

Dorset Area Joint Committee

Minutes of the meeting held at South Walks House, South Walks Road,
Dorchester, Dorset on Wednesday, 20 September 2017

Present:

Rebecca Knox (Chairman)
Shane Bartlett, Jeff Cant, Graham Carr-Jones, Hilary Cox, Spencer Flower, Matt Hall,
David Harris, Jill Haynes, Colin Huckle, Sherry Jespersen, Byron Quayle, Barry Quinn,
Gary Suttle, Alan Thacker and Simon Tong

Officer Attending: David McIntosh (Chief Executive East Dorset District and Christchurch Borough Council), Matt Prosser (Chief Executive West Dorset District, Weymouth & Portland Borough and North Dorset District Council), Debbie Ward (Chief Executive - Dorset County Council), Darran Gunter (Programme Director LGR), Stuart Caundle (Monitoring Officer), Bridget Downton (General Manager - Purbeck District Council) and Lee Gallagher (Democratic Services Manager - Dorset County Council).

Election of Chairman

- 1 On considering the election of the Chairman of the Joint Committee, Cllr Graham Carr-Jones proposed Cllr Rebecca Knox, which was seconded by Cllr Jeff Cant. On being put to the vote Cllr Rebecca Knox was duly elected as the Chairman.

Resolved

That Cllr Rebecca Knox be elected as Chairman of the Joint Committee for 2017/18.

Election of Vice-Chairman

- 2 On considering the election of the Vice-Chairman of the Joint Committee, Cllr Alan Thacker proposed Cllr Anthony Alford, which was seconded by Cllr Sherry Jespersen. On being put to the vote Cllr Anthony Alford was duly elected as the Vice-Chairman.

Resolved

That Cllr Anthony Alford be elected as Vice-Chairman of the Joint Committee for 2017/18.

Apologies for Absence

- 3 Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Tony Alford (West Dorset District Council), Cllr Ros Kayes (Dorset County Council) and Cllr Bill Pipe (Dorset County Council). Cllr Alan Thacker attended for Cllr Alford, Cllr David Harris attended for Cllr Kayes, and Cllr Hilary Cox attended for Cllr Pipe.

Code of Conduct

- 4 There were no declarations by members of disclosable pecuniary interests under the Code of Conduct.

Public Participation

- 5 There were no public questions received at the meeting in accordance with Standing Order 21(1).

There was one public statement received at the meeting in accordance with Standing Order 21(2) from the Dorset Association of Parish and Town Councils regarding the Dorset Area Joint Committee. The statement is attached to these minutes as an annexure.

Refining Terms of Reference of the Dorset Area Joint Committee

- 6 Councillors considered a report by the Assistant Chief Executive of the Dorset Councils Partnership, as the Acting Monitoring Officer of the Joint Committee, on the terms of reference of the Joint Committee within the remit set by all of the six partner councils, and the quorum arrangements for future meetings.

Members considered modest refinements to reflect the nature of discussions and priority areas, which was discussed at an informal workshop on 14 August 2017.

In addition to the terms of reference, the quorum of the Joint Committee was discussed which would see 50% of the membership of the Committee plus one member (9), but consideration was given to whether all councils must be represented within the quorum. The need for the quorum to include at least one representative from each council was explained as a logical arrangement by Cllr Flower. However, some other views were shared which recognised the importance of the Committee to ensure that all members attended, and that there were named substitutes for occasions when this was not possible.

Resolved

1. That the refined terms of reference attached at appendix 1 of the Monitoring Officer's report be approved.
2. That the working practice for the purpose of the Joint Committee's quorum (Option 1 – 50% membership plus 1) be approved.

Local Government Reorganisation Submission Update

- 7 The Joint Committee received a verbal update on the current status of the Future Dorset proposal submitted to Government in February 2017 by the Chief Executive Sponsor of the Future Dorset Programme Board.

It was acknowledged that it was a legal duty of Government to respond to the submission, but there was no defined timescale for this to happen and councils were therefore awaiting an announcement. In addition, it was noted that the Leaders and Chief Executives in support of Future Dorset proposal were due to meet with the Secretary of State and his representatives on 27 September 2017 in Westminster. The timeline continued to be updated, and the impact of the delayed announcement was being assessed, together with Future Dorset workstreams continuing to concentrate on some areas of disaggregation and legal implications.

Noted

Outcomes from Collaborative Working Workshops

- 8 The Joint Committee received a verbal update from the Chairman about the outcomes of the Collaborative Working Workshops held on 14 August and 20 September 2017 attended by representatives of the Joint Committee.

Cllr Knox drew attention to the positive start to joint working by the workshops and highlighted that, in addition to the terms of reference, there were three main areas of focus identified where progress could be made early in the life of the Joint Committee, as follows:

- Shared Services
- Multi-discipline Teams
- Community Partners Engagement

In addition, it was recognised that there were other longer term, and more complex, priorities such Affordable Housing, economic development including the work of the Local Enterprise Partnership, and One Public Estate.

Together with the priority areas identified so far, it was also felt that the wider membership of partner councils should be welcomed to take part in the workstreams which would drive the priority areas, build on the spirit of collaboration, encourage participation, and would ensure that the skills of individuals were used. This could be done in a variety of ways, or could be more specific as required, depending on the subject matter and focus of a particular workstream or workshop. More consideration of the offer to the wider membership of councils would be given due consideration outside of the meeting.

It was also noted that the role of town and parish councils, including the Dorset Association of Town and Parish Councils, would have an important role in contributing to workstreams. Cllr Knox confirmed that this was captured as part of the wider communications and engagement approach.

