

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE COUNTY COUNCIL HELD AT
WOODHATCH PLACE, 11 COCKSHOT HILL, REIGATE, SURREY, RH2 8EF,
ON 10 DECEMBER 2024 COMMENCING AT 10.00 AM, THE COUNCIL BEING
CONSTITUTED AS FOLLOWS:**

Saj Hussain (Chair)
Tim Hall (Vice-Chair)

Maureen Attewell	Eber Kington
Ayesha Azad	Rachael Lake BEM
Catherine Baart	Victor Lewanski
Steve Bax	David Lewis (Cobham)
John Beckett	* David Lewis (Camberley West)
Jordan Beech	Scott Lewis
Luke Bennett	Andy Lynch
* Amanda Boote	Andy MacLeod
Dennis Booth	Ernest Mallett MBE
Harry Boparai	Michaela Martin
Liz Bowes	Jan Mason
Natalie Bramhall	Steven McCormick
Helyn Clack	Cameron McIntosh
Stephen Cooksey	* Julia McShane
Clare Curran	Sinead Mooney
Nick Darby	* Carla Morson
Fiona Davidson	Bernie Muir
Paul Deach	Mark Nuti
Kevin Deanus	John O'Reilly
Jonathan Essex	Tim Oliver OBE
Robert Evans OBE	* Rebecca Paul
r Chris Farr	George Potter
Paul Follows	Catherine Powell
* Will Forster	Penny Rivers
John Furey	John Robini
Matt Furniss	Becky Rush
Angela Goodwin	Joanne Sexton
Jeffrey Gray	Lance Spencer
David Harmer	Lesley Steeds
Nick Harrison	r Mark Sugden
Edward Hawkins	Richard Tear
Marisa Heath	r Ashley Tilling
r Trefor Hogg	Chris Townsend
Robert Hughes	Liz Townsend
Jonathan Hulley	Denise Turner-Stewart
Rebecca Jennings-Evans	Hazel Watson
Frank Kelly	Jeremy Webster
Riasat Khan	Buddhi Weerasinghe
Robert King	Fiona White
	Keith Witham

*absent

r = Remote Attendance

78/24 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE [Item 1]

Apologies for absence were received from Amanda Boote, Chris Farr (remote), Will Forster, Trefor Hogg (remote), David Lewis (Camberley West), Julia McShane, Carla Morson, Rebecca Paul, Mark Sugden (remote), Ashley Tilling (remote).

79/24 MINUTES [Item 2]

The minutes of the meeting of the County Council held on 8 October 2024 were submitted, confirmed and signed.

80/24 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST [Item 3]

There were none.

81/24 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS [Item 4]

The Chair:

- Noted that prior to the meeting the Council witnessed the re-signing of the Armed Forces Covenant.
- Noted that his full announcements could be found in the agenda.

Bernie Muir and Harry Boparai arrived at 10.04 am.

82/24 LEADER'S STATEMENT [Item 5]

The Leader of the Council made a detailed statement. A copy of the statement is attached as Appendix A.

Members raised the following topics:

- Wished all a Happy Christmas and all the best for 2025.
- Asked what change Surrey would face regarding local government reorganisation, whether he had met with the Deputy Prime Minister and Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government.
- Asked whether the Leader could confirm that the Surrey local elections would proceed in May 2025 as planned.
- Noted that the draft budget highlights that vulnerable groups in Surrey would be most affected, the Council continued to leave them behind.
- Stressed that the Council must work efficiently and effectively with partners, funding the necessities, supporting early intervention and prevention to prevent further escalation of demand on statutory services.
- Noted that despite facing similar challenges, the narrative by officers at the Adults and Health Select Committee was on working in partnership, embracing technology, enabling and empowering people to live their best lives; whilst the narrative at the Children, Families, Lifelong Learning and Culture Select Committee was on Surrey's statutory responsibilities.
- Noted that having met a group of local secondary school pupils and parents suffering from anxiety, parents struggled to keep their children alive; was working on practical local support ideas.
- Welcomed the increased focus on early intervention and prevention, however much of that was signposting, no additional funding was going to charities or voluntary sector organisations.

Ayesha Azad arrived at 10.21 am.

- Noted that reception teachers faced difficulties around Covid-19 babies and developmental delays and behavioural challenges.
- Noted that service users valued the Digital Demand Responsive Transport (DDRT) service; questioned the financial sustainability of its expansion and if it should be a priority when the Council removed some non-statutory transport.
- Noted that the removal of the Local Committees was a mistake, services with the districts and boroughs needed to be properly integrated.
- Noted the need to move to a mindset of continuous improvement, not transformation, errors must be reviewed and changes made quickly.

Maureen Attewell and Sinead Mooney arrived at 10.23 am.

- Called for the Council to reset how it works with the voluntary, community and faith sector, they needed buildings and control over those.
- Noted that some services would be lost through the Council's strategy of taking control of Surrey-owned buildings being used successfully for Youth Services.
- Commended the projects funded through Your Fund Surrey, however in the financially challenging times, capital spend must focus on the necessities.
- Welcomed the re-signing of the Armed Forces Covenant, had seen first-hand the need to support serving armed forces personnel, veterans and their family.
- Had taken part in a recent select committee call-in process, which voted to refer the decision and the questions regarding the lack of evidence in decision-making back to the Cabinet, where it was only considered briefly.
- Noted that good decision-making must be evidence-based and original motions should be debated by all Members at Council meetings.
- Noted that the leaders of Surrey's councils had met and discussed the Council's lack of consultation on the cuts to the Family Support Programme.
- Noted that the worst outcome for Surrey from local government reorganisation would be to have a single unitary authority, collaborative working was needed to review the options, resisting further powers without financial support to deliver those and any changes must be alongside local government's finance reform.
- Welcomed that the new Government was taking the matter seriously, however it did not appear that it grasped the issue of local government funding, urged the Leader to continue to work with the borough and district councils on the matter.
- Noted that 'no one left behind' was not the current reality, those vulnerable people required support more than ever.
- Noted the increase from the Chancellor of the Exchequer in the budget of an extra £1.3 billion for local government, asked how much Surrey would receive.
- Noted that the Government sought to fix the basics so that local government could focus on its priorities, deliver for its residents and provide high-quality and vital frontline services.
- Noted that having the eleven borough and district councils, and the Council, and over 1,000 councillors including the town and parish councils was not necessarily the best way to deliver services; welcomed a review.
- Asked whether there had been discussions regarding an elected mayor, would they cover just Surrey or neighbouring authorities; asked whether the Leader was in favour of having a single unitary authority or multiple.
- Commended the Stars in Surrey Awards, which paid tribute to the hard work of those who deliver services in the county.
- Welcomed the Leader's desire for greater devolution and democratic accountability in health.

- Noted that the English Devolution Bill was rumoured to impose mayoral authorities on large local council areas, devolution would weaken councils' planning powers, blaming them for being blockers despite the lack of funding from the previous government holding back social housing development.
- Asked the Leader to confirm his support with the borough and district councils to keep democracy as local as possible; if unitaries are imposed queried what would the maximum size be for Surrey that the administration would support.
- Asked for new bus routes, noting the extra money in the draft budget.
- Asked how the new Family Support Programme compared in size to the former programme in terms of the number of families supported.
- Understood that funding regarding climate change was planned to be reduced, asked whether the Council could instead continue to lead the way and direct those resources into other areas of carbon reduction.
- Praised the team for undertaking the Redhill Library repair work and asked whether there had been any discussions with Reigate and Banstead Borough Council to collaborate on the matter.
- Noted that the draft budget yet again notes that last year's efficiencies had not been achieved in-year so larger savings were needed.
- Noted that despite being determined to improve services, parents of young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) were not adequately being supported and those young people were being failed, there were high successful appeal rates against the Council's decisions.

83/24 APPROVAL OF COUNTY COUNCILLOR ABSENCE [Item 6]

The Chair introduced the report.

RESOLVED:

That Councillor Mark Sugden continues to be absent from meetings until March 2025 by reason of ill health. The Council looks forward to welcoming him back in due course.

84/24 SURREY COUNTY COUNCIL - ELECTORAL REVIEW: FINAL REPORT [Item 7]

The Chair introduced the report.

RESOLVED:

1. Noted the final recommendations of the electoral review process.
2. Recognised the efforts of the cross-party task group in shaping SCC's response.
3. Noted that the new county division boundaries will come into effect in May 2025.

85/24 APPOINTMENT OF INDEPENDENT PERSONS [Item 8]

The Chair introduced the report.

RESOLVED:

1. Formally noted its thanks to the two retiring Independent Persons following the end of their term of office.
2. Appointed Belinda Knight and Dean Spears as Independent Members for a four-year term.

86/24 MEMBERS' QUESTION TIME [Item 9]

Questions:

Notice of twenty-six questions had been received. The questions and replies were published in the second supplementary agenda (items 9 and 11) on 9 December 2024.

A number of supplementary questions were asked and a summary of the main points is set out below:

(Q1) Mark Sugden asked the Cabinet Member whether funds were being set aside in the draft budget to enable a second weed spray should it be necessary.

The Cabinet Member for Highways, Transport and Economic Growth confirmed that there was sufficient budget available for a second weed spray if required.

(Q2) Tim Hall thanked the Cabinet Member, and various transport teams for their help regarding matters in his division. He asked how Members could engage with the future bus delivery grant and other money available.

