



## **A REVIEW OF 'VISION DERBYSHIRE'**

### **FINAL REPORT**

**30<sup>th</sup> January 2023**

DRAFT

## Contents

	<b>Executive Summary</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>1.</b>	<b>Background to Vision Derbyshire</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>2.</b>	<b>Purpose of the Review</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>3.</b>	<b>Methodology</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>4.</b>	<b>Vision Derbyshire: Issues Identified</b>	<b>8</b>
	Context	
	Role and Purpose of Vision Derbyshire	
	Progress towards Vision Derbyshire Objectives	
	Resources for Vision Derbyshire	
	Proposed Mayoral County Combined Authority	
	Summary & Conclusions	
<b>5.</b>	<b>Feedback from Vision Derbyshire Steering Group &amp; Joint Council</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>6.</b>	<b>Recommended Way Forward</b>	<b>14</b>
	Responding to Change	
	Devolution	
	Shared Services	
	A 'Single Platform' for Collaboration	
	Branding	
	Timings	
	Recommendations	
	<b>Appendix 1: List of Interviewees</b>	<b>19</b>
	<b>Appendix 2: Structured Interview Issues &amp; Questions</b>	<b>20</b>

## Executive Summary

1. In 2019 Derbyshire councils came together to explore the appetite for “...a shared commitment across nine county, district and borough councils, to strategically collaborate to improve outcomes for people and places, speak with one voice as a county, and coordinate [their] resources better and more sustainably.” This initiative became known as ‘Vision Derbyshire’.
2. Members commissioned a ‘Case for Change’ prospectus to identify the potential benefits of a collaborative approach. The positive impact to Derbyshire’s economy, public sector and communities was estimated to be approximately £1.08bn. Further financial savings of £20-£66m could be achieved through local government transformation.
3. This analysis led to the establishment of a Vision Derbyshire Joint Committee and proposals for joint funded Vision Derbyshire Executive Team. However, despite some notable successes, only four councils fully participated in Vision Derbyshire and progress towards the delivering the stated outcomes and savings has been limited.
4. In addition, since 2019 the economic and political landscape had fundamentally changed due to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, wider financial and fiscal challenges, and the proposal to establish a Mayoral County Combined Authority for the D2N2 Area.
5. As a result, Members of the Vision Derbyshire Joint Committee agreed to an independent ‘light touch’ review of Vision Derbyshire. Following an open tender process, East Midlands Councils (EMC) was commissioned to undertake the review.
6. Regular updates on progress were made to the Vision Derbyshire Steering Group throughout the Review process and emerging conclusions were tested with the Vision Derbyshire Joint Committee.
7. The Review involved undertaking 20 structured interviews with leaders and chief executives of Derbyshire councils that are both within and outside of the Vision Derbyshire partnership.
8. The interviews highlighted issues and concerns relating to role and purpose of Vision Derbyshire, progress against objectives, resources and the potential impact of the proposed Combined Authority.
9. There is general acceptance of the benefits of councils working together on common priorities. There is also consensus that the current Vision Derbyshire partnership vehicle will be unable to meet the needs of a future approach, alongside the view that current infrastructure for partnership working is complex and in need of streamlining.
10. The following recommendations are therefore made to support councils in Derbyshire move forward in meeting their common objectives:

- a) **There is appetite for collaborative activity between councils in Derbyshire, particularly on matters relating to the Combined Authority. Given this appetite, there is an ideal opportunity to establish a refreshed and fully inclusive approach to collaborative working in Derbyshire.**
- b) **The existing partnership and governance arrangements in Derbyshire should be simplified and rationalised, to be superseded by a single Derbyshire-wide partnership comprising all Derbyshire councils.**
- c) **The future partnership approach should specifically align with proposals for the Mayoral County Combined Authority and focus on securing collective influence and promoting investment and growth. Progressing any shared services and procurement initiatives is best implemented through separate arrangements involving the relevant councils, although there is an opportunity to share best practice through the new partnership.**
- d) **To support a fresh approach, the 'Vision Derbyshire' brand should be 'retired' as partners move to new arrangements.**
- e) **The timings for refreshing the partnership approach are important. It would be appropriate to develop and seek agreement to new arrangements after the forthcoming local elections but before any Mayoral election, i.e., between summer 2023 and spring 2024.**

## 1. Background to Vision Derbyshire

1.1 In 2019, Derbyshire councils came together to explore the appetite for future collaborative working across the county. The ambition was certainly bold, and the approach was intended to look beyond traditional partnerships towards a new and ambitious collaborative model focused on achieving the greatest public value for local people and communities – which became known as ‘Vision Derbyshire’.

