

## Message from leader of HCC:

(Reproduced from the Hampshire Chronicle)

*As we turn the page on 2025 and look ahead to the promise of 2026, I want to begin with a simple thank you. Public service is a team sport, and nothing we achieve in Hampshire happens because of one person, one department, or one council chamber speech. It happens because residents, volunteers, community groups, officers, councillors, and countless unsung heroes quietly get on with the business of making our county a better place to live. If there's a theme that has run through this past year, it's that Hampshire works best when Hampshire works together.*

*And what a year it has been. We've opened new school places, expanded support for children with special educational needs, and continued the long, patient work of improving the services families rely on. We've pushed forward on infrastructure—sometimes celebrated, sometimes cursed when it involves roadworks—but always with the aim of keeping our county moving. Best illustrated by the fantastic work ongoing at the moment to build the new underpass at Junction 10 of the M27 in Fareham. Standing watching the work earlier this week was a reminder that progress is rarely glamorous, but it is always worth it.*

*Of course, 2025 wasn't without its challenges. Local government continues to face financial pressures that would make even the most seasoned accountant reach for a strong drink. Yet despite the strain, we've kept our focus on what matters: delivering essential services, protecting the vulnerable, and planning responsibly for the future. Hampshire has a long tradition of resilience, and this year proved once again that we don't shy away from difficult decisions when they are the right ones.*

*As we step into 2026, I'm hopeful—not because the challenges have vanished, but because our capacity to meet them has never been stronger. We will continue to push for sustainable funding for local government, because residents deserve services that are secure, reliable, and fit for the future. We will keep investing in the infrastructure that underpins daily life. And we will carry on championing the values that make Hampshire a place people are proud to call home.*

*But perhaps most importantly, we will do all this together. At a time when national and global debates can feel increasingly polarised, and as we enter what I very much hope is an election year for the county council, it is worth restating something I have said many times: no one enters politics to do harm; we simply disagree about how we should do good. That belief has guided me throughout my years in public life, and it remains the foundation of how I try to lead—collegiately, respectfully, and with a sense of humour whenever possible. (If you've ever tried explaining local government reorganisation and devolution on Facebook, you'll know humour is sometimes essential.)*

*Division is easy. Unity takes work. But Hampshire has never been afraid of hard work. In 2026, let's continue to choose cooperation over conflict, shared purpose over point-scoring, and kindness over cynicism. If we do that, I'm confident the year ahead will bring not just progress, but pride.*

*Thank you for your support, your patience, your ideas, and your commitment to our county. I wish you and your loved ones a peaceful, healthy, and hopeful New Year.*

## Government currently consulting on May 2026 elections.

You may have seen reports suggesting that next year's Mayoral elections will be postponed for two years, until 2028. It is massively disappointing. It's important to note that this does not affect the County Council and other local elections which will still go ahead on May 7th 2026. It is important to separate two distinct issues here. While the election of a Mayor may be delayed, the creation of the Combined Authority — and the transfer of powers and funding from Westminster that comes with it — remains vital.

The Labour Government has invited Hampshire County Council to make formal representations regarding the capacity constraints which the May 2026 elections could create, and the potential impact of those constraints on the progress of local government reform in Hampshire.

My view and the view of the Leader of HCC is that democracy is far more important than administrative convenience, so elections should go ahead this May. A Full Council meeting and a Cabinet meeting has been hastily scheduled for this week to debate and agree our position. Our general view is that the Government has created this problematic situation, and so Ministers themselves should take a decision about the elections.

In any case, Councillors are inherently conflicted when it comes to any decision to extend their current term. I note that the Electoral Commission agrees with this point. I thought this was rather a good statement from their Chief Executive:

<https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/media-centre/electoral-commission-responds-potential-election-postponements>

## Enhancement to Connect to Support website

To meet our statutory duties, the County Council provides information and advice for families, young people, and those with special needs. This advice has hitherto included the Families Information and Services Hub (FISH) and the Local Offer. In order to streamline our web presence for the benefit of residents, I would like to let you know that both FISH and the Local Offer have now moved to the Connect to Support Hampshire (CTSH) website.

The website is managed by HCC to meet statutory requirements under the Care Act 2014 and will now serve as an **all-age information hub** for care and support, offering one website for residents and professionals to access information regardless of age, rather than different locations as previously. You can access the website via this link:

[Connect to Support Hampshire.](#)

## Local Nature Recovery Strategy for Hampshire published

You may recall that HCC consulted on its Nature Recovery Strategy last year. On 8 December 2025, HCC published its final Strategy. The plan aims to restore nature, protect precious habitats, and create more opportunities for people to connect with the outdoors. This new strategy brings together expertise from organisations and authorities across the region and sets out practical steps for how Hampshire can ensure a minimum of 30% of land and sea is secured for biodiversity by 2030.

To achieve these shared goals, everyone needs to keep playing their part in nature recovery. This strategy sets out how, together, we can protect and enhance our natural environment. The strategy has been designed to help guide land use choices, inform planning decisions, and encourage investment in nature-based solutions to wider environmental challenges such as climate change and flooding.

The full strategy is available to read here:

[Local Nature Recovery Strategy for Hampshire | Environment | Hampshire County Council](#)

## M27 J10 update

Great news to start the New Year.

The M27 between Junctions 9 and 11 reopened a full 24 hours ahead of schedule, at 4am, Saturday 3 January — an extraordinary achievement after one of the most complex engineering operations Hampshire has ever delivered.

Over ten days, around 130 people worked day and night through the Christmas period to install a brand-new underpass at Junction 10 using an innovative “box slide” technique. A 60-metre concrete structure — weighing 8,500 tonnes — was slid 65 metres into place with millimetre precision, avoiding months of lane closures and disruption.

We want to pay particular tribute to:

- Our outstanding Hampshire County Council highways and engineering teams
- The main contractor, VolkerFitzpatrick
- The many skilled local subcontractors who brought their expertise, machinery, and sheer determination to the job

Their professionalism, teamwork, and relentless effort — in all weathers, at all hours — are the reason the motorway can reopen earlier than planned.

This phase of work is a major milestone toward the new, free-flowing, all-moves Junction 10, which will support the Welborne Garden Village development and strengthen Hampshire’s infrastructure for years to come.

Thank you to residents and drivers for your patience during the closure. And an enormous thank you to every member of the team who made this possible. This is Hampshire engineering at its best — public and private partners working together to deliver for our county.