

CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the **Council**
held on Wednesday, 18th October, 2023 in
The Assembly Room - Town Hall, Macclesfield SK10 1EA

PRESENT

Councillor R Fletcher (Mayor/Chair)

Councillor M Houston (Deputy Mayor/Vice-Chair)

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

34 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors R Bailey, R Chadwick, B Drake, S Gardiner, T Jackson, C O'Leary, B Puddicombe, M Sewart, John Smith, Julie Smith, L Wardlaw, F Wilson and J Wray.

35 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Item 13 – Appointment of the Interim Chief Executive: Mr D Parr and Mr D Brown declared an interest and would leave the chamber during consideration of the matter.

36 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 19 July 2023 be approved as a correct record.

37 MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Mayor, in summary

- 1 stated he was grateful to his Chaplain - Rev Fox, for his reflections, before the meeting, on the ongoing conflict in the Middle East and

that that his thoughts went out to all those affected by this and other conflicts around the world.

- 2 reported that he had attended the funeral of Honorary Alderman and Freeman John Michael Bedson, who died in August.
- 3 asked all present to stand in a minutes silence in memory of those who had lost their lives in the conflicts around the world and in memory of Honorary Alderman Bedson.
- 2 reported that his Civic Service would be held on 5 November at 3 pm in the Wesley Place Methodist Church in Alsager, and encouraged all to attend.
- 3 reported that he had presented over 400 medals and certificates to the young people who had taken part in the Council's "Summer Reading Challenge", and commended the Library Service for running the scheme which encouraged young people to read and join their local library.
- 4 reported that he had met with staff from the End-of-Life Partnership, one of his Mayoral Charities, to learn about the work they do.
- 5 referred to the item 13 on the agenda - the Appointment of interim Chief Executive, and reported that the preferred candidate - Mr David Parr OBE, was in attendance at the meeting and that there would be an opportunity for Members to meet with him later in the day.

38 PUBLIC SPEAKING TIME/OPEN SESSION

Susan Munro, Chair of Elizabeth's Group, stated that Moody Hall was a Grade 2 listed building in the centre of Congleton and was once owned by Elizabeth Wolstenholme Elmy and housed her pioneering School for Girls. The Hall was of historical interest to the women's movement nationally and internationally, as well as to the Congleton community. The gardens at the rear of Moody Hall contained a collection of ancient trees, two of which had preservation orders on them. She stated that she had been campaigning and asking questions about the building since early 2018, when it first came to her notice that the building was empty and open at the rear, which meant that vandals and thieves had gained easy access. Several fires had taken place and some squatters lived there for a few months. She asked that Cheshire East Council put a compulsory purchase order on the property as there were several interested people who wanted to turn it into a community hub and asked what was Cheshire East Council going to do to protect Moody Hall?

In response Cllr M Warren, Chair of Environment and Communities Committee, stated that it was sad to see the historic building in such a poor state of repair. The property was not owned by Cheshire East Council

and, therefore, the Council was limited in its powers to protect it. The Council had previously taken steps to secure the ground floor of the property, including access from the adjoining car park. Following the recent fire, the Council had served an Urgent Works Notice seeking to make access from Moody Street more secure. These works had yet to be put in place and there had been further discussions with the current owner as to their plans to implement previously approved residential planning permission which would secure the long-term future of the building. There had also been a meeting with the Town Council to explain the current situation and officers were regularly visiting the site. They had also been in discussion with the fire service and Cheshire Police. Officers continued to seek the most effective solution for securing the building.

Andrew Wood stated that his question was about the planning department at Cheshire East. He had wished to try and sell a farm building and turn it into a house. He had contacted the Council for advice but could not find any help. He asked why the planning department was not helping the public with advice and form completion to help with planning for converting buildings, garages, and redundant farm building into residential properties as there was a need for housing and there would also be income for the Council from council tax.

In response Cllr M Warren, Chair of Environment and Communities Committee stated that Cheshire East had suffered, like many local authorities, with a lack of resources within its planning department which had affected the normal levels of customer service, particularly in providing pre application support which had been suspended for all but the largest schemes. A review of the service had identified a number of areas where improvement could be made, which included how customers' needs could be best met. A review of the pre-application process was part of the overall review, as was a Service restructure which would seek to include support officer roles which would provide the right level of service for all customers.

