

Cheshire West and Chester Council  
and  
The University of Chester

# Partnership Agreement



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## Foreword

We are proud to present the first formal Partnership Agreement between Cheshire West and Chester Council and the University of Chester.

We are now at a crucial moment as we look to rebuild from the challenges of the pandemic, and drive positive change which improves the lives and livelihoods of our population over the months and years to come.

Our organisations have a strong track record of working together towards shared ambitions, including through contributions to the One City Plan, and we are both strongly committed to supporting our communities by:

- working on initiatives to address the climate and ecological emergencies threatening our places and our people
- improving the health and wellbeing of our residents
- striving to develop higher level skills in industry, healthcare and business, upskilling workers, supporting social mobility and addressing unemployment
- improving education and learning opportunities for school pupils, students in higher education and adult learners
- and tackling some of the most pressing social, environmental and economic challenges that we face on a daily basis

This Agreement, and the work that will follow, will provide greater coherence between existing partnership efforts and a basis from which we can identify and drive forward new ideas and deliver specific initiatives in support of our shared ambitions.

This Partnership Agreement reaffirms our commitment to Chester as a *University City* and to the wider Borough which we serve, and to working even more closely together as civic leaders to further improve the lives of everyone across our region.

**Cllr Louise Gittins**

Leader  
Cheshire West and Chester Council

**Canon Dr Jeff Turnbull**

President of University Council  
University of Chester

**Andrew Lewis**

Chief Executive  
Cheshire West and Chester Council

**Professor Eunice Simmons**

Vice-Chancellor  
University of Chester

## Principles

Councils and Universities can make a real difference to the people and the places where they are based. Our collective influence links to a range of areas which impact on the quality of life and opportunities afforded to our local communities. The way we work together will continue to have a strong bearing on how effectively we are able to do that.

To that end, this Partnership Agreement is underpinned by a set of principles designed to guide the nature of our future relationship and how we will look to strengthen the connections already in place.

- Foster our shared ambition to promote a proud, dynamic and inclusive University city
- Embed collaborative, reciprocal engagement between our organisations, with the regular flow of knowledge, information and mutual support, through quarterly Steering Meetings between the Chief Executive and the Vice Chancellor, and scheduled Action Update Meetings with Council Officers and University staff
- Enable even stronger communication between our organisations and the community, through
  - sharing of our relevant institutional communication goals and plans
  - creating and delivering joint communication activities for shared ends such as voter engagement, public health messaging
  - ensuring that our communications are 'joined up' so that messages to the community - residents (including students), public services and businesses are clear and consistent.
- Ensure that our collective time is used effectively by being transparent about desired outcomes and accountable for agreed actions
- Be flexible and dynamic, to adapt to changing circumstances and priorities and to work collaboratively to resolve issues that arise within and outside our control
- Harness collective research and service expertise from both organisations by asking clearly for support to address local challenges, support genuine co-production with communities and provide a clear route to tangible impact
- complement the existing partnership with Storyhouse, to further enhance arts and culture at the heart of the City, enabling students, business owners and residents to forge new collaborations with cultural venues, arts professionals and local businesses
- and establish clear evaluation and review processes so that our progress can be effectively measured and plans put in place to support continuous improvement.



## Priorities

This Partnership Agreement will progress the initiatives highlighted by our communities through the One City Plan and prioritised by the Partnership leaders. An Action Plan will be developed to drive key pieces of work and ensure communication to relevant communities and stakeholders.

It is recognised that ambitions and aspirations change, particularly in light of the ongoing impact of the pandemic, so the following, initial Partnership priorities will be reviewed on an ongoing basis to ensure that they continue to meet the evolving needs of our communities.

Like the One City Plan, the University's Citizen Student Strategy is centred on a sense of purpose, and this will drive help to drive a range of priority decisions and their delivery.

