



Building a Better Bournemouth

**COUNCILLOR JOHN BEESLEY FIH
LEADER OF THE COUNCIL**

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BY EMAIL & LETTER POST

Rt Hon Sajid Javid MP
Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government
2 Marsham Street,
London
SW1P 4DF

Dear Secretary of State,

Representation: "Future Dorset" Local Government Reorganisation proposal

I was extremely encouraged by your statement on 7 November, announcing your intention to seek Parliamentary approval to implement the Future Dorset proposal for restructuring local government across the county.

For Dorset's local authorities to achieve this level of consent for their own dissolution is quite remarkable. This consent can only demonstrate the great belief in Future Dorset as a means to securing sustainable public services and instigating greater economic prosperity right across the county.

We welcome this period for representations as it presents the Council with an opportunity to reiterate our belief in Future Dorset, as well as respond to a number of additional local developments that you may be expected to review before making a final decision. I would therefore request that you carefully consider and give due weight to this representation, which I am making on behalf of Bournemouth Borough Council.

I must start by strongly re-emphasising this unitary Council's commitment to the Future Dorset proposal submitted to you in February 2017. We remain convinced that this is the only viable solution, not just for Bournemouth but for the whole county, and reaffirm our confidence that implementation will create two unitary councils that are the right size to be sustainable and protect public services, whilst better representing their areas and creating the conditions for economic growth and prosperity.

Your announcement on 7 November sent a strong message to all councils in Dorset that you too can see that the evidence demonstrates that the proposal would improve local government and economic prosperity across the county.

Turning to that evidence, I should point out that all nine councils in Dorset – including Christchurch Borough Council – were involved in the procurement of the Local

Partnerships and PwC work, as well as the preparation of the consultation material. All consultation content was agreed together, and all councils subsequently supported roadshows right across the county (including in Christchurch), to encourage public participation. Whilst I appreciate that the Borough Council in Christchurch has changed its position since, it is a fact that Christchurch Council was as much a part of commissioning and agreeing the Opinion Research Services (ORS) consultation, the PWC Case for Change and the Local Partnerships Financial Assessment as all other councils in Dorset.

It is clear to me, as I am sure it will be to all those with experience of professional research and consultation, that the quality and methodology of the public consultation which was carried out in Dorset and which contributed to and shaped the proposals submitted to you, cannot be credibly disputed. I attach for your information a copy of the methodology chapter contained within ORS's report (Appendix A), and a statement subsequently issued by ORS in response to the Christchurch Borough Council resolution of 2 January (Appendix B). This clearly gives us confidence in the professional, comprehensive and independent nature of the consultation work. Independently managed by ORS, the methodology adopted complied with best practice requirements as set out in The Gunning Principles, which state that consultation:

- a. Should take place when proposals are still at a formative stage;
- b. Should include sufficient reasons for proposals to permit 'intelligent consideration';
- c. Should provide adequate time for consideration and response;
- d. Findings must be conscientiously taken into account:

The consultation was wide-ranging and comprehensive. As a reminder, it involved:

- an open questionnaire which any resident could complete;
- a representative household survey based on a random sample of households;
- a survey of all parish and town councils;
- 15 in-depth deliberative workshops – one in each of the districts across Dorset, three with parish and town councillors, two with the voluntary and community sector and two with the business community;
- Nine in depth interviews with Dorset's largest companies.

The consultation explored a range of different questions which reflected the various issues involved in making a strategic and long term improvement to local government in Dorset. This was supported by a breadth of good quality, well researched information that was made widely available and which, as previously stated, was contributed to and collectively approved by all nine councils in Dorset.

The methodology used in the household survey is proven to give sufficient confidence that, 19 times out of 20, if the same question was asked and every single resident in the whole county responded, one can be certain that the findings would be broadly the same.

This means that a principal benefit of this work is that the consultation can be relied upon as statistically valid and a robust reflection of public opinion in Dorset as a whole, and therefore evidence of the required "good deal of public support". Indeed, the phrase used repeatedly during ORS's consultation feedback was "emphatic support".

In both new council areas, in all boroughs and districts, the statistically sound household survey found that residents consistently support the Future Dorset proposal. It found, overall, that:

- 73% of respondents across Dorset support two councils instead of nine
- 65% of respondents support the Future Dorset proposal

It also found that 63% of residents in Christchurch supported change, with 64% backing this proposed solution.

Much emphasis has been placed by some on the results of the town poll in Christchurch, in which a majority of the 54% of participants did not support a new council for Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole. This result is unsurprising for a number of reasons. Firstly, it is consistent with the finding of the open questionnaire in Christchurch, in which any resident could have their say. These findings identified that residents from Christchurch were the least supportive of any change, with 41% supporting two unitaries, and 31% supporting the Future Dorset model. This demonstrates that only those with the greatest interest or specific motivations will self-select and participate when offered the opportunity. It further reinforces the case for placing the greatest emphasis on the household survey, which includes appropriate weightings and sampling to guarantee a statistically reliable response and in which, as stated above, Christchurch residents expressed support for the Future Dorset proposal.

Additionally, whilst the Christchurch Borough Council officers did their best to ensure a balance of information within the accompanying literature, and despite a section devoted to the case for voting 'yes' as well as 'no' in the poll, the Council neglected to mention any of the pressures in adult social care or children's services being experienced by Dorset County Council. Whilst much was made of Christchurch Council's efficiency, there was no reference to the budget position of Dorset County Council – responsible for the majority of services for Christchurch residents, and the claim "we have local control over local services for local people" is disingenuous as the Borough Council has control of only 13% of spending and service delivery within Christchurch.

The final reason for the predictability of the poll result in Christchurch is the very active campaigning by some individuals intent on opposing change for reasons known only to themselves. Various printed materials and social media content containing numerous inaccuracies were distributed and promoted very widely throughout Christchurch, both before and during the poll period. It would have been inappropriate for Bournemouth Council to counter these leaflets by contacting Christchurch households directly and we were therefore reliant on our own communications channels, which obviously have limited reach in Christchurch, to counter these negative and inaccurate claims. I have attached at Appendix C detailed analysis of the false claims and the counter, accurate position on them, so that you can be left in no doubt that the negative campaigning in Christchurch did indeed skew the poll result and as such renders the result unreliable. I would therefore request that you disregard the results of the poll completely.

I should also reiterate the strength of support for Future Dorset from key stakeholders including the Dorset Local Enterprise Partnership and various public sector partners. You will recall that the original submission included supporting statements from the Dorset LEP, Bournemouth International Airport, and the Dorset Chamber of Commerce & Industry, as well as major employers in Dorset. A video available online at <https://youtu.be/mt0in1hyeuE>, setting out the vision for a 21st Century City by the Sea that one council for the area could create, features endorsements from international transport operator Transdev, global manufacturer Sunseeker International, with financial services sector support from Nationwide Building Society, as well as the Arts University Bournemouth and Premier League AFC Bournemouth. Additionally, the original submission also contains strong endorsement from public sector partners, including the Dorset Clinical Commissioning Group, Royal Bournemouth & Christchurch Hospitals NHS Trust, Poole Hospital NHS Foundation Trust, Dorset and Wiltshire Fire & Rescue Service and Bournemouth & Poole College of Further

Education. This support is unwavering, and there is now a very real expectation amongst these partners that this proposal becomes a reality. There is of course a risk they will feel badly let down should this not turn out to be the case.

