



Cheshire and Warrington Combined Shadow Authority Board

Date : Friday, 28 November 2025
Venue : Warrington Council Chamber - Warrington Town Hall,
Sankey Street, Warrington, WA1 1UH
Time : 10.30 am
Webcast Link : [Home - Warrington Borough Council Webcasting](#)

Agenda

PART A - Open to the Press and Public

1 Apologies for Absence

2 Declarations of Interest

Members to declare any interest in relation to items on the agenda, following consideration of the Code of Conduct under the following categories:

- Disclosable Pecuniary Interests (DPI)
- Other Registerable Interests (ORI)
- Non-Registerable Interests (NRI)

3 Minutes

Members are requested to approve the minutes of the first meeting of the Shadow Board held on 31 October 2025, attached.

4 Public Speaking Time

A total period of 15 minutes is allocated for members of the public to address Council on any matter relevant to items of business on this agenda.

Members of the public wishing to address Council are required to register their intention with the Director of Governance no less than two

(Pages 5 - 12)

clear working days prior to the meeting, via the officer contact details at the foot of this agenda.

5 Cheshire and Warrington Combined Authority Governance Update Report

(Pages 13 - 22)

Members are requested to consider the attached report with updates on the following:-

- 1) Membership
- 2) Local Constitution
- 3) Local Assurance Framework

Councillor Hans Mundry to lead on this item.

6 Cheshire and Warrington Joint Devolution Task Group

(Pages 23 - 26)

The Board are requested to note the feedback from the Cross Party Working Group, attached.

Councillor Hans Mundry to lead on this item.

7 Strategic Update

(Pages 27 - 34)

The Board are requested to note the attached report, to include updates on the following:-

- 1) Sustainable and Inclusive Economic Strategy (SIES)
- 2) Developing in Rural Areas
- 3) Opportunities for Growth
- 4) The Great North
- 5) The Budget

Councillor Michael Gorman to lead on this item.

8 Cheshire and Warrington Business Advisory Board Update

The Board are requested to note the update from the Business Advisory Board, attached as annex to Item 7.

Andrea Stott to lead on this item.

9 Get Cheshire and Warrington Working Plan

(Pages 35 - 102)

Members are requested to consider the Get Cheshire and Warrington Working Plan update, report and appendix attached.

Councillor Karen Shore to lead on this item.

10	Becoming a Marmot Combined Authority Devolution Area	(Pages 103 - 108)
	The Board are requested to consider the attached report regarding the Marmot Priorities.	
	Councillor Jean Flaherty to lead on this item.	
11	Devolution Programme Update	(Pages 109 - 114)
	Members are requested to note the attached report providing an update on the following:-	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Recruitment 2) Delivery/Budget 3) Risk Register 	
	Councillor Hans Mundry to lead on this item.	
12	Shadow Board Forward Plan	(Pages 115 - 116)
	Members are requested to note the Forward Plan.	
	Councillor Nick Mannion to lead on this item.	
13	Exclusion of the Press and Public	
	The Shadow Board may decide that the press and public be excluded from the remaining part of the meeting pursuant to Section 100 (A)4 of the Local Government Act 1972 on the grounds that discussions may involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in the provisions of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972 and public interest would not be served in publishing the information.	

Part B - Press and Public Excluded

Date of Publication: 20 November 2025

For further information, please contact:

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**CHESHIRE AND WARRINGTON COMBINED
AUTHORITY SHADOW BOARD**

31 OCTOBER 2025

(10.30 am - 11.45 am)

PRESENT: Councillors Jean Flaherty, Louise Gittins, Michael Gorman, Hans Mundry, Nick Mannion and Karen Shore

Apologies for absence were received from Gemma Davies, Phillip Creswell, Kevin O'Keefe, Rob Polkinghorne, Steve Purdham and Sandra Rothwell

Visiting Members: Councillors Stewart Gardiner (Cheshire East Council), Paul Donovan, Carol Gahan, Lyn Gibbon, Charles Hardy and Ted Lush (Cheshire West and Chester Council), Mark Browne and Sharon Harris (Warrington Borough Council).

Officers in attendance:	Delyth Curtis	Chief Executive, Cheshire West and Chester Council
	Philip Cox	Chief Executive, Enterprise Cheshire and Warrington
	Melissa Crellin	Enterprise Cheshire and Warrington
	Andrea Stott	Business Advisory Board
	Steve Park	Chief Executive, Warrington Borough Council
	Peter Skates	Growth Director, Cheshire East Council
	Dan Price	Police and Crime Commissioner
	Damon Taylor	Chief Executive, Office of the PCC
	Adam Simpson	Monitoring Officer, Warrington Borough Council
	Elena Lloyd	Head of Communications, Cheshire West and Chester Council
	Laura Edwards	Senior Transformation Manager, Cheshire West and Chester Council
	Deborah Ridgeley	Democracy Business Manager, Cheshire West and Chester Council

1 MEMBERSHIP AND TERMS OF REFERENCE

Adam Simpson, Deputy Monitoring Officer, Warrington Borough Council, opened the inaugural meeting of the Combined Authority Shadow Board.

The Board members and all those present were invited to introduce themselves.

The circulated Terms of Reference were referred to, and the Board were asked to note this published document with the following amendment:-

- Paragraphs 5.1 and 6.2 which contain the reference to Vice-Chair be amended to read Deputy Chair.

The membership of the Board, previously recommended by the Cheshire and Warrington Joint Committee and approved by the respective Council/Cabinet meetings of Cheshire East, Cheshire West and Chester and Warrington Borough Council's was referred to. It was suggested that two, non-constituent (non-voting) members could be added to the Board, to represent the Business Advisory Board and the Police and Crime Commissioner, with further consideration to be given to a representative of the Workforce Engagement Workstream. This suggestion would be taken back to the Workstream by Councillor Hans Mundry (Chair of the Workstream) and an update would be provided to the Board in due course.

Visiting Members: Councillor Lynn Gibbon, Cheshire West and Chester Councillor, spoke in relation to this item. Councillor Gibbon queried the membership of the Board and requested that consideration should be given to a wider political representation on the Board, to include the largest opposition groups from each local authority.

Councillor Stewart Gardiner, Cheshire East Councillor, spoke in relation to this item. Councillor Gardiner confirmed he agreed with Councillor Gibbon's concerns about political representation on the Board and requested that this be given further consideration to reflect the political makeup of the authorities and across the Cheshire and Warrington area.

DECIDED: that

- (1) the published Membership and Terms of Reference report be noted, subject to the amendment set out above;
- (2) the comments expressed by the Visiting Members be noted;
- (3) the Police and Crime Commissioner and a representative from the Business Advisory Board be appointed as non-constituent (non-voting) members of the Board; and
- (4) the Workforce Engagement Workstream be requested to consider a representative as a further non-constituent member, to be considered at a meeting of the Board in due course.

2 APPOINTMENT OF CHAIR

Adam Simpson, Deputy Monitoring Officer, Warrington Borough Council invited nominations for Chair of the Shadow Board.

Councillor Nick Mannion, Leader, Cheshire East Council moved, duly seconded by Councillor Hans Mundry, Leader, Warrington Borough Council that Councillor Louise Gittins, Leader, Cheshire West and Chester Council be appointed as Chair of the Shadow Board.

DECIDED: That Councillor Louise Gittins be appointed as Chair of the Shadow Board.

Councillor Louise Gittins in the Chair

On accepting the appointment, Councillor Gittins referred to the work and documents already completed and expressed her thanks on behalf of the Board for the continued support by all the organisations and stakeholders involved in reaching this important stage in the devolution process. The Chair continued, that this was an opportunity to not only build on a strong and varied economy but also an area where everyone would benefit, from improving skills, better housing and transport across both the urban and rural areas of the sub-region.

3 APPOINTMENT OF DEPUTY CHAIR

The Chair invited nominations for Deputy Chair, and Councillor Nick Mannion was proposed by Councillor Karen Shore, duly seconded by Councillor Hans Mundry.

AGREED: That

Councillor Nick Mannion be appointed as Deputy Chair for the Shadow Board for the remainder of the Municipal Year.

On accepting his appointment, the Deputy Chair expressed his view that devolution was an opportunity for all across the sub-region and he was confident the Shadow Board would share his view that there was a commitment to leave no-one behind and all could share in the economic prosperity.

4 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were submitted by Steve Purdham, Business Advisory Board, and Andrea Stott was in attendance in his place.

5 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Members did not declare any interests in items listed on the agenda.

6 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME/OPEN SESSION

There were no requests to speak during Public Question Time.

The Chair reminded the Board that this item was an opportunity for any resident to address the Board on items listed on the agenda, and that the meetings would take place at different venues across the sub-region.

There was one member of the public in attendance, with 8 visiting members also present.

7 SUSTAINABLE AND INCLUSIVE ECONOMIC STRATEGY (SIES) REPORT

Councillor Michael Gorman, Deputy Leader, Cheshire East Council, referred to the circulated report and appendices in relation to the Sustainable and Inclusive Economic Strategy (SIES). The Strategy had been developed over 3 years, which included an extensive consultation involving residents, the private sector, voluntary groups and the community across the sub-region. The Strategy would enable the delivery of the agreed Vision across urban and rural areas by 2045, with the next steps being to coproduce a clear road map for the next 5 to 10 years. The Strategy reflected more than the work of the local authorities, and Enterprise Cheshire and Warrington but involved the private sector, communities, further education, skills providers across the sub-region. This coproduction approach would continue and would be discussed and highlighted in the Conference to be

held in early 2026. The documents also contained indicators to enable progress to be tracked, which would be monitored and amended regularly.

Councillor Nick Mannion, Leader, Cheshire East Council, stated that the Strategy was ambitious, setting out the goal that Cheshire and Warrington should become the fastest growing economy in the North, drawing on the work already underway securing industrial opportunities in clean energy, life sciences and advanced manufacturing to deliver well paid jobs for all. Councillor Mannion also highlighted the £6bn being invested as part of the HyNet Carbon Capture and decarbonisation in Ellesmere Port, the £17bn being invested in Nuclear Power and support for Bentley in Cheshire East for high quality vehicle manufacturing as examples of investments that would bring new jobs and new opportunities to Cheshire and Warrington.

The Chair referred to a written comment submitted by Councillor Ted Lush, Cheshire West and Chester Council, and it was confirmed that a written response would be provided.

Visiting Member Councillor Stewart Gardiner spoke on this item. Whilst he welcomed the Strategy and overall he was in support of it, he expressed his concerns about the document restricting the new Combined Authority ability to react to changes following the Mayoral election and how essential it was to have all-party support to implement all aspects of the Strategy.

Councillor Karen Shore spoke in support of the Strategy, and commented that the Combined Authority would have the ability to amend and adapt the Strategy. There would be Scrutiny and Audit of the processes followed by the Board once it was formally created, and that as legislative requirement, a new Combined Authority had to have a Strategy.

Ms Andrea Stott, Business Advisory Board, welcomed the opportunity to address the Shadow Board, on the historic achievement of the inaugural meeting. The Business Advisory Board had 20 volunteer members who were fully in support of devolution and represented a wide range of business interests from across the sub-region. It was its view that the Strategy would provide the strong foundation for devolution which itself could be the catalyst for a better life for Cheshire and Warrington residents.

Mr Dan Price, Police and Crime Commissioner and non-constituent member of the Shadow Board, stated he was also in support of the Strategy. He could see the importance of having a strong local economy with the opportunities for fair employment. Crime and re-offending were linked with lack of employment opportunities, and the Fresh Start Programme funded by the PCC supported improvements in skills, access to training and helped give residents hope.

The Chair welcomed all the comments made and reminded everyone that as a living document it would be updated and amended. The importance of the Strategy was far-reaching and because of this, it was suggested that all future reports being considered by the Shadow Board should be referenced to the Strategy.

Councillor Michael Gorman moved the recommendations, seconded by Councillor Nick Mannion.

DECIDED: That

- (1) the feedback on the draft Sustainable and Inclusive Economic Strategy (SIES) as described in the Consultation Report, be noted;
- (2) the proposed Sustainable and Inclusive Economic Strategy be noted;
- (3) the publication of the SIES, subject to making any final changes to reflect feedback from members of the Shadow Board, be agreed, and authority be delegated to Growth Directors to make those changes in consultation with the Chair and Deputy Chair of the Shadow Board and the Chief Executive of Enterprise Cheshire and Warrington;
- (4) Enterprise Cheshire and Warrington's proposals to produce companion documents between now and Next March 2026 explaining the impact of the SIES on different communities in Cheshire and Warrington, in particular people living in rural and in urban areas be noted;
- (5) the SIES to be kept up to date as a "living document" and that once the Combined Authority was formally established in 2026 it should be invited to review an updated version of the SIES; and
- (6) every report considered by the Shadow Board to include the reference to the SIES and the report template to be amended.

8 MOVING TO THE TRANSITION PHRASE OF THE CHESHIRE AND WARRINGTON DEVOLUTION PROGRAMME

Councillor Karen Shore, Deputy Leader, Cheshire West and Chester Council, referred to the Transition Phase of the Cheshire and Warrington Devolution Programme report. It was stated that this would be first of many operational reports, with more details to be considered at future meetings.

The secondment opportunities set out in paragraph 3.4 were outlined, along with the ongoing discussions with Trade Union representatives and frequent FAQ's for employees across all four authorities. The estimated costs for the recruitment would be monitored and reported regularly, along with the 2026/2027 Business Plan. It was anticipated that for the 2 senior positions, a market testing exercise would be undertaken, which would include full HR support and Trade Union involvement.

Visting Member Councillor Stewart Gardiner spoke in relation to this item. Councillor Gardiner referred to the fixed term secondment opportunities and expressed concern that this could restrict the ability of the Elected Mayor to amend or vary the officer's structure once the new authority was operational.

The recommendations were moved by Councillor Karen Shore and seconded by Councillor Jean Flaherty.

DECIDED: That

- (1) the update and early priorities for the work programme arrangements as outlined in the report be noted; and
- (2) the commencement of an interim recruitment process based on secondment and a limited external market test for the interim “day one” structure of the Cheshire and Warrington Combined Authority as outlined in the report, be approved, and the Chief Executive of Cheshire West and Chester Council be delegated the authority to make any offers of interim or seconded employment on an “in principle” basis, to be confirmed as soon as possible for the Combined Authority.

9 BUDGET UPDATE

Councillor Hans Mundry, Leader, Warrington Borough Council, referred to the published report of the Devolution Steering Group which provided an update on the Budget.

Councillor Mundry stated that there was an anticipated underspend of just over £300k, which would be utilised to fund new commitments during 2026 as no additional funding would be available. Councillor Mundry outlined the statutory appointments that were required as part of the mobilisation to the new authority and the governance, systems and procedures that would be necessary. Regular budget reports would be provided to the Board.

The recommendations were moved by Councillor Hans Mundry and seconded by Councillor Karen Shore.

DECIDED: That

- (1) the devolution programme to date has been delivered within approved budget (by £0.3m against its original scope) and is forecast to remain within budget for the remainder of the year be noted;
- (2) the scope of the programme be extended to include funding the initial costs of recruiting and employing key roles for the Combined Authority and necessary costs to mobilise the new body before April 2026, subject to costs remaining within the already approved £1.275m budget, be approved;
- (3) an amendment to the financial principles for the programme to allow partial reimbursement of the cost of in-kind staff support provided to the Combined Authority, subject to affordability within the approved £1.275m budgets after all other relevant costs are met, be approved; and
- (4) the appointment of Cheshire West and Chester Council as the accountable body for funding received on behalf of the Shadow Combined Authority (such as the Capacity Grant) be approved.

10 SHADOW BOARD FORWARD PLAN

Councillor Jean Flaherty referred to the circulated Forward Plan. As this was the first meeting of the Board, the Plan was only in an outline form but would evolve as the Board evolved, and would remain an important document to guide Board

members, residents, businesses and stakeholders on the journey to make a difference across Cheshire and Warrington.

AGREED: That the Forward Plan be noted.

Chairman

Date

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Cheshire and Warrington Shadow Board

Date of meeting:	28 th November 2025
Report of:	Cllr Hans Mundry Leader, Warrington Borough Council
Report Lead Officer:	Vanessa Whiting, Chair of the Devolution Governance Workstream
Title:	Cheshire and Warrington Combined Authority Governance Update Report

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1. To approve the appointment of a representative of the Workforce Engagement Board and the voluntary, community, faith and social enterprise sector as non-constituent, non-voting members on the Shadow Board during the interim shadow period.
- 1.2. To update members of the Shadow Board on progress of the development of the Local Constitution and Local Assurance Framework – both critical documents to ensure effective future governance and financial propriety for the Cheshire and Warrington Combined Authority.
- 1.3. Outlining early thinking on mitigations to concerns raised during consultation and giving an outline across timeline and next steps, including wider engagement as the documents develop.

2. Decision Required

The Shadow Board is asked:

- 2.1. To approve the appointment of a representative of the Workforce Engagement Board and a representative of the voluntary, community, faith and social enterprise sector as non-constituent (non-voting) members on the Shadow Board during the interim shadow period only.
- 2.2. To note the progress and outline of the Local Constitution and Local Assurance Framework including timeline and engagement plans

3. Report Details

- 3.1. The report outlines proposed changes to Shadow Board membership. It also covers an update on initial work undertaken to develop key governance documents for the Cheshire and Warrington Combined Authority (CWCA) – the Local Constitution aligned to the statutory constitution which forms part of the Statutory Instruments creating the CWCA, and the Local Assurance Framework, which sets out the financial procedures underpinning how devolved funds will be managed. Both documents will be closely aligned as the legal framework for the Local Assurance Framework is contained within the Local Constitution.
- 3.2. Next steps are outlined, particularly the ways in which the Board and wider stakeholders will be engaged in finalising these important documents.

Shadow Board membership

- 3.3. Under paragraph 4 of the Terms of Reference for the Shadow Board, the Board may appoint by majority agreement other non-constituent members and associate members onto the Shadow Board as they see fit, to achieve the business of the Shadow Board. Non-constituent members and associate members shall have no voting rights.
- 3.4. It should be noted that membership of the Shadow Board does not automatically confer membership to the Cheshire and Warrington Combined Authority Board. Membership of the Combined Authority Board for non-constituent members and associate members will be via a transparent and open process to be confirmed at the January meeting of the Shadow Board as part of the final drafting of the Local Constitution.
- 3.5. Further to the 28th October 2025 inaugural Shadow Board, at which the Board agreed in principle to ask the Workforce Engagement Board (WEB) to nominate a representative to support the set-up arrangements of the Cheshire and Warrington Combined Authority (CWCA), the WEB has confirmed in principle (subject to formal sign-off at their Board on the 28th November) representation on the Shadow Board.
- 3.6. To ensure that the Shadow Board can take account of key stakeholder views during the set-up of the CWCA, it is proposed that, alongside the private sector on the Shadow Board, the voluntary, community, faith and social enterprise (VCFSE) sector is also represented. Following early dialogue with the sector, it is recommended that the Cheshire and Warrington Infrastructure Partnership (CWIP) nominate a representative to sit on the Board during the shadow period. The CWIP has membership from across the four VCFSE infrastructure support charities in Cheshire and Warrington – Warrington Voluntary Action, Community and Voluntary Services Cheshire East, Cheshire Community Action and Cheshire West Voluntary Action. This partnership works across the subregion to coordinate support for the VCFSE, sharing best-practice and resources, and assisting with the growth and development of community-focused organisations as they deal with the many changes and challenges of the last few years.

Local Constitution

- 3.7. It is important that members and officers consider how the CWCA will work on a day-to-day basis to reach the right balance and culture for the new organisation and agreement on procedures and protocols.
- 3.8. The Local Constitution will set out how the Combined Authority works, makes decisions, and the procedures the Combined Authority will follow to make sure its work is efficient and effective, and is both transparent and accountable to local people. Some of these procedures are set by law (in the statutory constitution as set out in the Cheshire and Warrington Mayoral Combined Order 2026), while others can be shaped and developed in a Local Constitution to reflect the local area and local principles.
- 3.9. It is important for Cheshire and Warrington to develop the Local Constitution at an early stage as it will be approved as one of the agenda items at the inaugural meeting of the CWCA in early 2026.
- 3.10. A first draft of the CWCA Local Constitution has been prepared by the devolution programme's governance workstream, which includes Monitoring Officers and legal officers from all three constituent authorities.
- 3.11. The draft Local Constitution has been prepared to reflect best practice and is based on examples from existing Mayoral Combined Authorities. Much of the content is technical in nature and aligns to legislative requirements for combined authorities. For those elements that can be developed for the local area, there will be a short series of workshops over the coming months to allow members across the three constituent councils and key partners to shape these provisions.
- 3.12. It is intended that a final draft of the Local Constitution will be presented to the CWCA Shadow Board at the end of January for an in-principle decision. This will enable the Local Constitution to be incorporated into the final Local Assurance Framework, facilitating approval of both at the inaugural meeting of the CWCA Board in early 2026.
- 3.13. The Local Constitution will contain key parts, including:
- **Articles** - setting out the underpinning legal framework of the CWCA and signposting readers to relevant aspects throughout the Constitution.
 - **Responsibility for Functions** - setting out who is responsible for exercising each function of the CWCA
 - **Procedure Rules** - which govern how the CWCA, and its decision-makers, operate, including:
 - formal meetings of the Combined Authority and its committees,
 - how to access information, and
 - procedures relating to finance and contracts.
 - **Ethical Standards** - including codes of conduct for Members and officers of the Combined Authority, and protocols relating to conduct, conflicts of interest and relationships between officers and members.

- **Member allowances scheme** - setting out the entitlement of any Member, including the Mayor, to claim expenses in carrying out their role and setting out the levels of remuneration applicable to the Mayor and other roles determined by the Combined Authority
- **Management structure** - setting out the senior officer management structure of the CWCA.

3.14 The purpose of the Local Constitution is to:

- enable the Combined Authority to provide leadership to the community in partnership with councils, citizens, businesses, and other organisations
- support the involvement of citizens in the process of local decision-making
- enable decisions to be taken efficiently and effectively
- provide ways to hold decision-makers to public account
- ensure that no one reviews or scrutinises a decision in which they have been directly involved
- clarify who takes decisions and ensure that decision-makers explain the reasons for decision, and
- help deliver the Combined Authority's vision of a more prosperous Cheshire and Warrington Combined Authority area.

3.15 The statutory constitution sets out membership requirements for the CWCA. This includes a maximum of 6 non-constituent and associate members. Non-constituent and associate members are non-voting members. A process for the appointment of these members will be considered at the upcoming member workshops and presented to the Shadow Board in January 2026 alongside the final draft of the Local Constitution.

3.16 The CWCA Monitoring Officer will regularly monitor and review the operation of the Local Constitution and it will be annually reviewed to ensure it remains fit for purpose.

3.17 The CWCA must have two statutory committees: an overview and scrutiny committee and an audit committee. These will be modelled largely on existing requirements for local authorities, but it is still recommended that Cheshire and Warrington start to consider the membership and operation of these committees. This will form part of the upcoming workshops to shape the constitution.

Local Assurance Framework (LAF)

3.18 The LAF sets out how CWCA will ensure public money is allocated in an appropriate manner, with strong accountability for its activities and spending. The document will set out the mechanisms in place to ensure that public money is being managed effectively, covering governance, accountability, and transparency arrangements as well as how the authority will deliver value for money in meeting local objectives.

3.19 The primary audience for the LAF is Central Government, it is intended to give Government funding departments assurance that the Combined Authority will manage any devolved funding effectively, based on a robust system of governance, transparent evidence-based decision making and appropriate levels

of independent scrutiny and oversight. If the Government is not satisfied that the LAF is robust, it can withhold the payment of devolved funding from the Combined Authority.

- 3.20 In addition, the LAF will provide assurance to the public and other stakeholders by clearly explaining the Authority's structures and processes. In this way, the public should be able to understand how and why decisions have been made and to provide sufficient transparency so that CWCA can be held accountable for its decisions.
- 3.21 The LAF will need to be signed off at the inaugural meeting of the Cheshire and Warrington Combined Authority Board early in 2026. To ensure that the document is ready for adoption at that point, drafting has already begun based on best practice guidance and examples from existing Mayoral Combined Authorities. These drafts will allow the Combined Authority to engage in dialogue with MHCLG, and internal and external stakeholders to ensure the final version is fit for purpose.
- 3.22 The document itself will evolve over time as both the legislative framework for the Combined Authority and the extent and depth of local devolution are expected to change over the CWCA's first few years. The document will be regularly updated and will need to be formally signed off each year, but the initial version will play an important part in establishing expectations for what kind of organisation CWCA intends to be.

Key features of the LAF

- 3.23 Much of the content of the LAF is shaped by the requirements of the 'Cheshire and Warrington Mayoral Combined Order 2026' which sets out the core constitutional requirements for the new authority, but the authority itself has reasonable discretion over how it meets those requirements.
- 3.24 The document outlines:
- The main activities of the Combined Authority, with details on the statutory areas of responsibility and any funds managed on behalf of the region
 - Governance structures and roles of the CWCA Board, the Mayor, key officers and the broader decision-making and delivery structure
 - Processes and controls the CWCA will have in place to ensure accountability, probity, transparency, compliance, and value for money
 - How any potential investment will be prioritised, appraised, approved, funded and delivered, and then monitored and evaluated for effectiveness.
- 3.25 Initial sections of the LAF set out background information about CWCA and the areas that it is responsible for, as well as any anticipated changes over coming years. The LAF will reflect the initial focus on economic growth and transport but also recognises the additional wider responsibilities and powers that are due

to transfer on the passing of the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill. This section also outlines the main funding streams that the CWCA will manage over this period, effectively establishing the scope of the funds and activities that the LAF will cover.

- 3.26 Further sections will set out the main governance and decision-making structures of the Combined Authority. Setting out the roles of the Board, and how they will be supported by advisory committees such as a Business Committee and Investment Committee. This also sets out how key officer roles will have responsibility for ensuring the authority is well managed, financially sound and compliant with all relevant legislation.
- 3.27 It will also set out the safeguards that are built into the system, to ensure that CWCA can be held to account for its actions and decisions. These include the role of independent overview and scrutiny and audit and governance committees, transparency of decision making and the adoption of best practice policies in relation to codes of conduct, whistleblowing, anti-corruption and information governance.

Investment Activity

- 3.28 The final section of the LAF is the area over which the CWCA has greatest discretion. This covers the approach to making investment decisions, and how the CWCA will ensure that it uses the funding available to deliver the greatest benefit to the local area. The main investment fund available to CWCA is the Mayoral Investment Fund (£630m over 30 years), but other national and local funding would also be subject to the same rigour.
- 3.29 The LAF does not determine the strategic priorities for the CWCA, those will be agreed by the Board and the Mayor, once in place. The LAF sets out the processes through which different options for achieving those objectives can be appraised. Its purpose is to provide a transparent and consistent approach, through which it can be demonstrated to the Government, stakeholders and the public that investment decisions are aligned to strategic targets, as well as being deliverable, affordable and value for money.
- 3.30 Certain requirements are mandated from Government, the process must ensure:
- Impartial appraisal of potential projects, based on a five cases model
 - Compliance with HM Treasury Green Book value for money principles
 - Transparency around funding decisions
 - Effective monitoring and reporting on the achievement of outcomes
 - Clear structured risk management at all stages of planning and delivery
- 3.31 To incorporate these principles, it is proposed that the framework is based around the following structures:
- **Investment Strategy** – Strategic priorities for the investment programme would be agreed by the Board/Mayor and captured in an investment strategy. This would reflect the short and long-term priorities of the Combined Authority

and would provide a basis against which options can be assessed. This strategy would be expected to change over time as priorities and needs change.