Robert Douglas spoke on fly-tipping and referred to the league table published by the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs of councils detailing the number of fly-tipping incidents and fixed penalty notices issued for the year to March 2022. He noted that Cheshire East had 4,456 fly-tipping incidents and had issued just 22 fixed penalties - less than one penalty for every two hundred incidents. He noted that whilst the number of fly-tipping incidents in Cheshire East fell by about 9% in the year to March 2023, the average cost of each incident increased by about 14% - meaning that fly-tipping was now annually costing the Council £239,400. He asked why the Council's record of issuing fixed penalty notices in respect of fly-tipping was so dismal in the year to March 2022? He asked whether there had been a substantial improvement in the percentage of fixed penalty notices issued in the year to March 2023 compared to that of the previous year? He also asked whether numerous cameras would be installed to catch these criminals, and what other actions were being taken to increase the number of fixed penalties?

In response Cllr M Warren, Chair of Environment and Communities Committee, stated that the Council's Community Enforcement service consisted of 6 Community Enforcement Officers who covered the entire Cheshire East borough. The team dealt with a variety of environmental enforcement issues, including abandoned vehicles, promoting responsible dog ownership, and fly tipping. Due to the size of the team and competing priorities it was not possible for the team to attend each fly tip incident before it was cleared. The team only formally investigated fly tipping incidents where there was clear evidence of a crime. For those incidents which were attended, it was not uncommon for perpetrators to take measures to ensure there was no traceable evidence contained within the fly tipped material. Cllr Warren reported that the number of Fixed Penalty Notices issued specifically for fly tipping in the year to March 2023 was 23. There were no plans to install cameras as a method of deterring or enforcing against fly tipping at this stage. A further two Community Enforcement officers were being recruited. These extra resources would assist with tackling all environment and waste related issues. Partnership working was also ongoing with two Town Councils - Crewe and Macclesfield, who directly funded a Community Enforcement Officer each to tackle issues within specific geographical areas of concern.

Charlotte Peters Rock asked why the Council had not moved a current employee up the pay scale as a temporary measure to cover for the Chief Executive instead of spending an outlay of a minimum base rate of £1,380 per day for three days a week stand-in? She felt that the proposal to raise the base rate paid to the next Chief Executive by another ten to thirty thousand, up to a total outlay of £250,000, was another cost pulling away vital rights from service users. She stated that the Council's Adults and Health Committee was letting down service users by closing the Stanley Centre in Knutsford and instead should be organising viable ways to take extra adult disabled attendees, possibly from Cheshire West and Chester, and of subletting the space during evenings and weekends to keep the facility open, or applying for National Lottery funding to be able to keep the place open for attendees. She felt the decision to remove the funding for the Stanley Centre was a predetermined decision, which ignored disability rights. The consultation results overwhelmingly showed that the purpose-built Stanley Centre was highly valued by its local attendees, their family and carers and the wider community, who all wished to see that vital provision remain. She felt that the consultations result being ignored was an absolute sham and a mockery of the adult learning disabled and their family carers and the community and that allowing one Committee to make such a closure without reference to the full Council was a disgrace.

39 LEADER'S AND DEPUTY LEADER'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Leader, in summary:

- 1 paid tribute to Dr Lorraine O'Donnell, who had started as the Chief Executive at Bradford Council, and stated that during her time at

Cheshire East Council she had brought stability to the Council – there had been no police investigations, dealt with a public interest report which recognised the significant improvements made since 2018, the accounts were up to date and the Council had a four year balanced budget and had moved to the committee system.

- 2 Highlighted the financial state of the Council and that the latest forecast was for a deficit of £12m due to increased demand on children’s services and increased costs due to inflation. He reported that inflation last year was 10% but council tax only went up by 5%. The Council had been hit twice, with its own costs going up and secondly with more people needing Council services and this has reduced the Council’s budget reserves.
- 3 encouraged residents to sign up to the garden waste system, which could be done via the Council’s website: - www.cheshireeast.gov.uk/gardenwaste
- 4 asked Councillors to look into the special education needs and disability provision before the next Council meeting to ensure that they were aware of the significant overspends of £14m a year which were being put in a negative reserve. This was a national problem and the County Councils Network had undertaken research which showed that spend was linked proportionally to deprivation.
- 5 reported that another Conversation with the Leader and Deputy Leader would be taking place, with questions to be submitted this week.
- 6 reminded all Councillors representing the Council at Remembrance Day events in November that wreaths could be obtained from Martin Smith, Registration and Civic Services Manager.

