

CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the **Council**
held on Wednesday, 11th December, 2024 in the Council Chamber, SKA
Observatory, Jodrell Bank, Lower Withington, SK11 9FT

PRESENT

Councillor M Houston (Mayor/Chair)

Councillor D Edwardes (Deputy Mayor/Vice-Chair)

Councillors S Adams, L Anderson, R Bailey, M Beanland, S Bennett-Wake, L Braithwaite, J Bratherton, M Brooks, D Brown, C Browne, L Buchanan, C Bulman, A Burton, R Chadwick, C Chapman, D Clark, J Clowes, A Coiley, N Cook, S Corcoran, L Crane, T Dean, S Edgar, K Edwards, M Edwards, H Faddes, R Fletcher, A Gage, S Gardiner, E Gilman, M Goldsmith, M Gorman, K Hague, E Hall, A Harrison, A Heler, C Hilliard, S Holland, T Jackson, D Jefferay, R Kain, A Kolker, N Mannion, G Marshall, A Moran, R Moreton, R Morris, H Moss, M Muldoon, J Pearson, J Place, B Posnett, J Pratt, J Priest, B Puddicombe, P Redstone, J Rhodes, J Saunders, H Seddon, M Sewart, M Simon, L Smetham, G Smith, J Smith, J Smith, L Smith, J Snowball, R Vernon, M Warren, H Whitaker, F Wilson, J Wray and B Wye

55 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors J Bird, B Drake, P Coan, A Farrall, G Hayes, C O'Leary and L Wardlaw.

56 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The Mayor advised Members that they did not need to declare an interest as a Council Tax payer, or as a member of a town or parish council, on the item of business relating to the Council Taxbase, as there was a dispensation in place which removed this requirement.

During consideration of Item 10 – Recommendation from Corporate Policy Committee: Cheshire East Council support for Proposed Future Rail Scheme, Councillor S Gardiner declared that in previous employment he had attended meetings relating to the Manchester to Liverpool railway proposals.

57 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 16 October 2024 be approved, subject to the correction to the spelling of Mr Stuart Redgard's surname in Minute 47 – Public Speaking Time.

58 MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Mayor, in summary: -

- 1 informed Council of the death of Honorary Alderman Bryon Evans, who had represented the Leighton Ward until the last election and had previously served on the former Crewe and Nantwich Council and invited all present to stand in a minute's silence in remembrance.
- 2 reported that on Remembrance Sunday she had represented the Council at the service in Memorial Square, Crewe.
- 3 reported that on 27 January 2025, the Council would be holding its annual Holocaust Memorial Day service in the Assembly Room at Macclesfield Town Hall, starting at 10.30 am. All Members would be receiving a formal invitation to the event.

59 PUBLIC SPEAKING TIME/OPEN SESSION

Mr Thomas Eccles spoke on behalf of the Save Dane Moss Community Group and urged the Council to urgently consider establishing a Peat Partnership for the preservation and sustainable use of peatlands in Cheshire. Mr Eccles stated that Peat Partnerships existed in Lancashire, Yorkshire, Cumbria and Northumberland to preserve and restore peatlands within their respective areas. Currently, there was no equivalent organisation for Cheshire.

In response, Councillor Mick Warren, Chair of the Environment and Communities Committee, stated that such partnerships required a collaboration between multiple agencies with an ambition to restore and conserve peatlands. They typically involved a range of stakeholders and whilst the Council was not currently in a position to lead the establishment of such a partnership, through teams in the Place Directorate the Council invested across the natural environment. The Rural and Cultural Economy Team were directly involved in improvements to Council owned assets and worked with partners for wider benefits (such as the Bollin Valley Partnership); S106 and Biodiversity Net Gain also provided funding streams for investment in nature. Additionally, the Council also supported the Lindow Moss Landscape partnership which sought to preserve, restore and enhance the Lindow Moss peatland at Wilmslow. The forthcoming Local Nature Recovery Strategy, to be published for consultation in the New Year, would be a regional plan for the natural environment, which was being developed with partner local authorities, DEFRA, Natural England, Cheshire Wildlife Trust and multiple farmers, landowners and other stakeholders. Through this process the Council would set out its priorities for nature, including the protection of peat land.

