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Coventry City Council

Minutes of the Meeting of Cabinet held at 10.00 am on Tuesday, 13 October 2015

Present:

Cabinet Members: Councillor Mrs Lucas (Chair)
Councillor Abbott
Councillor Gannon
Councillor Kershaw
Councillor Lancaster
Councillor Maton
Councillor Ruane

Deputy Cabinet Members: Councillor Brown
Councillor Clifford
Councillor Thomas

Employees (by Directorate):

Chief Executive's: M Reeves (Chief Executive), F Collingham, J Venn

Place: M Yardley (Executive Director)

People: G Quinton (Executive Director)

Resources: C West (Executive Director), C Bradford, R, Dickinson, L Knight, J Newman

Apologies: Councillors Andrews, R Auluck, Blundell, McNicholas, J Mutton, Townshend

Public Business

55. Declarations of Interest

There were no disclosable pecuniary interests.

56. Devolution and Economic Growth - Scheme for setting up a West Midlands Combined Authority

The Cabinet considered a report of the Chief Executive, which set out proposals for the Council in relation to the proposed West Midlands Combined Authority.

A combined authority is a statutory body that would facilitate the collaboration and joint working between local authorities to improve economic development, regeneration and transport in a functional economic area. It is a public body in its own right. On 28 May 2015 Coventry City Council's Cabinet agreed in principle to create a combined authority with a preferred option of councils from Coventry and Warwickshire (and Hinckley and Bosworth) with councils from the Greater Birmingham and Solihull and the Black Country Local Enterprise Partnership areas.

Coventry City Council and the other six West Midlands Metropolitan District Councils had undertaken a governance review on current sub-regional working arrangements which concluded that the creation of a combined authority would improve economic development, regeneration and transport in the metropolitan area, and a geography that includes other councils from the wider Local Enterprise Partnership areas of Coventry and Warwickshire and Greater Birmingham and Solihull could bring even greater economic benefits.

The seven West Midlands metropolitan district councils undertook a joint engagement exercise on proposals for a combined authority in the West Midlands over the summer. As a result of this some district councils from the surrounding area have opted to join the proposed combined authority as non-constituent members. Coventry City Council undertook its own engagement and consultation programme in the city in addition to the West Midlands exercise.

The Government continued its devolution agenda and asked areas to come forward with proposals for a devolution deal with Government for inclusion in the Comprehensive Spending Review in November 2015. Some 38 areas, including the West Midlands, had done so. The decision to set up a combined authority would be subject to specific legislative tests about the benefits such an authority would bring and would be separate to any decision on a devolution deal.

The report indicated that the next stage in the process for setting up a combined authority would be for the local authorities concerned to agree to submit proposals in a Scheme to the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, which would inform the provisions of any Order creating a combined authority. A draft Scheme for a West Midlands Combined Authority had been prepared for submission to the Secretary of State that set out the proposed membership of the West Midlands Combined Authority and how it would work, and was attached as appendix 5 to the report. A finalised Scheme was tabled at the meeting and it was noted that this may be subject to one further amendment should Lichfield District Council decide to become a non-constituent member.

The appendices to the report submitted also included details in relation to the West Midlands Authorities' Statutory Governance Review; a statement of intent for a West Midlands Combined Authority; a summary of the City Council's engagement and consultation on the proposals for a Combined Local Authority; a report of the Coventry Citizens' Panel.

As a combined authority must hold the statutory transport function for the area, only local authorities that have the statutory function for transport can be constituent members. This meant the area to be covered by the proposed combined authority will be the West Midlands metropolitan area: Birmingham, Coventry, Dudley, Sandwell, Solihull, Walsall and Wolverhampton, reflecting the current transport arrangements. This would build on and reflect the current West Midlands Joint Committee arrangements that had been in place for almost thirty years. It was proposed that the three Local Enterprise Partnerships would be non-constituent members of the combined authority: Black Country LEP, Coventry and Warwickshire LEP and Greater Birmingham and Solihull LEP. Coventry and Warwickshire LEP took a unanimous decision to join the West Midlands Combined Authority as a non-constituent member at its Board meeting on 5 October 2015.

The three county councils of Staffordshire, Warwickshire and Worcestershire had decided not to join the combined authority although each of them could look to join at a future date, as long as they did not become constituent members of another combined authority. Cannock Chase District Council, Nuneaton and Bedworth, Redditch, Tamworth and Telford and Wrekin Borough Council's had agreed to become non-constituent members of the proposed West Midlands Combined Authority. A decision was also expected from Lichfield following their Council meeting scheduled for 13th October 2015.

Coventry Council could opt not to join a combined authority as it was not compulsory and the Secretary of State could not make decisions for the Council. However, there were clear benefits of working with other authorities on issues at a sub-regional level which the Council would forgo. It would also mean that a devolution deal with Government, although not impossible, would be less likely. It was therefore recommended that, after considering the information available, including the documentation appended to the report, Coventry City Council should join the proposed West Midlands Combined Authority.

RESOLVED that the Cabinet recommend to Council:

- 1. That Coventry City Council should join the proposed West Midlands Combined Authority after considering the information available including the West Midlands statutory governance review and Statement of Intent for the Combined Authority (appendices 1 and 2) and the results of the local engagement and consultation process (appendices 3 and 4)**
- 2. That Coventry City Council should approve the Scheme for a West Midlands Combined Authority for submission to the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government.**
- 3. That any devolution deal would be subject to a separate and detailed decision by Cabinet and Full Council which would include an analysis of the benefits and risks and the value of the deal to the city of Coventry along with any proposed changes in governance including whether or not to have an elected metro mayor.**
- 4. That any devolution deal for the seven West Midlands metropolitan councils must require a unanimous decision by all the councils concerned.**
- 5. To undertake continued engagement across the city on the development of a combined authority and devolution.**
- 6. To continue to take a full part in the Coventry and Warwickshire Local Enterprise Partnership.**
- 7. To take a full part in and develop the Coventry and Warwickshire sub-regional local authority arrangements jointly with the other councils.**

8. **That the Executive Director of Resources is given delegated authority in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Strategic Finance and Resources to make decisions on the Council's behalf to withdraw from the existing Coventry and Warwickshire Business Rates Pool and agree the terms for entering a new wider West Midlands business rates pool where appropriate.**
57. **Any other items of public business which the Chair decides to take as a matter of urgency because of the special circumstances involved.**

There were no other items of business.

(Meeting closed at 10.15 am)