

**OPEN**

**30 May 2025**

## **Devolution Timeline: Latest Guidance and Information**

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**Report of: Cheshire and Warrington Devolution Programme Steering Group**

**Report Reference No: JC/02/25-26**

<b>Significant/Key Decision?</b>	<b>Yes/No</b>
Cheshire West and Chester	No
Warrington	No
Cheshire East	No

### **Purpose of Report**

- 1 This report is an information report to inform the Joint Committee of the latest anticipated timeline from Government, specifically via the Devolution Team in the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG).
- 2 It outlines key milestone dates from Government – and considers implications across the local decision-making timeline.

### **Executive Summary**

- 3 Following the announcement of Cheshire and Warrington as part of the England Devolution Priority Programme in February 2025, the Government confirmed an initial outline timeline. This has recently been updated and is outlined in this report. It remains a challenging timeline but gives more clarity to the future work programme. It should be noted that the date for a potential future mayoral election on 7 May 2026 has not changed.
- 4 This updated timeline reaffirms that, given tight delivery timelines, preparatory works will need to commence before the Secretary of State decision on the Statutory Consultation and Council decisions from the Local Authorities within Cheshire and Warrington. Resourcing implications of this are dealt with in an accompanying report for this Committee.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The Cheshire and Warrington Joint Committee is recommended to:

1. Note the latest overall anticipated timeline of the Devolution Priority Programme.
2. Note the potential impacts on the local decision-making timeline for each council in Cheshire and Warrington.

### Report Detail

- 5 We recognise that meeting the overall timescales to work towards a Mayoral Combined Authority by 2026 will be challenging. It is also recognised that this process is subject to Secretary of State decision following the recently concluded Government-led Statutory Consultation process and decisions of the three Local Authorities in Cheshire and Warrington. It is anticipated that the Secretary of State decision will be confirmed in June 2025.
- 6 High level information sessions have commenced between all the areas in the Devolution Priority Programme and the lead Whitehall Department (MHCLG). These have been generic in nature to date. We expect more detailed engagement on implementation impacts for devolution in Cheshire and Warrington to commence from around mid-June, and after confirmation of the Secretary of State decision on the Statutory Consultation (also referred to in this report as the statutory test decision).
- 7 There are 6 areas within the Devolution Priority Programme (all subject to Secretary of State decision on the Statutory Consultation). These are Cheshire and Warrington, Cumbria, Norfolk and Suffolk, Greater Essex, Sussex and Brighton, and Hampshire and the Solent. Aside from Cheshire and Warrington and Cumbria, all the other areas are considering concurrent local government reorganisation. We are engaging with these areas, as well as those areas who have recently been through the process of creating a Combined Authority and hosting mayoral elections, to share learning and best practice. We will also be working closely with the Local Government Association to ensure that we provide the support and space for Members to fully explore the implications of devolution.
- 8 The date of the conclusion of the Government's Spending Review is fixed at 11<sup>th</sup> June 2025. We expect this to confirm the overall funding offer for the Devolution Priority Areas.
- 9 Subject to the statutory test decision, the conclusion of the Spending Review will trigger the more detailed discussions on a Cheshire and Warrington Devolution Agreement. This will be based on the Devolution Framework outlined in the Government's English Devolution White Paper (December 2024) and the investment package outlined in the Spending Review. We expect the agreement to include detail across:

