

Discussion / Example Document

Working Together Document & Supporting Notes

For use by Officers to engage elected members



Introduction | This document was used to engage officers at the recent Clerks' Conference on 19 October 2022. It was be used as the basis for two interactive sessions where officer thoughts, feedback were received and captured. This draft document has been produced purely to aid the sessions at the Clerks' Conference and the subsequent engagement of elected members in parishes and towns across the Dorset Council area. The final document may look completely different following its wider distribution and input – please treat it as such, it is being used to get the conversation going.

Finally, providing input and feedback to shape this document needs to be done understanding and accepting, that we are now part of a unitary council structure in Dorset. The previous structures may be a useful reference point, but no more than that. We need to focus on what we want the relationship to look like and think more of the future and the path we all want to take for the benefit of our communities.

Neil Wedge, Chief executive of DAPTC

DRAFT TIMELINE TO ADOPTION

DATES	ACTIVITY	WHO?
19 Oct	Clerks' Conference <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Socialise draft Working Together document for initial officer input and feedback • Feedback on the key headings for completeness • Check the timeline • Gather ideas about broader engagement and socialising amongst parishes and towns • Think about what parishes and towns can do to bring the Working Together document to life 	Delegates attending Dorset Council representatives Distribute to those not able to attend and possibly organise online session
Oct to Dec	Clerks socialise the draft document amongst elected members in either committees or full council to increase awareness. DAPTC Area Committees onboarded with this document / timeline	Clerks DAPTC Areas
19 Nov	DAPTC AGM (online) – consider a motion put forward by the Executive Committee to in principle progress a Working Together document between parishes and towns and Dorset Council.	DAPTC AGM delegates
Dec -Apr '23	Elected members contribute to shaping the actual Working Together document	Elected members
May-Nov '23	DAPTC Extraordinary AGM or normal AGM (Nov) – consider the adoption and recommendation of the draft Working Together document if sufficiently progressed.	DAPTC AGM
Jun to Dec 2023	Parish and town councils adopt at the next ordinary meeting the Working Together document recommended at the DAPTC extraordinary AGM.	Parish and town councils
June '24 or '25	Annually or bi-annually a nominated group of delegates including representatives of Dorset Council review the Working Together document for any changes or updates.	To be agreed.

Note: There will be an equivalent timeline in Dorset Council for engagement and adoption to be confirmed.

HEADLINE CHAPTERS AND THEMES

As we work over the coming months to finesse and adapt a Working Together document there will be many views and comments come forward. Personally, having listened to many views on this topic, I feel that diving into an immense amount of detail and specific measures or expectations may lead us down a path which could become more divisive and without some vital principles agreed. We do have to start somewhere and for this draft discussion document. The first thing we want to discuss with you on 14 September are the headline sections or chapters of the draft Working Together document. These are summarised below:

CHAPTER	NAME / DESCRIPTION	OBJECTIVE
1	Foreword	Statements from key leaders in support of the Working Together document.
2	Contents	Schedule of chapters within the Working Together document.
3	Introduction	Any relevant background or supporting information to assist the reader to understand how the content was developed and why.
4	Aims and objectives	This section sets out the broad aims and how an effective Working Together document will be evidenced across the Dorset Council area. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Description of 'Effective Partnership Working' – using potentially 'Working Together' as the identifiable branding or another suitable appropriate name/branding ❖ Shared principles that all parties sign up to and apply to both
THE FOLLOWING CHAPTERS ARE THE THEMED SECTIONS THAT FORM THE CORE OF THE DRAFT DOCUMENT		
5	Effective Communication and Engagement	Will include a list of commitments from both Dorset Council and parish and town councils
6	Service Provision	
7	Training and Briefings	
8	Finance	
9	Planning and Development	
10	Licensing	
11	Democratic Services	

5 – 11 may not be a complete or exhaustive list and we are keen as this process begins to understand if there are any missing chapters that need to be considered. In developing this we need to be mindful that the Working Together document has to be established such that it can apply broadly to all parish and town councils and not focus in on unique problems to a specific location or council.

EXAMPLE CHAPTER CONTENT

The following information is an example of how the individual chapters could look in the final document. As mentioned earlier, the content of each section from a Dorset Council, parish and town councils' perspective will need further development.

The content that follows, therefore, won't be discussed on 19 October and what we'd like to do is pull together smaller review groups to look at a specific chapter – more on this at the end of this paper.

