

Minutes of a meeting of the SCRUTINY COMMITTEE on Thursday 12 January 2017

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Committee members:

Councillor Gant (Chair)	Councillor Hayes (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Azad	Councillor Fry
Councillor Henwood	Councillor Pegg
Councillor Simmons	Councillor Taylor
Councillor Tidball	Councillor Wilkinson

Officers:

Andrew Brown, Scrutiny Officer
Caroline Green, Assistant Chief Executive
Jennifer Thompson, Committee and Members Services Officer

Also present:

Councillor Bob Price, Leader of the Council

Apologies:

Councillor(s) Chapman and Coulter sent apologies.

73. Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest made.

74. Report back on recommendations

The Committee considered and noted the report on recommendations.

75. Report of the Devolution Review Group

The Committee considered the report of the Devolution Review Group.

Councillor Tidball, Chair of the Review Group introduced the report.

She thanked the Scrutiny Officer and councillors on the review group for their work on this key report. She thanked all those who gave evidence, including councillors and officers from this council and Oxfordshire County Council and the consultants.

She highlighted the key points of the review group's findings and the conclusions and recommendations in the report.

Councillor Price, Leader of the Council, thanked the review group for their work, for being able to gather evidence from wide range of witnesses, and for a quality report discussing the key issues. He said that the option of a mayoral combined authority provided the opportunity to gain a devolution deal to bring in resources and make advantageous changes in existing governance structures to benefit the county. The major debate would be about the need for and role and powers of an elected mayor to lead the combined authority.

He said that it was his understanding that:

- the national infrastructure commission would look to a combined authority to take forward any growth strategy;
- national industrial strategy would focus on deliverables and a combined authority would be helpful in this respect;
- it was anticipated that the DCLG would produce guidance on devolution bids by the end of the month which would allow the six authorities' preferred option to be taken forward, and more detail on this was being sought.

He considered that the recommendations would be broadly accepted by the CEB and he hoped the formal devolution bid would be published next month.

The Committee discussed the report and the wider implications of devolution, a combined authority, and an elected mayor.

They noted:

- The other local authorities were also discussing similar proposals for a devolution bid although a consensus was not assured.
- The six authorities and their roles and functions would be unchanged.
- The key role of a combined authority would be in strategic transport; the Growth Board already had a role in finance, planning and transport where the County Council acted as the delivery agent for its decisions.
- It was envisaged that the combined authority would comprise an accountable elected mayor as its leader, the 6 Leaders; possibly Deputy Leaders; would require a scrutiny function of its own as well as that provided by each member authority; and would require to be open to public scrutiny.
- The County Council would retain a key role and although some specific functions would be transferred to the combined authority, some combined authority functions were already the responsibility of the Growth Board or the county LEP (e.g. skills).
- Devolution was likely to be an iterative process involving negotiation with central government and if the benefits offered by central government – including financial benefits – were not sufficient to warrant continuing with the devolution deal then the process could be stopped.

They made the following points:

- The combined authority required strong accountability; and hopefully would have a commitment to sustainability as well as economic benefits.

- When available the DCLG guidance on devolution bids should be circulated to all councillors and briefings on the process should be arranged as it proceeded.
- As well as the required joint consultation on the new structures and arrangements, a survey of what residents envisaged these could help deliver and their vision for the county would be helpful.

The Committee agreed to approve the report of the Devolution Review Group for submission to the City Executive Board on 19 January 2017.

76. Minutes

The Committee resolved to approve the minutes of the meeting held on 6 December 2016 as a true and accurate record.

77. Dates of future meetings

The Committee noted the dates.

The meeting started at 6.00 pm and ended at 6.45 pm