

Reshaping your councils a better future for your community



Councils play a central role in our everyday lives. We all use council services. Dorset's nine councils are responsible for housing, planning, social care and protecting the vulnerable. They also empty the bins, maintain roads and run libraries. It is important therefore, that you have a say in how these and many other services are delivered in the future.

Why should I get involved?

If you live anywhere in Dorset, Bournemouth and Poole, your council, local services and the amount of council tax you pay would be affected by the proposals outlined in this document.

Responding to the need to save money, Dorset's councils are considering reducing the number of councils in the county from nine to two from 2019.

All Dorset's councils are working together to seek the views of residents, businesses and others about the proposals. This will help councils to understand your views on the proposals.

Public consultation on the proposals for change starts on 30 August and closes on 25 October 2016.

We want to
hear your views
before any decisions
are made

How are councils organised in Dorset now?

There are currently nine local authorities providing council services in Dorset.

Bournemouth Borough Council and the **Borough of Poole** are unitary authorities, providing all council services for residents in their area.

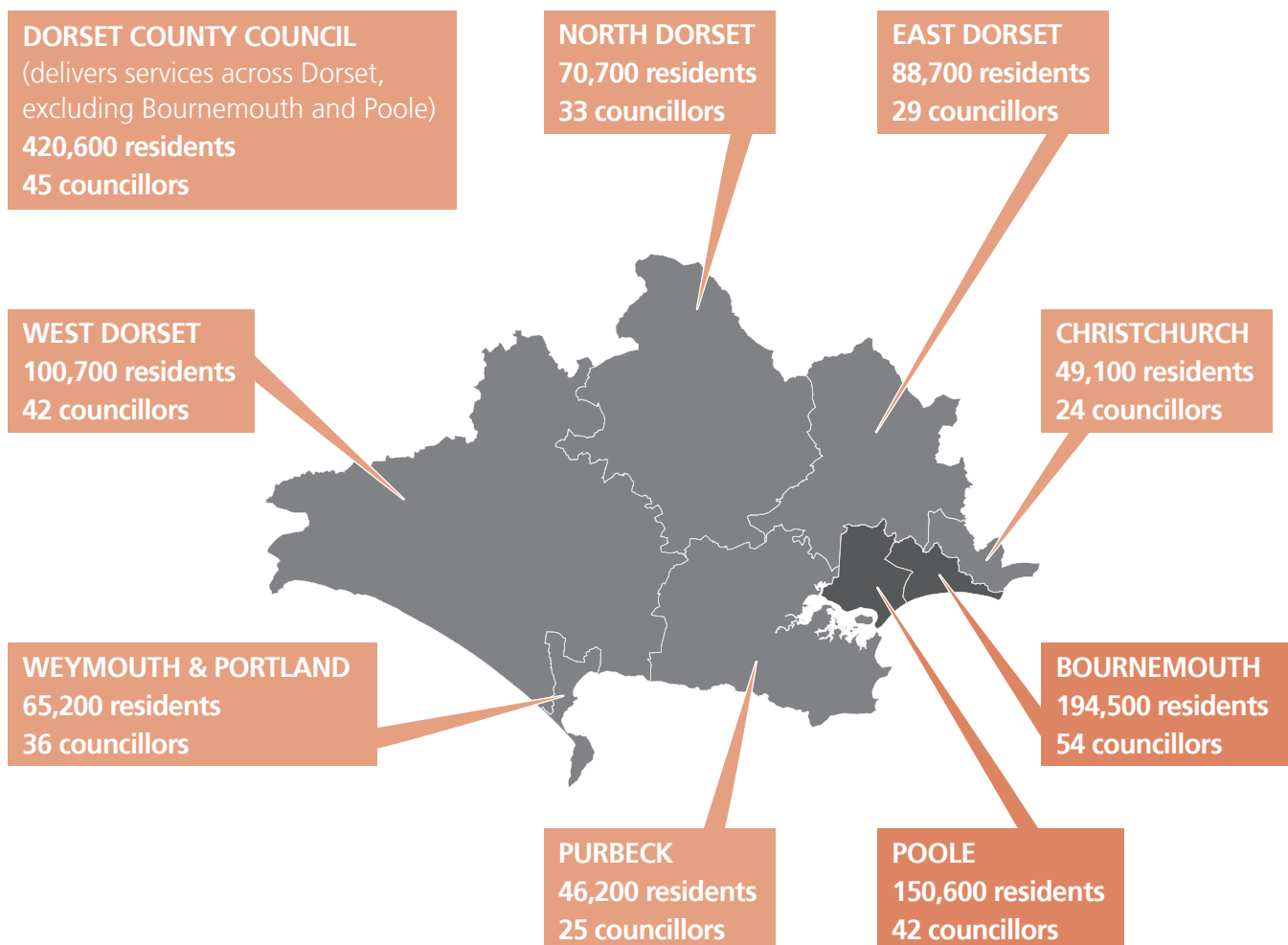
Dorset County Council provides some council services for residents across the whole of the rest of the county, including education, highways, libraries and social services.