- **Investment Committee** – An Investment Committee would be established to oversee the appraisal process. The Committee would comprise cross party Councillor representatives (non-Board Members) from across the Councils, alongside officers and representatives of wider groups. The role of the Committee would be to ensure that proposed investments were aligned to the investment strategy, delivered good value and met the CWCA's requirements in terms of robustness, evidence, deliverability and risk. The group would not be decision making but would offer advice to the Board on investment proposals.
- **Pathways** - allows for nomination of potential projects from within the CWCA, from constituent Councils, or wider partners. Allocations may take different forms, for example specific one-off schemes, contributions towards larger projects, revolving funds or establishing ring-fenced funds for specific purposes which could then be bid against.
- **Appraisal Approach** – based around a business case led gateway approach which requires each proposed investment to demonstrate how it meets identified priorities, delivers value and shows deliverability. This would support the process of prioritising between options and producing shortlists of high value/impact schemes for decision.
- **Proportionality** – It is recognised that different forms of investment carry different levels of risk, and the appraisal process will allow for fast-track approvals or more agile decision-making where beneficial and appropriate. Where utilised such approaches would be disclosed along with the rationale for doing so.
- **Transparency** – The investment strategy, outcomes from the appraisal process and resulting programme of investment would be published.

3.32 It is recognised that it will not be possible to follow the full LAF business case appraisal process in relation to CWCA's first year investment priorities, given the timeframes available for setting and delivering that activity. It will take time to establish an Investment Committee and the relevant governance structures, and it would not be appropriate to initiate long term commitments from the Mayoral Investment Fund before a mayor has been elected. As such it is proposed that a truncated process, centred around shorter term priorities is undertaken for 2026-27, based on the utilisation of the funding expected to be available for that year. The proposed approach to determining priorities for the Mayoral Investment Fund in 2026-27 will be set out further in a report to the Board expected in January 2026 following wider engagement.

3.33 The content of the Local Assurance Framework will continue to be updated and refined through ongoing discussions with the Shadow Board, Central

Government and wider stakeholders before a completed document is presented for approval at the inaugural meeting of the Combined Authority in early 2026.

4 What will it cost?

- 4.1 Whilst there are no specific budget implications in the report, it should be noted that the Local Assurance Framework is a requirement from Government to enable devolved funds to flow to the Cheshire and Warrington Combined Authority. It is also the primary document that outlines how public money is allocated in an appropriate manner with strong accountability for the authority's activities and spending. The Framework will set out the mechanisms in place to ensure that public money is being managed effectively, covering governance, accountability, and transparency arrangements as well as how the authority will deliver value for money in meeting local objectives.

5 What are the Legal aspects?

- 5.1 The provisions of the statutory constitution will be set in legislation under the Cheshire and Warrington Combined Authority Order 2026. This is intended by government to provide consistency on some key elements across all combined/strategic authorities nationally and, as such, these are not subject to change.
- 5.2 The Local Constitution and aligned policies and procedures in the Local Assurance Framework is developed locally and will set out all primary legal aspects of the CWCA. These documents will provide mechanisms for review and change to adapt to the needs of the local area and remain fit for purpose.

6 What risks are there and how can these be reduced?

- 6.1 Oversight risks form part of the programme risk register and are managed accordingly.

7 What is the impact of the decision on health inequalities and equality and diversity issues?

- 7.1 There are no significant impacts in the report. It should be noted that equality and diversity impacts will be referenced in the local constitution.

8 What are the implications of the decision on Climate Change?

- 8.1 There are no significant impacts in the report.

9 What are the implications of the decision on the Sustainable and Inclusive Economic Strategy?

- 9.1 There are no significant impacts in the report.

10 Are there any other options?

- 10.1 The local constitution and Local Assurance Framework are critical underpinning governance framework documents for the CWCA. Without either document the CWCA would not be legally operational nor fit for purpose for any devolved funds from Government. There are therefore no other options.

For further information:

Officer: Vanessa Whiting, Chair, Devolution Governance Workstream

Email: vanessa.whiting@cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk

Background Documents:

NA

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Cheshire and Warrington Shadow Board

Date of meeting: 28th November 2025

Report of: Cllr Hans Mundry
Leader, Warrington Borough Council

Report Lead Officer: Gemma Davies, Chair, Devolution Steering Group

Title: Cheshire and Warrington Joint Devolution Task Group.

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1. To update the Board on approach and next steps of the Cheshire and Warrington Joint Devolution Task Group.

2. Decision Required

- 2.1. To note the set-up of a cross-council, cross-party Joint Devolution Task Group to ensure regular wider member detailed engagement ahead of the formal creation of statutory committees under the Combined Authority.
- 2.2. Agree that feedback from the group will form a standing item on all Shadow Board meetings to ensure a consistent route for wider member feedback at Shadow Board meetings.

3. Report Details

- 3.1. Throughout the development of the Cheshire and Warrington devolution programme each of the constituent councils have supported a cross-party member engagement 'task group'. These task groups have been an effective and valued opportunity for members – and in particular backbench and opposition members - to understand and discuss devolution.
- 3.2. Ahead of the formal creation of the statutory committees of the Cheshire and Warrington Combined Authority (including overview and scrutiny and audit), Board members have expressed a priority to ensure on-going detailed engagement with wider members for each council. As well continuing with individual council groups, a Joint Devolution Task Group will meet regularly during the period of Shadow Board arrangements.

3.3. The purpose of the group will be to:

- provide a single forum to enable a broad and inclusive member consideration of the development of the combined authority;
- provide an interim alternative to the formal overview and scrutiny arrangements which will not be in place until the Mayoral Combined Authority is established;
- promote working relationships and develop a collaborative culture across the councillors on the three constituent councils; and,
- support consistent information sharing.

3.4. It is proposed that the approach to support the Group will be as follows:

- Meetings to precede the publication of the Combined Authority Shadow Board meeting agenda; and
- Include a standing item on the Combined Authority Shadow Board agenda that provides feedback on the discussions taking place within the task group.

3.5. Following an initial meeting of the Group, it was agreed that the future work programme will mirror that of the Shadow Board, and in addition, Members have expressed their wish to consider:

- The Sustainable and Inclusive Economic Strategy
- Implications of being a Marmot region
- Draft constitution and local assurance framework
- Future corporate/business plan and priorities
- Opportunities to hear external speakers e.g. Chair of scrutiny at an existing CA; and,
- Opportunity to 'get to know' the wider sub-region rather than each council area.

3.6. Membership:

Cheshire East	Councillors Nick Mannion, Fiona Wilson, Michael Gorman, Mark Goldsmith, Stewart Gardiner, Liz Wardlaw
Cheshire West and Chester	Councillors Louise Gittins, Michael Garvey, Karen Shore, Ben Walker, Adrian Waddelove, Lyn Gibbon, Mike Jones, Martin Barker
Warrington	Councillors Hans Mundry, Jean Flaherty, Maureen McLaughlin, Denis Matthews, Hitesh Patel, Nathan Sudworth, Mark Brown, Helen Speed

4. What will it cost?

4.1. There are no specific costs beyond time commitment to support this group. The financial implications of the creation of statutory committees will be considered as part of the development of the Local Constitution and Combined Authority

budget.

5. What are the Legal aspects?

- 5.1. There are no specific legal implications. The legal implications of the creation of statutory committees will be considered as part of the development of the Local Constitution.

6. What risks are there and how can these be reduced?

- 6.1. There are no specific risks to holding a cross-council, cross-party Joint Devolution Task Group to ensure regular wider member detailed engagement ahead of the formal creation of statutory committees under the CWCA.

7. What is the impact of the decision on health inequalities and equality and diversity issues?

- 7.1. There are no specific impacts. It should be noted that the Group have prioritised a discussion on the opportunities of embedding Marmot and addressing health inequality across Cheshire and Warrington.

8. What are the implications of the decision on Climate Change?

- 8.1. There are no specific impacts. All meetings and papers will be via digital format where possible.

9. What are the implications of the decision on the Sustainable and Inclusive Economic Strategy?

- 9.1. There are no specific impacts. It should be noted that the Group have prioritised a discussion on the opportunities of the 'SIES' across Cheshire and Warrington.

10. Are there any other options?

- 10.1. The Shadow Board could choose to only allow wider member input through the regular 'open session' item on the agenda. This would mean that only those members able to attend Board meetings would be able to share views and prevent wider discussion that the group meetings would provide.

For further information:

Officer: Gemma Davies (Chair of DSG)

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Background Documents:

NA

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Cheshire and Warrington Shadow Board

Date of meeting:	28 November 2025
Report of:	Cllr Michael Gorman Deputy Leader, Cheshire East Council
Report Lead Officer:	Gemma Davies, Chair of Cheshire and Warrington Growth Directors
Title:	Strategic Economic Update

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1. To provide members with an update on progress with delivery of the sub-regional vision of the Sustainable and Inclusive Economic Strategy; that Cheshire and Warrington will be the healthiest, most sustainable, inclusive and growing place in the country by 2045.

2. Decision Required

- 2.1. The Shadow Board is asked to note progress against the Sustainable and Inclusive Economic Strategy (SIES).

3. Report Details

- 3.1. This report summarises progress being made on a number of aspects of the delivery of the SIES and provides a summary of the advice the Business Advisory Board has been providing as delivery plans have been developed.

3.2. Business Advisory Board

- 3.2.1. The Business Advisory Board (BAB) was formally established in October 2024 to provide a strong business voice into the region's economic strategy development and the Cheshire and Warrington Joint Committee and subsequently the Shadow Board. It has become an integral partner in offering insight, as an integral partner, into economic strategy, growth and investment from the private sector perspective. It comprises 20 members drawn from across Cheshire and Warrington and from a diverse range of business sectors.

- 3.2.2. The Board has played an active and core delivery role with officers in identifying the key business priorities for the forthcoming Cheshire and

Warrington Combined Authority (CWCA) and how the CWCA's new powers and funding could help address them. The Board has demonstrated its ability to go beyond a pure advisory role and has actively mobilised its networks, amplified messaging and co-designed interventions. A fuller summary of the Board's work and conclusions to date is attached at Annex 1.

3.3. Publication and Delivery of SIES

3.3.1. Following the approval in principle of the Sustainable and Inclusive Economic Strategy (SIES) at the Combined Authority Shadow Board on 31st October 2025, the report has now been published and promoted through a Press Release and stakeholder notification. The Strategy, with its accompanying consultation report, is available for download on the Cheshire and Warrington devolution website ([SIES](#)) and has also been made available on the Enterprise Cheshire and Warrington (ECW) website for ease of reference.

3.3.2. Work on the first stages of delivering the SIES is focusing on co-production of companion documents showing how it will deliver on rural and urban inequalities and on a delivery dashboard and baseline for discussion at the Shadow Board meeting in January.

3.3.3. Officers are also planning a programme of engagement with key stakeholders, including elected Members (ward and town and parish councillors); the Business Advisory Board and other businesses; the Voluntary, Community, Faith and Social Enterprise Sector; rural communities; and young people to discuss ways in which we can involve them in the co-production of delivery of the SIES. This will involve work towards establishing a clear delivery roadmap for the next five to ten years, linked to the Local Growth Plan that the CWCA will have a statutory duty to produce once it is formally established.

3.4. Delivering in Rural Areas

3.4.1. A new Strategic Insights task and finish officer group is being created, to provide a coordinated approach to the cross cutting aspects of the SIES including: rural; inclusion; health, sustainability; and culture; so that they are embedded in all policies and investment decisions of the new CWCA and will ensure that best practice is followed throughout. It will also incorporate learning and best practice from the inclusion aspects from the Get Cheshire and Warrington Working Plan, and embedding health in all policies, both of which have separate reports on this agenda.

3.4.2. As part of this cross-cutting approach, the Local Authorities and ECW have worked with the Rural Strategy Group to commission a Rural Needs Analysis piece of work to feed into the work programme of the new CWCA across all competencies/themes to embed 'rural in all'.

3.4.3. The work will refresh and deepen our rural evidence base, including wide stakeholder engagement in identification of needs, opportunities and

priorities. This will bring together existing evidence with new intelligence on the rural economy, businesses, communities, places and environment and draw on best practice. It will also provide an assessment of Cheshire and Warrington against other rural and semi-rural Combined Authority areas, drawing lessons and examples of best practice, opportunities for double devolution and how Cheshire and Warrington can become a trailblazer for rural development.

3.5. Seizing Our Growth Opportunities

3.5.1. The SIES, and the Government's new Modern Industrial Strategy, outlines the importance of building on transformational business sectors, clusters, and innovation assets to drive sustainable growth, and identifies several exciting opportunities within Cheshire and Warrington. As stated above, a co-production approach with business and other stakeholders to identifying the key priorities will be important to focus delivery.

3.5.2. To realise this growth potential, a scope has been prepared for a comprehensive study that will update our sector evidence and spatial cluster propositions, pull together outline public-private sector plans for further co-production, and update our investor-ready narratives. This will also provide content for Cheshire and Warrington's "pitch" at the UK Real Estate Investment and Infrastructure Forum (UKREiIF) and Northern Investor Summit in Leeds in May 2026.

3.6. The Great North

3.6.1. As the Board will be aware, The Great North brings together Mayors and (Shadow) Combined Authority Chairs from all eleven Northern regions. A significant proportion of its energy has gone into the development of a Northern Summit to be held in Leeds in May 2026 on the eve of UKREiIF – the UK Real Estate Investment and Infrastructure Forum. Officers from the three Cheshire and Warrington local authorities and ECW/Marketing Cheshire have been engaging with The Great North and scoping a programme for both events, with an emphasis on engaging potential investors with a compelling narrative about why they should invest in the region and a set of investable propositions. A paper on The Great North, Cheshire and Warrington's contribution and outcomes expected to flow from these collaborations will be provided for the next meeting.

3.7. The Budget

3.7.1. Rachel Reeves will be presenting her Budget on Wednesday 26 November, two days before the Shadow Board meeting. Officers will provide a short verbal summary at the Shadow Board meeting of measures in the Budget likely to affect Cheshire and Warrington.

3.7.2. In the run-up to the Budget, members will have seen the announcement that the Government will be investing £2.5 billion into three small modular reactors at Wylfa. This is a significant announcement for Cheshire and

Warrington, as it places Birchwood at the centre of a North West Nuclear arc running from North Wales to Cumbria.

4. What will it cost?

- 4.1. Work to deliver the rural needs analysis has already been accounted for via a £25k LGA contribution to the devolution work. There are no further direct cost implications in this report, which is for noting only. All of the work reported is included within existing subregional budgets held by ECW as part of their agreed business plan.

5. What are the Legal aspects?

- 5.1. This report has no direct legal implications.

6. What risks are there and how can these be reduced?

- 6.1. This report summarises progress with achieving the subregional vision. Failure to pursue the work described here would risk the loss of investment opportunities and missing the subregion's other targets, including reaching net zero by 2045.

7. What is the impact of the decision on health inequalities and equality and diversity issues?

- 7.1. Successful delivery of the Sustainable and Inclusive Economic Strategy will close health inequalities in Cheshire and Warrington and improve equality, diversity and inclusion.

8. What are the implications of the decision on Climate Change?

- 8.1. Reaching net zero by 2045 is an essential element of the subregional vision and the work described in this report.

9. What are the implications of the decision on the Sustainable and Inclusive Economic Strategy?

- 9.1. This report summarises progress with the delivery of the Sustainable and Inclusive Economic Strategy.

10. Are there any other options?

- 10.1 This is a progress report on which members of the Shadow Board are invited to comment. Alternative options for delivering the subregional vision will be discussed with members in reports on individual elements of the work described above.

For further information:

Officer: Gemma Davies, Chair of Cheshire and Warrington Growth Directors
Email: Gemma.Davies@cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk

Annex 1: Summary Report from Business Advisory Board

Background Documents: None

ANNEX 1: Cheshire and Warrington BUSINESS ADVISORY BOARD SUMMARY

1. The Business Advisory Board (BAB) was established to provide a strong business voice into the region's economic strategy development and the Cheshire and Warrington Joint Committee (JC) (and now the Shadow Board), offering insight into economic strategy, growth and investment from the private sector perspective. The BAB has quickly established itself as an integral and core delivery partner, supporting the identification of key business opportunities as part of the deliberations about pursuing devolution and subsequently in early prioritisation across development work for the CWCA.
2. A key area of focus for the BAB over the past year has been planning for devolution and in January 2025 the BAB hosted a Devolution Summit bringing together local authority leaders with businesses and other stakeholders to hear briefings, experiences of devolution from other areas, including from Oliver Coppard, Mayor of South Yorkshire. It also discussed the benefits that the business community would like to see delivered by devolution and how those benefits might be most effectively communicated.
3. The BAB was clear that devolution must be synonymous with growth and in that context think that businesses will be anxious to see visible early delivery of a small number of visible and high-impact, clearly-branded projects which will demonstrate the value of devolution to communities and employers. This will help show that the Combined Authority can act decisively, visibly and at pace—unlocking investment, delivering change, and signalling that Cheshire and Warrington is not only ready to grow but already leading the way.
4. The BAB has been extensively engaged in the development of the Sustainable and Inclusive Economic Strategy. Its advice was that Cheshire and Warrington should prioritise and focus on a limited number of high-value growth priorities rooted in local strengths—such as clean energy, life sciences, digital technologies and advanced manufacturing—while ensuring alignment with national strategic frameworks like the Modern Industrial Strategy. It also stressed the importance of embedding the voice of business early in strategy development, particularly in addressing cross-cutting challenges like skills gaps, regulatory friction, infrastructure barriers and access to finance.
5. In April 2025, the BAB received a briefing on the South Cheshire Chamber led Local Skills Improvement Plan, including its purpose, development, stakeholders and underpinning data. It offered a number of suggestions to improve engagement with businesses, link to other work in progress and feature skills opportunities in place marketing, as a benefit to attract & retain young people.
6. Building on the insights of the Local Skills Improvement Plan and the Skills Bootcamp programme, the Business Advisory Board is keen for the employer voice to be embedded in the design, commissioning and evaluation of training provision, including linking skills delivery more directly to transformational growth areas such as net zero, life sciences and digital, ensuring young people and adults are prepared for

emerging roles. It would also like to work with Cheshire and Warrington's further education colleges to help them deliver more responsive and practical support for employers, including modular and in-work training. It also thinks that skills should be embedded as a visible asset in place marketing and investment strategies, helping position Cheshire and Warrington as a destination of choice for talent, businesses and investors.

7. To maximise the benefits of devolution, the BAB considers that the CA should establish a consistent and structured approach to business engagement that is genuinely two-way and outcomes-focused. The Business Advisory Board offers an effective platform for this, but broader engagement should include sector-specific dialogues, targeted outreach to SMEs, and collaborative forums that connect employers with local leaders. BAB members are also keen to amplify communications across the sub-region, drawing on their networks and local insight to promote transparency, build trust and maintain momentum. Clear messaging on the role and impact of devolution, coupled with visible delivery, will strengthen business confidence and encourage wider participation in shaping local economic priorities. To that end it is recommended that the CWCA should aim to quickly deliver a strong brand for Cheshire and Warrington to establish itself as a candidate for significant inward investment and job creation.
8. Infrastructure (e.g., transport, rail, digital connectivity) and how they underpin business growth has been a frequent topic of discussion and two members of the BAB are members of the Liverpool – Manchester Rail Board. Not surprisingly the BAB thinks that infrastructure planning and investment strategies should be fully aligned with the region's economic priorities, with a clear focus on enabling growth, strengthening resilience and attracting investment. The BAB also thinks the CWCA should support the development of investment platforms and mechanisms at scale creating a wider investment strategy that unlocks private capital for priority sectors and places.
9. The Board monitors potential pressures on business (such as cost increases, regulatory change) and how the subregion can be resilient and improve its attractiveness to potential investors. It has therefore actively encouraged the development of the Cheshire Angels Network, on which BAB members have contributed to the programme's development and presented at an investor meeting. It also thinks it can play a valuable role in engaging with the business community to monitor business risk, share intelligence and co-design interventions that strengthen business confidence and safeguard long-term competitiveness.
10. The Board has been clear that one of the most serious barriers to growth across Cheshire and Warrington is the current planning system, which is slow, unpredictable and disproportionately costly for investors. This uncertainty places the subregion at a disadvantage when competing for major inward investment, particularly from international companies that can readily choose more responsive locations. The shift to a Combined Authority offers a rare chance to reset this position. The Board strongly recommends that the CWCA uses this moment to take a fundamentally more proactive and enabling approach to planning. Acting ahead of the forthcoming national reforms would send a powerful signal to investors and could deliver a step change in long-term economic performance for the subregion.

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Cheshire and Warrington Shadow Board

Date of meeting: 28 November 2025

Report of: Cllr Karen Shore
Deputy Leader, Cheshire West and Chester Council

Report Lead Officer: Gemma Davies, Director Economy and Housing, Cheshire West and Chester Council

Title: Get Cheshire and Warrington Working Plan

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 This report provides an update on the Get Cheshire and Warrington Working Plan (GCWWP). This programme of work supports economic development across Cheshire and Warrington and will be delivered as part of the Skills and Employment devolution workstream. It is one of the ten employment and skills functions listed in the Government's English Devolution White Paper (December 2024) and the forthcoming English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill/Act.
- 1.2 The GCWWP will be an important strategic plan for the subregion, identifying a vision and short-term priorities to enable work to pay for all residents.
- 1.3 The Plan has been informed by local place-based evidence and co-designed by a range of stakeholders. This will be the Cheshire and Warrington response to the wider "Get Britain Working White Paper¹" launched by Government on 26 November 2024.
- 1.4 The GCWWP was discussed at the Joint Committee meeting on 11 November 2024, and the High-Level Priorities document was shared with the Joint Committee at its meeting on 25 July 2025. The GCWWP builds on this initial document.

2. Decision Required

- 2.1 The recommendation is for the Cheshire and Warrington Shadow Board to approve the Plan (Annex 1), recognising that further activity is scheduled to take place between now and 31 March 2026 to develop and agree the outcome/impact measures and to ensure residents with lived experience have an opportunity to shape both the priorities and proposed actions. This activity will be taken forward

¹ [Get Britain Working White Paper - GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk/get-britain-working-white-paper)

by the GCWWP Task Group, which includes officer representatives from the three constituent councils, Enterprise Cheshire and Warrington, Cheshire and Merseyside Integrated Care Board and the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP).

3. Report Details

- 3.1 This report provides an overview of the GCWWP, how it has been developed, building on a range of strategies and plans already in existence which support residents to access and progress within the workplace.
- 3.2 It has been developed through engagement with a broad range of local stakeholders and informed by a local evidence base ([C&W GBW Evidence base 0925](#)). In line with DWP guidance, the Plan identifies provision and support available to residents in Cheshire and Warrington and makes recommendations as to how these could be developed/ enhanced further to meet local needs.
- 3.3 Through this engagement and desk-based research, the following priorities were identified:
- **Priority 1: Most deprived neighbourhoods** – on the whole deprivation in Cheshire and Warrington is low, but there are pockets where residents do experience additional barriers to access key services, employment sites, affordable housing and community infrastructure. These include the urban centres of Crewe, Winsford, Warrington, Northwich, Macclesfield and Ellesmere Port.
 - **Priority 2: Young people and NEETs** - There has been a rise in the number of 16- and 17-year-olds who are not in education, employment, or training (NEET) over the last five years.

Attainment is far lower for those eligible for free school meals or classed as disadvantaged (e.g. SEND) which has a knock-on impact on their ability to progress onto further education provision, employment or some other forms of training.

- **Priority 3: Long-term sickness and disability**– this has been rising as a reason for economic inactivity, matching regional and national trends. The largest drivers of this across Cheshire and Merseyside are mental and behavioural disorders, which made up around 40% of fit note reasons, followed by musculoskeletal and respiratory diseases.

The employment rate for those residents with disabilities is 65%, compared to 84% for those without, therefore a 19% gap. This is particularly stark in Warrington, where the employment rate is 54.4% which is level with the North West rate and below the UK rate.

- **Priority 4: Early retirement** - Early retirement is the most likely reason for economic inactivity in Cheshire and Warrington, accounting for over a third of the total economic inactivity in Cheshire West and Chester. This includes those who have been forced to retire early due to health conditions.

- **Priority 5: Carers and parents facing challenges** - Although the number of children living in poverty is comparatively low, this number has risen across all three local authorities. Barriers that prevent low-income parents from returning to work include childcare, transport, and housing costs.

National research has also highlighted a lack of support for people caring for elderly, sick or disabled people to access employment.

- **Priority 6: Connecting people to opportunities** - Generally, there is a lack of coordinated careers information, advice and guidance for young people promoting the job opportunities available in Cheshire and Warrington.

There is also a need for employers to take an active role in skills development and invest in their workforce, with data showing that Cheshire and Warrington employers have arranged less training for staff than other areas of the country. Over the last 12 months, 58% of employers provided training for their staff across Cheshire and Warrington, below the 60-61% regionally and nationally, and as low as 55% in Cheshire East.

Also, the percentage of employers providing on-the-job training at 46% in Cheshire and Warrington is lower than 49% regionally and nationally, and as low as 41% in Cheshire East.

- 3.4 Over the next 12-18 months, the focus for the GCWWP will be establishing the governance required in the new Devolved structure to develop a joined-up employment support offer across the sub-region, continue to review and map existing provision to avoid duplication and identify gaps. The existing task and finish group will further develop the measures and outcomes required to demonstrate impact, and to ensure those with lived experience have an opportunity to shape the actions/ recommendations articulated in the Plan.
- 3.5 All actions will consider how greater control and flexibility associated with devolution will enable these ambitions to be achieved. It is recognised that we will need to go beyond a single approach to employment support to ensure residents needs are met.
- 3.6 The task group will also be working closely with the Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP) to ensure we are supporting and working with local employers to enable them to play an active role in skills, offering jobs for some of our more disadvantaged cohorts of young people and adults. The LSIP aims to put employers at the heart of the local skills system, facilitate direct and dynamic working arrangements between employers, providers and local stakeholders and help learners gain the skills they need to get good jobs and increase their prospects.²
- 3.7 The Governments' recent Post-16 Education and Skills White Paper³ states that local Get Britain Working Plans, along with the LSIP and the Local Growth Plan

² [Home - Cheshire & Warrington Local Skills Improvement Plan](#)

³ [Post-16 Education and Skills](#)

(this will need to be developed by the Mayoral Combined Authority once formally established), should be used to inform the local Strategic Skills Plan to be developed as part of devolution by the Mayoral Combined Authority and expected to be in place by December 2026.

4. What will it cost?

- 4.1 The GCWWP will not have any associated delivery money at this stage, but it will be used to inform future commissioning alongside on-going skills and employment devolution conversations. The Government has however allocated Cheshire and Warrington (via Cheshire West and Chester Council) £150,000 of implementation funding to be used on activities that support the development and publication of the Get Cheshire and Warrington Working Plan, to be utilised by 31 March 2026. This has enabled us to commission Metro-Dynamics to produce the Plan, host a stakeholder engagement event on 12 September, support the LSIP employer event due to take place on 13 November as well as supporting the Cheshire and Warrington Infrastructure Partnership to deliver a programme of activities for those residents with lived experience.
- 4.2 This funding is a grant allocation and is not subject to a competitive bidding process.

5. What are the Legal aspects?

- 5.1 Cheshire West and Chester Council as Accountable Body on behalf of Cheshire and Warrington will be responsible for ensuring spend and activity supported through the implementation funding (see above) is in line with the Grant Funding Agreement from DWP and that the GCWWP fulfils the requirements outlined by government.

6. What risks are there and how can these be reduced?

- 6.1 A detailed risk register will be developed alongside the delivery plan to ensure risks and mitigating actions needed are identified clearly.
- 6.2 This risk register will be monitored by the GCWWP Task Group.

7. What is the impact of the decision on health inequalities and equality and diversity issues?

- 7.1 An Equality Impact Assessment will be carried out on this programme. The programme will have a positive impact on many priority groups who are unable to access support or employment.

8. What are the implications of the decision on Climate Change?

- 8.1 There are no direct impact on Climate Change.

9. What are the implications of the decision on the Sustainable and Inclusive Economic Strategy?

- 9.1. The GCWWP directly support the Sustainable and Inclusive Economic Strategy as it will help to enable residents to access job opportunities, having a positive impact on our local economy and improving their health and that of their families. It will aim to ensure a consistent approach to employment support across the sub-region regardless of geography (including those in rural areas) and is intended to help to reduce the number of children currently living in poverty in Cheshire and Warrington.
- 9.2. The priorities identified include a focus on NEET young people, and through working with probation and other agencies should contribute to reduced local crime rates.

10. Are there any other options?

- 10.1. It is a requirement for all Combined Authority areas to develop and submit their own Get Britain Working Plan.

For further information:

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Email: gemma.davies@cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk

Background Documents:

Annex 1: GCWWP FINAL DRAFT November 2025

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Cheshire and Merseyside



Get Cheshire and Warrington Working Plan October 2025



Cheshire+
Warrington



Bringing better jobs,
better transport,
smarter investment

- **now's**
the time.



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Foreword

Cheshire and Warrington is one of the UK's economic success stories and the most productive economy in the North of England. However, our ambition is to go much further and ensure that this prosperity benefits all of our residents.

As a result, we have developed a Sustainable and Inclusive Economic Strategy which outlines our vision to be the UK's healthiest, most sustainable, inclusive, and fastest-growing economy by 2045.

This "Get Cheshire and Warrington Working Plan" directly supports this Strategy as it aligns to our inclusive and healthy objective. It looks to:

- Connect people to opportunities
- Considers health interventions alongside those which provide employment support
- Identifies geographies and cohorts that would benefit from targeted, bespoke, and flexible programmes, in both urban and rural geographies
- Improve life chances of families and young people
- Support employers to be able to provide healthy workplaces and consider new and inclusive approaches to recruitment.

Looking at statistics alone, many would think that Cheshire and Warrington had no challenges to overcome – this is simply not true. With our strong economy and potential to grow further, Cheshire and Warrington is in a prime position to make a significant contribution to achieving the government's ambition to reduce economic inactivity, but this will need targeted interventions both for local residents and employers who are experiencing difficulties filling vacancies.

There is a wide range of reasons for economic inactivity, requiring different tailored interventions. As well as tackling long-term economic inactivity, we need to help those who have recently become economically inactive and stem the flow into economic inactivity. We know that the longer someone is economically inactive, the harder it becomes to return to work.

This Plan is the first step in acknowledging where we need to focus our efforts to ensure more residents can find, secure, and sustain good employment, fulfilling their own personal potential and benefiting from our strong economy. It has been developed in collaboration with partners across work, health, skills, and the voluntary and community sector – driven by a shared vision to support local people in the best way – including challenging the ways programmes have been delivered previously and identifying how they should change.

We are lucky to have strong foundations, partners who are willing to honestly reflect on the current status quo and who are keen to improve.

Done right – this plan will also offer a solution to why so many are businesses struggling to recruit and retain staff. Together we can make a real difference, and in Cheshire and Warrington we are committed to make this a reality.

We need greater flexibility, investment, and a joint purpose to drive forward this agenda, and this Plan marks the beginning of a longer shared journey.



Cllr Karen Shore,
Deputy Leader, Cheshire West and Chester Council
Lead member for Health, Inclusion, Skills and
Employment

Executive Summary

Introduction

Cheshire and Warrington has a strong economy and labour market with employment already at almost 80%. However, some communities remain excluded from growth and can face multiple barriers to finding employment and getting on in the workplace. This plan provides an opportunity for Cheshire and Warrington to continue to unlock growth by targeting key cohorts into employment who we know face more barriers.

By understanding how to best target support; working collaboratively to prevent people from being excluded from work or becoming economically inactive; and building an inclusive labour market, Cheshire and Warrington can play a key role in delivering the government's ambition to get two million more people into work. Building on provision already in place and adopting a joined-up, targeted approach, we can help provide a route back into employment for 17,000 residents who are currently economically inactive but are seeking to return to work,¹ and some of the 65,500 Universal Credit (UC) claimants who have been unemployed for over 12 months.

We can also better coordinate a preventative approach to interventions, reducing the number who may find themselves at risk of becoming disengaged from education or employment. There are significant numbers of residents who are in danger of becoming economically inactive – for example, 1,000 young people in every year group in our secondary schools have been identified as at risk of dropping out.

The subregion can generate important long-term savings by providing opportunities for those who face more barriers, including those on a costed care plan. Providing a route into sustained employment for those not in work, can help them to feel more included in the labour market, reduce economic inactivity, encourage economic growth, and help identify long-term savings through reductions in the demand for adult health and social care services.

The Get Cheshire & Warrington Working Plan (GCWWP) brings together evidence from existing subregional strategies and policies, builds on engagement with stakeholders (including a GCWWP task group), and additional socioeconomic analysis of the strengths and challenges of Cheshire and Warrington's labour market.

The Plan demonstrates how the three Local Authorities, the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) and the Integrated Care Board (ICB) are committed to work together to co-develop a locally driven co-ordinated approach to reducing economical inactivity and improving outcomes for residents across Cheshire and Warrington. It is a practical, partnership blueprint to support people across Cheshire and Warrington into sustained, meaningful work and to ensure local employers can access the skills and talent they need.

¹ We have taken a 5-year average of the proportion of the economically inactive population across Cheshire and Warrington who want a job and multiplied this by the current economically inactive population.

This work builds on the strong foundations of programmes such as DWP's Restart Scheme and NHS- Funded Employment Advisors in Talking Therapies.

Labour Market Analysis

Employment and economic inactivity

There is a high number of job opportunities per working age resident and economic inactivity levels remain low particularly compared to the wider North West region. However economic inactivity has been rising over the last five years, with early retirement and long-term sickness cited as the main reasons for inactivity.

Earnings and quality of work

Median earnings are above the North West average, with Cheshire and Warrington's varied economy evident in the mix of occupations present across the subregion. Despite a fall in the number of residents earning below the living wage, there remains a challenge for many residents in low-paid or insecure work, with 64,000 residents earning below the living wage.

Sectors

Professional, scientific, and technical services is the highest employing sector in Cheshire and Warrington; this tends to be a high value sector, covering areas such as life sciences. Overall, there are few major differences in sector employment to the overall national economy, with manufacturing, health and business administration and support, significant local employers.

Skills

A high proportion of residents are qualified to degree level, but there are known gaps, such as: insufficient progression pathways for residents from Level 2 upwards, and a high proportion of residents with no formal qualifications in Warrington.

Employment demand

Vacancies have started to pick up over the last year, but vacancies cannot simply be filled by those currently out of work as there are skills mismatches across the patch. Employers have struggled in a high-cost environment over recent years. There has been a lack of incentive to invest in the future workforce, including hiring younger apprentices over more experienced workers.

Universal Credit and unemployment

In total, there are 89,850 Universal Credit (UC) claimants across Cheshire and Warrington. Around two thirds of UC claimants are not working. There has been an increase of over 7,000 UC claimants who are long-term unemployed to 65,400 across Cheshire and Warrington over the last year.

Priorities

The Plan identifies six priority groups facing additional barriers to entering and sustaining employment which we will target for support. Below is a summary of these groups, along with a link to the [priorities section](#):

Priority 1: Most deprived neighbourhoods

On the whole deprivation is low but there are pockets of deprivation across the subregion particularly in urban centres of Crewe, Winsford, Warrington, Northwich, Macclesfield and Ellesmere Port. There are additional barriers in terms of accessibility to key services, employment sites and housing affordability in more rural areas, and a requirement to improve community infrastructure (as referenced in Pride in Place awards).

Priority 2: Young people and NEETs

There has been a rise in the number of 16- and 17-year-olds who are not in education, employment, or training (NEET) over the last five years. Attainment is also far lower for those eligible for free school meals or classed as disadvantaged (e.g. SEND) which has a knock-on impact on their ability to progress onto further education provision, employment or some other forms of training.

Priority 3: Long-term sickness and disability

Long-term sickness has been rising as a reason for economic inactivity, matching regional and national trends. The largest drivers of this across Cheshire and Merseyside are mental and behavioural disorders, which made up around 40% of fit note reasons, followed by musculoskeletal and respiratory diseases.

The employment rate for those residents with disabilities is 65%, compared to 84% for those without, therefore there is 19% gap. More work is required to support those residents wanting and able to work, along with employers willing to provide opportunities, to ensure this untapped talent is not lost.

Priority 4: Early retirement

Early retirement is the most likely reason for economic inactivity in Cheshire and Warrington, accounting for over a third of total economic inactivity in Cheshire West and Chester. This includes those who have been forced to retire early due to health conditions, along with those who are in a position where they can retire early.

Priority 5: Carers and parents facing challenges

Although the number of children living in poverty is comparatively low, there has been a rise in the number of children living in poverty across all three local authorities. Some barriers for parents from low-income families to return to and enter employment include childcare, transport, and housing costs. National research has emphasised a lack of support for people caring for elderly, sick or disabled people.

Priority 6: Connecting people to opportunities

Generally, there is a lack of coordinated careers information, advice and guidance for young people promoting the job opportunities available in Cheshire and Warrington. There is a need for employers to take an active role in skills development and invest in their workforce, with latest subregional data for 2022 showing Cheshire and Warrington to be in the bottom half of Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) areas by the proportion of establishments who have funded or arranged training for staff over the last year.

Actions

The GCWWP provides an opportunity to set out what we can do now to support residents facing exclusion as well as drive long-term system change to create a more targeted, joined-up support offer which prevents economic inactivity.

Over the next 12-18 months we will focus on:

- Setting-up the governance required to move towards a joined-up offer across the three authorities.
- On-going audit of provision to highlight where there is duplication and potential gaps emerging in our collective support offer.
- Establish targeted task and finish groups to focus on specific priority issues and actions including:
 - ‘Quick wins’ such as programmes which have the potential to be scaled and immediate priorities to engage with wider partners from across the subregion.
 - Longer term opportunities for system change to support prevention, and consider how the role of a Strategic Authority could lever in greater control/flexibility
- Explore engagement with identified priority groups to hear the barriers they are facing to ensure the GCWWP is reflective of residents’ lived experience.

Making further progress on supporting people who are economically inactive will mean that we need to go beyond a one approach to employment support to ensure we meet people where they are in their communities and in the services and institutions with which they interact, to offer pathways to employment support that work for them.

Building on the effective targeted provision that exists in communities in Cheshire and Warrington, with the development of the Strategic Authority over the next year, there is an opportunity to draw together good practice in the programmes that are running in different places. This will be achieved through our ongoing provision audit and task and finish groups, and in the development of one strategic employment service. Initially, this will offer better coordination and connection with devolved powers and funding, as well as deeper collaboration with partners.

Our employers have a crucial role to play if we are to help those from our identified priority groups into sustained employment. It has been a tough few years for employers; an extended period of high inflation before recent rises in the National Minimum Wage and

National Insurance Contributions, and the introduction of global tariffs have further added to pressures. The British Chambers of Commerce has found that business confidence continues to remain subdued with over half of businesses citing taxation and inflation as their biggest external factors of concern, and a quarter of businesses saying they have had to cut back their investment plans². We need to ensure that employers have the support they need to change their recruitment processes to offer more supported employment opportunities for those from our identified cohorts.

² British Chamber of Commerce, 2025 Q2 Quarterly Economic Survey

Introduction and Context

The Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) and the Department for Education (DfE) Get Britain Working White Paper sets out the requirement for places to develop local Plans to address key issues in local labour markets. These span supporting people to enter and participate in local labour markets, ensure school leavers access quality further training and employment opportunities if not progressing into higher education, raise the bar on creating good quality jobs in local economies, fill skill and labour vacancies, support women and people who have had caring responsibilities to progress in work, and address local inequalities in labour market outcomes.

The Get Cheshire & Warrington Working Plan brings together existing strategies into a practical, joined-up framework for delivery. It maps what provision exists, where the gaps are, and how different parts of the system interact - both for those delivering services and for the people navigating them. Moving beyond strategy into implementation, the Plan builds shared understanding, surfaces delivery challenges, and supports collective action.

There are near-term opportunities for the subregion which mean this Plan is timely:

- Devolution will give the subregion a devolved Adult Skills Fund, which can be targeted at areas of need – if skills and confidence is a barrier for returning to work this could be a focus.
- Ability to codesign future employment support to address economic inactivity (for example around health and work) and concentrations of unemployment in some parts of Cheshire and Warrington and the forthcoming launch of the Connect to Work programme.
- Local Jobcentre reform to develop a local jobs and careers service, learning from the Wakefield Pathfinder Project.
- Local Growth Plan development and future local growth funding succeeding UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF), along with the refreshed Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP) for Cheshire and Warrington will connect labour market demand and growth opportunities with strategy around skills and local employment supply.
- Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) and the Cabinet Office are supporting place-based public service innovation efforts with test and learn approaches.
- The 10-year Health Plan sets out government reforms to neighbourhood health services and NHS management at the national and Integrated Care Board (ICB) level – moving to strategic commissioning and more alignment with Mayoral Strategic Authorities particularly in terms of prevention agendas.

Cheshire and Warrington has a strong foundation for inclusive economic growth: a growing population, a diverse economy, and established partnerships across local government, health, education, and business. The subregion is well placed to support the government's ambitions for national growth and the dual need to develop the future skills requirements of our economy to enable economically inactive people to move into good quality jobs.

However, like many places across the North West, some communities remain excluded from growth and can face multiple barriers to finding employment and getting on in the workplace. This plan provides an opportunity for Cheshire and Warrington to continue to unlock growth by targeting key cohorts into employment who we know face more barriers.

Devolution will provide the subregion with the opportunity to continue to capitalise on these strong foundations by having more direct control over investment into transport, housing, and local skills. It will also provide the platform to coordinate our approach to inward investment -collectively promoting our subregion as a great place to set up a new business - to help attract more businesses into Cheshire and Warrington to further encourage future economic growth.

Regional strategies set out a shared direction to reduce economic inactivity, improve employment and health outcomes, and better align workforce development with economic growth. These strategies present a consistent view of labour market challenges.

- Cheshire and Merseyside ICB's **Work and Health strategy** sets out the key health challenges in Cheshire and Warrington (along with those in Liverpool City Region), and how it impacts on the local labour market – this Plan draws on that data and analysis.
- The subregion's **Sustainable and Inclusive Economic Strategy** (produced by Enterprise Cheshire and Warrington) sets bold ambitions to tackle key indicators of deprivation and combat place-based inequality, aiming for no communities in Cheshire and Warrington to be in the most 20% deprived nationally by 2045.
- To support this, the **Fair Employment Charter**, endorsed by the three local authorities, encourages local employers to offer secure jobs, training pathways, and diverse hiring practices that also benefit residents in disadvantaged areas.

Economic inactivity in the subregion is rising, particularly among older people and individuals with long-term health conditions, and there is a need to reduce the 106,000 people currently economically inactive across Cheshire and Warrington and stem the flow into economic inactivity. Place-based inequalities remain, particularly pronounced in places such as Crewe, Ellesmere Port, and parts of Warrington, facing different barriers in each case.

The Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP) co-ordinated by South Cheshire Chamber on behalf of the subregion, identifies skills shortages in sectors including manufacturing, health and social care, digital and low carbon, and the Cheshire and Warrington Jobs Portal has on average 15,000 vacancies at any one time. Despite growth potential, skills provision is constrained by limited progression pathways, and misalignment between training infrastructure and employer need.

Programmes such as Multiply and Skills Bootcamps are widening access to adult learning, while the Health and Care Academy is developing clearer pathways into care roles. Local authorities are using UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) allocations to commission locally tailored interventions that respond to community needs and align with LSIP priorities.

The Integrated Care Strategy and Work and Health Strategy further reflects a shift towards a more person-centred and preventative model of support, recognising the role of work in improving health outcomes and reducing inequalities.

Together, these strategies and programmes offer a strong foundation for action planning.

To shift the dial on unemployment and economic inactivity, Cheshire and Warrington needs an approach going forward that will:

- Provide more flexibility to tailor services to meet local needs and enable partners to be more responsive and accountable to their local communities.
- Understand delivery at the best level for the individual to deliver better outcomes, preventing duplication of activity and administration.
- Promote early intervention activities to prevent more residents becoming long-term employed/economically inactive, in turn reducing employment support/public health demands.
- Encourage more employers to invest in training and promote healthy workplaces, and to work more closely with JobcentrePlus, employment support, skills, and local government partners.

This Plan sets out an analysis of the current labour market strengths and challenges, focusing on patterns of economic inactivity and unemployment, maps current provision and gaps, and proposes actions to better integrate provision and employment support going forward under the first devolution agreement for Cheshire and Warrington.

While the programmes and actions included here do not cover powers that will be devolved, it nevertheless supports a joined up strategic platform to go further on employment support. The priorities outlined here are intended to align with devolved powers across economic growth and skills, and partners will need to work together on actions alongside devolution.

This Plan has been developed through engagement with stakeholders across Cheshire and Warrington including the three local authorities, Cheshire and Merseyside ICB, Enterprise Cheshire and Warrington, DWP, skills providers, the voluntary and community sector, and employer representative bodies.

Labour Market Analysis

Overview of data

Using publicly available data largely from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) and MHCLG Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD), as well as bringing together insights from key strategies and policies, we have collated a separate detailed socioeconomic evidence base which is available to partners across the subregion. [C&W GBW Evidence base 0925](#)

We have also drawn on existing strategies and policies, DWP data on Universal Credit claimants in Cheshire and Warrington and engaged with stakeholders to help target specific groups which are currently facing more barriers to entering and sustaining employment.

The labour market analysis in this Plan is based on the following data:

Local labour market	Current service provision
Labour market supply factors	
Levels of employment and inactivity – incl. older people, risk of NEET, NEETs, ill-health	Existing services across the NHS, local government, JCP, and VCSE (coverage, levels of demand and delivery) supporting: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Inactivity and ill-health, disability• Unemployment and job matching• Skill and employability development• Poverty and multiple disadvantage Targeted initiatives and projects (coverage, levels of demand and delivery) such as UKSPF-funded employability programmes; Supported Employment; health and work support for people with disabilities of substance misuse and targeted services for care leavers.
Unemployment – incl. long-term, older and young people	
Disadvantaged neighbourhoods	
Disadvantaged cohorts – multiple disadvantages incl. disability, homelessness, ex-offenders, care experienced, ethnicity	
Skill levels and educational attainment across places	
Labour market demand factors	
Earnings	Employer led / engaged activity and initiatives to support: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Employment and apprenticeship opportunities targeted for disadvantaged cohorts and neighbourhoods.• Training and progression through high quality, skilled jobs with earnings progression• Specific in-demand skill development with colleges and skills providers
Vacancies in employment and apprenticeship/training opportunities across places and sectors	
Quality of jobs and local employer offer across places and sectors	
Skill requirements and shortage demand across sectors	

Employment and economic inactivity

The labour market in Cheshire and Warrington remains strong particularly within the wider North West region. Employment in Cheshire and Warrington is almost the 80% target as set out in the Get Britain Working White Paper. Jobs growth has been strong and there is a relatively high number of job opportunities available compared to regional and national levels. Economic inactivity, despite a steep rise following the pandemic, has since fallen, following a general downward trend over the last two decades, and at 18.5%, remains well below the 23.5% felt across the wider North West.

Figure 1. Employment rate (LHS) and economic inactivity (RHS) rate (2004-24)

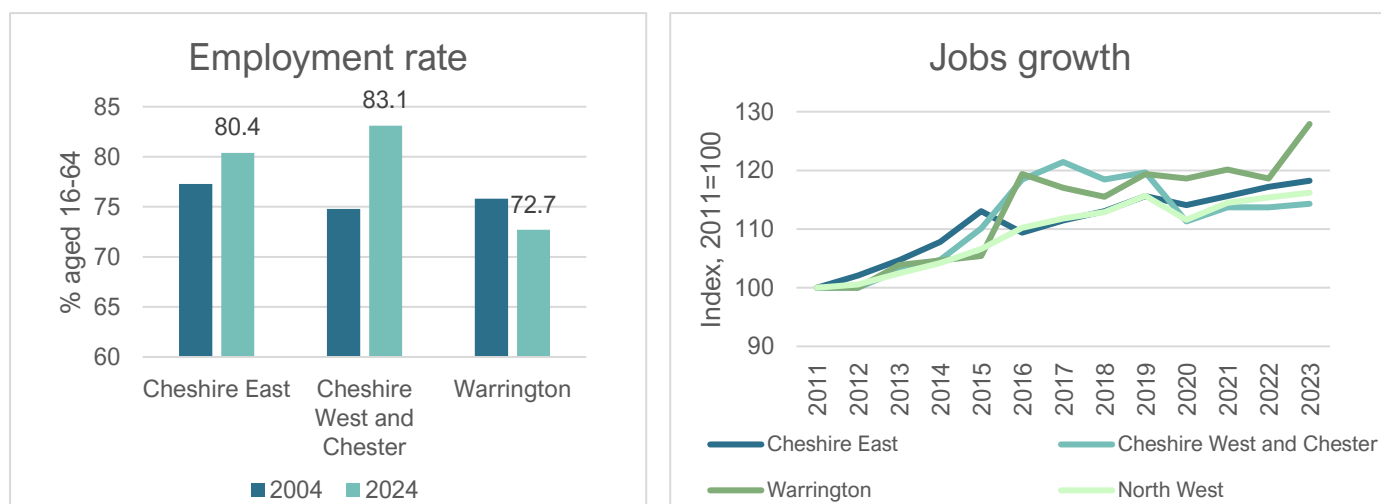


Source: ONS Annual Population Survey (2025)

However, this masks the varying experiences felt by residents. Despite strong employment levels, there are around 106,000 residents who are economically inactive, with 65,500 Universal Credit (UC) claimants who have been unemployed for over 12 months. Levels vary across the subregion, with some wards displaying lower levels of employment and higher levels of economic inactivity.

Economic inactivity is currently higher in Warrington compared to Cheshire, however, job opportunities across Warrington have been growing more quickly than elsewhere, and the number of jobs per working age resident (jobs density) is particularly strong at 1.26. All areas in Cheshire and Warrington have a high jobs density compared to 0.83 across the North West and 0.86 nationally, indicating a high number of local job opportunities.

Figure 2. Employment rate (LHS) and jobs growth (RHS)

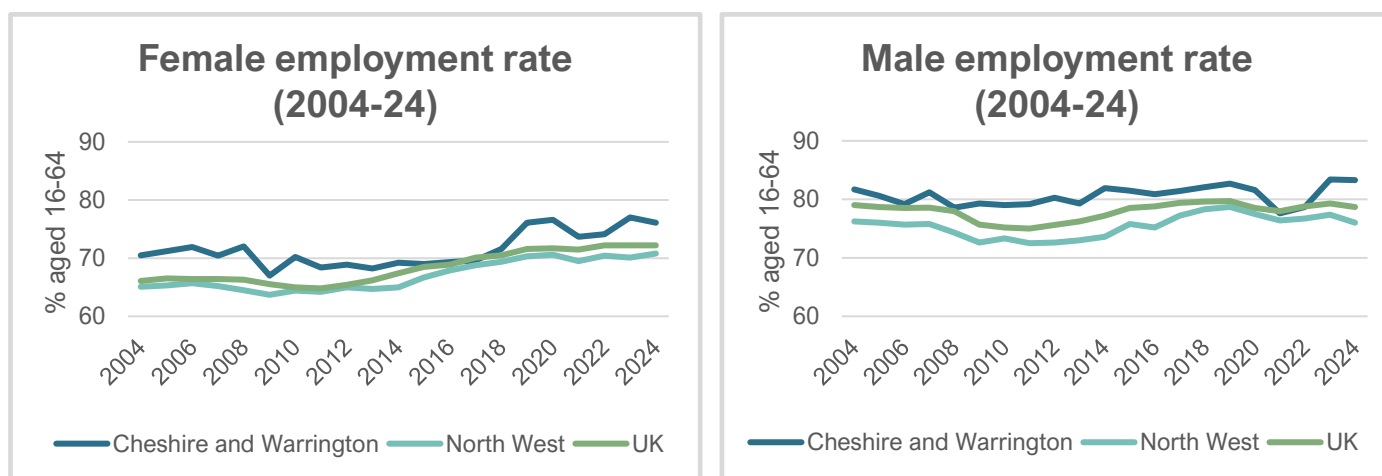


Sources: ONS Annual Population Survey (2025); ONS Jobs Density (2025)

The employment rate for both men and women are high compared to regional and national averages. Nonetheless, women in Cheshire and Warrington are more likely to be out-of-work than men. Employment rates by sex in 2024 stood at 83% for men and 76% for women. This follows through in terms of economic inactivity, although the female inactivity rate is lower compared to regional and national figures. The inactivity rate of 22.4% for women is above 15.1% for men in Cheshire and Warrington. Across the subregion, women make up 60% of those who are economically inactive, slightly above 56% regionally and 58% nationally. Women also make up a higher proportion of Universal Credit (UC) claimants at 58% across Cheshire and Warrington.

Across Cheshire and Warrington, it is estimated that around 87% of those who are economically inactive do not want a job. Of these, 60% are women, highlighting that women tend to face additional barriers entering and sustaining employment, although as seen in the chart to the left below, more women have been entering into employment over the last two decades.

Figure 3. Employment rate 2004-24, female (LHS) and male (RHS)



Source: ONS Annual Population Survey (2025)

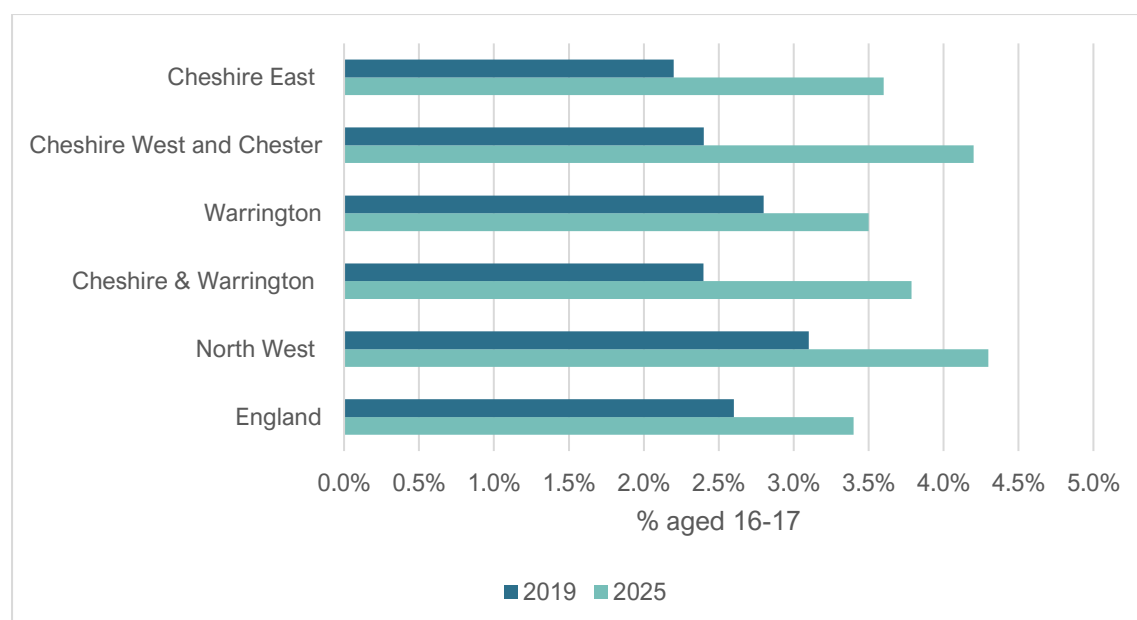
Young people and NEETs

A key transition point is those leaving school and/or college ahead of potentially entering the workforce. The risk for those leaving educational settings and not being in education, employment or training (NEET) has been steadily rising across Cheshire and Warrington over the last five years, with 821 16-17 years olds classed as NEET in 2025.

