

CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the Council

held on Wednesday, 17th September, 2025 in the Tenants' Hall, Tatton Park,
Knutsford WA16 6QN (postcode for Sat Nav WA16 6SG)

PRESENT

Councillor D Edwardes (Mayor/Chair)

Councillor J Snowball (Deputy Mayor/Vice-Chair)

Councillors L Anderson, M Beanland, S Bennett-Wake, L Braithwaite, J Bratherton, M Brooks, D Brown, C Browne, L Buchanan, C Bulman, A Burton, K Burton, R Chadwick, C Chapman, D Clark, J Clowes, P Coan, A Coiley, N Cook, S Corcoran, L Crane, T Dean, B Drake, S Edgar, K Edwards, H Faddes, A Farrall, R Fletcher, A Gage, S Gardiner, M Goldsmith, M Gorman, E Hall, A Harrison, G Hayes, A Heler, S Holland, D Jefferay, R Kain, A Kolker, N Mannion, G Marshall, R Moreton, R Morris, H Moss, C O'Leary, J Pearson, J Place, B Posnett, J Priest, B Puddicombe, P Redstone, J Rhodes, J Saunders, H Seddon, M Sewart, M Simon, L Smetham, G Smith, J Smith, J Smith, M Warren, H Whitaker, F Wilson, J Wray and B Wye

36 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors S Adams, R Bailey, J Bird, M Edwards, E Gilman, K Hague, M Houston, T Jackson, A Moran, M Muldoon, J Pratt, L Smith, R Vernon and L Wardlaw.

37 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

It was noted that Councillors may personally know some of the public speakers in attendance at the meeting.

In the interest of openness, Councillor G Hayes declared that he was an unremunerated director of the East Cheshire Chamber of Commerce.

38 PUBLIC SPEAKING TIME/OPEN SESSION

The following public speakers spoke in relation to Item 4 – Cheshire and Warrington Devolution and the Mayoral Combined Authority.

Mr Paul Colman spoke in support of the report and its recommendations on behalf of South and North Cheshire Chamber of Commerce, which represented businesses across the region. Mr Colman stated that for businesses to prosper and local communities to benefit, especially those experiencing disadvantage and deprivation, devolution was essential. Mr Colman stated the benefits of devolution and how it would provide the necessary tools to invest in what mattered most locally such as

infrastructure, skills, and integrated transport. Devolution would allow businesses to grow and create jobs and opportunities for local communities. Mr Colman urged Members to support devolution.

Mr Robert Douglas spoke in opposition of devolution and stated that it would introduce an additional tier of local government, and which would disadvantage Cheshire East residents. Mr Douglas highlighted his concerns in relation to devolution including the ability for an Elected Mayor to introduce a Mayoral Precept which would place an additional financial burden upon local households. Mr Douglas stated that supporting devolution would further risk the Council's financial stability and urged Members to oppose the recommendations set out within the report, which he felt were a negligent use of time and resource.

Ms Wendy Whittaker-Large spoke in opposition of devolution and stated that the public devolution consultation had received negative feedback from residents, Ms Whittaker-Large requested that Members took this on board when considering this item and its recommendations. Ms Whitaker-Large stated that the costs of a Mayoral Authority would fall to the public to pay for through increases in council tax and that the projections for economic growth were negligible.

Mr Henry Brooks spoke in support of devolution and stated that devolution would provide an opportunity for businesses across the county to prosper and would have a significant impact on future generations in securing investment in the local area.

Mr Jasbir Dhesi OBE stated that he spoke not just as a representative from the skills and local educational sector, but as someone who had worked in Cheshire East for more than a decade and expressed that he was aware of the talent, ambition and the potential that existed in local communities. He stated that devolution would provide the chance to shape a skills system which was designed to benefit businesses. Mr Dhesi stated that local businesses including Bentley and AstraZeneca needed a system that was agile, responsive, and locally led and that devolution would allow for the co-designing of training with employers, support adults to retrain and upskill and create real pathways for young people into meaningful careers.

Ms Helen Tonks MBE stated she was a member of the Cheshire and Warrington Business Advisory Board, a UK Government Export Champion and MBE recipient for services to business and exports. Ms Tonks stated that small businesses would benefit from devolution and would create a local environment in favour of small businesses. Ms Tonks expressed that a vote against devolution could mean more uncertainty, less stability, less control, less investment. She urged Members to vote for devolution.

Mr David Briggs stated that as a previous Lord Lieutenant of Cheshire, he cared deeply about the prosperity of Cheshire and was saddened that

potential overseas investors were not encouraged to invest in the area as they were only introduced to the Mayors of Manchester and Liverpool. Mr Briggs highlighted that devolution would open up opportunities for new investment and existing businesses would benefit from skills programmes and opportunities to create more enterprise zones. Devolution would mean that Cheshire could attract investment to become equal to the two city neighbours.

Mr Steve Purdham spoke in support of devolution and stated that as a resident and member of the Cheshire and Warrington Business Advisory Board, devolution was important in the region and was the single most powerful step that could be taken for growth. Devolution would mean businesses in Cheshire would get the same opportunities whether they were urban or rural. Mr Purdham stated that the business community fully supported devolution.

