information and expertise with partners, and more effectively protect victims and families. Domestic abuse professionals work in multi-agency teams across the borough, including those at the Countess of Chester Hospital, GP surgeries and in children’s safeguarding. The Council has commissioned a new medium risk case management provision to help support people before their situations escalate. Dispersed refuge accommodation has been extended so individuals and families fleeing domestic abuse can be housed, irrespective of their circumstances.

- The Counter Terrorism and Security Act 2015 placed a duty on councils, police, offender institutions, education and the NHS to protect those at risk of any form of **extremist propaganda and exploitation**. During its first full year of operation, feedback from the Home Office praised the Cheshire West Channel Panel for an unusually high level of interest from the Safeguarding Board and extremely good engagement from a range of agencies working together to help those at risk. The panel has also helped identify other safeguarding needs like high risk domestic abuse and mental health concerns.
- The You Are Not Alone campaign was launched to raise awareness and reduce stigma around **mental health and wellbeing for young people**. A theatre production focusing on common issues affecting mental health took place at 11 secondary schools with 31 year groups taking part. A website was also developed to offer further support to pupils.
- As part of the move towards a more flexible and mobile way of working, the Council's HR and Business Technology Solutions teams have run training days, called **iFlex days**, to help staff understand the IT available to them and feel more confident about working together from different locations. The three sessions covered using software to share documents and run virtual meetings, accessing systems from home, and data protection when working remotely. The days were attended by more than 500 members of staff.
- The Council awarded a bespoke corporate **mobile contract** in 2016/17. The contract, covering staff mobile phones and tablets, is estimated to save around £139,000 each year and allows the Council to share data, calls and text allowances across all users. This reduces wasted allowances for lower users and reduces excess charges for higher users.

Outcome: our resources are well managed and reflect the priorities of our residents



- In early 2016, the Council decided to review its accommodation portfolio and **introduce flexible and mobile working** across most of its workforce. The aim is to move services closer to residents and, by reducing the number of corporate buildings, save an estimated £2.4 million by 2020. The Council developed a staff questionnaire, ran a series of themed workshops and ran a session with the Disability Friends group to discuss what the challenges might be in working more flexibly. Information gathered from 1,095 completed questionnaires and 13 ideas workshops, attended by more than 200 people, helped shape the initial proposal, which was shared with staff in March 2017. Feedback has reinforced that the best solution is to vacate the HQ building over time and rent the building out. The income will help the Council to deliver services that continue to protect its most vulnerable residents.
- The Council's in-house Legal team was awarded **Lexcel accreditation** on its first attempt. Lexcel is a recognised accreditation scheme for law firms and in-house legal departments which gives assurance that the team meets high client care and business management standards. Lexcel accreditation is only awarded after a rigorous and demanding assessment by the Law Society.
- In October and November 2016 a **staff survey** was carried out by Investors In People, which provides a nationally recognised framework that helps organisations improve performance through effective management and development of staff. A total of 61 per cent of staff took part in the survey, an increase of 20 per cent from the 2013 survey. Of the respondents, 87 per cent feel they are living the organisation's values, 86 per cent feel they are encouraged to achieve high performance and 79 per cent feel empowered to make decisions and act on them.
- A **People Strategy** was launched in 2016 to support the workforce to perform to the highest standards. The four-year strategy includes developing the organisation, developing leadership capacity, developing individual workforce skills and capacity, resourcing, recruitment and retention, and pay and rewards.

