

# DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

At a Meeting of **Cabinet** held in Council Chamber, County Hall, Durham on **Wednesday 31 May 2023 at 9.30 am**

**Present:**

**Councillor A Hoggood (Leader of the Council)**

**Cabinet Members:**

Councillors R Bell (Deputy Leader of the Council), T Henderson, C Hood, J Rowlandson, E Scott and A Shield

**Apologies:**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Susan McDonnell, Councillor John Shuttleworth and Councillor Mark Wilkes

## **1 Declarations of interest**

There were no declarations of interest in relation to any items of business on the agenda.

## **2 North East Devolution (Key Decision: CORP/R/23/05)**

The Cabinet considered a report of the Chief Executive on the outcome of public consultation which the seven councils across the North East (i.e. Durham, Gateshead, Newcastle, North Tyneside, Northumberland, South Tyneside and Sunderland) have undertaken in relation to proposals for North East Devolution. The report sought Cabinet approval to submit the consultation report to the Secretary of State as the next step in the process of establishing the new Mayoral Combined Authority and to agree in principle to consent to the Secretary of State establishing an Order to create the new Mayoral Combined Authority (for copy of report see file of minutes).

Councillor A Hoggood, Leader of the Council informed Cabinet that the report set out details of the public consultation held across the region. The 'minded to' deal would see a significant shift of powers, funding and responsibility from central Government and was expected to provide £4.2bn additional investment to the region over 30 years.

The consultation period included a mix of online and in-person events, meetings, and an online questionnaire. This was in addition to engagement and an online survey with the business community and other stakeholders.

The consultation evidenced that there was overall support by the public and business community where support was expressed for governance, joined up and integrated transport, development of new and affordable housing, long term investment, skills, employment, and adult education in the region.

Subject to agreement by all the LA7 Cabinet's, the consultation report would be submitted to the Secretary of State who would then consider the making of the statutory order which would see the abolishment of the existing two combined authorities and create a new combined authority for the area covered by all seven North East Councils. The Leader of the Council placed on record her thanks to everyone involved for all their hard work in reaching this significant milestone.

Councillor R Bell, Deputy Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Finance explained that a thorough consultation had taken place and there had been very good engagement with business and other stakeholders. Whilst, Devolution had not gripped the imagination of the public, there had been a significant effort by Durham County Council to facilitate engagement which had been reflected in the feedback with the highest number of responses in the region being received from County Durham. The devolution deal would see County Durham being much better placed to influence the future of our County through the deal. Councillor Bell stated that the leadership, Cabinet and Corporate Management Team would ensure Durham gets its fair share of resources moving forward.

Councillor C Hood, Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Adult and Health Services commented that devolution had the potential to transform the region's economy by providing access to significant funding and new powers to shape local skills provisions, with over £4bn of funding available over a 30-year cycle, the region could invest in initiatives that will drive economic growth and create new job opportunities.

The devolution of adult education functions and the core adult education budget would enable the region to tailor its skills provision to meet the specific needs of local employers, ensuring that workers had the skills they needed to succeed in a rapidly changing job market. With an LA7 deal, the Council could expect to see an increase in funding for adult education programs, open new opportunities for collaboration and partnership with other organisations in the adult learning space. Councillor Hood was of the belief that an LA7 deal was a win-win for everyone involved and would provide for resources and support required to continue growing and improving adult education offerings, while also creating new and exciting opportunities for County Durham.

Councillor A Shield, Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Equality and Inclusion spoke about poverty in the region, particularly child poverty and explained that the deal would only lend strength to tackle such issues.

Councillor J Rowlandson, Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Resources, Investment and Assets commented that the devolution deal included £200m of brownfield funding which would see more, better and affordable homes, particularly for areas of Horden and Easington which had been failed by the previous labour administration.

Councillor E Scott, Portfolio Holder for Economy and Partnerships commented that she had spent much time meeting, talking, and most importantly listening to the business sector. The business sector had expressed their delight that Durham was taking these steps. The deal would bring about better options for transport infrastructure, develop a strong and resilient skills base and a stronger tourism narrative. The reaching of the deal had seen a political maturity never seen before in County Durham.

**Resolved:**

That the recommendations in the report be approved.