

**New Forest 'ready and willing' to talk to Christchurch over merger**

[Jason Lewis](http://www.bournemouthecho.co.uk/author/profile/80065.Jason_Lewis/) 23 November, 2017

ATTEMPTS by Christchurch to avoid the ‘super-council’ merger could see a partnership with old friends to the east of the borough.

**Both** [**New Forest District Council**](http://www.newforest.gov.uk/) **(NFDC) and Hampshire County Council (HCC) have said they are willing to talk with** [**Christchurch Borough Council**](http://www.bournemouthecho.co.uk/search/?search=Christchurch+Borough+Council&topic_id=4075) **(CBC) regarding mergers.**

At a public forum in the Priory on Monday, Christchurch council leader David Flagg told members of the public he has asked secretary of state Sajid Javid for a three week extension on the January 8 decision deadline.

He also said NFDC was “ready and willing” to talk.

**Cllr Barry Rickman, leader of NFDC, confirmed this position.**

“I have always felt that Christchurch is a very similar place to the New Forest, not only the coastal areas and the beautiful forest.” Cllr Rickman said.

“We have people’s lives to look after and we will always look at ways we can share services.

“We owe it to our public to look at ways we can work together wherever possible.”

**Cllr Roy Perry, leader of HCC, confirmed the authority had been approached.**

“We would certainly be prepared to meet with Christchurch, but we would also need to ensure that our colleagues in Dorset County Council are closely involved,” Cllr Perry said.

“These are complex issues and would not just affect the district council but also county council services and health services.

“For example, there are important relations between the health and care arrangements in Christchurch which are deeply connected to the wider Dorset arrangements.

“That is but one consideration as of course is the fundamental issue of the will of the people. But we are always ready to talk.”

[**David McIntosh**](http://www.bournemouthecho.co.uk/search/?search=David+McIntosh&topic_id=3831)**, CBC chief executive, said attention was currently focused on the referendum.**

“The priority of staff currently is to ensure the poll is run efficiently.

“The leader of the council has written to Hampshire County Council and officers await further instruction once he receives a response.”

The referendum on the merger with Poole and Bournemouth is taking place in early December.