- (a) Powers and functions for the Cheshire and Warrington Combined Authority
  - (b) Confirmation of the date that key programmes and powers would be transferred
  - (c) Governance arrangements
  - (d) The funding offer for Cheshire and Warrington
- 10 We anticipate we will be in a position to review a draft agreement for Cheshire and Warrington in mid to late June 2025. Officials have indicated that this agreement should be concluded by the end of July 2025.
- 11 In parallel with the development of a Cheshire and Warrington Devolution Agreement will be the development of the Statutory Instrument – the legislation that will allow for the creation of a Cheshire and Warrington Combined Authority. Whilst this will be primarily a technical document, it will set out the initial core governance and set up arrangements of the new Authority. This will establish how the Combined Authority will work – including how it will make decisions across the constituent councils, the role of the mayor, how it will maintain effective engagement with stakeholders and communities, deliver any statutory duties and ensure transparent and accountable delivery of its powers and funding. We expect to complete the detail of the Statutory Instrument by the early autumn ahead of the legislation then going through Parliament. This Parliamentary process is expected to run through the autumn into early 2026. A Cheshire and Warrington Combined Authority could be created in January or February 2026, with Mayoral Elections taking place on 7<sup>th</sup> May 2026.
- 12 This Statutory Instrument will be focused on the legislation needed to create a Cheshire and Warrington Combined Authority. The legislation that will be required to increase the number of devolution powers and devolved programmes to Cheshire and Warrington will be contained within the English Devolution Bill. This is now expected to be introduced in Parliament before the end of July 2025. This will contain the key elements needed to establish additional powers and funding across areas such as transport, skills, housing, employment, local energy provision, business support and regeneration.

### **Local Decision Making**

- 13 This indicative timeline from MHCLG is likely to have some impact on our own anticipated timeline (which has always been subject to confirmation from Government).
- 14 We have been working to an initial ‘in principle’ decision by councils in July 2025 with a further decision in October 2025. This was based on information received from Government earlier in the year. Given this latest indicative timeline, we may need to be prepared for a decision in each of the three councils to take place in July 2025 on the Cheshire and Warrington Devolution Agreement (and associated governance, powers and investment). This simplifies the process and ensures an early decision from councils with more detailed information upon which to make those decisions. This will provide

greater assurance on any activity required to prepare for devolution from July onwards.

- 15 This potential shift in the programme can be managed effectively within the agreed work programme (and aligns with the cost plan outlined in the associated report at this meeting). Officers across the councils are preparing for this scenario.

### **Reasons for Recommendations**

- 16 This is an information report to ensure the Joint Committee has the latest information from Government on the anticipated timeline for the creation of a Cheshire and Warrington Combined Authority with devolved powers and investment.

### **Comments from the Business Advisory Board (BAB)**

- 17 The Cheshire and Warrington Business Advisory Board would be supportive of a timeframe which enables effective decision making from the three councils as early as possible – ensuring that we can secure all the benefits of devolution under the ‘fast track’ status that being in the government’s Devolution Priority Programme brings. Every month of hesitation is a month in which real money, jobs and projects flows to our neighbours instead of to Cheshire and Warrington.

### **Other Consultation and Engagement**

- 18 A communications and engagement plan is now live – this is seeking to ensure that stakeholders across Cheshire and Warrington are fully informed of the process and how they can get involved.
- 19 As the detail of the elements of the timeline outlined in this report emerge, they will be integrated into our communications, supporting effective engagement in the development of the combined authority.
- 20 We will also be looking in detail at the findings of the statutory consultation once these are released by Government, to review and take account of public feedback during the Government’s consultation process.

### **Implications and Comments**

#### *Legal implications*

- 21 There are no immediate legal implications in this information report. As each element of the development process for the creation of a Combined Authority (and its associated governance) is developed, all legal implications will be considered and communicated.

#### *Finance implications*

- 22 The financial implications associated with supporting the devolution programme are set out within an associated report, ‘Devolution Work Programme Highlight Report, Future Work Planning and Cost Plan’.

- 23 As each element of the development process for the creation of a Combined Authority (and its associated funding) is developed, all financial implications will be considered and communicated.

#### *Risk Management*

- 24 A full risk register is in place and managed via Programme Management, reporting monthly to the Devolution Programme Steering Group.
- 25 It is noted that this outline timeline is indicative and subject to change. The Programme Team will remain in regular contact with Government and ensure that any timeline changes are reflected in on-going programme management.

#### *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion*

- 26 There are no immediate ED&I impacts. ED&I will be fully reflected in all outcomes across future Devolution Delivery.

#### *Policy*

- 27 Any devolution agreement would support the Cheshire and Warrington vision to be the healthiest, most sustainable, inclusive and growing economy in the UK.

<b>Access to Information</b>	
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Appendices:	NA
Background Papers:	Joint Committee Report 31 <sup>st</sup> January 2025: Devolution Work Programme.