

# Supplementary Papers for Council

Date:      Wednesday, 15 January 2025



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## 3.      Devolution

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## Extraordinary Council Meeting

15 January 2025

### Ancillary Report

This is an additional report taking into account information from the previous few days, which is intended to supplement the information available to councillors when considering the devolution options available to the Council.

Any additional information which becomes available before the meeting on 15 January will be reported to councillors at the start of the discussion.

#### Contents:

1. Update from MHCLG
2. Tables showing strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats from a BCP Council perspective for each option outlined in the main report.
3. Referendum information
4. Letter from Leader of Hampshire County Council
5. Business feedback table
6. Corrections to comparator data table

#### 1. Update from MHCLG

Following a meeting with all five of our Members of Parliament on Friday 10 January, an urgent meeting was requested with the Minister, to clarify a number of points which arose. Unfortunately, the Minister was unable to accommodate a meeting at such short notice and verbal advice has therefore been provided from senior civil servants at MHCLG. We have asked for that advice to be confirmed in writing, but it has not been received yet

The advice from MHCLG is that:

- a. There would not be support for a single-authority proposal for BCP Council, or one that involved BCP Council and the communities that focus on the conurbation with around 500,000+ population. The population criteria of 1.5m is clear.
- b. The Minister would not want to express a view on the preferred geography, either looking north-east into Hampshire and Solent, or looking north-west towards the Heart of Wessex. MHCLG would prefer that decision about preferred geography to be taken locally rather than by government.

## 2. SWOT assessment for each option outlined in the main report, from a BCP perspective

### Option 1: No decision to participate in the Priority Programme

Strengths	Weaknesses
Opportunity to learn from the Priority Programme first wave	Miss the opportunity to shape the agenda of either Strategic Authority
More time to seek public views through consultation	Potentially miss out on short-term future funding and investment (Appendix A)
Take decision in own time, for benefit of all, rather than follow Government timeline	Government could issue a ministerial directive in due course and best option for residents may not be achieved
Opportunities	Threats
Opportunity for more certainty over devolution area options available and the priorities adopted in each are	BCP Council seen as unco-operative or disengaged, damaging relationship with Government and our neighbours
Opportunity to get clarity from Government on what powers would be devolved and therefore clearer views on benefit for residents.	BCP Council does not get an opportunity to shape the early agenda and priorities

### Option 2: BCP Only

Strengths	Weaknesses
Can focus investment and powers on the challenges in Bournemouth, Christchurch & Poole	Does not meet Government population criteria of 1.5m+
Decisions would benefit the BCP economic geography	Previous efforts unsuccessful
	Single authority proposals are not supported
Opportunities	Threats
To ensure economic resilience and increase economic growth	Very small entity and little voice at national level
To improve productivity	Smaller amount of funding available
To focus on the economic needs of the BCP area	Complicated/confusing governance with a co-terminus mayor and Council

### Option 3: Hampshire and Solent

Strengths	Weaknesses
Clear proposal has already been constructed demonstrating the needs of the Hampshire and Solent area	Current proposal needs extending to include BCP issues e.g. transport and skills
Already has a good balance between urban & rural agendas	Local Government Re-organisation is needed in Hampshire and Solent and this will be distracting
Previous proposal was a strong starting point on which to build	Large geography over several “functional economic areas”
“Gateway to the world” message is strong and aligned with strong economic and education assets	Crosses two regions (South and South West) which complicates the picture for public services
Business preference (small sample and informal survey)	BCP Council is not central to the relationships across local government bodies in the area
Opportunities	Threats
Bigger pot of funding potentially available	Few existing relationships, new relationships will take time to develop
Clout with Government due to scale and opportunities	Other public services generally do not align and will take time to adjust their orientation
A global destination	The agenda for the BCP area could get lost in a bigger agenda
Similar economic challenges/opportunities to the BCP area in Southampton and Portsmouth	Other areas may take priority as they are more core to the proposal and have closer links to London
Shared economic sectors	Some businesses may see the new links and relocate east into the Hampshire and Solent area
BCP biggest population centre and therefore could attract investment	

