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Minutes of a meeting of the Council of the Bolsover District Council held in the Council Chamber, The Arc, Clowne on Wednesday, 23 March 2022 at 10:00 hours.

PRESENT:-

Members:-

Councillor Tom Munro in the Chair

Councillors Rita Turner (Vice-Chair), Derek Adams, Allan Bailey, Rose Bowler, Anne Clarke, Nick Clarke, Tricia Clough, Paul Cooper, David Dixon, Maxine Dixon, Mary Dooley, David Downes, Steve Fritchley, Hales, Ray Heffer, Andrew Joesbury, Chris Kane, Duncan McGregor, Clive Moesby, Liz Smyth, Janet Tait, Deborah Watson and Jen Wilson.

Officers:- Karen Hanson (Executive Director - Resources), Pam Brown (Assistant Director Leader's Executive, Partnerships and Communications), Theresa Fletcher (Assistant Director Finance and Resources), Jim Fieldsend (Interim Monitoring Officer) and Alison Bluff (Governance Officer).

CL91-21/22 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillors Jim Clifton, Stan Fox, Natalie Hoy, Tom Kirkham, Peter Roberts and Sandra Peake.

CL92-21/22 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations made at the meeting.

War in Ukraine

The Leader informed the meeting that Bolsover District Council was doing all it could to support the people who had been displaced in escaping the war in the Ukraine. One or two families had expressed an interest in coming to the District and the Leader and Head of Paid Service would keep Members informed.

CL93-21/22 LOCAL GOVERNMENT REFORM - LEVELLING UP

Councillor Steve Fritchley, Leader of the Council

This the third time I have brought my concerns about the future structure of Local Government before you.

First it was Vision Derbyshire and secondly the then proposed White Paper on Levelling Up.

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The discussion on Vision Derbyshire was based on a 'Price Waterhouse Cooper' study commissioned by Derbyshire County Council. I was immediately fearful of the loss of sovereignty and associated jobs that it entailed and you all shared my concern.

Our decision meant that the proposed Vision Derbyshire, which was supposedly, "just waiting for Bolsover District Council to agree", put other district authorities off as well.

However, as I understand it, not all councils have or are debating the County deal or the White Paper but I feel it should be in front of us all – you should feel free to say what you want, whether you support it, whether you don't support it, whether you need more clarification and so on.

So it is a deal between government and County – we aren't consulted on this, we have no input into this but you still need to be able to make your feelings known.

Personally, I think we are at the beginning of what may prove to be a major event in the future of Local Government and you should all be aware of it. I understand that the County Council have until Friday to submit their template to the government for consideration.

Whilst I am a believer in project collaboration that aims to produce an end product, I cannot reconcile myself, and neither can Duncan, to reductions in services and job losses and my views are supported by the 3 main Unions; GMB, Unite, Unison, and I have letters to that affect here today.

We need to discuss the ramifications of "Vision Derbyshire", and I refer to Vision Derbyshire because that was the structure that the County bid was based on. So we need to discuss the ramifications of Vision Derbyshire and the "Levelling Up" White Paper and the politics of either being a party to, or otherwise of, what "might be".

I want us to talk about the positives of collaboration, we've been doing it for years, and the negatives that are providing the impetus for change:

- For a number of years local authorities have relied more and more on the Revenue Support Grant (RSG) to balance the budget. The main ingredients of authorities' income are Council Tax, NNDR and RSG.
- The limitation on Council Tax increases have essentially controlled the amount of income in that respect.
- The reduction in RSG support is adding to the squeeze.
- The financial security, or even insecurity, from the above has, to some degree, been mitigated by adjustments to the NNDR pool but will not continue.

This forces Local Authorities to reduce expenditure through efficiency savings which has meant staff reductions etc. The easiest solution during this time had been collaboration and shared services – the Bolsover District Council and North East Derbyshire District Council Strategic Alliance is a good example. Over time it produced shared office responsibility but remains essentially part-time working.

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This potentially creates a conflict of loyalty and places the Officer in an invidious position. This would of course be magnified over a county wide or even greater operation.

This ultimately reduces the ability to continue to provide the expected service to residents or, for non-mandatory services, make the operation unsustainable and put more financial pressure on the overall budget.

We, at Bolsover, believe that creating additional income will compensate for the continuous control and squeeze on local authority budgets, therefore, maintaining services.

Collaboration/joint ventures etc. can help with this too; as well as, I might add, by creating jobs in all areas. So, working together on projects can be profitable and I am in full support of these beneficial ventures.

The practicalities of the decision by Government to reduce expenditure mean decisions have to be made on cutting costs and the easiest way in most cases is to reduce staff. That is something we don't want to do.

Some authorities believe that by putting services out to tender to the private sector is a possible solution. Others just slash services and jobs. In the present and in my opinion, the Government want to do just that, but they would much rather force/encourage local authorities to do the job for them, hence "Vision Derbyshire" and "Levelling Up".

There had been a rush by DCC to approach Mr Jenrick, the then Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, before the White Paper was published.

You will remember in the "impact of Vision Derbyshire" that savings will be made by reducing "back room" staff and duplicated management and the figures quoted by Price, Waterhouse, Coopers equate to a thousand or so job losses and a reduction in services to local residents. You will draw your own conclusions.

I can understand why some Derbyshire Leaders, whatever their political colour, have signed up to this; some authorities are in more of a predicament than others, having been squeezed financially over the years. Some also have doubts about future liabilities and being part of a larger organisation may give them some comfort.

We all understand the position of County Councils. Their parlous state could be due to the gradual erosion of their mandatory responsibilities and less financial support. There is an argument that bigger is better, that there is economy of scale in a larger organisation – the government would of course find it a lot easier to deal with a mayor than a few dozen leaders and MPs, and in a city or group of large towns, I can see some sense in that. However, as I have said before this District and many others are semi-rural so I'm not sure that by creating any sort of mayoral combined unitary authority will solve the problems of local government fulfilling their mandatory responsibilities, satisfying the expectations of the tax payer and maintaining democratic representation.

