

Enterprise Cheshire and Warrington

Invitation to Quote

**Cheshire and Warrington Devolution – Rural Strategy
Group**

**Rural Needs Analysis – Evidence Base, Engagement and
Priorities**

27/10/2025

1. INTRODUCTION

About ECW:

Cheshire and Warrington is one of the UK's economic success stories and the most productive economy in the North of England. Enterprise Cheshire and Warrington (ECW), a council-owned organisation, works alongside elected leaders to make the region the healthiest, most sustainable, inclusive, and growing place in the country. We collaborate with the three local councils, industry leaders, and community partners to shape economic and transport strategies, deliver skills training and business support, and ensure that the voice of business is heard in local decision-making. Through its Marketing Cheshire division, ECW also champions the region as an outstanding place to live, work, invest, study, and visit. Working in collaboration with local government, businesses, educational institutes and other public, private and community sector organisations, we keep Cheshire and Warrington firmly on the map.

2. PURPOSE OF THE COMMISSION

ECW, on behalf of C&W Local Authorities and the C&W Rural Strategy Group, is seeking a consultant(s) to deliver a robust Rural Needs Analysis that will strengthen the rural evidence base and inform devolution planning and future investment priorities. Cheshire and Warrington's rural areas are home to a significant proportion of the sub-region's population and businesses, and play a vital role in its economy, environment, and sense of place.

In C&W, the existing rural devolution workstream has defined the rural economy broadly, with the inclusion of agriculture (especially dairy), and land-based industries but also hosts other diverse sectors e.g. visitor economy, food & drink manufacturing, renewable energy and nature-based solutions, agri-tech & bio-renewables, financial & professional services, logistics, digital, creative & healthcare tech. Rural areas have a mix of SME's and micro businesses as well as some large companies e.g. those associated with the Cheshire Science Corridor.

This project will provide the intelligence, data and evidence base needed to strengthen the case for rural investment, shape policy, and prioritise interventions. It will combine quantitative and qualitative analysis with effective stakeholder engagement to ensure that local voices and perspectives across all relevant rural-related themes are captured. As part of the work, consultants will assist C&W stakeholders to review the definition/s of the rural economy, given recent changes to government taxonomies, and put forward a C&W position on the rural economy, and the key issues to address, that will help lay the foundation for the approach to rural within a devolved context.

The work will sit within the context of the Cheshire and Warrington Sustainable and Inclusive Economic Strategy (SIES) and its evidence base and will need to build on and complement work done at Local Authority level. It will also need to form part of the wider C&W investment and policy context. Consultants will be able to access the existing SIES's [economic evidence base](#) (2022) and

the emerging/updated Strategy and will need to collate and summarise the existing evidence base as far as possible as part of the work.

3. REQUIREMENT

The commissioned work will:

- Review, refresh, and deepen the rural evidence base, which is currently uneven across the three local authorities and limited at a Cheshire & Warrington level, and contextualise against relevant benchmarks.
- Gather and analyse new intelligence on the rural economy, communities, and environment.
- Establish the current and emerging needs of rural residents, businesses and places and understand opportunities.
- Benchmark Cheshire and Warrington against other rural and semi-rural Combined Authority areas (e.g. North East, Cornwall, Cambridgeshire & Peterborough), drawing lessons and examples of best practice.
- Provide an evidence base that underpins policy development and strengthens the case for rural investment through devolution levers.
- Recommend priority areas for rural investment, aligned with national policy, local devolution arrangements, and Cheshire and Warrington's economic agenda.
- Carry out wide stakeholder engagement including supporting the design and facilitation of a rural strand within a wider Devolution Conference in January 2026 to engage stakeholders in shaping local priorities.

Scope of Work

The successful supplier will:

1. Review, Refresh and Deepen the Evidence Base

- a) Working with the steering group, review and recommend a suitable approach to the definition (or definitions) of "rural" for Cheshire and Warrington, considering stakeholder and ONS classifications.
- b) Following this definition, combine quantitative data analysis (e.g. demographics, economy, infrastructure, environment) with qualitative insights (including access to key services/amenities, community perspectives, lived experience alongside other stakeholder views).

