

STAFFORDSHIRE MOORLANDS DISTRICT COUNCIL

Report to Cabinet

8th February 2022

TITLE:	Staffordshire Leaders Board / County Deal
PORTFOLIO HOLDER:	Cllr Sybil Ralphs – Leader
CONTACT OFFICER:	Andrew Stokes – Chief Executive
WARDS INVOLVED:	Non-Specific

Appendices Attached

Appendix A – Staffordshire Leaders Board- Constitution for the Joint Committee

1. Reason for the Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is consider the establishment of, and the Council's participation in, a Joint Committee of the local authorities in Staffordshire to explore opportunities for improved joint working and to develop and implement plans for devolution from Government through a County Deal

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 It is recommended that Cabinet:

- Agree to the establishment of, and the Council's participation in, the Staffordshire Leaders Board on the basis of the Terms of Reference set out in Appendix A to the report;
- Appoint the Leader as the County Council's representative on the Leaders Board.
- Appoint the Deputy Leader as the substitute for the Leader on the Leaders Board.

3. Executive Summary

- 3.1 Local authorities across England are awaiting the publication of the promised White Paper that will set out the Government's approach to devolution. The national landscape has recently shifted, with a move away from Devolution and Local Recovery to the Levelling Up agenda. It is anticipated that this

potentially will bring significant benefits to areas of the country including Staffordshire.

- 3.2 There is a necessity for all local authorities to put in place arrangements to position themselves at the forefront of these national developments. A key principle of the approach is to put in place a model to position Staffordshire at the forefront of securing a potential devolution deal which would potentially include new powers and funding.
- 3.3 More recent announcements by the Prime Minister, and the appointment of a Secretary of State for Levelling Up, have signalled a move towards the creation of County Deals and this presents significant opportunities for Staffordshire Councils to present a credible model to Government which builds on the significant co-operation and enhanced two-tier working that is already in place across the county.
- 3.4 Collaboration is at the heart of how the local authorities function in Staffordshire. There are a numerous examples of how the Councils, working together, across local government and with public and private partners locally, regionally and nationally, have contributed to making Staffordshire a great place to live, work and visit including the recent unified response to protect the most vulnerable and support those in need during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- 3.5 It is considered that this track record, and the solid foundations in place across the two-tier system, mean that Staffordshire is perfectly positioned to turn central government's Levelling Up agenda into reality. With or without devolution, the councils in Staffordshire are continuing to innovate, and work together, to make a positive difference for Staffordshire people.
- 3.6 At a meeting of the Leaders and Chief Executives of the County, District and Borough Councils in Staffordshire on the 2nd December 2021, the Leaders considered how the enhanced two tier working could be further enhanced with the support of a devolution deal ("County Deal") from Government providing additional powers and funding. A County Deal will accelerate delivery of the local authorities' ambitious programmes, improve public services, deliver on the Levelling Up agenda, and produce excellent returns for both the people of Staffordshire and the UK.
- 3.7 In order to drive this agenda forward, the Leaders recognised that the existing informal networking arrangements needed to be put on a more formal footing. The Leaders therefore decided to take back a proposal to each of their respective Cabinets proposing that their existing informal meetings are formalised as an Executive Joint Committee to be called the Staffordshire Leaders Board. The Leaders Board will consist of the Leader from each of the nine local authorities and will operate on the basis of one member, one vote. Scrutiny will be undertaken by each of the constituent authorities' own scrutiny arrangements.
- 3.8 The full Terms of Reference proposed for the Leaders Board are attached at Appendix A.

3.9 Once a detailed programme of work has been developed, more detailed reports will need to be considered by the Council to assess the implications.

4. How this report links to Corporate Priorities

4.1 The enhanced two-tier working approach delivered by the Staffordshire Leaders Board will potentially have a significant impact on the achievement of a number of the Council's corporate priorities

5. Alternative Options

5.1 There are no options to consider at this stage

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 immediate and significant financial implications arising from the establishment of the Leaders Board in itself. It is intended that it will derive its support from its constituent members. As and when individual projects are commissioned the board will give consideration to the resource requirements necessary to deliver those projects and the implications of this will need to be considered by the Council at that time.

6.5 Legal

The Joint Committee will act as a Joint Committee under Section 9EB of the Local Government Act 2000 and pursuant to Regulation 11 of the Local Authorities (Arrangement for the Discharge of Functions) (England) Regulations 2012.

