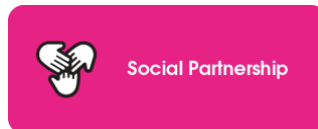




# Co-operative Councils

## Innovation Network

### COMMUNITY



## Cheshire West and Chester Council

### Play your part

In 2024, Cheshire West and Council refreshed the vision for the borough, asking local communities to 'play your part towards a stronger future,' where we all work together to tackle shared challenges. This is a continuation of the play-your-part approach set out in 2020 and a recognition that social partnership is fundamental to enabling a stronger future for the borough, where local communities are integral to the planning and delivery of the support that they draw on.

This is not a new approach, but one that proved its worth during the local community response to the pandemic, the cost-of-living crisis and the need to welcome and house guests from Ukraine. Cheshire West and Chester Council are working to develop a council-wide and borough-wide approach to social partnership, building on the many existing activities within the Council and local communities.

#### Community led working

The Council is developing a community-led support approach, driven by a comprehensive transformation programme within adult social care, to design and deliver different ways of working which maximise the strengths and community connections of people locally. This has meant establishing five ['Let's Talk' sites](#) that offer community drop-in, conversation and face-to-face advice about, and signposting to, wellbeing and wider support and services available locally. Work is ongoing to boost the number of people who opt for a Direct Payment and take greater control of how their care and support needs are met, but also to encourage the wide development of micro-enterprises that offer a range of choices of alternative, outcome focused care and support providers.

Community groups are being supported through projects such as [Cheshire West Crowd](#), a community crowdfunding programme that has enabled £2million funding for over a hundred local projects, from a slow-cooker loan scheme to a village arts trail. Enabling local people to take ownership of and finance their own ideas, for every £1 the Council has invested it has generated another £1.89 in project success. Not only that but it has made funding more accessible to a wider range of smaller, local organisations and community groups.

The Council is also supporting community groups to take on the management and operation of local land and buildings, and maximise local benefit, through a [community asset transfer framework](#). Most recently the Ellesmere Port branch of Men in Sheds, who help older men combat loneliness and isolation brought about through retirement and bereavement, took over the control of the empty and dilapidated Overpool Community Centre and are working to renovate it and make it their new 'shedquarters.'

### **Responding to the climate emergency**

Residents are central to our [climate emergency](#) response, whether by recycling over 57% of local waste, contributing to our climate emergency taskforce or supporting the group-buying scheme that brings interested households together to benefit from economies of scale when installing solar panels. Our [Inspire](#) website provides a place for communities to share ideas, stories and tips about tackling climate change. This includes the work that the [Mersey Forest Partnership](#), hosted by Cheshire West and Chester Council, has undertaken with local landowners and communities to plant more than nine million trees over 25 years. This is equivalent to five new trees for every person living within the Forest area and has created a growing network of woodlands and green spaces across Cheshire and Merseyside. This has given more people easier access to woodlands in which to exercise and play, and engaged local communities in planting and maintaining trees, but also helped to combat both climate change and habitat loss.

### **Responding to the Poverty Emergency**

In early 2020 the Council declared a [poverty emergency](#). This built on the learning from two local Poverty Truth Commissions, and it made the poverty truth philosophy of 'nothing about us without us is for us' central to the Council's ongoing poverty response. A Poverty Truth Advisory Board was established, bringing together local people with lived experience of poverty, called community inspirers with local civic and business leaders. The board informs and supports policy development and service design and coproduced the Fairer Future Strategy, an ambitious ten-year plan to reduce poverty. Community inspirers and the board have also played a key role in shaping the Council's customer services, and particularly the 'no wrong front door' approach to ensure that however someone first contacts the Council, they will be welcomed and supported to access the services they need.

The board has also helped guide the borough's response to the [cost of living crisis](#), working with council services, voluntary and community groups to identify and roll out a network of [welcoming spaces](#) and ensure that they were advertised and designed to be truly welcoming, safe spaces. The board also influenced the successful deployment of a £500,000 winter poverty fund, including £50,000 allocated towards a Tackling Poverty Crowdfunder to support local projects backed by communities with clear social benefits.

### **Tackling rough sleeping and homelessness**

The local Multi-Agency Rough Sleeping partnership (MARS) is a group made up of the Council and partners from statutory and third sector agencies which meets fortnightly to discuss referrals of disengaged and entrenched rough sleepers to help find the best pathway off the streets into accommodation and mainstream services. Through our new ways of working, nearly 75% of the individuals we worked with - who were rough sleeping or at considerable risk of doing so - were supported into accommodation and have been

empowered not to return to a situation of homelessness. This focus on rough sleepers benefits from wider projects such as '[End Homelessness in Chester](#),' a collaborative project between the Council, Chester Business Improvement District and the local charities which provide outreach, support, drop-in facilities and life skills training to homeless people. The project supports people to 'tap to donate' so they know how money will be spent and can donate even without carrying cash.

Local people, public, private and community sector organisations are coming together in west Cheshire to play their part in a social partnership with a shared sense of responsibility in our mutual wellbeing.

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