

Report of the Cabinet Member for Policy, Corporate and Asset Management

I have been asked to report as follows for Full Council on 17 February 2022:

By Councillor Hannaford on:

- 1. the Levelling Up White Paper, and the progress of the Devon Devolution Deal, including the aims, objectives and ambitions for Devon.*
- 2. a summarised version of the Race Equality Audit report with action points*

By Councillor Atkinson on:

- 3. the recent invitation of The Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs for applications for the Landscape Recovery Scheme. It's part of the new 'public money for public goods' system, which replaces the EU's Common Agricultural Policy. Up to 15 projects will be taken forward, each one up to 5 thousand hectares or 50 square kilometres. The projects will concentrate on restoring threatened species and ecosystems, recovering streams and rivers and adapting landscapes for climate mitigation. The competitive process favours large farms. Are we supporting local small farms and our own tenants to work together collaboratively to put in a bid? Especially as in order to put in a bid they have to first form a Community Interest Company. What is the position here in Devon on any bids being made or successful.*

Response

1. Levelling Up White Paper and Devon Devolution Deal

The Levelling Up White Paper was published on 2 February 2022. It sets out an analysis of the causes and impacts of regional economic disparities and proposes 12 national "missions" across four broad areas:

- Boosting productivity and living standards by growing the private sector, especially in those places where they are lagging.
- Spreading opportunities and improving public services, especially in those areas where they are weakest.
- Restoring a sense of community, local pride and belonging, especially in those places where they have been lost.
- Empowering local leaders and communities, especially in those places lacking local agency.

The White Paper also commits the Government to further consultation on the metrics used to measure the success of its 12 'missions', and to create a statutory responsibility on Government to report on their progress. This includes the establishment of a new independent data body to monitor the Government's progress, and a new Levelling Up Advisory Council to support its policy approach

To deliver upon this commitment, the White Paper sets out a new framework for devolution for England, seeking to enable local areas to better realise their own economic and social potential. This includes new opportunities to enhance economic growth and innovation, to invest in additional skills and employment activity, to support regeneration across the Country's towns, cities and rural/coastal areas, and reshape national investment programmes to meet local priorities.

Crucially, the new framework extends the offer of devolution beyond metropolitan areas for the first time, setting out pathways to a deal for every area of England that wants one. The framework is underpinned by four fundamental principles that Government wishes to pursue through its renewed devolution approach: effective leadership, sensible geography, flexibility, and appropriate accountability.

The Government has initially invited nine areas: Cornwall; Derbyshire and Derby; **Devon, Plymouth and Torbay**; Durham; Hull and East Yorkshire; Leicestershire; Norfolk; Nottinghamshire and Nottingham; and Suffolk to start formal negotiations to agree these new 'County Deals'.

The White Paper sets out the types of powers and functions that will be considered for each of three devolution levels. Some powers will only be available to certain authorities or geographies but there will be scope to negotiate further powers on a case-by-case basis.

The pan-Devon area will be a Level 2 area where a County Deal could devolve powers such as control of appropriate local transport functions, ability to introduce bus franchising, the ability to provide input into Local Skills Improvement Plans, and Homes England compulsory purchase powers.

Devon County Council, the eight district councils, Plymouth City Council and Torbay Council have welcomed the Secretary of State's decision to enter into negotiations. This is an opportunity for us to get powers and flexibilities we need to do more to tackle inequalities, improve social mobility and invest in economic growth and skills, and contribute to levelling up.

There is a reasonably good match between what we hope to achieve through a Deal and what is on offer to Level 2 areas. We particularly welcome the Government's initial options around community investment, employment and training, sustainable transport, and business support, each of which could play a stronger role in meeting our priorities as a Council. However, we will want to go further on some issues – particularly on housing, climate change, skills, and health and care.

We will be talking with Ministers and officials over coming weeks to and move ahead as quickly as we can. I will ensure that all Members are kept updated with progress.

2. Race Equality Audit Report - Understanding and Addressing Structural Racism in Devon County Council”

Members will recall that making Devon a fairer and more equal county is one of the six priorities in the [Strategic Plan 2021 – 2025](#) which we adopted at the end of last year.

