

NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL

At a meeting of the **Northumberland County Council** held at County Hall, Morpeth on Monday 19 March 2018 at 6.05 pm.

PRESENT

Councillor R.R. Dodd
(in the Chair)

MEMBERS

Armstrong, E.	Jones, V.
Bawn, D.	Lang, J.A.
Beynon, J.	Moore, R.
Campbell, D.	Murray, A.H.
Cartie, E.	Nisbet, K.
Castle, G.	Oliver, N.
Cessford, T.	Parry, K.
Crosby, B.	Pidcock, B.
Daley, W.	Reid, J.
Davey, J.G.	Renner-Thompson, G.
Davey, S.	Richards, M.E.
Dickinson, S.	Riddle, J.R.
Dunbar, C.	Robinson, M.
Dungworth, S.E.	Roughead, G.
Dunn, L.	Sanderson, H.G.H.
Flux, B.	Seymour, C.
Foster, J.D.	Simpson, E.
Gallacher, B.	Stewart, G.
Gibson, R.	Stow, K.
Gobin, J.J.	Swinburn, M.
Grimshaw, L.	Swithenbank, I.C.F.
Hepple, A.	Thorne, T.N.
Hill, G.	Wallace, R.
Homer, C.	Watson, J.G.
Horncastle, C.W.	Wearmouth, R.W.
Hutchinson, J.I.	Webb, G.
Jackson, P.A.	

OFFICERS

Angus, K.	Director of Human Resources
Elsdon, A.	Director of Finance
Hadfield, K.	Committee Services and Scrutiny Manager
Henry, L.	Legal Services Manager
Johnston, P.	Interim Executive Director, Place
Lally, D.	Chief Executive

Around 5 members of the press and public were in attendance.

85. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Bridgett, Clark, Dale, Kennedy, Lawrie, Ledger, Pattinson, Purvis, Quinn, Rickerby, Sharp, Towns and Wilson.

86. REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

Devolution to North of Tyne

Council was asked to consider the report to be taken to Cabinet immediately after Council on whether it should give consent to the statutory order, which would remove the North of Tyne Councils from NECA and establish a new mayoral combined authority, and to make any recommendations thereon.

The report was introduced by the Leader, who referred to the importance of the moment for the future of the County. He paid tribute to the former Leader, Councillor Grant Davey, for beginning this initiative, which he was pleased to carry on. The Authority had been working closely with Newcastle City Council and the Mayor's department at North Tyneside and there was real consensus in taking this forward. His vision was that the County would be more prosperous and enjoy a more dynamic environment, offering well paid jobs and support into work for those who had been excluded. He hoped the deal would bring about a lift in the aspirations of young people, and a County which attracted young talent, working closely with national government in a competent and competitive way post Brexit.

However, there were challenges to face. Work needed to be done to overcome the low wage and low productivity economy in the County. Not enough was made of the world leading businesses located in the County, but more were needed, and more had to be done to upskill people for the jobs being created by such businesses. Educational attainment in the County was below the national average, and the aim should be to be above the national average.

The investment fund as part of the devolution deal would bring investment of £1.1 billion into the economy, 10,000 jobs and an array of new powers for the region. The deal would bring about skills provision and inclusive growth, and was the only deal to reference rural issues in the whole country. Support for small to medium enterprise would bring a rural scale up to support the rural economy.

An elected mayor came as part of the deal and this had proved to be a very effective mechanism in tackling local problems in other parts of the country. Current mayors were spokesmen and champions for their areas and someone of that significance would speak for the region and knock on Government's doors. Experience showed that working with the grain of government policy

was more effective than against it. The deal necessitated withdrawing from NECA, but the Leader felt that North of Tyne was a sensible combined economic area which would be able to work in a cohesive way. He was very optimistic about its future, but it needed member support.

Councillor J.G. Davey supported the proposal but feared for the Leader's position in it. The deal was all about growth and his Group had shown no desire for that so far. He urged the Conservative Group to support its Leader and go for growth, and then more deals would follow.

