



Somerset Council
Climate and Place Scrutiny Committee
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National Devolution - Level 2 Devolution Deal position statement

Lead Officer: Paul Hickson
Executive Director: Mickey Green
Author: Sunita Mills
Contact Details: Sunita.Mills@somerset.gov.uk
Executive Lead Member:
Division / Local Member:

1. Summary

- 1.1. The national picture for devolution has changed as part of the Autumn statement and now includes eligible councils across England that represent a whole county.
- 1.2. This presents an opportunity for Somerset to start a national devolution journey and the Leader has written to the Secretary of State to express interest in developing a deal.
- 1.3. It is understood that the initial offer will be a simple template approach, based on the Levelling Up White Paper with no scope for additional negotiations beyond it.
- 1.4. Looking to the future, it is anticipated that this would be the first in a number of agreements that would increasingly transfer powers and funding to Somerset.

2. Issues for Consideration / Recommendations

- 2.1. Scrutiny Committee is asked to note the update

3. Background

- 3.1. National devolution involves the transfer of powers / functions and funding from national to local government. This is separate from the devolution of council services and funding to town / city / parish councils / community groups.
- 3.2. For Somerset the journey of devolution will be key to delivering local ambitions and addressing our priorities, it could offer the longer-term opportunities of agreed levels of funding and flexibly to use it to meet our local needs.
- 3.3. In February 2022, the Government published the Levelling Up White Paper. This set out a new devolution framework, that extended devolution beyond metropolitan areas for the first time. The framework sets out a flexible, three level approach to devolution recognising that a one-size fits all model would not be suitable, with different powers and functions for each devolution level.

Prior to this devolution deals had been made in eleven areas, nine of which were Mayoral Combined Authorities.

- 3.4.** The three levels set out in the devolution framework are:
- Level 3 – a single institution or County Council with a directly elected mayor (DEM), across a functional economic area (FEA) or whole county area;
 - Level 2 – A single institution or County Council without a DEM, across a FEA or whole county area;
 - Level 1 – Local authorities working together across a FEA or whole county area e.g. through a joint committee.
- 3.5.** In the 2023 Autumn Statement the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities announced a change in the pace of devolution to accelerate the level 2 deals, also known as county deals. This recent change means that there is no requirement for a directly elected mayor for Somerset to pursue devolution.
- 3.6.** At this stage devolution will be based around the geographic area covered by Somerset Council with no need to form partnerships with other authorities and can use our existing constitutional arrangements.
- 3.7.** For each level a different set of powers / functions can be pursued in a negotiation; the level 2 functions are –

Function	Detail
Strategic role in delivering services	Host for Government functions best delivered at a strategic level involving more than one local authority e.g. Local Nature Recovery Strategies
	Opportunity to pool services at a strategic level
	Opportunity to adopt innovative local proposals to deliver action on climate change and the UK's Net Zero targets
Local control of sustainable transport	Ability to introduce bus franchising
Investment spending	UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) planning and delivery at a strategic level
Giving adults the skills for the labour market	Devolution of Adult Education functions and the core Adult Education Budget
	Providing input into Local Skills Improvement Plans
Local control of infrastructure decisions	Homes England compulsory purchase powers (held concurrently)

- 3.8.** In response to the Autumn statement the Leader has written to the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities to express interest in working with government to secure a level 2 devolution agreement for Somerset. Somerset's MPs have also been informed of this intention.
- 3.9.** It's anticipated that devolution will feature in the manifestos of all the main parties at the general election. Pursuing a deal at this stage signals to the

current and future governments that Somerset is ready and willing to work with them to bring decision making closer to our communities in the longer term.

3.10. In the South West there may be future opportunities to work closer with other authorities, any agreement at this time doesn't preclude any future transfer of government powers / functions over the same or different geographies. The challenge of working with neighbouring authorities would be developing a coherent package of priorities that benefit all parties equally because of the inequalities, geographies and economic commonalities.

3.11. The next steps for Somerset level 2 devolution will be –
Engagement:

- Updates to Members
- Developing dialogue with MPs, business community, partners etc

Developing our proposal:

- Understand response from Secretary of State and work with government officials and the County Council's Network.
- Build on our story of place and agree key priorities and realistically ambitious asks that will become part of the longer term journey and potential future agreements.

Governance:

- Timetable formal governance and scrutiny once Government requirements are understood

4. Consultations Undertaken

4.1. None required at this stage.

5. Implications

5.1. At this stage there are no associated financial, equalities, health and wellbeing, climate change and sustainability or HR implications.

6. Background papers

6.1. None

Note: For sight of individual background papers please contact the report author