



**To: Members of the Cabinet**

## ***Notice of a Meeting of the Cabinet***

**Tuesday, 9 December 2025 at 4.00 pm**

**Room 2&3 - County Hall, New Road, Oxford OX1 1ND**

If you wish to view proceedings online, please click on this [Live Stream Link](#).

Martin Reeves  
Chief Executive

December 2025

**Committee Officer: Chris Reynolds**

*Tel: 07542 029441; E-Mail: [chris.reynolds@oxfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:chris.reynolds@oxfordshire.gov.uk)*

### **Membership**

#### *Councillors*

Liz Leffman	Leader of the Council
Neil Fawcett	Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Resources
Tim Bearder	Cabinet Member for Adults
Andrew Gant	Cabinet Member for Transport Management
Sean Gaul	Cabinet Member for Children and Young People
Kate Gregory	Cabinet Member for Public Health and Inequalities
Jenny Hannaby	Cabinet Member for Community Wellbeing and Safety
Ben Higgins	Cabinet Member for Future Economy and Innovation
Dan Levy	Cabinet Member for Finance, Property and Transformation
Judy Roberts	Cabinet Member for Place, Environment and Climate Action

*The Agenda is attached. Decisions taken at the meeting  
will become effective at the end of the working day on 15 December 2025  
unless called in by that date for review by the appropriate Scrutiny Committee.  
Copies of this Notice, Agenda and supporting papers are circulated  
to all Members of the County Council.*

*Date of next meeting: 16 December 2025*



## **AGENDA**

### **1. Apologies for Absence**

### **2. Declarations of Interest**

- guidance note below

### **3. Petitions and Public Address**

Members of the public who wish to speak on an item on the agenda at this meeting, or present a petition, can attend the meeting in person or 'virtually' through an online connection.

Requests to present a petition must be submitted no later than 9am ten working days before the meeting.

Requests to speak must be submitted no later than 9am three working days before the meeting.

Requests should be submitted to [committeesdemocraticservices@oxfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:committeesdemocraticservices@oxfordshire.gov.uk)

If you are speaking 'virtually', you may submit a written statement of your presentation to ensure that if the technology fails, then your views can still be taken into account. A written copy of your statement can be provided no later than 9am on the day of the meeting. Written submissions should be no longer than 1 A4 sheet.

### **4. Reports from Scrutiny Committees**

Cabinet to receive the recommendations of the Performance and Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee on Devolution for Oxfordshire (TO FOLLOW)

### **5. Devolution for Oxfordshire (Pages 1 - 14)**

*Cabinet Member:* Leader

*Forward Plan Ref:* 2025/202

*Contact:* Kim Sawyer, Programme Director – Devolution

[Kim.sawyer@oxfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:Kim.sawyer@oxfordshire.gov.uk)

Report of the Chief Executive

**The Cabinet is RECOMMENDED to**

- a) Endorse the benefits from the proposed devolution of powers and functions and agree to continue building on the collaborative approach across the region to date.**

- b) Approve the Expression of Interest (EOI), attached as Appendix 1, to be submitted by Oxfordshire County Council as the upper-tier authority to Government, noting that the EOI is designed to proactively position our region for early consideration in the next wave of the Devolution Programme.**
- c) Acknowledge the EOI as an initial invitation to Government, opening further dialogue and engagement, and not a decision to establish a Mayoral Strategic Authority.**
- d) Agree that a further report will be brought to Cabinet prior to any final decision by Government on the creation of a Mayoral Strategic Authority.**
- e) Note the informal Devolution Board will oversee discussions with Government, ensuring robust governance and stakeholder engagement by elected members throughout this process.**

## **Councillors declaring interests**

### **General duty**

You must declare any disclosable pecuniary interests when the meeting reaches the item on the agenda headed 'Declarations of Interest' or as soon as it becomes apparent to you.

### **What is a disclosable pecuniary interest?**

Disclosable pecuniary interests relate to your employment; sponsorship (i.e. payment for expenses incurred by you in carrying out your duties as a councillor or towards your election expenses); contracts; land in the Council's area; licenses for land in the Council's area; corporate tenancies; and securities. These declarations must be recorded in each councillor's Register of Interests which is publicly available on the Council's website.

