

Update from Hampshire County Council – November 2025



County Council highlights support for private foster carers ahead of awareness day

Are you caring for the child of a friend, neighbour or someone in your extended family? If the answer is yes, you could be in a private fostering arrangement

Ahead of Private Fostering Awareness Day on Wednesday, 5 November, Hampshire County Council is raising awareness of private fostering arrangements and why it needs to know about them.

Private fostering is when a child under 16 (or under 18 if they are disabled) lives with an adult who is not a close family member for 28 days or more. This could be an extended family member like a cousin or great aunt, a family friend or even a neighbour.

It is a legal requirement for the County Council to be notified of a private fostering arrangement by the parent or carer of the child involved. This can be done by phoning the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub on 0300 555 1384.

There can be many reasons why a child isn't living at home and someone else is required to care for them. These could include family relationship breakdown or divorce, parental illness, or parental homelessness. Other examples include children attending language schools or football academies, where they may be living away from parents for periods of time. Although they are living apart, parents of privately fostered children maintain their parental and financial responsibilities and continue to be involved in all decisions about their child's life throughout the arrangement.

<https://www.hants.gov.uk/News/20251030privatefostering>

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County Council to consult on School and Post-16 Transport Policies

Parents will be asked for their views on Hampshire County Council's School Transport and Post-16 Transport Policies in two consultations opening on Monday, 3 November

The policies cover transport for children of compulsory school age who meet [national eligibility criteria](#), and a Post-16 service for young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) travelling to further education or training. The School Transport service is required by law while the Post-16 service is chargeable and offered on a discretionary basis.

Most of the County Council's proposed changes to the two policies are designed to make them easier to understand and to provide greater clarity around the way both services are delivered. Alongside these basic changes to policy wording, the County Council is also proposing to withdraw the formal offer of a Spare Capacity Seats Scheme in its School Transport Policy. This is a discretionary scheme which allows spare seats on contracted vehicles to be offered on a temporary, chargeable basis to children who are not eligible for free School Transport.

The current offer of a Spare Capacity Seats Scheme creates an expectation that spare seats can be provided. However, this cannot be fulfilled if the available seats on a given vehicle are all in use by eligible children. Even once allocated, spare seats may later be withdrawn if needed for an eligible child, or if the number of spare seats reduces due to an operational change. There is therefore a lack of clarity for parents on whether spare seats can be made available.

Visit the County Council's website for more information about the proposed consultations on the [School Transport](#) and [Post-16 Transport](#) Policies.

<https://www.hants.gov.uk/News/20251023schoolpost16transport>

Hampshire County Council continues to grow SEND provision with more specialist places and inclusive support

Hampshire County Council is continuing its long-term investment in special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) provision, with plans well underway to deliver 1,000 additional specialist school places between 2025 and 2030. This includes a mix of new places in both dedicated special schools and Resourced Provisions (RPs), which are specialist environments based within mainstream schools

Together, these meet a wide range of needs, including autism (AS) and social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs. The Council's approach focuses on creating a well-distributed network of RPs across the county, with clear pathways through primary and secondary education.

HCC is launching statutory consultations on the following RPs, expected to open from September 2026, subject to consultation outcomes and final approvals:-

- **Harrow Way Community School**, Andover: for 15 pupils aged 11 to 16 with autism (AS).

These projects are the latest in a long line of improvements to expand the County Council's own SEND provision, with the aim of reducing reliance on expensive placements in the independent sector. Since 2018, more than 750 new specialist places have already been created.

A further 350 are in progress and expected to be phased in from September 2026, subject to planning, funding, and statutory approvals. Discussions are also underway for over 600 additional places to be delivered between 2027 and 2030.

<https://www.hants.gov.uk/News/20251023SENDOct2025>

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Hampshire County Council's Children's Services recognised in national awards

One of Hampshire County Council's Children's Services teams has been recognised as 'Team of the Year' at the national Social Worker of the Year Awards

The authority's Out of Hours team, which supports professionals and members of the public with urgent safeguarding or welfare concerns outside of normal office hours, has taken home the gold award for its inspiring teamwork. It was one of five finalists all vying to be named 'Team of the Year' at this year's awards, which took place on Friday, 17 October.

