

CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the **Council**
held on Wednesday, 16th October, 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, M Beanland, S Bennett-Wake, J Bird, L Braithwaite, J Bratherton, M Brooks, D Brown, L Buchanan, C Bulman, A Burton, R Chadwick, C Chapman, D Clark, J Clowes, P Coan, A Coiley, N Cook, S Corcoran, L Crane, T Dean, S Edgar, K Edwards, M Edwards, H Faddes, A Farrall, R Fletcher, A Gage, S Gardiner, E Gilman, M Gorman, E Hall, A Harrison, G Hayes, A Heler, C Hilliard, S Holland, T Jackson, D Jefferay, A Kolker, N Mannion, G Marshall, A Moran, R Moreton, R Morris, H Moss, M Muldoon, J Pearson, J Place, B Posnett, P Redstone, J Rhodes, J Saunders, H Seddon, M Sewart, L Smetham, G Smith, J Smith, J Smith, J Snowball, R Vernon, L Wardlaw, M Warren, J Wray and B Wye

43 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors R Bailey, C Browne, B Drake, M Goldsmith, K Hague, R Kain, C O'Leary, J Pratt, J Priest, B Puddicombe, M Simon, L Smith, H Whitaker and F Wilson.

Cllr Fletcher arrived at the meeting during the lunch break.

44 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

In relation to Item 7 – Proposed New Senior Management Structure, the following officers declared a disclosable interest: -

Helen Charlesworth-May, Executive Director of Adults, Health and Integration

Peter Skates, Acting Executive Director Place

Janet Witkowski, Acting Director of Governance and Compliance

Paul Goodwin, Head of Finance

Michael Moore, Head of Communications

Brian Reed, Head of Democratic Services

45 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 17 July 2024 be confirmed as a correct record subject to the following amendment:

Minute 32 – Corporate Peer Challenge

Recorded Vote results - the addition of Cllr L Anderson to the list of those who voted 'FOR'.

46 MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Mayor, in summary:-

- 1 welcomed Councillor Ben Wye to his first Council meeting, having been elected at the recent by election for the Crewe West ward.
- 2 reported the death of Honorary Aldermen John Goddard and invited all present to stand in a minute's silence in remembrance. The Council was represented by Councillor Rod Fletcher at his funeral.
- 3 reported that the Council had received the Gold Award in the Defence Employer Recognition Scheme and congratulated all those staff who had been involved in this achievement. The Mayor stated that she was looking forward to attending the Awards Ceremony in Liverpool later this year.
- 4 reported that details of all the engagements undertaken by the Mayor and Deputy Mayor could be found on the Council's website.

47 PUBLIC SPEAKING TIME/OPEN SESSION

Mr Stuart Redgard stated that he had identified 6 locations in Wilmslow where signs installed on roundabouts did not comply with the Council's Interim Roundabout Advertising Policy and asked if the Council was aware that the policy was not being followed; if yes why had this been allowed to happen; who allowed it to happen and what action would be taken and when.

In response Councillor M Warren, Chair of Environment and Communities Committee, stated that the Council did not currently have a policy relating to advertising on roundabouts. Erection of signage on roundabouts was generally subject to both planning and highway safety considerations. Advertisement opportunities on Council land were being reviewed in a wider context as part of the Council's Transformation Plan and a new policy which covered roundabouts amongst other things was likely to be developed as part of that work.

Councillor Warren stated that he would ask officers to investigate in respect of the Interim Roundabout Advertising Policy Mr Redgard had stated was published on the Councils website, and that a written response would be provided.

Ms Charlotte Peters Rock asked what oversight the Council had over specialist educational and residential sites either Council owned,

commercially run or run by a quasi-charitable body. Ms Peters Rock asked that when the environment changed dramatically, did the Council know or have the ability to safeguard the mentally and physically disabled who used those sites.

In response, Councillor C Bulman, Chair of the Children and Families Committee, agreed to provide a written response.

