

West of England Devolution Deal - speaking notes - Council meeting 29 Jun 16

I briefed FoBRA members about the Government's proposed West of England Devolution deal some weeks ago and we have discussed it in committee. It is clearly immensely important for this region, and could provide £30M per year of infrastructure funding, in new money, for many years. Moreover, it appears that, of the eight regional groupings chosen for this treatment, ours is by far the most generous proposal, both in total and per head of population, thanks partly to the skill of the team which negotiated it, but also because our region has a reputation for growth and productivity.

Some of our FoBRA members opposed this deal, mostly because it comes with a Regional Mayor, in order to give it democratic accountability. Those who dislike it point out that we have only recently rejected a Mayor for B&NES by a significant majority, and that excessive uncontrolled power would be in the hands of one person. They believe that it would reduce the power of B&NES Council, and that it would be "just like Avon all over again". Some point out that no Parliament can commit a future one and hence a 30-year promise is meaningless, and fear that Bristol could, through it, foist unwanted housing on us. They advise that further negotiation is needed.

In return, I have emphasised that the Government will apparently agree to the deal only as part of a package with the Regional Mayor, but that the Regional Mayor will have powers only over those areas devolved, such as a consolidated local transport budget, franchise bus services, key route networks, strategic planning, adult education budget, and a National Work & Health Programme – many of them of immense importance to Bath. I have added that this is devolution **from** central Government, and **not** from the existing powers of B&NES. It seems to me that B&NES would be unlikely to get the same funding or access by rejecting the deal and applying direct to Whitehall, and, who knows, the Regional Mayor with his or her small staff could even be based in Bath!

The Federation's conclusion, by a good majority and proportion of the membership, is to back this deal, especially as it seems likely to provide funding to help in solving FoBRA members' highest priority - Transport (in all its manifestations): for example

- an A36/46 link,
- another Park and Ride site and
- better public transport (for which a franchise bus service via the proposed devolved transport authority is the most obvious way forward).

I therefore urge Councillors, on behalf of FoBRA members, to vote to accept the deal.

Robin Kerr, Chairman, draft 1, 28th June 16