The Out of Hours team forms part of the County Council's wider Children's Services, which were judged as 'Outstanding' by Ofsted last year for the second time in a row. The Out of Hours service operates during weekday evenings, over the weekends and on Bank Holidays, and also supports with social care issues involving adults. Support may include responding to safeguarding concerns, providing information and advice, or undertaking assessments or more in-depth social work. The priority is to keep people safe until normal working hours resume.

The [Social Worker of the Year Awards](#) are the only major national awards for social work in England and recognise positive stories of outstanding social work, creative and compassionate professionals, and inspiring practice. This year's shortlist included 100 practitioners, teams and organisations in 18 categories.

<https://www.hants.gov.uk/News/20251020teamoftheyear>

Climate Change grants – there's still time to apply

Test Valley Borough Council's new Climate Change Grant is helping a number communities across the borough to deliver sustainability projects.

Ampfield Parish Council, Sherfield English Village Hall Trust, and Woodley Village Hall have each been awarded £10,000 to help deliver solar panels and battery storage. These upgrades will significantly reduce greenhouse gas emissions by generating renewable energy and help save on energy bills.

Meanwhile, Abbotswood Community Association, Baddesley Baptist Church, Over Wallop Parochial Church Council, Abbey United Reform Church, Valley Park Community Association, and Wellow Men's Shed have also all been awarded funding for a range of sustainability projects.

The Climate Change Grant is open to community groups and not-for-profit organisations across Test Valley. Grants of up to £10,000 are available, with 20% match funding required for applications of £5,000 or more. Projects must demonstrate how they will reduce greenhouse gas emissions or improve community resilience to climate change.

Applications are open until 31 December 2025, or until the funding is fully allocated. Interested groups are encouraged to read the guidance and contact the council's Climate Change team to discuss their project before applying.

For more information, and to apply, visit: www.testvalley.gov.uk/climatechange/grants.

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Lights, planning, action: new theatre venue gets the go-ahead

Plans for a new theatre venue for *The Lights* in Andover have been given the green light, with planning consent officially granted by Test Valley Borough Council's planning committee.

The new three-storey venue will include a state-of-the-art, multi-level auditorium with seating for over 400 people (a significant increase from the 249-seat capacity of the current theatre). Alongside this, the plans feature a separate, flexible space for performances and events, plus dance studios and meeting rooms available for public hire. Visitors will be able to enjoy relaxed social spaces, with café and bar areas located at either end of the building. Outside, terraced spaces will offer pleasant spots to sit and unwind during warmer weather.

One of the striking differences between the new venue and the current theatre, will be the ability to run shows and events in both the auditorium and second event space simultaneously, as well as operating classes and meetings in other locations around the building. Quality sound proofing and an enhanced design will mean the venue can run at full occupancy of nearly 1,000 people, playing a central role in enhancing Andover's daytime and evening economy, by drawing more people into the town centre to support local businesses

The design for the new venue, developed by specialist theatre architects Burrell Foley Fischer, reflects the character of Andover's historic centre while offering modern, accessible facilities for a wide range of performances and community uses. Taking inspiration from two prominent public buildings in the town, St Mary's Church and the Guildhall, the façade will feature a series of stone arches, forming a striking colonnade. The building will be crafted from light coloured stone, to reflect the local chalk stream, paired with pale brick and elements of natural flint and bronze.

The venue will include accessible seating across all levels, energy-efficient design features, and two entrances – one from the High Street and a second opposite Town Mills Riverside Park. A new public square will be created between the theatre and the library, with landscaping designed to complement the local chalk stream environment.

A separate application to demolish the former Poundstretcher unit was approved earlier this year, with demolition works now underway.

Pending appointment of a contractor, construction is expected to begin in 2026, with the new venue opening in late 2027 or early 2028. The current theatre will continue to operate as normal until the new venue is ready, ensuring continuity for audiences and performers.

The project is part of the wider Andover Masterplan and is supported by £18.3 million of funding from central government, secured to accelerate key regeneration projects in the town. It responds to strong public demand for a new venue for the popular local theatre, with almost 80% of respondents highlighting the need for a modern venue in the town centre.

You can view the full design proposals and learn more about the project at: www.thinkandovertowncentre.co.uk/theatre

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