

Cabinet member steps down over devolution

THE leader of Hampshire County Council has been forced to reshuffle the authority's cabinet after the fiasco over collapsed devolution negotiations with the government.

Last month it was confirmed that talks between the authority, which was the leader of a 15-council delegation from Hampshire seeking a devolution deal, and ministers broke down. That was because of the group's unwillingness to be headed by a directly-elected mayor.

It then emerged a rival devolution group, comprising various southern authorities, including the city councils in Portsmouth and Southampton, had struck up a deal with the government. That deal has not yet been finalised but it is understood negotiations are at a late stage.

The rival group does not include HCC, New Forest District Council or the New Forest National Park Authority, but does include Fareham Borough Council - which is led by Coun. Seán Woodward, Hampshire County Council's cabinet member for economy, transport and the environment.

Last week HCC leader, Coun. Roy Perry, revealed Coun. Woodward had stepped down from his cabinet post because of the emergence of the rival devolution bid.

Coun. Perry said: "Coun. Woodward has been an excellent cabinet

member of the county council and I have valued his input.

"He and I are agreed, however, there must be no opportunity for any misperception that cabinet members would have anything other than the interests of the whole of Hampshire at the forefront of their minds when taking executive decisions for the county council.

"For this reason, I have agreed that Coun. Woodward should stand down as the executive member for economy, transport and environment."

Coun. Perry revealed he had appointed Milford county councillor Mel Kendal to assume some of the responsibilities of the cabinet role and another member to do the others.

"I am asking Coun. Kendal, who is currently cabinet member for income and capital receipts, to include economic development in his brief, and Coun. Rob Humby, currently assistant to the executive and rural affairs champion, to become a full cabinet member for environment and transport."

Coun. Woodward added that he continued to be in "close dialogue" with the government to see if there were any prospects of a devolution deal involving the authority.

NFDC keeping options open over devolution

A BREAKAWAY group of councils trying to resurrect a collapsed devolution deal has asked New Forest District Council to join it.

NFDC leader Coun. Barry Rickman confirmed the news at the authority's latest cabinet meeting, but stressed he had made no commitment as he wanted to "keep all options open".

The possibility of a devolution deal first emerged last year when two

been talking with the government over a devolution deal but no agreement has been reached.

In his statement to the cabinet, on Wednesday, Coun. Rickman said: "I can now inform all councillors that I have received a letter asking if we would wish to attend regular meetings with those leaders of the Solent proposal with a view that they would support us joining the Solent Devolution proposal.