

OPEN

CORPORATE POLICY COMMITTEE

20 March 2025

Response to Government consultation for principles of Devolution in Cheshire & Warrington

Report of: Philip Cresswell, Executive Director of Place

Report Reference No: CPC/59/24-25

Ward(s) Affected: All

For Decision or Scrutiny: Decision

Purpose of Report

- 1 To confirm the response from Cheshire East Council to the government consultation on the principles of a proposal developed by government for devolution in the Cheshire and Warrington area.
- 2 This report covers two areas for consideration:
 - Noting that the Cheshire & Warrington area, including Cheshire East, has been confirmed as part of the government's Devolution Priority Programme.
 - The submission of a response to the government's consultation on behalf of Cheshire East Council.

Executive Summary

- 3 The Government published its Devolution White Paper in December 2024, and it is expected that the English Devolution Bill will pass through Parliament in 2025/26.
- 4 The Government announced details of a Devolution Priority Programme for those areas wishing to proceed as soon as possible, and Council Leaders and Deputy Leaders from Cheshire and Warrington expressed an interest in being included in the Programme.

- 5 On the 5 February 2025, it was confirmed that Cheshire & Warrington would be part of the Devolution Priority Programme, working to a timetable to see the creation of a Strategic / Combined Authority following Mayoral Elections by May 2026.
- 6 As part of the priority timetable, the government has launched its consultation on the principles of devolution within the Cheshire & Warrington area, and responses to this consultation are required by 13th April 2025.
- 7 Cheshire East Council is seeking to submit a response to this consultation as outlined in this report.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Corporate Policy Committee

1. Note that the Cheshire & Warrington area, including Cheshire East, has been confirmed as part of the Devolution Priority Programme.
2. Approve the submission of the Council's response to the seven questions requested as part of the government consultation as outlined in this report.

Background

- 8 Since election in July 2024 the government has continued to focus on the opportunity of Devolution across all of England, seeking to advance to agreements with those areas without existing devolved powers. Through devolution, such areas and their local leaders could receive more powers, functions and funding to take decisions about local priorities.
- 9 In December 2024, the government published the [English Devolution White Paper](#), which set out a new Devolution Framework for English devolution which will move power out of central government and into the regions and sub regions.
- 10 Devolution could achieve this through enabling more decisions to be taken at a more local level, thereby making it easier to tailor decisions to local needs and priorities. The potential outcome being more coordinated action in a place, giving communities a greater say in decisions that affect them and creating opportunities in policy and delivery.
- 11 The government's ambition on devolution is universal coverage across England, with a strong preference for every area to have a Mayor, so

that every part of the country could unlock the benefits and opportunities that devolution brings.

- 12 Within the English Devolution White Paper launched in December 2024, the government established the Devolution Priority Programme, to provide a fast-track to creating Mayoral Combined Authorities for areas ready to come together over sensible geographies which meet the criteria set out in the White Paper. These areas would receive the full backing of government to deliver to timescales.
- 13 Cheshire East Council, along with Cheshire West and Chester Council, and Warrington Borough Council expressed an interest to join the Devolution Priority Programme.
- 14 On the 5 February 2025, Cheshire and Warrington was confirmed to be part of the Devolution Priority Programme, along with the five other areas listed below:
 - Cumbria (Cumberland Council, Westmorland and Furness Council);
 - Hampshire and the Solent (Hampshire County Council, Portsmouth City Council, Isle of Wight Council, Southampton City Council);
 - Greater Essex (Essex County Council, Thurrock Council, Southend-on-Sea City Council);
 - Norfolk and Suffolk (Norfolk County Council, Suffolk County Council); and
 - Sussex and Brighton (East Sussex County Council, West Sussex County Council, Brighton and Hove City Council).
- 15 The Priority programme sets the objective to seek to establish the Mayoral Combined Authority by May 2026, holding Mayoral elections on the 7th May 2026.
- 16 To achieve that objective the government will require the implementation of key statutory processes, and this includes a public consultation to seek local views and inform a final decision by government.
- 17 The Government has stated that it is minded to establish a Mayoral Combined Authority for Cheshire and Warrington.
- 18 Government will take a decision on whether to proceed with the necessary implementing legislation after considering responses to a consultation and whether a series of statutory tests have been met.

