

Minutes of a meeting of the **Cheshire and Warrington Joint Committee**
held on Friday, 29th August, 2025 in the Committee Room, Ellesmere Port
Library, Civic Way, Ellesmere Port, CH65 0BG

PRESENT

Councillor L Gittins (Chair)
Councillor N Mannion (Vice-Chair)
Councillors H Mundry, K Shore, J Flaherty and M Goldsmith

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE

Delyth Curtis, Chief Executive Officer, Cheshire West and Chester Council
Gemma Davies, Director of Economy and Housing, Cheshire West and Chester Council
Sandra Rothwell, Programme Director, Cheshire and Warrington Devolution Programme, Cheshire West and Chester Council
Julie Gregory, Acting Head of Legal Services, Cheshire East Council
Kevin O'Keefe, Acting Governance, Compliance and Monitoring Officer, Cheshire East Council
Peter Skates, Director of Growth and Enterprise, Cheshire East Council
Sam Jones, Democratic Services Officer, Cheshire East Council
Steve Park, Chief Executive Officer, Warrington Borough Council
Paul Clisby, Director of Law and Governance, Warrington Borough Council
Eleanor Blackburn, Director of Place, Warrington Borough Council

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE

Joanne Moorecroft, UNISON North West's Regional Convenor
Damon Taylor, Chief Executive Officer, Cheshire Police and Crime
Philip Cox, Chief Executive, Enterprise Cheshire and Warrington
Steve Purdham, Chair of the Business Advisory Board for Cheshire and Warrington
Councillor Stuart Gardiner, Leader of the Opposition, Cheshire East Council

15 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Michael Gorman and Dan Price. Councillor Mark Goldsmith was present as substitute for Councillor Michael Gorman.

16 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

17 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED (Unanimously):

That the minutes of the meeting held on 25 July 2025 be approved as a correct record.

18 PUBLIC SPEAKING/OPEN SESSION

The public speaker procedure was noted. There were no public speakers.

19 CHESHIRE AND WARRINGTON DEVOLUTION PROGRAMME AND THE MAYORAL COMBINED AUTHORITY

Ahead of the introduction of the report, a point of clarification was made regarding Appendix C of Item 5. In early 2025 the three Councils (Cheshire West and Chester, Cheshire East Council and Warrington Borough Council) agreed to amend the Terms of Reference (TOR) to extend the rotation of the current Chair (Cheshire West and Chester) for a further 12 months to May 2026. Therefore, paragraph 5 of Appendix C should have read as follows, and the TOR would be amended ahead of any reports going to Council meetings in September 2025:

5. The Committee shall maintain a two-year rolling Chair and Vice-Chair from the Subscriber Members. The Chair will rotate every two years in the following order: Cheshire West and Chester Council until May 2026, Cheshire East Council until May 2028, Warrington Borough Council until May 2030 and that it then continue in that rotation. The Vice-Chair shall be from Cheshire East Council (until May 2026) and shall then rotate in the same order as the Chair every two years.

Members considered a report which outlined the devolution powers, functions and future investment opportunity for Cheshire and Warrington, which would be delivered via a newly created Cheshire and Warrington Combined Authority in early 2026, with an elected mayor in May 2027, as part of the UK Government's Devolution Priority Programme.

Councillor Louise Gittins noted that the three Leaders of Cheshire West and Chester Council, Cheshire East Council and Warrington Borough Council were committed to ensuring that the area was the healthiest, most sustainable, inclusive and growing economy in the UK by 2045, as a result of the benefits of devolution. It was noted that in addition to the statutory constitution contained within the report, the Cheshire and Warrington Combined Authority would be able to determine a local constitution which would reflect specific local circumstances, and arrangements would need to be in place to ensure that Cheshire and Warrington would be ready for a "go live" operational date, as early as February 2026.

It was noted that shadow arrangements would be put in place which would operate collaboratively from within the constituent councils in an advisory approach to oversee the implementation programme of establishing the combined authority. Members were updated that the initial phase of the combined authority, which would be mid to late 2026, would be a small core organisation which would include statutory posts and the minimum

number of other core posts to ensure that it could deliver demonstratable value from day one.

