

Portfolio Holder Decisions/Leader Decisions

Date: Friday 10 January 2025
Time: 12.00 pm
Venue: Shire Hall, Warwick

Membership

Councillor Isobel Seccombe OBE

Items on the agenda: -

1. **English Devolution White Paper - County Council elections 2025** 3 - 36

Monica Fogarty
Chief Executive
Warwickshire County Council
Shire Hall, Warwick

Disclaimers

Disclosures of Pecuniary and Non-Pecuniary Interests

Members are required to register their disclosable pecuniary interests within 28 days of their election or appointment to the Council. Any changes to matters registered or new matters that require to be registered must be notified to the Monitoring Officer as soon as practicable after they arise.

A member attending a meeting where a matter arises in which they have a disclosable pecuniary interest must (unless they have a dispensation):

- Declare the interest if they have not already registered it
- Not participate in any discussion or vote
- Leave the meeting room until the matter has been dealt with
- Give written notice of any unregistered interest to the Monitoring Officer within 28 days of the meeting

Non-pecuniary interests relevant to the agenda should be declared at the commencement of the meeting.

The public reports referred to are available on the Warwickshire Web
<https://democracy.warwickshire.gov.uk/uuCoverPage.aspx?bcr=1>

Public Speaking

Any member of the public who is resident or working in Warwickshire, or who is in receipt of services from the Council, may speak at the meeting for up to three minutes on any matter within the remit of the Committee. This can be in the form of a statement or a question. If you wish to speak please notify Democratic Services in writing at least two working days before the meeting. You should give your name and address and the subject upon which you wish to speak. Full details of the public speaking scheme are set out in the Council's Standing Orders.

COVID-19 Pandemic

Any member or officer of the Council or any person attending this meeting must inform Democratic Services if within a week of the meeting they discover they have COVID-19 or have been in close proximity to anyone found to have COVID-19.

**Proposed Decision to be made under the
Council's Urgency Procedure by the Leader on
10 January 2025
English Devolution White Paper - County
Council elections 2025**

Portfolio Holder	Leader of the Council
Date of decision	10th January 2025
	Signed

1. Decision taken

That the Leader of the Council responds to the Minister of State for Local Government and English Devolution signalling the County Council's willingness to be considered for delivering local government reorganisation and devolution to the Government's ambitious timeframe and recognising that, as a consequence, the Government may decide that it is necessary to postpone the May 2025 County Council elections.

2. Reasons for decision

- 2.1 On 16th December 2024, the Government published a policy paper entitled 'English Devolution White Paper'. The White Paper focuses on two aspects of reform (i) widening devolution across England through, where necessary, the creation of new Strategic Authorities to which centrally held Government powers would be devolved and (ii) a programme of local government reorganisation to create new unitary Councils, both of which are considered by the Government to be essential to driving its growth mission and delivering better outcomes for residents. The White Paper confirms that the Government intends to work at pace and to ambitious timeframes in the delivery of devolution and local government reorganisation.
- 2.2 Recognising that County Councils in England are scheduled to have elections in May 2025, the White Paper indicates that the Government would consider taking decisions to postpone local elections. This is particularly the case where the timing of elections affects planning for devolution, particularly alongside local government reorganisation proposals.
- 2.3 The Minister of State for Local Government and English Devolution therefore wrote to Warwickshire County Council on 16th December 2024, along with other upper

tier Councils across the Country, asking for a view on or before Friday 10th January 2025 regarding the potential postponement of the May 2025 County Council elections. A response is requested by this date to enable the laying of the secondary legislation necessary to affect a postponement with sufficient time for the legislation to be passed and come into force before the local elections are due to be announced in March 2025.

- 2.4 There are two options open to the Council in considering the request from the Minister of State for Local Government and English Devolution (i) Not to respond and await an indication from Government in the New Year as to which Councils it intends prioritising for devolution and local government reorganisation (ii) To respond to the Minister of State setting out whether the County Council would wish for Warwickshire to be considered for delivering local government reorganisation and devolution to the Government's ambitious timeframe and as a result whether it would be open to the postponement of the elections.
- 2.5 Not to respond to the letter from the Minister would mean that Warwickshire would be unlikely to be considered in the first tranche of Councils moving forward at pace with devolution and local government reorganisation. It would also mean that Warwickshire would be less well placed to influence the Government's proposed timescales and would have less opportunity to influence and shape the geographical landscape of devolution and reorganisation within which Warwickshire sits. Given that Warwickshire has already secured a Level 2 Devolution Deal with Government, Warwickshire is well placed to amplify and accelerate its devolution aspirations for the County, delivering growth for the local economy and benefits for residents. Not to respond would potentially be a lost opportunity for Warwickshire to be part of and benefit from deeper devolution arrangements with Government, through alignment with a Strategic Authority, which reorganisation could help to drive, and which could optimise the benefits for Warwickshire. Being part of early dialogue in relation to this would also provide the opportunity to influence and shape future arrangements at a strategic level. The options for Warwickshire would likely be more limited if Warwickshire moves at a slower pace, by which time arrangements in surrounding areas will likely have been already settled and implementation underway.
- 2.6 Responding proactively and positively to the Minister places Warwickshire in an optimal position in that it retains options for Warwickshire to move forward at a faster pace and with the opportunity to shape and influence future decisions at an early stage.
- 2.7 It is recognised that decisions as to future devolution and local government reorganisation will require significant engagement with the District and Borough Councils, local partners and other local stakeholders, in addition to further member decisions being required. However, at this stage, indicating a willingness to move forward and an openness to the postponement of the 2025 County Council elections preserves Warwickshire's position should Government be minded to prioritise Warwickshire for reorganisation and devolution. Should the Minister decide to implement legislation to postpone the elections, this would place

Warwickshire in a strong position to respond most swiftly to the Government's agenda as set out in the White Paper.

