

AT A MEETING of the County Council of HAMPSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL held
at The Castle, Winchester on Thursday 28 November 2024

Chairman:

* Councillor Keith Mans

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| * Councillor Ann Briggs | Councillor Adam Jackman |
| * Councillor Nick Adams-King | * Councillor Gavin James |
| Councillor Prad Bains | Councillor Andrew Joy |
| * Councillor Lulu Bowerman | * Councillor Mark Kemp-Gee |
| * Councillor Jackie Branson | * Councillor Melville Kendal |
| * Councillor Ryan Brent | * Councillor Rupert Kyrle |
| * Councillor Steven Broomfield | * Councillor Peter Latham |
| * Councillor Pamela Bryant | * Councillor Alexis McEvoy |
| * Councillor Graham Burgess | * Councillor Lesley Meenaghan |
| * Councillor Joanne Burton | * Councillor Derek Mellor |
| * Councillor Fran Carpenter | * Councillor Rob Mocatta |
| * Councillor Roz Chadd | Councillor Arun Mummalaneni |
| * Councillor Peter Chegwyn | * Councillor Kirsty North |
| * Councillor Adrian Collett | Councillor Phil North |
| * Councillor Mark Cooper | * Councillor Russell Oppenheimer |
| * Councillor Rod Cooper | Councillor Sarah Pankhurst |
| * Councillor Tonia Craig | * Councillor Tanya Park |
| * Councillor Alex Crawford | * Councillor Stephen Parker |
| * Councillor Debbie Curnow-Ford | * Councillor Louise Parker-Jones |
| * Councillor Tim Davies | * Councillor Neville Penman |
| * Councillor Christopher Donnelly | * Councillor Stephen Philpott |
| * Councillor Alan Dowden | * Councillor Jackie Porter |
| * Councillor David Drew | * Councillor Roger Price |
| * Councillor Barry Dunning | * Councillor Lance Quantrill |
| * Councillor Liz Fairhurst | * Councillor Stephen Reid |
| * Councillor Michael Ford | * Councillor Patricia Stallard |
| * Councillor Steve Forster | Councillor Elaine Still |
| Councillor Jonathan Glen | * Councillor Kim Taylor |
| * Councillor Tim Groves | * Councillor Tom Thacker |
| * Councillor David Harrison | Councillor Michael Thierry |
| Councillor Marge Harvey | Councillor Martin Tod |
| * Councillor Pal Hayre | * Councillor Andy Tree |
| * Councillor Juliet Henderson | Councillor Jacky Tustain |
| * Councillor Edward Heron | * Councillor Rhydian Vaughan MBE |
| * Councillor Dominic Hiscock | * Councillor Malcolm Wade |
| * Councillor Keith House | * Councillor Malcolm Wallace |
| * Councillor Zoe Huggins | * Councillor Jan Warwick |
| * Councillor Wayne Irish | * Councillor Bill Withers Lt Col (Retd) |

Also present with the agreement of the Chairman: Honorary Aldermen Keith Chapman, Andrew Gibson and Michael Woodall.

257. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors Prad Bains, Jonathan Glen, Andrew Joy, Arun Mummalaneni, Phil North, Sarah Pankhurst, Elaine Still, Michael Thierry, Martin Tod and Jacky Tustain and from Honorary Alderman Chris Carter.

258. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Members were mindful that where they believed they had a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest in any matter considered at the meeting they must declare that interest at the time of the relevant debate and, having regard to the circumstances described in Part 3, Paragraph 1.5 of the County Council's Members' Code of Conduct, leave the meeting while the matter was discussed, save for exercising any right to speak in accordance with Paragraph 1.6 of the Code. Furthermore, Members were mindful that where they believed they had a Non-Pecuniary interest in a matter being considered at the meeting they considered whether such interest should be declared, and having regard to Part 5, Paragraph 5 of the Code, considered whether it was appropriate to leave the meeting whilst the matter was discussed, save for exercising any right to speak in accordance with the Code.

259. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 3 October 2024 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

260. DEPUTATIONS

The following deputations were received in accordance with Standing Order 12:

- a) Improvements to the crossing in Lowford.

The Executive Member for Highways and Waste thanked the deputation for attending and indicated her agreement to attend a community meeting.

- b) Bus Provision for the Waterside Area.

The Executive Member for Highways and Waste thanked the deputations for their attendance and recognised the social connectivity issues affecting the area.

- c) The provision of spare capacity seats on the Ancells Farm school transport bus service to Velmead Junior School.

The Executive Lead Member for Children's Services thanked the deputation for their attendance and committed to including comments in the ongoing review of spare capacity seats.

261. CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman made the following announcements:

He was pleased to report that the Sir Harold Hillier Gardens had recently been awarded a Gold Award in Britain in Bloom South and Southeast, Parks and Heritage Section. This was the 11th year in a row that the gardens had been awarded such a prestigious accolade.

Earlier in November, the County Council and partners from Fareham Borough Council, Airbus, the MOD and the Defence and Security Accelerator, launched the South Central Defence and Security Cluster. The Cluster joined other regions across the UK in supporting companies of all sizes gain insight, funding and collaboration opportunities in an industry that was difficult to engage with.