### Priorities

- Education and skills
- Sustainable, inclusive and green growth
- Sustainable transport
- City centre improvements and culture
- Health and wellbeing
- Community relations
- The voice of our students

### **Introduction**

Our organisations play a central role in ensuring that young people and adults have the outlook, skills, qualifications and training necessary to access well paid and meaningful employment.

### **Our Shared Aims**

It is important, as far as possible, that this benefits the businesses and sectors that operate within Cheshire West and Chester. Many of our employers - of all sizes - are experiencing growing challenges in a variety of areas. This includes

- a need to encourage people into key front-line jobs such as health and social care;
- to adapt to evolving community expectations and priorities; and
- to modernise the Borough's workforce to meet new and increasing demands for Green and STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) jobs and digital transformation.

### **Our Priorities for Action**

We need to

- accelerate our transition towards a new economy that can attract and retain highly skilled people
- support our workforce to take advantage of that growth, with real opportunities for access and advancement for all.

Graduates from the University of Chester will be encouraged and supported into good quality jobs that meet the needs of our local organisations in key sectors including health and social care and other public services.

The Partnership will develop actions to

- support unemployment, underemployment and upskilling for local people
- promote a greater level of graduate retention, with good quality jobs and prospects available within the Borough
- support the University's plan to establish a full medical school from 2022
- work even more closely with local businesses to ensure that local skills match local need, and meet the evolving priorities and demand pressures of our employers
- and maximise the use of real work experience, work placements, mentoring and volunteering in key sectors.



### **Introduction**

Cheshire West and Chester faces significant challenges compared to many other areas. We are home to a range of energy intensive industries and a number of high-profile manufacturers. However, this also presents considerable economic and employment opportunities if we can effectively support a green resurgence that contributes to the Net Zero ambitions of the Council, the University and the wider Borough.

### **Our Shared Aims**

The opportunity for people to access well-paid and meaningful employment in the long term requires the Partnership to support sustainable, resilient and long-term growth across the region.

The availability of good jobs within an inclusive economy gives our students and residents the best opportunity to fulfil their potential, narrows the economic and health inequality gaps between communities, and supports our businesses to adapt to new and emerging conditions.

An important area of growth will undoubtedly relate to climate change - and there is a growing acceptance that people and businesses will choose to live and work in places where there is clear action to address it.

Both of our organisations are already doing a significant amount of work to address the climate emergency and increase awareness around how everybody can play their part. However, we can always do more. We remain absolutely committed to the green agenda, and will work even more closely together to further accelerate the speed and scale of change that is needed.

## Our Priorities for Action

The Partnership will collaborate to

- develop actions to reduce our carbon footprints, such as
  - rationalising and sharing spaces across communities, where possible, to maximise the usage of buildings and energy
  - working together to demonstrate in our projects what energy efficient building design and refurbishment can look like to local businesses
  - deliver joint projects with research students and the community to identify ways of generating less physical and energy waste
- support the decarbonisation of energy, industry and business through
  - provision of education and training
  - access to research, leading to innovation
- responsibly manage our own land holdings, make the most of our natural assets and optimise natural capital and biodiversity
- embed initiatives to support an inclusive economy and play leading roles in the West Cheshire Anchor Network
- promote even greater corporate and social responsibility, harnessing the enthusiasm of our students and residents to take action in their own lives
- use local suppliers wherever possible to support local jobs and minimise carbon miles
- and utilise the University's academic expertise to inform the Borough's green transition.

We aim to agree key actions within 3 months of COP26 and progress against them will be reported quarterly to reflect the urgency of the Climate Change Emergency.





## Introduction

A crucial part of our focus on tackling the climate emergency will be the steps we take to promote the use of sustainable transport within Chester and across the wider borough.

To achieve the target of carbon neutrality by 2045 or earlier - and preferably by 2030 - will require a 17 percent reduction in total travel demand, and a 25 percent reduction in car travel by 2025.