The Cabinet Member for Highways, Transport and Economic Growth noted that the Council was lucky to receive the amount of money allocated by the Government for bus improvement, he requested that Members let himself or the team know about any improvements they would like to see. He noted that the Council was launching its next generation of electric vehicle (EV) buses with Falcon Buses, the Government supported the acceleration of further EV and hydrogen buses and the Council sought to increase funding. Regarding the £50 million funded by the Council, the Government was looking to provide funding and recognised that the Council was leading on decarbonising its bus network. It was disappointing that the bus cap would rise to £3 from £2, that would add around £500 or more to a regular commuter's journey annually. Over 75% of bus trips in Surrey were made with the bus cap.

(Q3) Robert Evans OBE asked whether the Cabinet Member could review the form's wording as it was insensitive to people with disabilities and have a bay outside their home. More appropriate wording would be whether there was any change in their circumstances.

The Cabinet Member for Highways, Transport and Economic Growth confirmed that the wording would be reviewed.

(Q4) Catherine Powell noted that if the Multi-Disciplinary Team Panel database was operated by the Council but did not record panel attendees or the information shared at the panel, she asked whether that information was stored elsewhere. Queried that to be transparent and ensure high-quality decision-making, the experts involved and what information they used to make their decisions should be known.

The Cabinet Member for Children, Families and Lifelong Learning noted that she did not have the details of the operational arrangements regarding the panels but would liaise with officers and would provide a written response.

(Q5) Hazel Watson asked the Cabinet Member how long individual properties had been held vacant for.

Jonathan Essex asked whether the revenue costs included the business rates incurred on the empty property and to confirm how much that was.

George Potter asked what the total book value of the sixty sites planned for disposal was.

The Cabinet Member for Property, Waste and Infrastructure confirmed that she would provide the list of those vacant properties, that the revenue costs included business rates, and noted that the total Red Book valuation was different from what the Council could achieve on the open market and she would arrange for that confidential information to be provided.

(Q6) Lance Spencer noted that the Care Quality Commission found that families felt stressed and angry due to inconsistent support and noted the system was difficult to navigate. Considering the budget reductions in the area, he asked whether the Cabinet Member could provide hope to families of a better future.

The Cabinet Member for Children, Families and Lifelong Learning welcomed the Government Minister's announcement that there would be more money for schools and councils and for the SEND system; however the implications were unknown. She noted that the SEND Transformation Programme aimed to deliver better services for families and children with Additional Needs and Disabilities. She noted the systemic challenge of parents finding it difficult to navigate the system, the Council was committed to providing better communications with families, ensuring that they are clearer about the process and are engaged throughout their child's journey.

(Q7) Stephen Cooksey asked the Cabinet Member to explain why the project's development costs were not estimated more accurately before the scheme was agreed and planning permission sought, and what costs had been accrued in developing the now abandoned scheme. He asked why local Members were not notified of such major changes or why those decisions were not discussed with them.

Hazel Watson noted that in line with the Council's new responsibility for Adult Education, she asked whether the Council would consider reopening the former Adult Education Centre to meet the lack of provision in Dorking.

The Cabinet Member for Property, Waste and Infrastructure explained that Land and Property operated on behalf of the services, concerns regarding service provision would be better directed to the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care.

(Q8) Liz Townsend noted that the building in Cranleigh had been empty for nearly ten years, for the past four years she had asked about its future and was told that the plans were confidential. She asked the Cabinet Member to confirm why residents could not now be told what the Council was proposing on the site.

Edward Hawkins asked whether demolition should be considered pending further investigations and approval on the site.

The Cabinet Member for Property, Waste and Infrastructure requested that Liz Townsend address her question directly to the service. She noted that she would liaise with the relevant Executive Director to consider the demolition suggestion.

(Q9) Steven McCormick noted that he had tabled a similar motion to the Council meeting at Epsom and Ewell Borough Council, and had made good progress locally engaging with the Epsom Business Improvement District. He asked the Cabinet Member

whether meetings could be set up in the new year to review progress and produce actions on the motion agreed at October's Council meeting.

The Cabinet Member for Highways, Transport and Economic Growth explained that further details would be provided in the new year, he would ensure that a meeting would be set up in January.

(Q10) Catherine Baart asked the Cabinet Member why those six pilot zones were selected and what basis those were selected, what questions were hoped to be answered through those pilots and what the timescale was.

Tim Hall lobbied the Cabinet Member for Fetcham to Leatherhead to be added, it had been around eighteen months since his site visit.

The Cabinet Member for Highways, Transport and Economic Growth noted that he was happy to consider additional areas. He noted that funding was from the Government's Active Travel department or the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL), it would be good if Mole Valley District Council could release some CIL funding. He explained that the six zones had local political support, and there were plans in place to implement those. The pilots sought to demonstrate that the concept works and for the teams to learn about how to implement the schemes, and to see what works and what does not. He was happy to arrange a meeting with the team if Catherine Baart sought further analysis and lessons learned.

(Q11) Jonathan Essex thanked the Cabinet Member for recognising the need for capacity improvements to Redhill Bus Station. Asked whether he would agree to meet with him, Network Rail and Reigate and Banstead Borough Council to see what could be done.

The Cabinet Member for Highways, Transport and Economic Growth responded yes.

(Q12) Robert Evans OBE referred to the 27,000 young people between 16 and 18 years old in Surrey for which their activity was not known, noting that if the age range was increased to 21 or 25 years it could be more. He asked what the Cabinet Member would do to address the situation and improve young people's life chances.

The Cabinet Member for Children, Families and Lifelong Learning noted that she had been in contact with the service about the relatively high numbers of those young people, after Christmas that number would decrease. Figures had been provided for young people aged 16 and 17 as they were classed as children. However, regarding Looked After Children and children with EHCPs, their destinations were monitored through the Virtual School or via the pathway into adulthood. She noted that the Council had a duty to prevent young people becoming Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET). There was a Year 11 transition service which provides targeted support for those at risk of becoming NEET. Post-16 years, support was offered to Care Experienced young people. She noted the Government Minister's announcement of a new National Youth Strategy which includes additional money for additional youth facilities and buildings, and the creation of a Youth Guarantee. She noted the Council's Skills Strategy and Lifetime of Learning Strategy.

(Q13) Catherine Powell asked the Cabinet Member to advise when the review would be completed next year and whether there had been an allowance in the budget to address the requirements to change services and facilities to adapt for climate change, and whether it would need to be taken out of contingency or reserves.

The Cabinet Member for Environment noted the work underway looking at the risk the Council faces from climate adaptation, that included reviewing the anticipated financial impact and prioritising it - flooding was a priority. Regarding trees, she noted that the Council has a legal duty to keep people safe and asked the Member to inform her of danger areas; addressing Ash dieback had been resource intensive. She acknowledged that wetter weather would cause trees to be more unstable and that needed to be a focus. The approach would be outlined in April or May 2025.

(Q15) Lance Spencer asked whether the Cabinet Member was disappointed by the decision to reduce the resources and whether she would agree that would threaten the delivery of net zero by 2050.

The Cabinet Member for Environment noted that she did not want budget cuts but that was the reality. She acknowledged that reaching net zero would be difficult for the Council, and the district and borough councils; there were large challenges ahead and she committed to undertake a piece of work to address those. The biggest challenge was government funding and she welcomed future funding.

(Q17) Liz Townsend welcomed the approach taken regarding small cell networks using public assets and hoped that the Council would provide support for the pilot in Godalming and Cranleigh. She noted that the response overlooked the fact that digital connectivity included wider mobile phone coverage, there was a lack of understanding of the issues experienced in rural areas and the infrastructure required. She asked whether the response implied that residents in her division were facing a future of no or very limited coverage; and why the £4.5 million in Local Enterprise Partnership funding had not been used to improve the necessary service.

The Cabinet Member for Highways, Transport and Economic Growth noted that Rt Hon Jeremy Hunt MP was undertaking work in the division regarding mobile phone signal coverage, he suggested that the Member liaise with the MP.

(Q18) Steven McCormick had no supplementary question.

John O'Reilly asked whether the Cabinet Member and Leader would lobby the Government to take action to allow councils to enforce against vehicles blocking and obstructing pavements.

The Cabinet Member for Highways, Transport and Economic Growth noted that he would re-circulate the letter he wrote to the Government following the October Council meeting. He explained that the Government was still considering the matter. He noted that the Council would continue to press them for those enforcement powers.

(Q21) Catherine Powell welcomed that the gap in data was being collected and mapped on Surrey's Geographic Information System (GIS) system. She asked the Cabinet Member whether the Council could request data on sustainable drainage systems (SuDS) associated with new developments in a GIS compatible format. She asked whether officers could capture culverts and soakaways that were not currently mapped on the Surrey GIS system. She asked whether a dedicated email could be set up for local Members to provide information on lost infrastructure.

The Cabinet Member for Environment would ask the team to pick up on reporting the wet spots regarding the SuDS, she would liaise with the team regarding local Member information and check whether they could do that.

(Q22) Steven McCormick referred to those impacted teaching assistants and residents, and sought assurance from the Cabinet Member that no one would be out of pocket from the global system update implemented by Unit4, which caused the system-wide outage in November.

The Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources noted that the problems experienced due to November's upgrade were regrettable, the team had thoroughly tested the changes in advance, the issues were down to Unit4. He noted that there was some disruption at the start of the week after the upgrade, work was underway to stabilise the system. He was not aware that residents would be out of pocket as a result, there were robust processes in place and compensation available.