Disclosable pecuniary interests that must be declared are not only those of the member her or himself but also those member's spouse, civil partner or person they are living with as husband or wife or as if they were civil partners.

### **Declaring an interest**

Where any matter disclosed in your Register of Interests is being considered at a meeting, you must declare that you have an interest. You should also disclose the nature as well as the existence of the interest. If you have a disclosable pecuniary interest, after having declared it at the meeting you must not participate in discussion or voting on the item and must withdraw from the meeting whilst the matter is discussed.

### **Members' Code of Conduct and public perception**

Even if you do not have a disclosable pecuniary interest in a matter, the Members' Code of Conduct says that a member 'must serve only the public interest and must never improperly confer an advantage or disadvantage on any person including yourself' and that 'you must not place yourself in situations where your honesty and integrity may be questioned'.

### **Members Code – Other registrable interests**

Where a matter arises at a meeting which directly relates to the financial interest or wellbeing of one of your other registerable interests then you must declare an interest. You must not participate in discussion or voting on the item and you must withdraw from the meeting whilst the matter is discussed.

Wellbeing can be described as a condition of contentedness, healthiness and happiness; anything that could be said to affect a person's quality of life, either positively or negatively, is likely to affect their wellbeing.

Other registrable interests include:

- a) Any unpaid directorships

- b) Any body of which you are a member or are in a position of general control or management and to which you are nominated or appointed by your authority.
- c) Any body (i) exercising functions of a public nature (ii) directed to charitable purposes or (iii) one of whose principal purposes includes the influence of public opinion or policy (including any political party or trade union) of which you are a member or in a position of general control or management.

### **Members Code – Non-registrable interests**

Where a matter arises at a meeting which directly relates to your financial interest or wellbeing (and does not fall under disclosable pecuniary interests), or the financial interest or wellbeing of a relative or close associate, you must declare the interest.

Where a matter arises at a meeting which affects your own financial interest or wellbeing, a financial interest or wellbeing of a relative or close associate or a financial interest or wellbeing of a body included under other registrable interests, then you must declare the interest.

In order to determine whether you can remain in the meeting after disclosing your interest the following test should be applied:

Where a matter affects the financial interest or well-being:

- a) to a greater extent than it affects the financial interests of the majority of inhabitants of the ward affected by the decision and;
- b) a reasonable member of the public knowing all the facts would believe that it would affect your view of the wider public interest.

You may speak on the matter only if members of the public are also allowed to speak at the meeting. Otherwise you must not take part in any discussion or vote on the matter and must not remain in the room unless you have been granted a dispensation.

## CABINET

09 December 2025

### DEVOLUTION FOR OXFORDSHIRE

#### Report of the Chief Executive

#### RECOMMENDATION

1. **The Cabinet is RECOMMENDED to**

- a) Endorse the benefits from the proposed devolution of powers and functions and agree to continue building on the collaborative approach across the region to date.
- b) Approve the Expression of Interest (EOI), attached as Appendix 1, to be submitted by Oxfordshire County Council as the upper-tier authority to Government, noting that the EOI is designed to proactively position our region for early consideration in the next wave of the Devolution Programme.
- c) Acknowledge the EOI as an initial invitation to Government, opening further dialogue and engagement, and not a decision to establish a Mayoral Strategic Authority.
- d) Agree that a further report will be brought to Cabinet prior to any final decision by Government on the creation of a Mayoral Strategic Authority.
- e) Note the informal Devolution Board will oversee discussions with Government, ensuring robust governance and stakeholder engagement by elected members throughout this process.

#### Executive Summary

2. This report seeks approval to submit an Expression of Interest (EOI), attached as Appendix 1, to Government. This is in response to the release of the Government's Devolution white paper and subsequent English devolution and community empowerment bill. It seeks to position our region in the next round of devolution for the purpose of creating a Mayoral Strategic Authority (MSA). The EOI represents an initial, exploratory step—serving as an invitation to Government to engage in further discussions about the opportunity of establishing an MSA for our region. At this stage, no final decisions are being made; instead, the Council is seeking to understand Government's requirements and expectations, with a commitment to make informed decisions once these are clarified through ongoing dialogue.

