



Working Together

A Pilot Project for Locality Working in Dorset

Cynthia Starkey, Chief
Executive DAPTC
Bob Gillis, Town Clerk
Bridport Town Council,
Karen Wright, Town Clerk
Lytchett Minster & Upton
Town Council,
Trevor Savage, Town Clerk
Sherborne Town Council,
Martin Ayres, Town Clerk
Swanage Town Council,

A One County Project

“We will work alongside all of our key partners to fully understand what services are important to our communities and then deliver them using our assets in an appropriate manner through reviewing our services and sharing our accommodation wherever possible.”

*Debbie Ward – Chief Executive, Dorset County Council -
Dorset County Council Asset Management Plan 2015-
2018*

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report summarises the findings of a pilot project across four localities, Bridport, Lytchett Minster & Upton, Sherborne and Swanage, to create a picture of public sector service delivery in those towns and to identify which organisations are doing what. The scope included identifying services and properties in need of rationalisation and how that would be achieved. The project also sought to ascertain if the public sector partnership working achieved by the One Ilfracombe model in Devon could be achieved in localities within Dorset, but without the additional bureaucracy built into that particular model.

The research undertaken found that assets within towns appeared to be utilised efficiently with little immediate scope for further rationalisation. A number of assets have transferred from district to town council ownership but this has not happened in all areas studied.

Service delivery has begun to be rationalised but it became clear that there were further opportunities yet to be exploited.

There was some appetite among town councils to purchase support services from either the county or district councils. The county council is keen to use their economies of scale to allow other public bodies to buy-in support services. The county council is developing a website that will allow town and parish councils to buy services off-the-shelf, as and when required.

Communication from the county and district councils to the town councils is variable. The town councils pass information to the county and district councils but feel that this is not always reciprocated. There is a need to spread best practice as a matter of urgency as the current situation presents a reputational risk to all parties and leads to the public's perception that the 'left hand doesn't know what the right hand's doing'.

At a day-to-day level the Town Clerks felt that contacting the correct person within the county council (and district councils) was a chore as the official route is a phone call to Dorset Direct who then route to the correct person. If we are to view each other as partners there is an argument that town, parish and district councils should have access to the county council's telephone directory and vice versa.

Town councils are the 'shop front' of the three tiers of local authority, providing the public with a convenient channel for all of their queries. Town Councils spend time and resources working on behalf of the county and district councils and receive little or no acknowledgement for the role they play.

The following recommendations and suggestions for action resulted from the research:

Recommendations	Actions to achieve recommendation
<p>1. That town, parish, district, county council and other public bodies establish forums for regular information sharing, encouraging joint-working and directing actions to address problems of common concern, based around district council boundaries and modelled on 'Team North Dorset'.</p>	<p>DCC welcomes this approach. DCC will actively involve Town and Parish Councils early in any consultation process. DCC will make use of existing mechanisms to share information through DAPTC including the area based arrangements.</p> <p>DAPTC will cascade information through the network of Town and Parish Councils to ensure information from DCC reaches members in a timely manner.</p> <p>Joint explorations about how information can be discussed in locality based forums will be undertaken.</p>
<p>2. That DCC makes it mandatory for officers to engage towns and parishes in any review processes at the earliest possible stage to help find solutions to the problems that are being addressed when services are being reviewed. This could be done via the engagement strategy or the 'engaging Members protocol'.</p>	<p>DCC and DAPTC will work together to produce guidance on how officers of the County Council can engage with Town and Parish Councils.</p> <p>This information will be co-produced quickly and will need to be practicable and workable. DAPTC will explore the opportunities for access to training for County Council officers. Parish Clerks and Councillors will be invited to present to the Dorset Mangers Group.</p>
<p>3. That DCC recognises the importance of providing funding to town and parish councils wherever services are devolved e.g. where agreements have been entered into with town councils to carry out verge cutting, funding has been provided in the first instance and it would be important for this to continue in the longer term.</p>	<p>The County Council commits to supporting parish and towns by reducing bureaucracy and red tape. We recognise the ambition to support alternative ways of working but need to be aware of the context of 25%-40% savings to County Council budget.</p> <p>We will work together to secure investment into town and parishes.</p>
<p>4. That DCC work with towns and parishes to find workable</p>	<p>DCC is committed to consultation with Town and Parish Councils. We will</p>

