



Place and Resources Overview Committee

Date: Wednesday, 10 November 2021
Time: 10.00 am
Venue: MS Teams Live Event
Membership: (Quorum 3)

Les Fry (Vice-Chairman), Mike Barron, Pauline Batstone, Toni Coombs, Ryan Hope, Sherry Jespersen, Carole Jones, Val Potheary, Andrew Starr and Roland Tarr

Chief Executive: Matt Prosser, County Hall, Dorchester, Dorset DT1 1XJ

For more information about this agenda please contact Democratic Services on 01305 252209 / lindsey.watson@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk



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Due to the current coronavirus pandemic the Council has reviewed its approach to holding committee meetings. Members of the public are welcome to attend this meeting and listen to the debate online by using the following link: [Link to view Dorset Council's Place and Resources Overview Committee live at 10.00am on 10 November 2021](#)

Members of the public wishing to view the meeting from an iphone, ipad or android phone will need to download the free Microsoft Team App to sign in as a Guest, it is advised to do this at least 30 minutes prior to the start of the meeting.

Please note that public speaking has been suspended. However Public Participation will continue by written submission only. Please see detail set out below.

Dorset Council is committed to being open and transparent in the way it carries out its business whenever possible. A recording of the meeting will be available on the council's website after the event.

AGENDA

Page No.

1 APOLOGIES

To receive any apologies for absence.

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

To disclose any pecuniary, other registrable or non-registrable interests as set out in the adopted Code of Conduct. In making their declaration councillors are asked to state the agenda item, the nature of the interest and any action they propose to take as part of their declaration.

If required, further advice should be sought from the Monitoring Officer in advance of the meeting.

3 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

To receive questions or statements on the business of the committee from town and parish councils and members of the public.

Public speaking has been suspended for virtual committee meetings during the Covid-19 crisis and public participation will be dealt with through written submissions only.

Members of the public who live, work or represent an organisation within the Dorset Council area, may submit up to two questions or a statement of up to a maximum of 450 words. All submissions must be sent electronically to lindsey.watson@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk by the deadline set out below. When submitting a question please indicate who the question is for and include your name, address and contact details. Questions and statements received in line with the council's rules for public participation will be published as a supplement to the agenda.

Questions will be read out by an officer of the council and a response given by the appropriate Portfolio Holder or officer at the meeting. All questions, statements and responses will be published in full within the minutes of the meeting. **The deadline for submission of the full text of a question or statement is 8.30am on Thursday 4 November 2021.**

4 QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS

To receive questions submitted by councillors. The deadline for receipt

of questions is 8.30am on Thursday 4 November 2021.

5 ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR RELATED PUBLIC SPACES PROTECTION ORDERS 5 - 14

To consider a report of the Service Manager Licensing and Community Safety.

6 THE FUTURE OF REVENUES AND BENEFITS SERVICES AT DORSET COUNCIL 15 - 28

To consider a report of the Corporate Director, Finance and Commercial.

Please note this report includes two exempt appendices.

7 URGENT ITEMS

To consider any items of business which the Chairman has had prior notification and considers to be urgent pursuant to section 100B (4) b) of the Local Government Act 1972. The reason for the urgency shall be recorded in the minutes.

8 EXEMPT BUSINESS

To move the exclusion of the press and the public for the following item in view of the likely disclosure of exempt information within the meaning of paragraph 3 of schedule 12 A to the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended).

The public and the press will be asked to leave the meeting whilst the item of business is considered.

9 THE FUTURE OF REVENUES AND BENEFITS SERVICES AT DORSET COUNCIL - EXEMPT APPENDICES 29 - 66

Exempt appendices associated with the report on 'The future of revenues and benefits services at Dorset Council'.

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Place and Resources Overview Committee 10 November 2021 Anti-social Behaviour related Public Spaces Protection Orders

For Decision

Portfolio Holder: Cllr L Miller, Customer and Community Services

Local Councillor(s): Relevant to all Dorset Council Members

Executive Director: John Sellgren, Executive Director of Place

Report Author: John Newcombe
Title: Service Manager Licensing & Community Safety
Tel: 01305 838027
Email: john.newcombe@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk

Report Status: Public

Recommendations:

- 1) To consider proposals for Anti-social Behaviour related Public Spaces Protection Orders for parts of the Dorset Council area.
- 2) To support that the draft Orders are published for public consultation the results from which will help shape the final Orders.

Reasons for Recommendations:

- 1) To comply with legislative requirements,
- 2) To ensure openness and transparency in the Council's decision making and
- 3) To ensure that those persons affected by anti-social behaviour are afforded the protection provided by such Orders.

1. Executive Summary

The existing Anti-social Behaviour (ASB) Related Public Spaces Protection Orders (PSPO's) for West Dorset (covering Dorchester, Bridport, West Bay and Lyme Regis) are due to expire on 22 April 2022 and the Weymouth & Portland PSPO is due to expire on 19 Aug 2022. Officers have reviewed the existing Orders in consultation with statutory consultees and have prepared revised draft Orders for consideration by your Committee prior to launching a public consultation.

2. Financial Implications

The funding for the preparation and consultation of the new PSPO's will come from existing budgets and there are no further financial implications arising from the recommendations of this report at this stage. Should the draft Orders be approved, there may be cost implications in relation to enforcement of the additional areas and signage. Details will be provided at the appropriate stage.

3. Health and Well-being Implications

Certain types of ASB can have a significant effect on mental health. The Orders seek to reduce ASB and are a positive contribution to community and individual well-being.

