

David C Jones MA
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Dorset County Council

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24 November 2015

Dear Mr Biggin

Proposed Combined Authority and a possible “Greater Bournemouth”

Thank you for your e-mail and I must apologise for the delay in responding. I do not seem to have received your first e-mail but am happy to respond to the points you raise.

Firstly, the remarks quoted are not mine. I fear that my colleague Trevor Jones's memory is at fault: the County Committee of which I have the honour to be Chairman is the Regulatory Committee which does not deal with policy matters. Trevor's Committee is the County's Audit and Scrutiny Committee which is, I understand, considering options for possible change in local government.

However, perhaps for clarity I might be allowed to comment on the points you raise. I am actually a member of a small group of County Councillors set up to consider, from our party's point of view, the possibilities and we were fortunate enough to be given a briefing by the Chief Executive and other very senior officers recently. Also, last night Christchurch councillors received a briefing from Mr McIntosh on this matter.

As was reported in the Echo I intervened in a debate at County Hall on Thursday 12 November and as the points I made might be of interest to you and your membership I am attaching a draft of my speech.

If I may consider your queries:-

Which powers would Councils have to give up in a Combined Authority?

Non-Unitary Borough and District Councils would not have to give up powers to a Combined Authority, which might perhaps be more accurately referred to as a Consortium – a number of independent authorities acting together to promote public welfare.

The County Council, under the present proposals, would share its powers with other top-tier authorities in areas such as strategic transport and economic development. This would

mean, for example, that a Dorset consortium would be able, with the help of powers devolved from central government, to promote economic growth and sensible transport across the conurbation area and indeed promote through routes out of Dorset, for example to the north and west.

To whom would the powers be ceded?

As mentioned above, the “Combined Authority” would in effect be a Consortium, managed probably by a small number of elected councillors appointed by each sovereign authority. There would be equal numbers of Councillors from each Authority.

Experience of co-operation

As this must be a matter of opinion by the person quoted, I cannot fittingly comment, but would just say that there are splendid examples of co-operation (such as the Stour Valley and Poole Partnership) and some which, in my humble opinion, have not been so good.

Driving Reform

In general, my personal views are those of the first Conservative Prime Minister, Sir Robert Peel – “Where it is not necessary to change, it is necessary not to change.” However, not all change is bad, and where a system is not working well then reform may well be necessary. The 1972 Local Government Act, which operated on the principle “Big is Beautiful” and was rooted in the conventional wisdom of the late 1960s, does need changing.

That change, though, must be measured and justified. A “Greater Bournemouth” unitary, based on the 1972 Act and on the same lines as the Unitaries set up in, for example, Cornwall, Wiltshire and County Durham, would not be justified as it would move power away from the people, encourage remote government, take powers away from what Cllr Nottage has termed “People’s Front Doors” and give them to a big, amorphous authority in which Christchurch, far from “punching above its weight” would suffer the same fate as Truro, Penzance, Salisbury, Shrewsbury, Durham City and others. All of these once-proud Boroughs are now reduced to, if they are lucky, Town Councils or, like Durham City, having no elected statutory body to articulate their concerns and needs.

We need in Dorset a new **type** of structure, one which will enable us to work with a Combined Authority and not, as I fear a Greater Bournemouth would do, work against it. Many of my colleagues and I have a vision of a Dorset where there are different levels of authority, with communities which *can* exercise powers and *want* to exercise such powers having those powers devolved to them. Thus former Boroughs like Bridport and Lyme Regis should be offered devolution of suitable powers. Christchurch, in this vision, would not need to lose any powers. The aim would be to ensure that power flows upwards from the people, not downwards from a remote authority.

I hope this of interest and assistance. If you would like to discuss this further please do not hesitate to contact me. Incidentally, it is always best to use this e-mail address (cllr.dcjones1@gmail.com) as the Borough Council and County Council systems do not always find it easy to cope with an assortment of Cllr Joneses.

With all good wishes

Yours sincerely

David C Jones

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