He highlighted some of the events and visits made since the last Council meeting:

- HRH The Princess Royal visit to the Warsash Sailing Club
- Visit to the County Council's Emergency Planning team and the Integrated Business Centre.
- Hampshire Cultural Trust (HCT) 10 Year Party & the Launch of HCT 2030
- Staff Remembrance Service
- HRH The Duke of Edinburgh presenting a King's Award for Enterprise to Ahmad Tea Estate
- Chairman's Apprenticeship Recognition Event
- Annual reception of the Watercress Line

Finally, the Chairman reported the very sad passing of Honorary Aldermen Dr John Wall and Pamela Peskett. A number of members paid tribute to them and a minute silence was observed by the Council.

262. LEADER'S REPORT

The Leader began his report by congratulating Councillor Williams on his successful election to the Bishops Waltham county electoral division.

He also reported the forthcoming retirement of Councillor Price and acknowledged his contributions to Portchester and expressed appreciation for his work and the positive impact he had on the community.

Regarding the financial challenges, he reported that the County Council faced a significant budget gap of £180 million for the next financial year. To meet this gap sustainably, changes in government funding allocation were necessary, as well as flexibility in charging for services as the current system limited the ability to charge appropriately for some services.

He reported on ongoing positive discussions with Leaders of Southampton City, Portsmouth City, and Isle of Wight Councils regarding devolution. There was some concern about the government's expectation that local government reform would accompany any devolution deal including the potential disruption and costs associated with transitioning to unitary authorities.

The Leader expressed thanks and appreciation to County Council officers for their response to the impacts of recent storms, acknowledging the challenging conditions under which they worked, responding to over 130 emergencies and 28 fallen trees across the county.

He emphasised Hampshire residents' generosity in hosting over 3,700 Ukrainians through the Homes for Ukraine scheme, and recognised the successful management of the scheme by the County Council's Children's Services Directorate and district and borough colleagues.

Following consideration of a motion regarding changes to eligibility for the Winter Fuel Payment at the last Council meeting, the Leader reported that he had written to the Chancellor of the Exchequer requesting a review of the means test for the Winter Fuel Payment and a plan for the Household Support Fund. The government confirmed the continuation of the Household Support Fund for the following year, at the same funding level, which limited expansion. He reported libraries were being promoted as warm spaces, with targeted events to support residents facing food and fuel poverty, and a campaign to raise awareness about Pension Credit and its connection to Winter Fuel Payment eligibility was ongoing.

The Leader emphasised the support to vulnerable adults through the Argenti Care Technology Service assisting around 530 residents daily, supported by over 40,000 volunteers. The service had been enhanced by proactively contacting at-risk individuals to prevent crises.

He reported that the 21st Extra Care Housing scheme for older adults opened in April that year, providing affordable housing with care services on-site. Extra Care Housing schemes offered benefits such as on-site restaurants, communal lounges, and social events, and plans for additional schemes were underway.

Finally, the Leader highlighted support for local businesses through the County Council's participation in the Hampshire Business Awards, recognising outstanding achievements in the community.

263. **QUESTIONS UNDER STANDING ORDER 16.1.1**

Executive Members responded to questions submitted, as published, in accordance with Standing Order 16.1.1.

It was noted that written responses to questions not answered within the time allowed would be circulated to all Members following the meeting.

264. **PROPORTIONALITY AND APPOINTMENTS**

Prior to this item being considered the Chairman confirmed that the report was published after the main agenda and was therefore considered as an urgent item due to the need for the Council to approve its proportionality table and make the required appointments.

The Council considered and agreed the report of the Chief Executive as presented by the Leader of the Council.

RESOLVED:

That the County Council:

- a) Approves the Proportionality table at Appendix 1 to the report.
- b) Approves the appointments set out in Section 3 of the report.

265. **MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL UPDATE**

The Council considered a report of the Cabinet on financial forecasts for the following two financial years, taking into account the latest information from the in-year monitoring and the impact of the October budget announcement.

In introducing the report, the Leader addressed the ongoing challenges in social care services, the rising demand for Education, Health, and Care Plans (EHCP) leading to higher costs, particularly in school transport services. The Leader noted that inflationary pressures and increases in the National Living Wage and National Insurance, had worsened the financial situation.

The projected budget gap for 2025-26 was £182 million. Key actions taken to address the budget gap included identifying £84 million in savings, reviewing services to ensure alignment with the council's core purpose, implementing a "digital by default" policy, and rationalising office accommodation. In addition, the senior management of the County Council had been reduced by five roles, and application of a mutually agreed resignation scheme allowed staff to resign voluntarily, helping to deliver long-term savings and avoid compulsory redundancies.

The County Council continued to seek ways to improve efficiency and effectiveness, including streamlining business administration, complaints handling, and other common areas including reorganising commissioning, procurement, and contract management processes.

The Leader expressed concern about the approach to local government finance settlements and would write to the government again to request the necessary tools to address the financial challenges.