- 19 In particular, Government will need to decide:
- Whether they consider that the establishment of a Combined Authority in the area is likely to improve the economic, social and environmental wellbeing of some or all of the people who live or work in the area;
 - Whether establishing a Combined Authority in the area is appropriate, having regard to the need to:
 - secure effective and convenient local government; and,
 - reflect the identities and interests of local communities.
- 20 Government will also consider all factors in the round when taking the decision on whether to proceed with the necessary implementing legislation.
- 21 The public consultation by Government was launched on the 17th February 2025, and will last for 8 weeks. The closing date will be 13th April 2025 at 23:59.

Government Consultation

- 22 The Government consultation is seeking the views from interested parties and those who live and work across Cheshire and Warrington, on the effect of establishing a Mayoral Combined Authority in the area.
- 23 It comprises of seven questions on whether or not respondents consider a combined authority will improve the economic, social and environmental wellbeing in the Cheshire & Warrington area.
- 24 All members, businesses, and residents can submit a response, and this report seeks to confirm the response from Cheshire East Council.
- 25 Any response does not commit the Council to a Mayoral Combined Authority, this report is purely to confirm the answers to be submitted as part of the Council's response to the consultation.
- 26 The seven questions and proposed responses are outlined later in the report.
- 27 If the proposal proceeds, then Corporate Policy Committee and, following their recommendation, Full Council will be presented with a full report to consider with further detail of the proposed Combined Authority. Full Council will be required to provide final consent.

28 Similarly, the formal consent of the Councils of Cheshire West and Chester Council, and Warrington Borough Council will also be required.

Key considerations of the proposed Combined Authority outlined in the Government Consultation.

29 With the Launch of the public Consultation the Government provided further guidance and explanation of the potential workings of a combined Authority on the Gov.UK website, with the appropriate link [Cheshire and Warrington devolution - GOV.UK](#).

30 An extracted copy of the webpage is attached in Appendix B, and the key elements for noting ;

- Membership
- Decision Making
- Oversight
- Funding

Membership

31 Constituent councils - Cheshire East, Cheshire West and Chester, and Warrington Borough Councils would be the constituent councils of the proposed Combined Authority.

32 Each council would appoint two representatives to be constituent members. This means that there would be six constituent council members in total.

33 Constituent councils would each be able to appoint the same number of substitute members as they appoint constituent members to act in the absence of their constituent members.

34 The Mayor - A Combined Authority would have a Mayor, directly elected by those eligible to vote in local council across the 3 constituent council areas.

35 The first mayoral election would potentially take place on 7 May 2026, and Mayors are typically elected on 4-year terms.

36 The Mayor would be a constituent member of the Combined Authority.

37 The Mayor would be required to appoint a deputy Mayor from among the constituent members to act in their absence or if the office of the Mayor is vacant.

- 38 Non-constituent and associate members – the constituent members would be able to appoint a maximum of six non-constituent and associate members to support the delivery of their work programme.
- 39 Non-constituent members could be representatives of an organisation; for example, a district council, local NHS trust, the Police and Crime Commissioner, or a local registered provider. Associate members are named individuals who can provide particular experience or expertise – for example, on active travel, or local businesses.

Decision making at the Combined Authority

- 40 The Combined Authority's constituent members (the Mayor and six constituent council members) would be the decision makers within the Combined Authority.
- Constituent members would automatically have voting rights.
 - Non-constituent members could be given voting rights at the discretion of the Combined Authority.
 - Associate members would not be able to be given voting rights.
- 41 All members would have a single vote. The default voting arrangement for Combined Authority decisions to be approved would be a simple majority in favour, including the Mayor (i.e. 4 out of 7).
- 42 No decisions can be made at a Combined Authority meeting unless the Mayor (or deputy Mayor) and at least 4 constituent council members are present.

Oversight

- 43 To ensure effective scrutiny of decision making and audit of how resources are used, the Combined Authority would have at least one Overview and Scrutiny Committee, and one Audit Committee, in line with the requirements of the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009.

