

Shadow Dorset Council

Date of Meeting	11 February 2019
Lead Member	Cllr David Walsh
Officer	Bridget Downton / Trevor Warrick
Subject of Report	Timeline and resources for producing the Dorset Council Local Plan
Executive Summary	<p>The Consequential Order for Dorset Council requires the Council to produce and adopt a local plan by April 2024. Given that Council elections will take place in May 2024, Councillors have requested a report setting out the implications of accelerating this timescale from 5 years to 4 years.</p> <p>Officers believe that it will be possible, albeit challenging, to produce a Dorset Council Local Plan in 4 years, with minimal increase in resources, provided that current local plan work is incorporated into the new plan. This is also based on assumptions that existing staff will be retained as at the time of writing there was no information in relation to transitional staffing structures. If there is a reduction in the existing planning policy staff numbers, then additional money will be required to buy in additional external support.</p> <p>Continuing with some or all of the individual local plan reviews alongside may require additional resources depending how many reviews are progressed. It is also important to note that there will be matters beyond the control of the new authority, such as the timing of the local plan examination process, which will need to be managed through the plan's preparation.</p> <p>Officers propose setting up a task and finish group of Councillors, reporting to the Dorset Cabinet, to provide the strategic lead for the Dorset Council Local Plan and ensure that it stays on track to meet a demanding timeline.</p>

Impact Assessment:	<p>Equalities Impact Assessment: None – the Dorset Council Local Plan will include detailed equalities impact assessments in due course.</p>
	<p>Use of Evidence: Officers have carried out a high level assessment of existing resources, the work that needs to be completed and produced a high level project plan based on that assessment.</p>
	<p>Budget: £975,000 one off budget already identified from existing district budgets to be carried forward into Dorset Council.</p>
	<p>Risk Assessment: Having considered the risks associated with this decision using the LGR approved risk management methodology, the level of risk has been identified as: Current Risk: MEDIUM Residual Risk MEDIUM There are risks associated with not progressing with some or all of the existing local plans and these are set out in the report.</p>
	<p>Other Implications: None</p>
Recommendation	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Shadow Executive recommends that Dorset Council progresses with a Dorset Council Local Plan in line with the high level project plan set out at the end of this report with the intention of adopting the Plan by April 2023. 2. Shadow Executive recommends that Dorset Council sets up a member task and finish group to oversee the work of the Dorset Council Local Plan, reporting to the Dorset Cabinet. 3. All existing work carried out to date for current district local plan reviews be used where possible to shape the new Dorset Council Local Plan.
Reason for Recommendation	<p>To ensure that all the necessary work to produce the Dorset Council Local Plan is completed to enable adoption in Spring 2023.</p>
Appendices	<p>None</p>

Background Papers	None
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Date agreed by Lead Member	
Date agreed by Statutory Officers	

1 Introduction

1.1 In line with the consequential order, by April 2024 at the latest, Dorset Council will need to produce a Dorset Council Local Plan setting out where development will go. Having an adopted local plan in place is important to provide certainty to local people and to the development industry. A sound local plan that allocates adequate land for housing and employment will ensure that Dorset Council has control over where development does and does not happen. This is important to ensure timely delivery of appropriate levels of development whilst ensuring that Dorset's unique environment is safeguarded. The Shadow Executive is keen to ensure that a Dorset Council Local Plan is adopted as soon as is practically possible. It has asked for a plan to be drawn up to show what resources are necessary to deliver an adopted Dorset Council Local Plan by April 2023 rather than April 2024.

2 Current status of local plans

2.1 In order to have control over development, councils need to have three things: an adopted local plan (which must be reviewed every 5 years); a five year supply of deliverable housing sites; and sufficient recent housing delivery to meet the new Housing Delivery Test. A five year housing land supply means that the Council can demonstrate that it has enough land identified on deliverable sites to provide a minimum of five years' worth of housing against its assessed housing need. Where plans become more than five years old without a review having been completed, the weight to be given to their policies will depend on their consistency with current national policy. They will potentially carry less weight therefore, but are still part of the statutory development plan. The following table sets out the current situation in the existing sovereign district council areas that will be covered in the new Dorset Council:

Area	Currently adopted plan?	Land supply (years)
East Dorset	Yes (April 2014) – joint with Christchurch	5.1 (joint)
North Dorset	Yes (January 2016)	3.4
Purbeck	Yes (November 2012) but out of date – needed to be reviewed by 2017	5.6
West Dorset		
Weymouth & Portland	Yes (October 2015) – joint plan	4.9 (joint)

2.2 Land supply is based on the situation at April 2017.

2.3 All of the districts in Dorset are currently in the process of reviewing their local plans. The following table summarises the current position of each (excluding minerals and waste local plans):

