



Cheshire +  
Warrington

# Communications and engagement report

Bringing better jobs,  
better transport,  
smarter investment  
- **now's**  
the time.

July 2025



# Background



Communications and engagement are critical to the success of devolution in Cheshire and Warrington. We need to ensure that regional stakeholders are fully informed of the process, how they can get involved, and what they can influence.

We have had a planned approach to engaging core stakeholders since September 2024, and we have engaged, at key milestones, with councillors, staff, MPs, relevant committees/boards, businesses, and partner organisations, as well as our residents through a programme of community engagement.

# Activity to date – highlights



- Promotion of the government's consultation
- **Launch of ambassador programme** – sharing testimonials and continued engagement with identified ambassadors
- [Devolution newsletter](#) – first issue July 2025
- **Social media** – improving visibility/engagement across Cheshire and Warrington devolution accounts, myth-busting/dispelling misinformation, sharing FAQs etc.
- **Internal communications** – with staff across the three councils/ECW
- **Business engagement** – in partnership with the Business Advisory Board/ECW
- **Member engagement** – programme of activity across three councils/town and parish councils

# Communications and engagement –

## Key insights



### Media coverage

- **34** pieces of news coverage
- **1.04 million** estimated views
- Detailed [CoverageBook report](#)

### Community engagement

- 560 individuals engaged
- 453 via community pop-ups
- 64 people engaged via community events
- 43 young people targeted

### Top devolution priorities from community engagement

44% - transport  
28% - economy  
16% - environment  
12% - skills



# Social media

## LinkedIn (May/June):

- 10.5k impressions
- 5.3k members reached
- 6.42% engagement rate
- Followers have grown by 90 to 644
- Increase in re-posts by 18.2%\*

## Facebook (May/June):

- 189.2k impressions (up by 180%\*)
- 81.1k reach (up by 248%\*)
- 872 interactions (up by 179%\*)

\*all % figures compared to March/April

## Paid-for advertising:

### Promotion of animation

- 51.4k video plays
- 34.8k reach
- 68.2k impressions

## Younger people campaign – targeting people aged 21-40

Ongoing – at campaign mid-point:

- 273k reach
- 627k impressions
- 1k link clicks



# Community engagement programme



Community engagement is a key part of our overall communications and engagement strategy.

To support with this work, we commissioned an agency – **Social** – to facilitate a programme of community engagement across Cheshire East, Cheshire West and Chester, and Warrington, with a key focus on targeted youth engagement.

**A detailed report of this programme of activity follows (slide 9 onwards).**





# Next steps

- Following this initial phase of communications and engagement activity, we are refreshing our strategy
- Ahead of council votes in September, our focus is on engaging our elected members and communities of influence
- We will continue with myth busting/work to dispel misinformation – this is still common in the feedback we receive, so we must be relentless in correcting misinformation/raising awareness of the benefits of devolution
- Work will also focus on an intensive PR campaign and broadening our community engagement
- **This means...**

# Updated strategy



- **Residents, businesses and partners** will understand what devolution is and isn't, the potential benefits, the process and timeline, and how it affects them
- **Staff** will understand what devolution is and isn't, how it affects their roles, the process, and what it means for their organisation
- **Members** will understand what devolution means for their authority and area, and the stages of the devolution process and decision-making, so they are equipped and supported to talk about devolution using consistent messaging
- **Members** will see the feedback of residents, businesses and communities in the evidence base for decision making and devolution priorities
- **All stakeholders** will know how to get involved and have their say and will be able to see that their responses are reflected in local decision-making



# Social

Cheshire+  
Warrington

**Community engagement programme  
evaluation and key insights**



# Purpose of this report

Cheshire and Warrington has been selected by government as one of six areas in England included within its **Devolution Priority Programme (DPP)**. Part of the government's commitment to expanding devolution to all parts of England – as set out in its 2024 Devolution White Paper – the DPP identifies those areas that could form the next wave of strategic mayoral authorities, benefitting from similar devolved powers and investment to the 15 mayoral authorities already established. Subject to statutory consultation, ratification by individual councils, and the laying of an Order in Parliament, this could see the first Mayor for Cheshire and Warrington elected by residents in May 2026.

