

# Public Document Pack

## **COUNCIL (EXTRAORDINARY MEETING)**

**Wednesday, 19 March 2025**

**Attendance:**

Councillors Present

Gordon-Smith (Mayor)

Achwal S  
Achwal V  
Aron  
Batho  
Becker  
Bennett  
Bolton  
Brophy  
Chamberlain  
Clear  
Cook  
Cutler  
Eve  
Godfrey  
Horrell  
Laming  
Langford-Smith  
Latham  
Learney  
Lee

Miller  
Morris  
Murphy  
Pett  
Pinniger  
Porter  
Power  
Reach  
Rutter  
Scott  
Small  
Thompson  
Tippett-Cooper  
Tod  
Wallace  
Warwick  
Westwood  
White  
Williams  
Wise

**Apologies for Absence:**

Councillors Brook, Cramoysan and Cunningham

[Recording of meeting](#)

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### 1. **DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS**

Councillors Porter, Tod, Wallace, Warwick and Williams each declared disclosable pecuniary interests in respect of agenda items 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.

2. **QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC**

There were no written questions received for response at the meeting.

3. **QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF COUNCIL**

2 written questions had been received which were heard at the meeting along with associated supplementary questions. The questions received and their response were subsequently set out on the [council's website](#).

4. **LOCAL GOVERNMENT RE-ORGANISATION IN HAMPSHIRE AND THE SOLENT - AGREEMENT TO JOINT INTERIM PLAN (CL174)**

The Leader introduced the report and summarised the detailed work undertaken since 5 February 2025 when the Minister of State for Local Government and English Devolution (Jim McMahon MP) formally invited collaboration with other regional council leaders to develop a proposal for local government reorganisation.

The Leader then referred to the interim plan (appended to report CAB3502 at Appendix 2) which he explained was to be firstly considered by Cabinet on 20 March 2025 prior to its submission, having firstly considered any comments of full Council.

The Leader highlighted agreed principles in the interim plan and confirmed that these reflected key matters raised by councillors during their informal briefings. The overall aim of the interim plan was for a new council which effectively served residents and the area.

Council proceeded to ask questions on the report and proposed interim plan. In summary, the following matters were raised, which were responded to by the Leader:

- a) Would new applications for Assets of Community Value be supported and would town and parish councils be supported with requests to transfer local assets to them?
- b) A question was raised regarding how reorganisation supported the claim of improved democratic representation and better local government. With fewer councillors representing more residents, councillors would need more support from officers, and how would this support be delivered given the need to create efficiencies?
- c) Clarification was requested as to when resident engagement plans were to be published in advance of the final submission date for local government reorganisation.
- d) Further information was sought as to whether there was dialogue with government regarding progress following submission of an interim plan, and what were the criteria for potentially being dropped from the priority programme, and what the consequences of this might be.

- e) A question was asked regarding the Community Governance Review for Winchester Town Forum area, and if this was progressing given pressures on resources?
- f) Regarding the southern parishes, would there continue to be opportunities for the Leader to attend their parish council meetings to respond to the potential impact of reorganisation on these areas?
- g) Assurances were requested that the needs of communities and assets of the Winchester town area would be protected.
- h) A question was asked regarding the Denmead Parish area, and the potential for it to be part of a future adjacent southeast Hampshire unitary council.
- i) Confirmation was sought as to whether all the local authorities in the regional area were acting in a mature way, and that differences were being dealt with cooperatively.
- j) A question was asked about how the Leader expected to use information supplied by the County Council on demographics and service usage to justify decisions on unitary authority groupings, and what other evidence would be used. A further question was then asked regarding shared interests with Basingstoke & Deane Borough Council and whether that would influence future decisions regarding boundaries. Clarification was sought regarding factors that the Leader considered to be important in relation to a possible grouping of councils.
- p) A question was raised as to whether the models being considered included the prioritisation of the climate and nature emergencies and whether these matters would be central to reorganisation? Further clarification was requested on how National Parks would be considered within the process.
- q) Further clarification was sought on how strongly a local area committee approach could be played to ensure that the voice of local communities was heard.
- r) A question was raised regarding the Winchester Mayoralty and whether it would be guaranteed through the formation of a new Winchester Town Council. In addition, the community governance review should look at parish boundaries around Kings Barton.
- s) How could residents be engaged more fully in the discussion about local government reorganisation and was there a commitment to do so?