6.6 Climate Change

Collaboration on climate change has been identified as one of the key areas for potential future focus for Staffordshire Leaders Board

6.7 Consultation

Not applicable

6.8 Risk Assessment
Not applicable at this stage

ANDREW P STOKES
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Web Links and
Background Papers

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7. Background and Introduction

- 7.1 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."
- 7.2 Local authorities across England are awaiting the publication of the promised White Paper that will set out the Government's approach to devolution. It is anticipated that this potentially will bring significant benefits to areas of the country, including Staffordshire, through the Government's commitment to the 'levelling up' agenda.
- 7.3 There has been lots of speculation about the content of the White Paper and how local authorities need to prepare for its implementation. There is a necessity for authorities to put in place arrangements to position themselves at the forefront of any national developments including securing a potential devolution deal and maximising additional resources into their area.
- 7.4 The national landscape has recently shifted, with a move away from Devolution and Local Recovery to Levelling Up. More recent announcements by the Prime Minister including the appointment of a Secretary of State for Levelling Up have signalled a move towards the creation of County Deals and this presents significant opportunities for Staffordshire councils to prepare to present a credible model to Government.
- 7.5 The purpose of this report is to consider the proposal to establish a Joint Committee of the local authorities in Staffordshire to explore opportunities for improved joint working and to develop and implement plans for devolution from Government through a County Deal.

8 Levelling Up White Paper

- 8.1 Following the October 2019 Queen's Speech, the government subsequently promised that the English devolution white paper would be published in September 2020. Speaking at the LGA annual conference in July 2020, 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 in the 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 being to reduce regional inequalities.
- 8.2 There followed lots of debate about contents of the white paper and the required structures to secure devolution deals in individual areas. In Summer 2020, 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.

- 8.3 In Autumn 2020, it was widely reported that the white paper on devolution and local recovery has been shelved until 2021 as the Government prioritised battling COVID-19.
- 8.4 In October 2020 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.
- 8.5 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. However, the Secretary of State confirmed that restructuring is only one of the different ways that councils can streamline and make savings. It was accepted that 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.
- 8.6 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.
- 8.7 The national landscape has recently shifted, with a move away from Devolution and Local Recovery to Levelling Up. In July 2021 the Prime Minister whilst setting out the proposed agenda for Levelling Up signalled a move towards the creation of County Deals.
- 8.8 It was outlined that new 'County Deals' would take devolution beyond the largest cities, offering the rest of England the same powers metro mayors have gained over things like transport, skills and economic support.
- 8.9 Further detail will be set out in the Levelling Up White Paper, but as the Prime Minister set out, county deals will not be one size fits all, and government will take a flexible approach to allow more places to agree devolution.

- 8.10 Reduced public sector funding and increasing demand for services driven by demographics and long standing social, health and economic pressures mean that the Council, like many other authorities across the country, continues to face significant challenges in providing the services that local people need and want with available resources. The resulting impact of the pandemic on the national economy is likely to be significant and the anticipated financial shock on public finances will place local government under increasing pressures to deliver services with increasing demand and reduced resources.
- 8.11 Based on existing deals, a County Deal for Staffordshire could incorporate directly devolved investment in infrastructure, skills, transport and housing. Such investment would be of vital importance in enabling the local and regional economy to recover from the pandemic for the benefit of local people.
- 8.12 Given the anticipated publication of the forthcoming Levelling-Up White Paper, which was initially expected in Autumn 2021, many county councils are actively considering their routes to securing a County Deal. Government are currently in discussions with a number of authorities across the country and it is expected that the Government will invite a small number of these to be pilot areas.

9 Two-tier Working in Staffordshire

- 9.1 Collaboration is at the heart of how the local authorities function in Staffordshire. There are a number of highlights of how the Councils, working together, across local government and with public and private partners locally, regionally and nationally, have contributed to making Staffordshire a great place to live, work and visit:
- **Covid-19** – the unified response protected the most vulnerable and supported those in need. Notable successes include supplying food to the most vulnerable in the Staffordshire communities, PPE support to care providers and targeted action in hotspot areas
 - **Creating jobs and opportunities** – working together and across county borders to deliver nationally important employment sites and supporting businesses and the local economy to recover from Covid, through a countywide package of support– Staffordshire Means Back to Business.
 - **Town Centre regeneration** – reimagining and reshaping our High Streets and Town Centres
 - **Waste** – the county can boast zero waste to landfill in Staffordshire thanks to its strong Waste Partnership. The Partnership has led local efforts to reduce waste, and maximise reuse, recovery and recycling. It has also, through joint procurement exercises, produced significant efficiencies and economies of scale across Staffordshire.
- 9.2 It is considered that this track record, and the solid foundations in place across the two-tier system, mean that Staffordshire is perfectly positioned to turn central government's Levelling Up agenda into reality. With additional

responsibility and funding, much more can be achieved, and faster, for the people of Staffordshire, surrounding areas, and the country.