I've called this extraordinary meeting to enable us all to try and make sense of the

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smoke and mirror approach to reorganisation that is creating instability.

In today's world where everyone is painfully aware of what could be a burgeoning political and economic melt-down, our residents will want to rely on a known and reliable structure so I believe this to be the wrong time to de-stabilise local government in today's society.

So what is on offer?

It depends who you listen to - the short answer is make your own mind up.

You've got the white paper on levelling up.

Does it all make sense?

So Levelling Up, Unitary Authorities and Vision Derbyshire.

We all need to understand what it means for the future of our residents and our staff.

1 – the government favourite is a mayoral combined unitary authority. It may also be the favourite of the cities across Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire and it may be the desire of the counties too. Some may well think it is the only way and that efficiencies must be made.

2 – there is no extra cash for either option 1 or 2 so any changes will mean job losses. The Minister for Levelling Up, Neil O'Brien, said in the Municipal Journal, "there is no level 2.5". Which is essentially what the County bid is.

What they are saying is; no Mayor - no devolution, no devolution - no cash! Why anyone would want additional responsibility with no additional resources is beyond me.

A combined authority – what is it and what does it mean? For local representation and the delivery of essential and locally preferred services – I don't know what it means, except that it might be diminished. This needs to be completely understood by all the decision makers. That's everyone in here – we're all making this decision. There's no way back!

1 - perhaps not all leaders are supportive of any of the above. Some may be acquiescent to parts or elements of what they think the proposals mean. Equally, I don't think many authorities other than Bolsover have debated any of the proposals to date.

2 – there is also uncertainty of the consequences of any changes. I well remember a visit from Price Waterhouse Cooper in 2019 seeking my opinion on 'non-structural reform' which was commissioned and being developed for Derbyshire County Council. They produced the 'case for change' that DCC incorporated into their Vision Derbyshire.

3 – at the time it meant at least 1500 job losses and £50m redundancy costs. It may well mean more under the current suggestions.

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4 – there has been a reference to Leicester being part of this regional authority. Not sure about that either.

5 – the government have made it quite clear that a county deal is a deal with counties only and I said earlier the County has to submit its plans by Friday.

Bolsover District Council is keen to demonstrate to our residents that only we are capable of maintaining services and creating a vision for the future with Council homes, industrial units, business support and future plans for further growth and other infrastructure projects either current or planned.

1 – we have rewarded staff for the commitment, loyalty and flexibility during the recent difficult few years and are maintaining our pledge of no compulsory redundancies.

2 – we have kept the public informed over the years through our In Touch magazine, local parish gazettes, and of course Bolsover TV.

3 – we have also maintained and improved services even through the lockdown period.

This seamless buying back of the recycling operation is a good example of progress by an Authority in tune with a changing world especially in really difficult times.

Grant can't be here but he has used technology and has sent us a presentation by a video recording. I've also asked Duncan to give us a recap on what Bolsover District Council has done regarding representation and achievement.

This is not party political – it is purely and simply a debate on what the government is proposing – it's not concrete – the government is yet to decide whether any proposal stacks up. I was asked yesterday why we were having this debate and I said because our Councillors need to know what's happening and I know that not all councils are doing this. So I'd like now to listen to what Karen and Grant have to say.

Karen Hanson, Executive Director – Resources.

The White Paper was long awaited – heard lots of rumours about it leading up to its publication – there were lots of things being said about what it would and wouldn't include – how far it would go, how deep it would go into the changes around local government. However, on the 2nd February, it was published and it's a very hefty document nearly 300 pages long. There is a link to it online. Members could have a printed copy on request.

The White Paper covers various aspects of the levelling up agenda – you'll be aware that a government department has been created around it and ministers have been put in place to lead on it and it is a big piece of work for local government. It creates a new devolution framework which will be covered in Grant's presentation – through the powers of IT, Grant will be with us this morning as he has recorded his presentation because there is a lot of local aspects that he wanted to share with you this morning. So it covers a new devolution framework, a new independent data body and a new levelling up advisory council. The new independent data body in England will be focused on data transparency and robust evidence to empower citizens with

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as much information as possible about their local area to strengthen local leaders' knowledge of their services and to share best practice and to increase the central government's understanding on how local government works. The new levelling up advisory council will provide independent expert advice on all matters relating to the design and the delivery of the levelling up agenda. The document also contains 12 new missions and it's a very large part of the White Paper. They are centred around 4 main areas which are;

- Boosting productivity and living standards
- Spreading opportunity and improving public services
- Restoring a sense of community, local pride and belonging
- Empowering local leaders and communities

The 12 new missions are all about closing the gap between the best performing and the worst performing areas across the country.

The devolution framework for England will be explained in a lot more detail in Grant's presentation. It extends beyond the previous areas around the metropolitan areas for the very first time. It's available for every area that wants one and it sets out a pathway to obtain a devolution deal across every area and is underpinned by the 4 key principles.

The devolution deal itself has the 4 principles of effective leadership, a sensible geography which is quite difficult to understand in the document itself. It talks about different types of geography – it talks about an FEA a lot, which is a Functional Economic Area. It also talks about county areas and combined authority areas and different types of geography which may or may not be appropriate. What it does say is that those geographies, those areas do need to be appropriate for individual councils', individual parts of the country.

It must be flexible and able to move on. I think what the White Paper is saying is that if you start off at a level 1 or a level 2, you could potentially move up the ladder to level 3 and stay where you are – it requires and requests flexibility around the future of local government. It also talks a lot about accountability providing clear roles, scrutiny mechanisms and aims to lead and be able to demonstrate improvement.

The White Paper is also extending an invitation for county deals. This piece of work has been going on for some time – you'll be aware that we have already discussed it a couple of times here in Council about what that might mean for the East Midlands area but also for Derbyshire, Derby and specifically what it might mean for Bolsover District.

There are 9 areas identified within the levelling up White Paper where a county deal may be possible – I've listed them on the screen and you'll see that Derby and Derbyshire is the second on the list. What will happen is that each of those 9 have been requested to complete a template to explain what they want, how they want to take it forward and the government will choose 3 or 4 of those areas to take forward in the first tranche and then will move on to the remaining ones at a later date in 7 years' time.

