

CHESHIRE WEST AND CHESTER

REPORT TO COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE REVIEW

COMMITTEE

Date of meeting: 3 February 2026

Report of: Andrea Thwaite - Scrutiny and Civic Manager

Report Title: Phase One Consultation Feedback and Draft Recommendations
– Willaston

1.0 What is the report about?

1.1 The purpose of this report is to present the findings from the Willaston Community Governance Review - phase one consultation exercise and draft recommendations.

2.0 What Decision is required by the Committee?

2.1 To approve the draft recommendations, which are then subject to further public consultation before final recommendations are made.

That:

- (i) a new civil parish for the area of Willaston be created;
- (ii) a new local council for the area of Willaston be created and this could be an individual council or grouped with a neighbouring local council;
- (iii) the area (boundary) for the new civil parish/local council to be determined after the outcomes of the second consultation are known but, in principle, the proposed area is set out in Appendix 1;
- (iv) the name and style of the new council be more particularly detailed following consideration of the results of the second consultation (for example: parish, village, community or neighbourhood);
- (v) the electoral arrangements for a new local council (council size and warding) to be determined following consideration of the results of the second consultation;
- (vi) should a new civil parish and local council be created, as part of a Cheshire West and Chester Borough Council Order (Reorganisation of Community Governance) the polling districts for UJ1, UJ2 and UJ3 be redrawn to accommodate the creation of a new local council. This would be prepared in accordance with the above recommendations and that the Order be effective from May 2027. The recommendations relating to creation of a new local council for the area of Willaston shall come into force on the ordinary day of election of councillors in May 2027; and

- (vii) the second public consultation take place over six weeks, and that Council Officers hold one public drop-in sessions to inform residents of the community governance review process

3.0 How does the Decision contribute to the Council's Borough Plan?

- 3.1 Cheshire West and Chester Council (The Council) is committed to creating stronger futures in which everyone in Cheshire West borough play their part to build thriving, caring, and sustainable communities. The Council works closely with residents, community groups, and partners etc to maintain high levels of neighbourhood pride and to ensure timely responses to local issues.
- 3.2 As part of the Council's Borough Plan, the Council will continue to work closely with communities and local groups to make meaningful improvements to their areas and to maintain the cleanliness and attractiveness of their local neighbourhoods. The Council's Your Streets team supports this work by engaging directly with residents and community organisations to help enhance local areas.
- 3.4 Effective community involvement and strong local governance are important to delivering the Borough Plan, with parish councils offering a particularly effective form of governance at the most local level.

4.0 Background

- 4.1 Willaston is an unparished village in the former Ellesmere Port and Neston District Council area. It is situated on the Wirral Peninsula but in the unitary authority of Cheshire West and Chester. Centred on a village green, it is located between Neston and Ellesmere Port, less than a mile south of the Metropolitan Borough of Wirral boundary. It is located very closely to Eastham and Bromborough and just a short distance away from Neston.
- 4.2 Cheshire West and Chester Council was petitioned in April 2025 by a group of Willaston residents requesting that the Council undertake a community governance review of the local governance arrangements for the village.
- 4.3 A representative from the group also attended the Community Governance Review Committee on 2 June 2025 and stated that a former residents association group had folded and they wanted to explore options for a new local council be created.
- 4.4 The terms of reference for the community governance review of Willaston village were approved and published on 9 July 2025. These Terms of Reference triggered an initial consultation process, during which a consultation document was issued to every household in the village, as well as to key stakeholders. As there is no defined "parish" for Willaston, Google's Map of Willaston village was used. The Consultation document sought views on the current arrangements for local community governance and provided an opportunity to highlight any areas of concern. The consultation was

intentionally kept broad and open ended to allow households to express their views freely without being directed.

- 4.3 There is no formally defined area for the village of Willaston, such as a parish boundary. The polling districts covering the village UJ1, UJ2 and UJ3 include the wider surrounding area. As starting point, Google's outline map of Willaston was used, and only households located within that mapped area were contacted directly as part of the initial consultation exercise (see below). The consultation was open to everyone who wished to provide a view and it was advertised on the local noticeboards, local social media and the Council Issued a press release.

