**Government moves to break up Hampshire devolution bid**

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HAMPSHIRE could be split into two as part of plans to create a "Southern Powerhouse", it has been revealed. The county and the Isle of Wight face being divided between north and south as proposals for a super-council move forward.

The Government met council bosses yesterday to discuss a Solent combined authority between [Southampton](http://www.dailyecho.co.uk/search/?search=Southampton&topic_id=7090), Portsmouth and [Eastleigh](http://www.dailyecho.co.uk/news/district/eastleigh/), led by an elected mayor.

[Hampshire County Council](http://www.dailyecho.co.uk/search/?search=Hampshire+County+Council&topic_id=6987) had previously put forward a devolution bid that would have involved all 15 councils in the county including Southampton, Portsmouth and the Isle of Wight.

The apparent change of heart has prompted county council boss Cllr Roy Perry to write to MPs warning that "dismembering" the county would be "little short of a disaster".

Cllr Perry, who led the 15-council bid, wrote: "I am asking for your support to help avert what I think would be little short of a disaster for the area, not just this great county, if a Solent proposal is pursued in this late and hurried manner."

Warning the move would hit council services and the economy, he said: "We have worked diligently, co-operatively and transparently in our efforts to secure a combined authority for Hampshire and the Isle of Wight which we remain convinced will be in the best interests of our citizens and this crucial part of the nation's economy."

The councils involved in a potential Solent authority are Southampton, Portsmouth, [Fareham](http://www.dailyecho.co.uk/news/district/fareham/), [Gosport](http://www.dailyecho.co.uk/search/?search=Gosport&topic_id=1066), Havant, Eastleigh, East Hampshire and the Isle of Wight.

Council chiefs in north and mid Hampshire, including [Winchester](http://www.dailyecho.co.uk/news/district/winchester/), the [New Forest](http://www.dailyecho.co.uk/news/district/newforestpost/), Basingstoke, Rushmoor and Test Valley, were left in the dark about yesterday's meeting with officials from the Treasury and Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG).

It is understood the Government could offer them a separate devolution deal stretching further into north Hampshire. It follows a stall in negotiations over the idea of a Boris Johnson-style metro mayor, which many local leaders feel would cover too wide an area.

Eastleigh MP Mims Davies said: "I think Hampshire works together well as a whole and that's where I feel it most promising. The most important thing is making sure that we get the best deal for Hampshire and these constructive discussions continue."

Cllr Stephen Godfrey, leader of Winchester City Council, said: "I firmly believe that a united approach is the best way forward for the people of Winchester, who are well served by Hampshire County Council as part of a two tier authority structure."

A DCLG spokesman said: “The Government's devolution agenda offers a real opportunity for local areas to take greater control of their future - and we are discussing this with local partners across Hampshire and the Isle of Wight. We have always been clear this is a bottom-up process and there is no one-size-fits-all approach, with every deal bespoke and providing arrangements that are relevant to each local area. We look forward to continuing constructive discussions on devolution with local partners across Hampshire and the Isle of Wight as their proposals develop.”