**Hampshire 'could get elected mayor' in this week's budget**



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THERE are hopes devolution for Hampshire - and a directly-elected mayor - could be announced in this week's Budget. Crunch talks over the historic handover of powers over transport, skills and millions of pounds of funding have been continuing over the past week.

And there is now optimism among some council leaders that Chancellor George Osborne will announce a deal in Wednesday's Budget. Talks over the historic deal have been going on between local leaders and the Government for almost two years now. With Greater Manchester the first area to seize control of powers through Mr Osborne's first devolution deal, Hampshire and other areas were keen to capitalise on the opportunity to grab new powers.

The original Hampshire bid incorporated the entirety of the county, and was led by county council chief Roy Perry. However disagreements over whether the region should follow other new Combined Authorities in having a Boris Johnson-style "metro mayor" led to talks breaking down over a Hampshire-wide bid.

Instead, the Government opened negotiations with the southern parts of Hampshire over a Solent authority instead, that could cover [Southampton](http://www.dailyecho.co.uk/search/?search=Southampton&topic_id=7090), Portsmouth, [Fareham](http://www.dailyecho.co.uk/news/district/fareham/), [Gosport](http://www.dailyecho.co.uk/search/?search=Gosport&topic_id=1066), Havant, [Eastleigh](http://www.dailyecho.co.uk/news/district/eastleigh/), East Hampshire and the Isle of Wight.  County leader Roy Perry had warned it could lead to Hampshire being "split in half" and some smaller councils disappearing, but his fears were dismissed by other council leaders.

If announced in the Budget, the new mayor would be in charge of a new combined authority that would sit on top of existing councils and have control over infrastructure, transport, [business](http://dailyecho.co.uk/business) support, skills and other areas, which Government currently hands out funding for. It could also mean councils would have control over business rates raised in their areas, before the move comes into effect elsewhere in the country. Elections for a new "metro mayor" could take place next year. Negotiations are still taking place between councils and the Government before a potential announcement in the Budget on Wednesday.

[Labour](http://www.dailyecho.co.uk/search/?search=Labour&topic_id=1102) [Southampton City Council](http://www.dailyecho.co.uk/search/?search=Southampton+City+Council&topic_id=1493) leader Simon Letts said: "We've given an indication that we are prepared to accept a deal. Obviously all of the local authorities will remain as local authorities and they will largely do things they have always done. There is no Solent City or super council, the sovereignty of Southampton, Portsmouth and other places will remain as it does now, all we will be doing is working together to deliver more localised outcomes using resources from Government."

His Conservative counterpart at [Fareham Borough Council](http://www.dailyecho.co.uk/search/?search=Fareham+Borough+Council&topic_id=1495), Seán Woodward, said: "We are talking and that is all there is to it at this stage but clearly it is moving fast and if it is to get into the Budget we will need to move ahead. I hope we can achieve something that will be popular among the public."

Cllr Perry has said the county council will not be part of the new proposals, saying in a statement: "I remain of the view that our original proposal is the right one for the economic prosperity and democratic accountability of the whole area, particularly for those who live in the south of the county. I do not understand the Government’s insistence on their imposed mayoral model. I hope we are given time to think through a more logical model that reflects the area and is genuine devolution. I have not given up hope that the true principles of devolution may be rescued alongside the best deal for the whole of this great county.”