



Report to Cabinet

Subject Conurbation Area Agreement

Date 2nd August 2006

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Further to the report on the proposed Conurbation Area Agreement (CAA) presented to Cabinet on 1st June 2006, work on developing the draft agreement attached to that report has continued. Particular attention is being given to the proposed governance arrangements for the agreement, especially in the light of reports about government dissatisfaction with local governance board based proposals emerging from other core city conurbations. It is reported that the Secretary of State is dismissing these proposals on the basis that they do not provide the kind of clear and strong leadership which would be necessary in order to ensure that difficult decisions could be taken across existing local authority boundaries.

In the light of these reports, at their most recent meeting the Leaders of the six Councils whose areas include the conurbation have agreed in principle to develop a proposal for a joint board in the form of a legal joint committee with delegated authority to take decisions on an agreed range of strategic issues. The exact list of such issues, their scope and the geographical basis of the arrangement will need to be decided, but examples of the kind of issue which it is being suggested should be included are strategic land use planning and transportation. The proposal would be that the committee would comprise the Leaders of each of the Councils and that every member of the committee would have equal status and one vote.

As part of the submission to the government (now expected to be submitted in late September), it is also considered that a range of functions and powers should be identified for devolution from the government to the joint committee. Examples here would be powers over deregulated transport and additional powers to raise capital to fund regeneration schemes.

Members will appreciate that these proposals are not without risk for each of the participating authorities and their areas and that they require considerable trust, as well as the willingness to respect each others position, if they are to be made to work without one party or another withdrawing because of disagreement over the impact of any decision or proposal in any particular area. There are also difficult issues of local identity to be resolved, as well as the practical problems of reconciling the development of a CAA and its associated supporting structures with the County based LAA and its supporting structures. Notwithstanding these difficulties, it is considered that the development of convincing, authoritative and co-ordinated conurbation wide governance arrangements is essential for the future prosperity of the whole of the conurbation.

Recommendation

Members are asked to note this report and endorse the emerging proposals for the development of a joint committee with delegation along the lines suggested.