

County Council

Dorset County Council



Date of Meeting	10 November 2016
Officer	Debbie Ward, Chief Executive
Subject of Report	Exploring options for the Future of Local Government in Bournemouth, Dorset and Poole
Executive Summary	<p>At its special meeting on 10 March 2016 the County Council discussed the future of Local Government across Bournemouth, Dorset and Poole. The meeting enabled Councillors to debate the key considerations to determine if the County Council should consider options for Local Government Reorganisation across Dorset.</p> <p>The debate confirmed the Council's willingness to consider reorganisation and the Council has considered further reports to lead this process at its meetings on 21 April 2016, and 21 July 2016. This included the establishment of the Shaping Dorset's Future group, with cross party membership and consideration of the impact on the next County Council elections due in May 2017.</p> <p>Through these meetings the County Council has debated the options for Local Government reorganisations, established the principles to guide the development of options, agreed the timetable to progress the options and has enabled engagement with District and Borough Councils and Town and Parish Councils.</p> <p>The overriding ambition has been established as supporting sustainable Local government for Dorset putting services ahead of organisations.</p> <p>This report is intended to inform the on-going discussion among Councillors before the County Council and other principal authorities receive a final report and recommendations during a county wide decision making period in January 2017.</p> <p>The timetable for decision-making was agreed at the meeting on 21 July 2016. This is shown below. At the time of writing the</p>

	<p>analysis of the public consultation and the work on the case for change are being completed and are not available to support Councillors in their final decision making. The County Council will meet on 26 January 2017 and asked for a decision on the future of local government in Dorset after the opportunity to consider the content of the reports on the Case for Change and the Consultation completed on 23 October 2016.</p> <p>It is clear that Councillors cannot make a decision at this meeting. However, this meeting is asked to understand the process to date and the desired outcomes of this meeting are to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. Reflect on the County Council’s progress strengthening partnerships with other tiers of local government through the Shaping Dorset’s Future programme ii. Note the completion of the public consultation iii. Understand the decision-making timeline throughout December and January iv. Confirm the Leader’s authority to seek a consensus position with the eight other principal councils as the basis for a recommendation to the additional Council meeting on 26 January 2017 v. Note the position with the County Council’s 2017 elections. <p>In discussing these issues Councillors are reminded that the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) has asked Dorset’s councils to work together to find consensus in any proposals for change. The councils’ success in working constructively together to-date has been noted both anecdotally, by government officials, and by those involved in similar reviews elsewhere.¹</p> <p>Councillors are also reminded of the guidance on predetermination issued by the County Council’s Monitoring Officer, on behalf of Dorset Monitoring Officers’ Group, on 9 September, in particular that <i>‘it is perfectly fine for Members to say publicly that they have certain views or concerns about the issue (predisposition) so long as they do not indicate that their mind is made up and that they will not change their opinion, no matter what information or advice may be forthcoming in the future (pre-determination).’</i></p>
Impact Assessment:	<p>Equalities Impact Assessment: As options for reform are developed, any impact of specific proposals on people with protected characteristics will be considered.</p> <p>Use of Evidence: This report has been written in light of advice from DCLG officials, discussions with neighbouring councils and subject experts.</p>

¹ Review of Future Options for Local Government in Oxfordshire, August 2016, Grant Thornton (page 22)

Exploring options for the Future of Local Government in Bournemouth, Dorset and Poole

	<p>Budget: The pan-Dorset public consultation and development of the business case are being funded from a Transformation Challenge Award grant received by the nine principal councils from the government.</p> <p>Risk Assessment: Having considered the risks associated with this decision using the County Council's approved risk management methodology, the level of risk has been identified as: Current Risk: HIGH Residual Risk: HIGH</p> <p>Other Implications: Exploring options for the future of local government in Dorset has far-reaching implications. These are being explored as part of the development of the case for change, and will form the basis of a detailed programme should a submission be made to government.</p>
Recommendation	<p>That Councillors:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Note and comment on the progress of the Shaping Dorset's Future Programme, and the 'Working Together' Programme with Parish and Town Councils 2. Note the details of the public consultation on local government reform presented at the meeting 3. Note the timeline and process through to a potential submission to the Secretary of State in February 2017 4. Confirm the Leader's authority after consultation with the Chief Executive and Shaping Dorset's Future Board to seek a consensus position with the eight other principal councils, as requested by government 5. Note the position with regard to the 2017 County Council elections.
Reason for Recommendation	<p>To ensure local government services are sustainable and residents, businesses and communities are supported by the most effective local government arrangements.</p>
Appendices	<p>None</p>
Background Papers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exploring Options for the Future of Local Government in Bournemouth, Dorset and Poole – 10 March 2016 (Item 3) • Exploring Options for the Future of Local Government in Bournemouth, Dorset and Poole – 21 April 2016 (Item 10) • Exploring Options for the Future of Local Government in Bournemouth, Dorset and Poole – 21 July 2016 (Item 8)

