



# **Dorset's Communities after Local Government Reorganisation - a conversation with the Shadow Council**

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## **December 2018 CONFERENCE SUMMARY REPORT**

# ***A Conversation with the Shadow Council***

## **2018 Conference Summary Report**



The aim of the conference was to start a new conversation on the future of Dorset's Civil Society after Local Government Reorganisation. The day started with a presentation from DCC Deputy Leader, Cllr Jill Haynes giving an update on LGR and health and social care for Dorset. Alex Picot then briefed the delegates on the workshops that framed the conversation for the Panel session.

### **The Conference Agenda**

<b>Time</b>	<b>Activity</b>	<b>Who</b>
10.15	Presentation: Welcome & introductions	Alan Clevett
10.25	Presentation: Local government reorganisation, health & social care update	Cllr Jill Haynes
10.40	BREAK	
11.00	Presentation: background to workshop	Alex Picot
11.10	Introduce workshop table top conversation	Paula Bennetts
11.15	Table top conversations Two tasks: 1. Facilitators to feedback thoughts on each table's question 2. Facilitators to agree two questions from table for Panel on any topic.	Facilitators
11.55	Feedback x 8 groups	Paula B & Facilitators
12.20	Panel Q&A	Chair = Nicky Matthews
12.55	Summarise, DCA follow up & event evaluation Key messages & thank you	Paula B Alan Clevett
13.05	LUNCH / Networking / Informal video conversations	Jo Keats
14.00	ENDS	

## 1. WORKSHOP – Table top exercises

### Table Top Question 1

*Governance model & structures – what would you like to see at locality level in Dorset to connect VCSE groups to the new council? How could we contribute to the development of such an infrastructure?*

#### **3 KEY ISSUES**

1. What is a “locality” in the New Council areas?
2. It’s VITAL that there is a way to have effective 2 way communication between Localities & Dorset Council.
3. Locality : agree a purpose on networking and action, but structures need to be flexible depending on local scenario/need.

#### **DISCUSSION POINTS**

- Use other models e.g. area boards, community partnerships.
- Role of Voluntary, Community, & Social Enterprise (VCSE) / Town & Parish Councils (T & PCs) needs to be facilitated, accountable with adequate protection in place for partners.
- Need a system to share information e.g. Dorset For You

### Table Top Question 2

*How can we facilitate better communications between the VCSE sector, town & parish councils at locality level across the county?*

#### **3 KEY ISSUES**

1. Need to allow a voice (Dorset Association of Parish & Town Councils (DAPTC) / DCA), can only have influence with a voice.
2. Need appropriate communication to include all platforms e.g. Social Media / Forums etc.
3. Opportunity to create new partnerships – with a transparency in communication to move away from working in silos.

#### **DISCUSSION POINTS**

- Third Sector needs to be listened to and responded to.

- Dorset Communities Forum (DCF) – could be a useful starting point. Needs to include T&PCs to create a strong alliance.
- Not just “top down”. Create a second tier officer role to work closely with members.

### **Table Top Question 3**

*How would you define a ‘21<sup>st</sup> Century Councillor’ and what should their role focus on?*

#### **3 KEY ISSUES**

1. Effective communication, both to & from the community, with genuine processes in place.
2. Removal of political affiliation for all decision making committees/groups.
3. Engagement with local T&PCs e.g. joint training, face to face meetings, mentoring, work shadowing etc.

#### **DISCUSSION POINTS**

- Need to ask T&PCs – “what can you do?” to be fully inclusive.
- Training for T&PCs – inclusive, joint and supportive.
- Culture needs to be more collaborative, with the removal of political affiliation, for a fully independent council.



### **Table Top Question 4**

*What about the role of existing infrastructure e.g. Community Partnerships? How can they best support the new Council?*

### **NO PAPERWORK RETURNED**

### **Table Top Question 5**

*How can we best facilitate community engagement in the policy setting of the new Council?*

#### **3 KEY ISSUES**

1. Use of funds and support for volunteers for building capacity of VCSE sector in every area not just economic growth.
2. Listening to people in communities and responding through policy decisions.
3. Policy decisions = Community Engagement Strategy.

