

Local Government Reorganization

Extract from a Proposal for Joint Working Committees – June 2017

The purpose of this report is to enable sovereign councils to consider proposed governance arrangements through which they can oversee work towards local government reorganisation in Bournemouth, Dorset and Poole whilst awaiting a minded to decision from the Secretary of State.

The report recognises that three of the nine councils have decided not to support the submission of a case for the creation of new councils. It provides them with an opportunity to take stock and consider whether they wish, through participation in a joint committee, to be able to influence the work being undertaken to prepare for any new unitary council.

Alongside the submission to the Secretary of State the six Leaders whose councils support the proposal established the *Future Dorset Board*. Up until this point local government reorganisation had been discussed by all nine Leaders, with their deputies in attendance, during Leaders and Chief Executives meetings. However, with three councils resolving not to support the proposal, the *Future Dorset Board* provided a new forum in which to progress associated work with the proposal.

On the 18th April 2017, it was announced unexpectedly that there would be a general election on June 8th. As a result, officers were advised that they should not expect any decision from the Secretary of State before the summer recess. This prompted the *Future Dorset Board* to consider what governance arrangements should be put in place locally to oversee work in anticipation of a “minded to” decision and ahead of a legal order to be made by the Secretary of State.

The Future Dorset Leaders have recognised that each of the other three councils have made their own sovereign decisions not to support Future Dorset. They have though also maintained communication with Christchurch, East Dorset and Purbeck councils to ensure that they are aware of ongoing work.

The preference of the Future Dorset Leaders is that all councils, irrespective of whether they oppose the formation of new councils, should have the opportunity to influence plans being made in anticipation of and in preparation for local government change.

A report previously considered by the *Future Dorset Board* exploring options was therefore presented to all nine Leaders at a meeting on the 25th May.

The report provided the Leaders of Christchurch, East Dorset and Purbeck councils with an opportunity to consider whether their councils should engage in work in readiness for local government change within a joint committee arrangement.

No individual Leaders could commit their councils to participate in a joint committee. There was though a general willingness to put the issue before sovereign councils to decide for themselves (notwithstanding the opposition of some to the principle of new councils) whether they should be part of a joint committee arrangement through which they would be able to exercise influence over work to prepare for any new council.

Following the announcement of the general election and a subsequent delay of the minded to decision, Future Dorset Monitoring Officers met to consider possible next steps and how, within a shortened timeframe, new councils could be implemented in the most efficient and effective way.

Monitoring Officers have advised and Chief Executives agree that the establishment of two joint committees would provide a means through which councils could work together to prepare

themselves for a “minded to decision” and a legal order by the Secretary of State beginning the formal move towards new councils.

If full council meetings in July were to agree to establish joint committees then this would allow sufficient time for initial meetings, perhaps informal, to take place over the summer.

It is suggested that ahead of a ‘minded to’ decision an informal first meeting or workshop could concentrate upon establishing a clear understanding, priorities and a work programme. This would provide officers with clear direction and enable some progress to be made.

It is anticipated that a structural change order to be made by the Secretary of State will prescribe arrangements in the Dorset area and arrangements in the Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole area to implement each new council. These arrangements will involve councillors representing each of the existing councils.

The very first of the terms of reference states the role of the Joint Committees as being:

“To identify and promote collaborative and joint working between Councils”

This is important in that irrespective of local government reorganisation the Joint Committees provide a member forum for collaboration and joint working across councils.

When the Secretary of State makes any structural change order the central purpose will be described in terms of taking steps to prepare for the transfer of the functions, property, rights and liabilities of the existing councils to new councils. It is suggested that this purpose needs to be replicated in the joint committee arrangements.

Like the arrangements to be prescribed by the Secretary of State the function of each joint committee is to undertake work in preparation for new councils taking the place of existing councils. The joint committees are each described as the forum in which councils will cooperate with each other to secure the early, economic, effective, efficient and timely transfer of functions etc.

At their meeting on 12 April 2017 the Leaders considered a report from Monitoring Officers on the process for the appointment of Chief Executives as an important decision in preparation for any new council. Monitoring Officers are progressing work to secure access for Leaders to independent external advice on the options open to them. Whilst the proposed terms of reference for each joint committee include agreeing a process for the appointment of a Chief Executive, it is important to note that the actual decision will not be made by either joint committee.

For the Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole area it is proposed that the initial membership of the joint committee should comprise 8 members from Bournemouth Borough Council, 6 members from the Borough of Poole, 2 members from Christchurch Borough Council and 2 members from Dorset County Council (to address the issue of disaggregation only).

If Christchurch Borough Council does not agree to re-engage with the Future Dorset proposal, Dorset County Council will represent Christchurch residents on the Joint Committee with a membership of 2, who would also address the issue of disaggregation, negating the need for 2 additional Dorset County Council members.

For the Dorset area, it is proposed that the initial membership of the joint committee should comprise 2 members from each of North Dorset District Council, West Dorset District Council and Weymouth and Portland Borough Council and 6 members from Dorset County Council. Again, there

would be provision to increase this further should a decision be made by East Dorset District Council and/or Purbeck District Council to re-engage with Future Dorset.

Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Area Joint Committee

Purpose

1. To identify and promote collaborative and joint working between Councils
- 2. To take steps to prepare for the transfer of the functions, property, rights and liabilities of Bournemouth Borough Council, Christchurch Borough Council and the Borough of Poole councils and the relevant functions, property, rights and liabilities of Dorset County Council to a new council including the preparation of an implementation plan**
3. To act as the forum within which existing councils consult and co-operate with each other in order to secure the economic, effective, efficient and timely transfer of functions, property, rights and liabilities
4. To identify and establish early design principles that assist shape the development of the new Council and relevant staffing models
5. To ensure that councillors are kept fully briefed and engaged in establishing a new Council
6. To oversee the development and delivery of a comprehensive communications and engagement strategy that address the requirements of councillors, staff, local partners and wider stakeholders
7. To agree and monitor relevant finance associated to issues of transition and transformation
8. To monitor risks associated to the establishment of a new Council
9. To monitor the development of early enabling strategies including, but not limited to, organisational design process and principles, ICT, digital transformation, medium term finance, organisational development and assets
10. To identify and approve a policy framework and thereafter monitor the introduction of draft policy statements (including supporting procedures) relevant to the required statutory compliance of the new Council
11. To liaise with relevant internal and external auditors and ensure their focus supports the development of the new Council
12. To agree a process for the appointment of a Chief Executive and make a recommendation on the appointment of a new Chief Executive to the new Council
- 13. To agree a model and process for disaggregation**
- 14. To agree a model and process for council tax harmonisation**
15. To request a boundary review
16. To agree an electoral scheme
17. To respond to consultation on the content of Orders, for example the new authority name
18. To take a decision on any required consents
19. To carry out any other tasks where Member engagement is necessary

Membership

- 8 Members from Bournemouth Borough Council
- 6 Members from Poole Borough Council
- 2 Members from Christchurch Borough Council (should a decision be taken by Christchurch Borough Council to re-engage with the Future Dorset proposal)
- 2 County Councillors (to address the question of disaggregation only)

If Christchurch Borough Council does not re-engage with the Future Dorset proposal then Dorset County Council will represent Christchurch residents on the Joint Committee with a membership of 2, who would also address the issue of disaggregation, negating the need for 2 additional Dorset County Council members.