

Parish Council of Langton Matravers

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Minutes of an Extraordinary Meeting of Langton Matravers Parish Council held in St George's Church on Tuesday 18th October 2016 at 7 pm., to consider the Council's formal response to the Dorset 'Reshaping Your Councils' Consultation.

Present: Cllr W Knight in the Chair, Cllrs P Christie, P Loudoun, P White, C Drayson, R Sheppard. There were 9 members of the public present. The meeting was audio-recorded.

1. Apologies for Absence. Cllr Turner.

There was no formal agenda.

2. Chairman's Opening Remarks. After thanking Revd Gaynor Burrett and the PCC for the use of the church for the meeting, Cllr Knight set the context for the consultation, explaining the background to plans for changes to Unitary Authorities, and possible options proposed. He emphasised that the rationale behind these plans for change seemed to be entirely based on saving money, although a huge volume of savings had already been made under the present two-tier system which includes District Councils. He suggested that the meeting consider not only the possibility of further savings under the present system, but the effect the proposals might have on the quality of service to local communities, democratic accountability and Localism. He noted that the consultation document provided by ORS was the only information we had on which to make a choice.

Cllr Drayson said that rural Dorset is likely to be worse off under the proposals; it is Bournemouth and Poole who have deficits which must be met. It was noted that Cllr numbers would be reduced from 330 to 180 or less, and Council tax would be 'harmonised', with Purbeck probably paying more. Some services could be moved to Town and Parish Councils, which would then have to precept more; this would not represent a real saving for the Council tax payer.

The meeting was adjourned for Public Discussion.

3. Public Discussion:

a) **Josephine Parish, Studland Parish Clerk**, had attended a presentation for the business sector by ORS, the consultants staging the consultation. Business people were in favour of moving away from the 9 councils, on financial grounds. The formal business case for the changes will not be made until after the consultation closes. She also noted that Corfe Castle PC are not confident about the accuracy of figures presented in the consultation document. There will be no grants for the costs of transition. She had attended a meeting of the Voluntary and Services sector, where groups such as CAB expressed grave concern, as their funding is not ring-fenced and may be lost.

b) **Barry Mayes, resident**, expressed concern about aspects of the consultation process, asking about the relative weight of Town and Parish Councils' views. He asked what services might come down to T&PC level.

c) **Colin Garner, resident**, asked what the changes might cost Council tax payers? He feels that the questions on the questionnaire are leading and simplistic, and that public accountability may be lost through the changes.

d) **Pat Wright, resident**, asked who had done the financial calculations for ORS; Cllr Knight noted that the Chief Finance Officer for DCC had given part of the presentation at the Blandford meeting and seemed to both knowledgeable and supportive of the ORS financial case.

e) **Judith Priddle, resident**, asked how Planning applications will be process if changes go ahead. Cllr Knight said that strategic plans already in place would go forward, but the Unitary Authority would deal with ordinary Planning Applications, from a base in Dorchester.

A decision will be made by Councils on the matter at end of January 2017, and then the result will go to the Secretary of State for consideration.

f) **Barry Mayes, resident** noted that plans for a Dorset and East Devon National Park had not been included in proposals, though Cllr Trite had said that they might be 'in addition'.

The meeting was reconvened.

4. Council's Response.

Councillors were asked in turn for their views, and comments included concerns about lack of information, having to pay for urban deficits, loss of democracy and accountability and lack of confidence in the structure of the questionnaire. Cllr Drayson suggested that we lobby District and County Councillors, and DAPTC to take the matter further. Cllr Christie suggested a Tourist Tax in Purbeck, as in large parts of Europe, to pay for services.

It was **RESOLVED: To only answer the ‘Further Comments’ boxes on page 5 of the printed PC questionnaire, and not the tick boxes preceding.**

It was further RESOLVED: To respond in the upper box as follows:-

‘1.1 View on proposed options

The “Reshaping your Councils” consultation questionnaire is seriously flawed. To present options without having analysed and then presented the likely impacts of such changes on: the quality of service, accessibility, local democratic accountability, local knowledge and sense of ownership is at best negligent, and at worst wilful. The exclusion, in total or part, of the option which was previously being considered by councils to reduce cost within the current structure through the better sharing of services, could be seen to be incompetent or even intentionally manipulative. It is common knowledge that there is a serious campaign to make the Jurassic Coast a National Park. To exclude the impact that such a National Park would have on the financial viability of and the quality of services within Dorset again questions the viability of the questionnaire and the competence of the proposal group.

1.2 Alternative option

We would not wish to impose our views on Bournemouth and Poole. If they wish to join together then this should be a decision for their local communities/electorates. However, any re-organisation of the current Dorset boundary provides no clear upsides, be it financial or otherwise. Our proposal is that Dorset remains as it is (i.e. retaining district councils) but implements an aggressive cost reduction programme through shared services.’

In the lower box, about positive or negative aspects of proposed changes for T&PCs, it was **RESOLVED to respond as follows:-**

‘It is disappointing that this question does not ask parish councillors for any concerns that they may have about the impact on their parishioners, but rather asks about inter council working relationships. But maybe this is not that surprising, as the proposers seem to have given little or no thought about quality of service.

Comparatively, we find the District Council to be faster in their responses and to have greater local knowledge and understanding than County. It is our expectation therefore that the quality of service for our parishioners will not be as good, and that our interaction with a unitary authority will less effective.’

It was further **RESOLVED: To send copies of LMPC’s comments to all Chief Executives and Chairs of all relevant Councils, to our MP and the relevant Govt. minister.** The response will be posted on the website and it was suggested that other like-minded Councils be consulted with a view to producing a Press Release on the matter.

As Cllrs did not wish to discuss any other points on the consultation form at that time, the Chair thanked everyone for their attendance and input and declared the meeting closed.

Meeting closed 8.35 pm.

SIGNED:.....(Chairman) Date:.....