



Congleton Town Council

Title	Council
Date of Meeting Time	22 nd January 2026 7 pm
Status	Final Minutes
Reference Documents	Agenda Papers for the Council – 22nd January 2026

Attendance

Committee Members	Cllr Robert Brittain – Town Mayor (Chair) Cllr Suzy Firkin – Deputy Mayor (Vice Chair) Cllr David Brown Cllr Russell Chadwick Cllr Robert Douglas Cllr Mark Edwardson Cllr Emma Hall Cllr Sally Ann Holland Cllr Amanda Martin Cllr Susan Mead Cllr Rob Moreton Cllr Shaun Radcliffe Cllr Heather Seddon Cllr Richard Walton Cllr Kay Wesley Cllr Glen Williams
Officers	David McGifford (Chief Officer)
Members of the Press	1 Congleton Chronicle
Members of the Public	4 public 1 Town Burgess

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Suzie Akers Smith, Cllr Arabella Holland, Cllr Heather Pearce and Cllr Liz Wardlaw.

2. Minutes of Previous Meetings

CTC/57/2526 resolved to approve and sign the minutes of the Council meeting held on the 11th October 2025 as a correct record.

3. Declaration of Interest

Declarations were received from Cllrs David Brown, Russell Chadwick, Emma Hall, Sally Ann Holland, Rob Moreton, and Heather Seddon on matters relating to Cheshire East Council. Cllr David Brown declared a non-pecuniary interest on agenda item 9, Astbury Mere Trust.

4. Questions from Members of the Public

Questions were received from Richard Wharfe and Barry Speed on matters relating to the budget. Questions and responses are in Appendix 1.

5. Urgent Items

There were no urgent items.

6. Town Mayor Announcements and Engagements

The Mayor gave details of his engagements, which are in Appendix 2.

7. Minutes of the Planning Committee

CTC/58/2526 resolved to approve the minutes of the meeting held on the 13th November 2025.

8. Minutes of the Personnel Committee

CTC/59/2526 resolved to approve the minutes of the meetings held on the 13th March 2025, 12th June 2025, 3rd July 2025 and the 23rd October 2025

9. Astbury Mere

CTC/60/2526 resolved to approve the Astbury Mere Management and Maintenance contract.

10. Budget and Precept for the financial year 2026/27

CTC/61/2526 resolved to approve the operational budget.

CTC/62/2526 resolved to approve Option 1 of the long-term Project and Maintenance plan allocations.

CTC/63/2526 resolved to approve the Budget based on option 1 for 2026-2027.

CTC/64/2526 resolved to approve a Precept requirement of £1,585,910 for 2026-2027.

10.1 Ear Marked Reserves Report

CTC/65/2526 resolved to note the Ear Marked Reserves Report

10.2 Payments Over £5000

CTC/66/2526 resolved to approve the payments over £5,000

Noted that Cllr Glen Williams declared a non-pecuniary interest in Zurich Insurance.

11. PCSOs in Congleton, Cheshire Police's Public Consultation

CTC/67/2526 resolved to approve the Town Council's response to the Public Consultation with the inclusion of a sentence stating that Congleton's PCSO allocation needs to be aligned to the size of its population.

Noted that Cllr David Brown declared a non-pecuniary interest in this item.

12. Youth Council Constitution

CTC/68 /2526 resolved to approve the Youth Council's Constitution.

Appendix 1- Questions from members of the public

Richard Wharfe Question to Full Council (on CTC Precept 26/27)

I have lived in the same property in Congleton since 1998, so have Council Tax records covering the whole of this period till now. Reviewing the CT demands which in 1998 were £ 1,1052.96 which was issued by Congleton Borough Council of which £852.10 for Cheshire County Council, £68.79 for Cheshire Police and £132.07 for Congleton BC/Parish

*Increases based on previous year – the below dates were chosen as they are key dates in changes in council arrangements ie From CBC to CEC etc

By 2003/2004 the CT demand was £1,411.30, of which £ 1,101.45 for Cheshire County Council (9.9% increase), Cheshire Police - £107.68 (19.8% increase), Congleton Borough Council - £ 165.76 (5% increase) and £ 36.41 for Congleton Town Council (67.8% increase)

By 2010/2011 the CT demand was £ 1,822.02 of which £ 1,486.64 for Cheshire East Council (1.7% increase), Cheshire Police - £176.65 (2.7% increase), Cheshire Fire Authority - £ 81.19 (2.9% increase) and £ 77.54 for Congleton Town Council (9.9% increase)

By 2021/22 the CT demand was £ 2,415.64 of which £ 1,714.83 for Cheshire East Council (2% increase), Social Care - £215.10 (3% increase) Cheshire Police - £275.54

(7.1% increase), Cheshire Fire Authority - £ 98.84 (2% increase) and £ 111.33 for Congleton Town Council (2% increase)