Area	Current status	Potential adoption date	Further work required
East Dorset	Options consultation completed	Late 2020	Pre-submission publication followed by collating responses and then submission for examination
North Dorset	Issues and options consultation completed	Autumn 2021	Preferred options consultation; pre-submission publication followed by collating responses and then submission for examination
Purbeck	Plan submitted for examination January 2019	Late 2019	Preparation for and attendance at examination
West Dorset Weymouth & Portland	Options and preferred options consultation completed	Late 2020	Pre-submission publication followed by collating responses and then submission for examination

2.4 This shows that much work has already been undertaken to review current policies and to identify option sites for further housing and other development. Much of this work can be carried forward into the new Dorset Council Local Plan. Whether any of the current reviews will be carried forward alongside the new Dorset Council Local Plan is a matter for the new Dorset Council to decide (as agreed by the Shadow Executive in October). The resource requirements for this will vary depending on how many of the existing reviews are progressed. Further detail is set out in section 5 of this report

3 Available staff resources

- 3.1 Senior appointments to Dorset Council are underway. It is not yet clear when the merging of the existing planning policy teams from district councils and Dorset County Council will be complete. Nor is it clear exactly how teams in Dorset Council will be configured. Officers have carried out an analysis of the finances and staff resources that will be transferring to Dorset Council to support the development of the Dorset Council Local Plan. Officers have made some high level assumptions about resources that will be available and this assessment is therefore an approximation. Officers have assumed that all existing Planning Policy Staff will transfer to the new Council in order to deliver a new Local Plan in four years instead of five.
- 3.2 There are nearly 16 full time equivalent (FTE) professional policy planning officers in the districts, currently occupying a range of roles including planners, senior planners, team leaders and managers.
- 3.3 Dorset County Council's minerals and waste policy team also has just over 2.5 FTE dedicated policy officers, as well as a manager covering both policy and development management (minerals and waste). Dorset Council will have a responsibility to review minerals and waste policy, but these staff may also have some limited capacity to contribute to the Dorset Council Local Plan, for example where there is an opportunity to coordinate evidence gathering or prepare generic policies.
- 3.4 It is likely that the Planning Policy team in Dorset Council will be responsible for a range of other essential work in addition to developing the Dorset Council Local Plan. This work is also statutory or required under national policy and guidance. The Local Plan would need to be given the highest priority and this other work kept to a minimum, but it is likely to include:
- producing other strategic plans such as the minerals and waste plans;
 - producing or updating any essential supplementary planning documents, such as those needed to manage the council's obligations in relation to international nature conservation designations;

- producing other key planning policy documents such as the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) charging schedules; statement of community involvement (SCI); and statements of common ground for the duty to co-operate;
- providing the required support to local communities in the development of neighbourhood plans;
- joint working with colleagues in Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Council on key joint strategic evidence work;
- monitoring work to ensure policies are effective, including the assessment of the five-year housing land supply; and
- keeping up to date with national changes and ensuring Dorset is portrayed in a positive light on the regional and national stage.

3.5 An assessment of the amount of time that existing staff spend on these activities suggests that there is likely to be in the region of 8-10 FTE planning professionals available to work on the Dorset Council Local Plan assuming that it does not include minerals and waste matters and that such matters continue to be the subject of discrete development plans. Officers believe that it would potentially be possible to produce a Dorset Council Local Plan in 4 years with this resource, if this work were prioritised and if rapid progress towards preferred options could be made, using the work already undertaken on current local plan reviews. In addition to our own staff, some additional resource is likely to be required to produce the evidence required to support the new plan; to ensure resilience; and provide a critical external review at key points in the process. This resilience and assurance could be secured through a range of means including:

- Employing additional permanent staff, once a detailed project plan has been produced setting out the detailed resource requirements and existing gaps.
- Employing agency staff to deal with peaks and troughs.
- A contract for services – there are a range of companies that can provide this service. For a fee, the Council would be able to call off additional senior planning expertise to deal with peaks of workload as well as securing milestone reviews during the production of the plan. In this scenario, it is also possible to include a risk transfer where the company prices for delivering the plan to the specified date and takes on the risk for delivery. This has worked well with the current Purbeck Local Plan where external staff have worked alongside the Policy Team. The contract has been overseen by one of the Council's general managers. The contract would be overseen by a Dorset Council manager.
- Employing specialist consultants to carry out discrete pieces of work to inform the evidence base for the plan.

3.6 The eventual solution will depend on the market and may well include a mix of solutions.

3.7 Colleagues from elsewhere in the Council will also need to be involved to support the local plan development including for example legal advice; and transport modelling.