REFERENCE	EXAMPLE CONTENT
4	<p>AIMS & OBJECTIVES</p> <p>These next statements set out the headline aims and objectives that <u>all parties</u> may sign up to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Parish / town councils and Dorset Council will endeavour to work in partnership for the benefit of the local community they both serve, while respecting their mutual rights as separate democratic bodies.</i> • <i>Improve, develop and maintain positive relationships between Dorset Council and parish and town councils across the principal authorities area.</i> • <i>Set out clear expectations of both Dorset Council and parish and town councils.</i> • <i>Respect the constraints and acknowledge the dynamic roles delivered by Dorset Council officers and parish and town clerks.</i> <hr/> <p>These next statements set out the headline aims and objectives that <u>specific parties</u> may sign up to:</p> <p>Dorset Council will...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Recognise the importance of parish / town councils as the grass roots of local democracy and work with them to promote active citizenship and participation.</i> • <i>Will provide information / briefings to ensure that staff have a good understanding of the role and function of the parish / town councils and key contacts via an A to Z on their website.</i> • <i>Recognise and understand that the work of parish / town councils is heavily reliant on volunteering and good will.</i> • <i>Recognise the difference between smaller parishes and larger parishes and town in terms of ability to handle information and resources at their disposal.</i> • <i>Recognise the importance of engaging parish and town councils early with changes, projects and events potentially impacting their community.</i> • <i>Hold regular liaison meetings and briefings.</i> <p>Parish and Town Councils will.....</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Actively promote their work and achievements.</i> • <i>Encourage active citizenship and participation across all age groups.</i> • <i>Identify local needs and consult with local communities and groups within those communities.</i> • <i>Be seen as an active part of local government by their community to ensure the 'working together' intent is delivered locally.</i>

Note: In putting this example Working Together document forward to help both officers and elected members, I realise I have made example statements that some may not agree with. There will be an opportunity for all to contribute to the final document at which point the statements can be refined or removed altogether.

The following sections all parties are agreed to, but there may be specific statements that are only relevant to one or more of the parties under the compact.

REFERENCE	EXAMPLE CONTENT
5	<p>AIMS & OBJECTIVES</p> <p>Dorset Council will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Provide online and in person engagement and liaison meetings throughout the year which will include:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>Working Together Webinars hosted by DAPTC</i> ○ <i>In person events and consultations as and when appropriate</i> ○ <i>Larger Parishes and Towns Officer Meeting</i> ○ <i>Parish and Town Councils Newsletter</i> • <i>Ensure funding updates and opportunities are communicated promptly</i> • <i>Encourage all teams to understand and work with parish and town councils across the Dorset Council area.</i> • <i>Ensure that consultations undertaken and completed have a feedback mechanism to parish and town councils so that the potential outcomes are shared widely.</i> • <i>Avoid the use of jargon and abbreviations to ensure parish and town council colleagues and elected members are engaged effectively.</i> • <i>Liaise with DAPTC to ensure that key parish and town council information is maintained and that there is a dedicated webpage at assist with this aim.</i> • <i>Encourage effective ward member updates at parish and town council meetings and if unable to attend provide a short format report in advance of the meeting date.</i> <p>Parish and Town Councils will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Ensure their representatives attend any communication, briefing or engagement events as well as receive key communications by email or newsletter.</i> • <i>Ensure the representatives report back to their councils sharing key updates and communications.</i> • <i>Respond to consultations from Dorset Council within the allocated timescales.</i> • <i>Encourage their elected members to access information on the Dorset Council website and other communications.</i> • <i>Share information from Dorset Council in their communities through their websites, newsletters and social media accounts.</i> • <i>Keep their websites up to date with key contact information for Clerks and councillors.</i> • <i>Keep meeting records including agendas, minutes and annual reports updated and accessible on their website.</i> • <i>Use the preferred and dedicated escalation route for parish and town councils to raise an issue that is proving difficult to resolve or progress.</i> • <i>Ensure Clerks have use of and access to technology and online profiles to be able to engage fully with Dorset Council.</i> • <i>Work with Dorset Council to seek mutually agreeable and acceptable solutions to issues.</i> • <i>Recognise the strategic role Dorset Council plays in tackling issues beyond individual town and parish council boundaries.</i>

Note: The above section is probably one of the most important and probably relies heavily on resource and time commitment from all parties. What we do know, is that if communication and engagement is strong – outcomes for the communities we all serve are far better. The value of getting this right is significant for all.

REFERENCE	EXAMPLE CONTENT
6	<p>SERVICE PROVISION</p> <p>Dorset Council will....</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide prompt responses to requests for information from parish and town councils. • Provide comprehensive information to allow parish and town councils to decide whether to take on functions/services currently provided by Dorset Council. <p>Parish and Town Councils will....</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make available to Dorset Council their meeting/event spaces for the public, community or partnership meetings in which they have an interest. • Consider whether they wish to take on any functions when enabled to make an informed decision.
7	<p>TRAINING & BRIEFINGS</p> <p>Dorset Council will....</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide officers to help support any training and briefings on central government policies and initiatives that have an impact on parish and town councils in conjunction with DAPTC under the 'Working Together' approach. • Encourage officers and members to attend training and briefings to understand what parish and town councils do for their local communities and the benefits of working together. <p>Parish and Town Councils will....</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage staff and members to attend relevant training and briefings supported by Dorset Council and DAPTC. Where appropriate ensure updates are provided to their council and community.
8	<p>FINANCE</p> <p>Dorset Council will....</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consult parish and town councils on proposed changes to service provision with any budget implications in a timely manner. • Provide information to support parish and town councils to understand any changes in key data that impacts the determination of precepts. • Meet the administration and staff costs with ordinary elections and Neighbourhood Plan referenda. • Provide a detailed breakdown in a timely manner of elections costs to which parish and town councils are expected to contribute. <p>Parish and Town Councils will....</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide precept information by the mutually agreed deadline each year. • Contribute to the costs of any parish and town council by-election in their parish.

