

Consultation response to the proposed Norfolk County Deal

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Portfolio: Leader, Policy

Ward(s) Affected: All

Purpose of the Report:

This report provides an overview of the contents of the in-principle County Deal for Norfolk and the proposed areas to consider as part of a consultation response.

Recommendations

1. Approve the draft consultation response (in Appendix 1) to the Norfolk County Council consultation on a County Deal for Norfolk, with any minor amends delegated to the Leader in consultation with the Managing Director and Monitoring Officer.

1 SUMMARY

- 1.1 Norfolk County Council opened their consultation to the in-principle County Deal for Norfolk on the 6 February and it closes on 20 March. This report provides an overview of the Levelling Up agenda and the proposed consultation response set out in Appendix 1 for Broadland District Council.

2 BACKGROUND

The Levelling Up Agenda

- 2.1 As part of the Levelling Up White Paper that was published in February 2022, the Government committed to agree a devolution deal by 2030 with every part of England that wanted one. The White Paper outlined the future landscape for devolution in the UK and provided a blueprint for improving opportunity and outcomes in education, the economy, infrastructure, transport, and health by 2030.
- 2.2 Nine County areas were invited to submit deals to Government, including Norfolk.
- 2.3 The White Paper has aimed to simplify the devolution agenda and a key way Government have intended to do this is by seeking to legislate to establish a new form of combined authority (only available to areas where they have multiple county councils and/or unitary councils) to be made up of upper-tier local authorities. The White Paper also established that only upper tier authorities would be involved in the negotiations for Devolution Deals. The involvement of city, borough and district authorities has only been 'encouraged'.
- 2.4 The White Paper also set out a framework for devolution (see Appendix 2) which is designed to support every area of the country to have a deal. The framework includes three levels of functions available to local areas, dependent upon the governance model chosen (see below levels)
- Level 1: Local authorities working together across a functional economic area (FEA) or a whole county area
 - Level 2: A single institution or county council without a Directly Elected Mayor, across a FEA or a whole county area
 - Level 3: A single institution or County Council with a Directly Elected Mayor across a FEA or whole county area
- 2.5 The most powers are reserved to a directly elected mayoral model with a combined authority; less powers to a single accountable institution model (i.e. county council); and minimal powers to a joint committee model.

Devolution Deals currently in place

- 2.6 Devolution in the past has been closely tied with the creation of Combined Authorities who take on the responsibility for delivery of the agreed devolved powers and functions from Government. There are currently 10 Combined Authorities in existence, 9 of which are Mayoral Combined Authorities, with more

being established by Government through the most recent Deals (North East for example)

- 2.7 To date, these Combined Authorities have been established using existing legislation through the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009, which has been amended by the Cities and Local Government Devolution Act 2016. This legislation allows for all councils to be a part of the negotiation and delivery of devolution formally.

3 CURRENT POSITION/FINDINGS

- 3.1 In December 2022, the in-principle Deal for Norfolk was released, which set out the powers and functions proposed to be devolved to Norfolk County Council, alongside a change to their governance model to move away from a Leader and Cabinet to a Directly Elected Leader and Cabinet. Negotiations with Government on the Deal have been done only with Norfolk County Council.
- 3.2 Following the release of the in-principle Deal, it is a requirement that the County now conduct a consultation on the Deal. Following this, 'statutory requirements' will need to be made which includes consenting to the Levelling Up Bill and Parliamentary approval of the Deal. Only once this is done is the Deal confirmed.
- 3.3 As part of the White Paper, there are two governance models which allow an area to achieve level 3 powers – these are a Directly Elected Leader and Cabinet and a Mayoral Combined Authority.
- 3.4 At present, the Norfolk County Deal has proposed to adopt a Directly Elected Leader and Cabinet model. When looking at the devolution framework (see Appendix 2), this would only allow for 17 out of the 23 functions set out in the Levelling Up White Paper to be devolved. The remaining 6 functions are reserved for either Combined Authorities or Mayoral Combined Authorities.
- 3.5 There are a number of key concerns around the Deal which are set out in the consultation response in Appendix 1, but a summary has been provided below:
- **Ambition of the Deal** – the Deal is a starting point but we believe there is scope for a more ambitious deal for Norfolk which allows us to deal with the challenges and opportunities of the future across our County. The Deal misses the wider opportunities around health, justice and the community, which is increasingly important in Norfolk with a growing challenged social care system and problems with health care.
 - **Governance model** – the Directly Elected Leader and Cabinet model is untired and untested. In other parts of the Country, a Mayor has the ability to focus on delivery of the devolved powers and functions. No other existing Mayor has to simultaneously manage the added responsibilities of growth

with the complicated minutia of service delivery. Is this too much for one person to do? It is important that Norfolk is not left behind.

4 PROPOSED ACTION

4.1 Appendix 1 sets out the proposed response to the County Council consultation which picks up the key concerns and opportunities in taking forward the best deal for the County.

4.2 It is critical that the best deal is achieved – enabling better outcomes for our residents and businesses. The principles of devolution are supported by Broadland Council and Norfolk should have more control of money and functions devolved from Government – **but we also believe that Norfolk should have maximum devolution** based on the below factors:

- Be the biggest deal with the most powers
- Involve and engage all the principal authorities
- Build on the tried and tested model for devolution

4.3 To ensure we are able to deliver effectively on a deal for Norfolk, it is vital that all councils play a key role in providing the capacity and capabilities needed. Our preference and key ask of the consultation would be for a model, having similar principles to a Mayoral Combined Authority, which would allow for all councils in Norfolk to work together collaboratively to deliver the devolved powers and functions.

5 ISSUES AND RISKS

5.1 **Resource Implications** – No implications.

5.2 **Legal Implications** – Norfolk County Council must adopt a new DEL and cabinet executive model subject to the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill receiving royal assent and a resolution being passed at their Full Council.

5.3 **Equality Implications** – No implications.

5.4 **Environmental Impact** – No implications.

5.5 **Crime and Disorder** – No implications.

5.6 **Risks** – There are risks associated with the current County Deal on the table which have been highlighted throughout this report. The needs and requirements of Broadland residents are not recognised or heard.

6 CONCLUSION

6.1 Moving forwards, it will be important that we respond to the consultation on the County Deal to ensure that we get the best deal for the residents of our district.

7 RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Approve the draft consultation response (in Appendix 1) to the Norfolk County Council consultation on a County Deal for Norfolk, with any minor amends delegated to the Leader in consultation with the Managing Director and Monitoring Officer