Polling Districts or Wilaston and Thornton (Which cover Willaston village)

- UJ1 – 972 households (consult with part of this Polling District) approximately 200 households
 - UJ2 – 588 households (consult with all this Polling District)
 - UJ3 – 662 households (consult with most of this Polling District) approximately 600 houses
- 4.3 A summary document of the responses from the first initial consultation are attached at Appendix A. One thousand two hundred and fifty seven consultation documents were posted out to households and 219 were returned completed (either online, in the secure ballot box placed in the Village Pharmacy or by post).
- 4.4 Each household was invited to complete a consultation document but two submitted more than one. Therefore these responses were summarised and grouped together.
- 4.5 A number of Willaston key stakeholders (see appendix 2) were also invited to complete the consultation but none returned a completed consultation document.
- 4.6 Roughly 18% of households returned a completed consultation document. Research on the internet from the UK Planning Advisory Service (PAS) forum suggests that for community public consultations “anything over 10% is very good” for planning public consultations and in the broader survey world, typical response rates often range from 5% to 30% depending on audience and method. The response rate also sits well within (and towards the higher end of) typical survey response ranges. The internet references that in community consultations, especially when topics are not highly controversial, responses are often low, so an 18% rate typically indicates strong engagement.

5.0 SUMMARY OF CONSULTATION RESPONSES

- 5.1 Appendix 1 includes a summary and analysis from consultation stage one. Below is an overview of these responses.

5.2 The majority of those who responded to the consultation stated that they were broadly in favour of a new formal, locally accountable governance structure being established, with the most frequently suggested options were:

- Parish Council (the most popular)
- Village Council
- Community Council
- Community/Residents Association (similar to the previous Willaston Residents Society)

5.3 However, there were many respondents who did not express a strong preference for a specific model, as long as it provided effective and transparent support to local matters, and that it was democratic, cost effective and represented ALL residents and stakeholders in Willaston.

5.4 Many respondents confirmed their reasons for wanting a new locally accountable governance structure and these are summarised below:

- I. There was a need for a stronger local voice, especially regarding planning matters, developments, green belt protection, and traffic/road safety.
- II. Cheshire West and Chester Council as the unitary authority does not act on local concerns, though in previous questions some residents had stated that they successfully used the Council's report it platform.
- III. following the loss of the former Residents Society, a vacuum has been created and residents had nowhere to go with local matters. Also many mentioned the recent sad death of their local long standing councillor and this has also left a vacuum for local residents.
- IV. If a new locally accountable governance structure was created it needed powers, should reflect all residents' concerns and be able to influence local decisions.
- V. communication and engagement with residents needed improving and any new structure should hold regular meetings in public, be transparent and provide clear points of contact for residents.

5.5 Whilst the majority of respondents indicated that they would welcome a new structure, several concerns were also raised:

- The potential costs of any new organisation
- Any new organisations needed to be political neutral
- The need for clear communication for the process and the new group

5.6 Those who responded also identified the below areas which they were most concerned about in Willaston:

- Planning matters
- Village maintenance
- Traffic, transport and road safety
- Improved community activities and cohesion
- Maintenance and development of local community facilities

- 5.7 Depending on the outcome of the second stage of the consultation, if there is still a desire to create a new local council, its name and style (parish, community, neighbourhood or village council), its electoral arrangements (Council size, wards) and geographical area and boundary would be proposed for further consultation.
- 5.8 The Community Governance Review Committee will need to determine a style for the council and again this will be undertaken following the outcomes of the second consultation. Considerations may centre around:
- **Local Identity:** does the community identify as a village, neighbourhood or community?
 - **Public preference:** has a public preference been expressed during a public consultation
 - **Existing local names**

For example, a rural area may prefer “village council”, whereas a modern urban development may prefer “neighbourhood council” or communities may request a neutral label such as Community Council.

