

# County Council

## Dorset County Council



Date of Meeting	People and Communities Committee - 26 <sup>th</sup> June 2017
Officer	Debbie Ward, Chief Executive
Subject of Report	<b>Governance arrangements to support local government reform – Joint Committee Proposal</b>
Executive Summary	This report asks members to consider proposals to be part of two joint committees, with other Dorset councils to develop future governance arrangements and service provision across the County. This is intended to support structured and informed progress towards Local Government Reorganisation, as set out in the Future Dorset proposal agreed at the County Council meeting in January 2017 and submitted to the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government in February 2017.
Impact Assessment:	Equalities Impact Assessment: An initial pan-Dorset EqIA was completed to support the Future Dorset proposal and can be found at Appendix 2 this will be refreshed following a decision from the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, this could be a “minded to” or full decision.
	Use of Evidence: The standard report attached at Appendix 1 has been developed in partnership by Dorset Monitoring Officers
	Budget: In the report considered by Full Council on the 26 <sup>th</sup> January it was resolved:  <i>That the Chief Executive be authorised, after consultation with the Leader, to work with other councils that support the same option for reorganisation to develop and implement appropriate plans and allocate appropriate resources to progress local government change in Dorset</i>  To date, as Christchurch, East Dorset and Purbeck councils resolved not to support submission of the Future Dorset proposal, a formula has been developed between Chief Finance Officers to divide up costs accordingly between the remaining six councils.

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	<p>Risk Assessment:</p> <p>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: MEDIUM  Residual Risk MED</p>
<p>Recommendation</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. That this Committee consider the proposal to establish two Joint Committees with other Councils across Dorset to support the development of the Future Dorset proposal for Local Government Reorganisation, aiming to deliver sustainable services across Dorset for the future.</li> <li>2. That this Committee consider the proposed membership of the proposed Joint Committees.</li> <li>3. That this Committee confirms the outcomes of its consideration as comments to be referred to County Council, to inform the decision to join the Joint Committees and make appointments as appropriate.</li> </ol>
<p>Reason for Recommendation</p>	<p>To enable Dorset County Council to form part of the governance arrangements that will support the progress of local government reform in Bournemouth, Dorset and Poole as part of the Future Dorset Submission made to the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government in February 2017.</p>
<p>Appendices</p>	<p>Appendix 1: Draft County Council Report. July 2017. A report to consider local government reform in Bournemouth, Dorset and Poole.  Appendix 2: Initial pan-Dorset EqIA developed January 2017</p>
<p>Background Papers</p>	<p>DCC County Council Reports, Exploring options for the future local government in Poole, Bournemouth and Dorset</p>
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## **1. Background**

- 1.1 Following decisions taken by Dorset County Council, West and North Dorset District Councils and Weymouth and Portland Borough Council, Bournemouth Borough Council and Borough of Poole in January this year; a submission proposing reorganisation for local government in Dorset “Future Dorset” was made to the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government in February 2017.
- 1.2 It had been expected that there would be a decision, most likely to be a “Minded to” rather than “full” in late March. This was not received and no decision has since been possible, with the County Council and General Elections being held. The Future Dorset submission presents a plan to achieve structural change to Local Government by April 2019, to support the future of sustainable services across the County.
- 1.3 To achieve this timetable and maintain the ambition to secure sustainable services across the County joint development needs to take place. To achieve this in a timely and considered way it is proposed that two new joint committees are established with membership from each of the Authorities who have supported The Future Dorset submission, with the opportunity for each of the Authorities who have not, to consider being part of the joint committee structure, should they wish to do so.

## **2. Joint Committees – The Rationale**

- 2.1 The Case for Change considered by the County Council in January 2017 articulated significant opportunities to transform services for our communities through the creation of two new local authorities. The timetable to achieve this has been agreed for April 2019 and if this is to be achieved, there needs to be a method of working that will allow members from partner authorities to work together to plan for this transformation.
- 2.2 The mechanics for setting up the new authorities by March 2019, are significant and to make them achievable it is being proposed that two joint committees are established to carry out preparation and planning prior to the Implementation Executive. The work would include considering difficult questions relating to Council Tax harmonisation and beginning to establish a medium term financial plan for each new authority. It is proposed that it also include:
  - Agreement of a model and process for disaggregation of services and budgets.
  - Agreement of a model and process for Council Tax harmonisation.
  - Authority to request a boundary review.
  - Authority to agree an electoral scheme.
  - Authority to respond to consultation on the content of orders to be made by the Secretary of State, including the new unitary authority name.
  - For the Dorset area to agree a double devolution offer to parish and town councils.

