

Christchurch Borough Council

Further representation to the Secretary of State in response to
a proposal for Local Government Reorganisation in
Bournemouth, Dorset and Poole

4 January 2018

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1. Executive Summary

Christchurch Borough Council is an ambitious, progressive and outward-looking Council. It has created a successful shared service Partnership with East Dorset District Council which is customer focussed, financially secure and sustainable, agile and innovative. It delivers services in partnership with public, voluntary and private sector providers, is commercial in the pursuit of its objectives, and modern and flexible in its working culture and practices.

As well as being modern and progressive in its approach, the Council governs an area with a long and rich civic history, one which is unique in Dorset. The preservation of both the tangible and intangible heritage of the Ancient Borough, and the stewardship of that local history and culture, is at the heart of the Council and everything it does. This concept of stewardship is reflected in the corporate plan which states explicitly that *'we need to ensure that the decisions we make today will not have an adverse effect on future generations'*¹.

The Council believes that Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) represents a significant risk to Christchurch as a place, to its residents, to the successful partnership between Christchurch Borough Council and East Dorset District Council, and to the great number of successful shared service arrangements that exist between the nine Councils in Dorset. Christchurch Borough Council, East Dorset District Council and Purbeck District Council all rejected the recommendation to replace the nine existing Councils with two new unitary authorities. The Councils that opposed the proposal represent 50% of the districts in the County, and over 185,000 residents. Like this Council, the Borough's MP, Mr Christopher Chope, has strongly opposed the proposed reorganisation

The work that this Council has undertaken in just a few weeks indicates that 84% of local people do not want Christchurch to be in a single Council with Bournemouth and Poole, that the 'Future Dorset' submission is flawed, and that there are a number of alternative options that would save comparable amounts of money while avoiding the cost and disruption of LGR.

Members of this Council have received assurances from Government Ministers that this representation will be fully taken into account before a final decision on the future of local government in Dorset is made. We would welcome the opportunity to discuss it further.

¹ Page 16, Corporate Plan Christchurch and East Dorset Partnership 2016-2020

2. Introduction

In January 2017, Christchurch Borough Council was one of three Councils in Dorset to reject proposals for Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) in the County. Christchurch Borough Council, along with East Dorset District Council and Purbeck District Council, all rejected a recommendation to replace the nine existing Councils with two new unitary authorities. The Councils that opposed the proposal represent 50% of the districts in the County, and over 185,000 residents.

Despite the lack of local consensus, six Councils² agreed to pursue the proposal and, in February 2017, made a submission for Local Government Reorganisation, called 'Future Dorset', to the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government.

On 22 February 2017 the Leader of Christchurch Borough Council wrote to the Secretary of State setting out the Council's opposition (a copy is attached at Appendix 1). Since then, further work has been undertaken to:

- Better understand the views of Christchurch's residents (through a referendum), on the basis that any proposals for LGR must be 'bottom up'; and
- Identify alternative arrangements for the County that will deliver significant savings, retain the sovereignty of the current Councils and negate the need for a costly, time consuming and complex reorganisation of local public services.

The Leader of the Council, Mr David Flagg, met with the Secretary of State on 7 March 2017 and the Mayor of Christchurch, Mrs P Jamieson, met Mr Marcus Jones MP on 14 March 2017. Both received assurances that Ministers will give further representations their full consideration before any final decision is made about the future of local government in Dorset.

The Rt. Hon. Greg Clark MP, Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, has written compellingly about the value of endurance in the public realm. In the Building our Industrial Strategy Green Paper he writes 'we aim to set out an approach which endures. The policies that the government pursues, the institutions it sustains and creates, and the decisions that it takes should be, as far as possible, stable and predictable. In a world containing much uncertainty, public policy should aim to be a countervailing force for stability, not an additional source of unpredictability'³.

We welcome these words and very much hope they will be considered, along with the information below, before Ministers make a final decision about the future of local government in Dorset.

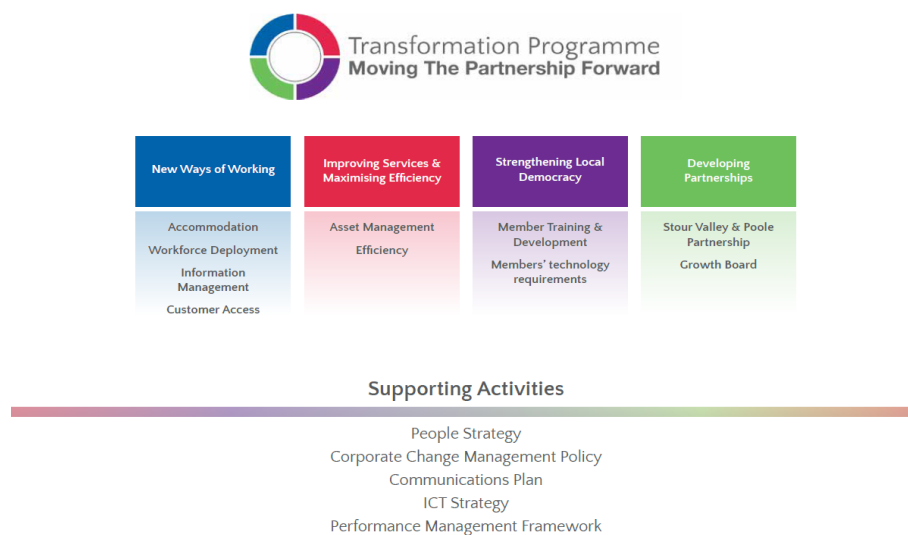
² Borough of Poole, Bournemouth Borough Council, Dorset County Council, North Dorset District Council, West Dorset District Council and Weymouth & Portland Borough Council

³ Page 7, Building our industrial Strategy Green Paper, January 2017

3. Christchurch: The Partnership

In 2011 Christchurch Borough Council created an award-winning shared service partnership with East Dorset District Council. All staff are part of a combined officer structure working to a single set of terms and conditions. Since its inception in 2011 the partnership has generated over £2m in revenue savings.

The partnership quickly developed an ambitious timetable for establishing shared services, one that has been delivered ahead of the Council’s expectations. Services are now integrated and the work has developed into an ambitious Transformation Programme. The programme capitalises on our progress to date with the introduction of new ways of working, the further development of more efficient and customer focused means of delivering services, asset rationalisation and the pursuit of our economic growth priorities. An overview of the programme is shown below:



In addition to the strategic partnership between the two Councils, the Council has also pursued service based partnerships with neighbouring authorities. This has included the development of the Dorset Waste Partnership (waste collection, disposal and street cleansing), the Stour Valley & Poole Partnership (revenues and benefits services on behalf of Christchurch, East Dorset, North Dorset and Poole Councils) and the Audit partnership (Christchurch, East Dorset, North Dorset, Purbeck and New Forest Councils).

Christchurch Borough Council has also been a key partner in the development of the Dorset Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP), and the LEP has made significant investments in projects in the Council’s area. The former Leader of the Council spent three years representing all the districts and Boroughs in the County on the LEP Board, and was also instrumental in setting up the Dorset Leaders Growth Board,

which we hope will become the Dorset Combined Authority and drive our economic growth and transport priorities in the future.