This is a key shared priority of both of our organisations. Along with the obvious climate benefits, an increase in the use of sustainable and active travel methods will help to ease congestion and parking demand in our urban areas, including the city centre, and support better health outcomes for our students and residents.

## Our Shared Aims

We need to do everything we can to encourage people to make healthy, climate-friendly choices, with safe and secure sustainable transport options easily accessible to all. It is also important that these provide good links to social, study, training, employment opportunities in ways that complement the character and environment of the local area.

## Our Priorities for Action

The Partnership will collaborate to

- encourage employees, residents, consumers, customers, students and visitors to use sustainable and active travel as much as possible by
  - aligning the University's Transport Strategy with the Council's - including the Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan - and promoting Pilot Projects to test the efficacy with public sector staff and University students
  - promoting active travel in line with established strategies, and identifying any new similar initiatives that would benefit students and residents
  - promoting connectivity between key parts of the city centre and beyond, enabling ease of access to the services and opportunities that our communities need
  - re-designing learning and teaching communities to encourage movement around them on foot/bicycle
  - supporting student research and outreach projects to promote green transport awareness in the community and schools



## **Introduction**

Chester is a city of rich heritage and culture, with a wealth of assets that make it a truly unique and attractive place to be part of.

Cities and town centres up and down the country are facing considerable challenges. Many of these challenges existed before the pandemic and have been exacerbated by it. There continues to be significant changes to the way cities and town centres operate, and with the demise of retail there are significant changes to what people want from the places where they live, work and enjoy their free time.

## **Our Shared Aims**

The One City Plan was first developed and launched in 2012 in recognition that, although Chester is already a unique and attractive place to be a part of, there is a real opportunity to evolve. The One City Plan refresh in 2021/22 provides an ideal point in time to assess our progress and determine the priorities for the next period in our history. Cities cannot afford to stand still, and we need to be just as proud of our future as we are of our past. Like many cities in the UK there is an opportunity for Chester to be recognised as a “University City” furthering many shared projects – cultural, economic, well-being, skills, sustainability and transport.

Along with local communities, many students and post-graduates feel a strong sense of connection and belonging to Chester. Chester is seen as a “safe” city by prospective students and their families, and an attractive place to visit, celebrate academic success, and potentially settle into appropriate graduate employment.

We have the building blocks in place to make the most of everything we have to offer - but as local leaders, we need to continually consider how we can best serve our varied communities and further improve their experience.

## **Our Priorities for Action**

To that end, this Partnership will develop actions to

- ensure that culture sits at the heart of an approach to regeneration that considers and benefits local people, considering community uses like libraries, markets, shared learning spaces and work/study experience opportunities, pop-up advice centres and performance spaces to bring people together
- further enhance the opportunities for students, residents and visitors to learn more about the history of the city and its unique heritage assets
- promote greater coherence in and between University sites across the city and improved integration with communities
- support the University to bring greater value to its work within and across the city centre
- use our combined specialist research and policy expertise to help revitalise the city centre and shape its ongoing regeneration, including through the further collaborative support of existing strategies and programmes of work
- and further contribute to promoting and marketing our University City as a great place to live, learn, work and visit.

### **Introduction**

The Council and the University have a duty, and a passion, to promote the health and wellbeing of our students and the residents of Cheshire West and Chester.

This was a key priority area before the pandemic, and we have a strong track record of partnership working to improve outcomes for our communities through the regular sharing of skills, knowledge and the evaluation of programmes and services across the Borough.

### **Our Shared Aims**

Even so, Covid-19 has created a range of new challenges over and above the immediate public health response - including greater demands for enhanced mental health and emotional wellbeing support, and supporting those experiencing or at risk of experiencing social isolation.