Across Cheshire and Warrington, the NEET rate has risen from 2.4% to 3.8% between 2019 and 2025, with a significant jump over the last year. All areas in Cheshire and Warrington have seen a rise in the NEET rate over this period, the most pronounced of which has been in Cheshire West and Chester. This is above the national average and in line with the North West NEET rate.

Cheshire East and Warrington have both seen rises in the number who are NEET, particularly over the last year with NEET rates in Cheshire East and Warrington around the national average.

Figure 4. Proportion of 16–17-year-olds who are NEET (2019 and 2025)



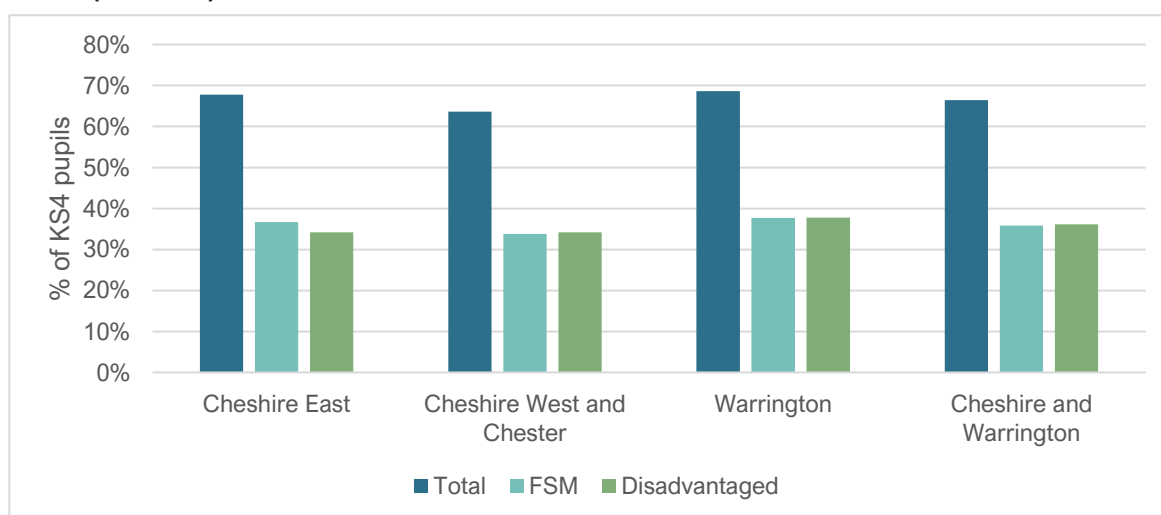
Source: DfE Participation in education, training and NEET age 16 to 17 by local authority (2024/25)

There are risk factors increasing the likelihood of young people in Cheshire and Warrington becoming NEET, including those eligible for Free School Meals (FSM) or classed as disadvantaged³ which includes those who have been in care or SEND. Approximately 1,000 young people in every year group in our secondary schools are at risk of dropping out.

³ Pupils are defined as disadvantaged if they are known to have been eligible for free school meals at any point in the past six years (from year 6 to year 11), if they are recorded as having been looked after for at least one day or if they are recorded as having been adopted from care.

In the 2023/24 academic year, two thirds of pupils achieved grades 4 or above in English and Maths GCSEs across Cheshire and Warrington. However, attainment of young people eligible for free school meals or classed as disadvantaged is almost half overall GCSE attainment levels. Although attainment varies across Cheshire and Warrington, in all three local authorities, attainment is far lower for those eligible for free school meals or classed as disadvantaged compared to their peers

Figure 5. Percentage of pupils achieving grades 4 or above in English and maths GCSEs (2023/24)



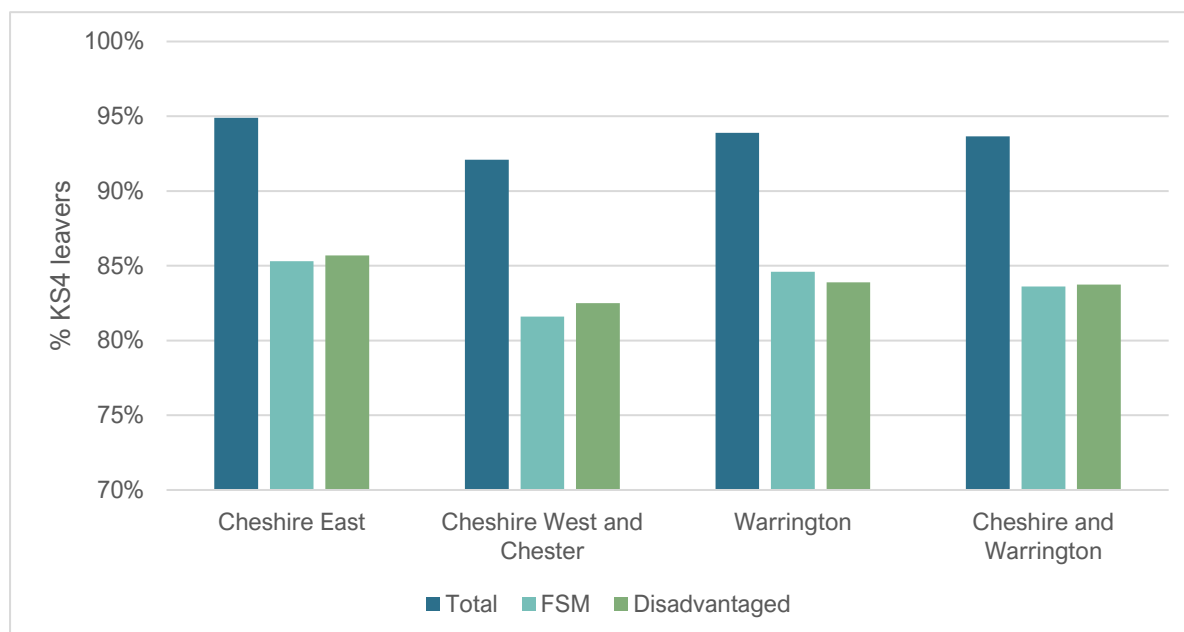
Source: DfE Key stage 4 performance (2025)

This then has a knock-on impact on the ability to progress onto further education provision, employment, or other forms of training. Across Cheshire and Warrington, 94% of Key Stage 4 (KS4⁴ leavers entered some form of further education, employment, or training in 2022/23. This falls to 84% for those who are eligible for FSM or classed as disadvantaged, again a trend which is seen across the three local authorities of Cheshire and Warrington.

The attainment gap for those achieving Level 2 qualifications is around 25% for those eligible for FSM or classed as disadvantaged, increasing to 33% points for Level 3 qualifications.

⁴ KS4 refers to students at the end of Year 11. 'Key stage 4 destinations' shows data on where pupils who finished key stage 4 in 2022 to 2023 went in the next academic year.

Figure 6. Percentage of KS4 leavers in sustained education, employment & apprenticeships (2022/23)



Source: DfE Key stage 4 destination measures (2025)

Stakeholders feel there is a lack of consistent, sustainable re-engagement activity available across the subregion despite good practice taking place, including:

- Collaborative work between schools, LA staff and college pastoral staff.
- Allowing young people to be able to swap courses until November and have the opportunity to start college in January.

There is however recognition for consistency across the subregion when sharing transition plans between institutions to try and ensure more effective progression into further training

More generally there is a lack of coordinated careers information, advice and guidance for young people promoting the job opportunities available in Cheshire and Warrington.

Stakeholder engagement has found that work experience is very difficult to source and still relies on parents helping young people to find placements.

The Kick Start programme demonstrated the benefits of incentivising employers to recruit young people, but the programme was yet another short-term intervention. From an employer's perspective, there is a lack of incentives to take on younger more inexperienced employees who have just left school or early into an apprenticeship. Employers are also continuing to grapple with an increase in minimum wage and National Insurance contributions, and higher energy costs. The Careers and Enterprise Company and the Careers Hub have an increasing focus to ensure every young person has meaningful experiences of the workplace whilst at education - with targeted support for our most disadvantaged young people.

Mental health is another significant driver of rising NEET levels with a lack of access to mental health services a challenge nationally as well as in Cheshire and Warrington, with long waiting times to access services. As noted in the Cheshire and Merseyside ICB Health and Work report, the mental health of young people is impacted by longer-term cultural and environmental changes, such as social media, increased loneliness, and reduced autonomy. All of these elements need to be considered when designing appropriate wraparound employment/training support for younger people.

Early retirement

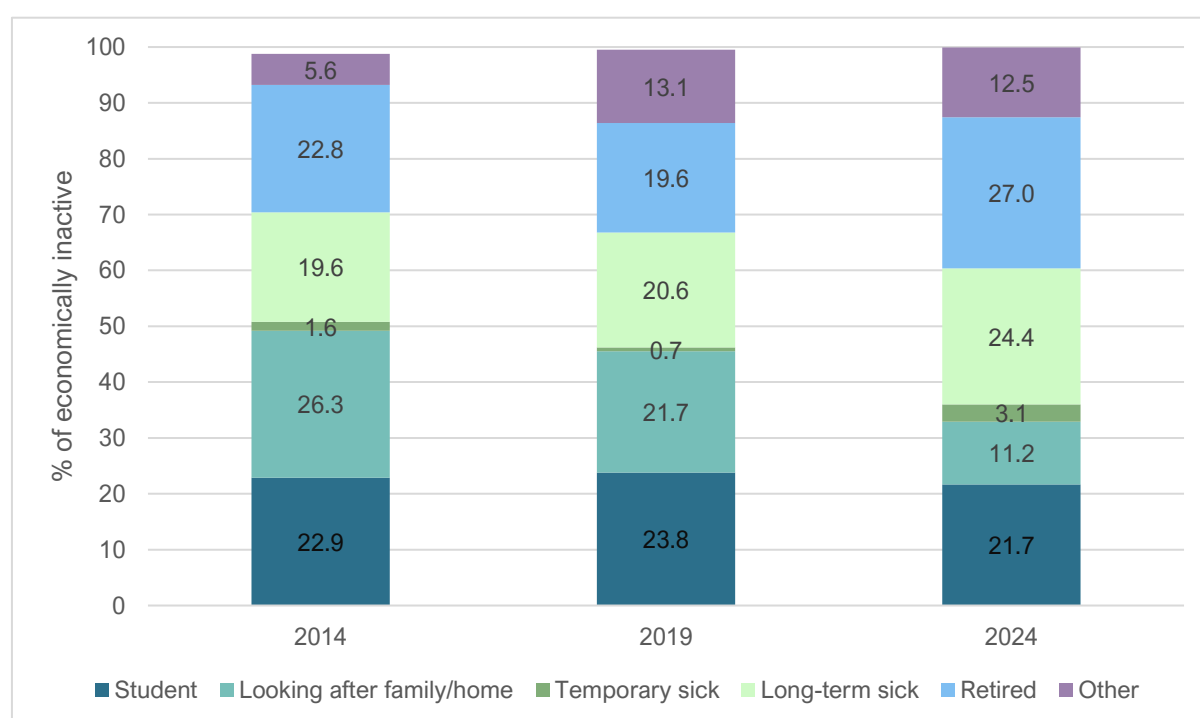
Between 2019 and 2024, there has been a slight rise in inactivity across Cheshire and Warrington, following wider national trends since the Covid Pandemic where economic inactivity has risen. Although remaining well below the regional and national averages, inactivity has increased more steeply than compared to national rates.

Within Cheshire and Warrington there has been differing experiences:

- Economic inactivity is lowest in Cheshire West and Chester, where inactivity has continued to decline over the last decade, including over the last 5 years to 15%.
- Cheshire East has seen a slight increase in inactivity to 16.6%, well below regional and national averages.
- Warrington has seen a significant rise in inactivity from 17% to 27% between 2019 and 2024 and has by far the highest rate of inactivity in Cheshire and Warrington. Employment has also fallen in Warrington to 73%, whereas employment is at least 80% in Cheshire East and Cheshire West and Chester.

The two main reasons accounting for more of the economically inactive population across Cheshire and Warrington is long-term sickness and early retirement. Increasing long-term sickness is reflective of wider trends seen regionally and nationally. An increasing proportion who are retiring early in Cheshire and Warrington differs from the regional and national picture.

Figure 7. Economic inactivity by reason in Cheshire and Warrington



Source: ONS Annual Population Survey (2025)

Early retirement is the most likely reason for economic inactivity in Cheshire and Warrington, accounting for over a third of total economic inactivity in Cheshire West and Chester.

Research conducted by University College London Centre for Longitudinal Studies⁵ using life course evidence from the 1958 National Child Development Study found that a third fewer people born in 1958 were in the labour market at age 62 than at age 55.

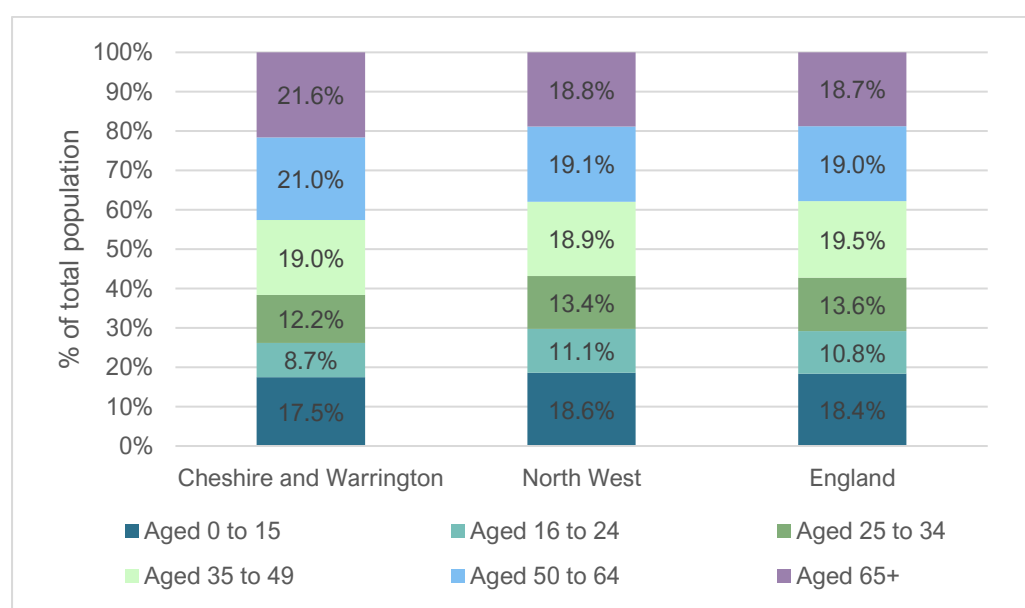
Given the median age of the population across Cheshire and Warrington is four years older than regional and national figures⁶, with more people approaching the latter stages of their working lives, this cohort will be an important one to target to ensure there is support for those who need it to stay in the workforce.

There needs to be support for those whose health is leading to early retirement - 45% of those aged 50-64 nationally gave long-term sickness as the reason for inactivity, as well as providing opportunities for those who are in a position where they can retire early, which will likely be a significant cohort in Cheshire and Warrington.

⁵ UCL Centre for Longitudinal Studies: Economic inactivity before reaching State Pension Age (2024)

⁶ ONS Mid-Year Population Estimates, England and Wales, June 2024

Figure 8. Population composition (2024)



Source: ONS Population Estimates (2025)

Long-term sickness and disability

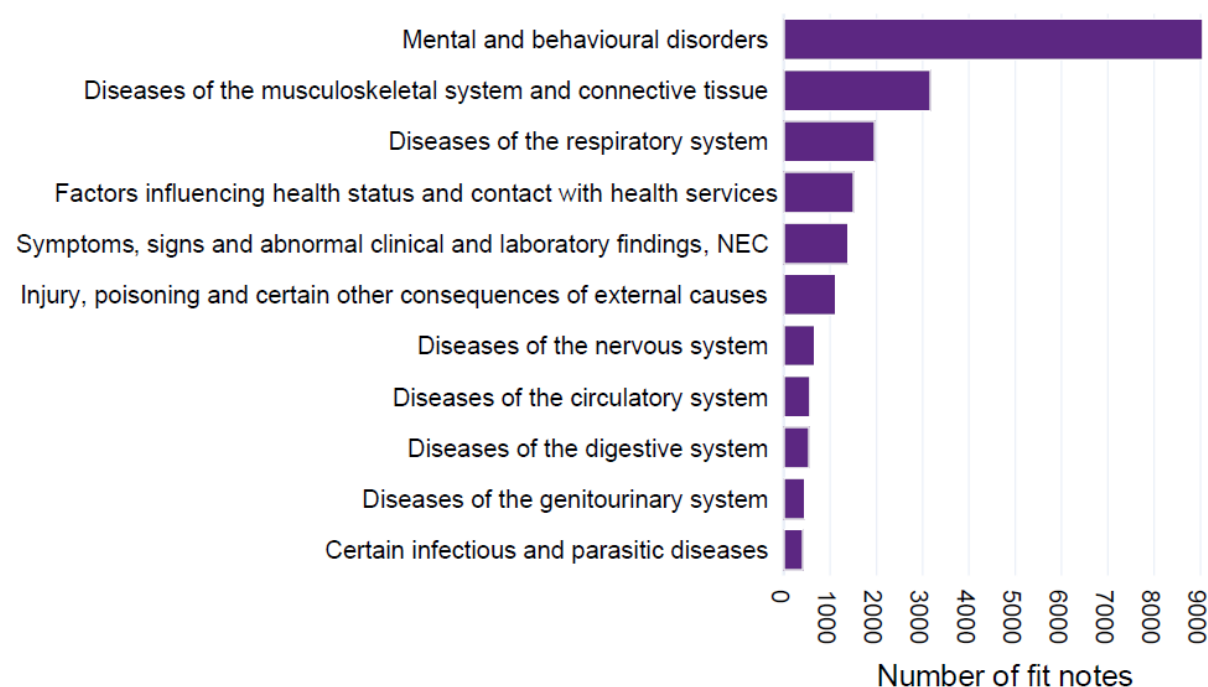
The next highest reason for economic inactivity behind early retirement is long-term sickness. All three local authorities have seen long-term sickness increase as a reason for economic inactivity particularly so over the last 5 years in Cheshire West and Chester. There has also been a continued rise over the last decade in Warrington. Long-term sickness accounts for a lower proportion of economic inactivity in Cheshire East.

In Cheshire and Merseyside in December 2024, 11,500 people were absent from work due to temporary sickness, compared to 6,800 in December 2004. This is a key group where early intervention should focus on preventing progression to involuntary worklessness related to long-term sickness.

Fit note data shows that a combined 7% of people are off work with long-term and temporary sickness across Cheshire and Merseyside, compared with 5.1% nationally⁷. The largest drivers of worklessness are mental and behavioural orders, which made up around 40% of fit note reasons, followed by musculoskeletal and respiratory diseases.

⁷ Cheshire and Merseyside Health and Care Partnership: All Together in Health and Work (2025)

Figure 9. Top 10 fit note reasons (Dec 2024) in Cheshire and Merseyside



Source: Cheshire and Merseyside Health and Care Partnership All Together in Health and Work (2025)

Fit notes owing to mental health and behavioural disorders have risen from around 6,000 per month in 2015 to 11,500 in 2024. Financial pressures, job strain, and insecurity tend to be more prevalent for people with fewer qualifications or living in more deprived areas which is reflected in Cheshire and Merseyside, with areas with greater deprivation exhibiting higher incidence of mental health fit notes.

Around a fifth - 21% - of the population in Cheshire and Merseyside report a long-term Musculoskeletal (MSK) condition, compared to the England 17.6% average⁸. MSK conditions affect people of all ages but are more common with advancing age and are more prevalent in areas with greater deprivation. Fit notes for musculoskeletal issues have risen from around 3,000 per month in 2015 to 4,300 in 2024 across Cheshire and Merseyside. Cheshire and Merseyside counters trends seen more widely where work-related musculoskeletal disorders have decreased over time⁹, highlighting a potential gap for employment support services specifically aimed at those with musculoskeletal conditions.

Residents with disabilities are more likely to be economically inactive than their non-disabled peers. The employment rate for residents with disabilities in Cheshire and Warrington is 65% (although this varies from 70.1% in Cheshire East and 54.4% in Warrington). Although this compares well again the UK and North West employment rate, Warrington is lower than the UK rate and level with the North West rate. This represents a loss in potential talent,

⁸ Cheshire and Merseyside ICB

⁹ The Health Foundation Commission for Healthier Working Lives

who with tailored support for the individual and employer could become economically active, which in turn could improve their health, resilience, financial independence and reduce demand on public services.

Figure 10: Employment rate for those residents with disabilities and those without (ONS Annual Population Survey, Nov 2025)

	Cheshire East	Cheshire West and Chester	Warrington	Cheshire and Warrington	UK	North West
Employment rate aged 16-64 - EA core or work-limiting disabled	70.1	65.8	54.4	65	56.7	54.4
Employment rate aged 16-64 - not EA core or work-limiting disabled	83.1	88.2	81	84	82.3	82

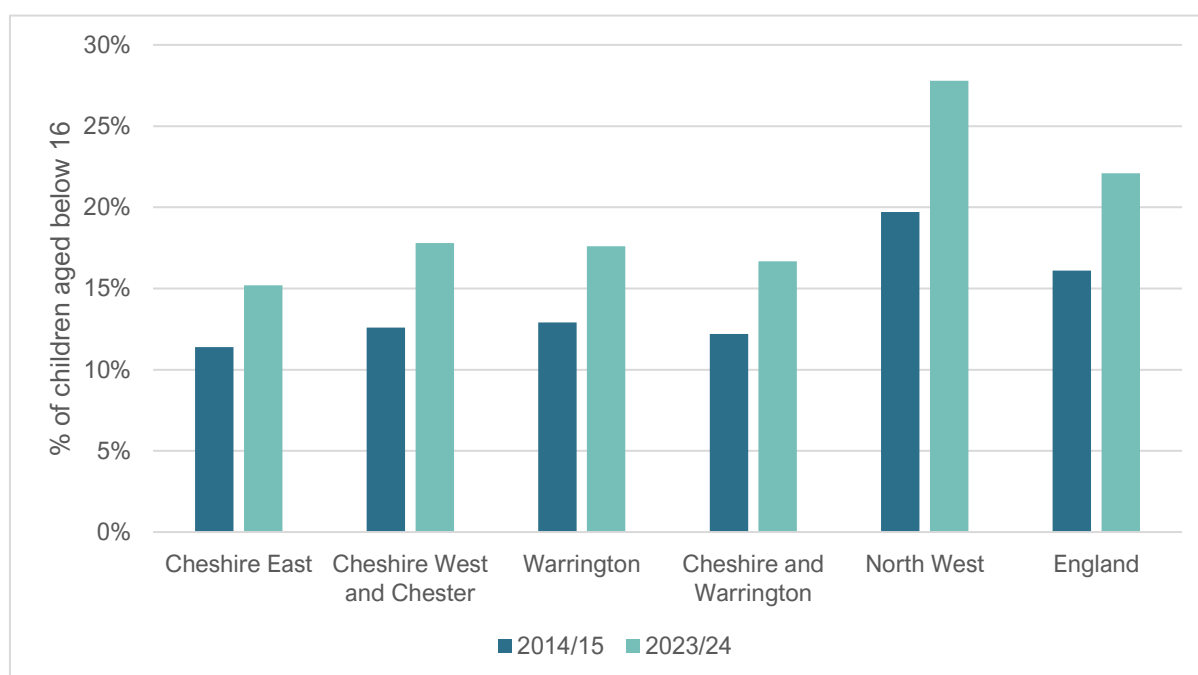
Carers and parents facing challenges

Although the number of children living in poverty¹⁰ is comparatively low, especially within the North West region, with the three local authorities amongst the six districts with the lowest levels of relative child poverty across the North West, there has been a rise in the number of children living in poverty across all three local authorities. Latest estimates across Cheshire and Warrington estimate that just over 29,000 children aged below 16 are living in relative poverty, a rise of 9,000 children since 2014/15, up from 12% of children to 17% in 2023/24. Around 70% of children in low-income households were in working households across Cheshire and Warrington in 2023/24¹¹.

¹⁰ Relative poverty refers to people living in households with income below 60% of the median in that year.

¹¹ Cheshire and Merseyside Child and Family Poverty Updated Metrics July 2025

Figure 11: Percentage of children aged below 16 living in relative poverty (2023/24)



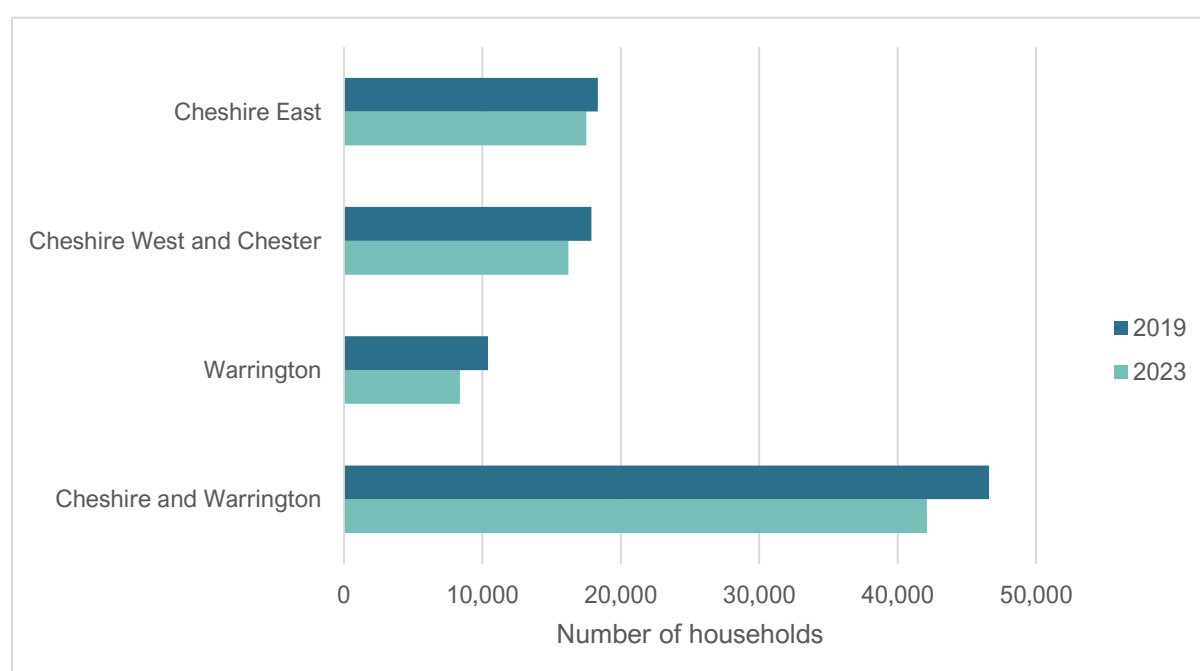
Source: Children in low-income families: local area statistics, financial year ending 2024

This reiterates that there is an increasing number of families who are living on low incomes and therefore may face more barriers to accessing and sustaining employment. Some barriers for parents from low-income families to return/enter into employment include childcare, transport, and housing costs (including the cost of heating and general maintenance).

