

TEWKESBURY BOROUGH COUNCIL

Report to:	Executive Committee
Date of Meeting:	2 September 2015
Subject:	Gloucestershire Devolution Project
Report of:	Mike Dawson, Chief Executive
Corporate Lead:	Mike Dawson, Chief Executive
Lead Member:	Councillor R J E Vines, Leader of the Council
Number of Appendices:	Two

Executive Summary:

There is considerable national interest in the 'devolution agenda'. In Gloucestershire, Council and other public and private sector leaders working together through Leadership Gloucestershire, have expressed an interest to government to explore this further and made initial proposals for further exploration. There are potential benefits for Gloucestershire in exploring what powers and budgets may be devolved. This would also require consideration of appropriate governance arrangements. These will include the potential creation of a combined authority to manage decisions related to the devolved powers and any powers that may be delegated by partner organisations. This report asks the Committee to note progress to date, recommends the establishment of a Member Devolution Working Group and recommends to Council that the potential benefits of the devolution agenda are supported in principle.

Recommendation:

- 1. That the Committee note the progress undertaken to date by Leadership Gloucestershire in respect of the devolution agenda.**
- 2. That a Member Devolution Working Group is established, in accordance with the Terms of Reference set out at Appendix 2, with the political composition being determined by the Leader and Deputy Leader of the Council and Group Leaders then being invited to make nominations to the Group as appropriate.**
- 3. That it be RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL that it notes the progress undertaken by Leadership Gloucestershire in respect of the devolution agenda and that it supports in principle further devolution development work together with Leadership Gloucestershire partners.**

Reasons for Recommendation:

To note progress to date and give in principle support to the Gloucestershire devolution agenda whilst establishing a Member Devolution Working Group to engage Members in this work.

<p>Resource Implications:</p> <p>None at this stage.</p>
<p>Legal Implications:</p> <p>None at this stage.</p>
<p>Risk Management Implications:</p> <p>None at this stage. Risk analysis will be undertaken as the project progresses.</p>
<p>Performance Management Follow-up:</p> <p>None at this stage.</p>
<p>Environmental Implications:</p> <p>None.</p>

1.0 INTRODUCTION/BACKGROUND

- 1.1** Nationally, there is an active debate about the need for government to pass significant powers down to local government in England to match the powers devolved to the parliament in Scotland and the national assemblies in Wales and Northern Ireland. So far ‘deals’ between the government and local authorities have tended to focus on English cities and large urban areas. However, across the country many two-tier areas are keen to take part in the discussion and the government is now seeking expressions of interest in further potential devolution projects, including those from two tier areas.
- 1.2** The purpose of these expressions of interest is so that government and local public sector partnerships can explore what policy/budget areas might be advantageous to both if they were to be devolved for more local control.
- 1.3** In Gloucestershire public sector partners, working through Leadership Gloucestershire, have recognised potential benefits of achieving devolved powers and budgets for Gloucestershire and also in developing closer and more effective working between public sector bodies in the county. The partners include the Leaders of all seven councils, the Police and Crime Commissioner and the Chairs of the LEP and the Clinical Commissioning Group. In mid-July Leadership Gloucestershire submitted an expression of interest (EOI) document to Government for consideration.
- 1.4** The purpose of the EOI was to alert government to Gloucestershire’s interest in exploring devolution benefits further, not to set out the full detail that would be needed for a worked up devolution bid. The EOI covered the following workstream areas:
- Economic growth;
 - Strategic planning and infrastructure;
 - Health and wellbeing;
 - Community Safety; and
 - Governance.

1.5 There are significant potential benefits associated with devolution. These include support and devolved government funding to encourage economic growth and infrastructure provision, better use of public funds in areas such as health and wellbeing allowing cross sector investment to reduce demand on services and more coordinated decision making in respect of major issues such as strategic planning, strategic housing and infrastructure delivery. These points are made within the EOI.

1.6 This is clearly an agenda which will be of great interest to Members and to keep Members aware of progress two briefing seminars on the subject of devolution have been held on 30 June and 26 August. In addition the EOI was circulated to all Members at the Leader's request in July shortly after submission the government. A copy of the EOI is attached at Appendix 1 for information

2.0 THE CURRENT POSITION

2.1 Since submission of the EOI, feedback has been received from Government that more detailed information is needed in respect of the actual 'asks' of government and benefits to be achieved under the work streams. Given the limited nature of the EOI, this was not unexpected.

2.2 Furthermore, information has been received in the feedback that the Government is at this time focussing on city and urban areas and will only select 3-5 non-urban areas to go forward in the current devolution round. Civil servants have advised that for any area to be included in the process at this stage, the required information must be submitted by 4 September.

2.3 This is a very tight timescale, however work is under way to develop the required information for a further more detailed submission and this will be considered by Leadership Gloucestershire on 2 September. If Leadership Gloucestershire agrees to submit this further information and is selected as an area to be considered for devolution there will follow a period of intense work to review potential governance options, develop business cases for the proposal and devolution 'asks' of government and development of other local partnerships related to the workstream areas.

2.4 The status of the documents submitted to date is that they are expressions of interest aimed at opening dialogue with government about devolved powers for Gloucestershire and the appropriate governance arrangements that will be needed. This Council and all partners will need to agree to support any devolution 'deal' and associated governance arrangement. If the Gloucestershire EOI is successful there is considerable work to be done to bring this to fruition.

2.5 This further work would involve consultation with all partners, including this Council, throughout the autumn. Current understanding would suggest that a decision by partner Councils/boards to agree the final arrangements would be needed around February 2016.

2.6 If, as is most likely given the limited places available, Gloucestershire is not selected to take part in the current round of devolution discussions with government, it is not possible to say when future opportunities will be offered. However, there are potentially significant benefits to government, to Gloucestershire public sector organisations and to the people of Gloucestershire. Therefore, it is likely that Leadership Gloucestershire will wish to continue to develop the case for devolution in Gloucestershire in preparation for any future opportunities.

2.7 Given that the devolution agenda will remain in either scenario it would be helpful to engage Members in the development work in the coming months. This will allow a Member perspective to be inputted to any proposals as they are generated, assist in the distribution of information at Member level and support the Leader and Deputy Leader in this work.

2.8 It is therefore proposed that a Member Devolution Working Group is established comprising nine Members including the Leader and Deputy Leader in accordance with the Terms of Reference attached as Appendix 2.

3.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

3.1 None.

4.0 CONSULTATION

4.1 Members have been advised of progress through briefings. There will be a need to maintain Member engagement in the devolution agenda as it progresses. Councils will be consulted about proposals in the event of the bid from Leadership Gloucestershire being selected for further work by government.

5.0 RELEVANT COUNCIL POLICIES/STRATEGIES

5.1 The Council Plan – any devolution proposals would need to support the overall aims of the Council Plan.

6.0 RELEVANT GOVERNMENT POLICIES

6.1 Government policy and existing and emerging (Cities and Local Government Devolution Bill) legislation relating to local government.

7.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS (Human/Property)

7.1 None at this stage.

8.0 SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS (Social/Community Safety/Cultural/ Economic/ Environment)

8.1 None.

9.0 IMPACT UPON (Value For Money/Equalities/E-Government/Human Rights/Health And Safety)

9.1 None.

10.0 RELATED DECISIONS AND ANY OTHER RELEVANT FACTS

10.1 None.

Background Papers: None

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Appendices: Appendix 1 – Expression of Interest – Gloucestershire Devolution submitted in July 2015

Appendix 2 – Proposed Terms of Reference for Member Working Group