3. The primary purpose of pursuing an MSA is to provide the support network for the innovation eco-system that drives economic growth through innovation, sustainability, and prosperity. Working within a strategic partnership can leverage our region's strengths. By providing collaborative regional governance, this Council can provide a framework to promote inclusive growth for our area for the benefit and wellbeing of our residents.
4. The principle of devolution is well-established, with Government aiming to redistribute political, social and economic power across England. With ambition now focused on universal coverage of Strategic Authorities across England following the English Devolution White Paper and the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill, Leaders have been meeting across our region to explore the opportunity for devolution.
5. The Government's vision, as set out in the English Devolution White Paper, is for all parts of England to be part of regional Strategic Authorities led by a regional Mayor. These authorities will drive growth, shape public services, and deliver strategic leadership in areas such as economic growth and sustainability, planning, skills, employment, and transport.
6. This move to devolving power to regions signals a significant step change in how UK economic growth will be delivered. It places significant shift in how local government needs to develop and deliver its economic growth strategies. This will shift relations from central government to local regional strategic partnerships, working with an elected Mayor within a Strategic Authority. It will require council Leaders, supported by their Chief Executives, to form new strategic regional partnerships to drive our ambitions for place based all-inclusive growth.

## **A Thames Valley MSA For Collective Regional Growth**

7. Becoming an MSA represents a significant opportunity for regions in England to drive inclusive growth and prosperity for communities and businesses. With new powers and investment, MSAs can address strategic economic challenges and opportunities, in collaboration with local Leaders, business leaders and investors, with Government and increasingly, with other Strategic Authorities as part of the Council of the Nations and Regions. This is a new and exciting platform in our regional and local government landscape, creating systems based on collaboration and collective action that can work at scale to make connections, drive innovation and support growth.
8. However, failing to pursue this opportunity carries real risks. Areas that do not secure an MSA risk missing out on funding, influence, the ability to set their own strategic direction, and deliver against regional priorities. In an increasingly devolved landscape, inaction could result in diminished competitiveness, slower growth, and reduced leverage in regional and national decision-making around investment.



## **Regional Economy**

9. The Thames Valley economy is one of the most dynamic and globally connected in the United Kingdom contributing billions in Gross Value Added to the national economy each year. On a per-person basis, it ranks second only to London, a reflection of the area's powerful concentration of high-value industries and skilled workforce.
10. The Thames Valley Region's prosperity has its roots in knowledge and innovation, driven by digital technology, communications, life sciences, biotech, and health including creative and professional service sectors that have flourished thanks to the regions connectivity and proximity to London and Heathrow Airport. Global companies have long chosen to locate in the region with recognised hubs for technology and business services. This includes fast growing sectors in pharmaceuticals, manufacturing, and digital.
11. This region's economy has a critical mass of science, learning, talent, intellect and inspiration. The region also has a culture of pushing boundaries, redefining leading edge, pioneering and entrepreneurship. The universities are powerhouses of knowledge and beacons of experimental excellence as indeed are many of the businesses located across the county.
12. The intellectual capacity of the region and talent emerging from the universities is driving the establishment of spin out businesses and the scale up of growing ones, contributing to an environment that promotes and nurtures commercialisation; a driving force for a new, science and knowledge led industrial revolution.

## **Regional Risk of Economic Decline**

13. Despite a track record of success, the Thames Valley economy has not been immune to the decline in productivity across the UK in recent years, suffering from underinvestment and increased global competition. In addition, continued prosperity brings challenges, including housing affordability, infrastructure constraints, and uneven growth across localities.
14. There are considerable challenges for residents and businesses in generating a future proof transport infrastructure that supports the region's economic growth, which is struggling to cope with increased demand. Education and skill need to be developed on a regional collaborative basis to power capacity for economic growth.
15. This means this region needs to take a lead in ensuring sustainable housing and transport, promoting green technology, repowering the economy, developing the regional connectivity and attracting inward investment. The region could do much more to benefit from the advantages generated through strategic growth planning and collaboration at a much greater scale that can be currently delivered by individual councils.