48 LEADER'S AND DEPUTY LEADER'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Leader, in summary:

- 1 thanked Members, officers, and residents of Cheshire East for the support he had received since becoming Leader of the Council in July 2024.
- 2 referred to the Council's financial situation and stated that the Council could no longer afford to do everything, everywhere for everybody all the time.
- 3 referred to the withdrawal of the Winter Fuel Allowance from all but the less well-off pensioners and stated that the administration had been working with officers and partner organisations to help those pensioners who needed extra support. He reported that 3500 pensioners who had had the Allowance withdrawn would get extra help from the Council over the winter months.
- 4 reported that the Government's Devolution White Paper was expected later this year and would be followed by legislation in the Spring 2025.
- 5 reported that he had reviewed the cohort of Member Champions and details of which were available on the Council's website - [Member champions](#). The Leader reported that a new Member Champion had been appointed for Care Leavers, with Councillor Geoff Smith taking on the role.
- 6 reported on the successes at the Olympic Games in Paris of those athletes who had close links to Cheshire East and highlighted the success of Honorary Freewomen Bryony Page and Dame Sarah Storey amongst others.

The Deputy Leader, in summary:

- 1 reported that the Council's Transformation Plan had been submitted to the Government and was being put in place at pace with support of Members and staff. He stated that Phase 1 of the Plan had been completed and the Council was moving into Phase 2 implementation.

- 2 thanked the Local Government Association and the Council's Transformation Delivery Partner- Inner Circle, for their continued support in helping to transform the Council.
- 3 noted that Council was being asked to approve the senior management structure as advocated by the Peer Review.
- 4 stated that the current Cheshire East Plan would run out in 2025 and the next Plan would need to reflect the new priorities of a smaller Council with financial stability, clear values, and a sharp customer service focus.
- 5 reported that the Solar Farm at Leyton Grange had been completed and was part of the Council's commitment to be a carbon neutral by 2027.
- 6 reported that Council staff including the Chief Executive had taken part in the Yorkshire Three Peaks Challenge to raise funds for Cancer Research UK.
- 7 stated he was pleased that the Council had been awarded the Ministry of Defence Employer Recognition Scheme Gold Award in recognition of the exceptional commitment to supporting the armed forces community.
- 8 encouraged all to watch the new Fostering Recruitment Video, which had been created collaboratively with 100 other local authorities to encourage more people to come forward to become foster carers.
- 9 recognised the major contribution of three senior staff who had left or retired in recent weeks – David Brown, Monitoring Officer, Deborah Woodcock, Executive Director Children and Families, and Matt Tyrer, Director of Public Health.

49 RECOMMENDATION FROM CORPORATE POLICY COMMITTEE: PROPOSED NEW SENIOR MANAGEMENT STRUCTURE

The officers who had made a declaration under Item 2 - Declarations of Interest, left the meeting during consideration of this item.

Consideration was given to the recommendations from the Corporate Policy Committee in relation to the Proposed New Senior Management Structure.

The proposed structure for Phase 1 of the restructure focused on the posts of Executive Directors and Directors (tier 2 and 3) across the organisation to provide stability and capacity at the most senior level. Phase 1 also included the structure within Corporate (Resources) Services to Head of Service (tier 4) to ensure an enabling structure was in place to drive the

transformation programme, support Childrens' Services improvements, deliver the Corporate Peer Challenge action plan and to achieve financial sustainability over the medium term.

RESOLVED: That Council

- 1 agree the senior management structure (Phase 1 only), as set out in Appendix 1 to the report, including the approval of new positions within that structure with salaries more than £100,000 per annum and statutory officers, prior to implementation, and agree that the Chief Executive commences recruitment to vacant/positions within the senior management structure.
- 2 note the implementation/recruitment timeline to the new senior management structure.
- 3 agree the release and associated redundancy and pension costs of the impacted/at risk staff members.

50 RECOMMENDATION FROM CHILDREN AND FAMILIES COMMITTEE: YOUTH JUSTICE PLAN 2024-27

Consideration was given to the recommendation from the Children and Families Committee in relation to the Youth Justice Plan 2024-27.

Local authorities had a statutory duty to submit an annual Youth Justice Plan relating to their provision of youth justice services. Cheshire East Council had a shared services arrangement for Youth Justice with Cheshire West and Chester Council, Warrington Council and Halton Council, with the governance arrangements being overseen by a pan Cheshire Partnership Management Board.

RESOLVED:

That Council approve the Youth Justice Plan 2024-27.

51 SUPPLEMENTARY REVENUE ESTIMATES (FIRST FINANCIAL REVIEW 2024/25)

Consideration was given to the report seeking approval of supplementary revenue estimates from the First Financial Review 2024/25.

RESOLVED: That Council approve

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| 1 | Children and Families - supplementary revenue estimates for | |
| | Teachers Pay Additional Grant | £1,645,000 |
| | Teachers Pension Grant | £2,393,000 |
| | Household Support Fund | £2,200,000 |

2	Economy and Growth – supplementary revenue estimate for Homelessness Prevention Grant	£1,054,000
3	Highways and Transport – supplementary revenue estimates for Bus Service Improvement Plan+ Phase 2	£1,188,000
	Bus Service Improvement Plan+ Phase 3	£2,268,000

The meeting adjourned for a lunch break.