3. Reasons for urgency

- 3.1 In light of the timescale set by the Government for a response (on or before 10th January 2025) the proposed decision is urgent and cannot reasonably be deferred. For the reasons set out below, it is considered to be impracticable to comply with Council Standing Orders 16 and 17 and to also meet the Government's deadline for a response.
- 3.2 It is of note that the Government's correspondence was received on 16th December 2024, following which it has been necessary to engage in dialogue and to seek advice from officers before a decision could be taken. This, together with the public holidays over the period, has meant that it has not been possible for a Leader report to be prepared in sufficient time for a key decision to be added to the Forward Plan in the usual way.
- 3.3 Although the decision to postpone elections is a matter for Government, by not responding by the Government deadline of 10th January 2025, Warwickshire would be unlikely to be considered in the first tranche for devolution and local government reorganisation. This could be disadvantageous to Warwickshire's economic growth, residents, local communities and businesses.
- 3.4 To meet the Government's timeframe for a response, an urgent decision pursuant to Standing Order 18 is therefore needed. The decision is urgent because if the Council were not able to implement the proposed decision with immediate effect, this would seriously prejudice the Council and the public interest in that it would not afford Warwickshire the best chance of securing advantage through early implementation of the Government's White Paper policies.

4. Background information

- 4.1 The Minister of State for Local Government and English Devolution has requested a response regarding the issue of the local elections on or by 10th January 2025. In submitting a response, the Government has asked the Council to set out how postponing the election would enable the Council to make progress with reorganisation and devolution in parallel on the Devolution Priority Programme or would speed up reorganisation and enable the area to benefit from devolution as quickly as possible once new unitary structures are in place.
- 4.2 The decision whether to postpone the elections falls to the Government and is not a decision for the County Council. Based on the County Council's response, the Government will decide whether to postpone the County Council elections in Warwickshire taking into account the extent of the County Council's commitment to devolution and reorganisation. If such a decision is taken, it is envisaged that the

elections would be postponed for a year to May 2026, however it would be open to the Government to postpone the County Council elections for a longer period.

- 4.3 Under the Equality Act 2010 public sector bodies have a duty to consider the public sector equality duty (PSED) in their decision making. The purpose of the PSED is to ensure that bodies carrying out public functions think about how they can promote equality in every aspect of their day-to-day business. The PSED has been considered in the context of the proposed decision set out in this report. Given that the issue under consideration (i.e. whether to postpone the County Council elections in 2025) affects all those of voting age to the same extent and has no greater or lesser impact on the proportion of the electorate who have a protected characteristic, it is not considered that there are any equalities implications that have a particular bearing on this decision. A detailed Equalities Impact Assessment is attached to this report at Appendix 1.

5. Financial Implications

- 5.1 The District and Borough Councils in Warwickshire deliver the elections for and on behalf of the County Council. The County Council meets the costs of the elections and reimburses the District and Borough Councils for the costs incurred which include costs such as printing, postage, the hiring of venues and reimbursement of Returning Officers and polling staff.
- 5.2 Preparations for the 2025 County Council elections are already underway across the District and Borough Councils in Warwickshire with certain costs having already been incurred and others expected to be incurred in advance of the election being called in March 2025.
- 5.3 Therefore, there may be abortive costs arising in the event that the Government decides to postpone the elections. At this point in time, and without further engagement with the District and Borough Councils, it is difficult to assess what those costs would be. Should it become necessary, the Council will engage with the District and Borough Councils regarding the level of any abortive costs and how they might be met, taking into account the available budget at that time and the expected profile of elections expenditure moving forward. In the meantime, this matter will be kept under careful review in line with any Government direction on the issue, which will affect a number of counties, and with a view to minimising such costs should the Government decision be to postpone the elections.

6. Environmental Implications

There are no environmental implications associated with this report.

Report Author

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Director	As above
Chief Executive	Monica Fogarty, Chief Executive Monicafogarty@warwickshire.gov.uk Tel; 01926 412514
Portfolio Holder	Leader of the Council Isobelseccombe@warwickshire.gov.uk

Urgent matter?	Yes
Confidential or exempt?	No
Is the decision contrary to the budget and policy framework?	No

List of appendices

Appendix 1 - Equalities Impact Assessment
Appendix 2 – Consent to Urgent Decision Notice

List of background papers

None

Members and officers consulted and informed

Leader of the Council – Councillor Izzi Seccombe

Corporate Board

Legal – Nic Vine – Head of Legal and Governance

Finance – Liz Firmstone - Head of Operational Finance Services

Equality – Lucy Gillings – Service Manager – Workforce Development

Democratic Services – Deb Moseley - Team Manager - Democratic Services

Councillors – Group Leaders of the political parties

Local Member(s): N/a. This is a county wide matter

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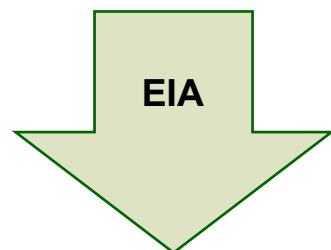
Warwickshire County Council (WCC) Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) Form

The purpose of an EIA is to ensure WCC is as inclusive as possible, both as a service deliverer and as an employer. It also demonstrates our compliance with Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED).

