

Devolution: What is it and why it will be good for Huntingdonshire?

In June, all seven District Councils, the Peterborough unitary authority, the County Council and the Local Enterprise Partnership agreed to accept the terms of a game-changing deal offered by Government.

If this deal is approved by all the authorities named above by November 9th a new Combined Authority will be established which will replace a whole network of Whitehall-based civil servants and politicians who are currently making decisions on our behalf without any real knowledge of our local situation nor the opinions of our local residents.

The principles of the deal are that we will receive new funding designed to help with our agenda for growth which includes

- an infrastructure investment pot of £20m per annum for 30 years to be used to leverage more funding from the financial markets to help us bring forward such projects as the new Ouse river crossing which aims to relieve the congestion in St. Ives and Huntingdon arising from the Wyton and Alconbury housing developments.
- A housing fund of £100m over 5 years to incentivise developers to build houses rather than sitting on land banks and helping to increase the number of affordable homes we need.

Beyond this, we need to modernise transport systems across our area and we need to train more people to help them find jobs in the region. There will be a new University build in Peterborough with Devolution money and the combined Authority will control the Adult education budget and Apprenticeship Grants so that as new jobs are created there are trained and qualified young people ready to take them.

Devolution will give us the right and the power to decide upon all these issues locally through locally elected Councillors all working together; not only to 'join-up' local government at last, but to agree how the cost of services can be reduced whilst making them more resilient.

To achieve all of this a Mayor will be elected and will take office in May 2017. His/her Cabinet will comprise of the Leaders of the various authorities mentioned at the start of this article (they will receive no extra remuneration for this).

Most of the officials needed to supervise and run the various programmes mentioned here will be transferred from existing authorities without back-filling and the combine efforts of the consortium of Councillors who will comprise the cabinet will commit to saving more money than the new mayor and their office will add.

So yes, this could be interpreted as another layer of Government but I prefer to think of this as a no-cost transfer of real power from the Government to Cambridgeshire with a billion pound plus benefit to the local economy and people.

As residents you are being asked to let us have your comments about Devolution – good and bad – before the end of August. A MORI telephone poll, an online poll and many grass roots soundings like this article will be fed into the system before the Council takes a vote on what to do by November.

Please let me have your views and questions. Send them to robin.howe@huntingdonshiredc.gov.uk

So finally; no Devolution deal means no extra funding and the loss of all these benefits to our housing, jobs and transport systems. Don't let this opportunity to move decision making into the hands of local people be passed up.

Robin Howe

Executive Leader Huntingdonshire District Council