6.0 Next steps

- 6.1 In undertaking a community governance review and making and implementing relevant decisions (Chapter 3) of the 2007 Act places a duty on principal authorities to have regard to the need to secure that any community governance for the area under review reflects the identities and interests of the local community in that area, and that it is effective and convenient; relevant considerations which influence judgements against these two principal criteria include the impact on community cohesion, and the size, population and boundaries of the proposed area.
- 6.2 Following the analysis of responses, and with reference to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England’s guidance on community governance reviews, draft recommendations have been prepared (see 2.1). The national guidance and the Terms of Reference state that these draft recommendations are subject to approval by the Community Governance Review Committee, followed by public consultation with local households potentially impacted by the recommendations. Whilst the first consultation focused on broad, generic questions, the second consultation will be more targeted and specific, based on the draft recommendations.
- 6.2 Given the concerns raised about establishing any new local organisation (see 5.5), Council Officers will hold two drop-in sessions during the consultation period to provide answers to these issues, together with the process and the legal aspects of any new local council. While Officers will not seek to influence or direct residents in completing their consultation responses, the purpose of the drop-in sessions is to provide factual information on the functions of a local council, its establishment process, electoral arrangements and potential costs.

7.0 Reasons for Draft Recommendations.

7.1 The draft recommendations have been prepared to enable the completion of the community governance review for Willaston within the timescales set out in statutory guidance and the approved Terms of Reference. They also reflect the views, wishes and concerns of respondents.

7.2 The draft recommendations will be subject to a further period of public consultation. Respondents from the first consultation who provided an email address will receive an electronic version of the consultation document, while those who did not will be sent a paper copy by post. Any final recommendations will need ultimate approval by Full Council.

8.0 What will it cost?

8.1 The cost of delivering a community governance review will be met from within existing resources. Any printing and postage costs will be picked up by the Council's Democratic Services Team. Printing and postage costs will be kept to a minimum and where possible electronic communication and consultation forms will be made available. To return completed consultation forms households will be encouraged to either: complete the electronic consultation form or alternatively, post their paper copy in the Ballot Box available from Willaston Pharmacy. In the drop in sessions, paper copies of the consultation form will also be made available along with a second ballot box.

9.0 What are the legal aspects?

9.1 The Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 sets out the requirements for recommendations arising from a formal community governance review and as defined by the terms of reference set at the start of the review.

9.2 In deciding what recommendations to make, the principal council must have regard to the need to secure that community governance reflects the identities and interests of the community in that area and is effective and convenient. The 2007 Act also takes into account any other arrangements (apart from those relating to parishes and their institutions) that have already been made, or that could be made, for the purposes of community representation or community engagement. The recommendations must take into account any representations received and should be supported by evidence which demonstrates that the recommended community governance arrangements would meet the criteria set out in the 2007 Act.

10.0 What risks are there and how can they be reduced?

10.1 For Risks see 12.1

11.0 What is the impact of the decision on equality and diversity issues?

11.1 The purpose of any community governance review is to ensure that local governance arrangements remain relevant, effective and reflective of the identities and interests of local communities. The overarching objective is to

strengthen democratic representation and increase opportunities for residents to engage in local decision-making.

- 11.2 A key consideration when reviewing community governance arrangements is the potential impact of any proposed changes on the local community, including how they may support or affect community cohesion.

12.0 Are there any other options?

- 12.1 A Community Governance Review is a statutory process governed by the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007. When residents submit a valid petition, the Council has a legal duty to act and if it doesn't, the following could occur:

1. Potential breach of statutory duty

A principal council should undertake a community governance review if a valid petition is received. Guidance confirms that a review should take place when triggered by a valid petition that meets the required signature thresholds. Failure to do so could expose the Council to claims that it is not complying with statutory obligations under the 2007 Act.

2. Judicial review and legal costs

If a Council ignores or unreasonably delays action on a valid petition, residents may pursue judicial review on grounds of:

- failure to discharge a statutory duty,
- procedural unfairness,
- acting irrationally.

3. Reputational damage and loss of public trust

Guidance emphasises that reviews exist to uphold effective local democracy, engagement, and community identity. If the council ignores a petition, it may appear dismissive of resident concerns, which can erode confidence in democratic processes.

4. Failure to support community identity and cohesion

A community governance review also can help ensure governance arrangements reflect:

- local identities,
- local interests, and
- effective and convenient local government.

There are therefore no other options available to this Council, other than to undertake the review.

For further information:

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Background Documents:

Documents are available for inspection at: Council Offices, The Portal, Wellington Road, Ellesmere Port, CH65 0BA

Appendix 1 – Summary of responses from Consultation stage 1

Appendix 2 – Terms of Reference approved in 9 July 2025.