

Hampshire County Council Report

Elections and Council Composition

Following the elections in May we won all seven Hampshire County Council divisions covering the Winchester district and increased the total Lib Dems from 19 to 26 overall.

- Downlands: James Batho
- Winchester Eastgate: Paula Ferguson
- Southern Parishes: Angela Clear
- Winchester Westgate: Martin Tod
- Bishop's Waltham: Jonathan Williams
- Itchen Valley: Jackie Porter
- Meon Valley: Anne Small

This led to Hampshire County Council with no overall political control. The new council has 27 Conservatives, 26 Liberal Democrats, 20 Reform, 3 Independants/Community Group, 1 Green, and 1 Labour councillor.

Conservative Nick Adams-King was re-elected leader with Conservative, some Reform, and one of the Independents voting for him to continue. Reform and Conservative Councillors subsequently voted for each other to take on Chair positions on all the committees with either a Reform Chair and Conservative Vice Chair, or Conservative Chair and Reform Vice Chair.

Within our group Keith House was re-elected as Lib Dem Council group leader with Jackie Porter as our deputy leader, and our Liberal Democrat spokespersons roles are Prad Bains for Children and Young People, David Harrison for Health and Adult Social Care, Martin Tod for Corporate Services and Resources, Rupert Kyrle for Universal Services, and Jonathan Williams for the Regulatory Committee. Additionally, despite Reform and the Conservatives postponing the meeting because they didn't have the numbers, Prad was elected at the subsequent meeting as Chair of the Hampshire & IoW Fire and Rescue Authority, a former fire fighter himself.

Council activities and ongoing financial pressures

Earlier this year there were two proposals at the budget meeting, one being a 15% increase in Council tax which would have required a referendum that would unlikely be successful so there was instead a maximum 4.99% increase bringing the county's Band D charge to £1,690.

That increase was with a stark warning from the chief financial officer who warned that even with the 4.99% increase and without additional government support (which so far has not come) reserves would be insufficient to balance the 2027/28 budget therefore a Section 114

notice (effective bankruptcy) would be required before the 2027/28 budget meeting in February 2027.

The main reasons behind the significant financial pressure continues to come from rising adult social care costs, children's services, SEND provision, and school transport costs which alone take up almost 83% of the total budget.

Since the election a number of Lib Dem motions have been put forward including two on local parking issues by Lib Dem members in the New Forest, one from James Batho on the County Councils 20mph scheme, another on Highways maintenance, and most recently one on digital exclusion following the County Council making tip bookings online only. In most cases they have sadly been voted down by both the Conservatives and Reform or amended to be watered down but we continue to challenge the Conservative Reform pact.