9.3 With or without devolution, the councils in Staffordshire are continuing to innovate, and work together, to make a positive difference for Staffordshire people. All of the local authorities are united in their desire to enhance and strengthen two-tier working. The Staffordshire Leaders and Chief Executives are committed to working together on key priorities in 2022, including:

- Climate Change – bringing together strategies, skills and expertise for reaching Net Zero.
- Waste – strengthening the waste partnership, exploring greater collaboration on waste collection, and improve recycling.
- Economy – continuing to create the right conditions for economic growth, and the creation of more, better-paid jobs and opportunities for the people of Staffordshire.
- Improving Public Services – Making it as simple and easy for the people of Staffordshire to interact and engage with local public services.
- Health Inequalities –In support of the establishment of the Integrated Care System and the Health and Wellbeing Board, there is an opportunity for local government partners in Staffordshire to work better, together to tackle many issues that have a significant impact on health, such as housing, parks and open spaces, leisure centres and employment.

10 Developing a County Deal for Staffordshire

10.1 At a meeting of the Leaders and Chief Executives of the County, District and Borough Councils in Staffordshire on the 2nd December 2021 the Leaders considered how the enhanced two tier working could be further enhanced with the support of a devolution deal (“County Deal”) from Government providing additional powers and funding.

10.2 The Leaders also considered how a County Deal might support joint working within Staffordshire. It was felt that a County Deal should not be seen as a one-off bid, but the start of a new, ongoing dialogue with central government, that builds on Staffordshire’s strengths, and addresses national challenges at a local level. A County Deal will accelerate delivery of the local authorities’ ambitious programmes, improve public services, deliver on the Levelling Up agenda, and produce excellent returns for both the people of Staffordshire and the UK.

10.3 Initially, the Leaders agreed to focus on the following priorities:

- Climate Change – To place Staffordshire as a leading location for the green economy.
- Social Care – To address recruitment pressures in care, ease the pressure on the NHS, and develop innovative solutions that allow Staffordshire people to stay independent, healthy and living at home, for as long as possible.

- Logistics – To support the Logistics sector to be innovative, cleaner, greener and higher value.

10.4 In order to allow Staffordshire to achieve the above, a full range of additional powers and funding would be required from Government. In exchange for these powers Staffordshire would deliver significant benefits for the people of Staffordshire and beyond, making a significant contribution to the Levelling Up agenda. This would include a significant increase in the number of local green economy jobs, a carbon neutral Staffordshire, and transformed logistics and social care sectors,

10.5 In order to drive this agenda forward the Leaders recognised that the existing informal networking arrangements needed to be put on a more formal footing. They decided that a Joint Committee would provide them with a vehicle that has the status and authority to speak to Government on behalf of the nine authorities, and that has the ability to make decisions itself to drive the existing joint working forward.

10.6 The Leaders therefore decided to take back a proposal to each of their respective Cabinets proposing that their existing informal meetings are formalised as an Executive Joint Committee to be called the Staffordshire Leaders Board. The remit of the Leaders Board will be to:

- a. Lead and oversee the development of a county devolution deal for Staffordshire with the Government.
- b. Lead and oversee the alignment of relevant local authority action on Climate Change, Waste and Sustainability.
- c. Lead and oversee the alignment of relevant local authority plans for Enterprise and Government Funding and Investment streams.
- d. Lead and oversee the alignment of local authority interaction with the Health sector in Staffordshire.
- e. Lead and oversee the alignment of relevant local authority plans for future Infrastructure.
- f. Lead and oversee the alignment of relevant local authority plans in relation to Housing and Homelessness.
- g. Initiate, lead and oversee Staffordshire-wide joint initiatives to enhance local government efficiency and effectiveness.
- h. Act as a local public sector decision-making body for strategic economic growth.
- i. Act as a conduit to other sub-regional and regional bodies such as the Local Enterprise Partnerships and the Midlands Engine.
- j. Where appropriate, agree shared priorities and bids for funding to existing and new funding sources such as Local Growth Funds and the Shared Prosperity Fund.
- k. Monitor and evaluate projects and programmes of activity commissioned directly by the Committee.
- l. Communicate and, where unanimously agreed, to align activity across Staffordshire on a range of other key public priorities that affect citizens.
- m. Prioritise and make decisions on the use of the funding that the Committee may influence or control.

- 10.7 The Leaders Board will consist of the Leader from each of the nine local authorities and will operate on the basis of one member, one vote.
- 10.8 Scrutiny will be undertaken by each of the constituent authorities' own scrutiny arrangements.
- 10.9 The arrangements make provision for the Board to admit Stoke-on-Trent City Council to its membership as an equal member in the future.
- 10.10 The full Terms of Reference proposed for the Leaders Board are attached at Appendix A.

11 Proposed Way Forward

- 11.1 A key principle which has emerged through the existing strong two-tier working in Staffordshire 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 Staffordshire that could meet all of the requirements to provide a platform for the planned devolution of powers from central government.
- 11.2 More recent statements made by Government have 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 approach proposed by the Staffordshire Leaders will be welcomed as a credible way forward.
- 11.3 It is therefore recommended that Cabinet approve the proposed approach set out in this report. Once a programme of work has been developed more detailed reports will need to be considered by the Council to assess the implications.