

Hampshire County Councillor Update – January 2026

Cllr Malcolm Wallace (malcolm.wallace@hants.gov.uk)



Devolution Update – Hampshire and the Solent MCCA

On 4 December, the Government announced in a written ministerial statement ([HCWS1128](#)) that it is “*minded*” to postpone the inaugural mayoral elections for Hampshire and the Solent—and three other areas in the Devolution Priority Programme—from May 2026 to May 2028. The statement explains that ministers want to ensure that local government reorganisation is completed before mayors take office, arguing that “*devolution is strongest when it is built on strong foundations*”.

The proposed delay means:

- The region would *not* elect its first Mayor in 2026 as previously planned.
- Work to establish the MCCA will continue, but the formal transfer of mayoral powers would be aligned with the new 2028 timetable.
- Councils across the area are expected to continue preparing for reorganisation and combined authority structures while awaiting further clarification from Government.

Both local Councils and national organisations, including the County Councils Network, have expressed disappointment at the delay, citing concerns about slower access to promised powers and funding.

Recent briefing packs continue to provide detail on the development of the MCCA:

-  [August 2025 Update](#) – Introduced the proposed structure of the MCCA, outlines the powers being negotiated with Government, and explains how the new authority will work alongside existing councils.
-  [September 2025 Update](#) – Focused on how new powers and responsibilities will support the region’s transport system, improving connectivity and infrastructure for residents, businesses, and communities.
-  [October 2025 Update](#) – Provided further detail on skills and employment responsibilities and how devolved powers could support local training pathways
-  [November 2025 Update](#) – Highlights the MCCA’s new powers and responsibilities relating to Economic Development and Regeneration, and how these will enable the MCCA to benefit the regional economy.

 For general information and future updates, visit: [Devolution | Hampshire County Council](#)

Government Consultation on Local Government Reorganisation – Have Your Say

Central Government has launched a public consultation on proposals to reorganise local government across Hampshire and the Solent area. This reform aims to simplify council structures by replacing the current two-tier system (county and district/borough councils) with unitary councils that deliver all local services in their area – from education and social care to waste collection and planning.

The changes would affect 15 existing councils, including Hampshire County Council, district and borough councils, and the unitary authorities of Southampton, Portsmouth, and the Isle of Wight. The Government’s goal is to make services easier to access, more joined-up, financially sustainable, and to protect the most vulnerable in our communities.

The consultation runs until 11 January 2026, with decisions expected in spring 2026 and new councils potentially coming into effect in 2028.

This is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to shape how local services are delivered. Residents, businesses, and community groups are encouraged to share their views.

What does this mean for parish & town councils?

Parish councils will remain an important tier of local democracy, but changes to principal authorities could affect how services are delivered locally, funding arrangements, and the way parishes engage with new unitary councils. It's vital that parish councils respond to the consultation to ensure the voice of local communities is heard.

Have your say: [Visit the consultation page](#)

📄 For more information, visit: [Local Government Reorganisation | Hampshire County Council](#)

New Blueprint for Nature Recovery Launched Across Hampshire

Hampshire County Council has unveiled a major new plan to help restore nature, protect precious habitats, and create more opportunities for residents to enjoy the county's natural environment. The Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) sets out a shared, long-term approach for reversing the decline in biodiversity and strengthening Hampshire's green and blue spaces for future generations.

The LNRS outlines practical actions to help ensure that **at least 30% of Hampshire's land and sea is managed for biodiversity by 2030**. This ambition aligns with national goals to halt the decline of wildlife and restore ecosystems that have been under pressure for decades. Hampshire's natural environment—though rich and varied—has experienced significant biodiversity loss over the past 50 years, mirroring national trends.



To address this, the strategy brings together expertise from councils, environmental organisations, landowners, and community groups. It aims to guide land-use decisions, inform planning processes, and encourage investment in nature-based solutions to wider challenges such as climate change, flooding, and water quality.

The plan has been developed with input from a broad range of partners, including Portsmouth and Southampton City Councils, the Environment Agency, and the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust. Natural England has welcomed the strategy as a vital step in protecting and enhancing Hampshire's diverse landscapes, wildlife habitats, and natural heritage.

The LNRS will help guide:

- **Local planning and development**, ensuring nature is embedded in decision-making
- **Investment in environmental improvements**, including habitat restoration and green corridors
- **Future land management**, by identifying priority areas where conservation action will have the greatest benefit
- **Healthy, sustainable communities**, by expanding access to nature-rich places

Overall, the strategy provides a roadmap for restoring Hampshire's natural environment, tackling climate and environmental challenges, and leaving a positive legacy for future generations. As the County Council notes, *everyone has a role to play*—from organisations and land managers to residents and local communities.

Bus Funding Boost for Hampshire – But County Still Among Lowest-Funded Areas

Hampshire residents are set to benefit from a significant injection of Government funding for local bus services, following the award of £27.2 million in capital funding and £24.9 million in revenue funding through the Local Authority Bus Grant, covering the four years from 2026–27 onwards.

