

Appendix 3

Summary of Coventry City Council's Engagement and Consultation Activities on Proposals for a West Midlands Combined Authority

October 2015

West Midlands Combined Authority
From Whitehall to the West Midlands, what does it really mean?

All decisions about local council services will still be made by Coventry councillors putting Coventry people first

Coventry City Council would like the combined authority to cover these areas

Coventry and Warwickshire

Black Country

Birmingham and Solihull

Council services run in Coventry stay in Coventry

Coventry City Council logo

www.coventry.gov.uk/combinedauthority

The infographic features a central map of the West Midlands region. The Coventry and Warwickshire area is highlighted in purple, with a list of services: 'Council leaders work in equal partnership to deliver: Better transport links across the whole region, A regional fund to boost building on brownfield sites, Funding for skills and training to get people into jobs needed in the region, More business support and foreign investment'. The Black Country area is highlighted in orange, and Birmingham and Solihull in pink. To the right, a silhouette of Big Ben is shown with arrows pointing to the text 'Power', 'Funding', and 'Responsibility'. At the top, a cartoon illustration shows a 'Welcome to COVENTRY' sign, a school, a recycling bin, and council workers. Text states 'Council services run in Coventry stay in Coventry'.

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1. Executive Summary

Engagement and Consultation programme

From July to September 2015 an engagement and consultation programme was conducted by Coventry City Council on the proposals for a West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA). This programme ran alongside a joint consultation by the seven West Midland metropolitan district councils and was wider than required under the statutory process for setting up a combined authority.

The engagement and consultation programme included Facebook promotion (15,700 reach), Twitter promotion (581,500 reach), presentations at ward forums and drop in sessions (nearly 500 attendees), dedicated website pages (1,680 users), online forums (375 comments), an electronic survey (38 responses), meetings with local businesses and a Citizens' Panel organised by DemSoc. Before the consultation programme began, a telephone survey was carried out by an independent market research company, reaching 1,117 Coventry residents.

The Citizens' Panel was held on 9 September 2015 and a separate report giving the details and outcomes of this has been produced by DemSoc and is available at <http://www.demsoc.org/coventry-citizens-panel/report/>.

Key Findings

A number of consistent themes emerged from analysis of the feedback and comments:

- People needed more information to make a decision
- People not wanting to join with Birmingham and/or preferred the idea of a combined authority with Warwickshire
- Concern Coventry will lose out on funding or lose local decision making
- Reluctance about having a Metro Mayor, often with reference to a previous referendum ruling against an Elected Mayor for Coventry
- Wanting a referendum on the topic of combined authorities
- Positivity towards Coventry being in a combined authority

2. Introduction and Context

On 28 May 2015 Coventry City Council's Cabinet agreed in principle to create a combined authority with a preferred option of councils from Coventry and Warwickshire (and Hinckley and Bosworth) with councils from the Greater Birmingham and Solihull and the Black Country Local Enterprise Partnership areas.

Although the establishment of a combined authority means powers would move from Whitehall to the West Midlands – not from Coventry to a combined authority – widespread media coverage of the issue has led to lively debate locally on the implications of Coventry joining a combined authority.

To ensure local people, businesses and key partners had information available and an opportunity to provide feedback on the combined authority, a widespread programme of engagement and consultation ran from July to September 2015. A joint consultation programme was also run by the seven West Midlands metropolitan district councils, consisting of an online survey.

3. Methodology

A variety of methods were used to try and reach as many people as possible with this programme of engagement and consultation. All comments received have been analysed using a thematic approach. These themes are consistently used throughout the report. Some individuals are known to have engaged with the programme in a variety of ways, so their views will have been represented a number of times in this report.

3.1 Dedicated website pages

Coventry City Council's website has a set of webpages dedicated to providing up-to-date information about the West Midlands Combined Authority (www.coventry.gov.uk/combinedauthority). These provided details of the engagement sessions running through July to September.

A link to the wider West Midlands Combined Authority website was also available on these pages – www.westmidlandscombinedauthority.org.uk.

1680 unique users visited these webpages.

3.2 Online survey

An online form was available on the Coventry City Council website for people to give their views, asking:

“What do you think about Coventry being part of a West Midlands Combined Authority? Please explain.”

The open question was designed to provide an unrestricted platform for feedback, reducing any potential survey bias.

38 respondents submitted 51 comments.

3.3 Online forum

Five online discussions, lasting two hours each, were led by Councillors and held on different days and times, to try and open up the opportunity to as many people as possible.

