

# **INTRODUCING DEVOLUTION AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION** 05 FEB 2025

**To separate the two concepts**

**Devolution – ie all areas of England are to be part of regional Strategic Authorities with an elected Mayor.**

**'Local Government Reorganisation' which will abolish the two-tier structure of County and District so all authorities are Unitary, and will also require existing smaller unitaries to be part of larger entities.**

Both are Government requirements as per the December 2024 White Paper – and both are happening.

## **Devolution proposals**

- i A 'Hampshire & Solent' Combined Authority will be a new regional authority comprising the areas presently covered by Hampshire County Council – which is all two-tier – and Southampton and Portsmouth City Councils and Isle of Wight which are each separate Unitary Councils.
- ii All parties at i. above agreed to submit a request for inclusion in Government's Priority Devolution programme. HCC agreed at its Full Council meeting on Thursday 9th January, Cabinet of Friday 10th, and the joint request was submitted by the deadline of Friday 10 January.
  - Part of the rationale for requesting Priority Devolution is that it will enable 'Reorganisation' to come (a bit) later.
  - With this request came agreement that County elections scheduled for May 2025 would be postponed for a year, and that the Combined Authority would submit plans for Local Government Reorganisation (into Unitary Councils) by Autumn this year.

**On 05 Feb, Government confirmed Hants & Solent is one of six areas accepted for Priority Devolution; others being Cumbria, Cheshire & Warrington, Norfolk & Suffolk, Greater Essex, Sussex & Brighton.**

**Government also confirmed that there will be no Hampshire County elections this year, and a consultation will be published shortly.**

- The aim will be for the Combined Authority to be in place by April 2026 and the Mayor elected in May 2026.
- The Combined Authority will have a seat on the Council of Regions & Nations; will have access to long term strategic funding; will have strategic responsibility for – transport & local infrastructure; housing & strategic planning; economic development & regeneration; environment & climate change; skills & employment support; health & public service reform; public safety, eg Police & Crime Commissioner functions, fire & rescue authority functions.

*The next stage will be a Government public consultation published Feb or March.*

## **Local Government Reorganisation**

- i Within the new Hants & Solent combined authority area, new Unitary Councils must be organised, with much ongoing debate.
- ii The White Paper says Unitaries should comprise 500K - 1.2M people, and suggests current districts / boroughs can be 'building blocks' for the proposals. It has been suggested that a 'Hampshire Unitary' might include Basingstoke & Deane, Hart, Rushmoor, East Hampshire and Test Valley.  
(This would be similar to the 'Heart of Hants' Unitary discussed in 2016, except the 2016 version included New Forest and not East Hants.)

## **Key dates for creating new Unitary Authorities**

- i **Outline proposals for the new Unitary Authorities need to be submitted to Government by 21 March and a final proposal submitted by 26 September 2025.**
- ii **Under the current timetable, final proposals put forward will be considered by Government in early 2026. New Unitary Councils will then take over from either April 2027 or April 2028, with potentially a period operating as 'shadow councils'.**