1.2 The objectives of Vision Derbyshire are outlined in the Case for Change prospectus (August 2020) and may be summarised by:

*“...a shared commitment across nine county, district and borough councils, to strategically collaborate to improve outcomes for people and places, speak with one voice as a county, and coordinate [their] resources better and more sustainably.”*

1.3 The Case for Change prospectus focused on the intended impact of this approach, and in particular the intended outcomes:

- Derbyshire will be a fair society where everyone has opportunities.
- People in Derbyshire will be better able to manage their quality of life, health and wellbeing.
- Derbyshire will exceed its climate change targets.
- Derbyshire will develop an inclusive and diverse economy.
- Communities will drive sustainable change and will be empowered.

1.4 The positive impact to Derbyshire’s economy, public sector and communities was estimated to be approximately £1.08bn. The prospectus also emphasised the importance of Local Government transformation in Derbyshire, and through collective engagement, estimated further financial savings of £20-£66m could be achieved.

1.5 This prospectus led to the establishment of a Vision Derbyshire Joint Committee in September 2021 and proposals to establish a joint funded Vision Derbyshire Executive Team.

1.6 However, only four authorities joined the Joint Committee as full voting members (and making a funding contribution), and it has proven difficult to recruit to posts within the Vision Derbyshire Executive Team. As a result, progress towards stated outcomes and targets has been limited.

1.7 In addition since 2019, the economic and political landscape has fundamentally changed due to the impact Covid-19 pandemic, wider financial and fiscal challenges, and the proposal to establish a Mayoral County Combined Authority for the D2N2 Area.

1.8 It is in this context that Members of the Vision Derbyshire Joint Committee agreed that a ‘light touch’ review of Vision Derbyshire should be undertaken.

## **2. Purpose of the Review**

2.1 The Vision Derbyshire Joint Committee agreed that the Review should have the following objectives:

- To ensure the current Vision Derbyshire approach and hosting arrangements continue to be fit for purpose in the context of the developing East Midlands Devolution Deal.
- To ensure that Vision Derbyshire achievements are identified and celebrated and that these form the foundations of future arrangements as they develop and emerge.
- To recognise and address challenges in recruiting and appointing into the Vision Derbyshire programme team.

2.2 In addressing these objectives, the Joint Committee agreed that the Review should seek to:

- Support Derbyshire Leaders and Chief Executives in reviewing the Vision Derbyshire approach three years on through a series of one-to-one semi structured interviews.
- Confirm the appetite to continue with the approach and the level of ambition for future collaboration.
- Develop a shared understanding of key achievements and successes, identifying what has worked well over the last three years.
- Identify key challenges and opportunities in taking forward the approach, developing a shared understanding of potential improvements that could be made to current arrangements.
- Review and confirm existing Vision Derbyshire principles, to ensure these are fit for purpose.
- Identify and agree the conditions which would need to be in place to support the future collaboration of Derbyshire Councils.
- Identify and scope further work that may be required over the coming period.

2.3 Following an open tender process, East Midlands Councils was appointed to undertake the Review.

### 3. Methodology

- 3.1 A literature review of project proposals, strategies and related work relating to Vision Derbyshire was undertaken to fully understand its background and progress achieved, alongside consideration of the agreed principles that have guided its work to date:
- Improve outcomes – collaboration was intended to enable the improvement of outcomes for people and place.
  - Speak with one voice – collaboration must support speaking to residents, business, regional and national stakeholders with one voice.
  - Better coordination – collaboration must enable better coordination and use of resources, allowing strategic choices according to the need of place.
  - Provide a visible alternative to unitarisation – collaboration needed to represent a viable alternative to unitarisation, with greater flexibility to deal with strategic challenges of the future whilst maintaining appropriate local control
  - Deliver to be sustainable – collaboration should be delivered within the means, both resource and financial, of all councils, to be sustainable.
- 3.2 The Review Team then held individual, semi-structured interviews with Leaders and Chief Executives of Derby and Derbyshire Councils, which took place between the 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2022 and the 14<sup>th</sup> December 2022 via Microsoft Teams. A list of those interviewed is detailed in Appendix 1. The interview structure and questions are set out in Appendix 2.
- 3.3 The lead Reviewer (Stuart Young) attended meetings of the Vision Derbyshire Steering Group who provided the key point of reference and direction to the Review. Progress was also reported to the Vision Derbyshire Joint Committee.
- 3.4 A collective discussion on the Review's draft conclusions and recommendations was held with Vision Derbyshire Leaders and Chief Executives at their Joint Committee meeting that took place on 19<sup>th</sup> January 2023 at the offices of Chesterfield Borough Council. The outcome of this discussion is summarised under Section 5 of this report informed the Recommended Way Forward set out in Section 6.
- 3.5 The Final Report was submitted to the Vision Derbyshire Steering Group on 30<sup>th</sup> January 2023.

