



Stakeholder Consultation Policy

Most recent update: 12 September 2025

Context

Using local intelligence and consultation to determine need and interest, Cheshire West and Chester Council's (CW&C) Skills and Employment (S&E) Service will commission and deliver a programme of learning and skills opportunities. This will enable adults to develop the skills, attitudes and attributes to grow both economically and socially. In turn this will allow them to lead fulfilling, independent healthy lives and support the development of vibrant communities in which they live and work.

What Is Consultation?

Consultation is a two-way dialogue that allows learners, potential learners, employers and partners (from public, private, voluntary and community sectors) a realistic and timely opportunity to:

- Influence commissioning, curriculum and programming decisions being made by CW&C S&E team.
- Contribute towards the quality assurance and improvement of adult education provision across Cheshire West and Chester.
- Ensure that adult education provision is meeting the needs of CW&C residents and employers facilitating effective progression onto further study or into employment.

Why Consult?

Consultation and external involvement are at the heart of good decision-making and strengthens the relationship between us and our learners, potential learners, employers and partner organisations. We are committed to improving consultation as part of its transparent and open way of working. This ensures that the provision we deliver is co-designed by the residents and businesses we serve.

Different Types Of Consultation

1. *Identifying need – employers, partners and other stakeholders*

A key priority for CW&C Skills and Employment team is moving people into work so it is vital that the curriculum we offer meets the needs of local employers. We want to clearly hear the voice of employers in our curriculum so employer engagement is high priority for the service.

We link with employers through:

- Personal relationships with employers, e.g. those who we have supported to recruit staff,
- Partnership working with DWP Job Coaches and Employer Engagement Officers,
- Our Business Growth Team account management activity – including inward investment queries – S&E can support with recruitment directly or in work progression activities,
- Our Regeneration Teams who will identify new projects, including construction schemes,



- Partnership working with DWP, National Careers Service and Cheshire East and Warrington Borough Councils as part of the Redundancy Action Support Team (RAST),
- Employer networks, e.g. working with Skills for Care, CITB Marketing Cheshire, Federation of Small Businesses, BID groups, West Cheshire and North Wales Chamber of Commerce and the Cheshire and Warrington Business Advisory Board.
- Monitoring the findings and on-going work of the Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP), facilitated locally by South Cheshire Chamber of Commerce,
- Supporting Capital Projects team to ensure construction companies deliver on their social value obligations with regards to skills and employment.

We link with partners and stakeholders through:

- Regular meetings with Cheshire College South and West and Warrington and Vale Royal College to ensure there is no unnecessary duplication of provision, that all priority wards and cohorts are being engaged and supported, and explore opportunities for learner progression,
- Links with our Locality, Young People's service, SEND team, Care Leavers and Adult Social Care Teams – to ensure we are supporting the transition to adulthood agenda and embedding skills and employment within health and wellbeing discussions,
- Links with the Enterprise Cheshire and Warrington and Growth Hub. This includes gathering Labour Market Intelligence through the EMSI tool and the Opportunities Portal,
- Working with a range of health and housing organisations to ensure we are responsive to need, including the development of the Health and Wellbeing Strategy.

We use labour market information gathered through our Insight and Intelligence team to monitor employment and population trends. Should we consider carrying out a more formal consultation process, the Skills and Employment team would follow the internal council process.

2. *Community and voluntary sector voice*

The Skills and Employment Team works closely with around 25 community and voluntary organisations who support vulnerable or potentially disadvantaged adults e.g. adults with learning difficulties and disabilities, mental health issues, people living in specific target wards, older adults or BAME communities. These organisations are well placed to identify the needs of their particular target group and are encouraged to bid for funding to deliver provision to support these individuals through our Adult Skills Fund commissioning process, with the aim of complementing the provision available through our Skills and Employment Hubs.

The Community and Voluntary sector also have a workforce made up from a mixture of both paid and voluntary staff. These staff have professional development needs and through annual training needs analysis, we are able to identify these and respond accordingly.

Alternatively, community and voluntary feedback is collected via the team's work with the locality staff within in the Council. This can be used to inform and target provision in line with need.

Finally, the Skills and Employment team also ensure that our voluntary and community partners are aware of our offer and are able to refer their clients when appropriate. They are also represented on our Governance Board.

3. *Establishing interests – learners and potential learners*



Consultation with learners and potential learners has many benefits. When undertaken successfully, it can provide better access to an appropriate range of learning opportunities that reflect local needs and aspirations. People participating in consultation can also become more confident and believe that providers do want to develop a curriculum which will respond to their requirements/interests. They also use and may develop their skills, for example, articulating and presenting their learning needs and aspirations.

From the provider perspective, those consulted are the best source of information about what would attract them to or inhibit them from participating, as well as what provision would best meet needs and/or interests. This user-voice is fully in line with the Council's own aspirations, learning from its recent Fairer Futures strategy.

The ways in which we engage and consult with learners and potential learners are through:

- Web based consultation channels on the council websites/social media,
- Participating in national satisfaction surveys,
- Networks supporting specific communities of interest e.g. BAME network, Mental Health network, Learners with Learning Difficulties and/or Disabilities,
- Feedback posters displayed in public venues inviting views,
- Publicise how to make complaints, compliments or comment regarding our service and promote the council's formal feedback procedures,
- In course feedback forms completed by all learners and summarised by tutors,
- Termly 'have your say' forums with learners,
- Collecting learner complaints and actions taken at the end of each year,
- Follow up on learners where course MI statistics give cause for concern e.g. where a number of learners have left a course and retention appears to be an issue,
- Discussion with learners recorded at observed teaching and learning sessions and learner feedback being graded as part of the observation process,
- Longitudinal progression monitoring,
- An annual graded Self-Assessment Report that summarises how effective we are at meeting the needs and interests of our local community.

Identification Of Target Groups For Engagement And Consultation 2025-2026

Based on consultation with partners and the local employment and inclusion picture, our priority groups for conducting deeper engagement and consultation in 2025-26 have been agreed as:

- Long Term Unemployed and those at risk of becoming long term unemployed due to the barriers they are facing, including homelessness
- Adults aged over 50 looking to re-skill or re-engage with work
- Recently redundant adults and those at risk of redundancy
- People in work on low incomes
- Ex-service personnel
- Ex-offenders
- Adults with learning disabilities
- Adults with physical disabilities
- Adults with mental health conditions both in primary and secondary mental health care looking to enter and sustain employment



- Adults who experience substance misuse
- BAME communities, including refugees and asylum seekers
- NEET/Young People at risk of NEET
- Young people, parents and teachers considering work experience opportunities
- Parents accessing our priority schools and Children's Centres
- Residents with caring responsibilities
- Employers and employer representative bodies
- Health partners
- DWP
- Local training providers

We will also be looking to identify how we can use the Inclusive Economy Strategy and UK Shared Prosperity Funding (UKSPF) engagement activities to better inform our service during 2025-2026.

During 2025-26, we will begin establishing a devolved structure in Cheshire and Warrington. This is likely to inform and shape how we engage with partners and stakeholders in the future.