#### **DISCUSSION POINTS**

- Engage community reps/Cllrs.
- Recognise the value of communities – invest in local volunteers and communities.
- Community Engagement Strategy needed.

### **Table Top Question 6**

*What does good look like in how successful engagement with the new Council is for members of the community and VCSE groups? How might we measure this?*

#### **3 KEY ISSUES**

1. An identified person in the Council to act as a “link” to VCSE sector/communities in Dorset.
2. Commissioning VCSE sector work.
3. Recognising the value of the community and resourcing its activities.

#### **DISCUSSION POINTS**

- Defined resources valued and recognised.
- High level commitment needed.

- More partnership so that Council members “know” the community.

### **Table Top Question 7**

*How can we incentivise communities & volunteers to engage in addressing loss of statutory sector services? Is it even appropriate?*

#### **3 KEY ISSUES**

1. We need to understand what motivates people to volunteer & take community action, before moving forward.
2. We shouldn't expect the VCSE to take on statutory services – must remember VCSE sector is not free (training, skills, coordination all cost money).
3. Councils need to clearly communicate why they are engaging the VCSE and give opportunities for VCSE partners to set out their concerns in an open, mutually respectful and timely way.

#### **DISCUSSION POINTS**

- Commissioning must contain guidance when requirement is statutory.
- Shared response with clear guidance on responsibilities.
- Need to be outward looking and engage in a meaningful and respectful way with VCSE partners, volunteers and the community.

### **Table Top Question 8**

*What should be the priorities for the Transition year (2019/20)?*

#### **3 KEY ISSUES**

1. Policy on how Dorset Council will work with the VCSE sector as partners when communicating, commissioning and joint working.
2. LEP bias towards funding for conurbations.
3. More early intervention / prevention work needed.

#### **DISCUSSION POINTS**

- Genuine and joint process for engagement.
- Need for joint training delivered by local VCSE partners.
- Commissioned and funded support to the VCSE sector.

## 2. WELCOME TO THE PANEL



**Members : Sue Fleet** (Volunteer Centre), **Gerry Stoker** (Southampton University), **Cllr Jill Haynes** (Shadow Council), **Cllr Sarah Jackson** (Parish Council), **Pauline Batstone** (Shadow Council) & **Cllr Collette Drayson** (Parish Council)

### QUESTIONS FROM WORKSHOP – for the Panel

1. How much power will locality board structures have to make things happen?
2. How accessible will the local H&W Boards be for Community Organisations, Town & Parish Councils and how can these groups feed in (upwards & downwards)?
3. If there is no devolution of power how will those at a local level be able to achieve representation to effect change?
4. How would the panel suggest we co-ordinate the efforts of the Voluntary Sector?
5. Are members of the Council committed to develop a Community engagement Strategy with local VCSE sector and Parish Councils within the first 3 months of the New Council?
6. Does the Council have a strategy to resource the VCSE sector and communities in order to achieve the benefits to all Dorset people? Including feeding into influential groups across the Council?
7. How realistic is it for the VCSE sector to take on the role of statutory services?
8. Will training be made available on the role of the third sector in all areas of health & wellbeing, and its contribution to social value?

### 3. SUMMARY OF PANEL DISCUSSION – Key Points Raised

#### 1. COMMUNICATION

- Communication between communities and Council must be meaningful, genuine and honest. Using a variety of methods to ensure that there is clarity of all messages both to and from those involved in LGR.
- Communities need to be able to feed in information in to the process and they also need the tools and support to feed that information out to everyone involved. All communication should be S.M.A.R.T.E.R.
- T&PCs across Dorset would value an opportunity to share and communicate with each other.