Christchurch Borough Council, East Dorset District Council, North Dorset District Council, Purbeck District Council, West Dorset District Council and Weymouth & Portland Borough Council provide other council services for residents in their area, including parks, revenues and benefits, housing, leisure and planning.

In Dorset each of the nine councils has a political Leader, but there are six Chief Executives:

- Christchurch and East Dorset District Council are two separate councils politically, but have already made efficiency savings by having a single workforce, including one Chief Executive.
- North Dorset District Council, West Dorset District Council and Weymouth & Portland Borough Council are three separate councils politically, but have already made efficiency savings by having a single workforce, including one Chief Executive.
- In addition, all Dorset's councils have worked hard to save money and become more efficient since austerity measures began.

While these arrangements have served Dorset well, Dorset's councils now think it is time to look at a different, more cost-effective approach for the future.



Why do we need to change?

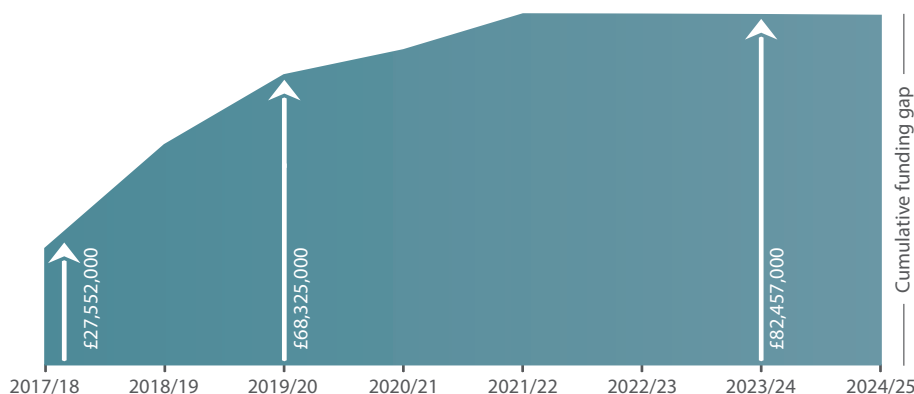
Dorset's nine councils currently spend £920 million a year delivering services (based on 2015/16). This year – 2016/17 – the amount of money the Government passed on to Dorset's councils to run services was £51.9million. That's £142 million less received in Government funding today than in 2010/11.

Despite your councils becoming more efficient, the reality is that they have less money to spend on services. The current forecast is that, from 1 April 2017 to 31 March 2025, Dorset's councils overall need to save an additional £82.3 million (see diagram below). Of this amount, £51.9 million will need to be found before any new councils are formed in 2019/2020, leaving £30.4 million to be found between 2019 and 2025 if proposals are approved. Many services will have to change drastically, or even stop altogether if savings cannot be made.

By 2019/20, Dorset's councils will have made savings over 10 years of almost £200 million. With at least another £30 million needed by 2024/25, it is now essential that change is considered in order to minimise cuts to services beyond 2019/20, and ensure councils are sustainable for the future. Whilst £30 million may seem a relatively small proportion of overall budgets, it is this on top of the £200 million already saved that makes considering change a priority now.

DORSET COUNCILS' FINANCIAL CHALLENGE:

Diagram shows the growing funding gap



Our proposals for change

Having considered the most efficient and effective options for delivering local services **Dorset's councils are considering reducing the number of local authorities in the county from nine to two.** This reform would:

- **Protect frontline services** — such as children's social care, road maintenance, libraries, parks, housing, planning and adult social services — by creating councils that are sustainable, cost-effective, and able to deliver good local services in the long-term.
- **Reduce costs and give better value for money** by cutting duplication, increasing economies of scale and improving efficiency. Although reorganisation would have a one-off cost of around £25 million, it would result in substantial savings - of at least £108 million in the first six years.
- **Focus on people and areas** by simplifying council structures and basing services around the way people live their lives and identify with a particular area, and how businesses operate.
- Continue to make councils **accountable to local people** and retain each area's **local characteristics**.
- **Stimulate jobs and promote prosperity**, by focusing on the economic opportunities within their respective areas.

The two new unitary councils would deliver the services currently provided by the six district and borough councils and Bournemouth, Dorset and Poole. The nine existing councils would cease to exist.

