

Hampshire County Council Report February 2025

CLlr Jan Warwick

Hampshire County Council Fast-Tracked for Devolution Priority Programme

Hampshire County Council has been accepted onto the Government's fast-track Devolution Priority Programme.

Earlier this month Hampshire County Council, together with Southampton and Portsmouth City Councils and Isle of Wight Council put in a 'Hampshire and the Solent' devolution bid to central Government which seeks to bring power and money from Westminster and provide greater local control over vital areas such as education, transport, and health services for Hampshire residents.

As part of devolution, a mayor will be elected in the spring of 2026 to head up a new Combined Authority across the wider region of Hampshire County Council, Isle of Wight Council, Portsmouth City Council and Southampton City Council. As well as promoting the interests of the wider region to central Government, the Mayor would work together with local council leaders, to make decisions about how to allocate regional funding. Greater collaboration across boundaries would be particularly effective in areas such as transport, skills and employment support, housing and planning, and tackling climate change.

Benefits of Devolution

Devolution will transfer greater powers and flexibilities from Westminster to Hampshire and the Solent region, accompanied by additional funding and investment. This shift will enable local authorities to make crucial decisions closer to where residents live and work, driving economic growth, innovation, and productivity.

The Government plans to consult with Hampshire residents very soon to gather people's input and feedback on the prospect of devolution for the area.

Local Government Reorganisation

Additionally, the Secretary of State has confirmed today that Hampshire will be formally invited to submit proposals for local government reorganisation. The reorganisation aims to replace the current two-tier council system with new unitary (all-purpose) councils, simplifying how councils are organised and run.

Postponement of May's Election

Due to selection for the Devolution Priority Programme, the Government has also determined that the County Council's elections, originally to focus on devolution and local government reorganisation, and allow for a mayor to be elected in 2026. Any by-elections, if required during this period, would continue to go ahead as normal. Reorganisation would then be expected to be in place by either April 2027 or April 2028.

Disruption Charges

Hampshire County Council plans to charge utility companies for disruptive roadworks.

This week our Highways Executive Member has unveiled plans for a new disruption charge scheme aimed at reducing delays on the county's busiest roads during peak times. The initiative, designed to complement the existing permitting scheme, would encourage companies and agencies to better plan their work, operate outside peak hours, and shorten the duration of their projects.

- ◆ How It Works: A daily fee would be charged for the duration of the work, including any delays. Surplus revenues would fund innovative projects to minimize roadworks disruption and will also be reinvested into highway maintenance.
- ◆ Already in use in parts of the UK, 'lane rental' charges apply to the most congested, strategically important local roads. Hampshire could charge up to £2,500 per day, the maximum allowed under current legislation.

Stay tuned for updates and have your say when the consultation opens.

Green Light for the new 'Super'-Recycling Centre

Hampshire County Council's plans to build a state of the art £50.5 million waste recycling plant based in Eastleigh will get underway later this year. The facility will process tons of waste from across Hampshire, and include waste from the cities of Southampton and Portsmouth.

The new materials recovery facility (MRF) will replace existing older sites in Alton and Portsmouth and allow Hampshire to meet government recycling targets by processing a wider range of materials such as plastic films, glass, and pots, tubs, and trays.

This facility is essential for meeting our recycling targets under the Environment Act 2021. Waste will be sorted using a "twin-stream" system where paper and card are collected separately from items such as glass, plastic, and metal. This will make recycling easier and helps retain the value of the recycled product. Recycling more plastics will boost the recycling rates across the county and save about £2.3 million annually by reducing residual (black bin) waste.

Work will start on the facility this autumn and it will take some time before it is fully operational so I will keep you posted as soon as we have more information on bins and collections.

Major Investment in Special Needs Education for Next Academic Year!

One of the greatest pressures on Hampshire County Council's budget is the cost of the increasing number of school pupils with Special Education Needs. We have therefore announced exciting plans to transform specialist education at three primary schools, significantly boosting support for pupils with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) in Gosport, Eastleigh, and Basingstoke.

These expansions are in addition to plans for a new SEMH special school in Eastleigh, set to open in September 2026, and further specialist places at three other schools from September 2025.

The three-year £500 million capital programme for Hampshire schools includes 10 new schools, 3 special schools, 3 school expansions and 11 projects to increase SEND provision by an additional 114 places.

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