

# 13<sup>th</sup> September 2016

## MINUTES OF MEETING

Title:	<b>Basingstoke District Association of Parish and Town Councils</b>	
Held On:	Tuesday 13 <sup>th</sup> September 2016	
Present:	Martin Slatford Chris Curtis Les Fryer Michael Webster Gareth Davies John Sawyer Louise Porton Wendy Gavin Mark Oszczyk Peter Bloyce Adam Trickett Philip Kingston Pete Lees Rosina Forde Ian Pearson Nicki Barry John Buckley Andy Jordan Sarah Curtis	Baughurst (Chair) Baughurst Chineham Hartley Wespall Herriard Kingsclere Kingsclere Oakley & Deane Old Basing and Lychpit Old Basing and Lychpit Overton Pamber Steventon Steventon Stratfield Saye Tadley Whitchurch Whitchurch Wotton St Lawrence
Guests:	Alison Edwards John Coughlan Mel Barrett	Secretary Chief Executive, HCC Chief Executive, BDBC
Apologies:	Alan Cox Susan Edwards Sandy Johnston Sheila Campbell	Ashmansworth Highclere Sherfield on Loddon Stratfield Turgis

### 1. Devolution , Opportunities for our Parish and Town Councils

1.1 John Coughlan, Chief Executive of Hampshire County Council (HCC) gave a

presentation (attached) on a consultation currently taking place on options for local government in Hampshire ('Serving Hampshire'). England currently has one of the most centralised systems of government in the western world, and it is thought that devolution could help our economy. Following on from the devolution agreement in Manchester, the Government wanted proposals put forward for a southern powerhouse. Hampshire and the Isle of Wight put forward a proposal for a combined authority to act as a vehicle for devolution of powers from central Government in September 2015. This proposal had the support of HCC, Southampton Council, Portsmouth Council, the Isle of Wight, the 11 district councils, the two Local Enterprise Partnerships and the two Parks Authorities in the region. However, in January 2016 the then Local Government Minister said that, in order to receive genuine devolution and investment, the region would have to have a directly elected Mayor. 70% of authorities involved voted against this idea, with the view that the area is too diverse and complex to be suited to a single Mayor. The breakdown of this proposal led to Southampton, Portsmouth, Fareham, Eastleigh, Gosport, Havant, East Hampshire and the Isle of Wight putting forward a bid for a 'Solent Mayoral Combined Authority' to Government in March 2016. HCC were not party to these discussions. HCC were subsequently faced with a dilemma, facing pressure to join the Solent deal and, in parallel, facing pressure from the Hampshire districts not included in the Solent deal to support the formation of a separate combined authority 'The Heart of Hampshire'. HCC therefore commissioned Deloitte to carry out an evidence-based analysis of financial and non-financial benefits of reorganisation and to consider a range of different options. Deloitte came up with seven different options which can be seen on the attached presentation. HCC is currently consulting on these and does not yet have a preferred option. The consultation can be found at <http://www3.hants.gov.uk/servinghampshire> and closes on 20th September 2016.

1.2 Mel Barrett, Chief Executive of BDBC, referred to the briefing note on Devolution circulated by the Chairman in advance of the meeting and informed the meeting about work commissioned by BDBC, on behalf of all fourteen district and unitary authorities in Hampshire, to identify the issues and options for unitary local government as well as comparing them with a combined authority approach and potential new ways of working. This is a 'bottom up' approach looking at service delivery from a residents' perspective where local voice and local choice, together with local democratic accountability, are considered important, based on the principle that, having regard to necessary economies of scale, the best services are those delivered in the most effective and cost-efficient way by an organisation as close as possible to the people that use them. The outcome of this review will be complete this Autumn and therefore BDBC Councillors were of the view that the HCC consultation exercise is premature. More information is available at [www.basingstoke.gov.uk/devolution](http://www.basingstoke.gov.uk/devolution).

1.3 BDBC is unusual in that it has a significant resource base, with a £400 million property and investment portfolio, making it one of the most financially resilient councils in the country. It is therefore able to fund revenue streams that are atypical and it can boast the sixth lowest council tax per head in the country whilst also boasting the sixth highest spend per head in the country. Public satisfaction rates are at 84% in BDBC compared to 66% nationally. It is therefore important that any future scenario supported by BDBC is one that will be able to improve on that baseline for residents.

1.4 Mel Barrett pointed out that, with a new Prime Minister and a new Cabinet in place since work on the devolution agenda started, and a new set of Government priorities, it was currently hard to identify a political champion for this agenda and there was therefore a risk that this work would stall at central Government level. He also pointed out that the £30mn a year being offered to new combined authorities (formally established partnerships of existing authorities that take decisions together at a strategic level in return for funding of things such as infrastructure) was actually not a huge amount of money when spread across the whole authority area, but was nonetheless important. Furthermore, it had been promised on a 30-year basis and no Government can realistically guarantee such a long-term offer. The need for local authorities to put forward agreed approaches to Government was also highlighted by the recent Government response to conflicting local government reorganisation proposals put forward by Oxfordshire councils. The Government told all parties to speak to each other and go back to Government when they had a consensus approach.

