

Date: 24 November 2023
Our Ref:
You Ref:

Hon Jacob Young MP
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State
(Department for Levelling up, Housing and Communities)
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

Via email – jacob.young.mp@parliament.uk

Dear Hon Jacob Young MP

Proposed Devolution in Lancashire

We felt we should write to you following the Teams call of 30th October 2023 and the announcement in parliament on Wednesday 22 November of an upper-tier Devo deal for Lancashire, which we contend did nothing to assuage the concerns highlighted directly to you on that date regarding UKSPF funding, sovereignty of District Councils, the wider benefits of the funds earmarked for upper tier authority projects and a clear ambition for all of Lancashire.

We have observed the current process for developing a devolution deal for Lancashire with interest. As district councils representing over 900,000 residents, equivalent to circa 60% of Lancashire's population, we understand our communities and the issues that are a priority for them. We want to ensure that all local authorities take on responsibilities alongside clear accountability through any devolution deal to improve our local areas. Unfortunately, it does not appear that the current work to develop a devolution deal for Lancashire will deliver that.

The discussions between the upper tier local authorities and the government seem to have started at least in part as a result of the great work undertaken by all local authorities (County, Unitary & District) across the county to articulate our ambitions through our Lancashire 2050 framework. As district councils, we were excited to work together as a local government family to both demonstrate our collective ambition and to deliver success for the county.

Although we have been unable to directly see all the detail of the devolution deal (which we have instead been allowed to inspect by named individual representatives. Hardly a ringing endorsement of trust in us as Council Leaders!), from that detail which has been shared with us, it seems that the current deal does not articulate any clear benefits for the county and conversely risks creating disunity, sowing division and breaking up the Red Rose County. If the people of Lancashire are to support the transfer of powers and receipt of funding to a new body, the communities of our large and diverse county need to be able to understand and support the benefits that will be secured. These are self-evidently not apparent to us as their local democratic representatives and to other stakeholders we engage with. We therefore believe that this will also be evident to our residents in due course.

We know that devolution can represent an enormous opportunity to secure economic growth, prosperity and improved services. We know that all of Lancashire should and can play a stronger role in delivering economic growth, improved community health and a low

carbon future and are committed to playing our part. We aspire to attain a similar profile and status to that of our neighbouring authorities in Manchester and Merseyside where devolution is flourishing. It is therefore disappointing that we now feel we have to send this letter to you as we believe our residents risk being ill-served by the current proposals as outlined to us. We have raised our concerns to the upper tier authorities and whilst they have listened, they are either choosing not to alter course or are constrained by the requirements placed on them, presumably by your department.

We ask that you pause and review the devolution deal currently being developed for Lancashire to ensure that it will deliver real benefits for the county and that you provide assurance that any devolution deal and associated governance arrangements will only be implemented if and when they are supported by at the very least a simple majority of the communities across Lancashire.

In particular, we are very concerned that current plans regarding allocation of UKSPF funding are unclear at best and seem to point towards a withdrawal of funds from District areas to an unaccountable and inefficient County and Unitary Council model.

We would be delighted to meet with yourself, civil servants and the MP's who similarly represent our collective populations in order that if our understanding of the above is in any way incorrect, that you can provide suitable reassurance and specific evidence as to benefits for our areas, that we can then share further with our residents.

Yours sincerely




Leader – Preston City Council




Leader – Rossendale Borough Council





Leader – Lancaster City Council




Leader – Chorley Council




Leader – South Ribble Borough Council




Leader – West Lancashire Borough Council




Leader – Burnley Borough Council




Leader – Pendle Borough Council

cc Michael Gove - michael.gove.mp@parliament.uk