

Hampshire County Councillor Update – December 2024

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Hampshire County Council Financial Challenges Continue

At the November meeting of the County Council's Cabinet, Cabinet Members considered the Local Authority's financial position over the next two years (2025/26 and 2026/27) and the prospect of formal talks that may be needed with Government to request permission to raise council tax for 2025/26 above the permitted 5% national threshold.

Hampshire County Council's Leader, Councillor Nick Adams-King reported that: "The exceptional budget pressures we face are not of our making - namely unprecedented demand for local services, particularly across social care and services for children with special educational needs and disabilities, as well as rising costs. The report we have considered today is a snapshot in time which warns of a stark financial challenge that potentially lies ahead in two years' time. We continue to do everything in our power to address this recurring budget gap - now anticipated to rise to £182 million from 2025/26 onwards. We have already identified a substantial part of this amount through our recent decisions around savings, however there is much more still to do."

"We are looking again within our own organisation, working more closely with our district, borough and parish council colleagues, and exploring every opportunity to find efficiencies, reduce costs and increase income, but we recognise that these steps alone, won't be enough to keep pace with the ongoing pressures in those key services we must deliver by law."

"Alongside councils up and down the country, we were hoping Government would announce a significant increase in funding in their recent Budget, to help with social care pressures, together with some extra freedoms and flexibilities over council tax setting and raising income. Frustratingly, this didn't happen, with only an extra £8 million or so for Hampshire from the additional £1.3 billion earmarked for local government overall."

Decision Due on Future of Hampshire County Council's Education Catering Service

Hampshire County Council is to recommend sourcing school meals from other providers, rather than directly providing meals as it currently does via its in-house Education Catering service.

This 'managed outsource' arrangement would see the local authority purchase and manage the supply of meals from providers on behalf of schools and nurseries who subscribe to this service. This would potentially support schools and families to pay a lower price for school meals. The recommendation is to move to this new arrangement by the end of March 2026.

This proposed change is due to be considered by the County Council's Cabinet Member for Education on Friday, 6 December. Whatever the outcome of his decision, school meals will continue to be available to all children across Hampshire, including those eligible for free school meals.

Hampshire Music Service to Loan String Instruments for Free

Young musicians across Hampshire are set to benefit from the loan of 1,000 used string instruments by Hampshire Music Service (HMS). These instruments include a wide range of sizes including child-sized and full-sized violins, violas, cellos, and double basses.

Schools, organisations and individuals interested in applying for these instruments can do so by visiting Hampshire Music Service Stringed Instrument Opportunity.

New Dates Confirmed for Consultation on Proposed Relocation of The Henry Cort Community College

Hampshire County Council is to open a formal public consultation on Friday, 10 January 2025 seeking views on the proposed relocation of The Henry Cort Community College in Fareham, to a new site in North Whiteley from September 2027. The consultation will be published on Hampshire County Council's website and will run until Friday, 14 February 2025. Final decision is expected to be taken in June 2025.

The proposal to relocate the school comes as forecasts show that the ongoing development of the Whiteley area will result in demand for between 900 and 1,200 secondary school places. A new secondary school in North Whiteley is planned to meet the predicted need for school places across the whole of the Whiteley area, once the new development is complete.

While clearly needed to meet future demand, the planned new school in North Whiteley would also have a significant impact on The Henry Cort Community College in Fareham, which currently takes pupils from across the Whiteley area.

As more families in Whiteley are anticipated to move their children to the new school in North Whiteley from September 2027, it is expected that Henry Cort would see a corresponding reduction in its pupil numbers, and consequently in its funding from Government, which is allocated on a per-pupil basis. This in turn would lead to a reduced curriculum, staffing recruitment and retention difficulties, an impact on children's educational outcomes, significant financial challenges - and ultimately, an untenable future.

The proposal to relocate Henry Cort to the new site in North Whiteley is considered the most viable option to protect its future while ensuring sufficient school places and most importantly of all, a good quality of education and stability for all children across Whiteley and Fareham. This has been informed by feedback from a previous informal consultation earlier this year, and consideration of the potential wider impacts on the educational offer in Whiteley and Fareham. If finally agreed, this would not mean that Henry Cort would close but that the school, including its staff and children, would be moved to the new site.

Funding Boost for Bus Services

On 17-Nov, Hampshire County Council was awarded £14 million pounds from the Government to boost bus services in the county. The Government has specified that this funding is to "enhance popular routes, protect rural services and increase bus use for shopping, socialising and commuting" and to "prevent service reductions on at-risk routes".

The Government's mandate for this funding appears to be at odds with the County's Bus Service Improvement Policy (BSIP). The aim of Hampshire's BSIP is to "at least double current bus use to 42 million journeys by 2038", however the plan for achieving this aim was focussed on "urban areas of the county where commercial services thrive". I am following up to understand how this inconsistency will be resolved.

Increasing bus use amongst Hampshire's residents is a key part of Hampshire's Local Transport Plan, helping to tackle climate change by taking cars off the road, benefitting Hampshire's local economy and linking communities with essential services.

Free Solar Panel Support for Winchester Community Organisations

Winchester Action on the Climate Crisis (WinACC) is providing free support to community organisations in Winchester District to upgrade their facilities with solar panels – helping to reduce their carbon footprint and their running costs.

They can help at every stage of the process, including with:

- producing initial feasibility study
- developing a fundraising plan
- writing funding applications
- writing tenders for installer quotes.

Any non-profit organisation in Winchester District which is responsible for a building is eligible – including village halls, faith organisations, sports organisations and community groups. The scheme is open until March 2025.

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 in England
- [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, off-gas households. The scheme is available until March 2025.

Thermal Imaging Cameras – 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.