#### **4. Vision Derbyshire: Issues Identified**

4.1 Informed by the wealth of supporting documents and discussions that took place through the 20 structured interviews, a number of key issues relevant to the Review are highlighted.

##### **Context**

4.2 Firstly, the positives should be acknowledged. This review is ultimately intended to inform a new way forward, and within this approach it is perhaps all too easy to merely focus upon the negatives. While the partnership does have its challenges, the review should reflect where Vision Derbyshire has met with success.

4.3 It is also worth emphasising that the period since Vision Derbyshire was established in 2019 has been one of unprecedented challenges. This is not solely a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, but also the increasingly acute financial and service pressures, the political and organisational uncertainty, not least in regard to devolution, and its impact upon the national policy and legislative framework.

4.4 These benefits provide the platform for the Vision Derbyshire partnership, with the focus being upon transition, building on successes, reflecting upon what has not worked so well, and crafting a refreshed approach that has the support of all councils in Derbyshire. The positives include:

- Providing the impetus for the acceleration of a number of joint programmes, and whose progress is evidenced through the regular reporting on thematic work programmes.
- Bringing leaders and senior officers within the framework of an overarching strategy and work programme has helped to develop a more collegiate approach in Derbyshire, and a greater understanding of common and more locally specific challenges.
- Demonstrated the value of joint work across programmes, by an innovative and inclusive approach, particularly where 2 councils had shared lead responsibilities through Leaders and Chief Executives working together cross-authority.
- Provided platform to deliver common programmes that sat outside the initial Case for Change and Vision Derbyshire programme, such as the Covid-19 response and asylum and refugee resettlement work.
- The proposed East Midlands Mayoral County Combined Authority is devolution without local government restructuring. Therefore, it has arguably achieved one of its priority objectives - non-structural reform. And as part of this, it provides a platform to jointly consider options for a refreshed approach in Derbyshire.

##### **Role and Purpose of Vision Derbyshire**

4.5 Vision Derbyshire was established to deliver collaboration at scale – not solely a focus on shared services but to deliver a ‘system change’ for better public service outcomes. It was an ambitious proposal that envisaged key decision makers working together, not just from local government but also from wider public service such as police and health.



- 4.6 However, it is clear that there is not common understanding or agreement amongst local authority partners of the basis for establishing Vision Derbyshire. This challenge of perception has been a factor in preventing unanimity of membership.
- 4.7 Some saw the principal purpose of Vision Derbyshire as securing efficiencies through enhanced collaboration, others saw its role as being to drive economic growth. There was a widely held view that the Vision Derbyshire approach provided an alternative to local government structural reform, but conversely others saw it as a means to achieve this by stealth. Some highlighted Vision Derbyshire's purpose as laying the foundations for devolution and pooling decision-making and influence, while others more suspiciously held it to be a means through which the County Council could exert control and influence.
- 4.8 To what extent some, or all, are true may be for further reflection. Nevertheless, it is illustrative of different perceptions. The PwC work which culminated in the 'Case for Change' and proposition to Government was intended, in part, to bring greater rigour to the partnership's strategy and objectives, but feedback suggests that it failed to achieve both this and the buy-in of partners.
- 4.9 This lack of clarity has frustrated Vision Derbyshire and has contributed to the lack of partner engagement. Without the 'function' being clear, it was difficult to develop the 'form' and overall approach in a way to support all councils to actively participate. Future arrangements should reflect upon this.