4. Climate implications

There are no implications arising from the recommendations contained within this report in terms of meeting the Council's climate change obligations.

5. Other Implications

There are no other implications arising from the recommendations contained within this report in terms of impacts on other service areas within the Council.

6. Risk Assessment

Having considered the risks associated with this decision, the level of risk has been identified as:

Current Risk: Low

Residual Risk: Low – however, not having valid PSPO's in place will have an impact on the Council and Dorset Police's ability to deal with Anti-Social Behaviour which may have a detrimental effect on residents and businesses within the Dorset Council area.

7. Equalities Impact Assessment

A draft Equalities Impact Assessment is being prepared by officers and will be completed as part of the consultation process.

8. Appendices – please click on the links below to view the appendices in each section

[Existing PSPO's – Appendices A to D](#)

Appendix A – The West Dorset Anti-social Behaviour Related Public Spaces Protection Order 2018.

Appendix B – The West Dorset Anti-social Behaviour Related Public Spaces Protection Extension Order 2021.

Appendix C – The Weymouth & Portland Anti-social Behaviour Related Public Spaces Protection Order 2018.

Appendix D – The Weymouth & Portland Anti-social Behaviour Related Public Spaces Protection Extension Order 2021.

[Proposed PSPO's – Appendices E to J](#)

Appendix E – The Bridport Anti-social Behaviour Related Public Spaces Protection Order 2022 (Draft)

Appendix F – The Dorchester Anti-social Behaviour Related Public Spaces Protection Order 2022 (Draft)

Appendix G – The Lyme Regis Anti-social Behaviour Related Public Spaces Protection Order 2022 (Draft)

Appendix H – The Portland Anti-social Behaviour Related Public Spaces Protection Order 2022 (Draft)

Appendix I – The West Bay Anti-social Behaviour Related Public Spaces Protection Order 2022 (Draft)

Appendix J – The Weymouth Anti-social Behaviour Related Public Spaces Protection Order 2022 (Draft)

[Proposed PSPO's – Appendices K and L](#)

Appendix K – The Dorset Beaches Anti-social Behaviour Related Public Spaces Protection Order 2022 (Draft)

Appendix L – The Dorset Open Land Anti-social Behaviour Related Public Spaces Protection Order 2022 (Draft)

[Additional – Appendices M and N](#)

Appendix M – Cornerstone Barristers - Banning begging in injunctions and PSPO's K Bhogal Feb 2021

Appendix N – Supporting Data Report – ASB Community Safety 2020-21

9. Background Papers

Sections 59 to 75 of the Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014.
The Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014 (Publication of Public Spaces Protection Orders) Regulations 2014.

Home Office – Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014: Anti-social behaviour powers Statutory Guidance Jan 2021

Local Government Association – Public spaces protection orders; guidance for councils

10. Background

- 10.1 Public Spaces Protection Orders (PSPO's) were introduced in Sections 59 to 75 of the Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014. PSPO's are intended to deal with a particular nuisance or problem in a specific area that is detrimental to the local community's quality of life, by imposing conditions on the use of that area which apply to everyone. They are intended to help ensure that the law-abiding majority can use and enjoy public spaces, safe from anti-social behaviour.
- 10.2 PSPOs are made by the Local Authority for the area and subject to a legal test that focusses on the impact that anti-social behaviour is having on victims and communities. A PSPO can be made by the council if they are satisfied on reasonable grounds that the activity or behaviour concerned, carried out, or likely to be carried out, in a public space:
- Has had, or is likely to have, a detrimental effect on the quality of life of those in the locality;
 - Is, or is likely to be, persistent or continuing in nature;
 - Is, or is likely to be, unreasonable; and;
 - Justifies the restrictions imposed.
- 10.3 Breach of the PSPO is a criminal offence dealt with by a Fixed Penalty Notice (FPN) of £100 or prosecution in the Magistrates Court. Persistent offenders may have a Criminal Behaviour Order (CBO) attached to a guilty verdict in court. PSPO's are not intended to tackle youth nuisance as FPN's cannot be issued to persons under the age of 18.
- 10.4 In accordance with s.60 of the Act, a PSPO cannot have effect for more than 3 years, unless extended under s.60(2). This section permits a local authority to extend a PSPO where it is satisfied on reasonable grounds that doing so is necessary to prevent an occurrence or recurrence of the activities identified in the Order.
- 10.5 The Community Safety Partnership (partners) considers that the current PSPO's have been an effective deterrent to ASB issues since they were introduced in 2018.

11. Existing Orders

- 11.1 West Dorset District Council approved a PSPO covering Bridport, Dorchester, Lyme Regis and West Bay on 23 April 2018. This PSPO was extended for a further year in 2021 and is due to expire on 22 April 2022. The PSPO was introduced after wide consultation with residents, partners

- and councillors. The Order is known as the West Dorset Anti-social Behaviour Related Public Spaces Protection Order 2018 as extended by the West Dorset Anti-social Behaviour Related Public Spaces Protection Extension Order 2021.
- 11.2 The West Dorset PSPO covers the consumption of alcohol in Dorchester, Bridport and West Bay and the intentional feeding of gulls in West Bay and Lyme Regis and is attached at Appendix A. The extension Order is attached at Appendix B.
- 11.3 Weymouth & Portland Borough Council approved a PSPO covering Weymouth and Portland on 20 August 2018. This PSPO was extended for a further year in 2021 and is due to expire on 19 August 2022. The PSPO was introduced after wide consultation with residents, partners and Councillors. The Order is known as the Weymouth and Portland Anti-social Behaviour Related Public Spaces Protection Order 2018 as extended by the Weymouth & Portland Anti-social Behaviour Related Public Spaces Protection Extension Order 2021.
- 11.4 The Weymouth & Portland PSPO covers the consumption of alcohol, the intentional feeding of gulls, begging and cycling on the promenade and is attached at Appendix C. The extension Order is attached at Appendix D.
- 11.5 East Dorset District Council allowed the Alcohol Consumption in Designated Public Places of the area of Wimborne Minster Order (No 1) 2004 to automatically lapse and become a PSPO on 20 October 2017. The Order expired on 20 October 2020. Consideration of extending the Order was given at that time however there was insufficient evidence of relevant ASB to support a need for extension of the Order and as a part of the current review, the available data was again insufficient to warrant an additional PSPO at this time.