The discussion could be joined by logging onto www.coventry.gov.uk/blog/wmca.

21 participants took part in discussion, with 77 comments made.

3.4 Ward forums

A presentation was given at each of the eighteen ward forums across the city. This gave local people an opportunity to be informed and participate in open discussion. Councillors and officers attended each of the forums. Views expressed at the meetings were recorded and have been analysed to inform this report.

3.5 Drop in sessions

Seven sessions were held between 11am and 3pm, with three in a city centre location and four elsewhere in Coventry. These sessions gave local people the opportunity to have one to one discussions with Councillors and Coventry City Council officers to find out more, ask questions and give feedback on the combined authority. Feedback forms were available in the venue if any attendees did not wish to discuss the topic at length.

102 people attended the drop in sessions and 42 completed a feedback form.

379 people attended the ward forums.

3.6 Focus group – Coventry Older Voices

A focus group took place with Coventry Older Voices on 11 August 2015. This was facilitated by the Major Projects Community Engagement Officer and included a presentation and discussion session.

3.7 Citizens Panel

Coventry City Council commissioned the Democratic Society to run a Citizen's Panel on 9 September. Feedback and views were collected from a group of Coventry residents and results from this exercise will contribute further to the understanding of

views in addition to this report. The full report can be found at <http://www.demsoc.org/coventry-citizens-panel/report/>.

3.8 Promotion

The drop-in sessions, ward forums and online discussions were promoted in a number of ways, including:

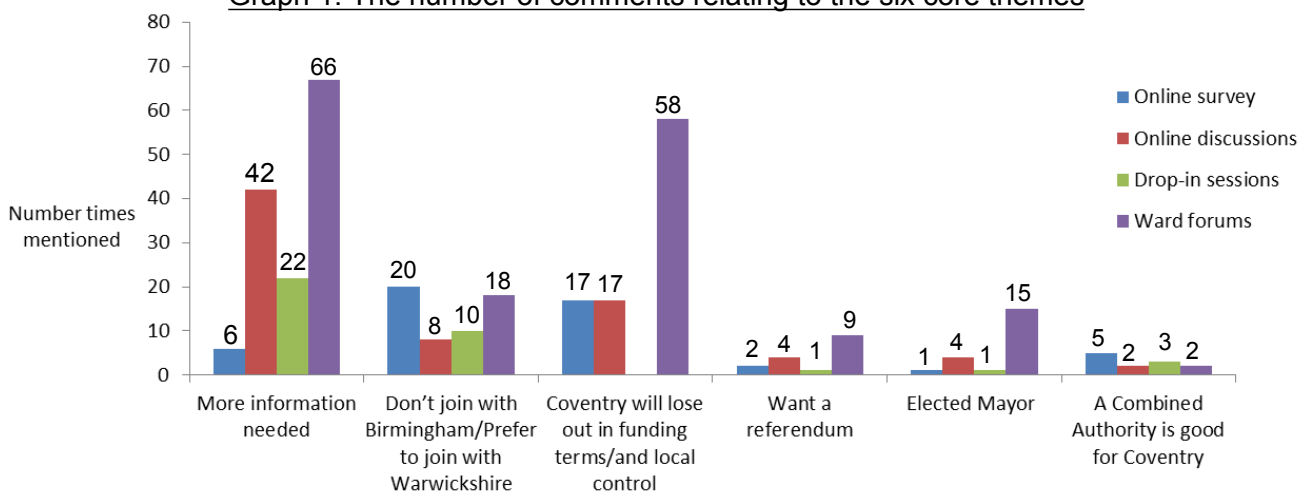
- Leaflets in all Coventry libraries, at community venues and civic buildings
- Website
- Citivision, the Council magazine
- Telegraph and Observer local newspapers
- Local radio
- Twitter and Facebook - 15,700 Facebook reach and 581,500 Twitter reach with 93 retweets/ shares
- Beacon – the Council’s intranet
- Members Bulletin

4. Summary of Findings

When analysing the online survey, online forum, drop in sessions feedback forms and ward forum comments, six core themes emerged.

Collating the number of comments relating to the themes shows a large number of respondents feel they require more information about the West Midlands Combined

Graph 1: The number of comments relating to the six core themes



Authority before they can make a decision on whether they support Coventry being a part of the WMCA.

Local businesses echoed the same belief that more information on the benefits was needed. Overall they were in favour of a combined authority but stressed the need for the relationship between Coventry and Warwickshire not to be undermined.

