

Appendix 1 – St Mary Bourne Parish Council Meeting 14th Jan 2025 Item 378

County Councillor Tom Thacker Update - January 2025

The following is taken from a statement published by Hampshire County Council:

At the meeting of the Full County Council on Thursday 9 January, followed by the Authority's Cabinet on Friday 10 January, approval was given to request that the County Council be included in Government fast-track plans to bring devolution to the area...

As part of devolution proposals, a Mayor would be elected in the spring of 2026 to head up a new Combined Authority across the wider region incorporating Isle of Wight Council, Portsmouth City Council and Southampton City Council, in line with the Authorities' expression of interest submitted to the Deputy Prime Minister last summer...

Alongside devolution, the County Council has committed to progress with developing proposals for local government reorganisation in the area. It would completely change the landscape of Hampshire's local councils by replacing the current two-tier council system, which is in place across most of the region, with a number of new unitary (all-purpose) councils...

If Government agrees for Hampshire to be added to the fast-track devolution programme it would then allow the County Council elections, due this May, to be postponed for 12 months. This postponement would be essential to enable local areas to focus on laying the groundwork for devolution and reorganisation and allow for a Mayor to be elected in 2026 so the benefits to local communities can be delivered as swiftly as possible. Reorganisation would then be expected to be in place by either April 2027 or April 2028.

Leader of Hampshire County Council, Councillor Nick Adams-King said:

"The proposal of devolution for the Hampshire and Solent area is truly exciting and the benefits it could bring to local residents and businesses are transformational. At the same time as enabling us to take control of our future, devolution would attract millions of pounds into our region to help shape key policies and initiatives to enhance people's quality of life and the growth opportunities of businesses. At the same time, we are being asked to bring forward proposals for local government reorganisation. It is vital that we take control of that process to ensure the outcome best suits the residents and businesses we serve.

"With final endorsement received today from the County Council's Cabinet, we can now progress our work with Isle of Wight Council, Portsmouth City Council, Southampton City Council and our 11 district council partners in Hampshire to draw up plans for a single Combined Authority for the collective area of our four upper tier authorities, in line with our joint Expression of Interest submitted to Government last summer. We will also engage with key stakeholders such as businesses, the further and higher education sectors, National Parks, police, fire service, health and parish and town councils. If the County Council is accepted onto the Devolution Priority Programme Government will then lead a consultation with residents on the creation of a Mayoral Strategic Authority.

"I recognise and share the concern of many, however the pressing deadline to submit our devolution plans to Government means it makes absolute sense to seek permission for our upcoming elections to be postponed. It will give us the space and capacity to complete this important work with crystal clear attention to the crucial job at hand, while working

collaboratively across political parties and engaging with local communities to secure the best possible deal for our residents.”

The full statement is published here:

<https://www.hants.gov.uk/News/01102025DevolutionPriorityProgramme>

For context, at the Hampshire County Council meeting on 9 January, the Liberal Democrat group put forward an amendment to request the Secretary of State to delay the 2025 County elections for a short period, as yet undefined. The unamended motion was passed, requesting instead a delay of the 2025 the elections for one year, which is the only option available to the Secretary of State.

We hope to hear from the Secretary of State on these matters, including the request to postpone elections, by the end of January.

Tom Thacker