Ms Natalie Abbott spoke on behalf of Global Justice Macclesfield in support of the Notice of Motion on Fossil Fuel non-Proliferation Treaty and

welcomed the Council's acknowledgement of the climate emergency through its endorsement of a Motion in May 2019 declaring an environment and climate emergency. She stated that local actions on environment and climate crisis were essential, and everyone had a part to play in reducing energy demand and restoring nature. She stated that it was essential that the Council recognised its interconnectedness with the whole of humanity and that emissions across the globe were already causing frequent and catastrophic weather events. Global Justice Macclesfield welcomed the Notice of Motion and stated that the Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty had been devised to gain momentum for the urgent action required in relation to climate change, which had been acknowledged in the Council's Carbon Neutral Action Plan. The premise of the treaty sought to bring enough countries together to work on a plan that would become a roadmap to a managed transition that would be fast, fair and just. Ms Abbott urged the Council to endorse the principles of Treaty to influence and encourage the UK government to work with other countries to implement the treaty.

Mr Robert Douglas spoke on behalf of the residents living on Thistle Way Estate, Padgbury Lane, Congleton and raised concerns that the S106 monies for their estate had not been paid to Cheshire East. Mr Douglas referred to the October 2024 S106 schedule generated by Cheshire East and stated that £540,000 of S106 monies due prior to first occupation of Thistle Way, almost six years ago and a further £255,000 prior to 75% occupation, 3 years ago, had not been received. An additional £10,000 had also not been received. The developer had gone into administration in January 2024 and Mr Douglas asked why the £800,000 had not been received and if the debt had been lodged with the administrators. Mr Douglas estimated that for sites within Congleton Town's boundary, except Thistle Way and the bridge linking Astbury Place with Congleton Park, over £1m of S106 monies have not yet been received and asked how much of this was overdue. It was estimated that there was £575,000 of S106 monies within Congleton's boundary that had been received and was listed as available. Mr Douglas asked when had these monies been received, and what plans were in place to utilise them and by what date. Finally, Mr Douglas queried why Planning Applications 13/4216C and 13/4219C were not accessible on the Planning Portal, as this meant that residents were unable to obtain any information.

In response, Councillor Mick Warren, Chair of the Environment and Communities Committee, undertook to providing a written response.

Ms Sue Helliwell spoke in support of the Notice of Motion Protecting Family Farms and Preserving Rural Communities across Cheshire East. Ms Helliwell shared the concerns that many local farmers had in relation to government proposals over inheritance tax and how this would impact them. Ms Helliwell stated that Cheshire East needed to urgently support its farmers, and that the Council should ensure that all refreshments used for council meetings were locally sourced and produced.

Mr Stuart Redgard spoke in relation to the tragic tree incident leading to the death of Mr Chris Hall in 2020. Mr Redgard referred to the Health and Safety investigation report of Cheshire East Council and its wholly owned ground maintenance company, ANSA Environmental Services Limited, and shared his concern about the matter. Mr Redgard looked forward to learning more about the changes that were instigated following the investigation. Mr Redgard confirmed that Mr Hall's family intended to attend a future full Council meeting, and he hoped that the Mayor would exercise their discretion in offering a 1-minute silence in memory of Mr Hall.

Mr Richard Yarwood spoke in relation to the Notice of Motion Protecting Farms and Preserving Rural Communities across Cheshire East. Mr Yarwood stated that the Yarwood family had farmed in Brereton for 100 years, firstly as tenants of the Somerford Estate and subsequently as owner occupiers. Mr Yarwood was the third generation, and he farmed in partnership with his wife and son at Handfield Farm. Mr Yarwood's farm of 220 cows supplied Muller Dairies with 7000 litres a day destined for the Cooperative Stores, which was enough milk to supply the needs of a town the size of Congleton. Currently, Mr Yarwood was the landowner of Handfield Farm which had a value well in excess of the proposed Agricultural Property Relief threshold. The Business Property Relief (BPR) business assets, the cattle, machinery and buildings also exceed the threshold. Mr Yarwood stated the Chancellor failed to take account of BPR in her budget announcements, and his son could face a liability on over a million pounds of assets amounting to £200k. Mr Yarwood stated the impact this would have on his family and business and urged the Council to support the campaign to reform the Family Farm Tax. this Notice of Motion would be referred to the appropriate service committee.

