

**Leader of the Council**

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4<sup>th</sup> January 2018

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

Dear Secretary of State,

**Representations about Local Government Reorganisation in Dorset**

Thank you for your statement made on 7 November in which you announced your intention, subject to Parliamentary approval, to implement the proposals for restructuring local government in Dorset. I acknowledge that you wish to consider representations before making a final decision. I would like you to take account of this representation which I am submitting on behalf of the Borough of Poole.

1. I wish to reaffirm the Council's support for the LGR proposal submitted to you in February 2017. I am very pleased you believe that the information available to you supports the view that the proposal would be likely to improve local government in Dorset. The evidence submitted in support of the proposals was robust and remains valid. This includes the Case for Change, the financial case, the public consultation results and accompanying detailed methodology.
2. The case for Future Dorset is proven. As well as presenting a more efficient structure of local government that will protect and sustain public services in Dorset, it offers opportunities to improve the quality of life for our residents into the future. A consistent voice for the area, aligned policies for infrastructure and partnership working will attract and open up access to funding opportunities. It will greatly enhance the area's appeal to inward investors, creating a more prosperous Poole and a more prosperous Dorset.
3. I would like to remind you about the quality of the public consultation which was carried out in Dorset and which contributed to and shaped the proposal submitted to you. Its key features were:
  - The methodology was devised according to the best practice 'Gunning Principles', complying with good practice requirements and was proportional and fair
  - The consultation was independently managed by Opinion Research Services (ORS) - a well-respected and specialist university-based social research organisation with wide ranging experience of controversial consultations



- The consultations were conducted at a formative stage before decisions were taken
  - They allowed sufficient time (eight weeks) for people to participate and respond
  - Sufficient information was provided to the public and stakeholders to allow them to consider the issues intelligently and critically.
4. Moreover, the nine Dorset Councils worked together to publicise and promote information about the consultation across every community in all eight districts in Dorset.
  5. The independent managers of the consultation, ORS, made sure the process was comprehensive whereby the public and stakeholders were invited to feedback through a wide range of routes including:
    - an open questionnaire for all residents,
    - 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
    - Written submissions from anyone who wished to share their views
    - Petitions – whilst none were received from any party in Dorset, petitions were welcome
  6. The consultation explored a range of different questions which reflected the range of the 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.

The principal benefits of this work are that the consultation can be relied on as:

- statistically valid and a robust reflection of public opinion in Dorset as a whole – the methodology used means that, were the same questions to be asked again, 19 times out of 20, if every resident responded, the findings would be the same
  - a robust basis for the proposals developed for the improvement in local government in Dorset
7. Since the proposal was submitted to you, the financial pressures on this Council have increased even further. This is driven by increased demand for services (particularly adult social care and children’s services) and the limits presented in the Local Government Financial Settlement. I expect these circumstances to continue for many years. I firmly believe we need a long term solution and reorganising from nine councils to two in Dorset is a vital part of this.
  8. Members of this 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 the hope and anticipation of your final decision to proceed with the reorganisation. I am very pleased with the positive approach being taken by members from all the constituent councils.

9. Members of the Joint Committee are leading the work necessary to make a success of the implementation. Task and Finish Groups have been established to:
  - develop a Council Tax Harmonisation strategy
  - disaggregate the County Council's budget and services in Christchurch
  - contribute to the Department's work on the Structural Change Order,
  - support the Department's work on electoral arrangements for the new council; and
  - propose plans that will preserve the distinct civic identities of Poole, Christchurch and Bournemouth.
10. A website has been created to share the Committee's agenda and reports at <https://bcpjointcommittee.wordpress.com/meetings/>
11. In order to support this work, a programme board has been established comprising the Chief Executives / Managing Director of the four constituent councils. 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 a very compressed timescale.
12. I recognise the importance of our MPs in this process and have been actively engaging with them in our work on the reorganisation. I am very pleased that Sir Robert Syms, Michael Tomlinson and Conor Burns - the MPs collectively representing all parts of Poole - have all, on being presented with the evidence, enthusiastically stated their support for the proposal. I will continue to work with them in the best interests of Poole and Dorset as a whole.
13. I am very encouraged by the progress towards greater local consent on the part of our neighbouring councils. It is clear that they have considered the issues carefully in the light of your statement to Parliament on 7 November.
14. You will be aware that Christchurch Borough Council has held an advisory poll and considered the result at a recent Full Council meeting, alongside an alternative proposal to our Future Dorset option. I would like you to be aware that the advisory poll in Christchurch was supported by privately promoted information which was factually inaccurate and misleading. I know this was not led by Christchurch Council. However, it is clear that other parties, who did not respect the good practice requirement of proper public consultation, have promoted unreliable and biased information in support of their objection to the reorganisation. I believe this action has rendered the poll wholly unreliable and ask you to disregard it completely. To support my request that you set the results of the poll aside, I have prepared a document which identifies and corrects the factual inaccuracies and misleading statements in the various leaflets circulated widely in Christchurch. Please find this attached at Appendix A.



