

CABINET

Thursday, 25 September 2025

Attendance:

Councillors
Tod (Chairperson)

Cutler
Cramoysan
Becker
Learney

Porter
Reach
Thompson

Members in attendance who spoke at the meeting

Councillors Bolton, Godfrey and Lee

[Video recording of this meeting](#)

1. **APOLOGIES**

There were no apologies received.

2. **DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS**

Councillors Tod and Porter declared disclosable pecuniary interests in respect of various items on the agenda due to their role as Hampshire County Councillors. However, as there was no material conflict of interest, they remained in the room, spoke and voted under the dispensation granted on behalf of the Audit and Governance Committee to participate and vote in all matters which might have a County Council involvement.

3. **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

There were no members of the public registered to speak.

4. **LOCAL GOVERNMENT RE-ORGANISATION: FINAL PROPOSAL FOR HAMPSHIRE & ISLE OF WIGHT**
(CAB3515)

Councillor Tod advised that the report had been debated at Council the previous evening and a copy of the draft notes of that meeting had been circulated to all councillors present at Cabinet. In summary, he stated that no alternative proposals had been submitted, it was essential that a decision was made by the government deadline and there was a majority support for Option 2 as outlined in the report. In addition, the public engagement response indicated a preference for Option 2. At Council, concerns had been raised around the level of detail of the financial modelling, which would be explored further at this Cabinet meeting. In addition, there were other matters raised that would be considered at a later

stage of the process such as consideration of how we manage risk, how we factor the environment into future plans, how to address the challenge of a potential democratic deficit from reduced councilor numbers and larger authorities, and how to protect the mayoralty.

At the invitation of the Leader, Councillors Lee, Godfrey and Bolton addressed Cabinet as summarised briefly below.

Councillor Lee

Councillor Lee stated that he remained unconvinced by the proposal, believing the suggested new authority would not be local and would be too large. He proposed a compromise that the council submit Option 2 as its preferred "least worst" option but simultaneously request a pause in the process to allow for a more balanced assessment. He justified this by highlighting several concerns, including the lack of a mandated climate impact assessment, the absence of a risk register, the potential for a democratic deficit with oversized councils, and concerns regarding the timing and meaningfulness of the public consultation.

Councillor Godfrey

Councillor Godfrey expressed concern about the lack of detailed financial information provided to the cabinet relating to the projected savings of £63.9 million, whilst accepting assurances regarding the quality of work undertaken by the council's Section 151 officer. He highlighted the significant difference between this figure and Hampshire County Council's (HCC) forecast, which predicted nearly £95 million less in savings annually. He contended that without access to the detailed models, Cabinet could not determine if the new authority would be financially sustainable or express a clear preference for an option and generally advised a more cautious approach on predicted savings. In addition, on behalf of Councillor Horrill who was unable to attend the meeting, he queried what would happen if option three (now Option 1A) was put forward by the government and Newlands parish did not want to be moved out of the mid-Hants authority?

Councillor Bolton

Councillor Bolton acknowledged that while residents welcomed the simplification of moving to a unitary system, they remained concerned about local identity and a potential democratic deficit. His primary concern was the lack of granularity of data and the high model risk associated with the financial projections. He cited the reorganisation in Cumbria as a cautionary tale of overestimated savings and underestimated costs, warning that poor financial outcomes can lead to service failures. Despite these reservations, he accepted that the proposed model of either a four or five unitary authority for the region should be considered.

Councillor Tod, the Chief Executive, the Director (Finance) and the Director (Legal) responded to the comments from councillors outlined above, including the following points:

- a) The Chief Executive stated that the proposed submission was a joint document and given the government had been clear in their aim for the

new shadow unitary councils to be place for May 2027 with new vested authorities by May 2028, it was unlikely that a request for a pause would be agreed.

- a) The Director (Finance) advised that in calculating the potential savings and the implementation costs from LGR the savings had been adjusted down by 10% and the implementation costs up by 10% to reflect erosion of benefits from having 4 mainland authorities as well as adding an additional 25% to implementation costs to reflect optimism bias and the risk of delivery (due to there being so many unknown factors at this early stage).
- b) The Director (Finance) confirmed that Section 151 officers from the 12 authorities had undertaken an exercise to understand the reasons for the different figures in the joint HCC and East Hampshire District Council proposals and were confident in the figures being put forward in the report.
- c) The Director (Legal) advised that if Option 1A was put forward as the preferred option by the government then the required boundary changes could be achieved via statutory instrument and the consultation would be the same as the government consultation on its preferred LGR proposal or could be achieved through a principal area boundary review at a later time.

Cabinet members also raised a number of questions in relation to the report. The Director (Legal) responded to questions regarding the possible alternative methods that could be used to preserve Winchester's mayoralty and confirmed that external legal advice would be sought at the appropriate time. The Director (Finance) also provided further information regarding the financial models used.

Cabinet agreed to the following for the reasons set out in the report and outlined above.

RESOLVED:

- 1. That views of council have been reviewed by Cabinet following the consideration of the submission 'close enough to be local, big enough to stay strong' at Full Council 25 September 2025.
- 2. That the full proposal to government at Appendix 4 be approved, including the council's primary support for Option 2 within the proposal, for submission to Government by the 26 September 2025 deadline
- 3. That it be noted that a final version of the proposal is under preparation following external legal advice which details that Option 3 will be referred to as Option 1A which is Option 1 as the core option but this is wholly conditional upon a formal request to Government as part of the Council's submission to undertake a modification to permit Option 1A as outlined in the proposal documents.

4. That it be noted that council has agreed that in the event of minor changes being necessary to the proposal, if they are agreed by all 12 councils, that the Leader, in consultation with the Chief Executive is authorised to agree such amendments on behalf of Winchester City Council.

The meeting commenced at 11.00 am and concluded at 12.10 pm

Chairperson