The Deputy Leader, in summary:

- 1 referred to the HS2 announcement of the cancellation of the northern part of the scheme and stated that this was a devastating blow, not only to Crewe and Cheshire East, but also to the wider region as well. He reported that the Prime Minister had given a promise that every penny that would have been spent on Phases 2a and 2b would be re-invested in new projects. He noted that the new network north plans failed to make any reference to Crewe, the Borough, or the transport aspirations of residents. The Council had written to ministers seeking an urgent meeting to discuss both compensation and appropriate funding for Cheshire East.
- 2 stated that the contracts for bus services funded by the Council were due to expire in March 2024 and reported that Councillors, as well as town and parish councils, had been invited to consider whether any

minor changes were required to these contracts and that the deadline for response was 18 October.

- 3 reported that the Enhanced Bus Partnership Forum would be taking place on 26 October. The Forum was intended to provide a platform to discuss issues and opportunities currently faced by the bus network across Cheshire East and would provide an opportunity to work collaboratively with the Council, user groups and commercial operators as well as making recommendations to the Partnership Board.
- 4 reported that 924 responses had been received on the consultation on the proposals to extend the Flexi Link demand responsive transport service. The consultation had run from 9 August to 30 September. The responses were being analysed and any recommendations would be considered at the meeting of the Highways and Transport Committee in March 2024.
- 5 reported on the progress of the latest highways schemes to improve cycling and walking in Cheshire East. The B5358 in Handforth was undergoing significant improvements including a new shared footway for pedestrians and cyclists, new drainage, improvements to pedestrian crossings, and the installation of additional traffic calming measures. The work was taking place in four phases and was due to last 10 weeks through to 1 December.

40 RECOMMENDATIONS FROM CORPORATE POLICY COMMITTEE: CHESHIRE AND MERSEYSIDE HEALTH AND CARE PARTNERSHIP

Consideration was given to the Cheshire and Merseyside Health and Care Partnership Terms of Reference.

The matter had been deferred at the last meeting of Council due to ongoing discussions between the nine authorities of the Partnership to reach agreement and finalise the terms of reference. These discussions had been concluded and the terms of reference, as appended to the report, had been agreed by all nine authorities.

RESOLVED: That the Council

- 1 becomes a member of the Cheshire and Merseyside Health and Care Partnership.
- 2 adopts the terms of reference of the Cheshire and Merseyside Health and Care Partnership, as set out in the appendix to the report.
- 3 the Leader of the Council be nominated to be the Council's representative on the Cheshire and Merseyside Health and Care Partnership.

- 4 delegates authority to the Chief Executive to nominate an Executive Director/Director of Public Health to be a member of the Committee if they consider this appropriate.

41 RECOMMENDATION TO COUNCIL FROM CORPORATE POLICY COMMITTEE: FIRST FINANCIAL REVIEW 2023/24

Consideration was given to the report seeking approval of supplementary revenue estimates and a supplementary capital estimate.

A revised Appendix to the report was circulated at the meeting which contained four supplementary revenue estimates for approval and one supplementary capital estimate.

RESOLVED: That Council approve

- 1 supplementary revenue estimates over £1,000,000 in accordance with Financial Procedure Rules, as detailed in Appendix 1 to the report:
 - Afghan Integration Support - £1,231m
 - Early Years Supplementary Grant - £1,262m
 - Energy Bills Support Scheme Alternative Funding - £2,089m
 - Bus Services Improvement Plan+ - £1,188m
- 2 a supplementary capital estimates over £1,000,000 in accordance with Financial Procedure Rules as detailed in Appendix 1 to the report:
 - Active Travel Fund - £1,297,882

42 ANNUAL REPORT OF AUDIT AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE 2022/23

Cllr Michael Beanland, Chair of the Audit and Governance Committee, presented the Audit and Governance Committee Annual Report 2022/23 to Council.