(Q23) Catherine Baart asked the Cabinet Member why there were two systems for measuring distance to schools, as the Stage Two Home to School Transport Panels received cases from parents who thought their child was going to the nearest school but could not have transport because it was not their nearest school under the Council's policy. She asked the Cabinet Member to review the information on the website to make sure it was clear to help such parents.

The Cabinet Member for Children, Families and Lifelong Learning explained that there were two systems because school admissions was governed by the School Admissions Code, and Home to School Transport eligibility was set out in home to school transport legislation. She noted that the Council tried to make the explanation as clear as possible on its website. She reminded Members that they agreed that Stage Two appeals panels would always have Member representation on them. She noted that there were not enough available Members to ensure those take place within the statutory timescales, she encouraged Members to be available to attend.

(Q25) Catherine Baart asked the Cabinet Member whether more detailed guidance was provided to the Council's contractors taking into consideration Natural England's guidance on hedges.

The Cabinet Member for Highways, Transport and Economic Growth noted that he would provide a written response.

Cabinet Member and Deputy Cabinet Member Briefings:

These were also published in the second supplementary agenda on 9 December 2024.

Members made the following comments:

Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Customer and Communities: on the transformation of the Council's libraries, **John O'Reilly** asked whether she would agree that had been exceptional and he welcomed the upgrade of Hersham Library.

The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Customer and Communities acknowledged the positive feedback on the library service, a briefing had been circulated to highlight the work to Members of the exceptional work underway in transforming the fifty-two libraries. She noted that the Council had previously considered rationalising its libraries and had fiercely defended those, the Council was now creating central hubs in every borough and district, investing across localities. She commended Land and Property and the Cabinet Member for Property, Waste and Infrastructure for their work.

The **Chair** highlighted the success of the libraries' extended opening hours and other offerings, there had been a good uptake on using library spaces.

Edward Hawkins on Your Fund Surrey, he asked the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member whether she was aware of how pleased residents in his division were regarding those contributions to help create a safe environment for school children and the works on the community centre. He thanked the officers for their work.

The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member thanked the Member for his determination in recognising a local situation that affected many children and families and using that funding and working closely with the officers to find a solution. She noted the importance of creating that additional funding to ensure that each division benefits from the opportunity to work with the communities and to address their needs.

Chris Townsend thanked the senior manager in libraries for her work.

Deputy Cabinet Member for Children, Families and Lifelong Learning: on youth centres, **Chris Townsend** asked when the meeting would take place with youth centres to understand those that were working well and those that were not.

The Deputy Cabinet Member for Children, Families and Lifelong Learning noted that the Director - Family Resilience and Safeguarding was planning to meet all the providers of the youth centres and she would follow that up and look for a date.

Cabinet Member for Highways, Transport and Economic Growth: on the implementation of the School Street on Bullers Road, **Catherine Powell** asked him to confirm whether the planned in person meeting and briefing with residents to show them the software at least a month before it is implemented, would take place.

The Cabinet Member noted that he would talk to the team and set a date.

Catherine Baart on Local Transport Plan (LTP4) and Vision Zero, she asked whether an update could be provided in his next Cabinet Member Briefing.

The Cabinet Member noted that he was happy to provide that update. He noted that Vision Zero was launched last week as a partnership with Surrey Highways, Surrey Police, Surrey Fire and Rescue Service, and National Highways; Surrey Police was supportive and demonstrated the new equipment they would use including the average speed camera.

Fiona Davidson on the Guildford E-Bike Share Scheme, she noted that the Council had invested over £1 million in the scheme and asked the Cabinet Member to explain why the Council allowed a new E-Bike model which the supplier acknowledged was less secure than the older model. She asked who was holding the supplier to account for the inadequate security of the new model, the issue was down to vandalism.

The Cabinet Member noted that the issue was being addressed with the contractor, it was unfortunate that the model had a flaw. He noted that the bikes were being upgraded at no cost to the Council, the Council provided capital to fund it through the winter, it was not paying revenue contribution. One journey per bike was expected, currently there were three or four journeys a day per bike which was a success.

Cabinet Member for Property, Waste and Infrastructure: the progress made on SEND provision was welcomed, **Edward Hawkins** on acquisitions and disposals and the targeting of £26 million of capital receipts, asked whether the Council was on track with those by 31 March 2025. He asked to be kept informed of the transfer of land

concerning Lakeside Frimley.

The Cabinet Member would ask the Cabinet Member for Children, Families and Lifelong Learning to provide the Member with a written update on Lakeside Frimley. She noted that regarding disposals, the Council was on track and had £150 million of capital receipts, recent decisions had been taken on £9.1 million of capital receipts.

Deputy Cabinet Member for Highways: he thanked Ringway for its hard work over the weekend as there was exceptional weather and it had dealt with numerous emergencies, 230 fallen trees were cleared and 37 jobs were outstanding.

Deputy Cabinet Member for Strategic Highways: on signs, **Robert Evans OBE** asked whether that included road signs cleaning, there were many signs across Surrey which were dirty and were affected by overgrown vegetation.

The Deputy Cabinet Member confirmed that was included in his portfolio, he outlined the work underway in implementing the Task and Finish recommendations. In 2023/24 the Council provided £3.5 million in revenue, that included removing signs and cleaning those. In 2024/25 the Council provided £5.5 million in revenue to do that work plus refreshing the road lines and to implement FixMyStreet.

87/24 STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS [Item 10]

George Potter noted that in November, the Cabinet decided not to proceed with the proposed London Road walking and cycling scheme in Guildford. He commented on the governance around how the decision was made and noted the very brief consideration by the Cabinet of the referral from the Communities, Environment and Highways Select Committee.

Jonathan Hulley noted Your Fund Surrey's four-year anniversary and highlighted two recipients of the Small Community Projects Fund. Firstly, Lyne community near Chertsey had benefited from a new community pavilion on the village green. Secondly, White Lodge Centre near Saint Peter's Hospital delivered services and support to children and adults for a range of disabilities, funding helped deliver improvements to their pathways. He thanked the Council's Community Investment team for its work in allocating the funding.

Trefor Hogg stressed that vacant and abandoned retail properties damaged communities and local economies, there were many small businesses or community organisations that would want to rent such properties if the rent was affordable. He welcomed the Rental Auctions Regulations which came into law on 2 December 2024.

Buddhi Weerasinghe highlighted Spelthorne Litter Pickers, a group of over 1,000 residents who work to keep the community green and clean; they received The King's Award for Voluntary Service for 2024. He urged Members to honour their contributions and encourage others to join them in building a lasting, cleaner and greener earth for all.

Joanne Sexton noted that residents in 2021 raised concerns about the safety of Feltham Road. She had arranged a meeting with residents, officers and Surrey Police where the road's history of collision and serious injuries were acknowledged, it was agreed that action needed to be taken to protect residents. She commended the officers for their work in developing a scheme which would improve safety and the quality of the life of residents.

Catherine Powell read out a statement on behalf of a head teacher at a local school, whereby since Unit4/MySurrey's introduction Surrey schools faced issues and changes created additional work for them. She highlighted the slow or non-existent response from Surrey payroll when issues surfaced. Schools were forced to sign up to the system without consultation, she had requested compensation or removal of the Service Level agreement Charge until the system runs properly.

The Leader asked the Monitoring Officer to review Standing Order 9.1 of the Constitution regarding Member statements being put without the right of reply which was unfair when there are allegations or comments about Members. The Monitoring Officer urged Members to be mindful of their comments made about others, to abide by the Code of Conduct and Nolan Principles; Members could raise Points of Order.

A Member raised a Point of Order under Standing Order 9.1 noting that it clearly stated that Member statements must be on a matter that the Council has powers, the statements made by Members above were in line with that. The Member also noted that a review of the Standing Orders was needed around the Chair's ability to control the meeting.

88/24 ORIGINAL MOTIONS [Item 11]

The Chair noted that under Standing Order 11.5, in consultation with Group Leaders he would reorder the motions and take the motion standing in the name of Jonathan Essex (11ii) last.

Item 11 (i)

Under Standing Order 12.3 the Council agreed to debate this motion.

Under Standing Order 20.3 (a) Catherine Baart (Earlswood and Reigate South) moved a proposed alteration to the original motion standing in her own name, which had been published in the second supplementary agenda on 9 December 2024.

The updated proposed alteration to the motion was as follows (with additional words in bold/underlined and deletions crossed through):

This Council recognises that:

- The UK is committed to reduce its carbon emissions to net zero by 2050, and by 68% from 1990 levels by 2030. The government's Committee on Climate Change is due to report on the UK's Carbon Budget on 26 February 2025.
- The Climate Change Committee has estimated that Local Authorities have powers or influence over roughly a third of emissions in their local areas.
- The Local Government Association have estimated that climate action can be three times more cost effective if led by local rather than national government.
- Surrey County Council has a target of achieving net zero across the county of Surrey by 2050, in line with the climate science as set out in the Surrey Climate Change Strategy.
- Significant additional financial resources are required to achieve these targets, in collaboration with local public, private and third sector partners.
- The Leader confirmed at the last full Council meeting that Surrey County Council has now formed strategic relationships with the University of Surrey, Royal Holloway and University of the Creative Arts.