4 Available financial resources for local plan work

4.1 The district councils have a variety of financial resources currently allocated for local plan work. This is summarised in the table below:

Council	Allocated	Set aside / committed for
East Dorset	£300,000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Additional transport & master-planning work £100,000 • Green Belt Study (Stage 3) £30,000 • Playing pitch Study £6,000 • Examination costs £50,000
North Dorset	£223,000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • £115,000 examination costs • £108,000 consultants for evidence base, and plan production
Purbeck	£105,000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • £80,000 examination • £15,000 specialist consultants to attend hearings or provide additional information • £10,000 contribution to Dorset wide playing pitch study that will be updated evidence base for local plan
West Dorset	£178,000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • £95,000 examination costs • £83,000 consultants and plan production
Weymouth & Portland	£169,000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • £80,000 examination costs • £89,000 consultants and plan preparation

4.2 A total of £975,000 is available from existing reserve budgets to be transferred in to Dorset Council to progress local plan work. This budget will be available for buying in specialist support and additional capacity as needed (e.g. viability appraisals; consultation specialists; habitats assessments; etc.) and for contributing towards examination costs. If this were all used to contribute towards the preparation of the Dorset Council Local Plan, it is likely that it would cover all or most of the costs, though additional financial resources would be needed if all the individual plan reviews were also to be continued. Once Dorset Council decides which individual plan reviews to continue with, detailed costings can be provided at that time.

5 Taking Forward Current Local Plan Reviews

5.1 All the current local plan reviews have made significant progress, and the Shadow Executive Committee has agreed that work on the reviews should continue until the new Dorset Council makes a decision on their future. However, a great deal of further work would be required to take them all forward to adoption. The overall level of housing (and other) development that needs to be provided varies. For example, the pre-submission version of the Purbeck Local Plan includes plans for 2,688 new homes, whereas the Preferred Options for the West Dorset, Weymouth & Portland Local Plan Review plans for 19,016 new homes. Those reviews promoting more development would require more staff resource to take them through to adoption, as estimated in the table below. Purbeck's plan is the most advanced and would require the least staff resource to progress to completion. North's plan is the least advanced and the joint plan for West Dorset, Weymouth & Portland would require the most staff resource to progress to completion.

Staff required		
Area	Number	Approximate date required until (potential adoption date)
East Dorset	3.5	End 2020
North Dorset	3.5	Autumn 2021
Purbeck	2.5	Late 2019
West Dorset, Weymouth & Portland	4.5	Late 2020
Total	14.0	

- 5.2 It is estimated that taking forward all the reviews would require about 14 FTE staff in total. After late 2019, when the Purbeck Local Plan Review would be adopted, it is estimated this would fall to 11.5 FTE until the end of 2020 / start of 2021. However, even this level of staffing exceeds the available resource of about 8-10 FTE at the districts. If work on the Dorset Council Local Plan was delayed until the bulk of these reviews had been completed in early 2021, this would only leave 2 years to prepare the Dorset Council Local Plan, which would not be possible.
- 5.3 It will be for the new Dorset Council to decide which of the current local plan reviews are taken forward to adoption, but the staff resource implications of doing so are clear. Significant additional staff resource would be required. The reviews would also use up all of the financial resources carried over from the districts outlined earlier in this report, requiring significant additional financial provision to be made to fund the examination and other costs associated with the Dorset Council Local Plan.

6 Proposed approach and potential timeline for completion of the Dorset Local Plan

- 6.1 Officers propose an initial assessment of work completed to date and a gap analysis to produce a detailed project and resource plan. This would include:
- clarifying what in-house expertise is available and what specialist work will need to be contracted out;
 - detailing what joint work can be produced with colleagues at Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Council; and
 - contacting the Planning Advisory Service (PAS) – part of the Local Government Association – to see what support it could provide.
- 6.2 Officers propose setting up a task and finish group of Councillors (a Local Plan Working Group), reporting to the Dorset Cabinet, to provide the strategic lead for the Dorset Council Local Plan and ensure that it stays on track to meet a demanding timeline. The Group would meet monthly to receive updates about progress and provide the necessary strategic steer to officers.
- 6.3 A high level draft project plan for the Dorset Council Local Plan is set out below. This has assumed a single further period of consultation prior to the pre-submission publication, and rapid progress to reach that stage. Members need to be aware of the risks inherent in the plan-making process, in particular of those elements that are not within the Council's control, such as the examination stage which is led by the independent inspector. The Dorset Council Local Plan will also require close cooperation with the Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole plan under the duty to cooperate, particularly in relation to housing numbers, and this could affect the programme.

