

From: Roger Gough, Leader of the Council
To: **Cabinet – 9th January 2025**
Subject: English Devolution White Paper
Key Decision: TBC

Summary: Following the publication of the English Devolution White Paper on 16 December 2024 the Government proposes to establish a Devolution Priority Programme for a limited number of areas which wish to access the benefits of both devolution and local government reorganisation as quickly as possible. The deadline for applications to the programme is 10 January 2025. Cabinet needs to determine how they wish to respond, if at all, to the Minister’s letter.

Recommendations:

No recommendations at the time of publication.

1. Background

1.1 On 16 December 2024 the Government published the ‘English Devolution White Paper - Power and partnerships: Foundations for growth’. On the same day, the Minister of State for Local Government and English Devolution, Jim McMahon OBE MP, wrote to council leaders setting out next steps to taking the proposals in the White Paper forward, and setting 10 January 2025 as the deadline for a formal request for areas to be included in the Devolution Priority Programme.

1.2 Details of the White Paper and the implications of applying to be in the Devolution Priority Programme will be considered at a Full Council meeting immediately prior to this Cabinet meeting. The paper for that County Council meeting sets out the background and content of the White Paper and discusses the rationale should Cabinet be minded to take any Urgent Decision. The County Council paper is attached as Appendix 1, which includes within the appendices the letter from the Minister.

1.3 Accordingly, there are two questions for Cabinet to resolve:

- a) Whether to request for Kent and Medway to be included in the Devolution Priority Programme
- b) Given a) above and the Government programme and timetable, whether to request the Minister to consider postponement of the County Council elections scheduled for May 2025.

1.4 Cabinet should note that these are both requests to be made to Government in response to the letter sent by the Minister setting out how the Council should respond. Accordingly, the decision-maker is Government in relation to both the election and the Devolution Priority Programme.

1.5 Should Members wish to make a request of the type contemplated in paragraph 1.3 then an Urgent Executive Decision will be needed.

2. Request to be included in Devolution Priority Programme

2.1 For clarity, acceptance by Ministers of Kent and Medway on the Devolution Priority Programme will commit the County Council, working with Medway Council and the District and Borough Councils in Kent to the following:

- **The creation of a Mayoral Strategic Authority:** Areas which are in the Devolution Priority Programme must work to create a Mayoral Strategic Authority (MSA) and holding the first elections for the Mayor by May 2026.
- **The delivery of Local Government Reorganisation:** Areas which are in Devolution Priority Programme will be committing to delivering local government reorganisation by either April 2027 or April 2028. Areas on the programme will be expected to set out initial reorganisation proposals by March 2025 and detailed proposals by Autumn 2025.

3. Request to consider postponement of County Council elections

3.1. The 16 December letter from the Minister also set out that he is minded to lay necessary secondary legislation to postpone local council elections from May 2025 for a 12-month period where this will help an area deliver both reorganisation and devolution to the most ambitious timeframe. Any request from the relevant Council asking the Minister to consider election postponement is required by 10 January 2025. It should be noted that any decision to postpone council elections is a decision only Ministers can make and requires parliamentary approval through secondary legislation.

4. Recommendations:

4.1 Given the preceding conversation at County Council, no recommendations are included with this paper at the time of publication and Members of Cabinet will need to propose and second any recommendations within the meeting.

5. Relevant Director:

Amanda Beer, Chief Executive Officer

6. Report Authors:

David Whittle, Director of Strategy, Policy, Relationships & Corporate Assurance

Ben Watts, General Counsel

7. Appendices:

Appendix 1: English Devolution White Paper, report to County Council, 9 January 2025