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1. Shaping Dorset's Future: Progress To-Date

- 1.1 The *Shaping Dorset's Future* Programme continues to develop, providing a forum for members to explore the major strategic issues facing the county, and give a voice to those views both within the council and beyond.
- 1.2 Since July, the district and borough councils have become increasingly involved in the programme. The work streams are now well attended by members from across the district and borough councils, as well as County Councillors. This has significantly strengthened discussion and debates around partnership approaches and has informed the development of strategic programmes of work.
- 1.3 The involvement of the district and borough councils has been considerable and has contributed to a better understanding of district services within the programme, and an insight into different councils within the partnership. At a recent meeting of the Public Services work stream, for example, discussion focused on the need for integration of housing requirements at a strategic level with social care and health to improve outcomes for residents, and the need to engage housing portfolio holders at future meetings.
- 1.4 The Shaping Dorset's Future Board has overseen the Council's communication and engagement throughout the consultation period. A high level of support has been provided by Members at public engagement events, as well as promoting the engagement through local networks.

2. Working with Town and Parish Councils

- 2.1 The Shaping Services work stream is developing a programme of work to establish stronger working relationships with Parish and Town councils, and learning from other Councils on implementing new models of service delivery to meet local needs. To support the improved engagement and communication, the Dorset Association of Parish and Town Councils (DAPTC) will be invited to attend future meetings.
- 2.2 In October, the Shaping Services work stream held a workshop to understand the types of services that may suit a more local provision. Actions from the meeting included commissioning officers (including district officers) to develop a set of guiding principles for future engagement and working arrangements, and to undertake further research into other Authority models of engagement and working with Town and Parish Councils.
- 2.3 A pilot of the 'Working Together' protocol and principles has recently been completed by Dorset Highways. The success of this pilot has been underpinned by the support and involvement of the DAPTC.
- 2.4 Using the learning from the Dorset Highways pilot, a programme of work is being developed with an action plan managed from the Chief Executive's Department. This work forms a key element of delivering the County Councils Vision and corporate priorities and can be developed with or without Local Government reorganisation.

3. Pan-Dorset Partnership Update:

- 3.1 Work on local government reform at a pan-Dorset level has focused on preparation and information gathering for the submission to the Secretary of State. The submission was originally expected to be 31 January 2017 but due to Councils' decision making processes it is now likely to be early February 2017.
- 3.2 The submission will be made up of three bodies of evidence:
 - i. A financial analysis, prepared by Local Partnerships
 - ii. A 'case for change' options appraisal, prepared by Pricewaterhouse Coopers
 - iii. A report on the public consultation, prepared by Opinion Research Services
- 3.3 These documents will be circulated to all Councillors electronically on 5 December.
- 3.4 Councillors are asked to note that the reports are likely to run to several hundred pages, so will take time to read and digest.

Public Consultation

- 3.5 The public consultation concluded on 25 October and was carried out as a single and common process across Poole, Bournemouth and Dorset. Feedback from officers suggests that the process of working with colleagues from across the districts on the roadshows was very positive.
- 3.6 At the time of writing, details of the completion of the consultation have not been finally confirmed and available for inclusion in this report but they will be available in time to form part of a presentation to members during the full council meeting on 10 November.

The 'Case for Change'

- 3.7 Councillors will be aware that Dorset County Council, on behalf of the nine principal councils, commissioned Pricewaterhouse Coopers (PwC) to undertake the 'case for change' (or options appraisal) in respect of each of the options. At the time of writing this work is in progress. This will form part of the evidence base that members receive on 5 December.
- 3.8 The purpose of the work is to assess each of the options against the following 'tests':
 - Ability to improve outcomes for residents and to realise the economic potential of each area
 - Effectiveness and efficiency of leadership and governance
 - Sustainability of services for the public
 - Alignment with the functional geography of each area - the way people live their lives and businesses do their business
 - Value for money and savings
- 3.9 PwC currently completing data analysis and validation of service and budget assumptions through a range of methods. The Case for Change will be ready for the 5 December 2016 report circulation. At this point there is no feedback although (they have repeatedly commented on the strength of the relationships between the councils.