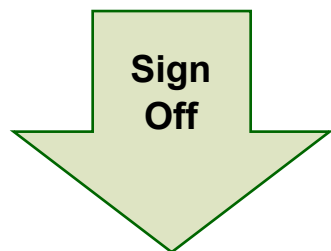
This document is a planning tool, designed to help you improve programmes of work by considering the implications for different groups of people. A guidance document is available [here](#).

Please note that, once approved, this document will be made public, unless you have indicated that it contains sensitive information. Please ensure that the form is clear and easy to understand. If you would like any support or advice on completing this document, please contact the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) team via equalities@warwickshire.gov.uk, or if it's relating to health inequalities, please contact Public Health via phadmin@warwickshire.gov.uk.

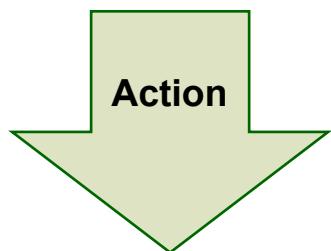
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- Having identified an EIA is required, ensure that the EIA form is completed before any work is started. This includes gathering evidence and / or engaging the relevant stakeholders to inform your assessment.



- Brief the relevant Director for sign off and upload the completed form here: [Upload Completed Equality Impact Assessments](#). Please name it "EIA [project] [service area] [year]"
- Undertake further research / engagement to further understand impacts (if identified).
- Undertake engagement and / or consultation to understand if EIA has identified and considered impacts.
- Amend accordingly to engagement / consultation feedback and brief decision makers of any changes.



- Implement proposed activity.
- Monitor impacts and mitigations as evidence of duty of care.

*Working for
Warwickshire*

Section One: Essential Information

Service / policy / strategy / practice / plan being assessed	English Devolution White Paper - County Council elections 2025
Business Unit / Service Area	Warwickshire County Council
Is this a new or existing service / policy / strategy / practice / plan? If existing, please state date of last assessment.	New
EIA Authors N.B. It is best practice to have more than one person complete the EIA to bring different perspectives to the table.	Nichola Vine, Sarah Duxbury, Sioned Harper, Lucy Gillings
Do any other Business Units / Service Areas need to be included?	No
Does this EIA contain personal and / or sensitive information?	No

Are any of the outcomes from this assessment likely to result in complaints from existing services users, members of the public and / or employees?

There may possibly be some residents who would wish the scheduled 2025 County Council elections to continue to take place and not be postponed. However, the decision as to whether or not to postpone the county elections is a matter for the Government and therefore any complaints would need to be considered by Government as the ultimate decision maker in this respect

1. Please explain the background to your proposed activity and the reasons for it.

On 16 December 2024, the Government published a policy paper entitled “English Devolution White Paper”. The White Paper focuses on two areas of reform (i) widening devolution across England through the creation of Strategic Authorities to which centrally held Government powers would be devolved and (ii) a programme of Local Government reorganisation to simplify current structures and create new unitary Councils.

Recognising that County Councils in England are scheduled to hold elections in May 2025, the White Paper indicates that the Government would consider postponing those elections where the timing of the elections affects planning for reorganisation and devolution.

The Minister of State for Local Government and English Devolution therefore wrote to upper tier Councils on 16th December 2024 asking for a view on or before Friday 10 January 2025 on the potential postponement of the May 2025 elections. The timescale for responding is short to enable the laying of the necessary secondary legislation to be passed and come into force before the elections are due to be announced in March 2025.

The Council has two options.

1. It could not respond and await an indication from Government in the New Year as to which Councils it intends to prioritise for devolution and local government reorganisation. This would mean Warwickshire would be unlikely to be considered in the first tranche of Councils moving forward, limiting the Council’s ability to influence the time table and the shape of the geographical landscape of devolution and reorganisation within which Warwickshire sits, and potentially reducing the Council’s ability to accelerate and amplify the impact and/or benefits of the Level 2 Devolution Deal already secured.
2. It could respond to the Minister signalling a willingness to be considered for delivering reorganisation and devolution to the

Government's ambitious timeframe, recognising this could potentially be accompanied by a postponement of the elections, placing Warwickshire in an optimal position and retaining options to move forward at a faster pace and with the opportunity to shape and influence future decisions.

2. Please outline your proposed activity including a summary of the main actions.

The intention is to recommend that the Leader of the Council responds to the Minister of State for Local Government and English Devolution signalling the County Council's willingness to be considered for delivering local government reorganisation and devolution to the Government's ambitious timeframe and recognising that, as a consequence, the Government may decide that it is necessary to postpone the May 2025 County Council elections.

Ultimately, the decision whether or not to postpone the elections rests with the Government. Based on the Council's response, the Government will decide whether to postpone the County Council elections in Warwickshire taking into account the extent of the County Council's commitment to devolution and local government reorganisation. If such a decision is taken, it is envisaged that the elections would be postponed for a year to May 2026, however it would be open to the Government to postpone the County Council elections for a longer period.

The recommended approach of responding to indicate the Council's willingness to be considered for delivering reorganisation and devolution is intended to preserve the Council's options moving forward.

