

HIGH PEAK BOROUGH COUNCIL

The Executive

3 December 2020

TITLE:	Vision Derbyshire
EXECUTIVE COUNCILLOR	Cllr Anthony McKeown – Leader
CONTACT OFFICERS:	Andrew Stokes – Chief Executive
WARDS INVOLVED:	Non-Specific

Appendices Attached:

Appendix A – Vision Derbyshire – Proposition to Government

1. Reason for the Report

1.1 The purpose of the report is to consider:

- The work that has been taking place with Derbyshire councils on the development of a new collaborative approach to deliver non-structural reform across Derbyshire; and
- An update on the progress with the proposed publication of the Government's Devolution and Recovery White Paper and the potential for local government reorganisation.

2. Recommendations

2.1 It is recommended that the Executive:

- Note the progress with the work that has taken place with Derbyshire Councils on the development of Vision Derbyshire – a new collaborative approach to deliver non-structural reform across Derbyshire.
- Note the intended publication of the Government's Devolution and Local Recovery White Paper and the potential implications in relation to local government reform.
- Approve Vision Derbyshire as the Council's preferred option of local government reform in Derbyshire at this current time subject to further reports on confirmed proposals.
- Endorse the District Councils' Network's call for proposals in the Government's white paper to back the success of district councils in delivery and not distract from the local recovery effort or reduce delivery capacity through forcing local government reorganisation.
- That the committee receive further reports on any confirmed proposals from Vision Derbyshire when available.

3. Executive Summary

- 3.1 In early 2019 the leaders of the county, city, borough, and district councils began to explore the potential of non-structural reform in Derbyshire. Consequently, the Council embarked on a programme of work with all Derbyshire Councils to explore the appetite for future collaborative working. This was fuelled by a desire to secure better outcomes and achieve the greatest public value for local people and communities across Derbyshire,
- 3.2 After a tender exercise in April 2019, Price Waterhouse Coopers (PwC) were commissioned to support the development of the approach and a programme of work which has been undertaken in two phases over the last eighteen months.
- 3.3 The first phase aimed to identify and explore the existing level of ambition and appetite of stakeholders to progress non-structural reform in Derbyshire and resulted in the development and agreement of:
- Principles for collaboration;
 - Potential areas for future collaboration; and
 - Critical success factors
- 3.4 Phase 2 of the programme, which commenced in March 2020, has subsequently resulted in the development of an ambitious approach to non-structural reform – Vision Derbyshire - and the development of a case for change and a proposition to central government. Derby City Council, who participated in Phase 1 of the approach, declined to participate in Phase 2, although the opportunity to work collaboratively on the further development of the approach has remained open to them.
- 3.5 Due to the increasing speculation that the Government would set out proposals for local government reform in their Devolution and Recovery White Paper, prior to the completion of the development of the case for change, a letter, signed by all Derbyshire Councils, requesting a meeting to discuss the approach was sent to the Secretary of State on 4th September 2020.
- 3.6 The Vision Derbyshire case for change was finalised in October. The proposition to Government is attached at Appendix A.
- 3.7 Vision Derbyshire is focused around four key ambitions as follows:
- **Seize innovation** - pioneering skills and technologies for a sustainable future economy
 - **Establish relentless ambition** - creating opportunities for everyone in Derbyshire and making these visible:
 - **Build proactive communities** - harnessing the energy in Derbyshire's communities and empowering people to make change:

- **Live and work sustainably** - committing to a zero-carbon footprint in our tourism, wider economy and ways of working:

