

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Meeting held on Thursday, 4th September, 2025 at the Council Offices, Farnborough at 7.00 pm.

Voting Members

Cllr Halleh Koohestani (Chairman)
Cllr M.J. Tennant (Vice-Chairman)

Cllr C.P. Grattan
Cllr Steve Harden
Cllr Rhian Jones
Cllr G.B. Lyon
Cllr Bill O'Donovan
Cllr S. Trussler

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Cllr Leola Card, Cllr Nadia Martin and Cllr Becky Williams

10. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the meeting held on 31st July 2025 were agreed as a correct record, subject to the inclusion of some additional wording (***in bold italic***) relating to Union Yard, Aldershot, as agreed with Cllr Trussler and the Portfolio Holder and set out below:

“The Committee discussed the 82 units at Union Yard, Aldershot, that had been allocated for key workers ***for which contract negotiations were still ongoing***. It was noted that arrangements were in place with the provider and Frimley NHS Trust to ensure key workers and critical members of staff had access to the accommodation. ***In addition, it was advised that, a condition of the award of contract had been that all staff housed at Union Yard would work primarily at Frimley Park Hospital.***”

It was also advised that ***a condition of the award of contract*** had been that there would be ***an Estate Officer, employed by the registered provider, permanently located at the site to manage the 82 units, this individual would have strong links with Human Resources (HR) at Frimley Park Hospital (FPH) to manage any matters arising. The Portfolio Holder advised that he was confident that that all the checks and balances were in place to deal with the Committees’ concerns and it was confirmed that once the deal had been completed the Committee would be provided with the detail of the contract documentation.***”

11. APPOINTMENTS

The Committee **NOTED** changes to the Membership of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, for the remainder of the 2025/26 Municipal Year, as set out below:

- Cllr Rhian Jones to be appointed to the Committee in place of Cllr Thomas Day
- Cllr M.J. Roberts to be appointed as Standing Deputy for the Committee in place of Cllr Sarah Spall

The Committee **DEFERRED** the appointment to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee Progress Group pending changes to the membership of the Committee to secure political balance.

12. **LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION**

The Committee welcomed Cllr Gareth Williams, Leader of the Council and Mrs Karen Edwards, Executive Director, who were in attendance to provide an update on the development of the Council's proposal for Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) as set out in Report No. ED2505.

Members were reminded that the proposal would set out how a single tier of local government could be established across Hampshire and the Isle of Wight. At its meeting in July, 2025, the Cabinet had recommended to the Council that a unitary council based on the areas of Rushmoor, Hart and Basingstoke and Deane councils should continue to be the preferred option for Rushmoor as, in line with the assessment criteria, it represented the best balance of a Council large enough to deliver high quality services and value for money but small enough to be connected to the place and needs of the people the council served. At its meeting on 10th July, the Council had agreed that recommendation and had noted the programme of engagement being undertaken to ensure that all residents, businesses and partners had had an opportunity to feed into the process. KPMG had continued to support twelve Councils across Hampshire and the Isle of Wight to prepare the necessary evidence base and support the development of a business case to enable final proposals to be agreed and submitted to the Government. The Report also set out the arrangements for engagement with residents, businesses, partners and voluntary organisations. This engagement had included seeking residents' views on the establishment of parish councils and/or Neighbourhood Area Committees, as part of a Community Governance Review.

The Report set out the three options that were contained within the draft proposal as Options 1, 2 and 3. In each of these, the preference for the north of the county was a unitary council based on the areas of Rushmoor, Hart and Basingstoke and Deane councils.

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

- Clarification of some of the language used in the six criteria would be helpful, eg 'stronger' in Criteria 6 and 'financial shocks' in Criteria 2

- It was clarified that this Report was only dealing with the three options drawn up by the twelve authorities with KPMG, not Hampshire County Council's preferred options
- Projections showed that the costs of the LGR process would be recovered within the first 2-3 years of operation but this was felt to be optimistic
- Concern expressed over the robustness of the sign off of the KPMG work
- Several Members expressed the feeling that not enough financial detail had been included in relation to the thirteen councils being merged into four, including which had considerable deficits etc.
- Do we sufficiently understand what the County Council currently does and how this will be provided in the new model?
- View expressed that work by KPMG was almost all based on assumptions – viability of Council Tax Base, how social care would be handled and spending on key services before and after reorganisation were all missing
- Suggestion that the Council should write to the Government to seek a guarantee that it would cover any shortfall in funding for the LGR process
- Members were keen to see details of where savings were envisaged to be delivered under the new model
- In setting the number of Councillors in the new authority at around 85, this would mean that local residents might be less well represented than at present

In summarising the Committee's feedback on these matters, the Chair proposed the following representations should be made to the Cabinet:

- The Committee did not feel that the proposal fully met all of the criteria, in particular;
 - Concerns that the financial information was not sufficiently detailed. Specifically, that the financial information was not broken down by the current authority areas or the proposed new unitary areas and that too much of the financial case relied on assumptions
 - In relation to the proposed changes in Councillor representation, whilst acknowledging that the proposal fitted within the parameters set by the Government and the Boundary Commission, the Committee was concerned that there would be a loss of local connection and empowerment and that future arrangements should ensure that a diverse range of councillors would be possible

- Given the known situation relating to local government funding, regardless of local government structures, funding needed to be reviewed before any LGR took place to address this and that a letter should be sent to the Government highlighting this.

The Committee **AGREED** the above as being an accurate summary of the consensus view of Members on the Committee.

The Chair thanked Cllr Williams and Mrs Edwards for their input.

13. **WORK PLAN**

The Committee noted the current Work Plan.

With the next meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee due to be held on 18th September, 2025, it was agreed that potential future items would be considered at the following Progress Group meeting.

The meeting closed at 9.09 pm.

CLLR HALLEH KOOHESTANI (CHAIRMAN)