The Race Equality Audit was commissioned by the Leadership Group as a way of helping the Council understand the nature and impact of structural racism within the organisation so that it can be addressed. The objectives were to provide an honest assessment of how it feels for Black and Asian colleagues to work for Devon County Council, to challenge assumptions and advise on actions to ensure DCC becomes a place where Black, Asian and Ethnically Diverse staff feel safe, included and welcomed. The audit was carried out by three consultants: Kalkidan Legesse MBA, Maia Thomas and Sandhya Dave.

The Chief Executive and I sent a link to the 30 page Race Equality Audit report to all Members on 26 January 2022. It is available, together with the accompanying summary infographic, at <https://www.devon.gov.uk/equality/performance-and-monitoring/raceaudit21>

The report’s recommendations are set out under six themes:

- Denial of Racism.
- ‘Small Numbers’ Rhetoric.
- “No Data” Excuse.
- White Fragility in Leadership.
- Lack of Sufficient and Consistent Leadership for Diversity and Inclusion.
- Unwelcoming Culture for Black and Asian People.

The overall findings make for some hard and uncomfortable reading. They are a stark wake-up call for all of us that racism still exists to an unacceptable extent in our country, in our county, and regrettably, within our Council. I am clear that we all need to do more to ensure Black, Asian and other Ethnically Diverse staff feel included and are able to express their needs and experiences safely. We all share a responsibility to challenge racist behaviour and call out racism within DCC and our local communities. To that end I am committed to eliminating discrimination, providing equality of opportunity and challenging prejudice.

The report highlights four areas for immediate focus:

- Provide clear guidance on the process of investigating incidents of racial discrimination to all stakeholders.
- Employ a diverse and skilled Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) team, with Black/ Asian/Ethnically Diverse backgrounds, to work alongside the Lead EDI officer in implementing the recommendations of this report and wider equality priorities.
- Implement appropriate racial grievance channels, enabling staff to raise concerns independent of line manager.
- Let’s Explore Race mentoring programme to be made available to all management within DCC.

The Cabinet and Leadership Group support the report and have accepted its findings. The proposed 2022/23 budget includes provision for additional investment in equality, diversity and inclusion. I have asked the Chief Executive to report to the Cabinet on 13 April 2022 on how that resource will be used to implement the report's recommendations and strengthen the Council's ability to challenge inequality and celebrate diversity.

All Members will be invited to participate in a discussion about the roles they can play in implementing the recommendations. Those sessions will be an important opportunity for Members to explore and fully understand the audit's findings and I urge all Members to participate.

Scrutiny committees will also have an important part to play in oversight of progress with implementing the recommendations to ensure that the Council is the best possible employer and service provider to everyone.

3. Landscape Recovery Scheme

The Landscape Recovery Scheme is one of three new environmental land management schemes announced by government as part of its Agricultural Transition Plan (2021 to 2024). Together these form part of the shift away from direct subsidy payments to farmers and landowners, which provides scope to support agriculture in new ways. There are three levels of support: Sustainable Farm Incentive, Local Nature Recovery scheme and the Landscape Recovery scheme which is a competitive fund to facilitate landscape-scale and ecosystem changes through a small number of large projects.

Defra is planning to open applications for Landscape Recovery pilot projects in at least two rounds over the next two years, with up to 15 projects supported through the first of these. The first of these opened early in February and is open to any individuals or groups who want to come together to deliver large (500 – 5,000 hectare) scale projects, to be split between the two targeted themes. (Recovery and restoring England's threatened native species and restoring England's streams and rivers)

The application deadline is 24 May.

Through our role on the Devon Local Nature Partnership (DLNP) we are supporting organisations to apply and work together to submit applications and provide signposting and information to support their applications.

Through the partnership network DCC County Farms have the opportunity to collaborate with potential lead partners (larger landowners across the County)

DCC Farms estate (dispersed across the County) does not have the areas of land eligible for the scheme to be a lead partner in the bid but could engage with other stakeholders through the DLNP forum to consider inclusion in the overall bid.

Councillor John Hart

Cabinet Member for Policy, Corporate and Asset Management