#### **Progress towards Vision Derbyshire Objectives**

- 4.10 Partners deserve some credit; Vision Derbyshire, whether through the delivery of its work programme, or through the process of bringing partners together, has achieved a number of positive outcomes. However, the rate of progress towards stated objectives and targets has been slower than anticipated.
- 4.11 The five stated objectives of Vision Derbyshire are bold and ambitious:
- *Derbyshire will be a fair society where everyone has opportunities which appeal to their ambitions and are accessible through appropriate training routes.*
  - *People in Derbyshire will be better able to manage their quality of life, health and wellbeing, through being empowered to take a proactive approach in managing this for themselves.*
  - *Derbyshire will exceed its climate change targets through an integrated approach incorporating low carbon tourism; transport; spatial planning and investment in low carbon industries.*
  - *Derbyshire will develop an inclusive and diverse economy through investment in new industries through businesses and training opportunities, reducing reliance on a small number of sectors and mitigating future risk.*
  - *Communities will drive sustainable change and will be empowered through access to better opportunities; devolved decision making and budgets.*

- 4.12 For those that expressed a view, there was little argument against these objectives, which all appear to remain relevant and worthy for a county area like Derbyshire. However, the level of ambition risked the partnership becoming a ‘hostage to fortune’. This led to concerns related not to the principle of working in a Derbyshire-wide partnership – but to the effectiveness and deliverability of the Vision Derbyshire approach.
- 4.13 The agreement of a Derbyshire wide Supplementary Planning Document on Climate Change and the Vision Derbyshire Business Development Program were commonly cited as successes, although the extent to which either was depended on Vision Derbyshire is less clear as both involved councils outside of the full Vision Derbyshire partnership.
- 4.14 Conversely against some objectives, such as around ‘empowering communities’, it is commonly accepted that very little has been achieved.
- 4.15 The ‘Case for Collaboration’ and supporting documents also identified stretching targets, savings and deliverables against all Vision Derbyshire objectives. There is little evidence that these have been met. In part this is due to the lack of a dedicated Vision Derbyshire Executive Team, but several interviewees questioned the level of political and economic realism underpinning the approach.
- 4.16 While there are a number of factors that contributed to Vision Derbyshire not meeting its agreed objectives, the effect has been to limit confidence in the overall approach, particularly amongst those authorities reluctant to fully participate in the partnership.

#### **Resources for Vision Derbyshire**

- 4.17 The lack of resources and therefore capacity has contributed to Vision Derbyshire’s limited progress against its objectives and target savings. A significant element of Vision Derbyshire’s work programme was undertaken using the existing capacity and resources of partner councils. While in part a positive reflection of partner commitment as it demonstrates what can be achieved through aligning existing resources, the work programme was limited as a result. The situation was exacerbated by councils reluctant to commit funding without reassurance of value-added.
- 4.18 This has resulted in asymmetric arrangements where a minority of councils have committed significant levels of funding to the partnership, and others have not – but a ‘free-rider’ problem prevails with some councils participating while not financially contributing.
- 4.19 A report to the Vision Derbyshire Joint Committee in April 2022 sought approval for the formal creation of a programme resource, comprising a small programme team and project fund, and this was highlighted as a critical factor in accelerating delivery of Vision Derbyshire ambitions.
- 4.20 However, work to stand up the programme resource and recruit into the programme team has been unsuccessful with the one-year programme roles proving difficult to fill. The Vision Derbyshire Steering Group have explored several options, for example offering roles on a longer-term basis, but without success.

- 4.21 The on-going commitment from participating councils to resource Vision Derbyshire to drive activity (and demonstrate value added) is commendable but may be counterproductive as it risks leading to perceptions amongst those non-participating councils that Vision Derbyshire will continue 'no matter what'.

#### **Proposed Mayoral County Combined Authority**

- 4.22 Several interviewees expressed the view that work through Vision Derbyshire made a significant contribution to establishing a Mayoral County Combined Authority (MCCA).
- 4.23 It is likely the approach taken through Vision Derbyshire may be seen as taking important steps, both politically and organisationally, towards securing non-structural reform through devolution. The subsequent East Midlands Devolution Deal, signed and published on 30<sup>th</sup> August 2022, is a significant development and has implications for wider Derbyshire governance arrangements. It is sensible that the review of current arrangements, and consideration of the future approach, is undertaken within the context of MCCA proposals.
- 4.24 It is widely accepted that the establishment of a MCCA will be a 'game changer' and would have major implications for Vision Derbyshire regardless of any other concerns. It is also acknowledged that devolution proposals should further encourage Derbyshire Councils to collectively input to the MCCA, particularly from a district and borough council perspective (which will not be constituent members of the Combined Authority).
- 4.25 Any future Derbyshire wide collaboration will need to 'lean into' the MCCA and provide the route through which local government in Derbyshire could influence and inform the work of the MCCA, including agreeing Derbyshire district/borough representation on the MCCA itself.

