

## **Proposal for joint working in Bournemouth, Dorset and Poole via a Multi Area Agreement (MAA) – summary of progress to date and issues / challenges**

### **Introduction**

The local authorities for Bournemouth, Dorset and Poole are keen to work together to take forward their economic development in particular. Among other issues they recognise the developing interdependence of the towns in South East Dorset and see that action is required across local authority boundaries. These include planning for growth within environmental limits, improving skills and planning for the legacy of the 2012 Games, for example.

### **Vision for the area and for joint working**

Whilst the Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) of the three Authorities have developed a vision for each area alongside the LAA process, at a more strategic level, Bournemouth, Dorset and Poole have already cooperated in preparing:

- a Joint Study Area submission for the South West Regional Spatial Strategy, setting out a broad spatial vision for South East Dorset; and
- *Raising the Game*, an economic development strategy for the sub region, developed through the Sub Regional Economic Partnership
- two Local Transport Plans (LTPs) guiding transport investment by those authorities.

This track record of joint working between Bournemouth, Dorset and Poole will form the basis of a vision for future shared working. It is also worth remembering that they are served by the same police force, a single fire and rescue service and fall within the Somerset and Dorset region of the LSC. Bournemouth and Poole have collaborated to agree joint targets and pooled funding of reward grant in their Local Area Agreements, are now served by a single PCT and the two councils collaborate effectively in many other areas.

### **Potential benefits of closer co-operation**

All the authorities recognise the need for collaboration and co-operation to address key economic issues. All recognise the need to achieve growth within environmental limits, including the constraints of designated land. All recognise the challenges of mitigating and adapting to climate change. All recognise the need to ensure that national and regional perceptions of the sub region properly reflect its needs and potential, and that this is more likely to be achieved by working together.

In addition, there are particular issues where action is required by others to allow forward progress. For example:

- there is limited land for business use or for housing in Bournemouth and Poole and growth is likely to require sites in those parts of the South East Dorset conurbation that lie within Dorset,

- any further development of Bournemouth Airport , which lies in the Borough of Christchurch, Is vital to the future of the whole sub region.
- Accessibility, investment in transport , and the need to address traffic congestion within South East Dorset are issues best addressed collectively
- Skills development is an important issue for the sub region as a whole and MAA governance structure might allow for the inclusion of a sub regional skills board of the type envisaged in the Leitch Report.
- The implications of the serious housing affordability issues that exist in the area would also be best addressed through joint working.

### **A way forward**

The Multi Area Agreement should provide a way of formalising joint working between the authorities and provide the mechanism for ‘contracting’ with Government – to ensure that all are clear about the outcomes being sought and the support available to help achieve them.

Existing mechanisms will not easily provide the same outcomes, and less formal co-operation between authorities would always be subject to political risks.

### **Issues to address**

Vision and scope – the three authorities need to agree the scope of their collaborative effort. This could be broader in scope than the formal agreement with Government through the MAA. The agreement of the vision and scope will ensure that there is common understanding at the outset and will help to maintain commitment of all parties.

Governance – practical and effective ‘light touch’ arrangements are needed – but these must also provide transparency and accountability to citizens. The partners recognise that DCLG will need an accountable body to take formal responsibility for delivery. They believe that a new body, formed for this purpose and replacing the previous Sub Regional Economic Partnership, might reduce bureaucracy by offering a single streamlined process for discussing, negotiating and reaching agreement with the three Authorities. The role of districts in the MAA will also need to be considered, especially because of their interest in Housing.

Private sector involvement – The partners believe that private sector involvement will be essential to the success of the MAA. There is a concern that an overly bureaucratic MAA process might put them off.

Geography – it is expected that the MAA would be signed by the upper tier authorities of Bournemouth, Dorset and Poole. Some of the work might then focus on the whole area, some on the South East Dorset conurbation and other geographies might also be appropriate (eg. concerning the heathland in South Dorset that bounds Bournemouth and Poole, or the relevant Housing Market Areas).

Effective links with LAAs – the MAA will need to dovetail neatly with the LAAs, without duplication. We expect that this can be addressed once MAA policy is clarified and the arrangements for ‘new style’ LAAs are finalised. The aim will be that each issue is dealt with at the appropriate level.

Performance measures – any short term measurement of progress (eg over a three year period) will need to recognise that the real goal is to address difficult issues that require concerted, joint action over a longer period.

Timescale – many of the issues to address (growth, employment sites, transport) will require concerted and consistent action over the short, medium and long term. A three year MAA could provide focus for an action plan in the context of a longer term agreement about joint working – milestones along the way, rather than the outcomes desired in the longer term.

### **Constraints**

MAA policy is still developing. The policy needs to be clarified and agreed before Bournemouth, Dorset and Poole can use it to help deliver their aspirations.

It is hard to say at the outset what freedoms and flexibilities will be needed. These will ‘come out of the woodwork’ when the detailed work is done.

However, initial ideas included:

- aligning or steering LSC and Communities England funding to address skills and housing issues
- seeking greater powers on transport, similar to those of passenger transport authorities
- seeking enhanced planning powers to address land and property banking and under utilised sites for example
- aligning the funding of the regional agencies with the aims of the MAA
- integrating Poole’s Growth Point status with the aims of the MAA
- enhancing Partnership work on the issue of killed and seriously injured related to elderly drivers.

### **What can central government do to help?**

Central Government needs to:

- clarify what it means by MAAs and how it will engage with them. The receptiveness to ideas is very much welcome, but at the moment the ‘everything is in’ approach makes focusing difficult.
- recognise that delivering MAA outcomes is likely to require a longer timescale than LAAs, possibly as much as 5 –10 years.
- facilitate cross-border working, where required

- continue to develop MAA policy consistently alongside that for LAAs
- consider if further resources are needed to support community engagement, alignment of strategies and the sourcing of evidence.
- consider how it could incentivise MAA development and delivery

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