An independent financial assessment shows that for the majority of residents, council tax would increase at a slightly lower rate with two new councils, compared to keeping the nine separate councils.

No decisions have been made. We want to hear your views on the following options.

Which options for local government in Dorset are being considered?

There are many different elements involved in considering the future shape of local government in Dorset, including local identity and characteristics, democratic accountability, population size and financial implications.

In Spring 2016, Dorset's councils employed an independent company to look at the financial details of five possible options for the future structure of local government in Dorset. This assessment has been based on the assumption that if we retain the existing nine councils, council tax in each area would need to rise by the maximum level each year because of the budget cuts facing councils from central Government. This level is currently 'capped' at a 3.99% a year increase for unitary and county councils, and 1.99% or £5 a year (whichever is higher) for district and borough councils.

We know the level of council tax is important to our residents. Just as now, the future ambition would be for all households to pay the minimum council tax necessary to fund local services. **Under proposals for a restructure of local government in Dorset, it has been assumed that any new unitary councils would be restricted to the Government's current limit for unitary councils of a 3.99% council tax rise.**

If a new local government structure is implemented across Dorset, councils would need to make sure that, within an agreed period of time, all residents of one council area pay the same — a process called council tax harmonisation. For more information about council tax harmonisation, please see page 9.

This table outlines the options being considered by Dorset's councils.

Option		
1 Retaining all nine councils		
Option	Unitary council A	Unitary council B
2a	LARGE CONURBATION: Bournemouth, Christchurch, East Dorset and Poole, plus the services currently provided by Dorset County Council in this area	SMALL DORSET: North Dorset, Purbeck, West Dorset, Weymouth & Portland, plus the services currently provided by Dorset County Council in this area
2b	MEDIUM CONURBATION: Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole, plus the services currently provided by Dorset County Council in this area	MEDIUM DORSET: East Dorset, North Dorset, Purbeck, West Dorset, Weymouth & Portland, plus the services currently provided by Dorset County Council in this area
2c	SMALL CONURBATION: Bournemouth and Poole	LARGE DORSET: Christchurch, East Dorset, North Dorset, Purbeck, West Dorset, Weymouth & Portland, plus the services currently provided by Dorset County Council in this area

option 1

RETAINING ALL NINE COUNCILS

KEY FEATURES:

- This option would result in a deficit across the whole county of **£30.4 million**, meaning that collectively the councils would have to find at least a further £30 million in total between 2019 and 2025, and probable further savings beyond this time.
- There would be a sense of familiarity by keeping the current arrangements.
- Potentially larger rises in most households' council tax bills in the medium-term.
- This option puts council services that we know the public want at significant risk. Many services would need to be cut even more from 2019 onwards, and it is likely that councils would focus primarily on providing the most important services, such as adult social care and child protection.
- Would continue to pay for senior management and back-office functions across all the existing councils.
- Would continue with 330 councillors across the nine councils.
- Maintains existing complicated local government structures with a two-tier system in the Dorset County Council area and two unitary councils in Bournemouth and Poole.

Financial implications by 2025 of retaining all nine councils

Dorset County Council shortfall of £11 million	Christchurch Borough Council – balance of +£0.1 million East Dorset District Council – shortfall of £0.3 million North Dorset District Council – shortfall of £1 million Purbeck District Council – shortfall of £0.5 million West Dorset District Council – shortfall of £1 million Weymouth & Portland Borough Council – shortfall of £1.2 million	Total deficit of £14.9 million across the Dorset County Council area
Bournemouth Borough Council – shortfall of £10.1 million		£10.1 million
Poole Borough Council – shortfall of £5.4 million		£5.4 million
Total shortfall across the whole of Dorset		£30.4 million

This table shows the predicted levels of council tax increase across Bournemouth, Dorset and Poole in 2019/20 under this option

Bournemouth	Christchurch	East Dorset	North Dorset	Poole	Purbeck	West Dorset	Weymouth & Portland
3.99%	3.79%	3.76%	3.92%	3.99%	3.81%	3.88%	3.67%

- Estimated Council Tax increase based on 3.99% increase for unitary and county councils, and 1.99% or £5 a year (whichever is higher) for district and borough councils.
- This does not include council tax that households pay to Dorset Police, Dorset and Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Authority or any precept set by Town and Parish Councils.

