

Blaby District Council

Cabinet Executive

Date of Meeting	13 January 2025
Title of Report	Local Government Reorganisation and Devolution This is a Key Decision and not on the Forward Plan This is an Urgent Report.
Lead Member	Cllr. Terry Richardson - Leader of the Council
Report Author	Chief Executive
Strategic Themes	Ambitious and well managed Council, valuing our people

1. Explanation for Urgency

- 1.1 This report has not been included in the last Forward Plan. It is a Key Decision. The matter has become apparent since the publication of the Forward Plan and requires consideration by the Cabinet for transparency purposes and to ensure effective decision making. Therefore, it is impracticable to defer the decision on this report until after the operative date of the next Forward Plan on which it could appear. Accordingly, the Cases of Special Urgency Procedure contained in Part 4 Section 2 Paragraph 10 of the Constitution has been invoked to enable its consideration. Agreement has been obtained from the Scrutiny Commission Chairman pursuant to the Constitution that the decision is urgent and cannot reasonably be deferred. A notice has been published on the Council's website and displayed at the Council Offices.

2. What is this report about?

- 2.1 This report seeks to provide an update regarding the actions and discussions taken to date in response to the Government's English Devolution White Paper and gives delegated authority to the Leader of the Council and the Chief Executive to take decisions and take part in discussions to influence and comment on proposals.

3. Recommendation(s) to Cabinet Executive

- 3.1 That the content of the English Devolution White Paper and the Government's intention to create unitary authorities as well as the current position in Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland is noted.
- 3.2 That the creation of a Mayoral Strategic Authority for Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland where there is a satisfactory outcome for local government organisation under the new Strategic Authority (SA) is supported.

- 3.3 That delegated authority is given to the Leader of the Council and the Chief Executive to engage with other local authorities, the government and relevant partners to develop the proposal to create a Mayoral Strategic Authority and develop options relating to local government re-organisation to ensure that Blaby District Council and its residents are represented as far as possible in ongoing discussions with the Government.
- 3.4 To release an initial £50,000 from reserves to support work arising from the White Paper.
- 3.5 To note that further reports will be brought to Cabinet and Council to consider the implications for the Council and our communities as a result of proposals.

4. Reason for Decisions Recommended

- 4.1 The position of Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland in relation to Local Government Reorganisation and Devolution is changing rapidly, the current position is noted.
- 4.2 To enable a dynamic approach to the changing environment it is necessary for delegated Authority to be given to ensure Blaby District residents are engaged and represented.
- 4.3 Further reports will be presented to members for debate, consideration and transparency.
- 4.4 To enable expenditure to ensure we are responsive to key issues and able to contribute to work on behalf of all Districts in Leicestershire.
- 4.5 To ensure members are engaged and informed.

5. Matters to consider

5.1 Background

The English Devolution White Paper was published on 16 December 2024. The White Paper sets out the Government's plans for changes to local government in England to extend devolution powers and funding.

It includes a programme for local government reorganisation for two-tier areas, such as Leicestershire.

The English Devolution Bill is intended to be brought forward by the Government, to devolve some Central Government powers to Mayoral Strategic Authorities.

The Government has set out a clear intent for Strategic Authorities, where a number of councils work together, covering areas that people recognise and work in, such as what we have seen recently with the East Midlands Combined County Authority.

The White Paper states that all remaining two-tier areas and smaller unitary councils will be expected to develop proposals for reorganisation, with all councils working to develop unitary proposals in the best interests of the whole area as swiftly as possible.

The overall timetable for the proposals set out in the White Paper remains to be confirmed, though those within what is termed a priority programme will be invited to submit draft proposals by March 2025 and final proposals by May 2025, with remaining areas required to submit their plans by autumn 2025.

Leicestershire County Council have written to the Government indicating their preference to be on the Priority Programme and in favour of a 2 Unitary model for Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland (combining District and County functions into 2 new Unitary Authorities). They have also sought permission to delay the County Council Elections planned for May 2025.

It is intended that any new unitary councils must be the right size to achieve efficiencies, improve capacity and withstand financial shock. The indicative aim is populations of 500,000 or more but there may be exceptions to ensure new structures make sense for an area, including for devolution, and decisions will be on a case-by-case basis.

The current views of the Cabinet are:

That Blaby District Council welcomes the opportunity for devolution of powers and funding from central government to the region as a good way to secure investment and stimulate economic growth within our communities.

That Blaby District Council shares the view of other district and borough councils in Leicestershire, that a population of 500,000 would be too big to be able to provide good local services to local people, especially in rural areas. We need to ensure local government remains local.

That a 3 Unitary model for Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland would ensure that services are delivered on a local, more targeted level to provide better outcomes for our residents and businesses.

That the Council will work hard to ensure that it gets the best for its communities.

That the Council would like to work collaboratively with other partners to develop proposals that work for Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland and that make sense to local people.

5.2 Proposal(s)

The proposals are dealt with in Paragraph 3 of this report and seek to ensure that decisions can be taken in a dynamic and appropriate way giving delegated Authority to the Leader of the Council and the Chief Executive to continue to engage with the current processes detailed by the government and comment and make decisions in order to ensure that Blaby District Council and its residents are represented.

5.3 Significant Issues

In preparing this report, the author has considered issues related to Human Rights, Legal Matters, Human Resources, Equalities, Public Health Inequalities and there are no areas of concern as a direct impact from this report.

6. Environmental impact

6.1 None arising directly from this report

7. What will it cost and are there opportunities for savings?

7.1 The purpose of this report is to identify the authority needed for engagement. With this in mind an amount of £50,000 is requested to enable key pieces of work to be commissioned, this is likely to be in partnership with other District and Borough Councils in Leicestershire. The Resource implications associated with the Change Management and any future Organisation and structure will be considered in future Council and Cabinet reports.

8. What are the risks and how can they be reduced?

8.1 The risks below are limited to engagement in the process identified and not on the risks associated with any Unitary or Combined Authority going forward.

Current Risk	Actions to reduce the risks
That no consensus on local government arrangements for Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland which may result in imposed arrangements.	Continued engagement with the other Councils in Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland
Local Services could be impacted negatively	It is noted that during any period of change our services need to continue to be delivered in the best interests of Blaby District residents, Resources will be directed as appropriate and any additional resource be sourced.

Resource implications to continue to deliver services during a period of change	The Council will ensure that resources are directed appropriately and reserves utilised to ensure that there is as little impact on service delivery as possible during a period of change.
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9. Other options considered

- 9.1 Not seeking Delegated Authority is not considered appropriate to ensure openness and transparency.

10. Appendix

- 10.1 None

11. Background paper(s)

[English Devolution White Paper - GOV.UK](#)

12. Report author's contact details

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