- 3.8 The case for change identifies potential organisational benefits of £20 million to £66 million and wider system benefits of approximately £1.1 billion that could be achieved if the new approach were to be taken forward and supported by Government. It reinforces the Derbyshire councils' commitment to working together differently. It is recognised that working together through Vision Derbyshire will enable the councils to have a much bigger impact on the lives of Derbyshire's people and places.
- 3.9 A new formal governance model to support effective decision making has also been identified as being crucial in taking the approach forward. The new governance model would see the creation of a new Joint Committee for Vision Derbyshire. The format of this will depend on the areas of work chosen for collaboration. Proposals for a Joint Committee will emerge as the programme of work is established and will be subject to further reports and full Council approval.
- 3.10 The Derbyshire leaders are in the process of identifying priority areas to accelerate delivery and take forward the case for change. There have been three pilot projects that have been implemented over the last few months in line with the COVID-19 pandemic response which cover communication & engagement and community and economic recovery. The case for change also includes a number of flagship projects and 2 year road map/10 year milestones for each ambition. Consideration is also being given to the identification of a small number of areas to start accelerated delivery. There are a number of asks and offers to central Government to support the realisation of the ambitions that have been identified.
- 3.11 The Vision Derbyshire case for change involves HPBC committing to collaboration with the other Derbyshire authorities. It is accepted that this will take a number of forms. The early work proposed in the Vision Derbyshire programme will be centred on strategic collaboration which in essence will involve active borough and district participation in shaping county wide strategies on challenges such as economic growth, improvement of skills etc. The achievement of the ambitions of Vision Derbyshire will also require successful administrative and policy collaboration with other public sector providers throughout the county and region.
- 3.12 The Council's strategic alliance with Staffordshire Moorlands is very much focussed on service collaboration where services provided to residents and businesses are delivered by one structure across the two districts. Vision Derbyshire does not in any way commit High Peak to move away from the strategic alliance with Staffordshire Moorlands. It may even provide for opportunities in the appropriate circumstances for both councils to further benefit from economies of scale in the future.
- 3.13 In the October 2019 Queen's Speech, the government pledged to publish a white paper setting out how it would 'unleash regional potential' in England.

The government had previously promised that the English devolution white paper would be published in September 2020.

- 3.14 Over recent weeks it has been widely reported that the white paper has been shelved until next year as the government prioritises battling COVID-19. On 12th October in a Written Ministerial Statement, the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government formally issued invitations to principal councils in Cumbria, North Yorkshire and Somerset, including associated existing unitary councils, to submit proposals for moving to unitary local government. In the statement he also confirmed that the Government will not impose top-down restructuring of local government and will continue to follow a locally-led approach for unitarisation where councils can develop proposals which have strong local support.
- 3.15 In September the District Councils Network (DCN) published “Power in Place, devolution and districts driving our recovery”, which is the first in a series of reports that they will publish before the Devolution and Local Recovery White Paper. The paper puts a number of proposals to government and had two accompanying messages:
- Devolution should back the success of districts in delivery. It should not distract from the local recovery effort or reduce delivery capacity through forcing reorganisation into a less local, less agile, less responsive local government pushed by interests wanting county unitary councils everywhere; and
 - Local governance is a local matter, places must be free to decide how to organise services and to progress any kind of reform only where there is significant local agreement.
- 3.16 A key principle which has emerged through work on Vision Derbyshire is the recognition that the current two-tier structure of local government across the county can be strengthened to significantly improve outcomes for communities. It is considered that Vision Derbyshire will provide a credible alternative to structural reform. It is therefore recommended that Executive approve Vision Derbyshire as the Council’s preferred option for local government reform at the current time.
- 3.17 It is also proposed that the Executive endorse the DCN’s call for proposals in the impending government white paper to back the success of district councils in delivery and not distract from the local recovery effort or reduce delivery capacity through forcing reorganisation.