Our ambitions for transformational change and the further exploitation of our partnership working arrangements are underpinned by our adopted 2014-2018 Partnership Development Strategy (attached at Appendix 2). We are already making progress against the strategy's objectives but in producing the strategy we have made our future clear for our staff and stakeholders:

- A customer focused organisation
- Financially sustainable and secure
- Agile and resilient
- Delivering in partnership with public and private sector partners
- Innovative and commercially minded in the pursuit of our goals
- Modern and flexible in our working culture and practices
- Recognised for our ambition and our achievements

Our plans are designed to create future capability that can face the challenges ahead and ensure we are well placed to support our communities and maintain the services they rely upon. The Council has the utmost faith in its ability to deliver for local residents.

These collaborations demonstrate the Council's commitment to adopting the most effective form of joint working to meet the needs of particular services and service users, and which represent the best value for money for our Councils and taxpayers.

The enduring strength of the partnership is characterised by strong political commitment, integrated service delivery focusing on customer needs, the delivery of sustainable savings and bringing about the behavioural changes necessary to thrive in an uncertain economic climate. It is a part of the Council's recent history of which we feel enormously proud, and which are very keen to protect.

4. Christchurch: The Place

In order to understand the Council's objections to reorganisation it is necessary to understand something of the Borough itself, because although the Council is modern and progressive, it is built on a deep vein of history which informs the views of residents and Councillors alike.

The Borough of Christchurch lies at the heart of the south coast of England in the south - eastern corner of Dorset. It consists of coastal, urban and rural areas and is the local service centre, providing a range of shopping, sporting, recreation and other community facilities for the surrounding areas. As well as forming a corner of Dorset, the Borough also forms the far south-eastern corner of the south-west region, so the Borough looks east towards Hampshire and the New Forest, as well as west into rural Dorset.

Christchurch has a long and rich civic history. It is an ancient Borough, granted by charter during the reign of King Alfred the Great in the ninth century. The first known

Mayor was John Leshelm in 1297 and a record of all mayors up to the present are listed in the Council Chamber. Christchurch is the only Borough in Dorset with a continuous history as a single entity, which contributes to a strong sense of history, place and identity. Feelings of neighbourhood belonging are strong in the Borough – in the Resident Survey 2015, 70% of respondents stated that they feel a ‘very strong’ or ‘fairly strong’ sense of belonging to their immediate neighbourhood – and the percentage of respondents who are ‘very satisfied’ or ‘fairly satisfied’ has been increasing year on year since 2006⁴.

The early history of Christchurch is obscure. Barrows on St Catherine’s Hill provide evidence of settlement during the Bronze Age (c 1800 BC – 600 BC) and there are traces of occupation during the Iron Age (600 BC – AD 43), particularly on Mill Plain. It was during the Iron Age that Hengistbury Head became an important trading centre dominating the area around what is now Christchurch.

In the Roman period, Hengistbury Head became a small settlement. Little is known of Christchurch after the departure of the Romans in AD410. King Alfred, who came to the throne in AD871, developed the strategy of fortified places, known as *burhs*, to enable the population to concentrate and resist Viking Raiders and Christchurch was one of three burhs in Wessex. The first written record of Christchurch is in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle which refers to it being captured by Ethelwald in AD900.

The Domesday Book of 1086 described Christchurch as a small market town. Mention is also made of a Saxon monastery of the Church of the Holy Trinity occupying the site of the present Priory Church. The Normans launched the building of the Priory. At the same time that the Priory Church was being constructed, Twynham Castle was built as a stopping place for journeying forces. In about 1160 a domestic building (known as the Constable’s House) was erected at the foot of the Castle to house the Constable. The ruins of both remain today.

Christchurch remained a generally small town, expanding little beyond its medieval suburbs, until the present century. The town has expanded along its major roads, establishing areas such as Jumpers and St Catherine’s Hill, and the outlying villages now form the main ‘urban’ area.

The Council itself is made up of 11 electoral wards, represented by 24 Councillors including the Mayor (who also chairs the Council) and Deputy Mayor (both of which are annual ceremonial appointments). As Christchurch is relatively small geographically, Members feel they have a close connection with their residents.

Christchurch has a long and rich civic history, and the Council has significant concerns about a loss of sovereignty, including the Mayoralty, “Ancient Borough” status and civic regalia.

The Mayor is a vital member of the Borough. His/her duties include:

- Representing the Council as first citizen and Civic Head of the Borough on all ceremonial occasions

⁴ P26, Christchurch Resident Survey 2015

- Receiving civic guests and providing appropriate hospitality
- Holding honorary offices as President or member of certain local charities/organisations
- Launching appeals within the Borough to raise funds for specific charitable purposes
- Not becoming involved in party politics either at Council Committee meetings or at functions

As the first citizen, the Mayor:

- Identifies themes and causes he/she wishes to promote
- Is an unashamed, passionate champion of the Borough
- Heads up charity appeals etc.
- Promotes local businesses and organisations when appropriate

The Mayor also safeguards the Borough's civic regalia, which include the Mayor's badge and chain, the two maces, the civic robes, and the coat of arms and seal.

The Council is extremely concerned that the Mayoralty, and all that the Mayoralty represents, will be at risk if local government reorganisation is imposed. The Council's motto is 'Fidelity and Freedom', and the Mayoralty embodies that spirit.

The natural environment of the Borough is varied, consisting of the coast, harbour and cliffs, inland extensive areas of wet and dry heath and river valleys. Many of these are recognised as being of national and international importance. There are ten Sites of Special Scientific Interest, and many of the sites hold rare species such as sand lizards, smooth snakes and birds such as the Dartford Warbler and Nightjar. Surveys have shown some 90% of Britain's sand lizards and 80% of smooth snakes are to be found on the Dorset Heathlands⁵.

Christchurch also has a vibrant community and voluntary sector. The Mayor supports many community and voluntary sector groups and acts as a focal point for much of this activity, working closely with a small number of organisations every year but supporting a great many more in the course of their duties.

The history and natural environment is significant because the Council feels a very strong sense of stewardship towards it. The preservation and promotion of the ancient Borough has always been a key role for the Council, and Councillors perceive it as a matter of public trust between themselves and the residents – that Councillors have a responsibility for safeguarding its history and passing it on to future generations. The concept of stewardship is reflected in our corporate plan which states explicitly that *'we need to ensure that the decisions we make today will*

⁵ Page 18, Chapter 3 'Conservation of the Natural Environment' Borough of Christchurch Local Plan, Adopted March 2001

*not have an adverse effect on future generations*⁶ (the corporate plan is attached at Appendix 3).