So how will it work - within the White Paper it is saying it is a simplified system enabling every area to access it – it seeks to legislate a form of new combined

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authority. The arrangements and the relationships and the contracts will be with upper tier local authorities. A single accountable institution across an FEA or a whole county geography - and district councils can become non constituent members but aren't really decision making bodies around the table – and the expectation is that county councils will work very closely with district councils on these arrangements.

At the end of my presentation, I will explain how the district councils network are lobbying very hard to increase the voice of district councils to improve what they have got in the levelling up White Paper in terms of the amount of influence they've got around the arrangements.

It's quite a complex technical document in some aspects and it requires a little bit of consideration around what it all means – there are 3 levels of options and there is a table in the document itself which lists the functions, how it will work and whether they fall within the level 1, 2 or 3 deal. It recognises that a 'one size fits all' approach probably won't work - it's a stepped approach and it sets out the powers and functions available for each level. There is scope to negotiate further and as we have just heard from the Leader, the level 3 deal has the largest set of powers but does require a directly elected mayor.

12 missions within an 8 year timeframe, so it's asking that by 2030, these things will be achieved or will be in progress to achieve. All of them are dealing with closing the gap between the highest and lowest performing areas across the whole of England.

So it talks about pay, employment and productivity having risen with the gap between the top and lowest performing areas closing. Domestic public investment in research and development will have increased by 40% outside of the greater south east area. Local public transport connectivity will be significantly closer to the standards of London, and the UK will have improved broadband and 4G coverage with the possibility of 5G for the majority of the population. Closing the gap on primary school achievement across the country and a significant increase in the successful completion of high quality skills training.

From those first 6, you can see why they are wanting to set up the new data body because they will be required to do an awful lot of work around capturing the data, tracking the improvements, and being able to evidence where that gap has or hasn't closed and where those efforts need to be placed across the whole of the country.

The second 6 are around healthy life expectancy and increasing that by 5 years but also narrowing the gap. The wellbeing will have improved in every area of the UK. Pride in place and satisfaction in town centres. Engagement and local culture to have risen in every area. Renters, and I know from Bolsover's perspective, private sector housing has always been and will continue to be a priority for the Cabinet here and for Council. So that renters have a secure pathway to home ownership, and that non-decent homes will have fallen by at least 50% but at Bolsover, I know we aim to do more than that if we can. Homicide, serious violence, crime and disorder will have fallen, and that every part of England that wants one will be able to access the devolution deal I mentioned earlier.

The District Councils Network, which is a network of all district councils, this is an extremely important piece of work for them. They will look at the county deals and they have included every single district which is affected by the first 9 pathway areas

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and Bolsover is included in that, so meetings are already taking place across the District Councils Network to look at and to try and secure greater influence and voice in those county deal discussions which have started.

The Network is saying that there are positives to take from the White Paper, level of ambition, economic prosperity, and pride but it does underplay the valuable contribution of district councils. That there is no formal role for district councils in the county deal arrangements and that districts are critical in the delivery of those 12 missions, and the outcomes for local people. The districts need a much fuller role to preserve and enhance the influence of the councils in the key areas of policy development and in establishing the framework around county deals and devolution generally. The Network goes on to say that district councils have a really good story to tell, strong local links and all the things that you are fully familiar with. Councillor Duncan McGregor will be speaking later in this meeting to really give some evidence on what we have achieved around that really good story to tell at a local level.

Pre-recorded presentation by Grant Galloway, Executive Director of Strategy and Development

Members received a pre-recorded presentation from the Executive Director of Strategy and Development who could not be in attendance at the meeting.

County Deal, Vision Derbyshire, Combined Authority, Unitary Authority and Vision Bolsover? What are they? Are they one and the same? Can they co-exist?

Please have your say at the end. Let us know your views, we need to know what Member's preferred option is.

Questions Members may want to consider:-

1. Derbyshire County Council is urging districts to think of the greater good of Derbyshire residents when deciding on whether to support a county deal. What will a county deal mean for the residents of Bolsover District?
2. What are the likely impacts of a county deal now and in the future?
3. Which version of a county deal is likely to prevail?

This Council has developed a set of policies and strategies and initiatives around growth and transformation – we have a full suite of service and improvement plans which are monitored through a performance management framework and a robust political governance structure - so in other words we are set up to succeed;

- Growth and transformation – Vision Bolsover
- Climate Change - Strategic approach
- Policy reviews
- Service Plans
- PERFORM
- Improvement programmes

This Council adopted its new set of ambitions at Council in January 2020, which focused on customers, environment and economy. It is important to remember its mission statement which is to become a dynamic, self-sufficient and flexible Council that delivers excellent services, whilst adapting to local aspirations and acting as the economic and

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environmental driver for Bolsover District.

We launched Vision Bolsover as Bolsover's answer to levelling up 18 months ago and Members are familiar with the content of this document. We are continually assessing and improving what we do and are currently in the process of refreshing the content and updating achievements.

Bolsover knows what it wants to achieve and how it wants to do it!

It is important that Members have a benchmark to weigh up options against – will supporting or rejecting a particular option lead to an improvement or a decline?

The Levelling Up White Paper was published on 2nd February 2022. It sets out the devolution framework around a number of missions including Digital Connectivity, Education, Skills, Pride in Place, Housing and Crime. The Executive Director – Resources will cover these in more detail later.

The White Paper also sets out 9 pathfinder authorities. The cluster around Bolsover District is what we will concentrate on today: Derbyshire County Council and Derby City Council, along with Nottinghamshire County Council and City Council, and Leicestershire County Council. Leicester City did not put a bid in.

Out of the 9 pathfinder authorities, 3 will be chosen to enter into further negotiation with an announcement expected in the autumn of this year. The other 6 authorities will be considered in a later phase which is expected to be around 2024.

The White Paper identifies 3 levels of County deal, each with different levels of powers and functions, which can be seen on the right hand columns of the table (on the slide). This is an extract of the White Paper and can be seen on page 140.

