

## **NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL**

### **DEVOLUTION WORKING GROUP**

At the meeting of the **Northumberland County Council Devolution Working Group** held in **Committee Room 1, County Hall, Morpeth, NE61 2EF** on **Wednesday, 7 February 2018** at **9:30 a.m.**

#### **PRESENT**

Councillor P Jackson (Chair in the Chair)

#### **MEMBERS**

Davey, G  
Reid, J

Roughead, G  
Wallace, R

#### **OFFICERS**

Henry, L  
Johnston, P  
Norris, K  
Paul, G

Rose, J

Legal Services Manager  
Interim Director of Place  
Democratic Services Officer  
Service Director Partnerships and  
Devolution  
Economic and Inclusion Policy  
Manager

#### **1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors D Bawn, W Daley, S Dickinson, G Renner-Thompson, and D Lally, Chief Executive, J Roll, Democratic Services Manager.

#### **2. NOTES**

The notes of the meeting of the Devolution Working Group held on 4 December 2017, as circulated, were received and noted.

#### **3. PRESENTATION BY GEOFF PAUL, SERVICE DIRECTOR PARTNERSHIPS AND DEVOLUTION**

Geoff Paul, Service Director Partnerships and Devolution, provided a presentation to update members on the present position of the North of Tyne devolution deal and the legal process to be followed. (A copy of the presentation is filed with the official notes of the meeting.)

The issues covered were:

- Why have a governance review?
- Consultation
- Process and timetable
- Portfolios
- Implementation Plan

In order to access the deal a new North of Tyne Combined Authority, with elected mayor, was required which would also require separation from the current North East Combined Authority. Reference was made to the Governance Review document and the proposals for change, which was subject to consultation. Consultation had been undertaken for 7 weeks and had now closed with just under 1100 online/hard copy responses received. Seven consultation events had been held, attended by 300 people. The results from Northumberland were not yet known but there had been a good turn out in Northumberland Hall, Alnwick, where 45 members of the public had attended and put forward some challenging questions. **Notes of that event and feedback would be circulated by email to the working group.**

Members were advised that the Trade Unions were not supportive of the devolution deal as they did not consider the funding proposed was anywhere near enough to compensate what had been lost by local authorities in order to provide core services.

A number of events with stakeholders had been arranged and there would be a report to Cabinet on 20 February to seek approval to submit the proposal to the Secretary of State. Details of the post consultation process were provided as follows:

Consultation report and analysis to SoS (Feb)

- Draft order(s) issued by SoS (March)
  1. Mayoral NTCA created
  2. NECA area reduced
  3. Joint Transport Committee (inc in 1 and 2)
- For 1. Consent required from 3 Local Authorities (March)
- For 2. Consent required (majority) from NECA (March)
- Order laid before parliament (April/May)
- NTCA created (summer 2018)
- Interim Mayor appointed (summer 2108)
- Transport Joint Committee set up (summer 2018)
- Mayor Elections for NTCA (May 2019)

The Secretary of State would consider whether the process had been sufficiently robust and, if he was satisfied it had, orders would be drafted and consolidated.

There was a considerable amount of work to be done on the implementation plan which was to be agreed jointly with HMG and structured around portfolios/deal themes. A series of actions and lead officers were allocated to each theme.

A list of portfolios, political leads, chief executives and lead officers was provided for each theme and there was a reasonable split in terms of each Council. Reference was made to progress made by Councillor Wayne Daley who had attended a very positive meeting with David Carter, a lead figure in education. **A report on each theme, in further detail, would be provided to future meetings of the working group.**

Discussion about creating the NTCA took place and it was noted that:

- procurement of support services would be brought from constituent authorities and be balanced out over the 3 Councils.
- The amount of staff required was to be determined.
- Policies and strategies could be cut and pasted from existing documents.
- A name and location for the new authority would be considered.
- There would need to be preparation for the election in May next year.
- From day one the NTCA would have to be a functional organisation.

Questions were invited and, in response, the following information was provided:

- In terms of risk, divorce from the NECA was a big hurdle and 20 March would be an important date in that regard. A meeting of the 7 leaders had been held the previous day but it was difficult to predict, at this stage, how they would vote.
- Success would depend on the strength of partnership between the 3 authorities and managing expectations. It was important to convey to members of the public that there would be significant benefits to the economy in the long term.
- Concerns were raised about the amount of responses to the consultation, publicity and public perception that their opinion would not make a difference to the outcome. In response it was stated that the number of responses was on par with what had been received by other combined

authorities and was considered to be an acceptable number. In terms of publicity, officers had made every effort to get the message out by issuing adverts, press releases and posts on social media. It was felt there would always be some people who did not view the democratic process favourably.

- Out of the 1100 responses, many of them represented organisations such as federations of small businesses, the chamber of commerce, educational colleges, universities and health trusts who employed thousands of people. Many larger organisations, who would be more directly affected, had shown massive support and the business community could see that, in the longer term, this would make a significant difference.
- In terms of consent, it was confirmed that it would be a Cabinet decision. However, the Leader stated he did want contributions from all members and it would therefore be discussed at a meeting of Council before a decision was taken by Cabinet. The Legal Services Manager added that, although the views of Council could be considered, under the Local Government Act 2000, decision making had been structured so that legally it must be a Cabinet decision.
- In response to comments that the current combined authority had rights and could also deliver some of the services mentioned, the Leader said that had been tried a number of times over the years without success. He added that there was still a commitment from the 7 authorities to work together.
- The 3 authorities north of the Tyne worked well together.
- The minister had said there was no 'upside' to the other authorities of NECA blocking the deal but accepted it was their decision. As stated previously it was difficult to predict what the outcome would be but there was nothing, at this stage, to suggest there would be a negative vote.
- The formal name would be decided by the authority once it was constituted. **The list of options would be circulated to members of the working group.**
- The elected mayor would initially have a 5 year term, which would be reduced to 4 years from 2024 onwards so that the elected mayor would be elected at the same time as other mayors across the country.
- An interim mayor would be appointed to support the NTCA between summer 2018 and May 2019 when elections for the elected mayor would take place.
- The interim mayor could be anyone already holding an elected position (although not parish/town councillors). Applications would then be put to the elected authority who would make a decision on nominations for the elected mayor (one vote for each council of six cabinet members).

- In response to a suggestion that the estate located just off moor farm roundabout would be a good position for the office/headquarters of the new combined authority, it was confirmed that location was on the list of those to be considered.

In response to a request it was agreed that **a map showing the combined 3 areas be circulated to members of the working group.**

**RESOLVED** that the information be noted and the requested information circulated to the Group.

#### **4. NEXT MEETING**

**Agreed** that the Group next meet around the beginning of March.

**PETER JACKSON  
CHAIR**