- c) Working with the steering group, gather and assess existing reports, datasets, plans and strategies across Cheshire and Warrington and nationally that will have a bearing on the rural economy, and position in the context of the emerging Sustainable and Inclusive Economic Strategy and other plans and strategies. This will include the three Council Local Plans, their evidence bases, the Mid Cheshire Plan, and other Council Reviews such as Community Governance and input to National Reviews e.g. Boundary Commission Electoral Review, etc (some of which will be provided via the steering group), as well as the County Councils Network and Rural Services Network and national policy.
- d) Refresh outdated material and deepen analysis to provide a consistent sub-regional view, and supplement with up-to-date demographic, economic, environmental and social data, including GIS mapping e.g. rural assets, deprivation, connectivity etc.
- e) Include rural/urban splits including market towns, sectoral/business strengths, transport, digital connectivity and infrastructure, housing, skills, employment, social inclusion and health (including indices of deprivation) and environment. Ensure this covers topics in 2c below, in line with available evidence.

2. Needs Assessment, Opportunity Analysis and Stakeholder Engagement

- a) The consultants will help the RSG devolution task and finish group coordinate the assembling of the C&W rural stakeholder list. Stakeholders will include DEFRA, Rural Services Network, businesses, community organisations and rural sector representatives etc. Consultants will ensure grassroots voices and community-level perspectives are captured, alongside institutional and business input. Engagement must reflect EDI best practices.
- b) Working with the steering group for guidance and contacts, undertake strong and effective qualitative engagement across stakeholders to identify rural needs and opportunities including:
 - Roundtables
 - Online sessions
 - One to one interviews

The steering group would be available to help with warm introductions and arranging some sessions.

- c) Identify gaps, barriers and opportunities across key themes including but not limited to:
 - economic growth, business sectors and innovation including agriculture

- transport and digital connectivity including broadband/mobile data access
- energy infrastructure and energy affordability/fuel poverty
- water infrastructure
- housing and its affordability
- skills and employment
- natural capital, environment and nature-based solutions
- social inclusion and health (referring to underrepresented/marginalised communities in SIES and with input from steering group)

3. Rural Strand within Devolution Conference

- Work with Cheshire & Warrington partners to develop agenda and potential workshop format.
- Facilitate plenary/workshop discussion if required.
- Capture, analyse and report on workshop stakeholder inputs.
- **Note:** Cheshire & Warrington will manage venue, catering, logistics and invitations. The Conference is expected to take place at the end of January 2026.

4. Comparative Research

- a) Benchmark against other Combined Authorities and devolved administrations, as well as any other important non-devolved best practice.
- b) Identify transferable models and best practice in addressing rural needs, including any opportunities for double devolution and for becoming a trailblazer for rural development within a Devolution Priority Programme CA.

5. Policy, Investment & Devolution Priorities

- a) Recommend and provide a rationale for a set of policy investment priorities, and outline how evidence can support future business case development. Take into consideration the approach to Green Book investment rules, the Fair Funding Review and the Rural Services Network positions and set out any implications for the CA Assurance Framework.
- b) Align with devolved powers/levers, funding streams and Cheshire & Warrington's economic agenda to identify how devolution can support delivery of C&W's rural

agenda. This will include how the rural agenda, and the needs identified, should sit in context with and how it can best be integrated with wider devolution priorities.

6. Summary of work

- a) Bring together all the work into summary reports/materials as outlined in the deliverables section below.

Deliverables

- **Inception note** and agreed methodology and plan.
- **Evidence Base Report** – review, refresh and deepen existing material (short report with updated analysis and identified gaps).
- **Interim Findings Report** – including benchmarking insights and emerging priorities.
- **Rural stakeholder engagement report with Conference output** – conference workshop agenda, materials, facilitation, and engagement report
- **Final Rural Needs Analysis Report** including:
 - Executive summary
 - Consolidated and enhanced evidence base.
 - Comparative case studies/examples of good practice from other rural/semi-rural CAs.
 - Recommended approach to the rural agenda, with reference to context and fit with expected wider programme/policy areas
 - Recommended policy and investment priorities with rationale
 - Policy recommendations on how devolution levers could support delivery.
- **Presentation/s** for key stakeholders.

