

Leader Heather Kidd's statement on devolution:

Devolution is changing where decisions are made and where investment goes. Shropshire cannot afford to stand on the sidelines.

As a local authority, our starting point is simple. Shropshire's interests must come first.

We are a large, predominantly rural county with distinctive market towns, strong links with Wales and an important economic connection eastwards towards Telford and the West Midlands. There is no perfect devolution geography.

But one thing has become increasingly clear - Shropshire and Telford & Wrekin need to work much more closely together.

We are different places with our own identities and priorities, but our economies and infrastructure are closely connected. The M54 corridor offers enormous potential for jobs, homes, infrastructure and investment. All of the strongest-performing options in our earlier work included Telford & Wrekin.

We already work together successfully, including on nature recovery and the visitor economy. Now we need to build on that relationship.

For me, that is one of the clearest conclusions from the work we have done. Whatever the eventual devolution arrangement, a strong strategic partnership between Shropshire and Telford & Wrekin needs to be at its heart.

We also recognise the direction Government is taking on mayoral devolution. We are open to being part of a mayoral arrangement if that provides the best route to the powers, funding and investment Shropshire needs.

This is not about having a Mayoralty for the sake of it. It is about what we can deliver for Shropshire. Government is increasingly putting powers and funding through Mayoral Strategic Authorities. At a time when traditional sources of public funding are under enormous pressure, we cannot afford to watch other areas secure investment and opportunities while Shropshire misses out.

Nor does closer working with Telford & Wrekin mean turning our backs on Wales. Our relationships through the Marches Forward Partnership remain enormously important. We can look east and west at the same time.

What we cannot do is sit back and wait for somebody else to decide Shropshire's future.

We need to be at the table with Ministers, making the case for Shropshire, strengthening our relationship with Telford & Wrekin and exploring an arrangement which recognises our rurality, protects our identity and unlocks new investment.



There will be much more discussion before any final arrangement is determined, and residents and partners must be part of that conversation.

But our direction is clear – work more closely with Telford & Wrekin, engage positively with devolution and make sure Shropshire gets the investment and influence it deserves.

We will not pursue devolution for devolution's sake. We will pursue the arrangement that gives Shropshire the strongest voice and the best opportunity to shape its own future.

Shropshire cannot afford to be left behind.

