



Cheshire +
Warrington

Cheshire and Warrington Devolution – 24 Questions



Devolution – national picture



- Devolution has been around for over 10 years – it is now an established architecture across England, with deals covering 60% of the English population
- Deals providing powers to local leaders now cover nearly 34 million people in England – including nine of our 10 largest cities and 90% of the North
- The current government wants to continue with devolution, but faster – hence the Devolution Priority Programme (DPP)
- English Devolution White Paper was published in December 2024 – sets out the plan for devolution going forward
- Devolution is the default setting – ambition for the whole of England to be devolved
- If we don't work together to get the best deal now, it will be done to us further down the line
- The White Paper clearly states that the best deals come with a Mayor – Mayoral Combined Authorities are given greater powers/funding than those without an elected Mayor

Devolution Priority Programme (DPP)

- A fast-track programme to securing a devolution agreement
- Confirmed in February 2025 – Cheshire and Warrington + five other areas:
 - Cumbria
 - Greater Essex
 - Hampshire and Solent
 - Norfolk and Suffolk
 - Sussex and Brighton
- Includes support and capacity funding from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG), and the network of other areas on the programme
- Mayoral elections to be held in May 2026 (subject to council and government decisions)

Government consultation



- Government carried out a statutory consultation across all DPP areas – 17 February to 13 April
- Consultation sought views, particularly from interested parties, including those who live and work across Cheshire and Warrington, on the effect of establishing a Mayoral Combined Authority in the area
- **We are awaiting the outcome of the consultation**



24 Questions

1) Is it another layer of bureaucracy?

- **No** – devolution shifts powers and funding from government to Cheshire and Warrington
- Powers over transport, skills, housing and growth move to local control
- Major decisions about Cheshire and Warrington will be made in the area by local leaders, closer to the people they affect
- The three councils will remain focused on their local services

2) It's happening too fast – why 2026?

- The Devolution Priority Programme (DPP) does mean we need to work at pace, which is the government's requirement
- Cheshire and Warrington has been working together towards devolution in a number of ways for the last 10 years
- We have an opportunity right now to secure additional funding and powers for Cheshire and Warrington, and we cannot miss this opportunity
- Not taking advantage of the DPP would push us to the back of the queue
- By acting now, we can negotiate a better deal – if we delay, and we run the risk of securing far less funding

3) What is the cost of setting up a Combined Authority?



- Individual councils will **not** have to fund this – it will **not** be a cost on council budgets
- Council contribution is in officer time to support the programme
- Set up costs will be funded by **(subject to Joint Committee agreement on 30 May 2025)**:
 - Central government – £1million
 - Previously agreed surplus from Enterprise Zone (Enterprise Cheshire and Warrington) – £250k
 - LGA Grant – £25k
 - **Total estimated cost – £1.275million**

4) How much will the Mayoral election cost?

- Estimated cost is £2.5million
- This cost is expected to be funded by the first year of funding received by the new Combined Authority, this will be confirmed by the shadow Combined Authority once set-up
- The three councils are not expected to have to cashflow the cost of the election, as resources will be used from Enterprise Cheshire and Warrington and MHCLG capacity funding if needed.

5) What is the cost of running/operating the Combined Authority?

- The new Combined Authority will be funded by a combination of new government funding and pre-existing local funding
- We will not know the size, shape or responsibilities of the Combined Authority until after the government's comprehensive spending review in June

6) How much will the Mayor be paid?



- The salary of the Mayor will be in comparison to other Mayoral Combined Authorities
- It is for the shadow Combined Authority, with its own governing body, to determine the salary
- Benchmarking (2022/23):
 - **GMCA** – £114,000
 - **LCR** – £96,000
 - **West Yorkshire** – £105,000
 - **South Yorkshire** – £79,000

7) Why do we need an elected Mayor?

