Being Chair of Cheshire Wildlife Trust

This document provides further information about the responsibilities of the Chair of Cheshire Wildlife Trust and the time commitment involved.

It complements our Chair Recruitment Pack and is intended to give prospective candidates a clearer understanding of what the role involves in practice.

Detailed role description

Role

To Chair Council and to ensure Council discharges its responsibilities for the governance of Cheshire Wildlife Trust (the Trust).

Accountability

The Chair and Vice Chair are accountable to Council.

Principal responsibilities

Strategic direction

- To promote a progressive strategy for the Trust.
- To ensure Council monitors delivery of the Trust's Strategy.

Council leadership and effective governance

- To build a constructive relationship with and between Council members and encourage challenging debate and informed decisions.
- To ensure Council receives professional advice where appropriate.
- To ensure the efficient conduct of Council and other general meetings and the effectiveness of Council and the roles within it.
- To proactively address and manage conflicts of interest amongst Council members and ensure that no Trustee participates in the discussion of, or vote in respect of, a matter in which they have a material conflict of interest.
- To ensure that Trustees make an annual declaration of conflicts of interest and that any new conflicts of interest are recorded at the start of each meeting.
- To lead, with the Honorary Secretary, the recruitment and induction of new Trustees.
- To undertake a biennial appraisal of individual and collective Trustee effectiveness.
- To ensure, in conjunction with the relevant officers and staff, that agendas are prepared for Council meetings, all associated papers are circulated beforehand, and minutes of the meetings are prepared and distributed in accordance with procedures on a timely basis.

Working with the Chief Executive

- To recommend to Council the appointment of a Chief Executive, establish a constructive relationship with them and be a source of advice, support, challenge and inspiration.
- To agree with the CEO a set of annual objectives and to lead the CEO's annual appraisal.
- To act as final arbiter in disciplinary and grievance cases.
- To review the CEO's remuneration package annually, making recommendations to Council for any changes.

Stakeholder relationships and wider representation

- To be attuned to the expectations of all stakeholders and to establish a trusting relationship with them.
- To represent the Trust as appropriate.
- To support the work of The Wildlife Trusts at regional, national and UK level.

Additional areas of focus for the incoming Chair

The following priorities were highlighted through the Chair succession planning discussions, building on the responsibilities set out in the existing governance document:

- With the CEO, ensure the long-term financial viability of the Trust.
- Horizon scanning and setting longer-term priorities and direction.
- Asking the bigger questions when considering the Trust's three-to-five-year strategy.
- Ensuring clarity on outcomes and where the Trust is heading.
- Oversight of strategic risks.
- Showing leadership in situations involving competing priorities, significant risks or crises.
- Supporting a commitment to staff wellbeing, including working smarter rather than harder.

The Chair provides leadership to Council in fulfilling these responsibilities, while accountability for the Trust's governance remains collective across all trustees.

A year in the life of the Chair

Understanding the time commitment

The Chair undertakes the regular duties and activities of a trustee, alongside additional responsibilities associated with leading Council and maintaining a close working relationship with the Chief Executive.

Based on the experience of our outgoing Chair, Charles Neame, the estimated annual commitment is approximately 12–15 working days.

This is an indicative estimate rather than a fixed schedule. The commitment will vary depending on the needs of the Trust and the Chair's level of involvement in additional activities.

Regular activities and commitments

Activity	Indicative time commitment
Council meetings	Six meetings per year. Approximately two hours per meeting, plus four hours for preparation and reading papers. 36 hours annually.
Finance, Audit, Risk & Resources (FARR) Committee	One or two meetings per year. Approximately two hours' participation, plus two hours reading papers per meeting. The Treasurer chairs these meetings. Up to 8 hours annually.
Quarterly review meetings with the CEO	Four meetings per year, approximately one to two hours each, plus preparation time.
Regular informal catch-ups with the CEO	Approximately eight meetings annually, normally monthly except when quarterly reviews are scheduled. Around one to one and a half hours per meeting. Approximately 12 hours annually.
Monthly informal catch-ups with the Vice Chair	Up to 12 meetings annually, around one to one and a half hours each. Approximately 15 hours annually.
Follow-up actions	Actions arising from meetings and discussions, allowing approximately one to two hours per month. Approximately 18 hours annually.
Official interventions and ad hoc matters	Reviewing and signing key documents, advising the CEO on matters arising outside the normal schedule of activities and responding to other issues when necessary. Variable time commitment.

Preparing for Council meetings

Preparation is an important part of the Chair's role and includes:

- Helping to shape the agenda and papers for Council meetings through advance discussions with the CEO.
- Reading Council papers closely to remain on top of discussions and steer meetings with confidence when required.

Additional opportunities for involvement

There are also opportunities to participate in wider Wildlife Trusts activities and events. These are not mandatory but can be valuable for building understanding of the wider movement, sharing experiences and developing relationships.

Chairs' strategy group meetings

These are typically regional meetings, involving Chairs from Wildlife Trusts such as Staffordshire, Lancashire and Warwickshire.

- Approximately two meetings per year.
- Usually full-day events.
- Attendance is not a requirement but provides valuable opportunities to share ideas and experiences.

Online Chairs' community of practice

These events bring together Chairs from across the Wildlife Trusts movement.

- Approximately four events annually.
- Usually one to two hours each.
- Up to approximately eight hours annually.
- Participation is optional.

Other national and wider federation events

Some wider events may last one or two days, occasionally longer, and may include European gatherings.

Although not mandatory, these events can help develop an understanding of RSWT's work and Cheshire Wildlife Trust's place within the wider movement.

Alternative representation is usually welcome. Where the Chair is unavailable, the Vice Chair or another trustee with a particular interest in the subject may attend.

Some events combine Chair and Chief Executive participation, providing a useful opportunity for more in-depth discussion of Trust matters away from the demands of everyday schedules.

Balancing the commitment

The regular activities outlined above form the main ongoing commitment associated with the role.

Additional involvement in wider Wildlife Trusts events, external representation and other opportunities can be considered according to the interests and availability of the individual.

The Chair should have sufficient time and flexibility to provide effective leadership to Council, maintain regular engagement with the Chief Executive and respond to important matters as they arise.

This is an unpaid voluntary role. Travel and expenses policy in place.

For further information about the role, please contact Charlotte Harris, Charris@cheshirewt.org.uk