Each of the devolution framework levels are associated with different powers:-

- Level 1 - the local authority working together across a functional, economic area or whole county area, e.g., through a joint committee
- Level 2 – a single institution or County Council without a directly elected mayor, across a functional, economic area or whole county area
- Level 3 – a single institution or County Council with a directly elected mayor across a functional, economic area or whole county area

Members need to note that;

- Devolution deal - combined authorities will be made up of upper-tier local authorities only (counties and city councils)
- The government's preferred option is directly elected mayors over a combined authority or in their words, a functional economic area
- Greatest level of powers are associated with Level 3, which requires a directly elected mayor
- There is no new money – the funding streams already exist

What other local authorities are saying:-

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Leicestershire County Council are pursuing a county deal on their own. They are not in talks with the Nottingham and Derbyshire authorities to create an East Midlands combined authority. They haven't ruled out a directly elected mayor but they have ruled out any form of structural reform – so they are not looking to adopt a unitary county authority. This decision was made in 2019, following opposition from the Leicestershire districts to forming a unitary authority.

The Leader of Nottinghamshire County Council has stated a full devolution deal is what the County should be supporting. We don't know a great deal about Nottinghamshire County and Nottingham City but what they have said is they are in conversation with Derby City and Derbyshire County Council about exploring setting up a combined authority and a mayor for what is currently the D2N2 footprint.

Derby City have been clear that they want a directly elected mayor and they want to pursue a Level 3 deal. They want a combined authority across D2N2 with the addition of Leicestershire County but we know that Leicestershire are not looking at a combined authority model so they have ruled that one out. We also know that they have been pursuing a south Derbyshire unitary authority for several years because they don't feel that Derby City is a big enough unitary authority to be sustainable. They have stated that they don't see the value in district councils, unitary authorities are more efficient in their words, and the county deals should be structured around a unitary authority model, so in other words, Derbyshire should be a unitary authority – and finally, they are not signed up to Vision Derbyshire and the importance of this will become clear in the following slide.

Derbyshire County Council, like Derby City, want a county deal combined authority, to include D2N2 footprint with the addition of Leicestershire County Council. However, as previously stated, Leicestershire County Council don't want a combined authority model. DCC don't want an elected mayor and they want to pursue a level 2 deal at this time. They don't support functional structural reform and they have presented the Vision Derbyshire governance model and the Price Waterhouse Cooper Case for Change model to government as their approach to delivering the county deal.

It is worth noting that out of the 10 authorities across Derbyshire, 40%, which includes the City, only four authorities have formally signed up to Vision Derbyshire.

An extract from the White Paper - In addition to the core elements in the table, there may be scope to consider public sector boundaries on a case-by-case basis, when requested, to support devolution. Proposals to pool local authority functions, where it can improve services and increase efficiency will also be supported.

There are some eye watering numbers in the document, which some senior figures in Derbyshire have reservations about being able to be achieved, in other words they don't believe they can be delivered.

The Figures: the green area in the slide shows the impact they claim the wider system benefits in delivering the case for change will be – this equates to £1.27b. The blue area shows the claimed organisational benefits – these are the annual savings targeted to 5 years and they range between £24m and £72m per annum. The biggest part coming from operational efficiencies and effectiveness. Operational efficiency, in their words, means sharing resources, joining up services and consolidating activities, leading to the reduction of employees across 4 key areas – front office, back office, service delivery and

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senior management.

This table in the slide shows the split between the areas as per the last slide. If you take the maximum savings of £43.7m for the operational savings at year 5, and use £25k as the average employees' salary, then there would be a reduction of more than 1700 employees across the whole of Derbyshire.

What does all this mean?

If a combined authority was set up, district and borough councils will act as "non-constituent" members of any combined authority, having no decision-making powers.

The combined authority would be expected to work closely with the lower-tier councils, but any negotiations for funding would be undertaken by upper-tier authorities. These are the city and county councils.

There are differing views across all parties – Derby City Council want Level 3, DCC Level 2. Derby City a mayor, DCC don't want a mayor. Derby City want combined authorities, DCC want Vision Derbyshire.

Only 4 authorities across Derbyshire have signed up to Vision Derbyshire. A county deal based on Vision Derbyshire, means joint services and a reduction in staff. A unitary authority means the removal of districts and boroughs and reduction in Members across the County.

Questions and discussion:-

- What will a county deal mean for the residents of Bolsover District?
- What are the likely impacts of a county deal now and in the future?
- Which version of a county deal is likely to prevail?

Deputy Leader, Councillor Duncan McGregor

Levelling Up has often been a concept much used but with very little clarity about what it means, except perhaps a vague sense of ensuring a fairer distribution of goods and services across our country and tackling inequalities.

The levelling up white paper provides more detail on how inequalities may be addressed in key areas of focus or 'missions' related to digital connectivity, education, skills, health and wellbeing, housing, local leadership – all the issues that are synonymous with the work we do within our District Council and through partnerships at a 'District' level.

We at Bolsover District Council are all fully aware of the causes of increased inequalities and therefore the need for levelling up. These inequalities were known to us well before the COVID pandemic; the pandemic simply laid bare just how far the lack of investment and planning in public services had reduced this country and increased the divide between the 'haves' and 'have nots'.

We are the ones our local residents come to for help and support on a daily basis; We are the people who meet regularly with local community leaders and representatives to listen to their concerns and hear the voices of the seldom heard; We are the ones who live within these communities and understand best how to maximise what resources we

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do have to address the challenges our communities face.

It is this local expertise, this local understanding and knowledge, this local affinity with our community that enables us to use every penny to best effect, and I know you will all fully agree with me when I say that those resources have been and continue to be sorely diminished by the same government that claims it wants to level up.

Local government is about local people and partner organisations working together to improve the life chances and life outcomes for its defined local community. Levelling up is a concept we know well at Bolsover - we have been doing it successfully for years and have an ambition to do so much more. So let me tell you how we have already made significant inroads on our own levelling up agenda in key areas.