Project Management

Day to day project management on behalf of ECW will be provided by Melissa Crellin, ECW's Strategy and Public Affairs Director, working closely with Carole Hyde, the designated Lead Officer for C&W Rural agenda. The C&W Growth Directors will act as sponsor for this work, with the Rural Strategy Group and its Devolution Task and Finish Group acting as the steering group.

The Consultants should make allowance for regular check-ins with the lead officers, and liaison via telephone and e-mail with officers and key stakeholders as necessary.

Work must be completed by end of March 2026 in line with funding commitments and to feed into ongoing devolution planning and engagement.

Budget

There is a budget of up to £25,000 minus VAT which is to be inclusive of all expenses.

4. TIMESCALES

Activity	Date
Issue brief for procurement	27/10/25
Deadline for queries	31/10/25
Deadline for submissions	10/11/25 9am
Interviews (if required)	13/11/25 PM
Appointment of successful provider	14/11/25
Inception meeting	17/11/25
Completion of work	27/3/26

5. SUBMISSION REQUIREMENTS

Bidders are required to submit tenders in an electronic format (i.e. MS Word/PDF) setting out the following:

- Introduction
- Project Appreciation (conformance to specification)
- Approach and methodology for the commission
- Demonstration of experience of providing similar services across both rural research and policy, and economic development, ideally with experience in a devolution context including 2 references.
- Knowledge, expertise and relevant experience of the proposed consultant team including CVs one A4 page summary per person)
- Approach to project management, risk and quality assurance, including submission of a 1-2 page high level project plan
- Value for money, including pricing schedule

All prices must be fixed and firm, quoted in pounds sterling and exclusive of VAT. Tenders should detail any ancillary costs and expenses included in the price.

6. EVALUATION OF TENDERS

Each proposal will be scored against the following evaluation questions, weighted as follows:

Evaluation question	Score %
Project Appreciation	Pass/Fail
Approach and methodology for the commission	25
Experience of delivering similar assignments across rural research and policy, and economic development, ideally with experience in a devolution context, and two references	20
Knowledge, expertise and relevant experience of the proposed consultant team including CVs (1 A4 page summary per person)	20
Approach to project management and quality assurance, including a high-level project plan	10
Value for money, including pricing schedule (refer to Appendix 1)	25
Total	100

Each evaluation question will be scored using the following scoring criteria:

Scoring criteria	Score
Failure to respond or irrelevant information which fails to meet the requirement	0
Response is inadequate, significantly failing to meet the requirements	1
Response is unsatisfactory partially meets the requirement	2
Response is acceptable and meets the minimum requirement	3
Response is good - better than merely acceptable	4
Response is excellent, exceeds the requirement and gives added value	5

7. FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS

Payments for services covered by this invitation to quote will be on submission of appropriate invoices, subject to ECW standard payment terms. Invoicing arrangements will be agreed with the successful provider following the award of the contract.

8. CONTRACT

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A contract will be awarded to the tenderer whose proposal is deemed to be the most economically advantageous subject to agreement on conditions of that contract. Please note that ECW reserves the right to cancel the tender process at any time prior to a contract being entered into. ECW is not bound to accept the lowest price or any tender submitted.

9. FURTHER INFORMATION, QUERIES AND SUBMISSIONS

If you require any clarifications relating to the information contained within this invitation to quote please contact Melissa Crellin (contact details below) before 12:00 noon on 31st October. Responses to requests for clarification may not materially change any of the elements of the tenders submitted. Any additional information provided by ECW as a result of requests for clarification will be made available to all potential bidders.

Tender contact:

Melissa Crellin, Strategy and Public Affairs Director
melissa.crellin@cheshireandwarrington.com

Submissions should be sent via email, stating in the email subject which tender the submission relates to. Completed submissions should be sent to the tender contact stated above only and must be submitted by the deadline for submissions. Submissions sent by other means may not be accepted at the discretion of ECW.