Funding

- 44 The Mayoral Combined Authority would receive devolved funding from central government, including those relating to the following policies
- Housing and regeneration.
 - Local growth.
 - Adult skills (except apprenticeships).
 - Local transport.

- 45 The Mayoral Combined Authority would therefore have control over how funding is spent in the sub region, including how it is spent to meet local needs in the area. As with all current government programmes, the precise programmes that will be devolved (and the amount of funding) will be determined through the Spending Review in June.
- 46 The Mayoral Combined Authority would also receive capacity funding from central government to help set up the new organisation.
- 47 The Mayoral Combined Authority would have the ability to introduce a mayoral precept on council tax should they choose to do so. This allows the authority to raise money to fund local priorities.

Consultation Questions

- 48 The responses to the seven questions are outlined in Appendix A, and Committee is asked to confirm the answers for submission:

Consultation and Engagement

- 49 Cheshire East Council has reported updates and matters connected with devolution to its Corporate Policy Committee on 13th June 2024 and 21st August 2024, 30th August 2024, and 6th February 2025. Corporate Policy Committee has also set up a small cross party Member Reference Group which has subsequently met on eight occasions to discuss key issues and progress.
- 50 Full Council also considered a matter concerning the terms of reference of the Joint Committee on 11th February 2024.
- 51 All Member Briefings relating to sub regional working and the wider Devolution debate have been held on 5th December 2024, 7th January 2025, and 10th March 2025
- 52 Engagement is continuing with the Cheshire and Warrington Leaders Board (including representatives from the voluntary and community sector, health, fire and police) as well as the Cheshire and Warrington Business Advisory Board (representing the private sector and business representative organisations such as the Chambers of Commerce).
- 53 Engagement has also been held previously with all local MPs.
- 54 Further to the consultation, comprehensive communications and engagement plan will be developed to ensure that stakeholders, business and residents are fully engaged in exploring the impacts of devolution.

- 55 Cheshire & Warrington Joint Committee have established a website to provide updates, information and news – the link is www.cheshireandwarringtondevolution.com.

Reasons for Recommendations

- 56 The Council wishes to respond as a consultee to the Government consultation on the proposals for devolution across Cheshire & Warrington Sub Regional area.

Other Options Considered

- 57 No further options were considered and reasons for recommendations are clarified above.

Implications and Comments

Monitoring Officer/Legal

- 58 A response submitted as part of the Government's consultation process does not commit the Council to a Mayoral Combined Authority. This report sets out the answers that are proposed to be submitted as the Council's response to the consultation.
- 59 Any decision to create a strategic/combined authority would need to be approved by Full Council for each constituent authority in due course, and are contingent on any proposals being brought forward.

Section 151 Officer/Finance

- 60 There are no immediate financial implications as a consequence of this report, as relating to the Terms of Reference of the Joint Committee. Any financial implications relating to potential devolution will be reported and considered at a later time, to respective councils and the Joint Committee.

Policy

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An open and enabling organisation <i>Ensure there is transparency in our decision making</i>	A thriving and sustainable place <i>A great place for people to live, work and visit</i> <i>Thriving urban and rural economies</i>
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Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

- 62 There are no direct equality implications as a result of this report.

Human Resources

63 There are no direct HR implications as a result of this report.

Risk Management

64 A full risk register will be established if the decision is taken to move towards devolution.

Rural Communities

65 There are no direct implications for rural communities.

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

66 There are no direct implications for children and young people as a result of this report.

Public Health

67 There are no direct public health implications.

Climate Change

68 There are no direct climate change implications as a result of this report.

Access to Information	
Contact Officer(s):	Janet Witkowski, Acting Governance, Compliance and Monitoring Officer. Phil Cresswell, Executive Director for Place. Philip.cresswell@cheshireeast.gov.uk or Janet.witkowski@cheshireeast.gov.uk
Appendices:	Appendix A – Response to Government Consultation Questions Appendix B – Extracted copy of Government Webpage
Background Papers:	Reports to Corporate Policy Committee; <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 13 February 2024• 3 June 2024

- 21 August 2024
- 6th February 2025

Report to Full Council :

- 11 December 2024

Appendix A

The Government questions along with the proposed responses are outlined below:

Consultees are to respond to the questions, that they:

- Strongly agree.
- Agree.
- Neither agree nor disagree.
- Disagree.
- Strongly disagree.
- Don't know.
- Prefer not to say.