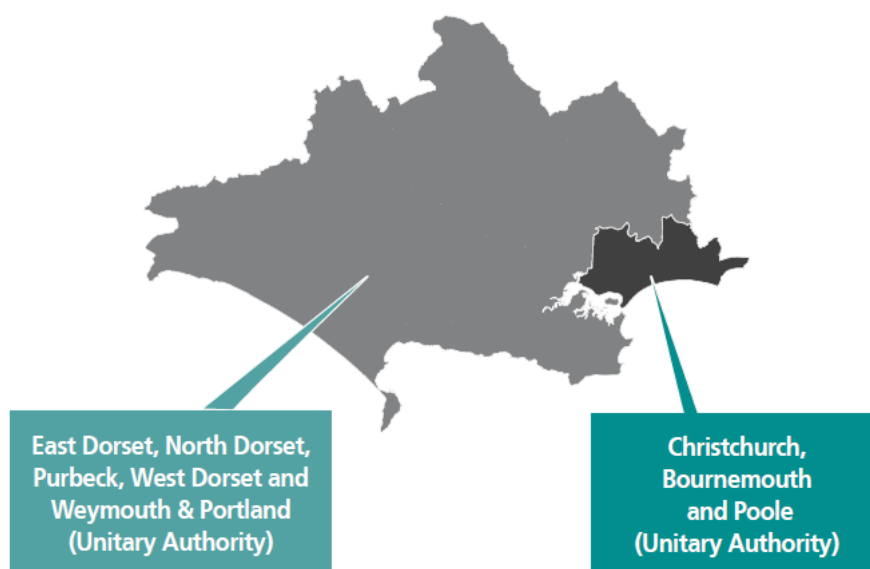
The preservation of both the tangible and intangible heritage of the Borough, and the stewardship of that local history and culture, is at the heart of the Council and its Councillors. It is not surprising that the importance of local history and assets – the Regent Centre, Red House Museum and Highcliffe Castle, to name a few – is consistently reflected in resident surveys.

‘Think global, act local’ has been one of the Council’s values for many years⁷, and research shows that it is these local services and local accessibility that residents value. Research conducted by One Poll recently shows that the top issues in communities concern litter, street cleanliness, and parking. Similar concerns are reflected in the Christchurch Resident Survey 2015. They are issues of a local matter, which local Councillors are attuned to, and which require local political leadership.

The Government’s decision about reorganisation in Dorset will profoundly affect how our local communities perceive themselves and their sense of place, and how they can address the things that matter most to them. It will have implications for local residents for generations to come. Given the significance of the decision, the Council does not feel that a convincing case has been made, for the following reasons.

5. Principal objections to the ‘Future Dorset’ Submission

The ‘Future Dorset’ submission proposes establishing two new Councils as shown below:



⁶ Page 16, Corporate Plan Christchurch and East Dorset Partnership 2016-2020

⁷ Para 1.9, page 4, Introduction, Borough of Christchurch Local Plan, Adopted March 2001

The Council has two key concerns about this proposal. The first relates to the impact on residents, their quality of life and the services they receive if the proposal goes ahead. The second relates to the credibility of the evidence on which the 'Future Dorset' submission is based, and on which Government has been asked to make a decision.

Detrimental Impact on Christchurch residents and services

Loss of Local Democracy and Representation

The Council is extremely concerned about the loss of local democracy and representation if local government reorganisation goes ahead.

Unitary councils typically have 50% fewer Councillors than under a two-tier system⁸, and the Council believes that this would result in a 'democratic deficit' that will leave residents without access to the information, advice and support they need. Anecdotal feedback from some Councils that have recently changed to a unitary system suggests that some Councillors struggle to adequately represent their constituents over a larger geographical area. It is clear that the costs and complexities of reorganisation carried out by other local authorities who have carried out something similar are still being established after many years.

It is also undoubtedly the case that, if Christchurch Borough Council, Bournemouth Borough Council and the Borough of Poole were to form a new unitary Council, the numbers of Councillors representing Christchurch would be in a small minority, which could leave them unable to adequately represent or meet the needs of local residents. Fewer Councillors would have more residents to represent and there are real concerns about whether they would be able to fully support their constituents and meet their duties as elected representatives.

Loss of Local Services

There is a very real risk that reorganisation will have a detrimental impact on local services. This comes in part from the loss of democratic representation and control described above, but also from the impossibility of guaranteeing service quality into the future. As explained elsewhere in this report, residents of Christchurch have a high level of satisfaction in the Borough and this would be put in jeopardy if a larger, more remote Council were to take on the running of services.

Christchurch and East Dorset have been incredibly prudent over the years and are in a strong financial position. They have good reserves and a healthy capital investment programme which is delivering real benefits to the community. To forego this position, and sacrifice it to a Council which will be exposed to different pressures and demands, feels like a dereliction of its duty to act in the best interests of local people.

Loss of control of the Local Plan and Housing Allocation Policy

⁸ Rural Services Network, Unitary Councils: Pros and Cons, 4 September 2009

The Council is also extremely concerned about losing control over the local plan, development control and housing allocation.

The OnePoll research referred to above shows building on green land as one of the top ten concerns in local communities. The Christchurch Resident Survey 2015 shows that beaches, parks and open spaces are amongst the most important factors in making somewhere a good place to live and this has seen an 18 percentage increase since 2013. Of the five factors valued most by residents, beaches, parks and open spaces ranked third, while access to the countryside and green spaces ranked fifth.

Housing is a major issue in Dorset but one that the Borough has managed well. Whereas control of green spaces and the protection of the green belt is a key concern for local residents, it is understood that building new homes (and the availability of land on which to build them) are priorities for the unitary councils of Bournemouth and Poole. While we have balanced our demand for housing with the protection of the green belt, the pressures on demand and supply in the conurbation mean that this would not be guaranteed if reorganisation went ahead and local Councillors could not continue to protect the local area. To illustrate the point, in Christchurch the waiting list for housing was 600 in 2015 whereas in Bournemouth and Poole there were a total of 6396 on the waiting list⁹.

Loss of Control of our Assets, Reserves and Reputation

The Council has throughout its recent history ensured the management of the assets it holds for the community are well maintained and utilised to their full potential. The majority of the Council's assets have been held by the Council for many years and are valued by the residents. In addition, it is not just the assets owned by the Council but the capital value of the intangible assets that contribute to the sense of place that makes the ancient Borough special.

The Council's assets are varied and are an integral part of the running of Christchurch. The balance sheet value of the assets the Council has worked hard to develop and maintain was almost £70m in 2016 and includes land, leisure centres, beach huts, a famous castle and the Council's Civic Offices. They are a blend of operational and investment assets that work in harmony to support the vibrancy and economic aspects of Christchurch. They are uniquely valued by residents of the Borough and there is a clear fear that this would cease if the Council was dissolved.

Some of the key assets are;

Nearly 400 beach huts that provide local people with a great deal of pleasure and contribute significantly to the local tourism economy as well as providing a valuable source of income to the Council. The Council has chosen not to see beach huts as a 'cash cow' and has therefore not allowed over supply to spoil the natural beauty of the coastline.

The Council has a significant investment portfolio of both commercial and investment properties that support local business and in turn provides a financial contribution to local service delivery. There is a concern that these assets which are integral to the

⁹ DCLG figures - www.gov.uk

infrastructure of the Borough could be sold off thus restricting their future business use and the loss of ongoing revenue to the people of Christchurch.

The Council has a number of car parks that provide valuable space for visitors, workers and shoppers to the town to park at reasonable cost and in turn support business and the community by doing so. The Council sees the provision of sufficient spaces as a key asset in maintaining the vibrancy of the town in particular. Many Councils are now building on car parks, about which this Council has significant concerns.