Note: The three sections above appear relatively straightforward, and some positive steps have been made in the last two years about timely supply of key information to assist parishes and towns with budget preparation.

The provision of briefings by the senior leadership has been primarily to larger parishes and towns and consideration needs to be given further consideration as to the best way to reach all parishes, no matter their size.

This following chapter topic has generated many emails to our mailbox specifically on the topic of the Local Plan as well as changes to the way the planning authority operate.

It's important whilst making comment on the performance of the planning authority, that parish and town councils look too at what we can do improve and help on this topic going forward.

REFERENCE	EXAMPLE CONTENT
9	<p>PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT</p> <p>Dorset Council will....</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Undertake the formal period of public consultation prior to deciding a planning application (this may vary for listed building and conservation area consent). • Issue required planning consultation to the relevant town or parish council. • Publish information online in an open data format so that it is available to anyone who wishes to comment. • Make planning applications available for comments for no less than 21 days or 14 days where a notice is published in a newspaper. • Notify parish and town councils of the outcome of planning applications when determined. • Ensure there is clarity for Dorset councillors and parish/town councils about the procedure for having applications determined by committee. <p>Parish and Town Councils will....</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Respond to planning applications within the 21 days consultation period; if they wish to respond. (No representation will be reported as 'no comments received'). • Extensions requests to the 21 days consultation period will be made on an exceptional basis by parish and town councils. • Respond to amended plans within the 14 days consultation period; if they wish to respond. • Ensure the Clerk has the capacity and is trained to handle planning applications electronically, to then circulate amongst their parish or town councillors.

Note: The above topic because of the volume and complexity of the subject matter, can cause major issues and frustrations for all concerned. It is also a topic that would feature in any commitments around communications and engagement. There is also can ongoing challenge to get councillors understanding the topic and the role they play in the planning framework. This could be a challenging part of the Working Together document to finalise, at the same time help provide greater clarity.

REFERENCE	EXAMPLE CONTENT
10	<p>LICENSING</p> <p>Dorset Council will...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Inform the parish and town councils of any licence applications listed, providing 28 days to respond under the following:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>Licensing Act 2003 – Premises Licence (New)</i> ○ <i>Licensing Act 2003 – Premises Licence (Variation)</i> ○ <i>Licensing Act 2003 – Premises Licence (Interim Authority)</i> ○ <i>Licensing Act 2003 – Club Premises Certificate (New)</i> ○ <i>Licensing Act 2003 – Club Premises Certificate (Variation)</i> ○ <i>Gambling Act 2005 – Premises Licence (New)</i> ○ <i>Gambling Act 2005 – Premises Licence (Variation)</i> ○ <i>Sexual Entertainment Venue – New</i> ○ <i>Sexual Entertainment Venue – Renewal</i> • <i>Inform the relevant town and parish councils of any Street Trading Consent (new or renewal), providing 28 days to respond.</i> • <i>Provide awareness and training to parish and town councils for any portal for licensing consultations.</i> • <i>Provide updates, briefings and general awareness training for parish and town councils on licensing laws and procedures.</i> <p>Parish and Town Councils will.....</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Attend any briefings, updates and training provided by the Licensing Team at Dorset Council.</i> • <i>Respond to licensing applications within the 28 days timeframe, if they wish to comment.</i>

Note: The above may not be relevant to all parishes and as such there might be content that is included to ensure specific circumstances apply for those locations where it is more critical.

REFERENCE	EXAMPLE CONTENT
11	<p>DEMOCRATIC SERVICES</p> <p>Dorset Council will.....</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Following each contested or uncontested election, the Returning Officer will give notice to the Proper Officer at each parish or town council the names of each candidate elected. In the absence of a Proper Officer the names will be provided to the parish Chair.</i> • <i>The Returning Officer will share the ‘statement of the persons nominated’ to the Proper Officer.</i> • <i>The Monitoring Officer will maintain a register of members’ interests which will be published to Dorset Council website.</i> • <i>The Monitoring Officer will support DAPTC in the delivery of training to support upholding the standards of elected members.</i> <p>Parish and Town Councils will....</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The Proper Officer for parish and town councils will help administer the registration of members’ interests within 28 days of their election or appointment to office through the self-service portal on the Dorset Council website.</i>

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>The Proper Officer will remind members to keep their details up to date and will also remove any councillor's information should they no longer be a member of council.</i>• <i>The Proper Officer will notify the elections team when a casual vacancy arises to ensure the correct procedures are followed to fill a vacancy.</i>• <i>Encourage members to attend training to uphold Standards of Conduct in Public Office and the Code of Conduct.</i>• <i>Review and ensure that the adopted Code of Conduct is up to date and where possible aligned to the Local Government Association Model Template.</i> |
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Can you help bring it all together from a parish and town council perspective?

We would also like to know which officers/elected members would like to be involved in contributing to specific chapter development and the progress of the document.

Finally, if you have any thoughts on a more appropriate name, that too would be beneficial – the working title for now is 'Working Together' but there may be something better?

END

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