

BRECKLAND DISTRICT COUNCIL

Report of: Executive Director Strategy & Governance

To: Council – 28 June 2016

(Author: Helen McAleer – Senior Democratic Services Officer)

Subject: Devolution

Purpose: Reference from the meeting of the Overview & Scrutiny Commission meeting held on 9 June 2016.

Recommendation: That, should the Governance Review and final scheme conclude that the Devolution model should include a Mayor as defined in the Cities and Local Government Devolution Act 2016, the Council should refuse to support it.

1.0 BACKGROUND

- 1.1 Councillor Nunn, the Leader of the Council, had been invited to the meeting of the Overview & Scrutiny Commission held on 9 June 2016 to provide Members with an update on Devolution. He gave a presentation in which he set out an overview of the process and sought to identify the risks and the potential benefits.
- 1.2 The Leader expressed his opinion that Devolution would benefit the area, but he felt that the process was being rushed and Local Authorities needed more time to consider the proposals. The current timetable indicated that the new authority would be established in January 2017 with a Mayor being elected in May 2017.
- 1.3 Despite his original strong opposition to having a Mayor he had come to accept that it made sense to have one person representing the views of the participants in the partnership. In any case, the Government had made it clear that to attain the full extent of the devolved powers sought, there has to be a Mayor. However, that person could be a 'strong' Mayor or more of a 'figurehead'.
- 1.4 Currently the Leaders were meeting weekly to discuss the proposals and put forward their suggestions for changes to the document. He noted that a two deal approach had been agreed but that deal 1 had to include part of deal 2. That was an area of concern as no agreement had been reached on the details of deal 1 yet. That was the deal that full Council would be asked to consider on 28 June 2016.
- 1.5 Another main area of concern was the lack of detail being provided by the Government. There was no explanation of the funding or governance arrangements and no certainty about the potential financial benefits on offer.
- 1.6 In conclusion, the Leader advised that even with all the uncertainties he felt it was better for the Council to 'stay at the table' and take an active part in the discussions, rather than to walk away.
- 1.7 Members raised various concerns about the potential costs, lack of detail and absence of obvious benefits or added value for Breckland.

- 1.8 Councillor Oliver pointed out that the Cities and Local Government Devolution Act at Schedule 1 conferred a huge range of powers on Mayors and that the Secretary of State had the power to fill the vacancy of a Mayor without an election and with no specified time limits on the term of that Mayor. He made a proposal, which was seconded by Councillor Crawford, that if Deal 1 included the requirement for a Mayor under the legal definition in the Cities and Local Government Devolution Act 2016, that Members should not support that Deal.
- 1.9 The proposal was supported and Members requested that their decision be referred to Council.

Background papers:- Powerpoint presentation by Councillor Nunn

Lead Contact Officer

Name and Post: Helen McAleer
Telephone Number: 01362 656381
Email: helen.mcaleer@breckland.gov.uk

Key Decision: No

Exempt Decision: No