12. Proposed Orders

- 12.1 The Bridport Anti-social Behaviour related Public Spaces Protection Order 2022 (Draft) retains the activities and areas identified within the existing West Dorset Anti-social Behaviour Related Public Spaces Protection Order 2018 (as extended) and includes an additional provision covering general Anti-social Behaviour and dispersal powers with an updated plan including additional areas as identified, including Jubilee Green, Community Orchard, St Mary's Church and Foundry Lane. The revisions have been made in consultation with Bridport Town Council and Dorset Police. The draft Order is attached at Appendix E.
- 12.2 The Dorchester Anti-social Behaviour related Public Spaces Protection Order 2022 (Draft) retains the activities and areas identified within the existing West Dorset Anti-social Behaviour Related Public Spaces

- Protection Order 2018 (as extended) and includes additional provisions covering the intentional feeding of gulls, general Anti-social Behaviour and dispersal powers with an updated plan. The revisions have been made in consultation with Dorchester Town Council and Dorset Police. The draft Order is attached at Appendix F.
- 12.3 The Lyme Regis Anti-social Behaviour related Public Spaces Protection Order 2022 (Draft) retains the activities and areas identified within the existing West Dorset Anti-social Behaviour Related Public Spaces Protection Order 2018 (as extended) and includes an additional provision covering consumption of alcohol, general Anti-social Behaviour and dispersal powers with a revised plan. The revisions have been made in consultation with Lyme Regis Town Council and Dorset Police. The draft Order is attached at Appendix G.
- 12.4 The Portland Anti-social Behaviour related Public Spaces Protection Order 2022 (Draft) retains the activities and areas identified within the existing Weymouth & Portland Anti-social Behaviour Related Public Spaces Protection Order 2018 (as extended) and includes general Anti-social Behaviour and dispersal powers with a revised plan. The revisions have been made in consultation with Portland Town Council and Dorset Police. The draft Order is attached at Appendix H.
- 12.5 The West Bay Anti-social Behaviour related Public Spaces Protection Order 2022 (Draft) retain the activities and areas identified within the existing West Dorset Anti-social Behaviour Related Public Spaces Protection Order 2018 (as extended) as well as an additional provision covering general Anti-social Behaviour and dispersal powers with an updated plan. The revisions have been made in consultation with Bridport Town Council and Dorset Police. The draft Order is attached at Appendix I.
- 12.6 The Weymouth Anti-social Behaviour related Public Spaces Protection Order 2022 (Draft) retains the activities and areas identified within the existing Weymouth & Portland Anti-social Behaviour Related Public Spaces Protection Order 2018 (as extended) with minor amendments to the Cycling provision and inclusion of additional areas within the Controlled Alcohol Zone as well as an additional provision covering general Anti-social Behaviour and dispersal powers with a revised plan.
- 12.7 There is also an additional provision for the installation of a pair of gates in Trinity Passage, Weymouth. Trinity Passage is a historic public footpath which runs parallel to the main public footpath along North Quay and Trinity Road. It dips below ground level and provides a route to access/egress Holy Trinity Church. It is believed that up until the Second World War, the passage was gated at either end to restrict access and that the gates were removed as part of the war effort.

- 12.8 Representatives of the church have complained of persistent ASB for a considerable period. Improvement has been made to street cleansing and lighting in the passage and the Community Safety Patrol Officers have this location on their patrol however, reports of ASB continue. Church representatives have asked if the gates can be reinstated.
- 12.9 PSPO's replace the previous 'gating order' provision available to councils to restrict access and if the relevant criteria are met, and subject to public consultation, access can be restricted. It is considered that there is sufficient incidence of ASB and that it is likely to continue unless the restriction is implemented. The installation of gates would require necessary permissions and funding arrangements to be in place. Dorset & Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Service has been consulted in relation to access and egress in emergency situations.
- 12.10 As well as members of the public, there are occupiers of nearby properties who may use Trinity Passage. The consultation will give an opportunity for them to make representation so that the council can decide whether to proceed.
- 12.11 The area has been blighted by anti-social behaviour issues arising from drug dealing, graffiti, sexual activity, rough sleeping, littering, fly tipping and public urination/defecation and is consequently having a detrimental effect on the use of Holy Trinity Church and on local residents. The revisions have been made in consultation with Weymouth Town Council and Dorset Police. The draft Order is attached at Appendix J.
- 12.12 The Dorset Beaches Anti-social Behaviour related Public Spaces Protection Order 2022 (Draft) is a new Order which is intended to tackle issues of Anti-social Behaviour arising from camping on beaches in several locations including Chesil Beach, Weymouth Beach and Lulworth.
- 12.13 The summer of 2020 saw a significant increase in the number of people camping on Dorset's beaches, which continued into the summer season of 2021. Supporting evidence is contained within Appendix N. The draft Order seeks to address the issues experienced over the last two summers which has given rise to a large increase in nuisance complaints, damage to property, accumulation of rubbish and human waste and destruction of natural habitat.
- 12.14 The additional Order has been prepared in consultation with the various land owners and town and parish councils affected including Lulworth Estates, Weymouth Town Council, Ilchester Estates and the National Trust. The draft Order would make it an offence to camp on designated land without the permission of the landowner and is attached at Appendix K.