4. How this Report Links to Corporate Priorities

- 4.1 The Vision Derbyshire approach will potentially have a significant impact on the achievement of a number of the Council’s corporate priorities

5. Options and Analysis

5.1 There are no detailed options to consider at this stage – these will need to be evaluated fully as the programme of work begins to emerge

6. Implications

6.1 Community Safety - (Crime and Disorder Act 1998)
None

6.2 Workforce
None

6.3 Equality and Diversity/Equality Impact Assessment
None

6.4 Financial Considerations
There are no direct financial implications at this stage

6.5 Legal
The establishment of joint committee arrangements will need to be considered and approved at full Council

6.6 Climate Change
Collaboration on climate change has been identified as one of the key areas for potential future focus for Vision Derbyshire

6.7 External Consultation
None at this stage

6.8 Risk Assessment
The emerging programme of projects that emerges from Vision Derbyshire will be subject to a full risk analysis

ANDREW P STOKES
Chief Executive

Web Links and Background Papers

“Power in Place, devolution and districts driving our recovery” - District Councils Network (DCN) – September 2020

‘Bigger is not better: the evidenced case for keeping ‘local’ government’ – DCN October 2020

Location

Contact details

Andrew P Stokes
Chief Executive

7 Introduction and Background

- 7.1 The main focus of this report is to consider the Council's commitment to Vision Derbyshire, which is an ambitious proposal for non-structural reform that has been developed over the last eighteen months by the leaders of the local authorities across Derbyshire.
- 7.2 Local authorities across England are awaiting the publication of the Government's Devolution and Recovery White Paper. It is anticipated that this potentially will bring significant benefits to areas of the country, including the East Midlands, through the Government's commitment to the 'levelling up' agenda.
- 7.3 There has been lots of debate about contents of the white paper and the required structures to secure devolution deals in individual areas. In the summer the Government were indicating that the most beneficial devolution deals would be given to areas that collaborated through combined authorities with an elected mayor. They also stated their preference for structural reform of local authorities through the creation of smaller numbers of unitary authorities to create a foundation for the creation of combined authorities.
- 7.4 This report also sets out the latest position with regard the publication of the white paper.

8 Vision Derbyshire

- 8.1 In early 2019 the leaders of the county, city, borough and district councils began to explore the potential of non-structural reform in Derbyshire. It was agreed that that a new approach should look beyond traditional partnerships, towards a new collective and ambitious vision and model of collaboration, integration and shared leadership.
- 8.2 It was accepted that moving to a more collaborative approach could take a number of forms and would potentially include the delegation of powers and / or shared governance arrangements as a key mechanism for taking this work forward where appropriate. Collaboration could result in the improvement of outcomes and operating efficiencies in a number of ways:
- **Service Collaboration** - Functions delivered by a service on behalf of multiple authorities;
 - **Strategic Collaboration** - Active district participation in shaping county wide strategies. External incentives (growth, skills money, devolution); and
 - **Wider Public Sector Reform** - Successful administrative and policy collaboration will provide a strong platform for local government to lead wider local public sector reform including deeper health and social care integration and cross public sector asset and workforce planning

- 8.3 Consequently, the Council embarked on a programme of work with all Derbyshire councils to explore the appetite for future collaborative working. This was fuelled by a desire to secure better outcomes and achieve the greatest public value for local people and communities across Derbyshire,
- 8.4 After a tender exercise in April 2019, Price Waterhouse Coopers (PwC), were commissioned to support the development of the approach and a programme of work which has been undertaken in two phases over the last eighteen months.

Phase 1

- 8.5 All ten Councils in Derbyshire – Derbyshire County Council, Derby City Council and the eight district and borough councils – worked together during the first phase to identify shared priorities and agree to strategically collaborate on the improvement of outcomes for people and places. This phase aimed to identify and explore the existing level of ambition and appetite of stakeholders to progress non-structural reform in Derbyshire and resulted in the development and agreement of:

- **Principles for collaboration** - to guide future working such as improve outcomes, speak with one voice, better coordination, provide a visible alternative to unitarisation and deliver to be sustainable
- **Areas for future collaboration** - to provide a potential focus for future working such as climate change, tourism, skills and employment, social mobility, economic prosperity
- **Critical success factors** - to drive a step change in approach/ways of working to accelerate a truly different model of local government in Derbyshire, including working at pace and building on momentum, working as a collective in a different physical and mental space from business as usual and strengthening and role modelling collaborative and collective leadership behaviours.