Although the percentage of households who are in fuel poverty¹² has fallen over recent years, there remains 42,000 households (10%) across Cheshire and Warrington who are experiencing fuel poverty. This can make it more expensive to heat homes and increases the risk of developing health related issues by living in cold environments. This could be another barrier to employment, especially those who are also living on low incomes.

¹² A household is considered to be fuel poor if they are living in a property with a fuel poverty energy efficiency rating of band D or below

Figure 12: Number of households in fuel poverty (2023)



Source: Department for Energy Security and Net Zero Fuel Poverty Subregional fuel poverty data (2025)

Unpaid carers and single parents are falling through gaps in current employment and skills provision and are therefore facing significant barriers to workforce participation. Research conducted by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation¹³ projects that by 2035 there will be an extra 400,000 people in the UK caring for the elderly, sick and disabled for ten or more hours per week. Although the government has recently put in place additional childcare support measures of up to 30 hours of free childcare for working parents.

Earnings and quality of work

Median pay in Cheshire and Warrington closely matches UK levels, with modest variation across local areas in May 2025. Median pay for employees living in Cheshire & Warrington is highest in Cheshire East, and lowest in Cheshire West & Chester, although median monthly pay of £2,525 across Cheshire and Warrington is £100 above the regional average¹⁴.

The varied nature of the economy in Cheshire and Warrington is evident in the occupations residents are employed in with both higher and lower skilled occupations present in the employment mix. Although not massively different to the make-up of regional and national employment, there is a slightly higher base of employment in high skilled occupations with a

¹³ Joseph Rowntree Foundation: The future of care needs: a whole systems approach

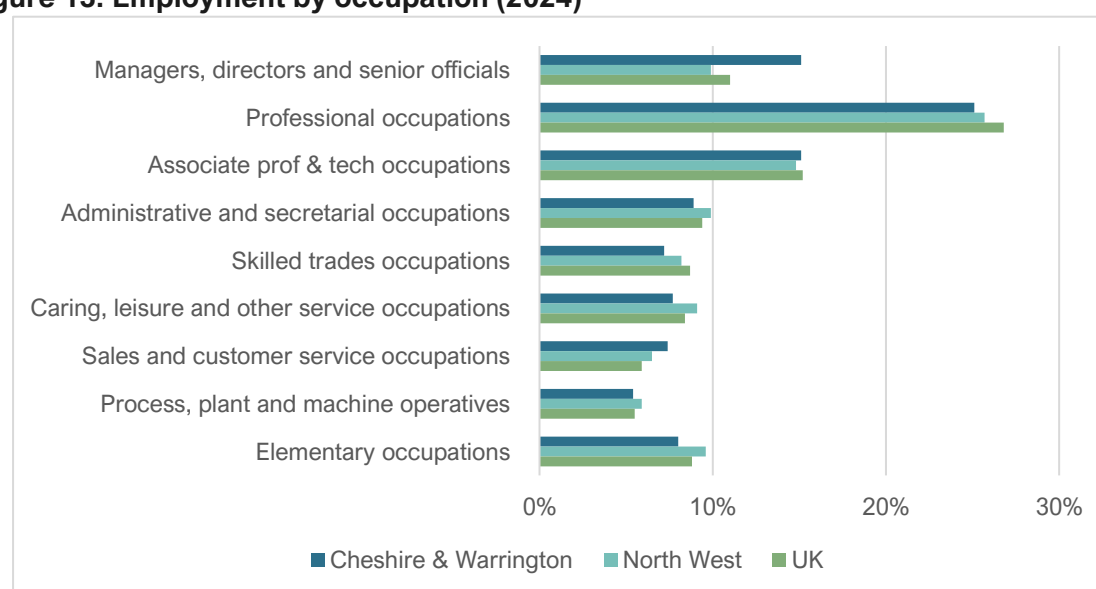
¹⁴ ONS PAYE Real Time Information (2025)

relatively high share of workers in managerial roles, well above regional and national averages.

But there is variation across Cheshire and Warrington with higher shares of those employed as managers and in professional occupations in Cheshire West & Chester than Warrington who has a higher share of residents employed in lower skilled occupations such as process, plant, and machine operatives, and in elementary occupations.

In Cheshire East and Cheshire West and Chester, residents' earnings are higher than workplace earnings suggesting many people commute to higher-paid, high skill jobs likely as managers or in professional occupations outside the area. In contrast, workplace earnings in Warrington are higher than resident earnings, indicating an inflow of higher-paid workers and potential skills mismatches among the local population, where residents are more likely to work in lower skilled occupations.

Figure 13: Employment by occupation (2024)



Source: ONS Annual Population Survey (2025)

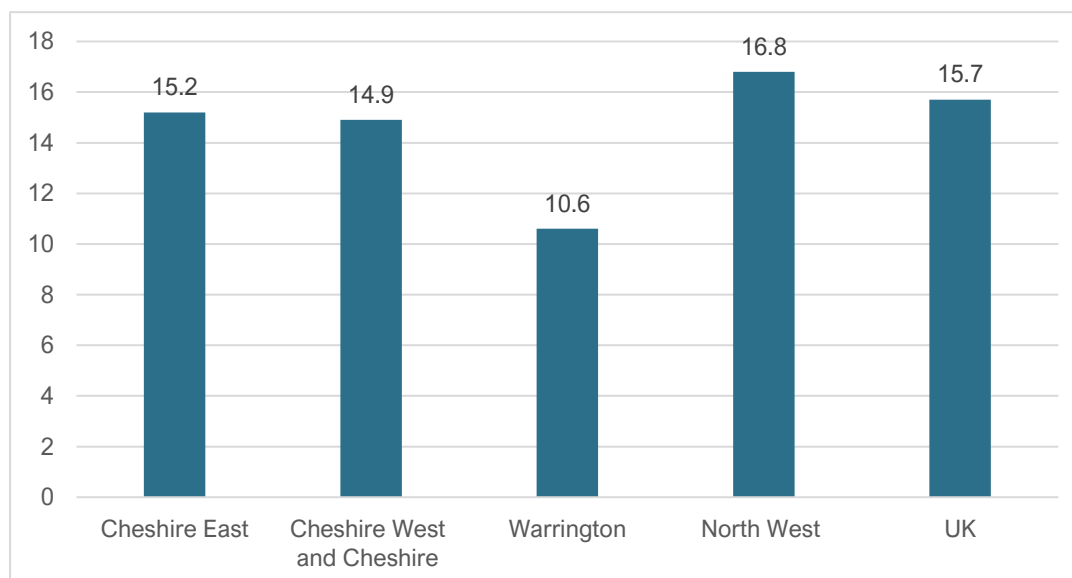
All areas have seen a decline in the number of employees earning below the living wage, and all have a lower proportion compared to the 17% of employees regionally, especially in Warrington. Coupled with a strong employment rate, high earnings in relation to the regional average, a high number of jobs per working age resident, and a high proportion employed in high skilled occupations, all point to a strong labour market featuring high quality job opportunities.

However, this is not felt by all in Cheshire and Warrington. It is estimated that 64,000 people earn below the living wage, around 14% of the working age population in Cheshire and Warrington, so there remain challenges for many residents in low-paid or insecure work with limited progression routes.

Despite the low proportion of employees earning below the living wage in Warrington, we have seen that qualifications attainment across the authority area tends to be lower than elsewhere in the subregion, creating a potential barrier to accessing good quality work. This may mean that residents may be stuck in lower skilled occupations rather than some of the

higher paid roles in sectors such as professional, scientific and technical services where Warrington is particularly strong.

Figure 14: Percentage of employees earning below the Living Wage (2024)



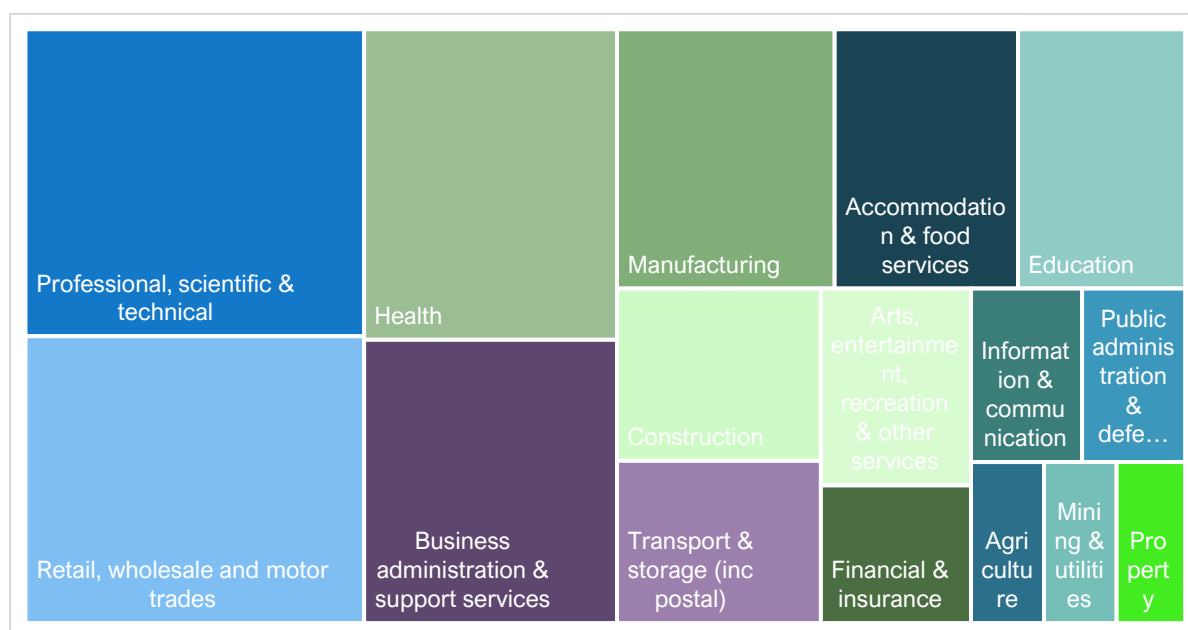
Source: ONS Number and proportion of employee jobs with hourly pay below the living wage (2024)

Sectors and occupations

Professional, scientific, and technical services is the highest employing sector in Cheshire and Warrington, with employment growing strongly in the sector particularly between 2022 and 2023. The sector makes up 15% of total employment, well above 9.5%-10% regional and national averages. This tends to be a high value sector, covering areas such as life sciences (one of five priority sectors identified in their LSIP) and are core components of the growth sectors identified by the government as part of the national Industrial Strategy.

Manufacturing remains an important sector (another priority sector) at over 8% of total employment, with employment growing by 1% a year on average since 2015, whereas nationally employment has declined. Business admin and support is also a relatively big employer in Cheshire and Warrington at over 10% of total employment. But overall, there are few major differences in sector employment to the overall national economy. IT is relatively small compared to nationally, along with health although this is still a significant employer regionally at 11% and another of Cheshire and Warrington's sector priorities. Public admin and defence has a low proportion of employment compared to nationally, as does education which may point towards having to travel outside the subregion for certain courses/training options.

Figure 15: Breakdown of employment by sector in Cheshire and Warrington¹⁵ (2023)



Source: ONS Business Register and Employment Survey (2025)

All areas have a strong base of employment in professional, scientific, and technical services. Warrington is the centre of employment in the subregion, with the sector making up a fifth of employment across the district. Warrington is also the hub for business administration, wider logistics, construction, and utilities jobs in the subregion.

Cheshire East is the centre for manufacturing employment and although a relatively small employer, the base for agricultural employment in the subregion.

Cheshire West and Chester is the base for employment in the financial and insurance sectors, along with education, creative and hospitality sectors.

Skills

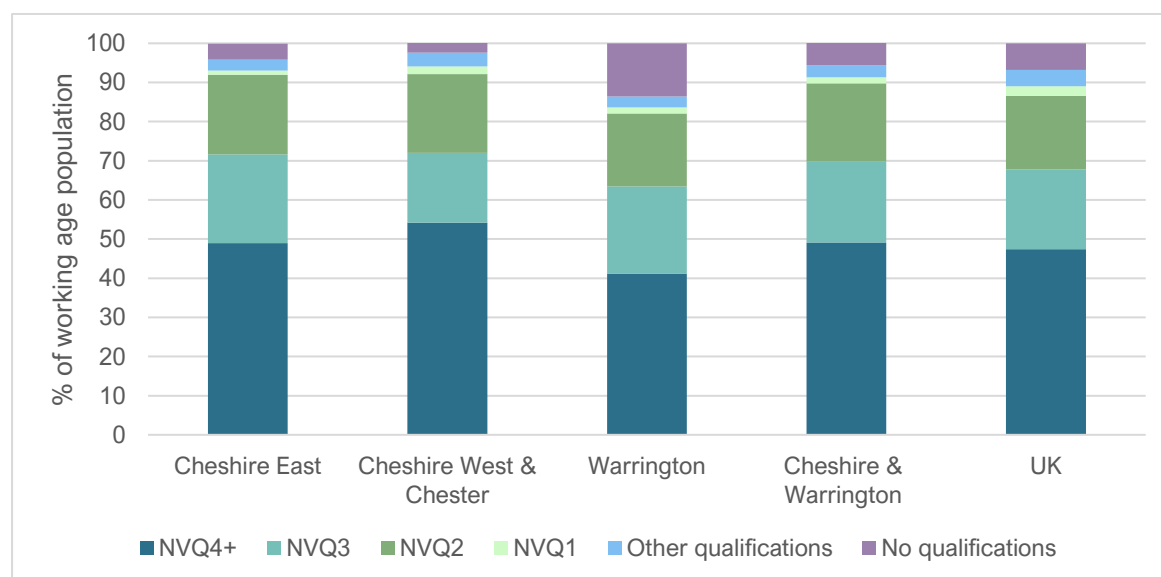
While there are strong top-end skills across the subregion, gaps remain in foundational attainment, particularly in Warrington. Overall, qualification levels in Cheshire and Warrington are slightly above the UK average: 49.1% of working-age adults (16–64) hold Regulated Qualification Framework (RQF) 4+ qualifications, compared to 47.4% nationally. Cheshire East and Cheshire West & Chester have relatively high proportions of residents qualified to RQF3 and RQF4+. In contrast, Warrington has a significantly higher share of adults with no formal qualifications at 13.6% - more than double the UK average of 6.8%, and well above neighbouring areas.

¹⁵ Figure 14 presents the proportion of total employment made up by sector

This suggests challenges in progression for some groups and points to uneven education outcomes across the subregion that may limit access to higher-skilled employment.

Although higher level apprenticeship achievements have been rising over the last 5 years, there has been a fall in intermediate level apprenticeships across the subregion, where the achievement rate is low compared to regional figures. There has also been a rise in the number of 16-17 years olds are not in education, employment or training (NEET) to over 800 across Cheshire and Warrington. Previous reports and engagement have raised concerns over insufficient progression pathways for residents from Level 2 upwards.

Figure 16: Highest qualification attainment aged 16-64 (2024)

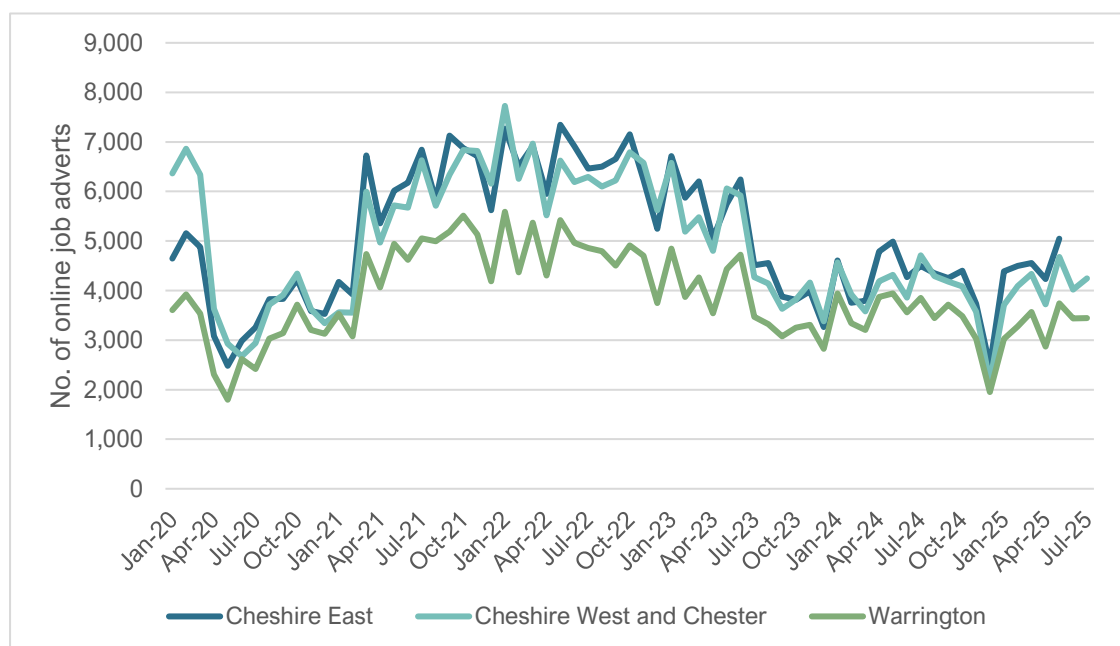


Source: Annual Population Survey (2025)

Employment demand

Vacancies fell significantly at the start of the Pandemic, before slowly picking up until early 2023. These fell again in late 2024. Over the last year or so vacancies have started to pick up across all three local authorities. Job vacancies are focused in health and social care, construction, advanced manufacturing (including opportunities associated with low carbon) and the visitor economy sectors, with some of the occupations most in demand being engineers, nurses and social care workers, and managers.


Figure 17: Online job adverts (2020-25)





Source: ONS Labour demand volumes by Standard Occupation Classification (SOC 2020), UK


Evidence from the LSIP and health and wellbeing strategies, alongside national trends, highlight health and social care, retail and hospitality, logistics, construction and manufacturing as industries where work related problems are the most acute. These challenges typically stem from a combination of skills shortages, recruitment and retention issues, workplace health concerns, and structural pressures in the business environment.


Figure 10. Sectors facing a high level of work-related problems

- 

Health and social care is one of the most pressured industries, with staff shortages, high turnover, and rising demand from an ageing population. Employers report challenges in recruitment and retention, reliance on agency workers, and above average sickness absence linked to physical strain and stress. The sector has difficulty retaining younger staff, with a 44.6% turnover rate of care workers aged under 25.
- 

Retail, hospitality, and other parts of the visitor economy see high workforce churn. Many roles are low paid, involve unsocial hours, or are seasonal, with peak periods in customer-facing jobs creating additional pressure. The sector also lost many workers during the pandemic, with a need to attract people back to sustain this part of the foundational economy.
- 

Logistics, warehousing, and transport experience skills gaps in higher-skilled roles, alongside high turnover in lower-skilled positions. Shift work, long hours, and physically demanding tasks contribute to musculoskeletal problems and absence rates.
- 

Construction and skilled trades face shortages of qualified workers, an ageing workforce, and the physical risks of the job. Seasonal weather disruption, demanding work, and a lack of new entrants in trades such as bricklaying, electrical installation, and retrofitting create capacity pressures nationally.
- 

Manufacturing and process industries are a major economic contributor, with strengths in advanced engineering, chemicals, and pharmaceuticals. The sector faces an ageing workforce in specialist roles, skills gaps, and the need to adapt to automation and digital manufacturing. Some jobs remain repetitive or physically demanding, adding to recruitment and retention pressures.

But it is not a case that vacancies can simply be filled by those currently out of work as there are skills mismatches across the patch. Previous reports and engagement have also raised concerns over insufficient progression pathways for residents from qualification Level 2 upwards, an obvious barrier to enter into many of the sectors highlighted, including

professional, scientific and technical services, the largest employing sector across Cheshire and Warrington. Areas such as life sciences where Cheshire and Warrington displays a strong specialism, are difficult for some residents to enter, particularly in Warrington where the share of adults with no formal qualifications is more than double the national average. And despite the need for more workers to enter into skilled trades, we have heard that apprentices have struggled to secure placements, with employers more focused on current delivery while operating in a high-cost environment, opting to try and hire more experienced workers rather than helping to train and recruit the next generation.

Employers need to take an active role in the skills and training landscape to help train staff to fill vacancies in the local economy and allow them to progress throughout their career. This will also improve their own business resilience. However, from the latest Employer Skills Survey where data is available from 2022 at a LEP level, Cheshire and Warrington ranks in the bottom half of LEP areas by the proportion of establishments who have funded or arranged training for staff over the last year (59%). Less than half of establishments funded or arranged on-the-job training (46%) for their staff, the fourth lowest proportion across LEP areas.

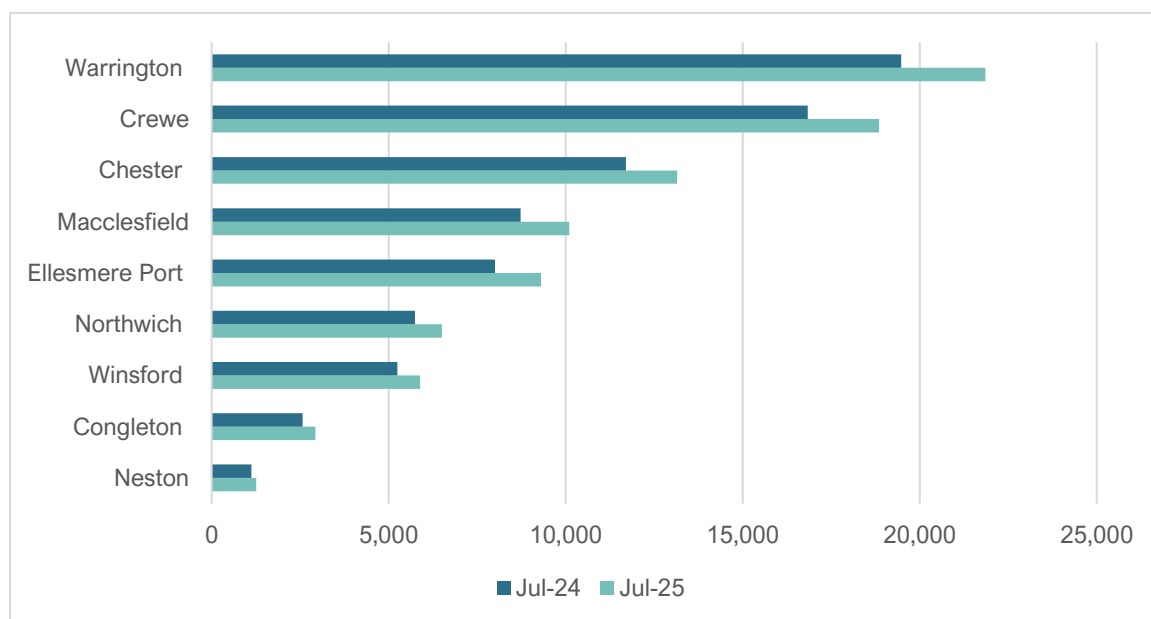
The proportion of employers investing in skills and training varies across the subregion, where over 60% of establishments invested in training in Cheshire West and Chester and Warrington, falling to 55% in Cheshire East. This highlights the need for employers to invest in their workforce and potential employees if we are to help provide residents with the skills they need to fill vacancies and help to grow the local economy.

Universal Credit and unemployment

Between July 2024 and July 2025 total Universal Credit (UC) claimants rose by over 10,000 from 79,400 to 89,850 across Cheshire and Warrington. The rise in UC claimants is partly explained by UC replacing six legacy benefits that cover people in work and out of work (income-related Employment and Support Allowance, income-based Jobseeker's Allowance, Housing Benefit, Income Support, Working Tax Credit, and Child Tax Credit), and to put into context, the 13% rise in UC claimants across Cheshire and Warrington is slightly below the 16% seen regionally and nationally.

Warrington continues to make up around a quarter of total claimants followed by just over one in five from Crewe – combined Warrington and Crewe make up nearly half of total claimants. All areas (as shown in the chart below using Jobcentre Plus areas) within Cheshire and Warrington have seen a rise of at least 12% in total claimants over the last year, the highest rises being in Ellesmere Port and Macclesfield of 16%. Ellesmere Port and Macclesfield combined made up a quarter of the total rise in claimants across the subregion over the last year.

Figure 18: Total UC claimants (Jul 2024 and Jul 2025) by Jobcentre plus area



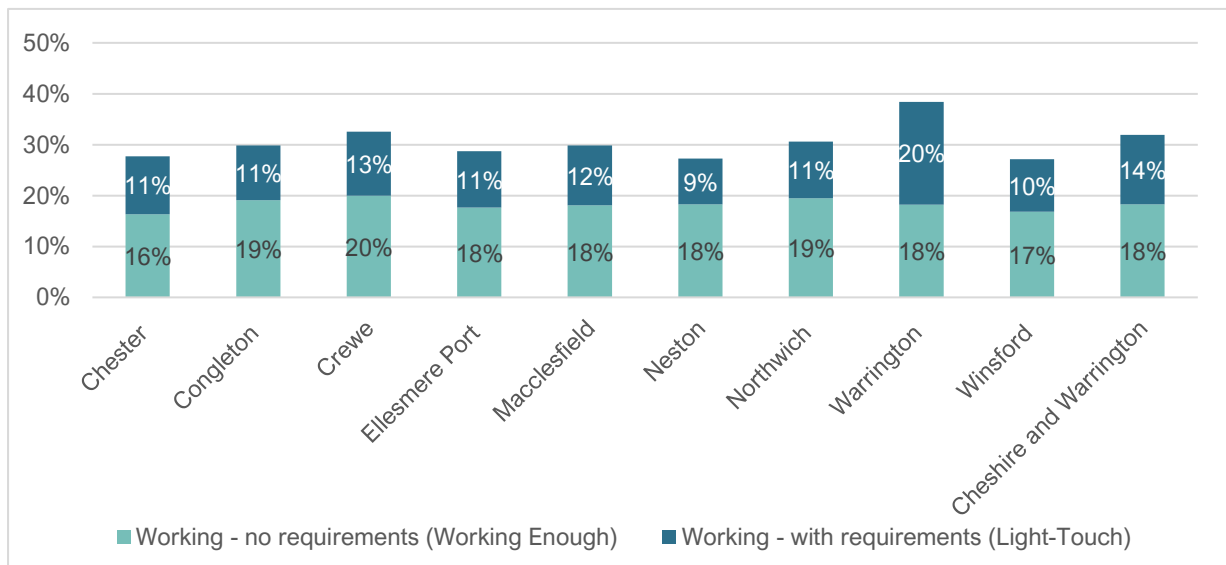
Source: Department for Work and Pensions (2025)

There has been a rise in the number of UC claimants with no work requirements to 45,600 across Cheshire and Warrington, making up over half of total UC claimants. Warrington and Crewe make up nearly half of the total UC claimants with no work requirements - Warrington around quarter of UC claimants with no work requirements and Crewe a fifth of claimants.

