**South East Dorset Devolution - Third of councillors face axe as 'super council' moves closer to reality, Daily Echo reports**

A THIRD of councillors’ face being axed as a South East Dorset “super council” moves closer to reality.

The Conservative-run Bournemouth, Poole, Christchurch and East Dorset councils revealed last summer that the authorities had entered into merger talks. And Bournemouth council leader John Beesley has now confirmed the four authorities’ chief executives have begun talks with the Department for Communities and Local Government regarding the plan’s “operational issues”.

This, he explained, could see a proportion of councillors lose their seats in 2018 and Dorchester-based Dorset County Council, which is also in talks about combining with other district authorities in the west of the county, delay elections scheduled for 2017. Discussions to date have confirmed that if there is local agreement by this autumn, the government could recommend the extension of the county council from May 2017 to May 2018 and be in a position to organise elections to the new council in May 2018,” he said.

“The council elected in May 2018 for South East Dorset and a likely Western Unitary Authority would have powers only of setting council tax for 2019/20 and establishing new structure. They would work in parallel in 2018/19 with the existing councils of Bournemouth, Poole, Christchurch, East Dorset and county council and western districts, who would continue until May 2019. Elections in 2018 could be on the basis of best fit local wards, whilst reducing the number of councillors by approximately a third. Following these 2018 elections the Boundary Commission would seek to review ward boundaries in preparation for the 2022 elections.”

Cllr Beesley said that officials at the Department for Communities and Local Government have experience in assisting authorities such as Cornwall in setting up new combined councils.

This latest development follows Bournemouth council’s decision to terminate an outsourcing deal with Kier Group, a move corporate efficiency portfolio holder Cllr Anne Filer admitted would help progress the merger. And in December the council delegated responsibility for running Millhams, its main waste and recycling centre, to neighbours Borough of Poole.

Cllr Ian Monks resigned as leader of [East Dorset District Council](http://www.bournemouthecho.co.uk/search/?search=East+Dorset+District+Council&topic_id=3822) in December ahead of a vote on plans to combine the authorities, while opposition councillors in Poole and Bournemouth have repeatedly had their requests for a referendum on the issue refused.

If the council merger goes ahead it would form the eight biggest local authority in the country.

**http://www.bournemouthecho.co.uk Monday 1st February 2016**