16. This places the Thames Valley under threat of seeing economic decline as businesses and inward investment risks diverting to regions that have clear joined up regional Growth Plans and unfragmented governance arrangements, selling the region's benefits to sectors and investors.
17. Areas that can deliver regional transportation connectivity, housing growth and other business support infrastructure such as skills training and wellbeing are better placed to secure investment.

### **The Opportunity**

18. There are substantial benefits in seeking devolution of powers. Devolved control over adult education and skills budgets allows authorities to better align training provision with the needs of local industries from digital technology and life sciences to creative industries, helping retain talent and businesses whilst ensuring inclusive access to opportunities.
19. Devolved powers and responsibility over strategic transport, strategic housing and spatial planning will support growth at a wider regional level enabling authorities to better target investment in deprived or underperforming areas, address housing affordability, promote green infrastructure and ensure growth benefits reach all communities. A regional transport strategy would future proof the region's rail links, while improving access to Heathrow and London. Coordinated investment in rail, bus, and sustainable transport would reduce travel times, improve productivity and support the net zero agenda.
20. An enhanced ability to attract private investment and innovation partnerships would support the development of the innovation ecosystem in key sectors such as IT to stem the current exodus of UK innovation overseas and help to attract more overseas investment to the region. A science partnership could form a knowledge-intensive growth region with a stronger national and international identity capable of competing with major European economic clusters.
21. As a key driver of the UK economy, an MSA has the potential to scale up rapidly and deliver significant regional and national economic growth. Establishing an MSA will function as catalyst for growth to target funding and skills programmes where they are needed most, helping to reverse productivity decline and remove barriers to economic development.
22. Stronger coordination through an agreed MSA regional growth plan, influenced and led by local authorities, will stimulate a larger, integrated economy that can carry more weight in negotiations with Government, securing devolved funding and national infrastructure investment. It would also present a more compelling 'investment ready' proposition to global investors seeking a region that combines cutting-edge research with commercial capability.

### **Expression of Interest Thames Valley Vision**

23. To unlock the opportunity for an MSA, it is proposed to submit an EOI to Government. The EOI emphasises the region's strengths in innovation and

productivity and its readiness to enter discussions for an MSA. Devolution will drive inclusive growth and unlock significant opportunities for local communities and the UK more broadly.

24. The Thames Valley EOI highlights:

- **Economic rationale:** The region has national excellence and/or international excellence in at least 5 of the 8 key business sectors highlighted in the Modern Industrial Strategy. The Strategic Authority would provide the framework that allows businesses to leverage those sectors across a wider geography and create jobs. Our intent is to restore growth to pre-Covid levels of prosperity.
- **Collaborative governance:** There is a commitment to partnership working across constituent councils, with clear terms of reference and for the EOI to mark the start of wider stakeholder engagement across the region.
- **Strategic powers and funding:** Powers over transport, skills, housing, and economic development and the ability to provide these within a business eco-system will lead to greater investment.
- **Place-based leadership:** Greater local control to deliver national policy objectives at local level has been shown to be successful in other established Strategic Authority areas. Adapting powers and functions to meet local needs strengthens local identity, accountability, and the ability to deliver tailored solutions for residents.

25. The EOI is the first stage towards devolution. Whilst it does not bind any Council to an MSA at this stage, it does indicate our readiness to engage further.

26. Oversight of the proposals will be through a Devolution Board made up of elected representatives from each participating Council.

## Next Steps

27. The following show our key areas of focus in next phase: -

- **Submission of the EOI** (subject to approval) to Government by 19 December 2025, followed by further engagement and refinement based on feedback from Leaders, Chief Executives, and stakeholders.
- **Ongoing governance and oversight** via the Devolution Board, with regular updates to Cabinet and public consultation as the process evolves.
- **Build the proposal** through regular engagement, agreeing our geography and the size and scale of the MSA based upon criteria set out in the Devolution White Paper as follows:
  - Scale: Strategic Authorities should be of comparable size to existing institutions. The default assumption is for them to have a combined population of 1.5 million or above.