#### Option 4: Heart of Wessex

Strengths	Weaknesses
Recent economic alignment with Dorset e.g. Local Enterprise Partnership	Large geography over several “functional economic areas”
Alignment of most other public services (Police, Fire and Rescue etc) including future funding for health and return to work programmes	Predominately rural with only small centres of population in towns across the rest of the area
BCP would be by far the biggest population centre and can shape the agenda	Challenges and needs are potentially very different between rural and urban areas
Some shared economic sectors and opportunities but not strongly favoured by business (Appendix D)	The Mayor would cover a large rural area with largely rural concerns and urban issues may get lost
Opportunities	Threats
Space for housing and employment sites along relevant transport corridors	Few existing relationships, particularly with Somerset and Wiltshire. New relationships will take time to develop
Possibility of new transport corridors north and west from the BCP area	
Improved connections north-south between M4 and ports enhancing trade	
More aligned skills provision to support employment	
Aligned health & employment programme geographies	

### **3. Referendum information from Democratic Services**

Some councillors at the Overview and Scrutiny Board meeting on 6 January suggested that we should consider holding a referendum to consider this issue. Officers have explored the likely process and costs to do this.

These figures assume that the requirement is for a BCP-wide referendum of the whole electorate, with a simple question with a single “yes”/“no” answer. The figures may vary if the question is more complex or requires multiple choices to be considered.

**Total Electorate** – 299,000

**Cost** – £700k

**Timeframe** – The official timetable would be 7 weeks approx., but 12 weeks is the minimum recommended notice for running a safe and secure electoral event across the whole of the BCP Council area. The lead time is needed to source suppliers, book polling stations, confirm a count venue and provide administrative accommodation as well as the need to engage with staff to work in the polling stations and at the count. This timescale would start from the Council agreeing the approval of the proposal to hold such a poll and agreement of the wording of the question to be put.

The process for a local poll is set out in Section 116 of the Local Government Act 2003.

If this was a route which councillors wished to pursue then the preferred route and the preferred question(s) would need to be agreed, and the budget would need to be identified to fund the poll. It is worth noting that referenda and local polls are not legally binding, despite incurring these costs and the formal process that needs to be followed.

The Council has other consultations options at its disposal which would be significantly cheaper and quicker than running a Local/Advisory Referenda/Local Poll.

### **4. Updates from other areas**

The Leader of BCP Council received a letter from the Leader of Hampshire County Council on 13 January 2025 which is included with this report at Appendix A. It is clear that the unitary and county councils forming the Hampshire and Solent proposal have submitted their proposal, although this does not mention BCP Council as far as we can tell.

The three principal authorities behind the Heart of Wessex deal, Dorset, Wiltshire and Somerset Councils have all submitted a proposal for the Heart of Wessex proposal, and all have confirmed that they would welcome the addition of BCP Council to that area and this has been detailed in their internal reports.

We understand that Swindon Council has not submitted a proposal at this stage and has continued to express an interest in an eastward-facing proposal alongside Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire councils.

## 5. Business Feedback

An informal survey was conducted through the Dorset Chamber of Commerce, the four Business Improvement Districts covering the area, Destination Management Board and the Federation of Small Businesses. Businesses were asked which option they preferred, either Heart of Wessex or Hampshire and Solent. The initial results are set out below. Councillors should note that this is a very simple survey, and little information was provided on the implications of either choice:

<b>Business Members/ Levy Payers of:</b>	<b>Hampshire &amp; Solent</b>	<b>Heart of Wessex</b>	<b>Other</b>
Dorset Chamber	22	2	2 (neutral)
Bournemouth TC BID	5	3	1 (BCP & Dorset)
Coastal BID	1		1 (either)
Christchurch BID	1	1	
Poole BID	1	3	2 (either/not Wessex)
Destination Management Board	1	2	1
Federation of Small Businesses	1		
Total	32	11	7