Our role in housing

Dragonfly was a Council supported partnership set up to deliver open market sale of residential and commercial developments on land deemed unprofitable for property developers. Dragonfly will stimulate economic growth and can be used to deliver much needed housing and commercial developments in Bolsover, not only on Council land but also selected stalled sites currently in private ownership. They have completed 10 properties so far and are starting another 35 this year. They are also working on planning permission for a further 2 sites.

Over the last 3 years, more than 500 new private sector houses have been built, meeting a continuing high demand, which has equated to £50,000,000 of inward investment, local jobs and apprenticeships. £3,000,000 on local infrastructure meaning more sports provision, green space, education, highways, health and public arts.

Our high performing housing service is also well regarded, particularly the warden service.

We have built 170 Council properties over the past few years working alongside Woodheads to develop new housing across the District.

Our role in public health

Our work to support health and wellbeing improvements was recognised by the Local Government Association (LGA). It described the public health and leisure work being piloted in deprived areas with schools, families and other partners as “exceptional” with real opportunities to expand and promote this work to support other areas for them to learn from it.

We have been extremely successful in addressing the needs of local people throughout the pandemic and supporting recovery from its worst impacts.

Our staff dealt with over 1,300 enquiries between March and September 2020, with a further 1,257 customer call backs.

We dealt with 893 business grant enquiries, 353 food parcels, supported the collection and delivery of 567 prescriptions, and gave a range of general advice and support to a further 843 people.

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We responded locally to what was a global issue – demonstrating very clearly that LOCALISM works best.

As a Council we are also acutely aware of the impact of employment, skills and training on people's opportunities to fulfil their individual potential, to enable people to be economically independent, to support their mental health, and in doing so, bring prosperity to their wider community. That is why we have proactively supported the Kickstart programme which provides funding to employers to create jobs for 16-24 year olds on Universal Credit. Four young people are currently employed on this scheme within the Council and its partners with a further 2 due to start shortly.

Similarly, over the past 6 months, 9 students from stubbing Wood special school and Ashgate Croft, have been benefitting from the 'Supported Insight Scheme', which provides weekly work experience opportunities for local children. Our focus on creating job opportunities is also why we have developed our Apprenticeship Strategy and put this in action by previously fully spending, if not exceeding, our Apprenticeship Levy.

Managing our environmental resources, reducing our carbon footprint and supporting sustainability is also a key ambition of BDC. We fully appreciate the impact of these issues on the future, as well as current health and wellbeing of our community.

We have been 1 of only 12 councils in the UK and the only one in the East Midlands to secure funding in 2021 from the Woodland Trust under their Emergency Tree Fund. We are investing this £270,000 to create community woodlands up and down our District to both create important environmental resources for our communities and also to help tackle climate change. We are also creating further opportunities for community development and cohesion through volunteering. We have now planted 6,000 trees at our flagship site in Creswell with over 20,000 more to be planted over the next few years.

This is a clear example of localism in action. I quote our Planning Policy Manager in saying that, "this initiative is about BDC providing leadership at a local level and not waiting for others to do it for us".

Our role in Economic Development

Over the past 3 years, permission for over 1,000,000 square feet of new commercial buildings has been granted, bringing £150,000,000 of investment and in excess of 4,000 jobs.

We operate business centres accommodating over 100 enterprises with further investment from D2N2 planned to increase this and include a training hub.

We continue to work on attracting investment into road infrastructure including the link between J29 and Shirebrook with £200,000 of external funding secured and consultation on the proposals.

We are working on making better use of mine water energy with help from £800,000 of external funding to help bring forward future homes heated by renewable energy sources.

Managing Resources

Since 2011/2012, BDC has delivered the necessary savings of over £5m. We have

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achieved this by understanding best where efficiencies could be achieved without losing quality of services and by growing income. Income growth, through, for example, the development of new business units, our new 3G football pitch, and the ongoing delivery of our 'growth corridor', has meant we have been able to mitigate the financial risk created by reduced business rate income and government support.

Another key development to support our financial resilience, has been our focus on tourism. You will already be aware of our amazing beautiful scenery, our easy access to the Peak District, our historically significant buildings such as Bolsover Castle and Hardwick Hall, our internationally recognised ice cave art at Creswell Crags. I'm sure many of us here have also enjoyed the opportunity to visit the markets in our local towns and shop at our 2 large shopping centres at the East Midlands Designer Outlet and Dobbies Shopping Village.

We have much to offer those beyond our local community and will continue to exploit these many attractions to boost tourism and bring additional economic benefit into Bolsover.

Our Local Plan for Bolsover, the Council's Vision Bolsover and our Local Development Scheme and associated growth plans, all outline our ongoing commitment to support further economic regeneration and growth in Bolsover over the next few years and beyond.

In summary – it has been our local knowledge of how to grow our local economy which has enabled us so far to weather the financial challenges that significantly threaten local authorities up and down the country.

Chair, I would like to give Notice on Motion at this point.

Members' comments:-

Councillor Mary Dooley:

I have previously been involved in meetings with Sheffield City Region, Doncaster and Rotherham – the issue: combined authorities. A lot wanted us to join but BDC stood firm and said a firm no. We would not have gained anything but a few crumbs from the table from these bigger authorities and no voice.

Today, I sit alongside 36 other Councillors representing over 79,000 residents. I ask myself, are we all singing the same song – do we really support the Leadership in all the discussions and the everyday running of the Authority. The Leader has said many times in the past that we all have a part to play. Local reform, Levelling Up Act is the most crucial document to come from the government to take our voice away – taking away the voice from Councillors from the grass roots of politics. There is no new money to be levelling up on the playing field, let alone the likes of Bolsover to all other areas. You all know the other areas in question. We need to act now. I am 100% behind the Leader and the Deputy Leader. I have no qualms taking on the government and other leaders to fight what is being predicted to happen. We must today support the Leadership, not by a nod but by adding your voice and your commitment to those 79,000 residents in Bolsover, to iron out those inequalities that we in Bolsover do our utmost to bridge the gap but most of all your commitment to the Leader of Bolsover and give him 100% assurance that you are standing at the side of him and that's all he can ask for.