- 12.15 The Dorset Open Land Anti-social Behaviour related Public Spaces Protection Order 2022 (Draft) is a new Order which is intended to tackle issues of Anti-social Behaviour arising from the starting of fires in grass, moorland and forest areas. Such fires can contribute to climate change and result in risk to life; damage to biodiversity, habitats and property; and loss of income from tourism and other land uses, and include provisions relating to placing, throwing or dropping items likely to cause a fire, lighting fires, barbeques (including disposable barbeques), Chinese lanterns or fireworks, or using items which either (i) cause a naked flame or (ii) pose a risk of fire.
- 12.16 There is evidence of fires being started by disposable BBQ's and campfires at Wareham and Puddletown forests and at similar other locations in the Dorset Council area, owned or leased by Forestry England.
- 12.17 Following the disastrous fire at Wareham Forest in May 2020 which was most likely to have been started inadvertently, councillors asked officers to investigate ways in which the Council could help prevent wildfires in such terrain. A report was brought to the Councils Cabinet on 6 April 2021, outlining a number of measures that could be taken and included investigating the use of a PSPO to restrict activities likely to lead to cause fires.
- 12.18 Research has identified a small number of other councils who have introduced similar provision following wildfires on open land and discussions with them have helped form opinion that this approach would benefit public safety and protection of our natural environment. Both Forestry England and Dorset & Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Service are supportive (see Appendix N).
- 12.19 Forestry England has asked for a number of areas in their control to be covered by the provision (see Appendix N). The evidence of issues at each location varies however, the similarity of terrain and level of public access are considered to be important factors when determining that the necessary criteria for a PSPO are met.
- 12.20 A concern has been how a PSPO would be enforced over such large areas. The Council will not be able to provide additional resource. It is recognised that the main benefit will be one of 'warn and inform' and Forestry England will provide signage at public access locations. This may include a 'reporting hotline' telephone number for concerned members of the public to contact a relevant agency. Also, it is possible that the Council will train and authorise some Forestry England wardens in a similar way to our joint work with town councils and their enforcement officers.

12.21 A PSPO provision is not the sole solution to this issue but it will be a measure which alongside others, will help to prevent wildfires and their devastating effect.

12.22 The draft Order covers areas of forest and heathland in various locations around Ferndown, St Leonards, West Moors, Wareham, Purbeck, Puddletown, Affpuddle and Moreton and is attached at Appendix L.

13. Consultation

13.1 In deciding whether to extend the period for which a Public Spaces Protection Order has effect, or where new Orders are to be considered the Council is required to consult with Dorset Police, Dorset Police & Crime Commissioner, relevant landowners, leaseholders and Town Councils.

13.2 The views of each of the statutory consultees have been sought and the proposals have been drafted with consideration of partner input.

13.3 It is proposed to conduct a full public consultation for a period of not less than 8 weeks commencing 18 November 2021.

13.4 All responses received as part of the consultation will be presented to the Place and Resources Overview Committee for consideration. The completed draft Orders may then be recommended to Cabinet for approval.

14. Legal Considerations

14.1 The European Court of Human Rights has recently issued a judgment which may cast doubt on the legality of Public Spaces Protection Orders and injunctions which seek to restrict begging. In its judgment in *Lăcătuș v. Switzerland* (19 January 2021) the European Court of Human Rights has found that a Swiss ban on begging violated human rights.

14.2 Whilst the PSPO does not carry the weight of an injunction and therefore would not involve a custodial sentence, it is still relevant to the proposed Order and as a result of this recent ruling the Council proposes to only seek to enforce the begging provision of the PSPO where begging of an aggressive nature takes place.

14.3 A summary of the ruling and its implications to the extensions to the PSPO's is attached at Appendix M to this report.

15. Publication

15.1 Before making, varying, extending or discharging a PSPO, the council must carry out the necessary publicity and notification in accordance with section 72(3) of the Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014 – this

includes publishing the Orders on its website and the erection of suitable signage adjacent to the public place(s) to which the order relates.

16. Signage

- 16.1 Signs informing of the existing PSPOs are currently in place in all of the areas where current PSPOs are in force. Existing signage will need to be reviewed to ensure it is still compliant and new areas where Orders are to come into force will require additional signage.

17. Enforcement

- 17.1 In Weymouth and Portland there is a partnership agreement in place which funds a Community Safety Patrol Service. The service consists of four full-time Patrol Officers who are accredited by Dorset Police through the Community Safety Accreditation Scheme. The scheme is funded by Dorset Council, Weymouth Town Council, British Transport Police, Weymouth BID and Dorset Police & Crime Commissioner.
- 17.2 None of the other areas covered by existing PSPO's have similar enforcement arrangements and enforcement activity has generally been less. Where PSPO provisions have been enforced it has mainly been undertaken by Dorset Police or Town Council employees, where the Council has authorised competent officers.
- 17.3 If the new Orders are adopted, additional funding maybe required to enable authorised officers to enforce the provisions contained within the Orders. Officers are working with partners to identify where the Council may authorise partner employees to assist in enforcement. It should be noted that the Orders in themselves can have a deterrent effect when effectively publicised and signed.
- 17.4 An additional dispersal power has been added to all of the draft PSPO's which will enable the Police or Authorised Persons to require persons acting in an anti-social manner to leave the designated area.