option 2a

UNITARY COUNCIL A

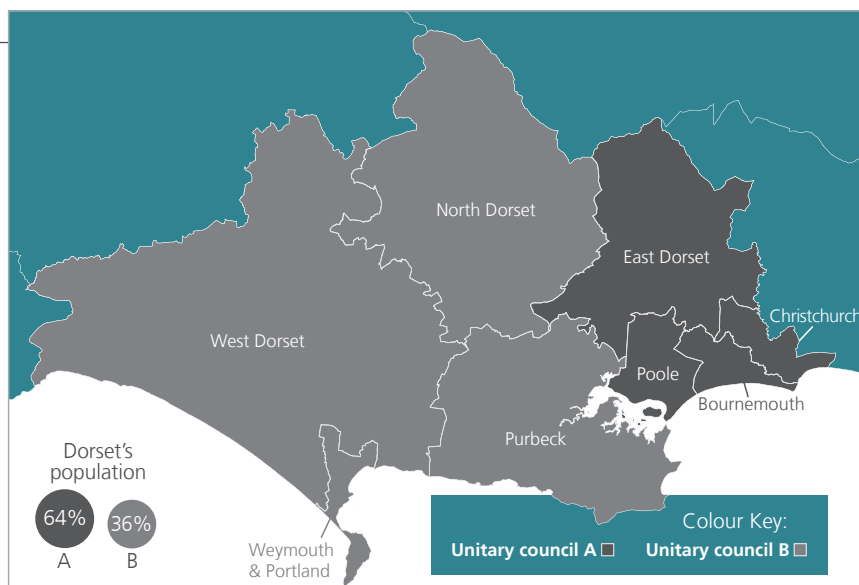
Large Conurbation:

Bournemouth
Christchurch
East Dorset
Poole, plus the services currently provided by Dorset County Council in this area

UNITARY COUNCIL B

Small Dorset:

North Dorset
Purbeck
West Dorset
Weymouth & Portland, plus the services currently provided by Dorset County Council in this area

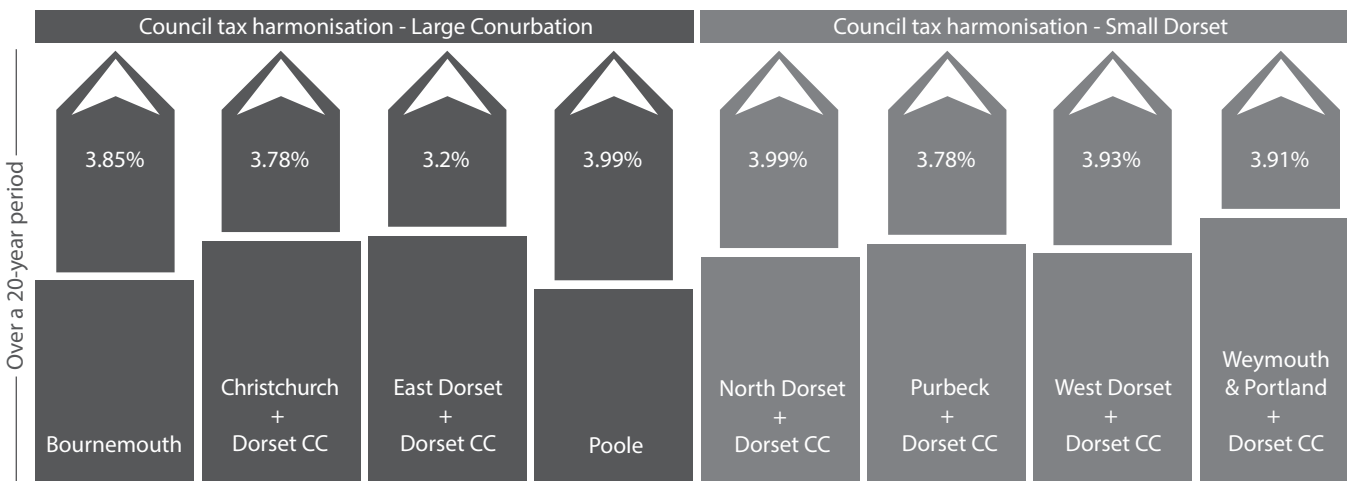


These population figures are based on projections for 2019.

KEY FEATURES:

- This option would provide a total contribution of **£39.6 million** towards meeting the funding gap in 2024/25, providing **£62.9 million** for the Large Conurbation's annual budget and creating a **£23.3 million** deficit in the Small Dorset annual budget.
- A large urban unitary council would be financially viable, with a high national profile, however there may be significant challenges to the Small Dorset unitary council.
- The population in the Small Dorset unitary (286,400) is lower than the government guidelines (400,000 to 600,000) for an efficiently-functioning unitary council.
- There is a one-off complexity and cost involved in separating and transferring services currently provided by Dorset County Council in Christchurch and East Dorset to the Large Conurbation.

