

# Verwood County Division – Alderholt February 2018

## County Councillor Report – Cllrs. Toni Coombs and Spencer Flower

**Local Government Reorganisation** - Members of the Dorset Area Joint Committee (DAJC) met on 18 January to progress structural arrangements for the proposed new council for the Dorset Area.

The Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, the Rt Hon Sajid Javid MP, continues to consider the Future Dorset proposal. However, DAJC Members stated today that they are hopeful for a decision before Parliament breaks for recess on the 8th February. The proposal would see Dorset's 9 existing councils replaced with two new unitary authorities. Subject to legislation, these would be up and running in April 2019; with Elections being held on the 2 May 2019.

DAJC Members voted on a number of recommendations in the draft Structural Change Order process which would set out the statutory arrangements for creating a new unitary authority. Members were asked to make decisions on the council name, choice of transformation model, composition and chairmanship of implementation arrangements and the electoral cycle. Below is a summary of the key decisions.

**Decision 1** - Members voted unanimously in favour of calling a new council for the Dorset Area 'Dorset Council' and that this must be about the creation of a new organisation.

**Decision 2** - Members were asked to consider two options which are open to the Secretary of State to govern the transition from old councils to a new council. Either:

- a) The County Council as a continuing authority with an implementation executive managing the transition
- b) A new legal entity with a shadow authority and shadow executive managing the transition.

Members agreed to carry forward **option b** for the creation of an entirely new council.

**Decision 3** - Members agreed that as this would be a newly created organisation the Leader and Chair of the shadow authority should be elected by the shadow executive.

**Decision 4** - The recommendation was upheld that the officer to lead the process could be from any of the constituent local authorities and would be confirmed later in the process following discussion agreement with the Joint Committee.

**Decision 5** - Members agreed that the election cycle should be consistent with the County and Unitary arrangements in England. For this to happen elections would be held in May 2019 for the new council and will be for a 5 year term. This would be repeated in May 2024 after which the election cycle would revert to 4 year terms. This brings the electoral cycle in line with other Unitary Councils in England. The Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government will be asked to include Town and Parish councils within the Dorset area into this arrangement. This is seen to safeguard turnout and ensure that the cost of elections are substantially borne by the Unitary Council.

In addition, the Dorset Area Joint Committee considered a report from the Task and Finish Group, which is chaired by the author of this report. Members agreed to refer to electoral areas as 'Wards' and that the new council would consist of 82 Members. The warding will be single member by default, but it is recognised that in urban areas multi-member wards normally work better in dealing with electoral equality, local identity and connectivity. More details as to the proposals will be available in late April 2018.

The current number of elected members [County and District Councillors] for the Dorset Area is 211. This will be reduced to 82 based on a local boundary review which will be overseen initially by the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government and then once the Parliamentary Order has been made, by the Local Government Boundary Commission, who will conduct the public consultation. The final warding arrangements will be announced in November 2018, when the order is laid before Parliament. For the record any such changes will not involve Town or Parish Council warding arrangements.