5. Findings by engagement type

5.1 Online survey

Total number of respondents	38
Comments /questions analysed	51

- Wanting Coventry to join with Warwickshire and/or not with Birmingham was mentioned 20 times. A major concern was that Coventry would lose its identity in a West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA).
- 17 out of 38 respondents expressed concerns about losing out on funding and local control.
- 6 out of 38 respondents wanted more information before making a decision. Many had a particular interest in the benefits to Coventry.
- 5 out of 38 respondents said a CA would be good for Coventry if it's fairly governed.
- 2 out of 38 respondents wanted to have a referendum.
- 1 respondent voiced concern about a Mayor being imposed.

5.2 Online forum/discussion

Number of sessions held at http://www.coventry.gov.uk/WMCA	5
Total number of participants	21
Comments /questions analysed	77

- Over half of the comments (42 out of 77) mentioned the need for better engagement and more information.
- 17 concerns were expressed about losing funding or local control, with some mentioning the previous West Midlands County Council.
- There were concerns voiced that Coventry would be left behind as the other WMCA councils would form alliances and exploit the one vote system.

5.3 Drop in sessions

Total sessions held	7
Total number attended	102
Total number of feedback cards completed	42

Details of attendance level at each session:

Venue	Dates and opening hours	Number of attendees per session
26 City Arcade (former Voluntary Action Coventry)	Thursday 13 August 2015 from 10am to 3pm	33
	Friday 14 August 2015 from 10am to 3pm	30
	Saturday 15 August 2015 from 10am to 3pm	15
Wyken Community Centre, Westmorland Road	Monday 17 August 2015 from 10am to 3pm	7
Allesley Park Community Centre, Winsford Avenue	Wednesday 19 August 2015 from 10am to 3pm	9
St. Paul's Church Hall, Foleshill Road	Tuesday 25 August 2015 from 10am to 3pm	2
Xcel Leisure Centre, Mitchell Avenue	Wednesday 26 August 2015 from 10am to 3pm	6

- 22 comments were received saying they would have liked more information, particularly about the benefits for the city.
- 3 of the attendees mentioned that they could see the benefits and think that a CA will be good for Coventry as it will help share expertise and resources with neighbouring authorities.
- 10 comments raised the issue of not wanting to join with Birmingham or preferring to join with Warwickshire.

5.4 Ward forums

No of Ward Forums held	18
Total No Attended	379
Total No of Comments	168

Details of attendance level at each forum:

Ward	No. attended	Ward	No. attended
Bablake	27	Radford	11
Binley and Willenhall	22	Sherbourne	22
Cheylesmore	50	St Michael's	15
Earlsdon	15	Upper Stoke	15
Foleshill	6	Wainbody	18
Henley	22	Westwood	47
Holbrooks	15	Whoberley	12
Longford	6	Woodlands	25
Lower Stoke	30	Wyken	21

- 66 of the total comments made at Ward Forums focused on the view that more effort to inform the public should be made and that more information regarding the benefits of joining a CA needs to be made available.
- 58 of the comments mentioned the fact that Coventry would lose out in terms of funding and local decision making.
- A number of comments (18) related to the fact that Coventry should consider going into a CA only if Warwickshire joined or otherwise create a Combined Authority just with Warwickshire not Birmingham.
- 15 people voiced concern about the prospect of an Elected Mayor being imposed, with reference to a previous referendum on an Elected Mayor in Coventry.
- 9 people mentioned wanting a referendum to be held.
- 2 people expressed the view that the council has no other choice but to enter into negotiations on a WMCA.

5.5 Coventry Older Voices focus group

Following a presentation, an open discussion took place. The main points raised were:

- Like the suggestion of a Coventry and Warwickshire authority
- Representative process of government needs to be improved
- Do not like wording of engagement and involvement. Want ability to influence.
- Feel like a decision has already been made, e.g. statement of intent.
- What happens if Warwickshire says no?
- What will the average resident get on a day-to-day level?
- Could it mean further cuts to funding on a Combined Authority level, like the current cuts seen at local authority level?
- Will there still be a Coventry Mayor?
- Will education budget be part of the combined authority?
- If decided that we would join the combined authority, could we go back on it?
- What other options were discussed and ruled out for the combined authority, before the current proposal?

6. Themes – supporting quotes

In order to demonstrate the sort of comments being received within the different core themes, a selection of quotes have been collated from across the engagement types.

