



**Council**

**Thursday, 30 September 2021**

**Devolution and “Levelling Up” in Nottinghamshire**

## **Report of the Chief Executive**

**Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Strategic and Borough Wide Leadership,  
Councillor S J Robinson**

### **1. Purpose of report**

- 1.1. This report provides a general overview of the latest government position on devolution and covers what has been happening locally in Nottinghamshire.
- 1.2. The Leader and Chief Executive have been involved in “County Deal” discussions with the Leader and Chief Executive of Nottinghamshire County Council and the Nottinghamshire District Leaders and Chief Executives recently and Council is asked to endorse them taking a positive approach in relation to discussions around collaboration and devolution in Nottinghamshire.

### **2. Recommendation**

It is RECOMMENDED that Council supports and endorses the Leader and Chief Executive’s involvement in continued discussions about a “County Deal” in Nottinghamshire with any arrangements affecting Rushcliffe Borough Council to be brought back to Council for full discussion and approval prior to adoption.

### **3. Reasons for recommendation**

- 3.1 In order to take a positive and proactive role in shaping the future of any local government arrangements in Nottinghamshire, it is imperative for the Leader and Chief Executive of Rushcliffe Borough Council to be willing participants of discussions and negotiations.
- 3.2 Any formal agreements that impact on the Borough Council will be brought back to Council for full discussion and debate prior to agreement and adoption.
- 3.3 There is no current regional commitment for any change to devolved powers from government or joining up of local authority services.

### **4. Background**

- 4.1 On 15 July, the Prime Minister set out a vision for new devolution deals across the country in his “Levelling Up” speech offering counties the ability to have devolved powers like some of the cities. On the same day, the Secretary of

State for Housing, Communities and Local Government wrote to Local Authority Leaders and Chief Executive setting out a commitment to “devolving power to local places and closer to citizens”.

4.2 The Secretary of State set out the following principles for a County Deal:

4.2.1 Strong local leadership will be fundamental. Whilst high-profile, directly elected individual leaders can provide a single point of accountability to local citizens and can act as a champion for their area, we will consider other governance proposals that increase stability and strengthen local leadership.

4.2.2 County devolution should operate across a sensible economic geography of a suitable scale and one based on local identity, bringing local partners together and with powers exercised at the right level to make a difference for local communities. We will be looking to do county devolution for example with the county council and its nearby unitaries, working with its districts as appropriate; or with the county council and its districts; geographically large unitary authorities, or a combination of say two such authorities where there is a recognisable single identity.

4.2.3 The nature and appropriateness of proposed governance structures will impact on the nature of the deal and the types of powers and flexibilities provided in a deal. We will expect demonstrable improvements in governance, efficiency, and local service join-up as part of the deal that support the delivery of levelling up.

4.2.4 We expect deals to include significant reform proposals, including ways to achieve greater financial efficiency, administrative streamlining and / or more joined up services in an area. This does not mean local government (unitary) reorganisation is a prerequisite to participation – although that remains a locally-led option available where there is strong local support.

4.3 In August, the Leaders of Nottinghamshire, Nottingham City, Derbyshire and Derby City Councils wrote to the Secretary of State expressing their interest in pursuing devolution.

4.4 On 1 September, all Nottinghamshire District Leaders and Chief Executives were invited to meet with the Leader and Chief Executive of Nottinghamshire County Council to discuss working closely together with the City Council to support a bid to be a “pathfinder” area for County Deals. It is expected that three areas in England will gain “pathfinder” status but other areas may also work up proposals for devolution deals and more details will be provided in the Government’s Levelling Up white paper in the autumn.

## **5. What powers might be devolved?**

5.1 As yet, the detail of what powers might be devolved by government has not been finalised, but greater powers linked to the following could be part of a deal:

- Transport

- Land and housing
- Skills and employment
- Tourism
- Finance
- Environment
- Health and social care

In theory, it is for the councils involved to ask for the powers they would like to see devolved, and there are some blueprints for previous devolved powers in the combined authority and mayoral deals that have already been agreed.