3. Who is this going to impact and how?

Under the Equality Act 2010 public sector bodies have a duty to consider the public sector equality duty (PSED) in their decision making. The PSED has been considered in the context of the proposed decision (ie responding to the Government's letter on or before 10th January 2025 indicating a willingness to be considered for delivering local government reorganisation and devolution to the Government's ambitious timescale and as a consequence that the Government may decide to postpone the May 2025 County Council elections). It is considered that the proposed decision affects all those of voting age to the same extent and has no greater or lesser impact on the proportion of the electorate who have a protected characteristic. In terms of the impact on political candidates, candidates from underrepresented or disadvantaged backgrounds or candidates with disabilities may face challenges in sustaining campaigns over an extended

period which could affect electoral diversity. However, an early Government decision on whether the elections will proceed in May 2025, which is expected, will help to mitigate against this risk. Therefore, it is not considered that there are any equalities implications that have a particular bearing on the proposed decision.

It is too early to predict the full impacts of any change to local government structures and deeper devolution should the Government decide to progress local government reorganisation and enhanced devolution for Warwickshire.

If the Council is invited to submit a detailed proposal to Government engagement will take place with District and Borough Councils in Warwickshire, partners and stakeholders, and a further EQIA will be undertaken at that stage when the impacts of any Government reform proposals will be better able to be understood.

Section Two: Evidence

Please include any evidence or relevant information that has influenced the decisions contained in this EIA. This could include demographic profiles; audits; research; health needs assessments; national guidance or legislative requirements and how this relates to the protected characteristic groups and additional groups outlined in Section Four.

A – Quantitative Evidence

This is evidence which is numerical and should include the number people who use the service and the number of people from the protected characteristic groups who might be affected by changes to the service.

It is too early to predict the impacts of local government reform or devolution on people from the protected characteristic groups. At this stage, the Leader report is simply proposing to respond positively to the letter from the Minister indicating a willingness to work with Government on devolution and local government reform.

The outcome of this may include the postponement of the 2025 local elections. As noted above, any such decision affects all those of voting age to the same extent and has no greater or lesser impact on the proportion of the electorate who have a protected characteristic. The decision also affects all those considering political candidacy and an early decision from Government, which is expected, regarding whether the elections will proceed in May 2025 will help to mitigate against any challenges that campaigning over a longer period may have on prospective candidates from protected characteristic groups. Therefore, it is not considered that there are any equalities implications that have a particular bearing on the proposed decision.

B – Qualitative Evidence

This is data which describes the effect or impact of a change on a group of people, e.g. some information provided as part of performance reporting.

It is too early to predict the impacts of local government reform or devolution on people from the protected characteristic groups. At this stage, the Leader report is simply proposing to respond positively to the letter from the Minister indicating a willingness to work with Government on devolution and local government reform.

The outcome of this may include the postponement of the 2025 local elections. As noted above, any such decision affects all those of voting age to the same extent and has no greater or lesser impact on the proportion of the electorate who have a protected characteristic. The decision also affects all those considering political candidacy and an early decision from Government, which is expected, regarding whether the elections will proceed in May 2025 will help to mitigate against any challenges that campaigning over a longer period may have on prospective candidates from protected characteristic groups. Therefore, it is not considered that there are any equalities implications that have a particular bearing on the proposed decision.

Section Three: Engagement

Engagement with individuals or organisations affected by the proposed activity must take place. For further advice and support with engagement and consultations, click [here](#).

<p>Has the proposed activity been subject to engagement or consultation with those it's going to impact, taking into account their protected characteristics and socio-economic status?</p>	<p>There is ongoing dialogue with the District and Borough Councils regarding the implications of the Government's White Paper policies.</p> <p>At this stage and given the decision to postpone the elections would be a Government decision, there has been no wider engagement with individuals who would be affected which would primarily be the electorate of Warwickshire.</p> <p>Secondary legislation will be required should there be a decision to postpone elections. This is a matter for central Government.</p>
<p>If YES, please state who with.</p>	

If NO engagement has been conducted, please state why.	We are not yet at the stage of deciding whether to put forward proposals for local government reform or devolution. This is simply a proposal to indicate a willingness to pursue both with Government in line with the White Paper policies.	
How was the engagement carried out?	Yes / No	What were the results from the engagement? Please list...
Focus Groups		
Surveys		
Public Event		
Displays / Exhibitions		
Other (please specify)		
Has the proposed activity changed as a result of the engagement?		See above
Have the results of the engagement been fed back to the consultees?		See above
Is further engagement or consultation recommended or planned?		See above
What process have you got in place to review and evaluate?		

Section Four: Assessing the Impact

Protected Characteristics and other groups that experience greater inequalities

What will the impact of implementing this proposal be on people who share characteristics protected by the Equality Act 2010 or are likely to be affected by the proposed activity? This section also allows you to consider other impacts, e.g. health inequalities such as deprivation, socio-economic status, vulnerable groups such as individuals who suffer socio-economic disadvantage, armed forces, carers, homelessness, people leaving prison, young people leaving care etc.

On the basis of evidence, has the potential impact of the proposed activity been judged to be positive (+), neutral (=), negative (-), or positive and negative (+&-), for each of the protected characteristic groups below and in what way?

N.B In our Guidance to EIAs we have provided you with potential questions to ask yourself when considering the impact of your proposed activity. Think about what actions you might take to mitigate / remove the negative impacts and maximize on the positive ones. This will form part of your action plan at Section Six.