#### Recommendations:

**The Shadow Council** to support local T&PCs to feed in and out of the LGR process to their constituents.

**Town & Parish Councils** to network with VCSE infrastructure organisations to capture questions and concerns to feed up to the Shadow Council.

**Town & Parish Councils** to liaise with DAPTC to develop a system for Councillors from across Dorset to communicate with each other. This will provide a mechanism to utilise and share relevant expertise.

#### 2. NETWORKING & ENGAGEMENT

- Relationships need to be equal. This requires adequate resourcing and an equal distribution of power.
- There is a need for partnership and collaboration to reach as many members of our communities as possible. This takes support and time to do this effectively and planned into the process.
- Without effective networking and information sharing there will be no meaningful engagement with Dorset's civil society.

#### Recommendations:

**The Shadow Council** to factor in time for effective engagement with T&PCs to share information for distribution to constituents & VCSE sector.

**VCSE Sector** to support T&PCs with networking and engaging their communities to increase community involvement in the process.

### 3. RECOGNITION OF THE VALUABLE CONTRIBUTION OF THE VCSE SECTOR

- There needs to be equitability of funding for all those engaged in the process.
- There needs to be a change in culture in regards to covering the expenses of those who attend meetings / workshops / task & finish groups.
- The VCSE sector is not free. Instead of being seen as a cheap option it needs to be seen as a Community Option, and a way of developing civic involvement and local engagement. Dorset's VCSE providers need to be resourced effectively to enable the continuation of local, civic partnership.
- Training Agents – The New Council needs to make use of local VCSE expertise when commissioning training partners to support T&PCs.
- Local expertise of VCSE assets to be valued and utilised, rather than bringing in organisations from outside of Dorset to “solve” local problems.

#### Recommendations:

**The Shadow Council** to commit to meeting with The Transition Group to discuss training arrangements for T&PCs to develop and promote a better understanding of the VCSE sector in Dorset.

**The New Council** to commit to commissioning local VCSE training expertise to support T&PCs.

**Town & Parish Councils** to have closer ties with local VCSE groups, utilising infrastructure support services to create an efficient communication channel.

### 4. CONSISTENCY DURING TRANSITION

- Commitment at DCC and T&PC level to ensure that good, well run, effective and efficient VCSE services are not lost as part of the reorganisation of funding from Districts to the new Unitary Council.
- The New Council should review with T&PCs, what they can do, what is currently missing locally, what is working and what is not working.

#### Recommendations:

**The Shadow Council/New Council** to transparently review current services funded at a local level and to commit to continuing support for VCSE services that are providing effective services. This needs to be an active process with face to face contact with VCSE partners.

**The Shadow Council/New Council** to create an effective communication channel between the New Council and T&PC, utilising the support of DAPTC, to allow for an open and genuine dialogue about what local Councils can do and what needs to change.

## 5. CO-ORDINATION

- A Plan is needed to ensure that the recommendations above are seen through as part of the LGR process.
- Communities need to know who they should contact and how they can be involved in the process.
- A new model of support is needed that improves the self-sufficiency of local residents to enable them to appropriately care for themselves and feel empowered enough to see this as important and a requirement for the future sustainability of our Communities.
- This new model needs to be coordinated by community organisations to ensure that messaging and training support is effectively provided.
- Adequate resourcing of VCSE providers to support residents with this model needs to be embedded into all plans made by the New Council.

### Recommendations:

**The New Council** to identify VCSE support agents to coordinate community engagement with their new model of self-sufficiency, with adequate resourcing identified to move this agenda forward.