- 5.2 The additional powers could make it easier for local authorities to tackle the issues facing them and their local residents and areas. The powers could assist with becoming more carbon neutral, securing the appropriate infrastructure for current or future population growth, having more controls over developing skills in the workforce, promoting social mobility and having a joined up further and higher education offer. There could be opportunities for more control and say over planning and housing and financial efficiencies. The East Midlands has had less central investment than other areas in recent times and a devolution deal may assist in addressing this. Several areas in Nottingham and the county were given level 1 and level 2 status in the Levelling Up Funding bid round meaning they were of medium or high priority. (Rushcliffe was classed as level 3.) Devolution would look to lift the whole county and city area in order to bring more jobs and productivity to Nottingham and Nottinghamshire as a whole.
- 5.3 In return, government will expect to see a commitment to public sector reform, but this does not have to mean Local Government Restructuring and the Leader and Chief Executive of County Council have said that they will not be pursuing a single county unitary bid at this time. Instead, public sector reform could involve shared working on eg waste management, more collaboration between councils, both county and districts, and with city. The integration of health and social care could be enhanced and closer working with police and fire could also be explored.

## **6. The governance of devolution**

- 6.1 In 2015, the Nottingham and Nottinghamshire Economic Prosperity Committee (EPC) was set up as part of a governance arrangement for the bid for a North Midlands Combined Authority. The bid did not succeed, but the EPC was formally constituted and has met regularly ever since. It is chaired by the city and county councils on a rotating basis with the districts taking the vice chair.
- 6.2 It is proposed that the starting point for the governance for any devolution deal based on a County Deal is the EPC. Legal advice will be sought on any amendments that would need to be made and any sub groups/committees that should be set up. There is funding available in the Business Rates Pool, which could be used for programme management and for legal advice.
- 6.3 Currently all the districts, the city and the county are members of the EPC and the Leader is Rushcliffe's representative. It will be imperative that all councils

take their own legal advice on matters relating to devolution and sharing of powers when there is more detail available on any deal.

- 6.4 If one or more districts decides it doesn't want to be fully involved in some or all aspects of devolution, it is proposed that mechanisms are put in place to ensure that a coalition of the willing can move forward, and other parties may join at a later date.

## **7. Next steps and timescales**

- 7.1 As set out above, Nottinghamshire County Council has submitted an expression of interest in pursuing a County Deal, and indeed in being one of the Government's pathfinder authorities due to be announced in October/November. To this end, a meeting of the county leader, two district leaders and senior civil servants was held early September to discuss support for a bid.

- 7.2 There are 27 administrative counties in England and it is believed that the majority, if not all of them have expressed interest in a County Deal. Only three are expected to attain "pathfinder" status but there may be follow up County Deals with the others.

- 7.3 An indicative timeline is below, should the Nottinghamshire pathfinder bid be successful:

- Phase 1: September-November 2021
  - Levelling Up White Paper published and Pathfinder Bids developed
- Phase 2: November 2021:
  - SoS announces pathfinder devolution deals
- Phase 3: November 2021-April 2022:
  - As a pathfinder, local councils negotiate and co-produce the Nottinghamshire Deal
- Phase 4: April 2022:
  - Nottinghamshire Deal goes live.

## **8. Alternative options considered and reasons for rejection**

The Council could decide that it does not wish to participate in discussions on the pathfinder or County Deal. However, that would close off potential possibilities for benefits to Rushcliffe and its residents. Participation at this stage is not a firm commitment to any change. Proposals will be brought back to Council for full discussion. Therefore, it is not recommended to follow this option.

## **9. Risks and uncertainties**

Nottinghamshire may not win "pathfinder" status. However, there is still the opportunity to explore closer working arrangements with the different councils.

## 10. Implications

### 10.1 Financial implications

There are no financial implications arising from this report.

### 10.2 Legal implications

Legal implications of any proposed deal will be considered and reported back to Council.

### 10.3 Equalities implications

Any deal that results in benefits to the residents of the Borough should be welcomed. These implications will be properly assessed when more detail is available.

### 10.4 Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 implications

There are no implications arising from this report.

## 11. Link to corporate priorities

Quality of Life	A County Deal should be predicated on making improvements to our residents. As such, the detail of any proposed County Deal will be assessed against all four priorities.
Efficient Services	
Sustainable Growth	
The Environment	

## 12. Recommendation

It is RECOMMENDED that Council supports and endorses the Leader and Chief Executive's involvement in continued discussions about a "County Deal" in Nottinghamshire with any arrangements affecting Rushcliffe Borough Council to be brought back to Council for full discussion and approval prior to adoption.

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<b>Background papers available for Inspection:</b>	N/A
<b>List of appendices:</b>	N/A