This Council resolves to:

- I. ~~Commission~~ **Deliver** a report for the council's Cabinet that identifies the additional finance, powers and partnership arrangements needed to deliver our county-wide 2050 climate target; and
- II. Use this report to support a request to the Secretary of State that Surrey County Council and all local authorities are given statutory duties, powers and funding to enable them to achieve net zero in line with the UK's legal commitment on carbon emissions.

Under Standing Order 20.3, the proposed alteration to the original motion was put to the vote and Council agreed to the proposed alteration and it was therefore open for debate.

Catherine Baart made the following points:

- Noted that the Council's confidence in being able to meet its net zero targets was faltering, climate change threatened the Council's ambitions to shape places, keep people safe, and create conditions for wellbeing and prosperity.
- Noted that the Council was just on target for its 2030 and 2050 net zero goals thanks to officers' and Members' hard work.
- Noted that the Council had achieved simple tasks such as putting LEDs in streetlights, yet its solar energy plans faced connectivity and financial problems, and meaningful reductions in transport emissions had not been made.
- Highlighted the studies by the Local Government Association that councils have a direct impact on more than one third of its area's carbon emissions and an indirect impact on 80% of its area's carbon emissions.
- Noted that councils are conveners and enablers, independent experts are calling on the Government to empower councils to act on climate change.
- Referred to a government report that councils could deliver net zero at half the cost of a national approach and deliver three times the benefits of tackling climate change regarding growth, jobs, skills and health.
- Noted that councils received no core funding for their climate work, so the Council had to compete with other councils for small, siloed pots of money.
- Called on the Government to support the Council's climate work with resources and powers, and access to technical support and data.
- Noted that global average temperatures in 2024 would likely reach 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels, the Council must maintain its efforts and continue to lead locally.
- Suggested that the Council redeploys resources to tackle fuel poverty and transport, and to lobby the Government for support around solar energy.

The motion was formally seconded by Lance Spencer, who made the following comments:

- Noted his speech to Council in 2021 on the same subject, where the former Prime Minister at the UN Climate Change Conference in Glasgow (COP26) identified local government's crucial role in delivering net zero emissions.
- Noted that in 2021 it was calculated that there was a less than 5% chance of holding the global temperature below 2 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels and less than 1% chance of keeping below the 1.5 degrees Celsius agreed in the Paris Agreement.
- Noted that 2023 was the hottest year on record, and 2024 was on track to surpass it, November 2024 was the second hottest November on record.

- Highlighted the work by the Greener Futures team which helped keep Surrey on target.
- Noted that since 2019 the Council's carbon emissions had reduced by 38%, equivalent to 6,700 tonnes; saving the Council £4 million a year. Yet, that reduction was only 0.1% of Surrey's total carbon emissions.
- Noted that without Government support and the devolution of statutory powers, the Council would start slipping behind its net zero targets.
- Noted that at the UN Climate Change Conference in Baku (COP29), the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change highlighted the importance of councils in delivering the net zero targets.
- Wanted to be able to tell his grandson in the future that the Council did act decisively to reduce Surrey's carbon emissions.

One Member made the following comments:

- Supported the motion and noted that the Council had decided to bring forward the plan originally scheduled for 2026 to review the net zero targets; to consider the areas of risk, a report had already been commissioned.
- Regarding the Skidmore Review, noted that the Council continued to lobby for those statutory powers.
- Noted frustration in the small, siloed pots of money with short bid times, officers worked tirelessly and were successful in winning those.
- Endorsed the support noted for the Greener Futures team.
- Called for long-term planning and a step-change by the Government, with adequate funding.

The Chair asked Catherine Baart, as proposer of the motion to conclude the debate, she made the following comments:

- Thanked her seconder and welcomed the Cabinet Member for Environment's support.

The motion was put to the vote and was carried, with 69 Members voting For, 0 voting Against and 2 Abstentions.

Therefore, it was **RESOLVED** that:

This Council recognises that:

- The UK is committed to reduce its carbon emissions to net zero by 2050, and by 68% from 1990 levels by 2030. The government's Committee on Climate Change is due to report on the UK's Carbon Budget on 26 February 2025.
- The Climate Change Committee has estimated that Local Authorities have powers or influence over roughly a third of emissions in their local areas.
- The Local Government Association have estimated that climate action can be three times more cost effective if led by local rather than national government.
- Surrey County Council has a target of achieving net zero across the county of Surrey by 2050, in line with the climate science as set out in the Surrey Climate Change Strategy.
- Significant additional financial resources are required to achieve these targets, in collaboration with local public, private and third sector partners.
- The Leader confirmed at the last full Council meeting that Surrey County Council has now formed strategic relationships with the University of Surrey, Royal Holloway and University of the Creative Arts.

This Council resolves to:

- I. Deliver a report for the council's Cabinet that identifies the additional finance, powers and partnership arrangements needed to deliver our county-wide 2050 climate target; and
- II. Use this report to support a request to the Secretary of State that Surrey County Council and all local authorities are given statutory duties, powers and funding to enable them to achieve net zero in line with the UK's legal commitment on carbon emissions.

Item 11 (iii)

Under Standing Order 12.3 the Cabinet Member for Children, Families and Lifelong Learning, Clare Curran, moved a proposal.

The proposal was as follows:

That the motion below by Liz Townsend be referred to the Cabinet for the purpose of consideration.

This Council recognises that:

Children and young people have a legal right to special educational provision and support that meets their needs. However, currently too many children and young people are not getting the education and support they need, with long-term consequences for their educational outcomes and overall wellbeing, together with that of their families.

Many parents and carers of children and young people with additional needs often find the system to access education an arduous and expensive battle that brings families to breaking point.

Part of the process that they report causes much distress is the panel decision making process. This is the point when decisions are made about their child behind closed doors often by unknown professionals, and to which the individual case officer, who is involved with the families on a day-to-day basis, is not automatically invited.

This Council acknowledges that:

Many parents do not currently feel that the panel process is transparent or consistent. These panels are making significant decisions about the future of children and young people with additional needs, and it is important parents are part of the process.

Due to its closed nature, many parents and carers often feel that vital information is not adequately covered and, in some cases, omitted. Once a decision is made, the rationale provided to parents and carers for this is often reported as inadequate and this compounds a feeling of exclusion and mistrust.

This Council notes:

This process is not a statutory requirement and could be changed in line with The SEND code of Practice [SEND Code of Practice January 2015.pdf](#) (publishing.service.gov.uk) that sets out the requirements to involve families and young people in decision making.

This Council resolves to call on the Cabinet Member for Children, Families and Lifelong Learning to commit to:

- I. Provide the opportunity for parent/carers of children with additional needs to be involved in the panel decision process with a clearly defined role.
- II. Provide the opportunity for the child or young person with additional needs to be involved in the panel decision process with a clearly defined role.
- III. Ensure the relevant case officer is automatically invited to attend panel decision meetings.

Liz Townsend made the following points:

- Felt as though the debate was being stifled by the same culture that was failing Surrey's families.
- Noted that Members continued to receive harrowing accounts of parents' experiences of children with additional needs trying to access their legal right to education.
- Noted that she proposed one change to make a fairer system, putting the child and their families at the heart of decision-making.
- Queried why the Council chose not to include parents and families as attendees to the panel meetings compared to other councils - parents were their child's best advocates - and why families' case workers were not automatically invited.
- Noted that the SEND Code of Practice legally requires local authorities to involve families in decision-making processes, children's opinions matter as they know what makes them feel safe, supported and understood.
- Noted that the current system creates barriers and mistrust, the proposed change would empower families and children, and build a more respectful and supportive relationship with the Council, leading to better outcomes.

In speaking to her proposal, the Cabinet Member for Children, Families and Lifelong Learning:

- Recognised the concerns of the motion's proposer and others about the structure and the operation of the panels.
- Reiterated the ambition that sound, impartial and objective decisions were made for children and young people, based on the statutory criteria and on evidence and prioritising children's needs.
- Noted that the Council's role was to consider issues of policy and strategy, not to focus on a specialist area of the operational activity of one directorate.
- Recognised that the scope of the changes proposed was in line with the End-to-End Review and the work of the SEND Transformation Programme, however, the SEND services and operational arrangements must be conducted in accordance with the regulatory requirements.
- Noted that the Children and Families Act and the SEND Code of Practice, were prescriptive and specialist, and therefore advice was sought from qualified professionals.
- Noted that potential changes to operational arrangements should be discussed with stakeholders as the Council was committed to co-production.

Liz Townsend confirmed that she was against the referral of the motion to the Cabinet.

Jeffrey Gray left the meeting at 12.24 pm.

Under Standing Order 28.1, ten Members demanded a recorded vote, the proposal to refer the motion was put to the vote with 42 Members voting For, 28 voting Against and 0 Abstentions.

The following Members voted For it:

Maureen Attewell, Ayesha Azad, Steve Bax, Jordan Beech, Luke Bennett, Liz Bowes, Natalie Bramhall, Helyn Clack, Clare Curran, Paul Deach, Kevin Deanus, John Furey, Matt Furniss, Tim Hall, David Harmer, Edward Hawkins, Marisa Heath, Robert Hughes, Jonathan Hulley, Saj Hussain, Rebecca Jennings-Evans, Frank Kelly, Riasat Khan, Rachael Lake BEM, Victor Lewanski, David Lewis (Cobham), Scott Lewis, Andy Lynch, Ernest Mallett MBE, Cameron McIntosh, Sinead Mooney, Bernie Muir, Mark Nuti, John O'Reilly, Tim Oliver OBE, Becky Rush, Lesley Steeds, Richard Tear, Denise Turner-Stewart, Jeremy Webster, Buddhi Weerasinghe, Keith Witham.