- 8.6 The work undertaken as part of the first phase marked a statement to develop a fundamentally new way of working together and to deliver differently for the people of Derbyshire. Following successful completion of Phase 1 the councils leaders agreed that further work to turn the vision and ambition into a viable alternative to structural reform through a second phase was required.
- 8.7 Derby City Council, who participated in Phase 1 of the approach, declined to participate in Phase 2, although the opportunity to work collaboratively on the further development of the approach has remained open to them.

Phase 2

- 8.8 Phase 2 of the programme, which commenced in March 2020, has subsequently resulted in the development of an ambitious approach to non-structural reform – Vision Derbyshire - and the development of a case for change and proposition to central government. This phase of the programme has coincided with the onset of the recent coronavirus pandemic which has

provided even greater incentives for the local authorities to work collaboratively to support recovery and renewal activity across the county.

- 8.9 A high-level proposition to Government has also been developed alongside the case for change as a statement of intent from Councils for Ministers and senior officers at the Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government (MHCLG). This statement of intent is a key step in the engagement process with Government in respect of the Derbyshire councils' wish to take Vision Derbyshire forward.
- 8.10 Due to the increasing speculation that the Government would set out proposals for local government reform in their Devolution and Recovery White Paper, prior to the completion of the development of the case for change, a letter, signed by all Derbyshire Councils requesting a meeting to discuss the approach, was sent to the Secretary of State on 4th September 2020.
- 8.11 The letter states the leaders' belief that Vision Derbyshire provides a viable alternative to unitarisation and that, with additional powers, resources, freedoms and flexibilities, the authorities will be able to implement plans at speed, focussing on outcomes for residents, businesses and communities rather than costly and time consuming structural reform. It also confirms that approach proposed will strongly support the regional ambitions for a streamlined and coherent East Midlands and align to the imminent Devolution and Recovery White Paper.
- 8.12 The Vision Derbyshire case for change was finalised in October. The proposition to Government is attached at Appendix A.
- 8.13 Vision Derbyshire is focused around four key ambitions as follows:
- **Seize innovation** - pioneering skills and technologies for a sustainable future economy
 - **Establish relentless ambition** - creating opportunities for everyone in Derbyshire and making these visible:
 - **Build proactive communities** - harnessing the energy in Derbyshire's communities and empowering people to make change:
 - **Live and work sustainably** - committing to a zero-carbon footprint in our tourism, wider economy and ways of working:
- 8.14 The case for change is a compelling, shared argument that a collective commitment to strategic collaboration across the councils which will realise significant benefits and is the most effective way to improve outcomes for Derbyshire people and places. At this stage it is not a detailed business case or delivery plan.
- 8.15 A number of enablers to support and embed collaboration, such as leadership, culture, technology, workforce, customers, and assets have been identified as key components of the approach. These will underpin the potential organisational (£20 million to £66 million) and wider system (£1.08

billion) benefits that could be achieved if the new approach were to be taken forward and supported by Government.

8.16 The case for change reinforces the Derbyshire councils' commitment to working together differently. It is recognised that working together through Vision Derbyshire will enable the councils to have a much bigger impact on the lives of Derbyshire's people and places. The ambition cannot be achieved by individual organisations working in silos. There is a commitment to consider the whole place and all tiers of government when addressing systemic challenges, collaborating by default to:

- Be outcomes-focused in all collaboration, maintaining focus on people and places, not organisational boundaries;
- Collaborate on a regional, county-wide and local footprint, blending approaches to achieve outcomes in a multi-faceted way, and balancing local delivery with delivery at scale;
- Not simply do the same activities together but will innovate actively considering the role of the individual council in relation to partners and communities in delivering outcomes;
- Allow the councils to speak with one voice as Derbyshire in all forums, making the offer clear;
- Share resources, responsibility and decision making, and delivery of services; and
- Prioritise choices consistently, making better use of our scarce resources.