#### **Summary & Conclusions**

- 4.26 Establishing the direct impact of Vision Derbyshire is difficult as in reality some of the deliverables could have happened anyway, and some activity had the buy-in from all councils despite some being outside the Partnership. What may be said, however, is that it likely accelerated the delivery of joint programmes through providing a fulcrum for activity, such as climate change mitigation, and has also supported a wider collegiate approach of benefit to wider work in Derbyshire, e.g., county-wide asylum and refugee resettlement work.
- 4.27 It is largely accepted that Vision Derbyshire has supported a more collegiate approach in Derbyshire. It has, with some certainty, supported a greater understanding of the common challenges facing councils in Derbyshire and how collectively these challenges may be addressed. It has also helped to lock together the county and district relationship and the approach of Leaders and Chief Executives from different councils having 'portfolio leads' across the whole county area was innovative and helped reinforce shared ownership and a partnership of equals.

- 4.28 Alongside this, through establishing a wider partnership vehicle, Vision Derbyshire provided a helpful platform upon which Derbyshire councils were able to develop and deliver elements of their collective programme response to the Covid-19 pandemic.
- 4.29 It is generally acknowledged by partners that the more notable successes associated with Vision Derbyshire were the climate change programme, the joint approach to planning and Supplementary Planning Documents, and elements of the economic development programmes, including the Festival of Business initiative, all of which had buy-in and active participation from all councils. However, the extent to which these required a Vision Derbyshire approach remains a moot point.
- 4.30 The central problem remains that only a limited number of councils are full contributory members, and there is little interest amongst partners currently not 'in the tent' to change their view. Merely forcing the existing approach further forward will not work and will only serve to entrench current positions and disengagement from collective work.
- 4.31 The lack of unanimity of membership is illustrative of the disconnect and undermines the ability of Vision Derbyshire to be an authoritative and representative partnership of councils. Nevertheless, there is potential appetite and opportunity to move forward.

## **5. Feedback from Vision Derbyshire Steering Group and Joint Committee**

- 5.1 This Review has been supported by regular consultation with the Vision Derbyshire Joint Committee and Steering Group. Its role has been primarily consultative, but also included discussion on the Review's draft conclusions and recommendations. These discussions were in no way directional to the Review Team, and there remain a number of issues raised in this Review that some Vision Derbyshire members may disagree with, or at least find disappointing.
- 5.2 Nevertheless, partners demonstrated pragmatism and flexibility, recognising the benefits of independent critical challenge, and acceptance of the need for change. The feedback from Vision Derbyshire members has focused on exploring the potential for a partnership framework that is both flexible and may enable the sign-up of all Derby and Derbyshire councils.
- 5.3 While discussions at both Joint Committee and the Steering Group offered no substantive counter to the conclusions and recommendations of this review, the most significant point of contention centred on the finding that there is not common understanding or agreement amongst local authority partners of the basis for establishing Vision Derbyshire. It is, after all, a challenge of perception, but nevertheless is one commonly cited and a factor in the lack of on-going engagement. If nothing else, it reinforces the need for all partners to be clear on the purpose, support and focus any new arrangements in the future.
- 5.4 There was, however, clear support by Vision Derbyshire Steering Group and Joint Committee for the suggestion that the MCCA provides the opportunity to re-engage partners, and the basis for a comprehensive review of Derbyshire-wider governance arrangements. It was also emphasised proposals going forward should be developed collectively and be sufficiently flexible to accommodate local arrangements.

## **6. Recommended Way Forward**

6.1 Despite a number of achievements, and notwithstanding that member councils have made genuine and concerted efforts to enable wider engagement in its work, the concerns that have led to the majority of councils not being constituent members of Vision Derbyshire are too significant to ignore and warrant a change in approach.

6.2 The principal challenges faced by the Vision Derbyshire partnership are essentially four-fold, lack of unanimity and engagement, insufficient clarity of purpose, challenges of delivery and lack of resources.

6.3 However, it is important to recognise that any scepticism expressed about Vision Derbyshire does not imply a lack of appetite for collaborative activity between councils in Derbyshire. There is a consensus that joint working across Derbyshire is intrinsically 'a good thing' particularly on matters relating to the Combined Authority. Given this appetite, there is an ideal opportunity to establish a refreshed approach. The focus should be on transition, building on the successes to date, and learning from where progress has been frustrated.

