

Extraordinary Eden District Council Meeting 2nd December 2020.

This meeting was called to discuss the options for a unitary authority for Cumbria. Eden District Authority favours two authorities.

Discussion

Virginia Taylor, Leader (VT): The executive agreed on their option on the 23rd of November: Eden to be aligned with Carlisle and Allerdale. Eden has been working with Carlisle and Allerdale on the options. Preferences had to be in by the 8th of December. KPMG commissioned the report. There are four options: single and two authorities with various combinations. The report looks at service delivery, growth and financial (savings from fewer staff and economies of scale). The various options were examined, the choice of a two authority with a north/south split favoured. Currently there are seven district authorities in Cumbria.

Henry Sawrey-Cookson (HSW): Why is this necessary at all?

Les Clark (LC): It is required because we have been specifically invited, with Yorkshire and Somerset, to respond to the government.

Phil Dew: The report is deficient in information. When will this be added? There is no evidence of public support.

LC: The report is a development draft and incomplete. It will go through further refinement. The final version will be finished next Monday. As regards public support, the timetable the government gave us does not give us sufficient time to look at public opinion. We have not been able to go out to the public because the decision for the preferred option was only received recently (and had to be made by 8th of December). The government will be looking at public opinion in February or March.

Mike Eyles: I will not be supporting this recommendation. It is a hasty and ill-conceived plan. EDC has a healthy financial reserve and if Cumbria becomes a unitary authority this money will be subsumed and used up in the more populous areas of Cumbria. One benefit they say will be to save money, the council tax will not be reduced. Council workers will demand higher salaries and we will have a mayor thrust on us. Having to work on this in the midst of a pandemic is crazy.

Doug Lawson: £50,000 for a report like this (KPMG report) at a time like this is obscene especially when it will sit on a desk in Whitethall somewhere.

Gordon Nicholson (who headed the working group to decide the preferred option): We had a very short timescale and weren't able to consult with our residents. We had an obligation to respond the best way we could.

Phil Dew: We have been talking about this at county level. We have been looking at Wiltshire, which has been a single unitary authority for 11 years. They feel it was the right way forward with hugely significant financial benefits. They didn't recommend a mayor as it would add too much complexity. A single unitary authority would have much bigger savings than a two part authority. They have 18 local boards who make local decisions. I think the best model is a single unitary authority. Please vote against the motion.

Mary Robinson: If I was in Councillor Dew's shoes I would have made a declaration of interest as he is already a county councillor.

Lisa Tremble (Monitoring Officer): I don't think this precludes him voting on this matter.

Debra Wickes: We have all been at meetings where the options have been discussed.

VT: The mayoral model is the one preferred by the government.

David Ryland: How much did this report cost?

Paul Sutton: This has already been mentioned. It was £50,000.

LC: This cost was shared by four authorities: Eden, Carlisle, Allerdale and Copeland.

HSW: A unitary authority takes power away from the people.

LC: By replacing a two tier system (district/county) with a single tier, I would agree with you.

The motion for the two authority option was voted on and was passed.