The following Members voted Against it:

Catherine Baart, John Beckett, Dennis Booth, Harry Boparai, Stephen Cooksey, Nick Darby, Fiona Davidson, Jonathan Essex, Robert Evans OBE, Paul Follows, Angela Goodwin, Nick Harrison, Robert King, Eber Kington, Andy MacLeod, Michaela Martin, Jan Mason, Steven McCormick, George Potter, Catherine Powell, Penny Rivers, John Robini, Joanne Sexton, Lance Spencer, Chris Townsend, Liz Townsend, Hazel Watson, Fiona White.

There were no Abstentions.

Therefore, it was **RESOLVED** that:

The motion be referred to the Cabinet for the purpose of consideration.

Item 11 (iv)

Under Standing Order 12.3 the Council agreed to debate this motion.

Under Standing Order 12.1 Marisa Heath moved:

This Council notes that:

- Having felt the impact of COVID and the conflict in Ukraine leading to rising costs in energy prices and food, our local economy, particularly our small and rural businesses need support and the ability to focus on growth, not additional tax burdens and complexity.
- The recent budget has had an immediate impact on farmers and rural businesses at a time when stability is important and as we seek to provide more healthy, sustainable and, where possible, local, food and look after our environment.
- The NFU has evidenced that around 75% of commercial family farms will be affected by the new IHT policy which was announced in the budget rather than the government's initial claim that it would only be 27% of farms. This means many Surrey farms will be impacted.
- Several farms will not yet fully understand the implications of the changes as they will not have had their farms formally valued since the 1992 changes. Many feel that the current change are a tax on rural areas.

- Many farms do not earn enough money to pay the potential Inheritance Tax Bill without selling off some of their land or business, which in turn makes the farm business unviable and threatens the future of Surrey farming.
- The average farm size in 2023 was 88 hectares. This is the fourth smallest average farm size of all the English regions and the same as the English average of 88 hectares. 63% of farms were below 50 hectares. Due to relative land values, farms in the south-east could be more affected by changes to Inheritance Tax than those in other parts of the country. Based on average land-values (arable and pasture) the average 88ha south-east farm has a value of between £2.1m and £2.6m (excludes machinery/ plant equipment – for context, a combine harvester can cost as much as £0.5m).
- 31% farms are rented and the impact on farmers who do not own their farms has yet to be measured.
- Surrey County Council has been working with local farmers and sharing information and best practice as it is recognised that farmers play a crucial role in land management and nature recovery across Surrey.
- The inflationary impacts of the budget on key inputs such as labour costs will prevent farmers and rural businesses being able to add investment and drive growth. Alongside this, the Rural Prosperity Fund comes to an end in March 2025 and there is no replacement for it which restricts businesses investing in their long-term resilience, competitiveness and their environmental performance.

This Council believes that:

- Food security and sustainability is a key priority for both Surrey and the nation, and the added financial pressure of the budget does not support the prioritisation of these important objectives.
- Farmers should be supported to get through the changes of moving away from direct payments, driving forward environmental objectives and producing high quality British food and encouraged to invest long-term in their businesses.
- We should not risk losing Surrey's high quality agricultural land used for food production to other uses which do not benefit the wider community.
- The tax would undermine investment and innovation in the sector at a time when we need Surrey farmers to invest in their businesses.
- In Surrey we have several rural businesses and farmers who are looking to both national and local Government for help to navigate changes such as the reduction in direct payments and it is important we respond to that and set out ways in which we will speak up for them.

This Council resolves to:

- I. Inform the Treasury that Surrey County Council disagrees with IHT proposal and calls for the policy on IHT to be scrapped.
- II. Call on the Treasury to provide a multi-year funding to support local rural businesses crucial to economic recovery, farming and sustainability.
- III. Ensure that Surrey County Council continues, and increases, support for farmers, local food production and rural businesses enabling sharing of best practice and resource.

Marisa Heath made the following points:

- Noted that the motion focused on protecting Surrey farmers and rural businesses, the Council had committed to support its farmers through its work on net zero, nature recovery and economic prosperity.

- Had spoken Surrey farmers, they had been impacted by the announcements under the recent budget and were questioning their future, Defra's figures suggested that two thirds of farms could face higher tax bills as a result.
- Notwithstanding Brexit and Covid-19, noted that farmers had been under pressure over many years, the number of intensive farms in the UK had risen by one quarter since 2011.
- Noted that 85% of animals farmed for meat come from intensive systems, family-owned farms were being lost at a high rate, at present Surrey was fortunate that it does not have the mega farms destroying its environment.
- Noted that whilst there were not yet specific numbers on how many Surrey farms would be affected, acting now was crucial and the Council should care about farmers regionally and nation-wide as they provided food security.
- Noted the sudden increase in applications for solar power on farms, several farmers who felt unsupported by the country were considering giving up farming and small businesses who rely on local farmers were worried about their future.
- Stressed that it was difficult for farmers to make a living due to unfair supply chains, they received less than 1% of the total profits of the food they produce.
- Noted that some farmers saw low scale farming as their duty and that should be nurtured, farmers help protect green spaces and stop urbanisation.
- Noted that whilst farmers could avoid the tax by transferring property at least seven years before death, the farmer could not receive any income, and a couple for example could use household tax allowances pushing them up to £3 million tax free, but Surrey land and equipment values were expensive.
- Suggested a more progressive approach for tax relief for those who provide public goods including environmental stewardship and nutritious food.
- Had met a family running Northfield Farm Supplies near Dorking, the business had been doing well until it was hit by increasing energy costs from Ukraine and the oil spillage on the A24, such businesses must be supported as a priority.
- Highlighted that there nothing to replace the Rural Prosperity Fund, driving investment in rural areas was vital for keeping the character of Surrey intact.
- Called for new funding to cover small and rural businesses across Surrey, British farming and a rural economy were crucial to the county.

The motion was formally seconded by Matt Furniss, who reserved the right to speak.

Paul Follows moved an amendment which had been published in the second supplementary agenda on 9 December 2024, which was formally seconded by Lance Spencer.

The amendment was as follows (with additional words in bold/underlined and deletions crossed through):

This Council notes that:

- Having felt the impact of **Brexit**, COVID and the conflict in Ukraine leading to rising costs in energy prices and food, our local economy, particularly our small and rural businesses need support and the ability to focus on **sustainable** growth, not additional tax burdens and complexity.
- **The departure from the European Union (Brexit) has led to an increased complexity of import/export rules and saw British farmers leave the EU Common Agricultural Policy. Leave campaigners and the last government**

told farmers and the public at large that both factors would be negligible. This has proven to be incorrect.

- **Land acquisition and banking for the purposes of tax-avoidance is possible and that some consideration of this aspect by central government is reasonable but should be handled sensitively and not to the detriment of genuine farmers.**
- **The potential for such tax-avoidance is sustained because the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) has limited prohibition of housebuilding on some grades of agricultural land.**
- The recent budget has had an immediate impact on farmers and rural businesses at a time when stability is important and as we seek to provide more healthy, sustainable and, where possible, local, food and look after our environment.
- The NFU has evidenced that around 75% of commercial family farms will be affected by the new IHT policy which was announced in the budget rather than the government's initial claim that it would only be 27% of farms. This means many Surrey farms will be impacted.
- Several farms will not yet fully understand the implications of the changes as they will not have had their farms formally valued since the 1992 changes. Many feel that the current change are a tax on rural areas.
- Many farms do not earn enough money to pay the potential Inheritance Tax Bill without selling off some of their land or business, which in turn makes the farm business unviable and threatens the future of Surrey farming.
- The average farm size in 2023 was 88 hectares. This is the fourth smallest average farm size of all the English regions and the same as the English average of 88 hectares. 63% of farms were below 50 hectares. Due to relative land values, farms in the south-east could be more affected by changes to Inheritance Tax than those in other parts of the country. Based on average land-values (arable and pasture) the average 88ha south-east farm has a value of between £2.1m and £2.6m (excludes machinery/ plant equipment – for context, a combine harvester can cost as much as £0.5m).
- 31% farms are rented and the impact on farmers who do not own their farms has yet to be measured.
- Surrey County Council has been working with local farmers and sharing information and best practice as it is recognised that farmers play a crucial role in land management and nature recovery across Surrey.
- The inflationary impacts of the budget on key inputs such as labour costs will prevent farmers and rural businesses being able to add investment and drive growth. Alongside this, the Rural Prosperity Fund comes to an end in March 2025 and there is no replacement for it which restricts businesses investing in their long-term resilience, competitiveness and their environmental performance.

This Council believes that:

- Food security and sustainability is a key priority for both Surrey and the nation, and the added financial pressure of the budget does not support the prioritisation of these important objectives.
- Farmers should be supported to get through the changes of moving away from direct payments, driving forward environmental objectives and producing high quality British food and encouraged to invest long-term in their businesses.
- We should not risk losing Surrey's high quality agricultural land used for food production to other uses which do not benefit the wider community.
- The tax would undermine investment and innovation in the sector at a time when we need Surrey farmers to invest in their businesses.