- Economies: Strategic Authorities must cover sensible economic geographies with a particular focus on functional economic areas, reflecting current and potential travel-to-work patterns and local labour markets. It is likely that where travel to work areas are small and fragmented, Strategic Authorities will cover multiple travel to work areas.
- Contiguity: Any proposed geography must be contiguous across its constituent councils (either now or with a clear plan to ensure continuity in the future through agreed local government reorganisation).
- No 'devolution islands': Geographies must not create devolution 'islands' by leaving areas which are too small to go it alone or which do not have natural partners.
- Delivery: Geographies should ensure the effective delivery of key functions including Spatial Development Strategies, Local Transport Plans and Get Britain Working Plans.
- Alignment: The government will seek to promote alignment between devolution boundaries and other public sector boundaries.
- Identity: A vital element of successful devolution is the ability for residents to engage with and hold their devolved institutions to account – and local identity plays a key role in this.
- **Stakeholder engagement** with residents, businesses and public sector partners to explore devolution for our region.
- **Finalise proposal** with further decisions made at key points by Cabinet supported by Scrutiny.

## Analysis and consideration of alternative options

28. The White Paper is clear that the Government intends that all of England be devolved by default and is committed to ending the deals-based approach. The Government will also legislate for a ministerial directive, which will enable it to directly create Strategic Authorities in any places where local leaders in that region have not been able to agree how to access devolved powers. Therefore the “do nothing” option could mean Government legislating on our behalf for devolution.
29. Opting to begin further discussions with Government on devolution would allow the Council to lead the definition of the MSA for our region. This will provide choice over the geography and the ability to determine the key priorities for our area.
30. Should this Council consent to an MSA at a future meeting, the mayor would have a seat at the Council of Nations and the Regions influencing government policy and ensuring local community voice is heard.

## Corporate Policies and Priorities

31. The County Council's Corporate Plan sets out a vision for a "greener, fairer, healthier Oxfordshire," with strategic priorities around climate action, reducing inequality, improving health and wellbeing, and supporting inclusive economic growth.
32. Table 1 below sets out potential contributions and outcomes that could be delivered through the formation of an MSA.

<b>Table 1</b>	
<b>Strategic Priority</b>	<b>MSA Contribution &amp; Outcomes</b>
Greener Oxfordshire	Regional climate action, integrated transport, green infrastructure, improved air quality.
Fairer Oxfordshire	Inclusive growth, more affordable housing, better skills and employment support, reduced inequality.
Healthier Oxfordshire	Joined-up health and care, reduced health inequalities, improved wellbeing.

## Financial Implications

33. Oxfordshire County Council has already committed £10 million from earmarked reserves, which can be used towards the cost of local government reform and devolution (£1.2 million of which will be used for devolution). To date the costs of devolution have been limited to the costs of the Programme Director role and consultants advising on the economic analysis. These costs are shared amongst the Councils participating in discussions on devolution.
34. There are no direct financial implications arising from the submission of the EOI. As discussions with Government proceed the opportunity will arise to explore how growth in our economy could create significant social and economic uplift for our area and indeed, for the whole country. The Thames Valley is a positive contributor to HM Treasury.
35. Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation offer an opportunity to reset local government finances. In this context, the EOI submission seeks discussions with Government on developing innovative fiscal solutions to support investment into the Thames Valley Region. This reference to investment funding will also look to develop a more self-sufficient strategic authority that is not reliant on revenue gainshare and seeks inward investment through the private sector and funding institutions, as part of any regional investment strategy.

Comments checked by:

Kathy Wilcox, Head of Corporate Finance, [Kathy.Wilcox@Oxfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:Kathy.Wilcox@Oxfordshire.gov.uk)

## Legal Implications

36. The submission of an EOI to open discussions with Government on devolution is an executive decision of Oxfordshire County Council as the upper-tier

authority. The Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023 (The Act), Section 45 allows for areas to collaborate to create new strategic authorities. The Act, Section 46 requires constituent councils to consent to devolution, which is defined in the Act, Section 10(11) as including only upper-tier councils. This Council has participated in all discussions regarding devolution for Oxfordshire and the wider region.

