

## **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/<br/>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<br>Wessex) |
| Destination Management<br>Board              | 1                             | 2                      | 1                        |
| Federation of Small<br>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 |