Social was commissioned by Marketing Cheshire, on behalf of the three councils (Cheshire East Council, Cheshire West and Chester Council, and Warrington Borough Council) progressing the DPP discussions for the area, to undertake **focused engagement with local communities** to inform councils' decision-making and planning in relation to the DPP process. This report provides an overview of the initial phase of engagement activity undertaken and summarises the key findings and conclusions for consideration by members of the councils.



# Key insights summary – Cheshire and Warrington-wide

## Sentiment about devolution

- ❑ **Awareness of the specific Cheshire and Warrington devolution proposals was very low** across the area. However, awareness of devolution and the work of elected mayors in other areas (especially Greater Manchester and Liverpool City Region) was relatively high.
- ❑ **Interest and engagement were also high** – many residents were interested in the proposals and keen to discuss them and ask questions.
- ❑ Initial hesitation about the creation of new political roles was overcome when a **short explanation** was provided about the purpose of devolution. Messages that resonated particularly strongly with residents were around bringing **additional investment** to the area and having a **figurehead** to champion the area's cause nationally. Many residents commented on the positive impact that Andy Burnham and (to a lesser degree) Steve Rotherham were having in their areas – even if they did not share their political views.

“Anything that will bring more investment into the area seems like a good idea to me.”

### Resident quote

“If we had a Mayor that was as good as Andy Burnham in championing the area, I would support that.”

### Resident quote



# Key insights summary – Cheshire and Warrington-wide

## Sentiment about devolution – continued

- ❑ **Younger residents** were more likely to have a positive view of devolution than older demographics.
- ❑ Where **concerns about devolution** were expressed, these were mainly in relation to perceived costs to local residents in creating a new strategic mayoral authority, that investment and power would be concentrated in certain areas to the detriment of others, and a general dissatisfaction/disinterest in politics.
- ❑ There was **notable confusion** about the role of an elected mayor/strategic authority in relation to local councils and MPs. There were also misperceptions that devolution meant a merging of councils or a return to previous county council arrangements.

“Why do we need a Mayor? Why can’t we just make the existing council system work better? How will having a Mayor make a difference?”

### Resident quote

“Sounds great in theory but there needs to be a plan, good people and collaboration for it to work. We need a Mayor who lives here and understands local issues.”

### Resident quote



# Key insights summary – Cheshire and Warrington-wide

## Priorities for devolution to address

- ❑ **Transport** was by far the biggest priority across the area that residents felt a Mayor could address. Perceived transport inadequacies were an issue across all age brackets and demographics. Issues raised included:
  - Transport for education (especially FE) and leisure purposes among younger people
  - Bus services – especially Sunday services, connections to/from rural communities, and provision for older people
  - Road congestion – especially among commuters/those of working age
  - Connectivity with Greater Manchester and Liverpool City Region
- ❑ The **economy** was the second biggest priority area for residents across the area, with particular emphasis on revitalising town and village centres, investment in places that residents feel have been neglected in recent years, and support for local small businesses.

“Buses are few and far between and we have to rely too heavily on cars to get anywhere.”

### Resident quote

“We need to do something about all the empty shops and invest to keep our towns alive.”

### Resident quote





# Key insights summary – Cheshire and Warrington-wide

## Priorities for devolution to address

- ❑ Lower numbers of people mentioned the **environment** as a key priority. When mentioned, this was primarily in the context of improving local environments (for example, addressing fly-tipping or rubbish) or concerns around over-development. Very few people mentioned climate change and net zero as priorities, despite the significant investment and employment opportunities in low carbon industries in the area.
- ❑ **Skills and employment support** was the lowest-rated priority among residents and communities, however, this could be at least partly explained by the demographics of participants as a clear majority of residents who took part in the community engagement activities were of an older working age or post-retirement demographic, for whom skills and employment support is less likely to be an issue.

“The environment is a big priority for me. We have to protect our green spaces and address flood risks.”

### Resident quote

“We need more of a focus on skills to get young people into jobs, not into trouble.”

### Resident quote



# Key insights summary – Cheshire and Warrington-wide

## Priorities for devolution to address

- ❑ Although mentioned significantly less frequently than transport, a lack of **affordable housing** in the area was also mentioned in all three council areas. There was particular concern about housing affordability for young people, who might be priced out of the area they grew up in, and those on lower incomes.
- ❑ **Large numbers of residents** cited issues that would not be within the direct control of a mayoral authority as their top concern. Local NHS services (availability of GP appointments and access to hospital care) were of particular concern, along with a view that investment in local amenities (particularly healthcare facilities) must go together with new housing development.