8.17 The approach confirms that the councils must transform how they work both as individual organisations and as a collective and commits to a fundamental transformation of ways of working to enable effective strategic collaboration. This will involve:

- Developing an organisational culture where everyone collaborates by default across all councils;
- Unifying the approach to customer service and experience across all councils in Derbyshire ensuring a consistent experience for all residents;
- Aligning technological and physical assets to enhance efficiency and make best use of scarce resources;
- Integrating business insight and performance measurement information to develop a shared basis for decisions and evaluation;
- Sharing career and training opportunities across the workforce of all councils, and aligning incentives;
- Taking advantage of economies of scale in commissioning and procurement, sharing negotiation and contracts to get best value for money for people in Derbyshire;
- Developing strategy and policy collaboratively, recognising there will be instances where a localised approach is needed; and
- Viewing organisational transformation as a means to an end in achieving better outcomes for people and places in Derbyshire.

- 8.18 A new formal governance model to support effective decision making has also been identified as being crucial in taking the approach forward. The new governance model would see the creation of a new Joint Committee for Vision Derbyshire. The format of this committee will depend on the areas chosen for collaboration. This will emerge as the programme of work is established.
- 8.19 The leaders are in the process of identifying priority areas to accelerate delivery and take forward case for change. There have been three pilot projects that have been implemented over the last few months in line with the COVID-19 pandemic response. These provide for examples of how issues can be tackled collaboratively moving forward. The pilots are as follows:
- Communication / Engagement
 - Community Recovery
 - Economic Recovery
- 8.20 The case for change includes flagship projects and 2 year road map/10 year milestones for each ambition. The flagship projects are detailed below:

Seize innovation

- Partnerships in-place with education institutions to develop knowledge-based innovation, support new industries, and raise skill levels, and with businesses to incubate and harness SME innovation.
- Agreement with our regional counterparts on the key future industries for our place, and a corresponding Derbyshire economic strategy that attracts inward investment in key technologies and innovation.

Establish relentless ambition

- Partnerships with academic institutions, and have mapped innovative career pathways for young people in Derbyshire.
- A Social Mobility Commission, with agreed county-wide initiatives to work on with partners, aimed at raising young people's aspirations.

Build proactive communities

- A joint framework for how councils and communities work together, and will have key community assets mapped across the whole county.
- A framework for learning setup at the local, county and regional levels to adopt best-practices and share successes.
- County-wide strategy to support community-led adult education

Live and work sustainably

- Joint strategic housing plan across the county based on modelling of future population demand and industries.
- Green public transport gateways developed to access the national park.
- Jointly prioritised procurement of green technologies.
- A regional forum set up to understand how to tackle climate change across the regions.
- Incubation spaces for green entrepreneurs to help them obtain grants/funding.

- 8.21 Consideration is also being made to identify a small number of areas to commence accelerated delivery. The overall approach will move Vision Derbyshire into implementation phase, support the development of a team and develop future governance arrangements
- 8.22 A number of 'asks' and offers to central Government to support the realisation of ambitions have been identified. The 'asks' request specific freedoms, flexibilities and resources to deliver identified priorities, whilst the offers outline the role the partnership will play in delivering better, more ambitious outcomes for less resource.
- 8.23 With a shared commitment and strong governance across all Derbyshire councils, the case for change argues that, collectively, the councils can rapidly transform the way they work together and what they offer to local people. At the heart of the case for change is the belief that strong commitment to strategic collaboration can improve outcomes and realise financial efficiencies, delivering the benefits of reorganisation without the administrative burden, financial cost, time delays and political upheaval.
- 8.24 As the Vision Derbyshire programme of work develops there will be the need for the Council to consider all of the proposals in some detail. This will include the consideration of any proposed joint committee arrangements, which would also require approval by a full council meeting.

