

Joe Robertson MP



Isle of Wight East
House of Commons
London SW1A 0AA

Councillor Phil Jordan
Council Leader
Isle of Wight Council
County Hall
Newport
Isle of Wight

9th January 2025

OPEN LETTER

Dear Cllr Jordan,

Yesterday I joined you, as a Councillor, at a meeting of the Isle of Wight Council to debate the Government's proposal for a **mainland-based Mayor with jurisdiction on the Island**. I voted against joining the Government's fast-track programme for a Mayor. So did the majority of voting Councillors.

I now write to you in my capacity as Member of Parliament for Isle of Wight East, to urge you and your Cabinet colleagues to respect Full Council's decision, and say no thank you to the Deputy Prime Minister's invitation to join a priority fast-track programme. This decision is being rushed for no good reason.

My primary concerns are:

- 1) **The overall benefits of a Mayor are not clear:** We should not therefore join any so-called "priority scheme" with Hampshire. If we end up being forced to choose a Mayoral deal – and it is not clear that we will be – it would be much better to have a proper conversation about a Mayor for the Isle of Wight, accountable to Islanders only.
- 2) **A small part of a big area:** Along with Hampshire, Portsmouth and Southampton, it is possible that Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole will join the fast-track proposal and become part of the Mayor's combined area with the Isle of Wight. If so, the Island population would make up just 7% of the Mayor's combined authority area. It is fanciful to imagine we would get substantially more than 7% of money the mayor has available to spend. 93% of the people who elect him/her would live on the mainland – that's where the power would lie.
- 3) **Centralisation of decision making:** The current proposal takes some powers away from the Isle of Wight Council and gives them to the Mayor. It is not just a devolution proposal – it is about the centralisation of our existing powers too. One of those existing

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powers is for strategic planning and our ability to decide the location and quantity of the homes we build on the Island. We know that the Labour Government wants us to build over 1,000 houses a year on the Island (we currently build around 300). We cannot give any power away to a Mayor representing a largely mainland constituency to make these decision with Government.

- 4) **Uncertain financial implications:** As some powers are being taken away from the Isle of Wight Council, our own Council's budget is likely to shrink, or Council Tax will go up, or both.
- 5) **No Councillor has a mandate from Island residents to give away any of our powers to a new administration based on the mainland.** If it is something you and your Alliance Group wish to do you should seek a mandate from Isle of Wight residents at the May 2025 local elections rather than delaying the elections to 2026 so that you can get this scheme through first. If the Isle of Wight does not proceed with the priority scheme now, the Deputy Prime Minister has been clear that we can join later in the year. This is not the last opportunity to consider a better Mayor proposal.

A new mayoral combined authority creates the structure to remove more and more powers from the Isle of Wight Council over time. We know that the Government does not want unitary authorities with a population under 500,000 people (we have 140,000) so this could be the start of a slippery slope to the eventual abolition of the Isle of Wight Council, even if that is not on the table today.

I urge you and every one of your cabinet colleagues to say no to the Government today and respect the decision of Full Council. If you vote to join in with Hampshire, Southampton, Portsmouth and possibly also Bournemouth, Christchurch, and Poole, to create a new layer of regional government, then Island residents will know that every single power stripped from the Isle of Wight Council is because of your decision.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Joe Robertson".

Joe Robertson MP