Across Cheshire and Warrington, 32% of UC claimants are working with or without requirements¹⁶. This varies with Warrington the highest at 38% of claimants with a high number of UC claimants working with requirements, to 30% or below in Winsford, Neston, Chester, Congelton and Ellesmere Port. Therefore, most of UC claimants are not working – 58,700 UC claimants across Cheshire and Warrington are not working with over two thirds of these with no work requirements.

¹⁶ Working no requirements: individual or household earnings over the level at which conditionality applies. Required to inform DWP of changes of circumstances, particularly if at risk of decreasing earnings or losing job. Working with requirements (light-touch): in work but could earn more or not working but has a partner with low earnings.

Figure 19: Percentage of total UC claimants working [either working with or without requirements] (Mar 2025)

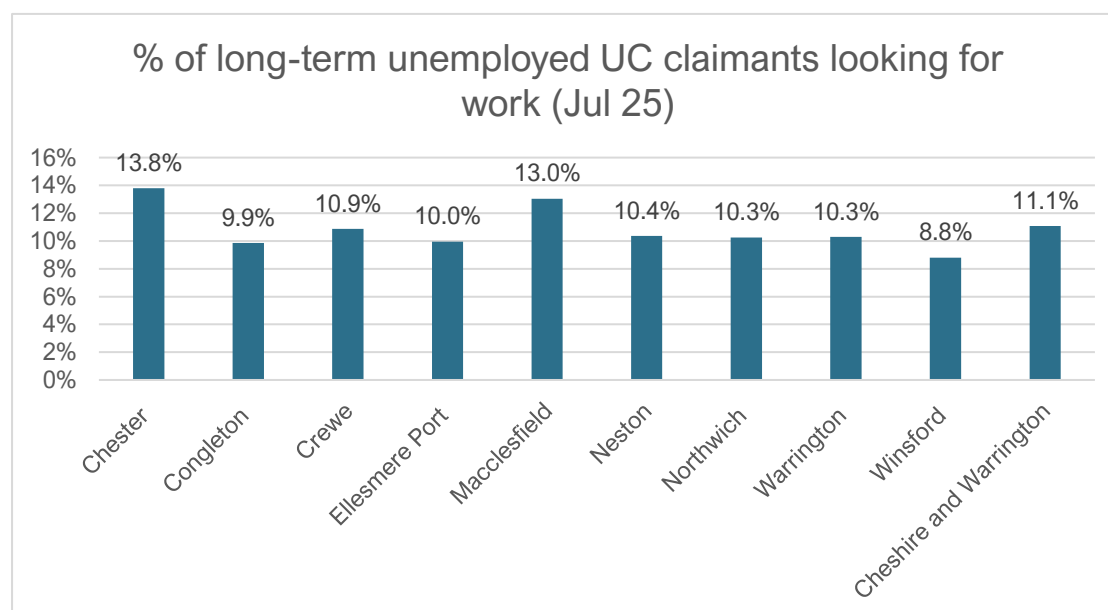


Source: Department for Work and Pensions (2025)

There has been an increase of over 7,000 UC claimants who are long-term unemployed to 65,400 across Cheshire and Warrington over the last year. This refers to people claiming UC who have been unemployed for more than 12 months across all DWP regimes. Warrington makes up around a quarter of long-term unemployed UC claimants, a fifth from Crewe, and Chester and Macclesfield combined another quarter of claimants.

Women make up 62% of long-term unemployed claimants across Cheshire and Warrington and this is fairly consistent across Jobcentre plus areas, although it is slightly higher in Winsford and Crewe. Across all areas most of those who are long-term unemployed are not looking for work. Only 11% of UC claimants who are long-term unemployed are looking for work, the highest is in Chester and Macclesfield with 13-14% of UC claimants who are long-term unemployed looking for work, but this figure is 10% or lower in Winsford, Congelton, Ellesmere Port, Warrington, Northwich and Neston.

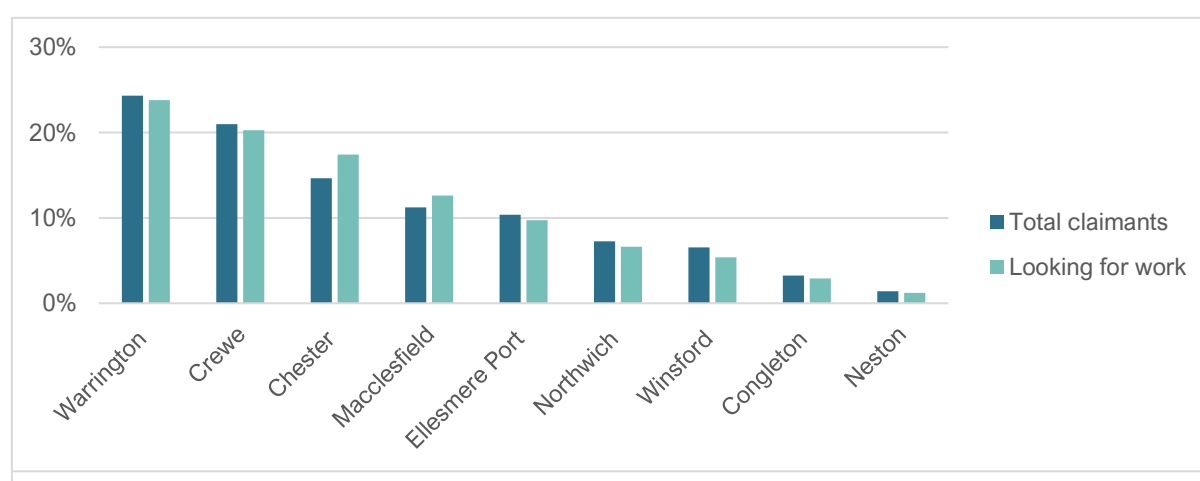
Figure 20: Percentage of long-term unemployed UC claimants looking for work (Jul 2025)



Source: Department for Work and Pensions (2025)

Between July 2024 and July 2025, the number of claimants looking for work has fallen by 6% from 14,450 to 13,635, with all areas within Cheshire and Warrington seeing a fall, although this has been more subdued in Winsford, Chester, and Warrington. Those claiming UC and looking for work only make up 15% of total UC claimants. Although the overall split of UC claimants looking for work by Jobcentre Plus area is not dissimilar to total UC claimants share, Macclesfield and Chester make up a higher proportion of claimants looking for work than total UC claimants.

Figure 21: Share of total UC claimants and looking for work by Jobcentre plus area



Source: Department for Work and Pensions (2025)

Women make up 58% of total claimants with this being fairly consistent across Jobcentre plus area, while men make up 58% of UC claimants who are looking for work. Overall, the fall in UC claimants looking for work appears to be from a fall in the number of female UC

claimants looking for work, falling by 12% over the last year whereas there has been little overall change in male UC claimants looking for work across Cheshire and Warrington.

Key transition points

Key transition points increase the risk of inactivity. They require sufficient, joined-up whole system support to prevent disengagement and support groups most at risk. Below we have summarised three key transition points of leaving education and becoming NEET; falling out of work due to health; and leavers from institutional system in the Cheshire and Warrington context, along with a high-level summary of existing support in place.

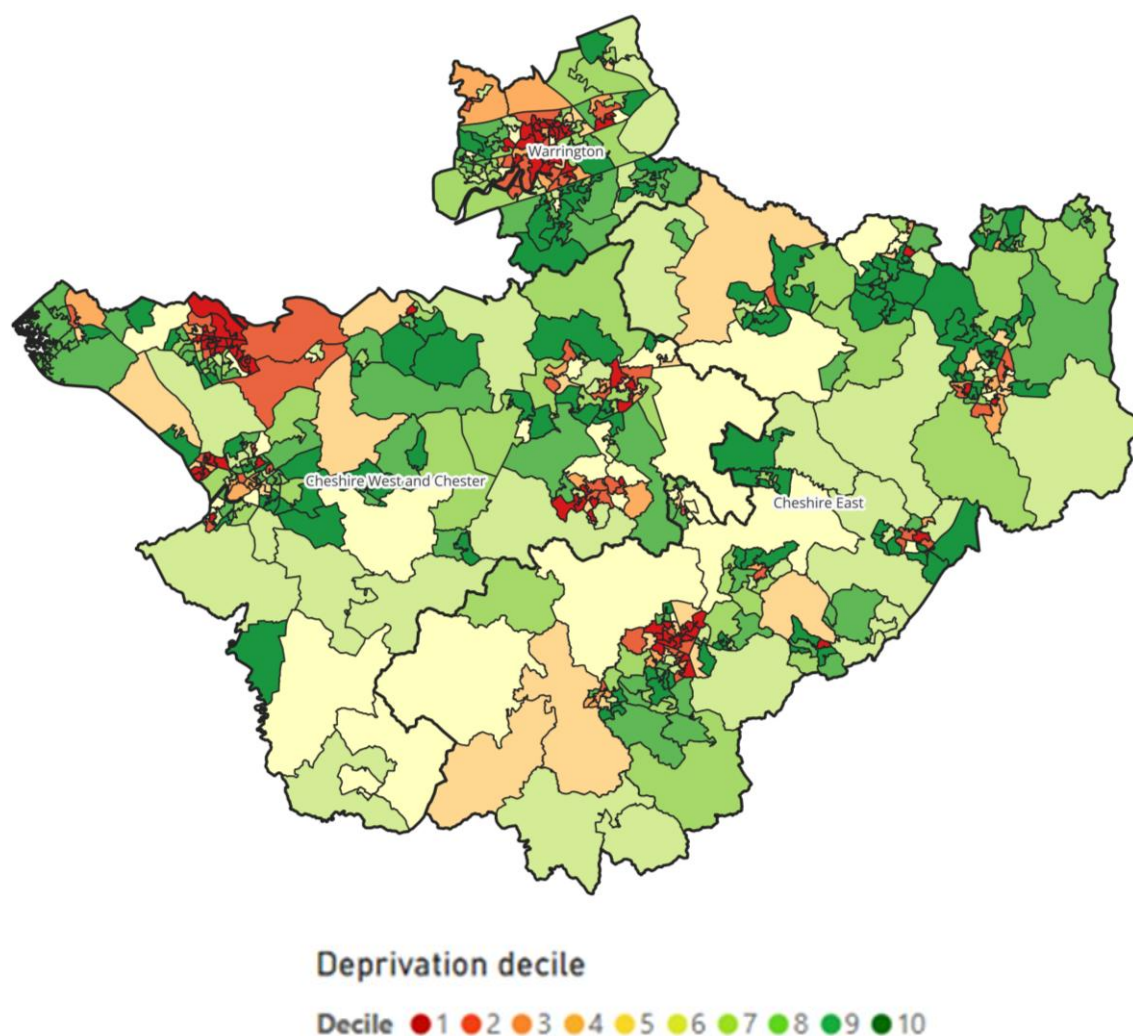
Figure 22: Key transition points – Cheshire and Warrington

Transition point	The need for intervention	Existing support
Leaving education becoming NEET	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Over 800 16–17-year-olds in Cheshire & Warrington are NEET, equal to 3.8% of this age group, above the national average Risk of dropping out during transition from school to college Risk factors include poverty, SEND, care leavers and rural isolation There is a lack of reengagement routes or sustained outreach in some areas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pledge Partnership Careers Hub Fresh Start Total people
Falling out of work due to health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rising long-term sickness is a key driver of inactivity Includes mental health, Musculoskeletal (MSK) and other chronic illness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mid-Life MOT Restart IPS Severe Mental Health
Leavers from institutional systems (e.g. prison, military)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> High risk of disengagement after structured institutional life Complex needs, including housing, mental health, addiction and stigma Limited integration with integration services and low levels of employer engagement in targeted hiring 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Breaking the Cycle: Tempus Novo support for ex-offenders The Armed Forces community support hub

Deprived neighbourhoods

On the whole deprivation is low at the Cheshire and Warrington level, with almost two thirds of neighbourhoods living in the 50% least deprived neighbourhoods nationally, and over a third of neighbourhoods in the least 20% deprived nationally. However, there are pockets of deprivation across the subregion particularly in urban centres of Crewe, Winsford, Warrington, Northwich, Macclesfield and Ellesmere Port. This includes some neighbourhoods towards the most deprived in the country including Crewe North East, Lache, Hebden Green, Poplars and Hulme, Central Warrington and Wharton.

Figure 23: Index of Multiple Deprivation

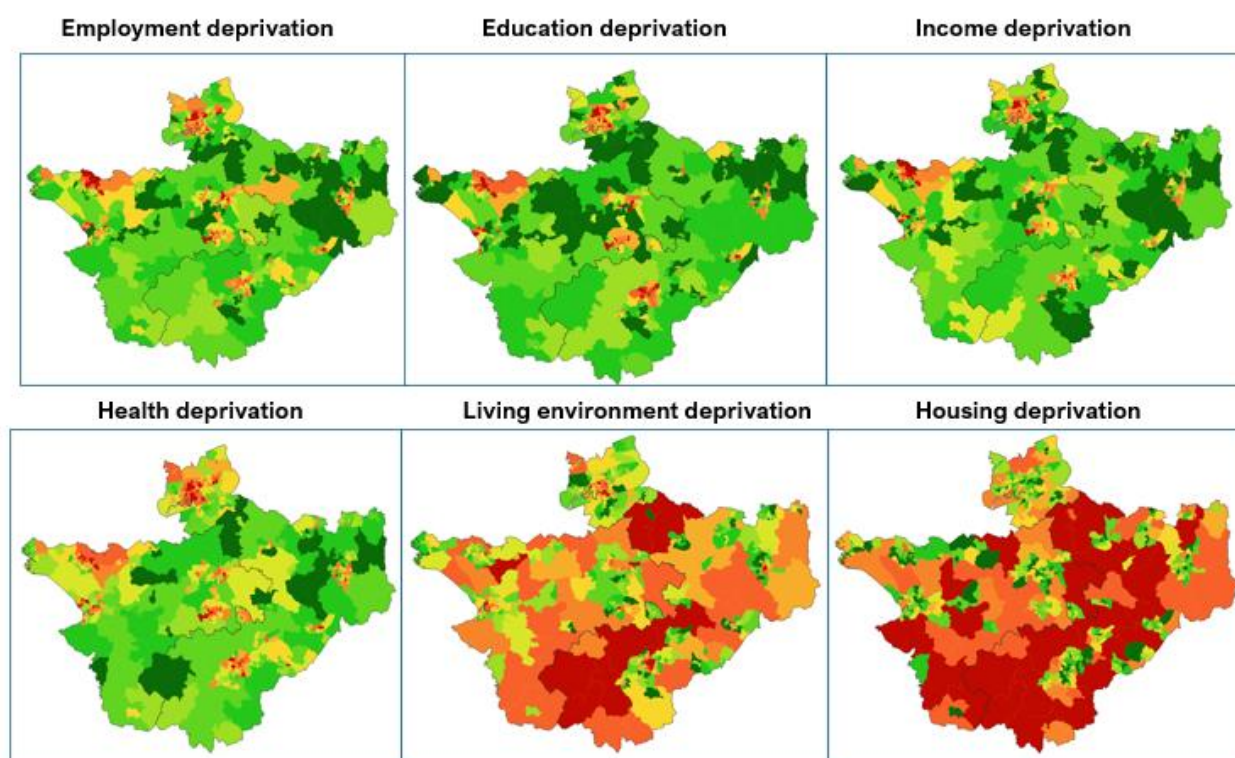


Source: MHCLG English indices of deprivation (2019)

Focusing on different domains which make up the overall Index of Multiple Deprivation again points to relatively low levels of deprivation across Cheshire and Warrington, particularly the domains of employment; health; education, skills and training; and income, whilst highlighting pockets of deprivation concentrated in Crewe North East, Hebden Green, Northwich, Dallam, Ellesmere Port, Central Warrington and Blacon.

However, the Index of Multiple Deprivation may mask some of the inequality felt in more rural areas, where transport accessibility and housing affordability are potentially significant barriers to entering and sustaining employment. This can be seen in the living environment and access to housing and services domains, where many of Cheshire and Warrington's rural communities rank more towards the most deprived nationally.

Figure 24: Domains of the Index of Multiple Deprivation¹⁷

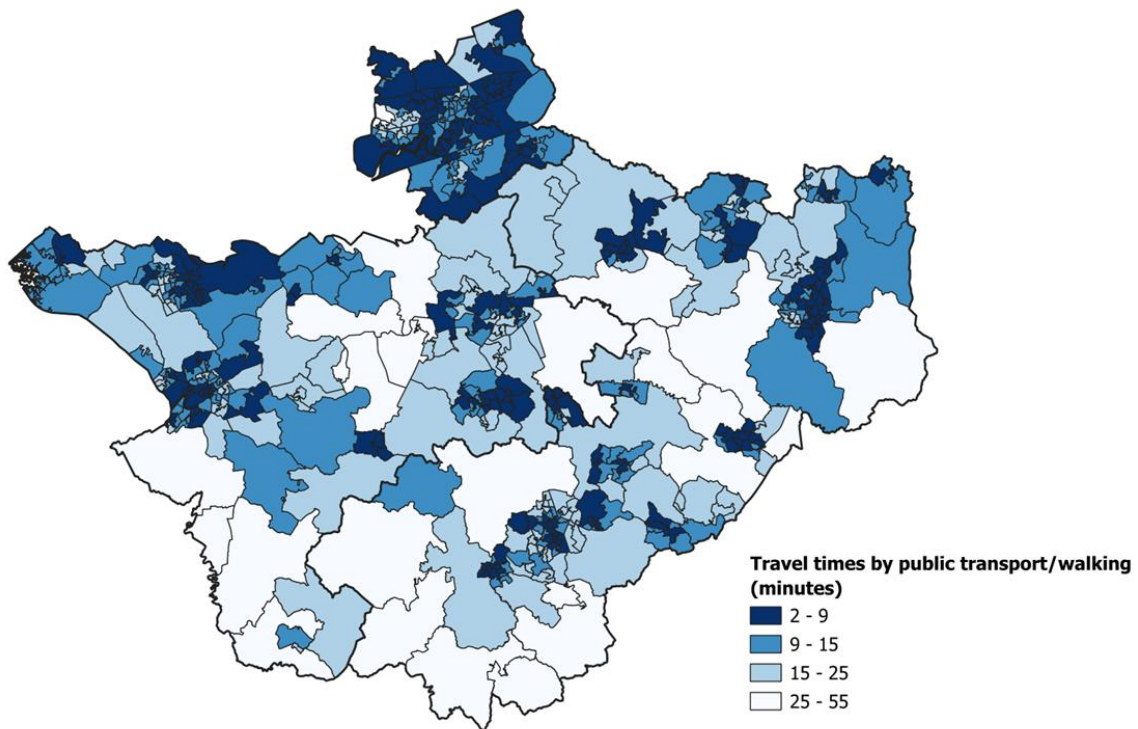


Source: MHCLG English indices of deprivation (2019)

Journey times to key services are generally longer in Cheshire than they are in Warrington, including average journey times to employment centres. The map below shows average minimum journey times to medium sized employment centres (500-4,999 jobs) by public transport/walking. This highlights that journey times are typically shorter in urban centres of Crewe, Winsford, Chester, Northwich, Ellesmere Port and Neston, Knutsford, Congleton, Macclesfield and generally across areas in Warrington, but are longer across large areas of Cheshire in what are more typically rural areas.

¹⁷ There are seven domains which make up the overall Index of Multiple Deprivation. The only domain not included in this figure is crime.

Figure 25: Average minimum journey times to medium sized employment centres (2019)



Source: *DfT Journey Time Statistics (2022)*

Social mobility is likely to be impacted for those living in more deprived neighbourhoods in Crewe, Winsford, Warrington, Northwich, Macclesfield and Ellesmere Port, and potentially reinforcing barriers people face to enter into employment after leaving school. But what may be considered less deprived areas, generally in more rural communities, there remains significant barriers to employment in the form of reliable and accessible transport, and in being able to afford housing given higher costs especially when compared to other areas in the North West.

Current System and Offer

This section maps the current service provision across Cheshire and Warrington, spanning local government, DWP, NHS, the education sector, and the voluntary sector. It provides an overview of local services and programmes, highlighting what support is available, who delivers it, and how far it reaches. It also summarises provision for each priority group and identifies key gaps in provision.

Cheshire and Warrington hosts a diverse network of employment and skills support. This includes:

- National DWP funded provision – delivered through a range of providers.
- Local Authority (LA) activity, funded through UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) and Department for Education (DfE)
- Work and health related initiatives are supported through the NHS/Integrated Care Board (ICB)
- Further education provision including apprenticeships and T Levels delivered by colleges and private training providers.
- Careers Provision delivered by SEETEC
- Numerous voluntary sector projects.
- Probation and Youth Justice Services

This array of skills provision and employment support assists inactive cohorts and those most at risk of disengaging from the labour market across the geography of the subregion. We have drawn on insights from engagement with councils, employers, and service providers, as well as the evidence used to inform the Cheshire and Merseyside Health and Work Strategy, to inform a comprehensive understanding of the support landscape.

The below table summarises an overview of what support and provision is currently delivered across Cheshire and Warrington by partners.

Services are delivered at a range of locations, including JCP locations, Skills and Employment Hubs in Cheshire West and Chester, Springboard Work Hubs and Youth Hubs in Cheshire East, Warrington Youth Zone, various community settings, at local schools and colleges, and via online support. Programme information has been collated through desk-based research and stakeholder consultation. This is not a comprehensive list of all support offered across the subregion, but rather a brief overview of work and health support commissioned programmes. (Stakeholders are recommended to continue to develop and update this catalogue of support available to residents of Cheshire and Warrington).

Key:

	Sub-region wide
	Cheshire West and Chester
	Cheshire East
	Warrington

Figure 26: Matrix of support

Type of Support	Commissioned				VSCE delivery partners
	DWP	DfE	ICB	LA	
Job Matching	JobcentrePlus National Career Service Restart			RAST redundancy support	Springboard Youth Fed
Skills Progression	Sector-based Work Academy Programmes Seetec Work and Health	Skills Bootcamps			Springboard Youth Fed YMCA Cheshire
SEND	Employment Directions Supported Internships schemes		Mersey Care	Site Smart New Ground, Fresh Start Defining Futures Inspiring Futures Supported Employment	Fedcap Petty Pool Warrington Mencap Walton Lea Partnership Creating Adventures
Young people and NEET	Access to Work Youth Hub	The Careers Hub Supported internships	CAMHs	The Pledge Partnership Venture with Confidence Youth Support Service Fresh Start	The King's Trust Youth Fed
Mental Health	Employment Advisors (EA) in Talking Therapies (Cheshire)		EA in talking therapies. Individual Placement Support (IPS) (Drugs and Alcohol) Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHs) Veterans in Mind		
CIAG		The Careers Hub		Warrington LiFE Skills Employment hubs Work Hubs	

Adult and mid life	Mid Life MOTs Flexible Support Fund	Adult Learning		Defining Futures	YMCA
Digital skills	Essential Digital Skills			Digital drop-in Microsoft Suite training	Springboard Learn My Way

Local government

Local authorities provide a mix of employment and skills support for residents of all ages, within Cheshire and Warrington. Councils work closely with voluntary sector providers, colleges, and businesses to deliver targeted support for young people, NEETs, employers, and adults seeking to retrain or upskill.

Across Cheshire and Warrington, there is a core offer of subregional support through national DWP programmes, complemented by Adult Skills Fund provision delivered by colleges, independent training providers, LAs, DfE funded Supported Internships to facilitate work placements and provide employability training to young people 16-25 with an Education Health Care Plan (EHCP), Skills Bootcamps and various support provided by the voluntary and community sector. However, variation in the scope and scale of services contribute to differing levels of support, resulting in a postcode lottery. Cheshire West and Chester Council delivers the most extensive locally commissioned offer through its Skills and Employment hubs funded by DWP, NHS and multiple UKSPF projects; Cheshire East relies more on commissioned providers and has varying coverage in communities; while Warrington commissions through its Chamber and voluntary sector partners, resulting in a stronger emphasis on community-based and specialist provision.

Each council maintains a specialist local offer for care-experienced young people setting out entitlements and available support. This is due to the fact that LAs are corporate parents for care leavers until they are 25. Further detail on council led services are summarised below:

Cheshire East

- Cheshire East Council hosts the welfare-to-work partnership, maintaining a directory of provision and referral routes, with outcomes delivered through commissioned programmes through various providers across the local authority.
- The Venture with Confidence programme provides tailored support for young people who are NEET, helping them to re-engage with training and employment. This is being funded by Cheshire East Council through the Virtual School and Care Leaver Team.
- The council works with YMCA and local housing associations to provide outreach and mentoring support for residents experiencing homelessness or multiple barriers to work.
- The Youth Support Service provides statutory open access support for 13–19-year-olds (up to 25 with SEND), outdoor education focused support for NEET, support to young people who have an Education Healthcare Plan (EHCP), and transitional planning for targeted young people preparing for adulthood.
- Inspiring Futures, delivered by Fedcap on behalf of Cheshire East Council (funded by UKSPF), offers personalised support for people with disabilities and health conditions into employment.
- Supported Employment team support residents with disabilities or complex needs into the work environment.

Cheshire West and Chester

- Cheshire West and Chester delivers the largest programme of employment support in the subregion and manages the biggest share of adult education provision.
- The council operates four Skills and Employment Hubs in Chester, Ellesmere Port, Winsford and Northwich, providing free one-to-one advice, guidance, qualifications, and confidence-building support for residents aged 19+. This is funded through the council's core budget and DfE Adult Skills Funding. It is where the majority of the employment support programmes are delivered.
- Site Smart, delivered by Procure Plus aims to break down barriers for care-experienced and NEET young people who are interested in entering the construction industry, offering local on-site experience at Ellesmere Port. This is currently funded by UKSPF.
- Team Around the Family, is a council led early intervention service to help families identify strengths and needs, offering support and advice, and bringing together involved agencies.
- Fresh Start is designed to support those with poor grades or unwilling to remain in school or college, offering an alternative to repeated GCSE exams through practical, community-based learning, providing functional skills training through this employment support approach. Currently there is no other employment support programme aimed at this age group.

Defining Futures, provides employment support to adults with disabilities, those at risk of homelessness, over-50s, and residents in rural communities.

Both have helped participants gain skills and qualifications, and progress into work, through UKSPF funding, although this is due to end in March 2026.

- Local Supported Employment is DWP and Council funded and supports adults with learning disabilities and autism into paid employment.
- Better Start, delivered by Youth Fed and funded through UKSPF and the Westminster Foundation, supports young people aged 16-24 living in Winsford, Northwich, Ellesmere Port, Lache and Chester. It offers practical and emotional support via a 12-week program to develop skills and supports transition into adulthood.
- Independent travel training is a Council funded support programme to help people build the skills and confidence needed to use public transport. Although the lack of sufficient public transport across the area, remains a concern.

Warrington

- Warrington's Employment Development Team offers a wide range of support, including tailored employment coaching, CV and interview preparation, Digital Drop-Ins, and redundancy support, alongside ESOL and digital skills programmes. The

team works closely with both residents and local businesses to support progression into work.

- Warrington LiFE is the careers, education, information, advice and guidance service provided by Warrington Borough Council. It works with schools, colleges and academies to deliver tailored support for young people, providing careers information, advice and guidance services.
- Community-based support like Youth in Mind at Warrington Youth Zone.
- The council commissions a range of voluntary sector organisations to deliver specialist provision. This includes Warrington Mencap, Walton Lea Partnership, and Creating Adventures, which provide supported work experience, job coaching, and life skills development for adults and young people with learning disabilities. Support for veterans is also delivered through voluntary and community-led services such as the Armed Forces Community Support Hub and Veterans in Mind.
- The UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) FY25/26 is delivering a range of impactful support programmes, including The Pledge, New Enterprise Accelerator, and Employment Training and Support. These initiatives provide tailored, person-centred support to individuals, helping them progress in their career development, improve employment readiness, and explore entrepreneurship. Through targeted interventions, participants gain the skills, confidence, and explore opportunities.