With over 100 sites of open space, play and recreation areas the Council provides the opportunity for young and old to have space to enjoy the outdoors. The Council sees this as such an important part of healthy living but is concerned that these sites often come into view when Councils are looking for development sites. There is a concern that they may be seen as development sites if under the control of another Council.

Probably the jewel in Christchurch's treasure of assets is Highcliffe Castle. Highcliffe Castle has been described as arguably the most important surviving house of the Romantic and Picturesque style of architecture, which flourished at the end of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th century. Its significance is recognised nationally by its Grade 1 status on the Statutory List of Buildings of Special Architectural and Historical Interest. There is an international importance, too. For a large amount of medieval French masonry, shipped across the Channel, was used in its construction. It is this Norman and Renaissance carved stone, along with the castle's Gothic revival features and ancient stained glass, which make it unique.

Highcliffe Castle's remarkable history tells how a magnificent building, once lavishly furnished in the 18th century French style, was reduced to a fire-ravaged roofless ruin. For years it had played host to royalty (including Kaiser Wilhelm II), the rich and famous. Then for two decades, the 1970s and 1980s, only a flock of white doves came to stay amid the derelict rooms. Today the castle's renovated exterior is a testimony to the remarkable skills of the craftsmen and women who carried out a huge repair and conservation programme in the 1990s, jointly funded by Christchurch Borough Council, English Heritage and a £2.65 million grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund. In 2008 a further £1.2 Million programme of repair was completed to enable public access to the State Dining Room, Butler's Pantry and East Tower. Then in March 2016 a third grant was awarded of £2.83 million, the work from this latest grant is due to begin May 2017. The Castle is being run commercially and generating a sustainable income.

Highcliffe Castle epitomises the culture, history and spirit of the people of Christchurch. The Council made sure such an important asset rose from the ashes where others may have left it in ruins and if placed into the hands of others it may not continue flourish as it has.

As mentioned earlier, the Council has over many years managed its finances extremely prudently. Ensuring a balance has been maintained between income generation, sensible investment and the holding of adequate but not excessive reserves. This has proven a successful strategy as the Council has "bucked the trend" in comparison with other councils. Not only is it able to balance its budget through to 2019, it is also generating income to contribute to the investment of services and assets for the benefit of the community. The forecast reserve position

for the Council for March 2018 is that it will hold total reserves of over £11m, with £2.8m of this unallocated or set aside for unforeseen events. There is a real fear that the prudence and hard work to establish this position could be wiped away and lost in the black hole of other councils' deficits if this Council were dissolved and the legacy of years of sound financial management lost.

The approach the Council has taken in recognising the significance of the Ancient Borough and its importance to local people and businesses has ensured that it has maintained a reputation for putting the interests of its residents first. The Council listens to the people of Christchurch through active residents associations and responds to their views, and the approach of our partnership has been to recognise the makeup of our population, to understand the things that matter most to them and to tailor our services to their needs and requirements.

Unlike many Councils, there is often a significant public presence at the many public meetings this Council holds. This is a testimony to the importance local people attribute to the role of the Council and their confidence in being able to influence local democracy.

Council Tax Harmonisation: Christchurch Residents Could Pay More

Clearly the original Local Partnerships' modelling of a 20 year harmonisation period was never an acceptable option. Now that this approach has been disregarded the strategy required now will have a fundamental impact on the financial viability of the new Council. The Council tax that would have been available and will now be foregone as a result of a shorter harmonisation period will run into the 10s of millions and will require additional cuts to services to ensure balanced budgets are set.

A principle the Council holds dear is one of equity; the quality of being fair and impartial. The approach to the harmonisation of Council Tax appears to conflict with this principle and the Council challenges this in the strongest terms. Put simply, how is it equitable for the residents of Christchurch to pay more in Council tax than other residents in the same unitary Council for potentially a significant period. This would mean that the residents in Christchurch would subsidise the residents that are paying less for the same services. Over a period the additional amount paid would be significant while Christchurch residents waited for the Council Tax of the other residents in the new unitary to catch up. Whilst it is accepted the Council Tax for Christchurch residents might not increase by as much as it may have, it is still a principle that is hard to convince residents is fair.

If all Councils were on the same footing as far as having no deficits to manage this would make it potentially more palatable, but as the residents of Christchurch will be paying for the inherited deficits of others, the approach is unpalatable. There has been talk of a shorter harmonisation period and even an 'alternative notional amount' but these options have not been agreed at this point.

The residents of Christchurch see this issue quite simply; we will be paying more for the same services. Until the Joint Committee agrees what approach to take it is clear there can be no definitive message on how and over what period harmonisation would take place, so it is very difficult to reassure residents that they will not be exploited by paying more than others for the same service.

The only two options the Council can see that are possible for quicker harmonisation is to increase the current lower Council Tax paid by amounts that would trigger a referendum, or to reduce that paid by Christchurch residents. The former is unlikely

and the latter could preclude the implementation of a Town Council. This is a fundamental issue in the proposal that has not had adequate openness or scrutiny applied to it and is plainly unfair. The extract below is from the Local Partnerships' work and speaks for itself.

	BBC	CBC	EDDC	NDDC	BoP	PDC	WDDC	W&PBC
2016/17 Band D £	1,293	1,454	1,471	1,381	1,258	1,441	1,399	1,553
Est Town Council Precept		(150)						(150)
	1,293	1,304	1,471	1,381	1,258	1,441	1,399	1,403

The Intangible Costs

The section above clearly demonstrates how residents of Christchurch will be required to pay for the deficits of other councils if reorganisation is pursued. There are also obvious intangible costs which cannot be calculated. As explained above, Christchurch has a strong sense of identity and heritage which the Council believes will be put at risk if the Borough is abolished. As long ago as 1969 it was accepted that in smaller towns people tend to associate the home area with the town, and the smaller the town the more often they did so¹⁰. Christchurch is a small town compared to Bournemouth and Poole. There is a real risk that a bigger, more remote Council would result in a loss of identity for local residents.

Many members believe that intangible considerations, such as responsiveness to consumer requirements, preservation of local identity and "sense of place", remoteness of government, the ability of elected members effectively to represent their constituents and of constituents to contact their Councillors and the prospects for service delivery should be accorded as much weight as purely financial concerns (particularly if those financial concerns pertain to other Councils). The well-developed sense of place in the Borough is an asset that should be treated with respect and consideration. A forced reorganisation will mean that people's understanding of their area will change drastically, and politicians locally and nationally will rightly be held to account for it.

The Abolition of Successful Partnerships

Christchurch and East Dorset have been building an extremely effective and successful shared service partnership since 2011. If the Government supports the Future Dorset proposal this Partnership will have to come to an end (as the two Councils will be in different unitary authorities).