In this context, I am aware that you will receive representations that seek to persuade you to consider alternative options to the Future Dorset proposal. In this context, please see Appendix D for our detailed commentary on the Christchurch Borough Council representation.

From what we have seen to date, there would appear to be no basis whatsoever for the alternative proposal, or for agreeing to any additional time for Christchurch Borough Council to provide more detail. Further delay in receipt of your positive final decision will have significant implications, not just for implementation within the time available, but also on our ability to provide sustainable public services for local people from April 2019, and achieve the many economic and other benefits for the area.

The proposal that I have seen from Christchurch Borough Council seeks to implement a unitary authority for Bournemouth and Poole – the least credible option based on the financial evidence, Case for Change and consultation findings presented in the Future Dorset submission – along with retention of the two-tier structure in the remainder of Dorset – a system that is so inefficient that its necessary reform is a key driver for proposing local government reorganisation across the county in the first place.

To be clear, Bournemouth Council is not prepared to consider a single unitary authority with the Borough of Poole. Had colleagues from Christchurch Borough Council consulted us on this matter we would have explained this to them, along with providing a detailed, evidence-based rationale for our position. The PWC Case for Change and the Local Partnerships Financial Assessment have already proven this to be less efficient than the proposal included within the Future Dorset submission. Furthermore, in the public consultation findings (in which we continue to have full confidence), the representative household survey found only 32% of Bournemouth residents supported this option whilst the open questionnaire revealed just 31% support.

I am therefore confident that no other proposal will present a detailed financial case. No other proposal will demonstrate local consent across the county. No other proposal will come with support from the business community. No other proposal will have the backing of public sector partners. And no other proposal will provide a sustainable solution for local government and the provision of public services across Dorset.

More positively, members of Bournemouth Council have worked very hard with others in the area to establish and operate the Joint Committee for Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole. I am committed to making sure that we will continue to work together to pave the way for successful implementation in anticipation of your final decision to implement Future Dorset. You will be aware that colleague members from Christchurch Borough Council continue to play an active part in the Joint Committee and that their officers are very constructively supporting some critical work areas.

All members of the Joint Committee are leading in the work necessary to make a success of the implementation. This programme has already begun, with Task and Finish Groups established to:

- develop a Council Tax Harmonisation strategy – prioritising models that freeze or even reduce council tax for residents of Christchurch;
- disaggregate the county council's budget and services in Christchurch;
- contribute to the Department's work on the Structural Change Order, on which work between officers of the councils and DCLG is already underway;

- support the Department's work on electoral arrangements for the new council, with this matter a key agenda item for the Joint Committee; and
- propose plans that will preserve the distinct civic identities of Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole, with a clear direction that Mayoralities and Civic traditions are protected.

A website (<https://bcpjointcommittee.wordpress.com/>) has been created to promote the business of the Joint Committee and share its agenda and reports.

At senior officer level, a programme board has been established comprising the Chief Executives / Managing Director of the four constituent councils (Bournemouth, Christchurch, Poole and Dorset). A comprehensive work programme to deliver the new authority has been developed. A full-time Programme Director has been appointed and a project team is being put in place to deliver the work programme in what is now a very compressed timescale.

You will no doubt be aware that, since the proposal was submitted to you, the financial pressures on this Council have increased further. This is driven by greater demand for services, particularly adult social care and children's social care, and the limits presented in the Local Government Financial Settlement, with the additional 1% on the cap limit only just mitigating against the cost of the recently agreed public sector pay rise. I expect these circumstances to continue for many years. This is exactly what we anticipated at the time when the proposal for reorganisation was conceived and developed. Indeed, a report presented to the Joint Committee on 15 December advised that Medium Term Financial Plan considerations show a cumulative funding gap for Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole councils of £21.2million by 2020/21, plus a £33.9million revenue funding gap for Dorset County Council, of which an element is of course attributable to the provision of services to the residents of Christchurch. I firmly believe we need a long-term solution and reorganising from nine councils to two in Dorset is a vital part of this.

I should also highlight the consequences of not proceeding with the Future Dorset proposal. Failure to proceed would mean:

- A negative impact on all residents of Dorset, due to the lasting and deep cuts that would be made to frontline services in order to deliver a balanced budget each year. The reality would be unnecessary spending on governance, management, overheads and support services – spending that could, largely, be diverted to vital frontline services, were this proposal implemented. Such are the pressures that lie ahead that I would be unable to guarantee that there would not be service failures.
- In particular, the ability to meet the rising needs of vulnerable adults would be severely threatened. Like many top tier local authorities, Bournemouth Council, and indeed Dorset County Council and the Borough of Poole, are at crisis point in the provision of adult social care services. The Government's recently-announced funding settlement, whilst offering short-term mitigation, does nothing to provide a long-term, sustainable solution to funding adult social care provision. By 2025, only half of Dorset's population will be of working age. This rapidly rising demographic, alongside the ongoing effects of austerity, mean that there is a real risk that the council will fail in its statutory duties. The efficiencies afforded by delivering services on a larger scale are clear. They are set out in the Future Dorset submission and are an opportunity that we owe it to our communities to take.
- Likewise, the rapidly rising birth rate in recent years presents challenges and pressures on top tier councils to properly protect vulnerable children and young people. Without the proposed change, which will bring about more sustainable

and efficient service provision, there is a real risk that this council will be faced with a reduced ability to keep children safe, in particular those with complex needs requiring high-cost, specialist support and care.

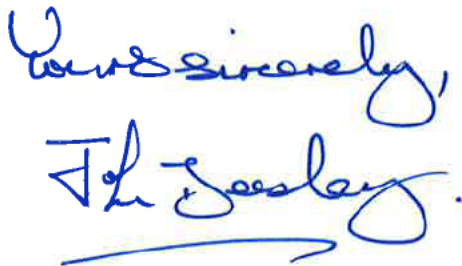
- The opportunity to create a 21st century council, capable of implementing a strong Industrial Strategy for the area would be lost. No change would mean losing the best chance in a generation to create two unitary councils which would promote successful economic development, create the right environment for business and the conditions for prosperity. This would be to the detriment of Dorset and the UK as a whole. It would result in a significant loss of confidence in the Government from the business community of Dorset, which includes many nationally and internationally significant and successful organisations.
- The expectations of the public and our public sector partners who supported the proposals for reorganisation so clearly in the consultation would not be fulfilled.

I should like to highlight the strong and consistent support of our MPs in this process. Both Tobias Ellwood and Conor Burns have been actively supportive from the outset, and regularly engaged in our work on the proposed reorganisation. I know that they are as committed as this council is to the solution proposed. I will continue to work with them in the best interests of Bournemouth and Dorset as a whole.

I am aware that you are keen to secure further local consent for the Future Dorset proposal. I am extremely pleased that, since your announcement on 7 November, very positive progress has been made in this regard, with eight of the nine councils in Dorset now either supporting or not opposing the proposal. I would also highlight that, collectively, Bournemouth Borough Council, Borough of Poole and Dorset County Council represent every resident of Dorset, and, as you know, were instrumental in the development of, and remain committed to, the plan submitted.