By 2023/24 the CT demand was £ 2,617.61 of which £ 1,812.67 for Cheshire East Council (3% increase), Social Care - £274.14 (2% increase) Cheshire Police - £306.09 (6.4% increase), Cheshire Fire Authority - £ 108.92 (6.1% increase) and £ 117.79 for Congleton Town Council (3.7% increase)

By 2025/26 the CT demand was £ 2,898.47 of which £ 2,300.27 for Cheshire East Council (5% increase), Cheshire Police - £338.48 (5.3% increase), Cheshire Fire Authority - £ 116.22 (5.5% increase) and £ 143.50 for Congleton Town Council (11.3% increase)

In summary, Congleton Town Council precept for an E rated property since 1998 has been as follows;

Between 1998 & 2003 – there was no precept to compare against current precept as different arrangement.

2003/4 - £36.41

2004/5 - £31.45

2005/6 - £ 34.23

2006/7 - £44.64

2007/8 - £48.85

2008/9 - £ 65.05

2009/10 - £ 70.55

2010/11 - £77.54

2011/12 - £76.78

2012/13 - £ 82.13

2013/14 - £ 81.35

2014/15 - £ 85.68

2015/16 - £ 85.68

2016/17 - £ 99.26

2017/18 - £ 100.14

2018/19 - £ missing

2019/20 - £ 105.36

2020/21 - £ 109.16

2021/22 - £ 111.33

2022/23 - £ 113.63

2023/24 - £ 117.79

2024/25 - £ 128.93

2025/26 - £143.50

Theoretical 20% increase for 2026/27 - £ 172.20~

As you can clearly see since 2003, CTC precept of gone up 6.14% per annum compounded, which roughly is double the average inflation rate or looking at it another way since 2003, CTC's precept monetary cost for a E rated Congleton property has gone up ~394% and should you increase this year's precept by 20% that is an overall increase of ~473% since 2003 !?

So my question is this, simply how can this council set & justify another substantial precept increase (above inflation) especially when it doesn't supply any essential services and if it was to obtain essential services from Cheshire East, therefore having to increase the precept to cover these services, given CEC don't provide payment to CTC for these 'taken on new

services', can this council guarantee that local residents will not pay twice for any services which CTC may take on in the foreseeable future from CEC ?

Response presented by Cllr Robert Douglas Chair of Finance and Policy

Thank you, Richard Wharfe, for your question and for providing us with such a detailed analysis of the Council Tax bills that you have received over more than the last 20 years. It is not feasible to compare Congleton Town Council of today with the Congleton Town Council of over 20 years ago because there have been major structural changes over that long period including:

- The creation of Cheshire East Council in 2008/09.
- Our subsequent acquisition of our Town Hall from Cheshire East for just one pound but requiring us to invest substantial sums to repair years of neglect.
- Our Town Council taking on new significant services for the benefit of our residents, such as the Streetscape operation in 2014.

I can, however, provide a detailed analysis of changes in our Precept compared to the rate of inflation for the six year period between April 2019 and May 2025, since I first became a councillor.

In that six year period, our Town Council has taken on additional responsibilities and suffered significant additional costs, many outside our control, including:

- A few years ago, we took over responsibilities of the Information Centre from Cheshire East. This is a service which provides a valuable service to those visiting our town and promotes and supports local businesses. Only one other town in Cheshire East provides this service.
- We recently took over the responsibility for the Street Sweeper service so that we now have complete control over this service to improve the efficiency of keeping our streets clean.
- Our largest cost is labour, which in this financial year accounted for about 59% of our total costs. Over the last few years, this cost has understandably generally increased at a higher rate than the increase in the cost of living. This is a cost that is negotiated nationally, so we have no control over it. Governments have been anxious to increase the minimum wage well above the rate of inflation and this has a knock-on effect on other pay scales. For instance, in 2023 the nationally agreed wage rates, over which we have no control, increased our labour costs by about 7%.
- We also have suffered factors totally outside our control, such as the £ 26,500 increase in Employers National Insurance we suffered in April 2025 following the changes announced by this Chancellor in her Autumn 2024 Budget.
- In order to retain our major Streetscape service contract with Cheshire East Council, a service so highly regarded and appreciated by our residents, we have had to agree in 2024 to a reduction in our contract price of about £ 40,000.
- We are the only town to offer the service of the Paddling pool, a service that is free of charge for users. With health and safety requirements, high maintenance costs and the increasing costs of chemicals, the costs to provide this much loved service has increased significantly in recent years.
- Utility costs, which are also outside our control, have increased significantly above inflation.

The retail price index, with January 1987 set at 100, published by the Office of National Statistics states that the index stood at 289.0 in the second quarter of 2019 and at 403.2 in the second quarter of 2025, meaning that over this six year period, the retail price index increased by 39.5%.

