



Full Council	Thursday, 06 February 2025	Matter for Information and Decision
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Report Title: **English Devolution White Paper Update (February 2025)**

Report Author(s): **David Gill (Head of Law & Democracy / Monitoring Officer)**

Purpose of Report:	To enable an initial response to be given to the White Paper.
Report Summary:	To advise Members of the content of the Government's recent Devolution White Paper and to seek approval to commence such work as is considered necessary in response.
Recommendation(s):	<p>That Council:</p> <p>A. Authorises the Leader of the Council, in liaison with the Chief Executive, to undertake such work as is considered necessary in response to the White Paper and subsequent approach from government; and</p> <p>B. Authorises the Section 151 Officer to set aside £50,000.00 from the reserves to fund any necessary legal and governance advice on framing any specific proposals.</p>
Senior Leadership, Head of Service, Manager, Officer and Other Contact(s):	<p>Anne Court (Chief Executive) (0116) 257 2602 anne.court1@oadby-wigston.gov.uk</p> <p>David Gill (Head of Law and Democracy / Monitoring Officer) (0116) 257 2626 david.gill@oadby-wigston.gov.uk</p>
Strategic Objectives:	<p>Our Council (SO1)</p> <p>Our Communities (SO2)</p> <p>Our Economy (SO3)</p>
Vision and Values:	<p>Collaborative & Creative (V3)</p> <p>Resourceful & Resilient (V4)</p> <p>Customer & Community Focused (V1)</p>
Report Implications:-	
Legal:	There are no implications directly arising from this report.
Financial:	The implications are as set out in this report.
Corporate Risk Management:	<p>Political Dynamics (CR3)</p> <p>Reputation Damage (CR4)</p> <p>Regulatory Governance (CR6)</p> <p>Organisational / Transformational Change (CR8)</p>
Equalities and Equalities Assessment (EA):	There are no implications directly arising from this report. EA not applicable
Human Rights:	There are no implications directly arising from this report.

Health and Safety:	There are no implications directly arising from this report.
Statutory Officers' Comments:-	
Head of Paid Service:	The report is satisfactory.
Chief Finance Officer:	The report is satisfactory.
Monitoring Officer:	As the author, the report is satisfactory.
Consultees:	None.
Background Papers:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/english-devolution-white-paper-power-and-partnership-foundations-for-growth/english-devolution-white-paper
Appendices:	None.

1. Background

- 1.1 The English Devolution White Paper was published on 16 December 2024. The White Paper sets out the Government's plans for changes to local government in England to extend devolution powers and funding, and proposes a redistribution of powers from central to local government, including extending powers to Mayoral authorities. It includes a programme of local government reorganisation for two-tier areas.
- 1.2 An English Devolution Bill is intended to be brought forward by the Government.

2. Proposals

- 2.1 The Government wishes to see universal coverage in England of 'Strategic Authorities' – which should be a number of councils working together, covering areas that people recognise and work in. Many places already have Combined Authorities that serve this role e.g. the East Midlands Combined Authority. The Government intends to continue to develop new Strategic Authorities collaboratively and in partnership with places. However, in order to ensure that citizens across England benefit from devolution, and to ensure the effective running of public services, they will legislate for a ministerial directive. This will allow the creation of those Strategic Authorities where local leaders have, after due time has been allowed, not been able to make progress. This, combined with plans to support local government reorganisation, will align public service boundaries with Strategic Authorities and will ultimately lead to fewer elected members.
- 2.2 The White Paper states that all remaining two-tier areas and smaller unitary councils will be expected to develop proposals for reorganisation, with all councils working to develop unitary proposals in the best interests of the whole area as swiftly as possible. The Government will be writing to council leaders to formally invite proposals and will detail its criteria for sustainable unitary structure and how and when to submit proposals. The overall timetable for the proposals set out in the White Paper remains to be confirmed, although it is understood those areas wishing to be part of what the Government is calling its priority programme will be invited to submit proposals by March 2025, with remaining areas to submit their plans by autumn 2025. The government asked to hear, by 10 January, from those areas who want to be part of the Priority Programme, and for those councils with elections, to

advise whether they wish to request a cancellation of the elections due in May 2025. The District and Borough Leaders have written to Government agreeing in principle to the establishment of a Mayoral Strategic Authority.

2.3 This deadline is extremely tight and it is understood that the Priority Programme is for those who are ready and able to progress Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation, and where there is a clear and shared consensus for any proposals which must be submitted by May 2025 if authorities are awarded Priority Status.

2.4 The Government is clear that reorganisation should not delay devolution and plans for both should be complementary. They intend to work with areas to deliver an ambitious first wave of reorganisation in this Parliament. New unitary councils must be the right size to achieve efficiencies, improve capacity and withstand financial shocks. For most areas this will mean creating councils with a population of 500,000 or more but there may be exceptions to ensure new structures make sense for an area, including for devolution, and decisions will be on a case-by-case basis.

3. Initial Response to Proposals

3.1 The Council welcomes the opportunity for devolution of powers and funding from central government to the regions as a good way to secure investment and stimulate economic growth within our communities.

3.2 The Council, along with other district and borough councils in Leicestershire, believes that a population of 500,000 would be too big to be able to provide good local services to local people, especially in rural areas. The Council wants to make sure local government remains local.

3.3 Local government in Leicestershire works well representing the interest of its residents and the Council will be working hard to ensure that it gets the best for its residents going forward.

3.4 The Council would like to work collaboratively with other partners to develop proposals that work for Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland and that make sense to local people.

3.6 In developing any proposals it is likely that the Council will require external legal and governance advice and it is requested that £50,000.00 is set aside from the reserves to fund this work which will be jointly procured with the other District and Boroughs with costs being paid on an equal share basis.