Resolved

1. That the initial and future priority areas of focus, as detailed above, be supported.
2. That the degree of involvement of the wider membership of partner councils be considered.

Proposed Methodology for Collaborative Working Across the Dorset Area Joint Committee

- 9 The Joint Committee considered a report and presentation by the Programme Director – Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) regarding the future collaborative working methodology between partner councils of the Joint Committee.

The presentation explained the new methodology which needed to be agile and scalable depending on the scale of the Joint Committee's ambition, to be able to bring together all involved in collaborations to cover all eventualities, and to incorporate existing collaboration such as the Dorset Finance Officers Group and Monitoring Officers Group.

A six stage process, as an amalgam of change management best practice was summarised. Members welcomed the good relationships so far and the start position of the Joint Committee, to move towards areas of collaboration, engagement with staff and communities, sharing of baseline information, and to understand and shape future delivery. Reference was also made to the potential for a commercial partner to assist with baselining. The steps through the development of business cases in complex areas, together with the need to assess all available options, and include stakeholders and staff, through to implementation planning and delivery were outlined.

Although there was no programme team there was some support through the Programme Director as part of his LGR role, and other commitment such as communications officers working collectively outside of their normal day jobs.

In relation to LGR it was explained that the delay of any decision, if it was to proceed, could see a focus on a transitional and transactional introduction of a new Council, and transformation of the organisation would follow due to the impact on timescale to deliver by March 2019.

With regard to the workstreams, support was given to the need to progress the first three priorities as outlined in minute 8 above.

It was suggested that although it would be part of the workstreams, the aspiration to work more innovatively should be more visible. It was agreed that this would be built into the methodology, as well as the need to draw attention to the exciting aspects of each of the priority areas.

A concern was raised about the need for good joint scrutiny of the Joint Committee and the workstreams to provide necessary checks and balances.

It was also suggested that consideration should be given to the timescaling of the individual priority areas, which would begin to build a picture of the size and scope of the workstreams, and would provide the opportunity to consider in terms of short, medium and long term realistic ambition and scaling. The Committee supported the need to look at timescales and to not impose areas that were not achievable.

Resolved

1. That the proposed programme structure and methodology be noted.
2. That direction of the Joint Committee in relation to the early establishment of workstreams to progress joint working (as outlined in paragraph 2.7 of the Programme Director's report) be approved, subject to the comments made in the minute above and in minute 8.

Communication and Engagement Strategy and Plan

- 10 The Joint Committee considered a report by the Programme Director – Local Government Reorganisation on the proposed Communication and Engagement Strategy and Plan of the Joint Committee to support the development of collaborative relationships and sharing of the future plans and delivery of the future joint working relationships.

Members welcomed the development of the strategy and plan which needed to mirror the Joint Committee's work plan and provide consistent messaging to all partners and staff with templates for communications and core briefings which would be signed off by the Chairman at the end of each meeting. The responsibility of communications teams to act as a collective body across all partner councils was supported.

In relation to digital communication, it was suggested that the increased use of Skype across partner councils could be used to enhance working outside of formal meetings and contribute to the development of digital access. It was noted that a practical system check would be useful, but this was a very small element of the wider Strategy.

Resolved

1. That the proposed methodology and approaches to the development of the communication and engagement strategy and plan be approved.
2. That the media protocols be agreed.
3. That the actions proposed in the short term communication and engagement plan be agreed.

Forward work plan for the Dorset Area Joint Committee

- 11 The Joint Committee considered a proposed Forward Work Plan of work which focused on an initial three month period in order to establish a longer term programme of work.

It was noted that a further informal workshop would be needed following the direction provided throughout the meeting. The next formal meeting was agreed as 16 October 2017 and the meeting thereafter would be confirmed shortly on 14 or 15 November 2017.

In addition to the progressive work being driven by the Joint Committee it was suggested that the work plan include high level tracking of performance delivery across partners which would help to provide assurance of 'business as usual' and would raise awareness of services provided by each partner council. It was agreed that this would be investigated and included in the work plan.

Resolved

1. That the initial Forward Work Plan of the Joint Committee be approved taking into account the priority areas highlighted throughout the meeting, and the addition of high level tracking of partner service delivery.
2. That an informal workshop be arranged for the next meeting on 16 October.
3. That the date of the next formal meeting be confirmed on 14 or 15 November 2017.
4. That high level tracking of performance delivery across partners be included in the work plan.

Meeting Duration: 12.00 pm - 1.00 pm

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STATEMENT TO THE DORSET AREA JOINT COMMITTEE

On behalf of the Dorset Association of Parish and Town Councils, thank you for allowing us to submit this statement for your consideration.

All town and parish councils in Dorset with an electorate over 200 are members of our association. The association is a democratically elected body, with representatives appointed by each member council. It has a very good network of communication with all its 160 members and provides updates, events and training for them.

We have already made our members aware of the challenges facing all tiers of local government and the potential changes this may bring. The association has a good overview of its members' needs from large town councils to very small parish councils. We also have a very good understanding of how town and parish councils should operate and how they can add value to this important process of re-structure.

Devolution to town and parish councils will be a fundamental issue for shaping services, whatever the structure of local government for Dorset.

Our association believes it is in a unique position to be a positive voice in ensuring that our members are engaged with principal authorities not only in collaborative design of services for the many different communities in Dorset, but also in all aspects of this change process which would help build relationships and ease the implementation of changes.

We are offering to be part of your formal discussions and would be delighted to attend your committee meetings in a non-voting and advisory capacity.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'John Parker'.

Councillor John Parker
Chairman of DAPTC Executive Committee

19 September 2017

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