

County devolution to extend, leader says

By Duncan Geddes
duncan.geddes@hampshirechronicle.co.uk

RADICAL plans to form a super council for Hampshire and the Isle of Wight should be extended in future, the county's top councillor has said.

Civic leaders are waiting to hear the fate of a proposed combined authority which would transfer extra powers and multi-million-pound budgets to the region.

But leading Hampshire county councillors want to take even more control in areas such as health and education.

It came amid accusations that the county's Conservative top brass are dictating the deal to smaller councils and should fix the current system before asking for more powers.

The devolution deal, backed by 17 councils and business partners, would see the region keep all of its business rates and give it greater control over housing, infrastructure and social care.

A meeting held last Thursday heard that the government has yet to decide whether the scheme will go ahead.

Meanwhile, Tory council leader Cllr Roy Perry echoed calls from his Lib Dem rival, Cllr Keith House, for Hampshire to take even more powers from government in future.

"Some things need to be dealt with at a higher level, some things can be better dealt with at a local level," he said.

"I agree with Cllr House that there are issues like health and



Lib Dem Cllr David Harrison

education where it will be very important in the fullness of time to do more devolution and get serious additional powers.

"There should be much more local control over those than is currently in place."

He added: "England is the last outpost of the British Empire.

"We're the most centralised country in Europe and the more decisions [that are] made to make it more decentralised the better."

Lib Dem councillor David Harrison and councillors for Labour and UKip said the deal was being run by the council's Conservative cabinet, ignoring the views

of other councillors and smaller authorities.

Cllr Harrison said: "We need a devolution revolution. Through-out my entire political career I have effectively been shut out of the decision making process.

"And why is this? It's because I'm not a member of the in-crowd. I share this with some of the Conservative backbenchers.

"They're going to spend most of their political life just voting fodder.

"We need devolution but we need to get our own accounts in order."

The Lib Dems won an amendment calling for urgent "double

devolution" proposals, handing county powers down to district and parish councils.

Cllr House said: "We need to make sure we also pass down powers and responsibilities to districts, parishes, towns, communities in our area so more local decision-making can take place on local facilities, local services and local priorities.

"I get a sense that this has been forgotten because of the bigger picture that Cllr Perry's interested in, the London stuff. Well, we think it's all important."

Cllr Perry said devolution was down from the county was "clearly" already in the scheme.



Roy Perry



Greg Clark



Keith House