

CABINET

Decision Notices and Minutes of a meeting of the Cabinet held on Thursday, 8th October, 2015 at 5.00 p.m. at Addenbrooke House, Ironmasters Way, Telford

PUBLISHED ON WEDNESDAY, 14th OCTOBER, 2015

PRESENT: Councillors K.S. Sahota (Leader and Chair), L.D. Carter, E.A. Clare, S. Davies, A.R.H. England, A.D. McClements, R.A. Overton, G.C.W. Reynolds and P.R. Watling

ALSO PRESENT: Councillor A.J. Eade (Conservative Group Leader) and W.L. Tomlinson (Liberal Democrat/Independent Group Leader)

CB-32 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

None

CB-33 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None

CB-34 MINUTES

RESOLVED – that the minutes of the meeting held on 17th September 2015 be confirmed and signed by the Chair.

CB-35 TELFORD & WREKIN'S DEVOLUTION DEAL AND NON-CONSTITUENT MEMBERSHIP OF THE WEST MIDLANDS COMBINED AUTHORITY (WMCA)

Key Decision identified as **Telford & Wrekin's Devolution Deal and Non-Constituent Membership of the West Midlands Combined Authority** in the Notice of Key Decisions published on 30 September 2015.

Not subject to Call-in due to the need for an urgent decision – as agreed by the Chair of the Customer, Community & Partnership Scrutiny Committee

The Leader, Councillor K.S. Sahota, presented the report of the Managing Director which asked the Cabinet to consider whether to seek Non-constituent membership of the emerging West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA).

The Council had submitted its proposals for a 'devolution deal' – a range of freedoms, flexibilities and the transfer of a number of responsibilities and functions currently held and delivered by the Government and its agencies – for negotiation. This built on the Council's 'business winning, business

supporting' priority as well as other major initiatives. Telford & Wrekin was a major economic force in the West Midlands, but to develop the local economy further and attract and retain jobs it was necessary to look at all opportunities that would benefit the Borough and its residents.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer was promoting the concept of Combined Authorities in major conurbations as a new way for local authorities to work together on key strategic functions that crossed geographic council boundaries – eg transport, regeneration and skills. It was apparent that significant Government powers and resources would be devolved to these Combined Authorities. In the West Midlands, seven Metropolitan councils had agreed in principle to form a Combined Authority which could lead to the creation of an Elected Mayor to oversee certain functions. There was an opportunity for councils outside the geographical area of the 7 Metropolitan councils to become associate or non-constituent members of the WMCA. This would be an opportunity to be part of a shared strategic approach in the development of significant policy areas, to collaborate on key priorities where there was mutual benefit, to share communication and channels for opportunities as part of any future devolution of powers and, if agreed by the Combined Authority, vote on certain matters. It was important to stress that as a Non-constituent member of the WMCA, the Council would continue to be responsible for and deliver all the services it currently provided, and would not come under the remit of an elected mayor for the Combined Authority.

Telford & Wrekin was a member of the Marches Local Enterprise Partnership, and there were no plans to change this. However, it was felt that in addition there would be a number of potential advantages to becoming a Non-constituent member of the WMCA, and these were set out in the report. The deadline for seeking Non-constituent member status was 13 October 2015, and there would be a membership fee for the current year of £10,000. Appended to the report were the Governance Review undertaken by the seven West Midlands authorities and the draft scheme for the establishment of a combined authority for the West Midlands.

During the ensuing discussion, Members referred to the strong historic links that the Telford & Wrekin area and economy had with the West Midlands, the benefits of being connected to the 'Midlands Engine for Growth', and the support from local business leaders for becoming an associate member of the WMCA. It would enable the Borough to be part of the conversations around strategic decisions about infrastructure and skills, but did not bind the Council to any formal structure and left it free to talk, or work with, any other authorities/agencies. It would also be positive in terms of promoting the Council's own 'devolution' deal. The Leader referred to the Chancellor of the Exchequer's recent announcement that 100% of business rates would be retained by Councils by 2020. As part of its devolution proposals, the Council was seeking more retention of business rates income and, while the Chancellor's headline announcement was welcome, local authorities needed to see more details of how this would be implemented.

Councillor A.J. Eade (Conservative Group Leader) stated that his Group would like to have been consulted on this at an earlier stage, and wondered

what other alternatives had been looked at in terms of a combined authority. He referred to the Council's involvement a number of years ago with a West Midlands 'City Region', which he believed had not generated many benefits for Telford and Wrekin, and the potential dangers of the Borough becoming a suburb of Birmingham. In response, the Leader emphasised that the Non-constituent status would leave the Council free to work with others if it benefitted the Borough, and to continue to be a partner within the Marches LEP. The Borough would not come under any political control/leadership of the WMCA.

RESOLVED –

- (a) that the Council seek to take up Non-constituent membership of the proposed West Midlands Combined Authority, and to formally apply to the Chair of the Shadow Board for the Council to be included in the submission to the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government;**
- (b) that the Leader and/or the Managing Director, or their nominated deputies, be authorised to represent the Council on the Shadow WMCA, as a Non-constituent member, and other forums which will discuss/progress aspects of its work and the devolution deal;**
- (c) that it be noted that the above decisions will be subject to the agreement of the Shadow Board of the WMCA and the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government;**
- (d) that authority be delegated to the Managing Director, in consultation with the Leader, to negotiate and agree the terms of the Non-constituent membership, including, if he considers it appropriate, voting rights on the WMCA;**
- (e) that the membership fee of around £10k in the current year be funded from the approved 'Destination Telford' budget, and that the ongoing membership fee be built into the service and financial planning strategy for future years.**

The meeting ended at 5.31 pm.

Signed for the purposes of the Decision Notices

Jonathan Eatough

Assistant Director: Law, Democracy & People Services

Date: 14 October 2015

Signed:

Date: