

REPORT OF THE CABINET

C. ENGLISH DEVOLUTION WHITE PAPER: LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION

Introduction

1. This report relates to the Cabinet's consideration of the English Devolution White Paper and the latest position in relation to local government reorganisation.

Background

2. Attached is a report (Appendix A) and supplementary report (Appendix B) considered by the Cabinet on 7th February 2025 which include details of urgent action taken by the Chief Executive using his delegated powers to request to postpone the County Council elections and of letters received from the Minister of State for Local Government and English Devolution on 5 February advising that the County Council's request to postpone the election has not been granted and setting out the formal invitation to develop a proposal for local government reorganisation.

Consideration by the Cabinet

3. At its meeting on 7 February, the Cabinet agreed the following:
 - (a) The urgent action taken by the Chief Executive under delegated authority to request the Minister of State for Local Government and English Devolution to postpone the County Council elections from May 2025 to May 2026 and to provide a clear commitment to devolution and reorganisation be noted;
 - (b) The letter from the Minister of 5th February saying that he has decided not to agree to the request be noted, together with the invitation received from the Minister also on 5th February to submit a proposal for unitary local government reorganisation and the accompanying guidance and assessment criteria, including the requirement to submit an interim plan to Government before 21st March 2025;
 - (c) The Minister's decision not to allow local government reorganisation in Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland through the fast-track process, as jointly requested by the City Mayor, the Acting Leader of the County Council and the Leader of Rutland Council, has resulted in devolution to the area being further delayed with any estimated date for devolution currently uncertain;
 - (d) The criteria for unitary local government be noted and supported, including that a unitary authority must be the right size to achieve efficiencies (with the aim of a population of 500,000) ensuring value for

money for council tax payers, improve capacity and withstand financial shocks; must prioritise the delivery, improvement and sustainability of services; that reorganisation should avoid unnecessary fragmentation of services such as social care; and that a unitary authority should enable stronger community engagement and should reflect sensible geography and a sensible economic area;

- (e) It be noted that, following the publication of the English Devolution White Paper, a meeting of the Leaders and Chief Executives of the 10 councils in Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland took place on 8th January, at which no consensus was reached on unitary authority structure options and it was agreed to meet again after the receipt of the Minister's invitation to submit proposals and the criteria to be followed;
- (f) If consensus cannot be reached, it be noted that guidance on the interim plan recognises that it may contain more than one potential proposal for a unitary structure;
- (g) This supplementary report and the original report be submitted to the meeting of the County Council on 19 February for information;
- (h) Progress on the interim plan be reported regularly to the Group Leaders.

Motion to be moved

(That the report and supplementary report on the English Devolution White Paper: Local Government Reorganisation – including urgent action taken, considered by the Cabinet at its meeting on 7 February, be noted.)

7th February 2025

**Mrs D. Taylor CC
Acting Leader of the Council**

Background Papers

Listed in the appended Cabinet report.

Appendices

Appendix A – Report to the Cabinet on 7 February “English Devolution White Paper: Local Government Reorganisation – Including Urgent Action Taken”

Appendix B – Supplementary Report to the Cabinet on 7 February ““English Devolution White Paper: Local Government Reorganisation – Including Urgent Action Taken”