Ms Charlotte Peters-Rock spoke in relation to SEND education and raised concerns in respect of the David Lewis Centre, and recent correspondence received from the Executive Director Adults, Health and Integration. Ms Peters-Rocks stated that SEND pupils costed significant monies to educate, particularly cohorts who attended such facilities as the David Lewis Centre, largely because of its rural location. Ms Peters-Rock stated the impact that surges of busyness across the SEN campus had on this cohort, especially when no impact assessments were undertaken in advance, and that there was a lack of communication with parents. Mrs Peters-Rock asked that this was investigated, and that the Council ensured that those who were physically disabled using the campus, were safeguarded.

In response, Cllr Carol Bulman, Chair of the Children and Families Committee, sympathised with the issues raised and stated that the response the Executive Director for Adults, Health and Integration had previously provided was comprehensive, demonstrating the Council had good oversight. Cllr Bulman thanked Ms Peter's Rock for raising awareness surrounding the difficulties faced for those pupils when their

environment changed over time and agreed to provide a written response if any further details were required.

60 LEADER'S AND DEPUTY LEADER'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Leader, in summary: -

- 1 referred to the significant financial pressures faced by the Council and reported that there was a current budget gap of £31.4m for 2025-2026 with ongoing efforts to identify savings, efficiencies, and additional funding sources.
- 2 reported that the provisional local government finance settlement and government grant announcements were expected by Christmas.
- 3 referred to the Transformation Programme and reported that both he and the Deputy Leader had attended the December staff event, which had been well attended by employees from all parts of the Council.
- 4 referred to the expected white paper on Devolution and stated that the Council was actively engaging with Cheshire West and Chester Council and Warrington Council on devolution proposals.
- 5 reported that he had attended a meeting of the Cheshire East Bus Partnership Forum which had heard speakers from the Dept of Transport and the Cheshire East Transport Team. The Government had announced the next round of bus improvement funding, which was vital funding to supporting bus service improvements, infrastructure and the £3 bus fare cap.
- 6 reported that the Council had been awarded Fostering Friendly status from the Fostering Network for supporting employees who wished to become foster carers.
- 7 thanked Council staff for their work responding to emergencies caused by Storm Darragh
- 8 wished everybody present and Council staff all the best for the coming festive season.

The Deputy Leader, in summary: -

- 1 referred to the staff event held on the Transformation Programme, which had provided valuable feedback and input from those who attended.

- 2 reported that development was underway for a new corporate plan for 2025-2029 which would focus on financial stability, clear values and effective partnerships and would align with the recommendations from the LGA Corporate Peer Challenge. A Member Task and Finish Group, comprising of himself, Councillors Liz Braithwaite, Mark Goldsmith, and Becky Posnett, had been set up to help with the drafting of the plan.
- 3 reported that the Council was supporting the Royal British Legion's Credit their Service Campaign which ensured military compensation would not be treated as income when calculating benefits.
- 4 reported that the Council was urgently looking to recruit more Personal Care Assistants to support individuals in the community who needed support to live independently.
- 5 commended the Cheshire East Highways Team who had worked day and night to mitigate the effects of Storm Darragh and paid thanks to the rural community who helped to clear and reopen roads as well as providing vital information on the situation in the rural areas.

**61 RECOMMENDATIONS FROM CORPORATE POLICY COMMITTEE:
COUNCIL TAX BASE 2025/26**

Consideration was given to the recommendations of Corporate Policy Committee on 28 November 2024 in relation to the domestic tax base 2025/26.

RESOLVED:

That in accordance with the Local Authorities (Calculation of Council Tax Base) Regulations 2012, the amount to be calculated by Cheshire East Council as its Council taxbase for the year 2025-26 is 163,261.10 for the whole area.