“We must protect the green belt, but we need more affordable housing across the region – especially social housing.”

### Resident quote

“We can’t continue increasing the number of houses without investment in public services. I just want to be able to get a GP appointment!”

### Resident quote



# Social

## Community engagement



# Community engagement – approach

Community engagement delivered by Social consisted of:

- ❑ **Community pop-up events** – three community pop-up events were held in May – one in each of the three council areas. These consisted of market stalls in town centres, held as part of local makers'/artisan markets to take advantage of higher levels of footfall. Display boards were created, providing summary information about key aspects of the area's devolution proposals, along with takeaway postcards that included a QR code link to the dedicated Cheshire and Warrington devolution website. Insights were captured on post-it notes, and residents were also asked to vote on their top devolution priority using a token voting system.
- ❑ **Community engagement events** – three community focus groups were also held (again, one in each council area), to allow for more in-depth discussion about the devolution proposals and the issues local people would like to see addressed. In Cheshire East and Cheshire West and Chester, these consisted of public events, promoted to residents via council channels, including local press releases, social media, and emails to virtual Citizens' Panel mailing lists. In Warrington, a small-group discussion involving representatives of community organisations was held, with participants invited directly to reflect a broad range of community interests. At each event, there was a short presentation about the devolution proposals by elected members and senior officers, followed by an interactive discussion facilitated by Social.



# Community vox pops

Across the three community pop-up events, Social captured a number of vox-pop interviews featuring Cheshire and Warrington residents sharing their views about the devolution proposals in their own words:

[Watch the video on the Cheshire and Warrington website](#)





# Social

## Youth engagement



# Overview

With almost 1 million residents, young people aged 17 and under equate to circa 20% of Cheshire and Warrington's population.

What matters most to this group now will play significant role in the area's future. Capturing their views will ensure they benefit from, and contribute towards devolution, allowing future generations to inherit a sustainable, inclusive and well-connected place to live, work and play.



# Youth engagement – overall summary

- Engaging with a wide variety of youth voices, both in these early stages and as a future combined authority is essential. Our approach, which included politics students in Crewe and Warrington Youth Zone's 'Young Leaders', helped to identify clear priority patterns, as well as unique priorities within each area.
- Career-minded young people (**26%**) feel opportunities in the area do not meet their aspirations. With the potential to become the most productive area in the North by 2045, devolution could realise this ambition. However, the creation of more innovative, high-quality jobs will be essential to inspire young people to build their futures here.
- Health, both physical and mental, is an emerging priority for young people across all three areas, with particular concern around access to, and support from, local services – particularly highlighting their value within smaller towns. As outlined in the Sustainable and Inclusive Economic Strategy (SIES), devolution offers a pathway to address these challenges and could help raise life expectancies above the national average by 2045, creating a healthier, more resilient area for the long-term.
- Shopping and retail is a priority for **64%** of young people. Despite town centres being less important, young people shared the value of having somewhere to spend time with their friends outside of education.



# Methodology overview

The local engagement programme delivered by Social ran for an approximate six-week period, from 4 May to 13 June 2025. This timeframe was determined by the government's DPP process, with engagement beginning after the government's own statutory consultation into the area's devolution proposals (which ran from 17 February to 13 April 2025) and before the submission of papers to the three Cheshire and Warrington councils to determine whether the councils wish to proceed with the proposed devolution arrangements.

The community engagement programme, which Social was commissioned to undertake, identified three strands of activity, with tailored engagement methods and approaches designed to meet the needs of three key local audiences:

- 1. Local residents and communities**
- 2. Young people**
- 3. Businesses and stakeholders**



# Methodology overview

Due to constraints on the engagement programme as a result of the government's DPP process and timeframe, it was agreed to **prioritise resident/community and young people's engagement** through the initial six-week period of work delivered by Social.

The three councils and partners, including Enterprise Cheshire and Warrington, have already undertaken substantial briefings and engagement with key stakeholders and business representatives across the area and, as such, it was decided that the **stakeholder and business engagement strand** of activity would be more effectively undertaken later in the year, once details of specific devolved powers and investment for Cheshire and Warrington have been confirmed by government.

Resident and youth engagement activity was **replicated in all three council areas**, ensuring a representative and reflective view from all parts of the area and that local nuances could be captured and presented to the respective councils.