Finally, I would urge you to make your final decision as soon as possible. April 2019 is less than 15 months away and you will be aware of the huge amount of work necessary to make this happen - through Parliamentary business, by the Boundary Commission and, not least, by the local authorities in Dorset. Further delay and uncertainty will increase the risks to successful implementation and the outcomes we want to achieve for residents and businesses. We owe it to our residents, the business community, partners and stakeholders to demonstrate our commitment to delivering great public services and a prosperous economic area for the long term. With goodwill and support from all parties there is just enough time to get the job done and launch the new council successfully.

Given the weight of evidence behind the Future Dorset proposal, coupled with strong and compelling representations demonstrating that support continues in force, I look forward to your positive final decision.



Cllr John Beesley
Leader
Bournemouth Borough Council

Cc Rt. Hon. Tobias Ellwood MP, Conor Burns MP

Appended documents

- Appendix 1: ORS consultation method statement
- Appendix 2: ORS Statement in response to Christchurch Borough Council resolution of 2 January
- Appendix 3: Commentary on leaflets issued in Christchurch
- Appendix 4: Commentary on Christchurch Borough Council representation to the Secretary of State

Appendix A

2. The Consultation Process

Overview of the consultation

The commission

- ^{2.1} Dorset's nine councils (Bournemouth Borough Council, Christchurch Borough Council, Dorset County Council, East Dorset District Council, North Dorset District Council, the Borough of Poole, Purbeck District Council, West Dorset District Council, Weymouth & Portland Borough Council) are working together to seek the views of residents, businesses and other stakeholders about options for the future structure of local government across the County. The particular focus is whether the nine councils in Dorset should be reduced to just two new unitaries; and, if so, which areas should the new councils cover.
- ^{2.2} Opinion Research Services (ORS) is a spin-out company from Swansea University with a UK-wide reputation for social research and major statutory consultations. Following a competitive national tender, ORS was jointly appointed by Dorset's nine councils to advise on their *Reshaping Your Councils* consultation programme, and also to manage and independently report major aspects of the consultation.
- ^{2.3} The consultation period ran for eight weeks, from 30th August until 25th October 2016 and the full programme included all the following elements:

Independent research by ORS

Advising on the consultation activity;

Designing informative and interactive presentation material suitable for use at the deliberative workshops;

Designing, implementing and analysing responses to online and/or paper versions of:

Open Consultation Questionnaire

Household Survey

Survey of Parish and Town Councils;

Recruiting, facilitating and reporting eight deliberative workshops with randomly selected members of the public;

Facilitating and reporting three deliberative workshops with parish and town councils; two with representatives of the voluntary and community sectors; and two with members of the business community – as well as undertaking nine telephone interviews with representatives from Dorset's largest companies;

Analysing and summarising submissions received by Dorset's councils during the consultation period; and

Producing an overall report of all consultation findings and guidance on the interpretation of the material.

Dorset's councils' additional consultation activity

Making the consultation document and open consultation questionnaire widely available in all public libraries across Dorset and on request at council offices or by post;

Promoting the consultation and informing the public by running over 40 roadshow events with residents across Bournemouth, Dorset, Poole and all the districts/borough areas;

Creating a dedicated informative website for the *Reshaping Your Councils* consultation;

Promoting the consultation on all council websites, intranet sites, social media channels and e-newsletters;

Providing widespread publicity and briefings for stakeholders including, MPs, network business events, the Diversity Forum, Youth Forums, a presentation for residents with Learning Disabilities, and other area forums;

Media launch and press releases with 93 media pieces across print, radio, TV and commentary; and

Contacting a wide range of stakeholders and partner organisations informing them of the consultation and inviting them to take part – including the community and voluntary sector, town and parish councils, business organisations and business networks.

Quantitative consultation

- ^{2.4} A consultation document outlining the issues under consideration was produced by Dorset's councils in conjunction with ORS. With that foundation, ORS then designed three questionnaires tailored for different groups of respondents, with each questionnaire featuring the same common or core questions. In each of the three versions there were sections inviting respondents to make any further comments and also to profile those responding.

Open consultation questionnaire

- ^{2.5} The first form of quantitative consultation was the open consultation questionnaire which in principle was available for anyone to complete – either via a dedicated council partnership website (between 30th August and 25th October 2016) or through paper versions that were widely available in libraries across Dorset, Bournemouth and Poole (and they were also available on request from council offices or by post). The questionnaire was designed to be completed on the basis of the issues presented in the councils' joint consultation document – with questions about the 'proposal for change' and the options.
- ^{2.6} Open questionnaires are important forms of consultation in being inclusive and in giving people an opportunity to express their views; but they are not random sample surveys of a given population – so they cannot normally be expected to be representative of the general balance of opinion. For example, the young are usually under-represented while the elderly are over-represented; and the more motivated groups or areas are also typically over-represented compared with others.
- ^{2.7} In total, 12,542 questionnaires were completed. 10,606 were submitted online, with 1,936 received by post. 12,468 were received from individuals and 74 were submitted on behalf of organisations.

Household survey

- 2.8 The second form of quantitative consultation was the household survey. The survey was undertaken in order to ensure that a representative profile of opinions across Dorset was achieved about the same core questions as in the open questionnaire. To capture the views of the general population, questionnaires were sent to a random sample of 20,000 addresses across Dorset (drawn from the Royal Mail Postal Address File (PAF), an index of all residential addresses). The sample was stratified to ensure that each local authority area received an appropriate number of questionnaires: 2,000 addresses were randomly selected by ORS in each of the two-tier districts/boroughs and (because of their larger populations) 4,000 addresses were selected in each unitary authority. The selected households were also sent the consultation document and a unique online reference number to enable them to complete the survey online or return the paper copies via post.
- 2.9 The surveys were distributed on 6th September 2016, with a reminder sent to all non-responders on October 10th.
- 2.10 The survey was used because, with a population of around 750,000 residents, it was not practical or cost-effective to do a census of all households or residents. The key feature of a random sample survey is that in principle everyone in the given population has an equal chance of being included in the sample and so, with a fully random sample, it is possible to certify the accuracy of the findings within given limits.
- 2.11 The key point here is that survey accuracy depends on the arithmetic size of the sample, not its scale as a proportion of the population. For example, with a fully random sample of 384 cases, we may be 95% confident that findings are accurate to within ± 5 percentage points – which means that 19 times in 20 the survey findings will be no more than ± 5 percentage points different from the result that would have been achieved had everyone in the population been surveyed.
- 2.12 In this case, the household survey used stratified random sampling, so that all addresses in each local authority area had an equal chance of selection. The sample was designed to provide sufficient responses for the analysis of views in each of the areas.
- 2.13 The extent to which results can be generalised from a sample depends on how well the sample represents the population from which it is drawn, and different types of people in different places may have been more or less likely to take part. The returned sample was weighted to make it representative of each of the local authority areas as well as the overall Dorset area.
- 2.14 The overall achieved sample of 4,258 responses yields overall findings for the general population of the whole of Dorset that are accurate to within about ± 2 percentage points.
- 2.15 Of course, the smaller samples within individual authority areas have larger error margins, but in this case they still provide sound data. Taking into account the sample sizes, the opinion splits, and the degrees of statistical weightings used (to compensate for different response rates from different demographic groups), the survey findings are sufficiently accurate to allow confident conclusions to be drawn about opinions on the 'case for change' and options in the different local authority areas. The error margins and confidence levels for key questions are indicated where appropriate in the chapter dealing with the household survey.