¹⁰ Report of the Royal Commission into Local Government, Cmnd. 4040, HMSO, 1969

It may also require complex legal and governance alterations to existing (and in many cases, very successful) shared service arrangements, including the award winning Dorset Waste Partnership (DWP) and two revenue and benefits partnerships, to name just two (other joint services include adult education, joint audit, joint archives, public health, and the Dorset for You website partnership). These partnerships are created by bespoke governance arrangements, including several joint committees, representing the nine Councils as appropriate, which may need dissolving and re-creating if reorganisation is imposed. The Council is not only concerned about the implications of potentially disaggregating these partnerships, but moving services such as local recycling facilities and revenues and benefits offices will inevitably mean local residents have to make longer journeys to access the services they need. The Council is also concerned that residents were not made aware of these issues through the consultation.

Concerns over the 'Future Dorset' Submission

The Council also has deep concerns about the 'Future Dorset' submission. The funding position has changed significantly since Local Partnerships did their analysis. The analysis contained an optimism bias, there is no clear business plan and the consultation process was flawed.

The Changing Nature of Local Government Finance

Future Local Government Finance is currently being reconsidered by Central Government which could have an effect on the future financial position of local authorities.

The Council followed closely the consultation and announcement regarding the Fair Funding Review and also the 100% of business rate retention. The Council welcomed both of these key aspects of how the future of local government could be funded and was disappointed that they were not progressed

The fact the Government announced that it would undertake a Fair Funding Review of the relative needs assessment formula following the implementation of 100% business rates retention was welcomed by the Council, as it recognised the need to address the funding problems of social care. This is probably the biggest issue facing local government and the fact it has not been addressed is driving Councils to make 'knee jerk' responses which are not necessarily in the best interests of residents or local government in the long term.

The creation of two unitary Councils will *not* solve the funding of social care in Dorset. It is a national problem that needs a national solution. The proposal for 'Future Dorset' claims it will save at least £28m but this is unlikely to solve all the funding issues. This Council would request that the Fair Funding Review and the 100% Business Rate retention is reintroduced first to see how they address the current funding issues before it makes radical and irreversible decisions on local government structures.

The Council's understanding was that the Fair Funding Review would deliver an assessment of relative needs within a fixed amount of business rates income and that the services currently supported by the local government finance system. The outcomes of the Fair Funding Review would establish the funding baselines for the introduction of 100% business rates retention. This was considered by the Council to offer the opportunity to recast the funding distribution across local government and to

direct the limited resources to the pressure points in the system. Whilst Christchurch Borough Council is not expecting to do well from a relative needs assessment it accepts that greater pressures exist elsewhere and funding should be directed there. What the Council is not content with is that a reorganisation may take place before this important analysis is undertaken which may in fact reveal that a radical change to local government structure in Dorset was not required at all.

The Council also understood that the distribution of funding for new responsibilities would have been considered on a case by case basis once these responsibilities are confirmed and that they are likely to have bespoke distributions. This again supports this Council's request to hold off on reorganisation until this has been done. The Government's approach in recognising the bespoke nature of demand in different areas will enable a sensible allocation of resource to support the unique requirements of different areas. The Council considers that this fundamental shift will give local government as a whole the opportunity to take stock on the future funding challenges. It does not seem at all sensible to make such life changing decisions as those proposed in the Future Dorset submission before having carried out this critical and important exercise.

The Council noted that 100% retention would have given local councils in England control of around an additional £12.5 billion of revenue from business rates to spend on local services. This provided a significant opportunity when taken with the Fair Funding Review to radically reposition the financing of local government and avoid the need to change structures unnecessarily the Government should not miss this opportunity to align resources appropriately and to ensure upper tier councils can see their future viability more clearly as independent bodies without needing to raid the assets of well run and respected lower tier councils to fill their funding gaps.

The Council recognises that the reforms to business rates are intended to be fiscally neutral, with some existing central Government grants being replaced by additional retained business rates, as well as the fact that local government will continue to deliver these existing responsibilities through such retained business rates and/or the acceptance of new responsibilities to reflect additional tax income. This should ensure that new burdens are followed by additional resources enabling those councils that need the resources receive them.

Lord Porter, Chairman of the LGA, responded to the Chancellor's Spring Budget announcement that councils will receive £2 billion extra funding for social care over the next three years by saying:

"The LGA has been leading efforts to highlight the significant pressures facing adult social care and secure desperately-needed new government funding for the system. We are pleased that the Government has started to act on our call and found a way to help councils plug some of the social care funding gaps they face in the coming years."

"Yesterday's announcement of £2 billion for adult social care marks a significant step towards protecting the services caring for the most vulnerable in our communities over the next few years".

Christchurch Borough Council asserts that the reintroduction of the 100% retention of business rates, the new Fair Funding Review and the £2bn for social services are all key factors that will help the funding of local government. It seems unwise to

change the structure of local government in Dorset until these three radical actions have settled in and taken effect.

The Difficulty of Accurate Forecasting

The Council believes that the costs and complexities of reorganisation are difficult to accurately forecast, with the savings often being too optimistic.

It goes without saying that the cost of dissolving nine councils and creating two will be significant. How significant depends wholly on the approach to implementing and managing the change. The information that has been presented as evidence for the 'Future Dorset' proposal is clearly one approach to forecasting the costs, but this Council's analysis of it raises more questions than answers.

The analysis was undertaken before the additional social care precept was announced, before the £2bn of additional social care funding was announced, before a Fair Funding Review has been undertaken and before the 100% business rate retention could be implemented. None of these major elements of local government funding have been taken into account in forming the evidence to the Secretary of State. These critical factors on their own are significant but when combined could fundamentally change the long term assumptions in Local Partnerships' work, potentially presenting a different funding gap. The Council recognises the gap could be greater or smaller but wishes to make the point that the analysis submitted is now out of date.

The cost of reorganisation is an area in which supporters of change will clearly naturally demonstrate an optimism bias. The smaller these costs are, the more beneficial the case appears. The modelling is often based on a relatively 'light touch' averaging which fails to take into account some of the extremes that can occur, particularly the redundancy costs of senior, highly paid staff. This Council is not satisfied that the cost analysis submitted to the Secretary of State was as robust as it needed to be to support such a radical and irreversible recommendation. The information was too high level, failed to acknowledge recent changes and was based on hypothesis rather than fact. The £25m forecast cost of reorganisation is therefore very difficult to validate independently. This then leads on to how this will be funded. To date there has only been sketchy explanations that it would be funded from capital receipts and savings.

This Council does not consider this to be anywhere near an adequate explanation as to where £25m will be found. A recent report to all Councils indicated that there would be no Central Government support for this and therefore proposed a contribution methodology from all Councils for some 'pump priming' sums. This does not give this Council confidence that the financial planning is at all sound.

Moving on to the savings, this is again an area that this Council does not consider to be robust. The bulk of the savings are based on a reduction in staffing of over 400 posts. This is considered by this Council to be significant especially as large cuts have already been made by many Councils to their staff base (including this Council). If there was a time when greater resilience was needed in local government it is now, so to propose to radically reduce that resilience and capacity seems to be ill considered. The savings are high level, averaged savings and will rely wholly on strong leadership and a delivery plan, neither of which have been in place at the moment which casts serious doubt over their deliverability.

