

DORSET CHAMBER

REPORT ON BCP INITIAL BUSINESS CONSULTATION ON DEVOLUTION

INTRODUCTION

BCP Council asked Dorset Chamber to undertake a very brief and initial business consultation to help inform a BCP discussion on the devolution area that businesses would feel is most relevant to them. With a brief explanation of what devolution means, they were asked the following question:

From a business perspective, would you feel you would benefit from being connected to either:

- a) Heart of Wessex area
- b) Hampshire/Solent area

Dorset Chamber asked its Board members, Ambassadors and Business Partners to respond. The sample was limited given the timescale for this piece of work. The majority of these businesses are based in the BCP area (although their activities will not be limited to BCP). This is appropriate given the question we are asking.

RESPONSES

A total of 26 responses were received and the responses are as follows:

Unsure/ no clear position	Dorset	Solent
2 (8%)	2 (8%)	22 (84%)

COMMENTS FROM BUSINESSES RESPONDING

Comments have not been directly attributed to respondents as they were not informed this would be the case at this time due to the urgency of the survey.

Comments received are as follows:

My view would most definitely be the Hampshire option. Ocean has businesses in Dorset and Somerset and I'd say the Somerset side is more aligned with more northern and west such as Bristol / Bath/ Taunton/Exeter. The Dorset businesses tend to look east.

Based on my experience and business success in the region, I am very much in favour of connecting with the Hampshire/Solent area. I am confident that there are significant

opportunities for businesses in Dorset, and I believe being part of the Hampshire/Solent Strategic Authority would provide a strong foundation for continued growth and success in the Central South.

No question that the greater opportunity for trade, logistics and prosperity in business is Hampshire / Solent.

It is tricky to say without knowing what each of the authorities would like to push through/prioritise. I imagine that would be quite key to see what group is more aligned with the issues businesses in the BCP area face. For most businesses, I would anticipate Hampshire/Solent would share more common ground. However, I would anticipate Heart of Wessex to be more akin to Dorset and potentially BCP – I am particularly thinking of outer Christchurch and Poole – those parts of the conurbation bordering the more rural areas. Sorry my answer is not a simple one. Without knowing more it is tricky to say but if pushed I think BCP will be better suited by Hampshire/Solent and Dorset (appreciate you are not asking about them specifically) to Wessex.

Heart of Wessex, I think we would get lost amongst Hampshire and Solent.

From a Chamber perspective I would have thought Hampshire/Solent but from a Motley business perspective Wessex makes sense.

Hampshire/Solent – I think we are more closely aligned to Hampshire as opposed to Wilts/Somerset.

Hampshire/Solent area for us (very selfish but that is where we are based!).

I don't think either option is ideal for Dorset business community – the Heart of Wessex area is going to be heavily rural focused, whilst that will have synergies with West and North Dorset, it will leave BCP isolated. Hampshire, we all know the New Forest is a big business divide. Businesses do not tend to cross it looking for B2B services. However, I think our profile in BCP is more aligned to Solent.

We're neutral, we can work in either direction. Wiltshire and Somerset seem a long way away, Dorset is not, and many areas are deeply linked to BCP – Wimborne, Ferndown etc. There are also many similarities to Solent area. A dilemma.

Based on the economic prosperity of the area, I would vote for Hampshire/Solent.

If the focus for BCP is to connect with larger urban centres and industrial hubs like Portsmouth and get stronger links to maritime industries and international trade then the Hampshire/Solent option would probably be better. Aligning with Wiltshire, Somerset and Dorset may strengthen links with the tourism sector benefitting hospitality and small scale manufacturing I would have thought. What's best for the majority is to probably focus on our niche but what's best long-term, probably align with the bigger hubs.

We are not sure we would be affected either way. Although like most others in Construction, we will be looking for a speeding up of the planning process and more acceptance of Build projects - whichever way Devolution goes. My personal view is that it would seem to make sense for BCP to go with Hampshire/Solent - as these are towns/cities more aligned to the Business make up of BCP area. By the same criteria, Dorset would seem to sit better in Heart of Wessex, more rural areas.

The obvious choice would seem to be Hampshire/Solent area. I have, however, been hesitant in my making my decision. It depends on how funding is going to be delivered. The sense behind going with Solent is our connectivity is better with them, they are closer in nature to Dorset local 'hubs and cities', and we also share an obvious relationship regarding ports, marine and education (universities and colleges). It's great to build a big picture regarding these shared assets, but will the funding be more 'watered down' as a result.

Our strong preference is for 'Heart of Wessex'. Assuming Dorset joins as well, this gives a far more cohesive area. Much of Dorset is in the BCP travel to work area, and by being the largest settlement in the Strategic Authority, it should give good weight and focus to BCP (and Dorset).

We do not favour Hampshire/Solent, as there is a real risk that BCP will not be the focus, with this instead being the Portsmouth/Southampton conurbation.

From my perspective, I'd favour a link with Hampshire/Solent over Heart of Wessex mainly because of the strength of the existing/new business/client/professional relationships have naturally flowed between the Hampshire/Solent region more so than Wiltshire and Somerset. Regardless of whichever Dorset join (if either), as a region, we must have an equal footing in the stakes rather than being seen as the "little brother".

My initial feeling on this is that if this was to proceed, we would benefit more from an association with a Hampshire/Solent Strategic Authority.

BUSINESSES RESPONDING

The following businesses responded to this snap survey:

Ocean Automotive
Caron Khan Creative Consultant
YMCA Bournemouth
ReidSteel
Frettons
Trethowans
Blue Sky Financial Planning
Savills
Motley
Purple HR
Lester Aldridge
Y-Not Finance
Azets
Bournemouth and Poole College
HSBC
Digital Storm
Newsquest (Echo)
Martin Beardsley Ltd
Superior Seals
Harry J Palmer
Morebus
Baguette and Son
Lewis Manning Hospice Care
Enhanced
Aspire Jobs
Tru Talent

CONCLUSION

Based on this limited nap survey, it's clear the majority of business feel that the Solent option is more relevant and of benefit to them.

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Dorset Chamber
9th January 2025