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Councillor Andrew Joesbury:

I feel that this is the government making a change for the sake of change and it isn't viable in my opinion. They're supposed to be closing the gap but what does that mean financially – it would mean that all the underachieving areas would be taking money from the higher achieving areas which is Bolsover District – our constituents, our rate payers, that's levelling up financially, I think. But it's more than that – were talking about putting the Authority into the hands of Derbyshire, which aren't doing very well themselves. They can't keep the youth clubs open, the local health service where you can't get an appointment at the Dr's – it takes 2 weeks to get a telephone call to make an appointment – they can't fill the pot holes in the road, so how on earth are they going to manage efficiency. This government can't manage the building blocks of our society and I can speak on this from personal experience. My wife is a primary school teacher and used to absolutely love her job but now she hates it. This government has pulled them down and down – same with the nurses - no one has had a pay rise for 10 years. For my wife to catch up in pay rises she hasn't had, she would need a 20% rise. It's not just teachers though, its police, nurses, and everyone who had the pay freeze but they're expecting to change things at a local level. Michael Gove, as a former Education Secretary, thought it was a good idea to put a King James Bible in every school – what a waste of money. They think they are going to make people live 5 years longer – it's in the paper. Crime rate – you can't just bring it down by getting rid of local authorities – it's ridiculous. The closure of youth clubs has had a knock on effect on society. If the kids had got something to do, we would halve the asb, I'm sure but there's no extra money to do it. Same with health - they can't cope with the health service as it is which comes from County. Children's mental health services was gotten rid of and they put it in with adult mental health services which was already struggling. The financial implications alone is enough to reject this proposal – it's about posh boys who went to posh schools who don't know what it's like to live in the real world, and they're making change for the sake of change. I am wholeheartedly against this devolution and I think if everyone had a vote on it in the District they would all be against it as well if it was explained to them properly.

(Councillor David Dixon left the meeting at this point.)

Councillor Deborah Watson:

I agree initially with everything that Councillor McGregor had said and particularly that all of us 37 BDC Councillors know our local areas the best, and the Authority is doing a cracking job. It was interesting to note that compared to Europe, England has far fewer councillors per head of population and under some of the proposals under the County deals, we would have even less. Even in this Authority, as you know I represent Tibshelf Ward, and on many occasions I have brought up something that my fellow Members did not know because it was only myself and Councillor Ray Heffer that knew what was happening in my local area. It appears to me that the county deals and the Vision Derbyshire, which ever option you go for, actually shoot the whole argument in the foot. The missions that they list in there are admirable aspirations but I cannot see how doing one of these devolution deals is going to achieve those aspirations. The best way to achieve them is to leave the local areas in the hands of the local people. In the levelling up document it talks all the time about 'local' – so why would you try and achieve things for local areas by removing local representation?

Councillor Clive Moesby:

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Thanks for the presentations, it's been good to get more of an understanding of it. We have to take this seriously. I want BDC to stay as it is for the very reasons that have already been said – we understand our areas the best and we look after the whole of the District.

Regarding the 12 Missions:-

Number 2 - Increase spending - 40% - we can't say we don't want more money in our areas – that's good.

Number 3 - Public transport – some areas are starved of public transport, definitely in my area. This happened when deregulation came in and local authorities filled the gap.

Number 4 - 5G and 4G coverage – this has been going on in DCC now for a while - about 8 or 10 years. It's difficult to get it in the rural areas. Would be good if this could be achieved.

Number 6 – Skills Training – we had a report on this a couple of weeks ago so we already looking at this data here at BDC.

Number 7 – Life Expectancy – the Observer published data years ago and said the life expectancy of people in Bolsover was less than some comparable areas in other parts of the country – mainly due to the industrial nature of the work people did at the time and the M1 corridor pollution. Any improvement on this would be welcome.

Number 9 – Peoples satisfaction with the town centre – we have 4 town centre officers bringing the town centres together and the areas around the centres so we are trying to join things up and improve things for better living conditions for our residents.

Number 10 – renters and owners – we have done a lot of work with absent landlords to try and get properties up to standard and relet – work is ongoing all the time and it's improving.

Number 11 – Serious crime – we have so many partnerships e.g. Police and Crime Panel - putting questions to the Police and Crime Commissioner to make sure she delivers on her policing plan, so people do feel safer in their communities. Speedwatch – addressing issues of speeding. ASB - community engagement with local neighbourhood police - we're working together with so many partnerships to make sure we deliver what we need to.

Number 12 - Devolution deal by 2030 – we've heard already that Derbyshire wants a 2 and Derby City wants a 3 – we should be exploiting this to show that even the ones that are trying to perpetrate the plan aren't even in agreement as to which way forward we should be going.

There are lots of good things in the levelling up plan but we need to deliver them in the way that BDC is structured now.

I have a public finance paper here: it talks about a study carried out by Colin Copus, Emeritus Professor of Local Politics at DeMontford University, and it states that;

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- “Bigger councils are not always more efficient”
- “Greater size doesn’t mean greater efficiency or better performance - there are no consistent or conclusive results, i.e., the evidence is not there that bigger means better”.

It does say, that working with District Councils Network, Copus suggests that;

- “the size of a council is less important than other factors as the quality of local decision making and public participation”.

We have to take the public along with us and the bigger we get, the more isolated we get from public opinion, and the public are the ones that put us 37 Councillors here today.

The report also says smaller authorities are not always more efficient – there is a level that is good. The report demonstrates that there is no perfect size for local government - *there* is an optimum size per population and geographically for maximum efficiency, and *that’s* also mentioned in the White Paper - and we need to get that right. I believe our local geography is the District of Bolsover as it stands at this particular time.

It is a view that the governance role of local government is, or should be, a politically representative institution that responds to the priorities of real communities of place with which the public express a genuine affinity. So that’s looking after the people in our areas and making sure they get it. The report says that some services respond differently in size but locally democracy suffers under mergers, finding evidence of lower public engagement leading to antagonism between areas – so when you get areas together, you get conflict.

Copus says, the best way forward suggest that cooperation between councils boosts efficiency and indeed capacity. This Council does work with local councils big and small and including Derbyshire County Council. So that’s the way – to work together in partnership, the way we have been doing it for many years – through the Strategic Alliance with North East Derbyshire District Council and others.