In line with standard procedure, Band D is the Band that councils quote when reporting on the level of their precepts. In that same six year period, our town's Precept for Band D, increased from £ 86.21 in April 2019 to £ 117.41 in April 2025. This is an increase of 36.2%.

So, despite the extra responsibilities that our Council took over and all the additional costs that we incurred, many outside our control, the increase in our Precept in that six year period was 8.4% below the increase in the Retail Price Index.

In April, 2019, our Town had the second highest Precept in Cheshire East, but in April 2025, we had fallen to sixth place. Therefore, residents in many other towns within Cheshire East have seen significantly higher increases in their Precept over the last six years than that seen by our residents of Congleton.

Unfortunately, our Primary Council Cheshire East, like so many other Primary Councils is tottering on the edge of financial bankruptcy, otherwise known as Section 114. Due to Cheshire East's financial difficulties, their services are being cut back significantly, which does have a serious adverse impact on our Town.

This leaves our Town Council with the unenviable Hobson's choice of either sitting back, washing our hands of any responsibility and allowing things in our Town to deteriorate or stepping in and taking over responsibility for the benefit of our communities who we serve, although this in effect is "double taxation, given such tasks fall under the responsibility of Cheshire East.

However, in a short survey, many of our residents have made it clear that there are such tasks such as taking responsibility of public toilets and managing highway weeding and grass cutting that they wish us to take responsibility for.

Question 2 Barry Speed

1. Appendix 3 of the draft budget shows a figure of 793K (+94K reserves) for Town Hall projects, over the next 12 years. Can I ask has there been detailed discussion and agreement to these costs, and in particular whether these costs have been compared against the rental of a standard suite of offices as an alternative to the Town Hall?

Answer Chief Officer The costs that have been presented have been generated by Officers, presented to councillors at various THAS meetings and more recently at a Strategy Working Group where all councillors were invited. Many of the costs have been quotes recently received and others are based on historic quotes plus inflation. Others are based on what we have previously paid plus an element of inflation. This is no different to home budgeting over a period of time where some figures are estimated based on best knowledge.

This could lead to an element of both under budgeting and overbudgeting whichever way around the budgets will be reviewed every year and adjusted where necessary. Any expenditure will need to be aligned to our Financial Regulations.

What we do know is the budgets for the boilers and destratification fans is accurate and close to £200k and will need to be replaced within the next 2 years.

With regards to comparing costs against a standard suite of offices the quick answer is no. There is a perception that the Town Hall is not generally utilised by businesses, groups, charities or residents. I would just like to place on record that in 2025 there were 279 external bookings for rooms at the Town Hall

- Appendix 3 shows a total projection of costs per year of 77,900. Can I ask where this is shown in the detailed budget broken down by cost centre?

This is shown at the bottom of Appendix 3

- In the detailed budget breakdown, it shows Streetscape Other Income of 42K. Can I ask what is the nature of this 'other income'?

We are in the process of agreeing a contract for our streetscape service for £42,000, the detail is covered within agenda item 9,

- Streetscape staff costs appear to have increased by some 180K (+30%) in just 2 years. Can I ask why these costs have increased by such a large amount?

Over the last 3 years the figure have increased from £577,073 in 2024-25 through to a budget of £762,353 for 2026-27 which is an increase of £185,280 which equals 32.1% In 2024/25 ERNI increased from 13.8% up to 15% as well as the government lowering the threshold from £9,100 to £5,000 which has been carried through to the current budget for 2026-2027.

These costs were in addition to the National Pay Awards of 2024-2025 5.12% and 2025-2026 x 3.2%

For 2026-27 we have budgeted for a National Pay Award of 4% plus 2 additional Streetscape Staff one of which will be allocated towards the Astbury Mere project.

It is worth noting that when there are increases in streetscape pay our contract with CEC has covered approximately 70% of that increase

Appendix 2

Council Meeting 22.1.2026 ITEM 6

TOWN MAYOR'S ENGAGEMENTS 2025/26

8 Engagements since 6.12.25 - Town Mayor, Cllr Robert Brittain

7 December 2025	Congleton Youth Orchestra Christmas Concert
8 December 2025	No Tier Snooker Christmas Charity Lunch
13 December 2025	Children's Awards at Congleton Police Station
13 December 2025	New Life Church Carol Service
13 December 2025	Rotary Christmas Concert
18 December 2025	Christmas Carol Service - St Peters Church
20 December 2025	Congleton Choral Society Christmas Concert
14 January 2026	Mayor of Leek 'Silent Night' Charity Fund Raising event

1 Engagement – Deputy Town Mayor, Cllr Suzy Firkin

13 December 2025	Children's Awards at Congleton Police Station
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