## 6. Corrections to Comparator Data Table

In the Comparator Data Table Appendix in the main report, there was an error in the Business Counts data. The Hampshire and Solent data also included Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole, so the Hampshire and Solent data was overestimated. This has been corrected and shown below:

Area	Micro (0 to 9)	Small (10 to 49)	Medium-sized (50 to 249)	Large (250+)	Total
Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole	13,825	1,340	280	50	15,495
Dorset	16,135	1,595	200	35	17,970
Somerset	22,290	2,120	325	65	24,795
Swindon	6,300	570	120	45	7,035
Wiltshire	19,340	1,795	310	75	21,520
Hampshire	51,495	5,845	960	220	58,520
Isle of Wight	4,110	495	70	10	4,680
Portsmouth	5,250	590	110	35	5,980
Southampton	6,660	605	100	35	7,400
HOW	57,765	5,510	835	175	64,285
HOW %	89.9	8.6	1.3	0.3	100.0
HOW plus BCP	71,590	6,850	1,115	225	79,780
HOW plus BCP %	89.7	8.6	1.4	0.3	100.0
HOW plus BCP & Swindon	77,890	7,420	1,235	270	86,815
HOW plus BCP & Swindon %	89.7	8.5	1.4	0.3	100.0
Hampshire & Solent	67,515	7,535	1,240	300	76,580
Hampshire & Solent %	88.2	9.8	1.6	0.4	100.0
Hampshire & Solent & BCP	81,340	8,875	1,520	350	92,075
Hampshire & Solent & BCP %	88.3	9.6	1.7	0.4	100.0
gor:South East	362,215	34,240	6,235	1,670	404,360
gor:South West	210,165	21,625	3,590	780	236,160
country:England	2,113,555	206,875	37,925	9,995	2,368,350

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Our ref: O-LO-2025-001  
13 January 2025

*Councillor Nick Adams-King  
Leader of the County Council  
The Castle, Winchester  
Hampshire SO23 8UJ  
Telephone 0370 7792878*

**Sent by Email**

Dear Millie

**Hampshire and Solent Devolution Proposals**

Thanks for your messages in respect of Bournemouth Christchurch and Poole Council (BCP) potentially joining Hampshire and the Solent's application to create a County Combined Authority under the Government's Devolution Priority Programme.

I have discussed your request with my colleagues Cllr Lorna Fielker, Leader of Southampton City Council, Cllr Steve Pitt, Leader of Portsmouth City Council and Cllr Phil Jordan, Leader of Isle of Wight Council. We all agree that there is commonality between BCP and Hampshire and the Solent and can understand why you would wish to pursue links to our Combined Authority area as opposed to that being formed by the Heart of Wessex authorities.

As you will be aware, there may be a challenge in the respect that BCP does not share the same public service footprint (police, fire and health in particular) as the four authorities creating the Hampshire and the Solent Combined Authority. You have reported that Baroness Taylor was open to discussion over how that might be overcome, and we are content that you explore this further with MHCLG.

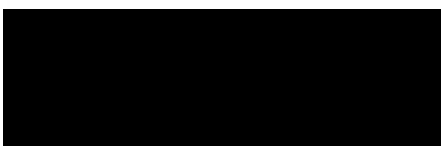
As you know, Isle of Wight Council, Portsmouth City Council, Southampton City Council and Hampshire County Council submitted our application to join the Priority Devolution Programme on Friday 10th January. We are determined to proceed with our application at pace and would not wish for interest from any neighbouring authority to delay our progress.

I hope that makes our position clear.

Good luck with your Council meeting next week.

Best wishes

Nick



**Cllr Nick Adams-King**  
Leader  
Hampshire County Council

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