

**Bolsover District Council**

**Council**

**9th December 2020**

**VISION DERBYSHIRE**

**Report of Cllr Fritchley, Leader of the Council**

This report is public

**Purpose of the Report**

- To provide an update on Vision Derbyshire and Local Government Reform.

**1 Report Details**

1.1 In June 2019, the Council embarked on a programme of work with all Derbyshire Councils to explore the appetite for future collaborative working. Building on the significant collaboration that existed already and by focussing on the key themes that affect all councils, it was envisaged that mutual benefit can be enjoyed in improving outcomes for our local communities. By collaborating across the county footprint on such themes, opportunities to lobby government for funding, for example, would be greater as the scale of return on government investment would be greater

**1.2 Future Collaborative Working**

Price Waterhouse Cooper (PwC), were commissioned to support the development of the approach and programme of work which has been undertaken in two phases over the last eighteen months, as follows:

1.2.1 Phase 1 - All ten Councils in Derbyshire – the County Council, City Council and eight District and Borough Councils – worked together during the first phase to identify shared priorities and agree to strategically collaborate on the improvement of outcomes for people and places. This phase aimed to identify and explore the existing level of ambition and appetite of stakeholders to progress non-structural reform in Derbyshire and resulted in the development and agreement of:

- **Principles for collaboration** to guide future working such as improve outcomes, speak with one voice, better coordination, provide a visible alternative to unitarisation and delivery to be sustainable.
- **Areas for future collaboration** to provide a potential focus for future working such as climate change, tourism, skills and employment, social mobility and economic prosperity.
- **Critical success factors** to drive a step change in approach/ways of working to accelerate a truly different model of local government in Derbyshire,

including working at pace and building on momentum, working as a collective in a different physical and mental space from business as usual and strengthening and role modelling collaborative and collective leadership behaviours.

- 1.2.2 The work undertaken as part of the first phase marked a statement to deliver differently for the people of Derbyshire and following Phase 1, Councils agreed that further work was now required to turn the vision and ambition into a viable alternative to structural reform through a second phase. Derby City Council, who participated in Phase 1 of the approach, declined to participate in Phase 2, although the opportunity to work collaboratively on the further development of the approach remained open.
- 1.2.3 Following what appeared to be a pause in the initiative, in March 2020, during the transition from the 'response' phase into the 'recovery' phase of the COVID 19 pandemic, the programme was reinitiated as a second phase. A series of workshops which included all CEO's (or senior officers) and Leaders from across the county were established. These were communicated as opportunities to test the 'emerging collaboration model' and build out a roadmap for the future of what was now – 'Vision Derbyshire' and to share ambitions with wider public sector partners.
- 1.2.4 Phase 2 of the programme has subsequently resulted in the development of four key ambitions as follows:
  - **Seize innovation** - pioneering skills and technologies for a sustainable future economy
  - **Establish relentless ambition** - creating opportunities for everyone in Derbyshire and making these visible
  - **Build proactive communities** - harnessing the energy in Derbyshire's communities and empowering people to make change
  - **Live and work sustainably** - committing to a zero-carbon footprint in our tourism, wider economy and ways of working
- 1.2.4 In July 2020, the first iteration of the Vision Derbyshire document - the 'Case for Change' was circulated to all Leaders and senior officers who have been part of the process to date. All District and Borough Leaders across Derbyshire were asked to seek endorsement from their respective Councils to pursue Vision Derbyshire and the Case for Change.
- 1.2.5 Having reviewed the 'Case for Change' document thoroughly, the Leader felt unable to do this for two predominant reasons:
  - The Case for Change set out financial savings that although not detailed, implied that these would be largely brought about by significant staffing cuts.
  - The Case for Change would require a new formal governance model to support decision making in the form of a new Joint Committee for Vision Derbyshire – the Leaders view is that this would impact significantly upon the sovereignty of District and Borough Councils.
- 1.2.9 Aligned to the Case for Change, the Leader was asked to sign a joint letter from all Leaders across Derbyshire (excluding City) to request a meeting with the

Secretary of State - Robert Jenrick, to discuss the approach as an alternative to structural reform. However, due to the Leader's issues with the Case for Change document as it stood, he would agree only to sign up to an approach and not the document itself. This was agreed and the jointly signed letter was sent on 4 September 2020, with a meeting yet to be arranged.

- 1.2.10 On September 15 2020 this year the Leader shared Vision Derbyshire information with all Members via email and attachment. An updated version of the information is attached at Appendix 1 as a link.