Parish and town councils survey

- 2.16 A separate survey was designed and distributed by ORS to capture the responses of parish and town councils (as opposed to their individual members). Where email addresses were available, invitations to respond were sent electronically to town and parish clerks, whereas those without email addresses were contacted by letter. A follow-up invitation letter was sent to all those councils that had not responded to the initial email invitation after two weeks to ensure their awareness of the consultation, and a final reminder was sent on October 12th both by email and by post to all parish and town councils that had not responded by this date. In total, 120 parish and town councils responded to the survey.

Deliberative consultation

Deliberative workshops with members of the public, parish and town councils, the voluntary/community sectors and the business community

Fifteen Workshops

- 2.17 The consultation meetings reported here used a 'deliberative' approach to encourage members of the public, parish and town councillors, voluntary and community sector representatives, and members of the business community to reflect in depth about the 'reshaping your councils' consultation options, while both receiving and questioning background information and discussing their ideas in detail.
- 2.18 All the meetings lasted for around two-and-a-half hours and, in total, 158 members of the public, 117 parish and town councillors, 58 voluntary and community sector representatives and 44 members of the business community participated.

WORKSHOP TYPE/ LOCATION	DATE	NUMBER OF ATTENDEES
West Dorset Town & Parish Council (Litton Cheney)	8th September 2016	38
West Dorset Public (Dorchester)	19th September 2016	21
North Dorset Town & Parish Council (Blandford Forum)	20th September 2016	50
Weymouth & Portland Public (Weymouth)	21st September 2016	16
North Dorset Public (Blandford Forum)	22nd September 2016	23
Purbeck Public (Wareham)	22nd September 2016	21
Christchurch Public	27th September 2016	23
Poole Public	27th September 2016	17
West of Dorset Voluntary/Community Sector (Dorchester)	28th September 2016	22

Bournemouth Public	28th September 2016	16
East Dorset Public (Wimborne)	28th September 2016	21
East of Dorset Voluntary/Community Sector (Bournemouth)	29th September 2016	37
East Dorset Town & Parish Council (Wimborne)	29th September 2016	29
Poole Business	18th October 2016	33
Weymouth Business	20th October 2016	11

- 2.19 The voluntary/community and business sector workshops were convened and recruited by officers of Dorset's councils and local networks (namely Bournemouth Council for Voluntary Service, Dorset Community Action and Poole Council for Voluntary Service) but independently run by ORS. Furthermore, the Dorset Association of Parish and Town Councils (DAPTC) was most helpful in organising and recruiting the workshops for parish and town councillors from across Dorset, which were chaired by the DAPTC, but facilitated by ORS.
- 2.20 Local residents, on the other hand, were recruited by random-digit telephone dialling (to landline and mobile numbers) from ORS's Social Research Call Centre. Having been initially contacted by phone, all participants were then written to - to confirm the invitation and the arrangements; and those who agreed to come then received telephone or written reminders shortly before each meeting. Such recruitment by telephone is an effective way of ensuring that the participants are independent and broadly representative of the wider community.
- 2.21 Overall, the public participants were a broad cross-section of residents from the local areas and, as standard good practice, were recompensed for their time and efforts in travelling and taking part. In recruitment, care was taken to ensure that no potential participants were disqualified or disadvantaged by disabilities or any other factors, and the venues at which the forums met were readily accessible. People's special needs were taken into account in the recruitment and at the venues. The random telephone recruitment process was monitored to ensure social diversity in terms of a wide range of criteria – including, for example: gender; age; ethnicity; social grade; and disability/limiting long-term illness (LLTI). Those involved in running the consultation were excluded from taking part in the sessions.
- 2.22 Although, like all other forms of qualitative consultation, deliberative workshops cannot be certified as statistically representative samples of public opinion, the meetings reported here gave diverse members of the public, parish and town councillors and representatives of the voluntary, community and business sectors the opportunity to participate actively. Because the meetings were inclusive, the outcomes are broadly indicative of how informed opinion would incline on the basis of similar discussions.

The Agenda

- 2.23 All forums began, for the sake of context and consistency, with a concise review of the current council set-up across Dorset. Following this, the prospect of reducing the number of councils from nine to two was considered in detail; and finally, participants were asked to examine what areas two new councils should cover if the number was reduced from nine to two. Throughout, discussion was stimulated via a

presentation devised by ORS to inform and encourage dialogue on the issues - and participants were encouraged to ask any questions they wished throughout the sessions.

Depth Interviews with some of Dorset's largest employers

- ^{2.24} In addition to the 15 deliberative workshops outlined above, ORS also undertook nine depth telephone interviews with representatives of some of Dorset's largest employers, namely:

Addo Group	Ageas Retail	Agincare Group Ltd.
Aim Aviation Ltd.	Atlas Elektronik	Hall & Woodhouse Ltd.
JPMorgan	Siemens	Yellow Buses

- ^{2.25} Council officers made initial contact with these managers to explain why we sought to speak to them, and the details of those who consented to take part were passed to ORS who then made follow-up contact to arrange the interviews.
- ^{2.26} The interviews lasted for about 15 minutes and explored most of the same issues as discussed in the workshops, namely: whether there is a case for reducing the number of councils across Dorset; whether the number of councils should reduce from nine to two; and, if this was to happen, which areas the new councils should cover.

Written submissions

^{2.27} During the formal consultation process 82 submissions were received. The table below shows the breakdown of contributors by type.

TYPE OF CORRESPONDENT	NUMBER OF RESPONSES	NAME OF ORGANISATION
Community/Voluntary Organisations	10	Bournemouth 2026 Trust Bournemouth Chinese School Dorset Local Nature Partnership DOTS Disability LGB&T Dorset Equality Network RSPB UK Nepal Friendship Society Uniting the Conurbation (2 submissions) Unity in Vision
Local Businesses and Chambers of Trade and Commerce	7	AFC Bournemouth Bournemouth Chamber of Trade and Commerce Bournemouth Development Company & Morgan Sindall Investments Bright Blue Day Cowling & West South Coast Land Urban Guild
Statutory Partners	4	Dorset CCG Dorset Fire and Rescue Service Historic England The Royal Bournemouth and Christchurch Hospitals
Members of Parliament and Political Parties	4	Christopher Chope MP Michael Tomlinson MP Bournemouth Labour Party West and South Dorset Green Party
Local Area Partnerships	3	Beaminster and Villages Local Area Partnership Bridport Local Area Partnership Sherborne Area Partnership
Parish and Town Councils	3	Blandford Forum Town Council Dorset Association of Parish and Town Councils Parish Council of Langton Matravers
Local Residents	51	
TOTAL		82

^{2.28} ORS has read all the written submissions carefully and summarised them in the full report.

Note on petitions

- 2.29 It should also be noted that, although it was not submitted to ORS or Dorset's councils during the consultation period, ORS is aware of a petition organised by the Keep Christchurch Special campaign group with the stated aim to:

Show Christchurch Borough Council the weight of popular opinion concerning the possible takeover by Bournemouth.