The local partnership figures were of course based on information available when LP began its work in the early spring of 2016. Thus the figures must relate to 2015 and earlier financial years. However since 2015 there have been a number of major developments in the financial affairs of the Councils and also in Government policy:-

- i. North Dorset, Weymouth and Portland and West Dorset have joined in a partnership (Dorset Councils) which is already realizing significant savings, to the extent that one North Dorset Councillor has remarked that had the latest figures been available at the time of the January 2017 decision that Councillor might well not have supported the proposal.
- ii. Dorset County Council has begun a programme called “Forward Together” which is also realising significant savings. New management in Children’s Services has resulted in a net saving of £6m, and matters have progressed to a point where the Chief Finance Officer can state in an e-mail to one of the present authors

The Useable Reserves for the County Council at the start of the year were £92m which is a far better measure of financial strength... The County Council has consistently demonstrated its ability to deliver a balanced budget and could continue to do this without the need for merger.

- iii. In an interview with DCLG officials on 7 November 2017 Chris Chope MP, the Member for Christchurch, was told that far from the 20 year period of Council Tax harmonisation publicised in the consultation document, the Government would bring forward a Modification of the “Future Dorset” proposal to set the harmonisation period as a maximum of five years – and a period of one or two years was more likely.

Thus it can be seen that the financial figures on which future Dorset was initially based – i.e. the figures used in the “Consultation” to support the need for change – are not reliable in any way as a forecast of the likely financial outcomes for the various Councils.

It is clear therefore that the financial advantages to merger have been overstated both in terms of savings generated and costs incurred. As has been consistently stated by opponents, every unitary reorganisation to date has been more costly, and has saved less, than forecast.

Lack of a Sound Business Plan

The three key pieces of evidence submitted to the Secretary of State were the financial analysis, the outcome of the public consultation and the case for change. The Council considers that a key piece of further information was missing; a detailed analysis of the relative merits of the different options, including no change. This Council has not seen a business plan that independently analysed the pros and cons of changing from nine Councils to two, and then the subsequent pros and cons of the three two unitary options. A single unitary option was dismissed without any reference back to Councils, yet this produced the most savings. There was brief but biased reference to the pros and cons of the unitary options in the consultation document, a financial analysis that used 20-year harmonisation process as the determinant of a 'preferred' option, and a case for change which sat on the fence. All three pieces of evidence were treated separately and not combined to present an honest representation of their individual merits and disadvantages. The Council considers it was presented with the preferred 'answer' and had no opportunity to discuss and propose an alternative.

Another fundamental aspect of the proposal that is missing is a delivery plan. No clearly 'time-lined' project plan that sets out the resources and actions required to deliver the dissolution of nine councils and the creation of two has been developed. How can this Council have confidence that the proposal can be delivered on time and that the forecast savings will be achieved and costs contained within forecast without a plan? This is probably the most significant event in the history of local government in Dorset and one which has to be achieved in less than 13 months, and no detailed co-ordinated or approved plan has been developed.

The 'Future Dorset' Consultation Process

The Council also believes that a key piece of evidence provided - the consultation report - was deeply flawed, and it has grave concerns about Ministers relying on the findings to guide their decision. The Council believes these shortcomings were made in good faith, and are not seeking to criticise the company that ran the consultation process, but they are flaws nevertheless and need identifying before they are used as a basis for decision-making. The concerns are as follows:

The Consultation Name: The document is entitled "Reshaping Your Councils – a better future for your community." This in itself must influence respondents in that the title is presented as a statement (reshape your current Council structure and your community will have a better future) rather than as an open question (will reshaping your Councils produce a better future?).

The Consultation leaflet: The leaflet contained numerous sweeping statements and unsubstantiated claims. There are too many to list but, by way of example, the document stated that the reorganisation would "stimulate jobs and promote prosperity." No evidence was provided to substantiate this comment and it is unclear what new unitary councils can do that the districts and County Council working together cannot.

Christchurch was also inaccurately portrayed. The document described the parishes of Burton and Hurn as “urban”, which is not accurate. Avon, Neacroft, and Waterditch were also included as urban areas. The urban area of Christchurch occupies less than a third of its territory, which is predominantly rural.

The document also contained significant omissions. It ignored the **disaggregation costs** of Option 2b, for example, for Christchurch and East Dorset Councils in particular and for the numerous service-based partnerships that exist in the County. The Christchurch and East Dorset partnership has been in existence since 2011 and has achieved ongoing savings of £2m per annum, and members from both Councils are proud of what they have achieved both from a service delivery perspective as well as financial savings.

The partnership has demonstrated that sovereignty does not have to be foregone to achieve change in local government and to respond to the financial challenges we all have faced. A single officer structure has provided an excellent basis on which to deliver services for a wide area of Dorset and in many cases service has improved. The integration of staff, systems and process has come at a cost and now we are faced with the proposal to unravel what has been a significant success. The Council is very concerned that the cost of separating the partnership has not been explicitly set out in any information it has received to enable any scrutiny to take place. The Council has been advised that the cost of separating the partnership is contained within the overall £25m cost of change but no specific detail has been identified. The Council understands that based on the methodology recently identified to share costs the Council would not be required to fund the specific cost of partnership separation but this is still considered basic information that should have been shared with the Council.

Insofar as the consultation document was the prime source of information to the public, it is clear that it was constructed in order to promote option 2b. The matters of local significance mentioned in this report - control of Christchurch’s environment, planning control, planning policy, housing policy – all vital to keeping Christchurch special –were all ignored. The Council also remains unconvinced that the duration of the consultation, which lasted just eight weeks, was adequate or reflective of best practice.

The Consultation Questionnaire: Like the consultation leaflet, the questionnaire was not unbiased in its approach. To begin, it was not at all clear how to support a ‘no change’ option. Some Councillors received queries from local residents who were uncertain how to complete the questionnaire in order to support the status quo.

The questions were also structured in a way designed to elicit certain responses. The very first question “To what extent do you agree or disagree that Dorset Councils should focus on duplication and reducing administration costs where ever possible?” is followed by the emotive statement “Major savings would need to be found and it is likely that many council services could not be provided in future”. To the (presumed) relief of the respondent, a solution is offered –“Dorset councils believe that they can make major savings to simplify local government...” The respondent is then invited to say whether they “agree or disagree with the proposal

to replace the nine existing councils...” i.e. to save the money that the respondent has just said, in question one, that they wished to save.

The ‘Representative’ Household Survey: The Council does not accept that the 459 respondents to the household survey are representative of the Borough’s entire population, and do not accept the conclusion that 63% of residents are in favour of change, particularly in light of the fact that the open survey indicated that more than half did *not* agree. It is for this reason that the Council resolved to hold its own poll to better understand the views of local people, details of which are set out below.

The Council also feels that the findings of this element of the consultation have been presented in a misleading fashion. Based on this very small number, the report states that 63% of the population are in favour of option 2b. However, the caveat on page 74 of the document states that, with a confidence interval of 8%, it can only be stated with any confidence that an absolute majority of residents (only slightly above 50%) agree with the proposal¹¹. Some proponents of option 2b have sought to dismiss the findings of the open survey and focus on the household survey but it is clear that even this supposedly more representative element of the consultation could not be said to be ‘absolute’. Claims that support for option 2b in the County was ‘overwhelming’ are quite clearly misleading.

