

9th November, 2017

**To the Chair and Members of the
COUNCIL**

**DONCASTER DEVOLUTION PROPOSAL – THE HOLDING OF A COMMUNITY
POLL**

1. The purpose of this report is to seek Council approval to hold a “Community Poll” seeking the views of the Doncaster Electorate about the next stages in any Devolution proposal.

EXEMPT REPORT

2. No.

RECOMMENDATIONS

3. Council is recommended to:-
 - (i) approve the holding of a Community Poll seeking the views of the Doncaster electorate about the next stages in any Devolution proposal;
 - (ii) agree the proposed Poll question as set out at Appendix A of this report;
 - (iii) give delegated authority to the Council’s Returning Officer to make the necessary arrangements to carry out such a poll.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR THE CITIZENS OF DONCASTER?

4. The Electorate of Doncaster will be given the opportunity to express their preference as to the devolution arrangements sought, which involve the borough of Doncaster. A Community Poll will be held utilising 100% postal votes asking whether the electorate would prefer to see a devolution agreement which is ultimately based upon a wider Yorkshire geography or upon the current Sheffield City Region footprint.
5. A Community Poll will be held utilising 100% postal votes asking whether the electorate would prefer Devolution based upon a wider Yorkshire basis or upon the current Sheffield City Region footprint.

BACKGROUND AND CURRENT CONTEXT

6. In 2015 the then Chancellor George Osborne announced plans for Regional Devolution based around English cities, which would get elected mayors and local powers devolved from Westminster. At the time, the Government stated deals must be based around City Regions and single combined authorities.

7. There is widespread support amongst the authorities and businesses in South Yorkshire for devolution in our region to progress. In line with the requirements of the time, Sheffield City Region developed a devolution proposal based around the existing Combined Authority that proposed powers and funding be devolved to the region, with both Bassetlaw and Chesterfield, which were Associate Members, planning to become full SCR members. At the time there was no other devolution proposals for the Borough to consider. The SCR deal contained a number of proposals including:-
 - The election of a Sheffield City Region Mayor, voted on only by the people of South Yorkshire
 - £30m annual 'gain-share funding' to promote economic growth
 - New powers for a Sheffield City Region Mayor, including over transport, housing, economic growth and skills.
 - Agreement to work with SCR to achieve our ambition for a new National Institute of Infrastructure in Doncaster (yet to be progressed by Government or the SCR)

8. Since the SCR devolution deal was developed a number of significant developments have occurred these include:-
 - The UK has voted to leave the EU
 - The Sheffield City Region lost a Judicial Review brought by Derbyshire County Council relating to its consultation process. Following this decision, Chesterfield and Bassetlaw have withdrawn from their plans to become full members of the Sheffield City Region
 - Alternative devolution models have emerged for example a deal has been agreed for example the West Midlands elected a Mayor in May 2017 with a total electorate of 2.8 million people. The West Midlands Combined Authority includes 18 Councils and 4 Local Enterprise Partnerships
 - A 'coalition of the willing' involving 17 out of 20 Yorkshire Councils was formed to bring forward proposals for a wider Yorkshire devolution deal
 - The Government's position has evolved, saying that it would welcome a proposal for a Greater Yorkshire devolution deal – a Yorkshire-wide devolution deal involving rural areas, including everyone in the West, North and East of Yorkshire, but excluding South Yorkshire
 - The Government has also said it would not rule out a Yorkshire devolution deal at some point in the future after a Sheffield City Region deal was concluded

9. These developments mean that the Council has a duty to ensure that the devolution option chosen is in the best long-term interests of the Borough. In order to do this Doncaster Council has made clear its intention to explore the wider Yorkshire Devolution deal which has the support of many of the Councils across Yorkshire. A wider Yorkshire Devolution deal has attracted support from a number of representative bodies including the CBI, the Institute of Directors, Doncaster businesses (with 70% of businesses

surveyed by the Doncaster Chamber of Commerce backing some form of devolution at a Yorkshire level), Trade Unions and local MP's. This position was also backed unanimously at a Doncaster Council member's seminar that took place in the Council Chamber in August 2017.

10. Devolution at a Yorkshire scale, with a population of over 5 million, an economy valued at £110 billion and world renowned brand has the potential make the region an even more powerful economic force. An elected Mayor would give the region a powerful voice both within the Northern Powerhouse and with central Government. This proposal offers an opportunity to secure a Devolution deal which will therefore help Doncaster's economy prosper.
11. Support for a wider Yorkshire deal is not unanimous however with a number of organisations maintaining their support for the Sheffield City Region devolution deal over other options, including Sheffield City Council, Rotherham Council, the Sheffield City Region LEP Board, Sheffield Chamber of Commerce, Barnsley & Rotherham Chamber of Commerce.
12. As things currently stand on 3rd May 2018 an election will be held across the four South Yorkshire Councils to elect a Mayor for the Sheffield City Region. However the Mayor will have neither functions nor powers except the right to vote at meetings of the Sheffield City Region 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.