37. The English Devolution and Communities Empowerment Bill is currently under consideration by Parliament. It sets out seven competencies for MSAs: transport & local infrastructure; skills and employment support; housing and strategic planning; economic development and regeneration; environment and climate change; health, wellbeing and public sector reform and public safety. The Bill is not yet an Act of Parliament and therefore further detail on these competencies will be set out in Regulations made under the Act.
38. The Cabinet has the authority to formulate the council's overall policy objectives and priorities, which permits it to make this decision.
39. The English Devolution White Paper sets out the Government's intention that where the geographies of new Mayoral Strategic Authorities align with Police and Crime Commissioner and Fire and Rescue Authorities, Mayors will, by default, be responsible for those services. Where those boundaries do not currently align Government has said that it will look to align public sector boundaries to strategic authority boundaries.
40. Through the English Devolution and Communities Empowerment Bill, the Government will introduce a new bespoke duty for Strategic Authorities in relation to health improvement and health inequalities. Strategic Authorities will support partners in driving public service reform and the new devolution framework will set clearer expectations for Mayors' roles in local health systems and in improving population health.

Comments checked by:

Anita Bradley, Director of Law & Governance and Monitoring Officer  
[Anita.Bradley@oxfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:Anita.Bradley@oxfordshire.gov.uk)

## **Staff Implications**

41. There are no immediate implications arising from submitting the EOI. Should the Cabinet make a later decision to proceed with devolution the staffing implications will be considered in full at that time. [OBJ]

## **Equality & Inclusion Implications**

42. There are no immediate equalities implications arising from this report. However, the purpose of forming an MSA is to bring an all-inclusive growth strategy to the Thames Valley Region. A strategy that ensures no one is left behind in the ambition to bring economic growth.

43. The expected benefits of devolution are to drive growth, enabling local leaders place more focus on inequality and living standards. An Equalities Impact Assessment will be developed against the different elements of devolution, as proposals progress.

## **Sustainability Implications**

44. There are no immediate sustainability implications arising from these decisions. Government has indicated it will give strategic authorities a meaningful role in planning for our future energy system, establishing heat network zoning in England and leading on local nature recovery. The detail of these various policies are to follow as the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill proceeds through Parliament.

## **Risk Management**

45. Risks are considered in the report.

## **Consultations**

46. The EOI was developed collaboratively, with input from local authority Leaders and Chief Executives.
47. The EOI is a strategic step to initiate formal discussions with Government, with public and stakeholder engagement planned should the Government accept the Council onto the devolution programme.
48. Devolution is a collaborative process which will require continuous engagement and collaboration between local authorities and with residents, public sector institutions including the NHS, Police and Fire Authorities, businesses, and further and high education providers and other key local organisations and businesses.
49. It is also vital that residents are involved at the earliest opportunity to inform and shape the process. It will not be possible to carry out resident engagement prior to submitting an EOI but it is expected that resident engagement would begin after Government agrees to further discussions.

MARTIN REEVES  
Chief Executive

**Appendix 1:** Expression of Interest (EOI)

Background papers: [English Devolution White Paper](#)  
[English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill](#)

Contact Officer: Kim Sawyer Programme Director Devolution

December 2025



Dear Secretary of State,

We, the leaders of the local authorities in the Thames Valley, are writing to you in your capacity as Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government regarding our desire for devolution and our inclusion on a future Devolution Programme.

We have carefully considered our rationale and case for devolution to this region and see a significant opportunity to drive growth and prosperity as a Mayoral Strategic Authority. Our £97 billion economy is already a core contributor to the national economy and will continue to add economic value through our highly productive and innovative businesses, constituting the sectors prioritised in the Modern Industrial Strategy and a large part of the Ox-Cam Corridor, a key national growth proposition. However, the region's post-pandemic recovery has been slower than the national trajectory, and our globally recognised clusters face increasingly strong competition. We will use the powers, investment and platform as an MSA to unlock constraints on growth, with the potential for the Thames Valley economy to be up to £18.7 billion a year larger by 2040, which corresponds to a £7 billion annual uplift in tax revenue contributions to the exchequer.

