

# Member Briefing

Number: 1120

**Title:** Community rail consultation

**Summary:** To make members aware of the Government's consultation exercise on its community rail strategy, and to give members the opportunity to contribute to the response to be submitted by Cheshire West and Chester Council.

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## Background

Community rail describes an extensive range of activities focused upon community driven partnerships, groups and organisations, connecting communities with their railway.

Community rail lines are supported by community rail partnerships (CRP), typically involving the train operating company (TOC) providing the rail service, local authorities, rail user groups and community groups. CRPs continue to be highly successful in boosting patronage of rail services, attracting volunteers and making stations more attractive environments. Awards to operate passenger rail franchises in recent years included significant investment commitments to positively respond to the sustained national demand growth for rail travel. These franchises include significantly increased financial (and in kind) commitments from the train operating companies for community rail.

The Northern franchise introduced in April 2016 includes a contribution from the train operating company Arriva Northern of £15,000 per annum (from 2016/17 – 2018/19 inclusive) (index linked) to create a new north Cheshire community rail partnership, and funding of £25,000 per annum (over the same period) for the existing mid Cheshire community rail partnership (for the Chester – Northwich – Manchester line).

Cheshire West and Chester Council support the following CRPs.

- Mid Cheshire (Chester – Northwich – Stockport – Manchester)
- Borderlands (Wrexham – Neston – Bidston)
- Chester – Shrewsbury

Cheshire West and Chester Council host the mid Cheshire CRP, which is widely recognised for its significant achievements. In 2015, the mid Cheshire CRP became the first CRP to win the Overall Winner category in the Community Rail Awards, and was recently short listed for the Best Tourism Marketing Project of the Year in the Marketing Cheshire Annual Awards.

The Government seeks to build upon community rail initiatives to date, with alignment to its future rail objectives. Through this consultation exercise, the Government is inviting comments based upon the four key themes of:

- connecting people to places and opportunities
- integrating communities to create a fairer society and encourage diversity and inclusion
- supporting local and regional economies and sharing opportunities
- suggesting innovative ways to improve the way the railway works, including productive use of underused or unused railway land and stations, and working more closely with heritage railways.

A link to this consultation, which closes on 28 January 2018, is provided below:

- [www.gov.uk/government/consultations/future-of-community-rail-strategy](http://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/future-of-community-rail-strategy)

If you would like to provide any comments to be considered within the consultation response from Cheshire West and Chester Council, please email:

[gerard.rhodes@cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk](mailto:gerard.rhodes@cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk) by no later than Wednesday 10 January 2018.

## Summary

There continues to be strong national demand growth for rail travel with significant investment commitments for rail services and rail infrastructure.

Community rail has a strong track record of involving communities with their railway, increasing patronage and supporting local economies. This consultation exercise is an important opportunity to help shape the future role of community rail, through the Government's review of its community rail strategy.

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**Responsible Committee, Cabinet Member:** Councillor Brian Clarke

**Date:** 7 December 2017