

## Portfolio holder decision – Leader – 11 April 2025

### Devolution – Hampshire and the Solent – consultation response to government

Purpose	For Decision
Classification	Public
Executive Summary	<p>This report deals with the Council’s response to the government’s consultation on establishing a Mayoral Combined County Authority across Hampshire, Portsmouth, Isle of Wight and Southampton.</p> <p>The proposed response is to be submitted by the Leader, on behalf of the Council, following the Council’s resolution at its special meeting on 20 March 2025, to delegate authority to the Leader to respond on behalf of the Council.</p> <p>As indicated in the report considered by Council on 20 March 2025, the proposed response supports the overarching principles of devolution, seeking to support the transfer of enhanced decision making from central government and the ability to retain a greater share of more locally generated funding.</p> <p>Whilst being optimistic about the potential for devolution, the response details the matters that, in the opinion of the Council, require greater clarification, including clarity on the scale and timing of funding, and the role of district councils through any transition period of local government reorganisation.</p>
Recommendation	<p><b>1. That the response attached at Appendix 1, be submitted to government as the Council’s response to the consultation on establishing a Mayoral Combined County Authority across Hampshire, Portsmouth, Isle of Wight and Southampton.</b></p>
Reasons for recommendations	<p>To comply with the resolution of the Council, to delegate authority to the Leader of the Council to respond to the government consultation, on behalf of the Council.</p>

	To ensure that the interests of the Council, its communities, residents and businesses are represented as part of the devolution process.
Wards	All
Portfolio Holder	Councillor Jill Cleary – Leader
Strategic Directors	Kate Ryan – Chief Executive
Officer Contact	Matt Wisdom Service Manager – Democratic and Support Services 023 8028 5072 <a href="mailto:Matt.wisdom@nfdc.gov.uk">Matt.wisdom@nfdc.gov.uk</a>

## **Introduction and background**

1. New Forest District Council (NFDC) welcomes the opportunity to respond to the government's consultation on the proposed establishment of a Mayoral Combined County Authority (MCCA) for Hampshire, Portsmouth, Isle of Wight, and Southampton. The response at Appendix 1 outlines NFDC's position on various aspects of the proposal, highlighting both support and concerns.
2. At a special meeting of NFDC on 20 March 2025, the Council resolved to delegate authority to the Leader of the Council to respond to the government's consultation on this matter.

## **Key aspects of the consultation response**

3. The government's consultation asks seven questions, which are contained in Appendix 1, alongside the Council's proposed response to each. This response can be summarised across those questions, as follows:-

### Question 1 – benefits of establishing an MCCA

- NFDC supports the principles of devolution, aiming to foster growth, enhance infrastructure, and drive public sector reform.
- The initiative presents an opportunity to attract investment to the region.
- Clarity on the scale and timing of financial investments is essential for effective planning.

## Question 2 – governance arrangements

- The role of existing district and borough councils during the transitional process of local government reorganisation, must be clearly defined, with a mechanism in place for effective representation of districts and boroughs.
- NFDC emphasizes the necessity for these councils to have a formal and active role within the MCCA to maintain continuity and leverage local expertise.
- Clarification is sought on Freeport governance arrangements, to ensure that the areas of benefit are protected.

## Question 3 – economic impact

- The creation of an MCCA is expected to generate significant positive economic outcomes.
- Localised decision making for infrastructure funding, skills and innovation investment, housing, health, and regeneration investment is seen as positive.
- The MCCA geography aligns with established transport corridors, allowing for improved coordination of infrastructure and public transport.
- A localised approach to investment will be needed given the diverse local economies within the region.

## Question 4 – social outcomes

- The MCCA offers significant potential to deliver positive social outcomes through integrated decision making and targeted investment.
- Prioritising rural communities, such as the New Forest, is crucial to prevent them from being left behind.
- The MCCA can better align skills provision with local employment needs, ensuring communities have access to training and education that leads to skilled jobs.

## Question 5 – local government services

- The MCCA allows for strategic local government to take place at a scale that reflects the population and geography of the region.
- True devolution should focus on securing new powers over transport, skills, infrastructure, and economic growth, rather than redistributing existing local government functions.
- If local government reorganisation is required through the devolution process, the delivery of truly representative unitary councils is key to the success of the MCCA.