Council proceeded to debate the matters in the report and interim plan. In summary, the following matters were raised:

- a) Whilst the plan was interim, emerging discussion on the impact on the southern wards must be noted.
- b) Whilst better local government for residents was welcomed, the reorganisation plan could be seen as a way fix historic underfunding of local authorities and may potentially reduce services and increase resident costs.
- c) The interim plan lacked detail on discussions to reach a coherent final proposal. There was concern that Leaders could be focused on their own areas rather than remaining objective.
- d) Councils should stay united and learn from others to ensure the best resident outcome and maintain service delivery.
- e) The interim plan submission was supported as pragmatic, but reservations remained. Reorganisation had merits, but there were concerns at creating large unitary authorities, the fast pace of change and lack detail regarding parish councils.
- f) The council should remain active in discussions, ensuring that community voices, especially southern parishes, were heard and community identity considered.
- g) Staff at the council should continue to be supported during the process.
- h) The six-week notice for the interim plan was too short considering the necessary resident, business, and councillor engagement and consultation.
- i) Although the report stated no immediate equalities implications, careful consideration was needed as proposals progressed. Persistent gender inequality amongst councillors and council staff pay gaps required addressing from the start.
- j) A point was made about resident consultation, questioning how and which residents were being heard. Creating communities with geographical identity was important, alongside recognising community diversity to ensure a sustainable economic and socially cohesive unitary authority.
- k) Concern was raised about reducing councillor numbers, noting the UK's already low ratio of representatives to residents. Further reduction risked poor local governance and democracy, and community voices risked being lost due to cost-cutting pressures.

The Leader then summarised the range of themes and key discussion points for Cabinet's consideration, and he thanked members for their contributions. These are as set out in the resolution below.

RESOLVED:

1. That Cabinet consider the points raised during Full Council consideration of the Cabinet report of 20 March 2025 as set out below:

- a) Dialogue and collaboration with neighbouring authorities should be maintained and the council should remain actively engaged in the ongoing process. Collective progress should be ensured to learn from all parties, including dissenting views. Ongoing learning and participation must be prioritised.
- b) Clarity on the engagement plan - engagement with residents was essential as specific options emerged, ensuring clear choices and input opportunities. Residents should remain central to engagement planning.
- c) The importance of equality and diversity were highlighted regarding local representation. Councils should be accessible to all, considering factors beyond age and gender, such as caring responsibilities and work. This should also be reflected in resident engagement, which should ensure all voices are heard.
- d) A robust approach regarding neighbouring authority discussions on localism, local identity, and empowering local communities was emphasised, requiring action and demonstrable work. Learning from best practices elsewhere.
- e) Core objectives included local resident interests and broader Hampshire and Solent commonality. Effective delivery across all authorities was crucial, requiring a system designed for regional functionality, irrespective of hosting authority or structure. The system's effectiveness for all residents, regardless of location, was paramount.
- f) Parishes and local communities (particular in the southern parishes) require consultation and support, ensuring their voices were heard as well as assistance with identifying potential community assets. The Winchester town would be subject to a community governance review to establish a town council, and this review must consider the town area's relationship with neighbouring authorities.
- g) Ward Councillor roles were recognised and appreciated, especially for their understanding of local communities and for their engagement with residents on the local government reorganisation process. Their feedback was highly valued.
- h) A strategic regional approach to the climate and nature emergencies was essential and appropriate representation within the interim combined authority was a means to facilitate this.
- i) Staff support was a priority during the transition of local government reorganisation.

- j) Overall, despite concerns regarding process and impact on communities, submitting the interim plan was considered the right course. Prioritising resident needs, effective service delivery, and achieving a strong council representing local communities were paramount within a functional regional system.

2. That it be noted that Cabinet is asked to approve the submission to the Government of the Interim Plan for local government reorganisation in Hampshire and Solent at their meeting on 20 March 2025.

The meeting commenced at 6.30 pm and concluded at 8.30 pm

The Mayor