- Areas with an elected mayor get the greatest powers and funding
- A Mayor will provide a stronger voice for Cheshire and Warrington with a direct line into government
- They will have a seat at the table where decisions that affect our area are made
- We don't know who the Mayor will be – candidates will be requested to put their names forward before the elections, and they will produce their own manifestos in line with usual election procedures
- Candidates could be from a political party, or they could be an individual with no party affiliation
- Mayors cannot have other political roles such as an MP or councillor

8) What if one council votes 'no'



- Cheshire and Warrington will be removed from the DPP and go to the back of the queue for devolution
- Each council area will miss out on significant funding for transport, bus services, investment in our towns, skills funding, support for business growth etc.
- We will not be prioritised by government for any 'levelling up' type funding
- Cheshire and Warrington would miss out vital additional funding each year
- Eventually, the government will create the Combined Authority by default (ministerial directive) – several years delayed and without our input

9) What is the council's role in the Combined Authority?

- Each council will make up two of the seven constituent members of the Combined Authority's main board/committee
- The elected Mayor will be the other constituent member
- They will also have members on the Scrutiny Committee and Audit and Governance Committee
- Each council, through its members, will have a key role in shaping the policy direction of the Combined Authority, and in making key decisions
- For voting purposes, the councils will have two votes each (six in total) and the Mayor will have one

10) Will the councils still be Unitary Authorities?

- **Yes** – each council will still be a Unitary Authority
- Councillors will have the same functions and responsibilities as they currently have
- The new Combined Authority will focus on regional strategies and policies, and be responsible for setting a Transport Plan for the area
- Individual councils will continue to deliver services for their residents/boroughs

11) What is the scrutiny of the Combined Authority?

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

12) What is double devolution and how can Town and Parish Councils benefit?

- Devolution is about making decision making more local – doing things and deciding things at the appropriate level
- The Combined Authority will focus on sub-regional decisions around economic growth, skills, planning and transport that were previously led by government
- Double devolution is about Town and Parish Councils taking on services and decisions that are currently the responsibility of Cheshire East, Cheshire West and Chester, and Warrington Borough Councils
- Double devolution is about starting the conversation on what appetite Town and Parish Councils have for this, and what services and decisions they would be interested in managing

13) What funding will we get?



- The final details are not known yet, but it will include a major, long-term investment in our future
- We will have more information following the government's Spending Review in June
- We could expect a deal worth up to **£20 million a year for 30 years**—like other Combined Authorities
- Plus, devolved budgets for transport, skills, housing and growth
- It will be flexible funding that we control, tailored to local priorities
- It will allow local leaders to plan and make decisions for the long-term, plus the potential to apply for much more

14) What is an 'Established Combined Authority'?

- A Mayoral Combined Authority with a strong track record of delivery and budget management can request access to a deeper level of devolution, including an integrated settlement. This is called an 'Established Combined Authority'
- Criteria for accessing Established Combined Authority:
 - The Combined Authority has been in existence, with a directly elected Mayor in place, for at least 18 months
 - The Combined Authority has a published Local Assurance Framework in place
 - In the previous 18 months, the Combined Authority has not:
 - Been the subject of a Best Value Notice, a MHCLG commissioned independent review, or a statutory inspection or intervention
 - Been subject to any ongoing (or implementing) recommendations from an externally mandated independent review
 - Had material accounting concerns covering the current or previous financial year, which relate to the Strategic Authority's ability to manage public money

15) What is the impact of the financial position of the other councils?

- There is **no** financial impact of any one council's financial performance on another council, or on the new Combined Authority
- The Combined Authority's budget and individual council budgets/debt position are completely separate
- The impact on individual council budgets will be positive in certain areas, as the Combined Authority may commission work from the councils and funds for new economic growth projects will flow into the Combined Authority from government

16) How will devolution benefit rural communities?