	Impact type (+) (=) (-) or (+&-)	Nature of impact including health inequalities Will your proposal have negative or positive implications for each group, including on health inequalities?	Mitigating Actions for Negative Impacts What can you do to mitigate any identified negative impacts or health inequalities? Use this column to form the basis of Section 6.
Age	No greater or lesser impact than on voting population at large		
Disability Consider: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Physical disabilities Sensory impairments 	No greater or lesser impact than on voting population at large		

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Neurodiverse conditions (e.g. dyslexia) • Mental health conditions (e.g. depression) • Medical conditions (e.g. diabetes) 			
Gender Reassignment	No greater or lesser impact than on voting population at large		
Marriage and Civil Partnership	No greater or lesser impact than on voting population at large		
Pregnancy and Maternity	No greater or lesser impact than on voting population at large		
Race Including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Colour • Nationality • Citizenship • Ethnic or national origins 	No greater or lesser impact than on voting population at large		
Religion or Belief	No greater or lesser impact than on voting population at large		
Sex	No greater or lesser impact than on voting population at large		

<p>Sexual Orientation</p>	<p>No greater or lesser impact than on voting population at large</p>		
<p>Groups who may require support:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individuals who suffer socio-economic disadvantage • Armed Forces (WCC signed the Armed Forces Covenant in June 2012) • Carers • Homelessness • People leaving Prison • People leaving Care 	<p>No greater or lesser impact than on voting population at large</p>		
<p>Other Identified Health Inequalities (HI)</p> <p>Many issues can have an impact on health: is it an area of deprivation, does every population group have equal access, unemployment, work conditions, education, skills, our living situation, rural, urban, rates of crime etc.</p>	<p>No greater or lesser impact than on voting population at large</p>		

Other Groups If there are any other groups			
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Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED)

Public Authorities must have 'due regard' to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations. Please evidence how your proposed activity meets our obligations under the PSED.

	Evidence of Due Regard
Eliminate unlawful discrimination (harassment, victimisation and other prohibited conduct):	<p>It is too early to predict the impacts of local government reform or devolution. At this stage, the Leader report is simply proposing to respond positively to the letter from the Minister indicating a willingness to work with Government on devolution and local government reform.</p> <p>The outcome of this may include the postponement of the 2025 local elections. As noted above, any such decision affects all those of voting age to the same extent and has no greater or lesser impact on the proportion of the electorate who have a protected characteristic. The decision also affects all those considering political candidacy and an early decision from Government, which is expected, regarding whether the elections will proceed in May 2025 will help to mitigate against any challenges that campaigning over a longer period may have on prospective candidates from protected characteristic groups. Therefore, it is not considered that there are any equalities implications that have a particular bearing on the proposed decision.</p>

<p>Advance equality of opportunity:</p> <p>This involves</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • removing or minimising disadvantages suffered by people due to their protected characteristics; • taking steps to meet the needs of people with certain protected characteristics where these are different from the needs of other people, for example, taking steps to take account of people with disabilities; • encouraging people with certain protected characteristics to participate in public life or in other activities where their participation is disproportionately low. 	<p>It is too early to predict the impacts of local government reform or devolution. At this stage, the Leader report is simply proposing to respond positively to the letter from the Minister indicating a willingness to work with Government on devolution and local government reform.</p> <p>The outcome of this may include the postponement of the 2025 local elections. As noted above, any such decision affects all those of voting age to the same extent and has no greater or lesser impact on the proportion of the electorate who have a protected characteristic. The decision also affects all those considering political candidacy and an early decision from Government, which is expected, regarding whether the elections will proceed in May 2025 will help to mitigate against any challenges that campaigning over a longer period may have on prospective candidates from protected characteristic groups. Therefore, it is not considered that there are any equalities implications that have a particular bearing on the proposed decision.</p>
<p>Foster good relations:</p> <p>This means tackling prejudice and promoting understanding between people from different groups and communities.</p>	<p>It is too early to predict the impacts of local government reform or devolution. At this stage, the Leader report is simply proposing to respond positively to the letter from the Minister indicating a willingness to work with Government on devolution and local government reform.</p> <p>The outcome of this may include the postponement of the 2025 local elections. As noted above, any such decision affects all those of voting age to the same extent and has no greater or lesser impact on the proportion of the electorate who have a protected characteristic. The decision also affects all those considering political candidacy and an early decision from Government, which is expected, regarding whether the</p>

	<p>elections will proceed in May 2025 will help to mitigate against any challenges that campaigning over a longer period may have on prospective candidates from protected characteristic groups. Therefore, it is not considered that there are any equalities implications that have a particular bearing on the proposed decision.</p>
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Section Five: Partners / Stakeholders

Which sectors are likely to have an interest in or be affected by the proposed activity?	Yes / No	Describe the interest / affect
Businesses		<p>It is too early to predict the impacts of local government reform or devolution. At this stage, the Leader report is simply proposing to respond positively to the letter from the Minister indicating a willingness to work with Government on devolution and local government reform.</p> <p>The outcome of this may include the postponement of the 2025 local elections. As noted above, any such decision affects all those of voting age to the same extent and has no greater or lesser impact on the proportion of the electorate who have a protected characteristic. The decision also affects all those considering political candidacy and an early decision from Government, which is expected, regarding whether the elections will proceed in May 2025 will help to mitigate against any challenges</p>
Councils		
Education Sector		
Fire and Rescue		
Governance Structures		
NHS		
Police		
Voluntary and Community Sector		

		that campaigning over a longer period may have on prospective candidates from protected characteristic groups. Therefore, it is not considered that there are any equalities implications that have a particular bearing on the proposed decision.
Other(s): please list and describe the nature of the relationship / impact		

Section Six: Action Planning

If you have identified impacts on protected characteristic groups in Section Four, please summarise these in the table below detailing the actions you are taking to mitigate or support this impact. It is also important to consider how often this E.I.A. will be reviewed, and who is responsible for doing this. If you are not taking any action to support or mitigate the impact, you should complete the No Mitigating Actions section below instead.

