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**Council leaders hit back in battle for future of Hampshire 17 May, 2016**

CIVIC chiefs in Hampshire have hit back in the battle over how the county should be run in the future. County council leader Roy Perry last week revealed a report had spelled out several new options for major changes, including one to replace all councils with one huge new authority. However, the leaders of seven city, borough and district councils have attacked the plans as “distancing our populations from the services they rely on”.

It is the latest round in the long-running battle over the Government devolution of powers to the Solent area, which Cllr Perry opposes but southern council leaders support. Cllr Perry said on Friday that a new report, commissioned by the council ad written by consultants Deloitte, had spelled out several different options for how the council could be governed. They include creating one new council for the entirety of Hampshire, including [Southampton](http://www.dailyecho.co.uk/search/?search=Southampton&topic_id=7090), Portsmouth and the Isle of Wight, and creating five new larger unitary councils. He said the new options could save residents’ money in council tax while saving tens of millions of pounds every year. However, the plans have been attacked by the council leaders set to take part in the Solent devolution project.

A joint statement by the leaders of Southampton, Portsmouth, [Fareham](http://www.dailyecho.co.uk/news/district/fareham/), [Eastleigh](http://www.dailyecho.co.uk/news/district/eastleigh/), [Gosport](http://www.dailyecho.co.uk/search/?search=Gosport&topic_id=1066), East Hampshire and Havant councils has been issued. In it, the councils’ seven leaders say they “want to place on record their concerns that the document is more concerned with looking in detail at how local government organises itself, rather than focusing on how councils can work together to provide better and more efficient services for local people”.

They continue: “This proposal amounts to localism in reverse. It exceeds the Government's own standards for scale and manageability, is a clear threat to town and parish councils and would further distance our populations from the services they and their communities rely on. Rather than creating a large and unwieldy council for the whole county area we would prefer to look at bringing existing councils together to work closely to improve outcomes for local people and bring extra powers and resources for the area - as being explored in plans for both the Solent and Heart of Hampshire combined authorities which between them cover the whole of Hampshire and the IOW.”

They say the proposed Solent deal being negotiated with the Government would provide £30m of extra funding every year and allow key decisions to be made locally as opposed to by ministers or civil servants in Westminster and Whitehall. They add: “Bringing these responsibilities together in the Solent area will simplify and strengthen support for [business](http://dailyecho.co.uk/business) growth and innovation as well as enabling a focus on training in skills businesses want people to have, therefore people get jobs, businesses prosper and the whole of South Hampshire & the Isle of Wight becomes better off.

“It would control a dedicated transport budget, franchised bus services and the network of strategic local authority roads. “It is also anticipated that once the combined authority is in place it would be able to demonstrate its successes and negotiate with government to agree further powers and opportunities to be devolved, potentially in areas such as health and criminal justice, as the Greater Manchester Combined Authority has done. Pursuing the options proposed by [Hampshire County Council](http://www.dailyecho.co.uk/search/?search=Hampshire+County+Council&topic_id=6987) will put all of this in jeopardy.”