The report provided details of the work undertaken by the Committee and the assurances received during that year.

The Annual Report was received and noted.

43 RECOMMENDATION FROM AUDIT AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE: RECRUITMENT OF CO-OPTED INDEPENDENT MEMBER

The Audit and Governance Committee had appointed a recruitment panel of three members to undertake the recruitment of the second co-opted independent member. The Panel, made up of Councillors M Beanland, K Edwards and P Redstone, had reviewed the applications and interviewed the candidates and recommended to Council that Mrs Jennifer

Clark be appointed as the co-opted independent member to the Audit and Governance Committee.

RESOLVED:

That Mrs Jennifer Clark be appointed as an independent member to the Audit and Governance Committee for a period of 4 years from the date of the Council meeting.

**44 RECOMMENDATION FROM CHILDREN AND FAMILIES COMMITTEE:
ANNUAL YOUTH JUSTICE PLAN**

Consideration was given to the Annual Youth Justice Plan 2023/24.

Local authorities had a statutory duty to submit an annual youth justice plan. Cheshire East had a shared service agreement for Youth Justice Services with the three other local authorities in the sub-region, with the governance arrangements for Youth Justice overseen by a pan Cheshire Partnership Management Board. The 2023/24 Youth Justice Plan had been drafted in partnership with Cheshire Police and other statutory partners and was approved by the Cheshire Youth Justice Management Board on 23 June 2023.

RESOLVED:

That the Cheshire Youth Justice Services Youth Justice Plan 2023/24 be adopted.

**45 RECOMMENDATION FROM APPOINTMENTS COMMITTEE:
AMENDMENT TO PAY POLICY STATEMENT**

The Appointments Committee at its meeting on 5 September 2023 had considered a report relating to the salary range for the appointment of the Chief Executive and had recommended to Council that the Pay Policy Statement 2023/24 be amended to include a pay band for the role of Chief Executive of £170,000 to £190,000.

It was reported at the meeting that the third paragraph of the minute extract on page 107 of the agenda pack contained an error and that the top end of the salary range proposed should read “£200k” and not “£220k.”

An amendment was proposed and seconded to amend the proposed salary range to ‘£160k to £190k’. Following debate, the amendment was put to the vote and declared lost.

Following debate on the substantive recommendation, this was put to the vote and declared carried.

RESOLVED:

That the Pay Policy Statement 2023/24 be amended to include a pay band for the role of Chief Executive of Cheshire East Council of £170,000 to £190,000.

46 APPOINTMENT OF AN INTERIM CHIEF EXECUTIVE

Having previously declared an interest, Mr David Parr and Mr David Brown left the Chamber for this item.

Consideration was given to a report relating to the appointment of an Interim Chief Executive (Head of Paid Service), and of an interim Electoral Registration Officer and Returning Officer until the appointment of a new Chief Executive.

The Mayor reported that he intended to take the two recommendations separately.

Appointment of Interim Chief Executive

The Appointments Committee had undertaken the recruitment and interview process for the post of interim Chief Executive and had unanimously agreed to recommend to Council that the preferred candidate - Mr David Parr OBE, be appointed as the Interim Chief Executive.

RESOLVED:

That Mr David Parr OBE be appointed as Cheshire East Council's Interim Chief Executive (Head of Paid Service) with effect from 18 October 2023.

Interim Electoral Registration Officer and Returning Officer

It was a statutory requirement for the Council to have an Electoral Registration Officer and a Returning Officer. It was common for the same person to carry out both responsibilities but not a requirement of the legislation. The duties of both office holders for electoral matters were personal responsibilities and separate from normal responsibilities in their employment by the Council. Once appointed the office holder was responsible to the Court for the proper carrying out of their duties.

Council was recommended to formally designate David Brown, Director of Governance and Compliance (Monitoring Officer) as the Council's interim Electoral Registration Officer and Returning Officer until the new permanent Chief Executive took up post.

RESOLVED:

That David Brown, Director of Governance and Compliance (Monitoring Officer) be appointed as the Council's interim Electoral Registration Officer

and Returning Officer pursuant to the Representation of the People Act 1983.

Mr Parr and Mr Brown returned to the Chamber. The political group leaders spoke to welcome Mr Parr as the Interim Chief Executive.