18. Supporting Data

- 18.1 Supporting data is attached at Appendix N and includes data and intelligence relating to incidents of anti-social behaviour in the areas identified. Data has been provided by the Council, Dorset Police & Crime Commissioner's Office, Dorset Police and Forestry England.

Footnote:

Issues relating to financial, legal, environmental, economic and equalities implications have been considered and any information relevant to the decision is included within the report.

Place and Resources Overview Committee

10 November 2021

The future of revenues and benefits services at Dorset Council

For Recommendation to Cabinet

Portfolio Holder: Cllr G Suttle, Finance, Commercial and Capital Strategy

Local Councillor(s): N/A

Executive Director: A Dunn, Executive Director, Corporate Development

Report Author: Jim McManus
Title: Corporate Director, Finance & Commercial
Tel: 01305 221235
Email: jim.mcmanus@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk

Report Status:

Public

Recommendation:

The committee are asked to support the recommendation to Cabinet:

1. Agree that Dorset Council makes the necessary arrangements to leave the Stour Valley & Poole Partnership (SVPP) and brings these services in-house to be delivered by an expanded Dorset Council Revenues & Benefits Team as set out in the business case attached at appendix 3;
2. Delegate authority to the Executive Director of Corporate Development, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Finance, Commercial and Capital Strategy, to implement recommendation 1, including authority to give notice to terminate the Council's involvement in the Stour Valley and Poole Partnership;
3. Request that the Place and Resources Scrutiny Committee oversee the future Service's integration into Dorset Council, where it can support further transformation, insight and strategic service development, as set out in the business case.

Reason for Recommendation:

The creation of a single revenues and benefits service for Dorset Council will provide a better level of customer service for Dorset Council residents, with a single process and contact details, making it easier, clearer and more accessible

for people to pay council tax and make benefits claims. As such, it is the best strategic fit for Dorset Council. It will give direct access and control of customer information to Dorset Council, presenting the opportunity to create a single customer account for all residents, in line with the agreed customer service strategy. Having direct control over the service will enable the Council to realise financial savings of over £730k per annum, whilst giving the opportunity to rapidly respond to changing national policies such as Universal Credit, Business Rates and the plans for health and social care.

Furthermore, the establishment of a single Dorset Council service creates the opportunity to integrate services such as customer services and the financial assessment team.

SVPP has been an effective partner in their work for Dorset Council and predecessor authorities. Looking to the future, as a unitary authority, the Council now needs to provide its own revenue and benefits service to take advantage of service integration opportunities rather than part of the service being delivered via a partnership arrangement.

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 Dorset Council is responsible for setting the revenues and benefits policies which apply to Dorset residents – there are no current proposals to change those policies. This paper is about ensuring the effectiveness of the administration of those policies.
- 1.2 While the responsibility for Dorset Council's Revenues and Benefits Services currently sits entirely with Dorset Council, the day to day administration is split, with the in-house service delivering the administration for the areas of Purbeck, West Dorset and Weymouth & Portland and with the areas of East and North being provided under a collaboration agreement with Stour Valley and Poole Partnership. The latter is hosted by BCP Council following Local Government Reorganisation and is governed by a partnership board.
- 1.3 Between them, Dorset Council and SVPP teams process over half a million transactions for Dorset residents each year:
 - 305,00 council tax bills
 - 104,000 business rate bills
 - 88,000 housing benefits claims
 - 26,000 council tax support claims
- 1.4 Having two delivery methods for an administrative activity is unusual and brings about an inherent complexity and risk. It can cause confusion for Dorset Council residents as to which administrator they should contact. This is a legacy of the arrangements of the predecessor district and borough councils.
- 1.5 When Dorset Council and BCP were established as unitaries in 2019, the majority of services were set up separately for each council. For example,

- there are separate finance departments, HR departments and IT departments, adult care and children's care services are separate as are the majority of place based services. However, for some services shared arrangements have continued where there it makes sense to do so on grounds of scale and/or synergy. (e.g. public health, safeguarding and archives).
- 1.6 The review of the arrangements for the administration of revenues and benefits services has been delayed by the pandemic, but it is now time to consider the most effective way of administering revenues and benefits in the future.
 - 1.7 Broadly, there are two options under consideration; an in-house model, where Dorset Council administers the revenue and benefits service for all Dorset Council residents, or a jointly governed partnership model hosted by BCP Council.
 - 1.8 The partnership option under consideration is an extension of the existing SVPP model, where BCP Council would administer the revenues and benefits service for all Dorset residents, with oversight provided by a joint committee of Dorset Council and BCP councillors.
 - 1.9 Each option has its merits and risks. The SVPP option suggests economies of scale by creating a larger service for the whole of Dorset, whilst the Dorset Council option has the advantage of control and flexibility, enabling it to rapidly adapt and integrate with other Dorset Council services to improve the customer experience whilst making considerable savings.
 - 1.10 In order to identify a preferred option for Dorset Council, each proposal was assessed against the following criteria:
 - Strategic fit – does it align with Dorset Council's operating model, vision for customer experience and other plans and strategies?
 - Cost effectiveness and value for money
 - Responsiveness - ability to adapt quickly to changing national policy and local circumstances
 - Opportunity for further benefits through service integration and transformation.
 - 1.11 Assessing the proposals against each of the criteria identifies that the preferred option for Dorset Council is to transfer the work currently undertaken by SVPP into Dorset Council. The existing Dorset Council team can be quickly scaled up to absorb the additional administration, processing and customer demand.
 - 1.12 The transfer is estimated to save Dorset Council over £700k per year but, more importantly, it will enable all Dorset Council's residents' data to be brought together in GDPR compliant systems, which is a key plank in the development of the Customer Account.