### **Responding to Change**

6.4 The organisational and institutional context has changed since 2019, not least with the proposed MCCA. There is support amongst partners that future joint working should reflect these changes. It is therefore a positive for the Vision Derbyshire partnership to be seen responding to these changes, demonstrating flexibility, pragmatism and degree of leadership.

6.5 The future approach must offer non-participating councils a route back in. Stakeholders consulted as part of this review emphasised the need for collaboration between all councils, collective input into the Combined Authority, rationalisation of the number of local governance structures, and the timely opportunity presented by present circumstances to make these changes.

6.6 However, the mere consolidation and tweaking of existing arrangements will not provide this route, instead there is a need to re-cast the partnership with a renewed focus on maximising opportunities of the MCCA, and to mitigate against the future challenging financial and economic context.

6.7 Derbyshire does not suffer from a lack of governance and there is certainly the perception that there are too many partnerships, board or committees, with similar or overlapping membership. For example, Vision Derbyshire sits alongside the Derbyshire Economic Partnership, the Derbyshire Economic Recovery Board, and Derby and Derbyshire Joint Economic Prosperity Committee. In addition, the MCCA will soon establish its shadow governance arrangements.

### **Devolution**

6.8 Devolution has changed the narrative and context. There is an opportunity to rationalise these partnerships/committees and to establish a single Derbyshire-wide partnership

structure leaning into the Combined Authority. This should involve all councils and potentially other key public service partners and should specifically align to MCCA functions and priorities. As a combined authority covering Derby, Derbyshire, Nottingham and Nottinghamshire – it will be important for Derbyshire authorities to collectively inform and influence MCCA proposals, just as councils in Nottingham and Nottinghamshire are likely to.

- 6.9 With the upper-tier councils the designated constituent authorities of the MCCA, a future single partnership structure (a 'Derbyshire Together' approach) could act as the route for better communication, influence and engagement on key issues. For example, agreeing local Shared Prosperity Fund allocations and as a route for the nominations process for the determination of the two District representatives onto the MCCA Board.
- 6.10 Reflecting the proposed responsibilities of the MCCA would appear, in the first instance, to provide a sensible basis for future collective work. Work on growth, including the allocation of investment, is a traditional docking point for councils' joint work and is by and large 'safe territory'. The MCCA proposes a wider approach and strategic opportunities in transport, tourism, housing growth, regeneration and skills training, and potentially public health. Notwithstanding that, in itself, this is an ambitious programme of work, it may lead to wider work – but this should naturally follow an iterative and mutually agreed approach.

#### **Shared Services**

- 6.11 The potential for the inclusion of shared services and procurement within any successor partnership approach is highlighted by some partners. However, this would be problematic. Aside from perceptions that, in effect, it is merely Vision Derbyshire Mk.II., shared services and procurement is an uncomfortable space for some partners that is not universally supported and risks cutting across existing local arrangements. Of course, councils should progress this work where appropriate, but it is suggested that this should be via separate arrangements.

#### **A 'Single Platform' for Collaboration**

- 6.12 It is the benefits and opportunities for joint working that need emphasising – i.e., the specific hooks and benefits to self-interest that provide the route to a more functional partnership. For example, despite the lack of support from some local authorities, the MCCA will in all likelihood be established. It will be the route for local investment and there will be a need to influence decisions to ensure local and joint priorities are met. This will be difficult to secure without co-ordination and collective work. Working in isolation will not work. The reality and stark choice facing councils in Derby and Derbyshire will be to either contribute to a joint approach, for that is what the new context will require, or choose not to and risk reinforcing distance and detachment from decisions that impact upon your locality.
- 6.13 A 'single platform' proposal should not infer a single board or committee doing absolutely everything. Instead, it is a single, unified framework led by a strategic leaders' board that 'lifts' leaders out from detailed or singular areas of activity, e.g., economic development, and enables a decision-making on 'place' (as MCCA will similarly do across the wider D2N2

geography). Sitting within this framework may be delivery boards that focus on specific programmes or areas of activity.

