

COPYTHORNE PARISH COUNCIL MEETING - OCTOBER 13TH 2026

ITEM 4 – COUNTY COUNCILLOR REPORT

Local Government Reorganisation – Government withdraws its decision

As I hurriedly reported last month, on 7 September the Government withdrew its March decision on the proposed structure of new unitary councils across Hampshire and the Solent and announced that it would review the position. Hampshire County Council had begun judicial review proceedings against the original decision in June.

This is particularly significant for the New Forest given the split of the New Forest the March decision proposed. However, celebrations that that battle has been won are probably premature – we are expecting an update from Government in October giving the result of their review, and it would not be unexpected for the same decision to be made again.

There also remains the possibility that the Forest is not split, but the whole Forest moves in with Southampton and Eastleigh (the option that Hampshire County Council voted for last year, but which is not widely supported by New Forest councillors).

£8.5 million investment in New Forest SEND provision

On 9 September, Hampshire approved funding for two major new SEND projects, including a 50-place specialist unit in the New Forest, based at the former Pennington Infant School site and operated by Pennington Church of England Primary School.

Although the provision is outside this division, it is relevant to families across the New Forest because increasing specialist capacity locally should enable more children to receive appropriate education closer to home.

New climate strategy

Cabinet approved a new Hampshire climate strategy on 22 September, alongside its latest annual progress report: <https://www.hants.gov.uk/News/20262209ClimateChangeReport>

The strategy includes work on flood and extreme-weather resilience as well as carbon reduction. The Council reports that more than 87,000 trees have been planted through biodiversity initiatives, 27,000 tonnes of household food waste recycled and 1.6 million additional bus journeys made following improvements to bus services.

Hampshire has also secured £6.66 million of Government funding for electric vehicle infrastructure, intended to support the installation of 17,000 public charging points across the county, and £13 million for improvements through the Bus Service Improvement Plan.

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Highways – call for more funding

As a result of a Liberal Democrat motion passed at the July Full Council meeting, Cabinet has been obliged to look at the road maintenance backlog and their approach to keeping our roads working. Hampshire maintains around 5,500 miles of local roads. Hampshire's highways maintenance backlog is now between £550 million and £600 million.

September's Cabinet meeting agreed:

- To step up Hampshire's campaign for a greater share of Vehicle Excise Duty revenues to be spent on local roads.
- Concentrate on preventative maintenance rather than relying on reactive pothole repairs.

Since April, 42 resurfacing schemes and 122 surface-treatment schemes have been delivered, alongside 154 planned patching schemes. Some 17,590 reactive defects, including potholes, were repaired between April and July.

Adult social care – helping people return home from hospital

Hampshire has approved a new service intended to help people with complex care needs leave hospital more quickly once they are medically ready.

The County Council will work with NHS Hampshire and Isle of Wight to coordinate assessment and support, with assessments taking place at home or in community settings where possible rather than requiring people to remain in hospital. Around 650 Hampshire residents a year are expected to use the new pathway.

The service is expected to begin on or after 1 January 2027.

Local recognition for Bickerley Green, Ringwood

There was also some very local good news at the end of September. Hampshire County Council's Bickerley Green care home in Ringwood was named Residential Home of the Year at the 2026 Hampshire Care Awards.

Local road closures

A number of temporary highway notices were issued across the New Forest during September, including School Lane in Minstead, Station Road in Sandleheath and Harbridge Drove in Ellingham, Harbridge and Ibsley.

Parish and town councils can search current notices, including forthcoming closures, on the County Council's public notices service:

<https://www.hants.gov.uk/community/publicnotices>

COUNCILLOR DAVID MILLAR

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