

DEVOLUTION - UPDATE

Policy & Performance Advisory Committee - 7 June 2016

Report of Chief Executive

Status: For Information

Key Decision: No

Executive Summary: This report provides an update on devolution as it is progressing both nationally and at a local level in West Kent.

Portfolio Holder Cllr. Peter Fleming

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Recommendation to Policy & Performance Advisory Committee: That the report is noted.

Reason for recommendation: To update Members on the progress of devolution at a national and local level.

Introduction and Background

- 1 Members received a report on devolution at their meeting on 26 November 2015. That report outlined the background to devolution and the response by cities and large combined authorities to the Government's invitation to submit proposals progress for devolved powers.
- 2 Of the 38 proposals that were submitted to Government in September last year, only 10 have so far been agreed, with others still at various stages of negotiations with Government, and in some cases, amongst themselves.
- 3 There have been two major reports looking at devolution so far at a national level. The first by the Communities & Local Government Select Committee; and a second by the All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Devolution. Both remain firmly in favour of devolution, but are critical of the lack of devolution of fiscal powers, and the lack of focus on objectives, measurable outcomes and transparency in the way some of the deals have been put together.
- 4 The challenge remains for those seeking devolution on a large scale to translate their ambitions into meaningful, measurable outcomes which will have public support.

- 5 The Government remains firmly committed to devolution as one of the main planks of the Chancellor’s Productivity Plan: Fixing the Foundations and announced a further three deals at the most recent budget in March this year. However all three of these are now experiencing difficulties in going forward.

Devolution in Kent

- 6 In the last report to Members it was noted that devolution offers the Council an opportunity to take increased responsibility for services that are important to local people and businesses and for these to be determined and delivered in a way that increases efficiency and results in savings. Being financially self-sufficient provides the Council will a level of certainty in its financial planning and means that it is well placed to consider its own position in relation to devolution, with the aim of delivering ever improved outcomes for residents and businesses.
- 7 Since the November meeting, Councils in West Kent, together with Kent County Council, have agreed to look at where responsibilities sit within all tiers of government and consider opportunities for devolution. This includes delegation, integration and co-commissioning that would enable either more efficient service delivery, greater responsiveness to local priorities, or a more seamless service for the customer.
- 8 The key outcome is that any joint working has the aim of adding value to what is currently happening. This has provided a helpful focus in terms of which services are being considered. The table below indicates what discussions on seven main themes have been considering in West Kent.

Highways and street scene	Improved co-ordination between county and district functions and joint commissioning and pooling expertise
Public health (preventative services)	Developing a framework to work together to make individual budgets work harder and smarter and developing a new model for this
Housing related support	Increased co-ordination and efficiency in support services to a range of vulnerable groups and realigning services at a local level in order to improve the service to the customer
Economic development and tourism	Options to further integrate economic development services and co-commissioning services for business support
Community safety	Examining co-commissioning and looking at how closer working can be delivered

Property and assets	Joint procurement of property services and development of an asset management plan
Sports development	A shared sports strategy including joint campaigns, bids and sharing of good practice

- 9 Meetings have been taking place and were continuing at the time of writing this report. A verbal update will be provided at the meeting to provide further information on the progress being made.

Governance and terms of reference

- 10 Discussions are taking place against a common principle that the individual sovereignty of the four authorities will be maintained. Should discussions progress to a point when a West Kent devolution model requires issues of governance to be resolved in order to move forward a Governance Group will explore options if and when the time is right.

Key Implications

Financial

- 11 There are no financial implications arising from this report.

Legal Implications and Risk Assessment Statement

- 12 There are no legal or risk implications arising from this report.

Equality Assessment

- 13 The information provided through this paper has a remote or low relevance to the substance of the Equality Act. There is no perceived impact on end users.

Conclusions

- 14 Discussions are continuing amongst West Kent authorities and the County Council to establish whether proposals for closer working that improves or adds value to current practices can be set out for individual local authorities and their Members to consider.
- 15 With a financially self-sufficient budget position the Council has the advantage of a level of certainty in its financial planning and means that it is well placed to consider its own position in relation to devolution, with a focus on delivering ever improved outcomes for residents and businesses.
- 16 To ensure Members are informed about the most recent position a verbal update will be provided at the Advisory Committee meeting.

Appendices:

None.

Background papers:

Local Government Devolution report to Policy & Performance Advisory Committee - 26 November 2015

<http://cds.sevenoaks.gov.uk/documents/s26147/07%20-%20Local%20Government%20Devolution.pdf>

**Pav Ramewal
Chief Executive**