

Cabinet Member for Policy and Leadership

8 October 2015

Name of Cabinet Member:

Cabinet Member for Policy and Leadership – Councillor Mrs Lucas OBE

Director Approving Submission of the report:

Chief Executive

Ward(s) affected:

All

Title:

Response to Petition “Not to Join Up With Birmingham to Form a Super Power”

Is this a key decision?

No

Executive Summary:

This report sets out a proposed response to a petition with 60 signatures which says: “*We the residents of Coventry do not want to join up with Birmingham to form a super power. The only benefactors of such a move would be Birmingham as they were when the West Midlands County Council was in place.*”

There are no proposals for Coventry City Council to join up with Birmingham to become one organisation or super power. The Council has made a decision in principle to join a Combined Authority with a preferred option of a combined authority to cover the area covered by three Local Enterprise Partnerships which includes the seven Metropolitan Councils currently working together through the West Midlands Joint Committee, Warwickshire, and councils that cover parts of Staffordshire and Worcestershire.

A Combined Authority can only be set up if it meets key tests that show it is of economic and administrative benefit to each local area that it covers and national legislation requires that a specified process must be undertaken before such a body is established which includes a formal consultation period by the Government before the decision is taken by the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government which then has to be approved by both Houses of Parliament.

The Council has recently undertaken an engagement and consultation process on whether Coventry City Council should join a West Midlands Combined Authority and this will be considered along with other relevant information when a decision on this is made. This is expected to be by full Council at its meeting on 13 October 2015.

Recommendations:

The Cabinet Member for Policy and Leadership is recommended to:-

- Instruct officers to include the views set out in this petition in the information to be considered by councillors when a decision is taken on whether or not to join a West Midlands Combined Authority

List of Appendices included:

None

Other useful background papers:

Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009
<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2009/20/contents>

Has it been or will it be considered by Scrutiny?

No

Has it been or will it be considered by any other Council Committee, Advisory Panel or other body?

No

Will this report go to Council?

No

Report title: Response to Petition “Not to Join Up With Birmingham to Form a Super Power”

1. Context (or background)

- 1.1 For a number of years there have been discussions and national policy change on the most appropriate level of geography and governance at a sub-national level to promote economic growth and prosperity. This sub-national economic policy also seeks to rebalance the national economy by delivering more economic growth to local businesses and local people in regions and sub-regions outside London and the South-East.
- 1.2 It is also recognised that real functional economic geographies often operate across individual local authority boundaries so some strategic issues such as infrastructure (including transport), business support, and skills may be best addressed collaboratively across a wider sub-regional area.
- 1.3 The Government is now actively pursuing a policy of devolution to cities and other areas through devolution deals which require formal sub-regional governance arrangements such as a combined authority. The West Midlands is now the only major urban area that does not have a combined authority.

2. Options considered and recommended proposal

- 2.1 A petition with 60 signatures has been submitted to Coventry City Council which says: *“We the residents of Coventry do not want to join up with Birmingham to form a super power. The only benefactors of such a move would be Birmingham as they were when the West Midlands County Council was in place.”*
- 2.2 The petition appears to refer to proposals for Coventry to become a member of a combined authority – specifically a West Midlands Combined Authority – as forming a super power with Birmingham. There has been a considerable amount of misunderstanding about what a combined authority is and does – with references to a *“super-council”* often being made. There are no proposals for Coventry City Council to join with or merge with Birmingham City Council. In fact a combined authority does not replace any existing councils or remove their functions but allows them to work together on issues such as transport and economic growth which cross-borders and are better dealt with at a sub-regional level. In particular they provide a formal body to which powers currently held by central Government can be devolved down to a local level.
- 2.3 The actual decision to set up a Combined Authority – a formal statutory body - is made by the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government and approved by both Houses of Parliament. The process setting up a combined authority includes formal public consultation on any proposals by the Secretary of State. The Secretary of State has to be assured that any Combined Authority will improve arrangements for economic growth and transport in an area and improve the efficiency of local government,
- 2.4 A combined authority is different to the former West Midlands County Council which had functions like highways maintenance and waste management that are now undertaken by the City Council. A range of sub-regional public services formally undertaken by the county council – including the police and fire services – continue to be run across the former county council area including joint working through the West Midlands Joint Committee made up of the seven metropolitan councils and the West Midlands Integrated Transport Authority responsible for strategic transport planning and public transport. During the previous coalition government a Police and Crime Commissioner was introduced to cover the West Midlands metropolitan area and Local Enterprise Partnerships were created – with three covering both the metropolitan area and their surrounding areas

2.5 Coventry City Council joined with the other metropolitan councils in undertaking a governance review of the current arrangements for sub-regional working in the West Midlands which was published in July. Following this, an engagement and consultation process on proposals to set up a West Midlands Combined Authority ran in Coventry from 1 August to 7 September. The feedback from the engagement and consultation process will be considered by councillors along with the governance review and other relevant information when they make the decision whether or not Coventry should look to join a West Midlands Combined Authority by submitting proposals in a Scheme to the Secretary of State for Local Government. It is proposed that the views expressed in this petition are included with this information.

3. Results of consultation undertaken

3.1 The results of the engagement and consultation process on the West Midlands Combined Authority will be published with the report for members to consider when making a decision whether or not Coventry City Council should look to join a Combined Authority by submitting a Scheme to the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government.

4. Timetable for implementing this decision

5. The information regarding the views expressed during the engagement and consultation process will be included in the report to Cabinet and Council on 13 October 2015.

6. Comments from Executive Director, Resources

5.1 Financial implications
None at this stage

5.2 Legal implications
The process for setting up a Combined Authority is set out in the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009.

7. Other implications
None

6.1 How will this contribute to achievement of the Council's key objectives / corporate priorities (corporate plan/scorecard) / organisational blueprint / Local Area Agreement (or Coventry Sustainable Community Strategy)?

n/a

6.2 How is risk being managed?

This report sets out the current requirements under legislation and there are no risks to be managed as a result of the recommendations of this report.

6.3 What is the impact on the organisation?

There is no additional impact on the organisation.

6.4 Equalities / EIA

None

6.5 Implications for (or impact on) the environment

None

6.6 Implications for partner organisations?

None

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Enquiries should be directed to the above person.

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