

Future Weymouth

Local government arrangements for the town

Local government in Dorset could be about to change.

A proposal has been made by six local authorities in Dorset, including Weymouth and Portland Borough Council, to replace all nine councils and replace them with two new councils.

If the government accepts this proposal, Weymouth and Portland Borough Council would cease to exist in April 2019.

Weymouth would then be virtually the only place in Dorset not covered by a parish or town council. Portland currently has a town council.

This consultation seeks residents' views about whether Weymouth should have a local parish or town council, and what

this would look like, if it was in place. This process is called a community governance review.

This community governance review is to decide whether a town council should be set up for the Weymouth area.

The council is now holding a full public consultation on the draft proposals.

We are keen to hear local residents' views. This includes suggestions for alternative arrangements that meets the criteria set out in the guidance.

You can complete the consultation at www.futureweymouth.co.uk

No decision has been made and all views will be listened to. We want as many people's views as possible to be able to make a good decision.

This is the first consultation and focuses on the proposal to set up a town council. A further consultation will take place later in the year.

Final recommendations will be published in March 2018.

Community governance reviews

A community governance review considers whether local government arrangements in an area are appropriate.

It also sets out whether there should be any changes to make sure communities are represented fairly and appropriately. This could mean introducing new councils.

Area covered by the review



The consultation covers the whole of Weymouth, but excludes Portland.

As a town council already exists in Portland, the decision was taken to exclude this area from the review.



The review looks at the number of councillors and the parish boundaries. It also takes into account expected changes in the area, such as large scale developments resulting in a change in population.

Parish and town councils

Parish and town councils have an important role to play in the development of their local communities.

Borough councillors have proposed that a new town council is created and replicate the existing borough ward boundaries.

A single town council would take the lead

locally on specific issues and represent the local community to other public sector organisations and partners.

It could deliver community services, which might include parks, cemeteries, play areas, and grounds maintenance.

Council size

Parish councils vary enormously in size and in the type of activities and services they provide and can represent populations ranging from less than 100 to up to 70,000 and having up to 31 councillors.

The law states that the number of parish councillors should not be less than five but

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there is no maximum number.

The proposed council size is 29 councillors.

Making good community governance

Government guidance states that characteristics of good community governance include:

- a sense of civic pride and civic values
- a strong, inclusive community and voluntary sector
- a sense of place - with a positive feeling for people and local distinctiveness
- effective engagement with the local community at neighbourhood level
- strong leadership
- the ability of local authorities to deliver quality services economically and efficiently
- an area that is of a size that is viable as an administrative unit of local government.

Weymouth and Portland Borough Council is currently divided into 15 Wards. 12 Wards covering the Weymouth area and three wards covering the Portland area. There is already an established town council for Portland. It was decided not to include this area as part of the review.

The borough council believes that the warding pattern proposed reflects the distinctive and recognisable communities that already have a clear sense of identity and feeling of local community. The council is clear that the interests of local people are a primary consideration in this review. Councillors feel that residents will benefit from a single parish council for the Weymouth area.

Elections

Elections of councillors should take place every four years. The next elections would be due in 2019, when the council would be formed.

Where possible, these will be held in the same cycle as other local elections so that costs can be shared.

An important part of the review is to determine the electoral arrangements for any new parish council.

The proposals are that:

- the first election to the proposed new parish council will be in 2019 and then every fourth year thereafter
- the number of councillors to be elected to the proposed new parish council will be 29
- the proposed new council will be divided into 12 wards
- the boundaries of the wards of the proposed new council will be as indicated on the map

Council tax for a new town council

There are already town councils throughout the rest of Dorset (outside Bournemouth, Poole and Christchurch) who add an amount to the council tax charged each year.

As a result, the amount of council tax charged by their district or borough council is lower. In Weymouth, where there is no town council at present, a higher council tax is charged by Weymouth and Portland Borough Council, which is about £300 a year for a band D property.

If a town council is created at the same time as a new unitary council for Dorset, it is likely that the council tax from the unitary council would have an adjustment of about £150 a year built into it, to allow the new town council to add to the council tax to help pay for its own activities.

The borough council will set the amount of council tax for the town council in the first year. In subsequent years, it will be for the town council to decide.

Council name

Weymouth and Melcombe Regis was a borough in England formed by a Charter of Elizabeth I, amalgamating the towns of Weymouth and Melcombe Regis in 1571.

The borough continued in existence until 1974 as a municipal borough -a type of local government district which existed between 1835 and 1974 -when it was merged into the district of Weymouth & Portland Borough Council.

A parish council is allowed to have the status of a town.

This also entitles the chairman and vice-chairman to use the title of "Town Mayor" and "Deputy Town Mayor".

A number of options for the name of the proposed parish council are set out below and the borough council would welcome residents' views on the options.

- a) Weymouth Town Council
- b) Weymouth and Melcombe Regis Town Council
- c) Weymouth Area Town Council
- d) Weymouth and Melcombe Regis Area Town Council

What happens next?

There will now be a public consultation which take place from 30 June until 1 September.

You can complete the consultation at www.futureweymouth.co.uk

The council will take into account all views received by 1 September. Any submissions received after this date may not be taken into account.

The council would particularly welcome local views, supported by evidence, on alternative arrangements. These will be considered before the final recommendations are prepared.

It is important that you let the council have your comments and views on the draft recommendations, regardless of whether you agree with the recommendations or not.

Your views should be submitted in writing to:

**Democratic Services
Weymouth & Portland Borough Council
South Walks House
South Walks Road
Dorchester, DT1 1UZ**

**Email:
committeeservices@dorset.gov.uk**

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Borough Council**