

## OFFICER DECISION RECORD - EXECUTIVE FUNCTION

**Title of matter:**

Proposals for Local Government Reorganisation in Cumbria.

**Officer making the decision:**

Pat Graham, Chief Executive.

**Decision taken:**

Taking into account the evidence referred to below, that:

(a) the full business case, attached to this Decision Record and proposing a unitary council for the geographical areas covered by the district councils of Allerdale, Carlisle and Copeland, be submitted to the Minister for Housing, Communities and Local Government ' (MHCLG' ) as the Council's proposal for local government re-organisation in Cumbria; and

(b) MHCLG be advised that this Council has no view on the postponement of elections next year but that such decision should be taken in consultation with the Cumbria County Council and after taking into account the logistical difficulties social distancing may cause to the holding and count of an election if vaccination is not completed by that time.

**Delegated power being exercised (please explain where the power comes from – which part of the constitution or specific Council/Executive decision):**

The Executive, in consultation with the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, has been dealing with this matter.

The Executive on the 6<sup>th</sup> November 2020 (decision statement 20/174) resolved that “authority be delegated to the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Elected Mayor, to continue to work with one or more of the Cumbrian Authorities to submit a final proposal alongside the financial case to the Secretary of State to comply with the stated deadline of by 9th December”.

This decision record records the Chief Executive's decision, taken in consultation with the Mayor, and other members of the Executive at its meeting on the 8<sup>th</sup> December 2020 and taking into account (a) the evidence, whether statistical or otherwise, set out or referred to in the attached full business case; (b) the comments of the Executive made at their meetings on the 22<sup>nd</sup> September 2020, 6<sup>th</sup> November 2020, 25<sup>th</sup> November 2020 and 8<sup>th</sup> December 2020; (c) the comments of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee at their meetings on the 17<sup>th</sup> November 2020 and 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2020; (d) the additional internal consultation with employees of the Council; (e) the external consultation with members of the public carried out including through a short on line survey during the period until the 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2020; and (f) the emerging proposals of other local authorities in Cumbria.

**Background information:**

Cumbria was created by the Local Government Act 1972 which introduced a major reorganisation of local government across the country into a two tier structure with effect from 1<sup>st</sup> April 1974. Cumbria since then has comprised of the Cumbria County Council and six districts.

From time to time since 1974 consideration has been given to re-organising the authorities in Cumbria but no particular proposal progressed. There are currently two procedures (under the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007) which allow for re-organisation – either by an invitation from the Secretary of State for proposals for local government restructuring or following a review by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England.

In 2019, the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government set out in a written statement to the Commons the specific circumstances in which he would be prepared to issue a formal invitation to Councils under the 2007 Act to submit proposals for new unitary councils. He indicated that the Government was supportive of councils that wished to combine where they were locally requested provided that any proposal would be likely to improve the area's local government, command a good deal of local support across the area and cover an area that provides a credible geography for the proposed new structures, including that any new unitary council's population would be expected to be in excess of 300,000.

The Head of the Governance Reform and Democracy Unit at MHCLG, on behalf of the Secretary of State, on the 9<sup>th</sup> October 2020 invited local authorities in Cumbria to submit a proposal for unitary government in this area. This could be individual or jointly with any of the five other district councils in Cumbria or the county council. If an authority wished to submit a proposal then it should do so by submitting an outline proposal by the 9<sup>th</sup> November 2020 and full proposal by the 9<sup>th</sup> December 2020.

This Council submitted an outline proposal, in accordance with the timescale, stating that its preferred option for local government in Cumbria was to create a unitary authority within the existing district boundaries of the councils of Allerdale, Carlisle and Copeland.

Further work on a full business case ('FBC') has now been completed to support the outline business case proposal.

**Evidence/discussion/reasoning:**

The proposal to be submitted prefers the option of a single unitary council for West Cumbria comprising of Allerdale, Carlisle and Copeland areas.

The vision in the FBC is that the proposal will 'promote Cumbria with strong and fair representation for our communities and businesses' adding that 'Our services will drive sustainable economic growth, enable safe and healthy lives and deliver value for money for everyone'. This proposal will then provide local representation, responsibility and accountability as part of a strong Cumbria Combined Authority; it will provide local, responsive, accessible services, integrating planning and service delivery; it will strengthen our economy to lead the UK towards a cleaner, prosperous future; and it will deliver high quality services, efficiently and delivering value for our residents in collaboration with our partners.