Consultees are also be invited to explain answers.

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Question 1: To what extent do you agree or disagree that establishing a Mayoral Combined Authority over the proposed geography will deliver benefits to the area?

Response : Strongly agree

Further Detail for inclusion in the response:

- Devolution and an MCA is about making more decisions locally - we know our region and its residents best.
- Through devolution/MCA, Cheshire East will have more say, more power and more funding.
- It will help us improve our transport, invest in more training and better jobs, supporting thriving town centres and prosperous rural communities.
- Devolution/MCA will help us to ensure that Cheshire and Warrington has the healthiest, most sustainable and growing economy in the UK.
- For residents, devolution/MCA will mean better transport, more jobs and more opportunities to thrive.
- For businesses, it will drive growth and investment in our world-leading sectors - life sciences, clean energy, advanced manufacturing and

agriculture - and help provide direct support to our wider sectors (including SMEs).

- A Mayor will also support a louder voice for Cheshire and Warrington on the UK and world stage - with a seat around the table at the Council of Nations and Regions and the Mayoral Council across England.
- Devolution will help support the Cheshire East Corporate Plan and its aims and objectives.

Question 2: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the proposed governance arrangements for the Mayoral Combined Authority?

Response : Agree

Further Detail for inclusion in the response:

The response is Agree as Cheshire East would wish to see some additional improvements to governance structuring

- An MCA will ensure the Council receive the most effective powers and significant investment - with the ability to shape how investment decisions are made locally.
- All of the Councils will be represented around the decision-making table alongside the Mayor to ensure transparent and effective governance.
- A Mayor will also support a louder voice for Cheshire and Warrington on the UK and world stage - with a seat around the table at the Council of Nations and Regions and the Mayoral Council across England.
- Working as an equal partner with our neighbours - especially Greater Manchester CA and the Liverpool City Region CA.
- With respect to the quorum – Cheshire East considers the arrangements proposed have key areas that warrant improvement to ensure positive and collaborative decision making across the sub region. Accordingly, it is critical that one representative member from each council is in attendance to be quorate.
- On Finance and reserved matters all members of the constituent councils should be in agreement.

Question 3: To what extent do you agree or disagree that working across the proposed geography through the Mayoral Combined Authority will support the economy of the area?

Response : Strongly agree

Further Detail for inclusion in the response:

- Our proposals for Crewe Hub, in the south of Cheshire East is a vital cross-pollinator for the entire agenda and agreement
- In the north of the Borough we believe the opportunity of strategic investment funds and Investment Zones will be a key support for major employment locations in the Science Corridor such as Astra Zeneca and Alderley Park.
- Across Cheshire East investment funds will enable our towns and town centres to access funding to support vitality and inclusion.
- We need affordable and convenient transport, good-quality homes and a workforce with the skills our businesses need. We believe devolution and an MCA will help us to deliver against these challenges.

For example:

- Exploiting opportunities offered by the Bus Services (No.2) Bill to deliver improvements in bus services to better connect people to jobs and learning.
- Unlock transformational investment for our major mixed-use sites around our strategic transport hubs in Crewe, Chester, and Warrington - delivering jobs, homes and 21st Century transport connectivity.
- Delivering employer-led skills and training to support the labour market needs of our businesses and grow our world-leading expertise in decarbonised energy through a green skills revolution.
- Unlocking the supply of sites to deliver the right homes in the right places across our subregion.
- Expand the opportunities of our Science Corridor through investment in business-led growth and targeted innovation in our priority sectors.
- Supporting our SME community through locally based support to scale-up and access new markets.

- Improving our rural economy and the sectors therein, improving connectivity

Question 4: To what extent do you agree or disagree that working across the proposed geography through the Mayoral Combined Authority will improve social outcomes in the area?

Response : Agree

Further Detail for inclusion in the response:

The response is 'agree' as Cheshire East recognises that differing boundaries between the Cheshire & Merseyside ICB and Cheshire & Warrington Devolution area will present a further need to clarify how services can be further improved.