- 1.13 Both Dorset Council and BCP, working with SVPP, have credible track records of managing change and service delivery. We are confident that by establishing a programme managed working group we will effectively manage the smooth transition and disaggregation process.

2. Financial Implications

- 2.1 Financial implications are set out in this paper and in the appendices and alongside the options available for future service delivery.

3. Well-being and Health Implications

- 3.1 Careful consideration needs to be given to staff wellbeing throughout this process. Both SVPP and Dorset Council revenue and benefits staff having been working under considerable pressure throughout the pandemic, supporting local businesses through Covid business grants, in addition to their regular duties.
- 3.2 Uncertainty about the future arrangements for revenues and benefits has brought added anxiety to a number of staff in both organisations.
- 3.3 It is important to recognise that the proposals considered in this report are in no way an indication of poor performance of either the SVPP or the Dorset Council teams. Both are highly regarded. The issue at hand is which arrangements provide the most effective administrative arrangements for Dorset Council in the future.

4. Climate implications

- 4.1 None relevant to this decision.

5. Other Implications

- 5.1 None.

6. Risk Assessment

- 6.1 There is a level of risk inherent in the transition arrangements for both options being considered in that the loss of key personnel may result in a deterioration in operational performance which could impact on customers. This risk will be mitigated through careful operational management.
- 6.2 Beyond that, the level of risk of the future service provision is entirely dependent upon the option chosen for the future delivery of the revenues and benefits service. Officers' assessment is that the in-house option has a lower risk profile in that it strongly aligns to Dorset Council's strategic priorities.

7. Equalities Impact Assessment

- 7.1 An Equalities Impact Assessment (EqIA) has been considered for bringing the revenues and benefits service in-house and is deemed unnecessary at this stage. The option to scale up the current Dorset Council operational service is considered to have minimal impact on employees or customers.

- 7.2 Once a decision has been made and the future service is designed, taking into consideration Dorset Council's customer promise and customer principles, an EqIA will be completed to ensure that our future customer access provision is equivalent or improved.
- 7.3 There is no risk to employment at Dorset Council within the recommended option. BCP Council working with SVPP will be required to complete their own impact assessments in terms of current employment and future structures to support their own service delivery.
- 7.4 A future working group will consider impact on both councils' employees once a decision is made and consult with employees and relevant trade unions on any necessary change.

8. Appendices

- 1 - Dorset Council Customer Service Strategy
- 2 - Dorset Council in-house proposal for future service delivery (Not for Publication)
- 3 - SVPP proposal for future service delivery (Not for Publication)

9. Background papers

None

10. Service contexts, history and earlier business cases

- 10.1 Prior to Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) in Dorset, revenues and benefits services were carried out by three organisations:
- Stour Valley and Poole Partnership (SVPP) – services for Borough of Poole, Christchurch, East Dorset, North Dorset. This service was hosted by the Borough of Poole, which acted as the employer.
 - Westwey Partnership – services for Weymouth & Portland, West Dorset and Purbeck. This service was hosted by the Dorset Council Partnership (DCP).
 - Bournemouth Borough Council – services for Bournemouth Borough Council.
- 10.2 SVPP and Westwey both had their own Joint Committees to which officers reported as part of the respective partnerships' governance arrangements. These arrangements for Westwey ended with the establishment of Dorset Council and the service assimilated into the Finance & Commercial division of the Council. The SVPP Joint Committee arrangements continued due to the Partnership basis of service delivery, and those members involved have been strong advocates of the service. Ultimately, the Portfolio Holder for Finance, Commercial and Capital Strategy has responsibility for and political oversight of revenue and benefits administration for all Dorset Council residents.
- 10.3 As part of the work to prepare for reorganisation of local government in Dorset, a business case was established to consider the establishment of

a pan-Dorset revenues and benefits service. A competing case also went into development for each unitary council to deliver its own services but, given that the new councils had yet to be established and would need to make their own decisions about future service delivery, work was unable to progress at that stage. The Shadow Councils also agreed that during their first year of business, they would not take any decisions that would disrupt existing partnership working.

- 10.4 Following this, the Covid-19 pandemic unfolded and colleagues in revenues and benefits services across Dorset (and nationally) were very heavily involved in the business grants distribution work and in the delivery of high levels of support to individuals and businesses across Dorset, meaning it was not feasible to consider reorganisation until now.

11. Local government reorganisation (LGR)

- 11.1 LGR established two new, unitary councils in Dorset on 1 April 2019. The result was that the partnerships delivering revenues and benefits services did not align with the Dorset Council and BCP Council boundaries.
- 11.2 Since that date, SVPP Joint Committee has given its approval to expand SVPP to incorporate services for former Bournemouth Borough Council customers, meaning that all of BCP Council's customers will ultimately be serviced by the same team. This work has not yet been completed and brings an additional complexity to critical path were a pan-Dorset service chosen.
- 11.3 Meanwhile, the fragmented nature of the current arrangement continues to cause complications and delays with key projects such as the alignment of all of Dorset Council's predecessor databases into a single system. Officers are required to work on multiple systems with different rules and processes determined by the sovereign Councils for what is currently an indeterminable period.