9 Impact of Vision Derbyshire on the Strategic Alliance with Staffordshire Moorlands DC

- 9.1 The Vision Derbyshire case for change involves HPBC committing to collaboration with the other Derbyshire authorities. It is accepted that this will take a number of forms.
- 9.2 The strategic alliance with Staffordshire Moorlands is very much focussed on service collaboration where services provided to residents and businesses are delivered by one structure across the two districts.
- 9.3 The early work proposed in the Vision Derbyshire programme will not be focussed on service collaboration. The initial focus and flagship projects are centred on strategic collaboration which in essence will involve active district participation in shaping county wide strategies on challenges such as economic growth, improvement of skills etc.
- 9.4 The achievement of the ambitions of Vision Derbyshire will also require successful administrative and policy collaboration with other public sector providers throughout the county and region. If successful this will lead to deeper health and social care integration, joined up education and skills provision, and cross public sector asset and workforce planning which in turn will result in enhanced outcomes and significant financial benefits.

- 9.5 Staffordshire Moorlands has arrangements in its own county and region for strategic collaboration and wider cross public sector working in this form which will not be impacted by Vision Derbyshire.
- 9.6 Vision Derbyshire may result in service collaboration amongst the districts and boroughs although it is accepted that this will more than likely occur in clusters as opposed to being pan-county. There are already examples where districts in Derbyshire collaborate in this way including in North East Derbyshire and Bolsover where there is already a strategic alliance with significant shared service arrangements.
- 9.7 Vision Derbyshire does not in any way commit High Peak to move away from the strategic alliance with Staffordshire Moorlands. It may even provide for opportunities in the appropriate circumstances for both councils to further benefit from economies of scale in the future through service collaboration.
- 9.8 The existence of the strategic alliance has been factored into the assessment of the organisational savings made in the Vision Derbyshire case for change. For example, the assessment of potential financial benefits from future shared management of services amongst Derbyshire districts and boroughs excludes High Peak's costs in order to recognise that these have already been significantly reduced through the shared arrangements with Staffordshire Moorlands.

10 Devolution and Local Recovery White Paper / Local Government Reorganisation

- 10.1 In the October 2019 Queen's Speech, the government pledged to publish a white paper setting out how it would 'unleash regional potential' in England. In the 2019 Conservative election manifesto, this commitment was reiterated, alongside a commitment to deliver "full devolution across England...so that every part of our country has the power to shape its own destiny."
- 10.2 The government subsequently promised that the English devolution white paper would be published in September 2020. Speaking at the LGA annual conference in July, Simon Clarke MP, the then Minister for Regional Growth and Local Government, confirmed the Government's intention to press ahead with the publication of their white paper on devolution and local recovery this autumn. He stated that 'the white paper will connect local recovery with levelling up which will encompass a much wider and more radical re-think of the way that communities are supported at a local level'. Their intention is to reduce regional inequalities.
- 10.3 Whilst the formal content of the White Paper is still not yet known, there was widespread speculation that the Government would set out its proposals for local government structural reform in England along with setting out the role which greater devolution will play in national recovery.

- 10.4 More recently it has been widely reported that the white paper on devolution and local recovery has been shelved until next year as the government prioritises battling COVID-19.
- 10.5 In October in a Written Ministerial Statement, the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government formally issued invitations to principal councils in Cumbria, North Yorkshire and Somerset, including associated existing unitary councils, to submit proposals for moving to unitary local government.
- 10.6 In the statement, the Government's policy position on the issue of local government reorganisation was reconfirmed. It was highlighted that the government accepts that locally-led changes to the structure of local government, whether in the form of unitarisation or district mergers, can be an appropriate means of improving local service delivery, saving taxpayers' money and improving local accountability. The Secretary of State confirmed that restructuring is only one of the different ways that councils can streamline and make savings. Joint working with other councils and partners can take a variety of forms ranging from adopting joint plans, setting up joint committees, sharing back office services or special purpose vehicles to promote regeneration. Such joint working may extend across county boundaries. Councils' general power of competence under the Localism Act 2011 makes it easier for councils to get on with sharing services.
- 10.7 The Secretary of State also confirmed that the Government will not impose top-down restructuring of local government and will continue to follow a locally-led approach for unitarisation where councils can develop proposals which have strong local support. He reiterated that this has been the Government's consistent approach since 2010, when top-down restructuring was stopped through the Local Government Act 2010. When considering reform, those in an area will know what is best – the very essence of localism to which the Government remains committed.

