

UNITARY GOVERNMENT IN CUMBRIA

EXECUTIVE MEMBER: Councillor Elaine Woodburn
LEAD OFFICER: Paul Walker, Chief Executive
REPORT AUTHOR: Lindsay Tomlinson, Democratic Services Manager & Monitoring Officer

WHY HAS THIS REPORT COME TO COUNCIL?

For information

RECOMMENDATIONS: That Full Council supports Copeland Borough Council's continued involvement in progressing Unitary Government options for Cumbria.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 This report updates Council on the current position on unitary local government in Cumbria.

2. DISCUSSION

2.1 There has been no initiative to introduce unitary local government (i.e. a single tier of principal councils) in England and Wales since 2007, when in a number of county areas, including Cornwall, Northumberland and Somerset, the two tier system was abolished and replaced by new unitary authorities. A proposal for a single county-wide authority for Cumbria was made at the time but was dropped at a late stage of the process by the then government.

2.3 The Coalition Government has indicated that it does not intend to bring forward proposals for structural reform of local government. The current Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government has stated that he does not intend to propose "top down" reform but that proposals for reform produced by local authorities themselves will be considered. It remains the case that abolition of principal councils and/or creation of new ones (as opposed to sharing of services) would require primary legislation in Parliament.

- 2.4 A report to Executive in May 2014 advised that there had been initial discussions between the Cumbrian districts and the County Council with a view to establishing whether there was consensus for reform, and that further discussions were planned. On 24 July 2014 a Cumbria County Council Scrutiny Review Task Group on National Best Practice report was presented to Cabinet. The report included eight recommendations, the last being:
“Cabinet ask the Chief Executive and Council Leader to urge government to impose a system of unitary authority on Cumbria”.
The draft minutes of the Cabinet meeting do not suggest that the recommendation has been taken any further at this stage.
- 2.5 Within the wider north-west region, on 4 September Chorley Borough Council is due to consider a report which sets out a proposal to investigate the viability of creating a single tier authority for the Borough. It is proposed that a business case be worked up with the intention of conducting a poll of local residents in Autumn 2015.
- 2.6 Should there be any move towards unitary status in Cumbria then clearly this will affect the position of Copeland Borough Council’s Directly Elected Mayor and elected members.
- 2.7 In the event that a unitary county council is established then Copeland Borough Council would cease to exist at the date the reorganisation comes into effect and the terms of office of its Councillors and elected Mayor would end at that time.
- 2.8 If a unitary authority were to be formed based on a merger of Copeland Borough Council with a neighbouring authority/authorities then the same would follow in that the former authorities would cease to exist and the terms of office of all the elected members and the Mayor would end.

3. CONCLUSIONS

- 3.1 Council is asked to note the current position.

4. STATUTORY OFFICER COMMENTS

- 4.1 The Monitoring Officer’s comments are: Included in the report

4.2 The Section 151 Officer's comments are: No comments at this stage.

5. RESOURCE REQUIREMENTS

None

List of Background Documents:

Cumbria County Council Scrutiny Review Task Group report: National Best Practice

Developing a Proposal for Unitary Status - Chorley Borough Council – report to Council 4 September 2014