47 **NOTICES OF MOTION**

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

1 Two Pound Bus Fares

Proposed by Councillor A Gage and Seconded by Councillor H Moss

This Council asks the Director of Highways and Infrastructure to develop and launch a publicity strategy to locally promote the extension and usage of the £2 bus fare cap.

RESOLVED:

That the Motion be referred to the Highways and Transport Committee.

48 **QUESTIONS**

- 1 Cllr R Kain referred to the cancellation of HS2 and stated that the Council had already committed £11.2m to the cancelled project, of which, he was led to believe £8m had already been spent on remedial works. It was his opinion that the Council had no true understanding of its budget or deficit until compensation claims had been presented to central government. He asked if the Council would now suspend what he described as the discriminatory green bin and car parking charges to communities across the Borough where car parking is currently free, and which would have a devastating economic effect on towns that did not have the retail offer or facilities, such as permanently staffed police stations; ambulance stations or fire stations found in larger towns where charges were currently in force. He felt that these should be halted until an accurate assessment of the Council's projected finances could be ascertained.

In response Cllr S Corcoran, Leader of the Council, stated that he had spoken in his announcements about the challenging financial situation the Council faced which was largely due to circumstances out of its control, including additional demands on its services due to the cost-of-living crisis and higher than forecast inflation and interest rates. The announcement about HS2 had certainly not helped and therefore it seemed perverse to stop taking the actions that were known as necessary just because it was not known what

further problems the Government was going to cause. The Council would be arguing very strongly for compensation for all the costs that the Council had incurred in preparing for HS2 coming to Crewe, mainly development and design work. It was not remedial work. Cllr Corcoran noted that several councils had issued section 114 notices with government commissioners appointed who then closed libraries, increased charges and Council Tax. He did not want to see that happen at Cheshire East Council. The Council was going to be taking difficult decisions that were necessary and sadly, given that the national economy had been crushed and the ongoing uncertainty around government decisions, he feared that the Council may need to do even more to achieve a balanced budget next year.

Cllr C Browne, Deputy Leader of the Council, responded that it was clear that the Council needed to do everything it could to cut costs and to find innovative non-council tax ways of raising revenue, and this was simply not the time to stand still, close our eyes and hope for the best. Cllr Kain had described the proposals to introduce charging to areas where parking was currently free as discriminatory. Cllr Browne thought that those parts of the borough that have had to pay to park for many years, whilst others have had a free parking, could say that the current charging regime was discriminatory. The proposals did not advocate a 'one size fits all' approach and the proposals for most towns, including Alsager, included a mixture of lower, medium, and high tariff spaces reflecting existing customers levels in different car parks in each town. To suspend these proposals, particularly at a point midway through a public consultation would be irresponsible and incredibly confusing to both residents and businesses.

- 2 Cllr L Anderson congratulated the Council and councillors for moving away from paper agendas, as it was not only good for the environment but saved Cheshire East Council money. She reported that Wilmslow Town Council had also moved to no longer issuing paper agendas. She asked how much paper and trees had been saved and what savings had been made by not buying paper, printing the agendas, and posting the agenda papers out.

In response, Cllr S Corcoran, Chair of Corporate Policy Committee, reported that the Council had planted over 50,000 trees in the last few years on its land to try and tackle climate change. Last year the Council had felled approximately 168 trees of varying sizes and species. Often the trees felled were diseased or hollow, which made the wood unusable for high quality use and would not be commercially attractive to timber merchants. Often it was difficult to access felled trees in parks and open spaces, and these needed to be dismantled in small sections so as not to damage nearby property, paths etc. and this meant that the wood was often not large enough to be processed into products of any value. When

work was carried out by a contractor, the wood became theirs to dispose of. Cllr Corcoran undertook to provide a written answer on the number of trees saved by not using paper agendas and reported that in 2021/22 the Council spent approximately £33,500 on printing and posting agendas and approximately £32,000 in 22/23. All the paper used was PFC certified, recyclable, and sourced from sustainably managed forests and controlled sources. Cllr Corcoran thanked all Members who have gone digital.