39 RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE CHESHIRE AND WARRINGTON JOINT COMMITTEE: CHESHIRE AND WARRINGTON DEVOLUTION PROGRAMME AND THE MAYORAL COMBINED AUTHORITY

Consideration was given to the report on the creation of the Cheshire and Warrington Combined Authority.

As part of the formal consenting process to proceed with a Combined Authority and associated devolution powers, functions and investment, approval was required from each of the Councils - Cheshire East Borough Council, Cheshire West and Chester Borough Council and Warrington Borough Council.

The Cheshire and Warrington Joint Committee, at its meeting on 29 August 2025, had endorsed the proposed recommendations for approval by each of the Councils in accordance with their own constitutional requirements.

The recommendations were proposed and seconded and following debate a recorded vote was requested with the following results: -

FOR

Councillors L Anderson, S Bennett-Wake, L Braithwaite, J Bratherton, M Brooks, D Brown, L Buchanan, C Bulman, A Burton, C Chapman, D Clark, A Coiley, N Cook, S Corcoran, L Crane, B Drake, D Edwardes, K Edwards, H Faddes, M Goldsmith, M Gorman, D Jefferay, R Kain, N Mannion, G Marhsall, J Place, B Posnett, J Priest, B Puddicombe, J Rhodes, H Seddon, G Smith, J Snowball, M Warren, F Wilson and B Wye.

AGAINST

Councillors M Beanland, C Browne, K Burton, R Chadwick, J Clowes, P Coan, T Dean, S Edgar, A Farrall, R Fletcher, A Gage, S Gardiner, E Hall, A Harrison, G Hayes, A Heler, S Holland, A Kolker, R Moreton, R Morris,

H Moss, C O'Leary, J Pearson, P Redstone, J Saunders, M Sewart, M Simon, L Smetham, Julie Smith, John Smith, H Whitaker and J Wray.

NOT VOTING

None

The motion was declared carried with 36 votes for, 32 against and 0 not voting.

RESOLVED: That Council

- 1 approve in principle the establishment of a Cheshire and Warrington Combined Authority in accordance with existing legislation under the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009 (as amended).
- 2 delegate authority to the Chief Executive (Head of Paid Service), or their authorised deputy, to consent to the making of the Cheshire and Warrington Combined Authority Order 2026 in accordance with s.110(1)(b) Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009.
- 3 Agree to hold inaugural mayoral elections in May 2027.
- 4 Subject to approval of the above recommendations, to create a new joint committee, to be known as the Cheshire and Warrington Combined Authority Shadow Board, to provide strategic direction and interim arrangements in the best interests of the establishment of a Cheshire and Warrington Combined Authority.
- 5 Approve the Terms of Reference for the Cheshire and Warrington Combined Authority Shadow Board, as outlined in Appendix B to the report, and delegate authority to the Constituent Members of the Shadow Board to carry out the roles and functions as set out in the Terms of Reference.
- 6 Note that the Constituent Members for the Shadow Board will be the Leaders and Deputy Leaders of each constituent council, as set out in the proposed Terms of Reference.
- 7 Amend the Cheshire and Warrington Joint Committee Terms of Reference, as outlined in Appendix C to the report, to reflect the revised function of the Joint Committee following establishment of the Combined Authority Shadow Board.
- 8 Appoint new membership to the Cheshire and Warrington Joint Committee in accordance with the Joint Committee Terms of Reference.

- 9 Delegate authority to the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Leader and Deputy Leader, to take all other steps necessary to establish and implement the Cheshire and Warrington Combined Authority.

40 **THE COUNCIL'S DECISION-MAKING ARRANGEMENTS**

Consideration was given to the report on whether the Council should move to a Leader and Cabinet form of decision making with effect from the Council's Annual General Meeting on 13 May 2026.

The English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill proposed the abolition of the Committee system form of governance and that all local authorities which operated committee systems of decision making would be required to move to Leader and Cabinet systems within one year of the enactment of the legislation.

It was anticipated that the effective date of the legislation would in or around Autumn 2025. The report proposed that the Council move to a Leader and Cabinet system before the this date as such a decision would proactively respond to the non-statutory Best Value Notice, received in May 2025, which required the Council to ensure it had effective governance processes in place that enabled decisions and improvements at pace; and also to the LGA Peer Review recommendation to urgently review the decision making framework, streamline current decision making arrangements and give more time and emphasis to scrutiny.

The recommendations were proposed and seconded and following debate were put to the vote.

RESOLVED: That Council

- 1 approve a change in the Council's governance arrangements from a Committee System to a Leader and Cabinet system, pursuant to Section 9K of the Local Government Act 2000, with this change taking effect at the Council's Annual General Meeting on 13 May 2026.
- 2 agree the design principles set out in Appendix 2 to the report.
- 3 appoint a member Task and Finish Group
 - a. the membership of which to be determined by the Council's political group leaders, which will be empowered to drive-forward necessary arrangements associated with the introduction of a Leader and Cabinet model of decision-making; and
 - b. with powers to make recommendations to the Council's Corporate Policy Committee upon required constitutional and other arrangements related to this.

- 4 note the key constitutional documents and tasks, as set out in Appendix 3 to the report, which will need to be prepared in advance of the formal change of governance arrangements being implemented.

The meeting commenced at 2.00 pm and concluded at 4.41 pm

Councillor D Edwardes (Mayor/Chair)