

## **WHO DOES WHAT IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT? – A PLAIN-ENGLISH GUIDE**

It's complicated – and it's all going to change within 2 years. At present there are 3 “tiers”:

### **County Councils**

### **District Councils**

### **Parish Councils**

Some areas have already had ‘county’ and ‘district’ councils reorganised into ‘unitary’ authorities. Portsmouth City, Southampton City and the Isle of Wight are three examples in our area. The Labour government was elected on a manifesto pledge to introduce elected Mayors, such as in Manchester and London, who would have significant financial delegations from central government to take on specific roles locally. These include strategic planning (ie strategic housing targets), strategic highway planning, public transport, provision of skills education to match local industry need etc. In our area a Mayor for the Hampshire & Solent area (incl IOW) will be elected in 2028, although some of the delegated funding (£17.84M in each year) will pass to an interim body from Summer 2026. The full delegation of £44.6M annually for 30 years will follow the Mayoral election in 2028. The interim body, forming now, will decide how the future ‘Combined County Mayoral Authority’ (CCMA) will operate – hold that thought.

So, today, **Hampshire County Council**, based in Winchester, runs the following services for all of Hampshire except the cities of Portsmouth and Southampton and the Isle of Wight: Schools (including Special Educational Needs provision); public transport planning; adult social care; waste disposal (including the waste recycling centres, or the ‘tips’), highways (except for strategic roads such as the M3, M27, A34 which are managed by Highways England); strategic planning for infrastructure and mineral extraction, libraries and the countryside, including the rights of way network.

The elected council comprises 78 members, each representing a county division. Ours is the ‘Meon Valley’ division, although it includes Whiteley and Shedfield as well as Swanmore, Droxford, Meonstoke, Exton, Warnford and West Meon. Since 2024 this has been held by Malcolm Wallace for the Green Party, following the resignation of Hugh Lumby following his appointment to a salaried post in the judiciary which disqualified him from simultaneously holding elected office. After the 7 May election, the make-up of HCC is 27 Conservative members, 26 Liberal Democrats, 20 Reform UK and 5 assorted Labour/Independent/Green members. HCC members have generally been elected for a 5 year term, and ordinarily elections would have been held last year for all of them, although these were postponed one year by the government whilst local government reorganisation was being pursued. All HCC members were up for election this year. Crucially, the interim body setting up the CCMA will be governed by a committee of 5 members: 2 from HCC and 1 each from Portsmouth and Southampton cities and the Isle of Wight. Now with no majority party in HCC, their 2 seats will doubtless be the subject of much horse-trading in the coming weeks

**Winchester City Council** currently delivers the following services:

Housing, waste collection, town planning (but not within the South Downs National Park – so not for us), council tax administration (ie they collect on behalf of HCC and the Police and Crime Commissioner as well as WCC), environment and leisure and business support.

Winchester is one of the few authorities left in the south that has its own stock of 'council houses' – my personal experience is that Winchester is a far better landlord than any of the 'registered social providers', ie housing associations. The current stock is around 5000. Nearly all of the villages in the Upper Meon Valley ward have some WCC properties. Whilst the National Park Authority (SDNPA) is the planning authority for our area it delegates back to WCC the task of deciding the majority of applications against the South Downs Local Plan under a contractual agreement (known as a Section 101 agreement). The SDNPA does, however, 'call-in' the larger and/or more contentious applications, such as the recent application to expand Corhampton Golf Club's course and, a few years ago, the extension of De Port Heights.

Winchester has 45 elected members serving 15 wards for a four year term – after the 7 May election there are now 36 Liberal Democrats, 4 Conservatives, 4 Greens and 1 Independent. Most wards have 3 members with the 3 smallest wards by electorate (Winchester St Luke, Colden Common & Twyford and Upper Meon Valley) having only 2. This led to a 5 year electoral cycle in each ward: Year 1 – elect HCC member, Year 2 – elect one WCC ward member, Year 3 – elect second WCC ward member, Year 4 – elect third WCC member where applicable, Year 5 – year off. The postponement of last year's scheduled HCC election led to the election of our HCC Meon Valley division member and one of our two WCC Upper Meon Valley ward members being run concurrently on 7 May.

The final twist in all this is that, at the end of March, the Government announced its decision, not in its manifesto, on local government reorganisation for Hampshire and the IOW. From 2028 neither HCC nor WCC will exist, but a new 'unitary' authority will come into existence subsuming the current East Hampshire, Winchester, Test Valley and New Forest districts. (The Southampton Water-side parishes of New Forest and Test Valley Districts will pass to Southampton City and the southernmost parishes of East Hampshire, chiefly Horndean and Rowlands Castle will pass to Portsmouth City.) There will be elections in May 2027 for this new unitary authority, in 'shadow' form for its first year, probably using the same divisional boundaries as those currently used for HCC. There will then be an election for the Hampshire/Solent/IOW mayor in May 2028. So, anybody elected this year will have a maximum tenure of 2 years, whilst those still in their original WCC 4-year term will likely be extended by one year until 2028.

If you've made it this far you'll understand that this is a particularly nerdy sport! But what's really at stake is influencing how the new, reorganised and Mayoral authorities will work in the future.

And then that leaves parishes. **Parish Councils** remain untouched by all of this – members of Corhampton & Meonstoke Parish Council will, for example, be subject to re-election in 2027 at the end of their 4 year term. Parishes run such things as management of open spaces and childrens' playgrounds, bus shelters and local verge maintenance, including ensuring drainage grips are cleared before each winter and other village facilities. They also have the right to be consulted on planning applications in their area. Much of it is deeply unglamorous but would nonetheless be noticeable if it wasn't done.

So there you have it – an attempt at a plain English guide to local politics.