4. The Decision-Making Timetable

4.1 Throughout December there will be a series of meetings and briefings to review the evidence and aim to reach a decision by Dorset councils on the proposals. The full timetable is as follows:

1 December 2016	Leaders and Chief Executives receive presentations of draft findings from the consultation and case for change
5 December 2016	Final reports for consultation and case for change are circulated to all elected members
7 December 2016	Leaders meet to debate the evidence presented in the reports
8 December 2016	Two 'all member' briefing sessions to receive presentations of the reports (locations in West and East venues)
15th December 2016	Leaders meet to agree recommendations to take forward to all councils
23 December 2016	Each council to issue the final reports to commence the democratic process for each authority.

4.2 DCLG have emphasised consensus throughout the process and have asked the Leaders to come forward with a collective proposal. To support these discussions the Leader will consult with the Shaping Dorset's Future Board, and aim to seek a consensus position with the eight other principal councils, as requested by government. These discussions will also be in consultation with the Chief Executive and the Monitoring Officer. Any collective proposal will be set out in the report and will be a matter to be considered and decided upon by of the County Council at its meeting on 26th January 2017. Equivalent decision making authority will rest with each sovereign council.

4.3 A Shaping Dorset's Future board meeting will be held on 14 December – the day before the Leaders meet to seek a collective view – to allow time for consideration of the reports circulated on 5 December and inform the view of the Leader of the County Council.

4.4 Formal decision-making will begin in late January. The schedule of full council meetings is as follows:

Date	Council	Time	Venue
24 th January	Borough of Poole	7pm	Poole Civic Centre
26th January	Dorset County Council	10am	County Hall, Dorchester
26 th January	West Dorset District Council	2.15pm	South Walks House, Dorchester
26 th January	Weymouth & Portland Borough Council	7pm	Council Offices, Weymouth
27 th January	North Dorset District Council	10am	Nordon, Blandford Forum
30 th January	East Dorset District Council	6.30pm	Furzehill, Wimborne
31 st January	Christchurch Borough Council	6pm	Civic Offices, Christchurch
31 st January	Bournemouth Borough Council	7pm	Town Hall, Bournemouth
31 st January	Purbeck District Council	7pm	Westport House, Wareham

- 4.5 In advance of full council on 26 January, local government reform will be discussed by the People and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 11 January 2017.

5. The 2017 County Council Elections

- 5.1 At the meeting of the County Council on 21 July officers reported on the possible timing of elections to unitary councils and on the cost of the May 2017 elections to Dorset County Council.

- 5.2 When councillors learnt that elections to any new unitary councils might take place only a year after the County Council elections and that the cost of the County Council elections would be some £800,000 they were concerned to avoid the unnecessary cost of running two elections very close together. The Council resolved:

“That the County Council do not wish the elections to take place in 2017, as the Council wishes to pursue Local Government reform, subject to the results of the public consultation.”

- 5.3 The County Council’s wish to avoid the cost of two elections very close together in time, one of which would be to a council which might cease to exist less than two years afterwards, has been misconstrued by some as an attack upon democracy. The reality was in fact a wish to avoid unnecessary cost to council taxpayers and a reflection that with the other eight principal councils the County Council has led a very significant consultation, actively seeking people’s views on the future of local government in Dorset.
- 5.4 Acting on the Council’s decision officers have reviewed the position on the May 2017 elections. This has included taking specialist legal advice and discussions with colleagues in the Department for Communities and Local Government. The legal position is very clear and although the DCLG have every sympathy with the Council’s wish to avoid unnecessary cost there is no case to make to postpone or cancel the County Council Elections in May 2017 and these will have to go ahead on 4 May 2017 as planned. Letters of confirmation of this position are anticipated by the 10 November 2016 but are not available to append to this report at the time of writing.

6. Risks and Issues

- 6.1 Risks associated with this work are being managed as per the corporate risk management approach. The key risk as at November 2016 is that Councils cannot reach agreement on the shape of any new authorities in January 2017 and therefore a joint submission cannot be made to government as planned.
- 6.2 Councillors and officers are working actively to mitigate the risks. Detailed planning has taken place to ensure for the final sets of evidence and the reports are shared as widely as possible to inform councillors of the findings and to allow discussions to take place within each Sovereign council before the final Full Council meetings take place in January 2017.
- 6.3 As awareness grows of the opportunities presented by change and of the realities of the challenge facing multi-tier local government there is a clear recognition that agreement must be reached to support sustainable local government and maintain services as the priority for the County Council.