Enterprise Cheshire and Warrington (ECW) a Council owned partnership vehicle and the successor to the LEP

- Opportunities Portal, a digital platform promoting apprenticeships, training, and job vacancies across the subregion.
- Hosting the DfE Cheshire and Warrington Careers Hub, working with the Careers Enterprise Company. Supporting strategic careers, education and guidance in schools and colleges and providing links to local employers.
- Oversees the Cheshire and Warrington Skills Bootcamps programme supporting employer-led training and responding to local skills needs. Provides funding to support in-work upskilling and links to DWP to provide adults a route to employment.

DWP and JobcentrePlus

DWP provides personalised employment support through its JobcentrePlus network and work coaches, consisting of 9 JCPs and 200 staff working across the subregion, supporting Universal Credit claimants.

Several nationally commissioned schemes operate across Cheshire and Warrington:

- **Work and Health Programme:** supports people of all ages with health conditions or disabilities, to see themselves ready for work within a 12-month period.

- **Restart:** Aimed at Universal Credit claimants who have been out of work for more than 9 months, providing up to a year of intensive help. Delivered locally across all boroughs, by FedCap in Cheshire East and Seetec Pluss in Cheshire West and Warrington.
- **Individual Placement and Support in Primary Care:** Cheshire West and Chester Council places employment specialists in GP practices to help patients who are accessing primary health services to return to or remain in work. Since 2023 this program has engaged over 1,000 people in Cheshire West and Chester, with 33% of participants experiencing positive outcomes.
- **Local Supported Employment:** Cheshire West and Chester Council supports adults with learning disabilities and autism into paid employment. Supported Employment staff work long-term with clients and employers to find suitable roles and assist with in work adaptation.
- **2nd Chance Employment Initiative:** DWP is currently working closely with the Probation Services and the Office of Police and Crime Commission, to develop a programme which would aim to provide wraparound support to Cheshire customers with offending issues currently supervised by Probation Services to provide employment opportunities.

In Autumn 2025, the Connect to Work programme is due to launch across Cheshire and Warrington. This will integrate IPS and Supported Employment, into a single, voluntary work and health support offer. This five-year scheme will provide holistic, person-centred support for economically inactive individuals facing barriers to employment. This will be managed initially by Cheshire West and Chester Council but will operate across the whole of the subregion.

NHS Integrated Care System and Board

The ICS operates across the footprint of Cheshire and Merseyside, working closely with local stakeholders to integrate health and employment support and encourage stable, and sustainable outcomes.

As a designated Marmot region, Cheshire and Warrington are committed to tackling the wider social determinants of health, including education and employment. Programmes include:

- **Employment Advisors in talking therapies:** Funded by DWP and NHS England and delivered across Cheshire, Employment Advisors in Talking Therapies work alongside therapists to address the emotional challenges related to work through integrated psychological treatment and employment support.
- **Child and Adolescent Mental Health provision,** delivered through the NHS across Cheshire.
- **IPS in drugs and alcohol:** Jointly funded with Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) and currently delivered only in Cheshire West by the LA, supports people

accessing substance misuse services (VIA provision) who want to move into paid employment. The program provides advice about health and wellbeing, regular sessions with personal keyworker, support groups, and guidance on next steps, including education, training and employment support.

- The **Work and Health Plan Pilot** is delivered in Crewe to support 16-18 young people at risk of dropping out during transition from schools to college. If successful, this pilot may be rolled out to the wider Cheshire and Warrington area.

The ICB Works with Councils on the Work and Health Strategy, aligning primary care, housing, and employment support to address long-term sickness and the main drivers of inactivity including MSK and mental health conditions.

Further education

In Cheshire and Warrington, further education colleges and independent training providers are central to delivering skills and training opportunities for both young people and adults. Higher education providers complement this delivery, and provide support linked directly to local economic and sectoral priorities outlined in the Local Skills Improvement Plan. Key areas of provision include:

- Sector-specific pre-employment programmes in areas such as health and social care, logistics, digital, and construction, alongside core English, Maths and IT skills.
- Supported Internships, available to SEND young people, aged 16 to 24, with an education and health care plan.
- Programmes to tackle wider barriers to work, including ESOL provision, digital skills support, and volunteering opportunities that act as a stepping stone into sustained employment.
- College pastoral staff and local authorities are working together to support vulnerable school leavers and those at greater risk of becoming NEET. Cheshire College South and West has worked closely with local authorities to smooth transitions and reduce disengagement across the academic year. Young people are able to start college in January, and opportunities are available to swap courses until November.

Universities and colleges collaborate through the Cheshire and Warrington Careers hubs, helping to align careers advice, apprenticeships and employer engagement with local labour market opportunities. Specialist training centres such as the Health and Social Care Academy and the Advanced Construction and Civil Engineering Centre, launched at Warrington and Vale Royal College, provide facilities to train students and upskill adults in high-demand fields. The Institute of Technology, a partnership of leading educational providers and local employers deliver high-quality, sector specific technical training at locations across the subregion.

Voluntary and community sector

The voluntary, community and social enterprise (VSCE) sector provides a range of commissioned and delivered services that support residents across Cheshire and Warrington to access work, build skills and manage complex barriers to work. The sector works closely with local authorities and the ICB to reach residents who may be less likely to engage with statutory provision.

Some examples of VSCE providers and services include:

- **Petty Pool:** offers supported internships for young people with special educational needs, helping them transition into employment or further learning.
- **Youth Fed:** supports a network of around 150 youth groups, providing mentoring, skills development and progression support for young people.
- **Springboard:** provides employability and confidence-building support for adults aged 18+. Springboard run Work Hubs in Cheshire East in Alsager, Congleton, Crewe and Macclesfield, as well as training for SEND student.
- **Via (drug and alcohol service):** delivers an Individual Placement and Support service within treatment pathways, supporting participants in recovery into employment.
- **Targeted training provision exists to support residents into entry-level work** – for example, the Greenhouse Training Centre, which delivers hospitality training, including a six-week barista course which has proven popular amongst residents. The centre offers a range of hospitality courses designed for both newcomers and experienced professionals, providing practical, hands-on training for individuals seeking to develop basic skills without undertaking formal qualifications.
- **The King's Trust Team Personal Development Programmes** offer 12-week programmes, delivered by Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service (CFRS) staff across several Cheshire locations in Chester, Crewe, Macclesfield, Halton and Winsford. This programme supports NEET young people aged 16-25 years to develop confidence, self-esteem, teamwork and employability skills.

Chambers of Commerce

The South Cheshire Chamber of Commerce delivers the Cheshire and Warrington Local Skills Improvement Plan, on behalf of the subregion, and working to tailor support to meet local sectoral needs. There is a rich network of Chambers of Commerce across the subregion representing different communities and economic centres. Their engagement feeds local intelligence around the local labour market, opportunities for growth and investment, and challenges that businesses are facing, whether in labour and skills or more broadly in local infrastructure, land, and connectivity.

Priorities

Priority 1: Most deprived neighbourhoods

Cheshire and Warrington generally experiences low levels of deprivation, but deprivation is high in some of our urban centres and rural communities including Crewe, Winsford, Warrington, Northwich, Macclesfield and Ellesmere Port. Deprivation has been concentrated in these areas for a number of years, impacting the social mobility for these communities, which for example can be seen in lower education attainment in Warrington. This may create a cycle whereby residents feel they have to move from these communities in order to access more training/employment opportunities.

The Index of Multiple Deprivation also masks some of the challenges felt by those in some of our more rural communities which may on the surface appear to be more affluent, but where significant barriers remain to accessing training or employment in the form of reliable and accessible transport, and higher than average housing costs.

Despite coverage across major towns in the subregion, stakeholders noted ongoing challenges in reaching all who need support, with engagement, not capacity being the biggest constraint. Deprived neighbourhoods lack consistent outreach and recognisable access points, underlining the need for a stronger visible presence within communities.

Partners expressed during engagement on this Plan a need for more local access points, particularly in areas in Cheshire East and Warrington, outside of employment hubs. These are needed in people's communities to be able to better support people in deprived neighbourhoods who may be further from the labour market. There are also issues with some pockets of rural deprivation and the reach of services.

Priority 2: Young people and NEETs

On the whole, Cheshire and Warrington has a skilled labour market with almost half of residents qualified to degree level or above. However, there are uneven education outcomes across the subregion that may limit access to higher-skilled employment.

NEET levels have slowly been rising across Cheshire and Warrington over the last 5 years – a trend reflected regionally and nationally. In 2025, the NEET rate had risen to 3.8% across Cheshire and Warrington, and as high as 4.2% in Cheshire West and Chester. There are further barriers to enter into employment for young people who are eligible for Free School Meals (FSM) or classed as disadvantaged, where the proportion attaining grades 4 or above in English and Maths GCSEs is almost half of the total Key Stage 4 cohort. This has a knock-on impact on ability to access future opportunities or access some form of further education, employment or training, and thus increasing the chance of becoming economically inactive, reinforced by insights from stakeholders of a lack of consistent, sustainable re-engagement activity.

Support for young people, including those not in education, employment or training is provided through a layered system of careers guidance, youth services, and targeted

programmes. Raising young people's aspirations and developing employability skills help to support young people through key transition points and into employment and training.

Transitions out of education can be a critical point for disengagement. Stakeholders recognised impactful support for young people in the area moving from education to employment, offering apprenticeship opportunities and specialised training to support sustainable career pathways. Despite this, apprenticeship opportunities for younger entrants have declined, with opportunities more likely to go to older and more experienced workers. For young people already disengaged from education, specialised re-engagement programmes provide alternative, employment-focused provision outside of traditional progression routes.

Mental health is a significant driver of rising NEET levels. Locally available services are not at levels to fully meet demand. Long waiting times exist (which are replicated nationally) and this limits the impact of support.

Provision is not consistent across the subregion, meaning that the level of support a young person receives depends heavily on where they live. In Macclesfield, for example, the removal of King's Trust provision has left a gap, with little alternative provision available locally. Cheshire West also lacks the presence of a dedicated local youth hub.

The DWP task group only supports those 19+, failing to address earlier issues or provide sufficient preventative support.

Support for young care leavers is fragmented. Specialised approaches that are trauma informed are not embedded across all programmes, and stakeholders recognised the need for more structured stepping-stone opportunities to help those most disadvantaged to move gradually into education, training or employment. Despite efforts with colleges to support more vulnerable school leavers, there is recognition that transition plans need to be consistent across the subregion and shared from education to receiving institutions to best prepare staff and maintain support.

Engagement revealed that apprenticeship opportunities for young people are being limited by a reduction in employer willingness to offer places. Engagement shows that in sectors such as construction; employers are increasingly reluctant to commit to long-term training. Rising costs including increases to the minimum wage, National Insurance contributions and energy bills compound pressures, reducing incentives to take on younger and less experienced entrants. Similarly, engagement has found that work experience is difficult to source and still relies on parents helping young people to secure placements.

Priority 3: Long-term sickness and disability

Over recent years health related issues have risen across Cheshire and Warrington. We have seen this in the form of an increasing proportion of economic inactivity made up by long-term sickness, as well as a rise in people off work due to temporary sickness. Fit note data shows that a combined 7% of people are off work with long-term and temporary sickness across Cheshire and Merseyside, compared with 5.1% nationally.

The largest drivers of health related worklessness are mental and behavioural disorders which make up around 40% of reasons for fit notes across Cheshire and Merseyside, exacerbated by financial pressures, job strain and insecurity, and therefore more acutely felt in some of our more deprived communities. Musculoskeletal and respiratory diseases are the next most likely reason given in fit notes, where 21% of the population in Cheshire and Merseyside report a long-term musculoskeletal condition, compared to the England 17.6% average.

As a priority, this includes supporting people temporarily out of the labour market – observed as a rise between 2019 and 2024 in the economic inactivity data – and preventing them from becoming long-term sick, as well as employers supporting employees who are temporarily sick from leaving employment due to ongoing health issues.

Residents with disabilities are more likely to be economically inactive than their non-disabled peers. The employment rate for residents with disabilities in Cheshire and Warrington is 65% (although this varies from 70.1% in Cheshire East and 54.4% in Warrington). Although this compares well against the UK and North West employment rate, Warrington is lower than the UK rate and level with the North West rate.

As a priority we would look to develop tailored support that would ensure an individual with a disability looking for work is supported to access and sustain employment, working closely with employers. This will be priority group for the new Connect to Work programme.

Priority 4: Early retirement

Early retirement is the most common reason for economic inactivity in Cheshire and Warrington, accounting for over a third of total inactivity in Cheshire West and Chester. With an increasingly ageing population, this is a key group to target to ensure there is support for those who may be considering retiring early due to health reasons, whilst ensuring there are suitable job opportunities for those who may be in a position financially to retire early. This could help fill the growing number of vacancies in the subregion and continue to contribute to the local economy whilst helping to develop the future skills pipeline by passing on the skills and knowledge they have developed through their careers.

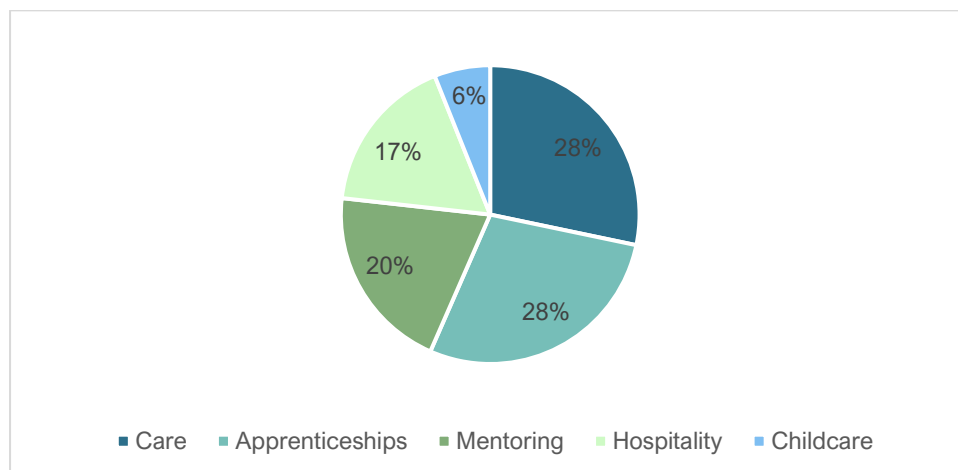
While JobcentrePlus can provide support for those who are out of work and seeking employment, and the Opportunities Portal provides signposting to job opportunities for people over 50, there is a lack of tailored programmes designed to prevent early retirement or actively seek to re-engage those who have already left the workforce.

Over recent years, employment services have shifted to digital platforms, with job opportunities posted online, and support often offered through portals and website signposting. With technology moving at pace that can be overwhelming for adults returning to work, digital exclusion acts as a barrier to job searching and training for older residents. For older residents with limited experience with modern, digitised recruitment practices, these systems can be challenging to use, further limiting access to job opportunities.

Engagement has informed the work opportunities those claiming UC aged 50 and over would value in Cheshire and Warrington includes care (cook, administration, reception),

apprenticeships while training, mentoring at schools/colleges, hospitality (waiting, bar or kitchen staff) and childcare.

Figure 27: Cheshire 50 Plus: What work opportunities would you consider?



Source: DWP Cheshire 50 Plus Insight summary

Priority 5: Carers and parents facing challenges

Despite the three authorities ranking amongst the six districts with the lowest levels of child poverty across the North West, there has been a rise of 9,000 children aged below 16 living in relative poverty since 2014/15, from 12% of children in 2014/15 to 17% in 2023/24.

Support for those balancing work with caring or parenting responsibilities, particularly lone parents and low-income families, is primarily embedded within broader programmes rather than offered through tailored provision. Access to support is typically through channels such as Jobcentre Plus work coaches or general skills and employment services, but these offers are usually generalised, and not specific to the circumstances of carers or single parents.

Unpaid carers and single parents are falling through gaps in current employment and skills provision and therefore facing significant barriers to workforce participation.

These services can direct carers to training or employment support when appropriate, but dedicated employment support is limited, with wellbeing remaining the central emphasis.

Childcare affordability and inflexible employment practices can be core barriers to entering employment, and employers are not consistently supported to offer adjusted hours or specialised support to fit commitments.

Cheshire and Warrington's carer support service offers education, training, and employment advice to carers across the subregion. Council commissioned services such as the Carers Trust Cheshire and Warrington, Better Together in Cheshire West and Chester, Cheshire East Carers Hub and Warrington Carers Hub offer support to carers. However, the majority of this is general support and advice, covering financial support, social engagement and signposting.

But partners have identified specialist services for carers as a significant service gap. Many in this cohort may not actively come forward for employment support because their immediate circumstances make working difficult. There is a lack of focused outreach to identify and engage carers or struggling parents specifically.

Priority 6: Connecting people to opportunities

There are stark contrasts across the subregion in adult skill levels - Cheshire East and Cheshire West & Chester have relatively high proportions of residents qualified to RQF3 and RQF4+. In contrast, 14% of residents in Warrington hold no formal qualifications, a clear barrier to entering into certain sectors/roles. This suggests challenges in progression for some groups.

Across Cheshire and Warrington 106,000 residents are economically inactive, whilst the number of UC claimants has risen to 90,000, with over two thirds of UC claimants being unemployed for over 12 months. Tailored support will be needed to help encourage some of those people back to work, along with working with employers to see what adjustments can be made to ensure a phased return for those who may never have had a job or those returning to the workplace.

A lack of sufficient entry level jobs in the business base act as a barrier to lower-qualified residents without accessible routes into good employment. This can exclude people from the labour market despite a desire to work. The number of vacancies has started to pick up again following a decline post-pandemic. There is a number of issues which may be preventing residents who are currently out of work from filling these roles.

Local Supported Employment services provide job matching services to connect residents with vacancies, helping to match existing skills with employer demand. Careers Hubs and the Pledge Partnership engage with the local employer base to raise awareness of local opportunities and provide brokerage between residents and businesses to help fill local vacancies. But engagement has found that a loss of local training providers has reduced options for entry-level and vocational training, leaving fewer accessible pathways into work. Employers are not consistently providing intermediate labour market opportunities or tailored entry-level roles for people with barriers to work, such as those with low skills or limited work history.

The last few years have been tricky for employers, and it continues to be so, with continued cost pressures, National Insurance rises, and global trade uncertainty to contend with. If we are to break down the barriers our identified cohorts face, we will need local employers to take a prominent role in ensuring roles are better tailored to meet their needs and/or there is training in place to help upskill and get them work ready. We need to ensure that employers have the support they need to accommodate providing more supported employment roles which are tailored towards our cohort groups who for example may not have held down a permanent role previously.

Actions

In order to shift the dial on unemployment and economic inactivity across the six priorities identified through the data, current provision mapping, and partner engagement, Cheshire and Warrington need an approach going forward to:

- Provide more flexibility to tailor services to meet local needs and enable partners to be more responsive and accountable to local communities, including going directly to neighbourhoods to make services more visible.
- Understand delivery at the best level for the individual to deliver better outcomes, preventing duplication of activity and administration.
- Promote early intervention to build the social and institutional capacity, enabling long term cost reduction.

The below actions are developed and proposed based on the analysis in this Plan and the current and evolving operating environment in Cheshire and Warrington. They are to be further developed and detailed with partners, aimed at removing the additional barriers the six priority groups face to entering and sustaining employment into the medium/longer term.

To start moving towards this point, we will focus on getting the foundations in place over the next 12-18 months, where we will aim to establish a joined-up support offer across the subregion, with the potential to scale smaller scale programmes which have been successful across Cheshire and Warrington. Specifically, our actions in the shorter term are focused around:

- Setting-up the governance required to move towards a joined-up offer across the three authorities.
- On-going audit of provision to highlight where there is duplication and potential gaps emerging in our collective support offer.
- Establish Task and Finish groups to identify which programmes have potential to be scaled and immediate priorities to engage with wider partners from across the subregion.
- Explore engagement with identified priority groups to hear the barriers they are facing to ensure the implementation of the Plan is reflective of residents' lived experience.
 - We will do this through survey work, working through community partners (e.g. VCSE organisations, housing associations, JCP, Health Settings, unions and the Probation and Prison Service), and direct engagement with communities through targeted events in local areas, drop-in sessions at common meeting places, and listening groups.

Evolving a strategic employment support service for Cheshire and Warrington

Over time, as devolution evolves in Cheshire and Warrington, this strategic capacity will be used to develop more integrated future service design. Government has indicated a direction towards devolving employment support, and the English Devolution Bill sets out the process through which Strategic Authorities can become Established SAs with Integrated Settlement funding across seven competences including skills and employment support, and health, wellbeing and public service reform. The Bill also allows for an annual right to request further powers and funding by Mayors to Ministers.

This will therefore be a strategic function for Cheshire and Warrington that develops over time, starting with coordinating and aligning existing delivery service insights, develop new approaches based on best practice and fill provision gaps over the medium term, and developing longer term into designing integrated services across Cheshire and Warrington with future funding and devolved powers.

The focus of the strategic service should be to design a system that addresses people at risk and preventing people from falling out of the labour market – that is strategic, consistent, and long term to help the cohorts of people who will become inactive through a similar range of barriers – health, skills, transport, culture, caring, and quality of jobs. This should provide a standing portfolio of responsive interventions that is always there for people and also sets up a delivery model for prevention.

Over 2026/27, local authorities, the ICB and DWP will work with providers and VCSE partners to develop a strategic employment support service for Cheshire and Warrington that provides a cohesive approach and set of functions that takes forward the priorities in this Plan and prepares the approach for future funding and commissioning of employment support. This will work in partnership and draw on the subregional capacity of the Strategic Authority as it is established.

We will develop core functions:

Building on provision that is working well

- While a range of local support is available, residents in deprived areas who face multiple barriers to employment, such as homelessness or substance misuse are often supported through community organisations. We will work with partners to connect services more closely to mainstream employment support, helping to remove gaps in pathways into work, building on current local good practice, for example:

- IPS approaches that are developing into the new Connect to Work programme, being designed for implementation in Cheshire and Warrington, building on understanding of what has worked locally.
- Using functional skills and practical learning design in adult training programmes for people to gain the certifications they need to progress into apprenticeships and employment, moving away from mandated approaches to GCSEs and classroom learning that doesn't work for everyone. This will be used to inform the developing devolved Skills Priorities Plan.
 - Testing pilot WorkWell services and embedding employment advisers in musculoskeletal pathways, which would strengthen preventative support for those whose health issues may lead to long-term sickness.
- We will develop ongoing new approaches that build on good practice tested in Cheshire and Warrington (and wider afield), using an overarching strategic service to retain knowledge and intelligence from programmes, and use engagement with service users to understand lived experience and how programmes work and could be improved in the future.

Data and evidence development

- We will continue to build and retain a local evidence base informed by programme intelligence and analysis of what is happening in the labour market, combining publicly available data and local service data to understand population level changes in employment and health over time.
- We will also build an understanding of beneficiaries' journeys in different circumstances and places in Cheshire and Warrington to inform future programme design and retain an up-to-date understanding of barriers people face.
- Investigation of enhanced data sharing and transferability between services – bringing together evidence from across local authority services, DWP and JobcentrePlus, NHS trusts and providers, and the VCSE sector.
- Setting up shared data analysis and digital tools will enable a more joined up view of where provision is delivered, scale up approaches that work well, streamline areas of duplication, and monitor programme outcomes to iterate as they are delivered.

Partnership collaboration

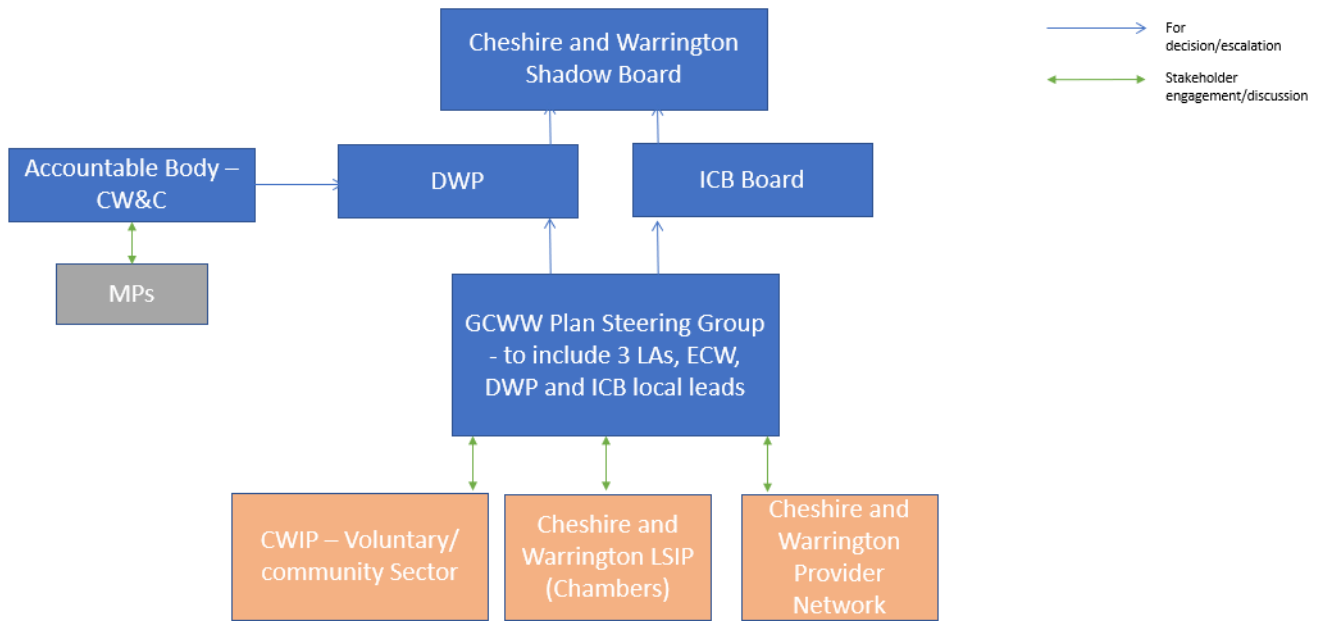
- Partnerships have been established in Cheshire and Warrington, with several active programmes including IPS, devolution, Pledge Partnership, the Population Health Programme, and Poverty Commission.
- We will build on these to develop lasting collaboration mechanisms and provide more tailored support to those with health issues, to help bring down barriers preventing people from entering and sustaining employment.

- We will develop opportunities to share capacity and capabilities among public service and VCSE organisations across frontline service delivery, data analysis, and programme design and management.

Governance – Get Cheshire and Warrington Working Plan

- As Cheshire and Warrington are currently preparing for devolution, many of the systems and processes required are not fully developed. This includes the governance structures for each of the devolved workstreams, including Skills and Employment, and delivery against the Cheshire and Merseyside Work and Health Strategy. The intention is that the governance of the Cheshire and Merseyside Work and Health Strategy is fully aligned with the GCWWP governance mechanisms to best utilise the available capacity and avoid duplication.
- We envisage that each workstream will have its own governance board which will include representation from each of the three LAs, Enterprise Cheshire and Warrington, DWP, Cheshire and Merseyside ICB, FE and HE training providers, a business representative body and the voluntary and community sector. This Board will provide strategic oversight and ensure appropriate links are made across other devolved functions such as transport and inward investment.
- This would then be supported by an operational group who would be responsible for the delivery against the actions identified in the Plan – including the further development of the actions themselves (including timeline, possible funding routes, lead actor) and approach to measuring progress. This group would also feed into the main Board to ensure they are kept abreast of developments and any emerging issues arising.
- This operational group would regularly engage with the voluntary sector, employers and providers to ensure the interventions are fit for purpose and responding to the needs of Cheshire and Warrington.
- Unless a decision is made to move this programme into the Combined Authority the accountable body will remain with Cheshire West and Chester.