- 3 Cllr C Naismith referred to the announcement at the Conservative Party conference last week that the Government was to perform a U-turn on the delivery of the northern leg of HS2 decision. He believed this represented a serious betrayal of the potential for Crewe and the wider area by the Government. Cllr Naismith requested a full debate about HS2 at the full Council meeting in December to include discussion of how the Council mitigated any impacts of the decision on jobs, investment and growth in Crewe and the wider local economy.

The Mayor confirmed that there would be an item on the agenda for the December meeting.

Cllr C Browne, Chair of Highways and Transport Committee, responded that the cancellation of HS2 was devastating for the town of Crewe and the estimated cost to the wider Cheshire and Warrington sub region was £2 billion of GBA annually, as well as 27,000 jobs. The HS2 Member Reference Group would be meeting to consider several key options at the Council's disposal. Cllr Brown suggested that the Member Reference Group, having originally been delegated authority by the Council, makes a series of recommendations back to full Council, which could be debated.

- 4 Cllr G Smith referred to the error made by the Department for Education officials in the school funding allocation for next year, leaving shortfalls in the school budgets of potentially tens of thousands of pounds. He asked how the Council could support heads, governors, teachers, support staff and parents in dealing with this gross incompetence and its potential impact on our schools.

In response Cllr S Corcoran, Leader of the Council, stated that he would write to the Education Secretary to ask that the Cheshire East schools have their budgets restored. He commented that Cheshire East schools were already some of the lowest funded in the country and this announcement would cause real difficulties, not just to school finance services, but also to children and teachers who would have to deal with the consequences.

Cllr C Bulman, Chair of Children and Families Committee, responded that the shortfall may not be restored and that there

would be consequences to the schools. She stated that it was £59 per secondary school pupil and £45 per primary school pupil less than schools had budgeting for and this would have consequences on things like staffing.

- 5 Cllr K Parkinson stated that she was finding the approach on how Members were committed to spending their member ward budgets inconsistent and, despite following the correct routes of inquiry, including MES, had not yet received a conclusive reply to how much of her budget she still had available. She had submitted her last inquiry on 11 August and asked if she had enough budget left to fund an assessment of double yellow lines in Pickmere following severe parking issues and related antisocial behaviour that the village had endured over three years. She stated that it had taken over a year for a fellow Member, in the south of the Borough, to achieve the same at a cost of £3500 - over half the budget available to a single member ward. She asked the Highways that provide an update of
- a) what works are deemed permissible for a ward member to commission.
 - b) The current prices of such works and
 - c) provide Members with an up-to-date account of their individual budgets spent together with the balance of monies available for future works.

Cllr C Browne, Chair of Highways and Transport Committee, responded that he also found himself in a similar position with a ward member budget request in his own ward. He undertook to ensure that a written response was provided to address the specific concerns.

- 6 Cllr H Moss referred to the £1.2m given by Government to improve bus services and asked for the David Lewis Centre on Mill Lane in Great Warford to be incorporated into a bus service route. This would enable hundreds of staff, who worked at one of the biggest employers within Cheshire East, to use public transport as an option to get to work.

In response Cllr C Browne, Chair of Highways and Transport Committee, stated that he was aware of the David Lewis requests having visited only a few months ago with the former Chief Executive and the Leader. Given the funding available there were likely to be quite limited opportunities to introduce new services as part of the re-tendering exercise about to be launched. If, however, there was a willingness to provide, or an ability to identify some private sector match funding, this would significantly assist in helping to find a solution. He referred to the inaugural meeting of the Enhanced Bus Partnership Forum taking place at Alderley Park Conference Centre next Thursday and stated that this would be an

excellent opportunity to raise this issue directly with the bus operators.

- 7 Cllr M Beanland referred to the no-assurance judgement given by the section 106 report done by Cheshire East Internal Audit team and asked if the Chairs of Environment and Communities Committee and the Finance Sub Committee would provide the Council with assurance that the timetable of deadlines to rectify the issues of the section 106 procedures were understood and would be met.

Cllr M Warren, Chair of the Environment and Communities Sub Committee, responded that there was a meeting scheduled for the coming Friday morning for the Chairs of the various committees to discuss this matter and a written response would be provided following this meeting.