**62 RECOMMENDATIONS FROM CORPORATE POLICY COMMITTEE:
REVISED STATEMENT OF LICENSING POLICY**

Consideration was given to the recommendations of Corporate Policy Committee on 3 October 2024 in relation to the Revised Statement of Licensing Policy.

RESOLVED:

That Council adopt the revised Statement of Licensing Policy.

**63 RECOMMENDATIONS FROM CORPORATE POLICY COMMITTEE:
CHANGES TO THE COUNCIL'S CONSTITUTION**

Consideration was given to the recommendations of Corporate Policy Committee on 28 November 2024 in relation to the changes to the Constitution.

RESOLVED: That Council approve:

- 1 the revised Petition Scheme, as appended to the report at Appendix 1, with the final sentence of the first paragraph being amended to read "subject to the decision of the Monitoring Officer as to *which* meeting will receive it".
- 2 the revised Job Descriptions for the Leader and Deputy Leader, Chairs and Vice-Chairs and Opposition Spokespersons, as appended to the report at Appendices 2, 3 and 4, subject to the title of the Leader/Deputy Leader JD being amended to 'Role of the Leader and Deputy Leader of the Council'.
- 3 the amendments to the Constitution in relation to Notices of Motion, Significant Decisions and electronic voting, as set out in paragraphs 17 to 19, 26 to 28 and 32 to 35 of the report.
- 4 the Acting Governance, Compliance and Monitoring Officer be given delegated powers to make any necessary changes to the Council's Constitution as they deem are required to implement the decision of full Council.

**64 RECOMMENDATIONS FROM CORPORATE POLICY COMMITTEE:
CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL SUPPORT FOR PROPOSED FUTURE
RAIL SCHEMES**

Consideration was given to the recommendations of Corporate Policy Committee on 28 November 2024 in relation to the Cheshire East Council's support for proposed future rail schemes.

RESOLVED: That Council

1. provisionally supports:
 - a) the proposed Liverpool to Manchester Railway section of NPR;
and
 - b) the use of the High Speed Rail (Crewe – Manchester) Bill to deliver the Liverpool to Manchester Railway provided that the conditions set out in paragraph 31 of the report are met.
2. remains a member of the Liverpool to Manchester Partner Board, acting at all times, under the agreed positions set out above.

3. welcomes the progression of alternative options to HS2, to improve rail connectivity and capacity between the Midlands and the North West, but the Council would only lend its support to schemes that put Crewe at the heart of the solution and deliver:
 - a) enhanced connectivity from Crewe with improved direct services to key conurbations including London, Birmingham and Manchester;
 - b) enables, facilitates and delivers the necessary capacity, upgrades and rationalisation at Crewe Station to enable any new services on an alternative north-south link to call at Crewe;
 - c) supports and enables investment and growth in Crewe including the regeneration of Crewe Town Centre and provision of high quality links to the Crewe Station, and
 - d) provides appropriate and sufficient mitigation against the negative impacts of the scheme, and its construction, on the borough, its residents and business and on the local environment.
4. only support the use of existing powers secured via the HS2 phase 2a hybrid bill to deliver part of any alternative north-south rail link if the scheme delivers the conditions set out above.
5. agrees the re-establishment of the HS2 Member Reference Group and that it be refocussed to support the Council's strategic rail priorities and positions.
6. approves the revised Terms of Reference and membership changes for the Member Reference Group, as proposed in Appendix 2 to the report, subject to the membership being extended to include Councillor Stewart Gardiner.

**65 RECOMMENDATIONS FROM FINANCE SUB COMMITTEE:
APPROVAL OF SUPPLEMENTARY REVENUE ESTIMATES AND
SUPPLEMENTARY CAPITAL ESTIMATES**

Consideration was given to the recommendations of the Finance Sub Committee on 7 November 2024 in relation to the Supplementary Revenue Estimates and Supplementary Capital Estimates, as set out in Annex 1, Section 3, Tables 1 and 5 to the report.

