



CABINET - 17 DECEMBER 2024

ENGLISH DEVOLUTION WHITE PAPER

URGENT REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

PART A

Purpose of the Report

1. The purpose of this urgent report is to advise the Cabinet of the implications of the English Devolution White Paper published on 16 December 2024 and to seek agreement for the Chief Executive to take initial steps in response to the proposals set out in the White Paper.
2. The White Paper sets out the Government's plans for changes to local government in England to extend devolution powers and funding. It includes a programme of local government reorganisation for two-tier areas.

Recommendations

3. It is recommended that -
 - a) The Chief Executive in consultation with the Director of Corporate Resources and Director of Law and Governance and following consultation with the Acting Leader of the Council be authorised to undertake such work as is considered necessary in response to the White Paper and subsequent approach from Government;
 - b) A further report be made to the Cabinet in February 2025 regarding the implications of the English Devolution White Paper.

Reasons for Recommendation

4. To enable the initial engagement and work to commence in response to the White Paper. The Cabinet will meet again on 7 February 2025.
5. Further detailed consideration will need to be given to the content of the White Paper.

Timetable for Decisions (including Scrutiny)

6. The English Devolution White Paper was published on 16 December 2024. It is stated that council leaders will shortly be invited to submit formal proposals for their areas.
7. The overall timetable for the proposals set out in the White Paper remains to be confirmed. An English Devolution Bill is intended to be brought forward by the Government.
8. Reports will be submitted to the Cabinet and the Scrutiny Commission early in 2025 to enable detailed consideration of the White Paper and proposed next steps.

Policy Framework and Previous Decisions

9. The Cabinet has previously considered reports on proposed changes to the structure of local government in Leicestershire including the development of a unitary structure for the County.
10. In July 2018, the Cabinet agreed in principle that the Council should develop proposals for a unitary structure for Leicestershire and in October 2018 considered outline proposals for development.
11. In March 2019, the Cabinet considered the findings of the Scrutiny Commission's examination of the outline proposals and comment from a Member Working Party on Unitary Structure for Leicestershire. The Cabinet agreed that a further report be submitted setting out a business case for a unitary structure for local government in the County.
12. In October 2019, the Cabinet approved the draft strategic business case for the development of a unitary structure for engagement with the Scrutiny Commission. Members noted the potential financial savings offered by the proposals.
13. The Leader and the Acting Leader have regularly updated the Council on devolution since the Council's first bid in September 2021.

Resource Implications

14. There are no resources implications arising from the recommendations in this report.
15. The Director of Corporate Resources and Director of Law and Governance have been consulted on this report.

Circulation under the Local Issues Alert Procedure

16. This report has been circulated to all members of the Council.

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PART B

Background

17. The Government on 16 December published a White Paper which proposes a redistribution of powers from central to local government, including extension of powers to Mayoral authorities.
18. The White Paper also states that all remaining two-tier areas and smaller unitary councils will be expected to develop proposals for reorganisation, with all councils working to develop unitary proposals in the best interests of the whole area, as swiftly as possible. The Government will be writing to council leaders to formally invite proposals and will detail its criteria for sustainable unitary structures and how and when to submit proposals.
19. The Government has stated that it intends to bring forward an English Devolution Bill to deliver the proposals set out in the White Paper.

Equality Implications

20. There are no equality implications arising from the recommendations in this report.
21. In developing any proposals for a unitary structure regard will be given to equality implications and how the proposals might affect those groups with protected characteristics.

Human Rights Implications

22. There are no human rights implications arising from the recommendations in this report.

Background Papers

“English Devolution White Paper” published 16 December 2024

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/english-devolution-white-paper-power-and-partnership-foundations-for-growth>

Reports to the Cabinet and minutes of those meetings -

29 March 2019 - “Review of Proposals for a Unitary Structure of Local Government for Leicestershire”

<https://cexmodgov01/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=135&MId=5601#A159004>

22 October 2019 - “A Vision for Local Government in Leicestershire”

<https://cexmodgov01/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=135&MId=5606&Ver=4>