Finally, it says that district councils deliver so many of the things that are at the heart of the Levelling Up White Paper’s 12 missions. So why do we need it if we are doing it already. Why do we need government interference – how can they suggest that they know better? What worries me is that if the government decides that this is the way forward, what we do need to do, is have a foot in both camps, we need to support Bolsover in its present form. We have a wealth of data, a wealth of information, many, many success stories, and we have achievements to hand that we can prove and argue that case. We are local Members, we are supposed to be local champions of our communities. We need to be careful that we don’t isolate ourselves in one position. We need to see what is going off on the other side, on the levelling up agenda. I don’t want us to lose out if we do get forced down this road, anything that we can get out of it to look after and maintain services for our residents. I don’t agree that we can sit on a board but not have any decisions but I think whichever way we go, sadly, we won’t be having a say in anything. We need to fight for Bolsover to stay as we are but we need to make sure we have a foot in both camps.

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Councillor Allan Bailey:

There is a saying, if it isn't broken, don't mend it. BDC is doing a brilliant job and has done for many years. All elected Councillors of this Council know what the people in their villages want. People in my village approach me for help with their issues. We are all looking after our local people. They report things to DCC like pot holes and its 6 months before they are fixed. I fully back the Leader and Deputy Leader and every Councillor in this room as we work together.

Councillor Maxine Dixon:

I've just been sent an email and I'd like to ask Councillor Fritchley why he didn't forward the email on. It was sent on 2nd March and he was asked if he could forward this on to District Councillors. With regard to the White Paper, we should listen to both sides of the coin, which we've listened to one side, which is fair enough but this is giving Councillors the opportunity to listen to the other side of the coin to make a fair judgement. There are sessions which would have been made available for Monday 14th March at 2pm and again tomorrow, 31st March at 10.30 – I just wondered why the opportunity wasn't given for Councillors to. The email is from Laura Boyce, Corporate Services and Transformation, DCC.

The Leader requested that Councillor Dixon send the link to everyone so they could look at it.

Councillor Liz Smyth:

I agree with a lot of what has been said. I loved Councillor Andrew Joesbury's comment about a document written by the posh boys because when I read the document it references the Italian Renaissance and the Medici family, and if I'm being kind, that is eccentric or it has a whiff of elitism about it. I also agree with Councillor Deborah Watson, the Council is doing an absolutely cracking job. Everyone here has seen the Vision Bolsover document – not only have we got a vision but we have a plan on how to achieve it as well. You may not have all yet seen the Growth Strategy document yet – but this is the strategy on how we are going to achieve Growth and achieve jobs. Duncan is also right, we have attracted millions of pounds in investment and funding and we are doing an excellent job.

(Councillor Maxine Dixon left the meeting at this point).

I've also read the Price Waterhouse Cooper document which was commissioned by DCC and if you read that document and the White Paper, you get the feeling that there is a theme running through which is efficiencies because this doesn't actually seem to achieve very much, this local government reform - it does seem to be change for change sake. I wonder if it's just a diversion. When they say they want to make efficiencies, it worries me. If we end up with a mayoral combined authorities or county deals, we will end up with all the power and all the money going away from areas like this and it will all go to enormous unitary authorities. The enormity could be several counties and some of us have experience of huge unitary authorities or even DCC which is quite a big authority. Localism is best because otherwise customer service becomes non-existent for our residents – they can never get hold of anyone, they can never get anything done because they can't get to talk to anyone, and the other bad thing is because they combine they make all these redundancies and an enormous redundancy bill. There are a lot people

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here who work really hard and are doing an amazing job, and if this happens, some of them will lose their jobs, it's inevitable. If there is a redundancy bill, the Council and its residents will pay for it, and what happens if all this disappears, this Authority here that makes all this money, well the spend that we spend in the local area will cease and it will have a huge knock on effect to all those people out there and those people who provide services to this Council will be worse off and could well lose their jobs too. This kind of local government reform just means less representation – you get someone from Nottingham City deciding what happens in Barlborough – it's not right. I suspect that all of the money will get spent on the densely populated areas in the cities – that will be their focus. I support Duncan because localism is best – I know it in my heart.

Councillor Donna Hales:

We all became Councillors because we wanted to represent our constituencies – I've had experience at DCC where I met a portfolio holder over a highways issue and he didn't even know what I was talking about – it was really frustrating to me and was totally unacceptable the way I was spoken to. That summed up to me that the work we do in the locality is really important. My constituents know me, they see me, I shop here, I work here sometimes, I live here, I run local things in terms of community work etc. This government has talked a lot about decentralisation – this is just a form of centralisation again. They are taking away what they gave us – they gave us responsibility for running our own areas and now they are going to take it away from us again - it's all about control. Efficiencies is about cuts – 27% of families in BDC are living in poverty and that is some working families as well – how are they going to be represented by someone who doesn't know this area, the history, the demographics and the problems that we have. We have huge amounts of clinically vulnerable people in BDC as well – how is one unitary authority going to manage those people – it's just not acceptable and I agree I am in full support of this Council.

Councillor Tricia Clough:

I spoke to some people where I volunteer about what the government are proposing to do and they said they did not like it - they like to know who they are dealing with, who they are talking to. They don't always agree with what BDC does but they also recognise some of the good things that it does. The areas where they don't feel safe or they don't feel things are happening is usually things that are related to the County Council. Like Andrew said, the youth services which has gone. This isn't the way to go – it's always the closer the better because they are the people that hear and can put things into practice.

Councillor Nick Clarke:

I have an issue with efficiencies because it means nothing but cuts to people's jobs and families will be devastated. It means loss of spending power in the local community. There are a couple of things I noted from Grant's presentation earlier regarding the front office – financial benefits, that's cuts, reduced full time employees. Enabling customers to self-serve – again your taking away the assistance they get with a face to face service – you can't talk to a computer, if you talk to someone across a desk then both get more back. When services are centralised into a larger body you lose all the local knowledge which affects local residents' issues. I agree with what has been said here today – this is

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not the way forward – it's not levelling up it is levelling down.