A two unitary model for local government reorganisation in Cumbria represents the right balance between scale and efficiency and local knowledge, understanding and delivery.

The FBC states that this model will:

(a) for people, place and the economy, maintain and reflect local community identity; provide communities with strong local representation through smaller, balanced electorates on which to develop effective functional relationships with Town and Parish Councils; reflect, support and develop functional economic geographies in the county; enable sustainable, inclusive economic development and attract business investment in the local economy; provide access to funding and increase the prosperity and wellbeing of businesses and communities; attract the support of the people and communities of Cumbria and reflect how they identify with place; and to create a strong leader and voice to attract investment on the national stage; and

(b) for services and the organisations integrate services around the needs and expectations of residents and businesses, utilising local knowledge; offer opportunities to focus, target and improve children's services; enable culture change and develop a customer-first culture of collaboration; reflect the structures of healthcare delivery, establishing local, integrated, all-age services over a viable footprint; establish financially sustainable, fit for purpose local government organisations and unlock efficiencies that can be reinvested in services to boost quality; develop greater self-sufficiency through income generation and leveraging scale and buying power; and drive strategic leadership and collaborate on strategic issues through a mayoral Combined Authority.

The key arguments for east/west unitary councils are specifically that they will:

- align with the existing road and rail infrastructure;
- connect ports infrastructure to air links and across Cumbria;
- provide focus to address the clear inequality in digital connectivity across Cumbria;
- reflect and understand different communities and challenges and will provide representation and services to address local concerns and priorities;
- build upon existing service delivery footprints which demonstrates natural alignment and will minimise disruption;
- achieve efficiencies and financial sustainability;
- build upon existing back office shared services and efficiencies demonstrating natural alignment in corporate functions;
- provide democratic representation by establishing political entities that represent a culturally coherent population;
- enable focused development and support for tourism assets in the west;
- have strong, balanced economies which are well diversified and provide a strong footprint to develop and grow;
- provide a balanced division of growth projects but will also enable focused development; and
- protect, support and strengthen the nuclear industry and world-leading site at Sellafield.

Each of these arguments is explained on pages 55 to 67 of the FBC.

The west unitary will have a population of 274,622 (55%); the east 225,390 (45%).

In respect of financial efficiencies the opportunity for annual efficiencies is estimated at between £19.1m and £31.6m subject to the decisions and ambitions of the future unitaries though there are opportunities for significant additional savings through wider transformation. Implementation

costs are expected to range between £17.6m and £23.8m and we expect these to be paid back through savings in year 3 following the vesting of the new unitaries.

The FBC is detailed and sets out the case for a two unitary model in Cumbria whether this be north/south or east/west. This Council's preference is for the east/west model for the reasons explained in the FBC.

**Consultation:**

*Internal*

In law this has been an executive decision. This has meant seeking cross party discussion on the options and this have been undertaken through the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee. That Committee made a useful contribution to the discussion on preferred options at their meetings on the 17<sup>th</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2020. The two party Group leaders have been involved in the process either by being a member of the Executive or invited to attend Executive meetings when the matter was discussed. Additional consultation has been held with members through member briefings the last one being on the 3<sup>rd</sup> December. Staff have been provided with briefings on the matter.

*External*

The FBC sets out the extent of the consultation carried out (pages 52-54). Additionally an online survey has however been carried out by the Council seeking the public's views on the process and to establish their priorities in any new council structure. A full copy of the survey results and letters written are available separately.

**Whether any conflict of interest arose whether of the decision maker or any consultee in the decision and if any was declared whether the head of paid service granted a dispensation:**

None declared.

**Background/Reports/Information considered and attached (legal, personnel, financial implications, etc.):**

Reports to the Executive and Overview and Scrutiny Committee as set out above;  
The outline business case;  
Workshop briefing papers dated Nov 2020;  
The full business case and background documents supporting such; and  
Online survey results.

**Signature and date:**



Pat Graham, Chief Executive

8<sup>th</sup> December 2020  
Date