



CABINET REPORT

Report Title	Outcome of the Government's Quinquennial Review of the West Northamptonshire Development Corporation (WNDC)
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AGENDA STATUS: PUBLIC

Cabinet Meeting Date:	10 th February 2010
Key Decision:	No
Listed on Forward Plan:	No
Within Policy:	Yes
Policy Document:	No
Directorate:	Planning and Regeneration
Accountable Cabinet Member:	Councillor Brian Hoare
Ward(s)	All

1. Purpose

- 1.1 To advise Cabinet of the outcome of the Government's Quinquennial Review of WNDC; the implications for our ongoing relationship with WNDC and the impact on the future role of WNDC and NBC.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 Cabinet notes the Government announcement following the Quinquennial Review of WNDC and welcomes the statement that the regeneration of Northampton remains a Government priority.
- 2.2 Cabinet notes that many points which were pressed by the Council through Scrutiny and Cabinet and Council have been accepted in whole or part by the Government.

- 2.3 Cabinet welcomes the commitment to return planning powers to the Borough Council and urges that this should happen as quickly as possible.
- 2.4 Cabinet welcomes the commitment to replace WNDC with a locally accountable delivery vehicle at the end of its life and urges that this should happen earlier if at all possible.
- 2.5 Cabinet reiterates this Council's view that any replacement for WNDC must have a prime and clear priority focus on the growth and development of Northampton as a town.
- 2.6 Cabinet welcomes the Government's commitment to operational efficiency and instructs Officers to create one of the most, if not the most, efficient and effective Planning and Regeneration services in the country.
- 2.7 Cabinet instructs the Chief Executive and the Director of Planning and Regeneration to work positively with WNDC and partners on the implementation of the conclusion of the Quinquennial Review and to report back to Cabinet and Scrutiny as required.

3. Issues and Choices

3.1 Report Background

- 3.1.1 Communities and Local Government (CLG) is the sponsoring department for the three statutory Urban Development Corporations (UDC's). At the time of their establishment in 2004-2005, Government committed to undertake a review of the UDC's after five years.
- 3.1.2 Cabinet, at their meeting on 9th September 2009, formally agreed the response to the Government's consultation, which is attached at Appendix 1.
- 3.1.3 On January 14th 2010, the Government announced the outcome of the Quinquennial Review into the three UDC's, and a copy of the written Ministerial Statement is attached at Appendix 2.

3.2 Issues

- 3.2.1 Key findings of the review, common to each UDC are that:-
 - There continues to be a need to secure regeneration of their respective areas and that there continues to be a need for focussed delivery arrangements to support this;
 - Each UDC has a mixed track record of success so far;
 - Planning performance of each UDC in respect of major planning applications is below the national target. However, planning performance is improving.

- 3.2.2. The conclusions relating specifically to WNDP recognises that the regeneration of Northampton, Daventry and Towcester continues to be an important priority, **particularly given the importance of Northampton to the economic strength of Northamptonshire and growth across the Milton Keynes-South Midlands growth area.**
- 3.2.3 The Review recognises that WNDP has had some significant successes and has put the foundations in place to deliver regeneration.
- 3.2.4 The Review concludes that over time, CLG would like to see a new type of local partnership to take forward and deliver the work started by WNDP. In the interim, the Review recognises that there is scope **for WNDP to become a more strategic delivery focussed organisation**, working closely with the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) and other partners.
- 3.2.5 The Review importantly recognises that the time is right **to start to return Development Control decision making powers to the local planning authorities.** The Government will therefore provide for planning responsibilities to be returned on a staged basis. The first stage will be to revise the threshold for residential planning applications handled by WNDP from 50 homes to 200 homes; return other applications in the Northampton Central Planning Area to Northampton Borough Council; and return Waste and Minerals applications to Northamptonshire County Council. **The Government intends that this should take effect from April 2011.**
- 3.2.6 The Government are inviting the local authorities and delivery partners to work with WNDP to bring forward proposals for a new delivery model which might succeed WNDP in 2013-2014.
- 3.2.7 The Review recognises the important role of the local authority WNDP Board Members. Government will preserve the number of local authority Members and look to strengthen the link between nominated Members and the local authorities they represent, through revised Terms and Conditions of Board Membership.
- 3.2.8 There is much within the Review that can be welcomed and supported. Some of the key conclusions follow closely our formal response to the Review. In particular, the following conclusions are highlighted;
- The return of Development Control decision making powers to the local planning authorities;
 - That WNDP should become a more strategic delivery focussed organisation;
 - That over time a new delivery model should be brought forward by the local authorities, partners and WNDP to succeed WNDP in 2013-2014;
 - Revised Terms and Conditions for WNDP Board Membership;

- Recognition of the importance of Northampton to the economic strength of Northamptonshire and growth across the Milton Keynes-South Midlands growth area.

3.2.9 The Review's conclusions are disappointing in that the timescale for change and transfer of powers are too long. The April 2011 date for transfer of Development Control powers is particularly disappointing, given that both Northampton Borough Council and WNDC are prepared to work together to achieve a manager transfer of powers during 2010. The date of **2013-2014** for the introduction of a new partnership delivery model to succeed WNDC is again considered to be too distant and insufficiently challenging to all the partners to effect real change. Representation to Government on this issue of programme and timing is recommended.

3.3 Choices (Options)

3.3.1 Cabinet could decide not to work positively with WNDC and partners to give effect to the Review's conclusions, but this would carry some serious risks.

- Loss of influence to shape a new delivery model;
- Loss of investment/infrastructure for Northampton;
- Loss of reputation.

3.3.2 The preferred option is as set out in the recommendations.

4. Implications (including financial implications)

4.1 Policy

4.1.1 There are no direct policy implications arising from this report. However, the future implementation of strategic planning policies (from both the Joint Core Strategy and the Central Area Action Plan for Northampton) will be hugely dependent upon an effective delivery model, capable of securing new investment and infrastructure to properly accommodate planned growth.

4.2 Resources and Risk

4.2.1 The transfer of Development Control powers will have a direct financial implication for the Council. There would need to be an increase in capacity and expertise within our Development Control Team which would be likely to involve a transfer of some staff from WNDC.

4.2.2 Continued partnership working to identify a new delivery model to succeed WNDC, and to manage the transfer of planning powers could be contained within our existing resource base.

4.3 Legal

- 4.3.1 There are no immediate legal implications, however the transfer of Development Control powers and other democratic changes may require further Statutory Instruments to replace or cancel those enacted in 2004/2005.

4.4 Equality

- 4.4.1 There are no equality implications arising from this report.

4.5 Consultees (Internal and External)

- 4.5.1 Consultation has taken place between the Chief Executive, Director of Planning and Regeneration, and Head of Planning. Members have been engaged through the Scrutiny process and at Cabinet.
- 4.5.2 Discussions are ongoing with WNDC and partner local authorities.

4.6 How the Proposals deliver Priority Outcomes

- 4.6.1 Refocusing the role of WNDC and strengthening partnership/joint working would deliver on a range of priority outcomes, not least the regeneration of the Town Centre, community regeneration schemes and delivery of the growth agenda.

4.7 Other Implications

- 4.7.1 None identified.

5. Background Papers

- 5.1 Report to Cabinet from Overview and Scrutiny 1 dated 25th February 2009.
Report to Cabinet dated 8th July 2009.
CLG consultation paper re UDC's (June 2009) and formal outcome of the Review (14th January 2010) (attached as Appendix2).

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