12. The case for change and options available

- 12.1 The "do nothing" option is still technically available to Dorset Council and we could continue to have East and North Dorset customer business transacted within SVPP, whilst directly providing services to other Dorset Council residents. However, having two delivery methods for an administrative activity is unusual and brings about an inherent complexity. This is a legacy of the arrangements of the predecessor district and borough councils. The current arrangements will not deliver any further efficiencies and potentially inhibit the transformation ambitions of the Council.
- 12.2 There are therefore two options under consideration; an in-house model, where Dorset Council administers the revenue and benefits service for all Dorset Council residents, or an arms-length model, where an external party provides the service on behalf of Dorset Council.
- 12.3 Key characteristics of the Dorset Council proposal are:

- Transfer of arrangements for East and North customers from SVPP to Dorset Council
- Scaling-up of the current Dorset Council Service to accommodate this
- Increase staffing by 22 posts, net base budget savings of £731k compared with current cost of operations (including net contract fee paid to SVPP)
- Future operating model determined and designed by Dorset Council and the needs of its residents and businesses
- No initial transformation work to complete, single dataset and PCR15-compliant system
- Database, processes and procedures already aligned, recruitment and training progresses as early as possible
- Potential to rapidly integrate the service into other Dorset Council support services. This will facilitate the development of a customer account and customer services to give residents a single 'council' experience, as well as bringing greater insights into residents and their needs. This integration may bring further cost efficiencies.

12.4 The partnership option under consideration is an extension of the existing SVPP model, where BCP would administer the revenues and benefits service for all Dorset residents, with oversight provided by a joint committee of Dorset Council and BCP Councillors.

12.5 Key characteristics of the SVPP proposal (Option 3A as detailed in Appendix 3) are:

- To bring together a pan-Dorset revenues and benefits service through the SVPP
- The SVPP to support each council's transformation objectives by working alongside their customer services departments to automate processes and gather and process data to support service provisions for residents
- To be able to provide all revenues and benefits functions and, subject to a business case and further investment, provide specialist services as requested that blend with the service, such as social services financial assessments and all areas of sundry income collection and administration
- To deliver, inclusive of additional expenditure by each council of customer access services, annual savings of £1.5 million – split in line with an agreed cost share agreement (Dorset Council's share would be approximately £690k)
- These savings could be achieved within the partnership, with the potential to support the further transformation savings targets of each council.

13. Dorset Council Future Service Requirements

13.1 The key requirements for Dorset Council from its future revenues and benefits service have been identified through discussions with its Senior Leadership Team (SLT) and relevant Cabinet members. These are:

- a) Strategic fit – does it align with Dorset Council’s future operating model, and other plans and strategies? (see Appendix 1)
- b) Cost effectiveness and value for money – does the option represent value for money for the Dorset taxpayer
- c) Responsiveness - ability to adapt quickly to changing national policy and local circumstances
- d) Opportunity for further benefits through service integration and transformation.

14. Evaluation

	Dorset Council Service	SVPP Proposal	Comment
Strategic fit with Customer Service Strategy	✓	–	<p>Appendix 1 details Dorset Council’s customer service model and ambition to integrate systems and data to provide a joined-up customer experience. The Dorset Council based revenue service will be fully compliant with this.</p> <p>The SVPP proposal is based upon the partnership working directly with both councils’ Customer Access Teams to deliver transformation. All face-to-face and telephony services to be provided by each council’s Customer Access Teams and not through the partnership.</p> <p>The partnership would act as the ‘back-office’, dealing with complex enquiries and processing accounts where not automated through BCP Council or Dorset Council customer transformation. In customer terms they would consider they are dealing directly with each council through their Customer Access Teams. However, this proposal will fall short of full customer service integration.</p>

<p>Cost effectiveness and value for money</p>	<p>✓</p>	<p>✓</p>	<p>The Dorset Council proposal delivers base budget savings of £731k with a high degree of certainty. Initial transformation work around systems and processes is complete. The cost of the new service is a straightforward scaling-up of the existing Dorset Council service to deal with additional requirements for East and North Dorset customers.</p> <p>The SVPP proposal suggests a similar level of savings through standardisation and economies of scale.</p> <p>The Dorset Council option is likely to incur one off costs as part of exiting the partnership, but beyond the establishment of the Dorset Council model there is the potential for further savings through transformation, such as integration with the customer service model.</p> <p>The SVPP model is likely to require some investment/additional costs from Dorset Council, such as redundancy costs, that would fall to Dorset Council as a result of the adoption of a pan-Dorset model (referenced in the SVPP documentation as a post transfer piece of work) and no consideration is given to the level of stranded costs that Dorset Council would incur and which would have to be managed out of the system.</p>
<p>Responsiveness</p>	<p>✓</p>	<p>–</p>	<p>Having an in-house service gives Dorset Council absolute control over all operational and strategic aspects of the service, its work and future developments. Initial cost savings are important, but the real value comes in the integration of the intelligence that comes from a single dataset that is immediately available and nurtured to help shape future services.</p>

			By its very nature, partnership work involves the dilution of control and therefore means Dorset Council's ability to get the best from the service is compromised. We have seen this under the existing arrangements whereby work priorities have to be agreed between partners and there is tension between competing priorities and objectives of each partner. Each change request comes with a cost because, in order to standardise, the service has inherent inflexibility of the operating model.
Opportunity for further benefits through service integration and transformation	✓	–	<p>With an in-house service, it is straightforward to link with the existing and emerging transformation plan. Dorset Council's own transformation governance and programme office are well established and managed internally.</p> <p>The SVPP (BCP-hosted) model might well move in directions which do not support Dorset Council objectives or strategies.</p> <p>The governance arrangements proposed under the SVPP model mean transformation cannot necessarily progress in the same direction at the same pace as the rest of Dorset Council. Everything would involve agreement and additional resourcing. SVPP has yet to integrate with the former Bournemouth Borough Council Revenues & Benefits Team and this may cause further complications in any transformation.</p>

14.1 This high-level options evaluation identifies that the Dorset Council in-house service is the best strategic fit for the Council.