Mitigating Actions

Consider:

- Who else do you need to talk to? Do you need to engage or consult?
- How you will ensure your activity is clearly communicated
- Whether you could mitigate any negative impacts or build on positive impacts for protected groups or health inequalities
- Whether you could do more to fulfil the aims of the PSED
- How you will monitor and evaluate the effect of this work
- Anything else you can think of!

Identified Impact	Action(s)	Timescale incl. evaluation and review date	Name of person responsible

No Mitigating Actions

Please explain why you do not need to take any action to mitigate or support the impact of your proposed activity.

It is too early to predict the impacts of local government reform or devolution. At this stage, the Leader report is simply proposing to respond positively to the letter from the Minister indicating a willingness to work with Government on devolution and local government reform.

The outcome of this may include the postponement of the 2025 local elections. As noted above, any such decision affects all those of voting age to the same extent and has no greater or lesser impact on the proportion of the electorate who have a protected characteristic. The decision also affects all those considering political candidacy and an early decision from Government, which is expected, regarding whether the elections will proceed in May 2025 will help to mitigate against any challenges that campaigning over a longer period may have on prospective candidates from protected characteristic groups. Therefore, it is not considered that there are any equalities implications that have a particular bearing on the proposed decision.

Section Seven: Assessment Outcome

Only one of following statements best matches your assessment of this proposed activity. Please select one and provide your reasons.	
No major change required	As the decision is simply to indicate a willingness to engage with Government on the White Paper policies for local government reform and devolution, there are no barriers from an equalities perspective with continuing at this stage, Future actions will be subject to EQIA and appropriate governance should they develop.

The proposal has to be adjusted to reduce impact on protected characteristic groups and/or health inequalities		
Continue with the proposal but it is not possible to remove all the risk to protected characteristic groups and/or health inequalities		
Stop the proposal as it is potentially in breach of equality legislation		

Section Eight: Sign Off

N.B To be completed after the EIA is completed but before the area of work commences.

Name of person/s completing EIA	Nic Vine – Head of Legal and Democratic
Name and signature of Director	Sarah Duxbury – Director of Strategy, Planning and Governance
Date	2 nd January 2025
Date of next review and name of person/s responsible	2 nd January 2026 or earlier if required

Once signed off, please ensure the EIA is uploaded using the following form. Please name it “EIA [project] [service area] [year]”: [Upload Completed Equality Impact Assessments](#)

These will be stored on a [Sharepoint library](#) which Warwickshire County Council colleagues can access.

It is the responsibility of the individuals and teams who completed the EIA to review it regularly and to carry out any required activities in line with the action plan made.

For advice or support, please contact equalities@warwickshire.gov.uk.

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CONSENT TO URGENT DECISION	PART 1 (to be completed by the person seeking consent)	
Proposed Decision Maker <i>(please name person or body proposing to take decision, if an officer also state title)</i>		Date for Decision
Councillor Isobel Seccombe – Leader of the Council		10 th January 2025
Title: English Devolution White Paper – County Council Elections 2025		

Summary of matter

On 16th December 2024, the Government published a policy paper entitled 'English Devolution White Paper' which focusses on two aspects of reform (i) widening devolution across England through the creation of Strategic Authorities to which centrally held Government powers would be devolved and (ii) a programme of local government reorganisation to create new unitary Councils, both of which are considered by the Government to be essential to driving its growth mission and delivering better outcomes for residents. The White Paper confirms that the Government intends to work at pace and to ambitious timeframes in the delivery of devolution and local government reorganisation.

Recognising that County Councils in England are scheduled to have elections in May 2025, the White Paper indicates that the Government would consider taking decisions to postpone local elections.

The Minister of State for Local Government and English Devolution therefore wrote to Warwickshire County Council on 16th December 2024, along with other upper tier Councils across the country, asking for a view on or before Friday 10th January 2025 regarding the potential postponement of the May 2025 County Council elections.

There are two options open to the Council in considering the request from the Minister of State for Local Government and English Devolution (i) Not to respond and await an indication from Government in the New Year as to which Councils it intends prioritising for devolution and local government reorganisation (ii) To respond to the Minister of State setting out whether the County Council would wish for Warwickshire to be considered for delivering local government reorganisation and devolution to the Government's ambitious timeframe and as a result whether it would be open to the postponement of the elections.

Not to respond would mean that Warwickshire would be unlikely to be considered in the first tranche of Councils and would be less well placed to influence the Government's proposed timescales with less opportunity to influence and shape the geographical landscape of devolution and reorganisation within which Warwickshire sits. Given that Warwickshire has already secured a Level 2 Devolution Deal with Government, Warwickshire is well placed to amplify and accelerate its devolution aspirations for the county, delivering growth for the local economy and benefits for residents.

Responding proactively and positively to the Minister by the deadline set places Warwickshire in an optimal position, retaining the option for Warwickshire to move forward at a faster pace and with the opportunity to shape and influence future decisions at an early stage.

Proposed Decision

That the Leader of the Council responds to the Minister of State for Local Government and English Devolution signalling the County Council's willingness to be considered for delivering local government reorganisation and devolution to the Government's ambitious timeframe and recognising that, as a consequence, the Government may decide that it is necessary to postpone the May 2025 County Council elections.