Councillor Reid had a number of points/questions:-

- Was this a Cabinet decision? Yes.
- What would the £19m be spent on? That would be a decision for the new combined authority but would include expansion of existing business, new investment and improvements to infrastructure.
- Who would fund the mayoral election costs? The funding for the combined authority came from the three authorities involved.
- What would the mayor do? This had been outlined in the Leader's opening remarks and included running the Cabinet and making sure transport funds were properly applied, etc.
- It would be difficult for a single mayor to be representative of the combined area as a whole and would not capture its imagination. This kind of democracy did not work in the UK.
- The consultation questions had been written in such a way as to elicit positive responses.
- More attempt should have been made to get the 7 authorities in NECA to work.
- Northumberland was going to be paired with two of the most densely populated areas in the north east and would not get a proportionate share of the funds.

Councillor Hill queried what evidence existed that people wanted this, and what assurances there were that neglected areas would gain from it. Significant powers were to be devolved to the mayor, and in light of that, she queried what justification there was for not having a referendum.

In response to some of these points, the Leader advised that the North of Tyne being chosen as the rural scale up champion for England was a significant issue and it was up to the Authority to develop programmes which would be supported by government. The devolvement of decision making powers from Whitehall would be much better for the prosperity of Northumberland. The mayor would have real accountability and would make a real difference in the longer term. Powers and funding were being handed down from Government, and that was why there was no need for a referendum on the subject.

Councillor Bawn welcomed the cross party support on this issue. Everyone would benefit from this whatever the level of funding. More deals would follow, and he felt they should be welcomed.

Councillor Roughead commented that he was pro-devolution but did have some concerns as he felt more detail was needed on the areas of scrutiny and

audit. He hoped members could work together on this for the future of the region.

Councillor Reid hoped there would be some resolution regarding the name as he did not support North of Tyne, and feared that not enough consideration would be given to allocating funding to the areas most in need, instead of it being driven by “personality politics”. Nor did he feel that a mayor could properly represent all of the competing priorities of the authorities involved.

The Leader acknowledged the points but responded that someone had to visit Government to make the case for funding. This was not about handouts, but about the Authority creating its own future in a positive way. This was the first deal of many, which he was sure would follow quickly. Regarding the Authority’s influence, this would be more as one of three than one of seven, and the far greater population would weigh heavily in its favour.

In view of the debate which had take place, Councillor Dodd suggested a form of words to Cabinet as follows:-

“Cabinet be recommended to consent to the making of the necessary parliamentary order to create the North of Tyne mayoral combined authority, on the terms set out in the Cabinet report”.

On the required number of members asking for a named vote on this proposal, the votes were cast as follows:-

FOR: 52 as follows:-

Armstrong, E.	Jackson, P.A.
Bawn, D.L.	Jones, V.
Beynon, J.A.	Lang, J.A.
Campbell, D.	Moore, R.
Cartie, E.	Murray, A.H.
Castle, G.	Nisbet, K.
Cessford, T.	Oliver, N.
Crosby, B.	Parry, K.
Daley, W.	Pidcock, B.
Davey, J.G.	Renner-Thompson, G.
Davey, S.	Richards, M.E.
Dickinson, S.	Riddle, J.R.
Dodd, R.R.	Robinson, M.

Dunbar, C.	Roughead, G.
Dungworth, S.	Sanderson, H.G.H.
Dunn, L.	Seymour, C.
Flux, B.	Simpson, E.
Foster, J.	Stewart, G.
Gallacher, B.	Stow, K.
Gibson, R.	Swinburn, M.
Gobin, J.J.	Swithenbank, I.C.F.
Grimshaw, L.	Thorne, T.N.
Hepple, A.	Wallace, R.
Homer, C.	Watson, J.G.
Horncastle, C.W.	Wearmouth, R.
Hutchinson, J.I.	Webb, G.

AGAINST: 2 as follows:-

Hill, G.	Reid, J.
----------	----------

ABSTENTIONS: 0

RESOLVED that Cabinet be recommended to consent to the making of the necessary parliamentary order to create the North of Tyne mayoral combined authority, on the terms set out in the Cabinet report.

The Common Seal of the County Council
of Northumberland was hereunto affixed
in the presence of:-

.....
Chair of the County Council

.....
Duly Authorised Officer