RESOLVED: That Council approve:

- 1 Children and Families – supplementary revenue estimate for: -
Household Support Fund £2,200,000

- | | | |
|---|--|------------|
| 2 | Highways and Transport – supplementary capital estimate for: -
Burford Roundabout Works | £1,389,281 |
|---|--|------------|

66 SENIOR MANAGEMENT STRUCTURE - CHILDREN'S SERVICES

Consideration was given to the report on the proposed new senior management structure in Children's Services.

Reference was made to the job description for the position of Director of Children's Services Commissioning, Quality Assurance and Partnerships and it was suggested that the job description be amended to specifically include the issue of children's safeguarding, so to ensure that the Council recruit a person with the appropriate qualifications and qualities who were fully aware of their responsibilities of the job before they applied.

The Mayor, having sought advice, responded that the job description could be changed by officers and that if there were any issues these could be reported back to the Chair and members of the Children and Families Committee.

RESOLVED: That Council

- 1 agrees the proposed change to the senior management staffing structure for Children's Services, subject to prior consultation with all parties affected by the decision, including any Trade Unions.
- 2 approves in principle a new post, subject to consultation with staff and trade unions on the staffing structure, where the remuneration will be more than £100,000 per year.

67 CHESHIRE AND WARRINGTON JOINT COMMITTEE: AMENDMENT TO TERMS OF REFERENCE

Consideration was given to the report on the proposed amendment to the Terms of Reference of the Cheshire and Warrington Joint Committee.

The recommendations were proposed and seconded and following debate a recorded vote was requested with the following results: -

FOR

Councillors L Anderson, S Bennett-Wake, L Braithwaite, J Bratherton, L Buchanan, C Bulman, A Burton, C Chapman, D Clark, A Coiley, S Corcoran, L Crane, K Edwards, M Edwards, H Faddes, M Goldsmith, M Gorman, C Hilliard, D Jefferay, N Mannion, G Marshall, J Place, J Priest, B Puddicombe, J Rhodes, H Seddon, G Smith, L Smith, J Snowball, R Vernon, M Warren, F Wilson and B Wye.

AGAINST

Councillors S Adams, R Bailey, M Beanland, D Brown, C Browne, R Chadwick, J Clowes, N Cook, T Dean, S Edgar, A Gage, S Gardiner,

K Hague, E Hall, A Harrison, A Heler, S Holland, T Jackson, A Kolker, A Moran, R Morris, H Moss, M Muldoon, B Posnett, J Pratt, P Redstone, J Saunders, M Sewart, John Smith, Julie Smith, H Whitaker and J Wray.

NOT VOTING

Councillors D Edwardes, R Fletcher, M Houston and R Kain.

The motion was declared carried with 33 votes for, 32 against and 4 not voting.

RESOLVED: That Council

- 1 approve the amendment to Part 2 of the Cheshire and Warrington Joint Committee Terms of Reference, as set out in red at Appendix 2 to the report.
- 2 agree that the final decisions related to the establishment of a Combined Authority and a devolution agreement are matters that will be brought back to this Council.

68 APPROVAL OF ABSENCE FROM COUNCIL MEETINGS

This item was withdrawn from the agenda.

69 URGENT ITEM OF BUSINESS: EXCEPTIONAL FINANCIAL SUPPORT

In accordance with Section 100B(4)(b) of the Local Government Act 1972, the Mayor had agreed that this item could be considered as an item of urgent business as it could not wait until the next scheduled meeting of full Council to enable a response to be sent to the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government.

Consideration was given to the urgent report on Exceptional Financial Support which was necessitated by a request from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government received on 4 December 2024 to submit a formal request and supporting evidence for any Exceptional Finance Support by Friday 13 December 2024.

RESOLVED: That Council agree:

- 1 that the Chief Executive finalise and submit a request for exceptional financial support in the form of an in-principle capitalisation direction for 2024/25 to the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government for up to £17.6m.
- 2 that the Chief Executive finalise and submit a request for exceptional financial support in the form of an in-principle capitalisation direction of up to £31.4m for 2025/26 to the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, and indications of a potential request of £23.7m for 2026/27.

- 3 delegate to the Interim Executive Director of Resources (S151 Officer) the ability to update those requests once further financial information from the local government finance settlement is received. This will be in consultation with the Chief Executive and will be reported at the earliest opportunity to the relevant committee(s).

