

**Decision on Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole merger expected**

31 October, 2017

AN initial decision on plans to merge Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole councils is expected in early November. The long-awaited judgement on the Future Dorset proposal by Local Government Secretary Sajid Javid will then be subject to representations in Parliament before a final decision in made in January.

At the first meeting of the new Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Joint Committee, with representatives from all three boroughs and Dorset County, members heard work to create a new unitary authority would have to begin from the date of the first decision, if approved, to meet pre-set deadlines.

"In the event of a positive decision received from the Secretary of State we will be embarking on an extremely large and complex programme of change, even more challenging in the reduced time we have to deliver it," said Julian Osgathorpe, executive director for corporate services for Bournemouth and Poole. The body appointed Poole leader Janet Walton as chairman and Bournemouth and Christchurch leaders John Beesley and David Flagg as vice-chairmen.

It was agreed that 'task and finish groups' made up of members from all three councils would be set up to look into specific issues, such as bringing council tax in Bournemouth and Poole up to the same level as Christchurch.

Cllr Flagg told the committee Christchurch members, who voted against Future Dorset earlier this year, had "no intention of disrupting meetings" by not attending. "We will have members from Christchurch at each and every meeting," he said.

Poole Liberal Democrat Cllr David Brown, the only non-Tory member, called for the party balance on the committee to be proportionate among those attending from each authority, but this move was not seconded.

Bournemouth's monitoring officer Tanya Coulter said the Boundary Commission might undertake a review of council boundaries if Future Dorset is approved, and that this should be discussed by a task and finish group.

Poole Cllr Drew Mellor said the committee's role would be to "improve services for everybody and save some money, because we need to".

The next meeting is at Bournemouth Town Hall at 10am on 21 November 2017.