It was expected that the combined authority would receive £1 million of capacity funding from central government for the first financial year, and confirmation had been received that capacity funding would be available for a further three financial years. Confirmation of a 30-year Mayoral Investment Fund had also been received, which would be split equally between capital and revenue; it was expected that Cheshire and Warrington would receive £20 million per year, in addition to further funds for transport, skills, economic development, regeneration and housing.

Councillor Nick Mannion noted the benefits which devolution would bring to rural Cheshire and Warrington and smaller business operating in rural areas. Councillor Mannion noted that devolution would offer the opportunity to reconnect many places with public transport to provide regular access to employment, services and training, and to redesign how services could be delivered.

Councillor Hans Mundy stated that Cheshire and Warrington would welcome extra funding for the area, and noted that devolution would allow the area to be on an equal footing with its neighbours such as Liverpool and Manchester with regards to transport and rail infrastructure, to provide benefit for the wider region.

Councillor Karen Shore noted that the impact of increased skills funding for the area would be substantial and would allow for the creation of a central careers hub across the sub-region, the continuation of the Connect to Work programme, a local Get Britain Working plan, Adult Skills Fund, Employment Fund and the Skills Boot Camp. It was noted that devolution would also allow space for innovation and the ability to focus funding and skills on local enterprises.

Councillor Jean Flaherty noted that the devolution communication had to date been government lead via the consultation, taking into account the voices of residents, and that going forward the combined authority would continue to listen and bring important decisions to the local level.

Councillor Mark Goldsmith noted the benefits of bringing decision making on strategic transport from central government to the local area.

Steve Purdham noted that the Business Advisory Board unanimously supported devolution in Cheshire and Warrington and that control, investment and changes were the key factors for them. It was noted that devolution would create a working environment in Cheshire and Warrington which was better than the present circumstances.

Damon Taylor noted that the Police and Crime Commissioner for Cheshire was supportive of the proposals, however noted that a Cheshire and Warrington Mayor would not have policing powers from the outset. The

importance of the close working relationship between the combined authority, Mayor and the Police and Crime Commissioner's Office was noted.

Joanne Moorecroft noted that unions were excited at the prospect of devolution and would be working closely with the combined authority.

Councillor Stuart Gardiner stated that, as Leader of the Opposition at Cheshire East Council, he was not currently supportive of the information presented and had significant reservations. Councillor Gardiner raised concerns regarding:

- a. How the government had pushed back when information on funding had been requested,
- b. Rurality,
- c. Quoracy of meetings, and
- d. What guarantees could be provided.

Members noted that it was the ambition of Cheshire and Warrington to start from a baseline and work towards additional benefits, powers and funding for the area over future years, and noted that a substantial amount of work had already gone in to supporting the rural areas in Cheshire and Warrington and this would continue. It was noted that it was likely that the funding levels anticipated would be confirmed by central government. It was noted that in terms of quoracy and democracy, the combined authority would have an elected Mayor, who would be accountable to the three authorities, residents and businesses, it would provide the opportunity for members to provide named substitutes to meetings, and that there needs to be a majority vote. Members noted that in accepting the deal from central government, there would remain several unknowns, but the positives already outweighed any uncertainty for Cheshire and Warrington, and members noted that the combined authority would do its work in a transparent and open and inclusive way in order to work closely with all political groups for the greater benefit of the combined authority area.

Officers committed to providing a briefing to Members on "rurality".

RESOLVED (Unanimously):

That the Cheshire and Warrington Joint Committee, in accordance with its function to provide strategic direction and oversight across potential devolution for Cheshire and Warrington, endorses the following recommendations for decision by each of the Councils in Cheshire and Warrington, in line with each Council's constitutional arrangements:

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 Officers (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. Agree to, 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 at Appendix B and to 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 at Appendix C to reflect the revised function of the Joint Committee following establishment of the Combined Authority Shadow Board.
8. Appoint new membership from each Council to the Cheshire and Warrington Joint Committee in accordance with the Joint Committee Terms of Reference.
9. Delegate authority to the Chief Executives, in consultation with the Leaders, of each constituent council, to take all other steps necessary to establish and implement the Cheshire and Warrington Combined Authority.

20 **FORWARD PLAN**

Members considered the Work Programme.

RESOLVED (Unanimously):

1. That the reports on the Forward Plan be adopted and approved.
2. That the September meeting be cancelled following the three Council meetings in September to allow officers to progress any decisions.

The meeting commenced at 10.30 am and concluded at 11.40 am
Councillor L Gittins (Chair)

