

Hampshire County Councillor Update – April 2025

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



Devolution

Still time to have a say on devolution plans for Hampshire and the Solent area. A public consultation on the proposed new Strategic Authority for Hampshire, Southampton, Portsmouth, the Isle of Wight is open until 13 April at: [Hampshire and the Solent devolution consultation - GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk/consultation/hampshire-and-the-solent-devolution-consultation)

Elections for Mayor of the new Strategic Authority are planned to be held in May 2026. As well as promoting the interests of the wider region to central Government, the Mayor will work with local council leaders to make strategic decisions for our region in areas such as transport, skills and employment support, housing and planning, and tackling climate change.

Local Government Reorganisation

Outline plans for Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) have been jointly submitted to central Government on behalf of all 15 councils in the Hampshire and Solent area: Hampshire County Council, 11 district and borough councils and the three unitary councils of Southampton, Portsmouth and Isle of Wight.

This initial plan towards LGR forms part of wider Government ambitions to replace the current two-tier structure of local government that operates nationally, with a smaller number of unitary (all-purpose) councils. For Hampshire and the Solent region, this means unitary councils will deliver all services currently provided by the 15 councils in the area.



Hampshire County Council is responsible for 85% of local government services and budgets within Hampshire. County Council staff are in our towns and villages every day, working at the frontline of communities and in our residents' homes - such as caring for adults and children; protecting people's health; educating children; maintaining the roads; delivering library services; helping people to recycle more and better; and managing much of the county's green space.

The creation of new unitary councils will inevitably mean that many countywide services will need to separate into smaller units. Maintaining quality of service and ensuring the new structures are sufficiently resilient to support these services must be at the forefront of our thinking as we proceed. Final proposals are required to be submitted to the Government in the Autumn.

More details on both devolution and reorganisation can be found at:

[Devolution and local government reorganisation | About the Council | Hampshire County Council](#)

Hampshire Highways Support for Parishes

Demand for new traffic measures far outweighs Hampshire Highways' annual traffic and parking budgets which has resulted in the County Council having to prioritise limited resources towards issues where highway safety is severely compromised. Highways' current safety-led policy targets casualty reduction and prioritises locations with treatable recurring patterns or clusters of reported injury accidents. This targeted approach has resulted in significant reductions in the numbers of people injured in collisions on Hampshire roads.

If Parishes are keen to push forward with traffic management improvements under their own funding arrangements, the first stage would be to fund a feasibility assessment of the project which

would also include a cost estimate. The findings from the feasibility study can then be used by the Parish Council to determine whether to proceed to implementation.

Irrespective of this, the Highways team will continue to support Parish Councils with enquiries relating to highways issues and these should continue to be reported online.

Stubbington Study Centre

A proposal that could have seen Stubbington Study Centre closed to make way for a new specialist secure welfare children's home has been stopped.

As a member of the Scrutiny Committee, I was pleased to not only vote against closure of the Stubbington study centre, but also to get universal support for an amendment that will hopefully ensure that the study centre will be there for the long-term. The scrutiny committee's decision was confirmed by Hampshire County Council Cabinet, who are the final decision makers on this issue.



Halt to Planned Investment in County Council Care Homes

Hampshire County Council's Cabinet have voted to cancel £173M+ of investment in extending the Local Authority's own provision of high-needs nursing and specialist care for older adults, as part of a shift to using more beds in private-sector care homes.

The plan for investment in six Hampshire care homes sites was made in July 2023 at the same time that a plan was announced to close seven other care homes, including Bishops Waltham House. A large part of the justification for closing Bishops Waltham House was that this would allow investment into new facilities at other Hampshire Care Home sites. That plan has now been cancelled in preference to adopting a private-sector solution.



The justification for the decision was that:

- Predicted building costs have increased by at least £45 million
- The cost of borrowing continues to rise
- The positive consequences arising from a change to the way the Local Authority purchases care, resulting in its ability to buy nursing and specialist care more cost effectively and easily in the private sector

The Care Home investment plan has been cancelled without going through a scrutiny committee and leaves many questions unanswered.

