



Community Governance Review: The Case For and Against Town Councils in BCP

Focus: Poole and Talbot Village

BCP Council is conducting a Community Governance Review to decide whether new town or parish councils should be established in areas like Poole that are currently unparished. Talbot Village, as part of Poole, would be directly affected if such a council were created. As the Chair of the Talbot Village Residents' Association (TVRA), it is important to consider both sides of the issue impartially.

Arguments For Town Councils

1. 1. Local Decision-Making

A town council can give residents more direct control over local issues like green spaces, events, community assets, and minor infrastructure. Decisions may be made with greater sensitivity to the character and needs of the area.

2. 2. Stronger Community Identity

A town council can promote civic pride, local history, and community cohesion. For areas with distinct heritage, such as Poole, it may help preserve and celebrate identity.

3. 3. Accountability

A local council could provide a more accessible forum for residents to raise concerns, with councillors focused solely on that area rather than the wider BCP region.

4. 4. Funding Local Projects

Town councils can raise funds via a council tax precept to invest in specific local services, potentially bringing benefits that might otherwise be overlooked by a larger unitary authority.

Arguments Against Town Councils

1. Increased Costs to Residents

A new town council would mean an extra charge on council tax bills. In Poole, the current Charter Trustee precept is just £2.14, whereas town councils in Dorset often charge £80–£140+ per year for a Band D property.

2. Duplication and Confusion

Residents already pay for services via BCP Council. Creating another layer of governance risks duplicating functions, causing confusion over who is responsible for what.

3. Limited Powers

Despite the extra cost, a town council does not gain control over major services like highways, education, social care, or housing. These remain with BCP.

No funding for these optional activities comes from BCP Council. This means all additional services come at a direct cost to local taxpayers.

For instance, Christchurch Town Council decided to renovate a building to support its operations. It is estimated this cost £80,000, this type of expenditure has contributed to higher precepts—currently around £70 per Band D property.

Town and parish councils have very limited statutory responsibilities. By law, they are only required to manage allotments and to be consulted on planning applications. Anything beyond that—such as community events, building maintenance, or services—must be decided locally and entirely funded through the precept paid by residents.

4. Risk of Low Engagement

There is a risk that elections for town councils attract low turnout, and unopposed seats can limit democratic legitimacy.

5. Potential Inequality

Creating a patchwork of parished and unparished areas could lead to inequities in service levels and taxation across BCP.

6. Risk of Politicisation or Special Interest Capture

While town councils are intended to represent local communities, there is a risk they can become dominated by a small group of individuals or political interests. In smaller elections with low turnout, even well-meaning councils may unintentionally exclude diverse views. This can lead to decisions that reflect the priorities of a few, rather than the whole community.

7. Loss of Civic Continuity, Asset Responsibility, and Confusion About the Role of the Mayor

In Poole, the civic role of Mayor is currently maintained by the Charter Trustees at minimal cost. If a town council were established, the responsibility for appointing a Mayor—and

managing related civic functions—would shift to the new council. This may create confusion about the Mayor’s role, especially if it becomes politicised rather than remaining a neutral civic figure.

Poole also has a historic civic team, including a Sheriff, Mayor, and Deputy Mayor—one of only 15 Sheriffs in the country, with over 500 years of tradition. These roles may be diminished, restructured, or lost altogether under a town council model.

In addition, civic assets—such as regalia, historic records, or civic items—could be transferred to a town council. That council would then be responsible for storing, insuring, and maintaining them, all of which would incur additional costs borne directly by local taxpayers.

8. Confusing Ward Boundaries and Democratic Overlap

The introduction of a town council would create new electoral wards that don’t necessarily align with existing BCP Council wards. For example, Talbot & Branksome Woods ward currently spans both Poole and Bournemouth. Under the proposals, this area would be split, residents would be placed in a new ‘Bourne Valley & Branksome East’ town council ward that combines areas from different BCP wards. This misalignment could create confusion for residents, complicate representation and weaken the clarity of who is responsible for what at each level of government.

Conclusion

The idea of a town council appeals to those who want stronger local representation and identity, but it brings clear financial, administrative, and practical drawbacks. For Talbot Village, any move toward creating a new town council must be carefully weighed against the cost, the risk of duplication, and the potential for limited return on investment in terms of actual services delivered.

The TVRA encourages all residents to consider the facts, participate in the consultation, and ensure their views are heard.

Jo Keeling

Chair of TVRA