

Hampshire County Councillor Update – January 2025

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Devolution

The English Devolution White Paper that was published on 16 December sets out the Government's intention to drive a programme of devolution and local government reorganisation across England. For our area, this means:

- A plan to replace our current two local authorities (Winchester City Council and Hampshire County Council) with a single tier, Unitary Authority.
- A plan to create a new level of Local Government called a Strategic Authority, that covers several Unitary Authorities and is led by an elected mayor. Our Strategic Authority will likely cover the whole of Hampshire, plus Southampton, Portsmouth and the Isle of Wight.

Upper Tier Councils have been invited to put forward proposals by 10 January for areas to be included in the Devolution Priority Programme, with reorganisation plans to be submitted in Autumn 2025. For such priority areas, local elections planned for May 2025 may be deferred.

Whether the County Council chooses to join the programme now or later, the White Paper and Ministerial Direction is clear that devolution accompanied by local government reorganisation will happen in our area and Councils are required to submit reorganisation proposals.

These proposals represent massive changes to Local Government in Hampshire, and whilst it will take several years for the full changes to be enacted, the wide-ranging implications mean that this will affect many areas of Local Government in the interim.

Local Government Settlement Announced

In December the annual announcement from central Government of how much financial support they will give local councils across the country in the coming financial year was issued.

Despite the scale of the financial pressures that Hampshire and many other councils face nationally, particularly in social care for vulnerable children and adults, where demand continues to drive up costs and widen the annual budget gap, the Settlement set out very little benefit. While some extra grant money for social care was welcomed, less support was received in other areas – resulting in only a very small overall boost to Hampshire funding. In addition, the maximum that councils are allowed to increase council tax was also unchanged at 5%.

This overall position continues to put pressure on the Council finances and is driving the Council's focus on delivering core services only.

Annual Report on Hampshire's Progress on Tackling Climate Change

Despite all the other challenges going on around the world, the head of the United Nations has repeatedly stated that the Climate Emergency is the biggest issue that the world faces. Average global temperatures in 2024 are set to be higher than at any time for more than 100,000 years and every year extreme weather events are becoming more frequent.

In 2019, Hampshire County Council declared a climate emergency and the Council has set a goal of reaching net zero emissions across the county by 2050. However, achieving this goal relies on all of us taking action; the work of the County Council alone is not enough.

The council produces an annual Climate Change progress report to highlight progress made in the past year. Highlights from this year's report include:

- Over 550 householders have invested in Hampshire County Council's third Solar Together scheme to generate their own green electricity
- More people seeking repairs for worn out or mechanically failing items through Hampshire's Repair Cafés
- Helping to secure Government investment for 62 zero-emission (electric) buses operated by First Bus and serving bus passengers in Fareham, Gosport and Portsmouth
- Construction of nine local walking and cycling routes in locations across the county, to enable people to walk, cycle or scoot for their local journeys instead of travelling by car
- Planting many more trees through the Hampshire Forest Partnership, bringing the total number of new carbon-absorbing trees planted in Hampshire to 41,000 since 2022
- Set up the Go Green challenge, spotlighting daily actions younger residents can take, such as avoiding food waste or making a pledge to swap a car journey for a greener alternative
- Around 4,500 vulnerable residents have been supported through Hampshire's Technology Enabled Care Programme, avoiding the need to travel to, or access, wider health services, and instead have received support at home, which significantly reduces carbon emissions
- Bridgemary Library in Gosport has been transformed into Hampshire's first 'Green Library', which has led to a 70% reduction in energy usage through the installation of renewable energy sources – rooftop solar panels and an air source heat pump system

Whilst the report does a good job in highlighting initiatives across the council, during Council committee meetings, concerns were highlighted that the report lacks clear data on progress to date, and is missing a plan on how to get from where we are now to net zero in 2050. A specific action was taken on producing a local area energy plan that can be used to guide grid energy infrastructure upgrades that are needed to support the energy transition.

Hampshire County Council to Continue Provision of School Meals via New Managed Outsource Arrangement

Hampshire County Council will move to sourcing school meals from other providers by the end of March 2026, rather than producing meals in-house as it currently does via its Education Catering service

This new 'managed outsource' arrangement will see the County Council purchase and manage the supply of meals from alternative providers on behalf of the schools and nurseries who subscribe to this service. This will potentially support schools and families to pay a lower price for school meals - particularly important given the ongoing cost-of-living pressures. School meals will continue to be available to all children across Hampshire, including those eligible for free school meals.

Date Set for Minerals and Waste Plan Public Hearings

Hampshire's Minerals and Waste Plan – a framework to ensure Hampshire can provide its share of materials, such as sand and gravel, for building homes, schools and roads in the future - is set to enter the final stages of the process. The Hampshire Minerals and Waste Plan contains local policies to guide the decisions when determining planning applications for minerals extraction or waste facilities and operations.

The Government's Planning Inspectorate has confirmed that examination hearings will open at 10am on 4 February 2024 and will be informal, 'round table' sessions led by the independent Planning Inspector, who will address pre-set topics. Unlike a public inquiry, there will be no formal presentation of parties' cases and there will be no cross-examination.

Joining Forces on Defence Cluster

Hampshire County Council has led the formation of a new, pioneering regional partnership. The new South Central Regional Defence and Security Cluster (SCRDSC) - spanning Hampshire,

Berkshire, the Isle of Wight, Surrey and West Sussex - is a collaboration between the Ministry of Defence, the Defence and Security Accelerator, the Armed Forces and businesses including Airbus Defence & Space and QinetiQ, as well as further and higher education institutions and local authorities.

In forming the Cluster, the Members have made a formal commitment to work together to raise the profile of the South Central's capabilities in defence and security and attract national and international investment and innovation in the region.

Free Solar Panel Support for Winchester Community Organisations

Winchester Action on the Climate Crisis (WinACC) is providing free support to community organisations in Winchester District to upgrade their facilities with solar panels – helping to reduce their carbon footprint and their running costs.

They can help at every stage of the process, including with:

- producing initial feasibility study
- developing a fundraising plan
- writing funding applications
- writing tenders for installer quotes.

Any non-profit organisation in Winchester District which is responsible for a building is eligible – including village halls, faith organisations, sports organisations and community groups. The scheme is open until March 2025.

Home Energy Efficiency Opportunities

The following offers advice and support. But please carefully check eligibility for grants as they will depend on the type of home and your circumstances.

- [Energy Saving Trust](#) – Guidance for the type of insulation for properties
- [Great British Insulation Scheme](#) – Eligible if the property has an energy performance certificate (EPC) of D to G and is in Council Tax bands A-D in England
- [Warmer Homes](#) – Warmer Homes provides fully funded insulation, solar panels and other energy efficiency measures for owner-occupiers and private renters living in low-income, off-gas households. The scheme is available until March 2025.

Thermal Imaging Cameras – A thermal imaging camera, under the right conditions, can reveal where heat is being lost from your home. Your local Community Action Group (for example, SWaCS – Sustainable Waltham Chase and Swanmore) may have one you can borrow. If not, you can reach out to Winchester Action on the Climate Crisis (WinACC) at homes@winacc.org.uk to find out more.