

POLICY AND PROJECT ADVISORY BOARD

Meeting held on Tuesday, 22nd July, 2025 at the Council Offices, Farnborough at 7.00 pm.

Voting Members

Cllr Abe Allen (Chairman)
Cllr Lisa Greenway (Vice-Chairman)

Cllr A. Adeola
Cllr Mara Makunura
Cllr S.J. Masterson
Cllr M.J. Roberts

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Cllr Rhian Jones, Cllr Halleh Koohestani, Cllr T.W. Mitchell, Cllr M.D. Smith and Cllr Ivan Whitmee.

Cllr Becky Williams attended the meeting as a Standing Deputy.

8. CHANGE OF BOARD MEMBERSHIP

The Board **NOTED** the appointment of Cllr S.J. Masterson as a member of the Board in place of Cllr Peace Essien Igodifo for the remainder of the 2025/26 Municipal Year.

9. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 10th June, 2025 were agreed as a correct record.

10. LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION - CONSIDERATION OF OPTIONS FOR UNITARY COUNCILLOR RATIOS AND WARDING PATTERNS AND ENGAGEMENT UPDATE (ITEM DURATION - 60 MINUTES)

The Board welcomed the Leader of the Council (Cllr Gareth Williams), Mrs Karen Edwards, Executive Director and Jill Shuttleworth, Corporate Manager – Democracy, who provided an update on recent work that had been undertaken in relation to Local Government Reorganisation (LGR). In particular, this item was to consider options for Unitary Councillor ratios and warding patterns and their implications for Members. Also, an update on the LGR engagement process would be delivered, ahead of the submission to the Government in September, 2025.

The Board was advised that the devolution process had been progressing well, with the strategic authority due to be established in Spring 2026 and the inaugural Mayoral election taking place in May 2026. In relation to LGR, it was confirmed that the establishment of a Unitary Council covering the areas currently served by Basingstoke and Deane, Hart and Rushmoor Councils was the preferred option in

each of those areas. A number of governance groups across the three Councils had been meeting now for some time. These included a Leader Group, a Chief Executive Group and a S151 Group.

Regarding engagement, it was acknowledged that this was a confusing picture for residents, with a number of options within the preferred approach. A countywide public survey had been externally commissioned by the twelve (of fifteen) Councils that had continued working together with KPMG. There had also been engagement sessions with countywide partners such as the Police and the Integrated Care Boards. In North Hampshire, a more detailed and focussed public survey had been commissioned. There had also been partner workshops held in relation to sectors including businesses, town and parish councils, the voluntary and community sectors, public sector partners and faith groups. In Rushmoor, several engagement exercises were underway, including roadshows and static displays.

In terms of the timetable of key upcoming decision points, following submissions to the Government in September 2025, the decision of the Government was currently expected by March 2026. This was likely to lead to elections to shadow unitary authorities around May 2027 with new unitaries replacing existing councils in April 2028.

Members were informed of the need to consider the optimum ratio of Councillors to population for the proposed new unitary comprising the Basingstoke, Hart and Rushmoor areas. It was reported that there was a considerable range of ratios currently at Councils that had a similar total population to the proposed new authority. Within Hampshire, Rushmoor had the lowest number of residents per Councillor at 2,737, with Hart at 3,226 per Councillor and Basingstoke at 3,597. Overall, district councils in Hampshire averaged a ratio of 1:3,391, whilst the Hampshire unitaries averaged 1:4,731.

Another consideration would be the warding arrangements of the new authority. It was confirmed that the Boundary Commission would be unlikely to undertake a review before 2028. It was necessary to consider the optimum number of Councillors for the new council. It was confirmed that the total number of Councillors across the three North Hampshire authorities was currently 126. Given levels of representation in other Unitary councils and advice from the Boundary Commission it was considered that this number would have to reduce in the new unitary authority.

The Board was requested to consider the following in its discussions:

- What was the most appropriate Councillor ratio for the unitary configuration area (North Hampshire Authority), based on the population figures and therefore, also, the number of Councillors?
- Given the Government steer, what approach to area committees would best suit the proposed North Hampshire Unitary configuration?
- What were the implications of these arrangements on Members and how could future Councillors manage the enhanced role given to the likely increase in population served and extra demands?

- What did PPAB feel needed to be taken into account in terms of Member support, workload etc?

In discussing the content of the presentation, the Board raised the following points:

- A view was expressed that around 75-90 Councillors would be appropriate, around two thirds of the current number. This would result in increased workloads for Councillors.
- In coping with increased workloads, would new authority consider more daytime meetings? Or Councillors being considered full time positions?
- Point made that Councillor ratios and wards would be different under shadow authority and would be amended as a result of the Boundary Commission review.
- Broad consensus that around 85 the right number, possibly in two-Member wards.
- In answer to a question, it was confirmed that the three existing authorities would need to come to a consensus view on these matters in relation to the proposed new authority. It was reported that it was thought there was broad consensus between the three at this point.
- Must be careful to avoid 'democratic deficit' as a result in the reduction of the number of elected representatives and take steps to ensure that representation was both diverse and representative of local communities.
- Suggested we should only change member numbers in Rushmoor when instructed to by Boundary Commission.
- Confirmed that Basingstoke currently had 54 Councillors across 18 wards.
- Southampton Unitary allowance = £14K – not considered high enough to be considered a full time role.
- Felt that lower than two Members per ward would lead Members feeling unsupported.
- How can Councillors be supported with casework? Could there be a formal 'caseworking system'?
- Could the introduction of 'hybrid' decision-making meetings increase capacity for Councillors?
- Confirmed that ward changes would be likely to take some time – first elections would be using existing wards.

- In relation to Local Area Committees, the view was expressed that there could be just one that cover the whole of the Rushmoor area to avoid the establishment of 'silos'. An alternative view of at least two Area Committees to cover the Rushmoor area was expressed, possibly around Aldershot and Farnborough.

In summarising the Board's feedback on these matters, the Chairman made the following points:

- The Board agreed that given the guidance from the Boundary Commission the suggested figure of 85 for the number of Councillors on the new authority was about right, subject to concerns over the level of representation in areas with a high level of deprivation, as set out below;
 - Concern was expressed that the Member to resident ratio should take account of whether the area/ward has high levels of deprivation. This should be taken into account when considering ward changes.
 - Appropriate steps should be taken to ensure that future Councillors were properly supported including case management systems, training and development and working arrangements that would ensure that future representation was both diverse and representative of local communities.
- The Board's view on Area Committees, should they be established by the new authority, was that there should be two or more covering the current council area.

The Chairman thanked Cllr Williams, Mrs Edwards and Ms Shuttleworth for their input.

11. **IMPLICATIONS OF THE SUPREME COURT JUDGEMENT ON THE INTERPRETATION OF THE EQUALITY ACT (ITEM DURATION - 30 MINUTES)**

In introducing this item, the Chair explained that he had been advised by the Council's Interim Monitoring Officer that the publication of statutory guidance had been delayed. This delay, along with the need to give full attention to the Local Government Reorganisation agenda item, had led to the Interim Monitoring Officer recommending that this item should be deferred to a later date.

The Board **RESOLVED** that the agenda item on the implications of the Supreme Court judgement on the interpretation of the Equality Act be deferred.

12. **WORK PLAN**

The Board noted the current Work Plan.

It was agreed that future items would be based around the Council's Delivery Plan and would be discussed in detail at the next Progress Group meeting.

The meeting closed at 8.30 pm.

CLLR ABE ALLEN (CHAIRMAN)