This diagram shows the predicted levels of council tax increase across Dorset in 2019/20 under this option. It does not include council tax that households pay to Dorset Police, Dorset and Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Authority or any precept set by town and parish councils.



- Not to scale.
- It is anticipated that harmonisation would take place over 20 years, starting in 2019/20.
- Council tax rises limited to 3.99%.

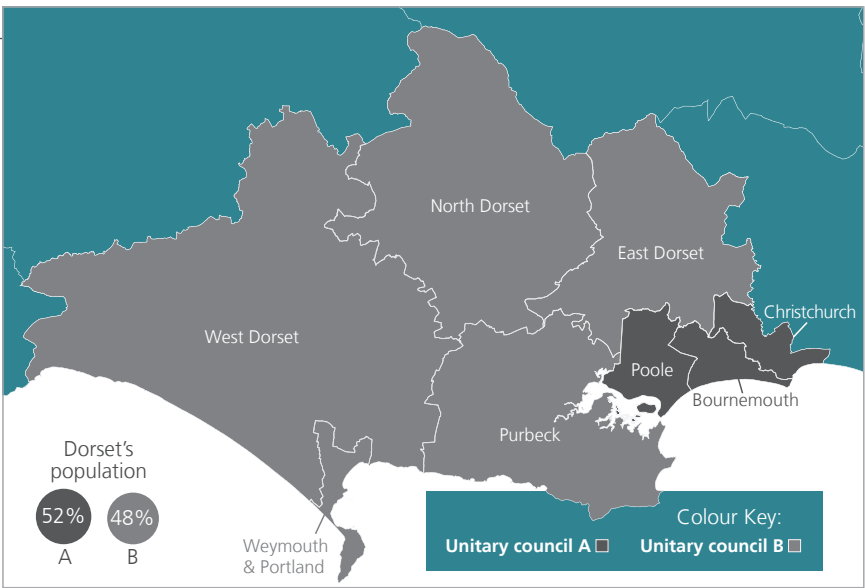
option 2b

UNITARY COUNCIL A

Medium Conurbation:
Bournemouth
Christchurch
Poole, plus the services currently provided by Dorset County Council in this area

UNITARY COUNCIL B

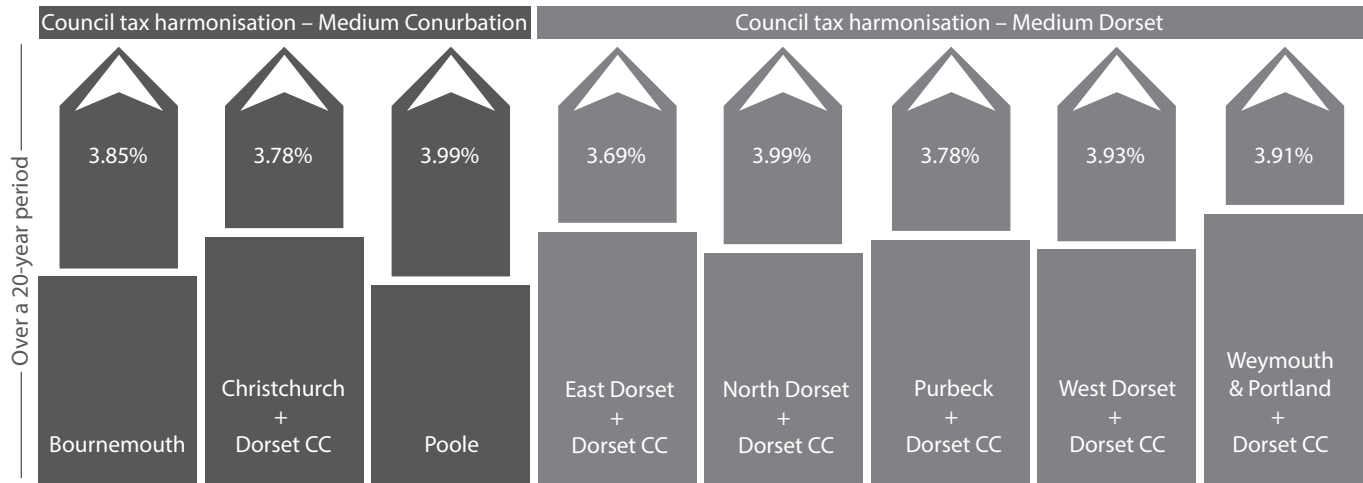
Medium Dorset:
East Dorset
North Dorset
Purbeck
West Dorset
Weymouth & Portland, plus the services currently provided by Dorset County Council in this area



KEY FEATURES:

- This option would provide a total contribution of **£46.7 million** towards meeting the funding gap in 2024/25, providing **£45.3 million** for the Medium Conurbation's annual budget and **£1.4 million** for the Medium Dorset annual budget.
- Of the various two-unitary options this is the option that is most financially beneficial.
- Most of Dorset's urban and suburban areas are served by one council, with the largely rural area served by another council.
- This option potentially provides the most effective and efficient way to deliver services for the future.
- This option has the most balanced population split of the three options.
- A medium-sized urban unitary council would have a profile nationally.
- There is a one off complexity and cost involved in separating and transferring services currently provided by Dorset County Council in Christchurch to the Medium Conurbation.