15. In considering the poll and its alternative proposal, Christchurch Borough Council made various comments on the viability of the evidence presented as part of the Future Dorset case. I have already addressed the robustness of the public consultation. Additionally, I believe the case to have been strongly made that the model for local government reorganisation, as set out in the Future Dorset proposal, benefits all residents of Dorset.
16. On the specifics of the Christchurch representation, I would draw your attention to Appendix B – Comments of the Christchurch Borough Council Draft Alternative Proposal considered at its meeting on 2<sup>nd</sup> January.
17. As part of the Christchurch submission, I am aware that Christchurch Borough Council has requested additional time in which to prepare a business case supporting its alternative proposal. The position of Christchurch Borough Council has not changed in a year and, during this time, no attempt has been made to develop a business case in support of the alternative proposal, with costs and savings set out, and the basis on which these will be achieved. I must be clear that the Borough of Poole is not prepared to consider a single unitary authority with Bournemouth Borough Council as 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), in the representative household survey only 27% supported this option whilst the open questionnaire revealed just 30% support. Further delay in receipt of your positive final decision will have serious implications not just for implementation within the time available, but also on the ability to provide sustainable public services for local people, and achieve the many benefits for the area.
18. I would like to remind you of the consequences of not proceeding with the Future Dorset proposal.
- The opportunity to put local government in Dorset on a sustainable footing would be lost. Our aspirations for Poole, and for Dorset, are ambitious, aspirational, and achievable. Improved quality of life, sustainable public services, greater investment, clear democratic accountability and better access to jobs and housing await. Conversely, without change, our residents and businesses would find that the level of services they expect to receive would be reduced. In particular, our work to meet the pressures on adult and children's social care services would be severely hampered. The reality would be spending more on governance, management, overheads and support services than is necessary or desirable. Such are the pressures that lie ahead that I cannot guarantee that there would not be lasting implications for sustaining frontline services.
  - The opportunity to create a 21<sup>st</sup> century council which can promote successful economic development and create the right environment for business would be lost. This would be to the detriment of Dorset and the UK as a whole.
  - The expectations of the public and indeed partner agencies and local business that have supported the proposals for reorganisation so clearly in the consultation would not be fulfilled.

19. Finally I would like to encourage you to make a final decision as quickly as you possibly can. I am very keen to make progress with the plans for the reorganisation planned for April 2019. This is only 15 months way. With goodwill and support from all parties there is enough time to get the job done and launch the new council successfully. Further delay and uncertainty will increase the risks to successful implementation and the outcomes we want to achieve for residents and businesses. I feel we owe it to our community to show a clear direction for local government and to demonstrate our commitment to delivering great public services for the long term.

Yours sincerely,



**Cllr Janet Walton  
Leader of the Council  
Borough of Poole**

Cc Sir Robert Syms MP, Michael Tomlinson MP and Conor Burns MP

Appended documents

Appendix A: Commentary on leaflets issued in Christchurch

Appendix B: Comments on Christchurch Borough Council alternative proposal

Supporting links

Future Dorset website: [www.futuredorset.co.uk](http://www.futuredorset.co.uk)