52 NOTICES OF MOTION

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

Motion 1 Winter Fuel Allowance

Proposed by Councillor A Kolker and Seconded by Councillor A Gage

“This Council is dismayed at the Labour Government’s recent decision, in the absence of a full impact assessment, to restrict the Winter Fuel Payment to only those pensioners in receipt of Pension Credit or similar benefit, with immediate effect this winter.

This means that many vulnerable Cheshire East pensioners this year, will lose between £200 and £300 that they have relied upon to keep their homes warm and hot food prepared.

Nationally, Age UK has identified that up to two million pensioners who badly need this money, will now not receive it.

In addition, as many as 800,000 pensioners who are eligible for Pension Credit, do not claim it and will therefore remain ineligible for the Winter Fuel Allowance.

As elected members, we have already received letters of concern from affected, older residents, including, for example, a petition from fifty members of the Congleton Widows Group.

Vulnerable Cheshire East Pensioners on limited means, but either not claiming Pension Credit or with incomes just above the Pension Credit threshold, will face desperate choices this winter; to “heat or eat” - decisions that pose a significant threat to health and life.

This Council therefore resolves:

- That Group Leaders write jointly to the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, expressing this Council’s deep concerns regarding the impact of this decision on Cheshire East’s most vulnerable residents and asking that the Winter

Fuel Allowance is reinstated with immediate effect. This to remain in place, pending the results of a full impact assessment and the evaluation of an alternative scheme that will protect the most vulnerable and middle-income pensioners at risk during Winter months.

- To bring forward a refreshed Council-led, local awareness campaign, via digital, targeted mail and via related services and venues (for example; GP surgeries, Community facilities, places of worship), to support all those eligible, to apply for Pension Credit, before 21st December 2024. This date is critical if they are to register for Winter Fuel Allowance this Winter and so avoid fuel poverty.
- That the Leader and Deputy Leader of Council write to all Members of Parliament representing Cheshire East constituencies, explaining this Council's concerns and to request their support in raising them in Westminster, on behalf of Cheshire East's most vulnerable pensioners."

RESOLVED:

That the Motion be referred to the Adults and Health Committee for consideration.

Motions 2 and 3 – The Mayor announced that these Motions would be dealt with at the meeting and taken together, with one debate on both motions as she did not believe that there was anything which was contradictory in either motion which would create problems for a joint debate, and that following the conjoined debate, a separate vote would be taken on each Motion.

Motion 2 Council's Governance Framework

Proposed by Councillor Clowes and Seconded by Councillor S Gardiner

An amended Motion was proposed by Councillor Clowes and seconded by Councillor S Gardiner which removed the reference to the Constitution Working Group.

"This Council notes the concerns raised in the LGA Peer Challenge Report (March 2024), related to the Council's systems of governance and specifically highlighted in:

Recommendation 8: Urgently review the Council's decision-making framework: The Council needs to streamline current decision-making arrangements to avoid siloed working across committees, ensure that Committees are working through effective work programmes, and reduce confusion and lost capacity caused by the current system.

This Council recognises that changes to the committee system are necessary to address this recommendation and related issues, as highlighted in the report.

It is therefore proposed that this Council gives authority to:

1. The Corporate Policy Committee to consider and recommend, no later than the 31st March 2025 those modifications to the Committee System that will address at pace the issues of financial management and governance as raised in the LGA Corporate Peer Challenge Review Report; and
- 2 That the Corporate Policy Committee consider and recommend, no later than the 25th September 2025, potential substantive changes to the Council's Governance Framework, that will facilitate improved capacity and effectiveness throughout the longer-term period of transformation."

Motion 3 - The Council's Governance Arrangements

Proposed by Councillor N Mannion and seconded by Councillor M Gorman

"At the Council's Annual General Meeting on 22 May 2019, Council resolved to express its commitment to implementing a change of its decision-making governance arrangements, comprising the cessation of the Leader and Cabinet model of governance, and the implementation of a full committee model of governance.

Following much preparatory work, on 19 November 2020, Council resolved amongst other things, to cease operating the Leader and Cabinet model of governance, and to implement a committee system model of governance, this to take effect from the Annual Council Meeting on 12 May 2021. Since then, the Council has operated committee system arrangements.