This diagram shows the predicted levels of council tax increase across Dorset in 2019/20 under this option. It does not include council tax that households pay to Dorset Police, Dorset and Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Authority or any precept set by town and parish councils.



- Not to scale.
- It is anticipated that harmonisation would take place over 20 years, starting in 2019/20.
- Council tax rises limited to 3.99%.

option 2c

UNITARY COUNCIL A

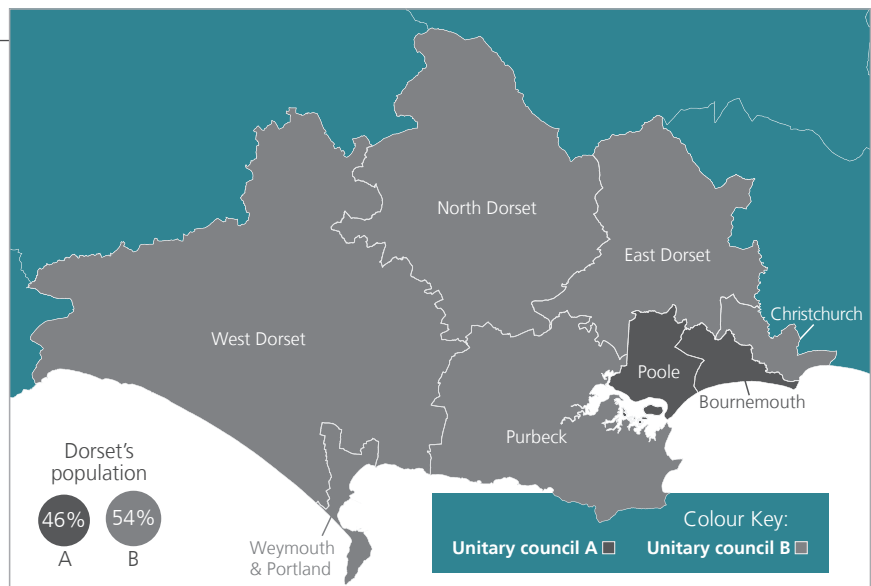
Small Conurbation:

Bournemouth
Poole

UNITARY COUNCIL B

Large Dorset:

Christchurch
Dorset County Council
East Dorset
North Dorset
Purbeck
West Dorset
Weymouth & Portland

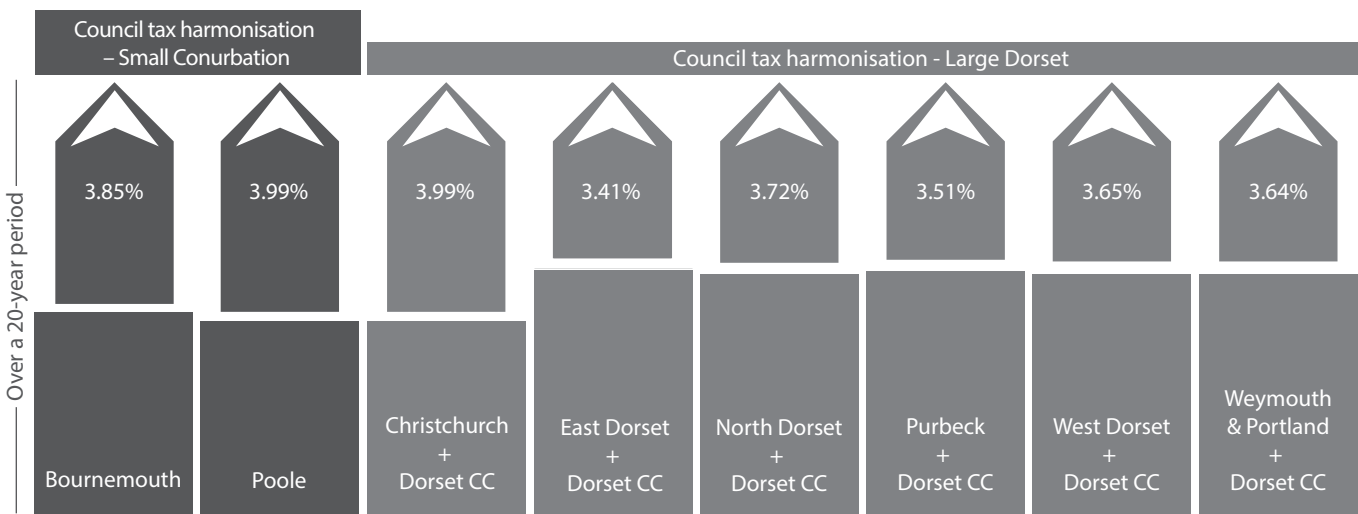


These population figures are based on projections for 2019.