Reasons for urgency

In light of the timescale set by the Government for a response (on or before 10th January 2025) the proposed decision is urgent and cannot reasonably be deferred.

For the reasons set out below, it is considered to be impracticable to comply with Council Standing Orders 16 and 17 and to meet the Government's deadline of 10th January 2025 for a response.

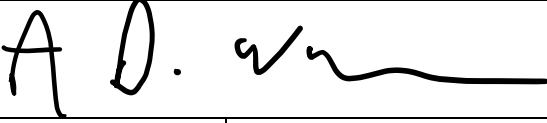
The Government's correspondence was received on 16th December 2024, following which it has been necessary to engage in dialogue and to seek advice from officers before a decision could be taken. This, together with the public holidays over the period and the Government's required response deadline, has meant that it has not been possible for a Leader report to have been prepared in sufficient time for a key decision to be added to the Forward Plan in the usual way as required by Standing Order 16 and/or for the procedure at Standing Order 17 (General Exception) to be followed. Therefore, in order to meet the Government's timeframe for a response, and for the reasons set out below and in more detail in the Leader report, the decision can be considered urgent pursuant to Standing Order 18 and as a result can be implemented with immediate effect.

Although the decision to postpone elections is a matter for Government, by not responding by the Government deadline of 10th January 2025, Warwickshire would be unlikely to be considered in the first tranche for devolution and local government reorganisation. This could be disadvantageous to Warwickshire's economic growth, residents, local communities and businesses. The decision is urgent because the delay that would be likely to be caused by call-in of the proposed decision would seriously prejudice the Council and the public interest in that it would not allow Warwickshire to respond by the deadline of 10th January 2025 and in turn would not afford Warwickshire the best chance of securing advantage through early implementation of the Government's White Paper policies.

Would the recommended decision be contrary to the Budget and Policy Framework? *[please identify relevant plan/budget provision]*


No

PART 2 (to be completed by the person giving consent)

Name	Councillor Warwick
Office Held	Chair of Resources and Fire and Rescue Overview and Scrutiny Committee
	
Date consent is given	31/12/2024

Proposed Decision to be made under the Council’s Urgency Procedure by the Leader on 10 January 2025

English Devolution White Paper - County Council elections 2025

Portfolio Holder	Leader of the Council
Date of decision	10 th January 2025
	Signed 

1. Decision taken

That the Leader of the Council responds to the Minister of State for Local Government and English Devolution signalling the County Council’s willingness to be considered for delivering local government reorganisation and devolution to the Government’s ambitious timeframe and recognising that, as a consequence, the Government may decide that it is necessary to postpone the May 2025 County Council elections.

2. Reasons for decision

- 2.1 On 16th December 2024, the Government published a policy paper entitled ‘English Devolution White Paper’. The White Paper focuses on two aspects of reform (i) widening devolution across England through, where necessary, the creation of new Strategic Authorities to which centrally held Government powers would be devolved and (ii) a programme of local government reorganisation to create new unitary Councils, both of which are considered by the Government to be essential to driving its growth mission and delivering better outcomes for residents. The White Paper confirms that the Government intends to work at pace and to ambitious timeframes in the delivery of devolution and local government reorganisation.
- 2.2 Recognising that County Councils in England are scheduled to have elections in May 2025, the White Paper indicates that the Government would consider taking decisions to postpone local elections. This is particularly the case where the timing

of elections affects planning for devolution, particularly alongside local government reorganisation proposals.

- 2.3 The Minister of State for Local Government and English Devolution therefore wrote to Warwickshire County Council on 16th December 2024, along with other upper tier Councils across the Country, asking for a view on or before Friday 10th January 2025 regarding the potential postponement of the May 2025 County Council elections. A response is requested by this date to enable the laying of the secondary legislation necessary to affect a postponement with sufficient time for the legislation to be passed and come into force before the local elections are due to be announced in March 2025.
- 2.4 There are two options open to the Council in considering the request from the Minister of State for Local Government and English Devolution (i) Not to respond and await an indication from Government in the New Year as to which Councils it intends prioritising for devolution and local government reorganisation (ii) To respond to the Minister of State setting out whether the County Council would wish for Warwickshire to be considered for delivering local government reorganisation and devolution to the Government's ambitious timeframe and as a result whether it would be open to the postponement of the elections.
- 2.5 Not to respond to the letter from the Minister would mean that Warwickshire would be unlikely to be considered in the first tranche of Councils moving forward at pace with devolution and local government reorganisation. It would also mean that Warwickshire would be less well placed to influence the Government's proposed timescales and would have less opportunity to influence and shape the geographical landscape of devolution and reorganisation within which Warwickshire sits. Given that Warwickshire has already secured a Level 2 Devolution Deal with Government, Warwickshire is well placed to amplify and accelerate its devolution aspirations for the County, delivering growth for the local economy and benefits for residents. Not to respond would potentially be a lost opportunity for Warwickshire to be part of and benefit from deeper devolution arrangements with Government, through alignment with a Strategic Authority, which reorganisation could help to drive, and which could optimise the benefits for Warwickshire. Being part of early dialogue in relation to this would also provide the opportunity to influence and shape future arrangements at a strategic level. The options for Warwickshire would likely be more limited if Warwickshire moves at a slower pace, by which time arrangements in surrounding areas will likely have been already settled and implementation underway.
- 2.6 Responding proactively and positively to the Minister places Warwickshire in an optimal position in that it retains options for Warwickshire to move forward at a faster pace and with the opportunity to shape and influence future decisions at an early stage.
- 2.7 It is recognised that decisions as to future devolution and local government reorganisation will require significant engagement with the District and Borough Councils, local partners and other local stakeholders, in addition to further member decisions being required. However, at this stage, indicating a willingness to move

forward and an openness to the postponement of the 2025 County Council elections preserves Warwickshire's position should Government be minded to prioritise Warwickshire for reorganisation and devolution. Should the Minister decide to implement legislation to postpone the elections, this would place Warwickshire in a strong position to respond most swiftly to the Government's agenda as set out in the White Paper.

