

Devolution – Moving Forward

Cabinet

Date: 10th February 2016

Author:	Leader of the Council, and the Interim Chief Executive
Wards:	All
Locality Affected:	All
Parishes Affected:	All

1. Purpose and Reasons

- 1.1 This report updates Cabinet on ongoing discussions that the Council is having with Wiltshire Council, other local authorities, and the Government in respect of the Government's devolution proposals.

2. Recommendations

The Committee is recommended to:

- 2.1 Note and endorse the action taken to date;
- 2.2 Authorise the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Leader of the Council, to continue discussions with other Councils and the Government in relation to the devolution agenda and to develop proposals for submission to Cabinet and Council in due course.

3. Detail

- 3.1 This report updates Cabinet on ongoing discussions that the Council is having with the Government and other local authorities in respect of the Government's devolution proposals.
- 3.2 The Government has been encouraging local authorities to open a dialogue to explore opportunities for further devolution to groupings of local authorities.
- 3.3 The report is also set in the context that in this period of austerity it should be recognised that more of the same will not deliver the transformation in services that residents need. The report reflects the view clearly expressed in Lord Heseltine's report, "No Stone Unturned" of the benefits of the leadership of place achieved as a unitary council and the partnerships developed with other public bodies. Such partnerships would include strategic relationships with other Councils that share common interest with Swindon Borough Council. For example, Council leaders have begun to discuss with other towns and cities identified like Swindon as fast growing, both economically and demographically, a common approach to government on strategic issues.
- 3.4 Over the summer period the Chancellor George Osborne called for local authorities to draw up their devolution 'wish-lists' ahead of the 4 September 2015 deadline.

Further information on the subject of this report can be obtained from Stephen Taylor, Direct Dial 01793 463012, staylor@swindon.gov.uk.

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- 3.5 To meet this tight deadline, an Expression of Interest document (Appendix 1) was submitted, following consultation with some of our key partners, to the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government to continue the dialogue.
- 3.6 This is a discussion document and does not commit the Borough Council to any of the proposals contained within. It will be the responsibility of Council to consider and approve the final devolution submission following further discussions with councillors, partners and Central Government.
- 3.7 By opening a dialogue and gaining the support of central government it is envisaged that we can develop proposals that would deliver seamless working across a wide range of services.
- 3.8 The discussion document submitted to meet the deadline set by government builds on work already in progress, further developing cooperation on strategic planning, the use of public buildings and integrating health and social care even further.
- 3.9 These are all open to discussion with the opportunity to add or remove pending further discussions with government departments and partners.
- 3.10 For Swindon, this could mean that by 2020 the Borough aspires to have:
 - 3.10.1 A vibrant town centre and a local economy continuing to grow and outperform the English average
 - 3.10.2 A council that is independent of central government grant
 - 3.10.3 A 'single view' of the customer for a range of public services
 - 3.10.4 A 'one Swindon, one budget' approach – where public services are free to plan for the long term with multi-year funding settlements
 - 3.10.5 Increased volunteering levels and easier secondments between public sector services. “
- 3.11 Wiltshire Council submitted their own Discussion Document (Appendix 2) and Wiltshire and Swindon have since been liaising to establish any common ground which could form the basis of a joint submission.

4. Alternative Options

- 4.1 The Council could decide not to pursue devolution options at this time. A few areas of the country did not submit expressions of interest in line with the timescale outlined by the Chancellor of the Exchequer. The risk in such an approach is that those areas which engage with government on the issue of devolution are likely to gain a greater range of freedoms and flexibilities as well longer-term security over resources for development.

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5. Implications, Diversity Impact Assessment and Risk Management

Financial and Procurement Implications

- 5.1 There are no specific financial or procurement implications at this stage.

Legal and Human Rights Implications

- 5.2 There are no such specific implications at this stage.

All Other Implications (including Staff, Sustainability, Health, Rural, Crime and Disorder)

- 5.3 There are no such specific implications at this stage.

Diversity Impact Assessment

- 5.4 No diversity impact assessment is required at this stage.

Risk Management

- 5.5 Devolution deals involve a balance of cost and benefit. In return for long term secure funding streams from central government, local areas take on increased responsibilities. By its nature, this is a deal with government and so negotiations need to ensure that the cost to the Council in increased responsibilities is outweighed by the benefits of local decision-making and the resources to carry out the task.

6. Consultees

- 6.1 The Board Director, Resources (Section 151 Officer) and Director of Law and Democratic Services (Monitoring Officer) are consulted in respect of all reports.

7. Background Papers

- 7.1 None

8. Appendices

- 8.1 Appendix 1 Swindon Borough Council's Expression of Interest
8.2 Appendix 2 Wiltshire Council's "One Wiltshire" consultation document