A COMMUNITY POLL FOR DONCASTER

13. The significant economic potential of a wider Yorkshire devolution deal allied to the strong local, regional and national support for the concept means that the option of regional devolution cannot be easily dismissed or ignored. Therefore a sensible course of action on such an important issue is to seek the views of the Doncaster electorate. This report seeks permission to do that.
14. Legislation allows Councils to carry out Community Polls to test the opinion of their population on the provision of Council Services. 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.

The services directly affected by the current Devolution deal and which form the backbone of the Government's approach to devolution across the country include the following areas:-

- 19+ adult skills – Combined authorities have taken responsibility for allocations to providers and the achievement of outcomes
- Employment support programmes – increasing local influence over programmes to support local people back to work
- Housing and Planning – Devolution deals contain proposal for the creation of spatial frameworks for managing planning across regions
- Transport – the Mayor would be responsible for a devolved and consolidated local transport budget, franchising of bus services and would take responsibility for 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 – the creation of a single pot of funding to support economic growth including annual 'Gainshare' allocations

NB this list is not exhaustive and devolution is an ongoing process rather than a one-off deal

15. 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. 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 City Council in 2016. ERS' forms are similar to the Household Enquiry Forms which are used by this 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.

OPTIONS CONSIDERED

16. (A) Support the recommendations set out at paragraph 3 of this report and hold a Community Poll. (RECOMMENDED OPTION)
- (B) Not to carry out a Community Poll. It is believed that this would miss the opportunity to gauge the opinion of the Doncaster Electorate on this significant decision facing the Council. (NOT RECOMMENDED)

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDED OPTION

17. Legislation allows for a Community Poll to be carried out by Councils on issues relating to their functions. Given the importance of this decision it is an appropriate step to seek the views of the Doncaster electorate as to the choices facing the Council.

IMPACT ON THE COUNCIL'S KEY OUTCOMES

18.

Outcomes	Implications
<p>All people in Doncaster benefit from a thriving and resilient economy.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Mayoral Priority: Creating Jobs and Housing</i> • <i>Mayoral Priority: Be a strong voice for our veterans</i> • <i>Mayoral Priority: Protecting Doncaster's vital services</i> 	<p>A poll to obtain the views of the electorate on their preferred option for devolution will enable the Council to gauge their opinion on such issues</p>
<p>People live safe, healthy, active and independent lives.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Mayoral Priority: Safeguarding our Communities</i> • <i>Mayoral Priority: Bringing down the cost of living</i> 	
<p>People in Doncaster benefit from a high quality built and natural environment.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Mayoral Priority: Creating Jobs and Housing</i> • <i>Mayoral Priority: Safeguarding our Communities</i> • <i>Mayoral Priority: Bringing down the cost of living</i> 	
<p>All families thrive.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Mayoral Priority: Protecting Doncaster's vital services</i> 	
<p>Council services are modern and value for money.</p>	<p>A poll to obtain the views of the electorate on their preferred option for devolution will enable the Council to gauge their opinion on such issues</p>
<p>Working with our partners we will provide strong leadership and governance.</p>	<p>A poll to obtain the views of the electorate on their preferred option for devolution will enable the Council to gauge their opinion on such issues</p>

RISKS AND ASSUMPTIONS

19. There are no specific risks associated with this report. The Community Poll must be carried out within the legislative framework provided.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

20. Section 116 of the Local Government Act 2003 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, or

.....

(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.

The law allows for a Community Poll to be held in these circumstances in order to gauge the views of the electorate. It is a matter for the Council to determine the timings and best methods of carrying out the poll, which would include a 100% postal return. It is permissible to utilise the Electoral Register for the purposes of conducting the Community poll. It should be noted that the results of the poll are not legally binding but the Council may take them into account as indicative of the views of the electorate.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

21. The cost of the community poll has been estimated to be circa £120,000 this will be funded from the councils' earmarked reserves. Reserves are reviewed on a quarterly basis and reported to cabinet. The review for quarter 2 has established that funds are available to meet this cost.

HUMAN RESOURCES IMPLICATIONS

22. There are no specific human resources implications associated with this report.

TECHNOLOGY IMPLICATIONS.

23. There are no specific technology implications associated with this report.

EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

24. There are no specific equality implications associated with this report.

CONSULTATION

25. There has been no external consultation on the content of this report. The purpose of the poll is that of wide consultation.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

26. Sample ballot paper.

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Appendix A

The Ballot Paper Question

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

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

Tick only one option