Councillor Janet Tait;

I fully support the Leader and Deputy Leader – we cannot afford to lose BDC. The world is upside down at the moment and we are facing a cost of living crisis. It is the wrong time to restructure local government – people are going to depend on us over the next 5 – 10 years. I also think it is very disappointing that the Conservative Members have left and are not taking part in this debate and they're not trying to defend what their government is doing to the people in our constituencies.

Councillor Steve Fritchley, Leader of the Council

This is why I wanted this debate to be a free debate, unencumbered with any whips or anything like that and I know for a fact that's not been the case in other parts of Derbyshire – I wanted to know exactly what Members thought and felt, no matter what your party, I wanted you to say how you felt.

I know what all this means – job losses, reduction in service and everything you've all mentioned today. Then I think am I being bloody minded, am I not wanting to join in or as Clive said earlier, do we really want to be left behind? I want to fight forever and a day until it got to the point if I lost – this is how we are going to get the best deal for the people we represent.

The Council collected £4.1m in Council Tax but we spend £67m (some of this is rent income also) in the local economy through procurement, spending, wages etc. That is a good mark-up – take that away and that is £60m taken away from the District and that will leave a big hole. I am really encouraged with what you have said here today and I thank you for it.

Councillor Andrew Joesbury;

I'd like to ask the Leader what the next step is.

Councillor Steve Fritchley, Leader of the Council

We don't know because there are 2 or 3 different things running at the same time. We have the levelling up White Paper, then the County Deal, which is somewhat different to levelling up options, then Vision Derbyshire, which is a cross between perhaps a level 2 and a level 3 and as I said earlier, one of the Ministers said there is no level 2 and a half and best thing to do is grab it with both hands.

Then there is the ambitions of one or two people locally in Derbyshire, Derby City, Nottinghamshire, Notts City, Leicester, as well because the government want only a few people to talk to rather than people like me. If the government just want to talk to barons – because that what a 3 county mayoral combined authority would be, that one mayor would become a baron and would have more power than a dozen MPs and other leaders. So if we are going to have restructure, let's do it properly, let's look at representation, do it from the government down and have a big debate on it.

Clive mentioned the money and yes we would like it but where would it be coming from -

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efficiencies which means job losses – if people aren't working, they're not spending it locally. We will go into terminal decline – we've seen it before where town and city centres have been decimated because of this. I like the Keynesian approach to the economy where whatever we are spending becomes someone else's wages, savings, mortgage and rent payments and on and on – it's worked for a long time.

I'd like to thank Members for what you have said and I know I can go into a debate knowing I have the full support of this Authority.

Councillor Andrew Joesbury:

What is the MP for Bolsover, Mark Fletcher's stance on this?

Councillor Steve Fritchley, Leader of the Council

Well he has previously stated that the Council's priorities are his priorities. Bolsover is doing a good job in spite of everything that has been thrown at us but we are still here and that is a credit to all of us.

Councillor Tom Munro:

I couldn't agree more with all the comments regarding cuts – they have a lot of knock on effects. As the Leader has already suggested, it completely ruins the whole basis of a Keynesian economy which is vital for the success of all communities and a whole country because not only have you got the loss of income, you have the loss of tax hole, therefore, the beginning of a nasty and unavoidable decline across the whole of society. Another issue around the package put forward in the White Paper, is the complete loss of accountability. I'm sure many Members here have filled in fault reports on DCCs website and just received an immediate response email but there is absolutely no accountability. Like Councillor Donna Hales, I also had a similar experience with a portfolio holder from DCC who I wrote to as a matter of courtesy and to this day I have never had an acknowledgement from that portfolio holder. I am fully behind not going down the route of any of the proposals in the White Paper because there could be other models - it isn't exhaustive at the end of the day the models that are available.

Councillor Allan Bailey:

From an historical perspective, even the Magna Carta stated that local people would have the say over their local economy.

Councillor Duncan McGregor:

I would like to thank everyone who has made a contribution today and I appreciate the comments which have been made.

I would like to confirm and underpin the comments made by another agency which was a peer review we had around 18 months ago. Our success on delivering our ambitions has been recognised and endorsed by others and I quote;

The LGA has suggested that with so much positive work in the Bolsover District Council, the partnership can afford to be bolder and develop its work further”.

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“New Members elected during May 2019 have brought renewed passion and commitment to service local residents and visitors well”.

“Bolsover District Council knows its communities well and has a strong clear understanding of the District which is informing the Council’s work programme, including approaches to public health, community cohesion and developing tourism strategy”.

“Bolsover District Council as a partnership organisation is highly regarded by partners and resident, as evidenced by the many positive comments from stakeholders - with this partnership success largely attributed to the work of a highly effective, skills efficient and effective internal partnership team.

The work we are doing together are focused on issues and not politics, was also recognised;

“with BDCs different political groups, generally working well together, working constructively, to talk through issues and find and agree solutions”

Very importantly colleagues, the LGA notes;

“Bolsover District Council’s Members and officers are committed, loyal and often long serving, passionate and keen to make the best decisions and deliver the most effective work to benefit the Districts residents and visitors”.

To conclude, I suggest to you that levelling up is what we have been doing successfully as a Council, as a partner, as an employer as a group of committed individuals who know and understand our local community of Bolsover District Council. Levelling up is not something that can be achieved from a central bureaucratic headquarters many miles away. It will not be achieved by those with only an academic and sterile understanding of the needs of local people. It will only be achieved by continuing to strengthen the local democratic process and influence of local people at local level – a District level and providing us with the resources to invest every penny where we know it will make the most impact.

Moved by Councillor Duncan McGregor and seconded by Councillor Ray Heffer

RESOLVED that (1) Bolsover District Council supports the continuation of two tier government in Derbyshire and urges other Derbyshire councils to do the same,

(2) the Leader of the Council be empowered to explore other alternatives if necessary.

(Leader of the Council)

Update on ex District Councillor Ken Walker

The Chair provided the meeting with an update on ex District Councillor Ken Walker.

The meeting concluded at 11:55 hours.