

BARNSELY METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR CORE SERVICES
TO THE SPECIAL COUNCIL MEETING
ON 9TH NOVEMBER 2017

YORKSHIRE DEVOLUTION – COMMUNITY POLL

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To seek Council approval to hold a “Community Poll” seeking the views of the Barnsley Electorate about the next stages in any Devolution proposal.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

Council is recommended to:-

- 2.1 **Approve the holding of a Community Poll seeking the views of the Barnsley Electorate about the next stages in any Devolution proposal.**
- 2.2 **Agree the proposed Poll question as set out at Appendix 1 of this report.**
- 2.3 **Give delegated authority to the Chief Executive to make the necessary arrangements to carry out such a Poll.**

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The Council has made clear its intention to explore the “One Yorkshire” Devolution deal which currently comprises at least 16 councils across Yorkshire, bringing together a powerful economic unit with a combined population of over 5.1 million and an economy valued at over £110 billion per year. Barnsley wishes to explore this approach as it is considered to offer the best opportunity to secure a Devolution Deal which will help Barnsley’s economy prosper and give the region a powerful voice with which to lobby Central Government on behalf of our economy and people.
- 3.2 Having previously committed to joining the Sheffield City Region Devolution proposal, Barnsley would like the freedom to explore the “One Yorkshire” proposal and has indicated (alongside Doncaster MBC) that it is not minded to conclude a deal based solely upon a narrower geographical footprint to the exclusion of a wider Yorkshire deal.
- 3.3 Barnsley and Doncaster originally signed up to the Sheffield City Region proposition in October 2015 on the understanding that this was the only form of Devolution available to the area. Since that time the situation has changed. The UK has voted for Brexit and other devolution models have been agreed by Government. The SCR proposal will no longer include the extension of the Combined Authority area to include Bassetlaw and Chesterfield. Such significant changes mean that the Council is under a duty to ensure that the devolution option chosen is the best possible option for Barnsley.

4. CURRENT POSITION

- 4.1 The current position is that on 3rd May 2018 there will be an election held across South Yorkshire to elect a Mayor of Sheffield City Region Combined Authority, although at present that the Mayor will have neither functions nor powers except the right to vote at meetings of the Combined Authority. The cost of the proposed election is estimated at £2,000,000. In the absence of the agreement of the Secretary of State that election will not be postponed or cancelled.
- 4.2 At the point that Barnsley consented to an election being held, it was understood that both Chesterfield Borough Council and Bassetlaw Borough Council would become full members of Sheffield City Region Combined Authority thus expanding the geography. But both Councils have now withdrawn that proposal and the Sheffield City Region Mayoral Combined Authority electorate will be confined to the four South Yorkshire Councils.
- 4.3 Although 17 Yorkshire Councils originally signed up to a wider Yorkshire Devolution concept, which also has significant support from the CBI, local businesses, Trade Unions and local MPs, as yet, there is not Government support for Devolution on a wider Yorkshire basis. The Government are keen for Barnsley to enter into a Sheffield City Region Devolution arrangement and currently appear unwilling to engage with the concept of a "One Yorkshire" proposal despite the benefits which many believe are deliverable. There has been commentary in the media that many of the originally interested Councils have withdrawn their support but at a meeting held on 26th October 2017 there was still significant levels of support for a "One Yorkshire" proposal and the benefits it will bring. It is therefore important to continue to push the case for that Devolution option. Therefore to seek the views of the Barnsley Electorate on the choices facing the Council is a sensible course of action and this report seeks permission to do that.

5. COMMUNITY POLL - POWERS

- 5.1 Legislation allows a local authority to carry out Community Polls to test the opinion of their population on the provision of Council services. It is permissible to use the electoral register for the purposes of conducting a Community Poll.
- 5.2 There is no obligation to do this and the results of any Poll are not binding but it is considered important to understand the views of the local electorate on such a key matter affecting Council services and the future of our Borough.
- 5.3 Section 116 of the Local Government Act 2003 in particular provides that:-
- (1) A local authority may conduct a poll to ascertain the views of those polled about:
 - (a) any matter relating to -
 - (i) services provided in pursuance of the authority's functions, or
 - (ii) the authority's expenditure on such services,
 - (2) It shall be for the local authority concerned to decide:
 - (a) who is to be polled, and
 - (b) how the poll is to be conducted.

- 5.4 The proposed Community Poll falls within the scope of these powers as the approach to Devolution, which is the question which the Poll is to address, relates to services provided pursuant to the Council's functions either directly or indirectly
- 5.5 The services directly affected by the current Devolution Deal and which form the backbone of the Government's approach to Devolution include the following areas and are either delivered by the Council concurrently with the Combined Authority or impact on the delivery of other Council functions:-
- 19+ Adult Skills – The Sheffield City Region Combined Authority is responsible for allocations to providers and the achievement of outcomes.
 - Employment Support Programmes – Including the co-commissioning of the National Work and Health Programme and trialling the integration of Employment and Health services.
 - Housing and Planning – An Elected Mayor would be responsible for creating a spatial framework for managing planning across the Sheffield City Region and would have the ability to create a Mayoral Development Corporation to support delivery on strategic sites in the City Region.
 - Transport – The Mayor would be responsible for a devolved and consolidated local transport budget, franchising of bus services and would take responsibility for the coordination of an identified Key Route network of local authority roads.
 - Business Growth and Investment – Including roll-out of superfast Broadband and business support packages; for example, Growth Hub and Skills Bank.
 - Infrastructure – There would be a single pot to invest in Sheffield City Region economic growth.

6. ORGANISING THE COMMUNITY POLL

- 6.1 The legislation governing Community Polls is not prescriptive as to how such a poll is conducted. A local authority may follow the processes which it feels are most suitable.
- 6.2 On this occasion it is suggested that a 100% postal poll is held, supported by the electoral specialists Electoral Reform Services (ERS). Utilising ERS techniques and bulk-buying Royal Mail discounts, this will enable the poll to be conducted at the most economic rate. ERS have significant experience in this field and carried out a similar exercise for Durham County Council in 2016.
- 6.3 ERS' forms are similar to the Household Enquiry Forms which are used by the Council as part of its Elections canvass and thus are familiar to the electorate. Information on Devolution and a postal vote return form would be sent to each person on the Electoral Roll. The background information would ensure that the electorate understands the issue on which their views are sought and the forms also allow for a secure on-line return if that is the Elector's preference. This method offers significant savings to the Council over a postal vote return and offers the best opportunity for the Electorate to respond.

- 6.4 The proposed wording of the Poll question to be included on the voting form is set out in Appendix 1.
- 6.5 It is proposed that voting forms would be sent out for completion and return within the period 1st to 15th December with the collated result available by 21st December 2017.

7. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 Costs obtained from ERS indicate that the Council would need to incur expenditure of approximately £120,000 to carry out a Community Poll. This would include some potential expenditure on communications advice for the preparation of explanatory material in addition to the costs of ERS in undertaking the poll in respect of design, printing, postage and collation of the returned results.
- 7.2 It is proposed that the costs associated with the Community Poll are funded from the Council's anticipated underspend for 2017/18, allowing the associated costs to be contained within existing resources.

8. BACKGROUND PAPERS

Sample voting form as set out in Appendix 1.

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THE BALLOT PAPER QUESTION

“I would prefer Barnsley MBC to pursue a Devolution proposal with:-

- (a) a wider Yorkshire**
- (b) Sheffield City Region .”**

Tick only one option