### Question 6 – environmental impact

- The MCCA can ensure a balanced approach to growth and sustainability, protecting natural landscapes while promoting sustainable economic growth.
- Authorities within the MCCA area have declared climate and nature emergencies, with ambitious targets around carbon reduction, climate adaptation, and nature recovery.
- Strategic responsibility for climate adaptation measures aligned to the MCCA would improve the resilience of the Hampshire and Solent area.

### Question 7 – local communities and identities

- The New Forest is a nationally significant landscape with a rich heritage and strong community ties.
- The distinct needs of rural, forest, and waterside communities must be carried into the MCCA.
- Local democracy in the New Forest is enhanced by an active network of town and parish councils, whose role must be respected and enhanced through the MCCA model.
- If local government reorganisation is required through the devolution process, the delivery of truly representative unitary councils is key to the success of the MCCA.

### **Corporate plan priorities**

4. The recommendations support all corporate plan priorities by ensuring that they are furthered through the development of devolution policy.

### **Options appraisal**

5. The reasons for the preferred option are set out above.
6. The Council could choose not to submit a consultation response, but this would miss a vital opportunity to shape the process in line with the Council's objectives and priorities.

### **Consultation undertaken**

7. The preparation of the consultation response has been developed by a number of senior council officers, including the Executive Management Team. All Council Group Leaders were shared a copy of a draft, prior to it being finalised. The Full Council debated the background report which provided an update on devolution and local government reorganisation and subsequently delegated authority to the Leader to respond on behalf of the Council.

## **Financial and resource implications**

8. There are no financial implications arising from the decision itself. The Council is seeking clarity from government on the financial frameworks associated with devolution, for effective planning and resource allocation.

## **Legal implications**

9. Whilst the Leader could submit a consultation response in her own right, constitutionally, she has been delegated authority by the Council to respond on its behalf.
10. With regard to the MCCA itself, the Council is seeking assurance that governance arrangements ensure the effective representation of district and borough councils. The current legal framework does not provide this guarantee at present.

## **Risk assessment**

11. It has not been deemed necessary to undertake a formal risk assessment for the Council's response to the government consultation.

## **Environmental / Climate and nature implications**

12. Whilst there are no environmental or climate and nature implications arising from responding to the government consultation, the response to question 6 of the consultation details a range of matters for consideration and the potential benefits and risks in this area of devolution.

## **Equalities implications**

13. None arising directly from this report. The Council considers that the MCCA must address the specific needs of diverse communities, including those in rural areas, to ensure that resource allocation is equitable and issues of social inequality can be addressed.

## **Crime and disorder implications**

14. None arising directly from this report.

## **Data protection/ Information governance/ ICT implications**

15. None arising directly from this report.

## **New Forest National Park / Cranborne Chase National Landscape implications**

16. Whilst there are no direct implications arising from this report, the MCCA must ensure the protection and enhancement of the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of these natural landscapes through future devolution arrangements.

### **Conclusion**

17. NFDC supports the establishment of an MCCA for Hampshire, Portsmouth, Isle of Wight, and Southampton, recognising the potential benefits for economic growth, social outcomes, and environmental sustainability. However, it is crucial that the governance arrangements ensure effective representation of district and borough councils, and that the specific needs of rural communities are addressed. Clear guidance on financial frameworks, governance structures, and strategic planning is essential to maximise the benefits of devolution.

### **Portfolio holder endorsement**

18. I have agreed to the recommendations of this report.

Signed: CLLR JILL CLEARY

Dated: 9 April 2025

#### **Appendices:**

Appendix 1 – Consultation response

#### **Background Papers:**

[Government consultation Report to Council – 20 March 2025](#)

Date on which notice given of this Decision – 11 April 2025

This decision is not for call-in. This is because, in the opinion of the Chief Executive and Monitoring Officer, it should be implemented urgently, having regard to the government’s consultation deadline, and the delegation of the Council to the Leader to respond on its behalf.