70 NOTICES OF MOTION

Consideration was given to the following Notices of Motion which had been submitted in accordance with the Council's Procedural Rules.

Motion 1 Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty

Proposed by Councillor S Corcoran and Seconded by Councillor D Clark.

"This Council notes that:

1. The scientific consensus is clear that fossil fuels are primarily responsible for accelerating global climate change, and that the climate crisis now represents one of the preeminent threats to global lives and livelihoods.
2. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change Sixth Assessment Report states that it is unequivocal that climate change has already disrupted human and natural systems and that societal choices and actions implemented in the next decade determine the extent to which medium- and long-term pathways will deliver higher or lower climate resilient development.
3. The International Energy Agency stated in its May 2021 report "Net Zero by 2050" that in order to reach that goal there should be no new oil or gas fields, or new coal mines, as of that moment.
4. The Paris Climate Agreement is silent on coal, oil and gas, an omission with respect to the supply and production of fossil fuels (the largest source of GHGs) that needs to be collectively addressed by other means; and that global governments and the fossil fuel industry are currently planning to produce more than double the amount of coal, oil and gas by 2030 than can be burned if the world is to limit warming to 1.5°C and avert catastrophic climate disruption, and such plans risk undoing the work of our Council to reduce GHG emissions.
5. A new global initiative is underway calling for a Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty that would plan the end of new fossil fuel exploration and expansion, phase out existing production in line with the global commitment to limit warming to 1.5°C and accelerate equitable transition plans globally.

6. Our entire global community will be impacted by the climate crisis. Vulnerable communities, and those who have contributed the least to climate change, however, will often be impacted most acutely.

This Council believes that:

7. New fossil fuel infrastructure and expanded reliance on fossil fuels exposes communities to untenable risks to public health and safety at the local and global levels; and that the economic opportunities presented by a clean energy transition far outweigh the opportunities presented by an economy supported by expanding fossil fuel use and extraction.

This Council resolves to:

8. Formally endorse the call for a Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty and make that endorsement public.
9. Call on the UK government to also endorse the call for a Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty
10. Reaffirm our commitment to rapidly decarbonising our economy at a local and national level.
11. Write to the Local Government Association and raise the need for a planned phase out of fossil fuels, and to call on it to promote the Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty among its members.”

RESOLVED:

That the Motion be referred to the Environment and Communities Committee.

Motion 2 Protecting Family Farms and Preserving Rural Communities across Cheshire East

Proposed by Councillor J Clowes and Seconded by Councillor A Heler

“This Council notes with concern, the proposed changes to inheritance tax announced by the Labour Government in the recent Autumn budget, which would scrap Agricultural Property Relief (APR) and Business Property Relief (BPR) on farmland and business assets.

This means an effective tax rate of 20% on agricultural assets valued over £1 million.

Whilst the government claims that the new £1m threshold will mean three-quarters of farms will not be impacted by the change, the NFU believes this is an underestimate and that at least 50% of all working farms may be impacted by the new tax rules.

Secretary of State for the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Steve Reed has stated that already struggling farmers will have to “do more with less”. At a time when many farmers in Cheshire are struggling with soaring costs and energy prices, this tax rise will threaten the future of their farms and destroy confidence in the agricultural community.

APR and BPR have been pivotal in allowing British family farms to remain intact across generations, supporting food security, sustaining rural communities, and aiding environmental stewardship.

The Family Farm is an important feature of the Cheshire countryside and this form of agricultural unit is recognised in Cheshire East Council’s own Rural Strategy (2022 – 2027) that states;

“There is real economic value in the area’s natural capital and landscape character, and the contribution of farming and land management should not be underestimated or forgotten. It is after all, what underpins our rural character, environment and communities, contributing to our ‘quality of place’, which is accepted as an economic attribute, supporting locational decisions and investment in the area”⁽¹⁾

Unfortunately, despite government assurances that “small farms” won’t be affected, recent analysis identifies that this tax is estimated to impact over 70,000⁽²⁾ family farms, leaving the average farming family with a tax bill of at least £240,000⁽³⁾.