3. Reasons for urgency

- 3.1 In light of the timescale set by the Government for a response (on or before 10th January 2025) the proposed decision is urgent and cannot reasonably be deferred. For the reasons set out below, it is considered to be impracticable to comply with Council Standing Orders 16 and 17 and to also meet the Government's deadline for a response.
- 3.2 It is of note that the Government's correspondence was received on 16th December 2024, following which it has been necessary to engage in dialogue and to seek advice from officers before a decision could be taken. This, together with the public holidays over the period, has meant that it has not been possible for a Leader report to be prepared in sufficient time for a key decision to be added to the Forward Plan in the usual way.
- 3.3 Although the decision to postpone elections is a matter for Government, by not responding by the Government deadline of 10th January 2025, Warwickshire would be unlikely to be considered in the first tranche for devolution and local government reorganisation. This could be disadvantageous to Warwickshire's economic growth, residents, local communities and businesses.
- 3.4 To meet the Government's timeframe for a response, an urgent decision pursuant to Standing Order 18 is therefore needed. The decision is urgent because if the Council were not able to implement the proposed decision with immediate effect, this would seriously prejudice the Council and the public interest in that it would not afford Warwickshire the best chance of securing advantage through early implementation of the Government's White Paper policies.

4. Background information

- 4.1 The Minister of State for Local Government and English Devolution has requested a response regarding the issue of the local elections on or by 10th January 2025. In submitting a response, the Government has asked the Council to set out how postponing the election would enable the Council to make progress with reorganisation and devolution in parallel on the Devolution Priority Programme or would speed up reorganisation and enable the area to benefit from devolution as quickly as possible once new unitary structures are in place.

- 4.2 The decision whether to postpone the elections falls to the Government and is not a decision for the County Council. Based on the County Council's response, the Government will decide whether to postpone the County Council elections in Warwickshire taking into account the extent of the County Council's commitment to devolution and reorganisation. If such a decision is taken, it is envisaged that the elections would be postponed for a year to May 2026, however it would be open to the Government to postpone the County Council elections for a longer period.
- 4.3 Under the Equality Act 2010 public sector bodies have a duty to consider the public sector equality duty (PSED) in their decision making. The purpose of the PSED is to ensure that bodies carrying out public functions think about how they can promote equality in every aspect of their day-to-day business. The PSED has been considered in the context of the proposed decision set out in this report. Given that the issue under consideration (i.e. whether to postpone the County Council elections in 2025) affects all those of voting age to the same extent and has no greater or lesser impact on the proportion of the electorate who have a protected characteristic, it is not considered that there are any equalities implications that have a particular bearing on this decision. A detailed Equalities Impact Assessment is attached to this report at Appendix 1.

5. Financial Implications

- 5.1 The District and Borough Councils in Warwickshire deliver the elections for and on behalf of the County Council. The County Council meets the costs of the elections and reimburses the District and Borough Councils for the costs incurred which include costs such as printing, postage, the hiring of venues and reimbursement of Returning Officers and polling staff.
- 5.2 Preparations for the 2025 County Council elections are already underway across the District and Borough Councils in Warwickshire with certain costs having already been incurred and others expected to be incurred in advance of the election being called in March 2025.
- 5.3 Therefore, there may be abortive costs arising in the event that the Government decides to postpone the elections. At this point in time, and without further engagement with the District and Borough Councils, it is difficult to assess what those costs would be. Should it become necessary, the Council will engage with the District and Borough Councils regarding the level of any abortive costs and how they might be met, taking into account the available budget at that time and the expected profile of elections expenditure moving forward. In the meantime, this matter will be kept under careful review in line with any Government direction on the issue, which will affect a number of counties, and with a view to minimising such costs should the Government decision be to postpone the elections.

6. Environmental Implications

There are no environmental implications associated with this report.

Report Author	Sarah Duxbury, Director for Strategy, Planning and Governance sarahduxbury@warwickshire.gov.uk Tel; 01926 412090
Director	As above
Chief Executive	Monica Fogarty, Chief Executive Monicafogarty@warwickshire.gov.uk Tel; 01926 412514
Portfolio Holder	Cllr Izzi Seccombe - Leader of the Council Isobelseccombe@warwickshire.gov.uk

Urgent matter?	Yes
Confidential or exempt?	No
Is the decision contrary to the budget and policy framework?	No

List of appendices

Appendix 1 - Equalities Impact Assessment
Appendix 2 – Consent to Urgent Decision Notice

List of background papers

None

Members and officers consulted and informed

Leader of the Council – Councillor Izzi Seccombe

Corporate Board

Legal – Nic Vine – Head of Legal and Governance

Finance – Liz Firmstone - Head of Operational Finance Services

Equality – Lucy Gilling’s – Service Manager – Workforce Development

Democratic Services – Deb Mosely - Team Manager - Democratic Services

Councillors – Group Leaders of the political parties

Local Member(s): N/a. This is a county wide matter

