

**To the Chair and Members of the
ELECTIONS AND DEMOCRATIC STRUCTURES COMMITTEE**

DONCASTER DEVOLUTION COMMUNITY POLL

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. This report provides an update to Members on the 'Community Poll' taking place to seek the views of the Doncaster Electorate about the next stages in Devolution proposals.

EXEMPT REPORT

2. Not applicable.

RECOMMENDATIONS

3. The Committee is asked to review the report for information only.

BACKGROUND AND CURRENT CONTEXT

4. 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.
5. 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 were no other devolution proposals for the Borough to consider.
6. However, since the SCR devolution deal was developed a number of significant developments have occurred which means 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.

7. 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.
8. 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

9. 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.
10. At an extraordinary Council meeting on Thursday 9th November 2017 it was agreed that Doncaster Council will hold a community poll to seek the views of Doncaster's electorate and ask the question:

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

(a) a wider Yorkshire

(b) Sheffield City Region

11. The poll will be held on the basis of 100% postal votes, 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.
12. 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.

13. The full Council report can be found on the Council's web page at:

<http://doncaster.moderngov.co.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?MId=2778&x=1>

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

14. Section 116 of the Local Government Act 2003.

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

15. 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.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

16. Council Report – 9th November 2017

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