- 2.30 At the time of writing, neither ORS nor any of Dorset's councils have been informed of how many people have signed the petition, so it is difficult to comment in more detail on how much weight it should carry. The petition header reads as follows:

WE THE UNDERSIGNED being residents of the Borough of Christchurch (or being persons employed in or studying in the Borough as indicated by the letters E or S in the right-hand margin) do respectfully ask the Borough Council not to agree to any merger with Bournemouth Borough Council as envisaged by either Option 2 (a) or (b) in the Consultation Document for the "Reshaping Your Councils" project.

- 2.31 Petitions are clearly important in indicating public anxiety about important issues and so Dorset's councils will wish to take seriously any of which they are aware. Nonetheless, they should also note that petitions are not necessarily sophisticated or subtle means of reflecting general public opinion, and in some cases can even exaggerate public sentiments if organised by motivated opponents using inaccurate or emotional petition statements.
- 2.32 In this case, the petition's stated aim of avoiding a "takeover" and its heading, which refers to a "merger with" Bournemouth Borough Council, are both over-simplified and somewhat emotional. It is, after all, inaccurate to describe either options 2a or 2b as simply a 'takeover' or 'merger' with Bournemouth - as if only those two councils would be included in the new structure. The petition fails to do justice to the nature of the options, for under 2a four council areas, and under 2b three council areas, would be replaced in the creation of a new unitary authority. So, neither option involves only Bournemouth and Christchurch; and neither option involves a takeover or merger of currently existing councils. Therefore, it could be said that the petition fails to address fairly the key features of the current options.
- 2.33 More generally, the petition fails to address the bigger and primary question of whether Dorset should in principle reduce from nine councils to two new unitary authorities.

Nature of consultation

Proportional and fair

- 2.34 Dorset's councils' consultation programme was conscientious: that is, it was open, accessible and fair to stakeholders across Dorset. The consultation was also proportional to the importance of the issues and conforms with good practice, both in its overall scale and in the balance of elements included. The key good practice requirements for proper consultation programmes are that they should:

Be conducted at a formative stage, before decisions are taken;

Allow sufficient time for people to participate and respond;

Provide the public and stakeholders with enough background information to allow them to consider the issues and any proposals intelligently and critically; and

Be properly taken into consideration before decisions are finally taken.

- 2.35 Taken together, these four elements do much to ensure the 'accountability' of public authorities.

Accountability

- 2.36 Consultation should promote accountability and assist decision making. Public bodies should give an account of their plans or proposals and they should ensure that all responses are taken into account in order to:

Be informed of any issues, viewpoints, implications or options that might have been overlooked;

Re-evaluate matters already known; and

Review priorities and principles.

- 2.37 Nonetheless, this does not mean that consultations are referenda. Properly understood, accountability means that public authorities should give an account of their plans and take into account public views: they should conduct fair and accessible consultation while reporting the outcomes openly and considering them fully. This does not mean that the majority views should automatically decide public policy; and the popularity or unpopularity of draft proposals should not displace professional and political judgement about what is the right or best decision in the circumstances. The levels of, and reasons for, public support or opposition are very important, but as considerations to be taken into account, not as factors that necessarily determine authorities' decisions.
- 2.38 For the public bodies considering the outcomes of consultation, the key question is not *Which proposal has most support?* but, *Are the reasons for the popularity or unpopularity of the proposals cogent?* In this context, Dorset's councils and ORS were clear that this important consultation programme should include both 'open' and deliberative elements in order to allow many people to take part via the open questionnaire while promoting informed engagement via the deliberative forums.
- 2.39 Consultation with informed audiences (who have the opportunity to question and test the evidence for particular proposals is especially valuable). All consultation elements are important and none should be disregarded, but the deliberative workshops, depth interviews and submissions are particularly worthy of consideration because they explore the arguments and the reasons for people's opinions.

Interpreting the consultation outcomes: the councils' role

- 2.40 Importantly, the different consultation methods cannot just be combined to yield a single point of view on the future of Dorset's councils that reconciles everyone's differences and is acceptable to all stakeholders involved. There are two main reasons why this is not possible. First, the consultation methods differ in type: they are qualitatively different and their outcomes cannot be just aggregated into a single result. Second, the different areas and sub-groups will inevitably have different perspectives on the reconfiguration options and there is no formula in the consultation process that can reconcile everyone's differences in a single way forward.
- 2.41 It is also important to recognise that the outcomes of the consultation process will need to be considered alongside other information available about the likely impact of each of the proposed options. Whilst the consultation process highlights aspects of this information that stakeholders

consider to be important, the councils will need to consider the appropriate emphasis to be placed on each element. In this sense there can be no single 'right' interpretation of all the consultation elements and other information available to the councils in their decision-making process.

The report

- ^{2.42} This report reviews the sentiments and judgements of respondents and participants on Dorset's councils' *Reshaping Your Councils* consultation. Verbatim quotations are used, in indented italics, not because we agree or disagree with them - but for their vividness in capturing recurrent points of view. ORS does not endorse any opinions, but seeks only to portray them accurately and clearly. The report is an interpretative summary of the issues raised by participants.
- ^{2.43} ORS is clear that its role is to analyse and explain the opinions and arguments of the many different interests participating in the consultation, but not to 'make a case' for any option or variant. In this report, we seek to profile the opinions and arguments of those who have responded to the consultation, but not to make any recommendations as to how the councils should make use of the reported results. Whilst this report brings together a wide range of evidence for the councils to consider, it is for the elected members to take decisions based on all the evidence available.

Appendix B

Proposed Local Government Reorganisation in Bournemouth, Dorset and Poole

STATEMENT FROM OPINION RESEARCH SERVICES – 4 January 2018

Opinion Research Services (ORS) is a university spin-out company that specialises in social research and regularly manages complex and important public consultation programmes. As a well-established, independent research organisation, ORS recognises that there can be legitimate and understandable disagreement about the interpretation of data; but our detailed consultation reports are objective and clearly set out the full range of feedback that is received.

ORS managed the consultation programme about the possible reorganisation of local government in Bournemouth, Dorset and Poole on behalf of Dorset's nine councils. The consultation process lasted from 30th August to 25th October 2016 and was wide-ranging enough to take account of many different views. ORS reported the outcomes of the consultation fairly and in detail to the Dorset councils. Our report identified strong support for the councils' proposals in many parts of the county, but recognised that levels of support for the different options varied and were lower in some areas, including Christchurch.

The consultation report confirmed that Christchurch had the highest proportion of residents responding to the *Open Questionnaire*, and that the majority of these favoured keeping nine councils. However, the *Household Survey* (based on a randomly selected and representative cross-section of residents) showed that a majority of Christchurch residents favoured the proposal to create two new councils; and 64% said that if two new councils were created, they would support Option 2b (in which Christchurch would join with Bournemouth and Poole), higher than the support for the councils' other options.

At their meeting on 2nd January 2018, Christchurch Borough Council concluded that they should write to ORS to express concern about the credibility of the consultation having considered the result of the referendum. However, the two key questions asked in the 2016 consultation differed considerably from the single question asked in the referendum. The ORS consultation asked (first) whether the number of councils should be reduced from nine to two, and (second) *"if two councils were created"* the extent of support for each of three options; whereas the referendum simply asked if there should be a *"single council covering Christchurch, Bournemouth and Poole"*. The referendum did not consider whether local government should be simplified in Dorset generally and it did not ask about the range of possible options. Moreover, the ORS consultation assessed public opinion in September/October 2016 (based on the information in the consultation document prepared by Dorset's nine councils), whereas the referendum was in December 2017 (more than a year later) following extensive local publicity and campaigning.