11 District Councils Network's Position

- 11.1 Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, HPBC has been working closely with other district councils through the District Council Network (DCN) to share experiences and to obtain support in the challenges faced in respect of the required response and the preparations for recovery.
- 11.2 These networking events have also provided the opportunity to discuss a number of significant policy changes that have been proposed by the Government throughout the pandemic period e.g. the changes made to the local planning process and the consultations that have taken place.
- 11.3 The Government's emerging position on the impending white paper and the announcements in July of its intention to link the devolution proposals to the recovery from COVID-19 focused the attention of the network to establish a position on the issue.

- 11.4 Consequently on 1st September the DCN published “Power in Place, devolution and districts driving our recovery”, which is the first in a series of reports that they will publish before the Devolution and Local Recovery White Paper. In publishing the paper the DCN issued two accompanying messages:
- Devolution should back the success of districts in delivery. It should not distract from the local recovery effort or reduce delivery capacity through forcing reorganisation into a less local, less agile, less responsive local government pushed by interests wanting county unitary councils everywhere; and
 - Local governance is a local matter, places must be free to decide how to organise services and to progress any kind of reform only where there is significant local agreement.
- 11.5 The paper makes 7 recommendations to Government calling for the White Paper to:
- Deliver genuine devolution that moves quickly to drive local growth;
 - Retain and build on the local capacity to deliver;
 - Empower real-world economies;
 - Continue to anchor local government in local communities;
 - Reject false arguments that bigger local government is better or cheaper local government;
 - Support strategic leadership across wider functional economic areas; and
 - Introduce an upper limit for the size of new unitary councils, in line with the principle of electoral equality.
- 11.6 On 15th October the DCN published a second report on devolution and local government reorganisation, ‘Bigger is not better: the evidenced case for keeping ‘local’ government’.
- 11.7 The report from Professor Colin Copus, Professor Steve Leach, and Associate Professor Alistair Jones at De Montfort University provides a rigorous assessment of over 300 pieces of independent research from around the world, which concludes that:
- Size of councils does not make a difference in quality or efficiency of services; and
 - Increases in the scale of councils does generally lead to falling public trust, falling engagement, and a reduced sense of belonging to their local area and council;
- 11.8 The report looks at a range of other issues, including a response to the County Council Network’s position by summarising 10 misconceptions pushed by voices wanting to create county unitary councils everywhere.

12 Proposed Way Forward

- 12.1 A key principle which has emerged through work on Vision Derbyshire is the recognition that the current two-tier structure of local government across the county can be strengthened to significantly improve outcomes for communities. Given the national focus on the 'levelling up' agenda, there is a pressing need to develop a new model of local government for Derbyshire that could meet all of the requirements to provide a platform for the planned devolution of powers from central government.
- 12.2 It is considered that Vision Derbyshire will provide a credible alternative to structural reform. It is believed that this approach would provide significant improvements in outcomes and will result in large scale system and organisational benefits without the cost and major disruption of reorganisation of the local authorities in Derbyshire.
- 12.3 The latest statement made by the Secretary State has made it clear that restructuring is only one of the different ways that councils can streamline and make savings. It is therefore expected that the Vision Derbyshire approach will be welcomed as a credible way forward.
- 12.4 It is therefore recommended that Executive approve Vision Derbyshire as its preferred option for local government reform at the current time.
- 12.5 Once a programme of work for Vision Derbyshire has been developed more detailed reports will need to be considered by the Council to assess the implications.
- 12.6 It is also important that the Council recognises the work undertaken by the District Councils Network (DCN) in the production of its report 'Power in Place, devolution and districts driving our recovery'. It is therefore proposed that the Executive endorse the network's call for proposals in the impending government white paper to back the success of district councils in delivery and not distract from the local recovery effort or reduce delivery capacity through forcing reorganisation.