Looking forward

- September 2017 will see the launch of a Regional Adoption Agency - **Together for Adoption**. The new agency has been established as a partnership between five local authorities, Cheshire West and Chester, Halton, St Helens, Warrington and Wigan, as part of government policy to regionalise adoption services. Cheshire West and Chester Council is the lead commissioner for the agency and Wigan Council will host the new arrangements. The purpose of regionalising the services is to increase the number of children being adopted and the numbers of people adopting. A larger pool of adopters improves the likelihood of successfully placing a child with an adoptive family that best meets their needs.
- Between April and June 2016 a consultation took place to consider the future commissioning arrangements and service delivery models for 0-19 year services. These include 0-5 years Healthy Child Programme, Family Nurse Partnership, 5-19 years Healthy Child Programme and Children’s Centre services. Integrating these services addresses health and wellbeing priorities through early detection, intervention and prevention. The outcome of the consultation process supported the integrated approach. The **Starting Well Service** ambition is to deliver a high quality preventative service for young children and their families. A single provider, Cheshire and Wirral Partnership NHS Foundation Trust, has been appointed to deliver the contract from 1 January 2018 to 31 December 2020.
- A pilot **Children in Need project** launched in Winsford and Ellesmere Port in May 2017. The pilot aims to offer more intensive support to families and empower them to meet their own needs, making it less likely that they will need social care in the future. A key aspect of the project is the role of family intervention workers who work directly with families with close oversight and guidance from a social worker. The pilot will be reviewed in 2018 with a view to rolling it out across the borough.
- Groundwork for the **West Cheshire Offer**, a far-reaching programme to transform and modernise how adult social care is delivered was put in place in 2016/17. The programme aims to promote independence, self-care, early intervention, prevention, use of technology or alternative solutions, support and recovery at home or in the community, personalisation, support for long term conditions and crisis avoidance. The first of four phases, expected to be implemented in February 2018, is focusing on residents’ initial contact with the service, adult locality teams and the review function.

Performance

A new performance framework was introduced to monitor how the Council is achieving the outcomes set out in the Council Plan, Helping the Borough Thrive. At the end of 2016/17 a review of performance was reported, containing analysis for all 137 performance measures captured on a quarterly basis. The report shows that more than half of these indicators are performing on or above target. There are 29 measures within five per cent of their target and 27 beyond five per cent. There are 12 measures which cannot be reported due to data availability.

Number of performance measures	Overall performance achieved target or on track to achieve target	Overall performance target almost reached	Overall performance not achieved target	Overall performance further information required
137	69	30	26	12
100%	50.4%	21.9%	19.0%	8.8%

Full information on all of the measures contained within this report and the associated plans can be accessed via the Council’s performance website: www.performancecheshirewest.co.uk.

Financial performance

Council expenditure

A wide range of services were delivered to residents. The Council incurred expenditure of just over £535m, while schools, which manage their own expenditure, spent just under £184m. All costs are tightly managed and the strength of arrangements for ensuring value for money were recently externally verified.

Service areas	£000	%	Services included
Children's Services	102,792	19	Education, children's social care
Adult Social Care and Health	115,556	22	Care for elderly and vulnerable adults
Places	103,091	19	Highways, waste, libraries, regeneration
Local Authority Housing (HRA)	19,189	4	Housing provision in Ellesmere Port
Corporate Services	102,327	19	Support functions, capital financing
Housing Benefits	92,388	17	Benefits payments
Gross expenditure	535,343		
Managed by schools	183,720	34	Held by individual schools

Capital investment

The Council invested more than £109m in capital assets and infrastructure including supporting the following projects.

Capital programme	Capital investment £000
Highways and transport infrastructure	12,400
Culture and leisure projects	15,600
Investment in housing schemes	11,600
Progression of major regeneration schemes throughout the borough, including Barons Quay	32,900
School improvement	7,700

2016/17 has seen investment in a number of major projects, including the Storyhouse cultural centre in Chester, Chester Bus Interchange and a range of other cultural schemes, including major regeneration projects and schools. £12.4m has been invested in highways and transport across the borough through the Local Transport Plan, Highways Asset Recovery Programme and ongoing highway maintenance.

Financial standing

The balance sheet shows the Council’s financial standing on the last day of the financial year (31 March 2017). The net worth of the Council was £684m.

Assets and liabilities	£000
Building, land and equipment	1,388,542
Cash / investment / other assets	56,320
Money owed to the Council	57,779
Money owed by the Council	- 818,046
Total	684,595
Financed by	£000
Cash reserves	131,203
Non-cashable reserves	553,392
Total	684,595

Further details of the Council finances can be seen in its published accounts which can be found in full at: www.cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk. Use the A-Z to find Budgets and Finances.

Accessing Cheshire West and Chester Council information and services

Council information is also available in audio, braille, large print or other formats. If you would like a copy in a different format, in another language or require a BSL interpreter, please email us at equalities@cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk

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