Whilst family farms may be asset-rich in terms of workable land and/or buildings, annual profits are modest.

A typical 200-acre arable farm owned by an individual with an annual profit of £27,300 would face a £370,000 IHT liability. If spread over 10 years, this represents 136% of their profit each year to cover the tax bill. At current land prices, successors would have to sell 16% of their land.⁽⁴⁾

In short, this policy compromises the viability of family farms, will force many to sell portions of their land, or close entirely, paving the way for corporate ownership over family ownership.

The Council believes that this tax will have severe impacts on:

1. Food Security: Selling off land or closing farms will put our national food independence at risk, at a time when global stability is already fragile. British family farms are critical to ensuring a steady supply of homegrown food.

2. Rural Community Stability: Family farms are the foundation of rural Britain and represent the majority of farms across the borough of Cheshire East. They contribute to local jobs, schools, and essential services. Labour's proposed tax risks destabilising communities, eroding the rural way of life, and causing a negative ripple effect across the countryside.
3. Environmental Stewardship: Farms cover 70% of the UK's land, with family farms playing a leading role in nature recovery, biodiversity, and sustainable land management. The sale and fragmentation of these lands would hinder conservation efforts and undermine environmental initiatives.

This Council resolves to:

- Oppose the Labour Government's changes to inheritance tax affecting family farms.
- Advocate for the exemption of family farms to preserve the UK's food security, rural communities, and environmental initiatives.
- That the appropriate service committee(s) proactively engage with local farmers and community representatives, to consider what support this Council may reasonably provide to this essential part of the Cheshire East economy.

This Council urges all Councillors to stand with Britain's family farms, to support our rural communities, the Cheshire East "Quality of Place" and to protect the environment by formally rejecting this proposed "family farm tax."

RESOLVED:

That the Motion be referred to the Economy and Growth Committee for consideration.

71 QUESTIONS

Councillor C Browne asked when Cheshire East Council would act in respect of installing acoustic cameras on the A34 Wilmslow to Alderley Edge and introduce a Public Space Protection Order.

In response Councillor M Gorman, Deputy Leader of the Council, stated that meetings had been held with elected members, officers and the Police and Crime Commissioner and that proposals were being brought forward, and the issue would be referred to the appropriate committee in due course.

Councillor N Cook referred to "Keep Clear" boxes on Middlewich Road, Sandbach that required re-painting, and asked that the prioritisation of signage, stop lines, give way lines and give way boxes be reviewed and action be taken on any outstanding requests and that the classification of defects were reviewed.

In response Councillor M Goldsmith, Chair of Highways and Transport Committee, undertook to provide a written response to the Middlewich Road junction in question, and stated that the Department for Transport were highly prescriptive on the signs which councils must act upon, and that Member's ward budgets could be used for this issue.

Councillor L Anderson asked for assurance that Tier 3 libraries would not be closed.

In response Councillor M Warren, Chair of Environment and Communities Committee, stated that the Library Strategy which had been agreed at Environment and Communities Committee on 27 November 2024 and implemented on 1 January 2025, did not include any library closures.

Councillor S Gardiner refer to proposed changes to the National Planning Policy Framework which could diminish the powers of planning committees and sought assurance from the Leader and Deputy Leader that they would use their influence and contacts, especially at the LGA and with local MPs, to fight against the proposals.

In response Councillor N Mannion, Leader of the Council, stated that the LGA and the County Council's Network would be consulting their members on the proposals and would ensure that Councillor Gardiner's views were taken on board and any responses would be shared. Councillor Michael Gorman, Deputy Leader of the Council, said that he would provide assurances and would scrutinise the details of any proposals coming forward.

Councillor P Redstone suggested that, in the interests of fairness and to keep Council meetings as brief and as relevant as possible, the Leader and Deputy Leader's announcements should be limited to three minutes, in line with other Members.

The Mayor responded that Councillor Redstone suggestion had been noted.

Councillor A Kolker asked what the Leader was planning to do to address the falling birth rate in the UK and that there would eventually be insufficient people to look after the rapidly ageing population.