We have come together as strong local Leaders to pursue the significant opportunities of devolution for our communities. Whilst we acknowledge and respect our differing political and local priorities, together we recognise and collectively support the core economic rationale and strategic intention for delivering inclusive growth within a Thames Valley MSA. We stand ready with the strength of relationships, trust, track record, collective governance and ways of working required to work with Government and implement a successful MSA. We would like to work towards a first mayoral election in May 2027, in line with the current timeline for local government reorganisation.

### **Importance of the Thames Valley for the UK Economy**

The Thames Valley serves as an innovation-driven and export-focused catalyst for UK economic growth, accounting for approximately 5% of England's total economy while comprising just 3.4% of its population. Our economy comprises world-renowned universities, respected research centres, and leading science parks filled with forward-thinking companies, driving innovation ecosystems that spur new ideas and growth across UK supply chains. Oxford University is a jewel in the UK's global research offer, and our partnerships with Reading University creates value for residents, businesses, and investors through key assets such as the Thames Valley Science Park, which hosts research facilities and archives for the Natural History Museum, British Museum and Kew Gardens. Our region is a globally compelling investment case, with major global companies such as Microsoft, Oracle, Redwood Technologies, Virgin, Vodafone, and Hewlett-Packard located in the UK's Silicon Valley along the M4 corridor, with direct links to London and Heathrow Airport. From the region that gave the world the Oxford–AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine, the Ellison Institute of Technology in Oxford is now investing over £10 billion in research and development to facilitate further globally significant advancements in artificial intelligence, robotics, and life

sciences. Major investment in AI infrastructure has been secured across the region, with the second largest concentration of data centres in the world in Slough and the first AI Growth Zone in Culham. We have high-performance manufacturing capabilities along the M40 corridor, exemplified by Plant Oxford, home to BMW Mini, extending into Banbury and the UK Motorsports Valley into the Midlands. We are home to world-famous tourist attractions, from Windsor to the Cotswolds, Oxford, Blenheim Palace and Bicester Village. We are known world-over as a great place to visit, live, innovate and invest. Our investment proposition is already backed by Government, with continued global promotion of the Oxford-Cambridge corridor, of which we are a core part, investment in East-West Rail, high-profile support through the Oxford Growth Commission and recent investment in the Cowley branch line.

The industrial composition of the Thames Valley directly aligns with almost all the sector strengths outlined in the Industrial Strategy – our economy is anchored by professional and business services, with notable capabilities in digital technologies, life sciences, advanced manufacturing and a prominent finance sector. The strength of the region's visitor economy not only supports our foundational sectors but also positively impacts our creative industries, especially our growing film and television cluster around Shinfield Studios. Proposed visitor economy investments, including the Puy du Fou Bicester, together with significant heritage landmarks would remain substantial contributors to export growth. Importantly, the Thames Valley demonstrates a strong orientation towards export activities: approximately 48% of the workforce is employed in exporting industries, and 40% hold positions within tradable sectors, both figures exceeding national averages. Exceptional productivity and economic complexity facilitate the dissemination of innovation across key sectors and strengthen supply chains nationwide. Furthermore, growth in GVA and household income in the Thames Valley has surpassed national rates, thereby improving local living standards and contributing positively to Exchequer revenues.