KEY FEATURES:

- This option would provide a total contribution of **£32.8 million** towards meeting the funding gap in 2024/25, providing **£18.7 million** for the Small Conurbation's annual budget and **£14.1 million** for the Large Dorset annual budget.
- It makes the least savings overall, of the three two-unitary council options.
- The savings made are most evenly split across the two unitary councils.
- The services currently provided by Dorset County Council remain with the Large Dorset unitary council — there is no separation work required, but services provided by the district and borough councils would need to be integrated into the new unitary council.

This diagram shows the predicted levels of council tax increase across Dorset in 2019/20 under this option. It does not include council tax that households pay to Dorset Police, Dorset and Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Authority or any precept set by town and parish councils.



- Not to scale.
- It is anticipated that harmonisation would take place over 20 years, starting in 2019/20.
- Council tax rises limited to 3.99%.

Further information about options 2a, 2b and 2c

Would there be fewer councillors under any new arrangements?

There are currently 330 councillors serving residents across the whole of Dorset. Two new unitary councils covering the whole of Dorset would require significantly fewer councillors. If a decision is made to create two new unitary councils, the Boundary Commission would review the number of councillors needed to properly represent all the people living within each council's area.

And what about staff?

If the decision is made to move to a two-unitary council structure the number of staff in director and senior manager posts and back office/corporate functions such as Finance, HR and IT would reduce. For example, instead of six Chief Executives as there are currently, there would be two.

What would happen to existing towns' historical and civic arrangements?

Each of the towns within Dorset has its own unique character. These would continue as towns, and local civic arrangements for each would be maintained, contributing to the preservation of each town's heritage.

Established ceremonial positions of Mayor would remain. In the same way that local history and traditions are currently preserved within district councils (just like the mayors of Wimborne, Verwood, Ferndown, which exist in East Dorset) so they would be preserved within any new authority.

Accessing your council

Dorset's residents having access to their council is a priority for all Dorset's councils. However, if the future set-up of local government in Dorset were to be two unitary councils, there would be no need to maintain all the councils' current buildings. Whatever the outcome, Dorset's councils will continue to encourage residents to access, pay for, order and complete more online, in order to protect frontline services.

CURRENT COUNCIL TAX LEVELS

Band D Council Tax 2016/2017

Bournemouth	Christchurch	East Dorset	North Dorset	Poole	Purbeck	West Dorset	Weymouth & Portland
£1,293.33	£1,453.77	£1,471.10	£1,380.74	£1,257.86	£1,441.19	£1,398.53	£1,553.14

- The district and borough councils' totals include the council tax given to Dorset County Council which is considerably more than the levels retained by the district and borough councils.
- Does not include council tax paid to Dorset Police, Dorset & Wiltshire Fire & Rescue or any Town or Parish Councils.



Wimborne Square

Council tax harmonisation

If a new local government structure is implemented across Dorset, councils would need to undertake a council tax harmonisation process to make sure that, within an agreed period of time, all residents of one council area pay the same. Some work has already been done to assess the impact of council tax harmonisation. This assumes an approach in which, over a 20-year period, the lowest council tax rate from a former council within the new council's area, is increased by the maximum allowable rate and council tax rates in the other former council areas are increased by a lower rate, so that the council tax rates in all areas within a new unitary council eventually become the same.

If it is decided to create two unitary councils, each new unitary council would be responsible for setting its own council tax level every year.

Business rates

Business rates are unaffected by a restructure of local government in Dorset.



