

COUNTY COUNCILLOR REPORT TO ALL PARISH COUNCILS IN PETERSFIELD HANGERS

1 APRIL 2025

1. Retirement of HCC Chief Executive

HCC Chief Executive Carolyn Williamson has announced her retirement after four years in the role. She will depart HCC in July. A selection process to recruit her replacement will commence in the coming weeks. This is likely to be a crucial appointment coming as it does at a time of transition for local government in Hampshire.

2. Future Services Consultation on possible changes

In order to bridge our budget gap, HCC is currently consulting on some service changes. I thought it would be appropriate to report on them. Here is a brief summary of the savings proposals:

Planned highway maintenance

This withdrawal of funding is possible due to an increase in National funding of £15.2m. The proposal is to remove £4.32m funding provided each year by the County Council to supplement Department for Transport funding for planned highway maintenance activities including larger-scale structural repairs, surface treatments on roads, and drainage improvements.

Older Adults Day Services

The proposal is for HCC Care and Support Service to stop running the older adult day care services at Chesil Lodge (Winchester), and Newman Court (Basingstoke). These day care services provide a range of individual and group activities (e.g. crafts, exercise, singing) together with personal care.

Post-16 Transport

- To focus the County Council's resources on those most in need, by amending the eligibility criteria for Post-16 transport assistance so that the County Council would only assist with travel for Post-16 students with special educational needs or a disability, and who are from a low-income family.
- To make Post-16 Transport provision more sustainable in the long-term by requiring all families of students who receive County Council-provided Post-16 transport assistance to contribute to the costs of transport for their child.

- To support SEND students to develop their independent travel skills by introducing mandatory Independent Travel Training (ITT) for some Post-16 students.
- To make Post-16 Transport provision more sustainable in the long-term by requiring parents/carers/responsible adults to act as a Passenger Assistant where it is reasonable for them to do so.

Both School Transport and Post-16 Transport

- To reduce the number of unused seats by utilising bus pass usage data.
- To increase flexibility to meet short-term variations in demand by using the full licensed capacity of buses.
- To make discretionary transport more viable by asking parents to increase their financial contribution towards the cost of the transport.
- To promote the most independent forms of transport assistance.

The service change proposals outlined within the consultation would contribute around £9.9 million in total towards balancing the budget for 2025/26 while ensuring that the delivery of essential services is maintained.

If you would like to respond to the consultation, you can do so until 7 May at this link:
<https://www.hants.gov.uk/aboutthecouncil/haveyoursay/consultations/future-services-consultation-spring-2025>

3. Consultation on new layout for junction

HCC has commenced a formal consultation on a new layout for the Causeway/Sussex Road/Hylton Road/Dragon Street junction, also known locally as the “Tesco junction”. As well as making it easier for everyone to cross the road, we also hope that this crossing will have a traffic-calming effect.

A Public Notice was published on 21 March and representations can be made until 18 April. More information is available at this link to the scheme web page:
<https://www.hants.gov.uk/transport/transportchemes/petersfield-dragon-street>

4. HCC enters Purdah due to by-elections

Due to the resignation of sitting councillors Dominic Hiscox and Adrian Collett, by-elections have been triggered for two County Divisions. They are Winchester Eastgate and Yateley East & Blackwater Electoral Divisions.

This means that HCC is now in Purdah and consequently will not make any substantial announcements until the by-elections have taken place on Thursday 1 May. This may mean that there is not anything meaningful for me to report in my next monthly report but let’s see.

5. Easter activity QE Country Park

Queen Elizabeth Country Park has organised an Easter trail for kids called the “Big Butser Egg Roll” Trail. For £6 you get a pack including a trail guide, a pack of pencils, a springtime craft to take home, and a rubber egg to decorate. The idea is that you throw the rubber egg up Butser Hill, see how far it goes, and then watch it roll down. The trail will be in place from 5-21 April. Tickets can be purchased online here:

<https://www.hants.gov.uk/thingstodo/countryparks/qecp/visit-us/whatson/the-big-butser-egg-roll-2025>

6. South Downs celebrates its 15th birthday



The South Downs National Park is marking its 15th birthday by announcing a major upcoming consultation that will help decide future priorities.

The South Downs National Park came into being on 31 March, 2010 after first being mooted in the 1920s. Fifteen years on, a great deal has been achieved for nature, climate and communities. Yet there’s still so much more to be done to protect and enhance the landscape, as well as create opportunities for people to enjoy it, all while facing growing challenges such as climate change, biodiversity loss, water pollution and economic uncertainty.

A public consultation will run from June to August on a new draft 5-year Partnership Management Plan, which is an overarching plan setting out the goals for the National Park over the next five years. It will replace the current Partnership Management Plan.

RUSSELL OPPENHEIMER
County Councillor for Petersfield Hangers