



## Kirklees Democracy Commission Cross Party Working Group – Wednesday 29 August 2018

### Regional Devolution - Supporting Councillors and Citizens

#### 1. Background and Context

As part of its work the Commission undertook detailed work looking at the evolving regional devolution agenda, and in particular the implications for local citizens and the councillors who represent them. By way of a reminder Council have agreed the following outcomes in the context of the work covered by this paper:

- **Our approach to local devolution is from the ground up, based on local identity and the specific priorities of our towns, villages and communities;**
- **Citizens and councillors understand the opportunities and implications of regional devolution.**

Regional devolution is an ongoing journey with a future that is as yet unclear. The Commission focused on what we can do in Kirklees to make the most of the opportunities. It was felt that we should start with the local and evolve our regional democracy from there.

The Commission established that we need the different levels of our democracy (from neighbourhoods to towns, districts, regions and national government) to connect. It's not easy for citizens to understand those relationships.

It should be clear who has responsibility for which decisions, how citizens can get involved, and how we can hold decision-makers to account.

The Commission welcomed the idea of devolution beyond Westminster and thought it could provide opportunities and potential solutions to the challenges we face. Citizens want a democratically focused devolution that starts with local communities and grows from the ground up. It should be rooted in the priorities and outcomes that are important to citizens in our towns and villages.

Citizens felt a real sense of concern that towns and villages have lost their identity and lost their connection with the council when becoming Kirklees. Local people are worried that devolution may further weaken our sense of identity. This is why devolution must be rooted in our communities.

There was clarify that local councillors should be leading the dialogue with, and on behalf of, our citizens. In this way, we will make sure that Kirklees is strongly placed to influence and access the opportunities presented by devolution.

In light of the above the Commission made the following recommendations:

- Kirklees Council should review and improve the ways in which we support senior councillors to carry out their role in the context of the wider region. This should involve improving the information flow, in both directions, between the City Region and local areas. We should also make sure that all our councillors receive timely information about the wider regional devolution agenda.
- The West Yorkshire Combined Authority (WYCA) should improve the quality and flow of information in order to help citizens and local councillors understand (and have a better awareness of) regional issues and their relevance. This should include improving the way in which democratic content is produced, published and communicated.

For full context this mandate should be read in conjunction with the “Regional democracy” chapter in the final report.

The Theme Lead for this project is Kate McNicholas.

## 2. Information

Since the recommendations were agreed by Council officers have undertaken work to begin to consider how to progress the above mentioned recommendations.

*Suggested approach:*

Support for senior councillors will include monthly discussion at Leadership Management Team (LMT), quarterly discussion at the cross party regional engagement group and written briefings for key meetings.

In this context “Senior Councillors” include those Councillors who represent Kirklees on various regional bodies who are not on Cabinet. An initial meeting of councillors who represent Kirklees on WYCA has been held, and further meetings are planned.

In respect of the information flow to all councillors WYCA have rolled out a district specific newsletter (monthly) that details programmes of activity. There has already been a Full Council discussion on devolution, an Overview and Scrutiny discussion is scheduled for January 2019 and political group briefings will be offered.

The information flow to citizens is supported by the communication teams within Kirklees Council and WYCA, with weekly comms planning meetings and a shared programme of messaging; discussion with WYCA about website analysis in terms of publication and dissemination of papers. In addition a communication plan for the devolution agenda is under development.

Much of the above is new activity. The approach adopted will be tested as it is implemented to see if it is achieving the required traction and impact.

*Key actions:*

To map Council and non-Council representation on WYCA, Local Economic Partnership and other partnership bodies. It will be necessary to update and share full picture of who attends what – officers and members and include a list of who leads on what and confirm briefing expectations and arrangements for each meeting. ***Underway – other partnership bodies mapping to be completed September 18***

Update and share a list of topic / theme lead officers for briefings. Linked to this will be the production of a topic brief template and development of topic briefs in a prioritised order, based on significance, time pressures and achievability. ***September 2018***

To model rapid feedback emails from attendance at meetings where possible to enable quick feedback. ***Already underway***

Regarding the Member regional working party – confirm membership and develop options for the focus and agenda plan that meet member requirements. ***First meeting scheduled 1 October***

Also, schedule in monthly discussions at Executive Team and LMT on regional issues, supporting senior officers and members to look backwards and forwards to key meetings, and develop clearer priorities for achieving in these forums. ***Scheduled. First meeting held July 18***

It will also be useful to review the existing pipeline of projects in the regional arena to ensure they are the right ones and in priority order. ***Ongoing***

There will be a refinement of programme management arrangements to encompass the total portfolio and clarification on reporting arrangements. Also to propose the scheduling of programme reporting at Overview and Scrutiny committees for the new municipal year. ***Scrutiny scheduled for January 2019***

To secure the effective roll out of the WYCA newsletter to interested stakeholders including elected members. ***Complete***

Communication of key issues around the regional devolution agenda, and key deliverables via ongoing work from the communication team, in conjunction with regional and sub regional partners. ***Ongoing***

### 3. Recommendation

The Cross Party Working Group is asked to:

## 3(c)

- Consider the objectives and proposed approach for undertaking this project as set out at section 2 of this paper and make recommendations for any other actions that would help achieve the objectives set out by the review.

Report produced by:

Kate McNicholas in consultation with the wider Programme Team.