During questions, it was suggested that a referendum to remove the council tax cap and allow a council tax increase above 4.99% could cost around £600,000 if held on the same day as county elections, and concern was expressed about wasting money if the referendum result was unfavourable. A less expensive survey to gauge public opinion was suggested. The Leader responded that the recent Future Services Consultation had already provided some insight into residents' views and many had indicated they would be willing to make a fair financial contribution for services but were opposed to service reduction.

A member enquired about the possibility of requesting exceptional financial support from the government and referenced experience of providing

government with evidence of maximum cost-cutting. The Leader confirmed that the County Council had been thoroughly reviewing its core purposes and statutory requirements, using external inspections and comparisons with similar authorities to ensure they are operating at the minimum required level.

The debate focused on the severe financial challenges facing the County Council and the impact on services and residents, emphasising the need to protect the most vulnerable residents and expressing disappointment about the government's financial support which impacted funding for essential services including adult and children's social care. There was frustration with the ongoing austerity measures and the unpredictable nature of service demands, emphasising the importance of long-term planning and adequate funding from government.

There was support for the proposals to address the financial challenges and members stressed the need for the current government to be more flexible regarding charging and income. It was noted that while there was a significant budget deficit, the County Council had adequate reserves and plans to balance the budget by 2025-26, and there was optimism about the County Council's ability to balance the budget with potential government support.

There were differing opinions on the past budget decisions at all levels of government, and arguments against reducing services to the legal minimum, stressing the importance of maintaining discretion to support residents effectively. A personal case study illustrated the real-life impact of budget cuts on vulnerable individuals.

The Leader thanked members for their contributions and acknowledged the spirited debate and the positive contributions of opposition members, frustration with government constraints and unintended consequences for residents, emphasising the need to focus on helping the most vulnerable.

The Leader stressed the importance of not using the term "bankrupt" to describe budget pressures. He highlighted the need for government support to manage finances and enable continued provision of essential services, despite financial challenges and concluded by urging the government to provide the necessary tools or funding to ensure sustainability.

RESOLVED:

With reference to the report annexed to the Council report, that the County Council:

- a) Approves spend up to the value contained in the capital programme for Manydown C and D loan notes that will be drawn down (repaid, transferred or converted) in line with the financial deal with Urban & Civic and Manydown 2018 Ltd.
- b) Approves the proposed changes to the funding and associated schemes within the Capital programme as set out in section M, to release revenue funding of £38.257m, to support an allocation of £28.257m to the Budget Bridging Reserve and retention of £10m as a capital contingency.

- c) Approves the changes in reserves and the transfers to the Budget Bridging Reserve as outlined in Section M.

266. NOTICE OF MOTION

The Council considered the Notice of Motion proposed by Councillor David Drew and seconded by Councillor Edward Heron, submitted in accordance with Standing Order 18.1.

Councillor Drew summarised the motion and proposed the recommendation.

During the course of debate, there was general support for the motion and the following points were made:

- Emphasised the burden on farmers due to climate change.
- Highlighted the reduction in farming subsidies and the impact of Brexit.
- Stressed the importance of food security.
- Highlighted the disincentive to invest in farms due to the new tax and the broader contributions of farmers to the community.
- Emphasized the broader economic and mental health impacts on farmers.
- Called for the government to review of the tax and distinguish between speculators and real farmers.

A number of members shared personal stories of farmers in their divisions highlighting the negative impact of the tax on families and expressed the importance of supporting farming families across the county.

In seconding the motion, Councillor Heron emphasised the devastation caused by the introduction of the tax and highlighted the custodian role of farmers in safeguarding farming land for future generations, and the potential increase in suicide rates among farmers due to the tax.

The Motion was put to the vote and carried.

RESOLVED:

This Council resolves:

- a) To request that the Leader of the Council writes to the Secretary of State for the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs to outline the Council's most serious concerns at this decision and calls on the Government to stop the changes to Agricultural Property Relief.
- b) That the Lead Executive Member for Universal Services engages with local farmers and community representatives to determine what action Council can take to support them.
- c) To encourage all Members to sign the National Farmers' Union petition calling for the overturn of the Family Farm Tax (<https://www.campaigns.nfuonline.com/page/160300/petition/>), and to promote the petition within their Division.

267. CHANGES IN RESPONSIBILITIES FOR EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONS

The Council received the report of the Chief Executive detailing changes in responsibility for Executive functions, as reported to Cabinet on 14 October 2024.

268. HAMPSHIRE AND ISLE OF WIGHT FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY (HIWFRA)

a) HIWFRA Questions

No questions had been received in accordance with Standing Order 16.3.

b) HIWFRA Report

The Council received the report as presented by Councillor Rhydian Vaughan, in his capacity as Chairman of the Authority.

269. EXECUTIVE AND COMMITTEE REPORTS

The following information reports were received:

a) Executive Lead Member for Children's Services

Short Break Grant Extensions 2025-26

b) Executive Member for Education

Additional Specialist Provision

The Meeting closed at 3.30pm

Chairman,