

Deal to bring £900 million to Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire moves a step closer

Council's in Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire are a step closer to a deal that would mean £900 million for the region over 30 years

A DEAL for powers to be handed from Whitehall to Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire councils, securing £900 million of funding over 30 years to boost employment, improve transport, and kick-start home building, has been put to the Government.

Derbyshire County Council says it is extremely difficult to say if it would mean more or less money for the area but that it would at least secure the cash, allowing for long-term planning.

And its leader, councillor Anne Western, has previously said it would be better to have decisions made by people who live in and know the region, instead of London.

Councils in the two counties have agreed to send their "devolution agreement" to the Government and it is now down to Whitehall to give it the go-ahead before it comes back to the authorities again for the final sign-off.

The deal would see the new body, called a Combined Authority, have control over:

- The budget for major road repairs and improvements and environmentally-friendly travel.
- The adult education budget, currently controlled by the Skills Funding Agency, so that courses are shaped to suit the needs of the area.
- Tackling air quality issues, with the ability to introduce things like the new Clean Air Zones – one of which, introduced by the Government, will already mean a congestion charge in Derby for older taxis, lorries, and buses by 2020.
- A £200 million pot of cash to be made available over a decade to housing developers in the form of "recoverable loans and longer-term equity".

It would see a mayor being overall head of the new Combined Authority, with one councillor from each of the two county councils acting in a "supporting and advisory function to the mayor". It is not yet known how much the mayor would be paid.

Derbyshire County Council has said it is "extremely difficult" to say whether the £900 million would represent an increase or decrease in funding "in the light of constant changes and reductions in public sector funding which emerge from the Government on almost a weekly basis".

But a spokeswoman added: "The £900 million would be secure, unlike other Government budgets. It is clear that the Government is restructuring the funding of local public services and important that the region secures money when it can."

The Combined Authority would come into being from May 2017 following a mayoral election.

It would not take powers from existing councils, so would form an additional layer of regional bureaucracy. But it would aim to create 110,000 apprenticeships in the region over 30 years and 55,000 jobs by 2023, as well as London Oyster card-style transport for the region.