

OPEN

Corporate Policy Committee

11 July 2023

Sub-Regional Working Update/Member Development Programme

**Report of: Lorraine O'Donnell, Chief Executive Officer/Peter Skates,
Acting Executive Director (Place)**

Report Reference No: CP/54/23-24

Ward(s) Affected: All

Purpose of Report

- 1 This report is seeking to broaden the member development programme to include briefings on sub-regional working.

Executive Summary

- 2 The Council has an established history of sub-regional working across Cheshire and Warrington. It delivers this through the Leader and Deputy Leader (and officers) attendance at regional meetings and through our input into the Local Enterprise Partnership.
- 3 It is important that the Council has members who are briefed and informed across our wide range of service areas, and this includes our sub-regional working. This will assist and inform any future member discussion on sub regional working.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Corporate Policy Committee is recommended to:

1. Note the current position on sub-regional working across Cheshire & Warrington

2. Agree to expand the member development programme to include member briefings to explore whether there are further opportunities to enhance our sub-regional working, for the benefit of our residents.
3. Invite officers to consider future developments for sub-regional working

Background

4. The Council has, for many years, been committed to working sub-regionally, together with Cheshire West and Chester Council and Warrington Borough Council, as well as additional engagement with Halton Borough Council. It has long been recognised that by working together, we can gain maximum advantage in terms of sustainable and inclusive prosperity for the communities of Cheshire and Warrington (C&W). There are benefits from working in this way, including to help coordinate activity and provide a stronger voice with government and neighbouring authorities and other LEP areas. Areas where a sub-regional approach is particularly appropriate including transport and infrastructure, skills and employment and business support.
5. The Leader currently attends the C&W LACE (Leaders & Chief Executives) Board, which shares information and opportunities for enhanced working together.

Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP)

6. The current Local Enterprise Partnership ('LEP') supports this sub-regional working and spans the geography of C&W. Local enterprise partnerships (or "LEPs") were set up by the Government in 2011 to improve economic growth within defined geographical areas through business-led partnerships between the private and public sector.
7. Since the Cheshire and Warrington LEP was formed, it has played a proactive part in the structuring of strategies across the sub region and in the administration of Government and European Funding to support local business, enterprise, and sectors. Cheshire East acts as the Accountable Body for the LEP on behalf of the sub regional local authorities, and therefore is responsible for its finances and accounting practices. Cheshire East's Chief Financial Officer (S151) is also the S151 Officer for the LEP, so has a key role in overseeing and scrutinising the LEP's financial activities.

8. The LEP functions through a Board with a Private Sector Chair and has a number of sub committees which look to address key areas of support and investment.
9. As part of the Spring Budget, the Government announced that it intends the functions of all LEPs to be delivered by Local Government. This would see the withdrawal of central government support for LEPs from April 2024 and is currently consulting on this proposal. If Government funding and support for LEPs is withdrawn, it will be necessary for the C&W Councils to agree a shared approach for its future and how the functions it currently provides can be delivered. Further information will be brought before members once the position becomes clearer.

Historical Position

10. An outline proposal for a devolution deal for Cheshire and Warrington was agreed by the three councils and submitted to Government in September 2015. Further meetings with central government continued to shape the proposals and public consultation was planned.
11. Proposals were developed and were in final draft form with general agreement across the three local authorities. However, progress was then paused.
12. However we have continued to work closely together across Cheshire and Warrington, where doing so will improve services and opportunities for our residents. This sub-regional working has helped us to develop Prospectus for Inclusive Growth (Devo) 2018, Local Industrial Strategy for C&W 2019, Local Area Industrial Strategy for Cheshire East 2020. Other areas where a sub regional approach may assist include digital connectivity, housing, transport and skills.
13. The 2022 White paper [Levelling Up the United Kingdom - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/levelling-up)

The white paper has provided renewed focus on devolution and summarises an overview of the policy from 2014 onwards, provides a description of the powers, and some details of funding, that have been transferred to Mayoral Combined Authorities (MCAs) and local areas via devolution deals. The paper provides details of the devolution arrangements in Greater Manchester, which form the most substantial deals negotiated to date. The paper also sets out additional information on features of deals in other selected geographical areas and concludes by providing some references to commentary on the policy agenda of devolution to local government in England.

Current Position

14. In January 2023 at the Convention of the North, the Secretary of State committed to '*devolution before the end of the year with areas of the North not already covered by a devolution deal*'. Almost 75% of the North is now covered by a devolution deal.
15. With this in mind, officers consider that it would be appropriate and timely to expand our member development programme to include initial briefing sessions with members, covering our current joint working, the Government's position with regard to devolution, and to explore any opportunities for future enhanced joint working throughout Cheshire and Warrington.

Consultation and Engagement

16. There has been no consultation to date, as the recommendation is for member briefings.

Reasons for Recommendations

17. There are a number of new members across the Council, and it would be helpful to ensure that all members have an understanding of our sub-regional working. Members may also want to explore whether there are any further opportunities which could benefit residents from joint working across Cheshire & Warrington.
18. Two key briefing sessions will be proposed for Corporate Policy Committee and Economy & Growth with both sessions open to wider audience. Future proposals may then be considered at the relevant committee.

Other Options Considered

19. Not to provide any briefings to members. This could potentially lose us the opportunity to benefit from members input into the wider sub-regional working.

Implications and Comments

Monitoring Officer/Legal

20. There are no direct legal implications.

Section 151 Officer/Finance

21. There are no direct financial implications, other than officer time involved in member briefings.

Policy

22. Working with members to gain a greater understanding of any sub-regional opportunities supports the following corporate priorities: -

An open and enabling organisation	A thriving and sustainable place
Ensure that there is transparency in all aspects of council decision making	A great place for people to live, work and visit
Look at opportunities to bring more income into the borough.	Thriving urban and rural economies with opportunities for all

Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion

23. There are no equality, diversity, or inclusion implications in this report.

Human Resources

24. None

Risk Management

25. Ensuring that members are appropriately briefed across all areas of the Council's business reduces the risk of any failure of corporate governance.

Rural Communities

26. None

Children and Young People including Cared for Children, care leavers and Children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)

27. None

Public Health

28. None

Climate Change

29. None

Access to Information	
Contact Officer:	Peter Skates, Acting Executive Director (Place) Peter.skates@cheshireeast.gov.uk
Appendices:	None
Background Papers:	None