Recommendations	Actions to achieve recommendation
<p>solutions where the scope of services is being reduced e.g. minor highway maintenance issues are addressed.</p>	<p>always use the most effective methods to achieve this. DAPTC will cascade information when appropriate and where consultation is required across the network of Town and Parish Councils.</p> <p>DCC welcomes Parish and Town Council's ideas and innovations and commits to where feasible to jointly implement.</p>
<p>5. That when the commercial version of Dorset Nexus goes live it must be promoted to town and parish councils and the teams delivering services should be adequately resourced to ensure an excellent customer experience for town and parish councils.</p>	<p>We will make access to our service accessible through our web based tools.</p>
<p>6. That the district and county council offer service contracts, where appropriate, to towns and parishes. For example, Purbeck District Council has a grass cutting contract with a private company which will be ending soon and could be offered to town councils, as happens elsewhere in Dorset.</p>	<p>We will follow the appropriate procurement rules. We will ensure that Town and Parish councils are aware of the opportunities when they arise.</p> <p>We need to find ways in which all the councils of Dorset work together for the benefit of Dorset Residents.</p>
<p>7. That the district and county council consider transferring land to town and parish councils to rationalise land ownership and devolve management to the local level e.g. Lytchett Minster and Upton Town Council could restart talks with PDC if they still wish to take over some of the PDC land.</p>	<p>DCC is reviewing the whole estate with a view to reducing volume and the cost of maintenance. DCC will provide information through DAPTC of planned asset disposal, subject to commercial confidentiality. This information will be updated.</p> <p>In addition to assets DCC will consult early on service changes that are being considered.</p>
<p>8. That the county and district councils look to resurrect the 'A-Z of council services' booklet that</p>	<p>DCC supports the development of this as an online information and will find ways of making this happen. Discussions will</p>

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<p>was produced in the past by the county council's communications team. It could be tailored to each locality so that it is clear which services are delivered by the town/parish tier in each town and produced electronically to minimise on-going costs. (Subject to the agreement of DCC's Customer Services Manager).</p>	<p>take place with district and borough councils.</p>
<p>9. That character assessments be drawn up for each town to inform decisions on future service delivery, based on town profile data held on D4U (https://www.dorsetforyou.com/statistics/town-factsheets). This could provide info on a key set of indicators e.g. how good are public transport links, the age and employment profile of the town, the number of dependent villages within their hinterland etc.</p>	<p>Resources to undertake this work have been reduced. There is a range of additional documents that build on the town factsheets such as https://www.dorsetforyou.com/article/403331/ACORN-Profiles-2010</p> <p>Other documents can be found at https://www.dorsetforyou.com/statistics/area-profiles</p> <p>Additional request for bespoke data can be made to the county council and dependent on the particular requirement and size we will do our best to provide any available data which arises from reasonable requests.</p>
<p>10. That district, county council and other public bodies, when looking to dispose of assets, will work with towns and parishes to explore other potential community uses and consider community asset transfer prior to their disposal on the open market.</p>	<p>Dorset County Council is committed to the principles of localism contained in the Localism Act, including community asset transfer.</p>

CONCLUSION

From the information gathered in this report, it is apparent that both the county council and district councils have already taken steps to rationalise services and remove 'silo mentality'. The Team North Dorset forum provides a model that could be rolled out across the rest of Dorset. This should improve communication and coordination between the tiers of local government and if other agencies get involved, Police, NHS, Fire Service for example, would provide fully joined-up public services for an area.

The Team North Dorset model may need to be modified slightly as meetings based on district boundaries would lead to some areas like West Dorset covering a disproportionately large area compared to Purbeck or North Dorset, which may make it harder to focus on particular localities. Nonetheless, this model should be supported and replicated in order to achieve all of the benefits this report has highlighted and forms the key recommendation to be considered.

The reason for creating a set of services that are bespoke to a town seems clear. Although the four towns in the pilot are of similar size in terms of population, the demographic data has shown that the composition of each town is unique and by extension, the priorities for each locality will be unique. It is therefore important to examine each locality to derive a 'sense of place' and decide on a way forward that will deliver services in the best way possible for each community. If this philosophy is applied across Dorset, everyone from the service users, elected members, council employees and third sector organisations should realise the benefits of greater partnership working and continue this on-going journey to improved service delivery.

Working Together Principles

Dorset County Council and Town and Parish Councils will work together in partnership, respecting each other roles to deliver their statutory duties and responsibilities to:

- Promote and protect social, economic and environmental well-being for the benefit of our local communities, to ensure vibrancy and future sustainability;
- Strive to eliminate all forms of discrimination and promote equality of opportunity;
- Promote an active democracy to ensure all members of every Dorset community is able to have a say in the future and feel able to help to develop a shared vision, identity and sense of belonging;
- Welcome all feedback and aim to act quickly and efficiently to address issues within their respective power;
- Mutually respect and promote the role of elected members, parish councillors and clerks including those co-opted, as representatives of their communities through positive communication, leadership and engagement, all undertaken to high ethical standards;
- Give importance and recognition to issues and ideas raised at each level of local government; and
- Ensure efficient, effective partnerships create value for money.