### **1.3 Devolution and Local Recovery White Paper**

- 1.3.1 The Government announced its intention to publish a White Paper on Devolution and Local Recovery, as a means to 'level up' all parts of the country and reduce regional inequalities, during the final stages of Phase 2 of the development of the Vision Derbyshire Case for Change. Whilst the formal content of the White Paper is not yet known, it was widely expected that the Government would set out its proposals for local government structural reform in England along with setting out the role which greater devolution will play in national recovery. Having initially been expected during autumn, it is now anticipated that the White Paper would be published in spring 2021 at the earliest – or if at all.
- 1.3.2 The initial announcement of the publication of the White Paper, resulted in a sense of urgency and need to present the Vision Derbyshire Case for Change, as an alternative to local government structural reform. More recently however, the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (Robert Jenrick), announced 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 accountability. However, restructuring is only one of the different ways that councils can streamline and make savings. Joint working with other councils and partners can take a variety of forms ranging from adopting joint plans, setting up joint committees, sharing back office services or special purpose vehicles to promote regeneration'.*

The communication also set out 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. 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 remain committed. However, the pandemic has rightly necessitated resources across Whitehall and in local government being reallocated to tackling covid-19 and on economic recovery, and this must be Whitehall's and town halls' No.1 priority at present'.*

## **2 Conclusions and Reasons for Recommendation**

- 2.1 There is clearly a case for working collaboratively with others, which the Leader has always maintained. The case for a collective commitment to strategic collaboration between Councils is already evident with many examples including; the Strategic Alliance with North East Derbyshire District Council; the Joint Building Control service with Bolsover District Council, North East Derbyshire District Council and Chesterfield Borough Council and the Joint ICT service with Bolsover District Council, North East Derbyshire District Council and Derbyshire Dales District Council.
- 2.2 Bolsover District Council will continue to work collaboratively with partners across the County and wider as long as it remains in the interests of the Council to do so. At the heart of such arrangements should be the belief that such a commitment to strategic collaboration can improve outcomes for the organisation and our communities.
- 2.3 Vision Derbyshire and in particular the Case for Change would require this Council to relinquish its sovereignty and agree to large scale job cuts – neither of these align with the ambition of Bolsover District Council.
- 2.4 The previously anticipated imminent publication of the White Paper, appears to have been at least one of the drivers to present the Vision Derbyshire Case for Change, as a viable alternative to local government structural reform.
- 2.5 Following the more recent announcement of the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (Robert Jenrick), it is clear that the Government will not impose top-down restructuring of local government and that Local Government Reform is not the Governments priority at present. The announcement clearly removes the urgency previously thought to be needed by some.

## **3 Consultation and Equality Impact**

- 3.1 There are no known negative equality impact issues aligned to this report.

## **4 Alternative Options and Reasons for Rejection**

- 4.1 To not work collaboratively with others is an option that is unlikely to produce the impact on our communities that.

## **5 Implications**

### **5.1 Finance and Risk Implications**

- 5.1.1 None at this stage.

### **5.2 Legal Implications including Data Protection**

- 5.2.1 None at this stage.

### **5.3 Human Resources Implications**

5.3.1 None at this stage.

### **6 Recommendations**

- 6.1 That Council note the update on Vision Derbyshire.
- 6.2 That Council reject Vision Derbyshire and the Case for Change at this time.
- 6.3 That Council note the Governments plans to publish a White Paper on Devolution and Local Recovery and the potential implications for local government reform in Derbyshire
- 6.4 That Council note the announcement (extract at 1.3.2 of this report) the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (Robert Jenrick) made recently in relation to local government reform
- 6.5 That Council authorises the Leader to continue to engage with other Councils across Derbyshire on the issue of devolution and working collaboratively and to report back to Council any alternative proposals that emerge.

## 7 Decision Information

<b>Is the decision a Key Decision?</b> A Key Decision is an executive decision which has a significant impact on two or more District wards or which results in income or expenditure to the Council above the following thresholds: <i>BDC:</i> Revenue - £75,000 <input type="checkbox"/> Capital - £150,000 <input type="checkbox"/> <i>NEDDC:</i> Revenue - £100,000 <input type="checkbox"/> Capital - £250,000 <input type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Please indicate which threshold applies	NA
<b>Is the decision subject to Call-In?</b> (Only Key Decisions are subject to Call-In)	NA
<b>Has the relevant Portfolio Holder been informed</b>	Yes
<b>District Wards Affected</b>	All indirectly
<b>Links to Corporate Plan priorities or Policy Framework</b>	All indirectly

## 8 Document Information

Appendix No	Title
1	Vision Derbyshire
<b>Background Papers</b> (These are unpublished works which have been relied on to a material extent when preparing the report. They must be listed in the section below. If the report is going to Cabinet (NEDDC) or Executive (BDC) you must provide copies of the background papers)	
Report Author	Contact Number
Lee Hickin Director of Corporate Services/Head of Paid Services	Ext 7218