

Resident perceptions of LGR

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY PREPARED FOR Oxfordshire County Council

July / 2025
1096/rm/ctw

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Oxfordshire County Council is starting to shape its overarching vision and strategic priorities for the period 2025-2029, alongside developing its preferred proposal for local government organisation to be submitted in November 2025. To feed into this development, the council commissioned REMind Research to conduct a series of focus group discussions with Oxfordshire residents in July 2025.

The focus of the research was to:

- explore current behaviours and attitudes towards local government and services among residents from across the county and representing different living situations/ life stages
- identify any gaps in understanding, provision or future requirements
- examine reactions to draft strategic vision, statements and potential actions
- deliberate benefits and concerns regarding future structure

This executive summary provides an impartial account of resident opinions on the aspects of Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) discussed specifically within the sessions.

KEY THEMES

63 residents took part across nine 2-hour sessions ensuring inclusion of a range of participants across area, lifestage, household composition and ethnicity.

Participants demonstrated strong engagement, with many expressing appreciation for the opportunity to share their perspectives directly with the council. Despite the diversity of residents involved, there was a striking consistency across sessions in the key issues they identified as challenges facing the county.

PERCEPTIONS OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION

There is minimal awareness of future local government reorganisation; except among older residents.

On balance, the benefits of establishing a single countywide unitary authority are generally seen to outweigh the concerns — provided those concerns are properly addressed.

The main perceived advantages include cost savings, greater efficiency, more consistency, fair and coherent policies across Oxfordshire, plus a single point of access for all key services.

However, concerns remain about the potential loss of focus on the specific needs of local areas and the risk of service disruption during the transition.

While most intuitively feel a county-wide unitary authority is a logical step, older residents, in particular, tend to be more sceptical about the benefits of moving to a unitary system, regardless of what final structure is implemented.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Residents deeply value the opportunity to engage with the council and help shape what matters to them. To maintain this connection and ensure strategic priorities reflect the needs of the population, there are key actions the county council can consider moving forward.

Be proactive in addressing concerns of LGR and benefits of one unitary authority for Oxfordshire

- Focus on how one authority can lead to cost saving and greater efficiency and more consistent policies across the county
- Purposefully outline awareness of concerns and how these will be mitigated e.g.
 - Plans for smooth transition
 - How clear and accountable decision making will be achieved
 - Continuing presence of local councillors to ensure representation of local views
 - What engagement with town/parish councils looks like
 - How current county-wide services (education, libraries etc.) are already working consistently and fairly for all areas
 - How the council will utilise resident ideas and feedback

The group was good, it definitely highlighted the need for community The proof of the pudding will be in the eating. With all the good intentions, practical measures have to be put forward to people. Saying you would like to enhance the environment or make somewhere safer or nicer is lovely but in practice what would that entail?