- 6.14 The development of a revised, collaborative approach should also include arrangements for officers. Effective arrangements for executive officer coordination and joint work are similarly important as those at the political level. Ideally, officer arrangements should mirror those of Members, including both strategic level boards and delivery boards/groups.
- 6.15 Reference to Derby and Derbyshire is deliberate – new arrangements have to include Derby City Council, Derbyshire County Council and all district councils. Future arrangements will have less authority and influence without all councils around the table.
- 6.16 The approach of each partner needing to contribute for seat at the table ('pay to play') at Vision Derbyshire has proved problematic – and would likely prove to be a barrier to any future approach. Whilst the potential for a 'single Derbyshire-wide platform' was clearly supported in principle, this should be flexible enough for councils to 'opt-in' to particular joint initiatives deploying additional resources as necessary, be they either on a geographical or programme basis. This helps to avoid the 'problem of construct' where partners may be less willing to make a financial contribution to a partnership (particularly at the outset) but more inclined to financially support specific programmes, e.g., climate change, homeless and domestic violence reduction, that appear currently supported and offer potential as elements of the work programme in the future.
- 6.17 Given its implications for the development of a future approach, it is also recommended that proposals to secure additional resources to support the work of Vision Derbyshire are put on hold until proposals for the future way forward have been agreed. In moving forward, the resource contributions for other elements of wider governance, e.g., Joint Committee for Economic Prosperity, should also be considered as part of the approach.

#### **Branding**

- 6.18 There remain concerns regarding the branding – and partners are advised that the Vision Derbyshire brand has become somewhat damaged and so it is a good time to move on from this. 'Vision Derbyshire' will inexorably be associated with the 'status quo', its successes and failures.
- 6.19 Without a genuine fresh start, current levels of detachment risk becoming further entrenched. The merits of a collective approach are widely accepted, the shortcomings of the existing partnership are similarly so – and even those in support of Vision Derbyshire accept that the vehicle is perhaps no longer fit for purpose and the recasting of Vision Derbyshire may allow all sides of the debate to be able to move forward.
- 6.20 A new approach enables, and necessitates, a new identity. What these new arrangements may be called will be for partners to decide, and suggestions already offered include Derby and Derbyshire Leaders Board, Derbyshire Together, and Derby and Derbyshire Strategy Board.



### Timing

- 6.21 Vision Derbyshire partners are advised to take advantage of the opportunity of timings. The changed context offers a way forward, to enable both a refocused and refreshed approach, more streamlined governance and the opportunity to re-engage all councils.
- 6.22 While it is sensible to undertake this review of Vision Derbyshire since it was established in 2019, these timings also align with district and unitary council elections to be held in May 2023, and it is expected that these will be followed in May 2024 by the elections for Mayoral Combined Authority.
- 6.23 The timings of developing the revised approach are important and it is recommended that successor partnership arrangements to Vision Derbyshire are developed and agreed after the local authority elections and before any Mayoral elections, and alongside the development of emerging combined authority governance arrangements.
- 6.24 The local authority elections offer the opportunity to reset, with a new mandate and the opportunity to implement new arrangements. In any case, it would be unwise to try to propose and drive forward new arrangements before the May 2023 local authority elections as leadership and thus commitment may change and discussions on partnership governance risk becoming a distraction.

### Recommendations

- 6.25 There is general acceptance of the benefits of councils working together on common priorities. There is also consensus that the current Vision Derbyshire partnership vehicle will be unable to meet the needs of a future approach, alongside the view that current infrastructure for partnership working is complex and in need of streamlining.
- 6.26 The following recommendations are therefore to support councils in Derbyshire move forward in meeting their common objectives:
- a) **There is appetite for collaborative activity between councils in Derbyshire, particularly on matters relating to the Combined Authority. Given this appetite, there is an ideal opportunity to establish a refreshed and fully inclusive approach to collaborative working in Derbyshire.**
  - b) **The existing partnership and governance arrangements in Derbyshire should be simplified and rationalised, to be superseded by a single Derbyshire-wide partnership vehicle comprising all Derbyshire councils.**
  - c) **The future partnership approach should specifically align with proposals for the Mayoral County Combined Authority and focus on securing collective influence. Progressing any shared services and procurement initiatives is best implemented through separate arrangements involving the relevant councils, although there is an opportunity to share best practice through the new partnership.**

- d) To support a fresh approach, the 'Vision Derbyshire' brand should be 'retired' as partners move to new arrangements.
- e) The timings for refreshing the partnership approach are important. It would be appropriate to develop and seek agreement to new arrangements after the forthcoming local elections and before any Mayoral election, i.e., between summer 2023 and spring 2024.

