



Meeting: Council

Date: 24 September 2015

Wards Affected: All Wards

Report Title: Devolution Update

Is the decision a key decision? No

When does the decision need to be implemented?

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1. Proposal and Introduction

- 1.1 On 23 July 2015 the Council established a Devolution Working Party to explore opportunities for devolution and requested an update be presented to the September Council meeting.
- 1.2 The Devolution Working Party met on 4 and 8 August and 2 September 2015 to consider how Torbay could engage with its partners and neighbouring authorities in respect of options for devolution and made recommendations to the Mayor and Executive Director of Operations and Finance on the Council's response to devolution.
- 1.3 There were two key meetings to discuss devolution during the summer. The Mayor and Assistant Director Community and Customer Services attended a meeting on 5 August with representatives from almost all local authorities across the South West Region to discuss potential options for devolution across the region. The Mayor, Executive Director of Operations and Finance and Assistant Director attended a meeting of Devon Authorities Leaders and Chief Executives on 20 August to discuss devolution and partnership working opportunities and Somerset's Leaders and Chief Executives met on 18 August.
- 1.4 The outcome of these cross authority meetings is that it has been agreed that authorities within the Heart of the South West Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) will work together on a devolution request to central government. The partnership have developed and submitted, a 'Heart of the South Waste Statement of Intent - Towards a Devolution Deal September 2015' to the Government to advise them of our intention to pursue the devolution agenda across the region. This was submitted in time to meet the 4th September 2015 deadline set by central government. A copy of the Statement of Intent and a copy of the letter signed by all participating local authorities is set out at Appendix 1 to this report.

2. Reason for Proposal

- 2.1 The report provides an update in respect of the work being undertaken by the Council and its partners in respect of devolution.

3. Recommendation(s) / Proposed Decision

- 3.1 That the contents of the submitted report be noted.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Heart of the South West Statement of Intent Covering Letter

Appendix 2: Heart of the South West Statement of Intent - Towards a Devolution Deal
September 2015

Background Information

4. Why are we doing this?

The Government has offered local authorities, in consultation with their LEP the chance to have greater power and responsibility for providing services and improving the economy. We are doing this because we believe that decisions about our future should be made as locally as possible. We also believe that there is scope for public sector organisations to work together more efficiently.

5. Which local authorities are involved?

In the Heart of the South West LEP area every one of the district, unitary and county councils are involved, as well as both National Park Authorities and the Heart of the South West Local Enterprise Partnership who are key to our work.

- Heart of the South West Local Enterprise Partnership
- Somerset County Council
- Somerset's district and borough councils: Mendip, Sedgemoor, South Somerset, Taunton Deane and West Somerset
- Devon County Council
- Devon's district and borough councils: East Devon, Mid Devon, North Devon, South Hams, Teignbridge, Torridge and West Devon
- Plymouth City Council
- Exeter City Council
- Torbay Council
- Exmoor National Park
- Dartmoor National Park

We have a shared commitment and the capability to deliver. We are eager to start a dialogue with Government, open a new chapter and build a strong and productive relationship.

We have collectively agreed a set of principles to underpin our statement and these will also shape the governance and accountability that will be required to administer new devolved powers. We are determined to take up the Government's invitation and negotiate an ambitious deal.

6. Why aren't others involved?

The Government is keen for devolution to happen within 'Local Enterprise Partnership' boundaries, and that is what our bid does. We want to make sure we work collaboratively with our neighbouring local authorities where it makes sense to do that, so that we can benefit even more from devolution. The Government's offer is to local authorities in the first instance as they have a unique role amongst other public services because they are run by democratically elected councils. Other partners, and stakeholders will be involved as part of the detailed negotiations that follow.

7. What powers do you want to see devolved?

Our Statement of Intent sets out that we are looking for additional powers and responsibilities in three areas:

- Economic growth and productivity
- Health, social care and wellbeing
- Infrastructure and local resilience

These are the areas we want to be the focus of our discussions with Government as we look in detail at what could make the biggest difference to us and bring the most benefits for our residents.

We need to have those detailed discussions before we can talk about specific powers that might want to have devolved.

However, we should not wait for the outcome of devolution to progress out partnership working. If we can do something without having any devolved powers, we will just get on and do it and it won't form part of our negotiations with Government

8. How much is it costing to make this bid for devolved powers?

The only cost envisaged is the cost of officer time which is being shared between the various organisation involved in the bid.

9. Would devolution save money?

One of the objectives of our bid is to make the public sector more efficient and save money. Ideally, with less bureaucracy and layers of decision-making, devolution will reduce costs. The Government expects devolution deals to be 'fiscally neutral' that is, it does not want to spend any more money than it already spends; but our communities should benefit from economies of scale and our ability to deliver better outcomes.

10. What happens next?

Once the Statement of Intent has been sent to the Government we will continue to work together and with other Heart of the South West public sector partners on the detail of the proposals, and start having conversations with Government departments.

11. How long will it take?

This process is complex and will take many months. Now we have submitted our Statement of Intent we will prepare more detailed proposals for Government, and then there will be some hard negotiating. We can't confirm a timescale but we are determined to move as quickly as we can because devolution offers us significant benefits. However, we must not underestimate the tremendous achievement to date in achieving a single voice from 20 different authorities across Devon and Somerset.