

**WEYMOUTH & PORTLAND BOROUGH COUNCIL MANAGEMENT
COMMITTEE**

MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 17 JANUARY 2017

Present: Cllrs J Cant (Chair), K Brookes (Vice-Chair), A Blackwood, J Farquharson, C Huckle, C James and R Nowak

Apologies: Cllrs F Drake, J Osborne and G Taylor

Officers present (for all or part of the meeting):

Kate Critchel (Democratic Services Officer), Stuart Caundle (Assistant Chief Executive), Matt Prosser (Chief Executive) and Jason Vaughan (Strategic Director)

98. Code of Conduct

There were no declarations of interest to report.

99. Public Participation

There was no representations from the public.

100. Questions by Councillors

There were no questions from councillors.

101. Exploring Options for the Future of Local Government in Poole, Bournemouth and Dorset

The committee considered a report of the Chief Executive which sought support to make a submission to the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government requesting the restructuring of local government in Dorset through the formation of two new unitary councils to replace the existing nine councils in Dorset.

The standard report (appendix 1) to all nine councils for consideration set out the findings of the commissioned work into the exploration of options for local government in Dorset and recommended a proposed course of action. A number of events had also been held for councillors across the three councils in the Dorset Councils Partnership.

Pan-Dorset consultation across the County was carried out and the public consultation process included an open survey, household survey and consultation roadshows across the County (details of the consultation were also appended to the report). In addition members also had access to three full reports from Local Partnerships, Options Research Services and PWC.

The Chief Executive further advised that based upon the weight of public opinion and the financial and other analytical evidence, option 2b as detailed in the report was the preferred option. The creation of two new authorities would help the Dorset Councils to address the county's underlying challenges and ensure they maintained resilience in the face of continued financial pressures. He further advised that option 2b most closely reflected the local geography of rural Dorset and would deliver the greatest financial benefit to deliver improved services to the local community. In conclusion, he stressed that change was required and that to maintain the status quo was not an option.

The Leader of the Council advised the committee that as a member of the Leaders Group and with the nine Chief Executives, the group had worked hard to produce the best case and form a future model for the continued delivery of local services. He indicated, that this was the best chance of protecting those services, giving Dorset a much more powerful united voice and strengthen Dorset's wider economic position.

The Leader of the Council acknowledge that should a decision be made by Council to support the recommendations, officers would bring forward a report to commence a community governance review to consider the creation of a town council in Weymouth & Portland. There would also be a short informal discussion at the conclusion of the meeting to answer members questions on this matter.

Members discussed the information presented to them.

In response to a question, the Section 151 Officer set out the current assumptions for the financial settlement of the Council in the event that there was no change in structure. He also set out the impact of amendments in the New Homes Bonus which was not predicted last year and how this affected the councils financial status.

In response to concerns regarding Council Tax convergence , the Section 151 Officer confirmed that the impact within a new proposed structure did present a significant issue, which would require a political solution.

R Nowak advised that he felt unable to support the proposal for unitary status as the argument for change was not convincing. However if the proposal went forward he hoped that Christchurch Borough Council would join the rural unitary authority as it had more in common with rural Dorset.

Nevertheless he indicated that the problems that the Council faced were due to lack of funding and a reorganisation would not, in the long term, address the financial pressures faced by local government or be able to provide the services that the local community needed or deserved.

In response, the Leader of the Council advised that he had sympathy with these comments, but considered that unitary status would place Dorset in a

stronger position to lobby central government for finance and services across the County.

In response to concerns regarding job losses there was likely to be the loss of 450 managerial posts lost from across the current council structures in Dorset with a stretched target of up to 1,500 job losses.

C James and A Blackwood both expressed concerns and reservations regarding the public consultation process, questioning if the responses could be considered a compelling case to change the local government structure in the county. In reply the Chief Executive advised that residents, stakeholders, volunteers and the business sector were invited to provide feedback through a wide range of routes including the open survey, household survey and roadshow events. Overall the outcome of the process was more consistent than was usually the case in such complex statutory consultations; the findings showed clear support for moving to two unitary councils.

K Brookes and J Farquharson supported the case of change and option 2b stating that this was an opportunity to introduce new appropriate structures and reflected the commissioned findings to transform and deliver services to residents of Weymouth & Portland. In respect of recommendation (f) K Brookes suggested that the Brief holder of Corporate Affairs and Continuous Improvement be added to the list of consultees. This proposal was agreed.

Some members felt unable to make a recommendation direct to Full Council and on this occasion this matter should be fully debated with a final decision by Full Council following that debate. It was suggested that at this stage members should only express a viewpoint on the proposal.

It was proposed by A Blackwood and seconded by R Nowak that the following words "To recommend the following to Council; this Council agrees:" be replaced with "To ask members of Full Council to make a decision on whether this Council agrees:-" Upon being put to the vote the motion was approved.

Recommendation to Council

To ask members of Full Council to make a decision on whether the Council agrees:-

- (a) That there has been a powerful public response acknowledging a compelling case to change local government structures in Dorset.
- (b) That a submission should be made to be Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government requesting that the existing nine county, district and unitary councils should be replaced by two new unitary councils;
- (c) That based upon the weight of public opinion and the financial and other analytical evidence the two new unitary councils should be based upon the following local authority boundaries;

Unitary A: Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole, plus the services currently provided by Dorset County Council in this area.

Unitary B: East Dorset, North Dorset, Purbeck, West Dorset, Weymouth and Portland, plus the services currently provided by Dorset County Council in this area.

- (d) That the Chief Executive be authorised after consultation with the Leader, the Brief holder for Corporate Affairs and Continuous Improvement and Group leaders to agree the wording of the submission to the Secretary of State demonstrating our ambition for public sector transformation and drawing on the evidence that has been presented to councils, to be made along with any other council that has agreed to support the same option for reorganisation.
- (e) That the Chief Executive be authorised, after consultation with the Leader, the Brief holder for Corporate Affairs and Continuous Improvement and the Group leaders 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 changes in Dorset and that a report on next steps be presented in due course.
- (f) That subject to agreement on recommendations (a) to (e) above the Chief Executive, in consultation with Group leaders and the Brief holder for Corporate Affairs and Continuous Improvement, be directed to bring forward to next Full Council plans for a community governance review to explore the formation of a Town Council for Weymouth.

Duration of meeting: 9.30 - 10.40 am

Following the meeting members informally discussed the process required to explore the creation of a Town Council. It was noted that a report would be presented to a future meeting of the committee on this matter.

Chairman

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