ORS understands the public concerns about the proposed local government reorganisation and we also recognise the important role that Christchurch Borough Council has in representing and protecting the public interest. However, the 2016 household survey provided a reliable measure of public opinion based on the consultation document and the range of options available (subject to the confidence intervals reported). It is also important to note that the consultation report did not depend solely on the household survey, but also presented findings from the open questionnaire (recognising majority support for keeping nine councils in Christchurch) as well as from an extensive programme of deliberative workshops and numerous written submissions.

Therefore, taking all of the evidence into account, the ORS report fairly concluded that: (a) the consultation showed *"widespread public support for the restructuring of local government"* in Dorset; and (b) that *"In general, across all areas of Dorset, there was an emphatic preference for option 2b as the fairest and most balanced of the three"*. Taken together, those statements are an accurate and fair summary of the outcomes of the 2016 public consultation process.

Appendix C

CRITIQUE OF LEAFLETS ISSUED IN CHRISTCHURCH: REPRESENTATION TO SECRETARY OF STATE FOR COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT, RT. HON. SAJID JAVID, MP

Prior to and during the Christchurch Borough local poll, several leaflets were circulated to households and made available in public places in Christchurch containing multiple inaccuracies. These were designed to stimulate participation on the local poll and, specifically, to encourage participants to respond 'no' to the question posed.

The persistent claim and overarching theme within all these leaflets is that Christchurch will be “ruled from / taken over by Bournemouth”. This table captures a selection of inaccurate claims that were widely circulated, and sets out the factual position as is consistent with the Future Dorset proposal.

LEAFLET 1:

Content within leaflet circulated in May 2017. This included the Christchurch Borough Council logo and the Bournemouth Borough Council logo and was clearly designed to mislead readers to believe that it was jointly issued by these two local authorities, when in fact it was funded and produced by an individual based in Hampshire.

Bournechurch
CHURCH OF ENGLAND
Building a Better Bournechurch

Bournechurch
CHURCH OF ENGLAND
Building a Better Bournechurch

RETAIN YOUR INDEPENDENCE

RETAIN YOUR INDEPENDENCE

VOTE NO TO THE AMALGAMATION PLAN - IT'S A BAD MARRIAGE AND IT'S GOING TO COST YOU AND YOUR FAMILY A LOT OF MONEY

Vote NO
to any proposed amalgamation with
Bournmouth and Poole

NO	
YES	X

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Printed by Churchward, 100 Church Lane, Bournemouth BH2 9AT.

NO	X
YES	

[illegible][illegible]

Produced by the same individual as leaflet one, this was circulated to homes in Christchurch at the time of the referendum.

LEAFLET 3:

Origin: Keep Christchurch Special group; address registered to Christchurch borough and Dorset County Councillor David Jones

KEEP Christchurch SPECIAL - JUST VOTE NO

LOCAL GOVERNMENT and Elector Christchurch are being asked to decide whether to continue the special status of Christchurch. Christchurchians, represented by a 13 "Yes" Status Committee, have agreed to put the question to a referendum in Christchurch next year.

The referendum will Christchurch people really want a referendum to decide whether or not to keep Christchurch special? It's a referendum that will be held in 1992.

TO HELP A MAJOR CHRISTCHURCH SPECIAL, JUST VOTE NO!

YOUR SERVICES ARE SAFE, SAVES MP

As well as being a great supporter of the Christchurch Special, the Mayor of Christchurch, Sir John Key, has also been elected to the House of Representatives. Sir John Key is a member of the Labour Party and is a strong supporter of the Christchurch Special.

On the 14th Christchurch has had a referendum on whether to keep the special status of Christchurch. The result was a clear majority in favour of keeping the special status of Christchurch.

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The referendum will Christchurch people really want a referendum to decide whether or not to keep Christchurch special? It's a referendum that will be held in 1992.

TO HELP A MAJOR CHRISTCHURCH SPECIAL, JUST VOTE NO!

The Council Tax Freeze that isn't

One of the major arguments for keeping the special status of Christchurch is that it allows the Council to freeze the Council Tax. However, the Council has decided to increase the Council Tax by 10% in 1992.

The Council has decided to increase the Council Tax by 10% in 1992. This is a decision that will be made by the Council in 1992.

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Why do the Government and Public want to take away?

The Government and the Public want to take away the special status of Christchurch because they want to have a referendum on whether to keep the special status of Christchurch.

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DOES CHRISTCHURCH HAVE TEARS?

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Origin: unknown

DORCHESTER, BOURNEMOUTH AND POOLE

ON

- tell you they are at risk. They are not.**

in the Christchurch Council Referendum on a proposed Rotorua

Forde and Christchurch Library Company

- By voting NO you will be:**

with Bournemouth and Poole.

control of its own destiny.

- Christchurch Council voted against joining with Bournemouth and Poole. Christchurch will

- services, just as DeSoto County Council does at the moment. There are other options too

CONNECTION TABLE

- Constitutional Council Tax would increase and may even decrease**

SUMMARY

- from them, and much has changed financially, they are out of date, and inaccurate

CONCLUSION

- DO YOU WANT TO LOSE CONTROL OF PLANNING, HOUSING DEVELOPMENT AND LICENSING?

VOIE

No

The following table references various claims from within these leaflets and robustly challenges these claims with factual corrections.

Claim	Factual position
<p>“SERVICES DEALT WITH BY DORSET COUNTY COUNCIL. Some may tell you they are at risk. They are not”</p>	<p>Dorset County Council has a MTFP funding gap of almost £34m by 2020/21. This means that, without the fundamental change set out in Future Dorset, county council services are at risk for all residents within that council area.</p>
<p>“We are told that this is all about saving money”</p>	<p>It is partly about saving money and bringing sustainability to public services in Dorset. It is also about a greater prize – a stronger economy, a more attractive inward investment climate, a clearer alignment with strategic health plans, a higher profile for the area and a better quality of life for residents across Dorset.</p>
<p>“Bournemouth and Poole Councils are in serious financial difficulty”</p>	<p>All Dorset's councils face funding crises, in particular the top tier authorities of Bournemouth, Dorset and Poole. Despite this, both Bournemouth and Poole councils have frozen council tax for five consecutive years 2011/12 – 2015/16, and all three councils have consistently delivered balanced budgets or better.</p> <p>In addition, Dorset County Council, which provides over 80% of services to residents of Christchurch, has a cumulative MTFP funding gap of almost £34m by 2020/21.</p>
<p>“Christchurch's assets would all be transferred to Bournemouth and used to help reduce Bournemouth's debt burden”</p>	<p>Bournemouth and Poole Councils are both asset and cash-rich, with £631m and £583m in long-term net assets excluding pensions liabilities, and £82m & £52m in reserves respectively. The value of these assets and reserves far outweigh any held by Christchurch Borough Council yet these assets would all transfer to the new council that would serve Christchurch.</p>
<p>“Whatever happens services will still be provided by the top-tier Authority for the area, whether that is a Unitary Council or a County Council.”</p>	<p>There will be no top-tier council unless the Secretary of State changes his mind and refuses the Future Dorset proposal. Christchurch Borough Council can only continue in a sovereign state if the two tier structure is preserved, the consequences of which are set out in our representation</p>
<p>“Bournemouth has a 50-year record of incompetent financial management”</p>	<p>Bournemouth has been a unitary authority, providing all local government services to its residents, since April 1997. Since being a Unitary, the council has set a balanced budget every year and has delivered a net nil or better outturn for at least the last 10 years.</p>