Despite this new investment, Hampshire remains in the **bottom quartile of transport authorities for bus funding**, receiving the equivalent of **£5.77 per resident per year**, compared with a **national average of £9.83**. This long-standing disparity highlights the ongoing challenge of providing reliable, frequent, and accessible public transport in a county with a mix of large towns, rural communities, and areas with limited commercial bus viability.



Recent Department for Transport figures show bus use in Hampshire has grown from 24.9 million to 26.6 million passenger journeys between 2023/24 and 2024/25, an increase of 1.7 million trips, suggesting rising demand for improved and reliable services across the network.

Under the new funding programme, improvements will focus on:

- **Bus priority measures** to reduce delays and improve journey times
- **Expanded services** on busy routes to support growing demand
- **Better travel information**, including real-time displays and on-bus updates
- **Infrastructure enhancements**, such as upgrades at sixth-form colleges, rural bus shelters, and community transport hubs

While the latest funding will support a wide range of enhancements, Hampshire's below-average per-resident level of bus investment continues to shape the county's ability to maintain and expand its network—especially in rural and semi-rural communities where commercial routes are not viable.

Have Your Say: Minerals & Waste Plan Update

Hampshire County Council is asking residents to comment on proposed updates to the Hampshire Minerals and Waste Plan, which guides how the county supplies essential construction materials and manages waste facilities up to 2040. The revised Plan reflects feedback from previous consultations and a Public Examination, strengthening policies and protections.

A 10-week consultation is now open, and all responses must be submitted by 11:59pm on 12 February 2026. An independent Planning Inspector will review all comments before deciding whether the updated Plan meets legal and national planning requirements.

You can view the proposed modifications and submit your comments at:

🔗 www.hants.gov.uk/minerals-waste-update

Hampshire County Councillor Grants Open!

The County Councillor grant scheme is now open for 2025-26. Groups and organisations can apply for funding for both revenue (one-off) and minor capital projects. Revenue grants should generally be used to support short term project related costs.

More details are available on the County Council website: [County Councillor grants | Hampshire County Council](https://www.hants.gov.uk/minerals-waste-update). The 2025/26 County Councillor grant scheme is open until 28 February 2026.

Local Government Finance Settlement 2026/27

The Government published the provisional Local Government Finance Settlement for 2026/27 on 17 December, setting out a three-year funding package (2026/27–2028/29) for councils alongside a new national funding formula.



Council Tax

- County councils will be able to increase Council Tax by **up to 5% each year** (3% core + 2% adult social care).
- A small number of mainly London authorities may raise Council Tax without a referendum in later years due to large funding reductions under the new formula.

New Funding Formula

- A revised national formula will be phased in over **three years**.
- For Hampshire County Council, this results in the following reductions in general grant funding:
 - £9.2m cut in 2026/27
 - £15.3m cut in 2027/28
 - £13.3m cut in 2028/29
 - Total cumulative reduction of £37.8m by 2028/29
- These reductions reflect national changes that place greater emphasis on deprivation and on assumed local Council Tax-raising ability.

Funding Structure Changes & Wider Context

A number of national grants have been reorganised for 2026/27, with some former grants merged into general funding and others reshaped into new ring-fenced grants for Public Health, Children's Services, Homelessness & Domestic Abuse, and Crisis & Resilience.

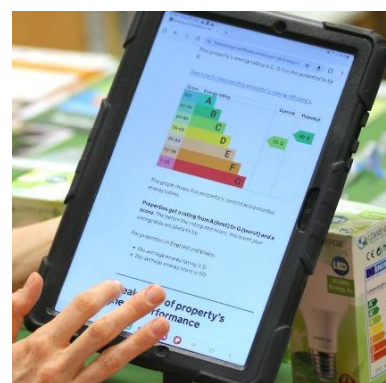
From 2026/27, business rates will be subject to a national revaluation and reset, with temporary protections in place due to uncertainty in valuations. Future allocations for councils undergoing local government reorganisation will need to be agreed locally. Further information on support for SEND funding pressures is expected later in the settlement process.

Free Advice to Reduce Your Home Energy Bills

The Environment Centre has launched a ground-breaking service to make our homes warmer, greener and cheaper to run.

It's called ***My Home Made Better***, and it offers free and impartial advice on everything from insulation and heating upgrades, to switching to new energy-efficient technologies.

Experienced energy advisers will simplify complex information and dispel myths to guide you through your options and help you find the best ways to keep the heat in, lower your energy bills, and make your home more comfortable.



This is how it works:

1. You call 0800 804 8601 (or email) to chat with one of the friendly advisers. Lines are open Monday to Friday from 9am to 5pm.
2. You'll be asked about your property and circumstances, following which you will receive tailormade recommendations and your own personalised plan. This will comprise a summary of everything discussed, including recommendations and things to consider before taking your next step.

3. When you're ready, search the independent directory to find local suppliers and installers.

For more information go to **myhomemadebetter.org**

Home Energy Efficiency Grants

The following offer 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
- [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 households in properties that have EPC energy efficiency ratings from D to G. The previous iteration of this program has now closed, but the Government has just announced a further £26 million of funding has been awarded to our local consortium. Whilst the previous iteration of this scheme only funded measures in off-gas households, the new scheme will be open to all fuel types, including on gas households and off gas households.