The Focus Groups: In the closed “focus groups” it is a matter for concern that Councillors were not invited to attend these meetings, even in a non-speaking/listening capacity. However, some Councillors have received feedback from members of the public who did attend that indicates a less than neutral atmosphere. Unfortunately there is no way of auditing the feedback from these groups so no weight should be attributed to this element of the process.

In summary the Council believes that, had the document been more impartial, and the costs of reorganisation more clear, the results of the consultation would have been very different indeed.

Further analysis of the actual detailed figures of the responses across the whole of Dorset shows that there were widespread public concerns over the process, not just the outcomes. Respondents said that they were unsure of the value of the consultation by indicating that they believed it to be a “done deal”, other respondents complained about lack of information or indeed information provided which they knew to be inaccurate.

Paragraph (b) above is confirmed by Fig. 59, p88: five items that total 17%+ commenting residents. If there are no multiple-comments from the same resident (and it accepted there will be some), this would represent (6% + 6% + 3% + 2% + 0.5% = 17.5% of 1,180 commentators = 206 commentators or 4.9% of all 4,205 'household' respondents. As this is the 'household' part of the survey, these comments are unsolicited. For 5% of respondents to make such comment when unasked, this might well be felt to be alarming.

¹¹ Page 74, Reshaping your Councils Consultation 2016: Final Report, Opinion Research Services, December 2016

Although ORS claim that sufficient returns were received from all sectors to guarantee a valid outcome, information is now available which must cast very serious doubt on the reliability of ORS's figures.

Paragraph 142 of the Executive Summary of the ORS Report, stated:-

*It is notable that for Christchurch the findings of the representative household survey contrast with those from the open questionnaire (as they also did in relation to reducing from nine to two councils). In the household survey 64% supported option 2b, whereas in the open questionnaire only half as many (32%) preferred 2b (and two-thirds (67%) supported 2a). The findings of both means of consultation are important, of course; but **the household survey is a better guide than the open questionnaire to the balance of general public opinion across Christchurch.** (emphasis added)*

It has been suggested that the higher return rate in Christchurch of the household surveys and also of the open questionnaires (as opposed to the rest of Dorset) could be the result of the actions of one particular group (incidentally, in favour of the reorganisation.) A more likely explanation is that only in Christchurch was there any form of public campaigning either for or against the proposal. It could well be argued that the process of campaigning heightened public interest, stimulated members of the public to find information for themselves, and thus led to a higher response rate.

Local Referendum Results

In the spring of 2017 Christchurch Borough Council, where strong criticism of the "Consultation" had occurred, agreed that an Advisory Local Poll (a "Referendum") be held to discern residents' views on the subject. (Appendix 4 refers.) The poll was carried out by post, the closing date for receipt of the votes being Thursday, 14 December.

The result was declared by the Counting Officer, Mr D McIntosh, the Borough's Chief Executive, and the official Declaration is included as Appendix 5. In summary, though, the result was

Question		
Do you support the current proposal for a single Council covering Christchurch, Bournemouth and Poole?		
	Votes Recorded	Percentage
Number cast in favour of a Yes	3321	15.82%
Number cast in favour of a No	17676	84.18%

A number of points are noteworthy about this result. Firstly, the turnout was in line or slightly higher in terms of Christchurch's local election results. In 2011, when (unlike 2015) the turnout was not boosted by a concurrent General Election, ward turn out ranged between 38% and 57%, only two wards having higher turnouts than that

recorded at this local poll. In 2007, the range was between 33% and 55%, and again only two wards equalled or improved on this turnout.

Secondly, the result was a complete reversal of the ORS findings. It is worth citing here Paragraph 1.65 from the ORS Report.

The singular exception to that generalisation is Christchurch where the open questionnaire showed that a majority of respondents opposed reducing to two Councils (54%) as well as opposed options 2a (67%), 2b (57%) and 2c (60%). However, in the **more representative** (*emphasis added*) household survey in Christchurch support for two Councils was much higher (63%) and residents also supported option 2b strongly (64%)... The findings of all means of consultation are important, of course; but in this case the open questionnaire is a less than perfect guide to the balance of general public opinion across Christchurch.

Now this paragraph is particularly noteworthy in that it provides a baseline against which the report's assertions in respect of other local authorities can be measured. It is not disputed that the "consultation" findings of more support for reform in other areas is accurate. In Bournemouth for example the absorption of Christchurch may well be perceived as a much overdue measure which would help solve that Borough's problems: in Shire Dorset, as was noted during the debates in Christchurch, both likely options would mean a restoration to towns of powers removed in 1974 and in any event in (say) Sturminster Newton rule from Dorchester would scarcely less local than rule from Blandford.

Even allowing for the peculiar circumstances of Christchurch being faced with what is perceived as a distrusted and aggressive neighbour, the "balance of public opinion across Christchurch" resulted in a (roughly) 84%-16% split against option 2[b] as opposed to an estimated 64 – 36 % split according to the household survey, the ORS "Consultation" shows a massive over-representation of the figures in favour of reform.

Empirical information from other authorities is indicative of similar mis-representation of the actual facts. For example, a well-attended public meeting in East Dorset was held to consult on the proposal and the balance of opinion was against any change. Councillors in Purbeck report that their discussions with residents again showed that opinion was against reform.

It may be calculated that if a 28% lead for reform in the autumn of 2016 actually becomes a 68% lead against reform by the winter of 2017 then either there has been a swing of 48% in public opinion or the ORS reliance on household surveys is inappropriate - and it is not unknown for similar huge leads in national opinion polls to be severely misleading.

Even assuming that the 48% difference is unique to Christchurch and the real over-estimation is half that, a reduction of 24% in the other authorities produces the following figures:-

Authority	ORS stated support (%)	Estimated Actual support (%)
Bournemouth	74	50
East Dorset	61	37
North Dorset	63	39
Poole	62	38
Purbeck	62	38
West Dorset	64	40
W/mth & Portland	54	30

Thus on the actual hard evidence of the Christchurch referendum the argument that there is widespread support across Dorset for the implementation of Future Dorset becomes questionable, to say the very least.

The Views of the People of Christchurch

Christchurch Borough Council believes that the prospect of LGR is of very significant interest to local people. This is demonstrated in the response to the public consultation when 13% of responses to the open questionnaire came from Christchurch people when they make up 6% of the Dorset population¹². For the reasons already given above, the Council has significant doubts about the process undertaken in the public consultation process and considered it to be essential to fully understand the views of residents by way of a local poll.

6. Alternative Options: Our proposal for service delivery in Bournemouth, Dorset and Poole

Alternative options

The Council feels that one of the greatest failings of the entire 'Future Dorset' programme was not to have fully considered any other options. It is clear from the further work this Council has done in just a few weeks that options exist for considerable savings to be made which retain Council sovereignty. The Council is unclear why this approach was dismissed so quickly by the other Councils, especially given the successful partnership working in Dorset to-date, and the huge cost and disruption of LGR.

¹² Page 33, ibid

Across England there are 481 local authorities in the UK, a mixture of Borough and districts, counties, unitary and Metropolitan councils. Some areas now also have Combined Authorities. It is clear that there is no one approach which works more effectively than another. There are many examples from within the same tier of local government of highly effective and successful councils, but also evidence of others who have failed.