Claim	Factual position
<p>“Bournemouth has very little land to accommodate new housing required by Government, so they would have to look to Christchurch and Poole for land.”</p>	<p>Bournemouth Council is exceeding current housing targets, whilst Christchurch did not manage to meet theirs in 2013/14, 2014/15 or 2015/16.</p>
<p>“Others have not increased their council tax in previous years and now find themselves in debt”</p>	<p>These two matters are not related, as council tax is a revenue contribution for running services. Debt, whilst having a revenue implication in terms of repayment, is not a result of council tax freezes or used to fund revenue services. Debts are taken on in order to fund investments, deliver capital schemes, or add value to assets.</p>
<p>“Large councils lose touch with their electorate, react too slowly, naval gaze and become inefficient. Government research has shown that larger councils are less efficient”</p>	<p>The Government says that local authorities operate most efficiently when serving around 400,000 – 600,000 residents. Research to support the Future Dorset proposal shows that the two new councils would provide the optimum level of savings, be the most efficient at service delivery and be best able to represent their area at a national level.</p>
<p>“Bournemouth would control all planning matters”</p>	<p>The new Council would take responsibility for all council services, including planning. The new council would have an equal responsibility to all its residents, regardless of which area they live. Bournemouth Borough Council would not exist.</p>
<p>All Airport business rates would go to Bournemouth</p>	<p>Bournemouth's Business Rates Payable is £78m in comparison to Christchurch's £21m including the Airport. Central Government has plans to allow all business rates to be retained by Councils, but they have made it clear they will also transfer a number of responsibilities to Councils to make the overall scheme of retaining 100% business rates cost neutral. If this goes ahead and business rate retention is agreed, these would be by the new council, and used for the benefit of the whole area that that council covers.</p>
<p>“excess from every Christchurch council tax payer will be set against the debts of Bournemouth and Poole.”</p>	<p>Any debt repayment modelling will be based on the circumstances of the sovereign council that exists at the time the debt is taken out.</p>

Claim	Factual position
<p>This is against local people's wishes</p>	<p>There's overwhelming support across all of Dorset for this proposal. Extensive consultation by an independent research company, ORS, was commissioned by all nine of Dorset's councils. It conducted the research over eight weeks last autumn and found support for this proposal is strong right across the county. In both rural and urban areas, in all boroughs and districts, a statistically sound sample found that residents favoured this solution.</p> <p>It found that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 73% of respondents across Dorset support two councils instead of nine • 65% of respondents support the Future Dorset proposal <p>It also identified support amongst business representatives, public sectors partners, businesses themselves, community groups and parish councils all across Dorset.</p> <p>The open questionnaire, in which any resident could have their say, identified that residents from Christchurch were the least supportive of any change, with 41% supporting two unitaries, and 31% & 25% supporting options 2b (Future Dorset) and 2c respectively. So in many ways the result of the referendum is unsurprising as it demonstrates that only those with the greatest interest or specific motivations will self-select and participate when offered the opportunity.</p> <p>In the household survey, which used a methodology that provides results that represent accurately the response that would have been received should every single resident have taken part, 63% of residents in Christchurch supported change, with 64% backing option 2b (Future Dorset) and only 17% backing 2c.</p>
<p>"Our MP Chris Chope has persuaded the Government to let us submit alternatives"</p>	<p>This is standard process during the representations period and is not down to a single MP. No costed or viable alternatives have been provided. The two-tier system is unsustainable, as acknowledged by the six councils behind the Future Dorset submission, and via the Cities & Local Government Devolution Act 2016. Option 2c - whereby Christchurch was included within the Dorset area council - was the least supported option by Christchurch residents in both the open questionnaire (only 25% backed this option) or representative household survey (in which just 17% back this option).</p>
<p>"The Council wants to remain as it is... to continue to 'buy in' services such as Social Care"</p>	<p>This suggests that Christchurch Borough Council has control of specifying, procuring and governing the services provided by Dorset County Council. This is not the case and is misleading.</p>
<p>"Christchurch has the land and money Bournemouth needs to help them resolve their financial and housing problems."</p>	<p>Bournemouth Council is exceeding current housing targets, whilst Christchurch Council did not manage to meet theirs in 2013/14, 2014/15 or 2015/16. Bournemouth Council has £631m in net assets, and £82m in reserves.</p>

Claim	Factual position
<p>"Bournemouth has almost no land left for housing and is not going to be able to meet the Government's house building targets"</p>	<p>Bournemouth Council is exceeding current housing targets, whilst Christchurch Council did not manage to meet theirs in 2013/14, 2014/15 or 2015/16.</p>
<p>Planning, licensing, green belt, transport needs planning would all be "given to Bournemouth"</p>	<p>These would be the responsibility of the new council, with equal responsibility to safeguard the entire area. Bournemouth Borough Council would not exist.</p>
<p>Christchurch residents would not benefit from this proposal</p>	<p>It is doing residents of Christchurch a huge disservice to suggest that they will not benefit from change. Dorset County Council, which provides almost all local government services to the residents of Christchurch, including libraries, education, highways maintenance, adult social care, children's services, and trading standards, faces a cumulative £34million service funding gap by 2020/21. Future Dorset is Dorset County Council's proposal (along with Bournemouth, Poole North Dorset, West Dorset and Weymouth & Portland Councils) for saving money and freeing up funds to make services sustainable in the long run, for everyone in Dorset.</p>
<p>"We could find that we are forced to maintain a gypsy and traveller site for all three towns"</p>	<p>Neither Bournemouth nor Poole Council have any plans for gypsy and traveller sites. Whilst any new policy would be down to the new council to determine, current policy in both Bournemouth and Poole is to discourage temporary settlement through the installation of deterrents and strong management of any encampments</p>
<p>"In September 2015 the Leaders of four Councils met on the Bournemouth sands..."</p>	<p>The photograph took place at Branksome Beach in Poole.</p>

Claim	Factual position
<p>"Bournemouth has asked the government to force Christchurch into the new planned 'Super Council'."</p>	<p>The proposal has the backing of six councils, including Dorset County Council, which serves residents of Christchurch. Future Dorset was prepared because the six councils behind it can no longer justify so many councils with all the costs that running them entails, in these times of financial pressure and austerity. The running costs of two councils instead of nine will be significantly lower, freeing up funds for spending on frontline services.</p>
<p>400,000 would be represented by 40 elected councillors</p>	<p>The number of councillors for each new council is expected that there will be around 75 per local authority. This alone will save over £1.1million each year across Dorset. Greater accountability will come from the clarity that local people will have over the role of their local authority and their councillors – one council for all services provided locally will be much easier for people to hold to account.</p>
<p>"Christchurch would be lucky to have a maximum of two councillors in the Cabinet"</p>	<p>Cabinet posts are not allocated on an area basis; they would be appointed by the Leader of the new Council.</p>
<p>"The Government now says that there is a maximum FIVE YEARS transition period" (for CTH)</p>	<p>DCLG officials have stated that a ten year harmonisation period is the maximum acceptable.</p>