The committee system has now been in operation for over three years, and it is appropriate and timely for members to consider the benefits or otherwise of this system of governance.

Between 24-28 March 2024, the Local Government Association undertook a Corporate Peer Challenge of the Council, which concentrated upon a number of issues, including the Council's governance arrangements.

The LGA's report included observations and comments upon the Council's governance arrangements, together with a recommendation, which are set out in the Appendix to this Notice of Motion.

Notice of Motion

Council calls for a full report to be prepared and presented to the Corporate Policy Committee on or before 6 February 2025, which will:

- Include information from Members of their experience of the current committee system.
- Set out details of how any change in the Council's governance arrangements might be made, the implications of such a change, and the timescale within which such a change might be implemented.
- Provide details upon any other pertinent matters, such as financial implications and the potential impact of such a change upon the speed and effectiveness of decision-making.”

Following the conjoined debate, Motion 2 was put to the vote and declared lost.

Motion 3 was put to the vote and declared carried.

RESOLVED:

That Motion 3 – The Council's Governance Arrangements, be approved.

Motion 4 Broadcasting and Recording Equipment

Proposed by Councillor L Wardlaw and Seconded by Councillor R Chadwick

“Will this Council commit to improving its broadcasting and recording equipment in the interest of openness, fairness and a wider access to democracy.

It is now over a year since Cheshire East Council has been made aware of the poor sound quality of its broadcasts and recordings, and yet the problem remains unresolved. The recurrent failure of its live broadcasting and the delays in recordings being available is unacceptable. We have made a commitment to deliver this service to our residents, but we fail at every meeting held. The situation is anti-democratic, unprofessional, and unacceptable.

Democracy is not well served when it cannot be easily accessed. The current service is inadequate. An improved offer is needed, and I ask that this be considered as a priority.”

RESOLVED:

That the Motion be referred to the Corporate Policy Committee for consideration.

Motion 5 Agreed Framework for Delivery of Services at a Local Level

Proposed by Councillor M Gorman and Seconded by Councillor K Edwards

“The Council is about to embark on the devolution journey.

It is also entering a new realm of co-operation with our Parish and Town Councils, where increased co-operation and shared working needs to be explored in a planned and systematic way to secure the ongoing provision of services at local level in a co-operative partnership.

We therefore urge that as part of the Council's Transformation Programme Cheshire East Council approaches our local town and parish council partners to discuss developing an agreed framework to support the delivery of appropriate services at the local level. There are already good examples of such partnership arrangements in place in parts of Cheshire East.

Such a framework should have at its heart a balanced and equitable relationship, for the benefit of both councils and of local residents.”

RESOLVED:

That the Motion be referred to the Corporate Policy Committee for consideration.

53 QUESTIONS

Councillor B Posnett sought clarification in respect of whether the grant cohorts already agreed on for the Household Support Fund 5 were those agreed at Children and Families Committee?

In response Councillor J Rhodes, Chair of Adults and Health Committee, stated that the money agreed at Children and Families Committee would be distributed as agreed. The Government had since given a new grant, as of 1st October 2024, which was not detailed in today's papers.

Councillor A Kolker referred to the winter fuel allowance and asked what assurance the Council could provide to ensure that the Congleton Widows Group, and all other pensioners who were entitled to claim pension credit, would be proactively informed and supported to do so before the final application date in December. He asked how the Council would ensure that vulnerable pensioners were able to keep warm this winter whilst their

applications were processed? Councillor Kolker asked the Leader to explain where the money was coming from.

In response Councillor J Rhodes, Chair of Adults and Health Committee, stated that the Council had been notified of a sum of money - around £2.2million, which would be given to Cheshire East Council from 1 October 2024 for the Household Support Fund. The Council would be contacting pensioners who may be able to claim pension credit using a targeted approach by using information from the council tax support records. Officers had identified around 3500 pensioners who were on the relevant benefits or claiming council tax credit, who may be able to access the Household Support Fund, but the details were still being worked through.

The Leader of the Council, Councillor N Mannion, stated that the Council would be relaunching the Warm Places Scheme to open up local venues for warmth and there would be a communications campaign to promote this which would be aimed at reaching as many people as possible.

Councillor T Dean asked that, as the Council were closing three Household Waste and Recycling Centres (HWRCs) in Cheshire East, to what extent were cross boundary drawbacks and reciprocal arrangements discussed with neighbouring local authorities to improve residents' access to HWRCs, reduce any potential impacts of rising fly tipping and provide mutually beneficial cost savings.