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2.3 Whatever the future of local government structures in Dorset, this is an opportunity for all councils to work collaboratively and to consider future operating models and approaches to delivering valued public services against a background of declining resources. It will also provide a valuable forum for agreeing how to deal with current challenges and consider appropriate vehicles for community involvement in decision making processes, such as looking at area board type arrangements. The work would include close working with town and parish councils, as effective development of devolved working is essential across the Dorset area.

As set out in the Case for Change the geographies covered by the proposed joint committees closely reflects the way in which Dorset operates as an entity and the differing needs between the conurbation and the county area. A joint committee would provide the forum in which the potential opportunities to improve the area for our residents collectively can be explored, such as:

- Improved transport links
- Consistent policies
- Improving health and well-being
- Developing a more attractive climate for businesses
- Matching skills requirements to the local economy
- Enhancing our natural environment
- Working across Public Services
- Delivery of the Sustainability and Transformation Plan

With representatives from across the councils the ambition is to develop a jointly owned, participative environment in which strengths, experience and expertise can be shared for the benefit of the whole of Dorset.

Working collaboratively to find solutions to current challenges will strengthen all council's abilities to deal with the on-going challenge of less finance and increased demand on services. It is thought that putting community decision making at the heart of this process, regardless of any decision by government on reorganisation, will improve the conversation and decisions we take collectively as councils in Dorset in the future.

### **3. Joint Committees - The Proposal**

3.1 The details of the joint committees and the proposed membership is set out in full at Appendix 1 and aims to mirror what an Implementation Executive is likely to be. Appendix 1 is in the form of a draft report for County Council and its contents is the same as that which will be included in reports to be considered by each of the other authorities considering the establishment of the joint committees. The joint committees would work to develop the arrangements for the new authorities, should they be agreed, but have no formal decision making powers for the establishment of new authorities until the creation of an Implementation Executive. This would only come into existence once the statutory order is made; which may now not be until late Spring/early Summer 2018.

3.2 In summary the proposal will be to establish two joint committees to reflect the two new authorities proposed in the Future Dorset submission:

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For the Dorset area it is proposed that the initial membership of the joint committee should comprise 2 members from each of North Dorset District Council, West Dorset District Council and Weymouth and Portland Borough Council, and 6 members for DCC, reflecting the risk and service responsibility for each geographic area. There would be provision to increase this further should a decision be made by East Dorset District Council and/or Purbeck District Council to wish to be part of this joint committee, with 2 members from each of these authorities and the County Council. This would lead to a maximum membership of the joint committee of 20 members.

For Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole it is proposed that the initial membership of the joint committee should comprise 8 members from Bournemouth Borough Council and 6 members from the Borough of Poole, with provision to add 2 members from Christchurch Borough Council should that Council choose to re-engage with the Future Dorset proposal and 2 members from Dorset County Council (to address the issue of disaggregation only).

In the event that Christchurch Borough Council takes a decision not to re-engage with the Future Dorset proposal, Dorset County Council will represent the Christchurch residents on the joint committee with a membership of 2, negating the need for 2 additional Dorset County Council members.

- 3.3 It is expected that the two joint committees are established to carry out preparation and planning prior to the Implementation Executive, and that its work will enable a smooth transition to those new arrangements, should local government reorganisation take place.

### **4. Nominations Process**

- 4.1 Each sovereign council will need to approve a nominations process suitable for their council's political make-up and reflecting the need for politically proportional representation.
- 4.2 The County Council is required to nominate members for both joint committees. This would be up to 10 members, for the Dorset Joint Committee to match the 2 district councillors from each of the potential five district councils involved. At the time of writing the report only three district councils had supported the Future Dorset submission and therefore the County Council would need to nominate 6 members. A further 2 members would need to be nominated for the Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Joint Committee.

### **5. Next steps**

- 5.1 Should those councils who did not take part in the Future Dorset submission accept an invitation to take part in this joint committee, they too will consider this standard report and would each be asked to nominate 2 members to the relevant joint committee.