- In Surrey we have several rural businesses and farmers who are looking to both national and local Government for help to navigate changes such as the reduction in direct payments and it is important we respond to that and set out ways in which we will speak up for them.

This Council resolves to:

- I. Inform the Treasury that Surrey County Council disagrees with IHT proposal and calls for the policy on IHT to be ~~scrapped~~ **reviewed and a greater emphasis placed upon supporting genuine farmers and addressing tax-avoidance schemes.**
- II. **Call on the Government to update the NPPF to strengthen the restrictions on development on agricultural land.**
- II.
- III. Call on the Treasury to provide a multi-year funding to support local rural businesses crucial to economic recovery, farming and sustainability.
- IV. **Call on the Government to improve its working relationship with the EU on agricultural and trade policy areas.**
- III.
- V. Ensure that Surrey County Council continues, and increases, support for farmers, local food production and rural businesses enabling sharing of best practice and resource.

Paul Follows spoke to his amendment, making the following points:

- Noted that he could not support a motion about farming that does not talk about Brexit more holistically, leaving the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and the single market had made life harder and more complex for farmers.
- Noted that the Rural Prosperity Fund was less than the previous European Union (EU) funding despite promises that it would be equal.
- Noted the addition of the word 'sustainable' before growth, the Council had declared a Climate Emergency and should not support growth at any cost.
- Noted that it was not improper for the Government to seek to deal with tax avoidance, particularly in the current financial climate; believed that the discussion should have been about the thresholds where that tax is applied.
- Noted that agricultural land could be used to land bank which has implications on house building, and to commit tax avoidance, the previous government did not make changes to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) to address that; the second resolution called for a review of that.
- Noted that the first resolution was amended to have a focus on tax avoidance and reiterate the Council's support for genuine farmers who produce food.
- Noted that the fourth resolution called on the Government to improve its working relationship with the EU on trade and the CAP was a huge issue for farmers.
- Emphasised that the amendment sought to collectively help farmers in Surrey and nationally by acknowledging the wider issues they faced which impacted their businesses and livelihoods, and to help with the wider issues of food and energy security.

The amendment was formally seconded by Lance Spencer, who made the following comments:

- Highlighted that Woking only had one farm, across Surrey there were fewer farms than most other shire counties.

- Noted his personal experience having grown up on a small family farm, the land value per acre had significantly increased over the generations; yet in a good year the profits would be less than the minimum wage and in a bad year the farm lost money.
- Noted that farming was unprofitable yet in some cases wealthy individuals purchase farms to avoid inheritance tax, that explain the high land value compared with minimal returns; genuine young farmers could not afford to purchase the land.
- Noted that the Government's proposed legislation sought to stop land banking but had not sufficiently considered genuine family farmers' situation.
- Noted that the unamended motion did not consider the need to stop the land being used primarily for inheritance tax planning purposes.
- Stressed the need to encourage farmers to hand their farms down through the generations, noting the bond between the farmers and their land, locally sourced food was beneficial to the environment and the local economy.

Marisa Heath did not accept the amendment and therefore the amendment was open for debate.

Two Members spoke on the amendment and made the following comments:

- Noted close family members that attended an agricultural university, many of their colleagues were now in the food supply chain and had worked on their family farm for no money but to keep the farm going.
- Noted that farmers work twenty-four hours a day throughout the year to look after their farm and livestock.
- Highlighted rural poverty and farmers being unable to pay their stockmen, many farms live on an overdraft and could not save to pay for the inheritance tax.
- Noted that farming is a calling, they work hard to leave that land to the next generation, they are caretakers of the land for the community.
- Hoped that the aspirations of the younger generation of farmers could be kept going so they keep on producing cheaper food than the rest of Europe.
- Noted that Brexit provided the UK with its individuality as the President of the European Commission recently signed a deal to import cheap food into the EU from South America which would not help their farmers.
- Noted that the amendment sought to distinguish between large landowners and family farms, it sought to distinguish between tax avoidance and the need to support family farmers, the average family farm was smaller than one thousand acres.
- Noted that solar farms were needed in the right place, not on Grade 1 agricultural land, that was a flaw in the NPPF to be addressed as indicated by the amendment.
- Noted the need to buy the heaviest items and those that degrade quickest close to the UK, undertook research whereby in the Brexit year (2019) 16% of fruit and 54% of vegetables consumed in the UK were grown here, that was the lowest level for over twenty years.
- Noted that the UK has the right climate to grow apples and pears but in 2019 it imported nearly 500,000 tonnes more than it exported, importing from as far afield as South Africa and New Zealand.
- Noted that Brexit and the trade rules affect climate change, agriculture must be bought as locally as possible and the UK must work within the common market.

George Potter left the meeting at 12.47 pm.

Marisa Heath noted the following comments in response to not accepting the amendment:

- Noted that she did not want the motion to be used politically to discuss the impact of leaving the EU.
- Highlighted that resolution four was not needed as the Government had committed to a common veterinary agreement with the EU, which would likely mean the adoption of equal standards and enabling ease of access.
- Noted that farming had been struggling for a long time and most of that was linked to the CAP and receiving less than what was inputted.
- Noted that the CAP was criticised for encouraging farming practices that were damaging to the environment and large landowners benefited, the protectionism damaged developing countries.
- Noted that the motion sought to protect farmers, rural businesses and food security.
- Advised the Government to think through its approach regarding tax avoidance.

The Chair asked Paul Follows, as proposer of the amendment to conclude the debate:

- Noted that the amendment sought to strengthen the motion to focus on food security and supporting genuine farmers, to review the inheritance thresholds and not allow those who deliberately abuse the land and planning policies to avoid taxation.
- Noted that the CAP has serious issues, there were many aspects of the EU that need reform; however since Brexit farmers who were operating based on having CAP money had lost out as they did not receive the promised equivalent subsidy from the government.
- Noted that the government did not provide the equivalent funding to that previously received from European rural development funding, whilst the net outflow of funding went from the UK to the EU, there was money spent in the regional and rural areas; farmers were at a deficit because of Brexit.
- Queried why the motion's proposer did not support the amendment calling for more to be done about tax avoidance and whilst mismanaged, the Government's policy was designed to raise revenue to fund public services.

The amendment was put to the vote with 17 Members voting For, 47 voting Against and 2 Abstentions.

Therefore the amendment was lost.

Returning to the debate on the substantive motion, two Members made the following comments:

- Noted that Surrey is renowned for its abundance of woodland and beautiful countryside, according to a report by the University of Surrey the farming and agricultural sector contributed over £500 million to the economy and accounted for 14% of the national farming income.
- Noted that Surrey's farms produced varied produce and livestock, 40% of Surrey Hills' land was agricultural and over 800 people were employed in land holdings.

- Stressed that Surrey's farmers were committed to safeguarding flora and fauna, and preserving traditional rural skills.
- Noted that farmers were proud of their stewardship to benefit the food chain and environment, and to pass on sustainable and viable businesses.
- Noted that many farms engage with children so they can appreciate farms and the countryside as future custodians, through local projects children were taught the vital link between farms and what they eat.
- Noted that a farming estate only needed to be valued at £1.3 million for their economic returns to be wiped out by inheritance tax under the new policy.
- Noted that farms were more exposed to the impacts of the inheritance tax measures due to Surrey's high land and property prices, the National Farmers' Union reports that farms under £1 million were too small to be viable and medium sized farms hit by the liability would not be protected by the ten-year payment window resulting in higher payments to returns.
- Noted that the measures threatened Surrey's farming families and community which had shaped the landscape, culture and outdoor opportunities for employment, leisure and wellbeing.
- Noted that market towns were formed through the agricultural trade and host regular farmers markets, providing healthy and sustainable food.
- Noted that the Council values the vital contribution that farming makes to Surrey's economy and identity; the motion recognises and thanks farmers.
- Noted that the motion must be better organised and accurate, based on facts, it fails to mention that one of the largest holders of farmland in Surrey with over 2,000 hectares is the Council.
- Noted that the motion refers to several farms and notes that 'many feel', that was not quantified.
- Noted that the motion stated that the average size of farms was 88 hectares, that was the figure for the South East region and not Surrey, the University of Surrey estimates the average farm size in Surrey to be 50 hectares mainly due to the high land cost; relative land values and the type of farming varied hugely across the region.
- Noted that a farmer who inherited a farm worth £1 million twenty-five years ago now had an asset worth £3 million equating to £2 million in profit if sold.
- Noted that a Surrey householder in the same situation would expect to pay 40% inheritance tax unless they legally passed it on seven years before death or set up a trust - which farmers could do - farmers could use red diesel in agricultural machinery which reduces the fuel cost by half.
- Queried what the support was by the Council to farmers as noted in the third resolution and whether the Cabinet had approved it, how much would it cost and was it in the budget.

Matt Furniss, the seconder of the motion, made no comments.

The Chair asked Marisa Heath, as proposer of the motion to conclude the debate, she made the following comments:

- Noted that she spoke to farmers daily, the reference to many equated to around hundreds of farmers, she joined the protest against the Government's new policy.
- Noted that the motion was not solely about Surrey, but about putting affordable food on residents' tables.
- Acknowledged that Surrey has higher land values which was a problem for farmers, the motion sought to protect farmers and to ensure that food costs do not increase for residents.

- Noted that she holds numerous meetings with farmers and visits their farms, officers liaise with them providing support on the issues they face.
- Noted that in the absence of funding to support them, called on the Government not to hurt them with the inheritance tax policy and to provide money to support rural businesses.

