

## **NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL**

### **DEVOLUTION WORKING GROUP**

At the meeting of the **Northumberland County Council Devolution Working Group** held in the **Chairman's Dining Room, County Hall, Morpeth, NE61 2EF** on **Thursday, 7 February 2019** at **2:00 pm**.

#### **PRESENT**

Councillor P Jackson (Chair in the Chair)

#### **MEMBERS**

Daley, W  
Davey, G  
Dickinson, S

Reid, J  
Roughead, G

#### **OFFICERS**

Allan, B  
Bowers, H  
Johnston, P  
Roll, J

Civil Contingencies Officer, NFRS  
Democratic Services Officer  
Interim Executive Director of Place  
Democratic Services Manager

#### **ALSO IN ATTENDANCE**

Cllr C Seymour

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

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors D Bawn, G Renner-Thompson and R Wallace.

#### **2. REVISED TERMS OF REFERENCE**

Further to the decision of the Council, members were asked to agree the additional terms of reference of the Group as follows:-

- (a) To receive and consider the risks of the forthcoming EU Exit and recommend actions to mitigate any adverse impact.
- (b) To receive regular monitoring reports from the Officer Business Interruption Management Team to ensure proper accountability and oversight.

**RESOLVED** that the additional terms of reference be agreed.

### **3. NOTES**

The notes of the meeting of the Devolution Working Group held on 1 November 2018, as circulated, were received and noted.

### **4. UPDATE ON NATIONAL, REGIONAL AND SUB REGIONAL WORK TO DATE**

Paul Johnston, Executive Director: Place provided a presentation to update members on the present position of the national/regional/sub-regional work. (A copy of the presentation is filed with the official notes of the meeting.)

#### **Brexit**

##### **(a) Update on National Regional and Sub-regional work**

There had been a significant amount of activity in Central Government with the increased possibility of a No Deal Brexit. Technical guidance from Central Government had been monitored, eg risks to businesses. Business engagement had taken place to develop our own Brexit preparations, primarily through Advance Northumberland.

Monitoring, oversight had taken place and a single point of contact established with the MHCLG.

Engagement had taken place with Local Resilience Forums to ensure civil contingency planning was up to date and a number of briefings and events had taken place with stakeholders.

Further notification had been received regarding the EU Exit Fund and money being made available to facilitate preparations.

A Brexit Local Government Delivery Board would be represented through SOLACE (Society of Local Authority Chief Executives) with a regional representative from South Tyneside Council. Guidance could be found on the on the following webpage

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/local-government-brexit-preparedness>

The Local Resilience Forum (LRF) met on a regular basis through regional and subregional forums to identify civil contingency risks.

In response to a query regarding the risks, it was advised that concerns would be identified, eg risks of unrest and plans put in place.

The Local Enterprise Partnerships had commenced a number of economic studies working closely with the Chamber of Commerce. Regional network events would be held.

At a regional level, an operational plan would be examined to look at issues anticipated to be a problem.

#### Brexit - North of Tyne

At the North of Tyne level, an event was being planned at the Centre for Life which would be open to businesses. LEP assessments would also be brought up to date, looking specifically at risks and issues facing the region.

Funding pots would be available to businesses looking to take advantage of changes, eg, the Inward Investment Fund and a Brexit Response Fund which would provide a short term facility. There would also be a long term plan working with the LEP, eg, Education Challenge and also exploring the possibility of free trade zones.

#### Brexit - NCC Preparations Update

The Council also had its own preparations under the business continuity arrangements. Across the Council, an officer group looked at risks that the Council might face coordinated through the Civil Contingencies Team.

In response to a question regarding vehicle hire, it was advised that the Fleet Renewal Programme was on the risk register to identify alternatives to mitigate any impacts. There was no intelligence to suggest that there would be any delays in delivery but there would be no stockpiling as this caused financial implications.

Liaison would also be carried out with external partners including over planned uses of the £210k contingency fund.

A member queried the border areas and it was explained that some authorities had significant border areas. The needs of people were required to be taken

into consideration and appropriate controls put in place. Risks needed to be identified with Port Authorities to ensure risks were mitigated.

The focus of the reporting and assurance was to ensure continuity of:-

- Statutory services
- Regulatory services eg, licensing and trading standards
- Border areas
- Supply chains
- Data handling
- Local partnership working
- Communications
- Regional and local growth

The Business Interruption Management Team (BIMT) had been established under Contingency Planning protocol coordinated by the Business Continuity Team.

The group met on a monthly basis and produced weekly returns on Local Authority risks although at this stage there were very little. Mr Johnston was happy to share the information with the group. It was suggested that the group met on a bi-monthly basis, but if urgent matters cropped an urgent meeting could be arranged. The next meeting would be held in April.

Following a query regarding benchmarks, it was advised that other parts of the country might need specific skills and key sectors and key jobs might drift to other parts of the country.

## **5. NORTH OF TYNE DEVOLUTION UPDATE**

The first employee had been recruited in the Inclusive Economy post for the Combined Authority. The Combined Authority would be a convener to facilitate resources and deliver through partner local authorities.

Work was being carried out on the Mayoral elections at the beginning of May and guidance was awaited on the period of Purdah. (Confirmation of dates to be given to the Interim Executive Head of Place).

The first tranche of £20 million had been received with another £20 million on 1 April 2019 for the financial year 2019/20. A number of different funds had been set up:-

- Inward Investment Fund
- Rural Growth
- Business Case Development
- Brexit Response Fund

Additional funding opportunities could become available and there were a number of Government Funds where priority was given to combined authorities. The Council could also bid for Government Funding in its own right.

The Combined Authority would be able to deliver and identify 'Quick Wins' which Northumberland could benefit from. Members were reminded that NCC has a strong pipeline of projects in development.

In response to a query regarding contributions from the Authority, it was advised that that each authority contributed approximately £85,000.

It was stated that a presentation on the Budget had been given at the last Castle Morpeth Local Area Council in relation to the North of Tyne finances, where it had been agreed to be presented at today's meeting. Mr Johnston said he had been unaware of that commitment and that this could be brought back to the next meeting.

#### Borderlands Initiative

A meeting had been held with the Secretary of State on 15 January. The Initiative continued at great speed. Assurance had been given that the Borderlands Deal would be next in line. An indication had been given that money would be available.

It had been hoped to announce the deal before Purdah but some areas still required to be dealt with, ie, cross border funding, departmental challenges and Governance requirements.

The scale of the deal was expected to be announced in March, with Heads of Terms to be agreed quickly thereafter; submission of detailed business cases would be required and thereafter funds would be released.

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

**Agreed** that the Group next meet in April, day and time to be confirmed.

**PETER JACKSON  
CHAIR**