Bus Services Funding

Improvements to local bus services and associated infrastructure to the value of £13,049,411 will be made across Hampshire during the coming year, 2025/26.

The funding, provided by the Department for Transport (DfT), supports the Local Authority to fund priority schemes and initiatives that make bus journeys on main routes faster, more frequent, reliable and greener, so that more people will want to travel by bus more often.



Specifically, the 2025/26 funding will support:

- a bus priority scheme on Bishopstoke Road, Eastleigh
- bus infrastructure improvements at Sixth Form Colleges
- safety and security measures in bus shelters, such as lighting improvements and CCTV
- real-time and on-bus passenger information improvements
- a fund for rural bus shelters - for town/parish councils to use
- community self-help schemes, such as contributions towards vehicle costs
- support for commercial bus services, including service enhancements
- help with the impact of high bus industry inflation relating to services for rural areas
- bus stop information initiatives
- Disability related initiatives

The priority schemes are set out in the County Council's Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) and were developed in partnership with bus operators. Going forward, I am pushing to get more resident involvement in setting priorities.

Hampshire County Council's HAF Programme Confirmed for an Additional Year

Hampshire County Council's Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) Programme supports around 8,000 children during Easter, Summer and Christmas school holidays. As well as children who receive benefits-linked free school meals, 15 per cent of funded places on the programme are also available for other vulnerable children and young people.

First piloted in 2018 and rolled out nationally in 2021, the HAF programme aims to alleviate the pressures faced by low-income families during school holidays. It provides around 150 schemes across the county, all ensuring that children have access to healthy food and engaging experiences outside of the school term.



Parents can register now for HAF places at [Family Information and Services Hub](#). For more information about the Holiday Activities and Food Programme and other cost of living support available, visit the County Council's [connect4communities](#) web pages.

Funding Approved for new North Whiteley Secondary School

Funding approval of £46.7 million for the new 900-place secondary school in North Whiteley was confirmed at the Hampshire County Council Decision Day on Friday, 7 March.

The site for the new school was secured as part of wider approvals for the development of North Whiteley. The new school, anticipated to open in 2027, is intended to meet the predicted demand for secondary school places across Whiteley, with scope to expand to a 1200-place school if needed, in the future.

A planning decision is expected in spring 2025; subject to this, work is anticipated to begin on site this summer and to complete in summer 2027. Full details of the [plans for the new school building](#) are available on the County Council website.



Information from Network Rail – Major Engineering Works to Impact Services Across the South Coast during the Easter Holidays

Network Rail are carrying out vital improvement works to stabilise the railway cutting between Swanwick and Fareham alongside other infrastructure improvements, which means train services along the south coast in Hampshire will be amended over these 9 days.

SWR services between **Southampton** and **Portsmouth** will not run between 12 and 20 April. Services will also not operate between **Southampton Central** and **Bournemouth** between 18 and 20 April.



Passengers are advised to check before they travel, as other services in the wider Southampton area will also be amended over the Easter break to accommodate for the works taking place. Replacement bus services will operate over this period, including on Easter Sunday.

Our online journey planners are now up to date with all of these changes. Anyone planning to make a journey during these dates can check whether it will be affected by using the planner on our website at <https://www.southwesternrailway.com/plan-my-journey>

We understand the inconvenience this may cause to you and other members of the local community and are working hard to minimise the impact of the works during this period.

Home Energy Efficiency Opportunities

The following offers 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.



Thermal Imaging

A thermal imaging camera, under the right conditions, can reveal where heat is being lost from your home. Your local Community Action Group (for example, SWaCS – Sustainable Waltham Chase and Swanmore) may have one you can borrow. If not, you can reach out to Winchester Action on the Climate Crisis (WinACC) at homes@winacc.org.uk to find out more.