Appendix D



APPENDIX D

Bournemouth Borough Council Critique of Christchurch Borough Council Representation to the Secretary of State, as discussed at Christchurch Full Council on 2nd January 2018

Comment on Christchurch Borough Council's review of the Future Dorset proposal

1. There are numerous inaccuracies within the Christchurch Borough Council representation which Bournemouth Council feels it is important to challenge, as, collectively, they provide more than sufficient basis for the quality and accuracy of the Christchurch Borough Council submission to be disregarded entirely.
2. By way of example the statement that "Bournemouth and Poole have already put in place a plan to share services and create a single officer structure." Whilst efficiencies have been made in corporate and executive functions in this way, along with libraries and seafront management, both councils have now formally agreed that there are no further plans to create single officer structures elsewhere across the two boroughs.
3. The claim that the Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole unitary council would be 'remote' is inaccurate, as the entire new borough, at its widest point, would be just 17 miles across. Dorchester is more than 30 miles from Christchurch.
4. From a financial perspective, Christchurch may be financially secure and sustainable in the very short-term, however the upper tier services provided by Dorset County Council to Christchurch residents could not be described in this way and certainly could not be described as sustainable for future generations. The increasing cost and demand for these upper tier services were a particular driver of the Future Dorset proposal. In reality, the financial position continues to worsen rather than improve for all local authorities, so the rationale for wholesale restructuring becomes even more compelling.
5. It needs to be borne in mind that only 13% of the 2017/18 Council Tax paid by residents in Christchurch is being used to fund the services provided by Christchurch Borough Council. The majority of the remaining 87% is passed directly to Dorset County Council (with a small proportion also passed Dorset Police and Dorset Fire & Rescue Services). Therefore, it could be considered a misrepresentation to say that Christchurch residents have no service revenue deficit apportioned to them. They clearly already have a considerable stake in the current and future deficit of Dorset County Council.
6. Similarly, it is disingenuous to state that "Christchurch residents could pay more". Christchurch residents are already paying more than residents in Poole and Bournemouth, and have done for many years. It is a certainty that, under the proposed two-tier retention in the Dorset area, Christchurch residents would pay more council tax than those within a unitary structure. Although the final model for council tax harmonisation is yet to be agreed, the Joint Committee has agreed that the Council Tax Harmonisation Task and Finish group should prioritise models which include freezes and/or reductions to the absolute level of Council Tax paid by Christchurch residents, for the harmonisation period.
7. There is no evidence to suggest a revised business rate retention system, either 75% as now proposed or 100% as discussed in the paper, will provide a sustainable funding solution to the ongoing pressures presented by either Adult Social Care or Children's Social Care. Key parameters of a 75% (or 100%) Business Rates retention system are that it would be fiscally neutral at a national level.

8. There is no basis for claiming that Christchurch would be subject to a "democratic deficit" in the new unitary council. In fact, only five Christchurch councillors currently influence spending on the 80%+ of services delivered by Dorset County Council, whereas on the new council, this representation could double.
9. There is no evidence that Future Dorset proposals pose a risk to the current successful shared partnership arrangements between the nine Councils in Dorset. The report makes statements about potential risks which are merely conjecture. For example, there is a concern expressed about "moving services such as local recycling facilities and revenues and benefits offices" so that residents would have to make long journeys to access services. These statements are nothing more than speculation. The new Council will make decisions about frontline service provision so that all residents have appropriate access to services, and indeed the Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Joint Committee agreed at its meeting on 21st November that "The transfer of services from one authority to another will not disadvantage individual people receiving services/care. This is the overriding principle and will be a key determinant on how disaggregation will be applied."
10. The attempt in the representation to extrapolate the current views of residents across Dorset using comparison with the outcomes of the recent poll in Christchurch is completely flawed and invalid. The methodologies are not like-for-like and cannot be compared, the application of the result across all other areas is nothing but speculation. It should be ignored completely.
11. There is also extensive reference to civic tradition and the desire to preserve these in Christchurch. These are important to all three councils and this is acknowledged in the setting up of the Joint Committee's Task and Finish Group on mayoralties and civic functions, at its meeting on 21st November, agreeing specifically to "Establish a separate Task and Finish Group to work with the Monitoring Officers to inform the Councils' input into the Order on the specific matter of civic arrangements beyond April 2019."

Comment on Christchurch Borough Council's alternative proposal

12. In short, there is no basis for the alternative proposal set out by Christchurch Borough Council. The predicted savings within the 'alternative options' presented are no more than guesses, as no evidence is presented which provides the basis for the figures included. They lack any credibility. For example, the proposal to combine all Children's and Adults Services in a Tricuro-style (LATC) model does not recognise that the services provided by Tricuro currently are those which have the specific potential for being traded. The figures for savings provided in the report in relation to the alternative model have no basis in a worked up business model nor are they based on the necessary understanding of upper tier authority services.
13. Although recommending a single unitary for Bournemouth and Poole, the proposal is not backing a single authority for the rest of Dorset. It is critical to note that, in the statistically-sound household survey, a unitary for Bournemouth and Poole was not a favoured option by local residents of Bournemouth, or Poole or Christchurch. It is not supported by either Council and the Local Partnerships work demonstrated that it was not a good financial option on a pan-Dorset basis.
14. Despite having had a year to prepare a detailed business case, there is no evidence of due diligence having been undertaken on the viability of the proposed model of service delivery. No independent verification, no evidence to assess the impact on the viability of

any ongoing sovereign local authority (such as Dorset County Council), and no evidence to support the sustainability of the proposal for future generations.

15. The financial savings alluded to in the Christchurch proposal are taken from the Local Partnerships report. What has not been acknowledged is that the main focus of the savings in the Local Partnerships financial model was from reducing the number of senior and middle managers. As the Christchurch proposal supports more organisations than the model it is referencing for financial purposes, it is unclear how the savings will be realised. In addition, there is an inconsistency in saying the Local Partnerships report produced in August 2016 is out of date whilst referencing a December 2014 public report on the financial merits of a Tricuro (LATC) model.
16. The model set out in the alternative proposal does not facilitate smooth or efficient partnership working. The Future Dorset proposal aligns local authority boundaries largely with proposed health delivery models as set out in the Sustainability and Transformation Plan.
17. Moreover, it is not clear how partnership working would become more efficient in the Dorset area, with seven sets of policies and procedures and priorities undoubtedly set to continue along with the 'sovereignty' of seven existing local authorities.
18. This would continue to frustrate the business community, who would be faced with a hostile, confusing and contradictory economic landscape, meaning an Industrial Strategy for Dorset becomes evermore challenging and the scope for inward investment continually reduced.
19. Bournemouth Borough Council would ask the Secretary of State to disregard the alternative proposal as it has no financial business case, cannot evidence the required levels of public or stakeholder support across Dorset and does not meet the government's own criteria of improved services for residents, providing a sustainable solution, delivering stronger leadership, offering improved value for money & efficiency or providing significant savings.
20. Evidence attached to the Future Dorset proposal achieves each of these requirements whilst additionally creating the right conditions for more efficient partnership working, improved quality of life for future generations and a strategic environment that attracts investment and adds to the prosperity of the county.

