

DAILY ECHO

Dorset council leaders' reactions

Council leaders have reacted to the Government approval to cut the number of councils in Dorset.

In a joint comment, the council leaders of Bournemouth, Cllr John Beesley, Dorset County, Cllr Rebecca Knox, North Dorset, Cllr Graham Carr-Jones, Poole, Cllr Janet Walton, West Dorset, Cllr Anthony Alford and Weymouth & Portland, Cllr Jeff Cant – who submitted the original proposal to the government, and East Dorset, Cllr Spencer Flower, and Purbeck, Cllr Gary Suttle – who withdrew their opposition to the proposal earlier this year, said:

“This is an historic day for public services in Dorset. Now we have received this decision, we can collectively focus our efforts, through the established Joint Committees, on creating two brand new councils. This will be a challenge but we will work hard to ensure our communities receive the services they expect and deserve. Our strong track record of partnership working in Dorset, whether through shared Chief Executives and management teams or joint service delivery, demonstrates our ability to put in place creative and innovative ways of working, and shows we will always put the provision & preservation of essential frontline public services and the interests of our residents first. This is about so much more than the re-organisation of council structures in Dorset. The opportunity to change the way we provide services will help us save money, give greater accountability to council tax payers and service users, and protect public services for future generations.”

Cllr Rebecca Knox, chair of the Dorset Area Joint Committee and Leader of Dorset County Council said: "It is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to remodel local services with our communities and partners to be responsive, innovative and above all else, efficient and effective. We will work with our colleagues in Bournemouth, Christchurch & Poole to make sure individuals who rely on our services, staff and services are transferred in a seamless and positive way.

“Local Government Reform offers an opportunity to move to shared and collective delivery, with a democratic mandate that can act quickly as we work even more closely with our communities and partners to make sure Dorset is a great place to live and work. The way forward for Dorset will focus on investing in our future, good education, a growing economy and good service delivery. It is what our staff strive to deliver, what our residents need, and why councillors carry out the work they do.”

Cllr Janet Walton, Chair of the Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Joint Committee and Leader of Borough of Poole said: "We have discussed openly the issues around council tax harmonisation, how the new council will work to protect services for those living in its area who currently receive care from Dorset County Council, and set out a commitment to protecting civic traditions. "Nowhere in the country has disbanded nine councils and created two new unitary authorities in the timescale that we now have, but we know from today's decision that the Government has every confidence in us to deliver. We have a clear and detailed work programme to take us through from now to day one of the new council. I have every confidence that, working together, we will make sure the new council is ready to deliver on the promises set out in the proposal approved by Sajid Javid today – to protect frontline services, to champion the area nationally and to improve the quality of life and access to opportunity for all those living in the area the new council will serve – the three towns of Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole."

A statement from nine Christchurch councillors - Claire Bath, Bernie Davis, Tavis Fox, Wendy Grace, Vicki Hallam, Ray Nottage, Lisle Smith, Sue Spittle, Trevor Watts - urges fellow councillors to work together to support the approved plans. "We want to put behind us the divisions created by this long-awaited decision and work together with our fellow Councillors to ensure a smooth transition of services into the new authority. The opportunities the new council creates should be grasped by all Christchurch councillors who now need to work closely with Councillors from Bournemouth and Poole to embrace the chance to deliver a future proof Council across the conurbation for all residents. By working in partnership with our neighbours we can ensure that the things that matter most to us in Christchurch are carried forward into the new structure. Now is the time to embrace the opportunities this brings for future generations by ensuring our voice is heard both locally and in central government to protect our heritage, grow our economy and improve our roads and schools, this can only be achieved by working in harmony together. Let's stop the fighting and get on with the business we were elected to do, to get the best deal for the people of Christchurch."

However, **Christchurch Council**'s deputy leader Trish Jamieson said: "We are disappointed that the Secretary of State has announced his final decision to approve local government reorganisation in Dorset. "This decision comes despite **Christchurch Borough Council** putting forward an alternative to the Future Dorset submission and 84% of Christchurch residents who voted in the local poll not supporting the proposal for Christchurch to become part of a unitary council with Bournemouth and Poole councils. We will be calling an Extraordinary Full Council meeting to allow us to consider our position moving forward and the opinion of the legal professional as to whether there is any arguable error in law. We are committed members of the joint committee and our priority now is to focus on getting the best for the Christchurch residents who elected us to represent them."