

## Bournemouth-Christchurch-Poole Joint Committee

### Notes on meeting of 20<sup>th</sup> March 2018

1. I attended this the sixth meeting of the Joint Committee at Bournemouth Council Offices along with Jumpers and St Cats RA committee member Maureen Biggin.
2. All the papers referred to can be found at <https://bcpjointcommittee.wordpress.com/meetings/>
3. We started with several verbal questions from the public.
  - 3.1. Councillor Hall (Christchurch) asked Councillor John Beesley about the financial situation in Bournemouth: projected funding gap 2017-18 of £1.3 million; and significant expenditure on a new retail park. In a very full answer we learned that the projected funding shortfall for 2017-18 is £173,000 as at end January and that the retail park is supported by a full business case
  - 3.2. Councillor Bungey (Christchurch) asked about disaggregation and a seamless transfer. Would people affected have to reapply for care to the new council? He was assured that they would not and that the entire process would be managed in accordance with the principles already set down by the Joint Committee. He then asked about Council Tax Harmonisation and was effectively told that this is work in progress. We can expect a full report to the April meeting of the Joint Committee prior to the placing of the Finance Order
  - 3.3. Councillor Bath (Christchurch) suggested that in the new council meetings should be held in the evening to ensure that younger, working people could properly serve as councillors. The suggestion was noted
  - 3.4. A Mr Fenning asked about Council Tax Harmonisation and was told that his question was out of date and this is all work in progress
  - 3.5. A Mr Sprackling suggested that individual councils be prevented from committing any further capital resources or incurring new expenditure more than £10,000 before the new council is formed. He cited Poole Council's office refurbishment as questionable expenditure. He was told that reporting procedures are being put in place and that all three councils are committed to cooperation.
4. The meeting received a verbal report from Councillor Jones representing the Christchurch Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The Councillor was severely reprimanded by the Chair for not simply delivering any recommendations. He eventually managed to express a concern about the lack of transparency caused by an excessive use of Task and Finish Groups. He then went on to Council Tax Harmonisation and a desire for such harmonisation from day one. He was told by an officer that models B and D assume day one harmonisation – and that this is work in progress
5. A verbal report from Councillor Parker from Poole expressed concern about local decision making in the new council citing work going on in Christchurch to form a new town council and suggesting similar efforts should be made in Poole and Bournemouth
6. **The first paper** concerned progress on the overall programme. The decision of the SOS was welcomed. I was given the impression that the April meeting will be a major event when important reports will be tabled covering: Council Tax Harmonisation; Consolidation of Medium Term Financial Plans; Disaggregation; the Parliamentary Orders. The paper was passed unanimously
7. **The second paper** concerned Parliamentary Orders. The date for tabling the Structural Change Order was confirmed as 29<sup>th</sup> March. There will be two Consequential Orders, one on Finance and one on everything else. The last opportunity to provide input to the Consequential Orders will be

21<sup>st</sup> May. The statutory instrument is scheduled to be laid before Parliament on 24<sup>th</sup> July. Work is underway to draft a constitution for the Shadow Authority. The paper was passed unanimously

8. **The third paper** concerned the consolidation of the Medium Term Financial Plans. This is a well written, detailed paper that one needs to read if one has more than a passing interest. The key points to emerge were: the Dorset Council targeted savings of £10.2 million in 2018-19 are high risk ( no surprise there) so the assumed cumulative funding gap of £24.1 million could be higher; the rule of thumb compound factor used to determine how much of Dorset's expenditure relates to Christchurch was confirmed as 11.84% which gives a Christchurch related cumulative funding gap arising from DCC of £2.8 million; the financial analysis undertaken by Local Partnerships that indicated a one-off transitional cost of £11.8 million will be brought up to date by April; the flexible use of capital receipts is being investigated. Finally, it was proposed that rather than forming a new TFG the existing Tax Harmonisation TFG should take on the role of identifying savings required to deliver a balanced budget for 2019-20. The paper was passed virtually unanimously, Councillor Jones voting against.
9. **The fourth paper** concerned Council Tax Harmonisation. We learned that a major paper is likely to be presented in April. Of the 28 original financial models 5 are still in play (C,G,J, M and N) with harmonisation periods of between 4 and 7 years. There is apparently some suggestion that legislation on this thorny topic will be produced by Sajid Javid. The paper was carried unanimously
10. **The fifth paper** concerned Disaggregation. There was some discussion on scrutiny of this activity and it appears that in addition to each council scrutinising it, a joint scrutiny committee will also be formed. Councillor Jones asked if the methodology for computing the split will be published and was told that a summary will be made available together with a template. I don't fully understand that response to a sensible question and we will look closely at the end-product once it is produced. The transfer of staff from Dorset to the new authority now forms part of the Disaggregation task. Again, we can expect developments in April. The paper was approved unanimously
11. **The sixth paper** concerned Civic Functions. This addresses such matters as keeping a mayor for each area (has anybody asked residents if that's what they want?); civic regalia; freedom of the borough; and so on. It is proposed to preserve Civic and Ceremonial Rights through the establishment of a Charter Trustee for each of Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole. This was passed unanimously
12. The next meeting is at Poole in April 2018. I don't have a date yet.

**Jim Biggin, 20<sup>th</sup> March 2018**