- Working closely with our schools and colleges to design learning and training packages which support our young people on a clear pathway to employment - with a specific focus on higher level skills for our growth sectors that need a better qualified workforce.
- Support employment opportunities in high vacancy sectors (such as health and social care) and for people who might need extra support towards accessing training and jobs.
- Working across the subregion to deliver measures to tackle health inequality - and embedding this across all policy areas for the MCA.
- Working at scale to deliver real impacts addressing fuel poverty and transportation.
- Delivering affordable housing options for our rural communities and ensuring that they are better served by good public transport to enable them to access employment and learning opportunities.
- Will provide opportunities to support Joint Strategic Needs Assessments and joint health and wellbeing strategies, and therefore the addressing the measured health & wellbeing statistics across the Borough.
- Cheshire East would wish to see targeted funding at a local sub regional level would provide investment into bus services, digital connectivity, and key services to reduce social isolation in Rural communities.
- With the Leighton Hospital redevelopment and the wider clinical & business neighbourhood opportunity, devolution can generate and enable further investment in the health sector.

Question 5: To what extent do you agree or disagree that working across the proposed geography through a Mayoral Combined Authority will improve local government services in the area?

Response : Strongly agree

Further Detail for inclusion in the response:

- Improve local government services with more powers in local control - so decisions about us aren't made in London.
- Working across key services to deliver a more cohesive approach - e.g. health and public safety. We already do this, but having a subregional authority with additional powers and statutory duties to ensure more effective delivery will result in better outcomes.
- Asset management processes and options can be maximised
- Using the opportunity of the MCA to work across the constituent councils to explore double devolution - seeking to involve and empower local communities about how we're looking to design, deliver and communicate services in a more local way and involve local people in that design and delivery.
- A Mayor will also support a louder voice for Cheshire and Warrington on the UK and world stage - with a seat around the table at the Council of Nations and Regions and the Mayoral Council across England.
- Devolution will further enable Cheshire & Warrington to continue to work cross boundary with partner Combined and Strategic Authorities such as Greater Manchester, and Liverpool City Region, as well as across national boundaries with North Wales.

Question 6: To what extent do you agree or disagree that working across the proposed geography through a Mayoral Combined Authority will improve the local natural environment and overall national environment?

Response : Strongly agree

Further Detail for inclusion in the response:

- Better co-ordination of local energy plans to deliver a net zero electricity grid that has the capacity to deliver the power businesses and homes in

all locations in C&W will need if we are to deliver C&W's net zero ambition by 2045.

- Local responsibility to encourage sharing of best environmental practice and approaches to reduce flooding and improve water quality.
- Rural communities can benefit from devolution as the key to unlock and maximise natural environments, habitats and agriculture as a key sector within our approaches to the rural economy

Question 7: To what extent do you agree or disagree that working across the proposed geography through the Mayoral Combined Authority will support the interests and needs of local communities and reflect local identities?

Response: Strongly agree

Further Detail for inclusion in the response:

- Exploring opportunities of 'double devolution' whereby Cheshire East can deliver 'onward' devolution (where devolution happens twice – first from national to regional and then from regional to local) and putting more power into the hands of our local residents across services.
- Building on many years of successful joint working, investment funding will enable additional support for projects and programmes of Town & Parish Council's, thereby supporting the interests of local communities.
- Devolution will provide opportunities to support our Town Centres, promoting their revitalisation and regeneration.
- Want to embed culture, heritage and tourism at the heart of our subregional agenda - celebrating the diversity of our local identities as well as the strength of our subregional proposition.
- Our industrial heritage in and round Crewe will be vital to recognise
- Cheshire East, and the Cheshire and Warrington area, has unique benefits underpinned by its Rurality, and therefore investment and opportunities from devolution should be key and instrumental in this respect. Investment in our Rural Communities in connectivity, infrastructure, and affordable housing should be a clear focus going forward, and to support for the broad spectrum of businesses and employment.

- Cheshire East would wish to explore further how devolution, and the potential of devolving powers from DEFRA, can provide stability, support, and investment into the rural economy and rural communities.
- Devolution will raise the profile of our subregion and highlighting our specific issues on a regional and national platform.