6.1 More information needed

“Would like the pros and cons to be explained...Who will actually control the authority?” – Online survey

“I think it would depend on what we would get out of it.” – Online survey

“Where will Coventry benefit?...Where do you think we need that investment?” – Online discussion

“Still an awful lot of questions that need to be answered.” – Drop in session

“Lack of awareness about this initiative a lot of people do not know what this means” – Ward forum

“Concern that there is contradictory information about which decisions will be made locally and which by the CA.” – Ward forum

“What will the average resident get on a day-to-day level?” – Focus group

6.2 Don't join with Birmingham/Prefer to join with Warwickshire

"As a proud Coventrian, I shudder at the prospect of losing the identity of the city I love to a massively unwieldy conurbation, with the title of greater Birmingham!" – Online survey

"Totally horrendous idea to have anything to do with Birmingham City Council" – Online survey

"I am opposed to any connection or being ruled by Birmingham" – Online forum

"Our only hope is you are insisting on joining with Greater Birmingham is to go in with Warwickshire." – Online forum

"Why not Warwickshire, Birmingham has too much debt?" – Drop in session

"If Warwickshire joins then Coventry would be silly not to join – if Warwickshire don't then it would not be a good idea." – Ward forum

"I believe Birmingham Council are in trouble with their own finances so how would they cope with both, we should be part of Warwickshire rather than West Midlands." – Telephone survey

6.3 Coventry will lose out if funding terms and local control

"Coventry will lose its election seat and right to vote" – Online survey

"The Government are giving us money on one hand only if we do what they say whilst taking it away with the other forcing the Council to make cuts" – Online survey

"With Greater Birmingham and Solihull already working together through the LEP, I fear Coventry will be excluded" – Online forum

"Do you honestly think that the four Councils which represent the Black Country area would vote in favour of diverting funds to projects such as NUCKLE phase 3... surely they could easily veto such a proposal." – Online forum

"Concerns about how the authority will be financed and who will hold the purse strings" – Ward forum

"I would be worried we'd lose our voice"- Telephone survey

6.4 Want a referendum

"I think the people of Coventry should have the opportunity to vote in a referendum."
– Online survey

"The refusal to allow a referendum is intolerable for such an important decision."
Online survey

"Could somebody explain why a referendum could not be carried out with the details being sent out with the recently delivered ELECTORAL VOTING REGISTERS."
Online forum

"Why oh why are you unwilling to hold a Referendum upon this matter" – Online forum

"Can we have a referendum" – Drop in session

"The Council is insisting on a combined authority and are not even giving us a say in it, as you have rejected holding a referendum." – Ward forum

6.5 Elected Mayor

"[Elected mayor] is an inevitability to get the gold standard devo package, everyone knows it – so be honest and let's discuss it now." – Online forum

"If it goes ahead is anyone going to vote for an elected mayor as very few seems to want one?" – Online forum

"Non-negotiable – no mayor." – Drop in session

"Will we be forced to have an elected mayor?" – Ward forum

"The Government has made it clear they want Metro Mayors to lead combined authorities. Why are we doing this when we have rejected a mayor for Coventry just three years ago?"- Ward forum

"Against a mayor (too much authority in one person, leading to corruption)."- Telephone survey

6.6 A combined authority is good for Coventry

"I fully support the proposal – if all the benefits listed in the information provided come to fruition it will be a great opportunity for Coventry and the West Midlands region." – Online survey

"It could provide a good opportunity to bring powers to the region." – Online survey

“The council is right to investigate the possibility of creating a WMCA.” – Online survey

“Imagine what could be done if the council had more power from the government! Imagine if the west midlands was able to attract the same kind of economic power as greater London and the benefits that this would bring in terms of jobs, tourism etc...”- Online forum

“More money for West Midlands. City regions are the way forward. We want to be like Manchester.” – Drop in sessions

“Hopefully beneficial in the long run as long as the agenda stays for local needs.” – Drop in sessions

