

Special Cabinet – 21 March 2025

Devolution update and local government reorganisation interim plan

At the Special Council meeting of 20 March 2025, Council passed the following resolution:-

It is the Council's view that, Cabinet recommendation 2C should be amended as follows:- Cabinet consider key points of importance in the development of a final proposal that reflects the unique geography, history, economy and communities of the New Forest.

Summary of points arising during Council debate:-

- Members did not feel that Local government reorganisation would benefit the residents of the New Forest and outlined that representations had been made to them from residents about the loss of the council and a fear of losing local services.
- Concerns were raised that instead of focusing on the delivery of services to New Forest residents, Council time and resources would be diverted into reorganisation.
- There was total opposition to any proposal which split the New Forest community through boundary changes.
- There was a concern that if the waterside area was subsumed into a 'Greater Southampton', the remainder of the New Forest had not been considered.
- There was consensus across the Council that Members should work together to develop proposals urgently, that work across Hampshire and the Solent, and that keep the New Forest together.
- Members referred to the New Forest's unique market town and village economy, which was noted as being rural in its nature. This included a coherent historic identity, focused on the forest. This was not considered to be compatible with an urban economic geography.

- Concerns were raised that by splitting the New Forest waterside away from the remaining district, both parts of the district would be disadvantaged.
- Members referenced the unique partnership arrangements in the New Forest including the National Park Authority, Verderers Court, Commoners, and the 37 Town and Parish Councils that form the building blocks of the local New Forest communities. It was noted that areas that do not have Town and Parish Councils have very different community governance arrangements that may not align with the New Forest.
- The long term funding of adult social care was of concern to Members, including the viability of future unitary councils and the fact that district and borough councils have an excellent track record in delivering statutory and community based services, that serve the needs of residents at a local level. The point was made that reorganisation would not resolve the funding challenges faced by authorities with responsibility for adults and children's services.