View over the Purbecks

One option no longer being considered

ONE LARGE UNITARY COUNCIL FOR THE WHOLE OF DORSET REPLACING ALL NINE EXISTING COUNCILS

All of Dorset's councils agree that even though this option would make financial savings in excess of the two-unitary options being consulted upon, creating one new large single unitary council for the whole of Dorset is not appropriate because:

- A single council for the area the size of Dorset would have less of a sense of identity than the two-unitary options, and could be less accountable to local residents. It is likely that the two-unitary options, by covering smaller geographical areas, would be able to serve their communities better.
- Such a wide variation of rural and urban areas would not be best served by a single large unitary council covering the whole of Dorset.
- If we change council structures, we would make sure that all households served by a new unitary council eventually pay the same — a process called *council tax harmonisation*. The issue of council tax harmonisation becomes more difficult across one large unitary council because of the significant difference between the current lowest and highest council tax levels.
- There is a one-off complexity and costs involved in combining services from all nine councils into one unitary council.
- Discussions with central Government (Department of Communities and Local Government) indicate that we would need to make an exceptional case for a unitary council with a population of more than 600,000. Based on 2014 projections the population of Bournemouth, Dorset and Poole in 2019 is 787,000.

For the reasons above, this option is not being included in the consultation.



Bournemouth Pier

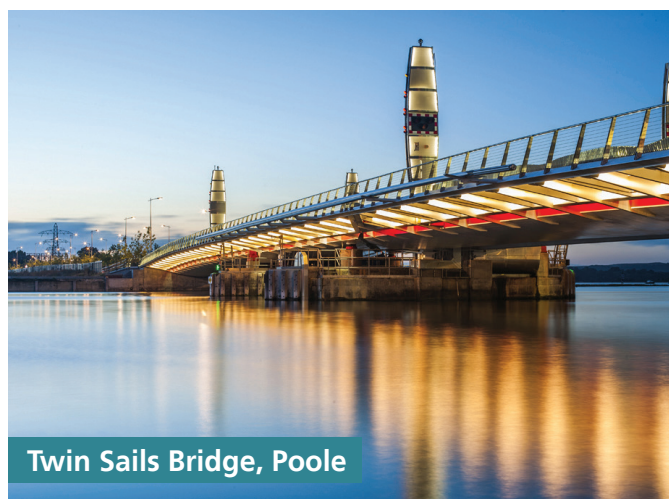


Christchurch High Street

What happens now?

This timeline shows the timescales that Dorset councils are working towards.

2016	30 August - 25 October
	Consultation and engagement with residents and stakeholders over future options for local government in Dorset
	December The Leaders of each of the nine Dorset councils consider the responses to the public consultation alongside the financial and business case for each unitary option
2017	January Dorset's councils agree final approach, to either: — Not pursue any of the three options to restructure local government in Dorset from nine to two councils, or — Submit a business case to Government about the creation of new unitary councils for Dorset.
	February If a decision to move forward with new councils is taken , Dorset's proposal submitted to the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government
	Later in the year Legislation would go through Parliament to change Dorset's council structure
	2018 Formation of interim arrangements, preparing to deliver services
	2019 April New councils would take responsibility for delivering services
	May Councillors elected to the new local authorities



How can I join the debate?

Dorset's councils have narrowed down the options for the future shape of local government in Dorset, but **no decisions have yet been made.**

Public consultation on the proposals for change starts on 30 August and closes on 25 October 2016. The consultation is being conducted by an independent research company, ORS. Dorset residents, local businesses, town and parish councils and other organisations are being asked to share their views on the proposals by completing a questionnaire.

Consultation questionnaire

The questionnaire is available online at reshapingyourcouncils.uk. We're encouraging all residents and other stakeholders to complete the questionnaire to make sure their views are considered. Paper copies are also available in local libraries.



Residents' survey

A sample of local residents in each council area will also be randomly selected by ORS and asked to complete a questionnaire. If you receive a letter inviting you to take part in this residents' survey, please do return the completed questionnaire, even if you have already attended another consultation event or completed the consultation questionnaire.

Meetings

Your councils will be talking to local stakeholders, from businesses and voluntary organisations to parish and town councils, to answer any questions they have, and find out how the proposals would affect them.

Roadshows

In early autumn your councils will be holding a series of roadshows across Bournemouth, Dorset and Poole for local people to come and find out more. You can read more about the proposals and find out when there will be a roadshow near you at reshapingyourcouncils.uk.



Once Dorset's councils understand local people's views they will consider them along with the other evidence, and make a final decision as to whether they will propose to central Government a change to local government structures in Dorset. If this is decided in January 2017, councils will work together on a final proposal to put to the Government early in 2017.

For more information about this consultation, go to ► reshapingyourcouncils.uk

Questionnaires and written responses can be returned FREEPOST to: **Opinion Research Services, FREEPOST (SS1018), PO BOX 530, Swansea SA1 1ZL**

If you have any queries about completing the questionnaire or need assistance to do so, including a copy in large print, audio version or translated into another language, please call ORS on **0800 3112126** or email Dorsetcouncils@ors.org.uk