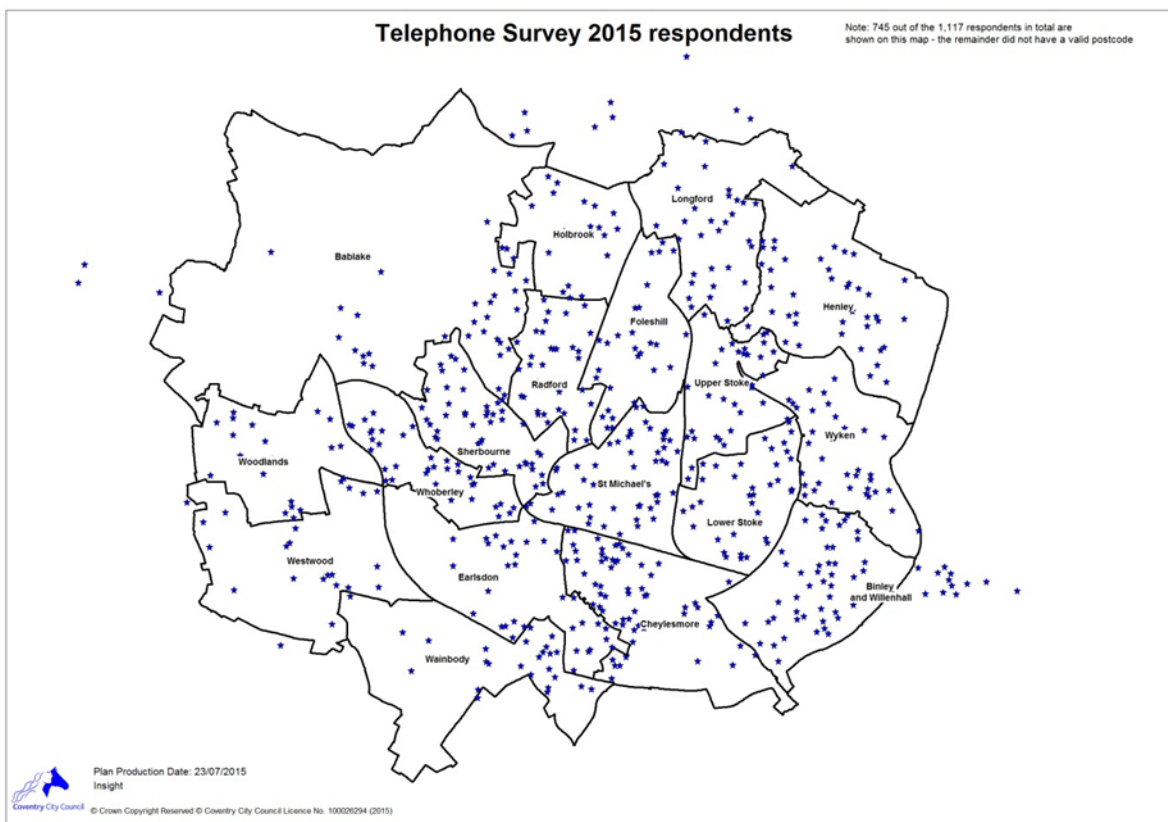
“It is the only economical and financial decision to make; we will miss out if we don’t join it.” – Ward forum

7. Telephone survey

Before the consultation programme began Routeways Ltd, a market research consultancy, were commissioned to undertake an independent baseline survey (telephone and face to face). In total 1,117 surveys were completed in June and July.

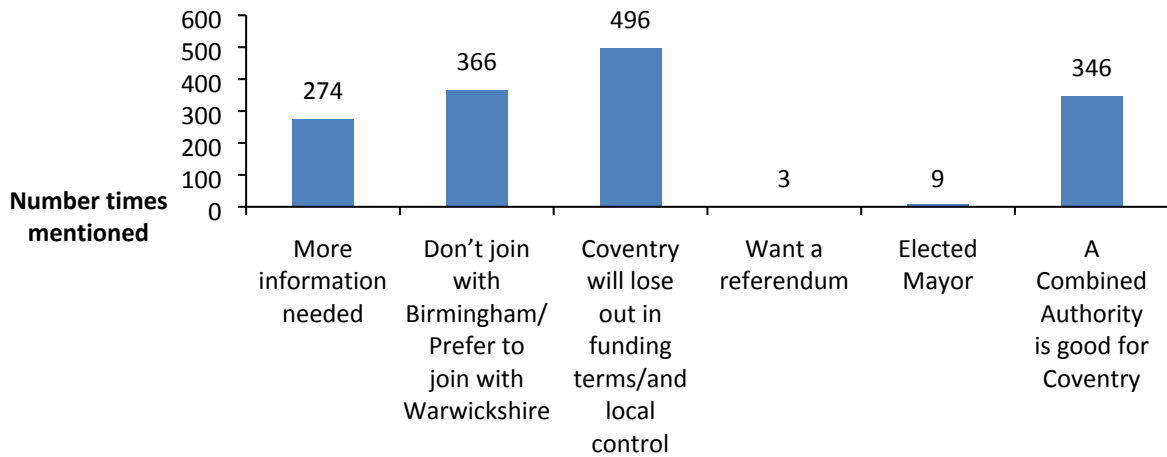
Demographic data was collected to insure the research is inclusive and representative. The organisation used face to face surveying of younger residents to make up for the underrepresentation of this demographic group. The face to face participants were randomly selected in the city centre.