- 8 Cllr H Whitaker referred to the proposed car parking charges that were imminent, and asked for a change in the way the public could respond to the consultation. She stated that at present members of the public were asked to either write in or e-mail in their comments regarding the consultation. She had received a number of complaints from residents to the effect that this felt quite obstructive and asked whether an online form could be provided by the Council where residents could simply click on a link and then complete the documentation and then click submit, as this would be easier than trying to find an email address and doing a separate e-mail.

In response Cllr C Browne, Chair of Highways and Transport Committee, stated that there may be difficulties in trying to change the process of the consultation midway through the consultation itself, and stated he would need to take legal advice on whether it was possible.

- 9 Cllr P Redstone referred to the green waste bin charge and that both the standard and small bin were proposed to be the same subscription with £56. He stated that the idea of the smaller bin was for small premises or people who are older or less mobile so that they could manoeuvre their bins with ease and asked why the charge was not reflecting of the level of service provided and why was there not a monthly service offered at a lower charge.

In response Cllr M Warren, Chair of Environment and Communities Committee, stated that it was the service for which residents were paying. The collection of the green waste, whether a full bin, full large bin or full small bin did not make the service any cheaper, as there was still a requirement to have the vehicles, the staff and the backroom working to provide that service. Cllr Warren undertook to provide a written response to the second part of Cllr Redstone's question.

- 10 Cllr A Farrell stated that it had been reported that the Government's promise to halve inflation by the end of the year was off track. He asked what the Council could do, perhaps in conjunction with other neighbouring councils and our MPs, to request appropriate support packages from the Government to plug the financial economic hole.

In response Cllr S Corcoran stated that the Government had given the Council some grants, which had been referred to earlier in the meeting, but these were ring fenced for specific purposes. He referred to the £46m in a negative reserve for special education needs and that the Council had been allocated £1,000,000 to assist with this negative reserve through the Government's Delivering Better Value programme. He stated that all Councils were under severe financial pressure because of the increasing inflation, increase in interest rates and the increasing demands on services. The Local Government Association and the County Council's Network were to petition Government and to put the case forward for more funding for local authorities. The number of councils issuing Section 114 notices was expected to increase – it was a national problem and the Government needed to address it. The Council would be looking at its own resources and this was why it was taking difficult decision around raising extra income and, in some cases, reducing services.

- 11 Cllr G Marshall referred to the garden waste recycling scheme and asked if any figures were available on residents' take up of the scheme so far.

Cllr M Warren, Chair of Environment and Communities Committee, responded that so far 11,387 people had subscribed to the scheme, which was encouraging since scheme had only been open a couple of weeks.

Cllr A Moran stated that 9500 people had paid the £56 fee, which accrued to £532,000.

- 12 Cllr A Gage referred to the Leader's remark that garden waste scheme was a great service and easy to sign up to and stated that this was not the experience of a resident in Rope who had contacted him to express their difficulty. The resident did not have a computer, and they were hard of hearing and could not sign up via the available means. Cllr Gage reported that he tested the user experience himself and had rung the hotline on the resident's behalf - 17 minutes later an operator asked if they could ring him back because they would need to speak with a supervisor on the issue. An hour later he had been advised that the resident could visit Delamere House in person to sign up or they could give cash to him in the understanding that he would sign them up. Cllr Gage had met the resident in person and having watched them come down the

stairs with great difficulty and reasoned that visiting Delamere House was not viable option. He had told the resident that he would be happy to them sign up, if need be, but this practice was less than ideal in a wider sense. The resident had noted that they could probably find a neighbour to do this for them, but they wished to stay independent. Cllr Gage asked the Chair of the Environment Committee if they would commit to providing further sign-up options, including the consideration of paper options.

In response Cllr M Warren, Chair of Environment and Communities Committee, stated that he was happy to find some kind of resolution for those people that might not be able to use the current sign-up options.

- 13 Cllr J Place asked how widely the Enhanced Bus Partnership Forum event was going to be advertised.

Cllr C Browne, Chair of Highways and Transport Committee, responded that he understood that it was a public event open to members of the Council and members of the public. He anticipated that following his announcement earlier in this meeting that there would be a press release going out this week for the advance notice of the event taking place.

The meeting commenced at 11.00 am and concluded at 1.44 pm

Councillor R Fletcher (Chair)