In response Councillor N Mannion, Leader of the Council, stated that different countries responded in different ways such as enhancing financial support to encourage an increase in the birth rate. It was noted that a large number of individuals from overseas came to the UK to seek employment in the health and care sectors.

Councillor R Fletcher referred to the flooding on Linley Lane in Alsager which was thought to be caused by drains be dealt with and asked for confirmation that Cheshire East Council had received money from Sainsbury's to rectify the ongoing issues with the drains, and that Alsager Ward Councillors were updated with progress.

In response Councillor M Goldsmith, Chair of Highways and Transport Committee, undertook to provide a written response.

Councillor H Moss referred to the recruitment of Personal Assistants (PAs) who provided support for individuals in the community and asked who was responsible for the recruitment and training of these new PAs.

In response Councillor J Rhodes, Chair of Adults and Health Committee, stated that Cheshire East Council had introduced a new system where PAs could be self-employed which should take away the stress of employing a PA from residents. Cllr Rhodes undertook to provide a written response.

Councillor D Jefferay asked that, due to updates to National Planning Policy Framework due to be published on 12 December 2024, how would the planning department manage the major development applications, and ensure that they would be assessed robustly, given that it was carrying a large number of vacancies.

In response Councillor M Warren, Chair of Environment and Communities Committee, agreed that capacity within the planning department was a concern and stated that there would be Member briefings in the New Year to help with the understanding of the changes, and to address concerns.

Councillor J Clowes asked, as climate change brought an increased likelihood of extreme weather events, and power outages were also likely to increase, what action could Cheshire East Council take to ensure all vulnerable residents, especially those reliant upon telecare and lived in signal black spots, or who were not able to access telecommunications during power cuts, stay informed and safe, and would the Council lobby the government and BT to ensure that there are backup solutions in place.

In response Councillor N Mannion, Leader of the Council, stated that Cheshire East Council worked closely with energy companies and emergency services to ensure that residents and council clients were contacted to check that they were safe, and the Council would then highlight any further issues to energy companies. The Council also contacted those on its priority list, and provided food, generators and hotels where needed. He stated that the Council would investigate household emergency plans, including windup torches, safety kits, batteries, non-perishable foods, etc, and to develop community resilience plans to help communities to look after one another. Members were requested to contact the Council's Emergency Planning Team if they would like additional information on any of the above items, or to arrange for an emergency planning officer to visit their ward. The Council was also working with BT to address the high numbers of mobile signal black spots and would lobby for appropriate financial support to try and address these challenges.

In response Councillor M Goldsmith, Chair of Highways and Transport Committee, stated that vulnerable people who relied on a land line could request a battery pack which could support their phones lines in a power cut, and those solutions would be made more widely available.

In response Councillor J Rhodes, Chair of Adults and Health Committee, stated that Cheshire East Council had raised the issue nationally regarding vulnerable residents relying on their telecare service with the LGA and ADAS and Local Resilience Forum and that the Council should let residents know of the backups available.

Councillor B Posnett asked why residents of supported living homes were not made aware that their meals provided by Cheshire East Council could be withdrawn, and why had finance details in the MTFS continued to include Beechmere supported living home, which burned down five years ago.

In response Councillor J Rhodes, Chair of Adults and Health Committee, said that the supported living homes had opened in 2009 under a different government and Council and that residents may not have been told at the point they moved in. Officers have been in to speak to residents at the two affected homes and Cheshire East Council were looking to support residents and had managed to find an alternative service.

Councillor R Bailey asked if the Highways and Transport Committee regularly considered all figures regarding car park usage and fees paid to park, and if not, could it do so in the future.

In response Councillor M Goldsmith, Chair of Highways and Transport Committee, stated that the Highways and Transport Committee did not currently review existing car park charges so this would be unlikely to change for new charges.

Councillor S Bennett-Wake asked how devolution would benefit Cheshire East?

In response Councillor N Mannion, Leader of the Council, stated that there was academic evidence to support devolution to the sub region which showed that it provided better value for money and allowed Councils to target resources where they were needed.

The meeting commenced at 11.00 am and concluded at 3.35 pm

Councillor M Houston (Mayor/Chair)