### **Signs of risk and stagnation**

Despite the Thames Valley's underlying strength, the region has not re-established its pre-pandemic growth path. Post-Covid productivity indicators show mixed fortunes, even as the UK aggregate edged up through 2023, evidence that recovery here has been shallower than the national trend. If the region were to return to the pre-pandemic growth trajectory from 2027 onwards the Thames Valley economy would be up to £18.7bn a year larger by 2040. This matters for residents: a weaker trajectory means fewer high-value job opportunities and slower wage progression than would otherwise have been the case. Slower growth in the Thames Valley reverberates through national supply chains and weakens spillovers to other regions, putting at risk delivery of the Industrial Strategy's IS-8 ambitions on productivity, exports and business investment. It limits the pace at which discoveries are commercialised, dampens the pipeline of high-value FDI into the UK, and slows diffusion of technologies across the wider economy. Crucially, restoring the Thames Valley's growth trajectory would result in an estimated £7 billion increase in tax revenue contributions from residents and

businesses, directly strengthening the Government's ability to fund essential services and invest in long-term national priorities.<sup>1</sup>

### **Scale and agglomeration to drive growth**

To address these risks and realise our full economic potential, we need to leverage our potential for scale and agglomeration across our economic geographies. While each authorities' economy is individually strong, travel-to-work analysis reveals largely self-contained labour markets with currently limited cross-boundary matching and knowledge transfer across the region. In this current fragmentation lies a clear opportunity: given the region's complementary sector strengths the absence of integrated governance and coordinated connectivity means the Thames Valley is under-leveraging innovation adoption and diffusion and the opportunity to create a more unified labour market to scale economic growth.

### **Establishing an MSA with a growth mission at its core**

We propose the establishment of a Thames Valley Mayoral Strategic Authority (MSA) as a decisive step towards realising inclusive growth across our region. By harnessing devolved powers, the MSA will transform thriving yet separate labour markets into a unified innovation economy, ensuring that prosperity is accessible to all communities. Through the implementation of a Local Growth Plan, we can extend and enhance the efforts of the Oxford Growth Commission to systematically address housing quantity, quality, and affordability across the Thames Valley, one of the key constraints on inclusive growth and a key driver of deprivation. MSA powers would enable accelerated delivery of affordable and social homes, around employment hubs. Integrated multi-modal, low carbon transport solutions could be expanded and expedited along the M4/M40 corridors, into Heathrow and across the Ox-Cam corridor, and critical investment in digital, water and energy infrastructure facilitated, strengthening connections between urban and rural residents and key economic growth nodes, and beyond. This infrastructure delivery would align with targeted skills and employment initiatives, developed with spatial awareness of our IS-8 strengths and a commitment to tackling deprivation and untapped potential within our communities. Enhanced collaboration and coordination enabled by the MSA would also position the region to more effectively address environmental priorities, including climate change and biodiversity.

Collectively, these measures would result in improved job opportunities, reduced commute times, and provide greater access to affordable housing for residents, supported by an aligned skills programme and transport system that matches talent to opportunity. For the UK, it means the Thames Valley driving national growth through faster innovation, stronger exports, and a bigger boost to the public purse.

We recognise the highly interconnected nature of the Thames Valley, with London, across the Ox-Cam Corridor and into the Midlands. A Thames Valley MSA will be a strategic

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<sup>1</sup> This estimate is based off the ratio of GDP to national taxation (UK taxation as 37% of GDP) established by [Institute for Fiscal Studies](#) research

platform from which to go further and faster on pan-regional collaboration with our neighbours, including working on joint projects, spatial development and investment to drive wider economic growth. We are determined to use our Thames Valley partnership to further capitalise on economic scale and complementarity and compete across the globe.

If granted MSA status, the Thames Valley would be a fundamentally different kind of strategic authority – the largest by GVA outside of London, the MSA will be focused on unlocking constraints on an already high-performing economy so that all areas of the Thames Valley, and indeed beyond, benefit. We are therefore actively exploring innovative approaches to securing private investment and financing. Work is already underway to develop robust and viable propositions that match the scale and ambition for a Thames Valley MSA, and we look forward to working with Government to shape this more sustainable growth financing model.

### **Next steps**

A Thames Valley MSA would unlock constrained, high-value growth, accelerate innovation diffusion across IS-8 sectors, and strengthen national fiscal headroom. We therefore ask that the Thames Valley be considered for inclusion in the next Devolution Programme, and we would welcome an early meeting to discuss this opportunity. We are ready to work in open dialogue with MHCLG and your officials to implement a new phase of devolution and make the best impact for our businesses, communities, and the country.