15. Cost of separation

15.1 The SVPP partnership is governed by a Collaboration Agreement (signed in April 2014) which details the action to be taken in the event of the partnership ending.

15.2 The formal requirement requires a council which is exiting the partnership to give financial year's notice. To end the SVPP for 31 March 2023, would

require notice to be given by 31 March 2022. The terms of the agreement also state that the Council that served notice shall be responsible for any costs arising as a result of the partnership ending. This approach contrasts with the principle which applied to all other services when the Unitary Councils were formed, in that as services were separated the 'stranded costs' were absorbed by the organisations which incurred them.

- 15.3 BCP will be considering the future of their Revenues and Benefits service in January 2022 and, depending on the respective Cabinets' decisions, the intention would be for Dorset Council and BCP Council to end the partnership on an amicable basis following a timetable which supports both councils' transformation plans and with an approach to cost minimisation which is in the best interests of BCP and Dorset Council taxpayers.

16. Summary and conclusions

- 16.1 Dorset Council recognises the value that all partnership arrangements - and the colleagues working in them - have brought to the respective councils, customers, taxpayers and residents of Dorset up to this point. But the arrangements are no longer suitable for Dorset Council's future journey and the aspirations that we have articulated in our various strategies for customers, staff and residents. Acknowledging SVPP's own view that the current model is unsuitable for the future, we must seek change.
- 16.2 There are two options for Cabinet to consider. These are summarised in this document and are supported by detail set out in Appendices 2 and 3.
- 16.3 The move to a Dorset-wide service could lead to some financial savings for both Dorset Council as well as BCP Council. However, these could also be obtained, to some degree, were the East and North Dorset areas to be integrated into the existing Dorset Council service.
- 16.4 Ultimately, the return of the full service to Dorset Council control would allow for greater integration with the corporate whole and other tangible (and intangible) advantages that could not be achieved with an external provider.
- 16.5 Whichever option is chosen, the Corporate Director for Finance & Commercial reporting to the S151 Officer will be the lead officer for Dorset Council. If the in-house option is chosen, he will lead the implementation programme with the support of the revenues and benefits team, DC head of customer service and colleagues from SVPP. If the SVPP option is chosen, he will be best placed to be the client lead for Dorset Council. For either option chosen, it is recommended that Scrutiny maintain oversight of the transition and subsequent implementation.

Aidan Dunn
Executive Director of Corporate Development

Footnote:

Issues relating to financial, legal, environmental, economic and equalities implications have been considered and any information relevant to the decision is included within the report.

Transforming the Dorset Council customer experience

1. Dorset Council has a customer access strategy which articulates how the council will engage with its customers in the future. Our plan is to make a real difference to the lives of all our customers, businesses and visitors by providing easy access to services, consistent service standards and an excellent experience.
2. The Council has engaged with Dorset residents and is using their insight to develop our vision and platforms. We adopted a [Customer Promise](#) in 2020, which was co-created with our people panel and our Senior Leadership Team (SLT) has agreed the principles and outcomes to shape a future 'one Dorset Council front door' operating model.
3. Our principles for customer transformation include our commitment to:
 - provide a single front door approach and the use of Dorset Direct (our central customer services team)
 - invest in libraries to further develop its role as a community service
 - improve the customer experience and
 - enable services to deliver savings in their areas.
4. These have now been translated into our strategic outcomes:
 - **Working together:** cross service and partnership working to provide capacity to support those with complex needs or vulnerability
 - **Improved customer experience:** embedding positive customer experience at the heart of everything we do
 - **Consistent, easy to access services:** delivering more at the first point of contact through a *one council front door* approach
 - **Establish One Dorset council hubs:** integrate services with libraries and other community spaces to provide a multi-service offer.
 - **Digital customer first:** our customers' choice helping us reduce demand and cost through innovative 'once & done' service design
5. Our transformation plans are fully supported by SLT and Councillors having received recent presentations. The developing strategy will demonstrate how plans contribute towards meeting council plan priorities whilst also aligning with our digital, enabling communities, equality & inclusion and library strategies. Customer transformation underpins how we will operate in the future, including our new Customer Platform, which will drive our website, customer account functionality and will be our customer management solution.

6. All future Dorset Council service transformation or convergence must embed the transformation principles within system, solution, process or structural changes supported by our digital, change and customer transformation business partners. This is to ensure that when customers contact us, we resolve all low-medium complexity enquiries via our customer platform either by self-serving or assisted through Dorset Direct or our Libraries.
7. Our data strategy is also developing, which will ensure that we use and share data in the most efficient way, which will also require our services and systems to be much more joined up in the future.
8. Integration of systems, processes and data will be key to everything we do in future and as the revenues and benefits services touches a huge number of customers in the Council area, the inclusion of these services in this work is essential.

By virtue of paragraph(s) 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A
of the Local Government Act 1972.

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