10. TENDER PROPRIETY

Confidentiality and Disclaimer

- 10.1. This invitation to quote is not an offer capable of acceptance but represents a definition of specific requirements and an invitation to submit a response addressing such requirements.
- 10.2. Neither the issue of the invitation to quote to you, your preparation and submission of a tender, or the subsequent receipt and evaluation of your tender by Enterprise Cheshire and Warrington commits Enterprise Cheshire and Warrington to award a contract to you or any other bidder, even if all requirements stated in the invitation to quote are met. Enterprise Cheshire and Warrington is not responsible directly or indirectly for any costs incurred by your firm in responding to this invitation to quote and participating in Enterprise Cheshire and Warrington's procurement process.
- 10.3. All firms shall keep strictly confidential all information contained in this invitation to quote, and other information or documents made available to it by or on behalf of Enterprise Cheshire and Warrington in connection with this invitation to quote. The firms shall not disclose, nor allow any such information to be disclosed. Submission of a formal response to this invitation to quote will confirm your agreement to observe these confidentiality requirements.

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10.4. Contact by the firms with Enterprise Cheshire and Warrington during the bidding process should only be with the individuals named as the Enterprise Cheshire and Warrington tender contact. Respondents shall not offer or give any consideration of any kind to any employee or representative of Enterprise Cheshire and Warrington as an inducement or reward for doing, or refraining from doing, any act in relation to the obtaining or execution of this or any other contract with Enterprise Cheshire and Warrington.

Material Misrepresentation

10.5. Enterprise Cheshire and Warrington shall rely on the information provided by the bidder in relation to its offer. In providing the services as specified in the invitation to quote documents the successful bidder/tenderer shall comply with the contents of its offer as failure in this respect may constitute a material breach of contract.

Collusive Bidding

10.6. Collusive bidding is unacceptable to Enterprise Cheshire and Warrington. Any tenderer that is caught by Enterprise Cheshire and Warrington to be circumventing rules or the law during this tender process will automatically be disqualified from the tender process.

This applies to any bidder who:

- a). Fixes or adjusts the amount of his bid by or in accordance with any agreement or arrangement with any other person, or
- b). Communicates to any person other than Enterprise Cheshire and Warrington the amount or approximate amount of his proposal (except where such disclosure is made in confidence to obtain quotations necessary for the preparation of the tender for instance) or,
- c). Enters into any agreement or arrangement with any other person* that he shall refrain from bidding or as to the amount of any bid to be submitted, or
- d). Offers or agrees to pay or give, or does pay or gives any sum of money, inducement or valuable consideration directly or indirectly to any person for doing or having done, or causing or having caused to be done in relation to any Offer or proposed Offer for the Services or any act or omission will be disqualified (without prejudice to any other civil remedies available to Enterprise Cheshire and Warrington and without prejudice to any criminal liability which such conduct by a bidder may attract).

*NB Sub-contracting is permissible where the bidder believes that this will enhance their proposal, however this must be clearly stated.

- 10.7. Bribery means any offence under the Bribery Act 2010 or related Laws creating offences in relation to offering, promising or giving a bribe or requesting, agreeing to receive or receiving a bribe
- 10.8. The Contractor agrees with the Client that this Contract will operate on the basis of zero tolerance being shown towards any Fraud and/or Bribery. The Contractor shall take all reasonable steps, in accordance with Good Industry Practice, to prevent Fraud and Bribery by Staff and the Contractor (including its shareholders, members, directors) in connection with the receipt of monies from the Client and with the operation of this Contract.

APPENDIX 1 – PRICE SCHEDULE – TO BE COMPLETED AND RETURNED

Staff Broken down by role			
Staff role/Name	Amount of time to be spent on project	Day rate	Total
Attendance at meetings	Number of meetings	Rate	

Travel and subsistence		
Other costs: please specify		
Total Tendered Price (exc of VAT)		

NB: The price schedule may be returned on an excel spreadsheet.