The motion was put to the vote and was carried, with 47 Members voting For, 5 voting Against and 16 Abstentions.

Therefore, it was **RESOLVED** that:

This Council notes that:

- Having felt the impact of COVID and the conflict in Ukraine leading to rising costs in energy prices and food, our local economy, particularly our small and rural businesses need support and the ability to focus on growth, not additional tax burdens and complexity.
- The recent budget has had an immediate impact on farmers and rural businesses at a time when stability is important and as we seek to provide more healthy, sustainable and, where possible, local, food and look after our environment.
- The NFU has evidenced that around 75% of commercial family farms will be affected by the new IHT policy which was announced in the budget rather than the government's initial claim that it would only be 27% of farms. This means many Surrey farms will be impacted.
- Several farms will not yet fully understand the implications of the changes as they will not have had their farms formally valued since the 1992 changes. Many feel that the current change are a tax on rural areas.
- Many farms do not earn enough money to pay the potential Inheritance Tax Bill without selling off some of their land or business, which in turn makes the farm business unviable and threatens the future of Surrey farming.
- The average farm size in 2023 was 88 hectares. This is the fourth smallest average farm size of all the English regions and the same as the English average of 88 hectares. 63% of farms were below 50 hectares. Due to relative land values, farms in the south-east could be more affected by changes to Inheritance Tax than those in other parts of the country. Based on average land-values (arable and pasture) the average 88ha south-east farm has a value of between £2.1m and £2.6m (excludes machinery/ plant equipment – for context, a combine harvester can cost as much as £0.5m).
- 31% farms are rented and the impact on farmers who do not own their farms has yet to be measured.
- Surrey County Council has been working with local farmers and sharing information and best practice as it is recognised that farmers play a crucial role in land management and nature recovery across Surrey.
- The inflationary impacts of the budget on key inputs such as labour costs will prevent farmers and rural businesses being able to add investment and drive growth. Alongside this, the Rural Prosperity Fund comes to an end in March 2025 and there is no replacement for it which restricts businesses investing in their long-term resilience, competitiveness and their environmental performance.

This Council believes that:

- Food security and sustainability is a key priority for both Surrey and the nation, and the added financial pressure of the budget does not support the prioritisation of these important objectives.

- Farmers should be supported to get through the changes of moving away from direct payments, driving forward environmental objectives and producing high quality British food and encouraged to invest long-term in their businesses.
- We should not risk losing Surrey's high quality agricultural land used for food production to other uses which do not benefit the wider community.
- The tax would undermine investment and innovation in the sector at a time when we need Surrey farmers to invest in their businesses.
- In Surrey we have several rural businesses and farmers who are looking to both national and local Government for help to navigate changes such as the reduction in direct payments and it is important we respond to that and set out ways in which we will speak up for them.

This Council resolves to:

- I. Inform the Treasury that Surrey County Council disagrees with IHT proposal and calls for the policy on IHT to be scrapped.
- II. Call on the Treasury to provide a multi-year funding to support local rural businesses crucial to economic recovery, farming and sustainability.
- III. Ensure that Surrey County Council continues, and increases, support for farmers, local food production and rural businesses enabling sharing of best practice and resource.

Item 11 (ii)

Under Standing Order 12.3 the Cabinet Member for Children, Families and Lifelong Learning, Clare Curran, moved a proposal.

The proposal was as follows:

That the motion below by Jonathan Essex be referred to the Children, Families, Lifelong Learning and Culture Select Committee for the purpose of consideration and making recommendations to Cabinet or Council for decision.

This Council agrees that:

- Surrey County Council used to support a network of 58 Sure Start Children Centres with some government support. These were replaced with 23 Family Centres in 2017 and these are now funded through 11 Family Centre and Family Resilience contracts that also include youth services up to 18 (and age 25 for those with SEN).
- This shift to the family centres model has been accompanied by a shift in council funding for children services. There is now less funding allocated to universal and community support, and signposting to families (often through group sessions) alongside increased funding for more targeted and intensive support to individual families, including through the new Intensive Family Support Service (IFSS).
- Recent academic research has highlighted that the Sure Start Children Centres model reduced childhood obesity and youth crime whilst increased early identification of SEN (and reduced SEN and EHCPs in secondary schools) and improved educational outcomes.
- The above shift in funding in children's services within a post-Covid context of continued austerity, together with service improvements in Surrey County Council, has contributed to a reduction in children being taken into care in Surrey. However, at the same time there has been an increase in the numbers of children requiring

additional support when they start school, and a surge in the number of children who have mental health needs.

This Council resolves to:

- I. Commission a review of recent research into the benefits of taking a broader preventative approach to children's services. This review should include recommendations to improve long-term outcomes for Surrey families, including through strengthening universal and community support to meet emerging needs earlier.
- II. Write to the new Secretary of State for the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, the Rt Hon Angela Rayner MP to call for additional funding for local authority Children's Services across the UK that is directed to prevention, to improve outcomes to meet the objective that no children or families are left behind.

Jonathan Essex made the following points:

- Noted that if the motion is referred, hoped that the Cabinet Member would call on the Deputy Prime Minister and Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government to direct more funding to prevention in Children's Services.
- Noted that budget constraints had affected Children's Services work, reducing children being brought into care and reducing prevention and emerging needs support to more families.
- Noted that research highlighted that Sure Start children's centres provided earlier support to families, reduced child hospital admissions and obesity, improved child mental health and reduced criminal convictions, increased educational attainment, and increased SEND support for five year-olds led to less children needing an EHCP by secondary school age.
- Noted that savings exceeded costs and prevention worked, should the motion be referred he sought assurance that without delay a broader preventative approach to Children's Services would be explored that reaches deprived communities, particularly as child poverty had increased.
- Called for sufficient centres to be created within walking distance from areas of greatest social need and to collaborate with the voluntary and community sector.

Matt Furniss left the meeting at 13.06 pm.

In speaking to her proposal, the Cabinet Member for Children, Families and Lifelong Learning:

- Hoped that by referring it to the select committee, it would be reflected on, researched and resourced, and recommendations would be developed that would bring forward the Council's future policy around early help and intervention.
- Welcomed the Government's announcement concerning social care, the overhaul sought to rebalance in favour of early intervention and consider national findings regarding the Families First initiative.
- Noted that the Local Government Finance Policy Statement 2025 to 2026 hinted at changes in the funding frameworks for early help services, the Member's motion called on various Council strategies and work underway.
- Noted that the Member's ambitions touched on the work being done to encourage stronger communities working with the voluntary, community and

faith networks across Surrey, the work by the Health and Wellbeing Board around poverty and the towns and villages work by health colleagues.

Jonathan Essex confirmed that he was against the referral of the motion to the Children, Families, Lifelong Learning and Culture Select Committee.

Under Standing Order 28.1, ten Members demanded a recorded vote, the proposal to refer the motion was put to the vote with 42 Members voting For, 25 voting Against and 1 Abstention.

The following Members voted For it:

Maureen Attewell, Ayesha Azad, Steve Bax, Jordan Beech, Luke Bennett, Liz Bowes, Natalie Bramhall, Helyn Clack, Clare Curran, Paul Deach, Kevin Deanus, John Furey, Tim Hall, David Harmer, Nick Harrison, Edward Hawkins, Marisa Heath, Robert Hughes, Jonathan Hulley, Saj Hussain, Rebecca Jennings-Evans, Frank Kelly, Riasat Khan, Rachael Lake BEM, Victor Lewanski, David Lewis (Cobham), Scott Lewis, Andy Lynch, Ernest Mallett MBE, Cameron McIntosh, Sinead Mooney, Bernie Muir, Mark Nuti, John O'Reilly, Tim Oliver OBE, Becky Rush, Lesley Steeds, Richard Tear, Denise Turner-Stewart, Jeremy Webster, Buddhi Weerasinghe, Keith Witham.

The following Members voted Against it:

Catherine Baart, John Beckett, Dennis Booth, Harry Boparai, Stephen Cooksey, Nick Darby, Fiona Davidson, Jonathan Essex, Robert Evans OBE, Paul Follows, Angela Goodwin, Robert King, Eber Kington, Andy MacLeod, Jan Mason, Steven McCormick, Catherine Powell, Penny Rivers, John Robini, Joanne Sexton, Lance Spencer, Chris Townsend, Liz Townsend, Hazel Watson, Fiona White.

The following Members Abstained:

Michaela Martin.

Therefore, it was **RESOLVED** that:

The motion be referred to the Children, Families, Lifelong Learning and Culture Select Committee for the purpose of consideration and making recommendations to Cabinet or Council for decision.

Jeremy Webster left the meeting at 13.13 pm.

89/24 REPORT OF THE CABINET [Item 12]

The Leader presented the report of the Cabinet meetings held on 29 October 2024 and 26 November 2024.

Recommendations on Policy Framework Documents:

26 November 2024:

- A. Coordinated Admissions Scheme for September 2026

RESOLVED:

That Council approved the coordinated admissions scheme that will apply to all applicants and schools for 2026.