### **Our Priorities for Action**

This Partnership will develop actions to

- continue to respond to the new and existing health and wellbeing needs of our residents, including students, with specific joint cross-community interventions (as demonstrated with Covid Testing and Vaccination Clinics)
- promote improved physical health of all of our communities, increasing awareness and enhancing opportunities for people to get involved in leisure activities, defining and implementing specific outreach projects utilising expertise and student volunteer and relevant undergraduate placement opportunities
- further improve our focus on the mental health challenges arising from new ways of learning and working which are being established across every part of our professional and educational lives through collaboration at specific events
- increase the level of GP registrations for students, to further promote their access to appropriate support at the earliest possible stage, ensuring that local GP services understand the needs of students and are able to provide timely and targeted support
- and ensure we are doing everything we can to protect our communities from harm through effective safeguarding processes and activities by ensuring that correct procedures and governance is used in the above projects.



### **Introduction**

The University of Chester is a fundamental part of the fabric of the city. It can and does make an invaluable contribution to the area, and shares a wide range of aspirations and values with people and organisations across the Borough.

There is also a strong tradition from students of promoting equality, diversity and social justice in the local region through active projects and extra-curricular engagement with a variety of community groups.

### **Our Shared Aims**

It is important that we continue to do everything we can to ensure all are supported to connect with and contribute to the city and its people - and to ensure the city and its people recognise the tangible value that being a University City brings to Chester on a daily basis.

### **Our Priorities for Action**

To that end, we will develop actions to

- strengthen the links between our University students, the Council and our wider partners across the public, private, voluntary and community sectors
- support opportunities for students to volunteer in the community, and to co-produce knowledge with and for local people
- enable and promote further student community action designed to improve the lives of residents across the Borough and enhance the personal and professional development of our learners
- ensure that students are able to contribute to community safety initiatives so that everyone can participate in and experience the city to their full potential.





### Introduction

Both of our organisations have found new ways to engage with our colleagues, our peers and our communities throughout the pandemic. As we move forward, we need to empower everyone to have a voice - arguably now more than ever.

The One City Plan consultation enables people to help shape the environment they want to live in and how they connect with each other in the months and years to come.

### Our Shared Aims

Vibrant places and effective services need to be influenced by those who use them. This helps them to be better, and supports a stronger connection between people and place. Engagement needs to be a two-way street between stakeholders and leaders; offering a range of perspectives, a balanced understanding of views, and enhancing the value of every decision that is made.

University students are drawn from the region, across the UK and around the world – our shared ambition is to ensure that Chester is a welcoming and inclusive city for all students, and one that provides opportunities for the many alumni that wish to stay and contribute to the region beyond their period of study.

### Our Priorities for Action

We will develop actions to

- empower students to participate in local democracy by increasing the level of student voter registrations across the Borough
- further develop routes into other forms of democratic participation and the open areas of engagement that matter most to them
- and promote a range of ways that students can help to shape local priorities and initiatives through links with established community groups.



## Monitoring, Delivery and Governance

A key principle of this Partnership Agreement is that we establish clear evaluation and review processes. To that end:

- A Partnership Action Plan will be developed to underpin and drive forward its ambitions. This will ensure that at our progress can be effectively measured and communicated at quarterly reviews and plans put in place to support continuous improvement in the short, medium and longer term (6 months, 3 years and 15 years, in line with Climate Emergency targets).
- Lead officers from Cheshire West and Chester Council and the University of Chester will meet on a regular basis to assess progress against the actions identified, help to address any challenges, incorporate new priorities and projects as they arise and ensure delivery and measurement of expected benefits
- The Lead Officers will consider summary actions being progressed by other groups to limit duplication and help to identify any gaps which the Action Plan can help to support. This will look to incorporate the work of two new operational partnership groups
  - o A Development Group, to explore how the University's future development can support the ongoing wider transformation of the city, and
  - o A Students in Chester Group, to foster stronger links between the student body and local community, including local Councillors, and to ensure that the city meets the needs of its student residents
- this Partnership Agreement will be refreshed on at least an annual basis to reflect the evolving ambitions and challenges of both organisations, students and community groups across the Borough.