Get Cheshire and Warrington Working (GCWW) Plan Governance Chart



We will develop a cohesive approach that targets:

Priority 1: Most deprived neighbourhoods

- There is a need to be more proactive in creating inclusive environments and providing opportunities and sufficient support for disadvantaged cohorts, to both enter and remain in employment, including a focus on wellbeing and preventative health support.
- We will support expanding community led approaches that are in development in some areas to enable local solutions to employment barriers in development but not yet embedded, so that we have fuller coverage of support across Cheshire and Warrington.
- We will develop and coordinate access points in deprived neighbourhoods to support people in their communities who are further from the labour market, face complex barriers, and live in areas with barriers to services and employment centres. These will provide wraparound support in existing community spaces, for example, at foodbanks or housing association premises, to target those most in need.
- Access points will provide a gateway into formal support – working with VCSE organisations to deliver a neighbourhood service setup for support triage, preparation for individuals to access further services, and provide a journey to JobcentrePlus, college or other learning environment, volunteering, or with an employer.

Outcome: a reduction in economic inactivity and health conditions acting as a barrier to the labour market, in our more deprived communities, encouraging those who are economically inactive to want to work, with more people going on to access employment related support.

Priority 2: Young people and NEETs

- We will develop a subregional approach to skills, careers, and employment support that delivers early intervention and prevention of young people falling out of education, training, or employment at key transition points. This should include helping to develop key soft skills/workplace behaviours expected by employers,
- This will build on our existing partnership working and collaboration between local authorities, schools, colleges, skills providers, local support services (including health and DWP) and employers to better match skills supply and demand tailored to younger people entering the workforce, gaining work experience, and understanding their own potential and training routes.
- We will collaborate on designing local apprenticeship schemes that can be more flexibly delivered to meet the needs of employers, and to engage with young people closer to where they live, and in community environments that work for them – not requiring everyone to come to a formal learning environment to understand careers options and guidance. We will work with schools to implement early intervention more comprehensively for young people who have been in care to prevent NEET status and offer alternative progression routes from formal education.
- We will support our young people with the mental health challenges they may be facing, which can present a prominent barrier to entering into employment, training or further education.
- Careers support and guidance from an earlier age whilst encouraging parents to play a more active role in careers development.

Outcome: a reduction in the number of young people who are NEET across Cheshire and Warrington by working to develop consistent and sustained engagement activity

Priority 3: Long-term sickness and disability

- While varied health related employment support exists, the system lacks consistency in linking health and employment services at scale across Cheshire and Warrington.
- We will join up innovative services that are currently operating in specific areas to shift more comprehensively to support for people who are inactive and long-term sick and to prevent people at risk of dropping out of the labour market.

- We will work with partners to develop more consistent front door support across the area to provide in every part of Cheshire and Warrington access to employment support, primary or secondary healthcare, housing and homelessness support or temporary accommodation, JobcentrePlus and welfare, financial or debt advice, and other voluntary organisation services.
- We will work with employers and employer representative organisations to better connect support for people who are off sick temporarily to prevent absences becoming long-term and people leaving the workforce.
- We will work with voluntary, community organisations to fully understand the barriers faced by residents with disabilities to access and sustain employment.
- We will support employers to better understand how they could become more inclusive of those with disabilities and the benefits these individuals could bring to their business.

Outcome: a reduction in the number of people who are economically inactive due to long-term sickness or disability, and a reduction in the 7% of people who are off work with long-term and temporary sickness across Cheshire and Merseyside.

Priority 4: Early retirement

- Support will include retraining and employability interventions, building on the current JCP offer to targeting older workers including working with employers, health and anchor networks to support return to work, age-inclusive employment support, and more flexible employment options.
- We will develop and coordinate physical access points for those who may struggle to access online employment support services and support/training to be able to use online recruitment/hybrid working practices.
- Design suitable volunteering/mentoring opportunities for those who may have retired from the workforce or are thinking about doing so.

Outcome: an increase in the number of UC claimants aged over 50 who are looking for work and an increase in the number of people aged 50 and over accessing volunteering/mentoring opportunities

Priority 5: Carers and parents facing challenges

- The rising numbers of children living in low-income households and inactivity linked to caring requires a more joined up approach for parents and those with caring responsibilities.

- We will focus on early years and family support across communities to provide more consistent family hub style support for early years education, healthcare and childcare, combined with access and guidance for parents on services they require e.g. financial, welfare or housing support, and employment support and learning opportunities, to support parents with multiple barriers to participate in the labour market and support early intervention for improved childhood health and development outcomes.

Outcome: more people engaging in early years and childcare support. An increase in the number of young people who are disadvantaged engaging in further education, employment or training opportunities.

Priority 6: Connecting people to opportunities

- Training and employment support services alone are insufficient to connect disadvantaged residents to sustained employment. Provision to engage this group therefore needs to be matched by demand-side measures that encourage the creation of accessible, good-quality jobs at the lower end of the labour market.
- Support is needed to ensure residents are not prevented from accessing local job opportunities by providing tailored support and training which can help to fill local vacancies, including those from more disadvantaged backgrounds who may have been prevented from achieving their potential in an educational setting.
- We will work with employers and trade bodies on understanding skills and labour needs, link up hiring pathways with individual support service pathways, and codesign participation in employment support and skills programmes. For example, T Level and apprenticeship placements, supported internships and employment, and targeted programmes for specific cohorts. This will help ensure that employers are better prepared to support individuals and develop quality job and progression opportunities.
- Supported employment provision which is provided must stick with the established Supported Employment Quality Framework (SEQF) and Individual Placement and Support (IPS) system as these are centred on evidence-based best practice and value for money.

Outcome: an increase in the number of employers who are investing in skills and training, and an increase in the number of supported internships and employment. More young people and adults accessing local training opportunities.

Maximising the impact of a new Strategic Authority

As the Cheshire and Warrington Strategic Authority is established and developed, we will ensure that the powers and funding that are immediately devolved align with the priorities in this Plan, and can help to deliver the operating environment that will improve employment outcomes, through:

- Devolved Adult Skills Fund via the Skills Priorities Plan (to be agreed with DfE): prioritising allocations and working with providers to ensure funding is targeted at our skills, labour market and employment priorities, building on the work of the Local Skills Improvement Plan, our local colleges employer advisory boards, the Integrated Care Board's Work and Health Plan pilots, the DESNZ pilots to support employers to transition to lower carbon usage, etc.
- Local Growth Plan: identifying employment and business growth opportunities through engagement with employers, and connecting specific sector, occupation, major project and skills needs with employment support and skills provision to inform individuals about the training and employment that supports local growth.
- Future local growth funding: using employment and skills priorities to inform future local growth funding (including the successor to UKSPF) and designing local interventions to support the Local Growth Plan and employment support priorities.
- Tools to alleviate barriers to participating in the labour market: employment priorities informing strategic roles of the SA in strategy, funding and delivery of transport, infrastructure, housing, employment land and spatial planning, to connect people to opportunities.
- Developing institutional roles: working to integrate employment support (JCP) and health at the strategic commissioning level between the Mayor and ICB, aligned with the ambitions of the 10-year Health Plan.

Over 2026/27, as the Cheshire and Warrington Strategic Authority is established, local authorities, the ICB, DWP, and partners will bring insights and priorities for employment and health support into the development of SA strategies including the Local Growth Plan, Adult Skills Fund commissioning, Transport Strategy, and local growth funding projects, to ensure that devolved levers deliver for the needs of communities and cohorts to participate and progress in the labour market.

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Cheshire and Warrington Shadow Board

Date of meeting:	28 November 2025
Report of:	Cllr Jean Flaherty Deputy Leader, Warrington Borough Council
Report Lead Officer	Professor Helen Bromley Director of Public Health, Cheshire West and Chester Council
Title:	Becoming a Marmot Combined Authority devolution area: Advancing inclusive growth and health equity across Cheshire and Warrington

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 This report proposes that the Cheshire and Warrington devolution area formally adopts Marmot status ahead of the formal go live of the Cheshire and Warrington Combined Authority. This means aligning the strategic priorities and actions in the Sustainable and Inclusive Economic Strategy (SIES) (and other sub-regional plans) with the Marmot principles and priorities as set out by Professor Sir Michael Marmot, to reduce health inequalities. These principles are already embedded in the Cheshire and Merseyside Health and Care Partnership 5-year strategy 'All Together Fairer: Our Health and Care Partnership Plan'¹. Cheshire East, Cheshire West and Chester and Warrington Borough Councils are fully committed to this strategy.
- 1.2 Becoming a Marmot Combined Authority area aligns with national policy in supporting our integrated care system objectives. This will embed health equity into all aspects of our journey to becoming a Combined Authority, including economic development, transport, housing, education, and employment. This will reflect our commitment to place-based health equity, where local governance structures take proactive roles in shaping fairer societies. This will also enable us to position our subregion as a national leader in sustainable and inclusive growth. It will also ensure the Cheshire and Warrington Combined Authority (CWCA) is ready to perform its statutory responsibility to address health inequality once the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill content comes into legislation.
- 1.3 Declaring the Shadow (and subsequent CWCA) arrangements for devolution a Marmot Board/Place would support engagement with the growing Network of Marmot Places (around 50 across the country) and support the profile of Cheshire and Warrington as an area focussed on improving health equity.

¹ https://www.cheshireandmerseyside.nhs.uk/media/i4kpjabn/july-updated-hcp-plan_ac.pdf

2. Decision Required

The Shadow Board is asked to:

- 2.1. Approve, in principle, the proposal to become a Marmot devolution area, adopting and implementing the Marmot principles and priorities across all its strategic priorities and aligning with the Cheshire and Merseyside All Together Fairer Programme.
- 2.2. Using existing resources, commission an outline Marmot Plan from the Cheshire and Warrington Health Inequalities/in All Policies Group, to be reviewed by the Shadow Board at the next meeting in January 2026.
- 2.3. Establish and resource a cross-sector Marmot Steering Group to oversee implementation.
- 2.4. Note that this approval of the Shadow Board is an 'in principle' decision ahead of the establishment of the formal Cheshire and Warrington Combined Authority (CWCA). Once the CWCA is operational, the CWCA Board will be requested to confirm this Marmot status and embed principles into the CWCA strategic planning and investment frameworks, for example, The Local Growth Plan.

3. Report Details

- 3.1 There is a strong evidence base² that provides a robust framework for addressing the social determinants of health. These are the conditions in which people are born, grow, live, work and age, significantly impacting on people's health outcomes and quality of life. They are non-medical factors that influence health outcomes, for example, socio-economic status, level of education, neighbourhood and physical environment (including housing and infrastructure, green spaces), employment and social support networks. Understanding and addressing the social determinants of health is crucial for promoting health equity and improving overall health and quality of life.
- 3.2 The Marmot Principles, developed by Professor Sir Michael Marmot are designed to tackle health inequalities by addressing the social determinants of health. The principles emphasise the importance of creating conditions that promote health equity across communities. The principles are set out in Appendix 1.
- 3.3 Using these principles, the CWCA could help decrease health and other inequalities across Cheshire and Warrington for example, by addressing damp housing with retrofit; reducing poverty and in-work poverty through skills, training and employment programme etc.
- 3.4 The vision of the Cheshire and Warrington Sustainable and Inclusive Economic Strategy is to be *"To be the healthiest, most sustainable, inclusive, and fastest-growing place in the UK by 2045"*. The subregion has long-standing economic strengths, with levels of productivity outperforming the rest of the North West and being consistently higher than the national average. However, there are real challenges that need to be addressed to achieve that vision, for both rural and urban areas. For example, approximately 17% (28,000) of our children and young

² Marmot Review (2010), "Health Equity in England: The Marmot Review 10 Years On" (2020), and "Build Back Fairer" (2021)

people grow up in poverty, impairing life chances, and there are large differences in healthy (disability-free) life expectancy between the most and least deprived parts of the subregion. 60% of households in poverty are working households. Health inequalities across our region remain stark. The average male life expectancy at birth differs by 12 years between the most and least deprived communities within our area. For women, the difference is almost 9 years. There is also a 16 year gap in Healthy Life Expectancy (HLE) between our most and least deprived communities. The COVID-19 pandemic further widened these gaps, disproportionately affecting vulnerable populations.

3.5 The vision of the Cheshire and Warrington SIES, and its public commitment to adopting a 'Health in All Policies' approach aligns with the Cheshire and Merseyside 'All Together Fairer Programme'. This began in September 2019, when health and care leaders from across Cheshire and Merseyside agreed that the subregion would become a Marmot Community. The Programme brings together public, private and third sector organisations with one shared aim: build a fairer, healthier Cheshire and Merseyside. The landmark report 'All Together Fairer: Health Equity and the Social Determinants of Health in Cheshire and Merseyside'³ was published and successfully launched in May 2022. The highly successful and nationally acclaimed programme deliberately and specifically focuses on the social determinants of health as described above.

3.6 All three Local Authority areas in Cheshire and Warrington have Health and Wellbeing Strategies aligned to the Cheshire and Merseyside All Together Fairer Programme and the Marmot principles. They have also signed a poverty declaration and can demonstrate that by adopting in principle, it has led /is leading to clear wins and successes.

4 What will it cost?

4.1 At this stage, there are no costs attached to approving the principle of becoming a Marmot devolution area. There is the potential for costs at a later date, relating to dedicated resource to support strategic planning, working across the core competencies to support embedding Marmot principles and a Health in All Policies approach. This would include stakeholder engagement, helping design in Marmot principles to plans and work programmes, and support to undertake data analysis. The costs are expected to be offset by long-term savings in health, social care, and productivity.

4.2 Any subsequent costs would be requested via a full business case. External funding opportunities may be available through national or other sources.

5 What are the Legal aspects?

5.1 Combined Authorities are likely to have specific statutory health duties under the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill, requiring them to address health inequalities and embed a "Health in All Policies" approach.

6 What risks are there and how can these be reduced?

³ [Cheshire-and-Merseyside-report_interactive-v6.pdf](#)

Risk	Mitigation
Lack of capacity and resources to deliver Marmot principles	Phased implementation plan with resourced support. Resources identified and allocated.
Resistance from stakeholders	Engagement strategy with clear benefits and case studies
Measurement challenges/data limitations	Use of existing public health data and Marmot (Beacon) indicators. Lack of granular data could hinder effective targeting and evaluation – need to identify approach and resource.

7 What is the impact of the decision on health inequalities and equality and diversity issues?

- 7.1 The decision to be a Marmot devolution area aligns with the Cheshire and Warrington Sustainable and Inclusive Economic Strategy and the Cheshire and Merseyside All Together Fairer Programme. This status will add value to the core competencies work programmes, supporting inclusive and sustainable economic growth whilst simultaneously addressing inequalities in health and the social determinants of health.
- 7.2 Priority 7 of the Marmot Principles is to “tackle racism, discrimination, and their outcomes: Addressing systemic inequalities and promoting inclusivity to ensure that all individuals have equal opportunities for health”.
- 7.3 The Equality Act 2010 Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) applies to combined authorities. Policies and decisions will be considered that affect people with protected characteristics to avoid indirect discrimination when implementing Marmot principles.

8 What are the implications of the decision on Climate Change?

- 8.1 Priority 8 of the Marmot Principles is to “pursue environmental sustainability and health equity together: Recognising the interconnectedness of environmental health and social equity and working towards solutions that benefit both”. This aligns with the Cheshire and Warrington Sustainable and Inclusive Strategy and will add value to the core competencies work programmes.
- 8.2 Health equity and climate are interlinked - climate change disproportionately affects disadvantaged communities (e.g., through poor housing, air pollution, and flood risk). Marmot’s approach addresses these vulnerabilities by improving housing quality, transport, and green infrastructure, which also reduces carbon emissions. Actions to reduce health inequalities (e.g., improving air quality, promoting active transport) also mitigate climate change.

9 What are the implications of the decision on the Sustainable and Inclusive Economic Strategy?

9.1 The vision of the Cheshire and Warrington SIES, and its public commitment to adopting a 'Health in All Policies' approach aligns with the Cheshire and Merseyside 'All Together Fairer Programme'. It will be important to ensure clear alignment in the final SIES with these Marmot priorities.

10 Are there any other options?

10.1 The Shadow Board could agree to not commit to Marmot principles and not be a Marmot devolution area. This would increase the risk of widening health inequalities and long term social and economic costs through entrenched poverty, poor health, increased public service costs and stalled life expectancy. It would also put at risk the ability of the CWCA to adhere to the forthcoming statutory responsibility around tackling health inequality.

For further information:

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Background Documents:

NA

Appendix 1: Marmot Priorities

1. Give every child the best start in life: Ensuring that all children have access to the resources and support they need to thrive from the very beginning of their lives
2. Enable all children, young people, and adults to maximize their capabilities and have control over their lives: Providing opportunities for education, skill development, and personal empowerment to enhance individual potential
3. Create fair employment and good work for all: Promoting equitable job opportunities and working conditions that support health and well-being
4. Ensure a healthy standard of living for all: Addressing economic disparities to guarantee that everyone has access to basic needs such as food, housing, and healthcare
5. Create and develop healthy and sustainable places and communities: Fostering environments that support health, including access to green spaces, safe neighbourhoods, and community resources
6. Strengthen the role and impact of ill health prevention: Focusing on preventive measures to reduce the incidence of diseases and promote overall health
7. Tackle racism, discrimination, and their outcomes: Addressing systemic inequalities and promoting inclusivity to ensure that all individuals have equal opportunities for health
8. Pursue environmental sustainability and health equity together: Recognizing the interconnectedness of environmental health and social equity, and working towards solutions that benefit both



Cheshire and Warrington Shadow Board

Date of meeting:	28 th November 2025
Report of:	Cllr Karen Shore Deputy Leader, Cheshire West and Chester Council
Report Lead Officer:	Gemma Davies, Chair of the Devolution Steering Group
Title:	Cheshire and Warrington Devolution Programme Update

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 This report outlines progress across the devolution programme since the last Shadow Board in October 2025. In particular, the updated programme risk register and update on progress to interim recruitment should be noted.

2. Decision Required

The Shadow Board is asked:

- 2.1. To note progress against the programme and updated risk register as outlined in the report.

3. Report Details

- 3.1. At the time of writing, final arrangements were being completed to progress advertising all the interim posts agreed by the Shadow Board. It is anticipated that interviews will take place between December 2025 and February 2026. We remain on programme to have all statutory posts in place by the expected timeframe for the Cheshire and Warrington Combined Authority (CWCA) becoming operational in February or March 2026.
- 3.2. Work is also on track to ensure all necessary set-up arrangements are in place to support operational set-up priorities within the budget parameters agreed by the Board in October. Set up functions include IT, office accommodation and key support services such as HR and democratic services. As previously advised to the Board, we are exploring various options from 'buy back'/service level agreement arrangements with constituent councils to open market solutions. All options are based on the agreed Target Operating Model assessment criteria of:
- Achievability
 - Quality

- Cost

An options analysis report will come back to the Board before finalising arrangements for 2026/7.

3.3. Transition planning preparatory work is in train to ensure that the CWCA is as effective as possible in the first year of operations. As the anticipated timelines for devolved competencies becomes clearer from Government officials, it has enabled officers to target priority activity for transition. Work is moving at pace to 'stand-up' transition arrangements for key competencies, including transport and employment and skills which will be amongst the first devolved functions for the CWCA. Competency-based task and finish officer groups are being mobilised to ensure all aspects of each area of operation is considered, including:

- Day 1 requirements
- Strategic plans and evidence gaps
- Key stakeholders and engagement planning, including effective member engagement
- Budget, resourcing and investment
- Commissioning/passporting/procurement arrangements
- Delivery of statutory duties and powers
- Governance and assurance

3.4. As we are now entering the establishment phase of the CWCA, we can operate with increasing clarity about financial, economic and community benefits, how the Combined Authority will be established and how it will work, what will happen when and what it is delivering. It is recognised that there remains a real need to ensure increased public understanding of devolution and ensure opportunities for stakeholder, business and resident engagement and influence. Agreed priority outcomes for our communication and engagement workstream are:

- **Increase resident understanding of the benefits devolution** – ensuring a substantial turnout for the mayoral election in May 2027.
- **Stakeholders feeling that they have lots of opportunities to have their say** and influence the priorities of the combined authority. Making sure everyone can see how their views, opinions and impact have shaped policy and decision-making as the combined authority becomes established.
- **People know what is happening** as the CWCA is created and what it is achieving as it becomes established.

3.5. To support these outcomes, focus will be on working to inform and inspire our residents and business about the benefits that devolution for Cheshire and Warrington will bring, alongside an engagement programme to enable people to learn about, inform and influence the priorities and policies of the CWCA. Working closely with partners across the business, voluntary and public sectors additional resources will be targeted on this important work. It should be noted that this engagement work will include identifying priorities for the future Mayoral Investment Fund. Current work planning remains within the overall budget agreed by the Board. Any recommended changes to the agreed budget will be brought back to the Board. To enable a longer period of engagement to shape priorities and arrangements going forward, targeting March or April 2026 for a wider

devolution conference is now the preferred option. Focusing on this timeline will coincide with the anticipated formal launch of the CWCA and of the Mayoral Investment Fund.

3.6. Alongside this focus on communication and engagement, additional support for member engagement and learning will be provided. Discussions are taking place with the Local Government Association to develop a programme of support early in the New Year.

3.7. The programme risk register has been updated to reflect changes in focus across the programme as we move through the transition phase to CWCA operations. This is attached at Annex A. It will continue to evolve as the programme progresses. Any significant changes or escalation points will be reported to the Board. On an on-going, twice monthly basis, this is reviewed at an officer level by the Devolution Steering Group. The following risks, whilst within tolerance levels, should be noted:

- R001/002: Maintaining focus on mitigations associated with a lack of effective communications and engagement remain a priority. This is an on-going, critical area of focus.
- R003-5: Risks associated with the transition arrangements are identified. These risks underline the need for focus and prioritisation to prepare for year 1 operations. They also highlight the importance of the Local Assurance Framework to ensure the CWCA can move at pace on early delivery.

4. What will it cost?

4.1. There are no changes to the programme budget as agreed by the Board at the October 2025 meeting.

5. What are the Legal aspects?

5.1. There are no specific legal implications in the report. All key legal and governance implications linked to the programme are contained within a specific report on the meeting agenda.

6. What risks are there and how can these be reduced?

6.1. See risk register update as detailed in the report and at Annex A.

7. What is the impact of the decision on health inequalities and equality and diversity issues?

7.1. There are no significant impacts in the report. All events as part of the communications and engagement programme will be assessed appropriately. Recruitment will comply with equality processes.

8. What are the implications of the decision on Climate Change?

8.1. There are no significant impacts in the report. All events as part of the communications and engagement programme will be assessed appropriately.

9. What are the implications of the decision on the Sustainable and Inclusive Economic Strategy?

9.1. All strategies and plans as referenced in the report will be aligned with the SIES vision.

10. Are there any other options?

10.1. This is an update report of progress against programme. Any decisions required by the Board for future operations will come back as individual reports with an appropriate options analysis.

For further information:

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Email: Gemma.Davies@cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk

Background Documents:

Annex A: Risk register

Risk Register: SET UP PHASE			Without Mitigations				With Mitigations						
Reference No	Risk Description	Raised by	Probability (1-5)	Impact (1-5)	RAG status	Status	Proposed Mitigation	Probability (1-5)	Impact (1-5)	RAG status	Responsible	Status (Open, Closed)	Actions
R001	Member engagement: Not engaging effectively with members across the three constituent councils may result in misunderstanding and poor information exchange. It will also be important to ensure effective engagement ahead of the formal process to appointment statutory committees for the CWCA to ensure these committees can mobilise at pace - there risk is that they will not operate effectively in time for early CWCA decision making.	PM	3	4	7		Set up and support on Joint Devolution Task Group (JDTG) across all 3 councils in addition to each council's own cross-party groups. Ensure regular and consistent information flows and ensure effective engagement points to shape and influence, including standing item in Shadow Board. Note specific session planned on statutory committee arrangements. Confirming LGA programme of support.	2	3	5	SR/MJ	Open	Forward plan and dates for JDTG. Finalise plan with LGA. Ensure effective engagement on constitution.
R002	Failure to deliver consistent comms and engagement across whole programme: Disengaged Members, business and stakeholders in development of competencies, functions and investment work will lead to lack of ownership and 'buy-in' as well as poor narrative. It will also risk a lack of engagement in the shaping and influence of early priorities and investments.	PM	2	4	6		Revised priorities for C&W plan agreed with the Board. Additional, specialist capacity/ resourcing, including maternity cover, being mobilised.	2	3	5	EL/SR	Open	Regular reporting on comms delivery to Board. Finalise process for backfill arrangements.
R003	The pace of 'set up mobilisation' and a fast-track approach to analysis and appraisal, increases the risk of not fully understanding all operational implications – leading to confusion and potential failure of delivery.	PM	4	4	8		Prioritisation of those competencies critical for year 1 transition. PM have requested full transition plans by end of December 2025 for prioritised functions. This will drive set-up actions and ensure business case requirements for any additional resourcing.	3	4	7	SR	Open	Integrate identified priorities in detailed transition plans.
R004	Content: Fast-tracking the work to fully develop content – and specifically how the CWCA will undertake its operations – increases the risk of failure to pass Government due diligence resulting in the CWCA not being able to function effectively in its first year.	PM	4	4	8		Due diligence will be conducted by relevant Whitehall Departments who are devolving programmes (e.g. DfE, MHCLG and DfT). It should be noted that there is also likely to be a significant performance management requirement, at least in the early years of the CWCA. Latest timetable front ends basic governance with detail on content to follow late 2025 and into 2026 whilst EDB goes through parliament. This will give additional time for set-up. Proposal to extend election gives additional time for set-up and assurance. Note the importance of the Local Assurance Framework initialisation to underpin all development work across devolution arrangements. LAF HMG sign-off due March 2026.	3	4	7	SR/PJ/VW	Open	Work in progress - note Assurance Framework requirement.
R005	Finance: The costs of set-up in both 2025/6 and in the first year of operations (2026/7) goes beyond the capacity funding budget set by HMG meaning that there would be a call on other local resources.	PM	4	4	8		Full budget plan in place (latest agreed by Board on 28/10/25). Utilise EZ surplus and LGA grant for 2025/6. Letter of confirmation for development costs now received from MHCLG across 4 financial years. First tranche expected November 2025. Financial modelling in progress as part of TOM work. Confirmation received that Mayoral Election costs borne by CA. Requires Board-led process to confirm MIF resourcing for year 1. Note impact of CFO recruitment.	3	4	7	PJ/SW	Open	Boad-led session to review MIF.

[illegible]



Shadow Board Forward Plan

30 January 2026
Joint Devolution Task Group Feedback
Strategic Economic Update
Business Advisory Board - Update
Mayoral Investment Fund Next Steps
Local Constitution, including arrangements for nominations to the CWCA Board
Cheshire East Council Local Transport Grant
Officer Appointments
Budget Update
Set-up options analysis
27 February 2026
Joint Devolution Task Group Feedback
Strategic Economic Update
Business Advisory Board - Update
Corporate/Business Plan 2026/27
Entity Creation
Mayoral Investment Fund Next Steps

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