The location of respondents to the telephone survey is shown below:



The survey was intended to find out about awareness of the combined authority proposals across the city before the programme of engagement and consultation took place.

Graph 2: The number of telephone survey comments relating to the six core themes



- Over half (53%) of respondents had heard about proposals for a WMCA.
- 31% of respondents felt it would be a negative move for Coventry to join the WMCA, 26% felt it would be a positive move, whilst 43% were unsure or had mixed feelings about it.
- Older age groups felt more negative about the proposal than those of younger age groups.
- Most of the participants who knew about the proposal heard about it from the local press, followed by the local radio and social media.

8. Devolution, Delegated Powers and Combined Local Authorities – Business Luncheon Thursday 6 August

Summary of views and input from a business luncheon held on Thursday 6th August 2015

The business luncheon discussion was facilitated by Adam Dent, Advent, and, alongside a group of some twenty business leaders. It was attended by Jonathan Browning, Chair of CWLEP, Martin Yardley, Chief Executive of CWLEP, Louise Bennett OBE, Chief Executive of Chamber of Commerce and Ian O'Donnell, Representative of Federation of Small Businesses.

The luncheon was held as part of ongoing consultation with business on the emerging issues of devolution, delegated powers, combined authorities and metro Mayors.

Summary of Views & Input (no particular order of priority)

The majority of businesses, across the wider geography of Coventry and Warwickshire, want to see the “partnership” between these two areas continue.

There is value in a Coventry and Warwickshire “brand” which offers investors both the value of a great City with the dynamism and beautiful rural areas of Warwickshire.

The majority of Business Leaders would recognise the arguments for creating ‘critical mass’ in terms of driving efficiencies and effectiveness in public services alongside the opportunity that a larger economic area could present in bringing together (and attracting) wider infrastructure investment, creating stronger (and wider) business networks including strengthening existing supply chains. Consequently, most Business Leaders acknowledge the arguments and value for combining Local Authorities and creating an Economic Engine of the Midlands.

Business Leaders would wish to see the ‘Business Case’ for combined authorities and better understand the ‘prize’ for implementing new local Government and/or LEP governance structures. Any new governance structures should not bring with it layers of new bureaucracy.

Business Leaders do not believe that a single choice has to be made and, indeed, believe that Coventry City could be supported in its efforts to belong to a Midlands Engine and much bigger critical mass (that could attract greater investment and could drive efficiencies in public services at a time when resources are being squeezed) whilst the “partnership” between Coventry and Warwickshire (neighbouring areas with much joined-up economic activity) should continue.

Business would ask that Warwickshire Leaders acknowledge the heritage and advantages of continuing to work in partnership with Coventry particularly on matters such as transport investment & connectivity, housing, planning and the potential creation of, and commitment to, a Midlands Engine infrastructure investment fund.

The private sector would wish to influence and input into the refresh of a united Coventry and Warwickshire Strategic Economic Plan and ensure that any Super-SEP views many of the Coventry & Warwickshire priorities as Midlands Engine priorities and opportunities.

In any Devo-deal, there may be a number of “business asks”, not least delegated authority around planning (the stopping of calling-in, by national Government, of local planning decisions); delegated authority around skills to ensure that local skills providers are delivering against the needs of business; and the appropriate governance structure for the creation of a Super-LEP wide investment fund. On issues of business taxation (such as business rates), businesses, via their representative bodies, would wish to see statutory consultee rights.

Business Leaders would wish to see clarity around the role of Local Enterprise Partnerships alongside Combined Authorities.

The private sector, across Coventry & Warwickshire, are yet to be convinced about the appointment of a Metro Mayor and, at the very least, would wish to see a private sector (and independent of Local Government) appointment.

9. Wider West Midlands Combined Authority Engagement

Running parallel to Coventry's programme of engagement and consultation was a joint consultation for the wider West Midlands combined authority area.

Coventry had the lowest response rate for the joint consultation. This could be due to having other opportunities to give feedback and comments through the local engagement programme.

The main findings are shown below:

Local Authority	Level of response to the consultation
Dudley	67
Birmingham	61
Wolverhampton	49
Solihull	46
Sandwell	40
Walsall	23
Coventry	13