- Bringing decision making more local – rural communities will be nearer those making the decisions that affect them, in particular the Mayor of the Combined Authority who will be directly elected by residents
- Businesses based in rural areas or rurally-based business hubs will benefit from the support offered through the Combined authority and Growth Hub
- Businesses in rural areas will be well placed to feed into the Combined Authority around the skills they need across Cheshire and Warrington to support their business growth
- Rural communities will have a strong voice in identifying what improved connectivity will look like for them, including inputting on plans for improved bus services, and initiatives such as Demand Responsive Transport, as well as enhanced local budgets for active travel and highways schemes
- Supporting key sectors to develop, including life sciences and animal life sciences (a key strength for Cheshire and Warrington), advanced manufacturing and visitor economy (which is heavily focussed on our rural areas, diverse market towns, and special rural landscapes)
- The Mayor and Board of the Combined Authority will engage with local communities around the future economic prosperity of our rural areas, and market towns and villages, to ensure economic growth benefits all and is genuinely inclusive
- The Mayor's powers over spatial planning will ensure balanced local neighbourhoods and more housing for families in rural areas to create sustainable communities and high-quality placemaking

17) When will each Full Council consider this?

- We are waiting for government to confirm that we have passed the statutory test following analysis of the consultation responses
- The timeline we are currently working to is:
 - Report on next steps and setting up of the shadow Combined Authority to Joint Committee in July, where a recommendation will be made to the three councils
 - Each council's Full Council will consider this at special meetings in September
- The above is subject to government confirming we have passed the statutory test following analysis of the consultation responses

18) What happens between now and the setting up of the Combined Authority?

- We are awaiting the government's decision to whether we have passed the statutory consultation test, which is expected towards the end of May
- A report providing more detail will be submitted to each council's Full Council meetings in July for a decision
- A 'shadow' Combined Authority would then be set up to develop a shadow organisation to ensure the Combined Authority is ready to operate immediately after the Mayoral election
- Recruitment of key interim staff will be required
- The set-up costs are funded – at no cost to individual councils

19) What consultation will there be with the public?

- We are running a local engagement programme to gather feedback from residents, communities and businesses
- Programme includes:
 - **Community pop-up events** – one in each council area
 - **Community focus groups** – one in each council area
 - **Youth engagement sessions** – one in each council area + potential regional event in partnership with Chester Zoo's Youth Board

20) How will the Mayoral election work?

- Usual election procedures/process
- Government has set **Thursday 7 May 2026** as the election day for Mayoral elections for areas on the DPP
- Candidates can be individuals or representatives of a political party
- Further detail expected – our assumptions are:
 - Candidates will need to submit an intention to stand (circa three to four months before election)
 - Candidates launch their manifestos (eight weeks before election)
 - Pre-election period in place (six weeks before election)

21) Where will the Combined Authority office be?

- Unsure at this time – Cheshire and Warrington is a large geographical area
- An independent evaluation process will be undertaken
- An interim solution may be required

22) Will there be a Mayoral precept for the Combined Authority?

- Not necessarily – this will be for the Combined Authority to decide, should they wish to generate more funding over and above that received from government
- Funding from a precept can only be used for specific purposes/projects
- Out of the current 12 Combined Authorities (including Greater London Authority) – only four have opted for a further Mayoral precept
- For Band D households:
 - Greater London – £171.25 (universal free school meals, crime prevention, homelessness)
 - GMCA – £42.75 (homelessness reduction programme, free bus travel for 16–18-year-olds, public ownership bus company)
 - LCR – £24 (programmes for digital connectivity, tidal energy, bus franchising)
 - Cambridge and Peterborough – £36 (funds 53 bus routes across the area)

23) Is devolution the same as Local Government Reorganisation (LGR)?

- **No** – although included in the White Paper, devolution is completely separate from LGR
- There are no LGR impacts for Cheshire and Warrington
- There are no boundary changes
- There will be no effect on Town and Parish Councils

24) Will each council still have their own Mayor?

- **Yes** – the Combined Authority has no impact on such functions
- Each council will continue to have its own Mayor with civic responsibilities
- A civic Mayor is mainly a ceremonial figure, chosen by council members – they do not have formal powers
- The elected Mayor, chosen by residents through a democratic election process, leads a board with councillors from each council



Any questions?

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