

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

At a **Special Meeting of Cabinet** held in **Committee Room 2, County Hall, Durham** on **Wednesday 23 March 2016 at 11.00 am**

Councillor S Henig (Chairman)

Members of the Committee:

Councillors J Allen, J Brown, N Foster, L Hovvels, O Johnson, A Napier, M Plews, B Stephens and E Tomlinson

Also Present:

Councillors J Armstrong, D Bell, J Clare, J Clark, K Dearden, M Dixon, O Gunn, G Holland, E Huntington, I Jewell, J Lindsay, A Liversidge, N Martin, H Nicholson, F Tinsley and M Williams

Prior to the commencement of the business, those present observed the minutes silence in memory of the victims of the terrorist attacks in Brussels on 22 March 2016.

1 Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest.

2 North East Combined Authority: Devolution Agreement [Key Decision: CORP/R/16/01]

The Cabinet considered a report of the Chief Executive which updated on the proposed devolution agreement and invited Cabinet to consider next steps (for copy see file of minutes).

The Leader advised that in line with his comments made at full council he had briefed all of the Leaders of the Minority Groups on the position, and although he had provided the opportunity for each group leader to speak at the Cabinet meeting today they had not taken up this offer. He hoped that there was a high level of agreement in terms of the way forward, however they could advise of their own views.

The Leader pointed out that over 80,000 people in County Durham had responded to the consultation, which was the largest consultation carried out on devolution in England, and with almost 60% of respondents supporting devolution, this showed conclusively for the first time in County Durham that devolution was supported. Although there is support there is also a minority who are sceptical as to whether this is going to be a good deal.

He went on to advise that although progress had been made in clarifying some of the issues and financial information, there are still issues including fair funding, and on the office of the elected mayor including the powers to set a council tax precept that are not yet clear. He pointed out that there are conditions set out in the devolution agreement, and that as a result of recent events there is no evidence that 11 (b) and (c) are to be honoured.

The Deputy Leader and other cabinet members in advising of their views re-iterated that the majority of respondents were in favour of devolution, however with a degree of scepticism on the offer for County Durham. From meetings with the business sector there was support for devolution however they acknowledged that without the financial information it was difficult to see how this affected County Durham. Cabinet members emphasised the importance for this decision to be the right decision for County Durham not only now but for future generations, and that further detail was required to enable Cabinet to make a decision. The Leader confirmed that the 24 March 2016 was not the last day when a decision had to be made regarding whether to proceed with the devolution proposal, and that Northumberland County Council had this week agreed to defer making a decision.

Resolved:

That the recommendations contained in the report be approved.