-----

DRAFT

## Appendix 1: Persons Interviewed

Interviewee	Date	Interviewer
Cllr Tricia Gilby, Chesterfield Borough Council	22 <sup>nd</sup> November 2022	Stuart Young
Cllr Garry Purdy, Derbyshire Dales Borough Council	23 <sup>rd</sup> November 2022	Andrew Pritchard
Emma Alexander, Derbyshire County Council	23 <sup>rd</sup> November 2022	Stuart Young
Cllr Steve Fritchley, Bolsover District Council	28 <sup>th</sup> November 2022	Andrew Pritchard
Paul Wilson, Derbyshire, Dales District Council	28 <sup>th</sup> November 2022	Andrew Pritchard
Cllr Christopher Poulter, Derby City Council	29 <sup>th</sup> November 2022	Stuart Young
Paul Simpson, Derby City Council	29 <sup>th</sup> November 2022	Stuart Young
Jeremy Jaroszek, Erewash Borough Council	29 <sup>th</sup> November 2022	Stuart Young
Frank McArdle, South Derbyshire District Council	30 <sup>th</sup> November 2022	Andrew Pritchard
Huw Bowen, Chesterfield Borough Council	30 <sup>th</sup> November 2022	Stuart Young
Lee Hickin, North East Derbyshire District Council	30 <sup>th</sup> November 2022	Stuart Young
Phil Mulligan, PDNPA	1 <sup>st</sup> December 2022	Andrew Pritchard
Cllr Kevin Buttery, Amber Valley Borough Council	2 <sup>nd</sup> December 2022	Stuart Young
Cllr Barry Lewis, Derbyshire County Council	6 <sup>th</sup> December 2022	Stuart Young
Cllr Carol Hart, Erewash Borough Council	6 <sup>th</sup> December 2022	Stuart Young
Karen Hanson, Bolsover District Council	8 <sup>th</sup> December 2022	Andrew Pritchard
Andrew Stokes, High Peak Borough Council	9 <sup>th</sup> December 2022	Andrew Pritchard
Cllr Alex Dale, NE Derbyshire District Council	13 <sup>th</sup> December 2022	Stuart Young
Cllr Anthony McKeown, High Peak Borough Council	14 <sup>th</sup> December 2022	Andrew Pritchard
Cllr Kevin Richards, South Derbyshire District Council	14 <sup>th</sup> December 2022	Andrew Pritchard

## Appendix 2: Structured Interview Issues & Questions

### 1. Experience to Date

- Develop a shared understanding of key achievements and successes, identifying what has worked well over the last three years
- Identify key challenges and opportunities in taking forward the approach, developing a shared understanding of potential improvements that could be made to current arrangements
- Review and confirm existing Vision Derbyshire principles, to ensure these are fit for purpose.

*Q: What is your understanding of the rationale/basis for establishing the Vision Derbyshire partnership?*

*Q: Overall what has been your experience of Vision Derbyshire to date?*

*Q: Can you identify what has worked well over the last three years?*

*Q: What you consider to be Vision Derbyshire's key achievements and/or successes?*

*Q: Are there any areas where things have not worked out as you had hoped?*

*Q: How do you think the current Vision Derbyshire working arrangements could be improved?*

*Q: Do you think the current Vision Derbyshire principles (to confirm) remain 'fit for purpose'?*

*Q: If not, how do you think they could be improved?*

### 2. Moving Forward

- Identify and agree the conditions which would need to be in place to support the future collaboration of Derbyshire Councils
- Confirm the appetite to continue with the approach and the level of ambition for future collaboration
- Identify and scope further work that may be required over the coming period.

*Q: What is your authority's appetite for further collaboration at the Derbyshire level?*

*Q: Should the emphasis be on collaboration across a wider range of issues, or on deeper collaboration around the current Vision Derbyshire agenda?*

*Q: How do you see Vision Derbyshire evolving in the context of the proposed Combined Authority?*

*Q: Given the cost and other pressures facing local government, do you believe that Vision Derbyshire can remain a viable alternative to unitarization?*

*Q: Do you think that further analysis or research is required into support the development of Vision Derbyshire to ensure it is 'fit for purpose'?*

*Q: Has the rationale/basis for establishing the Vision Derbyshire partnership endured – is it different to that originally envisaged?*

*Q: Overall, do you believe that your authority will wish to a part of Vision Derbyshire for the foreseeable future?*