



Councillor Jonathan Brook
Leader
Westmorland and Furness Shadow Authority
Town Hall
Duke Street
Barrow in Furness
Cumbria
LA14 2LD

4th January 2022

Dear Jonathan,

I have long been a staunch supporter of local government reform in Cumbria. On one level, these long-overdue changes were intended to avoid waste, inefficiency, and duplication, thereby streamlining services, increasingly accountability and providing value for money for the taxpayer. But there is another more important reason why these reforms are so vital to the future of Cumbria: they pave the way for a possible devolution deal, including the introduction of an elected mayor who will have the time and space away from the important day-to-day running of a council to provide the strategic vision and leadership we need across the county.

The creation of the unitary council you will lead from April should not be the end of local government reform: it is simply a milestone in the process. A devolution deal is the ultimate prize.

Just last month the Levelling Up Secretary announced an historic devolution deal for North East that will see a new elected mayor given fresh money and powers to level up the region. This included a £1.4 billion investment fund, allowing the new Mayor of North East to level up Northumberland, Newcastle, North Tyneside, Gateshead, South Tyneside, Sunderland, and County Durham. As you may know, the North East is the sixth area to agree a deal of this kind with the Government last year.

North Yorkshire, who will only vest as a unitary authority on the same day as Cumberland, were quick out of the blocks – and are minded to agree a significant devolution package following intense negotiations. This includes £18m/year investment funding for 30 years, to drive growth and take forward the authority's priorities and £13m over the next two years for the building of new homes on brownfield land. That is alongside new powers to improve and integrate local transport, powers to better shape local skills provision and to drive regeneration.

The elected Mayor there will also assume the powers of the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner, as well as integrating the Local Enterprise Partnership to ensure truly joined-up leadership.

These deals will bring new investment and powers to local leaders – and I think we should be no less ambitious in our vision for Cumbria. I certainly would not like to see the two



unitary authorities of Cumbria miss out on the opportunity that is so clearly now up for grabs.

A devolution deal of this kind would amplify Cumbria's voice at the top table, giving the two unitary councils the power and the wherewithal to effect positive and meaningful change. After all, who better to understand the unique challenges facing our region than the people who live and work here? A mayor can act as a local champion attracting investment to the area and acting as a powerful local voice in discussions with Government and other organisations. A representative with strategic oversight across the county, and with the democratic mandate to speak for a combined Cumbrian Mayoral Combined Authority would also be particularly well-placed to ensure that the considerable investment brought about through a devolution deal could be focused in those areas where it is needed most.

From April, as the leader of a new council with considerable budget and powers, you will have the power to shape local policy in the interests of the people you were elected to serve. Cumbria's new unitary authorities create a huge opportunity for more local decisions to be taken by local people. My own view is that local councils should not be going automatically, or as a matter of course, to Government to solve our problems. It is up to local councillors and Members of Parliament to work together to come up with solutions for the challenges that face the areas they represent.

A devolution deal provides the tools to do just that. It would not only pave the way to even greater investment in Cumbria as a whole. It will also give our residents, and their political representatives, a greater say over how and where this money is spent. This will help to ensure that local communities are truly at the heart of everything you do – allowing you to deliver on your priorities around, for example, public health - and mine such as economic growth, an integrated transport network and infrastructure investment.

I was delighted to see that the Westmorland and Furness Council plan recognised that working together is vitally important in terms of building a brighter future for everyone. I was equally pleased to see that the Cumberland Council Plan 2023-2027 describes the authority's central aim as improving the health and wellbeing of residents, and that it has signalled its intention to embrace collaborative working with local and national partners. In that same spirit of partnership and cooperation, I pledge to work closely with you and with Government to achieve these shared aims.

In order to be truly aspirational we need to take the next step and that means you, as leaders, actively engaging with and consulting on the possibility of a devolution deal. If we take this concept of joint-working to its logical conclusion, this represents the best way to empower local people, and to develop a vision that works for everyone across Cumbria.

This is a chance for joint-working across the political divide to address some of the historic failures of Cumbria County Council – in terms of children's services, highways infrastructure, adult social care, and local transport. If you are serious about giving local communities a greater say in how their services are run, and in attracting more investment for Cumbria, I would urge you to embrace this opportunity.



Fundamentally devolution is all about letting leaders who live and work in their region decide what is in their best interests, for their people and for their businesses.

I would ask you to work with me and other Cumbrian MPs to start negotiations on a devolution deal immediately in the spirit of partnership set out in your council plans. The Secretary of State's door is open.

Yours sincerely

Mark Jenkinson MP

cc. Councillor Patricia Bell
Sam Plum