Councillor M Warren, Chair of Environment and Communities Committee, agreed to provide a written response.

Councillor L Anderson asked if the Council could make it mandatory for all Councillors to undergo Corporate Parenting training and be made aware of their responsibility as Corporate Parents.

In response, Councillor C Bulman, Chair of Children and Families Committee, stated that the Children and Families Committee and the Cared for Children and Care Leavers Committee had recently received training from an external provider, during which care leavers provided feedback and the suggestions received were now being worked on. Councillor Bulman stated that it was mandatory for all Councillors to do Safeguarding Training and there was a lot of resources on the Learning Lounge relating to Corporate Parenting. Training for all members was being worked on.

Councillor D Clark asked the Leader to reassure Members that, following the closure of Westfields, the audio broadcasting system would be improved and asked if consideration had been given to an electronic voting system?

Councillor N Mannion, Leader of the Council, stated that facilities were being created at Delamere House, with a new PA system and broadcasting equipment which would be an improvement on that which was currently

used at Westfields. Officers were progressing the delivery of an electronic voting system following the identification of a suitable system and was due to be tested at upcoming committees. There would be a requirement for a minor change to the Constitution which currently stated that voting was by a show of hands.

Councillor S Gardiner asked that following the introduction of a revised highway arrangement in Knutsford, whether there would be an audit of the arrangement, when would it take place, and whether third parties could suggest alterations.

In response Councillor L Crane, Vice Chair of Highways and Transport Committee, agreed that a written response would be provided and suggested that a meeting with senior highways officers could be arranged.

Councillor R Fletcher asked if the car parking charges being introduced after 6pm would apply to Fairview car park in Alsager as this was currently free after 3pm.

In response Councillor L Crane, Vice Chair of Highways and Transport Committee, stated that assurance had been given that any free after 3pm car park would not be subject to evening charges.

Councillor P Redstone asked when officers propose the acceptance of government grants whether they look at the impact on the MTFS for future years as there were a number of proposed footpaths in Crewe, whilst existing footpaths had no budget for maintenance.

In response, Councillor N Mannion, Leader of the Council, stated that the footpaths in question had been funded by the Towns Fund which was separate and that they had a broader impact. Councillor Mannion agreed to provide a written response.

Councillor A Gage asked whether officers requested reassessments of circumstances to take place for those who received adult social care support from the Council and, if so, were residents informed? A resident of his had unexpectedly received a bill which was six times the previous amount despite no change in circumstances.

Councillor J Rhodes, Chair of Adult and Health Committee, stated that she could not comment on individual cases, but reassessment of residents in receipt of help from the Council happened on a regular basis and the Council had recently put in place a new charging policy, agreed by the Adults and Health Committee. The resident should be encouraged to contact their social worker for assistance.

Councillor L Buchanan commended the Council's commitment to support those pensioners who would lose their winter fuel allowance and asked how the Council would support children and working age adults living in poverty.

Councillor C Bulman, Chair of Children and Families Committee, agreed that a written response would be provided.

Councillor J Bratherton referred to the Constitution Working Group and sought assurance that there would be an improved approach to Members' input into the Constitution where contributions from the Working Group would be welcomed.

In response Councillor M Warren, Chair of the Constitution Working Group, stated that guidance would be sought from officers, and that Councillor Bratherton's comments were noted.

Councillor R Morris asked if the Council had a chicane in storage, where was it, and could it be used.

Councillor L Crane, Vice Chair of the Highways and Transport Committee, agreed that a written response would be provided.

Councillor J Clowes asked how many eligible low-income pensioners would be supported to claim pension credit by the deadline of 21 December 2024.

Councillor J Rhodes, Chair of Adults and Health Committee, agreed to provide a written response.

Councillor A Burton asked if anything could be done to fast-track the Nantwich bus contracts as residents in Nantwich were currently without a service.

In response Councillor L Crane, Vice Chair of Highways and Transport Committee stated that work was ongoing to expand the Flexi link and Go-To services as a direct response to D&G withdrawing their Nantwich services and agreed that a written response would be provided.

54 REPORTING OF URGENT DECISIONS TAKEN BY THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

Council received a schedule of urgent decisions taken by the Chief Executive on behalf of the Council, which were reported for information in accordance with the Council procedure rules.

RESOLVED:

That the schedule of urgent decisions be noted.

The meeting commenced at 11.00 am and concluded at 2.35 pm

Councillor M Houston (Mayor/Chair)