MUSIC MARK

SUPPORTING
CONNECTING
INFLUENCING

Devolution Big Meet

An initial discussion on the English Devolution White Paper published in December 2024

What is the Devolution White Paper About?

- **Shifting power** from Whitehall to the regions
- Creating a network of **Strategic Authorities** across the whole of England
- **New powers and budgets** for these Strategic Authorities
- Running parallel will be **Local Government Reorganisation** (LGR) – which will remove the two-tier local authority structure where it still exists
- It **is likely the LGR will have an impact on County Music Services** (many of whom are Hub Lead Organisations (HLOs) or Key Hub Partners).
- All this change is **unlikely to have much impact on independent music services** and the wider network of independent organistions delivering music education

Where are we at with CAs?

- There are currently already Combined Authorities (CAs) across the country including:
  - Greater London
  - North East
  - Greater Manchester
  - Liverpool City Region
  - Tees Valley
  - South Yorkshire

What's happening next with CAs?

- A number of areas of the country are developing plans to set up a Combined Authority including:
  - Surrey
  - Hampshire and the Solent (Hampshire, Isle of Wight, Portsmouth and Southampton)
  - Greater Essex (Essex, Southend and Thurrock)
  - Cumbria (Cumberland and Westmoreland and Furness)
  - Cheshire & Warrington (Cheshire East, Cheshire West and Chester and Warrington)
  - Norfolk and Suffolk
  - Sussex and Brighton (Brighton & Hove, East Sussex and West Sussex)

What do we know about CAs?

- The Devolution White Paper doesn't talk about Education
- The current **CAs don't have any responsibility for education** across the CA – education sits within 'Upper Teir' Local Authorities and/or is commissioned out to a 'service provider'
- Some of the proposed CAs mirror the **Music Hub Geographies**, but many don't!
- However there are **two CAs are Hub Lead Organisations** (Liverpool City Region and South Yorkshire) with another (NE) potentially taking on the HLO role in due course:
  - *Liverpool City Region Combined Authority as the HLO*

Where are we at with LGR?

- There is **less detail** about what is currently going on with regard to Local Government Reorganisation (LGR).
- But we do know that **some areas with two-tier councils are being fast tracked**
- These councils have been invited to **submit one proposal** based on what is expected within the Devolution White Paper around the role, size and scale expected of unitaries.
- We understand that at least some of the County Councils are looking at options which might **split the county** into a set of unitary authorities
- We understand it is likely that only a few if any of the current unitaries will be merged with neighbours – although this is an option within the white paper

Sone Councils being fast tracked?

We have been made aware that these Counties are being fast tracked in terms of LGR (and local elections have been postponed):

- Surrey
- Hampshire (IoW, Portsmouth and Southampton)
- Norfolk
- Suffolk
- Essex (Southend and Thurrock)
- East Sussex (Brighton)
- West Sussex

Any others?

What is expected of the new unitaries?

- Be the right size to achieve efficiencies, improve capacity and withstand financial shocks (population of 500,000 or more)
- Prioritise the delivery of high quality and sustainable public services
- Meet local needs and be informed by local views
- Support devolution arrangements
- Enable stronger community engagement and neighbourhood empowerment

What about LGR and Music Education?

- We have had conversations with a number of Heads of Service who are concerned about the impact of LGR on their County Music Service
- We don't know yet (?) whether any Unitary Authorities will merge
- We have flagged concerns with the DfE
- We have flagged concerns with ACE
- This isn't necessarily new – potential to learn lessons:
  - *LGR in Wales in the 90s*
  - *Cumbria County Council becomes two unitaries*

A few other key things to note:

- This process is **moving at speed** and is preoccupying may senior leaders within councils across the country
- **No specific map** in mind by Government, but will want to ensure no ‘deserts’
- There is a **transition period for LGR** with shadow councils put in place to enable transition
- Surrey’s LGR will go live in April 2027, the rest are expected to go live in April 2028
- Sign up to **Google alerts** to find out the latest news?

What Next?

- We're here to:
  - **Support** – Peer groups, briefing papers and templates, 1-2-1 conversations, advocacy support
  - **Connect** – peer groups, sharing knowledge and experiences
  - **Influence** – DfE/DCMS/APPGs/ACE/LGA
- What else?

Links to further reading

- England Devolution White Paper
- LGA Website - information including briefing papers, news etc
- Community engagement with English Devolution

musicmark.org.uk