Reports for Information/Discussion:

29 October 2024:

- B. Your Fund Surrey Application - New Rowledge Village Hall Project, Farnham
- C. London Road Guildford Active Travel Scheme - Independent Technical Assessment of Section 1 for Consideration to Proceed

26 November 2024:

- D. Reports from Select Committees, Task Groups and Other Committees of the Council
- E. Bagshot Community Recycling Centre
- F. 2025/26 Draft Budget and Medium-Term Financial Strategy to 2029/30
- G. Equity in Education – No Learner Left Behind – Surrey's Lifetime of Learning Strategy
- H. Right Homes, Right Support: Older People's Residential and Nursing Care Delivery Strategy
- I. Quarterly Report on Decisions Taken Under Special Urgency Arrangements: 1 October 2024 - 2 December 2024

RESOLVED:

- 1. Noted that there had been no urgent decisions since the last Cabinet report to Council.
- 2. Adopted the report of the meetings of the Cabinet held on 29 October 2024 and 26 November 2024.

90/24 MINUTES OF CABINET MEETINGS [Item 13]

No notification had been received by the deadline from Members wishing to raise a question or make a statement on any matters in the minutes.

The Chair wished Members and their families a very Happy Christmas and a prosperous New Year filled with joy, peace, and good health!

[Meeting ended at: 13.17 pm]

Chair

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Leader's Statement – County Council, 10 December 2024

Mr Chairman, Members, welcome to the final council meeting of 2024.

A tumultuous year for the country and in many ways for this council, with big changes, substantial challenges, but also huge progress.

Public service is never easy, nor will it be.

We set ourselves the highest of standards, because we truly care about the outcomes we're here to deliver for residents.

Caring for our most vulnerable, supporting those who need us most, helping people in their everyday lives..... making Surrey a better place.

Both Members and officers strive every single day to deliver that, in challenging circumstances, and as we enter the festive period and the year draws to a close, I'd like to recognise that hard work and dedication.

Mr Chairman, at November's Cabinet meeting the draft council budget for next year was approved.

We of course need to await the final details of the Local Government Finance Settlement expected on the 19th December, but we are on track to set a balanced budget, as we have done each and every year of this administration.

But that task gets more and more difficult as demand on services keeps rising, and costs increase faster than our income.

Over the past few years we have demonstrated strong and stable financial management, guiding the organisation through the most challenging times for local government.

But even the strongest local authorities like ours, are not immune to the national and global financial challenges.

All of our key services – Social Care, Children’s Services, Highways Maintenance – are facing huge increases in demand.

On top of that rising demand, the cost of actually delivering those services – wages, materials, other overheads – is increasing at a much faster rate than our income from government funding or council tax rises.

As with most budget setting processes at this stage of the financial year, we have a gap to close in order to set a balanced budget.

There are various ways in which we have identified we can do this, and all those options are being closely considered pending confirmation of the finance settlement by government in a couple of weeks.

But we *will* set a balanced budget, as we have done in every year of this administration.

But the financial headwinds for all councils in Surrey get stronger as the government sets out its agenda for the next few years. It is going to be even more essential that we remove cost from service delivery, as they press on with a review of the funding of local councils.

The primary criteria they intend to use for determination of appropriate funding, will draw heavily on the deprivation index, as well as the ability to raise money locally through council tax - the Labour party's equivalent of levelling up.

Whilst I accept that both of those metrics are relevant, they ignore the differential demands faced in ageing rural populations and the higher cost of delivering services, particularly here in the South East.

We will lobby this government as we did previous governments to accept that you cannot ignore the demographics and genuine needs of our local population and forcing us to increase year-on-year council tax paid by Surrey residents for redistribution to other parts of the country is simply unfair and inequitable.

While some positive noises have come from Ministers in their first budget in October by acknowledging the fundamental issues in Children's Care, Adult Social Care and SEND, it is concerning that the rhetoric seems not to be followed by investment, and I suspect their focus may be elsewhere.

Failing to properly address those creaking systems, with money as well as structural reform, would continue to fail the most vulnerable people in society.

We stand ready to help the government, and I hope they are as serious as we are, about tackling these challenges head on.

Neither central, nor local government, can do that alone.

But we will do what we can, and continue to look forwards, challenging ourselves to be the best we can be, responsible with public money and delivering really effective services that the people of Surrey rely on.

To do that sustainably in these challenging financial times, we must be strict with ourselves – is every penny we spend being invested well?

Is every decision we make truly delivering better outcomes for our residents?

Yes, some difficult decisions will have to be made, and we will stop doing things that perhaps don't meet that criteria.

However, our main focus will be driving improvement and transforming the way we do things so our service – our organisation – is fit for the future.

Embracing new opportunities, new technology, using our data better.

Working across partners to deliver better, more rounded support.

Better collaboration internally too – ensuring we are all focused on delivering our core missions and shared priorities, continuing to strive towards our ambition that no one in Surrey is left behind. One council, one vision.

Thanks to strong financial management and a determined approach, we are in good shape to deliver the transformation this council – and the wider local government sector – needs.

We will make bold decisions to transform how we operate so our services can continue to improve and remain sustainable into the future.

That journey of improvement has been paramount for this council under this administration.

We have never lost focus on that, and we never will.

At the end of November, I was delighted that we could announce that our Adult Social Care service has been given a 'good' rating by the Care Quality Commission.

The inspectors highlighted a number of strengths, including the passion and dedication of our staff and our work to keep people independent in their own homes.

I'd like to thank all our staff in Adult Social Care publicly for their hard work, making a positive difference to the lives of thousands of people in Surrey.

I'd also like to thank our partners and providers, as well as unpaid carers in Surrey, who are all pivotal in our aim of supporting people to lead independent and fulfilling lives.

Mr Chairman, we won't stop here – we want to keep improving and raising the bar for our residents.

We face significant demand across the county with more than 24,000 people receiving some form of support from Adult Social Care.

As we all know, we have significant pockets of deprivation in Surrey – and the CQC have highlighted that we're doing some really innovative and creative work to meet the differing needs of our population and help people keep their independence.

We know there are areas where we need to learn and develop and we are committed to doing that, and we are already actively working to address all feedback from the CQC through our comprehensive improvement plans.

Our new Executive Director of Adult Social Services recently started with us, so with her focus and commitment we are well-placed to build on this assessment.

Another area where we've made real progress is in our mission to deliver a sustainable economy here in Surrey.

We are focused on providing support in areas where it can have the biggest impact - whether that's high-growth businesses, investing in our key sectors, supporting our disadvantaged residents or providing opportunities to students.

In April, the government transferred responsibilities for business support to the County Council from Local Enterprise Partnerships.

For the first time, we have a universal comprehensive service covering the whole of Surrey, and since launching that very month, we have provided free expert advice on the levers of growth to more than 1,000 businesses of varying sizes via the Business Surrey gateway.

Work to expand this continues:

- Working with government and the business sector to help drive better use of innovation and technology.
- Delivering new opportunities with partners like our leading further education sector including the newly launched 'Future Studios' at Royal Holloway, which provides a cutting-edge space to nurture Surrey's growing creative industries.
- The Festival of Skills which took place in October and provided more than 2,000 students with the chance to connect with dozens of employers, universities, colleges and training providers.
- Surrey's Connect 2 Work programme, working with business to develop an employment support programme that enables disadvantaged groups to have an active role in the local labour market.

This is what can happen when we are given the right tools and powers to really make a difference to our county.

Mr Chairman, it won't have passed by Members that the government is due to publish a White Paper next week outlining its ambitions around devolution and potential reorganisation of local government.

It is clear that those ambitions could be advantageous for Surrey, and we will of course engage with Ministers and Civil Servants about any plans that could help deliver benefits for the people of Surrey.

I believe there is general consensus, in government, across our council partners and residents, that the current structure of local government – here and elsewhere in the country – is not the most effective.

Different tiers of local government, different scales and responsibilities, can be confusing for residents and result in too much bureaucracy, inefficiency, and barriers to progress.

I have long advocated for a real examination and review of how local government is structured – to make it more efficient and more effective for residents.

It is not an easy thing to deliver, and there is not always an obvious or simple solution. That's why previous governments have perhaps not addressed it boldly or seriously.

But it does appear that this government IS serious about reorganisation and genuine devolution from the centre.

Whilst of course we need to wait to see the detail, I am sure that all Members will want to engage constructively with government on this, and also with our District and

Borough and Parish Council colleagues, with a central focus to deliver better outcomes for Surrey and its residents. I think everybody here, and everybody involved in local government across the UK, would be an advocate of further devolution – from Westminster and Whitehall to local regions and communities.

We are told that the proposals in the White Paper will be bold with a particular emphasis on the creation of Mayoral Combined Authorities alongside greater devolution of powers from Westminster. But as local government is just one part of an eco system we also need to see at the same time reform of public service, including amongst other things more democratic accountability of the health system.

Members, we should relish this opportunity to deliver something meaningful, for the future of Surrey – together.

Councils, communities and residents themselves know what they need and want.

We know – together – how best to deliver it.

We have – together – the skills and the motivation to deliver it.

With true devolution we can have – together – the power to deliver it.

Mr Chairman, on a slightly lighter note, as this year draws to a close, we can look back with pride on many of the things we have achieved, but also look back with lessons to learn from and improve.

But our main focus must be looking to the future – with the potential for bold strides forward for Surrey. We want to be and indeed must seek to be, in control of our own destiny.

We can deliver that brighter future, but we must roll up our sleeves and work for it and grasp the opportunities in front of us.

I'm confident the next year will be a good one.

I wish you all a merry Christmas, and a peaceful new year.

Thank you.

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