

Bournemouth-Christchurch-Poole Joint Committee

Notes on meeting of 15th December 2017

1. I attended this third meeting of the Joint Committee at Christchurch Council Offices along with Cllr Sue Spittle
2. All the papers referred to can be found at <https://bcpjointcommittee.wordpress.com/meetings/>
3. There was some talk before the meeting about Christopher Chope MP submitting 7 questions to the committee, all of which were rejected because he is not a resident of Dorset. He had to get other people to ask them for him
4. **The first paper** reported progress on the critical path items and indicated that no risks need to be escalated at this stage. I suspect that the January meeting may see developments on several fronts. The paper was passed unanimously
5. **The second paper** concerned financial management, inter-authority cooperation (including the new Shadow Authority) and the medium term financial plans of Bournemouth and Poole as Unitary Authorities and Christchurch as a second-tier council within DCC. The disaggregation investigation should enable the DCC forecast funding deficit to be split between the two new unitary Authorities.
6. It has been established that the new coastal unitary will have balance sheet net assets of £0.6bn and a net budget requirement of £236m.
7. The paper was passed unanimously
8. **The third paper** concerned disaggregation (the process of moving Christchurch out of Dorchester and splitting it from East Dorset). Outline details were given of a pilot exercise that is underway involving library services. We will receive some feedback on that in January
9. A lot of thought and effort is being devoted to risk management and ensuring that vulnerable people are not put at risk or unfairly treated as a result of disaggregation
10. The paper was approved unanimously
11. **The fourth paper** concerned Council Tax Harmonisation. Work can't progress at speed because information is required from the disaggregation project. We will receive an update in January.
12. We learned that harmonisation within 5 years is the target but that harmonisation from day 1 has not been ruled out (seems impractical to me because of the level of tax foregone such an arrangement would involve and the difficulty of forecasting the costs of children's services and care for the elderly)
13. The first note of disharmony occurred when a vote to accept the principles (no increase greater than referendum limit; harmonisation within 10 years; Christchurch tax frozen or reduced) was passed by majority 13 to 2 with 1 abstention. The 2 were the Christchurch representatives who had argued for complete harmonisation from day 1 on the grounds of fairness. I think Central Government will make the final decision on this one.
14. **The fifth paper** concerned such things as the name of the new authority and the creation of a Shadow Authority in which all 120 councillors of the three existing councils would automatically become councillors in the Shadow Authority. The new authority will be a Borough Council with County functions.
15. This was approved 16 to 1, the 1 being a Liberal Democrat from Poole who was unhappy about the provisions for political balance, and 1 abstention

16. **The sixth paper** related to electoral arrangements. We learned that a full local government electoral review in Dorset could be achieved and would be beneficial. Officers have been talking to Central Government about the process and what is required by when.
17. The Structural Change Order presented to Parliament would include a fall-back arrangement based upon existing wards and divisions but including, where necessary, the merging of existing wards.
18. The new Shadow Authority will be expected to calculate and justify the size of the new unitary authority in a case submitted to Central Government. This has been done elsewhere in England and that work can be utilised.
19. We were given details of a very tight timetable with a lot of ifs and buts. I would expect this entire process to become clearer over the next couple of months.
20. The main body of the report was passed unanimously but a recommendation to establish a Task and Finish Group was passed 16 to 1 being opposed by Councillor Jones (CBC on behalf of DCC)
21. The next meeting is at Poole on 15th January 2018

Jim Biggin

15th December 2017