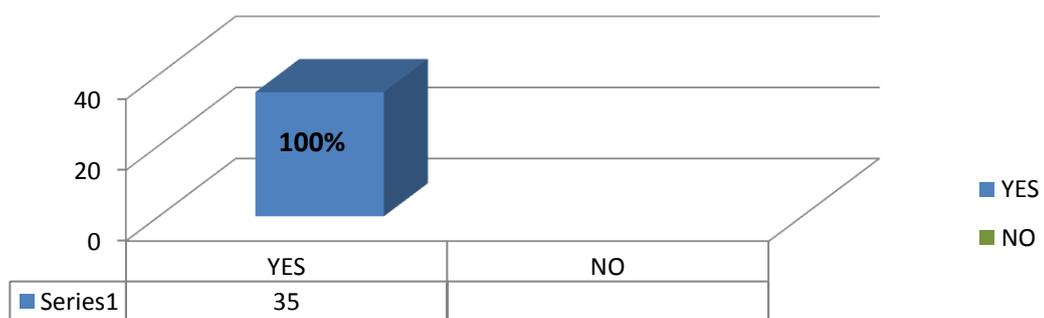


#### 4. CONTINUING THE CONVERSATION – Feedback received

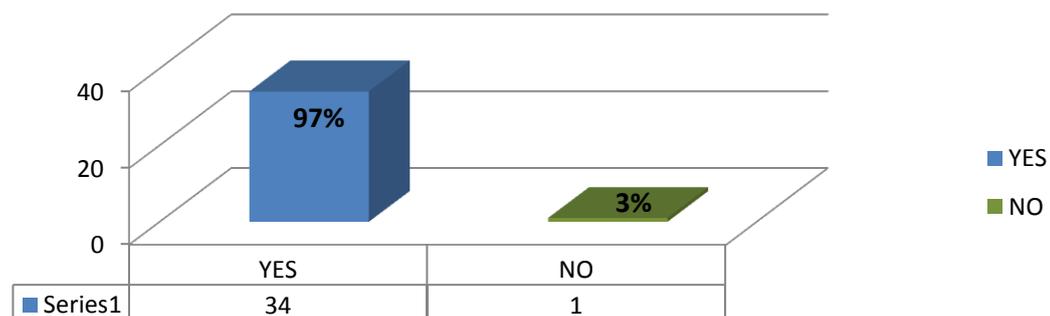
- ✓ *“What is absolutely clear from today is that right across the board the voluntary sector doesn’t feel listened to. I think that putting a united front together to ensure voluntary sector representation to the unitary, and making it powerful, could be a way to deal with this”.*
- ✓ *“We learnt today that the Shadow Executive have the role of arranging training for new Unitary Cllrs and ...The Transition Group... offered to help facilitate the training. I suggest that within that training new Cllrs need to be made aware of the challenges and issues facing P&TCs and the Voluntary Sector”.*
- ✓ *“Good to know that DCA are supportive”.*
- ✓ *I think that we’re all worried about finding new volunteers and keeping them, making sure we’re not taken advantage of, making it clear that the voluntary sector has costs and only so much can be free and making sure that we’re respected and listened to as an industry”.*

#### 5. EVALUATION – Conference Feedback

**Were you satisfied with the quality of today's event?**



**Did you find today's event useful?**



## 6. EXTENDING THE CONVERSATION

Thank you, to everyone who took the time to contact us directly to extend this conversation and to contribute to this report. DCA's Trustees would welcome the opportunity to hear from groups that would like to share their ideas further. Please email: [info@dorsetcommunityaction.org.uk](mailto:info@dorsetcommunityaction.org.uk) to arrange a speaker slot at a future DCA Board Meeting.



## 7. NEXT STEPS

1. DCA to continue to provide a communication channel between the VCSE sector and the New Council to support integration, transparency & engagement.
2. The Transition Group to continue the conversation with the Shadow Executive to ensure the VCSE sector is included as an essential part of Dorset's LGR process.
3. The Transition Group to engage DAPTIC to develop a self-support network for Parish & Town Councillors to allow a space to share support, feelings & concerns regarding LGR.
4. The Transition Group to follow-up actions raised with the panel, with a focus on developing a VCSE sector engagement strategy with the Dorset Communities Forum.

Thank you again for taking the time to be with us, and for helping us to raise the profile of the VCSE sector in Dorset. For further information please contact:

Dorset Community Action

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