This demonstrates the need to find the best solution in any particular place and the councils endorse the Government's policy position of not enforcing its will on councils in any given area.

The Councils in Dorset have a very successful track record of working closely together and with others. There are a wide range of opportunities still available, using experience to date, which will bring benefits in cashable savings and better service outcomes.

Christchurch Borough Council is very clear in its view that retaining its independence and sovereignty is in the best interests of local people and alternatives to the 'Future Dorset' submission would best serve all of those who live and work in the County.

The key elements

The Council believes that rather than implement two new large and remote unitary councils there is greater strength in developing a mixed economy of service delivery models. These are designed for the relevant tiers of council and for the services they deliver.

The essential elements, explained in further detail below, are:

- A single unitary for Bournemouth and Poole
- An extension of the Tricuro approach for all adult services (and similar approach for Children's Services)
- A comprehensive Combined Authority for Dorset
- Shared service collaborations for all other services

A single unitary for Bournemouth and Poole

At the time of writing, Bournemouth Borough Council and the Borough of Poole have already put in place a strategic plan to share services and create a single officer structure.

It would be a natural extension of this to create a single unitary Council for the areas of Bournemouth and Poole. While Christchurch Borough Council strongly advocates a progressive two-tier local government system it also recognises that in existing unitary areas, the logical approach is to maximise the efficiencies available.

The financial modelling working conducted by Local Partnerships established that a single unitary Council for Bournemouth and Poole would save £12.4m pa.¹³

An extension of the Tricuro approach for all adult services

An innovative example that has proven successful in contributing to efficiency and saving money is the setting up of local authority trading companies. Bournemouth, Poole and Dorset County Council have set up an adult social care company called Tricuro. The company undertakes day and residential care as well as mental health support. This has created an opportunity to generate income through trading, creates a commercially focused organisation that can have the flexibility of a company, and strengthens a challenging supplier market.

The overall value of the company was estimated to be in the region of £37m. This demonstrates that councils can go beyond partnership working and can create commercial enterprises that safeguard service delivery in key areas without having to dissolve their sovereignty. The model is now proven and could be used for other services where market delivery is weak or the framework of a commercial entity is better suited to that Council departmental delivery.

An extension for this approach for services would be possible where there is a high level of spend and therefore an opportunity to benefit from economies of scale – Children’s Services might be an example. Further elements of adult services with the additional Children’s Services would drive down cost and act as a catalyst for service transformation to improve outcomes.

A report to Bournemouth Borough Council in December 2014 indicated that the share of profit for Dorset County Council, the Borough of Poole and Bournemouth Borough Council from the Tricuro trading company would be in the region of £4m by year five. This was based on the day, residential and mental health adult social care delivery. The principle of the Tricuro trading company is to undertake directly provided services previously undertaken by the councils enabling a more commercial approach and the opportunity to trade with other organisations. Therefore, if other directly provided services within children’s social care, highways maintenance, grounds maintenance and waste were to be considered in a similar way across the County, the potential savings, based on the Tricuro model, might not be dissimilar and potentially in the region of a further £4m.

Development of a comprehensive Combined Authority for Dorset

Whilst the Chief Executives of Dorset County Council, the Borough of Poole and Bournemouth Borough Council consider that the Combined Authority acting as the commissioning body for major service delivery would not work, this Council contends that this issue has been too quickly dismissed. The arrangements mentioned earlier regarding the setting up of Tricuro demonstrate the benefits of combining service

¹³ Page 16, Dorset Councils: Potential options for the Reconfiguration of Local Authorities. Local Partnerships, 24 August 2016

delivery; why shouldn't the commissioning aspect of that service delivery be combined too? The purchasing power of the Combined Authority would be significant if it was charged with commissioning services for the Dorset councils. The gross spend of the Dorset councils is in excess of £1bn. If just 25% of this was commissioned services and was undertaken by the Combined Authority with a modest 2% saving being achieved through the combined commissioning, this could save £5m.

Share service collaborations for all other services across the relevant tiers of local government

There are three obvious models to expand shared services across the County:

Dorset CC to share services with other County Councils

Five of the six district/borough councils have entered partnership arrangements and all are achieving annual savings in the region of £1m each as a result. This represents about 13% of the net revenue spend of the six district and borough councils. The net revenue spend of these six district/boroughs is equivalent to just 16% of the County Council. This Council acknowledges that a significant proportion of the County Council's spend is mainly on commissioned services but even if a 2% reduction on the County Council's net revenue spend could be achieved through partnering with another County Council this could save over £5m.

Extending the Christchurch and East Dorset Partnership

The Christchurch and East Dorset Partnership is achieving a £2m saving per annum. The extension of the partnership with another district/borough council could enhance this by another 25% potentially saving a further another £0.5m.

Other Service Based Partnerships

It is equally possible to develop other service based partnerships based on the successful experience of Dorset Waste Partnership and the Stour Valley and Poole Partnership.

Dorset Waste Partnership was saving over £2m in 2016/17 on top of what councils have already achieved, which in the case of Christchurch has been over £0.1m per annum. The Stour Valley & Poole Partnership is currently developing a business case with the Dorset Councils Partnership¹⁴ for a pan-Dorset service which could deliver a further £0.9m. These successful examples of partnering demonstrate that further savings can be achieved through partnering rather than dissolution. A conservative estimate would pitch further achievable savings from the partnering of other services at between £3m - £5m.

¹⁴ North Dorset District Council, West Dorset District Council and Weymouth & Portland Borough Council

7. Summary of Potential Savings

The potential savings can be summarised as follows:

Alternative option	Potential savings
A single unitary for Bournemouth & Poole	£12.4m
Development of the Tricuro model	£4m
Development of a comprehensive Combined Authority	£5m
Cross County Council shared services	£5m
Extending the Christchurch/East Dorset Partnership	£0.5m
Widening service based partnerships	£3m
Total	£29.9m

8. Advantages of these alternative approaches

The advantages of these alternative approaches include:

- Retention of Council sovereignty, representation and democracy
- Significant savings, comparable with those put forward in Future Dorset
- Cost and complexity of LGR is avoided
- New and innovative service models are established
- Successful shared services are maintained and developed
- The advantages of the new Combined Authority are maximised

9. Conclusion

The case for local government reorganisation in Dorset has clearly *not* been made. The arguments against it include:

- The findings of the local referendum in Christchurch
- The risk to local services
- The risk to local heritage and civic culture
- The loss of local control over planning policy, housing policy and development control
- The unknown financial and intangible costs
- The unreliability of the consultation
- The evident viability of other options

This Council asserts that local government reorganisation is *not* in the best interests of residents and will do untold damage to services and communities at unknown cost. We urgently request that the Government rejects the Future Dorset proposal and works with local Councils to find a solution which is financially sound, builds on existing partnerships and delivers the best possible outcomes for local people.

Appendices

1. Letter from the Leader of the Council to the Secretary of State dated 22 February 2017
2. The Partnership Development Strategy 2014-2018
3. The Corporate Plan 2016-2020
4. Local Poll – background information, ballot paper, code of practice and rules for conducting a poll.
5. Declaration of the Local Poll
6. Geographical Objections