1.5 Members asked for clarification over what 'Area Boards' are. Area Boards are set up under a unitary authority and include elected members from the various councils. They could take decisions on issues such as planning, however it is important to recognise that the determination of planning applications is a quasi-judicial function and decisions need to be taken on that basis, in the context of national and local planning policy prevailing at the time.

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1.6 Is the status quo an option? Mel Barrett told the group that there was no guarantee that reorganisation would take place. However, financial settlements from central to local government continued to be increasingly tight and therefore there was a danger that some councils would become unviable in due course and are forced to consider the issue of mergers. John Coughlan said that, whilst the status quo was not off the table, it would be impossible to keep the status quo if part of the county joined a joint authority not supported by HCC.

1.7 Under the combined authority option, would the extra tier of bureaucracy cost money? Whilst the proposers of the combined authority options say that the bureaucracy would be light touch, any new system or layer creates costs.

1.8 It was pointed out that having the HCC consultation over the summer period was not helpful as many parish and town councils do not meet over the summer period. John Coughlan explained that HCC wanted to consult on options before adopting a position and, with the Solent bid pressing ahead, HCC need to make a decision soon. The consultation could not wait. It was hoped that an HCC position would be announced at the end of November.

1.9 John Coughlan explained that, under a unitary model, there would be a move towards all areas being covered by a parish or town council. He also wanted to consider a model whereby town and parish councils could exercise services by discretion, depending on their area's needs.

1.10 It was queried whether, under a unitary approach, BDBC's considerable assets would be invested in the new authority. The answer is yes. John Coughlan was of the view that there would be potential for deals to be struck about how these assets are

redistributed, nevertheless, economic sustainability of an area requires a holistic view to be taken.

1.11 The reports talk about potential savings/cuts in council tax under the new models. It was asked whether it would be better to talk about increased investment. John Coughlan explained that savings could be reinvested. However, for presentational purposes the consultations talk about council tax savings as, under a unitary model, council tax has to be harmonised and this has to be done at the bottom level rather than the top level due to cap increase issues.

1.12 Martin Slatford thanked Mel Barrett and John Coughlan.

## **2. Matters arising from last meeting**

None not covered elsewhere on the agenda.

## **3. Broadband**

3.1 The purpose of this agenda item was to: establish how many BDAPTC members have homes or businesses in the 5% without any hope of improvement to their broadband through the HCC/BT fast speed rollout; inform the Association of the BDBC initiative and budget of £250k to start to address this problem; and to hear about local projects to improve access to fast speed broadband. It is estimated that over 2,000 properties in the BDBC rural area are in the 5% aforementioned. Many rural communities are exchange only lines (wires from each home back to the exchange across fields). If there are no green cabinets in the area then BT have no technology to deliver superfast broadband. BDBC looked into the cost of putting fibre technology into some of these homes to the north of Basingstoke and found the cost for 7000 homes to be around £4k per property. BDBC is also conducting a trial with wireless broadband in Hannington and are looking at options for subsidising such work without falling foul of EU State Aid regulations. Interestingly, wireless connection speeds faster than BT Infinity are being delivered by local contractors and on Isle of Arran. For further information on this topic please contact [martin.slatford@gmail.com](mailto:martin.slatford@gmail.com)

## **4. Reports**

### Hampshire Association of Local Councils

The HALC meeting on 10<sup>th</sup> September 2016 was on the topic of local government reorganisation and members were given a similar presentation to the one given to BDAPTC members at this meeting. The AGM will be held in Hartley Whitney on 22<sup>nd</sup> October 2016 and members are urged to attend.

### Basingstoke Voluntary Action and Basingstoke and District Disability Forum

BDDF are hosting a Disability Awareness Day on Wednesday 14th September in the Malls. BVA and the DDF have both elected a new Chairman, Stephen Morgan. BDAPTC should consider inviting Stephen to a meeting.

## Headway

Headway is progressing very well and expanding its services to cover an extra day a week with extra staff.

### **5. Any Other Business**

5.1 Mel Barrett informed the meeting that Councillor Robert Musson had sadly passed away from cancer. His funeral will be held at 1.30pm on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of September at St Paul's Church on the Green in Tadley.

5.2 Martin Slatford asked for someone to come forward after the meeting to assist him with planning and chairing BDAPTC meetings. There is a lot going on where parish and town councils can provide improved services to their communities. BDAPTC needs to be the means to help deliver these benefits.

### **6. Dates of future meetings**

Tuesday 10 January 2017 and Tuesday 11 April 2017.

**Meeting closed at 8.30pm.**



