**Hampshire County Councillor report – Calleva Division**

**September 2023**

1. **Schools**

Residents may be aware of the recent news story regarding schools in England due to close imminently as a result of their buildings containing unsafe concrete: [School buildings in England to shut over concrete safety fears - BBC News](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-66673971)

No Hampshire school is being closed. Cranbourne College in Basingstoke is the only site where RAAC has been identified among Hampshire County Council’s maintained schools. Temporary works have already been undertaken to one section of the building to make sure it is safe and another area has been taken out of use since the beginning of the year, however, the school is expected to open as normal at the start of the autumn term.

Meanwhile, the council is encouraging families to do all they can to support regular school attendance for their children from the beginning of term. The first few days back in school are especially crucial in paving the way for a successful year. Attendance rates are improving locally, but are still not back to pre-pandemic levels.

Educational specialists advise that attending school every day, unless unwell, is best for children to ensure that the solid foundations for their future education and employment can be laid. It is also one of the best ways of protecting a child’s mental and physical health. The [County Council’s website](https://www.hants.gov.uk/educationandlearning/behaviour-attendance-parents) provides advice and guidance on school attendance including parental responsibilities and what to do if a child is unwell or expected to be away from school for a long period of time.

1. **County deal and the local economy**

The proposed county deal, withthe councils across Hampshire and the Isle of Wight seeking substantial devolution and funding of £1.14 billion from central government in return for a more combined structure, will not be proceeding after Southampton, Portsmouth and the Isle of Wight sought a separate deal. The leader of Hampshire County Council, Councillor Rob Humby, regretted the outcome, commenting that the deal could have made a significant contribution to Hampshire’s economic recovery, by stimulating economic recovery, regeneration and business growth.

Separately, the government has announced that the core functions of Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) will transfer to local authorities, including HCC, from April 2024. LEPs are non-statutory, business-led partnership bodies that are responsible for local economic development in England. They bring together the private sector, local authorities, and academic and voluntary institutions to help boost the local economy and drive growth.

1. **Solar panels for homes schemes - Solar Together**

I have mentioned this scheme before, whereby residents can join in the bulk buying of solar panels or batteries for their homes, which both reduce energy bills and boost local renewable energy generation. A new round has opened and residents have until 27 October to register their interest online, for free and without obligation – [www.hants.gov.uk/solartogether](https://www.hants.gov.uk/solartogether).

1. **Roads**

Hampshire County Council has pledged to spend an additional £7.5m a year over the next three years to fix thousands more potholes. This is on top of the £13.5m currently being spent a year on reactive pothole and road defect repairs. Progress is already being made, with road defects being fixed at a record rate - in May and June alone, 19,697 potholes and other problems were repaired and 33,671 square metres of surface design and micro asphalt was laid.

In separate news, two pupils at Basingstoke secondary schools have triumphed in a competition to name two County Council gritters with the winning vehicle names being Elvis Spreadsley and Grit of Thrones.

1. **Covid-19 vaccinations**

A Covid-19 vaccine programme is to start this month as a precautionary measure following the identification of a new Covid-19 variant. It will be offered to those most at risk from winter illness, including all adults over 65 years old and over, front line health and social care workers, carers aged 16 to 64 and pregnant women. An annual flu vaccine will also be available at the same time, where possible.

1. **Vaping**

Following an increase in young people experimenting with vaping, Hampshire County Council has pledged continuing support for a series of education and enforcement measures to tackle the increasingly pressing issue of teen vaping. In total, 20.5% of children nationally have tried vaping, up from 15.8% in 2022 and 13.9% in 2020.

Steps include writing to families of children in secondary schools with information about vaping to highlight the risks and the support available; redeveloping education and awareness schemes to encourage behaviour change and to reduce uptake; Trading Standards carrying out enforcement operations to deter underaged sales of vapes and tackle illegal vapes.

In other news on vaping, Hampshire residents can now recycle vapes at any Household Waste Recycling Centre, helping to avoid disposal in general waste, which is a fire risk. HWRCs can accept all types of vapes. The guidance is not to dismantle them before disposal, unless the batteries can be safely removed for separate recycling.

Single-use vapes contain lithium-ion batteries which can catch fire if broken. This is an increasing problem across the country; in Hampshire, the County Council estimates one fire a month on average in a waste truck or waste facility can be attributed to a battery, faulty electrical item or disposable BBQ. A battery was the suspected cause of a significant fire at the Portsmouth Materials Recovery Facility in 2021 which closed the site for three months.

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