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Dear Ros

Sheffield City Region Proposed Devolution Deal

At its meeting on Tuesday 12th January the OSMC reviewed the Sheffield City Region (SCR) proposed Devolution Deal. The purpose of the meeting was to consider what the proposed deal would mean for the wider City Region but specifically for Doncaster. The Committee agreed it would forward any recommendations, comments or feedback for your consideration to help inform Council when it considers the proposed agreement in February.

In reaching its conclusions the Committee received information from a range of attendees including Councillor Sir Steve Houghton, Chair of Sheffield City Region Combined Authority, Andrew Gates Head of Policy Sheffield City Region Local Enterprise Partnership and Combined Authority and Nigel Brewster SCR private sector representative. The Committee was also able to receive a Doncaster perspective by asking questions to yourself, Jo Miller and Dan Fell from Doncaster Chamber. A number of Councillors who are not on the OSMC were also in attendance and were able to contribute to a very positive and productive debate.

In reviewing this matter OSMC was unanimous in agreeing the following recommendation:-

That the Committee recommend that this Council support the proposed devolution deal to ensure local control over the powers necessary to deliver the economic ambitions for the Sheffield City Region.

The Committee also raised a number of key issues which it requested I place on record for your consideration and as a means of informing Council's future consideration of this matter:-

1. The Committee was informed that the proposed deal was an important step in seeking further devolution and demonstrating that the SCR could effectively manage its business and deliver significant economic improvements. Members considered that as central government funding for public services was reducing this would provide future opportunities to help support public services and deliver wider opportunities to the region.
2. It was acknowledged that the proposed deal would offer further opportunities for Doncaster to build on the positive work already undertaken by the SCR CA such as developing effective relationships with the private sector and gaining approval for and delivering major infrastructure projects in the borough such as the National College for High Speed Rail (NCHSR), National Institute for Infrastructure, Construction and Engineering, phase 2 of the airport link road, an airport railway station and a new M18 link road at junction 5.
3. The Committee recognised that going forward the proposal would seek to incorporate strong accountability arrangements including a robust Overview and Scrutiny process, a high level of transparency, accountability and opportunities to engage and take account of the views of the public. It was noted there was a role for all Members to support these governance principles e.g. by participating in the relevant Scrutiny processes. The Committee also received assurances that mechanisms would be put in place to ensure elected Members were kept informed and updated on the SCR's activities through minutes of meetings, briefings and updates and through the SCR website.
4. Concerns were raised over the requirement to elect a Mayor for the SCR and whilst supporting the view that this was not necessary for the success of the SCR, Members recognised it was an essential requirement of the proposed deal. Whilst initially raising some concerns that the elected Mayor may have powers to act autonomously against the wishes of other SCR members it was recognised that the flexibility to write its own Constitution would help ensure decision making was spread more equitably across the SCR encouraging decisions to be made through consensus rather than the wishes of one individual.
5. The Committee recognised that as the election of a Mayor of the SCRCA was a prerequisite to the devolution proposal there was a need to ensure a greater public understanding of the concept of the SCR and the role of the Mayor. This was important for democracy in Doncaster particularly where the Doncaster electorate would have the opportunity to vote for an Elected Mayor for Doncaster and a Mayor for the City region under a combined election.

The Committee considered that significant work needed to be undertaken to raise public awareness and understanding of the two roles.

6. The Committee sought assurances that if it was to achieve its ambitions and objectives the SCR would need strong performance management arrangements in place to ensure clear understanding of stated objectives with the necessary mechanisms in place to provide effective challenge and to monitor progress against targets.
7. The Committee acknowledged that the proposed agreement was subject to approval by the relevant local authorities and further legislative changes were needed to implement the proposal. Members sought assurances that they would be kept informed of progress and any key developments. The Committee recognised that Members had a key role in helping to ensure clarity and understanding of the arrangements to support wider public understanding and engagement.
8. The Committee recognised that the SCR would need to be effectively supported by corporate and back office staff. Whilst acknowledging the importance of having the right number and calibre of staff, the Committee expressed a view that consideration be given to how the SCR functions could be supported as efficiently as possible. The Committee received assurances that the SCR would seek opportunities to pool resources and work in partnership to maintain appropriate staffing levels and keep costs down.
9. Whilst recognising the potential for the overall economic improvement of the area the Committee sought assurances that measures and activities would be identified to ensure those living in the most deprived areas were able to benefit from the employment and economic opportunities created. Concern was raised that unless this issue was specifically addressed certain communities and individuals would become further marginalised and unable to access the wider economic opportunities.

I hope you find the Committees support for the proposed deal and the above comments useful as a summary of the key issues discussed at the meeting. I would be grateful if the views of the Committee could be included within the report presented to Council to help inform the debate and discussion.

Finally on behalf of the Committee, I would like to thank you for attending the meeting and answering the questions raised by Members.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J Mounsey', written in a cursive style.

Councillor John Mounsey
Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee

cc OSMC Members
Cabinet Members
Jo Miller, Directors and BAs.
Steve Mawson, Roger Harvey, Scott Fawcus, Lee Tillman, Christian Foster